Exploring Connection in Emily Dickinson's Poetics

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ABSTRACT: This article examines Emily Dickinson's poetics through the lens of connection, interpreting her perceived disconnection as a deliberate retreat to foster creativity and self-awareness. Using Carl Jung's concept of "twin existences" and Kae Tempest's insights on present awareness, the study explores how Dickinson's emphasis on the "Eternal Now" underscores the significance of everyday action in affirming human existence and creating a sense of connection with oneself and others. Drawing on several of Dickinson's poems and letter fragments, as well as historical and feminist interpretations of her life, this article argues that her rejection of conventional standards allowed for a profound engagement with the dualities of life—connection and disconnection, life and death. This analysis offers a new perspective on Dickinson's work and life, revealing how her poetic practices advocate for the daily nurturing of meaningful connections, contributing to broader discussions on creativity and human interaction.

KEYWORDS: Emily Dickinson; Connection; Creative Action; Eternal Now; Kae Tempest; Carl Jung

Forever - is composed of Nows -
'Tis not a different time -[1]
(Emily Dickinson)

Introduction

The Letters of Emily Dickinson (2024), edited by Cristanne Miller and Domhnall Mitchell, revealed the poet's profound connections with both her community and the wider world by illustrating her complex network of relationships and correspondents during her lifetime (2). While earlier works like Thomas H. Jonhson's 1958 edition of letters questioned the importance of Dickinson's oeuvre and emphasized her disconnected way of life, this new edition demonstrated that Dickinson was far from being an isolated woman, challenging the myth of disconnection that has pervaded criticism of her work for nearly a century (1). The first editions of Dickinson's poems, published in the 1890s, established her as a major figure in American poetry while also adding to the mystique surrounding her life. These editions portrayed Dickinson as a recluse, focusing on her isolated existence rather than her literary work. Newer editions challenged this notion and focused on Dickinson's connection rather than disconnection in her life and work.

Scholars from numerous disciplines have long been intrigued by the nature of human connection. Ralph Waldo Emerson observed that human connections are often "oblique and

[1] First two verses of the poem "Forever - is composed of Nows -" (Fr690). All of Emily Dickinson's poems are referenced using the abbreviation (Fr) and poem number, according to Ralph W. Franklin, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Harvard UP, 1998, 3 vols.

casual" (200), emphasizing their fleeting nature. In *The Human Condition* (1958), Hannah Arendt highlighted human action as central to shaping the world and building meaningful relationships. Carl Jung, in *The Red Book* (2009), explored connection through two guiding forces: "the spirit of the times," which drives individuals towards tangible, practical ends, and "the spirit of the depths," which is tied to their ancient, more spiritual selves (118). Building on Jung's insights, Kae Tempest's *On Connection* (2020) explored the challenge of being present in the moment, arguing that increased self-awareness and attention to daily experience are key to fostering connection (9). The act of connecting is central to Dickinson's poetics, demonstrating a keen awareness of both death and the present moment, and her poetry serves as a medium for navigating the tension between connection and disconnection. Some of Dickinson's poems stress the momentousness of the present in humankind's finite existence, encapsulated by the concept of the "Eternal Now." One of her speakers reflects on this idea, asserting that "Forever - is composed of Nows -" (Fr690), thereby suggesting that an eternity in time can be found in the present. Furthermore, Dickinson's speakers often highlight the role of creative action, pointing out the need to first connect with oneself in the present in order to form meaningful connections with others.

This framework offers a useful lens through which to rethink Dickinson's work and life. While early editors and critics alike, such as Johnson, viewed her as disconnected, late-twentieth-century feminist scholars, such as Adrienne Rich and Susan Howe, reinterpreted her seclusion as a conscious choice to focus on her poetic vocation. Recent studies by Cristanne Miller, Eliza Richards, Elizabeth Petrino, and Paula Bennett offered new contexts for understanding Dickinson's presumed disconnection. This article builds on these reinterpretations, investigating how societal norms intersect in Dickinson's work, suggesting that her retreat was not an act of disconnection, but rather a means of cultivating her creative potential, which, as Tempest argues, fosters connection. Likewise, it contends that Dickinson's poetics challenge traditional views of disconnection, proposing instead that her poetry advocates for connection through present action in everyday life.

This article is divided into two sections. The first section draws on Jung's concept of "twin existences," encompassing "the spirit of the times" and "the spirit of the depths," to investigate the historical reception and editing of Dickinson's poems and letters, particularly the narrative of her disconnected life, and how recent studies contradicted this earlier interpretation. The second section offers a close reading of selected poems and letter fragments, focusing on Dickinson's celebration of action in the present and its alignment with Jung's and Tempest's emphasis on present action over future intention. Finally, the article contends that some of Dickinson's speakers, influenced by Emerson, engage with the theme of connection by trusting and creating oneself, confronting, as Tempest states, "what is in ourselves" (22). Dickinson's poetics affirm the full spectrum of human experience by advocating for connection as a daily practice.

Dickinson and the Myth of Disconnection—A Historical Perspective

Dickinson's views on connection through her poetics of action are best understood in light of the myth of disconnection, which has shaped her biographical and literary criticism for decades. This section examines the historical reception of Dickinson's poems and letters in the United States using Carl Jung's "twin existences" hypothesis, focusing on her presumed disconnection. By considering Jung, the analysis shifts the interpretation of Dickinson's life and work from one that is frequently limited to social isolation to a more nuanced understanding of her existence as a balance between withdrawal and creative engagement. For over sixty years, Eliza Richards noted, editions of Dickinson's poetry portrayed her as an eccentric and isolated genius, "setting terms of reception that endure to the present day" (1). Richards, however, argued that situating Dickinson in her historical context reveals a richness of unexplored connections with the events, social movements, politics, and culture of her time (5). Similarly, Martha Nell Smith claimed that recent scholarship has increasingly challenged the dominant narrative of Dickinson's disconnection, turning attention to the aspects of her life and writing that have long been overshadowed by this myth, such as Dickinson's numerous social connections, which were critical to her career and posthumous recognition as a writer (1).

Dickinson's life and work were deeply influenced by the social, political, and literary contexts of her time, including the first wave of feminism, sentimentalism, and the Civil War. David Reynolds asserted that Dickinson's view of nineteenth-century American society was not detached, but rather vibrant and dynamic, reflecting confusion, moral ambiguity, and potential chaos (431). The 1850s, a politically charged decade marked by feminist activism, also witnessed a significant surge in women's literature, which paved the way for Dickinson's poetry. As Reynolds noted, women of the era, constrained by male-dominated structures, expressed their profound sense of powerlessness through literature (395-96). Dickinson's poetry, while characteristic of the best women's writing of her time, also represented unparalleled innovation (414).[2] For Reynolds, Dickinson was not a solitary and disconnected rebel but the beacon of a broader, rebellious sisterhood (413).

The dominant literary force among this sisterhood was sentimentalism. Marianne Noble described sentimental literature as driven by an irresistible impulse toward human connection, though writers like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Dickinson were skeptical of its normative aesthetics (13). Nobel argued that while versed in sentimental notions of sympathy, Dickinson's poetics also hinted at new directions, embracing a fragmented and open-ended style (37). Susan Manning further emphasized the transatlantic connectivity of the literary, educational, and theological contexts of the time, positioning Dickinson within this broader exchange (7). Patrick J. Keane concurred,

[2] According to Reynolds, some of these characteristics are tone flexibility, gaps and indirections, a resistance to settling into individual gender roles, and the use of dense imagery (412).

highlighting the dialogic and transatlantic nature of Dickinson's imagination (3). Jack Capps added that Dickinson's reading and correspondence exposed her to a vast array of ideas, from Calvinist religious revivals to Charles Darwin's theories and the American Civil War (vii).

The intellectual currents of her time, notably Emerson's philosophical influence across the Atlantic, shaped the ideas of both Dickinson and thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche. They pondered the fluidity of consciousness and life's processes, the role of inner perspective in molding reality, and the significance of the present moment (Wolosky 131). Nevertheless, critics of Dickinson's work often highlighted her supposed seclusion, in line with what Jung described as "the spirit of the times"—a mood that painted her as disconnected from the world. Jung's concept of "the spirit of the times" allows for an exploration of how Dickinson's apparent detachment was formed by and sensitive to the cultural currents of sentimentalism that characterized her era. Reading Dickinson through this theoretical lens reframes her life as an active, introspective process deeply intertwined with the intellectual and emotional climate of the nineteenth century, transforming her solitude into a deliberate and creative engagement with the world around her.

Dickinson's Disconnection in Light of Jung's "Twin Existences"

Carl Jung's concept of "twin existences" in *The Red Book*, inspired by Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), can be used to re-evaluate the dominant narrative of Dickinson's disconnection. Jung believed that humans are governed by two spirits: "the spirit of the times," concerned with outward order and goals, and "the spirit of the depths," tied to the inner, often irrational, world of dreams and visions (118-19). Maintaining balance between these two forces is critical, as Jung posited, because living solely in one would be detrimental to an individual's well-being (229). Drawing on Jung, Kae Tempest proposed that maintaining (or regaining) balance between the two requires cultivating the ability to focus on the inner self through connection and creativity (22). Jung suggested that there is no correct way to preserve (or regain) this inner equilibrium; each individual must create balance for themself since, as Jung wrote, "my path is not your path, therefore I cannot teach you. The way is within us, but not in Gods, nor in teachings, nor in laws. Within us is the way, the truth and the life . . . There is only one way and that is your way" (125). Jung's concept illuminates the historical reception of Dickinson's work, illustrating how her perceived disconnection was impacted by sentimental currents that placed special emphasis on "the spirit of the times."

Jung contrasted "the spirit of the times," which refers to surface-level concerns, with "the spirit of the depths," which reflects the inner world of the soul and its changing, multifaceted nature (147). He suggested that both must intersect for new growth to occur (152). While Jung acknowledged that "the spirit of the times" is a useful guide, he underlined that "the spirit of the depths" transcends it (132). True development, he argued, comes from living fully in the present, as "this hour belongs to you" (135-37). Consequently, individuals should immerse themselves in the here and now in order to forge a path where both dimensions coexist harmoniously. Jung believed that by directing one's creative energy inward, the soul can thrive, resulting in profound insights and new possibilities. As he observed, "the word is a

creative act" (143), highlighting that thinking and acting creatively enables individuals to unlock their full potential while respecting the paths of others. Dickinson's famous line, "I dwell in Possibility" (Fr466), mirrors Jung's point of view by implying unlimited potential within finite constraints.[3] Nonetheless, Jung cautioned against getting distracted by intentions for future actions, as this mindset often limits the present and hinders genuine connection. Instead of waiting for a "better tomorrow," Jung asserted that life's meaning emerges from within, shaped by how individuals interact with the world they create in the present moment (152).

Both Jung and Dickinson recognized that existence hinges on the interplay between opposing forces. For Jung, the balance between life and death exposes deeper truths, as solitude and isolation are both inevitable and essential for self-awareness and connection with others (266). This notion echoes Dickinson's own engagement with death, a theme that permeated her poetry and letters.[4] While she is typically characterized as a recluse, this interpretation warrants reconsideration. As Jung noted, disconnection is an essential part of life for both individual and collective well-being, allowing one to remain authentically connected to oneself and, by extension, others (406). Following this line of thought, Dickinson's apparent withdrawal from society can be understood as a way to bridge the "infinite gulf" between individuals (317), clearing the way for deeper creative and spiritual insight. Thus, the historical framing of Dickinson's disconnection calls for closer scrutiny, not as mere reclusion, but as a deliberate mode of navigating life's dualities.

First Editions of Dickinson's Poems and Letters

While Dickinson's work received little recognition during her lifetime, she left behind a trove of poems and letters that would eventually shape her legacy.[5] According to Marta L. Werner, Dickinson's rejection of print conventions marked a deliberate break from mainstream literary traditions (1). More specifically, Jen Bervin pointed out that it took more than a century—from Dickinson's first editions to Werner's pioneering transcriptions—to successfully accommodate Dickinson's manuscripts into book form (10-11). Due to the difficulty of categorizing her innovative and original poetry at the end of the nineteenth century, most scholars centered their criticism on her disconnection from life rather than on her work, laying the groundwork for her mystification as "the recluse of Amherst" (Todd and Higginson xi), an assumption that most editors and critics took for granted until the 1960s.

Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson published the first three editions of Dickinson's *Poems* in 1890, 1891, and 1896, establishing her as a major nineteenth-century American poet. However, such editions adjusted her poems according to print conventions

[3] Another example is Dickinson's poem "Finite to fail but infinite to venture" (Fr952).

[4] Death, by all accounts, holds a privileged place in Dickinson's cosmology, and her writings frequently attempt to confront its veracity. For instance, Barton Levi St. Armand notes that "Dickinson's concept of the afterlife bordered on blasphemy. Death became a literal all-or-nothing proposition" (55).

[5] Dickinson wrote nearly 1,800 poems and over 1,300 letters.

(Howe, *Birth-Mark* 170; McGann 45). Editors standardized punctuation and capitalization, supplied titles for the poems, and removed entire verses to adhere to the typographical practices of the time. It was not only Dickinson's poetry which had to comply with the canon, or "the spirit of the times;" her image had to conform to the stereotype of the nineteenth-century Victorian woman-poet as "literally and figuratively confined" (Gilbert and Gubar xi). For instance, Todd wrote to her parents about Dickinson in 1881: "I must tell you about the character of Amherst. It is a lady whom the people call the Myth . . . Her poems are perfectly wonderful, and all the literary men are after her to have her writings published" (Leyda 2:357). Another example is T. W. Higginson's preface to *Poems by Emily Dickinson* (1890), in which he referred to Dickinson as "a recluse by temperament and habit" (xi). Since then, the myth of Emily Dickinson as the "recluse of Amherst" has spawned other popular legends, all of which were upheld by historical and literary studies, with critics and biographers focusing on her neurosis and disconnection rather than her creative work.[6] Thomas H. Johnson, who edited Dickinson's poems and letters in the 1950s, questioned her awareness of the American Civil War due to her disconnection, as he noted in the "Introduction" to *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* in 1958:

> Since Emily Dickinson's full maturity as a dedicated artist occurred during the span of the Civil War, the most convulsive era of the nation's history, one of course turns to the letters of 1861-1865, and the years that follow, for her interpretations of events. But the fact is that she did not live in history and held no view of it, past or current. (Johnson xx)

Here, the image of Dickinson as fully isolated in her room, uninformed of "the most convulsive" event of her time trumped her oeuvre. Her work, often misunderstood and overshadowed by a focus on her personal life, was later revisited by feminist critics like Rich and Howe, who challenged the myth of Dickinson's disconnection and highlighted her deliberate choices in pursuing her poetic craft.

Late-Twentieth-Century Criticism of Dickinson's Work

Over time, new editions of her poems, additional material, and Dickinson's original manuscripts, published by Ralph W. Franklin in the 1980s, have revealed new insights into her life and work. In *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson* (1960), Jay Leyda observed that Dickinson "was no more and no less alone than many other artists, no more and no less isolated, or insulated, from the world. The most casual leafing through the chronology will reveal an extraordinarily large circle of acquaintances, friends, correspondents" (xx). During the Second Wave of Feminism in the 1970s and 1980s, American poets Rich and Howe, among

[6] For instance, in F.O. Matthiessen's classic literary history *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941), Dickinson is only mentioned in a short paragraph stating that the "compressed form" of her poems "resulted from her need to resolve conflicts" (115). See also John Cody, *After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson* (Harvard UP, 1971), and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (Yale UP, 1979).

others, refocused feminist criticism on Dickinson's work and life. Rich's renowned essay "Vesuvius at Home: The Power of Emily Dickinson" asserted that Dickinson "chose" her seclusion because she knew what she "needed;" it was, in fact, "no hermetic retreat, but a seclusion which included a wide range of people, of reading and correspondence" (179). Rich's Dickinson revealed herself to be a strong, practical, and powerful woman who deliberately chose her own community and organized her time and life on her own terms to practice her true calling and fulfilment—poetry. Like Rich, Howe contended that the poet was not as disconnected from the world as editors and biographers have traditionally assumed (*My Emily Dickinson* xi), and that Dickinson's self-imposed exile was crucial in both freeing her from the constraints of Victorian conventions and allowing her the chance of becoming a poet.

Dickinson's letters show that she was an active member of her family and community, and she felt deeply connected to the world around her.[7] Barton L. St Armand warned against reshaping Dickinson's image to fit contemporary desires, as doing so risks distorting her artistic integrity (15). More specifically, because Dickinson's historical reception was unbalanced and anchored in America's sentimental nineteenth-century, "the spirit of the times," her chosen spinsterhood—among other conditions that identify her as "The Myth"—was condemned as unnatural. Furthermore, this sentimental image jeopardized Dickinson's artistic integrity by isolating and disconnecting her poems from reality. Nonetheless, as Leyda pointed out, "her poems and letters take on unexpectedly deep roots in national and community life, in family crises, and in her daily reading" (xxi). In fact, Albert J. Gelpi asserted that Dickinson should be acknowledged as a "central and radial . . . figure . . . in the sweep of the American imagination from Jonathan Edwards to Robert Lowell, from Anne Bradstreet to Marianne Moore" (vii). He underlined that Dickinson's goal was "to find solitude in society," a pursuit she shared with other key figures such as Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman (20). Jane D. Eberwein further explained that Dickinson transformed her seemingly unproductive disconnection into a powerful tool for artistic achievement. This seclusion provided the privacy necessary for her meticulous craftsmanship while protecting her emotionally sensitive nature from overwhelming external stimuli (30).

Contemporary Criticism and New Edition of Dickinson's Letters

While considerable effort has been made to de-mystify Dickinson's narrative of disconnection, there is still work to be done. In 2017, Amherst College (founded by Dickinson's grandfather) co-organized a major exhibition titled "The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson" at The Morgan Library and Museum in New York. In the same year, Amherst College Press published *The Networked Recluse: Emily Dickinson's Connected World*, a collaboration between several institutions holding the poet's collections and leading academics in Dickinson studies such as Susan Howe, Marta Werner, and Carolyn Vega. They argued that the poet's reclusiveness and

[7] As Miller noted, Dickinson's letters confirm that the poet "maintained frequent contact with neighbors, friends, and family through messages and gifts" (*The Letters of Emily Dickinson* 2).

insularity were all part of her poetic *brand*, and situated the poet within her cultural, literary, and personal networks, which included long-lasting friendships, relationships with editors and published writers, as well as prominent New England figures (47). This connectivity opened up new avenues for interpreting Dickinson's work. Mike Kelly wrote that the publication's goal was "to remind everyone that the story of Dickinson's manuscripts, her life, and her work is still unfolding" (2). As a result of unveiling the mystification of disconnection propagated by earlier reception of Dickinson's work, it is possible to understand her in entirely new ways.

Disconnection encompasses not just physical confinement but also social isolation, a concept that Dickinson's letters vividly contradict. As previously noted, Miller's and Mitchell's new edition of Dickinson's letters revealed that she was not disconnected from the world but lived in "the stream of events in her town, state, country, and times" (1). Moreover, as an active member of her community, Dickinson communicated with family, neighbors, and friends on a regular basis via messages and gifts (2). Miller and Mitchell argued that "the looming presence of war, deaths of family and friends, and lingering illnesses charge even the most routine communications with significance. Yet again and again, Dickinson finds ways of formulating her delight in being alive" (24). As Dickinson told T.W. Higginson in 1870, "I find ecstasy in living—the mere sense of living is joy enough" (L342A).[8] In fact, genuine connections often emerge from periods of disconnection and life's richness is deeply intertwined with the inevitability of death, since "to have lived is a Bliss so powerful - we must die - to adjust it -" (L523). Dickinson, like Jung, frequently acknowledged the interplay of conflicting forces as the basis of existence.

Returning to Jung's hypothesis, this section has argued that his concept of "twin existences" sheds light on Dickinson's reception and creative process, revealing how her perceived solitude, traditionally understood as disconnection, was influenced by sentimental currents that emphasized "the spirit of the times" over "the spirit of the depths." However, Dickinson's solitary life, like Jung's emphasis on the balance between connection and disconnection, was integral to her poetic exploration and connection with herself and the world. Bearing this in mind, the following section examines some of Dickinson's poems and letters to show how they articulate the complex interplay between connection and disconnection. It specifically underlines Dickinson's reflections on the benefits of mortality, the significance of the present moment, and the creative actions that foster meaningful connections.

Dickinson's Poetics on Connection

In their exploration of connection, Dickinson's speakers often grapple with themes of death and mortality, as well as with the significance of the present moment. One poem that captures these ideas is "The Soul's distinct connection," in which Dickinson uncovers the profound relationship between the visible and invisible—between life and death—suggesting that peril

[8] All of Emily Dickinson's letters are referenced using the abbreviation (L) and letter number, according to Thomas H. Johnson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, Harvard UP, 1958, 3 vols.

or risk can illuminate this connection. This poem not only depicts Dickinson's inner landscape, but it also serves as a starting point for understanding her broader thoughts on the nature of existence and the connections that characterize it:

> The Soul's distinct connection
> With immortality
> Is best disclosed by Danger
> Or quick Calamity -
>
> As Lightning on a Landscape
> Exhibits Sheets of Place -
> Not yet suspected - but for Flash -
> And Click - and Suddenness. (Fr901)

In this poem, Dickinson's speaker contends that danger best reveals the soul's connection with death or immortality. "As Lightning on a Landscape" illustrates "Sheets of Place" invisible before, unforeseen misfortune best reveals an individual's inner relationship with the world around them. Given mortal frailty, an intimacy with death may yield a new perspective on life and, as a result, foster a new sense of connection with it.[9] As Jung asserted, "we need the coldness of death to see clearly" and "life and death must strike a balance in your existence" (266). If darkness is required to perceive light, then disconnecting from the outside world allows people to connect more intimately with their true selves. According to Richard B. Sewall, "Dickinson's constant aim, her life action," was "to make her 'truth' clear" by creating an "inviolable unity of art and life" (qtd. in Eberwein 16-17). Moreover, as Eberwein pointed out, "an exaggerated sense of limitation . . . somehow impelled her toward the infinite" (19). Dickinson's "inviolable unity of art and life" enabled her to strike a balance between "the spirit of the times" and "the spirit of the depths," between there and here, between limitation and action, and between outer and inner longings. For Jung, "he whose desire turns away from outer things, reaches the place of the soul" (129). With this in mind, Dickinson's perceived isolation impelled her sense of connection by focusing on action in the present moment. Dickinson's poetic exaltation of action is central to her exploration of the "Eternal Now," or eternity in time, which resonates well with Jung's theory and Kae Tempest's present-awareness in *On Connection*. Due to humans' twin and finite existences, Dickinson's "Eternal Now" underscores the significance of appreciating the present, as depicted in her verse "Forever - is composed of Nows -" (Fr690). By doing so, it is possible to affirm the totality of human existence—of both "the spirit of the times" and "the spirit of the depths"—and to promote the daily practice of connection.

[9] Another poem expressing this idea is "The Admirations and Contempts of Time" (Fr830).

Dickinson's awareness of the present and the significance of action in her approach to connection were greatly influenced by Ralph W. Emerson's views, a key figure in her literary milieu. While scholars such as Karl Keller, Jack Capps, and Joanne F. Diehl acknowledged Dickinson's poetic debt to Emerson, they often debated over the intricacies of this impact (Keller 149; Capps 113; Diehl 683). As noted by Dickinson's niece Martha, the New England Transcendentalists rebelled against societal norms and regarded Emerson as a prophet of new freedoms (Bianchi 47). Emerson's assertion of the challenge of balancing the immediate with the broader context in "The American Scholar" (1837) aligns with Jung's idea of "twin existences," as Emerson highlighted the significance of the "active soul." He wrote, "the one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul. This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although, in almost all men, obstructed, and as yet unborn. The soul active sees absolute truth; and utters truth, or creates" (59). Similarly, in "Self-Reliance" (1841), Emerson asserted that "your genuine action will explain itself and will explain your other genuine actions. Your conformity explains nothing" (125). When "the spirit of the times" dominates—prioritizing surface-level values and concrete outcomes—individuals may feel distracted and overlook the deeper possibilities that reside within themselves. Like Emerson, Dickinson's poem "The Lassitudes of Contemplation" (Fr1613) illustrates this point when the speaker notes, "Dreams consolidate in action." In the same spirit, in "I have no Life but this" (Fr1432) the speaker considers their earthly existence as the only certainty, as there will be no more "Earths to come" or "Action new," underscoring that every action is confined to the duration of life.

Just as Dickinson expressed the benefits of contingency when she "dwell[s] in Possibility" (Fr466), Jung asserted: "do you not know that you yourselves are the fertile acre which bears everything that avails you?" (125). Contrary to the nineteenth-century tendency to favor "the spirit of the times," Paul Crumbley argued that Dickinson "questioned convention from the beginning, acting on curiosity rather than on a logic founded on fear" (84). For instance, Dickinson encapsulates this in a letter writing "Action is redemption" (L726). Thus, when individuals become their "own task" and "own creator" (Jung 188), they no longer seek external redemption; instead, they discover that the potential for connection lies within their actions. Dickinson's view of action as redemptive links her artistic expression with her lived experience, allowing her to remain present—an essential quality identified by Kae Tempest in the act of connecting through present-moment awareness and creative action.

Dickinson's Connection in light of Tempest's Work

Kae Tempest explored the intricate relationship between creativity, self-awareness, and the necessity of being present in their work *On Connection*. They contended that "immersion in creativity can bring us closer to each other and help us cultivate greater self-awareness," arguing that creativity fosters connection (4). Living in the present moment is vital for developing this self-awareness. Given the struggle of navigating "twin existences," Tempest suggested that individuals often find it challenging to locate themselves "fully in the present" regarding "who we hope to be and who we actually are," a question which has long been a

literary obsession (9). Drawing on Jung's hypothesis, they emphasized the need for balance between connection and disconnection. However, when individuals are disconnected or lack genuine feeling, a heaviness can emerge "behind every action" (10-11). Tempest observed, "I see that every single person is affected by the violence of existence in different ways, and that people carry their burdens however they can" (19). To some extent, Tempest echoes Dickinson in the following poem:

> Up Life's Hill with my little Bundle
> If I prove it steep -
> If a Discouragement withold me -
> If my newest step
>
> Older feel than the Hope that prompted -
> Spotless be from blame
> Heart that proposed as Heart that accepted
> Homelessness, for Home - (Fr1018)

In Dickinson's poem, the speaker is willing to accept the difficulties and uncertainties of life's arduous journey. Using the metaphor of ascending a hill with a "little Bundle," they recognize the challenges that lie ahead and admit that they may grow discouraged at times. Nonetheless, they are confident in their resolutions. For instance, the repetition of the word "Heart" in the second stanza may allude to an urge or impulse that transcends rational thought, such as the desire of becoming a poet. Further, even if they feel lost at times in this "Homeless" setting, their creative actions, or writing practices, will eventually create a "Home" for them. As a result, "Homelessness" can be transformed into "Home" (and vice versa) by creating the conditions in which they wish to live. "[A] genuine act" is required to go "Up Life's Hill" because there will be no assurances other than those that "prompted" those steps. These acts connect individuals with themselves and others.

Like Jung, Tempest asserted that intentions—merely thinking about acting—limit one's ability to connect, provided that "if I'm to commit, I need to commit in action, not just in thought" (31). This echoes Emerson's view in "Spiritual Laws" (1841), when he asserted that "the ancestor of every action is a thought" (160). Yet he also emphasized in "Sermons" (1826) that "it is the duty of men to judge men only by their actions" (3), since "an action is the perfection and publication of thought" (42). Thus, failing to translate intentions into actions or remaining unaware of the dissonance between aspirations and realities can lead to a disconnection from one's true self. Tempest encourages mindfulness in daily actions, noting that "the closer we focus on our experience, the greater the awareness of the experience will be, the greater the immersion, the greater the possibility for connection . . . What defines you? The very moment you find yourself in" (60-61). Tempest pointed out that by paying closer attention to daily experiences, individuals can enhance their awareness and immersion in those moments, increasing their chances of making meaningful connections. This heightened attention

enables people to define themselves through the richness of each present experience. Consequently, the essence of connectivity emerges from fully engaging with the present moment, a characteristic embedded in Dickinson's work and life.

Dickinson's "Eternal Now"

Dickinson's artistic and lived integrity hinged on her concept of the "Eternal Now," as articulated in her verse "Forever - is composed of Nows" (Fr690). She contended that each moment should be appreciated and regarded as worthy of living, as individuals are perpetually situated in the present.[10] Thus, every moment holds intrinsic value. Gudrun M. Grabher asserted that some of Dickinson's poems suggest that "time's only apprehensible reality is the present," with "the now forever escaping us, only to tease us with another and another and another now, *ad infinitum*" (267).[11] The present existence—not a better one—serves as the basis for connecting with ourselves and the world around us. In Dickinson's cosmology the now is boundless, and its sweetness is enhanced by the knowledge of its inevitable end. Reynolds suggested that Dickinson's awareness of "the momentousness of the Present" may have been influenced by Donald G. Mitchell's engagement with the "Eternal Now," evident in his lines: "Thought alone is delicate to tell the breath of the Present" and "If you bring such thought to measure the Present, the Present will seem broad; and it will be sultry as Noon, and make a fever of Now" (34). Mitchell's concept of the present as an endless now parallels Dickinson's letter to her sister-in-law Susan in 1864, where she stated that "There is no first or last in Forever - It is Centre, there, all the time" (Leyda 2: 99). Like Reynolds, Wendy Martin interpreted Dickinson's notion of "eternity in time" as "the unfolding present as infinite" (123). In this way, Dickinson's vision of the "Eternal Now" reflected a profound understanding of time, in which the present moment is both transitory and limitless, holding the key to a deeper connection with reality as it is.

Throughout her life, some of Dickinson's speakers, along with Dickinson herself, contemplated the experience of being present. In 1845, at age fifteen, she wrote to her friend Abiah Root, "I will wish no longer, but be content to stay where I am placed" (L8). Thirty-six years later, in a letter to Elizabeth Holland, Dickinson expressed, "How sweet the 'Life that now is' and how rugged to leave it" (L685). Emerson, Jung, and Tempest have all shared Dickinson's belief in the necessity of being content with one's place—both physical and metaphysical—in the quest for connection through heightened awareness of the present and through self-reflection. Emerson advised in "Self-Reliance" to "insist on yourself," provided that this is "your own gift," the one "you can present every moment with the cumulative force of a whole life's cultivation" (134). According to Jung, "let us thank the life I have lived for all the happy

[10] Nietzsche's "Eternal Return," or "Eternal Recurrence," is analogous to Dickinson's "Eternal Now." Nietzsche's "Eternal Return" typifies the highest affirmation of life on the assumption that an individual would choose to life his or her life again if given the opportunity to do so.

[11] Other examples are: "Each second is the last" (Fr927), "How much the present moment means" (Fr1420), "In this short life" (Fr1292), and "Oh Sumptuous Moment" (Fr1186).

and all the sad hours, for every joy, for every sadness" (128), given that "the future should be left to those of the future" (376). Likewise, Tempest encouraged their readers to live "right here, regardless of whether that 'right here' is agitated or calm, joyous or painful" (5). The "right here" will undoubtedly be both joyous and painful at times, and accepting that these experiences are part of human existence is to affirm life as it is in order to, as one of Dickinson's speakers wrote, "venerate the simple days" (Fr55), given that "the future never spoke" (Fr638).

Learning through opposites, some of Dickinson's speakers asserted that to strive for connection is to find a balance between "the spirit of the times" and "the spirit of the depths," between here and there, between joy and sorrow, and between life and death. For Dickinson, according to William Sherwood, "the creation of poetry is a vital activity in the fullest sense" (113). More specifically, writing poetry allowed her to develop a deeper sense of connection through creative and present actions, which increased her self-awareness of the fact that "Life is what we make it" (Fr727) because "each of us has the skill of life" (L388) and the capacity to connect and disconnect in everyday life.

Conclusion

Exploring Dickinson's poems and letters reveals a nuanced understanding of connection and disconnection in the context of her life and creative work. By examining the interplay between her perceived isolation and her profound connections to both the external world and her inner self, it becomes evident that Dickinson's work transcends mere disconnection. Instead, it embodies a dynamic engagement with existence, suggesting that periods of withdrawal can catalyze deeper connections and self-awareness.

Drawing on the insights of Carl Jung and Kae Tempest, this article underscores the significance of balancing "the spirit of the times" with "the spirit of the depths." The examination of Dickinson's poetic practices, influenced by figures like Emerson, reveals her pursuit of an "inviolable unity of art and life" as a means of navigating the complexities of human existence. This unity allows for the appreciation of the "Eternal Now," where past, present, and future converge, highlighting the intrinsic value of each moment. As a result, the act of creation stems from a natural desire for connection and a personal path toward one's true self.

Each individual's creative expression has the potential to transform perceived isolation into connection, serving as an antidote to disconnection. Therefore, Dickinson's life and work reveal that actively engaging with the present moment and pursuing creative endeavors provide pathways to connection and understanding—facilitating both internal and external connections essential to human experience. Finally, Dickinson's creative endeavors forge a link between connection and disconnection, suggesting that genuine connection arises not only from engagement with the world but also from the reflective spaces that solitude provides.

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