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## "A Dimple in the Tomb": Cuteness in Emily Dickinson

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## “A Dimple in the Tomb”: Cuteness in Emily Dickinson

ANGELA SORBY

“This is one of the reasons that people who don’t like Emily Dickinson don’t like her, because she has this eternally cute, kind of smirking cuteness about her, about so much of her work, especially the better known work.”<sup>1</sup>

—James Dickey, 1972

“At first, I wanted nothing much to do with her. She was like a relative I knew too well and was ashamed of. I found her cuteness, in some lines of the poems of hers that I read in school, at best weak, at worst cloying: ‘I like to see it lap the Miles –’ (Fr383), ‘I’ll put a trinket on’ (Fr32)—not to mention the ubiquitous ‘A Bird, came down the Walk –’ (Fr359). That one annoyed me especially.”<sup>2</sup>

—Annie Finch, 2008

In one of Emily Dickinson’s early poems (Fr96), bees are described as “Pigmy seraphs – gone astray – / Velvet people from Vevay –.”<sup>3</sup> They are small, they are lost, they are swathed in fuzzy fabric, and they emit a charming Gallic buzz.<sup>4</sup> There is a word for these little insects from the French-speaking part of Switzerland, and the word is *cute*. During the modern era, as Emily Dickinson’s critical reputation rose, her pygmy seraphs, elfin mushrooms (Fr1350, line 1), and chubby-cheeked squirrels (Fr915, lines 9-10) became something of an embarrassment. James Dickey, steeped in the gendered aesthetics of the midcentury canon, cast Dickinson’s cuteness as a function of her femininity, and her femininity as a handicap. And even as feminists sought to affirm Dickinson’s

status as a strong woman poet, they did so by minimizing the cute factor; thus in her famous essay, “Vesuvius at Home” (1976), Adrienne Rich dismisses Dickinson’s “kittenish” tone as a false performance of “innocuousness and containment” that hides the more authentic and volcanic Dickinson.<sup>5</sup> Rich’s squeamishness (like Finch’s) makes sense given the extent to which women poets have had to fight to be taken seriously. In twentieth-century America, Emily Dickinson could not be cute if she were to be powerful. To represent a poet or a poem as cute was to feminize it, and to feminize it was to diminish, objectify, or cheapen it.

Thanks partly to the battles won by second-wave feminists such as Rich and Finch, it has become less obligatory to cringe at the cuteness that pops up so frequently in Dickinson’s poetry. In their pioneering study of Dickinson’s humor, Susan Juhasz, Cristanne Miller, and Martha Nell Smith note in passing that “Dickinson often calls attention to her speaker and her subject as cute,” remarking that such poems are “obviously designed to charm.”<sup>6</sup> But if a charm is a pretty trinket, it can also be a powerful spell. Even today, cuteness remains a risky strategy for any female poet, critic, or reader to embrace. Like sexiness, it sparks a physiological flood that threatens to drown a poem’s more cerebral effects. And like sentimentalism, it has often been associated with low-prestige nurturing impulses.

Furthermore, cuteness is an unstable element: once the pleasure rush has been delivered, the cute can quickly turn cloying, creepy, or even repellent—a tipping point described by the artificial intelligence researcher Masahiro Mori as the uncanny valley.<sup>7</sup> And, of course, the cultural devaluation of instant gratification was already underway in the nineteenth century, even as purveyors of popular culture were learning how to elicit such emotional responses using sentimental, sensational, and cute triggers. Thus, T. W. Higginson—who in his preface to Dickinson’s 1893 *Poems* likens her to *Mignon*, a Goethe character whose name

means cute in French—elsewhere denigrates the use of the word cute as one of many “small inelegancies” that “grate” on the ears of cultivated men.<sup>8</sup> More recently, the theorist Sianne Ngai has discussed cuteness at length, stressing its power to gratify even as she insists that “the cute” is trivial—a small inelegancy—compared to major aesthetic categories like “the beautiful” or “the sublime.”<sup>9</sup>

Dickinson, however, is nothing if not a risk-taker, and in her poems, cuteness’ visceral power, affective instability, and low prestige make it simultaneously dangerous and useful. Dickinson uses cuteness to engage, not just with conventionally fluffy animals, but also with insects, graves, and corpses; with an endangered Protestant God; and with questions of time, space, and scale. In this essay, then, I will argue that the capacity to read for cuteness is a major competency, not a minor deficit, and that by cultivating this skill, readers can gain access to one of Dickinson’s many powerful affective registers. Of course, not all of Dickinson’s work is cute, but to argue that sophisticated readers should never understand the poems in this way is to resist one of the important avenues through which her poems engage emotions. Cuteness can and indeed must be approached through a number of disciplinary lenses, since it registers an animal instinct with a strong cultural component. In other words, cuteness must be simultaneously understood as part of Emily Dickinson’s natural environment and as one of her many historically-conditioned responses to that environment.

Konrad Lorenz, the *de facto* founder of animal cuteness studies, became famous for a series of photographs taken during an experiment in which he convinced a brood of ducklings that he was their mother, causing them to follow him everywhere in a line. Like his predecessor Charles Darwin, Lorenz was interested in the shared affective experiences between humans and other animals. Lorenz proposed that people—and many animals—are

hardwired to respond to paedomorphic cues, including “a relatively large head, predominance of the brain capsule, large and low-lying eyes, bulging cheek region, short and thick extremities, a springy elastic consistency, and clumsy movements.”<sup>10</sup> Cuteness, for Lorenz, is thus an “innate releasing mechanism,” a kind of instinct spurring adults to engage with youngsters and enabling them to build beneficial relationships. In exchange for attention, food, educational play, and social inclusion, babies (humans, ducklings, puppies) offer adults a jolt of sensual, although not precisely erotic, pleasure.<sup>11</sup>

Lorenz was a behaviorist interested in the so-called nature/nurture debate, but the human cuteness response is not just about maternal nurturing any more than the human sexual response is just about procreation. While scientific research into the functions of cuteness is ongoing, Gary Sherman and Jonathan Haidt have recently theorized that, although cuteness evolved in the context of mammalian parenting, “it is not best characterized as a direct releaser of caretaking behaviors, but rather as a direct releaser of human sociality.” Pointing out that babies are cutest not at birth (when they tend to be quite wizened) but around five months old, they suggest that cuteness is meant to reach as many adults as possible—not just parents—and that it works to elicit play: physical play, linguistic play, and the introduction of toys or transitional objects. Cuteness, according to Sherman and Haidt, thus not only supports a baby’s development; it also encourages adults to admit the baby into a kinship circle, defined not necessarily by blood but by a wider species-based sense of affinity.<sup>12</sup>

The human cuteness response is remarkably polymorphic. Humans can find babies cute, but they can also find baby ducks cute; they can find *pictures* of baby ducks cute; they can find *rubber* ducks cute; and they can even find songs about rubber ducks (without accompanying visuals) cute.<sup>13</sup> Even human handwriting can be read as cute; the Japanese



"Puppies." 1848, color lithograph, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, accessed June 20, 2017, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/95505016/>. LC-USZC4-3218.

*kawaii* phenomenon—arguably the most hyperarticulated cuteness subculture in world history—originated in *burriko ji*, so-called Anomalous Female Teenage Writing, a stylized, difficult-to-decipher form of lettering invented by young girls.<sup>14</sup> Among humans, then, cuteness is a primal instinct, but one that is—again, like sexiness—subject to intense and variable cultural mediation. And interestingly, unlike sexiness, which has long excited the interest of Western artists, cuteness was not a regularly sought-after effect until well into the nineteenth century.

When Dickinson was born in 1830, the word *cute* (as opposed to 'cute, a contraction of *acute* meaning *clever*) was just beginning to circulate, and the verbal and visual conventions of what would count as cute were still evolving. Like the trajectory of *the homosexual* as traced by Michel Foucault, the cute was comprised of concrete, episodic instances (laughing babies, sportive kittens, funny turns of phrase) before it became a named trait.<sup>15</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, the word was considered a colloquialism; print sources suggest that, then as now, it tended to connote adorable novelty along with some residual cleverness. For instance, in T. H. Arthur's 1841 story, "Other People's Children," Mrs. Jones (mother of Angeline) brags about her daughter to her neighbor, Mrs. Carter:

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed out Mrs. Jones, as something crossed her mind. "You ought to have heard Angeline tell her dream this morning. 'What did you dream last night, Anne?' asked her father, when we were all seated at the breakfast table. 'I dreamed, father, that we were all sailing in a steamboat down in the bay, when a great whale, just like a man, came up out of the water, and reached out his arm to catch me. But didn't I scream!' 'Was that what made you cry out in the night so?' said her father. 'Yes, sir,' she said. 'And

how did you get off, Anne?' asked her father.  
 'O, I waked up, and then I was off?' Ha! ha!  
 Wasn't that a cute answer for a child six years  
 old to make, Mrs. Carter?"<sup>16</sup>

Angeline is precocious but linguistically awkward; she requires caretaking but also gives her parents pleasure and amusement. By the mid-nineteenth century, coalescing social forces—including liberal capitalism and the romantic emphasis on the senses—were making cuteness into usable aesthetic material, so that Mrs. Jones—via T. H. Arthur—could name the source of her delight. In the more familiar sentimental mode, a pallid, Christlike child (such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's Little Eva) invites sympathetic tears. Sturdy little Anne, by contrast, makes the adults laugh; her sudden self-redemption from the whale is entertaining, not spiritually instructive.

Most of the critical work on cuteness thus far has focused on its status as a liberal-capitalist commodity aesthetic. As industrial economies began to generate a substantial number of middle-class consumers, human agency became bound up in new networks of consumption and communication. As Karl Marx noticed in the 1840s, new forms of commodity fetishism began blurring the lines between desiring subjects and coveted objects. Sianne Ngai traces and expands upon the commodity's weird half-life in her work on cuteness as a modern aesthetic category. Ngai concludes, *inter alia*, that cuteness in both art and commerce encodes an unstable power dynamic in which humans imagine themselves overpowering, but also being oddly overpowered *by*, anthropomorphic objects.<sup>17</sup> Charles Dickens, a Dickinson family favorite, adopted an early version of this logic, sending cadres of cute characters across the Atlantic, from the Infant Phenomenon in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839) to Jenny Wren, the doll's dressmaker in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865). As Lauren Byler has argued, Dickens' novels teem with characters made cute by their

“distinguishing quirks, thingly quality, and generally misshapen quaintness.” Byler suggests that cuteness is “a mode of passive aggression” by which Dickens’s characters “actively stage themselves as vulnerable little objects in order to assert themselves and to fulfill particular desires.”<sup>18</sup> Literary cuteness, in this view, is a symptom, staging (albeit sometimes subversively) identities and relationships defined by systems of domination.

Dickinson’s use of cuteness certainly registers her awareness of systems of domination, especially in familial and religious contexts. However, these very systems were also changing in the wake of transatlantic romanticism—a set of discourses that, by emphasizing internal sensations and impulses, came to value the cuteness response as an adjunct to creativity. Dickinson absorbed romantic structures of feeling from multiple sources, but Friedrich Schiller’s influential work on passion (the sense-drive), reason (the form-drive), and the *Spieltraub* (the play-drive) is particularly relevant here. Jed Deppman notes that, while Dickinson probably encountered Schiller’s writings through the Hedges translations in the *Atlantic* and through Carlyle’s *Life of Schiller* (1825), Schiller’s influence, like that of other German philosophers, was diffuse and pervasive in her milieu.<sup>19</sup> For Schiller, the passions (unleashed by what Lorenz would call innate release mechanisms, such as cuteness) are corporeal and compulsive, linking humans to other animals. Reason, by contrast, operates in an abstract, formal realm where independent decisions can be made and ethical systems can be constructed. For Kant, reason is paramount, but for Schiller, passion and reason must inform one another, so that humans can be *human*, neither brutish nor mechanically logical, navigating between necessity and autonomy. This “being human” is not a fixed state but a process that entails dwelling in what Schiller calls *freedom* and what Dickinson calls *Possibility*. And

for Schiller—as for Dickinson—one way to generate this freedom/possibility is through play.<sup>20</sup>

Schiller posits aesthetic beauty as the bridge through which passion and reason can reconcile, not by hardening into a third, fixed state, but by being in constant play or flux. Dickinson also engages with, and produces, beauty, of course. But when she deploys cuteness, the terms shift subtly; instead of producing an experience of the sublime, or the transcendent, or the ethical, or any other standard romantic outcome, cuteness sparks play and play sparks relationships—which are, in turn, a *form* of play. In “A fuzzy fellow, without feet –” (Fr171), for example, the speaker meets a caterpillar:

A fuzzy fellow, without feet –  
 Yet doth exceeding run!  
 Of velvet, is his Countenance –  
 And his complexion, dun!

(lines 1-4)

Cuteness is not beauty: the caterpillar is attractive because he is small and oddly-shaped (Look here! A novelty!). And yet he is not repellent; his fuzz, like the new growth on a baby’s head, invites the reader to touch it. The poem’s speaker feels an affinity with him that crosses species-boundaries, and like many cute animals since, the caterpillar finds himself dressed up like a person—wrapped in a little swatch of velvet. The velvet partly covers his “dun” skin, evoking a surge of fuzzy fellow-feeling in the cute-competent reader.

The caterpillar may be “dun,” but he is not done; as the poem begins, he too is just beginning to develop. The speaker supports his growth through play, staging an infinite drama in the grass and trees. The caterpillar responds equally playfully, dropping “in plush / Opon the Passer-by” (lines 7-8), who may be the speaker, the reader, or a random stranger. The poem’s kinship circle gently enlarges

to include anyone who is willing to play along, eschewing mastery in exchange for multiple possibilities and surprises. The caterpillar tries out different residences (tree? grass?), outfits (velvet? damask?), and even genders (fellow? Lady?) without settling into one place, because the point is the process.

Just as the caterpillar's body is cute, so too does the poem's language exhibit Lorenz's "springy elastic consistency, and clumsy movements."<sup>21</sup> Although, unlike the caterpillar, the poem has visible feet, it totters; for example, line 16 does not quite scan metrically: "You'd scarce recognize him!" The poem's archaisms—"doth," "yclept"—also contribute to its charming awkwardness (line 2, 17). This is Dickinson half dressed up as Isaac Watts, whose busy bee, cute in its own right, neatly spreads wax in a little cell.<sup>22</sup> And yet, of course, this poem is only playing at being a didactic Watts song—a game that becomes clear in the poem's closing lines, when the speaker refuses to state a moral: "Who am I," the speaker asks coyly, "To tell the pretty secret / Of the Butterfly!" (lines 18-20).

What is the butterfly's secret? We may use the word *butterfly*, but that is a human word, meant to render experience as fixed and finite. Jane Donahue Eberwein understands the butterfly as a figure that reverses "industrious Yankee values," and this makes some sense, especially given its implicit relationship to Watts' busy bee.<sup>23</sup> However, I do not think this poem is just a flipped allegory that elevates butterfly over bee. Rather, as the poem's fuzzy fellow releases palpable fellow-feeling in the reader, this passing pleasure overrides the teleological aims of pro-bee Calvinist convention *and* pro-butterfly Romantic pedagogy. Of course, to reduce the enmeshed forces of Calvinism and romanticism to bees *versus* butterflies is to evade the complexities of both, but the poem's aim is sensual, not didactic or ideological. This sensuality is precisely why the butterfly's final secret is not voiced: what matters is a

delightful, compact, changing body, rather than a retained idea or lesson.

In this poem, the speaker casts herself as a careful observer. Although she frames the objects of her attention as cute, her words do not necessarily index her, much less Dickinson herself, as cute. Thus, although certain of Dickinson's cute nature poems are sometimes called childlike, the term can be misleading. The speaker in "A fuzzy fellow, without feet —" is not particularly fuzzy (or fuzzy-headed); on the contrary, she claims the authority of precise naming granted to botanists and other neutral adult observers. As Robin Peel has shown, Dickinson's approach to nature could be rigorously empirical.<sup>24</sup> And yet, if the poet's voice is not childlike, neither is it fully scientific in the modern sense, because it admits what mid-nineteenth-century professional scientists (although not Darwin) were busy excluding from their field: affective experience in general, and cuteness in particular. By engaging with cuteness, and modeling this engagement for the reader, the poet's speaker does not claim to master the butterfly's secret, but she does embrace the opportunity to feel emotional affinities—fleeting but visceral moments when the interspecies gap narrows.

Such narrowing is sometimes figured as anthropomorphism, but the term *anthropomorphic* implies crystal-clear boundaries between the human and the animal. Haidt and Sherman point out that the cuteness response, by releasing sociality, encourages adults to "mentalize agency," drawing babies—who are, after all, fairly alien-looking—into the circle of moral actors.<sup>25</sup> When the cuteness response is extended beyond the human, it tends to promote a highly affective form of anthropomorphism, as fuzzy-fellow-feeling overwhelms any logical sense of the boundaries between, say, humans and animals. Colleen Boggs has outlined how Dickinson participated in, while also revising, her culture's use of animals as an

educational “supplement to liberal subjectivity.”<sup>26</sup> More conventional mid-nineteenth-century texts anthropomorphized animals to help people (children especially) establish their humanity through interspecies kindness, thereby appearing to break down, but ultimately reinforcing, human-animal boundaries. This impulse is closely related to the idea of the pathetic fallacy, first introduced and bemoaned by John Ruskin in 1856.<sup>27</sup> When Dickinson uses the cuteness response, however, she is able to maintain more open, less moralistic boundaries, creating relationships that are not necessarily anthropomorphic in the sense of imagining the nonhuman as human and the human as stable and obvious. Part of the play of affections involves unsettling individualistic identities.

In “Bee! I’m expecting you!” (Fr983), for example, Fly writes a letter without identifying himself until the end, so that the reader encounters the text’s familiar epistolary features prior to the writer’s grotesque and spindly-legged form. The poem opens by announcing the news of spring in what Helen Vendler describes as the tone of a laconic Yankee, before signing off :

You’ll get my Letter by  
The Seventeenth; Reply  
Or better, be with me –  
Your’s, Fly.

(lines 9-12)

Vendler calls this poem “Aesopian,” but Boggs is right to beware of readings that turn Dickinson’s animals into didactic exemplars.<sup>28</sup> This poem’s point is not its message, but its affective structure: it is a poem about feeling longing.

But what is the relationship between the poem and the fly figure? Fly’s identity remains elusive until the last line, so that readers cannot focus on his body. Moreover, when they read Fly’s signature, questions of scale arise that block

any easy anthropomorphic identification: How does a Fly write? Is the paper so small that only a few words will fit, resulting in awkward enjambments? It is hard to picture a fly wielding a pen and it is also hard to find a fly cute. And yet the poem is cute, not because Fly is cute, but because he produces a cute (small, playful, engaging) letter. The poem encourages readers to be most interested, not in Fly and Bee as metaphors, but in the process of drafting and delivering and reading a text. In other words, we might understand "Bee! I'm expecting you!" as a poem *playing at being* a letter—with part of the game dependent on the unstable, nonobvious boundaries between entities: Bee, reader, Fly, writer. The reader's indulgence is ultimately sparked by the one clear (laconic, telegraphic) available entity: the letter itself. Just as one might anthropomorphize a bee, one might also, as the Japanese practitioners of Anomalous Female Handwriting discovered, anthropomorphize a text and find it cute.<sup>29</sup> The cuteness response thus helps the reader imagine, briefly, that Dickinson's verse is alive.

For Dickinson, then, cuteness can elicit feelings of affinity that in turn spark moments of play—and these, in turn, create further affinities. At the same time, as I noted from the outset, the power dynamics of cuteness can be vexed. Dickinson's charming caterpillars (bats, sunbeams) do not function independently of the midcentury social world that made them imaginable. Within the limits of "A fuzzy fellow, without feet –," the caterpillar's cuteness makes him a protean actor in a drama that disrupts discourses of anthropocentric scientism. And yet, such hierarchical discourses pervaded Dickinson's social world as they do our own, so that to find people or animals cute is to, at least potentially, objectify, belittle, or condescend to them. As the cultural critic Daniel Harris put it in an influential essay, "the aesthetic of cuteness creates a class of outcasts and mutations, a ready-made race of lovable inferiors whom both children and adults collect, patronize,

and enslave.”<sup>30</sup> To be cute is to risk disempowerment; Dickinson signals her awareness of this dynamic in an early letter to her brother Austin, who had apparently asked her to write more straightforwardly:

I strove to be exalted thinking I might reach  
you and while I pant and struggle and climb  
the nearest cloud, you walk out very leisurely  
in your slippers from the Empyrean and  
without the slightest notice request me to get  
down! As simple as you please! The simplest  
of the simple—I’ll be a little ninny—a little  
pussy catty – a little Red Riding Hood, I’ll  
wear a Bee in my bonnet, and a Rose bud in  
my hair, and what remains to do you shall be  
told hereafter.<sup>31</sup>

Margaret Homans notes that this funny passage is a serious reflection of, and on, the era’s skewed gender relations, in which men were exalted and women were infantilized. Perceptively, however, Homans goes on to argue that this passage outlines “what will become, strangely, a serious program of poetry-writing,” in which Dickinson embraces bees and bonnets, renouncing (or ironizing) lofty patriarchal diction while attempting to build poetic power and authority from a feminized subject position.<sup>32</sup>

Is this possible? Can a “little pussy catty” be taken seriously, or must she always be trapped in Harris’ “ready-made race of lovable inferiors”?<sup>33</sup> In Dickinson’s letters, the evidence is mixed. As T. W. Higginson’s framing of her letters in the *Atlantic Monthly* suggests, when she posed versions of herself as a “little shape,” “a minute host,” or an “obedient child,” she engaged Higginson but also risked his condescension.<sup>34</sup> Higginson’s understanding of Dickinson became increasingly complex as their correspondence unfolded, but even in retrospect, when he published her posthumous letters, he called her “quaint” as well as

"cultivated," and the label stuck, as documents from her reception in the 1890s reveal.

Unpacking the extensive scholarly discussion of Dickinson's textual boundaries is beyond this essay's scope, as is discerning the extent to which her letters are poems and her poems are lyrics. For Dickinson, both poems and letters can be forms of play. However, Dickinson's letter to Austin reflects a larger interpersonal relationship, the terms of which Dickinson could not control. If a poem, by contrast, is a letter to the world that can (perhaps fortunately) not write back, then its ludic capacities expand, precisely because the poet sets the rules of the game. Dickinson's poems draw from her cultural moment while reworking or even ignoring existing power relations. Thus, even as cuteness became a public commodity aesthetic, Dickinson arranged her poems to generate complex, private effects that did not necessarily replicate the dominant culture's terms.

In midcentury America's dominant culture, cuteness was starting to sell. One of the first Americans to monetize cuteness was P. T. Barnum, who, in the 1850s, understood that people, women especially, would pay to see cute babies in "baby shows."<sup>35</sup> By 1863, Barnum further cashed in on cuteness, hatching a plan to wed the 40" tall Charles "Tom Thumb" Stratton to another little person, Lavinia Warren. In February of 1863, *Harper's Weekly* arrived next door at Austin's house, its war news displaced from the lead story position and its cover emblazoned with a full-page etching of the spectacle. *Harper's Weekly* offered a blow-by-blow of the "pigmy" couple's nuptials, which were witnessed not by guests, in the traditional sense, but by hordes of mostly female spectators who had purchased tickets from Barnum.<sup>36</sup> The "mimic miniature Adam and Eve" then set off on a wedding tour of the East Coast, including six ticket-only "receptions" in Springfield, as the *Springfield Republican* breathlessly reported.<sup>37</sup>



"Genl. Tom Thumb & wife, Com. Nutt & Minnie Warren: four wondrously formed & strangely beautiful ladies & gentlemen in miniature, natures smallest editions of her choicest works." c1863, hand-colored lithograph, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, accessed June 20, 2017, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2001700093/>. LC-USZC2-2439.

Lori Merish sees the Tom Thumb wedding as a key moment in the history of nineteenth-century cuteness and commodity aesthetics. She argues that the "freak show" tradition had an uncanny, magical quality that a cute spectacle like Tom Thumb's wedding tamed in favor of "assimilating the 'freak' into a familial and familiar structure of domination and hierarchy."<sup>38</sup> Mass-cultural cuteness, for Merish, is thus a tool of gendered and racial normativity; a way to discipline women into patterns of public consumption that felt conventionally domestic.

There is no evidence that Dickinson succumbed to Tom Thumb fever; even the earlier hoopla surrounding Barnum's Jenny Lind seems to have made the class-conscious Dickinsons uneasy.<sup>39</sup> However, her poems are not immune to the attractive power of "mimic miniature" Adams and Eves. For example, "Some Keep the Sabbath Going to Church" (Fr236) enacts a ceremony that is scaled to fit bobolinks; that is, about 1:12 scale, or standard dollhouse size:<sup>40</sup>

Some keep the Sabbath going to Church –  
 I keep it, staying at Home –  
 With a Bobolink for a Chorister –  
 And an Orchard, for a Dome –

(lines 1-4)

An apple tree (or even several, joined at the top) is not as tall as a church dome, and of course, a bobolink is smaller than a human chorister. This scene's slight physical awkwardness (how, exactly, does the speaker don wings?) is part of its cuteness, and its cuteness matters because the orchard dome has not achieved heaven's awful perfection and fixity. Dickinson creates an environment that is not just small, but one that also calls attention to its miniaturism as a key feature of its power. Susan Stewart speculates that "the miniature represents closure, interiority, the domestic, and

the overly cultural,” while the gigantic represents “infinity, exteriority, the public, and the overly natural.”<sup>41</sup> And yet, as I have argued, to play is to unsettle fixity: a small space (a dollhouse, an orchard) can be the site of a game that does not end.

This orchard is not a transcendental microcosm of an abstract, sublime macrocosm; it is defiantly imperfect, embodied, and earthbound. The poem concludes: “Instead of getting to Heaven at last / I’m going all along” (lines 11-12), signaling, as Victoria Morgan argues, that “relation to the divine” is achieved not through telos, but through the present’s “chaotic multiplicity.”<sup>42</sup> To be *en route* to heaven is not to *arrive*; the poem is structured not as a Christian eschatological narrative but as a form of ludic space. “Some Keep the Sabbath” depicts a world of process-oriented evolution and—as Asa Gray put it in his 1860 *Atlantic* review of Darwin—of “analogical inference which ‘makes the whole world kin.’”<sup>43</sup> And, as Darwin himself would point out in his 1873 study, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, kin might struggle, red in tooth and claw, for power, but the capacity to survive, develop, and adapt is also contingent on our ability to compensate for our early—and to some degree—lifelong helplessness through the cultivation of emotional bonds.<sup>44</sup> To be small is to depend on others, and rather than being just a disempowered condition, smallness here, as in the natural world, invites the formation of interdependent, interspecies bonds that comprise a contingent but emotionally vivid version of paradise. Power is kinship, and kinship is *felt*.

Gray ends his 1860 review of Darwin by admitting that the notion of interspecies kinship “discomposes” him because of its theological implications.<sup>45</sup> What troubled nineteenth-century readers of Darwin also troubles this poem: Where does God fit in? Neither distant, stately lover nor mechanical telescope, this God operates on a reduced and none-too-stately scale. The fierce God of

Dickinson's Calvinist forebears could not be seen as cute, but a midcentury clergyman (such as the model curate in Dickens's *Sketches By Boz* [1836]) might be.<sup>46</sup> As a "noted clergyman," God comes as close as possible to the human circuit of play and affection, where he is the object of the speaker's gaze, and vulnerable—as preachers in Dickinson's orbit so frequently were—to her wry humor (Fr236, line 9). As a "mimic miniature" deity, he can be at least partway admitted into the speaker's kinship circle, "assimilating the 'freak,'" as Merish puts it, into a familial structure. Instead of reproducing hierarchical systems, however, the poem's little ceremony stages new possibilities, including the possibility of an earthly heaven that is not ruled by any one power, because it is a game—a nimble improvisation—rather than a system.<sup>47</sup>

Even in "Some Keep the Sabbath," however, God is only potentially doted upon, not doting. He is, as Schiller might put it, not human because he cannot play. In all of Dickinson's poems, God proves to be utterly incapable of the cuteness response. Over and over again, adorable sayings and doings are offered up to a deity that cannot coo or dandle or tickle. Industrious angels (Fr245), a little gentian (Fr520), wriggling worms (Fr932), a naughty girl in a stained apron (Fr271): these images might captivate a reader, but they cannot charm God. Emotional triangulation ensues, as in "Of Course – I prayed" (Fr581):

Of Course – I prayed –  
 And did God Care?  
 He cared as much as on the Air  
 A Bird – had stamped her foot –  
 And cried "Give Me" –

(lines 1-5)

The cute-competent reader, confronted with the image of a petulant bird stamping its foot, is engaged and amused.

Insofar as the bird appeals, its charm is physical: It is small and it talks! Who could resist? But nothing moves God, who counts every sparrow but can't seem to delight in them.

By the poem's end, the cute bird dissolves into abstract atoms and the speaker abandons her appeal, retreating into "smart Misery" (line 11). The drama of socialization has failed, but the principal flawed actor is not the speaker or the bird, but God, who is *not* cute-competent, although he is presumably smart in other (more miserable) ways. Including a cute bird in the first stanza does not trivialize the poem or the speaker; rather, to echo Gray, by an "analogical inference which 'makes the whole world kin,'" Dickinson aligns herself emotionally with the bird and with the reader, positing God as an unnatural and perhaps even irrelevant outsider. Creatures suffer not because God's Godlike omnipotence fails, but because he is not sufficiently human.<sup>48</sup> If, as Lorenz suggests, beauty connotes symmetry while cuteness connotes asymmetry,<sup>49</sup> then God is beautiful and can appreciate beauty because he is perfect, but for this same reason, he can neither be cute nor appreciate cuteness. As Dickinson wrote to Higginson, commenting offhandedly on the paradox of incarnation, "To be human is to be more than divine, for when Christ was divine, he was uncontented until he was human."<sup>50</sup>

Cuteness, as I have suggested, sparks moments of play—and God consistently drops the ball, as in "I know that He exists" (Fr365), when the speaker attempts to posit him as a kindly parental figure:

I know that He exists.  
Somewhere – in silence –  
He has hid his rare life  
From our gross eyes.

'Tis an instant's play –  
'Tis a fond Ambush –

Just to make Bliss  
 Earn her own surprise!

(lines 1-8)

The trouble is serious: God violates the rules of hide-and-seek by extending the game indefinitely, which makes it not hide-and-seek, and indeed not a game at all. Rather, the play "prove[s] piercing earnest" (line 10) as death approaches and the speaker realizes that she has been abandoned. All of her suppositions about "a fond Ambush" are wrong (line 6). Thus, as Eberwein puts it, "the initial jollity of the celestial hide-and-seek game gives way to fear either of God's indifference to the seeker ... or even worse of the supposed hider's nonexistence, which makes a mockery of the quest."<sup>51</sup> God isn't playful like a father; indeed, throughout Dickinson's oeuvre, he *just plain can't* play. He is, to put it another way, joylessly fixed and literal, so that when humans try to capture him through metaphor (What if God were a cat? What if God took a nap?), He simply recedes from view.

If God lacks the cuteness response that would enable him to play appropriately, humans risk social inappropriateness for the opposite reason: our cuteness response is promiscuous. In her poems about death, Dickinson exploits this affective flexibility, inviting the reader's cuteness response before repelling it, releasing urges to nurture, play, or communicate, that cannot be fully satisfied (although, weirdly, they can be *partly* satisfied) by corpses, graves, and postmortem images. One version of this dynamic emerges in "She lay as if at play" (Fr412), whereby a corpse takes on the look of a partly-living doll:

Her dancing Eyes – ajar –  
 As if their Owner were  
 Still sparkling through  
 For fun – at you –

(lines 9-12)

This poem describes how the cuteness response can misfire, and its effect is to underline, not the dead body's grotesqueness, but the grotesqueness of the living person's longing. The dead child is no longer human, but her cute face (corpse? photograph?) continues to invite the play-drive. And yet, "She lay as if at play" tips its hand in the first line; we know this child is dead, so the poem works less as a visceral enticement than as a philosophical meditation on the fixity of death versus the mobility of cuteness. Like a postmortem photograph (eyes closed, pupils painted on the lids), this image dips into the uncanny valley and ultimately reinforces death's finality.

In other poems, Dickinson ambushes readers with cute images that partially reanimate the dead, so that the cute-competent reader finds herself playing with graves and corpses. The dead are drawn halfway back into the kinship circle, but the play is entirely one-sided now: it cannot generate the kinds of affective exchanges that nourish living relationships. Dickinson starkly acknowledges this loss in "In thy long Paradise of Light" (Fr1145), which reads in its entirety:

In thy long Paradise of Light  
 No moment will there be  
 When I shall long for Earthly Play  
 And mortal Company –

And yet, although (as she would put it elsewhere) "recess never comes" to paradise (Fr437, line 6), Dickinson places playful decoys in many of her death poems. The grave is figured as a cottage equipped with a tea set in "The grave

my little cottage is" (Fr1784, line 1); a life is extinguished by "a Gnat's minutest Fan" (Fr415, line 14); the cemetery is a "Curious Town," overrun with squirrels (Fr1069, line 9); the corpse is buried "just a Daisy deep" (Fr424, line 8); the dead even hang Christmas stockings, albeit at an altitude too high for "any Santa Claus to reach" (Fr344, line 19). Such decoys, insofar as they are cute, can trigger the reader's urge to touch, nurture, and play—all urges that are impossible to suppress and impossible to indulge, and yet serve as a (pretend, but *felt*) bridge between the living and the dead.

The dead speaker in "I think the longest Hour of all" (Fr607) ends a meditation on time with movement through space:

Then I – my timid service done –  
 Tho' service 'twas, of Love –  
 Take up my little Violin –  
 And further North – Remove –

(lines 17-20)

The speaker's "little Violin" seems curious; the poem does not otherwise frame the speaker as a musician, so its final image comes as a surprise. And yet, the violin animates the speaker at the moment that the speaker herself departs: a little violin is meant to be played. This is precisely the relationship that can no longer obtain, and yet the "little Violin" is offered up as a stand-in for a real object, a toy that can be taken up *as if at play*. The cuteness response animates the timid speaker and her violin without reviving them. Possibilities continue to be imaginable even as death forecloses upon them.

Insofar as cuteness gives readers a jolt of pleasure, Dickinson's death poems cater to, and manipulate, the cuteness response much as gothic texts exploit the magnetism of necrophilia. Finding death cute (like finding

it sexy) enables the poet to explore questions about death from a visceral point of view that implicates the reader in his or her own humanity, as in the brief poem, “A Dimple in the Tomb” (Fr1522), originally included in a letter to T. W. Higginson following the death of his infant daughter:<sup>52</sup>

A Dimple in the Tomb  
 Makes that ferocious Room  
 A Home –

In the context of the letter, the poem was clearly meant—and surely would have been taken—to be consoling. But a dimple, that quintessentially cute baby feature, depends on chubby limbs or a smiling face. If adults melt at the thought of a dimple, they cannot follow through with a pinch to this dead baby’s leg or cheek. “A Dimple in the Tomb” thus consoles, not by implying that the baby is in an abstract, *better place*, but by empathetically reproducing the grieving parent’s intense physical longing for the infant’s body.

Ultimately, this unquenchable desire represents the double-edged sword of mediated cuteness: the poem generates feelings of pleasure, proximity, and kinship, but readers cannot take the natural next steps: vocalizing, feeding, cuddling, engaging in two-way play. A dimple, a squirrel, or a little violin cannot subdue death, but they can extract from the reader a nurturing impulse. This incapacity is frustrating, of course, but it is also a generative advantage: once the reader’s sensual desire is aroused, the poet can redirect that desire into the poem’s demands and complexities. Once the reader’s attention has been captured, emotionally and physically, the cute image has done its work and the poem can begin to engage, on a human scale, with questions (what is death? why do we die?) that are too remote for humans to fully grasp. In this way, the dead work like dolls that appear, at first glance, to be capable of interaction. It turns out they can’t walk or talk, but it is still possible—and tempting—to play with them.



Dickinson's edgy deployments of cuteness were unusual in the 1860s, and cuteness would remain an underutilized strategy in so-called high art (although not in popular culture) throughout the twentieth century—with notable exceptions, as Ngai's work on Gertrude Stein suggests.<sup>53</sup> In the twentieth century, cuteness was widely deployed by top-down pop cultural forces such as Hallmark and Disney. I do not disagree that cuteness can be cynically harnessed to serve neoliberal economic agendas, and it is certainly true that the concept of cuteness coevolved with Western market economies—as did many other concepts, such as the gothic, the sublime, and the sentimental. However, to collapse one of the most ancient and basic human drives into a story about marketing Tom Thumb is to radically underestimate its power. Cuteness can be harnessed for commodification, but this need not be its sole function.

Moreover, the twentieth century is history, and as the media scholar Anthony McIntyre has argued, "cuteness is emerging as one of the dominant aesthetic categories of the twenty-first century."<sup>54</sup> Our twenty-first-century moment manufactures and circulates endless iterations of cuteness, particularly via the Internet. Dickinson, too, is on the Internet, and her web poems, as Virginia Jackson puts it, "partake, by the virtue of their medium, of the new time frame of Web discourse: a text available at a click, an illusion of simultaneous production and reception, a public world of individual access."<sup>55</sup> Scholarly attention to Dickinson's material production(s) has been facilitated by the online availability of her original texts, which are, of course, digital. While, in one sense, sites like the Houghton Library's *Emily Dickinson Archive* return Dickinson to her handmade historical context, they also place this entire context in the larger and more seductive framework of the web. That is, if Dickinson's handwriting, marginalia, and jagged envelope tears put pressure on the meanings of

her poems, so too must the weirdly boundless text of the Internet itself.

And the Internet, as D. E. Wittkower has argued, is ruled by cats.<sup>56</sup> Or, to elaborate more fully, the Internet has become dependent on capturing the attention of distracted viewers, and to do so, it draws most heavily on two basic instincts: the sexual response (porn) and the cuteness response (animals, babies, and baby-animal memes). The web environment offers anecdotal examples of what currently counts as cute: cross-species bonding, animals dressed in human clothes, novel animals, and animals performing humanlike activities.<sup>57</sup> While it might seem like a wild historical leap to suggest that analogous scenes with analogous effects occur in Dickinson poems, the parallels are undeniable. The difference, of course, is that animal memes are not typically linked to complex artistic experiments that make demands on audiences.

However, if in the twenty-first century cuteness is sometimes just clickbait, proliferating and democratizing forms of media have also made it available to amateurs and artists with more complicated agendas. Japanese artists, inspired by anime and manga, such as Takashi Murakami, are engaged with destigmatizing cuteness and exploring its expressive possibilities.<sup>58</sup> Insofar as the lens through which we view Emily Dickinson is necessarily contemporary and global, it makes particular sense, in the twenty-first century, to accede to her cuteness as a generative aspect of her art and as an aspect of her implicit feminist edge. To return to the quotes that launched this essay: perhaps now, in the twenty-first century, there is nothing necessarily “smirking” or “weak” or “cloying” or “annoying” about the image of little mice tucked “Snug in Seraphic Cupboards / To nibble all the day” (Fr151, lines 7-8). Perhaps to find (some of) Dickinson’s poetry cute is to read it competently; when fully engaged, the cuteness response helps readers to “dwell

in Possibility" (Fr466, line 1) as embodied, playful, and interdependent participant-observers.

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NOTES

1. James Dickey, *Classes on Modern Poets and the Art of Poetry*, ed. Donald J. Greiner (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2004), 12.
2. Annie Finch, "My Father Dickinson: On Poetic Influence," *Emily Dickinson Journal* 17.1 (2008): 24.
3. Emily Dickinson, Poem 96, in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*, ed. R. W. Franklin (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998), lines 1-2; hereafter cited parenthetically according to the editor's numbering system.
4. Vevay, in Switzerland County, Indiana, was named after the Swiss town of Vevey, near Geneva; in the *Dickinson Electronic Archive's* lexicon and elsewhere, scholars seem to agree she is referring to the latter and just using a variant spelling. "Vevay," *Emily Dickinson Archive*, accessed 29 May 2017, <http://www.edickinson.org/words/5194>.
5. Adrienne Rich, "Vesuvius at Home," in *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose: Poems, Prose, Reviews, and Criticism*, eds. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Albert Gelpi (New York: Norton, 1993), 177-95.
6. Suzanne Juhasz, Cristanne Miller, and Martha Nell Smith, *Comic Power in Emily Dickinson* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1993), 15.
7. Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley," trans. Karl F. MacDorman and Norri Kageki, *IEEE Robotics and Animation* 19.2 (June 2012): 98-100. Mori's essay first appeared in Japanese in 1970.
8. T. W. Higginson, "The Test of Talk," in *Book and Heart: Essays on Literature and Life* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1897), 220. Higginson is discussing social distinctions; he begins the chapter: "After spending an hour in the dark with a stranger, we can classify him pretty surely as to education, antecedents, and the like, unless he has had the wit to hold his tongue" (218).
9. Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2012), 3-4; 53-109.

10. Konrad Lorenz, *Studies in Human and Animal Behavior: Vol. II* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1971), 154.
11. The innate releasing mechanism, or IRM, is a foundational concept for Lorenz; the most accessible popular account of its relationship to cuteness is in Stephen Jay Gould, "A Biological Homage to Mickey Mouse," in *The Panda's Thumb: More Reflections in Natural History* (New York: Norton, 1980) 96-106.
12. Gary D. Sherman and Jonathan Haidt, "Cuteness and Disgust: The Humanizing and Dehumanizing Effects of Emotion," *Emotion Review* 3.3 (2011): 245-51.
13. Jessika Golle, et al., "Sweet Puppies and Cute Babies: Perceptual Adaptation to Babyfacedness Transfers Across Species," *Plos One* 8.3 (2013): 1-5.
14. Sharon Kinsella, "Cuties in Japan," in *Women, Media, and Consumption in Japan*, eds. Lisa Skov and Brian Moeran (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1995), 220-53.
15. Michael D. Snediker makes this link in an essay that also frames Dickinson as cute in the context of an argument about saving the humanities. Snediker, "Fuzzy Thinking," in *Staying Alive: A Survival Manual for the Liberal Arts*, eds. L. O. Aranye Fradenburg and Eileen Joy (Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2013), 287-95.
16. T. H. Arthur, "Other People's Children," *Boston Weekly*, 17 October 1840, 1. Glenn Hendler argues for the importance of Arthur's public sentimentalism. Hendler, "Bloated Bodies and Sober Sentiments: Masculinity in 1840s Temperance Narratives," in *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture*, eds. Mary Chapman and Hendler (Berkeley: U of California P, 1999), 125-48. For other examples of cuteness at midcentury, see in particular the trend of regularly reprinting bright "sayings of little ones" in magazines such as *The Ladies Repository*. See also Lydia Sigourney, *Sayings of the Little Ones* (New York: Ivison and Phinney, 1855); and Elizabeth Prentiss, *Little Lou's Sayings and Doings* (Boston: Hurd and Houghton, 1868).
17. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 53-109.
18. Lauren Byler, "Dickens's Little Women, or, Cute as the Dickens," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 41.2 (2013): 224-25.

19. Jed Depmann, *Trying to Think With Emily Dickinson* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2008), 103.
20. See Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. and ed. Reginald Snell (Mineola: Dover, 2012).
21. Lorenz, *Studies in Human and Animal Behavior*, 154.
22. Isaac Watts, "Against Idleness and Mischief," in *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (London, 1715), 29. It is also important to remember that Watts, even as he allegorizes the bee, strongly encouraged empirical observation.
23. Jane Donahue Eberwein, *Dickinson: Strategies of Limitation* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1986), 169.
24. See Robin Peel, *Emily Dickinson and the Hill of Science* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2010).
25. Sherman and Haidt, "Cuteness and Disgust," 247.
26. Colleen Boggs, "Emily Dickinson's Animal Pedagogies," *PMLA* 124.2 (2009): 536.
27. See John Ruskin, "Of the Pathetic Fallacy," *Modern Painters*, vol. 3, pt. 4 (London: Smith, Elder, 1856), 157-72.
28. Helen Vendler, *Dickinson: Selected Poems and Commentaries* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2010), 382.
29. Boggs, "Emily Dickinson's Animal Pedagogies," 538-39.
30. Daniel Harris, *Cute, Quaint, Hungry and Romantic: The Aesthetics of Consumerism* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 4.
31. Emily Dickinson, Letter 45, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, eds. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1958), 1:117.
32. Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 197.
33. Harris, *Cute, Quaint, Hungry and Romantic*, 133.
34. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Emily Dickinson's Letters," *Atlantic Monthly*, 68:408 (October 1891): 444-56.
35. "The Baby Show," *New York Times*, 6 June 1855. On Barnum's American Museum and baby shows, see City University of New York, "The Baby Show Exhibit," *Lost Museum Archive*, accessed 29 May 2017, <http://lostmuseum.cuny.edu/archive/exhibit/baby/>.

36. "Tom Thumb and His Wife," *Harper's Weekly*, 21 February 1863, 114.  
For a discussion of the Dickinson family's magazine subscriptions, see Cristanne Miller, *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2012), 148.
37. *Springfield (MA) Republican*, 26 February 1863.
38. Lori Merish, "Cuteness and Commodity Aesthetics: Tom Thumb and Shirley Temple," in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York UP, 1996), 194.
39. Lind, a Swedish singer, was less of a sideshow figure than Charles Stratton. For a discussion of Dickinson and Lind, see Judith Pascoe, "'The House Encore Me So': Emily Dickinson and Jenny Lind," *Emily Dickinson Journal* 1.1 (1992): 1-18.
40. Antebellum dollhouses, like other toys of the era, were mostly handmade and not standardized, but 1:12 scale was common and became the norm after the Civil War; one example owned by twin girls of Dickinson's generation is the Morris-Canby-Rumsford house, made in Philadelphia about 1825, now at the Abby Rockefeller Folk Art Museum. See Susan Rountree, *Dollhouses, Miniature Kitchens, and Shops from the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center* (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1996).
41. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984), 70.
42. Victoria N. Morgan, *Emily Dickinson and Hymn Culture: Tradition and Experience* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 217.
43. Asa Gray, "Darwin on the Origin of the Species," *Atlantic Monthly* 6.33 (July 1860): 115.
44. Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (London: John Murray, 1872).
45. Gray, "Darwin on the Origin of the Species," 116.
46. "Such a man as the curate—such a dear—such a perfect love—to be consumptive! It was too much. Anonymous presents of blackcurrant jam, and lozenges, elastic waistcoats, bosom friends, and warm stockings, poured in upon the curate until he was as completely fitted out, with winter clothing, as if he were on the verge of an expedition

- to the North Pole: verbal bulletins of the state of his health were circulated throughout the parish half-a-dozen times a day; and the curate was in the very zenith of his popularity." Charles Dickens, *Sketches By Boz* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1850), 5.
47. Roger Lundin explores the idea of unsettled "nimble believing" in *Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 3-4.
  48. Linda Freedman discusses Dickinson's concern with "the paradox of the God-Man" and her "traditional and distinct vocabulary of divine otherness" in *Emily Dickinson and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2011), 31. Freedman argues that Dickinson could not embrace the Unitarian vision of a humanized Christ because her God was too Miltonic—remote and unnamable.
  49. Drawing on Lorenz, Stephen Jay Gould illustrates the ways that juvenilization produced a progressively less-symmetrical, larger-eyed version of Mickey Mouse. Gould, "A Biological Homage to Mickey Mouse," 266.
  50. Dickinson, Letter 519, *Letters of Emily Dickinson*, 2:592.
  51. Eberwein, *Strategies of Limitation*, 246.
  52. Dickinson, Letter 641, *Letters of Emily Dickinson*, 3:661.
  53. Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 88.
  54. Anthony McIntyre, "Isn't She Adorkable! Cuteness as Political Neutralization in the Star Text of Zooe Deschanel," *Television and New Media* 16.5 (July 2015): 422.
  55. Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton: Princeton UP), 47.
  56. See D. E. Wittkower, "On the Origins of the Cute as a Dominant Aesthetic Category in Digital Culture," in *Putting Knowledge to Work and Letting Information Play*, eds. Timothy Luke and Jeremy Hunsinger, 2nd ed. (Boston: Sense Publishers, 2012), 212-19.
  57. See respectively "!!SQUIRREL ADOPTED BY CAT LEARNS TO PURR," YouTube video, 2:05, posted by "SHARKSWHALESANIMALS," 14 September 2010, "<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHT1nAX46dM>"; "13 Pets in Ugly Christmas Sweaters," *People*, 15 December 2012, <http://people.com/pets/13-pets-in-ugly-christmas-sweaters/bee-gee>; Lucy Cooke, "A

- Bucket of Sloths—The Perfect Valentine’s Gift,” *HuffPost* (blog), last modified 15 April 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lucy-cooke/sloths\\_b\\_2672700.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lucy-cooke/sloths_b_2672700.html); and “Tiny hamster eating tiny sushi,” YouTube video, 1:27, posted by “Tiny Hamster World,” 18 January 2015, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cEiRSm10\\_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cEiRSm10_g).
58. For a historicized discussion of Murakami and cuteness see Roy Starrs, *Modernism and Japanese Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2011) 262-66.