

THE EMILY DICKINSON INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

Bulletin

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"The Only News I know / Is Bulletins all Day / From Immortality."

Dickinson and the Elements



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The images on the front cover are by Clark Lunberry, representing his installation, Bodies of Water: Somebody | Nobody (For E.D.), photographer Neil Soderstrom, from his work on Dickinson as a gardener; and Michael Medeiros, public relations director of the Emily Dickinson Museum. The image on the back cover is also by Lunberry. From a poem written on water, to a photographic study of Dickinson's flowers, to an exploration of the Elements around Amherst by Society members at the Annual Meeting, 2015 was a popular year for reading Dickinson against the background of the elements.

The Editorial Assistant for this issue was Elle Enander

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Emily Dickinson in Her Elements

EDIS Annual Meeting, Amherst 2015

The Annual Meeting formally opened with EDIS President Martha Nell Smith and Emily Dickinson Museum director Jane Wald welcoming the society and introducing, not for the last time, the upcoming documentary, *Phosphorescence*, by Hurricane Films, with Cynthia Nixon, who will play Dickinson in Terence Davies' new dramatic film *A Quiet Passion*, as narrator. Wald told how *Phosphorescence* was born when she watched the filming of a scene from *A Quiet Passion* at the Homestead and expressed her alarm that Austin's intimacy with Mabel Loomis Todd was taking place against the background of the mustering of troops for the Civil War (when Todd would have been about five years old).

After the opening formalities, Marta Werner, EDIS Board Member and author of *Dickinson's Last Folios* and *The Gorgeous Nothings*, as well as the website *Radical Scatters*, delivered for the first plenary session a singularly and remarkably appropriate ad-

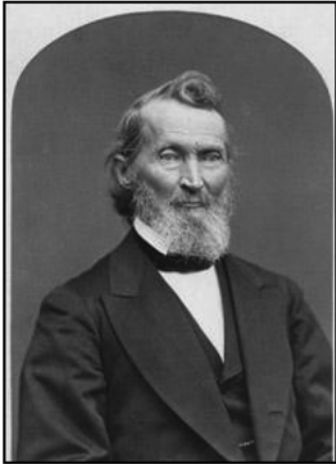
dress called "The Weather (of Manuscripts): The Genealogies of the Snell Family Meteorological Records at Amherst College Library." A description of a weather archive might seem an improbable highlight of an author society meeting, even one on the Elements, but Werner's discussion provided an intriguing beginning to the meeting with its rich pattern of connections among weather, archives, history, antecedent voices, and antecedent affections.

Werner traced the meteorological records of Ebenezer Strong Snell, long-time professor of mathematics and natural philosophy at Amherst. Snell allowed his eldest daughter, Rebecca, to keep the record when he was traveling, but she died at age 12, and he registered the tragedy with a brief lacuna in an otherwise unbroken ledger. His youngest daughter, Sabra, took up the journal after his own death in 1876 and kept it until 1902, maintaining his project in a hand undistinguishable from his own.

Werner explained that the record consisted mostly of outward observation of random chance events, yet through them Snell showed his faith in the legibility of the natural world. When Rebecca died the world ceased to be legible. By continuing her father's work, Sabra maintained his project, continuing his vision of the world's legibility. What was for him a kind of assurance that the skies spoke to him of their projects became for her a form of extended contact, a way to share his sensibility. By reading, discerning, the inner spirit of these archival records, Werner in turn was taking her place as a recorder who maintains the legibility of the past and its projects and sensibilities, letting antecedent voices speak in the faintest of clarities.

Emily Dickinson would have known Ebenezer Snell only distantly, but her poem "A Wind





Ebenezer Snell in 1872; Snell Family Papers, Amherst College Archives

that rose though not a Leaf" (Fr1216) was marked "Dec 5" – the day of Snell's death – and it is tempting to hear an elegiac note, to register an inward sympathy that, once registered, becomes part of the archival record. In this sense an archive becomes a place to read outer forms and the inner life that completed them. So just as Snell sought faint patterns in the weather through which the world spoke to him, and his daughter found in his record a voice and a sensibility through which she could connect to him and keep him alive in her, and Dickinson registered the dignity of his passing, Werner and other archivists with the patience and sensitivity to witness it – and surely no one in Werner's audience could have helped marveling at her patience and sensitivity in restoring this faint but powerful lineage

– such readers of archives bring the lives of others back and make contact with the past, creating what Werner called "genealogies between the living and the dead."

Snell's legacy became a model of the whole meeting. An archive of documents allows for one kind of connection to the past, but EDIS members with a geological bent went to the Beneski Museum at the college and learned of a different deciphering of distant signals, Edward Hitchcock's reading of the sedimentary layers of the Connecticut River Valley in his effort to discover the story of the land itself. Others could rise early and tour the woodlands south of town along the "Emily Dickinson Trail" and hear from Dave King, of the Kestrel Trust, how songbirds, meadow grasses, fern fronds, and even a dead mouse hold their own archival record and tell a coherent story to those with the sensitivity to hear it.

Nighttime, too, offered its archival tracery. On Friday the Red Skies Music Ensemble, led by George Boziwick and Trudy Williams, presented an arrangement of songs from Dickinson's songbooks, exploring what her musical interests reveal about her engagement with her elements, including town, region, servants, and visiting celebrity performers.

Saturday morning the Society convened for the second plenary speaker. Cody Marris, whose book *Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Long Civil War* (Cam-

bridge 2015) appeared this summer, spoke about "Dickinson in the Winds of War." Bringing together philosophical, political, and ecological issues, Marris explained how it is possible to hear, in Dickinson's wartime poetry, nothing less than the shock of a solitary sensibility proleptically discerning for the first time the rise of the anthropocene epoch of terrestrial history.

Lots of poets during and after the Civil War drew on the ancient image of war as a storm, implying that war comes in the natural course of things. Dickinson, Marris argued, used imagery of wind and weather precisely to question whether there was any historical or temporal legibility to it at all. In poems like "The Wind took up the Northern Things" (Fr1162), she seems to "abolish sequence and cycle," and even poses the question of whether or not the Civil War "abridges poetry" – poetry representing the power of the human imagination to discern patterns in history. Paradoxically, it is this very abridgment of natural cycles that signals the advent of the Anthropocene: because of the War, we are no longer subject to the winds of nature; rather, the "Winds of Will" (Fr1044) have created a new system of cycles that remains illegible and uncanny.

Reeling away from that bleak picture, some Society members repaired to the Beneski Museum again to learn of the regional bird populations, and some heard presentations about the two most recent novelizations of events in the



life of the poet, Nuala O'Connor's *Miss Emily* and Susan Snively's *The Heart Has Many Doors*. The rest participated in the second of two afternoons of workshop sessions on Dickinson's Elements.

These workshops highlighted the theme of the Annual Meeting by centering in a kind of archiving of the ways Dickinson registered the four classical elements. Friday afternoon's sessions focused on Earth (led by Martha Nell Smith and Ellen Louise Hart) and Fire (Antoine Cazé and Elizabeth Petrino), whereas Saturday's workshop participants discussed poems about Air (Eleanor Heginbotham and Dan Manheim) and Water (James Guthrie and Lois Kackley). If the discussion of poems about Air was representative of the level of conversation in the sessions, these workshops were thoughtful and animated, with consistently illuminating observations coming from everyone in the room. A session leader was heard to confess that he had come away with many more ideas than he had brought in.

All this while, behind closed doors, the sessions of the third Critical Institute were taking place. To emphasize and facilitate the support of research in early stages of development, the Institute sessions are closed to the public; nevertheless, they have become an increasingly popular feature of the Annual Meetings for young scholars and anyone else eager to test ideas out among others who have worked on the same issues in Dickinson's writing. Institute sessions for 2015 included "Sociality and Communication," "War and Death," "Inspiration / Atmosphere," "Ecology and Nature," "Scale and the Scientific Imagination," and "Thinking / Being."

Late Saturday afternoon, jazz pianist Tomoko Ozawa, leader of the "Tomoko Ozawa Quintet" and piano accompanist at the Boston Conservatory, Jose Mateo Ballet Theatre and Dance



Complex, performed some of her settings of Dickinson's poems on the piano at The Evergreens, sharing her own reading of emotions archived in the poems, in the same parlor where the poet played her reportedly "weird improvisations" more than 150 years earlier.

Later on, those who could tear themselves away from Amherst's vivid restaurant fare and find their way down dark deserted streets to the Wilder Observatory – built too late to have housed David Todd's efforts to discern radio signals from Mars – traced patterns in



the nighttime sky, while those interested in more sublunary patterns made their way to the Homestead to have their own inner lives deciphered by palmists and tarot card readers.

The final Plenary session, Sunday morning, saw Michelle Kohler, author of the recently published *Miles of Stare* (Alabama 2014), about figures of vision in 19th-century literature, turning her attention to figures of time in Emily Dickinson. In Kohler's reading, Dickinson's celebrated image of a train, in "I like to see it lap the Miles –" (Fr383) becomes an archive of her culture's responses to time keeping. Likewise, the solitary singer of "At Half past Three" (Fr1099) desperately fails to keep a coherent register of the accurate time. The "Maelstrom, with a notch" (Fr425) becomes, by contrast, a tyrannical timepiece.

Kohler's title, "Prompter than a Star – Dickinson's Clockwork," in short, reflects her sense of the poet's response to the "encroachment" of time-keeping upon a hitherto organic orientation in time. The many clocks, notches, and gauges in the poems mark the advent of exactitude in time, yet this exactitude was countered by the fact that each locality kept its own time, based on different relations to the stars. There was at once too much exactitude in time-keeping and not enough. Hence Dickinson's train in Fr383, for all its promptness, was following a railroad clock that would have been different from the town's time-pieces set by the church tower, which themselves might likely have jibed imprecisely with the factory whistles marking the line between work and leisure. Long ahead of her time, Dickinson was asking, "does anybody really know what time it is?"

Special thanks are due to Michael Medeiros, public relations director for the Emily Dickinson Museum, for permission to use his photographs from the meeting.

POET TO POET

Series Editor, Jonnie Guerra

Emily Dickinson and Me

By Richard Michelson

Readers of the Bulletin's Poet to Poet Series are in for a real treat in this issue, which features Richard Michelson, the Poet Laureate of Northampton, MA. Michelson's latest collection of poetry is titled More Money than God (Pitt Poetry Series, 2015). He is the author of many books for children, teens, and adults that have been listed among the Ten Best of the Year by The New York Times, Publishers Weekly, The New Yorker, and among the Best Dozen of the Decade by Amazon.com. He has been a finalist for the Massachusetts Book Award (3X), the National Jewish Book Award (3X), and the Harlem Book Fest Wheatley Award. He also is the only author ever awarded both the Sydney Taylor Gold and Silver Medals in a single year from the Association of Jewish Librarians. From my correspondence with him, I also know that he is a great guy. I know readers will enjoy his reflective essay on his connections to Emily Dickinson.

I was born into a poor, Jewish (soon to be racially torn) inner city working class Brooklyn New York neighborhood. I did not read much as a child, nor do I recall spending much quiet time pondering life's mysteries, beyond what TV's *Time Tunnel* and *My Mother the Car* served up. I came to poetry in my final teenage years, and the poets to whom I was most attracted wrote primarily politically and ethnically tinged narrative verse. What had I in common with a prim, secluded, upper-class, Calvinist (lapsed or not), lyric poet?



Photo Credit: Ellen Michelson

What verse by Dickinson that I did dip into, I found either unnecessarily abstract or difficult, metrically tame, or (no hate letters please) a bit syrupy. And of course I'd heard the truism that all her common ballad measures could be sung to the tune of "The Yellow Rose of Texas," or worse, the *Gilligan's Island* theme song.

I was reading the Yiddish socialist sweatshop poets (in translation), the macho James Dickey whose *Deliverance* led me to Buckdancer's Choice, early James Wright, Phil Levine's *They Feed They Lion*, the fierce and muscular Ted Hughes, and the war-torn

poems of Yehuda Amichai. (Yes, all men, although I doubt I noticed that then.)

When I finally ventured back in time it was to Whitman, Shakespeare and Dante.

In 1979, my wife and I moved to the picturesque town of Amherst, Massachusetts, where I opened a small art gallery. Every morning I drove into town, passing the Emily Dickinson House on my right, and every evening I returned home seeing it on my left. I rarely stopped. I would suggest visiting friends take the house tour (irregularly and

infrequently scheduled at the time), but I didn't join them. We'd meet afterward for dinner where I'd hear the same stories of the white dress and reclusive manner.

I'd published one chapbook by that time, and was working toward my first collection. I loved that Amherst was a literary haven, and I was reading voluminously trying to make up for a wasted youth. If I had to side with one local luminary, I'd pick Robert Frost, who Randall Jarrell had proved to be a dark and brooding presence.

Still, as the years passed I couldn't help but notice that a number of writers whose work I respected idealized Dickinson's poetry. I went to some lectures at the Jones Library and listened to what they had to say. I began to intellectually understand the attraction. The fresh use of enjambments, the unexpected leaps of logic, the unorthodox syntax, the experimental use of slant rhyme. And many of the artists I represented in my gallery used her words as a jumping off point. Barry Moser created portraits, Michael Kuch illustrated three of her poems for a limited edition collaboration with the

POET TO POET

composer Luna Pearl Woolf and cellist Matt Haimovitz. Kuch's unique interpretation forced me, for the first time, to study her words carefully.

I began "to get it," but still, I admit, the poems themselves did not take the top of my head off, nor did I return to them for solace.

I published my own books and found my own audience. I became Poet Laureate of the neighboring city of Northampton. I started a poetry radio program where I was honored to interview many of America's best poets. I had settled into a sort of peace with Emily Dickinson. I recognized her genius, and enjoyed some of her poems, but I could live comfortably in the same town, without worrying about, or needing to escape, her shadow.

And then one day...

I was asked to host a yearly local music festival called Transperformance. Area based rock and roll bands perform in costume of nationally known performers – lovingly mocking and paying tribute to their heroes. Money raised went to the City Schools to help fund arts programs. Might I host in drag as Ms. Emily D.?

Reader, I do not make a handsome Emily, but when the arts are being cut, you do what you need to do. A wig was found, as was a replica of the famous black dress and neckerchief.

I decided to read short verses between sets, commenting on the upcoming acts while imparting a bit of Emily. This year's theme was Food and so groups performed as Cream, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Black Eyed Peas, etc.

I started reading Emily for food references:

God gave a Loaf to every Bird -
But just a Crumb - to me -

I dare not eat it - tho' I starve -
My poignant luxury -

...

I wonder how the Rich - may feel -
An Indiaman - an Earl -

I deem that I- with but a Crumb
Am Sovereign of them all – (Fr1748)

Blossoms will run away -
Cakes reign but a Day, (Fr1614)
(this introduced the band Cake)

Fame is a fickle food
Upon a shifting plate. (Fr1702)

And for the first time I practiced reading Emily out loud. And again. And again. And an odd thing began to happen. Her words began to sound in my head and in my soul. They became my nourishment.

What had changed? It is true that my own poems, formerly multi-page and sprawling, had over the years become more metrical and compact. Meanwhile my wife became an interfaith minister, and for the first time I read the Bible and other Holy books, absorbing their rhythms and universal themes. I had lived in nature for a number of years and learned to look more carefully at the world around me. Mostly, however, I was older and in less of a hurry. I spent more time staring out my own window. I wrestled more with God and death.

We come to love poets at different points in our lives. When we are ready. When we need them to speak to us. I've never believed, and I still don't, that we must read those poets in the canon, or appreciate Mozart or Pi-

casso because we are told of their genius. 90+% of everyone's oeuvre is not up to their best standard. Even Shakespeare wrote poems that do not "work." We value people by their best actions, and should prize poets by their best poems. I still admit to skimming much of Dickinson. But there are poems of hers that have become part of my body now, and that do take the top of my head off. Where could my impression of a timid recluse have come from? The poet is vital and quirky and fearless and subversive in all the best ways. She questions her God like the best of the Jewish prophets.

What a pleasure then, to read in her living room as I did in April 2015, when the Museum initiated a monthly Art Walk/Poetry program. I was thrilled to kick off the series, and I did get chills reading on hallowed ground. Afterward I walked the stairs up to her bedroom and stared out her window. I wanted to get inside her mind by inhabiting her world.

Now, when I drive past her home, I always slow down and say a word of thanks.

Nobody

The day I played Emily in drag on an Amherst stage I finally understood the slant of my ambition. Desire entered my body like variant words scrawled sideways on a repurposed envelope. Inside was the flaming soul of her fame. I adjusted my wig as the audience roared. Outside, the snow – *sent us of the air* – was again falling when a gust flung open the hallway door. There she was, a ghost haunting the Homestead gift-store. *I'm Nobody* T-shirts hung beside illustrated guest-books, and DVDs. I tried to tell her that 233 biographies were itemized on Amazon, but she'd already turned toward the stairwell, disregarding the nameless crowd and my unconvincing juvenile humor. *Love me*, she mouthed. She shared no other words. So I echoed – *love me* – even as I climbed to her refurbished bedroom and stared out the window at those feathered twin Seraphim, Hope and Despair.

Reprinted by permission of the poet

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Series Editor, Diana Wagner

The Dickinson Lens

Neil Soderstrom is author and photographer of countless magazine articles, including an article on Emily Dickinson as gardener in Horticulture magazine. Neil's words and photos can also be found in three books, including Deer-Resistant Landscaping (Rodale, 2009). Neil has served as the Principal Photographer for five other books, including Chesapeake Gardening & Landscaping (Adkins Arboretum & U of North Carolina Press, 2015). In the past dozen years, magazine and book publishers have licensed more than 3,000 of his photos. His career in publishing began as magazine editor; then book editor; editorial director; and book producer.

Attired in a photographer's vest and serendipitously seated next to series editor Diana Wagner at the 2015 EDIS Banquet in Amherst, Neil graciously agreed to share through his unique lens Emily Dickinson's role in his work.

Q. What was your introduction to Dickinson?

Like that of many people, my high school introductions were unfortunate. Teachers either skipped lightly over Dickinson or focused on her eccentricities to arouse interest. Although Harvard published the Johnson-edited *Letters* and *Complete Poems* in the late 1950s, textbook adoptions remained decades behind resulting commentary.

When teaching college freshman, I sinned like my teachers had by skating quickly over Dickinson, a mistake that Army conscription put a halt to. Upon return to civilian life three years later, I was married with a child and had no means of continuing graduate studies. That led to a lifelong career in publishing, first as magazine editor, then book editor, and book producer, all the while moonlighting as a writer and shooting photos to illustrate articles and books. In 1999, I went freelance full time.

Q. What inspired your interest in Dickinson?

In October 2000, while photographing a children's book near Amherst, I visited the



Photo Credit: Hannelore Soderstrom

Dickinson Museum for the first time. In those days, the Homestead's bricks were red, the library hadn't been restored, and The Evergreens wasn't open. The tour introduced me to a new and inspiring Emily Dickinson, a gentle, loving person whose genius and options had been suppressed in a male-dominated society, not least by her authoritarian father and her Boston mentor. That day, standing in Emily's bed-

room, almost feeling her presence, I vowed to become Emily's champion.

Q. How does a photographer set out to champion Dickinson studies?

It has been humbling to learn how many champions she has had, past and present. To get up to speed, I've been working through two bookshelves of letters, poems, biographies, memoirs, and commentary.

Dickinson scholars do an impressive job of preaching to the choir. Instead, I hope to reach the whole congregation, as well as folks in the street. Many well-educated people – seniors as well as young folks – tell me they “never quite got Dickinson” and developed an unfavorable impression of her, primarily based on teacher introductions.

In recent years, I've begun collaborating with the Dickinson Museum and its volunteers. My goal is to reintroduce Emily in a far more appealing light than she has routinely been presented for more than a century – and I encourage friends to reintroduce her, too.

Q. *Through what outlets do you show your work?*

I have no appetite for daily distractions of a blog and social media. Instead through articles, I hope to arouse interest of bloggers and Tweeters in spreading the word. A sometimes overlooked advantage with magazines and newspapers is that many allow free access to their archives. Thus, decades from now, children and adults (including English teachers) could happen upon today's articles.

Before shoulder surgeries sidelined me for more than a year, I'd published a couple of newspaper articles on Emily's home life and an article on Emily as gardener in *Horticulture* (M/J 2013).

Since then, I've been developing article and book concepts and have aroused the interest of a few book publishers. Alas, most book publishers feel that today's market is aw-

fully tough for photo-driven books, no doubt owing largely to online competition. As for children's books, if you visit any children's bookstore, you find that "picture books" are virtually all artist illustrated, rarely photo illustrated, except for nature titles. Yet, nature photos could increase the appeal of Emily's letters and poems because photos show nature as Emily saw it, not as an artist imagined she saw it. In that regard, I've been experimenting with a soft-focus filter that gives flowers, birds, bees, and butterflies a dreamy look, as though occurring in Emily's time.

Q. *Where will your camera lens and your interest in Emily Dickinson take you next?*

I have several projects in the works:

First, I've begun interviewing Museum garden volunteers. The resulting articles will focus on topics such as first encounters with Emily, favorite garden poems, and how Emily influenced each volunteer.



Photo Credit: Neil Soderstrom

Marta McDowell, Garden Restoration Leader and Author of *Emily Dickinson's Gardens*

A New Series Editor for What's Your Story?

Diana Wagner, Salisbury (MD) University, takes over editing duties for the "What's Your Story" feature beginning with this issue of the *Bulletin*. Currently Assistant Dean for Assessment and Accreditation, Diana finds respite from outside regulators by exploring



the letters and collecting a Dickinson-inspired herbarium.

In 1998, Diana and EDIS Member Marcy Tarter published "New Dickinson Letter Clarifies Hale Correspondence" (*EDJ* 7:1). This article revealed a previously unknown letter to abolitionist Edward Everett Hale, who was Ben Newton's pastor. Currently in the Dickinson collection at Amherst, the letter fits between the two other known Hale letters in the Johnson edition of the *Letters*. Diana has also published "Creel Limit," an essay of creative non-fiction that explores the parallels among Dickinson, dying parents, and fly-fishing (*Northeast Corridor* 1999 [6]).

Diana lives in the middle of the woods with her wife, Rita Campbell, 12 chickens, and two Chihuahuas. When she isn't collecting herbarium specimens or crunching spreadsheets, she can be found playing guitar and other stringed instruments, kayaking the Chesapeake Bay salt marshes, and planning next year's organic garden.

"What's Your Story" seeks to feature Dickinson scholars, fans, and enthusiasts who bring a unique lens to this unique woman and have a story to tell. Readers with suggestions for future interviews should email Diana Wagner at dmwagner@salisbury.edu or call 410-677-5490.

Abyss may have no biographer, but we'll give it a try.



Photo Credit: Neil Soderstrom

Ruby-Throated Hummingbird (*ArchilocusColubris*), Female,
& *HostaVentricosa*

There is also a lot of interest in Dickinson's flowers – including her Herbarium, which is sadly out of print – her baking recipes, her dog Carlo, the planned conservatory reconstruction, relations with Father and Colonel Higginson, memoirs of the children who loved her. The list goes on.

Q. How do you foster interest among readers outside of the scholarly community?

Well, some provocative titles may sometimes help, such as "Emily Dickinson and The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo." What's the connection, you ask? Both Emily and Stieg Larsson's thriller relied on pressed flowers as gifts.

Q. For a young reader (or old reader, for that matter) who is interested in Dickinson,

what works do you recommend as introductions?

For adults and teens, Emily's letters from age 12 onward would be hard to beat. They also include some of her poems in context. Decades-old American lit anthologies contain many of Emily's most accessible poems, along with explanatory notes, albeit not always the poems R.W. Franklin deemed her final versions.

But before attempting to read many of Emily's 1,789 poems silently, most people might benefit by hearing them recited by a gifted reader – lifting those poems off the page into consciousness.

For example, after Emily's death, Thomas Wentworth Higginson wasn't interested in helping Mabel Loomis Todd select and edit poems for publication until Todd visited and read Emily's poems to him. (The paramour of Austin Dickinson, Todd had received formal voice training, she'd lectured, and she'd performed in plays.)

My own appreciation for the poems skyrocketed upon listening in the car to *Fifty Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Blackstone Audio, 2001) read by Meryl Streep, Glenda Jackson, Stephanie Beacham, and Sharon Stone. That CD reminds us why Streep and Jackson have won Oscars. Those two understand and then powerfully render Dickinson's material. By comparison, Beacham

is quite competent, but not so for Sharon Stone. Though possessing a rich alto voice, Stone enunciates poorly while imposing meter, rhyme, and emphasis where Emily intended none.

Each listening to Streep's and Jackson's readings increases my appreciation for Dickinson's verse. Streep might have had first choice on poems because most of hers are ideal for her soft, soprano voice – tender poems, poems of love and loss ("Few, yet enough" [Fr1639], "Heart not so heavy as mine" [Fr88], "I had a guinea golden" [Fr12], "Our share of night to bear" [Fr116], "If I should die" [Fr36]). Jackson and her forceful contralto seem perfect for sarcasm, humor, ruminations on death, and journeys in the brain ("Drowning is not so pitiful" [Fr1542], "I died for Beauty" [Fr448], "Much Madness is divinest Sense" [Fr620], "I had no time to Hate" [Fr763], "The Bustle in a House" [Fr1108], "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" [Fr340]). Listening to only small batches of poems such as these allows the listener time for absorption.

Q. How can we ensure that Dickinson is presented well in schools?

Because states dictate curricula, it might pay to investigate how Dickinson's work is being presented locally at various grade levels. English teachers might welcome links to resources such as the Museum, Amherst College, and the video and audio performances. Teachers at all levels in gardening, horticulture, botany, and birding might appreciate lists of subject-related Dickinson poems and online links.

Q. If people were to come away from your articles and photographs with one big idea about Emily Dickinson, what would it be?

To my mind, she is America's most important poet, both for her poems and the way she addressed life. She had the deep respect of all who knew her. And today, she has the deep respect from all of us who wish we had.

Visualizing Dickinson

Series Editor, *Maryanne Garbowsky*

The Slanted Life of Emily Dickinson

Rosanna Bruno lives in Brooklyn, where she creates abstract paintings. She has been the recipient of Yaddo fellowships, in 2012 and 2014, and was granted a New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship in 2012. The Bulletin gratefully acknowledges her permission to reprint her images.

She has been variously described as the Sforemother of a dominant tradition, the Belle of Amherst, the Moth of Amherst, “the only Kangeroo among the Beauty” (L268), the half-cracked poetess, but we all know her as the premier 19th-century American poet whose poetry has justly earned her immortality. However, visual artist Rosanna Bruno has recently introduced us to a new, 21st century version of our venerable poet. In her soon to be published comic book, “The Slanted Life of Emily Dickinson,” Bruno envisions a technologically savvy woman who tweets regularly, maintains her own Facebook page, and has an Instagram account that she signs “recluse1830.”

Even as a student, Bruno was attracted to Dickinson’s use of language and the “intensity in the work.” Perhaps this is one reason that the poet has followed her and triggered her own take on Dickinson. Bruno was also struck by the poet’s life. “I . . . found the myth surrounding her life fascinating and somewhat comical. Everyone is taught that she was this reclusive spinster who lived with her family, dressed all in white, and wrote in her room all day. This was funny to me and it seemed so incongruous to her work.”

“Humor is so important to me. It can often communicate things that are otherwise difficult to communicate. . . . I was sort of making fun of what technology

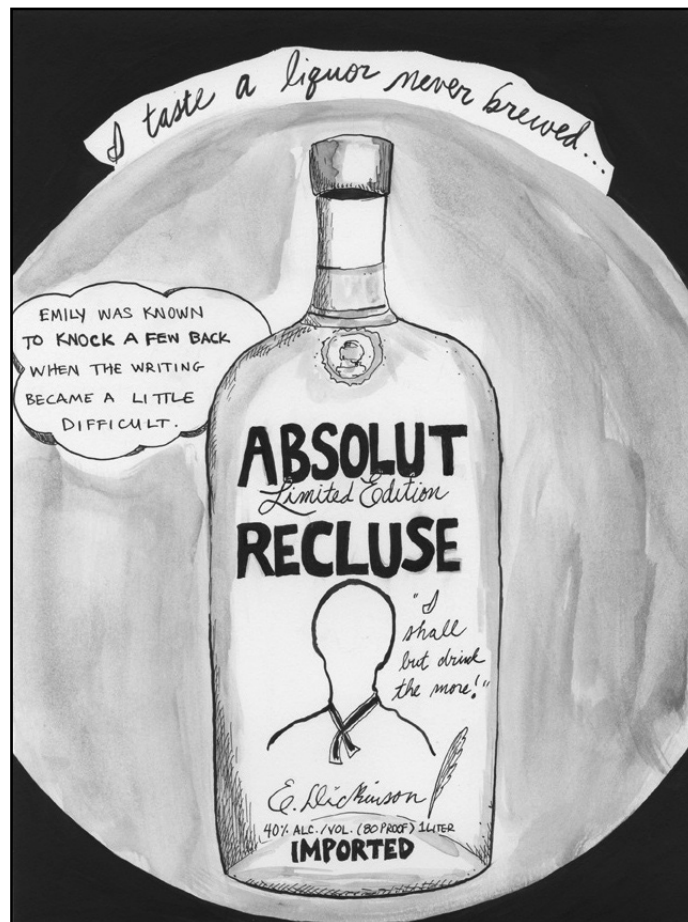
has done to us. We have become captive to it in ways that keep us from real experiences. [Dickinson] already stayed inside and limited actual contact. . . . If Emily would rather stay inside, wouldn’t she take advantage of the site if it were available to her?” Bruno’s answer is yes, she would, and her drawings amply demonstrate this. She has discovered a whole new side of the poet that offers a lightness and playfulness to her life and words.

Bruno’s artistry began early in life, in kindergarten, when she was allowed by a perceptive teacher to “sit in the corner drawing all day. All I wanted to do was draw and she encouraged that more than anyone in my life. I knew then that I wanted to be an artist, even though I had no clue what that meant.”

Fast forward to high school where Bruno was fortunate enough to meet another encouraging teacher who suggested that she go to art school.

She did, attending Tyler School of Art, and going on to the Art Institute of Chicago after graduation, where she majored in painting and drawing with electives in poetry and creative writing. It was in high school that she first met Dickinson. What impressed her the most about the poet was “that while her actual daily world was . . . small, her imagined world was huge. If I knew nothing of her life, I could not have thought she had the life she did.”

This is where Bruno’s creativity begins. In her drawings, she imagines another life for Dickinson, a modern Dickinson who avails herself of up-to-date technology. A series of “what ifs” fuel her creative imagination. What if she tweeted? What if she had a Facebook profile? These questions were answered with Dickinson’s own words, garnered from her poems. For instance, in answer to the question what would Dickinson order if she went out to a restaurant, Bruno responds “why a



Visualizing Dickinson



All images are from Bruno's website, telltislantemilydickinson.com

metaphor of course.” In the drawing, we see a stony-faced Dickinson telling a perplexed waiter: “Bring me the sunset in a cup.” The caption accompanying the drawing reads, “Emily stopped dining out because she could never get what she wanted.”

On her Facebook page the poet writes under “Likes” – “Music: I heard a fly buzz when I died.” For “Books – There is no Frigate like a Book.” For relationships, Dickinson writes “It’s complicated.” This, of course, refers to her biography and the perennial debate about her love life: who was the Master of the Master letters? Did she have a romantic liaison? Her Facebook profile offers two candidates, “ex-minister and soldier Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Also, Bruno adds Judge O. Lord as a contender as well, playing with his name, writing it as Judge, O Lord! Dickinson even has her own set of emojis: the page cleverly entitled Emoji Dickinson includes a gun, a

frog, a grasshopper, and a tombstone, among other icons.

Bruno’s “Dickinson Project” was launched at a 2014 Spring residency at Yaddo. There “in the woods with the birds chirping loudly,” the artist set her imagination free. She admits, however, that the idea was in her head “since I first read her poetry.” She explained how she works: she does research by looking for “the raw material” in Dickinson’s poems, letters, biography, photos of her home and her room. These jumpstart her thinking – and her wondering. Sometimes “when I am stuck” she reads through the index of first lines, and sometimes makes a discovery like “wow, she wrote a lot about bees! How can I make that funny?”

For an appearance at the New York Poetry Festival on Governor’s Island in July, 2015, Bruno designed a tote bag amusingly called

“My Life Had Stood a Loaded Tote!” It has a drawing of Dickinson as James Bond. Alongside the image, the instructions read “This bag is totes Dickinson! Fill it with your favorite books about birds, bees, solitude and death!”

What’s next for Rosie Bruno? We can only guess. Although many of her drawings are already online, Bruno looks forward to publishing a “limited edition book” in the fall of 2015. After that, her completed book – which will include “60 or so” drawings – will hopefully be published. She will undoubtedly continue to be inspired by Dickinson and her voice, which Bruno describes as “immediate” and “intimate.” She wonders if Dickinson “were out partying a couple of nights a week, or had a full time teaching job, her written world might . . . be smaller.” Of course we will never know, but we can wonder – along with Bruno – as she continues to create a newer portrait of our beloved and cherished poet.

Listening to Fragrance

Dickinson Poem as Theme for a Japanese Incense Ceremony

By Masako Takeda

Compared to Tea Ceremony and Flower Arrangement as Japanese art forms, Incense Ceremony or *koh-do* is far less known abroad. Even among Japanese people, few have experienced it. In order, therefore, to explain how and why Emily Dickinson and Incense Ceremony may be related, first I will describe the essence of Incense Ceremony.

Incense has been deeply connected with religion from the beginnings of Japanese culture, but it became an established form of *koh-do*, or Incense Ceremony, in the 15th century along with Tea Ceremony. As the word “ceremony” designates, it follows formalized rules and manners, different from attitudes toward perfume in the West, where perfume is only associated with fragrance. *Koh-do* pursues “*do*,” like any other art in Japan (*sa-do* – Tea Ceremony; *ka-do* – Flower Arrangement; *sho-do* – Calligraphy; and martial arts like *ken-do* – Swordmanship, and *ju-do*), following specific practices with the purpose of mastering a way to live. For Incense Ceremony, the practices concentrate on developing cultivation of the mind through the experience of sensory fragrance with literature and play.

Mental cultivation is characterized by quietude of time and mind. In *koh-do*, what is normally described as “smelling” or “sniffing” is called “listening to.” To “listen to” fragrance implies concentration, paying careful attention to. One doesn’t just “smell” the fragrance of the wood: one performs a ritual process of inhaling and identifying it through certain steps. These steps enable participants



Photo credit: Margaret Freeman

Top: Takeda setting up censers and chips
Bottom: Heath participants learn Dickinson through *koh-do*

to enter a moment of purified consciousness of sensory experience that, to my mind, creates *fukei*, a visual, mental landscape evoked by fragrance.

Usually the maximum of ten guests, with one as a guest of honor, are invited for each ceremony, led by three hosts. The master of in-

cense prepares the games with small packets containing fragrant wood chips, all imported from East Asian countries; the master of ceremony performs all the processes of opening the packets, burning the chips in a hand-held censer (incense burner), and tidying up; and the calligraphic scribe records the details for the entire ceremony.

Koh-do as play depends on recognizing the individual characteristic of each fragrance. A basic example of a *koh-do* ceremony is as follows. The incense master selects the game to be played. In this case, three fragrances are chosen to listen to. Then guests are given another fragrance and must decide if it is the same as the first, second or third, and write down their answer. The scribe then responds to the guests’ answers. It is said there are about one thousand different complex games, an important example being “Ten Fragrances *Koh*.” Games are mostly related with seasonal events and literature.

Literature chosen for the ceremony connects guests with past tradition and is often represented by *waka* (a poem consisting of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables), written centuries ago. At the time of the feudal period, *koh-do*’s continuation of ancient aristocratic tradition was much loved not only by samurai, but also by princesses, for them to learn the literature of the past through play. Their many gorgeous and elaborate lacquer utensils of the ceremony are now museum items. In the incense ceremony, literary examples serve to connect guests with their cultural past. The master of incense chooses the ceremony’s lit-

erary example that provides the poetic language to govern all the guests' answers and the scribe's recording and responses.

I became interested in *koh-do* to pursue Japanese culture more deeply by cultivating my mind, and, with its play focusing on literature, as a Dickinson scholar, I could not help but think of enjoying and appreciating Dickinson's poems through the experience of the Incense Ceremony. Dickinson wrote many poems with olfactory references using words like "smell," "incense," "fragrant," "scent," "aroma," "balsam," "attar," "luscious," "balm," "perfume," and "spice," such as "Essentials Oils are wrung – / The Attar from the Rose" (Fr772) and "They have little Odor – / . . . / And spiciest at fading –" (Fr505). Incense Ceremony introduces Dickinson readers to a more sensory way of appreciating her poems.

In 2015 during my stay in the United States, I performed Incense Ceremonies several times at different locations, including Specials Collections of The Jones Library in Amherst and the Emily Dickinson Reading Circle in Heath. In Japan, each ceremony's theme is given a title, for example, Star Festival *Koh*, which celebrates the seventh day of the seventh month. As a result, the Boston Incense Study Group created "Mayflower *Koh*" with a Dickinson poem (Fr1357 "Pink – small – and punctual") to celebrate their 10th anniversary. For one experiment, I named my ceremony "Prairie *Koh*," its theme taken from a Dickinson poem "To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee" (Fr1779), in which I used three fragrances. The object of this game is to identify the "revery" fragrance. First, the two sample fragrances are named "clover" and "bee." The third fragrance is named "revery":

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



The revery will do, if bees are few

After listening to the two sample fragrances and learning their names, "clover" or "bee," the three fragrances are presented in random order. Guests are challenged to identify the fragrance named "revery" they have not listened to before and to write down their answer on prepared answer sheets. Because of the random order, choices can be any of the three possibilities: "clover," "bee," or "revery." If they have identified "revery" correctly, it does not matter if guests confuse the fragrances "clover" and "bee," since "revery alone will do." The scribe writes down all the answers and notes down "prairie" when "revery" has been chosen. For those who answered correctly, the landscape they now have in their minds is a prairie. Those who answered "clover" or "bee" have in their minds just the entry point of a landscape: they are at the entrance of a prairie.

While the scribe is writing, the master of ceremonies and the guest of honor who is seated closest to the master talk about the theme of the day. For Dickinson readers, I suggest a longer time and encourage everyone to join in the discussion, starting with a question: why Dickinson did not write "To make a prairie it takes a clover and a bee / One clover, and one bee, / And revery. / The revery alone will do, / if **clovers and** bees are few."

The scribe's record is given as a prize to the guest who answers correctly. If several are right, the scribe gives the record to the one seat-

ed closest to the guest of honor. The scribe then announces the end of the ceremony with the statement, "The room is now filled with fragrance." When the Incense Ceremony is over, what we should bear in mind is not whether you have won or lost in the game, but rather that you bring home in your heart *fukei*, one mental landscape evoked by the sensory experience of listening to fragrance. In "Prairie *Koh*," the landscape can be interpreted as metaphoric: after the Incense Ceremony, you have something new in your mind, which is called *fukei*, literally translated as "landscape," but including meanings associate with mental, emotional, and sensory impression.

Before the performance, I was anxious that such a totally foreign Japanese experience might not be accepted in the US, and that the guests would be anxious and curious in facing something completely new and different. To my great joy, the Incense Ceremonies were greeted with enthusiasm. In Heath, the Emily Dickinson Reading Circle was happy to experience an Incense Ceremony and discover a new way to appreciate Dickinson more deeply. It has been a revelation for me to expand Incense Ceremony by including a nineteenth century American poet. I hope to create with help from American guests more Dickinson *Koh* and perform Incense Ceremonies in the future.

The performances at Heath were sponsored by Myrifiel Institute for Cognition and the Arts. Margaret Freeman took the photographs and was of great editorial help in writing this report, the result of several lively discussions in bridging two different cultures. I would like to thank her for her generosity and consideration.

Masako Takeda teaches at Osaka Shoin Women's University. Her books include a Dickinson cookbook and a narrative account of her travels in the US, called In Search of Emily: Journeys from Japan to Amherst (2005).

Bodies of Water: Somebody | Nobody (For E.D.)

By Clark Lunberry

Clark Lunberry is a Professor of English at the University of North Florida, Jacksonville, Florida. In addition to the “Writing on Water / Writing on Air” poetry installations on the UNF campus discussed in this article, Lunberry has completed related installations in Paris, France; Durham, England; Toronto, Canada; Tokyo and Hiroshima, Japan; and at Stanford University: <http://www.unf.edu/~clunber>.

I’m Nobody! Who are you?
Are you – Nobody – too?
Then there’s a pair of us!
Don’t tell! they’d advertise – you know!

How dreary – to be – Somebody!
How public – like a Frog –
To tell one’s name – the livelong June –
To an admiring Bog!

Fr260

On a pond adjacent to the University of North Florida’s Thomas G. Carpenter Library, parts of Emily Dickinson’s well-known poem about being a “Nobody” were recently written on the water. During the fall of 2014, the familiar words of that poem’s opening line – “I’m Nobody! Who are you?” – appeared to float upon the library’s pond, reflecting vividly in the light of day (yet disappearing entirely in the dark of night). While inside the library’s large open stairway, on the tall windows that face directly out onto that pond, the first line of the poem’s second stanza – “How dreary – to be – Somebody!” – was also written. As one climbed the library’s staircase, moving from the first floor to the fourth, this second line from Dickinson’s poem was spatially staggered – as if by its own dashes – between the floors, its words printed onto transparencies and attached to the panes of glass. Together, on the library’s pond and windows, Dickinson’s words remained in place for the next several weeks, the lines from the poem seen by all who came upon them.

This “writing on water / writing on air” installation was the most recent of six

such projects that I have completed at the University of North Florida, in Jacksonville, Florida, as well as similar installations that I have done at various sites around the world. These installations on the library’s pond began in 2007 with the simple, initiating inscription “WATER ON WATER,” with each letter of that line – around 7’ x 7’ in size – cut from a roll of thick plastic and, with the aid of a kayak, clipped to lines of twine stretching unseen from shore to shore.¹ A similar procedure was followed for this most recent Dickinson-related installation, one that was entitled “Bodies of Water: Somebody | Nobody” (for E.D.). This newest project was prompted in part by a course that I was teaching at the university that fall on Dickinson.

In the weeks leading up to this installation, I hadn’t yet settled upon the precise language to be used for the project, knowing from past experience that “writing on water / writing on air” demanded a particular kind of poetic affirmation. After all, not just any language can be seen to float on a pond, or to hang suspended from windows, as if into thin air. Many hours were thus spent going through Dickinson’s poetry with the site-specifics of this installation in mind.

¹ Subsequent installations at the University of North Florida were “Murmur of Words” (2008); “Floating Form Less” (2009); “Sinking Sensation” (2011); and “No Such Thing” (2012). Images and information about these, and related projects in Paris, Toronto, Durham (U.K.), Stanford University, Tokyo and Hiroshima, can be seen on my website: <http://www.unf.edu/~clunber>

I was, in this collaboration with the poet, hoping to locate just the right lines of language, *les mots juste*, that would be both concise enough to fit upon the library’s pond (with each letter again at around 7’ x 7’), as well as on the library’s stairway windows. In addition, though, I was also looking for poems, or parts of poems, that would effectively evoke and represent something significant and revealing of the poet’s work.

It was in light of this installation’s unique environmental and architectural constraints that Dickinson’s well-known poem about being a “Nobody” suddenly seemed the ideal choice for such a project, with both its form and content fitting nicely the particular (and peculiar) needs of this installation. In fact, it was in large part the very familiarity of this much-admired, much-anthologized poem that, to my mind, made it so suitable for such a *de-familiarizing* transposition onto water and air, making new the seemingly known by materially estranging its context and formation.

I sensed also from this celebrated poem about being a “Nobody” that there would be something powerful, even provocative, in taking poetic sentiments that were apparently so private, so resistant to being made “public,” presenting key lines of its language floating out in the landscape (after having been directly asked not to share the otherwise confidential sentiment: “Don’t tell!,” the speaker politely requests). Indeed, to take parts of a poem that seems on the page almost whispered, even intimate, and intended for only one other (making “a pair of us!”), and place

them on the pond and windows, so grandly and so openly, felt like the broadcasting of a secret to the world (as if to “advertise” it, in violation of the poem’s original discretion, at the scale of a billboard).

Weeks One and Two: After many days of preparation (with the time spent mostly cutting out the large letters from the plastic sheeting), on a bright but blustery Sunday afternoon, the selected words from this Dickinson poem were finally installed on the library’s pond and windows, taking many hours to finish, and with several students and friends helping with its arduous and exhausting completion.² As before, using a kayak, one large letter at a time was slowly clipped into position with wooden clothespins, the words attached to suspended twine strung just beneath the pond’s surface. First to be installed were those letters that form the poem’s astonishing opening exclamation: “I’m Nobody!” Next, the second line from the poem was completed, some distance down from the first, putting in place that powerful, if powerfully simple question: “Who are you?”

Once done on the water (taking, in total, more than four hours to install, struggling in particular with Dickinson’s never-before written-on-water apostrophe [’], question mark [?] and exclamation point [!]), it was immediately clear that it’s one thing to come across this poem’s provocative opening line – “I’m Nobody! Who are you?” – printed discreetly upon a page at ten or

² Many thanks to all of those who assisted with this installation: Michael Boyles, Michael Dimmitt, Noah Lumberry, and, in particular, Kelley Predieri, out in the kayak.



twelve point font. It’s another experience entirely to see it at such an inflated scale floating on water, with each of its individual letters larger than the person reading it. Indeed, seen in this unorthodox manner, the lines of the poem unexpectedly resonated with a new kind of uncanny urgency and insistence, as if having floated away from their originating poem, or from their originating poet. Hardly whispered, these bold words on the pond now loudly asserted themselves to those seeing them, causing us perhaps to wonder (anew) who, in that first part of the poem, is the “Nobody” that is speaking here, the “I” behind the apparent absence? And who, in the second section, is the “you” being so forthrightly, indiscriminately addressed (bringing theatrically to mind *Hamlet’s* own ghostly opening lines: “*Who’s there?... Nay, answer me: stand, and unfold yourself*”)?

Curiously, in seeing the poem’s large words floating out on the water, it might have appeared as if the pond itself had suddenly begun to speak, taking on a ghostly life of its own in the bright light of day. Recalling the poem’s own reference to an “admiring Bog,” the library’s reflecting pond and its liquefied letters – now directly facing us – seemed to echo from off that body of water’s mirroring surface.

Or, one might even have wondered in coming upon this writing on the pond, was it perhaps something of language itself that was speaking that day, its luminous words having assumed a certain self-presence out on the water? As a (quite literal) floating signifier publicly announcing itself as a now-liquidated “Nobody,” the “admiring” pond ap-



peared to ask those of us who came upon it – “Somebody” or anybody – that most troubling of questions: “Who are you?”

Seen from the sidewalks outside the library, the floating letters and words assumed their shifting formation in relation to the reader’s own movements, seen either from the front, to the side, or even – upside down and “backward” – from behind.³ Also, seen frequently on the library’s pond, alongside the poem’s two large lines of language, were the Canadian geese that annually migrate here in the fall, swimming both around and directly over the floating words, but seemingly untroubled by this temporary poetic alteration to their natural habitat. The big Florida turtles that live throughout the year on the pond, though initially skittish at the sight of it all, soon adapted to the situation, eventually even climbing up

³“Did you ever read one of her Poems backward, because the plunge from the front overturned you? I sometimes (often have, many times) have – A something overtakes the Mind – .” Emily Dickinson, note on wrapping paper (PF 30; quoted by Marta Werner in *Emily Dickinson’s Open Folios*, 1).

How dreary – to be – Somebody!
I’m Nobody! Who are you?

on the large letters and, hammock-like, sleeping upon them.

Cloudy days, sunny days, windy and rainy days, through them all the words of the poem endured, with the changing light constantly shifting the look of the language, the shadows of sense and suggestion at play on the pond. On bright afternoons, the letters glistened or glared, with tall trees mirrored upside-down and backwards onto the watery words; or a solitary cloud might be seen to float through the line “I’m Nobody!” – ephemerally offering a kind of objective correlative to that nobody before us. But, at other times, as more clouds moved in, covering the sky, those words on the water might suddenly appear soft and diaphanous, the actual plastic of each letter magically transforming into a kind of translucent film of shaped light. With

the words read in this constantly changing manner, the adjusted light of the letters, in turn, adjusted the question being asked – “Who are you?” – into one perhaps more plaintive or poignant, like one body of water addressing another (our own!), making “a pair of us” in the exchange. Later, as the sun would set, the growing darkness slowly absorbed the poem entirely, erasing it from view (that *something* in the day turned to *nothing* in the night) until, the next morning, as if reawakened, the words would reaffirm their poetic presence out on the pond.

With the first line from Dickinson’s poem – “I’m Nobody! Who are you?” – successfully written on the water, the opening sentence of the poem’s second stanza – “How dreary – to be – Somebody!” – was unfurled from the acetate transparencies, its pre-printed words then taped into place on the windows of the various floors in the library’s stairway. Though certainly not as large as those on the water, the letters on the windows were still big and bold, measuring about 3’ x 3’, with each word

printed jet-black onto the clear sheets of acetate.

Much like those seen floating below, the words on the library's adjacent windows were seen and read in specific relation to one's movement up or down the stairway, as if the poem's sentence itself was being moved through, the poem physically, spatially entered. Looking up the library's stairway from ground-level, what was first seen on the windows were the words "How dreary –" emblazoned starkly upon the background sky between the first and second floors. Then, taking my cue for the division of the poem's second line from Dickinson's own line-dividing dashes, the next two sections of the sentence were dimensionally connected as one climbed the stairs, first with "to be –" attached to the windows between the second and third floors, and then, between the third and fourth floors, that final large word "Somebody!" suspended boldly alone.

Once in place, these words on the window were both seen, and seen through, in relation to those other words of Dickinson's poem simultaneously seen out on the water, the various lines of language shifting

their locations, intersecting and overlapping, offering in the momentary adjacencies suggestions of unexpected formation. Reading this poem inside and out, from the library's first floor to its fourth, parts of its three spatially staggered lines could at times be read directly upon, or alongside, those floating out on the pond, forming such arrangements as the following:

- "How dreary –" / "I'm Nobody" (as if characterizing the dreary condition described)

Or:

- "Who are you?" / "to be –" (insinuating the audacity of the claim being made)

Or:

- "I'm Nobody? Who are you?" / "Somebody!" (That single word on the window, "Somebody!," heard as an affirmative response to the pointed question being asked out on the water)

Seeing and reading in such kaleidoscopic motion,⁴ those of us walking up and down

the library's stairs moved (like a passing cloud) through the poem, as the poem appeared to move porously through us. Each particular arrangement of language gave way to another, and then to another, in temporary and contingent alignment to one's own floating movements through the stairway.

Weeks Three and Four: After two weeks, during which the initial arrangement of the poem's words remained largely unchanged (more or less untroubled by the autumn winds or rain that passed through the area, or the geese and turtles seen moving on and around the language), a kind of editing and adjusting of the poem was to occur, a pared-down revision of the words written on the water and air. And so, on another Sunday afternoon, using

⁴Such seeing-in-motion suggests something of Baudelaire's 19th century Parisian *flâneur* transported to 21st century Florida, that "kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, which with every one of its movements presents a pattern of life, in all its multiplicity, and the flowing grace of all the elements that go to compose life. It is an ego athirst for the non-ego, and reflecting it at every moment in energies more vivid than life itself, always inconstant and fleeting" (Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*).



once more the kayak, the words on the pond were rearranged and rewritten, creating a new formation in which the original two-part exclamation and question “I’m Nobody! Who are you?” was radically reduced, with just the single large words “Somebody” and “Nobody” now made to intersect at the very center of the pond.

Inside the library, a similar reduction occurred, such that all that remained of the previous sentence on the windows (having taken down both “How dreary – ” and “Somebody!”) were the two small words “to be – ” suspended alone, seen still between the second and third floors at the center of the stairway. In this new arrangement, these words were then seen in direct relation to the “Somebody | Nobody” intersecting out on the pond. Those two key (and capitalized) words, those two *bodies* from the first and second stanzas of Dickinson’s poem, were joined together as a “pair,” while dimensionally aligning with the “to be – ” superimposed upon them through the library’s windows. Offering a kind of watery correlative to Baudelaire’s *flâneur* (with his “ego athirst for the non-ego”), it was as if the two intersecting words written on water were suddenly uttering a delayed response to the initial question asked the previous weeks: “Who are you?” Absorbed in their own conjunction, those words remaining on the pond were now interconnected, permeably floating as “Somebody | Nobody,” as bodies of water overlapping in motion, bodies of water crossing in time.

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From Antrim to Amherst

By Anne-Marie Fyfe

Irish poet Anne-Marie Fyfe was born in the Glens of Antrim and lives in London, where she gives frequent lectures and workshops on poets and poetry composition. She founded Coffee-House Poetry, a reading series at the legendary Troubadour, in the Old Brompton Road in the West End. She has taught seminars and delivered lectures on poets from Dickinson to Eavan Boland, Seamus Heaney, Elizabeth Bishop, and Robert Lowell. The following essay is a transcript of a broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in 2008.

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts, in 1830, and died 56 years later having written nearly 1800 poems, of which only 10 were published in her lifetime. Hardly an inspiration, then, for someone like me, starting to write in the late 20th century about life in the north of Ireland, and in cosmopolitan West London.

But Emily Dickinson's strangely sparky and breathless words, and her idiosyncratic, fractured punctuation, both of which I was to encounter some time before I began writing my own poems, had a continuous and pervading influence on my writing over very many years. Following Ted Hughes' 1968 Dickinson selection, she enjoyed belated fame as a heady mix of '60s desire for 19th century picket-fenced innocence and a '70s gothic chic that saw "the recluse of Amherst" as another Miss Havisham.

But that's not the Emily Dickinson that attracted me, although death does play a significant part in our relationship, if I may call it that. Emily's is not a gothic, Keatsian death obsession, but a simple acknowledgement of the end of life as part of life, as something that, in a small town like Amherst, is continuously present with funeral processions regularly passing the Dickinson's family home on the way to the churchyard.

That's not to say that you can only appreciate Dickinson's attitude to death if you come from a small town, but biographers always note that the shops in Amherst shut for Emily's father's funeral. This was still the practice in our North Antrim coastal town in the 1960s: and one didn't have to be a prominent civic leader, like Emily's father, for everyone to turn out for your funeral.

In the poem beginning "Because I could not stop for Death / He kindly stopped for me," many people find the image of Death as a courteous coachman deeply unsettling, but in our villages and glens, the local undertaker was always someone you knew, someone's father, and death itself almost had an easy neighborliness it does not enjoy in our great cities. One of her best-known pieces evokes the moment of death itself in a quiet room with family and friends waiting:

I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air –
Between the Heaves of Storm –

The Eyes around – had wrung them dry –
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset – when the King
Be witnessed – in the Room –

I willed my Keepsakes – Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable – and then it was
There interposed a Fly –

With Blue – uncertain – stumbling Buzz
Between the light – and me –
And then the Windows failed – and then –
I could not see to see – (Fr591)

"Motoring," the penultimate poem in my third book, is about a woman leaving an empty house, and a phrase that came to me, "no flies buzz / in the hallway there, alight on day-old mail," inadvertently stepped me into Emily's world where death might just be commonplace and quotidian, suggesting that the journey the woman in my poem is undertaking might just be a last journey.

In fact Dickinson – as well as seeing death, that last great voyage, as being familiar and ordinary – also sees it as rather exciting, rather challenging. When she was 20 she wrote to a friend: "the shore is safer ... but I love to buffet the sea. . . . I love the danger" (L39). Of course I've always responded to her sea-going imagery, growing up as I did on a bleak coastline of coves and headlands. But Dickinson makes it clear that taking leave of land is invariably a metaphor for leaving life behind:

Exultation is the going
Of an inland soul to sea –

Past the Houses –
Past the Headlands –
Into deep Eternity –

Bred as we, among the mountains,
Can the sailor understand
The divine intoxication
Of the first league out from Land? (Fr143)

This clearly isn't death as a carriage ride to the local churchyard, but the trepid beginnings of an epic, seafaring odyssey. In another of her poems we see the moldering pier, and pass on out, with all those echoes for us now of Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar." But where Tennyson expects to see his pilot face to face, Emily believes we will have crossed "into Conjecture's presence" (Fr243); God or the afterlife still remains a "conjecture" after all, our own best guess at life's meaning.

So my own poem, "No Far Shore," clearly takes on, a century or more later, that same question of conjecture versus belief.

No Far Shore

It will be winter when I untie
the boat for the last time:
When I double-lock the back door
on an empty house,
go barefoot through bramble
and briar, measure each
stone step to the slip.

It will be night-time when I row
to the horizon,
steady in North-Star light
the darkened house at my back.

It will be winter when I draw
each oar from the water,
shiver,
and bite the cold from my lip.

Emily Dickinson also has a bold opening that goes, "I went to Heaven – / 'Twas a small Town" (Fr577), a line that many of us who grew up in small towns view rather ruefully, recalling instead Paul Simon's "nothing but the dead and dying / Back in my little town."

Indeed while shunning society in what she called "the racket" of a busy world, Emily said that "Paradise" would be to be remembered as a poet. So there's an ambivalence in her acceptance of her role as the "desert flower . . . born to blush unseen" (to borrow from Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard") and in her crushing disappoint-

ment when Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who'd shown considerable interest in her work, didn't in the end publish the poems.

My grandmother took me to morning mass in Glenravel in the same spirit in which Emily's father had gathered his charges for morning prayers in their Amherst house. At least until a teenager, Emily decided she was unimpressed by the evangelical revivals of the period, revivals that were still a feature of North of Ireland life when I was growing up.



It was at that intellectually rebellious stage that Emily allied herself instead with the transcendentalism of Ralph Waldo Emerson and, later again, Walt Whitman, finding the spiritual in the sublime rather than in organized religion, an increasingly common view that means Dickinson finds an echo with attitudes today.

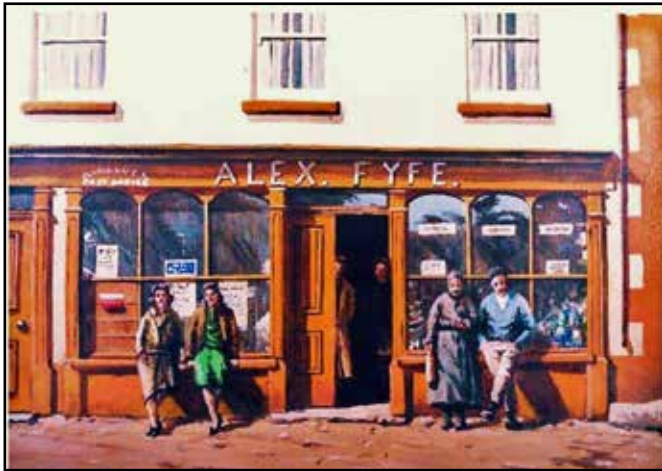
The Brain is just the weight of God –
For – Heft them – Pound for Pound –
And they will differ – if they do –
As Syllable from Sound – (Fr598)

That's perhaps as close as Emily comes to proclaiming her assent to the popular contemporary idea that God exists, perhaps only exists, within the human psyche.

I wouldn't want anyone to think Emily Dickinson's Amherst was all afterlife and a stern Puritan patriarch: her poems conjure up bobolinks, and golden daffodils, and pianos in the woods, and leopards, and the Italian Alps, and Norwegian wines, and emerald and ruby and cochineal, and there's that delightfully absurd opening line "The Mushroom is the Elf of Plants" (Fr1350).

So there are as many Emilys as there are poems: cool, passionate, philosophical, deep, joyous, pessimistic, feisty.

And when I talk of influence, it isn't so much about my writing in imitation of Emily's vivid work, but rather about how her off-beat syntax and that off-beam "certain slant of light," glancing equally on the quotidian and the ineffable, all combined to liberate me into writing with ironic familiarity, with a mixture of detachment and engagement.



Fyfe's General Store in Glenravel: Painting by Liam Reilly

Afternoon on Central Plains Avenue

In the suburbs of the lamented it is always late. Rumour is rife. None has forgotten the rattle of loam on a lid.

Smiles are the order of the day – the week – and neighbors are hardly at home in the dilapidations of rented rooms. Phones go unanswered and cat-flaps are sealed.

Cleaned

uncollected milk bottles clutter the stoops. Meat safes are close to high.

Singing is rare. Gloves shift but swimsuits stay on shelves and no-one fears heights.

In the country where snow is general and the undertaker is king, the only books on loan are elegiac. Fines are exempted.

There is only one season and just enough light to grow bluebells.

Occasionally someone recalls the headlines of apple peelings and shutters are locked.

Churchyards

are of the past. Cloud density eclipses the sun moon and stars.

The extent to which Emily Dickinson's poems made possible that kind of writing about where I grew up, about life and death, came home to me a few years ago during what was, for me, a homecoming.

In 1999 my widowed mother was dying of cancer – she “started for the Sun” (Fr154), as Emily would say. I left London – and work, and

home, and family – and went back to spend six winter months caring for my mother in that same weather-beaten, North Antrim coastal town.

What I rediscovered there was a sense of isolation I had experienced in my teenage years, the sense that you can be in the middle of a small, friendly town and yet you're totally alone, something I'm so aware Emily Dickinson felt about the society around her.

And it's more than just alienation; it's an intense awareness of existence, of what it is to be conscious in the world. Joseph Conrad described “carrying around the ball and chain of existence our whole lives”: and Emily continually fretted about the burden of being alive. In her poem “That Love is all there is” (Fr1747), she worries that “the freight should be / Proportioned to the groove” – that, using a railway metaphor, the track must be strong enough to bear the burden – railway carriages, or love, or life – which is why she's relevant whenever we feel the burden of existence. “The unbearable heaviness of being,” to rework Milan Kundera, is more freight than we can carry at certain times.

My last poem where I know I am both most Dickinsonian and most assuredly myself, explores the alienation of returning to the life where you're a stranger among friends, and the inexplicable closeness to that other world, both things which were very much on my mind at that time.

Morning on Bridge Street

This new address is lighter than airmail:
on blue my street name looks faint, watered.
I unwrap my mother's fine-bone chattels,
sugar bowl crazy with hairline fissures.
In 5 a.m. still, the locals aver
that time hangs slow, conscious of being
a stone's throw from the not-long dead
who thrive on such broken mornings. The blind
accordion-player on the bridge hollers
it's the real, the absolute, time of day.
Thanks you for the chink of currency.
Passers-by strain to catch his underplayed
wheeze. The postman abandons his route
in small hours. Residents
listen out for a noiseless whistle.

All three poems by Anne-Marie Fyfe appear in Understudies: New and Selected Poems (Seren Books 2010). The Bulletin gratefully acknowledges her for granting permission to reprint them. Her latest collection, House of Small Absences, was published by Seren Books earlier this year.

By Renée Bergland, Book Review Editor

God in the Nineteenth Century

John Dellicarpini

Emily Dickinson's God: The Divine Image in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson. London: Olympia Publishers, 2014. 142 pp.

W. Clark Gilpin

Religion Around Emily Dickinson. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014. 200 pp.

Dominic Mastroianni

Politics and Skepticism in Antebellum American Literature. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 217 pp.

Whether she believed in God or not, Emily Dickinson certainly structured much of her work around the idea of God. Three recent scholarly books present three very different views of Dickinson's attitudes toward God, religion, or faith—though all present Dickinson's beliefs as paradoxical and elusive.

As John Dellicarpini points out, Emily Dickinson's God has many faces. *Emily Dickinson's God: The Divine Image in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson* offers a "divine portrait" of Dickinson's God (15) that relies primarily on close readings of the poetry. Separate chapters describe God as austere, compassionate, inscrutable, forgiving, judgmental, revered, and finally Christ. Dellicarpini concludes by describing Dickinson as a "secular mystic" (141). In these pages, Dellicarpini himself comes across as something of a secular mystic –

he concludes that "Dickinson was an atheist, agnostic, and believer at different moments, and sometimes, at the same instant, but such an authentic relationship to God led her closer, and ultimately to his doorstep when she breathed her last" (142). In this passage, as throughout the book, it is clear that religious faith is of great personal importance to the author. His book is modest and unaffectedly sincere, and at times it can be very compelling.

If Dellicarpini's book reads more like religious meditation, W. Clark Gilpin's *Religion Around Emily Dickinson* is obviously the work of a historian of religion rather than an English professor. Gilpin is a careful and nuanced reader of poetry, but what makes the book useful is the broad and deep understanding of religious cultural contexts that it offers. Although in some ways, Gilpin builds on Barton Levi St. Armand's *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture* (1986) his lucid and remarkably well-informed depictions of the varieties of nineteenth-century American religious experience take us further and deeper into the history than any of its predecessors. Gilpin offers useful critical and historiographical context, introducing the book with a fascinating discussion of the "intersections between American religious and literary history," that connects the mid twentieth century theologian Reinhold Niebuhr to literary critics from Perry Miller to Sacvan Bercovitch (9). Later chapters "investigate both the nineteenth-century repertoire of religious practices and Dickinson's imaginative reshaping of them" (8). The very idea of a "repertoire

of religious practices" is a useful one, while the impeccably researched concrete details and careful explanations of each set of religious frameworks make *Religion Around Emily Dickinson* an indispensable resource.

Politics and Skepticism in Antebellum American Literature by Dominic Mastroianni offers a bracing alternative to Gilpin or Dellicarpini. The book focuses on skepticism rather than faith, but as Mastroianni sees it, the two are inseparable. The book begins with a masterful close reading of Dickinson's description of Ralph Waldo Emerson as a "secret spring" (1) for her work and – Mastroianni argues – for nineteenth-century America. He leads us briskly through a dizzying array of connotations of "secret spring": a source of water, a season of the year, a trick that opens a locked compartment, and finally a private leap of faith. For Mastroianni, the secret spring is a trope that gestures toward a profound and generative skepticism. He argues that Emerson, Melville, Hawthorne, Dickinson, Douglass, and Jacobs "use figures of unrevealable secrets to confront the epistemological optimism of their time" (2). Chapter Four, on Dickinson, is particularly notable since it offers a sustained and insightful reading of Fascicle 24, arguing that it "insinuates that God is indifferent or nonexistent; it explicitly condemns God's treatment of Moses, while hinting of a desire to punish God; it suggests that God and the angels were far greater sinners than Adam; it rewrites gospel and claims to walk on water; it feminizes military men and attri-

The *Bulletin* welcomes notices of all Dickinson-related books, including those published outside the U.S.
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butes to them homoerotic desires; and it suggests that liberty is not worth the loss of life” (168). True enough. But Mastroianni is equally convincing when he links the formal qualities of Dickinson’s poetry to her unorthodox stances, “With its seemingly endless chain of reference to and beyond itself, with its puns and verbal density, Fascicle 24 is uniquely equipped for the formulation of unwelcome thoughts” (168). Dickinson’s secret thoughts may have been unwelcome to some of her peers, but Mastroianni’s thoughts offer new and welcome insights to Dickinson studies.

John Dellicarpini is a bit of a mystic. W. Clark Gilpin is a religious historian. Dominic Mastroianni is a literary critic as at home within the archives of history and philosophy as he is adept at formalist close reading. All three offer careful and thoughtful readings of Dickinson’s God that bring much clarity without imposing the dogmatism that Dickinson so strenuously resisted. In the hands of these scholars, Dickinson’s attitude toward religious faith remains as “Capacious as the Sea” (Fr713).

Back to the New: Aesthetics and Formalism Return

Branka Arsic, Editor

American Impersonal: Essays with Sharon Cameron. London: Bloomsbury, 2014. 304 pp.

Jonathan Culler

Theory of the Lyric. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015. 416 pp.

Derek Attridge

The Work of Literature. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 320 pp.

Caroline Levine

Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015. 192 pp.

Turn. Turn. Turn. Thud. Thud. Thud. Heavy tomes monumentalizing the turn back toward aesthetic literary analysis landed hard on our doorsteps this summer. Despite (or perhaps because of) their ponderousness, there is something exciting about this cluster of ambitious works that advocate aestheticism with confidence and clarity, often turning to Dickinson to make their cases. Dickinson scholarship has never felt so central. In part, that may be because Dickinson scholars have perfected their balance between form and context over the past decades. *American Impersonal: Essays with Sharon Cameron* includes a dazzling essay by Shira Wolosky, “Formal, New, and Relational Aesthetics: Dickinson’s Multitexts,” that invokes Dickinson to argue that the New Aestheticism is relational rather than ontologically purist or contextless. Wolosky is brilliant; she makes clear what we all half knew.

It makes sense that the new aesthetics and the new formalism would turn to Dickinson, since aesthetics, formal analysis, and insistent close reading never really left Dickinson Studies. Although new criticism may have seemed old hat to our colleagues, it has continued to structure reading practices in poetry classrooms all over the world. It is hard to imagine reading Dickinson’s spasmodic verse without the invisible apparatus of close reading that developed over the twentieth century. In the past decades we have worked hard to contextualize Dickinson, but we have never stopped noticing form.

That said, it is good to see that Jonathan Culler has been noticing work in our

field, paying close attention to Virginia Jackson and Cristanne Miller as well as Emily Dickinson. Almost 400 pages, *Theory of the Lyric* weighs in at 1.6 pounds. It is an impressive book. Culler tends toward Miller’s views of the lyric as opposed to Jackson and Yopie Prins’s views, but what makes his book so useful is what happens when he moves beyond discussion of genre and genre theory, to chapters on Rhythm and Repetition, Lyric Address, Lyric Structures, and, finally, Lyric and Society. In his chapter on “Lyric Structures,” Culler focuses on verb tenses, describing the “lyric present,” the “lyric attempt to be itself an event rather than the representation of an event” (294). His discussion turns us back again toward Sharon Cameron’s *Lyric Time* by way of Cristanne Miller – but it contributes its own very useful insights, and, delightful to Dickinsonians, cites Dickinson throughout.

Derek Attridge also makes Dickinson central to *The Work of Literature*. The book revisits ideas that may be familiar to readers of Derek Attridge’s earlier books. In particular, the first section on “Singularity” rehearses Attridge’s arguments from ten years ago, when he published *The Singularity of Literature*. In the interim, Attridge’s writing has gotten looser, more direct – I’d even say better – while the need to argue for literature has become more pressing; his return to his own idea of singularity is worthwhile. Then, in the second part of the book, Attridge offers multiple frames for literary analysis. He starts with “Justice,” describing literary reading as “the realm of responsibility – which is to say, the realm of ethics” (118). Our responsibility as readers, Attridge argues, is to pay close attention. As an example of responsible reading, he offers his own interpretation of Dickinson’s “As Imperceptibly as

Grief” (Fr935). His extended reading of the poem is very good; it would be wonderful to talk over in a seminar. *The Work of Literature* is not slight, but it does not have the same weight that Culler’s book does: this is more a book that will energize discussions with students than an enduring work of reference.

While Culler offers a definitive account of the lyric and Attridge offers a useful introductory guide to aesthetically attuned literary analysis today, Caroline Levine’s groundbreaking *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* redefines fundamental conceptions of form and formal analysis. The book soars. Of the works we review here, it is the least focused on Dickinson. Instead, it offers a general theorization of the new formalism that attends to networks and their “affordances.” Levine does invoke Dickinson’s “multiple forms, which overlapped to provide surprising opportunities,” as she argues that Dickinson’s work shows us that “networks and enclosures are constantly meeting, sometimes sustaining and reinforcing one another, at other times creating threats and obstacles. It shows that neither form has the final organizing word – neither always regulates the other” (119). Levine argues that the “overlapping of multiple networks” can and should be the subject of the new formalist method (120). Of course, as Levine knows, Dickinson scholars are already practicing what she is preaching – what she manages to do is to give us new theoretical language to help describe a methodology that poetry like Dickinson’s has already demanded from us.

It’s a method that Shira Wolosky, in “Formal, New, and Relational Aesthetics,” would call “relational.” Wolosky’s brief essay anticipated this summer’s stack of monographs, as indeed, Sharon Cameron’s works did decades ago. What’s old is new.

Pretty in Pink: Emily Dickinson in Young Adult Lit

By Lauren Rizzuto

Nuala O’Connor

Miss Emily. New York: Penguin Books, 2015. 256 pp.

Cindy L. Rodriguez

When Reason Breaks. New York: Bloomsbury Children’s Books, 2015. 304 pp.

Jenny Hubbard

And We Stay. New York: Delacourt Press, 2014. 240 pp.

And We Stay (2014) by Jenny Hubbard, *Miss Emily* (2015) by Nuala O’Connor, and *When Reason Breaks* (2015) by Cindy L. Rodriguez are three new, young adult novels in which Emily Dickinson figures prominently, but they have more in common than a love for the poet and her poetry. Thematically, each is a story about coping with trauma, acclimating to a new place, and learning to trust. The main characters (almost all of whom are named “Emily”) face similar combinations of struggles: depression, suicide, and unwanted pregnancy. Oddly, the books’ covers all even look alike when lain side by side: the bold red or hot pink titles shout their importance in all-caps against a purplish background. It seems that, in today’s literary market for adolescents, the woman in white is represented by color schemes that are simultaneously punk and pretty. The message? Poetry isn’t as soft and genteel as others might expect. In YA lit, poetry is for renegades.

Set in 1860s New England, *Miss Emily* is perhaps the least obviously “YA” of the three. To my knowledge, it is not marketed as such, though its inclusion of

a teenage heroine and its unmistakable resemblance in plot to the other openly YA novels suggests that it has at least “teen appeal” if not a specifically designated teen audience. Ada Concannon is eighteen years old when she sails from Ireland to Amherst, and at first she exhibits that hardy blend of naiveté and fearlessness we’ve come to expect in contemporary books for young adults: “I’ll show them,” she thinks. “I’ll do something that will shake the lot of them, and though I have no idea yet what it might be, it will be big” (6). Emily, too, shares this perspective: “I do not wish to be regularized. Or regular,” she informs the reader, as early as the first page (1). Thus, we understand her quirks – not leaving the house, gardening in the middle of the night, demanding solitude, wearing all white, even baking gingerbread for the neighborhood children – as small acts of defiance. Yet Emily is thirty-six-years-old to Ada’s eighteen, and while Ada’s family clearly understands her attitude as youthful exuberance, Emily’s marks hers as definitively puerile. “My daughter loves to be a child,” Mrs. Dickinson comments, rather insensitively, at one point. “She does not desire to grow up” (98). True, Emily’s behavior can be somewhat selfish, especially when she is demanding that her very pregnant sister-in-law visit her, rather than the other way around (one of the things O’Connor does so beautifully is to create an Emily who is flawed but forgivable). But when Ada is raped and nearly dies from gonorrhea, it is Emily, not her decorous family, who blunts Ada’s shame with earnest indignation and tenderness. Read together, the back-and-forth narration of the two women certainly emphasizes the differences in their stations, but it also, and more importantly,

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illuminates their mutual needs for independence and acceptance.

When Reason Breaks is likewise told in two perspectives, again for the purpose of exploring adolescent nonconformity, but its treatment of Dickinson seems more forced than in the other novels. The two protagonists, Emily Delgado and (Emily) Elizabeth Davis, are students in Ms. (Emilia) Diaz's high school English class, where they are reading – must I say it? – Emily Dickinson's poetry. According to Rodriguez's note at the end of the book, the abundance of Emilys is intentional, for she hoped to show the multifaceted quality of Dickinson's work, but to my reading this narrative technique felt more like pedantic name-dropping. (In addition, Emily Delgado's brother is named Austin, and he is dating one of her best friends, who is not named Susan Gilbert (though the guidance counselor is) but Abby, for Abby Wood. In fact, nearly every name in the novel refers to a figure in Dickinson's life.)

Further, this constant repetition distracts from the storytelling, which is strong in concept if weak in execution. Emily Delgado is Latina and feels suffocated by her father's political aspirations. As her family's visibility grows, Emily herself becomes smaller, withdrawing from her friends, her family, and her boyfriend into silence and depression. Meanwhile, Elizabeth Davis confronts a family crisis of her own: her father's infidelity and subsequently her parents' recent divorce. As the school semester progresses, both girls seek comfort from their English teacher and Dickinson's poetry. Eventually, Emily decides death can be her only consolation – “This is my letter to the world / That never wrote to Me” (Fr519) acquires new meaning in her suicide note – and Ms. Diaz and Elizabeth rush to her rescue in the nick of time (252).

An exploration of teen depression and death is not new ground for a YA novel,

or even a YA novel about Dickinson. Yet in *When Reason Breaks*, any reference to Dickinson's life or her poetry seems somewhat thrown in, rather than carefully drawn, and sensationalized besides. However, I'd argue that there is still something to gain from reading Rodriguez's novel, told in two voices. As in *Miss Emily*, the author writes from two ostensibly disparate viewpoints, forged from but resistant to social expectations: to all outward appearances, Emily Delgado seems a quiet goody-goody, but she conceals a rebellious heart. Elizabeth Davis is a smart-mouthed Goth by day, but a sensitive artist by night. The juxtaposition of both reveals their underlying cry to be understood, on their terms – a need that is not exclusive to adolescents.

And We Stay strikes me as the most ambitious of the three novels, and not just because it won two coveted distinctions available to YA novels, the Printz Honor and a William C. Morris Debut Award finalist. No, this novel is ambitious because it takes plotlines that, I've noticed, are particular to Emily Dickinson literary YA fiction and renews them with sensitivity. Again, in Hubbard's novel we have the displaced and traumatized protagonist. Emily Beam arrives in mid-year at the Amherst School for Girls, a boarding school within walking distance of the Emily Dickinson house. She does not come of her own volition; her parents and aunt have sent her there so that she can acquire distance from a recent trauma: an unwanted pregnancy, followed by an abortion and her boyfriend's accidental suicide. Heavy stuff, to say the least, and it is unsurprising that Emily finds solace in poetry, Dickinson's and her own. Yet, while one could argue that *And We Stay* is threatening to become an after school special at every turn, to me Hubbard's chronicling of a teenager's guilt and grief feels poignant, not artificial. “How had Emily Dickinson put it?” Emily Beam asks herself, before finding the answer:

“Good morning – Midnight – / I'm coming Home – Day – got tired of Me” (Fr382). Something like that. Seventy-eight midnights, and the feeling of shame over the choices she's made – the big choice – refuses to leave her. Her heart is anchored by it, her head stuffed full of what-ifs” (120). Hubbard crafts a tentative dialogue between the protagonist and her poet, thus inviting readers to take part in the conversation even if they are unfamiliar with Dickinson's work. Further, Emily Beam's own writing recalls Dickinson's twists of meaning without sounding like either bald mimicry or bad imitation: “I am walking, I am out walking, / I am out-walking winter” is the beginning of a poem about a fallen robin's egg (77). Like Dickinson's poems, *And We Stay* is not a book to rush through in one sitting, but to read, to ponder, and to come back to.

Perhaps the most striking similarity between *And We Stay*, *Miss Emily*, and *When Reason Breaks* is in their use of multiple perspectives. Their portraits of the poet are never straightforward; rather, each novel offers dual-voiced perspective, whether it is an internal dialogue between the protagonist and her poetry, or the more overt authorial strategy of having two narrators share individual sides of the same story. In fact, looking back at the novels' covers, one sees that all three display a female figure, her face either partially or completely obscured. It's a subtle reminder that, like those of us who seek access to the private life of Emily Dickinson, adults writing for young adults have only an obscured view into their audience's lives. In the case of these three novels, I'd say this aperture is not only appropriate, but welcome.

Lauren Rizzuto teaches in the graduate program in Children's Literature at Simmons College, while she works toward her PhD in English at Tufts.

Rapture's Germination: Three Dickinson Albums

By Michelle Kohler

Most of us know that it is possible to sing many of Emily Dickinson's nearly 1800 poems to the tune of "The Yellow Rose of Texas" (or the theme of *Gilligan's Island*). While there is some uncanny pleasure to be derived from singing the hymn stanzas of "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –" (Fr764) or "I felt a funeral in my brain" to these rollicking strains, it is a more serious pleasure when Dickinson's lyrics inspire new melodies and musical settings. Hundreds of performers and composers (perhaps most famously Aaron Copland) have set Dickinson to music. Here, I focus on three recent albums by women folk artists from around the world: Josephine Foster's *Graphic as a Star* (2009, Fire Records, UK), Sofie Livebrant's *Emily and I* (2012, Playground Music Scandinavia,

Sweden), and Efrat Ben Zur's *Robin* (2012, Anova Music, Israel).

On *Graphic as a Star*, Josephine Foster, a folk singer from Colorado, brings her distinctive, lilting voice to 26 Dickinson poems. The sculpted vocal lines and finely controlled falsetto recall Billie Holiday, and Foster performs many of the songs *a capella*, adding to others only the slightest whisper of accompaniment (guitar, harp, banjo, and the occasional, bolder harmonica).

Some of the tracks, like Dickinson's poems, are very short – her *a capella* renditions of the four-line "With thee in the desert" and "Beauty crowds me till I die," for instance,

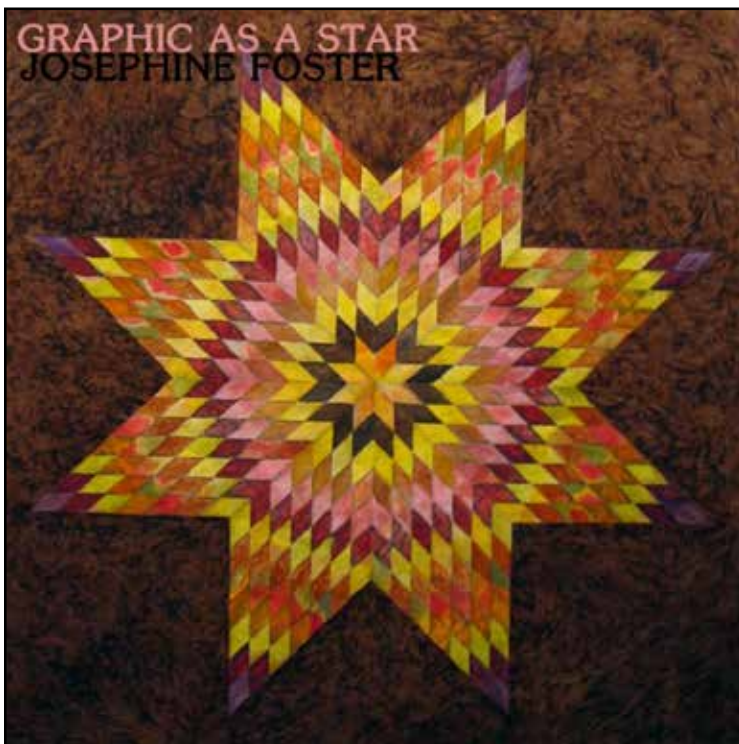
take less than 30 seconds each. Foster's voice emerges starkly and plainly, offering one poem after another with a haunting and kind of unrelenting contextlessness that in some ways invokes the experience of reading the poems for the first time in a volume like Franklin's reading edition.

The album is captivating throughout, but to my ear the

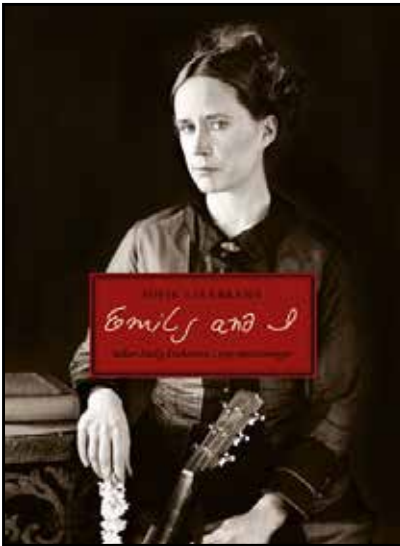
album's best moments come when Foster gives us a little more length and texture. We have time, for example, to take in the four stanzas of the devastating "In falling Timbers buried" (Fr447) because she extends the song by repeating the first two stanzas. Similarly, the harmonica breaks and guitar accompaniment help us savor the words of "She sweeps with many-colored Brooms" (Fr318) and "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun." Even so, Foster's spare, eccentric style brings us, appropriately, into stark confrontation with Dickinson's own startling language.

Swedish folk singer Sofie Livebrant's delightful *Emily and I* (previously reviewed in the Fall 2012 issue of the *Bulletin*) is, by contrast, playful, varied, rhythmic, and often spellbinding. Her instrumentation is minimalist without the starkness of Foster. Folky with an edge, the album begins with a hypnotic version of "My wheel is in the dark" (Fr61), which opens with a full minute of Livebrant's clear, low, sweet voice singing with only drums for accompaniment before acoustic and electric guitars join in. In the waltzy "There's something quieter than sleep" (Fr62), a lone accordion accompanies her with a playfulness that captures the poem's coy "prone[ness] to periphrasis" as it dodges the word death. Livebrant shifts gears in her beautiful, husky rendition of "There's a Certain Slant of Light" (Fr320). Accompanied only by guitar, she sings with the heft of cathedral tunes, as it were – in a rich, stoic alto that slips into the occasional betraying whisper, most movingly to announce "'Tis the Seal Despair."

The most unusual (and by far the longest) track on Livebrant's album begins with a



REVIEWS OF PUBLICATIONS



stark a capella rendition of the first four lines of “Beauty be not caused it is” (Fr654) that seems straight from Josephine Foster, which soon gives way to droning synthesizers (sometimes recalling Tibetan horns) and Livebrant’s slow, deep chanting of a Keralan lullaby that she explains expresses astonishment at a child’s beauty. Here and throughout the album, Livebrant’s interpretations of the poems are surprising and apt, inventive and convincing.

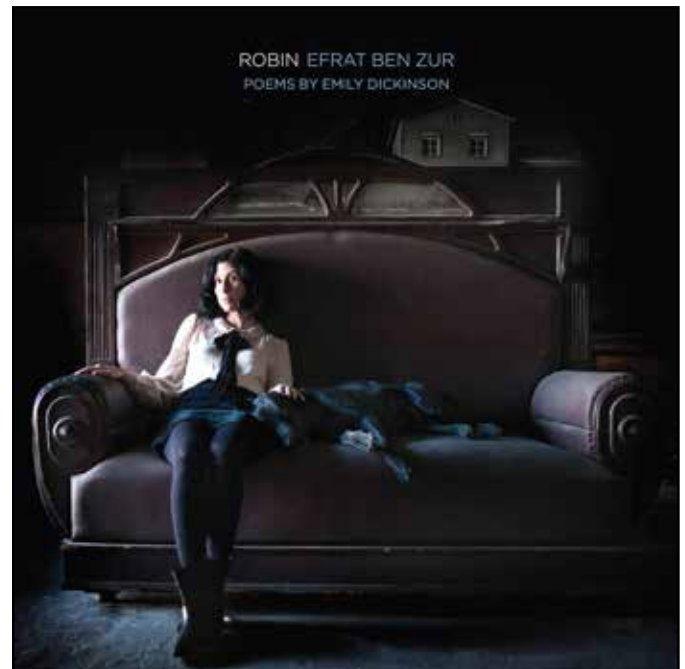
Israeli singer Efrat Ben Zur’s album, *Robin*, delivers Dickinson’s poems with the delicacy of Ben Zur’s voice and the force of a full band. The arrangements are positively lush compared to Foster and Livebrant, with driving rhythms and rich layers of guitars, strings, percussion, and gorgeous piano. The album opens with Ben Zur’s seductive version of “Bee! I’m expecting you!” (Fr983) in which Dickinson’s short poem (a letter from Fly) begins quietly but turns decidedly come-hither as piano, strings, and percussion gradually join in and intensify the Fly’s invitation to come bask in the “Clover warm and thick.” Most memorable among the tracks is her edgy, minor-key, subtly fantastical rendition of “I’m Nobody!” (Fr260). At once elegant, haunting, and cheeky, Ben Zur sings the first two lines twice as an in-

cantatory, arch refrain and captures Dickinson’s humor throughout, emitting the occasional croak to mock the public Frog and delivering the “admiring Bog” with a throaty bleat.

Also compelling is Ben Zur’s final track, “Till the End,” her tense version of “I should not dare to leave my friend,” a poem about the dread of reaching a beloved’s deathbed too late. Despite Dickinson’s metrical regularity, one of the challenges all of these artists face is in adapting poems with little to no repetition to the conventions of contemporary music organized around a chorus or refrain. “I should not dare to leave my friend” is unusual in that it readily lends itself to song, as six of its sixteen lines already contain repetition (“So sure I’d come – so sure I’d come –”; “Since breaking then – since breaking then”). The repetitions also duplicate the suspense of a deathbed watch, a tension that is gradually heightened here by the pensive, unrelenting guitar accompanying Ben Zur for two stanzas and the addition in later stanzas first of tambourine and then of piano. Throughout the album, the blend of Ben Zur’s filmy voice and full-bodied, percussive instrumentation rightly captures the simultaneous hush and intensity of Dickinson’s poems.

Although these three folk artists bring different styles and moods to their interpretations of Dickinson’s poems, what they share is an attentiveness and faithfulness

to the poems and to Dickinson’s voice. We hear Dickinson in these songs even when the artists are at their most inventive. One wonders, then, how Dickinson herself would respond to hearing her own lines sung – we know she imagined having “the Art to stun [her]self / With Bolts – of Melody” (Fr348). In a late poem (Fr1511), she describes “The fascinating chill that Music leaves” as being “Rapture’s germi-



nation / In timid and tumultuous soil” – there is indeed a fascinating chill that runs through all these albums, deriving in no small part from the tumultuous, rich soil of Dickinson’s lyrics.

Michelle Kohler teaches courses in nineteenth-century literature at Tulane. Her book, Miles of Stare, came out in 2014, and her address to the society and the 2015 EDIS Annual Meeting, “Prompter than a Star: Dickinson’s Clockwork,” is discussed above on page 6. Michelle joined the EDIS Board in 2015 (see her profile below, page 31).

New EDIS Board Members

Faith Barrett

Faith Barrett is an associate professor of English at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, where she teaches courses on nineteenth-century American culture, American poetry from the nineteenth through the twenty-first centuries, and creative writing/poetry.

Before coming to Duquesne, she taught for ten years at a liberal arts college in Wisconsin, Lawrence University.



Her educational background includes an MFA in Creative Writing / Poetry from the University of Iowa and a PhD in Comparative Literature from UC Berkeley. With Cristanne Miller, she co-edited *Words for the Hour: A New Anthology of American Civil War Poetry* (Massachusetts 2005), and she is the author of *To Fight Aloud Is Very Brave: American Poetry and the Civil War* (Massachusetts 2012), a study in which Dickinson is a central figure.

She has published articles on the poetry of Dickinson, Whitman, Melville, Abraham Lincoln, the enslaved potter David Drake, and George Moses Horton, and also on Civil War poetry. Her current project focuses on local poetry culture and on poetic parodies in the mid-nineteenth century. One of her first academic presentations was at an EDIS conference in Innsbruck in 1995, when she was a graduate student, and she

has since presented at the meetings in Trondheim, Hawaii, and College Park, Maryland.

She brings to the Board not only experience as a scholar but also experience teaching creative writing and working with contemporary poets. She is excited to create closer ties between EDIS and the contemporary poetry scene in the US, perhaps by inviting a poet or poets to read or speak at an EDIS meeting. On the academic side, she hopes to help connect Dickinson studies and the new poetry studies, which is currently enjoying a groundswell of interest in American studies circles. Finally, she hopes to stimulate greater graduate student involvement in EDIS.

Marta Werner

Marta Werner, elected to the EDIS Board as a member-at-large in 2014, is a professor of English at D'Youville College, a small college in Buffalo, NY, where she teaches American literature and poetry and poetics. Her teaching is in part informed by her commitment to give her students – many of whom are first-generation college students – access to poetry in all its forms. Emily Dickinson's writings have served as crucial emissaries in her work as a teacher, for they continue to speak across the centuries and to strike diverse and often unexpected readers. Her engagement with Dickinson is informed by her belief that there are many “Emily Dickinsons,” and still many more to discover.

Marta has long been involved with textual scholarship, especially manuscript studies. She has concentrated primarily on Dickinson's late writings – the poems, letters, and fragments composed in the 1870s and 1880s – with a focus in her late drafts. *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios: Scenes of Reading, Surfaces of Writing* (U of Michigan 1996); *Radical Scatters: An Electronic Archive of Emily Dickinson's Late Fragments*; and *The Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson's Envelope Writings* (New Directions 2013) all explore Dickinson's compositional processes, her poesis.

For many years, Marta feels, she has been working adjacent to the Society, in extended conversation with the scholarly ideas arising from the contributions of its members. Her work in textual scholarship has made her conversant with transhistorical and in-

terdisciplinary approaches to manuscript study, and especially to editorial methods, many of which have application to the reading and presentation of Dickinson's writings. Her ability to read seemingly inert archival manuscripts richly and transhistorically was exemplified in her paper, "The Weather (of Manuscripts): The Genealogies of the Snell Family Meteorological Records at Amherst College Library," presented at the 2015 Annual Meeting in Amherst.

Beyond the archives, her longstanding engagement with 20th and 21st-century poetics leads her to seek out connections between Dickinson and contemporary poets and artists. Finally, she hopes that her position as a sort of "prodigal daughter" of the Society – a stranger coming home – may open a conversation on the very meaning of our scholarly abodes, and the forms of shelter Dickinson herself constructed.



Michelle Kohler

Joining the Board in 2015, Michelle Kohler is an associate professor at Tulane University specializing in nineteenth-century American literature. She is the author of *Miles of Stare: Transcendentalism and the Problem of Literary Vision in Nineteenth-Century America* (Alabama 2014), which studies the historical emergence and influence of the Transcendentalists' strange visual metaphor for writing and traces its subsequent fate in the hands of other nineteenth-century American writers, including Dickinson, Douglass, Hawthorne, Jewett, and Howells. Her essays on Dickinson have appeared in *Nineteenth-Century Literature* and the *EDJ*, and she has also published essays on William Dean Howells, Sarah Winnemucca, and other nineteenth-century American writers in *American Literary Realism* and *Arizona Quarterly*, with another forthcoming in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century American Women's Poetry*. She is currently working on a book about Dickinson and nineteenth-century American constructions

of time, with an emphasis on timekeeping, the Civil War, and the temporality of poetry. Society members had the opportunity to hear her present a paper from this research, "Prompter than a Star – Dickinson's Clockwork," at the 2015 Annual Meeting in Amherst.



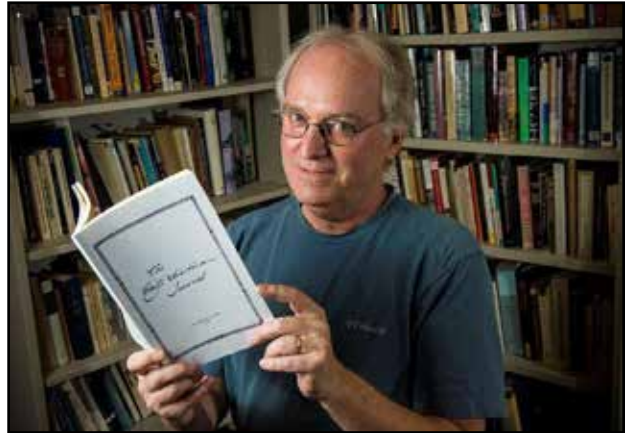
Michelle welcomes the opportunity to serve on the EDIS Board. She says that while her initial objective will be to understand the Board's ongoing goals and needs, she hopes to build a greater focus on the South with regard to EDIS membership and programming, both to expand the Society's reach and to support new and ongoing scholarship on Dickinson's engagement with the Civil War, slavery, and the South (including the larger Gulf South). She is also keen to join efforts to expand the Society's outreach both to younger scholars and to scholars who work on Dickinson as part of another area of focus, such as environmental literature, disability studies, or American philosophy.

New Editor for the *Journal!*

The Spring 2015 issue of the *EDJ* was the last for Cristanne Miller, who assumed the editorship of the *Journal* in 2005. Much gratitude is due to Cris for her wise and learned stewardship of a publication that has become increasingly important in Dickinson studies and in scholarship on nineteenth-century US literature in general.

Cris has been replaced by Jim Guthrie. Jim is currently experiencing the liberating sensation of embarking on his final year of full-time teaching as a professor of English at Wright State University, in Dayton, Ohio. He received his BA from the University of Michigan and his PhD from SUNY / Buffalo. He is the author of three books, including two about Dickinson, *Emily Dick-*

inson's Vision: Illness and Identity in her Poetry (Florida 1998) and, the most recent, *A Kiss From Thermo-pylae: Emily Dickinson and Law*, published this year by the University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst. His other book, *Above Time: Emerson's And Thoreau's Temporal Revolutions* (Missouri 2001) addressed the transcendentalists' views of time and history.



Jim invites *Bulletin* readers to consider submitting to the *Journal* scholarly essays written from any critical perspective, on all

aspects of Dickinson and her work. Anyone interested in doing so can contact him at wsuedj@wright.edu.

Recovering Emily Dickinson

When Zeus was boasting Leda's rape –
His mind was dull – His eyes were dim –
He could not see her clean escape –
Her Modesty – in spite of him.

He thought he held her by the hair –
He felt he had her in his hand –
But she still wore a garment fair –
A gown he could not understand.

While he was lying on her bed –
The Bird was gliding in the sky
And humming songs of Hope instead –
To which he could not make reply.

Her head was crowned with gauzy lace –
Her gloves were lamb – Her shoes were fawn –
A spotless veil set off her face –
She had her Eden apron on.

Her wedding dress immaculate –
Her word a verse – her crown a poem –
Her dignity inviolate –
And every stitch was made at home.

Invested in Eternity –
She wore her love in fresh bouquet –
And when her Gentleman could see –
She slipped with Him into the Day.

By Cynthia Hallen

A Bench to Honor Cindy Dickinson

In the last issue it was reported that Cindy Dickinson, after working at the Emily Dickinson Homestead and Museum for 19 years, coordinating special programs and educational tours, had taken a job nearer her home, as Director of Education at Hancock Shaker Village, near the New York state line. To commemorate her years of service, the Museum has purchased a bench, placed half-way in between the Homestead and the Evergreens, where visitors can sit in a newly cleared area along the path between the houses.

Work on the Homestead continues, as the Museum is currently trying to raise the \$300,000 needed to restore the conservatory Edward Dickinson built for his daughter when the family moved back into the house in 1855.



EDIS Membership Form

Membership in the Emily Dickinson International Society (EDIS) enables you to participate in the Society's meetings and conferences, to receive both of the Society's publications (the *Bulletin* and the *Emily Dickinson Journal*), and to help foster the goals of the Society.

Name, title & affiliation _____
Mailing address _____
Telephone (home) _____ (office) _____ (fax) _____
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Please check if this is: new address membership renewal

Annual Membership Categories:

Sustaining Member (added to joint or regular membership) _____ \$150 or more
Institutional Member _____ \$115
Contributing Member (added to joint or regular membership) _____ \$50 – \$149
Joint EDIS/Dickinson Museum _____ \$110
Regular Member _____ \$60.00 Student Member _____ \$30.00

(All of the above Members receive both the *Emily Dickinson Journal* and the *Bulletin*)

Associate Member \$20.00 (*Bulletin* only)

I have included an additional tax-deductible contribution of \$ _____ to support the Society's programs.

Gift Memberships

Name, title & affiliation _____
Mailing address _____
Telephone (home) _____ (office) _____ (fax) _____
Email _____

Use additional page for further gift memberships.

Please make check or money order payable, in U.S. dollars, to EDIS, Inc., and send to:
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Members are invited to endow a named award. All it takes is a gift of \$1000 to the Society!

Red Skies Music Ensemble Performs Dickinson's Music Book

The Red Skies Music Ensemble presented three programs on Emily Dickinson and music in 2015, each co-created by EDIS members George Boziwick and Trudy Williams. On August 7, 2015, "Emily Dickinson in Her Elements: Accomplished Musician, Emerging Poet" was presented at the EDIS Annual Meeting in Amherst, MA. Focusing on the music Emily Dickinson loved and played, the program's illustrated narrative, musical performances and theatrical components vibrantly traced the influence of Dickinson's musical engagements on her poetic development within the context of music, nature, Amherst and New England.

On April 12, 2015 "My Wars are laid away in Books – 'Emily Dickinson's Music Book: A Prelude to the Civil War,'" was presented by the Ensemble at the American Repertory Theater's Oberon Theater in Cambridge, MA. This program takes audiences on a rich journey through the musical activities, social context and historical events that informed and enlivened Dickinson's poetic voice that was emerging just as our country plunged towards Civil War.

On January 31, 2015, "My Business is to Sing: Emily Dickinson, Musician and Poet" was presented at The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center in New York City. This program situates Dickinson's



Stones

What modesty! Yours
sits only slightly higher
than, side-by-side,
Lavinia's (though both
appear to be the same
in size, with yours newer)
and it is decidedly lower
and smaller than theirs –
that's to say, your parents'.
Such deference, fitting
in your day, hardly matters
in ours – and you belong
to us and to the squirrels
who scoot and scud
through leaves limned
in rime this early November
morning in a place now
synonymous with fame.

Amherst, MA

Nov. 4, 1988

–George Monteiro

daily musical engagements in the context of her encounters with the music-making of the local community, the Dickinson servants, and the New England hymn tradition. It vividly captures and illustrates how these interactions contributed to Dickinson's fashioning of a compelling and enduring musical persona that would ultimately inform her unique, emerging poetic voice. Concurrently, George Boziwick (Chief of the Music Division of the New York Library for the Performing Arts) curated a reading room exhibit of music-related artifacts that would have been familiar to Dickinson.

For a fuller account of George Boziwick's studies of Dickinson's music, see his article, "My Business is to Sing": Emily Dickinson's Musical Borrowings," Journal for the Society for American Music, v8, Special Issue #2, May 2014, 130-166.

The Collector and the Playwright: A Brief Encounter with William Luce

By Krans Bloeimaand

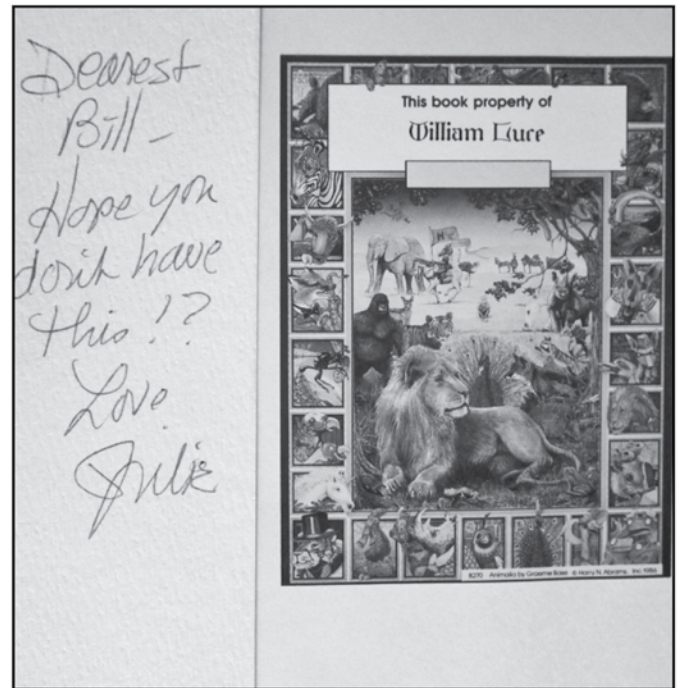
The twists and turns along the winding roads travelled by book collectors, more often than not, can lead to dead ends. The hopeful journeys along these dusky paths sometimes yield surprises, or to paraphrase Emily Dickinson, “precious - mouldering pleasures.” One such “pleasure” occurred in 2009 when quite unexpectedly, I received a phone call from playwright William Luce. After previously exchanging a few emails, it was understood that he would sign a blank archival sheet that I could tip in to my copy of his play, *The Belle of Amherst*. In retrospect, I felt honored to speak with the creator of this great play.

In a voice that I would describe as gentle and mellifluous, Mr. Luce asked if I would send him another sheet to sign. “You see,” he said, “I had a defective pen.” How ironic, I thought, a famous playwright with a recalcitrant writing implement. After ex-

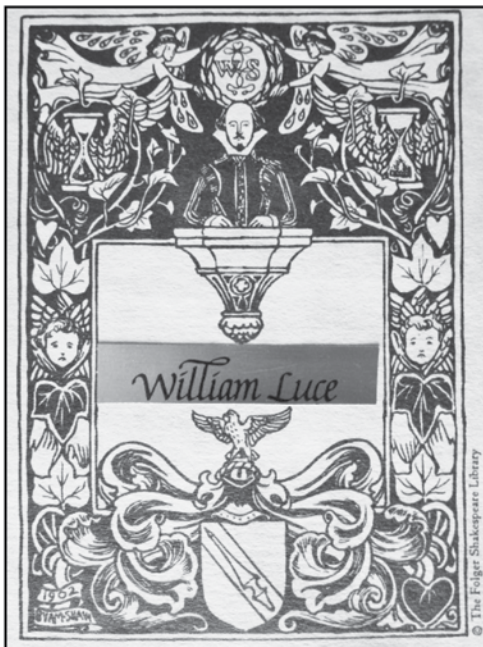
changing a few more pleasantries with my fellow Oregonian, I agreed to send another sheet and thought no more about it.

A week or so later, a large manila envelope arrived with William Luce’s handwritten return address that contained not only the signed sheet, but a crisp copy of the program for the 1976 Broadway premier of *The Belle of Amherst*. Inside the program, beneath the photo of the playwright, I found Mr. Luce’s inked inscription. Along with that surprise, there was a new paperbound edition of *The Belle of Amherst*, also inscribed. In our phone conversation, Mr. Luce mentioned in passing that he found it necessary to issue a new edition of his play due to changes in the script that were made by Charles Nelson Reilly and Julie Harris during performances over the years. He felt that it was important to send me the newest edition of his play.

One final twist to this story concerns the disposition of some of William Luce’s personal Emily Dickinson-related books. Enter the twin mysteries of geographical location and timing. In 2014, I received an email that contained a list of Dickinson books from Bob



Above, a book plate from a copy of Polly Longworth’s *The World of Emily Dickinson*, a gift to Luce from Julie Harris. Below left, a bookplate that Krans Bloeimaand says “resonates in so many ways with Bill Luce.”



Portwood, proprietor of Robert’s Bookshop in Lincoln City, Oregon. I was told that the playwright, approaching his eighty-fourth year in 2015, was downsizing and preparing to move to a smaller home in the area. The change in Mr. Luce’s housing situation partially explains how several of his Dickinson books ended up in my collection. My personal favorite is an autographed copy of Polly Longworth’s book, *The World of Emily Dickinson*. Longworth’s autograph, William Luce’s bookplate, and the book marker warmly inscribed by Julie Harris are what make this volume one of the high spots in my collection. As such, the book will always “tantalize – just so – ” (Fr569).



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