

Emily Dickinson



Envelope Poems

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Although a very prolific poet—and arguably America's greatest—Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) published fewer than a dozen of her eighteen hundred poems. Instead, she created at home small handmade books. When, in her later years, she stopped producing these, she was still writing a great deal, and at her death she left behind many poems, drafts, and letters. It is among the makeshift and fragile manuscripts of Dickinson's later writings that we find the envelope poems gathered here. These manuscripts on envelopes (recycled by the poet with marked New England thrift) were written with the full powers of her late, most radical period. Intensely alive, these envelope poems are charged with a special poignancy—addressed to no one and everyone at once.

Full-color facsimiles are accompanied by Marta L. Werner and Jen Bervin's pioneering transcriptions of Dickinson's handwriting. Their transcriptions allow us to read the texts, while the facsimiles let us see exactly what Dickinson wrote (the variant words, crossings-out, dashes, directional fields, spaces, columns, and overlapping planes).

Envelope Poems Details

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From Reader Review Envelope Poems for online ebook

Sarah says

A lovely little book.

Madeline says

A brief selection from the complete collection of Emily Dickinson's envelope poems, published several years ago in *The Gorgeous Nothing*. Such a warm, intimate presentation of writings in this small book. Happy to have come across it.

Mark Fallon says

Twice read, and thrice enjoyed.

Teresa says

In the 70s when I first learned of Emily Dickinson in my high school American Lit class, a picture of her emerged that is now being superseded, thanks to archivists, researchers and biographers. For too many years I've had an image of Emily as a perennial girl, never a woman, with genius of course but not emotions she showed in real life, only displaying them on the page; an image where she submissively sits behind her cross-barred bedroom window when she is not writing, imprisoned almost, perhaps by her father, occasionally looking out and ignoring the gawkers on the lawn below. That is not the Emily Dickinson I know now. And of course those poems we read in high school had been edited, for example, to change her capitalization and punctuation, removing those lovely dashes: reading her unedited poems was the first revelation.

On a recent visit to Amherst to visit her home/museum (a place I could've stayed in all day), I bought this little volume in the gift shop, as I'd never heard of the so-called 'envelope poems', another revelation, of a new form she used near the end of her life. This small selection is taken from the complete volume of her 'envelope poems' called *The Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson's Envelope Poems* ("gorgeous nothings" is a phrase from one of the poems, included here).

The book is an art object, with transcriptions of her handwriting facing facsimiles of the scraps of envelopes she wrote upon, some of which you can see through to the other side. But, of course, it is her words that are foremost, the shortest of these (of less characters than one can use on a Twitter post) being my favorites, though a slightly longer one (none are long) near the end was intriguing, as it was written on three small sections of a flattened-out envelope and can be read at least two different ways depending on how it is turned. I may just have to get the complete collection now.

A few photos from my day in Amherst: <https://flic.kr/s/aHsm3VyiGN>

Jon(athan) Nakapalau says

Almost like haiku or the poetry of e.e. cummings; a glimpse of raw genius.

Amanda Butler says

I found this book while on a random trip to the bookstore. I entered with no intention of buying anything, and left with a treasure.

Emily Dickinson has always been my favorite poet. Her rhythm and imagery captured my soul since I read her work as a child. I have her complete collection poems as well as her letters on my bookshelf. One of my favorite memories involves touring her house in Amherst, visiting her grave, and leaving a note on her gravestone. When I first started writing poetry, I wanted to BE her - I emulated my poetry to match the format of hers.

I may have since embraced contemporary free verse, but my love for Emily Dickinson and her work will forever be a passion. So when I found Envelope Poems, I was immediately curious. Wrapped in plastic, I was unable to flip through the pages. I had no idea what I was getting into, so I let her (and editors Marta L. Werner and Jen Bervin) surprise me.

The poems in the envelope scraps are incomplete, and there are occasional sideways words in the margins or plus signs to indicate where more words should go. We get a glimpse of her thought process.

Not to mention, using envelopes as poetry scraps is ingenious.

I held one of those laminated envelope scraps as part of the Dickinson tour. I was ecstatic to hold it in my palm; I wish I remember which one it was. This book makes me unbelievably happy that I can read her poems that are so incomplete they sometimes feel like free verse.

I recommend this book to Emily Dickinson enthusiasts. Unless there is a passion for the writer herself, criticisms may include an excess of white space in the pages or the scans of the opposite sides of the envelope scraps. This didn't bother me, as anything regarding Dickinson is worth it to me.

Usually, when I finish a book, it gets put away in some pile, headed to the closet or a donate or sell collection. This book will have a forever-spot on my bookshelf, next to Dickinson's complete poems and letters.

Cooper Renner says

Pocket-sized selection from the magisterial complete collection The Gorgeous Nothings. Both books are superb and put virtually all new books of poetry to shame.

Larry Smith says

Here is a book almost as rare as its author, Emily Dickinson (1830-1886). Drawn from the “envelope poems” of her final period of writing, the book reproduces full color photo images of those envelopes (both sides) and, for the reader’s sake, offers a light type transcription of her uniquely handwritten poems. It makes available in a less expensive format select poems from *Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson’s Envelope Poems* (2013) by the same editors Jen Bervin and Marta Werner and produced by Cristine Burgin Publications. This year also brings us another facsimile work in *Emily Dickinson’s Poems: As She Preserved Them Annotated Edition* edited by Cristanne Miller (Belknap Press, April 2016). And if one needs a new bold literary biography, we have Jerome Charyn’s *The Loaded Gun: Emily Dickinson for the 21st Century* released in March by Bellevue Literary Press.

All of these charming attributes of facsimile publishing make the book a keepsake, but they also offer a new even intimate vision of the life and work of one of America’s finest poets. As noted critic Helen Vendler says of these last Dickinson fragments “...what might seem only negligible scraps of waste paper brings us closer to the restlessness of the constantly thinking poet who, in her later years, repeatedly seized her pencil and a fragment of an envelope to write about the lowliest and the most exalted states of being.”

One can actually sense Miss Emily sitting by the upstairs window of her Amherst home and dashing off the poem she has been carrying in her mind on the closest thing possible...a nearly discarded envelope. And her positioning of the words and the forced conciseness of the paper itself play in our vision of her as person and poet still in her powers.

Look back
on Time
with kindly
Eyes—
He doubtless
did his best—
How softly
sinks his/ that
trembling Sun
in Human
Nature’s West—

There are many of these terse and witty observation poems , and as always Dickinson poems of intricacy of seeing things different and anew (spacing the author’s).

Had we our
senses
But /tho’/ perhaps ‘tis
well they’re not
at Home
So intimate with
Madness
He’s /That’s’ ‘tis/ liable with them
Had we the eyes
within our Head –s—

How well that
we are Blind –
We could not
look upon the
Earth -- World
& So Utterly
Unmoved

Dickinson had stopped writing poems for publication at this point or even for her own delicate poem packets of finished poems. She declares her late earned stance in metaphor:

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

Of course no Dickinson book of poems would be complete without her haunting thoughts on death made particularly relevant by her nearness to it.

Though what
transports of
Patience
I reached the
stolid Bliss
to breathe my
Blank without
thee
Attest me this
and this –
By that bleak
Exultation
I won as
near as this
Thy privilege
of dying
Abbreviate me
this
Remit me this
and this

This beautifully executed book of poems truly needs to be seen and held in the hands as a piece of visual art. It contains the essence of a poet who for over a century has informed and delighted us with her fierce charm and her oh, so memorable lines. It truly is a gift from Miss Emily.

Megan says

"There are those/who are shallow/ intentionally/ and only / profound/ by/ accident "

Filled with rare and beautiful poems. A true treat to read.

Liza Pittard says

A tiny, elegant book of fragments

Claudia says

"Look back on Time
with Kindly Eyes
He doubtless did his best"

This book is filled with the photos of original papers, in Dickinson's own hand. All on the backs or insides of envelopes to the family. Each envelope is reproduced, and then copied exactly, to the placement of the words, dashes and other punctuation. You can read her words in her hand, and also her words in print, which is the way we have read forever.

These appear to be quick sketches...rough drafts, word play. They're fragment of thought and theme and sound. As such they are magnificent. It's like I've been invited to a poet's workshop, but will never see the final product.

I'm not enough of a Dickinson scholar to recognize these little gems, so I just read them to myself and wept at the beauty of the words.

SOME of my favorite lines:

"I have no life but this to lead."

"A great Hope fell; you heard no noise-crash."

"The absence of the witch
cannot-not-- invalidate
the spell."

If I were still in the classroom, I would have so much fun with these lines...

Ariel says

As an object, this book is absolutely gorgeous. The cover is beautiful, the pages feel luxurious, the photographs feel so special, and it's all put together with incredible care.

The content feels like lucky snooping. Like maybe these were just scrap ideas, things Emily Dickinson didn't care for people to see (some of them are even scratched out), and thoughts she wanted to write but wouldn't fit in anywhere else (on one envelope it simple says "there are those who are shallow intentionally and only profound by accident").

It felt like a four star read to me simply because many of the ideas didn't feel finished or realized. Many of the poems had a nice line, but overall left me confused. I did find some gems and dogeared some pages I'll go back to in the future, but I read through most of these thinking "I have no clue what' going on."

Sophie says

A gorgeous little book of small poetry on small things. Highly recommended.

Ally says

Contained within this beautifully published book are full-color facsimiles of some of Emily Dickinson's later poems, notes, and other writing. As the title suggests, these were all written on the unused space of envelopes. On one page, is the reproduction of the article itself, with her own handwriting/strikeouts/edits and on the other, the writing has been transcribed by the Dickinson scholars Jen Bervin and Marta Werner. As Emily Dickinson's handwriting is difficult to read, these transcriptions are greatly appreciated.

This is the perfect book for someone who enjoys the poetry of Emily Dickinson, and is a wonderful companion to the larger published work THE GORGEOUS NOTHINGS. It is a naked hardback, and of a size that would fit easily into a bag for reading and contemplating. Highly recommended!

Ross says

*As there are
Apartments in our
own Minds that -
we never enter without Apology -
we should respect
the seals of
others -*

I'm glad the editors of this volume didn't heed this particularly aphoristic poem. Dickinson in fragmentary

form is cryptic, capturing a quality that many future poets would strive for (i.e., Anne Carson). Also interesting is the incredible glimpse into a master poet's creative process—alternative words, phrases crossed out, poems re-written on facing pages. The facsimiles are clear and the transcriptions true.
