

# Bulletin

Volume 27, Number 1

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



*Puuseppä, itseoppinut  
olin – jo aikani  
höyläni kanssa puuhannut  
kun saapui mestari*



## Emily Dickinson

in

Перевод

Käännös

Translation

Översättning

翻译

Взирать он должен – лишь всего –  
На Ширь Владения –  
Старик с горы Нево! Кровит  
Мой суд – ради Тебя!

*Jag aldrig sett en hed.  
Jag aldrig sett havet –  
men vet ändå hur ljung ser ut  
och vad en bölja är –*

*Jag aldrig talat med Gud,  
i himlen aldrig gjort visit –  
men vet lika säkert var den är  
som om jag ägt biljett –*



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Arthur Schopenhauer wrote that "poems cannot be translated; they can only be rewritten." Translation creates something new, even as it registers the spirit of the primary text. Spirit – a new translation is always a rendering not of the poet's experience but that of the translator's experience in reading. Perception of an object costs precise that object's loss – or its revision into the words, history, formulas of another particular idiom. In this sense, a translation may create music, or images, or performance: in all media it gives form to someone's encounter with the original object. Translation may finally be about refusing boundaries, whether between languages, countries, media, or creating minds, repairing divisions.

*The Editorial Assistant for this issue was Sara Loy.*

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# Feasts for the Ear: Songs by Alice Parker

By Emily Seelbinder

EDIS members may recall a remarkable event that concluded the Society's celebration of its twentieth anniversary in August 2008: a concert of poems by Emily Dickinson set to music by Alice Parker. The Da Camera Singers, under the direction of the composer, opened with a swirling consideration of the elements, "I think that the Root of the Wind is Water –" (Fr1295), then plashed into "A soft Sea washed around the House" (Fr1199). "Dirks of Melody" marked "One Joy of so much anguish" (Fr1450) before we were swept up in "The divine intoxication" of "Exaltation is the going" (Fr143).

Two more songs, "'Unto me?' I do not know you –" (Fr825) and "Whether my bark went down at sea –" (Fr33), plumbed the depths of searching, longing, redemption, and loss. Then we soared heavenward with three songs from Parker's suite *An Exultation of Birds*: "Of Being is a Bird" (Fr462), "Sang from the Heart, Sire," (Fr1083), and "Beauty crowds me till I die" (Fr1687).

This sumptuous four-course feast was but a small sampling of the seven suites Parker had then composed based on Dickinson texts. She has since added two more Dickinson suites to her list. I recently had a chance to sit down with her to discuss her career and the poet to whom she has returned again and again for musical collaboration.

When Parker arrived at Myrfield for our conversation, I was listening to *Three Seas*, a recording made by the musicians



Alice Parker celebrated her 89<sup>th</sup> birthday in December.

of Melodious Accord and Parker in 2001. Before our host, Margaret Freeman, could make proper introductions, I snatched off my headphones and leapt up, blurting out what was foremost in my mind: "I LOVE the alto part in this!" The Freemans' dog skittered sideways and gave me a wary look. Parker smiled broadly and extended her hand. During a career now spanning almost seven decades, Parker has encountered this sort of enthusiasm a lot, especially from altos. (If you want to know why, check out one of the many renditions of the "Alto's Lament" currently posted on *YouTube*.) "Thank you," she said. "I've always believed that everyone should have something good to sing."

Something good for everyone to sing is a signature feature of Parker's work. Ginger Wyrick, a choral conductor who has worked with singers of all ages and experience, notes that Parker's choral settings are generally polyphonic. Each voice has a melody, allowing the singers to enter into a musical conversation, sometimes leading,

sometimes following, and occasionally joining in perfectly placed moments of unison. The music enhances the text, giving it meaning and purpose. Each part also has a "rhythmic vitality" that energizes the singers and their performance.

That delightful interplay of melody and rhythm is what caught my ear in *Three Seas*, a 1989 commission for the Holton-Arms School in Bethesda, Maryland. The suite opens with two short descending patterns doubled on flute and piano before the chorus enters:

"There is a solitude of space / A solitude of sea / A solitude of death" (Fr1696). As the singers evoke each solitude, the soprano line lingers in recitative, then slowly rises, while the alto line holds steady, then gradually falls, creating a profound distance when they reach the word *death*. The first of the three songs in the suite, Parker writes in notes for the recording by Melodious Accord, "journeys to the center of the mind" (*Angels*). It certainly took me there. I wanted nothing more in that moment than to join in the singing of that text.

"I love singing her music," Wyrick says, "especially the arrangements of early American hymnody she set for Robert Shaw. The intricacies of melody woven with illustrative rhythms bring life and understanding to these texts. I bought her book *Melodious Accord: Good Singing in Church* early in my career and have read it several times, marking many pages and highlighting her words of wisdom. The joyful experience of singing this music



continues to draw me to her repertoire as I plan my own choral programs.”

That repertoire includes a hymnal of 150 tunes composed or arranged for “choirs and adventurous congregations”; a collection of “hand-me-down” songs “every child and family should know and sing together”; arrangements of folk songs, spirituals, praise songs and lullabies; several cantatas, including *A Sermon from the Mountain: Martin Luther King*, commissioned following King’s assassination in 1968, and *Listen, Lord*, based on texts by James Weldon Johnson; an opera arising from Eudora Welty’s *The Ponder Heart*; and three-dozen settings of poems by Emily Dickinson.

“I am constantly searching for texts to set,” Parker writes in *The Anatomy of Melody*. “I love lyric poetry and the kind of prose that approaches poetry (the King James Bible, for instance). I can tell immediately as I read whether the melody hidden in those words will reveal itself to me. I feel the sounds in my throat as I read, and they either ‘sing’ or do not. The lyric brevity of Emily Dickinson is music to my ears, but the expansive parabolas of sound in Walt Whitman (which I also love) are not. There’s no accounting for it. We are each different and respond to different cues. (Thank goodness!)” (23).

When words reveal a melody to her, Parker commits those words to memory, first by writing them out by hand, then reciting them over and over, sometimes dancing as she speaks, giving particular attention to “the rhythms into which the speaking falls. I hear and feel the pauses within, between and after lines and verses – the subtle shifts of mood and voice – the tangible vibration of vowels and consonants in the singing throat. In the best instances, I am collaborating with the poet, using her rhythms and stresses, appreciating her assonances and images, drawing on her voiced syllables to clothe

them in melody. . . . The music should, and must, stand alone – just as the poem must. But if I succeed, the languages of the poem and the music become one, fusing into an unforgettable whole” (*Angels*).

Note the plural: *languages*. For Parker, singing is an expression of the same human longing that inspires poetry. “Song,” she writes, “comes from a throat, lungs, a heart, a memory. It is primary human communication, outside the boundaries of rational thought, exploring the world of emotions through mental constructions that tend to be intuitive” (*Anatomy* 3). We should not overthink this. “Only an overly intellectualized society would think of separating music, words, and dance into different arts. Of course they can exist independently, but they begin together” (*Anatomy* 114).

To sing, “All we need are ears and voice – no expensive paraphernalia, no extended study. (That can come later.) Memory and the will to communicate take over. For this is a societal process: we sing individually, but the collective sound of a singing group is one of the great life-affirming experiences open to us as human beings. When our ears and voices connect in song, this makes possible a transcendental moment that releases us from our human limitations” (*Anatomy* xvii-xviii).

Parker experienced the power of song early. Though neither of her parents had any formal musical training, she told choristers at Amherst Regional Middle School in 2011, her family “sang all kinds of what I call ‘home songs,’ Stephen Foster and cowboy songs and things like that. . . . We all sang lots and lots of songs. . . . We were always singing. We took long car trips, and we were singing the whole way in the car. I remember being so delighted when I could hold the alto part against the melody and then again when we could sing a round and keep different parts going in

the car.” Her family’s music-making led her naturally into composing: “I always knew I was going to be in music, and I wrote my first pieces when I was eight. I’d always made up songs before then. Somehow it seemed perfectly natural to write a song as well as play other people’s songs or pieces on the piano. Why shouldn’t I write one? Nobody had to explain it to me. I just did it” (American Composers Forum).

She wrote her first orchestral score while still in high school and went on to study music performance and composition at



Photo Credit: Patricia Crapo

Smith College. Following her graduation in 1947, she was surprised and dismayed to be told by a professor interviewing her for a place at a conservatory that her time at Smith had been “wasted.” If she wanted to continue her studies in composition, he insisted she would have to begin undergraduate studies again. She decided to get a master’s in choral conducting instead. She had always sung with and accompanied choirs and choruses. Conducting, she reasoned, would provide her with a steady income.

Parker enrolled at Juilliard to study with Robert Shaw, who was just becoming well

known for his work with choral ensembles. After struggling to complete an exercise in counterpoint, she was assigned to study music theory with Vincent Persichetti, who would soon compose a set of Dickinson songs that remain popular in art song repertoire today. “Juilliard was a hive of personalities then,” Parker remembers. “Yet I never heard Persichetti say a harsh word to anybody.”

Meanwhile, determined to learn everything she could from the mercurial Shaw, she made herself indispensable to him as an assistant. They would work together for the next twenty years. “He found I’d do anything,” she says, “and I could write program notes that pleased him.” Her studies with Shaw, she later wrote, “gave my life its direction. In working with him, I felt as though I’d never really listened before, never been aware of the subtleties of living sound, of the incredible variety of sounds the throat can produce. We began working together on arrangements for albums recorded by the Shaw Chorale, and I spent hours, days, weeks in the New York Public Library sifting through thousands of songbooks. I began to get a sense of what melodies would work for me, for us, which would produce a wonderful arrangement or which would lead to okay but not inspiring results” (*Anatomy* 3).

In the process, she “came to have a profound respect for any melody that lasted, any melody that successive generations have sung and loved and kept in their hearts and passed on to the next” (*Anatomy* 4). She also found herself arranging and composing melodies with particular voices and other instruments in mind. She had come to know singers in Shaw’s ensembles well, including the man she identifies with a slight tilt of her head and sly smile as “my baritone” and the various altos who served as babysitters for her five children. When these singers enthused as I did about a particular vocal line, she resisted the temptation to say, “Of course you like it – I wrote it especially for you.”

Parker, who celebrated her 89<sup>th</sup> birthday in December, continues to write especially for the musicians who will be performing her work. “All my works are commissioned,” she told me. “I decided long ago that I didn’t want to write anything that wasn’t performed, and that has worked well for me.” When the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) approached her in 2013 to do a work for young women’s voices, something the organization had never sought in any of its previous annual commissions, she began by matching singers and texts. “As I thought about what high school girls would like to sing about, Emily was the first person that came to mind.” She chose four short poems about beauty: “The Definition of Beauty is” (Fr797), “Beauty – be not Caused – It is –” (Fr654), “So gay a Flower” (Fr1496), and “Estranged from Beauty – none can be –” (Fr1515).

These poems, she says, “contain wonderful ideas that easily spark discussion; memorizing these poems would add great value to their lives; singing in a brief, polyphonic rather than a harmonic style would challenge their musicianship.” The Heritage High School Women’s Ensemble met that challenge with a lively, lush, and charming performance of *Dickinson: The Definition of Beauty* at the ACDA Northwestern Conference in 2014.

Parker’s careful consideration of texts and contexts here demonstrates how fully and joyfully she approaches her work: “I’ve made my life to be earning my living doing what I absolutely love to do, and that’s making music – rehearsing, learning, teaching, composing, arranging. I don’t draw any difference between them. I describe myself as a composer and conductor and teacher, and these are like the legs of the three-legged stool. You know what happens when you take one of those legs away – boom!” (American Composers Forum).

Since 1985, Parker has maintained that important balance through Melodious

Accord, a small non-profit corporation founded upon the belief “that melody is an unparalleled means of communication for human beings; that when we use our ears and voices we enrich our lives through creating communities of sound; and that singing together brings immediate benefits – physical, mental and spiritual – to those who join in this most participatory of all the arts” (“Mission”).

As artistic director for the organization, Parker works closely with conductors, singers, and listeners throughout North America, leading singing workshops, collaborating with choral groups, and directing a 16-voice professional chamber chorus in the performance and recording of her work. She also offers advanced workshops in melody study, song leading, lyric composition, and score study. Three of these workshops take place annually at her home, Singing Brook Farm, in Hawley, Massachusetts.

Making music, Parker says, is a lot like preparing a meal: “I feel that what I’m doing when I write music is feeding your ears, just the way that if I have a meal to prepare I want to put something on the table that’s there when it needs to be there and that people are going to enjoy. . . . I have no idea what I would write, I can’t imagine writing a piece when somebody said just write the piece you’ve always wanted to write, and I’d say, well, who’s it for? When’s it going to be? I really need all of that” (American Composers Forum).

When the occasion calls for Dickinson texts, some special preparation is required. Dickinson, Parker has observed, “is in a class by herself, almost genderless in her philosophical questioning, her enigmatic brevity, her intense observation of nature and solitude. . . . [Her] spare, restrained forms hold a bottled-up power; the quiet surface often hides a blinding transcendence in the depths. One reads her slowly, carefully, a little at a time, savoring each morsel” (*Angels*).

Recently Parker completed her ninth suite of Dickinson songs: *Heavenly Hurt*, set for mixed voices (SATB), piano, and cello, was commissioned by the Da Camera Singers of Amherst, who will premiere the work during three concerts in western Massachusetts at the end of May. For this work, Parker says, “I had the idea of writing a Requiem – exploring Emily’s ideas about Death. Of course it has no relationship to the traditional Roman ritual, or even (on the surface) to the Bible. But she looks at suffering, loss and death with such an honest, personal, incredibly focused way – I’ve not seen any ‘requiem’ that can compare to it. It was not easy to select the poems – I cut down from a large group that finally arranged themselves in this order. They move from the general to the specific and back again.”

The suite opens with the full chorus singing “There’s a certain Slant of light” (Fr320), a text Parker describes as “haunting.” After this evocation of “the Distance / On the look of Death –,” the women sing a two-part setting of “The Bustle in the House” (Fr1108) that moves with the “repetitive, automatic motion” of the bustle the poem describes. That motion picks up speed in a scherzo setting of “Under the Light, yet under” (Fr1068), which concludes with another reference to “the Distance / Between Ourselves and the Dead!”

At the center of the suite is “Behind Me – dips Eternity –” (Fr743). Parker says this song was “such a surprise” because the setting is strophic, “three verses very much set as a hymn or chorale,” despite the considerable differences between the middle verse and the other two. Writing it, she remarks, was “like coming back to where Emily started – with hymns.” With “a little piano comment as you go through it,” this song serves as “an anchor in the middle of the cycle.”

Two more expressions of suffering, loss, and death follow without a pause between them: “A Shade upon the mind there passes” (Fr1114), sung by the men, and “There is a pain – so utter –” (Fr515), sung by the women, this time in a four-part setting. The final song, “The Love a Life can show Below” (Fr285), identifies an effect “in Music [that] hints and sways – / And . . . / Distils uncertain pain” and concludes – appropriately for a requiem – with the word “Paradise.”

The Da Camera Singers began work on *Heavenly Hurt* in early February. Tenor Donald Freeman reports that after their first rehearsal, “on the way out of Amherst College’s Octagon, all of us were buzzing about the musical intensity of this brilliant work. The Da Camera Singers has a long tradition of supporting local composers, and in commissioning *Heavenly Hurt*, we are supporting a composer whose reputation is not only local but international as well. We’re really looking forward to performing it.”

Freeman notes that Parker’s work “conveys her profound understanding of Dickinson’s poetic art” and that the new suite includes “two of my favorite Dickinson poems, ‘There’s a certain Slant of light’ and ‘Behind Me – dips Eternity.’ She didn’t include my absolute favorite, ‘Safe in their Alabaster chambers,’ alas, but maybe there’s hope for a future revisiting.”

Parker says she would welcome further opportunities to prepare musical feasts with Dickinson: “It’s as if her words were a condensed idea – sometimes almost a koan. Much is omitted: we have to train ourselves to follow the leaps of her mind. The very brevity leaves room for music to establish an emotional context; I try to set the words in a natural, speaking rhythm, allowing the interplay of voices to give time for reflection. I also love her use of simple meters: she plays amazing games

with them. I’ve spent much of my life exploring hymnody, and the echoes here are palpable. She doesn’t often mention God – but she’s profoundly religious, caught always in the struggle between flesh and spirit, between heaven and an incredibly beautiful earth.”

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*Emily Seelbinder, a Professor of English at Queens University of Charlotte, has a special interest in musical settings of Dickinson texts. Her students at Queens regard her as the “Meanest, Baddest English teacher on the Planet.”*

*She offers special thanks here to Margaret Freeman for arranging and hosting her conversation with Alice Parker in October 2014.*

# Dickinson and the Arts

*Series Editor, Barbara Dana*

*Michael Conley has earned a notable reputation in the US and abroad for his multifaceted career as a conductor, composer, pianist, organist and singer. He is director of the West Village Chorale in NYC and the Hudson Chorale in Westchester, NY. His nine-part cycle of Dickinson settings for chorus, soprano, and orchestra, This Bequest of Wings, will be performed in May of 2015 by the Hudson Chorale.*

*Readers are invited to suggest topics for future articles by, or about, artists in all fields of the arts whose work has been influenced by Dickinson, or to offer to contribute an article themselves. Contact Series Editor: Barbara Dana, wolfkoda@mac.com*

## Better than Music

By Michael Conley

The act of composing music, perhaps more than most art forms, is a mysterious one, usually even to the composer. When people ask me where my ideas come from, or what inspired me, or how I came to write a certain piece, my answer is often vague at best. And that certainly does not stem from an unwillingness to discuss my creative process, but rather from simply not fully understanding it myself. Usually I will get inspired by a certain broad theme or concept, search for a text or texts that relate to it, spend a protracted amount of time thinking about it, letting the ideas simmer and stew, and then, out of the blue, I'll suddenly realize I'm ready and will sit down and write the piece in a relatively quick burst.

But Emily Dickinson is complicated! The process for the gestation of my choral cycle *This Bequest of Wings*, utilizing nine of her poems, was a circuitous one. I had naturally read a few of her poems over the course of my education, and, to be honest, I can't recall being particularly moved or drawn to her work. But at some point in the mid-nineties, shortly after I moved to New York City, I noticed an attractive volume of her collected works on the shelf in a bookstore and, always on the lookout for poems that might inspire a musical setting, I capriciously purchased it. A couple of years passed, and, thinking generally about a large-scale choral and orchestral work I wanted to write, but not having any texts in mind, I started reading through the collection. Before long, I was mesmerized,



and devoured it from cover to cover, folding down corners when I was particularly struck by a poem, and bookmarking and creating lists left and right. So many poems! And so many great ones. In fact, too many to choose from. I thought about broader themes, like nature and animals, or love, or travel, or time and eternity. But somewhere in the back of my mind I wasn't satisfied with such concrete groupings. Rather than make a final selection, I just chose a handful of poems that immediately seemed to be calling out to me, and started writing.

That initial handful included "The Farthest Thunder" (Fr1665), "Transplanted" (Fr439),

"Mine!" (Fr411), and "If you were coming in the Fall" (Fr356).<sup>1</sup> In the idealized version of the piece, I always knew I wanted it to be a work for chorus and orchestra, but I settled on writing a first version for piano, string quartet, and chorus. I wrote these four movements, somewhat sporadically, in 2003 and 2004, and scheduled them for a performance in the spring of 2005 with a group I have directed for many years now, the West Village Chorale, based in Greenwich Village in Manhattan. The choir seemed to like the music well enough, and the performance was a success. But I was not entirely satisfied. I knew there was more to the piece, both in terms of length and substance, than I had yet captured in the sixteen or so minutes of music I had written. I set aside the project and moved on to other things, but it was always lurking there in the back of my mind, goading me, as Emily might put it, "like the Goblin Bee – / That will not state – it's sting" (Fr356).

Fast forward a little bit, and I was hired as the Music Director of a Westchester County group now named the Hudson Chorale. One of the members of that ensemble happened to be none other than Barbara Dana, an accomplished actor and author, and, serendipi-

<sup>1</sup>Michael Conley first read Dickinson in *Collected Poems of Emily Dickinson*, as edited by Todd and Higginson (reprint Avenel Books 1982). I have retained the song titles that he based on that edition and identified the poems by Franklin number. –ed.



# Dickinson and the Arts

tously, a Dickinson scholar and a contributor to the *EDIS Bulletin*. In the Spring of 2010, in a benefit for the chorus, Barbara gave a riveting performance of William Luce's *The Belle of Amherst*. Afterwards, she very graciously gave me a signed copy of her new book, *A Voice of Her Own: Becoming Emily Dickinson*. In the performance and in her novel, Barbara brought Emily to life. What had been a collection of lovely words and ideas suddenly became, for me, the expressions and the deepest feelings, exposed for all the world to hear, of a living, breathing, remarkable woman. She materialized, becoming so much more than the mysterious, reclusive poet of lore. She was a sister and a daughter; a sometimes shy student and a member of her community; a strong-willed and opinionated woman trapped in an era that did not value that kind of woman; a seeker, a questioner, a seer, a mystic, a keen observer, and a lover. Through Barbara, Emily became flesh and blood. And, as a result, Barbara had a profound impact on my music, and on the piece that would become *This Bequest of Wings*.

As soon as time allowed, I turned my attention once again to Emily. But somehow, it was a very different Emily than the Emily I thought I knew in 2004. When I went back over the poems I had bookmarked in my now dog-eared collection, I recognized new colors, new facets, new depths of meaning, and a much greater range of emotion. It was not the work that changed, of course, but my understanding of it. With those new eyes, I began to appreciate the missing ingredient in my work: it was love. I didn't love Emily before. I didn't appreciate her as a complex person who had once been alive and who had wrestled with all the same complications and challenges that present themselves to each of us in this life. Picturing Emily about her daily life, ruminating on her frustrations and disappointments, and, ultimately, reveling in the triumph of her lasting (albeit posthumous) success, was a process that breathed a completely new and more vigorous life into my settings of her poems, and, I hope, brought my work to a level it would never before have approached.

Like so many issues that trouble our complex world today, the seemingly naïve and simplistic answer almost always boils down to one word: connection. If I feel that I am connected to my brother or sister, even across an issue that divides us, we might just find a point of agreement or understanding that can serve as a bridge. These connections exist everywhere, suffusing almost every issue that we're confronted with, whether it's the environment or income inequality or the conflicts in the Middle East. When we refuse to acknowledge the connections between us, then we are free to demonize or minimize each other, and in the process absolve ourselves of the responsibility to find a solution. Like the legislator who just recently announced he had changed his long-held view on abortion, because he had finally sat down and talked to some women: talking to the people most likely to be affected by his policy positions had had an effect on his views! He had come to see that, while his personal feelings on the subject were still evolving, ultimately such a personal and important decision ought to be left with the families and individuals involved. Because this man made a connection with people outside his sphere of personal experience, his views on an important matter changed. He wandered outside of his comfort zone and found a new point of connection.

As if some little Arctic flower  
Upon the polar hem –  
Went wandering down the Latitudes  
Until it puzzled came  
To continents of summer –  
To firmaments of sun –  
To strange, bright crowds of flowers –  
And birds, of foreign tongue!  
I say, As if this little flower  
To Eden, wandered in –  
What then? Why nothing,  
Only, your inference therefrom! (Fr177)

Emily rarely had the opportunity to wander far from her own comfort zone, at least physically, but through the power of her extraordinary imagination, she became a builder of bridges and a forger of connections. She was

as connected to the wandering bee in her garden, or the flower upon which it landed, as she was to her beloved dog and to her family and to the tree outside her window. They were connected, not just as people and things inhabiting the same place and time, but as living parts of a wider web, a complicated whole, bound by common cords that our human senses and understanding can only begin to grasp. Once I began to grasp how broad and multi-faceted she truly was, I began to see what was missing from my work, and I knew where it needed to go. When I went back to the poems, I had little trouble figuring out which ones were needed to fill out the set. In addition to the four I had already composed, I chose five more, and put them in the following order:

- I. This Is My Letter to the World (Fr519)
- II. The Farthest Thunder
- III. I Hide Myself within My Flower (Fr80)
- IV. Transplanted
- V. Mine!
- VI. If You Were Coming in the Fall
- VII. Bring Me the Sunset (Fr140)
- VIII. Farewell (Fr338)
- IX. Better than Music (Fr378)

Now that the structure was in place, the writing went very quickly. I decided to finish the remainder of the work using the same ensemble I had written for already, string quartet, piano, and chorus, with the addition of a soprano soloist. I also completely rewrote the fourth movement, "Transplanted." The title I chose for the complete piece came from a poem that really spoke to me, but which I didn't feel belonged in the set. Somehow its sentiment perfectly captured how I felt about the piece as a whole:

He danced along the dingy Days  
And this Bequest of Wings  
Was but a Book – What Liberty  
A loosened Spirit brings – (Fr1593)

I scheduled the first performance of the complete work for the spring of 2012, and in a stroke of good fortune, the West

# Dickinson and the Arts

Village Chorale was asked to perform for the Washington Square Music Festival that summer, and the Artistic Director of the Festival, Lutz Rath, was brave enough to suggest programming my new work, sight unseen! Since the festival performance was set to feature Beethoven's Choral Fantasy and would be with full orchestra, it gave me the opportunity to quickly rewrite *This Bequest of Wings* for orchestra as well. I felt enormously grateful to finally get to hear the work the way I had imagined it from the beginning. And bringing the whole creative process full circle, the Hudson Chorale will be performing the piece, with orchestra, in May of 2015, with Barbara Dana among the altos. I could not be more pleased that the person who played such an integral role in bringing Emily to life for me, and therefore bringing this piece to life, will get to perform it with me. She has even agreed to give a joint pre-concert lecture with me on Emily's life and work and the connections we find to her in the music.

Through this whole process of reflecting on setting Emily Dickinson to music, I have realized that this issue of being connected – not just to each other and the world around us, but to the vital elements that inspire the creative process, be they our own life stories and experiences, or current events, or, in this case, poetry and the woman who wrote it – is ultimately the crux of it all. It's the whole shebang. I think you can feel, sense, whether or not an artist felt deeply connected to the subject matter. I can think of countless examples, but one springs to mind: the difference between one of Mozart's earlier operas, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*), versus a later masterpiece like *Don Giovanni*. The former is all splash and show, fluff and frills, technically virtuosic and very funny and amiable, but not possessing much depth or substantive meaning. The latter, while possessing plenty of technical showmanship, and moments of great humor, is also suffused with a deeper kind of emotional complexity, especially in the terrifying finale, that leaves the audience in no doubt

that Mozart had something important to say, and felt a palpable and personal connection to the story.

That is not to say that every work of art has to express lofty or weighty matters, or rise out of the kind of personal experience of the subject matter that I had with Emily. Schubert wrote over 600 songs, and I doubt, in his all-too-brief life, he had the opportunity to delve into the heart and soul of every poet he chose to set, nor could he have possibly accumulated enough life experience to draw from a deep personal well each and every time he sat down to write a song. Nevertheless, we can, and often do, sense a difference when that element of personal connection is missing. Another large-scale work I wrote not too long ago, *Appalachian Requiem*, was born out of a similar process. I had conceived the idea to write a big piece, for chorus and orchestra again, based in part on American folk hymns from the Sacred Harp tradition, sometimes called shape-note hymns ("Amazing Grace" is an example). I ruminated on this idea for several years, but had no clear sense of inspiration or direction. It was merely a gimmick of sorts, an interesting conceit. It wasn't until I read a devastatingly moving article about the deleterious effects of mountaintop removal mining on the Appalachian region that I finally had a reason to write that piece, and a genuine connection to a larger theme that would give the work shape and purpose. The same thing happened when I got to know Emily.

Throughout the writing of *This Bequest of Wings*, I was certain that "Farewell" (Fr338) would be the final movement. It is triumphant and fervent, and I was sure an equally grand musical setting, perhaps in the style of a quasi-spiritual, would make a fantastic conclusion to the piece. But something about it just didn't feel exactly right. And, after doing some Googling, I found a poem that was new to me. It was not as showy, not as confident, perhaps, but complex and full of wisdom and suffused with a sense of both melancholy wistfulness and a very quiet, assured kind of

joy: the joy of knowing that the best we can do will ultimately be enough. That this "letter to the world" we are all busy writing, every day, will someday be read and appreciated and understood. That when we say "Good bye to the Life I used to live" (Fr338), what we have done will have mattered, at least in some degree, to someone.

Better than Music – for I who heard it  
I was used to the birds before –  
This was different – 'twas Translation  
Of all tunes I knew, and more –

'Twasn't contained like other Stanza,  
No one could play it the second time  
But – the Composer – perfect Mozart  
Perish with him that keyless Rhyme!

So children, assured that Brooks  
In Eden bubbled a better melody  
Quaintly infer Eve's great Surrender –  
Urging the feet that would not fly.

Children matured are wiser, mostly,  
Eden a legend dimly told—  
Eve and the anguish – Grandame's story –  
But – I was telling a tune – I heard

Not such a strain – the Church baptizes  
When the last Saint – goes up the Aisles  
Not such a stanza splits the silence  
When the Redemption strikes her Bells

Let me not spill – its smallest cadence  
Humming – for promise – when alone  
Humming – until my faint Rehearsal  
Drop into tune – around the Throne –  
(Fr378)

If we stay connected – to each other, to the bee and the tree, to great works of the past like Emily's, and to the ongoing work of making the world a better and more beautiful place – then our "faint Rehearsal" will, in fact, finally "Drop into tune." I am so grateful to Emily for "wandering down the polar hem" and into my life and changing it. Her words make us all richer, but in my case, they made me better. Thank you, Emily.

Series Editor, *Cindy Mackenzie*

## Barton Levi St. Armand: Portrait of the Scholar as an Artist

By **Cynthia L. Hallen**

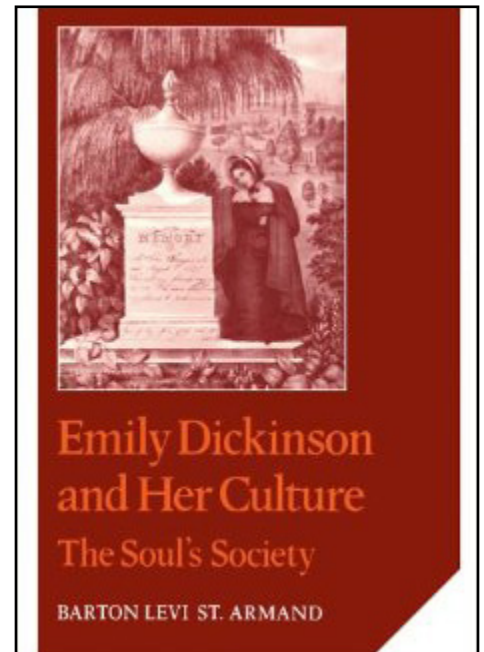
Writing a tribute for scholar Barton Levi St. Armand in one short *EDIS Bulletin* article reminds me of my attempt to revisit the Louvre Museum on a flight lay-over in Paris. Having spent previous visits in the Denon wing, I was determined to cover new ground in the Sully or Richelieu galleries. However, after viewing a lobby exhibition on “German Thought and Painting,” the pull of the Denon was too strong, and I got lost (literally) again in the paintings of the Italian renaissance. Similarly, having focused previously on St. Armand’s 1984 book *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture*, I was determined to foreground his other accomplishments and achievements for this essay, only to find myself drawn again to St. Armand’s unique role as a philological artist for the culture, family, faith, language, and life of Emily Dickinson.

To understand the aesthetic expertise of Barton Levi St. Armand in Dickinson studies requires an awareness of the role that Brown University has played throughout the entire course of his education and career. Grad school colleague Jane Eberwein explains that it is “hard to imagine an academic more firmly rooted in place than Bart is in Brown and Rhode Island.” In 1965, he graduated from Brown with a B.A. in American Civilization and a minor in American Art History. For graduate work, he continued in Brown’s interdisciplinary American Civilization program, earning a 1966 M.A. with a thesis on the horror fiction of Rhode Island native H.P. (Howard Phillips) Lovecraft. He finished graduate studies at Brown with a 1968 Ph.D. in American Civilization

and a dissertation on the aesthetics of Emily Dickinson and Edgar Allan Poe. Thereafter, St. Armand spent his entire career as a professor at Brown University, teaching first in the English Department, but then returning to the American Civilization program.

St. Armand’s years at Brown fostered a long-lasting collaboration with English professor George Monteiro, and they co-authored several Dickinson articles together, including a 1981 examination of the emblem tradition in Dickinson’s poetry. It was with George that Barton first entered the doors of the neo-Italian-renaissance edifice next door to the Dickinson homestead in Amherst. In preparation for his book on Emily Dickinson’s cultural contexts, Barton had written a letter to Mrs. Mary Landis Hampson, who invited him to meet her at the Evergreens so that he could see the collection of paintings that constituted the Dickinsons’ private art gallery. Mary subsequently gave Barton the keys to her Evergreens home, the former domicile of Austin and Susan Dickinson, their daughter Martha Dickinson Bianchi, and Alfred Leete Hampson, Martha’s secretary and Mary’s late husband.

In his 2007 autobiographical essay, “‘Keeper of the Keys’: Mary Hampson, the Evergreens, and the Art Within,” St. Armand documents the extraordinary series of events that led to the preservation of the Evergreens as an historic home and the accession of its book and manuscript treasures to Brown University’s John Hay Library in 1991. Using two keys as a metaphor, he begins the essay by virtually escorting readers into the Evergreens for



The dust jacket of St. Armand’s frequently studied monograph may not be familiar to anyone but collectors.

a reenactment of his first visit in June 1975. St. Armand provides an engaging account of how he and George won the trust of Mrs. Hampson to help preserve the papers, books, artworks, and other belongings left in the Evergreens. Having earned Mary’s confidence, St. Armand became the “first chair of the Martha Dickinson Bianchi Trust, dedicated to preserving the Evergreens and its contents” (112). As part of the preservation, Mary had asked handyman Eugene O’Neill to document the placement of paintings in the home so that St. Armand could reinsert the poetry of Emily Dickinson “into its original aesthet-

ic and intellectual context and restore its lost American Victorian resonances” for his work on the 1984 monograph *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture: The Soul’s Society* (112).

In *ED and Her Culture*, Barton Levi St. Armand presents a portrait of the poet as a folk artist. Eberwein points out that Barton “has been more attuned to the visual arts than any other Dickinson critic apart from Judith Farr.” In the book’s opening *apologia*, St. Armand champions a holistic approach for studying a work of art in its cultural context, unhampered by rigid methodology, terminology, or ideology. In the book’s closing appendix, he illustrates “Dickinson’s Mystic Day” by thematically tabulating the poet’s sacramental portrayal of cycles, sites, signs, rites, times, and seasons. (His characterization of Dickinson’s collected works as a mystical book of days resonates well with the fact that the word “day” is the most frequently used noun in the poems, with approximately 290 occurrences.) Between these initial and final frames of the book, St. Armand installs eight chapters as exhibition texts that showcase Dickinson’s eclectic assemblage of verbal art: keepsakes, scrapbooks, death parades, kindred spirits, heaven deferred, American grotesque, folk forms, earthly paradise, lone landscapes, sun worship, sublime peace, spiritual marriage, celestial reunion, gospel of nature, sentimental love religion, and Victorian aesthetic culture. Readers would never be bored with such vibrant commentary.

St. Armand’s evaluations of Dickinson and her work are not so much the dialectics of a literary critic as they are the text panels of a museum curator or an art connoisseur. He does not just tell us what he thinks about Dickinson, he shows us what her world looks like. He shows us that her poetry has a recognizable place in the sketchbook genre of nineteenth-century New England private portfolio verse. In doing so, his iconic diction is as authentic, expansive, innovative, and grounded as Dickinson’s lexis. In epithets and analyses, he selects a new society

for Dickinson: Henry James, Herman Melville, Washington Irving, Sarah Parton, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Mary Warner, Lydia H. Sigourney, Harriet Beecher Stowe, William Blake, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, John Ruskin, Walter Pater, G.W. Lewes, Frederick Richter, and Thomas à Kempis. Invoking such a company of authors and artists, St. Armand sees like a poet and writes like a painter:

The method employed by all of these artists was an acute attentiveness and obedience to the ways of natural phenomena, a scientific recording of the minute particulars of nature without any destructive autopsy of its wholeness. Only in this way would one capture through sentiment, effect, or expression the creative spirit that hovered just beyond both the earthly and the heavenly veils (*ED and Her Culture* 238).

In a 1990 interview for *The Single Hound*, St. Armand reveals more about the influences that colored his portrait of a poet in *ED and Her Culture*. He explains how his studies in American painting and American literature, as well as his training in social and intellectual history, had enabled him to challenge literary interpretations that abstract Emily Dickinson from her nineteenth-century New England cultural context. St. Armand sought to restore Dickinson to the fullness of her historical context, as a representative of, rather than an anomaly in, her own culture: “I felt that she belonged to her own time, and that she was expressing her own time. I felt the more we knew about that time, the better we could understand the spatial form in which she expressed herself.” He arrives at the conclusion that Dickinson’s high idealism moved into a new realism that “parallels the intellectual development of America.” Rather than perpetuate Dickinson as a case study for text-only New Criticism or for a divisive version of feminist criticism, St. Armand hopes to “re-humanize” the poet as a creative living person grounded in a particular time and place.

Attention to time and place leads St. Armand to explore Dickinson’s compressed,

romantic, melodramatic, gothic, psychological, and internalizing style. His context-based approach is congruent with the new philology outlined by anthropological linguist Alton L. Becker (1932 – 2011). Like St. Armand, Becker proposes a deep holistic approach to cultural texts through a set of contextual relations. Such contextualizing is the fundamental law of modern philology that St. Armand and Becker both attribute to Ralph Waldo Emerson in the proverb “Every scripture is to be interpreted in the same spirit which gave it forth” (*ED and Her Culture* 15; “On Emerson on Language” 9). Although Emerson attributes this precept to George Fox, it is actually a paraphrase from the fourteenth-century mystic Thomas à Kempis in his *devotio moderna* volume, *The Imitation of Christ*: “Each part of the Scripture is to be read with the same spirit wherewith it was written” (17). *The Imitation of Christ*, with its emphasis on daily scripture study, was one of Dickinson’s most treasured books, and it foreshadows a philological interpretation of her written texts that invites readers to strive for a disciplined response. In that spirit, St. Armand is one of the chief architects in laying the foundation for philological criticism in Dickinson’s works and in American studies.

In addition to the book-length work *ED and Her Culture*, St. Armand has published scores of articles on Dickinson in a variety of journals and has given ground-breaking lectures in numerous venues. A sample of highlights from selected works will have to suffice here. As a prelude to his book, St. Armand’s 1977 article on “Emily Dickinson’s American Grotesque” exhibits a trademark particularity that serves as a lens for seeing the poet as a folk artist. He diplomatically characterizes Martha Bianchi’s high-style gargoyle-cathedral metaphor as “not indigenous” to Dickinson’s milieu; rather, he intertwines connections between “the vernacular, the grotesque, and the comic.” Referencing an anonymous 1840 primitive painting titled *The Cat*, he contrasts high art with the folk art lyric verses of Isaac Watts, Emily Dickinson, and William Blake.



# Dickinson Scholars

His vivid imagery is consonant with the poet's vital metaphors: "It is the Indian Devil of the eastern wilds of Maine that springs out from the forest of Dickinson's soul to prowl through the *hortus conclusus* of her poetry" (15). Like a good philologist, he does not tell us what to think about Dickinson; rather, he shows us how to think about Dickinson from different perspectives.

In another 1977 article entitled "Emily Dickinson's 'Babes in the Wood': A Ballad Reborn," St. Armand expands our perception of Dickinson's prosody and thematic motifs by adding ballads, jingles, fairy tales, and nursery rhymes to the standard list of sources and allusions in her poetry. Later that year, he explores spiritualism and theosophy in an article on "Emily Dickinson and the Occult," declaring that the poet was a "born eclectic" and documenting the cultural progenitors for Dickinson's worldview "circumference."

As the impact of *ED and Her Culture* ripples steadily into American studies, St. Armand dives deeply into a cross-cultural comparison of New England's Emily Dickinson and Germany's Bettine Brentano in a 1987 article "Veiled Ladies." He navigates readers through supernatural dimensions of New England transcendentalism and German romanticism, while pointing to the parallels between Dickinson's mentor Higginson and Bettine's mentor Goethe. Every sentence and section of the article is packed with rich stores of cultural connections; for instance, the fact that Bettine's husband was one of the compilers of *Das Knaben Wunderhorn*, an 1806 collection of folk songs and fairy tales (including "A Child's View of Heaven" that Mahler later adapted for the soprano solo in the fourth movement of his fourth symphony). The research is so profound, and the prose is so lucid, one wonders if St. Armand is some kind of a Goethe-Emerison-Higginson proxy for his readers.

In a 1989 chapter on "Understanding Dickinson's Morbidity" for Fast and Gordon's *Approaches to Teaching Dickinson's Poetry*, St. Armand expands his views on Dickinson's re-

ligious beliefs. He discusses the spiritual implications of Dickinson's white dress as both a funeral robe and a wedding gown symbolic of either "celestial marriage or angelic celibacy." He asserts that Dickinson fashioned a "private love-religion" for herself and her beloved in order to replace "a religion of severity with a religion of sentiment." This examination of Dickinson's theology leads him later to make bold assertions in Kyoto, Japan, for the 2007 EDIS international conference: 1) that Emily Dickinson is no atheist, and 2) that her beliefs are closest to those of Mormonism, one of New England's emerging churches with its emphasis on sealing ordinances, celestial marriage, and eternal family relationships.<sup>1</sup> Such assertions are not merely personal opinions, but rather they are grounded in Barton's familiarity with Rhode Island's historical contexts: the founding of the Providence settlement by Roger Williams, who championed a tradition of religious pluralism. John M. Barry reports that Williams pursued "not only religious freedom but individual freedom, intellectual exploration" (264). This quest for emancipation presaged the abolition movement and the emergence of apocalyptic religions and "new churches" in New England, including the post-Calvinist doctrines of the Latter-day Saints, the Christian Scientists, and the Seventh Day Adventists.

St. Armand's invitation to speak at the EDIS conference in Japan was not arbitrary. He had taught classes in American Literature at Tokyo's Sophia University in 1984 and later donated his Dickinson book collection to their library. Eberwein points out that Barton became "a citizen of the world," welcoming international scholars to Brown "including Ken Akiyama, to whom he dedicated his Kyoto talk." He also taught and lectured in France, Poland, and China, later donating his environmental literature collection to a university in Beijing. In 2007, he collaborated with Magdalena Zapadowska to write a *Bulletin* tribute essay for Polish scholar Agnieszka Salska. Space does not permit me to specify his generous gifts to other institutions at home and abroad and to salute his numerous awards.

This tribute has focused on selected contributions in Dickinson studies, but St. Armand's literary interests have ranged from Poe to Lovecraft to Phelps to Melville to Cooper to Whitman to Hawthorne to Thoreau to Frost to Spofford to Woolrich to James to Bettine to Borges to Emerson to Yevtushenko, from horror literature to environmental texts to Asian aesthetics. As a poet himself, St. Armand has authored four volumes of verse.

Barton Levi St. Armand is a scholar's scholar, worthy of emulation as a philologist and an art historian. Through the course of his published works, we see the maturation of a marvelous mind. Like a Javanese *dalang*, he both familiarizes and defamiliarizes Dickinson through the shadow play of his verbal and visual analyses. His research findings are expansive yet particular, innovative yet grounded. He invites us to be authentic scholars. He is never boring, nor pedantic, nor conventional. He sets rather than follows the fashions of the academy. He weaves the fabric of textual criticism with truth, transparency, and transcendence. As an artist, he curated an exhibition of Emily Dickinson in her cultural context. As a philologist, he gave us keys to understanding the life and literary contributions of Emily. As a humanist, he showed us how her packets of poems fit into the Victorian domestic folk art tradition of the scrapbook, album, or quilt. He has done all of this with immaculate integrity, common sense, and uncommon humanity.

<sup>1</sup>A transcription of his keynote address is on p. 34 below. In the Q & A session, he confirmed that Dickinson would have known about Mormonism, saying that she invented her own special kind of Mormonism – but without polygamy.

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# Poet to Poet

Jonnie Guerra, Series Editor

## The Wide and the Narrow

By Amy Dryansky

Several months ago I noticed the name “Amy Dryansky” on the list of poets scheduled to read at an Emily Dickinson Museum event. I did a little online research – read her blog at Pokey Mama: <http://amydryansky.wordpress.com>, discovered that her second book titled *Grass Whistle* (Salmon, 2013) had received the Massachusetts Book Award for poetry, and was intrigued by the comment of one reviewer that Amy Dryansky focused on the “complicated simplicity of life.” That sounded so Dickinsonian! I have since learned that Dryansky is the assistant director of the Culture, Brain, and Development Program at Hampshire College and that she has been the recipient of fellowships to the MacDowell Colony, Vermont Studio Center, and the Bread Loaf Writers’ Conference. Her first book, *How I Got Lost So Close to Home*, was published by Alice James, and her poems have appeared in anthologies and journals, including *Orion*, *The Women’s Review of Books*, and *Harvard Review*. I know *Bulletin* readers will enjoy the essay that follows in which Dryansky reflects on her relationship to Dickinson.

I dwell in Possibility –  
A fairer House than Prose –  
More numerous of Windows –  
Superior – for Doors –  
Fr466

About 10 years ago, in short order, I published my first book of poems, lost both parents, and became the flummoxed mother of a toddler and infant. I also had a bad case of writer’s block. In this new territory of mother/orphan, I felt completely untethered. I couldn’t access the small, blind thing that, for me, used to be how I began a poem; I could barely even hear its mewling. I felt trapped by my domestic life, bored, and guilty about my secret – that no matter how much I loved my children, motherhood alone wasn’t enough for me, didn’t send me into rapture the way it seemed to transport other moms. I was an unbeliever in a community of supplicants.

A mix of desperation and inspiration impelled me to apply for a research associateship at the Five College Women’s Studies Research Center at Mount Holyoke College. My proposal: to study the impact of motherhood on women poets. In other words, to figure out what was wrong with

me. To my surprise, I was accepted, and soon I was installed in a tiny office with a large window in a beautiful old house on College Street. So began my study of the condition of myself.

To be honest, much of my “research” consisted of staring out the window at the leafy side yard, doodling on scraps of paper, and reveling in my precious few hours alone in a room with a door with no one on the other side, needing something. And, since I hated everything I was writing, I did a lot of reading, turning to the company of women poets past and present, looking for a sisterhood of misfits and rebels. I wanted to hear from women poets who were outsiders, in the way that I felt like an outsider: not a “career” poet with a job in academia, nor a dedicated stay-at-home mom experimenting with the best recipes for homemade baby food. A somewhere-in-the-middle poet, a foot-in-both-worlds poet, a non-joiner.

I didn’t “discover” Dickinson at this time. Like most of us, I’d been reading her for years: as a teenager, when I was given the edition with the floral cover; as an undergrad, when I moved on to the Baskin cover; and then in grad school, to the big book, the



Photo Credit: Trish Crapo

biographies, the intense speculation about her life, her choices. Reading, reading, reading the poems, but not really getting them. Admiring, yes; intrigued, yes; understanding, not really. Not in the way I’d been taught to understand.

But here she was again, and, suddenly, here was a model for the dichotomy I sought:

# Poet to Poet

a stay-at-home poet who transcended the physical and societal boundaries into which she was born, a builder of cathedrals in a teacup, a strategist and refusenik, the ultimate non-joiner.

As I sat in my narrow slice of office, reading Dickinson, Rich, Levertov, Brooks, Ostriker, Clifton, I began to let go of the idea of fitting in and to embrace the goal of moving beyond. And I began to write. Not anything I liked, at first, but poems that at least began to feel a little bit like I might like them, some day. I also engaged in some self-trickery by writing found poems, using text from other sources. It was easier for me to turn off the internal critic foxholed in my brain when all I was doing was acting as craftsman,

a humble bricklayer – at least, that’s what I told myself.

Eventually, I got to Dickinson, deciding I would make a cento from her poems. It felt impertinent, and I didn’t have any idea what the poem would be “about” but I started reading through the index of first lines in the Johnson edition and copying out those that spoke to me.

Though I hadn’t intended to, I chose lines that lent themselves perfectly to my situation, creating a portrait of a speaker pushing against the real and imagined confines of her life. As I started weeding out, arranging and rearranging the lines for “Soul Accounting,” reprinted here, I

was struck by how much easier it was for me to get Dickinson in this way – with her words lifted from their context. And when I went back to her poems I felt I was finally able to see into Dickinson’s world, to sit in that room with her, looking out at the dark bower of cedars, ignoring the requirements of domesticity, or yet another knock at the front door.

As Dickinson tells us, it’s only by embracing possibility – the wide and the narrow – that we attain Paradise, or in my case, understanding, if we take understanding to be a glimpse of something bigger than we are, both unknowable and made of us. Whatever the interpretation of something bigger may be. I’m still working on mine.

## Soul Accounting By Amy Dryansky

I had not minded walls.  
I had some things that I called mine.  
I read my sentence steadily  
from blank to blank.  
I breathed enough to take the trick.  
I asked no other thing.

It was a quiet way.  
It would have starved a gnat.

The sky is low, the clouds are mean –  
the moon upon her fluent route  
the reticent volcano keeps.  
Cocoon above, cocoon below –  
How soft this prison is!  
Perhaps you think me stooping –  
a little dog that wags its tail –  
my heart upon a little plate  
pink, small, and punctual.

Alone and in a circumstance  
I saw no way – the heavens were stitched  
within my reach.  
The future never spoke.

Of course I prayed.  
Oh give it motion, deck it sweet...  
If ever the lid gets off my head...

Over and over, like a tune.

There comes an hour when begging stops –  
the clock strikes one that just struck two.  
On such a night, or such a night—  
today or this noon –  
the life that’s tied too tight escapes.

Dreams are well but waking’s better.

So I pull my stockings off.  
Soul, take thy risk!  
Bring me the sunset in a cup –

the brain is wider than the sky.

*(Reprinted with permission from Amy Dryansky's second collection, Grass Whistle, Salmon Poetry, Ireland)*

# What's Your Story?

Georgiana Strickland, Series Editor

## Woman of Letters: An Interview with Joanne Dobson

Let's say you're a seasoned Dickinson scholar with a string of groundbreaking publications behind you. Then you get a year's grant that gives you a little extra time in your life. You're plowing ahead with literary research and writing. But what do you do for fun?

Well, if you're Joanne Dobson, you spend the evenings and weekends writing an academic mystery novel. The result (borrowing a line from Dickinson) is *Quieter than Sleep* (1997), the adventures of one Karen Pelletier, a professor of English at a small New England college whose street-smart background gives her a knack for solving the string of murders, robberies, and other academic mischief that surely plague all such institutions. The book is nominated for an Agatha award, and the publisher wants to hear more from Karen.

Having enjoyed reading the six Karen Pelletier mysteries, I recently had the pleasure of interviewing their author, now retired following a distinguished career teaching English and producing books and articles that have expanded the American literary canon.

Joanne Dobson was born and raised in New York City's Bronx and later in Peekskill, a small city on the Hudson north of New York, to a father who was an aide in a psychiatric hospital and a mother who was a nurse "and a wonderful writer." But for Dobson, writing came later. It was the "60s, and after graduating with an English major from a small religious liberal arts college that no longer exists, she immediately settled down to marriage and motherhood, "like everybody else." She



and her husband, David Dobson, moved to the country – Canaan, New York, just across the border from Pittsfield, Massachusetts. "We had cows, we had a horse, we had pigs. I baked six loaves of bread a week. I had child after child. Then I grew up."

"Growing up" meant earning a master's degree at SUNY-Albany, about thirty miles from Canaan. Dobson planned to go on for a PhD at SUNY, "but the very year I applied they lost their PhD program. So I commuted 150 miles a day to the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, which was arduous with three kids at home." It was at UMass that Dobson "fell in love with Dickinson" in a class taught by David Porter, and switched from being a specialist in modernism to a specialist in Emily Dickinson.

Dobson remembers vividly the moment in that class that changed her perspective. Porter "gave us possible assignments for presentations, and one of them was to read poetry by Lydia Sigourney and look at Dickinson's poetry in light of the other women of her time. I think he meant that we should say how unlike the other women Dickinson was," recalls Dobson, "but I just got hooked on the contemporary women writers. I saw so many of Dickinson's themes spring from that fertile ground – the issues that other women were dealing with, not only the poets but the novelists." That's where *Dickinson and the Strategies of Reticence: The Woman Writer in Nineteenth-Century America* (1989), Dobson's dissertation and later book, came from.

"I had known Dickinson before. Maybe I should say I fell in love with her the first time in college. It was the early '60s and my professor in American literature said, 'We have to read this woman named Emily Dickinson, but you don't have to pay her much attention because she was just a little virgin flitting through her father's garden.' So I didn't bother to read the poetry before class. I have this powerful memory of opening the book (*Norton Anthology*) and seeing the first poem, 'My life closed twice before it's close' (Fr1773). And it hit me physically! It was like 'Oh, my God!' I was entranced with her from then on, till I sort of forgot in the dailyness of my life then, but I came back to her."

Another memory is of teaching in a nursery school when they were living in Canaan. "As a gift at the end of the year one of the parents



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gave me the Johnson edition, and it was amazing! It all came back to me, helping me to see the possibilities and complexities of life in a way that I'd been too young to understand before. So Dickinson has been there right from the start."

Dobson's first academic position was at Amherst College, a one-year visiting professorship in 1985, followed by a year at Tufts in the same position. In 1987 she went to Fordham University as an assistant professor and taught there for about eighteen years until she took early retirement about ten years ago. "I did a great deal of work in recovering nineteenth-century American women writers. That stemmed from my dissertation as well. My Dickinson book came out in 1989, but the book before that was an edition of E.D.E.N. Southworth's hilarious comic melodrama *The Hidden Hand*. I was one of the three editors of Rutgers University Press's American Women Writers reprint series. We published eighteen volumes of work by previously unavailable nineteenth-century women writers. It was a brave venture on the part of that press, to strike out in this new direction – publishing writers most scholars at that point had thought were worthless. But those reprints transformed curriculum possibilities for the teaching of American literature in the classroom."

Dobson was also a founder of *Legacy* (along with Karen Danderand and Martha Ackmann), which started as a newsletter of nineteenth-century women writers and eventually became a journal that's still going strong. "It's now the industry standard for scholarship on American women writers. I was also on the editorial board of *American Literature* for three years."

Considering her career path and Dobson's obvious devotion to literary scholarship, I was intrigued to learn how she eventually turned to writing fiction, especially mystery fiction. "What was the original inspiration for the Karen Pelletier series?" I asked.

"Well, I was getting a little restless with the profession," said Dobson, "and particularly

with some of my colleagues. I had an NEH grant for a year of scholarship, and while I did a lot of research and writing and published two major essays that year, in the evenings and weekends I decided to write a mystery, just for fun. I've always been a mystery fan, from Nancy Drew on. When I was studying for my PhD exams, I read all the way through a ten-volume Swedish mystery series by Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahloo, the Martin Beck police procedural series. They saved my life by diverting me from the anxiety of taking those exams. I appreciate the works of crime writers from different countries because crime is so specific to place, depending on politics and the economy and geography. So I feel like I've traveled all over the world by reading some of these wonderful mystery writers."

A few words about the Karen Pelletier novels for those who haven't had the pleasure of reading them: The series is now in its sixth (and probably final) incarnation. *Quieter than Sleep* (1997) was followed by *The Northbury Papers* (1998), *The Raven and the Nightingale* (1999), *Cold and Pure and Very Dead* (2000), *The Maltese Manuscript* (2003), and finally *Death without Tenure* (2010). They follow the career of a Dickinson scholar who teaches in the English department at Enfield College, a prestigious small New England liberal arts college. With an office in Dickinson Hall and classes in Emerson Hall, Karen's life is made up of the usual professorial duties – preparing for classes, dealing with students, colleagues, and administrators, doing research, and getting grades in on time – plus the occasional corpse in the library stacks or falling out of the closet at the faculty Christmas party. One reviewer was led to wonder "if anybody has kept actuarial statistics on those faculty parties. They must be more dangerous than skydiving." Karen is also divorced and is raising her daughter as a single mom.

Dobson's heroine/sleuth has a background that often puts her at odds with some of her more patrician colleagues. "Karen is much braver and smarter than I am," says Dobson. "She's feisty. She grew up in Lowell, Mas-

sachusetts, a tough place. And she learned to take care of herself. So she comes into the academy not only being extremely smart and well educated but having a kind of street smarts her colleagues don't have. It helps her see beyond their conventional academic thinking." Karen is also a devoted teacher who cares deeply about her students.

In the established tradition of crime fiction, Karen initially finds herself at loggerheads with the police detective assigned to the cases. Charlie Piotrowski, who looks "like Father Christmas with a bad wardrobe and an attitude," doesn't necessarily understand the niceties of literary politics or the latest in academic-speak. But in time Karen learns to appreciate the qualities in him that she so often finds lacking in her colleagues, and over the course of six books, as the bodies pile up and rare manuscripts are purloined, the two find common ground – and mutual attraction.

Enfield College and the town of Enfield are as much characters in the books as those who people them. Dobson obviously has fun satirizing the more bizarre aspects of the academic scene, especially its jargon. "Satire is corrective humor. I tended not to write about my sane colleagues, people who are doing their job and doing it well, with love for the work. And then you get these people who mistake the teaching of literature for a kind of recondite political theorizing that seems to take over the broader range of literary studies. And it represents what I experienced with my colleagues at Fordham and the direction the profession is going in. The series was quite a lifesaver for me because it was so much fun to do."

Asked if Enfield represents Amherst, Dobson replies, "Amherst or any of those distinguished small New England colleges. I couldn't have written Enfield if I hadn't been at Amherst. Amherst was such an eye-opener to me. I'm forever grateful for having taught there. I'd gotten my PhD. at UMass Amherst, and then I crossed the tracks, I guess you'd say, to Amherst College. The university and

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the college both developed connections for me, particularly with the Emily Dickinson Museum. Every time I go up there I think, 'This is how I want to live.' But maybe not Amherst. Maybe Northampton. . . ."

I wondered how Dobson's colleagues and students responded to her venture into fiction. "When the first book came out I didn't tell anyone in my department, and then suddenly it was in Barnes and Noble right across from a Fordham campus. It was stacked up high, like thirty high. So I was outed! People would come up to me and say, 'Oh, Joanne. You write so well.' Then there would be a long pause, and 'You know, I think if you *tried*, you could write a real novel.' But the students loved them, especially the graduate students. Eventually I taught courses in writing mystery fiction at the graduate level." Now, in retirement, Dobson teaches adult classes in mystery fiction at the Hudson Valley Writers Center in, "of all places, Sleepy Hollow, New York – the birthplace of American fiction. It's great to be teaching these people who actually have stories to tell. So I've taught standard undergraduate and graduate students, and now I have adults, some of whom have been with me for six or seven years. It's gratifying to see them grow and gain confidence and learn to amplify their talents."

*Quieter than Sleep* was a finalist for an Agatha award from Malice Domestic, which celebrates the "cozier" side of mystery. In 2001 the New York State librarians gave Dobson an award as "Noted Author of the Year" for being "the author they most enjoyed recommending to their patrons." And in October 2014 she received an award from the Hudson Valley Writers Center. "I was honoree of the year. The award they gave me – and I so appreciated it – was as 'Woman of Letters,' encompassing both my scholarship and my creative writing, which really made my life's work feel completely recognized."

Dobson's latest venture into fiction, *The Kashmiri Shawl* (2014), is a historical novel set partly in New York City and partly in

India in the mid-nineteenth century. "I had immersed myself so deeply in nineteenth-century women's novels that I felt like I wanted to write one," she says. "But can a twenty-first century author write a nineteenth-century novel? And if she does, does anyone now want to read it? That was one of my inspirations and challenges."

Anna Wheeler, the novel's protagonist, is a graduate of Mt. Holyoke Seminary in the same year Emily Dickinson studied there. Dobson includes an oblique reference to Dickinson, but "I didn't want to bring her into the story. She would have run away with it!" Like a number of Dickinson's friends, Anna marries a young American missionary to India, where she spends ten years struggling to satisfy his demands for her submission to God's will – and to his own. In vividly descriptive scenes, Dobson depicts Anna's difficult life in the Fatehgahr missionary community, which was brutally wiped out in the infamous Sepoy rebellion of 1857. "It was horrific, inhumanity on both sides." In the novel, Anna, thinking her husband is among the Sepoy victims, escapes with the help of a wealthy Anglo-Indian man with whom she falls deeply in love. Returned to New York, she gives birth to a child she believes is her husband's, and is told it was stillborn. After resuming her career as a poet, she learns that her child did not die but was "taken," and she sets out on a long and perilous odyssey to recover her daughter.

One of the inspirations for the book was the scene in *Jane Eyre* in which St. John Rivers "doesn't ask but demands that Jane marry him. 'You were made for duty, not for love,' he tells her. I wondered what if she had gone with him? Then there was Emily Chubbuck Judson, a poet who published as Fanny Forrester. She was the third wife of Adoniram Judson, a noted missionary to Burma. His first two wives died there, and he came back to New York and convinced Emily to marry him and took her back to Burma, where *he* died. So she came back and picked up her career as a poet. That was a real inspiration to me, that she could feel secure in the ability to support

herself and her children as a poet. I gave that career to Anna Wheeler."

Dobson credits the vividness of the scenes set in India to letters written by the actual Fatehgahr missionary wives, who "wrote such wonderful letters – about the people, the climate, their delight in the foliage. I just fell into their letters as if I were falling into a certain place in time. They were so unlike what I expected a missionary's wife to be in that time and place"

One interesting aspect of the novel is Anna's success in supporting herself through publication of her poetry. "Poetry was central to the culture at that point," notes Dobson. "It hadn't been corrupted by the academy. And poets were in great demand because poetry was still poetry of the people. This was also the era of the rise of mass publishing. Popular poets such as Lydia Sigourney and Fannie Osgood were in great demand, and newspapers were the major outlet for poetry. Poets were celebrities. We have such a constrained notion of what was available to nineteenth-century women. There were stereotypes and conventions, but there were so many women who just sidestepped those conventions, and they're really not recognized in the way they should be."

Dobson's next writing project will be an edition of her mother's letters. "She wrote from a nursing school in Maine to her sisters and her mother in northern New Brunswick, Canada, and she wrote regularly. You couldn't afford to use the telephone then – it was only for emergencies. Her hometown had no electricity, no cars, no modern amenities. Caribou, Maine, was the modern world, and her letters are so vivid with the details of her new immersion in a place where there are actual stores and you can walk downtown, and there are people you can talk to. Eventually she came to New York City as a private-duty nurse and worked for people who could afford to have nurses in their homes. Once in 1941 she wrote to her sister, starting the letter, 'I always knew I'd end up on Park Avenue, but I never knew I'd be in my own private nut house.' She's writing

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about the woman she's working for who is totally delusional, and the fact that the woman's daughter wants my mother to stay there but she wants to decrease her salary because it's going to be a permanent thing. 'I said, "Nothin' doing." I didn't tell her I was sticking it because of the eight bucks. They are millionaires here many times over, and yet they want to deny a poor working girl her hard-earned pay.' That was just so like her."

It's obvious that Dobson inherited her mother's writing talent and enthusiasm for life. She now lives in Brewster, New York, "a sort of semi-rural suburb of Danbury, Connecticut,"

with her husband, Dave, a former civil servant and banker who now spends much of his time working on providing – and actually building – safe housing for people in Haiti who are still living in tents since the 2010 earthquake. Their son, David, the middle child, is in publishing with the Presbyterian Church USA and lives in Louisville. Their two daughters live nearby. Lisa has children at home and has founded Aiding Children Together (ACT), which supports education for at-risk children in Sri Lanka – street children and kids on remote tea plantations who would otherwise be illiterate. Their younger daughter, Rebecca, works in the expansion of medical care to

disadvantaged people. "I'm so proud of all of them," says Dobson. She and her husband have five grandchildren.

Joanne Dobson has made important contributions to our understanding of Emily Dickinson and many other women writers in nineteenth-century America. She has also demonstrated that academic life can serve as a provocative and entertaining canvas for humor, adventure, and a deeper understanding of life. Perhaps her success and her appeal to readers arise from what her fictional police lieutenant ascribes to Karen Pelletier: "Intelligence that hasn't had all the human feeling drained out of it."

## Departures

### Georgiana Strickland

With a mixture of gratitude and sadness, the Dickinson Society thanks Georgiana Strickland for this essay about Joanne Dobson, her last "What's Your Story?" article in the *Bulletin*. Georgie edited the *Bulletin* for twelve years. Ten years and two editors later, she served as interim editor during the search for a new replacement, and then she graciously helped a novice editor in many ways, not least by agreeing to continue to prepare her popular regular series.

Georgie wants to spend more time with other projects, but one dares to hope that her contributions to the *Bulletin* have not come to an end.



and The Evergreens merged to form the Emily Dickinson Museum, she gained the position of Director of Interpretation and Programming, which she held until her departure.

Cindy's tenure as Director, she believes, was one that saw growth and success come to the Museum. "I was especially pleased with the ever-increasing quality of our guided tour experience," she says. "Over the years, through working with dedicated guides and completing numerous exhibit and furnishings projects, we refined our telling of Emily Dickinson's life story and found multiple ways to convey the power of her poetry." In addition, Cindy found "particularly satisfying" her work with the Museum's website.



Following her time at the Emily Dickinson Museum, Cindy will become Director of Education at Hancock Shaker Village, where Emily Dickinson will keep on inspiring her. She says, "I will always be in awe of Dickinson's cognitive abilities, her steadfastness of self, and her unsurpassed facility with language." For the time being, she remains an honorary member of the EDIS Board of Directors.

EDIS thanks you for your career at the Museum, Cindy, and wishes you the best of luck.

*Photo Credits: Georgiana Strickland, Yanbin Kang; Cindy Dickinson,*

### Cindy Dickinson

The Dickinson Society would like to say farewell and thank you to Cindy Dickinson (no relation!) of the Emily Dickinson Museum in Amherst. Cindy officially began her time with Emily in 1996 (see a *Bulletin* profile in the Spring 1996 issue), when she became Curator of the Dickinson Homestead. In 2003, when the Dickinson Homestead



Every performance is an interpretation, a translation – not only into another medium, but into a unique understanding of the words spoken and of the author who wrote them. Translating an author into a living presence may be the most courageous interpretation an actor can make. Writer, performer, and educator MiMi Zannino is a poet-in-residence with the Maryland State Arts Council. As a 2014 Chautauqua actor/scholar through the Maryland Humanities Council, she performed her solo show *Time-Travel with Emily Dickinson* in colleges, museums, and libraries. As a performing artist with *Young Audiences of Maryland*, she brings Dickinson to life for students in middle and high schools. MiMi has also taught literature, composition, creative writing, and sociology at the college level. See [www.EmilyDickinsonLive.com](http://www.EmilyDickinsonLive.com) for a description of her project.

## Being Emily Dickinson

By MiMi Zannino

My version of Emily Dickinson is called *Time-Travel with Emily Dickinson*. Stepping back in time is my job – an exciting one that allows audiences to travel with me to meet the “Belle of Amherst.”

Why Emily? I’ll try: she lived in a fish bowl where the eyes of curious, parochial neighbors peered at her uniqueness and judged it odd. The daughter of morticians, I grew up in rooms over our funeral home, in a parochial, blue collar ethnic neighborhood and, of all things, had a penchant for writing poetry from childhood. I knew too well the pressure of dressing, behaving, and speaking in a manner that reflected my parents. I was considered “different” and never quite fit in, nor did I particularly aim to. From a young age I obsessed about the whys of death. Why did the little infant dressed in her christening gown lie motionless, like a porcelain doll, in this miniature casket beneath the backlit hologram of Jesus in our viewing room? Why did the sweet children in whose home I had recently sung happy birthday die in a house fire and lie, head to head, in closed caskets on funeral biers? Why had the handsome blond soccer star overdosed on drugs, resulting in the shock and grief of a hundred teens lined up around the block to gaze at him one last time?

Death was literally in my face on a daily basis. Dickinson writes about it with the

same unabashed intimacy as she writes about love, yet with a deft detachment that transcends barriers. This has led to some of the greatest surprises of the 35 performances I’ve given over the past three years. Teachers, college professors and writers will comment on fascinating aspects ranging from her poetic style to her fabled idiosyncrasies. In contrast, groups of individuals with dementia or speaking challenges will focus on the singularity of an image, and utter the word “bird” when I ask what image they recall or relate to during the question and answer session after my monologue.

She reaches everyone differently. After bringing Dickinson to life for over one hundred teenagers at a school dedicated to teaching students with autism and other learning challenges, hand after hand is raised with astute questions that reflect the depth of the students’ engagement with the poems they heard and the portrayal of

a historical figure: “Are you possessed by her ghost?” one asks. “You fooled me,” another writes in a letter; “I thought that



Photo Credit: Alan J. Cutler

MiMi Zannino dressed as a traveling Emily Dickinson



you were really Emily Dickinson. I didn't know that she was dead." "Precisely," I want to write back. The students pushed me out of the way and connected directly with the power and transcendent qualities of Dickinson's poetry. They shocked their teachers who had told me not to expect many questions or comments. Instead, our Q & A segment went overtime, and I received a hundred letters from the students commenting on everything from their delight in learning of her connection to the Civil War era, to their enjoyment of listening to me "bring her poems to life."

The early days of my research, starting in 2008, quickly altered many long-held views of an eccentric, nun-like poet sequestered in an attic, isolated from people and reality. (Sadly, this odd caricature still persists in many minds.) Through my living-history portrayal, I want to sweep away the musty (and inaccurate) cobwebs and breathe fresh life into perceptions of this New England literary figure.

As my one-person play unfolds, I relate many events from Emily's life during an imagined train adventure. Included are biographical details of an era before and after the Civil War. I am assisted by a traveling companion, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the real-life "preceptor" who spoke at Emily's funeral and co-edited her first book in 1890.

Dickinson's correspondence with Higginson ignited my imagination. Letter by letter, her voice began to inhabit my psyche and invited me to assume her personality. Their relationship proved to be a fascinating personal and historical journey, so it seemed natural to bring the biographical details to life by imagining them as train companions on her trip to Washington D.C. to visit her father, then serving in Congress.

My first order of business was to remove the plain white, buttoned-up wrapper – a garment that today's women might call a

housedress. It's not that I didn't like the dress: wearing such a prim frock was a practical fashion decision made later in life when Emily's days were increasingly filled with family responsibilities. It was easier and more practical to bleach away cooking and gardening stains from white cotton than from richer printed fabrics. The apron was Emily's uniform while she worked side-by-side in the kitchen with the family's domestic employee, Maggie Maher from Ireland. Having grown up in a multi-ethnic, working class neighborhood, I appreciate Dickinson's quiet involvement in the lives of the Irish immigrants whom she specifically asked to bear her casket from home to her grave.

Instead, though, I chose to avoid the dress in order to remove the idea of the muse or the bride of Christ. Also, the general public has the impression that she wore white her entire adulthood when in fact it was only the last part of her life. Travel clothes helped me bring to light the personality, wit, and humor that she shared with her intimates at all stages of her life. I want to explore the time leading up to those final years, which we know focused on writing and re-writing concurrent with care-giving: for her aging parents, and herself – physically, psychologically, and spiritually.

The daughter of a conservative, yet progressive lawyer, accustomed to receiving distinguished guests, Emily is keen-minded and possessed of all the social graces. Letters reveal her brother Austin's assistance in ordering calico dresses and bonnets from Boston to prepare Emily for her Washington D.C. journey along with her younger sister, Lavinia. They stayed at the grand Willard Hotel, attended teas and dinners, toured Mount Vernon, and later stopped for several weeks in Philadelphia to visit friends on their return journey.

Strand by strand, I weave lines of Dickinson's poetry, correspondence, and

personal history into the journey until a portrait emerges. Her features and gestures are animated. She has the confident sensibility of a mid-19th century American woman well versed in Shakespeare, popular fiction, botany, laboratory science, astronomy, natural history, Latin, algebra, philosophy, music, and logic. The wit and quick-mindedness evident in her letters to nearly one hundred correspondents is given free expression in my script.

The fearlessness in her literary genius draws me closer. Her ability to go eye-to-eye with raw emotion and then create highly original works of art astounds me. Her poetry throbs with a bold honesty, a creative pulse that is as relevant today as when she committed her words to paper, chocolate wrappers, or envelope scraps. At once mystical and unsentimental, she crystallizes a moment in the life of a flower, an insect, or a volcano with timeless immediacy.

As a life-long writer of poetry, I relate to Emily's expression of the emotions and thoughts surrounding love, loss, grief, and spirituality. Dickinson is my "master" because of the deftness with which she arranges words as if she alone knows the sequence that opens a combination-lock. Ultimately, her genius lies in decoding complex feelings and in employing poetic language that makes psycho-emotional experiences universally accessible and – according to many – a great source of consolation.

If one insists on labels, I offer devoted daughter, divine baker, dedicated gardener, and disciplined writer. Although merely brushing the surface in describing an innovative artist who defies simple characterization, these are qualities observed by people of her time and agreed upon by people of all time. This is the artist I travel back to see, and I revel in each opportunity to take audiences with me.

# Susan Johanknecht: Reading Emily Dickinson

By Marianne Garbowsky

Susan Johanknecht first encountered the poems of Emily Dickinson at the suggestion of Claire Van Vliet, her mentor at Janus Press, but waited a number of years before responding to them. A book artist by profession, Johanknecht creates “artist’s books,” a term first used by Dieter Roth in the latter part of the twentieth century. The phrase describes “works of art realized in the form of a book”; they can be “one of a kind” creations or be published in small editions. Educated in the United States at the University of Vermont and in London at the Central School of Art, Johanknecht began her work in Vermont in 1977, but then moved to London in 1981, where she currently works as an artist under the imprint of Gefn Press.

Her first book, done in 1984, was entitled *Five Poems – Emily Dickinson*. Many decisions went into its planning and design: specifically, what poems to include, and how would they relate to each other. Next, she considered what the book’s overall theme would be as well as the book’s size, the type of art that would be used, and its medium.

This first book is large: 20 x 14 inches, a choice the artist made to give the poems the “page-space” they needed. Johanknecht wanted the “pages to be large enough” so that rather than fit into the readers’ hands, the pages would have to be turned with their arms. This decision, plus the “heavy board covers,” would give the book the “gravitas” the artist felt the poems deserved.

The poems she chose – “Banish Air from Air” (J854), “It knew no lapse, nor Diminution” (J560), “The Dust behind I strove to join” (J992), “To Fill a Gap” (J546), and “Crisis is a Hair” (J889) – were poems that “shocked” her. They “disrupted” her “previous schoolgirl sense” of Dickinson as a writer of “delicate” verse “about roses and bees.” Instead these

were poems filled with “urgent present-tense energy.” Lines like “Sequence ravelled out of Sound / Like Balls upon a Floor” provided thoughts and images she could barely hold in her head.

The four lithographs she created for the book reflect “the toughness and directness of the poems.” First, she made relief sculptures out of found materials like wood, sponges, wire, and “synthetic fur.” She then took these reliefs and transferred them onto litho plates and continued to work on them – drawing on them, scraping them, attempting “to energize” them as well as to replicate what she imagined were “Dickinson’s writing processes.” “I tried to achieve a visual equivalent to the barely contained, compressed intensity I found in the poems.”

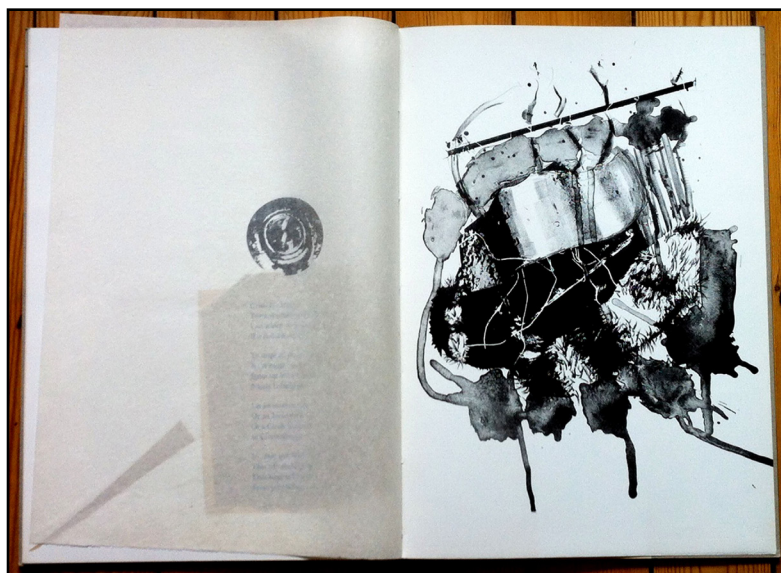
For her second book, *Five Poems – Emily Dickinson* (1989), Johanknecht reduced the size of the book, making it smaller – 4.1 inches square – so that it could be held in the readers’ hands, and “fingers [could] turn the pages.” Again she used relief prints of found objects; however, due to the book’s smaller pages, these prints “loom large.” The pages’ size give “the book an urgency and flow” as well as “a sense of the compression” she found in Dickinson’s poems: “These tested Our Horizon” (J886), “Each Second is the last” (J879), “Not ‘Revelation’ – ‘tis – that waits” (J685), “The Chemical conviction” (J954), and “Power is a familiar growth” (J1238). The poems included words such as “Atom and Abyss,” which gave the artist a feeling of “suspense.” Johanknecht envisioned the poet as concerned with “what is broken and absent,” as someone who entertains metaphysical ideas but is also “domestic” at the same time. To reinforce the poet’s focus on the domestic, she used objects from the kitchen – forks, which are “repeated,” emphasizing the poet’s sharp and “aggressive” nature.

Her third book, based on seven poems by Dickinson, is *Compound Frame* (1998). The title comes from the sixth line of the poem “A Weight with Needles on the pounds” (J264). Like Dickinson, Johanknecht plays with words – here the word “frame” suggesting the book’s interest in the “imagery of bone structure” as in the human skeleton. For this book, the artist again references the domestic – sewing and needlepoint. The covers of the book are, in fact, unsewn plastic needlepoint mats, the basic frames for needlepoint design but without any decoration. The woodcuts she made for the book are relief prints composed of “leftover flooring boards” from her kitchen. She also used sewing materials like “hooks and eyes, dressmaking pins,” which were “hammered” into the wood. Once printed, they take on a “ghostly” appearance.

To date, *Compound Frame* is Johanknecht’s last book based on Dickinson’s poems, but hopefully it will not be the final one. The artist’s association with Dickinson’s poetry has been mostly intuitive. However, five years after this last book, she read Richard Sewall’s two-volume biography, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*. “Theory, critical distance and academic context” followed “practice” for her. Now with her interest in the poet rekindled, the artist ponders the future: “How do I dare work again with Dickinson?” The artist believes that such a project “is exciting to consider.” I agree and am hopeful that she will take that risk.

*Marianne Garbowsky writes regularly for the Bulletin, often about Dickinson and the visual arts. She teaches English at the County College of Morris, in New Jersey, and has written two books on the poet. The content of this article is based on a series of e-mail interviews with the artist over a period of several months.*

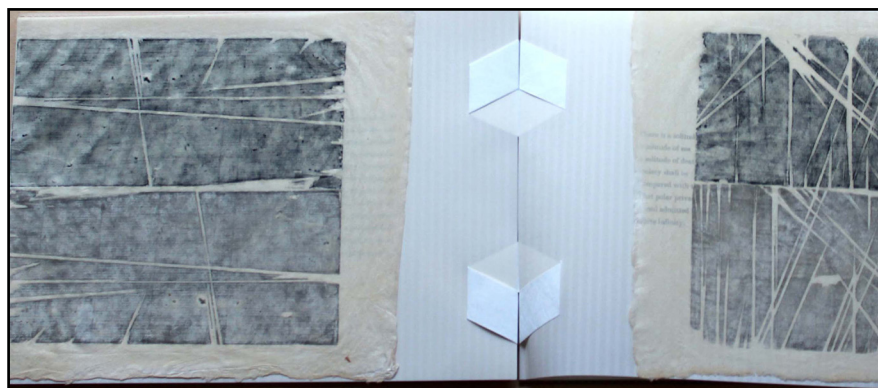
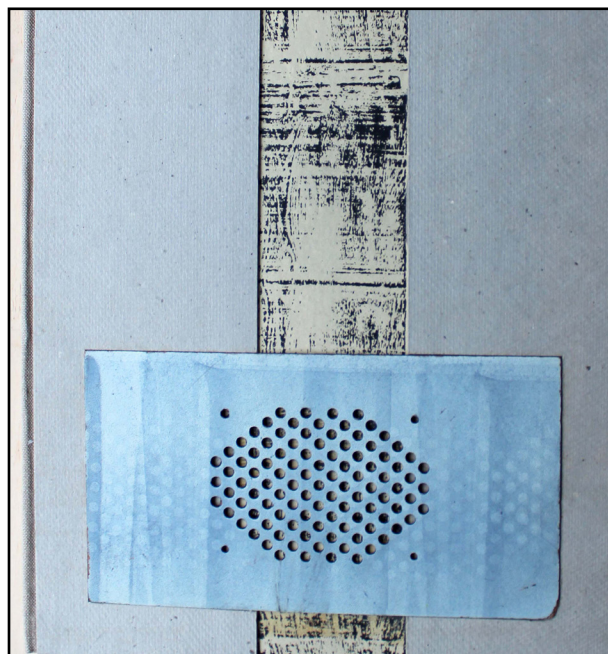
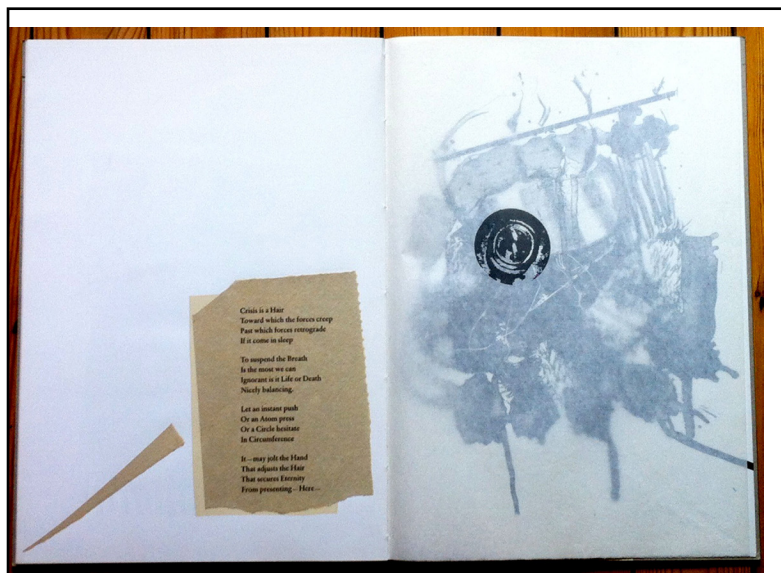




At left and middle left are two prints of “Crisis is a Hair,” from Five Poems – Emily Dickinson, 1984, spread 28” wide and 20” tall. Letterpress, lithograph and screenprint.

At middle right is the cover of the same book, 14” wide and 20” tall. Uncovered boards with inset radio backboard and screenprint.

Bottom center is “There is a solitude of space” from Compound Frame, Seven Poems by Emily Dickinson, 1998. Hand-burnished woodcuts, double-spread 21” wide and 7.5” tall.



# Emily Dickinson Dwells in China

The first international Emily Dickinson conference in China took place in November 2014, and it showed the explosion of interest in studying and translating the works of the poet. Baihua Wang and Martha Nell Smith are coediting three separate publications from the conference: special issues of *Comparative Literature & World Literature* (sponsored by The Chinese Comparative Literature Association, published by Peking University Press), *Cowrie: Journal of Comparative Literature and Comparative Culture* (sponsored by Shanghai Normal University, published by Fudan University), and the *International Journal of Poetry and Poetics* (Publication of the Chinese/American Association for Poetry and Poetics).

## Shanghai 2014

By Cristanne Miller

Emily Dickinson is perhaps not yet a household name in China, but her popularity there is undergoing a meteoric rise, as attested to by the increasing number of submissions to the *Emily Dickinson Journal* by Chinese and Taiwanese scholars, the number of translations of her poems recently published or underway, and the recent conference at Fudan University in Shanghai on translating Dickinson's poems. This conference, sponsored by the Fudan Center for Literary Translation Studies, in affiliation with EDIS, was called "Emily Dickinson Dwells in China – Possibilities of Translation and Transcultural Perspectives" – and it indeed indicated the extent to which Dickinson is now alive in Chinese scholarship.

The two-and-a-half day event (November 22 – 24) involved twenty-two translation groups linking a native speaker of English (who was in most cases also a Dickinson scholar) with one or more Chinese translators in working teams, each of which produced between three and six poems translated into Chinese with commentary. Many of the Chinese translators made presentations on their translations, or on the process of translating, and conference director Wang Baihua plans to publish these translations with commentary. She also plans a volume publishing

some of the papers presented by both Chinese and Western scholars at the conference.

The conference included a tour of Shanghai's Bund region along the Huangpu River, with its extraordinary contemporary architecture, and a tour of older parts of Shanghai, including the sixteenth-century Yu Gar-

den (or YúYúan, "Garden of Happiness"), with its wonderful grottoes, covered walkways, bridges, exhibits, and labyrinthine garden paths.

Association for Poetry and Poetics (CAAP). In December, 2014, the CAAP held its third annual conference (also in Shanghai) – with a primary focus on contemporary poetics and twentieth- or twenty-first-century poetry. (Marjorie Perloff is the current CAAP President and Charles Bernstein the Vice President; the conference was organized by Luo Lianggong from Central China Normal, who was also at the Dickinson conference, and Zhu Zhenwu, from Shanghai University). As the founding of the CAAP attests, there is rising Chinese interest in a great range of poetry from North America.

While in Wuhan in 2007, I spoke with some scholars who were enthusiastic readers and teachers of Dickinson, and conversations began about the possibility of a

conference on Dickinson's poetry in China. Between 2007 and 2014, several Chinese scholars spent time at American universities, including the University at Buffalo; Wang Baihua was one of the scholars who came to Buffalo. An experienced translator, Wang decided upon leaving to turn to the translation of some Dickinson secondary materials, beginning with Alfred Habegger's *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books: The Life of Emily Dickinson* (2002; Chinese translation



den (or YúYúan, "Garden of Happiness"), with its wonderful grottoes, covered walkways, bridges, exhibits, and labyrinthine garden paths.

A few words about my own experience with Chinese Dickinson scholarship and my own experience in China and Taiwan: In 2007, I was invited to attend a conference in Wuhan on Twentieth-Century American Poetry, which gave birth to the Chinese/American



published 2014, by Wang with the assistance of Zeng Yifeng).

At the inception of the Fudan University Center for Literary Translation Studies, Wang invited me to become a member of the Center because of my own interests in translation (German to English), and we began conversing about the possibility of a Dickinson conference in China with a focus on translation.

In the meantime, submissions to the *Dickinson Journal* both from Asian scholars and on topics having to do with Dickinson and Asian reception, philosophy, and spirituality were

increasing in number, leading to the idea of a special issue called “Pearls in Eastern Waters: Dickinson in Asia” (Fall 2013). A contributor to this issue, Li-Hsin Hsu of National Chengchi University in Taipei, Taiwan, invited me to give three lectures there (at National Tsing Hua University, National Chengchi University, and National Dong Hwa University). At every location, there were scholars with strong interests in Dickinson who were teaching her poems in their classrooms.

At Dong Hwa, it was a particular pleasure to meet Tseng Chen-Chen, who is a Dickinson scholar and has translated Dickinson. Tseng contemplates the possibility of organizing a

Dickinson conference in Taiwan in the coming years. And many scholars in Taiwan and China responded enthusiastically to the news of the 2016 EDIS conference to be hosted in Paris. It does not require a crystal ball to predict that we will increasingly see several Chinese scholars at EDIS international conferences and events, and that they will contribute increasingly to our understanding of Dickinson – how she travels and how we can read her in and out of translation at “home.”

*Cristanne Miller is the editor of the Emily Dickinson Journal and the author, most recently, of Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century (2012).*

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## Different Reading Interests Leading to More Possibilities: Collaborative Translation of Three Dickinson Poems into Chinese

By Cuihua Xu

Hosted by the Literary Translation Research Center of Fudan University in Shanghai and co-organized by EDIS from November 22 – 24, 2014, the Emily Dickinson International Symposium, “Emily Dickinson Dwells in China – Possibilities of Translation and Transcultural Perspectives,” was the first such occasion ever taking place in China, and its strong energizing force for Dickinson studies in China may have been felt by all the participants.

The cooperative translation project of the Symposium was a rare opportunity for Chinese translators to work with Dickinson scholars who are native speakers of English. Twenty-two small translation groups were formed. The rule of the game was that each Chinese translator selected, translated, and annotated three to six poems in electronic collaboration with other members of her or his group several months before the conference. As one of the translators who participated in the translation project, I consider the most essential part of its success was all the preparatory work that was done before

the meeting. All of the translators may have their own unique story to tell about their cooperation, but all would agree with me that the process of collaboration was challenging and exciting.

I feel grateful to the conference organizers for getting Dr. Karen Emmerich to collaborate with me. Karen (who was unfortunately unable to attend the actual conference) is an expert in translation and translation theory. Her current research focuses on the material aspects of both poetry and translation, and on the overlap in the tasks of the editor and the translator, particularly with regard to the instability of literary works. At the beginning of our collaboration, we exchanged our opinions about our interests in translation. Her interest in discussing “how the scholarly discussion of Dickinson’s visual and material form, as well as the variants to many of the poems, affect the task of translation” allows her to see through the various possibilities of translating a Dickinson poem, while my interest lies in what ideas Dickinson expresses

in her poem. I have wondered whether the difference in focus may be perhaps due to the fact that Chinese is an ideographic language, and that a Chinese translator must consciously or unconsciously search the meaning or ideas conveyed before translating a poem or a piece of an article. As an amateur translator I perceive that the qualities Karen possesses as a translator and a translation expert are just what I need to develop in myself, and that our different interests in translation would certainly lead to different perspectives of readings.

Our different interests in translation did play an important part in selecting the poems for translation. Aware of the tremendous challenge one needs to take in translating a Dickinson poem, we decided to work on three poems, following Karen’s suggestion “to work on the fewest number of possible poems and to use it as an opportunity to think seriously through and discuss some of translation questions.” The three poems selected by us were “I know some lonely Houses off the Road” (Fr311), “You see

I cannot see – your lifetime –” (Fr313), and “Read – Sweet – how others – strove –” (Fr323). All three were taken by chance from the poems written by Dickinson in quite the same period. I proposed the choices of Fr311 and Fr323 with consideration that the ideas Dickinson expresses in them could be achieved. Karen voted for Fr313, one of the most difficult Dickinson poems, as she favors the instability in the poems and taking challenges to find the possible interpretations, considering that “a translation that was able to keep all of these options in the air without settling on any one of them, a translation that was as strange and as challenging in Chinese as the poem is in English, would be in my opinion a successful translation.”

The mode of our collaboration was that firstly we each approached the poems in our own ways, then shared our understanding of the poems. Finally Karen wrote the English versions of the annotation and commentary while I did the translations and wrote the annotation and commentary in Chinese based on the ideas we shared in the part of the work we each did. Therefore, each of us could write in the way we felt comfortable with so that we could present our ideas very freely.

In the process of our collaboration, our different interests in approaching a Dickinson poem produced amazing results of interpretation, as Karen’s comments on each poem in response to my reading displayed her capacity in seeing through the various possibilities of interpreting a poem, which, as a

result, helped to widen my scope of reading. Fr323 is the poem of which we share the most in common in our understanding. I am in agreement with Karen’s comments on the poem that “The speaker of this poem is encouraging someone to find solace in reading, and specifically in reading of the attempts of others to strive, through renunciation and faithful witness, to maintain a faith that neither the speaker nor the addressee can themselves lay claim to. In other words, reading of the faith of others is one way to encourage faith and renunciation in oneself.”

But our reading of Fr311 differs very largely. I see the poem as a narrative one which may remind readers of a typical Grandma’s tale about robbery in its surface but deep down behind the veil of the story are the facts that include Dickinson’s careful choices of words, her deliberate plan of structure, and her exploration to present her shrewdness in understanding the psychological development concerning the process of robbery. Karen amazed me by highlighting the effect of audio and visual imagery and providing full evidences for her arguments that “the primary ‘meaning’ of the poem lies precisely in the hide-and-seek we find in its lines” and that “one could describe this as a poem about losing and finding, or losing and never finding, or forgetting and remembering, rather than a poem about an actual burglary – burglary, here, would be a playful metaphor for loss.” I consider her analysis would be more acceptable to general readers and integrated her whole idea into the Chinese version of annotation and comments on the poem.

Fr313 makes no sense to me as a translator who probes for an ideographic function out of it. Reading this poem is like experiencing a psychological process of guessing what Dickinson’s narrator is guessing. As Karen admits, “I chose this poem as one we could focus on for a translation precisely for the ‘riddle’-like qualities you point to. I myself, as a translator, am always drawn to the texts that present the most pervasive challenges for translation, and this one seems to me one of Dickinson’s most difficult poems for which to pin down an interpretation. This is a result, I believe, of the extreme syntactical irregularity of the poem: it is, as you note, very difficult to determine what nouns are serving as subjects and objects of what verbs.” Since I fail in making any meaningful sense out of the poem, I translate and annotate it based on Karen’s comments but try to make the translation look less strange and challenging to readers of Chinese, which, I know, is quite contrary to Karen’s ideal notion of translation. What makes me feel more despair is that I cannot find my way in English to explain to Karen or any native speakers of English how the Chinese translation of this poem is conducted.

On the whole the collaboration is significantly beneficial to me. It reminds me to keep my mind open and “dwell in possibility” when reading Dickinson. I realize that the ideographic certainty I am probing for in translation could only be, again in Dickinson’s words, “uncertain certainty,” and that much needs to be done in interpreting and annotating the poet.

You see I cannot see – your lifetime –	你知道我看不到你的人生 –
I must guess –	我须猜测 –
How many times it ache for me – today –	多少次这让我痛苦 – 今天承认 –
Confess –	
How many times for my far sake	多少次为了我的远大前程
The brave eyes film –	那勇敢的双眼悲痛迷蒙 –
But I guess guessing hurts –	但我估摸呀猜测令人伤心 –
Mine – get so dim!	我的眼啊 – 已模糊不清!

*Note: Karen’s words are quoted from her emails to me.*

*Cuihua Xu teaches English as a foreign language at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies in Guangzhou, mainland China. Her article “Approaching Emily Dickinson” was published in the Fall 2011 EDIS Bulletin and “A Scrutiny into Chinese Translations of Emily Dickinson’s Poetry (1984 – 2011)” in the Winter 2013 Emily Dickinson Journal.*

A segment of Cuihua Xu’s translation of Fr313 shows the result of a collaboration between a translator working in an ideographic language and a native speaker focusing on sight and sound.

# Dickinson and Whitman *au bord de la Seine*: American Poets in Paris, March 2015

By Marianne Noble

As the story goes, a few years ago, Cristanne Miller and Eric Athenot met in Paris and got to chatting about the surprising fact that there has never been a conference devoted to the intersections of the two major US poets of the 19th century, Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman. And voilà, an idea was born.

On March 12 and 13, around thirty international scholars gathered at l'Université de Paris, Creteil, for "Walt Whitman & Emily Dickinson: A Colloquy." There were around twenty papers presented, and the discussion was rounded out with a roundtable addressing formal choices of the two

poets. The event concluded with a festive dinner with much toasting, generously sponsored by Université de Paris, Créteil.

Ed Folsom kicked things off with a "what if" paper that addressed the many opportunities for intersection and influence between the two poets. Christine Gerhardt was the next featured speaker, addressing shared relationships to place in the two poets' work (the topic of her recently published book on the two poets, *A Place for Humility*). And Cécile Roudeau rounded out the opening session with a paper about resistances to abstraction in the two poets' work.

A particular favorite was the paper of Vincent Dussol (Université Paul Valéry-Montpellier 3) on "The List and the It" that had attendees alternately rapt and laughing their heads off. And Betsy Erkillilla delighted all with a consideration of the surprising erotics of the two poets. Dickinson may have believed that Whitman's poetry was "disgraceful," and Whitman may have wanted to be seen as one of the "roughs," but readers in this stunning conference found more commonality between the recluse of Amherst and the Bard of America than either one might have imagined.



Top left: Paul Hurh, Dorri Beam, Antoine Cazé; above right, Michael Hinds, Ken Folsom; below: Gary Stonum



*A sampling of paper topics will convey the range of interests of the participants and their innovative connections between the poets, and it may serve to sharpen anticipation of the 2016 International EDIS Conference, to be held in Paris:*

*Christine Gerhardt, "Have we not stood here like trees in the ground long enough?"*

*Dorri Beam, "Between the Sheets: Sex and Poetic Sequence in Whitman and Dickinson"*

*Paul Hurh, "The Arctic and the Polar: Death, Earth, and Cosmological Scale in Whitman and Dickinson"*

*Ken Price, "Handwriting and the Enveloping Artistic Act"*

*Michael Hinds, "Whitman-Dickinson: Punk-Post-Punk"*

*Paola Loreto, "Sensible Knowledge and the Language of Emotions: The Common Source of the Poetic Idioms of Whitman and Dickinson"*

# Report from Finland

## Sirkka Heiskanen-Mäkelä

First of all, an obituary, which comes – like my whole report – regrettably late.

It is my sad duty to announce that Kaarina Halonen, my long-time friend and collaborator in translating Emily Dickinson into Finnish, died in May 2013, at the age of 90. Suffering from Alzheimer's, she spent the last years of her life at a nursing home and was buried in the family grave in Suonenjoki, her native town, on June 12, 2013.

Kaarina was a member – actually the last genuine member – of the famous Halonen family, consisting of artists, sculptors, and handicrafts-men and -women. Her uncle Pekka Halonen, for instance, was one of the most famous painters of the so-called Golden Age of Finnish art, while her father Antti Halonen was also a renowned painter, as well as a handicraft teacher. Kaarina drew and painted in water-colors well, too, but chose to study philology at university and devoted her working years to teaching English and German in secondary schools.

Our collaboration started in 1980, when the Literature Department of Jyväskylä University (where I worked) arranged a summer seminar on translating lyrical poetry. I had learnt that Kaarina, during her university studies, had – as she herself later boasted – “introduced Emily Dickinson” to Helvi Juvonen, a fellow student and a well-known contemporary poet (1919–59). She had also collaborated with Juvonen at interpreting Dickinson for an extensive essay on the poet (with several translations), published in 1958 in *Parnasso*, the best-known Finnish literary periodical. Accordingly, I contacted Kaarina and asked her to come to our seminar and tell us about this collaboration, as well as the results thereof, which she did. Her talk

and the following discussion revealed that, besides the ones published in *Parnasso*, she had actually translated a good many more of Dickinson's poems, still unpublished.

The natural outcome of this encounter was a collection of Finnish translations of Dickinson's verse, published by our department (in 1983) and called *Valitsee sielu seuransa* (the first line of Juvonen's translation of Fr409). It consisted of the above-mentioned essay plus 45 translations by Helvi Juvonen, Kaarina, and myself. Some ten years later (in 1992), this collection was enlarged to contain 62 translations (with all the new ones by me), and both the editions were soon sold out.

To be sure, these were not the very first Dickinson translations into Finnish; since the 1940s, a few tentative translations of her poems had been included in literary articles and anthologies. Ours was, however, the first collection of her poetry here, and it remained as such for another ten years. Ever since I had retired and settled, in 1994, at my present hometown Iisalmi, I had been planning to publish another collection – or rather selection – of Dickinson's poems in Finnish. I had been working on new translations for some time, and eventually collected them, together with some old ones by Kaarina, into a volume called *Maailma, tässä kirjeeni* (the first line of Fr519). Published in 2003, it was only a slender booklet, containing an introductory essay by me and 39 poems, but beautifully illustrated with colored-paper cuttings by a local artist.

The compact schemes and iambic rhythms of Dickinson's prosody may be difficult to render into trochaic Finnish but not impossible. Kaarina and I have proved it, as has been also shown by various older Finnish

poets, who still master the rules of metrical composition. Juvonen proved it beautifully, and so did Aila Meriluoto, another celebrated Finnish modernist, who included ten thematically and metrically impeccable ED translations in her last collection, *Kimeä metsä* (2002). A decade ago one of our

*Puuseppä, itseoppinut  
olin – jo aikani  
höyläni kanssa puuhannut  
kun saapui mestari*

*mittaamaan työtä: oliko  
ammattitaitonne  
riittävä - jos, hän palkkaisi  
puoliksi kummankin*

*Työkalut kasvot ihmisen  
sai – höyläpenkkikin  
todisti toisin: rakentaa  
osamme temppelit!*

Sirkka Heiskanen-Mäkelä's Finnish translation of Fr475, “Myself was formed – a Carpenter –”

younger poets, Merja Virolainen, also took interest in Dickinson. After first publishing her free-verse translations in *Nuori Voima*, a literary periodical, she later collected them into a volume called *Golgatan kuningatar* (2004). In addition to 78 poems, the book, now out of print, contained an effusive biographical essay on the poet plus a sort of account (or even apology) for her own method of translating Dickinson's verse. While retaining her uneven free-verse lines, with occasional rhymes added here and there, Virolainen had imposed a sort of syllable-count on them. As Dickinson's meager stanza forms, together with their



tight prosodic patterning, were however lost, Virolainen's insistence that she was "keeping to the original meter" was difficult to understand. No doubt inspired by Dickinson, her interpretations remained – at least for me – paraphrases at most.

As to myself, I have – almost as a daily practice – continued translating Dickinson's poems into Finnish. For my 75<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2009, I edited my new translations into a collection and had it published as *Puuseppä, itseoppinut* (the first line of Fr475). The volume consisted of 104 translations with an introduction, dealing mainly with Dickinson's development as a poet, together with a presentation of her prosody. The edition is by now out of print, and I had been planning to publish a new one, with fresh translations, for my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday last year. As I have been too busy with some other editing jobs, that

scheme has not been realized so far, but it will keep alive.

Another activity to arouse and keep up Dickinson interest here has been the yearly competition for the students of the local lyceum (higher secondary school) in translating her poetry, arranged by the local Finnish-American Society. After the society had, so to say, adopted Dickinson as its own poet by sponsoring the collections of translations I've published, it seemed only natural to initiate this competition, which has been running for six years now. The poems to be translated (usually three in number) are suggested by me and accepted by the society board (of which I am a member). They are sent to the school to be published on Dickinson's birthday, December 10, and the date for returning the translations is May Day. The annual number of competitors has been varied, of

course, but general interest – which is individually rewarded by small monetary prizes – has been astonishingly high.

I have provided the school library with sufficient information about Dickinson for those who want to learn about her before the competition, and after the society board has processed the translations, we usually meet all the competitors at the coffee-room of the school and discuss the results. This meeting has been an excellent opportunity to inform the students of the various aspects of Dickinson studies, too, as well as of the activities of EDIS.

*Sirkka Heiskanen-Mäkelä is professor emerita of the University of Jyväskylä, in Jyväskylä, "the Athens of Finland." She has done many translations of Dickinson's poems, and is a long-time member of the EDIS.*

## Dickinson and the Arts

Emily Dickinson continues to exert her influence in visual art, theatre, and music. In addition to Michael Conley's *A Bequest of Wings* (see above, p. 8), the poet has recently reappeared in many media.

Last summer, the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum near Boston featured a 20-year retrospective of work by Lesley Dill. The exhibition of 16 works made between 1993 and 2012 ranged from oil pastel drawings and a large scale metal wall drawing to bronze and paper sculptures and illustrated Dill's signature use of the language of poetry with the human form. Among the Dickinson-inspired works were *Poem Dress* (1993) and *Word Made Flesh* (2002). Other of Dill's works were inspired by Franz Kafka, Salvador Espru, and Tom Sleigh.

*Emily Dickinson OUTER SPACE!* was performed by Theatre Plastique in New York City at the Bushwick Starr from September 4 to 7, 2014. Theatre Plastique was founded by Michelle Sutherland in 2013 and is an artist collective that creates original musical theatre, opera, and plays that celebrate American poetry and explore the American psyche through rhythm. The Dickinson piece was the second in a planned triptych of performances, following *Gertrude Stein SAINTS!*

*This, and My Heart: A Portrait of Emily Dickinson*, a musical and theatrical performance, took place on October 22, 2014, at the University of Southern California. Dickinson's poems and letters were read in conjunction with musical settings by several composers including Aaron Copland and Lori Laitman. The performance was a collaboration among actress Linda Kelsey, soprano Anne Marie Ketchum, pianist Victoria Kirsch, and painter/scene designer Bonita Helmer and was introduced by Dana Gioia, USC professor of poetry and public culture.

Also in California, the Yuba-Sutter Regional Arts Council mounted *Yuba Sutter Reads: Emily Dickinson*, a month-long celebration of the poet and her work in February 2015. Modeled on the NEA's Big Read Program, but funded solely by community donations, the program was designed to appeal to readers of all ages with special outreach initiatives for K-12 teachers and students as well as local artists. The culminating event was a musical, video, and spoken word performance/program complemented by both a gallery show of Dickinson-inspired work by local artists and a dessert reception that used the poet's own recipes.

# Dickinson's Realia: A Russian Perspective

By Tatiana Polezhakat

The poems of Emily Dickinson attracted me first by their unconventional rhyme and by the fact that the poet's name is little known to Russian readers. But after translating the first few, I realized that I had found a treasure-house.

Introduction to Dickinson's work in Russia began in the 1940s. At least 680 of her poems are now translated into Russian. Fifty percent of these poems have been translated more than once. Nevertheless, it is still too early to talk about the reception in general of Emily Dickinson's creativity in our country. Since 2011, with the help of Peter Mitchell, a senior lecturer in the Faculty of Foreign languages, Tomsk State University, I have set a goal to translate all of Emily Dickinson's poems; I am about one-third of the way complete. As a poet myself, with each translated poem I find more similarities in world outlook with Emily Dickinson.

If you are familiar with the grammar of a foreign language you can translate any prose text with a dictionary, but not poems. Only a poet can do it, and I'm interested in conveying the mood of a poem, and this means being careful with "realia."

Formally, realia can be called "untranslatable elements of the original text." According to dictionary definitions, all artifacts are realia. More particularly, words naming objects and concepts expressing the national and historical flavor of their nation can be called realia. These can preserve the national character of the poem. Realia not only keep the flavor of the host culture, they prepare a reader for the semantic content of the original text. And sometimes realia just let us understand the concept, which is embedded in the poet's work. I think that only through the transcription of realia can a reader become immersed in the original text. The large number of realia in Emily Dickinson's poems is one of the reasons why her poems are seldom translated into Russian.

Realia may be contrasted with "terms." Terms are precisely defined concepts of objects and phenomena. Ideally, a term is unambiguous and devoid of synonyms. The term cannot claim "nationality." It belongs to all humanity. Realia are associated with fiction, and are a means of transmission of local and temporary color. Realia always belong to the people of whose language they were born. But in contrast to terms, they penetrate into other languages, whether they represent an object or not.

For an example of realia versus terms, Emily Dickinson writes about a Bobolink in several poems. "Bobolink" may seem like a term, since it simply names a bird, but I consider it an example of realia, because this bird has multiple names ("butter bird," "rice bird" – since they dwell in

rice fields), and these names are all evoked by the general term. And the Bobolink dwells only on the American continent.

I try to preserve realia in the translations, because they convey national and historical character. I have dealt with the realia in the plane of two languages: English and Russian. I think there are two major difficulties with realia: 1) There is no equivalent in the target language; and 2) Both realia and semantics together are needed to truly convey the color of their national and historical connotation.

So when I am translating realia I rely upon the general theoretical position, on intuition, and, most importantly, on the context of the work. For example, Fr123 ends with these words:

Grant me, Oh Lord, a sunny mind –  
Thy windy will to bear!

"Lord" was unchanged in the translation originally. When I read the translation of this poem at a presentation to Russians, people asked, "What does this word mean? Who is this Lord?" At that moment I realized I had to change my translation, because the author talks about God in this poem and it was not obvious to the audience. Therefore, I have used the word "God" instead of "Lord" in the new version.

I have started translating the poems of Emily Dickinson from the first poem, in the order they were created, and I have not chosen only the easy ones. Today, when I have translated 446 poems, I can make some assumptions about translations of Dickinson's poems in Russian. My calculations show that about 64 percent of the translated poems contain realia. Among these, ethnographic realia are the most common, in 29 percent of the poems; 10 percent of the poems have the realia of names; 9 percent have socio-political realia; 7 percent have geographical realia, 3 percent include foreign languages realia; 3 are interjections (which I believe are realia); and 3 percent have military realia.

Some realia are proper names, but the boundaries between proper nouns and realia are not always obvious. Consider poem 207:

I taste a liquor never brewed –	Я пробую несваренный
From Tankards scooped in Pearl –	Жемчужный хмель равнин –
Not all the Frankfort Berries	Не каждый Франкфуртский ликер
Yield such an Alcohol!	Сравниться может с ним!

Summer's inebriation is almost heavenly in the first stanza. The finest Rhine wine could never equal it. Therefore words like "liquor,"

“alcohol,” “pearl” and the phrase “Frankfort Berries” bear the primary semantic load. It was important to preserve the beauty of metaphors in Russian translation and not lose the semantic content of the poem. So I transformed the phrase “Frankfort Berries” into “Frankfort liquor.” “Frankfort” identifies a place, but it also includes a system of images that do not carry over with its semantic meaning.

Similarly, I tried not to ignore the implications of direct address in English, such as “Sir.” For example, Fr258:

I came to buy a smile – today –	Зашла купить улыбку – раз –
But just a single smile –	Всего-то лишь одну –
The smallest one upon your face –	Что на щеке, но вскользь у Вас –
Will suit me just as well –	Да только мне к Лицу –
The one that no one else would miss	Ту, без которой нет потерь
It shone so very small –	Слаба она сиять –
I’m pleading at the counter – sir –	Молю, Сэр, подсчитать – её
Could you afford to sell?	Смогли бы вы продать?

I’ve Diamonds – on my fingers!	Алмазы – на моих перстах!
You know what Diamonds – are!	Вам ли не знать, о да!
I’ve Rubies – like the evening Blood –	Рубины – словно Кровь, горят –
And Topaz – like the star!	Топазы – как звезда!
‘Twould be a bargain for a Jew!	Еврею торг такой в пример!
Say? May I have it – Sir?	Что скажите мне – Сэр?

Ethnographic realia denote culture, customs and religion – the elements of life, work, and art. Different units of measurement and money can be called ethnographic realia. Mythical heroes, biblical images and more can also be attributed to ethnographic realia. For example, in Fr521, I preserved the name of Moses, the ancient name of Palestine (Canaan), the names of biblical characters (Stephen and Paul), and the name of the mountain (Nebo):

It always felt to me – a wrong	Что было сделано для Моисея –
To that Old Moses – done –	На мой взгляд, был обман –
To let him see – the Canaan –	Не дать войти ему, позволив
Without the entering –	Увидеть Ханаан –

\* \* \*

Upon the Broad Possession	Взирать он должен – лишь всего –
‘Twas little – He should see –	На Ширь Владения –
Old Man on Nebo! Late as this –	Старик с горы Нево! Кровит
My justice bleeds – for Thee!	Мой суд – ради Тебя!

Realia of measurement and money likewise are usually transcribed directly, such as the “miles” of Fr383 and “Doubloons” in Fr266:

Bags of Doubloons – adventurous Bees	Дублонов сумки – Пчелы мне
Brought me – from firmamental seas –	С небесных донесли морей –
And Purple – from Peru –	И Пурпур — из Перу –

Though I could translate “Doubloons,” I transcribe it directly and give it a footnote at the end of the poem.

Geographical realia present other difficulties. The second stanza of Fr1245 contains the words,

When it had pushed itself away	Когда ж в одной из дальних Прерий
To some remotest Plain	Он затерял свой пыл

The word “Plain” has several meanings in Russian translation, for example steppe, prairie, and so on. I have chosen to translate the word “prairie” as the American version to preserve the national character, even though the poet is not specific.

Onomatopoeia and interjections verge on being realia. Onomatopoeia really reflects the national color. For example, dogs bark differently in different countries. In Fr311 there is a line, “And mice won’t bark.” A mouse in general only can squeak, but the humor is difficult to capture. Likewise, interjections are an articulate onomatopoeia for the expression of feelings. It is very complicated to translate feelings from foreign languages. Consider words like this in Fr189: “hist,” “whist.”

Is it true, dear Sue?	Правда, дорогая Сью?
Are there two?	Вас двое, не пойму?
I shouldn’t like to come	Идти мне для чего,
For fear of joggling Him!	Тревожить лишь Его!
If you could shut him up	Ты в Чашке Кофе бы когда
In a Coffee Cup	Скрыть его б смогла,
Or tie him to a pin	Булавкой ли скрепляла б –
Till I got in –	Пока мне не попало –
Or make him fast	Иль Тоби чтоб
To Toby’s fist –	Догнать не смог –
Hist! Whist! I’d come!	Тсс! Тише! Я пришла!

To preserve the sound of the last line I had to use Russian onomatopoeia in “Тсс! Тише!”

I have only touched such a complex topic as translating realia. Each translator solves this problem on her own. But it seems to me that only respect for people and their culture will keep the most valuable things that the author puts in the original. So I do not see any other approach to translation of poems by a poet as great and unique as Emily Dickinson. Only a complete translation of all Dickinson’s poems will adequately reveal her poetry and allow Russian linguists to approach the issue of the reception of her creativity in Russia as a whole. I would like to think that the poems of Emily Dickinson are only part of my life, but the encounter with the realia in her poems has brought her work and her world into my life completely.

*Tatiana Polezhakat was born in T’blisi and studied biology in North Ossetia. After many years teaching biology and ecology, she turned to poetry, publishing her own work and translations from English, beginning with Shakespeare’s sonnets in 2011. She is currently working on Dickinson’s poems while writing her dissertation on the poet at Tomsk State University.*

# “Min flod flyter mot dig”: Sextio dikter av Emily Dickinson [My River Flows to Thee: Sixty Poems of Emily Dickinson]

By Cynthia Hallen

Ann-Marie Vinde’s English-Swedish bilingual translation of sixty poems by Emily Dickinson (Bokverket, 2010) refutes the common assumption that poetry is impossible to translate. Grounded in philological sensibility, “Min flod flyter mot dig” achieves a delicate balance between what is lost in the native language with what is gained in the target language as recommended by translation historian George Steiner in *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. Vinde has an instinctive ear for Dickinson’s music, style, and diction, reminiscent of William Tyndale’s ear for English expression in his translation of the Bible from its source languages. Her sensitive balance of English and Swedish prosodic features is evident in phonological fidelity, syntactic flexibility, and semantic versatility.

After a brief introduction and an explanation of her commentary format, Vinde presents her selection of sixty Dickinson poems in the upper half of facing even-odd pages, with the English poem on the left side and the Swedish translation on the right side. She explains her translation decisions and alternatives in footnotes at the bottom of the facing pages. A rationale for the order of the selected poems is not transparent; however, the arrangement seems to have some thematic coherence, such as the sequential grouping of three “Hope is” definition poems: “*Hoppet*” är det där med fjädrar; *Hoppet* – en konstig uppfinning, and *Hoppet* – frossar i det tysta.

In the end matter pages, Vinde provides readers with an overview of Dickinson’s life and poetry (*Liv och diktnings*). She then addresses unique aspects of the poet’s form: stanzas, meters, enjambment, rhyme, capitalization, dashes, and variant spellings, followed by sections on Dickinson’s idiosyncratic style in terms of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs,

conjunctions, emphasis, ellipsis, polysemy, and allusions (*Form och språk hos Emily Dickinson*).

A window into Vinde’s method illuminates the next section of the supplementary materials. She begins by stating that translating Dickinson is no different from translating any other poet, in that it requires an understanding of the poet’s time, culture, worldview, language, and versification, as well as an awareness of scholarly resources and previous translations of the poem. The end material continues with a brief biography, highlighting Dr. Vinde’s work at Stockholm University as well as her previous translations of Dickinson and Ford Madox Ford.

The poems, translations, and accompaniments are neatly packed into a little blue-bound book, 5 x 8.5 inches, large enough to be legible yet small enough to make a handy travel companion. The size, layout, design, and font are exceptionally fine, especially the delicate water-color washes by Bruce Rogers on the white dust jacket.

As a translation consultant, I was able to read through many of the sixty Swedish translations with Dr. Vinde, asking questions about specific lexical substitutions and stylistic adaptations. For example, I asked why she had translated the word “find” with *spåra* instead of *hitta* in the closing line of “The Color of the Grave is Green.” Although *hitta* would have made a satisfying final off-rhyme with the preceding rendition of “Bonnet” as *hätta*, Vinde explained that the word *hitta* would have sounded too low or colloquial in the Swedish register. In a recent commentary, Vinde provides a more detailed explanation of her decision to sacrifice the rhyme in order to focus on the meaning: “The reason was that I

wanted to get at the characteristics of ferrets and what they were used for in ED’s day: their inquisitiveness and ability to burrow and drive/ferret out prey, to make the metaphor as clear as possible. . . . In doing so, I sacrificed the rhyme, as you pointed out, but thought that the last word of the previous line, *på* (which is stressed), with its long /å/ could compensate for that.” Such sensitive word-crafting is the mark of a master translator.

The translator’s phonological fidelity is manifest throughout the edition. For example, in the title poem, Vinde matches the /r/ alliteration of the English first line “My River runs to Thee” with an /r/ alliteration in *Min flod flyter mot dig*, rather than rendering a literal but less interesting line such as *Min oa rinner att dig*. Vinde preserves Dickinson’s semantic versatility in the poem by choosing *skimrande vrår* for “spotted nooks,” evoking the shimmering spots of light and shade in a secluded dell full of leafy trees. Vinde uses syntactic flexibility to adapt English meters to Swedish prosody. For example, in the final line of *Min flod flyter mot dig*, she matches the four syllables of the final line “Say Sea – take me?” with four syllables in Swedish: *Hav! – Tar du mig?*

For grammatical versatility, she uses the historical present *stänger* to capture the present and past tense ambiguity in the verb “shut” in “They shut me up in Prose.” Always careful in metrical matters, she chooses *enkelt* rather than *lätt* to render “easy as a Star.” Neither does Vinde neglect rhetorical figures, preserving the word repetition of “still” across the boundary from the first stanza to the second: *för “lugn” jag skulle bli –//Lugn!*

Many of Vinde’s Swedish translations can provide a better understanding of the original English versions of Dickinson’s poems. When



the poet-persona boasts of “Ballet knowledge” that could “lay a Prima – mad” in the poem “I cannot dance upon my Toes,” Vinde translates “mad” as “galen” denoting “crazy” but also connoting “enthralled,” with the etymological resonance of “en-trolled” in Old Swedish. In the last line of “A narrow Fellow in the Grass,” the “Zero at the Bone” effect of seeing a snake becomes *iskyla i märgen* in Swedish, which back-translates beautifully as “Ice in the Marrow.”

Vinde’s exquisite rendering of Dickinson’s style includes a thorough examination of previous translations of a poem into Swedish. In preparation for the *Min flod flyter mot dig* edition, she compiled an inventory of the twenty-seven Dickinson translators who produced 681 translations of 454 poems from 1931 to 2010: Blomberg, Andersson, Edfelt, Ekman, Bagger-Sjöbäck, Löfmarck, Hellström, Heyman, Hallqvist, von Haartman, Roos, Lindsten, Asplund, Bruno, Nilsson, Westin, Vilén, Swahn, Lindén, Nyberg, Reuterswärd, Valdén, Engdahl, Lundgren, Jäderlund, Tunedal with Vinde, and Ann-Marie Vinde herself. Such a compilation enabled Vinde to present Dickinson poems which had never before been translated into Swedish and facilitated a comparative analysis as she approached poems that had been previously translated.

Vinde studied four earlier translations of “I never saw a Moor” from Blomberg, Ekman, Löfmarck, and Valdén to create her own translation. Here I compare the first stanza of each, before reproducing Vinde’s full translation:

#### UTAN KARTA

*Jag har aldrig sett en hed,  
ej någonsin havet jag såg,  
och ändå vet jag hur ljungen ser ut  
och känner igen en väg.*  
(Erik Blomberg. *I: Nya tolkningar*. Stockholm: Bonniers, 1931)

#### UTAN KOMPASS

*Jag aldrig såg en hed,  
jag aldrig havet såg;*

*men nu vet jag vad en ljunghed är  
och känner havets väg.*  
(Nils Ekman, 1942)

*Jag ej sett en hed  
jag har ej sett ett hav;  
men vet ändå hur ljung ser ut  
och känner vågens slag.*  
(Ellen Löfmarck. *I: Emily Dickinson: en introduktion med lyriska tolkningar av Ellen Löfmarck*. Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 1950)

*Jag har aldrig sett Havet –  
aldrig sett en Hed –  
vet ändå vad en Bölja är –  
om Ljung vet jag besked.*  
(P.O. Valdén. *I: Engelsk poesi* C-G. Kristiansstad: Anglia förlag, 1994)

Vinde’s 2010 version features natural idiomatic language. Vinde retains the short meter prosody, the parallel structures, and word repetitions:

*Jag aldrig sett en hed.  
Jag aldrig sett havet –  
men vet ändå hur ljung ser ut  
och vad en bölja är –*

*Jag aldrig talat med Gud,  
i himlen aldrig gjort visit –  
men vet lika säkert var den är  
som om jag ägt biljett –*

The Swedish translations of Dickinson’s poems in “*Min flod flyter mot dig*” are neither strict literal renditions nor loose free interpretations. Vinde does not indulge in artificial adaptations, revisionist gimmicks, or impressionistic appropriations that are merely staged as poetic interpretations. Vinde’s stylistic finesse is reader-friendly, refreshingly comprehensive, philologically sound, rhetorically powerful, and academically rigorous. We can only hope that Dr. Vinde will continue to translate as many as possible of the 1,300-plus poems that have not yet made it into Swedish from Dickinson’s corpus of 1,789 poems.

#### Network! by Carol Samuelson-Woodson

Maid-of-Amherst, why can’t you  
Network like the others do?  
All you want to do is write  
In your chamber, late at night?  
Safe, inside your Father’s House  
No more gumption than a mouse?  
Introverted, tongue-tied, meek  
Demon-haunted, loath to speak?  
Monster father, mother’s dim?  
For companion, Horror’s Twin.  
You don’t care to live aloud?  
You get nervous in a crowd?  
You’re Old-Fashioned, Quaint, discreet –  
Awkward when you meet and greet?  
Well, my dear, that would explain  
Why Nobody knows your name.  
Don’t expect to make your mark  
Stitching poems up in the dark.  
Summon up some Yankee grit  
Posture, pose, get over it.  
Launch a journal – maybe two –  
Publish me, I’ll publish you.  
Liberate your auburn hair  
Choose your best white frock to wear,  
Gussied-up in your fine dress  
Make some noise, stand out, impress!  
Learn to do the herky jerk  
If you would promote your work.  
Words on paper aren’t enough  
Connect! Promote! And strut your stuff!  
Would-be poets, if they’re wise  
Get up, get out, advertise.  
Circulate and find your group,  
Write a poem for Chicken Soup.  
Lighten up, embrace the bog  
Croak a stanza with the frog.  
You must make a proper fuss  
Or you’ll end up posthumous.  
Reputation, stature, fame –  
All will perish with your name.  
You’re so busy even Death  
Finds you toiling, out of breath?  
Then, alas, that Carriage ride  
Over to the other side,  
Courtly though the driver be,  
Cancels Possibility.

## **“Emily Dickinson and the Textures of Mysticism, West and East” by Barton Levi St. Armand, presented at the 2007 Emily Dickinson International Society Conference, Kyoto, Japan, Sunday, August 5**

*The address is based on notes taken by Cynthia Hallen, and while it is important to mention that Barton Levi St. Armand has read and approved these notes, the piece is nevertheless as much a reconstruction as it is a transcript. If St. Armand's address reflected his own translation of a spiritual dimension of Dickinson's poems into a pattern drawn from his own understanding, a transcription is a receptive reader's appreciative translation of the address into a pattern constructed from her own moments of greatest enlightenment.*

This paper is dedicated to Ken Akiyama, professor of American Puritanism, who passed away in March 2007. I begin by quoting Rudyard Kipling's poem, "The Ballad of East and West": "Oh, east is east, and west is west, and never the twain shall meet." I will offer no car wash of political correctness: Emily Dickinson was no atheist. Emily Dickinson testifies of locality. She practiced her craft by Western mysticism. God is the maker of places: the flight of birds, the passing of summer, the death of loved ones passing on to the next realm.

Her compass points are home and heaven. The grave caused her to feel spiritual claustrophobia, leading her to seek for a portal, a conduit to the next realm of being. She sought a new dispensation of locality: a concrete geographic place, a happy home raised to an infinite power, a promised land. She has faith in her place in heaven. Again, Emily Dickinson was no atheist (Fr1420): she has the eternal things. In her poetic works, she relates her own heretical place: a deep eternal system of divine election; she purloins the Western view of Heaven in her own re-vision. She cannot leave out a personal God who understands suffering.

She believes that she will be born again into eternal love, with her beloved, in a Church of Two, through the mediation of the God of love. She believes in eternal marriage, making her mysticism closer to Mormonism than to any other religion. Nature is the witness of an eternal mar-

riage made in heaven, a match consummated in heaven and in eternity. She abolishes space and time but not place. She preserves her faith by narrowing it. She enacts a privatized transvaluation, *à la* William James.

Hers is a disciplined mysticism and a darker mysticism. The discipline comes from her belief in a mystic marriage, located in or beyond the grave. The discipline includes "orison," poetry as prayer, verse as meditation, the mind's detachment from outer sensations (compare Loyola's exercises). Her faith is non-Protestant. She believes in a union with her lover in a home-like heaven. She has recycled Romantic Calvinism; she has retooled New England Christianity to create a place of fulfillment, her own private gospel that is both lyrical and Gothic.

The dark side of her mysticism comes from doubt, suffering, and fear. Nevertheless, she has faith that redemption will lead her to her home in heaven (Fr 431; compare St. John of the Cross). Also, for Dickinson, transport equals revelation. Some mystical experiences are so overwhelming that they cannot be communicated in ordinary language. She writes of super-experience: sumptuous destitution (Fr348 "Evokes so sweet a Torment – / Such sumptuous – Despair"); a renunciation (Fr680 "eye upon the Heaven renounced"). She experiences something co-equal with God and Nature: "Heavenly Hurt" and "Imperial Affliction." She Bib-

licizes her experience (Fr 1342). In spite of doubt and pain, she cannot abolish a personal God who guarantees her place in Heavenly mansions. She is an authentic mystical poet. She documents Jamesian transport. She acknowledges a Deity who is a grand Creator and Designer.

Compare Basho's [eastern] Ur-Frog poem as translated by Peter Bylundson, "Old dark sleepy pool / Suddenly frog jumps / Kerplop, water splash!" with Dickinson's 1875 frog Demosthenes, "His Mansion in the Pool" (Fr 1355), changing from one state of being to another.

Dickinson's mystical lyrics are oratory, with the same etymological root as "orison," meaning "to speak." Dickinson emulates the God who speaks worlds into existence. There is a place for everything, and everything has its place. That is the ecology of her poems. There is a constant wobble in Dickinson's dualism; she is always questioning both faith and doubt. Her "white Election" is severe and persevering. Her works are grounded in the Western Tradition. She knows that the magic of eloquence can defraud us; nature can allure and deceive us. The bubble of dualism is about to break in her work. She does cherish surprises but does not want them to dismantle her world. She does not want to abolish the body, the self, the personal God. She is carried by the Western winds not by Eastern typhoons. As Wallace Stevens, that brilliant student of Japanese, once said: "Emily Dickinson cannot do without God."

## By Renée Bergland, Book Review Editor

**Crumbley, Paul and Heginbotham, Eleanor Elson, eds.**

*Dickinson's Fascicles: A Spectrum of Possibilities*. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2014. 279 pp. ISBN 978-0-8142-1259-2, Cloth, \$69.95

*Reviewed by Gabrielle Dean*

This volume is the product of a decade-long collaboration. It “gathers a range of scholarly perspectives” on the fascicles “in order to express the state of fascicle scholarship at this time.” “Differences of opinion regarding approaches to fascicle reading” are very much out in the open – no one approach is valorized, nor is a consensus enforced.

The essay collection begins, literally and symbolically, with an adaptation of the first chapter of Sharon Cameron’s 1992 *Choosing Not Choosing*. What follows is designed to showcase the long-term influence of Cameron’s central insight that the “nonnarrative, indeterminate, and highly disruptive attributes” of the fascicles constitute a key component of Dickinson’s work. Contributors often stake out positions distinct from Cameron and, occasionally, from each other. Melanie Hubbard, for example, in “The Word Made Flesh: Dickinson’s Variants and the Life of Language,” argues that “Dickinson’s fascicles prove to be neither coherent artistic structures nor especially deviant from what others of her time and place were doing. . . . These facts cast doubt on the metaphysical interpretation Sharon Cameron advances for the fascicles” (33). Paul Crumbley, on the other hand, in “‘This – was my finallest / Occasion –’: Fascicle 40 and Dickinson’s Aesthetic of Intrinsic

Renown,” states plainly that he builds on Cameron’s argument (192).

In addition to Cameron’s chapter and a brief coda by Susan Howe, there are eight chapters, sequenced to “clarify significant developments in fascicle scholarship that we think are made evident for the first time in this volume.” Thus, the volume is organized to highlight correspondences and disagreements among critics; while several of the chapters represent altogether new analyses, others, though perhaps derived from longer works by their authors, are refocused on the fascicles. The advantage of this schema is that seasoned readers of Dickinson criticism are treated to the most current, “state of the art” thinking about the fascicles; the frequent engagements with other landmark fascicle studies gave this reader the sense of a brilliant symposium. But there is also a drawback to this method: readers new to “fascicle fever” do not get a sense of the historical development of this discourse, and may feel a bit lost among the intra-references. This imbalance is partially corrected by Martha Nell Smith’s “Civil War(s) and Dickinson Manuscript Book Reconstructions, Deconstructed,” which offers a brief review of the history of the fascicles’ treatment by editors and critics from the late nineteenth century through the present. The other contributors, besides those already named and the two editors, include Domhnall Mitchell, Paula Bernat Bennett, Alexandra Socarides, and Ellen Louise Hart.

So where do we end up? Does a consensus emerge despite the editors’ commitment to the “spectrum”? This reader was tempted to keep score on the question of whether the

fascicles function as clusters of thematically related poems, constituting an essential feature of Dickinsonian poetics. But aside from a few strong advocates at the clear “yes” and “no” ends of this problem, many of essays here are noncommittal. Bennett, for example, extracts some fascinating Civil War resonances from pairs of poems in Fascicle 16 (“‘Looking at Death, is Dying’: Fascicle 16 in a Civil War Context”), but says quite clearly, “I am not suggesting nor do I believe that Dickinson deliberately set the fascicle up this way. There are many other ways in which these poems could be arranged for analysis” (127 – 8). Smith concurs, noting “whatever a writer’s, reader’s, or editor’s intentions, all arrangements tell stories beyond those intentions” (136). In short, Smith says, given the fascicles’ history of dismemberment and “rememberment,” and the fact that they represent copies, not original manuscripts to which we can assign definitive compositional dates, it is impossible to discern in them specific authorial intentions.

Thematic links may exist among poems in a fascicle: this could be the result of a scribal program – perhaps Dickinson was committed to assembling in a fascicle poems related by theme or date; it could be accidental, a scribal practice producing meaningful assemblies by chance; or it could be a readerly creation, a reflection of critical imagination. Where we end up, in fact, is back at the beginning of some of the most vexing critical problems of the post-structuralist era. If we read fascicles as inter-connected poetic cycles – even when we insert material considerations into our analyses, arguing for the primacy of the page or the bifolium, for example – are we not ultimately

The *Bulletin* welcomes notices of all Dickinson-related books, including those published outside the U.S.  
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reproducing the tenets of New Criticism? How important are authorial intention, biography, historical context, and materiality to formal analysis – and, by extension, how reliable or vital is formal analysis as a way of understanding poetry? If all methodologies similarly reproduce and thus validate their ideological foundations, what are we to “do” with texts like those we have inherited from Emily Dickinson, which, by virtue of the particular mysteries attending their production, are so open to such a variety of critical approaches?

Although the editors maintain that the purpose of the collection is to advance “a rich and exciting new field of enquiry” that is “now entering its infancy” (11), the volume amply demonstrates that scholarship on the fascicles is already mature. In fact, the very success of this collection gives rise to significant doubts about the future of fascicle scholarship *per se*. The volume’s real value may lie in the fact that it leads us away from looking at the fascicles in isolation. There are several ways forward – ways around or through questions like the ones above! – but all seem to require a larger scope. One path, as indicated by the essays by Hubbard and Socarides, is to investigate readerly and writerly practices in Dickinson’s time: her own paper workshop, in Socarides’ essay; contemporary compositional training and mark-up, in Hubbard’s. Another is to look at everyday life and popular culture in Dickinson’s milieu: the omnipresence of death in both peace- and wartime, as noted by several contributors; the role of transient phenomena like Spiritualism, which Heginbotham examines in tandem with “magical transformation” in Fascicle 8. And still another is to take Dickinson’s literary crushes seriously: her immersion in a trans-Atlantic poetic enterprise in which sentimental, experimental, and didactic elements co-existed, as suggested by essays by Bennett, Mitchell, and Hart.

In short, if we are to learn how to read the fascicles – not to mention the printed publications, letters, “scraps,” and everything in between – we may need to read them in relation,

which is the tendency of the critics assembled in this *Spectrum*.

What the fascicles have taught us over the past several decades, as this book intimates, is that we might do well in all these further possibilities to admit greater degrees of both critical uncertainty and adventure. Given the complicated history of the fascicles, it may not be Dickinson who chose not to choose; it may be, instead, the Dickinson critic who is bound not to do so.

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#### Rohrbach, Augusta

*Thinking Outside the Book*. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014. 180 pp. ISBN 978-1-62534-126-6, Paper, \$24.95

#### Reviewed by Gabrielle Dean

This book, Augusta Rohrbach’s second, is ambitious, even valiant. In each of five chapters framed by an introduction and an epilogue, she navigates a way through the complex textual remains of a different “marginal” American woman writer of the nineteenth century; each chapter also serves as a meditation on a specific term within an “alternate typology” of textual production that Rohrbach develops to interpolate book history and digital culture. Chapter 1, for example, about Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, is titled “(Re)Mediation (Literacy Rethought)”; it focuses on Schoolcraft’s ability to bridge oral and literate traditions in her writings – and the consequences for her status as an author that result from her choices of publication forms. Later chapters take up Sojourner Truth, Hannah Crafts, Augusta Jane Evans, and Mary Boykin Chesnut. These writers present particular problems in terms of American literary history and material history, which can be addressed in part by seeing them through the lens of new media.

As I say, this is an ambitious book – brave but imperfect – which to my mind is much

more interesting than tractable and perfect. What I think is best about *Thinking Outside the Book* is Rohrbach’s ecumenical exploration of the diverse archives her writers have left behind: she is equal to the task of sifting through diaries, handwritten small circulation magazines, engraved frontispieces, photographic *cartes de visite*, manuscripts, printed books, and reprints, not to mention a variety of genres and genre hybrids, and she is able to put many of these forms into relation with questions provoked by digital forms. Rohrbach models a *respect des fonds* that is admirable – she lets the materials, in all their strangeness, shape the questions, rather than impose “flavor of the month” concerns on them. But the discursive juggling required by such a project – the variety of critical frameworks Rohrbach must also invoke in order to do justice to this panoply of materials – proves to be a bit much for the juggler. The premises she sets up in her introduction and inspects in her “typological” meditations may seem simplistic to Dickinson scholars who have long negotiated the relationships between print, manuscript, and digital forms, the ethics of editorial intervention, the status of authorship for women writers, and the tension between ear and eye. Likewise, while Rohrbach makes good use of the insights of book history and textual studies scholars like Robert Darnton, Jerome McGann, and John Bryant, one wonders where folks like Peter Schillingsburg and David Greetham are in her analysis of multimodal textuality, or Ellen Gruber Garvey in her analysis of nineteenth-century “low profile” textual materiality, or indeed the many Dickinson critics who have picked their way through these thickets before.

The book feels, overall, a bit rushed. Why does Roland Barthes need to be our expert on how “nineteenth-century viewers understood the relationship between the subject and its photographic representation” (38)? Why are the differences between the two versions of Sojourner Truth’s famous speech barely addressed? Why is Matthew Kirschenbaum referred to twice as “Michael” Kirschenbaum? One rarely wants an academic book to be



longer and more footnoted, but in this case, I would have appreciated some more description and exposition of the materials Rohrbach has unearthed so lovingly, and some more research and care – on her part, and on the part of her reviewers and editors – in looping them in to historical and critical networks. I also think such a wonderfully interdisciplinary book deserves a bibliography.

But these are quibbles, really. I mention these flaws so that you, when you read the book, will be inoculated against them, and can spend your time savoring what it offers instead. It will be a very good read for those who want to see Dickinson's work in the context of a much more materially diverse and unruly nineteenth-century literary culture than we are usually wont to engage, and understand her place among a larger sorority of American writers who chose not to tie their fortunes to establishment vehicles like the book.

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## Intimate Portraits

### Christian Bobin

*The Lady in White*. Translated by Alison Anderson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014. 80 pp. Paperback, 978-0-8032-4565-5, \$16.95. Published in France in 2007 as *La Dame Blanche*.

### Susan Snively

*The Heart Has Many Doors: A Novel of Emily Dickinson*. Amherst: White River Press, 2015. 273 pp. Paperback, 978-1-935052-69-2, \$21.

### William Nicholson

*Amherst: A Novel*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015. 287 pp. Cloth, 978-1-4767-4040-9, \$26. Published in England as *The Lovers of Amherst*.

Last summer, this reviewer went on a tour of Edna St. Vincent Millay's house in upstate New York. We had just

climbed the stairs where the poet met her death when one tourist lost it. She screamed that we disgusted her and that the tour was prurient, and ran from the house spelling out "PRURIENT" at the top of her lungs.

I share a bit of that tourist's squeamishness. The relentless focus on Dickinson's intimate life can make me impatient. But sometimes such attention pays off. In the past few months, a French essayist, an American poet, and a British screenwriter novelist have published creative works about Dickinson. Although they are quite different from each other in style, all three books offer startlingly intimate views of Dickinson.

Christian Bobin is literary essayist and a poet who won the *Prix des Deux Magots* in 1992. He is often described as a recluse. *La Dame Blanche* was published in France five years ago, to much acclaim, and the 2014 translation by Alison Anderson is graceful. *The Lady in White* is a dreamy and sometimes hauntingly beautiful meditation on Dickinson and death, as well as a glancing account of her life. Literary responses to Dickinson tend to construct narratives that focus on sex and sexuality. In contrast, Bobin's evocative writing jumps around in time, offering a sequence more thematic than narrative. The modernist structure and the insistent, almost prayerful focus on Dickinson's mortality work together to make the book oddly refreshing, new.

For Bobin, Dickinson is "the saint of the everyday." On the first page, Emily dies. She turns "her face to the invisible sun; for two years, it had been consuming her soul as if it were frail incense paper. Death filled the entire room, all at once." On the last page, Bobin characterizes Dickinson as having "a heart so pure that a bee can fly through it like a bullet, and nothing of the outside world can enter." He describes "the last of the hundred of letters that Em-

ily wrote – two words falling from a dying soul, like snowdrops at the foot of a cherry tree: 'Called back.'" As these excerpts show, Bobin's writing is lyrical, somewhat cryptic, and a little over the top. It is also dazzling.

Not to be outdazzled, Susan Snively has written a narrative that is daring in a completely different way. Snively has published four books of poetry and is a guide at the Emily Dickinson Museum. Although her book has a more conventional narrative structure, in some ways it is the boldest of the works under consideration here.

*The Heart Has Many Doors* imagines the relationship between Emily Dickinson and Otis Phillips Lord, quoting liberally from some poems and letters that survive in the archive, but also from others concocted by Snively herself, in the voices of the judge and the poet. She takes bold imaginative liberties, but Snively's sensibilities are in tune with Dickinson's. Her novel is affecting, fresh, and passionate.

Both Snively's dialogue and her interior monologue are pitch-perfect. When Dickinson and her father are stranded on the train from Boston during a snowstorm, they sleep close to each other, embracing: "Back and forth, half asleep, she crossed from world to world, home to elsewhere, nowhere, anywhere. Her mind was a boat, a carriage, a train, a sled, a cradle a bed in a town by the sea, or a room guarded by snowy hemlocks." The scene and the prose are Snively's, but the sensibility is pure Dickinson.

The recently knighted William Nicholson, the British screenwriter of *Shadowlands*, *Mandela*, and *Gladiator* (among others), is also a prolific novelist who has written books for adults and children. *Amherst: A Novel* is the sixth book in a loosely connected series of contemporary novels: *The Secret Intensity of Everyday Life* (2009),

*All the Hopeful Lovers* (2010), *The Golden Hour* (2011), *Motherland* (2013), and *Reckless* (2014). Nicholson writes, “These novels begin to get close to my deepest ambition, which is to write truthfully about our lives today” (*WilliamNicholson.com/bio*). It may surprise many readers that in order to write truthfully about our times, Nicholson has turned to Dickinson; EDIS members may understand his impulse.

*Amherst* offers parallel narratives. The framing narrative is from the point of view of a young British woman (coincidentally named Alice Dickinson) who visits Amherst to write a screenplay about Austin and Mabel. The framed story (which might be a novelistic version of her screenplay) describes that nineteenth century love affair. In both narratives, Emily Dickinson is generally offstage, but her presence looms large. The fictional Alice and her erstwhile lover, Nick Crocker, an extremely sexy quinquagenarian poetry professor in despair over his failures as a husband and a scholar, are most definitely imagined as our exact contemporaries: they meet at Rao’s and drink the same frothy coffee that so many Dickinsonians have also drunk. But since the general theme of the book is “Adultery in Amherst” (6), the protagonists don’t stop at blueberry muffins.

As it turns out, all three of these recent books focus on Dickinson’s body and her desires. Bobin offers an intimate meditation on her life as viewed through her death. Snively imagines her in the arms of her father and her beloved family friend. Nicholson puts her outside the door, listening to her brother and his lover, feeding her poetic imagination. And yet I would not say that any of these accounts are prurient. Dickinson is fair game – her poetry bares a soul and relentlessly inquires about its connection to a body. It makes sense that thoughtful writers might turn toward her when they want to write truthfully about our lives today.

### Briefly Noted

#### Damon Young

*Voltaire’s Vine and Other Philosophies: How Gardens Inspired Great Writers*. London: Rider, 2014. Cloth, 9781846044175, £12.99.

First published in Australia in 2012, *Voltaire’s Vine* is an engaging general audience book that offers brief meditations on the role that gardens played in the lives of Jane Austen, Marcel Proust, Leonard Woolf, Friedrich Nietzsche, Colette, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, George Orwell, Emily Dickinson, Nikos Kazantzakis, Jean Paul Sartre, and, finally, Voltaire. Damon Young describes gardens as “an invitation to philosophy,” and his vignettes are inviting indeed. The Dickinson chapter is sandwiched between Orwell and Kazantzakis, and as it turns out, these juxtapositions work very well. Dickinson’s “Acres of Perhaps” add dimension to this charming book.

#### Jerome McGann

*The Poet Edgar Allan Poe: Alien Angel*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014. 241 pp. Cloth, 978-0-674-41666-6, \$24.95.

Although Jerome McGann mentions Dickinson only a few times, his study of Poe’s poetics may prove useful and interesting to many Dickinson scholars. Poe’s “poetry remains to this day terra incognita for many American scholars and teachers,” but McGann puts this often ignored poetry (and the marginalia and essays that Poe wrote about poetics) into conversation with British Romanticism (from Coleridge to Swinburne), with the American Renaissance (represented by Emerson and Whitman), and with the moderns (American poets Stein, Eliot, and Williams; French poets Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Valéry). McGann argues that Poe’s “Modern Idiom” challenges the “High Romanticism” that has shaped American attitudes toward poetry and poetics for centuries. Ultimately, he agrees with Swinburne,

Mallarmé, Stein, and – most of all – William Carlos Williams, who described Poe’s writing as “itself ‘the New World’” (205).

#### Nancy McCabe

*From Little Houses to Little Women: Revisiting a Literary Childhood*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2014. 263 pp. Cloth, 978-0-8262-2044-8, \$29.95.

Readers who are interested in Children’s Literature (particularly classic girl’s books) and in author’s house museums might like this account of Nancy McCabe’s travels with her daughter to sites associated with Laura Ingalls Wilder, Maud Hart Lovelace, Louisa May Alcott, and Emily Dickinson. At times the book wanders a bit, which can be frustrating (although it is certainly appropriate to its subject). But the Dickinson chapter that concludes the book is far and away the best. Both the author and her daughter come alive on the pages that describe visiting the Homestead and Dickinson’s grave.

**Alfred Bendixen and Stephen Burt, Eds.** *Cambridge History of American Poetry*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. 1326 pp. Cloth, 978-1107003361, \$165.

There are fifty essays in this hefty volume, including “Emily Dickinson: The Poetics and Practice of Autonomy” by Wendy Martin, which is a thoughtful introduction to Dickinson. All of the contributors are distinguished scholars, and the essays are of high quality across the board. Essays by Faith Barrett, Virginia Jackson, Mary Loeffelholz, Cristanne Miller, and Eliza Richards might be of particular interest to EDIS members. If your library provides online access (Cambridge Histories Online, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CHO9780511762284>) this could be an invaluable teaching tool. If not, it may be worth getting hold of the book itself, since the essays are smart, reliable, and accessible, and the volume is quite comprehensive.

# The Belle on Broadway: Joely Richardson Portrays Emily Dickinson

By Elizabeth Petrino

I look at words as if they were entities, sacred beings,” pronounces Emily Dickinson in William Luce’s one-woman play, *The Belle of Amherst*. The play insists on this reverence for words, stringing lines from Dickinson’s poems and letters together so that they sparkle with gem-like vividness and cast a bright light on the poet’s famously enigmatic life. Some actors might shy away from this demanding role – but Joely Richardson, sister to Natasha Richardson and daughter of Vanessa Redgrave, was up to the challenge. Her performance in the Broadway revival of *The Belle of Amherst* in New York City in October and November 2014 was intelligent and packed with emotion.

Set in 1883, when the poet was fifty-three years old, the play dramatizes Dickinson’s life and captures many of the most affecting moments of her youth and adulthood. Rather than imagine a quirky recluse, Luce envisions a normal child whose teenage years were full of promise and rebellion. In his introduction, Luce, who specializes in one-person plays (including *Lillian* [1986] about the life of Lillian Hellman and *Barrymore* [1996] which starred Christopher Plummer as John Barrymore), writes that *The Belle* reveals “a love affair with language, a celebration of all that is beautiful and poignant in life.” Those familiar with Dickinson’s life will revel in the scenes of real and imagined encounters with friends and acquaintances – we hear of her adoration for Shakespeare and her refusal to cross out the “questionable” passages while a

student, and we witness an unrequited flirtation at a dance with James Francis Bailey, for whose benefit she affects an interest in cooking until his attention wanders (“It seems Mr. Billings found the pretty girl in yellow”).

The opening act also depicts her deep and intense relationship with her brother, Austin, with whom she facetiously compares numbers of valentines received; her witty comments during evenings reading from the newspaper to her sister, Lavinia; her fear of her father, from whom she hid the fact she could not tell time after he taught her; and her refusal to profess her willingness to become a Christian during her training at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. Her family accommodated her brilliance and promise, as evidenced by her father’s special dispensation that she might write at night, after she reads him several of her poems (“Cancel the rule for me? Then I can sleep late in the morning. Oh, thank you, Father!”). Ecstatically, she anticipates a long-awaited visit from Thomas Wentworth Higginson, her correspondent, who she hopes will publish her poems (“Face to face at last! Now – now we can accomplish something!”).

Luce envisions a brilliant poet who wanted desperately to publish but wrote for a generation tone-deaf to her experimental verse. The inevitable disappointment follows – Higginson offers a lukewarm response and some tentative criticism, and she sobers up about her future prospects as a writer, declaiming: “A great Hope fell / You heard no noise / The Ruin was within.” The evolution

from Dickinson’s early literary ambition to her resignation about publication is nowhere better represented than in concluding lines of each act: whereas at the end of Act I she anticipates becoming publicly known with Higginson’s support (“He’s coming! He’s coming”), she resigns herself to a longer-lasting fame by the play’s end, affirming her constancy and self-possession to her sister: “Vinnie, I’m here!”

Expertly acted and staged, the production made the most of historical connections that would interest an avid reader of Dickinson. The Westside Theatre, located in the heart of Broadway near Times Square, itself has a significant history: originally an 1890s Baptist Church, the structure was converted into a theater and, briefly, a discotheque, before it became the original home of Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues*. The left-side of the stage portrayed a view of Dickinson’s bedroom with a small writing table, chimney lamp, and trunk that contained her poems; on the opposite side, a living room appeared with a bookshelf, framed photographs, and a tea table, set for visitors, while in the background three full-length windows and a set of French doors were visible. Visitors to the Emily Dickinson Museum might have recognized a replica of the Franklin stove, and the wallpaper – light blue with large flowers and gold and olive branches – suggested the paper recently discovered in the poet’s bedroom.

Tall and slender, Joely Richardson differs from Dickinson’s description of



herself as “small, like the wren,” yet, as Richardson commented after the performance, voice and gesture can convey much more about a character than mere physical resemblance. (A brief clip of her performance is available on the *New York Times* website at <http://nyti.ms/1sUzwe9>.)

American audiences may know the British actor from her performances in films, produced both in the UK and US, including Peter Greenaway’s classic cult film *Drowning by Numbers* (1988) and Mel Gibson’s *The Patriot* (2000), as well as television (she performed for five seasons on the series *Nip/Tuck*, for which she was nominated twice for a Golden Globe Award). Although *The Belle of Amherst* is a far cry from *Nip/Tuck*, perhaps it was even more of a challenge for Richardson to disassociate the role from Julie Harris, who originated it in 1976. Richardson said that she avoided watching the widely available filmed version of *The Belle* performed by Harris (for whom Luce wrote the play and who won a Tony Award for her portrayal). She also avoided reading biographies, choosing to read Dickinson’s letters instead, in order to develop her own perspective. “Her love affair was with her mind,” Richardson said. “She was childlike and a part of her didn’t want to grow up.”

Richardson’s intense, often ebullient portrayal of Dickinson was surprisingly affecting. She balanced the acute intelligence and striking observations of the mature poet with a fey, childlike demeanor. Moving around on the stage, she projected her arms in mid-air, stood



photo Credit: Carol Rosegg

Joely Richardson as Emily Dickinson in the Westside Theatre production of *The Belle of Amherst*

on a trunk, fanned herself demurely, and balanced a book on her head, among other gestures – in short, she made the performance physically varied and intriguing.

Overall, the play disrupted familiar ideas about the reasons for Dickinson’s isolation in order to pack an emotional wallop: In one key scene, Dickinson recalls hearing Charles Wadsworth, a Presbyterian minister whom Luce believes was the “Master” of her letters, preach while in Philadelphia; in another she almost decides to run off with another lover, but after Vinnie responds by running to the Evergreens “like a raving lunatic,” Dickinson touchingly resolves to stay with her sister (“Everyone is somewhere, but Emily. Emily is here. Always here.”). Perhaps the most powerful moment occurs toward the end of the play during her recounting of the death of her eight-year old nephew, Gilbert. In the last scene, the room

goes dark and lightning flashes. Overcome with emotion, she recites lines from a series of poems, including “A Wife – at Daybreak – I shall be –”: “Eternity – I’m coming – Sir – / Master – I’ve seen the Face – before –” (Fr185).

Richardson’s compelling performance moved the audience to understand both the enormous sacrifice and the freedom of Dickinson’s life. For those willing to sample literary fare in the theater, *The Belle of Amherst* turns out to be a surprisingly gratifying treat. Future productions will continue to fascinate audiences and keep them contemplating Dickinson’s words for years to come.

*Elizabeth Petrino teaches courses in nineteenth-century and early American literature at Fairfield University in Connecticut. She is the author of Emily Dickinson and Her Contemporaries: Women’s Verse in America, 1820-1885, and she is Membership Chair of EDIS.*

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### Setting Out by George Monteiro

Mornings, before starting down to her day, she salted the pocket of her clean apron with a pencil stub and a scrap of paper, folded once – so that she need not search about for the wherewithal to squirrel away a sudden thought or secure a singular word, as she played at domesticity.

Sept. 22, 2013

# Dickinson in Her Elements: Annual Meeting 2015

The Emily Dickinson International Society will hold its 2015 annual meeting in Amherst, from August 7 – 9. The meeting will feature workshops focusing on poems that address aspects of the four elements, Earth, Air, Water, and Fire, and, during the discussion, coordinators for the workshops, including Antoine Cazé, Stephanie Farrar, James Guthrie, Ellen Hart, Eleanor Heginbotham, Lois Kackley, Dan Manheim, and Elizabeth Petrino, will welcome connections to other poems from the participants for collaborative discussion. There will also be special activities associated with the elements: gardening and archeology for Earth; Lake Hitchcock for Water; apiology and meteorology for Air; and protection of authors' homes for Fire. Participants will also be offered the opportunity to enjoy musical entertainment provided by Red Sky Music Ensemble; hikes along Amherst's literary trails; a visit to the Amherst College Wilder Observatory; and tarot readings by poet Dana Weir. Online registration is accessible from the EDIS website.



From left: Marta Werner, Cody Marrs, Michelle Kohler

The program will center in three plenary addresses by Marta Werner, author of *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios: Scenes of Reading, Surfaces of Writing* and editor of *Radical Scatters: An Electronic Archive of Emily Dickinson's Late Fragments*; Cody Marrs, whose book *Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Long Civil War* is mere weeks from publication, and Michelle Kohler, author of *Miles of Stare: Transcendentalism and the Problem of Literary Vision in Nineteenth-Century America*.

## Critical Institute

Running concomitantly with the general program, there will once again be a Critical Institute. The Institute will be made up of scholars discussing the Elements of Dickinson in six groups: Sociality and Communication, led by Alex Socarides; War and Death, led by Eliza Richards; Inspiration and Atmosphere, led by Mary Loeffelholz; Scale and the Scientific Imagination, led by Karen Sanchez-Eppler; Thinking/Being, led by Christopher Benfey; and Ecology and Nature, led by Michelle Kohler. At the Critical Institute sessions, 31 scholars will have the opportunity to share their projects in progress with group leaders and with four or five others working on related material, all with a view to enhancing their – and their ultimate readers' – understanding of Emily Dickinson in her Elements.

Cake is the Thing with Frosting

By Felicia Nimue Ackerman

Cake is the thing with frosting –  
That perches on the plate –  
And fills your heart with joy until –  
You think about – your weight –

And sweetness – in the mouth – is loved –  
And stern must be the scale –  
That shows you how your fleeting bliss  
Is followed by travail –

I've seen my weight go creeping up –  
Whene'er I have a spree --  
The scale in its severity  
Is merciless – to me.

***EDIS Members are invited to endow a named award. All it takes is a gift of \$1000 to the Society!***

## Emily Dickinson Program at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst, July 17-19

Come explore Emily Dickinson's passions as poet, gardener, and cook July 17 – 19, 2015 in Amherst. Beginning Friday afternoon and concluding Sunday morning there will be a program devoted to the life and works of one of America's greatest poets.

Offered as a fundraiser by the Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst, the program also includes private tours of The Homestead and The Evergreens (home of Dickinson's brother Austin and his wife Susan); visits to the poet's gardens and grave; a trolley tour of Dickinson landmarks; poetry discussions and readings; musical performances; and visits to local Dickinson collections.

The program fee of \$400 per person includes all admissions, tours and activities, refreshments and four meals. It does not include transportation to Amherst or lodgings. Optional lodging is available for \$75 per person per night in the homes of members of the UU Society.

**Marta McDowell**, landscape historian, garden writer, and author of *Emily Dickinson's Gardens*, will present "Would You Like Summer?" – a discussion of the fruits and vegetables that graced the poet's garden and table. On Saturday, she will discuss the basic techniques for mounting herbarium specimens and creating flower-decorated cards.

**Aife Murray** is the author of *Maid as Muse: How Servants Changed Emily Dickinson's Life and Language*. In "Taste Of Ours!" she will lead participants in making Dickinson family recipes while she describes some of the baking challenges of the poet's 19th century kitchen, the role played by household chores in Dickinson's literary process, and how baking served as literary inspiration. The morning's culinary treats will be tasted at a Victorian tea that afternoon over a discussion of Dickinson's poetry.

**Jane Wald**, Executive Director of The Emily Dickinson Museum, will present, as part of the UU Sunday morning service, "I am glad there are Books. They are better than Heaven: What did the Dickinsons Really Read?" Dickinson refused to become a full member of her family's church and called herself a "pagan," but she knew the Bible backwards and forwards and often spoke of faith in her poetry. An examination of her family's libraries can cast more light on Dickinson's personal theological explorations in the context of 19th century religious movements.

Contact: Janis S. Gray, Coordinator, 413-259-1584; jsgrey@crocker.com. For more information, visit <http://www.uusocietyamherst.org/EmilyDickinsonEducationalWeekend.aspx>, email [office@uusocietyamherst.org](mailto:office@uusocietyamherst.org), phone 413-253-2848 or write to the Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst, P.O. Box 502, Amherst MA 01004-0502

### EDIS Membership Form

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

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(All of the above Members receive both the *Emily Dickinson Journal* and the *Bulletin*)

Associate Member  \$20.00 (*Bulletin* only)

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

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# “PERIODS OF PAIN”: EMILY DICKINSON AND LYDIA E. PINKHAM

By George Monteiro

Apparently Emily Dickinson’s first editors, Thomas Wentworth Higginson and Mabel Loomis Todd, thought highly of the poem, for under the title “The Mystery of Pain” (added editorially) they chose to include it in *Poems* (1890), the first of the three volumes of Dickinson’s poetry published posthumously in the 1890s.

Pain has an element of blank;  
It cannot recollect  
When it began, or if there were  
A day when it was not.

It has no future but itself,  
Its infinite realms contain  
Its past, enlightened to perceive  
New periods of pain.

Among the commentaries on this poem is Clark Griffith’s interpretation in 1964 that Dickinson’s veiled reference to menstruation in the last line ties in to her larger and deeper vision of human experience as “the vision of a recurring hell.” Griffith continues: “This is her unique subject: the portrayals of New Periods – of Pain. And we need only look at the subject, and at the way she habitually structures it, to see that it conforms exactly to the preparation, the fact, the release, and the new preparation which are the basic stages of the menstrual cycle.”

So, to cut to the chase, I thought it might be useful to look into the usage of the phrase “periods of pain” in her time. Search-engines have made it feasible to search for the phrase in the pages of a significantly large number of nineteenth-century newspapers and journals from across the country. The three appearances of the phrase “periods of pain” before 1890 referred to the physical pain of men, including Prince Leopold. There was no connection of the phrase with women in these instances, let alone to men-

**PERIODS OF PAIN.**

Menstruation, the balance wheel of woman's life, is also the bane of existence to many because it means a time of great suffering.

While no woman is entirely free from periodical pain, it does not seem to have been nature's plan that women otherwise healthy should suffer so severely.

**Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound** is the most thorough female regulator known to medical science. It relieves the condition that produces so much discomfort and robs menstruation of its terrors. Here is proof:

**DEAR MRS. PINKHAM:**—How can I thank you enough for what you have done for me? When I wrote to you I was suffering untold pain at time of menstruation; was nervous, had headache all the time, no appetite, that tired feeling, and did not care for anything. I have taken three bottles of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, one of Blood Purifier, two boxes of Liver Pills, and to-day I am a well person. I would like to have those who suffer know that I am one of the many who have been cured of female complaints by your wonderful medicine and advice.

—Miss JENNIE B. MILLS, Leon, Wis.

If you are suffering in this way, write as Miss Mills did to Mrs. Pinkham at Lynn, Mass., for the advice which she offers free of charge to all women.



struation. In the 1890s, several years after Dickinson’s poem was published, it was another matter. The phrase began to appear in advertisements. Someone writing ads for Lydia E. Pinkham’s Vegetable Compound picked up the phrase and associated it with menstruation. Versions of these ads appeared in newspapers throughout the United States – Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Missouri, South Carolina, Georgia, Texas, and Washington. Griffith may have been the first Dickinson scholar

to associate the poet’s use of the phrase “periods of pain” with menstruation, but the anonymous adman for Lydia E. Pinkham, whether or not he got the idea from Dickinson’s poem, deserves credit for first making the connection in print.

The example at right, taken from page 2 of the *Grand Rapids Herald* for March 11, 1898, is typical of the Lydia E. Pinkham ads.

It probably will never be proven, but I would like to think that the author of this ad was a reader of Emily Dickinson’s poetry who was not above putting her words to use in selling the product.

### Notes

*Poems* (1890 – 1896) by Emily Dickinson, ed. George Monteiro (Gainesville, Florida: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1967), p. 33.

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“Eight Years of Torture,” *Alexandria Gazette and Virginia Advertiser* (Jan. 9, 1872), p. 2; “The Ills of the Flesh,” *New York Herald* (Feb. 11, 1878), p. 2; and “Scattering Shots,” *Bismarck Daily Tribune* (Mar. 11, 1887), p. 2.

“Periods of Pain,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Mar. 12, 1898), p. 13; (June 4, 1898), p. 13; “Periods of Pain,” *Kansas City Star* (June 2, 1898), p. 2; (Sept. 27, 1898), p. 8; *Tacoma Daily News* (June 2, 1898), p. 6; “Periods of Pain,” *New-England Homestead*, 37 (July 30, 1898), 117, and 38 (Feb. 11, 1899), 187; *Biloxi Herald* (Aug. 20, 1898), p. 2; *Duluth News Tribune* (Oct. 14, 1898), p. 2; *Grand Forks Herald* (Jan. 6, 1899), p. 2; *San Antonio Express* (Jan. 7, 1899), p. 3; (*Columbia, South Carolina*) *The State* (Jan. 7, 1899), p. 3; (*Georgia*) *Macon Weekly Telegraph* (Mar. 14, 1899), p. 5; “Backache and Despondency,” *Boston Daily Globe* (Feb. 4, 1907), p. 12; and (*Georgia*) *Columbus Daily Enquirer* (May 25, 1907), p. 2.



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glim-mers — flits — glim-mers — proves — dis - solves — proves — dis - solves — flits — glim-mers — proves — dis - solves — flits — glim-mers — proves — dis -

*mp* 'Tis this — in - vites — ap - palls — en - dows — flits — glim-mers — proves — dis -

*mp* 'Tis this — in - vites — ap - palls — en - dows — flits — glim-mers — dis -

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solves — Re - turns — Re - turns — sug - gests — con - victs — en - solves — Re - turns — re - turns — sug - gests — con - victs, — con - victs — en - solves — Re - turns — Re - turns — sug - gests — con - solves — Re - turns — re - turns — sug - gests — re - turns — con - victs — en -

*mf* *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*

*mf* *sim.*

*mf* *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*

***This - was different - 'Twas Translation - Of all tunes I knew - and more -***

VIII. Farewell

Emily Dickinson

Michael Conley

Soprano  
Tie the strings — to my life, my Lord, Then I an rea- dy — to go! Just a look — at the

Alto  
Tie the strings — to my life, my Lord, Then I an rea- dy — to go! Just a look — at the

Tenor  
Tie the strings — to my life, my Lord, Then I an rea- dy — to go! Just a look — at the

Bass  
Tie the strings — to my life, my Lord, Then I an rea- dy — to go! Just a look — at the

Violin I  
Violin II  
Mids  
Cello  
Double Bass

*Above, from Alice Parker's setting of "The Love a Life can show Below," (Fr285)  
Below, from Michael Conley's "Farewell," a setting of "Tie the strings to my Life, My Lord" (Fr338)*

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