

THE EMILY DICKINSON INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

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



Writing in Emily Dickinson's Studio

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Front Cover: With this issue, the Bulletin inaugurates a new occasional series titled Studio Sessions. When journalist Sarah Lyall wrote in her New York Times article, "Home Alone With the Ghost of Emily Dickinson," that she was "overtaken by a sharp distilled focus that expressed itself. . . in a compulsion to write," she named a phenomenon that many have felt in the poet's quarters. Barbara Dana recounts her own distilled focus. Photo credit: Michael Medieros, Dickinson's bedroom; Mark Kwaitek, Dana as The Belle of Amherst.

Back Cover: The 2019 EDIS International Conference will be held at the Asilomar Conference Center, near Monterey, California. Originally designed by architect Julia Morgan, the center sits on 107 acres of ecologically interesting land adjacent to the Pacific Ocean. Maybe Emily Dickinson "visited the Sea"; maybe she never saw it. Either way, EDIS will.

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Emily Dickinson: In the Company of Others (Otherness as Company)

The 2019 Annual Meeting of the Dickinson Society, “Emily Dickinson: In the Company of Others (Otherness as Company)” was an exciting event, with many sessions taking place during a day and a half in Amherst in early August. Even the excellent reports from participants and observers can only partially convey the intensity of the presentation and conversation during the sessions and richness of the many special events. Particularly noteworthy were a performance, by Laurie McCants, of her “solo hand-crafted-story-spinning-shadow-puppet-memory-play-with-music,” *Industrious Angels*; and a Concert Reading of Dickinson’s letters and poems. The latter, moderated by Richard Brantley, featured actors Amelia Campbell, Barbara Dana, and Elizabeth Morton reading poems and most gratifying, Christopher Benfey and Cindy MacKenzie performing the correspondence of the poet with Thomas Wentworth Higginson. McCants’ play, which was presented as part of the local Ko Festival, was described in the Fall 2017 issue of the *Bulletin*. Only partly about Dickinson, it dramatizes a woman’s exploration of a room in her house to find traces of her mother; discovering in the process that for all her efforts to contain her feelings, “You cannot fold a Flood – / and put it in a Drawer – ” (Fr583).

Vivian Pollak: “Reading Beyond Our Emily Dickinsons”

A highlight of the Annual Meeting was the keynote address, “Reading Beyond Our Emily Dickinsons,” by Vivian Pollak. Professor Pollak was greeted with a warm introduction by out-going EDIS President Martha Nell Smith, who revealed that Pollak had been a mentor to her even before they ever met. A founding EDIS Board member and a one-time President of the Society, Pollak has long been well known to Dickinsonians for her seminal book *Dickinson: The Anxiety of Gender* (1984). Her more recent *Our Emily Dickinsons: American Women Poets and the Intimacies of Difference* (2017; reviewed in the Spring 2017 issue of the *Bulletin*) engages the kind of connection of poet to poet she examined in her address.

Pollak began by discussing a set of letters written by Elizabeth Bishop to her psychiatrist, Ruth Foster, in the late 1940s. The letters first came to light in a January 2015 article in the *Yale Review* by Lorrie Goldensohn, and served as important source material in Megan Marshall’s 2017 biography, *Elizabeth Bishop: A Miracle for Breakfast*.

The letters were apparently presented to Foster by hand, as part of a therapeutic process. Pollak discussed from the beginning her uneasiness with the publication and interrogation of what were not merely private communications, but confessional statements inseparable from the wider context of Bishop’s psychotherapy. Nevertheless, the contribution the letters seem to make to our understanding of the life of a great and complex poet makes them impossible to ignore. Their sensational revelations, such as a claim that she suspected she did not have a clitoris, provide illumination of the trauma caused by events from the poet’s childhood – events like her Uncle George dangling her over the railing of a balcony or berating her Aunt Maud, as well as later comments, such as that by lover Marjorie Stevens, who accused her of not being sexual, of not loving women.

Bishop’s letters to Foster, Pollak said, can be usefully viewed in the context of the three much-debated seemingly confessional texts by

Emily Dickinson known as the Master Letters. These three letters have been resisted by some critics who point out that, in their echoes of various Victorian sources, they read more like literary performances than like biography-worthy confessions. Susan Howe, author of *My Emily Dickinson* (1985), insists on a strict severance between the erotic Dickinson and Dickinson the reader and artist. Nevertheless, Pollak reminded us, literary performance need not be seen as precluding actual emotional disturbance. “A wounded deer” may be the one that “leaps highest”; it may also be the one that disappears altogether. Dickinson may well have actually mailed the three letters to whatever Master; certainly she wrote many poems about surviving pain, wading grief. Bishop by contrast, Pollak noted, wrote only very evasively about her own pain, although her famous villanelle on “The art of losing” ends with the emphatic, almost desperate imperative, “Write it!”



Photo Credit: LeeAnne Gorthey

Reflections inspired by Vivian Pollak’s address made for an insightful Q and A discussion.

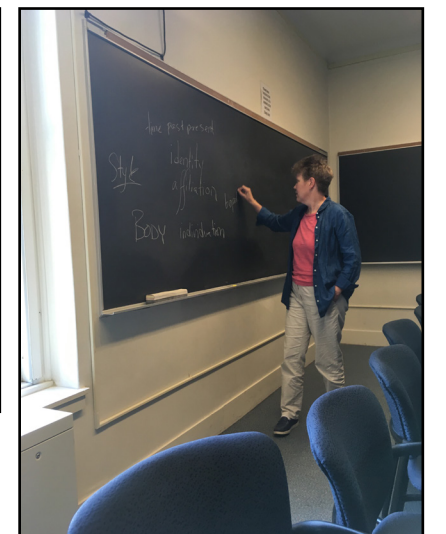
Which poet is ultimately more self-revealing? One reason the letters are easy to read as literary performances is that they are so much more distanced from their addressee than are Bishop’s to Foster. That may suggest more detachment from the content – but not necessarily more detachment from the emotions being expressed: Bishop’s moody remark that she didn’t have a clitoris, for example, was breezily dismissed by a later lover, who knew better. For all Bishop’s confessional intensity during her therapy, even there she drove into her own interior more cautiously than Dickinson. Caution entered even her criticism: in a review of *Emily Dickinson: A Riddle* (1951), in which Rebecca Patterson asserted that Dickinson had had a love affair with Catherine Scott Turner, Bishop deplored the author’s “unseemly deductions,” and labeled the book “infuriating.”

Should the Master Letters be taken as confessional documents? Pollak poses the problem that seems to have tormented both poets: at what point should scholarship stop short and, as Dickinson wrote in a late fragment, “respect the seals of others” (AC ms842)? Does an accurate representation of a subject include that subject’s reluctance to be represented? Don’t all barriers fall once, as Lorrie Goldensohn said to Pollak, the subject herself is dead? (And dead for how long?)

Moreover, what kind of evidence warrants speculative assertion about the shadowy contours of a hidden life? In the question/answer period, Pollak noted that once one begins to look closely at the Dickinson-Wadsworth relationship, all sorts of possibilities emerge. Dickinson wrote to James Clark that during one visit, Wadsworth had confess to her, “My Life is full of dark secrets” (L776). Could these have some connection to the Master Letters? Might seepage from his sealed life have encouraged Dickinson to break some of the seals of her own?



Left, Stephanie Farrar (photo credit: Eleanor Heginbotham) leading the session on Race; above, a group of scholars discussing Adrienne Rich; and right, Renée Bergland outlining the qualities of a Vesuvian Dickinson.



Vesuvius @Home: Adrienne Rich’s Emily Dickinson in our Erupting World Leader: Renée Bergland

By Marianne Noble

Renée Bergland led a reading seminar entitled “Vesuvius @ Home: Adrienne Rich’s Emily Dickinson in our Erupting World.” We explored Rich’s essay “Vesuvius at Home,” in the context of three essays about Rich. There were around twelve participants, about half of whom had read the Rich essay before. Everyone agreed that it is a wonderful essay, in no small measure because it frees us from the annoying tendency to try to figure out who the important and mysterious male figures in Dickinson’s life were. Renée described Rich as a strong second-wave feminist and asked us if her understanding of Dickinson’s feminism is our own. For a number of the participants, Rich seemed to interpret Dickinson’s poetry as more explicitly and deliberately anti-patriarchal than we do today. We discussed the possibility that Dickinson’s feminism is in keeping with “post-secular feminism,” a theory which holds that we can regain a fuller life by trying to get past Enlightenment metaphors and norms and reclaiming non-rational faith. Many in the group found this a more congenial approach to Dickinson’s feminism. We discussed “On my volcano grows the Grass” (Fr1743) and “A still – Volcano – Life” (Fr517).

After an initial almost-two-hour session, we reconvened with another group, which had been discussing race in Dickinson, and we addressed the overlap of feminist and anti-racist concerns, taking up poems discussed in that session (q.v.). We closed with a discussion of “A Deed knocks first at Thought” (Fr1294), a wonderful poem many of us had not known. Thanks to Paul Crumbley for bringing it our attention.

Reading Dickinson and Race in the 21st Century

Leader: Stephanie Farrar

By Li-Hsin Hsu

This reading seminar addressed the recurrent controversies over Dickinson's attitude to race in the context of the mid-nineteenth-century United States, when the issues of slavery and immigration played major roles in shaping the political landscape of the time. Scholars know the discomfort on encountering Dickinson's sometimes conflicting representations of the racial other. Her accounts of various races have undergone intense investigation in the past few decades and yielded a contested yet stimulating discussion. Stephanie Farrar began by framing the studies of Dickinson and race in the context of twenty-first century United States and invited Dickinson readers to rethink the ethical responsibility of literary scholars amidst resurging white supremacist rhetoric. She then introduced the three major categories in scholars' works on this topic – African-American, the Orient, and Whiteness. She moved on to offer two contrasting examples in Dickinson's racial depictions to demonstrate the inconsistencies and contradictions in the poet's implicit attitudes.

Farrar's analysis focused on two 1863 poems, "The Black Berry – wears a Thorn in his side –" (Fr548) and "It always felt to me – a wrong" (Fr521). The first poem was read in conjunction with Paul Laurence Dunbar's 1896 "We Wear the Mask" as well as T. W. Higginson's ethnographical observation of African-American soldiers during his service as commander of the first black regiment in South Carolina. Like Dunbar's poem and Higginson's report, her speaker's identification with black suffering is seen as pointing towards the limitation of one's sympathy for (and identification with) the suffering of the other.

The second poem was read in the context of the Exodus stories, popularized in the spiritual "Oh! Let My People Go" to rally against slavery, published 1861. The poem shifts the focus of Civil War rhetoric from the enslaved Isra-

elites', and by extension African-Americans', emancipation to God's injustice towards Moses, who was made to see Canaan without entering it. The second poem thus forms a stark contrast with the first, since the second speaker shows an apparent disregard of Israelites' plight and yet sympathizes with Moses' sacrifice. Farrar concluded the presentation by suggesting that Dickinson's attitude toward racial difference might not be far from Higginson's or Abraham Lincoln's.

During the discussion, Dickinson's music book passed around and several contemporary adaptations of African-American spirituals and Dickinson's poems about freedom were noted. Questions were also raised about the changing racial relationships in the nineteenth century and ethical implication of reading Dickinson's poetry today. Some of the difficulties in answering these questions arose from the challenges of determining whether Dickinson had the chance to read works by African-American writers of her time, such as Harriet Jacobs, Elizabeth Keckley and Frances Ellen Harper. It was further difficult to both identify the object of sympathy and the perspective of the speaker in poems whose syntactic opacity and semantic complexity invite multiple, even conflicting readings. Moreover, her portrayal of the Asiatic other was complicated by orientalist fantasy as well as its intermingling with her racial privilege and the wider geo-political landscape. Issues about how her racialized imaginings of the African and the Asian other might be conflated or distinguished were also brought up. Poems discussed included "Of Tribulation – these are They" (Fr328) and "A South Wind – has a pathos" (Fr883).

The seminar was partly prompted by the performances of two minstrel songs contained in Dickinson's music book during the picnic at the Homestead in the EDIS annual meeting in

2017. Responding to this moral dilemma, the seminar approached the question of Dickinson and race with a refreshing ethical urgency, openness and honesty. Thoughts about reading Dickinson in the context of slavery were germinated and pointed to new areas of study while also acknowledging her poems discussing fairness, salvation and liberty.

Critical Institutes

There were three Critical Institute sessions. At the Environment group, chaired by Eliza Richards, Ryan Heryford presented a paper on what he calls "necrogenesis" – his study of decomposition in Dickinson – in which he sees life emerging from compost. Amy Nestor discussed how Darwin left in his wake a loss of a sense of the linearity of Newtonian time. Elizabeth Swails reviewed Dickinson's presentation of animals, suggesting that they help her think about emotion. And Maria Ishikawa described Dickinson's openness to strangeness and the unknown.

Faith Barrett reported that the presenters at her session on Science, Health, and Medicine, Carol DeGrasse, Vivian Delchamps, Cate Mahoney, and Jamie Uthall, addressed representations of disability and of the body in the 19th-century medical profession. One paper extended the topic to the repurposing of the body, through such adaptations as tattooing.

Finally Alex Socarides, who led a session on Genre, Mode, and Form, told how Marva Duerksen considered the ways musical settings create a different text of a poem; Efrosyni Manda pondered what Dickinson was doing with the models proposed in the letter manuals of her day; Josie O'Donoghue, a linguist, addressed inference in Dickinson; and Jeanine Webb presented dimensions of epic in Dickinson's short poems, focusing on how blank spaces expand the field of reference.



Photo Credit, above: LeeAnn Gorthey



Top: Three attentive scholars. Above: Martha Nell Smith leads a discussion in the Evergreens. Below: Greg Mattingly and Sophie Mayer with members of their Reading Group.



Poetry Reading Groups

During the Critical Institute sessions and the two Reading Seminars, there were two concurrent reading groups.

Reading Group A was titled, "I think I was enchanted: "Reading Selected Poems, Letter-Poems, and Letters Dickinson sent to the Evergreens." For this session, a limited number of fortunate EDIS members were treated to an afternoon at the Evergreens with outgoing EDIS President Martha Nell Smith, who has spent a good portion of her richly productive career studying the connections, correspondence, and intellectual commerce that transpired between the two houses.

In the dim but richly sunlit library of Susan Dickinson's house she led the group in a discussion of "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers" (Fr124), a poem Dickinson rewrote and rewrote in response to Sue's responses, and of the letter-poem "Morning / might come / by Accident, / Sister / Night comes / By Event –" (L912), a text that illuminates much about the connection between the two houses and between the two minds of Amherst's "true poets" (L51).

The Second Reading Group was titled "In the Company of Dickinson: Notions of Solitude and Community in her Life and Work." Before Sophie Mayer (Sorbonne Paris 3) and Greg Mattingly (Guide, Dickinson Museum) assembled their group of about 20 in the Library of the Alumni House, Mayer offered an eloquent meditation on "Notions of Solitude and Community" that spurred rich discussion points later. What some saw as "solitude," noted Mayer, was a life full of "company": other people, nature, God, and herself or that part of herself in dialogue with another part of herself.

Of the first, Mayer particularly noted those who knew Dickinson and reported on their observations of her physical and apparent psychological being: Higginson,

of course, whose famous letter to his wife conveyed his fascination with what appeared as an "abnormal life"; the less well-known memories of Joseph Lyman, who spoke of Dickinson's eyes and mouth (made for observations) and of her "strong little hands" (made for writing the results of those observations); and the pleading letters of Dickinson's village contemporary poet Helen Hunt Jackson, who said, "You looked so white and mothlike that you frightened me." Although Dickinson's elitism frequently judged (she was always "looking for the rewarding person," said Vinnie), three volumes of poems and three of letters attest to the fact that she also obviously valued many in the community of farmers, lawyers, parents, children, and, yes, ministers and their congregants.

Those other hedges against "solitude" (as understood by most) – "Nature," "God," and Dickinson's dialogic self – were amplified by the group's readings (with thanks to Mattingly's quick duplication services) of poems in which the characters in Mayer's meditation had appeared: boys, poets, biblical characters, and a great many bees. Almost everyone in the crowded circle participated in lively explorations of the nature of "God" within a framework of the doctrine with which Dickinson often quarreled and also of Transcendentalism, with which she was thoroughly familiar; of "Election" as it pertained to that God and also as Dickinson approached the "Society" of other people; of "Nature" as "lenient," "benevolent," "pristine," and "always in motion"; and of "Rituals," "Sacraments," and "Conversions." With just barely enough time for deep dives into some twenty of the poems Mayer and Mattingly selected it was indeed an occasion for "conversion[s] of the mind."

Warm thanks are due to Eleanor Heginbotham for her help in reporting on the Reading Group sessions.



Photo Credit: LeeAnn Gorthey

The Annual Meeting could not have had a more appropriate closing ceremony than by honoring composer Alice Parker. (See adjacent page. Emily Seelbinder's article about Parker, "Feasts for the Ear: Songs by Alice Parker," appeared in the Spring 2015 issue of the Bulletin.) Board Member George Boziwick, who has also composed some settings of Dickinson poems, recently retired from his position as Chief of the Music Division of the New York Public Library.



Research Circle 2018 Leader: Ellen Louise Hart

The Dickinson Research Circle meets annually at the society's meetings and conferences. Our original purpose – thank you, Marcy Tanter, also Margaret Freeman and Ellie Heginbotham – was to establish a welcoming space for graduate students, independent scholars, and Dickinsonians working on creative projects that they might not have considered "academic." Soon after our start we expanded our sense of ourselves, so that together, from inside and outside the "academy," we share whatever we're doing to contribute to the extraordinary range of creative and scholarly work on Dickinson. During short presentations, Research Circle participants introduce and explain new ideas, describe early and ongoing efforts, seek assistance.

In response, we suggest research strategies, give tips, provide encouragement, identify shared interests, and get to know each other.

This year 39 people attended. (The generous time slot of 90 minutes barely allowed everyone in the room to check in!) Current work includes: metal point drawings of items in Dickinson's herbarium; the pursuit of Dickinson's math text book (What did she do with it? What happened to it?); exploration of her religious language and her relationship to the church her family attended; the "White Heat" blog; musical compositions and more information about Dickinson's own musical interests; more about the birds she observed and described in her writing; new ways of understanding her poetic theory; Susan Huntington Gilbert Dickinson's life story; and expanding pedagogies in Dickinson Studies. Overall, EDIS 2018 occasioned a rich and wonderful exchange.

Please feel free to contact Ellen Louise Hart at ehart@ucsc.edu with any questions concerning participants' ongoing work and about further gatherings.

A Tribute to Alice Parker

By George Boziwick

Bringing the formal part of the EDIS meeting to a close on Saturday afternoon, the Society honored the work of composer, conductor, musicologist, and teacher Alice Parker. The session began with Emily Seelbinder and Margaret H. Freeman, on behalf of the EDIS, offering tributes to Parker's contributions to our understanding of Dickinson's work.

"It is no exaggeration," stated Margaret Freeman, "that love and joy accompany Alice Parker wherever she goes." Parker, a longtime resident of the Pelham Hills, is a member of the local Emily Dickinson Reading Circle. Her talk, "The Music in the Words: Rhythm, Pitch and Phrasing in Two Worlds," was an exciting and compelling look into how a composer intimately engages with Emily Dickinson's world.

Parker noted that setting a suite of poems presents a journey for a composer, each poem carrying with it a capacity to "touch new places." When setting Dickinson, Parker works to achieve what she calls a "double idea." Since the poem is complete unto itself, the music should serve the poem, by wrapping itself around the poem in a manner that both amplifies yet preserves the integrity of the poem, leaving it undisturbed.

"Great poetry creates an unparalleled foundation" said Parker. A composer should strive to "keep the poem's sound values intact" and allow the music to echo those sound values. In order to do this, one must carefully plan out and construct what is often referred to by composers as pre-compositional musical activity. Here Parker engages fully with the poems, memorizing the texts, reciting, singing and even dancing, allowing the music to gestate and eventually emerge. "I dance the way I sing" mused Parker. "The rhythm often comes first," helping to create an emotional context founded solidly on Dickinson's poetic form. The suite *Heavenly Hurt, Songs of Love and*

Loss (2015) required a gestation time of eight months. "The longer the better," is Parker's formula. As a result the poems rest comfortably and completely within their musical settings.

Parker's compositional arsenal is drawn from all historical periods, most notably the American canon of hymns and folksong which has served her well for over 70 years. She noted that these traditional American musics were once the bedrock on which rested the common musical bonding of a local community. Drawing on a shared wealth of text and meter that was familiar to everyone, the community was able to participate in a rich legacy of music making. Our modern communities have become detached from this linear musical legacy. The local foundation of community, once bound by the common thread of hymnists like Watts and Wesley, has over time slipped through our cultural memory of participation, where people sought a common identification by the meters and texts of the music they knew. It is this shared commonality and spirit of hymns and meter that originally drew Parker to Dickinson.

Parker noted that in composing a cycle or suite of poems contrast is key, challenging the listener to grasp the whole and its relationship to the individual movements. In composing *Heavenly Hurt*, Parker drew from the Johnson edition of Dickinson's poems. The poet's metaphors of Beauty equaling Pain unifies this seven-movement suite, with the individual movements touching on metaphors of light/noon, winter/summer, east/west. The music of the suite's opening, "There's a certain Slant of light," (J238), with its sense of loss hidden within beauty, employs a philosophical tone, while the second movement, "The Bustle in a House" (J1078) offers pure musical contrast. The third movement, "Under the Light, yet under" (J949), explores the source of light,

ultimately seeing the distance of light as if through time.

While Dickinson's meter is an important consideration throughout the suite, the fourth movement, "Behind Me – dips Eternity –" (J721), is the suite's metrical and emotional centerpiece. Here Dickinson employs an 8-8-6-8-8-6 meter, which to Parker invokes a chorale-like hymn texture. Parker's response was to turn to the opening phrase of the famous Passion Chorale ("O Sacred Head Surrounded") that Johann Sebastian Bach used as a central element in his *St. Matthew Passion*. Parker's intentional use of this well-known hymn fragment, coupled with Dickinson's poetic transpositions of sea is sky, north is south, and midnight is noon, draws the listener into a chaotic listening space.

Movement 5, "A Shade upon the mind there passes" (J882), presents a non-hymnic 9-4-9-4 meter, subsequently altered as if by anguish, "Oh God / Why give if Thou must take away / The Loved?" Thus our journey through the suite reaches its lowest emotional point in the sixth movement, "There is a pain – so utter –" (J599). Parker treats the two poems as one, epitomizing the dull pain that persists after anguish. The final movement of the suite, "The Love a Life can show Below" (J673) explores Dickinson's contemplation of the contradictions of our existence, melding death with life, earthly love with heavenly love, creating a biblical Paradise of now which as Parker notes "resides right here."

Finally, Parker reminded us that Dickinson is accepting of the Bible as stories of life and love. She thinks deeply about them and while doing so, leads her readers into the heart of the essential mystery that embodies her "Heavenly Hurt." Following the talk we were treated to a splendid recorded performance of *Heavenly Hurt* by Parker's group Melodious Accord, 16 singers (mixed voices) with piano and cello.

The 2018 Annual Meeting was about Otherness, but many of the sessions were designed explicitly for teachers of Dickinson, at whatever level. Accordingly, for the final formal sessions, just prior to the tribute to Alice Parker, three groups of panelists addressed problems grouped under the general heading, "Teaching Our Emily Dickinsons: Pedagogical Challenges, Experiments & Futures."

Pairings: Approaches to Teaching Dickinson and Others

By Antoine Cazé

This session showed examples of how to bring together the American poet and two of the British authors who influenced her the most: William Shakespeare and Emily Brontë.

Introducing the two speakers, Alex Socarides underlined how humbling an experience it has always been for her to concoct a fresh approach to Emily Dickinson, noting that for years she had the feeling that she wasn't doing it right: Dickinson's inaccessibility was consistently confirmed by her resistance to a tidy syllabus, and by the students' questioning of any context in which she was put. Hence the possible solution of teaching her in the company of others. This, however, leads to the thorny question of how to choose whom to pair her with – Whitman? Thoreau? Lydia Sigourney? They all yield different Dickinsons. Crossing the Atlantic to place her in the company of two British writers can no doubt show us yet another facet.

Both Elizabeth Sagaser and Páraic Finnerty elaborated on the idea of *pairing* Dickinson with fellow poets of the past, as well as on what such pairings can mean, more broadly, for students to understand certain forms of *relationship*, whether between the poets themselves, or between literature and history/culture, and most importantly between literature and themselves.

Asking the question "Why teach Shakespeare's sonnets and Dickinson's poems together?" Sagaser suggested it can help students to "see the full colors of the past" by bringing them into a dialogue with Dickinson similar to the one we know Dickinson sustained with Shakespeare. Particularly important is how such a dialogue can help entwine the close reading of poems with historical inquiry. In both authors, the two are intensely combined in the first place: one can think of the degree to which the Renaissance in England and the 19th century in America are similarly centered on rhetoric and the oratory, beset by war and civil unrest, and pervaded by the omnipresence of death. Dickinson and Shakespeare are intense observers, absorbers and synthesizers of their cultural and historical surroundings; their poems are performative, dramatic, philosophical, richly aural, deftly weaving sounds and mixing registers and scales. Teaching them together may allow the class to discuss the foundations of literary studies in an introductory class for literature majors; raise the questions of Dickinson and English poetry vs. Shakespeare in 19th-century America in more advanced courses; or explore the rich links between poetry and cognition in a senior seminar.

Sagaser gave compelling examples of close reading: Shakespeare's "Sonnet 5" ("Those Hours, that with gentle work did frame") makes a good companion to Dickinson's "Essential oils are wrung" (Fr772): "How is Dickinson's poem a distillation of Shakespeare's sonnet?" Sagaser asked, showing how the question could be answered creatively, by inciting students to compose "Dickinspeare or Shakeson hybrids." Shakespeare and Dickinson were masters at creating intimacy with their readers: a reading of "Sonnet 18" ("Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?") through Dickinson can make readers into collaborators.

Next at the rostrum, Finnerty defined the idea of the "double poem" as the general concept thanks to which one could pair the two Emilys, Dickinson with Brontë – "a formal ploy in which the uttering subject becomes the poem's object." He examined Dickinson's reaction to *The poems of Currer, Ellis, & Acton Bell* (1846, 1848), a book of which she had a copy which she gave to Samuel Bowles, who then returned it; interestingly then, it was a book that meant a lot to Dickinson, but also a book she tried to get rid of. This raises issues of doubleness on several other levels: the authors' male pseudonyms as well as the fact that the Brontë sisters collaborated on the poems. These were more dramatic than lyric poems, which led Dickinson to find in them a sense of dramatic doubleness. To enrich the discussion of the context, Finnerty considered how Dickinson's contemporaries reacted to Ellis Bell's poetry by studying the reviews of the Brontë sisters' volume; Charlotte Brontë's own judgment that Ellis's poetry was "not at all like poetry women generally write" can be said to frame Dickinson's reading.

Finnerty concluded with a close reading of two poems by Ellis Bell, "Faith and Despondency" and "The Philosopher." The former is the first Bell/Brontë poem Emily Dickinson is likely to have read; it stages a skeptical father and a faithful daughter, and creates a dramatic dialogue without coming to a resolution. In it, we can see Brontë offering Dickinson a dramatization of the divided self, in turn a central trope in the American Emily's poetry. "The Philosopher" is also a dialogue, this time between a seer who has visions of another world and a rational philosopher who cannot have such visions; it is an unsettling poem staging another irreconcilable pair of opposites. Such characteristics of form and content can throw light on many a Dickinson poem, such as for instance "This World is not conclusion" (Fr373), in which the dramatic dialogue found in Brontë is fused and compressed into a single, self-split voice raising metaphysical and philosophical issues.

Dickinson, Pedagogy and Experiment in Secondary Education

By Eleanor Heginbotham

Dickinson study's future in the academy is secured; if the spirit and imagination of three teachers whose own imaginative visions of Dickinson are at all representative, Dickinson studies will thrive, indeed will be transformed. Having been awarded varying grants to try their experiments and test their visions, José Reyes of Marlborough Massachusetts, Stephen Eric Berry of Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Sara Brock of Port Washington, New York, created challenges for their students that yielded the remarkable results they showed us toward the end of an already packed day – and kept the more seasoned readers, in Dickinson's words, "breathlessly interested."

"Much Madness is divinest Sense" (Fr620) and "I dwell in Possibility" (Fr466) were cornerstone poems for José Reyes and his colleague Lindsay Shomphe to encourage their students in collaborative reading that would emphasize questioning every word, phrase, thought. Ask as many questions about a text without stopping, they told their students: The question will shape the answer. "QFT," or Question Formulation Technique, a process described by Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana in *Make Just One Change* (Harvard 2011), led their students to reflect on the process of the poet and to express through their own group process a new formation of the old thought: a hat garnished with quotations from "madness," for example, or a power point or a stop action video.

Just so but with another twist, Eric Berry's research project in Chelsea, Michigan's high school, introduced Dickinson to 47 juniors through PBS's *Voices and Visions*, then moved beyond the film to their own creations. The goal, explained Berry, was to make new art out of salvaged items, "like the wheels of verbs" or "addicting love" on a candy wrapper. As Berry pointed out, many students had never written on *paper*, only on their computers; the boundedness of a slip of paper or a candy wrapper becomes part of the process of distillation that marks Dickinson's work – and now that of these 47 students.

"Tell it Slant," was the project Sara Brock introduced to her New York sophomore students. Brock, too, kept the audience "breathlessly interested" as she showed the results of cross-disciplinary work in photography, film, and Dickinson texts. Space here does not allow for describing the fun of seeing Rudy's interpretation of the truth dazzling gradually or Lucy's comic strip on a poem as a frigate or Amy's on the poet being shut up in prose. "The possible slow fuse is lit by the imagination," said Brock, as she showed example after example of the work of Ellie, Eric, Karla, and others, some of whom may one day appear as panelists at EDIS meetings to which the rest of us will be wheeled in.

Pedagogical Approaches to an Embodied Dickinson

By Daniel Manheim

Elizabeth Petrino, chairing the final session, described her Fairfield University students' visits to the Homestead, during which she invites them to consider the household as a productive domestic space. She placed them on the alert for signs of labor and luxury; class and social security; a realm that is dependent on the work of women. She pointed out that the words Dickinson scrawled on a piece of paper covering French chocolate, "necessitates celerity," could not better represent the paradoxes of Dickinson's labor and her leisure too.

Marianne Noble's pedagogical approach was the truest embodiment of a poet who made many efforts to avoid embodied representations of herself to the world. Near the end of the semester, she invites her students to find their own ways of expressing their experience of Dickinson's poems. The most vividly memorable submission was by a student who presented images of herself in various yoga poses, evoking different aspects of each poem, such as negative and positive space, immediate intensity, animation, aspiration, and grace. Noble challenged the audience to discern the poem that lay within various poses. It proved difficult, but with more practice and careful study, readings would have grown more accurate.

In the third session, Dan Manheim considered what a visit to the Homestead can teach students about reading. One voyager, recalling, perhaps, that a stanza is just a room in the house of a poem, described the revelation of discovering how the Homestead is configured in complicated ways: entering a room opens up multiple possibilities, just like entering a poem. Another student admitted that while he did not really feel closer to individual poems after visiting the house, he did feel close to the presences of other visitors – Dickinson is embodied in the devoted honor of her acolytes. He described the little box of letters that used to lie next to her grave: letters in foreign languages with strange scripts brought him close to remote bodies, as they shared their common fascination.

Finally, Brooke Steinhauser presented a lively account of Homestead tours she has arranged or squired, from girl scouts to octogenarians, life-long learners all. She described the tourists' recognition of the guides' devotion to the poet; and she talked about the pleasure of figuring out what it takes to "turn" a reluctant visitor, one who, perhaps dragged along by family, school group, or friends, resists hearing who Dickinson really was. For one boy it was the opportunity to play Bruno Mars on Martha Dickinson Bianchi's piano; for another it might be a line well quoted by a guide or simply a view of the light in the bedroom. Indeed, the opportunity to write in her room may be the essential experience of the Homestead. Visiting writers have swooned: "She was there with me"; the room is "the seam between Dickinson's life and art."

What's Your Story?

Series Editor, Diana Wagner

An Interview with Marcy Tanter

Marcy Tanter is professor of English at Tarleton State University in Stephenville, TX, where she teaches the American literature survey, African American literature, introduction to literature, technical writing, and a host of upper-level and graduate courses which often include the work of Emily Dickinson and women poets of the long 19th century. Her most recent scholarship is focused on Korean tv dramas (or K-dramas).

Q: How did you first meet Emily Dickinson?

I was an undergraduate at UMass Amherst and David Porter was my advisor. First semester freshman year I was in a sophomore literature class with him and we were working on our first paper and I was panicked. I knew Emily Dickinson was buried in the town cemetery so I bought a sandwich and found her gravesite. I talked with her about the paper I wanted to write and asked for her help. I went home, wrote the paper and made an A. I've never said a bad thing about her since. ;)

Q: Your first book, *The Influence of Nineteenth-Century British Writers on Emily Dickinson: A Study of Her Library and Letters (2014)*, really tries to get at the question of Dickinson's literary lineage. Why is it important to know this about authors, generally, and Dickinson, in particular?

I think it helps to understand an author's work if you have a sense of their literary and intellectual forebears. Dickinson quotes texts or mentions authors quite a bit in her letters and there are definite allusions and echoes in her poems – for me, having a sense of her personal literary history gives me a perspective of her work that I wouldn't have otherwise and helps me situate her within her century instead of seeing her as an anomaly. She was a poet of her time and has a lot in common with her same-era peers.

Q: Your second book, *Martha Dickinson Bianchi 1866-1943: An American Poet of the First World War (2015)*, gives a much-needed study of Mattie as a writer and intellectual in her own right. Do you consider Mattie a descen-



Photo Credit: Tarleton State University

Q: As education, even higher education, becomes more obsessed with outcomes, how do we explain to colleagues the practical use of studying someone like Dickinson?

Thank you for that kind appreciation! Mattie was a pianist before she was an author. She wanted to play professionally but was sidelined by her own illness and her father's death. Writing became a kind of solace for her, especially after Ned died, so I think the creative spark was in her, as it was in her aunt AND her mother. Susan Dickinson was also a writer, so Mattie descends from both of those older women but she had her own voice and her own things to say. Her last book of poems, *The Wandering Eros* (1925), contains some great war poetry that I encourage everyone to read. I don't have any evidence that Mattie shared poems with her aunt at any point, but of course the contact they did have would have influenced Mattie somewhat.

Q: Your work has led you to become a scholar of Korean culture. Given Dickinson's popularity in Asia, how is her work received in Korea? Does anything about Dickinson's reception in Korea surprise you?

She is not as popular in Korea as she is in Japan, but I spent last semester teaching a

Dickinson seminar to students at Dongguk University in Seoul, and they liked her very much. They had heard of her but were not familiar with her poetry. Poetry is still an important genre in Korea for the reading public; there isn't a translation of Franklin or Johnson available. Some poems have been translated, but they are mostly the heavily-edited versions from the 1890s.

Q: As education, even higher education, becomes more obsessed with outcomes, how do we explain to colleagues the practical use of studying someone like Dickinson?

Employers tell us that they are having trouble finding employees with strong critical thinking and writing skills. If there is one thing we get from teaching/learning about Dickinson in a practical sense, it's critical thinking skills! Learning how to read her poems, teasing out and unfolding meanings and explications are great exercises for the brain and do help with critical thinking and analysis. Difficult poetry isn't bad poetry, it's just poetry that has to be carefully explored and considered. A student who figures out how to understanding Dickinson and can explain what they understand in a clear way will be an employee who has strong critical thinking skills.

Q: If there is only one big thing you want people to know about ED, what is it?

That she was a real person, not a mythological spectre. She was a woman who lived a good life that was sometimes troubled, just like the lives many of us live. She was affected by the patriarchal society that surrounded her and did what she could to be her own self and had the courage to expose her vulnerabilities on paper.



Counter-clockwise from top left (collected from EDIS members by the editor): Marianne Noble explaining the yoga of a Dickinson poem; Cris-tanne Miller and Antoine Cazé considering some new ideas at the pedagogy session; Ellen Hart posing a question of a speaker; former EDIS President Margaret Freeman; a musket, presumably not a loaded gun, stamped "Amherst College Gymnasium"; and Martha Nell Smith presenting gifts of appreciation to out-going EDIS Board Secretary Nancy List Pridgen, in honor of her years of service to the Board and to the Society.

The Bulletin editor is immensely grateful to LeeAnn Gorthey for all the images on this page except the musket, as well as for other images from the Annual Meeting, as marked.

Anyone attending Annual Meetings and International Conferences is encouraged to submit photographs to the Bulletin for possible inclusion in the issue following the event.



Introducing Barbara Mossberg EDIS President



ME! Come! My dazzled face
In such a shining place!
Me! Hear! My foreign ear
The sounds of welcome near!
The saints shall meet
Our bashful feet.
My holiday shall be
That they remember me;
My paradise, the fame
That they pronounce my name.
(Poems 1896)

And so we carry this charge, this Society of ours, to pronounce Emily Dickinson's name; to welcome her into our hearts and minds, to let her meanings and intentions simmer and shimmer, brim and burnish, flourish and nourish in us; to let

this so-called (by herself) "little" "Nobody" be known to our world. For what is at stake in Dickinson being known? And known by people for whom she could matter utterly? What are the stakes for Dickinson being taught, and read, and studied, and heard, and seen, and understood? What is lost to us if she is lost to us? And what is to be gained, if she is seen whole, in all her complexity?

I think about this: I think about this more and more – these questions are what I think we in the Emily Dickinson International Society give ourselves to, this issue of preserving, like the precious remaining wilderness, this wild spirit who lived on earth so consciously, this unique consciousness who yet seems to speak to each of us, in all our diversity, one at a time, each with the conviction she breaks through to our being, breaks barriers we didn't know existed, or know how to let down. Sure, she shatters us; she is so honest. But what is it that speaks to people seemingly so different from her, in language and culture and identity? Perhaps Dickinson gives voice to the need in each of us to belong, to matter utterly to our world, to be seen, to hunger, to rejoice, to sorrow, to know, to contest, to interrogate. Our smallest and largest selves: our funniest, our most defiant, our most irreverent, our most reverent, our most devastated, our most earnest.

My sense of us as a Society is of a devoted assemblage of readers (still, in this day and age) who, ourselves moved, utterly moved, often transformed, illuminated by, and known by, Emily Dickinson, exemplify work to bring her to the public, and support new ways, in ways that make her cherished to new generations of readers (yet), across media, across culture, across disciplines, across time and space. My sense of the Emily Dickinson we labor to make known to the world as a dynamic force is of somebody infinitely global, needed now more than ever in our compressed and fragmented lives. As she said the "brain is wider than the sky," she is wider than the headline news. We need her, and we are still learning what she says to us in our day and world, and astonished at how she leads us, perhaps as Rumi wrote, "to a mighty kindness."

This Society is comprised of remarkable people, leaders in their fields as scholars, performers, teachers, writers. Just to recognize and acknowledge and honor your work is a large part of this Society, a Society where you are seen and known.

I began with this Society in its embryonic stages over thirty years ago. A few of us were at a conference in Ohio, sitting on a hotel room bed, reflecting on the papers we had just given on Dickinson – we were outliers, then, in our own institutions, and to the field, with this interest in Dickinson, and we said, you know, we need to continue this conversation – we need a community context in which to do our work; we should be a society! We could have a newsletter! We could have a journal! This was pie in the sky: Tis so much joy! I was then beginning as the U.S. Scholar in Residence in Washington, D.C., to represent American higher education and scholarship at the federal level, and so I had moved to Washington, and got the Washington Historical Society with the great baroque-ish iconic building to host

us. We flew in from all the various states, each paying this ourselves, as we talked about what this Society would be. I made the case for having International in our title, in order to remind us constantly of the increasingly global implications of her work and opportunities for our Society's impact. We were acting real and we became real. I got my husband's international law firm, Coudert Brothers, to host us and to do our legal work for free to launch our formal Society. Our son, age six, cooked for us at our receptions at my house! Our first meeting we planned was in Washington at the Mayflower Hotel. For the conference, Dickinson dignitaries flew in from around the world. And we were off.

It is now more than thirty years. We are an august organization. I brim with pride in how this Society has taken shape and is a formidable player in academe and beyond, a generative body encouraging and supporting tremendous new work. I was our founding vice president of fledgling EDIS, and my life, made global and off the grid and whole by my work on Dickinson, brought me to commit once again to be our vice president, shadowing our president in the past years to imagine possibilities ahead. Being our president at this stage of my life will be momentous. Turning 70 at the Annual Meeting, I am thinking of the commitment of time and energies by which one will hang one's hat. I see my hat hung, in terms of my life and career, with the promotion and support of work on Emily Dickinson. She has been my companion, changing my own life as a scholar, teacher, poet, family, and friend, including making me a cultural diplomat and college president – yes, it was she, this "little" "nobody" who has got me into, and out of, such shenanigans. She has put me on stage for a one-woman show, "Fat Lady Flying," my career going around the world speaking on and supporting the work on Emily Dickinson, and in countless theaters, embassies, libraries, and institutions for my annual reading/performance for her birthday, complete with home-made ginger bread; I've read her at leadership meetings around the world, in Yosemite National Park summer programs, in senior centers, high schools, assisted living and hospice, college president retreats, academic conferences, law and medical meetings, and educational retreats.

She is the epigraph for my every speech for environmental causes. She is the heart of my eco literature courses. I can't teach John Muir without her, or Thoreau. Drama. War and peace. Health. Women's voices. Gender. American conscience. Revolutionary imagination. Diversity. Chaos theory. Shelley and Eliot. Music. I began the University Common Reading of *Between the World and Me* with Dickinson as the lens to the exploration of race and identity. I just was lecturing on her in Oxford on Sir Christopher Wren's architecture and their shared experience of the eye – along with James Joyce and others. Because of her I have encountered the black snakes of the temple of Borobudur, and done Grand Rounds for University of Utah Medical School, whose physicians and medical students and staff all read her in an extended four-day retreat on empathy, and have experienced my life not only more richly, but have had it lead me in ways I never would have gone. My own poetry and drama is of a piece with Dickinson in my head; it is a way of thinking, inextricable from the mystery and miracle of her lines.

There is bravery as well as bravura in Dickinson's work, and a kind of courage there to face the sorrows and losses and traumas. She helped me be a better college president; I could not have done it without her. She changed my life with my mom – and my whole family. Her poetry is our ritual shorthand of love and understanding. She is a life companion whose work is always new to me, always a surprise, sometimes literally breath-taking, always humbling, in how I actually have no clue what she can mean, and how her mind works.

I know I am a fractal of each of us, each of our stories, this gratitude, of how we came to Dickinson, or she to us, as we struggle to make matter of our lives. There is a precious need and startling rigor in our community, as we share our commitments and energies and sense of a life and culture illuminated by hers. I think the work and being of our Society is of tremendous importance today, providing leadership in humanities and our nation's civic life, alliances in humanities and interdisciplinary societies and conferences, and new directions in publishing, and public arts, and teaching, and support for students and faculty of the next generations, increasingly diverse. I am honored by the Board, with whom I have been learning over the past years as Vice President under the mentorship of Martha Nell Smith the various aspects of serving in this role. I bring my sense of honor and your trust, my passion and belief in what we each contribute, to work in Emily Dickinson studies what the world needs now more than ever. It was this world she believed would make her voice come to life, her life acquire meaning and renown, and it was this world, our world, our Society, us, on which she hung her hat. We give to Dickinson not a happy ending so much as a continuous new life – and our own gravitas and lift in the process. As a Society, we continue to live in Possibility, and be the shining place Dickinson imagined she would find herself dazzled in our fellow minds.

This essay is (minimally) adapted from the statement President Mossberg wrote explaining to the Society's members why she wanted to serve and what she would bring to the presidency of EDIS.

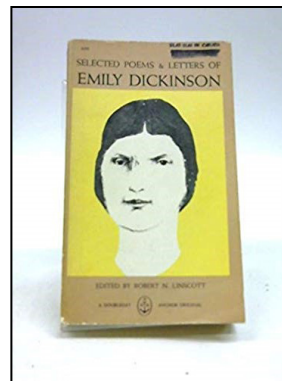
Poet to Poet

Series Editor, Jonnie Guerra

In this issue, I am privileged to feature two poets, Diane Seuss and Adrienne Su. Like Emily Dickinson, both have spent a considerable part of their lives in college towns located in rural settings. Seuss had a long teaching career at Kalamazoo College, where she still currently resides. Su is poet-in-residence at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and she has made her home in Carlisle since 2000. Both Seuss and Su have found aspects of Dickinson's biography and work to be sustaining in their own choices about the essentials of life and of poetry. Like Dickinson, both have earned praise for their abilities to "Distill . . . amazing sense / From Ordinary Meanings." Diane Seuss is the author of four collections of poetry: *It Blows You Hollow* (New Issues Press, 1998); *Wolf Lake, White Gown Blown Open* (U of Mass Press, 2010), winner of the *Juniper Prize for Poetry*; *Four-Legged Girl* (Graywolf Press, 2015), finalist for the *Pulitzer Prize*; and, *Still Life with Two Dead Peacocks and a Girl* (Graywolf Press, 2018). Adrienne Su also is the author of four books of poems: *Middle Kingdom* (Alice James Books, 1997) and three collections published by Manic D Press, *Sanctuary* (2006), *Having None of It* (2009), and *Living Quarters* (2015). Her awards include an NEA fellowship, a Pushcart Prize, and several prestigious residencies. The poetry of both women also has appeared on websites and in numerous journals and/or anthologies. As the poems selected to accompany their reflections suggest, Seuss and Su share Emily Dickinson's love of plants and gardening.

The Only One

By Diane Seuss



My first experience of Emily Dickinson was when I was eleven years old and I discovered the 1959 edition of her *Selected Poems and Letters* in my older sister's secret bookshelf behind a sliding door in the headboard of her bed. Dickinson was sandwiched between *Forever Amber* and *Valley of the Dolls*. All three books interested me equally. What I remember is being compelled by the graphic of Dickinson on the book's cover – a strange-looking woman with wide-apart eyes and a quizzical expression against a bright yellow background – and the look of her poems, shorter even than some of the nursery rhymes I still loved, and the thinness of the paper on which they were printed, which added to my feeling that I had encountered something precious and fragile, like a leaf pressed for years between the pages of a heavy book. A poet. A girl.

I never studied Dickinson's poetry in a classroom. She was not taught in my high school, nor was she part of American Lit, the gateway course to the English major in college. We read Emerson, Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville, essays, stories, and novels, but no poetry, no Emily – no women at all. Although I wrote what I thought of as poems – intense and formless – I did not consider myself a poet, and I was not yet free-thinking enough to question the syllabus of that course or any other. I was raised by a single mother in working class rural Michigan. Most of my college peers were what we would have called "well-off," products

Permission Not to Go

By Adrienne Su

My literary sensibility was formed mainly in cities, but like many poets who teach full-time, I find, at mid-career, that I have spent most of my adult life in a small town, in my case, Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Early on, as a twentysomething aspiring poet in New York City, where I felt most like my true self but could not find a job that fit, I knew I might end up somewhere rural. But the prospect was abstract, and conditions developed gradually.

Dickinson College (named not after Emily but John), where I teach, contributes to its surroundings in the same way most colleges far from urban centers do. It hosts free concerts, art shows, panel discussions, and literary events; supplies space for a food bank; and voluntarily pays real-estate taxes. It supports community efforts to protect air quality and waterways, as Carlisle sits at the intersection of two major highways and has become the site for a large number of Amazon warehouses. And the college draws guest speakers, students, and faculty from all over the nation and world, enriching daily life.

At the same time, the town-gown divide is palpable. Every fall, our students clog the limited street parking, often in expensive vehicles with Connecticut or New York plates. Many faculty members flee as soon as classes end, if they don't already live elsewhere; Baltimore and Philadelphia are challenging but not impossible commutes. For most it is because their families live far away, their spouses can't find work here, and/or because their research requires travel, but it would be false to deny that it's also because many have dismissed the town as provincial. Despite efforts to adapt, we bemoan the narrow range of restaurants and their short-sighted use of Styrofoam to-go contain-

Poet to Poet



Photo Credit: Gabe Montesanti

of the wealthy suburbs circling Detroit. Good clothes. Good hair. Good high school educations. I showed up on my first day of college, a scholarship kid, wearing men's overalls from Goodwill and braids. My high school had been in the middle of a pasture. A creek ran behind it, a good place to hide when I skipped class, which I did as often as possible. I was intimidated by the stately brick buildings of the college, the lush landscaping and too-green grass, the bubbling fountain in the central square, and professors who seemed so confident in what they knew and their place in the scheme of things. I couldn't imagine them feeling wrong, or marginal, or strange. Who was I to question the space in the classroom that could have only been filled by Dickinson?

I didn't get to know her until I became a professor of creative writing at the very college I had once attended. I had made it my pedagogical goal to become the teacher I wished I'd had, and to stay true to my marginality, which I had learned was essential to my writing and my personhood, setting up camp on the metaphorical edge of academia and inviting the students to join me there. I knew the students would need Dickinson, and Whitman too, as knowing their work, and them, is crucial to what came later, including the contemporary moment. And so I taught myself, and I taught myself as I taught my students, and I sought Dickinson's guidance in order to do so, via her poems and her life. To know her took time. Years. It required following bread crumbs – "Area – no test of depth," written on a scrap found among her papers. Her herbarium, begun in adolescence, where she pressed, arranged, and labeled, usually with their Latin names, plants gathered on and beyond her father's property. Morsels of biography – the white dress, more lab coat than symbol of purity, more utilitarian than eccentric, designed by Dickinson herself with pockets large enough for plant samples. The tonal intricacy of her letter reaching out to Thomas Wentworth Higginson – "Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?" And the poems, compressed as the black cakes she was known for, as improvisational in syntax, rhyme sounds, metrics, as jazz, and taken together, sewn into fascicles, an autobiography of the mind and an inimitable theology.

ers, buy pricey organic food, and hold up cultural events to the urban standard. When recruiting new colleagues, we always make the case that Carlisle is "only three and a half hours" from New York City, implicitly affirming that there is nothing here.

I plead guilty to many of these offenses. I read more national and international than local news, spend a relative fortune on food, drive a Prius, and almost always have a plane ticket for some date in the near future. I relish my time in cities.

Yet my travel is almost always for work or family; it is seldom a getaway. My more exalted food shopping is mostly from local farmers. Running a household alone with children and pets, I do a tremendous amount of unpaid domestic labor year-round and as a result can never spend more than about three hours in an ivory tower. The way I spend my time is reflected in the outward subject matter of some of my poems, especially my most recent book, *Living Quarters*, which focuses on four regions of a house.

In my eighteen years here, I've had three sabbaticals. Watching colleagues rent out their houses to take sabbaticals in far-flung places, I have spent all of mine in this borough of 18,500, away from the worldly pleasures of New York or even Philadelphia, except for short trips.

In part, joint custody has forced me to do this, and perhaps when my kids are grown, I'll go away, too, but – aside from the fact that it is much harder to get funding to make up the salary cut – staying put has never seemed a bad artistic choice. Instead of house-hunting, finding new schools and doctors, preparing the house for renters, and moving, I get to start writing the minute I post final grades.

While I have certainly worried that any woman poet who writes more than a few poems on domestic topics – cooking, gardening, buying groceries – is likely to be marginalized, Emily Dickinson has always been a pillar in my head, making the best argument for the potential profundity of mundane topics, as well as the irrelevance of the poet's demographics, if the poems are strong.



Photo Credit: Guy Freeman

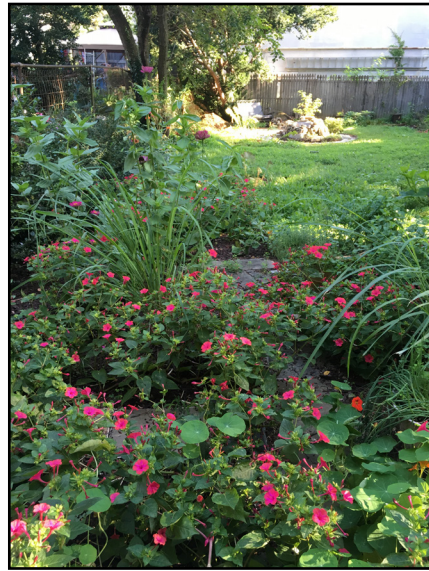
Poet to Poet

In the netherworld beneath books and classrooms is my private one-on-one with Dickinson herself, whose example provided me with a way to make sense of the shape of my own life. I had to defy the Dickinson of conventional lore – the spinster who rarely left her father’s house, the oddball lady poet who wrote about flowers and grasshoppers and birds – in order to understand her choices for what they were: an audacious commitment to poetry despite the restrictions of gender and history. I too have whittled my life down to a few essentials. I have my own house, mortgaged to the hilt – my father was dead by the time I was seven and I did not have the option to live in his – but I have located myself not far from the place where I grew up, and it has continued to be enough for all of the poems I could ever write. I rarely socialize. I pretend to be gregarious, but small talk takes a toll. My companion is my dog, not unlike Emily’s Carlo, named after a dog in *Jane Eyre*, who accompanied her everywhere. In my earlier years, I tended to focus on my life’s deficits. As I was working on my third book, *Four-Legged Girl*, I realized that poetry was and had always been all I needed, that I had unconsciously set up my life so that I could maintain my devotion to it. That loneliness – and this I learned from Emily – is one of the conditions of poetry.

A few years ago I was able to visit her house in Amherst. I was fascinated by her child-sized desk, the Aeolian harp wedged in the window, her father’s study with its book-laden shelves, but I didn’t *feel* her there as I had hoped. Finally I wandered up Triangle Street to West Cemetery and her grave, a pale tablet in the family plot behind a wrought iron fence, etched with the phrase from her last known letter, “Called back.” What was it like, I wondered, to be her. She must have felt so lonely in her singularity. I pictured her in her narrow bed, her small hands balled into fists. *The only one*. I spoke one of her poems out loud – “After great pain, a formal feeling comes.” Touched her cold stone. Then, I felt her. Finally. Right there with me.



“A narrow Fellow in the Grass”; “A Bird, came down the Walk”; “The Bat is dun, with wrinkled Wings”; “She sights a Bird – she chuckles –”; “The Sky is low – the Clouds are mean –”; “The morns are meeker than they were” – all seem to have taken place in Dickinson’s backyard in Amherst. Poems such as these remind me that what I crave is available right here, and while I treasure the chance to seek inspiration in a world-class museum or the restaurant of a famous chef, there is no excuse for not simply going outside for it, when more exalted things are out of reach.



Behind my house, in an unkempt yard, appear many of the same entities through which Dickinson reveals the universe: bees, a robin, worms, a neighbor’s cat, squirrels, flies, butterflies, clover, dew, spiders, sunlight, snow, even a few inadvertent roses.

The Dickinson poem that gives me heart in this context is not particularly about flora or fauna, although it contains a little of each:

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

Some – keep the Sabbath, in Surplice –
I – just wear my wings –
And instead of tolling the bell, for church –
Our little Sexton – sings –

“God” – preaches – a noted Clergyman –
And the sermon is never long,
So – instead of getting to Heaven – at last –
I’m – going – all along! (Fr236)

In my take on this poem, the townspeople are a population of intellectuals and artists. Everyone is seeking not after God but intellectual and creative fruition. The “church” is every site of

Poet to Poet

Self-Portrait With Herbarium

I bought pre-moistened bathing cloths for invalids in order to avoid the shared bathroom and shower. I did not want to eat with the others, so I lived on Saltine crackers I stored in a metal container to keep away moisture, and wormy apples from the orchard.

I walked the grounds only after dark, and often ducked beneath the low arbor to visit the graves of the founders to thank them for the trees and meadows, the small gray squirrels and the toads that leapt with every step I took, and all the plants

that composed my herbarium. I took pleasure less in the plants themselves than in their categorization. I went to the library often, but only in the dead of night. We each had a key, which revealed to me a degree of trust that seemed, at best, naïve.

Some nights, but rarely, I came upon some other lost soul out looking at the moon, which was gold and swollen. I worried—did she?—that it would break open and spill its seed over the meadows. To me, the animals, deer and foxes and such,

seemed terribly lonely. Even the pond shivered in its loneliness, and the mountain, for as far as the eye could see there was nothing to which it could compare itself. Owls called out to each other but were only answered by cemeteries.

How did I return to the world? One night I walked beyond the stone gate, not through any intention of escape, but only to seek a rare flower I could press in the pages of a heavy book and add to my collection. One quiet

foot in front of the other until I found myself walking faster, as if pursued, though no one was invested in calling me back. Still, at dawn, I felt like a freed prisoner. The purple night lifted its heavy curtain

on a day like an unripe peach, orange and softly green and curved. Mist lifted away from the fields revealing that what I’d thought were boulders were actually cows, reddish, lifting their white faces to look in my direction.

By Diane Seuss
Reprinted by permission of the author

ostensible worldliness: urban centers, prestigious conferences, the inner circles of leaders in every field. To “keep the Sabbath,” as I read the poem in my current context, is to create something of potentially lasting value.

Dickinson’s poem criticizes worshipers who think spirituality can be found only in the outer forms of the church (“a Chorister,” “a Dome,” “Surplice,” “the bell,” “the sermon”) and affirms her independent path toward God. Able to worship “staying at Home,” she has several advantages over them: She doesn’t have to put on her Sunday best, the Sexton (a bird) is right outside her house, she doesn’t have to endure lengthy sermons, and most of all, she doesn’t have to wait until death to “[get] to Heaven.” Instead, she is “going – all along!”

That last line shouts gleefully, its solitary triumph made un-solitary by faith in its future readers. Its speaker seems to know that someday her iconoclasm will be vindicated, even embraced, and that the fashions of literary publishing are temporary. It reminds me that the highest truths are accessible wherever you are, if you can shed your assumptions about what constitutes worldliness, then open your mind at just the right angle.

Weeding

Uproot them from our nation!
The decisive twist and give
augur transformation:
ragged to tended, anarchic

to formed, almost ruined
to almost beautiful. Wilted piles
molder in bags, destined
for rebirth as matter less reviled,

mulch or dirt to send up fruit.
Less than human, less than plant,
they mustn’t reproduce.
Hacked, choked, smothered by hand,

they die for what they represent:
speed, persistence, fecundity.
Anything so successful and abundant
can weather the adversity.

“Weeding” by Adrienne Su, from *Living Quarters* ©2015. Reprinted with the permission of publisher and author.

Visualizing Dickinson

“Waking Up Through Words”

Lesley Dill and the Poetry of Emily Dickinson

By Maryanne Garbowsky

The work of Lesley Dill was last described in the Bulletin in volume 5, Winter 1993. In that article, Susanna Rich described how, in Dill's own words, “words . . . are a kind of spiritual armor, an intervening skin between ourselves and the world. How nice to slip inside words . . . and go out into life. To look inside your closet and find the right fit . . . and coat your vulnerability with a shell of surrogacy.” The Hinged Poem Dress (below, reprinted from the earlier article) enacts what she describes. A new exhibition of Dill's works prompts Bulletin “Visualizing Dickinson” editor Maryanne Garbowsky to revisit the work of an artist who remains fascinated with the poet.

I met Lesley Dill in the late 1990s. She was the first artist I interviewed for what would become my book, *Double Vision: Contemporary Artists Look at the Poetry of Emily Dickinson* (2002). And what a memorable interview it was. I can still recall Dill greeting me with a worn, obviously well-used book of the poems of Emily Dickinson, holding it out to me like some private talisman that brought us together. She then spoke animatedly and with great enthusiasm about how the words of the poet had struck her like “a bullet,” like “lightning.” I was struck too, not only by her excitement and eagerness to describe Dickinson's inspiration, but by her art's blend of word and image.

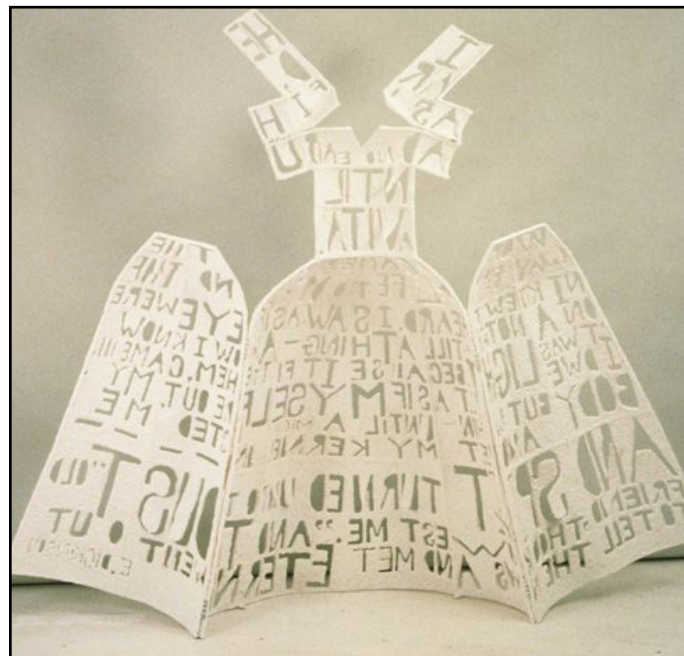
Dickinson has been Dill's “muse” for many years (Wayne), “an artistic catalyst” (Keefer). Over the years, the artist has used Dickinson's poems as a foundation on which to construct her visual art. “Black Poem Suit,” mixed media on a metal armature, was the first work to use the poet's words. Another, “Rolled Up Poem Girl,” mixed media on muslin, was done in 1995, and one of her most famous, “White Poem Dress,” was completed in 1993.

But Dill's fascination with Emily Dickinson did not end there: still reading Dickinson's poems, Dill continues to find inspiration. She describes the poetry and its impact on her vividly: it has been “food for her soul . . . a special food that worked” (Keefer). She is “still far from filled” (Garbowsky). When asked back in the 90's if she were finished with her work with Dickinson, she was quick to answer no. Now, more than 20 years later, we see that she has kept her promise.

Earlier this year, Nohra Haime Gallery, in Chelsea (New York City) presented a solo exhibition of Dill's work, which opened on February 14th and ran until March 17th. The show then travelled to Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury, Connecticut, where it was on view from June 24th until September 2nd. The title of the exhibit, “Wilderness: Words Are Where What I Catch Is Me,” was taken from a poem by Tom Sleigh, whose words, according to Dill, have the same powerful, evocative quality as Dickinson's poems. In an interview, Dill described her new show as a “turning point because for the first time I am looking to

history as a context and theme” (Wayne). In addition to “her beloved Emily Dickinson,” Dill includes work featuring outstanding figures from American history and literature, among them Anne Hutchinson, Edward Taylor, Mary Rowlandson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Walt Whitman, and Sojourner Truth.

Her work involves a personal journey too: the “themes stir something deep in my New England roots,” her family arriving in the new world in 1634 (McCoy). She has always been attracted to the idea of the wilderness, admitting that to be one of the things that drew her to Emily Dickinson. Dill recounts the impact that her mother's gift of a volume of Emily Dickinson's poems had on her: “It changed my life! . . . As I



Hinged Poem Dress (open) metal.

Visualizing Dickinson

turned the pages, phrases jumped off and flew down my throat like birds. In a place deep inside me, images for art making began to be born” (Wayne).

In the exhibition, there are free standing, eight-foot sculptures, clothing without bodies to fill them. Words and letters are visible on these forms. On one of them, Dickinson's poem “Omnipotence Enough” (“To be alive – is Power –” [Fr876]) is sprawled across and around a white dress with a long, pointed collar. Varied in size and shape, some words are readable while others are not; some letters are capitalized while others



Works from the exhibition at Nohra Haime Gallery, Spring 2018.

are in lower case; some bold and emphatic, while others are light. Dill reflects the strength of the language in the way she uses these letters and words. Using stencils “with (a) different medley of fonts,” she chooses her sizes and fonts almost as though she were making, as she puts it, “a giant musical crossword puzzle. I hum and rock and speed-choose – 8” Gothic A, then Dauphin 2’ . . . I weave lines of language together. I think of them as music. . . .” (Wayne). For this particular dress, Dill worked with oil stick on fabric. The standing clothing absent a body is meaningful to her: “These eight-foot sculptures are personae, not just clothing. They . . . speak the slow nature of how the body lives with and absorbs language as an internal tattoo.” Clothing, she says, “houses the house that houses the soul” (McCoy).

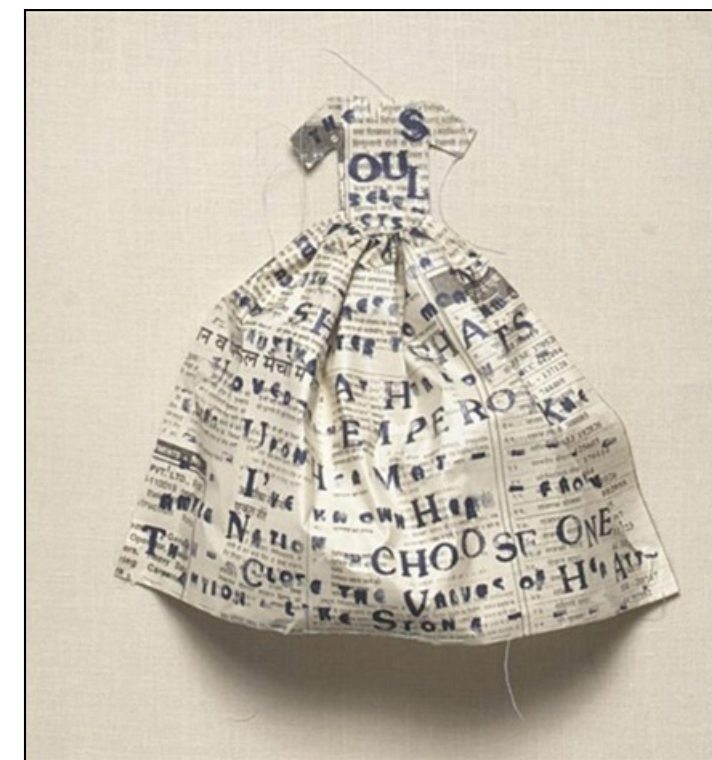
The exhibition also includes drawings, one entitled “Emily Dickinson and Voices of Her Time” (2017), which incorporates other literary and historic figures such as Walt Whitman, who “like Dickinson defined a very distinctive American voice in poetry” (Wayne). Another drawing, entitled “Poet” (2016), uses the poem “This Was a Poet” along with Dickinson's daguerreotype on the chest of a standing figure in the center of the image.

But Dill's love of Dickinson has not been restricted to the visual arts alone. She has worked for many years on an opera, *Divide Light*, which had its New York premiere in April, 2018. The opera celebrates the poet – “Her poetry, her words, stand tall as identity and narrative,” Dill says; “It's her words that are the story, not the persona” (McCoy).

To Dill, the visual arts demand more than an image; “There has to be language” (McCoy). Dill's grasp, her reaching into the well of words, specifically those of Dickinson, has been enriching, enlightening, and ongoing. Receiving that volume of Dickinson's poems was for her a “moment of awakening.” She recalls that “I thought, Ohh, I have a magic book” (McCoy). That it has been, and lovers of Dickinson and of art are hopeful it will continue to be for the uniquely talented artist Lesley Dill.

Bibliographic Note

Quotations come from three interviews with Lesley Dill: Bob Keefer's “Poetry in Motion,” from the Register-Guard (Eugene, Oregon), 27 September 2012; “Lesley Dill with Ann McCoy,” in The Brooklyn Rail, 7 February 2018; and Leslie Wayne's “Lesley Dill on her New Work,” from the New York blogazine, Two Coats of Paint, 28 January 2018; in addition to Maryanne Garbowsky's own book, *Contemporary Artists Look at Emily Dickinson* (2002).



One of the early works that got Maryanne Garbowsky interested in the work of Lesley Dill, *Small Poem Dress (The Soul Selects)*, 1993, is done in lithographic ink, thread, and newsprint laid on linen backed board.

After Emily: An Interview with Biographer Julie Dobrow

By Marta Werner

“What are these drives, so compelling that they warp people’s lives?”

– Millicent Todd Bingham, reflecting on her own life editing Dickinson’s poems.

After Emily illuminates more fully than ever before the intricate net of desires, both conscious and unconscious, that led Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham to undertake the editing of Emily Dickinson’s writings that secured their place in literary history while irreversibly altering the trajectory of their own lives. For me, the force of Dobrow’s portrait of Todd, the better known and more mythologized (sometimes demonized) of her two subjects, lies in its embrace of the conflicting aspects of Todd without denying any of them; while the power of her depiction of Bingham issues from the probing analysis of Bingham’s profoundly conflicted feelings about her brilliant, transgressing parents and the impact of those sentiments on her connection to Dickinson. Indeed, in her rendering of Millicent Todd Bingham, last in a long line of Wilder women, Dobrow’s biography fuses with American tragedy.

But After Emily is also a book for and of our time: a meditation on the nature of agency and the role of affect in women’s lives and writing; a story of the archives we create during, and sometimes even in lieu of, our lives; of the archives that represent us after our deaths; and of the abyss at the heart of all archives. Looking back from the far horizon of Dobrow’s meticulously researched and absorbing biography, we should not be surprised that while Todd and Bingham come ever more sharply into focus, Dickinson herself flickers in and out of the light, at last receding to an unfathomable distance.

MW: In the preface to *After Emily* you speak of both Mabel Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham’s fundamentally archival natures – they quite literally saved every scrap of paper they ever wrote on. One of the aspects of your work I find so compelling is the depth of your engagement with this vast and unruly archive. Can you tell us a little more about how it felt to encounter and then sift through the “seven hundred plus boxes of primary source materials” at Yale’s Sterling Library?

JD: It felt overwhelming in the beginning! I began by reading Mabel’s diaries and journals on microfilm because these were the only parts of the collection I could get on interlibrary loan (and none of it has been digitized). This actually turned out to be a good strategy because it gave me insights about Mabel’s life through her eyes and it enabled me to start putting together a timeline. I tried to triangulate things I was learning about her life with information from secondary sources, and ultimately also with primary sources from Millicent. I made many visits to Yale, basically camping out in the reading room of Manuscripts and Archives for two or three day stretches, trying to get through as many boxes as I could. It took me months to develop what

seemed a logical plan for trying to go through the boxes, and the plan shifted as I learned about Mabel and Millicent. That took me in different directions – and to different boxes.

MW: In the archives, we are sometimes surprised – even startled – by a document that we didn’t expect to find – indeed, didn’t know existed – and that reveals something hitherto unknown about our subject(s). I was curious, for example, to learn from your work that Bingham had preserved her handwritten notes documenting her sessions with a psychiatrist she consulted in the late 1920s. What was it like to read these very clearly private notes? Did Bingham disclose anything in them that touches on her relationship to her work on Dickinson’s papers?

JD: Some of these “psychiatric notes,” as she called them, were handwritten, but one of the extraordinary things about Millicent was that she was so meticulous about almost everything in her life that she not only wrote out notes right after the sessions, but she actually took the time to type many of them. I have to believe that an awful lot of the paper trail that Millicent left behind she left behind in a very deliberate way. So in one sense these notes

were private, but in another, I believe she curated at least some of them, knowing – or at least hoping – that someday someone would go through them to tell her story, something she ran out of time to do in her own lifetime. Though I felt a little uncomfortable reading some of these raw issues at times, I ultimately believe that she left these papers as part of the collection for a reason. I feel my understanding of her, and consequently my ability to write about her fairly as a complex but whole person, greatly increased with these glimpses into some of her deepest thoughts and fears.

Millicent had wildly mixed feelings about taking on her mother’s Dickinson work. Some of these feelings about the combination of obligation and opportunity came through in what she wrote about these appointments.

MW: Polly Longworth’s path-breaking work on Mabel Todd’s diaries opens one important – many would say central – dimension of Todd’s life: her life with Austin Dickinson. How does your work further our understanding of Todd, both as the first editor of Dickinson’s writing and as a woman in and out of her time and place? Is she – or does she become – for you a sympathetic figure?



Mother and daughter in 1931. Todd-Bingham picture collection, 1837-1966. Manuscripts & Archives, Yale University

JD: First I want to say how incredibly foundational Polly Longworth’s work has been for me, not just in helping me understand Mabel and Austin’s relationship, but more broadly, in thinking about how the Wilder family ethos loomed so large for both Mabel and Millicent.

I hope that my book enlarges our understanding of Mabel’s roles in editing and marketing Dickinson’s work. Some have assumed that she agreed with Higginson in all of his editorial choices and practices; I have presented information I believe shows that while she more often than not acceded to his ideas, she didn’t always agree with them. And Millicent certainly didn’t.

I also hope that Mabel becomes known as more than “just” Emily’s editor or Austin’s lover, because she was a multi-talented, multi-faceted woman. She was most certainly someone who in many ways was a product of the time in which she lived, but in many ways she was more forward thinking – and acting. She believed, emphatically, that she had been born in the wrong era. I think there are many ways in which she would probably be more comfortable living in the 21st century than in her own time.

I’ve tried very hard to paint an accurate and even-handed portrait of Mabel. I do find her to be an amazing and in some ways sympathetic character, especially later in her life. But there are many aspects of her that I found to be off-putting or troubling. I have tried to call her out when I thought she was being unfair, self-centered or misguided, and I have cited some of the scholarship that is critical of both her persona and her editorial efforts.

MW: I don’t think too many people still believe that Todd was responsible for mutilating some of Dickinson’s MSS containing references to Susan Dickinson; but, more generally speaking, do you think Todd was able to view Sue in a neutral way? Her own relationship with the Dickinson family really began with her fascination with Sue, didn’t it?

JD: It’s certainly true both that Mabel’s connection to the Dickinson family began with Sue, and also that in the beginning, Mabel was completely entranced by Sue. Even after Mabel’s own relationship with Austin commenced, she was deeply concerned about Sue’s opinions. But this shifted when her alliance to Austin became stronger than her alliance to anyone else in the Dickinson family. I do not believe that Mabel was able to view her in a neutral way after that, and I have tried to point this out in my book.

MW: *After Emily* tells an almost archetypal story of a profoundly conflicted mother-daughter relationship. Is it possible to trace the origins of this conflict that never found resolution during their earthly lives? Why – how – did these two “Wilder women” come to possess such radically opposed senses of themselves that Bingham at last reflected, “We inhabited – except for our industriousness – a different world”?

JD: This is one of the major themes of my book. I believe that Mabel and Millicent’s fraught relationship had its origins in its origin, when Mabel didn’t want to have a baby in the first place. Millicent spent the majority of her

first eight years of life – years when we know that important bonding and attachment goes on in parent/child relationships – living with her grandparents. Apart from structural separations, there were also gulfs between Mabel and Millicent’s personalities and predilections. And of course Mabel’s relationship with Austin didn’t help matters.

MW: David Peck Todd appears as a brilliant, troubled and troubling figure in your work. Is there another story of fathers and daughters to be told? What, intellectually and psychically, does Bingham inherit from her astronomer-father? Can we detect his influence in her geographical studies or editorial work?

JD: Millicent clearly inherited from her father a penchant for doing work precisely and meticulously. David’s influence on his daughter was profound in terms of her interest in science and her initial decision to study geography. The scrupulous ways in which Millicent pursued her Dickinson work, documenting everything, vowing that “all the data” had to be known so that readers could get the fullest sense of Emily Dickinson, also clearly emanated from her father’s influence.

MW: I was moved by your account of Bingham’s response to NASA’s 1960 launch of Pioneer V, a space probe created to explore interplanetary space between Earth and Venus. Bingham seems at her most poetic when she writes, “I wish I had all day to write about the profound emotions that have swept over me during the last twenty-four hours. . . . With my mind full of these fairy tales, and what it would all have meant to my father, I went out into the moonlit night, dazzlingly bright reflected from the snow.” David Todd seemed to have a connection with these interplanetary spaces – to feel agency in the non-human, even inorganic world. Did the presence of this vast, interplanetary world give Millicent Bingham a sense of perspective on her editorial work – or her life choices?

JD: What a wonderful question! I think astronomy gave Millicent perspective in at least

two ways. First, a lot of David Todd's work centered on making calculations of solar activity. He knew – and Millicent learned – that solar activity and the path of solar and lunar eclipses were both cyclical and predictable. Knowing this not only gives the astronomer a sense of what he or she needs to do to measure this activity and where to go to try to get the best view of an eclipse, but also, I think, a sense that in the skies above us there is some kind of order. For Millicent, order and predictability was something she tried to achieve in both her personal and professional selves; since the former wasn't always so successful, she really craved the latter to be. So in her Dickinson work we can see this sensibility, in the ways she tried to be so rigorous and meticulous.

And the other sense in which the vast interplanetary world gave Millicent some kind of perspective that she brought to bear in her editorial work was, I believe, the opposite of the kind of order and predictability of solar movement – it was a sense that there's almost indescribable beauty up there. I've read some other wonderfully poetic observations Millicent penned, often when she was at the Todds' camp on Hog Island off the coast of Maine. There were times she would return after a night of star gazing and write prose passages that are so beautifully crafted you want to read them twice. I think it was this sense of wonder in trying to capture the natural world in words that characterized so much of Emily Dickinson; Millicent's appreciation of the celestial world and her attempts to celebrate it in literary ways made her all the more appreciative of Dickinson's brilliance.

MW: In *After Emily* Austin appears as both a figure of great power and great passivity. Do you think Mabel Todd had any sense of how her relationship with Austin affected Millicent? Did she care?

JD: Austin and Mabel's relationship profoundly affected Millicent throughout her life. I discuss this at length in the book. His death marked the end of her childhood because it



Todd Bingham at the Hog Island Dedication Ceremony, 1960. Credit: Friends of Hog Island.

was at that point that Mabel transferred her dependence on Austin, to Millicent.

JD: I did not get the sense that Mabel had more than a superficial sense of how her relationship with Austin affected her daughter. Millicent knew, and wrote in her personal writings later in life, that her own silence and reticence to engage with her mother along many dimensions might have contributed to how little sense Mabel seemed to have about Millicent's extreme discomfort; Millicent also denied for many, many years having known about the relationship, at all. Mabel, too, was in many ways inside of a Mabel-and-Austin bubble, but I'm not absolving her. I think she should have been much more sensitive to those around her, especially her very sensitive daughter.

MW: One way in which Mabel Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham certainly seem to foretell 21st century concerns is in their concern for the natural world – and especially the destructive effect of human action on this world. Mabel Todd's early involvement with the Audubon Society and her efforts to preserve the natural biomes of the Everglades and Hog Island; Bingham's touching concern for the nesting sites of warblers on the Amherst property she wished to donate, along with her share of Dickinson's papers, to Amherst College and her late friendship with Rachel Carson feel especially timely to those of us living in the age of the Sixth Extinction. Can you tell us a little more about Todd and Bingham's environmental work? How did Bingham, who lived to read *Silent Spring*, imagine the future of

the planet whose surface she once dreamed of mapping?

JD: This is an area of their lives in which I feel both women were quite progressive. Both had a deep love for the natural world, both pursued this love through their avocations and professions (Mabel in her art, Millicent in her studies). Though she never met John Muir, Mabel was influenced by his writing and philosophy of preserving land for its own sake (as opposed to the idea that started to gain currency in the Theodore Roosevelt administration of preserving land for the sake of cultivating and procuring resources that could be used by humans). As soon as she was able to, Mabel started putting this preservationist philosophy into action by making land purchases. Millicent's view was that land preservation was something that needed to be pursued not only through putting aside acres but also by educating people about why it was necessary to do. You read some of what she wrote early in the 20th century and it seems incredibly prescient; she was worrying about climate change and its effects on the planet.

MW: Turning to other progressive ventures, today we are making some progress towards drawing together – at least digitally – Dickinson's sundered archive while also moving at last towards an abandonment of all institutional claims of copyright over Dickinson's writings. But is this late redress of institutional wrongs of any solace to Bingham, who suffered a brutal and protracted assault on her work and character by, among others, the collector Gilbert Montague; the director (and "Grand Acquisitor") of Harvard's Houghton Library, William Jackson; and, perhaps saddest of all, the textual scholar and Harvard protégé, Thomas H. Johnson? Can you describe the cost to Bingham of her editorial work? Was there a reward in persisting? What were Bingham's singular gifts as an editor?

JD: Pursuing her work cost Millicent dearly. Not only did the ongoing negotiations with Harvard (she would have referred to them

in more confrontational terms) over the publication of her own books and the copyright of Dickinson's poems eat up years of her life, she also felt that they were responsible for the decline of her husband's, Walter Van Dyke Bingham's, health. For Millicent this wasn't just a transactional relationship with Harvard; it was, for her, a moral issue, pursuit of a promise she felt she had made to her mother and above all, an issue of academic freedom – she wanted ALL of Dickinson available to the world. I think she would have been enormously gratified to see the online Emily Dickinson Archive, to know about Amherst College's ongoing efforts to digitize additional materials and about the ways in which Harvard, Amherst, and other institutions have worked collaboratively to provide access through digitization.

MW: In reading *After Emily* I was very often struck by Bingham's aloneness. At the end of her life her parents were dead; her husband was dead; and she had neither siblings nor children of her own to mourn her passing. But really it seems to me she was alone all her life, from beginning to end. Can you trace the history – or, since she was, after all, a geographer, plot the coordinates – of this aloneness? Did Dickinson's poems accompany her in the end, or had they too deserted her during her long struggle with the forces of Harvard?

JD: I do think that Millicent felt profoundly alone all her life. She did not have close relationships with very many people during her lifetime. I think if you were to trace the coordinates of her aloneness they certainly would go back to her earliest years of childhood, in which she did have close relationships with the grandparents and great-grandmother with whom she lived, but not with her parents. She was also shy and felt awkward in most social settings her entire life. This is perhaps one of the reasons she felt a kinship with Dickinson and her poetry; they were both outsiders looking in.

And I do think that the poetry stayed with her, always. After she had outlived most of those

people who'd been important, if not close, to her, she still had the poetry. Even the "battles with Harvard," as she so epically called them, could not remove Millicent's alignment with Dickinson's poems. She quoted them right up to the end of her life, using individual lines as emblematic of thoughts she had or issues she was facing.

MW: Both Mabel Todd and Millicent Bingham claimed an intimacy with Dickinson. In what ways are their claims to this intimacy warranted? In what ways might you imagine Dickinson slipping through the fingers of these women who, in different ways, gave up their lives to guarantee her work life? Can any editor, biographer, literary critic or reader ever know Dickinson?

JD: Again, this is a topic about which I speculate in the book at some length. Let me just say that for whatever acquaintance Mabel and Millicent might or might not have had with Dickinson during her life, both of them certainly believed that they understood her even better through their relationships with other members of the Dickinson family, through their deep familiarity with Amherst and through their ongoing study of and engagement with her writings. But I also believe that despite the hundreds – even thousands – of books that have been published about aspects of Dickinson and her work, there are many ways in which she remains an enigma. And that's why we keep trying to know her.

MW: The camphorwood chest appears in your work both as an actual material artifact and as the immaterial – symbolic – space of a mystery. This was of course the box in which Todd secreted those Dickinson manuscripts that remained in her possession after the lawsuit with Lavinia over the deed of a little piece of land brought Todd's editorial work to its first end. And it was this box that Bingham remembers dutifully carrying from Amherst to Springfield to New York before at last opening it in 1929 and beginning her own new life in service to its contents. After Bingham's death, though, the camphorwood chest disappears. Where

might it have gone? And what message might this box – long since emptied of Dickinson's MSS – have contained? Is there not something strange and beautiful about its vanishing – as if, like Thoreau's allegorical hound, bay horse, and turtle dove, it would keep us always on the trail of its recovery, while always just eluding our grasp?

JD: I have tried to find that camphorwood chest, following clues across three different states! I even looked at various chests that one of Richard Sewall's sons inherited and stored in the attic of an old house, to no avail. Its whereabouts remain unknown. And yet, as you suggest, there are ways in which I do feel that this is appropriate. Just as the essence of Dickinson always seems to be just beyond our ability to know her, that chest which long hid her poems from the world itself remains hidden, an emblem suggesting that there are still things about the world of Dickinson we do not know, and perhaps never will.

Note: Julie Dobrow's After Emily: Two Remarkable Women and the Legacy of America's Greatest Poet is available from W. W. Norton as of 30 October 2018.

Marta Werner's books include Emily Dickinson's Open Folios, Radical Scatters: An Electronic Archive of Dickinson's Late Fragments; Ordinary Mysteries: The Common Journal of Nathaniel and Sophia Hawthorne; and The Gorgeous Nothings. Werner is a member of the EDIS Board and editor of the journal Textual Cultures. She teaches American literature at D'Youville College

Julie Dobrow is the Director of the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies at Tufts University, where she also holds appointments in the Department of Child Study and Human Development, Film and Media Studies and Civic Studies. She has written and lectured extensively about the Todds and led Todd/Dickinson tours in Amherst.

Writing in Emily Dickinson's Bedroom

By Barbara Dana

In 2016 the Emily Dickinson Museum began offering the opportunity to spend an hour or more alone in the bedroom in which the poet composed her work. An April 27, 2017, article by journalist Sarah Lyall in the New York Times quoted Barbara Dana, who had spent her time in Dickinson's bedroom before Lyall, describing the connection she had felt as she sat in the room: "I felt her support." In this essay she expands on those comments. This is the first of an occasional series of essays about visits to Dickinson's bedroom. For more about this opportunity offered by the Emily Dickinson Museum, please see <https://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/node/548>.

Author, playwright, and actor on stage, screen, and television Barbara Dana, best known for her long-running portrayal of the poet in William Luce's *The Belle of Amherst*, is the author of *A Voice of Her Own: Becoming Emily Dickinson* (2010), and co-editor, with Cindy MacKenzie, of *Wider Than the Sky: Essays and Meditations on the Healing Power of Emily Dickinson* (2007). She is the Chair of the EDIS Arts Committee, and she edits the *Dickinson* and the *Arts* series for the *Bulletin*.

I was sipping Chardonnay with Jane Wald at the 2016 EDIS Board Dinner in Paris when she told me about the newly inaugurated Studio Sessions at the Dickinson Museum. I was ecstatic. The program offered up to two hours alone in Emily Dickinson's bedroom, writing. The opportunity struck me as beyond belief, perhaps one of the grandest opportunities of a lifetime. The actual experience exceeded my expectations.

I had been studying Dickinson for over twenty years. I had written a novel based on Dickinson's young life (*A Voice of Her Own: Becoming Emily Dickinson*), co-edited a book of essays with Cindy MacKenzie (*Wider than the Sky: Essays and Meditations on the Healing Power of Emily Dickinson*), written numerous articles and portrayed Dickinson on stage for five years in *The Belle of Amherst*. Emily was my constant companion, my inspiration, my mentor, my lodestar, my friend. Her words inspired and healed me. She was in my Brain, in my Heart, and in my Blood. It had never occurred to me in my wildest imagination that anything in this world could bring me closer to my love, "that being foreign to my thought, as Firmament to Fin –" (L265; 7 June 1862).

But I was wrong.

The Homestead is quiet. I follow Program Director Brooke Steinhauser up the flight of

stairs to the second floor. We turn left at the top of the stairs. Late afternoon light slants through the set of French doors at the end of the hallway as we proceed toward Emily's room. Brooke turns right. She enters. I follow.

Soft roses on white wallpaper, Emily's sleigh bed, the paisley shawl, the four windows, the gingerbread basket, the bureau, the pictures – Gib, George Eliot, Elizabeth Barrett Browning – the woven grass mats on the floor –

Is this where Carlo slept?

– the wood burning stove, the mantel, and best of all, to the left of the mantel, in the corner between the windows, Emily's tiny writing desk. I am struck by the outpouring of genius that emanated from that modest surface.

The windows facing south look out on Main Street and across to her "companion hills" in the distance. The windows on either side of the mantel face west, toward The Evergreens, her brother Austin and "sister" Sue's house. A rope hangs several feet from the wall along the north side of the room, in front of a small table and a chair, facing south.

In the center of the dimly lit room is a figure in a white, cotton dress, a copy of the "real" one, currently on display up the street at the Strong House, belonging to the Amherst Historical Society. It is as if Emily stands there,

welcoming me to her most special alone place, her workroom, her place of freedom.

"Enjoy," says Brooke. She leaves.

I take a deep breath. I am alone in Emily Dickinson's bedroom.

I look about the room.

Two hours alone with Emily!

I sit at the table.

The form in the center of the room, wearing the perfectly replicated white dress, has become Emily. She is there with me.

I take out my notebook, a pen and a pencil.

Shall I use the pen, or the pencil?

– It doesn't matter.

I don't hear her words, but I know. I open my notebook and pick up the pencil. I recall how Emily sometimes wrote in pencil. I saw her tiny, well-used pencil (no eraser) at an exhibit a few years ago in Soho. I take another deep breath. I'm nervous. I am about to write in Emily Dickinson's bedroom – where she wrote.

I brought two things.



Photo Credit: Mark Kwiatek

Barbara Dana as The Belle of Amherst, a role she played for over four years



Photo Credit: Michael Medeiros / Emily Dickinson Museum

Emily Dickinson's bedroom, Barbara Dana's vantage point during her Studio Session at the Homestead. Courtesy of the Emily Dickinson Museum.

I think now that I spoke to her inside my head, not in audible speech, but I'm not sure. It felt audible. She is silent.

One is a play I'm revising, the other is the recollection of a dark time of fear and shame. I shouldn't write about it –

– *You should.*

I am startled at her response, not at what she said, but that she spoke at all.

– *You think it's Death, but it is only Defeat.*

That sounds familiar.
Silence.

Then I remember. It's one of her poems.

*To those who failing new –
Mistake Defeat for Death – Each time –
Till acclimated – to – (Fr659)*

I take out my play. It will be the easier thing to start with.

LILY: I'll never forget the first time I saw you.

MARIE: (the Diva; with interest) Oh?

LILY: "Never The Twain".

MARIE: I love that play! No one remembers it.

LILY: I still have the program. I went with my aunt.

MARIE: How nice.

LILY: I was fourteen.

MARIE: Was it that long ago??... Forgive me! That was thoughtless.

LILY: No, no!

MARIE: It was!

LILY: Oh, stop! ... Do you have any ideas?

MARIE: For what?

LILY: For plays you'd like to do.

MARIE: Let me get my list. I have to write everything down or I don't know what to do.

Who I am.

I write, "who I am" above "what to do."

Better.

Suddenly I picture Emily sitting a few yards from me at her smallest of desks, pencil in hand, adding the word "strove" above the word "played."

"We passed the field where children strove at recess in the ring."

I feel the children striving to be accepted, to fit in, not to be bullied, or ignored.

"Where children 'strove' at recess, not 'played.'" The lives of children are not as simple as we think.

I return to my play.

MARIE: I have to write everything down, or I don't know who I am.

Better. Complete disorientation. Odd. Nonsensical. True.

I feel cold, then suddenly hot.

We are both writers!

Studio Sessions

Our two bodies meld into one, keeping the two. I don't know how. *We do the same thing!!*

I think later that I have never let myself realize this. I couldn't put us in the same category. Her genius set us apart. That was too bad and it was not accurate. Her genius was accurate, but not that she was a writer and I was not. Two writers – what a meaningful thing to share! Through all the days and nights, each in her own way, longing always to write! Is there a level of brilliance one must achieve before that person is a writer? What level is that? Who decides? There she sat at her tiny desk between the windows, putting new words above the old, words bearing future thought, words to consider at some later time to assist in getting closer to the truth of what she meant.

I do the same thing!

My first hour is up. I put away my play.

With trepidation, I take out the first third (or so I suspect it to be) of the first draft of my recollection of the unspeakable. I call it "Spoken." I am a survivor of longtime abuse. I held the secret for thirty years. I could no longer hold it. I chose this sacred space as a safe place to examine the most traumatic part of my past, to name it, to evoke the truth of what it was like for me. I wanted Emily to bear witness. Emily would understand. Emily wrote of her pain, maybe not all of it, but a great deal. Emily's writing helps others. It may have saved her life.

I stare at the blank page.

Do I have the courage?

I feel blank – as blank as the page – no thought – no feeling.

* * *

Why am I writing this? Do I even want my own voice? Do I want to be courageous like Emily, true to the message from my heart? If I'm going to tell it, tell it! Don't beat about the bush. Emily didn't. She didn't cut corners on her truth. That's what I most admire about her! Say it! Don't scurry over the surface like an autumn squirrel, heading for a place to hide a nut! Be there! Admit it! Speak the words! That's what Emily did! What does my heart want to say today? It wasn't just a difficult time, a hard few years! No!! I am a survivor of long-time abuse! This is no time to "tell it slant!" This is real, this is the guts of it and so it must be.

I begin to write, the blunt, terrifying truth of how it was, pouring onto the page.

It's not long before I stop. Fear has stolen my volition.

Who am I kidding? I'm never going to publish this. I sincerely doubt it. The experience is best kept to myself. And why would a writer spend years writing something – that's what it takes – if they're never going to publish it? Only Salinger, and he must have had some twisted, crazy reason. ONLY Salinger?? What about Emily??? Writing her entire life! Sending verses to friends in notes? Sewing little handmade books and keeping them in a drawer? Did she have a twisted, crazy reason?

I knew what I felt to be true.

It was her way. It was her heart's answer.

Would she advise me not to publish?

She would simply advise me to write.

Emily Dickinson's Herbarium
at The Morgan Library

Pressed so long, the leathery, spade-shaped leaves of trillium become a green pond with windy ripples on its skin and in that same stiff breeze from off-page the Dutchman's breeches are ironed flat, into a palm tree, its yellow blossoms now yellow songbirds sheltered in its crown. One hundred and seventy eight years later, I can page through your album, tapping the screen to bring a page closer or on the screen's arrow to turn the pages you turned. Your bundled puff of common smoke tree looks as though you paused from your taxonomy to clean some blond hair from a brush and the two ox-eyed daisies you crossed like (wobbly) swords might double as the logo for a roving band of pacifists. A very few times your curators correct—politely, nearly with pained regret—a slight inaccuracy in your Latin tag (inked, ant-sized, in your most practiced hand) while your shoot of Queen Anne's lace bears none; along with goldenrod—worth so little because their volumes overtake the meadows. When I tap again the patterned ivy of the back cover instantly grows over your pages, so I'm back in my boots in the Morgan Library, asking you to forgive us for pressing you to let us see you as you were—to bring you closer. Never have we found another.

Jessica Greenbaum



Reviews of Publications

Renée Bergland, Book Review Editor

Postsecular Poetics

Richard Brantley
Transatlantic Trio: Empiricism, Evangelicalism, Romanticism: Essays and Reviews 1974-2017.
Culicidae Press 2017

John Michael
Secular Lyric: The Modernization of the Poem in Poe, Whitman, and Dickinson.
Fordham 2018

Paul Quenon, O.C.S.O.
In Praise of the Useless Life: A Monk's Memoir. Ave Maria 2018

William Franke
Secular Scriptures: Modern Theological Poetics in the Wake of Dante. Ohio State University Press 2016

Perhaps (to paraphrase Bruno Latour) we have never been . . . secular. Or at any rate, we have never lived in a purely secular age, or experienced a completely disenchanting world. Like the postmodern, the postsecular coexists with the secular, pushing back against dogmatic rationality and empiricism. In *Transatlantic Trio*, a compendium of Richard Brantley's essays on Empiricism, Evangelicalism, and Romanticism written from 1974 to 2017, Brantley argues that Anglo-American Romanticism offers a both/and logic that twines the empirical and the evangelical together. Brantley's book offers a useful explanation for two of the most interesting Dickinson books we received this summer. Fordham University Press, currently a hotbed of super-cool theory, published *Secular Lyr-*

ic: The Modernization of the Poem in Poe, Whitman and Dickinson by John Michael. Meanwhile, Ave Maria Press, which styles itself a ministry of the United States Province of Holy Cross, produced *In Praise of the Useless Life: A Monk's Memoir* by Paul Quenon, O.C.S.O. Both books are astonishingly good, and both address questions of secularity and/or postsecularity in Dickinson. Although Quenon's memoir and Michael's monograph are quite different in style and draw different conclusions, they both position Dickinson's poetry at the heart of the questions of post-secularity.

Paul Quenon is a Trappist Monk who has lived at the Abbey of Gethsemani for more than five decades. He was a novice under Thomas Merton, and he has published five books of poetry including the 2011 volume *Afternoons with Emily*, inspired by Dickinson. *In Praise of the Useless Life* claims Dickinson as Quenon's "soul mate" and "soul sister." Quenon writes, "At times she seems to linger near me. I read two or three of her poems every day. . . . It has become part of my morning practice of *lectio divina*, the prayerful reading of scripture. Dickinson's beautiful texts provide a fine supplement to scripture." Quenon does not quite describe Dickinson as a mystic, but he remarks that he is "intrigued with the question of whether the designation fits her," and he comments, "A real mystic would not claim to be one, of course, or care to be designated as such, so I regard it best to leave the question moot. What is puzzling and authentic is how she can entertain opposite opinions about time and eternity." His memoir offers a lovely and insightful meditation on these mystic paradoxes, showing us what can happen

when a monk spends decades contemplating Dickinson.

It shouldn't surprise us that John Michael's *Secular Lyric* hones in on the same paradoxes that fascinate the monk, nor that he leans in a different direction. Both Michael and Quenon, like Brantley and all their interlocutors, agree that Dickinson's works vibrate with the energies of faith and reason in tension with each other. As Michael puts it, "she approaches the limit of what the lyric in a secular age can achieve." "She makes the reader's role in making meanings – the difficult sociability of interpretation – central to her poetics even as she repeatedly sets up the search for meaning to fail." But rather than focusing on the mystical invitations of Dickinson's aporetics, Michael focuses on questions of the lyric, addressing Virginia Jackson and Jonathan Culler more than Richard Brantley or Paul Quenon. Michael concludes that "Dickinson's poetry suggests that the modern lyric subject is the antithesis of that universal and endlessly perfectible Enlightenment individual." Rather than reaching for postmodernism or the Habermasian language of postsecularity, Michael refashions the idea of the lyric subject as an alternative to the disenchantments of modernity.

I started this brief essay with Richard Brantley's characterization of Dickinson as a practitioner of an Anglo-American Romantic both/and method. Building on Brantley, *Secular Scriptures: Modern Theological Poetics in the Wake of Dante*, by William Franke provides another useful frame: apophasis. Franke defines apophatic discourse as "backing off from language" in order to reflect on "incom-

The *Bulletin* welcomes notices of all Dickinson-related books, including those published outside the U.S.
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Reviews of Publications

municable registers of experience with the Inexpressible.” Franke argues that Dickinson’s apophatic poetics bring “the secular activity of the imaginative writer face to face with its own inherent impasse, and breaks the secular frame open to what it cannot fathom or comprehend in purely secular terms.” He concludes that “apophatic topoi and techniques can be found in [many Romantic poets]. But none enacts this mode as intensely, incisively, and persuasively as Dickinson does: her poetics can hardly be understood at all without some reference to this paradigm.” Thus, Franke explains Dickinson’s poetry as apophatic “secular scripture.”

Is it secular? Is it scripture? Empirical? Evangelical? Does the lyric include all these? Reading these remarkable, contradictory books in conversation with each other convinces me that Dickinson’s writing is postsecular in the both/and sense of the term – committed to both the disenchantments of modernity and the deep enchantments at the mystical heart of poetry.

Lara Candland.
The Lapidary’s Nosegay. Fort Collins: The Center for Literary Publishing, 2018

By Katie Berta

Lara Candland’s *The Lapidary’s Nosegay* traces the intersections between Candland’s life and Emily Dickinson’s in lyric poetry, paying tribute to the ways Dickinson has contributed to Candland’s poetic perspective. The book is more than just a poetic tribute to Emily Dickinson, though. Its experimental punctuation and ornately woven structure draw the reader’s attention to the intricate, nearly invisible ways in which influence works.

As Candland insists, there are deep ties between her own religious inheritance and Dickinson’s life and history. She and Dickinson are “Calvin’s bastard daughters

– transl(u)cent heretics & / Christian women seeded with invasive doctrines.” She is haunted by Dickinson because of a shared religious history, going so far as to pose Dickinson as her own ghost:

((My)) (((gh(o)st)) a queer & quiet quakeress)
and (((Emily))) (((Gh(o)st)))
(((Daisy Wraith)))
(((Belle Flower)))
(((Butterfly)))

In these ending lines of the poem that introduces the book, “Notes on the Writing of The Lapidary’s Nosegay,” Candland positions Dickinson as the ghost in the machine of these poems, as she positions nature as the ghost in Dickinson’s. Again and again Candland says her perspective is “ceded [to] (((The Anch(o)ress’s view))),” or at least haunted by it. Candland grapples with that surrender – and the ways that it asks her to compare herself to Dickinson:

bef(o)re y(ou)r ruddy necr(o)mancy
i am a ((blank balladeer))
my pr(o)lix verses fade
bef(o)re y(ou)r mitred & bustling
(((bl(oo)m))).

This ill comparison does not make Candland shy away from her identification with Dickinson, though. Rather, Candland uses structural moves to highlight the ways that Dickinson lives in the poems of *The Lapidary’s Nosegay*. Using parentheticals, other punctuation, and a key at the beginning of the book that decodes the punctuation’s meanings, Candland layers in Dickensonian images as annotations to her own. Passages like this one, from the first poem of the book proper, are complicated by their punctuation and its meanings, as outlined by the book’s key:

A sudden (((bright coin)))
turns in the sky
bringing the (((vi(o)lets)))

from their furr(ow)s
*
girls eat plums on the p(o)rch
((winged ((gh(o)sts)) in sodden gowns))
call the (((lambs))).

Here, Candland reinforces connections between the poem’s text and Dickinsonian images through the double parenthetical, which, according to the key, represents the catalog of words, phrases, and meanings “listen, ears, wings, angels, birds, butterflies, ghosts with or without wings, any other winged creature or the Belle of Amherst is speaking,” and through the triple parenthetical: “petals, sun, pleasure, god, radiance, shine, gems.”

While these parentheticals take some getting used to and can interrupt the ease of reading, they also gracefully suggest the process of unpacking influence. We discover the punctuation’s meanings, exterior to the text, housed in the key, as adjunct to the meanings we have access to as we read linearly, just as we discover the meanings provided by influence or allusion by exiting the text we’re examining. At the same time, this technique compacts the nexus of images we find in Dickinson’s poetry into a single moment of Candland’s. The reader might recognize these catalogs of associations from a Dickinson poem, or from many of them, and recognize, too, the Dickinsonian practice of allowing the idiosyncratic or personal image to stand in for the more conventional one. Here, “a bright coin” contains, too, “petals, sun, pleasure, god, radiance, shine, gems,” just as Dickinson allows an image to contain those ideas and things just to the image’s right or left.

The reader can choose how deeply she wants the parentheticals to direct her reading (does she flip back and forth between the poem she’s reading and the key? or does she read right through, knowing that these meanings exist in the text but not worrying too much about their specifics?).

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But no matter how deep or shallow her engagement, these poems seem to assert that those meanings live within the text and were integral to its production. In this way, the text’s experimental elements represent the process by which it was constructed as much as they deploy information to the reader, making the book’s focus the meta-poetic (a meditation on writing poetry and how that poetry contains/fails to contain that which influenced it) as well as the intersection between the two poets’ experiences.

In *The Lapidary’s Nosegay*, Lara Candland has succeeded in creating a catalog, a primer, of the ways Dickinson has affected her point of view, ornately embellished with images from both of their lives. These poems, as tidily arranged and as beautiful as Dickinson’s herbarium, take us on a tour of

clean (((glass)))
(&) angels tossing puzzles
(&) st(o)ne showers & (((pearls)))

or

(((Buttercups)))(((ranunculuses)))
(((pasque flower))) (((anem(o)ne)))
(((hepatica))) retrimmed
in crimson heart-blood.

This Dickinsonian impulse, to be always looking, to “put a ((word)) t(o) every insect” or flower, is one of the greatest inheritances *The Lapidary’s Nosegay* accumulates. Here, we get a chance to rummage through those fastidious catalogs anew, and through a new perspective – to feel, as Candland feels, possessed by Dickinson’s life and work again.

Katie Berta is the Senior Editor of Hayden’s Ferry Review. She graduated from the Creative Writing PhD program at Ohio University in 2017. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in The Kenyon Review Online, Blackbird, and BOAAT, among other journals.

Robert Macfarlane
The Lost Words: A Spell Book. Illustrated by Jackie Morris. Penguin Random House, 2017

By Meredith Bradfield

“I had long heard of an Orchis before I found one, when a child, but the first clutch of the stem is as vivid now, as the Bog that bore it” (Emily Dickinson to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, L458). In this excerpt, Dickinson grounds her vivid experience of the natural world with language acquisition. Words make experiences stick in memory, which is why, Dickinson suggests, the opening of Higginson’s first book “is still as distinct as Paradise” (L458). But what if Dickinson had never heard of an Orchis – would she experience the natural world so vividly without the words to describe it?

Naturalist Robert Macfarlane is concerned that children are losing access to the language which will allow them to experience the natural world in a visceral, detailed way. *The Lost Words: A Spell Book* (illustrated by Jackie Morris) aims to address this problem with a blend of whimsical acrostic poems, paintings, and search and find language puzzles: “You hold in your hands a spellbook for conjuring back these lost words” he announces.

Before each poem, Jackie Morris has sketched a jumble of letters. A closer look at the letter jumble reveals that a “lost word” is hidden in the jumble, drawn in a different color. These easy and aesthetically pleasing puzzles effectively create anticipation for the poems that follow. As the introduction suggests, the acrostic poems are best read out loud. Macfarlane’s voice is frequently playful and has understandably been compared to Edward Lear with its bouncy but somewhat nonsensical verses, like the one about the otter: “This swift swimmer’s a silver - miner - with / trout its ore it bores each black pool deep / and deeper, delves

up-current steep.” The tongue-twister-like qualities of the alliteration and assonance (perhaps even instress or inscape) can be a little distracting. Consider these bright and bouncy lines describing a rather melancholy-looking tree: “Willow, when the wind blows so your branches billow, / O will you whisper while we listen so we learn what / words your long leaves loosen.” Similarly, some of the poems seem to lose their grasp of their intended audience while reaching for their rhymes: “‘Newt, oh newt, you are too cute!’ / Emoted the coot to the too-cute newt, / ‘With your frilly back and your shiny suit / and your spotted skin so unhirsute.’” The language instruction and intended audience of this poem is somewhat confused. What reader would need exposure to the word “newt” while being somehow familiar with “unhirsute?”

The Lost Words is a beautiful book with enjoyable visuals and verbal puzzles. However, despite the apparent address to child readers, it is not a standard picture-book. While the sophisticated vocabulary and directions to read aloud seem to invite a shared reading experience between an adult and children, the thick page count and general heaviness of the book suggest that it would be difficult to hold up for a “storytime” with a large group of children. If younger readers can get through some of these more awkward constructions and the general heaviness of the book, *The Lost Words* might serve as an introduction to nature poetry, which in turn could pique interest in Emily Dickinson.

For adult readers, this book makes for a lovely coffee table book, since Jamie Morris’s illustrations are stunning in their own right. Adult readers who enjoy paging through *The Lost Words* might also consider reading Macfarlane’s *Landscapes* and *The Wild Places*.

Meredith Bradfield is a candidate for the dual Master’s degree in English and Children’s Literature at Simmons University.

Relics from Vanished Hands: Letters to Abiah Root, Mary Root, and Samuel W. Strong

By Krans Bloemaand

Not long after my career as an Emily Dickinson collector was launched, I acquired at auction a bundle of letters with possible ties to Emily. I only knew from the seller's description that thirteen letters were addressed to Miss Abiah P. Root, ten to Mrs. Mary Root, Abiah's mother, and seven to Abiah's future husband, Samuel W. Strong, later Reverend Strong. I also knew that three of the letters to Mary Root were postmarked "Amherst, Ms." The photos that accompanied the auction listing revealed that nearly all of the letters were examples of what postal historians call pen or in some instances, rubber stamp-franked letter sheets that were commonly used before the introduction of adhesive postage stamps in 1847. As always, when in "acquiring mode," I am mindful of Richard Sewall's blessing (or warning) that he inscribed in my copy of his book *The Life of Emily Dickinson*: "Happy hours – but courage! – with Miss Emily –."

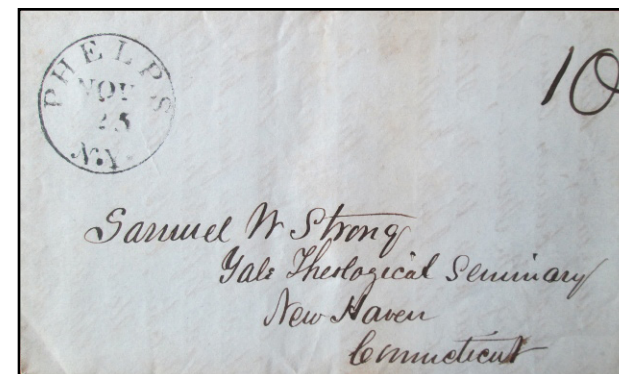
My first task upon receiving the bundle of letters was to group them by addressee then arrange them by date, an easy task, for all of the letters had been dated by their authors. Transcribing the letters was another matter, a job made more challenging since several letters were cross-written with text running first horizontally then vertically. This was a common practice in the first half of the 19th century since it cost twice as much to mail two sheets of letter paper, ten cents versus five. In most instances, the recipient of a letter was responsible for paying the postage charge, not the sender, so considerable prudence was practiced by letter

writers in those days. My final task was to determine if anything of interest could be extracted from the letters that might shed light on Abiah's mother (very little as it turns out), Abiah's future husband, or Abiah herself. Though none of the letters were written by Emily, they proved quite interesting in their own right.

Judging from a letter dated May 8, 1850, addressed to Reverend Samuel Strong, we can deduce that by that year, Samuel had graduated from Yale Theological Seminary. The letter, written by Samuel's mother, Harriet Strong, states in part, "I have a tasteful little table and a new carpet for it all ready for your bride to see when she comes." Abiah and Samuel were, in

fact, married on December 7, 1854. By late 1850, Emily writes to Abiah, "we are growing away from each other, and talk even now like strangers" (L39). This foreshadows Emily's letter in which she explains her reluctance to leave her home to visit Abiah, dated about July 25, 1854: "thank you for loving me, long ago, and today, and too for all the sweetness, and all the gentleness, and all the tenderness with which you remember me – your quaint, old fashioned friend" (L166).

The letters to Samuel reveal that he had ten siblings: brothers Edward, Theodore, Newton and William, sisters Abbie and Julia, Harriet, Mary, Sarah, and Helen. They were the children of William



Lightbourne Strong and Harriet (Deming) Strong. Among Samuel's kin, the most widely known was his brother William Strong, a Pennsylvania jurist and politician who served as an Associate Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court from 1870 to 1880. In a letter to Samuel dated Oct. 11, 1850, William writes proudly about his high reputation in Washington, D.C., and even notes that he might become "Speaker of the next Congress." He mentions his sister Abbie and brother Newton in the letter, but does not mention Abiah.

Abiah Root was a saver of letters no matter who sent them. Apparently, she especially cherished the letters written by Emily Dickinson. The warm tone and subjects of the Dickinson letters (minus Emily's precocious youthful introspections) are mirrored in the letters of many of Abiah's correspondents, which suggests that they shared Emily's high regard for her. Examples of this abound, as illustrated by this excerpt from a letter to Abiah from her cousin Annie Tucker, dated September 16, 1846: "I saw your smiling face enter the [train] car. I sprang forward to meet you, and almost felt your warm kiss against my lips." One could argue that this vaguely foreshadows Emily's letter of June, 1852 in which she chides Abiah for not paying her a visit while the latter was in Amherst: "I did want one more kiss, one sweet and sad good-bye, before you had flown away . . ." (L69). Annie's October 18, 1846 letter to Abiah laments, "There is some-

thing sad in the idea of the remains of a friend being at a distance from us, for there is a mournful pleasure in visiting the grave of a dear friend." Emily's letter to Abiah written four years later touches on the same theme: "You have stood by the grave before; I have walked there sweet summer evenings and read the names on the stones, and

wondered who would come and give me the same memorial; but I never laid my friends there, and forgot that they too must die . . ." (L39).

In another letter dated November 6, 1846, Annie chides Abiah for not writing more often, a familiar theme for Emily: "At present I think if I could see you, I wouldn't speak to you only to scold you, but mother (says) I should forget scolding and think more of laughing and kissing. Mother has tried to excuse you saying that you are so very studious, and had other correspondents, but I think I have the first claim, o you naughty girl." Annie closes her letter "O, Abiah, I wish we could live that happy summer again, but I fear we should be too happy." A September 4, 1849, letter from "Ellen" to Abiah opens with the salutation "My dear darling Abiah," and concludes with "You must come Abiah – I cannot be denied the great pleasure of a visit from you . . ." Abiah, it is clear, was loved and admired by many friends and family members. No less a friend than Emily Dickinson probably continued to love Abiah long after these two remarkable women stopped corresponding in 1854. Two years later Samuel Strong died, leaving Abiah a widow at age 26. Abiah never remarried.

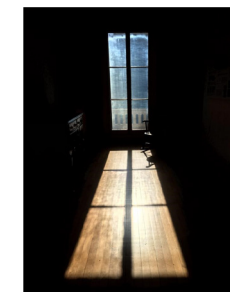
This essay is dedicated to the memory of Abiah Palmer Root Strong (April 10, 1830 – October 16, 1910).

Notes

Quotations from authors other than Dickinson are taken from letters to Mary Root, Samuel Strong and Abiah Root that are in the author's possession.

Abiah Palmer Root Strong's birth and death dates, along with a photograph of her gravestone, were found on the web site www.findagrave.com.

I look upon my collection as one to be shared with others. I would welcome comments, questions or general feedback from readers of the Bulletin about my articles, past or present. Please contact me at kbloemaand@gmail.com



Mullions

(Dickinson Museum, Amherst, Massachusetts)

Mullions divide this window into rectangles of uneven size, thus making two crosses, near to far – or is it, far to near? Quick. Gone.

George Monteiro
Nov. 17, 2017

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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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New EDIS Board Member

Adeline Chevrier-Bosseau

The newest member of the EDIS Board of Directors further expands the international composition of the body. New member-at-large Adeline Chevrier-Bosseau will also replace Nancy List Pridgen as Board secretary. She has been a member of EDIS since she first started working on her PhD in 2006, and she was a visiting scholar in Amherst in 2008.

Chevrier-Bosseau is associate professor of American literature at the University of Clermont-Auvergne. Her PhD dissertation, "Emily Dickinson du côté de Shakespeare: modalités théâtrales du lyrisme" ("The Dramatic Modes of Emily Dickinson's Lyricism") examines how Shakespeare's work and the extremely theatrical culture of Victorian America helped to shape Dickinson's lyric voice and her unique conception of a dramatized lyricism.

Out of her dissertation research have come several published articles examining the influence of Shakespearean theatricality on Emily Dickinson's poetry. These have appeared in French journals such as *Transatlantica* and *Représentations*, and in collective works such as *Thy Truth Then Be Thy Dowry, Questions of Inheritance in American Women's Literature*, ed. Stéphanie Durrans (2014).

Her current research focuses on the dialogue between American literature and dance, and examines the influence of dance and its imaginary on the writers of the American Renaissance, and conversely, how the literature of the American Renaissance has inspired 20th-century American choreographers. She has given papers on Emily Dickinson and dance at the 2017 SSAWW conference and at the 2016 EDIS conference in Paris, and she has more recently published several papers on the imaginary of dance in the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman.

Chevrier-Bosseau co-organized two EDIS-sponsored panels with fellow student of Shakespeare and Dickinson Páirc Finnerty at the 2017 SSAWW conference in Bordeaux, and co-organized the Dickinson-Whitman colloquy at the University of Paris-Est Créteil in 2015 with fellow Dickinson scholar Cristanne Miller and Whitman scholar Eric Athenot.

As a member of the Board, Chevrier-Bosseau will continue her endeavors in bringing together Dickinson scholars from both sides of the Atlantic. She hopes as well to encourage collaborations between EDIS members and specialists in other American writers or with Shakespeare scholars. She also hopes to develop connections between Dickinson scholarship and performance studies, in order to promote interest in Emily Dickinson's work and expand the scope of Dickinson studies.



Chevrier-Bosseau in front of the Bastille Opera, awaiting a performance of Ratmansky's *Sleeping Beauty*.

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

EMILY DICKINSON INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY
Meeting August 8-11, 2019
Asilomar, California
“To another Sea”: Dickinson, Environment, and the West

We invite papers for the 2019 International Conference on the work of Emily Dickinson and the sea. The conference will take place on August 8-11, 2019, in Asilomar, California. Known as Monterey Peninsula's “Refuge by the Sea,” Asilomar State Park is located on 107 acres of state beach and conference grounds, within the quaint and scenic town of Pacific Grove. Asilomar is celebrated for its restored dune ecosystem and architectural significance, with cozy, historic structures designed by renowned Arts & Crafts architect Julia Morgan between 1913 and 1928. Dickinson writes she “never saw a moor” or “the sea,” yet she recognizes the landscape intuitively and knows “how the heather looks” and “what a billow be.” Emily Dickinson may have said she never saw the sea, but she also maintains that she knows it. Through her creative imagination, Dickinson explored the landscape of the inner wild. Her poetry and letters investigate the end of consciousness and the West, as a figure for the unknown and a way to transcend physical and mental boundaries. Her writing investigates this unknown place by transforming her daily experience in poetry and allowing her readers to take a voyage with her through imagination.

The conference will feature panels by international scholars on a variety of topics, including critical interpretations of Dickinson's poetry and letters in light of water, environmental criticism, non-human studies, plant studies, creativity and imagination, ecology, geography, landscape, and the like. Topics on unrelated areas of current interest in Dickinson studies are also welcome. A variety of formats, including traditional panels and roundtables, as well as flash presentations, will be encouraged. Please submit 250-word abstracts or panel proposals and a two-page CV for each presenter by January 14 to Elizabeth Petrino (epetrino@fairfield.edu).

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