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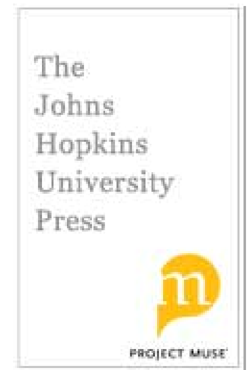

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DICKINSON AND THE POLITICS OF PLANT SENSIBILITY

BY MARY KUHN

Even at the end of her life, Emily Dickinson never withdrew from her flowers. Throughout her isolation at her parents' house on Main Street in Amherst, Dickinson continued to garden, arrange bouquets, and send cuttings to distant friends. As a student she had scouted for new flowers to press into her bound herbarium, and in winter, to keep plants warm, she brought them into the conservatory built against the southeastern wall of the house. The structure allowed her to cultivate tropical plants that could not otherwise survive the New England climate. Dickinson knew firsthand how fickle plants could be, and how fragile, and she had skill in growing plants that were not native to the area or suited to the climate. Yet readings of her botanical poems, even when critics acknowledge her gardening, often overlook the importance of the circulation of plants across the nineteenth century that made foreign flora accessible to American home gardeners.

Perhaps more than any other, Dickinson's literary career benefits from a revised critical approach to the culture of plants, and from an understanding of how sentiment and science overlapped in rendering plants intimately strange to nineteenth-century gardeners. As conventional sentimental tokens, flowers conveyed emotional significance. Their cultivation served as a popular metaphor for education and socialization. As commodities and specimens, meanwhile, plants were valued within the economic or scientific systems in which they circulated. This overlap of meanings often brought into focus another: the lively materiality of plants, which was unpredictable, and which could challenge human efforts to understand or control them. As nineteenth-century naturalists moved plants around the globe and attempted to cultivate them in new climates, plants sometimes failed to thrive in new environments or took root in unexpected ways, and their existence challenged the values that humans assigned to them.

Across her poems and her letters Dickinson dwells on how the creative energy of the botanical realm might escape, challenge, and in some ways reorganize human-centric designs. In this sense, she departs from dominant theories of natural philosophy that elevated

human consciousness above other forms of life, aligning herself instead with an emergent scientific discourse about plant feeling. Whereas the many theories of life in the nineteenth century—like the great chain of being or argument from design—tended to see the world as an orderly and stable hierarchy with humans at the top, Dickinson finds in the plant realm another possibility: life whose very nature is collaborative, decentralized, and communicative with other environmental agents in ways that human actors cannot anticipate or control.

Such theories about the organization of plant matter inevitably have political and literary consequences.[1] If plants are vital, sensible, and mobile, they cease to simply reflect back the human values projected upon them. Their autonomy is both difficult to imagine and politically charged, for it creates an organically organized other to the human that encourages an environmentally engaged sensibility. Dickinson is deeply interested in plant material for how its creative forces might instruct human life, not only for the moral cultivation of the individual, but also for the organization of society. The riot of life Dickinson depicts in the garden is therefore not only about allegory, subjectivity, or romantic aesthetics. Rather, because botanical vitality was recognized as being distinctive from human biology while at the same time unnervingly familiar, plants modeled alternative networks of social relations.

Scholars who study Dickinson's scientific language have struggled to frame her sentimental depictions of plants in relation to botany, often dismissing in consequence the rigor of her botanical knowledge.[2] Celebrating Dickinson's empiricism, Paul Giles has even suggested that "science for Dickinson represented not simply a positive field of learning but a challenge to every kind of sentimental domestic piety."[3] Rescuing Dickinson from such piety in this manner precludes recognizing the potency of sentimentalism in Dickinson's work, as Marianne Noble, Rachel Stein, and others attest.[4] More importantly, to assume that science and sentimentality were mutually exclusive is to read against Dickinson's poems and the history of plant practices in the nineteenth century.

In what follows I focus on two often overlooked dimensions of Dickinson's engagement with plants—their circulation and their liveliness. As a passionate gardener, Dickinson had occasion to see how the global traffic in plants transformed local environments, and to study the ways plants moved on their own. The first part of the essay takes up this issue of plant mobility, considering the ways that Dickinson's poetry engages with the circulation of plant matter during her lifetime. In the second part, I show how concepts of plant irritability, sentience,

and intelligence were more central to nineteenth-century botany than we usually recognize. A number of Dickinson's poems explore the possibility of an active, feeling natural world. Taken together, these sections address the ways in which Dickinson relocates historical agency—both human and natural—by attending to the materiality of plant life.

I. PLANT MOBILITY

Home gardening in mid-nineteenth-century Amherst was far from a domestic enterprise.[5] With the influx of plants from abroad, nineteenth-century botanists and home gardeners were increasingly aware that the data they could empirically collect about their plants might be influenced by forces beyond their local purview. Despite this context, the relationship between Dickinson's botanical language and horticulture as a transcultural, geopolitical enterprise has received little attention. This is partly because of a broader lack of attention to women gardeners who understood their activities in the context of ecologically diverse networks of plant circulation, and partly because of a tendency to assume that plants were passive matter in nineteenth-century America.

Yet Dickinson's own poems encourage us to consider plant and human behavior on a global scale. Rejecting the notion that the natural world could serve as a stable ground for reifying social order, Dickinson's flowers, birds, and even her poles move. Tulips that grow at home are transplants from Asia, flowers wander, and trees do not stand still, as "When oldest Cedars swerve – / And Oaks untwist their fists –".[6] In some poems, vast intervals compress into tight stanzas. The distance between Western Massachusetts and the Kashmir region of the Indian subcontinent—well over six thousand miles—is one that few in Dickinson's lifetime would travel. The poet, however, traversed these miles within the poetic line. The poem "If I could bribe them by a Rose" begins,

> If I could bribe them by a Rose
> I'd bring them every flower that grows
> From Amherst to Cashmere!
> I would not stop for night, or storm -
> Or frost, or death, or anyone -
> My business were so dear!
>
> (*P*, F176 A)

Dickinson's poetry often spans such distances, bringing places as diverse as Amherst and Cashmere, or New England and Santo Domingo, into

the same imaginative sphere. The generative energy of this dimension of her writing has led to a turn in criticism that has unmoored Dickinson from the fixed radius around Amherst and even the United States. Dickinson's ability to "telescope" place, as Christine Gerhardt puts it, is often particularly notable in the floral language she evokes over the course of her poetic career, because Dickinson was keenly aware that flowers simultaneously comprised the local garden and circumnavigated the globe.[7] This motion resists the explanatory power of conceptual categories like the local or national, and Dickinson's political engagement makes fuller sense when we consider how plants function within an international framework. Dickinson's poems can suggest how middle-class horticultural enterprises were facilitated by colonial botanical pursuits, and how the projects of the home gardener were tied to imperial designs.

Curiously, however, the history of eighteenth and nineteenth-century bioprospecting has been largely sequestered from discussions of domestic gardens.[8] On the one hand, so narratives usually go, male scientists and politicians from virtually every eighteenth-century empire pursued plant collection, propagation, and circulation on a grand geographical scale for nationalist and commercial ends.[9] Kew Gardens perhaps best exemplifies this dimension of collecting; as a center for the acquisition of new species, Kew organized and displayed the plant-growing strategies of the British colonies, and sought to legitimate political projects through what Jill Casid has called "a new ideology of empire as cultivation rather than conquest."[10] American Manifest Destiny likewise used the garden—and the garden imaginary—to justify imperial expansion.[11]

On the other hand, many histories of women gardeners in both England and America describe the garden gate as, to quote Judith Page and Elise Smith, "the boundary between the domesticated, feminized zone and the world beyond."[12] Studies of women and botany emphasize the activities of the domestic gardener as part of a private sphere, even while acknowledging the growing presence of botanical education in schools and other public institutions. While there are multiple studies of the role of botany and horticulture in shaping gender constructions, few sustain a focus on geopolitical concerns.[13] Yet Dickinson's poetry suggests a strong connection between home garden practices and environmental politics on a larger scale.

Seed and plant catalogs facilitated this connection by offering a tangible sense that species on offer circulated around the globe. Nurseries on both sides of the Atlantic advertised novel plant variety

for the home garden, and frequently identified in their catalogs the source of the new variety. At the Dickinson homestead, as Judith Farr has determined, the nursery catalogs included those by L. W. Goodell and B. K. Bliss.[14] Bliss's 1870 spring catalogue assigns each variety a "Native Country," and the list includes "France," "Mexico," "California," "East Indies," "Russia," "Chili" and "N. S. Wales," among many others.[15] More widely, such catalogs often identified origins not only in terms of nations but also continents, riverbanks, or mountain ranges. The 1862 *Barr and Sugden Guide to the Flower Garden, &c.,* for instance, names as origins not only "N. America," "Canada," "SW Australia," "Africa," "West Indies," "E. Indies," "France," "China," and "Germany," but also "Himalaya," "The Levent," "Arabia," "Straights of Magellan," "Swan River," and the "Caucauses."[16]

In addition to seed and plant catalogs, news of regular international plant circulation was available to readers of horticultural periodicals. The proceedings of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society were regularly published in *The New England Farmer* and elsewhere, containing information on the society's new acquisitions from abroad, such as "samples of the grape vines, cherries and other fruits of the Crimea,—seeds of such forest trees as were considered valuable for economical purposes."[17] The regular requests for new seeds—particularly those perceived as potentially economically valuable—fill the annals of horticultural institutions. Indeed, the craze for international seeds frustrated those nurserymen like Joseph Breck who had to keep pace with changing tastes. In *The Flower Garden; or Breck's Book of Flowers,* which Dickinson and her sister likely read, Breck speaks to the capriciousness associated with the availability of new imports: "We remember when Cape plants were the rage; . . . But in a few years these were thrown aside, and New Holland beauties supplanted them; to be succeeded by the flaunting, or shy and delicate, natives of South America."[18] Nursery culture by midcentury was tied into global networks of bioprospecting, and customers came to expect the annual arrival of new varieties from abroad.

Dickinson engages with the concept of bioprospecting as both a personal and general phenomenon. In "I robbed the Woods" the speaker expresses mild approbation at her own plant collection in the woods: "I grasped - I bore away -" has a confessional tone, but the use of the first-person pronoun suggests a limited scale (*P*, F57 A). The poem may even have been a critique of her brother's habit of taking specimen trees out of the nearby woods to plant on his own property.[19] In a second variation of the poem, the "I" is replaced by "Who." This

shift transforms the implications for the plant collection, making it far more reaching. "Who robbed the Woods -" might allegorize a larger exploitative operation:

> Who robbed the Woods -
> The trusting Woods?
> The unsuspecting Trees
> Brought out their Burs and Mosses -
> His fantasy to please -
> He scanned their trinkets - curious -
> He grasped - he bore away -
> What will the solemn Hemlock -
> What will the Fir tree - say?
>
> (*P*, F57 B)

Here the natural world is translated into a commodity: burs and mosses become "trinkets" to be carried off by an anonymous exploitative agent. The relationship between this version of the poem and the version engaging the personal pronoun suggests Dickinson's willingness to consider how the local, personalized collections of botanical specimens might fit within a larger historical paradigm.

"The Robin's my Criterion for Tune" also acknowledges environmental change in the local landscape. The poem is most often read as an exploration of a distinctive New England context, but it can also be read "slant" (see *P*, F1263 A) as ironizing the concept of biotic regionalism in an age of plant nurseries and imperial gardens:

> The Robin's my Criterion for Tune -
> Because I grow - where Robins do -
> But, were I Cuckoo born -
> I'd swear by him -
> The ode familiar - rules the Noon -
> The Buttercup's, my whim for Bloom -
> Because, we're Orchard sprung -
> But, were I Britain born,
> I'd Daisies spurn -
>
> None but the Nut - October fit -
> Because - through dropping it,
> The Seasons flit - I'm taught -
> Without the Snow's Tableau
> Winter, were lie - to me -
> Because I see - New Englandly -
> The Queen, discerns like me -
> Provincially -
>
> (*P*, F256 A)

The speaker of the poem associates with the robin, buttercup, and daisy because they share a habitat. As Gerhardt argues, "the poem suggests that the speaker is an equal member of the region's biotic community, and that New England is defined by interlocking cultural and natural systems."[20] Seeing "New Englandly" is causally related to "grow[ing]" there, a clear articulation of place and of regional difference. And as Gerhardt notes, contemporaneous discourses of plant geography and birding helped to establish a sense of New England as a distinct place.

But when the poem extends this sense of provinciality to the queen of England in its final lines, we might ask if seeing provincially means something more in this context. To be sure, the poem strongly links perception to place, suggesting that the speaker and the queen share a regional mode of perception based on the distinctiveness of the local biota. At the same time, however, the queen's metropolitan seat of power begs us to reconsider what provincial means. In the context of the British Empire, to discern provincially becomes a matter of understanding how the movement of objects and knowledge might link disparate regions.

Read this way, we might see this poem as wryly acknowledging the ways in which local ecological change was the product of environmental transformations on a global scale. By connecting the New England "I" to the British Queen, the speaker establishes parity between her own environmental regard and that of the symbolic head of an empire that had already claimed provinces across six continents. The biota of England in the mid-nineteenth century had been significantly augmented by colonial projects, and as Alan Bewell and others have noted, by the early nineteenth century, colonial natures—in the form of plants, minerals, birds—were "flooding" into Europe from around the globe on an unprecedented scale.[21] Natural history and economic botany were linked practices that facilitated this exchange of natural materials. New England was the recipient of colonial plants, technology, and cultivation practices, as the popularization of gardening among the middle class created a market for novel plants from abroad.

The transport that flowers could inspire thus might be perceived to be as much geographical as sublime. In "Some Rainbow – coming from the Fair!", the arrival of spring in the local arena is heralded as an international affair. The changing seasons invoke a sense of geographical compression from the start of the poem to its end:

Some Rainbow - coming from the Fair!
Some Vision of the World Cashmere -
I confidently see!
Or else a Peacock's purple Train
Feather by feather - on the plain
Fritters itself away!

The dreamy Butterflies bestir!
Lethargic pools resume the whirr
Of last year's sundered tune!
From some old Fortress on the sun
Baronial Bees - march - one by one -
In murmuring platoon!

The Robins stand as thick today
As flakes of snow stood yesterday -
On fence - and Roof - and Twig!
The Orchis binds her feather on
For her old lover - Dons the Sun!
Revisiting the Bog!

Without Commander! Countless! Still!
The Regiments of Wood and Hill
In bright detachment stand!
Behold, Whose multitudes are these?
The children of whose turbaned seas -
Or what Circassian Land?

(*P*, F162 B)

The poem forges a link between local natural phenomenon and military engagement elsewhere. Farr argues that the "near military formation" of the flowers "describes their aesthetic potency," and that the poem's international allusions are ultimately there to stress the "power of beauty."[22] In this reading, the focus is on aesthetic interpretation: the arrival of spring as a timeless, powerful force. But the poem's geographical references are, in a way, constitutive of its aesthetic intensity.[23]

The poem begins with clarity of vision about the landscape that slowly gives way to uncertainty. The declaration that "I confidently see!" in the first stanza concedes to questions of origins in the last. Moving from Cashmere to Circassia over the course of four stanzas to characterize spring, the poem conflates beauty not with truth, as a Keatsian romantic might, but with conflict. The allusion to Circassian Land invokes contested territory during the ongoing Russian-Circassian War in the nineteenth century. The protracted conflict, followed in

American periodicals, ended in 1864 with the Ottoman Empire offering refuge to Circassians forced to emigrate by the Russian victors.

As Cristanne Miller has pointed out, the history of the Circassians poses all kinds of access points for Dickinson to weigh in on national and international politics, as well as a window into Dickinson's engagement with U. S. orientalism. Like Santo Domingo, Circassia could function prismatically as a lens for U. S. politics. "The image of Circassians as fiercely committed to national independence prevailed," Miller notes; "To be the child of a 'Circassian Land' was to belong to a besieged Muslim people celebrated as heroes, mythologized as exceedingly beautiful, and associated with slavery in Turkish harems."[24] One could easily imagine Circassia as a means by which Dickinson thought through antebellum racial politics. Yet if reading the poem for exclusively aesthetic purposes renders it relatively inert, reading it for solely geopolitical ends can obscure just as much once the materiality of the flowers—and the spring they conjure—ceases to perform as anything more than metaphor. Instead we might look at the way the poem connects plant life that annually "resume[s]" in place and the transport that local plants might inspire.

In this sense the poem performs—like the conservatory or the seed catalogue—an act of geographical compression that troubles the relationship of foreground and background and registers the potentially disorienting effect of international plant circulation. By gesturing to a foreign historical context of local flowers, Dickinson sustains a relationship among local aesthetics, local materialism, and contestation over faraway land. The multiple questions in the poem's final stanza render the local environment legible not as a fixed entity, but as a confluence of migratory forces. The flowers growing locally are a reminder to the speaker that the surrounding environment is socially and politically constructed, not merely the backdrop against which political events are worked out. Depicting an active landscape defies the position of writers and thinkers from Thomas Jefferson and J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur onward who sought cultural specificity in the particular biotic qualities of a regional or national geographic range.[25]

It also resists the neat rhetoric of cultivation and human control. The Commander-less nature of the flowers in "Some Rainbow" might be their most provocative element, for beyond tying the floral to the political, the language of absent leadership challenges a simple narrative of human agency. Charles Darwin's watershed release of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 helped popularize the concept of autonomous plant mobility, and while the impact of Darwin's text on Dickinson's social

milieu has received a fair amount of critical attention, the impact of his theories of geographical mobility deserves a closer look.[26] Darwin believed that plants opportunistically dispersed their seeds. While mammals have not been able to migrate with as great a range, he notes, "some plants, from their varied means of dispersal, have migrated across the vast and broken interspace."[27] Darwin himself experimented with submerging seeds in water and testing their potential to germinate after a fixed amount of time, noting that dried seeds might travel over 900 miles in seawater and then sprout. Alternatively, they might travel across large distances in driftwood, bird carcasses, fish, or the beaks and feet of living birds, or get buried in icebergs. Darwin's position on botanical migration in *Origin* is by and large focused on forces outside human control that drive evolution and change. Henry David Thoreau takes up a similar approach in "The Succession of Forest Trees," concluding that pine and oak forests often replace one another when a seed "is transported from where it grows to where it is planted . . . chiefly by the agency of the wind, water, and animals."[28] Such theorizing about environmental agency dealt a blow, as Gillian Beer notes, to anthropocentric narratives of the world.[29]

A number of Dickinson's poems emphasize botanical mobility or the mobility of pollinators like bees and butterflies. In presenting the motion of natural phenomena, Dickinson provides an alternative narrative to the kinds of botanical circulation fostered in imperial contexts. In "The Wind did'nt come from the Orchard - today -", the wind, "a transitive fellow," carries a burr to the doorstep, leaving the occupants inside to wonder how far the seed has traveled (*P*, F494 B). In "As if some little Artic flower," the flower moves "down the Latitudes" in the first part of the poem:

> As if some little Arctic flower
> Opon the polar hem -
> Went wandering down the Latitudes
> Until it puzzled came
> To continents of summer -
> To firmaments of sun -
> To strange, bright crowds of flowers -
> And birds, of foreign tongue!
>
> (*P*, F177 A)

The flower's displacement here is the central subject of the poem, though its movement emphasizes its own agency in the process: its procession down the latitudes by wandering makes it fully in charge

Figure 1. Flower from "Desert of the Dead Sea" from Dickinson's botantical collections. By permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University, MS Am 1118.13.

of its own motion. As Timothy Mitchell has noted in another context, the more one understands the role of non-human forces, the more human agency appears less as a calculating intelligence directing social outcomes and more as the product of a series of alliances in which the human element is never wholly in control."[30] While Mitchell's criticism emerges out of a contemporary post-humanist turn, the scientific idea of biological mobility was in popular circulation since at least the release of *On the Origin of Species* and appears to be at play in Dickinson's poetry.

Dickinson's access to plants also included those acquired through noncommercial routes, such as those that had crossed thousands of miles enclosed in the letters of overseas friends and correspondents. Most notably, Dickinson received a number of plant specimens from Southern Europe, the Middle East, and Asia (Figure 1).

Amherst College prepared many graduates for missionary life, and it is probable that these cuttings came from one or several of her friends who married Protestant missionaries and subsequently traveled abroad. One likely candidate is Abby Wood Bliss, who moved to Syria with Daniel Bliss shortly after their marriage in 1855. Dickinson's collection of labeled plants from foreign climes includes pressings from India, Germany, Italy, Palestine, Greece, and Lebanon. Thus, flowers for Dickinson might just as readily conjure international correspondence with a dear friend as the garden corners and greenhouses she knew so well.[31] Such friendship networks, as Jim Endersby has noted, comprised an important dimension of the conduct of natural history.[32] We know that epistolary correspondence shaped ideas about what social relations might mean in a world of increasing geographical mobility, but far less attention has been paid to the fact that these letters could, and often did, contain cuttings from thousands of miles away.[33] Whereas letters are usually read foremost for their textual qualities, the inclusion of plant matter asserts the materiality of the landscape from which it is removed.

The epistolary exchange of botanical matter maps these informal networks onto national and religious cartographies.[34] In "Between My Country - and the Others -" Dickinson makes flowers central to the act of communication across a great distance:

> Between My Country - and the Others -
> There is a Sea -
> But Flowers - negotiate between us -
> As Ministry.
>
> (*P*, F829 A)

The gulf created by the first two lines, the separating sea, is navigated—or rather importantly, "negotiate[d]"—by flowers. And notably, despite the emphasis on difference of place, accentuated by the dashes, the poem makes no distinction between political, social, or religious ministry, or between personal correspondence and official communication. The multiple meanings of ministry in the final line speak to Dickinson's acknowledgement of the overlapping registers affixed to floral language. Moreover, given Dickinson's participation in a culture of sending pressed flowers in letters to friends, the poem links the sentimental circulation of flowers abroad to these other kinds of ministration.

To see that Dickinson's nature is dynamic in geopolitically significant ways is to dislodge the regionalism often associated with domestic

flora. Plant circulation eroded singularity of place. The popularization of conservatories, like the one attached to Dickinson's house, meant that plants from warmer climates could survive bitter New England winters. As Dickinson writes in an 1856 letter, "My flowers are near and foreign, and I have but to cross the floor to stand in the Spice Isles."[35] Such compression, and the ability to creating a synecdoche of the world's greenery at home, revises the idea of nature in place. It makes the designations of near and far harder to distinguish, and in doing so, establishes correspondence between local and international events. It also presents a wide-angle lens on agency. We may be familiar with nature as an omnipotent and aleatory force in Dickinson's poems—the sudden storm, volcanic eruption, or "imperial Thunderbolt" (*P*, F 477 B)—but plants are similarly surprising for their unique ontology and ability to act in autonomous, organized, and collaborative ways.

II. PLANT SENSIBILITY

If Dickinson's understanding of plant life challenges us to consider plant and human behavior on a global scale, her poems also encourage us to think expansively about a sensate environment. That is, Dickinson's interest in plants as organized and autonomous entities went beyond their ability to move and extended to the more radical possibility of their capacity to feel. To the extent that Dickinson anthropomorphized flora, as in flowers that "put their nightgowns on," she also wrote poems that acknowledged what Theresa Kelley calls plants' "material strangeness" (*P*, F127 A).[36] Nineteenth-century students—as well as botanists and writers—had to contend with plants as substantive objects as well as symbols.[37] And this in turn presented interpretive challenges for young botanists because the idea of plants as collectible objects dovetailed with the idea that plants could be vital subjects.

Floral vitality may seem a surprising interest for someone whose passion for plants is best archived in the herbarium of dried flowers she created as a student at Amherst Academy. The botanical instruction Dickinson received at an early age presented the natural world in a manner befitting the linked imperatives of domestic and colonial order. Her exquisite herbarium, for instance, reflects the taxonomic system used to control and regulate an increasingly networked array of natures across the globe.[38] Identifying plants according to a taxonomic system promised to give students authority over a passive vegetable kingdom, and Dickinson's herbarium reveals the control she exerted in arranging pressed specimens from various locales. She included

not only those flowers found in the wild, like marsh bellflower and frostweed, but those growing in the garden, like privet, a common border shrub, and Persian lilac.[39] In brief, the herbarium orients our thinking toward plants as the recipients of human values.

As a number of scholars have noted, students of botany in mid-nineteenth-century America were also immersed in figurative associations between flowers and human society that likewise made plants symbols of human thought and feeling. Carl Linnaeus's sexual basis for his classification system supported comparisons between courtship and floral pollination.[40] James Guthrie has argued that many of Dickinson's poems about bees and other floral pollinators can be read in this vein.[41] The language of flowers was another important, often related, figurative context. Elizabeth Petrino and Judith Farr have thoroughly illustrated how Dickinson often drew on this symbolic register, in which each flower species represents a specific human emotion or virtue.[42] Yet for all that Dickinson engaged with these traditions, her interest in plant life at times challenged the anthropocentric flattening inherent in both scientific and sentimental taxonomies.

By Dickinson's lifetime, plant sentience was an established, if hotly debated, current of thought within natural history. A brief discussion of this tradition is helpful for recovering structures of meaning that informed Dickinson's own engagement with plant life. By the end of the eighteenth century, naturalists hypothesized that plants could feel in ways analogous to human feeling. Whereas Linnaeus distinguished plants from animals in *Philosophia Botanica* on the very basis that plants had "growth and life" but no "feeling," by the time American naturalist William Bartram published his *Travels* in 1791, his observations led him to conclude that "vegetable beings are endued with some sensible faculties or attributes, similar to those that dignify animal nature."[43] Calling *Dionea muscipula* (Venus flytrap) "sportive" and noting the "artifice" with which they "intrap incautious deluded insects," Bartram perceived plants as like humans in certain respects, and indeed compares climbing vines to "the fingers of a human hand."[44] As Michael Gaudio notes, such a doctrine of plant feeling made sense in an Enlightenment context in which the natural and the social "were understood to operate according to the same principles."[45]

By the early decades of the nineteenth century scientists increasingly strove to detach subjectivity from empirical analysis, positioning the natural and the social further apart. Discussions of plant feeling among nineteenth-century botanists reveal ambivalence about the affinities between plants and humans. Many were willing to concede

plant sentience, but diverged widely on how to understand it. Georges Cuvier clearly limited the likeness between plant and animal, whereas Darwin's research into plant motion led him to conclude that the root of a plant "acts like the brain of one of the lower animals."[46] Augustin de Candolle, who dropped acid onto plant leaves to test their irritability and responsiveness, did not grant plants a close relationship to humans, but declared that "Plants live, not merely in the common sense of the word, which includes activity of every kind, but in that stricter sense, by which a higher and self-dependent activity is expressed."[47] And the Harvard botanist Asa Gray, whose work Dickinson knew, vacillated over several decades, but edged toward a theory of plant intelligence, titling his 1872 children's botany textbook *How Plants Behave: How They Move, Climb, Employ Insects to Work for Them, &c.*

As one 1873 review of the book noted, Gray's language

> goes far toward warranting the opinion that plants are sentient creatures. If this be so, what a world of strange revelations awaits some fortunate investigator! He—or the boon may fall to the lot of a woman—will tell us if it be true that plants have pleasures and pains, that they weep when bruised, that they sleep at night, that, like the *Vallisneria spiralis,* all flowers love. . . . We might say that in the very title of his book Prof. Gray concedes the sensibility of plants, and half admits their intelligence.[48]

The reviewer reveals the extent to which this book potentially opens the door to a new paradigm of thought about plant life, one granted authority through scientific investigation. "To behave," so the reviewer crucially continues, "implies a knowledge of propriety; and if plants approach humanity so closely, it would seem absurd to deny their near relationship."[49] In other words, plants may act in ways that are volitional, even decorous, meaning that the scientific observation of plants might call for more than simply recasting preexisting scientific categories. A "near relationship" between plants and humans potentially demands an affinity that is at once physiological, cultural, and aesthetic.

A number of popular journals helped disseminate the idea to a broader audience. An 1863 article in the *Horticulturalist* asks bluntly: "Is the plant stupid?"[50] The author extols plant intelligence: "Who will now undertake to say that a plant is not sensible? If you go into the fields, you will tread upon a multitude of flowers that know better than you do which way the wind blows, what o'clock it is, and what is to be thought about the weather."[51] An 1873 article in *The Youth's Companion* on plant sleep notes that "[t]he deeper we search into the

mysteries of vegetable life, the closer appears its relations to animal existence. Botanists—especially among the French—assert that plants breathe, work, sleep, are sensitive and capable of movement. These points lead to debatable ground."[52] This "debatable ground" is the extent to which commonality exists between plants and animals, and was contested because its implications were so potentially explosive. To follow the debate to its most radical social conclusions—a point before which most writers stopped—might be to concede plant life is intelligently organized in a manner that might entail ethical and epistemological demands on humans.

The fraught nature of the debate over plant sentience in part hinges on the ways in which plants model life itself differently. Competing theories about the nature of life were widespread in the nineteenth century, offering a somewhat chaotic and contradictory range of ideas about where liveliness originates and how it is organized. Benjamin Rush believed in what Monique Allewaert has termed "vitalist materialism": a theory that matter has a capacity for life but requires external stimuli.[53] For Samuel Taylor Coleridge, life occurs when a supernatural force—a kind of spiritual antecedent—animates nature.[54] Thoreau condemns the physiologist "in too much haste to explain [plant] growth according to mechanical laws" and muses that "the mystery of the life of plants is kindred with that of our own lives."[55] He urges a kind of restraint toward the question of life itself, arguing that "[w]e must not presume to probe with our fingers the sanctuary of any life, whether animal or vegetable; if we do we shall discover nothing but surface still, or all fruits will be apples of the Dead Sea, full of dust and ashes."[56]

As discussion of plant vitality broadened, the distance between literary and scientific ideas about plant life narrowed. In 1878 an article in the *Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* makes the point about plant perception more poetically and definitively. Wordsworth's "belief . . . 'that every flower / Enjoys the air it breathes,'" had in fact been validated by "the rapid march of investigation within recent years [that] transformed a poetic thought into a dictum of natural science."[57] Experiments with food, locomotion, and sensitivity had pointed biologists toward the overwhelming conclusion that the essential characteristics of plants and animals could not be easily or confidently distinguished. Part of the confusion stems from the creation of categories, for if differences might be clearly discernable "between the higher animals and plants," still "[a]ny definition of an animal or of a plant, to be either satisfactory or useful to the scientific man or to mankind at large, must include all animals and all plants."[58] Such broad

categories produce strange bedfellows, as Harriet Ritvo has noted with animal classification, and point to the ways in which botanical research in the second half of the nineteenth century did not simply seek to reify Linnaean order, but rather continued to revise the way in which life was conceptualized, organized, and understood.[59]

Beyond her access to a number of prominent periodicals, Dickinson directly encountered theories of plant sentience in a number of ways. The botany that Dickinson learned as a schoolgirl was mainly taxonomic, but even botanical educators who sought to teach students easy means of classifying nature conceded that the line between plants and animals was at least somewhat blurry. Almira Lincoln Phelps, the author of the most popular botanical textbook in nineteenth-century America, acknowledged the "almost imperceptible gradations by which the animal and vegetable kingdoms are blended."[60] Toward the end of *Familiar Lectures on Botany,* a textbook Dickinson used, Phelps furthermore attributed sensation and instinct to plants even as she qualified their "principle of life" relative to that of animals.[61] The geologist Edward Hitchcock, who taught natural sciences at Amherst College and whose book on local flora Dickinson also used, likewise believed the subject to be important enough to raise in his introductory lecture on botany, noting that "the lowest tribe of animals comes nearest to the lowest order of plants. This destroys the idea of a regular chain."[62]

Prompted by her friend and distant cousin William Cowper Dickinson, Dickinson also read X. B. Saintine's popular novel *Picciola: the Prisoner of Fenestralla*, which recounts a prisoner's obsession with the plant growing in his prison courtyard—an obsession that takes the form of compassionate care and empirical analysis of the plant. The prisoner's redemption lies in his studious love of the plant, which he calls his "benefactress," and with which he comes to feel a "mysterious sympathy of nature."[63] In a letter to her cousin thanking him for sending her the book, Dickinson conflates book with plant: "'Tis the first living thing that has beguiled my solitude, & I take strange delight in its society."[64] Dickinson's first person here echoes the perspective of Saintine's protagonist, whose social world for several years is primarily a flower that captivates him with its "sensibility and action."[65]

It is in light of this extensive discourse about plant feeling, as well as Dickinson's passion for gardening, that we might better hear Dickinson's own imaginative engagement with plant life. While both botanical classification and the language of flowers were widely used in poetic figuration across the nineteenth century, a poem like "Bloom - is Result - to meet a Flower" encourages us to consider the natural

world beyond its human analogy. The poem in fact closely tracks the strategies plants use to survive through maturity:

> Bloom - is Result - to meet a Flower
> And casually glance
> Would cause one scarcely to suspect
> The minor Circumstance
>
> Assisting in the Bright Affair
> So intricately done
> Then offered as a Butterfly
> To the Meridian -
>
> To pack the Bud - oppose the Worm -
> Obtain it's right of Dew -
> Adjust the Heat - elude the Wind -
> Escape the prowling Bee -
>
> Great Nature not to disappoint
> Awaiting Her that Day -
> To be a Flower, is profound
> Responsibility -
>
> (*P*, F1038 A)

When approached through conventional associations with sentimental flora, the poem proffers an analogy in which the growth of the flower stands in for the socialization of the human subject. In this vein, the flower's "Responsibility" is proxy for human subjectivity and experience, as Farr suggests: "Just as the world of flowers represents the world of men and women, so certain flowers represent specific qualities or endeavors, functions, or careers."[66]

Yet the subject of the poem encourages us to think of the flower also as a living entity in its own right, one whose difference from the human makes it captivating and whose workings increasingly appeared to scientists as a self-determining power bordering on agency. The poem charts an effort to understand plant life as dynamic. Bloom might be the result that allows us to meet a flower, but the poem is less interested in the result than the process, moving backward from the presentation of the bloom through its journey of coming into flower. To survive, the flower must nearly simultaneously "pack," "oppose," "obtain," "adjust," "elude," and "escape." Rather than a static object, it is an agent in a process, and the poem as a whole draws from nineteenth-century scientific discussions of plants as adaptive—and adept—agents.

To engage the matter of plant liveliness, Dickinson's approach to organic matter combines scientific knowledge with a sentimentalism often considered antithetical to empirical study. For Dickinson, shared sentiment might become a way to connect the human condition to that of birds, flowers, and the natural environment at large. In "The Birds reported from the South -" this rapport becomes increasingly intimate:

> The Birds reported from the South -
> A News express to Me -
> A spicy Charge, My little Posts -
> But I am deaf - Today -
>
> The Flowers - appealed - a timid Throng -
> I reinforced the Door -
> Go blossom to the Bees - I said -
> And trouble Me - no More -
>
> The Summer Grace, for notice strove -
> Remote - Her best Array -
> The Heart - to stimulate the Eye
> Refused too utterly -
>
> At length, a Mourner, like Myself,
> She drew away austere -
> Her frosts to ponder - then it was
> I recollected Her -
>
> She suffered Me, for I had mourned -
> I offered Her no word -
> My Witness - was the Crape I bore -
> Her - Witness - was Her Dead -
>
> Thenceforward - We - together dwelt -
> She - never questioned Me -
> Nor I - Herself -
> Our Contract
> A Wiser Sympathy[.]
>
> (*P*, F780 A)

The poem refuses a firm distinction between the civic and the natural through language that overlays the conflict of the Civil War—the reports from the South, the "News," the "spicy Charge"—with the progression of the seasons.[67] Not wholly distinct from human affairs, nature is also no mere mirror of the speaker's inner mournful state, but "A Mourner, like Myself." Nature is a sensible agent that strives for notice, draws away austerely, and ponders her own frosts. We

could read this as simple anthropomorphism or the pathetic fallacy, connecting the outer world to the speaker's inner turmoil, except for the fact that the poem tracks the discord between the speaker and nature before "I recollected Her –", making nature's emotions autonomous. Furthermore, Dickinson relies on metonymy to destabilize the trope of nature. Nature includes the birds with their spicy charge, the throng of flowers, the frost; rather than a steady entity it is an assemblage of interactive parts moving in time and space.[68]

Yet if nature does not simply reflect the speaker's inner grief, neither does it stand completely apart from that grief. The relationship culminates in the poem's last stanza, where the speaker and the natural world are bound by a "Wiser Sympathy" that forms "Our Contract." This closure by contract makes wordless, essentially private states of grief into something shared. The private nature of affect, as Lauren Berlant notes, can close off the possibility of addressing pain and suffering through political channels.[69] Here, pain is private, but its very intimacy is the basis for contract, and its signs are public: the speaker's "Crape" and nature's "Dead" are both witness to their suffering and visible markers of feeling. The terms of the contract produce an ecological sensibility that makes affect an imperfectly shared trait.

By resisting the metaphorical, this sentimental connection challenges the notion that feeling is essentially a human characteristic. Bodily sensation is critical to aesthetic theories in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the sentimentality epitomized in the United States by writers like Susan Warner and Harriet Beecher Stowe was indebted to the eighteenth-century discourse of sensibility.[70] While the political dimension of this tradition—its role in defining, to quote Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, "the terrain of liberal subjectivity"—is well established, scholarship on the link between feeling and aesthetic subjectivity has focused on an exclusively human politics.[71] Dickinson's writing points toward a different kind of sentimentalism in that the kind of subjectivity that she attributes to plants across her poems and her letters blurs precisely the borders that distinguish between plants and humans. Dickinson's characterization of plants fits in some ways with what Jessica Riskin has called "sentimental empiricism," a kind of emotion-based experimentation, but what makes her approach radically different is that sensory experience—and the kind of political subjectivity it entails—is not delimited to human subjects.[72] The kind of sensory experience that Dickinson attributes to plants and animals smudges to the point of erasure the separation of natural object from perceiving subject.[73]

Dickinson's bridging may seem counterintuitive, for it surely cuts against much of what we know about sensibility and sentimentalism in the nineteenth century. Literary critics have begun to establish ways in which ecological thinking was constitutive of unconventional political subjectivities in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America, but this has largely focused on spaces that are defined against the acculturated and the domesticated, and certainly against the sentimental. The wild places in Thoreau's writing, or the abyss of the swamp in William Bartram's travel narratives, for instance, challenge formulations of selfhood that distinguish personhood through calculating or aesthetic distancing from the terrain. Likewise, Allewaert has described how this distancing was collapsed in writings about tropical ecologies in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America.[74] The domestic garden, in contrast, has often been perceived as a tamed space where, as Ritvo writes, "even as the meaning of the word *garden* diversified . . . gardening remained securely . . . on the domesticated side of the line between wild and tame."[75] In ecocritical terms, domestication has been more readily associated with efforts to control and manage nature, and less likely to mobilize environmental debates. Indeed, the domestic garden has a long history of service as an educational trope for normative social behavior.[76]

Yet for Dickinson the relationship between human socialization and plant life could at times produce more eccentric results. That the speaker shares a sympathetic contract not with other humans, but with nature, revises our thinking about sentimental politics. Dickinson's sensible plants and feeling environment present a natural order that refuses the rigid separation of human, animal, and plant that shaped nineteenth-century conceptions of personhood. Categories reflect values, never more visibly so than when in flux. How the line gets drawn between sentience and sensibility, between raw physiological feeling and discernment, mattered in nineteenth-century America because taste had such political purchase. In William Huntting Howell's words, "understanding sensibility promised to answer the question of what counts as personhood."[77] But what if sensibility did not only "inde[x] . . . humanity" per se?[78] Dickinson's perspective on flora blurs the boundary between human and plant by at times making sentiment a character trait that she shares with the natural world, rather than merely an aesthetic stance towards that world.

In "Flowers - Well - if anybody," the implications of a sensate environment extend to aesthetic judgment. The poem moves from a human experience of feeling to that of butterflies through their shared appreciation of the botanical:

Flowers - Well - if anybody
Can the extasy define -
Half a transport - half a trouble -
With which flowers humble men:
Anybody find the fountain
From which floods so contra flow -
I will give him all the Daisies
Which opon the hillside blow.

Too much pathos in their faces
For a simple breast like mine -
Butterflies from St Domingo
Cruising round the purple line
Have a system of aesthetics -
Far superior to mine.

(*P*, F95 B)

The first stanza reads as a rehearsal of the sublime: the mix of pleasure and pain, the ineffability of the source of such overwhelming sensation, and the dwarfing power of the object to humble men. One could read it as a constitution of the self through aesthetic appreciation of the natural world. In this sense, the flowers incite "extasy" and evoke both "transport" and "trouble" in the perceiving human subject. At the same time, the "extasy" of the flowers makes the nature of the interaction more ambiguous. The flowers quite possibly "humble men" because they demonstrate, rather than inspire, an ecstatic state. The ambiguous syntax emphasizes the ambiguous dynamic, or at least the difficulty of defining the nature of the interaction in language. The playful proposition of "Daisies" for a definition underscores the meaningfulness of this equivocation. If the power of the flowers could be articulated, then the speaker could control their circulation. The hyperbole of offering "all the Daisies" upon the hillside (which carries the attendant and ironic presumption that they are property to be gifted) suggests the unlikeliness of such a causal definition.

The second stanza of the poem continues to challenge the subject/object orientation of a sublimely constituted subjectivity, as well as a hierarchy that runs from humans down to animals and then plants. In the lines, "Too much pathos in their faces / For a simple breast like mine –" the flowers are given "faces," whereas the speaker synecdochically becomes a breast. And here again the poem prevaricates about where the pathos resides: in the eye of the beholder, or in the flowers themselves. Furthermore, the excess here is beyond the speaker's ability to feel, but not the butterfly's. The rest of the poem

continues to trouble the exclusivity of affect to human subjects, and flowers serve as a bridge between the "I" in the poem and the butterflies. The final lines disturb the trajectory of sublime revelation by the observant speaker and attribute the notion of aesthetic evaluation to the butterflies. That it is not simply a transposition of the speaker's own experience is clear from the comparative aspect of the final lines: this system of aesthetics is "Far superior to mine."

To see butterflies as having a system of aesthetics is to strip away the notion that aesthetic judgment is exclusively a human experience. And in acknowledging the sensate dimension of the butterflies' existence, the speaker describes a world in which the nonhuman performs a process of feeling and judging that is usually only consigned to persons. Here the attraction of the butterflies to the beauty of the flowers edges toward animal aesthetics. This sensibility in turn has political consequences, for it suggests that nature "federates" (*P*, F798 A). Historians and literary critics have demonstrated at length how sensibility was a central concept for social transformation in the revolutionary period of the late eighteenth century.[79] At least one of those revolutions seems to be invoked in "Flowers – Well – if anybody": that the butterflies hail from Santo Domingo evokes the specter of the Haitian Revolution. As Ed Folsom and Kenneth Price have argued, San Domingo was a word that by the mid-nineteenth century had "become inscribed in the language in a kind of shorthand" for the Haitian slave revolt and subsequent revolution.[80] In Dickinson's poem, the sensibility that is brought into focus from "St Domingo" does not separate a new social order from the old, but rather casts into chaos the very classificatory foundations of racial and ecological hierarchy. The butterflies' aesthetic ability to discern, presumably, which flowers to select for nectar is deemed "superior" to the speaker's subjectivity constituted through the sublime experience of the flowers. This flipping of the script renders the boundary between human and nature, or figure and ground, indeterminate.

The erasure in "Flowers – Well – if anybody" links the Santo Domingo political revolution to an aesthetic that corresponds with a discerning, sensate environment. And this in itself challenges the correlation of rights with the individual affective citizen-subject. A feeling nature is, aesthetically speaking, potently political, challenging individualism not as a matter of law or even race but from a biological perspective. The sensibility that Dickinson describes in the poem might then augur a different kind of revolution in the way that the relationship between environment and politics is imagined and articulated.

By identifying other kinds of biological life as having characteristics foundational to the way the citizen-subject is recognized, Dickinson both undermines the human claim to distinction and points to affective environmental interaction as a necessity for political agency.[81]

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The Dickinson Museum has recently completed the process of restoring Dickinson's conservatory, the glass structure affixed to the house where she kept indoor plants. One Saturday in May 2016, I joined a group of anthropology summer school students from the University of Massachusetts as they carefully scraped and shifted the dirt at the conservatory site, and then sifted through it searching for fragments of material from the old structure—brick, pottery, glass, and other artifacts. Before restoration work could begin, this archeology was standard procedure for making sure that the new structure would not cover over any significant material. It was hot work in the height of summer, and by the end of the afternoon I was weak-kneed and covered in dirt.

The dig reminds us that Dickinson herself dug in the dirt in tending her plants, and the completion of the conservatory will help visitors consider Dickinson's poems in relation to her gardening. For all that plants were complex symbols, these symbols were tied up in the messy and material act of cultivation, arrangement, and circulation. Situating Dickinson's botanical language within the overlapping discursive and material practices that shaped mid-nineteenth-century plant culture reveals her sensitivity to plants as political matter.

More generally, however, Dickinson's poems help us escape from categorical declarations about the environment. While the idea of continental biotic distinctiveness served the ideology of American exceptionalism, Dickinson encountered a landscape changed not only by local industry, but by the burgeoning marketplace in seeds and plants from around the globe. The powerful global market in plants transformed the practice of cultivation—introducing new plants and new technologies. If nineteenth-century home gardening has thus far largely been perceived as a fairly parochial activity, Dickinson's botanical poems demonstrate our need to think anew about what it means, botanically, to be at home.

So too do the actions of plants themselves, whether propagating of their own accord or failing to thrive. The multispecies turn in anthropology and the non-human turn in literary criticism have taken up

the political and ethical question of how we incorporate other living entities into our world-making, although with few exceptions—most recently Anna Tsing and Eduardo Kohn—they have largely focused on animals.[82] Dickinson's fascination with plants reminds us that non-animal life constituted an important and wonderfully slippery category of scientific thought in the nineteenth century.

The border-crossing, mobility, and ephemerality of the flowers that inspire Dickinson challenge boundaries between human and nonhuman, political and apolitical. In this era of imminent ecological crisis, we perhaps have never had a more pressing need to seriously engage this provocation of Dickinson's verse.

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NOTES

[1] See Laura Dassow Walls, *Seeing New Worlds: Henry David Thoreau and Nineteenth-Century Natural Science* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1995).

[2] See Judith Farr, *The Gardens of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2005); Marta McDowell, *Emily Dickinson's Gardens* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004); Paul Giles, "'The Earth reversed her Hemispheres': Dickinson's Global Antipodality," in *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 20.1 (2011): 1–21; and Robin Peel, *Emily Dickinson and the Hill of Science* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 2010).

[3] Giles, 7.

[4] See Marianne Noble, *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000); and Rachel Stein, *Shifting the Ground: American Women Writers' Revisions of Nature, Gender, and Race* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1997).

[5] For discussions of Emily Dickinson in a global perspective, see Christine Gerhardt, *A Place for Humility: Whitman, Dickinson, and the Natural World* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 2014); Cristanne Miller, *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2012); and Giles.

[6] Dickinson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson, Variorum Edition*, ed. R. W. Franklin (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1998), F882 A. Hereafter abbreviated *P* and cited parenthetically by editor, poem number, and poem variant.

[7] Gerhardt, "'Often seen—but seldom felt': Emily Dickinson's Reluctant Ecology of Place," *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 15.1 (2006): 73. Hiroko Uno has recently speculated that Commodore Matthew Perry's expedition to Japan in 1853–54 made flowers of Japanese origin accessible to Dickinson's circle. See Uno, "Emily Dickinson and Japanese Flowers: Her Herbarium and Perry's Expedition to Japan," *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 26.1 (2017): 51–79.

[8] A number of excellent books on botany, natural history, and empire have been published in recent years, but the focus tends to be concentrated on scientific, commercial, and political narratives. See Christopher Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions: Natural History, West Indian Slavery, and the Routes of American Literature* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2012); Jim Endersby, *Imperial Nature: Joseph Hooker and the Practices of Victorian Science* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2008); Philip Pauly, *Fruits and Plains: The Horticultural Transformation of America* (Cambridge: Harvard

Univ. Press, 2007); Londa Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2004); and Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, British Imperialism, and the Improvement of the World* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2000). Dierdre Lynch's essay is a notable exception for its focus on imperial technology and domestic plots (see "'Young Ladies are Delicate Plants': Jane Austen and Greenhouse Romanticism," *ELH* 77.3 [2010]: 689–729]. Lynch argues that British "greenhouse romanticism"—in which the pluralities of colonial nature are represented in the home greenhouse—shapes novelistic realism.

[9] See Walls, *The Passage to Cosmos: Alexander von Humboldt and the Shaping of America* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2009); and Endersby.

[10] Jill Casid, "Inhuming Empire: Islands as Colonial Nurseries and Graves," in *The Global Eighteenth Century*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2003), 280.

[11] See Beverly Seaton, *The Language of Flowers: A History* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1995).

[12] Judith W. Page and Elise L. Smith, *Women, Literature, and the Domesticated Landscape: England's Disciples of Flora, 1780–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), 42.

[13] See Nina Baym, *American Women of Letters and the Nineteenth-Century Sciences* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2005); Amy King, *Bloom: The Botanical Vernacular in the English Novel* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007); and Elizabeth Keeney, *The Botanizers: Amateur Scientists in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2011).

[14] See Farr, 120.

[15] B. K. Bliss, *B. K. Bliss & Sons' Illustrated Spring Catalogue and Amateur Guide to the Flower and Kitchen Garden* (New York: 1870), 8, 10, 12, 12, 14, 13, 13.

[16] *Barr and Sugden's Guide to the Flower Garden, &c.* (London: 1862), 17, 21, 15, 15, 15, 14, 19, 21, 15, 16, 16, 16, 21, 14, 23.

[17] "Mass. Horticultural Society," in *The New England Farmer, and Horticultural Register* 11.45 (1833): 354.

[18] Joseph Breck, *The Flower-garden: or, Breck's Book of Flowers* (Boston: J. P. Jewett, 1851), 28. See Farr, 120, on botanical catalogues Dickinson likely read.

[19] See Farr, 110.

[20] Gerhardt, "Emily Dickinson's Reluctant Ecology," 68.

[21] Alan Bewell, "Romanticism and Colonial Natural History," in *Studies in Romanticism* 43.1 (2004): 14.

[22] Farr, 133.

[23] For an excellent discussion of aesthetics and global botany, see Theresa Kelley, *Clandestine Marriage: Botany and Romantic Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2012).

[24] Miller, 125.

[25] In a nice bit of irony, Dickinson's friend Thomas Wentworth Higginson retrospectively cast her in precisely this mold. In an 1894 essay in *The Chap-book*, Higginson excoriates American poets for using ornithological or botanical material that is not native to American soil: "It cost half a century of struggle for Lowell to get the bobolink and the oriel established in literature; and Emerson the chickadee, and Whittier the veery," he writes, adding, "At a later period, Emily Dickinson added the blue jay" ("A Step Backward?", in *The Chap-book: Semi Monthly* 1.12 [1894]: 332). Higginson melodramatically urges that "the literature of a nation must still have its own flowers

beneath its feet, and its own birds above its head; or it will perish" (335). Nowhere is Higginson's desire for fixity more apparent than in his appeal to "the genuine concrete earth" of America (334).

[26] For discussions of Dickinson and Charles Darwin, see Juliana Chow, "'Because I see—New Englandly—': Seeing Species in the Nineteenth Century and Emily Dickinson's Regional Specificity," *ELH* 60.3 (2014): 413–49; Jane Donahue Eberwein, "Outgrowing Genesis: Dickinson, Darwin, and the Higher Criticism," in *Emily Dickinson and Philosophy*, ed. Jed Deppman, Noble, and Gary Lee Stonum (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013); James Guthrie, "Darwinian Dickinson: The Scandalous Rise and Noble Fall of the Common Clover," *The Emily Dickinson Journal* 16.1 (2007): 73–91; and Peel.

[27] C. Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1860), 308.

[28] Henry David Thoreau, "The Succession of Forest Trees," in *"Wild Apples" and Other Natural History Essays*, ed. William Rossi (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2002), 93.

[29] See Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983).

[30] Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2002), 10.

[31] For a discussion of flowers and gift-based circulation in Dickinson's letters to local friends, see Paul Crumbley, "Dickinson's Correspondence and the Politics of Gift-Based Circulation," in *Reading Dickinson's Letters: Essays*, ed. Jane Donahue Eberwein and Cindy MacKenzie (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 2009); and Stephanie Tingley, "'Blossom[s] of the Brain': Women's Culture and the Poetics of Emily Dickinson's Correspondence," in *Reading Dickinson's Letters*, 56–79.

[32] See Endersby, 107.

[33] For a discussion of distant correspondence in the nineteenth century, see Konstantin Dierks, *In My Power: Letter Writing and Communications in Early America* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 110.

[34] Elizabeth Maddock Dillon has argued that, in addition to the dominant organization around nation-states, we need to pay more attention to "a public sphere that maps onto the geopolitics of religion" ("Religion and Geopolitics in the New World," *Early American Literature* 45.1 [2010]: 196).

[35] Dickinson to Dr. and Mrs. J. G. Holland, March 1866, in *Emily Dickinson: Selected Letters*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1971), 191.

[36] Kelley, 3.

[37] Kelley suggests that in this sense botany "offered a conduit to some of romanticism's most persistent inquiries, beginning with the nature of nature and of life and including the debate about whether nature or spirit should dominate, the global market of commodity plants, the relation between scientific inquiry and aesthetic pleasure, and the epistemological value accorded to concepts and particulars" (7).

[38] For a discussion of the ways that plant circulation through imperial channels affected local ideas of nature, see Bewell; and Lynch.

[39] See McDowell, 25; and Houghton Library collection, *Emily Dickinson's Herbarium* (Cambridge: Belknap University Press, 2006).

[40] Erasmus Darwin's 1789 botanical poem "The Loves of the Plants" helped popularize this association. For a discussion of sexual classification and literary courtship, see King. For good discussions of the relationship between taxonomic systems and social values, see Janet Browne, "Erasmus Darwin and 'The Loves of the Plants,'" *Isis* 80.4 (1989):

593–621; and Harriet Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid: and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998).

[41] See Guthrie, "Darwinian Dickinson."

[42] For an excellent discussion of Dickinson and the language of flowers as a form of private emotional symbolism, see Elizabeth Petrino, *Emily Dickinson and Her Contemporaries: Women's Verse in America, 1820–1885* (Hanover: Univ. Press of New England, 1998), 129–160.

[43] Carl Linnaeus, *Philosophia Botanica*, trans. Stephen Freer (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003), 9; William Bartram, *The Travels of William Bartram*, ed. Francis Harper (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1998), liv.

[44] Bartram, liv.

[45] Michael Gaudio, "The Elements of Botanical Art: William Bartram, Benjamin Smith Barton, and the Scientific Imagination," in *William Bartram: The Search for Nature's Design*, ed. Thomas Hillock and Nancy E. Hoffman (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2010), 437.

[46] C. Darwin, *The Power of Movement in Plants* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881), 573.

[47] Augustin de Candolle, *Elements of the Philosophy of Plants, containing the Principles of Scientific Botany*, ed. Kurt Sprengel (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), 238.

[48] "How Plants Behave," *The Literary World: A Monthly Review of Current Literature* 3.8 (1873): 114.

[49] "How Plants Behave," 114.

[50] E. H. C., "Gleanings," in *Horticulturalist and Journal of Rural Art and Rural Taste* 18.203 (1863): 150. This article was excerpted in a piece called "Sensibility of Nature," which examines nature that "could not talk words, but . . . could talk things" and proposes a study of "The wits . . . that a rosebush has" (*Ohio Farmer* 19.35 [1870]: 551).

[51] E. H. C., 150.

[52] "The Sleep of Plants," *The Youth's Companion* (April 3, 1873): 108.

[53] Monique Allewaert, *Ariel's Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2013), 55.

[54] See Walls, *Seeing New Worlds*, 56.

[55] Thoreau, *Wild Fruits: Thoreau's Rediscovered Last Manuscript*, ed. Bradley P. Dean (New York: Norton, 2001), 242.

[56] Thoreau, *Wild Fruits*, 242.

[57] Quoted in "Can We Separate Animals from Plants?", in *The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature* 27.5 (1878): 608.

[58] "Can We Separate," 614.

[59] For a discussion of the difficulty that some animals posed to neat classification, see Ritvo, *The Platypus and the Mermaid*, 1–50.

[60] Almira Lincoln Phelps, *Familiar Lectures on Botany* (New York: Huntington and Savage, 1845), 245.

[61] Phelps, 245.

[62] Edward Hitchcock, "Edward Hitchcock classroom lecture notes: 'Botany,'" undated (1826–1855), box 10, folder 2, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections.

[63] X. B. Saintine, *Picciola: or, Captivity Captive* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1838), 55, 51.

[64] Emily Dickinson to William Cowper Dickinson, 14 February 1849?, in *Emily Dickinson: Selected Letters*, 29.

[65] Saintine, 72.

[66] Farr, 186.

[67] For a discussion of this poem in the context of the Civil War, see Cody Marrs, *Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Long Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2015), 126. Miller also speculates that Dickinson references the war in this poem (see 160). Eliza Richards has more generally explored the ways in which Dickinson grappled with Civil War news and remote suffering, and "the difference between the unknowable experience of trauma and the vicarious imaginings of that experience inspired by reading about it" ("'How News Must Feel When Traveling': Dickinson and Civil War Media," in *A Companion to Emily Dickinson*, ed. Martha Nell Smith and Mary Loeffelholz [Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007], 165). See also Mary Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2009).

[68] Dickinson's poem "'Nature' is what We see" similarly illustrates this point. The speaker tests three theses on nature that hinge on human perception: seeing, hearing, and knowing. In the first two cases, the speaker begins with a diverse list of what nature "is" before offering a more totalizing claim: for instance, in the first stanza,

"Nature" is what We see -
The Hill - the Afternoon -
Squirrel - Eclipse - the Bumble bee -
Nay - Nature is Heaven -

(P, F721 B).

This list points out the discrete entities that can stand metonymically for Nature.

[69] See Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2008).

[70] See Dillon, "Sentimental Aesthetics," *American Literature* 76.3 (2004): 495–523; and June Howard, "What is Sentimentality?", *American Literary History* 11.1 (1999): 63–81.

[71] Dillon, "Sentimental Aesthetics," 498.

[72] Jessica Riskin, *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002), 15.

[73] Bruno Latour has identified the separation of scientific object from political subject as a key product of modernity. For a discussion of this, see Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).

[74] See Allewaert, 1–50.

[75] Ritvo, "At the Edge of the Garden: Nature and Domestication in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 55.3 (1992): 367.

[76] The educational reformer Horace Mann described collective responsibility for education in this way: "And as we hold the gardener responsible for the productions of his garden, so is the community responsible for the general character and conduct of its children" (*Lectures on Education* [Boston: Wm. B. Fowle and N. Capen, 1845], 80).

[77] William Huntting Howell, "In the Realm of Sensibility," *American Literary History* 25.2 (2013): 408.

[78] Howell, 408.

[79] Dillon describes how the history of aesthetics "developed in response to the revolutions of the eighteenth century that ushered in liberal political regimes and societies oriented around (newly) autonomous, self-governing citizen-subjects" ("Sentimental Aesthetics," 497).

[80] Ed Folsom and Kenneth Price, "Dickinson, Slavery, and the San Domingo Movement," http://whitmanarchive.org/resources/teaching/dickinson/intro.html.

[81] A number of recent books in critical race studies, science studies, and ecocriticism have emphasized the ways in which the category of the human has long been correlated with the "liberal humanist subject"—that is to say, with the white, western male (Alexander Wehliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* [Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2014], 8). On the role of scientific and environmental discourses in constructing and confirming the idea of the liberal subject, see Nihad Farooq, *Undisciplined: Science, Ethnography, and Personhood in the Americas, 1830–1940* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2016); and Allewaert, 30–34.

[82] For a sense of multispecies ethnography, see Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Towards an Anthropology Beyond the Human* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2013); Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2015); Eben Kirksey, *Emergent Ecologies* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2015); and *The Multispecies Salon*, ed. Kirksey (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2014). In literary studies, see also recent work by Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Dana Luciano, "Speaking Substances: Rock," in *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 12 April 2016); and Timothy Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (London: Verso, 2017); *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). Plant studies is gaining critical traction, as evidenced by the work of figures like Michael Marder and Catriona Sandilands, and by recent edited collections such as *Plants and Literature*, ed. Randy Laist (Amsterdam: Rodolpi, 2013).