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"Gone-to-Kansas": A Reading of Dickinson's L182

Hitch your wagon to a star.
Emerson, "Civilization"

Daneen Wardrop states that the Gothic form allowed Dickinson "more leeway to explore new avenues of consciousness, and ironically by utilizing the somewhat clunky apparatus of the Gothic, she enabled herself to achieve new effects" ("Gothic" 151). Although in her major book of 1994, Wardrop had quoted one paragraph of Dickinson's L182 to Mrs. Holland of January 1856 (109), the letter in its entirety deserves a close analysis on at least two major grounds. One is precisely Dickinson's early use of Gothicism in her writing — in this instance, in her correspondence — and the other the stunning critique or deconstruction of the American myth of Manifest Destiny which the letter offers.[1]

While I am giving the entire text in the Appendix, I will begin by noting that the letter opens with a macroscopic instance of self-aggrandizement by an overt challenge to the gods who are denied the "mortal music" Mrs. Holland's voice provides: "I wish I heard it oftener — One of the mortal music Jupiter denies." And then Dickinson goes on to claim superhuman power for herself by stating that when "its gentle measures fall upon my ear, I stop the birds to listen."

The letter continues in this jocular vein of hyperbolic boasting by challenging "Mr. Whately" (sic), the major authority on rhetoric whose book was amongst the set texts she had to study while at Mt. Holyoke Seminary: "Perhaps you think I *have* no bird, and this is rhetoric — pray, Mr. Whately, what is *that* upon the cherry tree?" After the pun on Mr. Whately/what, I should Iike to point out that the images of both the bird and the cherry tree are seen by Rebecca Patterson as part of the topical symbolism which is discussed in her chapter on "The Geography of the

Unconscious." In this context, it may be worth stating that the bird is the image Dickinson consistently associates with Mrs. Holland. If she can "stop the birds to listen," she feels perfectly entitled to assert that regardless of the winter snow there is a bird perched upon a cherry tree.

The contrast created by the juxtaposition of a boastful challenge to the gods with her being dejectedly sitting "in the snows," is one of the major figures Wardrop identifies in her essay as being a classic feature of the Gothic style, the "I that finds itself in isolation, divested of its material substance" (151). While the self aggrandizement will reappear towards the end in a far more serious vein, here the language of the letter begins to display the standard imagery of Gothicism: "Church is done, and the winds blow, and Vinnie is in that pallid land the simple call 'sleep'" — the latter being an ironically humorous remark, repeated often enough on Vinnie's tendency to doze off when household chores are not pressing.[2]

It is possible to read this remark as an indirect expression of Dickinson's deepening sense of isolation from the rest of the family, while the metaphor of "pallid land" for sleep may have been borrowed from the well-known popular writer E.R.B. Lytton, who uses it in his "Perturbation" in the context of impending danger, a state of mind clearly echoed in Dickinson's following references to "a sinful world," "spectral air" and "phantoms," which are seen to "vanish slow away."

These Gothic entrapments, as Wardrop calls them, are often used by major writers to give "physical, palpable verity to the pressing questions of selfhood in latter 19th century America" ("Gothic" 142). Again, the use of pronouns and the trading of perspectives between the dead and the living which constitutes the condition of looking "the other way," is present here with insistent prominence: *"they* will be wiser ... *we* shall all be wiser," "while *I* sit in the snows," "the summer day on which *you* came, *I* keep remembering *it,* till *it* assumes a spectral air," "nods and winks at *me,"* "and then *all of you* turn to phantoms and vanish slow away" (emphasis mine).[3]

What is paramount to the speaker is that "we cannot talk and laugh more, in the parlor where we met," even though in that parlor she "had learned to love for aye." The lapse into a Gothic handling of a basically sacred terminology is followed by a sententious seriousness that turns the familiar domestic parlor into a biblical one, "not made with hands," a direct quote from 2 Corinthians 5.1.

At this point the letter gives a personal account of the move from the house on Pleasant Street to the Homestead, a block and a half away. Alfred Habbeger, who entitled the pertinent section of his biography, "Father Moves" (338-341), remarks how "The poet's own account of this move dwells on her feelings of dizziness and fragmentation," and calls the letter "an extremely complicated performance, throwing any number of veils over the writer's confusion and worry" (341).

But it would seem that those veils hardly obscure Dickinson's antagonism towards her father and his despotic arrangements for the family move, providing yet another instance of Gothic style in the relevance given to the master/slave/victim antagonism. To my mind, this second section of the letter is an overt show of Dickinson's early rebelliousness towards her father.[4]

First the writer says, "I cannot tell you how we moved," and then follows this supposed inability to tell with "I had rather not remember." The abruptness of the first two sentences of this paragraph rests on the two negatives, "cannot" and "had rather not," both being disclaimers aimed at creating dramatic interest on the part of the addressee. Interestingly enough, the following affirmative verb, "I believe," a positive assertion, is in fact nothing but an added expression of doubt. The entire sentence which reads "I believe my 'effects' were brought in a bandbox, and the 'deathless me,' on foot, not many moments after," sets the tone for the humorous and self deprecating scene that follows, positing physical objects as mingled with the material identity of the speaker.

Her "effects" were brought in a bandbox "but the 'deathless me' on foot not many moments after." The appropriation of the heroic dimension

conveyed by "deathless me" is flattened not only by the verbal pun on "death," but by the legalistic itemization of her physical effects.[5] A "memorandum" is taken, but oddly enough the items are the speaker's "several senses," along with "my hat and coat, and my best shoes." What better denunciation could there be of her father's egotistical authority than to melodramatically pose as a fallen Greek hero, who has lost both his/her senses and his/her best clothes, not to mention the fun that is being poked at the genteel accessory, the "bandbox," that would enhance the father's prestige.

As we have seen, the first part of the letter ends with the Biblical aphorism referring to the parlor "not made with hands," and the second opens with a paragraph in which Dickinson describes her senses as being reified and she herself, along with the memorandum of her effects, lost in the *melée.* The confusion is so intense that it stretches in time so that even now, "I *am* out with lanterns *looking for myself*" (emphasis mine) — an example of "looking the other way" if there ever was one.

The speaker says she cannot help laughing at her own catastrophe, and hyperbolically compares an ordinary family move, "budget by budget," with the "transit" of heavenly bodies. What is missing from the account, however, is any reference to the "prime mover," who is none other than Edward Dickinson himself.

McClure Mudge is sensitive enough to state that Dickinson "was led away from the Pleasant Street house as if she had been a captured fugitive slave" (76), whereas for Edward Dickinson, "the return to Main Street marked a zenith of his career. It was a public witness of his ability to re-establish and maintain the Dickinson honor, fortune and homestead lost by his father . . . in the early 1830s"(77), not to mention the final attainment of domestic security for the whole family. What Mudge does not explicitly spell out, however, is the dejection and indignation Dickinson conveys in her account of the move. For her the move is "a kind of *gone-to-Kansas* feeling," a feeling that prompts a leap of the imagination, with her taking the driver's seat and in fact assuming the

male or parental role of being definitely in charge: "if I sat in a long wagon, with my family tied behind, I should suppose without doubt I was a party of emigrants!"

The "pantomime" contained in the word "moved" suggests a parody of the missionary zeal which prompted the members of organizations like the New England Emigrant Aid Society to provide material and spiritual means for the emigrant settlers heading for the strife-torn Kansas Territory. Let us note in passing that the emigrant state of mind reappears also years later in a letter to T. W. Higginson: "You noticed my dwelling alone - To an Emigrant, Country is idle except it be his own" (L330).

Not only that: the catch phrase *"gone-to-Kansas"* reads like the note left behind by the westward-bound pioneers who, prompted by the uncertain prospect of land and opportunity, were announcing their determination to face the toils and hardships of the rough frontier. In the collective unconscious the expression must have stood for the hearty pioneers who, in the words of an advocate of the Free States such as William Phillips, turned out to be the unwitting agents in the struggle "between the free state progressivism and slave state barbarism" (Slotkin 267). As pro-abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier's 1854 "Song of the Kansas Emigrants" reads, "We cross the prairies, as of old / Our fathers crossed the sea; / To make the West as they the East / The Homestead of the Free."

It is well known that the strife then taking place in Kansas was one of the hottest issues in the world of politics of the time, and Congressman Edward Dickinson himself took an active part, on the losing side, in the explosive debate which took place between the defenders of opposing positions. Dickinson's daughter is here experiencing a similar feeling of impotent rebellion in the reversal of roles suggested by the hypothesis raised in the second part of the sentence; the speaker is now seen as taking the driver's seat "with *my* family tied behind", as if *"I* was a party of emigrants" (emphasis mine),

The letter, then, appears to contain a parodic rebuttal to what Amy

Kaplan subtly analyzed in her 1998 essay on *Manifest Domesticity.* The imperialistic discourse here mockingly exposed by Dickinson is in fact part of the discourse put forth by the proponents of Manifest Destiny of those turbulent years. Reluctantly dragged to the neoclassically refurbished Homestead, Dickinson exposes the myth so keenly lived by her father. It would not be an exaggeration to state that in the course of this letter Emily Dickinson is providing an overt, albeit imaginative critique of the expansionist aims underlying the cult of domesticity as recently deconstructed by Amy Kaplan.[6]

Dickinson's dissent from the ebullient spirit of expansionism pervading society at that time may be traced back to the "Valentine letter" of February 1850 (L34), the year of the Great Compromise:

> We will be David and Jonathan, or Damon and Phythias, or what is better than either, the United States of America. We will talk over what we have learned in our geographies, and listened to from the pulpit, the press and the Sabbath School.
>
> This is strong language sir, but none the less true. So hurrah for North Carolina, since we are on this point! . . .
>
> But the world is sleeping in ignorance and error sir, and we must be crowing cocks, and singing larks, and a rising sun to wake her; or else we'll pull society up by the roots, and plant it in a different place. We'll build Alms-houses and transcendental State prisons, and scaffolds — we will blowout the sun, and the moon, and encourage invention. Alpha shall kiss Omega — we will ride up the hill of glory — Hallelujah, all hail!'
>
> Yours, truly, C. [8]

Though indulging in what Johnson calls topical features "of the nonsense ED could evoke for such occasions" (93), the letter makes a cutting reference to the short-lived euphoria with which the northern states deluded themselves into thinking they had settled the issue of slavery once and for all, "So hurrah for North Carolina." And we can hear now how Dickinson echoes the misguided optimism of Antebellum

America in its myth of the western frontier as an open continent where a new society could have all the blessings without the evils of a contentious and sectionally divided community.

As argued by Kaplan, domestic policy makes sense only in opposition to foreign policy. *"Going-to-Kansas",* then, is a pointed retort to the kind of domestication that her father imposed on her, since domestication "entails conquering and taming the wild the natural and the alien" (582). Just as the proponents of Manifest Destiny backed the occupation of the Kansas Territory as an imperial and religious project of civilizing, so Edward Dickinson propounded at home and abroad a notion of "separate spheres" which would make his wife and daughters the sovereigns of the household, while forcing them to follow him in his obsessive move from Pleasant Street to Main Street.

It may not be inappropriate for us to recall here an earlier letter to Austin of 1851(L65), where Dickinson expresses how sorely she missed her brother's company and fun:

> When I know of anything funny, I am just as apt to cry, far *more* so than to *laugh,* for I know who *loves jokes best* and who is not here to enjoy them. We dont *have* many jokes though *now,* it is pretty much all sobriety, and we do not have much poetry, Father having made up his rnind that its pretty much all *real life.* Fathers real life and *mine* sometimes come into collision, but as yet escape unhurt.

The extent to which the father interpreted the separation of spheres between his male son and his female daughters has been clearly passed on to us in a letter to Higginson, "My Father buys me many books but he begs me not to read them because he fears they jostle the mind" (L261). This stern onesidedness on the part of her father returns with amazing perception in Higginson's letter to his wife after the meeting of 1870, as he describes Edward Dickinson as being present, " a little — thin, dry & speechless," closing with the poignant comment "I saw what her

life had been" (L342b). Higginson's brief characterization of Edward Dickinson as a father, however, is in sharp contrast with the stance Edward Dickinson was taking in public, as depicted by Dickinson in the letter to Austin of June 1853 (L127), on the occasion of the opening of the Amherst and Belchertown Railroad, an expansionist move which had been masterminded by Squire Dickinson himself:

> The New London day passed off grandly— so all the people said — It was pretty hot and dusty, but nobody cared for that. Father was as usual, Chief Marshal of the day, and went marching around the town with New London at his heels like some old Roman General, upon a Triumph Day. Mrs. Howie got a Dinner, and was very much praised. Carriages flew like sparks, hither and thither and yon, and they all said t'was fine. I s'pose it was — I sat in Prof. Tyler's woods and saw the train move off, and then ran home again for fear somebody would see me, or ask me how I did. (254)

It's quite clear that as a public figure Edward Dickinson was the very embodiment of Manifest Destiny, albeit as one of the most prominent citizens of a small New England town. His daughter was certainly having fun in depicting his day of triumph at the opening of the small railroad, as she relates the event to her brother. But as the closing of her letter reads, the day of glory of the autocratic father is lived by his daughter in a retreat to the realm of nature, thus turning her back to the wheels of progress. Far away from the festivities, she coyly claims to be afraid of being seen and exposed, striking a Thoreauvian posture of a not so passive resistance to the encroaching forces of industrialization.

The private jesting about her father which characterizes her letter to Austin, is more openly expressed in the letter to Mrs. Holland I am analyzing. As we see "mad Emilie" imaginatively driving the wagon carrying a party of emigrants with the rest of the family (including her father) grotesquely tied behind, we are given a mocking representation of the conquering stampede for land in the West. Edward Dickinson himself had earlier expressed to his future wife a strong resolve to move

West if he couldn't make money in the East, for "To be shut up forever 'under a bushel' while hundreds of mere Jackanapes are getting their tens of thousands & hundreds of thousands, is rather too much for my spirit... half a house, & a rod square for a garden, won't answer my turn — Don't think me deranged so soon — altho' my regulator is gone — I am in earnest" (Sewall 323).

At the very time when Edward Dickinson is crowning his years of effort with the move to the expensively restored house lost by his father, we see Dickinson, struggling along with her invalid mother, angrily fulfilling her father's blindly endorsed conflation of domestic/manifest destiny. While he has settled as one of the most prominent figures in Amherst, conceivably "the embodiment of all those public virtues his daughter found a little tedious" (Sewall 55), Dickinson jumps at the opportunity to poke fun at his notorious pride in horsemanship. Not just by seizing the reins, but, as we see at the end of the letter, by moving far beyond her father's material ambition to repossess the Homestead, and whizzing "triumphant on the new stream" of the biblical Promised Land. When it comes to horses, it is well known that Edward Dickinson's pride in owning and driving them was one of the greatest displays of his many public appearances.

In a recent essay, Domnhall Mitchell has called attention to a pertinent description contained in Bianchi's *Life and Letters:* "the exhibition of horses included the entire space of the Common and down the Main Street. Deacon Luke Sweetser, Seth Nims, and Emily's father, Squire Dickinson, were invariably owners of fine horses, and they drove about on these occasions sitting very straight in the backless open buggies, reins taut, and the high showy heads of their steeds refusing the senseless check" (8).

As stated at the beginning of this essay, the series of disclaimers: "I cannot tell you how we moved," "I believe," "I suppose we were going to make a transit," concluding with the bitter assertion "I should suppose without a doubt," are meant to dramatize her own feelings as the

impotent victim of a misguided and implacable force. Habbeger subtly remarks (341) that her aphoristic use of "the hackneyed proverb that home is where the heart is" at the end of this section, is sharply countered by her sturdy correction: "I think it is where the house is, and the *adjacent buildings"* (emphasis mine). This is tantamount to saying that her own heart wasn't in the new house at all. In fact just before the move, Edward Dickinson had bought, along with the Homestead, the "adjacent" lot where he was to install his son Austin and his socially ambitious wife in the Italianate villa, The Evergreens.

But apparently Dickinson was not the only member of the family to be devastated by the move back to the Homestead. As she relates in the third part of the letter, her mother "has been an invalid since we came *home.* While Vinnie and I *regulated* and Vinnie and I got *settled..."* "Regulated" and "settled" have, of course, a familiar ring as part of the discourse so often associated with the regulation committees of the multifarious emigrants who moved West to settle the Kansas-Nebraska Territories. Not to mention an echo of her father's reference to his own "regulator," quoted earlier in the letter to his future wife. It may be worth noting that both Dickinson and her father used terms related to machinery, and the steam engine in particular, as applying to themselves and their own bodies.[9]

"Not only did the two Emilys take little pleasure at returning to what the younger one rightly termed 'our father's house,'" Habbeger comments, "but the older one's oddly timed collapse caused the poet to take fright at *herself,* fearing her own 'machinery [would] get slightly out of gear' and that some one might have to 'stop the wheel'" *(My Wars* 341). Although Habbeger's assessment is certainly accurate, I would flatly state that the odd repetition of "house" as a physical possession of her father's, coupled with the repeated juxtaposition of the term "house" with *"home,"* not only sharply emphasizes Emily Dickinson's disassociation of her own values from those of her father, but provides yet another instance of the poet's *private* view of her self in isolation from her family context, and I

would also add, from that of practically all society around her. In one of her later poems, "Civilization — spurns — the Leopard!" (J492, Fr702), she identifies with the leopard, and the leopard's wildness as a being exiled from "civil" society.

In this last part of my analysis, the way in which Dickinson depicts herself as being "but a simple child" gives us an early hint of what will later become one of the major personae the poet is known to have adopted. Not only that, but despite the seeming return to a more playful mood *("please,* kind ladies and gentlemen"), the references to natural personifications ("I often wish I was a grass, or a toddling daisy") are shot through with the mortal terror underlying the most remarkable poems of her later years. The terror which tightens the inner structure of her language relating the "simple child" to a "toddling daisy" and causing her own "machinery" to "get slightly out of gear" now prompts her to resort to the language of the Old Testament, with the familiar imagery of Elisha's vision of Elijah's ascension in a chariot of fire, seeing the wheel, "the belts and bands of gold" of his chariot carry her "triumphant on the new stream." (As Dickinson herself was to write shortly after, "To live, and die, and mount again in triumphant body, and *next* time, try the upper air — is no schoolboy's theme!" — L184.)

The oracular language of this part of the letter takes the reader back to the language used in the description of the "'transit' as heavenly bodies" in the second part. There the pantomime contained in the word "moved" is not enacted, but "fulfilled" as if it were a prophecy. The supposed deliverance to the Promised Land is equated with the violent and chaotic uprooting (as in the already quoted Valentine letter), underlying the *"gone-to-Kansas* feeling" of the speaker's "long wagon," which ironically does not contain the Prophet, but has instead "a party of emigrants tied behind."[10]

Ironically, Dickinson's fear that her own "machinery" is about to get "slightly out of gear," is couched in a language that recalls the earlier "pantomime." In fact the poet is now putting on the mask of a showman,

lending him/her exactly the language spoken to the audience of a side show, *"please,* kind ladies and gentlemen, some one stop the wheel"; except that here of course the showman is the poet endowed with the prophetic voice who "shall whizz triumphant on the new stream!" "The new stream" is taking her across to immortality, just as she will later state in "This World is not Conclusion" (J501, Fr373). Cleary this part of the letter can be read as a willful denunciation of the conquests proclaimed by the frontier "Prophecy of the Iron Horse" in its ludicrous clash with the values professed by the rigorous ethos of the Puritan errand.

Looking at the letter as a whole, we have seen Dickinson emerge from the literary tropes of Gothic Romanticism, to strike a highly personal note with a tense description of the family "moving day." The agility of the reader of literature gives way to the passionate irony of the poet who takes center stage, not only fictionally but in a consciously creative mode, enacting her own personal drama vis-à-vis the domineering force of her myth-driven father. The central symbol of the agrarian myth of the frontier, we are told, was the railroad. As he applied all his forces to a homebound success, Edward Dickinson was in fact engaged in an enterprise that, as Slotkin puts it, "represented 'the industrial revolution incarnate,' but which at the same time appeared to offer a benign and productive association between the order of industrialism and the ambitions of the yeoman farmer" (214).

It is easy at this point to establish a connection between Dickinson's reluctant obedience to her father and the choice of a deliberate seclusion in Thoreau's private "Westward Movement," as lived and described in *Walden. Walden,* we are told by Edwin Fussell, "is no guide book for emigrants, but a manual for poor students; much of its excellence depends on the energetic intelligence with which Thoreau attacked the problem of the higher culture for himself and his contemporaries" (202). In this light, it is no wonder that Emily Dickinson chose not to publish while overtly challenging the mandate of "separate spheres" so strongly espoused and propounded by those she chose to exclude from her soul's "society."

As she was to do in many of her letters, Dickinson felt comfortable enough with her "Little Sister" to vent her rebelliousness along with the assurance of her call as an artist. This seems to be the string that ties the letter's natural symbolism to her many biblical references and her self-willed apotheosis. As far as I know, Marisa Bulgheroni is the only critic to have appreciated that Mrs. Holland is the Little Sister "who was chosen to receive from young Emily the highest and most daring 'a solo' in her epistolary output" ("Cronologia," xlvi).

This is not the place to explore further the relation that Dickinson's use of a prophetic voice has with the Judeo-Christian tradition of prophecy. The issue has been recently analyzed by Beth Maclay Doriani. But I do find relevant that after striking the prophetic note of whizzing "triumphant on the new stream," the closing of this letter to Mrs. Holland is signed "From your mad Emilie" — and "madness" is of course traditionally considered also to be an intrinsic quality of the prophet and his prophetic voice. Doriani makes the connection abundantly clear in discussing, among others, Dickinson's poem "Much Madness is divinest Sense –" (1435). This seems to me yet another instance of how Letter 182 displays features, themes, concepts and wordings that are to reappear fully developed as the hallmarks of Dickinson's voice in both her poems and letters. Included among these are her many references to topical frontier visions and terminology, chief among them the Thoreauvian "Soto, Explore thyself! / Therein thyself shalt find / The 'Undiscovered Continent — / No Settler had the Mind" (1832, Fr814).

APPENDIX

Hereis the text of letter 182 (ms. missing) to Mrs. J. H. Holland of late January 1856.

Your voice is sweet, dear Mrs. Holland — I wish I heard it oftener.

One of the mortal musics Jupiter denies, and when indeed its gentle measures fall upon my ear, I stop the birds to listen. Perhaps you think I *have* no bird, and this is rhetoric — pray, Mr. Whately, what is *that* upon the cherry- tree? Church is done, and the winds blow, and Vinnie is in that pallid land the simple call "sleep." They will be wiser by and by, we shall all be wiser! While I sit in the snows, the summer day on which you came and the bees and the south wind, seem fabulous as *Heaven* seems to a sinful world — and I keep remembering it till it assumes a *spectral* air, and nods and winks at me, and then all of you turn to phantoms and vanish slow away. We cannot talk and laugh more, in the parlor where we met, but we learned to love for aye, there, so it is just as well.

We shall sit in a parlor "not made with hands" unless we are very careful!

I cannot tell you how we moved. I had rather not remember. I believe my "effects" were brought in a bandbox, and the "deathless me," on foot, not many moments after. I took at the time a memorandum of my several senses, and also of my hat and coat, and my best shoes — but it was lost in the *melée,* and I am out with lanterns, looking for myself.

Such wits as I reserved, are so badly shattered that repair is useless — and still I can't help laughing at my own catastrophe. I supposed we were going to make a "transit," as heavenly bodies did — but we came budget by budget, as our fellows do, till we fulfilled the pantomime contained in the word "moved." It is a kind of *gone-to-Kansas* feeling, and if I sat in a long wagon, with my family tied behind, I should suppose without doubt I was a party of emigrants!

They say that "home is where the heart is." I think it is where the *house* is, and the adjacent buildings.

But, my dear Mrs. Holland, I have another story, and lay my laughter all away, so that I can sigh. Mother has been an invalid since we came *home,* and Vinnie and I "regulated," and Vinnie and I "got settled," and still we keep our father's house, and mother lies upon the lounge, or sits in her easy chair. I don't know what her sickness is, for I am but a

simple child, and frightened at myself. I often wish I was a grass, or a toddling daisy, whom with all these problems of the dust might not terrify — and should my own machinery get slightly out of gear, *please,* kind ladies and gentlemen, some one stop the wheel, — for I know that with belts and bands of gold, I shall whizz triumphant on the new stream! Love for you — love for Dr. Holland — thanks for his exquisite hymn — tears for your sister in sable, and kisses for Minnie and the bairns.

From your mad
Emilie.

NOTES

1. By now, several readers have devoted their labors to a study of Dickinson's correspondence and in particular to the study of letter 182: Cynthia Wolff stresses the contrast between Edward's public triumph and "the family's private woe in 1855" and quotes parts of the letter without further elaboration (134). Susan Juhasz was perhaps the first to consider the relevance of the correspondents in the development of Dickinson's letter writing, and remarks that in the letters to Mrs. Holland we do find excess, "not the excess of suffering but of delight. Although the metaphoric mode is present here as in all of her major letters, the range from tortured hyperbole to lighthearted fantasy is a wide one, created . . . by the degree of Dickinson's own comfort (188). Another reader, who has analyzed how the correspondence with Mrs. Holland elicited Dickinson's independence of mind, is Betsy Erkkila: "Holland energized Dickinson's drama of self-creation and called for some of her most witty assaults on masculine authority and pretension . . . Dickinson's letters to Holland are full of antic posturings as she plays the role of the rebellious daughter" (25). It is curious to note how the most recent critical reader of Dickinson's correspondence, Marietta Messmer, misconstrues Erkkila's incisive comments by identifying the object of her rebellion, not as her father or other male authority figures, but as Elizabeth Holland herself.

2. See L47, "Vinnie is snoring"; L66, "sleeping soundly as a poker and shovel and pair of tongs." Even when they are away on a trip to Washington, D.C., Vinnie is

said to be "asleep this morning" (L178), and once again, after Edward Dickinson's death, "Mother is asleep in the library and Vinnie in the dining room" (L432).

3. Wayne Ude, discussing the Gothic elements underlying the Romance-Novel of the major writers of the American Renaissance, does not make any specific reference to Emily Dickinson's Gothicism.

4. One of the first to speak of Dickinson's potential rebelliousness towards her father was Richard Sewall, who mentions the arresting episode of a broken plate, quoting from Bingham's use of it to illustrate Edward's "standard of good workmanship." But "it also shows Emily as a master strategist," Sewall says, "replying to his imperiousness with a humor and dispatch he could not have missed": "One day, sitting down at the dinner table, he inquired whether a certain nicked plate must always be placed before him. Emily took the hint. She carried the plate to the garden and pulverized it on a stone, 'just to remind' her, she said, not to give it to her father again." And "'just to remind' him," Sewall suggests "that the two could play at the game of temperment as well as one" (62-63).

5. On the same allusion, which is also contained in L906, Johnson notes that the "deathless me" refers to an image "drawn upon Simonides' epitaph for the Spartans who fell at Thermopylae: 'Go tell the Spartans thou that passeth by that here obedient to the laws we lie" *(Letters, 826)*.

6. While I will refer to the import of Amy Kaplan's essay to a reading of L182, I ought to mention that Charlotte McClure had already pointed out several features of Dickinson's style in later poems as they relate to the American Dream: "like the other major American writers of this period, she too imaginatively recorded a vision of self identity in the New World by adapting a frontier mythology that shapes and criticizes images of the American Dream ... she uses the image of the hunt ('This consciousness that is aware,' J822, Fr817) to describe the soul's adventure to identify itself; the image of captivity to register her struggle to accommodate her own wilderness; her divided consciousness ('It ceased to hurt me,' J584, Fr421); and the image of a 'glimmering frontier' (,Their Height in Heaven comforts not,' J696, Fr725); and finally, beyond the settlement to represent immortality that lies on the other side of earthly life ('I am afraid to own a Body,' J1090, Fr1050)."

7. As a possible source of the last paragraph of this letter, it may be worth quoting

at least a few lines from the "The Custom House," Hawthorne's introduction to the Scarlet Letter: "with Gallows Hill and New Guinea at one end, and a view of the almshouse at the other, - such being the features of my native town" (88), where a similar conflation of gallows and almshouse is used to parody and criticize the religious afflatus behind the drive of material expansionism overtly stemming from the religious and ethical roots of Puritanism. It seems to me that Hawthorne's organic imagery, the "deep and aged roots" and the desire to strike "roots in unaccustomed earth" because "Human nature will not flourish, any more than a potato, if it be planted and replanted, for too long a series of generations, in the same worn out soil," are here reworked by Dickinson into a pulling "society up by the roots," and planting it "in a different place" - a send up of the tall talking age of enterprise which can confidently dispense with "the sun and the moon," now that it has the inventions provided by Yankee ingenuity.

8. I intend to deal with the many different ways in which Dickinson signed her letters elsewhere. But the "C." of this letter, which clearly stands for "Carlo," the name of the big black Newfoundland dog her father had given her, deserves a note. In "A Glimpse at Emily Dickinson's Reading," Habbeger notes thatthe name Carlo is that of St. John Rivers' dog in Jane Eyre, one of Dickinson's favorite novels. In the copy Dickinson was given by a friend years later, there are several penciled lines, one of which reads "at the fireside [he, St. John Rivers, was] often a cold, cumbrous column, gloomy and out of place." Some believe, Habbeger adds, "that Dickinson was thinking of her increasingly remote and dour father" (99.)

9. See for example "I like to see it lap the Miles" (J585, Fr383); L360 where she talks about her father's illness to the Norcross cousins: "You know he never played, and even the straightest engine has its leaning hour"; and previously quoted L65, where she mentions the two of them avoiding"collision."

10. To take just one instance, it is worth recalling Charles Anderson's comment on J1254, Fr1288: "Elijah's Wagon knew no thill," which shows the poet's "shrewd stand" in dealing with the whole problem of the supernatural which is neither accepted or rejected. A similar ambivalence seems to be at the core of Dickinson's account of her own plight in moving from the "home" on North Pleasant Street to her father's "house," her inner rebellion in having to submit to her father's steel-like determination (15).

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