THE EMILY DICKINSON INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

Bulletin

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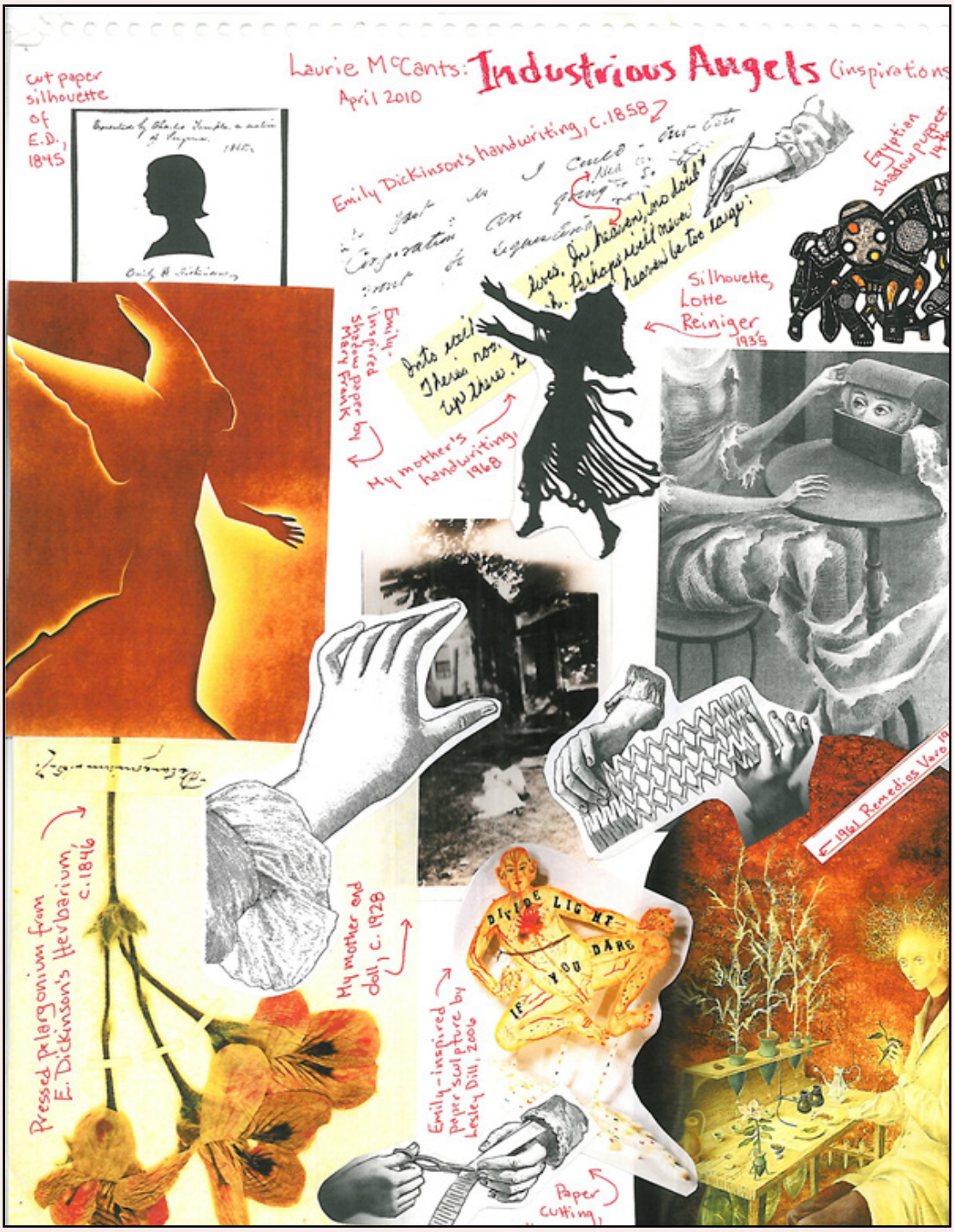
"The Only News I know / Is Bulletins all Day / From Immortality."



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In This Issue

The Bulletin *is particularly grateful to Laurie McCants for her contribution to the Dickinson and the Arts series, "*Industrious Angels*. Yes." The collage appearing on the front cover contains the "thematic threads" she found herself drawing together as she worked on her play. It features two works by Mexican artist Remedios Varo,* Encounter *(1959) and* Unsubmissive Plant *(1961). The images on the back cover include, clockwise from the left, three photographs taken by Sharon Hamilton at the Annual Meeting, and at the bottom, one of the water colors that Victoria Dickson created to demonstrate Amherst's "Edenic Possibilities."*

The Assistant Editor for this issue is Allyson Weglar

Edenic Possibilities: 2017 Annual Meeting

On August 11th and 12th, Dickinson Society members convened in Amherst for a concentrated and illuminating exploration of the 2017 topic, "Edenic Possibilities." The principal highlights were discussion groups and keynote addresses by two graduate students taking Dickinson studies in new directions, as well as a variety of musical and dramatic performances. There was also another session of the increasingly popular Critical Institute, for young scholars wanting criticism of works in progress.

The three Discussion Groups took place on the first afternoon of the Annual Meeting. In one, titled "Dickinson's Soundscapes," Marta Werner and Beth Staley (a doctoral candidate at West Virginia University) described Staley's project of reproducing the soundscape of Dickinson's garden. Staley is in the process of recording the current soundscape at the Homestead, which she plans to compare to evidence of the surrounding sounds in letters and poems. She hopes to produce a record of the "soundscape ecology" of the Homestead as a way of contributing to our sense of what it meant for Dickinson to "listen to the world."

Werner and Staley took careful readings of the ambient soundscape at the Homestead

Terence Davies' film *A Quiet Passion* was the subject of a Discussion Group called "Emily Dickinson on Screen – Feature Film(s), Documentaries." Noting that the passion generated in response to the film has tended to be anything but "quiet," Martha Nell Smith, Barbara Dana, Jonnie Guerra, and Jane Wald led a discussion that considered what it means when a "biopic" is presented as a work of fiction (or vice versa). Those familiar with Dickinson's biography (that is, anyone attending the Annual Meeting and many others likely to see the film) were ready to dismiss the biographical dimension of the work, and they could hardly have been surprised to learn that Davies admitted to never having read the poet's letters. Hurricane Films, producer of *A Quiet Passion*, has now released the companion documentary (a production initiated in response to anxious queries from Dickinson Museum Director Jane Wald, who watched in alarm as the inaccuracies multiplied during the filming of Davies' work). The new documentary, whose working title was "Wild Nights with Emily," has now been released as

Society menbers ponder Barbara Mossberg's pairing of Dickinson and Gilgamesh.

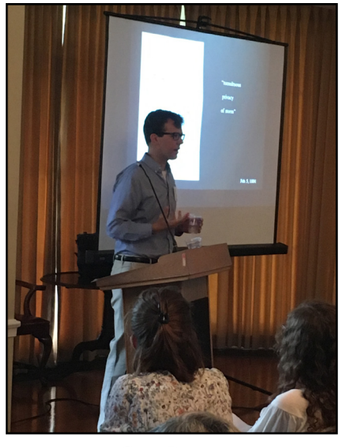
My Letter to the World. Susan Snively's review appears on page 23 of this issue.

Equally engaging was the session called "Eco Emily," in which the question on the table was, "Might Emily Dickinson, an avid gardener, be one of the greatest eco writers in English?" Many of those assembled in the Alumni House were ready to answer in the affirmative without hearing the presentation, but discussion leader Barbara Mossberg, fresh in from Paris, centered the conversation in the poem "A little Madness in the Spring" (Fr1356), viewing the natural world, the "whole Experiment of Green," as a dynamic becoming, something beyond the power of language to describe. The problem, she suggested, is as old as literature. Mossberg invited the group to consider the "King" in the poem as Gilgamesh, the epic tree-feller, and the clown as his redeemer Enkidu. In the poem, Enkidu prefigures the "Clown" who

"ponders this tremendous scene . . . / As if it were his own." Dickinson's redeeming Enkidu figure is the poet who, instead of claiming mastery of the land, speculates in imagination what it would truly mean to "own" the "tremendous" scene. Dickinson's eco-poetics turned out to anticipate such activists as John Muir and his disciple Julia Butterfly Hill, modern Enkidu figures who invite us to register the emergent tremendousness of nature's immanence and evanescence.

Day two featured two fascinating keynote addresses. In the first, Grant Rosson, currently in his sixth year at UCLA, presented a talk called "Dickinson's Interiors: A Theory of Authorship in the Todd Correspondence." The paper comes from his dissertation on geography and nineteenth-century American literature. In his paper, Rosson addressed the question of how a dimension of Dickinson's concept of authorship and her ability to communicate it evolved through her correspondence with, of all people, Mabel Loomis Todd.

Dickinson frequently used the image of the house to indicate a less physical interiority, the space in which authorship arises. Between artist and audience there must be a medium, some intervening substance, since interiors are by their nature not open to those on the outside. Mabel Loomis Todd's arrival in Amherst presented an opportunity to realize and explore this phenomenon. Todd wanted to know Dickinson, but was forced to know her in a mediated way; Dickinson used her letters to Todd to explore and convey her idea of what authorship is all about for her. In other words, physical separation modeled the idea of authorship she was trying to define.



Grant Rosson

Clare Mullaney

In late 1881, Dickinson wrote Todd her first short note, in which she asked, "The parting of those that never met, shall it be delusion, or rather, an unfolding snare whose fruitage is later?" Acknowledging that the two "never met," she offers a series of potential alternative models of connection: "snare," "fruitage," "unfolding." The note beckons as it baffles. An 1882 poem elaborates on the dynamic. "Elysium is as far as to / the very nearest Room" (Fr1590) opens the encounter of two interiors from both perspectives: the auditor and the poet simultaneously "endure" "The accent of a coming Foot" and "The opening of a Door – ." Noting that "Elysium" is an anagram of "Emily," Rosson read the poem as suggesting that contact requires separation, since the actions of authorship are literally immaterial. Dickinson was using material separation to underscore how privacy is the condition of an author's ability to make interiors intelligible.

Other writings from the period played with the same basic model. Obscurity, privacy, is repeatedly an attempt to be seen as an "enhanced" way to intimacy. In "Sunset that screens, reveals – " (Fr1644), the "moats of Mystery" in the final line – barriers that deny access – nevertheless have the power of "Enhancing what we see." That which "screens, reveals." Hiding provided an enhanced liberty. Dickinson signed an 1885 letter to Mabel, "America" (L1004; Mabel was in England), in order to emphasize that while public liberty limited Mabel to a particular place, the poet, in isolation, could extend her boundaries everywhere. A final comment from the audience noted, in fact, that "Elysium" could be further rearranged to read, "Emily – US."

The other keynote was by Clare Mullaney, recipient of the Irving K. Zola Award for Emerging Scholars in Disability Studies and winner of the 2017 Graduate Student Scholarship awarded by EDIS for her work on Dickinson and disability studies. Mullaney's paper was a portion of her University of Pennsylvania dissertation, "Textual Conditions: Disability and the Material Text in Turn-of-the-Century America, 1858-1932."

The paper, entitled "'Not to discover weak – / ness is / The Artifice of strength – ': Emily Dickinson, Strength, and Disability Theory," opened with a citation from a notorious early review of Dickinson's *Poems* that referred to the author's apparent "pathetic dumbness" and "arrested development." Poetic innovation in the nineteenth century was not infrequently characterized in terms drawn from physical or mental disability. Dickinson, Mullaney suggested, antici-

Both keynote addresses provoked passionate questions and comments from members of the audience.

pated such responses in letters such as an 1883 letter to Sophia Holland in which she showed a general resistance to being seen within a diagnostic framework. Drawing a distinction between disability and "constraint," a condition indicating tightness of circumstance, Mullaney cast the notion of impediment out of the individual body and into the environment which the body must navigate. She argued that constraint in Dickinson in turn gave way to "Possibility," her term for the condition of authorship.

Dickinson resisted any diagnostic representation of the human condition. Her incipient blindness appeared in poems not as an impairment but as essential to the creation of texts. In "Dont put up my Thread & Needle" (Fr681), for example, she presents herself as "blushing" about her stitching, but the form and content of the poem contradict any notion of impairment that could be attached to faulty seeing.

Mullaney's talk generated some of the richest general conversation of the whole meeting. One audience member noted that certain disabilities enable other abilities, and another offered the notion that Dickinson's variants might fruitfully be seen as prostheses to the body of the text. Dickinson's dog Carlo, it was suggested, could have been a compensatory appendage for the poet's apparent agoraphobia, the Newfoundland's very dimensions condensing the immensity of surrounding space. Other audience members likewise considered Dickinson's biography in the light of her emerging understanding of constraint. One person observed that Dickinson's reflections on disability might have been influenced by the time she spent as caretaker of her mother. Another asked Mullaney about possible connections between immigration and disability, especially given that Dickinson servant Tom Kelly, later one of her pall-bearers, had lost the use of an arm. Freak shows, we learned, frequently featured immigrants with impairments, as though there were some connection between the two constraints.

In all, Mullaney demonstrated how poetry reinforced Dickinson's imaging of strength, rather than any "Artifice of strength," regardless of the specific constraint within which she worked. "Power is only Pain" (Fr312), Barbara Mossberg reminded us: Dickinson may have deliberately immersed herself in constraint, her frequent references to her littleness becoming a device to highlight the release of power within a little space.

Other highlights of the Meeting included an audio tour called "Grounds of Memory," narrated by Richard Wilbur, as well as two musical events, including a performance of an original composition by saxophonist Jane Ira Bloom, entitled *Wild Lines!* and a reprise by Red Skies Music Ensemble of songs from the poet's collection of sheet music. (These events are reviewed separately in this dossier of reports on the Annual Meeting.)

There was also a display of water colors by Victoria Dickson. Dickson, a Homestead garden volunteer and local artist, in a recent issue of the *Bulletin* described her work: "I enjoy pairing poems with paintings and applying just the right watercolors to paper to record the beautiful hues and forms in Dickinson's floral world. The poet's use of dozens of color words from 'amber' and 'amethyst' to 'umber' and 'vermillion' demonstrates that she often took a painterly approach in her writing" (v28, n1).

Music at the Annual Meeting: Jane Ira Bloom and The Red Skies Ensemble

By Emily Seelbinder

The Jane Ira Bloom Quartet

The Jane Ira Bloom Quartet performed the entirety of Bloom's most recent composing and recording project on Friday night in Buckley Recital Hall on the Amherst College campus. *Wild Lines: Improvising Emily Dickinson*, a thirteen-part work for jazz quartet and spoken word, is a reimagining of poetry and prose adapted from Roger Lundin's *Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief*. This inspiration might seem an unusual choice until one remembers that the art of belief, as Lundin characterizes it, must be improvisational if one wishes to "keep Believing nimble" (L750).

Bloom's compositions are nimble indeed, requiring superb musicianship. The quartet more than met this challenge, delivering an energetic and complex performance. On soprano saxophone Bloom was always in motion, immersed fully in the music. Dawn Clement balanced that intensity with a finely nuanced performance on the piano, while Dean Johnson plumbed the depths on bass and Bobby Previte wove intricate rhythms on drums.

Each selection included a reading by Deborah Rush of the text that had inspired it. Rush's soft delivery was sometimes overwhelmed by the music, making it hard to connect the words and their reimagining. I found I enjoyed the concert most when I stopped trying to make these connections and allowed the music to swirl around me.

This resulted in an appreciation of what attendee Laurie McCants identified as "the vibrant artistry" of Bloom and her quartet. "Like Dickinson," McCants said, "Bloom is an iconoclast – a female artist in a male-dominated field; an improviser, like the poet who, late at night at her piano, created 'weird and beautiful melodies.' Each of us has our 'own' Emily, and I felt Bloom honored her kinship with Dickinson with her music – powerfully dynamic, weaving together rage, and grace, and wonder."

The Red Sky Music Ensemble

The sloping, dappled lawn of the Dickinson Homestead was a delightful setting for the final gathering of the meeting: a picnic and a performance by The Red Skies Ensemble of "Dickinson's Musical Eden." One of six programs developed by Red Skies founders George Boziwick and Trudy Williams exploring Dickinson's relationship to music, "this program presents rarely performed vocal and piano pieces that Emily loved and played from her own collection of sheet music, as well as selections of the popular sentimental songs sung by Lavinia" (program notes).

These selections are introduced and performed by the Dickinson sisters, spiritedly portrayed in this production by Suzanne Lenz (Emily) and Sara Banleigh (Lavinia), with Catherine Miller on piano. Attendee Barbara Dana later described them as presenting "a beautiful picture at the side door of the Homestead" and added that it was "charming and heartwarming to see the sisters enjoying each other and the music."

The performers' joy and sincerity helped to convey the appeal of parlor songs such as "Charity," which praises its title virtue as "Meek and lowly, pure and holy, / Chief among the 'blessed three,' / Turning sadness into gladness / Heaven-born thou art, . . ." (words by Charles Jeffreys, music by Stephen Glover, ca. 1846). It might have been cloying, but for the superb musicality of the performers.

Technical coordinator Mark Russo and sound engineer Jared Libby deserve special mention for ensuring that the music came through with remarkable clarity – no easy feat in an outdoor venue. Director Trudy Williams set a lively pace, while curator and musical director George Boziwick varied the nine selections well and elicited energetic performances of each one.

The highlight of the evening for me was Rodolphe Kreutzer's "The Celebrated Overture to Lodoiska," arranged for piano four hands by Charles Czerny (ca. 1846) and performed with vigor and virtuosity by Miller and Banleigh. They performed with such gusto that one could easily imagine the young Dickinson sisters relishing the challenge of this showpiece and of making music together in the Homestead parlor.

The Red Skies Music Ensemble's mission is "to present programs that combine music and scholarship, making archives and special collections come alive through research and performance." They certainly achieved that mission with "Dickinson's Musical Eden."

Emily Seelbinder frequently writes about music for the Bulletin.

Stop 6: White Oak

By Sharon Hamilton

For me, the tree was the revelation.

Just before the 2017 annual Emily Dickinson International Society meeting in Amherst, the *EDIS Bulletin*'s editor asked me if I would be willing to write about Richard Wilbur's scheduled tour of the Homestead Museum grounds. As those who attended the meeting this year will know, that event turned out to be not an in-person walk with this famous American poet, but rather the Museum's invitation for EDIS members try out its audio guide, which Wilbur narrates. At first I was a bit disappointed. My assignment had been downgraded to a review of an audio guide! But I decided to undertake this task anyway, and I began my self-guided tour of the grounds. I was glad I did; the experience turned out to be a wonder.

Beginning my tour of the Homestead grounds, I quickly discovered that using the guide meant looking for little numbered signs on the ground – which had the delightful effect of making me feel like a child on a scavenger hunt! When you spot these little signs, you are instructed to enter the appropriate number and hear a description from Wilbur of what this place meant to Dickinson and her family. You have the option of pressing additional keys to hear Dickinson poems relevant to that spot. This process proved magical, stop after stop. I especially loved it when the audio guide directed me to look out at something that no longer existed, but that I was invited to imagine I could see.

My favorite instance of that kind of imagined vista linked to the audio guide's instruction to look out at Main Street and try to picture the vast eleven-acre Dickinson family meadow that had once occupied the other side of the street. "The hired men cut the meadow grass at least twice a year," Wilbur's mellow voice said in my ear, "to make hay for the livestock." I felt moved by the impression of how much of the natural world Emily Dickinson could take in by taking no more than a few steps beyond her own front door. I smiled at the poem the audio guide linked to this scene: "To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee" (Fr1779).

Above, *Bulletin* correspondents Sharon Hamilton and Eleanor Heginbotham, flanking Cindy McKenzie. Right, the "gnarled grey tree" that grew out of one of Austin Dickinson's saplings.

My strongest emotional reaction to the audio guide's contents came, though, from something that did not require my imagination because it is still very much present on the front lawn. "Stop 6: White Oak." The audio guide informed me that white oak trees are native across Massachusetts and that Austin Dickinson often brought wild saplings he found in the forest home to the Dickinson grounds. This great tree might have grown out of one of Austin's small, found saplings. The gnarled grey tree loomed above me, its strong branches latticed against the blue sky. I thus found myself in the presence of something that had been on the property when the Dickinson family had lived in this house – literally a living connection to the past.

On the audio guide, the Museum's Director, Jane Wald, adds her touching observation that this tree bears important symbolism for us today. "Its widespread branches," she says, "suggest Emily's fame, grown quite far-reaching since her death." I had not expected a self-guided tour to form such a central part of my emotional reaction to the Annual Meeting. It served as a reminder to me that every year this event brings its own sweet surprises – the sort of experience that Dickinson referred to as the joy that comes with "Bright Wednesday Afternoons" (Fr437) as Jane Ira Bloom reminded us so beautifully in her Jazz rendition of these words. Although I was initially disappointed not to have a live tour to report, it turned out (in a twist appropriate to an artist who seems always to be startling us anew) that even something so seemingly prosaic as a self-guided audio tour ended up creating for me its own form of bright Wednesday afternoon by bringing me in closer contact with the life of this remarkable poet.

Richard Wilbur, winner of multiple Pulitzer Prizes among other major awards, taught at Smith College and was always deeply engaged with Dickinson's work. Wilbur passed away on October 14. A memorial will appear in the Spring Bulletin.

The Scholars' Circle

By Eleanor Heginbotham

For 25 years, no matter where EDIS meets (Europe, Asia, various cities in the U.S., including Hawaii), one agenda item has been constant: early on the last morning a large circle of Dickinsonians gathers. Emerging scholars share dissertations; senior scholars explain their latest books; artists, musicians, general readers, those with specializations outside the literary describe why Emily Dickinson has absorbed their time and interests and elicited their talent and imagination. Everyone chips in with relevant tips, and often the conversations spread throughout the day – and the following year(s).

Two dozen enthusiasts gathered this year with projects of such variety and significance that a plea that this part of the weekend, one Barbara Mossberg declared central to the goals of EDIS, be moved to a more open-ended time slot and that it be re-named to invite even greater inclusivity. With apologies for the necessary simplifications, here are samples of 2017's academic studies: one on bees – ramifications and echoes of classicism; one linking Dickinson to the "visionary" tradition of British Romanticism; one on the biographical background for Dickinson's ephemeral metaphors; and another, a study of the studios and practices of daguerreotypes that can shed information on those of the Dickinsons. Books and monographs in process include Richard Brantley's further work on Dickinson's experiments in intersections of religion and science; Marta McDowell's modified reissue of her garden book; and Stephanie Farrar's interest in the letters and poems of Lavinia Dickinson.

Creative and cross-disciplinary projects included a "Journal" of Emily melded with one of its true writer Emma; two different projects from a husband and wife team, his, a fully realized opera, hers a personal approach to the "Still Volcano"; and the work of George Boziwick and Trudy Williams in finding and arranging sheet music in preparation for performances like the one the team offered later that night.

A number of other projects focused on moving Dickinson further into "The World" beyond the music-filled parlor. One, for example, was an extended close reading of "This is my Letter." Participants reported on forays into medicine (more diagnosing of Dickinson in light of current practices); into teaching in Taiwan; and into discussing Dickinson in Japan, where Masaka Takeda has helped to translate the film (another topic of hot discussion, but not in this session), *A Quiet Passion*.

The not-so-quiet passions of participants in the Scholars' Circle, like those in all the years since Ellen Hart invited colleagues into it, allow early airings of future material proof of EDIS scholarship, creativity, and friendship.

Jonnie Guerra, Series Editor

"Then There's a Pair of Us"
Fr260

By Liza Wieland

This issue's featured poet, Liza Wieland, is Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor of English and Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Development at East Carolina University. She is the author of a collection of poetry, Near Alcatraz *(2005), as well as of three volumes of short fiction and four novels, including, most recently,* Land of Enchantment *(2015). Wieland is also the fiction editor for the* North Carolina Literary Review. *She has been the recipient of two Pushcart Prizes, the Michigan Literary Fiction Prize, a Bridport Prize in the United Kingdom, and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the North Carolina Arts Council, and the Christopher Isherwood Foundation. In November, she received the 2017 Robert Penn Warren Award, from the Fellowship of Southern Writers. I know* EDIS Bulletin *readers will enjoy the engaging essay and riveting poem that follow.*

In the 1980s, when I was a graduate student in New York City, I went to a costume party dressed as Emily Dickinson. I found some punk-ethereal combination of white blouse and skirt, pulled on a pair of new Keds and marched three blocks up Broadway to 117th Street to my friend's apartment, silently let myself in the front door and hurried across the hall and into the bathroom. I shut the door. Upon myself. We were a literary crowd; everyone got the joke. A little while later, someone coaxed me out with a drink.

Photo Credit: Daniel V. Stanford

Emily Dickinson has been a force in my life, beginning in 11th grade when a teacher gave us "Because I could not stop for Death – " (Fr479) and "After great pain, a formal feeling comes – " (Fr372). I did not know yet that Dickinson herself had identified what those poems did to me: "If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry" (quoted in L342a). In my imagination, a wall or barrier seemed to fall away and reveal a kind of surrealist abyss of possibility. Think Salvador Dali. *The Persistence of Memory*. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly that I could take more – and more surprising – chances on the page. In college, I studied with Mark Strand, whose work, it seemed to me, channeled poems like "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," (Fr340). In grad school, I lived alone, cherished and guarded my privacy, and read Dickinson and Elizabeth Bishop. I wrote a dissertation on Dickinson that was really a 450-page essay with 9 citations, profoundly unscholarly behavior indulged by two aging Americanists on the brink of retirement, who, I suppose, had seen all the footnotes they could stand.

I was hired to teach Dickinson at Dickinson College. In the fall of 1988, I took 18 seminar students to the Homestead, where we had a tour, read poems at Dickinson's grave, and spent the night in two hotel rooms, between which was a bathtub filled with beer. This experience became the basis for my first short story and for the brilliant first novel of one of the seminar students, Brocke Clarke.

I routinely taught Dickinson, Bishop, and Anne Bradstreet as an unlikely triumvirate. Privately, I wondered if Bradstreet had not scared these two poetic daughters away from marriage and childbearing, filled as both endeavors seemed to be with such great intrusions and losses.

Yet perhaps my most profound experience with Emily Dickinson has to do, oddly enough, with motherhood. Studying Dickinson in New York, I developed an obsession with the poet's mother, Emily Norcross Dickinson, whom I had assumed was dead, a specter in her daughter's life. Motherlessness would, I thought, certainly account for the unmoored quality of the poems, the deep sense of loss. I was surprised and relieved to discover that Emily Norcross was mostly there all along, renowned for her cooking and her cultivation of roses and figs, and dying only four years before her poet-daughter Emily Elizabeth. As my poem "Mrs. Dickinson," printed here, attests, I thought a lot about what it must have been like to be the mother of a poet – especially that poet. I myself had such a mother, who at times must have wondered what I was doing, alone in my room, long silences punctuated by the ding of the typewriter.

And in time I had a daughter (whom I did not name Emily, but Georgia, for another solitary iconoclast). When she was four, on a cross-country road trip, Georgia learned two poems by heart: Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" and "I'm Nobody! Who Are You?" (Fr260). She loved and spoke with hilarious and endearing emphasis two particular parts: "the sweep" in the third stanza of Frost's poem rose as a grace note, and "admiring Bog," the last syllable in Dickinson's poem, she nearly shouted, like the clang of a joyous bell.

I have long understood "I'm Nobody!" to be about privacy and anonymity, and the sheer nonsense of fame, as if Dickinson had

Continued on page 27

Mrs. Dickinson
(Emily Norcross Dickinson, mother of the poet)

By Liza Wieland

I have been here all along,
though my daughter might not know it
and might have made me spectral,
a comic ghost, scaring myself,
but it is really for her that I am frightened,
she who is more whisper than girl's body,
a sensation in the house, a hot spirit.

Flesh of my flesh and yet –
like looking into a well
and seeing myself, but distant,
darker, with the strange halo
water gives when the sun's behind it.
To understand her, I had to be like her: –
to be shadowless, or all shadow, I don't know –
to see her fully, I had to be mystifying,
as she wanted, be a sightless knot
of electric and unspeakable desires,
and so I think I know what she does
upstairs, quietly seeing out the years
and the departing birds and waiting –
I think it has to do with love
and saying words so many times
they come back different,
reborn almost into their first wisdom.
I think she must be praying
prayers no God will have.

Some evenings, the silence is terrible,
beating from her room,
but I can't break it.
In my head, questions clatter
like the tongues of held bells,
fall like stones inside my chest,
choking me while I lie here
listening for the skreek of her chair,
the gasping pulse of her thoughts,
her breath filling the lungs of the house.

At midnight, asleep, she's nearer,
yet I dream of finding her far from home,

of taking her small self in my arms
and folding up its fluttery wings,
kissing the hard beak of her face
and making her a girl again
saying, "Emily, Mother's here.
You know your mother, don't you?"
But her great dark eyes glow,
burn me, burn through me
down to the atom of our one name
and in the combustible force
of my love and my longing,
we both twist shut our mouths
and I just disappear.

Marianne Noble, Series Editor

"Old the Grace, but new the Subjects – "

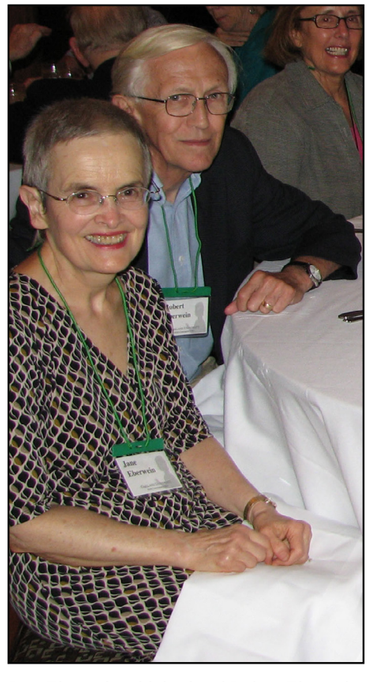
(Fr942)

By Jane Donahue Eberwein

In the year or so before my fall 2007 retirement from Oakland University, I found myself wondering when or whether I'd find opportunities to teach some of my favorite literary texts – works like *Walden*, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, and poems by Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor. I didn't worry about Dickinson's poems, perhaps because EDIS itself provides opportunities. If I'd wanted to keep grading papers, I could have accepted invitations to teach in the Honors College, but I wanted the freedom of Howard Nemerov's "Absent-Minded Professor," "who'd burn the papers and correct the leaves."

It has turned out, luckily, that metropolitan Detroit offers me frequent opportunities to share literary passions with fellow retirees. The first invitation came from the Society of Active Retirees (SOAR), operated through Wayne State University. They needed somebody to talk about poems. One of the students there immediately enlisted me to repeat that class for another Elderhostel group in the same area. Other invitations followed from a Lunch and Learn program at a Jewish Community Center, and a dinner gathering of an African-American arts sorority. A group of local friends requested an intensive series of discussion sessions focused on Dickinson. Such occasions all require planning on my part by way of choosing poems, preparing handouts, and organizing my thoughts, but there is never any grading. An advantage of teaching poetry rather than novels or autobiographies turns out to be that students don't have to do advance preparation either, although some want to. These haven't been sustained programs of study like classes Eleanor Heginbotham and Carolyn Cooley have been offering for senior citizens in college settings.

Teaching at Oakland prepared me well for teaching seniors. The university's suburban location always made it convenient for older women in our area to return to school after raising their families. From my first semester, back in fall 1969, I'd found that such students were often the most insightful and involved, even if they needed a little fluffing up to build confidence after years out of the classroom. And then there was the owner of a local tire company, about to retire himself, who wangled his way into one of my closed classes by identifying himself as a "geriatric freshman." In his papers, he loved to comment on how a passage came across as "obscure to the freshman mind," and I doubted he'd stick it out until he had to call himself a "senior." He did, though, and even went on to earn a master's degree and co-author a book with one of his professors. That kind of freedom to study whatever one wants with whatever passion one feels turns out to be a reward of retirement for the people I've been teaching as well as for myself. Some of my former colleagues have been among my students (from the sciences as well as English) and we have music experts, engineers, and health professionals all happy to be discussing poetry even when it is a fresh experience. There's quite a range of knowledge in the room. Somebody knows where bobolinks may be seen and heard at a Michigan nature preserve; someone else thinks of yeast when Dickinson asks Higginson to proof the life of her poems. When we're stumped by an allusion, deft fingers ply smartphones for references. Even better, I notice that mature learners approach poems more respectfully than typical undergraduates: less likely to grasp at one word or image as explaining everything and not assuming that a poem means "whatever I see in it." They share in lyric poets' sensitivity to the complex layerings of time.



Jane Eberwein with husband Robert Eberwein.

I learned quickly, though, that such occasional teaching stints expose one to surprises. When I agreed to offer a comparative discussion of Keats's "Ode to Autumn" and Frost's "After Apple-Picking" for my initial SOAR class, I envisioned sitting with a dozen or so people for intensive conversation. Then came a notice from the office indicating our room assignment and reporting that there were sixty-some registrants. Luckily, many of these people welcomed opportunities to speak up, ask questions, and offer insights. Yet when I was asked to reprise that class for the neighboring Elderhostel group, I anticipated the same level of involvement only to be told upon arrival that what the organizers wanted was for me to give a talk that would be followed by a short period of questions. There was even a ritual of passing around a microphone to each person

with a question, which pretty much assured no sustained conversation (microphones, deployed somehow, come with the territory; we have our infirmities). I gather this group had encountered problems with one or two people dominating discussion and had built protections against such behavior even though the protections stifled healthy conversation. It turns out also that program sponsors often consider one session on a poet sufficient, and I have learned to plan differently when there may not be a follow-up. When uncertain of focus, I sometimes begin with Dickinson's own self-introduction, reading her 15 April 1862 letter to Higginson and the four poems she enclosed to get a feel for what she wanted to convey about herself – and how she managed to hide. For the SOROSIS group of exceptionally accomplished women of color who wanted to share in Detroit's Big Read of Emily Dickinson, my goal was to give them a sample of poems reflecting the range and brilliance of her imagination. As it happened, I had just finished reading Aife Murray's *Maid as Muse* and was able to call attention to her insights into how some of Dickinson's phrasing might have been influenced by speech habits of African-Americans in Amherst. For the sessions with readers especially interested in psychology, we devoted a night to poems of emotional extremity.

Not all of these events have met my hopes. The first time I talked about Dickinson with elderly residents of an upscale retirement community near campus, I thought it would be interesting to reflect on how we look for different experiences from poetry as we get older. I structured the session to match each Dickinson poem I recalled from my own childhood reading with one that I now see as related to it thematically but richer and more interesting (also, in some cases, less likely to win approval from teachers interested in pupils' moral formation). Among the matches were "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" (Fr260) with "I'm ceded – I've stopped being Their's " (Fr353), "I never saw a Moor" (Fr800) with "To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee" (Fr1779), and "If I can stop one Heart from breaking" (Fr982) with "The Poets light but Lamps" (Fr930). That experiment might have worked better if anyone in the audience could remember any childhood exposure to poetry except for a lady who grew up in a Slavic-speaking country.

My happiest experiences have been with SOAR. At the end of that introductory session on Keats and Frost, I asked if people would be interested in a few sessions devoted to Dickinson's poetry. Decidedly yes! We are still at it ten years later, although there have been detours to other poets. "We" varies gradually; some students have been there since 2007, but almost every session draws ten or more newcomers. At first, we encountered familiar questions about how the poet used dashes and capital letters and why she secluded herself. The first topic someone in the class suggested was Dickinson's love poetry, so we spent a session on that. To counteract (or maybe heighten) assumptions about her fixation on death, we spent a morning on her consolatory poems and letters. Another time we looked into poems that expressed her understanding of what poetry is and why it is important. We've studied poems on God and religion. Another session focused on Dickinson's friendship with Helen Hunt Jackson, with comparative reading of some of their poems. When people asked about Lyndall Gordon's *Lives like Loaded Guns*, we talked about the challenges Dickinson and her family have always presented to biographers. When I became absorbed in reading book reviews from the 1890s, we devoted a class to her literary debut: Higginson's and Todd's attempts to deflect attention from then-dominant criteria of poetic judgment that could make her look careless or even incompetent and to direct attention to her strengths. That class led to a complementary session on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's sharp decline from eminence when standards of judgment that had worked to Dickinson's disadvantage (metric range and precision, for instance, as well as patriotic content) came to seem less important than her area of greatest strength: originality. When a student commented after class that I'd been quoting Poe several times in both those sessions, I added a class on him before finding my way home to the poet they keep requesting. So far we haven't plunged into editorial history, but I hope to overcome my fear of computer projection enough to give people a sense of how manuscripts have been converted into successive print versions.

Our spring 2017 class was planned purely as fun. "Some things that fly there be" freed us to consider virtually anything capable of flight. There were bird poems, of course, but also a bat, and a host of insects: bees, butterflies, even June bugs. Spiritual fliers included both angels and souls. "We pray – to Heaven" (Fr476) invited us to critique the familiar metaphor of souls taking wing (one that Dickinson herself drew on in letters about her mother's decline and death). Older students don't label awareness of death "ghoulish" like many undergraduates; they bring with them a realistic sense of loss. Over these ten years, we have dedicated classes to the memories of a SOAR organizer and classmate, and some among us have buried parents and spouses or contended with mortal illness. These people were well prepared to confront the riddling method of the title poem even though the student who plunged into our reading a month early found herself daunted by it and braced herself for the most difficult readings yet:

> There are that resting, rise.
> Can I expound the skies?
> How still the Riddle lies! (Fr68)

What next? The woman who introduced me at that session did more research than is needed for such rituals and discovered that I used to write about the Puritans. So now I'm committed to a session on Anne Bradstreet. That, inevitably, will lead us back to the poet whose first New England ancestors arrived with Bradstreet, her family, and John Winthrop aboard the Arbella.

Jane Donahue Eberwein is Distinguished Professor of English, emerita*, at Oakland University. She is the author of* Dickinson: Strategies of Limitation*, as well as many other works, most recently, as co-editor with Cristanne Miller and Stephanie Farrar,* Dickinson in Her Own Time *(Iowa 2014).*

Barbara Dana, Series Editor

Industrious Angels. Yes.

By Laurie McCants

"God permits industrious Angels –
Afternoons – to play – " (Fr245)

As I prepare to once again perform *Industrious Angels*, my solo play, this coming summer in Amherst, Massachusetts, the place of its birth (and yes, the birthplace of Emily Dickinson), it strikes me that my play's birthers, its mother-nurturers, its inspirational "industrious angels" were all women. I drew breath from their work – artists, performers, thinkers, animators, crafters, cartoonists, poets, and yes, I share a legacy with my own mother, who had a bit of all of these bound up in her complex being.

To begin at the beginning. Summer, 2007. I was driving to Amherst, feeling guilty, as I hadn't done my "homework" for the course I was about to take at the Ko Festival of Performance – "Creating Solo Theatre." I was supposed to arrive at the first class with an idea. My head was absolutely empty. Or maybe it was too full. I had just emerged from a long, twisty, ultimately triumphant collaboration with three strong-willed, culturally-confounding artist-members of an Egyptian shadow puppet theatre company. I was exhausted. I had no idea what I would make a solo show about. At that particular moment in my life, I had no idea who I was.

Our teacher was the gifted playwright-clown, Cirque du Soleil performer Michelle Matlock. She sensed my emptiness. She encouraged me to go outside. So, I walked across the campus over to Main Street to visit the Homestead, all the time thinking to myself, "I am NOT making a play about Emily Dickinson. That's been done to DEATH. No, no, no, I am NOT making a play about Emily Dickinson. NO."

But something happened in that house. As I stepped out of that bedroom into that hallway (in a certain slant of light), I was suddenly struck with a loaded memory. Actually, two memories. One, my mother read me Emily Dickinson poems when I was little, and two, I was actually reading an Emily Dickinson poem to my mother at the moment of her death. Bang. Bang. YES.

Those two memories always manifest themselves in my body. Whenever I describe that striking moment to anyone, I find my left hand opening, rising to the sky, my right hand opening, lowering to the earth, my entire body doing – what? "Spreading wide" to "gather Paradise"? Perhaps. Perhaps preparing to birth my play.

It's not really about Emily Dickinson. Yes, she's in it. As a shadow. She's in it as one of my many mothers – among them a witch, a child, my own mother, and myself, mother to my self.

I developed my play over the next few summers in Amherst, in collaboration with my director, composer, and designers, and I premiered it in Amherst in 2011 at the Ko Festival. I have performed it since at my artistic home in rural Pennsylvania, the Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble, and I have toured it to Allegheny College, where prior to the performance, my director/lighting designer Sabrina Hamilton and I conducted a week-long residency of workshops with students and community folks. I will perform it again in Amherst in early August 2018, and I hope to then take it on tour.

Though I've found that it plays well and easily for audiences of all ages, it's a difficult play to describe. Here's what I've come up with:

BRIEF: *Industrious Angels* is a solo hand-crafted-story-spinning-shadow-puppet-memory-play-with-music evoking the secret creative lives of women, mother/daughter bloodlines, and the ghost of Emily Dickinson."

LONG: "In a shadowed attic, crammed with curio cabinets, work tables, chests and drawers (containers for mementos and unmentionables), a daughter searches for what it is that ties together her mother, herself, and an elusive poet. A story about the crafting of stories, *Industrious Angels* was conceived by actor/creator Laurie McCants on a visit to Emily Dickinson's home, where the poet wrote, in secret, the almost 1800 poems that were found, hidden away in chests and drawers, after her death. The story unfolds through puppetry, paper-cutting, music, movement, light and dark, and the weaving together of words. It is a dance of the hands honoring women's handiwork: mending, preserving, ordering, adorning, writing, hiding.

Developed at the Ko Festival of Performance in Amherst, Massachusetts, and the Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, *Industrious Angels* is hand-made by Laurie McCants, in collaboration with director/lighting designer Sabrina Hamilton, scenic designer F. Elaine Williams, and composer Guy Klucevsek, who has created a haunting score with piano, violin, accordion, and toy piano."

"I felt my life with both my hands
To see if it was there – " (Fr357)

It's amazing how a deadline can jumpstart creativity. In the early days of working on my play, I assembled a collage of images I had gathered over several months to accompany a due-the-next-day grant application. I didn't get the grant, but I got a lot of ideas that led to the thematic threads that eventually made their way into the final play. The very process of assembling the collage informed the form of my performance – as I cut out the photo-copied images, arranged and glued them on the page, I realized that since childhood I have been enraptured by the sound of scissors cutting paper (Girl Scout arts-and-crafts-snowflakes, Mothers' Day tissue-paper flowers…). Collaging my inspirations taught me that "process" must actually be a part of my play. A play, after all, is "make believe," and as I made my collage, it became clear to me that I must actually "make" something to "believe" in as my play unfolds before my audience. This led to my realizing the setting, the "place" for my play: it had to be a playroom/workroom. Very much like the attic in my own house! Where I made this play! And what is "made" in the play includes these things: paper flowers, a paper-chain of hands, a cardboard tree, a pop-up haunted doll house, a shadow play of the ghosts that haunt that house, an imaginary garden made of paper and glue, a story, a play.

Here's a guide to my collaged inspirational images:

SILHOUETTE/SHADOW

The interplay of dark and light so intrinsic to shadow puppetry (and poetry) fascinates me. I knew I needed to have shadows in my play. Hence, the image of the ancient Egyptian puppet of a wanderer (a tribute to what I had learned from my Cairo collaborators), the cut-out girl-dancer (created by pioneering puppeteer/animator Lotte Reiniger), and yes, the silhouette-profile of child Emily, revealing and obscuring all at once.

Actor, director, writer, teacher, student, and theatre-goer Laurie McCants, as photographed by Sabrina Hamilton.

PAPER CUTTING AND THE WORK OF THE HAND

Dark and light also play in the work of two Emily-inspired artists who, in turn, inspired me – Mary Frank's shadow-paper-cut depiction of Dickinson's seraphic "Fellow in the Skies" and Lesley Dill's paper sculpture-kite, "Divide Light #2 (Healing Man)."

More traditional women's "handiwork" is represented by paper-cutting, pictured in the 19th-century illustrations of anonymous crafters, and flower-pressing, in a print from Emily Dickinson's own "Herbarium," which she assembled, with some pride, I imagine, in her childhood.

REMEDIOS VARO

In 1968, when I was 16, my family made a driving trip from Tulsa to Acapulco, with a stop-over to visit the museums in Mexico City. I was struck then by the strange paintings of Remedios Varo. They haunted me for years, until 2000, when I drove down to the National Museum of Women in the Arts in DC with the special purpose of seeing the first-ever major exhibit in the USA of Varo's paintings. I was surprised at how vividly accurate were my teenage memories of her work! They haunt me still. For my collage, I picked "Encounter" (1959), a self-portrait of the artist discovering her hidden self, and "Unsubmissive Plant" (1961), depicting a biologist's perplexed pursuit to "know" nature. Both images evoke for me

the search for meaning embodied in any sort of experimental exploration – in art, in science, in poetry, in plays. Varo's images manifest themselves in *Industrious Angels* in a variety of ways. In the half-hour as the audience arrives, I busy myself at a desk (much like Varo's biologist's desk), folding and cutting paper flowers which will come into use later in the play. Also, in one of the darker moments of the play, I open a small chest (much like Varo's chest holding her hidden self) and reveal what's in it – a glass jar, containing a ghost-like shadow-child, lit from within. This glass jar represents a very specific memory from my own past that scares me still.

To face my fear, which I really had to do to make my play, I breathed in inspiration from Emily – "Nature is a Haunted House – but Art – a House that tries to be haunted" (L459) – and from her acolyte, the poet Susan Howe, who said of Emily, "she studied Terror." I also borrowed bravery from what might seem a most unlikely source – a cartoonist. In one of those Amherst summers, I was stumbling around downtown, in something like despair, because I wasn't at all sure I had the guts or the artistry to handle the scary part of the story I needed to tell in my play. I wandered into the (sadly no longer existing) Food for Thought bookstore and found on the "new arrivals" shelf this book: *What it Is* (subtitled *The Formless Thing Which Gives Life Form: Do You Wish You Could Write?*) by Lynda Barry, whose cartoons in the *Village Voice* I had so much enjoyed over the years. I turned the book over. On the back cover was a drawing of what looked to be a barnacled shark, wielding a pencil and a paintbrush in its fins, exhorting the inhabitants of a small rowboat – an owl, a monkey with a bird perched on its head, and a ghost. In a cartoon balloon, the shark is shouting at its presumed students: "OK! Welcome to Writing the Unthinkable!" I bought the book.

Starting on page 51, a telling tale unfolds in Barry's bright, raw, child-like drawings of a grown woman, an artist, remembering her girl-self, seeing that girl-self holding a glass jar and playing alone, whispering to the jar in great seriousness: "There was a remedy. It was a potion and the girl discovers it and the village is saved." On a side-bar to the drawing of the girl holding her "magic" jar, Barry writes: "I believe a kid who is playing is not alone. There is something brought alive during play, and this something, when played with, seems to play back." The next page pictures the grown woman, a lump in a chair at a desk, turned to stone with "writer's block." Barry's comments continue: "Fairy tales and myths are often about this very situation: a dead kingdom. Its residents all turned to stone. It's a good way to say it, that something alive is gone." (Or, as Emily might say, "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" [Fr340]). Barry then says: "In a myth or a fairy tale, one doesn't restore the kingdom by passivity, nor can it be done by force. It can't be done by logic or thought. So how can it be done?"

How can it be done? The very question I was asking myself. And right below, she's drawn an octopus, a "magic" cephalopod (a recurring image in the book, this creature seems to be for Barry an idiosyncratic symbol of subconscious inspiration). Emblazoned on the octopus's head are these words: "You must get the jar."

I got the jar. The jar is in the play. I was made bold by Barry's words: "Monsters and dangerous tasks seem to be part of it. Courage and terror and failure or what seems like failure, and then hopelessness and the approach of death convincingly. The happy ending is hardly important, though we may be glad it's there. The real joy is knowing that if you felt the trouble in the story, your kingdom isn't dead."

AT THE CENTER, MAMA

The image in the middle of my collage is a very blurry photograph of my mother as a child. She is holding her favorite doll. That doll is on the set of my play. Along with a lot of other mementos that now live

Dickinson and the Arts

in my house. I live in my house because my mother had the forethought to save up money for me. She saved for me something that she called by its old-fashioned name, a "legacy."

I was quite surprised to discover that my play has a happy ending. Considering that I had initially identified my "central conflict" (we are taught in school that all plays must have a "central conflict") as "Loneliness vs. Solitude," the outlook for a happy ending was not very promising. And then I really got down on myself when I realized that really, the "central conflict" was my mother and me. "Oh, no," I thought to myself another summer later, wandering once again around downtown Amherst, "I'm NOT making a play about my mother. That's been done to DEATH. No, no, no. I'm NOT making a play about my mother. NO." So, I stumbled into Food for Thought again and bought another book, a then-newish volume by the renowned (and much admired by me) poet Anne Carson. I walked a half a block away, sat down at the bar at ABC (Amherst Brewing Company), ordered a drink, and opened up the book. The very first poem was about her mother.

SLEEPCHAINS

Who can sleep when she –
hundreds of miles away I feel that vast
breath
fan her restless decks.
Cicatrice by cicatrice
all the links
rattle once.
Here we go mother on the shipless
ocean.
Pity us, pity the ocean, here we go.

So, OK. Here we go.

And as it turned out, the Ko Festival workshop that I was taking that summer was led by another terrific playwright-clown, Sara Felder, who kicked off the first class by saying, "I've been thinking about mothers. Let's all make plays about our mothers." So, OK. Here we go.

I found other mothers that summer along the way to making my play. Cindy MacKenzie and Barbara Dana, editors of *Wider Than the Sky: Essays on the Healing Power of Emily Dickinson* (a book I bought at the also sadly no longer existing Jeffery Amherst Bookshop) led me to the realization that my play would, indeed, have a happy ending. And that to earn that happy ending, the journey of the play, just as wise cartoonist Lynda Barry had warned me, would require "Courage and terror" and facing "failure or what seems like failure . . ."

Unlike Emily, who, even though she hid her writings away in chests and drawers, knew she was good (there's plenty of evidence that Emily was proud of the work of her hand), my mother thought of herself as a failure because very little of her writings had been published. After my mother's death, I found her poems, essays, short stories hidden away in chests and drawers. I chose to read/share/act one of her stories, *Underneath the Garden*, as the culminating event of my play. It's a powerful story – funny, sad, moving, beautifully written. My mother should have been proud of the work of her hand.

Underneath the Garden is good. Audiences love it. It gives me great joy to share it with them. I have found, in the sharing of my mother's story, that she shares imagery with our shared beloved poet – there are references to hands, and dirt, and blood, and terror, and shame, and gardens, and Paradise.

A moment I will ever cherish occurred following my performance of *Industrious Angels* at Allegheny College. After the play, I always invite the audience up on the stage to explore the set, which is cunningly crammed with enticing chests and drawers, nooks and crannies. That night, amidst the milling about of folks young and old, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned, and a young man, a creative writing student who had been in one of our previous workshops, whispered to me: "If I can ever write a story half as good as your mother's, I will be in heaven." I looked up and said, "Mama, did you hear that?"

I'm not sure I actually believe in heaven. Like Emily, my church is here on earth. But take a look at my collage, the one I had created several years before, at the beginning of my making *Industrious Angels*. There is a snippet of my mother's handwriting, matched up with a snippet of Emily's handwriting. The word that they share is "heaven." Yes.

Most special thanks to Lynda Barry, Anne Carson, Barbara Dana, Lesley Dill, Sara Felder, Mary Frank, Sabrina Hamilton, Susan Howe, Cindy MacKenzie, Michelle Matlock, Lotte Reiniger, Remedios Varo, Elaine Williams, and, of course, Emily Dickinson and Billie Lee McCants.

Laurie McCants co-founded the Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble (BTE) in 1978, where she co-created Hard Coal, Our Shadows*, (with Egypt's shadow-puppet theatre company Wamda), and* Susquehanna: Mighty, Muddy, Crooked River of the Long Reach*. BTE was named the 2016 "Outstanding Theatre" by the National Theatre Conference. In 2010, Laurie was named an "Actor of Distinguished Achievement" through a Fox Foundation Resident Actor Fellowship, funded by the William & Eva Fox Foundation and administered by Theatre Communications Group. She served as co-President of the Board of the national Network of Ensemble Theaters. She recently directed the world premiere of Anthony Clarvoe's play,* Gunpowder Joe*. Her solo show,* Industrious Angels*, premiered at the Ko Festival of Performance in Amherst, Massachusetts.*

The Rhyme of the Rail

By John Godfrey Saxe

John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887) is today remembered, if he is remembered at all, for his retelling of the ancient fable, "The Blind Men and the Elephant." In his day, though, he was best known for "The Rhyme of the Rail." Close study of the poem will suggest where it, as well as many of his other works, was published. EDIS member Jonathan Morse sends it in suggesting that, while it now requires footnotes for full intelligibility, it may be productively paired with Dickinson's "I like to see it lap the Miles – " (Fr383) and Whitman's "To a Locomotive in Winter," both for differences in form as well as its different – perhaps more demotic – attitude toward rail travel.

Singing through the forests,
Rattling over ridges,
Shooting under arches,
Rumbling over bridges,
Whizzing through the mountains,
Buzzing o'er the vale, –
Bless me! this is pleasant,
Riding on the Rail!

Men of different "stations"[1]
In the eye of fame,
Here are very quickly
Coming to the same.
High and lowly people,
Birds of every feather,
On a common level
Traveling together!

Gentlemen in shorts,
Looming very tall;
Gentlemen at large,
Talking very small;
Gentlemen in tights,
With a loose-ish mien;
Gentlemen in gray,
Looking rather green;

Gentlemen quite old,
Asking for the news;
Gentlemen in black,
In a fit of blues;
Gentlemen in claret,
Sober as a vicar;
Gentlemen in Tweed,
Dreadfully in liquor![2]

Stranger on the right,
Looking very sunny,
Obviously reading
Something rather funny;
Now the smiles grow thicker, –
Wonder what they mean?
Faith, he's got the Knicker-
Bocker Magazine!

Stranger on the left,
Closing up his peepers, –
Now he snores amain,
Like the Seven Sleepers;
At his feet a volume
Gives the explanation,
How the man grew stupid
From "Association"![3]

Ancient maiden lady
Anxiously remarks
That there must be peril
'Mong so many sparks:[4]
Roguish-looking fellow,
Turning to a stranger,
Says it's his opinion
She is out of danger!

Woman with her baby,
Sitting *vis-à-vis*:[5]
Baby keeps a-squalling,
Woman looks at me;
Asks about the distance,
Says it's tiresome talking,
Noises of the cars
Are so very shocking!

Market-woman careful
Of the precious casket,
Knowing eggs are eggs,
Tightly holds her basket;
Feeling that a smash,
If it came, would surely
Send her eggs to pot
Rather prematurely!

Singing through the forests,
Rattling over ridges,
Shooting under arches,
Rumbling over bridges,
Whizzing through the mountains,
Buzzing o'er the vale, –
Bless me! this is pleasant,
Riding on the Rail!

Notes

1 Pun: "station" can mean either rank in society or the place where a train stops.

2 There is a tweed pattern called "temperance."

3 "Stupid" means stupefied, and "association of ideas" is a philosophical theory of how one thought leads to another. It was influential among the Transcendentalists, but you see Saxe wasn't a Transcendentalist.

4 Yes there was. On warm days, with the windows in the cars open, steam engines were hazardous to passengers' clothes. But in nineteenth-century slang, a spark is also a flirtatious man.

5 In the nineteenth century the term referred to a pair of vehicle seats arranged with the rear one facing forward and the front one facing backward.

Reviews of Publications

Renée Bergland, Book Review Editor

Pictures of Possibility

Rosanna Bruno
***The Slanted Life of Emily Dickinson.* Andrews McMeel, Riverside, NJ 96pp.**

Charles Bukowski, Emily Dickinson, et. al.
***Rue des Cordeliers: Portraits of a House.* Kerber Verlag, Berlin, Germany, 160pp.**

Poetry for Kids: Emily Dickinson
Susan Snively, ed. Moondance, Lake Forest, CA, 2016, 48pp.

Reviewed by Annelise Brinck-Johnson

It was my pleasure to review three very different books that framed Emily Dickinson with visual arts: a graphic novel / comic book, an art photography book, and an illustrated children's anthology. Reading them together allowed me to consider the fraught relationship between art, episteme, and exegesis. Questions of factual accuracy, artistic expression, and even straightforward instruction are particularly pressing in 2017. The books I review here bring these questions to the fore.

In *The Slanted Life of Emily Dickinson* (2017), a graphic novel / comic book written and illustrated by Rosanna Bruno (profiled in the Fall 2015 issue of the *Bulletin*), the reader is confronted by a vividly imagined world of what we in 2017 might call "alternative facts." Taking her starting point in Emily Dickinson's life and work, Bruno imagines and depicts speculative, counterfactual scenarios such as Emily Dickinson's enjoyment of marijuana or a Facebook page where Dickinson's friends are Ralph Waldo Emerson, her brother Austin Dickinson, and "Bird," a bird who appreciates Dickinson's poetry.

In the book's introduction, Bruno describes the project as originating in high school, when she was "floored by the immediacy of [Dickinson's] voice and her unusual use of language," but the book shows far more interest in "the poet's persona and the myth of her life" than in her use of language. Though Bruno frankly describes herself as an "amateur" scholar, the "slanted" vision of Dickinson presented in the pages is antithetical to any form of scholarship. Bruno manages to combine surface level understanding of Dickinson (there is an OKCupid profile, where Dickinson writes "I spend a lot of time thinking about: Death") with whimsical "alternative facts" (such as Dickinson asking for an Easy-Bake oven for Christmas) and a mocking attitude towards Dickinson Scholarship (mock-ups of "scholarly" works detailing Dickinson's practice of witchcraft and struggles with gluten intolerance). Though Bruno's book appears designed for popular appeal, it could confuse those who do not have a solid grasp on Dickinson's life and facts.

Bruno writes about the affection that Dickinson felt for her dog Carlo – quoting directly from a Dickinson letter – then a few pages later writes of Dickinson's failed attempts to "develop some lines of her poetry into reality TV shows," and then about Dickinson's "short lived stint as an advice columnist," and her dabbling "in writing detective stories." Some of these ideas are clearly meant to derive their humor from their ludicrous implausibility, but others are less clearly marked as fiction, and what exactly they are meant to mock is unclear. The book often juxtaposes facts and counter-facts without distinguishing between them. The overall effect is unsteadying and confusing for a reader familiar with Dickinson; my guess is that readers who don't know much about the poet's work would be even more baffled. For example, while it could be amusing for a Dickinson scholar to imagine (as Bruno does) that "Hope is the thing with feathers" was inspired by a sociable parrot named Hope, an uninitiated reader would have no way of knowing that Bruno was joking. Indeed *The Slanted Life of Emily Dickinson* might be viewed as the most definitely 2017 book about Dickinson published this year, drawing as it does on a combination of what has been termed "meme culture" and a carelessness with regard to clear delineation of facts and imaginary situations that has become common in popular debate. The vision of Dickinson presented is interesting enough to be highly reproducible, but not far enough from reality to clearly function as satire to those with little specialized information.

This is not to say that *The Slanted Life of Emily Dickinson* is a bad book. The drawings are well done, and the slanted life presented is wonderfully imagined. However, with attacks on made-up scholarship and humor consisting primarily of presenting inaccuracies as facts, the experience of reading this book is immensely uncomfortable. There may well be a time for joking about Dickinson's life, but for this reader the effect here is timely in the worst way – and the political and philosophical implications of such work are far from amusing.

At another end of the epistemological spectrum I turn to the truly gorgeous *Rue Des*

The *Bulletin* welcomes notices of all Dickinson-related books, including those published outside the U.S.
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Cordeliers: Portraits of a House, a work which provides no information about Dickinson, true or false. Instead there are beautifully composed photographs of a medieval Provençal town-house turned artists' residence. According to the publisher's website, the house belongs to "the specialist in American studies, writer, and exhibition organizer David Galloway." Ten photographers did residencies there, and a collection of the resulting images was edited by Christoph Benjamin Schulz to form *Rue Des Cordeliers*.

Interspersed with the photographs are snippets of text – excerpts from Bukowski, James, and Voltaire, poems in French, German, and English. Although the book is not about Dickinson, it is framed by two poems of hers: "The Props assist the House" (Fr729) and "I Dwell in Possibility" (Fr466). The placement of these poems as the book's conclusion leads the reader to reflect back on the photographs gathered within, to consider the meaning of "house" and "home."

The true star of this genuinely engrossing work is the photography. Divided into sections by photographer, *Rue Des Cordeliers* presents photos that range from standard interiors highlighting the unique interior design of the house to unsettling still lifes of artfully arranged dolls' heads and other objects. My two favorite sections explore the idea of home in ways that are particularly enriched by their juxtaposition with Dickinson's poems. Mary A. Kelly's piece "Conversations" consists of photographs of empty chairs and sofas. Shot from various positions, the images position the viewer sometimes in conversation with the lacuna on the chair, confronting an absence, sometimes on the sidelines projecting questions onto an empty room. The other outstanding piece is Jens Komossa's "Wandbilder," a series of minimalist analog photos of wall, light, and shadow that capture the serene and melancholy beauty of an empty house at twilight. Beyond Kelly's and Komossa's sections, the images in this book are generally thought-provoking as well as pleasurable. This is a work that truly dwells in "a fairer house than Prose."

Finally, *Poetry for Kids: Emily Dickinson* provides a good basic introduction to Dickinson. Edited by Susan Snively and whimsically illustrated by Christine Davenier, the book covers well-known as well as some lesser-known poems. The illustrations are energetic and charming, and the introduction provides a reliable overview of Dickinson's life, painting a portrait of the poet as good-natured and accessible to children. The rest of the book is equally accessible. Words that might be difficult for young readers are defined at the bottom of each page, while the poems are summarized at the back of the book. For example, as Snively explains "'Hope' is the thing with feathers – " (Fr314), "The poet sees hope as a brave bird that sings through storm, cold, and loneliness, yet never asks to be fed 'a crumb.' The giving comes from hope and the poet speaks in grateful awe." I did not bristle at these summaries as much as I did at Bruno's speculations, but I must admit to some hesitation about the project of explaining Dickinson this way. I am not convinced that it helps young readers to inform them that there are single, orthodox interpretations of Dickinson poems, and at times the explanations seemed forced to me. I had similar hesitations about the division of the poems into four "seasons" with appropriately seasonal drawings. (What makes "This is my letter to the world" a particularly wintery poem? I had a sense of an uncanny return to the Higginson-Todd edition.) Yet although I have some concerns that the didactic elements of this collection could circumscribe any truly magical possibility, my guess is that most young readers would be able to overlook the explanations and enjoy the poems and the artwork. Undeniably attractive and readily accessible to every age, this book performs its introductory function well, with a great deal of whimsy and charm.

Inaccuracy, irrelevance, or instruction – personally, I am most comfortable with recommending the instructional – the responsible and appealing children's book that gives young readers a chance to read the poetry themselves. I am most drawn to the irrelevant – or at least to the tangentially-connected – work of high art. I am most troubled, yet also most intrigued by, the inaccuracies of *A Slanted Life*. What would Emily Dickinson make of alternative facts?

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Theo Davis
Ornamental Aesthetics: The Poetry of Attending in Thoreau, Dickinson, & Whitman
Oxford University Press 2016, 245 pp.

Reviewed by Kylan Rice

Theo Davis's new book, Ornamental Aesthetics, reveals striking aesthetic congruence between Thoreau, Dickinson, and Whitman, while making philosophically radical claims about "counter-poetics." Davis engages with a diverse group of critics and philosophers, including Anne Carson, Susan Stewart, Martin Heidegger, and Buddhist commentators. She repudiates recent trends in materialist and historicist criticism in favor of connections "between and across texts from different time periods and even different cultures" as she tries to establish "the substantive identity of the artistic and philosophical commitments at stake" in particular works without regard for temporal or historical partitions.

Davis describes Thoreau, Dickinson and Whitman's artistic and philosophical commitments as an "ornamental aesthetics," arguing that all three advance poetic projects that dwell on the "relationship of attention . . . to objects" (116). Further, she asserts that these writers offer a "counter-poetics": a turning away from aesthetic modes that stress correspondence theories of truth or representationalism as the basic functioning relationship between mind and world (heretofore the mainstream approach to aesthetic and metaphysical questions in Western circles). This counter-poetic practice offers a strategy for "how to adjust, approach, and encounter" that Davis links with more classical models of poetry (11). She suggests that Thoreau, Dickinson, and Whitman saw the poet's task much as the Greeks did: as an occasion-based mode of response to the world. Insofar as poets use language as "a means of marking out persons, objects, and the world – or reality itself – for attention and praise," they perform an existential and metaphysical process that Davis describes as ornamental.

Davis describes the shift to ornament as a radical realignment in the larger history of aesthetics. "At issue here is not simply a literary historical claim," she writes, "but the possibility of thinking of poetry as a way of relating to the world, rather than as an expressive object." Sketching out the history of this notion, Davis shows how the poetry of attending carries inherently political freight and further links this mode of ornamental aesthetics to Marxist-Hegelian and Heideggerian traditions – epistemes that foreground the individual and her phenomenal experience of the world as a way of making the individual legible in her relational milieu.

In her prose style, Davis practices what she preaches. She explains that she uses "a more individual, if not personal, way of writing, partly in resistance to the new models of knowledge production that permeate contemporary universities, and partly out of a commitment to retaining the individual element of reading" (32). Thus, Davis attempts to "get closer to the life of experience, and hence the life of persons" (35) in her own writing, emulating the nineteenth-century ornamental aesthetics that she describes as attempts to "redeem human experience from modern conditions of alienation and individuation" (11) by addressing "how an object carries and even carries out human attention."

After treating Thoreau and his "poetics of touch" in Chapter 1, Davis turns to similar qualities in Dickinson's writing, arguing that "the work of noticing, attending, and loving what is seen" is a "shared poetic project" for both writers that "makes their work at once poetic and ornamental." Here Davis associates poetry with ornament based on what she sees to be the essential, classical function of each: that is, to "mark out" objects for praise, or to draw attention by adorning. This work of ornamenting attention foregrounds interaction, contact and interrelation between a poet and her object as opposed to the poet's doubtful capacity to represent or reconstitute that object. Drawing on Heidegger, Davis argues that Dickinson's concern with the aesthetics of ornament depends largely on distance from (or a loss of contact with) the object by the poet-subject.

Davis's most provocative claim is that "Dickinson's ornamentation looks past the centrality of loss to representation that has been critical not only to Christianity but also to Western culture and poetic history." Rather than claiming her distance-oriented aesthetic heritage, Davis argues, Dickinson developed her own ornamental aesthetics by asking "what being grounded in the world means." For Davis, this point is essential to grasping the force of Dickinson's work: she was concerned with an essential un-groundedness in being. Davis demonstrates how this interest results in repeated portrayals of "unsettled ornamental placing-upon," suggesting that "for Dickinson, ornamentation structures her exploration of the transient nature of all phenomena, leading to an at times painfully vibrant sense of the mutually fluctuating contact of mind and object." Because Dickinson did not see the mind or a subject's phenomenal experience as distorting or interfering with truthful contact with reality, she was able to see poet, poem, and object as integrated or leveled entities in the same ontic playing field.

In her discussion of Dickinson, Davis argues that contemporary modes of criticism that focus on historical or material conditions reinforce the same mind-world hermeneutic that Dickinson worked against. According to Davis, questions concerning the nature of manuscript, craft, and genre as they are materially-inflected simply miss the point. She claims that Dickinson saw poetry as engagement with an ineffable material world, not as a separate aestheticization that comments on reality from across an abyss. If Dickinson was curious about "the status of the object," she was not curious about it in the way that some previous Dickinson scholars have claimed. Instead, Davis argues for a more metaphysical treatment of object and thing in Dickinson's work and – perhaps counterintuitively – seeks to redeem a Dickinsonian poetics essentially concerned with experience and personal engagement with the world.

The structure of Davis's book is fluid and reciprocating, folding and unfolding like a river current. Her lively "personal" voice, larded with allusions to continental theory and Buddhist scholarship, can seem somewhat idiosyncratic. However, Davis's essayistic style enhances this sleek treatment of Thoreau, Dickinson, and Whitman, which borders at times on an aesthetic and critical manifesto. Her writing is entirely consistent with her essential claim: that Thoreau, Dickinson, and Whitman's counter-poetics offer us a new approach to writing a phenomenal world that is in essence fluctuating and co-constructed – an approach that foregrounds the essential work of ornament as a means of marking-out, honoring, and giving praise.

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Reviews of Publications

The Heart's Many Doors: American Poets Respond to Metka Krašovec's Images Responding to Emily Dickinson
Richard Jackson, ed. Wings Press, 128pp.

Reviewed by Jordan Greenwald

To read Dickinson's poetry is often to imagine abstractions taking solid shape. Love, hope, despair, faith, time, grief: by means of conceit, Dickinson gives these abstractions concrete form. One might say that Dickinson likes to flesh them out, which perhaps speaks to her fixation on the fleshlier abstractions of pain and death. All of the aforementioned concepts are incarnated in *The Heart's Many Doors: American Poets Respond to Metka Krašovec's Images Responding to Emily Dickinson*, a collection of eighty-one poems by forty-one American poets, accompanied by eleven drawings by the Slovenian artist. Aptly described by editor and poet Richard Jackson as an exercise in "double ekphrasis," the volume pays homage to Dickinson's talent for capturing the ideal in the concrete.

Perhaps known best for her paintings, Metka Krašovec was invited to hold a retrospective of her work by the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana in 2012 – the first time such an honor had been given to a female contemporary artist. Each of her drawings in this volume is paired with a handwritten Dickinson poem or, more often, selected verses that invite the viewer to divine a correspondence between word and image. In some cases, that correspondence is easy to decipher: above the first quatrain of "A wounded Deer – leaps highest – " (Fr181), for instance, one sees a human figure crouched above a deer's upturned head in the foreground, while in the background another figure leaps, ostensibly exemplifying "the Ecstasy of death – ." In other cases, the relationship between word and image is more difficult to trace: above "I've seen a Dying Eye / Run round and round a Room – " (Fr648) hover the likenesses of a skull, a rabbit, a horse and a person with arms outstretched, suspended in murky darkness.

All of the images contain at least one human figure, each distinct in the evocative posture or gesture it adopts. Jackson likens them to medieval illuminated manuscripts, but these richly expressive pairings recall William Blake's illustrated poems much more. The pairings, however, are not so much illustrated texts but rather something akin to dialectical images, independent works put into illuminating conversation. Krašovec, in fact, even drew some of the images before finding the verse that would accompany them.

The volume's poets adopt a wide range of approaches to parsing the relationship between text and image. Some fuse elements of both in what is indeed double ekphrasis. For instance, in response to a Munch-esque image of a lone figure shrouded in darkness, Cathy Wagner writes a flat description from the perspective of the figure itself: "in a cold white veil. / I covered my ears at the gray noise. / I wasn't given eyes." When her poem ends "I would be / still and set apart / for company," it nods also to Dickinson's "solitude of space" in the poem inscribed below. Emilia Phillips, meanwhile, responds to both works with an anecdote of a subway ride in which the speaker wonders if her adjacency to another rider is indeed "what it's like / to live in another body, its heat entering / into mine." Both poets work through Krašovec's image to give concrete form to Dickinson's ideas, even if they arrive at remarkably different results. These poems are works of ekphrasis, no doubt, but also acts of translation.

The poems are assembled in groups of around seven, corresponding to the image to which they respond. The result is eleven rich intertextual constellations with shared points of reference. One pleasure of reading the volume is the surprising recurrence of certain images. Responding to a drawing of two descending figures paired with Dickinson's "I measure every Grief I meet" (Fr550), Richard Jackson writes, "In winter squirrel nests appear clamped to bare branches. / You can feel gravity making its claims." Leslie Ullman writes that "The Noticing / holds things in place / the way roofs clamp houses / to their floors and corners," later offering a description of "papers stacked and weighted with a smoky / river stone." Bradley Paul, reflecting on a typo in the word "Weight" in a printing of Dickinson's poem, imagines "an h that fell; / an h subject to gravity so / an h that is a thing." Thus Dickinson's remark about another's grief – "I wonder if It weighs like Mine – " engenders new lines rich with images of gravitational pull.

Amid the collection of poems – many focused on the weighty subject of mortality – one can also find dashes of humor. Chris Merrill, for instance, reimagines Dickinson's "Dying Eye" as a brooch custom made for a woman whose husband is having an affair. In a poem titled "There's Something Very Unscientific About Zombies," Josh Mensch riffs on one of Krašovec's images: "You find a branch growing out of your back / Unlike you, it has a future."

Devotees of Dickinson's poetry, readers of contemporary poetry, and those with special interest in ekphrasis will all find much to appreciate in this volume.

Jordan Greenwald is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at Berkeley.

Noteworthy Publications

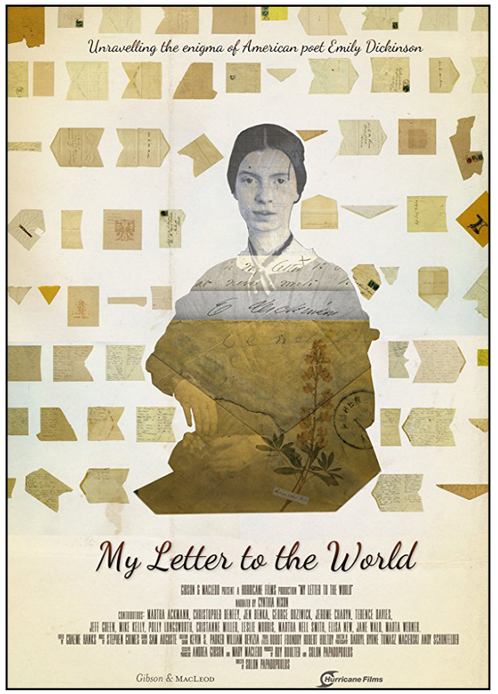
Long-time Dickinson Society member Richard Brantley has published *Transatlantic Trio: Empiricism, Evangelicalism, Romanticism* (Culicidaea Press), a collection of his essays and reviews, spanning his full career. One entire section, "Essays, Third Series," is devoted to Emily Dickinson.

Marta Werner, with Jen Bervin the author of *The Gorgeous Nothings* (New Directions and Christine Burgin Gallery 2013), has published a selection of the images from that work in a new cloth edition called *Emily Dickinson, Envelope Poems* (New Directions and Christine Burgin Gallery 2016).

A Quieter Passion: a Review of *My Letter to the World*

By Susan Snively

Emily Dickinson has inspired artists in many genres: drama, biography, fiction, documentary films, songs, dances, paintings, sculpture, and works that mix them up. Her "letter to the world" arrived first in November, 1890, edited by Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Todd and Higginson altered her spelling, punctuation, and word choice to evade criticism of her unconventional ways. Yet Higginson got it right in his introduction to the poems' second edition in 1891, when he called her "a wholly new and original poetic genius."



In 1955, when her 1,789 poems, by Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward, were collected and published by Harvard, readers saw Dickinson's letter to the world with the poet's original spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary. Surprises appeared on every page. Since then, evidence of Dickinson's shape-shifting has attained a kind of divine wackiness. Re-reading the poems in manuscripts, in print, or online, we never know from poem to poem which Dickinson we are going to meet: the brilliant schoolgirl, the mischievous playmate, the flirtatious young woman, the lover whose "heart had many doors," the poet who reshaped the English language. Her "infinite variety" – to quote her favorite author, Shakespeare – brings energy and joy to *My Letter to the World*, a new documentary film from Hurricane Films, directed by Sol Papadopoulos and produced by Roy Boulter and Andrea Gibson. The film premiered in Amherst on September 14 to a rapt audience of Dickinson friends, fans, and obsessives.

Hurricane Films produced *A Quiet Passion* in 2016. Directed by Terence Davies, it garnered much praise, including an extravagant claim that it was "the best film ever made." *My Letter to the World* is resolutely a documentary, steadier in its pace than *A Quiet Passion*, and more subtle in its voice. Narrated by Cynthia Nixon, who reads the poems in a mild, dutiful manner, the new film avoids the melodrama of the earlier film, with its ghastly death-scene and a nearly unbearable depiction of the poet's supposed (but non-credible) epileptic fits. Although brief scenes from *A Quiet Passion* appear in *My Letter to the World*, they do not intrude on its narrative integrity. Instead, the film awakens viewers' desire to dwell among the poet's unanswerable questions – antic spiders that dance among her intricately spun webs.

The dozen or so Dickinson scholars interviewed for the film don't try to construct a unified field theory of Emily Dickinson. Their respectful, imaginative, often funny interviews take the audience in many directions at once, an approach that seems exactly right for the poet who "dwelled in Possibility" (Fr466). Among the experts are film director Terence Davies, scholars Christopher Benfey, Polly Longsworth, Martha Ackmann, Marta Werner, Martha Nell Smith, Leslie Morris, Elisa New, and Cristanne Miller; novelist Jerome Charyn; Amherst College archivist Mike Kelly, Jen Benka of the American Academy of Poets, George Boziwick, composer and musical director of The Red Skies Music Ensemble, and Dickinson Museum Executive Director Jane Wald. These experts discuss the poet's loves, friendships, family, home, education, religion, passion for nature, musicality, writing habits, and posthumous publication. Each blooming subject buzzes with contradictions that shine and sting – the shine from Dickinson's radiant imagination, the sting from her readers' humble attempts to penetrate her enigmas.

Scholar and writer Martha Ackmann, whose interview opens the film, speculates

that Emily Dickinson was "a kind of outlaw" in both her biographical life and her poetry. The phrase sets the theme for others' variations. Novelist Jerome Charyn calls Dickinson "all-powerful" in her radical, explosive effects. Her dashes, he says, "express violence." Scholar Marta Werner, who has delved into Dickinson's texts, calls her "a terrifying force." Harvard professor Elisa New speaks of Dickinson's "uncompromising process," a radical authority achieved by breaking rules. About Dickinson's religious life, Leslie Morris, Curator of Modern Books and Manuscripts at Harvard's Houghton Library, observes that Dickinson "speaks of a God of Nature, not of the Church." Scholars Martha Nell Smith and Polly Longsworth express differing views of the poet's passionate love for her sister-in-law, Sue Dickinson. Smith has long believed that Emily and Sue were "deeply intertwined" lovers; Longsworth agrees that the two women were in love with each other, but "not in the sense that we use the term 'lesbian' today." Still, she says, "there was an awful lot of kissing." Longsworth turns this subject like a prism with many gleaming facets. Christopher Benfey covers an impressive range of subjects, including Emily's intense involvement with Sue, and Sue's attempt to suggest revisions to Emily's poems, a controlling gambit that threatened their friendship.

To the subject of Austin Dickinson's affair with Mabel Loomis Todd, which began in 1882 and lasted for thirteen years, Benfey brings a canny clarity to his interpretation of the romance between the unhappy Austin and the charming, narcissistic Mabel Loomis Todd. The pair evaded scandal, he says, because Mabel's tolerant husband David willingly participated in the cover-up. David Todd, the Amherst College astronomer, trained his eyes both on his wife's earthly desires and on the stars. The complex geometry of this relationship helped to bring about the publication of Dickinson's poems. After the poet's death, Emily's devoted sister Vinnie sought an editor for the treasure-trove of hundreds of poems found in the house, first asking the well-read Sue Dickinson to take up the task. When Sue moved too slowly, Vinnie, eager to have the world learn of "my sister's genius," asked Mabel Loomis Todd for help. Sue and Mabel, rivals for Austin Dickinson's affection, could never have worked together. Whatever one thinks of Mabel, she served as amanuensis, editor, and champion publicist. "She was the perfect choice," says Chris Benfey.

The film's expert insights – too many to enumerate here – are enhanced by the confident voices of Benfey, Boziwick, Ackmann, Smith, New, Miller, and others with long experience writing and teaching about Dickinson. Whatever their earlier experience as readers, students, and fans of the poet, viewers are persuaded both to read more, and to relax into a pleasure shared by thousands. Musician George Boziwick, founder of The Red Skies Music Ensemble, points out the use of common hymn meter in her poems, as she worked variations on its familiar pulse. As with the poet's impressive range of reading in many subjects, her music book, as Boziwick wrote in a blog for Harvard's Houghton Library, showed her "keen interest in the piano repertoire of the day." It is "uncommonly large," containing over a hundred pieces.

In contrast to some participants in earlier Dickinson symposia as far back as 1980, these experts never proclaim their opinions or raise verbal fists in indignation. Their devotion to Dickinson has led them to "judge tenderly." This approach is one of the film's great strengths. Some Dickinson veterans who attended the recent premiere may recall a 1980 conference in Amherst celebrating Emily's 150th birthday. Above the packed auditorium, as opinions flared, one could almost see faint puffs of smoke. A wild debate took place among a number of participants whose brothers were Trappist monks. Much was said, sometimes at high volume, about whether poetry required a vow of silence.

A special treat in *My Letter to the World* is the interview with Mike Kelly, archivist at the Robert Frost Library at Amherst College. Dickinson's preservation of her work shows how deliberately she sewed her poems into bundles and stored them. "Good to hide, and hear 'em hunt!" (Fr945) she may have whispered as she threaded her needle. Kelly displays some treasures from the Amherst collection, including a poem, "The way Hope builds his House," written on a house-shaped piece of paper. Dickinson wrote on any handy scrap, including the backs of telegrams, discarded letters, even a chocolate wrapper, proving, as Kelly said, that Parisian chocolate could be obtained even in Amherst. Always carrying pencil and paper no matter what her household tasks, Emily the poet was armed for poetry, and packed some heat.

Another mystery Kelly explores is the existence of a daguerreotype, discovered in a cache of random papers in a Springfield antique shop, now on loan in the Frost Library archives. Is it Emily? How old is she, and what is she thinking as she faces the camera with a mysterious smile? Pictured sitting next to a woman who may or may not be her friend Kate Scott, Emily has her arm around Kate's chair, a gesture some interpret as a sign of intimacy. Jerome Charyn argues that the photograph reveals Emily as a fully-grown woman, "filled with sexual desire." (The other woman in the daguerreotype looks sad and hostile.) Will we ever know for sure, or are we stuck with the daguerreotype of 1847, showing the poet as a pale, wistful teenager? It is appropriate that among the musical pieces in the film's superb soundtrack is Charles Ives's "The Unanswered Question."

As with the earlier film, *A Quiet Passion*, *My Letter to the World* omits some subjects important to those familiar with Dickinson's biography. Although her sister Vinnie, her father Edward, her brother Austin, and her sister-in-law Sue appear as important actors in the poet's emotional life, we miss the presence of Maggie Maher, her friend and servant – "warm and wild and mighty" – who aided in the preservation of her poems. Maggie surely deserved a larger part, as did Judge Otis Phillips Lord, her father Edward's best friend and the recipient of the poet's frisky letters to the man she called "my lovely Salem." Lord, Edward Dickinson's best friend, has been described by scholars Richard Sewall and James Guthrie as the great love of the poet's later years.

The Amherst area, with its five colleges, town libraries, a well-read populace, and throngs of writers, is a tough place to make definite pronouncements about Emily Dickinson – or to defy mystery by wishing them away. A hunger to have all unanswered questions settled at last is likely to remain unsated. We always want more, and the poet, exulting in her mysteries, must have known that they were the key to fame.

Emily Dickinson's letters, another trove of astonishing reading, prove that she had a richer, more complex, and more passionate life than the afflicted creature portrayed by her niece Martha Dickinson Bianchi in the early twentieth century. Bianchi helped to encourage the belief that Emily had suffered a disappointment in love for a married man, and decided to retreat from the world, refuse social gatherings, and always wear white. Thus did the minister Charles Wadsworth of Philadelphia ascend to a niche in what Richard Sewall called "the Dickinson cult." Wadsworth appears briefly in *A Quiet Passion*, but the moment is tender rather than sensational. In his 1974 biography, Richard Sewall wrote that the cult had grown ripe by June, 1891, as Alice Ward Bailey wrote in *The Springfield Republican*. By the time Martha Dickinson Bianchi died in 1943, others had crowded in to challenge the myth, or to supply one of their own. Sewall writes with his customary wisdom: "It is hard to convey a mystery, like love or religion. For all her obliqueness and her secretive ways, Emily Dickinson establishes an intimacy with her readers as do few other poets. Such an intimacy leads to a possessiveness the skeptics find hard to deal with. As Millicent Todd Bingham, something of a skeptic herself, once said, 'They all think they own her.'" Sewall adds a further insight: that when the subject of the cult is "a woman, sensitive, fragile, with legends of blighted romance…suppressions external and repressions internal…give added piquancy to the agony and ecstasy that all may read in her published poems. The appeal is, for many, irresistible." It still is.

The proliferation of Emily Dickinsons, like the fecundity of the poet's garden, has become perennial. Harvard scholar Elisa New draws an analogy between Dickinson's poems and her garden, sources of love and labor combined. Visitors to the Dickinson Museum are often startled to learn how expert the poet was at digging in the dirt and bringing forth flowers and fruit. Today, after the Museum's impressive reconstruction of Emily's conservatory, visitors can behold one of her kingdoms, rich with southeastern light. Reportedly she grew jasmine and pomegranate there, and allowed neighborhood children into the tiny kingdom to watch a chrysalis unfold into a butterfly. *My Letter to the World* features stunning graphics of the poet's herbarium that glide through the background, and include plants Emily found on her home ground: clammy locust, interrupted fern, *cannabis sativa*, and hundreds of other native plants. The poet's skill at cultivation, her welcoming ways with children, and her appearance, described by her young friend MacGregor Jenkins as "a beautiful woman," would have been visible to observant passersby through the clear panes of the conservatory. "Secretive ways" aside, her eagerness to learn the mysteries of nature gave the poet the privilege of revealing her generous selves.

Sol Papadopoulos, Terence Davies, Andrea Gibson, Mary MacLeod, and their colleagues have the gifts not only of filmmaking, but of devotion to the poet. The images of natural miracles produce a breathtaking joy. We see images of light-struck, rippling water – an actual pond, or the sea Dickinson claimed never to have seen? A wind-tossed field of golden grass recalls the "gazing grain" of "Because I could not stop for Death" (Fr479) The film's interior scenes recreate 19th century staid familial tableaux, complete with lace curtains and thick chairs that look almost comfortable. Other images remind us that Dickinson witnessed the maelstroms and miracles peculiar to New England, especially in changing seasons. *My Letter to the World* reawakens the audience to the small-town Amherst known to many of its citizens, and invites others to visit the homestead where a great poet reinvented poetry, for the world.

Author of four collections of poetry and founder of the Writing Center at Amherst College, Susan Snively has been screenwriter and narrator of two documentaries, Seeing New Englandly *(2010) and* "My Business is to Sing"*(2012). She has also written one novel,* The Heart Has Many Doors.

Restoring Emily Dickinson's Bedroom: 2015

When they lifted up the floorboards,
they found that someone had been walking in circles
at the side of the room nearest the window
so that (looking out) what could be seen were the church opposite,
a person running, perhaps the circus animals parading up from the
railroad depot, or possibly a drunk, or birds
poised on the fence surrounding the firehouse,
or maybe the firemen themselves, chafing at minutes wasted
when they might have been playing with their children
or chopping wood; it was possibly someone obsessed
with figures, someone yearning after the most perfect figure
of all, the one with no ending, just like God –
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost – a woman who walked
on the circumference, claiming it was her "Business,"
who put on white and called herself a "Bride,"
although she never married but lowered cakes
in baskets to the children of other girls who deemed
her "mad" after much deliberation, after·watching
her maid, Maggie, send visitors and old friends away
through the front gate, explaining "Miss Emily
can't see you now, she's busy, she's sorry she cannot"
but "she has to oversee a tulip bulb pushing up
through the earth in that container on her windowsill
and besides, she's had a letter from that man
she admires, Otis (I think) or Sam or Wentworth,
she'll be fetching some scrap or oddment of used parchment
to send him words like kindly angels to keep him company
in her absence" because she was so often absent,
tending the jasmine in her conservatory until it breathed
perfume like the memory of an imagined love
for whom she wrote hundreds of poems few people
knew about and those who knew did not value
so it was fortunate that she had those day lilies
she claimed looked like her (her hair was red,
her skin freckled by the summer sunshine)
lilies she might offer to a perfect stranger,
(since much madness is divinest sense)
saying "These are my introduction," fleeing
afterwards to her upstairs bedroom where
Eternity awaited her like a wilderness only
she could shape into a brilliant garden, an
everlasting world without end.

Judith Farr

Emily's Economies

Sometimes on a sheet of
wrapping paper
Often on a fragment of
stationery
Occasionally on an invitation
The fold of an envelope
A torn bill or
advertisement,
On a recipe, receipt or discarded
message of sympathy,
Once on the flyleaf of her father's copy of
Washington Irving's *Sketch Book*,
But always with a generous heart
Emily Dickinson wrote poetry.

Her methods could appear eccentric
But she saw "New Englandly"
So practiced strict economy.

Her words that soared into the ether
Were often cramped like postscripts
Between performances of household tasks.
Modestly, she would not accord them
The benignant latitudes of space.

The Muse, however, who also knew how to bake,
Sew, garden and launder, was never offended,
For she knew how earnestly, how lavishly, how perfectly
Emily would always serve her.

Judith Farr

Judith Farr, Professor of English emerita *at Georgetown. has long been a celebrated critic of Emily Dickinson's poetry. She is best known as the author of* The Passion of Emily Dickinson *(1992) and, with Louise Carter,* The Gardens of Emily Dickinson *(2004). Her more recent work explores the connections between poetry and painting, particularly the Hudson River School. However, she began as a poet and won a contest sponsored by Marianne Moore when she was a teenager. Moore's advice to her: "If you want to be a poet, never get married and steer clear of the Giantess." Reckless of the warning, she has recently finished a book of poetry that includes several inspired by Dickinson.*

Wieland, Continued from page 11

somehow foreseen the Kardashians. It's also about friendship and complicity. These are not original or ground-breaking observations – I am, you will recall, many footnotes short of a scholar.

Georgia went away to college last week. She is, not unlike her mother, a lover of ritual and symbolic gesture. We had planned our last evening together, the pair of us, songs we would listen to that would make us ugly-cry (we wanted to get that over with privately if possible), past events we would recall with fondness, promises we would make, and advice we would give. It all came to pass, as planned. Unplanned, she began to recite "I'm Nobody!" ending with the laughing ring of "Bog."

In these first weeks without her, I am experiencing that poem in a whole new way, as a different kind of nobody. I don't know what's become of the part of myself that's been a full-on mother for 18 years – it feels sometimes like blank, nothing, absence, a huge hole in my chest, like I can feel the wind whistling though it, and I can't breathe. I'm drowning in the bog. This poem suddenly sounds to me a little "the lady doth protest too much, methinks." The nobodies of the first two lines really only exist at all because there's someone else present, the "you" who isn't supposed to tell, a somebody to share the experience.

The Marathon Poetry Reading
at the Library of Congress: 12/8/2014

In the grand library hung with flags of her country
They come to celebrate her birthday. One by one
They come: the school teacher, the actress, the businessman.
The librarian, anxious to know "Who was 'Master'?"
The psychiatrist, fascinated by her white dress and reclusion,
The college professor who worships "the mimicry of her dashes,"
The lonely housewife who selected her society for comfort:
One by one they come. It is her one-hundred-eighty-fourth birthday.

Instructions are brief: "Read each poem in order,
Announce your own name first. Identify the poems by number."
To only a few she gave titles – later, if she had the chance,
Some time between baking, watering flowers, making tea.
But their tenderness, glamour and acuity resisted titles,
Those words that came to her like a flight of birds, needing rest.

Now it is almost evening in the grand salon. They read on.
In her father's house, however, in the hallowed room
Where Emily's dress hangs, there is silence.
The shadow of her light form flits, luminous, across the page
As they read. She is present here. She speaks to them.

Judith Farr

The Other Hemisphere

Dear Preceptor –

The word – said – lives,
say I, and my word
Said here, in this place –
lives still – a century
to the year when my
head was first turned
Away from the things
of this world –

Against evanescence –
to last long – to bear the spirit
of the body, to hear my
letters echoing in the blues
and reds of Brazil –
where the sun arcs
across Northern skies –

Themselves go out – I said –
Speaking of poets whose
words do not yet have
the right to expire –

As for me – I
breathe – I breathe
the air of Bahia –
Mr. Higginson – I
thought you would
like – to know –

Your Scholar

George Monteiro,
Salvador, Brazil, 1986

George Monteiro's poetry has frequently appeared in the Bulletin. *Professor of English emeritus at Brown, he has written critical works on topics in US, Portuguese, and Brazilian literature, including, of course, Emily Dickinson. He has also written many poems about other writers.*

New EDIS Board Member-At-Large

Stephanie Farrar

Stephanie Farrar is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire. After doing her Bachelor's and Master's degrees at the University of California, Davis and San Diego campuses, she did her PhD at the University of Buffalo. Now a junior scholar transitioning into her first tenure-track job, she is pleased to have the opportunity, as a member of the EDIS Board, to contribute to the profession beyond her campus and to foster interest in Dickinson beyond the academy.

With Cristanne Miller and Jane Donahue Eberwein, Farrar co-edited *Dickinson in Her Own Time* (Iowa 2016). The collection, subtitled, *A Biographical Chronicle of Her Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, and Memoirs by Family, Friends, and Associates*, is just that – an assortment of materials presenting a documentary biographical portrait of the poet that complicates some of even the more subtle impressions conveyed by the standard biographies, as well as those in the popular imagination.

Farrar's Dickinson-related work also includes a chapter on the poet's use of popular discourses of masculinity in the context of the Civil War, which she presented at the conference, "Emily Dickinson Dwells in China," co-sponsored by EDIS and the Literary Translation Research Center at Fudan University, in Shanghai in 2014. Also, on an EDIS sponsored Modern Language Association panel, she presented a paper about Lavinia Dickinson's 1898 typeset manuscript of experimental poems. She recently wrote a book chapter on narrative black poetry during Reconstruction, and she continues her research on the poetry of the Civil War.

She has assisted in administrative activities related to hosting a Dickinson marathon reading, putting on a departmental reunion for alumni, and preparations for the Modernist Studies Association Conference of 2011.

In addition to engaging members of the public in the delights of poetry in general, Farrar particularly looks forward to helping the organization grow even more inclusive, to helping the Society to honestly engage with historical evidence of Dickinson's relationships to race as we deal with her material culture.

The Belle Behind Bars: Teaching Dickinson in Prison

Susan Goldwitz moved from university teaching to the "Changing Lives Through Literature" program in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and from there to various positions teaching incarcerated inmates. Not long ago, at the state prison in Concord, she was teaching a course in poetry and essays, to introduce "new ways of thinking, developing decision-making skills, and reworking identity issues." She frequently avoided telling her students who an author was, so they would not classify the work before they had read it.

One man began the class sitting in the back row with his arms crossed and an expression I interpreted as, "try to show me this is worth it," a mixture of defiance and defense. He was large, maybe in his 30s or 40s, black, muscular, and silent. I noticed, though, that he came to every class, and after a few weeks passed, he moved up a row. When this event occurred, he chose a seat all the way up in the front row.

The poem we discussed was "The Brain – is wider than the Sky – " (Fr632). The discussion was lively; enough time had passed for the class to be comfortable speaking with me and each other about weighty subjects of self, thought, and God; hands went up without my calling. When we were finished, the silent student in the front row raised his hand for the very first time. "Who wrote this poem?" he demanded. I took a breath, asked for divine assistance, and said that her name was Emily Dickinson and that she lived in the 19th century in Amherst, not far from where we were; she wrote almost two thousand poems, just a handful published during her lifetime, and those often edited without her approval, many about religious ideas, and others about nature; she lived in her father's house and rarely left it. Whew.

He pushed his chair away, stood up, pointed two fingers on the end of an outstretched arm to the floor in two big swoops and said, "That CHICK is REAL!"

EDIS MLA 2018

"Of Strangers is the Earth the Inn": Still Life, Scale, and Deep Time in Emily Dickinson

This year's EDIS session at MLA, "Of Strangers is the Earth the Inn," will feature a cluster of papers sounding the intertwining motifs of still life, deep time, and scale for reading Dickinson in the shadow of the anthropocene.

Chair: Marta L. Werner, Professor of English, D'Youville College

Presenters:
Isabel Sobral Campos, Assistant Professor of Literature, Dept. of Liberal Studies, Montana Tech
Zachary Tavlin, PhD candidate, Dept. of English, University of Washington
Amy R. Nestor, Assistant Professor of Literature, Dept. of English, Georgetown University – Qatar

Respondent: Keith M. Mikos, Lecturer, Dept. of English, DePaul University

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.

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Members are invited to endow a named award. To do so involves a gift of $1000 to the Society.

Retouching Mabel

Jonathan Morse, using an Adobe Photoshop program and Lucis filter, has retouched the familiar image of the aspiring editor and journalist Mabel Loomis Todd. The filter is used to produce High Dynamic Range effects, increasing contrast and general luminosity. HDR techniques are designed to create effects similar to those experienced by the human iris, which receives considerably more complicated information from the world than a normal camera can simulate.

Compared to the Lovell image, the HDR version shows more of the texture of the dress and the hat, as well as a greater sense of the composure and expressiveness of the face.

The Many "Lives" of An Emily Dickinson Year Book

By Krans Bloeimaand

In a letter dated 3 December, 1894, Mabel Loomis Todd pitched the following idea to E. D. Hardy of Roberts Brothers, Publishers: "how does the idea of an Emily Dickinson Year Book strike you? I talked with Mr. Niles over a year ago about it, and he thought it a fine idea, and seemed to think it would sell largely." (see Millicent Todd Bingham's *Ancestors' Brocades*, p311). Todd envisioned a book "daintily bound for Christmas 1895," with a text consisting of what she called "365 flashes" or epigrams taken from Emily's poems. As we all know, fifty-four years passed before Mabel's idea came to fruition. The *Year Book* was finally published under the imprint of The Hampshire Bookshop, Inc., with a publication date of 15 May, 1948, the sixty-second anniversary of Emily's death.

With the book's text edited by Helen Arnold and illustrations drawn by Emily Dickinson's second cousin, Louise B. Graves, two issues were marketed: a signed, limited edition of 100 copies with a hand-colored circular design in green on the title page, and a regular trade edition that lacked the above-named special features. Both issues contained the same number of illustrations, twelve. Moreover, the book seemingly generated enough interest over the years to warrant its re-publication three more times under different imprints between the years 1976 and 1992.

Of interest to Dickinson bibliophiles is a possible sixth "life" for the *Year Book*, for in my collection is a copy of the second issue with a warm inscription from Helen Arnold to the book's illustrator, Louise B. Graves. Of singular significance is the fact that the illustration for December used in both issues opposite page 113 and printed on dull paper was augmented in the Graves copy with a different illustration printed on clay-coated paper. This thirteenth illustration incorporated an alternate ED quotation and appears at the end of the December section. Thus, the artist possibly adorned her personal gift copy from Helen Arnold with a drawing that Graves most-likely tipped-in. Whether this thirteenth drawing was initially rejected or meant to be used in a later edition remains a mystery.

A reproduction of the "thirteenth illustration," included in the *Year Book* copy sent from Helen Arnold to Louise B. Graves.