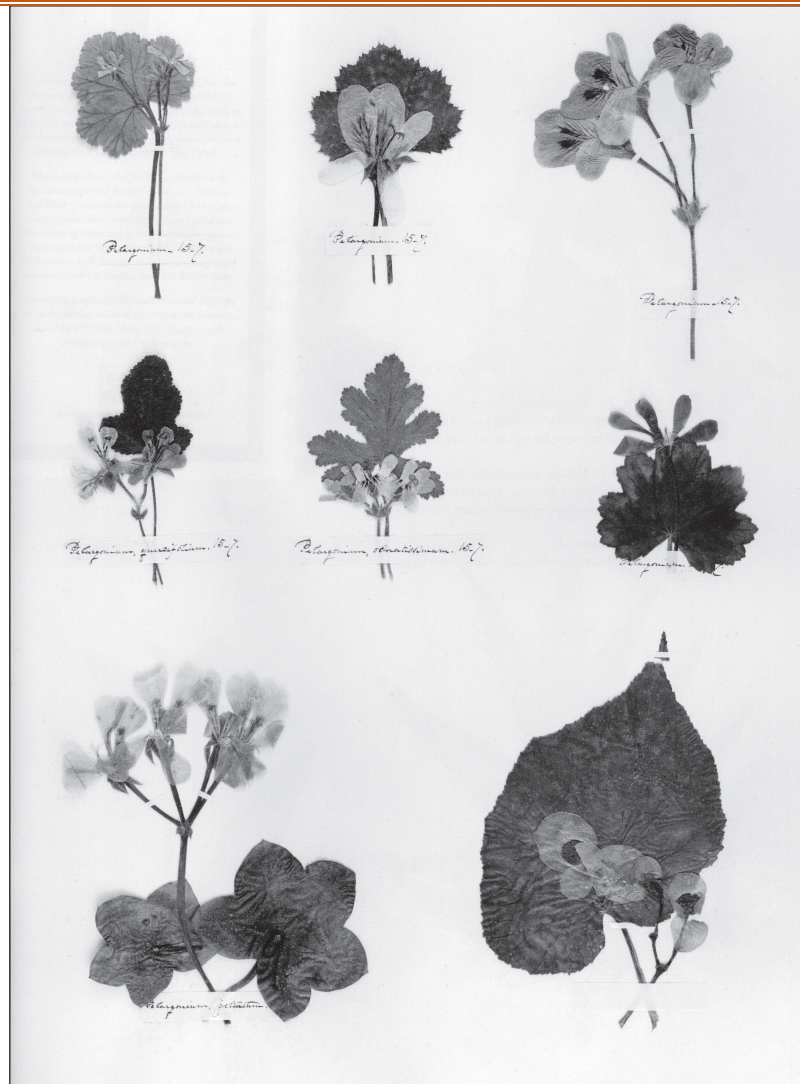

BOTANICAL ALLUSIONS AND SENSORY IMAGERY IN EMILY DICKINSON

A Stimulation of the Five Senses



Bachelor Thesis *English Language and Culture*

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Cover image

A page from Dickinson's herbarium showing her classification of a variety of plants of the genus *Pelargonium* or *Geranium* (Dickinson et. al.).

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Abstract

Emily Dickinson's life revolved around an expansive interest in botany. From a young age, Dickinson pursued gardening whilst also being educated in the natural sciences. Her affinity for botanical studies is reflected in her writing, in which numerous of flowers and plants are mentioned. Dickinson was preoccupied with nature in its entirety; in her poetry she describes natural phenomena utilising vivid imagery which appeals to the senses of the reader. The botanical allusions in Dickinson's poetry function as a means to evoke these senses. The current study aims to analyse the impact of botanical allusions and the use of imagery on the senses of the reader in Dickinson's poetry, by providing an in-depth textual analysis of three of her poems: "I tend my flowers for thee", "Come slowly, Eden!" and "They have a little Odor – that to me". During this analysis, botanical allusions and sensory imagery are highlighted. As a result, the botanical allusions in combination with the use of imagery are found to evoke the five senses of the reader, resulting in a multisensory experience of the poem. As a secondary focus on the study, the potential epistemological effect of botanical references in Dickinson's poetry is studied by analysing the scientific knowledge reflected in her poetry, as well as by conducting literary research on the history of poetic botany. As a result, the occurrence of botanical terminology and knowledge imbedded in Dickinson's poetry is found to convey scientific knowledge to the reader, and thus serve as a form of didactic poetry.

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1. Introduction

Emily Dickinson's writing was inspired by an expansive interest in botanical studies. Her knowledge of botany is reflected in her poetry; in several of her poems she carefully observes and describes flora and fauna. Earlier scholars have noted that Dickinson wrote close to 300 poems that included natural phenomena, from which a large number alludes to flowers and plants (Wang 49). Flowers and plants are a reoccurring theme in the imagery used in Dickinson's poetry, usually designated by name (McNaughton 10). In combination with these flowers, fauna are described such as bees, butterflies, birds and snakes to create vivid images (McNaughton 11). Dickinson observed nature through her senses; she was aware of nature in all its diversity. Intuitively, she knew that there was a reality that could not be expressed or understood (McNaughton 33). According to Whicher, her attitude towards nature was comparable to that of an artist (Mc Naughton 33). Whilst being utterly preoccupied by nature, Dickinson realized that the rest of the world did not necessarily share similar experiences with nature:

Had we the eyes without our Head –
 How well that we are Blind! –
 We could not look upon the Earth –
 So utterly unmoved – . (Dickinson)

In this stanza, Dickinson expresses the inability of many to observe nature to its fullest. Even though we might have eyes, Dickinson states that we are blind; we look at the Earth without being moved. In her poetry Dickinson attempts to counter this problem: she commonly incorporates imagery related to nature in order to make her readers share her experiences with regard to nature. Thus, her poetry overflows with vivid appeals to the senses (Mc Naughton 18). By extensively alluding to flowers, plants, bees in a descriptive way, her poetry evokes all senses such as sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. As a consequence, the reader receives

an opportunity to intensively live in a world of sense, filled with forms, colours, flowers, song of birds and various spices (Mc Naughton 18). It is as if Dickinson aims to open the eyes of the reader and to awake the reader's body to all the beauty found in daily life.

Whereas several critics have analysed the notion of flowers and plants in Dickinson's poetry (Guthrie; Farr and Carter; McNaughton; Wang; Erickson), less attention in literary studies has been devoted to the way in which the botanical allusions stimulate the external five senses of the reader: sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. The botanical allusions in Dickinson's poetry function as a means to evoke these senses. As a consequence, imagery is used to describe the senses evoked by the botanical allusions. This way, the combination of botanical allusions and imagery lead to a stimulation of the senses of the reader, resulting in a multisensory experience of the poem. This thesis aims to study the impact of botanical allusions and the use of imagery on the senses of the reader in a selection of poems by Emily Dickinson. As a secondary focus of the study, the potential epistemological impact of botanical allusions on the reader will be discussed.

First of all, Dickinson's background and interest in botany will be further explored in chapter 2. Secondly, the evolution of poetic botany as an eighteenth-century moment will be discussed, as it might have been of inspiration to Dickinson's poetry. Thirdly, in order to provide an insight into the exploration of the five senses within poetry, an overview will be given on the evolution and use of sensory imagery in the nineteenth century, discussing the concept of synesthesia. Subsequently, in chapter 3, a textual analysis of a selection of poems from Dickinson will be provided in order to argue for the use of botanical allusions and imagery, and the way in which they stimulate the five senses. For each poem, an in-depth analysis will be provided, highlighting the botanical allusions and imagery within the poem. Finally, in chapter 4, the impact of botanical allusions on the reader will be discussed, divided into a section devoted to the multisensory experiences and a section devoted to the

conveyance of knowledge and the epistemological potential of Dickinson's poetry. During this discussion, recurring botanical motifs in Dickinson's poetry will be discussed as a trigger for each of the five senses, leading to a multisensory experience for the reader.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 A Background in Botanical Studies

Flowers played a central role in Emily Dickinson's life. The following section will provide a biographical note on the development of Dickinson's interest for flowers and plants.

Dickinson's profound interest in botany emerged during her childhood. She grew up in the town of Amherst, Massachusetts, where she was classically schooled, attending Amherst Academy and subsequently Mary Lyon's Female Seminary (Farr and Carter 1). During her education at Amherst Academy she studied a variety of disciplines, such as Mental Philosophy, Geology, Latin, Botany, Ecclesiastical History, Algebra, Euclid and Electricity (Erickson 46). Subsequently, at Mary Lyon's Female Seminary she took the opportunity to develop her studies further, where she studied Ancient History, Chemistry, Physiology, Astronomy, Natural Philosophy and Algebra (Erickson 46). It is worth noting that these subjects are likely to have given her a solid foundation in the natural sciences. In addition, it will have given her access to books, literature and an introduction into botanical studies.

Most of her writing she produced after the age of thirty, at her father's 14-acre property overlooking Amherst's Main Street. At the time, Dickinson was primarily known as a gardener rather than a poet. Dickinson's life clearly revolved around plants and flowers: her poetry, that was mostly privately published, often consisted out of letters pinned together by flowers (Farr and Carter 1). Another example of her preoccupation with flowers is her meeting with T. W. Higginson, who wrote about her unique introduction: "She came to me with two day lilies which she put in a sort of childlike way into my hand & said 'These are my introduction' in a sort frightened breathless childlike voice" (qtd. in Wang 49). By communicating through means of flowers, both in the written and the spoken language,

Dickinson expresses her preoccupation with botany, whilst also emphasizing the metaphorical meanings that she assigned to certain flowers throughout her life.

It is commonly known that Dickinson was already preoccupied with gathering, tending and categorizing flowers before she started writing. Even when writing became her main occupation, she would still cultivate plants and flowers on a part of her father's property, as well as in a conservatory that was built just for her in their botanical garden (Far and Carter 3). Since the age of twelve Dickinson helped her mother in the garden, at a house on West Street, and later on the large property on Main Street. The gardens on Main Street were called the "Homestead" and were tended by Dickinson and her mother and sister (Far and Carter 3-4). At the age of fourteen, she mentioned her interest in making an herbarium in a letter to her friend, Abiah Root: "Have you made an herbarium yet? I hope you will if you have not, it would be such a treasure to you; 'most all the girls are making one" (Sewall 11).

During the 1860s and 1870s her artistic productivity was thriving, while she was also learning the skills of growing gardenias, jasmine, sweet peas, heliotrope, Gallica roses, oleander, lilies as well as many other flowers. Her choice of flowers was often uncommon and required specific knowledge and insight in order to grow and tend them correctly (Farr and Carter 4), emphasizing her expertise within the field of botany. In 1886, when she died at the age of 55, flowers played a central role in her funeral, as Dickinson requested to have her coffin carried from the Dickenson's' parlour through fields of buttercups to the West cemetery, always in sight of the house. Dickinson's obituary, written by her sister-in-law Susan, was published in *The Springfield Republican* and further reflected on her housekeeping arts and horticultural skills (Farr and Carter 5). Thus, from a young age until the end of her life, flowers clearly played a central role in Dickinson's life: from verbal to written communication; to the symbolic use of flowers during her own funeral. As a result, the

meaning and importance of flowers during Dickinson's life is well-documented in her written work.

2.2 Poetic Botany

Whereas Dickinson's inspiration for writing about botany might have aspired from her private life as a gardener, eighteenth century poetry might have contributed to her inspirations.

In the second half of the eighteenth-century botanical studies rapidly gained popularity, when Carl Linnaeus, a Swedish naturalist, published his *Philosophia Botanica* in 1751 (Bailes 224). Linnaeus is well-known for his system of botanical classification called the Linnaean system. His system was used all over the world in order to study plants, primarily for medicinal purposes (Mckertich and Shilpa 37). Before publishing his *Philosophia Botanica*, Linnaeus published *Systema Naturae* in 1735: a controversial botanical classification system which classified plants based on their sexual properties (George 2). Classes were distinguished by the number of male stamens or parts for each flower, whilst orders in the classes were distinguished by the number of female parts or pistils (George 2). Due to the system's sexual nature and terminology, it was considered controversial at the time, and was often referred to as the 'sexual system' (George 2). As these classification systems emerged, botany gradually became a common theme in poetry in the eighteenth-century. Whereas priorly plants were primarily studied in terms of their use to humans, botanical knowledge now became increasingly presented in books and works of art (Mckertich and Shilpa 41). In 1791, Erasmus Darwin, a doctor, scientist, inventor, philosopher and poet published his work "The Botanic Garden, a Poem in Two Parts" (Packham 195). With this work, he inaugurated the eighteenth-century movement, which can be referred to as "poetic botany". In Darwin's poem "The Loves of the Plants" (1789) the Linnaean system of botanical classification is reflected in combination with a marked use of stylistic devices such as personification (Packham 194). Together with "The Loves of the Plants", the poem "The Economy of Vegetation" (1791) brought widespread popularity to Darwin in the 1790s (Packham 195). In his "The Loves of the Plants" Darwin versifies the

Linnaean system of botany, thereby revealing the epistemological potential of poetic botany (Bailes 225). In 1791, Darwin published “The Botanic Garden”, in which he emphasized the Linnaean sexual content, with the goal to encourage women to engage with their sexuality through botany. (George 3; George 16-7). As a result, Darwin’s “The Botanic Garden” inspired many literary ladies to write about botany (George 3). This way, Darwin’s poetry served as an important source of inspiration for female writers in the eighteenth century, such as Charlotte Smith, Sarah Hoare and Frances Arabella Rowden, who all included botanical studies in their poetry (George 3). Even a century later, Darwin inspired female writers to write poetry related to botany, such as Felicia Hemans. It is plausible that Darwin served as a source of inspiration for Emily Dickinson as well: comparable to Darwin’s poetry, Dickinson often emphasizes or even questions the sexuality of the plants and flowers when describing them in her poems. She tends to express sexual desire openly through floral language (Petrino 153). As described by Hughes: “She uses her poems and her poetic imagination to ponder “her” gender and the assumptions that created it (19). For example, in “There is a flower that Bees prefer” (Dickinson), she overturns the literary convention where the bee is supposed to represent the man, whereas the flower represents the woman, as often seen in nineteenth-century women’s writing (Guthrie 73-5). In that perspective, Dickinson’s poetry was just as controversial as Darwin’s. More examples of sexual desire expressed through floral language will be provided in the textual analysis in chapter 3.

The use of science in poetry, however, often received criticism. Smith’s use of science in her poetry was commented upon by both *The British Critic* and *The Monthly Review*, as being a “pursuit [that] may seem less worthy the attention of a poet, and less calculated to excite those strong emotions in the reader which poetry should endeavor to awaken” (Bailes 242). Additionally, her poems were referred to as “too technically botanical” (Bailes 242). In the 19th century Linnaeus’ system was gradually replaced with the natural method of botanical

classification (Bailes 243). In 1821, Samuel Frederick Gray published a botanical work offering a full-scale system, based on the natural system. This marked change in botanical studies was reflected in nineteenth century poetic approaches to science. Hemans' poetry for example, distances both herself and Linnaeus from serious science (Bailes 243).

2.3 The Concept of Synesthesia in the Nineteenth Century

Apart from references to botany, Dickinson utilises imagery in her poetry that appeals to all the senses, in other words: sensory imagery. Through the means of imagery Dickinson explores and expresses the senses she experiences in her daily life:

They have a little Odor — that to me
 Is metre — nay — 'tis Poesy —
 And spiciest at fading — celebrate —
 A Habit — of a Laureate — (Dickinson)

This poem is one of many examples in which Dickinson describes several senses that merge into one another. This poem, amongst more of her poems related to synesthesia, will be further analysed in chapter 3.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, gradually more attention was devoted to the five senses. During this time, the concept of synesthesia emerged. Synesthesia is a phenomenon that can take many different forms (Jewanski et al. 259). It can be described as “the transfer of qualities from one sensory domain to another” (Marks). Additionally, it can serve as a way to unify the arts through a psychological unity of the senses (Marks). Since different forms of art appeal to different senses, synesthesia can unify but also distinguish different artistic forms (Marks). The phenomenon was first referred to in 1772, when it was described in a quote by the German poet and philosopher Johan Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) as an “obscure feeling”:

I am familiar with more than one example in which people, perhaps due to an impression from childhood, by nature could not but through a sudden onset immediately associate with this sound that colour, with this phenomenon that quite different, obscure feeling, which in the light of leisurely reason’s comparison has no relation with it at all—for who can compare sound and colour, phenomenon and

feeling? (qtd. in Jewanski et al. 260)

Throughout the nineteenth century the concept of synesthesia became further discussed and developed. Various scientists mentioned similar phenomena, devoting their attention to the five senses (Jewanski et al.260-9). In 1902 a French article appeared written by the poet Victor Segalen (1878-1919), who applied the term synesthesia to poetry and stylistic devices of French symbolistic poets from the second half of the nineteenth century, thereby extending its previous psychological definition (Jewanski et al 274-5). In 1892 Millet described the metaphors in German poets as “the color sounds” thereby referring to a similar phenomenon. Many poets from the second half of the 19th century combined different senses in their poetry. An example is Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), who described perfumes, colours and musical tones in his poem “Correspondances” (Jewanski et al. 275).

Marks (1984) describes two significant features that characterize synesthesia in poetry: 1) the intimation of meaning by sound, named sound symbolism, and 2) the potency of figurative language, such as metaphors (432-3). Both these features can trigger the universal senses. For example, he argues how different vowels can evoke different colours: low pitches vowels being associated with dark colours and heaviness, warmth, while high pitches vowels tend to be associated with light colours, lightness, and light-hearted youthful love. In a similar way, cross-modal connections can be found in metaphors, by phrases such as ‘bitter cold’ (Marks 434). In his study, Marks presents several experiments proving the cross-modal connections found in both synesthetic metaphors and sound symbolism (435-45).

3 Botanical Allusions and Sensory Imagery in a Selection of Poems

As described in chapter 2, the concepts of poetic botany and synesthesia emerged and developed throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Dickinson poetry exploits both of these concepts, combining the two into vivid floral imagery. The following chapter will offer an in-depth textual analysis of the combination of botanical descriptions and floral imagery in three poems by Emily Dickinson: “I tend my flowers for thee”, “Come slowly, Eden!” and “They have a little Odor – that”. During this analysis, the stimulation of the five senses will be highlighted.

I tend my flowers for thee

“I tend my flowers for thee” (appendix A) is an example of a poem that reflects Dickinson’s botanical background, as it mentions various types of flowers and plants. The poem was most likely composed in the late fall of 1861 or early 1862 (Farr and Carter 197). In this poem, Dickinson addresses a “bright absentee”, which could refer to a lover currently being absent. Farr and Carter argue how her “bright absentee” might refer to Samuel Bowles, who is known to have travelled to Europe in April 1862. In addition, he is known to have visited Dickinson, as well as to have shared her interest in gardening, often exchanging gifts of flowers with her (Farr and Carter 197-8). The poem discusses the tending of the flowers for the “bright absentee” after which several different types of flowers and plants are mentioned to express an inability to garden due to the bright absentee’s absence (Farr and Carter 198). Plant types that are mentioned are “Fuschzia”, “Geraniums”, “Daisies”, “Cactus”, “Carnations”, “Hyacinths”, “Globe Roses” and “Calyx”. Each plant or flower seems to be associated with a different image or feeling; their descriptions seem to have different connotations, described by Farr and Carter as vivid floral imagery (198-9). As described by Hughes the poem “burgeons

into a riot of color, odor, and kinetic energy as the flowers she is tending enact various excesses of longing and allure”: each description can be correlated with one of the five senses (19).

The first plant that is mentioned is the fuchsia: “My Fuschzia’s Coral Seams/Rip – while the Sower – dreams –” (Dickinson). Fuchsia is the botanical name of a genus of a flowering plant (Brickell 202). The plant can be described as a bell-shaped flower, usually hanging down (Brickell 202). The image of this flower could therefore be related to a feeling of sadness or feeling down. However, the phrase: “My Fuschzia’s Coral Seams” refers to a “coral” and “seams” as well. Her reference of corals emphasises her background in the natural sciences. By mentioning “coral” an image of a bright colour is evoked. Corals are usually related to a deep pink colour. This way, the vision of the reader is triggered. “Seams”, however, could refer to fabric, thereby engaging the sense of touch. “My Fuschzia’s Coral Seams” possibly refers to the petals of the fuchsia flower, as “Coral” implies a deep pink colour and “Seams” implies the binding of fabrics, or perhaps in this case the connection between the different petals. The line is followed by the word “Rip”, implying the tearing or breaking of the seams. “Rip” has a negative connotation and thereby amplifies the connotation of sadness that could be inferred with the image of the fuchsia’s hanging down. “My Fuschzia’s Coral Seams/Rip” could indicate the petals of the flower breaking or falling apart. In the meanwhile, “the Sower – dreams –”. Planting seeds for the growth of plants or flowers is often referred to as sowing. The verb “dreams” evokes a feeling or idea of hope. This line could imply the hope of new life and starting over, or in this case, the hope of the Bright Absentee returning, which could make new petals grow after they ripped.

The second stanza introduces geraniums, daisies and the cactus to the poem. “Geraniums – tint – and spot”. The verb “tint” implies a colouration of the flower and in combination with the verb “spot” engages the sense of vision. “Spot” could refer both to the

leaves of the plants obtaining spots as often occurs for plants as a result of fungal spores in the air, or to the concept of seeing or observing. The geranium is a genus of plants that is often associated with houseplants, as this type of plant thrives well indoors (85). Due to their need of light, geraniums are often placed in front of the window, in a way ‘looking’ out the window (Boyd 85). In the nineteenth century, the geranium was a very popular plant, commonly placed in a comfortable sitting room during winter, as they gave colour and grew in the midst of winter (Boyd 85-6). The appearance of the geranium can be compared to the appearance of an eye, due to the way in which the colours of the pistil of the flower resembles the colours of the iris of the eye (figure 2). Thus, due to their appearance as well as their common placement in front of the window, the definition of “spot” related to seeing or observing seems to suit the type of plant well. Another name often given to the *Geranium phaeum* is “Mourning widow” (Brickell 223). The geraniums in “I tend my flowers for thee” are therefore likely to emphasize the sorrow of the poet: the poet seems to be looking out the window waiting for her “absentee”. The “Low Daisies”, however, “dot”. Here again, an image is created and the vision of the reader is engaged. Daisies can be described as white petals surrounding a yellow centre shaped like a dot. A collection of daisies can therefore be described as a large collection of dots (figure 3). In addition to that, the alliteration in “Daisies – dot” strengthens the visualization. Farr and Carter argue how the use of “dot” could have been an older use of the word “spot”, which would imply a similar meaning for this flower as the previous line indicated for geraniums (198). Dotting, however, as a verb, could refer to the plant scattering on the ground, perhaps describing the wilting or decaying of the daisies (Farr and Carter 198).

Subsequently, the Cactus is described as splitting her Beard – To show her throat –”. The Cactus is given the female gender by utilising the pronoun “her”, contradicted by the word “Beard” following the pronoun. “My Cactus – splits her Beard” calls the sense of touch to mind, as both Cactus and Beard can be related to a sense of sharpness. The action of

splitting a Beard might remind the reader of shaving, another visualization awakening the imagination as a consequence of the floral and sensory imagery. This line is followed by the argumentation: “To show her throat”, which according to Farr and Carter serves as a sexual innuendo where flowers are metaphorically compared to women, dressing and undressing in the same way, resulting in the “showing of her throat” (198). This interpretation works well together with the feminine connotation given to the cactus.



Figure 2: The central part of the geranium resembling the iris of the eye (Brickels 270).



Figure 3: A collection of daisies resembling a large collection of dots (Brickell 227).

In the third stanza, various flowers are named while the poem becomes increasingly sensual. As described by Farr and Carter, the iambic/trochaic rhythm of the poem now becomes livelier, while “sensual flowers shed their scents flirtatiously” (198). The livelier iambic/trochaic rhythm of the poem introduces a musical note, evoking the sense of hearing. The first flowers mentioned are the carnations, which “tip their spice”, thereby referring to flavour, evoking the sense of taste. The verb, tipping, however, most likely refers to the botanical term used for removing off the ends of the flower. Thus, it seems the carnations are losing their spice. Carnations are known for their medical use against an upset stomach or fever, although also often associated with love (Parpală and Loveday 166-67; Al-Snafi). Thus, the carnations can be associated with a negative connotation, expressing the upset state the poet is in, as well as her sorrow and loss. Following, the Bees “pick up”, where a motion as well as a sound is implied, evoking the sense of sound. In the subsequent line “A Hyacinth – I hid – / Puts out a Ruffled Head”, an alliteration of Hyacinth, hid and Head occurs, where the lack of vision is emphasized by “hid”, again appealing to the sense of sight. Referring to

the flower hyacinth, Dickinson introduces a bright blue to purple colour to the poem, again engaging the reader's sight. The word "ruffled" serves as an onomatopoeia and consequently evokes a certain sound, and thus the sense of hearing. The fifth line of this stanza "And odors fall" directly refers to the sense of smell, engaging the reader's senses to their fullest extent. "From flasks – so small" then reminds the reader of perfume, awaking their sense of smell even more. Subsequently, "Globe Roses – break their satin – flake", where the word satin once again refers to fabric and thus a certain texture or sense of touch. However, globe roses breaking reminds the reader of the breaking sound of glass, evoking the sense of hearing. In combination with the roses, a "satin flake" could refer to the petals of the roses. Farr and Carter describe the satiny roses falling apart as being a symbol for love being denied, assigning a sorrowful mood to the line (198). In addition, their analysis notes the fact that most flowers mentioned in this poem blossom and decline in different seasons. However, in the poem, the flowers are described as decaying simultaneously. As a result, Farr and Carter interprets the "Garden floor" as the poet's mind or a mirror of the poet's meditation, as opposed to the grounds of the actual garden (198). Dickinson clearly seems to express a state of sorrow, reflected in the flowers mentioned in her poem.

In the final stanza, Dickinson seems to impersonate with a flower, as she writes "Thy flower". She now repeats the illness caused by the absence of "Her Lord", like all other flowers mentioned previously suffered from. Subsequently, she refers to calyx, a collective term for the sepals of a flower commonly utilised in botanical studies (Merriam-webster): "I'll dwell in Calyx". The sepals refer to the outermost part of the flower, typically of green colour, surrounding the petals of the flowering plant in a leaf-shaped structure (Milne). The function of sepals or calyx is to support and protect a flower, closing up around the flower until the flower is ready to bloom (Milne). By referring to calyx, she might address her inability to blossom due to the absence of "Her Lord". This statement is emphasized by the word "Gray",

implying a lack of colour and thus a lack of blossoming. By describing a grey colour, the sense of sight is called upon, while simultaneously setting a dark, sorrowful mood. The poem ends by describing herself as a Daisy: “Thy Daisy –/ Draped for thee!”. Once again, the theme of fabric and clothing reoccurs as the verb “draped” is used. The word expresses a state of sorrow, emphasized by the alliteration and the exclamation mark at the end.

Come slowly, Eden!

Botanical allusions described with vivid imagery can also be found in “Come slowly, Eden!” (appendix B). In this poem, Dickinson refers to Eden, which to her meant paradise (Farr and Carter 155). At the time, the word “Eden” was widely used to describe a tropical “paradise” (Farr and Carter 153). In the nineteenth-century, Latin America, and in particularly Brazil, became known as a contemporary Eden in literary discourse (Farr and Carter 153). In addition, due to the well-known notion of Eden in the bible, the term Eden was often used in the high art in the nineteenth century as a synonym for joy (Farr and Carter 154). By utilizing the term Eden in her poem Dickinson sets the scene of a paradise, introducing a mood of joy, freedom and relaxation. By utilizing this word in her first line, the reader is invited to enter a vivid world of joy, while the senses are slowly triggered.

The first botanical allusion in this poem are the “Jessamines” or in other words, jasmines. The jasmine is a bright, white flower (Brickell 196), originating from tropical areas, or warm areas such as the Mediterranean (Brickell 16; Farr and Carter 155). It seems like Dickinson tended to fantasize about far-off floral regions where tropical flowers could grow, symbolizing paradise and delight (Farr and Carter 155). The allusion to the jasmine, being a tropical flower, evokes a feeling of warmth. It is described in combination with the word “sip”, stimulating the sense of taste: “Lips unused to Thee –/ Bashful – sip thy Jessamines –” (Dickinson). Unused lips as well as the adverb “bashful” reminds the reader of a first kiss,

which conveys a feeling of fragile, innocent love. The white colour of the jasmines can be related to purity, thereby adding to the image of innocent love. Thus, in this case, by referring to botany and describing it with imagery, Dickinson awakens the sense of taste as well as a feeling of bright, innocent, pure love.

Other botanical allusions in this poem include “the fainting Bee”, “his flower”, “his nectars”. The Bee evokes the sense of hearing, especially in combination with the word “hums”, in the second stanza. Subsequently, his nectars remind the reader of taste, while in the last sentence the word “balms” reminds the reader of softness, and touch.

They have a little Odor – that to me

“They have a little Odor – that to me” (appendix C) is a short poem that expresses Dickinson’s senses, stimulated by her flowers. “They have a little Odor – that to me / Is metre – nay – ‘tis Poesy.” In the poem, she compares the smell of the flowers to both the rhythm of poetry and poetry itself, thereby emphasizing the imagery that she relates to her flowers. Just like poetry, the flowers seem shape her world and trigger her imagination as well as her senses. By comparing the odour of the flowers to metre – a term closely related to music and sound – she is describing a multisensory experience, evoked by the flowers. Such a transfer from one sensory domain into another could be described as a case of synesthesia (Jewanski et al.). The poem continues to appeal to the senses with: “And spiciest at fading – celebrate –/ A Habit – of a Laureate – ” (Dickinson). The flowers are described as “spiciest at fading”, an expression that evokes the idea of inhaling the scent of the flower, stimulating the sense of taste as well as the sense of smell. Here again, a synesthetic experience is evoked, where one of the senses transfers into another. It is plausible that the flowers she is referring to in this line are in fact oriental lilies, as they tend to have a rush of odour or perfume before they start to wither and become scentless and are thus in a way “spiciest at fading” (Farr and Carter 151-152). In addition, her description of “spiciest” could refer to the flowers being of tropical

origin, from her conservatory for example (Farr and Carter 152). Subsequently, “spiciest at fading” is described as “A Habit” and compared to “A Habit – of a Laureate –”. It is very likely that she is referring to poems from an aging poet laureate (Farr and Carter 152). At the same time, she could also be referring to the plant laurel: another, although more hidden, botanical allusion.

Overall, it seems like Dickinson is drawing a comparison between flowers and poetry. She explains the stimulation of the senses caused by flowers; and importantly, she expresses how closely flowers are related to poetry, as both flowers and poetry appeal to the senses and the imagination.

4 The Impact on the Reader

The botanical allusions in Dickinson's poetry affect the reader in two different ways. As seen in the close reading of a selection of Dickinson's poems, the botanical references cause the senses to be stimulated, emphasized by reoccurring motives used in Dickinson's poetry. On the other hand, the botanical references have an epistemological effect: the occurrence of science in Dickinson's poetry results in a conveyance of scientific knowledge.

4.1 The Impact of Botanical Descriptions on the Five senses

The five senses impacted by the botanical descriptions in Dickinson's poetry are sight, touch, taste, smell and hearing. The flowers and plants are described utilising vivid imagery, which consequently allows the reader to see, feel, taste, smell and hear the flowers or bees being described. As a result, the reader receives the opportunity to perceive the world through Dickinson's eyes, ears, nose, skin and lips: a multisensory experience. As described by McNaughton: "although she loved the sensible world for its own sake, she nevertheless continually sought the inner meaning of all that she saw, heard, smelled, tasted, touched, and felt; and it is in her imagery that she reveals most completely her own reaction to experience" (31). This subchapter will discuss the impact of botanical descriptions on each of the five senses of the reader, utilising reoccurring motives in her poems.

First of all, the sense of taste is triggered by the so-called spices of the plants: the carnations "tip their spice" while other flowers are "spiciest at fading". The reoccurring motive of spices might originate from Dickinson's interest in far-off, warm, tropical places such as Peru and East India (Farr and Carter 152). However, it does not seem like she had concrete plans to visit these places except in her dreams, poems and in her private garden (Farr and Carter 152). The flowers full of spices nonetheless remind the reader of tropical flowers with a distinct, strong taste. Thus, the reader's sense of taste is evoked; the reader might experience a warm sensation as we often relate to strong spices. The spices of flowers

and plants, however, closely relate to their odours, as it can refer to inhaling the scents of a certain plant. Thus, Dickinson's motive of spices can be envisioned as a case of synesthesia, where one sense transfers into another. As a result, the reader lives a multisensory experience, reminded of warm, tropical places while smelling and tasting the flowers and plants described by Dickinson.

The sense of sight is triggered by the bright colours of the flowers: fuchsias are compared to deep-pink corals, while Dickinson "dwells" in grey calyx. McNaughton argues that in her imagery, Dickinson reveals a truly feminine appreciation of colour variations (21): her coral fuchsias are a great example of this. McNaughton confirms that Dickinson's constant use of flowers as images gives colour (21). Especially the use of flowers common to the reader evokes a visualisation with bright colours, such as daisies and roses. In addition, Dickinson's carefully selected use of colours gives certain connotations to her poetry: by transferring from a deep-pink colour to a dull grey colour in "I tend my flowers for thee", Dickinson emphasizes the withering of her flowers and her sadness as a result of the absence of her "absentee": the grey colour establishes a negative, empty and depressing connotation to the poem near the end. The colours of the different plants in Emily Dickinson often see a distinct symbolism, as the red colours of roses are for example closely related to love, and in the case of "I tend my flowers for thee", sorrow due to love.

Furthermore, bees are included in many of Dickinson poems: meadow-bees, bumblebees, aged bees, baronial bees; the poet seems preoccupied with them as they "buzz and skim through her pages as they must have through her garden" (McNaughton 11). The bees express vivid life and movement, while evoking the sense of hearing with their buzzing and humming sounds: "As the fainting Bee -/ Reaching late his flower, / Round her chamber hums -". This way, the reader is invited to hear nature, which allows the reader to have a more in-depth experience of the nature described by Dickinson. In addition, the bees

introduce a sense of motion, which subsequently leads to a visualisation. As a result, the reader experiences a form of synesthesia, where sounds transfer into motion and thus vision.

Another reoccurring motive in Dickinson's poetry are her allusions to fabric. "Especially did fabrics of all kinds appeal to Emily. (...) Emily Dickinson possessed the rare gift of metamorphosing the simplest interests and activities of her everyday experience into the magic of poetry through the use of imagery distinctly feminine in origin (McNaughton 11). She commonly utilises imagery related to fabric in order to express the softness of the flower's petals or the plant's leaves: "Globe Roses – break their satin / flake –" (Dickinson). Again, Dickinson utilised daily life materials that we are all familiar with and can relate to in order to reach a more in-depth connection with the reader; adding to the multisensory experience of the reader.

Finally, the taste of smell is emphasized in many of Dickinson's poems. Dickinson describes smells that are common odours, familiar to all of us (McNaughton 27). Whereas commonly considerable attention is devoted to Dickinson's visual imagination, and her auditory sensibility, her fondness for strong perfumes have received fairly little attention (Farr and Carter 151). However, the odours emitted by the flowers and plants Dickinson was growing might have been key to her desire to pursue gardening (151). Farr and Carter describe a preference for the perfume of the tropical jasmine, as this plant and the description of its odours reoccurs in her poetry: a "sweet and overpowering, delicate and acute (...), intoxicating scent.

4.2 The Epistemological Impact on the Reader

Due to the use of botanical terminology and knowledge related to botany in her poetry, Dickinson conveys scientific knowledge to the reader. Whereas in the eighteenth-century the use of science in poetry was often frowned upon by critics, the nineteenth century showed admiration for Dickinson's knowledge about botany and cultivation. After Dickinson's publication of poem #986 in 1866, Samuel Bowles commented on her knowledge of agricultural matters, expressing admiration for her scientific knowledge and reminding the public that her knowledge of botany was extraordinary for a nineteenth century woman (Erickson 46). As formulated by Erickson, "Dickinson presents a vision more scientific than sublime in a number of her writings (...)" (45). In her poetry, Dickinson does not only refer to botanical names, but in addition she also shows her knowledge of botanical processes. In the following poem for example, Dickinson expresses her understanding of the pollination process:

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,
 One clover, and a bee,
 And revery.
 The revery alone will do,
 If bees are few. (Dickinson)

In the first two lines, the pollination process is described, where the bee pollinates the clover resulting in the reproduction of the clover: an entire prairie. Thus, Dickinson seems to be well-aware of the reproduction process of plants.

Another example of her scientific knowledge is her mention of microscopes:

"Faith" is a fine invention
 When Gentlemen can see —
 But Microscopes are prudent

In an Emergency, (Dickinson)

By comparing “faith” with a fine invention, and “Microscopes” with prudent in an emergency, Dickinson seems to show a preference for science as opposed to religion or belief, as an emergency has a more vital connotation than “a fine invention”. In addition, by mentioning microscopes, Dickinson extends her metaphorical use of botany to a demonstration of her anatomical knowledge of plants and horticultural terminology (Erickson 47). Thus, her metaphors translate knowledge and experience into literature (Erickson 51). In George Whicher’s words, Dickinson’s poetry is comparable to the building of the Brooklyn Bridge (Erickson 52): a scientific and technological performance worth noting.

Due to Dickinson’s use of scientific knowledge in her poems, her poetry can be referred to as didactic poetry. Didactic poetry is defined by the Poetry Foundation as “poetry that instructs, either in terms of morals or by providing knowledge of philosophy, religion, arts, science, or skills”. As opposed to a science book, poetry is more widely accessible and understandable for a wider public. In addition, learning through poetry can be a helpful way to remember scientific fact. Therefore, poetry can be considered an effective means of conveying knowledge. As discussed in chapter 2.2, botanical knowledge became increasingly presented in books and work of art throughout the eighteenth century after the publication of Darwin’s poems, which alluded to Linnaeus’ botanical system. Since Dickinson utilises similar botanical references and descriptions, her didactic form of poetry could potentially have been inspired by the poetic texts from Darwin. However, as discussed in chapter 2.2, Dickinson often reversed literary conventions, thereby introducing a new perspective and criticism onto the conventional assumptions about gender roles within botanical studies. This way, Dickinson does not only convey pure scientific knowledge, but she also invites the reader to think critically about literary conventions within botany.

Thus, by utilising scientific terminology and describing scientific processes from a critical perspective, Dickinson's botanical poetry impacts the reader in an epistemological way. The knowledge expressed in her clever way of formulating and her careful use of botanical names unconsciously impacts the reader. As a result, the reader is learning while reading the poem; poetry is used as a form of knowledge as opposed to a science book.

5 Conclusion

In this thesis, three poems by Emily Dickinson were analysed, offering a close reading of the botanical allusions and the use of imagery in Dickinson's poetry. As a result, the botanical allusions in combination with the use of imagery were found to evoke the five senses of the reader, consequently giving the reader a multisensory experience of the poem. Dickinson's background as a gardener, as well as a background on poetic botany and the concept of synesthesia were provided prior to the textual analysis. As a secondary focus on the study, light was shed on the epistemological effect of botanical references in poetry. The occurrence of botanical terminology and knowledge in Dickinson's poetry was found to serve as a means of conveying scientific knowledge to the reader, plausibly inspired by Darwin's botanic poetry from the eighteenth century. Overall, it can be concluded that the reader of Dickinson's poetry is guaranteed to be fully engaged, due to the use of both botanical allusions and sensory imagery, which leads to a stimulation of all five senses: a multisensory reading experience.

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Appendix

A. I tend my flowers for thee

I tend my flowers for thee –
 Bright Absentee!
 My Fuschzia's Coral Seams
 Rip – while the Sower – dreams –

Geraniums – tint – and spot –
 Low Daisies – dot –
 My Cactus – splits her Beard
 To show her throat –

Carnations – tip their spice –
 And Bees – pick up –
 A Hyacinth – I hid –
 Puts out a Ruffled Head –
 And odors fall
 From flasks – so small –
 You marvel how they held –

Globe Roses – break their satin
 flake –
 Opon my Garden floor –
 Yet – though – n not there –
 I had as lief they bore
 No crimson – more –

Thy flower – be gay –
 Her Lord – away!
 It ill becometh me –
 I'll dwell in Calyx – Gray –
 How modestly – alway –
 Thy Daisy –
 Draped for thee!

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H. Johnson., Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1955, 270-71. Print.

B. Come slowly – Eden!

Come slowly – Eden!
Lips unused to Thee –
Bashful – sip thy Jessamines –
As the fainting Bee –

Reaching late his flower,
Round her chamber hums –
Counts his nectars –
Enters – and is lost in Balms

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C. They have a little Odor – that to me

They have a little Odor — that to me
Is metre — nay — 'tis Poesy —
And spiciest at fading — celebrate —
A Habit — of a Laureate —

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