

# Bulletin

Volume 10, Number 1

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

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## **"Bloom upon the Mountain – stated" An Invitation to Celebrate Our Tenth Anniversary**

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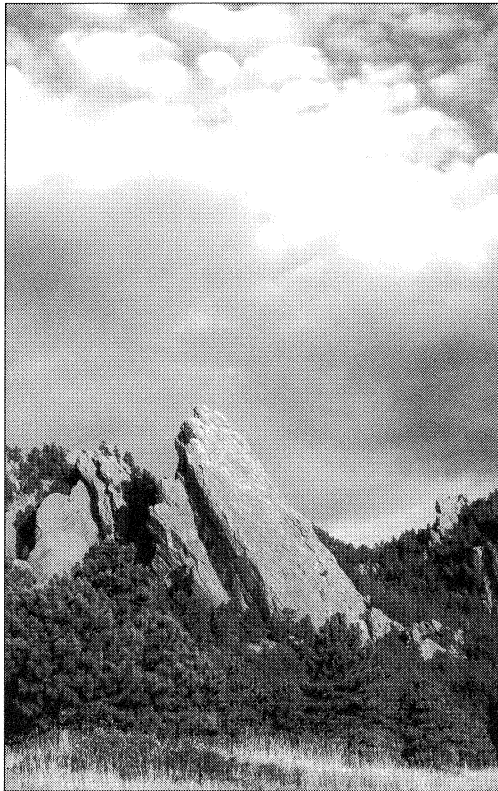
"Bloom upon the Mountain – stated," Emily Dickinson wrote, alluding in Poem 667 to what we learn in many of her writings: that those "Strong Madonnas" (P 722) were infinitely alluring to her. Just why this might be so you will see not only "stated" but in person when you come to celebrate EDIS's tenth anniversary in Boulder, Colorado, July 17-19.

In Boulder, just beneath the Flatirons, foothills to the beautiful Rocky Mountains, the summer sun is golden but temperate, the skies are brilliantly blue, delicate wildflowers bloom in the mountain meadows, and the highest peaks still glimmer with snow. A ten-minute drive will take you into these mountains.

Boulder is a town famous for its university, its restaurants, shops, and galleries, and its predilection for athletic activities of every kind. When not discussing Dickinson's poetry or enjoying other Dickinsonian diversions, you can stroll the Pearl Street Mall, climb the hill to the University of Colorado or to Chataqua Park beyond, bike, hike, swim, skate, run, or sit in the sun.

We invite you to join with fellow Dickinson enthusiasts for a weekend celebration that will include discussion of key Dickinson poems, a talk about Dickinson and Colorado, a retrospective on the Society and its impact, a gala banquet, and an entertainment at which you'll "Meet the Belle of Boulder." The weekend will begin with an opening reception on Friday in the late afternoon.

For the first time, our Annual Meeting will offer housing, most meals, and meetings under a single roof, at the Univer-



sity of Colorado's College Inn Conference Center. The cost is less than for housing elsewhere in Boulder, and we will have many opportunities for informal interaction. For meals not included in the registration fee, the Pearl Street Pedestrian Mall and many fine restaurants are nearby. Mountain views are free.

The cost for Friday and Saturday night lodging, the opening reception, breakfast both days, the birthday banquet, Sunday luncheon, and refreshment breaks, all at the College Inn, is \$191 for a single room or \$134 each person for a double room.

You should make your reservation promptly by calling the College Inn at 303-444-2676 or faxing them at 303-444-1706. Indicate with whom you'll be rooming and your smoking preference. Send no money; the lodging/dining fee is payable upon departure. MasterCard and Visa are accepted. The meeting registration form (see page 23) and registration fee should reach host Suzanne Juhasz by May 30. Further information is available on the EDIS Website: <http://www.colorado.edu/EDIS/>.

The nearest airport to Boulder is Denver International (DIA). There are several ways of getting from there to Boulder. A limousine service and bus line run at regular intervals, and cars may be rented. The Boulder Airporter is a limousine service that leaves DIA every hour from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. at a cost of \$14.00 one way, and it will take you directly to the College Inn.

SkyRide buses leave for the Boulder bus station at 15 minutes past the hour from 6:15 a.m. to 11:15 p.m., at a cost of \$8.00 one way; round-trip tickets may be purchased for \$13.00 between 7:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. From the Boulder bus station, a local bus or cab will take you to the Inn at a cost of about \$3.00. Reservations are not needed for either of these services.

Boulder is proud to adopt Emily Dickinson as an honorary Boulderite in the summer of 1998 and to serve as the setting for this gathering of her many devotees. The EDIS Board welcomes you to this gala birthday celebration. For a complete program listing, see page 14.

# "No Romance sold..." : Representing Dickinson in Fiction

By Eleanor Heginbotham

Perhaps she was preternaturally prophetic when she wrote "No Romance sold unto / Could so enthrall a Man / As the perusal of / His Individual One." Dickinson's own factual "Individual Romance" has been vigorously and variously studied, imagined, wished, and parodied almost from the time of her death. Some critics suggest that one or two biographical/critical studies, the results of such probing, are really "fiction."

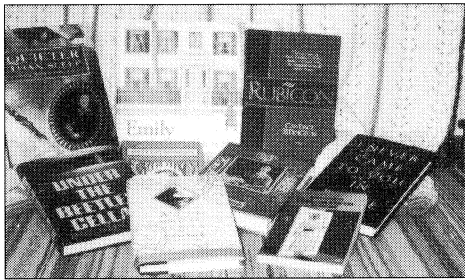
But the poet who claimed that her own first-person dramas were those of "a supposed person" has also figured in many frankly fictional works from her own lifetime on. Whatever the "real" story—whether it centers on the Reverend Wadsworth, Judge Lord, Publisher Bowles, sister-in-law Sue, an unknown lover, or simply her own work—the tantalizing business of filling in between the dots of what we know about Dickinson generally makes better reading than the intentional fictions. She was right about "fiction's [effect]—to dilute to Plausibility / Our Novel—When 'tis small enough / To Credit—'Tis 'nt true!" (P 669).

Nevertheless, reading the tales of Dickinson and her circle in fictional form is an entertaining exercise, offering everything from hagiographic tributes to outrageously funny parodies. At least one seems closer to the real woman than many critical psycho-biographies. All those I've uncovered reflect the scholarship and affection of their authors for the poet who said

(in another context, of course), "I esteem the fiction—real—/ The Real—fictitious seems—" (P 646).

## The Neighbors Write

The earliest of the novels, Helen Hunt Jackson's *Mercy Philbrick's Choice*, begins with a dedicatory sonnet's "gratitude and love" to the writers "Who serve before



Truth's altar, in his name." Jackson, Dickinson's childhood neighbor and would-be agent, suggests parallels between Emily and Mercy: both live "in the

ordinary New England town"; both are "slight," both have "gentle, laughing brown eyes," "pale skin," and so forth. Mercy becomes a well known, "deeply affecting" writer as she is wooed through correspondence by an older man. Although Jackson's name did not appear on the novel and (as far as I know) no one has proven that it is about Dickinson, it is difficult to maintain skepticism when one reads this: "I am often racking my brains to think what I shall say next. Half the people I meet are profoundly uninteresting to me; and half of the other half paralyze me at first sight, and I feel like such a hypocrite all the time; but, oh, what a pleasure it is to talk with the other quarter!" (182).

Reticent (and not particularly merciful) Mercy is confiding her shyness or her disdain for ordinary people to her first suitor, who will die before they can consummate their passion. The passage

strongly recalls that famous description of Dickinson sent by an exhausted Higginson to his wife after meeting the woman who told him, "How do most people live without any thoughts. There are many people in the world (you must have noticed them in the street) How do they live. How do they get strength to put on their clothes in the morning" (L 342a).

Newly widowed Helen Hunt and the Higginsons once shared a boardinghouse, Higginson becoming a mentor and publisher for Jackson, as he did not (while she lived) for Dickinson; to augment her own knowledge of Dickinson, Jackson must have had opportunities to hear such stories. To be sure, there are profound differences between Mercy and Emily. The former, for example, cares a great deal about the price her work will draw. And the sample of Mercy's work, an Italian sonnet "To an Absent Lover," is hardly up to Dickinson's spare, riddling lyrics. After Mercy's death, she is mourned by a Jackson-like female poet, the opposite of what happened between the actual Jackson and Dickinson, who outlived her Amherst contemporary by nine months.

Another neighbor, little MacGregor Jenkins, to whom Dickinson wrote "Please never grow up.... Please never 'improve'" (L 717), did grow up to write *Emily*. The love story Jenkins tells about his childhood friend and her minister lover claims to be "the picture of a beautiful young woman... as courageous as a crusader and as shy as a nun, threading her devious way through the mazes of a cyclonic experience." People from the actual life (Maggie, Lavinia, and Sue) blend with an imagined Emersonian professor and a Reverend

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Hayward, who prompts “a sense of something impending [that] had assailed her.”

### Hesitant and Kindly Hearts

Some forty years after neighbor Jenkins wrote his romance, Anne Edwards, who until then had mainly written about and for Hollywood, created something close to a filmscript for an old-fashioned tearjerker in her use of the stories of another potential “master,” Judge Otis Lord, and Emily Dickinson. Having researched Dickinson as much as was possible in 1973, Edwards wove poems and letters through the frustrated love affair, as Emily falls in love with the man who had befriended her in childhood, had read her Shakespeare as she recovered from eye troubles, and, during the pivotal event in this novel, fascinated her as he tried a patricide case.

Early in *The Hesitant Heart* Lord’s niece, Abbie Farley, speaks disdainfully of her uncle’s new love interest: “Miss Emily is indiscreet,” she snaps (22). That is one of the more believable lines. As Emily talks to “my darling Salem” (179), as she calls Judge Lord (paraphrasing “My lovely Salem” from L 559), she says rather unconvincingly: “Whatever is dear, whatever is worthwhile, you have taught me” (185). In this case, readers may prefer to read the surviving letters that Dickinson, obviously much in love with Lord, wrote to the distinguished judge and lifelong family friend, beginning in 1878 following the death of his wife. Both Jenkins and Edwards—and there will be others—make one man the focus of Dickinson’s life, which is all the more surprising (or intriguing) since Jenkins did indeed know Dickinson and has written about her elsewhere.

Closer to the historical little Jenkins and his Amherst neighbor is the friendship depicted in the beautifully illustrated children’s story *Emily* (Bedard and Cooney), in which the curious little narrator learns about gingerbread, plants, and poetry from “a woman on our street they call the Myth.” Somewhat older readers could learn other lessons from Zibby Oneal’s adolescent novel *A Formal Feeling*.

Oneal’s title is the most Dickinsonian thing about her book. Just so, the poet’s

words inform but are not necessarily integral to Anna Tuttle Villegas’s *All We Know of Heaven*. Villegas sprinkles Dickinson’s poems as epigraphs to each chapter in a love story set in California between a real estate agent with the heart of a poet and her client, a professor whose misfortune creates resonances with such powerful evocations of hurt as “After great pain, a formal feeling comes —” (P 341). Not all readers will enter into the love affair, particularly the not-terribly-subtle bedroom portions, and they may infer that the poems chosen reflect parallel events in Dickinson’s life. But the story picks up poignancy in the late chapters, and readers who don’t know Dickinson will at least have the chance to read the full texts of the poems.

Oneal and Villegas title their works Dickinsonly, but perhaps the most memorable use of Dickinson in fiction is the tiny but important part she plays in an earlier novel. Most readers will remember from the film, if not the novel, that William Styron’s Sophie, whose remembered and horrible “Choice” propels her to her death, makes Dickinson’s “Ample make this Bed” (P 829) achingly relevant to postwar adult readers.

Two books are written from Dickinson’s fictive voice. Jamie Fuller’s “discovered” *Diary*, which struggles to equal the wit and dash of the real letters and which sold briskly when it was published, contains “twenty-five previously unknown poems interspersed among the entries.” Fuller is brave to try such a *tour de force*. On the whole the diary entries are more convincing than the poems. One wishes Dickinson really *had* explained her fascicles. She does so toward the end of Fuller’s *Diary*: “Alone in my room I see the collection grow. To string the verses together is a shaping endeavor. We must make our own patterns as God wont reveal His” (203).

Perhaps most reflective of Dickinson of all these novels, certainly the most challenging, is Judith Farr’s *I Never Came to You in White*. In this critically acclaimed brief novel Farr presents a complex network of seasoned research, imaginative empathy, and great fictional and poetic skills in a witty, suspenseful, and moving exploration of what may really have happened between Mary Lyon and her puzzling young charge in 1848. Around that

focus Farr weaves material from the actual poems and letters (and her own convincing creations of new ones) into a cliffhanger that moves from Dickinson’s memories of childhood to 1932 as Mabel Loomis Todd tells her story. “Letters” from the proud and still befuddled Higginson, from the stolid English teacher Margaret Mann, and others reflect the impossibility of knowing the truth behind the Genius and the lover.

Without giving away the ending, I can say that, according to Farr’s novel, the mysterious “Master” letters are *not* “all for her [Sue], Elegant Fantasiist!” Nor are they all for “Mr. Samuel” [Bowles], Farr’s contender for lover in her critical biography, *The Passion of Emily Dickinson*. Unlike Fuller, who maintains her fictional diary throughout the volume, but very much like Anne Edwards in her 1973 *Hesitant Heart*, Farr includes an explanatory “Afterward” that, while helpful, has the effect of turning on the bright house lights while one is still in the thrall of a romantic movie.

Farr moves between time periods, as does Anne Walter’s recent, tiny French novel, *L’Herbe ne pousse pas sur les mots*, in which a would-be translator imagines Amherst, the Dickinsons, Lord, and others. Well worth reading, too, are two novels that focus on Dickinsons other than Emily. It would be a good idea to balance one of these with the other. Maravene Loeschke explains why in her preface to *The Path Between*, the focus of which is Emily’s niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi: “As I visited, as I interviewed, as I observed, I became aware of a division in Amherst that has continued beyond the deaths of the characters involved...I discovered that I was asked to identify my allegiance before interviews were granted.”

Although her novel is not necessarily flattering to Martha and her family, Loeschke, an actress who has also played *The Belle of Amherst*, clearly favors Sue’s side of the “division.” On the other hand, Candace Ridington’s *Rubicon* depicts Sue as the “other woman” in the love affair between Austin and Mabel. Imagining conversations, motivations, and events beyond the scope of Polly Longworth’s *Austin and Mabel*, the

*Continued on page 20*

## A Certain Slant of Light: The Art of Mary Frank

By Maryanne Garbowsky

**Editor's Note:** I am pleased to announce the appointment of Maryanne Garbowsky as editor of the series "Dickinson and the Visual Arts." Maryanne has written most of the previous articles in the series, and her appointment is long overdue.

Literature and art have always been Maryanne's favorite subjects, and in her doctoral program at Drew University she was able to combine her two loves in a study of the Romantic poets and the visual artists of their time. Since then, she has relished any opportunity to join the two disciplines. Discovering a Dickinson-related box by Joseph Cornell some years ago, she was launched on her study of artists using Dickinson as inspiration. She is now at work on a project that investigates this connection.

Maryanne is professor of English at the County College of Morris, New Jersey, and the author of *The House Without the Door*.

Mary Frank is an artist of multiple talents. The daughter of Eleanor Lockspeiser, a painter, and Edward Lockspeiser, a well-known music critic and Debussy specialist, Frank was born in London and came to the United States when she was seven. She remained in the States and attended a variety of public and private schools, including the High School for Music and Art and the Professional Children's School, from which she graduated in 1950.

Frank knew early in life that she wanted to be an artist and began as a dancer, studying with such notable teachers as Martha Graham, José Limon, and Jerome Weidman before giving up dance and moving on to sculpture.

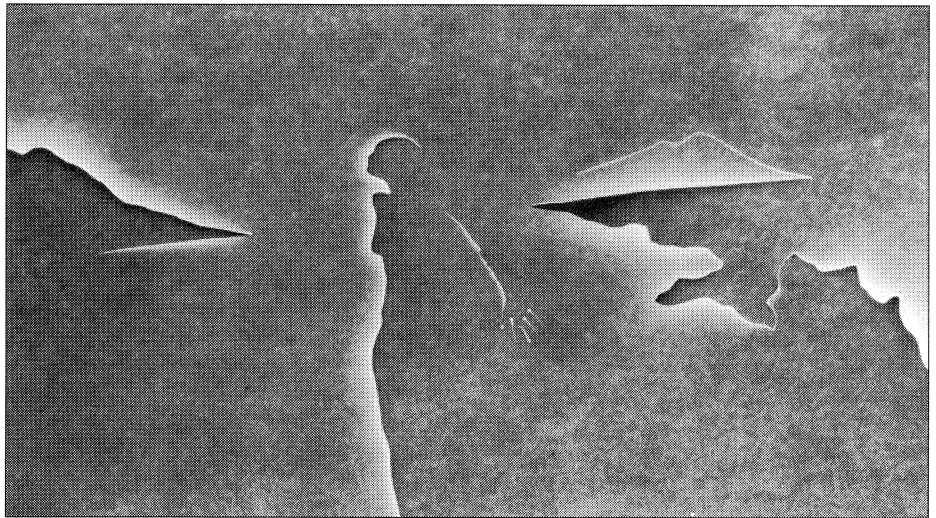
Frank had watched her mother paint with great intensity and seriousness (Munro 297), but for Frank art always had an element of play and freedom to it. As a child, she enjoyed working with her hands, so turning to sculpture was natural for her. Her first teacher was sculptor Alfred van Loen, a neighbor who instructed her in wood sculpture.

In New York, she studied drawing with

Max Beckmann and later life drawing with Hans Hoffmann. In 1956 some of her wood sculptures were shown at the Museum of Modern Art (Munro 299).

Through the years, Frank began to sculpt in wax, then plaster, and eventu-

maché, and monoprints, both large and small. Another show held at the D.C. Moore Gallery in New York in 1996 featured paintings and pastels. In March 1998 Frank had an exhibition of works on paper at D.C. Moore.



*Shadow paper for Dickinson's Poem 1105, "Like Men and Women Shadows Walk / Upon the Hills."*  
Courtesy of D.C. Moore Gallery, New York. Photo by Jerry Thompson.

ally clay. Many felt that clay was the right medium for her, but Frank did not agree, saying only that her "earlier pieces were just different" (Munro 302). Her clay pieces are figurative and have a mythic strength as well as the freedom and spontaneity of drawing. Monoprints, which came after her exploration in clay, allowed the artist to have her "cake and eat it" too (Munro 305), since she was able to make changes on the plate that would be impossible in sculpture.

Today Frank is equally at home in many media. Drawing, which is "a kind of breathing" to her, is the foundation (Van Wagner). She sculpts in clay, makes monoprints, and cuts shadow papers, an activity she describes as "drawing with scissors."

To attest to the range of her abilities, Frank has had numerous exhibitions. At the Zabriskie Gallery in 1987 she showed sculpture in bronze, clay, and papier

Frank came to know Emily Dickinson through dance. As a student of Martha Graham, she often saw Graham perform Dickinson's "Letter to the World." During the performance, someone would stand on the sidelines and read the poem aloud while Graham danced. Frank came to know the poem by heart and loved it. So when Jonathan Cott approached her to work with him on *Skies in Blossom*, a collection of Dickinson's nature poems, she was eager to collaborate with the poet.

At first, the editor of the collection was Jacqueline Kennedy, whom Frank described as having a "sharp eye." Kennedy knew poetry well and told Frank she always read poems to her children. Thus for Kennedy the book was a labor of love. Unfortunately illness, followed by her untimely death, ended her connection with the project. Frank is convinced the book would have been better had Kennedy lived to see it through to its completion. "It had

real meaning to her,” Frank says. The book is dedicated to Kennedy and quotes from Dickinson: “Unable are the loved – to die –/For love is immortality –/Nay – it is Deity –.”

The medium Frank chose in which to “respond” to Dickinson’s poems was one she had worked with previously. She came to it by making stencils for monoprints. She enjoyed the challenge of cutting the paper. Her shadow papers, as they are called, were exhibited at the Zabriskie Gallery in New York. The object, says Frank, is to try “to keep the paper intact, cutting in but not cutting out.” She holds the paper up to the light, which is the way the image is to be shown—with light coming through. Frank says that when she came across a line from a letter by Dickinson mentioning “a crack of light,” she was astonished. The discovery confirmed the appropriateness of the medium she had chosen.

In order to get one worthwhile shadow paper, the artist must make many. “It is like drawing in ink,” Frank says. “You can’t correct a mistake.”

The works are small, ranging in size from 5½" x 6" to 12" x 17". One practical reason they cannot be larger is that they would physically fall apart from the weight of the paper; they would also lose their delicacy. Their size parallels Dickinson’s compression of much meaning into a small space.

Frank adds that shadow papers are a very intimate medium. To her, it is “like a dance with the paper” (*Skies in Blossom* 97). She felt privileged to be able to express Dickinson’s poetry in this way.

Frank’s response to Dickinson’s poems can be seen in twenty-one shadow papers. They are not always connected to the poems directly, but indirectly—“obliquely,” as Dickinson might have said. The images, which Frank wanted to be “austere” and “full of Emily Dickinson’s poems” (*Skies in Blossom* 97), encompass natural plant, human, and animal forms. They are striking as the light pours through the cut lines and saturates their space. This is how they should be seen: the images “come alive only when they are held up to the light,” when “gravity pulls on the masses” and lets “in the light that gives them form.” Frank credits photographer

Jerry Thompson, whom she calls her collaborator, for allowing the shadow papers to “blossom into full life” (*Skies in Blossom* 97).

One of my favorites is the image that accompanies “The Dandelion,” Poem 1519. The play of light and dark, the carefully etched petal and leaf resonate with the poet’s words:

The Dandelion’s pallid tube  
Astonishes the Grass,  
And Winter instantly becomes  
An infinite Alas –  
The tube uplifts a signal Bud  
And then a shouting Flower,  
The Proclamation of the Suns  
That sepulture is o’er.

Frank’s image adds another level of enjoyment to the poem. Her shadow art’s carefully balanced interplay of light and dark has a haunting and elusive quality that matches the subtlety and complexity of Dickinson’s poem.



Shadow paper for Dickinson’s Poem 1540, “As imperceptibly as Grief.” Courtesy of D.C. Moore Gallery, New York. Photo by Jerry Thompson.

To Frank, the poems are very moving as they shift from meaning to meaning, going from minute to vast ideas and feelings. The poems’ strength, as she sees it, is in the different subjects and emotional

states the poet takes on. Frank appreciates and respects the poet’s view of nature, which was never a “soft one.” Dickinson sees nature as neither simple nor comforting but complex and strong.

We see this quality in Poem 1235, “Like Rain it sounded.” Here the shadow paper’s form swirls round and round as the universe might have appeared at the beginning of creation. The natural elements of rain, wind, and wave described by the poet are equaled by the image’s mystery and power.

Dickinson’s Poem 1540, “As imperceptibly as Grief,” which subtly and seamlessly describes summer’s passing, is matched by Frank’s equally subtle shadow paper. Reading from right to left, we see first the lovely curve of a swan’s neck emerge from the dark page. Fading into a light wing, it eventually evaporates into a lighter mist. Frank successfully captures the weightlessness of light and the grace of a summer season as it slips,

like a “Guest,” quietly into yesterday.

Always attentive to nature’s moods and changing light, Dickinson sensitively portrays a Nature come to life in Poem 1105. The inanimate world quickens and fills with life as the “Shadows Walk / Upon the Hills.” Mary Frank’s wonderful shadow paper (preceding page) responds in kind: a lithe shadow woman emerges and takes form, a silhouette excited by light. Balanced on either side by “the Hills,” the woman faces east to a hill outlined by a halo of light; the other hill, behind her to the west, is luminous and aglow, casting its own shadow.

Mary Frank’s deft hand cuts through paper with sureness and subtlety. Her imagery brings to the lover of Dickinson’s poetry new eyes and enriches its meaning by adding a

visual component.

Emily Dickinson is not the only writer Frank has worked with. In 1992, she collaborated with Peter Matthiessen in *Shadows of Africa*, a book that sets Frank’s

## Of Poems and Papers

*By Cindy Dickinson and Gregory Farmer*

### **At Home with Emily Dickinson**

Emily Dickinson hoped to be “the Belle of Amherst” by her seventeenth year, but as time went on, she was more commonly regarded among local residents as “the Myth of Amherst.” Even today, despite Dickinson’s international reputation as a poet, many residents of her own hometown are mystified by the acclaim scholars give her work and the devotion it inspires in readers around the world.

To introduce a local audience to the life and work of Emily Dickinson, the Dickinson Homestead in January 1997 collaborated with the Town of Amherst’s Leisure Services and Supplemental Education (LSSE) Department to offer “At Home with the Poems of Emily Dickinson.” The three-week course was taught by Jay Ladin, a recent M.F.A. recipient from the University of Massachusetts and a Ph.D. candidate at Princeton University. Twenty-seven people—twice the expected number—took advantage of the opportunity to study Dickinson’s work in the very place in which it was written.

Since the popular January 1997 class, seven more “At Home with Emily Dickinson” courses have been offered through LSSE. More than sixty people have come to read and discuss Dickinson’s work at the Homestead. Participants have ranged widely in their previous “exposure” to Dickinson’s poetry. Some are longtime Dickinson readers who have enjoyed the opportunity to discuss her work with other devotees. Others are inspired to take the course because a friend or relative is a fan of Dickinson. Still others are Amherst natives who want to understand what draws so many outsiders to the town. Although designed for local resi-

dents, the course has attracted participants from as far away as Lenox, Massachusetts, and southern Vermont.

The majority of the LSSE courses have been led by Ladin, who is himself a poet. Sensing that people are often intimidated by Dickinson’s work, he encourages students to explore the multiple possibilities in her poems. His classes often spend an entire two-hour class period on a single poem. Poems that have prompted particu-



*A poetry class in action. Instructor Jay Ladin is at right.*

larly intense discussion include “’Twas like a Maelstrom,” “My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –,” and “There’s a certain Slant of light.”

Other instructors have shared their expertise in the series. Marguerite Lentz, an instructor at Greenfield Community College, taught an introductory class last summer. Marcy Tanter, a recent Ph.D. from the University of Massachusetts, designed a new course for winter 1998 on Dickinson’s correspondence. All of the courses include a tour of the Homestead, and many conclude with a poetry reading in Dickinson’s bedroom.

According to Steve Ruhl, LSSE’s Youth & Adult Education Program Director, the Dickinson courses have had a significant impact on the local community: “People for a long time in Amherst have yearned for a more intimate relationship with Dickinson and the Homestead. There’s been a mystique in town regarding both the poet and her home; these courses assist

in dispelling that mystique while enriching the connection that people feel with Dickinson, her life, and her work.”

The “Belle” is a little less mythical to Amherst now.

### **Newsletter Information**

The Dickinson Homestead now issues a newsletter twice a year. To receive the newsletter (at no charge), please send your name and address to the Dickinson Homestead, 280 Main Street, Amherst, MA 01002; call (413) 542-8161; or e-mail your postal address to [csdickinson@amherst.edu](mailto:csdickinson@amherst.edu). Portions of the newsletter can be viewed on the Homestead’s website, [www.amherst.edu/~edhouse](http://www.amherst.edu/~edhouse).

### **Evergreens Papers Now Available for Study at Brown**

It was a mystery for years: Did the Evergreens hold untold treasures? Would Mrs. Hampson consent to see anyone? Were there more poems and letters in the house? What family secrets were being kept from prying eyes? Was Susan Dickinson’s reputation at stake? Now at last the secrets are out.

Mary Landis Hampson, the last resident of the Evergreens, was the steward and custodian of one of the largest and potentially most revealing repositories of Dickinson-related materials in Amherst. When she died, just ten years ago, there was intense speculation as to what would happen to the house itself, as well as the letters, family papers, manuscripts and books that Martha Dickinson Bianchi had so carefully preserved.

By her will, Mary Landis Hampson granted all the books, manuscripts and family papers remaining in the Evergreens to Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, to form the core of a new collection. She also established the Martha Dickinson Bianchi Trust as a charitable and educational corporation charged with restoring the Evergreens and making it available to scholars and the general public.

Together, the two organizations are working to reveal the untold portion of the Dickinson saga.

Mary Landis was a graduate of Smith College (1918) who developed a close friendship with Madame Bianchi and her co-editor, Alfred Leete Hampson, while residing at the National Arts Club in New York City in the 1920s. She was nicknamed "The Bird" by Madame Bianchi and was playfully cited as a good match for the bachelor Alfred. The three remained friends for years, but after Madame Bianchi died in 1943, Alfred's health began to fail. In 1947, Alfred and Mary, both in their mid-fifties, chose to marry. They reopened the Evergreens in Amherst as their new home, changing almost nothing but living carefully around the Dickinson furnishings and continuing the work of their mentor and friend.

In the early 1950s, faced with failing health and rising medical bills, Alfred Hampson arranged for a number of the more important Dickinson manuscripts and books from the Evergreens to be sold to Gilbert Holland Montague and subsequently donated to Harvard University. Those materials formed the core of the Dickinson collection at the Houghton Library. When Alfred died in 1952, there was already speculation about what else the Evergreens might hold.

Mary Hampson clearly recognized the value of the house, the furnishings and the family papers, but after Alfred's death she grew increasingly dissatisfied with the direction of Dickinson scholarship and interpretation. More often than not, she refused requests from scholars and Dickinson fans to visit the house. On her own, she undertook the tremendous task of sorting and organizing the many Dickinson-related materials still in the house. She was, in effect, the Evergreens' first archivist and first curator.

When Mary died in 1988, only a fraction of the papers had been sorted and annotated. An initial inventory, conducted under the auspices of the estate attorney, identified the key papers needed to guide Mrs. Hampson's will through probate and fulfill her intentions. Based on that first survey, an initial shipment of manuscripts and papers, amounting to

more than 23 cubic feet, was sent to Brown University in 1991.

With the conclusion of the lengthy probate process, Brown University and the Bianchi Trust assumed direct responsibility for the remaining material at the Evergreens. The task was daunting. Every available surface in the house was piled high with old papers. Bookshelves were tightly packed with books, many of which were also stuffed with inserts and loose notes.

The drawers of every desk and chest were filled to overflowing with assorted ephemera. Every closet was stacked with cardboard boxes containing more books and newspaper clippings. Half a dozen large metal file cabinets held letters and notes that Mary had sorted in manila folders, each with notations about the correspondent.

Many of the papers were dusty and brittle. Desiccated rubber bands and rusty paper clips were evidence of earlier attempts to sort and group the papers. Boxes and drawers were littered with rodent droppings, mouse carcasses, and signs of insect infestation. For all its historic potential, it was not a pretty sight!



*The Evergreens documents during sorting.*

It was clear that sorting and organizing the remaining material might take several years and that the opportunity now existed for the restoration of the house to be guided and informed by new Dickinson scholarship. As a result, representatives of the Bianchi Trust and Brown University agreed to proceed slowly with the transfer of archival materials, documenting their location in the house as well as the general nature of each lot prior to packing for shipment. The initial inven-

tory and packing were undertaken by Gregory Farmer, Project Manager for the Bianchi Trust, with volunteer assistance from Marcy Tanter, then a doctoral student in English at the University of Massachusetts, and technical advice from Mark Brown, Curator of Manuscripts at the John Hay Library of Brown University.

By the end of 1995, all Dickinson-related manuscripts, photographs, and publications had been removed from the Evergreens, and structural repairs and roof replacement could proceed with less risk of damage.

The materials transferred to Brown between 1991 and 1995 amount to approximately 360 cubic feet—for the most part in one-cubic-foot boxes. These include 185 cubic feet of books, as well as 66 cubic feet of magazines, newspapers, pamphlets, calendars, catalogues, maps, prints, and advertisements, 6 cubic feet of sheet music, and 4 cubic feet of photographs, many of which are of unidentified friends or relatives.

Of interest among the remainder are letters, diaries, literary manuscripts, scrapbooks, notes, and memoranda. Also included, however, is a great variety of other materials, such as drawings, water colors, clippings, calling cards, greeting cards, picture post cards, kindergarten artwork, and legal, financial, and government documents. It should be noted that the papers do not include any new manuscripts by Emily Dickinson, only her signature witnessing a deed. As for the

poetry in the collection, whether manuscript or printed, most of it was written or collected by Susan Dickinson and Martha Bianchi.

The collection is now accessible to researchers, in large part because of the work done prior to transfer from the Evergreens. Provisional finding aids include an item-level list of more than 3,000 books, an inventory of folder headings and serial titles for 57 cubic feet of manuscript and printed materials, and a list briefly identi-

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# PERFORMANCES

## Historical Greatness and Contemporary Opera

### *A Review of Emily by Bill Wallis*

The evening began inauspiciously with a difficult trip south on the Los Angeles freeway that, even with stalwart helmsperson Margaret Freeman in charge, lived up to most of the dreary characterizations of area byways. Nevertheless, the Southern California chapter of EDIS arrived in Fullerton in time to enjoy, appropriately, Italian cuisine before settling into our seats in the Muckenthaler Cultural Center in Fullerton to witness the world premiere of composer Brent Pierce's *Emily*, a "Chamber Opera in Three Acts."

Immediately before the performance I met with Pierce, who introduced himself as the composer of "three hundred published works," and the librettist, Shelley Peltier, an ASCAP lyricist. Aware of the complexities and challenges that await any composer and librettist writing a contemporary opera, I looked forward to the performance.

Yet, while a new opera should be cause for celebration for many reasons, I left this performance more defeated by ambivalence than elevated by pleasure. Two well-meaning individuals—neither one devoid of considerable talent—had failed to produce a work of high literary, musical, or musical-dramatic quality.

Rather than shred a well-intended work, I would like to lay down here a few ground rules for the traditional, historically based musical-dramatic portrayal of a literary figure—Emily Dickinson being an extremely challenging case because of both the difficult "settability" of her subtle, sometimes demanding verse, and the very private, seemingly secretive nature of her existence.

First, leaving aside scenic considerations and an authentic musical environment (a live, competent orchestra and chorus), there is the absolute necessity of dealing with the writer's style, preferably using recognized masterpieces, in order to establish the believability and veracity of character. This is especially true of Dickinson, whose poems and letters must

represent her historical presence for those of us who read her today.

We know great writers by their style, the character of their writing, and a libretto must come to terms with this fact. The character of Emily Dickinson must approximate, at least in moments of heightened emotion, the vibrancy of her letters, if not the brilliance of her verse. The libretto we heard, except for two set pieces composed before the opera's conception and based on Dickinson's own words (Poems 67 and 288), did not offer a believable verbal manifestation of the literary Emily Dickinson. It was written (or at least printed) in a kind of heightened prose. Did the librettist intentionally avoid writing in verse? This is one of many questions I came away with.

Second, to distort the historical veracity of those who surrounded the poet is to eliminate the possibility of creating a believable portrayal of the artist. To present Dickinson's father, Edward, as a sentimental, even gentle, paternal figure is almost certainly inaccurate. I am not suggesting that an opera about a father-dominated poet would be accurate either, but this man concerned with "rational happiness" certainly, as Richard Sewall has pointed out, "had his humanities" and his dark side. And to constrict Emily's beloved sister Lavinia to an ancillary remark seems absurd, since she was Emily's constant companion throughout her life and is given credit for getting Emily's poetry published.

Third, the plot must be constructed in such a manner as to lead inexorably to a climax that reveals new depths of the central character and new truth within the plot as a whole. *Emily* is divided into three periods, falling between 1848 and 1886, and always seizes the melodramatic for effect. In Act I, for instance, Emily is "at sea" for no other reason than that she is "hopeless" in her lack of religious conviction. The script then superficially works through Emily's romantic involvement

with the Reverend Charles Wadsworth, sublimation through writing, and her father's death, toward its climax—the tragic death of her nephew Gilbert. No event is explored with convincing depth, and the tenuous connecting link of personal loss pales.

Pierce's and Peltier's portrayal of the poet as a manic depressive who loves only what cannot be attained or held has a certain flair, and the first act recitative ("in a single ecstasy") and aria ("I stand alone") were promising, but the plot also addresses the period of "Because I could not stop for Death—" and "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –." Surely some accounting must be taken of the signal power of this genius's mature work. The creators of an opera about Emily Dickinson need not begin on the aesthetic heights of her work or dwell there, but they should not avoid them.

Fourth, characters must elucidate each other through interaction. There must be at least one major or secondary character with whom the central figure interacts on a more than superficial level. I have concluded—after witnessing sadly superficial portrayals of the poet in dramatic and musical-dramatic presentations in recent years—that this secondary character must almost certainly be a member of the Dickinson family. Regardless of the opera's length, at least one such secondary character is necessary, unless the opera is a soliloquy, which this *Emily* is not.

Finally, musically speaking, there must be a variety of melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic ideas for the text to mount and live from. Granted that the score, originally intended for a sixty-piece orchestra, was prerecorded on synthesizer for this performance. But the composition seemed to be chronically subdued in nature, devoid of the musical gesture needed to approximate the mature Dickinson's work or character. Pierce successfully sets two early poems, and it

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# The Search for Emily

A Preview by Lisa Heiserman Perkins

In a letter to Thomas W. Higginson, Emily Dickinson writes: "If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her. . . ." What, one wonders, might she have made of the superstardom her "sweet countrymen" would one day bestow? The kind of fame that belongs to her today would have been incomprehensible to anyone living in the nineteenth century.

Though myriad scholarly studies and critical biographies are the lot of all major poets, the myths and mysteries that cling to Dickinson have resulted in books devoted to her parents' love letters and her brother's sexual liaison. Unlike any other poet of her stature, she inspires plays, mysteries, romance novels, children's books, performance art, music, and dance. Though once the darling of the avant garde, Dickinson has long since so captured the heart of America that she is now

something of a hot property. Her image has graced everything from tea cups to T-shirts and tote bags. All that's missing is a Hollywood movie and a "Belle of Amherst" action figure.

I am an associate producer of *Loaded Gun: The Search for Emily*, a short documentary-in-progress directed by Jim Wolpaw that will probably not attract much interest among the Hollywood powers-that-be, despite its title. Yet our film also targets a very large audience. Using a playful approach to Dickinson's proliferating stardom, we hope to attract not only her established fans but the public, even those who may not be open to poetry, and lead them back to the core of all the hoopla—her poems.

The premise of *Loaded Gun*, the "hook," is that a filmmaker who wants to make a movie about Dickinson can't get

a handle on his leading lady despite years of research. The veiled, teasing selves she offers and the scholarly explanations of them fail to tell him what would it be like to be in the same room with a dazzling, disturbing genius who sat "in the ecstatic light of her own fire."

The documentary begins with the filmmaker finally deciding to just "go the Hollywood route." He puts out a casting call in *Variety*. Head shots pour in from more than nine hundred actresses. He selects twenty and sends them packets of Dickinson info. When they arrive to audition, he asks them to read poems for the camera and answer, in character, a number of arguably inane questions: e.g., "Are you in love with death?" "Why did you spend most of your life in your house?"

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**Listen and Read: Emily Dickinson's Selected Poems.** New York: Dover, 1996. 65-minute cassette and 64-p. paperback. ISBN 0-486-29118-9, \$5.95.

Reviewed by Judy Jo Small

Endowed with the hauteur of the garret, and with financial security as well, Emily Dickinson showed fine disdain for the "Auction" of publication (P 709). We too aspire to be purists of the text. Yet here we are, most of us, stuck in the marketplace, reduced to fretting over the various disgraces associated with "Price."

Price makes Dover's combined book-and-audiotape, at \$5.95, a highly attractive package. "One hundred nine of her best and best-remembered works," reads the introductory pitch. But here's the catch, unblushingly acknowledged in the same sentence: the poems "are reprinted exactly as they appeared" in volumes edited in the 1890s by Todd and Higginson. We purists know too well that this means the edition contains numerous alterations that besmirch the poet's "Snow." Should we recoil from the very idea of another cheap, corrupt edition? Or should we, especially teachers sympathetic to students' strained

finances, decide that affordability offsets deficiencies that non-experts probably do not care much about anyway? (Does "Poverty" justify "so foul a thing"?)

The excellence of the performance on the audiotape should weaken our understandable resistance. Dickinson's poems are beautifully read by veteran actress Marian Seldes, whose voice is rich and resonant and whose enunciation is simply perfect. Seldes's expressive tones range from awed grandeur to lilting rapture to solemn terror to quiet amusement. Her interpretations, almost without exception, are sensitive, intelligent, unmannered, restrained. Her pace, though generally brisk, is skillfully varied. She delivers effective dramatic emphases without histrionics and shows the most delicate respect for poetic pauses and enjambments.

Students in my poetry seminar, after listening to a segment of the recording, were presented with the question, "Should teachers put this inaccurate edition on lists of texts required for courses?" Not without reflection, they responded unanimously in the affirmative. People need to hear poetry, they were certain; those who may read a printed poem with bland indif-

ference are more likely, upon hearing it, to feel its power. And a recording of one's own, a vastly different thing from a recording played by a teacher for a class, gives the kind of private, intimate access that Dickinson especially demands.

Poetry ably read is a scarce commodity. Though it seems like heresy to say so, this edition is inexpensive enough that it could reasonably be required for survey classes (and supplemented with a list of explanations and "corrections") or required as an accompaniment to Johnson's *Complete Poems* for advanced or in-depth courses. The little Dover paperback refers students to Johnson's edition, follows his chronology, and provides his dates of composition for the poems. It also includes an index of first lines.

Life is seldom simple. So, until a purer, better edition comes along, it's possible to take pleasure in thinking of folks alone with this tape, discovering the "Grace" of Dickinson's poetry. Or even of enjoying it oneself.

*Judy Jo Small is associate professor of English at North Carolina State University and author of Positive as Sound.*

## On "1961"

By Ann Keniston

Featured in this issue is Ann Keniston, whose connection to Emily Dickinson has been lifelong. Keniston received a B.A. from the University of Chicago and an M.F.A. from New York University. She has worked in book and magazine publishing and as a teacher of adult basic education and English as a Second Language. Currently she is a doctoral candidate in English at Boston University focusing on twentieth-century American poetry. A 1996 winner of the Grolier Poetry Prize, she has published poems in *Kenyon Review*, *Antioch Review*, *North American Review*, *River Styx*, *Crazyhorse*, and elsewhere. She lives in Somerville, Massachusetts.

A special thanks to EDIS members Ellen Davis and Daria Donnelly, who are responsible for bringing Ann to my attention.

Jonnie Guerra, *Series Editor*



Eric Novak

For twenty-five years I've been reading Emily Dickinson from the same volume. My father gave me the *Complete Poems* for Christmas the year I was eleven, a heavy hardcover with elongated, narrow, old-fashioned-looking pages. My classmates always comment on it—it is so different from their compact paperbacks—when I bring it to seminars. Over more than two-thirds of my life, the way I've read Dickinson's poems has changed, and my favorite poems have changed, and then sometimes changed back again. When I think about reading Dickinson, it's a way of tracing my autobiography, not only how I've changed as a reader but how I've changed as a poet, a person.

As a child, I loved Dickinson's whimsical poems, the ones focusing on an observed scene—the snake in the grass, the bird and worm, the railroad devouring the miles. I loved the exuberant defiance of Dickinson's open-air Sunday worship. "The Belle of Amherst," which my father took me to see around that time—one of my first trips to a real Boston theater—taught me to see Dickinson as eccentric, benevolent, lovable—appealing to my notions of what a poet must be.

It wasn't until years later, when I was in the middle of getting my MFA (I remem-

ber the luxury of fulfilling my professor's assignment that we read the entire *Complete Poems*) that I discovered another Dickinson—at about the time, not coincidentally, that I discovered feminist theory. It was the poems of rage and extremity that now appealed to me, poems Adrienne Rich draws attention to in her essay "Vesuvius at Home." I realized that Dickinson's poems resisted, rebelled, were stubborn—qualities that corresponded to the ones I was discovering in myself at the time.

After years of fear about committing myself to being a poet, I was writing intensely and trying for the first time to draw on and describe my anger in my poems. I was also beginning to see that my childhood, which I'd always idealized, was far from perfect, and I began to scrutinize my memories to see what new discoveries about myself I could unearth. Although my search was painful, it mostly made me feel liberated. The critical essays on Dickinson I began writing then reveled in her difficulty and dismissed the poems I'd once loved—the obedient, inoffensive, "little-girl" poems. As I was writing these papers, I felt a sense of power: my essays were informed and impassioned by the kinship I felt to her work and voice.

Still later, returning to Dickinson in my Ph.D. coursework and beginning to realize that her poems would form the starting point of my dissertation on apostrophe and otherness in twentieth-century American poetry, I changed my way of reading her again. I have felt more recently an empathy with the intensity of pain in many of her poems. Maybe this corresponds to some deeper understanding of her defiance, of my own, or a discovery of something underlying that defiance.

"1961" comes out of these shifting, lifelong readings of Dickinson and out of my sense that the *Complete Poems* holds enough poems, and types of poems, to keep a reader like me engaged for a lifetime. The poem began with a conversation I had—again with my father—a few summers ago, as I was preparing to begin reading for my Ph.D. qualifying exams. He didn't know about Dickinson's publication history, the fact that many of the poems that are now considered most important weren't published at all before the *Complete Poems*. Explaining this to him, I was startled at how recently that volume had become available, "around the year of my birth," I said.

My mother had recently told me, somewhat melodramatically, the true story of my birth: I hadn't been born in the hospital after all. She had had something called placental insufficiency when she was pregnant with me—the placenta began to break down, and I was deprived of food and, the doctors worried, possibly oxygen. I was born late and, because I was so small, very fast.

In juxtaposing the scene of my birth with Dickinson's publishing history, I think I was doing several things at once: expressing my gratitude at her importance to me throughout my life of wanting to be a poet; writing about something in my own life I hadn't figured out how to express before; and, most centrally, exploring a kinship with Dickinson's work, or my own years of reading it, that had to do with secrecy, revelation, and rage.

The diminutive Dickinson—the tendencies in her work that let many early critics downplay or dismiss her importance—is connected for me to the smallness of her poems on the typeset page, and these two smallnesses also correspond to my own physical tininess at birth, which has always seemed metaphorical, or at least suggestive. While my poem doesn't imitate Dickinson's form, vocabulary, or lineation, I let my stanza and line length evoke, at least gently, hers.

I always feel compelled to admit that I know that Dickinson's *Complete Poems* wasn't in fact published in 1961. But perhaps the books (first available in 1959) were still being shipped then, and still startling readers.

### 1961

I started to starve in September's  
first weeks, and by the time  
I descended to earth, I was so small  
I caused my mother scarcely

any physical pain, my body  
slipping out of hers the way a coin  
vanishes through a pocket's seam  
and becomes invisible, except

I was made visible, and lay  
in the clear small cage around which  
doctors hovered, trying to determine  
whether I was damaged, or how, and my mother

vowed never to reveal to me this first  
way she'd failed me, and all that fall,  
the heavy new volumes  
of Dickinson's *Complete Poems* were piled

onto bookstore shelves in every city  
in America, and lay there  
silently, a cushion of empty space  
surrounding each poem, until a reader lifted one

and, holding open the book in some cramped  
public corner, read for the first time  
"My life closed twice,"  
"My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –"

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### Search, continued from page 9

One auditioner makes an Emilyesque escape to the bathroom and refuses to come out but slips written answers under the door; another is later found describing her audition ordeal in a comedy club; and still another is discovered in an inn entertaining Sunday brunchers with poems.

Excerpts from the auditions are juxtaposed with interviews in which the same questions are considered by, among others, a cranky professor who mocks the project, a psychiatrist diagnosing traits of personality disorder, an Amherst healer/psychic describing Dickinson's incarnations, Dan Lombardo of the Jones Library in Amherst, and artist Lesley Dill.

Together the artists, experts, and actresses present a barrage of responses to familiar details of Dickinson's life—sometimes profound, sometimes funny, always

spontaneous. Meanwhile, the magnitude of Dickinson's genius, her elusive power and dark humor, emerges with increasing intensity through readings of the poems selected to resonate with the audition questions.

As the film progresses, improvisation and speculation give way to the poetry. The search ends not with a leading lady but with the filmmaker's realization that the only place Dickinson can be found is in her poems. Yet the documentation of his curiosity is infectious, making this a valuable classroom resource, full of biographical information as well as fresh insights. And the many recitations of the poems, with their varied interpretive intonations, are a lively supplement to textual analysis.

*Loaded Gun* addresses the diminishing presence of poetry in modern Ameri-

can culture while raising the question of the importance of the artist's life in relation to her work. The real target audience is that segment of the public with no interest in poetry. The bad news—and the good news—is that this segment is huge.

But Jim Wolpaw has had success in drawing large audiences to poetry with his *Keats and His Nightingale: A Blind Date* (1985), which won an Academy Award nomination, was chosen by the NEH to show at a congressional appropriation hearing, and was distributed nationally to libraries, colleges, and high schools.

*Loaded Gun* is a hybrid: a documentation of several art forms, a challenge to the medium and, we hope, even to those resistant to the arts. Scholars working on the film are Dan Lombardo; Wendy Kohler, director of the Amherst Secondary Schools Humanities Curriculum; Dickinson scholar Polly Longworth; and Christopher Benfy of Mt. Holyoke College.

Grants from the Rhode Island Committee for the Humanities and the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities, plus numerous in-kind contributions, have enabled us to shoot 80 percent of the film and begin editing. Rough-cut clips have been screened at several locations, including the Jones Library, and responses have been overwhelmingly positive. But funds are still needed to complete the editing, produce a composite answer print and video master, and, most important, ensure distribution to as wide an audience as possible. The film will be premiered in Boston this summer, then shown at libraries, museums, and schools throughout Massachusetts and Rhode Island, entered in film festivals, and offered to PBS.

We hope some of you will decide to support our venture. Donations, however modest, can be sent to our fiscal sponsor, The Center for Independent Documentary/Dickinson Project/1608 Beacon Street/Waban, MA 02168. Contributors of \$50 will receive tickets to the premiere; for \$75, a video cassette of the film. For more information, call me at (617) 287-9979 or-0756.

*Lisa Perkins is a screenwriter who has taught literature at Tufts and Harvard Universities and Emerson College.*

# “Open Me Carefully”: Emily’s Book for Susan

By Martha Nell Smith

In Fall 1998, the book that Ellen Louise Hart and I have dreamed together since Fall 1986 (I had imagined it since the early '80s, but without a compatriot), will be published as *Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson’s Intimate Letters to Susan Huntington Gilbert*. The book has gone through several incarnations, most of which have been driven by the material itself and our responses to it. The final incarnation came about because of advances in technology that have enabled me to produce an invaluable complement to the printed version, the online edition, *Writings by Susan Dickinson*.<sup>1</sup> For the first time in a century of printing her work, a collection of the majority of writings that Emily Dickinson shared with her primary correspondent—Emily’s “Book of Susan”—have been gathered in a single volume.

Theirs was an intense relationship, and Emily’s writings to Susan have long been recognized as both passionately literary and passionately homoerotic. Newspaper columnists have railed against English professors who plumb Dickinson’s images and symbols for signs of the erotic, especially the lesbian erotic, and scholars bicker and argue over whether or not “lesbian” is a proper term to identify Dickinson’s decades-long devotion to her sister-in-law.

But that fear of discovering homoeroticism in America’s most beloved poet is not what first suppressed the story of these women’s relationship and made unavailable knowledge of this most intimate friendship at the heart of Emily Dickinson’s emotional and writing life. The fact is that Mabel Loomis Todd, one of Dickinson’s earliest and most influential editors, went to great lengths to suppress any trace of Susan as literary collaborator and confidante. Her motives are obvious. Susan completed a triangle with her husband, Austin Dickinson, and his young mistress, Mabel, more than twenty-five years their junior. Though out of ninety-nine correspondences Susan received well over a quarter of the writings Dickinson shared with her contemporaries, Loomis Todd did not mention her in her 1894 edition of *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*.

A century of suppression has followed that initial downplaying of the bond be-

tween these two women, and for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it is simply a matter of homophobia and thus a fear of investigating the same-sex erotic attraction so prominently on display in these writings. More often, the limited range of storylines available for scripting poetic influence and erotic devotion has prevented readers from going beyond the “facts” to what Susan remembered Emily calling “the phosphorescence of knowledge.”<sup>2</sup>

Though many of the facts have been available, those put forward in *Open Me Carefully* have not before been gathered in a story that clearly explains their relationship in the larger context of Emily Dickinson. Here are some key facts about Emily Dickinson’s correspondence with her beloved sister-in-law that cry out for “the phosphorescence of knowledge.”

Emily sent Susan substantially more writings than were addressed to any other correspondent, more than twice as many as to her next most frequent correspondent, Thomas Wentworth Higginson. These nearly 500 writings constitute one of two major corpora that Dickinson bequeathed to the world at her death, the other being the more than 800 poems in the fascicles. The number of texts alone testifies that Susan was Emily’s most trusted reader and critic, and the record shows that the two engaged in a literary dialogue that lasted for decades, the better part of Dickinson’s life.

Correspondents for nearly forty years and next-door neighbors for three decades, they enjoyed a constant relationship from the time they were girls until Emily’s death. Their mutual passions, especially for literature, were well-known to their contemporaries, and at least one—Samuel Bowles, in an 1862 letter to Susan—acknowledged their writing together. Just as Emily’s writing was commonly known, so was Sue’s “hard reading,” a fact also acknowledged by Bowles, in an April 1863 letter.<sup>3</sup>

As Emily wrote more and more to Susan over the years, her poetry emerged in, within, and from the epistolary scriptures, and the lyrics became more and more bold in theme, imagery, and form. As most beloved friend, influence, muse, and advisor, Susan played a primary role in Emily’s creative processes. Material evidence shows that Emily

was sending Susan pencilled versions of poems that she was recording in the fascicles in ink. Other material evidence in writings to Austin shows that someone, probably Loomis Todd, sought to expunge all affectionate expressions by Emily to and about Susan.

Facts about Emily and Susan’s relationship and its constancy and longevity were well-known to their contemporaries, but they have been passed along to posterity through a variety of testimonies, two of which have been central in determining the reception of that relationship. Closest to the source of any and all was Martha Dickinson Bianchi, Susan’s daughter, who has generally (and unfairly) been received as always unreliable. The other key source has been Loomis Todd, who served as editor of the first three volumes of Emily’s poems while playing devoted mistress opposite Susan’s “wife forgotten” (H274, P 301).

Other key facts about the writings of this relationship have been available but have been either overlooked or not analyzed for their significance, even by those who have had access to them. In effect, these facts have been privatized, reserved for editors and scholars engaged in manuscript study. They concern such matters as the fact that the versions of poems sent to Susan appear to be in what we call her “rough draft” or more casual hand, written in pencil, while the versions recorded in the fascicles are in her “performance script,” written in ink. In addition, Emily wrote to Susan on diverse types of paper (graph, scrap, and formal embossed paper of all sizes), while with other correspondents she almost always used more formal, gilt-trimmed stationery.

Moreover, the placement of texts on the holograph page may well convey meaning and so alter interpretation of words previously transmitted only in their linguistic (i.e., dictionary definition) forms—e.g., some words are set off by startling lineation (“I reason —” [H 274, P 301]) or are framed by placement on the page, by centering, and/or by white space. Dickinson, for instance, highlights the titillatingly carnal “Where my Hands / are cut, Her fingers will be/found inside —” by situating it provocatively on a page (H B56, L 288).

The profound cumulative effect of these

facts that seem negligible in isolation from one another has lain dormant in scholarly books and articles and manuscript collections and has remained unrecognized because its logically related parts have never before been narrated coherently.

Yet the textual body—Dickinson's manuscripts and all their material facts—are powerful witnesses to Susan's entanglement in Emily's compositional and distributional practices. Sending writings to another in one's casual script bespeaks trust, familiarity, routine. Sometimes placing those writings on less formal stationery and scraps of paper likewise signals the intimacy of comfortable quotidian exchange, a correspondence not confined to special occasions, an everyday writing habit taking as its subject any element of the everyday, from the monumental death of a beloved to the presumably negligible nuisance of indigestion. These expressions to and about Susan were powerful enough to drive Susan herself to destroy those "too personal and adulatory ever to be printed"<sup>4</sup>—and to provoke someone else to scissor half a sheet out of an early letter from Emily to Austin, to erase several lines of another, and to ink over every line of "One Sister have I in the house" (F 2, P 14).

Emily Dickinson died in 1886, and her poems were introduced to the reading public in 1890. Though she circulated her writings primarily through manuscript distribution in her correspondences, posthumous editors have circulated them in printed books. Thus her writings have moved from the realm of gift exchange to that of commodities bought and sold; from a world where Emily's "Mine" was Susan's "your own," and from "Copyright" mutual to a province in which "Publication – is the Auction,"<sup>5</sup> where law prevails, and copyright is mandated by courts. In commodification's geography, poetry is not so much "my sermon – my hope – my solace – my life," as it was to Susan, but "my property."

Between Dickinson's death and the appearance of the first printed volume of her work four years later, Susan began work on her "Book of Emily." As Dickinson's primary audience, she determined that including writings that were "rather more full, and varied"<sup>6</sup> was preferable to the conventional presentation by Loomis Todd and Higginson in their 1890 edition of the poems. Rather than separate the poems from their original contexts and divide them into the predictable subjects that audiences expected (Life, Love, Time & Eternity, Nature), Susan

wanted to showcase Emily's "early letters quite surpassing the correspondence of Gunderodi[e] with Bettine" (a romantic friendship celebrated by Goethe), to use "quaint bits to [her] children," with "illustrations of her [Emily's] own, showing her witty humorous side," which was "all...left out of" that first printed volume.<sup>7</sup>

Yet forty manuscript books and scores of poems on loose sheets had been found after Dickinson's death. Her sister Lavinia had wanted poems from that trove incorporated into a printed volume and turned to Susan to accomplish the task. Susan struggled with the making of a book from those fascicles, reading through the astonishing production of her dearest friend and marking individual lyrics with initials and "X's" to categorize them, not only in deference to Vinnie's wishes but also bowing to Higginson's judgment that the kind of "more full and varied" volume she had first imagined was "un-presentable." In other words, she tried to make *their* "Book of Emily" but could not because it went against her own judgment informed by decades of creative collaboration with Emily.

Conflicted, distracted, and grieved by the loss of Emily and by her husband's flagrant affair with Mabel, Susan moved slowly and Vinnie grew impatient, demanding that the fascicle poems be returned so that another editor, one who could get the job done more quickly, could work on the project. Though she was to work on designs for her "Book of Emily" the rest of her life, Susan returned the fascicle poems, knowing they would be given to Loomis Todd.

At that point, personal and cultural forces converged to suppress Susan's crucial role as audience for Emily's poetry. Her editors worked under the shadow of the most marketable image of woman poet, the reclusive, white-clad figure noted above. This romanticized figure wrote all alone, and an immediate audience for her poetry, especially on the domestic front, would not be viewed as an important player in the stereotypical biography of a "poetess." Wanting for obvious reasons to suppress Susan's role as Dickinson's primary audience, Loomis Todd in her editorial productions was more than happy to play up the image of the solitary woman writer. In a letter to her parents, she flatly declared her awareness that Amherst stories of Emily's life were very much "like a book,"<sup>8</sup> and for reasons not entirely professional, her iterations of the life of the poet conformed to audience expectations.

She refused Higginson's recommendation that Susan's obituary of Emily, which emphasized that she kept her own company but was "not disappointed with the world,"<sup>9</sup> serve as the introduction to the 1890 *Poems*, and instead used a three-paragraph introduction by Higginson that proclaimed Emily "a recluse by temperament and habit."<sup>10</sup>

So Higginson and Loomis Todd's editorial ventures from 1890 to 1896 distorted, disregarded, and muted a clear sense of the fact that the writings to Susan comprise one of two major Emily Dickinson corpora. Likewise, one gets little sense of that very important fact from the Johnson editions, in large part because the letters and poems are intermingled with others and all the variously signifying material elements of the Susan correspondence are translated into the flattening medium of typography, important distinctions between Susan's documents and those sent to others have gone unnoticed, and similarities between the writings to Susan and those to "Master," to Bowles, or to Elizabeth Holland have been overdrawn.

In contrast, similarities between the Susan papers and the rough drafts, notes, and scraps left by Dickinson have been underdrawn. Little is known about the origins and relations of the scraps, and they have been marked by their passage through the hands of Millicent Todd Bingham and Johnson as distinctly *unlike* all other Dickinson writings. Though Bingham says Austin gave Mabel these scraps, Marta Werner has astutely pointed out that "their history of ownership and passage is virtually unrecoverable,"<sup>11</sup> a fact that is crucial for evaluating whether these scraps are indeed unlike all other Dickinson writings.

Bianchi, in introducing *The Single Hound*, "offered as a memorial to the love of these 'Dear, dead Women,'" writes that "the poems here included were written on any chance slip of paper....Each of these is folded over, addressed merely 'Sue,' and sent by the first available hand."<sup>12</sup> Bianchi knew that these distinguishing features were vital to understanding the women's relationship and was likely acting according to "mamma's" designs and wishes in describing them. Both women knew that ruling *in* what had been "ruled out" of the 1890s volumes, and thus describing the correspondence in its intimately physical terms, profoundly reflected Susan's involvement on multiple levels with Emily's

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

"Bloom upon the Mountain - stated"

Boulder, Colorado, July 17-19, 1998

## EDIS Tenth Anniversary Meeting: Schedule of Events

### Friday, July 17

**4:00-5:00:** *Registration.* College Inn  
Pick up your welcome packet and T-shirt.

**5:00:** *Reception.* College Inn

*Dinner:* On the town. See list of local restaurants in your welcome packet.

### Saturday, July 18

*Breakfast.* College Inn

**9:30-11:30:** Workshops devoted to group discussion of single Dickinson poems.

*Leaders:* Paul Crumbley, Jane Eberwein, Robert McClure Smith, and Vivian Pollak

*Lunch.* On the town

**2:00-4:00:** Workshops devoted to group discussion of single Dickinson poems.  
*Leaders:* Ellen Louise Hart, Eleanor Heginbotham, Mary Loeffelholz, and Mike Yetman

**6:30:** *Tenth Anniversary Banquet.* College Inn

**8:00:** *Meet the Belle of Boulder: An Entertainment.* College Inn

*Cast:* Martha Ackmann, Gudrun Grabher, Jonnie Guerra, Cynthia Hogue, Suzanne

Juhasz, Dan Lombardo, Martha Nell Smith, and Gary Lee Stonum

### Sunday, July 19

*Breakfast.* College Inn

**9:00-10:00:** Participants will share research interests

**10:00-11:00:** Georgiana Strickland: "Emily Dickinson's Colorado"

**11:00-12:00:** *Annual Business Meeting*

**12:00:** *Lunch.* College Inn

Jonnie Guerra: "Reflections on EDIS, Past and Present"

## Chapter Notes

Dr. Gudrun Grabher of the University of Innsbruck, coordinator of the 1995 EDIS International Conference, shared her work on "Dickinson and the Unsayable" with the ninety-four Dickinsonians who gathered on February 15 for a meeting of the EDIS Minnesota chapter.

Attendees at the program, which was co-sponsored by the Friends of the Saint



Left to right: Eleanor Heginbotham, Gudrun Grabher, and Erika Scheurer, following the Minnesota chapter meeting.

Paul Public Library, ranged in age from six to eight-five. A large number of them were students from Concordia University, St. Paul, where Eleanor Heginbotham of Concordia and Erika Scheurer of the University of St. Thomas situated the event.

Grabher spoke about her new book, *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*, which she co-edited with Cristanne Miller and Roland Hagenbüchle. It includes chap-

ters by several well known Dickinson scholars and will be published this spring by the University of Massachusetts Press.

To celebrate Emily Dickinson's birthday, the Women's Studies Program at Mount Holyoke College sponsored a lecture on December 10, with Suzanne Juhasz, editor of the *Emily Dickinson Journal* and author of *The Undiscovered Continent: Emily Dickinson and the Space of the Mind*, speaking on "The Material Dickinson: Variants, Contexts, and Irresistible Repetitions." The event also commemorated the sesquicentennial of Dickinson's year at Mount Holyoke.

About a dozen members of the Saskatchewan chapter met for the second time on October 30 to hear a paper by Dr. Nicholas Ruddick on why Dickinson was not published until four years after her death. For the occasion, M.A. graduate student Heather Hodgson prepared a booklet of poems, resembling Dickinson's fascicles, that followed the order of poems in Ruddick's paper. Afterward, all enjoyed coconut cake and lemon water.

For news of the most recent gathering of the Los Angeles chapter, see the opera review beginning on page 8.

## Leadership Fund Established

EDIS has established a Leadership Fund for its fundraising activities. This year, donations will be directed to the Emily Dickinson dress reproduction project at the Homestead and the art conservation project at the Evergreens, both described in the Fall 1997 *Bulletin*.

The total cost of the dress project, which will ensure preservation of Dickinson's original dress and create two reproductions of it, is \$6,500. That of the art preservation project, which will provide professional conservation treatment for four of Austin and Sue's oil paintings, is \$14,000. To date about a third of the money for the two projects has been raised.

EDIS Board members have contributed more than \$1,000 to the Leadership Fund to assist these two undertakings. Won't you join them in supporting these projects? Send your check, made out to the Emily Dickinson International Society and marked for the Leadership Fund, to Gary Stonum, EDIS Treasurer, Department of English, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH 44106 USA. All checks are tax deductible and should be received by June 15.

EDIS will make a presentation to representatives of the Homestead and the Evergreens at the Society's Annual Meeting in Boulder in July.

### 1999 Conference Reminder

If you are interested in presenting a paper at EDIS's third international conference, "Emily Dickinson at Home," to be held August 12-15, 1999, at Mount Holyoke College, you must send an abstract or a completed twenty-minute paper by November 30 to Gary Lee Stonum, Department of English, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH 44106-7117 U.S.A., or e-mail him at gxs11@po.cwru.edu.

Further information on the conference will appear in the Fall 1998 issue of the *Bulletin*.

### Academic Meetings

Two Dickinson sessions will be held at this year's meeting of the **American Literature Association** in San Diego, May 28-31. The first, chaired by Gudrun Grabher, will focus on "Pain and Memory." Speakers will be Martha Nell Smith, on "Elements of Blank, Formal Feelings, and the Hallowing of Pain"; Margaret Freeman, on "'Affliction ranges Boundlessness - ': Memory and Pain as Cognitive Constructs of Space and Time"; Marietta Messmer, on "'and give bright tears to her memory': Dickinson's Correspondence with Sue Gilbert as an Example of the Transformation of Experiential Pain into Textual Gain"; and Lori Karen Lebow, on "Emily Dickinson: The Queen of the Condolence Card."

The second panel, which will be sponsored jointly with the H.D. Society, will be chaired by Grabher and Cassandra Laity. Helen Sword will speak on "Cryptopoetics"; Cynthia MacKenzie, on "Erotic Spirituality in H.D. and Dickinson"; Holly Norton, on "Psychic Recycling: The Divided Mind in the Poetry of Dickinson and H.D."; and Sarah MacDonald, "Following the Word: Language as Presence in the Poetry of Dickinson and H.D."

For registration information, contact Alfred Bendixen, English Department, California State University, Los Angeles, CA 90032 (abendix@calstatela.edu).

EDIS will sponsor two sessions at the December 1998 meeting of the **Modern**

**Language Association.** "Queering Dickinson" will be chaired by Ellen Louise Hart. Speakers will be Elizabeth Dillon, on "'Rearrange a 'Wife's' Affection': Dickinson and Same-Sex Marriage"; Toni McNaron on "'To Be or Not To Be' Is Not the Question"; and Ellen Louise Hart, on "Lesbian Editorial Theory and the Homoerotic Dickinson." Marilee Lindemann will be the respondent.

The second session will be a roundtable devoted to R.W. Franklin's new edition of Dickinson's poems. Katie King will serve as chair. Other speakers will be Deborah Cadman, on gift and material presence in the manuscripts; Paul Crumbley, on editions as textual homes; Margaret Freeman, on "Her Odd Secrets of the Line"; Elizabeth Horan, on literary property; Marta Werner, on the edges of the editions of the poems; and Martha Nell Smith, on the roundtable and Franklin's gifts. For further information contact Martha Nell Smith, Dept. of English, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742 USA.

### Editor's Note: The Hofmann Poem

I apologize to those who attempted to read Mark Hofmann's poem on the front page of the Fall 1997 *Bulletin*. The photographic print was exceedingly delicate and proved impossible to reproduce satisfactorily. The full text of the forgery reads as follows:

*That God cannot  
be understood  
Everyone Agrees –  
We do not know  
His Motives nor  
Comprehend his  
Deeds –  
Then why should I  
Seek solace in  
What I cannot  
know?  
Better to play  
In winter's sun  
Than to fear the  
Snow*

Emily

### Notes & Queries

The Dickinson Homestead recently received correspondence from two Russian scholars. **Dali Intskirveli**, one of the first to translate Dickinson's work into Russian, is interested in contacting colleagues in the United States. She may be reached through Dr. Anna Shakarishvili, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 4770 Buford Hwy., Mailstop K-32, Atlanta, GA 30324. Dr. Shakarishvili recently donated several items from Ms Intskirveli to Amherst College.

**Marina Katseva**, a Russian musicologist who now lives in Revere, Massachusetts, has noticed similarities between the works of Emily Dickinson and Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva (1892-1941). Any scholar with an interest in these poets may contact her at 382 Ocean Ave., Apt. 601, Revere, MA 02151.

Actress **Emma Palzere**, whose Be Well Productions has presented *The Belle of Amherst* for schools and community groups throughout the East, will play Dickinson this June as part of the Heartland Chautauqua, sponsored by the Missouri and Illinois Humanities Councils.

**Susan Loy's** Dickinson flower prints, illustrated in the fall 1997 issue, and several other Dickinson-related works created by the artist, can be ordered through Literary Calligraphy, 5326 White House Rd., Moneta, VA 2412. For a catalog, call 1-800-261-6325.

The **Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst** will again sponsor an Emily Dickinson's World weekend, October 9 to 11. Events will include talks by Gregory Farmer and David Porter, tours of the Jones Library's Dickinson exhibit and the Homestead, a walking tour of Amherst's many Dickinson-related landmarks, and, for the first time, a tour of the Evergreens. There will be an evening of music by the De Camera Singers and a poetry reading by Doris Abramson. A Victorian tea at the Amherst History Museum and the traditional walk to the Dickinson family grave will round out the weekend. As in the past, those attending will stay in the homes of church members. For information and a registration form, contact the UU Society at 413-253-2848.

# NEW PUBLICATIONS

Barbara Kelly, Book Review Editor

**Buckley, J.F.** *Desire, the Self, the Social Critic: The Rise of Queer Performance within the Demise of Transcendentalism*. Selinsgrove, Pa.: Susquehanna Univ. Press, 1997. 151 pp. Cloth, ISBN 1-57591-001-2, \$31.50.

Buckley identifies Margaret Fuller, Whitman, Melville, and Dickinson as transcendentalists and queer performers whose social criticism stems from their antisocial desires and their drive for self-identity. Not limited to expressions of same-sex desire, queer performance embodies any desire that begets a responsible self-consciousness in opposition to social norms. In his chapter on Dickinson, Buckley draws on her letters and poetry to show how she transcended nineteenth-century cultural and religious traditions and chose the world of self and poetry. He believes that an awareness of Dickinson's queer performance is necessary to an understanding of the antisocial desire that is "a major thread in transcendentalism."

**Cook, Ferris.** *A Murmur in the Trees: Emily Dickinson*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1998. 128 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-8212-2500-6, \$19.95.

Cook has selected and generously illustrated 112 Dickinson poems that feature the flora and fauna of Dickinson's world. The delicate and highly refined black and white drawings invite close inspection, illustrating the distinctive qualities of a wide range of plants, from anemones and asters to mushrooms and strawberries, capturing the nuanced differences among bobolinks, phoebes, orioles, whippoorwills, robins, sparrows, wrens, larks, and hummingbirds. Cook draws each blackberry, pine cone, beetle, and cricket with equal attention to detail. While the poems (listed with Johnson numbering) include a few widely anthologized works, such as "A narrow Fellow in the Grass," most are

less well known; for example, "Sweet is the swamp with its secrets" offers another view of the snake. Because of the lovely drawings and thematic focus, offering poems rarely spotlighted, this volume would make a delightful gift for both sophisticated and beginning readers of Dickinson.

**Felsen, Gregg.** *Tombstones: Seventy-Five Famous People and Their Final Resting Places*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 1996. 151 pp. Paper, ISBN 0-89815-860-5, \$19.95.

Dickinson's burial place is one of seventy-five that Felsen photographed during twenty years of travel. Accompanying each color photo is a biographical profile. Felsen's research has unearthed unexpected facts that make informative and compelling reading about a wide range of world leaders, military men, entertainers, athletes, and fifteen literary figures.

**Iwata, Michiko.** *Reading Emily Dickinson*. Tokyo: Shichosa, 1997. 250 pp. Cloth, ISBN 4-7837-2619-1 C0098, ¥2940.

Intending to interest Japanese readers unfamiliar with Dickinson, Iwata translates 32 Dickinson poems. An introductory biography and interpretive essays draw upon Dickinson's letters to show how her sense of humor, rebellious spirit, and keen eye for nature contribute to her poetry. Dickinson's writing strategies also interest Iwata, who is the author of a critical biography, *Emily Dickinson—The Martyr for Love and Poetry* (Osaka: Sogensha Press, 1982). Both works are in Japanese.

**Kazin, Alfred.** *God and the American Writer*. New York: Knopf, 1997. 272 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-394-54968-6, \$25.00.

Assessing the role of religious experience in the lives and works of twelve American

writers, Kazin says that Dickinson is "the most penetrating literary intelligence honored in this book." He believes she describes the spiritual quest better than anyone when she writes, "It is true that the unknown is the largest need of intellect, although for this no one thinks to thank God," and "We thank thee, Father, for those strange minds that enamor us against thee" (L 472). Focusing on Hawthorne, Emerson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Melville, Whitman, Lincoln, Dickinson, James, Twain, Eliot, Frost, and Faulkner, Kazin's lucid essays reflect a lifetime of personal engagement with these writers and his passionate response to their works.

**Kilcup, Karen L., ed.** *Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers: An Anthology*. Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997. 601 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-631-19985-3, \$64.95. Paper, ISBN 0-631-19986-1, \$24.95.

In Kilcup's multicultural, multigenre collection, the Dickinson entry emphasizes her letters and includes fifteen poems, most not commonly anthologized. One letter includes her black cake recipe calling for eight pounds of dried fruit. A broad range of other traditional and non-traditional selections includes advice and manners, travel writing, myth, children's writing, sketch, utopia, journalism, humor, poetry, oral narrative, sampler verse, short fiction, thriller and detective, spiritual autobiography, letter, and diary. The anthology, arranged chronologically, offers lists of contents by genre and theme, and an informative introduction.

**Lambert, Robert G., Jr.** *Emily Dickinson's Use of Anglo-American Legal Concepts and Vocabulary in Her Poetry: Muse at the Bar*. Lewiston, N.Y.: Mellen Press, 1997. 130 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-7734-8539-9, \$69.95.

Lambert has compiled an alphabetical list

*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 650-321-8146.*



of 98 legal terms found in Emily Dickinson's poems. Prefaced by a biographical introduction, the core of his book focuses on a description of the listed words: he cites poem numbers and lines, includes definitions from the 1844 Webster's *Dictionary*, and adds his own commentary, but he does not give all words equal treatment. Also, some words included in the text are not on his initial list, and two listed words are missing from the text. In spite of inconsistencies and flaws, Lambert's work might be a starting point for further research on the legal terms found in Dickinson's poetry.

**Ottlinger, Claudia.** *The Death-Motif in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti*. New York: Peter Lang, 1996. 194 pp. Paper, ISBN 0-8204-3183-4, \$42.95.

In a well organized text, Ottlinger explores Emily Dickinson's and Christina Rossetti's poetic responses to death from six perspectives: death's general characteristics, witnessing other people's deaths, the relationship between the living and the dead, the mourners' reactions, the poets' visions of their own deaths, and their visions of immortality. While Rossetti was a devout Anglican firmly believing in Christian doctrines, Dickinson felt estranged from her Puritan heritage and alternated between doubt and belief, but Ottlinger's close readings of the poetry find more parallels than discrepancies in the poets' complex attitudes toward death.

**Stein, Rachel.** *Shifting the Ground: American Women Writers' Revisions of Nature, Gender, and Race*. Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 183 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-8139-1741-7, \$32.50.

Stein examines the works of Dickinson, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and Leslie Marmon Silko in the context of ecofeminist theory, showing how these authors challenged dominant cultural assumptions about women and nature and "shifted the ground" with alternate viewpoints. Equated with women, nature was seen as a resource to be subdued, exploited, and conquered in the name of nation building and progress. In her readings of Dickinson's poems, Stein main-

tains that Dickinson undermines Puritan and Victorian attitudes about women and nature and offers open-ended and unsettling possibilities. Clearly presented, Stein's conquest rhetoric and ecocriticism should provoke energetic discussion.

**Sielke, Sabine.** *Fashioning the Female Subject: The Intertextual Networking of Dickinson, Moore, and Rich*. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1997. 263 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-472-10788-7, \$39.50.

Sielke imagines a dinner party for "Shakespeare's sisters," Emily Dickinson, Marianne Moore, and Adrienne Rich, and wonders how they might interact with one another. She shows how each, situated in a different time and place, fashioned an identity that transgressed cultural expectations. She believes that Dickinson "shatters the very cultural codes she exploits without, however, dismantling them." Sielke compares and contrasts the poets in three chapters: Dickinson and Moore, Moore and Rich, Rich and Dickinson. Sielke's work is a sophisticated theoretical analysis informed by feminists Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Hélène Cixous.

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## Reviews

**Crumbly, Paul.** *Inflections of the Pen: Dash and Voice in Emily Dickinson*. Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1997. 212 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-8131-1988-X, \$29.95.

Reviewed by Margaret H. Freeman

*Inflections of the Pen* is the first full-length study of one of the most puzzling features of a Dickinson poem—its use of the dash. Dickinson's dash has an interesting history: abolished altogether from the early editions, it surfaced in Thomas H. Johnson's variorum edition of 1955 and changed forever the way readers would read a Dickinson poem. When R.W. Franklin's edition of *The Manuscript Books* was published in 1981, another revolution in reading occurred: the long, horizontally regular dash of the Johnson edition turned out to be an artifact, a distortion of the diverse markings that pepper the manuscript page.

Edith Wylder's 1971 study suggested that the different markings were rhetorical devices "to create in written form the precision of meaning inherent in the tone of the human voice" (4), but most early critics, such as David Porter and Brita Lindberg-Seyersted, focused on the possible grammatical implications of the printed dash, ignoring its manifold forms in the manuscripts.

In recent years, attention has turned once more to the enigmatic markings collectively grouped under the simplistic label "dash." Susan Howe, Marta L. Werner, Sharon Cameron, and Martha Nell Smith have all paid particular attention to the physical forms the dash takes in the manuscripts. With the publication of Paul Crumbly's book, the University Press of Kentucky has gone further than any previous publisher in rendering as many as sixteen varieties of dash, with the proviso that even more might be required. What effects those inflections might have is the subject of Crumbly's book.

At the outset, I should point out that Crumbly makes no attempt to categorize the various forms the dash takes, nor to attribute a single meaning to each dash type. Rather, he follows in the tradition of Howe, Werner, Cameron, and Smith by asserting the importance of the text's physicality to reveal its meaning(s). The major contribution Crumbly makes to these studies is to provide a comprehensive and coherent dialogic theory for the significance of the dash in signaling disjunction as "one of the defining characteristics of the self in language." He argues that the dash introduces multiple voices into a poem as a "direct challenge to the primacy of a single unified voice." The result is the creation of "a poetics that instructs readers in the experience of living inclusively, on the boundaries that illuminate the choices undergirding conventional life."

Crumbly explores the ramifications of his theory in a series of chapters that focus on the dash as a polyvocal sign; Dickinson's treatment of the literary conventions of her day; the emergence of the dash as a central stylistic feature in Dickinson's letters; the emergence of the voices of the Child, the Bride, and the Queen throughout the poetry; and the relationship between literary form and the self. In the

course of his extensive and brilliant readings of individual poems, Crumbley shows us how Dickinson's poetics includes the notions of the limitless power of the child, the deceptive, misplaced confidence in social convention of the bride, and the confident mastery and authority of the queen. The dashes prevent us from seeing these voices as "shades of a single consciousness"; they are instead a sign that Dickinson interrogates the conventional definitions of the self. Crumbley places Dickinson in the context of women artists struggling against the conformity of patriarchy, providing a fresh way of reading Dickinson's concept of being "homeless at home" as crucial to the artistic aesthetic. In his conclusion, he draws intriguing parallels between Dickinson's interactions with T.W. Higginson and Constance Fenimore Woolson's short story "Miss Grief," a discussion that merits a more detailed treatment than he gives here.

Crumbley's argument for the role of the dash in signaling multiple voices in the poems is strong, and his comparisons of the printed editions with the manuscripts are convincing. His readings of individual poems are particularly insightful and illuminating. It is unfortunate that he allows his own clear and perspicacious voice to be clouded by the obfuscating terminology of heteroglossia and centripetal/centrifugal theorists. Given the subject matter of this book and the care taken to represent the sixteen different dash types, I should also have expected more discussion of the effects they have on producing a poem's particular polyvocality. But these are quibbles, not caveats, to Crumbley's significant achievement in furthering our understanding of Dickinson's "vice for voices."

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*Margaret H. Freeman is a professor of English at Los Angeles Valley College.*

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**Dobson, Joanne. *Quieter Than Sleep*.** New York: Doubleday, 1997. 272 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-385-48692-8, \$21.95.

## Reviewed by Ellen Louise Hart

"There's something quieter than sleep / Within this inner room ! / It wears a sprig upon its' breast - / And will not tell it's name" (P 45). A Unitarian minister once asked me to suggest some lines from Dickinson to use at a memorial service, but I told her it was hard to find Dickinson poems for funerals, that it would be easier to find them for autopsies. Or murder mysteries. "Looking at Death is Dying" comes to mind for Karen Pelletier (PELL-uh-teer), Dickinson specialist and new Enfield College English Department faculty member, when identifying the body of a student found in the snow.

This is the second murder victim in Joanne Dobson's mystery novel. The first is the arrogant Randy Astin-Berger, "a hotshot academic superstar on the make" who has just led the blackballing of four tenure candidates and is keeping secret some exciting new research, a "pompous wind up genius doll" working on "homosexual troping" in nineteenth-century sermon discourse, focusing on the work of Henry Ward Beecher, whose womanizing parallels Randy's own with students and colleagues. There are plenty of suspects when, last seen alive talking with

Pelletier, Randy's body falls out of the coat closet at the college president's house during the annual Christmas reception for faculty and staff.

Joanne Dobson, the author of *Dickinson and the Strategies of Reticence* and a founding editor of *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers*, provides a Dickinson plot line as well as inside jokes for Dickinsonians: on special occasions Pelletier wears a white "Emily" dress; the name of the college president's housekeeper is Maggie Maher; a beautiful woman on the faculty has eyes the color of sherry; there's a Dickinson Hall at the college, and an Emerson Hall.

But this clever novel will be fun not only for Dickinsonians but for all academics who enjoy seeing their foibles and jobs satirized. At semester end in the midst of murders and disappearances, Pelletier observes, "Maybe nothing else was resolved, but my grading, at least, was complete" (75).

In answer to my query to Dobson about mystery writers who influenced her, she responded: "I think I would look more toward the British writers, because the academic mystery novel is the closest thing America has to the British village mystery, with its strongly hierarchicalized class structure, its cloistered society, and its close attention to manners." Pelletier's "mean streets" (Raymond Chandler's term) lead through Enfield, the fictitious private liberal arts college in western Massachusetts, then to Cambridge and into Harvard's Houghton Library. Crime fiction enthusiasts will find that Dobson's gumshoe brings a welcome twist to the academic mystery and at the same time breaks new ground for the working-class hero. Philip Marlowe, Chandler's detective, feels as out of place in a wealthy neighborhood as "an onion on a banana split." Dobson's language has the same precision and wit, and her writing, a similar class sensibility.

Pelletier grew up in a row house in Lowell, Massachusetts. Married at eighteen to a truck driver and forgoing her college scholarship, a mother at nineteen, battered by her husband and at twenty-one divorced and destitute, she "learned early—very early—that poverty can breed ignorance, abuse, and fear. Learned it,

so to speak, in my very bones" (15).

Unlike the hard-boiled lone wolf crime fighters, Pelletier has lots of friends, ex-lovers, potential lovers, and a supportive daughter. Combining two conventions of the genre—the detective's sidekick and the uneasy relationship between the independent detective and the police—Dobson creates Lieutenant Piotrowski, who looks "a little like Babar the Elephant" (50) or "Father Christmas with a bad wardrobe and an attitude" (90). Pelletier finds Piotrowski "smart, an independent thinker, and totally free from pretension: qualities I often find lacking in my academic colleagues" (166).

I have one disappointment and one complaint to register about the resolution of this astute, hilarious, and suspenseful novel, and I'll try not to give anything away. First, for her plot's culmination Dobson provides an "answer" to a too-familiar question about Dickinson's life, a question that has created a false center for Dickinson studies and pushed other matters to the margins. Second, Dobson's Dickinson is too malleable. One of the impressive strengths of this exceptional first novel is the consistency of her characters and plot lines. But the figure of Dickinson is inconsistent. The solution Dobson playfully posits to her riddle does not match up with Dickinson's writing about her distaste for counterfeits and plated wares.

Nevertheless, readers have plenty to look forward to. *Quieter Than Sleep*, which has been nominated for an Agatha award, is an entertaining and provocative opening to a new series. Dobson has signed a contract for three additional novels. We can hope that Dickinson's poems will keep coming to mind as Pelletier finds herself in stressful situations. For readers who don't usually seek out crime fiction, try this series. "If your Nerve deny you — / Go above your Nerve —."

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**Ellen Louise Hart** is co-author, with *Martha Nell Smith*, of *Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson's Intimate Letters to Susan Huntington Dickinson, due out this fall from Paris Press*.

**Guthrie, James R.** *Emily Dickinson's Vision: Illness and Identity in Her Poetry*. Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1998. 211 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-8130-1549-9, \$39.95

**Reviewed by Domhnall Mitchell**

There is a subgenre of biographical and critical study that takes the illness and/or death of a major author for its subject: most recently, Norbert Hirschhorn and Polly Longworth offered us another look at Emily Dickinson's medical conditions in the *New England Quarterly*.

In his excellent debut book, James R. Guthrie argues that much of Dickinson's way of understanding and relating to the world, and hence her writing, resulted from a chronic optical weakness for which she was treated in Boston in 1864 and 1865. Her poetry, he argues, compensated for the daily tragedy of restricted sight: though not blind, her eyes often had to be bandaged to protect them during the day. Believing that Dickinson may have suffered from exotropia (a deviation of the cornea), Guthrie uses the example of vision diminishing in a deviant eye in order to allow the sound eye to see as a way of explaining the relationship between imaginative and oracular vision in the work.

Stated like this, illness might appear to be no more than a thematic convenience, a clever but reductive means by which to organize a sequence of otherwise unrelated readings of individual poems. But if illness as Guthrie defines it does effectively become translated into a metaphorical stance, it is neither crude nor static. He points to a consistent preoccupation with blindness and its side-effects in letters and especially in poems. In the opening of her correspondence with Higginson, for instance, Dickinson consciously places herself in the tradition of Victorian convalescents, and Guthrie believes this is something more than simply a strategy of disarmament, but was integral to how Dickinson came to think of her role. His readings of poems are lucid and powerful, and he remains sensitive to their integrity while using them effectively to advance his argument.

Illness, both actual and prospective, was interpreted in different ways by Dickinson. She may have understood it first as a punishment for having allowed herself to think that earth resembled and sometimes sur-

passed heaven, but gradually she came to identify her literary project as reconciling the claims of both with the needs of the self. She learned to make do with reduced circumstances: self-denial was a matter of necessity for a woman who loved the visible world but often had to rely on memory and internal imagery for its continuing representation.

There are points of weakness: Guthrie has read the available materials on Dickinson's eye problems and summarizes them well, but a book that makes a medical condition such a central presence might have made more use of a standard, non-literary study of the disease that he alleges she suffered from. The final chapter, on Dickinson's correspondence with Otis Lord, is somewhat undermined by the lingering uncertainty about the provenance of those letters. And Guthrie is often forced into reading the poems as autobiographical documents, when part of the fascination of Dickinson's poems lies in the uncertainty of the relationship between poet and persona. Nevertheless, *Emily Dickinson's Vision* is a powerful and persuasive book. In particular, the chapter on her changing attitude to publication is a timely and intelligent contribution to the contemporary debate about her attitude to print.

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*Domhnall Mitchell* is an associate professor of nineteenth-century American literature at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology at Trondheim.

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### Book Notes

Recently reissued in paperback:

**The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson.**

Boston: Little, Brown, ISBN 0-316-18413-6, \$16.95.

**Final Harvest: Emily Dickinson's Poems.**

Boston: Little, Brown, ISBN 0-316-18415-2, \$13.95.

**Judith Farr.** *I Never Came to You in White*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, ISBN 0-395-87442-4, \$12.00.

**Jamie Fuller.** *The Diary of Emily Dickinson*. New York: St. Martin's, ISBN 0-312-14586-1, \$10.95.

**Joyce Carol Oates.** *The Essential Dickinson*. New York: Ecco Press, ISBN 0-88001-520-9, \$12.00.

**No Romance, continued from page 3**

factual study that hovers behind this almost steamy novel, Ridington has clearly taken the other side. At one point, for example, Lavinia tells Ned, “Your mother frightens me,” to which he answers, “It’s only the Gilbert family temper” (411). Wherever the reader stands in the still-smarting debate between the houses, he or she will keep turning the pages of these carefully researched historical novels.

**Playing with Mystery and Dickinson**

Writing in a far lighter vein, Jane Langton creates a romp of an academic murder mystery, *Emily Dickinson Is Dead*, in which “the ardent tributes to Dickinson’s memory are rudely interrupted by arson, forgery...and murder.” Sprinkled with Dickinson lines and pen-and-ink sketches by Langton, the mock mystery is much more about well-observed professors than about Dickinson herself. Toward the end, a character wonderfully named Tilly Porch has a *frisson* that anticipated the one at last year’s EDIS Annual Meeting when the Jones Library introduced a new manuscript. Tilly holds an envelope dated February 18, 1860, containing a glass photographic plate: “And the name of the woman whose image was recorded in quadruplicate was *Emily D.*”

In the tradition of Langton are two other page-turning mysteries, one of them almost brand new. The older, Mary Willis Walker’s, involves what its cover blurb calls “one of the creepiest killers since Hannibal Lecter” and a plot borrowed from horrific news stories: the kidnapping of a busload of children who are held in a space that makes the narrator think of the Dickinson image Walker uses as title, *Under the Beetle’s Cellar*. Although Dickinson is peripheral to this book, it is clear that Walker, who is author of *Zero at the Bone* and a brand new mystery, *All the Dead Lie Down*, knows the poet and the poet’s commentators.

As the mystery reaches its most agonizing moments, the unofficial detective/journalist Molly Cates considers the world of the dead through Dickinson’s lines “Oh for a Disc to the Distance / Between Ourselves and the Dead!” (P 949). The book from which Molly reads had been passed along by a teacher named Theodora, an unusual name that calls to mind Thomas Johnson’s associate editor of the *Letters*, Theodora Ward. And can the fact that another character is named Dorothy Huff be a random choice? As most readers of the *Bulletin* will

recognize, those are the first two names of Oberhaus, whose book on the fascicles appeared in the same year as Walker’s book.

Perhaps such references are simply in-jokes that add texture to Willis’s book, which would be exciting even without them. There are a number of in-jokes in the most recent of Dickinson-inspired mysteries as well. Joanne Dobson, for example, names the maid in a pivotal scene after the Dickinson family’s Maggie Maher. But there’s much more. Dobson’s plot in *Quieter Than Sleep* depends entirely on our suspicion that a Dickinson scholar would be driven to murder in order to protect a theory regarding the poet. Situating her often funny take on academic types in a suspiciously Amherst-like fictive town, Dobson moves her appealing first-person narrator, Karen Pelletier (who wears a Dickinson-white dress in her first scene), from Emerson Hall to Dickinson Hall to the hallowed depths of Harvard’s Houghton Library. Among the richly detailed minor characters is a student who has analyzed the Master Letters as “documents of despair” (33). The object of those letters, in fact, is finally “revealed”—yet again—this time amusingly and astoundingly by a playful Dobson, who has heretofore been known as the author of the sober study *Dickinson and the Strategies of Reticence*.

Playing with Dickinson is especially delicious when handled by National Public Radio’s Garrison Keillor. Any listener to his “Writer’s Almanac” knows the depths of Keillor’s knowledge of American poets, but those who listen to his “Prairie Home Companion” will remember his skill in poking fun at them. They may remember, for example, a scene he created in 1983 in which Thoreau and Dickinson, involved in an assignation at Walden Pond, are interrupted by Emerson. More recently, he posited a pizza order by the revived (after 110 years) Miss Dickinson, who has smelled the heady spices wafting across the street. The order for toppings, which include Dickinson matter (“Snakes! Frogs! Flowers! The wind! A Rainbow!”), is in perfect Common Meter. Here’s a sample from *APHC*’s 20th Anniversary recording:

How sweet – a pepperoni is  
How mystical the cheese –  
How loving is the onion  
Upon the anchovies.

Most recently, Keillor and company spoofed an actual newly published collec-

tion by announcing a “discovery of new poems that Emily Dickinson wrapped in pill bottles and put into fresh concrete that had been laid to make a sidewalk in her back yard.” Then they offer a series of discoveries blending the real with the ridiculous:

I never saw a Moor  
I never saw the Sea  
And yet I know a boogie board  
Would be a joy to me.

Paul Di Filippo rivals Keillor in his Dickinson portion of *The Steampunk Trilogy*. To get a sense of his over-the-top fun in the story of “Walt and Emily,” listen to this dialogue, which follows some pretty unprintable (in this publication) stuff, as Walt explodes in his barbaric yawp:

“Walt?”

“Yes?”

“Did the Harebell loose her girdle to the lover Bee, would the Bee the Harebell *hal-*low much as formerly?”

“I am for you, and you are for me, Emily. Not only for our own sake, but for others’ sakes. You awoke to no touch but mine.”

“Oh, Walt!” [332]

This book may be found in science fiction bookstores, as may *War of the Words: Global Dispatches*, edited by Kevin Anderson. The latter book is climaxed by Connie Willis’s funny, heavily (parodically) foot-noted account of a Martian invasion witnessed by Dickinson. Willis muses on the “various theories advanced for Dickinson’s self-imposed hermitude.” They include all the usual, as well as that of “T.L. Mensa ...that all the rest of the Amherstonians were morons” (265). Then Willis says something that would have joggled Dickinson’s mind: “None of these explanations would have made it likely that she would like Martians any better than Amherstates, and there is the added difficulty [in having Emily encounter Martians] that, having died in 1886, she would also have been badly decomposed” (266). It’s a hoot.

Clearly—Jane Langton’s title aside—Emily Dickinson is *not* dead. In fact, Langton has her academic, Owen Kraznik, declare: “Stone dead. She only comes alive when some kid in Anchorage, Alaska, or Nashville, Tennessee, or Brooklyn, New York...opens an anthology of American poetry and reads one of her poems for the first time. It’s all the life she’s ever going to have. Listen you idiot, Emily Dickinson is alive and well in Pancake Flat as long as

you're there to pass the book around" (237).

That she lives, too, in the imaginations of scholars, romance and adolescent novelists, mystery and science fiction writers, and comedians (the distinctions between these are not always a simple matter) attests to what happened because fame did indeed "belong" to Dickinson. These "Romance[s] sold unto" Dickinson readers hungry for such things enthrall almost as much as what we know—or want to know—of the mysterious actual Emily.

The Vision – pondered long –  
So plausible becomes  
That I esteem the fiction – real –  
The Real – fictitious seems – [P 646]

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[Dates of *Bulletin* reviews of these novels are shown in brackets]

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*Note:* There may be many more fictional works with Dickinson as a focus. EDIS readers may write the *Bulletin* with additions. For the list above I am indebted to the suggestions (and in some cases the books) of Jane Eberwein, Norbert Hirschhorn, and Georgiana Strickland. I am also indebted to Jane Eberwein for permission to use some material prepared for her forthcoming edition of *An Emily Dickinson Encyclopedia*.

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*Eleanor Heginbotham* of Concordia University is working on a book on the fascicles, and will spend next year in Hong Kong on a Fulbright Senior Scholar Grant.

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### Slant of Light, continued from page 5

drawings of animals and plants alongside Matthiessen's text.

Frank's love of poetry has been lifelong. She remembers as a child reading and enjoying the poems of William Blake. Today she still loves poetry, reading, in addition to French and English poetry, Chinese poetry from the Tang Dynasty. In 1995, she worked with poet Terry Tempest Williams, creating monoprints for *Desert Quartet*. At the same time, *Skies in Blossom* was published with Frank's shadow papers.

In 1990, Frank herself was the subject of a study by writer Hayden Herrera. The book provides a full and satisfying look at this multifaceted artist whose career has already spanned four decades.

Frank's work can be found in several museums, including Washington, D.C.'s Hirshhorn Museum; New York's Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art; and Boston's Museum of Fine Arts.

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### Poems and Papers, continued from page 7

fyng the contents of an additional 122 boxes containing manuscripts and printed items. Library staff are slowly working on a more detailed inventory.

In addition to what Mrs. Hampson bequeathed Brown, some Dickinson-related materials that she gave to Professors Barton St. Armand and George Monteiro are being donated by them to the University. The Library already owned three letters by Lavinia Dickinson and a transcription of one by Emily. Some papers of Josephine Pollitt Pohl, Emily's first biographer, were acquired in 1994 because they include a suppressed chapter describing her meetings with Martha Bianchi, Mabel Todd, and Millicent Bingham. A small collection of Dickinsoniana was acquired in 1997 because it includes Caroline Healy Dall's 1895 account of Lavinia's denial that Charles Wadsworth was Emily's lover.

The John Hay Library, which houses the Special Collections Department of Brown University Library, is open Monday-Friday, 9:00-5:00 (except for major holidays) and on Saturday afternoons in January and May preceding the final exam periods. This collection can be seen only by prior appointment—the papers because they are being processed, and the books because they are stored in an off-campus facility from which deliveries are made once or twice a week.

Access to the collection requires a valid photographic identification, which is held while materials are used in the Reading Room. Researchers may have only one folder at a time. Note-taking must be in pencil, on paper supplied by the library. Personal computers may be used, but not scanners.

*Continued on page 22*

Photocopies, microfilm, and photographs may be obtained by submitting an application form. A limited number of photocopies can be made from printed materials, their physical condition permitting. The manuscripts, however, must be either microfilmed or photographed. (Almost all of Susan Dickinson's papers are now available on microfilm.) The Library can arrange for photographs to be made. Alternatively, researchers may use the camera stand available in the Reading Room. The library keeps all microfilm and photographic negatives, including those of photographs taken by researchers.

Those who wish to publish text or images from the collection—in any format or through any media—must apply for permission. If Brown University does not claim the literary rights or copyright to a particular item and it is not in the public domain, the researcher has the responsibility of obtaining written permission. Regardless of who owns the rights, the library may charge a fee for use of its materials in this manner, depending on whether the publication is commercial or nonprofit.

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**Editor's note:** This article updates Mark Brown's own report on the Evergreens Collection at Brown, which appeared in the May/June 1995 *Bulletin*.

*Cindy Dickinson* is Curator of the *Emily Dickinson Homestead*. *Gregory Farmer* is Project Manager for the *Evergreens*.

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**Contemporary Opera, continued from p. 8**

might be interesting to see what he would do with Dickinson's mature verse.

The glory of nineteenth-century opera was the great character inescapable reflected in the tension between transcendent melody and translucent accompaniment. Are we so far removed from the melody that Jenny Lind offered Emily Dickinson in Northampton in 1851 that it is unthinkable to grace Dickinson's ideas and imaginative flights with melody, and her metaphoric elegance with an orchestral weave of complementary strength and complexity? I hope not.

The striking stage presence and vocal beauty of Juliette Singler as Emily was well worth hearing. But after the melodrama had subsided, I simply wished for a vehicle worthy of her.

There is, in the future, a great and delicate musical drama that will portray this great poet. To create it is not an impossible task, only a difficult one that requires on the part of the librettist and composer an enormous investment of time, intellect, and energy in becoming conversant with greatness on its own historical and intellectual terms. It will somehow deal with the thorny problem of Dickinson's language and the ever increasing distance between her historical context and ours. I wish Pierce and Peltier more time and dedication in the exploration of Dickinson's life and work. *Emily* is only a beginning.

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*Bill Wallis* is a librettist, stage director, and singer who teaches English at Los Angeles Valley College. He was tenor soloist at EDIS's 1992 conference in Washington, D.C.

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**Open Me Carefully, continued from p. 13**

texts—corporeally, cerebrally, spiritually, emotionally.

Bianchi continued to display these physical distinctions throughout her printings of their correspondence, and in 1932 printed a facsimile of a rough draft of the second verse of "Two Lengths / has every day." She says the stanza beginning "Eternity will / be / Velocity or Pause" (H B3, P 1295) was "on the three-cornered flap of an envelope, pinned on the side of Sue's workbox."<sup>13</sup> That its wording is alternative to the second stanza of the fair copy Emily sent to Sue (H 367) corroborates the testimony of "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers"—that the two women worked over the poems together.

The challenge before Ellen and me, then, was how to make a book that would effectively present stories about this most generative of literary, emotional unions—what principles of selection should serve as guide, how the writings should be contextualized, to what extent biographical and critical information should be included, and how all that was to be brought together between covers should be organized. How might all this information best be interrogated to get beyond the mere facts and develop a "phosphorescence of knowledge" about this relationship?

Susan thought the verdict of "un-presentable" underestimated public taste and ability "to recognize the power of so many that were ruled out of the [1890] volume just printed."<sup>14</sup> We concur. Susan's plan for a "unique volume" did not fit Higginson's conventional idea of what a book of poetry looked like, and our

plan for this volume, combining as it does elements of popular storytelling, biographical analysis, textual theory, and close reading, does not conform to conventional ideas of what a book looks like. *Open Me Carefully* is not a biography per se, though it might be called the biography of a literary liaison. It is not an edition per se, though it might be called a critical reconfiguration of Bianchi's three books, one modelled on Susan's scrapbooks, notes, and outline for design, remarks to editors, and work on her "Book of Emily."<sup>15</sup>

A volume of selected writings by each writer, but primarily by Emily Dickinson, *Open Me Carefully* aims to tell the story of this highly productive liaison between two women and their poetic, erotic, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual engrossments. Over the past decade, advances in textual reproduction, such as photographic representations of the fascicles that show Susan's marks on the poems, have worked hand in hand with critical advances such as the development of feminist analysis to reveal more clearly Susan's immense importance as a participatory reader of Dickinson's works.

Both *Open Me Carefully* and *Writings of Susan Dickinson* (online edition)—showing Susan's poems, reviews, essays, stories, letters to the editor, notes, journals, and recipes—make extensive use of facsimile reproduction. With all of that information accessible, interested users can see not only the vast body of materials from which we had to choose the most salient but also how integral the Susan corpus is to all aspects of Emily Dickinson's artistic project.

Our tack for organizing materials from Dickinson's correspondence differs from previous efforts. While Johnson chose to produce a comprehensive critical edition of Dickinson's letters to a number of correspon-

dents, we are focusing on a particular correspondence with a single addressee in order to examine the poet's epistolary practices. Similarly, our focus on biographical perspectives differs from previous ventures. While Richard Sewall used a method in which he relied on "Jamesian 'reflectors,' each relationship [giving] back a phase, or facet, of her character, her personality, and her literary purpose,"<sup>16</sup> we are focusing on the audience on which Dickinson focused so much of her own attention, her most constant relationship from the late 1840s until her death in 1886, from "Emilie" to "Emily" and "E." and from "Susie" to "Sue" and "Susan."

While focusing on different reflectors offers a variety of perspectives, it also tends to level relationships, so that three letters to a fictional character or real person addressed as "Master," written within two or three years, is judged as equal to the hundreds of poems, letters, and "letter-poems"<sup>17</sup> to a flesh-and-blood intimate written over two score years. Focus on any other single correspondent cannot offer the diverse array of insights rendered by intense scrutiny of the writings to Susan, for no other addressee was privy to the depth and breadth of her writings. By studying her writings to Susan, readers can examine her development from girlhood to advanced middle age and the concomitant maturation in her poetic practices.

Thus, we have made our selections so as to present a wide range of textual forms and performances, and in ordering these documents we have as much as possible privileged chronology. A new storyline emerges from the assembly of these writings from Dickinson's most voluminous correspondence, one we trust readers will "Judge

tenderly" (F 24, P 441) as it beckons them to *Open Me Carefully*.

#### Notes

1. <http://Jefferson.village.virginia.edu/dickinson/>, hereafter cited as *Writings by SHD*.
2. Houghton, Box 9, Dickinson Papers, MS Am1118.95. Manuscripts at the Houghton Library are hereafter indicated by "H" and the catalog letter or number. Poems in R. W. Franklin, *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1981) are indicated by F and the fascicle number given by Franklin. Poem (P) and letter (L) numbers are from the Johnson editions.
3. Jay Leyda, *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1960), 2:78.
4. Susan H. Dickinson to William Hayes Ward [editor of the *New York Independent*], March 14, 1891, H Lowell Autograph; see *Writings by SHD*.
5. HB158, L 908, P 1599; HB144, L 909; F 37, P 704.
6. SHD to T.W. Higginson, Dec. 1890, quoted in Millicent Todd Bingham, *Ancestors' Brocades* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945), 86-87.
7. *Ibid.*; SHD to W.H. Ward, March 23, 1891; see also *Writings by SHD*.
8. Leyda, *Years and Hours*, 2:357.
9. *Springfield Republican*, May 18, 1886.
10. *Poems*, 1890, iv. Loomis Todd nevertheless mined the obituary a year later for her introduction to the 1891 *Poems*; see Martha Nell Smith, *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1992), 207-8.
11. Marta Werner, *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios: Scenes of Reading, Surfaces of Writing* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1995), 281.
12. Martha Dickinson Bianchi, *The Single*

*Hound: Poems of a Lifetime* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1914), vi, x.

13. Bianchi, *Emily Dickinson Face to Face: Unpublished Letters with Notes and Reminiscences* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1932), 260, 162.

14. SHD to W.H. Ward, Feb. 8, 1891; *Writings of SHD*.

15. Susan's outline for her "Book of Emily" emphasizes Dickinson's love of flowers, her affection, her witty and wise sayings (e.g., "Facts but not the phosphorescence of learning"), and her giddy lampooning of a popular period piece, "The Devil," while playing piano for guests in the Evergreens parlor (*Single Hound*, xi). Bianchi so clearly followed Susan's plans that Susan, though she died a year before its publication, could clearly be called a coeditor of *The Single Hound*. To read more about Susan's editorial work and writings, readers can consult *Writings by SHD*.

16. Richard B. Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1974) 1:12.

17. SHD to W.H. Ward, Feb. 8, 1891; *Writings by SHD*.

*Martha Nell Smith is professor of English at the University of Maryland.*

### Bulletin May Move

Because I will be retiring from the University of Kentucky, which has generously allowed the *Bulletin* to share its nonprofit mailing permit, future issues may be mailed from a different address, not yet determined. In the meantime, all communications to the *Bulletin* should be sent to my home address: 133 Lackawanna Rd., Lexington, KY 40503 USA. I expect to continue as editor for at least the next few issues.

*Georgiana Strickland*

#### Registration Form for EDIS Annual Meeting, Boulder, Colorado, July 17-19, 1998

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

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
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Registration Fee: \$30.00  
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 Total enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please make check payable (in \$U.S.) to: EDIS 1998 Annual Meeting, and return by May 30 to: EDIS 1998 Annual Meeting, c/o Suzanne Juhasz, Department of English, CB226, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO 80309-0226 U.S.A.

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James R. Guthrie, *Emily Dickinson's Vision: Illness and Identity in Her Poetry* Reviewed by DOMHNALL MITCHELL  
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