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

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In This Issue

Front Cover: Julia Morgan standing on a balcony in Paris, 1899. The architect of Asilomar, where members of EDIS and others eager to join will convene this summer for the 2019 International Conference, Morgan was the first woman to be awarded a degree in architecture from the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. The image is reprinted courtesy of Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University.

Back Cover: "Emily's House in Purple Night," by Nancy Meagher, of Amherst. An exhibit of Nancy Meagher's paintings appeared last summer in the Frost Library at Amherst College. Images of other paintings and an artist statement can be found on pages 17 and following of this issue.

Series Editor, Jonnie Guerra

I am pleased to feature Philip White, professor of English at Centre College in Kentucky, in the Poet to Poet series with this spirited and challenging essay about how he thinks about Dickinson in the context of America's racial history. White has won both a Pushcart Prize for poetry and a William Barnestone Prize for poetry translation. His collection of poems, The Clearing*, published by Texas Tech in 2007, received that press's 2007 Walt MacDonald First Book Award. White's poetry also has appeared in numerous publications, including* The New Republic*,* Poetry*,* The Yale Review*, and* Ploughshares*. A special thanks to Dan Manheim who brought his departmental colleague to my attention.*

Whiteness and Rubbing Away the Brand: My Emily Dickinson, Now

By Philip White

Where to start? A dozen or two poems, nearly whole, from early readings, from my mother's kitchen table recitations, from way back. And lines, phrases, figures, images from maybe a hundred or so more.

What comes?

A blazing intensity of perception. Spontaneous raptures of or by the soul, laden with existential import – "the vivid Ore," "a Soul at the White Heat" – the Dickinsonian transport, sublime. On one hand a gathering of Paradise in the mundane world, a leap out of the non-perception that is ordinary perception, and on the other, purity, leaving behind the "spangled," the "common tint" for the white and "unannointed Blaze" (Fr401, Fr328).

For some – for me, early – this is (was) Dickinson.

But, now, too, the wit. The strange conveyances of sublime perception, the wordwork, the imagework, putting her own English on English, making her own of what's at hand or underfoot, distilling "amazing sense" from "ordinary meanings" (Fr446), from ambient poems and poetries, argots of elevation and transcendence. All with some signature turn: resuscitations of dead metaphors and etymologies, inversions of station and scale, exoticisms of distance and diction.

And always the thought of the poem moving from scintillation to scintillation, leap to leap, twist to twist. First, in affinity with the absoluteness of the soul and the flares of wit, insisting on immediacy – each word and phrase (the dashes say) a speech act, an act of vision, of attainment or aspiration, venture or assay. But, second, with distance: the thinker of the poem orchestrating but also looking on, witnessing the soul's leaps, the wit's flashes, interrogating, figuring, re-figuring. The poem's thought a thread of reckonings and self-reckonings.

Back from the purity of "White Heat," "White Election," back from the soul's vanquishings and repudiations of the conditions and colors of her place in time, back from the unaccountable and stony exclusions in her selections of "her own Society," back to the forge that is her place in time with others, in something like society itself, a village, a place with color, "the Blacksmith's" ringing filling the air (Fr409, Fr411).

Vulnerability, then, to ambivalence, divisions of perspective, irony, wry or dry or bleak abandonment, the vehicles of transcendence like a circus packing up, leaving one just where one is, "miles of Stare – / That signalize a Show's Retreat – / In North America" (Fr257). And what, then, is the tone of the thinker – phrase by phrase, image by image, transport by transport, fall by fall, loss by loss, irony by irony, thought by thought? What is the attitude, the feeling? On which side of the self-division does the existential heft fall? How great is the force of the inquiry and insight?

A "fainter" Dickinson at times? – maybe, as (the thinker says) wisdoms are (Fr1072). And also prone to spry moralizing (my mother's Dickinson), comforting and comfortable discourse. For some, this is the Dickinson to be passed over. But when thought plays close to transport or desolation, to the spontaneous and immediate, or when it is doing the work of illumination, building a gradual dazzle, when the poem is the drama of the thinker in the vicissitudes of her thought – this, for me, now, is Dickinson.

* * *

It may also be closer to Dickinson writing poems in her time, in her white clothes in her house in her village in her North America. I mean when she was in all that but making her place there, making all that her own. Not, then, the self as absolute repudiation of conditions – which is what the soul wants – but as builder of "Temples": "Myself was formed – a Carpenter" (Fr475), a maker, a poet, fashioning out of the village and the forge and the blacksmith and tools at hand a place for soul and wit and thought, poem by poem. And from that, the self formed in the life of writing. When the poem is done, when one is mere reader of it ("This was a Poet"), the "Possibility," the present tense that might be poetry is still there ("It is That" "It is He"). The wealth, then, of having such a self: "Himself – to Him – a Fortune – / Exterior – to Time" (Fr446). Meaning, I suppose, among other shadings, a luck, a richness beyond the monetary and temporal, a fate not entirely dictated by historical and material conditions, a self made itself by "thoughts," without which she said she could not understand how people "get strength to put on their clothes in the morning" (L342a). "She had to think," says Lavinia. "She . . . was the only one of us who had that to do" (Bingham). A self based on the other kind of fortune, the one in time (Fortuna, goddess of material luck and status, of the auction, of the market, of "Portion," of publication and fame) was, then, anathema, reduction of the "Human Spirit / To Disgrace of Price" (Fr788).

So that in the self-making of writing I see Dickinson's version of the early American version of the emancipation of enlightenment, along with an indictment of early American crassness and conformity and the pursuit of success and status, which drives that other version of American self-making, freedom, and dream. Hers the freedom of self-ceding – "I've stopped being Their's." The movement from "half unconscious" perception and self-expression ("crowing") to the "conscious" achievement, somehow both chosen and "of Grace," of a new self "adequate, erect, / With will to choose" (Fr353).

So, that is my Dickinson, now. Busy at her thoughts and poems, at her self and self-consecration, the clothes of her White Heat made a daily habit in her house in her little village in her North America.

* * *

And what a North America it was. So violent, so divided. A place where whiteness was not just a private mythology of purity ("White – Unto the White Creator"), but, with the old "ordinary" meanings, a bulwark of the conditions that made the creation of such a mythology and such a self available to her but much less to specific categories of others. And there is the well-known incident, self-reported, with a new servant: "We have a new Black Man and are looking for a Philanthropist to direct him, because every time he presents himself, I run, and when the Head of the Nation shies, it confuses the Foot" (L721). She knows, I take it, that her discomfort or discomfiture is the source of the discomfiture of both, and the irony in that knowledge spurs, perhaps, the ironies and barbs of her witty self-comedy. But there is little recognition of the humanity of this Foot of the Nation, this Black Man, whose life in his North America, because it is her North America, can hardly not have entailed perpetual sufferance (to paraphrase James Allen McPherson) of like incidents of the stupidities of the intelligent. Should a white person really have to be a Philanthropist – an activist, say – to speak to a black man without running away? Her comedy only highlights the fact of her subjection, at the level of spontaneous perception and response (fear, flight), to the racial thinking of her time. It makes unmistakable, then, a failure, of her ceding, her emancipation, her achievement of an American self exterior to Time, to class, to caste, to historical privilege with its ways of perceiving.

I say failure because I think her self-awareness here shows she knows better, and because, in her thought-life, her poetry, some twenty years earlier, around the time of Emancipation, she tried to think herself out of such racial thinking even as she trenchantly registers its power in "our" minutest intuitions.

Color – Caste – Denomination –
These – are Time's Affair –
Death's diviner Classifying
Does not know they are –

As in sleep – All Hue forgotten –
Tenets – put behind –
Death's large – Democratic fingers
Rub away the Brand –

If Circassian – He is careless –
If He put away
Chrysalis of Blonde – or Umber –
Equal Butterfly –

They emerge from His Obscuring –
What Death – knows so well –
Our minuter intuitions –
Deem unplausible
(Fr836)

Two ways of perceiving, then, of knowing others: first, ours, which are the prejudices of the first line and the "intuitions" of the next to last line; and, second, Death's, which "Does not know they are." But how to know as Death does? His sweeping unconsciousness or utter unknowing of Color, Caste, and Denomination is surely beyond us, and beyond thought and poetry, if in "Denomination" we hear, not merely sect (which, with Caste, is implicated, as the poem proceeds,

in Color), but all language, naming, categorizing, classifying. But after that image of divine knowing, the poem, thought by thought, image by image, envisions such a way of knowing in more human terms that might help the poem's us, which it identifies as white, overcome the prejudices, the intuitions that control our perceptions.

The last lines of the poem honor the persuasiveness of that attempt by judging the prejudices "minuter," but at the same time, by calling them "intuitions," suggest their unpersuadability, as if they work in spite of conscious thought, at the seat of spontaneous pleasure and belief. Likewise, "plausible," as the last word, suggests agreeableness as well as judgement, and "Circassian," too, contained an erotic ideal of beauty. The intuitions, then, are "Time's Affair," meaning Time's business, yes, but, again, at the root, Time's doing, Time's making. They are Time's teaching (in-tuition) or instruction of our experience, our own minute history at the smallest unit of temporal perceptions and absorption of evolving cultural associations and meanings and responses. So "minuter intuitions" takes on a terrible double edge. They are "minuter" because pettier, smaller-minded, stupider, subject to time, more human than the "diviner classifyings" of Death; but they are also "minuter" because more entrenched by our lived lives. As the namings and "classifyings" built in us by experience, they are the conditions, as it were, of our thought itself. What more basic, what more hard to change, than one's ways of seeing, knowing?

But the thinker knows all of this already in the first stanza: there is no Color, no Caste, and no Denominating in death. But that knowledge cannot touch us, the thinker knows, cannot help someone, say, with white intuitions (recoil, fear, flight) to see a "Black Man" as a man and not run away. How free the perception of color from Color, with its chains of implications and reflex? How acknowledge the intuition's damage to the other? And so the thinker of the poem makes another assay.

But this is hardly better than the first, as if we could in a kind of sleep forget or simply "put behind" us such intuitions. Because death is not a sleep, because forgetting does not forget at a level below thought, from which thoughts come, because "tenets" is too conscious a term for the spontaneous meanings experience builds into perception.

The next attempt, with the image of Color as a brand has more power. It is, first, literal. The branding of human beings by other human beings under the auspices of Color really was, when the poem was written, one of Time's affairs. And, as part for the whole, the image potentially redeems color from Color: color is only a visual cue for the imposition of the brand, the denomination, the category, with its cascading meanings. The image conveys the impingement, even in mere perception and response (recoil, running away), on the person so denominated, racialized, commodified: the denomination (we have a name that does this work) applies the mark (the brand: say, caste-by-Color), burns it, as it were, onto and into the skin of the other, so that it cannot but be felt. Thus a black man is made, by external imposition, a Black Man. And, since the image is between people, a person is White who cannot be perceived in this way, and wields whiteness in the act of perceiving others in this way. The "intuition" in itself, the image implies, is to the other violence, pain, harm. And Death, who is now much more like us, fumblingly, awkwardly, humanly (with "large – Democratic fingers") tries to rub away the welts.

So, in the next image, the White, the "Circassian" – with its self-fetish and myth of geographical and genealogical purity – must be made to know its own death, must feel the affront that death is "careless" of its self-image, its self-love, the love of its own (as if unassailable) skin, its bodily being. As if, by what Phillis Wheatley calls a "strange Absurdity," whiteness does not know itself, feels, by so much forgetting of the death it has imposed on others, immune to knowledge of its own ("Letter to Samson Occum"). As if, as James Baldwin later thought, white America, blinded by narcissism, is at its core existentially obtuse, in denial of death, of the tragedy that is its history, its own imposition over and over, across centuries, of the brand ("But it is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent. It is the innocence which constitutes the crime"), and can only be redeemed by embracing the fact of mortality, of tragic history, of the heady delusion of Color that is also the delusion of innocence, and so accept responsibility to life and others. Here, in Dickinson, the image of redemption is in death's "putting away" of the binary of Color (now explicit: "Blonde or Umber"), asserted in the interpersonal agon of perception, and taking on of "What Death – knows so well," that all are "Equal Butterfly."

No ascent into whiteness here. Instead, the emergence of color out of Color (Dickinson's butterflies are typically "gay," "spangled," or "Numidian" dark [Fr142, Fr1650, Fr1395]). And, too, an "obscuring" by which the dangerous clarities of Color are first plangently rubbed away, then put away, then, blurred, literally darkened. One dimension of the Death image throughout, obviously, is the Christian afterlife, but the poem, again, would not have needed the imagework and wordwork of the last three stanzas if Death served only in that way. The poem's original insight, I think, is that there is in a mind given to the "minuter intuitions" of Time's affair (a mind which, say, cannot "stop for Death" [Fr479]) an impulse to find "unplausible" the existential implications of death for our lives ("One Life of so much Consequence!" [Fr396]). No poet, perhaps, went more regularly to that topic than Dickinson at the individual level. And somehow, there might be, this poem suggests, a way of knowing in life that takes Death into itself and so can recognize its part in Time's affair at a social level, the tragic imposition of a brand by people in one category on those in another, the perpetuation of the blinding intuitions. As if only by taking death into itself can the white part of the nation emerge into a truly "Democratic" way of seeing, one person at a time (the only way death can be taken in, the way poetry does it), and begin rubbing away the brand. That this is difficult, maybe impossible, that it requires an improbable transformation (as Baldwin, too, thought) of people inherently not likely to see the need, Dickinson's own prejudice and this poem and the century-and-a-half of history since it was thought and written in this my North America make deadly clear.

The females that were now offered for sale were principally of the fair and rosy-cheeked Circassian race, exposed to the curious eye of the throng only so far as delicacy would sanction, yet leaving enough visible to develope charms that fired the spirits of the Turkish crowd; and the bids ran high on this sale of humanity, until at last a beautiful creature, with a form of ravishing loveliness, large and lustrous eyes, and every belonging that might go to make up a Venus, was led forth to the auctioneer's stand. She was young and surpassingly handsome, while her bearing evinced a degree of modesty that challenged the highest admiration (10).

Circassia, the land of beauty and oppression, whose noble valleys produce such miracles of female loveliness, and whose level plains are the vivid scenes of such terrible struggles; where a brave, unconquerable peasantry have . . . defied the combined powers of the whole of Russia, and whose daughters, though the children of such brave sires, are yet taught and reared from childhood to look forward to a life of slavery in a Turkish harem as the height of their ambition (21).

These passages come from the pages of *The Circassian Slave: A Story of Constantinople and the Caucasus*, by Lieutenant Murray (Boston 1851). Lieutenant Murray is the pen name of Maturin Murray Ballou, the first editor of the *Boston Globe*, and the son of Hosea Ballou, the founder of the Uinversalist Church. There is no evidence that Emily Dickinson ever read Lieutenant Murray's novel – if she did, it would be one of those she hid away in the piano bench, away from the eyes of those who might fear it would "joggle the mind." Nevertheless, it provides an example of some of the associations the term "Circassian" would have had in the mid-nineteenth century. The novel, the last of Ballou's eighteen romances, all in some degree exploiting codes of exoticism from the period, appeared in 1851, immediately after the abortive rescue, by Thomas Wentworth Higginson among others, of seventeen year old Thomas Sims, who was being returned to Savannah under the provisions of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

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Cricket
By Philip White

A frigid morning, the trees outside nearly
leafless so the ticking now is limb on limb,
a few ice grains slithering on metal flashings,
roofers scraping shingles a block away, wind
hollowing out some other space to be here.
And some of the dead rustle back, bodily,
hunching out in the cold just as they did.
I approve the particular ways they shoulder
the burdens of themselves, remember by feel
the knot to the side of one's spine where the pain
never stopped, note this one's voice: she had a snap
inside her coat sleeve once that chirped exactly
like a cricket when it touched her watchface;
I'd listen for it as she moved along creaking
in spite of herself, laughing. Whose life is this?
And was it the dead who left it, or we? We close
our eyes and someone vanishes, open them
and another life is there to be seen. Time
for a new roof, someone thinks, and calls in
builders, an odd, unplaceable, wind-blurred
rasp at dawn. At first I thought it was a man
out in the cold trying futilely to clear
his throat, about to speak. But it went on
and on. It was only the builders out there.

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The Man Who Loved Emily Dickinson from Afar

By Mikheil Nishnianidze

Mikheil Nishmianidze offers this introduction to his memoir of his father: "The following piece is a memoir about a Soviet Georgian translator who fell in love with Emily Dickinson's poetry. Giorgi Nishnianidze's poetic and literary translation legacy leaves us with a few hundreds of pieces by several dozen Anglophone poets and writers. The regime reluctantly accepted western creative work, forcing it through the prism of Marxist ideology, even while never encouraging independent artistic expression in the minority languages. An eye-witness account by the son of the translator, the essay offers a retrospective analysis of the 70 years of the USSR. The author speculates about the artistic freedom and the agility required from Soviet artists who tried to circumvent strict communist censorship."

Mikheil Nishnianidze is an interpreter, editor, and translator in English/Georgian/Russian language pairs. He writes here about his father's and his own life on one hand, and on the other hand tries to offer an impartial view of the Soviet epoch from an insider's prospective.

I first heard of Emily Dickinson from my father, Giorgi Nishnianidze, a well-known translator of English poetry and prose into Georgian during the last thirty years of the Soviet Union. By the time he discovered her poetry he was already famous for his translations of Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, Lord Byron, Oscar Wilde, William Wordsworth, Walt Whitman, T. S. Eliot, Jack London and many others. His works won the renowned translation award – Ivane Machabeli Prize given by the Union of Writers of the Soviet Republic of Georgia for translations.

Father was born in 1935 in Tbilisi, the capital of the Republic of Georgia, only two years before the outbreak of the Great Purge of 1936 to 1938, which shocked the USSR and its weather-beaten population who could hardly ever be surprised with anything again after the massacres of the Revolution. Stalin and his team had no mercy for any opposition. Intolerance became contagious, and it didn't take long for it to become the social norm. When all dissenters were dealt with, the crowd outlawed new enemies, often for any arbitrary denominator, any noticeable social category – physicians, military, academics, teachers.

Since my grandfather was a Cavalry Captain, his family would most likely have fallen during these persecutions, but they were saved by a misfortune when my grandfather died from cancer at 29, just before the Great Purge began. My father was only three months old. My grandfather's brother was less fortunate. A Lieutenant Colonel in the Corps of Engineers, he was later executed. My great-aunt was exiled to Siberia, a fate typical for hundreds of thousands families at the time. The apocalyptic scale of persecutions dwarfed all the population. (*See Panel 1.*)

Living a "'small' life" (Fr307), discreetly, helped the family escape the existential clash of cultures. My *bebia* (ბებია) (grandmother in Georgian), a country woman with three minor orphaned sons, made her living by sewing, thus slipping under the radar, representing no threat to anyone.

Panel 1

LIFE, and Death, and Giants –
Such as these – are still –
Minor – Apparatus – Hopper of the Mill –
Beetle at the Candle –
Or a Fife's fame –
Maintain – by Accident that they proclaim –
Fr777

სიკვდილ-სიცოცხლეს - ამ ძველ გიგანტებს -
სძინავთ და მათი არ ისმის ჩქამიც,
წვრილფეხობას კი - სარეკელას თუ
ფარვანას, ალმა რომ შთანთქა ლამის -
სწამთ, ბრმა შემთხვევა წარმართავს საგნებს
და ყველაფერი მთავრდება ამით

Instead of "accident" in the original, Giorgi Nishnianidze replaced "A Fife's Fame" with the more emphatic "Blind Chance that manages matters and is the end to Everything," making it more fatalistic.

Giorgi Nishnianidze

Father was a frail child. He refused to walk even by the age of twelve months. So his family took him to a freshly made grave and made him walk over it, a Georgian practice based on old beliefs. The magic worked and he grew into a very independent boy, perhaps partly because of the lack of parental control from my overworked *bebia*, desperately trying to make both ends meet. She was almost illiterate, yet she loved singing as she worked, a habit she maintained all her life.

Total control

Stalin was a controversial figure. He was a strong leader who knew how to manipulate people. He had a good theological education and used his expertise to create an ideology comparable to a religious cult. At the same time he was a weak manager who failed to bring the country's struggling economy together. His contradictory persona becomes most obscure in relation to the arts. Stalin shared Lenin's way of "weaponizing" the arts; but he was a mediocre consumer, resentful of anything exceeding the ordinary or mundane.

Life was hard in Stalin's Tbilisi, especially during war-time. The authorities distributed bread, vegetable oil, kerosene and rationing tickets for some other essentials. But this was barely enough to survive, and indeed many people died from malnutrition. In winter everybody would gather in one of the neighbors' homes to socialize and save firewood. The most popular topic was food; they tried to remember different meals they used to have before the war. In spring the first greenery made their ration more diverse. In summer a main entertainment was swimming in the deep and treacherous Mtkvari River that flows through

Panel 2

We never know how high we are
Till we are called to rise
And then, if we are true to plan
Our statures touch the skies—

The Heroism we recite
Would be a daily thing
Did not ourselves the Cubits warp
For fear to be a King –
(Fr1197)

ჩვენ ჯერ არ ვიცით, რა მაღლები ვართ,
ვიდრე არ გვეტყვის ვიღაც: ადექით!
მაშინ ხომ - გეგმა თუკი არ ტყუის -
ავისვეტებით ღვთის სიმაღლემდე -

არად იქცევა თვით ჰეროიზმიც,
რაზედაც ქვეყნის პოეტნი ჰყეფენ,
მაგრამ წყრთებს ჩვენვე ვიკლებთ გზადაგზა
იმის შიშით, რომ არ ვიქცეთ მეფედ.

This translation by Giorgi Nishnianidze is almost an exact replica of the original except for one phrase that he translated as: "Annihilated (is) even the Heroism that poets of the world are barking about," which sounds much more caustic than Dickinson's phrase.

A Note on the Georgian Alphabet

There are three alphabets used to write down languages in the Kartvelian language family, which includes Georgian, Mingrelian, Svan, and Laz, of which only Georgian has over a million native speakers. All three alphabets developed out of the Greek alphabet, with influence from the Aramaic alphabet. All three Georgian alphabets are unicase. Two of the systems, Asomtavruli and Nuskhuri, while still in use, appear only in specialized textual illustration such as religious iconography. The third and last developed, Mkhedruli ("military"), now in general use, has 33 letters, most coming from Greek, with a few extra letters to represent specifically Georgian sounds. A table of sounds appears below.

ა	ani	[a]	მ	mani	[m]	ღ	ghani	[ɣ]
ბ	bani	[b]	ნ	nari	[n]	ყ	q'ari	[qʔ]
გ	gani	[g]	ო	oni	[o]	შ	shini	[š]
დ	doni	[d]	პ	p'ari	[pʔ]	ჩ	chini	[č]
ე	eni	[e]	ჟ	zhani	[ž]	ც	tsani	[ts]
ვ	vini	[v]	რ	rae	[r]	ძ	dzili	[dz]
ზ	zeni	[z]	ს	sani	[s]	წ	ts'ili	[tsʔ]
თ	tani	[t]	ტ	t'ani	[tʔ]	ჭ	ch'ari	[čʔ]
ი	ini	[i]	უ	uni	[u]	ხ	xani	[x]
კ	k'ani	[kʔ]	ფ	pari	[p]	ჯ	jani	[j]
ლ	lazi	[l]	ქ	kani	[k]	ჰ	hae	[h]

the city. School was not the first priority for children. The city streets maintained their own criminal hierarchy. Father didn't choose a life of street crime, but he wasn't a diligent learner, and even had to repeat a grade. All of sudden in his mid-teens he became obsessed with reading fiction, not only in Georgian but in Russian and English too.

The game changer

The fight against the Nazis brought moral satisfaction and a sense of justification to the Soviet people. It loosened the grip of the State because all attention was turned to the struggle. The hard-bitten war generation brought forth outstanding personalities in different areas of human creativity.

Isaiah Berlin comments on this period: "There is an uncommon rise in popularity with the soldiers at the fighting fronts for the least political and most purely personal lyrical verse by Pasternak . . . Akhmatova, and Blok, Bely, and even Bryusov, Sologub, Tsvetaeva, and Mayakovsky. . . . Distinguished but hitherto somewhat suspect and lonely writers, especially Pasternak and Akhmatova, began to receive a flood of letters from the front quoting their published and unpublished works . . ."[1]

My two elder uncles also started writing poetry at almost the same time as my father. One of them, the eldest brother Shota, later became a famous Georgian poet;[2] the middle child, Otar, became a dental technician and soon quit writing poetry. Nevertheless, he was an interesting character, a Bohemian hedonistic drinker with an anarchistic outlook who loved to recite his favorite poets when he was drunk. (*See Panel 2, previous page.*)

Eventually, Father's self-education allowed him to pass the necessary exams and enroll at Tbilisi State University's Department of Western European Languages, specializing in English. He graduated from the University and was dispatched to a village school to teach English, where he met his future wife, Valentina Borodavko, a teacher of Russian. Being a school teacher was a low-paying job with dubious potential for promotion, so he had few choices for the future. One career for a foreign language-speaking male was that of an intelligence officer. A few years later he was approached by the state security service with an offer he could hardly refuse. However, to his satisfaction, he was finally considered unfit for service because of his poor eyesight. Otherwise, his recruiter later confided, he would have ended up in Afghanistan.

He left the village school and tried several positions, teaching classes at Tbilisi State University, working as an education coordinator, as a manuscript reader for a literary magazine, and even tutoring. He didn't abandon his literary pursuits, although they couldn't provide a decent living for his small family. His first remarkable poetic success was the translation of *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, which made him famous in artistic circles.

Khrushchev's Thaw and Brezhnev's Time

Soviet soldiers had seen Europe during World War II, and people in the USSR had learned there was a different life elsewhere in the world. They began to pose questions that official ideology could not answer. It was impossible to justify using former violent measures now, against the Heroic Soviet People. Direct control was replaced by a hidden kind. It was a time of more carrots and fewer sticks. But spiritual starvation stripped the people of enthusiasm and the ordeals of torment and torture were replaced by an era of stagnation. Their common sense so long abused by brainwashing, people stopped believing anything. The arts followed reality: after being fed up with vulgar Soviet realism, Georgian artists turned to grotesque forms, bizarre narratives and exaggerated perceptions of self-identity and their culture. In the 1970-80s the pandemic of caution prevented people from sharing their inner world.

Literary translations became my father's own way of escaping sordid reality and eventually his endeavors gained him recognition. After many years of small part-time jobs he was offered an editor's position at the newly established Chief Editorial Collegium of Literary Translations and Literary Relations and was soon promoted to the position of Managing Editor and Deputy Director. This agency, with its peculiar name, was in charge of all literary translations in the Soviet Republic of Georgia. The staff enjoyed decent salaries and a certain editorial liberty, and though the list of foreign authors eligible for translation was restricted by censorship, the liberal environment and direct relations with foreign counterparts, including those from western countries, boosted creativity and produced dozens of excellent translated works that broadened viewpoints and enriched the language. There was also a school for literary novices. It's hard to tell who came up with this experimental idea but it was definitely backed by someone in the top leadership of the Soviet Republic of Georgia. Perhaps the main purpose was to gather all liberal thinkers and creative people together, i.e. potential troublemakers, which would make it easier for the authorities to control them – if not by the stick then by the carrot.

For the first time my father had a stable, contented life with a regularly paid salary while doing things he loved: teaching young people, working on translations,

Panel 3

I never lost as much but twice –	მთლიანად მხოლოდ ორჯერ გავკოტრდი,
And that was in the sod.	ორჯერვე ისიც შავი სამარის
Twice have I stood a beggar	წიაღ და ორჯერ მათხოვარივით
Before the door of God!	ვიდექ ღვთის კართან მიუსაფარი.
Angels – twice descending	ორჯერ მოფრინდნენ ანგელოსები,
Reimbursed my store –	ამივსეს კუბო ყველა სიკეთით...
Burglar! Banker – Father!	- ყოვლისმყვლეფელო, ბანკირო, მამავ,
I am poor once more!	მე უბედური კვლავ დავიქეცი!
(Fr39)	

The reader may think that it's a pious lamentation of the poetess surrendering to her fate. And then suddenly there comes the blasphemous: "Burglar! Banker – Father!" making the previous lines sound ironical and even equivocal. Now it looks like a transaction; a Debtor appealing to her Lender. Emily's irony takes an extremely materialistic approach towards the Lord, making God look like a business partner. This businesslike tone is reduced in the translation, however. For instance "Reimbursed my store" is rephrased to "Filled my coffin with all blessings." Should the translator have kept the original wording, it would not sound poetic to the Georgian ear. Instead, the effect is achieved by the twist: in Georgian it goes: "Omnivorous, Banker, Father, Poor me, I lost again," alluding to the jealous God of the Old Testament, or even Saturn Devouring His Children.

Panel 4

The Overtakelessness of Those	ის გულგრილობა, მოკვდავი რითაც
Who have accomplished Death –	არარაობის უკუნეთს ერთვის,
Majestic to me beyond	საწუთროს ყველა საოცრებაზე
The Majesties of Earth –	უდავოდ უფრო მეტია ჩემთვის -
The Soul her "Not at Home"	„შინ არვარ" - სხეულს წააწერს სული,
Inscribes opon the Flesh,	კარს მოიხურავს - ის დღე და ეს დღე
And takes a fine aerial gait	და ხალხით სავსე ქუჩას გაჰყვება
Beyond the Writ of Touch.	ჰაეროვანი ნაბიჯით ცისკენ..
(Fr894)	

The first two lines in the translation became "The Nonchalance with which a Mortal joins the Darkness of non-existence." "Overtakelessness" translated as "nonchalance," "indifference," is much less expressive than the word coined by Dickinson, and the translator didn't attempt to create an equal Georgian expression. The lines "The Soul her 'Not at Home' / Inscribes upon the flesh" are translated as "Shuts the door, Good riddance, And takes her fair aerial gait (through the crowded street, to Heaven)." It becomes very personal, like an improvisation inspired by Dickinson.

and associating with like-minded people of the same pursuits. His new status also protected him from the authorities. He had never enjoyed stability before because of family difficulties and his nonconformist personal positions.[3] However, the relative stability and contentment in his new situation ironically exposed the existential anguish formerly masked by his efforts to eke out a living.

Around this time, Father discovered Emily Dickinson's poetry, and she became his favorite poet.[4] The encounter was quite accidental. Dickinson's austere style matched the desolation of Soviet life; her numerous cognitive revelations where words lose substance, and then couple to express a meaning beyond the ordinary, allowed her to express forbidden ideas. In his translations of Emily Dickinson, Giorgi Nishnianidze conveyed his own comparable experiences. (*See Panel 3, previous page.*)

There was a sinister logic in the disintegration process. Whoever planned it tried to make it the bitterest experience possible for people. Supplies of all essentials, especially food, disappeared abruptly. Tbilisi, the capital of the Republic of Georgia, with almost two million people in the 1990s, was left with no bread and no natural gas – which meant no heating. People began using kerosene and firewood to survive the winter. Permanent power failures also interfered with the water supply, especially to high-rise condominiums. The streets were full of the walking dead, joylessly dragging by with the same melancholic faces. Those who had access to food supplies suddenly turned very influential, which toppled the social order and cleared the way for all kinds of opportunism. Former Communist bosses of different calibers ran the show along with organized criminals and newly criminalized law enforcement and security officers. Apparently the strategy was to make people beg to bring back the former arrangement.

Father witnessed the dawn of the Soviet empire, a system he never accepted, but one that nevertheless created the dualistic paradigm where he existed. His attitude towards the turbulent events of those times of imposed reforms offers an interesting parallel with Emily Dickinson, from a different angle.

He published a small article in a literary gazette after *Perestroika*, entitled "The truth will set you free." The article alluded to the Gospel message of freedom through conscience, which absolutely opposed the growing mainstream narrative in Georgia in the late 1980s as the Independence Movement gained the upper hand. It resonates with the Dickinson's "My Country is Truth . . . I like Truth – it is a free Democracy."[5] My father saw the collapse of the old system but didn't live to see the emergence of a new one. He died on his birthday, the 23rd of May, 1998 at 63 on the morning of the burial of my Mom who had passed away a few days before. (*See Panel 4.*)

A hundred and five years after Emily Dickinson locked herself up in her home

Continued on page 27

Emily Dickinson: Soul Sister

By Paul Quenon, O.C.S.O.

The Fall 2018 issue of the Bulletin *included Renée Bergland's review essay, "Postsecular Poetics," addressing, among other works,* In Praise of the Useless Life: A Monk's Memoir, *by Paul Quenon, O.C.S.O. (Ordre Cistercian de la Stricte Observance – commonly known as Trappists). Brother Paul has lived for half a century at the Abbey of Gethsemani, in central Kentucky, where he was close to Gethsemani's best known apologist for the monastic life, Thomas Merton (Fr. Louis). Brother Paul is also the author of collections of essays and poems, including* Afternoons with Emily *(2011). The following essay is redacted from* In Praise of the Useless Life *(Ava Maria Press 2018).*

Someone I readily speak of as my soul sister, "from the further side," is Emily Dickinson. At times she seems to linger near me. I read two or three of her poems every day and often commit one of her irresistible gems to memory, or polish up one I already know. This may be a form of poetic greed. Like walking into a store, I see something and have to have it. Memorization is a way of building up an inner reserve of received wisdom, a library handy without the smartphone. It has become a part of my morning practice of *lectio divina*, the prayerful reading of scripture. Dickinson's beautiful texts provide a fine supplement to scripture.

Poet of Solitude

Dickinson probes the deeps of experience with imagination, genius, and wit. It is strange how often she thinks and sounds like a monk. Most of her life, she lived a sequestered life in her family home. She increasingly kept more strictly to house and garden over the years, and sometimes she would not come downstairs and appear for visitors, however familiar they were. This narrowing of living space seemed to expand the circumference of her mind and heart. Her range of topics is astonishing, embracing nature without and mind within, existence temporal and eternal, freedom and predestination, love both erotic and divine. For me, she shows how a monk should live and develop – open, universal, and all-embracing.

Her prescription for inner growth is a perfect primer for a Trappist-Cistercian novice. "Growth of Man – like Growth of Nature . . . / Must achieve – Itself – / Through the solitary prowess / Of a silent life" (Fr790). This could easily have come out of the mouth of Dom James Fox, my first abbot, who so often preached about silence and perseverance.

What especially attracts me to her writing is how eminently she figures as a poet of solitude. The writings of Fr. Louis (Thomas Merton) have given me a taste for this, and I have often explored how voices outside the monastic tradition have handled solitude. Dickinson covers remarkably well the broad range of experiences from loneliness and isolation to intimacy with Christ. She addresses the inescapable solitude intrinsic to simply

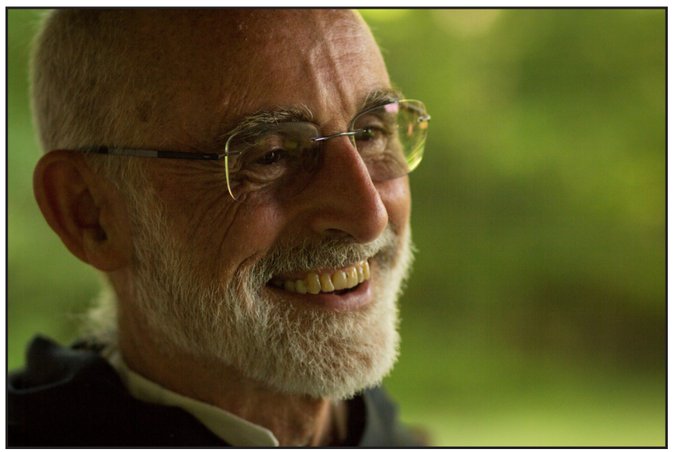


Photo Credit: Brother Lawrence Morley

being human, a unique person, living in view of the singularity of one's eventual death. She offers caution against the real hazards of living alone while illustrating its higher promise. In her solitude, she discovered contentment in God and repeatedly confessed herself as a bride of Christ. As much as her family situation allowed, she lived in "silence, solitude and seclusion" – to borrow another key phrase of Dom James. Her strict practice of "enclosure" actually surpassed that of most monastics of our day: "I live with Him – I see His face – / I go no more away / For Visitor or Sundown" (Fr698). I myself cannot resist running out to see a sundown, and I'm a monastic scandal for frequent visitors.

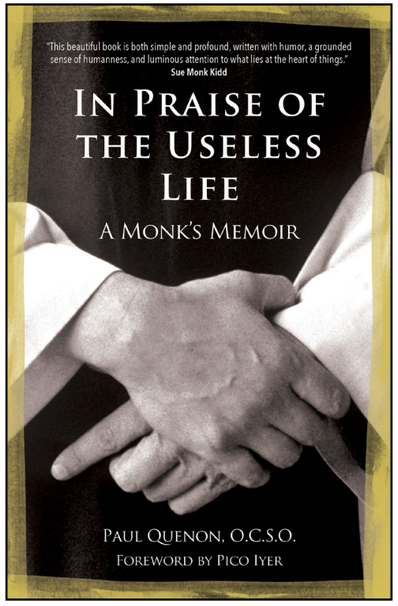
Episcopal Beginning of Our Affair

Time was, when I first began reading her, I just could not make sense out of much she wrote. The words, like foreign strangers, all passed me by – a peculiar vocabulary strung together with disconnected meanings. My mind simply could not take it in. I was well acquainted with T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, and a dozen other poets. Emily Dickinson defeated me. Then in 2004 we had a weeklong community retreat with Bishop Robert Morneau of Green Bay, Wisconsin. He was an unusual kind of bishop, one who liked poetry and confessed to having a special affinity for Dickinson. He also, like me, loved hiking. Daily during the retreat he quoted either Jessica Powers or Emily Dickinson and extracted some rare profundity.

So I made a personal resolution to set my mind to a deliberate effort. Every day I made a pass at it. Many poems were easy, of course, but if I got stumped on one, I stayed with it and did not move on until clarity came. How easily you get tangled up in such lines as: "Experience is the Angled Road / Preferred against the Mind / By – Paradox – " (Fr899). In the end, this poem proved a favorite of mine. It achieves a succinct, profound commentary on freedom and predestination. Often, my daily Dickinson perplexity required a twenty-four-hour fermentation before I understood anything. I would return to one of her puzzles and then, as if by some global rotation over my cranium, every word suddenly fell into place. Part of her technique is not to tell you what the topic is, so you must start with an untitled riddle and get the fun of working out the topic.

Followed by Fame

Publication, of course, was the least of her concerns. She continued to write furiously, but she told her housekeeper, upon her death, to burn all her work. Now that is what I call monastic detachment of the highest order! It is something on the level of St. Teresa of Avila or St. Thérèse of Lisieux, who only reluctantly wrote their widely influential autobiographies under command of their superiors.



Merton, of course, fell far short of this lofty idealism. For a few years, I was the one operating the mimeograph machine and could see how Fr. Louis liked getting things into print, even if it was merely a mimeograph. One day he handed me an essay, newly typed up, and slapped his hand against his hip and blew on it, like dropping a hot potato: the newest writing, fresh out of the oven. I believe writing was in his nature.

He was born to it. I cannot claim the same for myself. I write for enhancement of my monastic life. In the last summer of his life, Fr. Louis admitted to those attending a Sunday afternoon conference that writing helped his monastic life. While writing was often a burden and complication, creating conflict in his life, it was a positive part of his vocation nevertheless.

Emily Dickinson felt that "Publication – is the Auction / Of the Mind of Man" and that we should "reduce no Human Spirit / To Disgrace of Price" (Fr788). So why do I seek to have my mind published, and not follow her fine example? I can't blame it all on the influence of Fr. Louis. I might offer that I am swayed by the tide of his charisma, and take that fortunate circumstance as the course of the life I have been given. The fact is, I did not write much poetry until after many years in the monastery – until, in fact, after Fr. Louis died. Perhaps I felt too overshadowed to dare to try. Writing is not really essential to my nature or to my vocation. I learned to live a long time without it. The dozen or so small books I have subsequently produced are an overflow of my contemplation, a simple way of conveying to others whatever experiences come on their own in my life. In general, I think monks and nuns should be putting out some token of their existence (however modest that may be) for others to hear. To the surprise of many, this world continues to be a place where monasticism exists, and we monks do well to let people get some whiff of it, whether they take it seriously or not.

As for Miss Dickinson, I would sternly tell her that American literature would not be what it is without her. Hers was a work of the spirit, and part of the larger order of things; publication of her extraordinary work had to happen. I cannot resist making comparisons with the obscure and short-lived saints, the young, hidden monastic saints the Church widely celebrates today – I've already mentioned Thérèse of Lisieux, but also St. Rafael Arnáiz Barón and Blessed Gabriella Sagheddu. Although unknown to their times, something of their intrinsic worth squeezed its way through the stones of the enclosure wall into the living light of truth. Although Emily Dickinson was no saint in the usual sense of the word, she had a remarkable spiritual genius and an acute consciousness that might have left her with some inkling of her significance in history. Later, in a moment of reconsideration, she acknowledged that fame, for all its dangers, would catch up with her.

To earn it by disdaining it
Is Fame's consummate Fee –
He loves what spurns him –
Look behind – He is pursuing thee.
(Fr1445)

Photo Credit: Brother Paul Quenon

The Abbey of Gethsemani

Living the Hidden Life

The only evidence of Dickinson's acquaintance with monasticism was an anti-Catholic polemical novel, *The Romance of Abelard and Heloise*, by O. W. Wight, which her biographers tell us she read. In it, the Cistercian abbot St. Bernard is the villain. However, she also seems to have known *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis, written six hundred years ago for novices in a monastery. The life of a spinster in her era (mid-nineteenth-century New England) was normal and accepted, yet she had something more – an appreciation for and commitment to the hidden life. From my perspective, this again looks like the description Dom James often used of a true monk: "unknown, unheralded, and unsung."

On the day of my arrival at the monastery, I walked through a door with the inscription "God Alone" carved in stone above. The idea was both appealing and appalling to me, for it struck me as too absolute. The motif of the soul as the bride of Christ has never been very attractive, either. Dickinson expresses such notions persuasively, as strongly as found in the Cistercian fathers. Her white dress suggests a novice's habit or a wedding dress:

A solemn thing – it was – I said
A woman – white – to be
And wear – if God should count me fit –
Her blameless mystery. (Fr307)

Solitude, she sanely understood, can be positive or negative in its effects. "The Maker of the soul," as she once called it, can be dangerous, for it might also seal off the soul in a cavern of isolation (Fr877). Such seclusion is not for everybody but might be necessary for certain kinds: "The Soul's Superior instants / Occur to Her – alone – / When friend – and Earth's occasion / Have infinite withdrawn" (Fr630). I have known several monks who have this kind of compelling need to remain alone. Paradoxically, the effect for them is opposite to what it might be presumed. As St. Bernard said, "I am never less alone than when alone."

I love being in solitude, but I don't have to be a hermit. I get more than my fair share of solitude by sleeping out on the porch. Use of private rooms within the monastery has become standard in our order. Yet I find some edge of solitude that comes in waking up in the night and there is absolutely no one nearby. If I attempted a full-time solitude I would grow restless, and my sociable temperament would protest. For shorter periods I am fine. Though limited, this modicum of solitude over many years does add up to a significant amount, and I have been fortunate to have these stretches of seclusion. I must credit Fr. Flavian Burns, my second abbot, with the policy shift that allowed all the brothers in the community more periods of time alone. After my solemn profession was a fallow period when I was left to lay more of a groundwork for solitude. It counts for much in life as a refuge and a place to find strength when life gets complicated and busy. It is not a matter of seeking special spiritual experiences, but of dwelling quietly on the horizon of the absolute.

It is really something to wake up in the middle of the night and open one's eyes on the long banner of the galaxy, on that sheer abundance and distance. I wish more people could do this. It puts everything into perspective.

A Mystic

Emily Dickinson never thought of herself a "mystic," but I am intrigued with the question of whether the designation fits her. By "mystic," I mean someone who directly encounters God, one who enters into close union with the divine where the sense of self as a separate entity drops away. There are times when she evokes the direct encounter with God in words so uniquely her own, with such vivid images, having nothing of imitation, nothing of standard formulations found in spiritual books, that I deem it has to be authentic: "He fumbles at your Soul / As Players at the Keys / Before they drop full Music on / He stuns you by degrees" (Fr477). These are words leading slowly toward a direct encounter. That same poem continues with this: "[He] Deals – One – imperial – Thunderbolt / That scalps your naked Soul." You would have to reach for the book of Job, Isaiah, or Jeremiah to find such raw, forthright expressions.

When it comes to the question of her loss of the sense of the self, the answers vary. Most of what she says sustains a sense of continuity in awareness of individuality, at least in the face of death.

This Consciousness that is aware
Of Neighbors and the Sun
Will be the one aware of Death
And that itself alone

Is traversing the interval
Experience between . . .

Adventure most unto itself
The Soul condemned to be –
Attended by a single Hound
Its own identity. (Fr817)

I see some development in her beyond this; there are suggestions that she dropped this individuality, or at least questioned it: "I cling to nowhere till I fall – / The Crash of nothing, yet of all – / How similar appears – " (Fr1532). I think a Zen Buddhist would smile at these lines. A real mystic would not claim to be one, of course, or care to be designated as such, so I regard it best to leave the question moot.

What is both puzzling and authentic is how she can entertain opposite opinions about time and eternity. She lingers on the boundary between the two, jumps from one side to the other and back again. Now she is immersed in eternity: "As if the Sea should part / And show a further Sea – / And that – a further – " (Fr720). Then she is skeptical of what is beyond, and remains content with things finite:

Their Height in Heaven comforts not –
Their Glory – nought to me –
'Twas best imperfect – as it was –
I'm finite – I can't see –

The House of Supposition – (Fr725)

Fr. Louis found in her a kindred spirit, referring to her in his journal as "my own flesh and blood, my own kind of quiet rebel, fighting for truth against catchwords and formalities, fighting for independence of the spirit, maybe mistakenly, what the hell, maybe rightly too . . . like hugging an angel." I cannot imagine her particularly caring for my embrace, but I do sense a bemused sister standing by, quietly watching me explore her thoughts, enigmas, and utterances.

This excerpt from In Praise of a Useless Life *by Br. Paul Quenon, O.C.S.O., is reprinted with permission of Ave Maria Press, the publisher.*

Poems from *Afternoons With Emily*
By Paul Quenon

Oh, be just a bee –
sweet singer whose fearless hum
comes with a stinger.

Song of First Light

On the bench before dawn
a sparrow recites its one note,
as it did there

yesterday.

On the lawn-chair a robin
sings its song as it did there

yesterday,

Time, place and song,
– the same.

Summer is summer,
as it was last year,
and will be next.

Yet a bird, lost in a song of first light,
never knows repetition,
when all summers sing
as one timeless song
in each perfect call.

His Levitation

"What are you doing
up there?" said the Abbot
who found him floating in prayer.
"I've stayed where I was.
You and the turning earth
have gone lopsided.

Poems from Afternoons With Emily, *2011, reprinted with permission of Black Moss Press.*

"A Murmur in the Trees – to note"

Oil Paintings and Drawings by Nancy Meagher

An exhibit of oil and canvas paintings and drawings of the Amherst College Quad and the Dickinson Family Homes was on display in the Robert Frost Library in Amherst during the summer of 2018. The following description is from the panel that introduced the exhibit: "A member of Amherst's Gallery A3 cooperative, Nancy Meagher uses palette knives to move large areas of paint across the canvas in a manner that creates texture and a heavy layering of oil. The paintings of trees and homes . . . become in a sense "portraits" of the inhabitants who seem to wrestle with the sacred trunks and branches at night or in inclement weather. There are secrets buried deep within these scared and emotional works, which the four corners of the spectacular architecture hold gently within their colorful walls framed by trees that tell their own tales."

I'll tell you how the Sun rose –
A Ribbon at a time –
The steeples swam in Amethyst –
The news, like Squirrels, ran –
The Hills untied their Bonnets –
(Fr204)

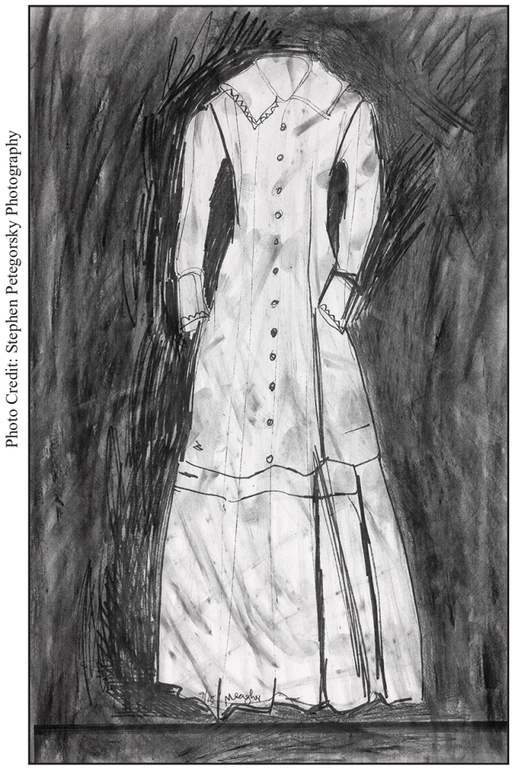


Photo Credit: Stephen Petegorsky Photography

Our home, set high on a hill overlooking Amherst's "amethyst" Pelham Hills, shares the same view as Emily Dickinson's house on nearby Main Street. Each day I pass her gracious yellow homestead on my way to town.

Years ago, after a complicated car accident, I became attracted to the color, yellow. Later, on an errand trip to town, I noticed scaffolding being set up against the front of Emily's brick home, and on my return from town, I observed house painters applying new paint, the color of butter. It's no surprise that Vincent Van Gogh's paintings with luminous brilliant yellows are close to my heart.

In every season, sunny afternoons, inclement weather or in an "amethyst dusk," painting the house on the hill where the mysterious poet worked late into the night has brought joy to me. Once a month on a Friday at noon in the Frost Library's "Center for Humanistic Inquiry," I can simply listen or partake in readings and a discussion of Dickinson's poems.

Several summers ago, a friend and I were given the unique opportunity to sit and sketch for three days in Emily's bedroom. The famous white linen dress was moved onto the stairwell, and positioning my chair in front of it, I felt that I was visiting with the very poet herself.

This determined woman in the yellow house, who wrote in the privacy of her rose wallpapered bedroom, has inspired me.

It was by chance that we landed in Amherst twenty-five years ago, not knowing the impression Emily Dickinson's life and poems would have on me. Squeezing out tubes of yellow oil paint in my studio each day, and watching the same early morning sun rise "a ribbon at a time" has been an extraordinary gift.

Photo Credit: Stephen Petegorsky Photography

Previous page: "Emily's Dress," pencil on paper.

Left above: Emily's House in Wind, Rain, and Night

Left below: a small painting of Austin and Susan Dickinson's dining room. The painting was displayed on the Evergreens dining room table during Emily's 188th birthday party at the Homestead.

Facing page above: a drawing of Emily Dickinson's bedroom titled "Emily's New Wallpaper"

Facing page below, "If you were coming in the fall," color pencil on giclee print.

Photo Credit: Nancy Meagher

Following page above: "The Night Was Wide, Austin and Susan's House," oil on canvas.

Following page below: Emily's Wallpaper Comes to Life (Ballerinas).

All of the works are less than 24 inches on a side except "Emily's House in Wind, Rain, and Night, which is The oil paintings 40" x 30."

The oils have dimension: Meagher uses a heavy impasto that was especially striking in the otherwise charmless lighting of an academic library.

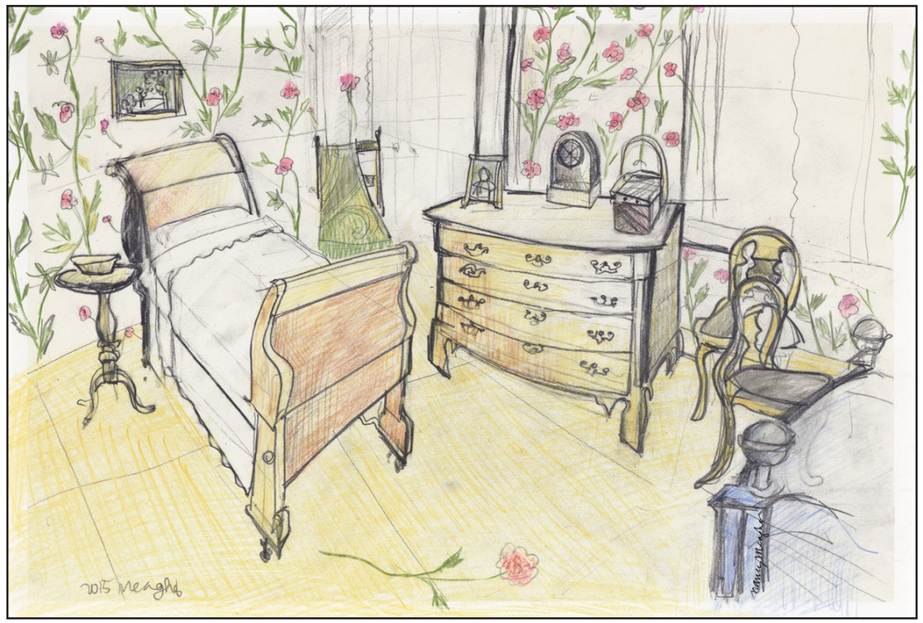


Photo Credit: Stephen Petegorsky Photography

Photo Credit: Stephen Petegorsky Photography

Photo Credit: Stephen Petegorsky Photography

Photo Credit: Stephen Petegorsky Photography

Rolf Amsler-Gross, 1930-2018

By Margaret H. Freeman

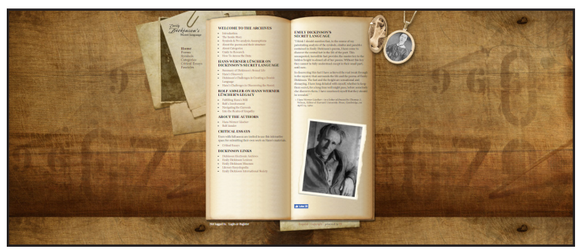
Rolf Amsler died in 2018. His work to promote and digitize the theories of Swiss Dickinson translator Hans Luescher (1901-1991) was discussed by Margaret Freeman in an article in the Fall 2012 issue of the Bulletin*: "Hans devoted more than thirty years of his life to deciphering Dickinson's secret language through the creation of a complex symbol system. . . . The result of Hans's labors is a massive database which he was never able to publish in his lifetime. This database . . . he bequeathed to his relative, Rolf Amsler, in the hopes that Rolf would be able to make his findings available to the world."*

Emily Dickinson scholarship owes an enormous debt to Rolf Amsler for preserving Hans Luescher's lifelong study of Emily Dickinson's secret language. Before the computer age, Hans spent over forty years laboriously working out the symbol system he discerned in Dickinson's poetry. Rolf was clearly committed to do what he could to fulfil Hans's wishes to publish his Dickinson work. Over the twenty years Rolf spent digitalizing Hans's typewritten notes and working out how to publish them, he finally created a website that includes an archive of all Hans's extensive notes on Dickinson's poetry as well as detailed coverage of his history and research, associated critical research, and Rolf's own involvement in the project.

Rolf had earlier contacted me through EDIS, searching for someone who might help him with the tremendous task he faced in bringing Hans Luescher's monumental and controversial work on Dickinson's poetry to the public eye. I agreed to act as his consultant. In 1997, Don and I were in Freiburg for a conference, and Rolf and Doris had invited us for lunch at their home in Schönenbuch, Switzerland. As we prepared to leave for the train station, the television news flashed a message: Princess Diana had died in a car accident in Paris. It was August 31, 1997.

I returned a year later to spend a long weekend at Schönenbuch to read through the Dickinson material that Rolf was still in the process of transcribing onto the computer. Hans had organized his notes on Dickinson's poems into lettered packets, much as Dickinson had arranged her poems into fascicles. The experience was intense and indescribable. Rolf and Doris were generous hosts, and I spent many hours poring over the entire collection of Hans's work, including a novel that gave me insights into Hans's motivation in engaging with Dickinson's poetry. I couldn't put it down.

The following year, Rolf travelled to the States to attend the EDIS conference at Mount Holyoke College, August 12-15, 1999, where he and I gave a presentation on "Emily Dickinson's Double Language: An Introduction to the Writings of Hans W. Luescher" that was subsequently published in the proceedings volume, *Emily Dickinson at Home*, edited by Gudrun M. Grabher and Martina Antretter (Trier 2001). Many Dickinsonians there will remember Rolf 's kindness and friendly generosity.



Rolf Amsler's digitized version of Hans Luescher's theories about Dickinson can be found online at www.emily-dickinson.net

Rolf was born in 1930 to a family prominent in the military and political scene in Switzerland. His father was an officer and instructor in the Army, and his maternal grandparent was a Professor of Agriculture and founder of the Swiss Farmers Organisation. Fluent in English, Rolf travelled widely throughout the world on business assignments for Swiss Companies, and was able to take his family on many occasions to visit his mother and stepfather in California. On his retirement, in addition to his Dickinson work, Rolf built a small vineyard, enjoyed spending time with his numerous grandchildren, and was an avid yachtsman.

Rolf and I both realised that undertaking a full account of Hans's symbol system and its significance was beyond our reach. Our hope was that the website would provide the basic material needed for possible future graduate study explorations. Unfortunately, Rolf died before he could realise his plan to establish a foundation that would support further research. I do not know as yet what the future status of the website will be, but I encourage you to visit it and explore both Hans's and Rolf's great achievement for yourself at http://www.emily-dickinson.net/.

Margaret H. Freeman is the Co-Director of the Myrifield Institute for Cognition and the Arts. She was the first president of EDIS, and she co-edits a series of books on Cognition and Poetics for Oxford UP.

Series Editor, Diana Wagner

Some Harmonic Nook: Eric Nathan and Dickinson in Song

Composer Eric Nathan, a recipient of a Rome Prize from the American Academy in Rome and a Guggenheim Fellowship, has written works commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic and the Aspen Music Festival. He is currently David S. Josephson Assistant Professor of Music at Brown University. His song cycle Some Favored Nook*, with texts adapted by librettist Mark Campbell, takes place in Civil War-era America and is inspired by the significant correspondence between an unlikely pair: Emily Dickinson and Thomas Wentworth Higginson.*

The piece, which he refers to as a chamber opera, is set for soprano, baritone, and piano. It has three movements, exploring Dickinson's vocation, Higginson's wartime experience, and their meeting with one another. It premiered in March 2019 in Providence.

DW: When and how did you first "meet" Emily Dickinson?

EN: While I have been reading Dickinson's poetry since I was in grade school, I think the time I first I truly "met" Dickinson's poetry was when I visited the Dickinson Museum and entered her room. I think there is something powerful about a sense of place that can help one feel connection to the past, and experiencing the sense of the house and her room where she wrote her poetry made her seem much more human to me and her struggles much more real. She was no longer an abstract figure of "genius" whose work I had read and learned in school, and I felt a deeper connection to the person behind the writing and it in turn made her writing feel more alive to me.

DW: We know that Dickinson learned to play piano when she was quite young. And she was also known to lead hootenannies late into the night! For many of us who are musicians, we engage in the extroversion of performance despite our yearning for reclusiveness. Is that the case for you as well? What is it about music that draws Dickinson and you into such a public sphere as performance?

EN: My life as a musician and teacher straddles these opposite realms of introversion and extroversion. Composing, for me, is a solitary endeavor, and it requires quiet time to look within myself, trying to solve the musical puzzles I present myself, answering questions that I may not yet know I am posing. However, I always feel the composing process is not completely solitary – it is a dialogue and exchange between me and my "characters," whether they are the instruments I'm writing for, the musical motives I'm using, or character roles in a dramatic work. Teaching and performing, on the other hand, is a more directly public form of communication. I feel that I need the introversion of composing and extroversion of teaching to be the best I can be at both. The extroversion keeps my music more immediate, and I use my experiences and discoveries writing music to inform my teaching and performance.

Photo Credit: Move Mountains Photography

What's Your Story?

DW: There has been much written about Dickinson and Higginson. Your 2017 composition *Some Favored Nook* places their relationship within the Civil War context and explores the social constructs of the day. How did this connection come to be?

EN: I read Brenda Wineapple's book, *White Heat*, and became fascinated by Higginson and Dickinson's correspondence and the various thematic intersections between their lives. I then read through Dickinson's letters to Higginson and Higginson's diaries and essays. I was drawn to the juxtaposition of two contrasting figures who each faced their own struggles. Higginson was a person of action, famous in his day but now almost completely forgotten, and he fought fiercely for the abolition of slavery and to give voice to women poets. Dickinson, on the other hand, was a private person, practically unknown during her time, but is now one of the America's most celebrated poets. However, living in an intensely patriarchal society, she struggled as a woman to be a poet, and it took bravery to reach out to Higginson. I felt that Dickinson and Higginson's is a story that needed to be told through music. Theirs is filled with contradictions, struggles, and parallels to issues of race and gender that are crucially important in our own divisive time.

DW: Seth Knopp, Artistic Director of Yellow Barn, said that you write "music from a quiet but very passionate place." I think most readers would say that also describes Dickinson's poetry writing. When you are reading Dickinson, do you meet her in that quiet place or the passionate place? Some place in between?

EN: I composed much of *Some Favored Nook* on a residency in the solitude of Aaron Copland's secluded home, Copland House. While reading Dickinson's poetry for this project, I think I met her first in a quiet place, but my solitary focus led me to feel a more passionate response to her work. After living in her poetic world for a few weeks, reading her poem, "They shut me up in Prose" (Fr445), upset and infuriated me intensely (more than it had before). I think I was trying earnestly to place myself in her world in order to best see how to bring her character's desires and struggles to life, like an actor would. I then tried to capture these feelings in the music. It was a way for me to release them, and I think show that I felt I had "heard" her – at least as I felt I did at that specific point in time in my own life.

I want my music to feel fresh and immediate – as if were were watching a play or a film, where the acting is so good that we forget it's just theater. Life is unpredictable and so are conversations. . . . In the end, I like it when a piece of music I wrote surprises me, too. I tend to think of my pieces as children that go out into the world and find their own selves.

DW: Dickinson often wrote in the predictable Watts hymn form, and yet her poetry isn't predictable at all! Having listened to some of your musical excerpts, I think your music is also unpredictable. And like a Dickinson poem, we're not quite sure where we'll land at the end, but we are glad to be there when we do. Do you find yourself wanting to challenge listeners' presumptions? Do our assumptions about music or poetry prevent us from hearing it fully?

EN: I want my music to feel fresh and immediate – as if were were watching a play or a film, where the acting is so good that we forget it's just theater. Life is unpredictable and so are conversations. I find a conversation interesting when someone reacts slightly differently than I expected or I learn something new from the exchange. If it's predictable there can also be a pleasure in having my expectation rewarded, and on the contrary, an interaction with someone could be also so unexpected as to turn one's world upside down – a potentially frightening prospect. In my music, I feel it's a balancing act between these extremes, keeping them in proportion in order to meet my expressive goals. In the end, I like it when a piece of music I wrote surprises me, too. I tend to think of my pieces as children that go out into the world and find their own selves. I keep hearing and finding new things in music that I know well as the years go on – both in music by others and my own. I think it's the same with returning to a poem or book we love. How does the artwork do that? Perhaps, our efforts to try to make sense of unpredictability may help us lend meaning to what we hear or read. We also keep changing and the world around us does, too.

DW: If there is one thing you would like people to know about Dickinson, what would it be?

EN: If you let Dickinson's writing into your own world, find your own meaning in it, it will be greater than anything I can tell you I feel I "learned." Her writing nourishes and keeps giving. Revel in the beauty that someone's words from one hundred and fifty years ago can help us see our own world anew and find meaning in our own lives.

A fuller description of Some Favored Nook, *as well as an excerpt, can be found here: http://www.ericnathanmusic.com/some-favored-nook*

Renée Bergland, Book Review Editor

Jennifer Putzi and Alexandra Socarides, ed.
A History of Nineteenth-Century American Women's Poetry
Cambridge University Press, 2017

By Karen Kilcup

Jennifer Putzi and Alexandra Socarides introduce their outstanding collection by underlining its scholarly prehistory. Noting that "nineteenth-century American women poets have long been regarded as too sentimental, too conventional, too popular—an undifferentiated mass not worthy of scholarly attention," they highlight two substantial obstacles the field has had to overcome. First is the mistaken belief that Emily Dickinson was "writing against the work of her female peers"; second is scholars' stress on the novel, which they have argued uses sentimentalism to more complicated or subversive ends than poetry. The editors' goal is "construct a history of sorts . . . that can be used to provide a framework for this rapidly expanding field of study." To this end they emphasize poetry over poets and showcase "a diversity of contexts for the production, circulation, and consumption of poetry." They prioritize poetry emerging from what we might call outsider contexts. This approach yields a multifaceted set of essays that provide welcome openings for future research.

The editors organize the volume into three periods. Part I, "1800-1840, American Poesis and the National Imaginary," includes essays on key authors (Lucy Terry Prince, Lydia Sigourney, Elizabeth Oakes Smith, Felicia Hemans), but it also considers genres or modes (album verse, the friendship elegy, pre-poetess verse) and circulation issues (gift book culture). Part II ("1840-1865, Unions and Disunions") features numerous individual writers (including Margaret Fuller, Sigourney, Hemans, Sarah Josepha Hale, Phoebe Cary, Frances Harper, Sarah Piatt, Elizabeth Akers Allen, Elizabeth Stoddard, and Ella Wheeler Wilcox). Even more than the first section, section two emphasizes conceptual or thematic groupings rather than individual authors. Transcendentalist writing, working-class women's poetry, transatlantic networks, anthology poetry, poetry and parody, the poetry of slavery and abolition, Southern women's poetry, and poetry and bohemianism all receive attention.

The final chapters in Part III, "1865-1900, Experiment and Expansion," continue this wide-ranging approach, incorporating essays on American women's realist poetry, verse forms, American Indian women's poetry, Reconstruction poetry, the dramatic monologue, children's poetry, and transnational poetry. The section – and the volume – concludes with Mary Loeffelholz' essay, "The Creation of Emily Dickinson and the Study of Nineteenth-Century American Women's Poetry." Notwithstanding the numerous writers the collection encompasses, a few appear in several essays. Three in particular (Lydia Sigourney, Frances Harper, and Sarah Piatt) warrant sustained attention for their aesthetic innovations, cultural interventions, and long careers.

This short review allows me to sketch only a few individual contributions. Highlighting the elegy for Lucy Terry Prince published by the distinguished African American minister, Reverend Lemuel Haynes, Mary Lou Kete's essay revitalizes our understanding of Prince and frames subsequent chapters. Tamara Harvey's chapter argues poetry's cultural centrality for the "post-Wheatley pre-Sigourney period." Its witty first sentence reflects the collection's engaging approach: "In January of 1790, *The Massachusetts Magazine; or, Monthly Museum* faced an embarrassing excess of Constantias." Kerry Larson's essay reaffirms Sigourney's virtuosity with genres and renews our understanding of her rhetorical energies and "[t]he sheer exuberance animating [her] love of eloquence and decorum."

Moving from this famous poet to unknown writers, Michael C. Cohen illuminates album verse, reminding us that "[s]cribal authors are the hidden majority among nineteenth-century American poets." Arguing persuasively for the importance of children's poetry, Angela Sorby provides an indispensable taxonomy of two (often interrelated) types: "poetry that reflects and promotes the interdependence of women and children, and poetry that idealizes childhood autonomy." Cristanne Miller's essay explores mid-to-late nineteenth-century verse forms by surveying five touchstone anthologies between 1874 and 1998. Miller contends that – contra the standard view – post-Civil War verse did not lead "progressively toward the formal originality of modernism" but that this postwar period did exhibit two important trends: an emphasis on longer-lined formal verse and on shorter poems. Miller's essay exemplifies an important strength of the collection: many chapters model innovative interpretive methodologies.

This collection's scope engenders a desire for even more coverage, and perhaps the most generous approach here is to identify a few opportunities for future scholarship. One essay that many scholars will welcome is a study of western women's poetry, which might include poets from the "First West" of Michigan (Jane Johnston Schoolcraft) and Ohio (Alice and Phoebe Cary). Born in Kentucky, Sarah Piatt lived for some time in Ohio, and her contemporaries often wrote about her as a western poet. Elaine Goodale Eastman lived in the Dakotas for several years; the Cherokee poets whom Robert Dale Parker addresses in his chapter also belong in this grouping. The far west contributed some important voices – not just Colorado-based Helen Hunt Jackson and California transplant Charlotte Perkins Gilman but also the first California Poet Laureate, San Franciscan Ina Coolbrith. Numerous conceptual perspectives, such as mythologies of the West, suggest themselves.

Another prospective essay could focus on nature writing and environmental writing – essential subjects for our current situation in the Anthropocene. From Lydia Sigourney's "Fallen Forests" to Celia Thaxter's "The Great Blue Heron," this poetry spans many decades and encompasses many different writers, places, and perspectives. And a third possibility might detail women's contributions (and resistance) to conventional long poem forms, including epic. Among the volumes that merit sustained collective attention are Sarah Wentworth Morton's *Ouabi: or the Virtues of Nature; An Indian Tale in Four Cantos* (1790), Sigourney's *Traits of the Aborigines of America* (1822), Frances Harper's *Moses: A Story of the Nile* (1869), and Lucy Larcom's *An Idyl of Work* (1875).

Putzi and Socarides have assembled a distinguished set of contributors with deep and broad experience in the field, making this volume an unusually valuable resource for new and experienced scholars as well as graduate students who seek a textured, provocative introduction to nineteenth-century American women's poetry. Both because it covers so much ground and because it elicits so many new directions, Putzi's and Socarides's collection represents an indispensable reference, not just for scholars and students of nineteenth-century American women's poetry, but for anyone interested in American literary and cultural history.

Karen Kilcup, Elizabeth Rosenthal Excellence Professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, is the author of Fallen Forests: Emotion, Embodiment, and Ethics in American Women's Environmental Writing*, as well as a book on Robert Frost and nineteenth-century women poets. She has edited many books on such subjects as Sara Orne Jewett, nineteenth-century children's poetry, and Native American writing. She is the current editor of* ESQ*, and she has published on Dickinson in the* EDJ, Legacy*, as well as a collection of essays on Hawthorne and women.*

Norman Lock
The Wreckage of Eden
Bellevue Literary Press, 2018

By Annelise Brinck-Johnsen

Norman Lock's *The Wreckage of Eden* is not a bad book. To the contrary, it is a well-executed tale of an army chaplain wrestling with his faith and some of the thornier questions confronting nineteenth century America (expansionism, slavery, self-determination, the Great Awakening). The protagonist, Robert Winter, is believable as a man who slowly loses his faith in God and the American idea. The book is perfectly suited to 2018: the publishers describe it as capturing "a nation riven by conflicts that continue to this day." At times it's a bit of a stretch, though. Like Zelig or Forrest Gump, Winter shows up at a few too many crucial historical events. He begins the book fighting in the Mexican American War, becomes a close personal friend to Lincoln, fights in the Utah War, and speaks to John Brown immediately before his execution. All in all, Winter is a man in the grand tradition of literary American men: he has adventures that cause him to ponder the nature of God, America, and sex, and he feels deep emotions about all of them.

This book is the fifth in Lock's "American Novels" series of literary historical fiction centered on great 19th century American writers: Twain, Whitman, Poe, Thoreau, and now Dickinson. Lock is an elegant writer, and his love of the era and mastery of the literary and political history are clear. The only off-note in this book is Winter's relationship to Dickinson – but sadly, that forms the bleeding heart of the tale. To read a novel that consciously highlights the ways in which the tensions of the American 19th century unfurl into the 21st without any clear consideration of the way in which the hero frames his relationship to the women in his life makes this reader uneasy.

My difficulty lies with the central conceit: the book is meant to be addressed to Emi-

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

ly Dickinson. Despite taking the form of a letter to Dickinson, the book and its hero set her up as a distant fantasy, almost completely outside the scope of nineteenth-century history. Dickinson is idolized and despised in turn, yet she is rarely imagined outside of the monotonous totality of Winter's churning first-person narration. There is an inherent oddity in contriving a novel written to one of America's foremost poets whose main character spends 278 pages attempting to woo the poet yet also admits that he has "no appreciation for your crabbed verses, even if I honor them for having come from you."

Winter opens his letter to Dickinson with a desire to be "frank," and proceeds to diagnose Dickinson at length, and to confess his many sins to her – but he never truly engages with Dickinson or her poetry. Unfortunately for Lock, Billy Collins has already led many readers to consider the perils and pleasures of undressing Emily Dickinson. Instead, Winter describes his sex life with his wife. In one of many uncomfortably explicit descriptions, he describes the woman he eventually marries as "a big-boned, large-hearted girl…[who] could milk a cow, deliver a foal, cook, sew, and put a sick dog out of its misery," and comments, "I liked her because she was unlike you, Emily." I'm not sure that this evokes Dickinson in any meaningful way. Previously, when I thought of Emily Dickinson I had never considered her lack of farm animal skills or her inability to shoot sick dogs. I doubt I will be able to read "I started Early – Took my Dog" in the same way.

But reading Dickinson's poetry is not central here. There's no effort to turn the narrator's steely eye on Dickinson's work or even on her personal history. Although the novel claims to be obsessed with Dickinson, it ultimately ignores her. In *The Wreckage of Eden*, Lock has created a masterful and persuasive portrait of a toxically self-centered intellectual man, which renders the book a convincing portrait of American history and a startlingly unpleasant read.

Annelise Brinck-Johnsen recently completed a her MSt. in Women's Studies at Oxford University; she is currently studying law at Columbia.

2019 EDIS Fellowship Awards

Vanessa Cook
Graduate Student Fellowship

Vanessa Cook's research project is entitled "Emily Dickinson and Nineteenth-Century Psychology" and situates Dickinson's poetry in relation to different philosophies of the mind circulating in nineteenth-century American culture. She provides evidence for Dickinson's familiarity with psychological theory going far beyond the Scottish-American mental philosophy taught at Amherst Academy. Dickinson's work offers us, she argues, an alternative psychology that is in dialogue with phrenology, with the neurological and physiological ideas of Victorian psychology and with Darwinian concepts of emotional expressiveness.

Vanessa is currently completing her PhD thesis at University College London where her supervisor is Dr Linda Freedman. She holds a Master in English from Cambridge University and a Master in Gender Studies from Oxford University. She is also the recipient of the Jane Austen Graduate Student prize as well as prizes from Cambridge University for literary studies and original poetry compositions.

Zachary Tavlin
Dickinson Scholar Award

Zachary Tavlin is currently working on two book projects. The first, "Glancing Visions: American Literature Beyond the Gaze," makes a case for the centrality of glancing in American literature, exploring critiques of the possessive gaze already developing in the nineteenth century by writers exposed to contemporaneous developments in visual art and technology. A keystone chapter on Emily Dickinson proceeds in methodological contrast to ubiquitous theories of "the gaze" that have been applied in contemporary Dickinson criticism, charting a new trajectory in her art that brings together material poetics, phenomenology, art history, animal studies, and ecocritism.

Zachary Tavlin is Adjunct Assistant Professor of the Liberal Arts at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He completed his PhD in English literature in 2018 at the University of Washington. His research focuses on the intersections of American literature and poetics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the history of philosophy, and visual culture. His work can be found in *ESQ*, *English*, *Nathaniel Hawthorne Review*, *Edgar Allan Poe Review*, *Wallace Stevens Journal*, *Mississippi Quarterly*, *The Comparatist*, *Transatlantica*, and *Continental Philosophy Review*, with writing forthcoming in *Early American Literature*, *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, and *Diacritics*. He is also co-editing a collection on Dickinson and the anthropocene (with Marta Werner and Keith Mikos), which aims to bring together top scholars interested in expanding the scales typically associated with reading and editing the poet's work.

Nishnianidze
Continued from page 12

resorting to her poetic delights, Giorgi Nishnianidze, being confronted with the same dilemmas, found an escape from the reality he never accepted. Passionate words of a lonely American woman who talked to an unknown addressee led his way to an eternity which looked more tangible than an ugly decomposed existence outside.

Notes

[1]Isaiah Berlin, "A Note on Literature and the Arts in the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic in the closing months of 1945," 1997, repr., Zvezda, *2003 No 7, 126–42. Published as "The Arts in Russia under Stalin,"* New York Review of Books, *19 Oct., 2000, 54-63.*

[2]Shota Nishnianidze, a famous Georgian lyrical poet, 1929-1999.

[3]He was a man of passion and never sought any personal gain. My younger brother, Constantine, was confined to home because of a severe form of epilepsy, which required the permanent attendance of my mother. Despite the personal hardships, Father – being true to his principles – refused to join the Communist Party although it would have meant a guaranteed career and other benefits.

* * *

[4]Giorgi Nishnianidze translated 32 poems of Emily Dickinson, which were published in 1985 in A Minor Anthology of English and American Verse. *Dickinson's poetry attracted attention of many Georgian poets and translators. Zviad Gamsakhurdia published his translations of two of Dickinson's poems in 1971. In 1981 Dali Intskirveli published 100 plus translated poems. In 2005 Diogenes Publishers published* Dickinson's Selected Lyrics, *translations made by different translators through the years.*

[5]From Emily Dickinson's letter to Joseph Lyman, quoted in Richard Sewall, The Life of Emily Dickinson, *v2, (1974), 427.*

Come to Party, Stay for Soiree

Fifty years ago, sweet old John Berryman celebrated Miss Dickinson's one-hundred-thirty-first with a hearty poem. She belonged to the poets and the lovers of poems then, or so J.B. thought. But it's different now, and a bucks-up crew works the room during the candle-bright hours to see one luminary shining within the pallor of all but visible halos. Some bring their Dickinsons, used to call notice to themselves. Or is it merely a sighting they seek for a quick eye? It's all for the cause, this is, whatever that cause might be.

George Monteiro, Nov. 14, 2011

George Monteiro, as readers will know, is the author of works on Dickinson as well as many other figures in US, Brazilian, and Portuguese literature. His poems about Dickinson, which appear regularly in the Bulletin, *are part of a collection he is preparing of poems about writers. To the right he appears in the Dickinson family plot with Barton Levi St. Armand, his long-time colleague at Brown.*

Photo Credit: Kate Monteiro

A Letter from President Mossberg On the Eve of the Conference in Asilomar

Dear EDISers,

On behalf of our Board and Conference Cognoscenti, I am excited to think about our upcoming "international" conference that is being held not internationally, per se, but in a place of global significance. After meetings at distinguished institutions ranging from Asia to Europe, we are meeting halfway, as far west as we can get from Amherst in an equally distinguished outdoors institution: a historic state park and ecological preserve that includes lions and butterflies! Does this mean that we are far from Emily Dickinson's mindset as a poet?

Au contraire! We contend that Dickinson is wild. She invites us to think this, with her dynamic intimacy with volcanoes, earthquakes, maelstroms, "wild nights," storms, waves that overtake you. . . . Seething, oozing, erupting, flooded, she commits to telling us Nature's "news." Although she said she "never saw the sea," she promptly tells us she "started early, took my dog, and visited the sea." We are exploring her inner wild, her seaside stance, and her ecological sensibility that puts her in the category today of such writers as Thoreau, and in our own time, Mary Oliver.

At the edge of the continent, we explore Dickinson's edginess. She pointed our attention to her bravery, her boldness. She incites our conspiracy with her as "Nobodies," against the Somebody hegemony; she leads insurrections to poetic practice.

In the West, we see a context for Dickinson as an explorer, blazing paths across territory in very new ways from Western explorers ("'Soto! Explore thyself!"). Surely, on these shifting sands, in this wild and startlingly beautiful sanctuary, Dickinson is at home, and our conference locates something deep and enduring about her, some "news" that is new to Dickinson studies.

On this note, in addition to a panoply of papers and panels from scholars around the world who rise – leap, and soar – to the occasion of our conference, we have a thrilling set of keynote presentations by three internationally famous Dickinson critics, poets, and cultural studies leaders: Sandra Gilbert, Alicia Ostriker, and Wendy Martin. Each night will feature a presentation by these pioneering leaders, featuring her own work and reflections on half a century of work illuminating Dickinson and creating new ways of seeing and experiencing and understanding our world and our selves.

Our conference program includes an opera about Dickinson, poetry from our participants, and Dickinson shenanigans (you knew this, you knew this): we will have the inaugural White Dress/White Suit Parade, in which people will don white (bring your best), start early, and visit the sea. We will leave from the historic Victorian gazebo in Jewell Park in Pacific Grove, our conference town, and walk (with our dogs – Emily Dickinson historic leashes available) to the sea, where waves crash upon rocks and spray flies into the air for the occasion. We will also have a seaside campfire program, singing songs, telling stories, and reciting poetry beneath the stars, eating s'mores (my Presidential Gift to the Conference), as we sing "You Are My Sunshine." We will have a seafood barbeque on the sands (shoes optional), our version of the annual conference banquet.

The special feature of this conference is that it is held in an internationally renowned conference center dedicated to programs that allow for 24/7 flow among participants. It is the equivalent of a cruise. One lodging price includes all conference meals, including the banquet, and snacks, meeting venues, campfire program, and gatherings inside and out on terraces under the pines and stars, overlooking the dunes. There are fire pits, pools, walking trails, pianos, and fireplaces strewn around, as well as an old-fashioned lodge for participants to meet and keep the conversations going in one coherent flow. We gather for our meals at the Crocker Dining Center, under great beams, around common tables, from breakfast to dinner. Everything is close at hand, and our conference makes its various activities both intense and relaxed. It is a new genre we are creating: destination scholarship; a resort experience conference. There's a beauty in addition to the natural beauty that is being revealed: it is us, each of us, who has come to join in this fest to honor the windswept ringing plains of a Wild West Amherst. It is your faces by the firelight and starlight and sunrise, your voices with the waves and sea lions, your shared insights lighting us, and your glow of friendship that strengthens the meaning of EDIS in our lives.

By Heathenwalls - Own work, CC0, https://commons.

Asilomar Conference Center meeting room.

In addition, we get to know a Victorian town that loves poetry. Not only does it have a Poet in Residence, and many programs by our own EDIS Chapter, but it is an ethos of nature. Pacific Grove drew international attention in 1939 when it passed an ordinance making it a misdemeanor to molest a butterfly. It is the butterfly capital of the world.

Today, the City of Pacific Grove boasts over 1,200 historic buildings on its official Historic Register, and is home to a half dozen structures that have earned a place on the National Historic Register. It has a Poet's Perch, in which I lived, dedicated to poetry, and given to the City by a poet who loved Emily Dickinson, Whitney Latham-Lechich, named for the mother of the building's owner, who loved poetry, and a main street with a hardware store that sells wheelbarrows and ladders, and a stationery store, and a grocery with a butcher who sells home-made pickles, and a bakery (well, several bakeries), and a newspaper that covers local events and publishes hometown poetry every week. It sponsors Occupy Cannery Row with a flashmob of Nobodies. I can't wait to welcome you, at Phoebe's Café, named for Phoebe Hearst, who convinced William Randolph to hire Julia Morgan, our conference site architect, a fellow visionary to Emily Dickinson!

Sincerely,
Barbara

Dr. Barbara Mossberg
President, Emily Dickinson International Society, along with our Fantastic Board and our Conference Leadership, headed by Elizabeth Petrino.

Featured Keynote Speakers

Sandra Gilbert is a legend in Dickinson studies for her seminal work, written with Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). She has spent most of her career the University of California at Davis, where she currently holds Professor Emerita status. For four years she held the C. Barnwell Straut Chair of English at Princeton. Gilbert was President of the MLA in 1996. Her other scholarhip includes a three-volume study, also with Gubar, called *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*. She is the author of nine volumes of poetry and four non-fiction works, and she has edited numerous anthologies and essay collections.

Wendy Martin became familiar to Dickinsonians with her 1984 book *An American Triptych: The Lives and Work of Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, and Adrienne Rich*, and she has continued to do work that is highly valued, especially though by no means exclusively by students, by editing *The Cambridge Introduction to Emily Dickinson* (2007) and *All Things Dickinson: An Encyclopedia of Emily Dickinson's World* (2014). She teaches at the Claremont Graduate University and she edits *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. Her most recent publication is *The Routledge Introduction to American Women Writers* (2016).

Alicia Ostriker is one of the country's most celebrated poets. Author of fifteen collections of poetry, she has also written nine works of scholarship and criticism on subjects ranging from William Blake, to biblical studies, and, in the title of her 1983 book, *Writing Like a Woman*. Her poetry, translated into at least eight languages, and her scholarship have garnered innumerable awards including, most recently, her having been named New York State Poet in 2018 and the Choice Outstanding Academic Title, in 2008, for *For the Love of God*, her second book about the Bible.

To Another Sea: Dickinson, Environment, and the West: Panels, Round-Tables, and Performances

The formal part of the conference will feature panels on a range of topics relating to the title, "Dickinson, Environment, and the West." Not surprisingly, given the topic, a group of scholars are preparing papers for a panel labeled "Ecopoetics," and there are a number of related papers on other panels. Dickinson confessed that she "never saw the Sea" (Fr800), but several papers will show how that very absence taught her to play on the homonym Sea/See, to take prospective voyages, and to explore the sensory apprehension of Sce (see/sea) nery more generally.

If Dickinson never saw the sea, she certainly never saw the west; nevertheless, several scholars will explore her visions and revisions of western US topics, while others will explore, more remotely, the place of Time and Distance in her work, physically, as well as through the interpersonal context of Sympathy and Intimacy.

Another way to see the sea is through someone else's travels. Several panels include papers that will address Dickinson alongside other authors, some of whom lived by the sea, some of whom traveled, some of whom, like the poet herself, voyaged imaginatively. Fellow travelers in these papers include the Brontës, Robinson Jeffers, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Henry David Thoreau.

"The shore is safer," she told Abiah Root, "but I love to buffet the sea" (L39). What sea she means she does not say, but the sea was a most supple figure for her. As her letter to Abiah suggests, it could often accommodate reflections on Rebellion and Dissent: accordingly a group of papers will address this topic, as it pertains to faith, prosody, and interpersonal relations. Finally a conference on Dickinson and the environment, set by the Pacific, will appropriately include papers on reading her poems in the light of Darwin.

Some of the most intriguing topics proposed have less to do with the theme of the conference, but will likely draw heavy attendance nonetheless. Scholars will discuss Dickinson and Music, and artists will present "An Opera for Rhapsodist." That opera will include a lecture, and will perhaps prepare for a more general roundtable discussion of Dickinson and the Performing Arts. Of course the most popular performing art of our age is film: there will be another panel discussion of Biography and the Bio-Pic, and whether or not they have anything to do with reading poetry.

Photo Credits, left, Pacific Grove Chamber of Commerce; right, Asilomar Conference Grounds

"That Granitic Base" Julia Morgan's Brilliant Career

On a Columnar Self –
How ample to rely
In Tumult – or Extremity –
How good the Certainty

That Lever cannot pry –
And Wedge cannot divide
Conviction – That Granitic Base –
Though none be on our side –
(Fr740)

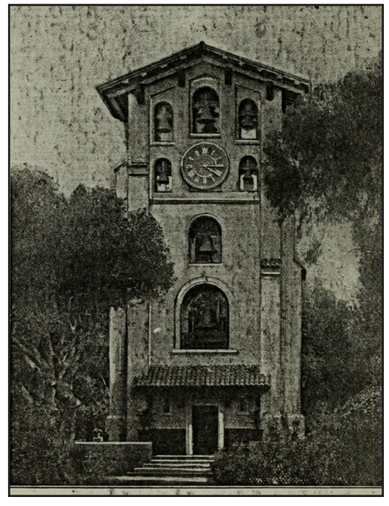
Julia Morgan received her first major commission right after earthquake and fire had ravaged the city of San Francisco. One structure left standing, across the bay in Oakland but near the faultline, was El Campanil at Mills College, the first freestanding bell tower at a US college. Mills, originally Mills Seminary, was the first women's college west of the Rockies. There are a lot of firsts in Julia Morgan's story.

El Campanil is an elegant mission style tower with ten bells. With a reinforced concrete core, it was ideally designed for the San Andreas Faultline – "earthquake style" (Fr517). Its survival drew attention to Morgan's name and techniques. After the fire, she was hired to replace the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco as well as other buildings.

Studying Dickinson at a conference center designed by Morgan is appropriate. The architect and the poet were both independent innovators who relied on a strong internal structure, in their work and in their character. For both, an elaborate, sometimes even whimsical visible style was undergirded by a solid interior.

The two sides to her style grew out of her training. Born in 1872 the daughter of a mining engineer, Julia Morgan studied civil engineering at Berkeley, a fit preparation for someone figuring out how to build against the threat of an earthquake. But one of her professors and the husband of a cousin encouraged her to reach higher. She went on to train in Paris, at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, where she studied the range of 19th-century European styles and became the first woman to gain a degree in architecture at the legendary Paris academy.

One of the first buildings she worked on when she returned to the US was the Hearst mining building at Berkeley. This early connection to San Francisco's most powerful family later led to her connection with Phoebe Apperson Hearst, wife of mining tycoon and US senator George Hearst.



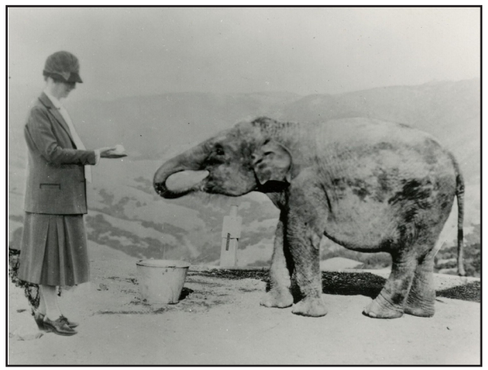
El Campanil, from Polk-Husted Directory Co's Oakland, Berkeley, and Alameda Directory for 1911.

Phoebe Hearst was the region's most important philanthropist, a regent of and a generous benefactor to the university at Berkeley. One of her favorite projects was the promotion of the Young Women's Christian Association in the American west. She saw that many young women were arriving in the city to find clerical or manufacturing work, but that they had no safe place to live and to associate with one another. Under Hearst's sponsorship, Morgan designed more than a dozen YWCA centers in California and elsewhere, effectively facilitating a safe and independent life for a new generation of urban women.

Morgan's first YWCA project began in 1912, a conference center in Pacific Grove, near Monterey. Asilomar was designed in the popular Arts and Crafts style, in which granite fireplaces anchored complex designs of exposed girders and redwood walls. Still in development until 1932, Asilomar came into general use when Pacific Grove was named a state park in 1956.

Like a latter-day Lorenzo Ghiberti, who devoted his life, and narrowed his talent, to the decoration of the doors of the Florence Baptistry, Morgan was blessed and cursed by the award of a major project, and her name became so closely associated with it that for a long time her other work was obscured. For 28 years she worked on the legendarily lavish compound of buildings at San Simeon, the extravagant dream community of Phoebe Hearst's son, the publisher William Randolph Hearst.

Morgan never married. She had many strong professional connections, but she seems never to have sought an enduring



Above, the Long Beach YWCA; below, Morgan and Marianne the Elephant, at San Simeon. Both images are reprinted courtesy of Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, California

companion. According to her biographer, Sara Holmes Boutelle, she liked trips alone by freighter to Mexico, South America, and Europe: "architecture was her vocation and the love of her life." She declined to tell her own story, in articles or even in interviews: "My buildings speak for me," she said in reply to one request.

By the time she retired in 1951, six years before her death, she had designed more than 800 buildings, including edifices identified with education, industry, publishing and media, theatre, worship, trade, and domestic dwelling. In the first half of the 20th century, California grew from a dream and a promise into the most celebrated of American states; to an extent that has only recently come to be recognized, Julia Morgan played a major role.

Ode to Julia Morgan

1872-1957, the first woman licensed to practice architecture in California

The trochees of our names have drawn
rectangles below
the blue vaults of the swimming pool.
Rich men. Poor men.
So many animals in the zoo.
An elephant stands at the edge of a ditch
where another has fallen and died.
Do animals grieve? the scientists ask.
Look at her eyes.
Egyptians called themselves Cattle of the Sun
God, born as they were of his tears and sweat.
Limestone cutaways in West Virginia
weep each winter. The face of the whole
planet's a wailing wall
and scientists ask, Do they grieve?
Even here, Julia Morgan, bougainvillea cascading,
the On/Off of whitecaps,
white lines of the freeway,
cows on the hillsides (live stock),
and stars like a landscape in a landscape of gravity holding it
all. There are so many
plans, Julia Morgan. So many extant, destroyed, and repurposed
dwellings. In one, the scientists ask
their question. In another, you are dying alone.
Which one is blown by spring
winds across the tarmac, its own feathers working
against it? Which one have I not yet been?
I, He, She, and It grieve. Why do they
ask? California. West Virginia. Mountains
making fuel and mountains making beaches. We are each
our own industry, the cow and its god.
Draw me a lotus
flower, Julia Morgan, a pool
like a chapel.
A room like a poem.
Our names are drawn on our graves already.

From Sycamore *by Kathy Fagan (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2017). Copyright © 2017 by Kathy Fagan. Reprinted with permission from Milkweed editions, milkweed.org*

2019 International Conference

The Wild West of Emily Dickinson is Seen and Celebrated at Asilomar, California (who knew?)

A Question and Answer with Dr. Barbara Mossberg, EDIS President and Poet Laureate of Pacific Grove, California

Q. What – and why – is Asilomar?

A. Asilomar is an historic landmark, designed by one of the most famous architects in the world, Julia Morgan. Now California's state-owned conference center, it's set on sand dunes, where sea otters and sea lions and actual mountain lions converge in Pacific Grove, home to the Monarch Butterfly Sanctuary, and whose city council has voted me its Poet Laureate since 2010, so it's a very poetry-friendly place. It is also one of the most Victorian-architectured towns in America.

Q. I can see a connection with butterflies, Victorians, and your being poet in residence, and possibly sand dunes (as in "I started Early – Took my Dog – / And visited the sea" [Fr656]), but who is Julia Morgan? Does she have anything to do with Emily Dickinson?

A. Aha! Thank you for asking.

I will tell you some of the facts, and you can tell me what you think!

Julia Morgan was both an architect and engineer. Born in 1874, and raised in Oakland, California (the same as Gertrude Stein, another international cultural groundbreaker), she had strong role models in her mother and grandmother, who operated as an independent woman through personal family wealth. Morgan resisted the social roles for women of her time, insisting on an autonomous life and towards that end, an education. She graduated from UC Berkeley in 1894 with a B.S. degree with honors in civil engineering; she was the only woman in her math, science, engineering courses and in her engineering class. After her graduation, Morgan became a member of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae, now the American Association of University Women. Morgan was the first woman to be admitted to the architecture program at l'École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris and the first woman architect licensed in California. It is not a coincidence that she designed many buildings for institutions serving women and girls, including YWCA buildings (including Asilomar) and buildings for Mills College, an early college for women.

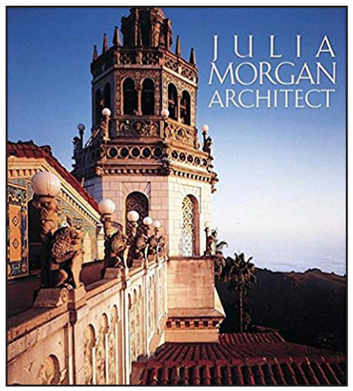
I like this quote from her official biography:

> Although Morgan was highly respected as an architect, not much is known about her personal life. She was never married and had no known romances. She kept a low profile and lived modestly, in spite of her wealthy clientele. She gave no interviews and did not write about herself. She worked tirelessly on minimal sleep and food. . . . (from Sara Holmes Boutelle's *Julia Morgan, Architect* [Abbeville Press 1988 – see image below]).

Q. Do you see a connection between her story and that of Emily Dickinson?

A. Who does this sound like? An incredibly accomplished woman whom society speculated about and continues to speculate about . . . in the case of Dickinson, we are just now, and still, discovering who she was, might have been. Our conference explores her inner wild, and I can't imagine a better place to do that than Asilomar, designed by Julia Morgan specifically to enable young women to conceive a way to be powerful and wild and free in their world, in sync with the natural and wild environment.

Q. Thank you. I hope to learn more about Julia Morgan in this conference! I didn't know about her.



A. I think it is interesting that like Dickinson, she is only now coming into her own. She was the first woman to receive the American Institute of Architect's highest award, the AIA Gold Medal, posthumously in 2014. She was ahead of her time in conceiving a way to engage with earthquakes; she (in the terms of her critics) "sought to reconcile Classical and Craftsman, scholarship and innovation, formalism and whimsy." I see a kindred spirit to Dickinson, and we will give a toast to Morgan at our campfire program. Of course, it will be "air" and "dew."

Emily Dickinson and Two Amherst Clergymen

By Kelly Sue Lynch

REV. HENRY L. HUBBELL.

Top, John Winn Underhill, from William Eastman Dickinson (1855) Class Album Materials, Amherst College Archives and Collections. Above, the Reverend Henry L. Hubbell.

On July 1, 1861, J. W. Underhill (John Winn Underhill; 1829-1862) wrote a letter to his cousin Jennie Parkhurst (Harriet Jane Parkhurst; 1837-1925) thanking her for some flowers. He went on to write, "Speaking of flowers let me tell you of a very pretty thing that was sent to Henry Hubbell the other day with a basket of flowers." He then quotes the Emily Dickinson poem "South winds jostle them" (Fr98) and writes, "Isn't that pretty? Have you ever seen it before?"

Underhill was minister of the North Amherst Congregational Church from October 6, 1859 until his death on October 17, 1862. An 1854 graduate of Amherst College, he went on to Andover Theological Seminary where he graduated along with Henry L. Hubbell in 1859. At the time of the letter, Hubbell (1831-1908) was the newly installed minister of the First Congregational Church in Amherst (April 24, 1861-April 4, 1865), the congregation of Emily Dickinson's family. The letter refers to Underhill's wife Mary (1830-1903), who, after John's death, married Charles Lothrop of Amherst.

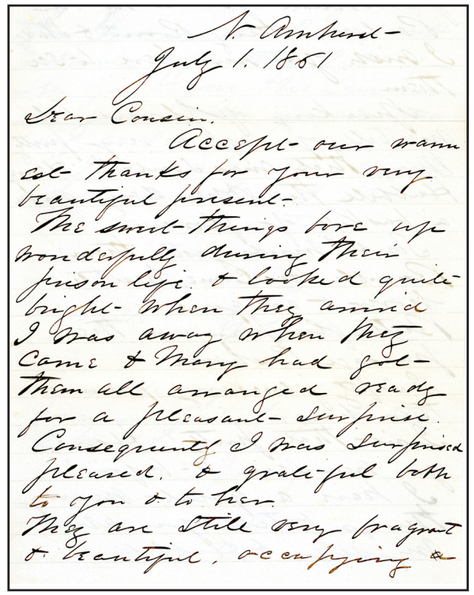
"South winds jostle them" was included in the second group of poems Dickinson sent to Thomas Wentworth Higginson in 1862, and copies are known to have been sent, presumably with flowers, to Louise and Frances Norcross and to her brother-in-law, Thomas Dwight Gilbert. The letter points to the existence of another lost or destroyed copy of the poem, and also, perhaps, to the existence of a relationship between Hubbell and Dickinson, who are not known to have corresponded with one another.

Underhill may have more of a connection with Dickinson as well; interestingly, when he became ill in 1862 and took a leave of absence from his church, he traveled in Europe and met Samuel Bowles, who wrote affectionately of him in *The Springfield Daily Republican*, Tuesday, October 14, 1862, p3. Narrating an encounter in Switzerland with "near a corporal's guard of young American clergymen," and lamenting Underhill's ill health, he describes how "we all sat together around the welcome fire of the Hospice of the Great St. Bernard, in the dry clothes of the hospitable fathers, and chatted of the terrible storm we had come through, and the more terrible ones that later travelers must experience. Our sympathy goes with its suffering one [Underhill]."

Sadly, but happily for us, the letter may survive because it was a beautiful keepsake of Underhill, who died not long after his return to North Amherst, at the young age of 33.

Hubbell retained his strong connection to Amherst. After leaving First Congregational Church he would return to Amherst over the years, often to convalesce, and in March 1868 his passport was notarized by Edward Dickinson and signed as a witness by Wm. A. Dickinson. Hubbell was married to Harriet Hinsdale (1825-1909), sister of Aurelia Davis (1827-1906), who long had a house near the Amherst Common where she would take in boarders. Daniel Lombardo writes of her in his book *Amherst and Hadley, Through the Seasons* (1998). Hubbell is buried in Wildwood Cemetery.

Kelly Sue Lynch is a psychologist and independent Emily Dickinson scholar who continues to do research on the Underhill letter.



N. Amherst
July 1, 1861
Dear Cousin,
Accept our warm
est thanks for your very
beautiful present.
The sweet things bore life
wonderfully during their
prison life + looked quite
bright when they arrived
I was away when they
came + Mary had got
them all arranged ready
for a pleasant surprise.
Consequently I was surprised
pleased, + grateful both
to you + to her.
They are still very fragrant
+ beautiful, occupying a

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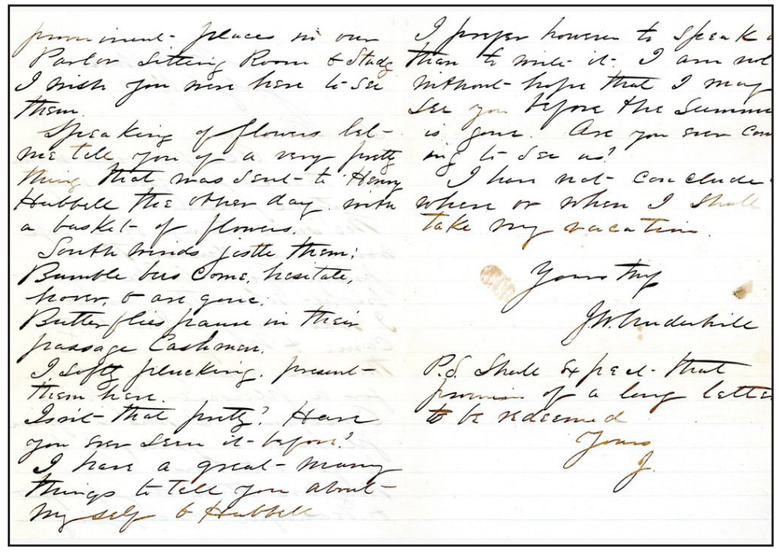

prominent places in our
Parlor sitting Room + Study
I wish you were here to see
them.
Speaking of flowers let
me tell you of a very pretty
thing that was sent to Henry
Hubbell the other day with
a basket of flowers.
South winds jostle them;
Bumble bees come, hesitate,
hover, + are gone.
Butterflies pause in their
passage Cashmere,
I softly plucking, present
them here.
Isn't that pretty? Have
you ever seen it before?
I have a great many
things to tell you about
myself + Hubbell
[end of second page]
I prefer however to speak it
than to write it. I am not
without hope that I may
see you before the summer
is gone. Are you ever com
ing to see us?
I have not concluded
where or when I shall
take my vacation.
Yours truly,
J.W.Underhill

P.S. Shall expect that
promise of a long letter
to be redeemed
Yours J.

Left: letter from J. W. Underhill to his cousin Harriet Jane Parkhurst; above: transcript of the letter, ©Kelly Sue Lynch.


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