

## **“To shut our eyes is Travel”: Nineteenth-Century Imaginary Journeys and Dickinson’s Virtual Europe**

Paraic Finnerty, University of Portsmouth

### ABSTRACT

In an October 1870 letter Emily Dickinson told her friend Elizabeth Holland: “To shut our eyes is Travel” (L354). As Dickinson is usually a figure associated with reclusive confinement rather than worldly travel, this aphoristic comment has not received much attention, even though travel and geographical imagery pervades her writings. Recent scholarship on nineteenth-century virtual travel provides a new approach to the function and frequency of global references and the travel motif in Dickinson’s work as a recurrent means of representing psychological complexity, imaginational scope, and nature’s inexplicability. Drawing on this research, this essay focuses primarily on the regularity and specificity of Dickinson’s references to Europe or to journeying there. Dickinson’s European imagery is interpreted as evidence of her participation in a broader nineteenth-century US cultural representation of transatlantic experience through conceptions of the virtual. Two examples of nineteenth-century armchair or fireside travel to Europe by Ik Marvel and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow exemplify how relations between the US and Europe are established through virtual tropes of being neither here nor there, being both outside and inside a specific location or situation, and occupying an objective and subjective position simultaneously. Like her contemporaries, Dickinson uses nineteenth-century notions of virtuality to construct topographical and experiential spaces that are transatlantic ones of duality and liminality. Dickinson’s virtual Europe unsettles her era’s discourses of nationalism and exceptionalism; it demonstrates that sets of relations between presence and absence, actual and imagined, and local and foreign fundamentally inform daily life and identity in the US.

KEYWORDS Emily Dickinson, virtuality, Ik Marvel, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, transatlantic, Europe

The title of this essay comes from an October 1870 letter that Emily Dickinson sent to her friend Elizabeth Holland shortly after Elizabeth and her husband, Josiah, had returned home from a

visit to the Dickinsons in Amherst. The letter provocatively begins by indicating how quickly one's perceptions can change and make belated their written representation: "I guess I wont send that note now, for the mind is such a new place, last night feels obsolete" (L354). Dickinson comments on her friend's possible speculation about the unsent, out-of-date note: "Perhaps you thought dear Sister, I wanted to elope with you and feared a vicious Father. It was not quite that." This statement evokes and then forecloses an erotic conspiracy of flight and Dickinson also mentions that Josiah wrote to her implying some degree of perceived disreputability in her behavior: "The Doctor's sweet reply makes me infamous." Without revealing the contents of the previous night's note, Dickinson explains that she is writing now because she has read in the papers that Josiah is often in New York. She wants to know who will read to Elizabeth in his absence.

The remainder of the letter connects the enigmatic, discarded note and unexpected events such as the Hollands' recent visit not with scandalous secrets but with the mystery and sublimity of universal human existence:

Life is the finest secret.

So long as that remains, we must all whisper.

With that sublime exception I had no clandestineness.

It was lovely to see you and I hope it may happen again. These beloved accidents must become more frequent.

"Beloved accidents" are then connected with the unpredictability of the natural world and the power of human beings to escape their sensory locatedness:

We are by September and yet my flowers are bold as June. Amherst has gone to Eden.

To shut our eyes is Travel.

The Seasons understand this.

How lonesome to be an Article! I mean - to have no soul.

An Apple fell in the night and a Wagon stopped.

I suppose the Wagon ate the Apple and resumed it's way.

How fine it is to talk. What Miracles the News is!

Not Bismark but ourselves.

The Life we have is very great.

The Life that we shall see

Surpasses it, we know, because

It is Infinity.

But when all Space has been beheld

And all Dominion shown

The smallest Human Heart's extent

Reduces it to none.

(L354)

Dickinson's flowers defy human categories that establish seasonal protocol and species designation by boldly blooming in September as if it were June. The flowers' alteration of her garden is used to signify the multifaceted nature of human experience—both mental and emotional—and accordingly the profundity of daily life. Dickinson contrasts the audacious possibilities of organic life with the soullessness of "Article[s]" such as the fallen apple and the wagon; they are just themselves and nothing else. Such objects can be given incredible signification by the imagination which can, as Dickinson shows, anthropomorphize the wagon into an apple-eating being. The poem at the end of the letter reinforces her point that the

complicated events of an inner life render quotidian existence and the “smallest Human Heart” more newsworthy than the Franco-Prussian war. The “Infinity” and global reach of human interiority involves spaces more immense than “all Dominion shown.” “The [very great] Life we have” may not be surpassed or even reduced by “The Life that we shall see.”

The historical turn in Dickinson studies has firmly located the poet within her New England culture and emphasized the importance of a historical and material framework for the discussion of Dickinson and her manuscript-based writings (see Richards). What has been increasingly sidelined is her often-stated orientation towards the intangible, metaphysical, and imaginary and her representation of this proclivity. This letter as a whole emphatically shows that while language can immerse a reader in a writer’s worldview and material, domestic, and political location, words must play catch-up with the changeability of perceptions, the rapidity of the imagination, and the unpredictability of the environment. Travel and geographical imagery, as this essay will argue, are some of the key metaphorical devices Dickinson uses to try to communicate the mercuriality and enormity of interior life.

The flowers’ Edenic rebellion against probability transports Amherst to paradise, unexpectedly changing a familiar location into an unfamiliar one. Such metamorphosis is linked to the concept of travel, imagined or actual, which inextricably changes the experience of an immediate location by establishing its comparative relations with far-flung places. Travel symbolizes the complexity of the human mind and its power to go beyond corporeality, disrupt its own temporal and spatial grounding of reality, and make surprising, quick associations. At any one moment, as she puts it, “the mind [can become] such a new place.” Although usually a poet associated with confinement and reclusiveness, Dickinson, in this letter, inimitably participates in a world in which letters, telegrams, and newspapers facilitated increasingly rapid

communication between individuals within the US and swift information exchange across the Atlantic. Dickinson's letter summons up an era in which travel had become more accessible and travel writing more ubiquitous. She implies, however, that these opportunities and technologies associated with modernity and progress stem from an attempt to match the much more potent celerity of the human mind.

Recent scholarship on nineteenth-century virtual travel affords a new way of understanding how the travel motif and global references function in Dickinson's writings as a recurrent means of representing psychological range, imaginational scope, and nature's immensity. As the majority of Dickinson's geographical references are to Europe, this essay will focus on the specificity and nuances of these allusions as her participation in a broader nineteenth-century US tendency to represent transatlantic entanglements through conceptions of the virtual (see Giles, *Virtual Americas*). Two examples of nineteenth-century armchair or fireside travel to Europe by Ik Marvel and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow exemplify how relations between the US and Europe are established through virtual tropes. Marvel's *Reveries of a Bachelor* (1850) and Longfellow's "Travels by the Fireside" (1875) are self-reflective celebrations of virtual travel that help explicate the ways in which Dickinson unexpectedly situates European countries, regions, cities, mountains, volcanoes, rivers, and seas within her depictions of local phenomena or presents illusionary journeys to or within Europe. Viewed as her contribution to her culture's popularization of imagined travel while staying at home, Dickinson's poems deploy nineteenth-century associations of virtuality with duality, dislocation, and disorientation. In so doing, her writings transform native spaces into strange, transatlantic ones and create personae whose comparative perspectives position them as neither here nor there, both out of and yet inside a specific location, and inhabitants of two places at once.

Dickinson's virtual Europe adds nuances to recent work on her transatlantic literary and cultural relations by firmly locating her writings within a nineteenth-century US literature and culture shaped in multiple ways by transnational and global elements (see Voelz).

## **I. Nineteenth-Century Virtual Travel**

Dickinson never uses the word "virtual" in her extant poems and correspondence. Her edition of Noah Webster's *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1844) defined the word as "Potential; having the power of acting or of invisible efficacy without the material or sensible part" and "Being in essence or effect, not in fact; as, the virtual presence of a man in his agent or substitute" ("Emily Dickinson Lexicon" <http://edl.byu.edu/webster/term/2371591>). This term's contemporary meanings tap into long recognized elements and emphases in Dickinson's work. Dickinson repeatedly thematizes the significance of forms of experience that prioritize the impending, absent, and desired rather than the actual, present, and possessed. She presents poetry as synonymous with potential, with the ability to "dwell in Possibility" (Fr466) and to explore epistemological, emotional, and imaginative limits. Her thinking shows the influence of Romanticism, which, as Richard Menke puts it, liberated perception and experience "from the constraints of time and place" and made the creative imagination "the ultimate virtual reality system" (23). Dickinson's ideas also stem from a nineteenth-century view of poetry as quintessentially related to "the 'as if' spirit of the virtual" and as specializing in constructions of hypothetical, imaginary, or unreal worlds (Alfano & Stauffer 1).

Recent scholarship on nineteenth-century virtuality confirms that the period's literature, technologies, and media provided opportunities for immersion and involvement in simulated

worlds and this altered the way Dickinson and her contemporaries conceived and imagined reality and themselves. Such research reveals the complicated relationship between advancements in literature and aesthetics across the long nineteenth century and developments in visual and textual media such as panoramas, dioramas, and travel guidebooks that facilitated virtual travel. Ralph O'Connor argues that the public appetite for contact with and information about distant times and exotic places was first "met by travel writing and topographical poetry" and that these "cradled the seeds of Victorian virtual tourism" (266). The Romantic wanderings in the poetry of William Wordsworth and the travel poems of Lord Byron were central to the evolution of and were frequently referenced in nineteenth-century travel writing and tourist guidebooks (Buzard 115-30). Such associations explain Dickinson's connection of poetry with mobility and her routine depictions of imagined journeys (Eberwein, *Dickinson* 17; Peel 207-28). As Cristanne Miller puts it, there are a "staggering" number of Dickinson poems, particularly from the early 1860s, which "contain some mention of travel, escape, or of foreign places, language, or people"; these features show that Dickinson regarded "travel as the exemplary instance of both education and poetry" (139-40).

New visual technologies such as the panorama, developed in the late eighteenth century, appropriated poetry's peculiar power of immersing audiences in alternative realities through images, illusions, and stimuli and of showcasing the "instantaneous viewability" of the "sights of the world" (Wood 106). Panoramas were "enormous circumferential paintings, hung in specially designed rotundas, [which] appropriated the elite academic genres of landscape and history painting to create a spectacular new form of visual entertainment for a mass audience" (Wood 9). This visual medium commodified natural and urban landscapes, offering an "all-embracing view" of familiar and unfamiliar places and historical and contemporary events. Like the poetry

of Wordsworth or Byron, panoramas supplied those excluded from “picturesque sightseeing and the Grand Tour ... with exotic sights and breath-taking scenery cheaply and conveniently” (Wood 101, 103). The panorama’s facility for allowing viewers to imagine being in and moving between different foreign locations immensely affected the nineteenth-century imagination. There is no evidence that Dickinson ever saw a panorama; however, she could have encountered visual displays and exhibitions that similarly facilitated “imaginative journey through time as well as to distant lands” during her time at the Chinese Museum in Boston in 1851 or by visiting the Amherst College Cabinet (Peel 202). The panorama had a profound influence on landscape painting, and she would have got a sense of what a panoramic view entailed from her known appreciation of the US painter Thomas Cole (Farr 74). Her poetic representations of objects and landscapes tend to replicate the panorama’s proffering of a “complete or entire view,” which Dickinson frequently achieves by bringing together local and exotic within her compacted poetic form (“Emily Dickinson Lexicon” <http://edl.byu.edu/webster/term/2392385>).

That textual and visual forms of virtual travel could immerse viewers or readers in alternative realities meant that these media were associated in the nineteenth century with the destabilization and disorientation of the self. Virtual travel promoted a “sense of dual citizenship, of belonging to two worlds” (Byerly 10) and necessitated a “double vision,” of moving back and forth between one’s actual and imagined location, between indigenous objects and foreign phenomena (O’Connor 316-17). As well as facilitating imagined travel, some texts foregrounded the cognitive dissonance and perceptual discontinuity associated with virtuality. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun* (1860) offers “minute descriptions of famous works of art and historical sites throughout Italy [that] turned readers into travelers” (130), but draws attention to the way forms of virtuality made it

possible for someone to have an experience without really having it because it is so filtered through prior representations, and that it is possible to be in a place without really being there because you've already been there through someone else's poetry (Jarkensi 143).

In Dickinson's era, imaginary travel connotes a disconnection between one's perceptions and one's environment; it highlights forms of mediation that forestall and prevent direct experience. Nineteenth-century associations of virtual travel with a "bifurcated vision" (Colligan & Linley 5-6) indicate why Dickinson, as in her letter to Holland, uses "travel as a metaphor for the imaginative displacement of self" (Byerly 2). It also explains why she uses global imagery to evoke the mind's ability to separate itself from its corporeal context and be stimulated most by that which is immaterial or absent. This scholarship explicates Richard Wilbur's earlier insight that Dickinson's work is energized by a "huge world of delectable distances," in which "Far-off words like 'Brazil' or 'Circassian' appear continually in her poems as symbols of things distanced by loss or renunciation, yet infinitely prized and yearned-for" (133). Her use of transnational imagery to conceptualize her signature theme of self-division shows the internalization of nineteenth-century globalization and its bifurcating effects on New England experience and imagination.

## **II. European Travel by Fireside or Armchair**

Many scholars have traced aspects of Dickinson's European connections, particularly her British literary heritage. Much more could be said about the function of European travel and geography in her writings. As Malina Nielson and Cynthia L. Hallen point out "Dickinson's poems contain

more references to Europe than to any other continent, both in unique placenames and overall occurrences”: although she “never made the grand tour, she traveled Europe poetically, rhetorically, and philologically from her home base in Amherst” (7). Rebecca Patterson argues that Dickinson’s conception of Europe derived from her study of its history and geography during her schooling, her subsequent reading about this continent in US newspapers and periodicals, and from information she would have gleaned from family and friends who traveled there. For Dickinson, Europe was “the realm of art, of high fashion and social rank” a place associated with “fine manufacture,” learning, cultivation, and historical sites and artifacts (5). As well as reading literature set in Europe, Dickinson would have been exposed to US travel writing, in which her countrymen and women recorded their visits to this continent. These texts established the convention of placing American standards, traits, values, and ideals in comparative relations with European ones (Eberwein, “Siren Alps” 176-8). The popularity of European travel writing in Dickinson’s era owes much to the fact that “crossing out of one’s own culture into another culture (not just place) to the end of living another way of life” and “a habit of mental acquisitiveness” were “highly developed in the nineteenth-century leisure class” (Brodhead 133). While allowing such cross-cultural acquisitiveness and interchange, travel writing underscores points of crossover between the US and Europe that unsettle discourses of personal, national, or topographical exceptionalism.

As far as European travel was concerned “the sights that [travelers] were expected to see, and even the thoughts and feelings they were expected to have, were passed down in guidebooks and travel accounts” (Stowe 17). The availability of detailed written descriptions and illustrations of travel to Europe in nineteenth-century US print culture meant readers could participate “vicariously in travel” while remaining on US soil (Stowe 3). The British poet William Cowper

termed this phenomenon “armchair traveler.” He coined the term to describe his experience of reading James Cook’s *A Voyage Towards the South Pole and Round the World* (1777):

My imagination is so captivated upon these occasions, that I seem to partake with the navigators in all the dangers they encountered. I lose my anchor; my main-sail is rent into shreds; I kill a shark, and by signs converse with a Patagonian, and all this without moving from the fire-side (quoted in Holmes 55).

Reading travel writing contradictorily connected the stillness, contemplativeness, and comfort of a domestic activity with geographical crossings and encounters with the far, foreign, and unfamiliar (see Byerly 26). A subgenre of nineteenth-century travel writing emerged that was written from the point of view of such an armchair or fireside traveler. Works of this type drew their rationale from the paradox of moving while remaining still and promoted the idea of containing that which was alien safely within the homely space. These texts often conceptualized the illusionary and captivating nature of imaginary journeys in ways that anticipate recent scholarship on virtual travel. While some readers of armchair travel may have been inspired to go abroad, works such as Marvel’s *Reveries of a Bachelor* (1850) and Longfellow’s “Travels by the Fireside” (1875) stressed the benefits of journeying through the mind to other parts of the world and becoming immersed there. Marvel’s and Longfellow’s use European travel imagery to celebrate the immaterial over the material, the deferred over the possessed, and to acclaim the power of the human mind. Their aesthetic strategies are vital for our understanding of comparable, recurring tropes in Dickinson’s writing. They also provide examples of how to, in Paul Giles’s words, create a “transatlantic imaginary” to virtualizes Europe for US readers (Giles *Virtual Americas*, 5). Their works blur reassuring distinctions between native and foreign identities and landscapes and create defamiliarizing and alienating effects.

Dickinson's early letters indicate her admiration of Marvel (Donald G. Mitchell) and particularly his *Reveries of a Bachelor*, in which a cultivated unmarried man sits by his fireside and begins a series of daydreams. Even though her father regarded *Reveries* to be "very ridiculous" (L113), Dickinson, in an October 9, 1851, wrote to her beloved friend and soon-to-be sister-in-law Susan Gilbert: "Dont you hope [Ik Marvel] will live as long as you and I do—and keep on having dreams and writing them to us" (L56). Lisa Spiro explains that the popularity of *Reveries* for women such as Dickinson and Sue was because it permitted them "to imagine themselves beyond the gendered spheres of work and domesticity, so that men embraced leisure, home, and feeling, while women dreamed about traveling across the ocean, engaging in a wild romance, or creating works of art" (62). Helpfully, Marvel contrasts the pleasures of a cerebral life and a "brilliant-working imagination" with the "trials" of real-world experience with (Marvel 7, 18). The book makes the case that the thoughts and feelings inspired by fantasy are as powerful as and even difficult to distinguish from those derived from reality. Through reveries, Marvel's bachelor-narrator vicariously experiences the restrictions, pleasures, and pains of love, marriage, and family life. He imagines the loss and death of his wife and children; life with a "coquette"; the joys of young love; and a lifetime with one specific woman called Isabel or Bella.

In his fourth and final reverie, the narrator, despite his love for Isabel, envisages leaving her and traveling across the sea to Europe. Throughout the simulated Grand Tour of Europe in *Reveries*, the experience of being abroad is interrupted by moments in which the bachelor thinks about, hears from, and even imagines seeing Isabel. He thinks he sees the "sweet face of Bella" in both London and Paris and sends her many letters describing all of his experiences, as well as treasuring the one letter she sent him (Marvel 90, 116). Committed to and delighting in his

European adventures and his freedom from domestic life, the narrator reflects: “how pleasant it would be to sit under the trees by [Isabel’s] father’s house, and listen to her tender voice going through that record of her thoughts and fears” (Marvel 116). Such occurrences correspond to similar passages in other contemporary US travel writing in which there is a need to balance the appreciation of Europe with national loyalty (Eberwein, “Siren Alps” 176). They also point to virtual travel as involving the disorienting idea of occupying two location simultaneously. The visions of and references to Isabel or his home during his European fantasy emphasize that he is not really in Europe and hasn’t left his native land. The bachelor is describing Europe and his life there, but his travels are through the “quick wing of thought” (Marvel 97). He can move effortlessly across geographical space without stirring from the location of his meditation:

One moment my thought ran to my little parlor, and to that fairy figure, and to that charming face; and then like lightning it traversed oceans, and fed upon the old ideal of home, and brought images to my eye of lost, dead ones, who seemed to be stirring on heavenly wings, in that soft Roman atmosphere, with greeting and with beckoning (Marvel 95).

This shifting of scenes and experiences is bound up with the text’s depictions of the cerebral speed of moving between domestic and foreign settings and the bachelor’s need to negotiate between virtual and actual experiences.

In the final section of the fourth reverie, “New Travel,” the bachelor imagines traveling from Switzerland to Italy and then home. The text draws attention to other forms of duality and points of opposition as the narrator describes specific differences between Northern and Southern Europe and between his actual US location and his imagined European one. Drawing on national stereotypes of the time, he aligns a New England temperament with a restrained Northern

European sensibility. In contrast, Italy and its people are associated with “passionate sympathies which are bred by this atmosphere and their scenes,” but also with a form of passion that “is not the material to build domestic happiness upon” (Marvel 94). The “cold valleys of Switzerland” are differentiated from Italy’s “soft, warm air, its ruins, its pictures and temples”: he describes “trembling upon the Alpine paths” before “rolling along under the chestnuts and lindens that skirt the banks of Como” (Marvel 133).

Even before he reaches Venice, he considers how it is envisaged by and related to other countries, including his own:

[Venice’s] water-streets and palaces have long floated in [our] visions. In the bustling activity of our own country, and in the quiet fields of England, that strange, half-deserted capital lying in the Adriatic has taken the strongest hold upon [our] fancy (Marvel 133).

Italy and especially Venice are places of fantasy and reverie, and associated with that which is excluded and repressed from US and British identity and experience. They are counterpoints to the “changeful, bustling American life of ours” (Marvel 67) and to “old England[‘s]” “cottage-homes, her green fields, her castles, her blazing firesides, her church-spires...as old as song” (86). The enchanting description of journeying into Venice depicts it as a ghost-like, alluring place that haunts the Anglo-Saxon imagination. Even if only experienced through virtual travel, Venice becomes a constitutive part of nineteenth-century US identity:

as we ride up swiftly under the deep, broad shadows of palaces, and see plainly the play of the sea water in the crevices of the masonry, and turn into narrow rivers shaded darkly by overhanging walls, hearing no sound but of voices, or the swaying of the water against the houses, we feel the presence of the place. And the mystic fingers of the past,

grappling our spirits, lead them away, willing and rejoicing captives, through the long vista of the ages that are gone (Marvel 134).

Venice is described in detail, including famous locations such as the Bridge of Sighs and the palace of St Mark. However, Venice's "treasures of thought and fancy" dissolve as he "wander[s] to Rome" (135). Underlining the swiftness of imaginary travel, his paragraph on Rome is succinct, and he is suddenly home:

But beyond the Campagna, and beyond the huge hulk of St. Peter's, heaving into the sky from the middle waste, we see, or fancy we see, a glimpse of the waters which stretch out and on to the land we love better than Rome. And in fancy we build up that home which shall be to us on the return, a home that has slumbered long in the future, and which, now that the future has come, lies fairly before me (Marvel 135-6).

The effect of reading Marvel's text is evident in the virtual orientation of Dickinson's writings. Like Marvel's text, Dickinson's poems involve similar instant transatlantic passage coordinated by brief European allusions. Her writings speedily lead readers on virtual journeys from a local scene (in Holland's letter, Amherst) to a foreign setting (in Holland's letter, the Garden of Eden and the Franco-Prussian War). She represents, as Marvel does, the multifaceted nature of inner experience (in Holland's letter, the vast dominions of the human mind and heart) through virtual travel. Dickinson's illustrations of virtual experience, even more so than Marvel's, emphasize its associations with psychological division and doubleness. Her poems highlight US identities and locations established through refraction and virtualization of Europe that interconnect home and away, the tangible and the intangible, the absent and the present, the real and the unreal (see Giles, *Virtual Americas* 1-5).

Nineteenth-century American poetry supplies many instances of virtual travel, often focusing, as Marvel does, on European locations such as the Switzerland, Germany, and Italy (see Larcom). Longfellow, who was much admired by Dickinson, was the nineteenth-century US poet best known for his cosmopolitan outlook (Miller 9-10, 23-26). Longfellow championed comparative literature and argued that American literature would only advance if US writers engaged with world literature and the composite and multicultural makeup of their nation. Emphasizing his country's international and intercultural relations, Longfellow saw the development of "transnational poetry and poetics ... [as] commensurate for a country of immigrants from many nations" (Armin and Maas 130). Longfellow's work highlights the ways nineteenth-century globalization shaped US literature (Giles, *Global* 77-90). As part of his commitment to transnationalism, he edited a multivolume anthology of topographical poems written in English or translated into English, *Poetry of Places* (1876-79). This collection showcases the various ways poets have represented journeys to or the landscapes of a range of locations: England, Ireland, Scotland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, France and Savoy, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Belgium and Holland, Switzerland and Austria, Germany, Greece and Turkey, Russia, Asia, Africa, America, Americas, and Oceanica. Appropriately written while he was working on this project and printed in the first volume, Longfellow's poem "Travels by the Fireside" illustrates the value of traveling through the medium of poetry.

"Travels by the Fireside" begins with the speaker describing days of "ceaseless rain" that have "drive[n] me in upon myself / And to the fireside gleams, / To pleasant books that crowd my shelf, / And still more pleasant dreams" (Longfellow 13). This inward movement on rainy days becomes, through the stimulus of reading poetry, an expansive journey that relocates the speaker to "lands beyond the sea" (Longfellow 14). The poem is not about memories of a

tangible visit to Europe but about a re-encounter with poems that had previously, in the speaker's youth, facilitated an imagined trip there: "And the bright days when I was young / Come thronging back to me" (Longfellow 14). Re-reading this poetry allows the speaker again to have the sensory experience of being in Europe. Longfellow's poem then is a record of the speaker's virtual return journey to Europe through re-performing earlier reading practices. His reading of this poetry transports Europe into the speakers' domestic space. Through brief European references the speaker allows readers to participate virtually in this imaginary journey back:

In fancy I can hear again  
The Alpine torrent's roar,  
The mule-bells on the hills of Spain,  
The sea at Elsinore.

I see the convent's gleaming wall  
Rise from its groves of pine,  
And towers of old cathedrals tall,  
And castles by the Rhine.

I journey on by park and spire,  
Beneath centennial trees,  
Through fields with poppies all on fire,  
And gleams of distant seas.

I fear no more the dust and heat,

No more I feel fatigue,  
 While journeying with another's feet  
 O'er many a lengthening league.

(Longfellow 14)

Like the effortless journeys in Marvel's prose from one continent, nation, or city to another, Longfellow's poem compactly uses countries, towns, rivers, and mountains as shorthand for and touchstones to fast-paced passage across Europe and the experience of being there. Like Marvel's narrator, Longfellow's speaker designates virtual travel as a journey "with another's feet" that avoids the fatigue, "dust and heat" of actual travel. Of course, readers of Marvel's and Longfellow's texts, like their respective narrator and speaker, go anywhere.

The self-division between real and virtual experience at the poem's beginning is further emphasized at the end. While celebrating the human mind's facility for imagined travel, the poem stresses the speaker's dependence on the stimulus of poetry. Going even further, the final stanzas do not merely denigrate the "toil" of actual journeys, they imply the authority of a poet's vision of global environments over a non-poet's:

Let others traverse sea and land,  
 And toil through various climes,  
 I turn the world round with my hand  
 Reading these poets' rhymes.

From them I learn whatever lies  
 Beneath each changing zone,

And see, when looking with their eyes,  
 Better than with mine own.

The sovereignty of the poet's visualization of the world is a result of its identification of "whatever lies" beneath cultural variation. What is contained and compressed within poetry is that which is invariable and universal across "changing zones." The poem normalizes and leaves unquestioned the way poetry's ideal mediation of life eclipses the possibility of direct experience. The effortless transition from looking through one's own eyes to looking through the poet's belies a disorientation of perception and subjectivity that this form of virtual travel must inevitably cause.

Dickinson's "There is no Frigate like a Book" (Fr1286), written two years earlier, reiterates Longfellow's notion that reading poetry offers a better and more affordable form of travel:

There is no Frigate like a Book  
 To take us Lands away  
 Nor any Coursers like a Page  
 Of prancing Poetry -  
 This Travel may the poorest take  
 Without offence of Toll -  
 How frugal is the Chariot  
 That bears the Human Soul -

Dickinson's poem, like Longfellow's, celebrates poetry as the most powerful vehicle for imagined journeys. As she indicates in other poems, the poet has the ability to "Distill[] amazing sense / From ordinary Meanings" (Fr446) and with a few words "Comprehend the Whole"

(Fr533). If as Longfellow claims and Dickinson acclaims poets provide readers with a loftier means of imagined travel, then it is because of their ability to encapsulate their visionary powers comprehensively and succinctly through language and imagery. Like Marvel's and Longfellow's texts, Dickinson's poems emphasize prompt, effortless traffic between US and European locations and entities and the incorporation of that which is foreign into the domestic space. Like her contemporaries, she creates transatlantic landscapes and virtual European journeys that foreground levels of duality and self-division as central features of everyday US experience. Dickinson's poems are examples of what Wai Chee Dimock and Giles have identified as the pervasiveness of international lookouts and global aesthetics within much nineteenth-century US literature (see Dimock; Giles, *Global*).

### **III. Dickinson's Panoramic Landscapes**

Recent scholarship has internationalized the study of Dickinson and proposed important frameworks in which to discuss her geographical allusions as evidence of her "global consciousness" (Giles, "The Earth reversed" 9). Giles demonstrates that Dickinson "situate[es] her poetry self-consciously between the local and the global" ("The Earth reversed" 8); her poetry highlights "transnational perspectives" and "reinscribe[s] New England within a global circuit, where the rotation of the Earth renders all vantage points equally refractory" ("The Earth reversed" 17, 18). Although Dickinson frequently refers to Asia, Latin and Central America, and Africa in her writings, the sheer number of references to Europe indicates this continent's great significance for her. Like Marvel and Longfellow, Dickinson uses transatlantic and travel imagery to show that what constitutes home is inseparable from what signifies abroad. Her images of Europe help her approximate the natural world's magnitude and mystery and human

subjectivity's instability and extent. Her transportation of European singularities into her delineations of local phenomena give her depictions of provincial occurrences a panoramic dimension.

The nineteenth-century panorama gave viewers the opportunity to become immersed in and transported to other parts of the world, to experience an alternative, international standpoint that made theirs contingent and provisional. Dickinson's depictions of New England scenes are truly panoramic in that they, like panoramas, "fuse[] local with the global" and create "a simultaneity of spaces" (Plunkett 7). As panoramas did, her poems exhibit differences and exoticize everyday US experience by showcasing European peoples, places, features, or objects. Her readers, like panorama viewers, are offered unfamiliar or remote phenomena for their controlling gaze, but these images of alterity may also be overwhelming or alienating (see Jarenski 74-85). Dickinson's transatlantic imagery highlights the effortless acquisition and appropriation of European marvels and stereotypes, as well as a US culture inescapably shaped by European standards, values, and biases. Her poems demonstrate the realities of nineteenth-century globalization by normalizing the way regional spectacles and innermost experiences have become internationally conceptualized.

Dickinson integrates references to Athens (Fr1606), Birmingham (Fr1407), Ghent (Fr20) Sevres (Fr706), Denmark (Fr1118), Greece (Fr1023), Westminster (Fr1019), St James (Fr602), Gibraltar (Fr1531), and Geneva (Fr259) into her descriptions of local phenomena or people, giving a provincial outlook a more expansive, transnational import. Her European tropes are central to her belief that, as one of her poems begins, "We see comparatively" (Fr580). In this poem, Dickinson's speaker gives the example of looking at "The Thing" one day and it seeming so "towering high" that it "could not be grasp[ed]"; however, then the situation alters:

This Morning's finer Verdict -

Makes scarcely worth the toil -

A furrow - Our Cordillera -

Our Appenine - a knoll -

Exemplifying Dickinson's typical use of geographical imagery, the poem connects the local "knoll" and "furrow" with vast European and Southern American mountain ranges. What was insurmountable can become insignificant, the poem implies, when it is given a larger, global context. This international background confirms Dickinson's point that perceptions are partial, relative, and changeable. The poem goes on to unsettle further the notion of a unified perspective or identity. As her speaker notes, our "striding spirits" mean our vision is alternately diminutive and vast: we find ourselves waking in a "Gant's [home]" or "embracing - / Our Giants - further one" (Fr580).

Presuming a reader's shared engagement with the ubiquity of nineteenth-century travel writing, the poem, like Marvel's and Longfellow's texts, uses topographical shorthand to proffer a journey from New England to South America to Europe and back to New England. Such poems summon up the panorama's shifting scenes and infinite scope. Through brief allusion Dickinson makes "Himmaleh ... stand - / [and then] Gibraltar's everlasting Shoe" appear (Fr352). The expansive and worldwide reach of Dickinson's poetic movement counters any attempt to narrow her concern to topics of interiority and self-autonomy. Instead, her poetry is about a movement out into a world of comparison, duality, and relations, in which words can have different connotations; as she explains: "'Morning' means 'Milking' to the Farmer, / Dawn to the Apennines" (Fr191). Using travel imagery, her poems endeavor to replicate the mind and imagination in a state of associative flux. These features of her work underscore the experience

of alternative positions, of private and provincial judgments locked in the mechanisms of global cultural exchange. The poetry's compressed form accentuates the inevitable proximity of a local matter or measure to its transnational complication or reimagining.

Like many of Dickinson's European poems, "The robin's my criterion for tune" (Fr256) establishes and then problematizes a reassuring or patriotic relationship between location and identity. The initial claim is that the things we are most familiar with -- robins, cuckoos, daisies, buttercups -- ratify our experiential criteria or values. The poem then emphasizes the inescapability of transatlantic connections and virtual experiences that complicate regional standards. Her speaker stresses the comparative nature of experience, pointing to the human mind's ability to dwell in two worldviews simultaneously. The speaker thinks about how different she would be "were I Britain born." She admits that she "see[s] - New Englandly -," but her vision is complicated by her ability to imagine another's perspective, a "Queen['s]," who "discerns like me - / Provincially -." Implicit in this poem is the idea that a comparative and transnational position shapes conceptions of self and environment. The broad cultural popularization of visual and textual forms of virtuality facilitates and normalizes the conjuring up of and immersion in alternative standpoints.

Offering a form of virtual travel, other Dickinson poems interconnect and compare US and European peculiarities in fast-moving transatlantic scenes. For example, in "Pigmy seraphs gone astray," (Fr96), the stylish "local" rose is compared to "Velvet people from Vevay -," but then the speaker makes it clear that "Paris could not lay the fold / Belted down with Emerald! / Venice could not show a cheek / Of a tint more lustrous meek." In light of the rose's unparalleled beauty, the speaker prefers to "dwell like her / Than be Duke of Exeter -." Such poems could be read as favoring the indigenous rather than the exotic. Alternatively, these

imagistic journeys to and fro across the Atlantic show that Europe is central to Dickinson's nation's creative and conceptual repertoire. As in Marvel's and Longfellow's texts, in her poem locations such as Vevey, Venice, Paris, and Exeter are brought into the parochial setting to stress the composite nature of US life. Something similar happens in "Of Brussels - it was not -" (Fr510) where the natural terrain created by winds and woods is described as a floor covering "Of small and spicy Yards - / In hue - a mellow Dun - / Of Sunshine - and of Sere - / Composed - But, principally - of Sun -." The grassy carpet is something "The poorest - could afford -" and is "within the frugal purse / Of Beggar - or of Bird -." The speaker downgrades the manufacture of and vogue for expensive carpets associated with Brussels and Kidderminster in favor of nature's own covering of its "floors." Dickinson's vision of a native scene is bifurcated, however, by these albeit brief allusions that carry readers to European soil, while also bringing global markets into this rural setting.

In her representations of regional landscapes, her fleeting European allusions suggest the panorama's juxtaposition of nearby and remote as well as its associations with a widening scope, an empowering vision, and the involvement of viewers in far-flung scenes and events. Her poetics bring together distinct cultures to create points of estrangement that for her encapsulate a perpetually surprising and enigmatic natural world. For example, in two poems Dickinson summons up the panorama through reference to European artists. In "The trees like tassels hit and swung" (Fr523), the speaker depicts the intricacies of a summer's day by specifying its sounds (the tune of "Miniature Creatures" "Enamouring the Ear") and sights (the changing light, clouds, birds, orchards, a snake and flowers). The poem ends by contrasting this natural scene with the paintings of Antony Van Dykes (1599-1614), who was a portraiturist in the court of Charles I. Dickinson may be alluding to Van Dykes' very few landscapes paintings or to the

landscapes that formed the background to his portraits. In either case, his work does not measure up to hers: “’Twas more - I cannot mention - / How mean - to those that see - / Vandykes Delineation / Of Nature’s - Summer Day!” While explicitly suggesting that European art cannot capture, as her poem does, the wonders, reverberations, and activities of this summer’s day, she is also inextricably relating European landscapes and their representations to her imagining of a local environment. Dickinson gives a New England scene topographical grandeur and transatlantic reach by virtually including within her picture the landscapes of a European artistic tradition.

In “How the old mountains drip with sunset” (Fr327), the transformation of dusk into night is presented through color imagery associated with burning “Hemlocks,” “lip of Flamingo,” fire, “Sapphire,” and “Flambeau.” The poem ends

These are the Visions flitted Guido -

Titian - never told -

Domenichino dropped his pencil -

Paralyzed, with Gold

Dickinson refers to these three highly significant Italian artists -- Guido Reni (1575-1642), Titian (1488-1576) and Domenichino (1581-1641) -- to underline their failure to capture the sunset as well as her poem has. Again, while stressing the preeminence of her poetry’s depiction of natural marvels, Dickinson’s insertion of these artists and by implication their “flawed” masterpieces in the totality of her poetic sketch gives it a majesty and expansiveness despite its condensed form.

In “They called me to the window, for” (Fr589), Dickinson summons up the panorama not through reference to paintings, but by acknowledging its commercial side and connections with entertainment. Dickinson’s speaker is offering her poetic vision of a sunset, allowing

readers to see, as she does, a “Single Herd” on a “Sapphire Farm,” a herd of “Opal Cattle” feeding on a hill. However, this image dissolves into an apparition of ships on the Mediterranean, which is then “rubbed away” by the “Showman”:

They called me to the Window, for

“Twas Sunset” - Some one said -

I only saw a Sapphire Farm -

And just a Single Herd -

Of Opal Cattle - feeding far

Opon so vain a Hill -

As even while I looked - dissolved -

Nor Cattle were - nor Soil -

But in their Room - a Sea - displayed -

And Ships - of such a size

As Crew of Mountains - could afford -

And Decks - to seat the Skies -

This - too - the Showman rubbed away -

And when I looked again -

Nor Farm - nor Opal Herd - was there -

Nor Mediterranean -

The ease of changeover from one virtual scene to another recalls a similar alteration and dissolution of imagined places in Marvel's and Longfellow's texts. The reference to the showman and the disposable, mobile nature of this spectacle summon up the painted panorama's transferable quality and the fact that panoramas were shipped around the world to give different audiences the illusion of and immersion within spectacles of otherness. Dickinson's poem, simultaneously local and global, is trying to capture, as a panorama does, the idea of a boundless view but also one that is artificial, ever-changing, and transitory.

In all of these landscape poems, Dickinson displays poetry's ability to shift and change direction and make inexplicable turns or associations. The poems connote forms of transformation associated with virtual travel but also with the human mind and imagination as sites of constant mutability. The poems' assertions of US particularity and uniqueness are undercut by their ambitious exhibition of all-encompassing views that must of necessity include European antecedents. In these poems what is perceived as an American scene becomes something else, a vision of coexisting worldviews. Europe's simulated presence means the speaker and reader are both within an American location and at a distance from it. For example, in "These are the days that Reindeer love" (Fr 1705) a snowy American landscape is the one "that Reindeer love" and a vista that represents the "Finland of the year" (F1705). Here and in the other poems discussed European landscapes are being virtually mapped onto an American ones.

Dickinson's specialization in compact transatlantic crisscrossing brings depth and convolutedness to her depictions of nature and the subjectivity of her speakers. Concomitantly, her poems identify levels of disorientation and faultlines within conceptions and perceptions of localities and nationalities. Her poem "The wind drew off" (Fr1703) is most explicit in its use of

European imagery to connote estrangement and terror. Dickinson portrays a wild landscape ravaged by wind and illuminated by lightning. The poem ends by associating the savagery of the natural world with the harsh Austrian climate:

The trees held up  
 Their mangled limbs  
 Like animals in pain  
 When Nature falls upon herself  
 Beware an Austrian

Dickinson may also be alluding to Austria's political brutality. Dickinson's beloved Elizabeth Barrett Browning explicitly addressed the tyranny of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, particularly in its treatment of Italy, in her poem *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851). As with her depictions of beautiful scenes, Dickinson's representations of nature's threatening side is given a larger scope through her European reference. Her allusion to Austrians summons up horrific scenes of torture, murder, and imprisonment associated with the European Gothic tradition and imperialism. While celebrating the power of the human imagination, her geographical imagery also points to the mind's capability of accentuating nature's ferocity.

#### **IV Dickinson's Virtual Europe**

As well as incorporating Europe into her visualization of native landscapes, Dickinson creates speakers who journey to or within Europe. The speaker of "All overgrown by cunning moss" (Fr146) goes to Charlotte Brontë's grave at Haworth, while the speaker of "I went to thank her" (Fr637) journeys to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's home in Florence. Both poems present US

admirers who travel to Europe to do homage to their literary idols; however, these records of actual journeys across the Atlantic lead to disappointment and failure. Most of Dickinson's other poems depicting travel to Europe describe an imagined or prospective journey there. In "I'm saying every day" (Fr575A), a self-divided speaker occupied a liminal state between their current situation and a future one. The speaker daily fantasizes about going to Europe and becoming one of its monarch:

I'm saying every day  
 "If I should be a Queen, Tomorrow" -  
 I'd do this way -  
 And so I deck, a little,  
  
 If it be, I wake a Bourbon,  
 None on me - bend supercilious -  
 With "This was she -  
 Begged in the Market place -  
 Yesterday."

She foresees what it will be like when she is queen and that no one will dare allude to her earlier status as a beggar in the marketplace. This "beggar" speaker, despite her lowly status, is already preparing for her future Bourbon grandeur. Her idea is to make the transition to royalty smooth and beyond suspicious. Aware of the conventions of "Court" she seeks to "qualify" in her present state by "looping [her] apron - against the Majesty / With bright Pins of Buttercup -" and putting her "simple speech / all plain word - / Take other accents, as such I heard." The speaker exists in an imaginary state of anticipation and planning; she is the virtual queen inhabiting the

threshold position between actual beggary and impending royalty. In this poem, a change in rank is figured as a movement in space and time, as virtual travel to and within Europe:

Better to be ready -  
 Than did next Morn  
 Meet me in Arragon -  
 My old Gown - on -  
 And the surprised Air  
 Rustics - wear -  
 Summoned - unexpectedly -  
 To Exeter -

The poem stages the attractions of Europe's locations and royal families. Virtuality is a means of testing alternative viewpoints and vicariously living beyond one's existing circumstances. The poem, however, also highlights virtuality's associations with a divided perspective, of inhabiting two different realms at once.

In a series of poems that refers to the Rhine or Frankfurt, Dickinson connotes the experience of imagined travel and the supremacy of internal forms of conveyance. In "We - bee and I - live by the quaffing" (Fr244), the unwed speaker (a figure not unlike Marvel's bachelor) and a married Bee transcend the domestic space. The poem presents a world of male-bonding and freedom associated with various forms of alcohol and getting drunk among the "jolly clover." The poem implies both an actual journey along the Rhine that involves the consumption of alcohol and virtual travel through inebriation:

While runs the Rhine -  
 He and I - revel -

First - at the Vat - and

Latest at the Vine.

Noon - our last Cup

“Found dead” - “of Nectar” -

In this poem, as in Marvel’s text, the speaker experiences imaginatively everything from bachelorhood to European travel to death. Interestingly, the poem echoes one section of William Cowper’s poem *The Task* (1785), in which the poet imagines traveling virtually through reading Cook’s adventures; in the following stanzas, Cowper draws an analogy between travel, actual or imagined, and the idea of a bee journeying from flower to flower:

He travels and expatiates, as the bee  
 From flower to flower, so he from land to land;  
 The manners, customs, policy of all  
 Pay contribution to the store he gleans;  
 He sucks intelligence in every clime,  
 And spreads the honey of his deep research  
 At his return — a rich repast for me.

He travels, and I too. I tread his deck,  
 Ascend his topmast, through his peering eyes  
 Discover countries, with a kindred heart  
 Suffer his woes, and share in his escapes;  
 While fancy, like the finger of a clock,  
 Runs the great circuit, and is still at home

(quoted in Holmes 51).

In both poems, the bee signifies the effortless freedom and pleasure of imagined travel, but also of the human mind and imagination to wander naturally from one idea to another.

In a more explicit reference to Marvel's cigar-smoking bachelor, Dickinson, in "Many cross the Rhine" (Fr107), shows alcohol along with a cigar as facilitating vicarious travel:

Many cross the Rhine  
 In this cup of mine.  
 Sip old Frankfort air  
 From my brown Cigar.

In "Exhilaration is within" (Fr645), the journey to the Rhine is definitely an interior one associated with personal bliss. The travel motif and European reference summon up the notion of a "diviner Brand," an "Ampler Rhine," a form of sumptuousness or joy, brewed internally within the soul and opposed to actual travel:

Exhilaration - is within -  
 There can no Outer Wine  
 So royally intoxicate  
 As that diviner Brand  
  
 The Soul achieves - Herself -  
 To drink - or set away  
 For Visiter - or Sacrament -  
 'Tis not of Holiday

To stimulate a Man  
 Who hath the Ample Rhine  
 Within his Closet - Best  
 you can  
 Exhale in offering -

Such a poem makes clear that Dickinson is most interested in using travel and exotic locations to demonstrate internal powers of stimulation and their associations with gratification and addiction.

The Rhine comes to signify the supremacy of the inner life, which in “A toad can die of light” (Fr419) is called the “Bare Rhine” “Naked of Flask -/ Naked of Cask -.” As in armchair or fireside travel, such journeys and their metaphors represent the ability of the mind to transcend locality and become immersed in otherness. Similarly, in “I taste a liquor never brewed -” (Fr207) Dickinson presents the idea of consuming and being consumed by a superior beverage becoming consumed by this substance:

I taste a liquor never brewed -  
 From Tankards scooped in Pearl -  
 Not all the Frankfort Berries  
 Yield such an Alcohol!

This exceptional liquor is brewed internally not externally and offers extraordinary sustenance. As in the other poems discussed, her interconnecting images of transatlantic journeying and intemperance are endeavors to articulate the pleasures and dangers she associates with the imagination. The metaphor of drunkenness reinforces virtuality’s connection with divided subjectivity and the risks posed by a dissimilarity between imagined and actual life.

Dickinson's theme of self-division is repeatedly related to her exploration of the human being's ability imaginatively to live elsewhere or exist otherwise. Her writings often present the possibility of switching places or identities with another person. This form of role play is connected with the notion of a European journey in "In lands I never saw - they say" (Fr108):

In lands I never saw - they say

Immortal Alps look down -

Whose Bonnets touch the firmament -

Whose sandals touch the town;

Meek at whose everlasting feet

A myriad Daisy play -

Which, Sir, are you, and which am I -

Opon an August day?

This speaker draws on the ubiquity of accounts of European travel writing to go virtually to "lands [she] never saw." However, she brings her addressee to an uncanny scene in which the "Immortal Alps" are not sublime entities but as a feminine figure, with bonnets and sandals, who looks down while a group of daisies plays at its feet. With the assumption that this pair swaps parts regularly, the speaker wants to know, given this illusory choice, whether her addressee identifies with the Alps or the daisies, and accordingly which role she should take. Virtual travel and the ability to envisage another's worldview provide an interesting slant from which Dickinson can challenge the notion of fixed gender roles and problematize normative power relations between the sexes.

While imagining being in Europe, some Dickinson speakers, like Marvel's narrator, juxtapose a Northern and Southern European way of life. Domhnall Mitchell notes the trend for Northern European culture in the second half of the nineteenth century "when people with Dickinson's class heritage and ethnic background sought new ways of distinguishing themselves from members of other classes whose money began to make them uncomfortably adjacent" (77). In "I think the Hemlock likes to stand" (F400) "'The Hemlock' represents enduring intellect against sudden passion; austerity against indulgence; the mind in control of the senses and the sensual" (Mitchell 79). A Northern European temperament is associated with triumph in the face of austerity and difficulty and is sharply contrasted with the carefree and sensual lives and "play" of "satin Races" who live near the rivers Don and Dnieper.

If Dickinson uses European stereotypes of the time to align Northern European with New England temperaments and lifestyles, she also interconnects both with their Mediterranean equivalent. In other references to Southern Europe, for example to the volcanoes of Italy, Dickinson explores the idea that volcanic depths lie dormant beneath seemingly cooler, innocuous surfaces (see Finnerty 115, 121). Buried inside a Northern European or New England front is Southern or Latin American passion, characterized by Mount Etna (Fr415, 1161), Vesuvius (Fr764, 1691) and Chimborazo (Fr452). Her work suggests that it is "Travellers" who tell those who "have never seen 'Volcanoes'" about "those old - phlegmatic mountains / Usually so still -" (Fr165). Elsewhere it is reading or studying geography that enables the prospect of a virtual tour of the world's volcanoes:

Volcanoes be in Sicily

And South America

I judge from my Geography

Volcano nearer here

A Lava step at any time

Am I inclined to climb

A Crater I may contemplate

Vesuvius at Home

(Fr1691)

Dickinson uses the concept of imagined travel to warn of the existence of New England volcanos that contain a hidden and reserved force which could at any moment erupt.

The idea that virtual travel provides a way of experiencing different ways of life or repressed or unrealized sides of identity is succinctly highlighted in “Our lives are Swiss” (Fr169). The poem opposes the Swiss or New England way of life to an Italian one. It focuses on a moment of transnational contact that complicates the stability and rigidity of regional characteristics and categories:

Our lives are Swiss -

So still - so cool -

Till some odd afternoon

The Alps neglect their curtains

And we look further on.

Italy stands the other side.

While like a guard between -

The solemn Alps -

The siren Alps

Forever intervene -

Like Marvel's text which sharply distinguishes Switzerland from Italy, this poem opposes the regularity of a "still" and "cool" Swiss existence to a passionate, exuberant, and artistic life enjoyed in Italy. The poem is not about a journey to Italy, but rather about a fleeting glance into Italy one "odd afternoon," when the restricting clouds give way. The imagery here recalls other Dickinson poems in which the Alps signify unyieldingness (Fr977) or the Apennines are "more distinctly seen" when "Mists" partially cover them (Fr203). In this poem, the "solemn," "siren" Alps maintain differences between but also teasingly connect the two countries.

Recalling Marvel's Venetian imagery, here Italy is a specter of otherness, present in its absence, desired at a distance. Even if never seen or only occasionally looked on, Italy is a constitutive part of Swiss routine and identity. For Dickinson and her contemporaries, as Marvel implies, this is the country that epitomizes and inspires reverie and creativity. The looking "further on" into Italy denotes virtual travel's threshold moment, as Swiss or New England gazers imaginatively experience Italian life, while remaining within their country's borders. It is fitting that Dickinson does not say anything about Italy. Italy cannot be fully presented or fully conceptualized; it is merely glimpsed at from an ideological, epistemological distance. The poem encapsulates the conception of virtual travel as an "experience that is not fully realized, but aspirational. It is a state of almost being, of tending towards realization" (Byerly 6-7). Interestingly, whereas her poems of actual travel (Fr146 and 637) end in disenchantment, imagined travel offers involuted experiences in which opposing ideas, locations, and peoples can be "virtually" brought together. These poems of virtual travel, in form and theme, normalize transcultural movement and spaces. The intricate subjective positions of their speakers express virtuality's associations with mobility and freedom on the one hand and with duality and self-division on the other. While drawing on

European stereotypes, Dickinson also complicates the notion of unyielding identities, whether national or regional.

### **V “Some Transatlantic Morn”**

Nineteenth-century formulations and examples of virtual travel provide a fresh schema for considering her use of European and travel imagery. While showcasing poetry’s strange powers of creating illusion and simulated experience, Dickinson also underlines virtuality’s associations with disruptive, erratic, and shifting viewpoints. The key motifs of armchair and fireside travel and the workings of panoramas illuminate Dickinson’s juxtapositions of local and global within her economy of desire and theme of self-division. The virtual context explains why as, Wilbur notes, “not only are the objects of [Dickinson’s] desire distant; they are also very often moving away, their sweetness increasing in proportion to their remoteness. ‘To disappear enhances’ one of the poems begins” (133). While her poems indicate a connection between character and habitation and celebrate native over foreign phenomena, imagined travel means she can also chart movement outwards towards a broadening of vista, standpoint, and identity. Her poems showcase the viability of the mind and imagination, but reflect on the possible implications of their immersion in spectacles of otherness. Dickinson’s virtual Europe emphasizes the intricacy and contradictory nature of nineteenth-century US national identity and its tangled relationship with and internalization of that which lay beyond its deceptively porous national and cultural boundaries.

Helpfully bringing together the themes of this essay is one final example of Dickinson’s use of European and virtual imagery:

The lonesome for they know not What -

The Eastern Exiles - be -

Who strayed beyond the Amber line

Some madder Holiday -

And ever since - the purple Moat

They strive to climb - in vain -

As Birds - that tumble from the clouds

Do fumble at the strain -

The Blessed Ether - taught them -

Some Transatlantic Morn -

When Heaven - was too

common - to miss -

Too sure - to dote upon!

(Fr326)

In “The lonesome for they know not what” travel symbolizes a form of self-division that prevents the possibility of a return to psychological unity. This typical Dickinson speaker exists in a liminal state in which “the pain of abstinence” is related to an earlier “moments of infinite joy” that can be possessed again only through the imagination (Wilbur 133). The inexplicably lonely, according to the speaker, are exiles who have carelessly left their beloved “Heaven,” having “strayed beyond the Amber line / Some madder Holiday.” The poem mentions their endless but fruitless struggles to return to their native land by climbing the “purple Moat.” They

remember, however, “Some Transatlantic Morn” being taught about (rather than experiencing) the division between home and abroad. At this moment, “Heaven” was “too common - to miss,” “Too sure - to dote upon.” These self-divided individuals, the poem implies, constantly imagine traveling back to their earlier state of bliss and are the characteristic figures of virtual travel.

Although stressing points of separation and opposition, the poem is really about the existence of two interrelated states, identities, ways of life. It is the lonely exiles who see both sides, recognizing the connection between bliss and loss, past and present, imagined and actual. In this poem, transatlantic captures this virtual position, of imagining oneself from the position of the other and vice versa. The idea aligns with Webster’s definition of this word as “Lying or being beyond the Atlantic. When used by a person in Europe or Africa, transatlantic signifies being in America; when by a person in America, it denotes being or lying in Europe or Africa. We apply it chiefly to something in Europe” (“Emily Dickinson Lexicon” <http://edl.byu.edu/webster/term/2374322>). This poem, like the other Dickinson poems discussed in this essay, demonstrates that her aesthetic and existential outlook is marked, as she explained in her letter to Mrs. Holland, by the immaterial, the distant, and the virtual. While increasingly committed to her home in Amherst, Dickinson in her poetry also charts journeys across time and space, which bring Europe especially into her locality and make this continent across the Atlantic one of the places she visited when she shut her eyes.

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