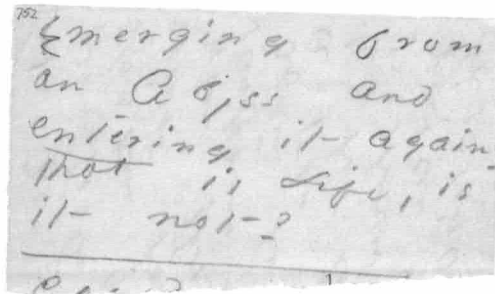


Possibly during 1885, the year before she died, Emily Dickinson wrote in a letter to her sister-in-law Susan,

"Emerging from an Abyss, and re-entering it that is Life, is it not, Dear?

"The tie between us is very fine, but a Hair never dissolves."

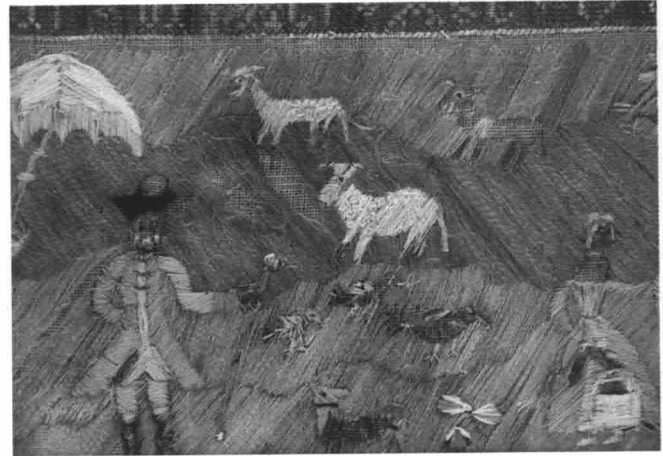


<sup>752</sup>  
Emerging from  
an Abyss and  
entering it again.  
That is life, is  
it not?  
P. 1

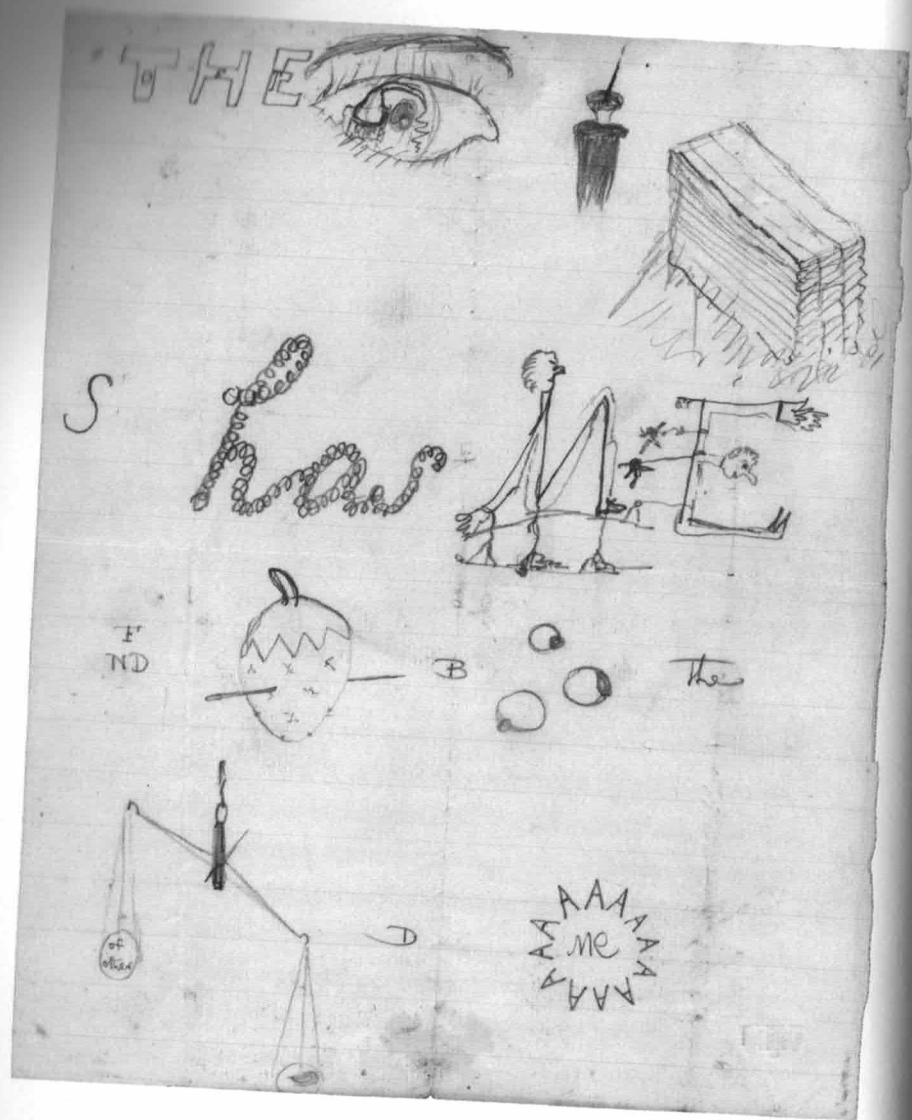
Things-in-themselves and things-as-they-are-for-us.

Often by chance, via out-of-the-way card catalogues, or through previous web surfing, a particular "deep" text, or a simple object (bobbin, sampler, scrap of lace) reveals itself *here* at the surface of the visible, by mystic documentary telepathy. Quickly—precariously—coming as it does from an opposite direction.

If you are lucky, you may experience a moment *before*.



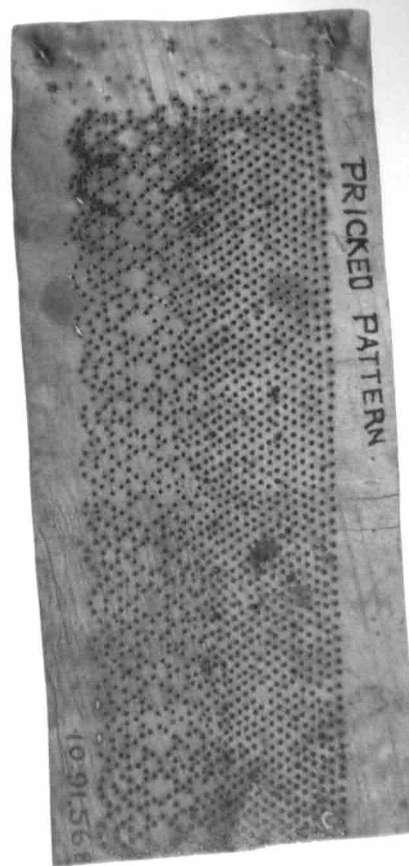
The English word "text" comes from Medieval Latin *textus* "style or texture of a work," literally "thing woven," from the past participle stem of *texere*: "to weave, to join, fit together, construct." In several notebooks she labeled "Sentences" (1928–1929), Gertrude Stein writes: "A sentence is partly softly after they write it. What is the difference between a sentence and a sewn. What is the difference between a sentence and a picture. They will sew which will make it tapestry. A sentence is not carrying it away. A sentence furnishes while they will draw. A sentence is drawers and drawers full of drawings. A sentence is an imagined masterpiece. A sentence is an imagined frontispiece. In looking up from her embroidery she looks at me. She lifts up the tapestry. It is partly. . . . Think in stitches. Think in settlements. Think in willows."



An article by Edward Moore and Arthur Burks on editing the manuscripts of the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce has an epigraph taken from the horse's mouth: "I am a mere table of contents ... a very snarl of twine."

In research libraries and collections, we may capture the portrait of history in so-called insignificant visual and verbal textualities and textiles. In material details. In twill fabrics, bead-work pieces, pricked patterns, four-ringed knots, tiny spangles, sharp-toothed stencil wheels; in quotations, thought-fragments, rhymes, syllables, anagrams, graphemes, endangered phonemes, in soils and cross-outs.

In 1907 Henry James placed his second novel *Roderick Hudson* first in the twenty-four volume Scribner's New York collection of his novels, novellas, and short stories. Near the beginning of the "Preface" he wrote for this edition he asks: "Where, for the complete expression of one's subject, does a particular relation stop—giving way to some other not concerned in that expression? Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so. . . . All of which will perhaps pass but for a supersubtle way of pointing the plain moral that a young embroiderer of the canvas of life soon began to work in terror, fairly, of the vast expanse of that surface, of the boundless number of its distinct perforations for the needle, and of the tendency inherent in his many-coloured flowers and figures to cover and consume as many as possible of the little holes. The development of the flower, of the figure, involved thus an immense counting of holes and a careful selection among them. That would have been, it seemed to him, a brave enough process, were it not the very nature of the holes so to invite, to solicit, to persuade, to practise positively a thousand lures and deceits."



One historical-existential trace has been hunted, captured, guarded, and preserved in aversion to waste by an avid collector, then shut carefully away, outside an economy of use, inaccessible to touch. Now it is re-animated, re-collected (recollected) through an encounter with the mind of a curious reader, a researcher, an antiquarian, a bibliomaniac, a sub sub librarian, a poet.

Each collected object or manuscript is a pre-articulate empty theater where a thought may surprise itself at the instant of seeing. Where a thought may hear itself see.

277  
 Long years  
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 of the witch  
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 fire  
 will <sup>still</sup> gleam  
 and  
 understand  
 Special Verse Bookman

For conversion, there must be a mysterious leap of love. Sometimes, a hidden verso side acts as prior counterpoint. The way improvised children's tales have needlepoint roots in Latin holy words and medieval jargon. What difference does it make if what we see before our mind's eye has already been interpreted? This meanly magnificent "waste" exists on a scale beyond actual use. It provides us with a literal and mythical sense of life hereafter—

Coming home to poetry—you permit yourself liberties—in the first place—happiness.

On August 19, 1926, Hart Crane ended a letter to Waldo Frank this way: "I have never been able to live completely in my work before. Now it is to learn a great deal. To handle the beautiful skeins of this myth of America—to realize suddenly, as I seem to, how much of the past is living under only slightly altered forms, even in machinery and such-like, is extremely exciting. So I am having the time of my life just now, anyway."

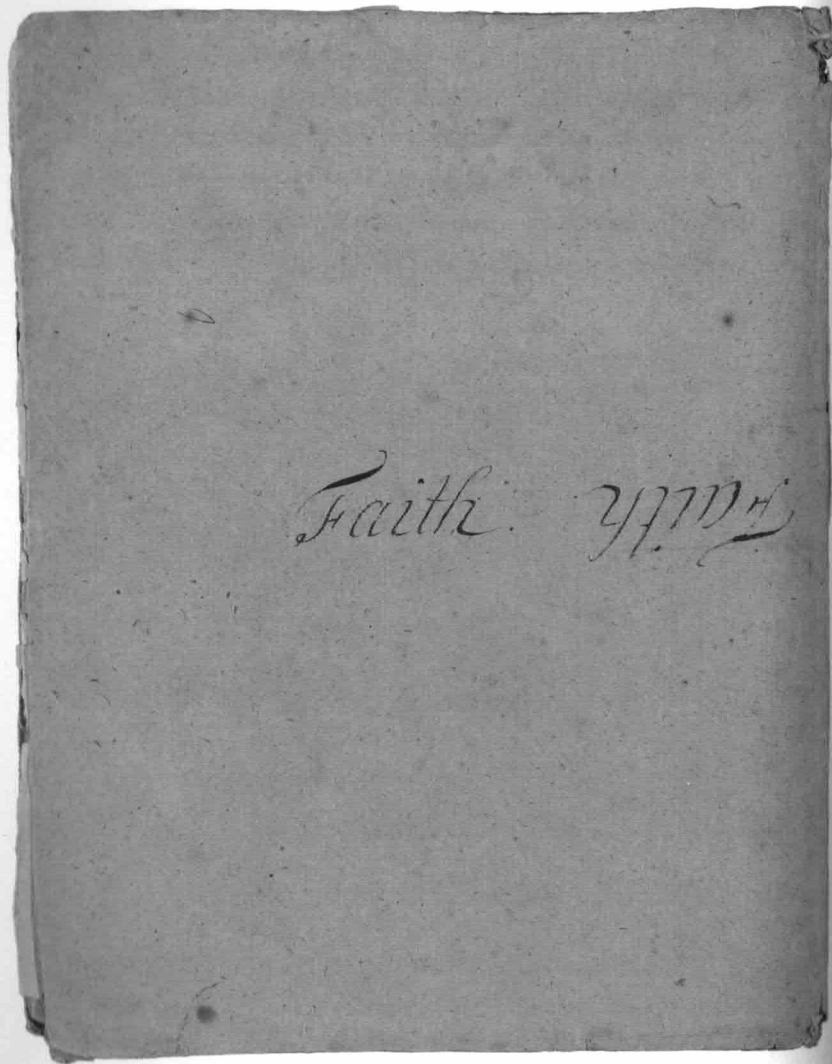
Webster's dictionary has defined skein this way: "Skain, *n.* [Fr. *escaigne*] A knot or number of knots of thread, silk, or yarn. A loosely coiled length of yarn or thread, wound in a reel suitable for a manufacturing process (as dyeing) or for sale as knitting wool or embroidery.

"Something suggesting the twistings and contradictions of a skein ('unraveled the tangled skein of evidence'). A trimmed strip of osier made from splits for basketwork. A metal thimble on an axletree arm.

"A flock of wild fowl in flight."

Words are skeins—meteors, mimetic spirit-sparks. Noah Webster's 1828 *Dictionary* is repeatedly invoked by our 19th-century North American interpreters, Emerson, Melville, Hawthorne, Dickinson, Whitman, and many others. Often the Calvinist lexographer's terse definitions, particularly when read aloud, resemble prose poems.

*A Dorable. See under adore*  
 Adore. *v.t.* L. *adoro*, from <sup>sup.</sup> Gr. *δοξω* to honor, reverence, to adorn.  
 The radical sense appears to be to adorn, or decorate, make splendid;  
 from  $\aleph$  to encompass; for  $\aleph$   $\aleph$   $\aleph$  to go round are *allos*  
 in sense; & from this root is formed  $\aleph$   $\aleph$   $\aleph$  roses of Jewry for ornament, whence Eng. *rose*, *attire*. See *attire*, *crown*, *ornament*,  
 whose radical sense is *round*, *a circle*. Hence the Ch.  $\aleph$   $\aleph$   $\aleph$   
 signifies not only to honor, but to *retire*, &  $\aleph$   $\aleph$   $\aleph$  things  
 twisted. This root *hadar*, has a like sense in the Lyre; & also  
 signifies a little ring, the year.]



“Faith!” shouted Goodman Brown, in a voice of agony and desperation; and the echoes of the forest mocked him, crying, ‘Faith! Faith!’ as if bewildered wretches were seeking her, all through the wilderness.”

Nathaniel Hawthorne: “Young Goodman Brown” (1835).

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Previous work I have done in terms of manuscripts and archives led me to the massive collection of the papers of the 18th-century New England theologian—some say our first American philosopher—Jonathan Edwards, in New Haven at Yale’s Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, one of the largest buildings in the world devoted entirely to rare books and manuscripts. The Beinecke was constructed from Vermont marble and granite, bronze and glass, during the early 1960s. The structure displays and contains acquisitive violence, the rapacious “fetching” involved in collecting, and, on the other hand, it radiates a sense of peace. Downstairs, in the Modernist reading room I hear the purr of the air filtration system, the rippling sound of pages turning, singular out of tune melodies of computers re-booting. Scholars are seated at wide worktables bent in devotion over some particular material object. They could be copying out a manuscript or deciphering a pattern. Here is deep memory’s lure, and sheltering. In this room I experience enduring relations and connections between what was and what is.

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Poetry has no proof nor plan nor evidence by decree or in any other way. From somewhere in the twilight realm of sound a spirit of belief flares up at the point where meaning stops and the unreality of what seems most real floods over us. The inward ardor I feel while working in research libraries is intuitive. It's a sense of self-identification and trust, or the granting of grace in an ordinary room, in a secular time.