# Noted

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## *Recognition*

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# *Contents*

# *Editors' Letter*

You have opened this journal. Now you should (promise to come back?) close it.

Back? Flip then close it. Then come back, hopefully.

Still there? If you are (thank you), then what did you notice? Or, better - what did you recognise?

Glasses-wearers and camera-users will be familiar with the fuzziness, pun intended, which conjoins focus to blurring. Sometimes the move from one to the other is intentional and enacted (I don't want to watch adverts, thank you); sometimes unintentional (glasses' rims are fickle beasts). I hear that good photographers have more control; for that, ask Greta, this issue's photographer. They are still, however, at their camera's mercy.

The point I am making is, believe it or not, about recognition - or perhaps, first, about cognition. How much of thought is intentional, how much ponderous or undirected? The same could be said of recognition, cognition's suffixially extended cousin. There is a rather large gap between déjà vu and the seasonal ritual of revisiting your favourite Christmas movie, but both rest on recognition.

This issue seeks to encompass the scope of recognition's referential range. Greta Fonzi's essay explores Dickinson's poetic voice losing and finding itself through nature; our second contribution to the Academic Section, a sneak peak at research conducted at the University of Zurich, has a rather different outlook upon the scales at which we may recognise language for its alterations and nuances. Tristan Gishig's novel episode for Philip Sidney's *New Arcadia*, only 450-ish years after its original publication, recognises Sidney's unique approach to writing and re-cognises it into something else. The contributions to our Art section all share this element of re-cognising: they are retrospective, reflective, re-perspectivised. The editors and editorial team invite you to recognise recognition in them.

# Academia





# *"The Drop, that wrestles in the Sea –": Being in Nature and Locality in Dickinson's Poetry*

*Greta Fonzi*

In a letter to her friend J. G. Holland in November 1866, Emily Dickinson asked: "[t]ravel why to Nature, when she dwells in us? Those who lift their hats shall see her, as devout to God" (455). Such a question seems contradictory since one of these two things is the Being and its internal activities, whilst the other is the exterior environment that influences an organism and its thoughts. Dickinson was known for being a very sedentary poetess, a recluse with only a close group of acquaintances, a dog and her *Webster's Dictionary* as company. Despite her isolation, her poems reflect a communality, a kinship within Nature that extends even to objects invisible to her eyes. My own reflection – as the foundation of such interconnectedness with the environment – is based on a sense of displacement and disorientation. Dickinson's poems and syntax disclose a speaker that has no fixed locality, no stable sense of self, and through her reflections upon the landscape – marked by a certain adriftness to its totality – she posits that, nevertheless, all things are reachable cognitively. By giving extreme power to the imaginative dimension of thought, she surpasses individuals' apparent separation from the environment and believes (literally) blindly that there is a concealed interconnectedness amongst beings. In the following, I present this 'blind spot' of one's place in a realm of entities in relation to Marjorie Levinson's recent work *Thinking Through Poetry* and discuss Dickinson's spatiality, conception of virtual unity and way of thinking via imagination in her poems. The Dickinsonian speaker has no concrete locality in space, no clear self-individuation and epistemological certainty when observing Nature's non-human beings (as in "Four Trees – upon a solitary Acre –" [778]). But how does she try to recover unity and spatial stability? The lyrical 'I' sublimates itself to abstract concepts (as in "Behind Me – dips Eternity –" [743]), or to the objects she perceives or wishes to reach (such as "The Drop, that wrestles in the Sea –" [255]) and uses planets and their circumferential trajectory to orient herself (in "Unfulfilled to Observation –" [839]). In this effort to find her location and relation to her environment, Dickinson believes that all things are in some way connected to one another and that it must be posited as a faithful truth since we have inherited a limited cognition of the external world, a kind of blindness. Yet, through my analyses of her poems, I make evident how such a sense of dislocation is part of her imaginative experiments and that, to communicate with one's environment, this

inherent limitation needs to be accepted.

Levinson (2018) conceives a "self-critical theory" (6) of lyrical poetry in which her main aim is to prove the existence and significance of "the intellectual dimension of poetry" (4). She advances "an enlarged notion of thinking . . . that activates the strange and special materiality of poetic language for a knowledge-based but imaginative activity" (4). The idea of "imaginative" poetic power is useful when considering Dickinson's poems, as she was also confident in the ability of imagination to overcome her sense of disorientation and negative emotions and to replace axiomatic reasoning. Before succeeding in imaginative thinking, Dickinson's poems suggest that one must recognize and accept the inheritance of a blindness. To define this limited perception, felt by the voice of her poems, I turn to Levinson's idea that when in a realm of knowledge, one cannot know *a priori* the role of an individual:

> "[In] analogy to a visual field, textual fields do not merely contain blind spots, they come into being in relation to some particular blindness [to] a situation (or, a conjuncture). Paradoxically, the existence of this blind spot (this seeing from a certain position that can itself never be fully seen, or not until one vacates the position) is the condition of seeing at all." (9)

Such blindness, related to a position, is considered as "dialectically codependent," because a "problematic is a field of vision . . . [wherein] who see through that problematic [cannot perceive] its outlines and workings" (13). In the following poems, the problematic faced by the speaker is the impossibility of perceiving a direct connection to other beings or generally to the globality of Nature. Moreover, Levinson's inspiration from Althusser's philosophy is based on the idea that a concept, or unity, "becomes such only in [a] relationship, [i.e. between individuals and how they experience the relation to the unity or concept,] rather than standing outside or prior to it" (14). Individuals can only perceive the effects of the abstract concept of a community. On this line, Dickinson's imaginative reasoning tries to overcome the feeling of dislocation, or unrelatedness to others, by endorsing blindness and filling it with faith in the invisible. Her wish to fulfil the concept of unity in Nature cognitively is similar to the concept of thinking advanced by Heidegger. He promotes a "thought-form" that also relies on the uninhibitedness in "unknown modes of being" and "a thinking [that is] a movement toward a realm of self-structuring possibility" (Levinson 28) which is never fixed. Moreover, Levinson tries to redefine the concept of lyric, and of being and environment, under biological concepts of dynamic, complex and self-organizing systems.

The following poem, "Four Trees", shows Dickinson's idiosyncratic use of syntax, ellipsis and metonymy in her poetic language. Indeed, her poems do not follow a conventional





directionality in their discourse or argument; very often the ending is suspended, or the reasoning reversed, and the speaker's voice is stripped out of context, making it impossible to find a univocal reading. These rhetorical devices and the questioning of teleology in her verse disclose the speaker's alienation by the scene they perceive. The poem, as it is read, superimposes the question of how the individual relates to their environment and spatial surroundings. Sharon Cameron conceives of all the ambiguities arising from Dickinson's "[f]ragmentary lines, the refusal of syntax and . . . subsequent absence of context . . . as temporal in origin [since] the relationship between the parts of a poem is inevitably a temporal relationship" (18). Nevertheless, her study of the portrait of a static and grief-laden present in Dickinson's poems is partly interested in space and the self's perception of its own location and relationship to the environment, most chiefly Nature, for "temporality . . . puts space at the center of being" and "[t]he relationship of space and presence . . . [is] defined as one of alterity" (Cameron 138). This essay will later discuss how Dickinson overcomes this alterity in imaginative thinking.

Four Trees – upon a solitary Acre –
Without Design
Or Order, or Apparent Action –
Maintain –

The Sun – upon a Morning meets them –
The Wind –
No nearer Neighbor – have they –
But God –

The Acre gives them – Place –
They – Him – Attention of Passer by –
Of Shadow, or of Squirrel, haply –
Or Boy –

What Deed is Theirs unto the General Nature –
What Plan
They severally – retard – or further –
Unknown –

This poem opens with the main protagonist of the speaker's description and subsequent philosophical reflection: the speaker depicts "Four Trees" upon "a solitary Acre" (1) and their "Design" (2) is "Unknown" (16). The word upon which the contemplation about the trees' purpose hinges is only revealed in the last line. The teleological theme, instantiated at the beginning, receives an answer – albeit not a definitive one – that their

"Plan" (14) "unto the General Nature" (13) is eternally mysterious. Indeed, the argument in the poem is postponed via the repetition of different possibilities in the first and third stanza ("Design / Or Order, or Apparent Action –" (2-3), the delineation of all possible passers-by, "Of Shadow, or of Squirrel, . . . / or Boy" (11-12)) and via what Marjorie Perloff concisely calls "syntactic indeterminacy," that is the indefiniteness generated by the word disorder. Dickinson's poem is written as a fragmented reflection on Nature and its main clause has a cryptic form. It is said that "Four Trees . . . Maintain" something, but as pointed out by Perloff, "the verb . . . has no direct object unless we read across the stanza break" (n.p.). One could then affirm that it is the "Sun" (5) that depends upon the trees, as Perloff claims. My reading is a different one, namely that the trees maintain "the Wind" left isolated in the sixth line. Indeed, "[t]he Sun – upon a Morning meets them" (5) is the main phrase for the subject "Sun," since "Morning" and "Sun" stand in close relation to one another (for the morning is the rising of the sun) just as the "Acre" and the "Trees" partake in the same nature. Indeed, it is surmised that the plants exist because they occupy space, but at the same time they give "Place" (9) to the same "Acre." There is a reciprocal participation in the other's existence (just like the "Sun" entails the "Morning," and vice versa), hence why the first lines of the two stanzas have the same structure. The verb "Maintain" (4) here is used to describe the interdependence between an organism and its system or surrounding space. It indeed signifies "to cause to continue in a specified state ... or position" (*OED*). In Dickinson's poetic world, to lend mystic powers to the four trees is not gibberish. The main clause "[t]he Four Trees maintain the Wind" in Dickinson's lexicon is in an ironic tone, typical of her poetry, when discussing epistemological or axiomatic truths. In this sense, it is Dickinson that ironizes the absurd conclusion that, since the teleological nature of the trees is unknown, it can also easily be that the trees are what support the wind. In her logic, the interconnectedness of the world is a mere fact, and it infringes upon all objects.

My final observations on this hauntingly beautiful poem, with its unpoetical structure and unorthodox presentation, are about its few hidden rhymes and the human speaker's role in it. Firstly, Perloff intelligently notes that the "[s]tanzaic structure [is] construed as editorial emendation upon a text that is almost in free verse" (n.p.). Indeed, there is no rhythmic pattern except some alliterations that hint at binary relationships. "**A**c**e**" (1) / "N**a**tur**e**" (13), "W**i**nd" (6) / "H**i**m" (10) and "G**o**d" (8) / "B**o**y" (12) are the three pairs that stick out. "Acre," used in the singular form, most frequently refers to a unit of area. I suggest that here Dickinson uses it as a substitute for 'physical space' in a metonymical figure. For any existing object fills a certain space, and it is indeed that space that has a location or specific "Place" (9). Hence, the first pair is between the physical space, and indirectly the locality, of an object and the purpose of such an object. It is the main puzzle of the poem: if something exists, why does it exist, and what is its purpose? The second pair contrasts the wind – which is a natural element that has no





body – to the "Acre" that is the space occupied by tangible bodies. Therefore, it is about the incongruity of invisible things that yet are existent, like the wind, to objects that are observable yet with which the speaker struggles to communicate, such as the "Trees" that inhabit the space. Finally, the last relationship between the figure of God and a human is more perplexing. A Christian would easily affirm that humans' existence, such as that of the "Boy," depends on God, but Dickinson wavers in her Christian beliefs. Nevertheless, I suggest that here the dichotomy is between an eternal omnipotent being and a finite one.

My second observation is on the meaning of the adjective "solitary" (1) in the opening line. The speaker projects loneliness upon a non-human object. More specifically, the poem mirrors the speaker's puzzle on human nature and its vacancy in its own "Design" (2) and purpose. Indeed, she posits that the trees intentionally "retard" (15) the accomplishment of their "Plan" (14) within Nature's design. To assign intentionality to an organic plant is absurd. It may, however, make sense if it is seen as a mirrored reflection of the speaker's own questions about her purpose. Moreover, "solitary" can also convey emptiness, which is exactly what the lyrical voice is left with: the inaccessibility of knowledge, so that the curious soul that observes yet is left empty handed. However, as the world is devoid of definite knowledge, it is "impossible to determine whether it is the external world that is empty or [if] it is the poet's observation that empties it" (Perloff, n.p.). The acceptance of no possible answer gives Dickinson license to use irony, to venture to say that the four trees are the reason why the wind continues to be present. Moreover, the extreme use of ellipsis and syntactic disorder creates this "sense of dislocation" (Perloff, n.p.) of the described scene and of the speaker who tries to conceive of her role within Nature, the trees' finality and her connection to her environment.
Dickinson's interest in the sense of place – of recognizing oneself as a spatial being related to its environment and other beings – and in imagination as a means of expansion has been important since her first poems. "The Drop, that wrestles in the Sea –" (255), an early poem, makes an argument about the intrinsic connection between things. More specifically, it presents how – if one wants to try to grasp something outside oneself, such as otherness – the feeling of disorientation is inevitable:

> The Drop, that wrestles in the Sea –
> Forgets her own locality –
> As I – toward Thee –
>
> She knows herself an incense small—
> Yet small – she sighs – if All – is All –
> How larger – be?

The Ocean – smiles – at her Conceit –
But she, forgetting Amphitrite –
Pleads – "Me"?

The first and second stanzas are important in relation to one's locality when faced with otherness, something outside oneself. The minute "Drop" (1) loses her "locality" (2) when trying to dissociate herself from the "Sea" (1) – that is, the body composed of other beings – to reach something. The lyrical 'I' appears then in the third line to disclose the speaker's daily experience in a simile when reaching "toward Thee" (3). The "Thee" of the sentence can refer to reaching another being, but also expands to anything the mind wants to know. In the second stanza, the argument is presented under an uncertain light and asked as a question. The voice recognizes how inferior and "small" she is compared to the things she tries to reach and understand. The droplet, however, innocently affirms that, if everything is "All" (5) – or if all beings are connected – how can she be "larger"? This humble question is central to Dickinson's idea of interconnectedness and imaginative power. In her poetry, she practices the exercise of expanding herself to become another being. Dickinson is aware of such a capacity, yet the difficulty in such phenomenological opened space is to remain aware of one's own locality – as the tiniest unit of the "Sea" (1) attests. This enlarged state and closeness to other beings entails that the self which reaches toward otherness will inevitably lose locality and its own space.

As Jed Deppman remarks, frequently in Dickinson's poems, "the last stanza is to narrate the way the living speaker comes to accept ... being part of a carceral community stripped to the atomic minimum" (69). The atomic size here is the "Drop," the figural duplicate of the lyrical 'I', and the final stanza is a downplay of the speaker's faith in unity, or "virtual community" (Deppman 70). An even larger body of water, the "Ocean" (7), "smiles" at the "Drop"'s belief that makes her forget about the goddess of the sea, "Amphitrite" (8). The bead-size being believes that she could be elected sovereign ("she ... Pleads – "Me"?' (8-9)). For Dickinson, when the speaker accepts her illocality and is transported by the open forms of imagination, without fear, she is sovereign of herself.

There are two omnipresent sounds that mimic the tension between the individual that tries to enlarge herself or to reach the other, and the totality (represented by the "Sea" and the "Ocean"). The long vowels, in particular the the diphthong /əʊ/ and vowel /ɔː/, of words like "**o**wn," "l**o**cality," "tow**a**rd," "kn**o**ws," "sm**a**ll," "**A**ll," and "**O**cean" contrast with the high-pitched humming of "S**ea**," "local**ity**," "Th**ee**," "b**e**," "Conc**ei**t," "Pl**ea**ds," and "M**e**." The alternation of the two throughout the poem creates the acoustic amplification of the tension between individual and whole which is part of the reason for this disorientation. The only word that combines both sounds, that vacillates between the two, is the word "locality" (2). The problem of individuality and otherness, or of





being in relation to an environment, thus converges in the notions of locality, place and the vicinity to other beings.

The sense of dislocation in Dickinson is partly due to her belief in unity with Nature and the otherness around her – a conviction that requires a "faithful leap" – and due to the blind spot that the speaker fills while observing objects that have defined stability, space and order. Paradoxically, the way the Dickinsonian speaker gains steadiness in relation to her place within Nature while feeling adrift is exactly by accepting one fragile state and by forcing her mind to reach the otherness through its imagination. This subject is well-discussed by Deppman who indeed characterizes her as "[m]yriad-minded Dickinson" (50). Deppman brilliantly suggests that Dickinson thought similarly to Kant about the use of imagination where reason falls short. This imaginative sublimation is used to apprehend the Nature around her, but it is an impetuous process that sometimes leads to nothing or to open conclusions. Among her poems that "expand her mind's abilities," some are about "astronomy and great amplitudes," which therefore "involve vast times and distances" (Deppman 54). I argue that she does this because of her speaker's disorientation in relation to Nature and as part of her search for a way to orient herself. This disorientation is due to the apparent lack of communication between the landscape and non-human beings. But, to reach the otherness yearned for by the speaker, she must accept and learn to be unanchored, since imaginative cognition entails that the subject has no stable ground. Dickinson uses metonyms, lengths, geographical coordinates and other stratagems to delineate her thinking process, and at the same time to locate herself in her environment. The main importance of this intellectual scheme is to create a "virtual community and make it intelligible as a consolatory grace earned by thought alone" (Deppman 70).

The next poem, "We miss a Kinsman more" (1087), succinctly presents Dickinson's belief in a secret society, which is best acknowledged by accepting a suspension of judgement in regard to fixed possibilities relating to the environment or Nature.

We miss a Kinsman more
when warranted to see
than when withheld of Oceans
from possibility
A Furlong than a League
Inflicts a pricklier pain,
Till We, who smiled at Pyrrhenees –
Of Parishes, complain.

Each stanza has an argument. The first hinges on the verb "warranted to" (2). The verb

"warrant" has an authoritative tone, meaning "[t]o guarantee as true" (*OED*). Thus, it is said that if one pledges to accept something as truthful , the outcome will be that a "Kinsman" (1) will be left out. Here, Dickinson relates the sensorial verb "to see" to an epistemological dimension by coupling it with "warranted." It is better, in Dickinsonian logic, to practice abstention (to have "witheld") from reasoning; we must keep "Oceans" (3) separate "from [fixed] possibility" (4) or any categorical stance. In the second stanza, the argument unfurls from the comparison to sizes. Dickinson inverts the hierarchy of units: she suggests that a "Furlong" – that is circa two thousand metres – can feel more deleterious, since it "[i]nflicts a pricklier pain" (6), than a "League" (5), which is more than thirty times larger. A part of the comparative sentence is inverted, as marked by the enjambment between the two lines. This emphasizes the second line that introduces "pain" (6). The use of units of measurement is ambiguous since we cannot be sure to which object each unit is related. Yet, if connected to the theme of communality and learning to dwell in an open space of imaginative transformation, it might refer to the distance between the speaker and the object they perceive.

Dickinson gives great importance to objects that are not visible as part of her faith in imagination, so that the visible might not be the only possible companion. This subtle belief is linked between the words "see" and "possibility" in a light rhyme. Moreover, the stanzas are in short hymn meter (6/6/7/6 // 6/6/8/6), since the third line of each is longer. This metrical form evinces the discussion about amplitudes and perception, for it is exactly the lines that introduce two natural giants ("Oceans" (3) and "Pyrrhenees" (7)) that exceed the others in length. Finally, the closure of the poem is sarcastic and makes evident the incongruity of people who whine about "Parishes" (8) but enjoy observing Nature.

Part of Dickinson's expanded thinking entails an associated emotional counterpart which is uncontrollable. The difficulty is locating where these afflicted emotions originate. In "A nearness to Tremendousness" [824], "Affliction" is defined as covering "Boundlessness" (3) and not having any location ("Its Location / is Illocality –" (7-8)). Hence, the speaker's disorientated state might be caused by affliction. Yet, Dickinson's strategy when falling into despair is accepting her disorientation in Nature and turning to faith to orient herself in the dark, as in "Unfulfilled to Observation –" [839]. What is striking in her poems, which is surely proven by the prolific quantity of them, is how she "keeps trying to think, ... to imagine fully and translate understandingly something unpresentable to the conscious life" (Deppman 57) such as when trying to place herself in the realm of things or to communicate with objects that are unintelligible. Another dead-on term that Deppman uses to describe her poetic cognition is that she "imagin[es] unveiledly" (57) and keeps all conceivable possibilities unlocked (as seen in "We miss a Kinsman more" [1047]). Paradoxically, the perception of the limitations and





detachment of the environment is the very condition of existing, but for Dickinson this is also the reason why imagination is effective. Dickinson was aware of this constrained condition; the acceptance of a detachment from other beings and the existence of an alterity and inherent feeling of despair and lostness enable her to believe in an invisible unity, reachable through thought alone.

The next poem expresses such reliance when the speaker uses her "Faith" in the movement of locomotive objects, such as the Sun, to nullify her sense of blindness and to appease her sense of isolation:

> Unfulfilled to Observation –
> Incomplete – to Eye –
> But to Faith – a Revolution
> In Locality –
>
> Unto Us – the Suns extinguish –
> To our Opposite –
> New Horizons – they embellish –
> Fronting Us – with Night.

The poem opens *in medias res*, for there is no specification of who the adjectives "Unfulfilled" (1) and "Incomplete" (2) refer to. The delivery of these lines seems like the intimate reflection of a person. The meter is 8/5/8/5: theodd lines are in a perfect trochaic tetrameter and half the even lines finish with a stressed syllable, such as "**In**com**plete** – to **Eye** –" (2). Thus, the trochaic pattern is continuous between the lines. Such balance and interposition of sounds create a suspended state, like when one is thinking. I suggest that the speaker tries to find comfort in her acknowledgement that she cannot see the totality of things or figuratively understand everything and how it is connected. This unattached knowledge can be despairing at first, but the voice of the poem recognizes a way to overcome it. She suggests that the observable "Revolution / in Locality" (3-4) should be our "Faith" (3). The word "Revolution" anticipates the following image of the motion of the sun, as the Latin verb *revolvere* means "the action of a celestial body" (*OED*). This circularity of movement is reflected in the prosody of the poem, by the continuous trochaic pattern that is only interrupted in the argumentative turn ("**Eye / But**" (2-3)), in the word "**Opp**osite" (6) and in the final line, in which the inherent "darkness" of one's perception is named as "Night" (8).

The second stanza presents the spatial movement of the "Revolution" (3), as previously named, that exemplifies her conception of faith. The disruptive use of dashes and word arrangement of the main sentence has multiple possible readings. One could read

across the stanzas as "A Revolution in Locality [toward] us[,] the Suns extinguish to our Opposite[,] they embellish New Horizons[,] Fronting Us with Night" or as "[toward] us the Suns extinguish, to our Opposite [they embellish] New Horizons, Fronting Us with Night." However, both readings convey the same idea: the observer sees the Sun set and *knows* that it rises in another part of the world, although she cannot see it rise. In relation to space, I take "unto" (5) as meaning "toward," but another more interesting reading is one of union. In older times, "unto" meant "attachment, union ... or kinship" (*OED*), especially when paired with a verb such as "attached" or "joined." Since Dickinson puts this ambiguous preposition at the beginning of the line, such readings are possible but cannot be confirmed. Nonetheless, what I take as important in this poem is the speaker who, despite knowing that she is confronted with "Night" (8), when the object of her orientation disappears, must learn to dwell in a disoriented state and keep faith in the now invisible object. In this blindness, which is like the one inherent to being in an environment, the speaker might recognize a unity or proximity to others more clearly.
The previous poem shows the close link between Faith and the sense of place connected to it. That which is invisible may nonetheless, for Dickinson, exist, and when left with "Night," one still needs to be confident in a hidden relationship to one's landscape. Paradoxically, Dickinson's poetic speaker believes in unity by thinking in an imaginative dimension, free of fixed forms because of the detachment to, or "blind spot" within, the environment. Levinson discusses a similar problem in Lyric theory. She observes that the limited perception of a scene is inherent to occupying a space and is part of the "condition of seeing at all" (9). Once one recognizes that an impediment is truly the door to access "ontic pluralism" (Levinson 255) via imagination, one will understand that the feeling of dislocation, alterity and inaccessibility to the other is an illusion:

> Not so the infinite Relations – Below
> Division is Adhesion's forfeit – On High
> Affliction but a speculation – And Wo
> A Fallacy, a Figment, We knew –

The speaker is conscious of the existence of "Relations" (1). Such interdependence is invisible but what the voice of the poem conjectures is that behind the difference between individual and otherness, there is "Adhesion's forfeit" (2), meaning the loss of unity. Therefore, one must learn to dwell in this alienated state, because this relationship exists due to this apparent separation. In the sky ("On High"), "Affliction" is just "speculati[ve]" (3) and grief – which in the poem is the interjection-noun "Wo" (3) – is just a "Figment" (4). Finally, this strong belief in unity is underscored by the use of the plural noun "We" (4), which was also present in the two previous poems. The speaker, in her intimate reflections, knows herself to be part of a collective whole that is concealed by her blindness.





In conclusion, Dickinson considers this sense of dislocation and this faith in a mysterious communality with Nature and non-human beings to be adjacent. "Four Trees upon a solitary Acre –" presents an observer that is aware of an alterity within her environment, and she recognizes the impossibility of ascertaining the purpose of being in an environment in a conclusive way. Yet, the Dickinsonian speaker yearns to reach the otherness in imaginative thinking, like the "Drop [...] wrestles" to be elected sovereign (284, 1). If one agrees to expand their being into another, this entails an intrinsic sense of dislocation; hence, one needs to learn to dwell in an open "Ocean" (7) with no fixed possibilities. The paradox in Dickinson's poetry is that, while accepting the "blind spot" that one occupies by existing and perceiving as inevitable, the possibility of using imaginative experiments to expand oneself is accessible precisely because there is an alterity between individual and environment. The very source of her faith in Nature as accessible and graspable is this separation.

It is therefore possible, in this suspension of not knowing and not being in place, to communicate in some way to and with others, even at a distance. In a letter to her mentor Thomas Wentworth Higginson – sent soon after their penultimate meeting – Dickinson thanks him for his New Year's wishes and writes:

> Largest last, like Nature.
> Was it you that came?
> A Wind that woke a lone Delight
> Like Separation's Swell -
> Restored in Arctic confidence
> To the Invisible (518)

Despite the presence of a "Separation" within the sea of things around her and her feeling of being unanchored, Dickinson trusts her "Arctic confidence" in her interconnectedness with others.

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# *Research Elsewhere: Waxing and Waning Words: Lexical Variation and Change in Middle English*

## *WAW-ME, University of Zurich*

The project *Waxing and Waning Words: Lexical Variation and Change in Middle English (WAW-ME)* is based in Zurich, and is funded by the SNSF. You can find more information about it at their website, https://www.waw-me.uzh.ch/en.html
...or, of course, by reading the responses below!

*Can you give us 5 key words to describe the project?*

Middle English, words and meanings, thesaurus, lexical and semantic change, learned professions

*What inspired the project, and which research gap do you hope that it fills?*

As perhaps typical for historical linguistics, it was a gap that inspired the project — you have a research idea and you know that there is no perfect tool that would allow you to implement it. So, you end up creating your dream tool. With the Middle English lexicon, on one hand, there are many studies on individual words or groups of words, which are interesting in themselves, but you wonder whether their findings are representative of any big trends. In other words, they are too specific. On the other hand, there are great tools like the *Middle English Dictionary* or the *Historical Thesaurus of English*, which, at least in their current configuration, are too general, and you wonder how you can analyse a lot of lexico-semantic information in an efficient way. Our solution to this dilemma is to collect our own database, to structure it according to our needs, and to produce research on the medieval learned professions that would be informed by historical semantics and generalisable enough to contribute to the understanding of the bigger picture. The aim of our database is to help answer questions such as: what's the composition of the Middle English lexicon in terms of source languages? How do professional lexicons and common lexicon interact? What diachronic trends (e.g. survival, obsolescence, semantic change) can be observed? How do regional and genre variation play out in these trends?





*Who is on the project team, and what are their roles?*

Olga Timofeeva, Principal Investigator; Annina Seiler Rübekeil, Co-PI; Johanna Vogelsanger, Postdoc; Rihab Ayed, PhD student; Anthony Harris, IT officer; Karin Taglang and Tabea Hilbe, student assistants.

*"Waxing and Waning Words" started in February 2025. What have you been doing at this stage in the project, and what are you hoping to do next?*

The project focuses on four learned professional domains: religion, medicine, law, and education. Since February we've concentrated mainly on medicine and law — collected lexical items and organised them into functional and semantic hierarchies, in a thesaurus-like fashion. At this point we would like to understand how the respective four lexicons are/can be structured, how the different source languages of those lexicons play out in its structure, how the four domains interact lexically at the level of polysemy and professional vs. common vocabulary. Once we've done that (and for all four domains), we'll move on to Middle English texts and study how 'our' words are used across time, region, and genre.

*Waxing and waning moon phases - Detail from Cambridge University Library, MS Gg.1.1*

# *The New New Arcadia*

*Tristan Gishig*

*Editor's note: This piece of writing was submitted as part of a BA5 seminar entitled 'Philip Sidney: Prose and Poetry', in which students were asked to creatively respond to his (often absurd, always intense) work.*

As you may guess, I clearly haven't read or studied Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* enough to be able to create a brand new sequel to it, and I strongly believe that any sane human being would not even consider doing so. Instead, I chose to use a passage we had discussed in class as the base for the content of my text (namely the moment when Musidorus secretly visits Pyrocles at the end of *Arcadia* 2.14) and to invent something from it.

I wanted to revisit the theme of friendship between the two characters, which I combined with Astrophil's poetry used to show his love for Stella, as well as with a few subtle references to the *Defense of Poesy*. As for the writing, I started by writing the text in French in the form of notes (as I am better at this language, especially when writing stories), to then rewrite each sentence one by one, consulting Arcadia and Astrophil and Stella for inspiration (a little for specific vocabulary, but mainly for the turns of phrase). As for metaphors and comparisons with the moon, I drew inspiration from the numerous instances in which Astrophil compares Stella to the sun, offering an alternative suited to the temporal and spatial setting of my story.

In addition to that, I took almost unhealthy pleasure in learning about the typographical and orthographic conventions of 16th-century English printing. As I was not entirely sure of my approach, I have listed below the changes I made and the reasoning behind them:

- I replaced every ‘s’ by a 'long s', except for the ones at the end of words and the ones in capitals.
- I replaced every ‘u’ at the beginning of a word by ‘v’, and every ‘v’ inside of a word by ‘u’.





*Pyrocles*, penſiue about his ſtagnant relationſhip with *Philoclea*, goes to meet *Musidorus* to tell him about hiſ ſadneſſe.

Taking aduantage of the fallen night, *Pyrocles* ſlipped ſilently from the confines of *Basilius*’s domain. Careful not to diſturb the ſlumbering houſehold, he moued with practiced ſtealth beneath the ſhadow’d eaues, his heart beating in time with the diſtant chorus of cicadas. Beyond the laſt outbuildings, he found the narrow, winding path that traced the edge of the foreſt, its courſe half-loſt beneath the tangled vndergrowth and the ſiluered miſt. For nearly twenty minutes he preſſed on, the moonlight flickering through the leaues aboue, vntil at laſt the trees parted to reueal a clearing where *Musidorus* awaited him. His friend ſat atop a great moſſie ſtone, his gaze lifted toward the ſtar-filled ſky, loſt in thought vntil the ſoft footfalls of *Pyrocles* drew him back to the world of Arcadia. *Musidorus* did not turn at once, but let the ſilence linger betweene them, the gentle huſh of the night wrapping both friends in its quiet embrace. Only when *Pyrocles* drew near enough for their ſhadows to mingle in the moonlight did *Musidorus* finally ſpeak. So, at laſt you come, Pyrocles (murmured *Musidorus*). I begin to wonder if loue haſ ſo wholly claimed your heart that you can no longer ſee the friend who once walked beſide you. Iſ it ſo eaſy, in the glow of newfound paſſion, to let old bonds drift into ſhadow? Musidorus, if thee truly knew the depth of my heart, you would vnderſtand that I have had no leiſure to think of anything but her. My reaſon, my ſoul, all that I was, has diſſolued in the light of Philoclea’s

eyes. I did not wiſh to forget you but haue been powerleſs to do otherwiſe. Then tell me, O Zelmane, how far has this paſſion carried thee? Haue you merely brushed her hand, or haue thy ventured further into the ſecret realms of loue beneath the moon's watchful gaze? Musidorus, anſwered *Pyrocles*, words falter before the viſion of Philoclea. O Moon, for you ſhine in Philoclea's eyes, and none eſcape the ſpell of her long, ſilken hair, your ſiluer ſnare. Her lips are pale and luminous, being ſo fulle of your gentle light, that her ſweete breath ſtirs thy tides with euerie ſigh. Your coole ſweetneſs dwells in her flawleſs breaſt, and her grace makes thy coldneſs tender, in that ſhe ſpeaks for you in euery word that leaues her mouth. And her clear voice lifts thy ſilent glorie to the ſkies. Yet, Musidorus, all theſe perfections are but ſhadows of the virtue that ſhines within her. Her beauty is ſo abſolute that my tongue falters, and my heart, though burning, cannot find the path to win her fauor. She is at once my delight and my deſpair, for how can one hope to gaze at a star he can only find in daylight? Pyrocles, it is of little vſe to philoſophize ouer her beauty, for philoſophy, howeuer virtuous it may seem, is far leſs noble than poetry. Where reaſon falters and words ſpoken cannot reach ſuch pure ears, let thy thoughts take form in verſe. If thy heart cannot ſpeak to her directly, let it ſpeak through the written page, ſo that ſhe may one day contemplate your feelings and, looking directly in thy heart find pleaſure where your voice alone could not hope to giue it. So, beneath the quiet gaze of the moon and the huſh of the night, Pyrocles and Musidorus ſet themſelues to the taſk. Side by ſide, they ſhaped Pyrocles's longing into verſe, each word a quiet offering to Philoclea's diſtant heart. When their work was done, the two friends parted with a ſilent claſp of hands, each carrying away the comfort of





ſhared endeauor, and Pyrocles, a new hope that his ſilent deuotion might one day be ſeen and vnderſtood by the one who inſpired it.

## Pyrocles's poem

Whether Arcadia's ſhepherds ponder ſtill
What omens ſtir vnder the moon's pale horn;
How much my heart would ſpeak, alas lack'd the ſkill,
And hopes to find in verſe the only way to mourn
If wiſe men weigh the fate of princely kin,
Or muſe how Philoclea's heart may be won;
If courtiers whiſper what may lie within
The ſecret looks of each beloued one;
If ſome would ſtriue by wit or patient art
To win the grace that fortune hides away;
Or if the nightingale laments apart
The loſſes loue and longing ſteal away-
All theſe others ſuppoſe my mind purſues,
But know me not: for all my thoughts are you.

# Art





## *"I stood outside smoking..."*

Anon.

I stood outside smoking. Elisa sat on the bench next to me. She asked how many of my guys knew that I smoke. I named them from the top of my head. And the others? The others didn't know. Smiling between her chestnut curls, she said: "*C'est pour préserver l'image*". And I nodded. What does it mean to preserve an image and what does it say about us?

I met N. four years ago.

I gave all my men nicknames. It's not an unusual thing; a casual thing, rather. One of my friends, afraid of uncovering her crushes' names in public, gave them second names. One would be Eric and the other Luc. Common names for two very special men in her life. I didn't give my men second names; I gave them nicknames, as I said.

I called A. – cat and N. – Hamlet, or recently Batman. But I liked Hamlet more. At the very beginning, I asked him for help with something at the French department. He said he was willing to help but unfortunately had to run to "catch the train", so maybe if he could write his number down somewhere. I only happened to have a copy of Hamlet, the blue Folger copy. It still sits on one of my bookshelves today and if I open it, the first page reads his number written in thin pencil.

He told me he cancelled a date with a girl because she'd made it clear that men usually decided everything for her. He told me he got mad and sent her long voice messages explaining why feminism was important.

We figured that we read different books. He asked if I knew Boris Vian, Romain Gary, Despentes. And well, I didn't. I've only seen Despentes' last novel in the nouveautés section at the entrance of P.

I sat next to him at the library, and we were absolutely absorbed by our respective readings. Since I'd known him, he would always read with a pen or a highlighter in his hand leaning with his full bodyweight on the table, as if he was reading with his chest rather than his eyes, and he would never be shy of smiling and even giggling at the text. By looking at him, I could recognize in which tone the text in front of him was written.

What does “to hoard” mean and what is a “tin”— he pointed at the words with his pen. Then, he showed me a sentence and added the classic “made me think of you”.

We stood at the train station, and he was as happy as a kid. He was so happy it made him shy; he didn’t even look in my eyes. When he heard that I said *chaste* instead of *chasteté*, I caught my mistake and said: “you see there are many things I do not know either.” He looked at the ground and smiled: “yes, *il y a un truc que tu ne connais pas*.”

Once I sent him a picture of a pair of jeans which under some mysterious circumstance ended up outside of the library entrance. The next morning, he sent me a message: “The sky is wet and the jean is blue. Little hypallage for you here.”

I told him I didn’t like fiction and that you cannot infect someone when you have acute tonsillitis. Now I know I was wrong.





# *Eyes over the shoulder*

Miranda Althaus

Oh my god, she had never been brought a drink from a stranger before, it was quite flattering. He looked at her with an awkward smile, and she could swear she had seen him somewhere before. Which didn’t mean anything since she always thought everybody looked like random celebrities she liked. She kept looking at him for a few seconds trying to place him until he finally said:

“Curious seeing you here!” and leaned to hug her. Her heart stopped for a moment, was he a friend of hers? She was almost certain that he wasn’t. But then, why was he acting like one?

“I’m so sorry, I feel really embarrassed, but do we know each other?” she asked, wanting to sink to the ends of earth. She felt so bad for not being able to place him, how inconsiderate and rude of her!

“I saw you on the bus this morning,” he said with a huge smile. “We kind of had a moment. That's why it’s so unbelievable seeing you, it’s like fate.”

With that statement, everything came rushing back, the whole uncomfortable experience from that morning: the way he had just stared at her for so long that she had to close her eyes and start mentally daydreaming to ignore the anxiety she felt. Suddenly when she opened her eyes he was gone, she was overblown with relief until she felt a tap on her shoulder, and he started talking to her. She couldn’t remember precisely what was said, but just that he had been creepy and insistent, repeating various times that it was the right choice and that, when she was ready, he’d be waiting. She felt so unsafe that she had to share her location with three different friends after getting off the bus. Maybe she was exaggerating… maybe she remembered it worse than it was because of her anxiety or fear.

“Oh. Yes, of course. How are you?” she asked, trying to be friendly enough but not too much.

"I'm great now. I don't want to be too forward, but maybe you changed your mind about that coffee?"

She reflected on what to say to make him give up once and for all. As sad as it sounds, men often only accept a "no" if women say they are not single, so it seemed like the only option for Marnie.

"I'm sorry. I'm in a relationship", she said, feeling proud of her escape plan until her awkward conversation was interrupted by an even more mortifying one.

"You're in a relationship?! Congrats!" Charlie said, smiling and getting his two beers from the bar next to them.

"Charlie! I didn't know you were here," she lied, smiling.

"Yeah, I had to celebrate our dear Julia. How are you? What about this relationship, is it new?" For some reason, there was nothing more terrifying than Charlie thinking she was in a relationship. Firstly, because it wasn't true, and secondly, because she was irrevocably still in love with him and the thought that he might think she had moved on made her terrified that he would too, even though he probably already had.





# *Sonnets for K.*

*Alex Pappas*

1.

Let me adduce the tokens of your charm,
A score would want an added dozen more,
So that, though I enfold you in my arms,
I can't embrace the secret I adore.
But like the man who's reached the end of space,
I should my hand extend and graze, beyond,
The two red locks that frame your lovesome face,
And verbalise the wherefore of my bond:
I love your laugh, in short puffs through your nose,
Like some small flame which sputters in the night,
Your garnet nails and your garnet toes,
Your blue-grey eyes with their complicit light;
Your magnetism, drawing others in,
Your reticence and naturalness within.

2.

Though we may love, we love in syzygy:
We take our turns to be the sun or earth,
One burning, one that burns in effigy,
The jaundiced moon then settling in its berth.
And though you are the apple of my eye,
When we're apart, and once you close your door,
Your portrait wanes and fades — the painted fly
Alights upon each feature I'd explore.
But I am wrong to judge you by your self
Because your worth will only sell you short:
I, too, elude a likeness of myself;
I am my conduct's master and its sport —
I would your limits and illusions, whole,
Devour and embody like my soul.

3.

If you can wait a week, so much the better —
It will be seven days the easier
To wait before you find a man like me,
To love you less than I do now love thee.
I want no vows, no serments from your lips,
No talk of projects of futurity;
If we must deal, let's deal in sterling kiss:
You love me if you kiss me willingly.
But if you'll wait a week, then I'll wait two —
Until your busy schedule frees, or till
Your heart aches to be free, to be subdued
By one who's made an altar of his will;
Let us throw love itself upon the flame
And make our own love & suspend its name.

4.

A fundamental law: when bright lasses,
Two or more, flock past half past four,
They must needs parrot, that men all are asses —
But here the prattle masks the chickie's lore:
For men, desiring, yet will play the prig
And wax poetic of their object's charms;
They charm themselves and light upon the twig
They've soused in glue, and vibe to the alarms.
But not quite this — I am a double fool:
Once to have pegged myself as my own sucker;
And then to think the con my own — mere tool
To trim your growths; or, a mere bloodsucker.
Because you love too much, we must love less;
I love too little and would our love progress.





5.

look, i want to tell you something but
from what you've said it wouldn't be fair of me
to burden you with my sincerity
so i am writing as a kinda shortcut
so that, not hearing, you won't pity me
and that, not pitying, you will feel free
to treat this carefree dude without regard
and freely treat me gentle, treat me hard.
because, if we are vibing, and we are,
it isn't me that's putting pressure on you,
it's the vibes, sent from some distant star,
from just around the bend of your iris blue.
i'm sorry you don't have the capacity
must i therefore doubt veracity?

# *The Poet's Decay*

*Lorys Fioletti*

There was no ink left,
the day the poet exhaled his final breath.
What could have possibly gone wrong?
All season long the same people came along.

Laid on a stainless bed with frozen hands to his chest,
the poet rests: bereft of affect.
What a sordid affair – there was no ink left!

"It must have been an accidental death!" whispered the fleshless-faced silhouette,
standing behind the glass doors.
"Disintegration is not coincidental" declared the big officer,
"the poet was hyper-emotional and death his ultimate credential."

Who can be sure?
This case was not conventional.
The poet's discussion has always been confessional
He got lost in his personal obsessions,
His mysterious fascination raised general confusion,
Was all of this pathological?

The poet was a professional, his condition was somehow experimental.
But when there was no ink left, the poet stood,
completely out of breath.
He was placed under arrest – he had a cardiac arrest,
his emotions were all suppressed.

September 10th 2025.





# *Recognition*

*River Orsini*

## I'm home

It's Sunday morning
people yawning
I'm barely awake
on the bus, too
in sleepy awe
at the trees
dressing in
warm colors
and the plump
white clouds
playing with
each other
in the bright
blue sky

Just then
someone gets on
and it hits me
your perfume
so sweet,
so comforting,
so familiar,
almost forgotten
or so I thought

It takes me back
to September days
spent in your bed
rainbows in
your irises
my universe
in your hands
safety,
your name

It's Sunday evening
people leaving
I'm 24 and a half
carrying a cake
baked by family
even if not by blood
and my heart is
so full of love
genuine, unconditional
I don't need nostalgia
to rewrite memories
with rose colored lenses
anymore

I can look
in the mirror
and say
with a voice
that feels mine
"I'm home,
dear body
of mine,
I've made you
my home"

## There was you

I'm five minutes away
from home
rain is pouring down
like it might
never stop
I'm tired and cold
but I don't mind, no
because this moment
takes me back
in time
ten years ago, maybe

I was safe and cozy
in the English classroom
everywhere I looked
grey and wet
made me wonder
if He'd sent
the flood again

And then
there was you
an ant in the storm
your bag over
your head
walking without a care

The world disappeared
because there was you
and there was the storm,
two things I love the most
becoming one

The universe stopped
because you were
the storm
and the storm
was you

calm and strong
quiet and lively
someone so
naturally extraordinary
contagiously alive

When it rains
I cherish that moment
I will never
forget you





## Merci, Gisèle

No, it's never
too late
to let go
of shame
it was never
yours
to begin with

You have a voice
we have a voice
your voice can
be ours
our voice will
be yours

You're never alone
we share
your pain
we see you
we hear you
we might hurt
but we'll cry
together
we'll hold
each other
as tears pour
like rain
let them
wash away
the pain

And I'll turn
to the mirror
I'll face myself
because
if she
could do it
if he
could do it
if they
could do it
then so can I
and I will whisper
"I have a voice"
my hands will
shake, but I
will take a
deep breath
and I will remind
the world that
"I have voice"

We will be heard.

# Varia

# *A Gentle Grilling...*

Katherine Hallemeier

Katherine Hallemeier is, since 2025, a *Maître d'enseignement et de recherche* in the English Department, having previously held multiple professorial posts at Oklahoma State University. She specialises in anglophone postcolonial literatures, which she teaches here in Geneva, and recently published a book entitled *African Literature and U.S. Empire: Postcolonial Optimism in Nigerian and South African Writing* (Edinburgh University Press, 2024).

*When did you choose your academic specialty, and why?*
I was pursuing degrees in English, History, and Political Science at the University of Toronto and more or less imagining law school as my fate when my professor of Canadian literature said, "I can't believe I get to read novels for a living!". I decided to try to live the dream.

*What is the most exciting thing your research in postcolonial literature has taught you?*
I have been very excited to learn: that Yvonne Vera's writing is gorgeous and devastating; that feeling in J.M. Coetzee's fiction is not granted moral content; that the University of Calabar published an essay on Americanisms in Nigerian English in 1986; and that the 1955 Freedom Charter of South Africa proposes that "rest, leisure, and recreation shall be the right of all."

*What have you learned from your experience teaching literature at the University of Geneva so far?*
All kinds of things! Students in a class on South African fiction taught me that Zakes Mda's *The Whale Caller* must be read alongside the French romance tradition. Students in an affect theory seminar taught me that Sara Ahmed's work on nationalism and emotion is newly urgent. Just recently, students in my seminar on the global novel have me thinking about how Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* situates the soap opera as a globally popular form





*If you could make the world read any book, which one would it be?*
I don't think I would ever want to make anyone read any book! This question reminds me of a great project, though, that I teach in my Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English lecture course. *Jalada* is an online pan-African writers collective that has an excellent translation series. The series prompts me to imagine what a book of the world might look like. Issue 1 features a short story by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o that is available in translation in 100 languages. Issue 2 centers a poem by Wọlé Ṣóyínká that is currently available in 49 languages with an open call for additional translations!

*What piece of advice, wisdom, or encouragement would you give to your first-year past self?*
I don't think that I would dare to approach that live-wire of a creature with advice. I might ask her how to live.

*What is the hardest exam you've had to prepare for?*
I seem to have forgotten it, which is encouraging.

*Who is your biggest inspiration?*
Usually, whoever is breathing close to me in kindness.

*Which talent would you most like to have?*
It would be so useful to my profession if I could write.

*What is your favorite English word or expression? And French?*
In English, I love "not to do!", a phrase coined by a beloved individual who was 3 years old at the time. It allows one to exuberantly reject any proposal on the table. In French, I'm fond of "*doucement* !" as a cautionary exclamation that emphasizes degree rather than cessation.

*The keyword for this issue is 'recognition'. What does recognition mean to you?*
I immediately think about how recognition may be a form of misrecognition. I think about the limits of recognition as a political and ethical project—I am thinking here of arguments in Black Studies and postcolonial studies about how the recognition of perceived others as "human" can implicitly uphold an exclusionary norm. I think about ways of being together that don't depend on recognition. I think about thinking things over again and again.