

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

THE CIRCUMFERENCE OF HOME

THE THIRD EDIS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE, 1999

By Domhnall Mitchell and Maria Stuart

One hundred and fifty-one years after she left, Emily Dickinson returned to the grounds of Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, this time as the sole focus of a four-day international conference featuring 155 delegates from sixteen countries and five continents.

In the opening ceremonies, the former "no-hoper" was welcomed back on behalf of the college by Martha Ackmann, conference co-director, and by Joanne Creighton, Mount Holyoke's president. Creighton set the tone for what followed by commenting on Dickinson's intensely home-centered life combined with her concern for circumference. Former EDIS president Vivian Pollak offered a tribute to the late Margaret Dickie, who served as program chair for the Society's Innsbruck conference. Finally, Gary Lee Stonum, program chair for this, the third EDIS conference, spoke of exciting times in Emily Dickinson scholarship, and the next few days bore this out.

Open days at the Evergreens and the Dickinson Homestead and an afternoon reception between the houses allowed delegates a glimpse into ongoing renovation and research projects. There were also major exhibits on Dickinson at the Frost Library of Amherst College and Amherst's Jones Library. The social aspects of this conference made it not only intellectually stimulating but enjoyable. The dine-around, where members of the EDIS Board invited people to join them

at a variety of sites in Amherst and Northampton, proved particularly successful.

This EDIS conference coincided with the publication of a new reader's edition of Dickinson's poems, edited by Ralph Frank-



Photo by Martha Ackmann

Our faithful yellow bus, dubbed "I love to see it lap the miles," transported conference delegates from five continents between South Hadley and Amherst throughout the conference.

lin, and the Society recognized Franklin's contribution to Dickinson studies at a Friday night banquet at which he was the recipient of a distinguished service award. (See page 4.) True to the Dickinson spirit, Franklin could not be present at the ceremony but was later pleased to accept the award in person from Daniel Lombardo.

A bus trip to Cambridge offered delegates a poetry reading by Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Jorie Graham, and a glimpse of a major exhibition at Harvard University's Houghton Library entitled "Emily Dickinson: A Life in Writing, 1830-1999." Organized by guest curator Mary Loeffelholz of Northeastern University, the exhibition brilliantly charted Dickinson's evolving relationship with her own writing and the

posthumous constructions of that relationship.

At one level, both the physical site and the title of this year's conference, "Emily Dickinson at Home," invited attention to the specific, material circumstances in which the poet lived and wrote: the Connecticut River Valley in the mid- to late nineteenth century. The beautiful grounds and Victorian ambience of the buildings at Mount Holyoke provided an appropriate setting with which to signal an interest in historical issues. Speakers responded with a diversity of papers on the immediate contexts for this poet's work: aspects of Victorian culture, collections of nineteenth-century art, and the Civil War were just some of the topics covered.

The four days of papers were flanked by particularly lively opening and closing sessions. As perhaps a variation on ideas of home and community, the conference had invited two speakers from outside the immediate field of Dickinson scholarship to open the conference. Both Heinz Ickstadt and Marjorie Perloff expressed a shared sense of being "outsiders" from the Dickinson community, yet both proceeded to offer stimulating overviews of the development of Dickinson studies.

Ickstadt began by charting the construction and reconstruction of Dickinson in various critical hands (from the first reception of her work, through the early stages of American Modernism, up to more recent Poststructuralist readings),

while Perloff focused on the attitude of Deconstruction, arguing that Dickinson has been relatively unacknowledged by this particular school because her poetry is less susceptible to the Deconstructionist strategy of finding the “loose stone” that undermines the ostensible stability of the poetic structure.

These opening remarks on the relationship between Dickinson and ever-changing critical strategies drew varied responses from the floor. Some pointed to omissions from the remarks concerning Dickinson and the critics, arguing in particular for a greater awareness of the role of feminist theory in recent Dickinson scholarship. At the other end of the spectrum, several delegates argued that Dickinson scholarship should be a theory-free zone. This division was to reverberate throughout the days that followed.

Personal relationships provided one form of historical approach, reflected in biographical papers on figures within Dickinson’s epistolary circle—Helen Hunt Jackson, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the Reverend Aaron Colton, and Henry Vaughan Emmons, to name only a few. The gradual and welcome process of revisionism by which Susan Dickinson is being reclaimed from negative stereotypes was extended by a number of speakers, including H. Jordan Landry, who employed queer theory to read Dickinson’s birds and bees poems in radically new and positive ways. Jane Eberwein, Alfred Habegger, Polly Longworth, Betty Bernhard, and Theresa de Langis, in different ways, challenged the myth of Dickinson the recluse and showed how important stages in Dickinson’s life and career were crucially impacted by family and friends.

Biography in its turn was usefully historicized: Jonnie Guerra looked at dramatic representations of Dickinson’s life dating from the 1930s and ’40s and showed how the poet’s reputed love affairs influenced her public reception and views of her writing—as indeed they continue to do today.

Home, inside and out, was of course a theme of the conference. Panels dealing with life in the Evergreens and the Homestead were arranged along with papers on breadmaking and housekeeping. For Stephanie Tingley, poetry functioned as an extension of the poet’s domestic and epistolary responsibilities. But the conference also did much to expand the whole idea of Emily Dickinson “at home,” offering an ongoing assessment as to what “home” might mean beyond the borders of geographical location. Running beneath many papers was a radical questioning of where Dickinson was most “at home” and what kind of context—generic, literary, social, political, theoretical—best facilitates our reading of this poet’s work.

Jonathan Morse reminded scholars in a lively paper not to forget that we are “historically challenged” and urged us to defamiliarize terms like “Emily” and “Sue.” It is “unlikely that any of us in this room would have been permitted through the door of the Homestead between 1830 and 1886,” he said, “but now we’re on first-name terms with the dead.”

If “home” implies a physical and geographical location, this definition came under scrutiny throughout the four days of the conference: the boundaries of home were widened to include Zen Buddhism, the Hebrew of the Torah, medieval mysticism, Whig concepts of ownership, the

Bible, and Shakespeare. Given Dickinson’s lifelong interrogation of all forms of “Circumference,” the scrutiny was apt.

In light of the expanding concepts of home, recurring themes emerged. Several speakers attended to the familiar concern with whiteness in Dickinson’s work and related this to social and political contexts. According to Domhnall Mitchell, whiteness denoted a strategy of disengagement from an increasingly unstable social world, a disengagement that was both racially inflected (with Scandinavian cultures being invoked as a kind of antidote to the rising tide of emigrants) and influenced by class (whiteness functioning in opposition to the gaudy excess of the lower middle class).

These racial meanings were further explored by Vivian Pollack, for whom Dickinson’s use of whiteness complicated and challenged the supposed divisions between a white American woman and a black American self. This reading of whiteness as signalling Dickinson’s engagement with the racial politics of her time was developed by Daneen Wardrop, who perceived the specific inflections of the slave auction beneath the rhetoric of liberation so prevalent in this poet’s work.

What Marjorie Perloff, in the closing plenary, called the “intensely negotiated space” of the Dickinson texts proved to be an important theme in the conference. The undoubted opportunities opened to Dickinson scholars by manuscript sources were somewhat tempered by concerns over access to such sources. Autograph materials have to be carefully guarded in order to protect them from damage. Daniel Lombardo’s talk on the

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challenges and responsibilities facing the Dickinson archivist showed clearly one side of manuscript studies: the role of the archive “cop” who needs to regulate access in the interests of the material itself. At the same time, demand for manuscript utilization is on the rise, and there is an increased emphasis on their indispensability to critical interpretation. According to Martha Nell Smith, manuscript studies release “inconvenient knowledge” that may challenge and disrupt our most fundamental concepts of what a poem is.

The alleged failure of contemporary poets to answer and extend this challenge was memorably addressed by poet Alice Fulton in a keynote address, “Between Felt and Felt: Emily Dickinson and Contemporary Fractal Poetics.” Fulton talked about her vision of poetry in the new millennium, hoping it would follow kinds and ways of knowing that are not conventional in poetry, the academy, or popular culture. She defined “fractal poetry” as writing that uses disjunctive, broken, but multiply suggestive kinds of diction, tone, syntax, punctuation, and form generally.

A notable and often irreverent meditation on the motives of manuscript study was presented by Rob Smith in “The Emily Dickinson Fetish.” In a fresh approach, his paper shifted the focus from psychological aspects of Dickinson’s writing to psychological aspects of writings on Dickinson. Elsewhere, Theresa de Langis revised traditional Oedipal versions of Dickinson’s relationship to her mother, Emily Norcross Dickinson, and Helen Shoobridge offered a feminist revision of Bloom’s anxiety of influence theory in describing Dickinson’s sense of her career as a writer. Feminist theory also underpinned the work of Traci Abbot, Cynthia MacKenzie, and Marianne Noble, who continued the historical spirit of the conference by contextualizing aspects of Dickinson’s writing on pain within cultural, literary, and religious fields.

The opening speakers, accompanied by Alice Fulton, were asked to return to the podium for the closing session of the conference. As a preliminary to a general discussion, each was asked to summarize his or her own thoughts on the proceedings. Fulton felt that many of the papers had attended to the idea of marginality,

suggesting that the margin had in fact become the center. Marjorie Perloff perceived that participants had been primarily concerned with *what* a poem means rather than how it means, how it works, and why it works. She was especially interested in issues related to the lyric and what Jakobsen termed “poeticity.”

In the spirit of what he hoped was “gentle disagreement,” Heinz Ickstadt expressed skepticism about single-author conferences, raising the undoubtedly contentious issue of whether they produce a kind of claustrophobia or insular-

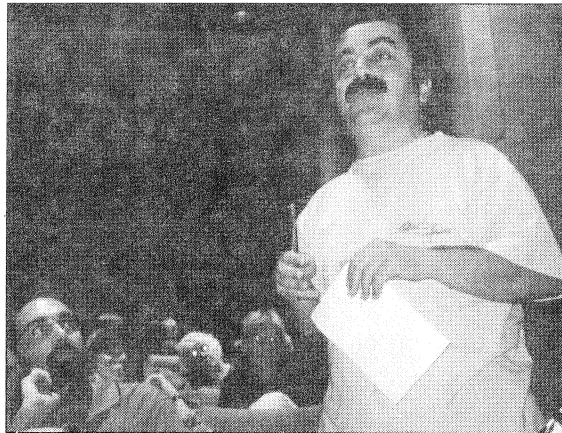


Photo by Eleanor Hegirhothian

Yusuf Eradam, from Turkey, spoke in favor of greater internationalism in Dickinson studies in the final plenary.

ity. He encouraged developing lines of dialogue between Dickinson and other figures from American literary culture. This kind of reservation drew a range of responses from the floor. Suzanne Juhasz argued that sustained focus on a single writer need not denote insularity and that, in her time as editor of the *Emily Dickinson Journal*, she had been afforded access to a wide and varied range of approaches to Dickinson’s work. Other delegates argued that the EDIS conference was unique in its ability to include academic and nonacademic participants, a composition that reflected this poet’s own cultural status, her particular ability to bridge the gap between the academy and popular culture.

Yet Ickstadt’s suggestion as to opportunities available for developing lines of communication between Dickinson and her culture was echoed by some of those working on the next EDIS conference: Mary Loeffelholz suggested that the next

conference place its focus firmly on the nineteenth century, not only by locating Dickinson in that cultural moment but also by attending to the issue of critical constructions of the period.

With the issue of the next conference in mind, several non-American delegates offered their suggestions as to how to develop the international dimension of Dickinson studies. Yusef Eradam, from Turkey, urged that the borders of that scholarship be expanded to include non-American contexts—that the issue of Dickinson’s dialogue with a wider literary

community be stretched beyond the circuit of American culture. K. Pramila Sastry, from India, also argued for an expansion of the borders of Dickinson studies, this time toward a more interdisciplinary approach. Speaking as a physicist, Sastry argued that there are many opportunities for placing Dickinson in dialogue with the sciences, an opinion echoed by a delegate approaching Dickinson from the vantage-point of psychology.

“Emily Dickinson at Home” was a conference that took four years of planning, and its successes owed much to the vision of the EDIS Board and, in particular, to the organizational efforts of Martha Ackmann and Gary Lee Stonum. The closing session managed both to celebrate the achievements of the conference and to confront the areas that could be developed and strengthened at the next conference. With Mount Holyoke 1999 as its starting point, Trondheim 2001 should offer another stimulating, provocative, and inclusive debate to all its participants.

Domhnall Mitchell is professor of English at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim. He will be a co-chair of the conference to be held there in 2001 (see page 28).

Maria Stuart is associate professor at the School of English, University College, Dublin. Her doctoral dissertation was on Dickinson and nineteenth-century German High Criticism.

PRESENTATION TO RALPH W. FRANKLIN THE EDIS AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED SCHOLARSHIP

By Martha Nell Smith

The following is a slightly abbreviated version of the text of the presentation made to Ralph Franklin, in absentia, at the EDIS conference banquet on August 13.

I will confess that I half expect Ralph Franklin to step in from his place just outside the hall and surprise us all this evening. But like the subject of his decades of study, Emily Dickinson, and her “ideal cat,” he seems to be “just going out of sight—though,” as Dickinson acknowledged, “going out of sight in itself has a peculiar charm” (L471).

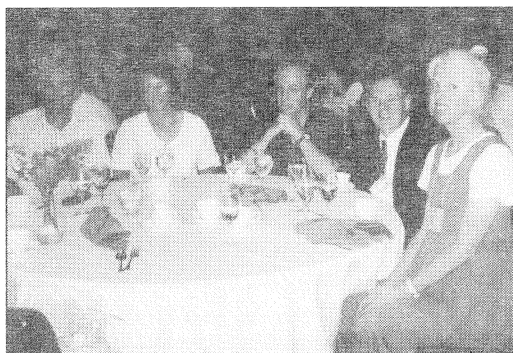
In this brief time, I want to praise Ralph Franklin—Director and Associate University Librarian, Beinecke Library, Yale University—for the most outstanding of his many accomplishments in Dickinson studies. Musing how best to do that, I have thought a lot about which of his contributions are the most important, and what makes them so crucial for all of us.

It will surprise some of you to learn that I settled on what you’re hearing now while thinking about a great New Jersey poet, Bruce Springsteen, and his audience, and while thinking about them in conversation with another great New Jersey poet, Alicia Ostriker. What led me to my remarks, you see, is that I’d been to a Springsteen concert, one of those fifteen mass poetry performances he and the E Street Band are putting on in New Jersey. In fact, their closing show is going on even as I speak. Twenty thousand people are down there in the Meadowlands having fun in the knowledge that it “ain’t no sin to be glad you’re alive,” “it’s all right—to have a good time,” and full of appreciation of the word, “tremblingly partook” and put to the beat of rock ‘n’ roll.

So last week I was one of those 20,000 tramps, born to run and all that, and I’m sitting in the audience thoroughly enjoying the music, the fun, the poignant dark reflections, the gleeful spirit of celebration of folks in concert. Right in front of me are two couples having fun in their own way, a way that was not particularly mine. They weren’t doing anything really “bad,” mind you, but they were irritating me with their beer spilling and noisy ways.

After the concert I made my way to

Beach Haven to enjoy a lovely day with my friend Alicia Ostriker. At the dinner table, folks started asking me about the concert the night before and I started telling them all about how I’d been singing, dancing, laughing—and, oh, there were those folks in front of me. If they weren’t louts, I proclaimed, they were certainly doing a good job of imitating louts, and I described them colorfully and with a certain amount of disdain. Alicia’s quick response was, “Well, aren’t you all high and mighty.” And that quick, loving response caught me up short, a lightning bolt of realization. I was trying to impose on those four folks whom I don’t even



It wasn't Bruce Springsteen, but conferencegoers were "having a good time" at the EDIS banquet.

Photo by Jim Fraser

know *how* they should be enjoying Bruce Springsteen and his music.

Now, just as there are all sorts of ways to enjoy Bruce Springsteen, and all of them are valid, even when they’re not to my taste, so there are all sorts of ways to enjoy Emily Dickinson—many to your tastes, to my tastes, and others not to my taste but maybe to yours, not to yours but maybe to mine, and others not to our collective taste. And in his work Ralph Franklin has clearly been aware of that, and has by and large honored the different, often contradictory tastes and perspectives. Though interpretation always inheres in any editorial practice—and his is no exception—Franklin has diligently tried not to impose or intrude too much on interpretations of Dickinson’s writing life and practices.

As part of this admirable effort, he has, over the past twenty years, bestowed upon us two monumental scholarly

works—*The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* and *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition*—as well as a new reading edition of *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* just out this week. Both of the scholarly resources are splendid, generative achievements that have deepened, broadened, and redirected our conversations about how Emily Dickinson’s texts should be arranged to make “poems of Emily Dickinson,” “letters of Emily Dickinson,” and whatever else.

Franklin’s reconstruction and facsimile presentation of her “manuscript books” for the first time made widely visible—in their lovely gray halftone reproductions—Dickinson’s careful placement of poems on exquisite stationery, her methodical assembly of books, artistic productions that constitute her own (as Franklin himself puts it) kind of “publication.”

Franklin’s Variorum renderings are most aptly celebrated not as the standard to which all proper representation of Dickinson’s texts must conform, but as the presentation of thoroughly researched documents that raise astute, generative ques-

tions, first about what counts as a poem *by* Emily Dickinson and then as a poem *of* Emily Dickinson, what counts as a significant textual detail and what not (e.g., placement of epistolary and poetic writings in relation to one another, different signatures to different correspondents), what count as relevant paratexts and what do not.

If Franklin’s Variorum Edition sets a standard (and indeed, I believe it does), the nature of that standard is not in that the account is all-inclusive or absolutely correct or definitive but is in the fact that his critical attention to textual details is an exemplary heuristic guideline for any study of Emily Dickinson’s manuscripts designed to learn about her compositional and distributional practices. His account of manuscript productions and publication histories of individual poems reflects the fastidious, conscientious, seemingly tireless work of a cormorant of detail of

Dickinson's writing practices. They also reflect his imagined biography for her, and her life as an author at the center of American literary study.

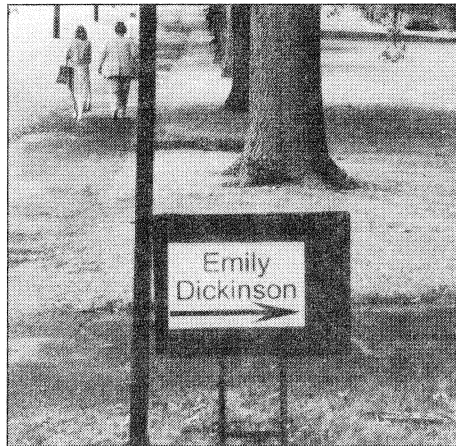
Framed by most of the important questions necessary to analyze the many telling characteristics of the manuscripts and of subsequent editing practices, Franklin's new Variorum Edition records features such as line breaks, page breaks, stanza breaks, and word divisions, the dating and transmission of each document, and its subsequent handlings. And Franklin's performance is exemplary in all of this because he doesn't insist that other audiences enjoy Emily Dickinson in precisely the same way he does.

Among the most laudable aspects of his latest work is that Franklin attempts to relate myriad facts and pieces of knowledge, as well as the contradictory critical desires, for which any responsible story about Dickinson's manuscripts and their revelations must at least begin to account. Indeed, he recognizes that the "necessary angels" of textual insight are in what others have summarily dismissed as the dry (and accidental) facts of lineation, page placement, creative orthography, and so forth.

Admirably, even when his own interpretive stance holds that elements such as lineation are accidents of page and handwriting size, Franklin realizes that other students of the manuscripts may not agree with him, and he scrupulously records details he does not believe are vital for understanding Dickinson's creative endeavors.

And this, my friends, seems to me the gist of why his work is so important and makes such a profound scholarly contribution. This recording of details—whether or not he believes they speak to or of

Dickinson's intentions—took a lot of extra work, years of examining and reexamining the actual manuscripts themselves, checking and rechecking that which Ralph deems artistically important and that which



he knows others—even readers we do not imagine yet—will find artistically important. Ralph Franklin's variorum witnesses decades of dedicated work for others, as well as for himself, and for that I cannot thank him, and the Emily Dickinson International Society cannot thank him, enough. His work is in the avenue of Possibility, not the dead-end street of closure and definitude.

And the variorum is filled with other resounding detail—such delicate informative touches as his note for "Whose cheek is this?" (FP48). There "Robins, in the tradition / Did cover such with leaves" is explained with the valuable information that "there is a tradition that the robin will cover the face of the unburied dead with leaves or moss," a lovely nuance reflecting Franklin's awareness of new understandings of our perpetually recoverable literary past.

And so, Ralph, on behalf of the Emily Dickinson International Society, and on behalf of myself, who is ever indebted to you, I present this award for Distinguished Scholarship in Dickinson studies, scholarship so distinguished that it does not insist that its way is The Way, scholarship so giving that its way leads on to way and then other ways. And I give this with a deeper admiration than I had nearly fifteen years ago when you crossed the Houghton Library, cowboy boots and all, to ask how I liked my laptop and oh, by the way, when I was finished with that document would I mind letting you know. You graciously didn't pull rank on an assistant professor writing that first book, and that indeed is part and parcel of your own poetics of Possibility.

Ralph, I am deeply honored to give this award, and I do so with admiration, applause, and appreciation for the years of extensive and conscientious labor that have bestowed these great gifts of immeasurable value on Emily Dickinson's readers. "Thank you" is much too weak a phrase, and so I take from our favorite poet to honor you for "dwelling in Possibility – A fairer house than Prose," giving us a textual world with more windows, and numerous doors—a House of Opportunity you have made, Ralph, a garden of seemingly perpetual delight—where we can spread wide our narrow hands, and gather Paradise.

Martha Nell Smith is professor of English at the University of Maryland and co-author (with Ellen Louise Hart) of Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson's Intimate Letters to Susan Huntington Dickinson.

RALPH FRANKLIN'S RESPONSE

Dear colleagues,

Although I am in Europe, I would like to express my gratitude to the Emily Dickinson International Society for honoring me today with the Society's achievement award. It is deeply gratifying, and humbling as well, to know that the previous recipient was Richard Sewall, whose work and generosity are well known. It was Professor Sewall who gave me decisive assistance at the beginning of my ca-

reer—when I was a graduate student at a different university—as well as encouragement and healthy criticism along the way.

The Emily Dickinson International Society has been on a professional journey of its own, as shown by the scope of the membership, the growth of the *Bulletin* and the *Emily Dickinson Journal*, and the ambition and imagination of the Society's

programs and conferences, like the one that began today. EDIS has made a fundamental difference for Dickinson studies. On this happy occasion, I would like not only to express my gratitude for the EDIS award but also to send warm congratulations to everyone associated with the Society and its achievements.

Ralph W. Franklin

EMILY DICKINSON'S HOME AS A CRUCIBLE OF CREATIVITY

Moderator: ROWENA REVIS JONES, Northern Michigan University; panelists: ALFRED HABEGGER, University of Kansas (retired); MARY ELIZABETH K. BERNHARD, Amherst, Massachusetts

By Rowena Revis Jones

As this panel portrayed her, Emily Dickinson emerges less a solitary individual than a poet immersed in human relationships. Her interactions with certain visitors to the Homestead as well as with her family not only reveal her as a person but also helped shape her as a poet.

In "Ministerial Interviews and Fathers in Faith," Jane Eberwein presented detailed accounts of two separate interviews over the years, the first involving Edward Dickinson and the second his elder daughter. Eberwein deftly evoked the pathos and humor inherent in both occasions.

When in 1840 Aaron Colton found himself a candidate for pastor of First Church, Amherst, it was appropriate that Edward Dickinson, as a town leader, should receive him at the Homestead. At stake was Colton's worthiness for the pulpit. Eberwein conveyed the awkwardness the minister later tells us he experienced while candidating, and also the tension Edward Dickinson must have felt, especially as his own eligibility for formal church membership was yet to be decided.

Providing insight into the man who was to become the poet's clergyman for twelve formative years, Eberwein presented him as the messenger of a softened Calvinism. He was tolerant of "nonessentials" and a genial shepherd who guided his flock through three awakenings.

The second ministerial interview occurred in 1873 after Edward Dickinson asked Jonathan Jenkins, a later pastor of First Church, to inquire of Emily regarding the state of her soul. The impossible encounter that followed between Dickinson and the Reverend Mr. Jenkins, who was known to her chiefly as a close friend of Austin and Sue, was entirely unproductive except for the assurance Jenkins politely offered a dutiful father regarding the daughter's spiritual welfare. The interview also demonstrates the poet's consideration of Edward's feelings, as only for his sake would she have submitted to so public a probe of her private self.

In "The Difference—made me bold": Henry Vaughan Emmons and Emily Dickinson," Alfred Habegger focused on the

poet's two-year friendship with the Amherst College student in the early 1850s and the ways Emmons contributed to Dickinson's poetic development.

Habegger explained that beyond a common religious heritage and strong affinities in their family background, Emmons and Dickinson came to share similar liter-



Photo by Win Bernhard

Panelists Eberwein, Bernhard, and Habegger pose with moderator Jones outside Mary Woolley Hall after their session.

ary tastes and ambitions. In their exchange of notes and compositions, Dickinson indirectly confessed her desire to become a poet. Emmons, in essays he published while editor of the *Amherst Collegiate Magazine*, revealed his view of poetry as subjective and visionary and of the poet as one who is schooled in sorrow. He derived these ideas partly from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "A Vision of Poets," which he quoted in two essays and which stimulated Dickinson to aestheticize the Calvinism she could not literally accept.

Habegger noted further that Emmons's view of the inspired poet, prepared by suffering to write of inward experience, impacted Dickinson at a critical time of personal loss and separation, when a serious rift distanced her from Susan Gilbert. Such "wounds" to herself, added to Emmons's endorsement of suffering, his use of images and symbols, his dedication

to beauty, and his view of poetry as revelatory, aided Dickinson's own understanding and choice of poetry as a vocation.

In "Let no one beside come": Lavinia as Poet's Apostle in the Triumvirate of Dickinson Women," Betty Bernhard used Dickinson's plea that only her sister meet her train at Palmer on her return to Amherst in late 1864 after her eye treatment in Cambridge, to underscore Lavinia's role as the "featured player" among the Dickinson women.

Emily Norcross Dickinson devoted herself to her home and set high standards for her daughters, Bernhard explained. In turn, her ill health required much of them in the domestic realm. But, except while she was at school in Ipswich, it was Lavinia who assumed the major responsibilities. Protective and energetic, she made it possible for her sister to continue writing poetry.

Bernhard pointed out that Vinnie created a balance in the home, countering the poet's tendency toward isolation. In contrast to Emily's shy and contemplative nature, she was volatile, outgoing, and socially self-assured. Different as they were, Bernhard stressed, the two complemented one another and even shared a "mutual empathy." Emily felt truly at home with Lavinia.

On Lavinia's part, there was far more than a sense of possessiveness toward Emily. She held a genuine, "awesome" respect for the poet's ability. In the end, it was Lavinia's conviction of her sister's genius as a poet that drove her to insist on publication.

Rowena Revis Jones is a retired professor of English at Northern Michigan University. Her particular studies have been of Dickinson's poems in their philosophic-religious context.

THE MATERIAL CONTEXTS OF EMILY DICKINSON'S WORLD

Organizer: CINDY DICKINSON, Emily Dickinson Homestead; moderator: KEVIN SWEENEY, Amherst College; panelists: SUSAN DANLY, Mead Art Museum, Amherst College; DIANA FUSS, Princeton University; MYRON STACHIW, East Woodstock, Connecticut; AMANDA E. LANGE, Historic Deerfield, Deerfield, Massachusetts

By Kevin Sweeney

The four presentations in this panel offered conferees new insights into Dickinson's home, its interior arrangements, and the artifacts that reflected the Dickinson family's tastes and aspirations.

In "Art at the Evergreens: A Study in Victorian Taste," Susan Danly described, illustrated, and discussed the collection of art assembled by Susan and Austin Dickinson. Numbering more than eighty-five works, the Evergreens collection included approximately thirty paintings, fifty prints, and a half-dozen small photographs. These domestically scaled works were hung in the two public rooms of the house and lined the stairway. Despite the presence of paintings by such well known American artists as Sanford Gifford and John F. Kensett, most of the subject matter was European.

In addition to reading Ruskin, the Dickinsons turned to such popular magazines as *Scribner's*, *The Crayon*, and *Century Magazine*, as well as art survey books, to guide their collecting. Examples of academic narrative art and romantic European landscapes predominated. The historical value of the collection, said Danly, is its representative character, reflecting the period's conventional taste and the Dickinsons' modest means for collecting.

Amanda Lange's illustrated presentation, "Service and Status: Ceramics and Silver as Indicators of Taste," was based on a study of objects in the Evergreens undertaken by Lange in 1995. The collection contains 330 pieces of pottery and porcelain and 140 pieces of flatware, primarily knives, forks, and spoons. Ceramics and silverware such as these owned by the Dickinsons represented more than just the means of conveying food to the table or tea to one's mouth, Lange asserted; they were nonverbal communicators of the family's status, reputation, social aspirations, and cultural knowledge.

As with their collection of art, Lange pointed out, the tablewares purchased by the Dickinsons embodied the family's moderate, middle-class means and aspirations. The quality of the wares and the range of forms were limited in comparison

to what was available at the time. The collection contains some items of earlier-nineteenth-century Canton china and sterling silver that were Norcross family possessions. They provide another angle from which to view Emily Dickinson's family background.



Canton ware from the Homestead, now at the Evergreens.

In "The 'Old Castle'" A History of the Dickinson Homestead," Myron Stachiw offered a summary of the most important findings contained in his recently completed architectural analysis of the Homestead, Emily Dickinson's birthplace and her home from 1855 until her death. This report, based on intensive research and physical evaluation of the house and property, provides the first solid documentation of the Homestead's evolution from its initial construction around 1813 through its extensive renovations: in the mid-1830s and 1840-41 by members of the Mack family, in 1855 by Edward Dickinson, and after 1916 by the Parke family. The full report will be a critical source for scholars exploring Dickinson's relationship to her domestic environment.

The original house, reported Stachiw, was a typical brick two-story, two-room-deep Federal style home with a hip roof. It originally had a divided central hall that contained staircases in both back and front. In the mid-1830s, the roof was raised and changed from a hip to a pitch roof, a two-story wooden wing was added to the west end of the house, the portico with Greek columns was added, and the entire structure was painted white in keeping with the Greek Revival style. Sometime during 1840-41 a two-story brick wing was added on the west side and a one-and-

one-half story kitchen wing was added.

When Edward Dickinson repurchased the house in 1855, noted Stachiw, he "Victorianized" it, adding the conservatory, the cupola, the current two-story brick kitchen wing, the double parlor, the one-story west porch, and the French doors. The house was repainted yellow and ocher with green shutters. After they purchased the house in 1916, the Parkes added Colonial Revival features, such as the current staircase in the main hall.

"Interior Chambers: The Poetics of Space at the Dickinson Homestead," was part of a larger ongoing project

by Diana Fuss exploring the relationship between poets and their domestic interiors. Focusing on the poetry of Dickinson's interiors rather than the interiors of her poems, suggested Fuss, raises questions about the popular image of Dickinson as the "helpless agoraphobic" in a "gothic prison" or a "domestic coffin."

Fuss's close examination of three key spaces of the Homestead—the parlor, Dickinson's bedroom, and the cupola—suggests a relationship to space that was not phobic but lyric. These key spaces were liminal, argued Fuss, providing privacy while allowing heightened connections to be made. Dickinson's secluded reception of visitors in the parlor while she herself was seated in the hall, for example, intensified the sound of the poet's voice. The particular location of her bedroom, at the southwestern corner of the second floor, placed her at the center of her world and invested her with considerable scopic power. The cupola, concluded Fuss, embodied the ultimate lyric space of complete seclusion and provided infinite possibilities for connection.

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CONTEXTS AND COMRADES I

Moderator: WENDY KOHLER, Amherst, Massachusetts; panelists: POLLY LONGSWORTH, Royalston, Massachusetts; KATHARINE RODIER, Marshall University; GEORGIANA STRICKLAND, Lexington, Kentucky

By Wendy Kohler

Our speakers in this early conference panel addressed a full house and engaged us in a lively discussion focusing on a true Dickinson friend, Helen Hunt Jackson. Polly Longworth began our session by talking about "Helen and Emily: An Amherst Girlhood," stating that "the contrasts and parallels between Helen Hunt Jackson and Emily Dickinson are almost too delicious to contemplate." But so we did, as Longworth examined the common childhood context of two of the nineteenth century's most prominent women writers and the friendship that bound each to the other at the end of their lives.

While one woman was recognized by her contemporaries as a great author and public figure, the other remained aloof from such fame. Yet today we look to the life of the former in order to help us understand the life and mind of the latter. In Longworth's words, "the estimable glow of H.H.'s literary reputation died with her century, while Dickinson's bright, enduring star was just ascending."

Born in Amherst within two months of each other, Helen and Emily were raised by parents with common values and expectations for their children. Both mothers owned *The Mother at Home* by the Reverend John S.C. Abbott, a guide that emphasized consistency and firmness in child rearing. Interestingly, Longworth pointed out that Mrs. Dickinson "pressed an aster among the passages that instructed how to encourage but contain a child's inquisitive spirit." Deborah Fiske, Helen's mother, may have tried to contain her daughter's "inquisitive spirit," but to no avail. Helen's irrepressible nature and rowdy behavior brought the child local notoriety.

Longworth's descriptions make clear that, while their girlhood contexts of community and family values were strikingly similar, Helen's and Emily's personalities were certainly not. Longworth also drew fascinating contrasts within the educa-

tional construct that guided the two girls' learning. For example, while only vague references to their children's education emerge in Mr. and Mrs. Dickinson's letters, Nathan and Deborah Fiske discussed their daughters' lessons at some length in many of their correspondences.

We have no samples of Emily's young handwriting, but we do have Helen's "wobbly, block-lettered messages" beginning when she was five years old. Longworth's examination of these letters revealed "ample evidence that the ability to write interestingly, and to punctuate properly, was urged by her parents



Panelists Strickland, Rodier, and Longworth and moderator Kohler respond to questions about the friendship between Helen Hunt Jackson and Emily Dickinson.

Photo by Paula Yellin

from the time she was small." In comparing letters by the two girls, both written in 1842, Longworth found that Emily apparently "had received less help and supervision." "Charming and delightful as we find it, this initial [Dickinson] letter attests that Emily's training had focused more on penmanship than on sentence structure or punctuation." Perhaps we owe a curious gratitude to Emily's parents for offering little insistence on the rules of grammar and punctuation.

Finally, Longworth noted that when Jackson and Dickinson became "reacquainted later in life, they spent no time we know of reminiscing about a shared past, but were intrigued instead by the poet each had become. They had been shaped by similar forces into different ways, yet those forces supplied the basis for their otherwise unlikely friendship."

The audience then enjoyed an oppor-

tunity to explore the comrade link between Dickinson and Jackson through their mutual "preceptor," Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Katharine Rodier began her talk, "'Lawfully as a Bird,'" by pointing out that Higginson mentored a number of women writers in the conventional sense of offering advice on their writing, with Jackson at the time being noted as his "star discovery." In fact, Jackson was the only woman writer Higginson included in the first edition of his critical work on important American writers of his day. Today, of course, it is Higginson's literary liaison with Dickinson that most intrigues us. Rodier's study pursued how Higginson's "charged presence" in the lives of both women informs us about their relationship to each other.

Rodier drew intriguing comparisons between Higginson's relationship to Dickinson and that to Jackson. Dickinson "contrived her letters to [Higginson] to elicit a unique form of self-validation: the words of a well-known writer and influential critic whom she admired, addressed expressly to her and the conditions of her art as she herself articulated them." Jackson, in contrast, had a public ambition even as she assumed a variety of pseudonyms in the course of a long literary career. Indeed, Jackson consulted Higginson about the choice of editors and journals in which to publish as well as eliciting suggestions about style and structure. He was her literary agent, and she was his candidate for "the best woman-poet on the continent."

Rodier aptly pointed out that, with their "three-way acquaintance," there was a good deal of "cross-referencing" and that in some ways each treated the others as "accessions." Both women admired Higginson's skills and influence. Higginson encouraged Dickinson to read Jackson, and Jackson urged Dickinson to forward her writing to Higginson. We can look to Dickinson's and Jackson's correspondences with Higginson as a way to better understand the art of each writer as well as their friendship.

Georgiana Strickland spoke "In Praise of *Ramona*," weaving a fascinating chro-

nology of the writing of Jackson's most successful novel, its impact on contemporaries, including Dickinson, and its lasting legacy. We learned of Jackson's "conversion" to the cause of the American Indian, her appointment as a special commissioner to examine the condition of the Indians of Southern California, her campaign to inform leaders and citizenry of the wrongs imposed on the Indian tribes, and the inspiration that consumed her as she wrote her greatest novel. In an 1883 letter Jackson expressed her hope for *Ramona*: "If I could write a story that would do for the Indian a thousandth part of what Uncle Tom's Cabin did for the Negro, I would be

thankful the rest of my life."

In March 1885, Dickinson wrote to Jackson, "Pity me, I have finished *Ramona*. Would that like Shakespere, it were just published." Strickland reminded us that we don't really know what Dickinson thought of the message of reform that Jackson so fervently wanted to convey. While, as Richard Sewall has written, "Jackson was a crusader. Emily, clearly, was not," Strickland urged us not to "dismiss Dickinson's own quietly rebellious heart." Dickinson, after all, "understood full well the price to be paid for the 'Madness' of opposing the culture into which she (and Jackson) had been born."

With that, Strickland brought the audience full circle, back to Helen and Emily's Amherst origins. We were all struck with the unity of spirit and the deep appreciation and affection each woman held for the other at the end of their lives, a comradeship of extraordinary depth of understanding and mutual appreciation.

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CONTEXTS AND COMRADES II

Moderator: ELEANOR HEGINBOTHAM, Concordia University; *panelists:* DOMHNALL MITCHELL, Norwegian University of Science and Technology; MASAKO TAKEDA, Osaka Shoin Women's College; ANGELA CONRAD, Drew University

By Eleanor Heginbotham

As one of the first "At Home" conference panels, this session, held early on a rainy Friday morning, placed Dickinson in a "context" far away from her Amherst home. Although the three papers differed radically in time and place of context, each resonated around similar, persistent questions. What were the strategies, conscious or not, with which Dickinson reflected, but more often resisted, the limitations of her own actual "context" and "home"? Through what outward devices—her use of white among them—did she pose? How did the various poses she adopted serve as a means of establishing rather than deflecting her sense of her own powers? Each of these persuasive and original papers led the overflowing crowd to circle back to such questions in the lively discussion that followed their presentations.

Domhnall Mitchell, who teaches in Norway, surprised some of us, first of all, with his Irish brogue. As a citizen of the world, Mitchell led us to consider international reasons for Dickinson's choice of garb. "The Woman in White: Emily Dickinson and Colour" explored some of the undiscussed reasons for the "strategic disengagement" suggested by Dickinson's choice of self-presentation.

Mitchell, like others, noted the political implications of white. Obviously class, cloth, and color merged in the white dress, a dress that would depend on servants for

daily care. But Mitchell added to that traditional surmise an emphasis on another source of Dickinson's choice of clothing: her interest in Norway and other northern places. Noting that the "North was in vogue during the last half of the nineteenth century," Mitchell spoke of the art collections in the Evergreens that privileged northern scenes and the visit of Jenny Lind, the "Swedish Nightingale," whom the Dickinson family went to hear in Northampton on July 3, 1851.

As Dickinson seemed to find attractive and to emulate, Lind's style as a naturally gifted singer (who wore simple white), in contrast to the trained Italian singers (who wore spangles), became emblematic of the kind of dichotomy that was Dickinson's focus in such poems as "I think the Hemlock likes to stand/Upon a Marge of Snow" (J525/Fr400). The Hemlock's preference for snow, for "Lapland's – necessity," is the preference for enduring intellect, austerity, resiliency—all of these qualities being opposite to those of the "satin Races." Although the "Northern winds" lead to excellent "Norwegian Wines," they also breed the kinds of difficulties that strengthen the artist drawn to challenge and deprivation.

At least that is the pose. So said Angela Conrad in "Of Humility, Suffering, and Faith: Emily Dickinson and the Medieval Mystical Women." Like Mitchell, Conrad

explored the poet's choice of white—with somewhat different results. Excerpted from her recent dissertation, which won the Chamberlain Prize for Excellence, Conrad's paper took us back in time to place Dickinson in a familiar position, as the Wayward Nun. Along with her focus on the white of brides and babies at baptism, Dickinson's stated preferences link her, in Conrad's eyes, to the religious women of the Middle Ages.

However sincere on some level are the apparent simplicity and humility of such lines as "I'm Nobody" or "I was the smallest in the house" or "Papa above," said Conrad, they mask the bottled power the poet prized. This masking of great spiritual will in language cloaked with modesty and purity creates an oxymoronic pride in the power of humility. Offering colorful examples of such erstwhile passionate brides of Christ as Marjory Kempe, Conrad placed Dickinson in their tradition.

This paper led to a lively discussion, sparked especially by questions from Shira Wolosky, who noted the shakiness of the line of descent and similarly deceptive images of humility and power in the Puritan writers Dickinson surely knew. Even those sober ministers used terms suggesting the transforming experience of a kind of intercourse with God achieved through abstemiousness and suffering and yielding to tremendous power.

Masako Takeda's paper on "The Belle of Japan: The Popularity of Dickinson in Japan" took listeners in the crowded room farther back in time and farther away in space than either of the other papers. Thus, although hers was the second to be presented, I end with it in special appreciation of the way this former visiting scholar in Dickinson territory attacked the questions with which many of us have pestered her for years. Why is it that Japan has the largest number of EDIS members outside the U.S.? What is it that is so appealing to the Eastern mind about this Robin who sang so "New Englandly"?

Takeda began by refuting some of the obvious answers. "To Oriental eyes," she said, "Emily Dickinson looks very Occidental." In a country that is only 1 percent Christian, Dickinson's preoccupation with her faith is not a binding force, and some of her dry humor escapes the readers of even excellent Japanese translations. In

fact, it is more correct to say that Dickinson is not a "Belle" to most Japanese, but only "among academics and artists."

Citing Bei Jinpeng in a recent *Bulletin* article on the Chinese, Takeda agreed that one reason such select Asians regard Dickinson so highly is her penchant for privacy and her resistance to the pressures of those like Helen Hunt Jackson, who called her "stingy" for withholding her songs. If she is "stingy," said Takeda, it is in the manner of the Tea Master of the ancient ceremony, or the Kado Flower Arranger, who selects just one single flower for an aesthetic statement. As in Zen, Dickinson's celebration of "Nothing" places her in the position of the most powerful. (Here was a distinct link with the other two papers.)

Although Dickinson did not write haiku, the links between her verse and that most disciplined and difficult of Japanese ancient poetry forms would deserve

a book in itself, but Takeda's examples of links from haiku to Dickinson and on to Imagism would make a good preface to such a book. Dickinson's humor and that of haiku are almost equally untranslatable, but they provide insight into the inner similarities between writers in such diverse places and times.

Zen artists practicing privately in far-away courtyards, religious penitents involved in self-conscious suffering as a linkage to ultimate power, and the polar pull of the austere North were images that took this session far from home but made us no less glad to be gathered where Dickinson's circumference seemed wide indeed.

Eleanor Heginbotham is associate professor of English at Concordia University and a recent Fulbright Visiting Lecturer at the University of Hong Kong.

CONTEXTS AND COMRADES III

Moderator: E. G. ANDERSON, Kankakee, Illinois; *panelists:* HELEN SHOBRIDGE, Macquarie University; YUSUF ERADAM, Ankara, Turkey; HELEN KOUKOUTSIS, Macquarie University

By E. G. Anderson

The three papers of this panel explored Dickinson's relationship to authority and human contact and the importance of mystical ideation in her work. No common thread was found, but parallel threads connected the work of these international scholars.

Helen Shobridge began the panel with "Dickinson the Mysterique: A Revision of the Anxiety of Influence and Authority." This carefully crafted paper showed how the poet managed to remain at home in her gender. For Dickinson this has often been seen as a traumatic aspiration. Shobridge drew on Luce Irigaray's concept of mimicry to reveal how a woman might appear in, and at the same time resist, the demands of a patriarchal system.

Shobridge argued that the concept of mimicry revises Harold Bloom's model of poetic authority, in which a male poet seizes power in a deadly struggle with his precursor-fathers, a conflict that induces profound anxiety and is resolved only when the poet identifies with the external sublime power. Shobridge maintained that this system is inherently unstable,

since it is based on repression and delusion, and she showed how Dickinson was able to take advantage of this instability.

Feminist critics such as Joanne Feit Deihl have detailed the hazards a woman faces if she tries to replicate masculine poetic subjectivity. When a woman poet experiences a sublime power, she risks being vanquished—the reason Dickinson is believed to have had gender trouble. Shobridge was careful to acknowledge the significance of the work that has been done to establish alternative matrilineal traditions for Dickinson, but she also saw a need to explore how Dickinson was able to destabilize the remaining patriarchal traditions.

In Shobridge's view, Dickinson went "over the top" in the receptive position normally allocated to Bloom's weak poet. By occupying other designated feminine roles, such as the loved "other," the hysteric, and the mystical vessel of divine impregnation, Dickinson seduced her composite fathers and precursors. Her excessive devotion not only drew attention to her subservient position but also

unsettled the masculine authority that required her to occupy that position.

While the male poet must maintain at least an illusion of autonomy, argued Shobridge, Dickinson accepted and even flaunted her lack of autonomy; while he misrecognizes precursors, she over-recognized them, thus reminding others of the role she was expected to play. The male poet is vulnerable; if he cannot individuate, he will be rendered impotent, forced to remain in a receptive position. Dickinson avoided this trap.

As an example, Shobridge described Dickinson's delight in her role as the receptive reader in poem J505, "I would not paint — a picture," in which her sensual experience of painting, music, and poetry becomes an erotic bodily response until, in the final stanza, she evokes ecstatic and convulsive "Bolts of Melody," an excessive response that overflows borders. Encounter with a powerful masculine force occurs in J315, "He fumbles at your Soul," where Dickinson becomes the acted upon "other." She not only survives this challenge but emerges with a stronger nego-

tiating leverage; the objectified feminine position is foregrounded rather than silenced.

Yusuf Eradam's paper explored problems inherent in interpersonal relationships. Its title, "Bartleby Visiting Emily: I'd Prefer Not To, or, The Inevitable Meeting of Two Artists in Defiance," was based on the story "Bartleby the Scrivener" by Herman Melville, published in 1853-56. This story primarily concerns an estranged personality who consistently resists engagement with others, even to the point of death. Eradam presented Bartleby as Melville's doppelganger, created as the "other" that threatened the author's peace of mind: "I am the abyss you yourselves are born with, if not into. Like it or not, you carry me everywhere you go."

Bartleby/Melville withdraws from the world to escape perceived injustice and, by resisting the human condition as handed to him, refusing even to use words, he gains existence. As Eradam put it, "Safety or security can be attained only if you create your own circumference and your own circle of awareness, consciousness."

This statement, suggested Eradam, parallels a fundamental concern of Dickinson, who refused to engage with the world except on her own terms but who, unlike Bartleby, did not refuse to use language. Instead, by bending and distorting expected usage, Dickinson engaged in her own form of civil disobedience.

Eradam spoke of others who have dealt with the problems of alienation and withdrawal: Kafka's Jos. K and Eliot's Prufrock, who was left "pinned and wriggling on a wall." Bartleby does not question, nor is he rash, like Goethe's Werther, but calm "because I have been there," like Sylvia Plath or her Turkish follower Nilgun Marmara.

This interesting and challenging paper concluded that Bartleby and Dickinson created bridges for readers "so that you do not develop terrors of your own that you 'could tell to none' and lest you fall into your own abysses." Bartleby sits hermetically behind a screen. Dickinson used words to screen her true self because, as Foucault has said, "visibility is a trap." Two artists in defiance: Melville, who traveled seas to find his essential threshold, and Dickinson, who arrived at hers through books.

The final work of this panel, Helen Koukoutsis's "From Reverie to Reality: The Mystical Emergence of Dickinson's Writing," explored the development of mystical ideation in the poet's life and work. Central to this was Donald G. Mitchell's *Reveries of a Bachelor*, published in 1850 under the pseudonym Ik Marvel. This book was wildly popular among the young adults of Amherst at the time and much discussed by them. The future poet read the work in 1851 and, as time went on, *Reveries* became vital to the emergence of her mystical discourse.

In *Reveries*, Marvel imaginatively meditates on the problems of life, using the progress of the day as a metaphor for the passage of time, and allegory to present the theme of loss. His example, argued Koukoutsis, encouraged Dickinson to explore these issues, but to overcome the effects of loss she had to accept the reality of the fleeting moment. Marvel's concept of Noon became central to this effort, though it was unobtainable.

This concept underwent three important stages in Dickinson's development, according to Koukoutsis: a stage of Desolation, driven by the need to resolve the problem of reverie and reality; a Revelatory phase that captured the Noon in degreeless thought similar in nature to

Zen Buddhism; and a phase of Renunciation in which the poet achieved a nondualistic comprehension of God and human.

Later, when Dickinson began to incorporate Noon into her poetry, it became the instrument to resolve the split between reverie and reality. Koukoutsis suggested that this dichotomy resisted resolution despite Dickinson's intense desire to exchange the shadows of Morning and Evening for the intensity and clarity of Noon. It was not until the late 1850s that she was able to resolve this problem in such poems as Fr962, "A Light exists in Spring," and Fr124, "Safe in their alabaster chambers."

Morning and Noon symbolized Dickinson's need to separate from life in order to overcome the pain of loss, and in her Revelatory phase she compromised reverie and reality to achieve degreelessness. Later, Noon was no longer used as a concept but as a determinant of negation where the duality of God and human, joy and grief, was eliminated in order to accept their irresolution.

Koukoutsis pointed to parallel thought reflected in Zen poetry, where detachment reigns without concept or religion and, like the Noon, exists without cause or effect. Koukoutsis concluded that Marvel's *Reveries* served as a stepping stone rather than as an influence in the emergence of Dickinson's mystical discourse.

These three intricate and thoughtful papers furthered our insight into the remarkable happening we know, for lack of better understanding, as Emily Dickinson.

E.G. Anderson is a retired physician with an abiding interest in Emily Dickinson.

CONTEXTS AND COMRADES IV

Moderator: BARBARA KELLY, Palo Alto, Calif.; *panelists:* STEPHANIE A. TINGLEY, Youngstown State University; THOMAS GARDNER, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

By Barbara Kelly

Stephanie Tingley and Thomas Gardner described two remarkably different households in their presentations. Tingley discussed the nineteenth-century New England Dickinson household where domestic chores were dutifully performed

and where Catharine Beecher's well worn *Book of Household Duties* contained many dog-eared pages. Gardner focused on Marilynne Robinson's novel *Housekeeping*, set in twentieth-century Fingerbone, Idaho, where Aunt Sylvie oversaw

"a more open sort of housekeeping," where "leaves and scraps of paper" began "to gather in corners of the house" and rustled whenever a door opened. In spite of the two different kinds of housekeeping, both Emily Dickinson and Ruth Stone, the nar-

rator of *Housekeeping*, share several affinities, including an affinity for words and language.

In “‘Blossoms of the Brain’: The Poetics of Emily Dickinson’s Correspondence and Women’s Culture,” Tingley showed how Dickinson’s domestic and writing lives intertwined. Often responsible for family correspondence, Dickinson transformed her duty into a creative project. Her early letters served as gifts and links to loved ones. Eventually the letters became not only a means of connecting but also a way of keeping distance and substituting for face-to-face encounters. This “converse of the pen” was a gradual process, but by 1862 letter writing replaced face-to-face encounters almost entirely.

Dickinson was interested in the moment when correspondents received her letters, the moment when the writer and the message became one, according to Tingley. Words are not watched while being spoken through letters—letters thus afford an element of control. They also provide nourishment for the body and soul. At one point Dickinson sends “imaginary doughnuts” to her brother, Austin, an example of how language links Dickinson’s domestic and creative worlds, providing refreshment and comfort.

Her gifts and letters often link the natural object and the artistic construct. She sometimes sent flower bulbs instead of cut flowers, perhaps with the idea of endurance and immortality in mind. Words, too, insure immortality. Dickinson regarded her poetry as “flowers of rhetoric.” Tingley drew upon Susan Dickinson’s obituary of Emily Dickinson and the works of Joanne Dobson and Elizabeth Peters for her paper.

In closing, Tingley cited “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens,” an essay in which Alice Walker suggests that there are myriad ways of nurturing and communicating, that communication is not limited to the printed word. For Dickinson, however, words and language were important, and she found a way to combine her domestic and writing lives.

In “Enlarging Loneliness: Marilynne Robinson’s *Housekeeping* as a Reading of Emily Dickinson,” Thomas Gardner used Dickinson’s poetry to elucidate and enrich his reading of Robinson’s novel. The novel is a speculative reconfiguration of the past, narrated in first person by Ruth Stone. In lyrical prose that evokes dream, memory, loss, and longing, Ruth tells how she and her sister Lucille were abandoned at a young age by a suicidal mother and raised by a series of relatives, last and most importantly by their Aunt Sylvie. In the family home near a glacial lake in Idaho, they set up housekeeping. Lucille, impatient with her Aunt Sylvie’s eccentricities, leaves home as an adolescent, but Ruth identifies with Sylvie, becoming more and more like her. Ruth and Sylvie finally burn down their house and leave Fingerbone to become wanderers.

Ruth’s story of how she became a wanderer is an elaboration of various Dickinson analogies of being left blinded, starving, impoverished, or homeless, yet feasting at a “Banquet of Abstemiousness” (J1430). The deaths of Ruth’s grandfather, mother, and grandmother and the loss of her sister repeatedly disturb the ordinary in her life. When the ordinary is so perishable and when such losses leave Ruth with nothing but shards and frag-

ments of memories and thoughts, she is forced “into something that requires a new articulation.” What are fragments for if not to be knit up?

The loneliness that Ruth experiences “leaves her without a visible or stable set of premises in which to dwell,” but it also opens new terrain. In Sylvie, Ruth senses that “what perished need not be lost” because Sylvie “felt the life of perished things” and “dwells in their continuing possibility.”

In the end, Ruth lives within thoughts, images, and language rather than within the literal world. Gardner suggests that “*Housekeeping* can be understood as Ruth’s account of reading herself from within the terms of a Dickinson analogy: beset by wandering and deeply alive within a strangeness in which she cannot be at home.”

In her novel, Robinson is interested in carrying on the conversation begun by nineteenth-century writers, who believed that “the only way to understand the world is metaphorical” but who regarded metaphors as inadequate. *Housekeeping* continues the conversation about limits and linguistic ambition by recalling Dickinson imagery and applying it to new situations in Ruth’s story.

The third scheduled panelist, Joan Kirkby, was unable to attend the conference because of recent surgery. Her presence and her paper were missed.

Barbara Kelly is an independent scholar who lives in Palo Alto, California. She is book review editor for the Bulletin and served in a similar capacity for Dickinson Studies.

CONTEXTS AND COMRADES V

Moderator: MICHAEL YETMAN, Purdue University; *panelists:* SYLVIA MIKKELSON, University of Aarhus; ELEANOR HEGINBOTHAM, Concordia University

By Michael Yetman

Session V of the Contexts and Comrades panels met Saturday afternoon. Unfortunately, Gudrun Grabher of the University of Innsbruck, who was to have delivered a paper, had to return to Austria because of illness, so her paper went undelivered.

Sylvia Mikkelsen began her paper, “Emily Dickinson, Two Twentieth-Century ‘Sisters,’ and the Problem of Feminist

Aesthetics,” by juxtaposing a passage from Marguerite Duras’s novel *Emily L* with “There’s a certain Slant of light” (J258). She then summarized the psychological indebtedness of Duras’s heroine to a familiar stereotype of the Dickinson poetic persona transmogrified into a gothic and grotesque version of Duras’s real-life (and alcoholic) self.

The main focus of the talk, however, was on the phenomenon of identity in Dickinson and Sylvia Plath, particularly the male/female, Apollonian/Dionysian duality constitutive of, Mikkelsen insists, all writerly identity, whether male or female. Mikkelsen cited the recent theorizations of Kristeva and Catherine Clément on the status of feminism as the millen-

nium approaches, theorizings that challenge the essentializing and exclusivist tendencies of earlier feminist models of female consciousness in general and of female artists in particular

The feminist critic, Mikkelsen argued along with Kristeva, requires a more generous and accommodating notion of writerly identity, one with fresh views on such old-fashioned ideas as androgyny and genius, in order to do justice to the complexity and multidimensional psychodynamic of writers of the caliber of Dickinson and Plath.

Necessarily skeletal in its conception, this talk was nonetheless extremely ambitious and successful in urging that the most advanced kind of theoretical thinking be brought to bear in the service of the best literary art and artists.

Eleanor Heginbotham's talk, "Unto my Books': Contemporary Poets on Editing Choices and on Dickinson's Fascicle Collections," described her ongoing scholarly project of rationalizing and assessing the aesthetic implications of Dickinson's gatherings of her poems into forty "Manuscript Books," or fascicles. Ralph Franklin's 1981 version of the poet's chosen role as self-editor has occasioned some of the richest and most contentious debates in recent Dickinson studies, touching virtually every aspect of scholarly inquiry, including the biographical, the material, the political, and above all the textual (and contextual) status of the corpus.

Seeking new interpretive strategies with which to confront Dickinson's editing

practices as these impact on critical understanding of the poems, Heginbotham wrote to an array of contemporary poets requesting information on their own practice of arranging and collecting poems, and their take—if they had one—on Dickinson's fascicle-making process.

Among the fifteen writers who responded, two—Richard Wilbur and Charles Wright—confessed that they followed no organizing principle save that of chronology and/or "intuition." Most of the respondents, however, insisted that they followed definite strategies and spent considerable amounts of time and worry on their collections. These "strategists" included John Solensten, Linda Pastan, Sandra Gilbert, Natasha Saje, Sharon Bryan, Debra Kang Dean, Alicia Ostriker, and Betty Adcock.

Remarkable to this listener was the fact that the versions of their practices supplied by the writers seemed anything but clear to themselves, raising questions not about their veracity or sincerity but about whether such *ex post facto* accounts can ever be much more than transparent, albeit necessary, fictions rendered plausible to fit the "facts"—meaning the details and themes and other data in the poems being gathered.

As if to corroborate this conclusion, Heginbotham quoted one writer on the hard, "confusing" work of arranging, while attributing to another a contradictory wariness toward the possibility of an overarching unity or order in her book, though she thinks the word "pattern" applies well

enough to its contents. Not surprisingly, most of the respondents employed metaphorical language to describe their collecting process. The poems "fall" into arrangements, like shards of iron filings magnetized; arranging is like piecing together a broken porcelain (like Humpty-Dumpty?), or like putting individual notes together into a larger musical composition, or like making a painting, etc. If a book of poems lacks thematic unity, it may still somehow be seen as "organic" in structure.

The problem with such descriptions is that they deflect from and problematize the actual practice of editing rather than clarifying and demystifying it. The fact that some few of the poets canvassed are also practicing critics and have themselves written on Dickinson (Gilbert, Ostriker, and Wilbur) apparently lends them no special insight into Dickinson's editorial practice. The best they are able to do is aver that, because they take the job of self-editing seriously, and because Dickinson, as everybody knows, wrote her poems seriously, therefore she must have been as good an arranger as she was a poet. Heginbotham was poorly served by these poets.

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CONTEXTS AND COMRADES VI

Moderator: CARLOS DAGHLIAN, State University of São Paulo; *panelists:* JENNY WEATHERFORD, University of Copenhagen; PARAIC FINNERTY, University of Kent; KRISTIN COMMENT, University of Maryland

By Carlos Daghlían

The first and third papers of this panel were related in their exploration of Dickinson's life through analysis of fiction and drama, while the second paper explored the meaning of Shakespeare for Dickinson in a different way.

Jenny Weatherford's paper, "Telling It Slant: Judith Farr's Novel about Emily Dickinson," argued that Farr's novel *I Never Came to You in White*, which imaginatively presented Dickinson's life at

Mount Holyoke Female Seminary and the events following the poet's death, when her poems began to be published, succeeded in recreating the poet's nineteenth-century society.

Farr's reliance on the epistolary form to develop her novel was most appropriate, Weatherford contended, since Dickinson's main relationships were developed through letters and poems. Farr's method was quite different from that of preceding

novelists and enabled her to present a young Dickinson who was both fun loving and intellectually sophisticated to the point of puzzling those around her; she is shown as reacting in her own way against the closed society in which she lived.

Farr moved away from an interest in the poet's relationships with men to examine those she enjoyed with women, of whom her sister-in-law Sue was not the first. Weatherford also spoke of Farr's presen-

tation of a “mysterious person” as the recipient of Dickinson’s letters, a person who, in her final letter, is addressed as “Master”—an entity that can be regarded as Dickinson’s Muse.

In the second paper, “Dickinson’s Skepticism of Shakespeare,” Paraic Finnerty “complicates Dickinson’s adoration of Shakespeare” by reading her poem J741, “Drama’s Vitallest Expression is the Common Day,” alongside the skeptical responses to Shakespeare of some of her contemporaries. Finnerty suggested that these nineteenth-century responses to Shakespeare resulted from the Bard’s position as the unsurpassable English literary genius. Such a view was sustained by influential critics like Henry Norman Hudson and Richard Henry Dana, who believed Shakespeare’s superiority was a consequence of the aristocratic order of his society, which they contrasted with a democratic society like that of America.

In contrast, Emerson, Melville, and Whitman praised Shakespeare but rejected the position held by Dana and Hudson. Emerson considered Shakespeare to be the “representative poet” because of his unparalleled ability to absorb the spirit of the Elizabethan age. Melville celebrated Hawthorne as a writer who equalled Shakespeare but went unrecognized by American critics. Whitman, in his turn, attacked Shakespeare for his stand in favor of aristocracy, arguing that his art was politically unsound and therefore unsuitable for America.

Finnerty argued that Dickinson was making ironical use of the debate about Shakespeare and American literature when she wrote to Frank Sanborn, literary editor of the *Springfield Republican* (L402), refusing to submit a poem. In the letter she recognized the impossibility of equalling Shakespeare’s genius. But her poem “Drama’s Vitallest Expression” suggests that she was ambivalent toward the Bard. The poem establishes a contrast between the drama enacted within the human heart and Shakespeare’s drama. Dickinson reiterates Melville’s central thesis, that Shakespeare could be not only equalled but surpassed. Finnerty concluded that, while Dickinson’s three male contempo-

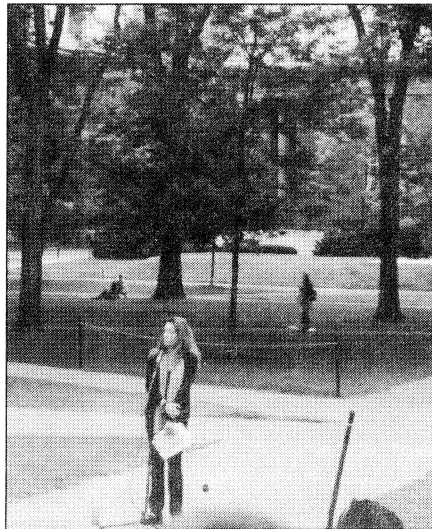


Photo by Jonathan Morse

Below, conferencegoers wait on the steps of Harvard’s Widener Library for the reading by poet Jori Graham, above.



Photo by Georgiana Strickland

raries continually displayed anxiety about Shakespeare’s influence in America, she was able to dismiss the Bard with one line.

Kristin Comment’s paper, “Dickinson’s Bawdy: Shakespeare and Sexual Symbolism in the Writing of Emily Dickinson to Susan Huntington Dickinson,” discussed the parallel between the relationship of Dickinson and her sister-in-law Sue and that of Antony and Cleopatra in Shakespeare’s play. She began by stating that, although many scholars have remarked on the importance of Shakespearean allusions in Dickinson’s writings, only a few have discussed the possible influence of what Eric Partridge called “Shakespeare’s Bawdy”—the pervasiveness of sexual metaphors and punning. Because such bawdiness was just as obvious to Dickinson’s contemporaries as it had been to Elizabethan audiences, it is unlikely that Dickinson missed it.

Quoting Jack Capps that “the prose and poetry of the Renaissance in England is one of the most important bodies of litera-

ture in Dickinson’s reading,” Comment contended that all aspects of that influence should be accepted, including sexual metaphors and allusions. The fact that Dickinson chose *Antony and Cleopatra*, the most “carnal” of Shakespeare’s tragedies, to represent her relationship with Sue is very significant.

Comment referred to critical statements published by Paula Bennett and Judith Farr, both of whom have suggested that *Antony and Cleopatra* was Dickinson’s favorite play because it reflected her relationship with Sue. But Comment argued that Bennett and Farr overlooked the significance of the sexual dynamic in Antony and Cleopatra’s relationship. Bennett sees Antony’s frustrated desire as a source of poetic inspiration for Dickinson. Farr suggests that Dickinson used Shakespeare’s tragedy as an emblem for the domination of one person by another and for the conflict between honor and duty. Comment sees the play as corroborating Ellen Hart’s contention that its allusions are “coded declarations of desire” to Sue.

Significant for Comment is that, in two letters to Sue, Dickinson imagines herself as Antony and Sue as Cleopatra (LL 430 and 854). In two poems addressed to Sue, “Her breast is fit for pearls” and “As Watchers hang upon the East” (J84 and 121), Comment pointed out the association of Cleopatra with pearls and the use of “Diver,” a word Shakespeare uses comically to represent Antony, as Dickinson’s code word for a man engaged in sexual activity. Thus, Dickinson might be concerned with “mockery of the action rather than a fear of its dangers.”

Comment’s conclusion is that Dickinson was influenced by Shakespeare’s free expression of sexuality rather than by any particular set of symbols or themes. The acceptance of this fact enhances our understanding of Dickinson’s poetry and of her relationship with Sue.

Carlos Daghljan is professor of American literature at the State University of São Paulo, Brazil. He has published on Poe, Melville, and Dickinson. His dissertation was on irony in Dickinson’s Poetry.

LOVED PHILOLOGY I

Moderator: JIM FRASER, Alexandria, Virginia; panelists: RICHARD ELLIS, University of Massachusetts; JONATHAN MORSE, University of Hawaii at Manoa; JAY LADIN, Princeton University

By Jim Fraser

This was the first of three panels devoted to "Loved Philology," whose common threads were Dickinson's word meanings, word usage, her lexicon, and her rhetoric. Examples discussed relate to Dickinson's formal education, religious and biblical knowledge, family law practices, and her passion for literature.

Richard Ellis began our panel, using "A little East of Jordan" (Fr145B), in which he finds "striking" similarities between language use by Dickinson and the Hebrew Bible in wordplay, multiple meaning, paradoxes, and "shifts in perspective." The poem is Dickinson's treatment of Jacob's wrestle at Peniel, from Genesis 32:24-31 (NRSV). Ellis, drawing from his recent paper of the same title in the Spring 1999 *Emily Dickinson Journal*, made a fascinating and convincing comparison of devices employed by Dickinson that parallel those in Hebrew.

The Hebrew of the Torah, says Ellis, "explodes" in wordplay, paradoxes, and shifts of perspective. Hebrew is written with only consonants (no vowels), leaving readers and speakers free to insert and experiment with vowels, vocalizations, and meanings. He compared this to the ambiguities in Dickinson's poems. Even the original handwritten format of the Torah scroll is analogous to Dickinson's holographs, bringing an intimacy of text to the reader.

Dickinson's poem concentrates on the human-Divine struggle in the story. By placing the scene "a little East of Jordan," she shifts the reader's perspective to recall another human-Divine encounter, in the Garden of Eden. Jacob becomes an ambiguous "Gymnast" and the biblical God, an "Angel." With the intimate and humorous plea in the line "The Angel begged permission/To breakfast – to return!" Dickinson's Angel is begging because the Gymnast has flipped or somersaulted the normal hierarchical relationship between the human and the Divine. Is the Angel's "breakfast" a pun on break hold?

The last lines, "And the bewildered Gymnast/Found he had worsted God!"

prompted discussion. "Worsted" (meaning bested) is also a textile. Does this suggest an interweaving of the fabric of human and Divine? Cynthia Hallen pointed out that "gymnast" comes from the Greek for naked (as shown in Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary). Could we read that the naked were clothed?

Jonathan Morse spoke in his paper about how word meanings and genre shift through cultural change and noted that we usually can't recognize the signs that we've lived through such a change. The title of his paper, "Dickinson and Other Girls," came from Ezra Pound's 1918 critique of the writings of Marianne Moore and Mina Loy, both young, little known poets at the time, in the March 1918 issue of the *Little Review*, co-edited by Pound. Pound sees Moore's and Loy's poetry as logopoeia, or poetry "akin to nothing but language...a dance of intelligence among words."

Morse made his point about shifts in word meanings and genre by highlighting three of Pound's comments. First, Pound detects only traces of emotion in Moore and no emotion whatever in Loy. Second, he says, "The arid clarity, not without its own beauty, of le tempérament de l'Americaine, is in the poems of these, I think, graduates or post-graduates." Third, "The point of my praise...is that without any pretences and without clamours about nationality, these girls have written a distinctly national product."

Morse argued that we, as modernists, reading as Pound read, prefer pure language with "arid clarity" to emotional or sentimental language. We prefer Dickinson's "My life had stood, a loaded gun" to "If I can stop one heart from breaking." "Perhaps," said Morse, "my thesis is that our preference is an artifact of our own preconditioning."

Dickinson, like Moore, expresses herself descriptively in her letters, creating emotion in the reader without communicating self-emotion or personal reflection. Morse argued that our understanding of a genre and the use of references like

"girl" are a lesson in the history of words.

The audience thoroughly agreed when Morse said, "It's unlikely that any of us in this lecture room would have been permitted through the Homestead door between 1830 and 1886, but now we're on first-name terms with the dead." Morse concluded by saying we must know the history of our vocabulary and heed injunctions from the past—our language is not Pound's or Dickinson's. And we're "historically challenged" in that we probably don't "speak Dickinson's language as well as we think we do when we try to get buddy-buddy with our girl Emily." "Do not think of Emily Dickinson as a role model," Morse warned.

Jay Ladin, in "Goblin with a Gauge," spoke about his experience teaching Dickinson's poetry to classes at the Homestead. He described how his approach to and techniques for teaching people who have never read Dickinson evolved over the course of several Homestead seminars, using "'Twas like a Maelstrom, with a notch" (Fr425).

As a poet, long-time student of American poetry, and reader of Dickinson, Ladin is comfortable with Dickinson's notable peculiarities, but an interpretive free-for-all quickly resulted in his first attempts to teach this poem. Since this is an all-too-familiar spectacle in attempts to "interpret" Dickinson, Ladin found success by teaching in a way that did not force definitive answers but focused on the reaction in readers' minds. Ladin also found that it was important to go slowly and linearly through the poem, word and line at a time, going against many fundamental habits of reading and learning. In the poem, "It" is a tantalizing unknown, a "non-recoverable deletion" in Cristanne Miller's words. The interpretive troubles start here. The teacher is supposed to "get" the poem and help the students "get" it too, but chaos results as each reader supplies his or her own "It" and goes in a different direction.

Ladin avoids this chaos by playing the role of the Goblin with a Gauge, interrupting arguments, metering out pieces of the

poem a little at a time, and “gauging” and noting down participants’ responses. In this way the personal responses to the language are revealed, giving understanding of the mechanism in the poem rather than the “meaning.”

Slow, Goblin-style reading prevents the reader from getting lost in Dickinson’s syntactical “sleight-of-hand” and avoids

resolving the poem into a single interpretation. With this approach, the students tend to become more excited the more the teacher/Goblin slows them down. Ladin finds that they consistently read this poem in one of three ways: as a riddle, a psychological crisis, or a narrative. To demonstrate that the reader becomes the hero, Ladin was able to devote a few minutes to

audience participation with his techniques.

These three speakers excited the audience with new and refreshed insights into Dickinson’s philology and helped us appreciate how her poetry unfolds within us, her readers.

Jim Fraser is an aerospace scientist with a lifelong passion for Emily Dickinson.

LOVED PHILOLOGY II

Moderator: MARY LOEFFELHOLZ, Northeastern University; ROBERT McCLURE SMITH, Knox College;
PAUL CRUMBLEY, Utah State University; BRYAN SHORT, Northern Arizona University

By Mary Loeffelholz

What did Emily Dickinson love in language? What do her readers love in her language? The loves explored by the panelists in this conference session proved to be of many different sorts, as did the panelists’ conceptions of the language underlying those loves.

Robert M. Smith’s “The Emily Dickinson Fetish” diagnosed the kinds of love entertained for Dickinson’s language by some of her contemporary critics, especially those engaged in manuscript study. In Smith’s analysis, those loves deserve to be diagnosed as fetishisms, in all the rich senses of “fetishism” elaborated by the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century human sciences—whether commodity fetishism in Marxist political economy, anthropology’s account of the fetish as the object invested by its worshippers with spirit, or Freud’s theory of the fetish as metonymic substitute for the penis “missing” from the woman’s body.

As conferencegoers familiar with Smith’s 1996 book, *The Seductions of Emily Dickinson*, were not surprised to hear, Smith concentrated his analysis in this paper on the specifically sexual, Freudian and post-Freudian ways of theorizing fetishism. Viewed in this light, Smith argued, much recent criticism of Dickinson, especially criticism devoted to the “tangible object” of the manuscript, participates in fetishism’s characteristic disavowals and displacements of desire from their original objects. In the case (what else to call it?) of Dickinson studies, the displaced object, Smith declared—the scene or sight from which recent Dickinson criticism is in flight—is history.

Paul Crumbley’s “Voice and Visual

Poetics: Reading Democratically” looked at models of intellectual or literary property in Dickinson’s texts and their manuscript circulation. Challenging the model of intellectual property sometimes tacitly associated with Dickinson manuscript studies, in which property rights are inextricably tied to the author figured as sole private origin and controller of her text, Crumbley argued that Dickinson’s overt poetic explorations of matters of intellectual property, in tandem with the practices of group reading and portfolio-sharing that formed the actual milieu of her manuscript writing, pointed toward an alternative, more democratic, and shared model of intellectual property.

Seen in this light, Dickinson’s refusal to publish in print is not necessarily a retreat to privileged privacy or an assertion of absolute proprietorship over her written word, but participates in a different kind of public sphere than that of print.

In “Emily Dickinson and the Origins of Language,” Bryan Short returned Dickinson’s “loved Philology” to its sources in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century theories of language—important precursors, it might be noted, to the human sciences of anthropology, political economy, and psychology drawn upon in Robert Smith’s paper. Demonstrating convincingly that Dickinson’s early nineteenth-century “intellectual milieu devoted considerable attention to the origins and development of language,” Short urged his audience to look beyond what he bracingly called “the linguistically jejune speculations of Emerson”—usually credited with giving Dickinson a theory of the evolution of language—to a much

broader tradition of linguistic inquiry, including Jonathan Edwards, Isaac Watts, Samuel Johnson, Lord Kames, Jeremy Bentham, and others.

This tradition tended to look for the origin of languages in “natural signs” conceived of first as simple nouns, with abstract nouns, verbs, and other parts of speech, especially pronouns, being later developments. Dickinson’s “These are the days when Birds come back” (J130, Fr122), Short argued, embodies in miniature this theory of language’s evolution, beginning in a world of simple nouns and ending in a world of abstract diction, adjectives, and possessive pronouns as the poem moves thematically “from the experience of nature to the ‘sacred emblems’ of religion.”

These three papers, forcefully written and crisply delivered, elicited a lively set of responses from their audience. Much of the discussion carried forward issues from the immediately preceding “Roundtable on Editing and Archiving.” Many members of the audience appreciated Smith’s witty diagnosis of the wayward desires her editors and readers have brought to Dickinson’s manuscript writing—as well as his candid admission that if this is fetishism, we are fetishists all.

We spent some time, however, pondering the problem—at least for post-Freudian versions of fetishism—of the original object said to be displaced by the fetish: Do we believe in that original object any more, and if we don’t exactly, what can it mean for Smith to call it “history” and see Dickinson criticism as fleeing it?

We also spent some time pondering whether the “democratic” manuscript

poetics advanced in Crumbley's paper truly answered the dilemmas of circulation and distribution raised by manuscript studies in the age of hypertext. Are Dickinson's manuscripts fetishes? souvenirs of democratic voice? or (as Short

might put it) the originally simple, perspicacious proper nouns of Dickinson studies? No final adjudication of these questions was forthcoming.

Mary Loeffelholz is associate professor of English at Northeastern University. She is the author of Dickinson and the Boundaries of Feminist Theory and the editor of Studies in American Fiction.

LOVED PHILOLOGY III

Moderator: JONATHAN MORSE, University of Hawaii at Manoa; *panelists:* DANIEL STRAIT, Asbury College; JAMES GUTHRIE, Wright State University; CYNTHIA HALLEN, Brigham Young University

By Jonathan Morse

When we read proverbs, says James G. Williams, we "face not a total system of thought but localized, concrete expressions of lived experience." Daniel Strait has found that perception applicable to Dickinson. The phrase "lived experience" may seem foreign to the idiom of a poet who equipped herself only with a garden, a pencil, and a key, but Strait asked us to imagine the Dickinson who said "My business is to love." This, he reminded us, was a woman of "inexhaustible sociability...undying concern for others."

To realize that concern in language, Dickinson wrote what Strait called proverbs. That term he borrowed from Kenneth Burke's social definition: "Proverbs are strategies for dealing with situations." The situation Dickinson faced, as a poet, was to give names to experience, and by realizing these names in the form of proverbs she created what Strait characterized in biblical terms as "a large body of wisdom literature...which provides her and her readers with a language to name, or 'size up,' as Burke says, recurrent religious situations."

We can see this language at work in the declarative paradoxes of a poem such as "Faith - is the Pierless bridge" (J915/Fr978), where the apparent oxymoron of the first line "signifies the mysterious means by which one is transported to another place of understanding." But the riddles don't come to an end on that bridge; they continue throughout the poem, leaving us wondering "whether accepted routes to religious truth, namely the 'Pierless Bridge' of conventional experience, remain 'A first Necessity.'" The general implication of such wordplay is that Dickinson, "by pushing the limits of language...restores a strangeness to the world....The natural activity of her verbal

experimentation forces the mind into a rich and genial world where she understands human life more completely by understanding it less and less."

James Guthrie's reading of Dickinson's language offered a secular complement to Strait's reading of Dickinson's intense religious wordplay. Guthrie's Dickinson, a poet in a house full of lawyers, created a specialized dictionary for herself by, among other things, reworking the concept of property—a concept that was very much in the air of mid-nineteenth-century middle-class Massachusetts. Knowing this can help us read such poems as the whimsical little complaint against God "I had some things that I called mine" (J116/Fr101).

God, says the poem, has sent a frost to destroy Dickinson's garden. In a retaliatory mood, the poet proclaims: "I'll institute an 'Action' - /I'll vindicate the law - /Jove! Choose your counsel - /I retain 'Shaw'!" Johnson and Franklin identify Shaw as a laborer hired to spade the Dickinson garden, and Guthrie completed the family joke by reminding us that the then-Chief Justice of the United States was another local Shaw: Lemuel Shaw of Massachusetts, a man held in the highest esteem by conservative lawyers such as Dickinson's father.

And yet, Guthrie added, although both Shaw and Edward Dickinson were Whigs who regarded property ownership as a basic requirement for social stability, "many of Judge Shaw's decisions were instrumental in securing the right of way for transportation providers, such as railroad companies, by upholding and enlarging the concept of eminent domain." This tension between attitudes toward property underwrites the poem's barely concealed rebelliousness, said Guthrie.

Similarly, argued Guthrie, "Alone and in a Circumstance" (J1167/Fr1174) benefits from an acquaintance with the mid-nineteenth-century debate about establishing British-style courts of chancery in the United States, and "I am afraid to own a Body" (J1090/Fr1050) "translates the political concept of national expansionism into a parable describing a somewhat panic-stricken realization of the fact of [the narrator's] own existence."

Each of these poems rests on a sophisticated understanding of property, and yet each of them undercuts that understanding. When she compares real estate with ideal estate, says Guthrie, Dickinson seems to be asking, "Do we own, or are we ourselves owned?"

The language of proverb and the language of law are anchored in external reference, of course. To be read intelligibly, Strait's Dickinson needs to be reinserted into a culture for which the Bible is native idiom. Guthrie's Dickinson takes her place on the bookshelf between the volume of statutes and the volume of Massachusetts political history. Cynthia Hallen's Dickinson too is a creature of cultural history.

According to Hallen's research, the sources of Dickinson's rhetoric (aside from her own genius) are (1) her study of Latin and Greek (especially Cicero) at Amherst Academy, (2) some discussions of language patterns in rhetoric and criticism textbooks, and (3) her inheritance of Renaissance rhetorical tradition from Shakespeare and the King James Bible. Knowing these facts can help translators translate and readers read, as Hallen proceeded to demonstrate. In fact, Hallen asked us to imagine a scholarship devoted to linguistic and rhetorical exegesis of every Dickinson poem.

Hallen began her demonstration by distributing a handout whose future passage through generations of duplicating machines is assured: a nine-page table of definition and example headed "Rhetorical Figures in Dickinson, Shakespeare, and the King James Bible." She then demonstrated the power of this analytical device by using it to equip us with a language for thinking about "I shall know why – when Time is over" (J193/Fr215).

Said Hallen: "The speaker's efforts to ease the distress with the promised future blessings of Christ's atonement are echoed in the balanced chiasmatic elements and parallel figures in the first seven lines of the poem. In the eighth and final line, the epizeuxis shows how the equilibrium is nevertheless overwhelmed by the scalding effects of present anguish." Epizeuxis, we learn from Hallen's handout, is the immediate repetition of adjacent words:

"That scalds me now – that scalds me now!" This naming of the phenomenon was philology at its most lovable: words in the service of helping us read other words.

Jonathan Morse is professor of English at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. His paper "Emily Dickinson and Other Girls" was a part of the panel Loved Philology I (see page 15).

MIND AND BODY I

Moderator: JANE F. CROSTHWAITE, Mount Holyoke College; *panelists:* SUZANNE JUHASZ, University of Colorado at Boulder; THERESA DE LANGIS, University of Illinois at Chicago; H. JORDAN LANDRY, University of Colorado at Boulder

By Jane F. Crosthwaite

Those who read and love Emily Dickinson's poetry join a large and enthusiastic society who recognize that the so-called quiet recluse led an explosive and dramatic poetic life. Those lovers of Dickinson who become social, cultural, and literary critics not only cross the threshold into this first, open secret of her poetic life, but commit themselves to fathom the sources of Dickinson's mysteries, surprises, and secrets. The three critics in this panel explored three aspects of Dickinsonian desire, probing the private pleasures of poetry in verbal, familial, and sexual terms.

Suzanne Juhasz, the veteran Dickinson scholar, began our session with a presentation exploring Dickinson's fascination with analogy and her employment of analogies as a means of approaching a subject. Juhasz stressed, however, that the approach is the point; the stalking, the teasing, the taunting of an idea offers the poet both "mastery and pleasure." Led by the "irresistible lure of repetition," Dickinson approached her subjects in order to display them, not to capture them in literal definitions. "Not literal," Juhasz says, "literal being not the point."

Drawing on theories about repetition advanced by Freud, Edgar Levenson, and Hans Loewald, Juhasz argued that Dickinson repeated phrases and staged definitional approaches with contrasting references in order to transform the act of definition into moments of experience. Repetition and analogy become tools for creation and transformation. Thus Juhasz is able to state that "analogies analogize analogies."

The complete poetic experience that Dickinson thus offers her reader is one that reveals the poet's pleasurable process of swimming in "that sea of wordless signifieds" by stimulating its reenactment for the reader of the poem. A Dickinson poem is a window on the failure and the power of language, an "irresistible Rapture" for the poet, the reader, and the critic.



Photo by Georgiana Strickland

The Victorian atmosphere of Mary Woolley Hall added to the ambiance of several panels.

When Theresa de Langis, a new scholar to the Dickinson field, took up the theme of desire, she turned to reexamine an old assumption about Dickinson's home life. Joining Martha Ackmann, but very few other Dickinson scholars, de Langis challenged the view that Dickinson's mother offered little personal or poetic sustenance to her daughter. De Langis applied common sense and overlooked common information to argue that Emily Norcross Dickinson set a pattern of independent thought and action for her daughter; indeed, de Langis suggested that the poet

followed her mother's "life script"—and did so in a productive and empowering way.

Set within the frame of the traditional Oedipal story, mother and daughter, Jocasta and Antigone, languish in a "narrative of erasure." But, aided by Marianne Hirsch's rereading of that plot, de Langis finds that the Dickinson mother and the value of her domestic world have been erased by false assumptions rather than fact. On the contrary, de Langis argues that Mrs. Dickinson established the domestic world within which her daughter could bake, garden, and write. In return, Emily Dickinson was loyal to her mother and her home, rebelling against traditional roles of marriage or motherhood and choosing the matriarchal world in which her poetry allowed her to flaunt the fact that she was a "Wayward Nun."

The third paper of our session, the work of another new Dickinson scholar, Jordan Landry, offered a glimpse of another mother/daughter relationship, since Landry has studied with Juhasz at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Landry took the issue of desire into a third category with an analysis of Dickinson's resistance to her Puritan world. More specifically, Dickinson transformed the Puritan conversion triangle into a lesbian world in which traditional assumptions about women—their possibilities,

desires, bodies, and self-understandings—could be reconfigured.

Landry reads the Puritan conversion triangle as an arrangement in which “the Bride” is instructed in desire for “the minister,” who sets the pattern of desire for the Christ, a pattern that Landry says “magnifies the positive value of male forms and fully authorizes desire for them.”

Landry finds that Dickinson, in her poems and letters, resists this pattern and that, most particularly, she uses the “birds and bees” to resist the dominant narratives and to create a new lesbian imagination. If the female is an impediment to conversion in the Puritan drama, she is a more active agent in the Dickinson drama

of desire. Letters to Susan Gilbert, written in her early twenties, contrast the confinement of church and sermon with an imagined escape behind Susan’s feathers. Seeking both a female friend and her protection, Dickinson also sought the freedom of flight, reveling in the wickedness of the rebellion and the escape—and in the written account.

Landry went on to propose a “Lady’s Supper” where Dickinson and the bee and the flower enact a lesbian pleasure/praxis as a significant means of rejecting the traditional “Lord’s Supper.” Landry argues that Dickinson’s “employment of bird and bee imagery is decidedly queer [because] it aims at reorganizing the expe-

rience, perception, and value of the female anatomy and reimagining its capacities to be pleased and give pleasure.”

As the papers in this session confirm, to cross the threshold into Dickinson scholarship is to move into new worlds that give surprising pleasure to the reader and to the writer. It is always a double pleasure to picture Emily Dickinson at her own desk opening such realms of desire.

Jane Crosthwaite is a professor of religion at Mount Holyoke College who has written several articles on Dickinson. Her current work looks at the theology and art of Shaker women.

MIND AND BODY II

Panelists: TRACI B. ABBOTT, University of Maryland; CYNTHIA MACKENZIE, University of Regina; MARIANNE NOBLE, American University

By Nancy Johnston

How have the themes of pain, loss, and death in Dickinson’s poetry and letters been interpreted by her editors and critics? What are the cultural and literary origins of her poetics of pain? These were some of the questions addressed by panelists in a well-attended morning session.

Traci B. Abbott opened with “Sadistic Goblins and Hours of Lead: The Language of Pain in Emily Dickinson’s Poems.” Her paper addressed the ways in which Dickinson imaginatively transforms the diverse and contradictory elements of pain while expressing the difficulties of translating physical pain into poetic language.

Abbott began with the lively argument that, while many of Dickinson’s poems are certainly expressions of grief, separation, and emotional suffering, we might look more closely at those poems that do not provide an obvious cause for pain, since these can be interpreted as thematic articulations of physical pain.

Much Dickinson scholarship, Abbott argued, has not adequately considered the physical or corporeal experience of pain as a literary theme. Critical interpretations of Dickinson’s themes of loss, death, and pain have depended in part on a version of her poetry and life created by editors Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

As a context for her discussion of the poet’s strategies and editorial practices, Abbott emphasized the cultural meaning of physical agony in women’s experience, suggesting that since physical agony has been associated negatively with female sexuality, reproduction, and hysteria, for nineteenth-century women such expressions were necessarily coded by both writers and editors. Since female pain in medical and moral discourse was often “synonymous with disease, inconstancy, and irrationality,” early editors Todd and Higginson were reticent to publish—or publish unedited—those Dickinson poems that presented female bodily pain without the sentimental referents: grief, love, or longing.

As Cynthia MacKenzie indicated in her title, “‘Heavenly Hurt’: Dickinson’s Wounded Text,” she related Dickinson’s pervasive subjects of pain and death to those dissonances found in her creation of a poetic persona, particularly her pose as the “wounded bird” in a letter to Dr. and Mrs. Holland (L269). In persuasive close readings, MacKenzie examined what she called Dickinson’s “self-inflicted textual wounds, represented by numerous gaps and ruptures, [which] are sustained by her unconventional use of oppositional devices.” In texts like the “wounded bird” letter, absence or wounds indicate the

contradictory relationship of pain and power such that their presence foregrounds “the paradoxical elements of desire that propel her language.”

To illustrate Dickinson’s “oppositional devices,” her poetic strategies of self-pleasuring and suffering in such poems as “It might be lonelier/Without the Loneliness” (Fr535), MacKenzie provided close analyses of Keats’s and Dickinson’s use of oxymorons, which open up opposition and paradoxically sustain it rather than attempt to achieve unity the way conventional oxymoronic phrases do.

MacKenzie also interpreted the self-reflexive relationship that arises between the poet and herself as reader of the text, which creates an auto-affective erotics that is inscribed pervasively and integrally throughout the poetry: “Perhaps you laugh at me! Perhaps the whole United States are laughing at me too! I can’t stop for that! My business is to love” (L269). MacKenzie suggested that the sentiments communicated in the letter underline the poet’s sense of marginalization as well as her determination to express herself with or without an audience. MacKenzie’s paper suggests how auto-affective desire protects Dickinson from becoming the final authority or from the tyrannical authority of readers, for we are always sent back to ourselves to find “Divinity.”

Marianne Noble's paper, "'Her Head Bowed in Anguish': Dickinson and the Mighty Man of Noon," focused on the representation of female desire in Dickinson's poetry. She suggested that what may be read as a relatively straightforward rejection of the culturally defined representations of "female desire" in the "Man of Noon" letter to Susan Gilbert (L93) may also be read as a vehicle for expressing a "revelry unspeakable" and the poetic "re-presence" of a female body.

Beginning with a discussion of the nineteenth-century sentimental romance, such as Susan Warner's *Wide, Wide World*, Noble pointed out the similarities between Dickinson's persona the Daisy and the willing, submissive female victims of those sentimental romances. The dramatic and emotional intensity of this letter, she argued, expresses the convergence of sentimentalism and Calvinist discourse. In both, pain promises to arouse feelings of pleasure in its association with salvation:

"Oh, Susie, it is dangerous, and it is all too dear, these simple trusting spirits, and the spirits mightier, which we cannot resist! It does so rend me, Susie, the thought of it when it comes, that I tremble lest at some-time I, too, am yielded up."

The central image is that of a powerful and potentially abusive husband, a figure drawn from sentimental romance and Evangelical Christian ideology. Noble suggested that Dickinson describes marriage as "an institution that transforms a bride into a masochist" who relinquishes her autonomy and locates her whole identity, despite the potential of abandonment, in her husband/God.

In the second half of her paper, Noble focused on the literary and classical origins of the Sun-like husband who provokes desire and pain. The myth of Clytie and the Sun-God Apollo represents the former lover Clytie as transfixed in adoration and submission, turning, like the heliotrope, to watch his path across the sky.

Noble noted that Dickinson, writing during the Second Great Awakening, would have understood marriage as a metaphor for God's relationship with humanity, characterized by a "proto-masochistic" heavenly rapture, submission, and terror.

Concluding with references to recent critical readings of Kristevan semiotic expressiveness in poetic language, Noble argued that the liminality that Dickinson associates with proximity to a Godlike other affords the poet an imaginative fantasy in which to experience "the thrill of feeling life so intensely precisely because it is on the brink of annihilation."

These diverse readings relating to the female body in pain indicate that the topic remains a provocative and complex one for Dickinson critics.

Nancy Johnston is an instructor at Ryerson Polytechnic University. Her doctoral work studied the literary production of the first edition of Dickinson's Poems.

ROUNDTABLE ON EDITING AND ARCHIVING

Moderator: ELLEN LOUISE HART, University of California, Santa Cruz; *panelists:* DANIEL LOMBARDO, Westhampton, Massachusetts; ELLEN LOUISE HART; MARTHA NELL SMITH, University of Maryland; LAURA LAUTH, University of Maryland; *respondent:* VIRGINIA JACKSON, Rutgers University

By Deborah Cadman

This roundtable explored a number of significant and controversial issues surrounding the Dickinson manuscripts, the libraries that house them, the archivists who determine which manuscripts will be made available, to whom, and in what form, and the editors who make interpretive choices about how Emily Dickinson's words will be represented.

Ellen Louise Hart, a member of the Dickinson Editing Collective, introduced the panel by emphasizing the relationships between archivists, editors, textual theorists, and biographers, and the importance of the collaborative nature of their shared work with the manuscripts.

Dan Lombardo, former curator of Special Collections at the Jones Library in Amherst, revealed the critical role the archivist plays in the editorial process. In his paper "On the Archivist as Manuscript Cop," he asserted that not only must the archivist "protect the legal rights of the author" and preserve the "physical

integrity of the manuscripts," s/he must also "organize and catalog the manuscripts for use, determine the amount and manner of access" to them, and "protect the rights and confidentiality of researchers."

Since the archivist "does the initial editorial work" on the manuscripts, s/he is "a rather commanding intermediary between the author's written word and the researcher." To illustrate his points, Lombardo explained how he recently acquired for the Jones Library a large and impressive collection of previously unknown letters from Edward Dickinson to his father-in-law, Joel Norcross, and his brother-in-law Alfred Norcross. When those letters, which contain many direct references to Emily Dickinson, were made available to scholars, Betty Bernhard made an important discovery. The archivist then had to protect Mrs. Bernhard's research and still allow other scholars to examine the same documents. As an "editor," "gatekeeper," and "protector," the archivist is

a "manuscript cop," aware of the rights of both authors and individual researchers and concerned about the danger of manuscript theft.

Hart spoke on the centrality of manuscript study within Dickinson scholarship during the last fifteen years in her paper "On Susan and Emily Dickinson's Correspondence." She defined manuscript study as an important choice for interpreting the poet's writings and discussed Dickinson's construction of various "writing surfaces," using Marta Werner's term. This writer "shaped and sized the space for her words," which determined "how her original readers would see and read a text."

Focusing on the significance of line breaks to interpretation, Hart noted that the Frost Library at Amherst College has one of Dickinson's writings on an envelope. The paper is cut and turned on its side, and the words are angled so that they begin at the smallest point of the envelope.

lope. The first line consists of the word “the,” and the words unfold like this: “the/mushroom/is the elf/of plants.”

Attending to Dickinson’s manuscripts, studying the ways her words unfold on the page, studying her line arrangements and line breaks are essential to a process of reading all of Dickinson’s writings, letters as well as poems. Hart pointed out that questions about “what Dickinson might have wanted for her printed manuscripts” and “what her intentions were or might have been” have consumed critics and dominated editorial studies. And yet the evidence of her careful cuttings and placement of words, showing that “her writing was not only intuitive but also arranged,” has been and continues to be undermined, trivialized, dismissed.

Hart argued that Dickinson was making choices about the visual strategies of her writing by her early twenties, after her earliest publications, which included a lost juvenile publication in script that appeared in Amherst Academy’s “Forest Leaves.” In closing, Hart emphasized the central role of manuscript study to biography, citing a 1902 letter from Susan to Curtis Hidden Page, a professor at Dartmouth and a friend of Martha Dickinson Bianchi, that echoes Emily’s line in a letter-poem to Susan, “Faith is doubt,” and represents poetry as “sermon ...hope...solace...life.”

Laura Lauth, a student in the MFA program in creative writing at the University of Maryland, spoke about what can be gained by editing Susan Dickinson’s writings and making them available on the electronic archives in her paper “On Writings by Susan Dickinson.” She suggested that these writings offer new contexts for generating impressions of Susan Dickinson herself, revealing the shared culture of Susan and Emily Dickinson, and making possible new interpretations

of their correspondence and their writing practices.

Lauth pointed out that the poem “The Shadow of Thy Wing,” printed in the *Springfield Daily Republican* of March 1, 1862, under “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers,” may have been written by Susan Dickinson. If so, the words sent from Susan to Emily Dickinson—“It takes as long to start our Fleet as Burnside”—could indicate a close link between their writing of poetry.

Martha Nell Smith, another member of the Dickinson Editing Collective, examined the different ways the poet’s manuscripts inform the 1998 Variorum Edition by Ralph W. Franklin and the Dickinson Electronic Archives in her paper “On Arkhe, Commandment, Commencement: What’s a Poem BY Emily Dickinson?” To clarify the differences between the variorum and the electronic archives, she separated the two meanings of *archive* that Jacques Derrida finds bound together in the term *arkhe—commandment*, “where men and gods command, the laws where authority, social order are exercised,” and *commencement*, “where things commence, where physical, historical, or ontological beginnings set events and existences in motion.”

Commandment, she argued, “describes the guiding principle of Franklin’s splendid variorum” because each version of a poem presented is made to conform to “the linguistic idea of a poem’s ‘text.’” His edition indicates that “the manuscripts contain the idea of ‘poem’ and the editor’s job is to deliver that idea in a container that makes ‘poem’ extractable.” Thus he imposes order on the “unruly”—“the messy handwritten artifacts of poems, letters, letter-poems, scraps, notes, fragments.”

The guiding principle of the electronic archives, on the other hand, is *commencement*. Images of Dickinson’s manuscripts

“in all their sizes, shapes, and messiness” appear in the archives along with “images of the printed pages.” This juxtaposition raises “ontological questions about the identities” of Dickinson’s writings, prompting readers to ask: “What is this?” “What is the writer doing?” and to decide “What constitutes a ‘poem’ BY Emily Dickinson.”

Smith pointed out that the preposition “by” has never been used since the early editions of poems, and thus the question remains an open one. She noted that the Editing Collective is not convinced a poem is separable from the artifact or that a cutout or a drawing is extra-literary. Readers must make those determinations.

Citing a phrase used by poet Alice Fulton in her conference keynote address, she spoke of “inconvenient knowledge.” The purpose of the electronic archives is not to find the truth about the poet’s intentions—her intentions changed all the time and meanings she did not intend are found by readers—but to make information about the manuscripts available, to open up access to that information, and thereby to build scholarship and inclusiveness. Smith also raised fundamental questions about whether “the archives tell us that Emily Dickinson wrote lyric poetry” and whether mutilations are constituent parts of an artifact or a text.

In her response to the roundtable, Virginia Jackson reviewed the many issues raised by the speakers—authenticity, authority, legitimacy, truth, ethics, ownership, access, accident, and intention.

Deborah Cadman is a research associate at Skidmore College. She is completing a book on Emily Dickinson, gifts, and the culture of exchange in nineteenth-century America.

DICKINSON AND THE ARTS

Organizer and moderator: JONNIE GUERRA, Cabrini College; *panelists:* JONNIE GUERRA; MARYANNE GARBOWSKY, County College of Morris, New Jersey; EMILY SEELBINDER, Queens College, Charlotte, North Carolina

By Maryanne Garbowsky

Each of the arts has its own vocabulary, which can intimidate the neophyte. Once learned and understood, however, this vocabulary can hold the key to a new ex-

citement and enhancement as the cross-over between the arts provides a synergy that is unique. These remarks, based on Emily Seelbinder’s presentation, offer an

appropriate entrée to this panel, which explored the impact of Dickinson’s life and poetry on three sister arts: drama, visual arts, and music.

Jonnie Guerra's paper, "Dickinson in the Spotlight: Recovering Two Early Biographical Dramas," dealt with plays based on the life of the poet written during the period 1930-1947. Although little definitive is known about Dickinson's interior life, playwrights have not been dissuaded from projecting their own imaginations onto her mystery. Guerra showed how the playwrights' "liberties with fact" led to misconceptions and errors that survive today.

The plays Guerra discussed were Vincent York and Frederick Pohl's *Brittle Heaven* (1934) and Dorothy Gardner's *Eastward in Eden* (1947), both written during a period when biographical dramas were popular, usually dealing with important writers and political figures. The critical study that fueled the imagination of the authors of *Brittle Heaven* was Josephine Pollitt's 1930 biography of the poet, in which she theorized that Major Edward Hunt, the husband of Helen Hunt (later Jackson), was the love interest in Dickinson's life and that their relationship caused a rift in the friendship of the two women. *Eastward in Eden* was indebted to George Whicher's *This Was a Poet* (1939), but Gardner made Benjamin Newton and the Reverend Charles Wadsworth love interests rather than intellectual mentors.

Brittle Heaven and *Eastward in Eden* had only limited runs on Broadway, but *Eastward in Eden* was chosen as one of the best plays of 1947 and went on to be performed Off Broadway nine years later. Both became popular in the amateur theatre circuit.

Guerra described the common elements in the plays, in addition to varying theories of Dickinson's thwarted love affair: a belief in the poet's genius and the intellectual attraction of her ideas, generational conflict, her white dress, and her withdrawal from the world.

Guerra concluded with a brief discussion of William Luce's *Belle of Amherst*, a monodrama that avoided many of the character conflicts implicit in the earlier plays, although it continued fallacies and myths about the poet. Guerra noted that the play has had a powerful impact on public awareness of the poet.

In "Emily Dickinson: The Artful Muse," Maryanne Garbowsky introduced two visual artists who have used Dickinson's poetry as a springboard for creative expression, Barbara Penn (who was in the

audience) and Katja Oxman, and showed slides of their creations.

In her work, Penn, a painter and installation artist, creates artistic arrangements that refer directly or indirectly to lines from Dickinson's poems or letters. In "I Make the Yellow to the Pies," for instance, using a line from a Dickinson letter to her cousin Louise Norcross (L302), Penn addresses issues of gender and societal limitations within Dickinson's nineteenth-century patriarchal culture, suggesting that Dickinson's struggle to create continues today in her own struggle as a visual artist.



Photo by Eleanor Heginholtz

Keynoter Alice Fulton intrigued delegates with a talk on "Contemporary Fractal Poetics" at the Friday conference luncheon.

In other paintings, Penn uses the silhouette of the poet done in 1845 as a "stand-in" for herself, showing the creative continuity that exists between Dickinson as muse and guide and her own creative expression today.

Katja Oxman, a printmaker working in the Washington, D.C., area, creates still lifes in colored etchings that incorporate and integrate personal objects and artistic imagery into complex designs. Identifying with the poet who, like herself, worked in isolation in her home, Oxman selects lines from Dickinson's poems as titles to her work, attempting to match with her prints their mood and atmosphere.

Garbowsky showed an Oxman print entitled "In an Adjoining Room," which uses line 4 of poem J449. The print was created as a memorial to the artist's mother, who died in 1997 and who gave Oxman her first book of Dickinson poems. Combining images that include the work of some of Oxman's favorite artists—Howard Hodgkins, Willem de Kooning, and Mark Rothko—Oxman tries to suggest the "other reality" that is death. A pocket watch alludes to the fleeting nature of time, while butterflies speak of transition and rebirth.

With the zeal of an evangelist, Emily Seelbinder presented the musical settings

of American composer and pianist Leo Smit. Although he knew Dickinson's work earlier, it wasn't until 1988 that Smit, perusing a copy of Johnson's *Complete Poems*, became enraptured with the poet and recognized in her "a soulmate." (See Seelbinder's article on Smit in the spring 1999 *Bulletin*.) Smit began to compose music for Dickinson's poems, creating *The Ecstatic Pilgrimage* (1988-91), a series of six cycles reflecting the poet's life and interests.

Three of the six cycles have recently been recorded on CD, with the composer as pianist and soprano Rosalind Rees. From the new CD, Seelbinder presented three songs: "I was the slightest in the house" (J486) and "They shut me up in prose" (J613) from Cycle 1, "Childe Emilie," and "I cannot dance upon my toes" (J326) from Cycle 2, "The Celestial Thrush."

Seelbinder described Smit as "a master of text painting—a sort of musical equivalent of onomatopoeia" that uses such musical effects as variations in dynamics and color, tempo, the shape of the vocal line, and the character of the piano part to "paint" the visual and emotional elements of the poems. These touches may be as simple as slowing the tempo when the speaker of "I was the slightest in the house" says "let me think" or adding a sudden increase in volume on the word "aloud." At other times Smit paints the entire text, as in his setting of "Within my Garden, rides a Bird," in which the piano line vibrates with the movement of the plants in the poet's garden.

Seelbinder demonstrated Smit's subtle touches by playing "They shut me up in Prose." In this setting, the voice, representing poetry, rises lyrically over a piano line that reiterates the dullness of prose by repeating an eighth-note E-flat throughout the piece. It is doubtful that the listener even consciously notices this repetition. The setting thus works as Dickinson's poetry does: it acts on the listener without calling undue attention to itself.

This session moved swiftly, running overtime and concluding with an enthusiastic appreciation of Emily Dickinson's impact on the arts.

Maryanne Garbowsky is professor of English at the County College of Morris, New Jersey. She is currently working on a book on Dickinson reflections in contemporary visual art.

THEMES AND BELIEFS I

Moderator: EMILY SEELBINDER, Queens College, Charlotte, North Carolina; panelists: CHANTHANA CHAICHIT, Chulalongkorn University; CAROLYN MORAN, Tennessee State University

By Emily Seelbinder

At the intersection of Emily Dickinson's life and work we can find many paradoxes. Two of these were the subject of this session. Echoing the paper she presented in Innsbruck ("Emily Dickinson Abroad: The Paradox of Seclusion"), Chanthana Chaichit brought the poet back home with "Emily Dickinson at Home: The Paradox of the Wandering Mind."

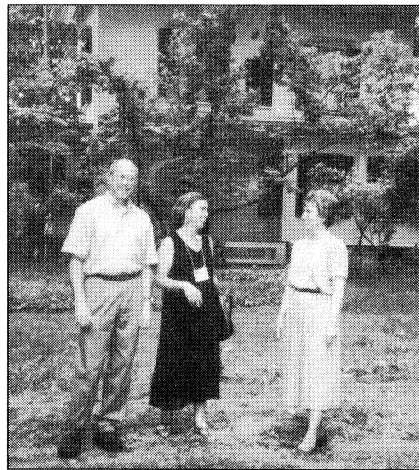
Chaichit began by asking, "Was Dickinson truly 'at home'?" Answering this question yields several seemingly contradictory responses. Dickinson was indeed quite at home in Amherst, from whence she rarely strayed. Her poems, too, detail "figures and objects of her home environment: family members, kitchen implements, the natural life of her garden, and the processes and movements of nature." She professes to a bias in seeing most things "New Englandly" and often confesses to limited experience ("I have never seen 'Volcanoes'" [J175], "I never saw a Moor" [J1052]).

At the same time, the poet seems to have been much preoccupied with a number of foreign literary figures, and in her poetry she travels often in imagination to distant, exotic lands—most notably perhaps, beyond the earth to heaven. In these journeys, she "reveals the spirit of a great traveler wandering everywhere, led by her curious and restless mind." As Chaichit noted, "Dickinson's mind was rarely at home." Her work therefore presents a paradox: "Physically and objectively she remains calmly at home—her poetry and correspondence expressing a reverence for the holiness of home—and yet, at the same time, Dickinson imaginatively wanders through unfamiliar places."

Chaichit identified a number of ways to address this paradox. Among them was one she has explored with her students in Thailand, who see Dickinson as both "a realistic individual and a fanciful dreamer" who "moves forward and around, and orients herself both in reality and in fantasy." In a number of poems, we find "words conveying a sense of traveling, journeying, and moving." These poems

"illuminate the poet's self-appraisal, self-assurance, and self-centeredness as well as her self-searching. To achieve her quest, Dickinson channels her concrete experience through her abstract imagination."

Even when her imagination falls short, the poet often demonstrates "penetrative insight" and an "acceptance of human truths. These truths are the gloomy passions identified by the Lord Buddha almost three thousand years ago, which comprise all the abstract experience that Dickinson was aware of in life, death, love, and frustration." Perhaps intuitively, Chaichit and her students suggest, Dickinson found a tenet of Buddhist teaching, the Middle Path. "The paradox of her life and her fantasy balances challengingly on this thin line."



Doug Evans, EDIS president Cris Miller, and Barbara Kelly enjoy a happy moment in front of the newly painted Evergreens.

Following Chaichit, Carolyn Moran, in "September's Baccalaureate: Emily Dickinson and the Philosophy of Aging," acknowledged that "it is a little presumptuous to attribute a 'philosophy'" to Dickinson. "Indeed, the range of response to her experience that Emily Dickinson exhibits could better be mapped as a constellation of points of emotional register, rather than a logical system." Despite these cautions, Moran finds in Dickinson's considerations of aging "a certain con-

stancy of tenor, one that we are familiar with in her other poems recording shock or loss." These poems, she argued, "might be considered as 'transit instruments' recording the poet's passage across meridians of emotional planes. It may be only in studying her display of emotion—her feelings—that her thinking (her 'philosophy') becomes 'knowable.'"

The almost two dozen poems Moran identified as addressing the experiences of aging must be distinguished from the many poems in which Dickinson addresses mortality and death. The poems on aging, she explained, "are most contiguous thematically with those marking seasonal change." For this reason, her discussion was organized "around time-meditations on retrospects and prospects—and tropes—of seasonal change and the rose." For example, in "What shall I do when Summer troubles" (Fr915), the speaker "registers anxiety at the seasons' passing," repeating "implicitly or explicitly half a dozen times" the refrain, "What shall I do?" A similar fear emerges in "As imperceptibly as Grief" (Fr935), where "anxiety about the passing of summer is able to be imbued with reflection, until *study* mutes immediacy—of loss."

Other poems on aging record "experience with time's synchronicity and, with that, the reinstilling of pleasure." In "The ones that disappeared are back" (Fr1697), the boundaries of time dissolve and "emotions associated with an earlier season [return] in a later one." In this joining of seasons, Moran suggested, "Sensation fortifies celebration" and "sensory experience is made richer anytime because of past knowledge." Thus "the poet can be both innocent and experienced." Still other poems reflect pauses, a stopping of time during which, through "retrospective insight, the poet gains a prospect on eternal things."

Two poems featuring the trope of a rose demonstrate "how powerfully [the poet] can convince—of opposite conclusions." In "Crisis is sweet" (Fr1365), the speaker prefers the rose "for its bud-stage, which

allows for continued possibility," while in "A little Snow was here and there" (Fr1480), the rose is depicted as "impregnable to time." Moran suggested, "We might read this as the constant temper evinced by the poet in the face of nature's accidents, a temper philosophical or archetypal, formal in flux."

In the poems on aging, Moran concluded, Dickinson employs "metaphors that create a synapse across the chasm between nature's indifferent regenerative ability and human uniqueness and once-

ness." In so doing, Dickinson exhibits once again her keen and unblinking insight into human experience.

The discussion that followed these presentations was wide-ranging. While we generally agreed that it is a dangerous thing to attribute a philosophy to Dickinson, we also acknowledged the usefulness of placing her work against the grid of a philosophical tradition. Chaichit's students, for example, may find Dickinson more accessible if they can examine her thinking through the lens of their spiritual

traditions. Eventually we wandered into speculations on Dickinson's feelings about Catholicism, which reminded us finally that this is a poet who not only refuses to be categorized but also insists on venturing in her musings anywhere she pleases.

Emily Seelbinder is an associate professor of English at Queens College, Charlotte, N.C., and is at work on a study of Dickinson's interpretation of Scripture.

THEMES AND BELIEFS II

Moderator: RUTH OWEN JONES, Amherst, Massachusetts; *panelists:* VIVIAN POLLAK, Washington University, St. Louis; LEIGH ANNE URBANOWICZ MARCELLIN, University of Georgia; DANEEN WARDROP, Western Michigan University

By Ruth Owen Jones

How aware of the Civil War was Emily Dickinson? What were her attitudes in those years toward race, gender, and class? The presenters on this panel tackled these questions and offered some new challenges and perceptions. This session invited the listeners to think about the prewar and Civil War historical context of Dickinson's life and milieu and to read several of her poems differently.

In her paper "Dickinson and the Poetics of Whiteness," Vivian Pollak looked at the racial rhetoric of the Civil War. Pollak noted that in her own earlier papers she had theorized that Dickinson tried to transform the political conflict in which men were the leading players into a more gender-neutral war of words. Pollak's earlier papers argued that Dickinson "flaunts a schismatic style, which announces that she has seceded from 'their story' into hers."

At this session Pollak supported that theory but went on to postulate that Dickinson holds many subject positions, one being that of a white person who sees herself as psychologically different from other racial and ethnic people. Whiteness for Dickinson, she said, "functions as an ambivalent sign of historical privilege," and Dickinson "was ambivalent about her whiteness." Pollak used as argument the 1862 poem "A solemn thing – it was – I said – / A Woman – white – to be" (Fr307).

Using both poems that speak of other racial and ethnic people and references in

Dickinson's letters to further her premise, Pollak theorized that, for example, the Orient in "His oriental heresies / Exhilarate the bee" (Fr1562, 1881) represents forbidden pleasures from which Dickinson was trying to distance herself. Pollak posited that other racial and ethnic people seemed to Dickinson to have more flamboyant, exotic lives and more successful sexual experiences than the poet herself.

In discussing Dickinson's wearing of white dresses, Pollak noted that other writers have dated her white predilection from about 1862 and see it as the poet's way of rejecting worldliness. Pollak agreed but went on to note that Dickinson figures "whiteness as a burden." Her dressing in white was congruent with her "self-imposed house arrest."

Pollak pointed out that Dickinson's attitude toward blacks and Irish immigrants changed over her lifetime, from small-minded prejudice to more open and accepting feelings. She discussed Dickinson's references to Orientals, Jews, Malaysians, and Negroes, arguing that in Dickinson's Civil War poems she was interested in "hybrid genres and colors" and that she viewed herself as a "mongrel being." Dickinson wished to transcend "Color – Caste – Denomination" (Fr836, 1864), Pollak noted, adding that Dickinson's apprehension of the war "critiques the racial exclusions on which her own class privilege also depended."

Leigh Anne Urbanowicz Marcellin, in

"'Singing off Charnel Steps': Soldiers and Mourners in Dickinson's War Poetry" (an excerpt from her dissertation on the war poetry of Dickinson and Elizabeth Barrett Browning), noted that Dickinson, in her poems and letters, expresses contradictory attitudes about the soldiers' deaths: "Dickinson writes about the front and the homefront in both sentimental and painfully realistic terms. She is both fascinated with and repulsed by the fallen men."

In two letters (245 and 255) in which Dickinson knew the soldier whose death she was retelling, Urbanowicz Marcellin pointed to highly sentimental words, but also to words of grief and pain in odd juxtaposition. "For every platitude in this letter, ... there is a phrase that reveals Dickinson's wrestling with thoughts and feeling this war occasioned." She cited also poems that appear to her to be extensions of the two letters, such as "To know just how he suffered – would be dear" (Fr688, 1863), "He gave away his Life" (Fr530, 1863), and "He scanned it – staggered" (Fr994, 1865).

Urbanowicz Marcellin saw Dickinson as idealizing death in some poems and showing the futility of the carnage in others. Sometimes the mourners' grief is tranquil, sometimes angry. "The position of Emily Dickinson herself is precisely that she held every position." That Dickinson herself "sang off charnel steps" (L298) gave her great power as a poet.

Daneen Wardrop, in "Emily Dickinson

and the Auction Block: Africanist Presence," traced tellingly some pre-Civil War events that Dickinson would have been aware of, such as the Fugitive Slave Act, the Shadrach incident, and the Anthony Burns trial in Boston. She also noted the role of Thomas Wentworth Higginson in these incidents and in supporting John Brown's Bloody Kansas and Harper's Ferry attacks. Wardrop pointed out that the San Domingo of Dickinson poems was the site of a bloody slave uprising about 1800 and that Dickinson undoubtedly knew of it. Wardrop found the encoding of race in several Dickinson poems and argued that when she writes of "the Ethiop within" (Fr415, 1862), she is identifying, as woman, with minority people.

"I never hear the word 'Escape'" (Fr144, 1860) could well be about escaping slaves on the Underground Railroad, Wardrop argued, but Dickinson uses the language of abolition and antislavery to write about her own life, not just the plight of slaves. "Dickinson used the materials at hand to portray the experience of living as a minority in the United States of the 1800s. Her use of the tropes of antislavery tracts and antislavery fiction draws, at least in part, from an awareness of the politics of being female in the nineteenth century."

The panelists agreed that their views were not mutually exclusive but overlapped at times. The three provocative papers in this panel elicited a sea of hands

at question time; unfortunately, the reception at the Homestead and the Evergreens in Amherst forced the session to end on time, since the buses were waiting right outside. One question went back to the wearing of white (a theme in other panels) and the possibility that Dickinson held Spiritualist beliefs. Another asked how many people in Amherst were active abolitionists, not just conservative Whigs in the 1850s. The buses to Amherst must have been full of good conversation.

Ruth Owen Jones is a historical writer and picture researcher who is currently compiling a book on Dickinson's flowers, plants, and gardens. She has been a guide at the Homestead since 1979.

THEMES AND BELIEFS III

Moderator: CINDY MACKENZIE, University of Regina; panelists: SHIRA WOLOSKY, Hebrew University, Israel; NANCY JOHNSTON, Ryerson University; BRAD RICCA, Case Western Reserve University

By Cindy MacKenzie

In a hot and humid classroom in Skinner Hall at 8:30 on the final morning of the conference, this panel attracted a capacity audience. The panelists presented diverse and provocative papers that left the warm and weary audience exhilarated enough to raise many questions at the conclusion.

In her provocative paper "Feminized Critique: Dickinson and American Selfhood," Shira Wolosky argued that despite her personal and literary reclusions, Dickinson's work reflects complexly on many norms central to nineteenth-century American culture. Her gender is one central pivot around which her understanding and self-expression becomes structured in ways that extend beyond the lives of women to the lives of men and outward into diverse aspects of nineteenth-century American culture.

These include conceptions of the self within America's developing political, economic, religious, and social as well as literary cultures. Dickinson's work not only addresses but also powerfully critiques American norms, Wolosky asserted, specifically notions of liberal individualism, particularly Emersonian self-reliance.

Nancy Johnston's presentation, "The

loaf and the crumb: Dickinson and the Aesthetics of Bread Making," began with an examination of a book of domestic guidelines that was part of the Dickinson library. In Lydia Maria Child's *American Frugal Housewife* (1829), Child offers useful suggestions about the technique

knowledge of the conditions to which the baking process is subject.

Johnston pointed out that Thomas Wentworth Higginson also appreciated the considerable skill involved in baking and chose breadmaking as one of his metaphors of literary excellence. The writer, he thought, "ought to engage in literary bread-making." Moreover, the responsible writer ought to make nourishing, wholesome food.

Dickinson's own role as the preferred maker of puddings and bread in the Dickinson household makes an examination of that role particularly interesting. Thus Johnston explored the way in which Dickinson engages the rules of domestic recipes, especially in her pose as a pupil to her female correspondents. The recipe ex-

emplifies an intimate exchange of a distinct female material and literary culture.

Second, Johnston examined the way in which Dickinson uses in her poetry what was a culturally resonant Christian trope, the breaking and eating of bread, to ex-



Marjorie Perloff, Vivian Pollak, Heinz Ickstadt (background) and Shira Wolosky continue the lively discussion begun in the *Themes and Beliefs III* session.

of making bread. Because the conditions of the nineteenth-century kitchen were demanding, Child cautioned her readers that "success in baking requires expertise to judge the variations and quality of flour, the strength of the yeast," as well as

Photo by Cindy MacKenzie

press intellectual and emotional meditation. Many of her better known “bread” poems, such as those drawing on the New Testament parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, contemplate spiritual starvation and emotional remoteness, while at the same time alluding to the rewards of self-imposed aesthetic distance.

At the end of the presentation, Johnston gave the “well baked” loaf of bread she had brought to the panel to Alice Fulton, who greatly appreciated the gesture—both the bread and the paper.

In “Emily Dickinson: Learn’d Astronomer,” Brad Ricca—with a notable enthusiasm and youthful energy—examined Dickinson’s science “homework” by way of Denison Olmsted’s *Compendium of Astronomy*, the textbook she studied while attending Mount Holyoke Seminary. By exploring her “astronomical” poems, Ricca attempted to explicate them both poetically and scientifically.

Along with a “sketch of the poem” (Brad believes you should first “read the poem, then draw it”), he drew our attention to “There came a Day at Summer’s full” (J322), one of the poems in which Dickinson explores the idea of the solstice. Ricca argued that Olmsted’s textbook may serve not only as a template for J322 in its chartings and depictions of the solstice, but also as a means of opening the poem into a more semiotically interesting space.

In fact, Ricca finds that the similarities of theme and language between Olmsted and J322 are so evident that their connection cannot be ignored for the starry-eyed Dickinson. She seizes on Olmsted’s definition of the solstice as a moment of absolute fixity as her natural sign—the moment and object by which everything else may be measured, even her familiar sightings of love, hope, and mastery.

In this Keplerian view of her project,

Dickinson uses poetry as her sextant to navigate realms of language and meaning both extra-textual and extraterrestrial, knowing that her primary sign is scientifically, visually, and thus poetically valid. Dickinson may search the sky, but she does so with faith in science. According to Ricca, when viewed in context with referential, astronomical information, her treatment of the heavens emerges as a deeply poetic, highly semiotic enterprise begging us to gaze at it.

Cindy MacKenzie is an instructor in the Department of English at the University of Regina, Saskatchewan. She is at present completing A Concordance to the Letters of Emily Dickinson, to be published in spring 2000.

SECRETS OF THE PEN

Organizer and moderator: MARGARET FREEMAN, Los Angeles Valley College; *panelists:* ROLF AMSLER, Schoenenbuch, Switzerland; SUSANNE SHAPIRO, Los Angeles, California; JACK McDERMOTT, Kamuela, Hawaii

By Paul Crumbley

This panel, organized and moderated by Margaret Freeman, provided a sampling of nontraditional approaches now being used to interpret semantic and holographic features of Dickinson’s poems and letters. These approaches shared an interest in revealing hidden or “secret” meanings that Dickinson either deliberately concealed or encoded through habitual compositional behaviors about which she had little if any conscious knowledge.

A distinctive feature of all three panelists is that they came to Dickinson as nonacademics or as academics with disciplinary homes other than English. By communicating conclusions and concerns central to investigations that fall outside the traditional English purview, the panelists provoked new appreciation for the ways in which Dickinson studies can benefit from other disciplines and technologies. The panelists also made clear that questions about Dickinson’s erotic experience, her mental health, and the identity of “Master” continue to elude final resolution.

Rolf Amsler’s presentation of the research undertaken by his step-father, Hans Werner Luescher, described the procedures followed and conclusions reached through some forty years of private study. Amsler stated that his aim in attending a gathering of Dickinson scholars was that of making public what Luescher believed to be “the central fact of [Dickinson’s] life,” “the master key to the hidden freight in almost all her poems.”

Simply stated, Luescher discovered that Dickinson’s poems present a coded account of her erotic experiences with Samuel Bowles and Kate Scott Anthon. Luescher arrived at these conclusions through a process that began as a translation of Dickinson’s poems into German and grew into an analysis of certain “odd expressions” that seemed to thwart easy translation while at the same time suggesting “hidden esoteric freight.”

Working closely with Dickinson’s edition of Webster’s dictionary, Luescher identified 267 “mother” terms that he believed conveyed second meanings. He then determined patterns of signification

for each term by locating all appearances in the poems and correlating the verbal context he found there with Webster definitions.

The result was a web of meanings that enabled Luescher to discern a consistently erotic subtext. As an example of what such an approach to Dickinson might yield, Amsler led the audience through a Luescher-inspired reading of poem J888, “When I have seen the Sun emerge.” According to such a reading, the first line may be translated as “When I have seen the glans engross.”

In her prepared assessment of the Luescher theory, Freeman argued that one need accept neither Luescher’s code nor his conclusions about Dickinson’s sexual relationships to appreciate the significant ways in which his study overlaps with other investigations of Dickinson’s erotic life and her struggle to voice intimate experiences at odds with nineteenth-century sexual mores.

Susanne Shapiro’s presentation, “Emily Dickinson’s Handwriting,” outlined the approach that she and Freeman have

employed in their ongoing project “to analyze Dickinson’s handwriting throughout her life.” Shapiro began by providing a brief history of graphology and explaining the principles that inform her work as a trained graphologist.

She then asserted that from a graphologist’s point of view “one of the most remarkable characteristics of Dickinson’s handwriting is the way it changed radically in the course of her life.” To be more precise, her earliest recorded writing shows “signs of an intense intellect and startling creativity,” whereas the writing of “1859 or so” shows “signs of ill health,” and by 1868 what becomes her later style reveals “increasing isolation, from herself as well as from others.”

Shapiro analyzed the spaces between letters and words that characterize this last phase of Dickinson’s writing as providing specific information about her “feelings for...Susan” and her “state of health at the time of writing.” In Shapiro’s words, “Given the fact that by 1884, Emily is no longer connecting any letters, [and is] leaving huge spaces between letters and words, her thoughts about Susan could not possibly have involved more than a dream, an illusion.” Shapiro concluded by observing that the graphological evidence presented in this letter supports the medical diagnosis proposed by Polly Longworth and Dr. Norbert Hirschhorn: that Dickinson “suffered from hypertension at the end of her life and that this contributed as much if not more to her last illness and death as the kidney disease that her doctor recorded on her death certificate.”

Jack McDermott’s presentation, “A

Computerized Word Analysis of the Master Letters and Comparison with Letters to Samuel Bowles and Susan Huntington Gilbert Dickinson,” explained the principles and potential implications of a computer program now utilized by psychiatrists to generate mental profiles through analysis of writing samples. McDermott,



Photo by Eleanor Heginbotham

East meets West as delegates from Japan and Norway exchange views on Dickinson at the Saturday dine-around.

himself a psychiatrist, proposed that such a program might shed light on the identity of “Master” while also clarifying Dickinson’s state of mind. The computer program, called the General Inquirer, develops psychological profiles by “systematically quantif[ying] samples of text into individual word frequencies, then group[ing] them into broad categories according to the Harvard III Psychological Dictionary.”

McDermott used this program to search for patterns linking Dickinson’s “Mas-

ter” correspondence to contemporaneous correspondence with Samuel Bowles and Susan Dickinson. His examination of four word samples showed that letters to Bowles and Sue differed in significant ways from the Master Letters. Specifically, the word category profile for the Master Letters contained the categories “danger and attack” that convey an intensity of emotion “qualitatively different from rejection and distress expressed elsewhere in her correspondence.”

McDermott concluded by affirming Richard Sewall’s observation that it is more important to explore Dickinson’s mental state than to answer the question “Who is Master?”

Audience discussion following the presentations raised the possibility that the precise nature of “danger and attack” conveyed

in the Master Letters could as easily be internal as external. McDermott readily acknowledged this possibility and suggested that Dickinson’s fear of danger or attack might well reflect “aggressive feelings of her own, from within, not from without, that may have mobilized her creative energy.”

Paul Crumbley is professor of English at Utah State University and the author of Inflections of the Pen: Dash and Voice in Emily Dickinson.

“MUSICIANS WRESTLE EVERYWHERE”

So said Emily Dickinson. And indeed they do. In his 1992 book of that title, Carlton Lowenberg cataloged 1,615 musical settings of 650 Dickinson poems by 275 composers. The trickle of melody that began in 1896 has become a flood in the years since. While the majority of these works are for solo voice and piano, a significant number are for chorus, orchestra, and varied chamber ensembles.

Given this rich trove, the time seems ripe for a conference bringing together Dickinson scholars, composers, performers, and teachers of singing to share insights into Dickinson’s poetry and ex-

plore the musical treasures it has inspired.

Current plans (not complete at this time) are for a gathering in Kalamazoo, Michigan, in early August 2000, close enough to the date of the EDIS Annual Meeting in Minneapolis (see page 28) so that Dickinsonians can attend both events. We will be combining forces for one concert with the Fontana Festival of Music and Art, which has presented a season of chamber music in nearby Shelbyville, Michigan, for the past twenty years.

Plans already initiated include a world premiere performance of selections from Leo Smit’s extensive song cycle *The Ec-*

static Pilgrimage, with the composer as pianist, as well as works by Ernst Bacon, Aaron Copland, and other leading American composers.

Organizers for the conference are Emily Seelbinder and Georgiana Strickland. Proposals for performance/analysis panels or abstracts of papers related to the musical aspects of Dickinson’s poems or to specific settings should be sent by February 1 to Emily Seelbinder at Queens College, 1900 Selwyn Ave., Charlotte, NC 28274, or to seelbine@queens.edu.

Watch for further details in the spring *Bulletin*.

MEMBERS' NEWS

ANNUAL MEETING MOVES TO MIDWEST

For the first time in its history, EDIS will host its Annual Meeting in the Midwest. We invite all members to join us August 11 to 13, 2000, at Concordia University, St. Paul. The theme of the meeting will be "To make a Prairie": Emily Dickinson and the Imagination." Emily Dickinson herself (in the person of actress Elizabeth Dickinson, a distant relative of the poet) will attend, and we will have the pleasure of hearing the paper Gudrun Grabher was unable to deliver at the conference: "Beauty – be not caused – It Is –": Spiritual and Physical

Concepts of Beauty in Emily Dickinson, Estée Lauder, and Lesley Dill." Other events will enliven this gathering in the Prairie birthplace of several writers, including Scott Fitzgerald and Sinclair Lewis.

For additional information, contact either Eleanor Heginbotham, Department of English, Concordia University, St. Paul, MN 55104-5494 (heginbotham@csp.edu), or Paul Crumbley, Department of English, Utah State University, Logan, UT 84322-3200 (PCrumbley@English.usu.edu).

DUES INCREASED

To meet rising costs, especially for its two publications, the EDIS Board has increased membership dues for the first time in several years. Beginning with the year 2000, dues for regular members are \$50; for students, \$30; and for contributing and institutional members, \$100. All of the above receive both the *Journal* and the *Bulletin*. For associate members (who receive only the *Bulletin*), dues are \$20. The procedures for joining EDIS are unchanged; see the bottom of page 2 for details.

ACADEMIC MEETINGS

EDIS will once again present two panels on December 29 at the 1999 meeting of the **Modern Language Association**, to be held at Chicago's Hyatt Regency Hotel. The first panel, 3:30-4:45, will be a roundtable focusing on "A New Volume of Dickinson's Letters to Susan Dickinson and the New Reader's Edition of Dickinson's Poems." Deborah Cadman will chair the meeting; panelists will be Timothy Morris, Elizabeth Petrino, David Allen Sullivan, Jeanne E. Holland, and Martha A. Ackmann. This panel will be held in the New Orleans Room (contrary to the printed MLA program).

The second panel, 7:15-8:30 the same day, will be on "Emily Dickinson, American Poetry, and Public Culture." It will be chaired by Mary Loeffelholz, with panelists Adam Frank, Jane Eberwein, Elizabeth Hewitt, and Virginia Jackson. For further information on these panels, contact Martha Nell Smith at the Department of

English, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742 (Martha_Nell_Smith@umail.umd.edu). For other information, see the MLA website at www.mla.org.

The American Literature Association will hold its 2000 meeting on May 25-28 at the Hyatt Regency in Long Beach, California (a change of venue from past years). EDIS will, as usual, sponsor two panels. The proposed topics include "Dickinson and the Body," "Dickinson and Audience," "Dickinson and the Civil War," and "Dickinson and Other Writers," but submissions on other topics will also be welcome.

Proposals and/or abstracts should be sent by December 15 to Vivian Pollak, English Department, Box 1122, Washington University, St. Louis, MO 63130 (vrpollak@artsci.wustl.edu). See www.americanliterature.org for additional information on the meeting.

EDIS JOINS SSAWW

EDIS recently became affiliated with the newly formed Society for the Study of American Women Writers, organized to promote research, teaching, publication, and the strengthening of relations among persons and institutions in this country and internationally, and the broadening of knowledge about American women writers among the general public.

SSAWW will sponsor panels at ALA meetings and conduct its own conferences, the first of which will take place in San Antonio, Texas, February 14-18, 2001. EDIS will organize Dickinson sessions for that conference. Watch the *Bulletin* for a call for papers.

Several EDIS stalwarts are among SSAWW organizers, including Karen Dandurand, Jane Eberwein, and Martha Ackmann. Many Dickinsonians have been contributors and subscribers to *Legacy*, which becomes the SSAWW journal with its move this fall to the University of Nebraska Press. Sharon Harris of the University of Nebraska is president.

Our affiliated status does not confer automatic membership. To join SSAWW, write to Jane Eberwein, Department of English, Oakland University, Rochester, MI 48309 (jeberwei@oakland.edu). Annual dues are \$10 for regular members, \$12 for international members, and \$5 for student members. Members who subscribe to *Legacy* will receive a 20 percent discount on the journal's regular rates beginning with the spring 2000 issue. A website for SSAWW is linked to *Legacy*'s current site: www.unl.edu/legacy/legacy.htm.

JOURNAL EDITORSHIP CHANGES HANDS

Suzanne Juhasz, founding editor of the *Emily Dickinson Journal*, is stepping down after seven years, to be replaced by Gary Lee Stonum. Juhasz and Stonum will share editorial duties for the 1999-2000 year, after which Juhasz will remain with the *Journal* as part of the editorial board and Stonum will become the editor.

Manuscripts and correspondence for the *Journal* should now be sent to Gary Lee Stonum, Department of English, 1112

Bellflower Rd., Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH 44106-7117. His e-mail address is www.cwru.edu/artsci/engl/faculty/stonum.html.

Three other scholars have recently joined the editorial board: Joan Kirkby, of Macquarie University, Australia; Robert McClure Smith, of Knox College; and Shira Wolosky, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

GREETINGS FROM AMHERST

What a pleasure it was to meet so many EDIS members and friends during the conference in August. We were especially pleased to open the Dickinson Homestead and the Evergreens for you on Saturday evening. We hope you enjoyed seeing both houses, hearing Doris Abramson read Dickinson's poetry in the Homestead parlor, listening to Sean Vernon's Dickinson-inspired music under the garden tent, and taking in the sweet smell of the summer rain.

On behalf of the Trustees of Amherst College and those of the Martha Dickinson Bianchi Trust, we would like to thank the Board and members of EDIS for the generous financial contributions to both houses and for your continuing support and assistance.

Cindy Dickinson
Director, The Dickinson Homestead

Gregory Farmer
The Martha Dickinson Bianchi Trust

NOTES & QUERIES

Emily Dickinson's birthday (December 10) will be the inspiration for celebrations in several locales this year. On December 5 and 6, the **Folger Library's** annual birthday event in Washington, DC, will feature **Elizabeth Spire**, author of *The Mouse of Amherst*, doing a lecture and a children's reading. There will also be a display of photographs of the two Dickinson houses in Amherst, and the traditional black cake reception. The event is open to the public.

On December 11, the **Dickinson Homestead** will host its annual Dickinson birthday Open House from 1:00 to 5:00.

Also on December 11, **San Francisco's Main Public Library** will sponsor a 2:00 P.M. celebration. **Ellen Louise Hart** will read from *Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson's Intimate Letters to Susan Huntington Dickinson* (co-edited by Hart and Martha Nell Smith) and **Aifa Murray** will introduce Margaret Maher, with whom Dickinson worked side by side in the kitchen for the last seventeen years of her life.

The December 1999 *New England Quarterly* will include an article by **Betty Bernhard** revealing the identity of the long-mysterious daguerreotypist who

Continued on page 31

FOURTH CONFERENCE ANNOUNCED

Close on the heels of its successful third international conference, EDIS is pleased to announce plans for its fourth conference, titled "Zero at the Bone," to be held in Trondheim, Norway, August 2-5, 2001.

The venue will be one of Trondheim's finest and oldest hotels, the Britannia, which first opened in 1897 and combines stylish elegance with all the facilities and hospitality of a modern establishment.

The conference will be sponsored jointly by EDIS and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. The organizing committee comprises Mary Loeffelholz, Cristanne Miller, Domhnall Mitchell, and Martha Nell Smith.

Given the conference location, a natural point of focus will be Dickinson and the North, which might include issues of class and race, the American Civil War, and imaginative geography. Other focuses might be nineteenth-century historical

contexts in general—both the specific, material circumstances in which the poet lived and wrote, and Dickinson's relationship to other women poets and lyric traditions. "Zero at the Bone" might also suggest the sciences—mathematics, astronomy, medicine—and their significance in Dickinson's writing. Given too that this will be the first conference of the new millennium, it will be appropriate to consider new climates of Dickinson criticism.

With the 1999 Mount Holyoke conference as inspiration, we hope to produce a stimulating forum for dialogue about this poet and her scholarly constructions.

The spring 2000 *Bulletin* will include further information on the conference. In the meantime, questions should be directed to Domhnall Mitchell (domhnall.mitchell@hf.ntnu.no) or Mary Loeffelholz (m.loeffelholz@nunet.neu.edu).

CHAPTER NOTES

The **Los Angeles chapter** will welcome the new millennium with a conference on January 9, 2000, entitled "The World of Emily Dickinson." To be held at the renowned Huntington Library in Pasadena, California, the conference will explore the cultural and contextual circumferences of Dickinson's poetry and life.

Speakers will include Steve Axelrod on Dickinson's contemporaries, Deborah Cadman on nineteenth-century gift exchange, Cathy Cucinella on Dickinson and politics, Gudrun Grabher on Dickinson and Nietzsche, Marcia Lebow on Dickinson and music, and Cristanne Miller on newspaper and periodical literature of the period.

Preregistration, including lunch, is \$25. Checks, payable to EDISLA, should be sent to Barbara R. Nicolosi, 1800 N. New Hampshire, #316, Los Angeles, CA 90027, before December 15. Walk-in registration on the day (no lunch) will be \$10 regular, \$5 with senior citizen or student I.D.

This is a wonderful opportunity for Dickinsonians to take advantage of the Huntington's extensive collections and elegant gardens. For advice on hotel accommodations and further information, contact Cheryl Langdell at clangdel@calbaptist.edu.

Arizona is the site of our newest chapter, thanks to the efforts of Anne Hall and Elizabeth Horan. The chapter's first meeting was a two-hour poetry reading held May 15 at Arizona State University, with fifteen persons in attendance, including members of the Arizona Poets Society. Plans are for annual May 15 and December 10 meetings. For information, contact Hall at anneh@imap2.asu.edu.



Conference t-shirts, modeled above by the poet herself, are still available for \$16, plus \$2 shipping (within the U.S.), in sizes S-XXL. They can be ordered from <http://home.att.net/~edis.tshirts/index.ht> or from Jim Fraser, 5208 Clinton Rd., Alexandria, VA 22312. Make checks payable to EDIS.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Barbara Kelly, Book Review Editor

Baker, Dorothy Z., ed. *Poetics in the Poem: Critical Essays on American Self-Reflexive Poetry*. New York: Peter Lang, 1997. 322 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-8204-3329-2, ISSN 0741-0700, \$51.95.

Fifteen literary critics explore the American lyric as self-reflexive poetry, using various critical approaches. Contributors include three Dickinson scholars. In a non-Dickinson paper, "Art, natures Ape': The Challenge to the Puritan Poet," Jane Donahue Eberwein discusses the relationship between seventeenth-century literature and theology. Focusing on Edward Taylor and Anne Bradstreet, she concludes that "Puritanism stimulated and encouraged literary expression in New England rather than stultifying it—above all by focusing on the salvific value of the Word." In "Ars Poetica/Ars Domestica: The Self-Reflexive Poetry of Lydia Sigourney and Emily Dickinson," Dorothy Z. Baker argues that both poets use domestic images "with an eye to securing the identity of the American woman poet." Readings of Dickinson poems (J937, 1273, 1275, 1775) illustrate domestic imagery, although Dickinson often coupled "the anti-domestic with the creative." In "Amazing Sense Distilled from ordinary Meanings': The Power of the Word in Emily Dickinson's Poems on Poetry," Joseph C. Schöpp is interested in Dickinson as a philologist in search of *le mot juste* and shows how she wavers between belief in the power of the word and a skepticism that causes her to approach the unnameable with indirection, looking toward the center from the circumference. All three essays are informative and accessible to the general reader.

Davis, Philip, ed. *Real Voices on Reading*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. 244 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-312-16475-0, \$35.00.

Thirteen poets, novelists, and critics, including John Bayley, Joseph Brodsky, Hester Jones, Doris Lessing, and George Steiner, discuss what reading means to

them. In "Triumphant Obstinacy: Reading Adrienne Rich and Elizabeth Bowen," Jones presents Rich and Bowen as model readers, describing Rich's response to Dickinson as a complex combination of wonder and objectivity, admiration and respect. Rich's identification with Dickinson is so personal that she says, "I have come to understand her necessities, could have been witness in her defense." Dickinson's self-knowledge and self-confirmation (J508, "I'm ceded – I've stopped being Their's") were necessities for Dickinson and for the women who followed her, including Rich, who sustains "the warmth of fervent and felt admiration, while ballasting it with articulate and engaged commitment." This volume provides a wide range of distinctive voices for general and sophisticated readers.

Franklin, R.W., ed. *The Poems of Emily Dickinson. Reading Edition*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1999. 692 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-674-67624-6, \$29.95.

Based on Franklin's three-volume Variorum Edition of *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1998), the Reading Edition presents a single fair copy of each of the 1,789 poems and an index of first lines. The helpful Variorum index collating Franklin and Johnson numbers has been omitted. An introduction describes Dickinson's workshop practices and the editor's selection policy. Omitting the multiple texts of the 2,500 source documents and most of the scholarly apparatus found in the Variorum, this edition's major assets are affordability and portability. Readers who want to update their Johnson edition of the *Complete Poems* (1960) but don't want to invest in Franklin's three-volume scholarly set will find this authoritative new Reading Edition an affordable alternative. Those who own the Franklin Variorum will find the Reading Edition a handsome companion that offers easy access to the poems.

Hirschhorn, Norbert. "Was It Tuberculosis? Another Glimpse of Emily Dickinson's Health." *New England Quarterly* 72.1 (1999): 102-18.

Hirschhorn suggests that Dickinson may have suffered from tuberculosis and that the experience would have informed her sensibility. His well researched, clearly written, and instructive article is based upon clinical clues found in Dickinson's letters and on medical information gleaned from nineteenth-century and contemporary medical texts. We learn that "from 1841 to 1845, approximately a quarter of deaths in Amherst were ascribed to tuberculosis." Dickinson had long bouts of recurrent, severe coughing and hoarseness, general debility, and noticeable weight loss. She was dosed with glycerine at the rate of one teaspoonful a day, an amount that would have been consistent for treating a tuberculosis cough, says Hirschhorn. He identifies the physician who may have treated Dickinson by using Boston maps to connect Dr. James Jackson with the Boston pharmacy that supplied the Dickinsons with glycerine. Hirschhorn concludes that it may have been Dickinson's "own close brush with consumption that served to organize [her] thoughts on the topic of death," and that her "characteristic empathy...is in part the legacy of a dreaded disease that may have temporarily invaded her body but certainly lodged itself in her sensibility." Hirschhorn, a physician, has previously written about Dickinson's health (see review in the spring 1997 *Bulletin*).

Knight, Denise D., and Emmanuel S. Nelson, eds. *Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1997. 534 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-313-29713-4, \$99.50.

A reference guide to seventy-seven American women writers, arranged alphabetically from Louisa May Alcott to Constance Fenimore Woolson, this volume docu-

Note: The *Bulletin* welcomes notices of all Dickinson-related books. We would be especially happy to learn of those published outside the U.S. Information should be sent to Barbara Kelly, 444 Washington Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94301, U.S.A., or faxed to her at 650-321-8146.

ments the works of known and less well known women writers. Each well organized entry includes a biography of the author, a discussion of her major works or themes, a survey of critical studies, and a bibliography of works by and studies of the author. In Nancy A. Walker's well written twelve-page entry on Dickinson, she notes that Dickinson's reclusiveness "can be seen as merely an extreme form of a familial tendency to stasis." Though the poet's complex work eludes thematic classification, Walker says that she has "perhaps the most distinctive individual voice of nineteenth-century American poetry." This volume was published too early to include R.W. Franklin's work on Dickinson, but overall it is an excellent resource book that brings into context writers who were previously excluded from the canon of literary studies.

Sofield, David, and Herbert F. Tucker, eds. *Under Criticism: Essays for William H. Pritchard*. Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1998. 320 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-8214-1224-8, \$39.95.

Christopher Benfey, Helene Deutsch, Joseph Epstein, and Helen Vendler are among the twenty-three contributors who have written personal essays to honor forty years of teaching at Amherst College by Pritchard, Henry Clay Folger Professor of English. Pritchard's sphere of influence is apparent in the wide range of voices and topics representing a variety of ideological approaches; included are testimonials on teaching and learning and independent interpretations of literature. Benfey's essay, "'The Wife of Eli Whitney': Jarrell and Dickinson," is based on Pritchard's account of Randall Jarrell's death, suggesting that Jarrell's last written words were written on the flyleaves and margins of Thomas H. Johnson's 1955 edition of Dickinson poems. Reading Jarrell's marginalia, Benfey attempts to reconstruct Jarrell's thinking about Dickinson. Admiring "her yankee ingenuity," and praising her strategies for "a rhetoric that, easily or with effort, can do up anything," Jarrell calls her "the wife of Eli Whitney." These collected essays engage, entertain, and instruct, and are a fine tribute to Pritchard, author of *Talking Back to Emily Dickinson and Other Essays* (see review in the fall 1998 *Bulletin*).

Spinks, C.W., and John Deely, eds. *Semiotics 1996*. Proceedings of the Twenty-first Annual Meeting of the Semiotic Society of America. New York: Peter Lang, 1997. 332 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-8204-4081-7; ISSN 0742-7611, \$54.95.

In "Emily Dickinson: Post-Colonial Feminist, Post-Modern Semiotician," William Pencak identifies Dickinson as not only an anti-colonialist but also a "profound semiotic deconstructionist of a masculine world." In a close reading of J430 ("It would never be Common – more – I said"), he explains that the poem is Dickinson's response to T.W. Higginson's rebuke about her "spasmodic" verse and that she "achieves universality and greatness as a writer in this one poem had she written no other." Her experience of rejection and her correspondence with Helen Hunt Jackson and Higginson, both advocates of social change, may account for Dickinson's sympathies with the oppressed. He cites various Dickinson poems to support his argument, offering J1124 ("Had we known the Ton she bore") as evidence that "Dickinson needs less than two dozen words to demolish with ruthless sarcasm every excuse sexism and imperialism has ever known" and that "she identifies the plight of women with the colonized while subtly bringing out the sadistic attraction held out by the possibility of exploiting others." Informed by feminist criticism, Pencak's essay is persuasive and clear.

Werner, Marta L., ed. *Radical Scatters: Emily Dickinson's Fragments and Related Texts, 1870-1886*. Electronic Archive. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1999. Introductory rate, \$25.00. For information write site-licenses@umich.edu.

Werner presents an exciting online resource of approximately one hundred Dickinson fragments; fifty-four poems, letters, and other writings linked to the fragments; and two introductory essays. Readers may access the fragments in four formats: high-quality facsimiles of the original documents, "diplomatic" transcriptions that offer legibility and show the documents' spatial dynamics, printed reading views, and SGML-marked electronic texts. "Floating windows" allow multiple formats to be viewed and compared simultaneously for close study. Each fragment is described in detail (composi-

tion date, size, paper type, condition of edges, folding patterns, location, publication history, etc.), followed by critical commentary. The archive is organized for search and analysis; one can locate documents with torn edges, those written in pen, those located in certain collections, those exhibiting various handwriting styles, and more. The many searches offered in eight indices and various code and type "libraries" will challenge and stimulate the user's perseverance and imagination in researching and collating the results. Organized "to allow scholars to work with Dickinson's texts in unedited form and to draw on them in a nonlinear manner," the archive gives users access to documents not otherwise easily available to view. This incredibly detailed and well designed electronic archive is user friendly and does not require advanced computer skills.

Book Notes

Recently reissued in paperback: **Polly Longworth**. *Austin and Mabel: The Amherst Affair and Love Letters of Austin Dickinson and Mabel Loomis Todd*. Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1999. ISBN 1-55849-215-1. \$19.95.

Two Dickinson books were among the "Valley Bestsellers" during the week of the EDIS conference, as reported in the *Daily Hampshire Gazette*. Based on bookstore sales in Amherst, Northampton, and South Hadley, *The Emily Dickinson Handbook* took fourth place for Nonfiction, and the Franklin **Reading Edition** was in fifth place—on the "Fiction" list.

Notes & Queries, continued from page 29

took the only known photograph of Dickinson. Bernhard made the discovery in the collection of Dickinson-Norcross letters recently acquired by the Jones Library.

The **Jones Library** announces the appointment of **Peter Nelson** as its new Curator of Special Collections, beginning November 1. Nelson's most recent post was as archivist for the Five College Archives Digital Access Project. Earlier he served as University Archivist/Special Collections Librarian at Thomas Jefferson University and project Archivist at the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society.

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