More on the Grammar of Emily Dickinson

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Introduction

This book shall serve to pursue two goals: First, we want to put forward an in-depth description of the grammar of Emily Dickinson. In particular her use of semantic and pragmatic aspects of language reveal that Emily Dickinson herself intuitively employed linguistic tools in order to arrive at dense text meanings. Thus, this book is an extension to other, valuable work on Emily Dickinson's grammar, especially Cristanne Miller's *A Poet's Grammar* (1987), that look at her work from the perspective of a combination of literary scholarship and generative linguistics, and more specifically, formal semantics. Second, our unique approach to the work of Emily Dickinson shall demonstrate the need and fruitfulness of interdisciplinary approaches to literary analysis in general, and especially the combination of literary scholars and formal semanticists. In that way, this book is a model for those kinds of collaborations. Overall, both the specific properties of Emily Dickinson's use of language as well as an interdisciplinary approach to literary analysis support our programmatic claim that poetry is not to be considered as different from natural language but rather as part of it. More to the point, poetry is a language variation close to standard grammar; in our specific case, Emily Dickinson's grammar is a variation close to standard English.

1. The combination of linguistics and literary studies

We favour a text-centred approach in literary studies, and focus on descriptive and theoretical linguistics, especially formal semantics and pragmatics. We concentrate on the poetry of Emily Dickinson, since it displays a highly uncommon use of language, which we argue is part of her poetic strategy and gives evidence of a large degree of linguistic competence and awareness. In our view, the reason for Dickinson's apparent non-compliance with linguistic rules is neither ignorance nor eccentricity but the desire to achieve specific effects and activate certain processes of interpretation. Dickinson's poems thereby reveal the flexibility

and potential of grammar. We will see that its rules are not suspended but function differently in her poetry (and poetry in general). These modified rules are still assumed to be systematic deviances from the original grammar, which is why speakers are able to adapt to them. It is this adaptation process that increases speakers' awareness of the rule system behind language.

Our interdisciplinary approach to the study of poetry arises from the similar needs and interests encountered when teaching English literature and English linguistics and semantics, and from the subsequent insight that there is considerable benefit in joining the expertise of both disciplines. There are a number of aspects in which both disciplines overlap. A linguistic approach will not ignore the plausibility or implausibility of a semantic interpretation, and a literary approach will also look closely at the language of a poem. From the point of view of literary studies, the methods of linguistics serve as a tool in reaching a better understanding of a literary text: linguistics will give a very precise and detailed analysis of a text, unaffected by arbitrary interpretations or conjectures. From the point of view of linguistics, a literary text can be seen as a tool for reaching a better understanding of linguistic mechanisms: a literary text as a complex form of utterance serves as a touchstone to test the accuracy and viability of linguistic theories and analyses. Our interdisciplinary work has been pursued within the research project "Interpretability in Context" of the Collaborative Research Centre "The Construction of Meaning" at the University of Tübingen since 2009.

In this section, we will once again consider Emily Dickinson's specific use of language in more depth, give an overview for whom this book is written and overviews of the approaches in linguistics and literary scholarship, respectively, that we are mainly concerned with in this book. Finally, we will introduce the operator FictionalAssert which is central to our interpretation of the poems.

1.1 Dickinson's special use of language

Our analyses of selected poems by Emily Dickinson will show that the poet deals with language creatively, bending the rules of grammar, and that she exploits a number of phenomena (e.g., reference, ambiguity, ellipsis, quantification and coercion) again and again. This repeated use of the same set of phenomena – which lead to the same effects each time they are employed – makes us assume that she does so systematically, and we are interested in identifying the mechanisms through which this happens. One effect of her use of language is that we are provoked to think about the way language works. Linguistic phenomena are used in a way that differs from normal, everyday use with the intention of triggering a reflection about language in the reader during the interpretation of a poem. This presupposes a high command of language, as well as a fine intuition concerning linguistic rules and the processing of language on the part of the poet. Considering Dickinson's intense occupation with language and the system discernible in her poetry, we can assume that she possessed such an extensive command and intuition.

Dickinson's use of language is rhetorical insofar as she exploits language for a distinct purpose – not to convince the reader of a particular agenda but to cause a process of reflective interpretation and to create an awareness of language and linguistic rules. While a similar strategy can be observed in some other poets as well (for example in metaphysical poets such as Donne or Herbert), most poets either generally conform to the rules of language or do not use deviations for the same purposes as Dickinson. A clear, contemporary counterexample to Dickinson is Alfred Lord Tennyson's poetry. Like Dickinson's poetry, it is distinguished by a special use of language (mostly by the use of archaisms), yet these peculiarities are not used to point at special features of language or at the mechanisms of understanding language. Instead, they are used merely to give a quaint and archaic flavour to Tennyson's poetry. Consider, for instance, the beginning of "The Coming of Arthur" from *Idylls of the King*:

(1) Leodogran, the King of Cameliard,
   Had one fair daughter, and none other child;
   And she was the fairest of all flesh on earth,
   Guinevere, and in her his one delight.

   For many a petty king ere Arthur came
   Ruled in this isle, and ever waging war
   Each upon other, wasted all the land; [...]
   (Tennyson 1908, 4)

Tennyson uses inversions ("for many a pretty king ere Arthur came ruled in this isle" instead of "for many a pretty king ruled in this isle ere Arthur came"), ungrammatical constructions ("none other child" instead of "no other child"), ellipsis ("in her his one delight" instead of "in her was his one delight") as well as old-fashioned and unusual words ("ere" instead of the more modern "before," "isle" instead of the more common "island") to make his description of King Arthur's time sound like a description from an old historical document. He only manipulates those aspects which are relevant for the text's atmosphere, while Dickinson manipulates grammatical aspects which are relevant with regard to a text's meaning, the conscious interpretation of which requires reflection on how language works. The study of Dickinson's poetry is therefore especially worthwhile to deepen an understanding of language.

In our analyses of Emily Dickinson's poems, we look at the language of a poem both on a local level, beginning with single words, phrases and sentences; and on a global level, stanzas, the poem as a whole, and extra-textual aspects. Although we distinguish between local and global phenomena and interpretation processes, both are of course interlinked and dependent on each other, as will become apparent in our analyses.

As mentioned above, the starting point for our considerations is Cristanne Miller's *Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar* (1987), which is largely concerned with the peculiarities of Dickinson's syntax. While studies of Dickinson's poetry frequently take into account

linguistic phenomena with reference to individual poems, Miller's study is the first (and so far only) book to attempt a systematic approach and classification of linguistic phenomena in Dickinson's poetry. To her insights into Dickinson's syntax, we wish to add the analysis of semantic phenomena and to incorporate the consideration of pragmatic mechanisms. In regarding both disciplines as equal contributors throughout, and in consistently and systematically combining them in our work, our approach is unprecedented, and it has already proven to be fruitful and successful during the last seven years of our work on the project.

1.2 For whom this book is written

Apart from providing new insights into Dickinson's use of language and poetical strategies, our work will enrich the methodological repertoire as well as the theoretical assumptions of both disciplines. Literary scholarship will benefit from the objective arguments and observations based on grammatical theory, which will help to establish reasonable and plausible interpretations based primarily on the text. The benefit for linguistics lies in the (innovative) use of literary texts as a data source, which widens the range of phenomena to be considered for linguistic analysis. Therefore the book will be useful to literary scholars (not just those who specialise in Dickinson's poetry) and for theoretical linguists alike. It will also be a valuable help in teaching university courses to students of both disciplines, as well as courses focusing on Dickinson's poetry. As well as exploring specific linguistic phenomena, we provide examples of accurate textual analyses which are helpful in both cases and insightful for those scholars or students interested in either a thorough analysis of a certain poem or a demonstration of how Dickinson's poetry works in general.

By combining literary scholarship and linguistics, the book will thus provide a good foundation and starting point for semanticists wanting to explore a new approach to

semantics, for literary scholars interested in a new approach to literary studies, and for teaching Dickinson's poetry.

1.3 Linguistic Approach

From the perspective of linguistics, our approach to syntax, semantics and pragmatics is based on the theory of Generative Grammar (Chomsky 1957), which assumes that the grammar of a language can be seen and described as a finite set of formal rules and principles which generates all the grammatical and well-formed structures of a language. The idea behind this theory of grammar is that artificial as well as natural languages can be modelled using a formal system. In this book, we are primarily dealing with the field of formal semantics, which is concerned with the investigation of linguistic meaning through the use of formal rules. A recent elaboration of a formal rule system to describe the meaning of linguistic structures was developed by Heim and Kratzer 1998. We will use a Heim and Kratzer-style framework for our analyses and extend it when necessary. A more detailed introduction of the core concepts and analytical tools employed throughout this book is given in the appendix.

1.4 Literary Approach

Our approach in literary scholarship is largely text-oriented. While we are aware of the fact that literary texts interact with other cultural products in various media, we are convinced that such more general cultural analyses depend on valid insights into the ways in which the meaning of literary texts is established. We take into account different approaches to the interpretation of literary texts but do not set out from any particular theory that would predetermine the direction of a text's interpretation. Instead, we argue for plausible interpretations derived from a linguistic analysis of the literary text. On the basis of this analysis, we incorporate extra-linguistic, contextual knowledge provided by the resources of literary scholarship in order to achieve plausible global interpretations. When analysing Dickinson's poetry from the perspective of literary studies, the main aspects we look at are

biographical information, intertextual references and influences as well as textual aspects that are not covered by a strictly semantic analysis.

Considering biographical information in our case does not mean to match statements in her poems to biographical occurrences (a problematic approach often found in analyses of her poetry). Rather, we use our knowledge of Dickinson's biography to substantiate our approach. For example, the special importance we attach to the definitions given by Noah Webster's *An American Dictionary of the English Language* is justified because we know that it was one of Dickinson's most-used books (cf. Benvenuto 1983; Hallen and Harvey 1993), and because we find many reflections about words, writing, language and poetry in Dickinson's works (cf. Thackrey 1963). When studying a poet who once said: "for several years, my Lexicon – was my only companion –" (L261, cf. Miller 1987, 154), biographical information to no small extent means information about the words and quotations found in that dictionary. The importance of intertextuality becomes evident when we look at the meaning (that is, at definitions, synonyms, and possible connotations) that particular words had in Dickinson's time, and especially at how they were defined in Noah Webster's dictionary, on which she heavily relied. We look at other instances in which Dickinson uses a word or phrase, that is, at those of her poems (and letters) where the word is used and at how it is used there (in what kind of grammatical construction, in what kind of context) in order to understand her very own idiolect. We also look at possible (and plausible) references to other texts. Dickinson's poems abound with biblical allusions, for example, and their recognition and understanding is in many cases essential for a plausible interpretation (cf. McGregor 1987). There are also instances where references to other literary works are manifest and influential on the meaning of a poem (cf. Pollack 1974; Cuddy 1978).

Our procedure is located closely to New Criticism, Reader-Response Criticism, and New Historicism, insofar as we, too, place great emphasis on the close reading of a text, take the position of the reader into account, and bear the poet's cultural context in mind. We do not

restrict ourselves to these approaches but try to achieve a productive combination. Generally, we start as readers of the text first and foremost. We consider our work an advancement and enhancement of a purely text-oriented approach – strongly based on the text but more holistic in its considerations of the text as a whole and of the author's intention in writing the text.

1.5 Text Interpretation through FictionalAssert

For the analysis of fictional texts in general and poetic texts in particular, we developed a linguistic tool that explains the difference in interpreting an utterance made in fictional discourse as opposed to everyday discourse. While both rely on the same rules of grammar, readers approach a poetic text differently than they do conversations in conventional settings. The difference in the pragmatic step taken is explained by the operator FictionalAssert (Bauer and Beck 2014):

> (2) $[[\text{FictionalAssert}_R]] = \lambda T. \forall w'[\ T(w') \ \& \ w'$ is maximally similar to @ otherwise $\rightarrow R$ $(w')\ (@)]$
> "Worlds in which everything the text says is the case and which are maximally similar to the actual world otherwise, are worlds that stand in relation R to an evaluation world."

Whereas in everyday discourse, the pragmatic step taken to update the shared information of all conversational partners implies that what the utterance conveyed must be true in the evaluation world, in fictional texts we do not follow the same reasoning: Fictional worlds may well describe a setting that goes against the facts or possibilities of our world knowledge. Instead, FictionalAssert is built up in parallel to a conditional and relates the text worlds through the accessibility relation R to our evaluation world. The conditional relation between the text worlds and the actual world is one of maximal similarity, only differing in aspects that the text specifies. In that way, the text retains its relevancy for us. Additionally, FictionalAssert takes a different unit as its argument: Whereas in everyday conversation, we most often update the shared information sentence by sentence, fictional communication happens on a broader level, namely on the level of the text as a whole. We are thus able to

explain differences in the pragmatic meaning components of fictional texts while preserving the same rules of grammar that also apply for everyday discourse. In that respect, FictionalAssert is conceived as a tool to describe the pragmatic step that is undertaken when reading fictional texts, one which explains, for instance, how readers can accept global ambiguity of a fictional text and a conjunctive reading of all sentence meanings as the overall text interpretation. Due to the limited contextual knowledge that comes with a text that is observable most radically in poetry, disambiguation on contextual grounds is not possible. The context is neutral as to which reading is preferred over the other. Accordingly, the text meaning can only be the combination of all readings in order not to lose any information that might be relevant for establishing the accessibility relation R between the text world and our actual world @. Thus, we see that fictional discourse is not inherently different from everyday discourse but rather has a different pragmatic situation.

FictionalAssert is not only a tool for executing the particular pragmatic step needed in fictional discourse but also leads the way to text interpretation. By relating the text worlds w' to an evaluation world, most often our actual world @, we undertake a transfer from what is true within the possible worlds of the text to our evaluation world and thus discover the text's relevancy to ourselves. The relation R is by and large a relation that is not arbitrary but falls in line with the reader's subjective experience: While the text offers a limited number of elements that can function as referents through R, the relation R can map these referents to individuals within the reader's own experience. A first-person narrative, for example, offers the speaker or narrator of a text as a referent to the reader, who can decide whether to map this referent to herself such that she identifies with the narrator, or whether she maps the narrator to someone else within her evaluation world. The text meaning thus stays specific, while how the reader relates the information given in the text to her own experience is subject to intervariation across readers. Some of the notions we will encounter in our subsequent analyses of Dickinson's poems as they pertain to the relation R are, for instance, the above-

mentioned identification with the speaker or addressee, or world properties that we relate allegorically to our own behaviour and world view.

As an example for how FictionalAssert works, consider the following fable:

(3) The Crow and the Pitcher
A Crow perishing with thirst saw a pitcher, and hoping to find water, flew to it with delight. When he reached it, he discovered to his grief that it contained so little water that he could not possibly get at it. He tried everything he could think of to reach the water, but all his efforts were in vain. At last he collected as many stones as he could carry and dropped them one by one with his beak into the pitcher, until he brought the water within his reach and thus saved his life.—Necessity is the mother of invention. (*Aesop's Fables*, trans. George Fyler Townsend, 2012)

It is clear that facts that are described in the text are not replicated in our evaluation world: Usually, we do not ascribe mental states such as delight or grief to crows. However, we still want the text to have a meaning that is relevant to us. FictionalAssert operates on the text as a whole and states that all worlds in which what the text says is true stand in relation R to an evaluation world, in this case our actual world:

(4) [[FictionalAssert]] ((3)) (@) = 1 iff $\forall$w' [[[(3)]] (w') & w' and @ are maximally similar otherwise $\rightarrow$ R (@)(w')]
"All text worlds w' stand in relation R to the actual world @."

The relation R triggers a mapping process between elements of the text and elements in the actual world:

(5) $\forall$w'[[[(3)]] (w') & w' and @ are maximally similar otherwise[1] $\rightarrow$ counterpart (reader$_{@}$, crow$_{w'}$) & $\forall$w'' [what is desirable in @ is the case in w'' $\rightarrow$ reader$_{@}$ behaves in w'' like crow behaves in w'] (Bauer and Beck 2014, 264)

Here, the crow in the text worlds is mapped to the reader in the actual world and the behaviour of the crow is mapped to desirable behaviour in the actual world. Thus, the text offers a limited number of elements that the reader can relate to her own experience. In the example above, it is the crow and its inventiveness in behaviour. In the course of the book, we will see the central role of FictionalAssert in more complex examples of Emily Dickinson's

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[1] To simplify matters in the upcoming chapters, we will take the similarity requirement as given in all cases where we apply FictionalAssert.

poems, revealing especially how FictionalAssert interacts with cases of underspecification and ambiguity, leading to various possible readings of the text.

2. <u>The structure of this book</u>

In order to achieve our goals introduced above, the book is divided in three parts: The first part consist of six in-depth analyses of individual poems. The variety of linguistic phenomena used and their simultaneous systematic use across poems will reveal Emily Dickinson's intuitive play with linguistic tools. The in-depth analysis will serve to find a pattern in Emily Dickinson's work that demonstrates her linguistic intuition. The table below illustrates this pattern. The phenomena listed on top reoccur in the six analyses as core phenomena that influence the text interpretation or as minor phenomena within the poems. The six poems analysed in depth are listed on the left side.

In the first poem we discuss in detail, "This was a Poet," structural ambiguities on a syntactic level interact with referential ambiguities: Determining the reference for demonstrative pronouns contributes to the overall meaning. "If it had no pencil," in turn, is a poem where the felicitous assignment of referents that agree with additional meaning components of the pronouns, like their gender requirement, turns out to be problematic and thus creates underspecification; in this chapter, we also deal with how to approach poems in question-form. In the poem "To pile like thunder," we will see examples of lexical underspecification. In "I'm Nobody," Emily Dickinson deliberately violates the basic principle of combinatory rules, though this violation itself serves as part of the overall meaning of the text. In "You said that I 'was Great'," the speaker of the poem herself attempts a playful 'linguistic' dissection of what it means to be 'great'; and finally, in "My Life had stood a Loaded gun," lexical meanings are forced to be reinterpreted due to their combinations with other elements of the text.

The patterns we discover in these analyses where Emily Dickinson plays with the potential in meaning created by linguistic mechanisms shall then serve as a basis to establish a systematic description of her status as an intuitive linguist. In a subsequent step, we will elaborate on the specific poetic nature of Emily Dickinson's work. The illustration of this system of language use will be the main concern of the second part of the book.

Finally, in the third part of the book, we will discuss how the poetry of Emily Dickinson can serve as a valuable data source in the disciplines of linguistics and how the present book can serve as new research in literary studies.

Primary Phenomena
additional phenomena, phenomenon in additional poems

Semantic Phenomenon →	Intentional Underspecification of Referents				Intentional Underspezification of the Utterance					Theme: Semantics itself	
	Reference				Ambiguity			Coercion	Quantifiers	Scales, Context	
Poem ↓	Demons.	Pronoun	Definites	PSPs	lexical	structural	Ellipsis	Coercion	Quantifiers	Scales, Context	
This was a Poet (Chpt. 1.1)	x_{this}										
If it had no pencil (Chpt. 1.2)		x_{it}	$x_{the\ Daisy}$			x_{before}	x_{harm}	$x_{distill}$			
To pile like Thunder (Chpt. 1.3)	x_{this}				x_{prove}	x_{now}					
I am nobody (Chpt. 1.4)		$x_{I, you}$		x_{too}					$x_{nobody, somebody}$		
You said that I was great (Chpt. 1.5)		$x_{you, I}$								$x_{"great"}$	
My Life had stood (Chpt. 1.6)			$x_{the\ owner}$		$x_{carry\ away}$	$x_{identified}$		$x_{stood, speak, reply}$	x_{modals}	x_{longer}	

3. **<u>Appendix: Glossary of most commonly used linguistic terms</u>**

In this section, we will introduce the reader to basic linguistic practices regarding the interpretation of sentences that we will employ throughout this book. Readers already familiar with these concepts may skip this part. We will look at three main components of linguistic analysis: Syntax, formal semantics and pragmatics. In the following, we will introduce basic concepts from each of the three components in turn, starting with syntax in section 3.1, proceeding with semantics in section 3.2, and finishing with pragmatics in section 3.3. In each section, various example phenomena will be taken into account that will also come up in the course of the book.
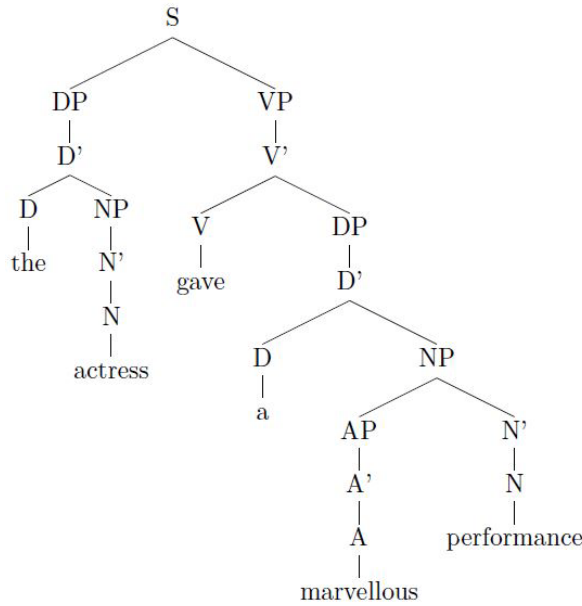
For the purposes of this book, we generally try to use an as simple as possible framework that can help us capture the core insights of linguistic analysis. This framework is only extended if necessary.

3.1 Syntax

In the tradition of Government & Binding Theory (Chomsky 1981; Haegeman 1994; Haegeman and Guéron 1999), we analyse all sentences of any natural language as being subject to the same recursive rules and principles that constitute a basic hierarchical structure. With this structure, we can define what it means for sentences to be well-formed (cf. Beck and Gergel 2014, 8). This structure entails that sentences are made up by constituents that themselves have subconstituents. The individual constituents are phrases that are always built up the same way: Each phrase has a head, taken from the lexicon, which determines the function of the phrase. Other elements of a phrase are complements and specifiers, which bear different hierarchical positions within the phrase. The hierarchy follows from the combination of all the constituents of a sentence and their subconstituents. This structure is traditionally represented either in tree form (see (7)) or in bracket form (see (8)):

(6) The actress gave a marvellous performance.

(7)

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                        S
             ┌──────────┴──────────┐
            DP                     VP
             │                      │
            D'                     V'
          ┌──┴──┐             ┌─────┴─────┐
          D     NP            V           DP
        the     │           gave          │
                N'                         D'
                │                   ┌──────┴──────┐
                N                   D             NP
             actress               a        ┌────┴────┐
                                            AP        N'
                                            │          │
                                            A'         N
                                            │     performance
                                            A
                                        marvellous
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(8) [$_S$ [$_{DP}$ [$_{D'}$ [$_D$ the] [$_{NP}$ [$_{N'}$ [$_N$ actress]]]]] [$_{VP}$ [$_{V'}$ [$_V$ gave] [$_{DP}$ [$_{D'}$ [$_D$ a] [$_{NP}$ [$_{AP}$ [$_{A'}$ [$_A$ marvellous]]] [$_{N'}$ [$_N$ performance]]]]]]]]

Both (7) and (8) are equivalent in that these are possible representations of the structure associated with the sentence in (6). Both encode the same hierarchical relations between the constituents of the sentence. Without going into too much detail, we see that for example the Determiner Phrase (DP) "the actress" forms a subconstituent of the overall sentence as well as the Verb Phrase (VP) "gave a marvellous performance." Both the DP and the VP have subconstituents. In the course of this book, we will simplify for the benefit of the reader and thus will not always be very concise in giving the correct labels to each node in the tree; for the purposes of a formal semantic analysis that requires the syntactic structure as input, the relevant information indicated by a tree structure as in (7) is the hierarchical relations of the elements and not their specific names.[2]

A special case: Syntactic Ambiguities

We speak of "syntactic ambiguities" when there are several possible ways to assign to a sentence a structure. For example:

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[2] A detailed follow up to this very simplistic introduction here can be found e.g. in Haegeman 1994, Haegeman and Guéron 1999 and Beck and Gergel 2014.

(9) *The woman looked at the man with the binoculars*

In (9), the constituent "with the binoculars" is either a subconstituent of the VP describing the looking-action of the woman, or it is a subconstituent to the Noun Phrase (NP) with the head "man". Two distinct Logical Form (LF) structures are available:

(10) [[DP The woman] [VP **looked** [PP at [DP the man]] **[PP with the binoculars]**]]
(11) [[DP The woman] [VP looked [PP at [DP [the **man [PP with the binoculars]**]]]]]

The structure in (10) thus means that the woman used binoculars in order to look at the man more closely. The structure in (11), in turn, means that the woman looks at the man who has binoculars. The meaning of the Prepositional Phrase (PP) does not change – it is only its position that triggers this difference in meaning.

A special case: Ellipsis

Another syntactic phenomenon that will be relevant in the following analyses are elliptical structures, i.e. structures that leave out a constituent. Cases of ellipsis often interact with structural ambiguities as shown above. Consider the following example:

(12)
    a. *Peter read* Harry *Potter and Sally did* ~~read Harry Potter~~*, too.*
    b. [S [DP Peter] [VP read Harry Potter]]] [and [S' [DP Sally] [VP did ~~read Harry Potter~~]] [too]]

The verb "do" in (12) does not contribute any meaning itself. Rather, it serves as a placeholder for the Verb Phrase "read Harry Potter". Thus, the VP "read Harry Potter" has been elided in the second conjunct, yet its meaning is still present and also necessary for interpretation. The Verb Phrase "read Harry Potter" in the first conjunct serves as its antecedent.

(13) *Sally₁ visited her₁ mother and Mary₂ did* ~~visit her₁/₂ mother~~*, too.*

The example in (13) is ambiguous: Either Mary visited Sally's mother, or she visited her own mother. Here, ellipsis and the reference for "her" interact to create ambiguity. We will see many examples in which structural ambiguity and ellipsis interact in Emily Dickinson's

poems, where it is not clear which part of the preceding lines of the poem the elided part is supposed to refer to since various elements will serve as possible antecedents.

3.2 Sentence Meaning in Formal Semantics

A formal analysis of sentence meaning as has been put forward first by Frege (1892) considers meaning to come about compositionally. This means that a sentence meaning comes about by combining the meanings of its constituents. This way, we can make use of the hierarchical structure determined by syntax and use further rules that define how to combine the meanings of the individual constituents specifically. Traditionally, it is assumed that the meaning of a sentence equals the conditions under which the sentence is true (cf. Heim and Kratzer 1998, 1). In other words, a sentence is true if the facts that are described by the sentence are true. Formally, a sentence meaning describes the conditions that have to hold for the meaning to be assigned the truth-value 1 (1 stands for true, 0 stands for false). The framework for a structurally based semantic analysis we will employ here is taken from Heim and Kratzer 1998. In the following, we will introduce core aspects of this framework that will be relevant to the upcoming analyses:

Interpretation Function

Semantic composition of a sentence follows from the combination of the meanings of the sentence parts. We can access the meaning through an interpretation function:

(14)
    a. *Klaus smokes.*
    b. $[_S [_{DP}$ Klaus$_{<e>}] [_{VP}$ smokes$_{<e>}]]$
    c. $[[\; [S [_{DP}$ Klaus$_{<e>}] [_{VP}$ smokes$_{<e>}]] \;]]$

A simplified syntactic structure of the sentence in ((14)a) is given in((14)b). The double brackets around this sentence structure in ((14)c) represent the interpretation function. The interpretation function tells us to go from the form of the sentence to its meaning. The syntax gives us the necessary information about the hierarchical structure. On the basis of this hierarchical structure, we can access the lexical entries of the heads. "Smokes", for example,

is a property, i.e. a function from individuals to truth-values. In other words, it is this function that assigns to every individual for which the property is true the truth-value 1. Its lexical entry is given below:

(15) $[[smokes_{<e,t>}]] = [\lambda x: x \in D_e. \, x \; smokes]$

According to the notation defined in Heim and Kratzer, we will use the Lambda-Calculus as a formal way to capture this meaning. The lambda in (15) tells us that this is a function which looks for individuals of type <e>. The information provided after the colon is called the 'domain description': It describes what the arguments that will be fed into the function have to look like. In this case, they have to be individuals. The information provided after the full stop is the value description of the function. It tells us which property is relevant for the individuals that are picked out by the function; in our case, it is the property of smoking. All elements of a sentence are either individuals or functions, or higher-type functions that take functions as arguments. Because semantic types are recursive, we only need a few rules that tell us how to combine functions and individuals.

Combinatory Rules

The most common combinatory rule suggested in Heim and Kratzer 1998, among others that we will not discuss here, is Functional Application:

(16) Function Application (FA):
If α is a branching node and $\{\beta,\gamma\}$ is the set of α's daughters, then α is in the domain of [[ ]] if both β and γ are and $[[\beta]]$ is a function whose domain contains $[[\gamma]]$. In this case, $[[\alpha]] = [[\beta]] \, ([[\gamma]])$. (Heim and Kratzer 1998, 49)

We can apply Function Application to example (14) above: The meaning of the DP "Klaus", which is the individual Klaus, is contained in the meaning of the VP "smokes", because "smokes" is a function that looks for individuals as arguments. Thus, we can apply the function "smokes" to the argument "Klaus":

(17)
    a. $[[Klaus \; smokes]] = 1$ iff (FA)
    b. $[[smokes_{<e,t>}]] \, (\, [[Klaus_{<e>}]]) = 1$ iff (Lexicon)
    c. $[\lambda x: x \in D_e. \, x \; smokes] \, (\, K \,) = 1$ iff (Simplification)

d. K smokes.

In (17)b, we have applied Function Application and can proceed by inserting the lexical entries for both elements through the interpretation function (see (17)c)). The result is the sentence meaning that says that the sentence "Klaus smokes" is true if and only if the property of smoking is true of the individual Klaus. However, we can still go one step further and simplify by replacing the variable x with the argument "Klaus". Note that all steps within the semantic derivation of the sentence meaning in (17)a, b, c, and d, are equivalent in their meaning.

Examples for higher-type functions are quantifiers like "no" or "every". Rather than talking about specific individuals, they relate different properties that do or do not apply to a group of individuals at the same time. In the case of "every", for example, for all individuals for which the first property that "every" takes as an argument is true, the second property has to be also true:

(18) Every runner stretches.
(19) $[[\text{every}_{<<e,t>,<<e,t>,t>>}]] = \lambda p_{<e,t>}. \lambda q_{<e,t>}.$ for all x such that p(x), q(x).
(20) $[[\text{every}]] ([[\text{runner}]]) ([[\text{stretches}]]) = 1$ iff for all x such that x is a runner, x stretches

An extension: Intensional Semantics

With the framework introduced above, we can interpret sentences only with respect to the here and now. However, we want to also make reference to other times and possible ways things could have turned out to be. For this purpose, semanticists employ the notion of possible worlds. Heim and von Fintel (2011) demonstrate how to implement that notion formally in a way that is compatible with a Heim and Kratzer-style framework.

Propositions

In Heim and von Fintel 2011, sentence meanings are not truth-values but functions from worlds to truth-values:

(21) $[[\text{Klaus smokes}]] = [\lambda w. \text{ K smokes in w}]$

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By formalising the sentence this way, we can look at each sentence in turn and determine in which world it is true. (21) may well be true in our actual world, yet there are also an infinite number of worlds in which Klaus may not smoke, in which case the sentence would receive the truth-value 0. Thus, our basic types of individuals and properties have to be extended to also include worlds, type <s> and propositions, i.e. functions that take worlds as their arguments of type <s,t>. There are also higher type functions that take propositions as arguments. Now we can apply function application as usual.

An example: Quantifiers over possible Worlds: Modals

Modals are constructions that shift propositional meanings:

(22) Klaus may smoke.

In (22), we are not discussing the state of affairs in our actual world, but are rather talking about worlds that are compatible with the laws in our actual world:

(23) According to the law, Klaus may smoke (because it is allowed to smoke in designated areas and Klaus is in such an area at the moment).

Similar to quantifiers like "every" or "some", which quantify over properties, modals like "may" and "must" quantify over possible worlds:

(24) [[may]] = $\lambda p_{<s,t>}. \exists w'$ compatible with the law in w such that p(w')=1

The context determines which aspect of our actual world is relevant for the meaning of the modal statement. We will see a more detailed analysis of modals in Chapter 1.4.

3.3 Pragmatic Meaning Components

In this section, we will first consider sentential elements that require contextual information in order to be interpretable: These include pronouns, demonstratives and presuppositions. In a further step, we will see how we can once again extend the Heim and Kratzer framework to build discourse information into our system.

Assignment Functions and Pronouns

In addition to the interpretation function, other contextual elements are sometimes necessary to be able to proceed with the interpretation. For pronouns, Heim and Kratzer argue that they can only be assigned a meaning relative to the context. Thus, Heim and Kratzer implement a contextually available assignment function g. The interpretation function is from now on always relative to that assignment function:

(25)
    a. $[[\text{She}_1 \text{ always laughs a lot.}]]^g$
    b. $[[\text{she}_1]]^g = g(1)$ is female. $g(1)$

Furthermore, they assume that pronouns carry an index that can serve as an argument for the assignment function and further impose a restriction on the context such that for every index, there has to be an available referent. Heim and Kratzer call this condition the Appropriateness Condition:

(26) Appropriateness Condition:
    A context c is appropriate for an LF [*a sentence structure*] ϕ only if c determines a variable assignment g_c, whose domain includes every index which has a free occurrence in ϕ.
    (Heim and Kratzer 1998, 243)

Let us assume a context for (25) above where three referents have been established in the previous conversation: Sally, Tina and Klaus. Tina and Klaus are talking to each other and Tina utters (25). Thus, the index assigned to the pronoun "she" can be felicitously mapped to Sally. Further content of the pronoun, such as gender and case, is provided by presuppositions (see (25)b).

Demonstratives

The variable system introduced above can also be extended to demonstratives (see Büring 2011). Here, in addition to the index, demonstratives carry additional presuppositions of the relative position of the referent to the speaker:

(27)
    a. I want this.
    b. $[[\text{this}_3]]^g = g(3)$ is proximal to the speaker. $g(3)$

<u>Presuppositions</u>

Many constructions come with further restrictions on their use that cannot be captured within the pure semantic structure, but that have to be observed once contextual information becomes relevant. Most commonly, presuppositions impose such restrictions. Presuppositions point towards already established information in the context. One way to establish which elements of a sentence trigger presuppositions is to negate the sentence:

(28)
    a. The king of France is bald.
    b. The king of France isn't bald.

Presuppositions are those parts of the sentence that are constant under negation. In the example above, there has to be a king of France in both sentences. We have to rely on our information provided within the context to check whether there really is a king of France. If there is not, the sentence is not true or false, but simply fails to be meaningful. How to formally capture this presupposition will be explained in more detail in the following section.

For example, Heim and Kratzer assume a semantics for the definite determiner 'the' that comes with a presupposition:

(29) $[[\text{ the }]] = \lambda f_{<e,t>}$: there is a unique x s.t. f(x) =1. the unique x s.t. f(x) =1.

In the Heim and Kratzer framework, presuppositions are added to the domain description within the lexical entries. Here, the domain description says that "the" looks for a property and requires that there be exactly one unique referent within the context for which the property is true. Once this requirement is met, we can proceed with the interpretation, and the meaning of the definite article then is this specific individual for which the property is true. For pronouns, gender information comes in through a presupposition (see (25)b). The sentence can be assigned a meaning only if these requirements are met.

Many words come with presuppositions that are often not as obvious as in the case of definites or pronouns. They are called selectional restrictions. They are lexical information of

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words that evokes specific requirements as to with which other elements the word can combine with. However, especially in Emily Dickinson's poetry, we come across semantic mismatches due to violations of presuppositions:

(30)
    a. The mountains reply.
    b. [[reply]] = λx: x is human. x replies.

Here, we come across a semantic mismatch because the selectional restriction of "reply" does not match "the mountains": "Reply" not only looks for an individual as argument, but also requires of this argument to be human, such that it is able to reply. "Mountains," however, are not human. Thus, the sentence is undefined and has to be reinterpreted. We will see in Chapter 1.6 how reinterpretation of such cases work.

An Extension: Dynamic Semantics

       As we have already observed, the Heim and Kratzer framework is a tool to formalise sentence meanings, but it also has its limits where further information might be relevant, as, for example, displacement to other times and worlds. Similarly, it has been argued that it is necessary to look at sentence meaning not in isolation, but within a system of conversational information that grows as a conversation proceeds. Above, we mentioned the fact that certain phenomena can only receive an interpretation relative to the context. Thus, if we would include a more elaborate system to keep track of contextual information given in the preceding discourse, we would be able to explain in a more precise way where the referents come from that the assignment function picks up. That is why Heim (1982) and Kamp (1981) have put forward frameworks that keep track of the constant context update related to any utterance. Accordingly, the semantic value of a sentence is not its truth-conditions, but rather its potential to modify and extend contextual information. In Heim's (1982) File Change Semantics, propositions are functions from contexts to contexts. The formal type of a context in that framework is a pair of worlds and variable assignments <w,g>. The context update happens after each utterance: The information given by the sentence (its type is <w,g>) is

intersected with the already existing, previous information (which is also of type <w,g>). For our purposes, we can simplify this system such that sentences are functions from variable assignments to propositions. In that way, a sentence still is the potential to extend contextual information by quantifying over all assignments that can potentially assign to the sentence a proposition:

(31) [[She$_1$ always laughs a lot]] = λg. λw. g(1) always laughs a lot in w.

Essentially, we are only concerned with contextual phenomena that receive their interpretation through the assignment function, i.e. pronouns and demonstratives. The idea is thus that the context provides information about all assignments that fit the previous information. By adding further information, the number of possible assignments constantly narrows down and shapes the context more. In order to make compositional interpretation work in this case, we have to modify Function Application as to accommodate the new types:

(32) Dynamic Function Application (DFA):
Let <g> be the type of variable assignment functions. Then: If α is a branching node with daughters β and γ and β is of type <g,<x,y>> and γ is of type <g,x> then [[α]] = λg.[[β]](g)([[γ]](g))

This extension of Function Application guarantees that once we have opened up all our semantic types to be functions from assignments, we can still combine them. A side effect of such a framework comes in handy in cases where a pronoun is uttered without there being a specific, already established referent. Imagine a situation in which (31) is uttered, but there is no available referent for the pronoun "she." Since the sentence provides information for all possible variable assignment functions, we can assume that there is at least one of those assignments that can map a referent to the index of "she": We quickly gather more information about this "she" in order to narrow down possible referents. We will see in Chapter 1.1 how such a system can be applied to poetic texts.

1.1 "This was a Poet": Identifying Referents – Definites and Demonstratives

(1) This was a Poet – It is That
    Distills amazing sense
    From ordinary Meanings –
    And Attar so immense

    From the familiar species
    That perished by the Door –
    We wonder it was not Ourselves
    Arrested it – before –

    Of Pictures, the Discloser –
    The Poet – it is He –
    Entitles Us – by Contrast –
    To ceaseless Poverty –

    Of Portion – so unconscious –
    The Robbing – could not harm –
    Himself – to Him – a Fortune –
    Exterior – to Time –

1. __Introduction__

The first poem that we would like to look at in some detail presents obvious problems for interpretation[1] as its syntactic structure is heavily fragmented and the reference of several expressions unclear. We will show in the course of our discussion that those difficulties in interpretation and the way we suggest to solve them lead to a global ambiguity of the whole poem, meaning that each local ambiguity contributes to the emergence of two main readings.[2] Emily Dickinson deliberately uses referential indeterminacy and structural underspecification to arrive at a complex and ambiguous but not arbitrary meaning of the poem.

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[1] Heginbotham (2003) suggests that since "This was a Poet" is located opposite to J613/Fr445, "They shut me up in Prose," on fascicle 21, the two poems are discoursing with each other thematically (16). Some authors argue that J448 was written as a eulogy of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (e.g. Schöpp 1997, 96; Sherwood 1968, 211), who died in 1861. Although the poem was written around 1862 (Heginbotham 1998, 285), there seems to be no conclusive evidence for this claim; in fact, there is no evidence other than the temporal proximity of Barrett Browning's death and the composition of the poem as well as ED's admiration for her. Textually, Heginbotham also points out the poem's closeness in word choice to Emerson's essay "The Poet" ("the verbs—'Distils,' 'Arrested,' 'Entitles'—are all in Emerson's 'The Poet'"; 1998, 286); see also Farr 1992, 323. Dickinson moreover recalls Higginson's "Letter to a Young Contributor": "Literature is attar of roses, one distilled drop from a million blossoms" (410). Her style shows a great deal of indebtedness to Higginson's after the publication of the "Letter," see Sherwood 1968, 205.
[2] When we speak of "global" and "local" phenomena, we categorise them according to whether they apply on the level of the text as a whole (global), or on only a specific part of it, for instance a phrase or a line (local).

2. <u>The Nature of Poetry – An Analysis of the First Part of the Poem, lines 1-8</u>

From the beginning of the poem, we are presented with an interpretational difficulty that is related to the interdependency of the first two stanzas' syntactic structure. The syntactic complexity interacts with two context-dependent elements in the first line, the two demonstratives "this" and "that". Both come without contextual clues as to how to interpret them. In the following, we will first go into detail as to how to interpret demonstratives generally. In a second step, we will relate this general analysis to the meanings of "this" and "that" in (2). We will see that both demonstratives introduce the basic theme of the text, poetry, which will lead to the two main readings.

(2) This was a Poet – It is That

Usually demonstratives underlie rather heavy restrictions as to when they are felicitously employed since they share their basic semantics with pronouns (cf. Büring 2011). Let us assume for now that demonstratives, like pronouns, carry an index that points towards a specific individual in a given context (cf. Heim and Kratzer 1998, Büring 2011). A variable assignment function is responsible for this mapping-mechanism. The assignment function takes the indices as values and gives back the contextually salient individuals:

(3) $[[\text{this}_1]]^{gc}$ is only defined if $g_c(1)$ is proximal. Then, $[[\text{this}_1]]^{gc}$ $g_c(1)$
(4) $[[\text{that}_2]]^{gc}$ is only defined if $g_c(2)$ is distant. Then, $[[\text{that}_2]]^{gc}$ $g_c(2)$

Let us assume a context where I, the author of this chapter, sit at my desk. On my desk, there is a mug of tea right next to me, and a textbook that I need to write this chapter is on the far right side of my desk. Suppose now that I ask my student assistant to take the mug away and to pass me the textbook:

(5) Can you take this_1 and pass me that_2?

The variable assignment maps the first demonstrative to the mug and the second to the textbook. Interpretation of both may happen smoothly as the relevant information is given by the context:

(6) $[[this_1]]^{gc} = g_c(1)) =$ the tea mug in c (well-defined since the mug is proximal)
(7) $[[that_2]]^{gc} = g_c(2)) =$ the textbook in c (well-defined since the mug is proximal)

When we turn to the poem, however, we lack the contextual information that can lead to a felicitous interpretation of the two demonstratives. The only contextual information that we have access to is the rest of the poem itself. We may still find plausible referents for the demonstratives after we have read the poem as a whole, i.e. once we have gathered information what the poem is about. That means, however, that it is impossible to interpret the demonstratives immediately. A dynamic system of interpretation can help us out (cf. Heim 1982; Kamp 1981; Poesio 1996; Stalnaker 1978; Groenendijk and Stokhof 1991); rather than interpreting every sentence relative to a given variable assignment function, we will determine the sentence meanings by quantifying over all possible assignments that make the sentence true. This is captured by analysing sentences as functions from possible assignments to propositions. When we have gathered more information about the assignments, we may be able to decide which variable assignment could best fit interpretation. That is we can assign values to variables at the global level of the text. What is necessary in order to interpret the sentences of the poem this way is to extend the formal framework we use in order to capture sentence meanings: Usually, we operate with the assumption that sentences denote propositions which are functions from worlds to truth-values, stating that the information given in the sentence is true in some evaluation world. An example for this is in (8) and (9):

(8) He is intelligent.
(9) $[[He_1$ is intelligent $]]^{gc} = \lambda w.\ g_c(1)$ is intelligent in w

The sentence meaning of (8) can be captured formally by (9), given that the variable assignment function g_c can provide a referent for the pronoun 'he'. In assuming that the salient referent for the pronoun in (9) is Bill Gates, for example, the sentence turns out true for all worlds in which Bill Gates is intelligent. Now, in extending our formal system in order to capture a more dynamic notion of sentence meaning, the interpretation of sentences is not dependent on the given variable assignment anymore but rather opens up a meaning potential

where all possible variable assignments could potentially give values for the pronouns in the sentence. In that framework, we understand sentences as functions from assignments to propositions:

(10) [[He$_1$ is intelligent]] = λg. λw. g(1) is intelligent in w

Instead of (9), the meaning of the sentence in (8) is now modelled as in (10), which says that for every variable assignment g and world w, the referent that is mapped to the index 1 through the variable assignment is intelligent in w. That gives us the option of keeping open who is meant by the pronoun.

In correspondence with this theoretical background, we turn to the poem itself and use this extension of our system to capture the meaning of (2):

(11) [[This$_1$ was a poet]] = λg. λw: g(1) is proximal. g(1) was a poet in w

We now consider the meaning of the sentence "This was a Poet" as it is given in (11): It is a function from variable assignments to a proposition which says that those referents mapped to the index 1 by any available assignment is a poet in w. Similarly, the sentence embedding the second demonstrative can receive the sentence meaning in (12) (taking the most plausible sentence structure for the first and second stanza), where different referents that here can be mapped to the index 2 by any assignment distil amazing sense and attar:

(12)
    a. It is that (which) distils amazing sense from ordinary meanings and (which distils) attar so immense from the familiar species that perished by the door.
    b. S$_2$ = That$_2$ distils amazing sense from ordinary meanings and (distils) attar so immense from the familiar species that perished by the door.
    c. [[S$_2$]] = λg. λw. g(2) is distant. g(2) distils sense [...] and attar [...] in w

Ignoring the cleft-structure of the sentence for now to somewhat reduce its complexity leaves us with a simplified version of the sentence as given in (12)b and its corresponding sentence meaning, considering the extension to a dynamic framework in (12)c. The first demonstrative "this" refers to something immediately in the context, something proximal, whereas "that"

stands in contrast to it by referring to something distant or abstract. There have to be two different referents for the demonstratives that are nonetheless connected to each other because of the cleft-structure. If we take the entirety of the poem into consideration (see below for a more detailed analysis), we can gather that both have to refer to something that a poet creates in contrast to a group of speakers. Thus, on the global level of the text, given that the only available information to us is the poem itself, it seems as if "this" is most plausibly to be interpreted self-reflexively in pointing towards the poem itself as something a poet creates. Through the contrast between "this" and "that" and their simultaneous connection, we can derive that, if "this" refers to the poem itself, "that" may refer to the broader concept of poetry in general – given that the poem is proximal, while poetry is a concept that is more abstract or distant.[3] Now that the basic theme of the poem has been established through an analysis of the demonstratives, the following lines provide an explanation of what poetry in general, and this poem in particular, does: It distils sense from meanings and attar from the familiar species. On the semantic level, we are presented with a mismatch of the selectional restrictions of the verb "distill," and the object "sense," as "distils" requires a physical substance as object, suggested by the juxtaposition of distilling attar from the familiar species that follows this line, but "sense" is an abstract notion:

(13) $[[\text{distil}]] = \lambda y. \lambda z. \lambda x.$ z is a liquid. x distils y from z.

Since the third argument of "distill," namely "ordinary meanings," is also an abstract concept, the most plausible way to arrive at a sentence meaning is to reinterpret "distill" and read it as metaphorical:

(14) $[[\text{distill}_{\text{Reint}}]] = \lambda y. \lambda x. \lambda z.$ z transforms y into x.

With that meaning, the first conjunct states that poetry transforms "ordinary meanings" into "amazing sense." In the second conjunct, we seem to need the literal meaning of "distill," as

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[3] Miller (1987) reads "that" as referring to the poet, and thus "reduc[ing] the poet's humanity" (119). Farr (1992), however, perceives the peculiar mixture of "this," "that," and finally "He" as Dickinson's "definition of the poet as a nearly suprapersonal asexual force," since "[t]he artist […] transcends sex in this poem" (324).

here, poetry distils attar, i.e. "[a] very fragrant, volatile, essential oil obtained from the petals of the rose; fragrant essence (of roses)" (*OED*, "attar, *n*."). from "the familiar species."[4]

But even though the verb and the object match, neither fits the subject, namely poetry, in a literal sense. Thus, the whole VP, distilling attar from species, has to be interpreted metaphorically: poetry can take something beautiful that is temporal or ephemeral (e.g. the blooming of a flower), and transform it into something timeless and lasting. This transformation of something short-lived into something that endures over time is further strengthened by the subordinate clause that describes the familiar species as having perished by the door:

> (15) [main Poetry distills attar so immense from [the familiar species [subord that perished by the door]]]

As the context of the poem is rather restricted and does not make reference to a specific door, there is, technically, a multitude of different doors that could be possible referents to the one where the familiar species perished by, e.g. on its threshold as part of the transformative process that is being described.[5] In order to accommodate the uniqueness-condition of the article, one possibility is a metaphorical reading of *the door*: if the door metaphorically stands for a unique transformation, i.e. the transformation from flowers to attar, the uniqueness-condition is met. "The door" then is a representation of the act of transition that takes place when flowers perish at the precise moment they are turned into attar, i.e. when something ephemeral passes away as it is transformed into something ever-lasting.[6] In this way, we are

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[4] Eberwein (2013) contextualises "This was a Poet" (and other poems, such as J501/Fr373 "This World is not conclusion") as influenced by Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, particularly with reference to the word "species"; see especially pages 64-65.

[5] Deppman (2013) – who places the poem in the context of Heidegger's philosophy – reads the door as "a threshold between this world of everydayness […] and the next or other world outside, usually male, dangerous, exposed, mysterious, and radically transformative" (241) across Dickinson's poetry.

[6] According to Cameron (1979), the process in the poem indicates that "[t]o keep meaning from perishing is to lift it out of the context where it is sheer mediacy, to make of mediacy a totality and of totality a meaning" (198), explained as the poem's "ability to isolate meaning from time, to spatialize it" (197). How "spatializing" meaning should serve to achieve "totality" remains unclear.

also dealing with a paradox: something has to perish in order to be turned imperishable as a consequence.[7]

Taking both conjuncts together, poetry here is described as fulfilling two main purposes: Creating sense, and at the same time creating a very dense essence, that is the aesthetic and sensual nature of poems. Through the conjunctive sentence structure it becomes clear that both the sense, the complex meaning, and aesthetics have to be part of the product of the transformation-process. The poem, iconically, becomes a representative of the very practice it describes.

Interpreting the last two lines of the second stanza presents a problem to the syntactic structure that is mainly caused by "before." This syntactic ambiguity will allow for two readings that will, in their interaction, introduce the relationship between the poet and the readers of poetry. While the first stanza has established a characterisation of what poetry does, we will now see how the poet and the readers use poetry – "before" can take both a DP or a CP as arguments. That is why we cannot be sure how to resolve the sentence structure in (16), given that either the argument of "before" has been left out and this is a case of ellipsis, or that the third stanza is the continuation of the sentence.

(16) We wonder it was not Ourselves –
      Arrested It – before –

Two possible readings arise[8]:

(17)
    a. DP: We wonder (that) it was not ourselves who arrested it before the poet (arrested it).
    b. CP: We wonder (that) it was not ourselves who arrested it before the poet (who is the discloser of pictures) entitles us, by contrast, to ceaseless poverty.

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[7] The Christian imagery is striking, as the process of distilling attar from roses can be likened to the passing from an earthly existence into life everlasting. Although we will not pursue this line of argument in this context any further, we note that it certainly is a possibility to make the connection between Poet and God (or Creator) in this poem.

[8] There is also the possibility of "before" not taking any arguments. In that reading, the sentence could best be captured by the following meaning: "We wonder it was not ourselves who arrested it earlier." However, this reading is closely related to (17), because we still have to find out to which earlier time "before" refers to – the context gives us only the activities of the poet, which again leads to us, in contrast to the poet, having not arrested it before the poet did.

In each case, the group of speakers "we" is contrasted with the poet in that they did not arrest something that the poet, in turn, did arrest. In order to arrive at a complete interpretation, we have to find the referent of "it". Only then we can pin down the content of the action that the poet was capable of and the speakers were not. Through the specific structure of the sentence, which includes the cleft-structure "it was not ourselves", the content that some arresting-event has happened is presupposed rather than asserted. This arresting-event should have been mentioned before in order for the presupposition to be felicitous. In the preceding lines, there are two possible referents for the arresting-event that "it" could refer to: the distillation of amazing sense and the distillation of attar. As both are connected via conjunction, they occupy parallel hierarchical positions in the LF and are equally plausible candidates for "it":

(18)
    a. We wonder (that) it was not ourselves (who) arrested the sense before.
    b. We wonder (that) it was not ourselves (who) arrested the attar before.

Combining both options for the reference of "it" and both ways of how to resolve the structural ambiguity caused by "before" leaves us with four possibilities of interpretation:

(19)
    a. We wonder it was not ourselves (who) arrested the sense before the poet did.
    b. We wonder it was not ourselves (who) arrested the attar before the poet did.

(20)
    a. We wonder it was not ourselves (who) arrested the sense before the poet entitles us to poverty.
    b. We wonder it was not ourselves (who) arrested the attar before the poet entitles us to poverty.

Since attar and sense both complement each other and are defined as being both part of the process that poetry is responsible for, it seems as if the conjunction of both readings in (19) and (20) best captures the overall meaning in each case. As we are confronted with poetic discourse, and the context of the poem is such that none of the two options is preferred over the other, only both options taken together seem to reflect on a complete interpretation of the

pronoun. Accordingly, we can take both ((19)a) and ((19)b) in conjunction to be one reading (repeated in (21)a) and both ((20)a) and ((20)b) in conjunction to be the other reading (repeated in (21)b):

(21)
    a. We wonder it was not ourselves who arrested the sense and the attar before the poet did.
    b. We wonder it was not ourselves who arrested the sense and the attar before the poet entitles us to ceaseless poverty.

The poet entitling us to ceaseless poverty can be seen as a consequence of our failure to distil or arrest the sense. The reading given in (21)b thus suggests a causal link in which arresting the sense could have prevented our impoverishment caused by the poet. Since this did not happen, and he has left us (entitled) with perpetual (ceaseless) poverty, we are poor, whereas the poet is rich. The verb "entitle" is in this case reinterpreted into having a meaning like "condemn," as combining "entitle" with "poverty" would lead to a contradiction; the relation of "Of Pictures, the Discloser" to "The poet" is that of an apposition. The reading in (21)a on the other hand does not strike up this same causal link, and the poet's entitling us to poverty is not necessarily connected to the earlier event of arresting (or failure to do so).

       In an interim summary of the first part of the poem, we come to the conclusion that a complex definition is given of what poetry in general should do (and what in effect the poet by creating poetry in the specific case of the present poem does), namely transforming something ordinary into something extraordinary, while at the same time preserving something sensual and beautiful to last for a very long time. In the present case, it is natural language which is used poetically, i.e. transformed. This distillation or arresting of both the sense and the aesthetics of ordinary things is ascribed to the poet as an ability proper to only him, unlike the group that the speaker is part of. In one reading, this inability of capturing something special with ordinary tools has as the effect that the poet impoverishes the group of

speakers; in an alternative reading, the poet only managed to do so earlier, while the group referred to by "us" could possibly have done the same. We can summarise both readings as follows and will refer to the first one as the "powerful poet-reading" (I_{PP}) and to the latter as the "powerful reader- reading" (I_{PR}):

(22) Lines 1-8 according to I_{PP}:
Poetry transforms something ordinary into something extraordinary and preserves something sensual and beautiful to last for a very long time. The speakers wonder why they did not use poetry in that way before the poet entitled them to ceaseless poverty.

(23) Lines 1-8 according to I_{PR}:
Poetry transforms something ordinary into something extraordinary and preserves something sensual and beautiful to last for a very long time. The speakers wonder why they did not use poetry in that way before the poet used it.

Both the impoverishment in I_{PP} and the hidden capability of the speakers in I_{PR} are true at the same time. Their combination illuminates this part of the poem and yields the most comprehensive interpretation. Furthermore, the simultaneity of the poet impoverishing us and our basic ability to do the same introduces one of the main topics of the poem: namely the reciprocal relation between the poet and the group referred to by "us".

3. The Relation between Poet and Readers – Analysing the Second Part of the Poem, lines 9-16

As we have seen in the analysis of the first part of the poem, the reading of stanza three depends on how we read "entitled". Our previous suggestion was to reinterpret it to mean "condemn". This ironic reading is not the only possible interpretation of the verb at this point, but a more straight-forward alternative might be preferred. In the following discussion, we will assume the most plausible sentence structure of stanza three given below:

(24) The Poet, the Discloser of Pictures, it is he (who) entitles us, by contrast, to ceaseless poverty.

The lexical entries of "entitle" and "poverty" force us to reinterpret either the one or the other, since else we would arrive at an implausible statement; this is what we have shown with our reading of "entitle" as "condemn". Alternatively, we may do the same with "poverty":

(25)
    a. The Poet condems us, in contrast to himself, to poverty (which is the inability to disclose pictures).

    b. The Poet entitles us, in contrast to himself, to keeping pictures undisclosed.

As we have seen before, the first reading, given in (25)a, goes along with the I_{PR}-reading of the preceding lines given in (23) where the group of speakers was not able to arrest the sense/attar (i.e. unable to disclose pictures in the way the poet does)[9] before the poet condemned them to poverty. The second reading, the positive reinterpretation of poverty given in (25)b, goes together with the I_{PP}-reading in (22): The group of speakers was not able to arrest the sense/attar before the poet arrested it, and thus, the poet relieves the group of speakers of the responsibility to disclose pictures. The group of speakers, in turn, is at liberty to not do the work the poet does for them (even though technically, they have the opportunity). In general, both readings, I_{PP} and I_{PR}, are asserted simultaneously and only in conjunction represent a complete meaning of the text, similar to stanza two. Accordingly, both poet and the group of speakers gain and lose something, or rather take something away from the other. This is further supported by the apposition "in contrast," which puts focus on the diametric relation of the two parties: The poet takes the ability to disclose pictures from the speakers, while, at the same time, the speakers take the possibility to leave pictures undisclosed from the poet.

    This diametric relation of poet and the group of speakers is further dramatised in the fourth stanza, especially in lines 13 and 14:

(26) Of portion – so unconscious –
     The Robbing – could not harm –

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[9] Deppman (2013) reads Dickinson's "Discloser" as an approach to the "Heideggerian vocabulary of aletheia, of truth as disclosedness [*Erschlossenheit*] rather than as adequation of language or concept of reality" (238). Wardrop (1996) points out that the "Discloser" is not only "one who reveals, but also the dis-closer, one who willingly opens the door. … The speaker insists on dis-closing her house in the way that the poet who dwells in the House of Possibility throws all the doors and windows wide, letting in the familiar, the detritus from which poetry can be crafted, converting death into life, distilling from ordinary meaning amazing sense" (30). For a discussion of J466, "I dwell in possibility," see chapter 2.2, "The Linguist as Poet."

Because of the ellipsis, we cannot be entirely sure of the sentence structure. A plausible way to resolve the structural indeterminacy, given the information in the preceding lines of the poem, is as follows[10]:

(27) The Robbing of portion could not harm

Through the definite article, the DP "the robbing" triggers a uniqueness presupposition:

(28) [[the robbing]] = [[the]] ([[robbing]]) =
     λg: there is a unique e such that e is a robbing. the unique e such that e is a robbing]

This uniqueness presupposition requires that there be one unique robbing-event. The preceding sentences therefore have to have alluded to this particular robbing event. A second point relevant for the DP is the semantic ellipsis involved: The lexical information of "robbing" requires an agent and a patient, so we need the semantic information as to who has done the robbing and who was being robbed. Thus, "robbing" requires two additional covert arguments in order for us to arrive at a complete interpretation:

(29) [[robbing]] = λx. λy. λe. e is a robbing of y by x
(30) [$_{DP}$ the [$_{NP}$ [robbing PRO$_1$] PRO$_2$]]
(31) [[the robbing]] = λg: there is a unique e such that e is a robbing of g(1) by g(2). the unique e such that e is a robbing of g(1) by g(2)]

The internal structure of the DP in the LF (given in (30)) thus has to include two covert pronouns, PRO$_1$ and PRO$_2$ which are the two arguments needed by "robbing". (31) is the fully specified meaning of the DP. The most likely candidates for the referents of the pronouns are the poet and the group of speakers, as those are the only referents mentioned in the remainder of the poem. Again, there are two possible ways of assigning a referent to the pronouns: One possibility is to choose the poet as the agent and the speakers as the patient. The other possibility is the reverse case: The speakers are the agents whereas the poet is the patient. In the first case, a possible variable assignment assigns the poet as referent to the index 1 and the speakers as referents to the index 2. The alternative is to assign the speakers to the index 1 and the poet to the index 2. This leads to the following two possible meanings for the DP:

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[10] For clarity's sake, we have left out "so unconscious" in this paraphrase, but we will come back to it later.

(32)
    a.   the unique e such that e is a robbing of the speakers by the poet

    b.   the unique e such that e is a robbing of the poet by the speakers

We see that each option contributes to one of the two readings established in the previous stanzas, I_{PP} and I_{PR}: ((32)a) fits the I_{PP}-reading, while ((32)b) fits the I_{PR}-reading. Hence, only the lack of an overt agent and patient for "robbing" makes a local, ambiguous interpretation of the DP possible that is then transferred to the two main readings. Coming back to the presupposition that there has to be a salient robbing-event available in the context of the sentence, one possibility is to read the distilling of sense/attar as the ability that the poet takes away from us, and thus the portion that he robs from us. This follows up on the I_{PP}-reading. In the second reading, I_{PR}, in which the speakers are the robbers, the end-product could equally be the distillation that we take away from the poet, because we do not have the ability to do the distillation ourselves.

Let us now combine the meaning of the DP with the meaning of the rest of the sentence. Two additional elements are relevant for its interpretation: The modal "could" and the VP "harm", both in combination with the negation. In the LF structure, we will assume the negation to have widest scope:

(33) [$_{CP}$ not [$_{TP}$ [$_{IP}$ could [$_{VP}$ [$_{DP}$ the [$_{NP}$ [[robbing [$_{PP}$ of portion]] PRO1] PRO2]] harm]]]]
"It is/was not possible that the robbing of portion from g(1) by g(2) caused harm."

One more local ambiguity needs to be addressed at this point: The interpretation of "could" – in one case, the morphology of "could" points towards an event that happened in the past, when the robbing was not able to do harm. In the other case, the temporal reference is irrelevant and "could" is interpreted purely modally. This means that, in the first case, we have to anchor the reference to a past time, while, in the second case, the sentence is a general statement about possibility. The two options lead to the following two propositions:

(34)

   a. λg. λw. $\neg$ ∃w'[R$_{circ}$ (w)(w') & ιe$_w$[e is a robbing of portion of g(1) by g(2)] harms g(1) at t$_{past}$]

   b. "The function that maps any assignment g and world w to true iff it is not the case that there is a world that adheres to the same circumstances as w in which there is a unique robbing of portion event of g(1) by g(2) which harms g(1) at the relevant past time t$_{past}$."

      "It's not the case that there was the possibility that g(2) robbing g(1) would harm g(1)."

(35)

   a. λg. λw. $\neg$ ∃w'[R$_{circ}$ (w)(w') & ιe$_w$[e is a robbing of portion of g(1) by g(2)] harms g(1) at t$_{ref}$]

   b. "The function that maps any assignment g and world w to true iff it is not the case that there is a world w' that adheres to the same circumstances as w in which there is a unique robbing of portion event of g(1) by g(2) which harms g(1) at the reference time."

      "There isn't any possibility that g(2) robbing g(1) could harm g(1)."

The two readings of "could" thus contribute to the ambiguity of the semantic ellipsis of "robbing" and thus also to the ambiguity between I$_{PP}$ and I$_{PR}$. We argue that the intended interpretation derives from both options in conjunction: neither in the past, nor ever, will any of the two robbings of either the poet robbing the speakers or the speakers robbing the poet harm the robbed entity.

The final item that requires explanation in this sentence is the apposition "so unconscious." To which element of the sentence does it belong? Due to its position, it can either modify "portion" or the "robbing." Accordingly, in the first case, the portion that is taken away is held unconsciously, meaning that the person having this portion is not aware of it. This fits the reading where the poet robs the speakers without harming them, so the I$_{PP}$-reading, as they are not aware that they are missing something – and it also refers back to the presuppositional element of the DP, namely that the poet robs us of the ability to distil sense/attar, though we were not aware of this ability in the first place. The second option,

where "unconscious" modifies "robbing", fits the I_{PR}-reading quite well: The speakers rob the poet without him being aware of it, and, thus, he is not harmed. This latter reading also accommodates the presupposition of the poet's lack of awareness of the fact that we rob him of the end-product of his ability to distil sense/attar, because he can repeat this process as often as he wishes to.

We can now turn to the last sentence[11]:

(36) Himself – to Him – a Fortune –
     Exterior – to Time –

We cannot be sure how to interpret the sentence due to its elliptical structure: the problem is that the main verb is missing. But the two readings I_{PP} and I_{PR} can help with a reconstruction of sense. In the I_{PP}-reading, it is the poet who robs the speakers of a portion or ability that the speakers were not aware they had; hence, they are not harmed, because they do not know that and what they have lost. In consequence, the poet is the only one who has the ability to disclose pictures and distil sense/attar. Through this ability, a timeless fortune is available to himself, because he can be sure that no one else will interfere with this unique ability. Thus, an informal paraphrase of the reading, that follows I_{PP}, can be seen below:

(37) "He has gained a fortune for himself that is timeless."

His fortune is timeless because the work will survive the poet. The alternative reading is closely connected to the I_{PR}-reading: Here, the speakers rob the poet without him being aware of it and without him being harmed. He is not harmed through the robbing by the speakers because he is sufficient unto himself. As he has the ability to distil sense/attar and can repeat this process whenever he wishes to, he is independent from the robbing of the speakers, who could only take away the end-product, i.e. the poem and its meaning. His creativity is his fortune. Accordingly, an informal paraphrase of this reading can be seen below:

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[11] We will exclude the possibility that "himself" is the argument for "harm." Following our two readings for the sentence, neither of them provides a basis where it is grammatical to use "himself" as an argument for "harm." In the reading where the speakers rob the poet without harming him, the reflexivity would not make any sense as the poet is not the agent of the robbing event; the other reading would fully account for the reflexivity of the pronoun, and, given that if the poet robs somebody else, it is less plausible (but possible) that this action leads to him harming himself. Since the first reading suggests that it is not the poet who is responsible for the robbing but the speakers, using a reflexive is dispreferred.

(38) "He is a timeless fortune for himself."

The poet is the creator who has the power to turn something ordinary into something extraordinary; the robbing by the speakers could never harm him. Seen in conjunction, both readings interact: It is simultaneously the case that, through robbing us, the poet gains a fortune and because our robbing of him could never possibly harm him, he is his own fortune.

In the third and fourth stanzas, the contrast between poet and the group of speakers ("we") is fleshed out in more detail. The two readings identified at the end of stanza two, I_{PP} and I_{PR}, are sustained by considering structural and referential local ambiguities of the text:

(39) Lines 9–16 according to I_{PP}: the poet as agent condemns us to poverty and thus robs us of an ability that we were not aware of, gaining a fortune only he has access to.

(40) Lines 9–16 according to I_{PR}: the speakers are agents and entitled to poverty in that they do not have to disclose pictures; in turn, they rob the poet of his portion of ingenuity without him noticing it, and, since he can repeat the process of distilling sense and attar, he is not harmed by this action either.

Only taken together do these readings of either poet as agent or "we" as agents constitute the text meaning since both are simultaneously present. In either reading, the speakers are always poor, because they do not have the poet's ability, yet still can rob him in one scenario. Simultaneously, the poet is the one who produces or creates but simultaneously benefits from "us" because he can take away an ability that we were not aware of. In both readings, the poet gains a fortune and is himself his biggest fortune. These two readings are similar in that we are always poor and the poet always gains a fortune, yet the circumstances of this distribution are evaluated in drastically different ways each time.[12]

4. Overall Readings of the Text

In order to arrive at an overall understanding of the text, let us recapitulate the meanings of the four stanzas, given that we have found two main lines of interpretation. Below are two informal paraphrases:

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[12] See also Bauer & Brockmann (accepted).

(41) I_{PR} Reading:

    a. Stanza 1/2: This (poem) was a poet. It is that (poetry in general, produced by the poet) which transforms ordinary meanings into amazing sense and which creates timeless beauty from short-lived species that do not survive the transformation process. We wonder that it was not ourselves who arrested the sense/attar before the poet.

    b. Stanza 3/4: The poet, who is the discloser of pictures, is the one who entitles us, in contrast to himself, to keeping pictures undisclosed. We can in turn rob the poet of his share of ingenuity without him being aware of it. This robbing was and will never be able to harm the poet, as he himself is his biggest and timeless fortune.

(42) I_{PP} Reading:

    a. Stanza 1/2: This (poem) was a poet. It is that (poetry in general, produced by the poet) which transforms ordinary meanings into amazing sense and which creates timeless beauty from short-lived species that do not survive the transformation process. We wonder that it was not ourselves (in contrast to the poet) who arrested the sense/attar before...

    b. Stanza 3/4: ...the poet condemns us to ceaseless poverty (of the ability to disclose pictures). Thus, the poet robs us of an unnoticed share without (ever/in the past) harming us (as we did not know what we lost). Thus, he gains a fortune for himself (that no one else is entitled to) that is timeless.

The poem is composed in a way that defies disambiguation and the decision in favour of one single interpretation. This, we would like to argue, is the point of the poem, and both (41) and (42) are plausible readings. The coexistence of two interpretations points us to the reciprocal relationship between poet and readers or speakers and is an important component of the overall interpretation.[13] The interaction of two interpretations throughout the poem mirrors the complex relation between the poet and the group of speakers, who could plausibly be the readers of both this poem in particular and poetry in general. We can actually see in the syntax of the poem that these three elements - poet, poem, and reader - are the core of what the poem is about. They are all foregrounded through cleft-constructions:

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[13] Miller states that ED uses non-recoverable deletions in her poetry to create density and syntactic or logical ambiguity (1987, 28ff.). She gives J448 as an example for this technique, and discusses the non-recoverable deletion in line 1 that may be resolved in different ways.

(43)

    a.   This was a Poet – It is That –

    b.   We wonder it was not Ourselves

    c.   The Poet – it is He –

Thus, the poem consciously exploits structural and referential ambiguity to reveal the triangular relationship between poem, poet and reader, and this complex relationship is addressed in a very economic way, namely by way of consistently available double interpretation.

How can this relationship and the poem's global ambiguity be captured formally? Having determined the different readings of the text, our final step is to connect them in order to arrive at a global interpretation of the poem. We have shown that all possible readings of the sentences can be interpreted conjunctively, i.e. they are all simultaneously asserted. The overall text meaning of the poem is then the conjunction of all these individual readings. We arrive at the text meaning through the pragmatic step of applying FictionalAssert, which relates the text worlds to the actual world @ (as described in the Introduction):

(44) $[[\text{FictionalAssert}_R]] = \lambda T. \forall w' \ [T(w') \rightarrow R (w') (@)]$

Applying this operator to the overall text meaning results in following interpretation:

(45) $\forall w'[((41) \cap (42)) (w') \rightarrow R (w') (@)]$

The pragmatic interpretation of the text depends on what we define as the relation R. According to Bauer and Beck 2014, we assume that it is a relation of maximal similarity. Accordingly, the value for R for the present poem can be roughly paraphrased as below:

(46) "The relation R between the text worlds w' and the actual world @ holds iff w' is exactly like @ except that the group of speakers in w' are all readers of poetry in @ and the poet in w' is the poet in @ and the relation between the readers in @ and the poet in @ reflects a reciprocal relation as given for the speakers in w' and the poet in w'."

(47) "If everything the poem says is the case, then poetry in general and this poem in particular create a creative and reciprocal relation between readers and poet."

In summary, we arrive at the conclusion that both poet and reader rob someone, and that both are getting robbed. The robbing is, on a basic level, the very fact that the poet has written the

poem, which may also be put in relation to poetic originality, and that the speaker has been robbed of the originality to write the poem first. Nonetheless, the reader has the capability to attain the creative potential that is seen in the poet, and she gets to share the poet's originality in reading and interpreting the poetry he produces: When the reader applies interpretive tools, whether consciously or not, in reading the text, they correspond to the tools the poet used in producing it, and hence a reciprocal relationship is created between the two. The actions of both the reader and the poet are original and utilise creative potential. If the reader thus plays an active role, she "robs" the poet.

With this in mind, lines 7-8, "We wonder it was not Ourselves / Arrested it", show another local ambiguity that arises from ellipsis. The text does not provide any clue whether we are to "wonder why" or "wonder that" or "wonder if … it was not Ourselves". The last of these possibilities ("wonder if") serves to approximate the "Poet" and "Us", which up to this point have appeared as opposing parties, and ties them together.

5. <u>Conclusion</u>

Several local ambiguities that Dickinson creates through ellipsis and fragmentation in interaction with presupposition and anaphora resolution at the level of Logical Form serve to induce at least two strains of interpretation of the whole poem that are simultaneously present. Both of these are coherent in their own right, but the juxtaposition of the two that arises due to the formal structure and linguistic tools Emily Dickinson employs suggests that an overall meaning of the poem is intended to convey the simultaneous truth of the poet robbing his environment and his environment robbing the poet. This interpretation highlights the reciprocal relationship between poet and speaker(s) in the poem, and, similarly, between author and reader on another level of communication. The poem itself serves as an example for the interaction between the poet and reader and becomes the very thing it describes in the creative potential of the poet: it is "amazing sense", an aesthetic product, and filled with

verbal richness ("Fortune").[14] Only if all parts of the poem are taken together and parallel interpretations are combined in conjunction does J448 reveal itself as a brilliantly devised composition.

The phenomena discussed in this chapter link J448 in particular to poems such as J754 "My Life had stood," J921 "If it had no pencil," and J1247 "To pile like Thunder." Referents, especially pronouns and their identification are discussed in chapter 1.2 in an analysis of "If it had no pencil", in which the pronoun "it" may refer to an abstract concept like "love" or "creativity", but just as well to a person – the poem shows that Dickinson deliberately provides the reader with multiple ways of how to interpret pronouns that influence the overall text interpretation. The cases of lexical ambiguity as in J448 are even more prominent in "To pile like Thunder" (see chapter 1.3); various kinds of possible meanings of verbs lead the reader to a paradox. An overview over the core findings of this chapter are summarised in the table below.

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[14] Critics differ on their evaluation of the poet's depiction: whereas reading "This was a Poet" as a celebration of the poet has a long tradition (a particularly strong interpretation is Sherwood's, who writes that "the creation of a poem is not an intellection so much as it is the saving of a life"; 1968, 211), it was also pointed out that the poem can be read as a criticism of poetic skills: "The poet, in other words, may, in the very attempt to preserve nature, also become a destroyer of the natural order, a burglar who (unintentionally perhaps) succeeds in impoverishing his or her intended beneficiaries" (Budick 1985, 123). Budick supports this reading by pointing towards the vocabulary used in the poem, which circles around poverty, theft, unconsciousness, and harm. As is often the case, this interpretation neglects the very active role that the readers play as well, and instead places all influential power on the poet alone.

Core Phenomenon

Demonstratives/Definites
[[this$_1$]]^{g,c} is only defined if $g_c(1)$ is proximal. Then, [[this$_1$]]^{gc} = $g_c(1)$ = this poem
[[that$_2$]]^{g,c} is only defined if $g_c(2)$ is distant. Then, [[that$_2$]]^{gc} = $g_c(2)$ = poetry
[[the robbing]] = λg: there is a unique e such that e is a robbing of $g(1)$ by $g(2)$. the unique e such that e is a robbing of $g(1)$ by $g(2)$]

Text Interpretation

Reading I$_{PR}$: This (poem) was a poet. It is that (poetry in general, produced by the poet) which transforms ordinary meanings into amazing sense and which creates timeless beauty from short-lived species that do not survive the transformation process. We wonder that it was not ourselves who arrested the sense/attar before the poet. The Poet, who is the discloser of pictures, is the one who entitles us, in contrast to himself, to keeping pictures undisclosed. We can in turn rob the poet of his share of ingenuity without her being aware of it. This robbing was and will never be able to harm the poet, as he himself is his biggest and timeless fortune.

Reading I$_{PP}$: This (poem) was a poet. It is that (poetry in general, produced by the poet) which transforms ordinary meanings into amazing sense and which creates timeless beauty from short-lived species that do not survive the transformation process. We wonder that it was not ourselves (in contrast to the poet) who arrested the sense/attar before the poet condemns us to ceaseless poverty (of the ability to disclose pictures). Thus, the poet robs us of an unnoticed share without (ever/in the past) harming us (as we did not know what we lost). Thus, he gains a fortune for himself (that no one else is entitled to) that is timeless.

FictionalAssert:
[[FictionalAssert]] (PP $\cap$ PR) = $\forall w'$ [PP $\cap$ PR (w') $\rightarrow$ R (@)(w')]

Relation R:
If everything the poem says is the case, then poetry, and this poem in particular, creates a creative and reciprocal relation between readers and poet

Demonstratives/Definites in other chapters

Definites (in Chapter 1.6): **The owner** passed – identified – // and carried me away
[[the owner]] = λg: there is a unique x such that x owns $g(3)$. The unique x such that x owns $g(3)$.
Demonstratives (in Chapter 1.3): **This** would be Poetry – // Or Love – the two coeval come-
[[this$_1$]]^g = $g(1)$ = the property of piling like thunder piles to its close, while everything created hid, then crumbling grandly away

Other Phenomena in this Chapter

Structural Ambiguity: We wonder it was not Ourselves – // Arrested it – **before**
 [[before]] (NP) or [[before]] (CP)
Reinterpretation:
[[distill]] = $\lambda y. \lambda z. \lambda x$: z is a liquid. x distils y from z.
[[distill$_{Reint}$]] = $\lambda y. \lambda x. \lambda z$. z transforms y into x

1.2 "If it had no pencil": Identifying Referents ─ Pronouns

(1)   If it had no pencil
        Would it try mine –
        Worn – now – and *dull* – sweet,
        Writing much to thee.
        If it had no word,
        Would it make the Daisy,
        Most as big as I was,
        When it plucked me?

1. **Introduction**

"If it had no pencil" (J921) was probably written sometime between 1861 (Sewall 1975, 526) and 1864 (Dickinson 1961, 433) but not published until 1945. It has been preserved in a peculiar form, not in one of Dickinson's notebooks but written on a slip of paper pinned around the stub of a pencil and signed "Emily" (Sewall 1975, 526).[1] This specific mode of preservation provides us with an extra-linguistic context for the poem which will be considered later in our interpretation. In this chapter, we are primarily interested in Dickinson's systematic use of pronouns without referents, which can be appropriately observed in this poem. Similar to the interpretation of demonstratives in the previous chapter, we will see that through the specific communicative situation of the poem, the variable assignment which offers various possible interpretations of the pronouns leads to different interpretations of the poem as a whole. "If it had no pencil" is an exemplary poem to show how grammatical rules like the "Appropriateness Condition," which determines the use of referential expressions (Heim and Kratzer 1998, 243), can be suspended in order to create

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[1] As it is, the circumstances of the poem's creation and its addressee have been the subject of most of its criticism. Jackson (2005) reads it as "an invitation to written exchange," addressed at the time to "Samuel (or perhaps Mary) Bowles," who "was meant to write back, or if he could not write (Bowles was ill at the time), at least draw in response" (135-36). Sewall (1975) likewise believes it to have been addressed to Samuel Bowles, but reads it as "another, though muted, complaint that he has ignored or rejected her" (526).

some interpretative freedom for the reader. Such a creative treatment of linguistic rules would lead to interpretive difficulties (and technically, to uninterpretability) in everyday discourse. But in literary texts, due to their specific nature of discourse, interpretive possibilities are activated that are not as prominent in other types of texts or discourse. Specifically, readers assign meaning to the sentence nonetheless, because they expect that difficulties in interpretation may arise. This difference between the interpretation of referential expressions in poetry and their interpretation in everyday language is revealing for how their semantics should be modelled.

What complicates the interpretation of this poem is the mode it is written in, i.e. a question: Although the first sentence of the poem lacks a question mark, it contains subject auxiliary inversion, which structurally marks questions in English: "If it had no pencil would it try mine." Semantically, the denotation of a question is the set of propositions that are possible answers that cannot be true simultaneously (Hamblin 1973; Karttunen 1973):

(2) [[If it had no pencil would it try mine]] = {If it had no pencil it would try mine, If it had no pencil it would not try mine}

In this case, the two possible answers are counterfactual conditionals. A counterfactual presupposes that its antecedent is false. Both possible answers hence presuppose that "It has no pencil" is false: whatever "it" refers to, "it" does have a pencil in the fictional worlds described by the poem. Conditionals denote sets of possible worlds, namely, logical possibilities of how the reference world (the world we start out with, in this case a fictional world described by the poem) could be like if certain facts were different (cf. Heim and von Fintel 2011, 49-58). The possible worlds the conditional describes are distinct from the reference world with respect to one specific fact, the one the antecedent defines. Consequently, the set of worlds the conditional talks about are worlds where everything is just as described by the text, but in these worlds "it" has no pencil. Returning to the question in

(2), the difference between the two propositions that are possible answers to the question is the consequent of the conditional. The first possible answer says that "it" would try the speaker's pencil in the counterfactual worlds; the second possible answer says that "it" would not.

Unlike utterances and texts that are usually declarative statements, we cannot simply assert questions, but need to proceed slightly differently than what has been shown before: we will begin by analysing the presuppositions given within the text that presuppose information about "it" as well as those presuppositions we can derive from the speaker's references to herself. Accordingly, this chapter is structured unlike other analyses in Part I of this book in that we will not proceed chronologically through the sentences of the poem, but rather begin with figuring out what we know about "it" and the speaker, and finally how the poem as a whole can be interpreted, given the question-form of the poem.

2. "It" and the Speaker : What We Know

2.1 "it"

A striking problem is the lack of a referent for the pronoun "it." There is nothing in the immediate local context "it" could refer to. As we have already seen in the previous chapter, a standard analysis assumes that pronouns, similar to demonstratives, are variables that carry an index. They receive their interpretation via a variable assignment function g that assigns a value to this index (Heim and Kratzer 1998). A standard interpretation for a pronoun like "it" according to these assumptions is given in (3):

(3) $[[it_1]]^g = g(1)$

The assignment function can be seen as a list of all individuals that are in the context. If there are no individuals in the context, the context is not appropriate for the structure and the

utterance becomes uninterpretable. This is stated as the "Appropriateness Condition" by Heim and Kratzer (1998, 243): "A context c is appropriate for an LF φ only if c determines a variable assignment g_c whose domain includes every index which has a free occurrence in φ."

The lack of a referent for "it" would be perceived as a strong semantic violation in everyday discourse. Compositional interpretation would fail and no meaning at all would be assigned to the structure. A reader's or listener's response might be: "Hey, hang on - what do you mean by 'it'?" This reaction may happen with poetry as well whenever the referent of a pronoun is not easily identifiable – but since poems are a special linguistic environment, there is no one to clarify beyond what has been said before already. The question is thus how the reader can deduct possible referents (if, indeed, there are any), as finding a referent in poems can only ever be restricted to the text itself and not extend the context beyond this limitation. Since we assume that the poet is a cooperative speaker and wants to convey meaning, readers assume that there must be a reason for the poet to use a sentence where a fixed referent is lacking. For the purpose of interpreting the poem, the Appropriateness Condition is temporarily suspended. In the following, we will address how to assign a referent in the limited context.

In parallel to the interpretation of demonstratives in the previous chapter, we can make use of a dynamic system to interpret the pronoun, where we take all sentences to be functions from variable assignments to propositions. In that way, the meaning of "it" is just the set of functions from variable assignment functions to the values they give the index:

(4) $[[it_1]] = \lambda g.\, g(1)$[2]

With the switch to a dynamic interpretation, readers can go on accumulating information about "it" in order to eventually pick out a variable assignment function on a global level of

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[2] For simplicity's sake, we will implement the dynamic extension only at the level of sentences. We will use a simplified system in which parts of sentences, e.g. predicates, receive their usual denotation without adding quantification over variable assignments, although this would be the technically correct way to implement the dynamic system and to use Dynamic Function Application as explained in Chapter 1.1.

text. The Appropriate Condition can thus be fulfilled on the level of the overall text. The purpose of the individual utterance may be to not give an immediately identifiable referent to "it." One possibility that helps accumulating information about the referent is to interpret the features of the pronoun to limit the possibilities for referents to come. The features of "it" are that it is neuter and singular; it is rarely used to describe human beings. The presuppositions of the features of the pronoun "it" are therefore the following (cf. Kratzer 2009):

(5) $[[it_1]] = \lambda g.\ g(1)$ if $g(1)$ is a non-human, single individual, undefined otherwise

Due to its presuppositions, it is very unlikely that "it" denotes a human individual or more than one individual, with the exception that it may refer to a child. This is one possible interpretation which we will pursue at a later stage of this text.

Even when the reader makes these assumptions and proceeds with interpretation, the meaning of the question "If it had no pencil would it try mine" remains unclear. As mentioned before, the counterfactual presupposes that the antecedent is false. To know what the consequences of this presupposition are one has to interpret the antecedent. The meaning of the Verb Phrase contained in the antecedent is given in (6)a, a paraphrase of which is given in (6)b.

(6)
    a. $[[have\ a\ pencil]]w = \lambda x.\ \exists y\ [pencil(w)(y)\ \&\ have(w)(y)(x)]$
    b. "Have a pencil" is the function from individuals to truth values that maps an individual to true if he has a pencil ready to use in the reference world w and to false otherwise.

The interpretation of "have" as "[t]o hold in one's hand, on one's person, or at one's disposal" (*OED* "have, *v*." I.1.a.) follows from the close connection between the verb and its internal argument, the object of the verb. The most obvious reading of this line is thus to ask whether

"it" has a pencil at its disposal.[3] Hence, we know that there is an unknown referent "it" that has a pencil at its disposal, but also has the possibility to use the one of the speaker's. However, in order to be able to have a pencil at one's disposal, the referent is required to be human, because only human beings can write. Thus, combining the Verb Phrase in (6) with "it" would lead to uninterpretability. Yet again, we assume that the utterance is not uninterpretable, but that the poet intentionally made use of this violation in order to convey something meaningful. Thus, we have to reinterpret either the Verb Phrase or "it" as referring to a human referent.

A possible linguistic argument for reinterpreting the VP is the strong presupposition of the pronoun. A strategy for reinterpreting the VPs could involve some kind of generalisation, or more specifically finding a superset to the property in (7).

(7) [λx. x has a pencil]

The goal is to create a superset property to "having a pencil," something like (8), which has a wider domain including individuals that fit the features of the pronouns more easily.

(8) [λx. x has the means to express x]

This mechanism seems to be the reverse of the usual domain restriction and has to be further investigated as a general strategy to resolving personifications. "It" under this line of interpretation might refer to the personification of an abstract concept like "love" or "creativity," since it is possible to assign a property like the one in (8) to them. This is due to the fact that metaphors of this sort are fairly common language use, for example "language of love" or "love rules the world."

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[3] An alternative is to interpret "have" as "to own," such that the speaker asks about what if "it" did not possess a pencil of its own. This reading is not necessarily the most plausible one, since it invites implications about ownership and suggests a different relationship between hypothetical pencil and "it," whereas the reading illustrated above ("it" has a pencil ready to use) is more neutral in its terms.

So far, we have been able to derive the presupposition that "it" has a pencil from the counterfactual conditional in the first line. A parallel construction can be found in line five, which begins with the counterfactual "If it had no word," and then segues into another question: "Would it make the Daisy / Most as big as I was / When it plucked me?" Analogous to the first line, the counterfactual conditional here presupposes that its antecedent is false: "it" has a word. Again, we can encounter a mismatch between "having a word" (a property of human beings exclusively) and the features of the pronoun (referring to a non-human entity), so that reinterpretation becomes necessary.

The reader could reinterpret the predicate in a way that makes it fit a non-human agent because of the presupposition of the pronoun. Parallel to generalising from "having a pencil" to "having the means to express oneself," one could say that "having a word" means "having the ability to express oneself." This incorporates a notion of authority but also a mental capacity. For instance, people can have no word in the sense that words fail them in an overwhelming situation. Alternatively, the option that "it" refers to a child is also available as well as the option that "it" might have a human adult as a referent. One could easily imagine what it means for a child to "have no word," namely that it cannot speak yet or not express itself properly. Reading "it" as a child in relation to "have a word" moreover opens up the Christian context of *logos*, i.e. a name or title of Jesus Christ, which can be translated as "Word" as well.[4] This would lead to a topical wordplay of the Word having no word, that is by becoming an *infans* in the birth of Jesus Christ.[5]

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[4] *Logos* appears in "three passages of the Johannine writings of the N.T. (where the English versions render it as 'Word') as a designation of Jesus Christ; hence employed by Christian theologians, esp. those who were versed in Greek philosophy, as a title of the Second Person of the Trinity" (*OED* "Logos, *n*."). See, for instance, John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" and 1:14: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." For more discussion about the Word in Dickinson's poetry, see Bauer 2006.

[5] On the topic of wordplay (or "word" play), see, or instance, J8 (c.1858), which begins as follows:
    There is a word
    Which bears a sword
    Can pierce an armed man – […]

Narrowing down possibilities at this stage is difficult since coherence can be achieved in various ways. It is a possibility is to keep all options in mind while moving on with interpretation, which shows that mismatches that allow different reinterpretations do not prevent compositional interpretation.

For now, there are three possible referents for "it" that interact with how the mismatches in the two counterfactual questions are interpreted:

(9)
- a. "it": nonhuman (abstract concept, e.g. creativity; or supernatural power)
  Presupposition: It has the means to express itself
- b. "it": child
  Presupposition: It has a pencil at its disposal and it has a word
- c. "it": (human) adult
  Presupposition: It has a pencil at its disposal and it has a word

One seems to be capable of processing the consequent of the conditional "would it make the Daisy most as big as I was when it plucked me?" without having made a definite decision with regard to the interpretation of the antecedent.

The definite description "the Daisy" presupposes that there is some unique x in the discourse which is a Daisy.

(10) $[[\text{ the Daisy }]]^g$ is only defined if there is a unique x, such that $Daisy(w)(x)$. Then, $[[\text{ the Daisy }]]^g$ = the unique x, such that $Daisy(w)(x)$

Since no other referent for "the Daisy" is mentioned in the poem, the reader has to make the assumption that there is some unique entity in the discourse that is a Daisy. Yet another complication is added to the interpretation of the conditional by "most". It is plausible to assume that 'most' in American English is used like 'almost' in this context, which gives rise

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For one thing, this is obviously a pun, in that the letters of "word" make up 4/5ths of the word "sword" and can thus be seen as "bear[ing]" it; moreover, the "word" is mighty enough to affect a human being in a powerful way, not unlike the "it" in J921.

to the implicature that the height of the Daisy never exceeds the height of the speaker when it was plucked.

The question immediately arises what it means "to make a unique Daisy almost as big as the speaker when she was plucked."[6] A standard semantic analysis of "making the Daisy big" assumes that it is a resultative construction (cf. von Stechow 1996) which says that there is a making event of which "it" is the agent that causes "the Daisy" to reach a degree of "bigness" that is no bigger than the degree to which the speaker is big at a certain time. Since the verb "make" is underspecified here and it is unclear at what point of the Daisy's existence the influence of "it" is located, we are left with two possibilities for reading "make the Daisy":

(11) $[[make_1]] = \lambda y. \lambda x. x$ creates y and y is big
(12) $[[make_2]] = \lambda y. \lambda x. x$ causes y to grow

Consequently, the reader has to assume that the referent of "it" has enough power to cause "the Daisy" to grow (see (12)), and also to "pluck" the speaker. Hence, there is a clear imbalance of power between "it" and the speaker. This is consistent with "it" referring to a supernatural being, which might exert power on a human being. Another option would be to see "make big" as a process in which the daisy is created, and in which the daisy is already big from the beginning of its creation (see (11)). This reading, too, would assume a mighty "it" with creative power. The use of the verb "to make" is conspicuous in this passage, because — in combination with the extraordinary power which "it" has over the speaker — it may hint at a religious reading of the poem in which "it" is God, the maker *par excellence*,[7]

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6 Sewall (1975) suggests: "For all the pronominal difficulties, [the last four lines] seem to say, 'If I don't hear from you, does that make me the little girl I was when I fell in love with you?'" (526). This paraphrase assumes a number of reinterpretations, hardly any of which he explains (only that "it" must be read as "you" since it appears as such in the third Master letter), in order to accommodate the biographical context he believes to be the case (i.e. that Dickinson is in love with Bowles, but not satisfied with his correspondence). Farr (1992), by contrast, reads these lines less incriminating as Dickinson "telling Bowles—since he was not writing to her—to draw her a picture of a daisy" (283), and avoids dealing with the question what precisely "pluck" must mean in this context.

7 The pronoun "thee" is prominently used in the Authorized Version, and may thus be in (minor) support of such a religious reading.

thus linking back to the wordplay on "Word"/"word" and "it" as referent for an infant Jesus Christ mentioned above. In a reading where "it" is a child, "making a Daisy" could mean "drawing a Daisy." In addition, the (seemingly ungrammatical) phrase "most as big as I was" sounds like something a child would say, rather than an adult, and a speaker's use of the third person (in this case, "the Daisy") is also something we would associate with children's speech.

The "it" mentioned in the poem not only has the power to "make" the daisy but also to "pluck" the speaker. "Pluck" is defined as "to pluck (up) a plant" (*Webster*, "pluck" v. t.), a rather violent action, ripping out by the roots, or is applied to plucking fruit from a tree (*OED*, "pluck, *v*." 1.a.). But pluck could also be seen in a positive light. The motion of plucking is an upwards movement, lifting, elevating the speaker, chosen perhaps for grander purposes (see *OED*, "pluck, *v*." 5.a.: "To bring (a person or thing) forcibly into or out of a specified state or condition; †to bring (disaster, etc.) *upon* a person (*obs*.). Now *esp*.: to snatch or rescue *from* danger, to take *from* obscurity, etc."). Note especially the ambivalence of the word, which can be used both to describe a positive as well as a negative action. In J499 (*c*.1862), Dickinson describes people from the past only visible to the speaker through their portraits:

(13) Those fair – fictitious People –
      The Women – plucked away
      From our familiar Lifetime –
      The Men of Ivory –
      […]

These people are separated from the speaker, "plucked away" to "places perfecter" – ostensibly a metaphor for death into life everlasting. The verb "to pluck" thus works both in the semantic field of literally plucking a flower as well as in relation to human beings, both by a supernatural force such as God as well as figuratively by other people.[8] In either case,

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8   See also a quotation from Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1997): "The grim life out of which she had plucked her brother." (518).

regardless of whether "pluck" is seen as good or bad, it reveals a power relation where an overwhelming "it" can "make" daisies and "pluck" the speaker.

If we regard having word and pencil as essential properties of "it," "it" has the tools of an artist, and most likely of a poet. "It" could use word and pencil to write and to "make" the daisy. In addition, the link between words and creation has biblical connotations: in Genesis, Creation is the result of speech acts.[9] The expression "make the daisy […] big" is moreover reminiscent of "The Word was made flesh" (John 1:14), an expression Dickinson used in J1651, "A Word made Flesh is seldom," in which she also links this topic to the power of language (cf. Bauer 2006, 382–86). Taken in connection with the biblical passage, something inanimate (the Word and the Daisy respectively) are turned animate by an act of creation, or "made" animate. Two creative processes are thus alluded to by the counterfactuals that let us draw presuppositions about the nature of "it": firstly, that of writing or drawing, since "it" has a pencil, and secondly that of speaking (and possibly creating through speech acts), since "it" has a word.

As we have seen, the "it" mentioned in the poem is very powerful and dominating. "It" can "make" the daisy "big," that is, either create the daisy or make it grow. Considering that daisies are not made by human beings, "it" seems godlike (also, considering that "it" has a "word"), creative but also potentially destructive.[10] Having now collected all the

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[9] See, for instance, Gen. 1:3: "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light"; the notion of "making" that we find in this poem can similarly be connected with Creation in Genesis, e.g.: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness [...]. So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him" (Gen. 1:26-27).

[10] As far as extra-textual evidence is concerned, there is some for Emily Dickinson's use of "it" referring to a human being in a number of her poems (Sewall 527). J462 (*c*. 1862), for instance, begins with "Why make it doubt – it hurts it so," where "hurt" is a transitive verb that requires the argument "it" (in the sense of "it_1 has caused physical or mental damage to it_2" and "it_2" thus must refer to a sentient being capable of feeling pain). This does not exclude animals, for which, however, (judging from many of her other poems) Dickinson would sometimes use a male or female pronoun; as she does for example in J328/Fr359, J500/Fr370 (birds); J1185/Fr1236 (cats and mice); J186/Fr237, J500/Fr370, J1185/Fr1236 (dogs). In J500/Fr370, the dog is even endowed with a mental capacity and associated with logic and philology, i.e. with exclusively human characteristics (cf. Bauer 1995, 214–16). Notably in the so-called Master Letters (i.e. three drafts of letters, composed in spring 1858, early 1861 and summer 1861; see Franklin 1968, 7 – around the time when J921 was written, though it is not known whether they were ever sent off, or even meant for a real addressee), "it" is used as a replacement for "he" and "him." The second of these letters begins with "Oh – did I offend it" and continued in the draft with "Didn't it want me to tell it the truth," where the "it" apparently refers to a human addressee, a "you." Although "it" is no form of direct address, "it" seems capable of answering the speaker's question (and also of "wanting" something),

information given in the text for "it," we can summarise the state of our knowledge and limit the number of possible interpretations. Through the features of the pronoun and the presuppositions resulting from the counterfactual conditionals, following information is provided by the text about "it":

(14) λg: g(1) is singular & g(1) is not speaker, nor addressee & g(1) has a pencil & g(1) has a word. g(1)

These presuppositional properties restrict the possibilities for referents, but do not solve all questions posed by the text. Though we cannot exclude that "it" refers to an adult human being, this reading turns out to be much less plausible than interpreting "it" as either a child, or as a creative agency or God. If the agent is God (rather than a human child), the imbalance in power between the agent who plucks and the patient who is being plucked is more appropriate; this also does justice to "plucking" as an act of selecting (and possibly elevating) someone or something. Since "it" is conceptualised not merely by its own right in the poem but posed in a relation to the speaker through the mode of questioning, a look at what we know about the speaker will further inform the possibilities for interpreting the pronoun "it."

1.1 The Speaker

We have discussed the first line with regards to "it" already, but it is only part of the conditional in which the pronoun consequently combines with the VP "try mine." This triggers further presuppositions. The first person use of the possessive ("mine") presupposes that the referent is the speaker (cf. Kratzer 2009). The possessive presupposes that the possessed element is unique in the discourse. It is plausible to assume the possessed element to be "a pencil" in this context (i.e. "mine" is "my pencil"). The content of the presupposition

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thus functioning like an implicit addressee intended to 'overhear' what the speaker is saying although "it" is not directly addressed. This shows that an interpretation of "it" as a human being, not necessarily a child, can be substantiated within the context of Dickinson's writings elsewhere.

is thus that there is a unique pencil in the context the speaker possesses. The corresponding semantics is given in (15)a below, a paraphrase of which is given in (15)b.

(15)

    a. $[[\text{mine}]]^g$ is only defined if there is a unique x such that pencil(w)(x) & the speaker has x in w. Then $[[\text{mine}]]^g$ = the unique x such that pencil(w)(x) & the speaker has x in w.

    b. (15)a is only defined if there is a unique x such that x is a pencil and the speaker has x. If defined, it denotes the unique x such that x is a pencil.

Since this information is not explicitly provided by the context the reader has to accommodate that the speaker of the poem, similar to "it" in the discussion above, possesses a unique pencil. The pronoun "it" combines with "try mine" as it did with "have a pencil" and a mismatch occurs. "Trying a pencil" seems to prefer to combine with human subjects; however, as we have seen above, the overall text makes it more plausible that "it" refers to God or a child, leaving the pronoun to be neuter.

    The following lines at first glance seem to be defining properties of the speaker's pencil: "worn – now – and *dull* – sweet." The third line is structurally ambiguous in three respects. It is either a relative clause with an elided relative pronoun: "mine, which is worn now and dull – sweet," or it is an apposition. Moreover, the adjective "sweet" could either structurally belong to the relative clause or to the following line and thus be a form of address, an option that will be returned to below. Finally, the temporal adverb "now" can have scope over one, two, or all three adjectives. Depending on the structural position of "now," it delivers the time argument for all three adjectives "dull," "worn," and "sweet," or only for some of them. This is under the assumption that adjectives have an open argument slot for times:[11]

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[11] Generally, predicates and adjectives are both world- and time-relative. In order to simplify the technical formulas, we will only allude to times when they are relevant for the interpretation, as is the case here.

(16) [[worn/dull/sweet]] = λt. λx. x is worn/dull/sweet at time t

"Now" deictically refers to a specific time and presupposes that this time includes the utterance time. It therefore also carries an index and a presupposition and is given its value by a variable assignment function.

Consequently, the temporal adverb "now" can deliver the time argument for the adjectives "worn," "dull," and "sweet," 'and triggers a conversational implicature, which changes with the structural position of the adverb:

a. Temporal adverb "now" has scope over all three predicates → conversational implicature: the speaker's pencil was not "worn," "dull," and "sweet" at some time before now

b. Temporal adverb "now" has only scope over "worn" → conversational implicature: the speaker's pencil was new and not worn in the past, yet is worn now, and is – independently of time – dull and sweet

c. "now" has scope over "worn" and "dull" but not "sweet" → conversational implicature: the speaker's pencil is now worn and dull, used to be shiny, sharp and new; it is also sweet, though unspecified to time in that respect

"Dull" as an adjective most often refers to characteristics of a person or their wits,[12] which is less plausible in the context of the predicate modifying "pencil." It is more plausible to read "dull pencil" as "pencil that has often been used" (in that its tip is blunt and dulled), which in turn makes possibility (c) more prominent since "worn" and "dull" are related more closely to each other than either is to "sweet": "worn," just like "dull," can describe a result state such that they describe the result of extensive usage. In sum, there is a very complex interaction between syntactic ambiguity and lexical underspecification in this sequence of the poem that will yield a set of possible conversational implicatures. What seems to remain uncontroversial

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[12] See, for instance, Webster, in whose dictionary the first seven listed meanings for "dull" are all in relation to human beings in some way; only from meaning 8 onwards – "Gross; cloggy; insensible; as the *dull* earth" – does it refer to inanimate objects. "Dull" as a decidedly human quality is used by Dickinson in, for instance, J704 (*c.* 1863): "Won't you wish you'd spoken / To that dull Girl?". Similarly, in J1130 (*c.* 1868), she ends with "Oh Life, begun in fluent Blood / And consummated dull! …"

is that the pencil of the speaker had all of these properties at some point in time and that the information is relevant to answering the question in the first two lines.[13]

Yet another fact is added in the fourth line: "[W]riting much to thee." The fragmentary structure of the line renders it ambiguous. The sequence of the gerund might either be completed as "[from] Writing much to thee" or "[I am] Writing much to thee." To find what is more plausible one has to assign meanings to both versions. The pronoun "thee" is another indexical that introduces an individual directly via the context (cf. Kaplan 1989), namely the addressee:

(17) [[thee]]^g = the addressee in the context

Both possibilities for the interpretation of the fragment require reinterpretation of the meaning of the last two lines. In the second case one has to take the personification "the pencil is writing much to you" as meaning "the one who has the pencil is writing much to you." This version may be structurally preferred, since relative pronouns are more commonly elided. However, when taking this version into consideration, it is possible that all properties that were enumerated before are not only properties of the pencil but really are properties of the owner of the pencil. A third version of the preceding sequence is therefore "mine, [I am] worn now and dull – sweet." All three options require reinterpretation at some point. There is no preferred structure based on linguistic analysis.

The introduction of the addressee is interesting from a linguistic perspective. Assigning the pronoun "it" and the indexical "thee" to the same individual is semantically impossible because "thee" receives its interpretation directly through the context and is thus restricted to the addressee. It is implicated that the addressed person could provide an answer to the question posed in the poem at this point. However, it is critical to notice that the "it"

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[13] On another note, "sweet" might also be meant as an endearing form of address; Dickinson does so in other poems, for instance at the beginning of J704: "No matter – now – Sweet –". The syntax here is open to this possibility.

which most likely should be able to give an answer is not addressed. It is completely unclear why the addressee should be an expert on the decisions of "it," which makes assigning referents to the pronouns and indexicals even more complicated. Another point to consider is the significance of using the archaic address "thee" instead the more commonly used "you": by the 19th century, the forms "thou" and "thee" were both marked register for addressing God, as well as "found in conventional and poetic address and invocation to (super)natural forces and ghosts, and also objects" in literature (Wales 1996, 77), though we similarly know it from intimate amorous poems (such as Barrett Browning's "How do I love thee"). The versatility of the pronoun "thee" thus does not help to clarify about referents for the addressee nor the conspicuous "it." [14]

We have already discussed the second part of the poem (ll. 5-8) with regards to "it" and alluded to its possible actions towards speaker and "Daisy." It is important for our understanding of the speaker to acknowledge the inherent comparability between speaker and "Daisy": firstly, there is comparability in size; and secondly, there is comparability in their susceptibility to being "plucked."

As for a comparison in size between speaker and Daisy, we return briefly to our analysis above, where we stipulated that "most" in line 7 is an elided version of "almost." The speaker's question can thus be paraphrased as

(18) Would it make the Daisy almost as big as I was when it plucked me?

The syntactic ambiguity that arises from the position of line 7, "Most as big as I was," by which it is either part of the main clause ("Would it create the Daisy so?") or a relative clause modifying the Daisy independent of the making event ("Would it cause the Daisy to grow

[14] As has been mentioned in the introduction, the mode of preservation of J921 (wrapped around a pencil) stands out. It is believed that the poem was meant as a present, and there are many speculations about the potential addressee based on various pieces of evidence, though the evidence is inconclusive. Still, the context of the poem's origin is relevant for our analysis of the poem, since it opens up additional possibilities of interpretation and introduces a degree of self-referentiality only available if the pencil is a real object. Considering this, the "pencil" implied in the second line ("mine," i.e. the speaker's pencil) could have a very real referent in the pencil around which the poem was wrapped. The "writing" in line four could then refer to the writing presented with the pencil, that is, to the poem itself.

big?") complicates the matter. Yet in both cases, the size of the Daisy does not exceed that of the speaker. We discussed the possibilities of what it means to "make a Daisy" above and concluded that the most plausible interpretations are either to draw a Daisy or create it forthright, supporting our two main readings of "it" as child and/or supernatural being/God respectively. Without evidence to the contrary, we assume that the speaker is a human being and thus within the reasonable size range of that of human beings; whereas if we take the unique Daisy of the poem to be a common lawn daisy, the comparison in size between the two reveals a potential conflict. The presupposition of the speaker's question, i.e. whether "it" *would* make the Daisy most as big as the speaker, is that it *could* do so. We also know that the speaker was "plucked" by "it" in the past. If "make" is an action that can be applied to Daisy and speaker both, then "make" and "pluck" cannot be read literally at the same time. "Pluck" needs to be figurative in order to be applied to the speaker; we here paraphrase "pluck" as "select":

(19)
    a. If "make a Daisy (most as big as the speaker)" means to make it big, e.g. by drawing it so, then to "pluck" the speaker must indicate an act of selection, e.g. by selecting to draw the speaker big as well.
    b. If "make a Daisy (most as big as the speaker)" means to create a Daisy, then to "pluck" the speaker must indicate an act of selection, e.g. by elevating the speaker into a higher state of being.

The Daisy could also be read as referring to a human individual,[15] yet the unusual word choice of "pluck" in this context derives from a literal reading of the verb, which is only licensed if the Daisy refers to a garden flower and not a human individual.

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[15] There is some evidence that Dickinson regularly used "daisy" to refer to a being with human traits, for instance in J85; in addition, "daisy" in Dickinson's poems is often linked to humility and humble adoration (see, e.g. Seaton (1995), who lists as other meanings for the daisy the messages "I will think of it" and "I share your sentiments" (176f); and also mentions one eighteenth-century text where the daisy is seen as a symbol of "timidity and humility", (65)), and contrasted with a mightier, adored being, which is sometimes addressed, as in J921. Other poems in which a "daisy" is given human traits are, for instance, J106, J339, J481, and J124. Moreover, in the Master Letters, there is plenty of evidence for an equation of "daisy" and a human being, in this case the speaker. In the third letter, the speaker is a daisy, while the addressee is

As an interim summary, we will now combine the information about "it" and that about the speaker respectively, in order to provide three readings of the poem:

(20) Reading 1: 'An individual, most likely a child, has a pencil and has a word. If that wasn't the case, would it use the speaker's pencil and would it instead draw the Daisy and make it as big as (it drew) the speaker?'

(21) Reading 2: 'An individual has a pencil and has a word. If that wasn't the case, would he/she use the speaker's pencil and would he/she help the Daisy to grow to become almost the same size as the speaker when he/she plucked or chose him?'

(22) Reading 3: 'God has the means to express himself. If that wasn't the case, would he use the speaker's pencil and would it still make the daisy and make it almost the same size as the speaker when it plucked or chose her/him?

Reading 1 in (20) above requires the afore-mentioned reinterpretation of "pluck": While the word choice makes sense if we talk of an actual daisy, this reading demands the effort of reading "pluck" as a metaphor for "draw," or "choose (to draw)." This reinterpretation can only take place because the Daisy is mentioned in line 6, without which these lines of the poem would be nonsensical – Dickinson here suggests the semantic field from which to draw the meaning of the reinterpretation. Meaning is thus derived from intratextual context.

3. <u>Combining the Analyses</u>

As we have seen above, several pieces of information can be collected about both "it" and the speaker by means of analysing the presuppositions that derive from the counterfactual conditionals. A summary of all available presuppositions are in (23) and (24) below[16]:

(23) Presuppositions about "it" (PR$_{it}$):
$[[\text{ it }]] = \lambda g.\ g(1)$ iff

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grand and powerful: "Daisy's arm is small – and you have felt the Horizon – hav'nt you." The speaker also describes herself as "[n]o Rose, yet felt myself a'bloom." This letter also contains a long passage with hypothetical questions ("could..." and "would...") about their possible life together, similar in their syntactic form to the "would" questions in J921. In the second letter, the speaker is again a lowly daisy: "it [= the Daisy] often blundered," but the addressee "teach[es] her majesty – Slow at patrician things – Even the wren upon her nest learns more than Daisy dares." Interestingly, Dickinson had originally written "dull" as an alternative to "slow" (Franklin 1968, 25). Their unequal relation is emphasised: "Low at the knee that bore her once unto wordless . . . rest . . . Daisy kneels, a culprit."

[16] Some structural ambiguities have been neglected here for simplicity's sake.

g(1) is singular.
g(1) is not speaker, nor addressee.
g(1) has a pencil.
g(1) has a word.
g(1) has the ability to use the speaker's pencil.
g(1) has plucked the speaker in the past.
g(1) has the ability to make the Daisy almost as big as the speaker at the time of the speaker's being plucked.

(24) Presuppositions about the speaker (PRsp):
[[I]] = the speaker in the context *(sp(c))* iff
(sp(c)) is singular.
(sp(c)) is not "it," nor addressee.
(sp(c)) has a pencil, which is worn, dull, and sweet, and which has been used to write to the addressee.
(sp(c)) is comparable to the Daisy both in size as well as in susceptibility to plucking.
(sp(c)) has been plucked by "it" in the past.

We accommodate that the information conveyed through the presuppositions is true in the text. However, as we as readers didn't have this information before, we can just now, after having read the text add it to the Common Ground through FictionalAssert. Thus, even if the information is given as presupposition in the text, we treat it as if it was asserted and new information that we hold as true for the textworlds. With this reasoning, we can apply FictionalAssert to the conjunction of all given presuppositions:

(25) $[[\text{FictionalAssert}_R]] = \lambda T. \forall w'[T(w') \rightarrow R (w')(@)]$

(26)
   a. $[[\text{FictionalAssert}]] ((23) \cap (24)) = \forall w'[((23) \cap (24)) (w') \rightarrow R (w')(@)]$
   b. Worlds in which g(1) is singular, not speaker nor addressee, has a pencil and a word, the ability to use the speaker's pencil, has plucked the speaker in the past and has the ability to make the Daisy almost as big as the speaker at the time of the speaker's being plucked and in which the speaker has a pencil and is comparable to the Daisy, are worlds that stand in Relation R to the actual world.

Though we may be able to assign meaning to the presuppositions that we have collected, we cannot interpret the poem as a whole: first, much depends on how we identify the referents for "it" and speaker (and, to a lesser degree, "the Daisy"). Leaving these choices open allows us

to come up with a parametrised text interpretation, and a set of plausible readings when referents are picked. The rules of grammar are not arbitrarily dismissible, and hence help narrowing down the set of plausible interpretations. The main lines of interpretation derive from our referent for "it": Does "it" refer to a human individual, to a creative force in general, or to God in particular? If "it" is a human being, then we get a poem asking questions about a 'real' relationship. If "it" refers to an abstract concept, like love or creativity, or to God, we get a more philosophical poem asking questions about the nature of this creative entity and its impact on the speaker. Connected to this are of course further choices the reader can make, for instance how to interpret "make."

Second, the mode of the poem comes into play as well, since it poses a question. As FictionalAssert only operates on assertions, we cannot employ this operator for the present poem without further qualification. We have thus proceeded by analysing the presuppositions, which we can assert through accommodating that they are true in the text worlds; the next step then must be to establish the relation of what we have been able to assert with the speaker's wondering about the counterfactual state, i.e. if "it" had neither pencil nor word. In the case of "it" being a supernatural power, in which relationship would "it" stand to the speaker? Similarly, if "it" refers to a human being, what properties does it have? Is it a powerful being influencing others (speaker and Daisy), or is it a child?

Since the context of the speaker's questions is fictional, we cannot give actual answers, but at most provide alternative scenarios that take all the information into consideration we have collected so far. One way to interpret the poem with the help of FictionalAssert is to apply it to every possible scenario deriving from the counterfactuals posed in the poem, see how these options interact, and if they can be true at the same time:

(27)

    a. Possible Scenario 1: "It" is a supernatural power that does not have the means to express itself, and would thus use human means to communicate and it would create the Daisy.

    b. Possible Scenario 2: "It" is a supernatural power that does not have the means to express itself, but it would not use human means to communicate and it would not create the Daisy.

(28)

    a. Possible Scenario 3: "It" is a human being that does not have the means to express itself, and it would use the speaker's pencil and help the Daisy to grow as big as the speaker.

    b. Possible Scenario 4: "It" is a human being that does not have the means to express itself, and it would not use the speaker's pencil nor help the Daisy to grow as big as the speaker.

(29)

    a. Possible Scenario 5: "It" is a child, and it would use the speaker's pencil and draw a daisy to have almost the size of the speaker.

    b. Possible Scenario 6: "It" is a child, and it would not use the speaker's pencil and draw a daisy to have almost the size of the speaker.

One the one hand, only scenarios 1, 3 and 5 could possibly be true at the same time, as they involve different agents. Scenarios 2, 4 and 6 are complementary to the others in that they negate them. One way to solve this is to combine all scenarios that do go together and apply FictionalAssert, and thus arrive at a disjunction of the two groups (affirming scenarios as opposed to negating scenarios):

(30) [[FictionalAssert]] (Scenario 1 $\cap$ Scenario 3 $\cap$ Scenario 5) $\cup$ [[FictionalAssert]] (Scenario 2 $\cap$ Scenario 4 $\cap$ Scenario 6)

Thus, it is either the case that the worlds of scenarios 1/3/5 stand in relation R to @, or that the worlds of scenarios 2/4/6 stand in relation R to @. On the other hand, given the limited context of the poem and its counterfactual querying, it is not possible to conclusively assert

the overall meaning of the poem, nor necessarily to assign a conclusive referent to "it" at all: it may be intentional to leave "it" unspecified. This ties in with what we call "apparent flouting" (see Brockmann et al., forthcoming), i.e. that a conversational maxim – in this case the maxim of quantity – is only apparently flouted, but actually obeyed on a global level of text in order to communicate a more complex text meaning. None of the scenarios above can be considered a final answer to the questions that the speaker poses, since they are by necessity fictional and only outline what implicatures the question may have.

The question form of the poem encourages a reflection about the relation between the scenarios 1/3/5 and 2/4/6s, where, irrespective of their contradiction, a relationship between the speaker, "it" and the process of writing is described in either way. The point is then not whether "it" would use the speaker's pencil or not, but how the speaker relates to this third party "it" and what position the speaker would take in this hypothetical scenario of creation. Hence, the meaning of the text may be to encourage a reflection on the part of the addressee, knowing that even though the poem poses a question, an answer is still not possible.

Above, we considered an interpretation where "it" is both a human child as well as a divine power with the means to create, i.e. Jesus Christ. The conjunction of 1, 3 and 5 and 2, 4 and 6, respectively may be the key to extrapolating the relation R between the text worlds and the actual world of the reader. This is only one option, however; the question format denies final assertion, and instead asks the addressee to continue the intellectual game.

4. <u>Conclusion</u>

In this poem, we see how underspecified reference is exploited to open up various but not arbitrary possible readings that interact in a meaningful way. Especially in combination with the status of the poem being posed as a question, we see a new way of employing FictionalAssert by looking at presuppositions first and foremost and opening up a possible

way as to how to relate the questions posed by the text. The result is quite surprising and contributes to in-depth philosophical questions that most plausibly cannot receive a definite answer. Through employing the meaning of questions in interaction with the semantics of pronouns and indexicals, Emily Dickinson demonstrates how to capture complex thoughts with the help of linguistic means.

Core Phenomenon
Pronouns $[[it_1]] = \lambda g.\ g(1)$

Textinterpretation
FictionalAssert applied to presuppositions: $[[\text{FictionalAssert}]]\ (PR_{it} \cap PRsp) =$ "Worlds in which $g(1)$ is singular, not speaker nor addressee, has a pencil and a word, the ability to use the speaker's pencil, has plucked the speaker in the past and has the ability to make the Daisy almost as big as the speaker at the time of the speaker's being plucked and in which the speaker has a pencil and is comparable to the Daisy, are worlds that stand in Relation R to the actual world."   **FictionalAssert in interaction with questions::** **Possible Scenario 1**: "It" is a supernatural power that does not have the means to express itself, and would thus use human means to communicate and it would create the Daisy. **Possible Scenario 2:** "It" is a supernatural power that does not have the means to express itself, but it would not use human means to communicate and it would not create the Daisy. **Possible Scenario 3:** "It" is a human being that does not have the means to express itself, and it would use the speaker's pencil and help the Daisy to grow as big as the speaker. **Possible Scenario 4:** "It" is a human being that does not have the means to express itself, and it would not use the speaker's pencil nor help the Daisy to grow as big as the speaker. **Possible Scenario 5:** "It" is a child, and it would use the speaker's pencil and draw a daisy to have almost the size of the speaker. **Possible Scenario 6:** "It" is a child, and it would not use the speaker's pencil and draw a daisy to have almost the size of the speaker. $[[\text{FictionalAssert}]]\ (PS_1 \cap PS_3 \cap PS_5)\ \&\ [[\text{FictionalAssert}]]\ (PS_2 \cap PS_4 \cap PS_6)$

Pronouns in other chapters
(In 1.4 and 1.5): $[[\text{I}]]$ = the speaker in the context $[[\text{you}]]$ = the addressee in the context

Other Phenomena in this Chapter
Structural Ambiguity: Worn- **now** – and dull – sweet Now [worn & dull &sweet] *or* [Now[worn & dull]] &[sweet] *or* [Now [worn]] & [dull & sweet] **Definites**: Would it make **the Daisy** – $[[\text{the Daisy}]]^g$ is only defined if there is a unique x, such that Daisy(w)(x). Then, $[[\text{the Daisy}]]^g$ = the unique x, such that Daisy(w)(x)

1.3 "To pile like Thunder": Lexical Ambiguity

(1) To pile like Thunder to its close,
    Then crumble grand away,
    While Everything created hid –
    This would be Poetry –

    Or Love – the two coeval come –
    We both and neither prove,
    Experience either, and consume –
    For None see God and live

1. **<u>Introduction</u>**

In the two poems discussed in detail (see 1.1 and 1.2), underspecification of reference was the main tool Emily Dickinson employed to create complex meaning. In the present case, we find ourselves confronted with underspecified lexical meanings on the one hand and a logical riddle on the other. The poem posits both poetry and love in comparison to the natural phenomenon of thunder, and then proceeds to reflect on the relation between the two and their respective nature as well as their interaction with "us", i.e. the group that the speaker is part of. The interplay of underspecification and logical structure that we find in this poem makes this reflection process possible. In the following, we will first look at each stanza and then come to an overall interpretation.[1]

2. **<u>Stanza One, lines 1-4</u>**

In general, stanza one introduces the imagery of thunder that is then compared to poetry and love. The following linguistically informed analysis will specify both the natural phenomenon and its relationship to poetry and love.

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[1] Ford (1997) discusses this poem in the context of Dickinson's implicit poetics: "Perhaps Dickinson never wrote a poetic treatise because her poetics take shape in the course of her poems and are formulated only as they are enacted. […] Here again, poetry terrifies and intimidates its listeners, who hide from its thunderous voice. Moreover, in the description of the *process* of the thunder—an initial frightening clap succeeded by a gradual recession of sound—we can recognise the poetic structure identified by Porter: emphatic assertion followed by formal disintegration" (41). On what we believe to be Dickinson's poetics, see chapter 2, "The Linguist as Poet."

The syntax of the first stanza is comparatively straightforward, although it bears some qualification (see below). As a first step, however, we need to determine the lexical meaning of the key verbs "to pile" and "crumble" in this stanza.

As far as "to pile" is concerned, of the meanings listed by the *OED*, most are in reference to a physical event of piling or stacking something, i.e. "[t]o form into a pile or heap; to heap up" (*OED* "pile, *v*." 2.a.). Considering that the agent of piling is thunder, we find it most plausible to define piling as "form[ing] into a heap or mass; […] increas[ing] in quantity" (*OED* "pile, *v*." 3.a.), or "amass[ing], […] accumulat[ing]" (*OED* "pile, *v*." 4.a.). Together with crumbling, i.e. to "fall asunder in […] particles" (*OED* "crumble, *v*." 2.), the image created is a potently physical one: the juxtaposition "to pile like Thunder" and "crumble grand away" suggests either thunderclouds amassing and then dispersing again, or even visualising the actual noise that can be heard in thunderstorms. An aid in this may be the nature of sound when it travels to first grow louder, and then gradually "crumbles" away. While thunder can, thus, not literally "pile" or "crumble," a metaphoric reinterpretation allows us to enrich the proposition with the lexical meaning of either verb, and consequently make sense of it. The physicality that is achieved through this remains with the reader throughout the poem. What is more, Webster's Dictionary evokes the religious dimension of earthly existence in its definition of "crumble": "2. To fall to decay; to perish; as, our flesh shall *crumble* into dust." In our discussion of stanza 2, we will come back to the religious motifs present in the poem, but it is striking that, from the first two lines onwards, both the physical, natural world, as well as its demise in a religious context, are present.[2] Yet how "pile" and "crumble" are related can only be determined through a closer look at the syntactic construction in which they are embedded.

The first stanza is comprised of one sentence that is syntactically complete and, simultaneously, runs on into stanza two; and although the punctuation is unclear, the

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[2]   For the religious contexts evoked, see also McIntosh (2000) and Freedman (2011).

adverbials "while" and "then" create a structure of an infinitival clause and a matrix clause. There is, however, a structural element that is harder to integrate in the syntax: the modification "like Thunder to its close" can be positioned at various points in the sentence structure. It can be the adjunct for "to pile" as well as of the bigger structural element "to pile then crumble grand away." In the first case, only the piling is compared to thunder, whereas, in the second case, both piling and crumbling are part of the comparison with thunder. As the second option seems more plausible in the context of the stanza as a whole, which describes the natural phenomenon of thunder and compares this with poetry and love, we will assume the following structure for the sentence:

(2)
    a. Matrix Sentence: $[_{CP}$ would $[[_{CP}$ this$_1$ is poetry $]$ or $[_{CP}$ this$_1$ is love $]]]$
    b. Infinitival Construction: $[_{INFP}[[[$PRO to pile to its close $]$ $[$ like thunder piles to its close$]]$ $[$ while everything created hid$]]$ [then crumble grand away]]

Intuitively, the demonstrative "this" seems to refer to the complete infinitival construction given in (2)b. Thus, the variable assignment function selects the infinitive as the referent for the demonstrative. In order to make sure that there is a unique referent in the context, we will assume that there is an additional covert definite determiner that operates on the variable[3]:

(3) $[[$ [the [this$_2$]] $]]^g$ = the unique x s.t. g(2) is true for x

We can assume the same but slightly more complex structure for the demonstratives in the matrix clause:

(4) [would [[the [this$_1$]] is poetry] or [[the [this$_1$] is love]]]
(5) $[[$ the [this$_1$] $]]^g$ = the unique g(1) s.t. g(1) is a piling to its close […] in w

With this semantics, the covert definite triggers a uniqueness presupposition that there be only one relevant instance of what is described in the infinitival construction in ((2)b). In the poem,

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[3] This is a slightly simplified version of Heim and Kratzer's (1998) treatment of possessive pronouns that come with an overt NP complement. This analysis can be extended to cover demonstratives: In those cases, we have to account for the NP argument without changing the basic meaning of the pronoun or the demonstrative. In order to do that, we will assume that there is an additional covert definite determiner (cf. Heim and Kratzer 1998, 246):
    $[[$ The [this$_1$ house] $]]^g$ = the unique g(1) s.t. g(1) is a house in w

the uniqueness condition is indeed met; poetry and love are compared to a particular natural phenomenon of a thunderstorm.

Looking at the infinitival construction itself given in (2)b, we find that a combination of its parts results in the following meaning:

(6) $\lambda y_3. \lambda w. \exists t$ [y_3 piles at t in w & [$\lambda w'. y_3$ piles at t in w'] like (w) [$\lambda w'.$ thunder pile to its close (w')] & $\forall x$[individual (x) & created (x) ➔ hid (x) at t in w] & & $\exists t'$[y_3 crumbles grandly away at t' in w & t<t']]

(7) "To pile like thunder piles to its close, while everything created hid, then crumble grandly away."

Without going into too much detail, the piling described by the infinitival is compared to thunder piling to its close. At the same time, every created being hides. The crumbling then happens at a time after the piling.

The matrix clause that bridges the gap between stanzas one and two identifies poetry or love with what is expressed in the infinitival construction and contains the modal "would." "Would" quantifies over the worlds described by the sentence, namely that either poetry or love is a piling and crumbling like thunder:

(8) $[[would]] = \lambda w. \lambda R_{<s,<s,t>>}. \lambda p_{<s,t>}: \neg p(w). \forall w'[R(w)(w') \rightarrow p(w')]$

(9) $[[R]] = \lambda w_1. \lambda w_2. w_2$ is maximally similar to w_1

The modal "would" indicates *irrealis*. What the sentence says is true in worlds that are maximally similar to the text worlds – i.e. the worlds in which what the poem says is true – but false in the text worlds themselves. Because of this discrepancy between the text worlds on the one hand and the else maximally similar "irrealis"-worlds triggered by "would" we know that the property referred to by the infinitival construction is not directly identified with poetry or love in the text worlds themselves, but that it is only identified with worlds that are closely related to the text worlds. We will see that this shift towards possible worlds is part of the nature of love and poetry.

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"Love" and "poetry" are not simply juxtaposed to each other here but set off with the grammatical conjunction "or," which effects a logical disjunction. This disjunction of "love" and "poetry" can be interpreted in the following way:

(10) $[[or]] = \lambda p_{<s,t>}. \lambda q_{<s,t>}. \lambda w. p(w) \lor q(w)$

"Or" as given in (10) is inclusive. That means that it permits that both, poetry or love, can be identified with the infinitival construction, but not necessarily at the same time.[4]

As an interim summary of the first stanza, we find that it reveals a description of something that is compared to the natural phenomenon of thunder. This description is then identified with poetry or love in a world maximally similar to the text worlds, except that, in the text world itself, love and poetry are not identified with this natural phenomenon but only likened to it. Through the demonstrative "this," the image of piling and crumbling which is compared to thunder is integrated into the matrix clause. We thus can paraphrase the combination of the matrix clause with the infinitive as follows:

(11) $[[this_1]]^g = g(1) =$ the property of piling like thunder piles to its close, while everything created hid, then crumbling grandly away

(12) "The property of piling like thunder piles to its close, while everything created hid, then crumbling grandly away, would be poetry or love."

Though the syntactic structure of stanza one provides us with little challenge in general, what continues to grab our attention is the matrix clause enjambment that connects stanzas one and two with each other.

3. <u>Stanza Two, lines 5-8</u>

The second stanza presents the reader with a logical puzzle that is directly intertwined with more lexical underspecifications. From a syntactic point of view, the sentence structures are quite straightforward. However, the second stanza concentrates on the possible functions of poetry and love and their interaction, and presents their interplay as a logical riddle. Let us

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[4] Miller (1987) reads the peculiar syntactic position of "Or Love" and the subsequent second stanza as "an afterthought […] [t]he speaker's sudden realization that poetry and love are analogous causes her to stumble momentarily in her definition, and then to conclude far from the crescendoing description with which she began" (100). The poem in its entirety would thus be the representation of an ongoing thought process that is simultaneously being articulated.

briefly go back to the disjunction that combines poetry and love: What has been described as a phenomenon comparable to thunder in stanza one is put on equal footing with "poetry or love". The disjunction "or" can be interpreted either inclusively or exclusively. If we take it to be exclusive, only one, either love or poetry, is like a natural phenomenon. The inclusive "or" means that both love and poetry can be captured by the image of a natural phenomenon. With the latter reading, it is important to note that love and poetry are not read conjunctively – the inclusive "or" includes both options as possible, whereas "and" would state that both options have to be true at the same time. In the poem, love and poetry are both described "like thunder" but do not have to be thunder at the same time. This play with love and poetry is elaborated on in the second stanza: "The two coeval come" states that both poetry and love are "of the same age or standing in point of time *with* another" (*OED* "coeval, *adj.* and *n.*" B.1.), that is, contemporaries (see also meanings B.2. and B.3. listed in the *OED*). The temporal co-existence of the two that is expressed here supports the inclusive reading of "or."

In the second sentence of the second stanza, we find a logical riddle that presents us with a contradiction: "We both and neither prove" can be paraphrased as "We prove both and we prove neither," that is resolving the N' ellipsis:

(13) We prove both poetry and love, and we prove neither poetry nor love.

This should be contradictory in the same way as the simpler example (14):

(14) I called both Robin and Laura and I called neither Robin nor Laura.

It cannot simultaneously be true that I called Laura and that I didn't call Laura. Thus, on the semantic level of the text, interpretation should fail. But readers do not stop with their interpretation once they arrive at a contradiction; rather, they look for a resolution, e.g. a reinterpretation that is not contradictory. In the case of "we both and neither prove," the key to the solution lies in the semantic contribution of the verb "prove." As a transitive verb, it needs both a subject and an object, and both are given in the sentence. However, it may still take on

subtly different meanings, which can be discerned by a further specification of "prove": a by-clause. This by-clause can give the motivation or evidence for the proof:

(15) The lawyer proved his innocence by giving an alibi.
(16) The logician proved the theorem by induction over the structure of the logical language.

Revealing the different senses of "prove" through inserting a by-clause, we can resolve the contradiction:

(17) We prove both love and poetry by existing.
(18) We prove neither poetry nor love by giving evidence.

Similar cases of resolved contradiction can also be found outside of poetry:

(19) A: "Did Hans attend the seminar?" B: "yes and no." (i.e. he was physically present, but didn't pay attention)

Accordingly, the two respective meanings of "prove" as given in (17) and (18) take different arguments and receive two distinct lexical entries. The lexical entry in (20) captures the meaning as illustrated in (17) and the lexical entry in (21) captures the exemplary use in (18):

(20) $[[prove_1]] = \lambda P. \lambda x.$ x's existence would be impossible if there weren't a y such that $P(y)$
(21) $[[prove_2]] = \lambda y. \lambda x.$ x present convincing arguments for y

In "we both and neither prove," we are thus dealing with a zeugma, i.e. a rhetorical device with which "multiple clauses are governed by a single word, most often a noun or verb" (Moore 2012, 1553), as the verb "prove" takes on different meanings in accordance with the elements of the sentence that it governs. The use of a zeugma in this case is an economical means to emphasise the double nature of "prove," though if it is not recognised as such, the phrase appears as a paradox. Since we are dealing with intensely abstract concept in "love" and "poetry," the seeming paradox that results from the zeugmatic construction is stimulus to reflect on the nature of both love and poetry, and in our relation to each. As the paraphrase in (18) with the corresponding lexical entry in (21) outlines, we may not be able to prove the existence of love and poetry by giving evidence for them as we would for physical objects or in scientific discourse: if we wanted to prove that the moon existed, we could do so by giving

evidence of our hypothesis in that not only can we see it from earth but also that, should an object intercept it, it would collide with the moon, since it is a massive celestial body that physically exists. At the same time, phenomena such as the oceanic tide implicitly proves the existence of the moon, as it is a direct consequence of lunar gravitational fields. Accordingly, "we both and neither prove" can be read as in (18) as our impotence of actively giving evidence for the existence or power of poetry and love but, at the same time, passively proving them because we exist, as paraphrase (17) expresses.

Line 7, "Experience either and consume", can thus either be the confirmation that by experiencing and consuming love and poetry, we prove their existence, if we read "consume" as to "absorb (culture, art, etc.)" (*OED* "consume, *v.*[1]" 11.). In that context, "we," through experiencing and absorbing love and poetry, can prove their existence, because the two concepts apply to us (see (20)). However, the subsequent line suggests a different reading. The last line of the poem, "For None see God and live," is a close echo of the Exodus verse which states that man cannot look at God: "And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live" (Exod. 33:20). With this context, the meaning of "consume" rather turns to "to waste away" (*OED* "consume *v.*[1]" 3.b.). Therefore, in analogy to the perfection of God, we, if we were to experience the perfect idea of poetry or love – that is, the very *idea*, and not one of its many iterations in the world –would have to perish, as it would be beyond our human capacities to grasp the magnificence of those two phenomena. This reading presents an obvious link to the lexical ambiguity of "crumble" as outlined above, where Webster provides a definition that takes heed of the religious connotation in the sense of "to perish". If we were to experience love and poetry as the abstract concepts they are and thus fully understand them, this would qualify as providing evidence for them. However, together with the second meaning of "consume," we would have to die as an effect of that evidence. Instead, we only partially experience them and thus prove that they exist. It would be impossible to prove poetry and love as transcendental, abstract ideas, but we certainly are

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capable of loving, and reading or writing poetry. Our proof is that we may live what they entail and experience them in a human, imperfect way. We can see that the reinterpretation of "prove" that has been effected by a contradiction interacts with the lexical ambiguity of "consume":

(22) $[[\text{consume}_1]] = \lambda x. \lambda y. y \text{ absorbs } x$
(23) $[[\text{consume}_2]] = \lambda x. x \text{ perishes}.$

Thus, reinterpreting "prove" as providing evidence through grasping the conceptual notions of poetry and love in their entirety would lead the speakers of the poem to perish, according to the lexical entry for "consume" in (23). Reinterpreting "prove" as an experience, the speakers absorb both poetry and love in that experience, according to the lexical entry for "consume" in (22).

This is the solution of the logical riddle: While we cannot provide evidence for the abstract ideas love or poetry (and thus going along the meaning of "prove" in (21)), we do prove their existence by experiencing both (captured by (20)), even if this experience only imperfectly captures the idea. This points us back to the beginning of the poem: The modal "would" indicates an irrealis relation between the text worlds and worlds maximally similar in which the natural phenomenon is identified with love or poetry (see (4)). Having had a look at the entirety of the poem, we realise that the impossibility of identifying poetry and love in a specific manner is indicated at its beginning. In the first stanza, this impossibility is expressed by comparing love and poetry to a natural phenomenon, namely thunder; in the second stanza, the theme of impossibility re-emerges, and the irrealis is explicated through a logical riddle. In the hypothetical possible worlds, poetry and love can be *like* a natural phenomenon, but they are not in the text worlds. This circumstance can be seen in parallel to the possibility of proving both exist by experiencing them, and the impossibility of proving them by providing evidence: The evidence is part of worlds not accessible to us human beings, i.e. worlds

maximally similar to the text worlds in which we as human beings could experience the complexity of poetry and love. In reality, we are not capable of doing so.

4. <u>Resulting Interpretations</u>

The local ambiguities interact with each other, which leads to the global text meaning. The first stanza with a comparison: In worlds that are maximally similar to the text worlds, what is compared to thunder is identified with love and poetry. The second stanza further explains the complex nature of poetry and love, which is presented in the form of a logical riddle. This logical riddle interacts with different lexical meanings of the individual verbs. On the basis of this analysis, we arrive at the following paraphrase of the overall text meaning:

> (24) Poetry and love would both be like natural phenomena comparable to thunder. Both are equivalent in their value, as they are contemporaries to each other. By experiencing and consuming both, we prove that they exist. On the other hand, we cannot prove their existence in their complexity by providing evidence because if we would experience both in their entirety, we perish. This is in parallel to seeing God, since no one may see God and survive.

At this point, our speech act operator FictionalAssert comes into play:

> (25) $[[\text{FictionalAssert}_R]]^{g,w} = \lambda w.\ \lambda T.\ \forall w'\ [T\ (w') \rightarrow R\ (w)(w')]$

Applying FictionalAssert to this text meaning gives us a value for R: The subject of the poem, "we," is not a specific group of people, but most likely interpreted generically as all human beings. The poem thus gives information on the capabilities and limits of humankind in general.

> (26) $[[\text{FictionalAssert}_R]]\ ((24))\ (@) = \lambda T.\ \forall w'\ [\ (24)(w') \rightarrow R\ (w')(@)]$

> (27) "Worlds in which what the text says is true are worlds where we (as human beings) have only access to a subpart of the essence of poetry and love."

In figuring out R, this juxtaposition of poetry and love is all the more remarkable as Emily Dickinson elevates poetry to the same status as love in that both are phenomena beyond human comprehension, and both are essential to mankind. This outstanding role of poetry as one of the great constants of human life, comparable to such ideas as love or indeed faith,

often appears in Dickinson's poetry. This recurrence demonstrates the value she assigns to poetry as a constitutive element of the world – one that we also find in our discussions of other poems, which will become especially explicit in Chapter 2.2, "The Linguist as Poet."

5. Conclusion

The poem presents the reader with mostly lexical ambiguities and a complex play of logical meaning, which is the essence of formal semantics. As we have seen, both phenomena are consciously used to establish a complex relation between poetry and love and their value. The resolution of the contradiction in the second stanza shows once more Emily Dickinson's conscious play with resolution strategies that we find not only in her poems but also in other, non-poetic contexts. Thus, grammar in poetry adheres to the same mechanisms as language use in other contexts.

Similar to what we have detailed in previous chapters of this book, Dickinson uses deliberate underspecification of what is said in this poem in order to trigger a reflection process about the main topics discussed, which are poetry and love in particular in this poem. We have seen ambiguity employed in a similar manner in "This was a Poet" (Chapter 1.1); in this poem, we are encouraged to reflect on the nature of the "Portion" that is mentioned in the text; moreover, in "If it had no pencil" (Chapter 1.2), lexical ambiguities such as in the case of "dull" or the "Daisy" are up for discussion. Depending on the decisions we make as readers in interpreting them, these ambiguities lead to vastly different outcomes but may also offer the possibility of conjunctive readings. It is only fitting that this mechanism is harnessed in "To pile like Thunder" in such a way that we rely on the lexical ambiguity of "prove" in order to solve the logical riddle presented to us.

Core Phenomenon
Lexical Ambiguity $[[prove_1]] = \lambda P.\ \lambda x.$ x's existence would be impossible if there weren't a y such that P(y) $[[prove_2]] = \lambda y.\ \lambda x.$ x present convincing arguments for y
Text Interpretation
Text interpretation T: Poetry and love would both be like natural phenomena comparable to thunder. Both are equivalent in their value, as they are contemporaries to each other. By experiencing and consuming both, we prove that they exist. On the other hand, we cannot prove their existence in their complexity by providing evidence because if we would experience both in their entirety, we perish. This is in parallel to seeing God, since no one may see God and survive.   **FictionalAssert:** $[[\text{FictionalAssert}]]\ (T) = \forall w'\ [T\ (w') \rightarrow R\ (@)(w')]$ **Relation R:**   "Worlds in which what the text says is true are worlds where we (as human beings) have only access to a subpart of the essence of poetry and love."
Lexical Ambiguity in other chapters
(In Chapter 1.6): The owner passed – identified - // and **carried me away** $[[\text{carry away}_1]] = \lambda x.\ \lambda y.\ \lambda l.$ y transports x to l $[[\text{carry away}_2]] = \lambda x.\ \lambda y.$ x overwhelms y emotionally
Other Phenomena in this Chapter
Demonstratives: **This** would be Poetry - // Or Love – the two coeval come- $[[\text{this}_1]]^g = g(1) =$ the property of piling like thunder piles to its close, while everything created hid, then crumbling grandly away

1.4 "You said that I 'was Great'": Scales and Contextual Parameters[1]

(1) You said that I 'was Great' – one Day –
   Then 'Great' it be – if that please Thee –
   Or Small – or any size at all –
   Nay – I'm the size suit Thee –

   Tall – like the Stag – would that?
   Or lower – like the Wren –
   Or other heights of Other Ones
   I've seen?

   Tell which – it's dull to guess –
   And I must be Rhinoceros
   Or Mouse –
   At once – for Thee –

   So say – if Queen it be –
   Or Page – please Thee –
   I'm that – or nought –
   Or other thing – if other thing there be –
   With just this Stipulus –
   I suit Thee –
   (Dickinson c1863/1975, no. 738)

1. Introduction

In this poem, Emily Dickinson very explicitly shows her intuitive knowledge about the semantic structure of sentences. Her sensibility towards semantic composition and its violations has been a main issue in the preceding chapters; in the present case, we will see that the speaker of the poem offers up a playful 'semantic analysis' of what it means to be "great." The phenomena that are central to the poem are degree constructions and, drawing on their properties, the scales and contextual parameters necessary for their semantic interpretation. In the course of the poem, Dickinson highlights the semantic content of the utterance "You are great," indicating that contextual information is necessary in order to fully understand what is

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meant by being "great," as its lexical meaning is insufficient for a clear determination. The poem thus discusses the meaning of the predicate "great" in which the speaker proceeds to playfully apply different scales to reveal this multiplicity in meaning.[2]

We see that the adjective "great" is notoriously versatile in its lexical meaning when we consider, for instance, that the *OED* lists 23 different lexical entries for the adjective alone (that is, not counting the entries for "great" as noun or adverb), most of which are divided into even smaller units. Webster likewise lists 25 meanings. Central to the word's meaning is that it can be used with reference not only to size but also to rank, power, etc. (see *OED* A.III.16.c.), which is often metaphorical in its use. Dickinson's dictionary told her that "Large in bulk or dimensions" was the first meaning of "GREAT, a. [L. crassus]" (Webster 1828). "Great" in this sense may refer e.g. to "a great house; a great farm." Webster's second meaning of "great," "Being of extended length or breadth," is exemplified by "a great distance; a great lake." None of these meanings are applicable to persons; yet in the poem, the speaker (S) teases the addressee (A) by contrasting "great" with "Small – or any size at all" and assuming that A actually did refer to her physical size.[3] This interpretation by S is explained in the next two stanzas: "great" as an expression of size may refer either to the scale of length or to the scale of bigness. It is, according to Webster, "a term of comparison," a fact which S comically stresses by comparing herself to a stag or a wren, a rhinoceros or a mouse.[4] As a statement about a person to said person's face, the literal meaning of "great" that S playfully draws on here is shown to be absurd in many ways, especially if we consider the possibility that A in his previous utterance intended to pay S a compliment by addressing the

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[2] Smith (1996) reads the poem as "absolutely malleable to the desire of its addressee/reader" and suggests that one reading could be to see the poem itself as speaker (139-40). We discuss this idea in more detail in chapter 3.2, "Formal Linguistics as a Tool in Literary Analysis."

[3] In order to distinguish more easily between the persons involved, we assume S to be female and A to be male. Apart from the fact that the poem was written by a woman, which may lead to the assumption that S is female, there is no evidence as to the sex of either S or A.

[4] The comical inappropriateness of being called "great" (in the sense of "big" or "tall") is thrown into relief if we make a further assumption about the context and identify S with Emily Dickinson, who in a letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson famously described herself as "small, like the Wren" (Sewall 1975, 556), a phrase actually used by S in the second stanza ("Tall – like the Stag – would that? / Or lower-like the wren –"). See also J143.

metaphorical meaning of "great" and its positive connotations about her abilities or her personality: "great" could also mean, for example, "supreme, illustrious" (Webster 1828, def. no. 08), "wonderful; admirable" (no. 09), or "Dignified in aspect, mien or manner" (no. 13). Exactly because S plays with these unusual interpretations of "great," however, she arrives at an interpretation that she considers appropriate: The very fact that the meaning of "great" is relative with respect to some kind of standard (usually a size standard) gives S the opportunity to stress that she wants to be "relative" to A. S does not want to be "great" in any fixed sense but wants to be whatever A says she is.

This poem is therefore different from the ones analysed in the preceding chapters: the overall text meaning is not ambiguous in the sense that it offers several equally plausible readings; rather, the overall text meaning can be identified clearly. What the poem does, however, is to describe facts that are incompatible with the data of the evaluation world of the reader. An informed semantic analysis of the poem results in the following informal paraphrase:

(2) "As long as I suit you, I can be of any degree on any scale."

In the actual world, individuals can have only one size at a specific moment in time: In the case of my height, I am either 1.50 m tall or I am 1.70 m tall – it is impossible for me to be both at the same time. Additionally, my height is a fact that neither I nor any other person could change. Yet this impossibility seems to be the result of combining all sentence meanings of the poem.

The interpretive challenge hence lies in transforming the rather implausible interpretation within the text to something consistent and relatable given the facts of the actual world. This difficulty lies at the heart of what the poem conveys. Through discussing each stanza in turn, we will arrive at the overall text meaning and, in a final step, we will show how the interpretive riddle presented by S can be solved.

2. **Stanza One, lines 1-4**

The first interpretive problem that a reader encounters in stanza one is that the poem seems to start in the middle of things. We have not yet encountered either speaker or addressee,[5] but the first line presupposes an earlier conversation between the two in which A told S that she is "great" – a presupposition that is strengthened by the quotation marks around "was great." Since this utterance by A seems to be the topic of the poem, we are inclined to assume that there is a (fictional) conversation[6] that has taken place previously to the beginning of the poem; we accommodate (Lewis 1979; Kadmon 2001) the missing information.

(3)
   a. Accommodate: There is an earlier situation e in which A talks to S.
   b. Assertion: A says in e that S is great.

But even if we accommodate that this conversation took place, we still do not know what exactly the conversation was about[7]. This means that important contextual information about what A could have meant by this utterance is not available to the readers. The lack of contextual information opens up interpretive possibilities that Dickinson deliberately plays with. The only contextual information that is available is restricted to the information given in the poem itself. Considering the semantics of the predicate "to be great", we need to consider two aspects in order to arrive at a meaning.

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[5] Kher (1974) identifies the addressee as "her lover" (154) but gives no reference as to why this particular relation must be the case. Phillips (1996) reads it intertextually as a "light-hearted and amusing […] courtship verse[s]" that goes back to "Jane Eyre's story of her devotion to Rochester and the efforts she made to cheer, to tease, and to 'suit' him" (107). Phillips underlines this by admitting that even though "the poet's own experiences contribute to the brio of the moment, […] her use of the fictive voice is undeniable" (108).

[6] Deppman (2008) considers this poem part of "Dickinson's profoundly conversational, other-dependent conception of poetry" and counts it as one of those that "stage conversations between lovers, friends, spirit and body, the heart and the mind, natural phenomena, and other entities" (28-29). In this context, he also mentions "I'm Nobody"; see chapter 1.5.

[7] The present example is not a case of standard accommodation (Lewis 1979), where information that is conveyed through a presupposition is not given in the context but is assumed to be true by the hearer, e.g. in the following case:

    Situation: A and B talk, B does not know that A has a dog.
        A: I need to go home and feed my dog.

Here, even if B does not know that A had a dog, she can easily accommodate that it must be the case that A has a dog without the need for clarification. In the example above, in turn, there is no presuppositional element that requires accommodation. Still, in order to understand the utterance "You said that I "was great"', we as readers assume that a previous conversation of S and A took place. Thus, the present poem demonstrates cases of accommodation that go beyond the standard natural language occurrences considered for traditional theories on the matter.

Firstly, semantic analysis describes "great" as a gradable property (Beck 2011), i.e. it talks about the degree to which something or someone is "great." Degree properties always operate on scales that can be retrieved by the lexical information of the predicate; for instance, the adjective "tall" operates on a scale of height, whereas the adjective "fast" operates on a scale of speed.

(4)
1. $[[tall]] = \lambda d.\ \lambda x.\ Height(x) \geq d$
2. "x reaches the degree d on the height scale."

The predicate "great," however, is underspecified, which means that several scales could be meant. In everyday conversation, this predicate can easily be used in order to make a statement about someone's personality, though very often it is also used as a general predicate to distinguish the quality of a thing or a circumstance.[8] Other possibilities of scales on which individuals are arranged when contemplating their "greatness" can be (literal) physical size but also status and (metaphorical) greatness (i.e. rank, power, etc.). Thus, there are several possibilities for the meaning of the property:

(5) $[[great_1]] = \lambda d.\ \lambda x.\ physical\ size(x) \geq d$
(6) $[[great_2]] = \lambda d.\ \lambda x.\ social\ rank(x) \geq d$

For the purposes of the following discussion, we shall assume that the scale activated here is an underspecified scale of measurement and disregard, for the time being, what exactly is measured:

(7) $[[\ great\ ]] = \lambda d.\ \lambda x.\ MEAS(x) \geq d$

The second contextual aspect that we need to take into consideration lies in the nature of the adjective: here, we find it in the unmarked form (the so-called Positive; Stechow 1984). This form, at a first glance, does not seem to refer to degrees as no overt comparison is made in the

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[8] For instance: "Of considerable importance, significance, or distinction; important, weighty; distinguished, prominent; famous, renowned; impressive. Also in weakened sense: highly commendable, praiseworthy" (*OED* "great, *adj.*, *n.*, *adv.*, and *int.*" A.III.13.a.), or the colloquial use as "excellent, admirable, very pleasing, first-rate" (A.III.22).

sentence. Upon closer investigation, however, we notice that it does indeed make reference to a degree, namely by comparing the degree that the property talks about to a contextually given standard. It is this standard which lies at the heart of S's considerations, and it may differ from one context to another, which becomes evident in the following example:

(8)
　　a.　(about a four year old:) Pascal is tall.
　　　　~ 1.20m would suffice

　　b.　(about an adult basketball player:) Pascal is tall.
　　　　~ certainly over 2m

(9)　Height (P) $\geq$ s_c
　　Pascal's height reaches s_c (where s_c is the contextually given size threshold)

This property relevant to the interpretation of "great" is used by S: there is no fixed or independently given size standard in our example. The sentence meaning is the following:

(10)
　　1.　MEAS(c_s) $\geq$ sc
　　2.　"The speaker's measure reaches a contextually given measurement threshold."

The sentence meaning in (10) thus identifies two values that have to be determined contextually: the interval s_c and the exact nature of the measurement. For both, we are forced to look within the text of the poem itself. In the following lines, S offers up different possibilities. In lines two and three, S relates the properties that apply to her to the addressee's estimation. The most plausible way to semantically resolve the elliptical structure of the two lines can be seen in the paraphrase[9]:

(11) "If that pleases A, the property true of S is "great" (an interval high up on the size scale), or if that pleases A, the property true of S is "small" (the standard interval would be situated low on the size scale), or if that pleases A, any size property (no matter which) is true of S."

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[9] We say "most plausible" in this place because there are several ways to resolve the scopal relationship between the disjunction ("or") and the conditional structure. However, this structural ambiguity does not lead to a decisive change regarding the overall text meaning, which is why we assume for this sentence and all following examples that involve this scopal relationship that the disjunction always outscopes the conditional or modal.

Essentially, S lets A choose what the relevant standard should be. She offers up three possibilities to A: Either he can choose "great" as the size standard, or he can choose "small" or, rather, it is not important what he chooses: as long as it pleases him, all sizes are equally suitable values for the standard on the size scale.

S finishes the discussion of the logical possibilities offered here by stating what the only relevant criterion is for choosing both the contextual standard and the right measurement – the size that suits A:

(12) I'm (of) the size that suit(s) Thee –
  1. SIZE (S) = the unique d : SIZE (d) & d suits A
  2. There is a unique degree d, such that d is a size and d suits the addressee. The speaker is of the unique degree d, such that d is a size and d suits the addressee.
  3. "The speaker is of exactly the one contextually given degree that is a size and that suits the addressee."

3. **Stanza Two, lines 5-8**

In this stanza, S continues the logical reasoning introduced in the first stanza but varies the assertive mode into an interrogative one. She asks A directly which property he would choose for her. In parallel to the first stanza, all three possibilities depend on A's estimation. The scale here is specified and defined as referring to physical size or, more specifically to height, where the "Stag" is situated rather high on the scale, while the height of the "Wren" is situated much lower than the stag. Either one of the examples S mentions can serve as the property that is applied to S, a fact which S uses to state that, whatever A wants to consider "great," will be fine with S, no matter if it be a standard interval that is high on the height scale or low.

The most plausible way how to resolve the elliptical structure in a paraphrase is presented here:

(13) "Would it please you if I was tall like the Stag or would it please you if I was lower like the Wren or would it please you if I was of other heights of other ones I've seen?"

Concurrent with the logical structure in stanza one, S offers three possibilities to A; she also stresses that it does not matter which size A chooses: what is important is that the size pleases A.

4. <u>Stanza Three, lines 9 – 12</u>

In the same vein as the previous stanzas, S continues to reflect on the contextual information necessary to fully interpret A's utterance "You are great". Unlike the first two stanzas, where we encountered the two distinct sentence modes of assertion and question, now Dickinson includes a third option: the imperative. S orders A to identify which property it is that pleases him and that applies to S. The use of three different modes, i.e. indicative, interrogative and imperative, in the first three stanzas also shows that S is trying out different ways of addressing A and thus exploring the quality of their relationship.

The consequence of not knowing what exactly pleases A is then formulated in the following sentence:

(14) And I must be Rhinoceros
  Or Mouse –
  At once – for Thee –

"At once" is ambiguous. It may mean either "immediately, this instance" or "simultaneously." As we shall see, both meanings are present in the poem. Interpreting "at once" to mean "immediately" seems fairly straightforward: S does not want to wait any longer but asks for A's immediate decision. This reading is supported by the exclamation in line nine: "Tell which – it's dull to guess," which can also be read as an expression of S's impatience.

Reading "at once" to mean "simultaneously" in the context of the poem also leads to surprising results. It is impossible to be a Rhinoceros and a Mouse at the same time, yet the adverbial phrase "at once" (in the sense of "simultaneously") seems to force this contradiction. Upon closer investigation, we realise that the combination of "at once" with the disjunction of Rhinoceros or Mouse is not acceptable: Either S is Rhinoceros and Mouse at

once – a possibility that does not exist in the real world but which could be true in a world related to the real world through S's wishes; or we take disjunction at face value, and A has to choose between Rhinoceros and Mouse. The disjunction suggests the latter, whereas "at once" suggests the former – thus, this sentence cannot be interpreted: It is logically inconsistent, as the paraphrase of the semantic structure shows.

> (15) "It is simultaneously the case that S must be a Rhinoceros for A or that S must be a Mouse for A."

What we have seen in previous chapters becomes evident once more at this point: because we read a lyrical text, readers do not abandon the poem because of a local semantic violation but tend to continue reading and try to resolve the violation.[10] In order to resolve the violation, the logical structure S introduced in the previous stanzas comes into play. The following logical possibilities were offered there:

> (16)
> a. Stanza One: S's size is defined as either B (great) or C (small) or ALL (any size at all: plural)
> b. Stanza Two: S's size is defined as either B (Stag) or C (Wren) or OTHERS (other heights of other ones: plural)

The beginning of the third stanza seems to go along the same pattern: B (Rhinoceros) or C (Mouse). However, the third aspect that played a role before and that evoked a notion of plurality, (see in ((16)a): "all" and in((16)b): "others") seems to be missing at first sight. However, that is exactly where "at once" comes in which evokes this plurality without its being overtly uttered. Thus, the rescue strategy that is put forward through the context of the poem is to enrich the sentence meaning in the following way:

> (17) "S must be a Rhinoceros for A, or S must be a Mouse for A, or S must be both at once for A."

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[10] We will observe a parallel example in the discussion of "I'm Nobody" in Chapter 1.5.

Even though the sentence structure does not give this possibility, the preceding discourse makes the pragmatic rescue mission accessible. What we as readers are left with is a parallel reasoning that is so salient that it may overrule the violation of semantic composition:

(18) Stanza 3: B (Rhinoceros) or C (Mouse) or BOTH (at once: pragmatically inferred plural)

This strong statement brings S's wish to please A even more into focus and hints at how S sees her relation to A.

5. <u>Stanza Four (Lines 13-18)</u>

The last stanza marks the finale of S's semantic game. In addition to the explicitly mentioned gradable adjective "great" at the beginning, the text is full of expressions indicating size or dimension: S names "great" (twice), " small," "any size," "the size suit Thee," "tall," "lower," and "other heights" as possible options for understanding A's utterance "I was great." In the last stanza, two things happen with regard to the understanding of "great": first, the meaning of "great" is shifted, and, second, the last stanza combines all previous options. In the first two lines of the last stanza S again offers two possibilities for A to assign a property to her. This time, the measurement is one of social rank. In imperative sentence mode, S requests A to decide if S should be associated with being high on the scale, as the Queen, or lower on the scale, as a Page. These two options depend each on A's preference:

(19) "So say if me being great as a Queen would please you or if me being great like a Page would please you."

We notice that there is a shift with respect to the scale that "great" refers to and realise that the (mis)interpretation of "you are great" as a reference to S's size was a deliberate reduction or shift of context. S shows that she has of course understood that "great" could mean "supreme, illustrious" (Webster 1828, def. no. 08), "wonderful; admirable" (no. 09) or "Dignified in aspect, mien or manner" (no. 13).

In the last four lines of the poem, S concludes her logical game by including all possibilities that S offered to A and by stating once more that the only relevant criterion for the interpretation of the contextual information given in the predicate "great" is that S should suit A. The sentence structure is paraphrased as follows:

(20) "As long as S suits A, S is Queen or Page, or none of the properties hold for S or if there is some other property, this property holds for S."

The options given here include all options that were given in the previous stanzas and they also include additional options:

(21) (B (Queen) or C (Page)) or Nothing or (any) OTHER THING (inferred plural)

As in the other stanzas, all options depend on A and on S's wish to please A.

In the last two lines, S then presents an apparent resolution to the dilemma of choosing a meaning for "great": "With just this Stipulus – / I suit thee". However, the meaning of "Stipulus" is obscure. The word "stipulus" does not exist in English, and the closest equivalent would be the Latin adjective "stipulus" meaning "firm". The similarly sounding verb "to stipulate" is defined by Webster as to "make an agreement or covenant with any person or company to do or forbear any one thing" (no. 1), suggesting an agreement or understanding between S and A that connects the two. Yet the relation between S and A remains open, similar to word meaning in this poem, which is anything but "firm." Another conceivable alternative against which to read "stipulus" is the similarly sounding "stimulus," i.e. "[a]n agency or influence that stimulates to action or […] that quickens an activity or process" (*OED* "stimulus, *n*." 2.a.), which fits well with S prompting A to address the meaning of "great." Yet the poem ultimately does not provide an answer by A, and, thus, just as the meaning of "great" is left open, the ending only apparently presents a solution.[11]

S does not simply either reject or acknowledge A's compliment but plays with the notion of greatness and wishes to be what suits A. By this strategy, however, S proves to be

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[11] The manuscript of the poem shows "Reservation" as an alternative to "Stipulus", which would have provided a different and much clearer reading of the last two lines.

much "greater" than A in this exchange, as she takes up his rather unoriginal statement and transforms it into a complex expression of her wish to be determined by A. We see that S lovingly (and mockingly) deals with A's verbal helplessness by treating it as an expression of genuine admiration. The poem is thus revealed as an elaborate game that is played with the apparently banal compliment that A pays S. In particular, both the underspecified MEAS and the standard s can be assigned values arbitrarily, as long as it is to the liking of A:

(22) $MEAS(c_s) \geq s$

6. Overall Text Meaning

We arrive at an overall text meaning by combining all individual sentence meanings: that proposition in which everything the text says, and thus in which everything each individual sentence says, is true simultaneously. We can hence draw the following inference:

(23)
1. it pleases A that $MEAS(S) \geq d$
2. "For any values of the degree d and the scale MEAS, it pleases A that the speaker's measure is d."

What does S mean by making such a statement? As already hinted at in the introduction above, this statement cannot be true in the actual world because the facts of our worlds do not accord with it: For every individual, there is one physical size, one degree or rank, etc. It is impossible to have more than one height. What seems rather to be the case is that the speaker does not care which one value for MEAS and d will be chosen by A: Any value chosen by A qualifies as a definition of her 'greatness', so many values are possible candidates for her position on the 'greatness'-scale. This does not mean necessarily that more than one value will be assigned to her. On the contrary, she does not want to be assigned more than one value of being 'great', and it does not matter which value it will be, as long as A is defining it. What seems to be contrary to fact in the actual world is an expression of the speaker's wishes with regard to A's estimation of her, no matter what the values for MEAS and d could be.

Additionally, the choice of animals and occupations by S to illustrate possible meanings of "great" is telling with regard to the relationship between S and A. Throughout the poem, there is a progression: after the adjectives "great" and "small," S goes on with "tall" and "lower," and illustrates her apparent conceptions of these adjectives with the help of comparisons in pairs (stag-wren, rhinoceros-mouse, queen-page) and sets up dichotomies between them (great-small, tall-lower).

This progression is another instance of S's playfulness. While a "stag" can be seen as a majestic animal, and "wren" is used by Dickinson several times without particularly negative connotations, it is difficult to see "rhinoceros" as a compliment. It appears almost equally difficult to call someone a "mouse" in a positive sense, though Dickinson does use "mouse," similarly to "wren," to describe neutral, if not positive characteristics[12]; she mainly seems to use rhinoceros and mouse in order to oppose a particularly large animal with a particularly small one, regardless of the connotations they may transfer to a person. S thus shows that her comparisons lead nowhere (just like the attempts to classify her "greatness"). With the subsequent reference to "queen" and "page," S retracts from the humour entailed in the possibility of calling her a "rhinoceros." Moreover, "Queen" and "Page" refer to status again and thus serve not only to lead the interpretation of "great" back to a consideration of rank or position, but they also point to human relationships: a queen is commanding and superior to most people, whereas a page is submissive and inferior to those at court. If S were a "queen" or "page" in A's perception, S would inevitably be placed above or below A (unless A were also a queen or page or their equivalent, which seems unlikely). However, as even this (more accessible) option is not chosen, the nature of the relationship between S and A is left open.

The poem's two central concerns – the meaning of "great" and the relation between S and A – are linked through the exploration of "great," which becomes symbolic of their

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[12] "Mouse" appears in seven other poems besides J738. In J636, for instance, the mouse assumes a similar function in that it refers to a small creature whose presence the speaker is wary of because she wants to be alone. J793, on the other hand, begins with the line, "Grief is a Mouse": here, the literal meaning of mouse yields to the metaphor more clearly than it does in J738.

relationship: the apparent necessity of defining "great" links S to A, and provides an occasion for their communication. Thus, the poem is also about the communication taking place between S and A. S asks for a response ("You said", "Tell which", "so say"), and the central matter – the meaning of "great" – is dependent on something A must provide, namely to specify the values for MEAS and s_c. In the foreground of the poem is the fact that A should answer and clarify the initial statement, and not what exactly A will decide (which can be "any size at all").

The poem ostensibly presents a "private" conversation in which a specific addressee on a previous occasion, "one Day," said something to S, and is all the while addressing this A with her response. S and A are partaking in a – rather one-sided – fictional conversation to which the reader is a "witness" who is invited to make sense of what she is reading. The poem thus also becomes a poem *about* communication and understanding. The context of this instance of fictional communication is not explicit; accordingly, we can read the poem as an explication by the speaker made in the context of an intimate or personal conversation.

There are thus two possibilities for how we can read the relationship between S and A: Either S expresses that she is everything A requires her to be because A says so, thereby putting A in control of the situation; or that quality of S which is declared as "great" by A has always been so, but only now given the particular name "great" by A, in which case the scales are tipping in S's favour (who has always been "great" anyway). In both cases, S is "great" because the scale on which this is defined "suits" A.

Considering all this, the operator responsible for interpreting the global text meaning, FictionalAssert, comes again into play at this point:

(24) $[[\text{FictionalAssert}_R]]^{g,w} = \lambda w.\ \lambda T.\ \forall w'\ [T\ (w') \rightarrow R\ (w)(w')]$

When we apply FictionalAssert to the given text meaning in (23), we get the following result:

(25) $\forall w'$ [it pleases A in w' that MEAS $(c_s) \geq d$] $\rightarrow R\ (w)(w')$

(26) "All worlds w', in which it holds for any values of the degree d and the scale MEAS, it pleases A that the speaker's measure is d, stand in relation R to the evaluation world w."

A value for R can reflect upon the specific relation between A and S, given the overall text meaning. If we take the text meaning to be that either S submits to the judgment of A in that S attempts to fulfil A's requirements of what it means for A to be great, or that S can do no wrong in the eyes of A because anything S represents can count as being great, we may come up with a relation R that includes both options: the text itself does not give any indications which of these two versions of the relationship is the preferred reading.

(27) The relation R is such that speaker S and addressee A in the text worlds hold as prototypes for two people x and y involved in a relationship in the actual world, and the relationship of any two people in the actual world is like the relationship between the speaker and the addressee in the text worlds, such that S is keen on fulfilling A's understanding of what it means to be great while for A, anything S does holds as being great.

Thus, we can read the poem as the representation of a complex description of relationships where, on the one hand, people want to please each other constantly, but where, on the other hand, they can do no wrong in the eyes of their partners.

On a meta-level, the notion of communication comes into focus as a particular point of interest. Accordingly, one further possibility for R is that the reader identifies with S and chooses some referent for A:

(28) If everything the text says is true, then I am S and So-and-so is A, and I can turn a seemingly meaningless compliment by A into something much more meaningful.

Yet the direct identification with S is not necessary. A more abstract alternative for R is to highlight the communicative play with conversational implicatures and see the poem as a commentary on how much meaning can get lost in communication, either because the phrasing is not precise enough, or because it cannot be precise enough – and that language always expresses a multiplicity of connotations that can be dealt with in a playful, creative fashion:

(29) If everything the text says is true, then statements of persons behaving like A, and thus communication between A and a conversational partner are in need of further specification.

7. **Conclusion**

Our interpretation reveals a reading of the poem which is primarily informed by semantic criteria may be more plausible than previous explanations. According to Hagenbichle (1988), for example, the poem shows that the wish to acquire an identity appropriate to the addressee cannot be realised; he sees this futility in S's agonising quizzing game, vacillating between extremes (240). The recognition of S's playful analysis of her interlocutor's compliment, however, makes us aware of the fact that S is not agonised at all but quite in control of the situation. S finds it "dull to guess" what she is to A not because it is impossible to fix the standard or scale but because guessing becomes superfluous when S is whatever A has given the adjective "great." It is noteworthy that in Webster's dictionary, the lengthy entry on "great" ends with the elaboration that "[t]he sense of *great* is to be understood by the things it is intended to qualify." What defines the meaning of "great" hence is, ultimately, S herself – both consciously in her play with scales and degrees, as well as unconsciously with regard to her being the way she is, which is what prompted A to call her "great" in the first place.

The poem seems to be a conscious reflection on a way of interpreting context-dependent linguistic expressions, which Barker (2002) calls a "sharpening use". On this use, a context dependent utterance like "Chris is great" informs us what the context is like that we are in, i.e. what counts as "great" in the situation in which the sentence is uttered. Barker contrasts this with a normal "descriptive use", which takes the context for granted and informs a hearer about the facts – in the example, that Chris fulfils the criterion for greatness. It is remarkable that speakers, i.e. Emily Dickinson in our case, may be aware of the fact that sharpening is a use that language can be put to.

From a literary perspective, the linguistic criteria are helpful in order to make us aware of the process of accommodation that is both required by the reader and reflected upon by Dickinson. The interpretation of utterances thus becomes visible as a thematic focus of the poem and not just as an activity we more or less consciously engage in whenever we are reading poetry. The very absence of a specific, identifiable context furthermore suggests the need for a personal interpretation; i.e. for the evocation of a context most immediately relevant to the individual participants in the act of communication.

In this poem, we are dealing with one single utterance that is taken to pieces, and a deep reflection on the semantic ingredients of this utterance follows, such that the one utterance becomes a mirror image of what S wishes the relationship between S and A to be like. Here, the speaker's analysis of the sentence "you 'are great'" can be read as a play on the linguistic properties of the sentence, and, thus, the speaker acts as a linguist. This embedding of linguistic notions in the primary text has not been observed in the previous chapters, where we have found that the primary phenomena contributed to an overall interpretation in more and more direct ways. In contrast to our other analyses, in the present case, the overall text meaning presents something that is, regarding the facts described by it, very implausible or even impossible in our actual world. However, upon closer investigation, we realise that the deliberate underspecification of what it means to be 'great' may serve as a complex mirror of relationships and the weaknesses of communication in general. Hence, the underspecified values for 'MEAS' and 's_c' serve as a tool of the speaker to express her view on the relationship between her and the addressee.

Core Phenomenon
Scales and Contextual Parameters [[great]] = λd. λx. MEAS(x) ≥d

Text Interpretation
Text interpretation T: it pleases A that MEAS(S) ≥d 'For any values of the degree d and the scale MEAS, it pleases A that the speaker's measure is d.' **FictionalAssert:** [[FictionalAssert]] (T) = ∀w' [T (w') → R (@)(w')] **Relation R:** "If everything the text says is true, then I am S and So-and-so is A, and I can turn a seemingly meaningless compliment by A into something much more meaningful." *or* "If everything the text says is true, then statements of persons behaving like A, and thus communication between A and a conversational partner are in need of further specification."

Scales in other chapters
(See Chapter 1.6)**:** Though I than He – may **longer** live // He **longer** must – than I – "It is possible that I live longer than he, and it is necessary that he live longer than I." *or* "My maximum life expectancy exceeds his maximum life expectancy, and the minimum required lifetime of his exceeds the minimum lifetime required of me"

Other Phenomena in this Chapter
Pronouns: [[I]] = the speaker in the context [[you]] = the addressee in the context

1.5 "I'm Nobody!": Interpreting Quantifiers

(1) I'm Nobody! Who are you?
    Are you – Nobody – Too?
    Then there's a pair of us!
    Don't tell! they'd advertise – you know!

    How dreary – to be – Somebody!
    How public – like a Frog –
    To tell one's name – the livelong June –
    To an admiring Bog!

1. <u>Introduction</u>

The poem "I'm Nobody" (J288) is one of the shorter poems that we discuss in detail, but it is nonetheless rich in linguistic phenomena. Similar to the exploration of contextual underdeterminacy in "You said that I 'was great'", here we find a poem that focuses on the semantic ingredients of the text and deliberately plays with them in a very surprising manner. The phenomenon central to this semantic play is quantification, i.e. the quantifiers "nobody" and "somebody". The way in which they are used requires a thorough consideration of their properties and possible combinations with other words.[1]

In this context, it makes sense to first have a look at the characteristics and the regular use of quantifiers in non-literary use. Quantifiers are interpreted as non-referential elements of a sentence. Their semantic contribution lies in relating elements of the sentence to each other in a specific way. Let us look at an example:

(2) No vegetarian eats meat.

"Vegetarian" describes human beings that do not eat meat. Its semantic contribution can be seen below:

(3) $[[\text{vegetarian}]]^g = \lambda x.\ x$ is a vegetarian

"No" relates two properties, saying that there are no individuals that share both properties:

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[1] Some critics have read this poem as Dickinson's rejection for public recognition; see Porter (1966, 62) and Juhasz, Miller, Smith (1993, 15). Pollak (2004) pursues the historical context even further and reads it as "Dickinson's anxiety about the twin forces of democracy and technology that were transforming rural Amherst and moving America from the country to the city in the nineteenth century" (151). Others have read it in the context of feminist criticism, for instance Grabher (1998, 230) and Wardrop (1996, 40-41).

(4) [[eats meat]] = λx. x eats meat
(5) [[no]]^g = λP$_{<e,t>}$. λQ$_{<e,t>}$. there is no x such that P(x) & Q(x)
(6) [[no vegetarian]] = [λP. there is no x such that x is a vegetarian and P(x)]
(7) [[no vegetarian eats meat]] = 1 iff there is no x such that x is a vegetarian and x eats meat

Accordingly, what "no" does in our example is saying that the intersection of the set of vegetarians (see (3)) with the set of people who eat meat (see (4)) yields an empty set – no individual that is a vegetarian is also an individual that eats meat (see (5) and (6)).

Quantifiers never make reference to specific individuals; they relate properties that do or do not hold for a group of people. In the present poem, however, Emily Dickinson uses quantifiers in order to make statements about specific individuals, namely the speaker S and the addressee A. This turn is, from a semantic perspective, rather risky. We as readers are forced to reinterpret the quantifiers, and the way we reinterpret them influences the overall interpretation of the text. In contrast to other analyses (such as the ones in chapter 1.6, "My Life had Stood," and chapter 1.1, "This was a Poet"), with regard to "I'm Nobody," it is not possible to find alternative readings of the text that are consistent with each other. Instead, two options for the reinterpretation of "nobody" emerge, each of which can only partially be combined with the individual sentences of the text. What we arrive at as a consequence are two readings of the poem that each draw on parts of the text, though neither on the whole. The overall text meaning then lies in the combination of those two readings, and the question is how this overall text meaning comes about.

2. Stanza One, lines 1-4

The speaker's initial statement "I'm nobody" is, strictly speaking, uninterpretable, since the semantic type of "nobody" does not go together with the rest of the sentence: "I" refers to a specific individual (the speaker of the poem), while "Nobody" – like "no" in example (2) above – denotes a set of properties. Compositional interpretation thus collapses:

(8) [I<e> [am [nobody<<e,t>,t>]]]
(9) [[I]] = S (the speaker)

(10) [[nobody]] = λP. There is no person x such that P(x).

As noted above, quantifiers do relate items to each other; in the case of "nobody," the set that it may combine with is empty. This, however, leads to a paradox as "nobody" in this sentence refers to "I." a specific individual; semantically, "nobody" and "I" (as a specific individual) cannot be combined. In order to still make sense of the utterance, we have to reinterpret "nobody." There are two possibilities: Treating it as being referential (see example (11)a) or as a being a property (see example (11)b).

(11)
    a. Referential analogy: I am the boss $\rightarrow$ S = [[the boss]]
    b. Property analogy: I am important $\rightarrow$ [[important]] (S)

Analogous to ((11)a), one way of reinterpreting the sentence is to change the meaning of "nobody" from being a quantifier to being a referential proper name, e.g., "I am the unique person called Nobody," such that "nobody" refers to a specific individual similar to the unique individual in "I am the boss."

(12) [[nobody$_{<e>}$]] = Nobody
(13) [[I am nobody]] = the speaker (in c) is Nobody

This reading is strengthened by the capitalisation of "Nobody," and by the question following it:

(14) [Who$_{1<e>}$ [are$_2$ [you [t$_2$ t$_1$]]]]

The answer to this question requires that the addressee identify herself as the specific individual she is, similarly to the statement by the speaker, who identifies herself as the specific individual "Nobody."

      Reading on to the next line, however, we are confronted with a problem: the reinterpretation of "Nobody" as designating a specific individual cannot be combined with the other elements of the sentence in line two.

(15) [Are$_1$ [you [t$_1$ nobody] too]]

The additive particle "too" carries the presupposition that a different proposition is also true. In our case, this is the proposition that, like the addressee, someone else is "Nobody":

(16) $[[\text{ too }]]^{c,g} = \lambda p_{<s,t>}. \lambda w$: there is a proposition q such that $q \neq p$ & $q(w)$. $p(w)$

And here we see that it is not possible for two individuals, speaker (S) and addressee (A), to be the same specific individual "Nobody."[2] If the referential reinterpretation of "Nobody" is not plausible, we are forced to find another possibility to reinterpret "Nobody," and that is by treating "nobody" as a property, in parallel to ((11)b). Plausibly, this is the property of being insignificant: [3]

(17) $[[\text{ nobody}_{<e,t>}]] = \lambda x.$ x is insignificant
(18) $[[\text{ I am nobody }]] = S$ is insignificant

With that reinterpretation, the compositional derivation of (15), "Are you – Nobody – too", is possible as both S and A may be insignificant.[4] Still, this second reinterpretation does not go together with the question in (14), "Who are you," which is a question primarily asking about A's identity and not about A's properties ("What are you?"). Each of the two questions allows for only one of the two reinterpretation mechanisms. Semantically, we encounter a problem: we cannot seem to find one way of consistently interpreting all sentences.

This impossibility of deciding in favour of one consistent interpretation is then continued in the next line: While "pair" says that S is talking about two specific individuals that make up a pair (since the lexical semantics of "pair" require there to be exactly two

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[2] We disregard the possibility that "Nobody" is a proper name that can refer to more than one individual; compare, for instance, the substitution of "Emily" for "Nobody": "I'm Emily! Who are you? Are you – Emily – Too?". The reading of "Nobody" as a proper name is unlikely at this point, as one would rather ask, "Are you **called** Nobody too?". In simply asking "Are you Nobody too", S puts a focus on A's identity rather than on A's actual name.

[3] The idiomatic use of "nobody" meaning "insignificant" is attested in the 19th century and earlier; see *OED* "nobody, *pron.* and *n.*" A.2.

[4] Mudge (1975) represents a minority opinion in that she reads the poem as Dickinson's worries "about inconsequence," though she notes the "element of irony" as well (20). Richards (2013), in contrast, emphasises that ED "reverses the subject position; she valorises the idea of being a nobody, enlists the nobody as a comrade, and asserts their superiority over the somebodies" (144). See also Weisbuch (1975), who reads the poem as a rejection of conventional identity and quest for individual identity (172). Erfani (2013) places it in the context of Dickinson's existentialism, where she expresses that Dickinson is "suspicious of the knowledge crowds hold because it unburdens the self of its responsibility" (179). Freedman (2011) addresses the religious link to Jesus Christ and his making himself "of no reputation"; she points out that the poem's speaker ridicules this notion, and partakes in "disobedient acts which subvert the idea that, as a process of naming and bonding into Christ's obedient sacrifice, Baptism undoes original sin" (59).

elements), it is not entirely clear what she means by "of us." Somehow, the pronoun "us" seems to mean more than just a reference to S and A together and to suggest that S means a pair of "us Nobodies," so that both speaker and addressee are identified as being insignificant. Within the sentence itself we thus find that we need to sustain both options: the notion that "Nobody" refers to a specific individual, and the notion that "nobody" refers to the property of being insignificant. This combination through "pair" and "us" already hints at the peculiarity of the overall text meaning in that both readings have to be taken into account.

The last line of the first stanza then turns around the quality of the property "nobody": It is presented as a secret between S and A and should be kept as such, else "they" would advertise it; because we lack more explicit context it is left open who exactly "they" refers to.[5] It seems that being "nobody" is something special that only applies to S and A, and no one else.

We hence arrive at the following interim summary: the type mismatch triggered through the combination of "I" and "nobody" leads to an exploitation that, in turn, results in two possible readings that go along with either of the two reinterpretations: The reading where S identifies with a particular individual called "Nobody," from here on I_{Ind}, and the reading where S characterises herself as having the property of being insignificant, from here on I_{Prop}:

(19) I_{Ind}: S is Nobody. S asks A who she is.
(20) I_{Prop}: S is insignificant. S asks A if A is insignificant, as well. There is a pair of two (specific) insignificant people. Being insignificant is something special.

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[5] In any case, "they" must be the others that oppose or are different from A and S. Freedman (2011) refers to Dickinson's variant of "advertise," which is "Banish us"; she points out the Edenic imagery of the frog/bog imagery in the poem and imagines the two voices as possibly those of Adam and Eve after eating the apple (59). See also Lindberg-Seyersted (1968), who points out the "use of the phrase you know as a congenial device for underlining bonds of camaraderie between speaker and addressee" (218).

3. Stanza Two, lines 5-8

The second part of the poem begins with "How dreary – to be – Somebody," which contains a similar mechanism as line 1. The expression "to be – Somebody" is also not interpretable due to a type mismatch, and "somebody" has to be reinterpreted. Due to the infinitival structure of the sentence that assigns to a nonspecific, generic subject the property of being "somebody," one way of reinterpretation is to treat it, similar to "nobody" above, as the property in (21) and thus goes along with I_{Prop}[6]:

(21) $[[$ somebody$_{<e,t>}]] = \lambda$ x. x is important

This property is then depicted as "dreary" and frog-like. But once more, this line of interpretation breaks down in line 7: "To tell one's name" again can be seen in parallel to the question "Who are you?". Here again, the person that is identified as "Somebody" is described as telling her name – we have to come back to the referential option of reinterpretation, reading "Somebody" as a reference to a specific individual, in accordance with I_{Ind}:

(22) $[[$ somebody$_{<e>}]] =$ the unique x such that x is called 'somebody'

Both readings, i.e. "nobody" as being insignificant as well as reading it as the identity of the individual called nobody, are clearly described as negative. S claims that being "nobody" has to be preferred over being "somebody": Being "Nobody" is special, a quality shared only between S and A, and it therefore needs to be kept secret from others. Being "somebody," on the contrary, is "public" and "dreary," and imparting this fact is compared to the constant croaking of frogs.

4. Overall Text Meaning

We have seen that neither I_{Ind} nor I_{Prop} can be consistently combined with all sentences of the text: Some sentences are so explicit in their semantic properties that they only allow for one

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[6] This interpretation, too, shows a common idiomatic use of "Somebody" (cf. *OED* "somebody, *n*." 2.a.).

of the options, while others are similarly explicit but allow only for the other line of reinterpretation. Thus, finding an overall consistent text meaning has to function differently from the other cases we have discussed so far. A possible solution, as already alluded to in the introduction to this chapter, is that the text offers up I_{Ind} and I_{Prop}; combining them via conjunction will lead to an adequate interpretation of the text as a whole. I_{Ind} only includes those sentences that go together with it:

(23) I_{Ind}:
    S_1: I'm Nobody!
    S_2: Who are you?
    S_5: Don't tell! They'd advertise – you know!
    S_6: How dreary – to be – Somebody!
    S_8: -like a frog –
    To tell one's name – the livelong June –
    To an admiring bog!

For this reading, all other sentences are ignored. Those sentences are taken care of by the I_{Prop}:

(24) I_{Prop}:
    S_1: I'm Nobody!
    S_3: Are you – Nobody – too?
    S_4: Then there's a pair of us!
    S_6: How dreary – to be – Somebody!
    S_7: How public –

Only sentence 1 and sentence 6 go together with both readings. As we can see, we arrive at a zigzag schema of interpretation, and both readings alternate in combining one of the two possible reinterpretations of "nobody" with the individual sentences:

(25)

R_1 (Individual) $S_2 \longrightarrow S_5$ S_8
          S_1 S_6
R_2 (Property) $S_3 \longrightarrow S_4$ S_7
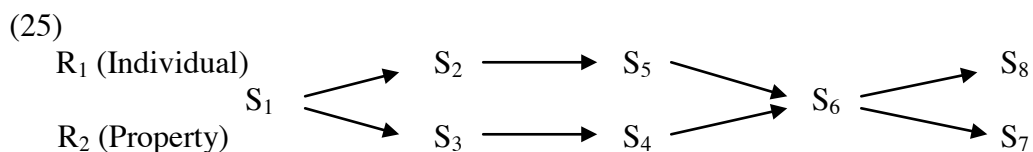
Intersecting the sentences of the two possible interpretations gives us two overall readings of the text that are (roughly) paraphrased below:

(26) Reading T_1 (I_{Ind}): 'I'm the individual "Nobody." Who are you? Don't give away your identity, as they will advertise it. It is dreary to be the individual "Somebody" and to advertise this name over a long time-span, like the frog croaks about himself continuously.'

(27) Reading T_2 (I_{Prop}): 'I'm insignificant. Are you insignificant, too? Then there's a pair of us insignificant people. It's dreary and public to be important.'

In a next step, both readings can now be intersected and thus form the overall text meaning.

(28) $T = T_1 \cap T_2 = (26) \cap (27)$

By intersecting both partial text meanings, we make sure that none of the information given in the text gets lost. A reconciliation of the intersection is now achieved with the help of FictionalAssert. By applying FictionalAssert after having read the whole poem, the relation R defines how we relate what the text says to our evaluation world:

(29) $[[\text{FictionalAssert}]] (T_1 \cap T_2) = \forall w' [T_1 \cap T_2 (w') \rightarrow R (@)(w')]$

The intersection leads to a result different from having parallel readings that are equally plausible for the overall text interpretation. In this case, one reading is only complete in combination with the other – thus, instead of having a complex text meaning in which we need to accommodate paradoxical strands of interpretation, we arrive at a very specific one where both options of reinterpretation are combined. There are no further hints in the poem about which (re)interpretation should be preferred, and therefore both have to be considered as equally valid; deciding in favour for one or the other is not possible. Having applied FictionalAssert to the intersection of both readings gives us the following overall text meaning (in a paraphrase):

(30) "Worlds are described by the text, in which it is the case that the speaker is the individual 'Nobody' and in which the speaker asks the addressee which individual he is, telling him not to give his identity away. Being the individual 'Somebody' and advertising this is dreary. It is simultaneously the case that the speaker is insignificant, asking the addressee if she is insignificant as well, in which case there is a pair of insignificant people; this is contrasted with the property of being important, which is dreary and public. Those worlds stand in relation R to the evaluation world of the reader."

Through the limited possibilities of reinterpreting the quantifiers "Nobody" and "Somebody," Dickinson points us to a reflection about identity, in particular about identity in relation to others. In order to find one's place in the world as an individual, human beings are constantly confronted by the characteristics they are assigned by other people and are also often forced

to belong to a group – what plays a role when we discuss someone's identity is not only the individual as such but also the properties that apply to them, and the relation between these properties as well as to other people. It is striking that reinterpreting the semantics of a quantifier (i.e. a function that relates properties) into either an individual or a property can be likened to the difficulty of finding one's identity. Dickinson thus uses linguistic mechanisms as a means of describing one of the fundamental questions of human existence.[7]

The overall text meaning gives us the information that being "nobody" is associated with being secluded and quiet, while being "somebody" is linked to being public and talkative, "dreary" and frog-like (i.e. loud). Furthermore, the speaker places much emphasis on the fact that she is "Nobody" and makes the question of being "Nobody" or "Somebody" the central concern of this short poem. "I am" is a strong statement (especially right at the beginning of the poem) and shows that the speaker is aware of herself, and has some notion of her identity. This fact contributes to the impression that being "Nobody" is a special and valuable condition which merits reflection. The common notions of being "Nobody" and being "Somebody" have thus been reversed.

These qualities converge in the relation R. By establishing the value of R, each reader has only a limited number of elements that she can map to individuals or experiences in his evaluation world. As the text is written as an address by the speaker to the addressee, possible values for R map speaker and addressee to individuals inherent to the evaluation world of the reader, taking into account the missing contextual information about who is referred to by "I" or "you." Through the lack of more explicit contextual information, the reference is ambiguous. As readers we could simply be observers of a part of a one-sided conversation between two individuals, or we could be conversational partners ourselves, being directly addressed by the speaker. This ambiguity will automatically influence the choice of the reader to assign these two conversational partners that we find in the poem to individuals in her

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[7] See also Budick (1985) who reads the poem against the context of Puritanism (145). Kher (1974) interprets the poem as showing the paradoxical creation of personality through impersonality (75).

evaluation world. She might just as well identify herself with the speaker of the poem and consider herself to be the addressee. Both speaker and addressee are assigned specific properties in the text, and these properties have to be carried over to the evaluation world of the reader. Accordingly, whoever she assigns the speaker or addressee to be, both have to have the property of being special, exactly because they do not reveal their identity to the public ("Don't advertise – ") and because being insignificant (the property that the speaker assigned to them) is contrasted with the dreariness of being important. A simple paraphrase of a possible value for R could then look like this:

> (31) The relation R between the text worlds w' and the evaluation world w (R(w')(w)) iff w is exactly like w', except that the counterpart of the addressee in w' is the reader in w and the characteristics assigned to the addressee in w' are also assigned to the reader in w.
> (32) If everything the poem says is the case, then being unknown to the public is more precious than being a hotshot.

The reader can now relate these characteristics to her own world and world-views. For example, the poem may be read as a general statement about the value of being reserved and silent (yet perceptive and understanding) in contrast to being public, loud, and insensitive. More specifically, it may be read as a reclusive poet's opinion about more "public" talkers and writers.

In relating the poem to a reader's world it is also possible to draw on intertextual knowledge. The use of "Nobody" as a proper name describing an individual has a prominent predecessor in the story of Odysseus and the Cyclops.[8] When asked for his name, Odysseus calls himself "Οὖτις," ("No-one," "no man" or "nobody," Od. IX.366). Because of the ambiguity inherent in this name – that it can be read as a proper name but also as a quantifier – Odysseus is not pursued upon his escape. When the Cyclops shouts that he has been attacked by "The man called 'Nobody'," the other Cyclopes understand his exclamation as

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[8] Eberwein (1983), in discussing possible sources for Dickinson's poem, notes both Desdemona's last words ("Nobody, I myself; farewell") and Charles Mackay's poem "Little Nobody", which also plays with the notions of being Nobody or Somebody. She regards the Odysseus episode as an even more significant influence (9-10).

"There is nobody who has attacked me." Additionally, the name of the Cyclops, "Πολύφημος" ("many-voiced" or "much spoken of," Od. IX.403) can be seen parallel to being "Somebody" in Dickinson's poem. Reading "I'm Nobody" as an allusion to the episode of Odysseus and the Cyclops supports the overall reading of the quantifiers "nobody" and "somebody": the secretive and reticent Odysseus is clearly seen in a positive light, while the well-known ("public") and loud Cyclops is a man-eating monster. In addition, Odysseus is able to grasp the detailed meaning of words and to use it for his own purposes, while Polyphemus is unable to understand the possible meanings of "Οὖτις".[9]

5. __Conclusion__

Once again, Emily Dickinson demonstrates her intuitive knowledge of the possibilities and rules of semantic composition in this poem. By deliberately violating usual interpretation mechanisms, she forces the reader to reinterpret certain words, here quantifiers, and by doing so is able to reflect on the main concern of the poem: identity. In the reader, this leads to a thought process about the interpretive differences and similarities between the original phenomena, in our case the quantifiers "nobody" and "somebody" and their alternative reinterpretations. On the level of the poem as a whole, the ambiguity created by the possible options of reinterpretation likewise contributes to a reflection on what it means to be "Nobody" or "Somebody."

An important effect of Dickinson's unconventional use of quantifiers is therefore that it draws the attention to the words themselves – both to their meaning and to their function. The reader is made to think not only about what it means to be nobody or somebody, but also about what the words "nobody" and "somebody" mean if considered in general and how they can (or

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[9] A predecessor for Dickinson's play with the meaning of "Somebody," though not as well-known as the episode from the *Odyssey*, can be found in Dickens's novel *Bleak House*: "They said there could be no East wind where Somebody was; they said that wherever Dame Durden went, there was sunshine and summer air" (Dickens 378). "Somebody" and "Dame Durden" both refer to the protagonist Esther Summerson, who perceives of herself as insignificant, while she is in fact highly significant within the novel. Additionally, "Somebody" here is used as a proper name that denotes a specific individual, namely the protagonist.

cannot) be employed, or to what ends. The reader thus gains more insight into the possible applications of quantifiers, and into the way language can be utilised. "I'm Nobody" also shows a quality that is characteristic of poetry in general and of Dickinson's poetry in particular: An interpretation of a poem on the level of content and general notions alluded to or discussed therein is directly intertwined with the poem's semantic structure and with the complex meanings that arise when linguistic phenomena are used by a poet deliberately. While we have observed in the four preceding chapters that Emily Dickinson deliberately exploits semantic mechanisms to arrive at a complex system of overall text meanings, this chapter presents the most extreme case of pushing semantic composition to its borders. Here, similar to chapter 1.4., linguistic analysis is part not only of the text meaning but of the text itself. "I'm Nobody" presents a case where a deliberate violation of the semantic composition principles is consciously used to force reinterpretation. However, the text interpretation reveals that this violation itself is a necessary part of the meaning of the text as it initiates a discussion about identity.

Core Phenomenon

Quantifiers

$[[$ nobody $]] = \lambda P_{<e,t>}$. There is no person x such that $P(x)$

Type Mismatch leads to Reinterpretation:

$[[$ nobody$_{<e>}$ $]] =$ Nobody (*Individual*)

$[[$ nobody$_{<e,t>}$ $]] = \lambda$ x. x is insignificant (*Property*)

Text Interpretation

Reading T$_1$ (Individual-Interpretation): 'I'm the individual "Nobody". Who are you? Don't give away your identity, as they will advertise it. It is dreary to be the individual "Somebody" and to advertise this name over a long time-span, like the frog croaks about himself continuously.'

Reading T$_2$ (Property-Interpretation): 'I'm insignificant. Are you insignificant, too? Then there's a pair of us insignificant people. It's dreary and public to be important.'

FictionalAssert:

$[[$ FictionalAssert $]]$ $(T_1 \cap T_2) = \forall w'$ $[T_1 \cap T_2 (w') \rightarrow R$ $(@)(w')]$

Relation R:

If everything the poem says is the case, then being unknown to the public is more precious than being a hotshot.

Quantifiers in other chapters

Modals as Intensional Quantifiers (In chapter 1.6): Though I than He – may longer live // He longer must – than I –

$[[$ must $]]^{c,g} = \lambda w. \lambda R_{<s,<s,t>>}. \lambda p_{<s,t>}$. for all worlds w' such that g(R) (w)(w'), p(w')

$[[$ may $]]^{c,g} = \lambda w. \lambda R_{<s,<s,t>>}. \lambda p_{<s,t>}$. there is a world w' such that g(R)(w)(w') and p(w')

Other Phenomena in this Chapter

Presupposition: Are you – Nobody – **Too**?

$[[$ too $]]^{c,g} = \lambda p_{<s,t>}. \lambda w$: there is a proposition q such that q $\neq$ p & q(w). p(w)

Pronouns:

$[[$ I $]]^{c,g} =$ speaker(c)

$[[$ you $]]^{c,g} =$ add(c)

1.6: "My Life had Stood a Loaded Gun": Semantic Mismatches and Coercion[1]

(1)   My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –

In Corners – till a Day

The Owner passed – identified –

And carried Me away –

And now We roam in Sovereign Woods –

And now We hunt the Doe –

And every time I speak for Him –

The Mountains straight reply –

And do I smile, such cordial light

Upon the Valley glow –

It is as a Vesuvian face

Had let its pleasure through –

And when at Night – Our good Day done –

I guard My Master's Head –

'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's

Deep Pillow – to have shared –

To foe of His – I'm deadly foe –

None stir the second time –

On whom I lay a Yellow Eye –

Or an emphatic Thumb –

Though I than He – may longer live

He longer must – than I –

For I have but the power to kill,

Without – the power to die –

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[1] An earlier version of this text was published in the *Journal of Literary Semantics*: Bauer, M., N. Bade, S. Beck, C. Dörge, B. v. Eckartsberg, S. Ottschofski, J. Niefer & A. Zirker (2015). Emily Dickinson's "My life had stood a loaded gun"— An Interdisciplinary Analysis. *Journal of Literary Semantics* 44(2), 115–140.

1. **Introduction**

"My life had stood a loaded gun" (J754) was written around 1863 and published in 1929 (Dickinson 1955, 574). It is one of Dickinson's poems that has been treated most controversially and triggered a multitude of different interpretations that range from the description of a male-female relationship over the battle and subversion by a suppressed woman to regarding it as a poem about language and what it means to be a poet (Leiter 2007, 145-47).[2] Robert Weisbuch (1975, 25) even calls it "the single most difficult poem Dickinson wrote." We have chosen this poem precisely because it seems to be difficult enough to prevent one straightforward interpretation and is hence very suitable for our approach of linking literary and semantic analysis. In this chapter we present two main lines of interpretation of the poem that allow for a combined and plausible overall reading.

One main strategy to achieve plausibility within this poem is to analyse reinterpretation mechanisms which are tools for ED to create the two main readings. The semantic mismatches in the poem trigger repair-mechanisms that open up the possibility for ambiguity as several options for resolving the mismatch are simultaneously plausible. The linguistic term for such cases of reinterpretation is coercion. The poem provides unusual examples of the phenomenon and their analysis will fine-tune existing theories of coercion through their complexity.

By providing a linear analysis that considers each stanza in turn, the interaction of several coercion mechanisms and the two overall interpretation threads will be revealed.

2. **The first stanza, lines 1-4**

We begin with a syntactic analysis that will help us assign an interpretation to the first stanza and help us arrive at more global considerations. Since meaning is based on structure, it makes sense to break down the sentence that is the first stanza into smaller parts. It consists of

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[2] S. Leiter (2007) expounds different interpretations; E. K. Sparks (2011) lists 20 different (though some similar) interpretations between 1934 and 1992; and M. Freeman (1972, 271n18) notes seven main lines of interpretation of gun and owner.

the matrix sentence "My life had stood in corners," the apposition "a loaded gun" and the subordinate clause "till a day the owner passed – identified – and carried me away." The following bracketed representation illustrates the structure we assume:

(2) [Matrix My life had stood – [Apposition a loaded gun] – in corners]
[Subordinate till a day the owner passed – identified – and carried me away]

2.1. Matrix sentence: "My Life had stood in Corners"

The two features of the matrix sentence to be examined are the occurrence of a past perfect and the plural of "Corners." In order to illustrate how these forms are usually analysed in formal semantics, we shall consider the simpler example in ((3)a). An intuitive description of its meaning is suggested in ((3)c), whereas the according formal semantic representation is given in ((3)b). Following a standard analysis of tense (cf. von Stechow 2009), the past perfect is analyzed as situating the time of the described event before the speech time. Following a standard analysis for plurals (Link 1991; Beck and Sauerland 2000; Beck and von Stechow 2006), the sentence describes a plurality of standing events that take place in various corners. We take this to mean that John was habitually standing around before the past topic time.

(3)
    a. John had stood in corners.
    b. $\exists t[t<t_{Topic}$ & $t_{Topic}<t_{now}$ & $\exists E[\tau(E)\subseteq t$
         & $\exists C[{*}corner(C)$ & $<E,C>\in {**}[\lambda e. \lambda x.$ John stands in x in e]]]]
    c. There is a time t before the time the discourse is about, which is before the speech time, and into t falls a plural event E such that there is a set of corners C such that in the relevant subevents of E, John stands in one of the corners.

Relating this interpretation to the poem yields the reading that "my life" was habitually standing around in corners at some point in the past. This leads to the most problematic feature of the matrix sentence, which is the mismatch between "my life" and "stand in corners."

The combination of "My Life" and "stand" is in itself not problematic. Although it requires reinterpretation, it is a conventional combination found, e.g. in the phrase "My life stood still." However, the prepositional phrase "in Corners" adds a physical dimension to the verb which is inconsistent with "My Life." A basic lexical entry for "stand" as it appears with the prepositional phrase "in corners" is provided in ((4)a). "Stand" denotes a relation between an individual, a location, and an event. Moreover, there is a presuppositional component to "stand,"[3] namely that the individual argument for "stand" is a physical object that has a vertical dimension (represented in (4(b)). The mismatch between "my life" and "stand in corners" is therefore a presupposition failure: Since "my life" is not a physical object, the verb cannot apply to the subject. Thus, the meaning of the matrix sentence will be undefined. The linguistic notion of undefinedness captures that a sentence lacks a truth value, which means that it can neither be judged true nor false (cf. Frege 1892). This disrupts the interpretation process.

(4)
 a. $[[\text{stand}_1]] = [\lambda e.\lambda x.\lambda y.\ y\ \text{stand at } x \text{ in } e]$

 b. $[[\text{stand}_2]] = [\lambda e.\lambda x.\lambda y:\ y$ is a physical object that has a vertical dimension. y is in location x in e and y is vertically oriented in $e]$

 c. $[[\text{stand}]]([[\text{my life}]])$ is undefined.

In order to assign a meaning to the matrix clause, we either have to reinterpret the Verb Phrase, or the subject, or both at the same time. A possible reinterpretation of "stand in corners" would be "to remain unnoticed, neglected." "My life" could be read metonymically as "I," or as "what is important about me" (especially considering the speaker's (S) consistent later use of "I" and "we" to talk about herself). Taking these possibilities into consideration, we arrive at the following readings:

(5)
 a. I stood around in corners.   (NP reinterpretation)

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[3] The notation used for adding a presuppositional component to a lexical item is taken from Heim and Kratzer (1998).

b. My life remained unnoticed. (VP reinterpretation)

c. I (what is important about me) was neglected. (NP/VP reinterpretation)

2.2. Apposition

There are two possibilities for the interpretation of the apposition "a loaded gun": first, it can be taken to be an apposition in the sense "I am a loaded gun" (cf., e.g. "My brother, a physicist, …"); second, the apposition is an implicit comparison with "a loaded gun" (cf., e.g. "This gardening catalogue, an invitation to buy plants, …"). Taking the possible reinterpretations of "my life" from above, either the speaker herself or the speaker's life are such individuals. In combination with the matrix clause, this gives us the following plausible interpretations:

(6)
  a. The speaker (S), who was a loaded gun, had stood habitually in corners. In the following: S_{gun}

  b. The speaker (S), who was like a loaded gun, had remained neglected (or S's life/essence was like a loaded gun and had remained neglected). In the following: S_{ind}

At this point, we thus have two basic interpretive possibilities: The poem's speaker could be a gun, or the poem's speaker could be a person who is compared to a gun. Both readings require reinterpretation. In the first case, "my life" cannot be taken literally, and, in the second case, the predicate "stand in corners" cannot be taken literally.

2.3. Subordinate clause

The next step is to identify those parts of the subordinate clause "till a day the owner passed – identified – and carried me away" which require clarification. The first problem is the meaning of "until" and what it tells us about the temporal order of events described in the poem. The second one is the definite description "the owner," and the third the structural ambiguity in the Verb Phrase.

To get a clearer understanding of the meaning of "until," a slightly simplified version of matrix and subordinate clause combined is given in ((7)a), a paraphrase of which can be found in ((7)c). ((7)b) is the corresponding formal representation of this reading.

(7)
    a. My life had stood in corners until the owner passed.

    b. $\exists t[t<t_{Topic}$ & $t_{Topic}<t_{now}$ & $\exists e[\tau(e)\subseteq t$ & my_life_stand_in_corners (e)] & $t<t_{Topic}$ & $\exists e'[\tau(e')\subseteq t_{Topic}$ & Owner passed in e']

    c. There is a time t before the time the discourse is about, which is before the speech time, and into t falls an event of S standing in location l, and abutting on t is the topic time into which falls the passing of the owner.

"Until" has a meaning which sets the right boundary for the described standing event. The whole subordinate clause thus has an implicature that S's standing ceases with the owner's arrival. In addition, the use of "pass" is underspecified as its meaning is not entirely clear. The most likely reading would be "to go by or move past" (*OED* "pass, *v*." III.10.); it indicates, at any rate, the strong impact the owner has on S.

The subject of the sentence is "The Owner." As can be seen in the lexical entry suggested in (8)a, "Owner" denotes a relation between two individuals that holds at a time. The definite article "the" furthermore triggers a uniqueness presupposition: "there is exactly one x such that x owns something t a certain time." In the example below in (9), the definite article relates the individual owner and Balmoral Castle and thus triggers the presupposition that there be only one individual for which this relation is true:

(8)
    a. [[owner]] = $\lambda t.\lambda y.\lambda x.x$ owns y at t

    b. [[the]] = $\lambda f<e,t>$: there is exactly one x such that f(x)=1.
       the unique x such that f(x)=1

    c. [the [[owner t] [(of) _NP]]]
       PSP: there is exactly one x such that x owns _NP at t

(9) [[the owner of Balmoral Castle]] = there is exactly one x such that x owns Balmoral Castle at t. The unique x such that x owns Balmoral Castle at t.

In order to make this use of the definite article felicitous, we ought to determine what the owned entity is as well as when the ownership holds, and then verify the presupposition triggered. Formally this is presented in ((8)b) and ((8)c). Neither the time of ownership nor the owned entity are explicitly introduced in the poem. Moreover, the content of the presupposition is not entailed by the immediate context. In order to proceed with the interpretation we therefore have to accommodate certain facts. That is, we take it that the presupposition is fulfilled in the context and add the relevant information to our background assumptions. First, we assume that something is owned. Plausible candidates are S or S's life, since they are the two entities that occur in the context prior to the point where we encounter "The Owner." Second, we assume that there is a unique individual that is owner of S/S's life. This leads us to the following range of interpretations:

(10)
    a. S_{gun}: our unique x is the owner of the gun.

    b. S_{ind}: our unique x is the owner of the speaker S.

    c. S_{ind}: our unique x is the owner of the speaker S's life.

    d. S_{ind}: our unique x is the owner of the place where S is situated.

Interpretations ((10)b) and ((10)c) are nearly equivalent, even though what is accommodated in ((9)c) is less clearly defined. On the one hand, ((9)c) could describe all kinds of asymmetrical interpersonal relationships, such as an unequal marriage or economic dependence of a worker on his employer. On the other hand, considering the perspective of S, we become aware of the question of who owns our lives. It is remarkable that the usual answer to this question, namely "My life is mine," seems not to be true for the speaker of the poem.

The last issue arising in the subordinate clause is the coordination we find in the Verb Phrase. The structure in (11)a invites two analyses: either as a coordination of two Verb Phrases with an apposition in between the two conjuncts (see (11)b), or as a coordination of three verbal categories (see (11)c).

(11)
    a. The owner passed – identified – and carried me away

    b. [VP [VP passed] [APP – identified –] and [VP carried me away]]

    c. [VP [VP passed] [VP [VP identified _] and [VP carried _] me *away*]]

The first version would mean that the owner (O) was identified, presumably by S. The second version would entail that O identified S. From a syntactic point of view, (11)c is the most plausible structure, and we shall focus on (10)c in the following.

None of the arguments of the verb "identify" are overtly specified due to the elliptical structure of the first stanza. Supposing that the individual arguments are O and S, we still do not know *as what* S is identified. However, the absence of an explicit first argument suggests a default interpretation of "identify" if it refers to an individual, in this case: O realises who S is.

If we put things together for the subordinate clause, we arrive at the following reading:

(12) There is a unique individual O such that O owns S and there is an event of O encountering and identifying S and taking S away.

Given the various possibilities discussed above, this could describe different scenarios:

(13)
    a. Acquiring a gun. (S_{gun})

    b. Identifying a gun (as one that one owns?) and taking it. (S_{gun})

    c. Acquiring or recognising and taking a subordinate associate. (S_{ind})

In terms of S_{gun}, it is not obvious how to read "identify." We know the gun would have to be very special in some way for us to make sense of the encounter described, but we do not know what it is that makes the gun special. The lack of a third argument for "identify" is more problematic in this case, since it would specify the property that makes the gun special (e.g., "O identified S as a Smith and Wesson."). A S_{ind} interpretation is hence slightly favoured at this point ("O realised who S was.").

In addition, the use of "Me" instead of "it" rather strengthens the S_{ind} reading ("Gun" and "Life" are inanimate, an individual is not): S_{ind} suggests that O recognises S as a desired

inferior of some kind. The verb "carry away" confirms the implicature that the standing around in corners is ended. In addition, the use of the ambiguous expression "carry away" shows the strong impact O may have on S's emotions (cf. also *OED* "carry, *v*." I.20.: "To impel or lead away as passion does, or by influencing the mind or feelings," and "carry, *v*." I.21.: "to be carried: to be rapt, to be moved from sober-mindedness, to have the head turned.").

2.4. Result

Two basic interpretations can be distinguished by locally interpreting the first stanza: One in which S is a gun, set in a fictional context in which inanimate entities can think, talk and feel as they are personified (see (14)a), and one in which S is an individual, creating some sort of fictional autobiography (see (14)b).

(14)
  a. S_{gun}: a rather special gun stood around loaded, disregarded, until it was recognised, possibly bought, and taken by its (new) owner.
  b. S_{ind}: a person lived a neglected life, unrecognised in her or his dangerous nature, until someone came, recognised and took her or him as a suitable subordinate associate of some kind.

3. The second and third stanzas, lines 4-11

The reader's decision about the interpretation of stanza one determines how she will interpret the following verses, since they are compatible with both readings. However, there are linguistic factors that cause a slight tendency towards S_{ind}. We will look at these factors next by comparing the interpretation of the second and third stanza in accordance with an S_{gun} and an S_{ind} reading, respectively.

3.1. The second stanza according to S_{ind}

Stanza two begins with a complex conjunctive sentence consisting of three conjuncts (C1–C3):

(15) [And [now we roam in sovereign woods]$_{C1}$ and [now we hunt the doe[4]]$_{C2}$ and [every time I speak for Him the mountains straight reply]$_{C3}$]

The first two conjuncts describe collaborate activities of S and O. The personal pronoun shifts from the singular ("*my* life"; "me") to the plural "we," thereby stressing the cooperation between the two and their close relation. This fact points in the direction that we are dealing with two individuals, either with two people, or with an animate gun and a human being.

Moreover, there is a shift from passive to active mood in the predicates describing S. In the first stanza, S was "passed," "identified" (as pointed out above, the analysis follows ((13)c) and regards S as the object of identification) and "carried […] away." The only verb form attributed to S is a state ("stood […] in corners"). Opposed to that, in stanza two, the verb forms associated with S refer to activities ("roam", "hunt" and "speak"). The personal pronoun "we" therefore entails that the activities are conducted both by S and O. Taken literally, this strongly suggests that S is at least animate, most likely human, which is why a S_{ind} interpretation seems to be slightly favoured.[5]

3.2. The second stanza according to S_{gun}

Following the S_{gun} interpretation, one would have to reinterpret the predicates since inanimate objects do not "roam," "hunt," or "speak"; this is manifested linguistically via the presuppositions of these verbs: essentially, the act of speaking is associated with human beings. Hence, the verb "speak" usually only allows for animate subjects to be its external

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[4] We might expect the more common "deer" instead of "doe" that is to be hunted, since does are usually not hunted for trophies, lacking antlers. The word "doe" only appears in one other poem of Dickinson's, J565/Fr527, which describes the hunting of a single, terrified doe. There is no indication that the lexical choice of "doe" yields any significance on the content level (without enriching it with symbolic meaning, for instance that it signifies amorous pursuit; see, for instance, the use of hunting imagery and female deer in Renaissance love poems like Wyatt's "Whoso list to hunt, I know where is an hind" (77) and Spenser's *Amoretti* #67: "Lyke as a huntsman after weary chace" (1958, 223). An alternative explanation is a phonetic one, in that "doe" allows the end rhyme with "foe" and "glow." Since Dickinson uses rhyme erratically, at best, this could hold significance but would need to be scrutinised more closely under the question of rhyme in Dickinson's poetry in general.
[5] Another possibility to read S at this point is as an animate individual; rather than a human being, S could be a hound. The second stanza then works with a literal reading, as hounds can be said to "roam," "hunt," and even "speak" (*OED* "speak, *v*." I.7.d: "Of a hound: To give tongue; to bay"). The reading would also fit the Master-servant relationship proposed later in the poem, and that S must guard O. However, this reading is less likely if we draw evidence from the overall poem, which is why we will not consider it in more detail.

argument, i.e. it has this restriction incorporated as a presupposition. If S is not human, then the indexical "I" will refer to an inanimate entity because of its presupposition, which is stated in ((16)b) Combining verb and subject would yield a presupposition failure in this case, as ((16)c) shows.

(16)
   a. $[[\text{speak}]] = \lambda x: x$ is human. x speaks
   b. $[[I_1]]^{g,c} = \lambda g: g(1)$ is the speaker in c. g(1)
   c. $[[\text{speak}_2]] ([[I_1]]^{g,c})$ is only defined if g(1) is human

However, a reinterpretation of "speak" is also possible by presuming that it is used metaphorically and that human properties are transferred to the properties of a gun. A plausible way to do this is to find a generalisation for "speak" that can function as parallel between properties of both guns and humans. One possibility is to read "speaking" as a special way of making sounds. When human beings speak, they emit sounds. Guns, on the other hand, emit sounds when they are fired. And indeed, "speak" is conventionally used with reference to firearms (cf. *OED* "speak, *v*." I.7.c.). Still, a very important distinction needs to be made between the interpretation of "speak" for S_{ind} and S_{gun}. A human being can speak of his or her own accord; thus it becomes ambiguous what "I speak for Him" means under the S_{ind} interpretation. Possible paraphrases are given in (17)a and (17)b below.

(17)
   a. When I speak, it is for his good/on his behalf.
   b. He is the reason for my speaking, he makes me speak.

A gun, on the other hand, cannot fire itself. The intent is coming from O. Thus it would be transparent how "speak for Him" is most likely interpreted under S_{gun}, namely parallel to ((17)b): the reason for my firing is he, since he pulls the trigger ((17)a may still be implied, but (17)b is a sine qua non for S_{gun}).

The third conjunct in the second stanza describes reactions evoked by S. They have to be reinterpreted in both readings. One of them is described in the second line "And every time

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I speak for him – The Mountains straight reply," the formal representation and paraphrase of which are given in ((18)a) and ((18)b) below.

(18)
   a. $\forall t.\ speak(S)(t) \rightarrow \exists t'.\ t' \subseteq t.\ reply\ (the\_mountains)(t')$
   b. For every time t at which the speaker is speaking there is a time t' which is properly included in t and at which the mountains are replying.

Mountains, since they are not human, cannot reply in the same sense that humans can, hence there is a presupposition failure and a need for reinterpretation, which works analogously to the reinterpretation of "speak" in (16).

Again, decoding the metaphor is possible when taking properties of human beings or guns to be transferred to properties of mountains. The reply of the mountains can be reinterpreted as the echo of S_{ind}'s speech or S_{gun}'s reverberation. The resounding noise a gun creates when fired is also called "report" (*OED* "report, *n*." III.7.a.), which, in a less technical sense, usually refers to human speech, so that the mountains' "reply" can also be compared to a (spoken) "report." In both readings it is implied that S is powerful (being able to roam, hunt, speak and smile) and uses the potential of "a loaded gun" that was described at the beginning of stanza one.

3.3. The third stanza according to S_{gun} and S_{ind}, lines 9-12

The third stanza begins with a sentence consisting of a matrix clause and a subordinate clause. The matrix clause verb is very plausibly "glow," although it has the wrong inflection.[6] The inversion in the subordinate clause is assumed to have a temporal clause meaning. These assumptions together yield the following structure for the first sentence:

(19) [And when I smile, such cordial light glows upon the Valley]

Thus, S's smile evokes the existence of a cordial light. The semantic interpretation is found in (20)a, a paraphrase of which is given in (20)b.

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[6] Miller (1987, 64-66) points out Dickinson's frequent use of verbs without inflection.

(20)

    a. $\forall t.$ smile (speaker)(t) $\rightarrow$ $\exists t'.$ $t' \subseteq t.$ glow (light)(t')

    b. For every time t at which the speaker smiles there is a time t' which is included in t and at which the light glows.

Again, we need to reinterpret "smile" under the S_{gun} interpretation. Analogous to "speak" and "reply," "smile" is also a concept associated with human beings since it expresses a pleasurable emotion. If we follow the S_{gun} interpretation, a similar mismatch between the verb "smile" and its subject argument occurs as in the cases above. "Smile" can be reinterpreted as the muzzle flash of the gun (both smiling and a muzzle flash being temporary phenomena that manifest themselves nonverbally). Moreover, it is also consistent with the appearance of light. However, this reinterpretation is not as clear-cut as the reinterpretation of "speak": A smile, for example, can occur without speaking, but, following the reinterpretation of "speak" for S_{gun}, a muzzle flash can only occur in combination with shooting. Even though smiling and speaking follow each other in the poem, only the muzzle flash – shooting reinterpretation requires them to have a causal relationship.

The two interpretative possibilities are supported in different ways by the fact that the reaction is a "cordial light": Although "cordial" is here applied to the (inanimate) light, the adjective "cordial" is derived from Latin "cor," or "heart" (*OED*, "cordial, *adj.* and *n.*"), and the use of the word thus emphasises feeling and emotion. In Webster's *Dictionary*, "cordial" is defined in two ways. First, as "Proceeding from the heart; hearty; sincere; not hypocritical; warm; affectionate" ("cordial," a. 1.), a meaning which is suitably applied only to people or animals and which increases the need for reinterpretation when applied to inanimate entities. Secondly, as "Reviving the spirits; cheering; invigorating; giving strength or spirits" ("cordial," a. 2.).[7] If we relate this definition to the effect of firing a gun, we have to assume that Emily Dickinson's use – and especially the combination – of "smile" and "cordial" is

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[7] There seems to be no precedent for the phrase "cordial light"; however, in Ouida's novel *Under Two Flags* (1871) the expression is also used: "[...] his eyes rested with a kindly, cordial light on the new-comer [...]" (13). It is striking that the novel partly deals with the intimate relationship between a master and his servant.

ironic in this interpretation, since (although a volley or salvo in some cases may have an encouraging or invigorating effect) the firing of a gun is unlikely to be perceived as affectionate or reviving.

In any case, the combination of S's smile and the valley's glow and their possible interpretations links the two global interpretations S_{ind} and S_{gun} to each other. If S is an individual, S's smile can be taken literally, while the valley's glow must be seen metaphorically. If S is a gun, however, S's smile can only be interpreted metaphorically, while the valley's glow would be read literally as a valley glowing with a gun's fire.

It does make sense to compare the "cordial light" evoked by a gun to a "Vesuvian face" that lets "its pleasure through," since volcanoes, too, are perceived as being dangerous but described as pleasant in the poem (and volcanoes, too, are in principle inanimate and are here endowed with the emotions of an animate being). The "Vesuvian face" in this line shares its properties with a gun, since both the "Vesuvian face" – which is "like or resembling Vesuvius" (*OED* "Vesuvian, *adj*. and *n*." A.a.) – as well as the gun possess "volcanic violence or power" (ibid.) upon eruption and firing respectively. This comparison takes place in the second half of the stanza, where we suppose an "if" is deleted.[8]

(21)   [It is as if a Vesuvian face Had let its pleasure through]

The reinterpretation necessary for the S_{gun} interpretation in the second stanza is thus more complex than the literal understanding if we take S to be human. It becomes clear though that S is dangerous and amiable at the same time, the second quality being more difficult to attribute to a gun.

Overall, the words used in stanzas two and three indicate a positive atmosphere: "smile," "cordial light," and "pleasure". S seems to be able to evaluate the situation and show emotions. Since inanimate objects cannot do that according to our world knowledge, these

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[8] For a reference to Vesuvius, see also the Master Letters. In the third letter, the speaker compares herself to Vesuvius, talks about speaking and being silent, and about the "face" of a volcano: "Vesuvius dont talk, Etna – dont – one of them – said a syllable – a thousand years ago, and Pompeii heard it, and hid forever – She couldn't look the world in the face, afterward" (Franklin 1986, 12-44).

expressions favour the S_{ind} interpretation. In the interpretation S_{gun}, a gun must be able to have human properties within the poem. This reading is less compatible with the facts of the actual world; however, when interpreting a poem, we do not necessarily relate the information in the text to the actual world, but to possible worlds. Thus, given the context of a poetic text, we can very well imagine a possible world in which guns can have human features (cf. Bauer and Beck 2014).

3.4. Result

From a local perspective, the activities described and the evaluative description used in stanzas two and three allow for both interpretations of S. The S_{gun} interpretation seems to require a more global perspective in that the reader has to make assumptions that are not compatible with the facts of the actual world she relates to but can only be attributed to the possible world described by the poem (cf. Bauer and Beck 2014). Emily Dickinson seems to be playing with the fact that we try to match our world knowledge with the facts we take from the poem.

Since the reading in which S or S's life is compared to a gun is slightly more prominent at this point in the poem exactly for this reason, the nature of the relationship between S and O is the more pressing question. Below are two rough paraphrases of how stanza two and three contribute to s_{gun} and s_{ind}:

(22) S_{gun}: S is being used, but is itself active by provoking reactions
(23) S_{ind}: S is an (unequal) partner that still acts herself

The second and third stanzas, with their strong emphasis on "sovereignty," freedom ("roaming"), untamed wilderness ("doe"), mountains and the uncontrollable force of nature ("Vesuvian" power) remind us very much of the sublime.[9] S, by interacting with this sublime

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[9] Cf., for example, Burke's (1990) statements that "Greatness of dimension, is a powerful cause of the sublime. [...] Of these the length strikes least; a hundred yards of even ground will never work such an effect as a tower an hundred yards high, or a rock or mountain of that altitude. [... A]nd the effects of a rugged and broken surface seem stronger than where it is smooth and polished" (66); and "Amongst [domestic animals] we never

scene, acquires some of its power, and, in return, nature seems to "call back": the gun "speaks," and the mountains will reply; the gun "smiles" and this is linked to a "Vesuvian face". Moreover, much in accordance with the role of a Romantic poet, S becomes a mouthpiece of sublime nature: the mountains reply only because the gun speaks, and the mountain gets a "face" only because S makes a corresponding comparison. Thus S also has the poet's power to depict and animate nature.

4. <u>The fourth and fifth stanzas, lines 12-19</u>

4.1. *The fourth stanza according to S_{ind}*

Stanza four is a continuation of the events described by S in stanzas two and three. It consists of a temporal clause with an apposition and a matrix clause. One possible structure for the temporal clause is the following:

(24) [And when I guard my master's head at night [after our good day is done]$_{Apposition}$]$_{TempClause}$

According to the S_{ind} interpretation, the Verb Phrase "guard my master's head" can straightforwardly be interpreted as an actual guarding activity. Since guarding a person is usually not restricted to the head, this makes it plausible to take "My Master's head" to be a metonymy that really stands for "my master." In linguistic terms this rhetorical figure has been described as an instance of predicate transfer (cf. Nunberg 1995) which requires a functional relation between the predicate described ("guarding the head") and the predicate derived ("guarding the person"). In this case the relation is defined via heads and their owners. The predicate transfer leads the reader to believe that the relationship between S and O is close. This closeness is stressed by the following matrix clause, which contains a comparative construction.

(25) [It is better than the Eider-Duck's pillow to have shared]

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look for the sublime: it comes upon us in the gloomy forest, and in the howling wilderness, in the form of [wild animals]" (60-61).

This kind of judgement evokes the impression that S takes pleasure in protecting O, even in an uncomfortable position, and that all of S's actions are voluntary and conscious. Again, S seems to be capable of feeling and evaluating, which is more straightforwardly compatible with a S_{ind} interpretation.

At the same time, the relation is once again described as being unequal. On the one hand, guarding someone implies that there is a difference in strength and power; on the other hand, the description "my master" implies that the guarding person is inferior to O. This would suggest a very deep emotional or factual dependency, which is also supported by a more global perspective. Similarly, Dickinson's use of the word "Master" reminds us of her "Master Letters" and of other poems making reference to a "master."[10]

4.2. *The fourth stanza according to S_{gun}*

The fact that S is described as a possession and is protecting O is more compatible with a S_{gun} interpretation. The closeness implied by the use of "Head" could refer to the position of the gun: it is put close to O. If a S_{gun} interpretation is assumed, "guard My Master's Head" has to be reinterpreted. When we take the interpretation where the speaker is a gun with human properties seriously, however, the active mood is not surprising, since then the poem talks about worlds where guns are actually capable of "guarding." No reinterpretation would be necessary in this case.

When taking into consideration our knowledge about the actual world, we understand that the implicit agent of the guarding event has to be human, and it is more reasonable to think that not the gun itself is doing the protecting but that it is O that uses the gun for his own protection. Yet, in the poem, the gun is not described as a passive instrument. This fact underlines the presence of a reading in which a human speaker is comparing herself to a gun

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[10] There are, of course, also many poems by Dickinson which present a similar relationship without explicitly using the word "master", for example, many of the poems where the speaker is identified with a daisy also show an unequal relationship of the "daisy" to a higher being on whom the daisy is dependent (see e.g., J85/Fr87, J106/Fr161, J339/Fr367 and J481/Fr460).

(a human being is, after all, an active being, while an inanimate weapon is not), especially since the question in a S$_{gun}$ interpretation arises *why* the feelings of a gun should be so important. It allows for an interpretation where S sees herself as a dangerous instrument as well as a human being capable of reflected decisions. These reflections are not the ones of a defenceless individual but the ones of a dedicated, unconditionally loyal person.

4.3. The fifth stanza according to S$_{ind}$ and S$_{gun}$

The interpretive difficulties that arise in the fifth stanza seem to be largely independent from the question whether S is a gun or a human being. In both cases, stanza five stresses how protective S is of O and how dangerous, which becomes especially obvious in the first sentence of the stanza where the indirect argument "foe" is fronted so that it receives emphasis:

(26) [To foe of his I'm deadly foe]

This impression of a protective relationship is underlined by the use of the adverbial modifier "deadly," which fits a S$_{gun}$ interpretation, since guns are known to be deadly instruments. Still, "being foe" to someone suggests human feelings and high emotional involvement, which strengthens the S$_{ind}$ interpretation.

The second sentence of the stanza consists of a main clause and a subordinate relative clause. The main (or matrix) clause is a quantificational statement, the relative clause functions as a restriction of the quantifier "none":

(27) [None [on whom I lay a yellow eye or an emphatic thumb$_{Relative}$] stir the second time$_{Matrix}$]

It is unclear what "yellow eye" and "emphatic thumb" mean in this context. There is no clear semantic conflict or mismatch between the adjectives and the nouns; all four words are properties. The meaning of the NP should therefore be determined by intersecting the two sets the adjective and noun denote, respectively. Intersecting the predicates yields a set of individuals that have both properties. This is shown in (28).

(28)
    a. $[[$yellow eye$]]$ = {x: x is yellow and an eye}

    b. $[[$emphatic thumb$]]$ = {x: x is emphatic and x is a thumb}

While in S_{ind}, S has eyes and thumbs, human eyes are not usually yellow and thumbs are not emphatic. When S is supposed to be a gun, "eye" and "thumb" have to be reinterpreted. The only plausible meaning is a metaphoric one where "eye" is understood as the muzzle of a gun that is yellow as soon as the gun is fired.

Our linguistic knowledge seems to be insufficient to determine the meaning of the part of phrase used. Hence, it might be useful to consider a global view and the associative power of the words with other elements in the overall poem. If we consider S literally as a gun, the "Yellow Eye" could be the muzzle flash seen by the opponent immediately before being shot — the visual, "looking" activity accompanying the "speaking" in line 7. Dickinson uses the expression in a similar way in J590/Fr619: "Did you ever look in a Cannon's face – / Between whose Yellow eye – / And yours – the Judgment intervened – / The Question of 'to die'."[11] On another note, the colour yellow is traditionally that of jealousy, and till 1858 the use of "yellow" to mean "jealous" is indeed documented (*OED* "yellow, *adj.* and *n.*" A.2.a.). The expression "emphatic Thumb" could be associated with the holding and handling of a gun (the cocking piece of a gun, which can be manipulated with the thumb). Still, one must wonder why exactly this action should be described as "emphatic."[12] The adjective

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[11] The metaphor "yellow eye" for a flash of light can, for example, also be found in Stephen Crane's tale "Flanagan and His Short Filibustering Adventure" (1897): "One night the *Foundling* was off the southern coast of Florida and running at half speed toward the shore. The captain was on the bridge. 'Four flashes at intervals of one minute,' he said to himself, gazing steadfastly toward the beach. Suddenly a yellow eye opened in the black face of the night and looked at the *Foundling* and closed again" (1047).

[12] Webster lists "Oversight; inspection" as a definition for "eye" and gives as an example the proverb "The eye of the master will do more work than both his hands" ("Eye, *n*. 16"), while one of his definitions for "emphatic" includes "striking to the eye; as, emphatic colors" ("Emphatic, emphatical, *a*. 4"). Although these definitions do not clarify the use of "Yellow Eye" and "emphatic Thumb", they suggest a link between the expressions. Looking at the "emphatic thumb" as a human gesture, we can find the idiom "to bite the thumb at" someone (*OED* "thumb, *n*." 5.e., and *OED* "bite, *v*." 16.), which describes a depreciatory and insulting gesture. Although this expression was no longer used in Dickinson's time, she is likely to have known it from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, where an entire dialogue is dedicated to it (2012, I.1.37-47). Lastly, there is also the idiom "to be under someone's thumb" – which with respect to the poem would add an ironic touch, since S (whether human or gun) is certainly under the Master's thumb, regardless of whether S threatens others with an "emphatic Thumb".

"emphatic" is used to describe utterances or verbal statements (see *OED*, "emphatic, *adj.* and *n.*" and Webster "emphatic, emphatical, *a.*"). Therefore, the use of "emphatic" leads into the direction of a third possible interpretation outlined below, relating S's actions to language and poetry.

4.4. Result

At the end of stanza five the reader of the poem knows that the individual described as O is male (due to the pronouns "him" and "his" and "My Master") but knows very little about the identity of S. When assuming that S is an individual, one is drawn to see an intimate relationship based on the emotional component that is implied. This component primarily is expressed through the adjectives and nouns S uses to describe the surroundings and the activities ("Sovereign Woods," "cordial," "pleasure," "good Day").

The two individuals are described as working together, more specifically, they hunt. S is powerful and takes pleasure in the activity. If a romantic relationship is described, then it is unequal, not sexual and far from being stereotypical. S does not share the pillow of O; S perceives him as her master and is at the same time the one that protects him. S is becoming more active as the poem continues, which is represented by the mood of these four stanzas, as opposed to the passive mood in the first stanza. At the same time, S is apparently only becoming active as an instrument of O and not of her own accord. This is evidence that, even though slightly less plausible in the preceding stanzas, the interpretation where S is an actual gun is kept a possibility throughout. In this case, we have to assume that a personified gun which has human properties is described in the poem. Otherwise mismatches between the agent and the predicates that are used for the description ("speak," "smile," "Eye," "Thumb") would occur. As human feelings are also assigned to the gun, this interpretation would result in supposing that O has a deeply emotional, almost intimate, relationship with his gun.

5. The final stanza, lines 20-24

The last stanza again displays high linguistic complexity. In order to get at its plausible interpretations, it is useful to analyse the two sentences it consists of very carefully and in detail, first separately and then in conjunction. These two sentences are given in (29) and (30) and will be referred to as S1 and S2 in the subsequent discussion.

(29) [S1 Though I than He may longer live, He longer must than I]

(30) [S2 For I have but the power to kill, Without the power to die]

5.1. Interpretation of S1

Both sentences are structurally complex. To simplify things, the structure considered for the first sentence will be the one in (31), where the word order is adjusted and the ellipsis filled.

(31) [S1 [subord though I may live longer than he][matrix he must live longer than I]]

The subordinate clause is given in (32). The comparison can be in the scope of the modal ((33)a) or vice versa ((33)b). The modal force of a possibility modal like "may" is existential. This means it claims the existence of a possible world; in this case, a possible world where S lives longer than O (see, for a discussion of modals, also Hacquard 2011, Kratzer 1991).

(32) I may live longer than he.

(33)
    a. [may [[–er than he live _ long] [I live _ long]]]
    b. [[–er than he may live _ long] [I may live long]]

Moreover, there is an accessibility relation ("relation R") between possible worlds and an evaluation world, for instance the actual world (cf. Kratzer 1991). It tells us which worlds are relevant for us to consider. Accordingly, we can strike up relevancy for worlds compatible with the law (deontic reading), worlds compatible with what we know (epistemic reading), worlds compatible with the facts presented (circumstantial reading), and worlds compatible with what we desire (bouletic reading) in the actual world (cf. Kratzer 1991).

(34)
    a. $\exists w[R(@,w) \ \& \ Lifespan(w)(S) > Lifespan(w)(O)]$

= it is possible that I live longer than he.

b.   max(λd.∃w[R(@,w)   &   Lifespan(w)(S)≥d]) > max(λd.   ∃w[R(@,w)   &   Lifespan(w)(O)≥d])

= my maximum life expectancy exceeds his maximum life expectancy.

The matrix clause is given in (35). Like (32), it is ambiguous. A necessity modal like "must" has universal force. It indicates that a specific fact — in this case that O lives longer than S — holds for all worlds that stand in a certain relation to the actual world (defined via R).

(35) He must live longer than I.

   a.   [must [[–er than I live _ long] [he live _ long]]]
   b.   [[–er than I must live _ long] [he must live long]]

(36)
   a.   ∀w[R(@,w) –> Lifespan(w)(O)>Lifespan(w)(S)]

       = it is necessary that he live longer than I.

   b.   max(λd.∃w[R(@,w)   –>   Lifespan(w)(O)≥d]) > max(λd.   ∀w[R(@,w)   –> Lifespan(w)(S)≥d])

       = the minimum required lifetime of his exceeds the minimum lifetime required of me.

Putting together both the ambiguous subordinate clause and the ambiguous matrix clause, we theoretically have a total of four possibilities:

(37)
   a.   Although ((34)a), ((36)a).
   b.   Although ((34)b), ((36)b)).
   c.   Although ((34)a), ((36)b)
   d.   Although ((34)b), ((36)a).

Since the two parallel ones are the most plausible, they will be pursued further ((35)a, (35)b). As it will make the syntactic analysis clearer and since the difference is not relevant to make our point, we will here treat "although" as "and." The two interpretations and paraphrases for S1 are given in (38) and (39). Let us first consider (38):

(38)
   a.   ∃w[R(@,w) & Lifespan(w)(S)>Lifespan(w)(O)] &

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$$\forall w[R(@,w) \rightarrow Lifespan(w)(O)>Lifespan(w)(S)]$$

b. It is possible that I live longer than he, and it is necessary that he live longer than I.

If the relation R is the same for the two modals "may" and "must," we get a contradiction: it is not possible that all relevant worlds are such that his life extends beyond that of S and that there is a world in which the life of S extends beyond his. However, we know that there are various possibilities for R. (38) becomes non-contradictory if we suppose, for example, that the natural facts are such that "I" might live longer than he because it is a possibility, but her desires are such that he must live longer than S, and S will thus do her best to keep him alive beyond her own lifespan. In this case we assume a circumstantial reading of "may" and a bouletic reading for "must."

Next, the second interpretation will be considered, which is given in (39):

(39) $max(\lambda d.\exists w[R(@,w)$ & $Lifespan(w)(S){\geq}d]) >$
$max(\lambda d.\exists w[R(@,w)$ & $Lifespan(w)(O){\geq}d])$ &
$max(\lambda d.\forall w[R(@,w) \rightarrow Lifespan(w)(O){\geq}d]) >$
$max(\lambda d.\forall w[R(@,w) \rightarrow Lifespan(w)(S){\geq}d])$

a. My maximum life expectancy exceeds his maximum life expectancy, and the minimum required lifetime of his exceeds the minimum lifetime required of me.

b. t_1 t_2 t_3 t_4

|---------|--------|-------------|-------------|----------------------------->
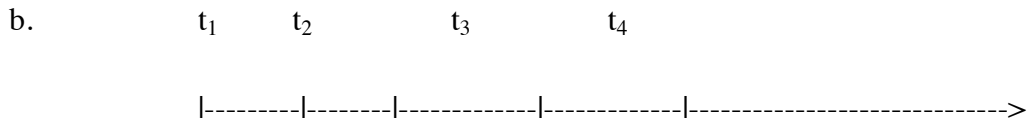
The conjunction under (39)a is not contradictory. It would be true for instance if, given all the relevant facts, S might die anytime between t_1 and t_4, while O might die anytime between t_2 and t_3. This means that the day of O's death can be narrowed down more than the day of S's death. Given what we already know about S and O, the interpretation in (38) might be the more plausible, since it is the more relevant one. But to be able to disambiguate between the different interpretations, the second sentence might be of importance.

5.2. Interpretation of S2

For the second sentence we will consider the structure in (40) below, assuming that "but" means "only" in this case.[13]

(40) [$_{S2}$ I have only the power to kill, Without the power to die]

If we consider the S_{gun} interpretation, this sentence is trivially true, since inanimate objects cannot die. The apparent banality of the statement invites the interpretation that more is meant than what is literally said, for example, that this specific weapon will always exist. Another small interpretive difficulty arises with "power to kill." It is not a gun itself that wields this power, being a mere instrument, but it needs an agent. If we consider next the interpretation where S is an individual, the sentence is false, and once more rather trivially so, since all people die. Again, the apparent banality as well as the factual falsity invites reinterpretation. One possibility for the sentence to be read is: I cannot choose my death.

5.3. Putting things together

The overall structure is "S1 for S2." This will be read as "S1 because S2," and we will paraphrase S2 for now as "S can kill, but S cannot die." Taking the two readings for S1 and putting them into this context yields the paraphrases in (41) and (42):

(41) It is possible that I live longer than he,
and it is necessary that he live longer than I,
BECAUSE I can kill but I cannot die.

(42) My maximum life expectancy exceeds his maximum life expectancy,
and the minimum required lifetime of his exceeds
the minimum lifetime required of me,
BECAUSE I can kill but I cannot die.

These are the most plausible interpretations of the last stanza that a grammatical analysis can offer and on which more global interpretations can be based. If we assume everyday meanings for both "live" and "die" in (41), S is wishing for something impossible. If S cannot die, then S's lifespan necessarily exceeds the lifespan of any animate owner. However, given our world

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[13] An interpretation of "but" as a conjunction would make no sense at all here, regarding it as a modifier does.

knowledge, this interpretation is only plausible if S really is a gun. It may then be the case that O lives longer, since he is capable of living at all, whereas a gun can only exist. But this is contradicting the first line of the stanza where the possibility that S – a gun – lives longer is admitted.

It seems that, according to this reading, a reinterpretation of "live" and "die" is necessary. For S_{gun} to "live" might mean that it exists. This interpretation fits with the beginning of the poem. The gun's "life" was standing in corners; hence it existed although it was not used. The gun only functions and operates in the way described in the poem because O took it, but it existed even before O passed. The necessity that O exists longer is therefore only possible in a bouletic reading. Given the facts of the world, the length of existence of the gun can easily exceed the length of existence of the human owner.

Therefore, "die" cannot be the opposite of "live," since "to stop living" is impossible for inanimate objects. "To die" has to mean "to stop existing" in this case. What remains problematic is the interpretation of "power to kill" then. Strictly speaking, it is not the gun that is killing but O. If "power to kill" rather means "can be used for killing," then "without the power to die" has to be interpreted as "lacking the ability to be used for its own destruction." This means that the gun cannot end its own existence. It is damned to uselessness without O, since it cannot take action itself. It will always be able to function and never be able to stop existing. This reinterpretation could thus explain the causal relation between the existence of O and the existence of S when it is assumed to be a gun.

A similar reinterpretation process has to be triggered in (42). If S cannot die, then the minimum lifespan reached in all worlds tends towards infinity and cannot be shorter than that of any animate owner O. Hence, the sentence in (42) also describes something that cannot be true, given natural laws of our world.

Both interpretations completely change when S is assumed to be an individual. It is unproblematic to interpret "I have the power to kill" under this assumption. It is, however,

unclear what it means for a human being to lack the "power to die." If we argue the same way as for the gun-case above, then "without the power to die" means that S is not capable of killing herself. This reading seems to imply that all her choices, even the ones that concern her own death, are really the choices of O, which is consistent with the analysis of the preceding stanzas, since a very deep dependency is suggested. The overall tone of the poem does not speak for an interpretation according to which this dependency is seen as unfair or negative.[14]

6. <u>Overall Interpretation</u>

The two lines of interpretation, S_{gun} and S_{ind}, that have guided the previous analysis, reveal a complex interplay. This is due to the fact that neither of the two can be applied without arriving at some interpretative difficulty at some point in the text. Before coming to the overall interpretation through FictionalAssert and through finding a value for R, we will rephrase the readings of the poem in (43) and (44):

(43) S_{gun}: I am a loaded gun and my existence was neglected until a day my owner came, identified me and carried me away. And now he takes me to roam in woods and hunt the doe and every time he shoots with me there is an echo in the mountains. When the muzzle flash of the shot appears, light appears upon the valley, it glows and is like the face of Vesuvius when it erupts. And when he is done hunting at night and poses me next to his bed, this creates a comfortable atmosphere. He takes me to kill his foes, and I am very efficient. Although I may longer exist than he does, in order for me to function it is necessary that he lives, since I am an instrument for killing, but I have no life of my own.

(44) S_{ind}: I am a human being who is like a loaded gun; my life has been neglected until its owner came, identified me and took me with him. And now we roam in sovereign woods together and hunt the doe, and every time I speak for him, the mountains

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[14] The use of the expression "power to die" does not seem appropriate for the negative associations of death and especially the passivity of dying. From a religious point of view, the "power to die" could be understood as the reassurance to die and be saved after death by Christ; see, e.g. Eberhard Jüngel's (1993, ch. 6) statement that mankind has achieved the power to die only through the death of Christ, that is, the power to die without fear in the knowledge that man's sins are forgiven though Christ's sacrifice. Dickinson herself also uses the expression "power to die" in J1651, "A Word made Flesh," in an explicitly religious context. In this poem, the "Word made Flesh" comes to life, and only through this coming to life can it then be subjected to life and death (Bauer 2006, 374), similarly to the gun in "My life had stood". A single word "that breathes distinctly," however, is only an instrument, and like S in "My life had stood" it has – standing on its own – only the "power to kill, / Without – the power to die" (Bauer 2006, 383-84). It can however, be made cohesive and "expire" through the power and condescension of Christ ("Made Flesh and dwelt among us").

straight reply. My smile is as pleasant as when the valley glows. The glow is like Vesuvius when it erupts. And when at night I guard him it is better than to have shared pillows with him. I will kill all his foes, and even though it is possible that I live longer than he, it is my wish that he will live longer than I do, since I have power with him but no life without him.

Specifying what this interplay consists of and what overall interpretation it yields goes beyond the semantic analysis of the text as it requires pragmatic enrichment. We propose that a plausible analysis, rather unusually, applies the operator FictionalAssert to the disjunction of both readings. In the present poem, we see that both readings cannot be combined conjunctively as they contradict each other: the speaker cannot be human and be a gun at the same time.

Accordingly, an overall interpretation of the poem comes about through applying FictionalAssert to the disjunction of the readings above:

(45) $[[\text{FictionalAssert}]] ((43)\cup(44)) = 1$ iff $\forall w'\ [((43)\cup(44))(w') \rightarrow R\ (w')\ (@)]$

Here, FictionalAssert results in a conditional statement that as long as (43) or (44) is the case, the reader can establish R. But moreover, R also triggers a reflection on the interaction of the two readings. If the counterpart of the reader can be either a human being or a gun, what specific characteristics make guns and human beings comparable to each other? Accordingly, values for R reflect on the similarities between the two readings, and more specifically between human beings and guns. The relation R is individual for each reader; two possibilities to apply it are paraphrased in (46) and (47):

(46) "The relation R between the text worlds w' and the actual world @ holds iff w' is exactly like @ except that who is described in w' as the speaker and who is either human or a gun, is the reader in @ and the characteristics shared by human and gun apply to the reader in @ and there is a relationship between the reader and someone in @ that shares the characteristics of the relationship between speaker and owner in w'."

(47) "If (43) or (44), then one should not let anyone instrumentalise oneself, because that leads one into a desperate situation."

7. __The poem as a reflection about language__

Although both readings present quite a different setting (the S_{gun} reading offers a fictional context in which a gun is personified; the S_{ind} reading is more like an autofictional narrative), they are related to each other in that they both contain a strong self-reflective element, and more precisely, reflection about language. The determination of values for R which forces us to think about combinations of these two readings thus triggers reflections about meaning and language and about the interpretative options the poem offers, which draws attention to language itself. We therefore now wish to introduce another line of interpretation that emerges at the global level of text interpretation, where this attitude of self-reflection is made more explicit and more clearly related to the issue of language and meaning. References to language reverberate through the text: for example, "speak" and "reply" are verbal actions, the "Sovereign Woods" evoke the notion of *silva* as a common title for writings of mixed content,[15] the use of "emphatic" is linked to speech, and the idea of immortality is also linked to poetry (see below).

Especially considering the vagueness of the last line, we should keep in mind that weapons are not the only things without a "power to die". In J1651, the expression "power to die" is linked to religion but also to literature and speech. The "consent of Language" and "loved Philology" are compared to Christ's power over life and death, transforming a single "Word that breathes distinctly" into a "Word made Flesh". It is possible to read not having the "power to die" in two different ways, either as the possession of eternal life or as the incapability of dying (thus, a kind of powerlessness). One possibility therefore is to assume that the speaker of the poem is a poem or poetry in general, since words cannot die. But words are also powerless without someone who uses them. A second possibility hence is that the

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[15] Lat. "silva" is "a wood, forest" (*OED* "sylva/silva, *n.*"); its second meaning as a title for collected writings is derived from a work by Statius, *Silvae*, a collection of poetry. This juxtaposition of woods and writings is then continued in, e.g. Simon Pelegromius's 16th-century dictionary *Silva Synonymorum* or Ben Jonson's *Timber*; see also the passage from Horace's *Ars Poetica* preceding the lines quoted below: "As the forests shed their leaves [...], so perish those former generations of words [...]" (Horace 2005, *Ars Poetica* 60-62).

speaker of the poem is a poet who becomes immortal through the texts she writes. The idea that poetry has the power to immortalise its subject is a common notion familiar since antiquity (found, for example, in the ending of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in Horace's Ode IV.9, and in some of Shakespeare's sonnets, for example sonnet #18).[16] A dichotomy parallel to the two interpretations discussed above arises: we have an interpretation S_{poet} according to which the speaker is an individual, and we have an interpretation $S_{poem/poetry}$ in which the speaker is not human.

In "My life had stood," we additionally get an ironic twist: S cannot die (which is seen as a lack of power) but can kill instead. Again, on the one hand, one may regard the poem itself as the "killer," since it can have destructive power by for example destroying clichés, relations or reputations with its content. On the other hand, one could also see the words as powerless without their creator, the poet, who thus has the power to destroy. A similar idea can be traced back to Horace's *Ars Poetica*, where the power(lessness) of words over the course of time is described. Here, what gives power to words (or takes it from them) is that words are being used (or not used) by human beings:

(48) Many words that are now unused will be rekindled,
      Many fade now well-regarded, if Usage wills it so,
      To whom the laws, rules, and control of language belong. (Horace, *Ars Poetica* 60-72)

In J1212, Dickinson describes the same notion:

(50) A Word is dead

      When it is said,

      Some say.

      I say it just

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[16] The *Metamorphoses* end with "[…] a work which neither Jove's anger, nor fire nor sword shall destroy, nor yet the gnawing tooth if time. […] If there be any truth in poets' prophecies, I shall live to all eternity, immortalized by fame" (Ovid 1980, 357). In Horace's Ode IV.9, the speaker states, "I shall not pass you over in silence, unhonoured by my pages; nor shall I allow jealous oblivion to erode your countless exploits" (Horace 2004, *Odes* 247). Shakespeare's sonnet 18 ends with "But thy eternal summer shall not fade, / Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st, / Nor shall death brag thou wand'rest in his shade, / When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st. / So long as men can breathe and eyes can see, / So long lives this and this gives life to thee" (Shakespeare 2000, *Sonnets*, 19).

       Begins to live

       That day.

In Dickinson's poems, words can either live or die, or they are able to bring life or death. In J118, Dickinson links the power of guns to the power of words, in this way giving words the power and status of weapons:

(51) My friend attacks my friend!

       Oh Battle picturesque!

       Then I turn Soldier too,

       And he turns Satirist!

       How martial is this place!

       Had I a mighty gun

       I think I'd shoot the human race

       And then to glory run!

The poem presents "Soldier" and "Satirist" as two alternatives complementing each other and involving the same kind of action ("attacking").[17] Of course, it is not possible to shoot all of mankind literally, but it is possible to shoot them in a literary way (as a satirist) and attain glory just as a soldier might attain glory through fighting. And, in fact, Dickinson does possess a "mighty gun" in the form of language. In the manuscript of J754, line 23 originally read "For I have but the art to kill" (Dickinson 1955, 574) – "art" is a poet's strongest and only power. The "Owner" could then also refer to the power that inspired S to write poetry (and to write this particular poem), a muse or divine inspiration. This variation could also explain O's depiction as very powerful and S's depiction as more submissive (though S is of course the one who must necessarily speak throughout the poem). Porter (1966, 209-18) sees "My life had stood" as a poem about an instrument (S) and a purpose (dependent on O), and, more specifically, as a poem about a poet and what she should do. He cites several other poems where language is used as a weapon or has the power and impact of a weapon (e.g., J479, "She dealt her pretty words like Blades").

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[17] By using the adjective "martial" (and thereby alluding to the Roman satirist Martial), Dickinson creates another link between war and satire.

Accepting this interpretation, we can see the use of the gun image as a twofold metaphor. If we assume a human speaker, she uses the gun metaphor to express his/her feelings. But the gun itself is then endowed with human sentiments and thoughts, and thus acquires characteristics of a human being. In this way, the gun is a metaphor to express the state and feelings of a human speaker; in addition, the gun leads the way to a second metaphoric level, where it is personified. The structure of this twofold metaphor is one of exchange, where a human being becomes a gun and speaks through the gun, and at the same time a gun becomes animate and 'human', and speaks with a human voice.

8. <u>Conclusion</u>

In this poem, Emily Dickinson primarily plays with the two interpretive possibilities that a gun or a human being are reflecting on their respective lives. By looking at the poem in more detail, it becomes obvious that neither of these two possibilities allows for an interpretive process to run coherently throughout the whole poem without having to reinterpret different parts for S_{gun} and S_{ind}, respectively. The juxtaposition of the two readings we have presented leads to a reflection about language itself.

Thus, "My life had stood a loaded gun" is an example of Emily Dickinson's use of deviant structures. She prevents the reader from deriving a literal interpretation by exploiting mechanisms of grammar in such a way that the reader is forced to look for nonliteral meanings. These reinterpretation processes allow for more freedom of interpretation, and, thus, the reader is left with more interpretative choices. This freedom is created by select points within a fixed structure, which is not arbitrary but created deliberately by Emily Dickinson, to enable the coexistence of various threads of interpretation.

It follows that there cannot be one unique interpretation of the poem. It has been shown, however, that there is a set of plausible interpretations which can be identified, and that considering the relation between these different interpretations adds an additional level of

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meaning to the poem. The claim we make is that all plausible interpretations function parallel to the ones we describe: S_{ind}, S_{gun}, S_{poet}, S_{poetry}. All these interpretations vary only with respect to which decisions are made at points of interpretative variability within the fixed structure.

Core Phenomenon

Coercion
 [λx: x is a physical object that has a vertical dimension. x stands in corners] (the unique x such that x belongs to the speaker in the context and x is life) is undefined
Reinterpretation Possibilites:
[[stand in corners$_{Reint}$]] = λx. x is unnoticed/neglected.
[[my life]] = f ([[my life]]) = the speaker in the context

Textinterpretation

Reading T$_1$: I am a loaded gun and my existence was neglected until a day my owner came, identified me and carried me away. And now he takes me to roam in woods and hunt the doe and every time he shoots with me there is an echo in the mountains. When the muzzle flash of the shot appears, light appears upon the valley, it glows and is like the face of Vesuvius when it erupts. And when he is done hunting at night and poses me next to his bed, this creates a comfortable atmosphere. He takes me to kill his foes, and I am very efficient. Although I may longer exist than he does, in order for me to function it is necessary that he lives, since I am an instrument for killing, but I have no life of my own.
Reading T$_2$: I am a human being who is like a loaded gun; my life has been neglected until its owner came, identified me and took me with him. And now we roam in sovereign woods together and hunt the doe, and every time I speak for him, the mountains straight reply. My smile is as pleasant as when the valley glows. The glow is like Vesuvius when it erupts. And when at night I guard him it is better than to have shared pillows with him. I will kill all his foes, and even though it is possible that I live longer than he, it is my wish that he will live longer than I do, since I have power with him but no life without him.

FictionalAssert:
[[FictionalAssert]] (T$_1$ ∪ T$_2$) = ∀w' [T$_1$ ∪ T$_2$ (w') → R (@)(w')]

Relation R:
If everything the text says is true, then one should not let anyone instrumentalise oneself, because that leads one into a desperate situation.

Coercion in other chapters

(In 1.1): **distills** amazing sense – from ordinary meanings
[[distill]] = λy.λz.λx: z is a liquid. x distills y from z.
[[distill$_{Reint}$]] = λy.λx.λz. z transforms y into x

Other Phenomena in this Chapter

Scales and Modals: Though I than He – may **longer** live // He **longer** must – than I –
[[must]]^{c,g} = λw.λR$_{<s,<s,t>}$.λp$_{<s,t>}$. for all worlds w' such that g(R) (w)(w'), p(w')
[[may]]^{c,g} = λw.λR$_{<s,<s,t>}$.λp$_{<s,t>}$. there is a world w' such that g(R)(w)(w') and p(w')
'It is possible that I live longer than he, and it is necessary that he live longer than I.' *or* 'My maximum life expectancy exceeds his maximum life expectancy, and the minimum required lifetime of his exceeds the minimum lifetime required of me'
Definites and Structural Ambiguity: The owner passed – **identified** - // and carried me away
[[the owner]] = λg: there is a unique x such that x owns g(3). The unique x such that x owns g(3)

2. The Poet as Linguist, and the Linguist as Poet

2.1 Emily Dickinson: The Poet as Linguist

1. __Introduction__

In this chapter, we will reveal recurring patterns and structures that show Dickinson as an intuitive linguist who systematically exploits grammar to produce interpretative flexibility in her poems. As has been observed in the first part of this book, her particular use of linguistic techniques reveals that she was acutely aware of the linguistic potential of her poems, and, though not a trained linguist, able to grasp and exploit principles of how language and grammar work. Moreover, her deliberate exploitation of and non-compliance with certain grammatical rules and features leads to a specific structuring of her texts, which is characterised by a limited number of readings that may be combined with each other and interpreted via the speech act operator FictionalAssert. As has become evident in the preceding chapters, Dickinson uses language not in a coincidental but in a planned way, which shows her linguistic awareness. Her systematic use of language speaks against Dickinson's arbitrary violation of grammatical rules to create vague and uninterpretable utterances that allow for an infinite number of textual meanings; rather, it suggests a systematic approach that lends itself to the interpretation of her texts from a linguistic point of view. While our aim in the preceding analyses of individual poems was to offer in-depth and linguistically informed interpretations, the objective of this chapter is to systematise the insights gained by these analyses: Specifically, Emily Dickinson's use of the linguistic phenomena outlined below demonstrate a recurring pattern. The analysis of the phenomena in most cases lead to a number of possible meanings of the utterance. Taking together all those instances where the use of a linguistic phenomenon creates more than one possible interpretation, we can observe that on a global level of text, these interpretations interact and

themselves make up a limited number of overall interpretations of the poem that are then mediated and related through FictionalAssert. It is thus not the case that the specific use of linguistic phenomena just creates ambiguity and vagueness, but rather, it creates a complex structure of several readings on the sentence level that together reveal a limited number of specific readings of the overall poem. Thus, Emily Dickinson's work is interesting linguistically not only because of her play with ambiguity triggered by certain phenomena, but because the ambiguity she creates is part of a more complex text structure that conveys a multilayered meaning in an as economic as possible way. The linguistic phenomena are the tools to create these meanings. Her uses of the phenomena outlined in this chapter are thus not merely individual cases, but Emily Dickinson rather employs the same phenomena repeatedly across her poetry.

In each of the following sections, we will outline linguistic phenomena that frequently appear in Dickinson's poetry,[1] starting with syntactic and structural phenomena, especially structural ambiguities and ellipsis.[2] We will then extend the discussion to semantic features Dickinson exploits, and, lastly, consider her specific use of phenomena that lie at the semantics-pragmatics interface, concentrating on context-dependent expressions as presuppositions and referential expressions. All of the linguistic features discussed are typical of her poetry and are found frequently.

2. <u>Syntactic Ambiguity</u>

2.1.Structural Ambiguity

Syntactic ambiguity may arise when a word or phrase structurally belongs to either one constituent or the other (e.g. to different lines in a poem):
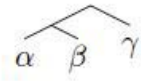
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[1] In many cases we have chosen the most plausible readings, disregarding that there may be additional interpretations available.
[2] This is an addition to what has already been observed and analysed in great detail by Cristanne Miller (1987).

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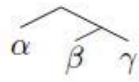
(1)

(2)

The same constituents α, β and γ can be structurally combined in two ways: in one case, β and γ form a subconstituent (see (1)), and, in the other, α and β form a subconstituent (see (2)).

This will make a difference in the poem's interpretation, as we have seen in the context of "If it had no pencil" (J921).
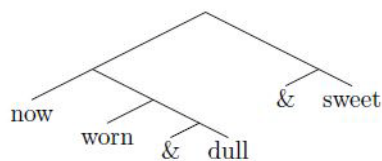
(3) Worn – now – and dull – sweet,
    Writing much to thee

Ambiguity arises as it is unclear which item the adverb "now" structurally belongs to (see chapter 1.2, pp. 57-58). It could either be a modifier to the adjectives "worn," "dull," and "sweet," (see (4)a)) or to "worn" and "dull" (see ((4)b) only, or to "worn" (see ((4)c):
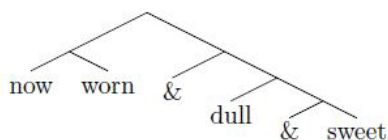
(4)
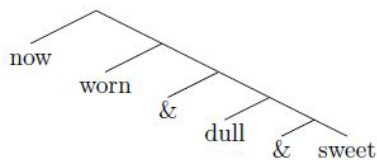
a.

b.

c.

The three options lead to different implicatures that interact differently with the following line, suggesting different causal relations between the pencil and writing. The first reading

implicates that the pencil used to be neither worn nor dull nor sweet at some time prior to the utterance; in this reading, a causal relation is suggested between the act of writing, and the three qualities the pencil has "now," resulting from frequent writing. The second reading merely implies that the pencil used not to be worn and dull, but always has been sweet, suggesting that the pencil is now worn because of the writing, which has always qualified as being sweet. The third reading in turn implies that the pencil has always been dull and sweet, and has only recently been worn by writing. The different causal relations that we see on the basis of our syntactic segmentation cause a reflection about both the properties of the pencil addressed as well as on the relation between speaker and pencil; these contribute to the overall interpretation of the poem achieved through FictionalAssert. The three readings suggest emotional involvement in the "writing much to thee" of the speaker and hence also points to an emotional relation being described.

Another case in which structural ambiguity is crucial for the overall interpretation of a poem is the one in (5) below, taken from Dickinson's "A Bird came down the Walk –" (J328).[3]

(5) He stirred his Velvet Head
    Like one in danger, Cautious,
    I offered him a Crumb

In this poem, the speaker observes a bird and describes its actions. One possibility to read the passage above is to treat "like one in danger, cautious" as a modifier within the sentence "He stirred his velvet head." In this reading, the modifier refers to "he" (the bird) in the preceding line. However, a structurally equally plausible interpretation is one where the phrases modify the subject "I," where "like one in danger" is a modifier within the sentence "I offered him a crumb." Both readings are paraphrased in (6):

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[3] Here, we refer to Miller (1987), who calls this phenomenon "syntactic doubling" (37). For a further analysis of the poem see also Weisbuch (1975, 137f). For an analysis of versions with different punctuation see Vendler (2010, 158f).

(6)
    a. I was cautious and like one in danger when I offered him a crumb.

    b. He was cautious and like one in danger when I offered him a crumb.

((6)a) raises the question why the speaker should have to be "cautious" or "like one in danger." The ambiguity that suggests this reading creates the impression that the situation described is more complex than a simple bird watching scenario. This intuition is made stronger when looking at the actions of the bird described after the speaker "offer[s] him a Crumb":

(7) And he unrolled his feathers
    And rowed him softer home –

    Than Oars divide the Ocean,
    Too silver for a seam –
    Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon
    Leap, plashless as they swim.

The fact that the bird disappears after it has been offered a crumb strengthens a reading of the lines above where "cautious" and "in danger" refer to the bird ((6)b), since his immediate leaving suggests that he is scared away. However, ((6)a) is still a possibility, since the speaker might be equally afraid of chasing off the bird. Either way, the poem describes a complex relation between speaker and bird that is expressed through an implied reciprocity in the way they approach each other. This reciprocity is achieved by the means of structural ambiguity.

As a last example of structural ambiguity, consider the first two lines of "Who never wanted – Maddest Joy" (J1430):

(8) Who never wanted – maddest Joy
    Remains to him unknown –

The relative clause interacts with the arguments that "wanted" selects[4]; it can either be fronted, such that "maddest joy" is the subject of the sentence, or is the subject itself:

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[4] For more explication on this, see our discussion on subcategorisation.

(9)
   a. Maddest joy remains unknown to (the person) who never wanted.

   b. (The person) who never wanted maddest joy remains unknown to him.

In ((9)a), "want" is interpreted as intransitive, i.e. "to be lacking or missing" (*OED* "want, *v*."
I.2.a.). With this structure, the sentence can be paraphrased such that the person who does not
lack anything will not experience an extreme form of joy. ((9)b), in turn, interprets "want" as
transitive, i.e. it selects a noun phrase as argument, such that the person who never had the
desire to experience an extreme form of joy remains unknown to a third person "him." If we
were to interpret the sentence according to ((9)b), we would have to find clues as to who "he"
could be. However, the text does not refer to a third person in the preceding lines, which
makes ((9)a) slightly more prominent. Furthermore, the following lines further the
implausibility of ((9)b). However, both possibilities will play a role for an overall
interpretation of the text that roughly focuses on unfulfilled desires.

The examples show that structural ambiguity systematically creates complex text
meaning. Grammar, however, restricts which structures are possible, and consequently which
interpretations are (linguistically) plausible. The options left open by local structural
ambiguity are telling, since they correlate with the global interpretative possibilities a text
offers. An overall interpretation of the text happens through applying the speech act operator
FictionalAssert to the combination of those global interpretative possibilities, a mechanism
we have seen at play in chapters 1.1–1.6.[5]

2.2.Ellipsis

Dickinson frequently uses elliptical and fragmentary structures to create ambiguity. In these
cases, ambiguity arises because there are multiple ways to resolve the ellipsis.[6] Ellipsis is

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[5] An overview of additional examples of structural ambiguities can be found in the table at the end of the
chapter.
[6] On ambiguity and ellipsis see, e.g., Winkler (2005), Bauer et. al. (2009), Konietzko and Winkler (2010), and
Winter-Froemel and Zirker (2015).

subject to an identity condition (Johnson 2001), which says that the elided parts must be identical to an antecedent in the structure:

(10)

a. $\widehat{XP_1}$

b. $\widehat{\cancel{XP_1}}$
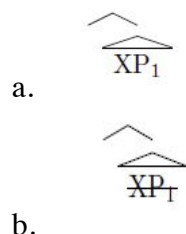
Here, the elided structure in ((10)b) has to be identical with the antecedent in ((10)a). In Dickinson's poetry, the antecedent is often missing, which allows for more interpretative freedom. Moreover, we find cases where more than one antecedent qualifies to fill the gap.

As we have seen in chapter 1.1, line 14 of "This was a Poet" is elliptical (see a simplified structure in (12)):

(16) The Robbing – could not harm
Himself – to him – a fortune
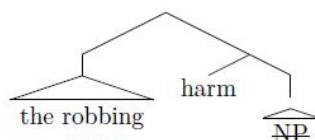
(11)

It is not clear who the object of "harm" could be. The preceding text makes two antecedents available: either the poet, or the referents for "we," which we refer to as "the readers." As discussed in detail in chapter 1.1, the elided object of "harm" interacts with the question of who has done the robbing and who is being robbed. Thus, most plausibly, either the robbing harms the poet, or it harms the readers of the poem; this ambiguity contributes to an overall reading of the text that suggests a reciprocal relationship between readers and poet.
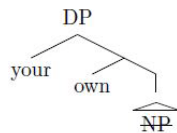
In the poem "I found the words to every thought" (J581), an example of noun ellipsis after "your own" in line 6 can be found (see (13) and (14))[7]:

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[7] For further analyses see Wardrop (1996, 160f; also stressing the ambiguity of "own"), Freedman (2011, 4-6), and Cameron (1981, 193f).

(13)   I found the words to every thought
   I ever had – but One –
   And that – defies me –
   As a Hand did try to chalk the Sun

   To Races – nurtured in the Dark –
   How would your own – begin?
   Can Blaze be shown in Cochineal –
   Or Noon – in Mazarin?

(12)

The most prominent noun in the preceding discourse is "hand," so one plausible way of resolving the ellipsis would be "How would your own hand begin?" As the topic of the poem is finding words to every thought, another possibility is "How would your own thought begin?". As another ellipsis follows after "begin" – with an underspecification as to which event is to "begin" – the lines become enigmatic. The poem becomes even more complicated as it initially addresses the problem of finding words, but from line 4 onwards the process of writing is compared to painting. It would hence be possible to fill the ellipsis after "own" with "how would your own hand begin to paint/write," or to even fill it with a nominalised verb: "how would your own painting/writing begin?" If line 5 is taken to continue from line 4, then it should read "how would your own hand begin to chalk the sun to races that have never seen it?" In this case "hand" could also stand metonymically for the act of painting or writing; in one specific reading, if we consider poetry as an overall theme, this metonymy extends to "handwriting": how could you yourself (as a poet) paint something (with words) that your readers have never seen? The poem here becomes iconic of what it describes: The two ellipses point towards the speaker's inability to find words to express one particular thought and mirror this lack through the syntax.

The last example of ellipsis discussed here is again taken from Dickinson's "A Bird came down the Walk":

(15)   A Bird came down the Walk –
He did not know I saw –

We set aside a reading of "see" as an intransitive verb for now,[8] and assume that "see" is used transitively and that, hence, the phrase is elliptical. In its transitive use, "see" can either take a noun or a whole clause as its direct object. In the poem, the elided structure after the verb "saw" could, at first glance, either be just the pronoun "him," which would make it a case of argument ellipsis; or it could be that a clause ("him coming down the walk") was elided.

(16)
   a. He did not know I saw him.
   b. He did not know I saw him coming down the walk.

As mentioned when we first discussed some lines of the poem, a number of the bird's actions are described in the following lines, and the resolution of the ellipsis has an impact on how to interpret these lines. If the elided part is assumed to be the argument "him," it might be that the bird is not aware that he is being watched throughout the whole poem. However, if it is the CP that is elided, then the bird might not have known that the speaker saw him coming, yet is aware of being watched after that. Both options are possible since it remains uncertain whether there is any type of recognition of the speaker on the side of the bird. The poems analysed so far show that ellipsis is used systematically by Dickinson to create interpretative freedom. However, the options she provides us with are limited.[9]

So far, we have mainly supplemented Miller's analysis of structural ambiguities in Dickinson's poetry. The following phenomena will go further in describing how Emily Dickinson not only uses syntactic phenomena, but also semantic and pragmatic ones to create ambiguity on the level of meaning. We hence view the following sections in particular as an important addition to Miller (1987).

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[8] If "see" is intransitive, we do not require the assumption that some part of the structure was elided. We will return to when discussing the subcategorisation frame of verbs as a separate phenomenon below.
[9] More examples can be found in the table at the end.

2.3.Lexical Ambiguity

Dickinson intentionally uses lexical ambiguity to create interpretative openness, such that one word (the variable α in (17)) comes with several lexical entries (i.e. plausible meanings):

(17)
    a. $[[\alpha_1]] = \lambda x....$
    b. $[[\alpha_2]] = \lambda x....$

One example of lexical ambiguity is presented in chapter 1.3: in "To pile like Thunder to its close" (J1247), it remains to be specified what it means to "prove" love or poetry in line 6[10]:

(18)   This – would be Poetry –

    Or Love – the two coeval come –
    We both and neither prove –
    Experience either and consume –
    For None see God and live –

The interpretative choice for "prove" makes quite a difference as to the overall interpretation of the poem, since it is not just about the relationship between love and poetry but also about "our" relationship towards both or either of them (see chapter 1.3, 75f). The two lexical entries are given below:

(19) $[[prove_1]] = \lambda P.\lambda x.$ x's existence would be impossible if there weren't a y such that P(y)
(20) $[[prove_2]] = \lambda y.\lambda x.$ x present convincing arguments for y

In "He fumbles at your soul" (J315), Dickinson resorts to the homophonous word "still" in the last line, which is ambiguous on a structural as well as on a semantic level.[11] In this poem, both kinds of ambiguity play with and depend on each other.

(21) When Winds take Forests in their Paws –
    The Universe – is still –

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[10] For further reading see McIntosh (2000, 109f), and for a detailed reading of this poem see Miller (1987, 126-30), as well as Bauer et al. (2010).
[11] For some other ambiguities in this poem see Leiter (2007, 86f). For a detailed reading of the poem see Miller (1987, 113–18) and Weisbuch (1975, 98f).

Semantically, "still" could be an adjective meaning either "silent" (going together with the homonym "paws"/acoustic "pause" in the previous line) or "motionless," or an adverb meaning "continually," "forever," or "up to this point":

(22) [[still₁]] = λx. x is silent
(23) [[still₂]] = λx. x is motionless
(24) [[still₃]] = λt*. λt. λP<i,t>: the time interval t* immediately precedes the time interval t and P is true of t. P is true of t.

Structurally, "is" could be either an auxiliary verb that has to be combined with an NP complement ("The Universe is motionless/silent"), going along with the two lexical entries in (22) and (23). Alternatively, "is" could be a full verb complemented by an adverb ("The Universe continually, up to this point exists"), or "is still" could be a case of ellipsis ("The Universe is still ...") where it is not further specified what exactly the universe is. The latter option requires the lexical entry in (24).

In "Life, and Death and Giants" (J706), we find the same homophony in interaction with a structural ambiguity:

(25) Life, and Death, and Giants –
Such as These – are still
Minor – Apparatus – Hopper of the Mill –
Beetle at the Candle –
Or a Fife's Fame –
Maintain – by Accident that they proclaim –

"Still" can be interpreted along the lines of (22) or (23). These readings each interact with a structure where "still" ends the first sentence and "minor apparatus" is the subject of a second sentence. In the third case, "still" is interpreted as a particle further modifying "Minor Apparatus," such that "Beetle at the Candle" is the subject of the second sentence. Three possible readings arise from this:

(26)
    a. Life, and Death, and Giants are motionless

    b. Life, and Death, and Giants exist continually

    c. Life, and Death, and Giants are still a minor apparatus

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Accordingly, the first two readings focus on the nature of life and death and giants, while the third reading sets them in a bigger context. Both notions are an important part of the overall reading of the poem: Even if concepts like life, death and giants exist continually, they are still only part of a larger concept.

A special case in point is the creation of lexical ambiguity independently of the lexical category a word belongs to whenever she relies on the figurative sense words may have in addition to their core or literal meaning. An ambiguity of this sort appears in the first stanza of "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –" (J754)[12] where "carry away" might be understood in the literal sense as transporting something or someone to another location, or in the figurative sense as being emotionally overwhelming (cf. chapter 1.6).

(27) The Owner passed – identified –
    and carried Me away
(28) [[carry away$_1$]] = λx.λy. λl. y transports x to l
(29) [[carry away$_2$]] = λx. λy. x overwhelms y emotionally

The ambiguity of "carried Me away" in (27) adds to the global ambiguity of the speaker being either human or a gun. When the speaker is understood to be a gun, a literal carrying by the owner is more plausible. However, if the speaker is a person comparing herself to a gun, assuming a figurative meaning of "carry away" becomes more prominent.

A parallel example can also be observed in "Empty my Heart, of Thee –" (J587). In this poem, the figurative meaning of "heart" as "the seat or repository of a person's inmost thoughts, feelings, inclinations, etc.; a person's inmost being; the depths of the soul; the soul, the spirit" (OED "heart, *n*." 6.a.) is so conventionalised that it even seems to be preferred at the beginning of the poem. However, as soon as the reader moves on to the second line, the actual physical heart again becomes plausible:

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[12]For interpretations of this poem, see e.g. Miller (1978, 122–126), Benfrey (2002, 44f), Weisbuch (1975, 25–39), Vendler (2010) 318–22 and Bauer et al. (2015). Faderman (1998, 203) calls it the "most discussed and debated of all Dickinson poems." Lists of different interpretations can be found in Leiter (2007, 258–72), and Freeman (1998, 271n18).

> (30) Empty my Heart, of Thee –
>   Its single Artery –
>   Begin, and Leave Thee out –
>   Simply Extinction's Date –
>
>   Much Billow hath the Sea—
>   One Baltic—They—
>   Subtract Thyself, in play,
>   And not enough of me
>   Is left—to put away—
>   "Myself" meanth Thee—
>
>   Erase the Root—no Tree—
>   Thee—then—no me—
>   The Heavens stripped—
>   Eternity's vast pocket, picked—

This play with the figurative and literal meaning is continued in the poem with the notion of billows of the sea that could equally be interpreted figuratively as emotions or feelings. Similarly, the roots of the tree can either be read literally or figuratively, such that they refer to the origin of the speaker's emotions in a figurative sense. By keeping all three images on both the literal as well as the figurative level at the same time, Dickinson is able to create a complex text that, as is often the case in her poetry, links nature and natural phenomena to emotions.

2.4. Subcategorisation

Another type of ambiguity arises from the fact that certain expressions subcategorise (i.e., allow to combine with) more than one type of phrase. The lexicon defines via subcategorisation frames which kind of phrase a word can combine with:

(31) *see* (transitive) : [V, + _NP; _CP#]
(32) *see* (intransitive): [V#]

As an example for the ambiguity arising through the availability of both subcategorisation frames, consider "A Bird came down the Walk –". Depending on whether it is used transitively or intransitively, "see" leads to an ambiguity:

(33) A Bird came down the Walk –

He did not know I saw –

"See" as a transitive verb requires an object to be syntactically represented and means that something is actually perceivable by the eyes (*OED*, "see, *v*." 1.a.). As mentioned when discussing ellipsis above, it is possible to assume that the object of "see" is the NP "him" or the CP "him coming down the walk," which was elided in the structure in (36). Another possibility, however, is that "see" is used intransitively. It could then mean "being able to see" (*OED*, "see, *v*." 2.a.), or receive a meaning closer to "understand" or "realise" (*OED*, "see, *v*." 3.a.). The latter interpretation makes the addressee not only visually perceive the bird and his actions but understand something about him or them. This reading is to be reconsidered especially after having read the whole poem, which leaves the impression that there is more to the relationship between the speaker and the bird than just an animal being watched by a human being. Leaving open the possibility that "see" is used intransitively hence forces the reader to consider that there might be something to understand or realise when watching the bird, even though it remains underspecified what this something is.

Subcategorisation frames not only apply to verbs, but to all categories that can have arguments. As has been observed in chapter 1.1, the subcategorisation frame of "before" creates two possibilities of how to read the second and third stanzas in "This was a Poet" (J448):

(34) We wonder it was not Ourselves
      Arrested it – before –
(35)
    a. *before*: [Adv, +_CP#]
    b. "We *wonder* (why) it was not ourselves who arrested it before the poet entitles us to ceaseless poverty"
(36)
    a. before: [Adv, +_NP#]
    b. "We *wonder* (why) it was not ourselves (who) arrested it before the poet."

Either "before" is assumed to take a Clausal Phrase complement as shown in ((35)a), with the resulting reading in ((35)b); or we assume that "before" takes an Noun Phrase as a complement as in ((36)a) with the corresponding reading in ((36)b). The first option fits an

interpretation of the poem as a whole where the poet robs us as readers. The second option, however, is more consistent with a reading of the poem where we, the readers, rob the poet (cf. Bauer et al. 2010). Both readings are simultaneously present in the poem.

Analogously, "want" in "Who never wanted – Maddest Joy" is also ambiguous because of different possible subcategorisation frames:

(37) Who never wanted – maddest Joy

Either, "want" requires a noun phrase – which would be "maddest Joy" – or "want" is interpreted intransitively and means to be lacking or being deficient (see our discussion of the example above). These two subcategorisation frames interact with different positions the relative clause can hold in the sentence, either as subject or as object. Both options have to be considered for an overall understanding of the poem.

2.5. Reinterpretation

While we have just seen how subcategorisation allows for the combination with more than one kind of phrase, lexical expressions sometimes have selectional restrictions that determine what kind of arguments they cannot combine with. Consider the following entries for the first lines of "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun":

(38) [[stand_in_corners]] = λl. λx: x is a physical object. x is upright in l.
(39) [[my life]] = the unique x s.t. x belongs to S and x is a life

While the selectional restriction for "stand in corners" states that the argument has to be a physical object, a pronoun like "I" or "my" specifies through a selectional restriction that the speaker be human (see (38) and (39)).

A specific effect can be created by using these expressions when, in unusual combinations of words, their selectional restrictions are not met and a new meaning of either or both of the words has to be acquired. In chapter 1.6, we have considered the combination of the noun phrase "my life" with the verb phrase "stand in corners." Here, we have to

reinterpret either "stand in corners" or "my life," as both in combination violate the respective selectional restrictions specified above:

(40) My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –
In Corners – till a Day

(41) [λl. λx: x is a physical object. x is upright in l] (the unique x s.t. x belongs to S and x is a life) is undefined

Several reinterpretation options arise:

(42)
a. I stood in corners.
b. My life was neglected.
c. I was neglected.

Through the three reinterpretation options, Dickinson plays with the two global interpretative possibilities such that the speaker is either a human being or a gun. A metaphorical reading of the Verb Phrase as in (42)c) is far more likely when the speaker is considered to be a human being. However, if this poem is actually about a gun, then the literal meaning of "stand in corners" has to be assumed. Local ambiguity once again makes the reader aware of the linguistic choices involved in reinterpretation processes and, at the same time, makes her realise the global impact of the decisions which add to (strategic[13]) ambiguity on a text level.

Similarly, reinterpretation such as in the case above is necessary in "There's a Certain Slant of Light" (J258):

(43) When it comes, the landscape listens –
Shadows – hold their breath –

Both "listen" and "hold one's breath" require a human subject. "Landscape" and "shadow" are defined as nonhuman in the lexicon (see the lexical entries below):

(44) [[landscape]] = λx: x is non-human. x is a landscape.
(45) [[shadows]] = λx: x is non-human. x is a shadow.
(46) [[listen]] = λx: x is human. x listens
(47) [[hold one's breath]] = λx: x is human. x holds x's breath.

The pronoun "it" here most likely refers to "a certain slant of light": we can either reinterpret "landscape" and "shadow" as personified, such that they have human traits; or we can reinterpret "listen" and "hold one's breath" to cancel the selectional restriction and generalise the meaning of the verbs:

(48)
    a. The landscape (with human traits) listens and shadows (with human traits) hold their breaths
    b. The landscape (in the sense of flora and fauna) is silent, does not give a sound and shadows do not move.

Again, only a combination of both options seems to capture the intended meaning adequately: What is alluded to here is an internal experience that is felt in an intense way. This abstract feeling can best be described with an image of nature, namely moments where there seems to be a standstill in time and even shadows do not move.

Another example is the verb "fumble" in (49):

(49) He fumbles at your Soul

The presupposition of "fumble" that requires a physical object as argument is encoded in the lexical entry of "fumble," which is given in ((50)a). Reinterpreting "fumble" depends on, similar to the example taken from "My Life had stood" above, the interpretation of "soul": It is either interpreted as an immaterial concept or as a personification. One possibility is to give "fumble" a more general interpretation which allows it to combine with an immaterial interpretation of "soul," as in ((50)b).

(50)
    a. $[[\text{fumble}]] = \lambda a$: a is a physical object. λb. b clumsily touches a
    b. $[[\text{fumble}]] = \lambda a. \lambda b$. b affects a in a sort of roundabout way

The literal meaning of "fumble", in turn, can combine with an interpretation of a personified "soul". The choice and combination of words create an awareness of the interpretation process itself. Similar to the ambiguity in "My life had stood" of the speaker either being a

human being or a gun, the ambiguity of "soul" either being an immaterial concept or a personified entity that can have material traits interacts with the reinterpretation possibilities of "fumble." On the global level of text, an interpretation of the poem with the help of FictionalAssert will have to specify what the relationship between both readings of "soul" consist of.[14] [15]

3. **Context-Dependent Expressions**

Dickinson also works with ambiguities that are derived from the inherent context-dependency of certain lexical items. These include quantifiers like "some," "no" and "every," modal verbs like "may" and "must," as well as pronouns and presupposition triggers like the definite article "the." In the following, we will consider first how Emily Dickinson uses quantifiers that evoke seeming contradictions which are then resolved through their context-dependent elements. In a second step, we will analyse phenomena that require specific referents within the context, such as pronouns and the definite article.

3.1.*Resolution of Contradiction*[16]

Linguistic theory assumes that the meaning of a modal verb like "may" or a quantifier like "every" is dependent on restrictions further specified by the context. This dependence in the case of quantifiers is modelled as a silent domain variable C whose value is to be determined based on the contextual information available:

(51)
    a. No student passed.
    b. $[[\text{No}]]^g = \lambda C\langle e,t\rangle. \lambda p\langle e,t\rangle. \lambda q\langle e,t\rangle.$ it is not the case that there is an x, such that
           $g(C)(x)$ and $p(x)$ and $q(x)$

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[14] Additionally, we have seen a radical example of reinterpretation in chapter 1.5, where the quantifier "nobody" had to be reinterpreted. This reinterpretation was not necessary because of selectional restrictions, but rather because the semantic types of subject and predicate do not match

[15] An overview of additional examples of reinterpretation examples can be found in the table at the end of the chapter.

[16] We have seen above that contradictions can also be resolved through lexical ambiguity, as e.g. in "To pile like thunder" (chapter 1.3), where only two lexically discrete entries of the verb "prove" solves the contradiction by revealing the syntactic structure of a zeugma.

c. $[[\text{No}]]^g$ ($[[C]]^g$) ($[[\text{student}]]^g$) ($[[\text{passed}]]^g$) = 1 iff it is not the case that there is an x such that g(C)(x) and x is a student and x passed.

What is still missing in this formula is a value for C. C is interpreted through the variable assignment function g that is also responsible for the interpretation of pronouns. Let us assume that Prof. Schmidt utters the sentence in ((51)a) above about the class she teaches. Applying the variable assignment function g to C would be the set of individuals in Prof. Schmidt's class; for example:

(52) $[[C]]^g = g(C) = \lambda x.$ x takes Prof. Schmidt's class

Modals are inherently context-dependent as well, since they are assumed to be quantifiers over possible worlds. Similarly to "no" above, the relation R to an evaluation world within the lexical entry of any modal is expressed via a silent restriction built into the lexical entry and is also interpreted through the variable assignment g:

(53) $[[\text{must}]]^g = \lambda w.\ \lambda R_{<s,<s,t>}.\lambda p_{<s,t>}.$ for all worlds w' such that g(R) (w)(w'), p(w)
(54) John must be in class.

What kind of worlds exactly we are to consider (i.e. what the relation R is) depends on what the context is like as well as on the reading of the modal it makes prominent. For example, when uttering (54), we might be talking about an epistemic accessibility relation, where we have evidence in the actual world that John is in class (we know that he is not at home and he usually has class at the time of utterance):

(55) $[[R]]^g = g(R) = \lambda w.\ \lambda w'.$ w' adheres to the same known facts given in w.

In the example from "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun" (see chapter 1.6), a change of the domain restriction has to be assumed for two different quantifiers in order to make the two sentences non-contradictory:

(56) Though I than He – may longer live
    He longer must – than I –

The interpretation and paraphrase for (56) are given in (57) and (58):

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(57) There is a world w' such that R(w) (w') and lifespan(w')(speaker) > lifespan(w')(owner) & for all worlds w' such that R(w)(w'), lifespan(w')(owner)>lifespan(w')(speaker)

(58) It is possible that I live longer than he, and it is necessary that he live longer than I.

If the relation R is the same for the two modals "may" and "must," we get a contradiction: it is not possible that all relevant worlds are such that his life extends beyond mine and that there is a world in which my life extends beyond his. However, if we suppose, for example, that the natural facts are such that I might live longer than he, but my desires are such that he must live longer than I, there is no contradiction anymore. The variation that comes with the freedom of how to define R interacts with the two lines of interpretation that linger in the poem (see a more refined analysis in chapter 1.6, section 5).

Another example of Dickinson's play with covert contextual restrictions on modals and quantifiers that prevent a contradiction can be found in "There's a certain Slant of light" (J258)[17]:

(59) There's a certain Slant of light,
    Winter Afternoons—
    That oppresses, like the Heft
    Of Cathedral Tunes—

    Heavenly Hurt, it gives us—
    We can find no scar,
    But internal difference,
    Where the Meanings, are—
    None may teach it—Any—
    […]

The use of the quantifiers "none" and "any" in interaction with the modal "may" in line 9 allow for several interpretative options. Here, the contextual restrictions are hard to determine because of the lack of context. A plausible structural analysis of line 9 in (59) assumes a second VP to have been elided after "any" (since this version satisfies Johnson's identity condition for ellipsis as explained above). The underlying structure with the reconstructed VP is given in (60):

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[17] For additional comments on this poem see Weisbuch (1975, 81), Leiter (2007, 197-99), Vendler (2010, 126-29), and Spear (1998, 283-84).

(60) None may teach it – Any [may teach it].

It is plausible to assume that both quantifiers range over people, due to the verb "teach," whose objects and subjects usually are human.[18] Moreover, the pronoun "it" in the last line in (63) most likely refers to "a certain Slant of light." To discuss possible restrictions for both quantifiers we first look at the interpretation of the two sentences "No one may teach it" and "Anyone may teach it."

(61)
    a. No one teaches it.
    b. 'There is no x such that x is a person and x is in C and x teaches it'
(62)
    a. Anyone teaches it.
    b. 'For every y such that y is a person and y is in C, y teaches it'

"May" as opposed to "must" is a possibility modal: it *existentially* quantifies over possible worlds (i.e. it states the existence of a possible world where a certain fact holds, see (63)).[19] Differently to the epistemic accessibility relation for "must" in (55), we assume a deontic accessibility relation of "may" here, where the evaluation world and the worlds evoked by the modal are similar with regards to the laws in the evaluation world:

(63) $[[\text{ may }]]^g = \lambda w.\lambda R{<}s,{<}s,t{>}.\lambda p{<}s,t{>}.$ there is a world w' such that g(R) (w)(w') and p(w)

(64) $[[R]]^g = g(R) = \lambda w. \lambda w'.$ w' adheres to the same laws given in w.

When assuming a deontic reading of the modal "may," the interpretation of the two sentences in (59) looks as follows:

(65)
    a. [[[may]] ([[no one]] ([[teaches it]]))
    b. there is a world w' in which the laws of w are observed and in which it is not the case that there is a person x such that g(C)(x) and x teaches it.

---

[18] "Teach" can, in principle, also be used to refer to nonhuman subjects (and objects), as in "the accident taught me to be more careful." However, in combination with "none" and "any," which, without further context, we would interpret as referring to people, an interpretation of "teach" as a human activity is most plausible here.

[19] This is similar to the existential quantifier "some," which states the existence of an individual with a specific property.

(66)
  a. [[may]] ([[anyone]] ([[teaches it]]))
  b. 'there is a world w' in which the laws of w are observed and in which for every person x such that g(C)(x), it is also the case that x teaches it.'

As becomes clear through the paraphrases above, the two sentences are contradictory. The first sentence in (65) states that there is no one for whom it is possible (according to laws and rules) to teach "it," whereas the second sentence in (66) states that it is possible for everyone to teach "it" in some world that is in accordance with laws in the actual world. However, through the domain restriction C, which is not made explicit in the poem, we can avoid the contradiction. It is possible to come to a coherent interpretation of both sentences with a deontic reading of "may" if one considers different restrictions for the two quantifiers. For example, since the poem is about "a certain slant of light" and the experience of it, one might imagine that one of the quantifiers quantifies over people that have had the experience, whereas the other quantifier quantifies over people that have not had that experience – that is, to assume two different domain restrictions C for the quantifiers "no one" and "anyone." Moreover, one could assume that the quantifiers quantify over the same people before and after the experience, respectively. A paraphrase of a deontic reading of the two sentences under these assumptions is given in (67).

(67) No person who has not yet experienced the slant of light is allowed to teach it. Every person who has experienced the slant of light is allowed to teach it.

The superficial contradiction that arises in the two sentences is hence not meant to lead to uninterpretability but is used by Dickinson to make us aware of the inherent context-dependency of quantifiers and forces the reader to choose two different domain restrictions. It furthermore affects the global interpretation of the poem. The description of "a certain Slant of light" makes it plausible to divide people into groups who have or have not had the experience described, which suggests that this is a fundamental experience which changes us as human beings and which is universal in such a way that as soon as one has experienced it,

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one (i.e. everyone who fulfils this precondition) can teach it. This particular interpretation of domain restrictions links up with other elements of the poem that further the collective and elementary nature of the experience.

3.2. Reference

Another grammatical feature often exploited by Dickinson to create varying interpretations is the use of referential expressions such as pronouns and definite descriptions without proper referents.

As discussed in chapter 1.2, the pronoun "it" is used right at the beginning and therefore lacks a linguistic referent[20]:

> (68) If it had no pencil,
>   Would it try mine –

From a grammatical point of view, these pronouns require an antecedent that is present in the context to be used appropriately (cf. Heim & Kratzer 1998, 243; chapter 1.2, 47f). A sentence like (69), for example, uttered out of the blue and without a proper referent for the pronoun "it," would be considered infelicitous.

> (69) It fell off the shelf!

In a conversation, this infelicity would likely result in the sentence being challenged immediately by the listener or simply being rejected (creating a "Hey wait a minute"-effect, cf. von Fintel 2004). In poetry, the use of referential expressions like pronouns without reference rather forces the reader to acquire additional information about what the referent is like in order to contemplate options for how to interpret the pronoun, and Dickinson exploits this fact. The violation of the Appropriateness Condition hence does not lead to rejection in poetry.

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[20] The possibility of "it" being used cataphorically is excluded in the poem because, even after the pronoun has been used, no referent is introduced. This is the case also for the following examples.

In chapter 1.2, we made use of a dynamic interpretation system in order to explain the acceptance of certain violations in poetry; in the previous section, context-sensitive elements have been interpreted relative to the contextually given assignment function g and found that g was able to give values for the restrictor variables C and R. However, in cases where the antecedent cannot be inferred through the context, we arrive at a problem. A dynamic interpretation goes one step further in claiming that sentences, instead of being interpreted relative to one specific g, are functions from all possible assignment functions that can provide a value for the variable. Thus, the meaning of any sentence, and of (68), would be the following (ignoring the conditional question for now):

(70) $\lambda g.\ g(1)$ does not have a pencil and $g(1)$ would use S's pencil.

In the case of (68), the reader gathers further information about "it" throughout the poem, e.g. that if "it" did not have a pencil, it would use the speaker's; and if "it" had no word, it would make the Daisy almost as big as the speaker, so that the meaning of the poem includes all sentence meanings that are now functions from possible variable assignments to truth values. Hence, enough information about the variable can be gathered as to decide for one specific variable assignment function. Here, it seems to be most plausible to interpret "it" as a human being, for instance a child (though under some circumstances "it" can also refer to an adult, though this would be unusual) or a more abstract power such as God or creativity. Each possibility contributes to the overall interpretation of the poem, which interacts with the poem being a question.

Another example is the poem "He fumbles at your Soul," where the pronoun "he" is also used right at the beginning without a linguistically available referent:

In the case of (71), the reader has to assume that, in the respective discourse, there is some "he" who has the property of "fumbling at your soul."

(71) He fumbles at your Soul
(72) $\lambda g.\ g(2)$ fumbles at A's soul

The reader continues to read and accumulates information about who "he" could be, again by assuming a dynamic interpretation system. The reader could, for example, add the information that "he stuns you by degrees" to her knowledge about the referent of "he" when continuing to read the poem.

(73) He stuns you by degrees –
(74) λg. g(2) stuns A by degrees
(75) Combining (72) and (74):
   λg. g(2) fumbles at A's soul & g(2) stuns A by degrees.

The poem remains unspecific as to what kind of experience might be described. The reader, however, is given a set of clues and most likely supposes that the general statements have some relevance for her understanding of what is being described. When establishing the relevance of the poem as a whole, it might be easier for the reader to also decide on referents for the pronouns. Our analysis supposes that Dickinson leaves it to the reader to determine a possible referent (regardless of whether she had a specific experience with a specific referent in mind). After having added each sentence given in the poem, it lies within the reader to choose a specific variable assignment that provides a value for the pronoun:

(76) λg. g(2) fumbles at A's soul & g(2) stuns A by degrees & g(2) prepares A's nature for the ethereal blow …

For each reader, a different value might fulfil the properties that characterise "he" in the poem. Thus, on a global level, the reader assigns a specific assignment function as an argument of the dynamic text meaning and thus arrives at a specific referent. This could be an individual referent for each reader. However, all referents and variable assignment functions have to fulfil the information given within the text about the referent:

(77)
   a. $[λg. g(2)] (g_{reader1}) = God$
   b. $[λg. g(2)$ fumbles at A's soul & g(2) stuns A by degrees & g(2) prepares A's nature for the ethereal blow …$] (g_{reader1}) = 1$ iff $g_{reader1}(2)$ fumbles at A's soul & $g_{reader1}(2)$ stuns A by degrees & $g_{reader1}(2)$ prepares A's nature for the ethereal blow $= 1$ iff God fumbles at A's soul & God stuns A by degrees & God prepares A's nature...
(78)
   a. $[λg. g(2)] (g_{reader2}) = John$

b. [λg. g(2) fumbles at A's soul & g(2) stuns A by degrees & g(2) prepares A's nature for the ethereal blow …] (g$_{reader2}$) = 1 iff g$_{reader2}$(2) fumbles at A's soul & g$_{reader2}$(2) stuns A by degrees & g$_{reader2}$(2) prepares A's nature for the ethereal blow = 1 iff John fumbles at A's soul & John stuns A by degrees & John prepares A's nature ...

Dickinson also uses plural pronouns in a similar way to the examples above, as can be seen in "I'm Ceded – I've stopped being Theirs –" (J508):

(79) I'm ceded – I've stopped being Theirs –
The name They dropped upon my face
With water, in the country church
Is finished using, now,
And They can put it with my Dolls,
[...]

Similar to "If it had no pencil" and "He fumbles at your soul," Dickinson starts out the poem with using the plural pronoun "Theirs." Throughout the poem, the reader can gather information about this group of people. The pronoun can most plausibly have two referents: the speaker's parents or the church authorities, as the poem deals with baptism and childhood. However, the choice is left to the reader. The only information that the pronoun itself provides us with is that "they" be a plural entity:

(80) [[theirs]] = λg. λp$_{<e,t>}$: there is a unique x s.t. g(3) owns x & p(x) & g(3) is a plural entity. the unique x such that p(x) & x belongs to g(3).

With a dynamic sentence meaning, we add the sentence meanings to each other such that, on the global level of text, each reader can decide individually for one specific variable assignment that can assign a referent to the variable.

Presuppositions are another phenomenon at the semantics-pragmatics interface which Dickinson exploits. The interpretation of presuppositional items is similar to that of pronouns. As we have discussed in the course of this book, presuppositions are felicity conditions, i.e. conditions that have to be met in the context for a sentence to be interpretable (to receive a truth value, that is, to be judged true or false). If we have a look at (82) again, we notice that the pronoun "theirs" is a possessive construction and not only requires that the referent be a plural entity, but that it also requires the existence of a unique item that the plural entity

possesses. Presuppositions (PSPs) hence help restrict plausible interpretations, since they narrow down possibilities of what the context is like, but they are also responsible for flexibility in interpretation. If the information conveyed by the presupposition is not explicitly given in the context, the reader has to *accommodate* the missing information. Accommodation is a very complex process, but the general idea behind it is that hearers take the presupposition of an expression to hold when it is not explicitly verified or falsified by the context. However, accommodation is not freely available and depends on the expression that triggers the presupposition as well as the context.

Another example of a presuppositional element is the use of "mine" in line two of the poem "If it had no pencil":

(81) If it had no pencil,
    Would it try mine –

(82) [[mine (my pencil)]] = λg: there is a unique x such that S possesses x & x is a pencil. the unique x such that S possesses x & x is a pencil.

"Mine" is a definite description parallel to the definite article that presupposes the speaker has a unique pencil which the reader cannot possibly know about at this point.

Dickinson makes use of this presupposition and forces the reader to accommodate.

(83) If it had no pencil,
    Would it try mine –
    Worn – now – and dull – sweet,
    Writing much to thee.

The lines that follow might be considered to be part of the definite description ("would it try the worn, dull, sweet pencil which is writing much to thee"). The reader would then have to accommodate that it is the sum of these properties, especially the writing to the addressee, which makes the pencil unique (see chapter 1.2 for a more detailed analysis).

Similarly, the poem "My wheel is in the dark" has various presuppositions that interact with the overall interpretation of the text: First, as in "If it had no pencil," the possessive pronoun "my" is used twice; and, second, a definite description is used that does not easily allow for accommodation:

(84) My wheel is in the dark!
I cannot see a spoke
[...]
My foot is on the Tide!
An unfrequented road –
[...]
Some have resigned the Loom –
Some in the busy tomb
Find quaint employ –
Some with new – stately feet –
Pass royal through the gate –
Flinging the problem back
At you and I!

The poem is about the journey of life – taken by the speaker and people in general – and about the end of this journey for different sets of people. The possessive definite descriptions "My wheel" and "My foot" both presuppose, respectively, that there is a unique wheel and a unique foot that the speaker possesses. While it is quite straightforward to assume that the speaker has a foot, as long as she is human, it is less straightforward to accommodate the fact that the speaker possesses a wheel. What complicates the accommodation process further is that we could either interpret "wheel" figuratively such that the wheel stands for the speaker's fortune or course of life. Disregarding these options for now, the accommodation process that there be a unique wheel that is possessed by the speaker in the context of the poem is related to the second part of the poem in a specific way: As it is the speaker herself and her wheel that is talked about, the groups of people alluded to in the following part are all examples of how her own life could turn out to unfold.

Additionally, several points complicate the search for the unique referent that the definite NP "the problem" in the last stanza requires:

(85) [[the problem]] = λg: there is a unique x such that x is a problem. The unique x such that x is a problem.

The verb "flinging" is used in the gerund in line 14, and it hence remains underspecified who "flings the problem." Even though it is the most prominent interpretation to refer "flinging back" to those who "pass royal through the gate" (since it is the nearest VP), it is also possible

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that "flinging the problem back" refers to all three sets of people mentioned before (those who pass royal through the gate together with those who resign the loom and those who find quaint employ). Nevertheless, even if one decides in favour of one of these options, it remains unclear what exactly "the problem" is. One might consider the people in all three sets mentioned to be at the end of their journey, which, when considering a journey of life, would be equivalent to their death (or, rather, to different fates in death). Further assuming that "you" and "I" are still alive, among other options, "the problem" could be life itself, which is still a problem for those alive but not those who are dead (this raises the question why life itself should be taken to be problematic).

Another aspect that comes into play with definite Noun Phrases is that the definite article can also select relational NPs that are semantically underspecified regarding their arguments. An example is the definite Noun Phrase below, taken again from "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –."

(86) The Owner passed – identified –
       And carried Me away –

As discussed in chapter 1.6, in order to verify the uniqueness presupposition of "the owner," we have to determine what the owned entity is, as "owner" is a relational NP:

(87) $[[\text{ owner }]] = \lambda x. \lambda y.$ x is the owner of y.

Syntactically, the arguments are not required to be explicitly given in the structure, but they are important for a semantic interpretation. Thus, we infer that the property "owner" comes with a covert variable y that specifies what (or who) the owned entity is:

(88) $[[\text{ the }]]$ ($[[\text{ owner }]]$ ($[[y_4]]$)) = $\lambda g.$ there is a unique x such that x is the owner of g(4). The unique x such that x is the owner of g(4).

Since they are the only entities mentioned, the speaker or the speaker's life are to be considered values for g(4). Yet again, a dynamic interpretation will provide information about the referent of the covert variable, including possible referents that are given within the text.

On a global level of text, the reader can then choose an assignment function that maps the variable to a specific referent. Here, because we deal with a relational NP, the question is not only whether the speaker of the poem is a gun or a human being, but in particular what kind of relationship the poem is about. Of course these two questions are crucially interrelated.[21]

The word "Heir" in "Defrauded I a Butterfly" (J730) is semantically underspecified in a similar way:

(89) Defrauded I a Butterfly –
      The lawful Heir – for Thee –

As the poem only contains two lines, the question remains who the heir is and what it is that she inherits:

(90) $[[\text{ heir }]] = \lambda x.\, \lambda y.\, x \text{ is the heir of } y$

This semantically underspecified NP interacts with the structural ambiguity of the first line: Here, the fragmented structure could be resolved most plausibly in two ways:

(91)
   a. I defrauded a butterfly
   b. I am a defrauded butterfly

Going along with ((91)a), the heir is most likely the butterfly and the speaker took the inheritance, whatever it consists in, away from the butterfly. With a structure as in (91)b, the speaker herself has been cheated of her inheritance. The only information about what the inheritance is made of is given through "for Thee": The addressee is the one giving out the inheritance or rather assigning an heir. Furthermore, either the butterfly or the speaker is the lawful heir. However, as we do not have further information about who the addressee is, it remains unclear what the inheritance is specifically and will, analogously to the previous examples, be subject to the dynamic interpretation and hence given a value by the reader.

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[21] A similar use of underspecification can be found in "This was a Poet –," where Emily Dickinson uses the relation noun "The Robbing" in a parallel fashion; see Bauer et al. (2010) for discussion.
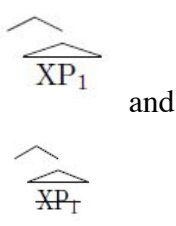
Our examples show that pronouns and presuppositions are used by Dickinson systematically, both to create interpretative flexibility but also to narrow down possible interpretations by helping the reader to reconstruct the context. Pronouns allow for the assumption that certain referents exist, but it seems to be left to the reader how the referents are fixed. Presuppositions allow for making assumptions about the context only to a certain degree, since accommodating information is not always possible for every occurrence of presupposition.

4. <u>Conclusion</u>

We have provided a systematic overview of those linguistic phenomena that Emily Dickinson uses and exploits most often throughout her work. Considering the complex interaction in Dickinson's poetry of all the phenomena just outlined, our claim is confirmed that there is a recurring pattern of how linguistic phenomena on all levels of linguistic analysis are used: It is not only the case that these phenomena trigger ambiguity in their interpretation, but that this ambiguity is intentional and establishes a complex text structure where a limited number of interpretations arise on the global level of text. This complex text structure is made up of the use of phenomena on the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic level of linguistic analysis. FictionalAssert then sets these interpretations in relation to each other either by disjunction or conjunction. This relation, in turn, also informs the relation R such that the reader not only establishes in which way the interpretations are similar, but also in which relation they stand to the evaluation world of the reader. This multiplicity of interpretation is achieved through using linguistic mechanisms that are both restrictive, i.e. determined by grammar to some extent, and flexible, respectively. Emily Dickinson as a poet is revealed to be an intuitive linguist: Her main tool to convey complex meanings lies within a linguistic approach to language and text. Consequently, in order for readers to interpret Emily Dickinson's poems, it is necessary to also approach her work through a linguistic analysis

5. Overview

Phenomenon	Analysis	Additional Examples	Analysis
Structural Ambiguity	α β γ or α β γ	We wonder it was not ourselves- Arrested it before – (Chapter 1.1.)	before [DP the poet] before [CP the poet arrested it] (p. 7)
		To pile like thunder to its close, then crumble grand away (Chapter 1.3)	[like thunder to its close] (to pile then crumble grand away) or [like thunder to its close] (to pile) (pp.1-2)
		The Owner passed – identified- And carried me away (Chapter 1.6)	[VP [VP passed] [APP – identified –] and [VP carried me away]] or [VP [VP passed] [VP [VP identified _] and [VP carried _] *me away*]] (p.9)
Ellipsis	XP$_1$ and XP$_T$	Experience either – and consume (Chapter 1.3)	Experience either [love or poetry] – and consume [love and poetry] (pp. 8-9)
		Tall – like the Stag – would that? (Chapter 1.4)	Would that [please you] [if I was] tall like the Stag? (p.7)
		Though I than he may longer live – He longer must – than I – (Chapter 1.6)	He must [live] longer than I (pp. 23-24)
Lexical Ambiguity	$[[\alpha_1]] = \lambda x...$ $[[\alpha_2]] = \lambda x....$	Experience either and consume (Chapter 1.3)	$[[consume_1]] = \lambda x.\ \lambda y.$ y absorbs x $[[consume_2]] = \lambda x.$ x perishes.

Reinterpretation	$[[\alpha]] ([[\beta]]) = [\lambda x:$ x is non-human . $[[\alpha]] (x)] ($ x is human. x) $\rightarrow [\lambda x: \text{—x is non-human}. [[\alpha]] (x)] ($ x is human. x) $\rightarrow [\lambda x: $ x is non-human . $[[\alpha]] (x)] (\text{—x is human}. x)$	Distills amazing sense (Chapter 1.1)	$[[distill]] = \lambda y.\lambda z. \lambda x: z$ is a liquid.. x distills y from z. $[[distill_{Reint}]] = \lambda y.\lambda x.\lambda z.$ z transforms y into x. (p.5)
		Entitles us to Poverty (Chapter 1.1)	
		I speak for him (Chapter 1.6)	$[[I1]] = \lambda g: g(1)$ ist he speaker in c. g(1) $[[speak]] = \lambda x:$ x is human. x speaks $[[speak_{Reint}]] = \lambda x.$ x makes sounds
		The mountains straight reply (Chapter 1.6)	$[[mountains]] = \lambda y.: y$ is non-human. y are mountains $[[reply]] = \lambda y.\lambda x: x$ is human. x replies to y. $[[mountains_{Reint}]] = \lambda y.$ y are mountains $[[reply_{Reint}]] = \lambda x.$ x echoes (pp. 12-13)
Contradiction	"Every α is β and no α is β" $\rightarrow [[every]] = \lambda C_{<e,t>}. \lambda p_{<e,t>}. \lambda q_{<e,t>}.$ for all x s.t. p(x) and C(x), q(x) $\rightarrow [[no]] = \lambda C_{<e,t>}. \lambda p_{<e,t>}. \lambda q_{<e,t>}.$ there is no x s.t. p(x) and C(x) and q(x) "A must not α and A may α" $\rightarrow [[must]] = \lambda w. \lambda R_{<s,<s,t>>}. \lambda q_{<s,t>}.$ for all w' s.t. R(w)(w'), q(w') $\rightarrow [[may]] = \lambda w. \lambda R_{<s,<s,t>>} \lambda q_{<s,t>}.$ there is a w' s.t. R(w)(w') and q(w')	We both and neither prove (Chapter 1.3)	We prove love and poetry and we don't prove love and poetry $[[prove_1]] = \lambda P.\lambda x.$ x's existence would be impossible if there weren't a y such that P(y) $[[prove_2]] = \lambda y.\lambda x.$ x present convincing arguments for y
Reference	$[[she/he_1]] = \lambda g.g(1)$	This was a Poet – It	$[[this1]] = \lambda g: g(1)$ is

		is That (Chapter 1.1)	proximal. g(1) $[[that2]] = \lambda g: g(2)$ is distant. g(2) (pp. 2-4)
		The Robbing – could not harm (Chapter 1.1)	[the [[robbing [of PRO_1]] [by PRO_2]]] $[[PRO_1]] = \lambda g.g(1) =$ the poet or the readers $[[PRO_2]] = \lambda g.g(2) =$ the readers or the poet (pp. 10-13)
		This would be poetry (Chapter 1.3)	$[[this1]] = \lambda g.g(1) =$ the property of piling like thunder piles to its close, while everything created hid, then crumbling grandly away

2.2 The Linguist as Poet

In the previous chapter, we have seen how Emily Dickinson is a poet who is also – perhaps even first and foremost – a linguist. But what is the point of her linguistic awareness that becomes transparent in her poetry? Why does it matter so much for the meaning of her poetry that its author consciously and wittingly refers back to language? Dickinson systematically uses language and exploits rules of grammar and semantics in a way that results in interpretative flexibility. This way of writing not only makes evident the flexibility of language but also shows in how far the poet is an organising consciousness who, in using language, is testing it for its possibilities. While we have thus seen that the poet regards language as one of her prime concerns and thus becomes, as it were, a linguist, we now wish to turn to her being a linguist as a poet and analyse how her linguistic reflection and awareness results in poeticity, i.e. how the conscious exploitation of language is at the basis of poetisation in Dickinson's work and how linguistic reflection becomes in itself a topic in her poetry (see above, Part I.). One might summarise the interplay between the preceding chapter and this one as follows: while linguistic awareness is the common denominator of both, in "The Poet as Linguist" we have tried to show what this means in terms of language, while, now, we are interested in the question what this means for the poem as an utterance.

Emily Dickinson is a linguist who is a poet – and vice versa. In her poetry, we find a number of examples that foreground linguistic reflection in a way that is hardly possible in other forms of communication. Poetry thus becomes a means to understand language better because to Emily Dickinson poetry is the form of writing in which language can best show its potential. This is one reason why the linguist turns poet. There is another one, closely related to it: *because* language itself is its topic. To make language a topic reflects on Dickinson's apparent conviction that the world – both the inner and the outside world – is accessible

through language but also comes into being through language.[1] Dickinson moreover reflects on the relations of meanings and wonders "where the meanings are" (see chapter 2.1, "There is a certain Slant of Light") and wishes to "distill sense" ("This was a poet" l. 2; see chapter 1.1) in a manner that is probably unique to her (see below 2.2.3). The role of semantics is thus to question and foreground meaning – as well as to ask how meaning is actually brought about.

Linguistic reflection may be explicit in Dickinson's poems – as well as implicit. It is explicit, for instance, in poems such as J 1261, "A Word dropped careless on a Page" or, blatantly, J 276, "Many a phrase has the English language." In J 165, "A Word made Flesh," it is explicit as well as implicit since the speaker reflects on her love of language, "This loved Philology" and speaks of the transformation of the word into a physical thing, flesh.[2] In many of Dickinson's poems language becomes an ontological mode, i.e. when the linguist is a poet and interacts with language as in "Shall I take thee, the Poet said / To the propounded word" (J 1126) or the words become living agents as in "A little overflowing word" (J 1467). Overall, Dickinson's attitude as a linguist towards language is based on the assumption (perhaps even conviction) that language contains and is the world and therefore is a means to express relationships in the world.[3] Language hence serves not merely as a means to signify and denote things but also marks difference and identity. It opens up possibilities of expression, and it is in poetry that Dickinson as a linguist can best express and experiment with these possibilities.

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[1] This statement has a religious dimension implicitly if not explicitly addressed in "If it had no pencil" (see chapter 1.2).

[2] On this poem and its biblical poetics, see Bauer 2006.

[3] Chapter 1.6, "My Life had Stood," is a case in point: here the relationship between human beings and things is explicitly addressed and negotiated.

2.2.1. "I dwell in Possibility": Dickinson's Concept of Poetry (as a Flexible Use of Language and as Fiction)

One of the poems that reflects on Dickinson's approach of the linguist as poet is "I dwell in possibility" (J 657):

(1) I dwell in Possibility –	01
A fairer House than Prose –	02
More numerous of windows –	03
Superior – for Doors –	04
Of Chambers as the Cedars –	05
Impregnable of Eye –	06
And for an Everlasting Roof	07
The Gambrels of the Sky –	08
Of Visitors – the fairest –	09
For Occupation – This –	10
The spreading of my narrow Hands	11
To gather Paradise –	12

Whereas some critics read this poem mainly in light of Dickinson's biography and gender,[4] our focus is a somewhat different one as we consider it as an example of Dickinson reflecting on poetry as the mode of expression best suited to an author whose foremost concern is the exploration of linguistic phenomena. It offers an answer to the question why Emily Dickinson, as a linguist, chooses to be a poet.

The poem is striking in its linguistic makeup from the beginning. The speaker writes that she "dwell[s] in possibility." The phrase "dwell in" is usually linked to material objects; one dwells in a house or an abode (see *OED*, "dwell, *v*." 7.[5]). The phrase, however, also allows for other readings that are exhausted by Dickinson in this context as she links it with the abstract noun "possibility."[6] A full text search in the *OED* for "dwell in" gives a few results that point towards a similar use. Milton has "can envy dwell / In heavenly breasts?" (*Paradise*

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[4] For biographical and gender-related readings, see, for instance, Juhasz (1977, 106), Doriani (1996, 127), Wohlpart (2001).

[5] "To remain (in a house, country, etc.) as in a permanent residence; to have one's abode; to reside, 'live'. (Now mostly superseded by *live* in spoken use; but still common in literature.)"

[6] See, e.g., *OED* "dwell, *v*." 4.a. "To abide or continue for a time, in a place, state, or condition" and 5. "to dwell on, upon (†in): to spend time upon or linger over (a thing) in action or thought; to remain with the attention fixed on; now, *esp*. to treat at length or with insistence, in speech or writing; also, to sustain (a note) in music. (The most frequent current use in speech.)"

Lost IX, 729-30); Hooper (1757) writes: "The spirit dwells in…"; in Southey's poem "Joan of Arc" (1796), one finds the phrase "Rather than dwell in peace"; and in the *Baptist Missionary* (1848), it appears as "the word of God must dwell in us richly." The search results show us that, in combination with a non-material noun, the phrase is ambiguous, as it may refer to 'remaining' (e.g. in peace, or in possibility) or to 'being surrounded' by something, i.e. the speaker in Dickinson's poem either remains in "possibility" or is surrounded by it. Her phrase thus either means that her state of being is as yet a possible (rather than an actual) one, or that possibility is where she is actually to be found, i.e. it is her mode of existence. This double meaning of "dwell in" is expressive of the speaker's relation to poetry.

The relation of a dwelling-place to a linguistic utterance may have been familiar to Dickinson from Thomas Wentworth Higginson's "Letter to a Young Contributor" in the April 1862 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, wherein he writes that

> There may be phrases which shall be palaces to dwell in, treasure-houses to explore; a single word may be a window from which one may perceive all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them. Oftentimes a word shall speak what accumulated volumes have labored in vain to utter: there may be years of crowded passion in a word, and half a life in a sentence.[7]

The "Letter" addresses and encourages young poets, upon which Dickinson wrote a letter of her own to Wentworth Higginson in which she enclosed four of her poems (June 1862).[8] The idea that a single phrase or word may contain a wealth of meaning for the poet to explore was quite congenial to Dickinson (cf. the aforementioned poems J 276 and J 1467); in J 657 she integrates it into the consideration of "Possibility" as the state and dwelling-place of the poet.

She does so by literalising the metaphor in that she identifies "Possibility" with a "House" which is "fairer […] than Prose." Through the comparison, "Possibility" becomes

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[7] See C. Miller's (2016) note on "I dwell"; for a full text of the "Letter," see <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1862/04/letter-to-a-young-contributor/305164/>.
[8] For an overview of the influence that the "Letter" had on Dickinson and her writing as well as her ensuing correspondence with Higginson, see the corresponding chapter in Ruth Miller's *The Poetry of Emily Dickinson* (1968).

the antonym of "Prose" – i.e. possibility is poetry.[9] Even though this identification of poetry and possibility is presented here through a surprising inference, it is as old as poetic theory itself. According to Aristotle, it is "not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen – what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity" (*Poetics of Aristotle* 1451b, trans. Butcher 1995). Possibility in this sense describes the realm of poetry.

Possibility as such is a guiding principle of Dickinson's method of working as a poet. If one looks at her poems, one finds that she often crossed out words and substituted them with alternatives.[10] Her poems are never presented as fully defined and realised. Her refusal to publish in print goes along with this; critics have noted that she would rather circulate her poems in manuscript, allowing for the presentation of variants as well as typographical subtleties that cannot be achieved in the mechanical representation of print.[11] She plays with language in that she plays with possibilities and semantic as well as lexical variants.

As Dickinson establishes the identity of poetry and possibility by contrasting both with prose, the poem may be read in the context of J 613: "They shut me up in Prose – / As when a

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[9] See Vendler (2010). Kher (1974) writes: "The windows in this fairer house of possibility are in themselves the wide open doors of poetic perception"; he goes on to note the "supernatural quality of the house of poetry" and speaks of its being "haunted" (121), without, however, giving any textual proof. – A similar concept would later appear in Henry James's preface to *Portrait of a Lady* (1881): "the house of fiction has not one window, but a million – a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather" (see Mitchell 2000, 103).

[10] See, e.g., Freedman (2011): "Her variants imply a reluctance to make definitive choices about the way in which any poem should be read" (5). It is striking, almost paradoxical, that for "I dwell in Possibility" the only variant seems to be "Gabels" for "Gambrels" (see C. Miller 2016, 233), probably because "possibility has long been considered part of Dickinson's aesthetic" (Freedman 2011, 5), which she expresses in this poem (i.e. possibility is inherent to it, which is why variants are not necessary). The first comprehensive edition of all poems with textual variants given is Cristanne Miller's *Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them* (2016), which also differs from preceding editions in that she does not suggest a new enumeration, but presents the poems according to fascicle and sheet that they appear on. Similarly, the open access website *Emily Dickinson Archive* (of which Miller is an editor) provides images of all manuscripts and their print counterparts in different editions. For more discussion on variants and the physicality of the fascicles, see especially Heginbotham (2003).

[11] See, e.g., Smith (1992), who cautiously speculates: "the reader assumes, therefore, that the particular incident Dickinson describes is representative of her general experience with the world of mechanical literary reproduction and that Dickinson found the printed transformations of her work dissatisfying; most important, the reader concludes that, because of her disappointments, Dickinson chose not to distribute her work in the mass-produced ways to which most unknown authors aspire" (12).

little Girl / They put me in the Closet,"[12] written in the same year as "I dwell" (1862). Poetry is possibility in the sense of freedom and movement, while prose is being shut up and "still" (J 613, 14); Webster even has "To make a tedious relation" ("Prose, v.t." 2.) as a lexical entry. Here we can see what, to Dickinson, characterises poetry in comparison to other forms of utterance. At the same time, the second sense of *poetry* indicated above plays a role: poetry is not just contrasted with prose in the sense of verse versus prose but in the sense of a free and flexible rather than a restricted and rigid use of language. In this wider sense Aristotle speaks of the "poet," whom he defines not by the observance of metrical rules but by his or her relation to what happens. If verse as the opposite of prose is defined by the observance of the "rules of prosody" (*OED* "verse, *n*." 1.a.), Dickinson has a different idea in mind. Her own fairly free use of verse, which is frequently not restricted by rhyming patterns or established metrical and stanza forms but in fact often rather looks like prose, shows that the contrast between poetry and prose established in J 657 and other poems is based on a metaphorical sense of the two terms. Even though in J 657 the pattern of the ballad stanza is predominant (a four-line stanza of which the second and the fourth lines rhyme; alternating lines of four and three stresses), it is not observed with strict regularity. (Cf. line 3, "More numerous of windows," which according to the metrical pattern of the ballad stanza should have four stresses but does not, and the imperfect rhymes "Prose" / "Doors" and "This" / "Paradise".) At the same time, Dickinson establishes free relations of sound. The word "possibility" allows for expression, for sound, and in this poem, is in itself playful: it contains [sibil]s and may be read as "sibilation" (see *OED*, "sibilation, *n*. 1.a. The action of hissing or whistling; a hissing or whistling sound. b. *spec*. Hissing as a sign of disapproval"). "Sibilation" is furthermore reminiscent of the sound made by snakes and thus creates a link with "Paradise" later in the poem (see below).

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[12] J 613 was found in fascicle 21, displayed on the opposite page to "This was a Poet" (see above, chapter 1.1). Heginbotham (2003) reads this as a joke in which prose is visually juxtaposed to poetry (5), "the preferred terrain of the 'little girl' closeted in the wardrobe" (Freedman 2011, 8).

If we accept the option that Dickinson is playing with sound and thus integrates some secret wordplay into the opening lines of her poem,[13] the possibilities offered by language are inherent to her utterance – which, in turn, becomes iconic of what it expresses. Accordingly, the "house" which she describes in lines 5-8 is a somewhat enigmatic construction: "Of Chambers as the Cedars." The simile introduces the "wood used to build the House of the Lord in the Old Testament (see 2 Samuel 7:2)."[14] The cedar is a black wood, which is "impregnable of eye" and known for its durability (see Webster, "Cedar, n.").

The word "impregnable" appears repeatedly in Dickinson's poems and in this context represents or illustrates the double perspective of inside and outside: from the inside perspective of the speaker, who "dwell[s] in Possibility," the windows and doors are openings to the outside world, allowing the fairest of visitors to come in and allowing access to the sky, and allowing the speaker "to gather Paradise," it is at the same time not so easy to get in; to the prying eye it is like a black box, just like that in the wooden drawer in her bedroom in which Dickinson kept her poems hidden from the public eye.[15] The impregnability of the cedar chambers is a protection against it; she allows for "Visitors – the fairest" only.[16] In J 642, she has "Impregnable my Fortress," in J 1525 "Impregnable we are," in J 1663 "Impregnable to inquest / However neighborly" – all uses indicating some sort of shielding against the outside world. The phrase "Impregnable as Light" in J 1351 reads like an exception to this usage at first but, in the overall context of the poem, proves to express a similar notion of safeguarding against external influence ("That every man behold/ But take away as difficult / As undiscov-

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[13] On the topic of "secret wordplay," see Bauer (2015).

[14] See the entry for "cedar" in the online Emily Dickinson Lexicon (http://edl.byu.edu/lexicon/c/14). Leiter (2007) connects the image to a different verse: "The trees of the Lord are full of sap: the cedars of Lebanon which He hath planted" (Psalms 104:16), and points out that while Dickinson retains the imagery of vitality, she leaves out the praise to God and instead "incorporates it into a 'theology' of her own" (96).

[15] See Farr (2004), who considers line 5-6 ("Cedars / Impregnable of Eye") as a reference to Dickinson's own "confinement of her poems to the famous cedar chest" (156). However, the wooden drawer in which Dickinson hid her poems from the public "Eye" (l. 6) is listed among the inventory of her room in the online Harvard University Library (http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/~hou01551) and was built principally of cherry wood.

[16] Leiter (2007) comments: "If her House is 'fairer,' these visitors are 'fairest.' All we have of them is this assertion; but they resonate with the ethereal 'Hosts' who visit her continually in 'Alone, I cannot be–,' and with the shower of mint that falls ceaselessly into her basket in "I was the slightest in the House–,' poems written during that same year [1862] of astounding poetic productivity. They are her mysterious and endlessly bountiful sources of inspiration, essential to the miraculous process in which she engages" (97).

ered Gold"). At the same time, the paradoxical character of the house of poetry as open and secret at the same time may be evoked by the playful way in which Dickinson uses "Impregnable": apart from the (actual lexical) sense of being invincible[17] Dickinson offers the option to read it as a compound of *impregn* and *–able* (comparable to being *impressible*).[18] Milton in *Paradise Lost* (IX.737-38), for example, speaks of "[Satan's] perswasive words, impregn'd / With Reason. The house of poetry receives impressions from the outside (it has windows), it is impregnated with the outside world and still it is not dependent on it.

The cedar chambers in the house of possibility thus enable their dweller to look outside but remain undisturbed, except by the fairest visitors. The linguist here expresses that poetry is chosen because of its openness and its adequacy to the flexibility of language: it may have fast structures that are, however, open and may resolve at the same time: the "Everlasting Roof" is hence made of "The Gambrels of the Sky." A gambrel (the word is, according to Webster, derived from It. *gamba*, the leg) is a hipped roof. If her house has an "Everlasting Roof", one might expect – similar to her notion of "dwelling in" – some abstract notion to be involved here. But she uses gambrels, concrete structures in houses as she knew them.[19] Similar to "Possibility" and "Impregnable," Dickinson is playing with the word and does not use it by chance: gambrel sounds like *gamble*, and this is what she does: she is playing with words and denotations as well as connotations. The word and its sound become another example of what poetry can do better than other kinds of language use: add a playful notion to the utterance and thus make us realise that poetry is where all the possible aspects of language are at home.

Language, therefore, is open from the inside to the outside (cf. also the movement of the hands that concludes the poem; see below) but does not allow for outside intrusion and is

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[17] See *OED* "impregnable, *adj*. and *n*.: "1. Of a fortress or stronghold: That cannot be taken by arms; […] 2. *fig*. That cannot be overcome or vanquished; invincible, unconquerable, proof against attack.

[18] The *OED* "impregnate, *adj*." documents (2.) the erroneous use in the sense of "impregnable".

[19] "Gambrels are roofs with slopes on each side, of the sort traditionally used in barns. Thus, the image blithely transposes Amherst architecture to the domes of the heavens" (Leiter 2007, 97).

impregnable. Poetry as possibility is very much like a black box as we cannot be entirely sure what will happen. It is also a secret chamber because, as poetry is where the speaker dwells, it becomes identical with herself. The chambers will remain impregnable and become like rooms of the speaker's soul.[20]

The prepositions "of" and "for" indicate a similar relation of inside and outside: whereas "of" – in "Of Chambers" and "Of Visitors" – suggests a movement directed at (or towards) the inside, while "for" – in "For Occupation" – is directed at the outside, the sky and the occupation of "spreading wide" the hands (see below). The poem thus constantly oscillates between these various movements and sometimes is even ambiguous in this respect: are the windows meant for looking out or to get in something? At any rate, the house – because of the numerous windows and the roof that opens up towards the sky – becomes the world, and it is from this world that the speaker spreads out her "narrow Hands / To gather Paradise –."[21]

The concluding lines of the poem gesture towards the process of writing: the speaker turns to her hands and to gathering; according to Webster, "gather" may refer to "8. To sweep together. The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind. Matth. xiii.," and the *OED* has "pick up, pluck" (4.c.) but also "To collect (knowledge) by observation and reasoning; to infer, deduce, conclude" (10.). The occupation in the house of possibility/poetry is an action of the hands by means of which a world that is the best possible one ("Paradise") is collected and grasped, i.e. understood. The (writing) hands of the poet cast out a net and pick up what belongs to it. It is noteworthy in this context that "spreading" and "gather" as well as "dwell" are the only verbs in this poem. They signify the action

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[20] See also Juhasz (1976, 14). Moreover, the image of the soul as both a dwelling as well as the agent who inhabits it is a tradition that goes back to St Teresa's of Avila *Interior Castle*, where the soul is depicted as "both castle and nomadic inhabitant" (Hughes 1997, 379).

[21] Wohlpart (2001) writes: "She moves from narrowness, a symbolic reference to human depravity and sin borrowed from orthodox, Puritan religion, to expansion. The capitalisation of the word 'Hands' suggests a parallel between the poet as creator and God as creator" (65). As much as the poem does provide room for allegorical readings, Wohlpart fails to link his observations back to the text.

of the speaker and are connected to poetry (dwell), writing (hands) and putting together/comprehending. These actions seem to be what poetry is about.

At this point it makes sense to return once more to the ambiguity of the first line: the speaker either lives in the house of poetry, i.e. in possible worlds, or she remains in possibility, i.e. has not yet become real (and perhaps will never do so, being merely "possible"). This ambiguity can now be seen as expressing a paradox: what seems to be a limitation (being restricted to what is merely possible) becomes an advantage, as it enables the speaker to grasp a better world, to "gather Paradise." (This goes well with the stress on the "fairer House" of poetry.) We can relate the description of writing poetry as actually grasping what is possible and possibly grasping what is actual to the combination of the literal and the metaphorical in the expression "dwell in Possibility": if "dwell" is meant metaphorically, then "Possibility" has to be literal – and vice versa. This is a structure familiar from other poems by Dickinson as well, most prominently perhaps from "My Life had Stood" (J 754; see chapter 1.6). The poet as linguist explores this semantic structure, and the linguist as poet makes it expressive of the specific relation of poetry to language and the world: it is not fixed but flexible and at the same time it is clearly structured – (literal/metaphorical and metaphorical/literal). This corresponds to Dickinson's description of the house of possibility/poetry, which is both open and well-structured: it is a building with doors and windows (and therefore walls), chambers and a roof structure (gambrels). Thus it is constructed and yet it is natural (its chambers can be compared to cedars) and open (its roof is the sky). Perhaps for this very reason its roof is "Everlasting" and in this house the speaker is able "To gather Paradise."[22]

At the same time, poetry is always related to the world. This relation becomes most evident in the nature imagery in the poem, e.g. the simile of the cedars. The movement of the

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[22] Wohlpart (2001) hence reads the poem as one of "liberation" that "subverts orthodox, religious views on redemption and can most clearly be defined as the establishment of interrelationships with the natural world and with other humans that enable her to transform the quotidian into the sacred" (55). He fails, however, to provide any textual evidence from the poem for this claim but refers mainly to Dickinson's letters and secondary voices (see 76n8).

speaker's hands is an imitation of the cedars and the gambrels, and the transition from speaker to house to sky is organic. Hence, the openness as a central image[23] that can be linked back to windows and doors is chosen by the poet to express what possibility, i.e. poetry, means, and linguistic reflection becomes a reflection on the world: poetry is what prose is not, it is not closed (a "closet" as in J613) but it is open.[24] We see that the linguist as poet makes a reverse movement from the poet as linguist as she asks in how far language is world. When she gathers Paradise at the conclusion of the poem, she is outgoing and literally gathers all that is outside, that is world: she is looking for those words, "Visitors – the fairest –," that may best express what she wishes to express, that make expression *possible*. To "dwell in Possibility" means to have a whole reservoir of possibilities at her hands that are based in language, and to exploit these is to write poetry with all its ambiguity, vagueness and semantic openness.[25]

Paradise, the conclusion and climax of the poem, is a possible world that Dickinson is able to open up and enter through poetry, i.e. through using language in a way that does not claim to include the actual world (see Bauer and Beck 2014). It is a "golden" world, to use Sir Philip Sidney's (2002, 85) expression, which is not restricted by the limitations of the "brazen" world of nature but nevertheless remains relevant to it: poets "may make the too much loved earth more lovely" (Sidney 2002, 85). The relation to the actual world is not determined by the grammar or linguistic convention, nor is the interpretation of poetry established by the application of an assert operator. As Dickinson puts it, the house of poetry has more and better doors and windows. The meaning of poetry, which stands in a much more open relation to the actual world than assertions about reality, is derived as the result of applying a pragmatic

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[23] S. Freedman (2011): "'I dwell in Possibility' has often been regarded as a kind of Dickinsonian manifesto precisely because of the way it portrays openness to the beyond as the necessary condition of poetic endeavour" (4). See also Raab (1998, 290), and Morgan (2010) on "the importance of openness" (105). Morgan toes on to write that "to gather paradise" means "gathering or capturing experience in the World." We think that "Paradise" refers to the ability of poetry not just to represent what is actually there but, as it were, the best of all possible worlds.

[24] Pugh (2007) reads the windows and doors as metaphors and regards them as "necessary for the permeability of the poetic stanza (*stanza* translated as 'room,' from the Italian itself)" (15).

[25] See Mitchell (2000): "The point to make, then, is that ambiguity in Dickinson's writing seems to be a fully conscious and deliberate strategy and not simply an accident of the fact of her nonpublication" (100).

operator FictionalAssert, which covers possible worlds as described within poetry, and puts them in a relation to the evaluation world of the reader:

(2) [[FictionalAssertR]] = λT. ∀w' [T(w') → R (w') (@)]

Dickinson is thus referring to a set of possible worlds which does not claim to include the actual world but which is relevant to it and which the reader can likewise access by engaging with her poetry. The linguist chooses to be a poet because the absence of any restriction to what happens (to quote Aristotle again) allows her much more freely to realise and put into practice what she has recognised, found, noted in the language.[26]

2.2.2. **Relations of Meaning, Language as World, and the Active Word: The Linguist's Poetic Skills**

We have seen by means of one example, "I dwell in Possibility" (J 657), how Emily Dickinson consciously exploits the possibilities offered in language and how her linguistic awareness,   the basis of poetic creation, becomes the subject of the poem. If we bring together the results from our analysis and read them in the light of other examples from her work, we arrive at a few patterns that can be regarded as further evidence of the way in which Dickinson's linguistic awareness informs her idea of poetry.

This concerns, firstly, her idea of "meaning(s)." As a linguist, even a semanticist, who is looking for "Where the Meanings, are" (J 258), she mostly finds them in concepts of identity and (internal) "difference." As we have seen, in the poem "I dwell," possibility means poetry – in distinction from prose (see J 613), which means that, while the speaker says A (possibility), she actually means B (poetry). In other cases, she says A but thus expresses an ambiguity, i.e. she means B *and* C.[27] In "This was a Poet" (see chapter 1.1), she reflects on

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[26] Cf. Freeman (1997), who speaks of Dickinson creating "for us a world of possibilities […]: a world in which things can happen and be made to happen through the agencies of the self" (25).

[27] We discussed one example of this technique in chapter 1.2, "If it had no pencil," in which the verb "pluck" echoes its literal meaning by being juxtaposed with "Daisy"; yet in the poem, the verb must be read figuratively and reinterpreted as either "choose (to draw)" or "select (i.e. elevate)." Both readings can be retained at the same

the notion of meaning in describing how the poet "distills amazing sense / From ordinary Meanings / And Attar so Immense." The composition of poetry becomes a quasi-alchemical process of distillation. The poem itself reflects on the difference of meaning in providing us with an unresolved ambiguity as to who is robbed by whom:

(3)   The Robbing – could not harm –

Neither agent nor patient of the "Robbing" are specified; it is thus possible to read the line both as the poet robbing the speakers without harming them, and as the speakers robbing the poet without harming him. Since a final disambiguation is not favoured by the poem as a whole, both readings can be taken conjunctively as one element of the text meaning. The relationship between the two agents is thus dramatised as reciprocal and equitable, since they both rob each other at the same time (and neither comes to harm).

What we find in her poetry is then the linguist's awareness of the tension between linguistic sign (an expression) and what it may mean in a specific context. Frequently the speaker of Dickinson's poems does not just use expressions to convey meaning but reflects on the signs themselves and on how can they be used, as when, in J 613, she wonders at "still": "They put me in the Closet -- / Because they liked me 'still' -- // Still! Could themselves have peeped -- / And seen my Brain – go round –" The tension between the possible meanings of an expression is moreover often related to metaphor making, e.g. in the context of "I am Nobody" (chapter 1.5) where the conventional meanings of "Nobody" and "somebody" are reversed by playing with quantification and proper names. …. Similar reinterpretations can be found in "My Life had Stood" (1.6), in which two distinct lines of interpretation – i.e. I_{Ind}, where the speaker is a (human) individual, and I_{gun}, where the speaker is a gun – are retained throughout the text, such that the ambiguity between figurative and literal reading create

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time, lending the overall text meaning a complexity that is achieved through Dickinson's clever play on possibilities of lexical meaning.

metaphors for each other.[28] Accordingly, meaning is never simply there but must be established by acts of (re)interpretation in which relations between meanings are considered.

In our example for Dickinson's being a Poet as Linguist (chapter 2.1), "There's a certain Slant of Light" (J 258), the pattern of reinterpretation is analogous to that described for "My Life had Stood": In the lines "When it comes, the landscape listens – / Shadows – hold their breath –" the verbs require a human subject, while the subjects linked to them are non-human (see lexical entries (44) – (47)). As the pronoun "it" most likely refers to the "slant of light" in the opening line of the poem, either the subject or the verbs have to be reinterpreted: in the first case, "landscape" and "shadows" are personified and thus acquire human traits, in the latter, "listen" and "hold one's breath" are reinterpreted to cancel selectional restrictions and generalise their meanings (see (48) in chapter 2.1). Meaning, eventually, resides in the "internal difference."

These reinterpretations, secondly, result in a reality of language that becomes personal: language is part of the world and not separate from it, language and world become interchangeable, and language, the word, becomes real. In "I am Nobody," the quantifier also denotes a name (see chapter 1.5), and they become identical (refer to the same referent) in the poem. There is no longer a tension or a categorical difference between language and world, which becomes also clear to some extent in "My Life had Stood" (chapter 1.6), when the gun may be both material and immaterial at the same time, the ambiguity is upheld throughout the poem and, hence, the distinction between *res* and *verba* is blurred. In "A Word made Flesh" (J1651), the speaker stresses that "it is seldom / And tremblingly partook," which implies that "partaking" is regarded as a mode of engaging with words. In the same poem, she speaks of "this consent of Language," regarding it as a decision-making person or institution, and even

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[28] Weisbuch (1998) comments on "My Life had Stood" in a vein that is reminiscent of/can be linked with "I dwell": "I don't mean that anything goes interpretively or that the poem is a Rorschach ink blot. I do mean that the poem gets egregiously robbed if you see the gun-to-owner relationship simply as that of a believer to her god or a s a lover to her adored beloved or even (and more interestingly) as language personified in relation to the poet who shoots and masters it. The poem can absorb these meanings, as usual, but it is the play among the possibilities that makes the poem" (206f).

uses a pleonasm enhancing the expression of her personal involvement with language when she speaks of "this loved Philology."

Language, thirdly, becomes an agent as the poet feels its impact on her and as she works with language and does something with and to it: language is experienced as influencing life; it becomes action and acting.[29] This is particularly true for "If it had no pencil" (J921; chapter 1.2). Here, the question form of the poem supports the creation of possible worlds: while we are able to assert the presuppositions of counterfactual conditionals, this is impossible when it comes to the speaker's querying about possible actions by "it" (such as "Would it try mine –"). These queries rather point us to the unlimited number of fictional worlds that are thus to be derived from a set of given presuppositions. The explicit mention of "it" having a "word" contextually links up with the biblical notion of the creative word, and thus emphasises the poem's concern with bringing something into being through speaking and/or writing.[30] Poetic composition is a process which in Dickinson's poems appears as an activity by language itself. Thus, in "Shall I take thee, the poet said / To the propounded word"?", the poet, in the end, is no longer in total control of the words chosen: "The Poet searched Philology / And when about to ring / For the suspended Candidate / There came unsummoned in – / That portion of the Vision / The Word applied to fill" (J1126). While this is a way of describing the process of poetic inspiration, it should be stressed that to Dickinson this process is conceptualised as an activity of language (rather than, say, the Muses).

The examples described so far show that the aspects we have identified in our analysis of Dickinson being a linguist as poet may overlap in some of the poems, i.e. they do not exist in isolation but in combination with each other. This overlap can be found in particular in "To Pile like Thunder" (J1247; see chapter 1.3) and "You Said that I was Great" (J738; chapter 1.4). In the first case, we have analysed an identification of poetry and love: "this would be

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[29] This is not primarily meant in the sense of speech acts, which are of course part of the poetic utterances, but mainly in the sense of all aspects of language having an impact on speaker and listener, and on the world.
[30] Another example can be found in 1.6, "My Life had Stood," where the speaker indicates that she acts for her owner's benefit by "speak[ing] for him."

Poetry / Or Love" as the two come "coeval." Two different signifiers are linked to one another and thus become identical. This reinterpretation process is intricately linked to the reality of language becoming personal and *res* and *verba* identical: there is no difference between poetry and love, and, because of this, the internal contradiction of "We both and neither prove" is a seeming paradox only that results from the zeugma (based on the semantic contribution of the verb "prove" as explained in 1.3). In this manner, we are made to reflect on the nature of love and poetry, and our relation to each. Accordingly, the line may mean that we cannot actively give evidence for the existence of power of poetry and love (see 1.3, (18)), and, concurrently, as it may mean that we passively prove them because we exist (see 1.3, (17)). The poem has its climax in the concluding lines "Experience either and consume – / For None see God and live –." The action of 'consuming' is evidence for the existence of poetry and love as we experience and consume them – which means that language here becomes an agent and makes real something that is at first kept in a hypothetical balance in the "both and neither."

We observe similar patterns in "You said that I 'was Great'" (chapter 1.4): the speaker leaves it to the addressee to call her whatever he feels suits best, which means that differences in meaning are cancelled. At the same time, she becomes something other than she is, i.e. reality is changed through language and she will become everything the addressee wishes so that "I suit Thee." The metamorphosis that is described in the poem – which is actually going on while it is being described – hence becomes exemplary of aspect three, namely language as an agent that is able to change the world.

The Linguist as Poet hence does indeed exploit the possibilities that language provides her with. The different linguistic phenomena that we have been able to identify as constitutive of some her poems (in Part I. above) feed into Dickinson's poetics and make her poetry exceptional in that linguistic reflection foregrounds the world and is an intricate part of it (e.g. when *res* and *verba* become identical in her poems). Language and world are structurally re-

lated, and this relationship is communicated on a meta-level in her poems, for instance, when reinterpretation takes place. Thus, her poems become expressive of how Dickinson views and imagines the world, and this expression is foregrounded linguistically by means of complicated semantic relationships. Language, hence, is not merely an instrument to describe the world but is part of it – as much as the world is part of language.

And yet, we may detect some sort of paradox here: while Emily Dickinson uses language in its common denotative function (which is semantically inconspicuous, although the word is the object of her reflection), she also makes use of implicit linguistic reflections in foregrounding linguistic rules without naming them (see Part I. of this book) but which show the identity of *res* and *verba*. In this case, what she writes about becomes identical with what she writes. Her awareness of language as a semiotic system is juxtaposed with implicit reflection that entails processes which focus on structures in language that are, at the same time, structures of world (e.g. when she reflects on the relationship of quantifiers and names in 1.5 "I am Nobody" and of animate and inanimate objects as in 1.6 "My Life had Stood"). This is what it means, when Dickinson, in her poems, presents us with a speaker who shows to us what language is capable of, and in so doing shows to us the workings of her mind and her soul, of nature and the world: in other words, becomes a poet.

3. Benefits of Interdisciplinary Work

The purpose of this third and final part of the book is to tie back the empirical findings regarding Emily Dickinson's poetry that we obtained by using the combined methodologies of linguistics and literature in parts one and two to the general research agenda behind them. We want to begin with a discussion of the value that poetic texts have for linguistic theory in this chapter, and will then proceed with the perspective of literary studies that use formal linguistics as an analytical tool in the following chapter 3.2. The more general points we make in these chapters are not restricted to Emily Dickinson but of a general nature; her poetry here rather serves to exemplify these points.

3.1. Poems as a Data Base for Formal Linguistics

In recent decades, linguistic research has considered a wide range of evidence for the development of the theory of grammar. In addition to looking at introspective data in order to investigate our knowledge of language, linguists work with, e.g., experimental, cross-linguistic, diachronic and corpus data. This practice is now widely accepted. One type of data source to consider is lyrical texts. In this chapter we argue for their analysis in the context of the language research, to great advantage for linguistics.

The concrete textual analyses in part one of this book have shown that a number of theoretical implications for linguistics with regard to, for example, the limits of using context-dependent structures emerge from the analysis of poetic texts.

In the following, we start off from the insights gained from the analyses in part one and two of this book in order to make the general methodological point that linguistics, especially semantics, should explore and use lyrical texts as a data source.

Our line of argument proceeds in two steps. In the following section of this chapter (3.1.1), we undercut possible counterarguments against the use of lyrical texts as data for investigations of grammar. Specifically, we invalidate the commonly found position that poems are not suitable data because they are not normal or ordinary language. We will show that the rules of composition and core properties of Universal Grammar[1] do hold in lyrical texts: First, by pointing to similarities with other types of data where these rules are obeyed and that have been proven very fruitful for these investigations, and second, by showing that certain rules of grammar can't be violated and certain types of interpretations are impossible even in poetry.

In section 3.1.2 of the chapter, we will explain why lyrical texts are actually particularly valuable data: Because of the specific communicative situation of the text type, speaker and reader do not share a common ground and thus the context is very limited. Yet, it is exactly this contextual limitation that gives rise to a complex text interpretation where several lines of interpretations interact (see part two of this book). Secondly, poetry is written by a speaker that is especially sensitive to the properties of language, the poet. Thus, a thorough linguistic analysis of poetry should give further insights especially for context sensitive phenomena, as only poetry demonstrates the whole range of flexibility of grammar. Section 3.1.1 and section 3.1.2 put forward following proposals:

(P1) Lyrical texts follow the rules of UG.

(P2) The high density of creative uses of language by a language expert reveal the potential of language.

(P3) The lack of context creates a special communicative situation that makes poetry particularly fit for investigations of grammar.

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[1] We assume, in the tradition of generative linguistics, that all languages stem from a grammar that is universal (see e.g. Matthewson 2012; Pesetsky 1999). Languages differ in those aspects of grammar that are flexible. These can be captured by parameters. Other elements of universal grammar are fixed and all languages adhere to them, e.g. compositional rules (e.g. function application).

We conclude that the investigation of lyrical texts should enrich the range of empirical methods used for the study of the grammar of the human language.

3.1.1. <u>Validity: Lyrical Texts Do Not Do Things Language in General Cannot Do (P1)</u>

3.1.1.1. What Might Be Problematic about Lyrical Texts as Evidence

There is a commonly held opinion that poems and literary texts in general are not data that are useful for the investigation of the grammar of the language the poem is written in (Fries 1952; Thorne 1965; Labov 1972) (we speak about L1 as the language of the poem and of G as its grammar). This opinion is based on a tradition that sets "poetic language strikingly apart from logical, scientific, historical language" (Miles 1940). It is treated as something "different from generated language" (Fabb 2010, 7). The distinction between poetic and non-poetic language follows from the assumption that the former is not derived from the latter and therefore does not share its grammatical features. Hence, it has been argued that sentences like (1) below taken from Emily Dickinson's "My Life had stood a Loaded Gun" "resist inclusion in a grammar of English" and that "it might prove more illuminating to regard [them] as a sample of a different language" (Thorne 1965, 51).

(1) My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun – in Corners

Even though the position and tradition that lyrical texts are not appropriate data for investigations of grammar has not been defended much in recent literature, it has led to a lack of research in formal syntax, semantics and pragmatics that makes use of this type of data. However, data of this sort finds some representation in investigations on phonological and phonetic features of language (Hayes 1988; Hayes 1989; Kiparsky 2006; Fabb & Halle 2008). We argue that the lack of research in the fields of syntax,

semantics and pragmatics leaves gaps that ought to be filled in order to arrive at an appropriate model of grammar which describes accurately its variable as much as its fixed points. In part one and two of the present book, we have shown that research at the semantics-pragmatics interface benefits especially from the discussion of literary texts. It has become obvious that lyrical texts can be extremely valuable data.

At the same time, we acknowledge that (1) does not obey all the rules and constraints of Present Day English (PDE). There is thus a genuine question here of how the utterance in (1) relates to G, the grammar of PDE. Yet even (1) is still recognisably English. It is implausible that a poem is completely unrelated to the language of its intended readership. Without any prior knowledge of the core grammar as, for example, rules of composition and grammatical features of certain words, a reader whose linguistic knowledge amounts to G, would not understand anything when first reading a poem. The reader would have to reconstruct its grammar based on the little text sample she has, the poem itself. As a consequence, this position would predict that it is tremendously difficult if not impossible to retract meaning from a poem. It is, however, possible to interpret (1) based on the rules of grammar. Interpretation requires syntactic reanalysis and semantic reinterpretation but the mechanisms used are systematic and generally available as part of our grammatical knowledge, as shown by our analysis of the poem that (1) stems from (see chapter 1.6).

We assume that poetic language is developed from the rules and constraints of non-poetic language (Kuhns 1972; Fabb 2010). From this perspective, poems can be seen as departing from the grammatical structures of a language in particular, systematic, and limited ways. Because of our knowledge of G which includes knowledge of word meaning, of syntax and of rules of composition (e.g. Heim &

Kratzer 1998) we can perceive what these departures are, and we are able to interpret the texts. This knowledge is implicit but is manifested in the ability to judge certain structures as grammatically acceptable and reject others. Our position is developed below. Our line of investigation is innovative but not completely isolated from current research as it is related to investigations on the impact of iconic features on interpretation as pursued, for example, by the Iconicity Research Project (Ljungberg 2001; Fischer 2011). Moreover, literary (narrative) texts have recently been exploited as a data source for studying speaker oriented indexicals (Eckardt 2012).

3.1.1.2. Our position

We argue that studying poetic language can be revealing with regard to the question of how grammar is structured. It can help us distinguish between universal properties and language specific properties of grammar. It can also tell us which components of a given grammar are flexible and which are more stable, since the degree of flexibility of the grammar is driven to the limit in poetic texts. *The Study of data that is not in grammar G of L1 can be evidence for UG*. Structures in lyrical texts that depart from the rules of G are particularly interesting for our enterprise. To study deviances from grammatical form is a common method exploited for the development of linguistic theory. Intuitions and grammaticality judgments mirror native speakers' competence of a language, i.e. its grammar. Studying levels of (un)acceptability is hence taken to be revealing with respect to the structure of grammar.

Featherston (2006), for example, in an experiment compared the degrees of (un)acceptability for relative marker drop in German and English. Whereas in English object marker drop is acceptable (2a) and subject marker drop is not acceptable (2b), both are unacceptable in German (3a, 3b).

(2)
   a.   John saw the girl he liked.

   b.   *John saw the girl liked him.

(3)
   a.   *Peter hat das Mädchen gesehen   er   mag.

       Peter has the girl   seen   he   likes

   b.   ** Peter hat das Mädchen gesehen ihn   mag.

       Peter has the girl   seen   him likes

He found a significant difference in acceptability between dropping the subject versus the object relative marker in German. This effect cannot be explained by exposure to these structures or their frequency since both are never used. The overall difference in acceptability of course can be explained by a different parameter setting for relative marker drop in English and German. The fact that the structures in ((2)b) and ((3)b) are considerably less acceptable than their counterparts in ((2)a) and ((3)a) in both languages, however, should be explained by a cross-linguistically stable property of human language. Comparisons of grades of unacceptability hence play a very important role for linguistic theory, since they help to identify potentially universal features of human language.

This is further emphasised by the vast study of the deviant grammar of speech errors of second language (L2) learners. Just like the experiment presented above, the ungrammatical structures reveal what the scope of certain linguistic possibilities is, i.e. whether certain structures are unacceptable due to language specific properties or universal properties of human language (e.g. Yamane 2003).

Hence, we must refute a position by which the study of unacceptable structures like errors by L2 learners is revealing but the study of literary texts is not. Degrees and types of unacceptability in general are important evidence for more general properties of human language.

Lyrical Texts offer data that are not predicted to be acceptable by G but might well be acceptable by G' – a grammar close to G. We consider it important that we are relating G, the grammar of PDE English, to a poem targeting L1 speakers, native speakers of English and non-native speakers of Mandarin Chinese. Without any prior knowledge of English, a native speaker of Mandarin Chinese would be unable to understand anything from the poem, as opposed to native speakers of English. Consequently, to consider the language of the poem a "different language" is not quite right. A more accurate description would be to consider its language a variety of the same language. The grammar of the poem - which we call G' - must be close enough to G to make its language recognisable by G speakers. That is, once a speaker with G in mind is able to identify the rules for how G' systematically deviates from G, she can understand the poem fully. We compare lyrical texts to other cases of related grammars which reveal striking similarities to grammatical properties of lyrical texts. More precisely, we want to show how poetic texts uncover the dynamic potential of language and the steps grammar can take in its development by comparing them with the grammar of child language as well as diachronic stages of English. We argue that all varieties of a language display potential states of that language.

Many structures that appear in poems and are not part of the grammar of L1 appear in child language as well. One example is once more dropping the subject relative marker, which, as has been shown above, is ungrammatical in PDE adult language. However, it is commonly used in poetry and by children. Examples ((4)a) and ((5)a) are taken from Emily Dickinson's "This was a poet". Plausible readings of these lines are given in ((4)b) and ((5)b), respectively (see also chapter 1.1). They assume that the subject relative markers were elided.

(4)
    a. We wonder it was not Ourselves

        Arrested it – before –

    b. 'We wonder it was not ourselves **who** arrested it before'

(5)
    a. The Poet – it is He –

        Entitles Us – by Contrast –

        To ceaseless Poverty –

    b. 'The poet, it is he, who entitles us by contrast to ceaseless poverty'

As Schuele and Tolbert (2001, 258) show, there is a stage just before the age of three where children omit obligatory relative markers and produce sentences like ((6)a):

(6)
    a. (there's baby) there's my baby wants to go in train
    b. 'There is my baby **who** wants to go in the train.'

Moreover, they argue that the same omission is grammatical in English dialects, e.g. Scottish (Schuele and Tolbert 2001, 260). This means that the ungrammatical structures in (4) and (5) are commonly accepted in varieties of PDE.

There are other omission structures for which a parallel point can be made. In the example in (7), which is taken from Emily Dickinson's "Who never wanted – maddest Joy", most likely the copula is dropped.

(7)
    a. Within its reach, though yet ungrasped

        Desire's perfect Goal

    b. 'Within its reach, though yet ungrasped **is** Desire's perfect goal'

At the age of two years children also omit copulas (Becker 2004) and produce sentences like ((8)a) and ((8)b).

(8)
    a. I in the kitchen. ('I **am** in the kitchen')
    b. He way up dere. ('He **is** way up there')   (Becker 2004, 158)

Similarly, African American English (AAE) permits copula omission, see the example in (9) (Labov 1969, 717).

(9) You out the game. ('You **are** out of the game')

Labov (1969, 719) argues that the conditions under which the copula can be dropped in AAE are parallel to the conditions under which contraction is possible in standard PDE. Hence the study of a grammar G' close to G is revealing with respect to G.

Apart from omission structures, there are also similarities with regard to the use of pronouns in poems and child language. Gender features that are encoded in the lexical meaning of the pronoun sometimes do not fit the predicate the pronoun combines with in poetry (for instance, Dickinson's "If it had no pencil"; for a detailed analysis see chapter 1.2).

(10) If it had no pencil
     Would it try mine –

One possible referent for "it" is human even though it falsifies the presupposition of the pronoun, which requires the referent to be non-human. But the mismatch creates an interpretive uncertainty. Children have been reported to show non-adult uses of pronouns in the same way: "As *it* is the first pronoun used, it is not strange that it sometimes occurs with reference to animate objects" (Cruttenden 1977). One plausible consequence of this similarity could be that pronouns are variables. The gender information encoded is an additional feature which is most likely used to avoid ambiguity in context. This latter property is one that children are not yet sensitive to. The poet, on the other hand, consciously chooses this option to create ambiguity. This play with pronominal features emphasises that the occurrence of the genderless pronoun responsible for the ambiguity is an inherent property of human language.

A grammar that is similarly close to the grammar G1 of L1 is the grammar of historically earlier stages of L1. The study of structures that used to be acceptable in

earlier stages of L1, but are not anymore, is also considered valuable for the development of linguistic theory. It provides evidence for additional variants of G1, grammars G2, out of which G1 would evolve. Old and Middle English syntax, for example, is extensively studied because of the implications for the clause structure of Modern English. The seemingly ungrammatical structures that occur in poetry show tremendous parallels to structures acceptable in earlier stages of English. Therefore, they are equally revealing with respect to the syntax of Modern English. One example of structures which are unacceptable in Modern English but were perfectly acceptable in Middle English are Object Verb orders (Biberauer and Roberts 2006). They are also commonly used in poetry as in (11), taken from Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem "A Farewell," or (12), taken from Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Give all to love."

(11)
    a. Flow down, cold rivulet, to the sea,
        Thy tribute wave deliver   (Hill 1971, 94)
    b. 'Flow down, cold rivulet, to the sea,
        deliver thy tribute wave'

(12)
    a. Give all to love;
        Obey thy heart;
        […]
        Nothing refuse   (Emerson 1918, 90-1)
    b. Give all to love;
        Obey thy heart;
        refuse nothing

Other structures that used to be grammatical in Old and Middle English are Verb-Second word orders (Kroch and Taylor 1997). They are ungrammatical in Modern English but can frequently be found in poetry, as for example in (13), which is the

beginning of Tennyson's "Now sleeps the crimson petal," and (14), which is taken from John Keats' "A Galloway Song."

(13)
    a. Now sleeps the crimson petal   (Tennyson 1971, 115–16)

    b. 'The crimson petal sleeps now'

(14)
    a. Then came his brother Rab and then Young Peggy's mither

                                     (Keats 1970, 363–64)

    b. 'Then his brother Rab came and then young Peggy's Mither'

Not only systematic syntactic changes but also semantic changes are visible in lyrical texts. The origin and development of a word, which is important for how its semantics should be modeled, can sometimes be followed by looking at its use in verse texts. Quite a number of lexical changes can be observed in Shakespeare's plays which are partly written in verse. The now common use of "forward" as a verb, for example, was unavailable in Middle English where it was exclusively used as an adjective or adverb. The first written use as a verb is attested in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 1* which was first printed in quarto in 1598 (*OED*):

(15) […] Then let me hear
      Of you, my gentle cousin Westmorland,
      What yesternight our Council did decree
      In forwarding this dear expedience.   (Shakespeare 2002, I.1.30-33)

Shakespeare enriched the meaning of "forward" by extending its use to another lexical category. It is, of course, possible to observe systematic changes like this in other text types. Poems and verse texts in general, however, draw our attention to examples of unusual and novel structures and the environments they occur in. The unusual way in which certain lexical items like "forward" in (15) are used show under which circumstances an enriched or even completely new meaning is possible and

might become conventionalised (see Eckardt 2012 for recent discussion of this view on language change).

The examples from poems hence illuminate what kind of linguistic structures are subject to change as well as the conditions in which they have the potential to change. These cases of language change, too, help identify stable properties of grammar as opposed to parts that vary between different speakers over different times and in different languages.

In sum, while the poem may not be data in support of all properties of G1, it constitutes data for grammars close enough to G1 to be comprehensible to speakers with G1 in mind. Those are grammars very similar to the grammars at work in first and second language acquisition and grammars of varieties of L1. They are also what one might call grammars of possible, and sometimes actual, language change. We conjecture that poems may synchronically make visible paths of diachronic development.

3.1.1.3. (Im)Possibilities

In the previous section we showed that structures occurring in poetry are similar to what we find in other varieties of language. Additionally, the deviances we observe are not the result of arbitrary violations of just any rule of grammar but operate within a certain range of flexibility the grammar allows for – i.e. not everything that is logically possible occurs. Some conceivable analyses and interpretations of structures occurring in poetry are impossible or highly implausible. This fact reveals the boundaries of what rules can be bent when analysing and interpreting lyrical texts. It is unlikely, for example, that the expression "three person'd God" in (16), from John

Donne's "Batter my heart," is interpreted via a rule that is not Predicate Modification (Heim & Kratzer 1998).

    (16) Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you   (Stringer 2005, 109)

It seems completely impossible, for example, to assume that "three person'd God" receives a disjunctive interpretation, resulting in a meaning like (17).

    (17) [[three person'd God]] = λx. three-personed(x) $\lor$ God(x)('x is three-personed or x is god')

Instead, we interpret the Noun Phrase according to Predicate Modification that creates a conjunction of the two elements:

    (18) [[three person'd God]] = λx. three-personed(x) & God(x)('x is three-personed and x is God)

The two lines in (19) taken from ED's "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun" can also serve as an illustration for what is an unlikely interpretation, disobeying the rules of composition:

    (19) And every time I speak for Him –
         The mountains straight reply –

A highly implausible interpretation of (19) (which for this very reason was not considered in the analysis of the poem presented in 1.6) is the one given in (20) below where the universal quantifier "every time" first combines with its nuclear scope and then with its first argument, the restrictor, thereby violating the order of Functional Application (Heim & Kratzer 1998).

    (20) $\forall$t'. the mountains reply at t' $\rightarrow$ I speak for him at t''
         'For every time t', if the mountains reply at t' then I speak at t'''

Instead, we interpret the line according to the order of the elements within the sentence, such that "every time" combines first with its restrictor and then with its nuclear scope:

    (21) $\forall$t'. I speak for him at t' $\rightarrow$ the mountains reply at t''
         'For every time t', if I speak at t' then the mountains reply at t'''

The fact that both interpretations in (17) and (20) are unavailable for the structures in (16) and (19) shows that the rules of composition are not to be violated. The mechanisms necessary to interpret poetry hence do not violate hard limits of grammar. The examples we find in poetry suggest that the rules of composition constitute one of these hard limits. It seems that all interpretation is driven by compositionality, and that flexibility occurs within its limits.

In sum, there seem to be soft restrictions of the grammar that, if violated or suspended in certain structures in poetry, still allow for these structure to be reinterpreted. This interpretative flexibility should not be considered as aiming at obscurity, but as intended by the poet and important for the global interpretation of the text. The discussion in part two foregrounded that Emily Dickinson systematically uses certain mechanisms of grammar – e.g. ambiguity, ellipsis, reference – to yield a certain effect on the global level of the text. The result is a set of limited non-arbitrary global interpretations. But there are also hard restrictions as, for example, the rules of composition and type shifting rules that are preserved and obeyed in poetry.

3.1.1.4. *Input of literary scholarship*

Here is a proviso regarding our plot: We acknowledge the fact that there is a wide spectrum of what might be called lyrical uses of language. There are rather trivial lyrical texts which show some of the structural features of poetry but are not characterised by a high complexity of language. Birthday poems like the one in (22) below, for example, have line breaks and show instances of rhyme, but are not characterised by distinctive semantic or syntactic features.

(22) I wish you the best
 Birthday ever,
 One that's so
 Fantastic that

It lives in your heart
Forever.
And I want you to know
That wherever
You go,
I'm always
wishing the best
for you[2]

Together with its lack of syntactic and semantic complexity, this type of poetry is also not very interesting from a pragmatic point of view. It is meant for a special occasion. Hence, in the situation they occur, speaker, addressee and purpose are clearly defined. They are not especially revealing as a data source.

On the other side of the spectrum, there are also highly unconventional lyrical texts, as for example experimental poems, which show that language has some structure but none that will map onto a semantic structure which can then be interpreted according to the rules of composition (e.g. Christian Morgenstern's "Fisches Nachtgesang," see appendix). We concede that both ends of the spectrum might be unrevealing with regard to the grammatical features of a language. It is, however, important to note that we are looking at lyrical texts that lie in the centre of the spectrum, and argue for those texts to be valuable data sources for linguistics. The input of literary scholarship helps identify the poems that are appropriate data since it tells us what types of texts are complex but not uninterpretable. Furthermore, this input is valuable for judging the influence of other, non-compositional features poetic language possesses, and which make it different from ordinary language besides the variations described above. These features include rhyme, metre and rhythm, for example[3]. It can be considered an advantage of lyrical texts as data source that such

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[2] Loveliestmoment.blogspot.de/2013/05/birthday-poems.html, last accessed 09.08.2016
[3] As a side remark, not only poetry, but also other data sources for linguistics include factors which make them different from spontaneous language production: In an experimental setting, unnatural tasks tend to put enormous emphasis on aspects of language that are normally much less influential (like word frequency). Thus, it should be unproblematic to include poetry alongside experimental data as

non-grammatical features are fairly obvious. Moreover, the connection to literary studies allows us to consult experts on precisely those features that the linguist does not understand so well.

3.1.1.5. Summary – P1

We disagree with the prejudice that studying lyrical language in general is unrevealing with respect to the properties of the grammar. We have shown that those features that are special to lyrical texts – i.e. uses of language that deviate from the grammar of the language the poem is written in – are certainly revealing with respect to grammar more generally. They open up possible states the language could be in, even if it is not – as revealed by parallels to language acquisition, language varieties, and language change. At the same time, lyrical texts do nothing that natural language does not allow for. We elucidated this by discussing impossible interpretations. The core properties and rules of UG are preserved and serve as the basis of interpretation in poetry. Our findings suggest the following revision of P1

> (P1')Lyrical texts follow the rules of UG. They deviate from G in ways similar to certain language varieties. They do not allow for violations of universal rules, e.g. type shifting rules and rules of composition.

3.1.2. Special Value for Semantics and Pragmatics: Lyrical Texts Constitute Particularly Interesting Evidence (P2 and P3)

In this section, we argue that lyrical texts should supplement other data types that reveal linguistic dynamics, like acquisition and change. First, we argue in general terms that both the poet as a special kind of native speaker and the poem as a special kind of utterance merit our interest in section 3.1.2.1. We give examples of how the creative use of language by an expert of grammar makes its limits and flexibility visible in special ways (P2). Second, we illustrate that the lack of context in poems

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data for natural language, as both are different from spontaneous language production.

creates a special discourse situation which makes them especially fit for investigations at the semantics-pragmatics interface (P3). In section 3.1.2.2., we will provide three explicit examples of how investigating lyrical texts can enrich linguistic theory, especially with regard to creativity (coercion, E1) as well as the semantics-pragmatics interface (referential expressions, E2 and *apparent flouting*, E3).

3.1.2.1. General Considerations

It is, we believe, relevant to the present discussion that the texts we investigate are not, after all, errors of language learners or any casual type of corpus evidence produced by randomly picked native speakers of L1. Quite to the contrary: the poet should be considered a language expert, and his or her text was produced with great care. Deviant linguistic structures are used consciously to yield specific effects. In many cases, a poet reveals through her or his work that she is engaged in an intuitive linguistic analysis of L1 in order to achieve these effects. This was discussed and argued for in detail for Emily Dickinson's poetry in chapter 2.1. The discussion has shown that the usage of certain complex linguistic expressions such as quantifiers and modals is not accidental. She uses grammatical structures like these systematically to increase reflection about features of language, especially the interrelation between local and global interpretative decisions. We assume that poets in general demonstrate a very high degree of linguistic awareness and sensitivity to properties of G beyond that of the average speaker. All features, even the non-target-like features of the poem, are supposed to be decoded by speakers with G as their linguistic knowledge. The poet should thus be an especially interesting subject when studying knowledge of a language.

Moreover, in the present discussion it is essential that the poems considered are short, dense texts presented without surrounding context. The data thus

specifically tells us something about the nature of context-dependency and how the meaning of context-dependent expressions should be modelled.

In ordinary linguistic interaction, the participants share a common ground (cf. e.g. Stalnaker 1974; Kadmon 2001), which locates speaker and hearer and guides assumptions they make about context-dependent expressions in language. By contrast, when reading a lyrical text there is no common ground that we can rely on when interpreting. This is due to the fact that the communicative situation that the poet was in when writing the poem is completely detached from the situation in which the reader is experiencing the poem. Furthermore, poet and speaker of the poem are not the same and, thus, the only information available for the reader is that given in the text itself which may or may not characterise the speaker of the poem further, but never the poet.

Both assumptions are summarised in our hypotheses P2 and P3, repeated below, and will be tested with the help of examples in the following:

(P2) The high density of creative uses of language by a language expert reveal the whole potential of language.

(P3) The lack of context creates a special communicative situation that makes poetry especially fit for investigations of grammar.

3.1.2.2. Coercion (E1), Referential Expressions (E2) and Apparent Flouting (E3)

We would like to substantiate our programmatic claims (P2 and P3) above about the special value of lyrical texts as a data source by giving three concrete examples of how linguistic theory can be enriched through the study of lyrical texts. The examples further illustrate for which investigations lyrical texts are especially well suited due to the features of poetic language discussed above. We claim that the circumstances

under which poetic texts are interpreted give insights into the nature of phenomena of grammar that are not revealed by just looking at everyday language.

3.1.2.2.1 Creative use of language by the poet: coercion (E1)

Our first example relates to the point we made about linguistic creativity and language dynamics (P1). Our data challenge and clarify existing theories on coercion. The examples illustrate what the linguistic and extra-linguistic factors are that promote coercion processes. We show that

    a.   conflicts are resolved locally according to the principle of interpretability.

    b.   both component parts can be reinterpreted, functor as well as argument.

    c.   world knowledge constrains typical interpretations in ordinary contexts.

The full range of grammatically available interpretative options is revealed by lyrical texts where world knowledge can be suspended locally.

Coercion is a reinterpretation mechanism which is activated when local semantic mismatches occur in the structure. There are still many unresolved issues regarding the nature of coercion, and how it differs from other reinterpretation mechanisms. Especially the question what exactly influences coercion operations and at which level of computation it happens is controversial. Some theories see it as a more global repair mechanism that works on a defective semantic structure (Nunberg 1995; Lang and Maienborn 2011). Other theories assume that the coercion process is encoded in the lexical entry of expressions, either via their so called qualia structures (Pustojevsky 1995) or their complex types (Asher 2011). The different theories make different assumptions about the division of labour between the lexicon and the context. Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical ground for how to theoretically distinguish between different types of coercion mechanisms based on, for example, the integration of context.

We suggest that the debate suffers from the fact that expressions often taken as standard examples for coercion processes seem to be conventionalised and are operative in only very specific contextual settings, as the stereotypical example in (23).

(23) The ham sandwich wants to pay.

A standard analysis of this example (Nunberg 1995) assumes that a covert function is inserted into the structure in (23) which maps meals to their consumers to resolve the mismatch between the subject and selectional restrictions of the verb "want." What drives this insertion is unclear. In the case of (23), the option is easily available when uttered in a restaurant setting. But it is not the context alone which plays a role: convention seems to be relevant as well – i.e. the mapping function used for (23) is too specialised to be used in other settings. At the same time, it is the only option for resolving the mismatch in (23) when in a restaurant setting.

Examples taken from poetry are valuable for the investigation of coercion and other reinterpretation processes, since they often display non-conventional, creative uses of figurative language. They reveal what influences and drives the reinterpretation process apart from convention and context and thereby makes visible the full range of interpretative possibilities. Below we repeat the example of a violation of selectional restrictions taken from "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun."

(24) My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –
In Corners – till a Day

Our analysis of the poem in chapter 1.6 revealed that the mismatch allows for three reinterpretation strategies. All three are valid options in the context of the poem, where it remains unclear throughout the poem whether a gun or a human is the speaker.

(25)
    a. I stood around in corners. (NP reinterpretation)

    b. My life remained unnoticed. (VP reinterpretation)

    c. I was neglected. (NP/VP reinterpretation)

The example shows that the lexicon and syntax do not dictate alone which part of the structure has to be reinterpreted. We can either reinterpret the predicate or its argument, and also both. The latter possibility is the most surprising from the viewpoint of most current theories on coercion which assume that only local conflicts are the trigger of coercion processes (cf. Swaart 2011). At the same time, the option is a very prominent one in the context of the poem. Since reinterpreting either the predicate or the argument would be sufficient to resolve the local conflict, it is unclear under existing theories why the option to reinterpret both parts of the structure should be available. It seems to be a question of contextual pressure to reinterpret as in ((25)c), which poses a challenge to current theories and asks for an appropriate modification of said theories which captures this observation.

    A similar reinterpretation process is triggered by another line of the poem, discussed in detail in chapter 1.6 and repeated in (26):

(26) And every time I speak for Him –
       The Mountains straight reply –

Due to the requirement that "reply" needs a human agent as its subject argument (see ((27)a)), a conflict arises (see ((27)b)) when "reply" combines with "the mountains" which are clearly not human. This conflict allows for different types of reinterpretative possibilities.

(27)
    a. $[[\text{reply}]] = \lambda x: x$ is human. x replies.

    b. $[[\text{reply}]]([[\text{the mountains}]])$ is undefined.

The first option is that "reply" is reinterpreted as something that fits an inanimate agent like "the mountains." In the immediate context where it is set parallel to a human being making sounds, a likely interpretation is one where "reply" stands for the production of an echo. This option is illustrated in ((28)a) and ((28)b). The lexical entry of the mountains remains stable.

(28)
    a.   [[reply]] = λx.x produces an imitative sound
    b.   [[reply]]([[the mountains]]) = The mountains produce an imitative sound

There is a second option where "the mountains" are considered to have human properties and hence really "reply." This option requires that we suspend our conceptual knowledge about "the mountains." This makes "the mountains" a suitable argument for "reply."

(29)
    a.   [[reply]] = λx: x is human. x replies.
    b.   [[reply]]([[the mountains]]) = The mountains reply.

Both options are available in the context of a poem, whereas in ordinary discourse the second option of the mountains having human traits would be inconsistent with our world knowledge and consequently be dismissed, and the first, metaphorical reading of mountains producing an echo would most likely be chosen. This again stresses the importance of context for the ways to resolve the conflict in ordinary discourse. Examples from lyrical texts exhibit the full range of reinterpretive possibilities allowed by the grammar.

The two examples just discussed show that the direction of coercion is not fixed. The reinterpretation of both the argument and the functor is possible (as well as both simultaneously). This speaks against a *Head Typing Principle* as formulated by

Asher (2011), which predicts that the argument is always coerced into a type that fulfils the requirements of the head. A simplified version is given in (30).

(30) Head Typing Principle:
If X is a constituent with daughters α and β, (and X is uninterpretable) and α is the syntactic, lexical head, then the typing/interpretive frame of α must be preserved in the composition of α and β.

The prediction of the Head Typing Principle is falsified by the examples just explained. It would mean that the interpretation of the verbs which are the heads in these structures had to remain stable in (24) and (26). This would only allow for an interpretation of (24) where "my life" is reinterpreted as "I" (the speaker) and for an interpretation of (26) where "the mountains" receive a different interpretation (as being human). It is, however, crucial for both cases that all interpretative options remain available in the poem. The arguments for why it is plausible to assume that they are available can be found in the detailed analyses of the complete poems (cf. chapter 1.6; see also Bauer et al. 2015). It is hence clearly not just a question of the lexicon and the structure (i.e. what the head of a phrase is) which mechanism of resolution is chosen. Our data reveal the whole range of interpretative possibilities. We see that examples from ordinary contexts are usually constrained by our knowledge of the situation and the context. Through the lack of context in poetry we find the whole potential of grammar revealed.

Of course, opening the theories of coercion to capture the possibility of reinterpreting both parts of the structure as well as allowing contextual pressure to trigger conflicts has the danger of forming a theory which is too unrestrictive. Without any limits to inserting a transfer function which changes the referents or shifting the meaning of the verb we might expect the grammar to allow shifts and reinterpretations as in ((31)a) and ((31)b), which would lead to a completely arbitrary and impossible interpretation of (31):

(31) Charlotte smiled.
   a. f[[Charlotte]] = Hans
   b. [[smile]] = λx. x smiles → λy. y snores.
   c. [[Charlotte smiles]] = Hans snores.

Our examples show that existing theories of coercion should allow for more flexibility. However, we do not want said theories to end up predicting arbitrary reinterpretations as in ((31)c). The revised theory should be able to identify pathways of reinterpretation. More research is needed to spell this revised theory out fully. Here is a first approximation to what we have in mind: We find recurring patterns of what types of reinterpretation strategies we pursue in interpretation. One possibility is to insert a transfer function f which will change the referents of a sentence, e.g. the cappuccino to its drinker, the life to its owner. We thus find that there must be a contextually well-defined and close relation between the referents which also has some generality to it, e.g. ownership. A specialised function like in ((31)a) which just changes one individual to another is disallowed. Furthermore, the examples from poetry show that we must have good reasons to change the referent: Only if a local conflict is involved, the need for reinterpretation arises, e.g. changing "my life" to "I" is allowed in the context of a poem because "my life" violates the selectional restrictions of "stand in corners" and a metonymical shift to "I" is necessary because of the semantic structure. In sum, we observe that fixing the referents – which is a more complex process in poetry as the next section will also show – might be defining for when the grammar allows us to reinterpret (especially when we do not find a conflict arising from, for example, a selectional restriction). A second type of reinterpretation mechanism we discussed is shifting the meaning of certain verbs. The mechanism we find is one where the meaning of the verb becomes weaker and less restrictive in the sense that certain presuppositions are dropped so that the domain set

of verbs is widened. For example, "reply" is shifted to a meaning like "make an imitative sound" which will include non-human agents. More research in linguistics is needed to identify in how far grammar restricts why and how we reinterpret and what the division of labour is between the lexicon and the context. We argue that to look at more data from lyrical texts helps forming a theory of coercion which isolates the grammatical factors involved.

Summary: P2–E1

Our second hypothesis argued for in the previous sections was that the high density[4] of lyrical texts helps reveal the whole potential of language (P2). We have shown that the grammar allows for more interpretative possibilities than what we observe in standard assumed examples. Most importantly, both component parts in structures with semantic mismatches can be reinterpreted and even both at the same time. Furthermore, we saw that contextual pressure might be responsible for the arising of a conflict. Conflicts are still resolved locally in accordance with the principle of interpretability. We need a refined theory of coercion which captures these observations and more data to further support our findings. So far, our data allow the following revision of P2:

> (P2')Creative uses of language in poetry reveal the whole potential of language. A large range of the reinterpretive possibilities that the grammar allows for is laid open. The driving force of reinterpretation is not limited to plain uninterpretability; the direction and pathways of reinterpretation are not fixed (*contra* standard coercion theories).

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[4] An apt illustration for this point is the German word for poetry, "Dichtung" (figurative "compression" or "concentration"); we also speak of fiction in general as "Erdichtetes" (i.e. concentrated matter). This attribute of poetic texts – being very densely and closely compressed linguistic structures and phenomena – is thus reflected in language use in German.

The second example we discuss explores the role of context in the interpretation of pronouns as it is highlighted in lyrical texts by its lack. Our findings raise interesting questions for the influence of situations on the interpretation process as a whole. We will see that

a. a genuinely dynamic interpretation is possible.
b. the text type and discourse situation may decide between static and dynamic interpretation, or, more accurately, between the increment size that is applied to a particular context.

In both cases, the evidence provided by lyrical texts hence has an impact on linguistic theory, specifically, different aspects of the semantics-pragmatics interface.

Anaphoric expressions like pronouns or certain presupposition triggers impose strong requirements on the context. An utterance like (32) is only appropriate in a context that furnishes a referent for the pronoun, which can be captured formally as in (33) and (34) (compare e.g. Heim & Kratzer 1998).

(32) He sneezed.

(33) $[[he_1]]^{gc}$ is only defined if $g_c(1)$ is defined.
Then, $[[he_1]]^{gc} = g_c(1)$. (where g_c is the variable assignment function provided by context c.

(34) $[[He_1$ sneezed$]]^{gc}$ is only appropriate if $g_c(1)$ is defined.
Then, $[[He_1$ sneezed$]]^{gc} = 1$ iff $g_c(1)$ sneezed.

In a standard static framework, compositional interpretation will fail when these requirements are not fulfilled by the context. Accordingly, if A utters the sentence in (32) out of the blue, a 'Hey wait a minute'-effect/challenge will be evoked, as indicated by the answer of B (Von Fintel 2004; Matthewson 2006). The assumption therefore is that checking the context for relevant information happens right away. If

no relevant referent is available, sentences will be uninterpretable in the context and challenged by the interlocutors.

Poems behave differently in this respect (for a detailed discussion see chapter 1.6.). The use of pronouns without a referent or antecedent is extremely common in poetry. Very often they appear right at the beginning of a poem, as in the previously discussed poem "He fumbles at your Soul":

(35) He fumbles at your Soul

Rather than taking these expressions to be uninterpretable, readers continue to interpret and accumulate information. They build up a compositional interpretation of the whole text. Thus, they arrive at a text meaning and can reconstruct the context.

To model how compositional interpretation proceeds under these circumstances, a dynamic model of interpretation is needed (Kamp 1981; Heim 1982; see also chapters 1.1 and 1.2). The semantic value of a sentence in a dynamic framework is not its truth conditions but its potential to modify and extend information that exists in the context. It is possible in such a system to model that some parts of the sentence, like "he" in (35), may remain underspecified. A first step towards a simplified version of a dynamic system that achieves this is to consider the parts of the sentence sets of variable assignment functions that are passed along as interpretation proceeds. The system is inspired by the basic ideas expressed in Montague (1970), a more recent use of which can be seen in Poesio (1996). The meaning of a pronoun in this simplified dynamic system is shown in (36); it is the set of assignment functions that assign the variable a value.

(36) $[[\, he_1 \,]] = \lambda g.g(1).$

Such a framework allows certain parts of meaning to remain unspecified, as for example who the referent of "he" in (35) is. An interpretation of (35) would thus proceed as in (37)-(40):

(37)   [[he$_1$]] = λg.g(1).

(38)   [[fumble_at_your_soul]] = λg. λx. x fumble_at_your_soul

(39) Dynamic Function Application (DFA):
Let <g> be the type of variable assignment functions. Then: If α is a branching node with daughters β and γ and β is of type <g,<x,y>> and γ is of type <g,x> then [[α]] = λg.[[β]](g)([[γ]](g))

(40) λg. g(1) fumble-at_your_ soul

To arrive at a meaning of a text, the reader retrieves information from the poem to learn more about what functions g are described. The interpretation of an additional sentence ((41)a) from Dickinson's "He fumbles at your Soul" results in ((41)b).

(41)
a.   He stuns you by degrees –
b.   λg. g(1) stuns_you_by_degrees

The rule for combining two sentences like (35) and ((41)a) in such a dynamic model is given in (42). Applied to our example, we get (43).

(42) [[S1 and S2]] = λg. [[S1]](g) & [[S2]](g)

(43)
a.   He fumbles at your soul. [...] He stuns you by degrees.
b.   λg. g(1) fumbles_at_your_soul & g(1) stuns_you_by_degrees

For an interpretation of the whole text, the reader has to iterate application of this rule, roughly illustrated in (44).

(44) [[Text]] = [[S1 and S2 … and Sn]]

The result of interpretation is a set of assignment functions, bundling information about the referents in the poem. The application to a context happens later than in ordinary conversation, after the reader has computed the meaning of the text.

Different readers may envision different contexts, i.e. collections of referents that make the text true. Due to this fact, it is expected that there is some variation with regard to what the final meaning of a text for an individual reader is. Poetry is thus evidence for the fact that interpretation is a dynamic process and requires a dynamic framework (Kamp 1981; Heim 1982). It contributes to an ongoing debate on whether static frameworks are able to describe interpretation processes sufficiently (cf. e.g. Schlenker 2011 for recent discussion).

We have shown that a dynamic system is more appropriate for modelling how interpretation proceeds in lyrical texts. In everyday discourse, the system seems to allow for less flexibility. Our data suggests that it depends on the communicative situation at which level (i.e. size of increment) the context is updated with the information from the text and under which circumstances this pragmatic step of updating the context succeeds or fails. There seem to be two alternatives depending on the situation a speaker is in. First, the whole text is interpreted dynamically and the resulting text interpretation is then applied to a specific context. Second, smaller units (increment sizes) are interpreted and applied to a specific context immediately. Our data suggest that the pragmatic step always takes place but can be postponed until text interpretation is completed given the appropriate communicative setting.

Summary: P3–E2

Especially investigations at the semantics-pragmatics interface can benefit from the discussion and analysis of the linguistic data provided by lyrical texts. The lack of context creates a communicative situation which allows the reader to switch into a special mode of dynamic interpretation. We have shown that this mode of interpretation is the only appropriate way to interpret referential expressions in poetry. A static system would force the reader to interpret a sentence immediately with

respect to a contextually provided variable assignment function g. This static interpretation results in a conflict when a referential expression without a proper referent in the context is used:

(45) $[[S1]]^g = \dots$ → possible conflict

There is no appropriate value for the pronoun, and interpretation fails. In a simple dynamic system, as sketched above, sentences can be seen as a set of variable assignment functions. The information about the properties of these assignment functions is accumulated sentence after sentence. This can be modelled via intersection of the sets of the assignment function each sentence denotes:

(46) $[\lambda g[[S1]](g) \ \& \ [[S1]](g)]_\varphi$ → possible conflict

The pragmatic step only happens after all information has been collected. That is, the whole text is interpreted with respect to a certain variable assignment after the meanings of individual sentences have been combined.

(47) $\varphi (g1)$

Our findings result in a revision of P3:

> (P3') The special communicative situation created in poetry reveals that choosing between static and dynamic interpretation depends on the text type. Dynamic updates are related to the increment size. The pragmatic step is possibly postponed to text level in lyrical texts and interpretation proceeds dynamically until then.

3.1.2.2.3 Fictional Assert and Apparent Flouting – E3

The last example we want to discuss also illustrates the point that lyrical texts are especially well suited for investigations at the semantics-pragmatics interface due to the communicative situation they create (P3). Specifically we show that, through the special Assert operator at play, an additional pragmatic mechanism is available in lyrical texts which we call *apparent flouting* (Brockmann et al. accepted).

As discussed in section 1, Bauer and Beck (2014) argue that the meaning and relevance of fictional texts can be modelled with a special Assert operator (FictionalAssert) that sets the fictional worlds described by the text in relation to the evaluation world (most often the actual world of the reader) via an accessibility relation R similar to the one occurring in conditionals. Defining this relation and thereby specifying what the relevance of the text is for individual readers only happens after the whole text has been interpreted, as put forward in the definition of FictionalAssert.

(48) [[FictionalAssert]] = λT. ∀w [T(w) & w is maximally similar to @ otherwise→ R (@)(w)]

One important aspect to note is that this operator works at the level of text, which may explain why certain decisions, like finding a referent for pronouns, can be delayed in lyrical texts. The fact that FictionalAssert only establishes an indirect relation to the actual world, via a conditional, moreover allows for a pragmatic mechanism which we call *apparent flouting*.

Flouting is a term introduced by Grice (1978) and describes the fact that interlocutors can choose to not obey a maxim to create an implicature. An example of disobeying the maxim of quantity is B's utterance in (49).

(49) A: Did you like the Millers?
     B: I liked Mrs. Miller.

B is only giving a partial answer to A's question. Since A assumes B to be cooperative (due to the cooperative principle), she can compute an implicature based on deductive reasoning: B could have said something more informative, i.e. that he liked Mr. and Mrs. Miller. He did not say that he liked Mr Miller. As a result, A can deduce that B does not like Mr. Miller. The reason for B not saying explicitly that he does not like Mr. Miller could be based on politeness. People flout maxims for a specific reason

and with a specific communicative goal in mind. However, it is also possible that they violate the maxim of quantity as exemplified by B's utterance in (50).

(50) A: Where are you going?
     B: Out.

Ruling out the option that B does not know where she is going, A can deduce from the answer that B does not want to give an answer and is just being uncooperative. Thus B is not saying less to produce an implicature but simply to withhold information.

At first glance, it seems like Emily Dickinson is violating the maxim of manner with the beginning of "My Life had stood" in saying something ambiguous.

(51) My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun – In Corners – till a Day

Let us assume, for the sake of the argument and simplicity, that (51) only allows for the two readings in ((52)a) and ((52)b) below.

(52)
    a. I am human and I stand in corners
    b. I am a gun and I stand in corners

The two readings are contradictory and can thus not both be true at the same time. Yet the ambiguity cannot be resolved at this point in the poem and continues to be prominent throughout the whole text and makes a resolution impossible (see chapter 1.6 for a more in-depth discussion). Furthermore, given what we know about poems in general and Emily Dickinson in particular, it is unlikely that she is trying to be uncooperative and is thus violating the manner maxim to confuse the reader. An option that is available is to consider both readings to be relevant and combine them via disjunction (compare Brockmann et al. accepted):

(53) λw: the speaker is human in w & the speaker stands in corners in w
     OR
     λw': the speaker is a gun in w' & the speaker stands in corners in w'

Through the disjunction of the two propositions, we arrive at an overall meaning that states that the speaker is either human or a gun. No contradiction arises. However, this kind of strategy is unlikely to occur in non-fictional discourse, since combining utterances via disjunctions makes the statement considerably weaker when we apply the "standard" Assert operator. Since for Assert the goal is to narrow down possible ways the evaluation world looks like, it is less informative to assert the disjunction of two propositions than a conjunction. The picture looks different for lyrical texts, though. Given that FictionalAssert is a conditional, having a disjunction instead of a conjunction in the antecedent actually makes the statement stronger:

(54) [[FictionalAssert]] = λT. ∀w [the speaker is human in w & the speaker stands in corners in w OR the speaker is a gun in w & the speaker stands in corners in w & w is maximally similar to @ otherwise → R (@)(w)]
"For all worlds w where the speaker is human and stands in corners or where the speaker is a gun and stands in corner it holds that w stands in relation R to the actual world."

The understanding that assertion works differently in lyrical texts allows for both readings to be asserted via disjunction. This disjunction captures that both readings are relevant for the text meaning and even makes the overall assertion stronger, such that in both cases that the speaker is a human being or a gun, a relation between the text-worlds and the evaluation world of the reader can be established. The relevance of both readings comes into play through the reader trying to establish R, the relation of the worlds in which what the text says is true to the actual world. Since both propositions in (53) are part of the text meaning, it forces her to reflect upon the relation between human beings and guns to establish R. This reflection mechanism is crucial for the understanding of the poem (see chapter 1.6 and Brockmann et al. accepted for further discussion). The ambiguity in (51) can thus not be considered a violation/flouting of a maxim. It is a different strategy which seems like flouting/violating conversational maxims at first glance, but, on the level of text,

no maxim is violated and the speaker must be considered fully cooperative. The mechanism is thus described as *apparent flouting*.

Summary: P3–E3

Lyrical texts let us see how pragmatic strategies depend on the text type as well. Assertion works differently in lyrical texts, which requires an additional operator in our inventory of speech act operators (Krifka 1995), FictionalAssert (Bauer & Beck 2014). Given the nature and semantics of this operator, the range of pragmatic mechanisms broadens. We discussed one such mechanism, *apparent flouting*, which enriches our understanding of the relation between text-type and pragmatics in that it provides evidence for an impact of pragmatic mechanisms on the level of text. This has to be seen as an addition to the recent literature on implicature, which focuses on the fact that implicatures can arise locally, below the level of the text (Chierchia et al. 2012). Our data leads to a second refinement of P3 given below.

> (P3'') The special communicative situation created in poetry reveals that different pragmatic strategies, including implicature generation, depend on the text type. The apparent violation of Gricean maxims is an additional mechanism made available by the FictionalAssert operator at work. This mechanism is crucial for the understanding of the text.

3.1.3. <u>Conclusion and outlook</u>

The three main proposals we defended and argued for in this chapter are repeated in their refined versions below:

> (P1')Lyrical texts follow the rules of UG. They deviate from G in ways similar to certain language varieties. They do not allow for violations of universal rules, e.g. type shifting rules and rules of composition.

> (P2')Creative uses of language in poetry reveal the whole potential of language. A large range of the reinterpretive possibilities that the grammar allows for is laid open. The driving force of reinterpretation is not limited to plain uninterpretability; the direction and pathways of reinterpretation are not fixed (*contra* standard coercion theories).

(P3') The special communicative situation created in poetry reveals that choosing between static and dynamic interpretation depends on the text type. Dynamic updates are related to the increment size. The pragmatic step of applying to the given context is possibly postponed to text level in lyrical texts and interpretation proceeds dynamically until then.

(P3'') The special communicative situation created in poetry reveals that different pragmatic strategies, including implicature generation, depend on the text type. The apparent violation of Gricean maxims is an additional mechanism made available by the FictionalAssert operator at work. This mechanism is crucial for the understanding of the text.

Given our results, we find that the often made distinction between "ordinary" language and "poetic" language is misleading in that it suggests that poetic language is not ordinary (enough) to be considered as data by formal semanticists and pragmaticists. Our claim is that lyrical texts use a variety of a given language. The grammar of this language variety deviates in certain respects from the grammar of the standard variety. These deviations are not mistakes, but are systematic and used by a special native speaker to achieve a certain goal. Identifying the system behind these deviations is crucial for understanding the core grammar. Many questions arise for different phenomena when looking at the language variety used in lyrical texts. Our analysis of referential expressions, for example, shows issues regarding the relation between the text type and the mode of interpretation (dynamic versus static) that is chosen. In addition, lyrical texts have a special type of pragmatics due to FictionalAssert which allow for different strategies and mechanisms which are not revealed by a standard variety of the language. What these mechanisms are specifically requires further research.

3.2 Formal Linguistics as a Tool in Literary Analysis

3.2.1. Introduction

We would now like to address the benefits of interdisciplinary work between formal linguistics and literary studies from the perspective of the latter. Similarly to the preceding chapter 3.1, in which we argue for the use of lyrical texts as a data source in formal linguistics, we now turn to the discussion why formal linguistics are a valuable tool in the analysis and interpretation of literary texts, both with regard to Emily Dickinson in particular as well as to fictional texts in general.

In the course of this book, we argue that Emily Dickinson is an intuitive linguist who employs a variety of linguistic phenomena in order to create complex text meaning. We speak of systematic language use because said phenomena create recurring effects in her poetry to a degree where it no longer makes sense to describe them as coincidental; rather, her poetry points to a high command of the complexities that language offers. Cristanne Miller's excellent study *A Poet's Grammar* (1987) has already shed light on the fact that the linguistic peculiarities we find in Dickinson's poetry yield much potential for meaning that may go unnoticed unless we take Dickinson's methodology seriously. We thus continue and extend the framework proposed by Miller in adding the analytical methods of formal linguistics to explore the language of Dickinson's writings.

The preceding chapters have shown how closely linguistic knowledge on the part of the poet is interlinked with complex text meaning. In chapter 1.1, we discussed the poem "This was a Poet," which among other features presents a diametric relationship between a "Poet" and the readers. This finds particular expression in line 14:[1]

(1)   The Robbing – could not harm –

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[1] A discussion of this analysis also appears in more detail in Bauer and Brockmann (accepted).

In order to arrive at the sentence meaning for this line, we are lacking two pieces of information: agent and patient of the robbing-event are left out, which Heim (2001) calls semantic ellipsis. The sentence structure is given in simplified form below:

(2) [[$_{NP}$ the [[robbing *(of) x*] *(by) y*]] [$_{VP}$ not [harm *y*]]]

There are two contextually available antecedents, the "Poet" and the readers, who are equally plausible candidates for the two variables, though it is not clear which antecedent stands for which variable. The two possible readings come along with two respective sentence structures:

(3)
    a. [[$_{NP}$ the [[robbing of the_readers] by the_poet]] [$_{VP}$ not [harm the_readers]]]
    b. [[$_{NP}$ the [[robbing of the_poet] by the_readers]] [$_{VP}$ not [harm the_poet]]]

Formal semantics provides us with a compositional interpretation of the above and results in two distinct propositions; (4) is the compositional interpretation of the structure in (3)a, while (5) is the compositional interpretation of (3)b:

(4) λw: $\exists$!e'[the poet robs the readers in e']. $\exists$ e [BECOMEw (e) (λe''. Not harmed w (e'') (the_readers))&CAUSEw (ιe'[the poet robs the readers in e']) (e)]
"The robbing of the readers by the poet does not harm us (the readers)."

(5) λw: $\exists$!e'[the readers rob the poet in e']. $\exists$ e [BECOMEw(e) (λe''. not harmed w (e'') (the_poet))&CAUSEw (ιe'[the readers rob the poet in e']) (e)]
"The robbing of the poet by the readers does not harm him (the poet)."

The compositional interpretation that formal semantics provides us with shows how the semantic ellipsis leads to two discrete readings of the line given in (1), which can be related to the overall text meaning. Since we are dealing with fictional discourse, both readings may persist at the same time; in fact, this is the very point of the utterance. Since neither agent nor patient of the "Robbing" are specified, the context of the poem allows us to read this line conjunctively in that both the poet robs the readers and the readers rob the poet simultaneously. The relationship between the two agents is thus by the economic means of a semantic ellipsis dramatised as a mutual one, and reciprocal and equitable with respect to the

robbing. Semantic analysis reveals the structures and relations of elements of the sentence in such a way that interpretation becomes valid and draws directly from the text rather than being arbitrary and indiscriminate. Similarly, this analysis allows us to look at critical texts and assess whether these elements of the text have been taken into consideration. An example from Leiter (2007) shows that the mutual relationship of poet and readers in (1) is not always recognised in secondary literature about the poem:

> (6) "So sufficient is [the Poet] unto himself, he would scarcely notice should he be robbed. […] By condemning us 'by Contrast— / To ceaseless Poverty—,' this Poet, far from enhancing his readers, underscores their inadequacy. (208)

Leiter neglects the second reading of the semantic ellipsis and instead highlights only the reading as given in (4); for her, the hierarchy is clearly in favour of the poet.

However, readings, such as Leiter's in (6), gloss over essential elements of Dickinson's poetry and do not take into consideration the complexity of linguistic expression that she achieves. Since Dickinson exploits a variety of linguistic phenomena, it is only fitting that we read her poems by analysing these phenomena. If we can understand what principles underlie the semantics of her poetry, we also achieve a more rewarding and extensive view of her poetics as a whole. Language is the basis of Dickinson's poetry not merely because the poems are linguistic expression, but because they reflect on language and lend a particular power to linguistic expression in their utterance (see our chapter 2.2, "The Linguist as Poet"). In her poems she expresses how she experiences the world, and the key to understanding this experience is formal linguistics which provides us with suitable tools for the task of analysing poetry.

3.2.2. <u>Objectives of Employing Formal Linguistics as a Tool</u>

Having the methods and tools of formal linguistics at hand provides literary studies with a reliable starting point for interpretation. One particularly persistent myth about literary criticism, especially by those who do not actually practise it, is that one can read into a text

whatever one wants to, since all meaning is subjective. This is of course categorically wrong. Semantics as the study of meaning points us precisely to the fact that meaning is not arbitrary nor completely subjective, but that, at least at one point, it must be founded in features of language.

Poetry is a type of text especially well-suited to show how linguistic features and a subsequent interpretation of text meaning are interlinked. Certain poetic features circumvent what would be considered a more direct communication as we are used to from conventional discourse, and instead demand for an intense examination of and reflection on language itself.[2]

The objectives of an interdisciplinary collaboration in the analysis of poetry are twofold and directly related to retaining plausibility of readings as put forth by the text:

(7) Aim 1: Identify (*all*) possible readings.
(8) Aim 2: Dispel and reject implausible or impossible readings.

Linguistic analysis may help us identify possible readings by spelling out precisely the potential and flexibility in the syntactic, lexical, and semantic structure of the text – especially when these might otherwise go unnoticed, when linguistic features are only considered on the surface. Conversely, it allows to reject and dispel implausible and impossible readings that are not based on or underpinned by the text of the poem by showing us limitations and restrictions of the text's linguistic makeup. Though these two aims are certainly related to each other, their implications are not quite the same.

To illustrate this point, we would like to turn back to our example from chapter 1.1. The reciprocal relationship between poet and readers as established in "This was a Poet" showcases the intricacy of linguistic expression at work. Going along our analysis, we argue that this special relationship is actually an essential part of an interpretation of the poem as a whole – yet critics often neglect this (see our discussion in (1) to (6)). The conjunctive reading

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[2] See chapter 2.2, "The Linguist as Poet," in which the complex workings of Dickinson's language use in poetry is explicated in more detail. The German word for poetry, "Dichtung" (figurative "compression" or "concentration") likewise mirrors the idea of poetry as a particularly "compressed" and dense form of writing.

that the syntax cleverly proposes in this poem seems to have been neglected by critics, who rather disambiguate the line and thus remove the level of complexity in the relation between the poet and readers within the context of the poem – and, on another level of communication, that between poet and reader in a more general meta-sense – to the benefit of either agent. Our analysis with the tools of formal linguistics has revealed that this deciding disambiguation is not necessary, nor, indeed, desirable: Any interpretation that does not take the equity between poet and speakers into account by necessity takes away from the overall text meaning and jeopardises literary criticism as somewhat arbitrary after all. Aim 1 as spelt out in (7) is thus met by giving all possible readings of the line, and subsequently concluding an overall text interpretation that considers all of these individual possible readings.

Aim 2 in (8) above is the flipside of the coin, but also an aim in its own right. Consider the following example from Robert Smith's (1996) discussion of "You said that I 'was Great'" (see above, chapter 1.4):

> (9) The possible affective manipulation of the reader by the poem is facilitated by the poem's exaggerated offering to the reader of the possibility of its *own* manipulation. For example, poem 738 is a poetic offering insofar as it is possible to imagine that the voice is that of the poem as it directly interpellates its reader. […] **The poem assumes that it will be what its reader chooses to make it, responsive to every whim. This is generally true of Dickinson's canon: her poems can suit the desire of their readers perfectly**. In this case, whether that reader interprets this poem as representing the voice of Dickinson discussing her varied personae ("if Queen it be") or, my own pun-determined choice, a representation of language speaking itself ("Or Page—please Thee"), or anything else at all ("Or other thing—if other thing there be") is ultimately all the same. **The fact that the speaker/poem offers the possibility that she/it can be made absolutely malleable to the desire of its addressee/reader is all that matters.** My own refashioning of the poem—the interpretation of it as a self-reflexive poetic allegory—is simply a "suitable" example of how the speaker's "Stipulus" ensures her poem's successful initial engagement with a reader's interpretive desire. (1996: 139-40; emphasis added)

In our analysis in chapter 1.4, we show that the poem offers great flexibility with respect to seemingly conflicting attributes in the context of the notoriously underspecified adjective "great," achieved through the speaker's clever play with scales and lexical meaning. Smith thus reads the poem as "a self-reflexive poetic allegory" and transfers this play on to

Dickinson's poeticity. While it is certainly true that the complexity and richness of her poetry rightfully inspires a great variety of criticism, the claim that it "can be made absolutely malleable to the desire of its addressee/reader is all that matters" does seem somewhat far-fetched. If any poem can have any number of arbitrary meanings, does it really have any meaning at all? Or do we only impose individualised, reader-oriented readings on the text, irrespective of what it actually says and thus treat it as a completely blank canvas?

The problem with this stance is obvious and links back to our point about text meaning and interpretation not being arbitrary. If fictional texts did not have meaning specific to the individual text, there would be no point in reading (nor, indeed, writing) them.[3] In the case of "You said," we showed that, while there is a certain amount of flexibility and freedom, there are restrictions as well, namely by the scales addressed within the poem. The speaker refers to scales such as size, height, and rank; even though the different positions on these scales are juxtaposed paradoxically with each other, none of the speaker's examples leaves the frame altogether. "Great" cannot be read as, say, "beverage," or "computer," or anything else entirely haphazard. The point is hence not, as Smith concludes, that text meaning "can suit the desire of their readers perfectly" without further qualification. The linguistic makeup of the text delineates the limitations within which we are moving with regard to interpretation. A close linguistic analysis is important precisely because it specifies not only where flexibilities and possibilities lie, but also which limitations apply and thus adds validity to the resulting interpretations: Within those limits, subjective interpretation has its place by establishing a relation R between the text worlds and the evaluation world. Concurrently, wholly impossible and implausible readings are circumvented by formal linguistic analysis based on the restrictions foregrounded by it.

None of this means that literary criticism cannot extrapolate from the findings of linguistic analysis – on the contrary: the intricate ways in which non-literal meaning is created
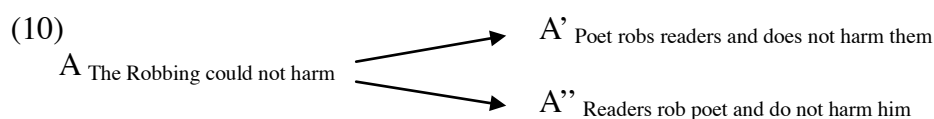
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[3] See also Bauer and Beck (2014), "On the Meaning of Fictional Texts."

by and within literature usually necessitates such an intense reflection that it is nearly impossible to *not* conceptualise further and abstract from the basic grid on the page. There may be countless different roads we can embark on when discussing a text – but the text itself suggests which of these are more plausible than others, and a formal linguistic analysis helps us distinguish between these, and furthers adequacy in interpretation.

3.2.3. <u>Adequacy of Interpretation[4]</u>

If what is formulated in Aims 1 and 2 (phrased in (7) and (8) respectively), the groundwork for text interpretation that can be considered adequate is laid. Working with the tools of formal linguistics not only facilitates analysis and interpretation from the point of view of the critic, but also allows a look in the other direction, i.e. at literary commentary written about fictional texts, and to assess it by testing how well its elements correspond to the text. Adequacy of interpretation is then achieved when the elements of the text and the elements of the interpretation stand in an equivalent relation to each other; that is, if there is an element A in the text, there has to be an element A' in the interpretation, and so on. Likewise, if element A translates to ambiguity in interpretation, there will be both A' and A''. When text complexity increases, then so does the complexity of interpretation. In the case of example (1), the schematics would look like this:

(10)
A The Robbing could not harm → A' Poet robs readers and does not harm them
→ A'' Readers rob poet and do not harm him

Analysing Dickinson's poetry linguistically allows for each of these elements to be catalogued and then re-appear in interpretation accordingly. The schema in (10) illustrates the principle: the semantic ellipsis triggers ambiguity, which, since it cannot be resolved but remains global on the level of text, must find its expression in the overall interpretation of the poem as well. Hence, we speak of a mutual relationship between poet and speaker, in which each has an

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[4] A specific model for approaching adequacy of interpretation is outlined in Bauer and Brockmann, "The Iconicity of Literary Analysis" (accepted).

effect of some kind on the other. Deciding for one of the two readings and excluding the other despite would be detrimental to text interpretation, neglecting that both are expressed in the text. This differentiated reading of the text is facilitated through close formal linguistic analysis, which uncovers mechanisms of language that Dickinson employs in order to create complex text meaning (see our chapter 2.1). It also makes terminology available with which these complex structures can be explained and traced back to *how* they are created, rather than merely recognising the fact *that* they are there. Being thus able to look into the texture of the poet's creative process and verbalising its setup is a definite advantage for literary studies scholars.

3.2.4. <u>FictionalAssert and the Relation R</u>

The pragmatic operator that is at work in the perception of fictional texts[5] is FictionalAssert:

(11) $[[\text{FictionalAssert}_R]] = \lambda T.\ \forall w'[\ T(w')\ \&\ w'$ is maximally similar to @ otherwise$\rightarrow R\ (w')\ (@)]$
'Worlds in which everything the text says is the case and which are maximally similar to the actual world otherwise, are worlds that stand in relation *R* to an evaluation world.'

FictionalAssert as a pragmatic operator is a tool to explain how readers of fictional texts approach the fictional nature of what they are confronted with as opposed to utterances in conventional discourse. The operator is thus not to be considered a novel technique of interpretation but the formalisation of a process that happens in the perception of literature. In the individual analyses of Dickinson's poems discussed in this book, we have showed how the analysis of poetic texts under consideration of FictionalAssert takes place. The literary interpretation of these poems hinges on the basal findings we achieve with the help of formal linguistic analysis. In many cases, this analysis has yielded several different readings that could either be combined via conjunction,[6] or that contradicted each other and had thus to be

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[5] While "fiction" in the English language often refers to only prose texts (cf. *OED* "fiction, *n*." 4.a.), we include both poetry and drama in our discussion of fictionality. See Bauer and Beck (2014).
[6] See chapter 1.5, where the analysis of "I'm Nobody" yields two discrete readings: I_{Ind} (in which "Nobody" is a proper name and refers to an individual) and I_{Prop} (in which "Nobody" is considered the property of being

read in disjunction.[7] The decisive step at this point of interpretation comes into play through the relation R between the worlds established by the text, and the evaluation world of the reader; this relation thus expresses the relevance of a given fictional text for its readers. The expertise of literary studies most significantly sets in at this point of the analysis, drawing on the findings of semantic analysis, and leads the way to felicitous interpretation of a literary text.

Formal Linguistics and Literary Studies: A Collaboration Beyond Dickinson

In the course of this book, we have tried to show that Emily Dickinson is a particularly salient example for the combined analysis of formal linguistics and literary studies for various reasons, particularly because of her own outstanding linguistic intuition and skill. Poetic texts in general are, due to their limited context and relatively short length, ideal to exemplify the detailed process of formal linguistic analysis which ties into literary interpretation, though this method is certainly not exclusive to texts as short as Dickinson's poetry. Long poems as well as dramatic and prose texts can equally be analysed with the tools presented here. One aspect particularly salient for literary studies is the relation R. The evaluation world in the preceding chapters has usually been the actual world (@), though other evaluation worlds are possible. Whereas so far, we have discussed poetry in general and Dickinson's poetry in the particular, we now want to take a brief look at prose texts as well. As far as frame narratives are concerned, for example, FictionalAssert works on multiple levels – both as far as the relation between narrative and reader is concerned, as well as on the interaction of two (or more) of the narrative levels themselves.[8]

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insignificant, and that applies to the speaker). The individual sentence meanings that comprise either of these readings can then be intersected through FictionalAssert and combined through conjunction, i.e. that the speaker is both called Nobody and also insignificant etc.

[7] See chapter 1.6, "My Life had Stood," in which the readings S_{gun}, S_{Ind}, S_{Poem}, S_{Poetry} cannot all be read in conjunction, but offer discrete interpretations of the overall text meaning.

[8] See esp. Lavocat (2016), who discusses the relation between narrative worlds in the context of possible world theory. Another approach is text world theory; see for this Gavins (2007).

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818/1831) is a novel in which several narratives are embedded[9]: on the outermost level lies Walton's epistolary communication to his sister, which encloses Frankenstein's narrative and that of the creature. The interaction between these narratives is, at times, explicitly reflected on. From the beginning, Walton states his intentions to document Frankenstein's oral narrative in writing:

> (12) He then told me, that he would commence his narrative the next day when I should be at leisure. […] I have resolved every night, when I am not engaged, to record, **as nearly as possible in his own words**, what he has related during the day. If I should be engaged, I will at least make notes. (Shelley 1977, 30-31; emphasis added)

The approximation to Frankenstein's words is briefly addressed here. Walton claims his record shall be "as nearly as possible in his own words," and thus allows for minor deviances that might occur due to his not remembering Frankenstein's tale perfectly and verbatim by the time he manages to write it down; his plan to "at least make notes" underlines this uncertainty while it also signals his intent to be as thorough as possible. At this point, the reader cannot know whether Frankenstein's narrative is represented accurately or not, since it is only ever mediated through Walton. The question of whose story we are reading is however raised at the end of the novel:

> (13) Frankenstein discovered that I made notes concerning his history: he asked to see them, and **then himself corrected and augmented them in many places**; but principally in giving the life and spirit to the conversations he held with his enemy. "Since you have preserved my narration," said he, "I would not that **a mutilated one** should go down to posterity." (Shelley 1977, 312; emphasis added)

The reader thus learns that the narrative as mediated so far has in fact been edited by Frankenstein himself, whose word choice in calling Walton's recording (by implication) "mutilated" seems to suggest that the revisions made must have been significant, and that Walton's notes have been "corrected and augmented […] in many places." The reader is consequently prompted to reflect on the interaction of the diegetic levels, both on the level of

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[9] For the sake of simplicity, we use the term of embedded narrative, even though there is some contention to this terminology; Pier (2014) points out that "[s]trictly speaking, however, likening narrative embedding to the concept of embedding in transformational grammar, a concept developed in place of subordination in traditional grammar, is not defensible" and references Greimas and Courtés (1979) who have instead put forth the term of "intercalation," i.e. "the insertion of one story in another, i.e. metadiegetic narration, a relation which is not, in all cases, one of subordination" (Pier 2014).

form, i.e. what meta-function is fulfilled by questioning some parts of the embedded narrative towards the end of the novel,[10] as well as on the level of content: Even though there is, of course, no answer possible, since there is no alternative narrative other than the one the reader is confronted with, the passage in (13) incites questions about those parts of the narrative, specified to be mostly "conversations he held with his enemy," which must have been altered by Frankenstein. We may wonder in what ways he "augmented" them and to what end, or whether there were elements that he did not want to "go down to posterity" other than stylistic issues.[11] Drawing from this, one could, for instance, argue that what we believe to know about Frankenstein's narrative and his interactions with the creature – their being mediated by Walton, i.e. someone other than the homodiegetic protagonist himself – is cast doubt on at the very close of the tale, leaving the reader to reconsider and possibly go back to the beginning or parts of the novel with this circumstance in mind. Since the relationship between Frankenstein and his Creature is such a significant part of the novel, this change is not inconsiderable. FictionalAssert thus comes into play at the intradiegetic level where the reader relates the sets of possible worlds described by the individual narratives to each other (for instance, do they adhere to the same rules and conditions, or does the text signal differences?); the fact that there are competing accounts within W_T has an influence on R. The operator also comes in on the global level of text, where the relation R may then be drawn between the narrated world/diegesis and the actual world. What value the reader concludes for R is, as argued elsewhere, in some ways subjective and depends on many factors, for instance knowledge about narratology and generic conventions that draw on the structure and form of the novel; personal decisions (e.g. how much do we sympathise or feel pity with the creature,

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[10] Some interpretations of the frame narratives in *Frankenstein* are discussed in more detail in, e.g., Benford (2010) and Newman (1986). The functions of embedded narratives in general are manifold; Nelles (1997, 138-49), as one example, classifies them as both "dramatic, as it defers or interrupts the embedding narrative; thematic, by highlighting contrast or analogy" (Pier 2014).

[11] A comparable mechanism is at play in "If it had no pencil," where the speaker poses a question, the answers of which by necessity we can only approximate, yet never answer conclusively, since the setup is fictional from the go and thus ultimately not accessible. See chapter 1.2.

do we consider Frankenstein's actions morally reprehensible and/or unforgivable, etc.) also come into play here. Yet they can be traced back to the text itself, in the same way as has been explained above. By collecting and analysing local phenomena that appear within individual passages and combining them, a global interpretation of the text is achieved. FictionalAssert, by considering the differences and relations between the text worlds and the actual world, accounts for the non-literal assertion that takes place when reading a fictional text; the intersection between all local readings leads to a reflection on the part of the reader, who can draw the consequences from these findings, and consequently establish the relation R between worlds in which what the text says is the case and the evaluation world. To link this back to the prose example from Frankenstein above, establishing the relation R becomes complicated since we have learnt about the circumstances that make the relation to truth problematic:

> (14) R1: If Frankenstein had a hand in revising the recordings, especially those on his interactions with the Creature, he might have an agenda in depicting himself in a more sympathetic light, especially since he told the story in the first place. Said passages are thus called into question, and may be re-considered retrospectively.

> (15) R2: From the beginning, the claim is one of authenticity: Walton records Frankenstein's narrative for him, and, since he has no part in Frankenstein's story for the most part, does not seem to have an interest in changing it significantly. Frankenstein's late admission that Walton's narrative would have been "mutilated" without his additions and corrections re-evaluates this claim of authenticity and raises the question of whose story we have read. In the context of the Gothic novel, this also has implications on the fantastic elements of the narrative, which are retrospectively obfuscated by means of form rather than content.

These are only examples, but they show that what is at work in the evaluation and interpretation of Dickinson's poetry is also at work in other fictional texts whose form differs significantly. Emily Dickinson is a singularly well-suited example to demonstrate both how FictionalAssert works and in how far a linguistic analysis allows a differentiated view on what poetry can achieve – but the principles are at play elsewhere as well. Emily Dickinson, for her part, simply excels in writing poetry that is both product and stimulus of remarkable linguistic skill.

3.3 The Value of Collaboration between Formal Linguistics and Literary Studies: Concluding Remarks

Formal linguistics are a valuable analytical tool in literary studies. Though the focus of this book is Emily Dickinson and a selection of her poetry, the principles underlying the approach presented here are universally applicable in literary studies. Linguistic analysis on the level of semantic structures and formalisation allows literary studies insight into only into the fact *that* but particularly into the question *how* text meaning is generated. Moreover, linguistic analysis also provides critics with the tools to evaluate and study criticism as such. By considering factors such as adequateness of interpretation and faithfulness to the linguistic setup of a text, scholarly discussion becomes much more effective and profitable; it prevents continuous talking at cross purposes and instead establishes a reliable base for discussion. The validity of interpretation and critical reflection can be ascertained and negotiated on clear terms. Concurrently, we have also seen that poetic texts are indeed a valuable data source for formal linguistic analysis that is concerned with linguistic theory on natural grammar. Insights from literary scholarship serve to guide linguistic analysis, especially as regards fictional texts, which are not a prominent data source in formal linguistics yet. In particular the consideration of non-literal meaning and rhetorical figures can play a valuable part in the formal semantic interpretation of compositional parts of an utterance. Dickinson's grammar in particular has been shown to inform linguistic theories of context-sensitive phenomena, as well as theories of context-update in pragmatics. These findings come together in the formal representation of the pragmatic operator FictionalAssert, which shows how both disciplines work together and how fictional texts are related to the actual world by readers.

Emily Dickinson's grammar has been under scrutiny in this book. We hope to have shown the fruitfulness of formally analysing her language and combining these findings with literary criticism, both to further our understanding of her grammar and poeticity, as well as to

draw conclusions for the two disciplines formal linguistics and literary studies and their collaboration with each other.

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