

Bulletin

Volume 26, Number 1

May/June 2014

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



Dear Miss Emily,

EMILY DICKINSON INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

Officers

President:	Martha Nell Smith
Vice-President:	Barbara Mossberg
Secretary:	Nancy Pridgen
Treasurer:	James C. Fraser

Board Members

Antoine Cazé	Jonnie Guerra	Nancy Pridgen
Paul Crumbley	Eleanor Heginbotham	Eliza Richards
Cindy Dickinson (Honorary Board Member)	Suzanne Juhasz	Martha Nell Smith
Páraic Finnerty	Barbara Mossberg	Alexandra Socarides
James C. Fraser	Elizabeth Petrino	Hiroko Uno
	Vivian Pollak	Jane Wald (Honorary Board Member)

Legal Advisor:	[Position Open]	Chapter Development Chair:	Nancy Pridgen
Nominations Chair:	Alexandra Socarides	Book Review Editor:	[Position Open]
Membership Chair:	Elizabeth Petrino	<i>Bulletin</i> Editor:	Daniel Manheim
Dickinson and the Arts Chair:	Barbara Dana	<i>Journal</i> Editor:	Cristanne Miller

Sustaining Members

Mary Elizabeth K. Bernhard	Robert Eberwein	Barbara Mossberg
Richard Brantley	James C. Fraser	Martha Nell Smith
Jane D. Eberwein	Jonnie G. Guerra	

Contributing Members

Antoine Cazé	Linda Healy	Daniel Manheim
Carolyn L. Cooley	Eleanor Heginbotham	Ethan Tarasov
LeeAnn Gorthey	Suzanne Juhasz	Robin Tarasov
	Niels Kjaer	

EDIS gratefully acknowledges the generous financial contributions of these members.

EDIS *Bulletin* (ISSN 1055-3932) is published twice yearly, May/June and November/December, by The Emily Dickinson International Society, Inc. Standard Mail non-profit postage is paid at Lexington, KY 40511. Membership in the Society is open to all persons with an interest in Emily Dickinson and her work. For further information, contact Martha Nell Smith, President, EDIS, Department of English, 2119 Tawes Hall, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, 20742, or mnsmith@umd.edu. Annual dues are \$50.00 for regular members, \$30.00 for students, \$200.00 for sustaining members, \$113.00 for institutional members, \$100.00 for contributing members (all of whom receive the *Bulletin* and the *Emily Dickinson Journal*), or \$20.00 for associate members (*Bulletin* only). Membership inquiries should be directed to James C. Fraser, 159 Prospect St., Apt 7, Acton, MA, 01720-3654, USA. Membership applications and changes of address should be sent to The Emily Dickinson International Society, c/o Johns Hopkins University Press, P.O. Box 19966, Baltimore, MD 21211-0966, USA. Direct changes of address to jrnlcirc@mail.press.jhu.edu, 800-548-1784 (U.S. and Canada), or 410-516-6987; fax to 410-516-3866. Address submissions for the *Bulletin* to Daniel Manheim, Centre College, 600 West Walnut St., Danville, KY 40422, USA or dan.manheim@centre.edu. Submission deadlines are March 1 (Spring issue) and September 1 (Fall issue). All articles become the property of the *Bulletin*. Back issues are available for \$5.00 each from the editor. Copyright © 2014 by The Emily Dickinson International Society, Inc. The *Bulletin* is indexed in EBSCO, Humanities International Complete, and the MLA Bibliography.

IN THIS ISSUE

Features

- 4 **Writing with Miss Emily**
By Burleigh Mutén
- 9 **Dickinson, Death, and Doctrine in a High-School Classroom**
By Michael Wall
- 13 **Collecting Emily Dickinson**
By Joel Myerson
- 18 **Was it Epilepsy?**
By Norbert Hirschhorn and Polly Longworth
- 19 **Inspired by Emily**
By Mary Jarvis

Series

- 6 **Teaching Dickinson**
Emily Dickinson Through Children's Eyes
By James Sulzer
Series Editor, Marianne Noble
- 15 **Poet to Poet**
Dickinson and Presley, the Sacred and Profane, and I
By Hans Ostrom
Series Editor, Jonnie Guerra
- 21 **Dickinson Scholars**
George Frisbie Whicher
By Paul Crumbley
Series Editor, Cindy MacKenzie
- 24 **What's Your Story?**
Twenty Years as a Reviewer and Editor
By Barbara Kelly
Series Editor, Georgiana Strickland

Reviews

New Publications

- Eliza Richards, ed., *Emily Dickinson in Context***
Reviewed by Renée Bergland
- Jed Deppman, et. al., eds., *Emily Dickinson and Philosophy***
Reviewed by Seth Perlow
- Faith Barrett, *To Fight Aloud is Very Brave***
Reviewed by Jennifer Putzi
- James Sulzer, *The Voice at the Door*; Despina Lala Crist, *Emily Dickinson: Goddess of the Volcano***
Reviewed by David Garnes
- Burleigh Mutén, *Miss Emily***
Reviewed by Marty Rhodes Figley
- Lea Bertani Vozar Newman, "*Virgin Recluse*" and *Rebel***
Staff

Members' News

- 33 **Obituary**
David Porter, 1928 to 2013
By Christopher Benfey
- Memorial to David Porter**
By Hiroko Uno
- 35 **Annual Meeting in Amherst**
- 39 **Residue of Adz**
Emily Dickinson and the Eclipse of 1860
By Stephanie Wampler

Front Cover: an illustration of "A Bird, came down the Walk" (Fr359), by an 8th-grader in Nantucket. Three articles in this issue explore the pleasures and challenges of teaching Dickinson's poetry to, respectively, elementary school, middle school, and high school students. Visually and verbally, the students come up with many startling insights, reminding us that Dickinson can be accessible to readers of all ages.

The Editorial Assistant for this issue was Laura K. Zolman

Dickinson poems are reprinted by permission of the publishers and the Trustees of Amherst College from the following volumes: *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Thomas H. Johnson, ed., Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1951, 1955, 1979, 1983 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College; *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition*, Ralph W. Franklin, ed., Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1998 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College; *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*, Ralph W. Franklin, ed., Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1998, 1999 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College; *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Thomas H. Johnson, ed., Copyright © 1929, 1935 by Martha Dickinson Bianchi, Copyright © renewed 1957, 1963 by Mary L. Hampson: Little Brown and Co., Boston. Dickinson letters are reprinted by permission of the publishers from *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, Thomas H. Johnson, ed., Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1958, 1986 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College; 1914, 1924, 1932, 1942 by Martha Dickinson Bianchi; 1952 by Alfred Leete Hampson; 1960 by Mary L. Hampson.

Writing with Miss Emily

By Burleigh Mutén

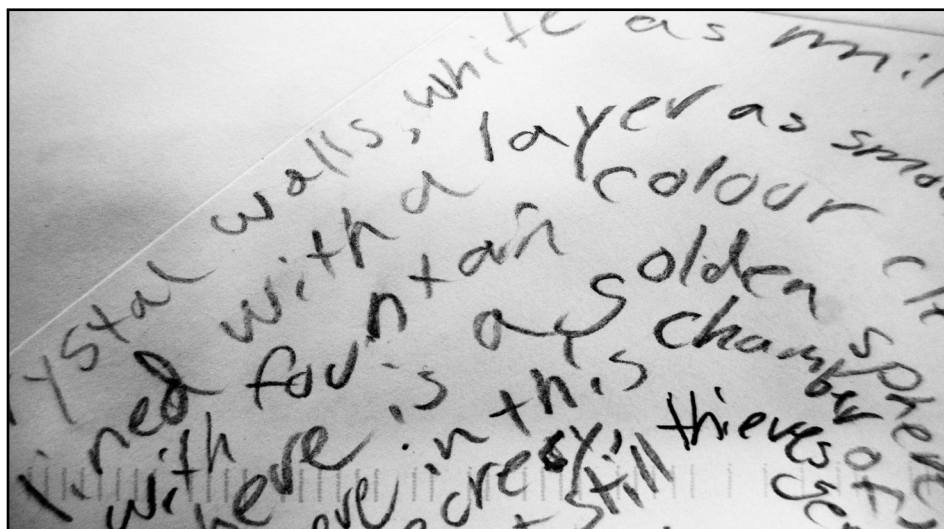
Imagine being a ten-year-old living in Amherst, Massachusetts, 2013. Of course you know that Emily Dickinson is the most famous world citizen from your hometown. You've passed the big yellow brick house all your life. When your mom signs you up for a summer writing workshop about the life, times, and work of Dickinson, you wonder what it will be like.

I wondered what it would be like, myself – designing a workshop for ten- to twelve-year-olds to explore their own creative voices as they learn about Dickinson and hear her unique rhythm. What fun!

Leading a children's writing workshop in Amherst about Emily Dickinson gave me a unique opportunity to incorporate several special venues including the Jones Library's Special Collections Room, which houses, among other treasures, an original copy of the atlas Emily used when she was a student at Amherst Academy, as well as translations of her work in fourteen languages.



Bella Greenbacher rears her continents of light.



Dickinson's envelope poems prompted students to experiment with creative forms.

"Might I be able to take the children into the 'Northwest Passage' at the Emily Dickinson Museum where museumgoers are not usually allowed?" I inquired.

"Yes," affirmed Cindy Dickinson, the museum's program director. "Might the children be allowed to write right there, where Emily may have stopped midstream while baking, to jot down a few lines on a scrap of paper? Could we visit the place where Emily met with Sue and some of her cousins to recite her work, the very room where *The Fortnightly Bumble Bee* was entitled with young Mattie?"

"Yes" – after our tour of the Homestead, we were generously granted permission on the second day of the workshop to sit upon the steep, back stairway off the pantry and on the pantry floor to write! The prompt was to describe what happened in that tiny, important room, and some of the people who gathered there to have private conversations. A palpable exhilaration circulated behind the red velvet curtain as the children wrote – pencils rapidly scratching across the recycled envelope scraps the children were given.

Here is an excerpt from eleven-year-old Bella Greenbacher's piece, penned in Lavinia's voice:

My sister is the babbling brook, my sister is the calling wind. My sister is a sly fox. My sister is a timid deer. My sister is a dictionary, my sister is my mother. My sister is Emily. Emily I love.

(If you have ever had the privilege as an educator of witnessing a young writer's astounding talent, you know this is the moment when the top of my head is taken off.)

A few days later, as we gathered outside the Evergreens, Cindy provided the young authors with blank calling cards to design and place in the wide copper bowl in the Evergreens' elegant front hall. This was a special thrill for the workshop writers, since they'd excitedly discovered Miss Emily Elizabeth Dickinson's calling card in the Special Collections at the Jones Library the day before.

And again we were allowed to write on the premises – this time about the role Austin

Dickinson’s family played in Emily’s life. One girl wrote from the cook’s perspective. Another from the point of view of a friend asking for a lock of hair.

Some of the children knew very little about Dickinson when we began our week together. Some knew surprising details about her correspondence with Higginson and Lavinia’s amazing discovery after Emily’s death. “She didn’t title her poems,” said one girl. “She went to Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, where I live,” added another. A number of the girls in our group of twelve readily identified as poets themselves.

Ken, the one brave boy in our group, said “I like to write, but I’m not a poet.” Later in the week, as soon as he finished writing the following piece, he strode over to me and slipped it into my hand.

Poems don’t have Rules
I caN do anything I WANT
anything can BE A poem
(ExcEpt STORies)
Anyone Can wRite a pOe

m

eVen mE and you
Punctuation, doesn’T matter:
Isn’t tHis SO Fun?#@//
I

Can

Even

WRiTe

Like

This -----

WhO

CarEs ABOut RuLes I dOn’T
anD NeithHEr ShOUld You
POEMS ArE aBout Expressing
YOURself. I’mGoINg to WRiTE
a pOem Now!?!/@;.,

Ke

N

Wan

g

Young writers vary in their skill like the rest of us. This workshop, which was funded by a

local cultural council grant and sponsored by the museum, allowed me to share my passion for supporting young writers and my fascination with Dickinson. Whenever I teach Dickinson to youngsters, I like to open with the fact that Dickinson loved children as much as she loved nature.

When ten-year-old Sasha Campbell read her “I’m somebody” to the group, we cheered.

I’m somebody
you are too.
I’ll be somebody
with you.
Since there’s a pair of us
Do tell!
We’re powerful
you know.
It’s horrid
to be nobody
so quiet
like a snake
to sit long gone forever more
and leave yourself to bake.

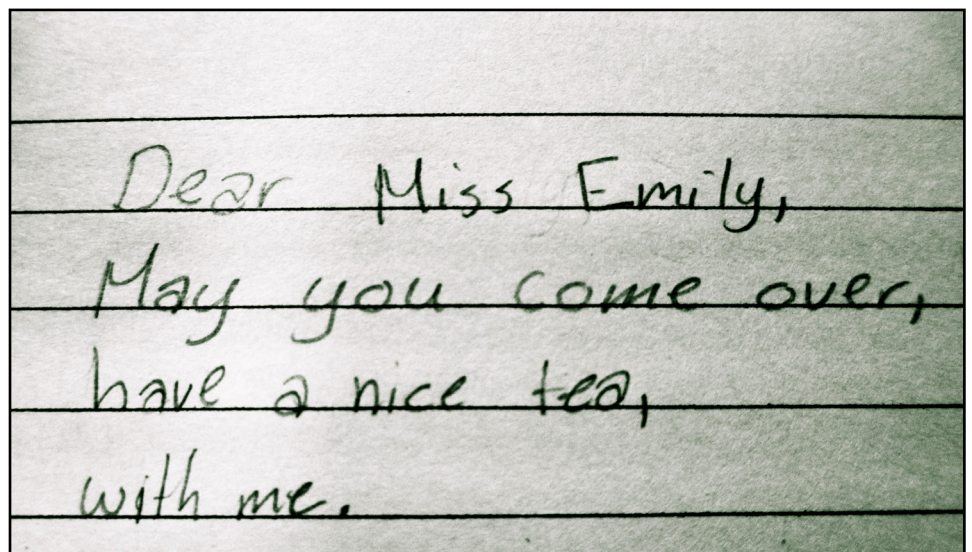
It’s humbling to write alongside young authors. Their creativity is an easily accessible wellspring. Most of our writing segments last for twenty minutes. Reading aloud is an option. Some private writers never read aloud.

The hands of some fly upward the moment I announce the end of a writing session. They are not intimidated by the famous poet. She is their friendly, encouraging muse.

Burleigh Mutén teaches Kindergarten at The Common School in Amherst. She will offer her workshop again this coming summer. Her book Miss Emily, illustrated by Matt Phelan, was recently issued by Candlewick Press.



Morgan Brennan takes inspiration from writing in the Homestead.



Arianna Williams-Suarez left this invitation with her calling card.

Series Editor, Marianne Noble

Teaching Dickinson is a periodical feature of the Bulletin. Anyone with stories about teaching experiences or narrative explorations of Dickinson pedagogy should submit proposals and drafts to the series editor: mnoble@american.edu.

Emily Dickinson Through Children's Eyes

By James Sulzer

James Sulzer teaches English/Language Arts in grades 5-8 at the Nantucket New School. Most recently, he is the author of The Voice at the Door: A Novel of Emily Dickinson (reviewed in this issue of the Bulletin.)

There is a certain quality in some of Emily Dickinson's poems, a breath of childlike innocence, which seems to speak directly to younger readers. We can't know, of course, if that was her intent. When Dickinson's voice assumes a childlike tone, it may be a strategy intended for adult readers – a way to invite them into a common space, a shared image of childhood.

Still, children do discover and read Emily Dickinson, and teachers such as myself do teach selected Dickinson poems to students in the early grades. Perhaps easing the way for young readers of Dickinson, some of her images seem to lift off the page with the transparent buoyancy of soap bubbles. "There is no Frigate like a Book" offers, at least on the surface, such a lightness and clarity. But Dickinson's language can be difficult and her imagery complex. What can a young reader take away from a first encounter with Dickinson? How might a child's understanding differ from that of an adult? And what can those differences reveal about the unique qualities of her poetry?

Hoping to shed some light on these questions, I asked two different groups of my students – a class of fifth graders and a class of eighth graders – to read an Emily Dickinson poem and respond to it with words and artwork, all within the confines of a 45-minute period. The verse I chose was "A Bird, came down the Walk –" (Fr359) – a poem that charms us at first with a welcoming domestic scene, turns on an ambiguous phrase, and then flutters off into mystery. This well-

known piece seemed to offer the right mix of familiarity and uncertainty.

It was December 10, an auspicious day. In both classes I began with the announcement that it was Emily's birthday. The fifth graders were excited by this news; they squirmed in their seats and smiled, and a few jaws dropped at the news that she had been born 183 years earlier. By contrast, the eighth graders were only mildly interested by the birthday news, but they looked up in interest when I told them that Emily Dickinson was my favorite poet in the world. I informed both groups that Dickinson had lived in the small Massachusetts town of Amherst, about the size of our own town of Nantucket, but I offered few other biographical details.

In both classes – there were fifteen fifth graders and eight eighth graders – I gave each student a printed copy of the poem. I read it aloud twice and asked for volunteers, who then read the poem aloud three or four more times.

From the outset in both classes, the students were entranced; they listened carefully, their brows compressed with concentration. They seemed to enjoy hearing about the bird; some laughed out loud at the phrase, "And ate the fellow, raw." They frowned at the conclusion and asked to hear the poem again.

But the reactions of the fifth and eighth graders were markedly different. The fifth

graders, more naïve in their reading, found meaning in the simple story that Dickinson tells with such economy and drama. The eighth graders, more adult-like in their understanding, helped each other negotiate Dickinson's finely woven web of imagery and consulted her quirky punctuation, at times, for guidance. The result is two contrasting views of a poetic landscape from two different points of ascent on a mountain.

Fifth Graders

The fifth graders were sitting forward in their seats and waving their hands in the air. They had all sorts of questions. I called on Ella first. "Was the person in the poem Emily?" she asked, smiling as her friend across the table crossed her arms and playfully pretended to pout at not being called on first. I answered that I wasn't sure; Emily Dickinson said that she often wrote poems from the point of view of a "supposed person" – someone other than herself. I turned the question around and asked the kids who they thought the speaker was – an adult or a child? Isobel said she was pretty sure it was a child, and everyone agreed. When I asked why, Katie explained, "Because kids love nature, and the person in the poem really loves birds. Most adults aren't like that with nature."

It was apparent that the fifth graders were understanding the poem holistically, seeing the broad picture and placing it within the context of their experience, rather than analyzing such specifics as the poetic voice or

TEACHING DICKINSON

the structure of the metaphors. Emily Dickinson has created such a clear scenario in this poem – the bird, the worm, the person – that it can be understandable at this level to a ten year old.

But I wanted to learn more about their reactions. “So, what did the poem make you feel?” I asked.

Elena was the first to respond. “It made me feel differently with each stanza. Some of it was funny, some of it was a little puzzling, and the rest makes me feel calm.” Other students gave similar answers, about feeling happy and, at times, a little worried.

What was their understanding of the emotions of the two main characters in the poem – the bird and the human? I asked the fifth graders about the ambiguous phrase at the start of fourth stanza: “Like one in danger, Cautious.” Who did that phrase refer to – the person or the bird? Almost unanimously, the fifth graders responded that it was the bird who was in danger and cautious.

This reading made sense to them, given their knowledge of the world and their understanding of the perils of being small; and the poem does leave itself open to this interpretation, though Dickinson’s punctuation (ambiguous as always) seems to suggest otherwise. In a way, the fifth graders’ understanding of the phrase reveals something basic about Dickinson’s multi-level artistry. She presents a situation – a bird on a walk, a person offering it food – that is accessible at one level to a ten year old, but she also offers textual clues (as we will see in the eighth graders’ reactions) that complicate, deepen, and enrich the poem. In other words, the Dickinson landscape is so textured and nuanced that it will look different from different points on the mountain.

I also asked the fifth graders about two specific phrases. First, I asked what the

speaker means by the sentence, “And he unrolled his feathers and rowed him softer home.” There were some puzzled faces, a long pause. Then Anah raised her hand, a shy smile on her face. She explained, “It’s saying the bird lifts its wings, like oars going up and down.”

“OMG, that’s right!” someone exclaimed, and as heads nodded around her, Anah’s smile grew broader. I then asked a second question: “Here, in the last stanza, what do you think this means: ‘Butterflies off Banks of Noon?’” Again, there was momentary silence. Then Orion raised his hand, stroked his chin like a wise man, and proclaimed, “It’s where the sun is, when it’s noon.” He nodded sagely. Trying to hide my smile, I doubted that I could have come up with a better description myself. For almost fifty years I’ve have been puzzling over this phrase.

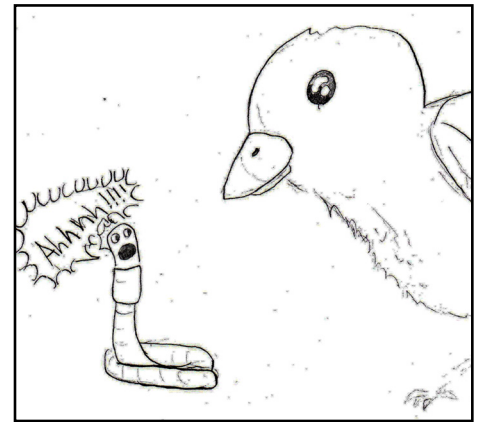
I then asked the students to respond in writing to a few questions, and finally (most important of all, from my point of view) to draw a picture of the poem or of a scene from the poem.

Though poems exist in the medium of words, a reader’s experience of a poem inhabits some realm that is beyond words. I suspect that we understand poems as much in mental images as in verbal constructs, and artwork may offer the most direct route to some of those images.

The pictures by the fifth graders revealed an understanding that relied largely on their intuitive grasp of the world, and less on textual details such as specific imagery. But the pictures also revealed that they read the poem carefully, came to their own understanding of the characters in the poem, and interpreted the larger meanings (including a sense of the poet) within their own experience and worldview.

Here are two representative pictures from fifth graders, coupled with the student’s own words and some comments from me:

Finna, Grade 5:



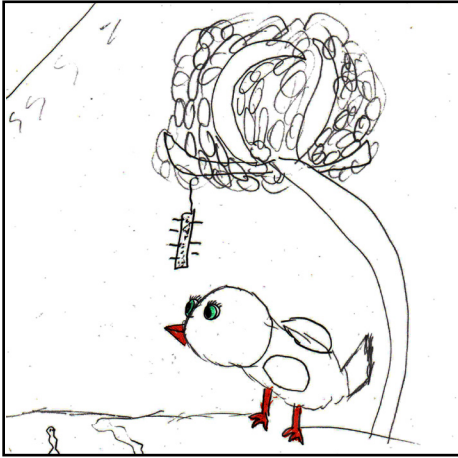
In her picture Finna visualized the opening scene of the poem – the encounter between the bird and the worm. While the humor in the rhyme of “saw” and “raw” seems, in a way, to discount the suffering of the worm, Finna gave the worm strong emotions: shock and fear. As she explained succinctly in her summary of the first stanza, “A bird bit a worm in half and ate it without cooking it.” Her drawing reveals a reader who is alive to the fearsome side of nature – a view that Dickinson articulates more fully in some other poems, such as “The Whole of it came not at once”: “The Cat reprieves the mouse/She eases from her teeth/Just long enough for Hope to tease – /Then mashes it to death –” (Fr485).

Finna’s piece of artwork also raises the issue of perspective. Though the poem details a meeting between a person and a bird, Finna’s generous response to the poem allowed her to give voice to the inner life of even the smallest creature, the worm. It seems that a child’s mind can inhabit every corner of this poem. The dramatic scenario that Emily Dickinson has created is compelling enough to bring a ten year old fully into the world of the poem.

Elena, Grade 5 (next page):

Elena’s artwork shows a bird that is full of personality and inquisitiveness. From the alertness of Elena’s bird, we can see that she

TEACHING DICKINSON



has internalized Dickinson's portrait of a living, purposeful being who glances about, feels fear, refuses an offered crumb, and flutters off to his "home." Elena wrote: "This bird is special to her. Also, this meeting was a special one. Emily is trying to tell us that she takes the time to notice little things – and she is fascinated by nature."

Elena also speculated on Emily Dickinson's personality, based on what she saw in the poem and from her own ten years of experience: "I think she doesn't have any best friends, but she probably has a few friends . . . she'd rather study nature or write poetry than do any 'normal' stuff." Her holistic reaction to the poem is representative of the fifth graders' response in general; moreover, it suggests that Emily Dickinson's verbal magic sprinkles enough clues about herself for even her youngest readers to form a sense of her uniqueness.

Eighth Graders

By contrast, the eighth graders looked more closely at the details of syntax, punctuation, and imagery in constructing their sense of the poem. For instance, all but one eighth grader thought that "Like one in danger, Cautious," referred to the adult. Maggie pointed out that "cautious" was followed by a comma, which meant that it "went with I." They also – all but one – thought that the speaker was an adult. "Kids can't come up with metaphors like these," Jack explained.

And they gave a fuller explanation of the rowing metaphor. John said that it was about "flying away, almost like a rowing action," and Caroline traced the image farther into the final stanza, "She is implying that the air is like water – birds rowing – butterflies swimming."

"Why would she be implying that?" I asked.

She shrugged. "Beats me." I shrugged too. The extension of this water image to butterflies and the banks of noon has always puzzled me. But before I could say anything else, Ramon reduced us all to laughter. "So would the fish be walking?" he asked, raising one eyebrow ever so slightly.

The eighth graders quickly came up with more questions and offered more opinions. Angela asked, "Is this a poem about a girl or a boy?" (I said I didn't know.) They theorized that the bird was either a catbird, because of its "velvet head," or a robin, because robins eat worms. And they asked about the historical context. Ramon inquired, "Did Emily Dickinson write this during a war?"

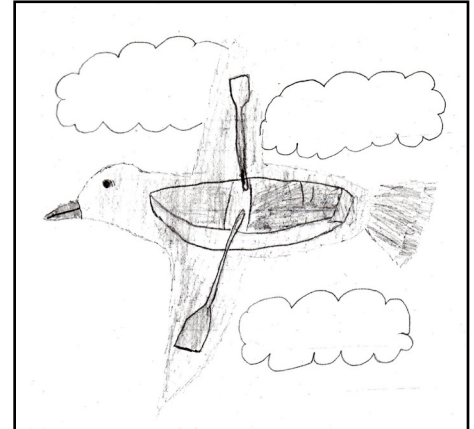
I replied, "Yes, as a matter of fact – during the Civil War. Why do you ask?"

"The bird could be an innocent person . . . seeing someone could be like seeing a soldier, and then running away." Other eighth graders nodded at this interpretation.

When compared to the fifth graders' drawings, the eighth graders' artwork revealed more attention to the specifics of metaphor as well as the drama of the meeting between bird and person.

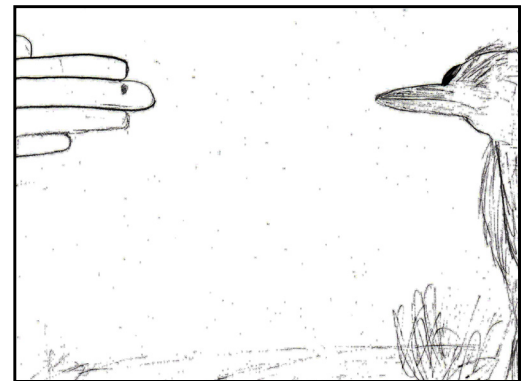
John, Grade 8:

John visualized one of the final images of the poem, giving a graphic interpretation of the phrase, "And rowed him softer Home –" His artwork cleverly replicates Dickinson's lovely metaphor.



John also had his own, very specific interpretations of the details that Dickinson offers the reader. He wrote, "I think the bird's eyes symbolize an inner insecurity and fear. The bird flying away shows fear, restlessness and carefulness. She [Dickinson] also shows a love for ornithology and nature through the stanza with the oars along with the butterflies. This poem shows insecurity, love, fear, kindness and gratitude."

Caroline, Grade 8:



Caroline's picture represents the poem as an interaction. The speaker holds out the crumb; the bird looks on cautiously, with eyes very much like the frightened beads described by the poet. Caroline wrote: "I think she is trying to portray a meeting between a person and a bird that is maybe meant to represent how different she is

Continued on Page 18

To complete the portfolio of essays about teaching, here is an account of teaching a well-known work by the poet to a group of excellent college-bound students at Etowah High School in Cherokee County, near Woodstock, Georgia. Many of the students reflect seriously over the poet's struggles with religious orthodoxy, even as they are alert to inventions in form and diction. Michael Wall, an Atlanta native, is enjoying his twenty-first year teaching English. A former Navy Supply Corps officer, he lives in Woodstock with his wife, Rachel, and children, Parker and Elaine.

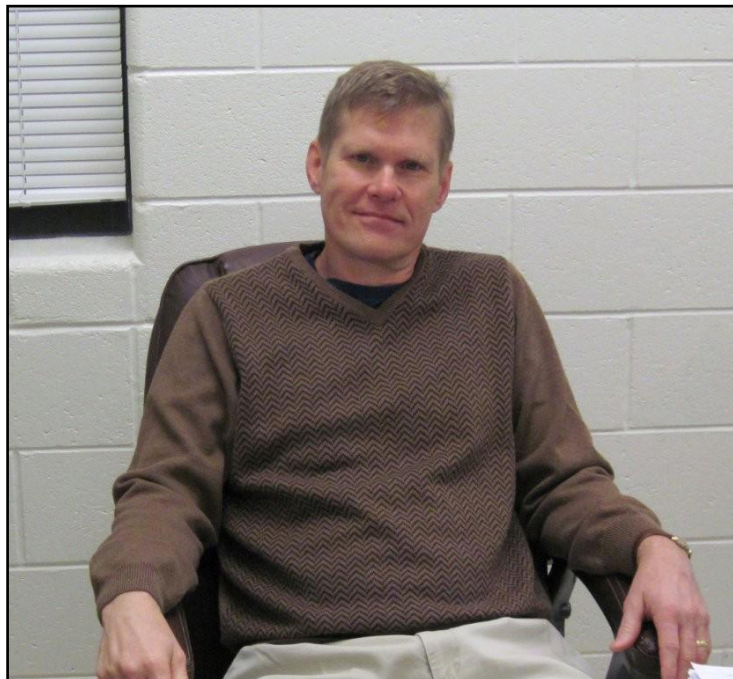
Dickinson, Death, and Doctrine in a High School Classroom

By Michael Wall

In my AP Lit class, students are determined to achieve the elusive 5 on the AP exam. Their motivation to claim such a difficult prize is so intense that it sometimes transforms my high school classroom into a proving ground. They are looking for the "truth" in literature, and they will analyze, debate, research, question, and speculate into the smallest details in their effort to defend their findings. My role as instructor includes moderator, mediator, and guide as the kids wrestle with the English poetry, prose, and drama I spread before them. Emily Dickinson is a favorite. The students respond with curiosity to her wide range in subject matter and complexity, which strikes them as foreign, yet also familiar. For competitive and

tenacious students like mine, her metaphysical poetry can make for a lively and delightfully volatile class.

Our AP classes meet daily, and we spend much of our time reading and discussing poetry. The Dickinson poems that elicit our best discussion concern death, perhaps because they are some of her most striking, thought-provoking, and elusive. It is certainly unusual for a person to speak from the grave, of course, but it is that, combined with Dickinson's blend of imagination, religion, and am-



Michael Wall at home, as photographed by his wife, who sends assurance that he is better in person.

biguity, that makes her poems from the grave exhilarating for both me and my seniors. It might have something to do with my particular audience, too. Although ours is a public school, many of my students are devoutly religious – more than a few carry their Bibles with them. I always try to treat spiritual matters head-on; religious or not, my students expect candor as we deal with meaning-of-life issues in literature.

Even though Dickinson's poems usually defy precise interpretation, I have found that it is

beneficial for students to engage the most challenging and to try to devise a responsive and clear interpretation that honors the ambiguity of the poem. We call it "developing UMA", (ultimate mental awareness, a phrase our Laurence Perrine text employs). My students like the sound of the acronym; it works for us.

One day last spring, my students and I pursued UMA in a discussion of "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers" (Fr124) that took us beyond the classroom to that place that certain texts unlock. Without introduction, we read the poem aloud, and then began by focusing on the imagery-rich first stanza.

Safe in their Alabaster Chambers –
Untouched by Morning –
And untouched by noon –
Sleep the meek members of the
Resurrection,
Rafters of Satin and Roof of Stone –
(Fr124)

Joey, bound for Emory and my most vocal student, got the conversation started. "The first sentence is blunt, describing the dead as 'Safe' in their graves. I think she means they are unaffected by the things of

this world. Details that matter to the living, such as times of day, are meaningless to the dead.”

I asked, “Why does she refer to them as ‘members of the Resurrection’ rather than simply the dead?”

Joey answered right away. “To me she is acknowledging that there will be a ‘resurrection of the body’ that will take place at Christ’s second-coming.”

Then Megan asked, “By singling out ‘members of the Resurrection’, could the speaker be making a *positive* statement about those specific ‘believers’ versus the non-believers?”

Kaylea responded, “Are you implying that the ‘non-members’ are not safe?”

Joey answered, “All the dead, believers or not, are in their graves “untouched” by the living world. But that will change with Christ’s second-coming. Read “Revelation.” Then, the resurrected bodies of Christ’s followers will be perfected and will dwell with Him forever, while the bod-

ies of non-believers will be cast in the lake of fire.”

I listened to the debate as to whether or not Dickinson was implying that the fate of the non-believers was an eternity apart from God – unsafe. Since the argument was likely going to be un-resolvable, after a while, I decided to push them in another direction, asking about the sound elements of the poem. I called on Cameron, who was currently number one in the class. He hesitated only a moment.

“This stanza is highly euphonious with the assonance in line one, the repetition of ‘untouched’ in lines two and three, both assonance and alliteration in line four, and the alliteration in lines four and five.”

I quickly followed with, “How does the sound affect tone and meaning?”

Danielle, who had recently professed her love for poetry, said, “Well, I don’t think she is mocking the dead by making it sound like that. It is simply matter-of-fact, and the sounds make it more comforting... even appealing.”

Several nodded their heads in agreement, and Ansley added, “It’s not an unpleasant image of the grave.”

“Why does she call the dead ‘meek members of the Resurrection,’” I asked. There was silence for a few moments, and no hands went up. I decided to call on Robert, who rarely volunteers. “Is she being sarcastic toward the dead, Robert?” I waited while he pondered.

“I don’t think she is,” he said, looking straight at me.

“Then why does she call them ‘meek’? What does that mean?”

Finally, he murmured, “Well, they don’t do anything. They just lie there. They aren’t active anymore.”

I smiled. “That’s certainly true,” I said. “In fact, you could say they have withdrawn from all interaction with the outside world.” There is some chuckling.

Then Joey said, “I think she chose meek as much for sound as for meaning. ‘Meek members’ sounds better. But no matter what they were in life, all the dead become meek as they withdraw from life.”

Jacob is busy leafing through his Bible. He points out that Dickinson’s choice of “meek” could allude to Psalms 37:11 and Matthew 5:5. “The meek shall inherit the earth,” he says. “When?” I ask. He looks serious and responds, “It will be after Christ’s return... after the Resurrection.” “What about the last line – the ‘Rafter’ and the ‘Roof,’” I asked.

Megan responds quickly. “The satin lines the coffin. The stone is the headstone. It is their resting place.”

So, our discussion in general viewed this stanza as expressing a scripturally-informed faith in conventional Christian promises of the afterlife, and comforting, reassuring feelings about death, which seemed safe and relaxing. “Meek” is doctrine, not satire. We then turned our attention to the second stanza that provides contrast – what takes place on the earth “above” the dead.

Grand go the Years,
In the Crescent above them –
Worlds scoop their Arcs –
And Firmaments – row –
Diadems – drop –
And Doges – surrender –



The above image is a scan of a charcoal drawing done by one of Michael Wall’s students, Ashley Schieffelbein.

Soundless as Dots,
On a Disc of Snow.

My students read this stanza as straightforward as well. Life above ground goes on and on, the poem says, but to the dead, none of that matters. They are out of the action, literally safe. Momentous earthly events, such as kingdoms won and lost, have no more impact on those “waiting” below than does the snow falling on their graves. The actual graves may be “scooped,” becoming gradually shallower, but existence below ground is serene compared to life above. Aurally, we noted, this stanza suggests four couplets, and again the alliteration in the last four lines is quite pleasing to the ear.

Walter raised his hand. “In reality, why would the dead care what happens on the Earth anyway? I think her main point is the passing of time. Millennia can pass, and all kinds of changes can take place above ground, but none of it matters to the dead.”

“However,” I said, “by making no further comment about the dead, is she denying there will be a Second-Coming – that the dead will just remain in their ‘safe chambers’ forever?”

Joey had his Bible open now, and he said, “This is from Psalm 90, verses 3 and 4: ‘You return man to dust and say, “Return, O children of man!” For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past or as a watch in the night.’” The class was silent as Joey continued. “This passage means that in eternity, time passes much like when we are asleep, that a thousand years are literally like a few hours.” So maybe Dickinson is focusing on how the sleep of the dead may seem long from the point of view of the living, but it is only a moment from the point of view of eternity. The room was quiet for a few moments while that thought sank in.

It was a good point to transition. We turned to “Because I could not stop for Death.” They were all familiar with this famous poem,

which they had read in American lit. We focused on the last four lines:

Since then – ‘tis Centuries – and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses’ Heads
Were toward Eternity – (Fr479)

I asked, “Can someone explain how the two poems are similar?”

Chris answered. “In this poem, the speaker narrates her own death, which I think came as a surprise, and then her journey to the grave. As she says, centuries have passed since she arrived, but time passes quickly in the grave. In the other poem, the speaker is alive and commenting how life keeps moving regardless of the dead. Big, important events take place, but they don’t matter to the dead. I think both poems are really about time passing.”

“What does ‘Eternity’ mean?” I asked. Molly volunteered to search the Dickinson Lexicon, and she reported several definitions: “The first is ‘life after death,’ then ‘heaven,’ then ‘everlasting life,’” she said. “They all seem to be spiritual in nature, even specifically God.”

Joey had been gazing at the ceiling, but he looked at me and said, “It’s like she is all caught up with the concept of time and how it is irrelevant, but her focus is the body, not the soul.”

Linda, who had once said we should not discuss religion in school, asked, “How do we know she is not simply denying the existence of the soul?”

Joey glared at her. “One, she never mentions the soul, so it’s not part of the discussion. Two, she knew the Bible, and she certainly knew about the difference between body and soul at death.” Linda did not respond, but I could tell she was unconvinced.

To provide another vantage point on Dickinson’s treatment of the immortality of the soul,

I directed the discussion to John Donne’s “At the round earth’s imagined corners,” in which the speaker is enthusiastic about the Second-Coming in theory, but anxious about his own status with respect to that happy future. After we read the poem twice, I asked if anyone saw a connection to “Alabaster Chambers.”

Rebecca, perhaps my strongest writer, speculated that Dickinson may have recently read Donne’s poem before composing hers: “Donne’s speaker calls for the Second-Coming, but then he asks God to help him repent before he becomes one of the buried dead. It’s completely personal and sincere. Dickinson’s third-person speaker is just making an observation. I think it’s the speaker’s distance that gives it a cold feeling compared to Donne’s passion.”

I looked at Rebecca. “Be more specific. What do you mean by distance and cold?”

She thought a moment, then said, “Compared to Donne’s impassioned speaker who is concerned with his own salvation, Dickinson’s speaker is detached, more objective, just a passive observer.”

I had to smile. “Rebecca,” I say, “I believe *cold* is exactly how Susan Dickinson said that poem made her feel when Emily first sent it to her.” Rebecca was pleased and so was I.

I paced the room a bit; the kids were actually silent.

Danielle raised her hand. “I think Dickinson knows that time is irrelevant, that God will return in His own time. Her speaker does not need to explain further. Actually, I suppose he can’t. He doesn’t know God’s mind.” That thought led to more quiet reflection.

Then, just before the bell rang, Theresa said, “Remember in *Our Town* how the dead are portrayed as being more focused on ‘something eternal’? When Emily returns to the living, she can’t stand that life moves so fast. Well, remember that the Stage Manager com-

ments that ‘only poets and saints’ appreciate life while they live it. Isn’t that kind of ironic?” Indeed.

We may not have achieved UMA, but we had definitely tried, and we felt pretty good about our discoveries. The next day I showed the students Helen Vendler’s essay on “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers.” and they were shocked at the discrepancy between interpretations. Vendler calls the poem “blasphemous” and adamantly asserts that Dickinson, who “doubted that the dead would be raised,” wrote this poem to satirize believers who go to the grave deluded. She finds it ironic that the “safe” dead are untouched by the sun’s light and warmth. She also prefers Dickinson’s second version which uses “lie” rather than “sleep” because it implies that there will be no awakening.

What were we to make of the dramatic difference between our discussion and Vendler’s? We looked more closely at Vendler. In her essay, Vendler observes that Dickinson’s long-time correspondent Thomas Wentworth Higginson had published the poem in *Christian Union* in 1898. Vendler argues that he did so in an attempt to portray her as a Christian poet. My students doubted that Higginson would have printed this poem in a Christian

publication if it had been intended as blasphemous. Recalling that this was one of the four poems that Dickinson sent Higginson with her initial letter to him in April 1862, I asked, “Would she have been so bold as to send a blasphemous poem to a stranger, a man she sought out for honest criticism of her work?”

None of my students had read the poem as mocking religion, but when I challenged them with Vendler’s reading, they conceded that there is ambiguity enough for a range of interpretation.

Molly concluded, “To me it depends on whether you believe what the Bible says or not. Her words are in-line with Scripture – unless someone infers a mocking tone.”

Learning that she changed “sleep” to “lie” in the revision added to the puzzle, and that margin of imprecision frustrated some of my students. They wanted to know the woman by her poetry. I pointed out to them how far apart Dickinson and Donne may seem as people and poets, yet noted that some scholars find common ground. Donne boldly expresses his faith in longer explicit verse. Dickinson begins with a bold statement, but her compact verse also leaves room for questions about what is not said. I reminded them that while

the private poet ceased church-going and admitted to religious skepticism, more precisely she ceased going anywhere beyond her own yard. We know, too, that she continued to read her Bible and wrote some poems and letters that clearly express belief and faith.

“I don’t think we can pin her down, and I doubt she would want us to define her,” I say. “Perhaps ‘Safe in Their Alabaster Chambers’ reveals truths and also the doubts she embraced.”

That year, 12 out of my 48 students scored the coveted 5 on the AP exam, and many scored 4 and 3. That was a very good year. But all of them, I assert, aspired towards and struggled to develop ultimate mental awareness. Discovering UMA is a personal and unique journey. In my classes, it must begin with the students’ experiences and convictions. It requires audacious candor regarding beliefs and values. It also requires the vantage point of outsiders who help us ask the questions our own experience may not have encouraged us to ask. Still, after listening to the experts, it always comes back to what it has always been: an interaction between an inquiring, educated, receptive mind and a provocative, brilliantly idiosyncratic poet. A supportive teacher doesn’t hurt.



Photo Credit: Laura Zolman

Young readers pay their respects outside of the classroom as well. Items seen on Emily Dickinson’s headstone in the Amherst Cemetery on an April afternoon include a troll, a pair of sunglasses, some floral soap, and an eraser wider than the sky.

This is the third in a series of, currently, four articles by collectors of books, letters, and other objects related to the poet. Any other collectors who would like to discuss their experiences are encouraged to contact the editor of the Bulletin.

Collecting Emily Dickinson

By Joel Myerson

I began accumulating works by and about Emily Dickinson while in graduate school in the late 1960s. As a budding scholar of textual editing, descriptive bibliography, and book history, I saw in Dickinson real potential for a future project. I was familiar with the controversies over the editing of her poems and the dispersion of her manuscripts, but no one had actually dealt with the business of publishing (as opposed to editing) her books: even Jacob Blanck's magisterial *Bibliography of American Literature* dealt with first edition publications in a mere seven pages.

My first descriptive bibliography, though, was of Margaret Fuller, and encouraged by my colleague Matt Bruccoli, who edited the Pittsburgh Series in Bibliography, I took on Ralph Waldo Emerson next. This was quite a project, resulting in an 802 page book. I read through old publishers' advertisements, the complete run of *Books in Print*, and manuscript copyright records; sent letters to hundreds of American and British libraries asking about their holdings; and visited some thirty libraries in the U.S., Canada, and Britain. As I prepared to carry my three-inch-thick "bible" (the work-in-progress) to various libraries, I realized that, if I was going to do a descriptive bibliography of Dickinson next, then I should aim for a "twofer" and work up her books as well.

By this time I had put together a fairly decent collection of post-1900 Dickinson works, so I set about, as I have with all the authors I collect, to assemble one copy of every edition, printing, issue, and state of every title wholly by her, as well as foreign-language editions that printed English texts along with translations. This was, of course, impossible, which made it a lifelong project

and fun. I travelled to Boston a couple times a year to do research, and booking in the seventies was wonderful: in Boston, Goodspeed's had two stores, Ernie Starr and Sam Morrill were on Kingston Street, George Gloss' Brattle had settled into its location on West Street, Anne and David Bromer were opposite the Public Library and Avenue Victor Hugo was nearby on Newbury Street, and David and Mary O'Neal, Priscilla Jewellis, and Buddenbrooks were just setting up shop; in Cambridge, there was another Starr, Pangloss, and Ahab books. And, whenever I went to libraries for research or to conferences, there were local shops to hunt through. And none of them had comfortable leather reading chairs, baristas, or lattes.

I was also fortunate to work at libraries when it was still possible to do so without restrictions. I had a stack access pass to the Library of Congress and when I paged literally every Dickinson and Emerson book at the old British Library on Great Russell Street, they brought them to me in a series of carts. And I snagged a stack access pass to the new section of the Bodleian Library in Oxford, only to discover that the call numbers were arranged in the order in which the books were accessioned, not in any system normally recognized by librarians, resulting in much exercise as I shuffled from floor to floor, and much needed respite in the King's Arms pub across the street.

But why collect Dickinson? Don't libraries have copies of her books? As I discovered in doing my other bibliographies, there is no substitute for having multiple copies on hand to examine for variations in their texts, bindings, and other physical attributes. Because I was collecting on a newly-promoted associate professor's salary not just Dickin-

son, but more Emerson and starting on Walt Whitman, I did not worry about condition but bought as many copies in as reasonable condition as possible (but not rebound ones because that destroyed bibliographical evidence). I also pretty much avoided fine press editions or artists' books, which were often more expensive than first editions.

I looked forward to the Dickinson bibliography while I was completing the one on Emerson because it promised to be short. After all, Emerson was a prolific author over his forty-year career, and many of his works went out of copyright in the late nineteenth-century, resulting in hundreds of reprintings of individual titles and essays. The latter books were especially challenging because the plates from one publisher were loaned or rented to another, and tracking down the genealogy of these reprintings was frustrating. Also, many of the reprint firms had various "series" in which their books appeared, and I had to try and find them all. In Dickinson, though, I had an author who died before her first book-length work was published, and who stayed in copyright through the mid-twentieth century. There was no evidence of her publication history among her own private papers, and the papers of most of her editors were available. Because she published so few books compared to Emerson, I was able to describe each work in much greater detail.

Also, I was able to track down the records of her first publisher, Roberts Brothers, which had been purchased by Little, Brown in 1898. In working on Emerson, I discovered that Houghton Mifflin had the original contracts between Emerson and the firm and its predecessors, dating back to the 1850s, in its office in Boston, because one

of its Emerson titles was still in print, thus making him a “current” author. Therefore, I approached Little, Brown about the Roberts Brothers costbooks, and when they graciously allowed me into their vault, I discovered the costbooks, which I was told, were kept there because they looked “old.” With these, I was able to precisely state the number of copies printed of all of her works through 1898.

I purchased the core of my collection in 1980 from Ernie Starr. I loved his store: besides normal bookshelves, he had towers of orange crates filled with books and a flashlight with which to see them in the murk of the back room. I walked into Ernie’s one day and saw a bunch of Dickinson volumes, nearly all published before 1915. The possibility of buying all those books at once was too good to pass up, and we negotiated a price of \$1250 for some three dozen (a lot of

money then, to be sure, but a purchase that ultimately saved me both time and money in assembling my collection). But I lacked a copy of the first printing of *Poems*. That hole was filled in 1987 by Malcolm Ferguson, a book scout in Concord, Massachusetts. Malcolm used to park his car in front of the First Parish church during the annual Thoreau Society meeting and deal books from his trunk to favored customers. One year when he needed to fix his roof, he sold me his copy of *Poems*, discounted at \$412.50 because it lacked the front endpaper, which did not discourage me in the least, especially since I knew what I’d have to pay if that single leaf of paper was present (in 1998 I paid \$1500 for a copy in very good condition).

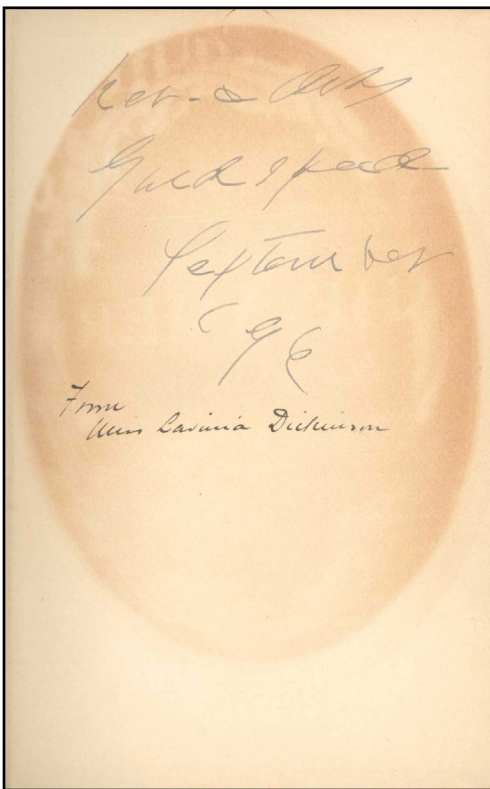
When I started collecting in the late 1970s, the prices were low, which is how I could afford to collect on an academic’s salary. To give examples of how prices have changed in the last couple decades, here’s what I paid and when, and then the highest current price for the book listed on the internet: *A Masque of Poets* (1980, \$150; now, \$650), *Poems* (1987, \$412.50; 1998, \$1500; now, \$8500-\$30,000), *Letters* (1980-1992, \$50-\$150; now \$400), *Poems: Third Series* (1980, \$100; 1998, \$15; now, \$4000), and Hitchcock’s *A Handbook of Amherst* (1987, \$27.50; now, \$400). And, often, the price did not reflect the importance of the book. I paid \$375 in 1982 for a first London edition of *Poems* (now, \$1500), but the next year spent \$150 for a copy in what may be a unique trial binding.

Finally, the titles I consider the real gems of my collection. In 2002 Jack Hanrahan sold me copies of the first two series of *Poems* in the white leather binding, by far the rarest format. I have Nathan Haskell Dole’s copy of *A Masque of Poets*, with his identification of contributors. But the real treasure is related to a joke I used to tell my classes. If any of them found, I said, the “black tulip” of Dickinson collecting, a copy of *Poems*

inscribed by Dickinson, then please let me know. A few of them actually figured out the impossibility of such a search. I do have, however, the closest thing: three copies, one of each series of *Poems*, inscribed by Lavinia Dickinson.

My Emily Dickinson collection not only served as the basis for my descriptive bibliography, but was a lot of fun in assembling. I’m up to nearly five hundred volumes now (and can brag that I’ve “read” every one of them), and have of late started to buy fine press and artists’ books with the same enthusiasm as a gambler drawing to an inside straight – I must fill that gap in the collection. I mourn the passing of bricks and mortar bookshops, where I actually got to meet dealers and handle books, itself an educational experience (I learned more from book-dealers than I ever have from librarians). At the same time, I embrace the internet, which has emptied America’s attic onto eBay, allows dealers all over the world to make their wares accessible, and generally places on sale items usually thought too inexpensive to put in printed catalogues. I do, though, abhor print on demand titles that clutter up sites like eBay and distract from real books. All in all, this is an exciting period in which to collect Dickinson, even though prices are up and stocks of available titles are down. Still, I yearn for the days when, after buying books in Boston, I would return home to find a number of large boxes full of books ready to open and view again; now, I spend the same amount of money but put the one book in my pocket.

Joel Myerson, *Carolina Distinguished Professor of American Literature, Emeritus, University of South Carolina*, has prepared descriptive primary bibliographies of Dickinson, Emerson, Fuller, Theodore Parker, and Walt Whitman. *The Joel Myerson Collection of Nineteenth-Century American Literature, some 12,000 volumes and over 200 manuscripts, is at the University of South Carolina library.*



Lavinia’s inscription to a copy of the 1890 edition of *Poems*.

Series Editor, Jonnie Guerra

Dickinson and Presley, the Sacred and Profane, and I

By Hans Ostrom

This issue's featured poet is Hans Ostrom, professor of African American studies and English at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington. Ostrom is the author of two books on Langston Hughes and the coeditor of the 5-volume Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Studies and an essay collection titled Colors of a Different Horse: Rethinking Creative Writing Theory and Pedagogy. He also has published three novels, Three to Get Ready, Honoring Juanita, and Without One, as well as two poetry collections, The Coast Starlight: Collected Poems 1976-2006 and, most recently, Clear a Place for Good. Ostrom's poetry and short fiction have appeared in a variety of anthologies and literary journals. Participants in the Society's 2013 annual meeting in Cleveland, Emily Rocks, may remember that I read Ostrom's entertaining poem, "Emily Dickinson and Elvis Presley," during our evening of cabaret performances. I am pleased to present his equally entertaining reflections on his connection to and appreciation for Emily Dickinson as part of the Poet to Poet series.

About twenty-five years ago, I was watching a documentary about Elvis Presley. In a scene from it, a member of Elvis's entourage – the so-called Memphis Mafia – calls Elvis "E." For reasons I have yet to identify, I connected the "E" to Emily Dickinson and imagined someone calling her "E." The idea amused me, as does the notion of a parallel Dickinson entourage, an Amherst Mafia.

Not long thereafter, at any rate, I began to write a poem in which Elvis and Emily meet. A logical poet, I asked myself, "Where could they meet?" Answer: "In a poem." Second answer: "In Heaven."

The poem as it eventually turned out appears at right.

My sense of Dickinson's mind and spirit, to the extent one may infer those by reading her work, is that she was immensely broad-minded, witty, and ready to be surprised. Therefore, I assumed she would be delighted to meet Elvis and learn about such things as Levi jeans and rhinestones and such people as Little Richard and Richard Nixon.

Second, I imagined she would welcome Elvis's friendship but set firm boundaries. As to Elvis, I figured he couldn't help but hit on her at least once, even in Heaven, but would respect her wishes. I also thought he'd be interested in her sense of craft, hence the part about half-rhymes. It's important to recall that Elvis was not merely a performer but a student of music and a fine producer of recordings.

Overall, I probably was concerned chiefly with pleasing myself – poets are selfish – and getting these two American icons together did please me, no end.

There is often much whimsy in Dickinson's poetry and in Elvis's performances, so I hoped the poem would reflect a bit of that, too,

Emily Dickinson and Elvis Presley in Heaven

They call each other 'E.' Elvis picks
wildflowers near the river and brings
them to Emily. She explains half-rhymes to him.

In heaven Emily wears her hair long, sports
Levis and western blouses with rhinestones.
Elvis is lean again, wears baggy trousers

and T-shirts, a letterman's jacket from Tupelo High.
They take long walks and often hold hands.
She prefers they remain just friends. Forever.

Emily's poems now contain naugahyde, Cadillacs,
Electricity, jets, TV, Little Richard and Richard
Nixon. The rock-a-billy rhythm makes her smile.

Elvis likes himself with style. This afternoon
he will play guitar and sing "I Taste A Liquor
Never Brewed" to the tune of "Love Me Tender."

Emily will clap and harmonize. Alone
in their cabins later, they'll listen to the river
and nap. They will not think of Amherst

or Las Vegas. They know why God made them
roommates. It's because America
was their hometown. It's because

God is a thing without
feathers. It's because
God wears blue suede shoes.

although I had no delusions about trying to compete with either of them. Of course, there are other possible parallels between Dickinson and Presley. Both are American originals even as both draw on longstanding American cultural traditions: Dickinson improvises upon the form of the hymn, and Elvis is hugely influenced by African American spirituals, blues, and rhythm & blues.

Few if any poets can foresee what the “career” of a poem will be, to use Karl Shapiro’s term. The Elvis and Emily poem first appeared in a small literary magazine called the *Sucharnochee Review*. From there it was re-published in books of mine, in anthologies, and even in a text that is used in high school advanced-placement courses in the United States. When the Internet came along, it found more audiences and continues to find them.

It seems many readers can relate to the oddball pairing, to Dickinson’s reticence and Elvis’s renewal, and to the aforementioned whimsy.

Sacred and Profane?

But it wasn’t until Rita Dove republished the poem and commented on it that I saw how some people might derive deeper meaning, so to speak, from the poem. Dove suggested the poem is in part about the sacred and (or versus) the profane, with Dickinson representing the former and Elvis the latter.

I do see what she was getting at. Dickinson is certainly dignified, especially in comparison to the public Presley, who could often be vulgar, crass, and way over the top. They certainly spring from different corners of American culture. (For a shrewd, subtle interpretation of Presley, however, I would recommend Bobbie Ann Mason’s biography.)

Also, for all her dignity, Dickinson liked to get her hands dirty, writing about morbid subjects, looking hard at snakes and birds, and exploring the unforgiving landscape of the psyche. Presley, for his part, intuitively understood as much about language and American English as Dickinson did (hence the heavenly discussion of half-rhymes), and literally he could be



Photo Credit: Nathan Aune

sacred: he grew up around gospel music, and he recorded it.

I don’t think we catch Dickinson being literally profane, but her poems about death and Eternity certainly aren’t conventionally pious, either.

From my point of view, the eccentric Americanness of Emily and Elvis complicates the issue of the sacred versus the profane.

Dickinson and I

But this is a publication about Dickinson, not about Dickinson and Presley, so let me say a few words about my attitude toward Dickson’s work.

“Who is your favorite poet?” Because the question is so difficult to answer and so plainly non-academic, I like to answer it. I often answer, “Dickinson.” My main reason for doing so is that I think American poets, especially, have not caught up to some of the “moves” Dickinson makes in her poetry. Her capacity to blend the abstract and concrete, consistently and deftly, continues to amaze me and ought to amaze poets of any age.

What else? The ease with which she applies a broad lexicon and a zest for improvisation

to the short lyric continues to amaze. The way she constructs a tough-minded but vulnerable, learned but plain-spoken, reserved persona is, to my mind, as absolutely crucial to American literature as Whitman’s creation of his voluble, self-centered, and grandiose poetic persona. More than that, she is as playful as a jazz musician and as consistently astute as any clever Modern poet, including Auden. And her catholic interests: trains, snakes, death, flies buzzing in a death-room, publication (which, in Fr788, she calls “the Auction/of the Mind”), passion, depression, despair, and states of mind not easily categorized. Her imagery is as sharp as that of any Imagist, but it is a part of a larger whole. She does parade her reading-life the way Eliot and Pound did, but she comes off as quicker, smarter, and more emotionally wise than they.

I think I sensed most of this richness, at some level, when I first began reading her work in high school. However, I had to overcome not so much my own resistance to her work as others’ resistance to it. Others made way too much of the capitalization and dashes. Others turned her into an eccentric recluse, a feminist icon, a pretty poet, and/or “difficult.”

Even more sophisticated, academic views of her sometimes muddy the waters unnecessarily. To poets and to those who would understand the craft of writing poetry, then, I would suggest simply that you read the poems indiscriminately, be ready to learn from the least famous poems, and soak it all in. What is “it”? With her work, it could be anything. Fitting a polysyllabic word (which happens to be just the right word) into a comparatively clipped meter. Bending the notes of rhyme. Adding the nitty gritty to meditative poems, and adding the meditative to observational ones – in the most economic way possible. Amusing yourself and your reader at the same time. Being interested in anything that comes along. Not thinking or writing conventionally – but also not experimenting or rebelling out of mere insecurity or the wish to be different. Putting no limits on what a lyric poem may take on. Knowing precisely when to start and stop a poem. And on and on. As a source of instruction to poets, Dickinson’s poetry is inexhaustible.

Moreover, where others, as noted, present her work as complicated and unapproachable, I believe she welcomes readers from all kinds of backgrounds and many stages of life. Thus, in my case, her work appeals to one from a small-town, rural background. I grew up in a town of 200 in California's Sierra Nevada, and the work of a woman from Amherst appeals to me because of the way she looks at nature – carefully but not very sentimentally – and because the rhetoric of her poetry is often that of gossip, even as the secret revealed is profound.

And so I come to the second Dickinson poem I wrote, in 2001, at least a decade after I arranged the meeting with Elvis.

Homage to Emily Dickinson

A bird came up
My mental walk.
It pinched a Dickinson
Scholar in half.

In my scrappy hometown,
I knew weirdoes like you,
Liked them. They
Lived their lives,

And just their lives.
How rare that is
I began to know
Even at age six.

Your poems are prim
Graffiti scratched
On the back of Piety's pew.
Good old you.

Your poems know more
Than ever they let on,
Were postcards sent
From privacy, anon.

Well, there I go again with the sacred and profane, calling her a weirdo – but in the most

loving terms – and comparing her poems to postcards. Not to mention the abject folly of imitating her verse while knowing it can't be imitated. And then the jab at Dickinson scholars! For that, I apologize. Dickinson scholars have done noble work. Where would we and Dickinson's poetry be without them? A scholar myself, however, I couldn't resist the worm-comparison, and I had to have the bird take action. Anyway, I think the poem condenses much of the complicated appeal Dickinson's poetry holds for me.

And, apparently, I routinely look at contemporary culture and wonder what Dickinson would think. What, for example, would she think of Twitter, the very name of which poaches on her beloved birds' turf. Twitter's celebrated verbal economy (140 characters) may not be Dicksonian, per se, but is certainly not Whitmanesque. And so we will conclude with Ms. Dickinson on Twitter in a poem I scribbled a year ago to please myself and the imaginary Emily reading over my shoulder:

Emily Dickinson on Twitter

I'll leave it to
the forest Friends
to tweet –
mellifluent –
and brief –
and sometimes Sweet.

Their message
stays the same –
"We are! We are!"
They travel here –
each Spring –
from very far.

Of PC – of Mac –
of Twitter Account –
they have no need.
Just throat –
and beak – and tiny
tongue for Reed.

Works Cited

Dove, Rita. "Poet's Choice." *Washington Post* May 20, 2001.
Mason, Bobbie Ann. *Elvis Presley: A Life*. New York: Penguin, 2007.
Ostrom, Hans. "Emily Dickinson and Elvis Presley in Heaven." *Sucarnochee Review*. Fall 1989. Reprinted in *Kiss Off: Poems to Set You Free*, ed. Mary D. Esselman and Elizabeth Ash Velez. New York: Warner Books, 2003 and in *Hans Ostrom, The Coast Starlight: Collected Poems 1976-2006*. Indianapolis, Dog Ear Publishing, 2006, p. 26.
Ostrom, Hans. "Homage to Emily Dickinson," *The Coast Starlight: Collected Poems 1976-2006*, p16.
Ostrom, Hans. "Emily Dickinson on Twitter," *Poet's Musing*, <http://poetsmusings-muser.blogspot.com/> (March 28, 2012).
Shapiro, Karl. "The Career of the Poem." *The Poetry Wreck: Selected Essays 1950-1970*. New York: Random House, 1975. 300-323.

By an odd coincidence, another poet offers his own meditation on Dickinson's tweets. – Ed.

Emily Dickinson Tries Skyping

On any – Social – Media –
I am a – Nervous Guest –
I dwell in – Wikipedia –
Its Googles – suit me – Best –

And – Facebook proves a Torment –
Still –
I am afraid to Post –
To – My Three Friends – Lest I sound –
Shrill
My Profile is – a Ghost –

That's why, Upon your – Silver Screen –
You can no – Image – raise –
I hide behind the Mirror's Sheen –
Eluding – every – Gaze –

So – choosing Limitations – Sweet –
That suit my – Scarcity –
I think – now on – I'll tweet the World –
That never – Tweeted – Me –

Barton Levi St. Armand

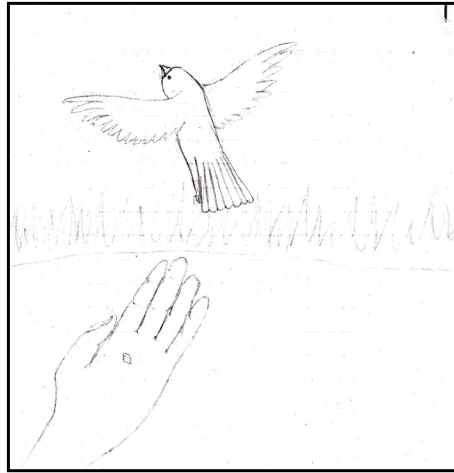
Continued from page 8

to this beautiful bird, and how humans have detached themselves from the rest of nature.” Caroline’s picture and words reveal a young reader who is sophisticated enough to be alive to the complexities, longings, and doubts in Dickinson’s description of a meeting between strangers.

Mac, Grade 8 (right):

The drawing by Mac radiates a gentle sense of grace and resolution. His choice of a subject – the bird joyously ascending into the sky – seems to capture a tone of mystery and peace, giving expression to a sentiment that I also feel with the poem’s last stanza.

My own understanding of this poem has grown from that of a naïve reader, at age



sixteen, who thought this was simply a poem about feeding a bird; to a sense some twenty years later that the poem was exploring issues of trust and kind-

ness with a stranger; to my current (and still incomplete) reading of the poem as a yearning for release and bliss. My internal image of the poem continues to evolve.

One of the delights of reading Emily Dickinson is that our readings of even well-known poems alter over time. As we become more familiar with Dickinson’s dense imagery and the indeterminacy of her language, new shades of meaning, ambiguity, and reinterpretation offer themselves.

The Dickinson images are so striking and elemental that they seem follow us through our lives, like the moon gliding just above the horizon beside a moving vehicle, and take on new forms as our ongoing life experiences afford us new perspective.

Was it Epilepsy?

By Norbert Hirschhorn and Polly Longworth

The authors have published a full-length version of this notice as “Was it Epilepsy?: Misdiagnosing Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), in *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, vol. 56/3, 371-386.

Lyndall Gordon’s recent biography, *Lives Like Loaded Guns: Emily Dickinson and Her Family Feuds* (2010), tells with high verve the story of generational infighting over Emily Dickinson’s posthumous presentation to the world. Unfortunately, what got more attention from reviewers and public media was Gordon’s hypothesis that Dickinson suffered from epilepsy – an aspect Gordon herself has said was not the principal subject of the book. Our paper seeks only to take issue with what we believe was a mistaken diagnosis, to correct the biographical record.

Gordon’s diagnosis was based on a misreading of 19th century pharmacology in which the medication glycerine was used as a nutritive anti-tuberculosis remedy (in the early 1850s, as in Dickinson’s case), and decades later as a sweetener for astringent drugs like chloral hydrate – a soporific first used against epilepsy in the 1870s, but not a medicine Dickinson was ever known to take. Glycerine *per se* was never advocated or used against epilepsy.

Gordon’s other line of evidence was a supposed family strain of epilepsy. We show that the poet’s cousin-once-removed, whom Gordon cited, did not have epilepsy, based on a close reading of his remarkably abundant clinical history. While Dickinson’s nephew Ned did have the classical disease, no other person in the extended Dickinson or Gilbert families is known to have experienced it. Therefore Ned’s illness may be considered one of the spontaneous, non-familial epileptic conditions that occur within 1% of the general population.

We went further to examine all of Dickinson’s illnesses noted on record. None of them indicates epilepsy, including unconsciousness and seizures at the end of her life, which were marks of severe hypertension, not epilepsy. We hope our paper will be a useful contribution to Dickinson studies and will help lay to rest Gordon’s speculation.

Inspired by Emily: Jewels

By Mary Jarvis

I have a passion for the visual arts. I have loved making art, visiting art museums, and learning how and why people make art since childhood. For many “creatives,” such as myself, making art is the method we use to express ourselves: our thoughts, opinions, joys, sorrows, and yearnings. A few years ago I began to turn to our beloved Emily Dickinson for inspiration to create a series of jewelry pieces. As I read her work, some of the poems produced “tiny paintings” in my mind. I soon had a small collection of her poems to which I felt a strong connection. I imagined walking alongside Emily as she discovered small miracles in the woods behind her home. Miss Dickinson found ageless wonders and wisdom in the smallest objects, in the tiny beings in her yard, and outside her window.

I was frustrated that many people did not appreciate the depth of her work. About the same time I began researching the poems of Emily, I visited the Georgia O’Keefe Museum in Santa Fe, New Mexico. There I learned that Georgia began drawing and painting flowers in Central Park, in New York City. She became frustrated that so many people visiting the park would pass by the beautiful flowers without stopping to appreciate their wonders. Her frustration brought her the idea to paint the flowers so large that people would be forced to notice the details and beauty that she discovered in them. Similarly, it was my hope that by illuminating Emily’s poems in sterling silver, gold and stones, people would be curious to seek the wisdom expressed in her poems.

I selected her popular favorite, “‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers – ” (Fr314), and made several drawings of the images in the poem including feathers, and a bird. How

does a bird perch in the soul? The expression “window of the soul” came to mind, so I found images of a hand-carved wooden Chinese window to create the “soul.” I searched for stones the color of the sea, and moonstones that illustrated ice or “the chill.” Just as Emily stitched most of her poems together in small booklets, I wanted the large pendant to open like a small book, with the entire poem etched inside, visible when closed.

Sometimes it is the stone that inspires the design. With “A Drop fell on the Apple Tree – ” (Fr846) in mind, a gorgeous aqua blue druzy stone caught my eye. It had been cut into the shape of a cloud. The stone became the main element of the design. I created a sterling silver bezel, leaving a large scalloped edge. I etched part of the poem onto the back and sides of the setting. I attached the “drops” or rain, with small seed pearls “kissing the eaves” of the stone/cloud. The whimsical design evokes a bit of laughter, a delightful element Emily included in her poem. I was happy to think of Emily imagining, while writing her poem, what a necklace made of raindrops might look like!

My love for Emily Dickinson’s poems began in high school English class. My personal favorite was “I held a Jewel in my fingers – ” (Fr261). I had had a similar dream, waking up with the sensation of holding the object of my dream after I woke, but finding it was gone. I wanted to bring this poem to life, making it a large locket with a hinge. I had a beautiful amethyst stone, and created the setting at the end of a hand. As in the previous pendant, the words to the poem are etched inside the locket.

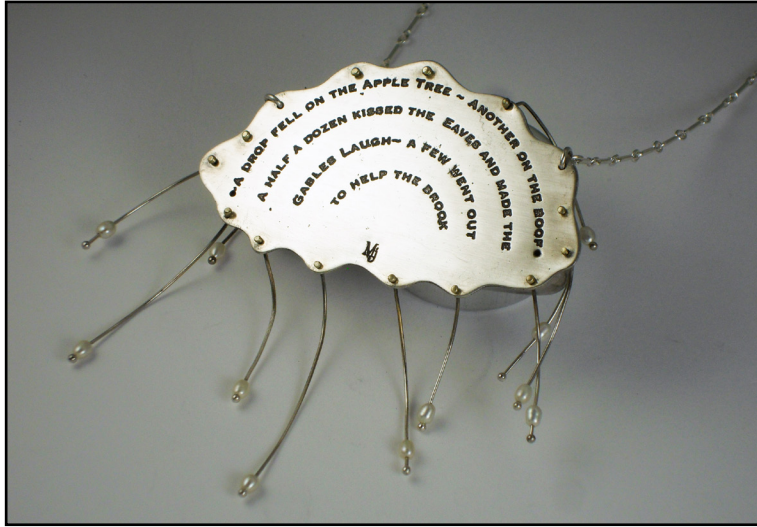
While inviting Emily to become my muse, I discovered a new favorite poem, “Bring

me the sunset in a cup – ” (Fr140). I read it over and over. It was more challenging to understand. I had to research words more common in her day: flagons, Debauchee, withes, piers and pomposity. This is a poem on the grand scale: a poem that celebrates the many gifts of our world as if served on a platter by God. I knew this piece needed to be large scale. I did not want to be inhibited by any of the restraints of jewelry, the requirement of making it small and wearable. The large wall collage was created using many enameling techniques, chasing & repousse hammering technique (the coffee cup), and found objects. The entire poem is legible in several different areas. Included is a facsimile of an Emily Dickinson poem handwritten by Emily on an envelope, (many of which can now be seen online), a vintage woman’s leather glove stuffed, to make the piece a little eerie, as if it were the gloved hand and arm of Emily, an inherited lace napkin, a real turtle shell, an enameled chrysalis representing the “little Alban House” giving birth to the butterfly: “Who’ll let me out some gala day / With implements to fly away, / Passing Pomposity?” There is also a small enameled, winged portrait of Emily Dickinson.

I look forward to my next “Emily inspired” project. Perhaps it will be “Wild Nights.” I dream of the day I can visit Emily’s home, and walk the surrounding grounds, connecting with her spirit as never before.

Mary Jarvis, artist, jewelry designer, and maker, lives in Dallas, Texas.

The works on the following page illustrate, clockwise from middle left, “A Drop fell on the Apple Tree – ” (Fr846) (inside and outside); “I held a Jewel in my fingers – ” (Fr261); and “‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers – ” (Fr314), inside and outside.



Series Editor, Cindy MacKenzie

George Frisbie Whicher

By Paul Crumbley

This is the third in a series of articles about early Dickinson biographers. See the Fall 2012 issue of the Bulletin for Aife Murray's article about Josephine Pollitt Pohl, and the Spring 2013 issue for Jane Eberwein's article about Genevieve Taggard.

Anyone interested in the history of Dickinson scholarship will find George Frisbie Whicher especially noteworthy as an early biographer whose 1938 *This Was a Poet: A Critical Biography of Emily Dickinson* set the standard for all biographies to follow. Previous articles in this series have sketched the significant contributions to Dickinson biography made by Josephine McIlvain Pollitt Pohl and Genevieve Taggard, both of whom published biographical studies in 1930 that investigated unresolved questions regarding Dickinson's private life, including much speculation as to the identity of "the poet's elusive lover" (Murray 16). Whicher also presents the poet's life as significantly influenced by what he describes as a "death-blow to her heart" (272), but he is far less interested in the players central to this signal trauma than he is with Dickinson's ability to translate personal disaster into enduring art. For Whicher, Dickinson is first and foremost a New Englander, and as such blessed with philosophical resources sufficient to translate personal adversity into spiritual and artistic achievement. "Stand a New Englander on his head," he writes, "and he will soon arrive at an antipodean philosophy" (283). It is this antipodean turn that most interests Whicher and that most directly informs his reading of Dickinson as a poet who places her passions in the service of visionary art.

Whicher grew up during Dickinson's initial emergence as a public figure, developing his understanding of her and her poetry in the decades marking her initial reception by the reading public and literary scholars. He was born in Lawrenceville,



George Frisbie Whicher in 1940.
Photo Credit: Amherst College Archives and Special Collections

New Jersey, in 1889, the year before Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson brought out the first volume of Dickinson's poetry. His maternal grandfather, Alvah L. Frisbie, graduated from Amherst College in 1857, and Whicher followed in his grandfather's footsteps, completing his Amherst degree in 1910. Five years later, in 1915, he returned as an associate professor, earned promotion to full professor in 1922, and remained on the Amherst College English faculty until his death in 1954. Over the course of his academic career, Whicher published *The Life and Romances of Mrs. Eliza Haywood* (1915), *Alas All's Vanity* (1942), *Walden*

Revisited (1945), *Selected Poems of Horace* (1947), *Thoreau's Walden and Selected Prose* (1947), *The Goliard Poets* (1949), *Mornings at 8:50* (1950), and *Poetry of the New England Renaissance 1790-1890* (1950), but it was his 1938 Dickinson biography that brought him to prominence as a Dickinson authority. The only book-length biographies to precede his were Martha Dickinson Bianchi's 1924 *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson*, her 1932 *Emily Dickinson Face to Face*, and the two 1930 biographies by Taggard and Pollitt Pohl. This made Whicher the first male and the first academic to publish an extended study of Dickinson's life.

The table of contents for *This Was a Poet* makes plain Whicher's aspiration to academic precision and clarity. Most notable is the symmetrical organization reflected in an initial division into two parts that are further divided into two subdivisions composed of four sections each, resulting in a total of sixteen chapters averaging twenty pages. The two largest sections neatly divide the book in halves; the first deals directly with facts surrounding the poet's life and the second concentrates on cultural context and the poems themselves. The overall impression is one of order, and, above all, balance. Whicher's aspiration to objectivity governs all dimensions of the book, from its formal structure to its assembly of evidence.

The scholarly orientation is clear from the first sentence of the preface, where Whicher confidently declares that Dickinson's poems rank as "the final and artistically the most perfect product of the New England

Renaissance” (i). Such an opening makes plain Whicher’s belief that biography is most valuable as a tool essential to positioning Dickinson at the pinnacle of America’s first great wave of literary art. He does acknowledge the need to address the nagging question of who the lover might have been, but he does so with the aim of putting the question to rest so that he can concentrate more fully on the cultural resources that fueled Dickinson’s rise to literary mastery. Alluding to “a considerable body of fresh” evidence brought to light since 1930, Whicher incisively notes, “I hope I may have used it with effect to terminate the persistent search for Emily’s unknown lover”

(ii). He failed, of course, but believing that he had solved the mystery lib-

erated him to train his gaze elsewhere. As he observes of Dickinson in his final chapter, “she had passed through the valley of the shadow and reached the hill of vision” (287). It is his understanding of that vision that most interested him and that makes Whicher appealing to readers today.

The first half of the book, the most consistently biographical part, opens with a section titled “The Little Tippler” that covers Dickinson’s life from birth to the conclusion of her year at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary; the second section, “Tutors and Shepherds and Later Years,” covers the remainder of her life, including her harrowing affair of the heart. Whicher speaks with great conviction on this topic, narrowing the time frame to the period of eight years between 1854, when Dickinson travelled to Washington DC, and 1862, when she first wrote Thomas Wentworth Higginson and indicated that her crisis was behind her. “If we ask what friendship she most cherished during these eight years,” he writes, “and indeed for the remainder of her life, there is only one possible answer” and for Whicher that answer is “the Reverend Charles Wadsworth” (99). Whicher

briefly mentions Susan Huntington Gilbert Dickinson as a friend with whom Dickinson shared her poems. He even acknowledges that “Sue suggested improvements” (34), but in his account the friendship faltered in the final years.

The brevity of Whicher’s comments on Sue may at first glance seem strange to those of us familiar with more contemporary accounts of the poet’s life, but certainly no more peculiar than the fact that Whicher does not mention Austin’s affair with Mabel Loomis Todd or Dickinson’s late-life correspondence with Judge Otis Philips Lord. Gaps such as these can for

“She had passed through the valley of the shadow and reached the hill of vision.”

the most part be explained by the fact that Whicher’s biographical resources were limited and that he used those that were at his disposal to explain how the poet’s life achieves fruition in the poetry. It is easy to forget, for instance, that the Lord correspondence did not come to light until Millicent Todd Bingham announced it in her 1954 *Emily Dickinson: A Revelation*. In his “Biographical Transcript,” Whicher describes having examined “more than two hundred” letter manuscripts, “about half of which have not yet been printed” (311). Compare that number to the 1047 letters now available in the standard Johnson and Ward edition of the letters and the gaps seem far less surprising.

Even so, Whicher’s main concern may have been to keep Dickinson’s love life as simple as possible, and limiting it to a single major crisis certainly served that end, especially if doing so was consistent with the evidence at his disposal. The time frame Whicher identified also matched up well with Dickinson’s most prolific years, lending support to Whicher’s contention that Dickinson productively transformed her romantic disappointment into vision-

ary art. It is all very neat, perhaps too neat in light of Whicher’s presence in Amherst as a student at Amherst College in the first decade of the twentieth century, when rumors of Austin’s affair with Mabel would almost certainly have been in the air. It is also strange that he makes no mention of the fact that Sue wrote the obituary for the family that appeared in the *Springfield Republican*. She would have hardly been considered the best person for that task had the friendship cooled in the later years, nor would she have written such a knowledgeable and affectionate account if the two had grown distant. It may well be that Whicher viewed the previous bi-

ographies as altogether too engaged with family matters and speculation about other love

interests and wanted for that reason to limit his own discussion to only those influences that he considered to have a direct bearing on Dickinson’s life as a writer. For that reason, he acknowledges that Sue advised Dickinson on poems but goes no further. To admit the possibility of collaboration would have detracted from his concern with the solitary origins of Dickinson’s art.

What is perhaps most intriguing for readers today is Whicher’s conviction that Dickinson channeled the seemingly boundless energies generated by that “most intense event of her life” into an “inward drama” that yielded poetry of extraordinary richness and range (290). This is the primary subject Whicher explores in the second half of the book under the headings “The Sources of a Style” and “Poetry as Playmate,” where he concentrates most intently on cultural influences and criticism. His central argument is that Dickinson’s “mind was formed in what would now be called the New England hinterland” and thus “protected, as though under glass, from all shaping influences” (153). For Whicher, the cultural influences that most mattered were those Dickinson absorbed during the

first three decades of her life; these would serve as a lens through which she concentrated her vision to such an extent that she remained largely untouched by the Civil War or the Gilded Age.

Whicher presents three primary influences that shaped Dickinson's early development: "the Puritan tradition," a newly emergent Yankee or American sense of humor, and "spiritual unrest" as "typified by Emerson" (Whicher 153). Of these, it is Whicher's treatment of humor that is perhaps most surprising and delightful. In his eyes, Dickinson combines a command of informal banter with a "Puritan genius for introspection" to produce a brand of "frontier" poems (181). He characterizes these as approaching serious themes with a light-hearted ease that avoids descending into sentiment by ending with sudden twists that seem to disregard the preceding serious train of thought (181). Whicher cites "God is a distant – stately Lover –" (Fr615) as one of many examples and is quite convincing, but his real strength lies in his account of Emerson's influence on Dickinson. He is careful to state that Dickinson was not a disciple of Emerson but rather that she imbibed the same spirit of the age that achieved its "consummate fruition and received it widest applications through his work" (199). Most important, Dickinson joined Emerson in giving "voice to the single master thought" of the age: "the conviction of self-sufficiency" (199). Dickinson, like Emerson, "required no proof, and could accept no disproof, of the soul's sovereignty" (199). For her, Whicher avers, "'To be alive is power'" (qtd in 199).

As might reasonably be expected, some of what Whicher asserts jars against modern sensibilities. Such is the case when he more or less dismisses Dickinson's "most outrageously mocking . . . poems on Biblical [sic] subjects" by casting them as "written in a spirit of frolic and banter for a special audience, her nephew Ned" (155). His assessment of "the technical details of her poetry" might also give today's readers pause, particularly when he concludes

that "she was naïve as a blueberry" and betrayed none of the "experiment with novel and intricate verse forms" evident in Helen Hunt Jackson's poems (165). Similarly, Whicher's announcement that Dickinson's "only external subject was nature seen from her garden" is at odds with current research that presents Dickinson as vitally engaged with her historical moment (290).

Despite what may seem to us today as an excessively narrow framework for assessing Dickinson's achievement, Whicher is quite impressive and even prescient when describing the content and scope of her poems. With characteristic wry humor, he comments on the startling diversity of her thought: "The variety of her attitudes is so notable that it has induced many readers, Higginson among the first, to characterize her as elusive and unpredictable, a doubtful compliment, since really elusive minds are generally shut up in institutions" (291). But, as he quickly points out, "Dickinson's poems are not the vague mumblings of a pythoness." Quite the opposite: "Her constant effort was to be clear and exact in every phrase" (291). It was Whicher, after all, who, as James Woodress has noted, "was the first scholar to warn biographers that the I in Emily Dickinson's poetry . . . 'does not mean – me – but a supposed person'" (193-94). It is here, in his demonstration of the diversity of guises assumed by her "supposed person," that Whicher is most able to reach across time and achieve a kind of currency. When Whicher comments that two of Dickinson's poems "amount to little more than field notes," it is hard not to think of Robin Peel's recent study of Dickinson's engagement with science (293). Jed Deppman's work with Dickinson's thought experiments comes to mind when Whicher argues that Dickinson "is concerned primarily with the inner life of the mind" (292) and that she "insisted on testing what her mind had wrought" (297). "Few poets," Whicher declares, "have cared so much for mental honesty" (297). We might also detect a precursor to the interplay of faith and doubt that James McIntosh has described

as "nimble believing" when Whicher writes, "A mood of faith that possessed her in the morning might become matter of delicate mockery in the afternoon" (305). Even Shira Wolosky's recent argument that Dickinson's "identity crisis may be said to reflect the nation's" (16) appears traceable to Whicher's assertion that Dickinson's "individual struggle was a replica in miniature of the greater conflict breaking out around her; the acute accidents of her experience paralleled and intensified for her the spiritual predicament of the age" (307).

That Whicher was able to tap into so many aspects of Dickinson's writing that continue to engage scholars today testifies to his skill as a reader. This skill is all the more impressive in light of the fact that, judged by contemporary standards, he had so little to work with. In addition to the incomplete record of Dickinson's correspondence mentioned earlier, Whicher was also hampered by editions of the poems that we now consider poorly edited and far from complete. The most up-to-date volume that he identifies in his "Bibliographic Postscript" is the 1937 *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Leete Hampson (Whicher 312). Working from what we today would consider severely limited resources, Whicher produced a remarkably familiar portrait of the poet and her work. Even seventy-six years after it was first published, his biography still breathes.

Works Cited

- Murray, Aife. "Josephine McIlvain Pollitt Pohl." *EDIS Bulletin* v24 #2, Fall 2012, 16-17, 27.
- Whicher, George Frisbie. *This Was a Poet: A Critical Biography of Emily Dickinson*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1938.
- Wolosky, Shira. *Poetry and Public Discourse in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Woodress, James. "Emily Dickinson." *Fifteen American authors before 1900: Bibliography Essays on Research and Criticism*. Rev. Ed., Earl N. Harbert and Robert A. Rees, eds. Madison: U of Wisconsin, 1984. 185-229.

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Series Editor, Georgiana Strickland

Twenty Years as a Reviewer and Editor

In 1992, at EDIS's first international conference, in Washington, D.C., I had the pleasure of meeting Barbara Kelly and her husband, George, for the first time. She had previously been book reviewer and bibliographer for Fred Morey's odd little newsletter, Dickinson Studies, for five years. I was fairly new as the EDIS Bulletin editor and was struggling to handle all aspects of the job. Fortunately I had the good sense to recognize talent and invite Barbara to be book review editor for the Bulletin—the smartest move I ever made in that position. She also served as EDIS secretary from 2000 to 2008. Now, after twenty years of superb work, Barbara is retiring from her reviewing duties, and I invited her to share what she called “random musings” on reviewing all those years and on her own life. It's an amazing story, and all I can add is, “Barbara, we hardly knew you!” Read on.

In 1988, for a graduate course at San Jose State University, I compiled an annotated bibliography on Emily Dickinson, and Dr. Jack Haeger urged me to submit it to *Dickinson Studies*, where the editor, Dr. Fred Morey, published it, then asked me to serve as his bibliographer and to write an occasional book review. I did that for five years and also indexed *Dickinson Studies* (1987-91) until the publication's demise when Dr. Morey died in 1993.

In 1992, at the first EDIS International Conference, I met Georgiana Strickland, who invited me to become book review editor for the *EDIS Bulletin*. My first reaction was surprise, disbelief, and reluctance. But thank you, thank you, Georgie, for opening the door to twenty years of intellectual stimulation, new friends, interesting travel, and a lot of fun!

From a very early age, I loved to read. Undergraduate work at Penn State (majoring in English, working for *The Daily Collegian* for three years, and student teaching at Kane [PA] High School), plus graduate school helped me to develop discipline and organizational skills and to read fast when necessary. With encouragement from Georgie, I learned the job simply by working at it one book review at a time.

People have asked how I find all those books. Since I live in Palo Alto, I spend many hours at Stanford University's Green Library cruising through the book shelves and journals and monitoring the MLA International Bibliography among other electronic databases. Because I am limited to seven days a year at



Photo Credit: James Kelly

Barbara Kelly at home in Palo Alto, California

Green Library and cannot check books out, I have learned to be efficient with my time. Amazon and Google Scholar are also helpful resources, as are tips I get from authors, publishers, and EDIS members.

For someone who loves books, the hunt for and discovery of new books is fun in and of itself. I'm an avid collector of information, enjoy learning new things, and sharing what I learn with others. I especially enjoy reading different perspectives on Dickinson's life and work. Reading just-published books is always a great adventure for me. The challenge of condensing scholarly books into a 250-word

review has been the source of both frustration and satisfaction, teaching me to choose and use words carefully and deliberately, to make every word count and earn its place on the page.

I suppose my natural affinity for book reviewing may have some connection to my lifetime of other experiences. I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the same unquiet year that Japan declared war on China, Germany marched into Czechoslovakia, and here in the United States world news was broadcast instantaneously for the first time via trans-Atlantic radio. This was the year that Orson Welles panicked listeners about a scary invasion from Mars in his “War of the Worlds” radio broadcast.

My father, who was from Pennsylvania, became an officer in the U.S. Navy and had met my mother while his ship was stationed in San Francisco. My mother was born and raised in Northern California. The Navy relocated our family every two years, and in my early childhood we traveled back and forth from coast to coast, crossing the country on trains that had cozy Pullman sleeper cars and formal dining cars.

In 1946, soon after World War II, we sailed from San Francisco to Saipan, a tiny island in the Pacific Ocean, midway between Japan and Australia. Japanese soldiers were still hiding in the island caves, and though my father had to carry a pistol, he never had to use it. We lived on Saipan for two years, near a Japanese lighthouse on top of Navy Hill, in a Quonset

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

hut tied to the ground by steel cables anchored in cement blocks so that typhoons would not carry us away. For entertainment on weekends we explored the jungle, gathering wild-growing bananas, avocados, mangoes, and breadfruit, our only fresh produce besides what we grew in our garden. Occasionally we found caches of military C-rations or unlabeled cans of food that the military had left behind in abandoned Quonset huts. The water we used came from a rain barrel outside our Quonset hut home. Periodically a freezer ship delivered meat and dry goods. Having found abandoned parachutes, my mother cut and sewed them into a white First Communion dress for my sister and curtains for our home. Our school, grades one through twelve, consisted of several Quonset huts located on the beach. My third-grade class shared one teacher and a Quonset hut with fourth and fifth grades (about ten children in each grade). Science class included collecting seashells on the beach, then labeling and mounting them in a format something like Emily Dickinson's herbarium.

In 1948 our family lived in San Diego, then moved to Long Island, New York, the following year. We traveled across country in our first automobile, often on gravel roads because this was before President Eisenhower's interstate highway system. We saw Lake Tahoe and Yosemite National Park in their near-pristine beauty. Driving the many miles through Midwest corn fields gave my sister and me in the back seat a good sense of the size of the United States and the time it takes to drive across it. In 1951 we returned to San Diego, where I attended my first year of high school.

General MacArthur had signed a peace treaty with Japan in 1945 and left Japan in 1951. In 1952, our family sailed from San Francisco to Yokohama. Knowing about World War II, I was wary of moving to Japan, but my fears were quickly calmed by the warm welcome we were given by the Japanese. As a sophomore and junior at Yokohama American High School, I was a cheerleader for the Yo-Hi Red Devils and a member of the National Honor

Society. Our family lived on a high bluff where we could see the ocean from one side of our house and from the other side what remained of Yokohama city and harbor. The wartime bombing had left the city a flattened, ashy gray plain below us, but in the distance we could see beautiful Mount Fuji. Many other parts of Japan remained untouched by the destruction of war, and our travels revealed a lush, green, beautiful country.

Our next home was in Wheeling, West Virginia, where I worked on the school newspaper my senior year and graduated from Triadelphia High School. From 1955 to 1959 I attended The Pennsylvania State University. Three days before I graduated a sorority sister, knowing that I was going to California, introduced me to a young man she was dating who was also California-bound to take a job in San Francisco at Haskins & Sells (now Deloitte). After traveling to Europe for the summer, I arrived at my parents' home in Palo Alto and soon had a call from George Kelly. Having much still on my mind about Europe and the need to find a job in California, I was a bit embarrassed not to know who was calling, but when he mentioned that we had met at Penn State – well, that was the beginning of our friendship, and in December of 1960 we were married in Palo Alto.

While George was getting his MBA at the University of California at Berkeley, the San Mateo School District hired me to teach seventh and eighth grade English and Social Studies. Three days before school started, at a faculty coffee, my principal introduced himself and asked me if I was ready to teach Math and Science! I thought he was joking, but he was serious, and I did, indeed, teach Math and Science that first year.

We bought a home in Palo Alto in 1964 and have lived here for fifty years. George became a partner at Deloitte, retired after thirty years, worked on corporate and non-profit boards, and taught accounting at the University of California/Berkeley and Santa Clara University. Our four children are Anne (52), Laura

(50), John (47), and James (40), all college graduates. We have eight grandchildren: one grandson and seven granddaughters, ages 26 to 3 years old.

While our children were growing up, I was active in the community, teaching art history and art techniques for three years in the Palo Alto public schools and taking library books to home-bound seniors. At our church I was a parish council member and taught classes in Bible literature.

The one project I am most proud of was the establishment of Hoover School, a Palo Alto public elementary school that focuses on maintaining a more-structured environment for its students, including teacher-directed learning, lesson plans, orderly classrooms, homework, and grades, probably the kind of school most of us have experienced. A friend and I were unhappy about the controversial avant-garde Stanford experimental methods being used in our neighborhood school during the sixties and seventies. It took us four years of researching, organizing instructional meetings, gathering signatures and support, and attending still more meetings with school district officials, but in addition to neighborhood schools, Palo Alto now offers two "choice" schools, one liberal with open classrooms and learning centers rather than desks, and the other a more-structured school that ranks academically among the top six elementary schools in California and has had a waiting list from the day it opened.

In 1999 George and I established the Emily Dickinson Lecture in American Poetry at The Pennsylvania State University, an annual event featuring a notable poet who delivers the lecture and spends a day visiting English classes and talking with students about poetry. Lecturers have included eminent Dickinson scholars, several U.S. Poets Laureate, winners of a number of prestigious poetry awards, and both of President Obama's inaugural poets. We have attended all but the 2009 lecture, choosing instead to attend our 50th Penn State class reunion. In 2014 poet Marilyn Nelson

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

will deliver the sixteenth annual Emily Dickinson Lecture.

As I look to the future, I realize that I'll miss many things about reviewing for the *Bulletin*: the intellectual stimulation, the challenges, and the required discipline that is part of the job. I'll certainly miss the communication and engagement I've had with the many EDIS members who have graciously and generously written book reviews for the *Bulletin*. Their contributions have enlightened readers and enhanced the book review pages.

What I probably won't miss is facing a blank computer screen every spring and fall, the hardest step toward creating those biannual bouquets of book reviews. Nor will I miss the deadlines, though I must admit that deadlines helped keep the work flowing for twenty years.

And what's ahead for me? When my parents died and I cleared the house they had lived in for forty-five years, they left me with hundreds, maybe thousands, of photographic slides that I'm planning to scan, transfer to my computer,

and thence to a DVD format, so that I can give copies to my sister and adult children. Another project is to clear a no longer spare bedroom and attic filled with my parents' things, from fine china to unique collections from their many hobbies and travels. Amid the boxes are family documents that I want to organize, entering the information I find into Ancestry.com software as a start to a genealogy project.

I also want to revisit my formerly dilettante ways of reading books, with no thoughts about reviewing them, and to amuse myself with the pleasures of sewing, knitting, crocheting, acrylic and oil pastel painting, calligraphy, refinishing furniture, gardening, writing – the list is long. Finally, I want to read all of Dickinson's poems and letters methodically in a way that I've not had time to do while reading and reviewing her literary critics.

Starting with Georgie Strickland, the best mentor I could have hoped for, thank you to everyone who has made the past twenty years with EDIS a productive and memorable experience: my former fellow EDIS Board mem-

bers, especially Jonnie Guerra who helped me hone my secretarial skills and Paul Crumbley who in my absence recorded minutes in Amherst and Kyoto; Ellen Louise Hart who, besides writing many book reviews, organized an impressive Dickinson gathering at Santa Clara University in 2003, and invited Aife Murray and me to participate; Martha Nell Smith who delivered the inaugural Emily Dickinson Lecture at Penn State in 1999; and Margaret Freeman, Maryanne Garbowski, David Ganes, Dan Lombardo, Domhnall Mitchell, and Emily Seelbinder, among many other wonderful book reviewers and correspondents. From the hard-working members in Amherst to the ever-loyal travelers from Japan, and to editors Michael Kearns, Kathy Welton, and Dan Mannheim – a big thank you!

Although I'm redirecting my attention to some long-neglected projects and new adventures, I'm not abandoning my interest in Dickinson or EDIS. I hope to see you in Amherst and am certainly looking forward to seeing many of you at beautiful Asilomar in Pacific Grove, California, for the 2015 EDIS annual meeting.

The End of an Era: The Start of Another?

Barbara Kelly's retirement marks the end of an era at the *Bulletin*. Her section was always the first to arrive, on the day of the earliest deadline, and it had always been scrupulously proofread, requiring little if any further work. She scoured lists of new publications in order to give notice of works even tangentially related to Dickinson and as a result she kept many of us abreast of interesting work beyond books of formal criticism, for which she always found excellent, appropriate reviewers.

At the same time, it is a pleasure to introduce a new Book Review editor. Renée Bergland teaches at Simmons College, a women's college nested between Harvard Medical School, the Museum of Fine Arts, and Fenway Park in Boston. Her courses include the graduate seminar on American Women Poets, which,

she confesses, is "generally referred to as the 'Dickinson Seminar,'" despite her efforts to keep Dickinson from "swallowing it all."

Renée did Great Books at St. John's in Annapolis, then got her graduate degrees at Columbia. Addicted to Dickinson, she is working on a general audience book about American genius. She is just back from Paris, where she spent the Spring exploring the world of Gertrude Stein.

Why Dickinson? "One reason is that I think her amblyopic vision was physiologically similar to mine. After a lifelong visual impairment, I recently had my eye fixed, and now I am making the complicated neuro-mechanical adjustment to binocular vision. It's thrilling and very disorienting to look through two

eyes. Dickinson is the poet who best captures my own experience of the vertiginous possibilities of compound vision."



Renée Bergland reading with both eyes

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Dan Manheim, Interim Book Review Editor

Richards, Eliza, ed.

Emily Dickinson in Context. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 410 pp. Cloth, ISBN 1-107-02274-4, \$89.10

Reviewed by Renée Bergland

The culture wars of the late twentieth-century are officially over. And the winner is: ...Emily Dickinson.

Looking back through the grey-blue mists and scarlet flashes, the battle lines seem to have been drawn between form and context, while “theory” shifted alliances at unpredictable moments. At one time, Dickinson was invoked by the formalists, and her generally accepted “genius” made her a mascot for the canonically inclined. But Dickinson was always an oddball – a woman who had been unknown and unccelebrated in her lifetime. Even at the height of the culture wars, Dickinsonians knew that form and context murmured to each other from close-adjointing rooms. Now, with Eliza Richards’ remarkably useful *Emily Dickinson in Context*, it is clear that (like truth and beauty) context and form are inseparable.

There are thirty-three essays in the volume, plus a thoughtful introduction by the editor. The standard is uniformly high, but the approaches, methodologies, and scholarly voices are diverse and wide-ranging. Even “Context” means wildly different things at different points in the volume – Richards stretches it broadly enough to encompass the eternal verities that the new critics cherished (for example: immortality and

democracy in essays by Joan Kirkby and Paul Crumbley), traditional literary history (with an essay on “British Romantic and Victorian Influences” by Elizabeth Petrino or another on “Transatlantic Women Writers” by Páraic Finnerty), local environments (from Domnhall Mitchell’s essay on “Amherst” to Margaret H. Freeman’s on Nature), and a groundbreaking collection of varied approaches to questions of reception and influence. There are notable essays on popular culture (Sandra Runzo), painters (Alexander Nemerov), scientists (Sabine Sielke), and philosophers (Jed Deppman). With such a wide range of perspectives it is particularly notable that all of the essays in the volume, without exception, are textually grounded in Dickinson’s own irresistible language. Today’s Dickinsonians seem to agree that context is meaningless without text.

I will shelve *Emily Dickinson in Context* with other essay collections that are particularly useful for me when I teach Dickinson, such as *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays* edited by Judith Farr, *The Emily Dickinson Handbook* edited by Gudrun Grabher, Roland Hagenbüchle, and Cristanne Miller, *A Historical Guide to Emily Dickinson* edited by Vivian R. Polak, and *A Companion to Emily Dickinson* edited by Martha Nell Smith and Mary Loeffelholz. Like these, Richards’ collection includes essays from top scholars that are very accessible for students. In fact, I imagine that students will find *Emily Dickinson in Context* particularly helpful both because the essays are quite a bit shorter than those in the other collections (about

half the length) and because there are so many of them – thirty three distinct topics, each explained with authority and insight (and useful, up-to-date, suggestions for further reading for each topic).

But there is more to distinguish this volume than its pragmatic and skillful presentation. One distinctive feature of the new book is that it brings many new voices into the conversation. Martha Nell Smith (“Editorial History I”) contributed to Farr’s volume in 1996, and a few other contributors also started publishing on Dickinson in the 1980s or 1990s, but the majority are twenty-first century scholars, whose work on Dickinson commenced after 2000, after the culture wars subsided. This new generation of Dickinson scholars is fantastic, and reading their work is truly exciting. Their approaches are more catholic than canonical – they are willing to consider everything. They come across as historically well-trained and theoretically sophisticated, yet they generally have a light touch with historical and theoretical discourses. Páraic Finnerty contributed two essays to the volume – one on Shakespeare and another on transatlantic women writers. A generation ago, the Shakespeareans and the Elizabeth Barrett Browning scholars would have had a hard time speaking to each other, and neither would have known what to do with Dickinson. Those conflicts are in the past.

Other notable essays by newer scholars include Melanie Hubbard’s brilliant discussion of Nineteenth-Century Language Theory, Gabrielle Dean’s essay “On Materiality (and Virtuality),” and Theo Davis’s careful close reading of the New Critics’

The *Bulletin* welcomes notices of all Dickinson-related books, including those published outside the U.S.
Send information to Renée Bergland, 3 Barrett Road, Hanover, NH 03755, U.S.A.
Email: renee.bergland@simmons.edu

often paradoxically contextualizing readings of Dickinson. These three all build on Dickinson's own insistence on "not choosing," though each sets the choice in a different context. Hubbard offers a remarkably useful overview of the "evolving philosophical-theoretical debate . . . about the relationship between thought and language" (246) that spans from early nineteenth century rhetoric textbooks up to Sharon Cameron's *Choosing Not Choosing* (1992). Dean starts with Cameron, and with the questions of manuscript central to Ralph Franklin's work, and she offers a sustained discussion of the materiality of Dickinson's fascicles, and the questions of materiality and virtuality that confront us as Dickinson's handwriting moves from paper to pixels. Davis's essay returns us to the New Critics, to questions of form and context, language and meaning that are central to Dickinson Studies, arguing that although the New Critics' "press to embody Dickinson in manuscript form paralleled the New Critical prizing of lyrical and ideological embodiment" (318), Dickinson generally got away, leaving readers (then, as now), with a "breakage of thought and sensation that is central to her work" (318). Even the most dogmatic of New Critics found it hard to be doctrinaire in the face of Dickinson.

Eliza Richard's *Emily Dickinson in Context* makes it clear that the current generation of Dickinson scholars is, as promised, "thoughtful, innovative, and deeply knowledgeable" (7). Reading these essays puts us right at the center of new conversations about ideas that have been central to Dickinson studies for a hundred years. It's head spinning, and intoxicating, and it makes me excited to be a Dickinson scholar. I suspect many readers will react the same way.

Renée Bergland is Hazel Dick Leonard Research Professor at Simmons College. She has written on sex in the nineteenth century, and she is working on *Emily Dickinson in a global context*.

Deppman, Jed, Marianne Noble, and Gary Lee Stonum, eds.

Emily Dickinson and Philosophy. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 278 pp. Cloth, ISBN 1-107-35281-0, \$89.10

Reviewed by Seth Perlow

The copular "and Philosophy" in book titles has become suspiciously popular; recent offerings include *Batman and Philosophy*, *Facebook and Philosophy*, and *Mad Men and Philosophy*. One furtively awaits *Philosophy and Philosophy*. Unlike many such volumes, however, the collection *Emily Dickinson and Philosophy* fills a substantial need. As editors Jed Deppman, Marianne Noble, and Gary Lee Stonum rightly argue in their introduction, "a persistent image of Dickinson as a sibylline or mystic poet who intuited rather than thought" has often prevented scholars from seriously considering the philosophical significance of her work.

To correct the omission, this volume collects twelve incisive essays that take a range of approaches to Dickinson's philosophy. These essays face the challenge of eschewing two dominant tendencies in Dickinson criticism – first, the historicist-materialist emphasis upon the reality of Dickinson's world and her poetic materials and, second, the aesthetic-performative approaches that emphasize her formal and figural achievements. Bringing Dickinson's work into conversation with an array of philosophers, the essays of *Dickinson and Philosophy* ably flesh out this underdeveloped sector of her reception.

The volume is divided into two sections of six essays, the first section "placing Dickinson within the intellectual culture of her time" and the second "asserting that her poems anticipate later philosophers." Inasmuch as historicism itself has helped to discourage the philosophical readings these essays pursue, one wonders why the collection "roughly follows the chronology of the history of philosophy," reasserting an historical logic instead of organizing the chapters according to branches of philosophi-

cal inquiry, for instance, or schools of thought. Nevertheless, this division between philosophical discourses to which Dickinson might have been exposed (more or less directly) and those she anticipates helps to showcase the various ways of coordinating the relation between Dickinson's poems and philosophers' writing.

The book opens with a pair of essays that bring Dickinson into conversation with the Scottish Common Sense thinking that strongly informed the philosophical climate of New England during her life. These chapters come closer than any to biographical argumentation, since they refer to what Dickinson actually studied. Happily, both essays also attentively read Dickinson's poems in conversation with the philosophy of her day. Michael Kearns's "Emily Dickinson: Anatomist of the Mind" opens with a helpful intellectual history of how Common Sense ideas influenced American philosophers of the mind whom Dickinson read; Kearns's efforts "to consider Dickinson as an anatomist of the mind" demonstrate how her poems respond and contribute to discussions of mental faculties and the mind-brain duality. Meanwhile, Melanie Hubbard's "Dickinson, Hume, and the Common Sense Legacy" tracks Dickinson's affinities with Common Sense thinking, while also noting her attachments to the Humean skepticism that preceded it. Hubbard engagingly describes how the tension between skepticism and common sense shaped Dickinson's ideas about perception and signification.

Chapters three and four address the tensions between scientific secularism and religious faith in Dickinson's milieu. Jane Donahue Eberwein's "Outgrowing Genesis?" argues that Dickinson's poems and letters bespeak "awareness of the Darwinian struggle for survival while also responding to alternative ways of interpreting nature, some of which reinforced belief." Whereas Darwin sought the origins of species, the poet concerned herself with the individual body and soul, and her focus on redemption rather than creation enabled an interface between her faith and her reflections on natural life cycles. Next, Linda

Freedman's chapter deftly explores the intersections between poetry and theology in Dickinson's reflections on the humanity of Christ, arguing that the incarnation guides the poet's ideas about representation and, ultimately, her aesthetics.

The final two chapters of Part I bring Dickinson into conversation with the German idealist philosophers and their respondents – thinkers Dickinson seems less likely to have read, though the critics convincingly argue that their ideas shaped her intellectual world. Daniel Fineman's chapter traces an "alternative aesthetic" the poet develops at the intersection of Hegel's totalizing viewpoint and Schlegel's ironizing emphasis upon particularity. Jim von der Heydt's essay reads Dickinson alongside Kierkegaard, focusing on the four poems Dickinson chose to include in her famous first letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Von der Heydt compellingly argues that these poems sent to a potential mentor focus upon the theme of learning, which together they construct as an instantaneous event reminiscent of Kierkegaard's skeptical theory of learning.

The chapters of Part II, which bring Dickinson into conversation with modern philosophers, are not as tidily paired as the earlier essays, but they prove at least as interesting because they address more commonly discussed philosophers. In "Truth and Lie in Emily Dickinson and Friedrich Nietzsche" Shira Wolosky argues that both thinkers respond to a crisis of metaphysical belief with a redoubled dedication to the actual. By contrast, Renée Tursi's chapter links Dickinson with the pragmatism of William James and his respondents, claiming that "we can find pragmatic truths" in her poems because they emphasize "linguistic contingency" and other forms of uncertainty. Farhang Erfani, meanwhile, makes an intelligent case that Dickinson anticipates the Sartrean valorization of individual self-creation. With surprising grace and economy, he also contextualizes Sartre within European intellectual history and seeks to avoid the merely thematic readings of poetry that philosophical interpretation often prefers.

Chapters 10 and 11 place Dickinson in dialogue with French phenomenology, though to different effects. In "Dickinson on Perception and Consciousness," Marianne Noble compellingly argues that Dickinson anticipates Maurice Merleau-Ponty's attention perception as informing the reality of objects around us; she then reads Dickinson alongside Longfellow to illuminate how Dickinson's phenomenological attentions shape her aesthetic. Next, Megan Craig's chapter finds in Dickinson's "concern with the displaced subject and the intrigue of the intimate" an affinity with the ethicist Emmanuel Levinas. Craig pays admirably close attention to Levinas's own stylistics, sustaining a lively interplay between him and Dickinson; to Craig's credit and to Dickinson's, the poet ultimately develops a more convincing ethics than the philosopher.

The volume concludes with one of the most impressive chapters, Jed Deppman's "Astonished Thinking: Dickinson and Heidegger." Deppman casts Dickinson as an ontologist by framing her poetics of astonishment as a response to the question of Being, and he finds the same astonished response to Being operative in Heidegger's work. This case presents special challenges because Heidegger himself famously accorded poetry a privileged relation to Being, and Deppman admirably coordinates Dickinson with Heidegger's own poetics.

The editors and contributors to *Emily Dickinson and Philosophy* enrich our image of Dickinson by attending to an underdeveloped area of her reception. These essays demonstrate the philosophical significance of Dickinson's poems by unpacking their contributions to a variety of philosophical discourses. Contributors at times prefer straightforward, propositional reading styles, but this is precisely the idea, since the collection claims Dickinson as a poet with properly philosophical things to say. From the first chapter to the last, the essays display an admirable philosophical rigor, as well as awareness of the intellectual contexts in which Dickinson and her philosophical interlocutors thought. It is a credit to this collection that certain chapters seem so convincing

as to make one wonder how Dickinson could also have affinities with the other philosophical schools covered in the same volume. If one finishes in astonishment at Dickinson's relevance to such an array of philosophies, this response underscores the enduring poetic and indeed philosophical rewards to be found in her work.

Seth Perlow teaches twentieth-century poetry and poetics at Oklahoma State. He is working on a book about poetry in a technological age.

Barrett, Faith

To Fight Aloud is Very Brave: American Poetry and the Civil War. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012. 328 pp. Cloth, ISBN 1-558-49962-1, \$80.00.

Reviewed by Jennifer Putzi

Following the publication of "Words for the Hour": *A New Anthology of American Civil War Poetry* (co-edited with Christanne Miller) in 2005, *To Fight Aloud is Very Brave* demonstrates the extraordinary breadth and depth of Barrett's work in this field. Focusing on the range of stances of address taken in poems that explore the relationship between self and nation, Barrett argues that, despite the critical neglect of poetry in studies of Civil War literature, poetry was central to the way in which national identities were constructed both during and after the war. Over the course of the book, she also successfully contends that reading Civil War poetry for these varied stances of address allows us to see not only the proliferation of audiences for American poetry but also the origins of the shift from romanticism and sentimentalism to the more graphic realism and formal experimentation of modernist poetry. While other critics have examined the Civil War poetry of individual writers, Barrett's beautifully written book not only examines Civil War poetry as a coherent and

flexible body of work, but also makes an enormously successful, carefully nuanced argument for its importance in any study of American poetry.

In six chapters, Barrett moves from popular songs and soldier poetry to the work of writers like Julia Ward Howe, Frances Harper, Emily Dickinson, Sarah Piatt, George Horton, and Herman Melville. While she examines a wide range of work in each of these chapters, she remains tightly focused on the issue of stances of address, demonstrating the varied ways in which each of these poets negotiated their relationship to the nation, often speaking from a range of positions on the experience and larger politics of war. For example, in Chapter Two, “We Are Here at Our Country’s Call”: Nationalist Commitments and Personal Stances in Union and Confederate Soldiers’ Poems,” Barrett argues that white soldier-poets’ direct involvement in battle allows them to speak directly about war, but that these first-person accounts often function to disrupt the “we” used (often in the same poem) to construct a military and often nationalist collective. The stances of address available to female poets like Howe, Harper, Piatt, and Dickinson herself are further complicated by gender, race, and region, and one of the undoubted strengths of the volume as a whole is Barrett’s careful consideration of intersectionality; the range of options open to each of these poets is different and each one must negotiate the positions from which he or she is allowed or willing to speak.

Other than perhaps the first chapter on popular song (which is crucial to setting up Barrett’s argument in the rest of the book), there is not a single chapter in this excellent study that does not make original and exciting contributions to the field of nineteenth-century American poetry. Barrett’s readings of individual poems are also meticulously detailed, providing new insight at every twist and turn. For the purposes of this review, I want to focus on Chapter Four, “Addresses to a Divided Nation:

Emily Dickinson, Walt Whitman, and the Place of the Lyric I,” both because readers will be interested in Barrett’s treatment of Dickinson’s Civil War poetry and because this chapter demonstrates the strength of her overall framework in that it allows for productive readings of poems that have been addressed previously in the seminal work of Shira Wolosky, David Cody, and Benjamin Friedlander. Along with these critics, Barrett argues against the notion of Dickinson being ambivalent about or indifferent to the Civil War. Unlike the soldier-poets, however, Dickinson avoids the personal “I,” addressing the nation obliquely, at least in part, Barrett suggests, because of her identity as a woman poet. Barrett looks at two groups of Dickinson’s Civil War poetry – her “landscapes of war” and her soldier elegies – and demonstrates Dickinson’s engagement with and transformation of the popular print culture of the war. Contrary to many critics’ reading of Dickinson’s war poetry, however, Barrett successfully argues that Dickinson does not always write against conventional nationalist ideologies regarding the deaths of soldiers and the larger significance of the Civil War. Her insistence on Dickinson’s occasional conventionality is perhaps the most eye-opening and exciting argument in the chapter, paired as it is with readings of poems like “The name – of it – is ‘Autumn’” that demonstrate Dickinson’s willingness to push the boundaries of her culture.

The neglect of nationalist Confederate poetry by anyone other than Henry Timrod (who is used primarily as a foil for Piatt and Horton) and one of the soldier-poets seems a missed opportunity in this study. Similarly, given Barrett’s brilliant recovery and analysis of the soldier-poets, it is impossible not to wonder what other Civil War poetry is awaiting discovery in the archive. Who else was writing and perhaps even circulating poetry in manuscript during the Civil War? And how would their work fit into the larger paradigm established by Barrett in *To Fight Aloud is Very Brave?* The fact that these questions can be

asked is clearly one of the strengths of the book; Barrett has not only broken ground, she has cleared the way for other scholars to follow.

Jennifer Putzi teaches English and Women’s Studies at The College of William and Mary. She is the author of Identifying Marks: Race, Gender, and the Marked Body in Nineteenth-Century America.

Sulzer, James

The Voice at the Door: A Novel of Emily Dickinson. Ashland, OR: Fuze Publishing, 2013. 203 pp. Paper, ISBN 978-0-9897306-2-4, \$13.95.

Lala Crist, Despina

Emily Dickinson: Goddess of the Volcano, a Biographical Novel. Translated by Robert L. Crist. Illustrated by Ave George Ioannides. Charleston, SC: Create Space, 2013. 461 pp. Paper, ISBN 978-1470147099, \$15.28.

Reviewed by David Garnes

Fictional accounts of Emily Dickinson have appeared over the years in all genres of popular literature, and with unflagging frequency. In works ranging from William Luce’s drama *The Belle of Amherst* to Jane Yolen’s and Nancy Carpenter’s children’s book *My Uncle Emily* to Judith Farr’s novel *I Never Came to You in White*, writers have presented often illuminating and innovative versions of what might have transpired in the life of “the eccentric recluse,” “the myth of Amherst,” Higginson’s “half-cracked poetess.” (Jerome Charyn’s *The Secret Life of Emily Dickinson* is perhaps the most notable recent example of a highly speculative, brilliantly realized reconstruction.)

Dickinson herself, glimpsed in white in her garden beyond the homestead fence, lowering goodies by basket from her bedroom window, fleeing from visitors via her “northwest passage,” is partially respon-

sible for the mystery and ensuing fascination that seem to spawn a disproportionate number of conjectural tales. Two new entries in this category of Dickinsoniana are *The Voice at the Door: A Novel of Emily Dickinson* and *Emily Dickinson: Goddess of the Volcano, a Biographical Novel*, each of which demonstrates the pleasures and risks of the genre.

James Sulzer's *The Voice at the Door*, modest in length and written in a straightforward, graceful style, begins with Dickinson's trip to Washington D.C. in 1855 and focuses on her relationship with the Reverend Charles Wadsworth. Though the novel covers her remaining 31 years, introducing the expected characters and documented incidents of her life, it is the examination of the love for "[her] Philadelphia" that provides the meat of the book as well as its most startling and provocative imaginings.

Sulzer, a Yale graduate and middle-school teacher on Nantucket Island [see his account of teaching Dickinson, on page 6 of this issue], uses a clever conceit to introduce and frame the story: His imagined uncle, a doctor specializing in infectious diseases and an inveterate admirer of all things Dickinson, has left behind a manuscript that details the poet's love affair with the married, enigmatic Charles Wadsworth. This "found" narrative describes in dramatic detail how the relationship affected her poetry and significantly altered the course of her life.

Going well beyond the assertion that, in fact, Wadsworth is the "Master" to whom Dickinson wrote, Sulzer offers the theory that he also suffered from syphilis and transmitted the disease to the poet (who, we are told, is aware at the time of this possibility). As Sulzer writes in the fictional introduction, "[My uncle] must have known that his ideas would astound some and dismay others."

Well, yes, although other biographical and fictional explanations of Dickinson's reclusiveness and malaise in her later years have occasioned the same kind of reader response. Perhaps even more than the fact of the supposed illness, the scene in the book involving Dickinson's seduction of Wadsworth does stretch one's willing suspension of disbelief.

That said, the novel is, as mentioned earlier, well-written. There are poems and excerpts from the "Master letters" placed carefully throughout the book to help account for Dickinson's behavior. Additionally, the book includes a timeline of Dickinson's life, list of sources, excerpts and references to the poems (Franklin numeration) mentioned in the book; and a reader's guide with questions for discussion.

Despina Lala Crist's *Emily Dickinson: Goddess of the Volcano* is a hugely ambitious novel that attempts to cover Dickinson's entire life, though focusing in great and unrestrained detail on her relationship with Susan Gilbert Dickinson. While not offering the kind of bombshell James Sulzer sets off, Lala Crist's novel is an explosion of a different sort: an overflowing cornucopia in which the author herself is a participant in various scenes depicting dreams and time travel and containing comments on her own life, all the while relating these experiences to her near-obsession with Dickinson's life and her poetry.

Roughly chronological, the novel, translated by Lala Crist's husband, Robert Crist, an American professor emeritus of the University of Athens, is replete with chapter headings, sub-headings, and diversions by way of introducing secondary personages in Dickinson's life. Copious and evocative full-page sketches by Ave George Ioannides, based on photographs and paintings, of everyone from Mabel Loomis Todd to Joseph Lyman, appear throughout the book.

Greek-born Lala Crist, the author of another novel, *Nostos*, frequently references mythological gods and goddesses as she tells the story of her extraordinary subject. These allusions to super-beings seem fitting in this grand opera of a novel. In one passage, she describes the correspondence between Dickinson and Judge Otis Lord as "florid, continuous, bold." These words could well describe the entire book. It is wildly romantic, particularly the scenes describing the intensity and complexity of the love relationship between Dickinson and her sister-in-law. (Susan is not the only "erotic," as Lala Crist says, object of Dickinson's feelings, but their love is the heart of the novel.)

Many poems are quoted in their entirety throughout the book, with other excerpts inserted tactically, perhaps conveniently, following a crucial episode or revelation. Similarly to Sulzer's novel, this device can become somewhat facile as a way of substituting for real plot motivation or character development. However, as a result, we do have Dickinson's glorious poetry very much present in the book. A bibliography and a list of poems (Johnson numeration) appear at the end of the novel.

It is difficult not to get caught up in Despina Lala Crist's passionate enthusiasm for Dickinson and her spiritual connection to a poet whom she discovered while studying in America and who has remained a major influence throughout her life. As with James Sulzer – and, I would guess, most writers who focus on Dickinson – Lala Crist's love for and appreciation of her as poet and person are evident throughout.

David Garnes has taught English at the secondary school and college levels and was a longtime librarian at Columbia University and the University of Connecticut. The author of a novel and a collection of poems, he serves as a guide at the Emily Dickinson Museum.

Mutén, Burleigh

***Miss Emily*. Illustrated by Matt Phelan.** Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 2014. 144 pp. Cloth, ISBN 978-0-7636-5734-5, \$15.99.

Reviewed by Marty Rhodes Figley

Burleigh Mutén is no stranger to goddesses. [See her essay about teaching elementary school students, on page 4 of this issue.] She previously authored several books about them. Now she takes on “The Laughing Goddess of Plenty” – Emily Dickinson, as the children in poet’s neighborhood described her. *Miss Emily* (for ages 8-12), written in lilting narrative verse and charmingly illustrated by the much-lauded Matt Phelan, is plenty of fun. Inspired by MacGregor Jenkins’ 1930 memoir *Emily Dickinson, Friend and Neighbor* the book portrays a droll, mischievous woman who not only regularly dispenses gingerbread to the children, but also is their ally, confidante, and on occasion, even a daring playmate.

Mutén, who is a kindergarten teacher and appreciates what children value and enjoy, tells a story of a fanciful high jinx initiated by the poet with the help of her next-door niece and nephew, Mattie and Ned Dickinson, and the preacher’s son Mac, who lives across the street. The circus is coming to town and will arrive on the rails at midnight. Emily conspires, “Ah, yes, this year I propose you join me! / After the second whistle and the hiss of steam, / we five wily ones will watch/ horses and monkeys, / and if Fortune smiles – /an elephant shall strut from the cars.” The children, dressed as gypsies, sneak out into night where you can still see the silhouetted rim / of the Pelham hills / in the rising moonlight.” A turbaned Dickinson leads the hardy band. “Call my Prosperiana – Queen of the Night, if you please, / for I will charm the diamond vipers / till they dance tonight.” Dickinson’s beloved Newfoundland, Carlo, the “straight man,” lends a furry charm as he lumbers, growls, barks, and slobbers his way through the story.

Although the wonders of the circus are witnessed, the night doesn’t end well. But, no need to despair. The story, with its twists and turns, concludes on a high note with a grand finale in the form of a homegrown circus performed by the “gypsies” that will satisfy all. Mattie Dickinson wrote that her aunt “lent a contraband thrill to the slightest pretext.” After reading *Miss Emily* young readers will wish that the delightfully splendid Emily Dickinson lived in their neighborhood.

Marty Rhodes Figley received her BA from Mount Holyoke College and is the author of sixteen children’s books. Her newest picture book, Emily and Carlo, is about Emily Dickinson and her beloved dog.

Newman, Lea Bertani Vozar

***Emily Dickinson: “Virgin Recluse” and Rebel: 36 Poems, Their Backstories, Her Life*.** Manchester Center, VT: Shires Press, 2013. 212 pp. 978-0-0746-3898-0 \$22.00.

Lea Newman, professor emerita at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, long used biographical questions to get students in her college classes to engage Emily Dickinson’s poetry. In “*Virgin Recluse*” and *Rebel* she sets poems in their biographical and historical context before offering comments that will, she hopes, help readers who “know a little about Emily” to learn more about a puzzling but intriguing poet. Choosing thirty-six poems that she feels to be “representative of the full scope of her canon as well as reflective of her life,” Newman attempts “to separate fact from myth” in order to present these chronologically-arranged poems into a sort of “mini-biography.” She concedes that “scholars differ on how much attention should be paid to Dickinson’s life when reading her poetry,” but believes that in disguising the “I” of her poems as a “supposed person,” the poet was able “to express herself freely without any inhibitions.” Accordingly, “Wild nights – Wild nights!” (Fr269), a poem that “captures the consummation of sexual intercourse with ecstatic abandonment,” appears in the light of

Dickinson’s letters to “Master” (“most likely” Charles Wadsworth, though other candidates are listed, including Susan Gilbert Dickinson). At the same time, however, Newman ends up suggesting that the poem derives its power from her “ability to engage the reader’s sensibilities in her erotic experience.” Likewise, in her discussion of “A narrow Fellow in the grass” (Fr1096), Newman offers biblical and psychosexual possibilities, but ends up observing that the poem may be most richly enjoyed if the reader responds to its sights and sounds and “experiences the effect with her.” Thus even while the biographical possibilities are offered for any insight they might contribute, she returns to the immediate encounter between readers and words. Newman draws from a range of sources for her biographical information and critical insights, sometimes turning to anecdotes from Martha Dickinson Bianchi’s reminiscences and sometimes to recent works of criticism. The book contains a selective chronology of events in Dickinson’s life, a list of sources indexed by paragraph and chapter, and a bibliography. The book might be of most interest to students beginning to consider the value and limitations of biographical readings.

Noted with Pleasure

Jed Deppman, on “*The Lightning is a yellow Fork*” (Fr1140), in “*Astonished Thinking*” from *Emily Dickinson and Philosophy* (qv):

“Through disclosedness,” says Heidegger, we enter into “the possibility of being ‘there.’” Disclosure attunes us to our place(s), to the ways we “‘are’ one way or another” and this “lets us find ourselves among beings as a whole.” For Dickinson the term “picture” connoted artistic process. The poet discloses pictures not by representing Nature but by creating the linguistic stimuli, the awful verbal cutlery, for the reader to strip beings of their familiar use-meanings and see or create new pictures of familiar things. Reading becomes an event of disclosure that reperspectivizes everydayness and allows us more fully to *be here*.”

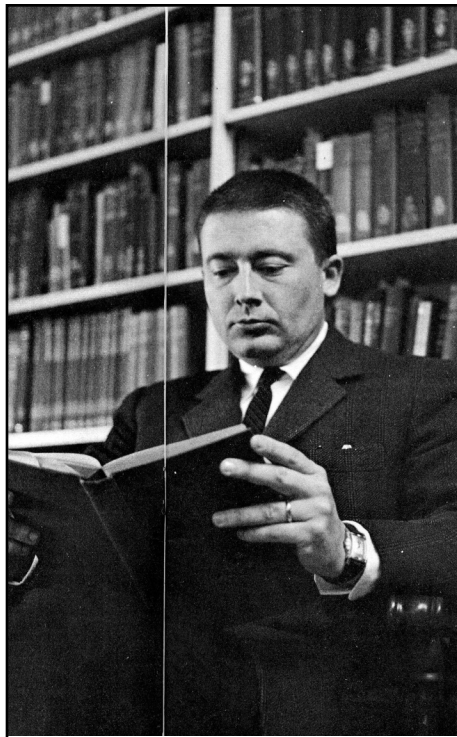
DAVID PORTER, 1928-2013

By Christopher Benfey

David T. Porter, one of the most distinguished, revered, and influential scholars of Emily Dickinson in our time – or, indeed, in any time – died on November 16, 2013. He was 85 though he seemed, right up to the end, much younger than that in his obstreperous vitality. Over the past half century, Dickinson scholars from all over the world have made the pilgrimage to Amherst not just to see the Homestead and the Evergreens, but also to visit David Porter, an inspiring and ever generous figure at the University of Massachusetts where he taught from 1962 until his retirement in 1995, receiving the Faculty Award for Distinguished Research and Scholarship in 1986. Among his many grateful students are the Dickinson scholars – and this is a partial list – Martha Ackmann, Karen Dandurand, Joanne Dobson, Margaret Freeman, Erika Scheurer, and Hiroko Uno.

You could tell from David's demeanor that he came, like Dickinson, from somewhere local, somewhere real – from upstate New York, as it happened – attending Elba Central High School in a small town between Buffalo and Rochester. He got his BA (and, later, an honorary doctorate) from Hamilton College and his PhD, writing on Dickinson's early poems, from nearby University of Rochester. But then his horizons abruptly widened, and stayed wide. He served as head of the English Department at Robert College in Istanbul, from 1953 to 1959, interrupting his time there for stints in the Naval Air Corps and the 101st Airborne Division of the US Army. He was twice awarded Fulbright Lectureships (which took him to Italy and England), won a Guggenheim Fellowship and a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and held a residency as senior research fellow at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. – again, a partial list.

What I remember best, though, is David's laughter, his boisterous pleasure of scholarly assent, of joyful camaraderie. There was also his more measured laughter of skepticism. I



David Porter at the University of Rochester in 1962.

experienced both kinds of laughter, as a young scholar just starting out in 1986, the centennial year of Emily Dickinson's death. Scholars convened in many places, and from many places, during that eventful year. David himself organized the Centennial Celebration of Dickinson at the Folger Library in Washington, and delivered the keynote. There was at those spirited gatherings a particularly energetic contingent from Japan, composed entirely, as far as I could tell, of friends of David's. "Traveling to Japan," he later told Erika Scheurer, "was a great adventure – to see their insights into Dickinson. To hear about the challenges of translating Dickinson was an eye-opener to a native speaker."

A demon networker at the center of every clump and clique, David introduced everyone to everyone at those centennial celebrations. He liked that I was a comparatist and (in those days) a theorist, full to bursting with

Rilke and Paul Celan and Stanley Cavell. He liked that I seemed "modern," in touch with living poets and thinkers. He did not like that I had brashly, and self-servingly, claimed (in *The New York Times*, of all places), that American criticism hadn't yet caught up with Dickinson, or some such stupid thing. He let me know, with his hearty laughter, what he thought of my up-to-date views, and he let me know, with his measured laughter, what he thought of my thoughtless (and ignorant) dismissal of our colleagues.

And of him, since his own commanding *Dickinson: The Modern Idiom* (1981), following his path-breaking *The Art of Emily Dickinson's Early Poetry* (1966), had already made, forcefully and eloquently, many of the points that I was so eager to inflict on the supposedly unwary. When I actually got around to reading that marvelous book, certain of David's observations stuck like burrs in my memory: how brilliant Dickinson's first lines so often are, and how rarely that brilliant energy is sustained throughout; how she never wrote an *ars poetica*, never had, as David put it, "a project"; how much she left unsaid, unwritten, trusting instead in gaps and absences; how her genius is modern, surprising, astonishing through and through – modern as Williams or Stevens is modern, and modern as Longfellow or Emerson, at least in his poetry (as David explained in his incisive 1978 book *Emerson and Literary Change*), isn't.

David felt you could learn more about Dickinson from Joseph Cornell's boxes than from a mile of Calvinism, as served up by Allen Tate or more recent religiously minded scholars. He thought that the poetry of his friend and University of Massachusetts colleague James Tate could open more doors in Dickinson's locked stanzas than a hundred poems by Dickinson's conventional contemporaries. David never got tired of the wonder of Dickinson's offhand working methods: the scraps of envelopes, the chocolate wrappers, the stamps and pencils enclosed with poems. How like Cornell, how

OBITUARY

modern, how Mallarmé! Dickinson scholars are still catching up with David's emphasis, in his classic essay on Dickinson and Cornell (prepared under blissful circumstances as a Resident Scholar at the Rockefeller Research Institute at Bellagio), on Dickinson as a visual artist. I was lucky to work with him, in 1997, on the exhibition at the Mead Art Museum, at Amherst College, on Dickinson and contemporary art. He would have been thrilled to see a volume like Marta Werner's and Jen Bervin's *The Gorgeous Nothings*.

David wasn't entirely down on history – he was as thrilled as a proud father when his graduate student Karen Dandurand discovered that Dickinson had published poems in pro-Union Brooklyn newspapers during the Civil War. But he wanted his Dickinson alive, not dead – not safe in her alabaster chamber. I think he liked the Brooklyn connection be-

cause it brought Dickinson closer to the “disgraceful” Whitman – one of the very few nineteenth-century American poets who David felt had made the grade. His occasional skepticism regarding feminist readings of Dickinson had nothing to do with misogyny – he was hugely supportive of women scholars and poets, as others will testify. He just thought these readings were sometimes too mired in the past – untrue, no doubt, at least in a red-hot reading like Adrienne Rich's, but true to his prejudices regarding Dickinson's modernity.

David had a zest for travel – one cannot imagine him saying, for example, “I must omit Boston” – but he also loved to be at home. Gregarious by nature, he was fond of quoting Dickinson's reason for avoiding men and women: “they talk of Hallowed things, aloud – and embarrass my Dog.” He was at his best at his own table, with a sumptuous meal, Ital-

ian in every way, prepared by his beloved wife of 56 years, Rosalie Pedalino Porter, and best of all when one of their sons – Thomas, David, or Stephen – were also in town, sometimes with spouse and children. No shrinking violet, Lee is herself a leading scholar, in the field of second-language acquisition, and as lively and passionate in her convictions as David. They brought joy and contagious laughter to everything they touched.

Christopher Benfey is Mellon Professor of English at Mount Holyoke. His work appears in The New York Review of Books and The New Republic, among other periodicals. Among his four books on the Gilded Age is A Summer of Hummingbirds: Love, Art, and Scandal in the Intersecting Worlds of Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Martin Johnson Heade.

Memorial to David Porter

By Hiroko Uno

I shall never forget how kind and generous Professor David Porter always was to me. We first met in 1978 when as a special graduate student at Mount Holyoke College I took his course on Emily Dickinson's Poetry at the University of Massachusetts.

When I suggested to him that the photo in the frontispiece of volume II of Richard Sewall's biography of Dickinson might be

of William Carlos Williams' grandmother, he introduced me to Professor Paul Mariani, who was writing a biography of that poet. As a result, I was invited by the poet's son to visit his house, which was where the poet also used to practice medicine.

Professor Porter tried to help me in a different way when, after one year at Mount Holyoke, I was accepted by the graduate school but had financial problems, applying too late for a scholarship. He suggested that I be a companion to Mrs. Hampson, who lived alone in the Evergreens and who had recently broken her leg and had to walk with crutches. Although this plan did not work out, I had a memorable meeting and talk with Mrs. Hampson.

So I cannot express how happy I was to see him again

in 1984 when he visited Japan to give lectures at several universities. I arranged his lecture at Aichi Prefectural University, where I then worked, and set up some sight-seeing in Nagoya, but it was nothing compared with all he had done for me.

Later, as a member of the Emily Dickinson Society of Japan, I deeply appreciated Professor Porter's efforts to hold an international conference at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in 1986, where several Japanese scholars, myself included, were able to read papers together with distinguished American scholars, such as Professor Charles Anderson. This opportunity greatly encouraged the study of Emily Dickinson's poetry in Japan.

Hiroko Uno, former President of the Dickinson Society of Japan, teaches at Kobe College. She is the author of Emily Dickinson Visits Boston and Emily Dickinson's Marble Disc: A Poetics of Renunciation and Science.



David Porter with the author in Amherst in 1986.

Annual Meeting in Amherst

The Emily Dickinson International Society will hold its 2014 annual meeting program in Amherst, Massachusetts, from August 8 to August 10. This year's theme is "Emily Dickinson and New England Writers." The program, co-sponsored by the Emily Dickinson Museum, will include presentations and activities related to the topic for all participants as well as an institute format for participants who have submitted papers on the theme for discussion in critical workshops. A preliminary schedule follows, and members are advised to check the EDIS website www.emilydickinsoninternationalsociety.org, for the most up-to-date information as the weekend approaches. Online registration is accessible from the EDIS website; those who prefer to mail the registration form will find one on page 38 of this *Bulletin* issue. We hope to see many of you there!

Friday, August 8

- 9:30-10:45 am Registration (Amherst College Alumni House Foyer)
10:45-11:00 am Welcome and Meeting Overview (Alumni House Large Meeting Room)
11:00 am-12:15 pm "Emily Dickinson's New English" (Alumni House Large Meeting Room)
Presenter: Karen L. Kilcup, Linda Arnold Carlisle Distinguished Excellence Professor of Women's and Gender Studies, University of North Carolina, Greensboro
- 12:15-1:30 pm Lunch on Your Own
- 1:30-4:15 pm Institute Critical Workshops (Locations to be announced)
OR
1:30-3:30 pm Discussion Workshops (Alumni House Small Meeting Rooms)

Participants can select to attend either "Emily Dickinson and Henry David Thoreau" led by Nancy and William Pridgen (EDIS San Antonio chapter) or "Emily Dickinson and Elizabeth Strout" led by Lois Kackley and Greg Mattingly (EDIS Amherst Chapter). For more information on the discussion workshops, see page 37.

- 4:30-5:00 pm Report on the Institute Critical Workshops (Alumni House Large Meeting Room)
6:00-7:45 pm Reception and Banquet, Lewis-Sebring Commons, Valentine Hall, Amherst College
8:00-9:30 pm "Henry & Emily: The Muses of Massachusetts," Stirm Auditorium, Amherst College
This three act, 90-minute play will be performed by its author/actor Jim Stapleton and actress Diana Bigelow. (Find more information at www.jimstapleton.com.)

Saturday, August 9 (All activities will take place in the Alumni House Large Meeting Room)

- 9:30-10:30 am Annual Members' Meeting, Presider: Martha Nell Smith, EDIS President
10:45 am-Noon "Emily Dickinson's Precincts of Freedom," Presenter: Jane H. Wald, Executive Director, Emily Dickinson Museum
12:15-1:15 pm Box Lunch and Report on Discussion Workshops
1:15-4:00 pm Free Time to Visit the ED Museum, to Take a Self-Guided Walking Tour of Amherst Writers' Homes, or to explore Exhibits at the Frost and Jones Libraries
4:00-5:00 pm Maxine Silverman will read from *Transport of the Aim*, a garland of poems on the lives of Emily Dickinson, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and Celia Thaxter. (Find more information at www.maxinesilverman.com.)
5:00 pm-?? Join EDIS Board Members for Happy Hour followed by dinner on your own.

Continued on next page

MEMBERS' NEWS

Sunday, August 10 (All activities will take place in the Alumni House Large Meeting Room)

9:00-10:00 am Research Circle, Convener: Ellen Louise Hart
10:15-11:30 am "Back Talk in New England: Dickinson and Revolution," Presenter: Paul Crumbley, Professor of English and American Studies, Utah State University
11:30 am-Noon Wrap-Up and Looking Ahead to 2015

Workshops at the Annual Meeting

Discussion workshops are one of the most popular features of EDIS annual meetings. Here is a preview of the two planned for summer 2014. Participants need not do the reading in advance.

Emily Dickinson and Henry David Thoreau Take a Look or Two at the Sky Led by Nancy and William Pridgen

Both Emily Dickinson and Henry David Thoreau observed nature closely and described nature in poetic detail. Both Dickinson and Thoreau aspired to be poets. While Dickinson became a successful poet, Thoreau gave up this dream early on and focused on prose. Yet Thoreau's writing employs poetic devices quite effectively. This workshop will explore the sky as seen by Dickinson and Thoreau. We will briefly compare their poems about sunrise and sunset and rain. In addition we will explore the poetic aspects of Thoreau's descriptions of the sky in several prose fragments from his *Journals*.

Dickinson poems we will explore as time permits are the following:

Fr204/ J318 "I'll tell you how the sun rose –"
Fr233/ J204 "A slash of blue! A sweep of gray!"
Fr572/ J304 "The day came slow – till five o'clock –"
Fr846/ J794 "A drop fell on the apple tree –"
Fr216/ J194 "On this long storm the rainbow rose –"

(With the exception of "A drop fell," the Dickinson poems as edited by Johnson are available on the Internet.)

Thoreau poems we will consider are the following (Page numbers are from his *Collected Essays and Poems* Library of America, 1984):

539-540 "I'm guided by the darkest night"
599-600 "On Ponkawtasset, since, we took our way,"
536-537 *The Summer Rain*

(*The Summer Rain* is available on the Internet: <http://www.poemhunter.com/henry-david-thoreau/>)

A New England Perspective in Emily Dickinson's Poems and Elizabeth Strout's Novels Led by Lois Kackley and Greg Mattingly

"...I see New Englandly" (Fr256/J285), wrote Emily Dickinson.

Oh! Really?

We suggest Dickinson's non-provincial, redoubtable, "circumferential" poetry disproves the designation and subverts her "status" as a writer with a New England perspective.

Continued on the next page

MEMBERS' NEWS

Was to “see New Englandly” another “pose” (similar to that of “wife,” “bride,” or innocent child), this time as a narrow-minded speaker? Or, is the emphasis on “new” an assertion of status as the groundbreaker poet of pioneering New England (and by implication the New World) contrasted with old-world England and its queen?

Regardless, geography cannot be denied. The poet was born and reared in a part of the world with distinctive characteristics. Likewise, Maine native Elizabeth Strout, who received the 2009 Pulitzer Prize in Fiction, is conscious of her and her characters' roots and nurturing in New England's Puritan asceticism. Strout portrays the thrust of personal independence, wealth, and the lure of sophistication in narratives about New Englanders who move to, or share experiences with, New York City.

In addition to “The Robin's my Criterion for Tune-”(Fr 256/J 285), the poems and letter listed below may enlarge our discussion of the New England perspective in Dickinson's work. For Strout's rendering of a 21st century version of that perspective in narrative responses to New England origins, we will focus on *The Burgess Boys*.

Fr143/J76 “Exultation is the going”

Fr236/J324 “Some keep the Sabbath going to church-”

Fr307/J271 “A solemn thing - it was - I said-”

Fr445/J613 “They shut me up in Prose-”

Fr800/J1052 “I never saw a Moor.”

From L39 to Abiah Root, late 1850: “You are growing wiser than I am, and nipping in the bud fancies which I let blossom - perchance to bear no fruit, or if plucked, I may find bitter. The shore is safer Abiah, but I love to buffet the sea – I can count the bitter wrecks here in these pleasant waters, and hear the murmuring winds, but oh I love the danger! You are learning control and firmness. Christ Jesus will love you more. I'm afraid he don't love me any.”

Dickinson Institute

On Friday, August 8, 2014, the “Dickinson Institute” will convene in Amherst. The Institute will be made up of 27 scholars who have come together to think about the topic “Emily Dickinson and Other New England Writers.” The afternoon will begin with a talk by Karen Kilcup, and then presenters will work on pre-circulated papers in one of 5 different groups: Dickinson & 20th/21st-Century Poets, Dickinson & Her Female Contemporaries, Dickinson & Her Friends, Dickinson & Emerson/Thoreau/Melville, and Dickinson & Theories of Language & Reception.

The afternoon will wrap up with a meeting of all Institute members to discuss what kind of work has been made possible by thinking about Dickinson in such configurations. The applications that we received for the Institute were diverse in scope and method. Some rethink Dickinson's relationship to other canonical figures (such as Emerson and Thoreau), while others bring less canonical ones (Phelps, Spofford, and Freeman) within Dickinson's orbit, while still others introduce literary figures with whom we may not be familiar with at all (Hennessy and Hitchcock). Groups will be led by Alex Socarides, Meredith McGill, Martha Nell Smith, Elizabeth Petrino, and Eliza Richards.

Don't Forget to Vote!

The Emily Dickinson International Society is electing an at-large member of the board. A ballot has been included with this mailing of the *Bulletin*. Please vote, on-line or by mail!

The candidates are Michelle Kohler and Marta Werner. Michelle Kohler teaches at Tulane University. Her current work engages the discourses of Transcendentalism, Civil War rhetoric, and post-Darwinian evolutionary debates. Her book, *Miles of Stare: Transcendentalism and the Problem of Literary Vision in Nineteenth-Century America*, will appear in the summer of 2014.

Marta Werner teaches at D'Youville College, near Buffalo. Deeply interested in textual scholarship and manuscript studies, she is the co-editor of *The Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson's Envelope Poems*. Her book *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios: Scenes of Reading, Surfaces of Writing* was an early work to draw attention to the works that are now less and less frequently thought of as “late fragments.”

The polls are open until May 20. To vote by email, please write to socaridesa@missouri.edu, subject line “Member-at-Large,” and put your name and the name of your candidate of choice (Michelle Kohler or Marta Werner) in the message.

MEMBERS' NEWS

EDIS Annual Meeting Registration Form

Name _____

Affiliation (if applicable) _____

Mailing Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

REGISTRATION FEES

_____ Annual Meeting Patron \$125.00 (Patrons will support lower fees for graduate students.)

_____ EDIS Member \$ 80.00 _____ Non-Member \$110.00

_____ EDIS Graduate \$ 50.00 _____ Non-Member \$ 75.00

Student Member _____ Graduate Student _____

_____ I want to purchase Friday Evening Banquet tickets at \$40 per person.

The buffet will include a vegetarian option.

I am unable to attend the annual meeting, but I would like to support this EDIS initiative with a contribution of \$ _____.

TOTAL ENCLOSED: \$ _____

Please make checks or money orders payable in U.S. dollars to EDIS, Inc. Do not send cash. Please indicate credit card information below.

Credit Card: Master Card VISA AMEX Discover

Account Number _____ Expiration Date _____

Return with payment by July 1, 2014 to EDIS, c/o Johns Hopkins University Press, P.O. Box 19966, Baltimore, MD 21211-0966.

Payment must be received by July 1, 2014. No refunds will be made after July 15, 2014.

EDIS Membership Form

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

Name, title & affiliation _____

Mailing address _____

Telephone (home) _____ (office) _____ (fax) _____

Email _____

Please check if this is: new address ___ membership renewal ___

Annual Membership Categories:

Sustaining Member (added to joint or regular membership) _____ \$150 or more

Institutional Member _____ \$115

Contributing Member (added to joint or regular membership) _____ \$100

NEW: Joint EDIS/Dickinson Museum _____ \$100

Regular Member _____ \$50.00 Student Member _____ \$30.00

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

Associate Member ___ \$20.00 (*Bulletin* only)

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

Gift Memberships

Name, title & affiliation _____

Mailing address _____

Telephone (home) _____ (office) _____ (fax) _____

Email _____

Use additional page for further gift memberships.

Please make check or money order payable, in U.S. dollars, to EDIS, Inc., and send to:
EDIS; c/o Johns Hopkins University Press; P.O. Box 19966; Baltimore, MD 21211-0966

www.emilydickinsoninternationalsociety.org

Emily Dickinson and the Eclipse of 1860

By Stephanie Wampler

July 18, 1860, began as a momentous day for the informed citizenry of the United States. Newspaper headlines from California to New York had for weeks announced the coming of the Great Eclipse. According to numerous accounts, the eclipse would begin a little after 7:30 a.m. and would last for nearly three minutes, and though viewers in the continental U.S. would only see a partial eclipse, dedicated astronomers could observe the total eclipse along a line through Hudson's Bay, Northern Spain, and Africa.

The New York Times proclaimed that "Today occurs the most impressive of all celestial phenomena – a total Solar Eclipse! [and] the chief planets of our system – Venus, Mercury, Jupiter and Saturn, constellated around the sun [will] 'assist' at the fete. Many a century will pass before the numbers which rule the stars shall bring about so rare a combination . . . a spectacle so magnificent."

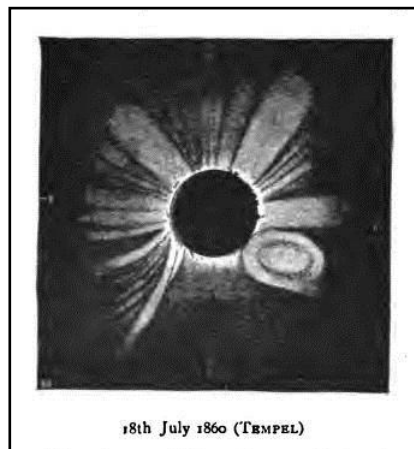
As the writer noted, not only was the spectacle to be magnificent for ordinary people, but "savans" of "leading nationalities" (the United States, as well as England, France, Germany, and Russia) had trekked to Spain and Africa to observe the eclipse, and the costs of those scientific expeditions were "greater than went to the outfit of COLUMBUS on his voyage of discovery of a New World." Even the "Viceroy of Egypt gave orders that a scientific expedition be organized." From their appointed posts, these intrepid astronomers would make many "delicate and complicated observations" which would be so useful to "the entire scheme of human action and endeavor!"

After the eclipse was over, coverage resumed, and one article described the crowds of Americans who had "halted in the highways" to watch the great event. It was a brief moment of excitement for which the *Salem Register* reported many "ragged urchins" selling bits of smoked glass (the only safe

and easily accessible viewing apparatus) for a "one or two coppers." Newspapers confirmed that both the Sun and Moon lived up to expectations and "behaved well."

The eclipse had its place in both solar history and in the annals of the Dickinson family and friends. In her 1894 *Total Eclipses of the Sun*, Mabel Loomis Todd described the 1860 eclipse in detail and was especially interested in various scientific expeditions that went to observe it. She described an American expedition to the "inhospitable" Aulezavik Island. The Americans had a "thorough eclipse programme mapped out" but were foiled by an overcast sky. However, observers in Spain were more fortunate, except for the "luckless photographer [who] went enthusiastically to work" snapping pictures, only to discover when it was all over that "he had forgotten to put any plate in his camera slide."

It is quite possible that Emily Dickinson herself expressed interest in the eclipse. Although she does not directly refer to the eclipse or its corresponding news coverage, Dickinson's "If the foolish, call them 'flowers'" (Fr179) probably composed in the summer of 1860, nods to the studies of "Savans," then notes that



18th July 1860 (TEMPEL)

Illustration from Mabel Loomis Todd's *Total Eclipses of the Sun*, 1894

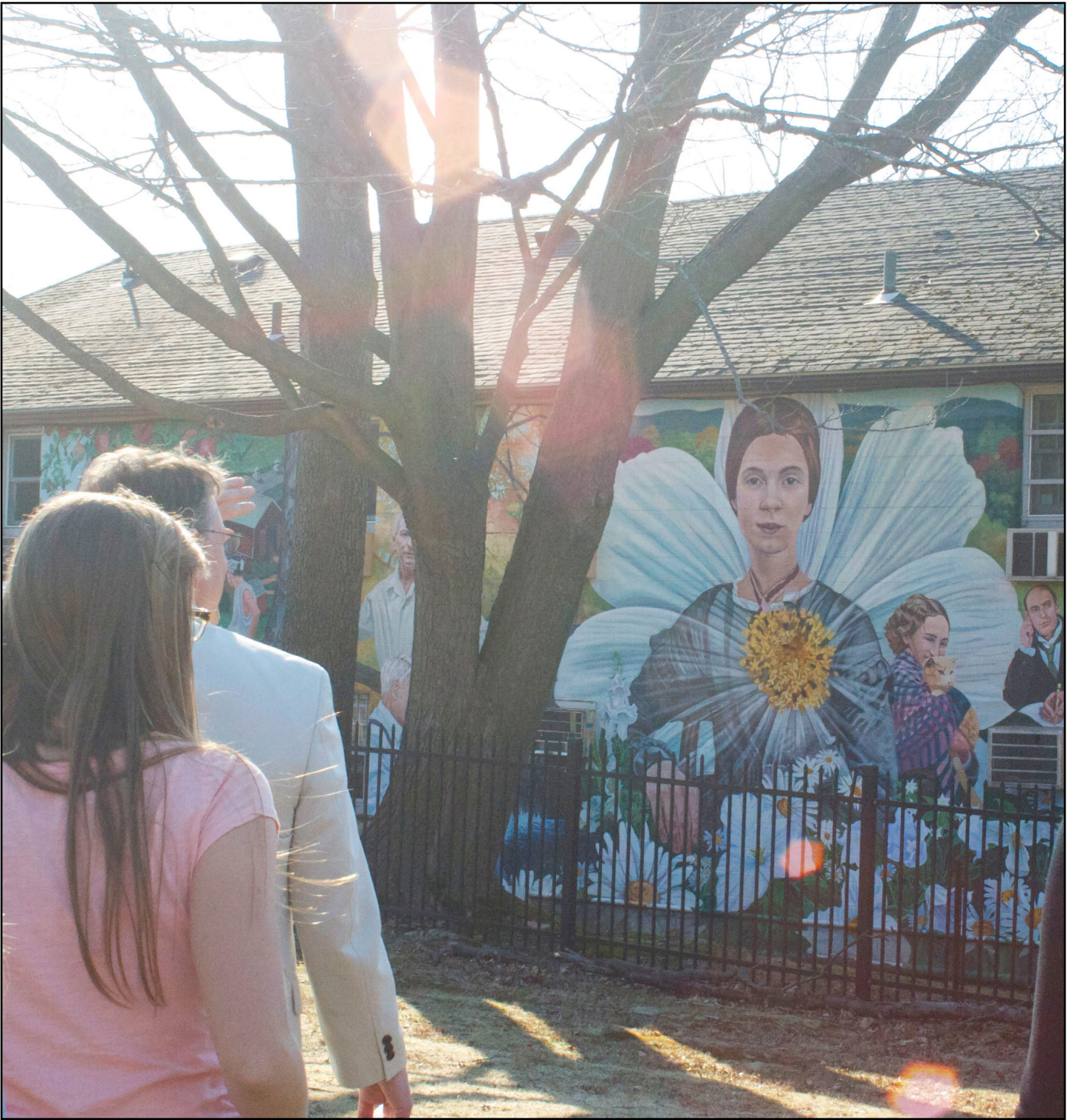
Doubtless, we should deem superfluous
Many Sciences,
Not pursued by learned Angels
In scholastic skies!

Low amid that glad Belles lettres
Grant that we may stand –
Stars, amid profound Galaxies –
At that grand "Right Hand"! (Fr179)

It is perhaps more than coincidental that Dickinson mentions the "savans" studying the heavens, and then hints that her own literary endeavors sometimes feel inadequate when compared to the magnificent studies of the astronomers.

Dickinson's "I taste a liquor never brewed" (Fr207) is also suggestive of her interest in the eclipse of 1860. One possible reading of the poem is as a riddle about the eclipse. The first three stanzas seem to compare the sun's rotations through the skies to those of a drunkard through the taverns in town: nightfall prompts last calls for all for nectar-imbibing earth-bound creatures, but the intemperate sun moves from one "inn . . . of molten blue" to the next, sipping airy alcohol "from Tankards" made of pearly clouds. Then, the fourth stanza likens the moon's eclipsing the sun to a "little tippler/ Leaning against" his bigger friend. Together, the two inebriates stagger through town. In *The New York Times*, the "chief planets" honor the "celestial phenomena" and crowds "halt . . . in the highway" to watch the eclipse; likewise, in this last stanza of Fr207, Dickinson's heavenly angels take off their hats to the drunken pair even as the people dash over to their windows to witness the spectacle.

Stephanie Wampler teaches American literature at Haywood Community College in western North Carolina. She presented portions of this article at the 2013 EDIS Conference in College Park, MD.



Follow us on [**facebook**](#)

"Emily Dickinson International Society (EDIS)"

www.emilydickinsoninternationalsociety.org