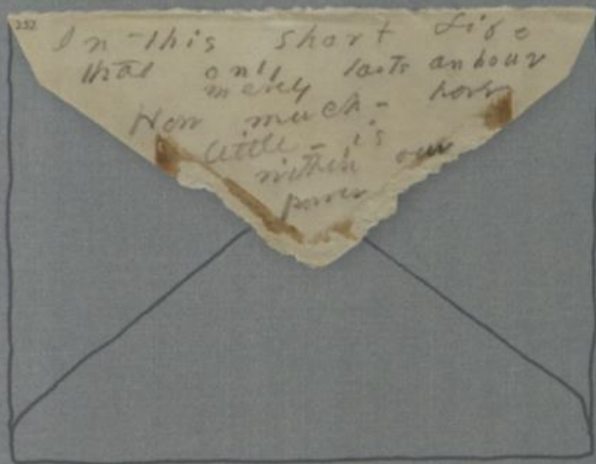


Emily Dickinson



Envelope Poems

One note from
One Bird than
Is better than
a million words
A seagull
has ^{no} ^{eyes} ^{to} ^{see}
but ^{one}
word

Preface

Although a very prolific poet—and arguably America's greatest—Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) published fewer than a dozen of her eighteen hundred poems. She preferred not to, and instead created her own gatherings of poems into packets later known as fascicles. When, in her later years, she stopped producing these, she was still writing a great deal, and at her death she left behind many poems, drafts, and letters. And it is among the makeshift and fragile manuscripts of Dickinson's later writings that we find the "envelope poems" gathered here. (Strictly speaking, some of the envelope writings collected here are messages or notes rather than poems.)

The earliest envelope poem may have been composed around 1864, but the majority were probably created from 1870 to 1885, when she was no longer creating her fascicle books and when she was testing, differently, and for a final time, the relationship between message and medium.

"What a | Hazard | a Letter | is —" Dickinson scrawled in a late fragment composed in a handwriting so disordered it seems to have been formed in the dark.

These manuscripts on envelopes (recycled by the poet with marked New England thrift) are sometimes still referred to as

Manuscript A842, "As there are | apartments in our | own minds"

“scraps” within Dickinson scholarship. But one might think of them as the sort of “small fabric” the poet writes of in one corner of a large envelope: “Excuse | Emily and | her Atoms | the North | Star is | of small | fabric but it | implies | much | presides | yet.” When we say small, we often mean less. When Emily Dickinson says small, she means fabric, Atoms, the North Star.

In 1862, she wrote to her future editor Thomas Wentworth Higginson, during a stretch when she was writing three hundred poems a year: “My little Force explodes –” This enigmatic poet, petite by physical standards, is vast by all others. These small envelope poems carry a poignant yet fierce art and, as the poet Susan Howe has remarked, “arrive as if by telepathic electricity and connect without connectives.”

Written with the full powers of her late, most radical period, these envelope poems seem intensely alive and charged with a special poignancy—addressed to no one and everyone at once. They remind us of the contingency, transience, vulnerability, and *hope* embodied in all our messages.

The fragments in this book are selected from those reproduced in the complete collection of envelope writings, *The Gorgeous Nothings*, a collaboration between Marta L. Werner, the foremost scholar of Dickinson’s late work, and the poet and visual artist Jen Bervin (Christine Burgin/*New Directions* 2013; Granary Books 2012). Their transcriptions allow us to read the texts, while the facsimiles let us see exactly how Dickinson wrote them (the variant words, crossings-out, dashes, directional fields,

spaces, columns, and overlapping planes)—and absorb the visual and acoustic aspects of the manuscripts: these singular objects balance between poetry and visual art.

When she was only sixteen Emily Dickinson wrote, in a letter to her friend Abiah Root, “Let us strive together to part with time more reluctantly, to watch the pinions of the fleeting moment until they are dim in the distance & the new coming moment claims our attention.” *Envelope Poems* claims our attention with a new Emily Dickinson.



Emily Dickinson sent this minuscule two-inch-long pencil in a letter to the Bowles, “If it had no pencil, | Would it try mine –” (A695), wryly nudging them to write. It was enveloped in a letter folded into thirds horizontally, pinned closed at each side.

A 105

A great Hope fell	The mind was
You heard no noise crash	built for mighty Freight
The Ruin was havoc damage within	For dread occasion planned
Oh cunning Wreck	How often foundering
That told no Tale	at Sea Ostensibly . on
And let no Witness in	Land

A great hope

fell

You heard no

noise
crash

The Rain was

within ^{have} damage

Oh cunning

work

that told no

talk

and let us

quit mess in

the mind was

built for

might, might

for bread

occasion planned

how often

foundering

at sea

ostensibly, on

land

Ms. J. S. H. 1500

Miss Hester Hunt

1055

A not admitting
 of the wound
 until it grew so
 wide
 that all my
 life had entered it
 and troughs there
 were troughs
 beside -
 was space
 room

A closing of the
 simple lid that
 opened to the sun
 until the tender
 Carpenter sovereign
 Perpetual nail
 it down -

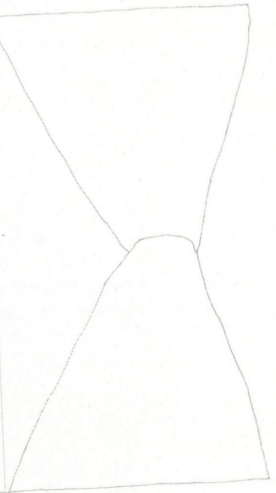
Unsuspicious Carpenters

A 105a

A not admitting
 of the Wound
 Until it grew so
 wide
 That all my
 Life had Entered it
 And troughs there
 were troughs
 beside -
 was space
 room -

A closing of the
 simple lid that
 opened to the sun
 Until the tender
 Carpenter sovereign
 Perpetual nail
 it down -

Unsuspicious Carpenters



A 128

All men for Honor
hardest work
But are not known
to earn -
Paid after they have
ceased to work
In Infamy or Urn -

All men for honor
hardest work
But are not known
to earn -
Paid ^{paid} after they have
cared to work
In Inbans or Carn.



Emerson.

Mrs Hart

109
As old as crea-
tion and is that
some rights
thousands years-
As old as
Bliss
Joy-
Now old is
that or
the age of that
they are of
equal years-
together
Chiefest they
chiefs
are found

But the seasons
side by side-
~~and~~ from
neither of
them tho'
he but
can
may
human
nature
hide

A 139

As old as Woe -	But <u>l</u> tho seldom
How old is that ?	side by side -
Some Eighteen	not From
thousand years -	neither of
As old as	them tho'
Bliss	he try
Joy -	can
How old is	may
that or	Human
The age of that	Nature
They are of	hide
Equal years -	
Together	
Chiefest they	
Chiefly	
are found	

A 165

Death warrants are
supposed to be
believed to be me
An Enginery of
Equity
hazardous
A merciful mistake
A pencil in
dainty
an Idol's Hand
A Devotee has
oft consigned
To Crucifix
or Block
stake
cool - bland

165

No such warrants are
 supposed to be
 believed to be
 An Engineer of
 Equity hazardous
 A merciful mistake
 A pencil in
 an ^{paint} Hand
 A decorative has
 oft-^{signed}
 to Crucifix
 or Block
 stake

Wm. A. Dickerson Esq.

Miss Lavinia Dickerson
Amherst Mass



Dr - E - M - Pease

202 Had we our
senses

But ^{tho'} perhaps 'tis
well they're not
at Home

So intimate with
madness

Wes liable with them

tho'
'tis

Had we the eyes

within our head - s-

Had we ^{prudent} well that
we are Blind -

We could not
look open the

Earth - World

So utterly

Unmuzzed -

A 202

Had we our
senses
tho'
But perhaps 'tis
well they're not
at Home
So intimate with
Madness
He's liable with them
Thats'
'Tis
Had we the eyes
within our Head - s -
prudent
How well that
we are Blind -
We could not
look upon the
Earth - World
& So Utterly
Unmoved -

A 232

I have no life to but five this	The loving you -
But To lead	+ Withheld -
it here but	deprived
Nor any	from
Death but	there -
lest dispelled	+ Nor tie to
+ Abased from	+ Expanse -
there -	
Nor + Plea	
for World s	
to come	
+ Nor Wisdoms	
new	
Except through	
this + Extent	

I have ^{no} ~~life~~ ^{out} ~~in~~ ^{this}
~~But~~ ^{to} lead
 it here ^{out}
 nor any ⁺
 death ^{out}
 lest dispelled ^{this}
⁺ ~~ceased~~ ^{from}
 there -

nor ⁺ plea
 for world's
 to come
⁺ nor wisdoms
 new
 Except through
 this ⁺ extent

the loving
 sou-
⁺ withheld.
 deprived
 from
 there.
⁺ nor tie to
⁺ expanse -

Miss Emily Dickinson
Care of Mrs. Southworth
Concord
Mass





In this short life
that only lasts an hour
How much - how
little - is
within our
power

A 252

In this short Life
that only lasts an hour
merely
How much - how
little - is
within our
power

A277

Long	Years	Who	says
apart -	can	the	Absence
make	no	of	a
Breach	a	Witch	
second	cannot	In	-validates
fill -		his	spell?
+The	absence	The	embers
of	a	of	a
the	Witch	Thousand	Years
cannot	does	years	Uncovered
not	invalidate	by	the
the	spell -	Hand	
a			
+			

101 m - Fax - 107

Long years
apart - can
make no
breach a
second cannot
fill -

+ The absence
of the witch
does ^{cannot} not
invalidate
a the spell -
+

who says
The absence
of a
witch
in - validates
his spell?
The embers

of a
Thousand
years
years
uncovered
by the hand

2470

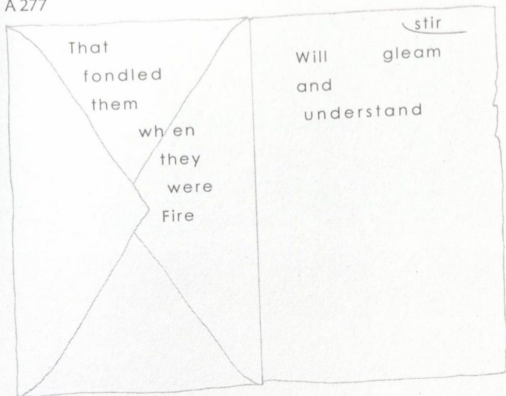
that
banded
them
and en
they
were
tire



will ^{stir} glean
and
understand

Spalding Brown Dickinson

A277



A278

Look back
on Time
with kindly
Eyes -
He doubtless
did his best -
How softly
sinks ^{his} that
trembling Sun
In Human
Nature's West -

278

Look back
on time
with kindly
Eyes -

He doubtless
did his best -

How ^{softly}
sinks ^{his} ~~that~~

trembling Sun
In Human
Nature's West -

33
34
Myself compu-
ted were they
Pearls
What Legacy
could be

Oh Magnanimity -
My Visitor in
Paradise -

A313/314

Myself compu-
ted were they
Pearls
What Legacy
could be

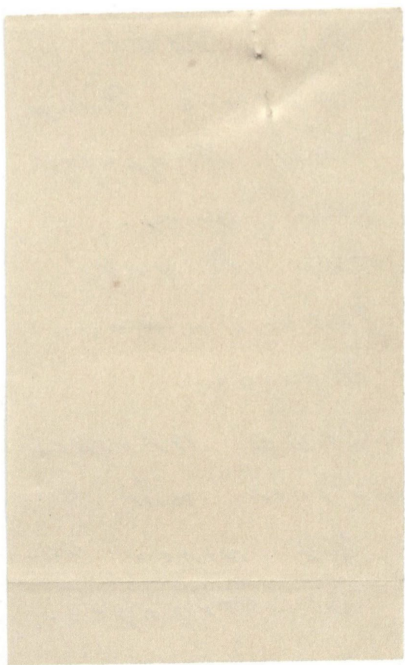
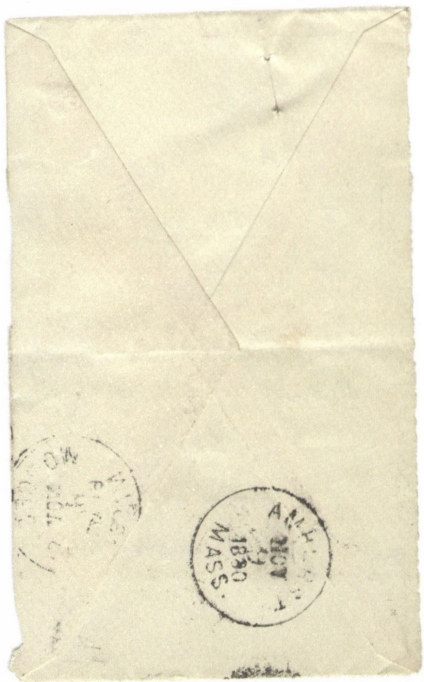
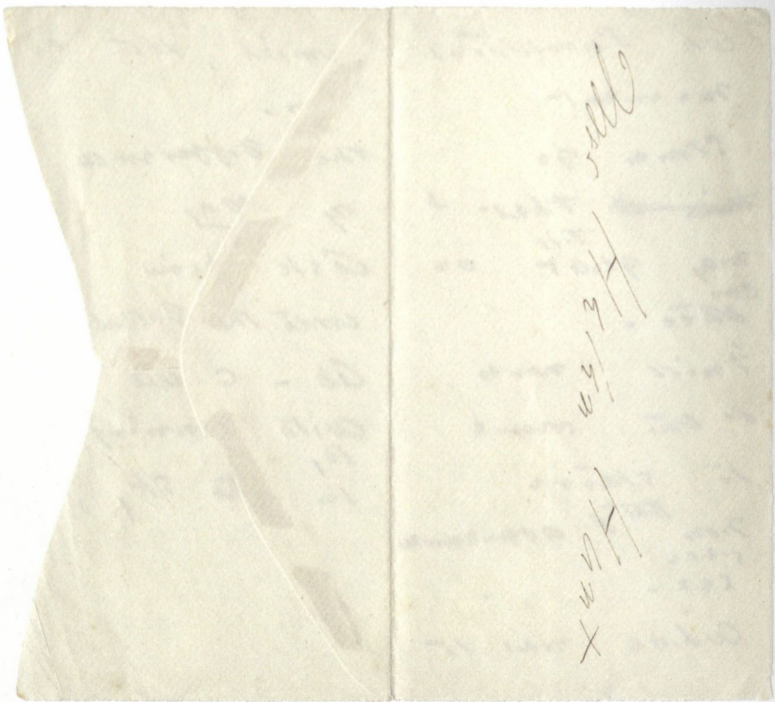
Oh Magnanimity -
My Visitor in
Paradise -

A 316

Oh Sumptuous	famish, then or
moment	now -
Slower go	The difference
That I	of Day
Till	to
may gloat on	Ask him
can	unto the Gallows
thee -	led - called
'Twill never	With morning
be the same	By
to starve	in the Sky
Now that I abundance	
since	
see -	
Which was to	

316

Oh Sumptuous	famish, then or
moment -	now -
Slower go	the difference
that that - I	of way
may gloat on	Ask him
can	unto the Gallows
thee -	led - called
'Twill never	With morning
be the same	By
to starve	in the Sky
Now that I abundance	
since	
see -	
Which was to	



A320

One note from
One Bird
Is better than
a million words
A scabbard
needs
has - holds
but one
sword

One note from
One Bird than
Is better than
a million words
A seagull
has ^{no} ²⁵ ¹⁰ ¹³⁵
but ^{one}
word



