What Do Collections Tell Us?—Teaching Dickinson's Poems, the Herbarium, and Contemporary and Historical Material Practices
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ABSTRACT: Teaching Emily Dickinson in undergraduate literature courses often comes with a lot of frustration. Scholars have recently been using Dickinson's works for interesting and compelling work, but this kind of work often feels inaccessible in the limited time and space of undergraduate teaching. Worse, the heritage of certain unproductive (often pseudo-autobiographical) assumptions about Dickinson's work still influence the way undergraduates interact with her work. In this article, I attempt to provide a simple solution for defamiliarizing Dickinson's poems for students: reading Dickinson's poems along with excerpts from Belknap Press's facsimile reproduction of Emily Dickinson's Herbarium. Not only does this reading practice help readers circumvent the problem of autobiographical reading but it also offers critical benefits, such as pushing students to think critically about the curatorial practices that influence the texts they work with, focusing attention on Dickinson's material writing practices, and even forging a way for students to see connections between poetic practices and ecological practices. Ultimately, reading Dickinson's poems alongside the herbarium offers an effective way for students to think about how they interact with the historical materials of literature within the often abstracted discipline of literary studies.

Falling into autobiographical modes of reading obviously isn't a new problem for literature students, let alone readers of Emily Dickinson's poems; we want to know why, for example, Emily Dickinson was so reclusive, so we look to her poetry for clues. Despite the problems with this kind of reading, autobiographical reading is a particularly egregious problem for studying women writers given our tendencies to reify the ways that women were pathologized in their own times. Nevertheless, it's difficult for teachers of literature to steer many students away from this kind of reading which is often very compelling to them. I speak particularly for myself here, knowing how I tried to read author's autobiographies and biographies as an undergraduate, looking for clues to their literature. This problem is especially acute for Dickinson, for whom we have so much poetic material but comparatively little information about her life that is not heavily mediated.

For teaching Dickinson, I have a solution that is simple but also critically productive in multiple ways: reading her poems along with excerpts from Belknap Press's facsimile reproduction of Emily Dickinson's Herbarium. Not only does this reading practice help readers circumvent the problem of autobiographical reading but it also offers critical benefits, such as pushing students to think critically about the curatorial practices that influence the texts they work with, focusing attention on Dickinson's material writing.
practices, providing a context for understanding more unusual poems, and even forging a way for students to see connections between poetic practices and ecological practices. Ultimately, reading Dickinson's poems alongside the herbarium offers an effective way for students to think about how they interact with the historical materials of literature within the often abstracted discipline of literary studies.

Against Autobiographical Reading

Reading Dickinson's herbarium alongside her poems ameliorates many of the problems of autobiographical reading. First, the herbarium provides a physical way of historicizing Dickinson since it is an actual artifact from her life (and one that is not her letters, which retain a similarity to her poems). Dickinson made her herbarium while she was a student at Amherst Academy sometime between the ages of nine and sixteen, probably before she was fourteen (Sewell 19, 21). The practice of making a herbarium was seen as an introduction to the science of botany; herbaria trace their roots back to the 1600s, and in the nineteenth century, Charles Darwin's influence encouraged the practice of keeping them (Farr 17). Compiling a herbarium may appear to be a gendered activity today (and even in Dickinson's letters, to a degree), but it wasn't then. Amherst Academy was a school for male and female students, and other prominent men such as Henry David Thoreau and Thomas Wentworth Higginson (Dickinson's "mentor") kept herbaria during their lives (cf. Farr 17, Angelo 169). More than anything, the herbarium betrays Dickinson's class status via her education, which provided her with the resources to collect, prepare, and preserve specimens. The flowers in the herbarium with their clean layout and Latin genus and species point to Dickinson as a young botany student. As Ray Angelo points out in his catalog of the facsimile edition of the herbarium, "The identifications in the Dickenson herbarium are for the most part competent, especially considering the dearth of accurate, usable manuals in her era. Illustrated field guides such as those we take for granted were virtually nonexistent" (170). Moreover, the herbarium—though not a perfectly rigorous or

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1 Both the Norton and the Heath anthologies of American literature include some of Dickinson's letters in addition to her poems. The 1985 and 1998 editions of the Norton include four letters; the 1990 edition of the Heath includes twenty-six letters, which is cut to nineteen in the 2002 edition. While including letters with poems is an effective way for calling Dickinson's poems as poems into question and focusing attention on textual editing practices that have been performed on her writing as a whole (cf. Jackson), it can contribute to a certain biographical strain of reading since letters are often thought of as very personal—more than poems, at least.
complete scientific document—reveals a Dickinson who was, if not a certified botanist, more than a mere dilettante of horticulture, something which carried over into her adulthood, as Judith Farr has demonstrated.

For anyone who might argue that reading the *Herbarium* reinforces autobiographical reading, I contend that most students' interactions with authors are often already mediated by other things they read alongside primary texts. Commonly used anthologies especially tend to exacerbate the problem of autobiographical reading because they don't give Dickinson's readers a sense of her poetry *only*; they also usually provide a biography. One only needs to consider the common practice of including an author's biography at the beginning of her section to see that anthologies encourage biographic reading. To take Dickinson as an example, both the Norton and the Heath anthologies—the two primary anthologies for American literature—include extensive biographies of Dickinson's life that suggest specific ways of reading her poems: in the Norton, Dickinson as slighted lover, as neo-metaphysical poet, as transcendentalist; in the Heath, as shaped by men in her life, as closeted lesbian; in both, as religious skeptic, as proto-modernist poet, as cosmopolite reader, as recluse. These kinds of readings are reinforced by the format of the anthology, biography followed by poems printed in succession, usually as complete and authoritative texts, institutionalized by the publisher's reputation.

Conversely, while reading the herbarium engages in a kind of autobiographical method, it becomes less of a problem for two main reasons. First, a herbarium is totally unfamiliar to most literature students (except that it's a book). Second, unlike the hypotheses put forward by author biographies, the herbarium is a kind of evidence. These two aspects force students to approach the herbarium as something that already doesn't fit into their paradigm of what counts as information about an author's life; through defamiliarization, it forces students to stretch their understanding of an author like Dickinson rather than fitting neatly in a pre-established category or hypothesis. Perhaps students already think of Dickinson as a "Nature poet," but even then, a herbarium is not likely to represent the same kind of heavily mediated version of romanticized Nature that students in the twenty-first century assume was common during the early nineteenth century.

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2 Admittedly, Norton's biography discourages reading Dickinson as slighted lover, but by mentioning it at all, they open the possibility of that type of reading. Christopher Lydon touches upon some common stereotypes of Dickinson at the beginning of his interview with Vendler: "The Belle of Amherst, Victorian spinster, recluse."
Including the *Herbarium* in analyses of Dickinson has an almost immediate benefit for reading Dickinson's poems in practice, a benefit which I have found particularly useful for students who are new to the practice of close reading. For example, when I have taught poem 124 "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers—"—a poem which appears to have little relationship to plant life—I have found that, without any additional background but what the anthology provides, students either can't figure out what to make of the poem or decide that it's about dead people, usually because of the lines, "Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection, / Rafter of Satin and Roof of Stone —" (Ins. 4-5). They often back up this reading with what they've read about Dickinson's religious background or her thematic preoccupation with death.

However, when I introduce material from Dickinson's herbarium and point out that Dickinson was an avid gardener throughout her entire life, I'm able to get them to see the poem in a completely new light—like one of those double images that is either an old woman or a young woman depending on how you look at it. "Alabaster Chambers" can be read as translucent onion or tulip bulbs, resting underground throughout the winter while "Grand go the Years, / In the Crescent above them—... Soundless as Dots, / On a Disc of Dnow" (Ins. 6-7, 12-13). "Meek members of the Resurrection" becomes a metaphor productively adapted to gardening rather than a static statement of religious belief. Students often have a startling moment of recognition, especially for those who have not previously understood how literary works can have multiple meanings. The point, of course, is not to get them to see one reading or the other but to help them to understand how poetry works. Students are then ready to discuss the poem in a deeper way, no longer trying to figure out what it means but ready to talk about what comparing the religious idea of Resurrection to perennial gardening might mean in Dickinson's social context.

**Collection and Classification: Anthology as Herbarium and vice versa**

Students are also ready, in the moment of realization I've just described, to begin to have a conversation about the curatorial practices that operate behind the scenes to present literature to readers, especially undergraduates, in a specific kind of way; they no longer take this work for granted but begin to realize the stakes of the work that their predecessors in the field have done and that they themselves are doing. Obviously, curating Dickinson's nearly 1,800 poems into a representative anthology is a very difficult task.
Surely advanced students of Dickinson frequently read all of Dickinson's poems and letters, but even in their case, careful selection must occur in order to talk about them. Helen Vendler, in her interview with Christopher Lydon, wittily points to the problem of anthologizing Dickinson's poems: "She [Dickinson] was in anthologies of American poetry but usually with the worst possible poems chosen." In response to Lydon's challenge to choose five poems to take to a desert island, Vendler responds, "It's very hard to say. When I was cutting the eighteen hundred poems to one hundred for my book, I thought, 'Well, I'll just go through and check off the indispensable ones,' and when I counted those, I had four hundred."

Selecting a collection of Dickinson's poems for any given reading method is a difficult task. Should a course on Dickinson examine canonical poems, non-canonical poems, a random sampling? And what makes a poem canonical? Frequent inclusion in anthologies? These questions, of course, aren't new; everybody picks and chooses from Dickinson's poems when analyzing or anthologizing them (except perhaps Thomas Johnson and R. W. Franklin). This problem isn't even unique to Dickinson's poems, although what makes collecting her poems more problematic than average is what I would call their sparseness: they are usually title-less, posthumously published (and republished), very brief, and not widely accessible in their original material formats. This "sparseness" adds to what is a difficult task for any poet. Anyone aspiring to read, write about, or teach Dickinson's poems has a difficult time analyzing a critical mass of her poems in order to be able to talk about them collectively while also selecting a small enough set to discuss in a limited space. While an anthology can easily print dozens of them (rather than the usual range of between two and thirty poems for an author\(^3\)), the poems' sparseness also requires large quantities of them to get a sense of what Dickinson's poetry is like. In both cases, it is difficult to make the inductive leap from a set of Dickinson's poems (even if the set contains all of them) to Dickinson's poetry.

The herbarium, on the other hand, helps to address this problem by asking students to think about what an anthology is—what it contains and what it doesn't. To explain how this could work, I turn to the definitions of "anthology" and "herbarium," which, surprisingly to most people, can function as synonyms. An "anthology" is "a collection of the flowers of

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\(^3\) I draw these numbers from volume one of the fifth edition of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* (1998); besides Dickinson, the fewest number of poems they include for an author is two for John Greenleaf Whittier and the most is thirty for Walt Whitman.
verse, i.e. small choice poems" and it was "originally applied to the Greek collections so called" (OED). Etymologically, it derives from the Greek *anthos*, meaning "flower," and *logia*, meaning "collection," which is distantly related to the Greek word *logos*. One of the now obsolete definitions literally means "a treatise on flowers." Obviously the word is currently used for many genres besides poems, but this definition sets up an analogy between the act of collecting "choice poems" and the act of collecting flowers that allows for more specific thinking about anthologies. Is the anthology arranged as a bouquet or a specimen panel? Does the anthology represent the best, most characteristic flowers, or does it include misfits? What ecosystems did the individual items come from? Were they cut from a bush, uprooted from the soil, purchased from a vendor who labored to obtain them, or grown in a pot? These questions, while perhaps distractingly analogic, call attention to the anthology as a specific type of material collection, a collection of materials that have been removed (sometimes violently) from their more suitable environment, and a collection of materials as *materials* that have existed as more than the abstracted words at some point and place in history.

I find great significance in the fact that a herbarium could be understood as a type of anthology. A "herbarium" is "a collection of dried plants systematically arranged….Also, a book or case contrived for keeping such a collection" (OED). Its etymology comes from the Latin *herba* ("herb") and the suffix –*arium*, meaning "thing connected to something." The herbarium is, perhaps more so than the anthology, the *thing* containing plants, and it bears the distinct possibility of being a physical book, as opposed to the anthology, which is slightly more abstract since it is a collection of verses (an anthology could exist in one's brain, for example). Now, I don't mean to say that Dickinson's herbarium is the perfect representation of what an anthology of Dickinson's poems should be like. I do want to call attention to the relationship between the herbarium and the anthology more broadly since, in the most basic sense, they could be the Latin and Greek variants on the same word. More importantly, the herbarium functions as a material reminder that poems in an anthology have been removed from their environments. A herbarium begins to deconstruct the book-ness of the anthology, which (when an anthology is a book) is usually the same kind of thing as the texts it contains—printed words on paper—whereas a herbarium, though a book, does not contain things that are the same kind of thing, and one can easily imagine the original environments of the things it contains. (On the other hand, one could
productively point out that a book containing both dried plants and more the uniform sheets of chemically processed and dried plant material does, in fact, contain things that are the same kind of thing. But this objection reinforces the need for attention to the book's and the poems' means of production.) So, a herbarium accomplishes two feats for understanding an anthology: first, it functions as a material way of heightening one's awareness of one's own practice of collecting an anthology of poems; and second, it serves as a reminder that poems are not self-contained, that they have outsides and histories which anthologies often elide, for better or for worse.

One subset of Dickinson's poems that the material context of the herbarium is especially valuable for reading is the "verses sent with flowers" (cf. Johnson's "Subject Index" 727). This set of poems, since it specifically incorporates both a material poem-note and a flower, becomes easier to understand when students know about and understands Dickinson's relationship to flowers. In this set are poems such as the two-line 730—"Defrauded I a Butterfly— / The lawful Heir—for Thee—" and 200:

I stole them from a Bee—
Because—Thee—
Sweet plea—
He pardoned me!

Taken together (with the additional background knowledge that each was sent with flowers), these poems give a stronger sense of their first environment before they were "picked" to be Poems. Read without any context, students face unanswerable questions: Of what is the Butterfly the Heir? What does "them" in the first line of 200 indicate? Who is "Thee"? Things and people outside the poem, to be sure. Some digging among the original Dickinson papers (or Johnson's and Franklin's bibliographic anthologies) might reveal who "Thee" is in each poem (though the record of every "Thee" has not been kept perfectly). And the fact that both refer to taking something from an insect provides a clue. But in the poems' original situations, the flowers to which they were attached formed part of the text of each poem—which makes those flowers both an essential and essentially unrecoverable part of each

4 Johnson identifies thirty-three poems under this subheading (though I suspect he missed some, given that he missed many poems that fit under other subheadings such as "flower," even several that obviously fall under "rose"). This number amounts to almost two percent of the 1775 poems in Johnson's Complete Poems. One might argue that this is a fractionally small number that the herbarium assists in interpreting. However, given that one in fifty poems were originally sent with a flower, not including the ones Johnson doesn't identify, and given that many of these are enigmatically short poems, I think this connection constitutes a considerable interpretive advantage.
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Their deictic proximity solidifies the flowers as part of the poem—not just a context but an extension of the text. The flowers' ephemerality is what detaches them from the verses, which is a circumstance that the "immortality" of the flowers in the herbarium ameliorates.

Poems 730 and 200, though very sparse, also position their speakers in a relational field. It is a field that contains both an "I" and a "Thou," which narrows to "sender" and "recipient" when the reader becomes aware of the part of the text that is a flower. Interestingly, it is also a world in which butterflies and bees are significant actors, which transforms not only the flower but also the attached poem into plunder. But one can't push the "original context" too far. This subset of poem is plundered again when Dickinson comes to include them in her fascicles—stealing them from one context to paste them into another. Divorced from their original context and juxtaposed as I have them, it is no longer clear to whom or by whom these poems are addressed. The addressee could be an intimate friend, the reader, Nature, God, or the President of the United States. What's most important is not that Dickinson's poems have specific material contexts that affect what they mean or don't mean. The main point is to be able to see them as things that had an original material circumstance from which they have been gleaned. It is a both-and way of seeing, which just happens to be more conspicuous in the herbarium because it is difficult to think of dried and pressed flowers as always existing in their current material form. The poems' material contexts are certainly important—when they were attached to flowers and when they were rewritten in a fascicle; what is more important is not prioritizing one method of reading over the other and being aware of the curating and anthologizing that has already happened.

Several of Dickinson's poems explore questions of collecting and organizing specimens and could contribute to classroom conversations about classification in literature or in science. One particularly good example is in poem 70: "Arcturus" is his other name—." In this ballad, the speaker laments the ways in which sciences impose their classification systems onto everything in the world, including stars, insects, flowers, and heavens. The speaker indicts Science on the one hand, saying "It's very mean of Science / To go and interfere!"; she calls the stamen-counter "A monster with a glass"; she even laments the fact that "Heaven'… is mapped and charted too." The speaker is also frustrated with Theology: she rolls her eyes at the "Savant," though I'm not sure who says "Oh Lord—how frail are...
we" since the exclamation mark comes after and the speaker doesn't use quotation marks for her own speech otherwise; she also separates herself from the "new fashioned Children" in the "Kingdom of Heaven." What the speaker wants more than anything is, in fact, a cosmic prank that would unsettle everything and everyone, perhaps even herself— one in which "the poles should frisk about / And stand upon their heads!" Indeed, everything in this poem points to the ephemerality of labels and the materiality of insects, flowers, and stars; the important but controversial words are all in quotation marks, drawing attention to their fundamentally unstable meanings. From the place where the poles reverse, the "Savant" may be a fool, the "class" may be a random assortment, and "the worst" may be the best. The poem's speaker ultimately sees herself as a participant among the collectors— she pulls a flower and takes a Butterfly, after all— but she doesn't want her actions to stand as definitive.5

Reading Dickinson's herbarium alongside her poems offers instructors and students other benefits beyond staging conversations about how critics have curated her poems. This kind of reading also calls attention to Dickinson's material practices in a broader way than focusing on her poems alone does. relatively recently, critics such as Sharon Cameron, Virginia Jackson, and Alexandra Socarides have productively focused their attention on Dickinson's material practices as a way of better understanding how her poems were produced and how they relate to each other.6 As I have already argued, the herbarium functions as a material reminder of the analogous practices at play in any anthology of Dickinson's poems; in this way, it calls into question the poems' status as complete, self-contained units, just as the pressed and dried flowers in the herbarium are not complete or self-contained units but part of a larger ecosystem. In many ways, the herbarium does this kind of work more easily for students than looking at Dickinson's fascicles does because of its ability to defamiliarize; while the fascicles may seem too similar to other iterations of Dickinson's poems to non-specialists, the herbarium looks very different from Dickinson's

5 Cf. poem 168: "If the foolish, call them "flowers"— / Need the wiser, tell? / If the Savants "Classify" them / It is just as well!" The speaker concludes: "Doubtless, we should deem superfluous / Many Sciences, ..." Also, cf. poem 100 "A science—so the Savants say," for a potentially less skeptical treatment of science and savants.

6 Cameron's Choosing not Choosing: Dickinson's Fascicles (1992) marks a turn in Dickinson criticism as it explores Dickinson's poetic practices as they play out in the fascicles she produced. Jackson continues this trend in Dickinson's Misery: a theory of lyric reading (2005), which calls attention to the ways that editors of Dickinson's textual remains have decided whether something was or was not a poem based on a circular understanding of the lyric. Most recently, Socarides in Dickinson Unbound: paper, process, poetics (2012) reads Dickinson's poetic practice according to the paper that Dickinson wrote upon.
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poems, even while it bears many similarities.

The herbarium can even function as an introduction for instructors to talk about Dickinson's fascicles since it prepares students to think about the work of collecting that happens in both herbarium and fascicle. Specifically, the flowers are all grouped on their individual pages. Their arrangement directs students' attention toward Dickinson's decisions to group certain flowers on certain physical pages in certain arrangements. The way that the flowers are arranged points to the fascicles which Dickinson kept during her lifetime. The fascicles also represent the activity of selection, arrangement, and completeness just as the pages of Dickinson's herbarium do. But while I see great value in reading Dickinson's poems in their fascicles, such a practice done in exclusion of other practices would foreclose on the full range of possibilities for understanding her writing and aesthetic production. The main thing that I want to draw out of this comparison between the fascicles and the herbarium is that Dickinson's poems are not necessarily order-less or isolated from each other, nor are they completely ordered in a way that cannot be altered. The herbarium doesn't ossify a specific arrangement of its specimens in its reader's imagination; the plants clearly come from wider environments in which many of them are connected, and though their arrangement has been permanently established, it is also willfully arbitrary. In other words, the fascicles are curated like the herbarium is curated—by Dickinson. While the fascicles do provide a context in which to read Dickinson's poems, Dickinson did not write the fascicles as units with connections between poems planned ahead. Instead, she curated them from manuscripts and fragments of poems, some of which she circulated to her family and friends before including them. "Fascicle," after all, is another botanical term that signifies a bunch or a bundle, "a cluster of leaves or flowers" (OED). Dickinson made specific selections, she made alterations, and she "pressed" them in order to preserve them (i.e. she printed them, if her handwriting can be called "printing"). Thus, if the poems and the herbarium are read not as texts and non-text but as if each is a text, then the herbarium steers us away from reading too strongly into Dickinson's "intentions" while still providing a context for understanding her poems. In this way, if we allow the boundary of textual genre

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7 In many ways, I agree with Cameron's claims about how Dickinson "chooses not to choose" even in the fascicles; I don't think her argument about how the fascicles "invite us to read Dickinson's poems in the context of other sequences" (143) prioritizes one method of reading over all others. And this is where I argue that the herbarium offers another significant sequential context alongside of which to read the poems. It is likely that just as reading the fascicles has turned up interesting new readings of Dickinson's
to recede so that comparison between poems and pinned flowers is no longer the focus, the herbarium models both a theory of selecting or collecting and a method of reading Dickinson's poems.

Some instructors may think it unfortunate that Dickinson's herbarium doesn't provide a method for choosing a specific subset of poems for creating an anthology or for framing an analysis. But this openness is actually one of its strongest advantages. It allows students to be more aware of the ways that Dickinson's poems have always been curated. At the very least, if the reading practice I argue for has the benefits I claim, it would be sufficient simply to read the herbarium alongside any major anthology's selection of Dickinson's poems. But the openness of the herbarium also allows readers to discover and create their own collections of Dickinson's poems.

Poems and Plants: A New Collection

I've been saying a lot about how the herbarium helps instructors and students to interact with the poetry, both on the page and historically, but I don't want to foreclose on the possibility that Dickinson's herbarium suggests that we read her poems for the flowers—or, at least, for the plants. On the surface, this might sound a little absurd. However, I think it makes sense to draw attention to the importance of flowers not just because they are common in Dickinson's poetry but because they clue her readers in to her aesthetic and material practices, which are not separate.

Instructors should demonstrate what alternative collections of Dickinson's poetry that focus on flowers would look like. Readers of Dickinson have focused on various specific collections of Dickinson's poems for a long time. For example, in the introduction to his "Subject Index," Johnson writes offhand, "It will be noted that certain large groups, such as those headed Life, Love, and Death, contain the bulk of the poems" (723). Johnson indirectly claims that Dickinson is a poet of Life, Love, and Death. He doesn't specify what he means by "bulk," but I assume he thinks these poems would together form a majority. Unfortunately, this common method of reading merely abstracts and obfuscates Dickinson for students. It focuses their attention on Dickinson's love life and her "fascination with death," but these are abstract notions that are difficult to quantify. There is little material work, reading poems alongside the herbarium would also begin to produce interesting new readings because of the types of pattern creation the comparison would coordinate.
record of Dickinson's love life, except for her letters, and those are not usually easy to interpret. Instructors and students will discover a very different Dickinson if they reconstellate her poems around Plants. Indeed, they will find that a separate "bulk" of her poems focus on plants for their subject, which unsettles previous understandings of Dickinson's supposed fascination with Life, Love, and Death.

To better prove my point, I want to examine Johnson's own collection of plant poems in his Subject Index. While his list is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive, it begins to put weight behind my point. Johnson lists 113 poems having to do with plants in his subject index (thirty-three of which, as I've already said, were originally sent with flowers). This set constitutes about 6.5% of all Dickinson's poems. This may look like a small percent—but Johnson misses many poems. In general, it is so easy to find missed plant poems that I can often open Johnson's Complete Poems at random and find one he doesn't include in the Subject Index. For example, 438 "Forget! The lady with the Amulet" is also a Rose poem, though it isn't listed under Rose or anywhere in the index. 1082 "Revolution is the Pod" or 1463 "A Route of Evanescence" could also be put under Flower, though neither is mentioned at all. There are also many categories, such as Blossom, Bud, Calyx, Petal, Plant, Pod, Pollen, Root, Seed, Sepal, and Stem, that Johnson doesn't consider, and there are many poems that would fall into those categories but are not yet on this list of 113. I consider it a safe guess that there are at least twice as many plant-related poems as Johnson records, which would bump their percentage up to at least 13%. Besides, most anthologies do not even contain as many as 113 Dickinson poems; a relative average of Dickinson poems in an anthology is eighty-four. In that sense, even Johnson's limited list of plant poems constitutes a significant "anthology." These 113 poems form a critical mass of poems that need to be reckoned with.

But what might this large volume of poems—or even a subset of this set—reveal? As an example, I take the Rose poems, and I include them in a chart in order to speak about

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8 At the time of writing, I did just that and found 416 "A Murmur in the Trees—to note—." A second try turned up nothing, but on my third try I found 567 "He Gave away his Life—" which mentions Blossoms, Buds, and Pods.

9 I calculated this number by taking the average of the two major anthologies of American literature from two separate editions. The 1985 Norton contained 66 poems; the 1990 Heath contained the most at 116 poems; the 1998 Norton increases to 81 poems; and the 2002 Heath decreases to 73 poems.

10 And if this project were expanded to include all of the insect and bird poems (and if some category besides "Nature" could be found to group them all together), it would probably include an even larger percentage of Dickinson's corpus. Johnson records thirteen types of birds and ten types of insects (not including the categories Birds and Insects) which Dickinson mentions in her poems.
Roses in Dickinson’s poems more broadly rather than close read just a few (see Table 1). This type of surface reading certainly has its drawbacks, but it also demonstrates—in a general way—the value of reading for plants; I have also tried to include more information than a close reading would (e.g. dates).

### Table 1: Roses in Emily Dickinson’s Collected Poems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem #</th>
<th>Line 1</th>
<th>Rose Line(s)</th>
<th>Line #</th>
<th># of Lines</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Baffled for just a day or two—</td>
<td>Encounter in my garden / An unexpected Maid</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>c. 1858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>A sepal, petal, and a thorn</td>
<td>And I’m a Rose!</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>c. 1858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32*</td>
<td>When Roses cease to bloom, Sir,</td>
<td>And Violets are done—</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>c. 1858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Garlands for Queens, may be—</td>
<td>The Rose ordained!</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>c. 1858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Nobody knows this little Rose—</td>
<td>Ah Little Rose—how easy / for such as thee to die!</td>
<td>11-12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>c. 1858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56**</td>
<td>If I should cease to bring a Rose</td>
<td>’Twill be because beyond the Rose / I have been called away—</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>c. 1858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>A Science—so the Savants say,</td>
<td>Stands representative in gold / Of Rose and Lily, manifold,</td>
<td>10-11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>c. 1859</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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All information in this table comes from Johnson’s Complete Poems. Poems marked with an asterisk (*) were originally sent with flowers. Not all poems mention Roses explicitly, which reveals Johnson’s interpretation of them. All poems marked with two asterisks (**) were not originally in any of Johnson’s subjects.

I decided to include a chart of the poems in an attempt to navigate a tension between close readings of only a small quantity of poems versus trying to draw conclusions from a title-level reading of a larger quantity of poems. Since I’m interested in how the poems are collected and grouped, this seems an appropriate middle ground, though there are quite a few rose poems (the number has increased as I keep finding them). I tend to think it has a gestalt effect, overall, which is rather pleasing.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Artists wrestled here!</th>
<th>Lo, a Rose!</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>c.</th>
<th>1859</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>138</td>
<td>Pigmy seraphs—gone astray—</td>
<td>Never such an Ambuscade / As of briar and leaf displayed / For my little damask maid—</td>
<td>9-11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>c.</td>
<td>1859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>163</td>
<td>Tho' my destiny be Fustian—</td>
<td>Roses of a steadfast summer</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>c.</td>
<td>1860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>179**</td>
<td>If I could bribe them by a Rose</td>
<td>I'd bring them every flower that grows / from Amherst to Cashmere!</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>c.</td>
<td>1860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>208**</td>
<td>The Rose did caper on her cheek—</td>
<td>Till opposite—I spied a cheek / That bore another Rose—</td>
<td>1, 9-10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>c.</td>
<td>1860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>339</td>
<td>I tend my Flowers for thee—</td>
<td>Globe Roses—break their satin flake— / Upon my Garden floor—</td>
<td>16-17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>c.</td>
<td>1862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>438**</td>
<td>Forget! The lady with the Amulet</td>
<td>Deny! Did Rose her Bee—</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>c.</td>
<td>1862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>442</td>
<td>God made a little Gentian—</td>
<td>It tried—to be a Rose—</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>c.</td>
<td>1862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>675</td>
<td>Essential Oils—are wrung—</td>
<td>The Attar from the Rose... The General Rose—decay—</td>
<td>2, 5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>c.</td>
<td>1863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>991**</td>
<td>She sped as Petals of a Rose</td>
<td>Offended by the Wind—</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>c.</td>
<td>1865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1154</td>
<td>A full fed Rose on meals of Tint</td>
<td>A Dinner for a Bee</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>c.</td>
<td>1870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1339</td>
<td>A Bee his burnished Carriage</td>
<td>Drove boldly to a Rose—... / The Rose received his visit / With frank tranquility</td>
<td>2, 5-6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>c.</td>
<td>1875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1434**</td>
<td>Go not too near a House of Rose—</td>
<td>The depredation of a Breeze / Or inundation of a Dew / Alarms its walls away—</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>c.</td>
<td>1878</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This collection illustrates many things about Dickinson's Rose poems: Dickinson wrote poems about roses for a quarter of a century; the Rose poems vary in length from four lines to twenty-seven. This chart also reveals roses being used in a variety of ways. There are the poems that end emphatically with roses—19, 34, 1730, and maybe 35 and 110. There are the poems about roses and bees: a bee has a sexual encounter with the rose in 438 and 1339; a bee eats a rose in 1154. A rose is a maid in 17 and 138, while roses are the speaker's "Crimson Scouts" in 1582, and a House in 1434. Roses die in 32, 35, 339, 675, and 1154 (which constitutes a new way to read Dickinson's Death theme). The speaker possesses roses in 138 and 1582—in a metaphorical way each time: a maid and a scout—while the speaker is a rose in 19. In all of these, it is fair to claim that the rose functions as more than a decoration. A poem may or may not be about roses, but the rose performs significant and variable functions from euphemism to anthropomorphism to the pathetic fallacy.

Collectively, these poems are now linked together in my chart like the pressed flowers on a page of Dickinson's herbarium. I have laid them out and pinned them like specimens. The herbarium itself recommends this method for constructing an anthology. First, one finds the specimens in a larger environment, and then one brings them together in one location and labels them for later reference (though for the sake of space, I haven't included the whole text of each poem). What's important is remembering and maintaining the awareness that these are just a sample of what actually exists in a broader environment and that these have been removed from their appropriate contexts and assembled for a specific purpose.

Even taking one poem at a time, poem 19 for example, it is clear that Dickinson has a thorough knowledge of plants and that plants function in unusual ways in her poems.

A sepal, petal, and a thorn
Upon a common summer's morn—
A flask of Dew—A Bee or two—
A Breeze—a caper in the trees—
And I'm a Rose!

A "sepal" is one of the leaves of the green part at the base of a flower’s petals (the calyx). Dickinson describes one of her favorite flowers piece by piece. "A sepal, petal, and a thorn" could describe other flowers from the rose family, such as the raspberry in bloom. "A caper in the trees" could refer either to another species of brambly plant or a frolicsome dance, probably both. The list-like quality of this poem with its lists of noun phrases gives it the feeling that something is being assembled in front of the reader's eyes. Then, of course, in the last line, the reader finds out what is being assembled: "And I'm a Rose!" The "And" acts like the line at the bottom of a sum, signifying that the process of growth has ended. Whether readers should understand the speaker of this poem as an actual rose or a human who imagines she is a rose is uncertain. Certainly, there are multiple figurative readings, one of which understands the last line as a climax in a sexual encounter. But what about the possibility that this poem is spoken by an actual rose? Perhaps it is a poem about plant reproduction; Dickinson often casts bees and flowers as lovers. What might it mean to have a plant as the speaker of a poem? Not necessarily even an anthropomorphized plant but a plant as a plant?

Turning to Dickinson's herbarium in pursuit of roses complicates this collection of rose poems. Dickinson includes five members from the genus *Rosa* in her herbarium (see Table 2). The genus *Rosa* is one of many in the larger "rose family" *Rocaseae*; Dickinson includes twenty-six members of this family including the five members of the *Rosa* genus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page #</th>
<th>Dickinson's Notation</th>
<th>Modern Classification</th>
<th>Position on Page</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Rosa, parviflora</td>
<td><em>Rosa Carolina</em></td>
<td>Bottom right</td>
<td>Pasture Rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Rosa, muscosa</td>
<td><em>Rosa centrifolia</em> var. muscosa</td>
<td>Top right</td>
<td>Moss Rose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Rosa, rubiginosa</td>
<td><em>Rosa eleganteria</em></td>
<td>Bottom right</td>
<td>Sweet Briar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All of Dickinson's roses have specific things in common: they all look like roses; they all still have their petals and stamens; they are all cuttings from the stem (no roots); they all have jagged-edged, eye-shaped leaves; they all have thorns; none of them are the main focus of the page they are on. They also have differences: for example, the Moss Rose has wispy-looking thorns; and the Pasture Rose, Sweet Briar, and Austrian Brier have fewer petals and more leaves. They don't all happen to have the same name either ("rose") but Dickinson correctly identifies them all as members of the Rose genus. In a way, they begin to break down the linguistic signifier "rose" since they are all roses and all different, but only one of them is probably the one evoked by the sign "r-o-s-e" in a poem. Another way of seeing this could be that they add depth to the possibilities evoked by "rose" in any given Dickinson poem. Finally, these five roses are both dead and undead, preserved for generations of observers—rather like Dickinson's poems.

Perhaps most significant is the blank that follows "Rosa" on page 55. Indeed, this is the most rose-looking rose (at least by modern standards), but it's hard not to read it more poetically—the blank becoming one of Dickinson's characteristic dashes. Zooming out and focusing on this page in particular also begins to suggest Dickinson's aesthetic design and the possible play she creates between signifier and signified. Rose is grouped on the same page as queen-of-the-meadow, two common periwinkles, catnip, groundnut, black mustard, rose-of-Sharon (she identifies it as mallow), and, right in the center of the page, a handful of common smoketree. It's a rather odd page, primarily since the wispy smoketree is the central focus. There is a suggestive parallelism between queen-of-the-meadow (which is unlabeled) at top center and rose-of-Sharon at bottom center; these both command attention because of their mirrored effect and because they are the largest and most ornate flowers on the page. The rose is almost an aside on the lower middle right, below two common periwinkles (one above the other, one unlabeled). This page displays an element of play between the flowers' names. Who is the queen of the meadow? The rose? The rose of Sharon? Is the rose of Sharon a real rose?
Conclusion

In general, the herbarium provokes many productive questions for readers of Dickinson, especially for readers wanting to be attentive to her use of plants. It also challenges instructors and students to focus on anthology practices that are occurring every time Dickinson's poems are collected. It draws readers' attention to Dickinson's own material practices, which occasionally incorporate the use of flowers as materials. It even, as I have attempted to demonstrate, focuses conspicuous attention on flowers and plants in Dickinson's poems. These are important benefits from a side-by-side reading of the herbarium and the poems if only to make students of Dickinson more aware of the implications of curatorial practices that are always happening when they read an anthology and in a literature course.

But finally, the way that the herbarium re-contextualizes Dickinson's textual production can contribute to an ecocritical politics of reading too. It doesn't contribute to ecocritical politics only by focusing readers' attention on plants. The herbarium helps readers understand poetry as an embedded material—something that can be traced through words and materials to a specific environment, literally an environment and not a context only. It draws attention to paper as plant material and even to plants as writing surfaces or things that can be made to signify. It forces readers to become more aware of their practices of collection and consumption, here in the case of poems. In this sense, reading becomes fully ecological, not just an act that has no net effect on the reader's own environment.
Works Cited


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