good as Henry Nelson,' one of the greats," Chuck said.

"And that was from family," Darick added. The brothers agreed, however, that it made them practice harder.

Before Chuck and Darick headed for North Carolina, the Campbells stopped at Matt Umanov Guitars, on Bleecker Street, where Chuck set up his pedal steel and, with Darick on lap steel, played "Amazing Grace," and they had their photograph taken with Umanov.

Chuck made one more remark that his brothers agreed with: "You knew you had a bad service, you knew you had bombed out, when the ladies said, 'We're praying for you.'"

—Alec Wilkinson

POESY DEPT.
BACK OF THE ENVELOPE

Jen Bervin, a visual artist and a poet, first read Emily Dickinson as most people who read Emily Dickinson do, in a poetry collection aimed at high-school students. It was not until Bervin was getting her master's degree in poetry, at the University of Denver, that she first saw a page in Dickinson's own hand. "Seeing what the poems looked like changed everything," Bervin explained one recent afternoon, in her studio, in Gowanus. "What I was responding to was the visual composition."

Dickinson's editors had often given her poems line breaks that differed from those on the manuscripts. In addition, her pages were covered with tiny crosses and other markings that had not been preserved in any printed edition. "It seemed to me that what she was doing was much more interesting than what was being done to her," Bervin observed. That insight led to Bervin's first Dickinson-related work, in 2006: a collection of large-scale reproductions of composite pages from Dickinson's "fascicles," or homemade booklets, stitched onto cotton batting, with the crosses and marks restored in red thread and most of the words omitted. "Red is a mending color, to me," Bervin said. "It's a way of visualizing what has been removed, and calling attention to that. I just needed to see what it looks like when it is all put back." The sturdy quilts marked with delicate traceries recall Dickinson's inspired, homebound artistic practice. "I think her work requires a great deal of visual attention," Bervin said.

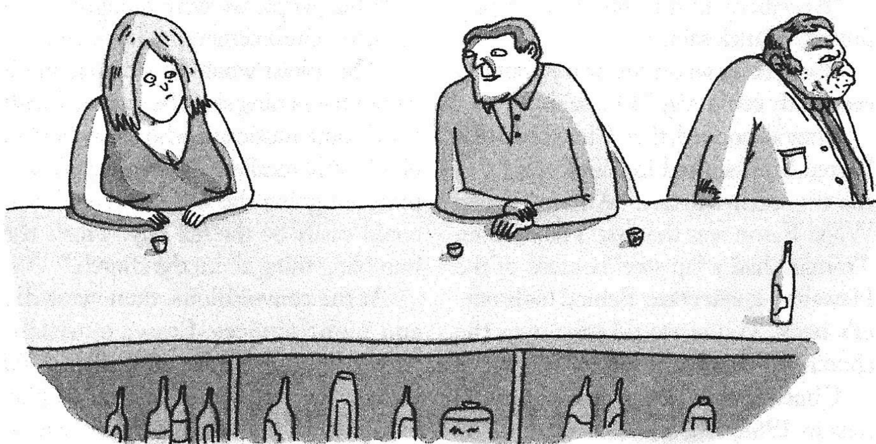
A more recent Dickinson-related project is "The Gorgeous Nothings," a book co-edited by Bervin and Marta Werner, a professor of English literature at D'Youville College, in Buffalo, and a Dickinson scholar. (Originally published as a limited edition by Granary Books, it has just been released in a trade edition by New Directions.) "The Gorgeous Nothings" reproduces Dickinson's so-called "envelope poems"—the mostly late compositions that Dickinson made on scraps of correspondence. The book contains fifty-two scale reproductions of Dickinson's compositions, written in pencil on envelopes that have sometimes been unfolded and occasionally torn, with some postage stamps excised. In addition to an index by first line, the back pages of the book catalogue the works by shape or structure, displayed like butterflies in an lepidopterist's specimen cabinet.

"One of the big problems with work on Dickinson is this question of genre—what are these things?" Werner said the other day. "People will say these are coincidental relationships, but once you see the documents together it is very difficult not to see connections among them." Werner contests the suggestion that Dickinson wrote on envelopes simply out of Yankee parsimony. "I have seen her write a rough draft on a piece of gilt-edged stationery—that was in some sense unbelievably wasteful, in this gorgeous way," she says. "I think she is always negotiating with the shape of the page."

One work, written on the envelope of a letter from Otis Lord, who is thought by some scholars to have been Dickinson's lover, can be read both folded and unfolded—the phrase "A Mir/acle for/ all" is tucked into one corner, by the postal office's frank. Werner points out that many of the poems are about the problems of communication. "The nineteenth century is when these really fraught relationships with communication begin," she said. "Telepathy is big. The postal system is changing—you can have this intimate, absolute connection almost immediately. Yet this is also the era of the dead-letter office, of things not getting there." The Dickinson envelopes may be particularly poignant now, Werner says, "because we are far into the age of the anxiety of communication—maybe at the end of it."

In the future, Bervin said that she would like to produce an edition of Dickinson for the general reader. "I feel like I work for her—I feel that it's so unjust that her work still isn't published with the right line breaks, or all the words. There's a literary arrogance in choosing for a writer who chose so carefully," Bervin said. "She was utterly brilliant: she figured out how to have all her time to work. Tell me that's not well chosen."

—Rebecca Mead



"Can I buy you a drink? And then if things don't work out between us you can pay me back?"