vor poet like Paul Celan (who translated Dickinson into German while interned in a forced labor camp) had to reshape his language in order to translate the shatteredness of his inner and outer worlds, Dickinson's deftly hesitant, quickened breath-work embodied a spirit that to my ear seemed deeply discerning of the liminal spaces, the thin places, in which the truth – in a time whose Beauty and Truth can no longer be sensed, let alone died for – can sometimes hide.

Thus, when I set out to write, a few years after the release of my album, a series of poems from Isaac P. Anderson's point of view, poems that later appeared in my fifth poetry collection, *Another City*, I read Dickinson more than Whitman to capture the prosody that would have served to translate Anderson's quiet survival in the aftermath. Dickinson was labeled an introvert, a shut-in; but she was not. Her monastic qualities were balanced with ecstatic curiosities, the joys of music, conversation, and correspondences. Anderson was labeled a deserter, even after his exoneration (there are still records that indicate him so); but he was not. I quickly saw that Dickinson's *in-spoken-ness*, a quality of introspection and skepticism mixed with the language of hymns, was the key means of grasping Anderson's post-war experience. In the following poem, I consider Anderson's journey back to Phoenixville and the reception awaiting him there:

After Charges of Desertion, June 1864

I saw my river, one kid
stood fishing there,
not even waving
to a passing man

in uniform. My long
coat brushed

the ground, I was taller,
in my boots,
maybe my feet
weren't touching, my beard

the only weight,
like leader fishing line,

my hair like tippet,
and that's

my story, that's when
the cough discharged,

the sad, black
blood—exit ink.

Another City, Milkweed Editions, 2018.
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The enjambments and the language – I fell upon "tippet" without consciously trying to invoke Dickinson – grew out of my sense of the quietness that can hold enormity, as it must have done, too, in poems she wrote during those years of 1861-1865. Sometime later, while working on a new collection, I visited Dickinson's home in Amherst and stood in the room where she had composed the life's work. My grasp of her gift, if it were possible, expanded to include the whole experience she had lived, beyond her work with words. The evidence of that life, from the hawthorn cone to the wisps of notes the piano had seemed to leave stenciled in the air, hung all around me.

Living now in a time of rage and outrage as she did – and in a city in the center of it all – her prosody began to reach into me, in collaboration, as I set out to engage with my new work. I've included one example in the inset, a poem whose broken-opened lines mean to echo the feeling of spacious awareness I discovered in Amherst. It is a memory so vivid. It is a conversation with her music that does not ever seem to end.

Reading Emily Dickinson in Amherst, Massachusetts

I know how it feels to live in a small leaden room,
with only snakes and birds as consolation. I know how
to imagine death by falling through stories
of floorboards like a poem flutters through molecules, air
and time. It never lands in the yard. The trick
is not to die while dreaming of death. That's why
the circle of doors and windows here remain open
a little. That's why the poems seem always to end
on slant rhymes, and dashes. That's why the hawthorn cone
is never quite in full bloom but almost. I too come here
respectfully. I bow, halfway at thresholds. I know how to wait
at a completely empty window, holding out my hands.

David Keplinger
(Reprinted by permission of the author)

She Played Us the Fool: Emily Dickinson and Children's Games

By Katherine Humes

Emily Dickinson loves to play. She toys with her readers' attempts at interpretation ("My life had stood – a Loaded Gun," J754, the poster child poem for evading dissection); plays with theological principles ("Eden – a legend – dimly told," J503 reducing a theological pillar to mere legend); and entertains solemn topics with theatrics ("I heard a Fly Buzz – when I died –," J465). Her equally contemplative and jocund approach to poetry culminates in a marriage of perspicacious subjects and humorous critiques, such as depicting a gentlemanly Death offering a joyride and Hope as a flighty bird who might abandon one at any given moment.

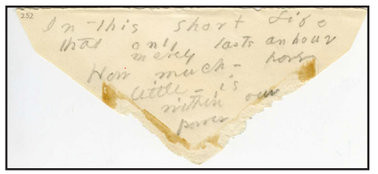
What possible historical evidence suffices to demonstrate her mischievous approach to such disturbing subjects? I propose to illuminate Dickinson's playfulness within her poetry by looking for comparisons and contradictions between her work and children's games (especially those manufactured between 1830 and the 1860s). I will demonstrate the connection between her approach (or reproach) to morality and the agendas for teaching morals within the games. In doing so, I will explore the materiality of her work in the context of games.

Dickinson, in effect, preserved the visual factor of children's games in her works, as well as their apparent purpose of entertainment, but entertainment with an ulterior agenda.

Howard P. Chudacoff's *Children at Play: An American History* argues, "free white children grew up attentive to parental authority and to the devil's temptations, a consciousness that shaped and even curtailed their play." The board-and-card games children played during the period between 1840 and the later 1860s often incorporated moral, theological, and educational schemata. Because many parents looked to their children as, in Chudacoff's words, "guarantors of, not just the family's survival but also the nation's future," children's play was deeply influenced by the attitudes and ideals believed essential for the preservation of the United States. Educating and moralizing governed the play of white children; games and toys lacking in moral or academic agendas distressed society at large and became the subject of critique. Through their experience with games, children were inculcated with bourgeoisie ideals of right principles and the "proper" livelihood (though many more children besides Emily Dickinson probably rebelled against these inculcations). Given the prevalence of such ethical and domestic manipulation within children's play, it is no surprise Dickinson's poetry addresses these overt agendas within games as a reflection of societal mores and expectations, though not necessarily interacting with the games themselves. Her rejection of the traditional right/wrong binary and Christian doctrines exhibits a rejection of not only church teachings but also the informal (and yet highly influential) teachings of childhood play.

An antiquarian version of Hasbro's classic *Life*, *The Checkerboard Game of Life* incorporates conventional stages of life – "to college," marriage, poverty, crime, moral failings, old age. The goal of the game is to complete each of these stages. Without matrimony, players cannot proceed to "happy old age," and therefore cannot hypothetically "win" the game of life. A simple but effective tactic for manipulating children into the appropriate and expected stages of real life, this game presents matrimony and virtuosity as both "fun" and essential to life, positioning vices and bad behavior as directly impacting final happiness. The implication that life is a game requiring strategic play in order to win unsettles Dickinson, who quips,

In this short Life
That [merely] only lasts an hour
How much – how little – is
Within our power [1]



"How little" choice remains "Within our power" exhibits itself on the gameboard, as winning requires avoiding poverty, ruin, and suicide and depends on matrimony. These games represent perhaps the first encounter with physical, printed media children interacted with independent from direct supervision of their parents and teachers; however, the game covertly per-

[1]Poems quoted from the *Emily Dickinson Archive* (edickinson.org) follow the transcriptions as they appear on the site. Accordingly, some of the formats of the poems might appear unfamiliar.

Figure 1: *The Checkerboard Game of Life*, 1866, Content compilation (c) 2020, by the American Antiquarian Society.

suades players to practice the rules of the game in "real" life.

Dickinson defied nearly all of these life stages and took a sardonic attitude toward the expectation of marriage and motherhood. Marriage (both to a husband and as the "bride" of Christ) was particularly detestable to Dickinson. Her poem "Given in Marriage unto Thee" addresses marriage irreverently, its sacrilege originating partially from its being written and sent to her sister-in-law Susan Dickinson and partially from its distortion of the sacrosanctity of the marriage act:

> Given in Marriage unto Thee
> Oh thou Celestial Host –
> Bride of the Father and the Son
> Bride of the Holy Ghost.
>
> Other Betrothal shall dissolve –
> Wedlock of Will, decay –
> Only the Keeper of [the Seal] this Ring
> Conquer Mortality –

The first stanza establishes the traditional marriage of an individual to the Trinity – an analogy for salvation – and the apparent dissolution of all other betrothals or marriages, presumably earthly ones. The distinct lack of personal pronouns raises the question of whether Dickinson is the subject or whether she assumes the position of observer; part of the irreverence in this poem lies in Dickinson's inability to name herself as a bride of the Trinity. In the final lines she doubts the possibility of a trinitarian marriage, clandestinely replacing the Trinity with Susan, "Only the Keeper of [the Seal] this Ring / Conquer Mortality."

Spiritual salvation requires no ring, but a temporal and carnal marriage does. In conquering mortality, she allows all other marriages to "dissolve" and "decay." Her subversion of theological mores reflects her almost comical relationship with traditional marriage, as the "Wedlock of Will" (God's will being that she be given as a bride to "the Father and the Son") will "decay" in the enactment of the mortal marriage between herself and Susan. Furthermore, even if Susan were not the intended subject of the betrothal, Dickinson's third-person voice establishes her as an observer in both senses of marriage, equally as scandalous as women were expected to marry and bear children.

Games such as *The Checkerboard Game of Life* attest to the popular ideals held by nineteenth-century society. Children played games hoping for respite from academic duties and domestic chores, but in a subverted way found themselves being educated and moralized to even in their play. Similarly, Dickinson plays with her readers until they reach the penultimate or final lines of her poems, which often reverse, question, or doubt her opening thesis. "The Wind didn't come from the Orchard – today –" catalogs various items, "Little Boys' Hats," "a Bur," thrown about by the wind. Dickinson dupes us into thinking her poem offers a pithy distraction from life's challenging and sinister questions. However, in the final stanza, "an occasional Steeple" appears tossed by the wind. The wind snatches an apparently firm and immovable structure – representative of God and Christian virtue – whisking it away as easily as a straw hat. In a poem supposedly about the Wind and its transitive nature (i.e., the wind demands an object or objects), Dickinson questions the stability of an entire social institution. Her final lines ask, "Who'd be the fool to stay? / Would you – Say – / Would you be the fool to stay?" Is the one who remains within the church in spite of its temporality and false promise of immortality the fool? Or is the fool one who remains steadfastly within the church even when it perpetuates misogyny, sexism, and suppression? However, looking back at the first line tells us that the wind didn't come to the orchard, so the steeples and hats and sticker burs have remained unmoved: does this mean the fool is one who does not see the possibility of the wind returning? Dickinson's poem presents itself as an appealing distraction from tyrannical morals, only to engage in a disturbing agenda about the truth or falsity of such morals and theologies.

Dickinson also employs a reversal of this procedure, miming a moralizing schoolmarm, achieving an ironic parody of the morals and manners trope within games. Dickinson likewise introduces her own set of ante-morals. A tactic often used in children's games, game makers present explicit moral concepts draped in quaint pictures

Figure 2: "AFFECTATION," *The Good and Bad Passions*, 1845, Content compilation (c) 2020, by the American Antiquarian Society.

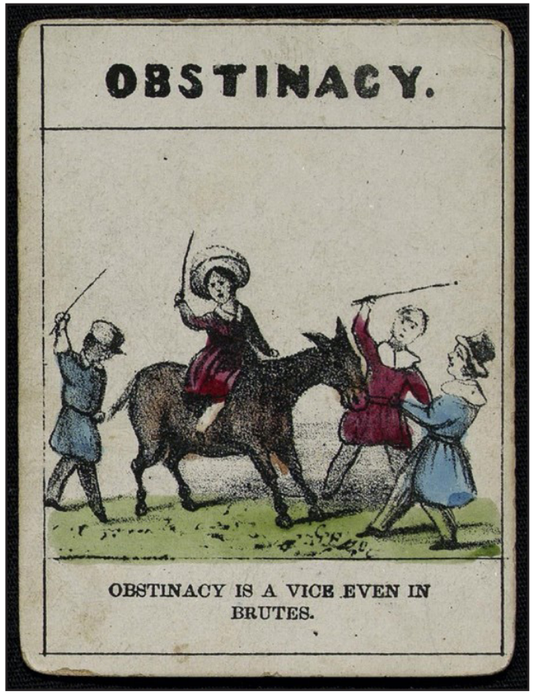


Figure 3: "OBSTINACY." *The Good and Bad Passions*, 1845, Content compilation (c) 2020, by the American Antiquarian Society.

and colorful graphics. Another children's game popular during Dickinson's teenage years was a deck of cards containing the *The Good and Bad Passions*.[2] Teaching children to distinguish between and identify the "passions" as either "good" or "bad" appears the unofficial goal of the game. The cards depict sketches of children enacting the different passions and a short proverb-like descriptor. An example of a comically blunt card, "AFFECTATION," is described as "AT BEST A DEFORMITY" (what, then, is Affectation at its worst?).

Young children interacting with the cards are unconscious of the moral compass directing their play. Take, for example, Dickinson's poem "The Child's faith is new –," which depicts the faith of the child as "new," "whole" and "Wide – like the Sunrise." However, children grow into adults, and the faith they "Never once had a Doubt" about turns into "Prickly Things," Paradise morphing into the "sham" the child once emphatically believed existed. Thus, faith becomes a childish fancy and a foolish enterprise for adults.

Ironically, children's games intent on moralizing fall into the same trap Dickinson herself lays in her poems: children outgrow their games and morals along with them. When moral education becomes synonymous with activity and entertainment, it is hardly unimaginable children view the former as childish once they outgrow the desire to play. Parodying the child's faith, likely as whole and naïve as faith could ever be, Dickinson follows these lines with the child's belief in their own "Sovreignties" [sic], only to grow older and realize how their reign was equally as fanciful as their faith. Dickinson satirizes the Christian adult, essentially calling them children because they have not outgrown faith nor their sense of self-importance. Furthermore, the cards unintentionally poke fun at their own moral intimations, as on the card that reads "EXCITABILITY MAKES OLD AND YOUNG APPEAR RIDICULOUS," as if being ridiculous truly equals obstinacy or negligence in its badness. The almost idiotic itinerary within this game teaches students to distinguish between the good and bad passions, but that some of the passions labelled "bad" are as menial

[2]Unfortunately, we do not know the rules of play because the instructions for the game did not survive with the rest of the playing cards.

as “excitability” and “vanity” makes Dickinson’s irreverence for morals and moral designations not only understandable but warranted.

Dickinson’s material and visual writing style, in addition to her irreverence of theology and its corollaries, in effect mirrors of the physical printed game board or cards. The physicality of the cards reveals striking similarity between Dickinson’s poetry and children’s games. Dickinson’s poetry exists as a visual production, a prototype of concrete poetry. Her poems written on small envelopes or receipts or the backs of newspaper advertisements often incorporate elements of the chosen paper in the lines. If we look for a moment at the image of the “OBSTINACY” card, we see the title at the top with end punctuation, an image in the center depicting the passion, and a final group of words describing obstinacy. From the macro perspective, this card contains an idea with an arguably poetic depiction of the idea in both image and word. The card both tells and shows obstinacy, similarly to how Dickinson both tells us about the steeple’s import in the poem and subsequently shows it by giving the steeple its own line and by underlining the word; she also shows the steeple’s import through its singularity in being a fixed object, unlike all the other objects within her poem. Her placement and artistic marks designate a visual project. Let us quickly turn to the poems Fr1635A and Fr1636A, written in a puzzling and puzzle-like presentation. The words written around the page upside-down, descending letters, and in subscript become part of the poem and part of our interpretation. “Arrows enamored of his Heart” appears on the page next to a word descending down the page, acting as the physical “arrow” directing us to the next line. Additionally, the diagonal lines on the right of the folded page direct the “Arrows” to the line “Possessed by / Every hallowed / Knight.” Often these lines are split and divided into two poems, but given they are written on the same page and with a directive to interact with both sides of the page, the presentation appears a single poem. Though only one example of her many visual productions, this poem exhibits both Dickinson’s materiality and playfulness, directing us through her poem as a piece is directed through a game.

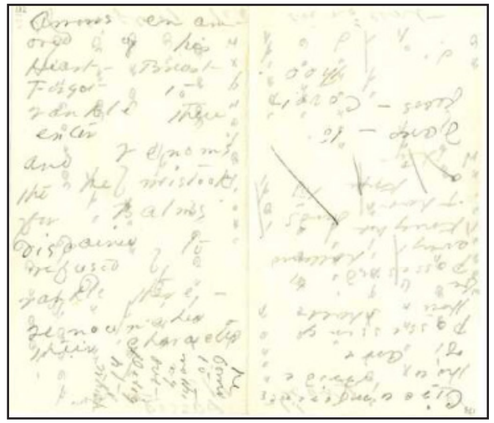


Figure 4: Amherst Manuscript #132, 133; image retrieved from *The Emily Dickinson Archive*.

Dwelling on the question of whether or not Dickinson played these games herself proves irrelevant. Dickinson’s poems reflect a knowledge of childhood play and how it was moderated by the physical game pieces rather than by adult supervision. Her materiality, as well, reflects that of childhood games, as she counts on images, words, and spaces to enhance or even create meaning within her work. She subverts Biblical stories (as the garden of Eden becomes only a legend which adults assure children “Bubbled a better – Melody” [J503]) and disturbs the ideal of matrimony (“A Wife – at Daybreak I shall be – / Sunrise – Hast thou a Flag for me?” [J461]). Children’s games represent a physical object with images and words meant to guide the player through the process of the game while posing obstacles that children could possibly encounter in adulthood. The game enables children to question the “fairness” of such obstacles as they prevent them from winning. Dickinson directs us through a serious game, presenting obstacles such as doubt and disbelief, hopes to trip us up, play with us, or have us question our own agenda, is perhaps all part of her game.

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Katherine Humes currently studies at New York University, working towards an MA in English and American Literature. Her nonfiction essays have been published in online blogs. Her research interests are Emily Dickinson, Jane Austen, contemporary poetics (specifically looking at concrete and visual poetry), and the politics of space and place in the early nineteenth-century novel. She won the de Jager Award for Academic Excellence at The University of Oxford for her research on jane Austen and modern consumerism. Aside from her academics, Katherine teaches middle school ELA and writing and in her spare time continues to write essays and poetry.