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Reimagining Emily

Gender and Poetry in the Biographical Series
Dickinson (2019)

Master's thesis in English with Teacher Education

Supervisor: Eli Løfaldli

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Abstract

This thesis explores the use of Emily Dickinson's poems in highlighting gender issues in the biographical series *Dickinson* from 2019 through a contemporary understanding of the past. The focus of this research is narrowed down to three poems and three episodes: season 1, episode 2 and the poem "I Have Never Seen Volcanoes." Season 2, episode 10 and the poem "You Cannot Put a Fire Out," and season 3, episode 6 and the poem "A Little Madness in the Spring," to exemplify a general trend in the series' use of Emily Dickinson's poetry. These poems are used as a tool in the series to depict the struggles and challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society through the character of Emily and the events in her life. The analysis is conducted with a theoretical background relying on both adaptation theory and feminist literary theory. The findings of the thesis reveal that the selected poems and episodes from the series are used to highlight gender issues related to oppression and marginalization of women, restriction of women's creative freedom, conformity to societal expectations and norms, and suppression of sexuality and desire. The analysis demonstrates how the poems are integrated into the narrative of the series as a means to exploring gender issues of the past and the present simultaneously and to enrich the audiences' viewing experience. Overall, the paper's commentary on gender related issues presented in the series *Dickinson*, provides a contemporary perspective and contributes to an extended understanding of the cultural significance of Emily Dickinson's poetry. The focus of this thesis is therefore to provide insight into the complex relationship between literature and the adapted product, and to show how poems and biographical adaptations can be used to contextualize and challenge issues related to gender and promote gender equality.

Sammendrag

Denne oppgaven utforsker bruken av Emily Dickinsons poesi som et virkemiddel for å fremheve dagsaktuell problematikk knyttet til kjønn i den biografiske serien *Dickinson* fra 2019. Fokuset i denne fordypningen er snevret ned til tre dikt og tre episoder fra serien: sesong 1, episode 2 og diktet «I Have Never Seen Volcanoes.» Sesong 2, episode 10 og diktet «You Cannot Put a Fire Out,» samt sesong 3, episode 6 og diktet «A Little Madness in the Spring,» for å eksemplifisere en generell trend når det kommer til seriens fremstilling av Emily Dickinsons poesi. Diktene blir brukt som et virkemiddel for å fremheve utfordringene og kampene kvinner møter i patriarkalske samfunn gjennom seriens framstilling av Emily og hendelsene i hennes liv. Analysen er gjennomført med en teoretisk bakgrunn som bygger opp under både adaptasjonsteori og feministisk litteraturteori. Analysens funn illustrerer hvordan de utvalgte diktene og episodene blir brukt av serien for å fremheve utfordringer knyttet til ulike aspekter ved kjønnsproblematikk relatert til marginalisering av kvinner, begrensning av kvinners kreative frihet, press på å tilrettelegge seg samfunnets normer og forventinger, samt undertrykkelse av seksualitet. Analysen fremhever hvordan diktene har blitt inkorporert i seriens narrativ som et virkemiddel for å utforske kjønnsproblematikk knyttet til både fortid og nåtid samtidig som det skaper en mer helhetlig opplevelse for publikum på flere plan. Helhetlig kan man si at oppgaven bidrar til å skape en mer utdypende forståelse for den kulturelle betydningen av poesien til Emily Dickinson gjennom seriens historiske og samtidsaktuelle forståelse og presentasjon av kjønnsproblematikk. Hovedfokuset til denne oppgaven er derfor å gi innsikt i den komplekse forbindelsen mellom litteratur og dets adapterte produkt, samt å understreke hvordan samspillet mellom poesi og biografiske adaptasjoner kan bidra til å kontekstualisere og utfordre kjønnsproblematikk samtidig som det promoterer likestilling og rettferdighet.

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Reimagining Emily: Gender and poetry in the biographical series *Dickinson* (2019)

Introduction

The art of adapting literary works to screen is a delicate balancing act, as filmmakers strive to combine fidelity to the source material with their own creative interpretation as they seek to translate beloved material into contemporary engaging mediums while honoring the spirit of the original work. Moreover, adaptation can be understood as «The inevitable contradiction inherent in the simultaneous adherence to the idea of creation and interpretation (and transformation) of something already created” (Emig 30). In other words, adaptation is a double process which demonstrates a product that reflects a process of both interpreting already existing artistic content and creating something new. Most often, adaptations on screen are products of literary works, but a growing subgenre within adaptation is something referred to as the biopic. The genre of biopic can be understood as a film that tells the story (of the life) of a real person who has lived a remarkable life. The cinematic structure of this genre “allows the biopic to move between public and private knowledge pertaining to the film’s subject” (Kuhn and Westwell). Biographical films, or biopics, therefore, bring life to historical figures and their stories on screen by adapting the tales of these individuals for a wider audience. This form of adaptation is often contested and prone to criticism regarding fidelity as it transforms the legacy and memory of beloved and important figures into products for mass consumption (Indrusiak and Ramgrab 97). The ambiguity is inherent to biopics as most adaptations take some interpretative and artistic liberties when transforming true personas, their lives and legacies into screen adaptations (Indrusiak and Ramgrab 99). It is difficult for the audiences of the adapted product to be certain of which parts are historically accurate and which parts are fictional events created to tell a more compelling and consumable story.

A recent adaptation which told the story of a biographical persona is the 2019 Apple TV+ television production *Dickinson*. This TV series tells the story about the American poet Emily Dickinson by focusing on her life on the Homestead in Amherst and how this influenced her critically acclaimed and cherished poetic work. The series, which was created by Dickinson enthusiast Alena Smith, is set in the 1850s and focuses on a limited period of time in the life of Emily Dickinson. Moreover, it is important to mention that biographical individuals and their work are often highly studied subjects, as those with knowledge of the individual will often question and object to the interpretations of the various biopics since their own interpretation of the subject might contradict that of the biopic. This is also the case with *Dickinson*, where scholars have voiced their objection of the series’ interpretation of Emily herself and the presentation of her life (Winant). Although the series can be categorized as a biographical historical drama, it is original in its contemporary aesthetic designed to appeal to a millennial audience through both a contemporary soundtrack and dialogue (Russo). Furthermore, the genre of historical drama can be defined as a genre of fiction that is set in a specific time period and often implements real people and historical events. It is therefore a genre which combines elements of historical accuracy and drama to explore important issues of the past (Kueffner 22).

Overall, this thesis will explore the use of Emily Dickinson's poems in highlighting gender related issues presented in the biographical series *Dickinson* through a contemporary lens. In other words, the series and its interpretation of Emily and her poetry, will be used to discuss the gender related issues present in Emily's time through a modern-day presentation of the past. This will be analyzed and discussed through a contemporary understanding of relevant theory and prominent features presented within the series and her poetry to understand how the various poems are used as a tool to depict the struggles and challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society through the character of Emily and the events in her life. Moreover, the selected poems and episodes that are objects of analysis are used to highlight gender issues related to oppression and marginalization of women and their lives. The effect of the poems within the series, must therefore be understood as a means to exploring gender issues of the past and the present simultaneously through its contemporary presentation of historical struggles.

Emily Dickinson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts on December 10th in 1830 and lived there for most of her life until her death at the age of 55 in 1886. She is the middle child of Edward and Emily Norcross Dickinson who also had Emily's older brother Austin and younger sister Lavinia (Kirk 9-10). Emily Dickinson lived comfortably as she and her family belonged to the upper middle class as her father was actively involved with politics, and her brother Austin became an attorney. The New England poet spent most of her life on the family's Homestead with her mother, father, and sister, with her brother and sister-in-law, Susan Huntington Gilbert living next door at the Evergreens. Little is known about Emily Dickinson's romantic life, and much is left up to speculation based on her oeuvre filled with love poems and her passionate letters to different correspondents varying from her sister-in-law to an unknown correspondent addressed as "Master". However, what is known is that she never married and had children of her own (Kirk 124).

Emily Dickinson is by many scholars seen as a sensitive and historically isolated poet described as a recluse and unknown at the time of her death as she had published next to none of her 1800 poems. Her homelife was comfortable and consisted mostly of her tending to her interests; the writing of poetry and the tending of flowers as she was very much interested in botany (Mitchell 1-9). Furthermore, although Emily Dickinson took little part in housework, scholars have found that she found much pleasure in the kitchen as she enjoyed baking. However, this seems to be the one of the closest alignments she had to traditional female roles associated with that time (Kirk 3). Moreover, no one knows why Emily gradually became more reclusive later in her life as she stayed more at home and participated in social events less compared to her earlier years when she frequented both social events and attended school (Kirk 2). As this shows, one can only know so much about a person, which is why much is left to speculation and opens for numerous interpretations when various biopics are created for an audience, be it in literature or on screen.

Although this introduction to who Emily Dickinson was is brief, it does reflect the collective impression scholars possess of her as a person. She is generally thought to

have been a reclusive and enigmatic woman, who was relatively private during her lifetime, thus leaving room for much speculation regarding her personal life and character (Mitchell 1). *Dickinson*, however, presents its audience with Emily as a social and passionate woman, eager to share her art with the world. In season one Emily is presented as a character who is anything but reclusive. She actively travels outside of Amherst in episode four to meet one of her biggest inspirations, author David Henry Thoreau. Throughout the season she attends parties and lectures, she goes dress shopping, she hosts a book club, and she tries to publish her poetry. Her beloved bedroom, from which she is thought to have spent most of her time and wrote most of her poetry, is even used as a punishment as she is locked inside by her brother as a means to exclude her from his wedding to Sue in the season finale. Moreover, throughout the run of the series she is not made mysterious at all, as her desires and intentions are made perfectly clear. There is no speculation surrounding her romantic life and sexuality, as the series presents Sue as her romantic interest from the very first episode. The series also firmly presents Emily as a character who is full of life, determination, and love for those around her, through her presentation as a character eager to live up to her family's expectations of her while simultaneously fulfilling her need for a creative outlet. Emily in the series is therefore presented as a great contrast to the scholars' interpretation of Emily Dickinson as a tortured soul battling mental illness (McDermott 686).

Dickinson, then, is about Emily Dickinson and her life as a female poet in 1850s America. Other important figures in the storyline are her parents Edward and Emily Dickinson, also referred to as Mr. and Mrs. Dickinson, her older brother Austin Dickinson, her younger sister Lavinia Dickinson, and sister-in-law Susan Gilbert (also known as Sue in the series), who all influence her poetic work in various ways by both inspiring and constricting her. Furthermore, the series explores the constraints of society, gender, and family from the perspective of Emily, who is presented as a rebellious young poet with a desire to break free from the restrictions placed on her by the use of her poetry and becoming the greatest poet who ever lived (IMDB). Although this is a fictional series presenting the life and work of a real person, one can argue that it makes use of certain tropes connected to the biopic genre, as it includes photographs of the real Emily, voiceovers giving brief information about Emily and her life, and by displaying the house she lived in for most of her life (Russo). As mentioned earlier, *Dickinson* also incorporates a number of poems written by Emily Dickinson in each episode in various ways, either by text showing up on the screen, a reading of the poem, or as a combination of both. Each episode therefore connects both actual and fictional incidents and aspects from Emily's life to her poetry and how they were created (Russo). The series has taken artistic liberties by interpreting what might have influenced her poetic work by looking at the political and social climate during her time, historical events influencing her life, and her relationship to the people in her life. The series includes both authentic poetry and biographical information, but with its own interpretation of both, again highlighting the series' mode of representing the life and work of Emily Dickinson.

The series is targeted at individuals that are not already familiar with Dickinson's life, and therefore potentially more open for a new interpretation of her and her poetry. Moreover, *Dickinson* approaches both the biopic and historical drama genres by implementing

elements such as authentic costumes and settings derived from the life of Dickinson, in addition to the introduction of important characters that were associated with her in her lifetime, varying from family to correspondents that influenced her poetic work. Furthermore, the series, which concluded its final season in 2021, consists of three seasons in total, each season consisting of ten episodes, making the series a story told over the course of thirty episodes overall. Each season focused on Emily Dickinson herself as the protagonist, and her struggle to understand herself by using her personal dilemmas as the foundation of the storyline and its developments. The main conflict in season one was whether she should be a poet, whereas season two focused on whether she should take ownership of her art and how this should be done, and lastly, season three concluded the series by focusing on what kind of impact she hoped her poetic work would have in the future (Li). Based on this, one could argue that the very heart of the series is her poetry, which is used to present several issues that she is arguably to have battled with: her struggle to balance her creativity and relations to the people around her. Emily's struggle to fight for the opportunity to simply write her poetry, and her struggle to determine what poetry truly meant to her and how to express it. The series presents an interpretation of Emily Dickinson as a person who valued poetry above everything and needed it to express herself. This can be tied to a comment written by Dickinson herself in one of her many letters, which was also used in the first season of the series:

If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only way I know it. Is there any other way?
(Dickinson 1870).

Thesis Outline

In this thesis, I will explore a selection of Emily Dickinson's poems by looking at how they are presented in the *Dickinson* series and analyze how the adaptation of these particular poems and their themes are presented in the series. The poems play a significant role in this series, not only because they have become of great historic and literary value, but because they influence each episode in various ways. Each episode is named after one of her poems, often by using their opening lines as its title. This both influences and frames each episode in significant ways. This use of her poems and their presentation in the series are used to tell the story of the poet by highlighting how they can be connected to her personal life and her experiences by connecting the poems to both the narrative and dialogue. Thus, the selected poems have a function in the story by explicitly commenting and illustrating to the reader how particular events and challenges in the life of Emily Dickinson the character influenced her and her poetry simultaneously. This use of the poems therefore works as a digest of the oeuvre of the poet (Andrews 371-372). Furthermore, the episodes and their plot are centered around how Emily and her experiences can be connected to the creation of the poem-s presented in each episode as they reflect important happenings and realizations in her personal life. Although the series offers numerous ways to explore Emily Dickinson, her poetry, and various branches of adaptation, the thesis will focus on how the poems are connected to the theme of gender and how this is presented throughout the series. Additionally, it will

analyze how the series has incorporated its interpretation of gender issues by analyzing it with regard to cultural, literary, and poetic aspects.

This will be done by first presenting an analysis of the poems themselves based on peer reviewed secondary literature that both analyze the poems and establish the commonly accepted or dominant interpretation of her poems, since this is a form of shared cultural knowledge that the series relies on. Secondly, the poems and how their themes are interpreted and presented in the series through the plot itself and with the help of cinematic tools that explicitly visualize these themes for the audience, will be analyzed. Lastly, the main theme of gender will be divided into sub-categories which will focus on gender roles, gender expectations, and sexuality. I have selected three examples that are particularly relevant in this context. There are three poems and episodes that will be analyzed in total:

Poem	Numerical reference to poem	Episode
I have never seen volcanoes	#175	Season 1, episode 2
You cannot put a fire out	#530	Season 2, episode 10
A Little Madness in the Spring	#1356	Season 3, Episode 6

Moreover, the main aim of this thesis is to discuss the presentation and use of Emily Dickinson’s poems in the biographical series *Dickinson (2019)*, with a particular focus on how issues connected to gender in nineteenth-century America are presented for a contemporary context. Since this is a complex subject matter, which demands a basic understanding of both her poetry and specific branches within adaptation, I will present relevant theory connected to this in Chapter 2 (Theoretical perspective on literary lives on screen). I will also explain important aspects and terms connected to both adaptation of historical figures, adaptation of poetry, and how the interplay of adaptation of poems in biographies can be understood. Chapter 3 presents two medium-specific features of adaptation known as anachronism and interpolation, before the analysis of the function of her poems in the series is discussed and analyzed in relation to the theme and subcategories of gender throughout Chapter 4. The poems will be presented and analyzed according to which order they appear in the series and the subcategories of gender will be discussed simultaneously as they are intertwined, (this will be discussed further in Chapter 2.). The last subchapter of the analysis, (common features within the poems), will be dedicated to analyzing how the poems are collectively used in the series to communicate issues related to gender for a contemporary context. Therefore, the portrayal of Emily’s character in the series reflects and emphasizes how the real Emily Dickinson was ahead of her time in terms of beliefs, behavior, and values. Additionally, it will be discussed how the series has handled the balance of staying true to the real Emily and incorporating interpreted elements in order to fit the medium and reach a target audience. The analysis will therefore present how the series has interpreted and presented Emily Dickinson’s poetry to its audience through its contemporary

understanding and rendition of her poems and persona. The purpose of this thesis is therefore to provide insights into the approach taken by the series in portraying Emily Dickinson's persona and work on-screen, while also exploring the topic of gender through her poetry and its visual presentation in the selected episodes.

Theoretical Perspective on Literary Lives on Screen

This chapter will highlight the relevance and context of gender issues during Dickinson's time through a contemporary presentation of the past. This will be achieved by using adaptation and poetry with modernized interpretations that focus on the effects they have on our understanding and perception on her life in the nineteenth century. Aspects of adaptation such as fidelity, the literary biopic, adaptation of poetry, and the topic of gender are important things to mention in this context because they provide a framework for understanding how the series has adapted the life of Emily Dickinson and her poetry into a fictional narrative. Additionally, it is necessary to understand the series' interpretation and adaptation of her poetry in relation to the context of gender and gender issues, as the series integrates her poetry as a central part of its storytelling. Lastly, by providing insight into the topic of gender, one can better understand the struggles of women during Dickinson's time and contextualize them in regard to contemporary issues and understandings within the topic of gender. This modern understanding of gender related issues connected to the past may therefore demonstrate the ongoing fight for equality, and thus highlighting the connection between the present and the past as we are reminded that there is still progress that needs to be made.

Adaptation and Fidelity

Adaptation of biographical material is a complex genre that juggles many aspects in order to create a story on the big and small screen. When we talk about biographies on-screen, it is important to remember that the presentation of the life and individual is just one of many potential versions (Devine 367). There are many variables that influence the final product that is the adaptation, such as the source material, the vision of the screen writer, time of creation, and the fact that it is usually created for mass consumption. It is evident that aspects such as the source material and the vision of the filmmakers heavily influence the adapted product, but it might be more difficult to understand how the cultural moment of creation might influence the adaptation process. This is because the time of creation does not only influence creators of biographical films and series, but it also influences the historic, intellectual, and commercial demands of the creators, as their job is to create a product that can appeal to an audience that is relatively unfamiliar with the subject (Jansson 32). The form and emphasis of the series or film are therefore shaped by the relevant topics of the time it is created in, which can impact the question of fidelity that often arises when the lives of real people are dramatized.

The issue of fidelity is prominent when discussing adaptation of biographical material, but before we look at this aspect of fidelity, it is important to understand what it is in general. Fidelity can be understood as the reference to which degree the adapted product

manages to capture the significant aspects of the original product and stay true to it (Harold 90). Furthermore, if we take this understanding of fidelity and apply it to adaptation of biopics, it is evident that there are two aspects to consider. First, the aspect of staying faithful to the source texts and presenting a story that complies with the textual material in terms of setting, characters, and events used to create the adapted version. Second, the challenge of presenting an accurate personification of the biographical individual is also an issue of fidelity. This is extremely complex as there is not one single written text or representation of the biographical individual to begin with, thus making the subject of accurate presentation contested before the adapted product in question is even complete, as it is bound to depart from some source material during the process of adaptation. The issue of fidelity in adapting biographies is therefore a complex issue due to the interpretive nature of the adaptation process and the blurring of lines between fact and fiction in different versions of the subject's story (Jansson 33). Much of this can be related to the source material that is often used to familiarize oneself with biographical subjects. As much of the source material is of subjective nature, such as personal letters and diary entries it only further complicates the issue of fidelity in adapting biographies (Ibid 33). One can therefore argue that there cannot be one single version of a life that is deemed correct, since much of the source material is unstable and was never intended for public consumption.

In many ways, creators of biographies must interpret source material and fill in gaps, which can make achieving complete fidelity difficult, if not impossible. As James Harold, writes in "The Value of Fidelity in Adaptation", "Fidelity is not one thing. There is [...] no such thing as global fidelity. No film could be faithful to its source in every respect because adaptations, by their nature, include departures (at a minimum, those necessary to the change of medium) from the source" (Harold 92). One can therefore understand fidelity as a matter of degree. No biographical adaptation could possibly be perfectly faithful to its source material because the source material itself is not necessarily coherent. The issue of fidelity therefore lies in the tension between the expectation of achieving an accurate representation of the individual and the impossibilities of achieving that due to the requirements mentioned above.

The Literary Biopic and Adaptation of Poetry

A branch of biographical adaptation that it is important to mention in this setting is the literary biopic, which is a subcategory of biographical adaptations to the screen, where the lives of writers are told (Indrusiak and Ramgrab 98). Although it is often contested and criticized, the contemporary biopic also manages to bring the original artwork and the artist themselves a new kind of attention. Thus, the adaptation often gives the artist and their work a newfound appeal to modern audiences, by renewing and reintroducing them to new generations (Andrews 369). These adaptations focus on presenting the biographical subject both as creators and a creation themselves, as they often are represented as something that differentiates them from "normal people" because of their genius. Their art is often presented as a product and a necessary outlet for them to express their despair connected to various hardships and as a means to cope with this (Indrusiak and Rambgrab 100). The literary biopic therefore also takes some liberties in terms of blurring the lines of fact and fiction connected to the artwork of the biographical

subject, as the biopic often questions the nature of their creation by connecting them to events in the life of the creator. As will be evident in the analysis of *Dickinson*, this phenomenon is presented in the series.

Another branch within adaptation that is important to mention is adaptation of poetry. To better understand why adapting poetry is such a complex matter, we must first understand what makes poetry itself distinctive. Shira Wolosky defines it the following way: "poetry is language in which every component element word and word order, sound and pause, image and echo is significant, significant in that every element points toward or stands for further relationships among and beyond themselves" (Wolosky 3). The process of adapting poetry into a new medium is therefore understandably a challenging task, as one must destabilize the significance of each of these elements that a poem is made up from. When one transfers a poem from page to screen it is therefore impossible to transfer every aspect from the poem, thus the affect, meaning and mode of expression is often emphasized instead. In other words, the screen adaptation often plays on the notion of emotion by finding an acceptable mode of expression in film that can be an equivalent to the poetic moment from the written artwork (Andrews 368). The adaptation of poems can therefore be understood as a process where something invisible, namely the emotions and feelings a poem creates, is turned into something visible on screen. Additionally, it is essential to mention that the adaptation of a poem also undergoes a process of transformation. It is not uncommon for visual mediums to take some central themes, ideas, or images as they adopt a poem rather than literally adopting the whole poem. By doing so they can create a perspective fitting to the story they are trying to tell by altering and adapting the original work (Scott 2019). Based on this, one can also see that the process of adapting poetry demands flexibility and a creative vision, in addition to faithfulness to the original work. The key to adapting poetry is therefore not to create a copy of the original, but to create a new work that preserves the essence of the original while adding something new.

Screen adaptations therefore offer a different way to communicate a poem's emotions and feelings to a mass audience in arguably more comprehensible and explicit ways as a scene from a series or film can use various elements such as music, manuscripts, the actor(s), camera shots, and editing, whereas as a written poem solely relies on the words themselves, and their syntax and semantic meaning (Devine 5-6). This manages to familiarize the poet's work to new audiences of various ages, fields of interests, and cultural background. In other words, the high culture art product, which is the poem, is made into a more universally consumable product. However, it is important to note that the issue of fidelity is also present in such adaptations, as the idea, mode, and emotions presented withing a written poem are both translated and reframed when turned into the new medium. Furthermore, *Dickinson* is not the only biographical work that incorporates poems in the representation of the life of a poet. There are also other biopics that include and adapt poems in biopics which take poets as their subjects. The adaptation of poems in this setting is noteworthy because the poems themselves are "the subjects of the adaptation process and are simultaneously used in these films to support, underline or illustrate the adapted narrative of the life of the poet that the film proposes" (Andrews 365). This is exactly what happens in *Dickinson*: the poems are used to illustrate and enhance important developments and incidents in the life of Emily. The recorded film and

the use of the poems are used to construct metaphors, illustrations, and symbols that enhance the experience of the story that is being told on screen.

Gender and Poetry

As the previous subchapters reflect, there is much to consider when analyzing the poetry of Emily Dickinson in the light of contemporary adaptations, approaches, and understanding themes, which is why I have narrowed the focus down to discussing the use of Dickinson's poems to highlight contemporary issues connected to gender in the biographical series *Dickinson* (2019). As Shira Wolosky (138) has stated in *Emily Dickinson: Being in her Body*: "Dickinson's texts are scenes of cultural crossroads, situated within the many and profound transitions taking place around her. These include the changing, indeed the tremendously dynamic, status of women in nineteenth century America." This is precisely what the makers of *Dickinson* have aimed to emphasize. They have adapted the topic to a contemporary context, fit to simultaneously represent the issues connected to gender of both the present and the past.

Identity, then, is a central term in this discussion. In Amy Allen's *The Politics of Ourselves*, she explains that the term identity can entail how we as "finite, embodied individuals, shape and fashion the circumstances of our birth and family, linguistic, cultural and gender identity into a coherent narrative that stands as our life story" (163). As this statement reflects, our identity is not one singular thing, but it is composed of layered roles, attributes, and belonging, that are applied to us both by others and ourselves. We therefore have to balance a collective identity constructed by society, and our individual identity in order to not feel discomfort, and gender plays a major role in this context. As Allen demonstrates in her text, the role of gender is culturally and socially preconditioned as we apply norms, expectations, and values to the existing gender roles, which go far beyond the biological abilities of each gender construction (Allen 165). Identity (in which gender plays a significant role) can therefore be connected to all the little things that make us who we are, both from an individual perspective and a collective perspective, and also influence our conception of identity and belonging in terms of society, politics, and history. If we connect this understanding of gender issues to women's role in the literary world, it is evident that the implications within that sphere also limited women's participation and recognition in nineteenth-century America. As Nelson states: "The notion of the separate spheres has been used for over a century to endow emerging cultural hierarchies with the obviousness of gender opposition" (Nelson 38). In a society historically ruled by men, it is evident that the constructed gender roles and expectations placed on women has reinforced the power imbalances and existing hierarchies as the separate spheres have prevented women from expressing themselves and claiming their space.

Regardless of the limitations placed on women in literature, the literary world was also a newfound space where women could express themselves, as "social structures forbidding women to speak in public did not apply to print" (Zaggari 20). Women claiming their space within literature therefore eroded the existing divisions between the sexes and made it easier for women to become fuller participants in public life, illustrating how the

different spheres oppressing women were connected. Additionally, it also highlights the impact women's contribution to literature has had on their developments in terms of a right to participate in society, female empowerment, and self-expression. The issues of gender are therefore universal, and thus also timeless, which makes Dickinson's work appropriate for a contemporary adaptation over a hundred years after its creation. Petrino even claims that "Emily Dickinson shares many of the characteristics of nineteenth-century American women's poetry, while at the same time she exceeds her contemporaries" (Petrino 137). I would like for this statement to be understood in connection with Shira Wolosky's comment: "Dickinson's work addresses cultural forces and challenges in ways that remain fundamental" (Wolosky 129). If we combine what these two scholars argue about Emily Dickinson and connect it to issues related to gender and literature, it is evident that her poetry has played a significant role in our questioning of the patriarchal society that denied women the opportunity to pursue self-expression and intellectual fulfillment. Overall, Emily Dickinson's work addresses cultural challenges that continue to remain fundamental to our western society, which will be made evident in the analysis of her poems and the series.

Gender is such an important branch of identity because it is one of the most influential factors in the social and individual construction of our identity. Historically, gender roles have been a decisive force regarding power distributions within a patriarchal society silencing women's voices and deeming men as superior (Rivikin and Ryan 893-896). This portion of history is especially relevant as we analyze Emily Dickinson's poetry in the light of a contemporary setting, as her position as a woman writing poems in nineteenth-century America has been influential in terms of how we understand her poetry (Juhasz and Miller 112). In other words, identity categories are created and conditioned by practices and developments within cultures and societies. When we connect this to poetry, a poem can therefore be "understood to be an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities" (Juhasz and Miller 108). Women writers such as Emily Dickinson, therefore, give us an unique insight into the issues connected to the historical constructions of gender roles and identity by defying the collective identity norms applied to her and staying true to the core of her individual identity.

The connection between lyric poetry and gender performance is also relevant to consider in this context. In order to better understand Dickinson's poetic construction of both gender and identity, it is beneficial to have an overall knowledge of the genre of lyric poetry (which is the category Dickinson's poems fall under) (Petrino 139). This is a genre which is linked to song and the ability of self-expression since the lyric always has a speaker, although not necessarily the poet themselves. Nonetheless, this creates a sense of subjectivity as the construction of lyric poetry often communicates personal feelings through the perspective of the poem's speaker. As is pointed out in by Juhasz and Miller:

The lyric always has a speaker, and the process of speaking always establishes a subjective presence or implied subjectivity. On the other hand, subjectivity in the lyric inheres not in the transmitted personal feeling of the autobiographical speaker, but in the fact that poems are made up from words. It is therefore a construction. It is not the poems relation to the poet or the I that creates subjectivity, but the use of words that create that perspective (Juhasz and Miller 109).

Reading such poetry is therefore an interpretive process influenced by intersecting aspects related to the poet, the speaker of the poem, and the reader. Based on this, it is apparent how the aspect of gender is influential in the interpretive process, since it can affect our understanding of the poem and the world around us in general. Moreover, if we connect this to the performance of gender and identity in a poem and to how we as readers interpret it, our interpretation is reliant on our "identity positioning of the speaker, as interpreted by the reader." The poet can therefore provide their readers with imagery, metaphors, and linguistic signs to interpret; however, it is ultimately the audience who assigns meaning to the poem (Juhasz and Miller 112-113). This is an important aspect of poetry to remember in this setting. The cultural conventions reflected in society are therefore influential in terms of how we interpret a literary product and the meaning behind it. The contemporary reading and interpretation of Dickinson's poetry is therefore both influenced by our knowledge of the social conventions connected to gender and identity at the time of its creation, but also by the cultural conventions of gender and identity taking place in today's society. The series *Dickinson* reflects this aspect of Emily Dickinson's poetry in its interpretation and presentation of her work and her as a biographical persona through their complex blending of the past and the present. To rephrase, the importance of understanding the historical context of Dickinson's poetry is essential while talking about gender, but it is also important to recognize its continued relevance and familiarity in today's contemporary society, which is exemplified through the series.

Central Features of *Dickinson* (2019)

This chapter will focus on prominent features in *Dickinson* by exploring two medium specific features of adaptation of poetry, namely interpolation and anachronism, and how they are relevant for the close reading of the poems and episodes conducted in the analysis.

Interpolation of Poetry

A term that describes integration of poems in screen adaptations is interpolation. This can be understood as “to introduce new material into a text, to insert content from a different context into the body of a new text” (Andrews 370). Interpolation can therefore be understood as something that creates the communicative interaction between poetic text, film, and audience in adaptations of biopics that depicts artists and their artwork. Moreover, the insertion of poetic text into the film text can be signaled in various ways, be it through auditory utterings in the form of recitation or readings, or visual representation through written text. These various modes of incorporating poetic text into a visual medium and their effect are all factors that remind the audience that they are watching a portrayal of a historical figure, and not the actual artist, as these visual and auditory cues presented by interpolation are helpful in separating the artist’s life from the experience of the text presented to us (Devine 9).

A mode of interpolation that is often used is quotation. This can be described as:

the appearance of the poetry in the soundtrack as an aural accompaniment for the events on screen. There are two main image sets that usually accompany quotation in biographical films: images of the act of poetic creation, and images of the poems being read (Andrews 374).

Since the creative process connected to the act of writing and the act of reading are physical actions that are difficult to visualize on screen, the quotations from the poems presented help contextualize the poetry within the narrative of the biopic. This form of interpolation is often performed as a nondiegetic voice-over reading performed by the poet themselves (Andrews 374). This means that the voice-over reading can be heard by the audience, but this audio does not exist within the world of the film or series itself (Bordwell et al. 285). Thus, it is a mode that is used as a tool to speak to the audience and adding significance to the poems and their function. In *Dickinson*, this is executed throughout the course of the series, primarily by Emily reading lines from her poems that are relevant to the episode, therefore connecting the lines from the poem to the scenes presented as the poem is performed. Moreover, the effects of voice-over readings as a tool in adaptation is quite informational for audiences, as screen adaptations are dominated by visual information. The information about a character’s inner life, thoughts, and emotions communicated through voice-over readings provide a more in-depth understanding of the characters and their lives (Toth and Ramoni 151). This familiarizes the characters and the significance of the narrative developments to the audience in a manner visual storytelling cannot communicate on its own. For a series like *Dickinson*, where poetry plays a significant role in the narrative developments and the protagonist’s

inner life in each episode, it is particularly important to communicate the connection between the poem, the character, and the plot to the audience.

A second mode of interpolation relevant to elaborate on is a combination of recitation and quotation, namely a voice-over recitation. This is not an independent mode itself, but it is highly relevant for *Dickinson*, as this form of interpolation is the form that is most used throughout the series. This is often used when the creation or moment of conception of a poem is being dramatized. The presentation of poems in *Dickinson* is mainly incorporated as a voice-over recitation by Emily as she writes down her poetry or thinks of it as a result of emotional events or encounters. In this way, audiences are invited to witness how the poem came to life as it happened and understand the significance of the scenes presented both before and after the creation. This helps tie the poem to the narrative of the plot because it signals that the poem was created as an outlet of emotions as a consequence of events going on in the story. This removes the connotations of careful consideration of words, punctuation, and meter when a poem is composed and rather it presents the poem as a product that is fully formed within the poet's head as an outpouring of emotion (Andrews 376). This is an artistic liberty taken by the makers of the screen adaptation to enhance the dramatic and emotional elements within the poem to create a more engaging viewing experience for the audience. "In dramatizing the moment of conception for specific pieces of poetry, the films strongly suggest a fusion of the artistic subject, the artist, and the artwork within biographical discourse" (Ibid 376). This portrayal of the moment of conception for a poem in a series, in addition to the voice-over recitation therefore suggests to audiences that the poem is connected not only to the poet's life, but also the real-world events that inspired it. In a series like *Dickinson*, where they have incorporated many factual elements from Emily Dickinson's life into their fictional world on screen, this creates a perception in which the poem is not simply a work of art, but also a reflection of the poet's experiences and emotions.

Anachronism: Integration of the Present into the Past

Dickinson is an interesting series to analyze through the lens of adaptation studies because of the numerous themes and aspects that can be explored. Moreover, the series offers a great opportunity to explore historical fiction, poetry, and adaptation since it "explores the past through a contemporary and playful lens" (Li). This can be exemplified through the series' feminist approach to exploring challenges and expectations connected to issues both in the past and present and connecting them to one another. This is made evident in several ways throughout the series, including through the series' blending of historical and contemporary aspects by using both Dickinson's poems and elements from her life to express issues related to gender, sexuality, and identity (Russo). Since *Dickinson* can be categorized as a historical drama in addition to being a biopic, a relevant term to consider is anachronism. In general, anachronism can be understood as something that is out of place within the setting it is presented (De Grazia 13). Furthermore, if we connect anachronism within screen adaptations it can be understood as an inconsistency within the overall setting either as a result of poor research or as an artistic choice done deliberately by the creators to communicate something to the audience. If used appropriately, it can therefore be used as a tool which can draw parallels between the past that is being represented and the present. In other words, it

can make the past more familiar by highlighting how it differs from the present and thus making the two easier to compare. Anachronism is therefore an effective way to present history in an understandable and relatable way to contemporary audiences (Russo). This approach to accessing history, historic figures and historic literary works is very much present in the series as well. *Dickinson's* use of intentional anachronism is the series' way of blurring the lines between past and present as it used to emphasize the familiarity within that historic period rather than its strangeness.

Furthermore, for a historic figure such as Emily Dickinson, an artist who is still deemed a mystery, the intentional anachronism presented in *Dickinson* provides a more recognizable and relatable young woman, who like everyone else, has her likes and dislikes and an uncontrollable love life (Hill). The series presents her as a modernized Emily from the very beginning as her first line is: "this is bullshit," uttered as a response to doing housework. *Dickinson*, then, evidently uses contemporary language and music as a modernized way to present the past and its strangeness. Furthermore, Emily is also presented as a queer woman from the first episode, as Sue is introduced as Emily's love interest before it is revealed that Sue is romantically involved with Austin, Emily's brother. This anachronistic presentation of Emily is also transferred to her poems and the series' interpretation of them, as it presents the poems in a way that suggests certain ways of understanding them and their imagery. The very reading of the poetry is therefore an anachronism as well. This can be claimed because the series forces us to reinterpret her poems in light of the present (Russo). They are therefore presented outside of their historic context and given a suggested meaning because of the setting they are presented in within the series' plot.

The challenge with anachronism is therefore that it makes the story less about Emily Dickinson the artist, and more about the reimaged person who wrote these incredible poems. However, one can also argue that this "misplacement" of Emily the character, the reimagination of her as a woman breaking every patriarchal norm presented to her so openly also reflects the bravery and brilliance that the real Emily Dickinson portrayed in her poetry. "She didn't really fit into her society all that well, so recasting her as this millennial voice enhances that contrast" (Townsend et al). This indicates that anachronism manages to make familiar the character of Emily and comment on contemporary elements by blending aspects from the present and the past. Overall, intentional anachronism, such as it is used in *Dickinson* with its references to historical figures and literary work with a blend of contemporary dialogue and soundtrack, serves to create a unique and modern take on Emily Dickinson's life while also recognizing and including the historical context of her life. The series has therefore in many ways modernized Emily and some of her peers, and placed her within her real-life historical context to emphasize how she was ahead of her time and thus, in many ways, constricted to society's expectations of her as a woman.

However, regardless of the active use of intentional anachronism presented in *Dickinson* and its ability to create a connection between the past and the present, scholars have also opposed to the use of anachronism when conducting adaptations from page to screen. Margreta De Grazia presents a view on anachronism that reflects a strong

disagreement to the use of anachronism presented in *Dickinson*. Although her critique is not a direct response to the series, it reflects an opposing view, which can help readers better understand why some scholars oppose to the series and its presentation of a biographical figure and the historical period Dickinson lived in.

The Annaliste historian Lucien Febvre judged anachronism 'the worst of all sins, the sin that cannot be forgiven'. He did not mean, of course, those venial little slips whereby something from a later period is attributed to an earlier (an article of dress, for example, or a custom or an invention); these errors are easily forgiven and amended. The unpardonable sin occurs when a present way of thinking is imposed upon the past (De Grazia 13).

The way De Grazia understands it is therefore based on the notion that anachronism signals a failure to differentiate between the past and the present, which again signals a lack in appropriate knowledge and consciousness regarding the topic and historical periods in question. Anachronism in this way can therefore be understood as a lack of awareness that the past and the present differs from one another (De Grazia 26). However, the interesting counterpoint to this understanding of anachronism, is that *Dickinson* uses anachronism to reduce this differentiation between the past and the present, and rather show how two different periods can be similar in some ways. By breaking from historical accuracy, the series is able to explore timeless themes and ideas that resonates with modern viewers, which is exactly what *Dickinson* reflects with its take on gender issues.

Analysis: Issues connected to Gender and Poetry

The following chapter will focus on a general analysis of the three poems, in addition to an analysis of how *Dickinson* has incorporated the poems into the series' narrative. The analysis of how the series' interpretation of the poems can be connected to the topic of gender is conducted through a close reading of the poems themselves, and a close reading of the three specific episodes. The analysis is mainly concerned with the poems' presentation within the series, and how their interpretation of Dickinson's poetry can be understood as a contemporary reading of the past and its gender related issues.

"I Have Never Seen volcanoes" (175)¹

I have never seen "Volcanoes" -
But, when Travellers tell
How those old - phlegmatic mountains
Usually so still -

Bear within - appalling Ordnance,
Fire, and smoke, and gun,
Taking Villages for breakfast,
And appalling Men -

If the stillness is Volcanic
In the human face
When upon a pain Titanic
Features keep their place -

If at length the smouldering anguish
Will not overcome -
And the palpitating Vineyard
In the dust, be thrown?

If some loving Antiquary,
On Resumption Morn,
Will not cry with joy "Pompeii!"
To the Hills return!

(Dickinson 83).

¹ The poems presented throughout the analysis are retrieved from Thomas H. Johnson's one-volume edition containing all of Emily Dickinson's verse. In this edition Johnson presents the poems in their original form as an effort to stay true to the artist herself and her preferred readings of her poetry. After years of editing and alterations made by various editors since the poems' first publication, Johnson has relied on the 1955 Harvard variorum edition owned by Harvard University, which has left Dickinson's syntax, capitalization, and punctuation unaltered (Dickinson x-xi).

Analysis of Poem #175

The heart of this poem is the imagery of volcanoes. Dickinson uses the "adoption of the volcano metaphor to embody the idea of intense emotions under deliberate control" (Porter 77). A common understanding of this poem is therefore that the volcano functions as a metaphor for humans and their emotions in the sense that human emotions can erupt just like a volcano. Dickinson uses nature and natural phenomena to create an imagery that communicates intense experiences connected to human's emotional life (Porter 76). A common notion amongst scholars is that the poet is drawing on her personal experience, emotional state, and frustration connected to the world she lives in, particularly connected to her inability to show emotions, or live as she would prefer (Baldwin). The poem therefore deals with the notion of controlled emotions and the "eruption" of these emotions as the speaker can no longer keep them in control.

Furthermore, her use of the word volcano creates an image of human emotion and suppression, which can be related to more than just one single emotion. The most common interpretations connect the eruption of the volcano to the emotions of anger and passion. However, some critics also suggest that the imagery of the volcano can be connected to a sexual meaning rooted in desire (As will be elaborated in the next subchapter) (Marnin). Critics highlight how the main theme of this poem is the contrasts between internal and exterior life. If this is understood in light of the emotions commonly connected to the poem and the context of social norms existing at that time, it is inevitable to exclude the fact that she was a woman (who is speculated by some scholars to have been queer) (Ackmann 112). "For the poet, she has a whole inner life, that as a woman in nineteenth-century America, she could not regularly let out" (Baldwin). The interpretation of the poem is complex, but this analysis will focus on the sexual meaning apparent in its imagery as this is significant in the series' adaptation of the poem.

Furthermore, this view on the poem as related to sexual desire connects it to the themes of gender and sexuality and must therefore be analyzed in regard to its historical context. Marinela Freitas suggests in "Dickinson's A still volcano life", that "If we understand the volcanic life as a metaphor for the definition of the self, we can see here the opposition between private behavior, potentially destructive, and a public prose that is socially contained" (201). When connecting this interpretation of the poem to gender, one must situate it in terms of women's rights to express themselves and their emotions, their sexuality and their sexual desires in nineteenth-century America. Women were expected to serve men and be their property, leading to a repression of individuality and emotions (Zaggari 20-21). The repression of the public and private self, as well as the volcano imagery, can be associated with femininity, gender, and sexuality. The poem's speaker struggles to balance their internal and external selves, resulting in an outburst of emotions and the expression of their individuality. Moreover, Freitas connects the imagery of the volcano to "the fiery self as a prisoner of social forces" (201). Thus, reflecting the feminine suppression of gender expectations and clash between public and individual identities as a result of cultural and societal norms created by a patriarchal ideology. The volcano imagery therefore represents a fiery inwardness and dissatisfaction that eventually erupts, reflecting the clash between public and individual identities. Dickinson's "volcano" can therefore be interpreted as a representation of the self and of

the woman (Freitas 202). This interpretation of the poem's imagery is in line with the series contemporary adaptation of the poem.

Analysis of Sexuality Through the Imagery of the "Volcano" (Season 1, episode 2)

As briefly mentioned in the paragraphs above, the series' interpretation of the poem is connected to the imagery relating to gender and sexuality. It is important to explicitly mention here that throughout the series' run, Emily Dickinson has been portrayed as a queer woman, who is in love with her sister-in-law, Sue Gilbert. The truth to this is something that remains unknown, as little of Emily Dickinson's romantic life is known to the public, except that she never married or had children of her own (Kirk 3). However, the series' interpretation of their relationship is of importance as we move on to analyze the themes of the poem as they are presented in the series. The main conflicts that can be connected to the poem is the reality of gender roles that is expressed in the scenes between Emily and her father in addition to the relationship between Emily and Sue which finally "erupts" as they can no longer hold back their feelings for one another.

The episode begins with a scene where Emily and Sue are in bed and Emily is watching Sue sleep (00:37-01:35). As Sue wakes up, she tells Emily not to watch her sleep, to which Emily responds: "You won't be sleeping here anymore once you and my brother get married" (01:14). The scene proceeds with Sue stating that she wishes to go back to sleep, but Emily states "I can't sleep with you next to me, because there is this rumbling" (01:35). This dialogue carries a double meaning which can be detected if we connect it to the poem. The exchange between them foreshadows the volcano erupting, with Emily's notion of the rumbling that happens when Sue is nearby. In other words, this can be understood as a visualization of the sexual meaning connected to the imagery of the volcano in the poem as their feelings for each other, and the sexual tension between them is building simultaneously as they must suppress it for several reasons. First of all, Sue is to be married to Emily's brother, Austin, which makes Sue and Emily's relation highly inappropriate. Second, their relationship by nature is also not socially acceptable as they are two women, thus, it must stay hidden, suppressed only to a rumble, hidden under the surface. Throughout the episode, Sue and Emily have several scenes together where the tension between them builds before the final scene of the episode, where the "volcano erupts." This continuous buildup uses scenes between the two to foreshadowing what will happen when the conflict (their sexual tension) eventually erupts. First, they are laying in bed fantasizing about a life together and touching each other lightly, then they break the societal rules together by sneaking in to the university lecture held for men, gradually diminishing the weight of societal norms as their inner desires intensifies.

Another important aspect within the episode connected to the build-up that finally results in an eruption of emotion and desire is Emily's struggle with doing what is expected of her as a woman. This is visualized through her finding out about a lecture that is to be given at the local university, but which she is forbidden to attend by her father simply because she is a woman. He claims that women's educations should not be the same as a man's since their careers will not be the same, playing on the notion that a woman's

work is within the home. Regardless, Emily defies her father's orders and attends the lecture in the company of Sue, and they are dressed as men to disguise themselves. However, as their identities are exposed, word of her disobedience gets back to her father, and she is called into his office to receive a reprimand. After her scolding for disobeying him, she is given a copy of his essay "On the proper place of women," which he demands that she read to familiarize herself with her expected place in society and within the household. If we connect this exchange to the poem, it can be linked to both gender and identity as this is a demonstration of the previously mentioned opposition of a private self and a collective acceptable self. The suppression of Emily and her individual self is connected to both her identity as a woman and her sexual desires toward Sue, as they do not conform with the collective ruling ideology of the patriarchy.

At (19:15), later in the episode, we see Emily in her room crumbling her father's essay in her hand, signaling her refusal to conform to his and society's expectations of her. However, she unfolds the paper and begins to write on the back of it. This is when the poem is first introduced, as a voiceover in Emily's voice reads the opening line, writing of the poem appears simultaneously. The creation of the first line of the poem "I have never seen "Volcanoes"" signals the buildup of discomfort within Emily, like the magma of a volcano building pressure before it erupts. However, she is interrupted as there is a knock at the door. Her mother enters the room and scolds Emily for not apologizing to her father after her disobedience. She claims that Emily must begin doing what is expected of her, rather than "constantly expressing herself" (20:49). We can therefore see that the place of women in society and the expectations put on them is a recurring theme in Emily's interactions with her parents, as she constantly fails to follow these cultural norms. The notion of an opposition between a public and private self is played upon, resulting in the pressure building within Emily and constantly increasing her discomfort.

The last significant event of the episode which can be directly linked to the poem is the scene where Sue and Emily are in bed again (23:47-27:07). This can be connected to the opening scene of the episode, where they can also be found in bed, but now the tension between them is much more evident as they have tried to suppress their feelings for one another, but now are slowly reaching a breaking point. As they lie in bed talking about how they are going to miss sleeping next to each other, Emily states: "I just can't stop thinking about Pompeii. A whole city frozen in time" (24:19). She compares herself to Pompeii, expressing how she also feels frozen in time, "Like I'm trapped.", referring to her constant suppression of her individual self at the cost of maintaining an acceptable public self and signaling her discomfort. This reference to Pompeii connects these emotions to the poem, because of the volcano imagery and explicit mention of Pompeii, which is also mentioned on line 19 in the poem. Furthermore, Sue responds by saying "I think I know what a volcano feels like" (25:03), to which Emily responds, "show me." This results in Sue beginning to seduce Emily, thus connecting the volcano imagery to their sexual desire for each other. As Sue and Emily are being intimate, the recital of the poem appears again both in writing and spoken as a voice over (26:14). The first two stanzas of the poem are presented as a montage of Emily and Sue appears simultaneously as visuals of bread rising in an oven and magma boiling inside volcanoes, before the volcanoes finally erupts as Emily climaxes. This montage of visuals represents

the final build up before the eruption, which signals a shift in Emily and Sue's relationship as they give in to their desires. Based on this, it is evident how the series' interpretation of the poem uses Emily's suppressed feelings towards Sue, and her oppression as a woman in nineteenth-century America to create a visual story that emphasizes the issues connected to gender and identity within the poem. Additionally, the series' presentation of the poem also highlights a sexual interpretation of the poem's imagery of the volcano.

"You Cannot Put a Fire Out" (530)

You cannot put a Fire out -
A Thing that can ignite
Can go, itself, without a Fan -
Upon the slowest Night -

You cannot fold a Flood -
And put it in a Drawer -
Because the Winds would find it out -
And tell your Cedar Floor -

(Dickinson 259).

Analysis of Poem #530

This is another poem by Dickinson that is commonly seen to be dealing with the themes of oppression and gender through an imagery denoting passion and anger by using metaphors rooted in nature and natural phenomenon. Similar, to the first poem of the analysis in this thesis, this poem can also be connected to feminine imagery as the setting of the poem can be connected to a woman's duty at that historical moment, or, in more general terms, the tension between the internal and external in terms of expression of emotions and desire. It was the woman's responsibility to tend the fire, to fold things away in drawers, and to worry about maintaining the floors. The imagery of the fire and flood, however, is what connects the poem to the emotionally rooted themes such as passion, anger, desire, and individuality (Kornfeld). The imagery and the emotions performed in the poem is therefore the aspects that connect the poem to the overarching theme of gender.

The imagery of the "fire" is used as a symbol of passion, desire, and individuality to express how such internal needs cannot be extinguished by external forces and societal expectations put on an individual. It is this inevitable fire that Dickinson refers to when she claims that a fire cannot be put out (Tearle). The imagery of "fire" therefore functions similarly to the imagery of the "volcano" in the previous poem, as fire is commonly associated with symbolizing strong and intense feelings one cannot control.

These similarities in using natural phenomena to express an oppression of internal emotions continue in the second stanza where the flood is commonly interpreted as an outburst of emotions. The poem suggests that the suppression of one's internal self leads to discomfort, which can eventually result in an uncontrollable outburst of emotions (Tearle). This is symbolized through the flood which cannot be folded away, because it will eventually find its way out of its containment. In addition, the element of air in both stanzas, is serving as a factor that intensifies the fire through the "fan" and reveals the flood through the "wind," which can be interpreted as a metaphor for unrequited love and desire, enhancing the notion of discomfort, as this unfulfilled longing suggests a hidden aspect that do not come to light (Tearle). Furthermore, the poem can therefore be understood as a commentary on how, although we attempt to conceal and hide our emotions, they will endure regardless and ultimately burst out. Just like we cannot put a fire out or hide the flood, we cannot suppress our emotions to go away for good. By connecting this understanding of the poem to the theme of gender then, the poem can be seen as a commentary on the limitations connected to women's possibilities of self-expression in nineteenth century America and the importance of establishing and expressing individuality regardless of societal oppression.

Lastly, an interesting approach to the poem to consider is the remarks made by the feminist scholar Cindy Macenzie. She highlights the importance of setting by pointing out that Dickinson's experience as a nineteenth-century woman is important to consider in relation to this poem. "Feminist scholars have insisted that a much more fruitful analysis can be made by considering the poet's experience as a nineteenth-century woman caught between an identity constructed by patriarchal society and yet fully conscious of another "authentic" if unexpressed self" (Macenzie 135). Macenzie reads Dickinson's poetry in light of her biography in the sense that she considers how what we know of her, her personal experiences, and social contexts might have influenced her poetry, much like the series does. In other words, Dickinson's personal struggles with societal norms and expectations can be reflected in her work. As depicted in the series, some scholars have speculated upon Dickinson's sexuality and on whether the true nature of her relationship to her sister-in-law was romantic (Hart and Smith). She is therefore caught between performing a socially acceptable identity, while simultaneously acting out a part of herself that is not acceptable behind closed doors. This is where the naturalistic imagery of the poem intertwines with the themes of sexuality and gender, which is made explicit in the series' presentation of the poem.

Analysis of Oppression and Gender Expectations Through the Imagery of Nature's Power (season 2, episode 10)

"You cannot put a fire out" appears in Season 2, episode 10, which is the season finale, this means that many of the storylines have reached a point in the buildup leading to the climax. This is relevant to mention, as one of the many interpretations of the poem is that of unrequited love and desire, as mentioned above, connecting the episode's plot to the imagery of oppression through the fire that cannot be put out or the flood coming out of the figurative drawer. Another relevant thing to mention is the fact that throughout Season 2, the characters of Sue and Emily have drifted apart as Sue now has married Emily's brother and intentionally pulled away from Emily, in addition to having an affair

with Emily's publisher. Emily feels betrayed, which fuels the themes of passion, anger, and unrequited love. Adding to the tension, Emily's brother, Austin, has also found out about Sue and Emily's romantic relationship. If we connect this to the poem, we can understand the intense emotions of the characters involved in reference to the natural forces of the flood and the fire. The "fanning of the fire" can be interpreted as a metaphor for the increasing tension and discomfort, whereas the "wind taking the flood out of the drawer" can be interpreted as Sue and Emily's emotions building up and being released, thus enhancing the emotional impact of the narrative in relation to the poem. Additionally, much of Season 2 revolves around Emily's desire to be acknowledged for her art and her getting published, (Which only happened with 11 of the real Emily's poems, as most was published postmortem), (Kirk 87). Her desire for publication is a creative liberty the series has included in its narrative, which is far stretched from historical accuracy. The real Emily did not strive for publication and even once wrote in a letter that "publication was like selling one's mind at auction" (Ibid 87). However, after being published, Emily (the character) starts to regret her decision as she feels that she cannot longer control her art and how it is perceived by people. This turmoil of her relationship with Sue and her regaining control of her poetry is the series' way of implementing the poem in the episode, as her passion for writing and her love for Sue is equivalent to the fire and flood which cannot be tamed presented within the poem.

After a conflict with Sam Bowles, Emily's publisher and Sue's partner in infidelity, about regaining control of her art and relationship with Sue, we see Emily in her room (09:44-10:36). The scene shows Emily accidentally finding a letter intended for Sue. Just as she finds the letter, the scene shifts to two girls in a church playing with matches, before the scene shifts again to Sue's face, obviously unhappy. We see her leaving the church, and later learns that she goes to find Emily. As Sue leaves the match that the girls are playing with catches fire, this is symbolic of the strong and enduring love between Emily and Sue, which has survived "the slowest night" which represents the difficult times they have endured as they have slowly drifted apart for much of season two.

After this foreshadowing of their reunion, we see Emily in her room again talking to a personification from one of her poems, "Mr. Nobody," (from: I am nobody! who are you? #288) who appears in the form of a yet unidentified soldier fighting in the Civil War in the series. During their conversation (11:29-12:22), Nobody tells Emily to fight her battles in silence and to be a nobody herself. As he tells her this, the scene shifts again to the girls playing with the ignited matches. This dialogue can be connected to Macenzie's (135) notion of a split identity within the poem, as Emily must love Sue in silence and write her poetry without being published to reach her full potential, thus playing the part of nineteenth century woman in public spheres but being her authentic self in private. After this scene the poem is introduced (12:25-17:32) in a voice-over reading, with the three first lines of the first stanza being presented at first. As the interpolation of the poem is happening the scene shifts to the church, which has now caught fire. If we consider the setting and the following events in the story, the church could arguably represent the patriarchy and the public identity going up in flames as it can be seen as a symbol of the patriarchal society itself and the norms and expectations historically enforced by this branch of society. The burning of the church can therefore be interpreted in relation to the poem as a symbol of resistance against patriarchal norms

and expectations, since the next thing that happens is Emily fully submerging to her authentic self by writing poetry and giving in to her emotions for Sue. This can be connected to Macenzie's comment on split personality as Emily's state of mind during these scenes is heavily affected by her struggle to conform with society's expectations placed on her while simultaneously fulfilling her internal needs. The creation of the poem is interrupted by Sue, who wishes to reconnect with Emily. The two get into a heated argument as Emily is still hurt by Sue's actions, only fueling the fires of anger and passion, and the flood of emotions between them. However, as Emily tells Sue to leave, Sue confesses her love: "the biggest thing I don't want to feel is that I am in love with you" (16:54). This visualizes the opposition between their public identity and their core identities as their feelings for each other prevails, just like the fire and the flood. Sue's confession causes Emily to kiss her, and the scene shifts to the church, now completely up in flames. The moment Sue shares her true feeling with Emily, finally reciprocating her love, and the church simultaneously being lost in uncontrollable flames, visualizes the metaphor of the flood breaking out of the drawer or the fire never burning out. Society's pressure for them not to be together and for Emily to not be a female poet is therefore the embodiment of the air keeping the fire alive and the wind spreading the flood. A significant aspect of the series' interpretation of the poem is therefore the fact that the town is on the release rather than the pressure. In terms of issues connected to gender, this can be connected to the fact that patriarchal society and its norms can try to suppress women, but they will eventually fight back and release the town (society) from the pressure of restricting women and their ability to express themselves. This is suggested through the church, which represents patriarchal norms, burning down and Austin letting Sue leave the church to visit Emily as this signals a release on the hold of societal norms and traditions, and thus also a release on the suppression of Emily and Sue's relationship as well.

"A Little Madness in the Spring" (1356)

A little Madness in the Spring
Is wholesome even for the King,
But God be with the Clown -
Who ponders this tremendous scene -
This whole Experiment of Green -
As if it were his own!

(Dickinson 577).

Analysis of Poem #1356

Once again Dickinson uses the imagery of natural phenomena to communicate themes within her poetry, and for this poem it is the season of spring. The most important elements that convey meaning within the poem are the king, the clown, and spring, which is the main source of imagery within the poem (Stonum 70). Although this is a complex poem which opens up for various interpretations, a common reading is that the poem is centered around the celebration of nature and human reflection connected to this (Eckerson). Moreover, the poem can be understood as a celebration of spring's arrival and the madness and joy this evokes in the people. The notion of joy connected to the impressive blooming of nature spring brings is comprehensible for most readers, the notion of madness, however, might be harder to understand.

The spring in literature, nevertheless, looks out at us with the winter as its frame or backdrop. Discussions of the spring in this context always seem to capture the sudden impulse toward life as an ungainly rushing forward from the thaw. It is against this introduction that we grasp the madness to be found in Dickinson's spring (Eckerson).

Madness here therefore plays out as a weakness and a natural reaction to the effects of spring, which is communicated through the subject of the king. The spring is therefore wholesome as it brings change, whereas the king is a little mad as he struggles to accept the superiority of power spring has over him. Furthermore, this madness of the king is enhanced by the character of the clown. "The clown in the poem looks out on the "scene," on spring and on life, on "this whole experiment of green." We argue that the experience of awe before a color is what is truly wholesome, as opposed to the madness of the king" (Eckerson). The arrival of spring therefore brings with it human reflection in relation to the power of spring. The one in power (the king) is reminded of his inferior position as he cannot command nature the way spring can, whereas the clown is liberated by the inspiration spring brings by allowing him to imagine the possibilities if he were to have spring's powers. Overall, the poem is therefore read as an expression of excitement and reflection related to the celebration of nature.

Moreover, as is evident by this general analysis of the poem, there is no obvious connection to gender and gender expression, which is why it is useful to highlight Gary Lee Stonum's reading of the poem as something connected to the sublime as this will highlight the series' narrowed interpretation of the poem. The sublime in relation to poetry can be understood as the feeling of awe, amazement or even terror that arises when experiencing something grand or that is beyond our comprehension (Stonum 69). The sublime in poetry often follows a pattern of the subject being stuck in their habitual ways, before this habitual way of living gets interrupted by the encounter with the grand object, which in this case is spring. Lastly, the sublimation happens when this encounter inspires reflection and a new state of consciousness amongst the subject(s) (Ibid 69). The sublime in poetry is therefore a tool that evokes emotion and creates a sense of awe and wonder in the transaction between the poet, the poem, and the reader. Lastly, if we are to understand these readings of the poem in connection to the series' incorporation of the poem the clown has to be understood as the suppressed subject, the king represents men, who are used to being in charge, whereas the spring is the grand thing that disrupts the clown's habitual way of living. Furthermore, the king and clown have

different reactions to spring's powers, the king is reminded of his limitations, whereas the clown is inspired by the awe spring influences and reflects upon the possibilities presented (Stonum 71). These "roles" from the poem can be visualized in the episode as well as Emily or women in general is a personification of the clown, Mr. Dickinson, or men in general represent the king, and the personification of spring can be found in the overwhelming powers and otherness found in the phenomenon of time and societal change. This connects the analysis of the poem to the overall themes of the analyses, namely gender and gender expectations.

Analysis of Gender Roles Through the Imagery of Power Relations (Season 3, episode 6)

The majority of the episode revolves around the Dickinsons' visit at a women's mental institution as Mr. Dickinson has been offered a role on the board if the leader of the institution sees him a good fit for the role. Moreover, the episode opens with a monologue from Emily about how we must accept things for what they are (0:30). If we are to understand this in terms of the poem, we can connect the underlying meaning of this to the pattern of sublimation, where the subject is stuck in their habitual way of thinking and feeling as no other way of life has presented itself. This interpretation is reinforced when Emily tells her father that she is ready to play her role, "whatever you need, you can depend on me" (03:25). The connection as women as a personification of the clown from the poem becomes evident when the Dickinson family arrives at the institution and the doctor lists reasons for why women are admitted there, both voluntarily and against their will, playing on the notion of the subordinate role of both women in nineteenth-century America and the clown in the poem. The doctor's reasons vary from melancholia, overeducation, menstruation, and being unmarried (08:00). These unjust reasons for locking women away, in addition to an unauthorized exploration of the asylum makes Emily doubtful about whether her father should get involved in their business. This can be connected to the poem's ability to evoke feelings of reflection and unpredictability as the introduction of something overwhelming is brewing. The asylum and what it represents can be connected to the effects of spring, as this patriarchal treatment of women is something that has been abolished through time and societal change.

After having met with the Dickinson family, the leader of the asylum talks to Mr. Dickinson in private, where he insistently suggests that he must admit Emily to the mental institution because of her strangeness and lack of conformity to society and its patriarchal norms. Mr. Dickinson strongly objects to this by responding: "she is not a lunatic, she is just a poet" (16:34). This connects Mr. Dickinson or men in general to the role of the king, as his power is challenged by the institution, or in more general terms; men's power is challenged by time and societal change. After this exchange, the scene shifts to focusing on Emily, who has found several women locked away in more hidden parts of the asylum against their will. Many of these women portray contemporary expressions of gender fluidity and sexuality, playing on the series' anachronistic power to blend the past and present to make a political statement. Women in the nineteenth century were considered strange and had to be made to conform for whatever cultural reasons, in much the same way as non-cis women, non-binary, and transgendered

women are considered different from the cultural norm in contemporary societies. This makes Emily realize that the institution is not a good place, and she inspires an escape by exclaiming to the locked-up women that it is "a violation of women's rights" (19:04). Emily helps the women escape (25:20), and as they do, the poem is presented through a voice-over reading, signaling the inspiration the women experience as they are symbolically awakened at the thought of fighting for their rights and realizing the possibilities that lie before them. Their habitual ways of acting according to men's wishes have been disrupted by the overpowering force of time and the possibility of change that is encapsulated by this. The power of societal time that lies within time is transferred to them as they take it on them to object the men's power over them.

Furthermore, as the Dickinson family's visit at the institution comes to an end, Mr. Dickinson is refused a role on the board by the director since he refused his wish to admit Emily. This is the personification of the power of spring disturbing the power of the king and reminding him of his limits, as he cannot get whatever he wants just because of his superior role as a man (in this setting). Just as the director utters his ultimatum to Mr. Dickinson, Emily arrives with the other women and confronts him about the way women are being treated at the asylum. Her civil disobedience only reinforces the doctor's insistence about how Emily must be admitted as she explains to her father how women are being mistreated, misdiagnosed, abused, and manipulated, again drawing on the anachronistic merging of past and present to make a statement digestible for the audience (26:53). The episode ends with Mr. Dickinson taking Emily back to the Homestead, thus ruining his chances of sitting on the asylum's board. This scene aligns with the interpretation of the poem that highlights how the king is reminded of his limited power by the arrival of spring, but still remains content because men are still seen as socially elevated figures. This interpretation emphasizes that the clown (represented by Emily and women, in general, in the series) are much more affected by the power of spring because it inspires them and elevates them, as signaled throughout the episode by Emily and in the last scene by Mrs. Dickinson. As the Dickinson family arrives back to their home, Mrs. Dickinson, who has always been an obeying housewife, suddenly refuses to make her family dinner and states that she is going to her room, abandoning her duties as a wife and mother and tells her family not to bother her until the war is over. Although she is referring to the Civil War, there is a double meaning here also referring to the "war" of women's rights. This ending scene can be seen to emphasize how the habitual consciousness of women has been disrupted by the introduction of a power able to bring empowerment, and a feeling of liberation. The introduction of women's rights has ignited a desire for elevation in identities opposing the patriarchal norm, which is communicated in this episode through relatively contemporary gender expressions and feminist movement.

The Issues of Gender: Past vs Present

As is reflected from the very first episode of *Dickinson*, the series' version of Emily is presented as a passionate woman, willing to violate society's norms and structure in order to follow her heart. In the first episode, the character Death, personified by rapper Wiz Kahlifa, tells Emily that her immortality will not be achieved through being "good and well behaved" or by following the rules, but by breaking them (Finnerty 1). It is worth to

mention that this presentation of Emily the character as a defiant woman is not how the real Emily is traditionally presented, but the notion of breaking the norms of society to achieve greatness is somewhat rooted in reality, as women were far more restricted at that time in history. This introduction to Emily as a woman and poet is a fitting starting point for the series as we follow her journey as an aspiring poet and the challenges she overcomes along the way. The series presents her as a socially defiant woman, which is also much of the reason for her challenges which can be expressed through the series' presentation of her and her struggles. Her departure from traditional gender roles, including not taking part in housework, being childless and unmarried, the series' interpretation of her sexuality and possible romantic relations, in addition to her unorthodox identity as a female writer in nineteenth-century America are all prominent features in *Dickinson* that exemplify the series' contemporary portrayal of Emily's historical setting (Finnerty 2). This anachronistic approach to presenting Emily as a biographical figure is therefore the foundation for the series' ability to blend aspects of the past and present in a digestible way for audiences. Emily's struggles as a woman, fighting for her right to be herself and to break free from the expectations put on her by society is in many ways a timeless issue. Arguably, the series uses Emily as a personification to reflect our need to assert control over our lives and resisting oppression. What is meant by this statement is that the character Emily Dickinson and the implementation of her poetry in this context are used to enhance the problematic historic oppression of women and their limitations related to gender, social norms and creative expression by blending it with issues associated with contemporary struggles relating to personal autonomy such as sexuality, individuality, and equality (Townsend et al). The series therefore uses her struggles and triumphs to comment on her endeavor for individuality in a society that limited her. Furthermore, the poems add emotion, insight, understanding, and perhaps a familiarity that allows for audiences to connect with Emily's struggles and recognize themselves in this celebration of a character created to represent someone who did not fit in.

A continuous feature in the series' use of the poems analyzed above, is the fact that they are used to enhance particular scenes and storylines. They are used to explicitly voice what is communicated through implications in dialogues and body language, thus helping the audience understand the importance of what is happening on screen and the emotional importance of this to Emily in the series. Moreover, most of the poems are directly connected to the developments in the plot, as upsetting, emotional and riveting events in Emily's life often are used as the inspiration for her creating the poems presented. The series' presentation of the poems and Emily may therefore not be historically accurate, but it is an attempt to capture the unknown spirit and voice within Emily Dickinson, that can be found in her poetry for those who are open to discovering it (Finnerty 17). The series is therefore a recognition and tribute to a woman and artist willing to commit herself to a life of art, regardless of the cost.

Furthermore, as Juhasz and Miller (108) states: "poems are understood to be an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities." This observation is a great tool for understanding the effect of the anachronism presented in *Dickinson*. The series' approach to blending aspects from the present and the past through their presentation of Emily, at the same time as they introduce the poems in scenes of

emotional importance to the character and structural importance to the story, blends past and present issues connected to gender seamlessly. Moreover, all women are public women, with expectations put on them determined by a male dominated society. The only difference between past and present is the convention of those expectations. Lastly, to connect this to the series' utilization of her poems, the words of Domnhall Mitchell (111) are appropriate: "Even if the poems can be constructed as existing in political reaction to her own times, opposing voices and viewpoints are stubbornly, and I think deliberately, present in the work, disturbing, and invigorating, challenging and energizing." This shows that how we interpret, present, and utilize a poem is dependent of our own needs both as individuals and as a society. We can try to read it and understand it in context to the writer and the time they lived in, but our understanding of it is somewhat bound to be colored by our own lives. Which is how the poems are used in *Dickinson*, the series takes the context of the poems as a starting point and connects them to issues present in contemporary society, and just like nineteenth-century America, the gender-determined experience today is filled with inequality. This highlights the fact that although the passage of time and all of the historic progress that has been made, there are still inequality and oppression in different parts of society determined by gender. The blurring of contemporary and historical issues related to gender presented in the show can therefore be understood as a commentary suggesting that the fight for gender equality is an ongoing fight.

Common Features within the Poems

Moreover, some common features present in the poems analyzed above can be found in the themes related to the power of nature and nature as a force beyond human control. This is evident in the poem "I have never seen volcanoes" through the buildup within the volcano eventually leading to its eruption. It is also evident in the poem "You cannot put a fire out" through the fire that cannot be put out even in the slowest night or hide away the flood as it will find its way out, thus these two poems are similar in its presentation of nature as a force beyond human control and as a reflection of human emotion. Regardless of our efforts to contain the powers of nature it will eventually overpower us, similar to how our efforts of repressing our feelings will eventually lead to an outbreak of emotions. "A little madness in the spring", however, reflects this also, but with another approach to nature and its effect on humans and our emotions. In this poem, Dickinson presents nature as a transformative force inducing emotions of awe, inspiration, reflection, and desire. As Cavallo (549) states: "in Dickinson, nature can be a destructive force, beyond human control or understanding." It is therefore evident that nature and how the presentation of nature communicates various themes and meaning is the central common feature among these poems, as nature is used as a tool to express emotions and ideas that are difficult to articulate solely by language.

Furthermore, when we connect this understanding of the poems to the series' presentation of them, it is important to remember that the series is an adaptation, thus the poems have been adapted and interpreted in a certain way as a means to comply with the series' vision (Bauer et al). The series has therefore taken central themes and ideas from the poem and transformed how they are interpreted in order to fulfill the story told on screen. In relation to *Dickinson*, the poems are used in a way that explores the

stifled experience of women in nineteenth-century America. More specifically, the series uses the poems to enhance how audiences perceive the presentation of female oppression connected to creative freedom, exclusion from society, societal expectations, and suppression of sexuality. This can be exemplified from the episodes where the respective poems are utilized. Season 1, episode 2 "I have never seen volcanoes" is a clear example of how the series takes the central theme from the poem (nature as a force beyond human control) and relates it to gender and suppression of sexuality through the presentation of Sue and Emily's relationship. As much as they try to stay away from each other and suppress their feeling from each other, their desires eventually overpower them and erupts into an uncontrollable outbreak of emotions, much like the eruption of the volcano in the poem.

Another example that highlights how the themes of nature as a powerful force are connected to sexuality, creative freedom, gender and societal norms, and expectations placed on women in the nineteenth century is evident in season 2, episode 10 "You cannot put a fire out." In this episode Emily is deeply hurt by Sue's betrayal and thinks their relationship is over, however, as soon as she sees Sue, she is overcome with emotion. It is evident that they cannot pull away from each other as they confess their true feelings for each other which can be connected to the flame that cannot be put out. Additionally, Emily wishes to regain control of her art and how it is perceived after the publication of her poetry brought her distress. As she discusses this with Mr. Nobody it becomes evident that her creative freedom is affected by her gender and the expectations placed on her because of this. The forces of the natural elements reflected by the fire and the flood is therefore connected to issues related to gender through her resistance to conform to traditional gender roles, and how this is presented as an expression of her spirit and individuality which cannot be distinguished or hidden. Dickinson's work and its interpretation in the series' adaptation of the poems can therefore be understood as a contemporary presentation of the past and its gender related issues. The series therefore uses her work to address historical challenges that remain fundamental in today's society; thus, the show is using Emily as a character and Dickinson's poetry to communicate how history seems to be repeating itself. We might have overcome the issues related to gender in the nineteenth century, but other contemporary issues have certainly replaced them.

Overall, the connections between these three poems and how *Dickinson* presents them on screen are relevant to gender in the context that they talk about what goes on beneath the surface. They highlight the inner life that women in nineteenth century America could not express because of the expectations installed by a patriarchal society (Baldwin). The connection between Dickinson's focus on the power of nature and the series' presentation of this as something relating to gender and gender issues is the foundation of how these poems are adapted and incorporated in the storytelling. Through Dickinson emphasizing the power of nature and the series emphasizing the importance of individual expression, *Dickinson* uses her poetry to present a vision of female empowerment that can be reflected through the imagery of nature and its transformative power.

Concluding Remarks

It is evident that Emily Dickinson and her work is of great cultural value, and that she was an admirable poet and woman. Her poems possess an unique ability to celebrate the idea of being an outsider and rejecting societal expectations placed on her as a woman through various imagery connected to nature and human emotions. This is something that is expressed continuously throughout the series and the presentation of the poems. This celebration of otherness and defiance is something that is relevant for most of the poems presented in the series, but the four poems that have been highlighted are great examples in terms of expressing issues connected to gender. It is the combination of the poems themselves and the series' utilization of them that makes them noteworthy. In terms of highlighting contemporary issues connected to gender, through *Dickinson's* presentation of Emily Dickinson's poetry in the context of female sexuality and exploration, the series exemplifies how she managed to challenge traditional gender norms by portraying female sexuality as a powerful force (Petrino 130). Additionally, it is a great example of how *Dickinson* has connected this approach towards topics such as gender and sexuality and appropriated it to contemporary issues surrounding sexuality and gender expression through the series interpretation of Emily and Sue's relationship, thus blending the present and the past through its anachronistic approach of presenting a biographical persona and her poetic work. This can be understood through De Grazia's (32) approach to sensitivity regarding anachronism in the sense that sensitivity to anachronism means that we are being properly and ethical in terms of how we acknowledge and adapt the past in our present context. Overall, the themes and their cultural significance presented through these poems and their interpretation in *Dickinson* provides an unique foundation to understand how the issues of gender are explored in both past and present contexts.

Moreover, the use of Emily Dickinson's poems to highlight contemporary issues connected to gender, such as oppression, limitation of creative freedom, sexuality, and social expectations in the biographical series *Dickinson* is therefore evident in several ways. By exploring the themes and ideas presented in Dickinson's poetry, the series has highlighted the ongoing struggles women face to claim their space in society as a marginalized group. The series has focused on how women are outsiders in society, and highlighted women's experience throughout history as they have fought for recognition and equality. The poems presented in the series have functioned as a commentary on this, emphasizing the limiting opportunities and freedom women have possessed over the years. The poems function as a tool to achieve this because they deepen the audience's understanding of the subject's life and their experiences, since poems encompass the ability to reveal emotions, struggles, triumphs, and heighten the overall emotional impact of a scene (Andrews 370). In other words, it communicates what is expressed between the lines of dialogue, much like music. Similar to the function of music, this implementation of the poems in the series manages to influence audiences' experience of the plot, characters, and our emotional response unconsciously (Davison 2012). The poems presented in *Dickinson* therefore amplify what can already be seen and offer a fresh perspective and provide audiences with a deeper understanding of the themes and emotions conveyed.

To summarize, although *Dickinson* can be characterized as a biopic with authentic poetry, events, and people dramatized, it is important to remember that the Emily we are presented with in the series, is one of many potential versions. As the series is an adaptation, and her poems have been adapted and interpreted in a certain way for the purpose of the series, it is relevant to remember that this is a creation intended for mass consumption. However, the series does consist of actual people in her life, historical events and developments connected to her life, and the poetry she wrote, but it has also taken some artistic liberties for the sake of telling a story. It is this blending of authentic and anachronistic elements that creates the compelling interaction between the many complex elements of this series. It is a biopic, it is an adaptation of poetry, it is a historical drama, and it is a contemporary comedy. It is this blurring of lines between genres, fidelity, and past and present that familiarize Dickinson and her struggles to a contemporary audience, as we can recognize ourselves in her struggle to be recognized and accepted for who she is. Fidelity in this sense refers to the blurring of lines between genres of adaptation and mixing elements from the past and the present to create a persona of Emily Dickinson and her struggles that resonates with modern audiences and their experiences. *Dickinson* can therefore arguably be said to close the gap between the past and the present, and bring Emily closer to contemporary audiences in a way that makes her relatable.

Dickinson, then, uses Emily Dickinson and her poetry to comment on and highlight to audiences the pressure placed on women to conform to society's gender norms and expectations, and how women who resist to conform often are excluded and deprived of their rights. Emily is just one of many women throughout history who have lacked recognition and freedom simply because of gender, and this issue is not isolated to a specific time in history, it is ongoing. Dickinson said it best herself: "I dwell in possibility" (Dickinson 327). Just like this line from her poetry, *Dickinson* celebrates the potential for change and growth that exists in society and within us. We have the power to change and transform the reflection of societal expectations that limit women's possibilities. Emily Dickinson herself is an example of this, as she is still remembered as a poet ahead of her time with a lasting impact on modern poetry, feminist literature, and popular culture.

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Appendix: Relevance for the teacher education

The thesis' relevance for teacher education

In my thesis, I have worked closely with literature and adaptation to contextualize and analyze how aspects of literary products can be understood in both past and present settings in terms of cultural significance. The knowledge and experience I have gained from this year-long project have the potential to be a great benefit for me as I take on the role as a teacher. I would argue that it has developed my understanding regarding how to analyze and interpret literature in ways that encourage critical thinking and the ability to contextualize the literary product. Additionally, this project has also opened my mind to how one could work with pop culture, literature, movies, and tv series in the classroom in ways that are engaging and educational. In my opinion this is a very relevant approach to teaching, as this can engage students by incorporating their own interests and cultural references in ways that help them understand the learning objectives connected to the different courses. Moreover, this is also in line with the renewed goals and core values of the core curriculum implemented in 2020, also known as LK20. As the curriculum highlights: teachers have an obligation to provide students with an education that fronts historical and cultural insight in a way that promotes students' ability to develop their own identity in a diverse society. Implementing literature of various forms into the classroom is therefore a unique way for me as a future teacher to highlight different cultures, identities, and diversity in a way that promotes tolerance and inclusion. This thesis and my experience from working on it can also be a source of inspiration as this way of working with literature, film, and its cultural context are possible entrances to incorporating in depth learning, interdisciplinary learning, and ways to include the students and their interests in the classroom.

Overall, close reading and analysis of reading or viewing a text, film, or series might be helpful ways for students to immerse themselves in other cultures, identities, and historical periods. As it is my job to promote a learning environment that activates the students by encouraging critical thinking, including literature in the classroom might be a useful tool for achieving this goal. Additionally, incorporating literature in various forms can also provide an approach to learning where students are encouraged to develop their communicative skills through critical thinking, analysis, and expressing their ideas. In addition, this approach to teaching and learning may help promote an appreciation for literature and reading in a school environment gradually more in favor of digital technology. With this in mind, it is evident that the knowledge I have gained from working on this thesis is beneficial in terms of how I can teach literature, but also in regard to how I can evaluate other people's analysis of literary products. In conclusion, this thesis has been relevant for my education as a teacher because it gives me a deeper understanding regarding how to analyze and teach various literary works, their adaptations, and how to use literature to explore various important issues to my future students.



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