
“How News Must Feel When Traveling”: Dickinson and Civil War Media

Eliza Richards

Receiving news bears a troubled relation to making news in US Civil War poems. The conjunction of a new mass media network with the mass death that resulted from a full-scale war foregrounded the gap among vicarious and direct experiences of the conflict. For strangers and loved ones alike, reading news of the Civil War may have been analogous to receiving a battle wound – Dickinson warned that “twill riddle like a shot” – but it certainly wasn’t the same (FP 1379).¹ Even so, reading the news was an experience in itself, and many Civil War poems mark the difference. Faced with the stark ascendance of news over literature and the limitations of existing forms of lyric representation in responding to the national crisis, poets of the period experimented with forms of lyric address that worked in tandem with newspaper reports and drew upon them for inspiration.²

This essay explores figurations of the news and its impact in Emily Dickinson’s poems written during the Civil War (her most prolific period) in the context of the work of some of her Northern peers – John Greenleaf Whittier, Julia Ward Howe, and Herman Melville – in order to develop the claim that these poems enforce a difference between direct and indirect forms of experience while nevertheless positing relations between them. In doing so, they mark productive distinctions between the distant suffering of slaves and soldiers, reports of that suffering, and readers’ reception of those reports. They also explore the difference between writing news and writing poems in a time of national crisis. In Dickinson’s poems, news from abroad is unspecified, even de-specified, but the circulation of information nevertheless underpins a poetic logic that charts a mostly failed mediation between actors in a drama and their distant observers.

News was hard to avoid in the period. Because telegraphic bulletins could reach many parts of the country simultaneously, people throughout the North could receive the same information at the same time. According to Menahem Blondheim, by standardizing the transmission and reception of the news, the Associated Press consolidated the “first mass communication medium of national scope,” starting in about

1850. During the Civil War the Associated Press (AP) played a crucial role in addressing a national readership; the Lincoln administration considered the AP central to their strategies for information management (133). Because news traveled primarily over the wires, it was no longer delivered in single bulletins, but rather in a constant stream of ever-changing reports: "The telegraph, by increasing the speed of news and making its continuous transmission possible, broke down the reporting of developing new stories into smaller and more frequent fragments. By rushing each new development to the public, editors enhanced the public's suspense as to the final outcome of the stories they were covering" (38). Cultivating suspense attracted readers and promoted newspaper sales. Alice Fahs asserts that during the Civil War, "newspapers suddenly became an urgent necessity of life, with readers eagerly gathering at bulletin boards outside newspaper offices in order to read the news as soon as it was printed." Because "reading habits changed dramatically with the onset of the war," the literary landscape changed as a result. Booksellers complained that the public was entirely absorbed by current events and was no longer buying books (19–20).

If book sales lagged, poetry thrived nevertheless, published alongside and often working together with the reports on the conflict in Northern papers, usually to generate popular support of the Union. Thousands of poems tracked, responded to, and shaped the reception of multiple aspects of the war. These poems urged men to join, fight, and die for the sake of the Union; they urged civilians to support the soldiers and to accept the sacrifice of loved ones; and they insisted that soldiers' deaths would sanction and promote the growth of a stronger democratic nation purged of the sin of slavery.³ In *Traces of War*, Timothy Sweet asserts that a central rhetorical task during wartime is the translation of the war dead into the victors' national symbolism, so that the weight of human sacrifice gives national ideology force and holding power (1–6). The poems published during the Civil War repeatedly proclaimed that this was a just war for a moral purpose, and that the thousands who were losing their lives were not doing so in vain. "The Volunteer," for example, published anonymously in May 1862 in the highly influential, widely circulated, strongly pro-Union genteel magazine *The Atlantic Monthly* (a magazine that Dickinson read avidly), concludes that "To fight in Freedom's cause is something gained – / And nothing lost, to fall."⁴ The poems about wounded, dying, and dead soldiers that circulated widely during the Civil War arguably served to bind together communities of readers and forge relations between civilians and combatants. The general consistency of the poetry's ideological message indicates that literate Northerners achieved something resembling a literary consensus, and that poetry served a crucial role in negotiating a crisis of representation, both political and poetic, instigated by the war.

While poets adapted their skills in order to render themselves useful during the national crisis, their participation was by no means uniform or predetermined. A number of poets questioned the role of poetry in wartime. Foregrounding the difference between bloody conflict and its verbal representations, the war raised questions about how properly to write about the experience of soldiers. This gap was already problematic in journalistic accounts; poets had the complex task of discovering or

creating the purpose of art in wartime. Not everyone was as assuredly even-handed as Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who, in his “Letter to a Young Contributor” in the *Atlantic Monthly* of April 1862, warns the soldier never to

. . . fancy for a moment that you have discovered any grander or manlier life than you might be leading at home. It is not needful here to decide which is intrinsically the better thing, a column of a newspaper or a column of attack, Wordsworth’s “Lines on Immortality” or Wellington’s Lines of Torres Vedras; each is noble, if nobly done, though posterity seems to remember literature the longest.

An officer in the war who was later wounded, a man of action as well as words, Higginson balances literary and military pursuits against each other, using the words “column” and “line” for orders of both type and people, emphasizing the difference between them but valorizing both. Higginson suggests that while poets may in earlier times have been considered “pleasant triflers,” at the present moment, the “pursuits of peace are recognized as the real, and war as the accidental.”

Other poets were not so certain that the pursuits of peace could or should continue during the war, as if men were not dying; they felt obligated to write about “accidental” events rather than lasting ideals. In light of the news of the day, many poets expressed guilt that they were writing rather than fighting for their country. Some of the poems in northern journals articulate and seek to negotiate this dilemma. In the January 1864 issue of *The Northern American Review*, Quaker abolitionist poet John Greenleaf Whittier laments the impotence of poets in a poem entitled “In Wartime”:

. . . doomed to watch a strife we may not share
 With other weapons than the patriot’s prayer,
 Yet owning, with full hearts and moistened eyes,
 The awful beauty of self-sacrifice,
 And wrung by keenest sympathy for all
 Who give their loved ones for the living wall
 Twixt law and treason, – in this evil day
 May haply find, through automatic play
 Of pen and pencil, solace to our pain,
 And hearten others with the strength we gain.

The war has caused Whittier to think that the sword is mightier than the pen, and that professing poetic sympathies for soldiers and their loved ones is insufficient. The speaker gains strength not through plumbing the depths of his sorrow, nor through seeking to understand the suffering of others, but through the “automatic play / Of pen and pencil.” Whittier suggests that solace might be found by following the play of a medium unconscious of its message, or by transmitting a message of unconsciousness to those who need it most. Though he wrote such patriotic classics as “Barbara Frietchie” (published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in October 1863), at the outset of the

war Whittier cannot imagine doing more than solacing civilians' pain of impotence. The resigned solipsism of poetic self-comfort, extended to others as a form of anesthesia, is especially striking because Whittier had already spent years as a public poet speaking out against the evils of slavery. Here he cannot see a way beyond encouraging readers to withdraw into private numbness.

Another *Atlantic Monthly* poet, Julia Ward Howe, strongly rejects such an approach, and would certainly disagree with Higginson's claims for the civilizing mission of art in contradistinction to war. In a poem entitled "Our Orders," published in July 1861, she calls on poets to sharpen their words into swords, or to accept their total irrelevance:

And ye that wage the war of words
With mystic fame and subtle power,
Go, chatter to the idle birds,
Or teach the lesson of the hour!

If the war of words is to help the Northern cause, poets must purge themselves of personal ambition and aesthetic aspirations and enlist their services fully in the cause of wartime propaganda. And indeed, Howe was highly successful in lending her verbal power to the physical struggle. Her poem "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," first published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in February of 1862, became an unofficial Union anthem set to the melody of "John Brown's Body," one that Howe enjoyed imagining the soldiers singing in unison: "I knew, and was content to know, that the poem soon found its way to the camps, as I heard from time to time of its being sung in chorus by the soldiers" (Howe 276). However different their approaches, both Howe and Whittier divorce lyric utterance from personal expression and attribute the necessity of this revision to the vicissitudes of war. While Whittier abnegates personal expression in favor of the automatic play of the pen, Howe serves the collective voice of Northern wrath, her words sung in unison by the soldiers and timed to their marching steps. Howe in particular identifies the mass media's powerful potential to sway the conflict, one that Whittier would come to appreciate as well.

Howe's exhortation to "teach the lesson of the hour" blurs the distinction between poetry and the news, and indeed the genres are more interactive during the period than one might imagine. Just as poetry takes on the voice of the press, the press assumes a lyric voice in attempting to convey the drama of warfare to an impatient public, hungry not just for information but for vivid reportage that captures the experience of soldiers at the front. Herman Melville explores the effects of this hybridization in his post-bellum collection of poems entitled *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866). An avid researcher, Melville gained his information about the war almost entirely from newspapers and other printed sources, many of them garnered from *The Rebellion Record*, a massive compendium of ephemeral publications relating to the war (Garner 138). Drawing on newspaper accounts of the Battle at Fort Donelson reprinted in this collection, Melville composed his long poem "Donelson. (February, 1862)," which, as Franny Nudelman notes, "takes the difficulty of conveying information from

the battlefield to the home front as its subject" (97).⁵ A meditation on print mediation, the poem presents itself as a collage of headlines, newspaper bulletins, and scenarios of people on the home front reading, listening to, and talking about the news of a battle. The poem purports to include a range of news bulletins quoted verbatim by an impersonal narrative speaker who refers to himself, albeit parenthetically and in the third person, as a lyric news man: "(*Our own reporter a dispatch compiles, / As best he may, from varied sources.*)" (108; 196–97). Composing a drama in which the poet's arranging hand purports to be the primary sign of his presence, Melville's staging of reception suggests that the news is as interested in its audience as the audience is interested in the news:

When, pelted by sleet in the icy street,
 About the bulletin-board a band
 Of eager, anxious people met,
 And every wakeful heart was set
 On latest news from West or South.
 "No seeing here," cries one – "don't crowd" –
 "You tall man, pray you, read aloud."

*We learn that General Grant,
 Marching from Henry overland,
 And joined by a force up the Cumberland sent
 (Some thirty thousand the command),
 On Wednesday a good position won –
 Began the siege of Donelson.* (102; 6–19)

Aware of and anxious to capture the people's attention, the news bulletin's collective "We" tells a story in vivid, detailed prose that Melville half comically makes into poetic stanzas. That the news is multiply mediated – through telegraphic reports, hearsay, print bulletins, and reading (silently and aloud) – is emphasized by Melville's use of various typefaces (regular print, all caps, italics), line spacing, indentation, and punctuation (parentheses, dashes, quotation marks, etc.).

"We" describes the setting of the soldiers' "intrenchments" in an incongruously beautiful – poetic – way:

*The welcome weather
 Is clear and mild; 'tis much like May.
 The ancient boughs that lace together
 Along the stream, and hang far forth,
 Strange with green mistletoe, betray
 A dreamy contrast to the North.*

*Our troops are full of spirits – say
 The siege won't prove a creeping one.
 They propose not the lingering stay
 Of old beleaguers; not that way;*

*But, full of vim from Western prairies won,
They'll make, ere long, a dash at Donelson.* (103; 29–40)

Both tending towards and disrupting tranquil iambic meters, the description of the peaceful, natural landscape is disconcertingly unhinged from the impending slaughter. (The perfect iambic pentameter line finally and ironically arrives in line 40, with the description of the troops' attack.) Whether or not this precise description actually appeared in newspaper reports, others like it suggest that Melville did not have to tinker too much to foreground the surreal juxtaposition between nature's beauty and battle's ferocity, or at least the surreality of reportage that so exuberantly mingled the two.⁶ The insistence on the troops' optimism is equally unnerving, and the phrase "full of spirits" suggests that the soldiers themselves may not be in their right mind – may not even be themselves – in their positivity. When we learn later that "*Our heedless boys / Were nipped like blossoms. Some dozen / Hapless wounded men were frozen,*" the juxtaposition of lovely simile and brutal fact reaches its full horror, underscoring the gap between the circumstance and its print mediation (109; 234–36). The voice of the press becomes hysterically detached from the situation it reports upon in its fervent attempt to entertain and reassure readers.

This is not to say that the readers/listeners whom Melville represents are simply entertained, enclosed within a fantasy world of print. The people gathered around bulletin boards to hear the latest from the front identify not with the soldiers at Donelson, but with the reports about those soldiers. Their faces assume the look of the posted pages, which have turned grayish because the ink has bled in the rain: "Flitting faces took the hue / Of that washed bulletin-board in view / And seemed to bear the public grief / As private, and uncertain of relief;" (112; 321–24). Readers absorb the suffering of unknown men not as if it were their own, but as if it inhabited them in unsettling and communal terms. Gripped by the massive sacrifice of lives – the "*flushed fields of death, that call again – / Call to our men and not in vain*" – they are equally moved by the later report of "VICTORY!" (113, 374–75; 114, 392). Only the "wife and maid" go back to the bulletin board for the next dispatch in order to search for the names of their loved ones on the list of the dead. They cry while reading, and their tears join with the rain in a flood of sorrow that flows down the page, dissolving the print: "The death-list like a river flows / Down the pale sheet, / And there the whelming waters meet" (116; 450–52). The "pale sheet" of the page now resembles the women's grieving faces, as if they have achieved full identification with the news, which has ceased its narrative form and is now simply a list of the dead whose very print has dissolved, leaving behind a blank page that signifies both lost communications and the communication of loss.

Dickinson and Remote Suffering

Though her poetic engagements were more indirect, perhaps to reflect her sense that "War feels to me – an oblique place –," Emily Dickinson was also interested in the

Civil War news (JL 280). While it is true that after a certain age Dickinson preferred “not to cross [her] Father’s ground to any House or town,” it is also true that she didn’t need to travel anywhere to keep track of current events, for the news came to her (JL 330). An avid reader of *The Springfield Republican* and the *Amherst Record* as well as the leading genteel monthlies of the day – *Harper’s*, *Scribner’s*, and especially *The Atlantic Monthly* – Dickinson also counted among her closest personal friends and most steady correspondents the editor of the *Springfield Republican* – Samuel Bowles – and the founder and editor of *Scribner’s*, Josiah Gilbert Holland. A number of her correspondents, including Higginson (with whom she initiated contact after reading his “Letter to a Young Contributor” in *The Atlantic Monthly*), actually *made* news.⁷ Since news spread by word of mouth as well as by print, she could hardly have avoided hearing about the war, which was such a central topic of interest. When Frazar Stearns, the son of the President of Amherst College and adjutant in the 21st Massachusetts regiment, was killed, she learned and passed on the details of his death “by a minié ball” at Newbern, North Carolina (JL 255). Her letters also note Higginson’s service and Jeff Davis’ capture, both reported in *The Republican* (JL 280; JL 308). Most of the handful of poems that made it into print during her lifetime were published during the Civil War, in and among reports of the conflict in *The Republican*. Three poems appeared in *Drum Beat*, published by the Brooklyn and Long Island Fair for the benefit of the US Sanitary Commission, whose purpose was to raise funds to purchase supplies for the Union soldiers (Dandurand 18). Dickinson was, in other words, closer to the local and national news than many of us will ever be.

Until recently, scholars had determined that the Civil War provided Dickinson – whose period of greatest poetic output coincided with the years of the national crisis – with little more than metaphors for her own mental disposition. If she said in a letter that “sorrow seems more general than it did, and not the estate of a few persons, since the war began,” her critics understood that to mean that she thought that her own misery now had company (JL 298). In his landmark study of Civil War literature, Daniel Aaron relegates what he calls Dickinson’s “private campaign” to a “supplement” in which he says that “since the national conflict coincided with her private anguish, martial analogies and imagery naturally entered into her depictions of the wars of the Heart and Mind. . . . She fought her war without benefit of public bulletins” – and then he quotes her – “‘The only News I know / Is Bulletins all day / From Immortality’” (355). According to Aaron, who buttresses his point with Dickinson’s own words, the war enhanced and reinforced her preexisting emotional orientations, providing her with apt metaphors for psychological states.

The only book-length study to date on the subject – Shira Wolosky’s *Emily Dickinson: A Voice of War* – makes a claim for a less insular Dickinson, but continues to interpret her poems as statements of personal feeling. Wolosky determines that the war caused a crisis of religious faith for Dickinson, who could not convince herself that the loss of so many men was part of God’s plan (59).⁸ Recent articles by Wolosky, Leigh-Anne Urbanowicz Marcellin, and others move outside the persistent critical space of Dickinson’s consciousness. Marcellin, for example, claims that Dickinson

assumes a range of personae in order to encourage readers to “view the loss of life during wartime from a number of different perspectives”: “the position of Emily Dickinson herself is precisely that she held every position” (73). I would like to consider the possibility that when Dickinson wrote of the war she was neither registering its impact on her personal outlook, nor was she imaginatively inhabiting or seeking to convey the perspectives of others. Instead her Civil War poems warn of the dangers of assuming that one can fully know the experience of another. They repeatedly posit an insurmountable gap between civilians’ vicarious experience of the war, gained through newspaper reports and pictorial representations, and soldiers’ direct, physical, and largely unimaginable experience of combat. Like Melville, Dickinson explores the effects of print mediation on those who read about the conflict from a distance.

It is hard to argue with Dickinson’s own words, which clearly seem to corroborate Aaron’s claim that she attends to her poetic inspiration in contradistinction to worldly things, but if we look at the lines in their epistolary context, we might arrive at a quite different conclusion. They appear in a letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who was, among other things, Dickinson’s long-term correspondent, a leading literary figure of the day, an abolitionist, a women’s rights activist, and the Colonel in charge of the first black Union army regiment, the First South Carolina Volunteers. Hearing that Higginson had been discharged from service because of his wounds, Dickinson wrote from Cambridge, Massachusetts, in June of 1864 (Carlo is her dog):

Dear friend,

Are you in danger –

I did not know that you were hurt. Will you tell me more? Mr. Hawthorne died.

I was ill since September, and since April, in Boston, for a Physician’s care – He does not let me go, yet I work in my Prison, and make Guests for myself –

Carlo did not come, because that he would die, in Jail, and the Mountains, I could not hold now, so I brought but the Gods –

I wish to see you more than before I failed – Will you tell me your health?

I am surprised and anxious, since receiving your note –

The only News I know
Is Bulletins all day
From Immortality.

Can you render my Pencil?

The Physician has taken away my Pen.

I enclose the address from a letter, lest my figures fail – Knowledge of your recovery – would excel my own –

E Dickinson (JL 290)

Far from shutting herself off, Dickinson both wants to know and wants to spread the news. She asks Higginson to tell her more about his own situation, and she tells him that Hawthorne died, an important piece of information in her time. Rather than

celebrating the fact that she only receives “Bulletins all day / From Immortality,” Dickinson could very well be *complaining* that she can’t read the newspapers, for she was in Cambridge receiving medical treatment because her eyesight had failed. She was not supposed to be taxing her eyes by reading or writing – the physician has taken away her pen – and she encloses her own address for Higginson in another’s hand because she cannot see well enough to be sure that her “figures” are legible. Under these unusual and difficult circumstances, it seems more likely that she is disturbed that she may be missing the newspaper reports – like those about Higginson’s discharge – than that she is celebrating her inspired detachment from external events. Because she cannot see, she has to content herself with inspiration from beyond, but she would prefer to be able to read the earthly news.

There is a second possibility. Dickinson may also be suggesting that the only news she has heard during the war years is of death – or “Immortality,” as she delicately puts it. If so, that would be a fair if very condensed summary of the situation. The newspapers were saturated with reports of the battles that left unprecedented numbers on both sides dead. They also carried wood-cut engravings and reproductions of photographs of the dead on battlefields – Matthew Brady and Alex Gardner’s famous photographs were reproduced as sketches in the popular *Harper’s Illustrated Weekly*, for example – and long lists of the names of dead soldiers were published after the battles.⁹ Dickinson’s “Bulletins all day / From Immortality” could be a fairly literal description of one basic and tragic fact of her time: that men and boys were dying in huge numbers, that newspapers reported this fact, and that Higginson narrowly missed his own place in the immortal ranks.

Though Dickinson’s poems express skepticism that reading the news can bring battle experiences “home” to readers, they nevertheless experiment with ways of depicting the difference between the unknowable experience of trauma and the vicarious imaginings of that experience inspired by reading about it. Beyond the reception of news of any particular event, Dickinson is interested in the process of production, transmission, and reception of the news in a time when the first mass media networks were consolidating. “Myself can read the Telegrams” (FP 1049; 1865), for example, contemplates the experience of receiving information via telegram. Because the news creates an absent presence, or presence of absence, the speaker has difficulty apprehending the meaning of the information she receives:

Myself can read the Telegrams
 A Letter chief to me
 The Stock’s advance and retrograde
 And what the Markets say

 The Weather – how the Rains
 In Counties have begun.
 ’Tis News as null as nothing,
 But sweeter so, than none.

Reading the mundane news of the day pleases the speaker, but it also causes her to conflate the impersonal and the personal, telegrams and letters. She naïvely assumes that the news is specifically addressed to her.¹⁰ Markets speak, while the speaker seems unable to claim herself directly as “I,” instead referring to herself in a personal third person (“Myself”), as if she possessed her self but was separate from it, and so did not know exactly what it was reading. She registers skepticism about the validity or significance of receiving abstract reports about abstractions – the stock market, weather elsewhere – that cannot be seen, directly experienced, or proven. The simile “null as nothing” seems to equate two negations, thereby canceling canceled meaning, or doubling nothingness. Unlike “nothing,” however, “null” suggests a lack of binding legal power or efficacy. Something rendered invalid is not exactly nothing. While questioning the import of the news, the speaker nevertheless expresses pleasure to receive confirmation that the world exists. Since it sends reports, the world must exist, she reasons. The mere information signals are comforting.

With the advent of the telegraph, the signals were newly continuous. In Dickinson’s words, Lightning’s “Yellow Feet / May pass – and counterpass – / Opon the ropes – above our head – / Continual with the news –” (FP 595 {1863}). This electrical activity brings the far and near together in an unprecedented way and makes newly crucial the question of how to respond to the disaster of strangers. Dickinson suggests that extending sympathy to strangers is not automatic, especially when their suffering is invisible and distant, transmitted through signals in an electrical wire and then converted to words. Under such circumstances, generating sympathy or any emotional response seems inadequate, difficult, or impossible. Dickinson repeatedly notes the difficulty of valorizing the distant suffering of strangers in letters and poems. The “anguish of others” is “dangerous to value, for only the precious can alarm” (JL 298).

Dickinson formulates, explores, and seeks to solve the problem of distant nearness created by Civil War era news circulation. “Bereavement in their death to feel” (FP 756; 1863), for example, diagnoses the problem of sympathizing with distant strangers:

Bereavement in their death to feel
Whom We have never seen –
A Vital Kinsmanship import
Our Soul and their’s between –

For Stranger – Strangers do not mourn –
There be Immortal friends
Whom Death see first – ’tis news of this
That paralyze Ourselves –

Who – vital only to Our Thought –
Such Presence bear away
In dying – ’tis as if Our souls
Absconded – suddenly –

Charting an inexorable tendency toward solipsism, the speaker formulates the paradox that hearing the news of a stranger's death creates a "vital Kinsmanship" between a dead person and the living recipients of the knowledge. The bond is created, however, not by putting one's self in the place of the other, but in imagining death's reception of the other's Soul. The paralysis resulting from hearing the news simulates the final, irreversible obliteration of identity. There is an obvious irony in this scenario, and a flaw in the logic. Since strangers do not mourn for strangers, then it is the news of the stranger's death that forges a friendship. Since friendship as we know it cannot exist between a living person and an unknown dead person, the speaker suggests that this peculiar kind of friendship is a selfish convenience, "vital only to our thought." Death serves the purpose of giving the living a foretaste of their own soul's escape. The speaker does not come to imagine what it is like to be the other person, but rather what it is like to cease to be a person.

Rather than portraying sympathetic relations between speakers in tranquil surroundings and their distant, suffering subjects, Dickinson underscores the unknowability of another's pain. By forging tropic connections – via analogy, simile, metaphor – between her speakers' domestic, rural environments and the violence in which her distant subjects are immersed, Dickinson posits a range of relations that do not minimize but rather foreground the gap between experiences. The resulting formulations range from sympathetic dis-identification, to antipathic alienation, to narcissistic appropriation, to indifference. Without resolving it into a moral act, Dickinson charts the dangers and pleasures of the irresistible tendency to use the suffering of others as a basis or touchstone for evaluating our own experiences. In what follows I examine her treatment of two groups of distant others deprived of their full humanity and particularly of their liberty during the Civil War era: soldiers and slaves.

Soldiers

The speaker of "When I was small, a Woman died" (FP 518; 1863) – one of Dickinson's most widely recognized and familiar war poems – places herself as an eyewitness to a wartime death, even while foregrounding the fact that she is not really there; instead, she explores the consequences of imaginatively envisioning the scenario.¹¹ The poem seems to allude to the Battle of Antietam in September of 1862, renowned as one of the bloodiest of the war, in which nearly 6,000 men died and 17,000 were wounded (McPherson 544). The Union troops won, turning Lee's soldiers back across the Potomac into Virginia, preventing them from crossing into Maryland and then Pennsylvania. The speaker imagines the boy's death in battle and subsequent reunion with his mother in "Paradise," even while questioning whether such a place exists. The speaker also questions the meaning and purpose of war, and her own spectatorial relation to it:¹²

When I was small, a Woman died –
Today – her Only Boy

Went up from the Potomac –
 His face all Victory

 To look at her – How slowly
 The Seasons must have turned
 Till Bullets clipt an Angle
 And He passed quickly round –

 If pride shall be in Paradise –
 Ourselves cannot decide –
 Of their imperial conduct –
 No person testified –

 But, proud in Apparition –
 That Woman and her Boy
 Pass back and forth, before my Brain
 As even in the sky –

 I'm confident, that Bravoes –
 Perpetual break abroad
 For Braveries, remote as this
 In Yonder Maryland –

The poem's subject is a boy, not a man, whose innocence and immaturity are underscored by his mother's hovering spectral presence. The mother's willing sacrifice of her beloved son is a common theme of the poetry of the period. (For example, in Lucy Larcom's "Reenlisted," published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in May 1864, a mother proclaims "I cannot hold a musket, but I have a son who can; / And I'm proud for Freedom's sake to be the mother of a man!"). Here the speaker gives a cynical cast to this patriotic figure of maternal sacrifice when she imagines that the mother is waiting for her son to die so that they may be reunited and speculates that the boy's violent death will make her proud.

While the speaker imagines that the celestial mother and child might experience a sense of "pride" in the actions that resulted in his death, the reason for the pride remains unspecified. "Freedom," or any other abstract ideal, is distinctly absent as a justification for the boy's death. Indeed, his "face all Victory" challenges the legitimacy of attaching such an ideal to the event, for the poem does not specify what victory stands for: victory over what, in the name of what? Because the speaker is only willing to admit the appearance of victory on the boy's face and not its source or validation, we must wonder whether he was wrong when he thought he was victorious at the moment he died, or whether he experienced triumph in his own erasure simply because he thought he would finally be able to see his mother again. Instead of symbolic sacrifice, there is the simple fact of the boy's death in battle, underscored by the graphic delineation of the bullet's angle through the body, and the body's trajectory – it "passed quickly round" – upon the impact of the bullet.

Various forms of dislocation, including geographic dislocation, indicate that the reader's speculative relation to the events is the poem's subject. Whereas most poems published during the war are emphatically aligned with one side or the other, in Dickinson's poem the speaker declines to take sides. The boy "went up from the Potomac" in a battle that made the Potomac a dividing line between Northern and Southern forces. That the boy went up precisely from the middle suggests that he could be either a Union or a Confederate soldier, or that the speaker refuses to make the distinction. At the same time, the speaker's resistance to taking sides shows how carefully Dickinson read the news of the conflict: she knew where the middle was, and that it did not, in reality, exist. By referring to "yonder Maryland" in the final line, moreover, the speaker perhaps situates herself far away in New England, at a great distance from the fray, but also perhaps in Virginia, looking across the Potomac from the Confederate side. "Yonder" "usually impl[ies] that the object spoken of is at some distance but within sight" (according to the OED). The "Braves" breaking "abroad" also support this reading, for abroad signifies "out of the home country; in or into foreign lands," and the South was a foreign land at this moment, as far as both sides were concerned. Dickinson's speaker, then, assumes a Confederate perspective on the North's victory cries. That the "Braves" break "abroad" also suggests that the news of the victory has traveled to foreign countries, or to places that may as well be foreign, because the grisly experience of battle is so "remote."

Geographic dislocation indicates a larger confusion and incomprehension on the speaker's part that arises from the enormity of the event and her distance from it. Her insistence that she's "confident, that Braves – / Perpetual break abroad" shows that she does not know; since she must surmise what is happening, it is clear that she is not there and cannot say for sure. She admits as much when she calls the "Braveries" "remote." And though it may be true that braves are breaking, the question remains whether they should be; the more braves, the more young men have died with victory frozen on their faces. The enormous number of dead is underscored by Dickinson's alternate word for "Yonder" in the last line; "Scarlet Maryland" evokes an image of a land soaked in so much blood it cannot be absorbed. The plurality of "Braveries" marks myriad deaths, which, in turn, provokes the speaker to try to recuperate the image of a single soldier, however spectrally and generally. The boy is one of numerous deaths that will go unnoted, except perhaps by his dead mother, and by the speaker. Dickinson's speaker insists on her inability to know the boy's thoughts or feelings. There's victory on his face, but who knows what was in his mind when he died? Perhaps he and his mother are having a happy reunion in Paradise, but the possibility of religious redemption seems as dubious as the myth of national redemption in the poem. Even if "Paradise" exists, it may not sanction the particular brand of "pride" the boy and his mother may or may not possess. The only thing the speaker knows for sure is that the spectral images – she makes a distinction between her fantasies and real people – preoccupy her. Apparitional boy and mother meet in her imagination, which is perhaps the closest thing to a reunion in the afterlife they will ever have.

Dickinson repeatedly addresses the remoteness of the fact of mass death, not just in poems that take as their explicit topic the plight of soldiers (for example, “It feels a shame to be Alive –” (FP 524; 1863), “My Portion is Defeat – today –” (FP 704; 1863), “My Triumph lasted till the Drums” (FP 1212; 1871), etc.). As several critics have recently suggested, battlefield slaughter often haunts peaceful New England settings.¹³ The speaker envisions a sunset as intangible regiments of blood in “Whole Gulfs – of Red, and Fleets – of Red –” (FP 468; 1862). In “The name – of it – is ‘Autumn’ – ,” another speaker hallucinates that falling leaves are a bloody “Shower of Stain” that “sprinkles Bonnets,” marking civilian women with the soldiers’ sacrifice (FP 465; 1862). Petals blowing in the June wind invoke the myriad, “Repealless” dead in “They dropped like Flakes –” (FP 545; 1863). In “It sifts from Leaden Sieves –,” the maimed battlefield dead register in a post-harvest winter field filled with “Stump, and Stack, and Stem” and “Acres of Joints, where Harvests were, / Recordless but for them –” (FP 291; 1862). By presenting speakers who admit their partial, distant knowledge of battle, Dickinson foregrounds the gap between home and war fronts, rather than seeking to close it. Not entirely abnegating the project of representation, these poems represent the distance between, evoking the information networks that both connect and estrange combatants and civilians. In doing so, they suggest that the belief that one can understand war by reading about it is a source of estrangement. Dickinson’s poems explore what it means to learn about events in a fragmentary and second-hand way via newspaper bulletins. The poems represent the necessity of conjuring the absent scenario as well as the necessary failure of the imagination to rise to the task.

Slaves

If the blood of soldiers merits the respectful recognition of what might be called Dickinson’s strategy of sympathetic dis-identification – that is, her speakers’ acknowledgment of the emotional limits of identification as a form of respect for the suffering of others – the blood of slaves is a more complicated matter. In several poems apparently written during the Civil War years, Dickinson exaggerates the dehumanizing tendencies of racist rhetoric, highlighting the way the news of slavery travels and lodges in the psyche of speakers who fail to imagine African Americans as human. By dramatizing acts of psychic appropriation that objectify others, she demonstrates the difficulty or impossibility of achieving sympathy, especially across “racial” lines. Dickinson’s several uses of the word “Berry,” which she associates with blackness, are a test case for this idea.

In January and February of 1863, the *Springfield Republican* reported on Higginson’s transfer to the South Sea Islands, where he took charge of a black regiment, the First South Carolina Volunteers. In response to this news, Dickinson wrote him a letter in February of 1863 that cryptically asserted “I too, have an ‘Island’ – whose ‘Rose and Magnolia’ are in the Egg, and it’s ‘Black Berry’ but a spicy prospective”

(JL 280). The separation of the fruit's name into two capitalized words personifies the Berry as a black man, and at the same time objectifies him as a fruit. By creating a correspondence between Higginson's soldiers in an exotic locale and the edible fruit in her yard, she shockingly dehumanizes the black men. A far more familiar tendency in nineteenth-century rhetoric is to liken African-American slaves to animals – work horses, dogs, deer fleeing from hunters. Dickinson's botanical metaphor offers a more extreme negation of common humanity that not only rejects a species relation between blacks and whites, but relegates African Americans to another kingdom entirely. Whether she mocks her own inability to grasp the humanity of those whose experiences are foreign to her own, or jocularly expresses an extreme prejudice, remains unclear.¹⁴ Either way, the extreme metaphor foregrounds the radical disjunction between Higginson's proximate relation to African-American soldiers and her remote location.

Dickinson develops this meditation on insoluble differences in two "Berry" poems. In "The Black Berry – wears a Thorn in his side –" (FP 548; 1863), she again makes the distinction between a "Black Berry" and a "Man"; the poem almost certainly makes a commentary on slavery:

The Black Berry – wears a Thorn in his side –
 But no Man heard Him cry –
 He offers His Berry, just the same
 To Partridge – and to Boy –

 He sometimes holds upon the Fence –
 Or struggles to a Tree –
 Or clasps a Rock, with both His Hands –
 But not for sympathy –

 We – tell a Hurt – to cool it –
 This Mourner – to the Sky
 A little further reaches – instead –
 Brave Black Berry –

As in her letter to Higginson, Dickinson's transformation of "blackberry" into a proper name personifies the fruit while objectifying the man. The second effect is underscored, since Dickinson contrasts the Berry's suffering with the Man's oblivion, suggesting that only one is regarded as human, or that two mutually exclusive recognitions of humanity are simultaneously operative. The speaker's use of the male pronoun for the Berry in the same line as the word "Man" foregrounds the absurdity of a plant characterized as a sufferer and a person characterized as ear-less (like a berry), incapable of hearing or registering suffering. The Man's incomprehension is ensured by the impossibility of linguistic communication between animal and plant kingdoms.

Further intensifying the paradox of a de-personified figure defined by the human capacity for suffering, the speaker compares the Berry to Christ in a way that marks

the extreme circumstantial differences between Christ's crucifixion and the slave's subjection. The thorn in the Berry's side associates him with Christ by overlapping the image of his crown of thorns with the stab wound in his side (John 19:34). Dickinson's capitalization of the third person pronoun "He" when referring to the Berry encourages this association. Like Christ, the Berry offers himself fully to all, and visibly suffers, "not for sympathy," but for the benefit of others. There the similarity ends, however. That the Berry "wears" the thorn in his side suggests that it is a fashion that he has chosen, rather than a wound that was inflicted by others. The speaker makes light of or ridicules the Berry's suffering by suggesting that he wounded himself for show. Her choice of the verb "offer" also seems wholly inappropriate, for offering something depends upon the ability not to offer it. Because the Berry is rooted, he cannot help but offer himself to every passerby, just as a slave legally cannot help but serve the bidding of others. The poem implicitly juxtaposes the Berry's compulsory sacrifice with Christian communion, in which the faithful consume the body and blood of Christ in remembrance of His sacrifice. The scenario Dickinson portrays is precisely unlike Christ's sacrifice, because Christ was able to tell His followers that He chose to die to redeem the sins of others. Dickinson's consumers, on the other hand, learn nothing from seeing or eating the Berry and are, in fact, oblivious to its sacrifice.

The poem offers both a spectacle of racist dehumanization and its critique. Mapping the suffering of an absent, imagined man onto a rural landscape demonstrates the failure of sympathy to cross a geographical and experiential divide. The speaker's perspective on the grotesque scenario with cannibalistic overtones is unclear. Her choice of the verbs "wears" and "offers" to describe the Berry's plight suggests that she does not comprehend the violent scenario she portrays. It is as if she designs the solitary and incurable nature of the man's pain by turning him into a Berry because she is more interested in the aesthetic appeal of the iconography of suffering than in providing solace. In this way, the poem warns of the futility and even danger of projecting one's sympathetic fantasies onto another. The final stanza makes explicit the contrast between the speaker and those whom she addresses – the "We" who can "tell a Hurt – to cool it" – and the Berry, who cannot speak his pain and can therefore find no sympathy. No sympathy, that is, except from the speaker, who offers commendation and encouragement in a final apostrophe – "Brave Black Berry" – as if she herself has lost the awareness that her metaphor is a metaphor and affirms a Berry's bravery rather than a man's. The final line brings out the cruelty of de-personification. That the speaker thinks that the Berry is an appropriate metaphor for a man indicates the diminishing powers of sympathy. Indeed, the image is so extremely inappropriate, and the meter so anticlimactic, that a reader wonders if the subject of the poem is the speaker's naïve incomprehension, or inability to imagine black humanity, rather than the suffering of a black man. Dickinson may be offering a scathing critique of her speaker's naïveté. Both enacting and critiquing the violence of representation, Dickinson foregrounds the difficulty of understanding the pain of absent strangers through an act of the imagination.

If “The Black Berry – wears a Thorn in his side –” is about mute, unrelenting, misunderstood, solitary suffering, “As the Starved Maelstrom laps the Navies” (FP 1064; 1865) offers the reverse scenario of insatiable rage and lust for revenge. If the Berry offers himself as food for Man, the Tiger seeks to feed on him. In either case, according to the poems’ logic, human status belongs only to some people. Following a similar tropic logic as “The Black Berry – wears a Thorn in his side –,” the speaker’s personification of the Tiger de-personifies the slave. So too, the Tiger’s suffering is mute, expressed by a speaker who again foregrounds her removal from the violent scenario; in this case she emphasizes through an unsettling, sustained analogy the gap between the Tiger’s bloodlust and her own “finer Famine”:

As the Starved Maelstrom laps the Navies
 As the Vulture teased
 Forces the Broods in lonely Valleys
 As the Tiger eased

 By but a Crumb of Blood, fasts Scarlet
 Till he meet a Man
 Dainty adorned with Veins and Tissues
 And partakes – his Tongue

 Cooled by the Morsel for a moment
 Grows a fiercer thing
 Till he esteem his Dates and Cocoa
 A Nutrition mean

 I, of a finer Famine
 Deem my Supper dry
 For but a Berry of Domingo
 And a torrid Eye –

As Ed Folsom and Kenneth Price have suggested in their reading of this poem on their provocative website “Dickinson, Slavery, and the San Domingo Moment,” Dickinson’s “vortex word” Domingo codes the poem as a meditation on slavery. “Domingo” was shorthand for the successful slave revolt that erupted in Haiti at the turn of the nineteenth century. During the antebellum period, the word was used frequently to evoke the fear of bloody slave insurrection. A series of articles entitled “Horrors of San Domingo” appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* starting in May 1862, for example. Noting that Dickinson’s poem was written just months after the Emancipation Proclamation, Folsom and Price suggest “that the charged image of ‘Domingo’ is used to evoke the spirit that rejects insufficient nutriment, a spirit that once it tastes humanity can never again return to its meaner diet.” In this reading, “tasting” humanity takes a carnivorous turn, which raises questions about the value of human status. The “Man” is at once the oppressor, the object of rage, and the object of desire.

Dickinson not only imagines African-American rage, but also the white imagination of black rage. There are two figures in the poem, balanced against one another – the Tiger of the middle two stanzas, and the “I” of the final stanza. Two separate hungers are compared: the hunger of the slave for revenge against those who have oppressed him, and the hunger of the white speaker for an emotional intensity that she imagines the slave has and she lacks. Dickinson foregrounds her speaker’s vicarious relationship to distant events in which she has no part. The poem obliquely but persistently addresses the problem of plantation labor. It names delicacies – Dates and Cocoa – produced at an inscrutable distance in the tropical climates of the West Indies, Africa, or Latin America by enslaved workers that remain unknown to distant consumers (“Berry” was a common term for a coffee bean). The poem’s structure follows two developing orders, depending on the reader’s understanding of the single word “As.” If “As” generates a series of similes, then the speaker compares the hunger of the Maelstrom, the Vulture, and especially the Tiger, to her own “finer famine.” If, however, “As” signifies simultaneity, then the speaker tells us that she “deem[s]” her “Supper dry” while the Maelstrom, Vulture, and Tiger work to control their bloodlust. Either way the sequence of “As” clauses enforces a distinction between the agents of action and the final stanza’s human commentator, ensconced at home, contemplating her Supper.

As in the Black Berry poem, the speaker offers a portrayal of a racialized white consciousness. Expressing a common white fear of the San Domingo Hour, the speaker casts a bloody slave revolt in terms of cannibalism. If the speaker of “The Black Berry – wears a Thorn in his side – ” unsuccessfully seeks to experience pity through her vicarious imaginings, this speaker seeks to experience murderous rage by imaginatively inhabiting the mind of a vengeful black man. Since the line “Dainty adorned with veins and tissues” is not directly attributed, the speaker now seems to think along with the Tiger. Yet the speaker invents the distinction in the first place. African Americans are not Tigers, nor do they eat people, except perhaps in the white imagination. The conjuring of experience is a solipsistic act of imagination that folds in on itself. The speaker reveals that she has been talking about herself all the while and foregrounds her inability to conjure others’ experiences except as a trope for her own experience. The progression of tropic invention draws attention to her deliberate choice of the most de-humanizing form of representation when portraying black rage. The Maelstrom is animalized, the Vulture is personified, but when the Tiger is personified, a person is de-personified. The speaker chooses the most violent tropic form in order to dehumanize the black man, so that she may try to imagine what it feels like to want to murder and consume someone.

The speaker’s narcissism is rendered explicit in the final stanza.¹⁵ “I of a finer famine” marks a difference in degree, not kind, which undermines the list of similes she has so carefully constructed. Similes are predicated on difference; the reader must discover the unlikely similarity. Here, the similes are predicated on difference in degree, not kind. They are not, in fact, similes, but a series of likenesses. This demonstrates a self-mocking awareness that the voracious creatures are fantastical

projections of her own mind, created for her own convenience, in order to describe her own hunger through comparison. "Deem" suggests that she can design her level of rage for her own entertainment and pleasure, whereas the other creatures she portrays cannot choose their feelings, though they can control them.¹⁶ The Berry of Domingo figures contained rage in a way that is, if not nonsensical, at least counter-intuitive; revolution has no clear circumference; once it starts it cannot be contained within the boundaries of a Berry (Dickinson formulates this image of unbounded proliferation in "Revolution is the Pod/ Systems rattle from" [FP 1044]).

Dickinson, in other words, portrays a genteel poet vicariously appropriating experience she cannot imagine for the sake of self-expression. She marks the difference between the poet and the slave, or more accurately the poet and her imagined figure of the slave. Appropriation is held within the image of eating the Berry to improve her supper: a matter of taste, not of starvation. Eating the Berry replicates the Tiger's earlier cannibalism on a demure, and therefore absurd, scale. Rhyming "I" with "Eye" reinforces the speaker's solipsism, her inability to see beyond herself; the poem offers a portrait of the speaker lost in rootless subjectivity, tenuously tied to unknown registers of lurid rage that she lodges in a black body transformed first into a Tiger, then into a Berry for her supper.

Conclusion: Feeling News

While Dickinson treats the news of soldiers' deaths and slaves' sufferings in dramatically different ways, all the poems discussed in this essay register an awareness that the mediation of events through print both stimulates the necessity and ensures the failure of readers' desires to understand the suffering of distant strangers. While Dickinson's poems express skepticism that learning about distant pain can bring it "home" to readers, they nevertheless experiment with ways of representing the experience of others that stop short of naturalizing their suffering as something a reader can understand through sympathetic identification. "How News must feel when traveling" (FP 1379) is a strange experiment, imagining human experience from the news' point of view:

How News must feel when traveling
 If News have any Heart
 *Alighting at the Dwelling
 'Twill enter like a Dart!

What News must think when pondering
 If News have any Thought
 Concerning the stupendousness
 Of its perceiveless freight!

What News will do when every Man
 Shall comprehend as one

And not in all the Universe
A thing to tell remain?

* Last two lines of the first stanza have this fascicle variant:

Advancing on the Transport
'Twill riddle like a Shot.

Rather than thinking about how the news makes her feel personally, the speaker formulates a philosophical axiom that the most impersonal forms of communication can be the most personally devastating to the recipient. The news cannot feel or think about its own import; that is left to the reader. But by thinking about how the news would feel and think if it could, the speaker tries to break the boundary of personal feeling in order to imagine what might be called mass emotion or mass thought. The poem not only posits a relation between public information and its impact on individuals, but also between physical and mental, direct and vicarious forms of experience. Several words and phrases in the poem may be interpreted both literally and figuratively: "News . . . advancing on the transport" could refer to the physical dissemination of news and newspapers via train and telegraph, modes of transport that dramatically accelerated the dissemination of information in the mid-nineteenth century and created new appetites for perpetual information. The phrase could also refer to the internal state of an individual who, in the midst of "transport," receives devastating news that shatters her bliss. The phrase "riddle like a shot" overlays images of physical and mental devastation. Bodies are riddled by shot in war, among other places, and the news of a shooting death can transmit an analogous state of mental destruction to those who have the heart to feel the news they receive. The poem searches for ways to develop correspondences between direct and indirect experience without assuming that the two are identical. Though indirect, the reception of words and news is nevertheless a form of experience, one that merits further study.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks to Tyler Curtain, Rebecka Fisher, Mary Floyd-Wilson, Matthew Spencer, Jane Thraikill, and the audience at the April 2003 American Antiquarian Society Seminar in Literary History for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this essay. I'm also grateful for the AAS-NEH fellowship that provided the time and resources for my preliminary research.

NOTES

- 1 Citing Dickinson's poems, I note Franklin's estimated dates of composition in parentheses after my first mention of each Dickinson poem in order to indicate that these poems are all "Civil War poems," at least by virtue of being copied into a fascicle, sent in a letter,

- or written during the period. I am in agreement with Coleman Hutchison's recent argument that we should expand interpretations and definitions of Dickinson's "Civil War" poems beyond battle thematics to include an awareness of a broader range of the period's concerns.
- 2 In *The Language of War*, James Dawes explores the impact of violence on language, and notes Melville's interest in "the new requirements that war demands of poetry" (13).
 - 3 Fahs devotes a chapter to poems about dead soldiers, 93–119.
 - 4 All issues of *The Atlantic Monthly* cited in this essay may be found online in their entirety at the website listed in the bibliography. On Dickinson's reading of this magazine, see Capps, 132–33.
 - 5 Thanks to Paul Wright for drawing my attention to this poem and sharing his thoughtful unpublished paper on Melville's poetic engagements with the Civil War. In an endnote, Garner draws from the research of Richard Fogle and Frank L. Day, which shows that Melville reworked stories from the *New York Times* and *The Missouri Democrat* for the poem (476 n. 34).
 - 6 For example, a passage about the battle in the *New York Times* compares sharpshooters to hunters "waylaying deer at the salt lick." This becomes, in Melville's poem, "*Our fellows lurk / Like Indians that waylay the deer / By the wild salt-spring.*" See Robert Penn Warren's note on "Donelson" (Melville 361).
 - 7 For Emily Dickinson's reading of newspapers and periodicals, see Capps, 128–43. Shira Wolosky notes that Emily Dickinson made fifteen references to the war in her letters between 1861 and 1865 ("Public" 107). Marta Werner's excellent website, "A Nosegay to Take to Battle," is a helpful and provocative resource for students of Dickinson interested in her relation to the Civil War (see *The Classroom Electric*; Available: <http://www.classroomelectric.org/>).
 - 8 Other essays that interpret Dickinson's war poems as statements of personal feeling include Cappucci, Ford, Hoffman, and Wardrop ("Poetics"). Faith Barrett's forthcoming article claims that Dickinson "addresses a divided nation," but does so obliquely, through "her rejection of sentimental models for identification with the suffering other" (note 4). This claim bears a relation to an idea that I work through here, that Dickinson foregrounds the mediated reception of distant suffering; I seek, however, to suspend the question of what Dickinson herself thinks and consider instead her exploration of the ways that authors hold mediated relations to their lyric speakers that bear a complex relation to the circulation of news in the period.
 - 9 F. A. Stearns is listed among the dead in *The Springfield Daily Republican* for March 20, 1862, for example. *The Republican* is available online at Werner's website.
 - 10 On the impact of the telegraph on Dickinson's poetic style and (impersonal) lyric voice, see McCormack.
 - 11 According to Franklin, Thomas Johnson "suggested the poem was prompted by the death of Francis H. Dickinson of Belchertown, killed at the battle of Ball's Bluff, Virginia, 21 October 1861, while serving with the 15th regiment, company F, but his death is early for this poem. With few exceptions, poems from 1861 entered the fascicles before 1863. Dickinson's characteristic use of 'Ourself' . . . first appeared in 1862, and no Civil War battles occurred in Maryland (line 20) before September of that year, when Robert E. Lee invaded the state on the way to Pennsylvania, engaging Union forces at several points, notably at Sharpsburg, where he was turned back across the Potomac to Virginia. The soldier may not have been local, or even historical, as none of the casualties for the Amherst area occurred in Maryland" (FP 518n).
 - 12 Maurice Lee notes that both Melville and Dickinson register "profound misgivings" about the war. In his reading of "When I was small," he asserts that "the soldiers' death invokes the mystery of a self-consciously fantasized afterworld" (1127). See also Ford (203).
 - 13 See Hoffman and Barrett on "The name – of it – is 'Autumn'" (FP 465), Barrett on "They dropped like Flakes –" (FP 545), and Berkove on "A slash of Blue –" (FP 233), for example;

- Cody offers an extremely detailed analysis of the historical contexts for “The name – of it – is ‘Autumn’” in the context of the Civil War, a literary tradition of New England fall poems, and other cultural references of the period.
- 14 Benjamin Friedlander finds that Dickinson “perversely” appropriates the rhetoric of slavery for the selfish purpose of describing her literary plight (2); Vivian Pollak, in contrast, finds that “this woman’s war critiques the racial exclusions on which her own class privilege also depended” (92); my reading posits a third possibility, that Dickinson’s poems display the limitations and difficulties of what Castiglia calls the “racial interiors” of a “white” imagination of slave suffering. For a treatment of abolitionist diction in Dickinson, see Wardrop (“Minute”).
- 15 I am indebted to Julia Hansen for conversations about this poem; her unpublished essay offers an astute analysis of the self-consuming logic of the speaker’s solipsism.
- 16 See Chris Castiglia’s article for an analysis of the ways abolitionists defined their “white civic depth” by the imagined ability to inhabit other subjective positions, especially that of the suffering slave.

WORKS CITED AND CONSULTED

- Aaron, Daniel. *The Unwritten War: American Writers and the Civil War*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973.
- The Atlantic Monthly*. Online at the *Making of America Project*. <http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/mao/browse.journals/atla.html>.
- Barrett, Faith. “Addresses to a Divided Nation: Images of War in Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman.” *Arizona Quarterly* 61.4 (2005): 67–99.
- Berkove, Lawrence I. “‘A Slash of Blue!’: An Unrecognized Emily Dickinson War Poem.” *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 10.1 (2001): 1–8.
- Blondheim, Menahem. *News over the Wires: The Telegraph and the Flow of Public Information in America, 1844–1897*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1994.
- Capps, Jack. *Emily Dickinson’s Reading, 1836 to 1886*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966.
- Cappucci, Paul R. “Depicting the Oblique: Emily Dickinson’s Poetic Response to the American Civil War.” *War, Literature, and the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities* 10.1 (Spring–Summer 1998): 260–73.
- Castiglia, Christopher. “Abolition’s Racial Interiors and the Making of White Civic Depth.” *American Literary History* 14.1 (2002): 32–59.
- Cody, David. “Blood in the Basin: The Civil War in Emily Dickinson’s ‘The name – of it – is ‘Autumn’ –’.” *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 12.1 (2003): 25–52.
- Dandurand, Karen. “New Dickinson Civil War Publications.” *American Literature* 56.1 (March 1984): 17–27.
- Dawes, James. *The Language of War: Literature and Culture in the U.S. from the Civil War through World War II*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002.
- Fahs, Alice. *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861 to 1865*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2001.
- Folsom, ed. and Kenneth M. Price. “Dickinson, Slavery, and the San Domingo Moment.” *The Classroom Electric*. Online. Available: <http://www.unl.edu/Price/dickinson/>.
- Ford, Thomas W. “Emily Dickinson and the Civil War.” *University Review* 31 (1965): 199–203.
- Friedlander, Benjamin. “Auctions of the Mind: Emily Dickinson and Abolition.” *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 54.1 (1998): 1–26.
- Garner, Stanton. *The Civil War World of Herman Melville*. University Press of Kansas, 1993.
- Higginson, Thomas Wentworth. “Letter to a Young Contributor.” *Atlantic Monthly: A Magazine of Literature, Art, and Politics* IX, No. LIV (April 1862): 401–11.
- Hoffman, Tyler B. “Emily Dickinson and the Limit of War.” *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 3.2 (1994): 1–18.
- Howe, Julia Ward. “Battle Hymn of the Republic.” *Atlantic Monthly: A Magazine of Literature, Art, and Politics* IX, No. LII (February 1862): 10.

- Howe, Julia Ward. *Reminiscences 1819–1899*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899.
- Hutchison, Coleman. "Eastern Exiles: Dickinson, Whiggery, and War." *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 13.2 (2004): 1–26.
- Larcom, Lucy. "Reenlisted." *Atlantic Monthly: A Magazine of Literature, Art, and Politics* XIII, No. LXXIX (May 1864): 629–31.
- Lee, Maurice S. "Writing through the War: Melville and Dickinson after the Renaissance." *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 115.5 (2000): 1124–28.
- Marcellin, Leigh-Anne Urbanowicz. "'Singing Off the Charnel Steps': Soldiers and Mourners in Emily Dickinson's War Poetry." *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 9.2 (2000): 64–74.
- McCormack, Jerusha Hall. "Domesticating Delphi: Emily Dickinson and the Electro-Magnetic Telegraph." *American Quarterly* 55.4 (2003): 569–601.
- McPherson, James M. *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1988.
- Melville, Herman. *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1866.
- Melville, Herman. *Selected Poems of Herman Melville*. Ed. Robert Penn Warren. New York: Random House, 1967.
- Nudelman, Franny. *John Brown's Body: Slavery, Violence, and the Culture of War*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2004.
- Pollak, Vivian. "Dickinson and the Poetics of Whiteness." *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 9.2 (2000): 84–95.
- Price, Kenneth M. and Martha Nell Smith, eds. *The Classroom Electric*. Online. Available: <http://classroomelectric.org>
- Sweet, Timothy. *Traces of War: Poetry, Photography, and the Question of Representation in the American Civil War*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1990.
- Wardrop, Daneen. "'That Minute Domingo': Dickinson's Cooptation of Abolitionist Diction and Franklin's Variorum Edition." *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 8.2 (1999): 72–86.
- Wardrop, Daneen. "The Poetics of Political Involvement and Non-Involvement." *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 10.2 (2001): 52–67.
- Werner, Marta. "A Nosegay To Take to Battle: Emily Dickinson's Civil War Wounding." *The Classroom Electric*. Online. Available: <http://www.classroomelectric.org/volume2/werner/>
- Whittier, John Greenleaf. "In Wartime." *The North American Review* 98 Issue 202 (January 1864): 290–92.
- Wolosky, Shira. *Emily Dickinson: A Voice of War*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1984.
- Wolosky, Shira. "Public and Private in Dickinson's War Poetry." *A Historical Guide to Emily Dickinson*. Ed. Vivian Pollak. Oxford University Press, 2004. 103–131.
- Wright, Paul. "Herman Melville and the Print Culture of the Civil War." Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing. Cambridge, England. 4–7 July 1997.