

“If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her”: Dickinson and the Poetics of Celebrity

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Abstract

This essay throws new light on Dickinson and her writings by viewing them in the context of nineteenth-century celebrity culture. The first part of the essay focuses on Dickinson's participation in a culture of literary fandom driven by a powerful attraction to and near-obsession with admired writers and all things associated with them. In the context of contemporary celebrity tourism, it examines her presentation of speakers who elegiacally describe journeys to sites connected with Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and considers how these poems relate the workings of literary fandom to loss, absence, and death. The second part of the essay considers the ways in which Dickinson deploys celebrity discourse to foreground her poems as enticing spaces that exhibit that which attempts to evade public scrutiny or knowledge. Building on connections between Dickinson's concern with literary immortality and her arresting poems, the final part of the essay focuses on her personification of death as a mysterious celebrity-like figure (Fr166) and her presentation of the experience of death as a "famous - Sleep" (F463) and of the dead as achieving "strange fame" (Fr1398). The various strands of the essay coalesce in pointing not only to Dickinson's complex engagement with and response to the workings of celebrity, but also to her provocative foregrounding of interconnections between her culture's obsession with the dead and its construction of celebrities as absent-present, ghost-like figures who are intimately known individuals, but also otherworldly, transcendent strangers.

In a Northampton church, on July 3, 1851, Emily Dickinson had her most significant known celebrity encounter when she attended, along with her father, mother, and sister, a concert by

the soprano Jenny Lind, who was known as “the Swedish Nightingale.” The show was part of Lind’s 1850-52 American tour, which had been carefully organized and publicized by the media-savvy, commercial impresario P.T. Barnum. Tapping into a desire in the US for popular entertainment and European celebrity, Barnum did everything he could to encourage “Lindomania,” which began even before her arrival in New York in September 1850 and which continued throughout her tour (see Bechtold 497-8). Like other American newspapers, the *Springfield Republican* updated readers, including Dickinson, about Lind’s tour and the nuances of her performance, and met but also increased the demand for information, anecdotes, and gossip about the singer (see Pascoe 3, 14). The *Republican* emphasized the frenzy that her presence caused and mentioned the volumes of fan letters she received, and also printed poetic homages to her. A few weeks before the concert, Dickinson expressed a level of skepticism about Lind to Austin Dickinson, who had just heard the singer in Boston, and had in an earlier letter suggested that his sisters accompany him to this event. Dickinson hyperbolically praises Austin’s disparaging review of this concert in defiance of the publicity and celebrity that surrounded the singer:

permit me to accord with your discreet opinion concerning Swedish Jennie, and to commend the heart brave eno’ to express it - combating the opinion of two civilized worlds, and New York into the bargain, must need considerable daring - indeed it had never occurred to me that amidst the Hallelujahs one tongue would dare be dumb - and much less I assure you that this dissenting one should be my romantic Brother!
(L44)

Dickinson praises her brother’s bold stance, but also the eloquence of his epistolary performance, what she calls the “very high style of rapture in such a youth as you.” She celebrates her brother’s letter in and through the discourse associated with Lind’s fame. Their father is a fan who “perused the letter and verily for joy the poor man could hardly contain

himself - he read and read again, and each time seemed to relish the story more than at first.” Fearing that such frenzy and over stimulation would have an adverse effect on this reader and the manuscript, Dickinson, a less impassioned admirer, tells Austin that she “seized the exciting sheet, and bore it away to my folio to amuse nations to come.” The letter, according to their father, is newsworthy and had it arrived earlier would have been ““transferred to the *Paper*’ to tell this foolish world that one man living in it dares to say what he *thinks*.” Their father then proclaims Austin’s letter aloud and is transformed, through his daughter’s hyperbolic language, into a star entertainer:

encomium followed by encomium - applause deafened applause - the whole town reeled and staggered as it were a drunken man - rocks rent - graves opened - and the seeds which had’nt come up were heard to set up growing - the sun went down in clouds - the moon rose in glory - Alpha Delta, All Hail!

Although in her secluded life, elusive writings, and decision not to publish, Dickinson expresses a class- and gender-inflected refusal to become a public figure such as Lind, this essay focuses on how, as in this letter, she engages with contemporary discourses of fame and fandom, and responds to celebrity culture’s blurring of distinctions between public and private life.

After she and her family attended the Northampton concert, Dickinson writes again to her brother. Although concurring with his less than favorable opinion of Lind’s musical style, Dickinson is in awe of Lind as a public figure “meant to be observed, brushed up against, talked about, and above all *recognized*” (Dames 33):

how Jennie came out like a child and sang and sang again, how boquets fell in showers, and the roof was rent with applause - how it thundered outside, and inside with the thunder of God and of men - judge ye which was the loudest - how we all loved Jennie Lind, but not accustomed oft to her manner of singing did’nt fancy *that*

so well as we did *her* - no doubt it was very fine ... *Herself*, and not her music, was what we seemed to love - she has an air of exile in her mild blue eyes, and a something sweet and touching in her native accent which charms her many friends (L46).

Capturing the contradictory essence of the celebrity, Dickinson's Lind is worldly and otherworldly, an intimate and a stranger, a naïf and a professional. The account shows Dickinson's participation in her community's brush with fame and presents it as communal worship, akin to religious experience. As well as being enthralled by Lind as a child-like, foreign woman, who inspires applause, flowers, love, and friendship, Dickinson was fascinated by the audience's response; she tells her brother that their father "sat all the evening looking *mad*, and *silly*, and yet so much amused you would have *died* a laughing." Her letter, however, also underlined the commercial side of this mysterious woman, pointing out that Lind "took 4000 \$... for tickets at Northampton aside from all expenses." Dickinson's description of the spiritualistic and materialistic side of Lind shows her involvement in her culture's attempt, encouraged by Barnum's publicity and Lind's self-staging, to reconcile the reality of a profit-making, public female figure with ideals of femininity associated with domesticity, purity, reticence, and altruism. Barnum, for example, manufactured and marketed Lind as separable from "commercial ends," knowing the lucrative nature of emphasizing her as "untouched," "divine," and "charitable" (Brodhead 282). Print culture stressed Lind's angelic, supernatural, and ethereal stage persona, which was underscored by her appearance dressed in white, while publicizing Lind's income from the tour and its generation of merchandise associated with the star, such as gloves, bonnets, hats, shawls, and cigars, newspapers (Pascoe 2; Bechtold 497). Lind's celebrity is inextricably connected to the marketability in US culture of innovative, exotic performers and of physical and public embodiments of respectable womanhood and its ideals. She offered

Dickinson an important example of the complexity but also marketability of contradictorily maintaining allure, privacy, and mystery, while becoming a spectacle of communal fascination.

There exists much evidence of Dickinson's "anxiety about the value of literary performances and the nature of celebrity in a market where status is transitory and contingent on (changing) public tastes" (Mitchell 165). Her writings also indicate that she "worried obsessively about immortality after death – both her poetry's and her own," and that she regarded immortality as the reserve of great artists who dedicated themselves to art rather than pursuing worldly renown (Bennett 228). Recent work on nineteenth-century transatlantic celebrity culture, however, offers an important new context for re-considering her epistolary and poetic constructions of immediate and posthumous fame, and showing not her opposition to but rather her appropriation and unsettling of the workings of celebrity and fandom. It explores her responses to celebrities such as George Eliot, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Charlotte Brontë, showing the ways in which she plays with and problematizes relations between the admirer and the admired. Connecting her concern with literary immortality with her provocative writing style, especially her poetry's many publicity-grabbing opening lines, imagery, metaphors, and concepts, the essay focuses on her poetic showcasing of privacy and that which evades public scrutiny and knowledge: the interiority of her "supposed persons" and secret lives of natural phenomena. In this context, it also focuses on her mapping of celebrity discourse on to the practices and rituals associated with death and the representation of the dead.

Poetics of Fandom

Recent scholarship suggests that a "new category of public experience called *the celebrity*" emerges at the end of the eighteenth century, accelerated by technological developments in

print media and mass circulation, and inextricably connected with democratization, urbanization, individualism, and consumerism (Dames 25). By the early nineteenth century practices and institutions were in place to produce, reproduce, and commercialize a multiplicity of ways for admirers, later called fans, to access the lives, works, homes, and bodies of the famous individuals. Photography, biography and autobiography, travel guidebooks, newspapers, journals, illustrated periodicals, interviews, carte-de-visite, fan letters, autographs, souvenirs, celebrity sightings, the tourist industry, and gossip columns worked as part of a celebrity system that generated fans' feelings of intimacy, affinity, sympathy, and identification with celebrities. Having a value in proportion to their association with, or what they might reveal about the famous, such commodities relied for their continuation as much on the marketing of a celebrity's personal accessibility as on the promotion of his or her unknowability and mystery. The American response to Lind's tour implies that by the mid-nineteenth century celebrity culture was already in place in the US as "an extensive, industrialised, and intertextual mode of gossip, disseminating information, facilitating identifications, channelling desires, defining relations within a community, proscribing behaviours and legitimating values" (Goldsmith 22). Dickinson's attention to the audience's captivation with Lind rather than her singing taps into a historical moment at which distinguished individuals' achievements, talents, or abilities led to, and were often eclipsed by, increased fascination with their personalities, lifestyles, preferences, and tastes (Franssen & Honings 1-8). Following the pattern of Dickinson's response to Jenny Lind, there is ample evidence of Dickinson turning to textual and visual sources from print media or to what she could glean from the experiences of others to satisfy her fascination with renowned individuals. Her growing reclusion, if anything, intensified her interest in the private lives, appearances, and places associated with celebrities. While her letters show her

observation of and participation in the commercialized and industrialized worship of public figures, her poems indicate her complication of the mechanisms of fandom.

Although Dickinson refers to and admires American literary celebrities such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Helen Hunt Jackson, her most enthusiastic approbation is lavished on contemporary British writers, especially Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, Emily Brontë, and Charlotte Brontë. The newspapers and periodicals Dickinson read would have kept her abreast of any available information about these public figures and their private lives. Dickinson's letters suggest that although she was centrally attracted to their literary works, she was also fascinated with their biographies and appearances, and sites associated with them. Sometime after Barrett Browning's death on 29 June 1861, Dickinson writes the following to her cousin Louise Norcross:

That Mrs. Browning fainted, we need not read *Aurora Leigh* to know, when she lived with her English aunt; and George Sand "must make no noise in her grandmother's bedroom." Poor children! Women, now, queens, now! And one in the Eden of God. I guess they both forget that now, so who knows but we, little stars from the same night, stop twinkling at last? (L234)

Reading sections from *Aurora Leigh* biographically and alluding to an extract from Sand's memoir that had been published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in November 1861 (Leyda II 37), Dickinson is the fan finding points of identification in available information about the suffering of and restrictions placed upon these great writers, particularly during their childhoods, as well as discovering inspiration in their eventual triumph over adversities to earn regal-like literary greatness. There are numerous other examples of her interest in biography. She gave Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857) as a present to her sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert Dickinson, inscribing it "Sister, from Sister" (Capps 174).

Again, blurring the lines between artistic and biographic works, she described A. Mary Robinson's biography of Emily Brontë (1883) as "more electric far than anything since 'Jane Eyre'" (L822). In the final four years of her life, the pre-publication publicity about John Walter Cross's biography of his wife, George Eliot (1885), transformed Dickinson into an obsessive enthusiast eagerly seeking more information and the book. In April 1883, she asks Higginson if he would allow her, as a gesture of gratitude for his mentorship, to send him a copy of "'Life of Mrs Cross' by her Husband, which the Papers promise for publication?" (L819). Although Thomas Niles, an editor at Roberts Brothers publishers in Boston, was very interested in publishing her poetry, Dickinson was primarily interested in playing an Eliot admirer rather than a prospective author. After earlier exchanges (L749a 749b) about the Eliot biography, in March 1883, he informs her: "I do not hear anything about the Life of George Eliot by Mr Cross - at least only rumors that he is at work upon it. We shall publish on Saturday a life of her by Mathilde Blind wh. will be worth your reading." (L813a). When Dickinson acquires Blind's biography, she responds to Niles that it "had much I never knew - a Doom of Fruit without the Bloom, like a Niger Fig," and with a poem, "Her Losses make our Gains ashamed" (L814), which contrasts Eliot's great artistic achievements with her personal losses. Blind's work does not abate Dickinson's fixation on Cross's biography, presumably because she felt that having been written by someone so close to Eliot it would offer the most intimate and accurate knowledge: in January 1885, Dickinson tells Louise Norcross: "Loo asked 'what books' we were wooing now - watching like a vulture for Walter Cross's life of his wife" (L962). When in February 1885 she eventually read this biography and then sent a copy as a gift to Higginson, she commented: "Biography first convinces us of the fleeing of the Biographied" (L972), pointing to this genre's paradoxical associations with life and death, presence and absence, exposure and suppression.

As well as being a self-styled predator of celebrity biographies, Dickinson also presented herself as someone drawn to visual representations of and geographical locations associated with those she admired. Even more so than biographies, photography at this time “produced a still more radical apprehension of intimacy between literary celebrities and their readers,” allowing a sense of “proximity” to photographed figures who were rendered singular and unique, while also being reproducible images (Salmon 169-70). Participating in this visual route to intimacy (see Leyda II 139), Dickinson, according to her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, hung pictures of Barrett Browning and Eliot (along with one of Thomas Carlyle) on her bedroom wall (83). Knowing she was a great admirer of the recently deceased Barrett Browning, Dickinson’s friends, by August 1862, had sent her three “portraits” of the English poet (L271). In 1870, she gave Higginson a picture of Barrett Browning’s “tomb,” which had been given to her by Josiah Holland after a visit to Europe (L342b). Ambivalent about seeing the face of Eliot, while also aware of the gossip about the writer’s unattractive appearance, Dickinson, in April 1881, tells Elizabeth Holland, whose husband Josiah was the editor of *Scribner’s Monthly*, “Vinnie is eager to see the Face of George Eliot which the Doctor promised, and I wince in prospective, lest it be no more sweet. God chooses repellant settings, dont he, for his best Gems” (L692). When the portrait was published in the November 1881 issue of the magazine, it was removed by someone in the Dickinson household (Leyda II 357). Stemming from the same desire for closeness to the famous, Dickinson vicariously participated in the popularity of literary tourism. She asked friends who were visiting Europe to act as her proxies seeing and touching its sites and cultural treasures (see L487, 1004). For her, these ambassadors went where she could not and always with the possibility of discovering new information about or having an unexpected encounter with those she admired. In 1862, she asks Samuel Bowels, the editor of the *Springfield Republican*: “Should anybody where you go, talk of Mrs. Browning, you must

hear for us - and if you touch her Grave, put one hand on the Head, for me - her unmentioned Mourner” (L266). In 1878, Dickinson writes to Higginson “I hope your rambles have been sweet and your reveries spacious - To have seen Stratford on Avon - and the Dresden Madonna, must be almost Peace - And perhaps you have spoken with George Eliot. Will you ‘tell me about it?’” (L533).

Dickinson’s letters suggest her cognizance that her favorite authors existed in a field of celebrities in which commercial, visual, and informational systems and the workings of fandom mediated fame. Dickinson would have also been very sensitive to the fact that female celebrities in this marketplace “found it necessary to balance privacy with visibility to enhance public interest in their lives and work. Too little exposure could mean invisibility in a fiercely competitive literary marketplace, yet too much exposure could mean being cast aside as the latest vulgar literary fad” (Easley 12). As a result, Dickinson’s constructions of fandom in her poetry are often more ambiguous, as she interrogates the desire for ever-closer proximity to admired, but elusive figures. “All overgrown by cunning moss” (Fr146) and “I went to thank her” (Fr637), although usually read as elegies, poetic tributes, or declarations of influence, feature speakers who are literary tourists, one journeys to Haworth to Charlotte Brontës grave and the other goes to Barrett Browning’s Florence residence; both poems associate intrusive admiration with disappointment, absence, and death. These poems draw on tropes, images, and ideas associated with celebrity tourism and fandom, but also on constructions of celebrities, in particular female celebrities, as absent-present, seen and yet unseen, ghostly figures, who haunt the texts that attempt to materialize them. Dickinson seems to be gesturing to the fact that “the discourse on literary celebrity was as much premised on what could be seen and known about popular authors as it was focused on the mysterious and unknowable aspects of their lives and works” (Easley 12).

Written in the late 1850s, “All overgrown by cunning moss,” (Fr146), presents a speaker who has gone to a weed-grown grave at “Haworth,” the “little cage of Curren Bell.” Brontë is presented as a bird who in dying has followed other birds, perhaps her sisters and brother, to “other Latitudes” and has not returned:

All overgrown by cunning moss,
 All interspersed with weed,
 The little cage of “Curren Bell”
 In quiet “Haworth” laid.

This Bird - observing others
 When frosts too sharp became
 Retire to other latitudes -
 Quietly did the same -

But differed in returning -
 Since Yorkshire hills are green -
 Yet not in all the nests I meet -
 Can Nightingale be seen -
 Or
 Gathered from many wanderings -
 Gethsemane can tell
 Thro’ what transporting anguish
 She reached the Asphodel!

Soft fall the sounds of Eden

Upon her puzzled ear -
 Oh what an afternoon for Heaven,
 When "Bronte" entered there! (Fr146)

In the first part of the poem, the speaker discovers only profound lack in the green "Yorkshire hills," as well as levels of secrecy and hiddenness provided by the "cunning moss" and interspersed "weeds." The pilgrimage ends as an unfulfilled quest for intimacy or connection with the departed "Nightingale." Tapping into the expectations and disillusionments of nineteenth-century celebrity-led travel, the devotee presents the unkept cage-grave and Haworth not as sites of inspiration and inclusion, but as ones of indifference and exclusion. Interestingly, the poem's suggestive placement of "Or" between stanzas three and four marks a shift of focus and perspective: the fan's discovery of an environment's disregard for and destruction of human commemoration and fame is eclipsed by the fan's vision of Brontë's triumphant entry into heaven. Stanzas four and five imply that it is the now unnecessary male pseudonym that is dead and buried, as the female author, after her "many wanderings" and anguish, arrives in Eden, a paradisiacal site Dickinson associates with radical possibility and desire (see Fr205, Fr269). Stressing heaven's benefit in gaining Brontë rather than Brontë's in entering into heaven, the poem also indicates that this writer is puzzled because she had not expected such celebration, perhaps owing to the moral controversy her works caused or to personal humility. Reversing a Christianization and feminization of Brontë in Gaskell's biography, the poem presents an influential, authoritative, and even unsettling "Brontë," who has achieved immortality associated with heaven but also with the asphodel of Greek Elysium. While contrasting the literary tourist's fruitless expedition with Brontë's posthumous acclaim, the poem also points to the fact that at this time fans conferred celebrity on individuals and were the agents of remembrance and apotheosis in the face of time's and

nature's obliteration. Dickinson's "Or" aptly connects fans' intimacy-seeking activities with their new roles as the arbiters of fame.

Like the first part of the Brontë poem, Dickinson's 1863 poem "I went to thank Her -" (Fr637), emphasizes a fan's devastation at the eternal loss of a beloved writer:

I went to thank Her –

But She Slept -

Her Bed - a funneled Stone -

With Nosegays at the Head and Foot -

That Travellers - had thrown -

Who went to thank Her –

But She Slept -

'Twas Short - to cross the Sea -

To look upon Her like - alive -

But turning back - 'twas slow -

Here, Dickinson constructs another literary devotee turned tourist or, perhaps more worryingly, an intrusive admirer wishing to experience the intimacy of a private audience with a worshipped writer. Unfortunately, the speaker arrives too late, perhaps at the writer's residence, and unexpectedly attends the poet's funeral and becomes part of an occasion of communal mourning. The hoped-for private encounter with the living celebrity is transformed into a public event involving other "Travelers" who have also come to thank the now-dead idol. Dickinson creates a speaker who both fulfils her 1862 request to Bowles to represent her grief for Barrett Browning by touching the poet's grave and head, and participates at Barrett Browning's funeral, which had been described in articles from newspapers and periodicals Dickinson read, such as Kate Field's 1862 *Atlantic Monthly* essay

“Elizabeth Barrett Browning” (see Finnerty 115). The journey to Italy is short, full of anticipation and excitement with the prospect of seeing “Her like - alive -”; however, returning home is a slow, presumably melancholy trip. Even more strongly than in the Brontë poem, here Dickinson uses death as the ultimate barrier protecting writers from their fans and re-establishing personal privacy. Yet Dickinson, who wrote two other elegies for Barrett Browning (Fr600, Fr627), knew that death, like any reinforcement of the division between private and public life, only intensifies worship and the mythologizing work of fandom.

Both poems evoke and are condensed, sparse versions of the more elaborate and detailed descriptions of literary tourism that were ubiquitous at this time. Authors of such accounts act as conduits for their readers, visiting literary shrines and sometimes even having intimate encounters with celebrity authors. As Easley notes the “growth of the literary tourism industry was inseparable from the practice of bio-geographical criticism that emerged in the periodical press during the same period” that connected an author’s life and works with geographical locations associated with them (13). Rather than offering an intrusive touristic or celebrity encounter, however, Dickinson’s poems stress the writer’s ghostliness, at a time when ghosts were ubiquitous within literary tourism and when a visit to the writer’s home or meeting with a celebrity was akin to a spiritual encounter with the dead. Dickinson’s Brontë and Barrett Browning are “spectral presences, neither fully present nor absent”; their “ghostly invisibility” is a result of “the intersecting discourses on literary tourism and domestic ideology,” which “mandated women’s absence in the public sphere” (Easley 14, 49). Both poems interconnect renown with fandom, remembrance, and death, while the Brontë poem offers the notion of posthumous fame that blends Christian religion and Greek mythology, demonstrating Leo Braudy’s claim that from the eighteenth century onwards “hope of heaven, hope of immediate fame, and hope of fame in posterity were becoming difficult to distinguish” (379). Positioning Brontë’s and Browning’s lives and deaths within the context

of actual and published transatlantic pilgrimages to literary sites, the poems draw on imagery of personal and communal, internal and external, intimate and distant, and perceptible and imperceptible to stress the inaccessibility and mystery of these writers who transcend, evade, and defy the intrusive fandom they inspire. While underlining the attractions of the suffering Brontë bird and of an inspirational figure such as Barrett Browning, the poems dwell not on the cliché of the suffering, dying, or dead woman, but rather on the disillusionment of the archetypal fan seeking access to or knowledge and access to a celebrity's inner essence, private life, and personality. Interestingly, if celebrity culture legitimizes the fans' transformation of private spaces, graves, and residences into places of worship, Dickinson's poems, particularly the Barrett Browning one with its reference to communal mourning, hint at the way an admirer's individuality and singularity are also threatened by the highly imitative nature of admiration.

Mother and I for greater celebrity are remaining at home

When Dickinson began a correspondence with Higginson in 1862, she primarily wanted to know if the poems she sent him were "alive" and if they "breathed" (L260). She "hoped to find a critical audience without the risk of exposing herself to public scrutiny through publication" (Lundin 115). When he discouraged her from publishing, she made her career-long position on fame very clear:

I smile when you suggest that I delay "to publish" - that being foreign to my thought, as Firmament to Fin - If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her - if she did not, the longest day would pass me on the chase - and the approbation of my Dog, would forsake me - then - My Barefoot-Rank is better - (L265).

Suggesting embarrassment and a preference for deprivation, Dickinson's formulation evokes the new opportunities for women to receive mass acclaim and become celebrated public

figures, but also the difficult requirement that they embody feminine ideals, in particular domesticity, modesty, and humility. Her statement perfectly encapsulates the fact that for women, fame “[had] to be a matter of fate rather than of design, of rewards passively received rather than conquests actively pursued” (Weber 4). Dickinson does not disallow fame but rather delays it, reiterating her remark a year earlier to her sister-in-law Susan Gilbert Dickinson: “Could I make you and Austin - proud - sometime - a great way off - ’twould give me taller feet -” (L238). Her patient and careful attitude towards fame echoes ideas Higginson puts forward in his 1862 *Atlantic Monthly* essay, “A Letter to a Young Contributor,” which is believed to have inspired her to write to him. Here, Higginson explains to would-be authors that the commercial marketplace has become not only the formidable tribunal for “transitory reputations,” but also “the organ of eternal justice and infallibly awards posthumous fame” (404). While noting “the habit to overrate the *dramatis personae* of the hour,” Higginson evokes the context of posthumous existence and fame to offer solace: “Yet, if our life be immortal, this temporary distinction is of little moment, and we may learn humility, without learning despair, from earth’s evanescent glories” (410). In lines Dickinson quoted from in a later letter to him (L488), Higginson advises honor-led hesitancy: “Such being the majesty of the art you seek to practise, you can at least take time and deliberation before dishonoring it” (403). Although Higginson would later play a key if cautious role in Dickinson’s posthumous publication, his importance to her in her lifetime stemmed from her use of his critical and literary authority to validate her resistance to publication and her preference for circulating her poems as part of epistolary exchanges (see Crumbley 154-169).

Discussing Dickinson’s attitudes toward publication and publicity, Leo Braudy, in his ground-breaking history of fame *The Frenzy of Renown* (1986), categorizes Dickinson as a reluctant celebrity: she one of many “writers in the nineteenth century... beginning to turn

neglect into a banner of ultimate value, for themselves as well as for others” (424).

Dickinson’s hand-stitched books are an “attack [in the name of artistic integrity] against commercial reproduction” and her social withdrawal a perfectly understandable move in a context in which “To be too clearly visible, to be too easily understandable, in short, to be containable by the great and growing public, was beginning to be a mark of shallowness and insignificance” (424). Rather than being exceptional, Dickinson’s distancing and differentiating herself from the competitive “fame-choked world” was an extreme enactment of a Romantic belief in an author’s self-sufficient singularity and the concomitant notion that “anonymity and neglect [were] emblems of true worth” (425). Dickinson is the neglected-genius type who strives not to appeal to the masses, but to “rare Ear / Not too dull” (Fr945) or the “sole ear I cared to charm” (Fr324) and, ultimately, to a discerning posterity. Immediate fame in one’s lifetime is a “fickle food / Upon a shifting plate”; “Men eat of it and die,” and it is rejected by cynical crows (Fr1702); it is bee whose pleasurable “song” does not compensate for its “sting” and fleeting nature (Fr1788). Instead, True artists “Work[s] for Immortality” and “Slow [but everlasting] Gold” rather than striving as most do “for Time” and its immediate compensations of fame, the former being an eternal “Mine”, while the latter is merely the “Bullion of Today” (Fr536 see also Fr1707).

Although Braudy uses Dickinson’s lines “To earn it by disdaining it / Is Fame’s consummate Fee -” to summarize a “distinctive strain in many nineteenth-century literary careers,” (464) the full poem from which these lines are taken highlights that withdrawal from the public, commercial world is a tactic aimed to attract and quantify the world’s pursuit:

To earn it by disdaining it
 Is Fame’s consummate Fee -
 He loves what spurns him -

Look behind - He is pursuing thee -

So let us gather - every Day -

The Aggregate of Life's Bouquet

Be Honor and not shame -

The poem recalls Dickinson's words to Higginson about fame's pursuit of her, but adds the idea of keeping one's eye continually on the world one has evaded or rejected. While the daily assembly of "Life's Bouquet" is about measuring the gaining of honor and avoiding shame, the practice implies that the attention of the world is an ongoing concern, tally, and temptation. While her correspondents were aware of Dickinson as an individual who carefully guarded herself against and sought to be protected from all types of publicity (L225, 573a), they also knew her as someone who often drew attention to the power of refusal to increase demand. One 1859 letter to Mrs. Joseph Haven draws attention to Dickinson's awareness of the function of denial in celebrity culture. Thanking this correspondent for a delightful letter associated with remembrance, surprise, and grace, Dickinson compliments Haven on her husband's letter that was so full of mirth that it belonged in the family library. Recalling her Lind letter in which she transforms her father and Austin into celebrated entertainers, Dickinson writes: "Father is in New York, just now, and Vinnie in Boston - while Mother and I for greater celebrity, are remaining at home" (L200). What Dickinson hints at here and which is central to her writings and her relationships with others, is the idea that that which "resists" most "attracts" (Fr844). As she put it to her friend Judge Otis Lord: "you are happiest while I withhold and not confer - dont you know that 'No' is the wildest word we consign to Language?" (L562). Dickinson's life and writings suggest that she did not stand apart from the marketplace of fame and fandom, but recognized the increasingly

significant role celebrity played in cultural reception, and was not averse to using publicity-seeking mechanisms to her advantage.

Scholars of the history of celebrity have shown that Dickinson was not the only reluctant celebrity to strategically engage with and become fascinated by the workings of celebrity. Recent research shows the inextricable intersections between celebrity and poetry in nineteenth-century Anglo-American culture and the ways poets experimented with and incorporated these associations into their poetry. David Haven Blake has shown that relations of affection, sympathy, and intimacy were central to both the workings of celebrity and of poetry, at a time when “the combined forces of industrialization and print capitalism were creating increasingly abstract forms of public life” (“When Readers Became Fans” 110). The focus of poetry, particularly lyrics, on selfhood and personality “compensate[d] for this dehumanization structural shift” and “poets could accrue a quasi-religious aura, especially if they presented themselves (or had been presented) as distinctive cultural personalities” (110). Moreover, poetry that “arouse[d] intense feelings of closeness and devotion in readers,” offered “an emotional immediacy and sense of mutuality,” and was “intensely personal and deeply felt” had a huge commercial appeal (“When Readers Became Fans” 108, 109, 108). Although presented as a counter to the “alienating effects of mass-mediated, consumer society,” the imagined intimacies of nineteenth-century poetry were continuous with “the structure of mass-mediated celebrity” (Eisner 18, 15). Noting the “significant overlap in the ways literary works and market structures conjure seductive forms of poetic presence,” Eric Eisner argues that

Poems and market institutions both work through essentially impersonal mechanisms to create forms of presence that are at once compelling and ephemeral, and that exercise power by virtue of being, in face, mere systems effects. Like lyric poetry

itself, the poet's charisma depends on an impossible intimacy, where what seduced us is a presence we know is not really there (13).

The publication and reception history of Dickinson's writings highlight the interconnection between her seductive personal address and the ways in which readers have responded personally with feelings of intimacy, familiarity, and passion, often interpreting the poems as personal embodiments of the poet (see Smith 127, 151). The fact that her poems exist in manuscript form and only ten were published in her lifetime has meant that, even more so than the poems of her contemporaries, Dickinson's seem to embody the "idea of the lyric as ideally unmediated" and of "lyric poetry as a discourse immediately and intimately addressed to the reader" (Jackson 7, 51). Although she regarded publication, as "the Auction / of the Mind of Man" (Fr788), Dickinson wrote as she did because she, like other contemporary poets, she recognized the viability, popularity, and marketability of poems that established intimate, personal, immediate relations between poet and reader, disguising the formal, artistic, and linguistic means and strategies that facilitated such an intense connection.

For Blake, part of Dickinson's engagement with celebrity culture is precisely the ways she entices the reader into her exhibition of a "soul's dramatic conflict" and her displays of the self "as a kind of audience-directed performance" (*Walt Whitman* 52, 53). Moreover, he pinpoints her celebrity-informed tactics:

Despite her focus on Parnassus, Dickinson remained strikingly aware of the need to court and please an audience. The poet may have limited her self-promotional activities to a series of private letters, but her poems reveal a stunning mastery of the language of publicity" (*Walt Whitman and the Culture of American Celebrity* 52).

These insights allow Dickinson's poems to re-emerge as not merely intimacy-creating texts, but publicity-astute ones. Many of her poems begin with incredible opening-line pitches, spoken by intimate, direct, open, confiding first-person speakers, who reveal as much as they

conceal. Her constructions of intimacy are accompanied by promotional obstructions, involving outlandish, unexpected, and paradoxical imagery, metaphors, and ideas. As Cristanne Miller puts it “The extraordinary power of Dickinson’s language stems largely from her success in balancing the contradictory impulses towards the privacy of self-protection and the publicity of fully expressed intimacy or articulate pronouncement on the broader concerns of her life” (39). Dickinson’s linguistic balancing of “private life” and “public spectacle” shows that in her culture these are “two sides of the single process”; as Brodhead puts it, “a more publicized and spectatorial entertainment order and a more leisured, privatized domestic model arose at the same time in [nineteenth-century] America because it was the nature of that domestic model to create a need for” its opposite (288). Fitting into a trajectory in which domestic privacy has a mass marketability and entertainment value, Dickinson’s constructions of privacy and the private life could not help but be orientated towards the public sphere. Although rejecting the role of the public and commercial performer, Dickinson, in her life and writings was culturally predisposed to occupy imaginatively, rhetorically, and poetically just such a position. Reflecting the public visibility and mass appeal of female celebrities such as Lind, Eliot, Brontë and Barrett Browning, Dickinson, in poems such as “No matter now - Sweet -” (F734), “I’m saying every day -” (F575), and “You’ve seen Balloons set - Haven’t You?” (Fr730), “I would not paint - a picture -” (F348), creates speakers who imagine what it would be like to suddenly become public figures enjoying adulation and acclaim. In these performance poems, privacy is constituted in terms of spectacle, commerciality, display, and audience (see Jessee 18-19). Yet what Dickinson specializes is the representation, advertisement, and publicization of selves and entities that are most reluctant to go public.

In the preface to the 1890 initial publication of Dickinson poems, Higginson predicts that her “verses will seem to the reader like poetry torn up by the roots, with rain and dew

and earth still clinging to them, giving a freshness and fragrance not otherwise to be conveyed” (Eberwein et al 57). Unknowingly he points to the unearthing of that which is hidden as not only that which did and continues to attract readers, and also to her poetic penchant for exhibiting the unseen. The rhetoric of Dickinson’s poems is driven by an intrusion into that which seeks to remain private and avoid exposure. As if explaining her predominant use of personally confiding, first-person speakers, in key poems she celebrates the attractions of the secret performers and hidden performances, implying that the “Vitallest” dramas are those “infinite[ly] enacted,” in the “Human Heart,” the “Only Theatre recorded / Owner cannot shut -” (Fr776). In “I cannot dance upon my Toes -” (F381), while the speaker, outwardly or publically, has no outward talent or achievement, she can imagine having “Ballet Knowledge” and performing for “Audiences” as part of a “Troupe” and wearing a “Gown of Gauze.” The poem publicizes a speaker who can go “out of sight, in sound, / The House encore me so -”, a figure that “none know” and whose secret and operative “Art” no “Placard boast[s].” In her most famous rejection of the cult of personality, “I’m Nobody! Who are you?” (Fr260), Dickinson satirically states that the desire to be somebody makes one (“like a Frog”) dependent on the validation of others (“To tell one’s name – the livelong June - / To an admiring Bog!”). Yet she also implies that in a culture of promotion and advertisement (which act as forms of surveillance) even nobodies (such as the poem’s speaker and possibly its addressee) need to be wary of the attractions of inconspicuousness and anonymity:

I’m Nobody! Who are you?

Are you – Nobody – Too

Then there’s a pair of us!

Don’t tell! They’d advertise - you know!

Interestingly the alternative word for “advertise” is “banish,” suggesting that nobodies are threatened by both being included and excluded from celebrity. While in “The Clover’s simple Fame” (Fr1256), “The Martyr Poets - did not tell -” (Fr665), and “A Spider sewed at Night” (Fr1163), Dickinson contrasts the vulgarity of literary dependence to the idea of self-reliance, art for art’s sake, and literary immortality (see Mitchell 150; Bennett 230), these poems also place that which is concealed and secretive on display. Even when making an argument for fame that derives from notions of personal integrity, self-respect, and honor rather than from public acclaim, Dickinson’s specialty is the exhibition of an autonomous, reluctant self:

Fame of Myself, to justify,
 All other Plaudit be
 Superfluous - An Incense
 Beyond Necessity -

Fame of Myself to lack - Although
 My Name be else supreme -
 This were an Honor honorless -
 A futile Diadem -
 (Fr481)

In other poems, Dickinson strategically showcases moments of intense covert, personal experience through analogy with mysterious natural phenomena:

Best Things dwell out of Sight
 The Pearl - the Just - Our Thought -
 Most shun the Public Air

Legitimate, and Rare -

The Capsule of the Wind

The Capsule of the Mind

Exhibit here, as doth a Burr -

Germ's Germ be where?

(Fr1012)

Following this poem's logic, her poetry acts as rough external "Burr" teasingly advertising that that which is "best" or "rare" eludes the public gaze or realm. The function of such poems is to highlight and increase the desire to make tangible the intangible "Capsule" or "Germ." Similarly, in "A transport one cannot contain" (Fr212A), "Though God forbid it lift the lid, / Unto it's Extasy!": the speaker imagines the commercial benefit of prohibitively depicting "Rapture":

A Diagram - of Rapture!

A sixpence at a show -

With Holy Ghosts in Cages!

The *Universe* would go!

Again, the poem evokes the lucrative nature of giving the public that which is seemingly impossible, unavailable, paradoxical: the impracticality of materially containing a spirit recalls the aberration of an ethereal public performer such as Lind, or the illusion of a text containing an internal, personal, or psychological presence.

Often Dickinson's parading of the interiorities of her retiring "supposed persons" is accompanied by her promotion of the sequestered, unrecognized, and secreted within the natural world. In "The tint I cannot take is best" (Fr696), what is being revealed and publicized is the speaker's inner experience of sublimity:

The Moments of Dominion

That happen on the Soul

And leave it with a Discontent

Too exquisite - to tell -

Although both exposing and concealing something happening “on the Soul” that is “Too exquisite to tell,” the poem also draws comparative attention to the commercial viability of covert natural phenomena: “The Color too remote / That I could show it in Bazaar - / A Guinea at a sight -.”

In other poems, Dickinson juxtaposes the mediated nature of celebrity and publicity and the unconscious workings of the nature to unveil unknown and overlooked entities. “Forever cherished be the tree” (Fr1600), for example, exposes the forces that protect what is unobserved: the poem announces that a “Winter worn” apple is eaten by two breakfasting robins breakfasting, even though “Angels have that modest way / To screen them from renown.” Similarly, in “Bloom upon the mountain stated” (Fr787), Dickinson foregrounds the viability of unnoticed things like the bloom that will “Come - and disappear - / Whose be her Renown - or fading - Witness is not here -” Drawing on celebrity discourse, such poems point to precarious or easily missed moments and function as obtruding eye-witness testimonies. Dickinson’s speakers are intruding figures, comparable with contemporary journalists or fans, exposing the environment’s secret processes:

We spy the Forests and the Hills

The Tents to Nature’s Show

Mistake the Outside for the in

And mention what we saw.

Could Commentators on the Sign
 Of Nature's Caravan
 Obtain "admission" as a Child
 Some Wednesday Afternoon.

This poem's incorporation of the language of fame and public acclaim into natural spaces to which it is opposed is also evident in "There is a flower that bees prefer" (Fr642), in which the fragile flower's "Progress" is associated with "newer fashions," having a "public," being "proclaimed," before finally, as if an unsuccessful show, "cancelled by the Frost -". What becomes explicit in "Of Bronze and Blaze" (Fr319) is the rewards available for the tactic of publicizing that which is disregarded and overlooked:

My Splendors, are Menagerie -
 But their Competeless Show
 Will entertain the Centuries
 When I, am long ago,
 An Island in dishonored Grass -
 Whom none but Daisies, know -

Posthumous fame, her poem implies, lies in the poet's ability to entertain "Centuries" of readers with her "Competeless Show" of unseen natural "Spendors," as well as with her "Menagerie" of otherwise indiscernible "supposed persons."

Dead Celebrities

Dickinson scholars have noted that she incorporates the topic of death into almost six hundred poems, viewing it from multiple angles and making it "the most important single factor in shaping the contours of her poetry" (Ford 14). Unsurprisingly, since she associates death with the speechless, silent, secretive, the reportless (Fr422, 1315, 543, 1315, 1654) and

describes the dead as going “Further than Guess can gallop / Further than Riddle ride” (Fr1068), this subject has an important role in her strategies of poetic display. Although usual her fascination with death has been connected with nineteenth-century cultural activities, genres, practices, protocols, and beliefs regarding lamentation and bereavement, what has not been fully considered is how her death poems relate to the workings of celebrity culture. For Braudy, “What Byron, Napoleon, Emily Dickinson, or a hundred others felt in their marrow now blithely becomes part of a song called ‘fame’ in which going to heaven and having your name remembered amount to the same thing” (392). In her work, “[Dickinson] manages to present the urge for earthly success in the most appealing possible terms—as a subcategory of the striving for heaven” (Braudy 419-20). Unsurprisingly because so many of Dickinson’s poems present similar ideas, Braudy calls Dickinson “the show-off of eternity for the innumerable ways she devised to humble herself in the world even as she asserted herself to posterity and to heaven” (472). Dickinson’s poems about personal immortality or a relationship with a Christ-like lover or God, for Braudy, are inseparable from other poems that explore the eventual literary recognition of the ignored, or overlooked figure. Fleshing out Braudy’s idea, Blake suggests that Dickinson aligns Christian notions of eternal life with the idea of literary immortality (*Walt Whitman* 51-2); posthumous reward, in both cases, is through the earthly accomplishments and talents of the “effaceless Few” (Fr1552) who earn Fame’s “deathless syllable” (Fr1227). A typically neglected Dickinson speaker asserts that her “Holiday” will be “That They remember me” and Paradise will be “the fame - / That They - pronounce my name” (Fr389) or argues that if worldly fame “does not stay” and will die, there is the possibility that one can in death gain true fame: “out of sight of estimate / Ascend incessantly” (Fr1507). What has not been discussed, however, is Dickinson’s use of the language of celebrity and fandom to represent the dying and the dead and to map and conceptualize posthumous existence.

While in many of her poems on death, she presents the dead rendered into impersonal, inanimate objects (Fr431, Fr658) and Death as an equalizer removing earthly distinctions (Fr836), in others she focuses on death as the “famous sleep” (Fr463A), and puts on display the mysterious, private, and secret moments the dead move “out of story” into what she calls “that strange Fame - / That lonesome Glory / That hath no omen here – but Awe -” (Fr 1398). In “Ambition cannot find him” (Fr115), there is a sense in which the dead have been rhetorically and poetically transformed into renowned figures: “Yesterday, undistinguished! / Eminent Today.” Dying “Reorganizes Estimate” and unsettles “The Admirations - and Contempts - of time” (Fr830). Death offers the “unknown Renown” (Fr1363) and confers fame (Fr1006): “The first We knew of Him was Death - / The second, was Renown - / Except the first had justified /The second had not been -”. Everything associated with the dead takes on new significance (Fr640): the books they read and marked, the “little workmanships / In Crayon - or in wool - / With ‘This was last Her fingers did’ - / Industrious until - /The Thimble weighed too heavy - / The stitches stopped - themselves -.” The dead become the newsworthy: “Read - Sweet - how others strove” (Fr323) as “Brave names of Men - / And Celestial Women - / Passed out - of Record Into - Renown!”. In other poems, such as “It feels a shame to be alive” (Fr524A), it is being alive that is “dishonourable”: “When Men so brave - are dead - / One envies the Distinguished Dust - / Permitted - such a Head.” Entering the “Mystery” of death, the dead become “mystic creature[s]” (Fr315). As Dickinson puts it, “the Dead [are] exhilarants - they are not dissuaders but Lures - Keepers of that great Romance still to us foreclosed - while coveting (we envy) their wisdom we lament their silence” (PF50).

In transforming the dying and dead into celebrity-like figures and the living into their admirers, Dickinson’s poems underline a connection between a culture of a celebrity and nineteenth-century cult of the dead, which privatizes and domesticates the mechanisms of

fandom. Her culture's powerful feelings of fascination, obsession, and love towards the dead are expressed through the use of fan-like practices, pilgrimages, communal rituals, and a range of media that attempt to do homage and get close to the diseased. Having poetically made her the dead renowned figures, Dickinson also creates fan-like speakers who scrutinize and archive the activities of the dying, and mourn, eulogize, elegize, commemorate, idolize, and fetishize the dead; her speakers visit locations (homes, graves) associated with the departed, and examine, venerate, treasure their possessions, remains, and keepsakes (see Ford 72-184). In other poems, Dickinson imagines what the hereafter might be like, most pertinently in "I went to heaven - Twas a small town," which charts the space of the afterlife in a similar way to a travel writer or literary tourist (Fr577):

Stiller - than the fields
 At the full Dew -
 Beautiful - as Pictures -
 No Man drew -
 People - like the Moth -
 Of Mechlin - frames -
 Duties - of Gossamer -
 And Eider - names -
 Almost - contented -
 I - could be -
 'Mong such unique

Here, as in "Who occupies this House" (Fr1069), the afterlife is a place of stillness and its unique occupants are pioneers, settlers "Liking the quiet of the place / Attracted more unto." If the dead are famous, then it is because their association with the "Majesty of Death" (Fr169). While in some poems Death is personified as "the postponeless Creature" (Fr556), a

“supple Suitor” (Fr1470), in “Dust is the only Secret” (Fr166), Death is the ultimate reluctant celebrity whom “You cannot find out all about [him]/ In his native town -

Nobody knew his Father -

Never was a Boy -

Had'nt any playmates

Nor “Early history” -

Industrious - Laconic -

Punctual - sedate -

Bolder than a Brigand -

Swifter than a Fleet –

As if a biographer, celebrity journalist, or fan, the speaker attempts to get at the personality or private life of death. Death occupies the celebrity’s ghost-like position between the seen and the unseen, visible and invisible, known and yet unknown.

Never does Dickinson more intriguingly explore interiority, secrecy, and privacy, though, as in her poems spoken by those who are dying or have died. Complicating the incommunicability, inactivity, and stillness she associates with the dead (Fr238), these poems position Dickinson as the most innovative and inventive user of one of the most powerful literary devices in nineteenth-century poetry. Dickinson’s posthumous speakers have been interpreted as allowing her to explore and test, often skeptically, the central ideas of Christianity (Bolton, Fuss); to challenge a traditional anesthetization or poeticized of the dead woman’s body (Raymond 22-24); and to redress an objectification, reification, and silencing of women and the woman writer in a male-dominated social, political, or literary tradition (Raymond 127). What has not been stressed, however, is the shocking and publicity-grabbing posthumous speakers performatively create the space of their own posthumous fame. What

needs to be added to current scholarship on the influence of the spiritualist movement on Dickinson and her poetic appropriation of its language, ideas, and the authoritative and public role of the female medium (Crumbley 107-132) is more recent research on the shared emphases of celebrity culture's and spiritualism's on "personality, magnetism, and the real fellowship that can arise from phantom intimacies" and their origins in the decline of traditional religious authority and influence (Blake 112). Drawing attention to the public careers of the Fox sisters, public séance as spectacular and theatrical entertainments, and internationally famous mediums such as Eusapia Palladino, Simone Natale offers compelling evidence of "how mechanisms of celebrity and publicity that were typical of show business were also at play within the spiritualist movement" (83). In this context, her deployment of the vogue of spiritualism and communication between this world and the next, Dickinson, like Edgar Allan Poe, Sarah Helen Whitman, and Sarah Gould, aims to attract, intrigue, and get a reader's attention (Blake 112-116), Dickinson's speaking cadavers are the ultimate in spectacle and performance: they are the dead celebrities in her Barnum-like show. In poems such as "I cried at Pity - not at Pain" (Fr394), "'Twas just this time, last year, I died" (Fr344), "Dropped into the Ether Acre" (Fr286), "Because I could not Stop for Death" (Fr479), "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died" (Fr591), and "I died for Beauty" (Fr448), Dickinson's speakers are not mediums bridging "the Distance / between Ourselves and the Dead," they are dead. In these poems, Dickinson's makes public the "solitude of death" (Fr1696), exposing readers to a brief glimpse at the most revered type of interiority, offering a poetic exclusive from the lips of those who have gained "Renown" (Fr1006). Her poetic revelations of experiencing things "By Ear unheard, / Unscrutinized by Eye" (Fr132) tend to divulge as much as they mask, maintaining the death's unknowability and privacy. They are dramatic feints in which speakers describe a life they have left or are no longer part of, usually from a space connoting timelessness or eternity, or as part of a last glimmer of consciousness; the

poems then dramatically peter out into a break-taking silence before the mystery of nothingness or of something else.

What this essay has emphasized is Dickinson's interest in and appropriation of the commercialized and industrialized processes that inextricably connected celebrities and fans, and that also ensured that a level of mystery, ambiguity, and allure remained to maintain and perpetuate such relationships. In line with her secluded life and indeterminate writing style, there is evidence in Dickinson's writings of her attempts to counteract the types of intrusion and fandom celebrity culture promoted and validated. Her poetic focus on and the language she used to depict the interiority of the living or dead, and concealed natural phenomena, however, show her awareness of the marketability of and her ability to publicize that which evades the public's attention and scrutiny. Although rejecting a commercial world of mass culture, star entertainers, and celebrities emerging around her, she exhibited and marketed herself and her poems as exceptional, rare, and veiled things coming to light. If anything, her focus on the hidden and the private, in fact, underscores her life and writings orientation towards the idea of eventually coming before the public's attention. The documents included in the recently published *Dickinson in Her Own Time* (2016), moreover, offer ample evidence that editors, publishers, other writers, friends, family, neighbors admired Dickinson's literary abilities and powers, and that she "developed a reputation as a remarkable writer even while maintaining extreme levels of privacy" and "made considerable provision for the survival of her poems and laid the groundwork for their eventual publication" (xvi). What also emerges is that Dickinson's extreme privacy meant that she was identified in her lifetime as an incomparable and mysterious figure, and that fascination about her character and personality was coterminous with discussion of her literary works. Placed in the context of nineteenth-century categories of fame outlined by Nicholas Dames, Dickinson, in her lifetime, was a notable, a person whose fame was within a "circumscribed sphere" and was "deeply

relativistic” and “limited to a particular circle” (28-9). Although certainly seeking to create glorious artworks, akin to George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, through which she imagined a “mortal” could “put on immortality” (L389), she also recognized that the notability she achieved in life was a necessary step that invited fame’s pursuit of her.

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