The Body in the Word: A Cognitive Approach to the Shape of a Poetic Text

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Chapter 2

The body in the word

A cognitive approach to the shape of a poetic text

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1. Introduction

Imagine, if you will, a blended space in which a philosopher and a poet debate the nature of language in writing.[1] The French philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962: 401), says:

> The wonderful thing about language is that it promotes its own oblivion: my eyes follow the lines on the paper, and from the moment I am caught up in their meaning, I lose sight of them. The paper, the letters on it, my eyes and body are there only as the minimum setting of some invisible operation. Expression fades out before what is expressed, and this is why its mediating role may pass unnoticed…. This certainty which we enjoy of reaching, beyond expression, a truth separable from it and of which expression is merely the garment and contingent manifestation, has been implanted in us precisely by language.

The English poet, William Blake (1810; 1972: 611), responds:

> Every Man has Eyes, Nose & Mouth; this Every Idiot knows, but he who enters into & discriminates most minutely the Manners & Intentions, the [Expression *del.*] Characters in all their branches, is the alone Wise or Sensible Man, & on this discrimination All Art is founded. I intreat, then, that the Spectator will attend to the Hands & Feet, to the Lineaments of the Countenances; they are all descriptive of Character, & not a line is drawn without intention, & that most discriminate & particular. As Poetry admits not a Letter that is Insignificant, so Painting admits not a Grain of Sand or a Blade of Grass Insignificant — much less an Insignificant Blur or Mark.

From Merleau-Ponty's perspective, the eyes through which I perceive the world are invisible to me. The fingers with which I type fade from consciousness as I

concentrate on what it is I want to say. When I read, the physical words on the page "disappear" in Drew Leder's (1990) sense, displaced by the ideas they generate. Through cognitive processes not yet fully understood, my mind engages in conceptual projection from the concrete world of my sense experiences to the abstract realm of thought. The physical marks on the page, the combination of letters and the order of words are, in Merleau-Ponty's words, "merely the garment and contingent manifestation" of a linguistic expression whose particular characteristics recede before the meanings they generate. When it comes to works of art, however, Merleau-Ponty's "merely" becomes Blake's "most minutely." Blake urges us to focus on the very marks and lines that Merleau-Ponty claims are "there only" to mediate abstract thought.

The distinction between the philosopher and the poet in these two passages is more apparent than real.[2] Language becomes transparent to its meaning only when I have mastered its secrets. When I try to read a text in a foreign language I do not know well, I must pay attention to its physical forms and characteristics in order to tease out its meaning. In the case of art, and for my particular purposes, poetry, "meaning" emerges from the accoutrements of its expressions that have been embodied in — incorporated into — the forms of the language in which it is couched. To understand a poem, I must learn to read these embodied characteristics. The cognitive processes which are not apparent to me when I read a text transparent to me must be brought to the conscious mind to read one that is opaque.

The regularization of language into print, with its standardizing of character, line, and punctuation, increases its transparency. The idiosyncracies of handwriting that tend to draw attention to the physical appearance of the words on the page are removed, and the eye can more readily make the language "disappear" as the mind conceptually projects into the meanings the language generates. Something, however, is inevitably changed when script translates to print. And if what is changed is part of the *necessary* accoutrements of the language's design, the conceptual projection that results will also be changed. Writers who oversee the translation of their work from script to print, or who themselves compose in print form, can control these effects. For a writer like Emily Dickinson, however, who did not publish her poems in print form, the effect of transforming her script into print can drastically alter the way the reader will conceptually project abstract meaning from concrete form. The editor who attempts to render Dickinson's poems into print must be critically aware of the consequences of compromising the physical manifestations of her writing, for it is these physically embodied manifestations that enable us to

cognitively conceptualize the range of meanings generated by a Dickinson text (Werner 1995).

Traditional readers of Dickinson's poems have overlooked the importance of Dickinson's manuscripts because they have ignored the importance of recognizing that language is embodied, just as the mind is embodied (Johnson 1987). This "cognitive turn" in current cognitive linguistics provides a way of revealing the projections that writers and readers make when they construct meaning through a process of conceptual integration of multiple mental spaces (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002). To show what I mean, I will discuss two poems by Emily Dickinson that have received little critical attention, partly perhaps because of the conceptual difficulties and obscurities they present. Both lend themselves to misreading because of the editors' regularization of Dickinson's lines. Additionally, interpretation depends on a cognitive awareness of the knowledge domains that inform Dickinson's choice of language and that constitute the metaphorical framework of what I have called elsewhere Dickinson's conceptual universe (Freeman 1995). In the following sections, I describe in detail the online process by which we cognitively re-construct the meanings of Dickinson's texts by making conceptual projections from the formal shape of the texts' linguistic characteristics.

2. The cognitive import of Dickinson's line breaks

The first poem was published as No. 77 in *Unpublished Poems of Emily Dickinson* by Dickinson's niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, with Alfred Leete Hampson, in 1935, and appeared as follows:

> Dreams are well, but waking's better
> If one wakes at morn!
> If one wake at midnight better
> Dreaming of the dawn.
>
> Sweeter the surmising robins
> Never gladdened tree,
> Than a solid dawn confronting,
> Leading to no day.

In his 1955 three-volume edition of Dickinson's poems, Thomas H. Johnson published the poem as No. 450. As we shall see, Johnson's version attempts to approximate more closely Dickinson's original text. Johnson changes the regular

punctuated 1935 poem into one that drops the 's' from the word 'wake' in line 2, capitalizes certain words, and sets off the phrases and words with dashes:

> Dreams – are well – but Waking's better,
> If One wake at Morn –
> If One wake at Midnight – better –
> Dreaming – of the Dawn –
>
> Sweeter – the Surmising Robins –
> Never gladdened Tree –
> Than a Solid Dawn – confronting –
> Leading to no Day –

In his 1998 variorum edition of the poems, R. W. Franklin renumbers the poem as No. 449 and follows Johnson's rendering, except that he reduces the en dashes adopted by Johnson to hyphens, and he changes the comma at the end of the first line to a hyphen. Below the poem Franklin indicates where Dickinson's line breaks differ from the printed version. All three editions are printed versions of the one extant manuscript copy archived as No. 183 in the Houghton library that was bound in fascicle 21.[3]

David Porter (1981:103) has commented on this poem as follows:

> Syntax is garbled because of syllable [*sic*] count in poem 450 as well. The poem is a Dickinson allegory of passage into immortality. Her term 'Solid Dawn' presents a typical problem of semantics. She wanted it to mean what she said it meant: sufficient dawn, total dawn, permanent dawn. Other defects are caused by the syllable count: it forces the misleading parallel placement of 'better,' one as a line stop, the other enjambed. The use of 'well' as an adjective and 'sweeter' where an adverb is called for is gratuitous. The final stanza must be completely rearranged to make an understandable syntactic chain: The surmising robins would never gladden a tree more sweetly than if they were confronting (singing in) a perpetual dawn leading to no day.

With these comments, Porter is clearly being misled by Johnson's printed version, as the original manuscript copy of the poem shows (Fig. 1).

Notice how differently the words appear in their spacing on the manuscript page. The regular-sized dashes in Johnson's printed version take on different lengths, spacings, position, and direction of slant. The lines break differently. Both Bianchi and Johnson obviously read the short lines as runovers and regularized the lines to create eight-line poems of two stanzas. They have created poems Dickinson did not write. Johnson's poem is the one Porter read and rightly criticized. Reading, in Blake's words, the "Lineaments of the

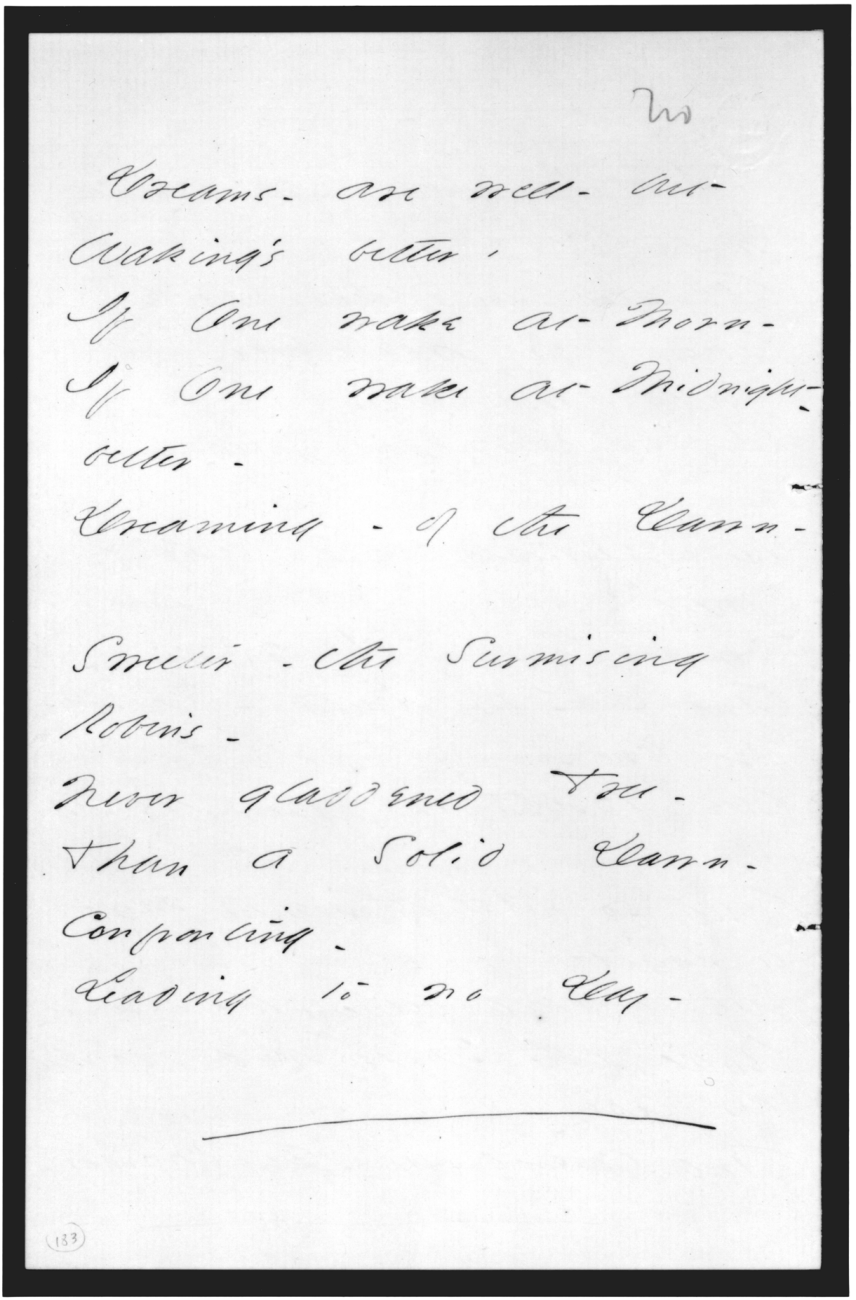

Figure 1. "Dreams - are well -" (The Houghton Library, Harvard University)

Countenances" of Dickinson's original manuscript conceptually projects a very different poem with very different results.

Note first the word spacing. It has been assumed that Dickinson was indifferent to where her lines break, that the ends of the paper on which she wrote forced her to run over her lines. But there are plenty of examples to show that Dickinson would crush words together into one line if that is what she wanted. The embodied viscosity or "pastiosity" of her script provides clues to her cognitive intention.[4] Notice how the extra and regular spacings between the words in lines 3 and 4 draw attention to the pattern of repetition they make across the page. Placing "better" at the end of line 4 as Bianchi, Johnson, and Franklin do destroys the symmetry. Dickinson *meant* to put "better" on a separate line, as she meant to put "Robins" and "Confronting" on separate lines in the second stanza. Placing "Robins" on a separate line separates the word from "Surmising," thus enabling the latter to be read (correctly) as a gerund and not as a participial adjective. In this reading it is not the robins that are surmising or confronting the dawn, whether it is a real or "solid" one. They are, on the contrary, the *objects* of the surmising, and are placed into equivalence with "a solid dawn." Though Dickinson's robins may faint (J919/F982),[5] they do not surmise. In Dickinson's conceptual universe, bees get drunk, flowers shout, tigers thirst, and sparrows know how to starve. But nowhere in Dickinson's nature is the pathetic fallacy committed of assuming that beings other than humans can reason.[6]

The embodied shape of a text constitutes its cognitive design. Dickinson's twelve-line manuscript poem is balanced in a way the printed versions are not. The comparison at the outset between dreams and waking gives a clue to her constructive design.

Dreams - are well - but
a **Waking**'s better /
If One wake at Morn -
If One wake at Midnight \
better -
b **Dreaming** - of the Dawn -

b Sweeter - the **Surmising**
Robins -
Never gladdened Tree -
Than a Solid Dawn —
a **Confronting** \
Leading to no Day —

The poem divides into four equal parts of three lines each, dominated by the four parallel verbs, "Waking" and "Dreaming" in the first stanza, "Surmising" and "Confronting" in the second. The dominant structure of the poem is chiasmic, with words and phrases in *abba* pattern. An analysis of the poem's parallel structure shows that the second stanza is an expansion of the topic and theme of the first, with "Surmising" being to "Dreaming" as "Confronting" is to "Waking." A paraphrase of the poem would thus read: "Waking can only be conceived to be better than dreaming if it occurs in the morning. If it occurs at midnight, it would be better to be dreaming of the dawn. In fact, it is sweeter to surmise/dream that day never occurs at all than it is to confront/wake to a dawn that is solid because it is perpetual."

The poem is thus an argument between what is better: waking/confronting or dreaming/surmising. Waking/confronting are associated with the conscious, logical, and analytical reasonings of the human mind, as opposed to the creative, imaginative, and analogical capabilities of dreaming/surmising. The various forms of the punctuation markings in the manuscript text carry the argument forward, as the prosodic mark-ups serve to animate the dialogic voices in the mind.[7] Edith Wylder (1971) observed that Dickinson's markings conformed to the four types of inflections found in *The Rhetorical Reader* used at the Amherst Academy when Dickinson was a schoolgirl there. As its author, Ebenezer Porter (1835) explains, the inflections of the conversational voice support the intended meaning of the utterance; any fault in the use of the correct inflection does violence to the meaning. Porter distinguishes these inflections by using different notations: when "antithetic relation is expressed or suggested" the rising slide "either expresses *negation*, or *qualified* and *conditional* affirmation" whereas the falling slide "denotes *positive* affirmation or enunciation of a thought with energy" (44). The monotone, or horizontal dash, "belongs to grave delivery, especially in elevated description, or where emotions of sublimity or reverence are expressed" (27).

Dickinson's markings in the manuscript copy reveal three directions of slant: horizontal, up, and down, with some marks ambiguous between horizontal and down. There is only one upward slant, that after "better" at the end of line 2. The two slants that clearly go down occur at line end, after the capitalized words "Midnight," line 4, and "Confronting," line 11. The eleven remaining slants are all roughly horizontal, four occurring mid line in lines 1, 6, and 7, and the rest at the end of lines 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 12. No other punctuation appears.

The horizontal inflections reinforce the deliberation of the opening

statement: "Dreams - are well -." Immediately, however, another voice is heard, and we as readers are betrayed into the argument of the poem: "but / Waking's better /," and the rising slant not only serves to negate the opening statement but to suggest that the claim is being insinuated rather than strongly expressed, an insinuation that, though conventionally stereotypical in its assertion (waking is better than dreaming), will be undermined throughout the rest of the poem. This undermining begins with the concessionary third line, as the voice of the poet appears to agree with the second. It is as though the voice that has asserted "Dreams are well -" agrees with its arguer: "Yes, waking is better if you were to wake up in the morning, but if you were to wake up at midnight…," and the falling slide after "Midnight \" reinforces the strength of the contradiction as the stereotypical and clichéd thought that "waking is better than dreaming" is ultimately and utterly demolished in the second stanza. Notice that the falling slide after "Confronting \" in the second stanza occurs after the words that parallel the waking at midnight of the first; that is, confronting "a Solid Dawn - ."

The argument is couched in terms of projections from the present reality space of "Dreams are well -" into hypothetical spaces that contrast dreaming with waking. The first section, lines 1–3, set out the terms of the argument, with the concessionary "If One wake at Morn -" ending the section. The first line of the following section, "If One wake at Midnight \," begins the parallel and chiasmic *abba* repetitions, repetitions that will dominate the rest of the poem, and introduces the poem's main argument.

a	Waking's better /	*a*	waking
b	If one wake at Morn -	*b*	better
b	If one wake at Midnight \	*b*	better
a	better - / Dreaming -	*a*	dreaming

In the second stanza, the complements, "Robins - / Never gladdened Tree -" and "a Solid Dawn - /… / Leading to no Day -," of "Surmising" and "Confronting," respectively, are also in semantic as well as syntactic chiasmic equivalence:

a Surmising
b Robins (Never gladdened Tree)
b Solid Dawn (Leading to no Day)
a Confronting

The parallelisms throughout the poem adhere to a fairly strict pattern of exact equivalences in chiasmic form. As a result, divergences from such exactness are

given especial prominence, are "foregrounded," to use Mukařovský's (1970) term. The poem begins in a different, *abab* pattern, with "dreams are" and "waking's" forming the *a* components, "well" and "better" the *b*.

a	Dreams are	Dreams	:: Waking
b	well	are	:: 's
a	Waking's	well	:: better
b	better		

The morphological and lexical repetitions are not in exact equivalence: "Dreams :: Waking"; "are :: 's"; "well :: better." The only indicative verbs in the entire poem outside a subordinate clause are the first two: "are" and the " 's" of "Waking's." As the lexical and morphological variations that occur in the opening *abab* lines are replaced by the more exact equivalences of the *abba* lines, the expectancy of parallelism is reinforced and an alarm goes off. Something is wrong with the initial argument. And something *is* wrong. We are being asked to accept something at the conventional and stereotypical levels of our experience: "Sure, dreaming is fine, but waking is far superior." *Only the language of the poem won't let us do it.* The comparison laid out for us at the beginning is made superficial by the relative nonequivalences of the lexical and morphological components of the opening argument compared with those of the rest of the poem. The "s" of "Dreams" is not exactly equivalent to the "ing" of "Waking," however much we might want it to be. And the words "Dreams" and "well" are not in the same syntactic category as the words "wake" and "better." So that we end where we begin. Dreams are well. And the poem shows us why.

The only variation from strict parallelism in the second section of the first stanza is the addition of the prepositional phrase, "of the Dawn." The action of dreaming is initially given lexical form in the opening word of the poem: "Dreams." This nominalization obscures the underlying transitive nature of the verb: one dreams about something. When waking is put into parallel opposition, however, the full force of the distinction is made: whereas the act of waking is intransitive (it doesn't make anything happen, one simply wakes), dreaming is transitive, it creates an object, an object in the poem, moreover, that is experienced by waking "at Morn," that is, "the Dawn." What is created by dreaming of the dawn is something that proclaims the truth of its own existence, in the use of the homophoric determiner, " the" (Halliday 1964).

The second, more complex, stanza spells the argument out, as the argument of the poem becomes the argument for all who wake, dream, surmise, or confront. Why is dreaming better than waking at midnight? The hint we have

been given in the first stanza, that dreaming is more powerful than waking (since it can produce of its own accord what the latter can only experience), is reinforced by the final section of the last stanza, to which it is compared.

If one wake at Midnight \

better -
a Dreaming -
b of the Dawn -

---

than
b a Solid Dawn -
a Confronting \

The result of waking at midnight is to experience (confront) the kind of dawn that does not lead to day. It is no accident that the word "Solid" is a non-paralleled isolate in the poem: it is the only adjective that is not a comparative and that appears in regular noun phrase position. Porter comments on its importance; it *does* mean what Dickinson wants it to mean. The phrase results from a complex blending of time and space elements from one input space, someone facing an impenetrable wall, and another input space, the onset of morning. In the blend, because it occurs when waking at midnight, *this* dawn cannot go anywhere; its creative potential is blocked.

Unlike the waking/confronting spaces, the dreaming/surmising spaces are productive. Holding central position between the comparisons governed by the conditional phrase, "If One wake at Midnight \," the robin section is grammatically the most complex structure and the linch-pin of the entire poem. The robins are the only named agents in the poem and their action is represented by the only tensed causative verb (to make tree become glad). "Tree," like "Robins," has no determiner at all. As "the Dawn" is the complement and thus the product of "Dreaming," "Robins" are the complement and thus the product of "Surmising." Thus, the third section not only stands in syntactic parallelism with the second section, but it is brought into semantic equivalence as well. "Dreaming" and "Surmising" both carry equivalent complements. Just as dreaming can create the dawn, surmising can create robins, which themselves can make something happen (gladden tree). In contrast, waking makes nothing happen, and all that is experienced in confronting (ironically, the poem's only purely transitive verb that takes a direct object in its event frame[8]) is a solid dawn that leads to nothing, that makes "no Day." The syntactic-semantic progression of the determiner has reached its chilling conclusion: from the homophoric "the" of "the dawn" and its disappearance in "Robins" and "Tree,"

all associated with the dreaming/surmising side of the argument, it surfaces on the waking/confronting side as the determiner "a" in "a Solid Dawn" that anticipates the negative "no" of "no Day."

But the robins, in the end, do not gladden tree.

a Robins –
b Never gladdened Tree –

---

a a Solid Dawn –
b Leading to no Day –

As the robins themselves are placed into parallel equivalence in *abab* pattern with "a Solid Dawn," both as complements of the surmising/confronting opposition, they reflect the ultimate negation and final undermining of the original argument. The real test of whether dreaming or waking is better occurs not with consideration of the good but of the bad, as Hamlet in his famed soliliquy well knew. Better to dream of something bad than to confront it. Better to anticipate nothingness than to experience it. With such an argument, anticipation must always win out over actualization and is therefore, characteristically for Dickinson, to be preferred.

We end as we begin, in the poem's reality space. We are forced, as readers, to pass judgment on the poet's initial statement, that "Dreams are well." "Well," as a different category word from its comparative adverbial analogs "better" and "sweeter," stands alone. It appears to be the one grammatical oddity of the poem.[9] This statement is not allowed to have a comparative, unlike the other statements in the poem. The reason becomes evident in the restoration of the *abab* pattern at the end. Any possible alternative to dreaming, given the condition of waking at midnight, is to awaken us to that solid dawn that leads to no day: that is, the stasis of death. Dreaming, therefore, in keeping us cognitively alive, is good for us: it makes us "well."

Instead of being, in David Porter's interpretation, "a Dickinson allegory of passage into immortality," the poem celebrates the superiority of cognitive power that can create over passive experience that can only react to someone else's creation. The poem is a chilling refusal to accept the conventional and comforting beliefs of the unimagining mind, as the poem poses the existential question always uppermost in Dickinson's thoughts: "Where go we - / Go we anywhere / Creation after this?" (J1417/F1440). It is a poem about life and poetry, a celebration of the life-force of the imagination over the deadening effects of logic and reason.

As the foregoing discussion indicates, the problems raised by a Dickinson

text begin with the transformations that occur from manuscript to print. In addition, the difficulties presented by Dickinson's syntax, by the seemingly referent-less quality of her words, by her aberrant punctuation, are all too obviously clear, even to the most casual of readers. Before we can begin to appreciate the possible multiple levels of meaning in a Dickinson text, we need to avoid the trap of misreading caused by overlooking the "discriminate and particular" marks Blake recognizes as significant in poetry and art. My approach has been to start with the assumption that Dickinson knew exactly what she was doing, that what appears to be erratic in her poetry is so only because we have not fully comprehended the principles of her cognitive grammar. Dickinson in fact has what I will call a "frame grammar," after Charles Fillmore's (1977) phrase "frame semantics," and related to the more recent cognitive linguistic terminology of cognitive-cultural models and event frames (Lakoff and Johnson 1998; Langacker 1987, 1991; Talmy 2000; Ungerer and Schmid 1996).

In explaining what he means by the term frame, Fillmore says,

> I have in mind any system of concepts related in such a way that to understand any one of them you have to understand the whole structure in which it fits; when one of the things in such a structure is introduced into a text, or into a conversation, all of the others are automatically made available.
> (Fillmore 1977: 111)

I have found this true not only of Dickinson's semantics but of her entire grammar. I argue, in fact, that to properly "read" a Dickinson poem, one needs to know her grammar, and that this means not just in the sense of "compositional" grammar but in the sense of Fillmore's frame semantics and subsequent cognitive linguistic theories. That is, to use the analogy Fillmore chooses to explain the difference between the two:

> To know about tools is to know what they look like and what they are made of — the phonology and morphology, so to speak — but it is also to know what people use them for, why people are interested in doing the things that they use them for, and maybe even what kinds of people use them. In this analogy, it is possible to think of a linguistic text, not as a record of 'small meanings' which give the interpreter the job of assembling these into a 'big meaning' (the meaning of the containing text), but rather as a record of the tools that someone used in carrying out a particular activity. The job of interpreting a text, then, is analogous to the job of figuring out what activity the people had to be engaged in who used the tools in this order. (Fillmore 1977: 112)

3. Conceptualizing meaning: Understanding the "frame" of a Dickinson text

My approach to a reading of Dickinson's poems is to recognize both the cognitive frames that structure her poetics and the ways in which she uses those frames and the cognitive-cultural models, or knowledge domains, that inform them. The second poem I discuss in this paper raises both grammatical and semantic challenges to critical interpretation and, as a consequence, like the first poem, has been little discussed.[10] It first appeared in Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham's (1945) edition, *Bolts of Melody: New Poems of Emily Dickinson*," as No. 126:

> Upon a lilac sea
> To toss incessantly
> His plush alarm,
> Who fleeing from the spring,
> The spring avenging fling
> To dooms of balm.

Johnson kept Todd and Bingham's line arrangement of the poem in his edition (although his line placements lost the parallelism theirs showed), restored Dickinson's capitalization, and assigned it No. 1337:

> Upon a Lilac Sea
> To toss incessantly
> His Plush Alarm
> Who fleeing from the Spring
> The Spring avenging fling
> To Dooms of Balm –

The only changes Franklin made to Johnson's text were to reflect Dickinson's spelling "Opon" for the first word and to assign the poem No. 1368. Franklin also adds below the poem Dickinson's line divisions. Two original manuscripts exist. The complete poem, No. 502 in the Amherst College archives, is a pencil draft on a scrap of stationery. The other, No. L51 in the Houghton archives, is a rendition of the final lines of the poem, beginning "Who fleeing / from the / Spring," that Dickinson sent as a wedding congratulation to Helen Hunt on the occasion of her marriage to William S. Jackson in 1875. Dickinson kept the same line divisions in her note to Jackson as they appeared in the penciled draft. These are as shown in Figure 2 below.

Many of Dickinson's grammatical and stylistic strategies occur in this short

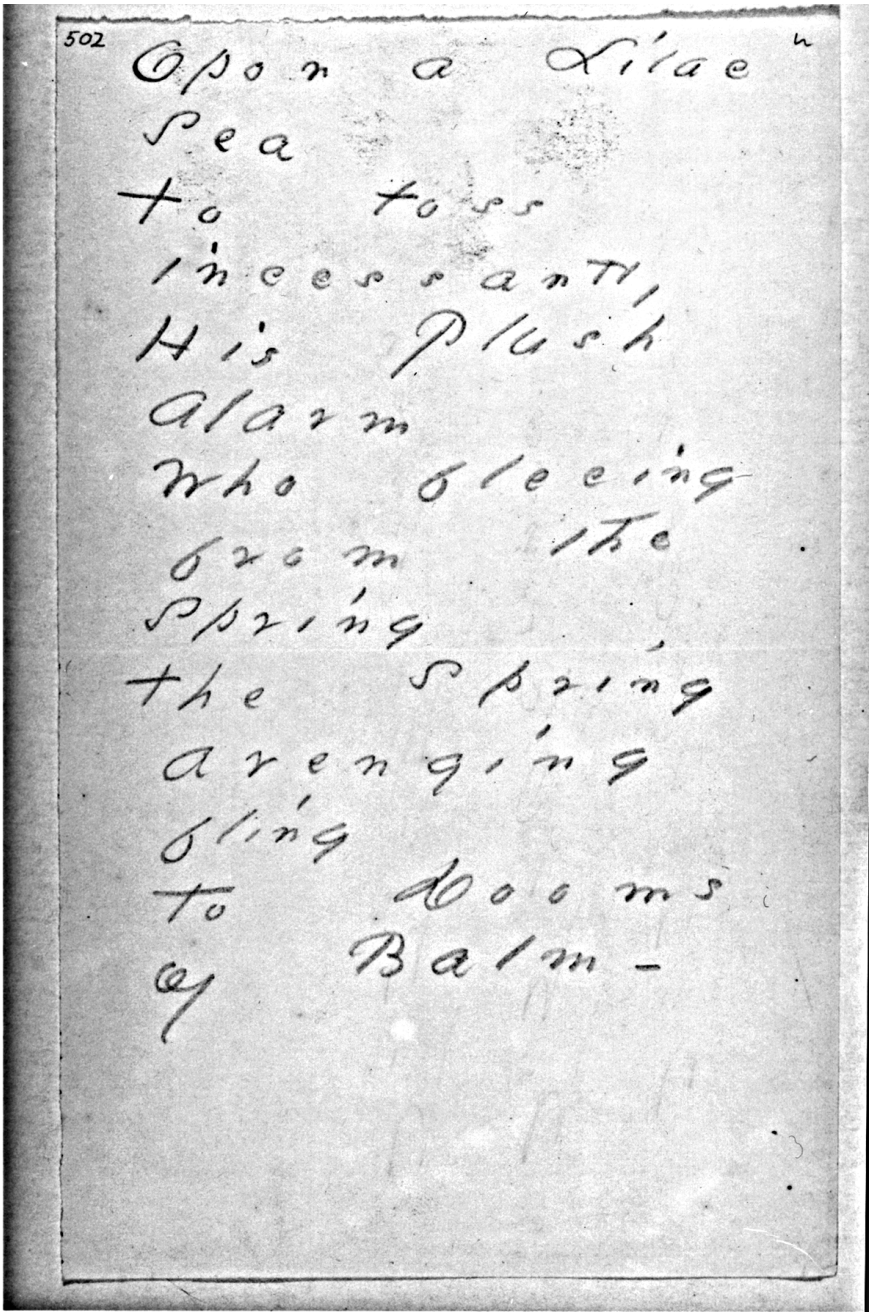

Figure 2. "Opon a Lilac Sea" (Amherst College Archives and Special Collections)

poem. The sea-for-air substitution is a pervasive image metaphor throughout the Dickinson canon (Freeman 1995). In this poem, the same metaphor occurs, as the heavily lilac-scented air of early spring becomes the "Lilac Sea." The practice of reconstructing nouns, whereby their usual meanings are deconstructed or detached from their referents and reconstituted within the referential frame of Dickinson's conceptual universe, can be seen in the words "Plush" and "Dooms." But the most difficult strategies of all to comprehend are Dickinson's syntactic moves.

Within one sentence of twenty-three words, Dickinson has created a complex subordinating pattern that can be read in at least two ways. The alternative readings turn on the problem all Dickinson scholars must face, as we saw in the first poem discussed, the question of text. In the printed editions, for example, the word "Alarm" is placed on the same line as "His Plush." Since Dickinson rarely capitalizes verbs, this rendition leads the reader to interpret the word as a noun, thereby precluding the reading of "Alarm" as a verb. Recourse to the manuscript resolves this dilemma. As in the previous poem, Dickinson's line breaks are quite different from the printed versions. Most notable is the fact that the word "Alarm" occurs in a line on its own, a fact which in itself can account for the capitalization. Although Dickinson occasionally breaks her lines differently when writing various copies or versions of a poem, the fact that she maintains the exact same line breaks in her letter poem to Helen Hunt Jackson indicates that these line breaks had meaning for her.

Understanding the poem on its literal level depends on the answer to a simple question: what is the main verb and what the main subject? Dickinson, characteristically, has it two ways. By having divorced the last lines from the extant manuscript version in the letter to Helen Hunt Jackson, Dickinson encourages us to read "fling" as the main verb and "Spring" as its subject. This reading is further encouraged by the previously mentioned capitalization of the word "Alarm." Reading the poem this way, however, creates difficulties in deciding how to place the complement phrases, and results in an uneasy and unsatisfactory violation of grammar, something I have learned to trust Dickinson not to do.

If one reads "Alarm" as a noun, "Spring/fling" become the main subject/verb of the sentence. Since "fling" is transitive, its object is the preposed noun phrase "His Plush Alarm." The problem created by the reading is a syntactic one: how to fit in the line, "To toss incessantly"? Had the verbal phrase been "tossing," it could have read as an appositive to "His Plush Alarm," and the problem would not exist. But Dickinson did not write this, nor is there any

variant to suggest she was unsatisfied with the construction as it stood. "To toss" infers purpose; it is possible to read such purpose as a complement to the main clause: that is, the spring flings his plush alarm to toss incessantly upon a lilac sea,[11] but then what does one do with to "Dooms of Balm"? Even if it were grammatically possible to have two complements in this context, and one could just manage it here, with total disruption of poetic syntactical order (Spring flings his plush alarm to dooms of balm to toss incessantly upon a lilac sea), the effect is to undermine the final line, since "Balm" does not connote the turbulent images of "tossing" or "incessantly." If, however, "Alarm" is read as a verb, the syntactic problem is resolved. In this reading, "Plush" is no longer an adjective, but a noun. Although the *Oxford English Dictionary* records adjectival use of the word "plush" as far back as 1629, its substantive use is more general, and Dickinson's use of the term elsewhere in the poetry is always as a noun.[12]

There are, according to this second reading, five verbal constructions in the poem: "toss," "alarm," "fleeing," "avenging," and "fling." Their corresponding subjects (some conceptually, not linguistically, represented[13]) are, in order, the sea/air, the action of tossing, "His Plush," and two references to the spring. Except for the action of fleeing, "His Plush" is the object of all the actions in the poem. After the preposed prepositional phrase which begins the sentence, Dickinson employs a subject-object-verb (SOV) order, one that is frequently found throughout her poetry; in SVO order this becomes: "To toss incessantly alarm(s) his plush." The last three lines of the poem are subordinated by means of "who" to the noun phrase "His Plush."

Dickinson's seemingly arbitrary love of preposing complements and apparent disregard for grammatical rules are constrained, as we saw in the first poem, by the dominating principle of parallelism that structures her poetic form. In this second poem, for example, the *aabccb* metrical/rhyme scheme brings the *b* phrases "His Plush / Alarm" and "To Dooms / of Balm" into prominent proximity and causes the remaining lines to collapse into supporting pairs, as Todd-Bingham's (1945) edited version indicates by its line indentations. It is no accident that both of these *b* phrases carry the weight of reader opacity in this poem. The ostensible subject of the first two verbs is "Sea," the subject of the last two verbs is "Spring," leaving the middle verb, the odd one out of the five, with the subject "His Plush." That is, the poem takes, in its subject/verb structure, the following parallel form:

Sea — toss, alarm
Plush — flee
Spring — avenge, fling

The only verb used intransitively is, not uncoincidentally, the verb that has "Plush" as its subject (that is, the verb to flee); all the other verbs are transitive, and their objects are all the "Plush" that is central to the poem. Although the ostensible subject of the first two verbs is "Sea," the sea/air's tossing which alarms is rather the instrument of the causative agent, Spring, that underlies all the actions of the poem.[14] "Alarm" and "fling" are grammatically anomalous in their form. As present-tense verbs of singular third person subjects, they would normally carry the *-s* inflection. That they don't may be a constraint imposed by the parallelism of the poem. Although Dickinson often uses slant rhymes, she never, to my knowledge, commits the weakness of a rhyme scheme that the pairs "alarms/balm," "spring/flings" would present (Small 1990). Certainly, the dropping of the *-s* inflection occurs commonly in Dickinson's poetry and of itself, therefore, is no argument for reading "Alarm" as a noun.[15]

To paraphrase, then, His Plush, alarmed by the tossing of the heavily lilac-scented sea /air, attempts to flee, and (or "but ," depending on a yet unresolved relationship between the spring and the poem's subject) Spring exacts justice by flinging him/it into dooms of balm.

The next stage in interpretation involves online processing of conceptual integration mapping, the development of which I describe in detail as an exploration of reader strategies in constructing meaning from text. When I first read this poem, I assumed in mapping the metaphors that Dickinson was referring to a bee, possibly with the bee poems that include the lines, "Like Trains of Cars on Tracks of Plush" (J1224/F1213) and "is lost in Balms" (J211/F205), in mind. Her bees are suitors, male, all sexual, in their relationships with their flowers. What other fate, predestined for the bee, does spring bring if not the balm of nectar, the honey of the flower, the lilac? Is it so surprising, I thought, that Dickinson would use this image to send as a wedding congratulation? I later changed my mind, but at least I had the cognitive frame right. This is what I wrote as I thought about the bee:

> The bee, swept by the turbulence of the lilac-laden air (one is reminded of Dickinson's drunken bees), is tossed and alarmed, verbs that denote unease, unfocused disturbance, and, in the syntactical form or context in which they are placed, with no immediately obvious agent causing the imbalance. Fleeing from what to all appearances we would call spring (the lilac-laden air), the bee is avenged by the generative, reproductive, order-making force of "Spring" which flings (note the cavalier tone of this word) it into the calm, the repose, the inevitable preordained goal — bee balm.

Of course. Beebalm. With her botanical and practical knowledge, Dickinson both knew and grew this herb. In the *Rodale Encyclopedia of Herbs* (1987) a hummingbird is represented on the second page of the beebalm entry, a bee on the third (Kowalchik and Hylton 39–41). The color photograph shows the vivid red, scarlet red, of the petals. It doesn't flower until July-August. Where, I thought, is the bee flung? To dooms of balm: have I finally understood the avenging? How much sustenance does a bee get from an early spring flower like the lilac? (This point bothered me: why was the bee in an uneasy state in the spring?) Is spring compensating for its own early turbulent-causing euphoria of lilac-laden air by flinging the bee toward its fate: the beebalm of summer? What resonances are here! Spring-summer : anticipation-fulfillment. Dickinson themes, if ever there were.

But that nibble at the soul. Why wasn't the bee satisfied with spring? Or the spring not satisfied with the bee? It wasn't until I checked the word "plush" that I realized more was going on. I knew Dickinson saw "Plush" as a noun, but I needed to explore the cognitive frame in which she uses the term. And that's when I found the caterpillar. The bee protruded itself because of the marriage associations; the hummingbird because of *Rodale*. But the caterpillar is pure Dickinson. Caterpillars are the unwitting victims of air: they can't do anything, especially in their cocoon state, except be at the mercy of the wind wherever it takes them. And certainly they can't partake of the lilac. Not like the bee. Or the hummingbird. Now "dooms" takes on new resonance: the fate of the caterpillar to become the butterfly, who can partake. Spring doing its thing: flinging into summer the caterpillar to become its apotheosis: the butterfly. Caterpillars, too, exist only on the edge of seasons: between summer and fall they emerge from eggs to become larvae, feeding on the harvest. Between fall and winter, they turn themselves into pupae by wrapping cocoons around themselves. And then in spring, between winter and summer, they become butterflies. The avenging image now seems to make more sense, with "Spring," the ultimate agent, exacting justice for the disturbance and unease expressed in the first two verbs, "toss" and "Alarm," by flinging the caterpillar into its metamorphosic state of becoming a butterfly. Butterflies, too, partake of nectar. The appropriateness of Dickinson's wedding congratulation to her female friend takes on new dimensions, a more Victorian expression of fulfillment (caterpillar to butterfly) than the more overtly sexual quality of the male bee. It is more characteristic of Dickinson's sensitivity in using appropriate words for particular occasions (Lebow 1999). Understanding a Dickinson poem, I would thus argue, is a matter of understanding its cognitive-cultural-contextual frame.

Two additional poems show the caterpillar frame working for my interpretation of this poem, a frame that, even if Johnson's dating of the poems is only approximately correct, governs the entire time span of Dickinson's poetry. An early (1860) poem, J173/F171, associates the caterpillar with the words "alarm" and "plush" (Franklin's text):

> A fuzzy fellow, without feet -
> Yet doth exceeding run!
> Of velvet is his Countenance -
> And his complexion, dun!
>
> Sometime, he dwelleth in the grass!
> Sometime, opon a bough,
> From which he doth descend in **plush**
> Opon the Passer-by!
>
> All this in summer -
> But when the winds **alarm** the Forest Folk,
> He taketh *Damask* Residence -
> And struts in sewing silk!
>
> Then, finer than a Lady,
> Emerges in the spring!
> A Feather on each shoulder!
> You'd scarce recognize him!
>
> By men, yclept Caterpillar!
> By me! But who am I,
> To tell the pretty secret
> Of the Butterfly!

And a late (c. 1880) poem, J1448/F1523 (Franklin's text):

> How soft a Caterpillar steps -
> I find one on my Hand
> From such a Velvet world it comes -
> Such **plushes** at command
> It's soundless travels just arrest
> my slow - terrestrial eye -
> Intent opon it's own career -
> What use has it for me -

Dickinson gave Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the literary editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, a clue to her poetics in a letter she wrote in the early days of their correspondence: "You said 'Dark.' I know the Butterfly — and the Lizard

— and the Orchis — Are not those your Countrymen?" (L268).[16] With this reference to shared knowledge domains, Dickinson is assuming Higginson capable of making the appropriate mappings. In a subsequent letter to Higginson, she writes: "You say 'Beyond your knowledge.' You would not jest with me, because I believe you — but Preceptor — you cannot mean it? All men say 'What' to me, but I thought it a fashion — " (L271). Immediately preceding this August letter in the Johnson edition is one Dickinson sent to Mrs. Flint (L270) in late July which included the following poem (J334/F380A):

> All the letters I could write,
> Were not as fair as this -
> Syllables of Velvet -
> Sentences of **Plush** -
> Depths of Ruby, undrained -
> Hid, Lip, for Thee,
> Play it were a Humming Bird
> And sipped just Me -

As is clear from Johnson's annotation to his edition of the poem, Helen Hunt Jackson sent Dickinson's wedding congratulation back with a request for an interpretation (thus continuing the tradition Higginson began), and then in a subsequent letter, commented: "Thank you for not being angry with my impudent request for interpretations. I do wish I knew just what "dooms" you meant, though!" Read from a cognitive frame perspective, a quite different construction can be placed on these words. Although we don't have Dickinson's letter of response, I would argue that she did in fact provide Jackson with an interpretation. Helen Hunt Jackson was no fool, nor was she a naïve, eighteen-year-old virgin. With this her second marriage, she had already experienced the realities of married life. Her question can be read as an "in" joke between the two friends, with a play on the meaning of "dooms." The emphases of "do," "just," "you," "though," and the exclamation point of Jackson's last sentence all point in this direction.

Read from a cognitive grammar perspective, one brief, anomalous, puzzling, incidental-seeming poem reverberates with a love of language, potent with the force of compressed expression. Neither obscure nor ungrammatical, Dickinson's language explodes with power. As Thomas John Carlisle (1987: 64) describes her in his poem, "Emily Dickinson," she is "demure as dynamite."

4. Conclusion

Ultimately, both Merleau-Ponty (the philosopher) and Blake (the poet) agree with the precepts of cognitive linguistics that understanding is embodied, that meaning, imagination, and reasoning have a physical basis in our experience of the world. The choice in a painting of oil over water-color, acrylic over crayon, or the choice in music of the cello over violin, french horn over flute affect the very way we respond to and understand a work of art. No less is true of literary works in the form of the printed book. William Blake exercised control over each "Blur or Mark" in his poetry by controlling the means of publication, etching his own plates, designing his own words and figures. Dickinson chose not to publish, at least publication in a print medium controlled by others. As a result, critical interpretations of Dickinson's poetry can be misled by the poem's appearance in print; the physical representation of the letters and words, the gaps, and marks on the manuscript page all contribute to a poem's "meaning." When Dickinson first wrote to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who, with Mabel Loomis Todd, became the first editors of her poems in print publication, she asked him to tell her if her verse were alive, if "it breathed" (L260). Did he realize the question was one of embodied understanding?

In applying the principles and methods of cognitive linguistics to literature, I am not claiming that it produces insights into Dickinson's poetry that cannot be achieved by any sensitive close reading or other literary critical approaches. A cognitive poetics, in this sense, is not just another literary theory that contributes readings resulting from its own particular approach. Rather, by revealing the cognitive processes by which a literary work is created and understood, cognitive poetics has explanatory power. It illuminates the conceptual structures of a literary work. It explains how both writer and reader make conceptual projections and mappings that create new meanings. It focuses on process, not product. It is limited by these constraints. It cannot explain why a poet like Dickinson thinks the way she does, nor can it (as yet) describe the novel uniqueness of literary creativity. What it can do, as I have tried to show in this paper, is illuminate those imaginative capabilities that enable poetry to happen.

Notes

1. The impossibility of nineteenth century Blake and twentieth century Merleau-Ponty engaging in actual debate is made possible through the cognitive ability for blending. See,

for example, discussion of the debate between Kant and the Professor in Fauconnier and Turner (2002).

2. Merleau-Ponty (1962:151), in describing the body as a work of art, comments on the importance of the poetic text: "the poem is not independent of every material aid, and it would be irrecoverably lost if its text were not preserved down to the last detail."

3. The story of Dickinson's manuscripts and publication history is a long and complex one. Many of the manuscript poems found after her death in 1886 had been bound by the poet into little packets or booklets. These were referred to as "fascicles" by the first editors, and this term has been retained by subsequent scholars. Dickinson's manuscripts (with a few exceptions) are archived in the Frost library at Amherst College and the Houghton library at Harvard University.

4. "Pastiosity" is a term borrowed from graphology where it refers to the physical features of handwriting, such as thickness of line and pressure on the page. From a graphological perspective (Shapiro 2001), the embodied characteristics of handwriting can reveal elements of a writer's embodied mind or corporeal psyche, and in this sense graphology can be considered a cognitive science.

5. References to Dickinson's poems indicate the Johnson (1955) and Franklin (1998) editions, with the poem numbers preceded by "J" for Johnson and "F" for Franklin.

6. An exception may be Dickinson's dog Carlo, the only animal in her entire corpus given human emotion and intelligence (Eberwein 1998:41).

7. I thank Jonathan Culpeper for pointing out that Dickinson's inflections look remarkably like those used for marking spoken language in computer corpora. Wylder (1971:13) notes that "the art of elocution is held in comparatively low esteem today," and it is true that Crumbley's (1997) linking of the dash to voice in Dickinson's poems speaks to polyvocality rather than prosody. Wylder's thesis, long neglected in Dickinson criticism, deserves revisiting.

8. In cognitive linguistics, grammatical relations among elements conform to Langacker's figure/ground orientation and what Leonard Talmy calls "windowing of attention" in an "event frame."

9. "Well" is used adjectivally when it refers to a satisfactory condition, as in "all is well," or indicating health, as in "Is your mother well?" Although Porter criticizes this use in the poem, Dickinson is actually punning on the syntax of the word, putting it in the context of a comparative but at the same time indicating that adjectivally it is foreshadowing and reinforcing the main argument of the poem that dreams are indeed good for us.

10. At a conference on Dickinson in October 1989 held at Amherst College, Richard Sewall, a long-time Dickinson scholar and biographer, pointed out the poem's obscurities and confessed his puzzlement, despite his many years of studying Dickinson, at what the poem might signify.

11. Note that this rearranging of the syntax suggests the possibility that the pronoun "His" refers to "Spring," a reading that is not at all clear in the poem.

12. There are ten references to the word "plush" in the Dickinson corpus, plus one plural "plushes" (Rosenbaum 1964). All of them are nouns, with the ambiguous exception of the poem in question (J1337/F1368). The referents of four (not counting the poem under

discussion) are indeterminate (J401/F675, J457/F684, J1140/F1164, J1738/1772), two refer to feet (J589/F617, J1664/F1708), two to the caterpillar (J173/F171, J1448/F1523), and two possibly to a flower in a hummingbird poem (J334/F380) and in a bee poem (J1224/F1213). It is not clear, in J1224/F1213, whether the prepositional phrase in the analogy "Like Trains of Cars on Tracks of Plush" refers to the referent of the analogy, that is, the bee, or to where the bee is flying, "across the Flowers." Support for the latter is given by the close association of the word "plush" to velvet in Dickinson's poems (see J173/F171, J334/F380, and J1448/F1523 for other examples), which unambiguously depicts the flower. On the other hand, it is the sound of the bee that Dickinson describes in J1224/F1213, and plush is related to sound in several other poems (see J457/F684, J589/F617, J1664/F1708, for example). In the hummingbird poem (J334/F380), it is related to both sound or writing and a flower.

13. In Langacker's (1987, 1991) terminology, whether the subjects appear in the linguistic expression or not is a result of profiling; Talmy (2000) calls this backgrounding of conceptual information "gapping."

14. This reading could be disputed on the question of what, exactly, the spring is avenging. To explore the Romantic frame that underlies this poem would take the point of this paper too far afield, but it is an aspect that needs to be treated in a more comprehensive accounting of Dickinson's cognitive grammar. For causative agency in Romantic poetry, see D.C. Freeman (1987).

15. Dickinson's *-s*-less verbs have a subjunctive quality that may trigger projection from the perspective of the poem's reality space into other mental spaces. Exploration of this phenomenon in Dickinson's poetry is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is a cognitive enterprise that needs exploring.

16. References to Dickinson's letters are drawn from Johnson's (1965) three-volume edition of the letters.

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