THE EMILY DICKINSON INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

Bulletin

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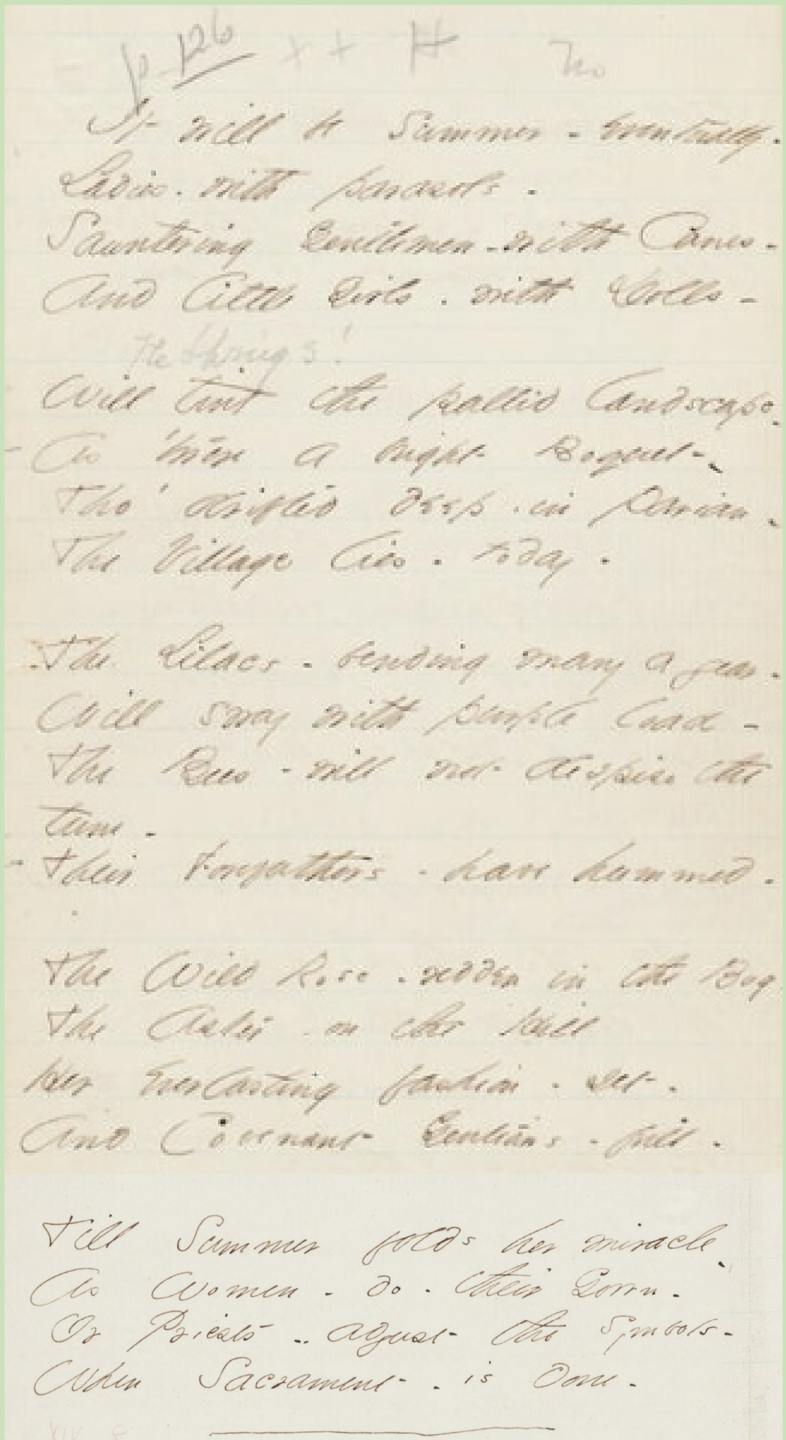
"The Only News I know / Is Bulletins all Day / From Immortality."


It will be Summer – eventually.
Ladies – with parasols –
Sauntering Gentlemen – with Canes –
And little Girls – with Dolls –

Will tint the pallid landscape –
As 'twere a bright Bouquet –
Tho' drifted deep, in Parian –
The Village lies – today –

The Lilacs – bending many a year –
Will sway with purple load –
The Bees – will not despise the tune –
Their Forefathers – have hummed –

The Wild Rose – redden in the Bog –
The Aster – on the Hill
Her everlasting fashion – set –
And Covenant Gentians – frill –

Till Summer folds her miracle –
As Women – do – their Gown –
Or Priests – adjust the Symbols –
When Sacrament – is done –

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In This Issue

Front Cover: Several EDIS members responded to an invitation to share how Dickinson has helped them through their social isolation. Tracy Winkler contributed two stanzas from "It will be Summer – eventually" (Fr374 – Amherst MS #670). The poem's cautious optimism seemed to make it an appropriate cover for an issue that will appear during a pandemic.

Back Cover: The editor himself, however, felt less ready even for such a guardedly optimistic assertion. No manuscript of "A lane of Yellow led the eye" (Fr1741) exists – it was transcribed in its current form by Susan Dickinson – but that very uncertainty, the extra remoteness of the source, helps to convey the uncertainty that some feel about what world will emerge from this period of enforced isolation.

The Assistant Editor for this issue is Aly Beckham

It will be Summer – eventually

Daneen Wardrop

The above line opens a poem in which Dickinson looks out hopefully on a winter scene, even though it gives little assurance of imminent change. A contributor sends the first two stanzas of this poem as her contribution to a collection of reflections about reading Dickinson during a time of social isolation:

Tracy Winkler: Instead of Dickinson's many death-themed poems or the one about hope and feathers, I found the certainty of the first two stanzas of this five stanza poem to be more comforting:

It will be Summer – eventually.
Ladies – with parasols –
Sauntering Gentlemen – with Canes –
And little Girls – with Dolls –

Will tint the pallid landscape –
As 'twere a bright Boquet –
Tho' drifted deep, in Parian –
The Village lies – today – (Fr374B)

Many of the people world-wide who have withdrawn in an effort to "flatten the curve" that indicates the rate of spread of the Covid-19 viral infection have turned to Dickinson as a sort of queen of social distancing, hoping for an intimation of what she was able to see, with such clarity and assurance, from within her bedroom walls.

"I died for Beauty – " says one of a pair of "Kinsmen" in their separate sepulchral entombment, and the two proceed to talk "between the Rooms" (Fr448), hearing one another better in their isolation than they might have in a common space.

One of Dickinson's poems written shortly after the Civil War begins, "An honest Tear / Is durabler than Bronze – / This Cenotaph / May each that dies – " (Fr1232). The Tear is durabler than the public monument in that it takes its place with every other act of grieving. The solitary tear that falls, even if it falls in a thousand faces for a thousand soldiers, falls for only a moment. What endures is the ever-recurring cenotaph of human sorrow. The honesty of the honest Tear turns it (homophonically) into an "honest Ear": separate, but connected in our common feelings of loneliness, fear, and uncertainty, we may better attend to the lower decibels. Cleared of ordinary affairs, we talk between the rooms like Kinsmen – talk of Beauty and Truth.

The Bulletin *is grateful to those who shared their reflections during these strange, uncertain times, and to all those who attend them with an honest ear.*

– Editor

The poem I've been thinking of at this time is Dickinson's "I am afraid to own a Body." Dickinson's fear of the body is central to her mightiness, as inevitably as the truth is devastating and freeing, both. I remember being intrigued in 10th grade biology (actually, it was the only minute in that class that I was intrigued!) when the teacher mentioned that viruses were both alive and dead. Now that was interesting. And, unfortunately, grim.

I am afraid to own a Body –
I am afraid to own a Soul –
Profound – precarious Property –
Possession, not optional –

Double Estate, entailed at pleasure
Opon an unsuspecting Heir –
Duke in a moment of Deathlessness
And God, for a Frontier. (Fr1050)

Being afraid to hug friends these days seemed at first an utterly upended way to approach the practice of living, yet has turned into a kind of reverence from six feet away to bow with steepled hands when encountering each other at the grocery store. Or giving a charades-type hug from a distance. We respect each other's health, each other's corporeality, we all have a body in common. And we're afraid, too: "Possession not optional."

We live in the same interconnected world, is what COVID-19 tells us. Lately, like many, I've been rethinking, on the cellular level, about how we're joined as beings on the planet. We cycle in delicately calibrated networks of complexes, and as a result we can hope that we develop an ever more powerful systems-consciousness. The world has a body. Not optional.

Tragically, it takes a virus to show us such links – that we interexist on and in the earth's body. At this point in time we interact, necessarily, from afar, from inside our houses. But we're like Dickinson in having a bridge to each other through this "Estate" of being human. Each of us lives in this accentuated period of knowing we are "unsuspecting Heir" – that is, we're heir to all that having a body portends. Dickinson, who took on "physical distancing" for her own reasons, lived in a state of connectedness with the globe, a vital state of continually honing a systems-consciousness. As her biographers have shown, she loved biology, keeping an outdoor garden, an indoor garden, and an herbarium. No doubt she took a systems-consciousness into her way of being.

Ellen Hart comments thus on the above photograph by Lee Ann Gorthey: "We live on a street where neighbors gather every evening at 7:00 for 20 minutes or so, to say hello, check in with each other, sometimes sing a song together, and to make noise in solidarity with a city-wide nightly moment of appreciation for Portland, OR's medical workers. Many of us have stuffed animals peeking out of our front windows for children (and their parents) to find in our neighborhood treasure hunt. We've received so many comments and thumbs up, so much appreciation from our neighbors, of all ages, passing by. There are other signs posted around, such as: 'Kindness is contagious.' Our Dickinson hope sign fits right in."

For me, it may be her dashes that most suggest her part in the movement of the planet's connections: infinite dashes eddy in her poems, energize words, create expanses of space. When we read her, the dashes respirate our breathing in rhythm with the poem's body. In her poems sometimes Dickinson lets you die – then see. There have been certain brief cruxes in my own time when I've felt I existed on her dashes and not much else. And there have also been certain cruxes when I find between her dashes the interstices between the rungs to another realm of awareness, "in a moment of Deathlessness." Then, too, at extremely tenuous times, I've held my breath. And that's when I come to shelter a while on the Dickinson dash. The dashes intermit. I suppose they show me the times that I am, as each of us is, an unsuspecting heir of having a body, an all too vulnerable one.

She insists we have a soul, too. Regardless of what heedful great power we keep for our choice of inspiration as we hunker down in order to save lives, as we prepare for the continued enormity of these months, as we see inconceivable suffering, as we grieve, we can remember that Dickinson's awareness of the mighty workings of the world opened a "Frontier" for that power. In this frontier we greet each other as our most profound selves.

Barbara Dana

I'm having trouble concentrating on my writing at this time of isolation. I find myself wondering why my new play matters during a global catastrophe. What difference does it make if I finish it? Many thousands of people are dying! My play is such an insignificant concern. I'm anxious. I decide to take a nap. As I lie there, I wonder: Is my writing less important in a terrible time? Is it more important? Is it just as important as in a "regular" time? I think of Emily. She wrote volumes during the Civil War. I hear her voice. "My business is to sing!"

That's it! Writing is what I do. It's not for me to say how important it is. It's just for me to do it, because it's who I am.

Maryanne Garbowsky

I have studied Emily Dickinson's poems for more than half my life. I have loved them, read them, taught them, but I never understood them so deeply as I do now during this period of world trauma. Her words ring out loudly – her isolation, her seclusion, her pain – have become more real to me. She speaks to me with a voice crying out for understanding, compassion, kindness. "This is my letter to the World" tells of her loneliness, her desire to be heard, to not be ignored. As I walk through streets that are deserted, as I see stores shuttered, closed indefinitely, I feel her separateness. I perceive her sense that she is on a foreign planet where everyone is gone. She alone is there. When she writes of pain, of madness, of doubt, I want to say "Emily, I understand you. I hear you." Before this time, I appreciated and analyzed the poems, but never, never felt them in my being the way I do now.

So, too, her observations of Nature sustain me, help me to see that there is something to be grateful for, the regular rhythms and routines that go on despite the fear of disease. The birds come "down the walk," the "many-colored Brooms," their "Amber Thread" in the sky – all these fill me with hope. I have left the most important poem for last, the one I never really liked – "'Hope' is the thing with feathers." But now that bird "perches" in my soul, giving me the HOPE that this will be over. I never asked for much, the speaker seems to say, but I am filled with hope nonetheless. So am I. Her words will help us to find a beacon of light in a dark time.

Frog
quiet loud
plops

– Anonymous

Anne Ramirez

Uncertainty – this is perhaps one of the hardest trials during the global pandemic swirling around us. How long will the lockdown last? How long before we can travel to look upon loved ones? Which small shop owners will be able to open their doors again at all to serve their communities? If we have ever scorned the time-worn admonition to live one day at a time as unrealistic amid the twenty-first century's myriad timetables and deadlines, we are now forced to reconsider its value. For some, the pace of life has slowed dramatically. For others, it is more hectic than ever, as learning new approaches to working from home encroaches upon the care and education of children of assorted ages. In these unfamiliar circumstances, Emily Dickinson's wisdom becomes startlingly relevant:

Superiority to Fate
Is difficult to gain
'Tis not conferred of any
But possible to earn

A pittance at a time
Until to Her surprise
The Soul with strict economy
Subsist till Paradise. (Fr1043)

Although the poet increasingly selected "her own society" over the years, she derived continual sustenance from the unceasing cycles of seasons, days, and nights. One wonders how she would have responded to the irony of Nature's extravagant generosity as one of the earliest springs in decades now unfolds across hills, gardens, and almost empty streets. Here near Philadelphia, the crocuses and snowdrops braved February winds, followed in untimely succession by daffodils, tulips, and violets. Countless shades of green astonish those willing to roam through woodlands or meadows, pausing to seek out rejoicing birds, and stepping far aside with warm smiles for others who might understand Dickinson's observation:

To venerate the simple days
Which lead the seasons by –
Needs but to remember
That from you or I,
They may take the trifle
Termed *mortality*! (Fr55)

Dickinson here suggests that it is not life but mortality that may be taken away at any time. Does loss of mortality mean introduction to Immortality, that mysterious other passenger sharing the carriage in "Because I could not stop for Death (Fr479)? The time of coronavirus is a time of waiting, of uncertainty about our journey into the future, but Emily Dickinson goes both before us and beside us.

I sing to use the Waiting,
My Bonnet but to tie
And shut the Door unto my House
No more to do have I

Till His best step approaching
We journey to the Day
And tell each other how We sung
To keep the Dark away. (Fr955)

John Dellicarpini

I met Tiina on a trip to Helsinki last year. Her beagle, Ruusu, charmed me first, I, the proud parent of two beagles, Emma and Hana. I call George, my cocker spaniel, the "forgotten" dog, but it's certainly not so.

I write to Tiina about once a month … She writes back mostly about what keeps her going these days of social distancing. In a word, it's Nature. She sends pictures of Ruusu in Helsinki's Central Park, not a gardened space, but lightly managed woodland crisscrossed by gravel paths, a treasured secret, at least to her. Tiina is a voice for Nature in Helsinki's politics. She advocates for the preservation of trees, plants, and flowers, Helsinki's best qualities, but, under the present administration, not a priority.

She's heard Emily's name but hasn't read her poems, so I attach one to every message; it gratifies me as donor and her as beneficiary. The poems, of course, address Nature, for that is what links Tiina and Emily. They honor Nature for no other reason than what Nature is – a tutor, an enigma, and, and most especially, a friend.

I sent Tiina this poem a few days ago.… She said it reminded her of hanami, the cherry blossom festival in Japan, wilted this year by provision, but not by import …

A Dew sufficed itself –
And satisfied a Leaf,
And felt "How vast a Destiny" –
"How trivial is life"!

The Sun went out to work –
The Day went out to play
But not again that Dew was seen
By Physiognomy –

Whether by Day Abducted,
Or emptied by the Sun
Into the Sea, in passing
Eternally unknown. – (from Fr1372C)

Erica Scheurer

Erica Scheurer's contribution is excerpted, with the author's permission, from an essay appearing in the Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, on April 2.*

On the first day of my Emily Dickinson seminars I always ask students what they have heard about the poet. Usually, responses include that she wore white dresses all the time, that her poems are all about death, and that she never left her house. What often follows that last comment is a gloomy assessment of Dickinson's mental health, followed by nodding agreement around the table.

Scholars, of course, offer lots of theories for the poet's seclusion. For me, the most persuasive argument is this: If Dickinson had lived the conventionally social life of an upper-class 19th-century woman, she would not have had the time or energy to produce 1,789 poems.

What, then, might we learn from Emily Dickinson, who – with sound mind and no government orders – chose of her own free will to live in self-quarantine?

Pay attention. Her routinized life at home allowed Dickinson to slow down and notice everything: the slant of light on winter afternoons, the funerals in her brain, the wild nights of her dreams, the way bees circle the flower before entering, her Newfoundland dog Carlo's lumbering gait, the way a hummingbird's wings create a wheel of color, a robin biting a worm in half, a snake dividing the grass.

While we don't necessarily need to make art as Dickinson did, we may find our lives enriched – both during quarantine and beyond – by using our newly slowed-down pace to pay attention to details in the present moment. Live with intention. Dickinson made the unusual decision to self-isolate in order to free herself to be a poet. While most of us would not willingly choose quarantine as a permanent lifestyle, the shake-up caused by this drastic change may lead us to reflect on our choices: What is most necessary and important to us and what is not? What do we really want to do with the time we are given on this earth?

Dickinson's answer to those questions was that she needed to write, and to do that, time alone was essential. Her niece Mattie describes how, during a visit, her Aunt Emily gestured as if to lock her bedroom door with an invisible key, then said "It's just a turn – and freedom, Matty."

Instead of looking at "sheltering in place" as a euphemism for entrapment, what might happen if we practice it as the queen of quarantine did: as an opportunity to "dwell in Possibility – ," to experience an entirely new form of freedom?

Cynthia Hallen

Before 22 March 2020, I had been driving to local parks, river trails, or quiet neighborhoods in order to walk and get some fresh air. However, I became a semi-recluse in my home after realizing that one random driver running a red light could make me a part of the virus-crisis problem in an overwhelmed medical system. So for exercise, I have been walking more intentionally inside my house, following the perimeter of walls, rooms, and stairs, with or without my dust-mop as a staff. As I walk, I often think of invalids, shut-ins, quarantined persons, patients in isolation, prisoners justly convicted of crimes, and those who are incarcerated unjustly. Most of the time, instead of feeling lonely or limited, I "look with gratitude" (Fr456) on this place of shelter from disease, this haven from life's literal and metaphorical storms.

In addition to teaching online Zoom classes with my Linguistics students, I have found "Kinsmanship" (Fr456) in curating the family history records that I have been gathering and archiving for many years. One of my students is making a website for her Digital Humanities class, using my family history letters, biographies, stories, and photos for content. Scanning and labeling materials for the website is helping me document the experiences of my grandfather's immigrant parents who survived the Great Peshtigo Fire of October 8, 1871, as well as their daughter Anna who experienced the Great Fire of 1910 in Kootenay, Canada. It is good to learn about the disasters they faced as we face present challenges.

I have wondered how my EDIS colleagues are faring, and I wonder if any of them are recalling that "Crisis is a Hair" (Fr1067) as they seek refuge in their domains? Perhaps they are reflecting on "Crisis" as that "dull – benumbing time /There is in Fever or Event" (Fr1093). Perhaps they are grieving for fair Italy (L184) or far New York (L244)?

On several occasions, the first line of a paradoxical poem by Emily Dickinson has come into my mind: "A Prison gets to be a friend" (Fr456). I think of Emily in her later years, a denizen of the domestic sphere after days of wandering in the woods, fields, and orchards. As she paced the "narrow Round" of a "Demurer Circuit," did memories of "plashing" through dell "Pools" with Carlo bring a "Geometric Joy" (Fr456) to "the scant degree" of life's "penurious Round" (Fr283)? As she bent over her bedroom table, heeding lyric voices and making midnight verses, did she remember kneeling on the red shawl over her garden bed, hearing summer breezes and weeding daylit blossoms?

Before the virus crisis, I had already decided to retire on July 1st, and I have been bringing home materials from my office library. My Dickinson books sit between my mother's bronzed-baby-shoe bookends across the top of the long green genealogy cabinet in my family room. The Houghton Library electro-print (photocopy) of Noah Webster's

1844 dictionary that Edward Dickinson gave to Emily for her 14th birthday is resting comfortably in a box on the shelf of my walk-in closet. My quarantine is giving me a preview of the next phase of my life. Will I feel empty, bored, useless, constrained, or irrelevant after retirement? I do not think so. "Day and night, house and garden, a few books, a few actions" can serve us well, as Emily read in Emerson's essay "The Poet." I can find a whole universe in my house, especially if Emily Dickinson or Elizabeth Goudge is sitting on the kitchen table. We can find perfect worlds in the "slow exchange of Hope" (Fr456) for "Night's possibility!" (Fr161). We can find a whole cosmos of "sweet opportunities" (L40) as we discover that "Home is the definition of God" (L355).

Emily Seelbinder

Last May, after forty-two years in the profession, thirty at Queens University of Charlotte, I retired with full professorial honors and all of the rights and privileges pertaining thereto. I had concluded my career conducting one last, glorious iteration of "Emily Dickinson & Her Descendants," having worn to each class meeting one of my many Dickinson tee shirts, the design and text of which kicked off that day's discussion.

Less than a week later, one more Dickinson tee arrived on my doorstep: scoop-neck, bright blue, with the word FOREVER emblazoned in rainbow colors across the front, underneath which, in light blue, is inscribed the rest of the line: "is composed of nows." In smaller, pink script below the uncapitalized "nows," Emily Dickinson receives credit for the declaration. At the end of our semester together, my students had helped me choose both the text and the tee, and we had spent a delightful hour unpacking the poem it represents.

The weekend following my last required attendance at graduation exercises, my brother and I officiated at our niece's wedding. (Yes, we are both certified by the inter-webs to commit civil marriage, but that is a conversation for another day.) Incorporated into the ceremony was a reading of "Forever – is composed of Nows" (Fr690) that segued into my imposing on the couple (and all those there assembled) the simple news that the Forever they were undertaking in that moment would be composed of the Nows they would share from this day forward. They should, therefore, be deliberate each day in how they live and love so their Forever might be the best that it could be.

I did not wear the tee shirt at the wedding, choosing instead to debut it at the brunch enjoyed by the couple and family the next morning (their honeymoon was planned for a few weeks later). As it happened, my soon-to-be niece-in-law was the first to notice the connection between the tee and the ceremony, so when I packed for my nephew's wedding in March – on Pi Day, because it has a cool Forever vibe of its own – the new tee went into my bag.

Pi Day 2020 proved to be unusually cold for Portland in March, so I wore a purple turtleneck, not the tee, under my spring jacket and never took the shirt out of my bag. There were many unusual things about that time – just over a month and also a lifetime ago. We flew in through Seattle. By the time we returned to the airport a week later, the city was on lockdown. We spent the night in an eerily empty airport hotel, dining on fruit, crackers and cheese we had brought with us and praying the morning flight would not be cancelled.

On our return, we self-quarantined, checking our temperatures and reporting them to each other daily, venturing out only for necessities and spring gardening, wearing masks – for pollen protection in the yard, for our safety and those around us when we went beyond our "ground to any [other] House or town" (L330). It is a strange "I felt my life with both my hands" (Fr357) experience to take off the mask and inhale with relief the air *inside* the house.

We keep Shabbat – via Zoom – at home on Friday nights. We keep up with friends and family by text and phone and emails and Facebook. We read. We binge-watch. We sleep odd hours and wake to a stillness that used to come only on snow days, when cars and school buses are temporarily frozen in place and children are still asleep or not yet bundled up for the wonders awaiting them outside.

Now the vehicles are parked for who knows how long, we have no snow on which to sled, we are acutely aware of how we move and breathe in our remarkably quiet neighborhoods and the city we inhabit, and I find myself thinking very differently about that text I chose to mark the weddings of two young people I cherish as deeply as another Aunt Emily cherished Ned, Mattie, and Gib.

Photo Credit: Alison Van Pelt

As "Months dissolve in further Months – ," our "Forever – *is* composed of Nows – " (emphasis added), and "We notice . . . smallest things – / Things overlooked before / By this great light upon our minds / Italicized – as 'twere" (Fr1100). "'Tis not a different time – / Except for Infiniteness – ," but it is unlike anything we have ever known in this "Latitude of Home –" (Fr690).

Poet to Poet

Series Editor, Jonnie Guerra

A special thanks to Diane Seuss for introducing me to this issue's featured poet, Jane C. Huffman. A graduate of the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, Huffman currently works for the Iowa Youth Writing Project. She also is the founder and editor-in-chief of Guesthouse*, an online literary journal (www.guesthouselit.com). Huffman is a 2019 recipient of the Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Fellowship from the Poetry Foundation. Her poems have appeared in* Poetry*,* The New Yorker*,* The Iowa Review*,* Gulf Coast*, and elsewhere. Huffman is currently completing a full-length poetry manuscript titled* Dilemma*. She invites* Bulletin *readers to follow her on Twitter @janechuffman.*

Emily Dickinson isn't Finished

By Jane Huffman

No tool in the old poetry tool bag is more useful to me than imperfection: deliberately stopping short, spilling over, pushing at the perimeter of the selvage. I look to Emily Dickinson as a foremother of an imperfect poetics – a poetics that is off-kilter, too-much, not-enough – strategies that she employed with intentionality and wonder. She used and repurposed blank verse, subverting the structures of the hymns she learned in church. And her brilliant slant rhymes, like keys that fit but don't turn, are nearly as ubiquitous as her dashes. But there are other poems in the Dickinson lexicon that embody a more brazen poetics of imperfection: the failed poems, those left decidedly unfinished, hanging in the balance, glowing with half-life, metastasizing to the bone.


Photo by Sandra L. Dyas

I took a shine to failure and unfinishedness as praxis in graduate school while I was studying sestinas. I pursued the form with great self-immolation because a professor told me that I shouldn't. His reason, that the English language doesn't have the prosodic strength of rhyme to carry off such a highly repetitive form, except in rare cases, was enough for me to begin writing them at a fever pitch.

Of course, my sestinas failed. The English language, I realized, (and I remember this moment of epiphany – I was prone in front of the A/C unit in the terrible attic apartment I inhabited during my first year in Iowa), doesn't have the prosodic strength of rhyme to carry off such a highly repetitive form, except in rare cases. After a few stanzas, the form begins to collapse into itself. The six words on which it hinges become exhausted. And the poet must either abandon ship or start shoehorning square shapes into round holes.

But in these months of eking out a way to make ends meet – both in life and in poems – my idea of completeness shifted. The hours I spent surgically splicing and stitching together sestinas that never reached completion revealed to me that finality was my subject, not my objective. The poems that resulted were slipshod and babbling. Their seams frayed and their gaps bled. Something happened in those tedious hours that snipped the cord between "completeness" and "made-ness." I came to see the potential energy in poems that were left artfully open, imperfect. My second epiphany was this: in order for my sestinas to be successful, they couldn't be finished.

Alexandra Socarides, author of *Dickinson Unbound: Paper, Process, Poetics* (2012), posits that especially in her later poems, Dickinson was fixated on and troubled by finality, which she saw as "a textual and material impossibility." This rings true to Dickinson's resistance of traditional means of publishing, but I am most intrigued by this lack of resolve (a phrase I use here not to indicate indecision but the artful omission of closure) at the poem level. Many of Dickinson's poems boast interchangeable lines and phrases that plummet the poem through the fourth wall and into readers' hands.

Socarides writes, "Dickinson's manuscripts from this period show that she was absorbed with issues of drafting and revision, as so many of them include a vast number of variants, sometimes copied in multiple directions on the page." As readers, we must accept the responsibility of choosing which of Dickinson's ideas is best, or we must accept multiplicity as a form of completeness. Either way, there are consequences.

In an interview with *The Rumpus*, poet Diane Seuss termed similar practices in her own work as "'freaking form' – learning traditional forms so that they can be usurped, upended, repurposed, like a bathtub

that can be made into a shrine to the Virgin Mary." I think that this would resonate with Dickinson, who has been "freaked" by readers and editors for decades: as outsider, as woman, as myth. Both Seuss and Dickinson – and many other poets who "freak" the old-hat in their formal processes – have taught me to embrace both form and degradation of that form, to open poems instead of resolving them. And to be critical of the structures and presets of language that bring me to this intersection.

Socarides gestures to Fr1175 as an example of a poem that demonstrates this practice:

> Contained in this short
> Combined
> Comprised Life
> Were wonderful extents –
> Are magical
> Terrible
> miraculous
> tenderist –

And later in the same poem:

> As doth the tired sense
> unmanifest to sense
> Unwitnessed of the sense

And then scrawled up the left margin:

> Were exquisite extents

We can't know if Dickinson used this method as an artform, as a private drafting process as she worked toward each poem's best-possible outcome, or both. But I like to envision an Emily Dickinson who knew exactly what she was doing. An Emily who anticipated that her future readers would confront these very questions, a century ahead of her time in both form and content. (I think of Hypertext pioneers from the 1980s and 90s who gave us Internet poems with secret alleyways and dead ends.) The same Emily Dickinson who wrote, "Publication – is the Auction / Of the Mind of Man – " (Fr788). This, of course, however wonderful to imagine, presents obstacles for today's readers and editors. When he was compiling what would become the foremost collection of Dickinson manuscripts, R. W. Franklin wrote that "if we want the poems in a finished state, we must apply other principles of selection [than traditional means] and must take responsibility for doing so."

Artists and scholars have long pursued this line of questioning as it pertains to visual art. A 2016 Met Breuer show surveyed how artists, from the Renaissance to the present, have experimented with *non finito* (tran. "intentionally unfinished") methods. In his review of the show for *BBC Culture*, Alastair Sooke notes that, according to Met Breuer curators, although some such paintings are simply abandoned and later found, "there is also a second important category of unfinished artworks: those that only seem unfinished, but which their artists actually deemed complete, because they were striving, intentionally, for an unresolved aesthetic."

When I fumbled into this methodology in my writing practice, the weight of the sestina lifted. I invented ways to break the parameters of the form in order to eke more out of it, like snapping a glow stick to activate the fluorescence. Instead of using repetition tactfully, I overused it, exploded it. I pulled apart and pushed together stanzas. The form remained present, but it was in ruins: crooked, chipped, and eroded. This duality between formal wholeness and brokenness reflects what I want my poems to do: to explore the duality between female body and embodiment, to track a movement of mind that's often at odds with itself. My thesis boils down to this: to write a good sestina, run it through the chipper.

The experiment is ongoing, but it has since yielded several sestinas that deconstruct the form: "Sestina with Six Titles," "Failed Sestina," and "Sestina, Unfinished." The latter poem is most emblematic of my connection to Dickinson's negotiation of completeness, what Socarides called her "competing desires to both explode and tighten the texts she was writing." It began, as most of my sestinas do, with an attempt to get it right. And as in most of my sestinas, the form quickly fell away from me. The walls narrowed and the ceiling dropped. The six words I'd installed as the poem's turbines strained under the pressure. In an effort to retain my momentum, I began leaving swaths of white space in the places I couldn't fill and moved on. The resulting poem, reprinted in conjunction with this essay, was like no other I'd ever written. The lines were scatterbrained and fragmented, as illustrated in this excerpt:

> I am a fuselage of dove. She says,
> I am a fuselage of cheek, stranded
> in the bulwarks of an art,
> she says, still life of mind,
> of grief, before it manifests in vanity,
> a child's line drawing of god.

But the effect was greater than I imagined. In a poem that meant to convey the strange landscapes of childhood – the years when one is closest to the divine but has no language for it – the poem's absences made sense. I loved the idea of readers filling in the blanks themselves – "taking responsibility," as Franklin called it, for how the poem "ends." Kelly Baum, one of the curators of the Met Breuer *non finito* show, explains that "a seemingly unfinished work of art demands your creative and imaginative investment in a picture, because you have literally to fill in the blanks" (Sooke).

Continued on page 29

Sestina, Unfinished

By Jane Huffman

I'm escorted by a vanity of mind.
She lays me down atop her vanity.
adjusts the mirror and says,
there's no such thing as abstract art,
only vanity, the study of god
a strand
of beads. As a child, I was stranded
on the nude beaches of my mind,
the lap of god,
the ocean tending to its vanity,
tending to the vanity of art.
my vanity says,

I am a fuselage of dove. She says,
I am a fuselage of cheek, stranded
in the bulwarks of an art,
she says, still life of mind,
of grief, before it manifests in vanity,
a child's line drawing of god.

I climbed into the brainstem of god.
vanity confessed to vanity.
I confessed to vanity. I stranded
her inside my three-way mirror,
the beaches of the mind.
It was not me, not art.
I learned how to talk an art
the way a god can talk about a god
— the pronoun of the mind—
the "I"—that towers she says,
I am a vein, I am a strand
of erect pearls, shocked into vanity
by the old electric chair of vanity
until the body was a strand
of heat.

This poem includes a quotation attributed to Jean Dubuffet: "There is no such thing as abstract art, or else all art is abstract." Reprinted with permission of Jane Huffman

Series Editor, Barbara Dana

Tell It Slant: Not Writing About Writing in Emily's Room

By Ethelyn Friend

Ethelyn Friend is an actor, poet, playwright, vocalist and voice teacher. Her theatrical performance texts include Wednesday, An Opera, Songs My Grandmothers Taught Me*, and* More Than Daisy Dares*, an exploration of Emily Dickinson's Master letters performed by the playwright. Her acting work includes regional and NYC credits. Ethelyn was a founding faculty member of Naropa University's MFA Theatre Program where she served as Associate Professor of Voice from 2004-2019 .*

Dear Reader, I am sorry. I could not write an article about writing in Emily's room. The experience acted on me like truth serum. It was not exactly pleasant. And it has left me blank, mildly shocked, and quiet. I'd like to tell you the whole truth. Maybe I can tell some of it. I can take you on my Circuit.

The memory of a
trauma is marked by a gap.
A place that cannot be
reached by words, or
touched by any hand.

At the center of Emily's writing is a silence. At the center of my relationship to her is a blank.

Photo Credit: David Noles

For most of my life I have been both an actor and a poet, the two co-existing but not ever quite meeting. I first encountered Emily in the theatre. My parents took a warm interest in my desire to act and brought me to see Julie Harris perform *The Belle of Amherst* when I was 14. It marked me. I identified with Emily, poet. I identified with Julie, actor. I remember once hearing someone call Dickinson "the patron saint of shy girls" – and I was a terribly shy girl, who stepped onstage to have a voice, to have a face, and to feel.

My feelings were suspect in my home. Onstage they were celebrated. By the age of 11 I had learned to cry on cue for my art, which especially impressed my father. At the dinner table he would ask me to perform this skill: "those are real tears!" – to my mother – "Look, Marcia! – that's incredible!!"

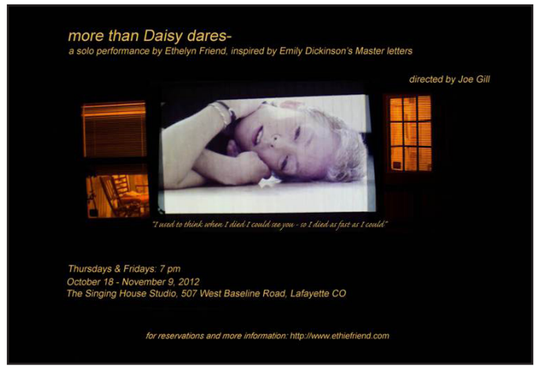
My early relationship to Dickinson's work culminated with a mystical experience on April 24 of 1980. I was 17 and had chosen to perform *The Belle of Amherst* as my high school senior thesis. I spent a year researching her life; visited the Homestead with my parents; stood for the first time in her bedroom. I lay for hours in my dorm room, memorizing the two-hour script. When I stepped onstage in front of the audience for the first time, as soon as I said the first line – I disappeared –

"Yes, Vinnie, I have the tea dear! This is my introduction. Black cake. Forgive me if I seem frightened. I never see strangers and hardly know what I say."

I blacked out and was inhabited by an energy which led my body and voice effortlessly.

I "came to" at the end of the play to find the audience on its feet, many in tears. I had almost no memory of the performance, but noticed an unfamiliar physical sensation. My body felt a deep peace, an interior silence, and a visceral sense of being full, fulfilled. The next night I performed the play again, but did not "disappear." After thirty years in the professional theatre, I've never again experienced such a complete surrender.

Emily stayed with me through the years. In the 80's, in class with Allen Ginsberg at the Jack Kerouac School, I read Emily's poems again. Allen's ear and his eye led me to experience them as units of verbal magic, constructions hiding special powers. In 2012, I made a solo performance in which "A theatre professor on sabbatical in New England" (me) "becomes haunted by the unfinished love letters of her favorite poet" (Emily). The performance includes all the texts of the three "Master letters" and a series of frenzied letters to the Archives Department seeking permission to see, to touch, the original manuscripts:



From a video by filmmaker Ed Bowes

My project, MORE THAN DAISY DARES (title taken from Master Letter #2) focuses on the intimate prose work of an artist in a liminal phase in her creative development – "liminal" as defined by Victor Turner as a period in the process of social and personal transformation during which the individual "occupies a gap between the worlds and becomes a sort of conceptual medium between alternative structures of "here" and "there." The editor of the "Amherst College" facsimile edition asserts: "The Master letters stand near the heart of her mystery" –

I performed *More Than Daisy Dares* in a tiny house, where the audience entered by climbing through the window.

* * *

Dear Reader, I am a good student. Before coming to Amherst to write in Emily's room I prepared. It was October and my visit was scheduled for an early morning later that month. I practiced writing for an hour every morning, imagining it.

Like an actor, I rehearsed. During "rehearsals" I wrote philosophical things like this:

How long have I been here? Sitting on this piece of granite. A planet. On which resides: Emily's room. In the room her dreams still murmur, hover. Whisper, scream, talk about the master. While I write, on a stone, alone, "as if," in Emily's home.

And romantic things like this:

Dare to dream you are in a room where the voice of your favorite ghost can reach you. Teasing the night, filling the lamp and inking the page: Dear Master – this is not a poem. Drag your battered lungs to the surface again and drink the air she was born into. Her face is not in my view but I taste her mouth I do – a single kiss while the earth turns slow like this.

But as an actor can't really prepare for the rush of opening night, I couldn't prepare for my date with Emily's room, a date which blindsided me.

When my day finally came, the date had changed, and the time of day as well. It was mid-December, frigid, just before dusk. I put on my vintage black and white polka dot dress and black silk long underwear. Yes, I felt like I was going on a date. I walked uphill to the Homestead, suddenly in tears, a rush of faces, all the precious ones who are linked to my connection to Emily: my mother and Luke, Leeny and Lisa, Erica, Barbara, and Todd. The wind came up. My tears froze. I walked to the oak tree and said a prayer.

Dear Reader, even when I'm ready to visit Emily's room I can't see straight when I look at her. When I try to write about writing in her room, other writing comes, poems and songs reaching horizontally away from my subject, like the spreading branches of her white oak. The not-writing now fills two notebooks. My success a set of acrostics trying to stand tall and still, like this one, called Interstitial Emily.

Inside her
Nothing is hidden—
Terror
Eventually
Released as
Streams of
Thought magic.
Inside her
pencil, **T**error
Investigates
itself, **A**llows
Light to **E**mbrace
Matters of
Intense Dark –
Light that
Yells its own name.

Inside, I relinquish my photo ID at the front desk. Follow my kind guide up the stairs. Instructed not to step off the straw matting on the floor, I have a choice to sit at the card table, face the room, or face the window. I move a chair to face the window. It's 5pm and the sky is already darkening. I'm in. I begin to write on loose 8x11 pages with my tiny pencil:

To the max degree the purple cloak – it was heavy on me – don't deserve – Still the thread of it under all, cloak of shame.

Dear Emily. Don't look at me while I look at you. I want your tiny desk I want your breast. Touch of the white bones.

Studio Sessions

I rearrange my view, my seat. I write things like this:

I can't do this, I can't write in Emily's room. Where the gloom comes down on me like gods fail me, but words carry me. I want to make sentences, if I could recognize them I would. Buoyed up, propped up by whiteness. While Emily sat here in her white dress and white skin, the many slaughters of the Civil War went on and on and on.

I write:

Dear Emily, I'm a liar. I want you to know I'm a liar. Born to be a sponge, I did absorb you the best I could. I caused myself to disappear for you, or did you cause it?

I always let the audience decide who & what I was to be. Cancel the dead & expose the living.

I write.....(scribble unintelligible to end of page)

then: Put the genie back in the bottle

The sun has gone down. Cursed to feel what I ever felt before. All the times I gave myself a break. I'm a liar. I write:

Dear Emily I fake it. I fake it. This is my train sounding, this is the train you heard.

You make me a songbird a song a bird a caller

You make me a dweller, in the ether, in the stranger

Less of a light than a space

You take my writing hand
And place it on my heart
In the forgiving palm
Your skeleton fits like (a) dove
glove
doll
curl
ball
crawl
all
all
all
all
Dear Emily

Did you ever stop imagining an audience?

Will you stop me now?

* * *

Dear Reader, it is March and I am at home in New York City. This morning again I tried to tell you all about writing in Emily's room. I dreamed another dead poet's voice in my head, Ted Berrigan, and a song came instead:

Dear Emily,

Ted said to write to you you you
But a different head is afraid to to to
The dead don't fear the living but I do do do…

* * *

She did touch me at the end. Or an Emily-type of angel. You take my writing hand / And place it on my heart. I went to her room as a poet and an actor, hoping to "get" something. And what I received was a stripping away of those identities and their drive, a mirror to see the face under all that striving.

I walk away with a humble wish to give thanks to this mystery, and to all the many pilgrims like me.

* * *

WWW.ORACLEOFAMHERST.COM

Supply your question in the box below and we shall endeavor to return a reply by a route of evanescence. Use a pseudonym.
Edited by Norbert Hirshhorn

Dear Oracle, I'm a poet and hate not getting published, upset when lousy poems win big prizes, stammer stupidly to famous authors who look over my shoulder. How can I find ease? – Frustrated in Florida

— Success is counted sweetest by those who ne'er succeed.

Dear Oracle, I'm in love with someone not my wife. I don't want to hurt her, but how should I break the news? – Smitten in Siena

— Tell all the truth but tell it slant — Success in circuit lies.

Dear Oracle, My children never visit, write or call, even with Facebook, Facetime, WhatsApp. Not even in this lock down time. Why are they so careless? Don't they know I love them?
– Neglected in New York

— Saying nothing sometimes says the most.

Dear Oracle, I'm afraid of dying from Covid-19, 'timor mortis' and all that. Help me be at peace. – Agéd in Alabama

— These Fevered Days – to take them to the Forest. . . .
That it will never come again is what makes life so sweet.

A New Editor for the *EDJ*: Ryan Cull

The Emily Dickinson Journal *has published some of the most important articles on the poet that have appeared in the past 30 years. Started in 1992, under the editorship of Suzanne Juhasz, it is now saying goodbye to its current editor, James Guthrie, whose final issue appears in Spring 2020. The Fall 2020 issue, edited by Eliza Richards and Adeline Chevrier-Bosseau, will be a special issue devoted to international scholarship in translation. In Spring 2021 the* Journal *will welcome a new editor, Ryan Cull. Ryan teaches US literature, lyric theory, and cultural theory in the English Department at New Mexico State. The* Bulletin *took the opportunity of a lull in the frantic season of sudden and unexpected online course preparation to get to know him.*

Bulletin: Have you always been a New Mexican? What other places have been your home?

Ryan Cull: The first time I visited New Mexico was when I came for a campus visit for the position I now hold at New Mexico State University, where I am an associate professor of English. Prior to that I lived in Champaign-Urbana and attended the University of Illinois, where I earned my PhD. But I am an Alabamian, born and raised in Birmingham, and I received my BA and MA about an hour down the road at the University of Alabama (Roll Tide, y'all).

B: *What first made you want to study literature? When and why did Dickinson become someone you really wanted to study?*

RC: To be honest, I don't recall being exposed to much poetry at all prior to college. Even after enjoying a handful of English classes as an undergraduate, it took me a long time to convince myself that it was ok to be an English major, a decision that seemed wildly impractical (even if, as studies have shown, English majors actually do as well as their peers in many other fields). I recall walking past the Johnson edition on a library shelf and half-heartedly thinking that I ought to read more of Dickinson's poetry at some point. I think it was during my sophomore or junior year in college. What I remember more distinctly was that once I started I didn't stop and found it difficult to sleep that night. In the moment, I likely couldn't have named what I was feeling, qualities that have impressed many other readers of Dickinson: compression, musicality, a characteristic velocity of thought and wit, an uncanny ability to observe and extrapolate in unexpected ways, and so forth. I know this is already veering towards cliché, but it did indeed feel a bit "as if the top of my head were taken off."

B: *I remember your essay on Dickinson and Keats in the* EDJ *a few years ago. Where should people go to find other work you've done on Dickinson?*

RC: A few years [after that first experience], I wrote a master's project on Dickinson, and her work became the focus of the first chapter of my dissertation. Since then, I've been particularly interested in Dickinson as a powerful thinker about sociality (and not just the avoidance of it) as it has been conceptualized since Romanticism, an angle that's influenced in quite different ways an essay in *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, another in the *Emily Dickinson Journal*, as well as a third that will appear in the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Emily Dickinson* edited by Cristanne Miller and Karen Sanchez-Eppler.

This latter essay spins-off, in some ways, from a book project I'm completing tentatively titled, "Unlimited Eligibility?: Inclusive Democracy and the American Lyric," that studies how American lyricism has been shaped for more than a century by several successive models of socio-political recognition (e.g. cultural pluralism, identity politics, multiculturalism, etc.). The book investigates the powers and limits of these models, while similarly assessing the development of a parallel (with other powers and limits) counter-tradition that

has emphasized affirmation of ontological proximity rather than epistemological confirmation of recognizability. My hope is to contribute to and complicate contemporary conversations in lyric theory that have tended to identify social recognition as the political work of lyric writing.

B: What are your favorite courses at New Mexico State? Do you have a signature course?

For most of my time at NMSU, we've only had two (though happily now three) American lit specialists, so I've had to be fairly flexible with my teaching. I enjoy teaching a range of classes from introduction to literature for non-majors (and other general education classes) to American literature survey classes to more narrowly-focused, upper level classes. My upper level course this spring, in fact, focused on Dickinson, situating her thinking and writing practices in her historical moment with a few detours to contemporaries. Just before spring/corona virus break, we had been discussing a range of scholarly perspectives on Dickinson's manuscripts in advance of the students working on a project that required them to edit (or, alternately, choose to rely only on the manuscript of) a Dickinson poem of their choosing, offering a reading of their edited poem, and then reflect on the impact of their choices on the poem and on the way that prospective readers could approach the poem.

Ryan sent along this photo of poppies near the Organ Mountains: an improbably large desert flower, not some little Arctic one.

B: What can you tell us about living in Las Cruces? Weekend fieldtrips to Alamagordo?

RC: I enjoy taking a short half-hour drive south to El Paso with friends on weekends to eat and then watch a film or see a concert. To the north, Santa Fe is a bit further down the road, so I don't get there as often as I'd like. But it offers an amazing range of artistic events, especially during the summer. Each year a few friends and I try to make sure to catch a concert at the wonderful open-air Santa Fe Opera. It sits atop a mesa with views of nearby mountain ranges. They encourage people to arrive early and enjoy the view as they tailgate dinner. Lightning occasionally punctuates arias. When in Santa Fe, I also love to hear the magnificent Santa Fe Desert Chorale perform at St. Francis Cathedral. Closer to home, when it's not too hot, there's hiking at the periphery of Las Cruces in Organ Mountains – Desert Peaks National Monument. An unusual amount of rain this spring granted us, for a couple weeks, several astonishing acres filled with desert poppies in full bloom near the base of the mountains.

Perhaps this continued fascination also reflects something better: a sense, not just among academics but among the public, that few writers have combined such analytical acuity with a capacity to exist purposefully within spaces of unknowing, talents that feel as essential as ever amidst pandemics and so much else.

B: What have I not asked that I should have?

RC: It's been fascinating to sense Dickinson's continuing cultural presence in recent years, including two distinctly different biopics, a documentary, and a TV series. Even amidst the unfolding Covid19 crisis, there she is, turned into a meme as an avatar of social distancing. The old, confining "ghost of Amherst" tropes still persist, at times. But perhaps this continued fascination also reflects something better: a sense, not just among academics but among the public, that few writers have combined such analytical acuity with a capacity to exist purposefully within spaces of unknowing, talents that feel as essential as ever amidst pandemics and so much else.

Lastly, I want to add a word of gratitude to my distinguished predecessors at the *Emily Dickinson Journal*. I seek to build on their foundation. A journal is only ever as good as its contributors. The *EDJ* has had a distinguished history in this regard, and my highest hope is that this continues. In fact, consider this an invitation to submit your scholarship to the *EDJ*! And, in addition to those contributions, I also welcome your insights about how we can continue to position a single-author journal like the *EDJ* in the vanguard of literary studies within academia and beyond.

Emily Dickinson and the Visual Arts

Series Editor and Author, Maryanne Garbowsky

Emily Dickinson and Emily Mason: Sisters in Spirit

Emily Mason died on December 10, 2019, the same date that Emily Dickinson was born 189 years before. She had been named for her mother's favorite poet, Emily Dickinson. Thus, it is no coincidence that when Emily Mason became an artist, she would remember Dickinson's poems and use them as titles for her paintings and prints.

From an early age, Mason knew she wanted to be a visual artist, painting "her first oil at age seven" (Ebony, *The Fifth*). Inheriting a love of art from her mother, Alice Trumbull Mason, an artist herself and a descendent of John Trumbull (1756-1843), the well known American portrait painter, (Ebony,*The Light*), Mason was exposed early to art and artists. Her mother was a founding member of The American Abstract Artists (AAA) group, which included such well known modern artists as Joseph Albers, Ad Rienhardt, and Piet Mondrian (Ebony, *The Fifth*). With her mother as role model, Mason set off at a young age to pursue her artistic career.

Born and raised in New York City, Mason went to the High School of Music and Art and attended Artists' Club meetings with her mother. She also frequented museums – the Museum of Modern Art, for one – and was accepted into Bennington College in Vermont, which she attended for only a year before transferring to The Cooper Union, in

Restored, perhaps rightfully

By Jonathan Morse

The legacy of the Amherst College astronomer David Peck Todd (1855-1939) has been pity and derision. Astronomers know him as the but-for-the-grace-of-God colleague who almost but not quite discovered the moons of Mars and was defeated by cloud cover every single time he tried to observe a solar eclipse. Readers of poetry know him as the husband of Mabel Loomis Todd, Emily Dickinson's first editor, who betrayed him with Dickinson's brother.

But in 1924, briefly released from the mental hospital where he spent his last years, David showed up in Washington and attempted to make radio contact with the Martians. For the occasion, he posed in the observatory at Georgetown, and some photographs survive on the record in the Library of Congress.

"Dr. David Todd, Georgetown Observatory, 8/21/24." National Photo Company Collection, Library of Congress, photoshopped by Jonathan Morse

Doesn't the man in this image deserve to survive as he would have liked to be remembered – smiling and competent, at the controls in chiaroscuro and beautifully shined shoes?

Above, *Whose Fingers Comb the Sky*, 1978; below, *Infirm Delight*, 2009. All reproductions of works by Emily Mason © 2020 Emily Mason/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

New York. In the summer of 1952, she studied at the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Maine as one of two scholarship students. Her experience there was especially formative since she was introduced to "analogous color theory" in a lecture given by Jack Lenor Larsen:

> "The most important experience for me that summer was when Larson (sic) hung skeins of brightly colored wool over long dowels suspended between chairs. The colors spanned the spectrum of primary, secondary, and tertiary colors. He explained analogous color theory as color modified not by black and white but by other close colors of the spectrum. . . . This experience has helped me throughout my painting career. It also enabled me to continuously discover how colors affect each other: a visual magic" (Ebony, *The Fifth*).

After traveling to Europe in 1954, visiting such artworks as the Lascaux caves, Gaudi's Cathedral in Barcelona, Giotto's frescoes, and the paintings in the Van Gogh museum, Mason moved on from Cooper Union to attend Yale's Norfolk Summer Art School. A two year Fulbright grant allowed her to study in Venice, Italy. While at the Accademia di Belle Arti, she met German born fellow artist Wolf Kahn, whom she would marry one year later. After much travel, both internationally and nationally, the two settled down in West Brattleboro, Vermont, where they lived for the rest of their lives, spending half the year in New York City.

Mason, a cross between an Abstract Expressionist and a Color Field artist, worked diligently at her craft, perfecting and refining it day by day. In time her hard work would be widely recognized with exhibitions – both solo and group – in galleries from Venice, Santa Fe, and New York, to Maine, Vermont, and Connecticut, among others.

Looking at Mason's painting, one feels the artist's excitement and joy in color. She never uses black or white, never acrylics, but rejoices in the excited interplay of bold, vibrant colors: reds, oranges, blues, greens, yellow and purple as they mingle together on a blank canvas. Her colors, poured from recycled cat tins, are not mixed on the palette, but meet for the first time as she dribbles them onto a fresh canvas: "It's a process of letting a painting talk to you. I want my painting to take me to a place I've never been," Mason explains (Williams). And they do, taking on a life of their own, as she, like an experienced maestro, conducts them into a poetic harmony.

Poetry was in her genes; her mother wrote poetry as well and corresponded with writers like William Carlos Williams and Gertrude Stein. She drew titles from poets like W.B. Yeats and Robert Frost, but Dickinson's poems predominate. Mason knew many of Dickinson's poems by heart (www.EmilyMason.com/writings). At least eleven of her works are named from lines from Dickinson's poems. Her longtime studio manager, Steven Rose, divulges that she "always titled afterwards," but adds that "the poetry was with her all the time"; the phrases were an integral part of Mason's art. David Ebony, writing in *The Light in Spring*, a 2015 catalogue of Mason's work, discusses the artist's connection to Dickinson:

> The words of Emily Dickinson have long been a source of inspiration for Emily Mason…. She shares with the poet a special connection to nature, a profound sensitivity to its vibrant and sometimes tumultuous energy. Like Dickinson, Mason is attuned to the indelible psychic bond and emotional resonance that nature forms in unique ways within every individual. On some level, Mason's paintings reflect the subtle shifts of light and nuances of color that accompany the seasonal changes. In another sense, each of her works implies a special place and a specific mood that only the viewers, through their own imaginations, can complete and comprehend.

One of the most direct correspondences in mood and color is found in *Whose Fingers Comb the Sky* (oil on canvas, 1978). The line comes from "Of all the Sounds dispatched abroad" (J321). The poem describes the wind as it plays through "the Boughs / That phraseless Melody – ." In this abstract painting, color bars of blue, purple, and green parallel each other like the tines of a comb. Above, at the painting's center, there is a rectangular block of blue, topped by a red and orange cap. Here Mason seems to suggest the poet's "Caravan of Sound / . . . in the Sky."

In another, *Stillness is Volcanic* (oil on canvas, 1966) based on "I have never seen 'Volcanoes'" (J175), Mason depicts the turbulence and terror of volcanoes in vivid reds and gold, suggesting the "Fire, and smoke" beneath the surface of the earth. Above, along the top of the painting plane, is a lavender strip perhaps indicating the "stillness" which allows the "Features" to "keep their place" despite the "pain Titanic" within.

Infirm Delight (oil on canvas 2009) takes its title from Dickinson's well-known poem "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant" (J1129). The painting is dominated by a large disk, reminiscent of the phrase "Success in Circuit lies." Mason seems to agree with the poet's admonition that sometimes it is better to lie than tell the truth raw. Here the calm blue/green background is punctured by the vibrant orange/yellow ball. Above it are vertical slashes of orange/yellow/white that suggest Dickinson's "Lightning," which is best avoided "Or every man be blind – ."

There is a parallel here between these two creative artists: Mason's love of color equaling Dickinson's love of words, a fascination reflected in her "best" friendship with her Lexicon. Dickinson's use of words "like Blades" (J479) complements Mason's keen sense of color, which she uses boldly and dramatically. It is little wonder that Mason borrowed phrases from Dickinson to title her work, intuiting their common purpose. Dickinson gave voice to Mason's paintings, speaking in words rather than in color. Mason, on the other hand, recognized a spiritual connection to Dickinson, both sharing an intense and passionate response to life, one that her mentor Thomas W. Higginson quoted her as describing, "the mere sense of living is joy enough" (L342a).

These three paintings are representative of at least eight more (Steven Rose says there are "easily 20"): *Marrow of the Day*, *The Wind Pursued*, *The Purple Could Not Keep the East*, *A Certain Slant of Light*, *Secreted in a Star*, *Blue Haven*, *March is Heard*, and *Where the Meanings Are*.

"On her final day," those with her recalled, "Emily recited one of her favorite poems by Dickinson: "She Sweeps With Many-Colored Brooms" (J219), an appropriate choice for the artist, who must have delighted in Dickinson's use of color in her description of one of Nature's special moments:

> You dropped a Purple Ravelling in –
> You dropped an Amber thread
> And now you've littered all the East
> With Duds of Emerald!

In the poem's final stanza, "She" – Nature – "plies her spotted Brooms." Mason, too, had "Her spotted Brooms" – the brushes and cans of paint which visualize Nature's transcendent beauty and intensity. It was her life's work and meaning:

"Till Brooms fade softly into stars"

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William Luce, 1931-2019

By Georgiana Strickland

The Dickinson world lost one of its most eloquent voices with the death, on December 9, of William Luce, author of *The Belle of Amherst*. His one-woman play based on the life of Emily Dickinson took the American theatre by storm in 1976 and made Dickinson's name a household word among theatregoers. It has since been performed in translation in more than twenty countries around the world.

Luce, born and raised in Portland, Oregon, was introduced to Emily Dickinson's poetry by his high school English teacher in what he described as "a major gift to me for the rest of my life." He also exhibited talent as a poet, but devoted his early years largely to music. After several years as a pianist and church organist, he enjoyed a varied career singing in professional choral groups, including the Norman Luboff chorus, the Ray Charles Singers, the Roger Wagner Chorale, and the Robert Shaw Chorale, and as a backup singer for Johnnie Mathis. He was also continuing to write poetry and produced song lyrics, one for Doris Day.

In 1973, while singing with the Ray Charles Singers in a TV variety show, Luce met Timothy Helgeson and actor/stage director Charles Nelson Reilly. Reilly had been talking for some time with actress Julie Harris about creating a stage work based on Dickinson's life and poetry, and when they learned that Luce was a poet and lover of Dickinson, they invited him to join their "Emily Committee." Their early efforts involved a multi-character work that met with no success, but when Luce adopted Harris's preference for a one-woman play, the eventual result was *The Belle of Amherst*. The opening scene, echoing Dickinson's first words to Higginson, came to Luce in a dream, and the rest of the play flowed from his pen in rapid succession.

From its opening in New York in 1976, *Belle* met with almost immediate critical and popular success worldwide. Harris won her fifth Tony Award for her performance, and her recording of the play won a Grammy. A British version starring Claire Bloom won an International Emmy award. In 2001 the play enjoyed a successful twenty-fifth anniversary U.S. tour, with Harris again as Dickinson. In that same year a performance at New York's Lincoln Center titled *My Business Is to Love*, with text by Luce, featured Harris reading Dickinson's poems and soprano Renée Fleming singing musical settings of them.

Belle was Luce's first but far from last work for the stage. Over the following decades he produced a string of biographical works for stage, film, and television, most of them focusing on creative or performing artists – Charlotte Brontë, Lillian Hellman, Zelda Fitzgerald, Isak Dinesen, John Barrymore, Enrico Caruso, Najinski, and Molière, plus a number of non-literary figures such as General George S. Patton, the Duchess of Windsor, and Lucille Ball. Most are seen at a crucial point in their life or as they approach the decline of their creative powers, even death. These plays, many of them single-character, have provided virtuoso vehicles for some of our greatest actors and have received multiple awards. *Brontë* received three major awards, including a Peabody, and Christopher Plummer won a Tony for his performance in *Barrymore*.

Luce's musical background led to several works, including librettos for the musical film *Sayonara* and one opera, *Gabriel's Daughter*, with music by Henry Mollicone. In 2001 Luce was again working with Mollicone on what was to be titled *Song of Eden*, an orchestral work with Dickinson poems to be read by Julie Harris. This project had to be abandoned when Harris suffered a stroke.

In a 2001 interview for the *Bulletin*, Luce responded to some criticisms of *Belle* from Dickinson scholars. He has great respect for the scholarly community, he told me. "The scholar is needed to keep focus on facts. . . .

Photo Credit: Walter McBride

On the other hand, the biographical dramatist adheres creatively, not slavishly. . . . The dramatist puts a fact on stage, then he dreams with it. And that's drama. . . . The responses of the human heart – and mind – end up being quite simply reached."

Luce also remarked that his subsequent stage works "all came about because of *Belle*. That has been the touchstone for me." Asked if he had a favorite among his plays, he said, "No, it's whatever I'm working on at the time. But my favorite *subject* is Emily. My favorite subject will *always* be Emily. It always will be Emily."

William Luce died at age 88 in a memory care facility near Phoenix on December 9. His legacies to the stage, especially *The Belle of Amherst*, will live on in future performances and in the minds and hearts of theatregoers around the globe.

Georgiana Strickland is a former editor of the Bulletin*. Her interview with Luce can be seen online at http://www.emilydickinsoninternationalsociety.org/node/337; click on* Bulletin*, issue of May/June 2001.*

The Prig from Dell

By Dr. Michael D. Coe

Former EDIS President and Bulletin *editor Margaret Freeman sends along this reprinted article from the local newspaper in Heath, Massachusetts. Reprinted from the* Heath Herald*, December 1990/January 1991,12 5: 7. With permission.*

There is an interesting, instructive, and somewhat chilling story to be told about how Heath's "Dell," with its charming mill pond and dam, got its name. Its full name is "Holland's Dell," in honor of the most famous and financially successful writer in Victorian America: Josiah Gilbert Holland (1819-1881). Today few Americans have ever heard of this man. Why? Holland's story of meteoric success followed by post-mortem eclipse is told in Ed Calver's history of Heath and in a critical (in all senses of the word) 1940 biography by Harry Houston Peckham, and is worth further examination.

Holland was born in Belchertown, the son of Harrison Holland, a puritanically pious but totally improvident inventor and handyman. As Peckham says, "he (Holland) was conceived and suckled in Calvinistic piety." Harrison moved in 1822 to what was to be Dell, with his wife and children, including the 3-year old Josiah, and lived in a one-story house where he made wagon wheels for the carriage trade; but in 1832 he lost both his house and a 5-acre farm on a mortgage, and the 13-year old Josiah moved forever from Heath (the naming of this as his Dell was a retroactive tribute to his later fame, probably some time in the 1860's or 1870's). On reaching maturity, the young Josiah decided to be a doctor (he was "Dr. Holland" all his life) and received a degree form Berkshire Medical College in Pittsfield, but practiced medicine in Massachusetts only until 1844. In 1847 he taught in a business college in Richmond, Virginia, then moved to Vicksburg, Mississippi, as Superintendent of Schools; notwithstanding his high moral stand about almost everything under the sun, Holland was out of sympathy with abolitionism and took a tolerant attitude towards slavery: he was quite unenthusiastic about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. But Holland's inclination always led him towards the literary world, and in 1849 he returned to his native state and became assistant editor of the Springfield Republican, and later co-owner of the paper with Samuel Bowles.

From the Wikipedia entry on Josiah Holland. The engraving appears uncredited in the *Biographical Encyclopedia of Massachusetts of the Nineteenth Century*.

Described in the sources as a kindly man with tall, erect figure, his black eyes and straight black hair gave him the appearance of an Indian chief, as his granddaughter Theodora Ward tells us; she also says that "his moral principles were as unyielding as an outcrop of rock in a New England pasture." In the house of Josiah and his wife Elizabeth, whiskey and cardplaying were unknown, and going to the theatre or prize fights forbidden. The Hollands clearly disapproved of the wine-tippling, smoking Bowles, but they got along famously with the Amherst poet-ess Emily Dickinson, whose correspondence with Elizabeth lasted until Emily's death in 1886 (these letters are currently the great man's only claim to fame).

Holland's strict principles carried over into his literary career. Under the pseudonym "Timothy Titcomb" he wrote articles giving moral advice to young bachelors, young maidens, and young married people, and this name became famous in households throughout the United States. I checked out a collection of these essays from the Yale Library, and they are pretty awful; I would certainly not advise any feminist to read them! At the same time, Holland was writing poetry, having instant success in 1858 with *Bitter-Sweet*, a saccharine narrative poem about New England life that sold in larger numbers than any other American poem except *Hiawatha*! He was also writing novels full of his usual didactic moralizations, beginning with *The Bay-Path*, a tale of early Springfield drawn from materials which he had compiled in his *History of Western Massachusetts* (this is probably the only example of his prose still checked out of public libraries).

His literary success put him in great demand on the lecture circuit, where he spe-

cialized in right-minded homilies not very different from his "Timothy Titcomb" articles. To give an instance of his huge popularity, in January 1872 he lectured in the Opera House of Columbus, Ohio, where Mark Twain – probably the greatest public speaker of the 19th century – had spoken six nights earlier. Twain only received half as much newspaper attention as Holland!

In 1870, Holland moved to that den of iniquity, New York City, where he helped establish and became editor of *Scribner's Monthly*, editing this until his much-lamented death in 1881. Here he had a chance to express his critical opinions to a very wide audience. His fellow authors Henry James and W.D. Howells were airily dismissed as presenting "the lighter social topics and types." He detested certain other contemporaries, and stated,

> " . . . when the genuine geniuses of this period shall be appreciated at their full value . . . their countrymen will have ceased discussing Poe and Thoreau and Walt Whitman."

Holland praised Longfellow as superior to both Byron and Poe, and thought the world of that fellow moralizer, Whittier. But his greatest enthusiasm was reserved for an English novelist named George Macdonald, who now resides in the same literary oblivion as Holland himself.

When Holland died in 1881 and was buried under an elaborate obelisk in the Springfield cemetery, the American newspapers were crowded with encomiums. He was the greatest American author of all time. Who now reads him? And what has happened to the reputation of his fellow American, the cigar-smoking, hard-drinking, profane, and irreverent Sam Clemens, whose life, opinions, and stories must have staggered the priggish Holland? Twain is one of history's immortals, and even if he couldn't command Holland's immense audiences or match his commercial success, he surely has had the last laugh on this prig from Dell.

* * *

Counting Emily:
The State Census of Massachusetts, 1855 & 1865

by Tracy Winkler

We know Emily Dickinson was born in 1830, a US Federal Census year. She is not counted on that census because she was born in December, several months after the census-taker had knocked on her parents' door. She is counted, but not named, on the 1840 census. For the household of Edward Dickinson in Amherst, there is a "2" in the "females 5 to under 10" column. This represents Emily and her younger sister, Lavinia. Emily is listed by name on the 1850, 1860, 1870 and 1880 Federal censuses. You can search these censuses on *Ancestry*, a premium genealogy website, and view the specific census page where Dickinson's household and her neighbors are listed. Many public libraries offer a library version of *Ancestry* for their library patrons to use.

Ancestry also has searchable state censuses for several different states. Many states took their own censuses for their own purposes at various times. Massachusetts had an every-name state census in both 1855 and 1865. The pages of these are viewable on *Ancestry*. Yes, as expected, Emily Dickinson is listed in both of them, living at home in Amherst with no occupation. We know, more than 150 years later, that for Emily Dickinson's occupation, the census-taker should have written "Poet for the Ages." Her poem that begins "I Dwell in Possibility" suggests her own answer to a census-taker: "For Occupation – This – / The Spreading wide my narrow Hands / To gather Paradise" (Fr466).

The 1855 census for Massachusetts lists each person in every household. For each person it lists name, age, sex, place of birth, "color" (white or black or mulatto) and occupation. The 1865 census is similar. It added a question about marital status (single, married or widowed) and "Indian" became an added choice in the "color" column. It also asked if the person was a "Legal voter" or a "Naturalized voter." These two state censuses as well as the US Federal censuses provide many tantalizing clues about the people who lived in Amherst during Emily Dickinson's lifetime.

Reviews of Publications

Renée Bergland, Book Review Editor

Martha Ackmann
***These Fevered Days: Ten Pivotal Moments in the Making of Emily Dickinson*.**
Norton, 2020.

By Renée Bergland

Martha Ackmann's new biography of Emily Dickinson begins with a parhelion – a rainbow circle around the sun – that occurred on August 3, 1845, the day when the fourteen-year-old Emily Dickinson sat down at her carefully arranged writing stand and announced that she was ready to write. On that lazy Sunday, Dickinson had prepared to write a long letter to her friend Abiah Root. In this account by former Mount Holyoke professor and EDIS President Ackmann, however, Dickinson's declaration takes on a larger significance. This luminous moment marks the fact that Dickinson was ready to write all of the works – hundreds of letters, thousands of poems – that we celebrate today.

The parhelion at the beginning of *These Fevered Days* is a good metaphor for the bright possibilities that encircled the young Dickinson in 1845. There is also something parhelion-like about the rainbow of biographies that have surrounded Dickinson in subsequent years. First, there were the personal recollections. Since then, there have been many scholarly biographies, some comprehensive, others focused on particular relationships or interests. There are scores of novels based on Dickinson's life. And then, at the least scholarly but most entertaining end of the spectrum, there are the plays and films. *The Belle of Amherst* has been staged hundreds of times over the past decades. More recently, Cynthia Nixon, Molly Shannon, and Hailee Steinfeld have presented three remarkably different versions of Dickinson onscreen. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but to gesture toward the wide range of biographical works that radiate around Emily Dickinson.

Where does *These Fevered Days* belong on this circle? Although the relatively brief biography focuses on ten "pivotal moments," it is still fairly comprehensive. In some respects, it leans toward the scholarly – it is closer to Alfred Habegger than to Hailee Steinfeld. Ackmann dramatizes Dickinson's life without sacrificing accuracy or precision. She writes with sympathy and imagination, but the book is certainly not a fictionalization. This is not to say that it's dull. To the contrary, *These Fevered Days* is poignant, even piercing at times.

Each of the ten chapters starts with an observation of the weather on a significant day, drawn from the Amherst College logs kept by Ebenezer and Sabra Snell. From the parhelion of 1845, on the day when Dickinson declared herself ready to write, to the cloudless May evening in 1886 when she ceased to breathe, the meteorological records allow Ackmann to frame her narrative with truly Dickinsonian attention to the metaphorical implications of observing the atmosphere.

April 15, 1862 was very cloudy in Amherst. That day, Dickinson wrote her first letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, an editor whom she had never met. Ackmann contextualizes Dickinson's pitch to Higginson with a description of Amherst's collective mourning for the civil war dead. That spring, the town was grieving many young men who had died on Civil War battlefields. The Dickinson family was profoundly affected by the news of the death of Frazar Stearns a few weeks before. In the context of all this death, Dickinson's question to the editor on that very cloudy day is particularly poignant: she wondered "if my Verse is alive?"

On a brilliant October afternoon in 1876, when the temperature was 63.4 degrees Fahrenheit and the humidity was 51, Emily Dickinson's childhood friend Helen Hunt Jackson paid a call at the Homestead, hoping to persuade her to publish her poetry in the "No Name" series edited by Thomas Niles. Helen was a celebrated poet in her own right, who supported herself as an essay-writing journalist willing to tackle a wide range of topics. She admired Dickinson's poetry immensely, and she was determined to convince her to publish. Although it took months, she would finally wring permission to submit a single poem to the No-Name anthology. Ackmann's account of the friendship between Helen Hunt Jackson and Emily Dickinson is threaded through the entire biography; it makes sense that she sets her penultimate chapter on a colorful October afternoon when Dickinson's old

The *Bulletin* welcomes notices of all Dickinson-related books, including those published outside the U.S.
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friend pleads that she will publish something. That Dickinson chose "Success is counted Sweetest" to be her single poem in a published book is particularly fitting for this chapter's autumnal meditation on Dickinson's heady mix of anonymity and ambition.

Martha Ackmann is remarkably successful at evoking the atmosphere around Emily Dickinson. The circumstances were unquestionably propitious: Dickinson was showered with opportunity and graced with remarkable talent. But the rainbow of good luck was just the beginning. Emily Dickinson approached her poetic career with profound thoughtfulness, intense emotional courage, and serious, sustained effort. *These Fevered Days* offers us a chance to witness the pivotal moments when Emily Dickinson made herself a great poet.

Julie Dobrow
***After Emily: Two Remarkable Women, and the Legacy of America's Greatest Poet*. Norton, 2018.**

By Cristanne Miller

In *After Emily*, Julie Dobrow tells a compelling – at times powerful – story of Mabel Loomis Todd's and, especially, Millicent Todd Bingham's lives, generally and in their extensive service to the transcription, publication, and preservation of Emily Dickinson's manuscripts.

For Dickinson scholars, the portion of this narrative that focuses primarily on Mabel Loomis Todd may be familiar in many of its particulars, because of previous publications of Polly Longsworth and Christopher Benfey, among others – although Dobrow tells the story well and with additional information related to her parenting. The chapters that focus on Millicent, however (well over half the volume), are newly illuminating in revealing the ways that yet another gifted, ambitious, troubled woman devoted years of her energy to Dickinson: Millicent sought both to preserve Dickinson manuscripts (thereby demonstrating the astonishing worth of the poems and letters) and to preserve her mother's legacy as Dickinson's first major editor.

Julie Dobrow has done extensive and meticulous research as the basis for her intertwined stories of the Todd mother and daughter, the history of manuscript acquisition and horse-trading by major scholars and institutions, and of Dickinson herself. Were it necessary to name a villain in this tale, it would be Harvard University – as manifested through the Press's protective investment in Thomas H. Johnson's editing of the poems (resulting in his 1955 *Poems*) and its (and his) coercive attempts to make Millicent share her unpublished manuscripts with him while also preventing her from publishing her own already-prepared transcriptions/edition of manuscripts in her possession. Harvard blocked other publishers from working with Millicent on publication until after Johnson's edition was out. Dobrow argues, persuasively, that this procedure was not in the interest of professional scholarship – altogether apart from questions of copyright legality. Harvard University Press acted in its own interest and that of Thomas Johnson. Harvard also attempted to coerce Millicent to sell them her manuscripts, but she increasingly leaned toward the kinder politics and more cordial welcome of Amherst College, where she all along had believed that Dickinson materials should reside.

Dobrow faithfully depicts Mabel and Millicent's complex relationship with each other, as Mabel was ambitiously crafting a professional career in a world that did not readily accept female ambition and also balancing her passion for Austin Dickinson, even while doors were opening to her for world travel with her husband David Todd. For me, the most interesting aspects of the mother-daughter relationship come to light after Mabel's death, as Millicent learns more about her mother's life and seeks to come to terms with, for example, Mabel's infidelity to David and Mabel's indifference toward consistent maternal care, especially in Millicent's youth. Mabel's powerful charisma exerted a strong effect on her daughter, who adored her mother in a complex way that also involved feelings of guilt in condemning her mother's infidelity and maternal neglect.

Like her mother, Millicent was a gifted, intelligent, and ambitious woman. After teaching French at Vassar and Wellesley, and studying art in Berlin, Millicent entered an interdisciplinary program at Harvard, where she studied geography, geology, and anthropology. She was the first woman to earn a PhD in this department, in 1923, and she published *Peru: A Land of Contrasts* in 1917. Later, Millicent assisted in the publication of *Geography of France* and translated *Principles of Human Geography* from French. This field offered her a professional world of her own making. On the other hand, Millicent had promised her mother to continue the publication of the Dickinson materials, which included laborious transcription and, increasingly, conflict with others whose publications were less precise or, in Millicent's view, slighted her mother's pioneering work in publishing Dickinson's letters and poems.

Millicent engaged in negotiations with various institutions as she attempted to publish and then bring into professional custody the Dickinson manuscripts left in her possession, as related by Dobrow in riveting detail. Even more than her mother, who did not have to deal with universities or with competing copyright claims among publishers, Millicent was attempting to preserve her professional self-esteem in a context with little respect for a woman editor with no position in literary academia and related to Dickinson only through the bruising legacy of her mother's affair with Austin. Millicent also battled anxiety and a crippling tendency to berate herself for never doing enough – either for her mother's legacy or for her husband Walter Bingham, especially in his last illness.

Dobrow represents Millicent as a life-long champion for the fidelity of her mother's transcriptions and also as an exceptionally attentive and astute transcriber and editor of Dickinson materials. While this volume will certainly not be the last word in representing the conflicts between the Todd/Bingham legacy of editing and the Dickinson/Bianchi legacy, it expands the tale to include the powerful university spokespeople lobbying to gain possession of Todd/Bingham manuscripts and makes a valuable contribution to that highly debated story through its painstaking sifting of thousands of pages of diaries and professional documents. It also provides us with the fascinating story of, as her subtitle declares, "two remarkable women."

Cristanne Miller is a former President of EDIS, former editor of the Emily Dickinson Journal*, and original editor of the* Bulletin*. Her influence on Dickinson studies began with* Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar *(1987); her most recent critical work on Dickinson is* Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century *(2012). She is the editor of* Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them *(2016).*

For an interview between EDIS Board Member Marta Werner and Julie Dobrow, see the Fall 2018 issue of the Bulletin*.*

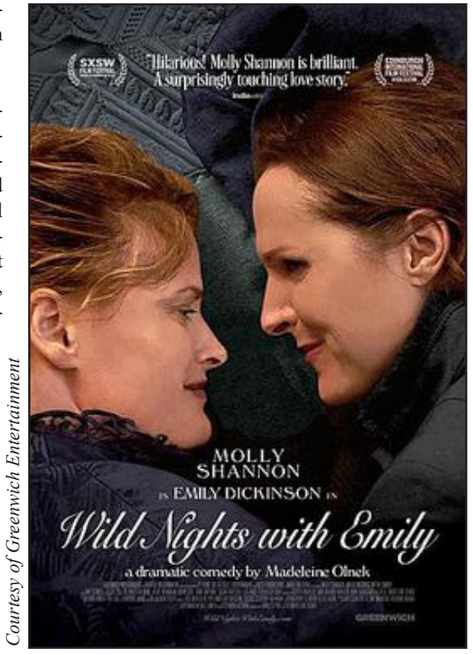
Review of *Wild Nights with Emily*

By Jordan Greenwald

The final frame of *Wild Nights with Emily* (Greenwich Entertainment 2018; general release 2020) captures the aim of all that precedes it with stark clarity. On a split screen, we see on one side a scene of poignant intimacy in which Susan Gilbert Dickinson (Susan Ziegler) tenderly washes the body of her beloved Emily in preparation for burial. On the other, Mabel Loomis Todd (Amy Seimetz) studiously erases Susan's name from the most erotic of Emily's letters to her, washing clean what will become the new incarnation of Emily – the body of her soon-to-be-published work – from the scandalous truth of the amorous relationship between the two women.

Acknowledging the historical success of Todd's branding of Emily as "our dear, sweet, spinster recluse poet," near its end the film stages a scene in which Mabel uses that very epithet while lecturing a crowd of adulatory readers of Dickinson's published poems, contrasting it later it with a shot of Susan's daughter Mattie (Sella Chestnut) addressing an all-but-empty lecture hall about the essential role – both romantic and literary – that Susan played in Emily's life.

As if to reinforce the film's commitment to contesting the false image of Emily as a bitter spinster bereft of a man's love, the credits end with a dedication to Martha Nell Smith, with whom director Madeleine Olnek consulted throughout the making of the film. Indeed, *Wild Nights with Emily*, which began its life in the form of a 1999 play Olnek wrote and directed in New York, was first inspired by a 1998 New York Times article that featured Smith's use of digital and spectrographic technologies to uncover the true nature of the written correspondence between Emily and Susan. In 1999, Smith and Ellen Louise Hart compiled these same letters in *Open Me Carefully*, testifying to the overwhelming



Courtesy of Greenwich Entertainment

significance of the lesbian relationship and the literary collaboration between the two women in the context of Emily's development as a poet.

A number of scenes in the film draw from these same letters as spoken dialogue, while others feature a voiceover (with subtitles) that recites poems gifted to Susan via their correspondence. This latter use of the poetry proves to be a rich interpretive device, as it allows Dickinson's poems to resonate in new and surprising contexts – sometimes to a surreal effect.

Despite its solemn treatment of the erasure of Susan from Emily's legacy, *Wild Nights with Emily* is a comedy through and through, offering a sharp contrast with the somber image of Dickinson depicted in many representations of the poet, not the least of which is Terence Davies' *A Quiet Passion* (2016). The film maintains an ebullient rococo aesthetic to match its comedic brilliance – Emily is played by none other than SNL comedy great Molly Shannon – with numerous incursions into sunny Amherst and a soundtrack composed of sprightly minuets and sonatas performed by a chamber ensemble.

One highly successful comedic trope consists of recurring excerpts from the aforementioned lecture given by Todd, (the *de facto* narrator of the film) juxtaposed with scenes from Emily's life that directly contest Todd's biographical claims. In one instance, Todd remarks on the influence Ralph Waldo Emerson surely had on Dickinson, which is immediately followed by a scene where Emily grimaces as Emerson drones insufferably through a lecture in the parlor of the Evergreens. In another, Todd declares that Emily had wished to be published only posthumously, and the film cuts immediately to Emily premiering her first fascicle to her most important readerly demographic: Susan.

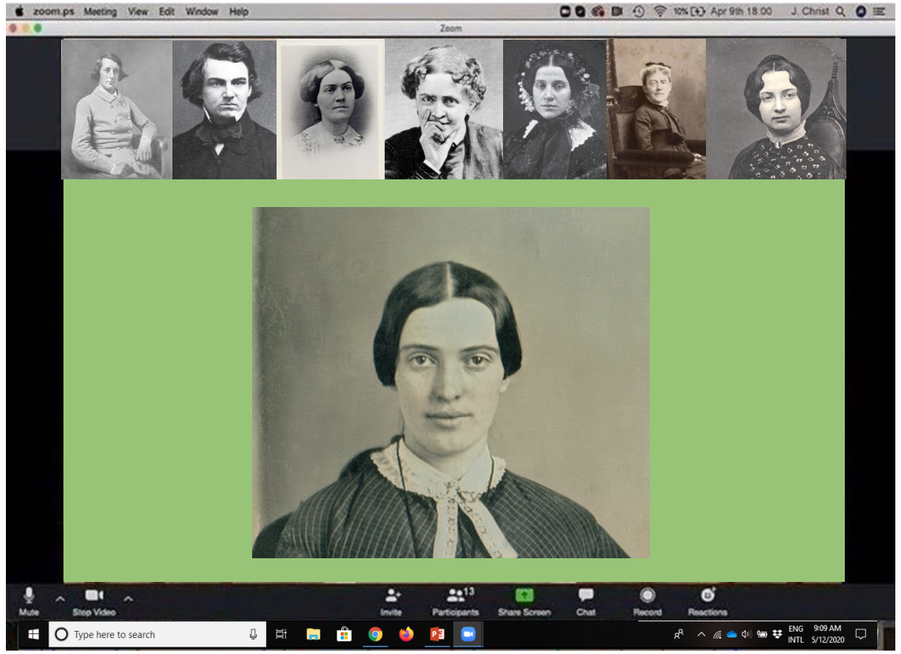
From its start, *Wild Nights with Emily* does much to situate Dickinson's writerly life in the context of her love for Susan: the first character we see reading Emily's poetry is Susan, to whom Emily has excitedly hand-delivered it. A flashback then shows young Emily and Susan reciting *Much Ado About Nothing* (playing Benedick and Beatrice, respectively) for the Lady's Shakespeare Society. Mediated by poetry, their romantic bond thus forms, leading to teenage sexual experimentation, love letters, and finally to Susan accepting Austin's (Kevin Seal) proposal to marry expressly so that she can move next door to Emily and be her sister, since "it is quite normal for sisters to spend many hours alone in each other's company." The film plays up the comedic dimensions of the open secret throughout (Higginson, Emily assures Susan, knows nothing of the true meaning behind "I taste a liquor never brewed") and posits that Susan was not just Emily's muse but also her greatest champion, advocating that she publish her work for the benefit of posterity.

Mediated by poetry, their romantic bond thus forms, leading to teenage sexual experimentation, love letters, and finally to Susan accepting Austin's (Kevin Seal) proposal to marry expressly so that she can move next door to Emily and be her sister,

Dickinson scholars are sure to find a source of delight in many an inside joke. Naturally, the venal figure of Mabel Todd is the target of much of the film's parodic efforts (much is made of Emily's famous refusal to meet Todd in person, to great comedic effect), but few if any of the surrounding cast of characters escapes Olnek's satiricial lens. Thomas Wentworth Higginson's (Brett Gelman) marked condescension toward Emily is undercut by a clip in which Higginson vaunts his literary accolades to the decidedly unimpressed all-black regiment of Union soldiers he has been appointed to lead. Judge Otis Lord (Al Sutton), the fabled love of Dickinson's life to whom some speculate she penned her "Master" letters, is depicted as a senile and somnolent visitor to Emily's salon – certainly neither a desirable love object nor a match for Emily's keen wit. When Susan and Emily discuss Higginson's esteem for the poetry of Helen Hunt Jackson, the film ironically cuts to Jackson (Cynthia Kapan) delivering some of her most painfully bathetic lines to a captivated audience – a not-so-subtle nod to Dickinson's current fame and Jackson's relative obscurity. Indeed, even the recently-discovered daguerreotype of Dickinson with Kate Scott Turner gets a mention by none other than Kate herself (Allison Lane) – whom we later spy cavorting in Emily's bedroom while a jealous Susan looks on from her own bedroom window in the Evergreens.

While such jokes land equally well on viewers new to Dickinson studies, those with a deeper biographical knowledge will likely feel vindicated by the film's willingness to lampoon the myths about Emily promulgated by her contemporaries and upheld for many years by biographers and literary scholars alike. After all, while the film fleshes out the relationship between Emily and Susan, it also does the work of rescuing *Susan's* Emily, the Emily of their letters – witty, passionate, loving, sometimes even prurient – from the gaze of those invested in painting a much different portrait of the poet. In a time that seems to be experiencing a veritable renaissance of popular interest in Dickinson, *Wild Nights with Emily* delivers an updated rendering of the poet, one that finds humor and passion in Dickinson's life while also taking stock of key developments in literary criticism of the past two decades.

Jordan Greenwald received his doctorate in comparative literature from Berkeley in 2019 and currently teaches high school in Oakland. His dissertation, Hopeless Romantics: The Poetics of Unredeeming Nature, *uncovered an Other Romanticism, a view of the nonhuman world as "fragile, contingent, and indifferent to human thriving." At Asilomar he presented a paper on "Dickinson's Intimacy of Distance."*



EDIS Annual Meeting 2020: "Dickinson at a Distance"

Date: July 31-August 1, 2020

Away from Home are some and I –
An Emigrant to be
In a Metropolis of Homes
Is easy, possibly –

The Habit of a Foreign Sky
We – difficult – acquire
As Children, who remain in Face
The more their Feet retire. (Fr807)

How does Dickinson respond generatively and creatively to friends, relatives, and other writers even over distances of time and space? How does she engage with events that happen elsewhere or in other historical periods? What does she think about strangers, immigrants, people living in other places? In what ways did Dickinson and others in her era close geographic and emotional distance, and how might we learn to overcome or interrogate the same issues? At this time of global crisis, we will hold a virtual one-day Annual Meeting that explores how figurations of isolation, distance, and remoteness in Dickinson's work can teach us ways to connect more deeply with each other on personal, emotional, and intellectual levels. As Marianne Moore, who admired Dickinson greatly, wrote, "the cure for loneliness is solitude." We plan to explore these themes of seclusion, distance, privacy, and communication at a distance in her work, and we will consider how these themes might provide a new understanding of her poems and letters and allow us to celebrate her achievement together using interactive technology.

We plan a variety of synchronic and asynchronic scholarly panels, cultural events, and poetry sessions using Zoom and YouTube as platforms. Many of these activities, such as the Research Circle

and Poetry Discussions, will be familiar to members from our Annual Meetings in years past.

There will be Keynote Addresses by Eliza Richards, on "Remote Suffering," , and by Cristanne Miller, on “A New Dickinson's Letters and Prose: A Preview of Exciting Discoveries.”

In addition to the keynotes, members will want to join in for the many other intriguing events:

- International Dickinson (a panel devoted to English translations of scholarship by critics outside of the United States)
- Dickinson and Disaster (a panel formerly proposed at the ALA Conference)
- #trendingDickinsonataDistance (a series of presentations on dissertations and recent publications)
- “Away from Home”: New Views on the Homestead and the Evergreens (video interpretations by the Museum docents of household objects, paintings, the gardens, and other features that were imported or represent a world outside Amherst)
- Poetry Circle discussions with scholars and critics, based on suggestions made by members in advance of the conference
- Research Circle
- Live-stream video events, including a musical interlude inspired by Dickinson’s poetry
- Virtual Social Hour and Celebration

Short papers on the theme of distance, isolation, privacy, retirement, seclusion and methods of connection, both emotionally or spatially, are invited. Participants will offer 5-minute presentations on the theme of the conference. Please send a 100-word abstract to Páraic Finnerty and Adeline Chevrier-Bosseau by June 30.

Eliza Richards’ keynote will be based on her recent book, *Battle Lines: Poetry and Mass Media in the U.S. Civil War* (UPenn 2019)*;* Cristanne Miller is working, with Domhnall Mitchell, on a new edition of Dickinson's complete [extant] letters, drafts, and fragments, to be submitted to Harvard UP in December 2021. Her presentation will summarize some of the changes they will be making and their exciting finds, in relation to formatting, dating, state of manuscripts, and letters not included by Johnson.

A Note about Norman Worrall

Composer Jean Hasse, a *Bulletin* correspondent writing from England, wrote recently to remind readers of the DVD that her late partner, Norman Worrall, created as a tribute to Emily Dickinson. The video, *Becoming Emily,* uses her poems and letters to create a story about her life, and is accompanied by an 8-page booklet. Worrall, who discussed the project in the Fall 2011 issue of the *Bulletin*, also wrote the music for the film. Those interested will find more at the following address: https://www.visible-music.com/becoming-emily-dvd

Huffman, continued from page 11

This kind of reader buy-in is what I hope for my sestinas. I am fixated on the sestina’s metaxy – the in-between space where the inner and outer worlds meet, the tug-of-war between the private mind and its public reception – and I invite my readers to meet me there. It is in this space where Dickinson’s poems exist: a space where liminal and wild things go. And like all things that linger just out of reach, the work of harnessing it is never finished.

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EDIS Membership Form

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

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Recasting Emily Dickinson's Poems: Memories, and an Invitation

By George Mamunes

*In the middle of the 19th century, tuberculosis was responsible for 25% of the deaths in Massachusetts. It is thus sadly fitting that in the midst of a later pandemic, we feature this topic. George Mamunes, author of S*o has a Daisy Vanished: Emily Dickinson and Tuberculosis *(2007) offers us memories and an "Invitation."*

Following the Mamunes contribution are two parodies by regular contributor to The Sweets of Pillage feature, Felicia Nimue Ackerman.

MEMORIES. In the summer of 2002, newly retired, I took up a study of Emily Dickinson and her verse. I purchased Franklin's recent reading edition of the poems, and each morning, after seeing Lenora off to work, I met with Emily at the dining room table. I jotted down comments on dozens of her early poems, hoping to summon up her inner and outer lives. Instead, I found myself in a muddle. Emily was rolling out her story in bits and pieces and, famously, telling it "slant." I turned to biography. Dickinson's earliest major biographer, George Frisbie Whicher (1938), and her most recent one, Alfred Habegger (2001), both pointed to Emily's two years of camaraderie with Benjamin F. Newton as a factor in her emergence as a poet. Whicher felt she "had good reason to be grateful to Ben Newton, for he had put her in touch with new and stimulating currents of thought beyond the range of her orthodox upbringing. More than that he had awakened in her stirrings of young ambition, if not young love. He had told her that she had the power to be a poet and had praised her early verses in terms that she never forgot." Habegger took note of thirty-one people in ED's orbit, including Newton, who died of consumption. He added that Dickinson, too, had pulmonary tuberculosis, "two of her symptoms being weight loss and a cough."

I sensed a research and writing project in the making. On the premise that Ben Newton and a deadly disease were two of ED's concerns, I focused on the first six years of her poems, 1858 to 1863 (Fr5 to Fr793). What happened next was unplanned – I began to recast her poems, eventually dozens of them. And then – please forgive me! – I gave each recast poem a title.

My pre-writing spree was a joy, and I'm still feeding off the energy of those two summer months.

AN INVITATION. Match each of the eleven "offspring" below to its "parent" poem (Fr5 to Fr793). While your match-ups may differ at times from mine, every one of your choices is, of course, entirely appropriate for you.

Trauma Fr___

I've spent the Night addressing
The Slivers in my Brain –
I'll put away the Balm – for now –
And camouflage the Pain.

The Darkness of the Night is just
As it has always been –
But now my Lamp burns Brighter,
Inviting Glimmers in.

Spell It Out Fr___

It's not "in God's hands," Mr. Bowles –
Those "hands" we cannot see –
My need – to look within my Lungs
To see what's eating Me.

Kindred Spirit Fr___

Your Courage drew me to your side –
I leapt across the Sea –
To look upon a Tuscan Bed –
To Learn – what I might Be –

The Schoolyard Fr___

Ben Newton came – all grace and care –
My Playmate – for a Day –
God leaned against a fencepost
And looked the other way –

The Shadows – dwindled – into Dusk –
My Realm was minus One –
Abducted by the Bystander!
He took My Only Sun –

Child Care Fr___

Pity the weak who cannot bear
The Winter's arctic blast –
A Shelter ready – Underground –
To warm their feet at last –

Each Child a Gem – inviolate –
Each swaddled in its Bed –
No one coughs to wake the others –
The Salving of the Dead –

The Orphanage of Amherst –
With Parents Thanking God
For looking after all the Flock –
Except – so many – gone.

No Exit Fr___

I'm in an Icy Grip of Death –
And yet I do not die,
I sing one song, it stands at Naught –
The frozen cannot fly –

One Redbreast off to Florida –
Another, New Orleans –
The South of France or Italy –
The places of my Dreams

I shiver at the Lord's Estate,
And scratch upon His door –
He cannot hear – or does not care –
The snowdrifts love me more.

Forbearance Fr___

Bathed in White – no need to breathe –
Relieved of Earthly Care –
The difference is so minuscule
Some deem I'm taking Air –

A closer look would ascertain
That all is stilled – inside –
The little elves have closed up shop
And left me here to die –

Anxiety Fr___

September is a month of Blood –
Or so it seemed Last Year –
A sudden flood of Crimson –
Catastrophic Fear –

I dreamt I'd spilled my Circumstance
And soaked the townsfolk Red –
But life in Amherst wended on
As if I'd never bled –

No Vermillion Pools appeared –
No globules in the street –
I fought the Hurricane – alone –
While Autumn reddened – sweet.

Elopement Fr___

Christ is wont to hold and love –
God is arch, and stern –
How can He love me, yet dispatch
A Son to take his Turn?

I may just run off with that Son,
And leave God pondering why –
Jesus calls on those in Pain –
He's not the Lord on High –

Emily and Ben Fr___

When my Time is up
I'll seek Another Place –
A Vast Estate where everyone's
Familiar with Your Face –

I'll call your name out at the Gate –
The Door will open wide –
And deferential Angels
Will gather at my side –

They'll organize a Wedding –
Betrothal posthumous –
It may be Heaven, may be not,
For Heaven mirrors Us –

Closing Night Fr___

The kindest thing to say of Death,
It features no Remissions –
Consumption takes its Curtain Calls –
With Death, the Theater's black –

Suspense springs from Uncertainty –
The Opera ends – The Curtain falls –
Then rises – for the Encore –
Why can't we – just – go – home.

Felicia Nimue Ackerman

We Grow Accustomed to the Dog

We grow accustomed to the dog
When peace is put away,
As when our human leaves the house
And Rover holds full sway.

We quickly hiss a little
And scurry off to hide
Directly 'neath the dresser.
But as we gain our pride,

Either our darkness alters
Or something gives us cause
To gird ourselves for battle
By stretching out our claws.

The Soul Selects Her Social Distance

The soul selects her own society,
Then shuts the door.
She keeps her social distance of
Six feet – or more.

Unmoved, she notes the careless crowd
Outside her gate;
Unmoved, she notes the feckless folk
Still tempting fate.

I've known her from those foolish people
Choose none
Then turn her mind to friends she's meeting
By phone.

A lane of Yellow led the eye
Unto a Purple Wood
Whose Soft inhabitants to be
Surpasses solitude
If Bird the silence contradict
Or flower presume to show
In that low summer of the West
Impossible to know

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