

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

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## A New Dickinson at the Homestead

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*An Interview by Polly Longworth*

Cynthia Dickinson, the new curator of the Dickinson Homestead in Amherst, had been in residence just six weeks (and three major snowstorms) when she agreed to a *Bulletin* interview. "Don't make this too formal," she protested. "I'm not ready to make definitive statements about what will be happening in Dickinson's home." So far, she has moved with a small assemblage of possessions into the generous 1813 Federal mansion and National Historic Landmark owned by Amherst College at 280 Main Street. "I'm getting a real feel for the house in winter," she smiled, noting that much of her growing up took place in Kentucky and South Carolina.

The Homestead, which closes each year between mid-December and mid-March, has now reopened on its usual schedule. Its tours are staffed, as formerly, by guides trained under previous curator Carol Birtwistle and her predecessors. It will be business as usual, Cindy indicated, while she gains the widest possible exposure to Emily Dickinson. Her first weeks in Amherst have been spent meeting colleagues at the College and in town, reading Dickinson books, watching Dickinson videos, and talking, talking, talking about the poet.

To answer the question she's asked many times a day, Cindy, so far as she knows, is not related to Emily's family or any of the now-widespread Amherst Dickinson clan.

A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Princeton, Cindy comes to Amherst with the enthusiastic endorsement of those familiar with her preparatory work. She holds graduate degrees in English from



the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (her Master's thesis was on D.H. Lawrence) and in Early American Culture from the University of Delaware (this included internships at Winterthur Museum). The opportunity to combine those experiences made the Homestead curatorship particularly appealing to Cindy, who has loved literary history, museums, and historic preservation since she was taken at age six to see Laura Ingalls Wilder's home. She grew up loving especially the Smithsonian's American History Museum, a frequent destination for a family that spent its vacations at historical sites.

In 1995, Cindy served as Project Director at the Teackle Mansion in Princess Anne, Maryland, a nineteenth-century Federal residence featuring many interesting architectural idiosyncrasies, but filled with artifacts and furnishings unrelated to the occupants, and in some cases to the period, of the structure. Cindy supervised a collections inventory and developed a collec-

tions policy for the museum, among other initiatives.

The Dickinson residence, while built in the same era, presents different problems. Of immediate concern is the sparsely furnished condition, for only a few of its objects belonged to the poet or her family. Nor has there been a historic analysis of the Homestead's architecture to determine changes made during three major remodelings (by the Macks, by Edward Dickinson, and by the Parke family) since 1813, when Emily Dickinson's grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson, began building it.

"I studied Dickinson in college, and am drawn to her as a woman and a poet," Cindy says. "It's important to me that this is her home, that she lived here nearly her entire life. This isn't a transient setting." As curator, she hopes to open more rooms to visitors, "so they will get a better feel for how the house worked as a home," although the kitchen, so vital to Emily but much changed since her time, will remain off-limits.

"The immediate goal is for visitors to have a good experience," Cindy points out. "It's important, especially for people who don't know a lot about Emily Dickinson, to sense what went on here and receive accurate information about her."

Cindy is looking forward to the Amherst gathering of EDIS members in June, when the Society will hold part of its Annual Meeting under the trees in the Homestead's side yard.

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*Polly Longworth is author of three books on Dickinson, most recently The World of Emily Dickinson.*

## The Contributions of Theodora Van Wagenen Ward

By Stephanie A. Tingley

Stephanie A. Tingley, associate professor of English at Youngstown State University, is at work on a book examining Emily Dickinson's correspondence in a number of cultural-historical contexts, including nineteenth-century women's culture. Her long-term interest in the poet's friendship with Elizabeth and Josiah Gilbert Holland, which has resulted in several memorable conference presentations, extends to their granddaughter's editorial and interpretive contributions to Dickinson scholarship.

Jane Donahue Eberwein, *Series Editor*

In "*Real*" and *Other People*, her posthumously published (and privately printed) memoir of her childhood and life to 1950, Theodora Van Wagenen Ward describes the fortuitous moment in 1929 when she discovered a collection of letters from Emily Dickinson to her maternal grandmother, Elizabeth Chapin Holland, while going through the family attic with her sister:

While she was with us Katherina and I examined a great many things that had accumulated in the family attic, and found in an old trunk a red leather-covered box containing a large packet of letters tied up with a lavender ribbon. The box had belonged to my grandmother Holland and the contents were sixty-five unpublished letters from Emily Dickinson. The discovery, exciting as it was at the moment, was to lead me later into the most important work of my life. [129]

This discovery marked the beginning of a thirty-five year career as a Dickinson

scholar, both as editor of the poem and letter manuscripts and as biographer. Although some may know of Ward's 1951 published collection, *Emily Dickinson's Letters to Dr. and Mrs. Josiah Gilbert Holland*, or her 1961 collection of biographical essays, *The Capsule of the Mind: Chapters in the Life of Emily Dickinson*, most will remember her as the person who, in the 1950s, assisted Thomas H. Johnson with the daunting task of collecting, dating, ordering, and editing the Harvard editions of Dickinson's *Poems* (1955) and *Letters* (1958).

Despite the body of important work she left to future generations of Dickinson scholars, Theodora Ward remains a shadowy and underappreciated contributor to Dickinson studies. Published biographical material about her is sketchy and scarce, and critics writing about Dickinson's life and work usually mention Ward's scholarship only in passing. A brief entry in *Contemporary Authors* written the year after Ward's death and her August 18, 1974, obituary from the *New York Times* provide the basic facts.

Theodora Van Wagenen Ward was born on November 13, 1890, in South Orange, New Jersey, the eldest child and first daughter of Bleeker (a publisher) and Kate (Holland) Van Wagenen. Kate was the second of the three children of Elizabeth (Chapin) and Josiah Gilbert Holland, who was for many years an editor of the *Springfield Republican* and later a founding editor of *Scribner's*. Dickinson included the elder Hollands in the select circle of friends to whom she sent poems and letters.

Theodora was educated in private schools and, on February 7, 1931, married Jasper D. Ward, an engineer, and became stepmother to his sons, Allen and Jasper D., Jr. She lived most of her life in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Alstead Center, New Hampshire, and died in Keene, New Hampshire, at the age of 83.

She was an artist as well as a writer; her woodcuts can be found not only in the collections of the Boston and Baltimore art museums, but as the illustrations for Eleanor Melville Metcalf's 1947 *Poems*. Her last scholarly publication, *Men and Angels* (1969), reflects her interdisciplinary training and interests. As Mary Reed Newland notes in the February 8, 1970, *New York Times Book Review*, "*Men and Angels* will be rewarding for those ardent angelophiles, for those whose concept of the angelic leans toward the unique religious experience, and for those who see the angel as an emergence into consciousness of something deep in the unconscious." Newland credits Ward with "exegetical skill and the charm of a gifted story teller" (18). Ward's project, which includes a brief discussion of Dickinson's angel imagery in her chapter on nineteenth-century artists' work, almost eerily prefigures the late 1990s revival of interest in things angelic.

What did Theodora Ward contribute to Dickinson scholarship? First, she added sixty-five previously unpublished letters to the collection of Dickinson's extant correspondence. Her introduction to *Letters to Dr. and Mrs. Josiah Gilbert Holland*, the first of her Dickinson publications, which she undertook as a "novice in

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the field of scholarship" (vii), reveals that Ward's purposes for doing so were both personal and professional. She wanted to add the sixty-five letters in her possession, which she describes as "a legacy which I have long desired to share with the public" (v), to the twenty-nine Mabel Loomis Todd had published in her 1894 and 1931 editions of *Letters of Emily Dickinson*.

Yet in addition, and perhaps more significant, Ward wanted to demonstrate how important her Holland grandparents (particularly her grandmother, Elizabeth) were to Emily Dickinson, to redress what she believed was benign neglect of the significance of the Hollands' thirty-year friendship with the poet. She persuasively argues that her grandmother, in particular, was central to Dickinson's select circle of friends.

Ward's editing of the Holland correspondence is also noteworthy because her meticulous scrutiny of the letter manuscripts in her possession led her to develop and test her theory about how changes in Dickinson's handwriting over time, as well as the type of letter paper used, could aid in dating individual manuscripts. Ward also decided to retain Dickinson's original punctuation (reproducing the dashes and capitalization patterns as best she could in print) and to provide readers with rich biographical and historical contextual notes for each letter. Ward's editorial practices may, in retrospect, be seen as a small-scale test of the methodology Johnson and Ward would employ for the variorum *Poems* and the *Letters* a few years later, for Johnson, with Ward's assistance, applied her ideas to all extant poem and letter manuscripts in these editions.

Beyond her methodology, it is difficult to determine the extent of Ward's contributions to the 1955 *Poems*, nor is there much information about the nature of her collaboration with Johnson, although in the "Acknowledgments" to *Poems* Johnson speaks warmly about how essential Ward's help was to the project: "The editorial assistance of Theodora Van Wagenen Ward has immeasurably lightened the task of preparing this edition. She has acted as counselor in all matters of plan and execution, while devoting her

time chiefly to the letters, now being prepared for publication. She wrote the section in the introduction on 'Characteristics of the Handwriting,' and compiled the subject index" (I:xv).

Curiously, however, in two articles written while the editing of the poems was actually in process, Johnson never mentions Ward by name, despite the centrality of her theories to his proposed editing process and his frequent use of the plural pronouns "we" and "our" in describing the project.

As someone whose own scholarship has involved extensive research on Emily Dickinson's correspondence, I had long wanted to know more about Ward's role as associate editor of the three-volume Harvard edition of the *Letters*. The little evidence that exists suggests that Ward's specific contributions were more substantial than in the *Poems* volumes, and it seems clear that she devoted most of her time and energy to work on the letter manuscripts from the start of her collaboration with Johnson, taking on much of the responsibility for dating individual letters, establishing a chronology, and, with the assistance of Jay Leyda, checking facts and reconstructing historical and biographical contexts. This time, her name appears on the title page with Johnson's, above the title "Associate Editor," and the *Letters* volumes clearly borrow heavily from Ward's format and methodology for her earlier work on the Holland letters.

Although subsequent textual critics and editors have rightly criticized Johnson's and Ward's editing of the Dickinson texts because they may misrepresent the intentions of a poet who self-consciously sought alternatives to traditional publication and experimented with visual layout and prosody, their work was exemplary given their stated purpose, which was, as Johnson wrote, "to establish an accurate text of the poems and to give them as far as possible a chronology" (I:lxix).

As Richard Sewall wrote about the importance of the Harvard editions of Dickinson's work (in his profile of T.H. Johnson earlier in this series), "It wasn't until Tom Johnson published his three-volume edition of Emily Dickinson's poems in 1955 and, three years later (with Theodora Ward), the three-volume edition of the

letters that the world began to take Dickinson seriously." Sewall reminds us that until 1955, "We had never seen those poems in that way—with the Dickinson punctuation, especially the dashes, honored; her capitalization retained; and no alterations of diction, rhythm, or rime to suit conventional taste. Listing the variant readings opened up a whole new dimension of speculation."

Subsequent publication of the *Letters*, Sewall adds, "beautifully edited, organized, and annotated, added glory unto glory. We could now see Emily Dickinson, if not 'steadily and whole,' better than we had ever seen her before. Her standing as a world-class figure was assured" (*Bulletin*, May/June 1993, 9, 12).

Although Sewall and many others expressed more skepticism about the chronology—a skepticism which, by the way, both Johnson and Ward shared—the dating of the manuscripts, no matter how tentative, provided an essential starting point for later investigations, including R. W. Franklin's 1981 *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*.

Both of the Ward-authored appendices to *Poems* have profoundly influenced Dickinson scholarship since 1955. Her illustrated essay "Characteristics of the Handwriting," an expansion and revision of her observations about the Holland letter manuscripts, traces and documents changes in Dickinson's handwriting over time from 1850 to her death in 1886. More particularly, Ward notes striking variations in the forms of certain letters, particularly "d" and "y," as well as the fact that "from about 1860 to the mid-seventies [there] is the gradual separation of letters, finally resulting in a resemblance to print, with each letter standing alone" (I:xlx).

Together with study of the paper on which Dickinson wrote her poems and letters, these physical details from the manuscripts were used to establish a chronology that, although tentative, has profoundly affected the ways in which subsequent critics have written about the development of Dickinson's style and the shape of her poetic career. Similarly, despite Ward's disclaimer in the introduction to her "Subject Index" in *Poems*

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## Remembering Katharine Zadavec

By Jean Nordhaus

I credit Katharine Zadavec with connecting me to other Dickinson scholars in the Washington, D.C., area and beyond. In 1986 I was among the audience at the Dickinson conference Katharine directed at the Folger Shakespeare Library. Its intensity and intimacy have remained a standard for the Dickinson conferences that have followed. A decade later, it is a pleasure to celebrate this early experience of Dickinson community and to remember, with affection and admiration, the woman whose vision made it possible.

Jonnie Guerra, *Series Editor*

Katharine Zadavec was a poet, teacher, columnist, and arts administrator who died in 1989. A founder of the Emily Dickinson Society (a predecessor of EDIS), she organized a major conference and exhibition at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C., in May 1986 to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of Dickinson's death.

Born in Canada, Katharine was educated at Manhattanville College in New York and was the author of three books of poetry, *Shewski's Ladder*, *How to Travel*, and *Imitations*. In addition, for thirty years she wrote the "Anne's Reader Exchange" column in the *Washington Post*. Another among her many achievements was the founding, in 1982, of a yearly Writer's Week at Manhattanville College.

In December 1986, the *Washington Post's* health section published an article by Katharine on hope and cancer. Noting that Emily Dickinson had thrice attempted poetic definitions of hope, "as if this flighty bird did not rest easily in her soul," Katharine discussed her own uneasy attempts to distinguish hope from expectation in facing the cancer that would eventually claim her life:

I cannot lift a tennis racket anymore, or swim in the ocean I've loved all my life, or take long walks—even in the neighborhood, much less in woods or by the sea, for fear of break-

ing fragile bones, or placing undue stress on reactive muscles.

And I cannot afford to regret what I have had to give up, afraid of the effects of negative thinking. At 53, accustomed to enormous activity most of my life, pain has taught me to be grateful for its absence, for days without crippled or broken bones, for the privilege of getting out of bed.



The article arose from Katharine's discovery that her doctor had pasted a copy of "'Hope' is the thing with feathers" on the front page of her medical file. That a doctor—in these days of high-tech medicine—would include a poem in a patient's medical file is testimony both to Katharine's force of personality and to the intensity of her lifelong engagement with Dickinson.

I first met Katharine at the Folger Shakespeare Library. The occasion was my first public reading on the Folger's Midday Muse series. Not long before, Katharine had learned of the disease that would eventually take her life, and she came up to me after the reading to say how much she had liked a poem of mine about camel bones that suggested that the camels had simply dropped their bones along

the trail and kept traveling. That her cancer, when it returned, would attack through the bones seems, in retrospect, the kind of ironic prescience that encounters with poetry sometimes deliver.

Some years after this meeting, I came to work at the Folger as Poetry Coordinator. When responsibility for administering the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction was added to my duties, I persuaded Katharine, by then a close friend, to help out. Her administrative talents were prodigious, and after I left she stayed on for several years, running the much expanded PEN/Faulkner project and planning and administering the Emily Dickinson conference that crowned her career.

I had to miss the conference itself, but I still have a vivid vision of Dickinson's white dress floating in its lucite case in the Great Hall of the Folger—as if the ghost herself were in attendance.

My friendship with Katharine was, from its inception, based on a shared belief in the power of words. (She once found me a cleaning lady, on the linguistically inspired hunch that—since the prospective housekeeper, a Mrs. Baltimore, had the same name as my hometown—our future relationship was foreordained.)

Katharine's poems, like Dickinson's, take off from the daily stations of a woman's life and move in subversive and metaphysical directions. She wrote with housekeeperly economy, a musical ear, and an acute sense of what the poet Linda Pastan (writing of Dickinson) has called "the serious mischief / of language."

My favorite among her three books of poems is the last, *Imitations*, a beautiful chapbook she put together (with the help of her friends Kit and Joseph Reed), based on the little Saint books she'd been given as a child. The poems are, as much as anything, about her womanly vision of the poet's task. The writer compares herself to Monica, "Embroidering/the August Syllable/into a shawl." "Like little Rose of Lima," she writes, "scratching / at the bottom of her garden, her mouth / full of hymns, / I treat my tongue

Little Rose

I eat roses,  
a handful of radishes,  
thorny-tasting things.  
Like little Rose of Lima scratching  
at the bottom of her garden, her mouth  
full of hymns,  
I treat my tongue  
with gall and, outraged  
it sings.

from *Imitations*

/ with gall and, outraged / it sings.”

Throughout her years at the Folger, Katharine lived with the bitter knowledge that her physical resources were slowly diminishing. That knowledge fed her writing, and it also, I believe, fueled her administrative labors. It meant a great deal to her—since a writer’s world is essentially private—to feel that she could have some role in the larger world of letters, to be able to work, with imagination and energy, in the public sphere before illness could push her back—into the house, into her room, and finally into her own body.

But Katharine was never truly a shut-in. Nothing of her mind or spirit seemed the least bit confined. I remember going to visit her during one of her earlier stays in the hospital and being handed a final

draft of *Imitations* to look over before it went to the typesetter. With the same administrative brilliance I had long admired, she managed from her bed at home to meddle most benevolently in the affairs of others—buying a piano for a friend’s daughter, orchestrating an art show for one of her own six children.

By carefully rationing the lucid periods her medication schedule allowed her, Katharine also was able to continue her life as a writer and reader to the very end. She was much occupied, in her last months, with Sally Fitzgerald’s edition of Flannery O’Connor’s letters and would often call to read me parts she liked. Among these were O’Connor’s utterances about her Catholic faith, passages insisting that she *meant* it literally—not as a metaphor.

In one of the poems quoted in Katharine’s 1986 *Post* article, Dickinson defines hope as a “A Patent of the Heart—,” an “electric Adjunct” of which nothing is known, though its “unique momentum/Embellish all we own —” (P 1392). Katharine had this impetus in abundance: “unique momentum,” what keeps the camels traveling beyond their bones.

When I think of Katharine, the word that comes most readily to mind is “Circumference.” It is significant that the writers who were most important to Katharine, Emily Dickinson and Flannery O’Connor, were both women who managed, through

Song in the Bone

An old complaint  
a fractious bone  
that asked  
a crutch and cast  
once kept me  
heavy company,  
feeding my intent  
to play the saint  
Now when it rains  
an echo in  
that bone still sings:  
Repent! Repent!

from *Imitations*

severely restricted circumstances, to achieve an enormous concentration of intellectual and creative power. I’ve never known exactly what Dickinson meant when she wrote “My business is circumference,” but surely whatever else she had in mind, it must also have included this power—a closing-in that is simultaneously an opening-out and enlargement of consciousness: that focus that sees in the buzzing of a fly an icon for eternity.

*Jean Nordhaus, former Poetry Coordinator at the Folger Shakespeare Library, is the author of two books of poetry, A Bracelet of Lies and My Life in Hiding.*

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## The Folger Dickinson Conference: A Reminiscence

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By Jane Donahue Eberwein

Although a flood in my office a few years back destroyed mementoes of the 1986 Folger Dickinson conference, I still recall it with great pleasure and with profound admiration for Katharine Zdravec’s organizational skills. I remember feeling very lucky to be one of those filling the theatre; many would-be conferees had been turned away as a consequence of limited seating.

Despite the weirdly cobwebby stage set (for *The Miser*, was it?) that served as backdrop for most presentations, we had compensatory visual effects. The Folger’s Amherst College connection resulted in remarkable displays of books, manuscripts, photographs—even the iconic

white dress transported from the Homestead.

The program featured eminent Dickinson scholars: Charles Anderson demonstrating modern aspects of her imagination through parallels in twentieth-century painting; Richard Sewall speaking on her life; Jay Leyda responding to Karen Dandurand’s talk on newly discovered poem publications with encouragement to keep on searching for hidden poems, letters, and facts.

There were new faces, too. Perhaps the longest applause of the conference followed Martha Lindblom O’Keefe’s reading of the fascicles in terms of Christian spiritual discipline. The liveliest discus-

sion followed presentations by Japanese and Polish scholars on issues of cross-cultural appreciation—especially Agnieszka Salska’s reflections on the challenge of translating “Because I could not stop for Death” into a language that personifies death exclusively in female terms as mother or nurse.

I recall considerable discussion about the poet’s intention for her poems, with Dandurand detecting a hesitation to publish and Ruth Miller drawing on fascicle evidence to argue for a suppressed eagerness on Dickinson’s part to showcase the range of her powers. My own talk kept that conversation going by considering what literary celebrity entailed in Dickinson.

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## Jan Owen—Book Artist

By Maryanne Garbowsky

The work of Jan Owen, book artist and calligrapher, is striking: large-format books that can be hung on the wall or folded up in individual jackets. I first met Owen and saw her work at a gallery in Northeast Harbor, Maine. When I realized that several of her books were based on the words of Emily Dickinson, I knew we were fated to meet, drawn together by our mutual love of Dickinson's poems.

An unassuming, modest woman, described as "a calligrapher with exquisite skills," Jan Owen has always been interested in art. From her undergraduate background at Depauw University in Greencastle, Indiana, to her work as a graphic designer, art has been her medium of expression. Yet she has always loved the word, taking in addition to art "a lot of English courses."

Strangely, she never read Dickinson's poetry in her studies. Instead, as a young mother of twin daughters, she began to browse on her own and came across the anthology edited by Thomas Johnson that today is dog-eared from years of use. It was from reading Dickinson that Owen found the words that expressed for her "moments of awareness" with clarity and depth.

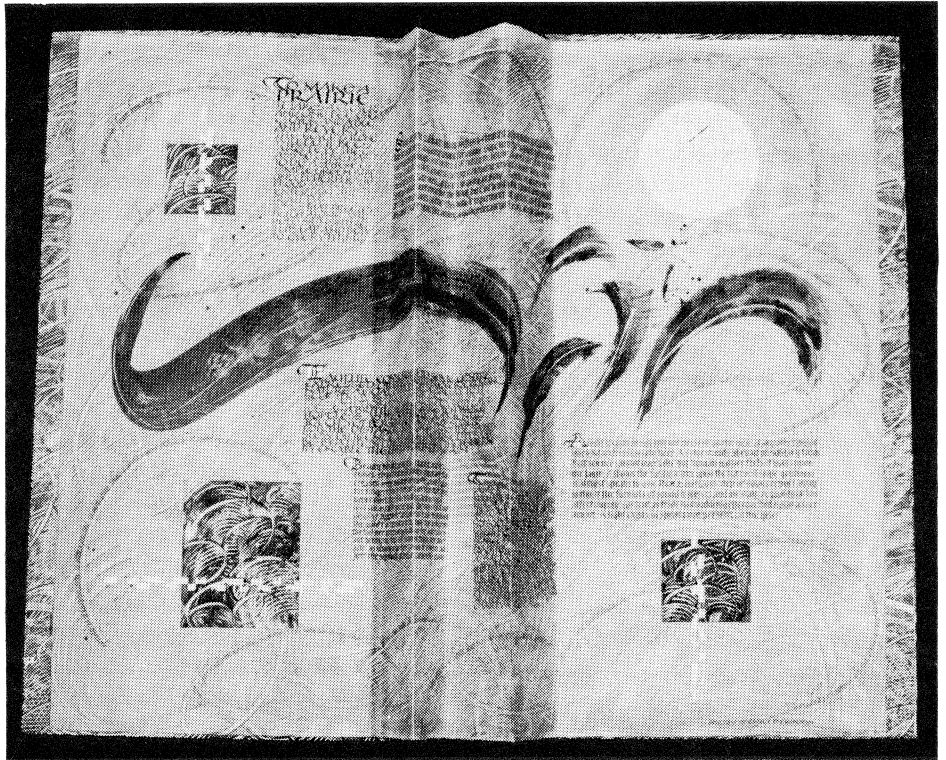
After the birth of her twins, Owen turned from graphic design to the art of calligraphy because it was easier to practice with the limited time she had and did not require a lot of equipment or space. Also it was "environmentally friendly." Later, while recovering from a long illness, Owen turned to the book as an art form that can be enjoyed both visually and verbally. For a calligrapher, she explained, it was a "natural evolution."

Her artwork demonstrates her love of the book as well as of the "handwritten word." One of the primary catalysts was a two-week course of study in Wales and a trip to the National Library in Aberystwyth. There Jan was able to touch and turn the pages of a twelfth-century manuscript and see the work of a talented medieval artist up close. "Since my Latin

was poor, all I could do was look at the words, their shapes and forms, without understanding their meaning." Owen was struck by the "reverence, love, and care of the scribe's hand" as he wrote the words. It is this "reverence, love, and care" that she hopes to convey in her own work.

To date, Owen has created seven books based on her favorite Dickinson poems

and emotion. She chose lines that she felt would manifest the poet's "passion for language." The result is a unique round book with strips of "paste paper" emerging from the center. In this age of electronic print, when many have foretold the demise of the book, Owen celebrates the "physicality" of the book, its actual presence. As the viewer/reader looks at it, the book blossoms forth like a flower, some-



"To Make a Prairie," 1995. 22¼ x 30¼" open. Gouache on paste paper, gold leaf.

and letters, two of which are already in private collections. Each book is unique. Owen loves to watch people as they look at her work. Some respond in a purely visual way, enjoying the colors, the shapes, the design, while others stand in front of the work and read every word.

Interestingly, when Owen creates a book, the text and the design work in tandem: sometimes the forms suggest words, while at other times the text suggests the form. In one instance—"Emily's Passion"—Owen searched her Johnson anthology for poems that suggested color

thing that books and words, especially Dickinson's, have done for Owen.

As Owen recovered from an illness that took over ten years to diagnose, she found hope in Dickinson's words, especially in the poem "Will there really be a 'Morning'?" which became the subject of her second Dickinson book. Although Owen is quick to admit that she has not studied the poet as an academic would, she does draw personal meaning from the words. She compares her love of Dickinson to her love of music. She has performed on the string bass for twenty



"Exultation," 1994. 25½" x 40" open. Gouache on paste paper.

years with the Bangor, Maine, Symphony.

Owen's work methods are interesting. Beginning with an old German process called paste paper, she applies colored wheat paste with her fingers and brushes to a large sheet of paper. Then she scrapes some of the paste away to see the effect. Up to this point, her work is nonverbal, that is, she has no idea what text will go with it.

Next, she makes a large, graceful mark with a brush dipped in an opaque water-based paint. When the paper dries, she folds it; the folds determine the layout of the words. Since Dickinson's poems are "always close" to her, it is at this point that a line may suggest itself and she begins to put it down. In the book "Will there really be a 'Morning'?" the mark reminded her of a heron or a lily pad, and this seemed to go with the poem.

Another work based on a favorite Dickinson poem started with lavenders and blues as a background. When Owen placed the grand, sweeping mark on the paper, it brought to mind the poem "Exultation is the going." To Owen, the poem suggests "the wide expanse of space

Dickinson sought in her poems but never found in life." On the left-hand side of the paper, Owen wrote the text of the poem tightly, ignoring the poet's line breaks and spacing, and on the right-hand side, in larger, graceful letters, she wrote the first line of the poem.

Dickinson's poems have provided the artist with "an insight and understanding" that "we all hope for in life." What drew Owen to Dickinson's poems originally

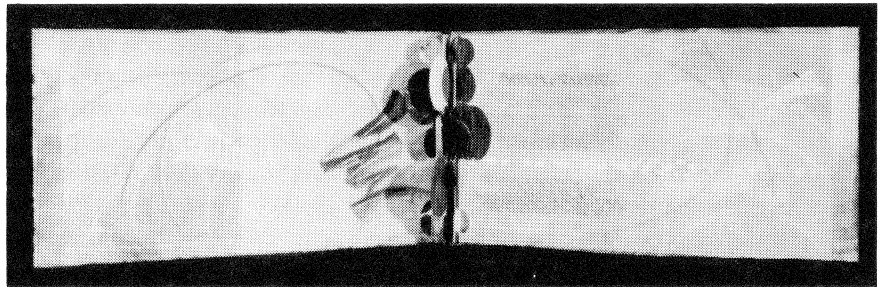
was their "spare, precise" quality as well as the poet's "wonderment at the natural world." So, too, the poetry is "spiritual without being religious—the word God seems a convenient term to describe some creative force deep within and without."

Has Owen completed her work with Dickinson after seven books, or will she do more? "I'm sure I will," she answers enthusiastically. "Since I love the poetry, her words are not far beneath the surface of my mind, so they will always be there to inspire me."

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"Eternity," 1995. 7¼" x 14". Sculptural book.



**Theodora Ward, continued from p. 3**

that its "principal purpose . . . is to aid the reader in finding a desired poem" (III:1213), the subject index has, in fact, often set the parameters within which subsequent scholars have categorized Dickinson's topics and themes. Although certainly not Ward's fault, her subject index has too often predetermined and narrowed readers' ideas about which poems fit under which broad rubric.

Ward's later work on Dickinson, particularly the essays she collected in her biography, *The Capsule of the Mind* (1961), is noteworthy for her almost intuitive understanding of, sensitivity to, and empathy for the challenges, choices, and limitations life in nineteenth-century Amherst offered a fellow woman artist. Ward is particularly good at reconstruct-

ing the historical and cultural contexts within which Emily Dickinson lived and wrote, as she explores the variety of forces and influences that, she argues, helped shape the poet's mind and art. Her aim, as her title suggests, is to explore the life of the mind, the inner workings of Dickinson as creative woman and writer.

Together with Johnson's own *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography* (1955), Ward's is one of the first biographies of the poet to draw on Dickinson's manuscripts—the poems and letters as she wrote them—rather than on the regularized and prettified texts of Todd's and Higginson's 1890s First through Third Series or early twentieth-century editions.

Ward's last comments on Dickinson can be found in an April 17, 1963, *Saturday Review* "Letter to the Editor" in which

she refutes Edith Perry Stamm Wylder's controversial theory, published the month before in that same magazine, that Dickinson's dashes are rhetorical and expository marks designed to help readers see how her words should best be read aloud.

In all her work on Emily Dickinson, Ward brings a fellow artist's sensitivity to the importance of the poet's formats and methods of presenting her manuscript letters and poems, as well as a reverence for the physicality of the manuscripts and the need to preserve the integrity of the holographs. In the opening paragraph of her essay "A Study of the Handwriting" in her edition of the Holland letters, Ward reminds us of the difficulty of "translating" Dickinson's manuscripts into print and communicates her distress at the misrepresentations that inevitably result. Bor-

*Continued on p. 13*

# P E R F O R M A N C E S

*Fifty Poems of Emily Dickinson.* Beverly Hills, Calif.: Dove Audio, 1995. 1 cassette, 45 min. ISBN 1-55800-991-4, \$10.95. 1 CD, ISBN 0-7871-0091-9, \$12.98.

*The Heaven Below, The Heaven Above: The Poetry of Emily Dickinson.* Minocqua, Wisc.: NorthWord Press, 1994. 1 cassette, 1 hour. ISBN 0-939643-61-8, \$10.95.

## Reviewed by Judy Jo Small

Last week I read an entry in a local high school literary contest written from the point of view of the fly in "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died." Surely Emily Dickinson would be amazed. Having chosen to address her poems to a highly select audience while taking her chances that "the world" might someday discover them, she would be dazzled by the widespread currency of her work today and its permutations in the marketplace of late twentieth-century popular culture.

Successive ages provide their own disseminating lenses. Yet the disparity between two recently released audio-recordings of Dickinson poems indicates the extent of contemporary dissemination. Both recordings reach out to a public wearied by frantic modernity and craving the timeless essence that fine poems promise to deliver, but their producers have targeted sharply dissimilar audiences.

*The Heaven Below, The Heaven Above* adopts a New Age approach, in a series called "Poetry of Nature." Dickinson poems with nature-related themes are accompanied by soothing sounds of twittering birds, rushing water, whispering winds, rain, and thunder. Gentle interludes played by piano, guitar, synthesizer, or flute separate individual poems and allow listeners time to reflect. Lyn Dalebout, a Wyoming poet and writer, reads the poems in a soft, solemn voice; unfortunately tending toward sing-song rhythm and uniform tone, her delivery is at least never grating.

This is Emily Dickinson Lite, tranquil therapy for stressed-out souls to come home to at the end of harried days. Mildly introspective but intellectually undemand-

ing, it is well suited, I have found, to the final stages of influenza.

The audience projected by the producers of *Fifty Poems of Emily Dickinson* is comparatively highbrow. (The title is listed among Dove Audio's "Ultimate Classics.") On the recording, cultivated voices of experienced actresses deliver shades of meaning beyond the reach of Dalebout's casual style. Classical music played by solo piano or chamber ensemble provides a refined background for the spoken text. No attempt is made to offer thematic or biographical coherence; instead, the selection respects Dickinson's great variety, stressing her acute thoughts and emotional profundity. Here is poetry not to lull the soul but to arouse its subtlest currents.

Four readers—Stephanie Beacham, Glenda Jackson, Sharon Stone, and Meryl Streep—take turns presenting poems. The alternation of voices demarcates boundaries between individual poems, and the combination of different voices enlarges the overall interpretive and expressive compass. Beacham has a crisp, polished, resonant voice with extraordinary range; she renders Dickinson's rich dramatic nuances with breathtaking assurance. Jackson's firm, dry, throaty voice lends dignity to familiar verses such as "'Hope' is the thing with feathers," and her restrained emphases do brilliant justice to Dickinson's wry wit. Streep's voice is an exquisite lyrical instrument, supple and breathy; with stunning freshness, stroking the poetic syllables, it brings forth Dickinson's poignant depths. In the company of these three splendid performers, Stone is outclassed. Her efforts to dramatize light, playful verses are marred by clumsiness and pretentious strain. The naturalness of the real virtuosos is thereby emphasized.

It must be said that both recordings ought to be better. *The Heaven Below, The Heaven Above* suffers from sloppy production. During one stretch of tape, normally equable listeners may find themselves desiring to strangle the guitarist for interminably repeating the same four bars. An unintended, hilarious effect fol-

lows an ill-considered intonation of the line "My period had come for Prayer." A serious misreading makes nonsense of a line in "A light exists in spring." And how can one excuse the carelessness that allowed the repetition on side 2 of several poems already performed on side 1?

Defects of *Fifty Poems* spring primarily from the producers' decision to record the texts of various editions now known to be inaccurate. This error is most glaring and destructive of meaning when the poem "Few, yet enough" (in the Johnson text) is reproduced on the recording as "Few get enough." The awkward reading of "titles" before each poem includes both titles attached by editors of the 1890s and first lines, subsequently repeated. Furthermore, one must protest the dreadful incompatibility of "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" and the musical accompaniment attached to it, Schumann's "Of Foreign Lands and People."

Even so, who knows what responsive stirrings may not be produced by NorthWord's pleasant setting of nature poems? *The Heaven Below, The Heaven Above* does not represent Dickinson at her deepest, but it does contain superb poetry, much of it reasonably well read, accessible to listeners who might recoil from the high-toned atmosphere of Dove's new collection.

Likewise, despite weaknesses that the highly select audience of the *Bulletin* cannot help lamenting, Dove's *Fifty Poems of Emily Dickinson* contains such a wealth of the genuine poetic essence that it seems ungenerous to carp.

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**Kalellis, Barrett.** *One and One Are One: A Collection of Eight Songs for High Voice and Seven Instruments on Texts by Emily Dickinson.*

## Reviewed by Barbara Hess

The world has changed since Emily Dickinson was alive. The Amherst of the



1860s is not the Amherst of today. How would she have read her poems then, had she wanted to share them with her community? What would have been the lilt, inflection, rhythm of her voice? And how would she have set her words to music, had she chosen to do so?

Today we have claimed Dickinson as our poetic kindred spirit, fascinated by the mystery of her poetry, the enigma of her persona. As scholars, writers, poets, artists, and musicians, we have been drawn to decipher her and in some way to add our voice to hers.

One of these additions is *One and One Are One*, settings of eight Dickinson poems by Barrett Kalellis. Commissioned in 1986 by the Michigan Council of the Arts and written for and premiered by soprano Linda Thorne at Wayne State University in Detroit, the songs are richly underscored by an ensemble made up of flute, clarinet, harp, piano, violin, cello, and a variety of percussion instruments, including vibraphone, tom-toms, maraca, and musical saw.

The first hearing of this collection, from a recording supplied by the composer, left this reviewer with an admiration for much of the instrumental writing but with an odd sense of separation from the often searing intimacy of the poems. Awareness of and fascination with the instrumentation predominated throughout, despite the strong, even athletic, vocal line, which verges on the operatic and demands a high degree of technical ability and a strong high C sharp. The final impression was of a series of marvellous tone poems in which the singer could execute her line without singing a word,

by simply becoming part of the skillfully woven fabric of sound.

Surely, given the inspiration of Dickinson's poetry, it was Kalellis's intent that her words be heard, even enhanced, by the composition. And surely he intended his settings not as arbitrary atmospheric tone paintings but as interpretations of the poet's voice through his own musical voice.

It is precisely here that contemporary music with text often flounders: It is accessible to neither the ear nor the heart at first listening. The rhythms and pitches distort the rhythm of the poetry and the sound of its words to the point of unintelligibility. It was not until after several hearings, carefully following the written text, that I could begin to experience the intended marriage between the Dickinson texts and the Kalellis score.

In some of these songs the vocal lines are interesting and appropriate to the meaning of the poetry. The second verse of "The Crickets Sang," for example, honors the rhythm and tentative mood of the poem, and Kalellis does not allow the instruments to come too strongly to the foreground or create too large a space, too long a breath, from phrase to phrase. At other times the instrumental ensemble colorfully underscores either the meaning of or events in the poems. The instruments in "I Heard a Fly Buzz," for instance, *are* that fly in all its nervous agitation, creating an air of extreme unsettledness and mocking that moment of awe and solemnity called death.

But too often the rich tonal atmosphere of these songs serves neither the poetic line nor its meaning. At times it

seems to defy the implicit emotion of the poem, as in "Split the Lark," in which the poem's violent imagery, barely masking the poet's anguish, is reduced to a quasi-peaefulness, as if nothing extraordinary were occurring during this moment of dissection.

And because there is little thematic repetition in Kalellis's writing, a myriad of musical ideas rush by the listener's ear, as if to produce sound for sound's sake. This multiplicity often works against the mounting intensity and climactic endings of the poems, as in "I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed." Despite the rhythmic introduction and a very effective moment of inebriated waltzing, Kalellis's setting goes nowhere toward the poem's ecstasy. At the grand closing lines—"To see the little Tippler / Leaning against the - Sun"—one is left disappointed with the anticlimactic musical interpretation.

Despite the clarity of intent with which Kalellis has scored these songs, the poetic line is often so disjointed, the technical requirements so demanding, that words and meaning are lost. The result for the listener is, at worst, disappointment that consummation between poetry and music has not been achieved. If the music serves neither Dickinson nor the listener by bringing her poetry vividly to life but only emphasizes the prowess of the musicians, what is the point?

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**Folger Conference, continued from page 5**

son's America and what she would have had to sacrifice for unwelcome fame.

In keeping with the Amherst-Washington connection that made the conference possible, some of the wittiest and most ingeniously researched presentations focused on Dickinson's experience of those places: Judith Farr rehearsing Edward Dickinson's dismal congressional record around the time of his daughters' visit and demonstrating that Emily and Lavinia had signed the guest registry at

the U.S. Patent Office; Daniel Lombardo offering insight into health care and the cost of funerals back home in Amherst.

Beyond the scheduled program events, which included a reading by contemporary poets as well as a showing of the then-new *Voices and Visions* "Emily Dickinson" video, there were enjoyable coffee break, reception, and mealtime conversations. I date several valued friendships from those few days.

By demonstrating the breadth and depth of interest in Dickinson, the Folger con-

ference (like the Chapel Hill, Amherst, Dayton, and Claremont Dickinson celebrations of that centennial year) prompted hopes for further meetings. People who first met in Washington in June reunited at the MLA convention that December to lay the groundwork for the Emily Dickinson International Society.

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*Professor of English at Oakland University, Jane Donahue Eberwein is author of Dickinson: Strategies of Limitation.*

*Barbara Kelly, Book Review Editor*

**Bain, Robert, ed.** *Whitman and Dickinson's Contemporaries*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1996. 555 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-8093-1721-4, \$49.95. Paper, ISBN 0-8093-2031-2, \$19.95.

An anthology of poetry that recreates the literary landscape in which Whitman and Dickinson worked. Bain and thirteen other scholars bring together fifty-three poets "so that readers can rediscover these authors, can reconstruct the poetic contexts of the age, and can better understand why Whitman and Dickinson now so overshadow other poets of their time." Preceding each poet's work are a biographical/critical essay and a bibliography of the poet's work and of secondary sources. Bain's introduction discusses Whitman and Dickinson in the context of the historical issues and themes that concerned their contemporaries.

**Doriani, Beth Maclay.** *Emily Dickinson, Daughter of Prophecy*. Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1996. 248 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-87023-999-6, \$35.00.

Doriani "explores some of the central strategies Dickinson used to claim both poetic and religious authority and to join the ranks of the self-proclaimed prophets of her day—literary figures like Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, as well as a host of preachers and other popular orators." Drawing on the patriarchal voices of the Bible and nineteenth-century Protestantism, her own voice remains female as it "not only indicts but also sings, consoles, and wonders." Doriani blends two approaches: feminist readings and historical recontextualization.

**Farr, Judith, ed.** *Emily Dickinson: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1996. 268 pp. Paper, ISBN 0-13-033524-X, \$12.95.

Containing eighteen essays by Dickinson critics spanning thirty-three years, this is

a volume in the New Century Views series (modeled after Prentice Hall's Twentieth Century Views series). Farr's introduction describes the publication history of Dickinson's poems, her reclusive life, and the impact of visual arts on her work. Farr calls Dickinson "a remarkable mid-Victorian" who "escapes categories" because her poetry "transcends its place in time." Includes a chronology and a bibliography.

**Hirshfield, Jane, ed.** *Women in Praise of the Sacred: 43 Centuries of Spiritual Poetry by Women*. New York: Harper Collins, 1995. 288 pp. Paper, ISBN 0-06-092576-0, \$12.00.

An anthology of spiritual poetry by women from many cultures and traditions spanning 4,000 years. Included are Enheduanna, a Sumerian priestess and the "earliest known author of either sex"; Makeda, queen of Sheba; Yeshe Tsogyel, foremost woman in Tibetan Buddhism; Hildegard of Bingen; Izumi Shikibu, Japan's greatest classical woman poet; Maria de' Medici; and Emily Dickinson, among others. A poet and translator, Hirshfield translates many of the poems in the book and provides commentary and biographical sketches of more than sixty poets.

**Hughes, Ted.** *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose*. William Scammell, ed. New York: Picador/St. Martins, 1995. 481 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-312-13625-0, \$27.50.

A wide-ranging collection of forty-three essays includes autobiographical reflections, reviews, and articles by the Poet Laureate of England. Hughes discusses Shakespeare, Coleridge, Thomas, Eliot, Plath, Dickinson, and others. His essay on Dickinson is a reprinting of his six-page introduction to *A Choice of Emily Dickinson's Verse* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968). He says Dickinson is "one of the oddest and most intriguing personalities in literary history." She "became

'the greatest religious poet America has produced,'" having "grasped the 'center' and the 'circumference' of things."

**Price, Kenneth M., and Susan Belasco Smith, eds.** *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*. Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1995. 292 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-8139-1629-1, \$45.00. Paper, ISBN 0-8139-1630-5, \$17.50.

Robert J. Scholnick, one of fourteen contributors, maintains that literary periodicals were an "essential component" of Emily Dickinson's development. He examines her connection to the *Round Table*, a New York weekly magazine founded in 1863 by Dickinson's cousin and an Amherst neighbor. The *Round Table* published Poem 324, the only poem published first in a magazine during her lifetime. Like Dickinson, the magazine explored "the relation between popularity and intrinsic literary value, between reputation in one's time and lasting fame." It argued for individuality and "distinctive personal expression" and did not print contributors' names.

**Smith, Robert McClure.** *The Seductions of Emily Dickinson*. Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1996. 232 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-8173-0806-7, \$34.95.

Dickinson defined her response to poetry as a sensual reaction. Smith wonders if the popular and critical success of her poetry demonstrates that her readers experience a similar visceral response. He believes that "relocating Dickinson within her own culture reveals the genesis of her rhetoric of seduction" but that "introducing a past scene of seduction into a present interpretive context misshapes the reader's relationship with the text." Recipient of the 1994 Elizabeth Agee Prize in American Literature.

**Note:** The *Bulletin* welcomes notices of all Dickinson-related books. We would be especially happy to learn of those published outside the U.S. Information should be sent to Barbara Kelly, 444 Washington Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94301, U.S.A., or faxed to her at 415-321-8146.

## Book Reviews

**Walker, Mary Willis.** *Under the Beetle's Cellar.* New York: Doubleday, 1995. 320 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-385-46859-8, \$22.50. Dickinson's Poem 949 provides the book's title and is crucial to the plot. Based partly on an actual event that occurred in California in the 1970s, the plot involves a cult of religious fanatics holding eleven children and a bus driver hostage for forty-six days while police race against time to rescue them from underneath a fortified compound. Another Walker book, *Zero at the Bone*, takes its title from poem 986.



**Werner, Marta.** *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios: Scenes of Reading, Surfaces of Writing.* Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1995. 308 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-472-10586-8, \$49.50.

Werner presents forty Dickinson pencil drafts in facsimile form, each juxtaposed with a typed transcription on the facing page. These late drafts, written after Dickinson stopped binding her work into fascicles, are associated with the Judge Otis P. Lord correspondence. Reminding us that "there can never be an authorized edition of Dickinson's writings," Werner argues against editorial interventions, print conventions, synthesis, and closure, and emphasizes the visual iconicity of the drafts.

**White, James Boyd.** *Acts of Hope: Creating Authority in Literature, Law, and Politics.* Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994. 322 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-226-89510-6, \$27.50. Paper, ISBN 0-226-89511-4, \$15.95.

White shows how a wide range of thinkers and writers, including Dickinson, Plato, Shakespeare, Mandela, and Lincoln, respond to authority and transform their experience into work that creates its own authority and provides new ways of thinking. White's forty-seven-page essay on Dickinson explores the ways she resisted and changed poetic conventions to express an "authority of self." White, who teaches law, English, and classical studies, has a contagious enthusiasm for his selected texts.

**Brock-Broido, Lucie.** *The Master Letters.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995. 84 pp. ISBN 0-679-44174-3, \$20.00.

*Reviewed by Ellen Davis*

Lucie Brock-Broido has written a beautiful, devastating collection of poems in late twentieth-century homage to Emily Dickinson's elusive Master Letters. The forms, riffs, and wildly various references in her fifty-two Master Letters are compelling, musical, memorable for what they say and do not say.

At first reading, the poems can appear so dense with image and allusion as to discourage pleasurable response, not to say understanding. But repeated immersion in the work reveals extraordinary powers of linguistic facility, of disciplined excess. *The Master Letters* marks a significant leap in style and subject matter for this poet, whose first book, *A Hunger*, earned her (as she winningly discloses in the "Notes") the sobriquet "poet laureate of *People Magazine*."

Brock-Broido demonstrates *gravitas* in "Carrowmore," the book's magnificent opening poem, which begins, "All about Carrowmore the lambs/Were blotched blue, belonging." The image of lambs to the slaughter resonates through the book, with grim reminders of the Holocaust ("Did Not Come Back") as well as private devastations and betrayals—Anne Boleyn's story is one of many not-so-oblique references.

The final poem of the four sections, "Am Moor," taken from a Georg Trakl poem, "On the Moors," doesn't require a scholar or magician to discover the *amour* of the title and underarching theme. Brock-Broido's sinuous, jammed and jamming syntax is on its most dazzling display. Here are the final three stanzas:

Was gaunt.  
Was — why — for the mutton &  
moss. Was the rented room.  
Was chamber & ambage  
& tender & burn. Am esurient, was  
the hungry form.  
Am anatomy.  
Was the bleating thing.

Brock-Broido's project and method

are as astonishing as the individual works. Begun after the poet first read Emily Dickinson's Master Letters, as a series of prose poem tributes to "a Fixed star," Brock-Broido writes in "A Preamble to *The Master Letters*," the silent absent Other became a composite: "Editor, mentor, my aloof proportion, the father, the critic, beloved, the wizard — ." She plunders and bends the prose poem, couplet, and sonnet forms.

As to the persona, Brock-Broido discloses, "At first, she was a brood of voice—a flock of women with Dickinson as mistress of the skein, the spinning wheel, the Queen Domestic, composed and composing, as she did, from her looms & room & seclusion." The Speaker, too, became a composite: Brock-Broido names Sappho, Bradstreet, Brontë, Akhmatova, and Plath as important figures.

Lines from Dickinson's letters are woven into the poems in italics to extraordinary effect; other arcane allusions (Bette Davis as Margo Channing: "Everybody Has a Heart, Except Some People"; poems and madrigals by "Mr — Michael Angelo") fit with jewel-like precision into Brock-Broido's "scarlatina line."

It is impossible to miss the playful aspect of Brock-Broido's work. In her teaching, she is fond of quoting Stevens's "Man Carrying Thing": "The poem must resist the intelligence / Almost successfully." *The Master Letters* accomplishes that resistance in ways that are quixotic, erotic, unsettling, super-contemporary. A line woven from Prospero into "For the Lustrum" speaks to the reader: "Or else my project fails, which was to please."

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**Howe, Susan.** *The Birth-mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History.* Hanover, N.H.: Univ. Press of New England/Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1993. 208 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-8195-5256-9, \$40.00. Paper, ISBN 0-8195-6263-7, \$16.95.

*Reviewed by Sue Russell*

In her latest essay collection, *The Birth-*

mark, poet and critic Susan Howe speaks of her compulsion as a reader and writer of American literature “to go back, not to the Hittites but to the invasion or settling...of this place” (164). This book represents another leg of the journey she began in *My Emily Dickinson*, using many of the same formative texts, which include not only Dickinson’s poems and letters but also such documents as Mary Rowlandson’s seventeenth-century captivity narrative and the journals of the evangelical preacher Thomas Shepherd.

The “birth-mark” in her title refers to the distinguishing features of a text that evade our attempts at categorization. Such marks may manifest themselves as physical characteristics, such as punctuation and variant words, or as the subversive “undervoice” that lets us know that Mary Rowlandson is not quite as pious in the face of her capture by “heathens” as we are meant to believe.

Howe’s “birth-marks,” suggested by Hawthorne’s story of the same title, continue to appear in spite of the efforts of “helpful” others to cover them up with verbal cosmetics. For Dickinson readers, those others would include Thomas H. Johnson, whose 1955 edition “standardizes” the poems by omitting Dickinson’s characteristic notations. Howe is therefore grateful for R.W. Franklin’s edition of the *Manuscript Books*, which, however expensive and unwieldy, restores the careful attention Dickinson paid to each detail of composition, including lettering, spacing, and the presence of a watermark on her stationery.

For Howe, this artisan-like devotion is indicative of Dickinson’s conscious desire to maintain control over the production as well as the creation of her art. Each element of the process adds its own layer of meaning. Handbound fascicles are superior to leatherbound books because the poet remains free of the meddling hands of editors, publicists, and other representatives of the world of commerce. Dickinson’s solitary labors become an asset rather than a spinsterly eccentricity when seen in this light, with no small portion of that fierce individualism that is thought of as a distinctly American trait.

Although only one chapter of Howe’s book specifically focuses on Dickinson,

the points the author makes in that small space could radically alter the way we approach her work. Citing the *Manuscript Books* as her source, Howe would have us read the poems with their original line breaks intact and with the lists of variant words Dickinson maintained in her own handwritten versions.

As a contemporary poet in an era of free verse, Howe knows how line breaks affect the dynamics of a poem. Likewise, with her own affinity for the “language” school, she has the tools to understand the significance of Dickinson’s linguistic experimentation. Where Johnson and others have viewed Dickinson’s line endings as merely a function of the width of her writing paper, Howe argues convincingly for their conscious, shaping effect. She is also certain that Dickinson’s variant word choices noted with a cross are more than “suggested alternates.”

Both the restoration of line breaks and the inclusion of variant words allow the reader to participate in the continual re-making of the text. Thus each poem exists in a timeless sphere in which silence and sound are interwoven, an effect Howe refers to as “a premeditated immersion in immediacy” (139).

Through these careful observations, Howe has a great deal to tell us about the habits of mind that poets share across the centuries. Her audacity in claiming Emily Dickinson as her own is balanced once again by her clear respect for the poet’s choices in life and art.

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**Webster, Noah.** *An American Dictionary of the English Language*. New York: S. Converse, 1828; facsimile of first edition, San Francisco: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1967. Unpaginated. ISBN 0-912498-03-X, \$59.95.

*Reviewed by Cynthia L. Hallen*

Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary of the English Language* is one of the most useful reference tools in Dickinson stud-

ies. Most critics believe that Dickinson was referring to Webster’s dictionary when she told Thomas W. Higginson that “for several years, my Lexicon – was my only companion” (L 261). Her brother Austin reported seeing Webster’s big dictionary on the kitchen table where Emily would sometimes write verse. Her niece Martha reported that Emily read the dictionary the way a priest reads the prayerbook.

In 1844, when Emily was fourteen, her father purchased a copy of Webster’s unabridged 1844 edition, a reprint of Webster’s 1841 revision of the 1828 dictionary. That copy of the 1844 dictionary is now part of the Dickinson collection at the Houghton Library at Harvard University. Although Dickinson’s “Lexicon” was probably the 1844 edition, she may also have used the 1828 edition at school before 1844.

Eighteen years before Dickinson’s birth in 1830, Noah Webster moved from New Haven, Connecticut, to Amherst, Massachusetts. During his ten-year residence, from 1812 to 1822, he worked on the dictionary and became a major figure in Amherst. He helped establish Amherst Academy, where Emily Dickinson later went to school with his granddaughter, Emily Ellsworth Fowler (later Ford). Webster was also a co-founder of Amherst College with Samuel Fowler Dickinson, Emily’s grandfather.

The works of Dickinson and Webster have many common characteristics: both had a taste for philology and etymology; both quote the Bible extensively; both make references to Shakespeare and other authors, British and American; both create a unique American diction; both sense the centrifugal and centripetal powers of language; both have a talent for writing definitions.

Nevertheless, Webster’s “dry wine” is different from Dickinson’s flooding philology. Dickinson’s explanation of poetry transcends Webster’s definition of poetry as “metrical composition”: “If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire can warm me I know *that* is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know *that* is poetry” (*Letters*, pp. 473-74).

Dickinson dances on the thin line be-

tween definition and Deity, while Webster treads the strait and narrow way between explication and evangelism. Webster defines *God* as the "Supreme Being; Jehovah," while Dickinson says that "Home is the definition of God." Under definition 4 of *faith*, Webster quotes 2 Corinthians 5:7, "For we walk by faith, and not by sight," while Dickinson's definition is a figurative exegesis: "Faith—is the Pierless Bridge / Supporting what We see / Unto the Scene that We do not" (P 915). *Lightning* is a "sudden discharge of electricity from a cloud to the earth" in Webster's scientific definition, but in Dickinson's metaphor (P 1173), "Lightning is a yellow Fork / From Tables in the sky"

In spite of these differences, many scholars believe that Dickinson read Webster's dictionary as a source of poetic inspiration. Many of the synonyms, antonyms, metaphors, definitions, etymologies, allusions, and citations in her poems correspond to entries in Webster's *American Dictionary*. For example, Webster defines *sacrament* as a supper "commemorating the death and dying love of Christ," and Dickinson uses the words "Christ," "Sacrament," "Commemorate," "love," and "Death" in Poem 833. Webster uses *assemble*, *sum*, *beam* and *place* in the etymology of the adjective *same*, and Dickinson uses similar collocations in several poems: "The Same Locality – / The Sun in place – no other fraud / On Nature's perfect Sum –" (P 978) or "A Bone has obligations – / A Being has the same – / A Marrowless Assembly" (P 1274).

Such ties between Webster's work and Dickinson's words have been dubbed "webplays." Looking up the webplays in Webster's dictionary helps readers better understand the network of lexical ties in Dickinson's poetry.

Unfortunately, some of the "webplays" exist only in the rare 1844 edition and not in the 1828 edition. For example, the adjective *Noachian* is not listed in the 1828 edition, but in choosing the word "Patriarch" for Poem 48, Dickinson may have noticed Webster's 1844 definition of *Noachian* as "Relating to the time of Noah, the patriarch." The 1828 entry for *abolition* has only one definition: "The act of abolishing; or the state of being

abolished; an annulling; abrogation; utter destruction." The 1844 entry adds an antislavery definition: "2. The putting an end to slavery; emancipation." The abolitionist flavor of Webster's "emancipation" can suggest a new slant on Dickinson's "Mortal Abolition" in Poem 306.

A careful comparison of the "A" entries in the 1828 and 1844 editions reveals that most of Webster's revisions are minor changes in capitalization, format, or punctuation. Content revisions are less frequent, and most do not affect Dickinson's wordplay or webplay. Therefore, the 1828 edition is suitable, though not preferable, for studies of Dickinson's poetry. Some of Webster's 1844 entries have new information that can be important for interpreting her poems. Unfortunately, the unabridged 1844 reprint is one of the rarest Webster editions, and only a few copies of the comparable 1841 edition are available.

Until we have a comprehensive reference lexicon for Dickinson's words, Webster's 1828 edition is the most accessible tool we have for studying her diction. Any edition after 1845 is less useful because the Merriam brothers revised the entries substantially after Webster's death. And we have no evidence that Dickinson consulted later editions, such as those of 1847, 1848, or 1849.

Noah Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language* was a storehouse of philological knowledge and thus a major source of linguistic power for Dickinson. His lexicon gave her access to information about words and language that no other source could have matched until publication of the *Oxford English Dictionary* in the early twentieth century.

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*Theodora Ward, continued from p. 7*

rowing a metaphor from her own work in the visual arts, she writes:

The task of rendering Emily Dickinson's manuscripts into print can be

compared to trying to represent a watercolor in an engraving. The lines, the spacing, the punctuation, as well as the highly individual forms of the script, all play a part in the effect on the reader.... Since the punctuation marks, aside from the commas, consist chiefly, in the penciled letters, in small dashes of various lengths, it is impossible to reproduce them exactly, yet each must be interpreted according to the meaning of the sentence. [239]

As her comments here make clear, Ward's principal gifts to Dickinson scholarship were her keen artist's eye and her meticulous yet sensitive editing practices.

#### Acknowledgments

Special thanks to reference librarian Susan Halpert of the Houghton Library for locating, on very short notice, the quoted passage that begins this article.

#### Book-Length Works by Theodora Van Wagenen Ward

##### As Editor

*Letters to Dr. and Mrs. Josiah Gilbert Holland.* Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1951.

*The Poems of Emily Dickinson.* Ed. Thomas H. Johnson. 3 vols. Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1955. [Ward's contribution is uncredited on the title page, but in the Acknowledgments Johnson credits her "editorial assistance" and tells readers which sections she wrote.]

*The Letters of Emily Dickinson.* Ed. Thomas H. Johnson; associate ed., Theodora Ward. 3 vols. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1958.

##### As Author

*The Capsule of the Mind: Chapters in the Life of Emily Dickinson.* Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1961.

*Men and Angels.* N.Y.: Viking Press, 1969.

*"Real" and Other People: Memoirs of Theodora Van Wagenen Ward.* Oslo: Lino Sats, ca. 1978. Copy in Houghton Library, Harvard University.

##### As Illustrator

Metcalf, Eleanor Melville. *Poems.* Cambridge: Crimson Printing Co., 1947. [Ward's woodcuts illustrate the poems.]

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# M E M B E R S ' N E W S

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## Annual Meeting Returns to Amherst

EDIS will once again hold its Annual Meeting in Emily Dickinson's hometown, Amherst, Massachusetts, on June 22-23. Highlights of the weekend include lectures, the East Coast premiere of James Saucedá's musical postmodern collage *Shatter Me with Dawn*, a trip to view Mt. Holyoke College's Dickinson archives, a graduate student colloquium, a visit to the Dickinson gravesite, the annual business meeting, and a box luncheon. Homestead tours will also be available. Schedules can be obtained that weekend at the Jones Library, Jeffery Amherst Bookshop, and Lord Jeffery Inn. Transportation plans for the Mt. Holyoke trip will be announced at that time.

If you plan to attend the weekend's events, several of which require advance planning, please send Dan Lombardo the registration form on the opposite page,

along with a check for the events you wish to attend, by June 10.

We hope to see many of you there!

### Saturday, June 22

**9:30 a.m.:** Graduate student colloquium on Dickinson, organized by Marcy Tanter, University of Massachusetts. If you plan to attend, please contact Marcy by e-mail at [tanter@econs.umass.edu](mailto:tanter@econs.umass.edu) or by phone at 413-256-4090. *Boltwood Tavern, Jeffery Amherst Inn*

**2:00 p.m.:** Trip to Mt. Holyoke College to see Dickinson archives; lecture by Martha Ackmann, "I am really at Mt. Holyoke": Dickinson, Mary Lyon, and Lessons of Independence." (Transportation arrangements to be announced; there may be a small charge.)

**8:00 p.m.:** *Shatter Me with Dawn* by James Saucedá (\$10.00). *Jones Library*

*Performance Space (rear entrance)*

### Sunday, June 23

**9:30 a.m.:** Architect and historian Peter Wells, slide show on Austin Dickinson's "naturalistic" landscaping of the Evergreens and current restoration of the house. *Jones Library Performance Space*

**10:30 a.m.:** Annual business meeting. *Jones Library Performance Space*

**11:30 a.m.:** Box lunch (\$7.00). *Homestead lawn, weather permitting*

**12:00 noon:** David Porter speaking on "Reassembling Emily Dickinson: What Is Revealed." *Homestead lawn, weather permitting*

**1:00 p.m.:** The Dickinson family will lead a short visit to Emily Dickinson's grave to restore a memorial plaque that had previously hung there.

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## MLA Affiliation Approved

Thanks to the efforts of Vivian Pollak and Jane Eberwein, EDIS has at last been granted status as an allied organization of the Modern Language Association of America. This means we will be able to present two Dickinson sessions at each annual MLA meeting.

Pollak has organized this year's panels. The first, moderated by Eberwein, will be on "Emily Dickinson's Influence." Pollak will speak on "With Jealous Affection: American Women Poets Reading Dickinson"; other panelists are Cynthia Hogue on "The Plucked String": Dickinson, Moore, and the Poetics of Select Defects"; and Karen Sánchez-Eppler on "Exhibiting Sheets of Place: Seeing Emily Dickinson Through Contemporary Art."

The second panel, moderated by Paul Crumbley, will address "Dickinson's Critical Reception." Panelists will be Marietta Messmer on "Emily Dickinson's Critical Reception in the 1890s: The Politics of Journalistic Criticism"; Marianne Erickson on "The Polish Dickinson"; and Wendy Martin on "At Century's End: Emily Dickinson—A Composite Portrait."

The MLA meeting will be held in Washington, D.C., December 27-30. For registration and other information, contact the MLA at 212-475-9500 and ask for the convention office.

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## ALA Panel Set

"Emily Dickinson and the English" will be the topic of the EDIS session at this year's meeting of the American Literature Association. The panel, scheduled for Thursday, May 30, from 4:00 to 5:20 p.m., will hear papers by Eleanor Heginbotham on "Our timid Mother": Emily Dickinson's Milton"; Marcy L. Tanter on "Captivity is Consciousness": Emily Dickinson and Lord Byron"; and Robert Bray on "The stones I shaped endure": Dickinsonian Pastiche in A.S. Byatt's *Possession*."

The ALA meeting will be held at the Bahia Hotel in San Diego, May 30 through June 2. For registration information, contact Alfred Bendixen by e-mail at [abendix@calstatela.edu](mailto:abendix@calstatela.edu) or by fax at 213-343-6470.

## Chapter News

On December 3, **Randolph-Macon Woman's College** held its first Emily Dickinson birthday celebration with a dance concert that included several original pieces inspired by Dickinson's poetry. The student choreographers were seniors Faydra Breining, Julie Fleming, Mary Beth Resler, and Jennifer Uzzi, and junior Laura McManamy. A reception, featuring Dickinson's gingerbread, followed.

Concordia College and the University of St. Thomas hosted the first meeting of the **Minnesota Chapter** in December. Some fifty Dickinson enthusiasts attended, despite cold and ice. Norbert Hirschhorn spoke on two previously unknown Dickinson family letters he had recently located. Erika Scheurer and Eleanor Heginbotham provided Dickinson's coconut cake and gingerbread.

The fourth meeting of the **Utah Chapter** was held February 13 at Brigham Young University. Brent Ashworth displayed recently acquired Dickinson manuscripts, and Graciela Torino of the BYU dance faculty instructed all participants in the

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**EDIS Bulletin**

## Evergreens Awarded Grant

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has made a matching grant of \$1,000 to the Martha Dickinson Bianchi Trust to support a landscape study of the Evergreens, the home of Austin and Susan Dickinson on Main Street in Amherst.

Gregory Farmer, project manager for the Bianchi Trust, says the six-month study, to begin this spring, will include an inventory and analysis of the existing and historic landscape features, recommendations for maintenance and restoration, and a schematic design for improving drainage, access, and circulation.

The landscape study is part of the Bianchi Trust's efforts to restore the Evergreens and open it to the public as a museum and study center.

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## Notes & Queries

Harvard University Press has several Dickinson titles on sale through June 30: Judith Farr, *The Passion of Emily Dickinson*; Ralph Franklin, *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*; David Porter, *Dickinson: The Modern Idiom*; Richard Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*; and Thomas H. Johnson's 3-volume editions

The Dickinson community is saddened to learn of the recent deaths of two scholars. **William White** died June 24, 1995, in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. He is gratefully remembered as the compiler of annual bibliographies for *Dickinson Studies* over many years.

Founding editor of the *Walt Whitman Review* and a prolific scholar, he wrote extensively on Whitman, Hemingway, and Dickinson. After serving as professor of journalism and director of American Studies at Wayne State University, White established the journalism program at Oakland University before retiring in 1980 to teach in Israel, Florida, and California.

From Japan comes news of the sudden death of Professor **Yoko Shimazaki** following a heart attack at her home in Tokyo on February 6. President of the

of the poems and letters. For information, call 1-800-448-2242.

**Sophisticated Shirts** of Indianapolis now offers tee-shirts and sweatshirts adorned with a rendering of the Dickinson daguerreotype and several of her poems, one in her own handwriting. For

## Obituaries

Emily Dickinson Society of Japan, she had recently presided over the Society's eleventh annual meeting at Kobe Women's College.

After pursuing her studies in American Literature at Boston College, she taught for many years at the University of the Sacred Heart in Tokyo. Her gracious ways and understanding spirit won friends at the 1986 Amherst and Folger Library Dickinson conferences and at the 1993 EDIS conference in Washington. The paper she presented in Washington, "A Perspective on Reading Dickinson in Japan," appears in the fall 1993 issue of the *Emily Dickinson Journal*.

EDIS extends its sympathy to Professor Shimazaki's family and the Emily Dickinson Society of Japan on the loss of this energetic and accomplished scholar.

Jane Eberwein

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information, call 1-800-259-7283.

**MacDonnell Rare Books** of Austin, Texas, frequently has Dickinson-related books, manuscripts, and other items in its catalogs. For information or a catalog, call Kevin MacDonnell at 512-345-4139.

### Registration Form for EDIS Annual Meeting, June 22-23, 1996

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  I plan to participate in the following events:

Mt. Holyoke trip  *Shatter Me with Dawn*: (\$10.00)  Box lunch (\$7.00)

I enclose a check in the following amount: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please return form by June 10 to Daniel Lombardo, Jones Library, 43 Amity St., Amherst, MA 01002 U.S.A.

### Emily Dickinson International Society Membership Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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

**Annual Membership Category** (check one):  Contributing (\$50)  Regular (\$35)  Special (\$15)

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

Please make check or money order payable in U.S. dollars to EDIS, Inc., and send to:

Gary Lee Stonum, Treasurer, EDIS, Dept. of English, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH 44106 U.S.A.

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## Thanks to Our Donors

EDIS owes "quick gratitude" to those who have made monetary contributions to the Society beyond their membership dues. Their donations help support the many important EDIS programs and publications. The following is a partial list. Additional names will appear in the next issue.

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## EDIS Bulletin

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quadrille, a nineteenth-century dance popular in New England.

The highlight of the evening was announcement of the winners of the parody poetry contest, which attracted 54 contestants and 100 poems. First and second place winners were Christopher Lund and Robert M. Hogge. Honorable mentions went to Brian Best, Linda Larsen, Christopher Lund (for a second poem), Mark Morris, Merry Christensen, Bai Jinpeng, and Jillanne Michell.

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