

# Bulletin

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May/June 2017

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



# In This Issue

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## Features

- 13 **An Interview with Cristanne Miller on Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them**
- 19 **Emily Dickinson and the Art of Tattoos**  
*By Maryanne Garbowsky*
- 22 **Thinking Dickinson**, *By George Monteiro*
- 27 **Recovering Emily Dickinson**, *By Cynthia Hallen*
- 30 **Emily Dickinson, Astronaut!** *By Sharon Hamilton*

## Series

- 4 **What's Your Story?**  
**A Conversation with Ferris Jabr**  
*Series Editor, Diana Wagner*
- 6 *Poet to Poet*  
**Emily Dickinson, Death, and the Irish**  
*Series Editor, Jonnie Guerra*
- 9 *Visualizing Dickinson*  
**A Certain Slant of Light**  
*Series Editor, Maryanne Garbowsky*
- 10 *Teaching Dickinson*  
**Creative Appropriation**  
*Series Editor, Marianne Noble*

## Reviews

- 16 **Morgan Library Exhibition: "I'm Nobody! Who are You? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson"**  
*Reviewed by Ivy Schweizer*
- 21 **New Publications**  
**Vivian R. Pollak**, *Our Emily Dickinsons: American Women Poets and the Intimacies of Difference*  
*Reviewed by Jennifer Leader*
- Mary Loeffelholz**, *The Value of Emily Dickinson and Jane Donahue Eberwein, Stephanie Farrar, and Cristanne Miller, eds., Dickinson in her Own Time*  
*Reviewed by Páraic Finnerty*
- 35 **Dickinson in Film: A Quiet Passion**  
*Reviewed by Stephane Tingley*

## Members' News

- 30 **Edenic Possibilities: 2017 Annual Meeting**
- 31 **Report from Paris, African American Inflexions**,  
*By Vivian Pollak*
- 35 **The Sweets of Pillage**

*Front Cover: Images of some of the fauna and flora found in Dickinson's works, from the catalog of Ferris Jabr. Clockwise from top left, Anemones, Asters, Bartsia, Daisy, Hawkbit, Trailing Arbutus, Hyacinth, with birds and animals interpolated.*

*Back Cover: Letter from the Morgan Library Exhibition, "I'm Nobody! Who are You?" The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson. "I suppose the time will / come," Poem written in 1876 on the verso of invitation from George Gould, dated 1850, Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Emily Dickinson Collection, AC 240.*

*The Assistant Editor for this issue is Allyson Weglar*

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# What's Your Story?

Diana Wagner, Series Editor

## A Conversation with Ferris Jabr

**F**erris Jabr is a writer based in Portland, Oregon. He is known in Dickinson circles for his 2014 New York Times article “The Lost Gardens of Emily Dickinson,” which examined the archeological explorations of the orchard and conservatory. His work is found regularly in Scientific American, The New York Times Magazine, The New Yorker.com, Outside, Slate, Foreign Policy, New Scientist, Medium, Aeon, Nautilus, Hakai, The Awl, and McSweeney’s. Mr. Jabr holds an MA in journalism from New York University and a Bachelor of Science degree from Tufts University. This interview took place just as the crocuses were bracing against winter’s last fury and as the Conservatory Restoration Project at the Emily Dickinson Museum was nearing completion.

How did you first meet Emily Dickinson?

I first met Emily Dickinson in ninth grade English class. Like an exchange student, her presence was brief but magnetic; her language odd yet compelling: a mix of singsong meter, idiosyncratic punctuation, and astoundingly original word pairings – phrases that sent a jolt to the brain. I remember puzzling over the imagery in “Because I could not stop for Death” with my classmates, finding new meaning with each reading. I enjoyed “A Bird came down the Walk” so much, and read it so many times, that I could recite it from memory. It was not until a few years ago, however, that I returned to Dickinson’s work in earnest, and not until last year that I decided to read her collected poems in chronological order, as well as several biographies. I met Emily as a teenager, but I did not get to know her until adulthood.

In your New York Times story, “The Lost Gardens of Emily Dickinson,” you wrote about how science and history have combined to bring ED’s orchard “back to life.” Why do you think it is important that we recreate the natural history of our authors?

Yes, the Emily Dickinson Museum and its archaeological collaborators are doing some wonderful work at the Homestead, rebuilding the Dickinsons’ greenhouse (where Emily spent many hours tending plants year-round), resurrecting an orchard

of apples and pears on the property (similar to the original family orchard Emily called the “Dome” of her personal church), and trying to find remnants of the once vast vegetable and flower gardens. In Emily Dickinson’s case, understanding her ardent interest in botany and gardening, as well as the natural history of Amherst – in particular the plants and animals Emily studied in school and encountered on a daily basis (she called them “Nature’s people”) – is essential to understanding who she was as a person and poet.

Does your lens as both a science writer and poetry explorer make her gardening especially interesting to you?

This is precisely the aspect of her life and work that most fascinated me when I read her collected poems last year. The experience of gardening – its toil and responsibilities, its struggle to reconcile the wild and

cultivated, its frequent joys and unexpected losses – coupled with observations of nature during frequent walks through the woods, was a near limitless source of inspiration for Dickinson. In her 1,789 known poems, she refers to animals about 700 times and to plants around 600 times. The vast majority of species she names are not exotic creatures from far-flung locales but rather commonplace residents of the garden, forest, and household: the squirrel, robin, bumblebee, worm, spider, and bobolink; the rose, daisy, clover, and buttercup. These organisms became her metaphors, her epithets, her way of understanding life and other people, and the subjects of some of her most beloved poems; think of the robin in “A Bird came down the Walk” or the snake (probably a garter snake) in “A narrow Fellow in the Grass.” After early adulthood, Dickinson did not venture far from her family’s property. Instead, she was a self-described “Balboa of house and garden.” We need to understand the natural history of Emily Dickinson because so much of her genius was nurtured in nature – in her personal Eden at the Homestead.

What was Emily Dickinson’s relationship with science?

Dickinson definitely had the instincts of a naturalist, especially with regard to botany. She studied botany in school and made an extensive herbarium with more than 420 dried, pressed, artfully arranged, and care-



Photo Credit: Salim Jabr

# What's Your Story?

fully labeled plant specimens collected in and around Amherst. On occasion, she even names plants by genus or species in her poems. One poem in particular, “Whose are the little beds – I asked,” showcases Dickinson’s scientific knowledge. She seeds the stanzas with copious botanical nomenclature in the original Latin: *Epigaea repens* (a.k.a. a flowering shrub known as trailing arbutus), *Leontodon* (hawkbit, a dandelion relative), *Bartsia* (a genus in broomrape family), and *Anemone* and *Aster* (both large genera of flowering plants). In her poetry, Dickinson also borrows the language of geology, astronomy, and physics.

Some people think Dickinson wants science to get out of the way of her wonderment. What do you think of that?

Dickinson is sometimes perceived as anti-science. Her poem “Arcturus” is his other name” is the classic example. In it, Dickinson bemoans “Science” for interfering with unadulterated adoration of nature. She wants to simply admire the flower and butterfly, but science would dissect, label, and preserve them beneath glass. She wants to gaze in wonder at the starry sky, but science needs to chart it all and name every pinprick of light. She is so “old-fashioned” (i.e. against the progress of science) that she worries she might not make it into Heaven! Unless God forgives her “naughtiness” the way a father can’t stay mad at his beloved but spoiled daughter.

Do you ever find Dickinson to be funny?

This poem and others Dickinson wrote on similar topics are suffused with hyperbole and self-aware humor. We know Dickinson does not take this anti-science stance too seriously. After all, she devoted a great deal of time to learning plant taxonomy and preserving specimens. And elsewhere, she recommends “microscopes” – that is, careful examination – over blind faith. Still, one imagines the world of 19th-century scholars could get a bit stuffy and tiresome at times, especially

for a secret revolutionary poet. What better antidote than a little comedy?

Do you have a favorite poem, letter, or fragment of Dickinson?

I am particularly fond of “Further in Summer than the Birds.” This poem utterly baffled me the first few times I read it. Consider that opening line: “Further in Summer...than the Birds”? And later: “Antiquest felt at Noon”? What is Dickinson on about? But the more you read it, the more you decipher, and the more beautiful, profound, and compelling the poem becomes. I won’t spill this esoteric poem’s core secret – the source of the “spectral Canticle” arising from the grass. I will only say that I think it is one of Dickinson’s most mysterious, evocative, and innovative poems, one that resists a complete decoding, urging you to return again and again.

I also love the “Liquid Feet” and “imperial Veins” of the hot air balloons in “You’ve seen Balloons set – Hav’nt You?”; the brilliant metaphor in “A Clock stopped – Not the Mantel’s”; the morbidly hilarious image of “A Gnat’s minutest fan / Sufficient to obliterate / a Tract of Citizen” in “More Life – went out – when He went”; and the idea of lightning as a giant yellow fork dropped from some table in the sky.

If there is one thing you want people to know about Emily Dickinson, what is it?

She’s probably not who you think she is. When many people hear the name Emily Dickinson, they think of “Hope” is the thing with feathers” – a lovely poem, but one that is a little more maudlin than is typical for Dickinson, and does not properly convey the rebellious character of Dickinson’s poetry or the

full range of her linguistic prowess. If Jane Austen is mistakenly perceived by some as the bored spinster turning her marital fantasies into sappy romance novels, then Dickinson is the odd aunt in the attic, scribbling nursery rhymes and cryptic quatrains. I urge anyone curious about Dickinson to abandon all preconceptions and sit down for a proper first meeting – just you and Emily. If a poem seems childish and trivial at first, or too arcane to comprehend, don’t give up; Dickinson demands and rewards persistence. There is always something hidden, something delightful, beautiful, or electrifying waiting to be discovered.

Jabr has also written about Dickinson in Slate, “How Emily Dickinson Grew her Genius in Her Family’s Backyard,” May 17 2016. There he describes the scope of his fascination with the poet’s gradening and attachment to nature generally.

I decided to record every single reference to a living creature of any kind in Dickinson’s poetry. . . . What I learned is that Dickinson’s single biggest source of inspiration was not “Nature,” that grand abstracted entity supposedly external to human society, but quite simply – and quite literally – her backyard. From childhood until death Dickinson cultivated an intense passion for gardening and observing local wildlife. . . . She grew up among gardeners in . . . a patchwork of forest, pastureland, and residential areas where it was common for families to own orchards and small working farms. Her mother was renowned in town for her “delicious ripe figs”; her brother and father added fruit trees and handsome conifers to the family property; and both Emily and her sister tended large vegetable and flower beds packed with beets, corn, scarlet runner beans, asparagus, peonies, hyacinths, lilies, and marigolds. . . . She filled the conservatory with buttercups, ferns, wood sorrel, heliotropes, and jasmine, which she quenched with a “tiny watering-pot with a long, slender spout like the antennae of insects.”

Citations from “Emily Dickinson and Gardening” on the Emily Dickinson Museum website, and “Emily Dickinson’s Garden,” Bulletin 2.2, 1990.

Jonnie Guerra, Series Editor

## Emily Dickinson, Death, and the Irish: Musings by Tom Daley

I met Tom Daley in 2010 at EDIS's Oxford conference when he participated in a roundtable discussion that focused on Dickinson-inspired plays. I and others were mesmerized by the excerpt Daley performed as Tom Kelley from his play *Every Broom and Bridget – Emily Dickinson and Her Irish Servants*. Since then I have come to appreciate Tom's talents as a poet, photographer, calligrapher, and teacher in addition to his gifts as a playwright and performer. He leads writing workshops in the Boston area and online for poets and writers working in creative prose. Daley's poetry has appeared in numerous journals including the *Harvard Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Witness*, and *Poetry Ireland Review* and has earned him the *Dana Award in Poetry* and the *Charles and Fanny Fay Wood Prize* from the *Academy of American Poets*. In addition to his play about Dickinson, Tom is the author of *In His Ecstasy – The Passion of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, which he also performs as a one-man show. In 2015, *FutureCycle Press* published his first full-length collection of poetry, *House You Cannot Reach – Poems in the Voice of My Mother and Other Poems*. I am pleased to feature Tom Daley, one of the nicest men I know, in the *Poet to Poet* series.

When I was a morbid young man drawn to the death-obsessed poetry of Plath, Sexton, and Berryman, it was Emily Dickinson's own conjuring with death that won my ferocious allegiance. I still shudder when I imagine the winds as they draw "quivering and chill" around the neck and shoulders of the tulle-clad speaker of "Because I could not stop for Death" (Fr479). My eye stretches to unimaginably far fields under the impetus of that curious formula, "Gazing Grain." And those horses' heads still rear in my mind, snorting and chafing, simultaneously eager and patient, champing in the direction of forever.

When I set out to explore a group of poems of Dickinson I haven't read, I can hardly take in three or four without falling into the baffling and encompassing maw of one of them. As I fall, my mind wanders over Dickinson's lines with a charmed bewilderment, inspired to understand, but often tripping in the effort. I stall, slow, find myself annoyed at the poem's resistance to felicitous comprehension, but also enchanted by its cheek, startled by its bravado, rendered temporarily mute by its musicality.

Even when I am impatient and want to step away, there is something that keeps tugging me back – a coy little wink, an exclamation

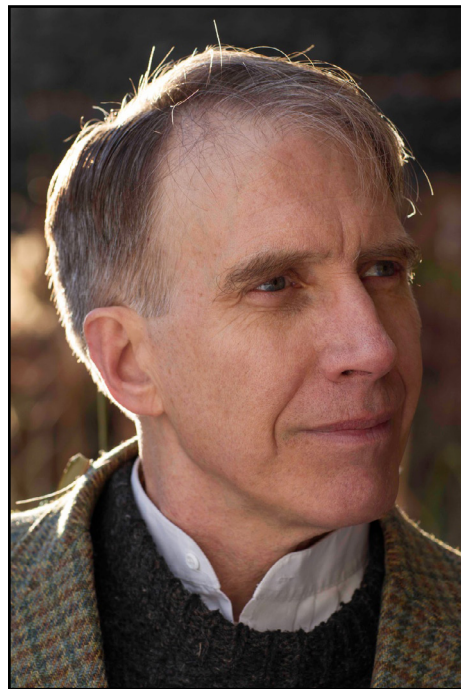


Photo Credit: Devin Altobello

point that incites a mysterious thrill ("The Smitten Rock that gushes! / The trampled Steel that springs!" [Fr181]), a distillation of observation into some apt aphorism, an image that bridges and muffles the chaos of longing in my meager heart.

Dickinson's poetry is often at the back of my mind (and often in the forefront) when

I am leading workshops on poetry writing. I once devised an exercise in which workshop participants were instructed to use fifteen words I had chosen from "As imperceptibly as Grief" (Fr935) in a poem. I explained the etymology of each word and then asked them to use the words with the original or earlier meanings in mind.

Dickinson ends the poem, "Our Summer made Her light Escape / Into the Beautiful –." I like to think that she knew the origins of "escape," explained by the *Online Etymology Dictionary*: "Vulgar Latin \**excap-*pare**, literally 'get out of one's cape, leave a pursuer with just one's cape.'" One witty participant cooked up a poem replete with stock images of dastardly villains from a Western. The etymology of "escape" inspired the poet to have the hapless maiden who is tied to the railroad track manage, Houdini-like, to wriggle out of her dress, and the dress was all that remained bound with rope for the oncoming train to flatten.

As an amateur producer of poetry performance extravaganzas (including something called "The Poetry Vaudeville Show"), I decided a number of years ago that I wanted to showcase a panoply of interpretations of Dickinson. I imagined flamenco-inflected trappings of a Spanish translation of "I

felt a Funeral in my Brain" (Fr340); Tuvan throat-singers whipping up the surf of "Wild Nights – Wild Nights!" (Fr269); a taunting, Yiddish-accented mugging of "What Soft – Cherubic Creatures – / These Gentlewomen are –" (Fr675); a blues harp brazening the howls of "There came a Wind Like a Bugle" (Fr1618); and an African ululation rendering those essential oils in "Essential Oils – are wrung" (Fr772) into a "Gift of Screws." (How disappointed I was, as a working machinist, to learn that someone else had already published a book of poems with that marvelous phrase as the title – I had wanted it for my own collection of poems about unrequited homoerotic lust in the machine shop!) In the course of doing research for some blue-collar angle for the project, I stumbled upon Jay Leyda's

and Aife Murray's studies of the Dickinson family servants and Miss Emily's relationship with them. Fascinated, I turned my energies towards writing a play on the subject, which became *Every Broom and Bridget – Emily Dickinson and Her Irish Servants*.

The play's central character is Tom Kelley, the Irish immigrant who was a groundskeeper (and probably property manager) for the Dickinsons. He and Dickinson must have had as close to a platonic relationship as was possible between a Yankee mistress and her servant. Kelley and the Irish cohort who worked for the family would have been considered at best second-class citizens by the "enlightened" Yankees of the day, including Samuel Bowles, who published (in the *Springfield Republican*) hideous caricatures of the Irish and mocking accounts of hapless "Paddys" in factories, who, as Kelley did in a fall while working on a roof, lost limbs in horrifying accidents. Dickinson appointed Kelley to be her chief pallbear-

er, a snub at proper Amherst society, the equivalent of a contemporary Westchester county socialite arranging for a member of her Laotian floor-sanding crew to be the lead man carrying her coffin to Woodlawn Cemetery.

When she received the news of the grave illness of Judge Otis Lord, presumed by some scholars to be her paramour, Dickinson collapsed in Kelley's arms. In a letter to Lord she writes, "Meanwhile, Tom had come, and I ran to his Blue Jacket, and let my Heart break there – that was the warm-

The Emily Dickinson I cherish and am startled by lodges somewhere in between the beguiling quaintness of the character in *The Belle of Amherst* and the cruelty-obsessed presence conjured by Camille Paglia in her chapter, "Amherst's Madame De Sade" in *Sexual Personae*.

est place. 'He will be better. Don't cry Miss Emily. I could not see you cry.'" (L752) In the lyrical center of my play, Kelley wanders away from a gathering after Dickinson's funeral and stands outside her house looking up at her bedroom windows, rhapsodizing over their attachments. In places, Kelley is articulating my own rapt attention to and affection for Dickinson and her strange genius:

"Just around the corner is your garden where we committed our first confidences . . . There you told me of your squelched yearnings, and I told you of my terrible feeling that I am nothing more than a tenant in the garret of my own heart."

". . . I think of you now as some well-oiled, prehistoric bird – a cormorant – staggering through water tension and slinging yourself into air darker than time's bone. You were a votive bat, blinking out of small caves. A torch fusing pollen and horsehair. A marsh drowned in the thaws of April."

The Emily Dickinson I cherish and am startled by lodges somewhere in between the beguiling quaintness of the character in *The Belle of Amherst* and the cruelty-obsessed presence conjured by Camille Paglia in her chapter, "Amherst's Madame De Sade" in *Sexual Personae*. I grit my teeth at the nineteenth-century "lady" who seems manifest in the lines "Lest I sh'd be old-fashioned / I'll put a trinket on," which end "The morns are meeker than they were" (Fr32), but then imagine that Dickinson is making a little dig at social convention. The atheist in me bristles at the notion of a "Sequel" in "This World is not Conclusion" (Fr373), but smiles at the wit of the finish of that poem: "Narcotics cannot still the Tooth / That nibbles at the Soul." Having studied a little Buddhism, I am intrigued by the way in which Dickinson's poems often align with what might seem a very Buddhist notion of the

ephemerality of experience ("ephemera" derives from Medieval Latin *ephemera* [febris] "[fever lasting a day]"), as in that muscular finish to "Dare you see a Soul at the 'White Heat'?" (Fr401):

Refining these impatient Ores  
With Hammer, and with Blaze  
Until the Designated Light  
Repudiate the Forge –

All of these colliding reactions manifested themselves while I was granted the privilege of writing in Dickinson's bedroom for an hour while it was undergoing renovations several years ago. Here is the poem, composed in her room, that grew out of those collisions. It is reprinted with the kind permission of Michael Medeiros, editor of the anthology, *This is a Mighty Room: Poetry Written in Emily Dickinson's Bedroom*.

Tom Daley's poem "Writing in Emily Dickinson's Bedroom as It Is Being Restored on the 128th Anniversary of Her Death" appears on the following pages.

## Writing in Emily Dickinson's Bedroom as It Is Being Restored on the 128th Anniversary of Her Death

By Tom Daley

Published by permission of Michael Medeiros, editor; This is a Mighty Room: Poetry Written in Emily Dickinson's Bedroom

i.  
Is that your scent,  
a smoke that coaxed creation  
from the exhumation of a fire too riffling  
to flee or leaf out? At the fringe  
of the renovation, tattered,  
tottering paper reliquaries  
still grip their wallpaper paste in a muddy,  
barely discernible pattern that flags down  
all your Rhenish vats and your Franklin stoves.  
Floorboards widen further than the dew  
which wed itself to a mild, wild  
tracery, to a ceramic shine the doorknob  
still nourishes and gives back,  
reflecting your skin  
or a rush of hushed sponge baths  
in your long neuralgia.

ii.  
Leggy ghost, speak to me of spectral  
lariats that cinch their riots, their storied  
rot. Against decay, you  
were yes and thread and dearth  
and drifted, like so much plaster dust, between  
the patching cement and the chapters.  
Here you made your turns, your nut-brown  
wobbles, your cadences that decked their electric  
trim and tricked all the gentlewomen.  
I breathe you in—cinnamon, slippery as lard  
from hybrid hogs in your mixing bowls,  
from your pantry which entranced  
the neighbor urchins.

iii.  
Out this window, in a hamper, they've bundled  
all the myths that thin you to necessary  
sugar, to Miss Maxim,  
to reached-for lozenge

or lamp or sword. Now you  
are captured only in the glass panes where your  
eye sought its own impermanence.  
Here in my remaining half hour, I seek  
only the buzz saw that unnerves  
your memory, the leaf blower tending the grass  
the Irish once raked, your heart—a crackling  
finish, like raku—and your mouth—that museum  
of extravagant blasphemies.

iv.  
The latter day beams that shore up your ceiling  
are snaked through and through  
with corrugated steel tunnels to wire the light  
you abjured and once were injured by. Here you slept  
narrow and plain, whistled your slipper whisper  
that padded the halls like sturdy ether  
organized around a skeleton.  
Shall I memorize the molding, the layers  
counting out their iambs, the bevels finding  
their discrete disjunctions? What token  
shall I leave of myself  
as I am pinioned here under rafters  
that kept you dry, between things  
set off with blue tape and a black marker  
that speculates but cannot confirm?

v.  
Panes—six to a window half.  
Death has perfumed away your moons  
pricked with spinsterhood, your private estivations.  
Here a potpourri—sandalwood?  
Eleven minutes left and I will not have  
you again, shaved so close to when you were.  
And in my head slosh the vague frequencies  
of the mutton chop gentlemen who measured you,  
lost in the snarls of their metronomes,  
their gradations, their now disused mantelpieces  
where they set their sherry glasses down.

Maryanne Garbowsky, Series Editor

## A Certain Slant of Light

A Certain Slant of Light,” an exhibition curated by artists Bill Conger and Shona Macdonald, appeared from January 15th to February 25th at the Riverside Arts Center in a suburb of Chicago, Illinois.

When artist Shona Macdonald read the poem “There’s a certain Slant of light” (Fr320), she felt an immediate kinship with the words. They took her back to her own childhood growing up in Aberdeen in the northeast corner of Scotland. She remembered Sundays being taken to church by her parents and seeing the same slanting light and feeling the emotional undercurrents present in the poem. There was a sense of darkness, of melancholy, of doom.

The poem became the impetus for an invitational art show that Ms. Macdonald and Bill Conger co-curated. Both reviewed slides submitted by other artists and chose six additional artists to complete their show.

The exhibit included work in various media: painting, drawing, sculpture, collage, and photography. The artists are not illustrating the poem, but rather responding to it visual-

ly and emotionally, attempting to create in imagery the mood that Dickinson’s poem conveys. The mood is one of foreboding with an “under-current of affliction” as Macdonald describes in the gallery notes. The notes also address the poem’s construction which, despite its appearance of “fragility,” is complex with a toughness about it.

Macdonald’s silverpoint drawing entitled “Ghost #4” has a cloak of mystery which surrounds the shapes depicted. There is a feeling of terror and the unknown lurking within. Macdonald’s drawing is in actuality blueberry bushes covered in gauze to protect them from the winter cold. They correspond with the poet’s words “the Seal Despair” and “The Look of Death.” However, they appear to the viewer as ghostly presences, unrecognizable shapes that loom up to mystify the viewer.

Macdonald chose silverpoint since it has a “silvery diaphanous quality” which over time will change in color from a cold gray to a warm sepia. The medium is transient like the subject of the poem, subtle and fleeting, difficult to hold and preserve.

A work that has a similar effect is an untitled ink drawing by Melissa Randall. Like “Ghost #4,” it presents a series of amorphous shapes that overlap and echo each other, creating a feeling of mystery and emptiness. Like the words in Dickinson’s poem, “We can find no scar,” no visible



©Melissa Randall

Melissa Randall, Untitles (Jentel Series)Walnut Ink on Paper, 7.5 x 5.5”

mark, the artist presents a reality with no name, only the feeling of an “internal difference / Where the Meanings Are.”

Artist Buzz Spector crafts a collage made of “dust jacket elements” and titles it “Ghost writers # 2.” Here we see what appear to be cutouts of photos of people’s heads and shoulders but no faces. They are dark like negatives and have no recognizable features or detail. Like Dickinson’s poem, the collage makes palpable a feeling of unease and uncertainty.

Dustin Young’s graphite on paper entitled “Fragment” shows a series of side by side wooden slats that line up horizontally across the picture plane. They form a continuum of slanting angles that are light in color against a darker background and suggest the poet’s words “the Landscape listens.” In the drawing, the viewer is aware of stillness: there is neither sound nor movement as the forms move into “the Distance / On the look of Death.”

The show will travel to other sites, carrying with it the spirit of Dickinson’s words, proving once again their power to provoke, to inspire, and to live again in creative minds.

Marianne Noble, Series Editor

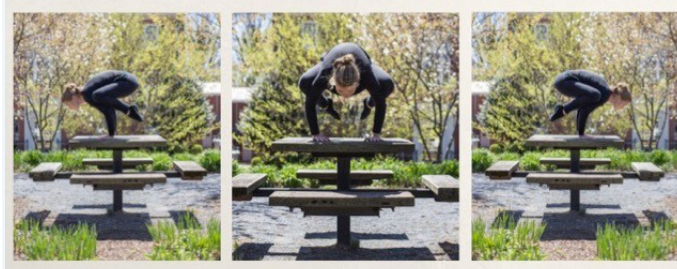
## Creative Appropriation

By Marianne Noble

Last semester, I taught American Literature at Sogang University, in Seoul, Korea, on a Fulbright Fellowship. I loved teaching Korean students, whom I found smart, ambitious, and dedicated. Overall, their serious mindset paid off when we were studying Emerson, Hawthorne, and literature about slavery, but I discovered that it was not the perfect attitude for appreciating Whitman and Dickinson. To improve this part of the course, therefore, I revised the syllabus mid-semester, replacing a midterm exam with a creative assignment. This essay is about our experience with that assignment

Analytical essays represent the majority of the writing I assign in all of my courses, but they do not tap everything a student brings to the experience of poetry, and they do not bring out the best in every student. In the United States, my upper-level course on Whitman and Dickinson therefore culminates in a creative project of the students' own choosing. Almost without exception, students' creative imagination surprises and delights everyone involved. They revel in the freedom to think and invent in their own ways, and to respond to the poetry on their own terms. My Spring 2016 class brought out their creativity:

- One student had herself photographed in yoga poses that to her mind suggested the spirit of particular Dickinson and Whitman poems, in settings carefully chosen to enhance the overall effect.
- One re-wrote "She rose to his requirement – dropt" in graphic novel format.
- A group of students wrote a script for a play about sexual domination, and then filmed a performance of it.



Elle Smiley in yoga poses suggesting "‘Hope’ is the thing with feathers" (Fr314)

- One student photographed sites in Rock Creek Forest, the setting for "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" and then developed them using 1850's photographic technology.

In this Spring 2016 class, one student, Brittany Jones, invented a creative project that I later came to realize was perfect for my Korean students. Brittany chose poems by Whitman and Dickinson and rewrote them as the other might have written them. First, she rewrote "The Sleepers," by Dickinson. Then, she wrote "A Bird, came down the Walk," by Whitman. Here is Brittany describing that component of her project:

As this self-analysis indicates, Brittany came to a keener understanding of Dickinson's artistry by trying to capture it in another voice. Here are two of the poems Brittany produced:

The Sleepers by Emily Dickinson

I watch them - Sleepers - in the dark  
While solemnly they play  
Like Children in their cradles born  
And in their cradles dream

[ . . . ]

The homeward bound and outward bound,  
The swimmer and the ship  
Each Beautiful in dreams and sleep,  
Each find here Heaven's peace

Hand in hand we pass and wake  
Each night a different World  
And though we pass back into Day  
Let not this World unfurl

A Bird, came down the Walk by Walt Whitman

[ . . . ]

Behold a robin!  
Stretch'd on the ground, loafing on the grass,  
I watch as a robin – lonely, arrest'd, needing the earth – lights

softly on the ground.  
His legs thinn'd and reedy, twigs gripping the ground, holding  
an orb, stumbling, lunging, loving the dirt,  
He walks away from me, not seeing me though my eyes stroke  
and embrace him.  
He pecks at the dirt, digging his beak into the plush of the earth,  
and the earth yields to him as the grass yields itself to the  
curvatures of my arms and stomach and legs.  
Taking a worm into his beak, he bites it into halves;  
The worm multiplies, becomes two, doubles itself before  
dividing, receding into the bird and the earth.  
The robin, son of two planes, lungs of earth and bosom of sky,  
washes down the worm and the world with dew softly  
sipp'd from the grass  
Before hopping, buoying himself over a blind beetle, reaching  
his thinn'd legs over the beetle's thinn'd legs, letting the  
beetle pass.

The robin, caresser of air, inhales the world from the safety of  
dirt,  
His bright eyes darken, beaded and keel'd,  
His brown head ruffling, trembling, quivering, wavering, turn-  
ing to my own head,  
I gaze into his eyes, he knows I am looking at him, knowing  
him, fondling him.  
He knows he has been let out for me and by me, as I am let out  
for him and by him.  
I offer him bread from my lunch, I toss it to him like an offering,  
a promise that his world is bountiful and perfect as he is  
bountiful and perfect.

And the robin, purveyor of breezes, unrolls himself, billowing  
his feathers, letting go the earth,  
He sails over the dirt and the grass and the beetle and my body  
loafing,  
He dives into the arms of an atmosphere that is there only to  
know him and hold him,  
He rows his wings through waves of light and floats on the surface  
of the sun,  
He lists to the edges of my morning, shimmering, silver, stitch'd  
already seamlessly into some other's afternoon.

I stay with him though I cannot see him,  
Though he swims out of my eyes and steers his body softly  
home.

Brittany's creative fusion of the two poets is not only sensitively  
attuned to both poets, but beautiful in its own right.

Fast forward four months. Now, I'm teaching Korean students.  
I'm giving more A's than I usually do, which my ambitious stu-

dents are earning through sheer hard work. Grades matter trem-  
endously to them, and they feel great anxiety about them. The  
students at Sogang are justly renowned for working very hard.

Though well-trained in literary interpretation, my Korean stu-  
dents found reading complex literature in English difficult. I  
was surprised how difficult they found *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.  
Likewise, given that I'm accustomed to students reveling in  
the freedom and enthusiasm of Whitman, I was surprised when  
quite a few of my Korean students were troubled by the overt  
sexuality of Whitman, replicating perhaps the sensibilities of  
Whitman's first readers. I had also expected that the koan-like  
poetry of Dickinson would resonate with their own literary  
sensibilities, but if it did, they did not report this to me. In-  
stead, they found Dickinson very difficult; she confirmed all of  
their fears about poetry. Overall, I would say, both poets made  
them anxious.

I wanted my Korean students to experience literature – and  
education – with less anxiety. I also wanted them to discover  
the poets on their own, rather than permitting me to deliver  
up crucial knowledge nuggets. With Brittany's work from the  
previous semester in the forefront of my memory, I chucked  
my plan for a midterm and instead asked them to write a  
Dickinson poem as Whitman might have written it or vice  
versa.

Here are some of their poems:

Dickinson's poem "Why do I love you sir?" as Whitman might  
have written it, by Eun Shim.

I mind how once my dear friend my lover turned to me,  
And how you settled your head on my bare-stript chest  
And how you asked why I loved you  
Swiftly arose and spread around me the wisdom that passes all  
arguments  
The wind does not ask the grass why he shudders  
And the lightning does not ask the eye why he blinks  
And the sunrise does not ask me why I watch  
And my voice goes after what my reasons cannot reach  
And with the twirl of my tongue I plunged your heart  
And answered, as the waves eternally kiss the shores, there-  
fore, then, I love you

Another student, Jackie Simeit, tried to write Dickinson's "If  
I can stop one heart from breaking" like Whitman. She did a  
good job, but we realized together that Whitman would never  
have written the sentiments in that poem. The closest he would  
come to easing someone else's pain might involve becoming it,  
I thought:

# Teaching Dickinson

I myself have the power  
With every atom of my being,  
To keep your heart from breaking;  
Let the warmth of my hand ease your aches,  
Let the whisper of my breath cool your pains;  
I shall pick you up like a fainting robin,,  
And keep you in the nest of my heart  
A place of tenderness, padded with grass,  
Where you will stay, a place to heal;  
To feel this love, no act would be in vain.

I suggested that the simile in the sixth line did not sound much like Whitman. (Though the original has never sounded much like Dickinson to me, either.) This poem was not a perfect end-product, but the process of writing this poem revealed as much in its false movements as in its right ones.

One student selected the “marriage of the trapper” section from Section 10 of “Song of Myself.” Her revision captured how Dickinson might have approached this theme:

I’m “wife” – after I pass the bank  
And join the man in skins  
Burdensome beard - luxuriant curls  
And now I’m to be his

Master he’s called he lounges soft  
While Father sits on a bank  
And dumbly smokes with friends around  
Thickoccasins to their feet.

Through lashes long I see my steps  
My coarse straight locks down hang  
I’m wavering upon my limbs  
I’m “wife” – once I hold his hand. (by Wonji Woo)

Junhee Park did a great job rendering how Whitman might have handled the poem “Tell all the truth but tell it slant”:

I tell the truth for every atom, like a grass, for every folk of human.  
And I tell the sea with rivers or streams.  
And the path I shall take to the truth, shall be a circuit track of road,  
a bundle of strings which are crossing together, or a ringlet of a child.  
What is love and what is faith, where is god and what is the meaning of every nature for you?  
The spring of water or vibration of your heart, and the root of every wood or grass, or the spine of an old bear,

All that I reflect on and all that you have in your dictionary,  
Shall knock to you like a breeze in spring.  
And shall become narrow in you like water seeps into gauze.

The meaning of nature is “the spine of an old bear.” In my experience, no amount of analytical writing would have driven a student so directly to the heart of Whitman’s sensibility. The students’ artistry and personal investment leaps off the page.

Playing with poetry helped my Korean students understand how the poets work, from the inside. They improved their understanding of the forms, lines, sounds, and themes. They realized that some themes were incompatible for one or the other, which – being an intuitive realization – came home to them with greater force than any lecture could ever hope to replicate.

In retrospect, I can see that some aspects of the assignment were stereotypically American. It refuses the hierarchical nature of Korea’s Confucian culture by privileging the student’s interpretation over mine. It values creativity over correctness. It is out of the box, while Korean education is in the box. It individualizes the student’s learning, putting induction before deduction. There’s even something democratic, or egalitarian, about taking creative liberties with iconic poems. All of that seemed fitting for a course in American literature, and it was part of the de-stressing and self-reliant experience I wanted for my Korean students. For three hours a week, they had a cross-cultural experience too.

I encourage readers to try this assignment. Students learn a great deal about the formal methods of both poets, and the project develops a fun class spirit. Readers are welcome to use my assignment sheet, which you can acquire by contacting me at [mnoble@american.edu](mailto:mnoble@american.edu)

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*Marianne Noble teaches US Literature at American University in Washington DC. The editor of the Bulletin series Teaching Dickinson, she is the co-editor of Emily Dickinson and Philosophy (2013), and author of The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature (2000) as well as many articles on 19th-century US authors. Anyone wishing to see the unique grading rubric she uses to assess the student work on this assignment may write to her at [mnoble@american.edu](mailto:mnoble@american.edu) or to the Bulletin editor at [dan.manheim@centre.edu](mailto:dan.manheim@centre.edu).*

## An Interview with Dr. Cristanne Miller on *Emily Dickinson’s Poems: As She Preserved Them*

A review of Cristanne Miller’s new edition of Dickinson’s poems ran in the Fall 2016 issue of the Bulletin. However, those who have not been following Professor Miller’s progress with her project, not anticipating the appearance of a new reading edition of the poems, might wonder what her volume offers that is different from what has come before. Bulletin assistant editor Allyson Weglar recently spoke to Miller to ask her to explain what she feels the book has to offer.

**Cristanne Miller**  
*Emily Dickinson’s Poems: As She Preserved Them*. Cambridge: Harvard, 2016. 864 pp.

*What provoked the creation of this edition?*

There was a combination of reasons. The first was a kind of frustration with the Johnson and Franklin one-volume reading editions: all of the information I needed was in the variorum, but getting a precise answer to any question required reading through a large amount of detail. I thought it would be good to have a reading edition that provides key information in a relatively simple, clear way. In addition, I was unhappy with not having access to fascicle poems in the order that Dickinson copied them. It has longed seemed to me that we should have an edition of the poems in fascicle order.

It also seems to me that the typical Dickinson poem is not the poem that is now most widely represented in popular imagination and some scholarship. The widespread assumption seems to be that Dickinson wrote primarily on scraps of paper and in very draft-y form, but in fact most of her poems remaining to us are written on clean paper and preserved in a way that suggests she took the process of copying and preservation quite seriously. I wanted to create an edition that would make clear at a glance the poems Dickinson was writing that had no alternatives written onto

their pages and those that included alternatives, or were more fluid or draft-like.

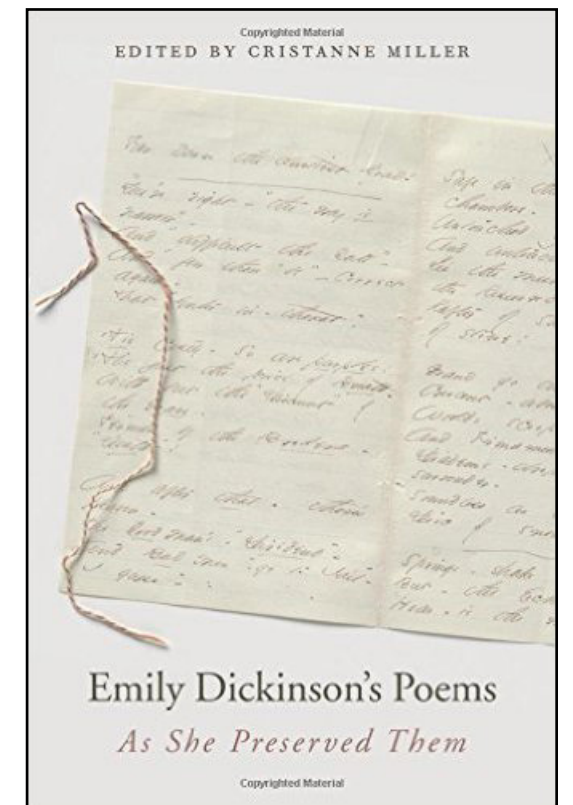
At the same time, I agree with most manuscript scholars that Dickinson is very interested in an ongoing process of composition or revision, and it seemed to me important to represent that emphasis on her work in process.

The more I thought about it, the more it seemed to me that, given the directions of current scholarship, it would be useful and interesting to have a volume in which you could see Dickinson at work, on individual manuscripts and throughout her lifetime – how did she keep her poems? order them? how can we understand her poems in relation to periods of time in her life? My edition attempts to get us closer to what Dickinson was like as a composer of poems and what she hoped or thought about the future of those poems.

*Why did you structure the edition the way you did?*

The fascicles are the single most important work that Dickinson left us. She left us actual booklets of poetry that she took a lot of time to inscribe onto clean stationary and then to bind into booklets. That project of copying, binding, and preserving is quite extraordinary to me. In order to get at how Dickinson herself pre-

served and handled her work, one needs to begin with the fascicles.



The second group of poems (what I call the poems on folded “Sheets” and Franklin calls “Sets”), following that same logic, are carefully preserved but not bound. These and the fascicles are the two units I wanted to start with in my edition. The section following those contains poems

Dickinson retained in some form for herself, but not systematically copied onto folded sheets of stationery – which I call “Loose Poems.” Some of these are written cleanly, in fair hand, on stationery, and others are written on scraps of wrapping paper, or envelopes, or any other type of paper that was at hand. Because I wanted the edition to be “complete” (that is, to contain what I and other scholars have interpreted to be Dickinson’s complete extant poems), there also needed to be an acknowledgment of poems we have only in transcription and of poems Dickinson circulated to friends but to our knowledge did not retain a copy of for herself.

The poems in my edition are in rough chronological order. 1858-1864 are fascicle poems; in 1864-1865 and in the early 1870s, Dickinson was copying onto folded sheets of stationery. Starting in around 1866, Dickinson also started keeping loose copies of poems (she kept only a few loose copies before this date). Most of the poems she circulated and didn’t keep a copy of were sent in her later years.

I very much hope that my edition fills a gap in existing editions of Dickinson’s poems – not to replace other editions but to add to them. I have found the work of editors and scholars like T. H. Johnson, R. W. Franklin, Martha Nell Smith and Ellen Louise Hart, and Marta Werner to be extremely stimulating and provocative in the best sense, and I’m grateful for every edition of poems that’s been published because they all offer something to Dickinson’s readers.

*What was the intention behind creating this new edition?*

I wanted to show Dickinson at work, copying, preserving, and to some extent (as close as we can get) to composing the poems through a representation of the fascicle orderings, sheets not bound, poems left in loose form, and then the poems that she circulated to people that she did not apparently herself keep a copy of.

*Nobody else has grouped poems as “loose” or “poems not retained” or “transcribed” – and as I said before, there is no reading edition of the fascicles. All other editions of Dickinson’s work proceed chronologically, regardless of how Dickinson herself kept the poems – or didn’t keep them.*

My edition provides a new categorization of at least some of Dickinson’s poems. Nobody else has grouped poems as “loose” or “poems not retained” or “transcribed” – and as I said before, there is no reading edition of the fascicles. All other editions of Dickinson’s work proceed chronologically, regardless of how Dickinson herself kept the poems – or didn’t keep them.

*How is your edition different from other editions?*

Johnson and Franklin constructed three-volume variorums in which they tried to give all the information available to them about manuscripts: how many are extant, how to locate them, how they differ from each other, etc. This is far more information than my edition contains. Their reading editions, however, simply present one version of each poem with no commentary about whether it is an early or late version, whether Dickinson mailed it, whether it is part of a fascicle, etc., and the organization is chronological.

My edition instead prioritizes the version of a poem that Dickinson wrote out for herself in clean copy, most often to include in a fascicle. This is the priority because it seems to me that she herself was giving a kind of priority to those versions

by having written them out so carefully and systematically.

The other main difference is that my edition contains information that is usually only available in a variorum, intended primarily for scholarship, and presents it in an accessible way. You could call it a “reading” edition because it does not contain extensive detail, but it’s sort of a cross between the two kinds of editions, and I hope it is useful to casual and to scholarly readers. It is, for example, the

only reading edition that gives alternative words that Dickinson wrote on the manuscripts she kept for herself (visible at a glance in the margins of the page rather than in footnote format) and it is the only reading edition that gives information about whether a poem was circulated, and to whom. This is the only reading edition that really shows Dickinson at work on the poems.

My edition is more comparable to the Johnson and Franklin editions than to anyone else’s. Johnson’s, Franklin’s and mine are the only editions that attempt to reproduce all of Dickinson’s poems; others are more specialized.

For example, *Open Me Carefully* reproduces Dickinson’s correspondence with her sister-in-law and perhaps lover, Susan Dickinson. That’s a very particular focus on a subset of Dickinson’s writing that makes a particular kind of argument about ways that poems coincide with or overlap with the function of letters. That volume has a completely different kind of focus than mine. Another example is Marta Werner’s. Her focus in *Radical Scatters* is on the visual manuscript, on what the actual manuscript looks like. For someone interested in Dickinson as a creative

visual artist, this is very important. Werner and Jen Bervin’s *The Gorgeous Nothings* similarly focuses on a particular subset of Dickinson’s manuscripts – the poems she wrote or copied onto envelopes. These are examples of editions that have different intentions than mine in relation to the poems.

Finally, while other editions contain various annotations, mine attempts to give brief notes on Dickinson’s reading and possible biographical or historical contexts for the poems. It provides no notes on where manuscripts are located, and very few about possible relationships among poems or between poems and letters, but it is the only “complete” reading edition that provides annotation. My notes let you see, for example, how much of Dickinson’s verse alludes to biblical passages or stories.

*How does this edition come out of your own work on Dickinson?*

Over the last decade, I have spent a lot of time thinking about the extent to which other poets in the 19th century, and especially poets whose work Dickinson would have known, use the same kind of metrical deviation that Dickinson does. It became clear as I did research for *Reading in Time* that the 1840s-1850s was a period of extraordinary experimentation with poetic forms and rhythms. In some ways, Dickinson’s experiments with poetic form and meter were a part of what interested many poets of her time – she and Whitman weren’t alone in pushing the boundaries of poetic form. They just pushed them farther, and more consistently, than other poets.

I wanted to make clear to readers what’s characteristic of Dickinson and what isn’t. This led me to other kinds of questions, such as “how many poems does Dickinson circulate?” and “do most of her poem manuscripts in fact contain alternatives written on the page?”

Then, once I had a contract to go forward with my edition, I continued to do research, especially on the annotations. Some of that research came out of the kinds of exploration I had been doing on what Dickinson was reading during her lifetime – her cultural context in the 19th century – but I also started taking a different kind of notes on Dickinson criticism and other nineteenth-century poems.



“Behind this mortal Bone / There knits a bolder One – “ (Fr649). Cristanne Miller, in a familiar pose, draws together the various strands at a recent conference.

*Who is your target audience? Why would somebody buy your edition?*

I wrote my edition targeting everyone. What this specifically means is that I wanted this edition to be completely accessible and usable by the general reader. This is the kind of thing any person can pick up and really enjoy browsing and reading through – I hope! However, it’s also intended for scholarly readers or students who would like both access to her poems and easier access to a kind of information that is typically only provided

in variorums. Also I think and hope the annotations will be useful to the general reader. There are a lot of things scholars know that general readers don’t know. Some things in my edition may also be of use to newer scholars.

*Do you think a common reader should own only your edition?*

I wouldn’t say they should only own my edition, but I think someone with my edition only would find it adequate. My edition gives all of the poems and lots of information about them. If one regards various presentations of a poem as being essentially one poem rather than lots of different poems, then my edition represents each poem in at least one form.

*What are the deficiencies of your edition?*

They are not deficiencies but rather where I placed my focus. I didn’t want something overwhelmingly scholarly but instead something that would be useful to general readers. If you want chronology, my edition is less useful than Franklin’s, for example.

*What is left out of your edition, and is there anything you would add in an expanded edition?*

One regret that I have is that I wish I had included a bibliography of the scholarship that was useful to me in annotating the poems. There are also two tiny errors to correct.

It seems extremely unlikely to me that I would ever do another edition of Dickinson’s poems. This one does basically what I wanted it to do. Of course, it is altogether possible that new information might be found that would change my opinion.

*Do you think this edition will alter scholarship?*

I hope very much that it will provoke people to ask new questions and pursue new directions of scholarship.



# Morgan Library Exhibition: “I’m Nobody! Who are You? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson”

Reviewed by Ivy Schweitzer

**Exhibition: “I’m Nobody! Who are You? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson.” The Morgan Library and Museum, New York, NY: January 20 through May 28, 2017.**

**Catalogue: Mike Kelly, Carolyn Vega, Marta Werner, Susan Howe, Richard Wilbur. *The Networked Recluse: The Connected World of Emily Dickinson*. Amherst, MA: Amherst College Press, 2017.**

Nothing confirms the visual nature of manuscripts – or poems as aesthetic objects – like viewing them framed on a wall with accompanying commentary in a show at a prestigious museum. This is one of the major goals of the exhibition, “I’m Nobody! Who are You? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson,” on display at the Morgan Library and Museum from January 20 through May 28, 2017. Carefully chosen and beautifully curated, this set of “objects” not only reinforces the importance of consulting Dickinson’s manuscripts for a fuller and more accurate experience of her achievements, but immerses us in the complex layers of connections.

Created around a small group of Dickinson’s manuscripts in the Morgan’s holdings, but drawing on the major collections at Amherst College, Houghton Library at Harvard, Mount Holyoke College, the Boston Public Library, New York Public Library and the Emily Dickinson Museum, the exhibition challenges several myths that continue to distort Dickinson’s biography and history. As Colin Bailey, Director of the Morgan Library and Museum, notes in his “Foreword,” both show and publication “contextualize” and “trace the development” of Dickinson’s

career as writer. In doing so, they challenge the persistent beliefs that Dickinson was morbidly isolated by situating her firmly in her historical moment, and that she did not evolve as a writer by showing drafts alongside more finished work. The exhibition manages to be an excellent introduction to Dickinson’s life and work while also offering insights for scholars and aficionados.

The exhibition catalogue, sold in a paper version but also available as a free download, is aptly named *The Networked Recluse: The Connected World of Emily Dickinson*. This title alludes to and builds on the scholarship presented in the Special Issue of *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, v23, Fall 2014, which connects the poet, long considered detached from the world, “to an array of nineteenth-century information networks” as well as reflects on the implications of emerging digital networking methodologies for studying Dickinson (Eliza Richards and Alexandra Socarides, “Editorial Note”). Mike Kelly, head of Archives and Special Collections at Amherst College, one of the architects of the exhibition and author of the catalogue’s “Introduction,” notes the revolutionizing effect of the accessibility of digital surrogates on Dickinson scholarship. It has engendered a fruitful new set of approaches to Dickinson’s work that emphasizes the materiality and performativity of her texts, as well as the salience of manuscripts in the ongoing process of “unediting” Dickinson’s work. This process unsettles the very borders between poem, letter, fragment, envelope poem, draft and finished work (if such a thing exists in Dickinson’s canon). But Kelly also cautions against “the limits of the digital” and offers the exhibition as a reminder that “scale” is often distorted in digital representations, and “that these piec-

es bear many marks of their journey,” which disclose valuable details in the unfolding story of Dickinson’s lived networks.

Kelly reinforces the revisionary approach of the exhibit and catalogue by calling attention to the four-page facsimile of a poem titled “Renunciation” (“There came a day – at Summer’s full –”) included as the frontispiece to *Poems: Second Series*, published in the fall of 1891 by Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson. These first well-meaning editors explain in their preface that this poem illustrates Dickinson’s handwriting at a transitional period, but they could not have been unaware of how this poem’s theme, emphasized by their invented title, highlighted Dickinson’s mythic repudiation of the world. We now know that as the physical borders of Dickinson’s world contracted in the 1860’s, she became even more heavily connected to an extensive, vital and prestigious web of correspondents, visitors, and cultural, national, global, even cosmic events. The paradox of a “networked recluse” asks us to rethink renunciation as strategic withdrawal and necessary protection.

But there was more at stake in the publication of this manuscript, according to Carolyn Vega, Morgan Library’s Assistant Curator of Literary and Historical Manuscripts. In the next essay in the catalogue, Vega points out that Millicent Todd Bingham, Mabel Todd’s daughter, explained in 1945 that the facsimile served to illustrate “mistakes” in a version of the poem published in Scribner’s Magazine in 1890 in order to bolster the “correctness” of her mother’s version printed in *Poems*. The story is even more complex, Vega continues, because different editors were work-

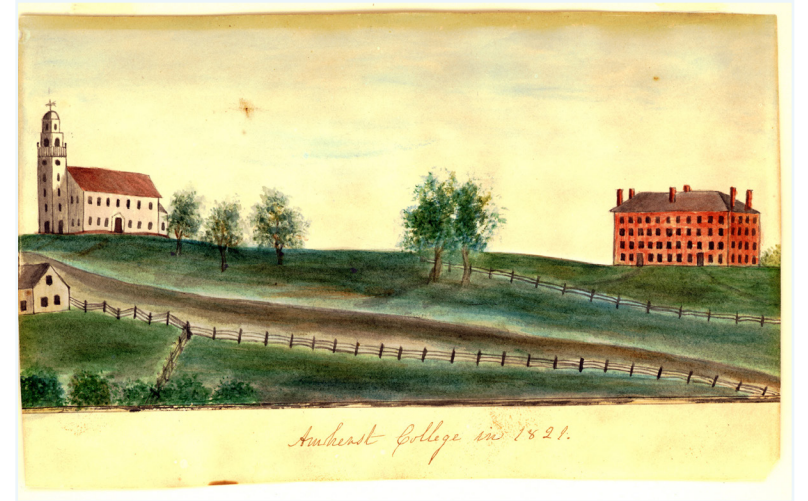
ing from different versions of this poem, driving her to affirm “the huge importance of examining the work in manuscript.” It is also possible that Todd and Higginson included the manuscript to illustrate the generally unorthodox and “crude” state of Dickinson’s canon, thus justifying their meddling with the texts. Included in the exhibition is a letter Higginson wrote to Todd on June 11, 1890, mentioning a letter passed on to him by the publisher Thomas Niles from Mr. Baxter, who opined: “There is hardly one of these poems which does not bear marks of unusual and remarkable talent; there is hardly one of them which is not marked by an extraordinary crudity of workmanship.” In light of this criticism, Higginson asks Todd to further “revise” some of the poems.

Higginson’s letter appears in the extensive “Checklist of the Exhibition” that follows Vega’s essay. It is divided into five categories organized chronologically, and includes helpful transcriptions of letters and commentary. While all the sections are well done, and include a wide variety of contextual materials, carefully placed, with well-chosen accompanying poems, I found section five, “Lifetime Publications,” the most visually dazzling and insightful. Viewing a huge page of close-

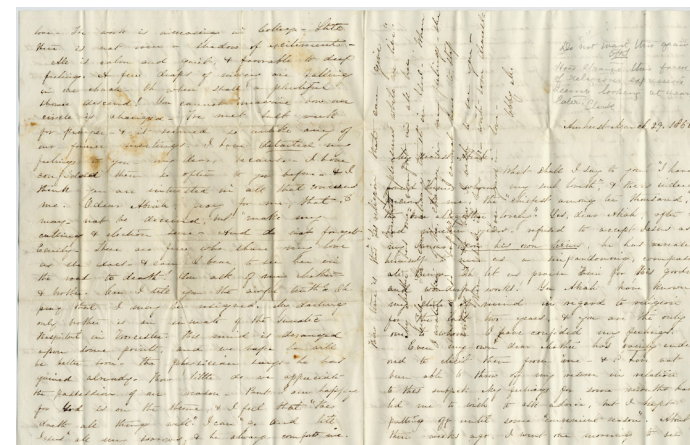
ly printed newspaper in which even a six stanza poem like “A Narrow fellow in the Grass” is almost entirely obscured, next to the poem’s manuscript version of large looping letters and fertile open spaces emphasizes the enormous differences in scale between

19th century print publication and Dickinson’s self-publication in letters and fascicles. The curators include several different versions of the poem as well as the letter Dickinson wrote complaining to Higginson about how the poem was revised without her consent. Likewise, the section on Posthumous Publications and Legacy has important examples of Todd’s initial typescripts on an early typewriter that had neither lower case letters nor punctuation.

Following the Checklist is the lead essay by co-curator/editor Marta Werner, which represents a significant expansion of her ground-breaking approach to Dickinson’s later works and envelope poems, an appreciation by poet Richard Wilbur from a volume that appeared in 1960, Werner’s interview with her teacher and noted scholar and poet Su-



Orra White Hitchcock (1796–1863), Amherst College in 1821  
Ink and watercolor on paper, ca. 1845  
Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Edward and Orra White Hitchcock Papers, MA.00027



Abby Wood Bliss (1830–1915), letter to Abiah Root, signed and dated Amherst [Massachusetts], March 29, 1850. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, 2009.002.  
All information about images comes from the catalog of the exhibit.

san Howe, and finally a “Textual Preface” in which Werner explains her theory and practice of transcription, followed by a note on the transcriptions and the transcription of manuscripts in the exhibit.

Werner’s lead essay, “Emily Dickinson: Manuscripts, Maps, and a Poetics of Cartography,” represents a new generation of Dickinson scholarship, one based solely on the manuscripts rather than printed texts, and focusing on scale and spatialization through mapping. We come to understand that the turn to manuscripts and materiality, ironically facilitated by the virtuality of digital surrogates, is part of a spatial turn. The carefully conceived exhibit embodies this insight by including as its last “object,” an 1873 map of the town of Amherst, enlarged to fill the entire right wall of the entrance to the show. Thus, we literally begin and complete the exhibit by entering a map of Dickinson’s town. (Several visitors complained to me that they wanted a little arrow on the map pointing out the Homestead; having just visited there with my class, I could find it, but think now that the searching and not knowing are part of the experience.)

And indeed, not knowing where we are is a key part of Werner's new "poetics of cartography." In this ambitious project, she reimagines Dickinson's writings in spatial terms as a "new atlas" in which "the legend is missing, and in its place we find a series of questions." Drawing from recent theories of mapping as dynamic and orienting, Werner also includes the cartography of Dickinson's own day, illustrated by a gorgeous reproduction of the hand-colored frontispiece to Edward Hitchcock's *The Religion of Geology*, which fittingly shows a volcanic eruption.

In order to conceptualize and visualize a Dickinson manuscript or "pagescape," Werner proposes that we think of it as a "new deep map," which is always in process, is multi-layered and three dimensional, entailing "the inscription of a subjectivity while also registering the many forces—historical, cultural, geographical, environmental—that shape the subjectivity and circulate beyond it." With an exquisite attention to shifting borders, scope, scale and time, she argues for abandoning the conventional terms we use to label manuscripts, such as "rough draft" and "fair copy," because they "do not fully reflect the varied textual conditions of Dickinson's manuscripts." In order to more accurately map the shifting borders between letters and poems, Werner divides Dickinson's writing into six provisional stages and, given her career-long work with the later writing, shifts the emphasis from the Civil War years of "white heat" to the last years of elegiac poems and monumental letters. Again, she cautions: "Parts of the map are missing. To traverse this negative space, the reader must become cartographer, de-territorializing—perhaps even exiling herself in order to draw new routes and byways." It is a necessary critical relinquishment of completion or certainty, but one that will enable the final goal, "interpretation without end."

After this breath-taking re-vision, it seemed strange to come upon Richard Wilbur's essay, "Sumptuous Destitution," now almost sixty years old, which benefited not a jot from

the digital or materialist turns in Dickinson scholarship. But in reading this marvelously written essay in the context of the entire catalogue, one realizes that it is foreshadowing meditation on scale and space as well as a revisionary account of renunciation, the two themes that shape this project. Offering a "rough sketch of the imaginative logic" through which Dickinson comprehends "the paradox that privation is more plentiful than plenty; that to renounce is to possess the more," Wilbur concludes, "That is how one comprehends a nectar." Nor is this a static condition: "And not only are the objects of her desire distant; they are also very often moving away, their sweetness increasing in



Program for an Organ Concert by Howard Parkhurst, June 1873, with notes by Emily Dickinson. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Emily Dickinson Collection, AC868.

proportion to their remoteness." Thus, he reinforces the themes of exhibit and catalogue by finding that Dickinson conceived renunciation as both destitute and sumptuous, and it was "in a spatial metaphor that she gave her personal definition of Heaven. 'Heaven,' she said, 'is what I cannot reach.'"

Despite its thematic relevance, I wondered if the inclusion of Wilbur's essay was driven by the desire to have more sympatico male voices in the mix. The influential male editors of Dickinson's work, Thomas Johnson and Ralph Franklin, though acknowledged and thanked, come in for a bit of a (deserved) bashing in Werner's interview with Susan Howe, whose unusual "acoustic" approach to Dickinson paved the way to re-envision the manuscript "pagescapes" as visual objects and objects of art. While Howe acknowledges the crucial importance

of Franklin's publication of the manuscripts and Johnson's retention of dashes and capital letters, she claims Dickinson as a poet of terrifying "excess" and "that's what her two authorized male editors have failed to account for or represent. Dickinson is a poet of excess, a boundary-crosser. Often the scholarly apparatus of these editions functions like a net to trap her in. But of course she who refused title and number ultimately escapes all nets."

The burden of this interview, titled "Transcription and Transgression," is not only to promulgate the ideas of the teacher who set Werner on her scholarly path, but to tackle the perennial problem of transcription in Dickinson studies from the most experimental of readers. Both Werner and Howe agree that though it is doomed to failure—"there's always something blind about the transcript"—and something like the exile from Eden—"But the transcript is fallen. It is always fallen"—it must be done. Werner spies a solution in the Cornell editions of Yeats and the Garland Shelley where it "wasn't one male editor constructing the final version of a poet but groups of editors collaborating, perhaps even differing in their ideas of what should be represented and how" (131). She labels the transcripts she includes in the catalogue "thin maps" because they "can only ever partially capture something of the poem's existence-in-suspension," and approaches them as a form of translation, trying "to harness print technology 'against itself.'"

And so we arrive at a new plateau, created in part by feminist, materialist and queer approaches to Dickinson and by digital technology, which is always collaborative, processional, performative and incomplete. It is not coincidental that Howe concludes her encomium of Dickinson by calling her the ultimate "nasty woman." We are finally getting a Dickinson worthy of that compliment.

*Special thanks to Book Review editor Renée Bergland for help in arranging this review.*

## Emily Dickinson and the Art of Tattoos

By Maryanne Garbowsky

We are accustomed to thinking of Emily Dickinson as a subject of academic research and inquiry: there are seminars, conferences, annual meetings in which scholars debate and discuss the poems and their meanings. It might therefore be surprising to learn that the poet is a popular subject for tattoos, both for her iconic image as well as for her words.

Perhaps one of the standouts is Philip Jenks' tattooed portrait of the poet, which covers his entire back. Jenks, a lecturer at the University of Illinois at Chicago and a poet himself, explains his "ink ode" to the poet by saying he is defending her against those who see her as a "timid woman in a white dress." Instead he sees her as a powerhouse, whose popular image needs readjustment—thus his proclamation and affirmation of the poet on his back. In addition to Jenks' dramatic tattoo statement, there are countless others who have chosen her poems to wear on their skin. By inking Dickinson's image and her words onto their skin, these people are partaking in an art with a long and interesting history. Tat-

toeing is an ancient art; archaeologists have turned up evidence of tattooing from prehistoric times, including a mummy found in the Otzaler Alps that was approximately 5300 years old.

The practice of tattooing came to England in the late 1760s and early 1770s with the arrival of Captain James Cook, who learned about it in Tahiti and New Zealand. By the 19th century, tattooing traveled to the United States, brought by the sailors who popularized it even among the upper classes.

By the 20th century, however, aristocratic society frowned on body decoration, seeing it as an act of rebellion instead of simply aesthetic. It was identified with gangs, convicts, and bikers, not something practiced by "polite" society. However, in the mid-20th century, all this changed when it was embraced by the younger "hippie" generation. As a result, in the 1970s, tattooing went "mainstream," and today it is practiced by well-known celebrities—such as Drew Barrymore, Julia Roberts, Jude Law, and Ben Affleck—as well as the general public.

Although people of today no longer use body art to identify their "tribal status," it is still used for a variety of reasons. Some choose to do so for beautification and sexual attractiveness, masking scars or birthmarks; others use tattoos to identify "a rite of passage that defines who they are," to demarcate a change

of lifestyle or pattern of behavior. Tattoos are also used to commemorate loved ones—living or dead—a religious belief, or a group affiliation.

For my students, tattooing is a way of expressing who they are. Males and females alike wear them as body art and see tattoos as a way to remind themselves of what's important in their lives. For instance, one young man's tattoo reads "Idle time kills great men" and recalls what he formerly was and never wants to be again, emphasizing his commitment to his new goals in life. Another young man got his first tattoo at 18 when his "father had no control over [his] decisions anymore" to symbolize that he was now his own man. A young woman chose her favorite color—purple—and coupled it with a heart, symbolizing the importance of love in her life.

Though unconventional, tattooing is a form of art, not only to those who create the designs and to those who apply them to the skin but also to those who wear them. As one student wrote, "this is art come to life." Many tattooists are from artistic backgrounds and may have planned a career in art. According to one would-be fine artist, "I can get skin to do more than paper."

In addition, some art institutions recognize tattoos as a "legitimate art form." The American Museum of History highlighted tattoos in an exhibition entitled "Body Art: Marks of Identity" (1999). Even art journals have taken notice. *Art in America*, for one, included an article about tattoo artist Tony Fitzpatrick in one of its issues (July 1997). More recently, a TV reality show called "Ink Masters: Rivals" has tattoo artists compete with each other's work.

Emily Dickinson is one of the poets whose work is frequently chosen for tattoos. A popular poem used is "I'm Nobody" (Fr260). One



Philip Jenks teaches English at the University of Illinois, Chicago. His most recent book of poems is *Colony Collapse Metaphor* (2014), and his tattoo has been repeatedly featured on a variety of internet sites. The tattoo artist is Serena Lander; the photograph is reprinted with the permission of Max Herman.

## Renée Bergland, Book Review Editor

**Neighbors and Warriors:  
New Thinking About Birds and Bees**

**Jeff Karnicky**  
*Scarlet Experiment: Birds and Humans in America.*  
University of Nebraska Press 2016, 221pp.

**Ursula K. Heise**  
*Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meaning of Endangered Species.*  
University of Chicago Press 2016, 280pp.

**Branka Arsić**  
*Bird Relics: Grief and Vitalism in Thoreau.*  
Harvard University Press 2016, 455pp.

**James Lenfestey, ed.**  
*If Bees are Few: A Hive of Bee Poems.*  
University of Minnesota Press 2016, 225pp.

**Carolyn Merchant**  
*Spare the Birds: George Bird Grinnell and the First Audubon Society.*  
Yale University Press, 328 pp.

*Reviewed by Renée Bergland*

Readers averse to the lady-like Dickinson sometimes wince at the bird poems. But if Dickinson is lady-like, then her bird poems shows that ladies can be sharp, clear, and ruthless – surgically precise. The ornithological Dickinson is not romantic. She is less akin to John Keats, with his waking dream of the nightingale, and

more akin to the avian assassin/artist John James Audubon, whose art was predicated on collection and dissection.

Jeff Karnicky's *Scarlet Experiment: Birds and Humans in America* takes its title from "Split the Lark," the most explicitly surgical of Dickinson's bird poems. Karnicky's book is a direct response to Christopher Cokinos's *Hope is the Thing with Feathers*, published in 2000. Karnicky begins by remarking, "I am not convinced that hope is the thing with feathers, or that the things with feathers have much hope if they need to depend on human benevolence. Rather, I take my inspiration for this book about birds and humans from another Dickinson poem, not about hope and souls, but about doubt and blood." The book that follows is a remarkable synthesis of environmental studies, ornithology, and literary criticism, composed in the key of profound and bracing skepticism.

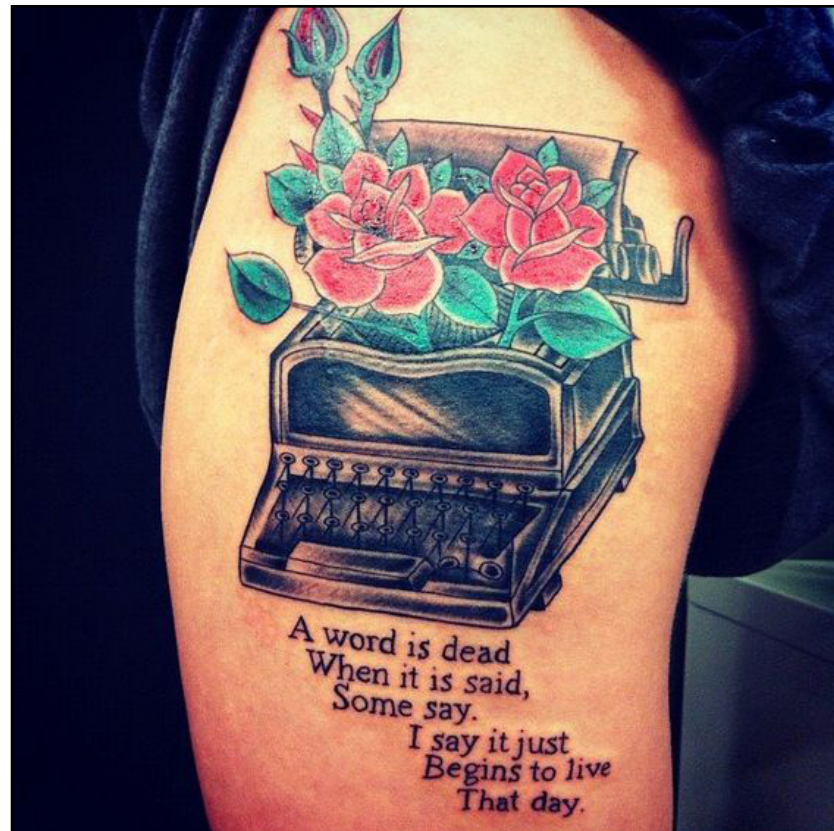
Like Cokinos, Karnicky organizes his book into chapters that focus on bird species. Cokinos poignantly mourned the extinct Carolina Parakeet, Heath Hen, Passenger Pigeon, Labrador Duck and Great Auk. In contrast, Karnicky gives us the species we live with today: Blue Jay, European Starling, Red Knot, Canada Goose, and Titmouse. This is an interesting move – Karnicky points out that the vanished birds tend to inspire sentimental nostalgia for most of us though we have never seen them, but the live ones, who commonly flock our feeders, soil our windshields and walkways, and crash our jetliners, tend to inspire less sentimental feelings. We

mourn the Great Auk and curse the Canada Goose.

*Scarlet Experiment* is not merely a work of ornithology or environmental studies with a Dickinsonian title. It is also a book about Emily Dickinson. The book offers focused readings of Dickinson's poetry as it engages with a broad range of literature and critical theory. The first chapter begins with Karnicky's "strong feeling of historical continuity" with Dickinson when he glimpses a blue jay on the grounds of the Dickinson Museum in Amherst. The blue jay chapter that follows discusses Dickinson, Thoreau, Audubon, Formato, and DeLillo, alongside philosophers from Friedrich Nietzsche to Donald Griffin and many ornithologists, including the 29 scientists who co-authored a 2004 paper on "The Avian Brain."

The central question of *Scarlet Experiment* comes from Donald Griffin, a cognitive ethologist who focuses on questions about nonhuman conscious awareness. Karnicky's goal is to map out how human perceptions of birds "have altered in the past two hundred years in ways that lead to a rethinking of human-animal relations." Although human-animal relations may seem impossibly vast, the book succeeds by focusing on a few bird species. It is lucid, intelligent, provocative, and elegantly succinct (clocking in at 176 pages). And it also opens up many avenues of inquiry.

Some readers will turn to Karnicky for a Dickinson-inflected response to the hu-



Above, from thegloss.com, June 6, 2014; below, from emilyjeanthesmilingmachine Tumblr page, February 12, 2013.



young wearer has the entire text of the poem printed on the right side of her back, while another has the first stanza on the inside of her right arm.

Other poems are tattooed too. One young woman has the two stanzas of "Tell All the Truth" (Fr1263) on her upper thigh. Another has "I Dwell in Possibility" (Fr466) tattooed on her lower back, a rainbow and bird accompanying the letters. A third uses the lines "Unable are the loved to die / For Love is Immortality" (Fr951) on her left upper back, memorializing Corey, whose name appears beside the poem and is joined by flowers and a bird holding a rosary in its beak.

Although many Dickinson poems are used, by far the most popular choice is "'Hope' is the thing with feathers" (Fr314). The words are printed or written in script with various designs, such as small birds, an owl on a branch, a feather, or a quill. Some wearers choose the entire text of the poem, while others only use the first two lines. This particular poem's popularity stems from the fact that it is for many a source of strength and courage, a reminder that no matter how difficult life can be, it will get better. Whether there has been a major trauma in one's life, an illness, or a lifestyle change, the poem seems to help and heal. One young woman overcame breast cancer, making this poem especially "speak volumes" to her. Others have dealt with the loss of loved ones, rejection, or loneliness.

As you can see, Dickinson is many things to different people, and this meaning extends even to art forms such as tattoos.

Despite the fact that we envision the poet from so many different perspectives, we can all agree that she is a significant resource for all of us. Whether we read her poems in a printed text or on someone's skin, Emily Dickinson continues to inspire, to provoke, to challenge, and to heal.

*Maryanne Garbowsky edits the "Visualizing Dickinson" series for the Bulletin, and contributes articles on a wide range of topics.*

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

# Reviews of Publications

man/non-human turn in critical theory, while others will be startled by his skeptical attitude toward environmentalist nostalgia around extinction. Ursula K. Heise's *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meaning of Endangered Species* might be a useful companion volume for readers who are interested in the push to "move beyond the story templates of elegy and tragedy, and yet to express continuing concern that nonhuman species not be harmed." Heise, like Karnicky, makes a very compelling case for new narratives – and Karnicky offers convincing accounts of bird consciousness that may prove more effective than the elegiac extinction narratives of yore.

But extinction is real. Our shared concerns about it should not be dismissed, particularly if such concern can help motivate collective action. In this vein, *If Bees are Few: A Hive of Bee Poems*, edited by James Lenfestey with a foreword by Bill McKibben, was published with the purpose of raising money for the Bee Lab at the University of Minnesota. The anthology includes poems by poets from Virgil to Sherman Alexie and Carol Ann Duffy, and, most prominently, Emily Dickinson. The title references Dickinson, the book features a generous selection of her poems about bees, and both the Foreword by Bill McKibben and the Afterword by the bee scientist Marla Spivak use Dickinson's poetry to structure their thoughts. It is striking that Dickinson works so well for Lenfestey's volume as a poet of extinction when she also grounds Karnicky's promising alternative to extinction narratives, but in truth this does not seem paradoxical to me. From both angles, Dickinson has much to offer to twenty-first century environmentalist thinking.

Dickinson scholars whose interests focus more on the nineteenth century than the twenty-first should get their hands

on Branka Arsić's *Bird Relics: Grief and Vitalism in Thoreau*. The book is an exhilarating labyrinth, as expansive as Karnicky's is succinct. Like Karnicky, Arsić divides her book into parts that focus on bird species: fish hawk, loon, crow, and turtle dove. Where Karnicky turns toward the present, Arsić faces toward the past, studying ancient Greek in order to enter into Thoreau's investigations of Greek philosophy. Although there is a brief comparison of the formal manuscript qualities of Thoreau's notebooks and Dickinson's poems, *Bird Relics* is a Thoreau book with little to say about Emily Dickinson. Nonetheless, Arsić's discussion of vitalism and the Harvard vitalists who resisted Louis Agassiz's approach to nature is essential reading for Dickinson scholars who are interested in Dickinson's thoughts about life, death, and birds.

Carolyn Merchant, the environmental historian whose feminist approach to vitalism shaped contemporary ecocriticism, also published a book about birds last year. *Spare the Birds: George Bird Grinnell and the First Audubon Society* is a documentary history of late nineteenth-century conservation of birds. The book begins with Merchant's careful introduction to conservation in nineteenth-century New York (and the central role of Lucy Audubon in the 1850s and 1860s), and then presents George Bird Grinnell's nineteenth-century writings about Audubon and conservation, with extensive notes. Although Dickinson died in 1886, just as the first Audubon Society was being formed, Merchant's discussion of gender and the conservation of avifauna at midcentury could provide useful context for readers who are curious about Dickinson's thinking about birds.

All in all, 2016 was a remarkable year for books about birds and bees in Dickinson's poetry and in her time. Although they are very different works, both Karnicky's

*Scarlet Experiment* and Arsić's *Bird Relics* have altered my thinking about Dickinson and her bird poems. Some of Dickinson's bird verses are ecstatic, drunk on avian beauty, while others are anguished, outraged by human brutality. These books show that when Dickinson describes the "electric rest" of birdsong, she offers us vital insight into neighboring nineteenth-century consciousness, living and dead, human and otherwise.

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## Thinking Dickinson

By George Monteiro

It's time to say things. Dickinson often built better than she knew or, at the least, other than she knew if we are to believe the academics, the poets, the feminists, the code-breakers, etc. and so on. Often her difficulty—or her difficulty in poems—lies less in achievement than in flat-out distraction of the poet's attention or the whim of just swiping away at a last line or a slapdash verse. Often her inner life was that of Amherst gossip, nothing more or less. At her best, though, she fired up her lexicon to make those lines that take the top of your head off.

March 29, 1999

# Reviews of Publications

Vivian R. Pollak  
*Our Emily Dickinsons: American Women Poets and the Intimacies of Difference*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017. 355pp.

Reviewed by Jennifer Leader

At this point, no one needs to be reminded that many of our institutions of higher learning have abandoned humanistic understandings of education in favor of a business-minded embrace of data-driven analysis and scientific positivism. While the study of Arts and Letters has suffered by unconscious assimilation of these values, feminist philosophers such as Sandra Harding, Jane Flax and Donna Haraway gave us permission some time ago to resist this trend by way of their concept of knowledge as context-embedded and "situated." More recently, in her book *Loving to Know: Covenant Epistemology* (2011), philosopher Esther Lightcap Meek advocates for a new epistemology in which knowledge involves not only dispassionate facts (as if such a thing were possible; as if scientists themselves weren't subject to emotions and weren't dependent upon their own interpretive communities), but also an acknowledgment of the process of coming-to-know-in-relation-to-the-other. This epistemology pushes us to view the world in terms of broad and deep relational truths – truths that incorporate knowledges derived from our affections, affiliations, lived experience, bodily sensations, spirituality, and intuitions.

Vivian Pollak's new book, *Our Emily Dickinsons: American Women Poets and the Intimacies of Difference*, offers one approach towards studying poetry in a way that acknowledges these collective and relational ways of knowing. At the heart of her "experimental, collective psychobiography," as she calls it, is the

notion that poets are influenced not only by the traditions they inherit, but also by way their own biographical circumstances and proclivities highlight for them some aspects of their literary precursors' lives and poetry while blinding them to other aspects. Taking the relationship between Dickinson and Helen Hunt Jackson as her starting point, Pollak carefully arranges and examines poems, letters, journals, and other documents connected to Dickinson, Jackson, Mabel Loomis Todd, Marianne Moore, Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, and Elizabeth Bishop so as to revivify their intimate reflections and conversations. She depicts these poets as dynamic, moving targets who, in their ongoing appraisals of Dickinson, created "fractured self-portraits" that "affirmed particular versions of themselves." In particular, Pollak contends, there are two powerful factors that especially fostered the poets' impulses to create Dickinson in their own images: first, the ambiguity that is inherent to Dickinson's artistry (and especially insofar as her ambivalence about intimate relationships is concerned), and second, the slow and incremental release of Dickinson's poetry and letters, which Pollak traces from Higginson and Todd's 1890 edition of *Poems*, through Todd's 1931 edition of the *Letters*, and finally to Johnson's 1955 edition. Along the way, Pollak finds certain recurring and thematic tensions in the poets' own lives that further complicate their reception of Dickinson; these include the poets' varying resistances to or affirmations of the relations between a woman poet's life and her art and the poets' relations to their own mothers, be they biological or literary.

Arranged chronologically, Pollak's first two chapters depict the way Dickinson's contemporaries responded to and passed on her legacy. Chapter one delineates the fascinating triangulation of relationship between Dickinson, Helen Hunt Jackson

and Thomas Wentworth Higginson and illumines the two women's conflicting values concerning the nature of artistic success. One sympathizes with the frustrated Jackson in Pollak's telling – she seems to have been singularly prescient in her insight that she was reading not just Emily Dickinson, but *Emily Dickinson*. Chapter two lays out the timeline of the War Between the Houses, showing how "Dickinson's death created imperfect reader-allies" (72). Pollak's sympathetic Mable Loomis Todd is "a literary woman in crisis" whose own frustrations with the conundrums of what it meant to be a nineteenth-century woman writer caused her to miss Dickinson's "existential loneliness, with its residual Puritanism" (92); nonetheless, through Todd's editing Dickinson emerges as a highly self-conscious and crafted poet.

Chapter three maps Marianne Moore's growing embrace of Dickinson from her first reading of the poet while a student at Bryn Mawr to her review of the 1931 *Letters*. Pollak suggests Moore reads Dickinson in relation to her own powerful mother figure, and that she works to normalize Dickinson as a fellow "resilient" single artist for whom separateness from hetero-normativity is not a problem. In chapters four and five Pollak reconstructs the inter-relations of Moore, Sylvia Plath, and Ted Hughes via the trajectories of Plath's pique at Moore and Hughes retrospective re-constructions of the incident causing Plath's ire and of Plath herself. We also learn in these chapters that Dickinson was both an early poetic model for Plath and her own mother's favorite poet, thus involving Plath in a complex and somewhat antagonistic relation with Dickinson and her work.

Finally, in chapter six Pollak looks closely at Elizabeth Bishop's negative responses to two books published in 1951, *Emily*

# Reviews of Publications

*Dickinson's Letters to Doctor and Mrs. Josiah Gilbert Holland* and Rebecca Patterson's *The Riddle of Emily Dickinson*. According to Pollak, Bishop disliked Dickinson's vulnerable expressions of intimacy in the letters and resented Patterson's exposé style that trained attention on the poet rather than her work. Pollak makes a sensitive argument here for "Bishop's aversion to gender criticism and sex stereotyping," "her deeply conflicted response to the emergence of a public discourse of queerness in her time," and her "internalized homophobia" (212, 235). Yet she finds that "for both poets, writing becomes "a partial "solution to the problem of love's migration" (256).

Amidst what must have been an enormous challenge to connect the dots between the nuanced, push-pull moments of these poets' intimate responses to Dickinson and each other, Pollak freely admits that Dickinson's "multifaceted achievement exceeds any critic's ability to define it . . . . Thus, my Emily Dickinson is both singular and representative, a person and a symbol" (265). Even if a reader may quibble over an interpretation of a particular poem or letter, one gets the sense that Pollak is inviting us to a timely new stance towards scholarship in which we are more willing to think out loud about our own partialities and personal inclinations towards our subject, both out of humility and as a way to foreground the role our relationship to a poem always affects our interpretations.

In his book *Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for Our Common Life*, internationally acclaimed artist Makoto Fujimura asserts that if we can find ways of linking artistic creativity to a hospitable generosity that brings others into relation with that art, we will promote an environment of human flourishing in place of culture wars. Since we are presently threatened with the loss of federal funding for the N.E.A. and other non-profit cultural organizations, now might be a good moment to enjoy Pollak's text and then to begin to imagine how we might continue to invite others into our literary conversations, advancing relational ways of knowing beyond the merely data-driven.

*Jennifer Leader is Professor of English at Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut, CA. Her book Knowing, Seeing, Being: Jonathan Edwards, Emily Dickinson, Marianne Moore, and the American Typological Tradition, was published last year by the University of Massachusetts Press.*

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## Noted with Pleasure

From Elisa New's *New England Beyond Criticism: In Defense of America's First Literature* (Blackwell 2014):

So much wind blows through Dickinson's work, it is as though the whole oeuvre is unsettled by it. Ever turning, ever troping, this wind stands in Dickinson's work for the force poems can discharge, the force true Spirit fills with breath. These skies liberate the objects they carry from their more static relations. They loosen the "here" to the refreshment of "there," today to yesterday or way back when. They free the known, the inert, to find correction and redemption in the unknown. . . .

To pay more mind to weather is to see the line between earth and sky made fluid, the stacked planes of the terrestrial and aerial confuted every minute by the vertical risings of heat and the falling moisture, by evaporation and condensation.

**Mary Loeffelholz**  
*The Value of Emily Dickinson*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 236 pp.

**Jane Donahue Eberwein, Stephanie Farrar and Cristanne Miller, eds.**  
*Dickinson in Her Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of Her Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, and Memoirs by Family, Friends, and Associates*. Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2015. 203 pp.

*Reviewed by Páraic Finnerty*

Mary Loeffelholz has written one of the best introductions to Emily Dickinson currently available. She offers readers a clear, concise, and eloquent exploration of why Dickinson is so highly valued as a writer, while at the same time making accessible important contextual issues that are essential for understanding this poet. Importantly, readers are also introduced to many recent controversies in Dickinson scholarship, including ongoing debates about how and if her manuscript poems can be translated into print. The central power of Loeffelholz's book is her argument for and demonstration of the benefits and importance of viewing the poems as "sounded verbal" objects, deserving of a form of "close and careful" reading that is attentive to the inextricable connections between their rhythm, rhyme, assonance, and alliteration, and their language, imagery, and ideas (10).

While appreciating why many scholars and readers place such value in Dickinson's manuscripts, and acknowledging the importance of what they reveal about her practice as a poet, Loeffelholz argues that these visual artefacts should not be prioritized over and above the rhymed and metered poems. What is to Loeffelholz's great credit is that she deals with these and other debates within Dickinson criticism in such an even-handed way, making very obvious what she values

# Reviews of Publications

most in the poet, while also paying respectful attention to different features of Dickinson's work that are highly regarded by other scholars and readers. Particularly illuminating is the way in which Loeffelholz engages with the poems and their manuscript forms to underscore Dickinson's "changing conception of her poetic project over time," her "evolving, ever-revised aesthetic commitments," and her shifting attitudes towards her vocation and to questions of recognition (33, 35). Throughout the book, Loeffelholz draws "on historical, cultural, and biographical contexts where they seem interpretively useful" for an understanding of Dickinson's life and work as a poet (10).

In each chapter, we see evidence of Dickinson's relationship to a range of aspects of her nineteenth-century American culture and how these shape her representations of love, gender, sexuality, nationality, transnationality, war, faith, and doubt. For example, Loeffelholz foregrounds the idea that "Dickinson's liberties with poetic form and style assert in a different aesthetic and political register her inalienable individual right to craft discordance, difficulty, and rarity out of common American materials" (85). Although making provocative connections between Dickinson's attentiveness to literary myth-making and self-fashioning, and her concern about the life and afterlife of her writing, Loeffelholz is also alert to, and takes delight in, the indeterminacy of Dickinson's poetry; she admits "how difficult it is to tolerate the uncertainty in which [so many of Dickinson's texts] leave us about their biographical referents," yet acknowledges that it is the complexity of these texts that makes them interpretively rich, "potentially boundless space[s]" for readers (38).

The value of *The Value of Emily Dickinson* is that it offers all those who

study, teach, and read Dickinson new insight into this great American poet and provides a wonderful model for engaging with the complexities and difficulties that accompany any investigation of her life and writings.

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For those unlucky enough not to possess a copy of Jay Leyda's *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson* (1960), hope is offered by the publication of new affordable scholarship that supplements and becomes in various ways a substitute for or alternative to his important volume. *Dickinson in Her Own Time* makes a significant and invaluable contribution to the documentation of Dickinson's life and afterlife by providing new and difficult-to-locate material of immense relevance for any understanding of Dickinson and her work.

This carefully edited, organized, and introduced chronicle locates Dickinson historically through extant recollections, interviews, memoirs, and reviews of her contemporaries that reference, discuss, and comment on the poet or her writings. What emerges very plainly from the material gathered here is that Dickinson ensured through her correspondence with leading literary figures such as Samuel Bowles, Helen Hunt Jackson, Josiah Holland, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson that she "developed a reputation [in her lifetime] as a remarkable writer even while maintaining extreme levels of privacy" (xvi).

While such contacts lay the foundations for her posthumous fame, what the documents in this book imply is that it was most likely Dickinson's choice not to publish in her lifetime, when her status easily afforded her such an opportunity. The extracts show, for example, that some of her contemporaries were wary about publishing her poems, while others

actively encouraged Dickinson to publish. Some of the material here indicates that when, in her writings, she presented scenarios associated with future fame and renown, she was probably tapping into her position as a literary prodigy and notable figure in Amherst, whose contemporaries celebrated the power of her language and her wit, humor, playfulness, and even social defiance.

Although there is much here to demonstrate Dickinson's sociability, particularly as a correspondent, it is also evident that her retirement from society into a restricted and protective familial circle generated much curiosity and speculation among those who knew her. Yet we also see her contemporaries emphasizing her seclusion as "the normal blossoming of a nature introspective to a high degree, whose best thought could not exist in presence" (xxi). A major contribution of this collection is that it helps readers understand the trajectory of Dickinson's posthumous reception. We see the ways in which criticism that emphasizes her failure to adhere to poetic standards of meter and rhyme, and to follow grammatical rules, becomes slowly eclipsed by praise for her as an original, innovative, and experimental writer associated with powerful examinations of the natural world and provocative explorations of metaphysical issues. This excellent volume challenges an earlier tendency to position Dickinson as a proto-modernist poet by underlining her position as a nineteenth-century writer whose life, works, and reception were shaped by the changing literary and aesthetic values of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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# Reviews of Publications

## Dickinson in Fiction

### From Sublime to Ridiculous

**Max Porter**  
*Grief is the Thing with Feathers.* Minneapolis: Graywolf Press. 120 pp.

**Amanda Flower**  
*Crime and Poetry.* Penguin. 364 pp.

**Shannon Yarbrough**  
*Emily Dickinson: Mad Scientist.* Amazon Digital Services.

Reviewed by Annelise Brinck-Johnsen

Max Porter's lyrically raw debut novel *Grief is the Thing with Feathers* locates itself firmly within the Dickinson tradition with its title, but quickly moves beyond allusion to literary predecessors to become a sublime interrogation of the intertwined nature of art and grief. Although this brilliant novel takes its title from Dickinson, Porter changes "hope" to "grief." He opens with a similarly altered epigraph from Dickinson:

That Love is all there is,  
Is all we know of Love;  
It is enough, the freight should be  
Proportioned to the groove.

The verse is laid out on the page, with the words "Love," "Freight," and "groove," scratched out and replaced by the word "crow" in a childish scrawl. This epigraph serves to introduce the central conceit of the novel: A scholar of Ted Hughes struggles to complete his book "Ted Hughes' Crow on the Couch: A Wild Analysis" after his wife dies, leaving him to raise his two boys alone. A spectral Crow enters the book as a father-monster hybrid, a clannish trickster who is by turns wise and feral. Crow is the alter ego of a grieving husband and embattled father, the kind of coping mechanism that could only be imagined by someone who has internalized a poetic tradition.

Even though the book begins with a title drawn from Dickinson's poetry and an epigraph from Dickinson, the specter haunting this book is undeniably closer to Ted Hughes than to Dickinson. Faber and Faber, the publishers of *Grief is the Thing with Feathers*, also published Ted Hughes' edition of Dickinson in 1968, followed by Hughes' own *Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow* in 1970. Hughes' *Crow* was written in the three years after Sylvia Plath's death. Here, Porter brings to the forefront the sense of loss that infuses Hughes' work from that period. But since Hughes himself was immersed in Dickinson, her work also structures this post-modern novel.

*Grief is the Thing with Feathers* is a very British book. The boys miss their "mum," they vacation in the Chilterns, and are given "lasagne" by well-meaning friends. Beyond these small details, the book embraces a particularly English version of a European, post-modern aesthetic. In a touching description of grief immediately after the funeral, Dad says:

I felt it would be years before the knotted-string dream of other people's performances of woe for my dead wife would thin enough for me to see any black space again, and of course – needless to say – thoughts of this kind made me feel guilty. But, I thought, in support of myself, everything has changed, and she is gone and I can think what I like. She would approve, because we were always over-analytical, cynical, probably disloyal, puzzled. Dinner party post-mortem bitches with kind intentions. Hypocrites. Friends. (5)

This emotional embrace of gently ironic urbanity follows in the tradition of Auden and Larkin. In sharp contrast, the more savage sections of Dad's reminiscences seem more akin to Plath, or to Hughes' *Crow*: "I've drawn her unpicked, ribs splayed stretched like a xylophone

with the dead birds playing tunes on her bones" (16).

Despite the centrality of Hughes and the British poetic tradition, it is clear why Porter chose a title that invokes Dickinson. The book is split into three sections that occur over several years, and divided between three speaker-narrators – Boys, Dad, and Crow. The beautifully dizzying shifts in space, time, and scale repeatedly evoke Dickinson's formal poetics, while the amalgamation of beauty and horror – the fusion of nature, art, the eternal, and death – calls Dickinson to mind on every page. Porter's hauntingly beautiful grief is underwritten by Dickinson's own bleak hope. This is the best Dickinson-inspired novel I know of; I cannot recommend it highly enough.

On another plane entirely, Amanda Flower's cozy mystery *Crime and Poetry*, is the rare Dickinson-inspired piece of genre fiction that focuses on the poems rather than an Emily Dickinson character. In this case, Dickinson's poems serve as clues that help solve a grisly murder. Despite the grim premise, Flower's charmingly slight novel cozily combines American history with poetry and magic. When Violet Waverly returns to her hometown of Cascade Springs, New York, after an extensive self-imposed exile, she expects to spend her time nursing her ill grandmother, not delving into the mysterious death of her grandmother's paramour or the mysterious happenings associated with the bottling of Cascade Springs' famous water. Luckily, Violet soon learns that her grandmother is not only perfectly well, but is also a "Caretaker" of the magical Cascade Springs – as well as the family bookstore – and a talking crow named Faulkner. The slightly zany plot hinges on the history of the underground railroad and the role of settler-colonialism in the commercialization of water. An enchanted spring endows a bookstore with the

# Reviews of Publications

power to read minds, and to communicate to protagonist Violet Waverly through a magical edition of Dickinson that falls open to particular poems that help Violet find solutions to her life's mysteries. With her prescient edition of Dickinson, and her adeptness in poetic interpretation (honed throughout her years in grad school), Violet finds herself helping the handsome Chief of Police solve crimes and protect the Springs, while also stumbling into a professorship at the local community college. Though this novel could never be accused of seriousness or literary pretension, a love of American literature and history ground its utterly good-natured escapism.

Dickinson-inspired mysteries are surprisingly common, but speculative fiction and science fiction about Dickinson are rarer. Yet the gaps in our knowledge – the mysteries of the master letters; the eroticism of Dickinson's verse; and the unusual tension between the sequestered end of her life and her globally expansive letters – provide ample gaps for speculation, while Dickinson's interest in science beckons us toward science fiction. Shannon Yarbrough's gothic take on Dickinson's life in the 1850's, *Emily Dickinson: Mad Scientist* (2016) is an implausible, but remarkably inventive attempt at Dickinson science fiction.

The novel was originally released in 2013 as *Dickinstein*, an awkward mashup/portmanteau title that gestures toward its plot, which hinges on what would have happened if Benjamin Franklin Newton had given Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (1818) to Dickinson. Yarbrough, a self-proclaimed "friend of Emily," writes Dickinson as a gothic heroine torn between the erotic energy she feels when speaking to men (truly, any man seems to inspire it), and her love for the seclusion of nature. Spurred by *Frankenstein*, skepticism towards religious dogma and the Christian afterlife, and her friend Leon-

ard Humphrey's beautiful eyes and experiments with galvanism, the tender-hearted Dickinson builds a machine so that she can resurrect innocent little woodland creatures.

Unfortunately, Dickinson reveals her experiments to two of the men she has adopted as mentors – the aforementioned scientifically-minded Leonard Humphrey, and the religious but inquisitive Charles Wadsworth. Like Victor Frankenstein, these men are driven to use Dickinson's invention to interfere in the human realm, defying Dickinson's scruples. In a somewhat murky plotline, one of these men (it is never specified which) becomes the man referred to in the Master letters, and when Newton dies, Dickinson and her Master decide to steal his corpse and revive it. In the grand tradition of gothic fiction, Dickinson realizes that her erotic desires have overwhelmed her traditional piety and good sense, and no sooner is Newton revived than Dickinson realizes she must kill him. Dickinson accomplishes this, burning down the Amherst train station and setting free a chimpanzee in the process. Repentant, she terminates her relationship with her Master and decides never to dabble with science again. After Dickinson's death, her sister Lavinia burns all record of her ventures into corpse-reanimation.

Imaginatively conceived, if haphazardly executed and at times jarringly confusing, Yarbrough's novel highlights the interplay of Dickinson's scientific and religious thoughts, but falls short of its speculative potential by discarding its uncanny imaginings in favor of a strict morality and ascribing Dickinson's creativity

and agency to her unresolved lust for less brilliant men. I wouldn't go so far as to recommend this novel, but I love the fact that Yarbrough has plotted Dickinson into such a ridiculously wild speculation.

*Annelise Brinck-Johnsen is an undergraduate at Dartmouth. She presented a paper at the EDIS International Conference in Paris in 2016, sponsored by Dartmouth as a James O. Freedman Presidential Scholar.*

## Recovering Emily Dickinson

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cynthia Hallen

## Dickinson in Film: *A Quiet Passion*

By Stephanie Tingley

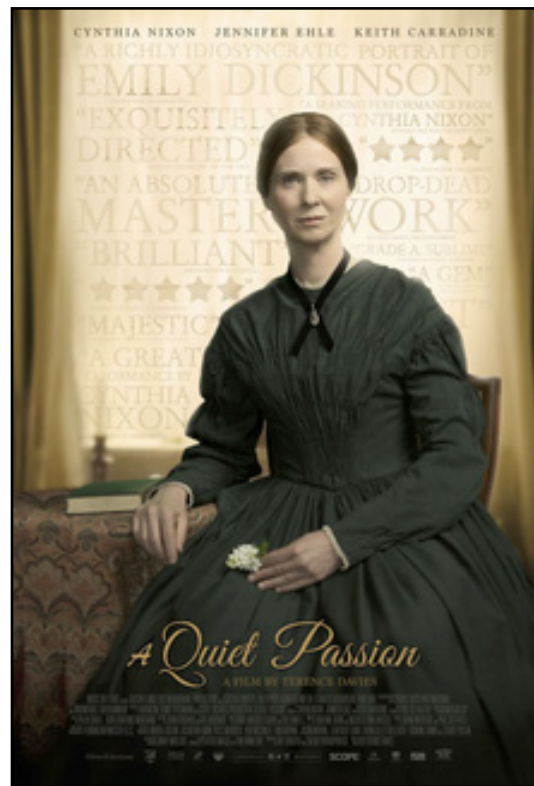
The long-anticipated Terence Davies-directed Emily Dickinson biopic, *A Quiet Passion* (2016), is currently making the transition from North American film festivals and special screenings to wider distribution. The film has much to recommend it. Dickinson scholars and readers will find things to quibble about, certainly, but overall the film provides a long-overdue rich, nuanced, and psychologically-astute three-dimensional portrait of the poet.

We enter the adolescent Emily Dickinson's world (after a hushed credit sequence) at a key moment in her young life. Mary Lyon, Headmistress at Mt Holyoke Female Seminary, addresses a group of young women, Dickinson among them. She asks those students who have professed their Christian faith and joined the church to move to one side, and those who have hope of becoming Christians to move to the other side. Only one student stands still and alone – Emily Dickinson. She stands firm as a “no-hoper,” strong-willed, resolute, and able to match wits and words with the headmistress, despite persistent questioning and scare tactics from Lyon. She refuses to do what she does not feel or believe, despite being pressured to do what she “ought.” Alone in the frame in the soon-abandoned classroom, we hear, in voice-over, the first of what will be a series of Dickinson poems woven into the story.

To Emily's delight, her father, brother, and sister soon arrive to take her home, and when questioned about her ill health, she wittily attributes it to a “severe case of Evangelism.” Choosing to begin the story here is a brilliant choice by Davies, who both directed the film and wrote the screenplay, for it efficiently introduces important characters and sets up key themes and tensions that will play out later – Dickinson's verbal precociousness and

already-evident poetic talent, her wicked sense of humor, her strong ties to family and home, her sometimes-fragile health, her sensitivity, and her independence and self-reliance, especially where her core values and beliefs are concerned.

It is difficult to make engaging films about writers, as so much of their work is interior and there is often not much physical action, at least for movie-goers saturated in the quick-cutting and often-frenetic action sequences in many blockbuster films. Dickinson led an especially circumscribed exterior life and possessed an especially rich and complex interior life, which intensifies the challenge, but Davies has developed several effective strategies to compensate – a fluid camera that moves about the Homestead and often focuses for quite a length of time on close-ups of the poet's face



so viewers can “read” her emotions. In addition, Davies weaves a generous selection of Dickinson's poems into the screenplay. Some lyrics are inserted as voice-over interior monologues and some Dickinson speaks aloud. Terence Davies' filmography includes directing a well-regarded adaptation of Edith Wharton's novel *The House of Mirth* (2000), starring Gillian Anderson as Lily Bart. Davies is successful at situating Lily Bart in her time, place, and social milieu in Gilded Age New York, but also gives us access to the conflicted and tragic inner life of his heroine. *A Quiet Passion* uses some of these same strategies to good effect, and the film certainly benefits from his astute, sensitive, subtle direction and nuanced dialogue, which is crafted to incorporate familiar phrases and images drawn from Dickinson's poems and letters.

The screenplay takes some risks to explore Dickinson's inner life. In one powerful sequence near the middle of the film, for example, framed by the slow opening and closing of the door to her bedroom, Dickinson is framed in the doorway deep in reverie at her small writing desk. The film shifts from realism to a poetic and impressionistic set piece as we see a montage (as a plaintive and haunting ballad sung by a solo soprano plays on the usually-spare soundtrack) that reflects the aging poet's desires and fears, including a shadowy silhouette of a faceless male figure framed by the doorway – Lover? Muse? Gentleman Caller Death? Real? Imaginary? We are left to draw our own conclusions.

The film's production is richly detailed, down to the pictures on the walls and the delicate stitching and sheen of the costume fabrics. The film darkens both visually and emotionally in the second half, as Dickinson's losses and frustrations mount. The cinematographer makes skillful use

of period lighting (natural light – sometimes warm, sometimes harsh, as well as lamplight and candlelight). Both on-set reconstructed interiors and exterior sequences filmed at the Dickinson Homestead and environs in Amherst, Massachusetts add authenticity and visual interest.

The performances in the film are well-cast, strong and nuanced. The female characters are particularly well-developed. Some of the most powerful and affecting moments in Cynthia Nixon's performance contain no dialogue; her facial expressions (whether expressing joy, humor, pain, or anger) and her body language speak volumes. Supporting performances by Jennifer Ehle (Vinnie) and Duncan Duff (Austin) highlight the strong and complex bonds among the three siblings.

*A Quiet Passion's* expert and expressive cinematography by Florian Hoffmeister deserves especially high praise. The pace is leisurely and there are many long takes – the slow panning as the camera explores a scene, often lingering on Dickinson's face, is very effective. Viewers' patience is required but rewarded, as we have the time to really look and absorb the details of time, place, and character. The slow pans, long takes, and sparse cutting also capture the slower pace and mood of mid-19th-century American life in the household. For example, in one scene the camera explores an ordinary evening in the Dickinson parlor, lit by lamplight and candlelight, and focuses, in turn, through a slow pan from right to left, on each family member. All sit silent – reading, sewing – as the parlor clock ticks and chimes, until Mrs. Dickinson asks her elder daughter Emily to play some hymns on the piano. Another early sequence that benefits from innovative camera work is set in the daguerreotypist's studio, where we see the Dickinson nuclear family posing for their portraits. Last in line is the adolescent Emily. In a subtle and effective use of transitions and dissolves, without dialogue, we watch as the young actress playing Dickinson (Emma Bell) recreates the famous daguerreotype image of Dickinson at seventeen. We then see this image morph into

our first look at Dickinson's adult visage, as portrayed by Cynthia Nixon. Well done!

I was glad to see much attention paid to Dickinson's relationships with key women in her life: her mother (a shadowy figure at best in most scholarship and biography) is fleshed out as a character and an important influence, despite her emotional and physical fragility; her Aunt Elizabeth, who is appalled at the Dickinson siblings' irreverence when she appears early in the film, but whose outspokenness and acerbic wit mirror, on many levels, Emily Dickinson's own; her younger sister Vinnie, stalwart companion, supporter, and defender; her sister-in-law Susan Gilbert Dickinson, who is portrayed sympathetically and as someone who possesses a keen understanding of both the poet and the person. Long-term, intimate friend Elizabeth Holland does not make an appearance, although her husband, the editor Josiah Holland, does enter in briefly. A composite fictional character named Vryling Buf-fam (memorably played by Catherine Bailey) stands in for the group of bright and energetic female friends who matched wits with Dickinson and often served as foils as they drifted away or made different, often more conventional, life choices. This decision may be problematic for some viewers, but justifiable given the time constraints of a feature film, for it provides an efficient way of representing this part of Dickinson's experience: her female friendships, high standards for friendship, and great distress when friends and love interests moved away, married, or died. What is most important is to see how deeply these friendships and their losses affected the sensitive and passionate Emily Dickinson.

And, of course, connections and conflicts with key men in her life find a prominent place in the storytelling as well: her severe and supportive father Edward (Keith Carradine), her elder brother Austin, the Reverend Charles Wadsworth, and editors Bowles and Higginson. Gender roles and restrictions, tensions between faith and doubt, the importance of personal ethics, and the opportunities and obstacles surrounding female authorship, publi-

cation, and fame are explored through Dickinson's interactions with these men. Although the poet's late love relationship with Judge Otis Lord (who does get mentioned in the context of a pending court case earlier in the film) and the devastating death of her 8-year-old nephew Gilbert are omitted, viewers do see how the accumulation of deaths and the intensity of her grieving impact the poet and fuel her art.

The film takes time to show us the immediacy and often harsh reality of death and dying in Victorian America. There are many scenes of illness, death and grieving, which are powerful and not easy to watch. Although father Edward dies off camera with no explanation (we just see him in his coffin and the family's reactions), there are several powerful scenes featuring her mother's emotional fragility, illness, and death. We see Emily and Vinnie tenderly nursing their mother after her stroke, and, later, as the siblings gathered at her death bed. Dickinson's own declining health is shown through episodes of fainting, weakness, chest pains, seizures, and doctor visits. We also see the poet's death scene, and the moment when her labored breathing stops, which Austin wrote about so succinctly and powerfully after his sister's death. A brief montage of historical images documenting the slaughter and devastating losses of the Civil War puts the family's personal struggles into historical and cultural context.

In all, *A Quiet Passion* succeeds in providing us a powerful picture of Emily Dickinson as an American poetic genius and a human being who feels deeply and struggles mightily, as the contrasting title words suggest. One is reminded of Dickinson's famous metaphor of the creative and passionate self as a volcano in the poem which begins “On my volcano grows the grass / A meditative spot” (Fr1232). It may be calm on the surface, but the speaker warns,

How red the Fire rocks below –  
How insecure the sod  
Did I disclose  
Would populate with awe my solitude.

# Emily Dickinson, Astronaut!

By Sharon Hamilton

On February 22, 2017, the media unexpectedly lit up all around the world with news arising from an article published in the science journal *Nature*, which reported that scientists had discovered a dwarf star in a distant solar system orbited by seven earth-like planets. All of a sudden astronomy became the talk of the day – discussed around water coolers, carried in every newspaper, and ubiquitous online. The question everyone wished to know was whether these newly-identified planets might contain life.

This situation is not unlike what Emily Dickinson knew, because she too lived during a time of unprecedented scientific discovery concerning outer space. Dickinson's interest in astronomy as it appears in her poetry fascinates me, so I was delighted to discover on a recent visit to Washington DC an exhibit at the Smithsonian Museum of American History on science-fiction in the 19th century. While viewing this exhibit I found myself, quite unexpectedly, walking with Emily Dickinson – on the moon.

In the 1770s, brother and sister William and Caroline Herschel began making something remarkable in the basement of their shared home in Bath. Working together, they cast and polished six-inch diameter mirrors. No one had ever before managed to produce reflective mirrors of this size. The process of polishing the speculum metal that made up the mirrors needed to result in a completely smooth surface. If the polishing process were interrupted, even for a few seconds, especially during the final stages, the metal could harden in such a way that the mirror would lose its sheen, becoming useless. Caroline recorded in her journal that making one of these seven-inch mirrors required William to work for 16 uninterrupted hours, in the course of which the mirror never left his hands.



The Octagon, at Amherst College, was built in 1845 as the Lawrence Observatory to house Edward Hitchcock's collection of natural history artifacts as well as the college's first telescope. Photograph by the author.

I learned from Richard Holmes's terrific *The Age of Wonder* that Caroline fed William during this time by putting "the Vitals by bits" directly into his mouth. This painstaking process allowed William to hand-craft reflector telescopes of enough power to begin to make celestial observations of a type that had never before been possible. This was how he first began to measure the height of the mountains on the moon and how he came to discover a previously unknown planet: Uranus.

The exhibit I caught, "Fantastic Worlds: Science and Fiction, 1780-1910" at the National Museum of American History, reminded me just how profoundly Herschel's telescopes came to affect progress and excitement about astronomy in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, including in Emily

Dickinson's immediate cultural and intellectual environment. Amherst College's "Lawrence Observatory" opened just down the hill from her home in 1847, the same year in which Maria Mitchell discovered a comet by looking through a telescope from the roof of her father's workplace in Nantucket.

The most arresting image from this Smithsonian Institution exhibit answered for me a question I had long pondered concerning Dickinson's extremely unusual perspective in "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers" of the earth seemingly viewed from outer space:

Grand go the Years – in the  
Crescent – above them –  
Worlds scoop their Arcs –  
And Firmaments – row –

Diadems – drop – and Doges –  
surrender –  
Soundless as Dots – on a  
Disc of Snow – (Fr124C)

While there is little doubt about the primary role of Dickinson's imagination in creating this extraordinary image of a small, insignificant Earth (with its even more insignificant graves) viewed from the distant heavens, the Smithsonian show revealed to me, as I had not recognized before, that this was something Dickinson could have seen for herself!

I was born only a few years after the moon-walk, so the Apollo missions occupied a magical part of my childhood, including my early memories of seeing re-broadcasts of that famous televised image of Earthrise: our small green-blue planet in the background with the moon in the foreground, as first captured in 1968 by the American astronauts on Apollo 8. It never occurred to me before seeing this exhibit that Dickinson could have viewed an almost identical visual image over a hundred years before the first successful space missions! But there it was in the display case – a small, round, painted glass plate bearing the inscription "Imaginary view of earth from the moon, ca. 1850." On it I saw virtually the same image as from Apollo 8. On the glass plate our planet appeared in the background, with the moon in the foreground, just as if viewed from deep space. Only for Dickinson, instead of on a television screen, she would have seen this image projected from a lantern slide – the mass media of her day.

As this Smithsonian exhibit demonstrates, observations from the Cape of Good Hope using a 20-foot reflector telescope, the largest working telescope of the time, made by Sir John F. W. Herschel (William's son), and announced in 1847, provided the most

detailed celestial observations to that time. This activity resulted in a kind of moon craze in the 1830s that strongly paralleled the effect on American popular culture created by the NASA missions of the 1960s. The 19th-century mass media picked up on this popular interest so Dickinson would not only have been exposed to science textbooks and teaching that educated her to the latest developments in astronomy but would also have seen things exactly like the objects in this display case: visual artifacts from imagined voyages from the earth to the moon and back again. The Smithsonian display revealed to me, for example, that 19th century pictorial images of cosmic voyages took many



Photo Credit: Hugh Talman

Glass magic lantern slide image of the Earth as seen from the moon, ca., 1850-1900. National Museum of American History.

forms, including speculative woodcuts in newspapers, such as an illustration in the *New York Sun* from 1835 that showed men with batwings standing on the moon. And in 1865, Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* (*De la Terre à la lune*) included detailed drawings of lunar exploration. The novel also predicted, with eerie prescience, that Americans would be the first people

to put someone on the moon and that they would base their launch station in Florida.

As I discovered by reading early 19th century newspaper accounts, astronomers also took part in the popular activity of imagining what the Earth would look like viewed from outer space. In 1833, in a widely re-published "Treatise on Astronomy," John Herschel himself indulged in speculating what an Earthrise would look like. "If there be inhabitants in the moon the earth must present to them the extraordinary appearance of a moon nearly 2 degrees in diameter, exhibiting the same phases as we see the moon to do, but immovably fixed in their sky," he wrote, "while the stars must seem to pass slowly beside and behind it" (*United States Telegraph*, Washington D.C. 24 Aug. 1833).

Dickinson joined such virtual space travelers by making her way into the night sky the same way they did: in her head, from the ground. "The Brain – is wider than the Sky" (Fr598), as she famously wrote. The astronomy text she studied at Mount Holyoke (Denison Olmsted's *Compendium of Astronomy*, 1839) contained information credited to both Herschels, father and son, and one of them – it is not clear which – even makes a named appearance in Dickinson's poem "Nature and God, I neither knew" (Fr803). In her imagination, and based on her knowledge of scientific advances of the time, this astronaut of a poet regularly ventured out beyond our planet, somewhere out there, through her verse crammed with references to stars, comets, constellations and, of course, the moon.

*Sharon Hamilton is a writer who divides her time between Ottawa, Ontario, and Spring Brook, Prince Edward Island. Her last contribution to the Bulletin was "Nectar of Infatuation: A Mennonite Coming-of-Age," in Spring 2016.*



## 2017 EDIS Scholarship Awards

### Graduate Student Scholarship

The 2017 EDIS Graduate Student Scholarship of \$1000 has been awarded to Clare Mullaney, of the University of Pennsylvania. Clare works on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literature, disability studies, and material text and material culture studies. Her dissertation, "American Imprints: Disability and the Material Text, 1858-1932," addresses how disability emerges as a sociopolitical identity in response to the growth of print culture.

In her project, "'Not to discover weak-ness is/The Artifice of strength -': Emily Dickinson, Constraint, and a Crip Editorial Theory," she proposes that Dickinson's poems, from her early fascicles to her later scraps, work to register the presence of disability through the material text. Beginning the project by turning to late nineteenth-century literary critics who name Dickinson's relationship to disability in explicit – if not troubling – ways, she then attends to the physical environment in which Dickinson wrote, positioning the poet's bouts of eyestrain and temporary blindness in the mid-1860s alongside the temporal restrictions imposed by Amherst's industrialization and the nearby Hills Hat Factory to suggest that Dickinson was a poet whose poems were premised on constraint rather than "Possibility."

### Scholar Award

The recipient of the 2017 EDIS Scholar Award of \$2000 is Christa Holm Vogelius, assistant professor of American Literature at the University of Copenhagen, where she teaches and works on nineteenth-century literature and culture. Her articles have appeared in such publications as *Amerikastudien*, *ESQ*, and the *Emily Dickinson Journal* (2009).

Her project, "Dickinson's Transnational Landscapes," is a chapter in her book manuscript, *Fair Copy: Gender, Originality, and the Making of American Literature*, which positions ekphrasis, or the literary description of visual art, and copying practices more generally, as a means for writers to interrogate literary nationalism. In Dickinson's canon, she argues, both ekphrasis and textual transcription practices serve as ways of engaging with contemporary ideas around originality and the developing American canon. What critics have called Dickinson's planetary verse, she suggests, is both provincial and transnational, but also haunted by the spectre of the nation and literary nationalism that circulated in her exchanges with contemporaries like Higginson.

## Edenic Possibilities: 2017 Annual Meeting

The 2017 EDIS Annual Meeting will be held August 11-13 in Amherst. It will include the usual popular features, such as reading groups facilitated by well-known scholars, musical performances, tours of the museum, and a walk along the Emily Dickinson Trail.

A special feature this year will be presentations of new scholarship by past participants in the Dickinson Critical Institute. The Institute, which will be in its fourth year, is an afternoon-long seminar-style discussion in which emerging Dickinson scholars workshop their research in a group with an established scholar in the field.

The talks will be delivered by Grant Rosson and Clare Mullaney – recipient of the 2017 EDIS Graduate Student Scholarship.

Grant Rosson, a graduate student in US Literature at UCLA, will deliver a talk entitled "Dickinson's Interiors: A Theory of Authorship in the Todd Correspondence," about the letters exchanged between the poet and Mabel Loomis Todd and Dickinson's conception of authorship that emerges in it.

Clare Mullaney will deliver "'Not to discover weak - / ness is / The Artifice of strength -': Emily Dickinson, Constraint, and an Early History of Print Disability."



## Emily Dickinson Undergraduate Essay Prize

The Emily Dickinson International Society offers a prize for undergraduate research on Emily Dickinson. We seek critical essays by undergraduates from institutions of all kinds, focusing on Dickinson's poems or letters. Students at all levels are eligible to submit. Papers should be 15 pages maximum. The winning essay will be published on the EDIS website, and the author will receive an award of \$100.

To submit an essay for the prize, send copies of articles as anonymous word attachments, plus a cover letter with contact information to the following address by June 5, 2017: [epetrino@fairfield.edu](mailto:epetrino@fairfield.edu). The essays will be distributed electronically to a panel of nationally recognized scholars for judging. All submissions will be acknowledged and receive a response within a month.

## African-American Inflexions

By Vivian Pollak

*The following report on a session from the 2016 International Conference in Paris was mistakenly left out of the Fall 2016 issue of the Bulletin. The editor regrets the omission of this account of what was plainly a lively and inventive group of presentations.*

The session on "African-American Inflexions" was well attended and contained three papers that took different approaches to this seldom-discussed topic. Amanda Licato developed the idea that race is no longer absent from readings of Dickinson but that more needs to be done. In "'Upon a foreign shore / Haunted by native lands': Emily Dickinson and Racial Masquerade," she argued that public racial conflict is replayed in Dickinson's poetic production, adducing an example from an 1853 letter to her brother (L127) and connecting it to the minstrel mask as described by Houston Baker. She stated that Dickinson is very much aligned with a major track in African American literature that likened identity or subject positions to the concept of wearing masks, before offering a detailed reading of "The Black Berry – wears a Thorn in his side –" (Fr548). Licato is a Ph.D candidate at Stanford University. The talk drew on her emerging dissertation, "Out from Behind this Mask: Persona in African American Poetry, 1830-1930," which merges formal

attention to poetics with cultural history during the slave era and into Jim Crow.

In "'Odd secrets of the line': The Poetics of Emily Dickinson and African American Spirituals," Wendy Tronrud noted that at least since 1950 a number of scholars such as Russell Ames, John Lovell, and William Dargan have heard Dickinson in African American spirituals. Building on their insights, Tronrud suggested a number of key intersections such as a vocabulary of movement; a context of physical confinement; the use of animal symbolism; quick, internal shifts in voice and tone; and speaking in code, particularly around the idea and geography of freedom. This latter point loops back to Licato's interest in personae and masks. She offered readings of poems such as "Going to Heaven!" (Fr128) and "Just lost, when I was saved!" (Fr132), arguing for Issac Watts's hymns as a formal ground from which both Dickinson and the spirituals more broadly draw and experiment. Tronrud is a Ph.D candidate at the CUNY

Graduate Center who teaches at Queens College and Cooper Union, both in New York City. She describes herself as a committed educator.

Maria Muresan was born in Romania and lives in Paris, where she works on world poetics, oralities, and African fiction. Her wide-ranging talk on "Unsettling the Map of Lyric: Dickinsonian Moments in African-American Poetry of Experience" offered a reading of Dickinson's abortion tropes as defined by William Shurr in *The Marriage of Emily Dickinson*. Muresan extended his analysis to compare Dickinson's imagination of abortion with that of Gwendolyn Brooks in "The Mother." There was also analysis of theories of lyric pathos, experimental intimacy, riddle, charm, and voice.

All the papers generated lively discussion, with the audience members rigorously engaged in debates about Dickinson's multiple connections and helping to define her African-American inflexions.

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## “Tell all the Truth but tell it Slant - ”

By Jonathan Martin

“Tell all the Truth but tell it Slant - ”  
 For Truth is seldom Straight -  
 Queer and Warped - but never spent -  
 It fills and forms our Faith.

As if like Ice it sometimes seems -  
 Its frigid features fixed -  
 And yet it flows by fluid means  
 And floods our minds - Eclipsed -

By all the shiny - blurry - Lights  
 That cloud our crowded World -  
 Wherein we see not Truth nor twice  
 Nor once before we're whirled -

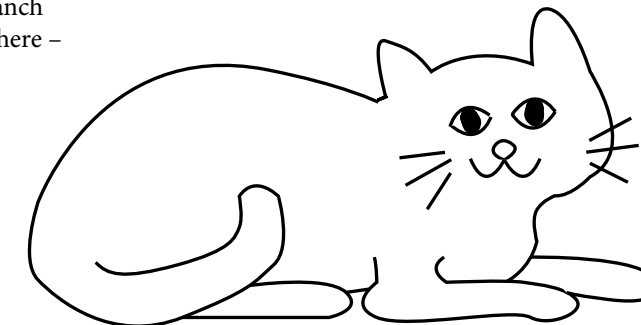
Aloft in the Invisible Air -  
 Much like the Bird upon the Branch  
 Who saw that I could see Him there -  
 And so he flew away -

## I Like a Look of Agatha

By Felicia Nimue Ackerman

I like a look of Agatha,  
 Because it comes from her -  
 Cats do not sham affection,  
 Nor simulate a purr -

The eyes light up - and that is bliss  
 Impossible to feign.  
 She stretches and rolls over;  
 She's purring once again.



## To Offer Fancy Cookies

By Felicia Nimue Ackerman

To offer fancy cookies  
 To lives that binge alone -  
 When one has failed to guide them  
 Into a healthy zone

Is sweeter than resuming  
 One's effort at reform -  
 The feelings they accord one  
 Will surely - be more warm -

## I Never Fired a Gun

By Felicia Nimue Ackerman

I never fired a gun -  
 Nor used a knife to kill -  
 Yet know I that in time I could  
 Develop either skill.

I never had your love.  
 You've only been my friend -  
 Yet certain am I this could change  
 If Laura's life would end -

## I started early - took my cup -

By Danielle Jernigan

I started early - took my cup -  
 And headed for the punch  
 And all the chips, and cookies too -  
 It's time for me to munch -

The party starts an hour from now -  
 Crumbs dribble as I eat -  
 No time to rest - I chew and chew  
 I do not miss a beat

My ears are perked - but not a sound  
 In my perception lies -  
 No time to waste - another plate -  
 Already piled high

I gorged - until I ate it all -  
 And now I feel quite gay  
 The party starts - the food is gone -  
 And I have - slipped away -

240  
I suppose the time will  
come  
And it in the coming  
When the Bird will cross  
the Tree  
And the Bee or Brooming,  
I suppose the time will  
come  
And it a little  
When the Corn in silk  
will cross  
And in Chintz the  
Apple Red, Pink,  
I believe the day will  
be  
When the Day will  
giggle  
At his new white  
House the Earth  
+ hat, tie, half a  
little

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