

Bulletin

VOLUME 18, NUMBER 2

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2006

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

DICKINSON ANNUAL MEETING

By Margaret DeAngelis

My daughter was in elementary school the first time I attended an Emily Dickinson International Society annual meeting. I explained to her that I was going to a town far away where the poet was born and where she wrote her poems, and that I was going to meet other people who love this writer and her work as much as I do, learn about their new projects, and maybe try some writing of my own.

"Mommy went to Emily Dickinson Camp," Lynn told a neighbor. When my friend reported this, I reached back to a phrase from my salad days to describe my experience: "Three days of peace, love, and academic papers," I told her.

Having attended the most recent EDIS annual meeting, I think the camp metaphor is still apt. From August fourth through the sixth, about a hundred people—some scholars, some knowledgeable readers of the work, some merely "come alongs" (family members or other companions with but a scant acquaintance with the poet)—gathered on the campus of the University of Maryland. We came from twenty-one states, the District of Columbia, and three other countries, from points as close as our own faculty offices and as far away as Japan. Some of us came from the relative comfort of cooler climates to an area struggling through a heat wave described as "deadly," while some of us merely exchanged one kind of stickiness for another. Upon receiving our registration materials, we scanned the program, noted the pan-

els and workshops we were most interested in, and found someone to sit with at dinner.

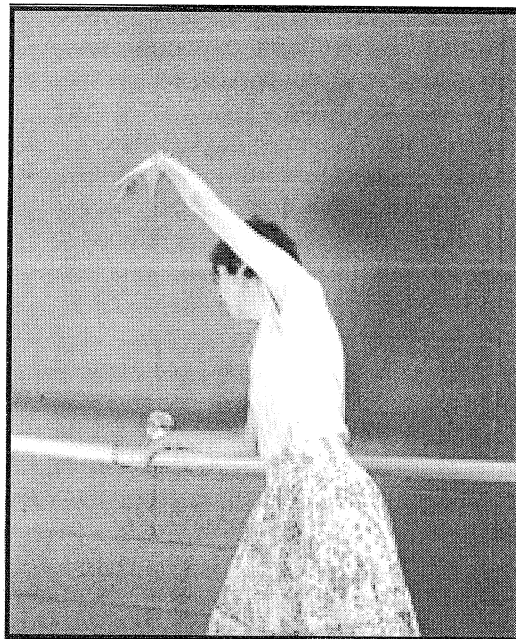
The theme for the 2006 meeting was "The Economy of Pain," a phrase used by contemporary poet Linda Pastan to describe the mystery that Emily Dickinson continues to present even to those whose lives are dedicated to studying her and her work. After a welcome from James Harris, the dean of arts and hu-

by seven of the participants followed, setting the mood for Saturday's full schedule of lectures, workshops, and other events.

One not familiar with Dickinson and the lively people who study her might think that such a mood would be somber and sad. But while the study of this poet and her milieu is for many a serious endeavor, even a life's work, it has been my experience that Dickinson devotees are an upbeat bunch whose delight in whatever angle they're using to approach the subject is infectious. After Gudrun Grabher's presentation on navigating the territory within and without Dickinson's "boundaries of pain," participants had to face the one truly difficult choice of the weekend: which two of the four poetry workshop breakout sessions would each attend?

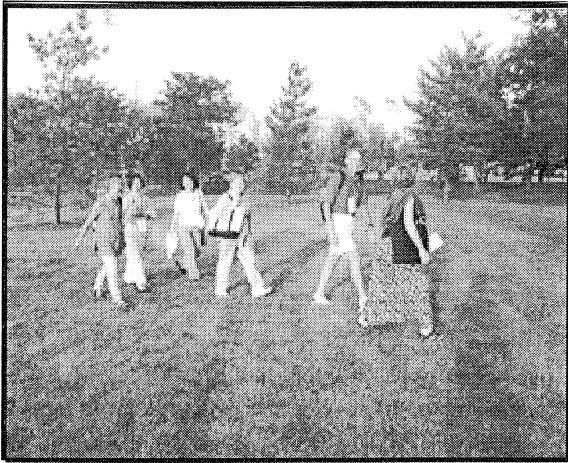
I chose Cristanne Miller's consideration of "I felt a Funeral, in my Brain," and a discussion of "It ceased to hurt me, though so slow," led by Suzanne Juhasz. "Work the poem," Juhasz said as we began. Both these sessions were a delight. Since leaving the classroom several years ago I have had scant opportunity to "work the poem" with eager readers prepared to tease out any new idea and lay it beside the familiar interpretations.

Between each participant's two workshop choices was the welcome interlude of lunch, followed by a change of pace and direction. Jane Eberwein and Martha Ackmann (identified as the only Dickinson scholar who is writing a book about baseball) sat across from each other at a table on



Dance movement workshop
Photo by Michael Hustedde

manities at the University of Maryland, and one from EDIS president Gudrun Grabher, the assembled campers were treated to a reading by poet Alicia Ostriker from her book *No Heaven* and then a meditation on Emily Dickinson's various takes on loss and pain. A choral reading of Dickinson pain poems given



Left: Intrepid trekkers

Right: Dining around in D.C.: Lynn Welch, Michael Kearns, unidentified (but gracious) server, Cris Miller, Hedy Hustedde



Photos by Michael Hustedde

the stage and had a conversation about Dickinson and religion. Later, poet Sandra Gilbert read from and amplified the material about Emily Dickinson in her prose work *Death's Door*, a nonfiction history and analysis of deathways in America. Once again, those not familiar with the way Dickinsonians approach

these difficult subjects might be surprised at the amount of levity and enjoyment that such an endeavor can produce.

Those who plan the EDIS meeting programs work hard to find something new and engaging for each meeting's Saturday night entertainment. This year participants were treated to a

performance of *Violet in my Winter*, a dance choreographed by Meisha Bosma, which was commissioned by the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Poetry Society of America, the Alexandria Performing Arts Association, and the Emily Dickinson International Society. This dance takes a contemporary look at the life and writings of Emily Dickinson, using four dancers, images pro-

jected on scrim, music, and spoken words. Ms. Bosma introduced the piece, cautioning the Dickinson aficionados present not to search their concordances for the phrase "violet in my winter," because it isn't there. Nor, as I recall, did it occur in the dance's spoken portion, which used only excerpts from the poems. Instead, the phrase was meant to give an overall artistic impression of the poetry.

I, for one, was mesmerized. I know little enough about classical dance, let alone modern dance. The energy and athleticism of the dancers gave an interesting counterpoint to the quiet voice reciting the poems. It is all too easy to think of the poems as proceeding from a sedate and settled state of "emotion recollected in tranquility," but the performance suggested otherwise.

Sunday morning began with Research Circle, an informal gathering of Dickinson scholars and others who



Dining around in D.C.: Cris Miller, Hedy Hustedde, and Nobuko Shimomura
Photo by Michael Hustedde

performance of *Violet in my Winter*, a dance choreographed by Meisha Bosma, which was commissioned by the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Poetry Society of America, the Alexandria Performing Arts Association, and the Emily Dickinson International Society. This dance takes a contemporary look at the life and writings of Emily Dickinson, using four dancers, images pro-

EDIS Bulletin (ISSN 1055-3932) is published twice yearly, May/June and November/December, by The Emily Dickinson International Society, Inc. Standard Mail non-profit postage is paid at Evansville, IN 47708. Membership in the Society is open to all persons with an interest in Emily Dickinson and her work; for further information, contact Gudrun Grabher, President, EDIS, Institut für Amerikastudien, University of Innsbruck, Innrain 52, A-6020 Innsbruck, Austria.

Annual dues are \$50.00 for regular members, \$30.00 for students, \$100.00 for contributing and institutional members (all of whom receive the *Bulletin* and *The Emily Dickinson Journal*), or \$20.00 for associate members (*Bulletin* only). Membership inquiries should be directed to James C. Fraser, 5208 Clinton Rd., Alexandria, VA 22312 USA. Membership applications and changes of address should be sent to The Emily Dickinson International Society, c/o Johns Hopkins University Press, P.O. Box 19966, Baltimore, MD 21211-0966 USA. Direct changes of address to jrnleirc@mail.press.jhu.edu, 800-548-1784 (U.S. and Canada), or 410-516-6987; fax to 410-516-6968.

Address submissions and other communications for the *Bulletin* to Michael Kearns, mkearns@usi.edu or English Dept., Univ. of Southern Indiana, 8600 University Blvd., Evansville, IN 47712 USA. Submission deadlines are March 1 (spring issue), September 1 (fall issue). All articles become the property of the *Bulletin*. Back issues are available for \$5.00 each from the editor. Copyright © 2006 by The Emily Dickinson International Society, Inc. The *Bulletin* is indexed in the American Humanities Index and the MLA Bibliography.

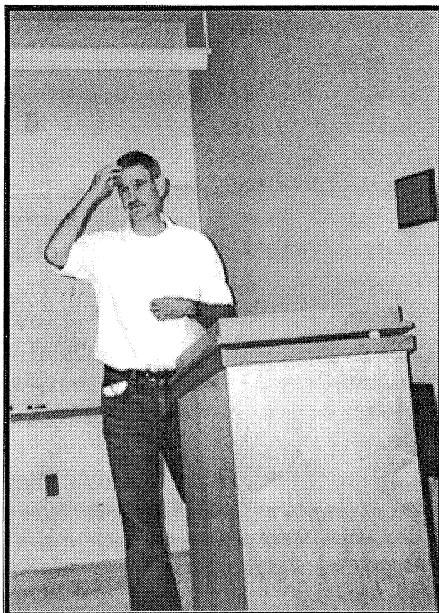


Left: Dance movement workshop
Photo by Michael Hustedde



Right: Cindy MacKenzie and Vivian Pollak
Photo by Eleanor Heginbotham

trade information about the projects they are currently working on. A discussion of linguistics and regional accents and the way Dickinson might have pronounced certain words gave rise to an impromptu performance by Emily Seelbinder of "I heard a Fly buzz when I died" in her wonderful southern accent. I am not primarily a Dickinson scholar. I am a fiction writer with an academic interest in nineteenth-century domestic life among the Pennsylvania Germans of Berks County. And yet whenever I attend Research Circle, I come away with encouragement and suggestions for sources. Such is the generosity of the Dickinson community.



Dr. Fred Foote
Photo by Eleanor Heginbotham

After Research Circle, those participants who arrived for Meisha Bosma's class on movement found themselves engaged in an extraordinary event. Ms. Bosma and several of her dancers taught us some basic dance movements and gestures, and then worked with us in small groups to choreograph "I was the slightest in the House." Believe me when I say that anyone who can get me to move my body unselfconsciously in a mirror-lined room full of strangers is a spectacular teacher.

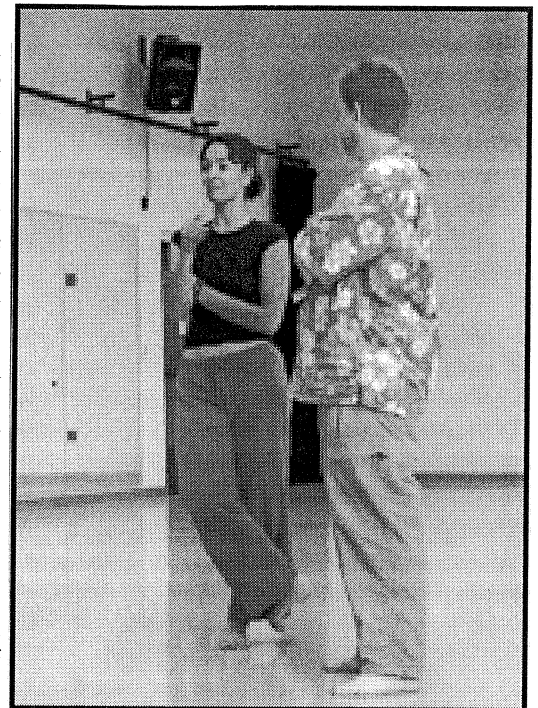
With the hour getting on toward noon and people needing to leave for long flights, the annual business meeting of the Society took place. A business meeting has a certain formulaic quality, especially when the members are scattered around the globe and the business is transacted by a few dedicated and trusted members. But some excitement did run through the crowd when it was announced that the 2007 meeting would take place in Japan.

The final event was a presentation by Dr. Fred Foote, a career Navy physician and poet, who gave a talk and reading on "Poetry and the Iraq War." His work is a testament to the power of poetry to transform hard emotions and bring about at least the start of healing. Lunch and goodbyes followed.

I won't be in Japan next year, but I look forward to the report someone else will write about that event. I look

even farther forward to 2008 in Amherst again, and 2009 in Saskatchewan. May the poet whose work has brought us together continue to inspire us.

Margaret DeAngelis is a fiction writer and historian who taught high school English in Pennsylvania for a long time. She publishes a continuing series of personal essays online at her website, The Silken Tent (<http://www.silkentent.com>).



Meisha Bosma and Emily Seelbinder
Photo by Michael Hustedde

EMILY DICKINSON'S EPISTOLARY IMMORTALITY

By Sara Polak

"Dear Friend, — A letter always feels to me like immortality because it is the mind alone without corporeal friend." So Emily Dickinson wrote in 1868 to her friend and literary tutor Thomas Wentworth Higginson.¹ One of Dickinson's primary interests is to achieve immortality by committing herself to the page, yet she is also self-consciously aware of the "corporeal friends" (such as paper and ink) that letters do have. This is famously exemplified in her first letter to Higginson, which Dickinson did not sign in the usual manner, instead conveying her name in pencil on a small card enclosed in a separate envelope. Dickinson exploits both the material and linguistic oddities of her writing to confuse the writing's physicality with that of her body, as if she herself were in fact a letter or a poem:

Mr. Higginson, — Your kindness claimed earlier gratitude, but I was ill, and write to-day from my pillow.

Thank you for the surgery; it was not so painful as I supposed. I bring you others, as you ask, though they might not differ. While my thought is undressed, I can make the distinction; but when I put them in the gown, they look alike and numb.

You asked how old I was? I made no verse, but one or two, until this winter, sir.

(L261, April 1862)

The "surgery" refers to Higginson's comments on Dickinson's poems, but through the mention of her own physical illness, it is here presented as surgery on her physical being. Dickinson then touches on the question of her age: without giving Higginson the calendar age he must have hoped for, she jokingly presents herself as a being that exists only in poems. The entanglement of her bodily and her verse-making age is strengthened by the iambic quality of the sentence, which begs to be read as a poem:

You asked how old I was?
I made no verse
But one or two
Until this winter, sir.

Dickinson deliberately obscures the conventional transparency of epistolary writing. This stress on the correspondence between writing and the body would not have needed so much attention had she purely wished to transmit "the mind alone without corporeal friend." By transmitting the body in the text Dickinson goes a step further: she lets her body disappear into the text.

In a similar vein, Dickinson draws attention to the fact that death and immortality are at once opposites and synonyms. "The mind alone without corporeal friend" is the disembodied spirit that remains after the body has died, but at the same time only death can secure immortality ("undyingness") for the mind. Something similar can be said of letters: they bridge the distance between author and addressee, but at the same time they cannot avoid symbolising the presence of such a distance. Thus letters bear a sense of death about them — the bodilessness that enables them to change places so freely and rapidly stresses the physical absence of their writer, and by implication also the possibility of the writer's death before the words arrive at their destination. This becomes particularly pertinent during the Civil War, when the threat of bodily death is more acutely present than usual, especially for those like Higginson serving in the army.

I should have liked to see you, before you became improbable. War feels to me an oblique place — Should there be other Summers, would you perhaps come?
[...]

Should you, before this reaches you, experience immortality, who will inform me of the exchange? Could

you, with honor, avoid death, I entreat you, sir. It would bereave
Your Gnome
(L280, Winter 1862-3)

The ambiguity contained in "the exchange" of the bodily Higginson for his immortal spirit is especially important at this time of uncertainty. The implication is that for a loved one to be "improbable" is harder to bear than for the beloved to be dead (immortal). This vital uncertainty is what makes war an "oblique place." Dickinson cannot know what war is like, but the listener may hear the bleakness contained in its qualifier, "oblique." The fact that this is less obvious in reading the letter illustrates how letters can lose some of their confessional power during their journey, just as the war's bleakness will disappear as soon as immortality becomes a fact.

By posing as Higginson's "Gnome," however, Dickinson uses the opaque and yet transient quality of letters in a very deliberate fashion. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a gnome is "one of a race of diminutive spirits fabled to inhabit the interior of the earth." Moreover, in early uses, gnomes were "earth-dwellers," creatures that "move unobstructed through earth as fish do through water." This combination of being earthly and yet a "diminutive spirit" pinpoints both Dickinson's own evasiveness and the tendency of letters to move easily when humans cannot. Dickinson reaches Higginson because her letter does, and having put herself in it, she signs off as one who can move through earth as fish through water. It is difficult to say whether gnomes are immortal, but the eeriness that surrounds inhuman, and thus possibly immortal creatures, fittingly matches Higginson's improbability. Dickinson thus exploits an epistolary ambiguity to make her statement: letters (especially during wartime) are flighty and ghostlike things, because while they are meant

to be read by one person and interpreted in one way, there is no guarantee they will be. This issue is, of course, particularly pertinent to her own career as a poet—Higginson was (with Susan Huntington Dickinson and a handful of others) one of the few she elected as a reader of her work

Dickinson's reclusive life and apparent disinterest in obtaining a large readership have elicited almost as much critical attention as her work. The many biographies, with titles such as *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretative Biography* (1955) and *This Was A Poet: A Critical Biography of Emily Dickinson* (1938), show a tendency to speak of "Emily," even when analyzing poetry. Clearly, there is a sense that the details of Dickinson's life must contain the key to interpreting her otherwise elusive poetry. A crucial work in this line is Leyda's *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson* (1960), which logs her life and writings chronologically, "in the conviction that what is presently most needed in the study of the life and works of this enigmatic poet, who has been the subject of so much distorting gossip and legend, is the most factual treatment possible." The facts Leyda finds are "presented with a single aim: to get at the truth of Emily Dickinson" (xix). Aside from the question of whether Leyda's method is the best for his purpose, the two volumes of his work mainly convey the impression that Dickinson's life was relatively uneventful, so that one risks ascribing too much importance to whatever did happen. Leyda himself argues that

The tiniest scrap of biographical fact might be the very detail needed to help grasp a cluster of associations, the missing piece in the puzzle that makes plain a series of relationships in the life that in turn reveals a major theme or continuity in the poems. With no poet is such a process more needed than with Emily Dickinson, whose poems are among the most intensely personal and yet impersonal on record.
(Leyda xix-xx)

Leyda's quest for "tiny scraps of biographical fact" has at times tended to topple into over-readings of the lack of events and social interaction in Dickinson's life. Her celibacy, for instance, has elicited considerable speculation about her emotions, as if the absence of evidence of an active love life is somehow proof that it must have been particularly exciting. For example, in *Open Me Carefully* (1998), one of the most recent works to do this, Ellen Hart and Martha Nell Smith propose Dickinson's sister-in-law Sue as her secret lover. Likewise, Dickinson's habit to stay at home has been diagnosed as depression, social phobia, agoraphobia, and other physical and psychological disorders (e.g. Amy Lowell, cited in Pollak and Noble, 26). Such speculations may satisfy our curiosity, but there is little direct evidence to support them. Moreover, as Wolff points out, "It is difficult to chart the course of Emily Dickinson's social life: although an exchange of letters gives unambiguous evidence of separation, there are no similarly reliable records for visits and attendance at parties" (492).

Dickinson may not have been conscious that she would become such a difficult case for biographers, but she seems to have been quite aware that letters ultimately leave more of a trace than direct contact, even if that trace is evidence of separation. Although it seems Dickinson was happier to stay home than go out, given the bulk of her writing and particularly the number of letters she wrote, most evidence of this fact is taken from things said in her poems. This raises the problem of whether the persona in the poem may be interpreted as Dickinson herself, which is at issue, for instance, in Fr592:

The soul that hath a Guest
Doth seldom go abroad —
Diviner Crowd at Home —
Obliterate the need —

And Courtesy forbid
A Host's departure when
Upon Himself be visiting
The Emperor of Men —

It is tempting to take the speaker to be Dickinson herself, in which case the poem would be her own explanation of her reticence in social contacts. In that reading, she is content to be by herself—in the company of the "Diviner Crowd at Home" who offer food for thought and obliterate the need to "go abroad"; she is more interested in depth than in breadth. The "literate" in "Obliterate" can in this context be viewed as an argument for why there is no need to go abroad: reading and writing literature, and being "literate" to the point of sublimation in literature, are important objectives for Dickinson. At the same time literacy is a form of disappearance into the word, which characteristically works to obliterate Dickinson's physical presence, while creating a self-conscious link with the act of writing. The same can be seen in "There is a pain—so utter— / It swallows substance up—" (Fr515): "so utter" could be understood as qualifying the pain, but because of the dashes, it may also be read as expressing an imperative to relieve the pain through expression. In this way, Dickinson tentatively establishes herself as the persona of some of her poems, identifying the poems as the authors of her letters in this June 1862 letter to Higginson:

Would you have time to be the
"friend" you should think I need? I
have a little shape: it would not
crowd your desk, nor make much
racket as the mouse that dents your
galleries.
(L265)

Dickinson's assertion that she has "a little shape" may be true of her figure—indeed it is hard to get rid of the image of a very small woman trotting about on Higginson's desk—but the only thing Higginson can confirm about the statement is that Dickinson's poems "have a little shape." Thus, while tempting the reader to take her writing so literally as to identify her not only with the speaker but with the text itself, Dickinson does not actually allow one to do so (Pollak and Noble).

Rather, she casts herself as a textual being: her letters as well as her poems can only be read as projecting personae, and never “the real Emily Dickinson.”

Such flirtatious gestures arouse more interest in her biography than an autobiography might have done: they invite critics to interpret not only her poetry as something meaningful, but her life as well, treating it in effect as a piece of art as opaque and encoded as her poems. Given Dickinson’s hypothetical intention to confuse her physical being with the existence of her poems, accepting this gambit is perhaps the best compliment one could pay her. The poems provide a space for interpretation more than they say anything definite, so one needs to try to fill in the gaps in her language. Thus, critics are teased into trying to complete Dickinson’s life story, which in itself is a testimony to her success in casting herself as poetry.

The outwardly uneventful quality of her daily life has come to act as an empty space for critics onto which to project their solutions. Judith Farr, for instance, comes up with a “Narrative of Sue” and a “Narrative of Master,” offering a division between “Sue”-poems and “Master”-poems, which in itself is useful, although the question how Dickinson related to each of the categories remains a point of speculation. *Open Me Carefully* is also determined to read a story into the body of Dickinson’s letters and poems. The way Hart and Smith collapse the distinction between poems and letters seems sensible in the case of Dickinson’s correspondence with Sue (and, as we have seen, in the case of her correspondence with Higginson). However, they take the persona in all texts to be Dickinson herself (because this is usually possible with letters) rather than personae in a fiction Dickinson may consciously have created.

A similar urge to interpret a character who provides insufficient grounds for interpretation can be found in Herman Melville’s “Bartleby, the Scrivener,” though the results are more depressing. There is no clue as to what

ails Bartleby, or even whether anything is wrong with him at all, but it seems impossible for those encountering him to live with the emptiness of not knowing. The lawyer who tells the story goes to enormous lengths to accommodate Bartleby, engaging in a foredoomed quest for clues to his motivation. Yet eventually the narrator must concede:

It was truly a beautiful thought to have assumed Bartleby’s departure; but, after all, that assumption was simply my own, and none of Bartleby’s. The great point was, not whether I had assumed that he would quit me, but whether he would prefer so to do. He was more a man of preferences than assumptions.

(39)

With his opaque and inscrutable motives, Bartleby could be seen as an extreme exaggeration of Emily Dickinson. Both personae are too empty to stop others from putting meaning into them. Bartleby’s otherwise unaccountable “preference” to cease copying is attributed to his supposedly failing eyesight. His living alone in the office raises more questions about his relatives and background than any explicit or implicit referral to such ties could have done. The narrator of the story tells it because he finds unbearable the lack of understanding and possibility for empathy with Bartleby’s life and motives. While other scriveners do provide a foothold for interpretation—and the narrator thoroughly accounts for the actions and interactions of his other clerks—Bartleby cannot be pinpointed. As the narrator says at the beginning:

While of other law-copyists I might write the complete life, of Bartleby nothing of that sort can be done. I believe that no materials exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man. It is an irreparable loss to literature.

(18)

It is exactly Bartleby’s inscrutability, his playing “hard to get” (although the

notion that he would be “playing” already contains an unjustified assumption) that seduces the narrator into allowing Bartleby to stay in his office even when Bartleby openly refuses to work, and that later necessitates the narration of this story, as an amputated way of restoring the “irreparable loss to literature” that Bartleby’s incomprehensibility constitutes.

The only information that sheds light on the embodied void represented by Bartleby is the rumor of his former career in the Dead Letter Office. Although Bartleby himself gives no reason to believe that he is in any way maimed by his career either in copying documents or in sorting dead letters, it seems obvious to the narrator that anyone would experience some influence from performing such a deadening job.

This inference again risks reading something into Bartleby that is not necessarily there, but there are other reasons to think of him as having been influenced by his career in the service of dead letters. Bartleby’s unbearable passivity and his inability to respond share some of the unbearable aspects of letters that never arrive. Because Bartleby never responds reasonably, his colleagues cannot receive any feedback from him, or hold their ideas up to his approval or judgment—an activity to which the other clerks are required to lend themselves. This creates a kind of isolation, not only of Bartleby himself, but also of those who try to communicate with him. Speaking to Bartleby is like writing a letter that will never be received, and will therefore to some extent reflect its failure onto the writer.

The dead letters Bartleby has sorted are equally failed attempts at communication, and thus irreparable losses to literature. They have tried to transfer love, money, consolation, and hope, but have died along the way. Because they were never read by their addressees, they have stopped fulfilling the functions of a letter, acquiring even smaller chances of ever arriving than a letter in a bottle. Since Bartleby

has functioned as the dead end for these letters, he has come to inherit their incommunicability and has become, as the narrator puts it, "a bit of wreck in the mid Atlantic" (38). Only the deadness of the letters has arrived at the letters' original destinations, insofar as all their intended recipients are dead as a result of missing their letters. *Bartleby*, on the other hand, as a powerless surrogate recipient has assumed only their forlornness and their unavoidable tendency to end on dead walls.

Dickinson wrote many poems and letters that remained unread during her life, but not many of her poems refer to letters or dead letters. While the distinction between letters and poems is often obscured, as we have seen, Dickinson seems acutely aware of whether and by whom her work was read. The importance of death in her poems, and the fact that, if they were read at all, this was usually only done by one person, gives them an epistolary quality.² Even poems that were incorporated in letters to different correspondents retain this personal quality. For example, Fr1626, a poem of condolence, was sent to Sue after Gilbert's death on 5 October 1883 in the following version:

Climbing to reach the costly Heart
To which he gave the worth,
He broke them, fearing punishment
He ran away from Earth —

Later, in the spring of 1884, she sent a variant to Higginson, as though for his daughter Margaret, in memory of her infant sister Louisa:

In memory of your Little Sister
Who "meddled" with the costly
Hearts
to which she gave the worth
and broke them — fearing
punishment,
she ran away from Earth —

Thus, even poems that reached more than one recipient were geared to their specific readers. Perhaps the most fa-

mous example of this is "Safe in their Alabaster chambers" (Fr124), but "The Wind begun to knead the Grass —" (Fr796), for instance, is known to have been sent to at least four different addressees in slightly varying versions. It is sometimes difficult to decide to what extent these variants were created specifically for their different readers, but in many cases it seems clear that Dickinson plays with this possibility. In "The Stars are old, that stood for me —" (Fr1242), she flirtatiously hints that her addressee is implicated in the poem, by using masculine forms in the version sent to Higginson ("Presuming on that lone result / His infinite Disdain / But vanquished him with my Defeat") and feminine forms for the variant to Sue ("Her infinite disdain" etc.). E. A. Petrino has argued that it was difficult for women in nineteenth-century America to publish for a large public, but in Dickinson's case projecting a single reader has become a part of her strategy to establish interaction with readers in general. Even when the variants to different addressees do not seem telling, one can often choose to read a poem into what Judith Farr calls the "Narrative of Sue" or into the Higginson narrative.

But there are also more genuine "dead letters" in Dickinson's work. Such is the following poem, which she did not publish or send to anyone, as far as is known:

This is my letter to the World
That never wrote to Me —
The simple News that Nature
told —
With tender Majesty —

Her Message is committed
To Hands I cannot see —
For love of Her — Sweet —
countrymen —
Judge tenderly — of Me
(Fr519)

Although this poem does not look like a letter, it professes to be one, and although this "letter to the World" was not published during Dickinson's life, there is a hint of indignation that it

was never reciprocated. The role of the third to sixth lines is confusing: should the World, by letter or otherwise, have passed on "the simple News that Nature told"? Or did the news eventually reach the speaker, because nature told it? Such questions are so intransigent that the poem becomes incommunicative and ends up giving the lie to its robust-sounding claim to be a letter. The ending, on the other hand, is clear and conventional; it asks something that can be granted, thus establishing a communication by directly offering the reader a sense of exchange and an opportunity for reciprocity. This soothing ending reconciles the reader with the fact that the middle part is so difficult to decode, accepting that, in the words of Karl Keller, "Emily Dickinson is a great tease" (2).

The result of Dickinson's ability to communicate, by being unambiguous as necessary yet offering many options for interpretation to entice the reader, is that she becomes more alive to her "sweet countrymen" after her death than before. Unlike *Bartleby*, whose interment nobody recalls because it has never merited even a "meagre recital," Dickinson judged very well when (and to whom) to be communicative and when to be enigmatic. Her flirtations with death and immortality pervade not only all of her writing, but also her management of her writing. Her endless surgery on the poems meant that they had to stay at home indefinitely and were only disseminated among those she knew would "judge tenderly," to confirm their being "alive." Yet only after Dickinson's death was her lifelong quest to cast herself as poetry completed: because she was no longer alive, the poems could become alive and could include her in their immortality. Dickinson after death became one of the most widely studied and interpreted poets of American literature, because, instead of becoming dead letters, her poems became letters to everyone individually, seducing us with their ambiguities to believe that an actual correspondence is possible.

Polak, continued on page 19

THE BETTENDORF PUBLIC LIBRARY'S EMILY DICKINSON GARDEN, AN UPDATE

By Hedy N. R. Hustedde

The Bettendorf Public Library Information Center's Emily Dickinson Garden, located in Bettendorf, Iowa, was planted in 2004 as part of the Library's Emily Dickinson Lives! project. The Garden was dedicated on the anniversary of Dickinson's death, May 15. Dickinson scholar Sheila Coghill wrote about this event in the May/June 2005 *Bulletin*. A feature article by librarian Hedy Hustedde was included in *Public Libraries* magazine (September/October 2005). Some poetry and photographs from the Garden may be viewed by going to the Bettendorf Public Library's home page: www.bettendorflibrary.com. Click on "About us" and then "Visit the Emily Dickinson Garden."

The Garden features plants that are mentioned in Dickinson's own poems. The Garden tied in more closely with Dickinson herself when Master Gardener Sue Laimans, who took the lead in planning, determined that each cultivar planted today had to have been available in Dickinson's day.

Since then, the Garden's condition has ebbed and flowed. Last year a drought wreaked havoc, and this year the sprinkler system went awry, drowning some of the plants. The lemon balm and a particular geranium spread themselves and their descendants far and wide, smothering more delicate plants. Some daisies just picked up and moved en masse to another part of the garden. The Garden has become a living, breathing entity in its own right.

The original volunteer list has been depleted because of people moving away or finding out that the work was too hard for them. The librarian in charge has determined that it might be a good idea for her to take Master Gardener classes herself in order to know more about what needs to be done to keep the Garden healthy. A Master Gardener Information Librarian would be an asset to both library and commu-

nity by stimulating the cross-pollination of programming.

Since the original plantings were fewer than ideal due to money constraints, more plants have been added yearly. This year 100 *Narcissus Jonquilla Simplex* (Wild Jonquil) and *Narcissus Albus Plenus Odoratus* (Poet's Narcissus) will be added. Then there is the periodic addition of



Photo contributed by the Bettendorf Public Library Information Center

mulch and compost plus the purchase of gardening tools. The Friends of the Bettendorf Public Library organization has always been generous with the funding of those items.

The Gardens of Emily Dickinson (2004) by Judith Farr and *Emily Dickinson's Gardens: A Celebration of a Poet and Gardener* (2005) by Marta McDowell have been more delightful to read when there's been a real live Emily Dickinson Garden in the neighborhood.

Judy DePauw's poem "Summer Soft" (which includes the names of plants Dickinson used in her own poetry) is on the plaque on the pedestal which supports Dickinson's bust in the middle of the garden. DePauw's

words add to the ambience of the Garden.

The bust was formed from a composite material by area artist Kenn Brinson as solid bronze was not affordable. It did crack the first year – poor Emily – but Brinson repaired it and it weathered the second year. Sometimes there are flowers or rocks on the pedestal, presumably memorials of some sort.

Librarian Hustedde intends to start a twice-yearly program to take place on or near December 10 and May 15 (Dickinson's birth and death dates). The program will start with a little ceremony in the Garden, continue with an in-depth discussion of a single Dickinson poem or theme led by a local scholar, and end with Dickinson's own ginger cookies and tea or lemonade. This December, Bea Jacobson, professor of English at St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa, and longtime member of EDIS, has volunteered to lead the discussion. She has suggested the theme of "winter." Several Dickinson poems fit the theme, including "The Winters are so short –," "Winter is good – his Hoar Delights," "Like Brooms of Steel," "These are the days that Reindeer love," and this two-liner – "Winter under cultivation / Is as arable as Spring" – not to mention poems of snow or frost! That is the glorious thing about Dickinson – she always fits.

So the Garden lives in Bettendorf, Iowa, and, through it, so does Emily Dickinson.

Hedy N. R. Hustedde is an Information Librarian at the Bettendorf Public Library.

BULLETIN WELCOMES POETS

As of this issue, the *Bulletin* welcomes the submission of Dickinson-influenced poems. At its most recent meeting, the EDIS Board decided that the *EDIS Bulletin* and the EDIS as a whole would be well served by making a place for such poems.

This addition to the *Bulletin* will complement our coverage of Dickinson's vital, contemporary presence in music, dance, theatre, and the visual arts. It will also complement our long-standing *Poet to Poet* series, which features well-known poets who acknowledge the significant influence of Dickinson on their own work. Over the years, this series has included such poets as Cynthia Hogue, Marianne Boruch, Landis Everson, Marilyn Nelson, and Judith Farr. By making space for poetic voices that may not be (or may not yet be) as widely recognized, we hope further to enrich the Dickinson conversation supported and stimulated by the *Bulletin*.

EDIS Board member and Dickinson scholar Ellen Louise Hart will serve as the poetry editor. Submissions should be sent to the *Bulletin* editor, preferably as an MSWord file.

Inaugurating this new feature is "Mail from Tunis: for Emily." The poet, Clint Frakes, currently lives and writes in Honolulu and teaches in the English Department at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. He was steered toward the *Bulletin* by Dickinson scholar, long-time EDIS member, and co-host of the 2004 EDIS Conference in Hilo, Hawaii, Jonathan Morse.

Mail from Tunis *for Emily*

Your unacknowledged clay
teeters on a ruddy peninsula & you,
wren-like with a butterfly caught in your throat.
None will touch you without first
knowing severest hunger or
lean internal difference.
Wednesday, your skirt traversed the Amherst earth—
moth-like & veiled,
a warm miracle
as you interrogated each capsule & calyx,
your mute chestnut bun aimed at
mighty periphery,
sheets of your mind delivering
the edge of place.

When the mail from Tunis came
with saffron & nutmeg you commenced
banging spice for cake, barefoot among
incessant folds of nimblest light
now bursting upon the tree—
a pail of milk,
a fly's wing flexing.
At 4 pm something shifted—
you ran fast upstairs,
closed the door.

Your volcano came timidly
as words crash upon the eye
& your daily bread of the sky
with each cloud a horse's head.
The guest leaves the house,
a bead of brandy in the glass—
& your door still quiet as infant's breath
until the cunning reds of morning
ignite this ellipse again.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Barbara Kelly, Book Review Editor

Barrett, Faith, and Cristanne Miller, eds. *“Words for the Hour”: A New Anthology of American Civil War Poetry*. Amherst, Mass.: Univ. of Mass. Press, 2005. 401 pp. Cloth, ISBN 1-55849-510-X, \$80.00; paper, ISBN 1-55849-509-6, \$24.95.

Offering a wide range of responses to the Civil War, this volume includes anonymous, popular, and literary poems by familiar and less well-known poets. By presenting poems written from many perspectives, the editors “hope to encourage a reassessment” of Civil War poetry. The anthology is divided into three parts. Part I contains poems published in newspapers and periodicals; Part II includes poems by Melville, Whitman, Whittier, and others who wrote in response to the war; Part III features poems by Emily Dickinson and Obadiah Ethelbert Baker, who did not publish during their lifetimes but “chose poetry as their means to meditate on the costs and consequences of war.” Of the 19 Dickinson poems included, Barrett cites “The name—of it—is ‘Autumn’” (Fr 465) as an example of the poet’s oblique style: “She plunges her speaker into the midst of the war’s carnage,” but the poem can be read as “nothing more than an autumnal scene,” having initially appeared in a nineteenth-century children’s magazine. Barrett places Dickinson “among the most profound of the writers on the American Civil War.” This easily read, well organized anthology provides introductory essays, nine archival photographs, a historical time line, a glossary of names and terms, brief biographies of the poets, and an index of authors and titles.

Felton, R. Todd. *A Journey into the Transcendentalists’ New England*. ArtPlace Series. Berkeley, Calif.: Roaring Forties Press, 2006. 179 pp. 7.5 x 7.5 x 0.5 inches. Paper, ISBN 0-9766706-4-X, \$19.95.

Described as “a new kind of book” combining “biography, art, history, and travel guide,” this well-designed, beautiful volume traces the development of the New England Transcendentalist movement, 1828-1854. Felton focuses on Emerson, Thoreau, Bronson Alcott, Hawthorne, Dickinson, and others, and the places where they lived and worked. Chapter headings include Boston, Cambridge, Concord, Walden, Salem, and Amherst, inviting both tourists and armchair travelers. Generously illustrated with paintings, colored photographs, archival prints, and street maps, the text is enhanced by inserts on such topics as the Lyceum Movement, the Hudson River School, Transcendentalist Women, and the Abolitionist Movement. Included is a photograph of Guillermo Cuellar’s attractive, precisely detailed oil painting of Dickinson based on her daguerreotype. As the Transcendentalists broke with the past and offered new ways of thinking, they emphasized “the individual’s quest for ‘an original relation to the universe,’” which, Felton suggests, “inspired the lyricism of Emily Dickinson’s poetry.” He says that her “poetry would, in many ways, explicate the dreams of the Transcendentalists more clearly than any other,” and that “Dickinson is perhaps the ultimate example of the individualism that both inspired and limited the Transcendentalist movement.”

Gilbert, Sandra M. *Death’s Door: Modern Dying and the Ways We Grieve*. New York: Norton, 2006. 580 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-393-05131-5, \$29.95.

Driven by her husband’s postoperative death involving medical malpractice, Gilbert interweaves autobiographical narrative with a historical, cultural, and literary study of death and mourning. Her ambitious, encyclopedic investigation explores the etymology, mythology, literature, and past and present attitudes and rituals associated with death, in three sections: “Arranging My Mourning: Five Meditations on the Psychology of Grief,” “History Makes Death: How the Twentieth Century Reshaped Dying and Mourning,” and “The Handbook of Heartbreak: Contemporary Elegy and Lamentation.” Drawing from Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, Dickinson, Whitman, T. S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams, Wilfred Owen, Sylvia Plath, and many others, Gilbert also considers World War I, the Holocaust, Hiroshima, AIDS, the September 11 attacks, and the Iraq War. In her discussion of Dickinson (332-65), Gilbert cites a dozen poems illustrating the poet’s fascination with death, her doubts about a Christian afterlife, and her range of religious and anti-religious positions; she fully explicates J465/Fr591 and J712/Fr479. A letter to Louise Norcross summarizes Dickinson’s questioning attitude: “I wish ‘twas plainer, Loo, the anguish in this world. I wish one could be sure the suffering had a loving side” (L263). Gilbert’s book, as well as George Mamunes’s and Madge McKeithen’s books reviewed below, are fine extensions of the

The *Bulletin* welcomes notices of all Dickinson-related books, including those published outside the U.S.
Send information to Barbara Kelly, 444 Washington Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94301, U.S.A.
E-mail: barbarakelly@psualum.com.

2006 EDIS meeting theme: "The Economy of Pain."

Mamunes, George. *So has a Daisy vanished?: Emily Dickinson's Tuberculosis*. 2006. 220 pp. Available at lulu.com. Paper, ISBN 978-1-4116-3496-1, \$16.95.

Mamunes argues that tuberculosis affected Dickinson's life and informs her poetry "beyond the 1846-1852 period spotlighted by Dr. [Norbert] Hirschhorn" in his article suggesting that Dickinson may have suffered from tuberculosis (*New England Quarterly* 72.1: 1999). Mamunes cites the second Master Letter, dated 1861 by Franklin, in which Dickinson writes: "Wonder wastes my pound, you said I had no size to spare"; she describes a "cough as big as a thimble" and "a Tomahawk in my side" (L248). Also descriptive of tubercular symptoms is Dickinson's poem "It knew no Medicine—" (Fr567), dated 1863. An excerpt from an American novel (1850-76) introduces each of the author's ten chapters. In a chapter on Ben Newton, Mamunes says, "many of [Dickinson's] early poems (1858-1863) can be read as attempts to keep in touch with Ben" as his "spirit-bride." Tracing Newton's long lasting influence on Dickinson, Mamunes links her letter to Edward Everett Hale inquiring about Newton's death to a poem written ten years later in 1863: "To know just how He suffered— would be dear—" (Fr688). Well researched and carefully documented, this book is a compelling study of a widespread and dreaded disease that haunted the lives of Dickinson and her contemporaries.

McKeithen, Madge. *Blue Peninsula: Essential Words for a Life of Loss and Change*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006. 219 pp. Cloth, ISBN 978-0-374-11502-9, \$22.00.

McKeithen's son, Isaac Levy, developed degenerative neurological disorders of unknown origin at age 14, changing his and his family's lives irrevocably. In 32 short, unsentimen-

tal, sometimes lyrical essays, McKeithen chronicles eight years of experience with Isaac's chronic illness, beginning with paralysis in his legs and progressing to dementia and increasing cognitive decline. She tells of MRIs, biopsies, tests, gene scans, X-rays, well-intentioned well wishers, "sadness, decline, loss, [and] dashed dreams." She confesses "the consistent inconsistency of my faith." For companionship in her sorrow and grief McKeithen turned to poetry: "Poems insinuate themselves. They get through when other things cannot." Searching for balance amid chaos, she "saw poems about creating a space, admitting vulnerability, the incompleteness of knowing, connecting through suffering and finding energy and life in the midst of it all." Interweaving her story and meditations with poems that resonate for her, she chooses Dickinson poems (J269, 405, and 568) to begin three essays, one of which provides her with the title for her book. More than 25 other well-known and less-familiar poets sustained her, including Elizabeth Bishop, Paul Celan, Billy Collins, George MacDonald, Marianne Moore, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Walt Whitman.

Potter, Angela. *Shared Histories: Transatlantic Letters between Virginia Dickinson Reynolds and Her Daughter, Virginia Potter, 1929-1966*. Athens, Georgia: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2006. 359 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-8203-2793-X, \$59.95; paper, ISBN 0-8203-2802-2, \$22.95.

No Massachusetts attic has yielded additional Dickinson manuscripts, but from the back of a cupboard in a London flat comes a cache of letters exchanged between Virginia Dickinson Reynolds from Richmond, Virginia, and her daughter, Virginia Potter, who married an Englishman and lived in England. Reynolds is a cousin-once-removed from Dickinson, whose grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson, was Reynolds's great-grandfather. To clarify relationships, genealogical charts are provided.

Reynolds's granddaughter, Angela Potter, gathers selected letters exchanged before, during, and after World War II, providing a vivid picture of two fascinating women who wrote candidly about their personal lives and the historical events swirling about them—a trans-Atlantic correspondence reminiscent of the letters exchanged in Helene Hanff's *84, Charing Cross Road*. Reynolds, who at one point sees herself as "a scion" of the "House of Dickinson," is glad to see that her granddaughter does not resemble the Dickinsons, for "whatever they may be, they are not beautiful." Reynolds's long friendship with Martha Dickinson Bianchi results in visits to Amherst, concern at Bianchi's death in 1943 about what will become of the Dickinson inheritance, and indignation about Millicent Todd Bingham's 1945 publications "written in a spirit of revenge." Potter's introduction, family pictures, notes, genealogical charts, and index provide a biographical and historical context for these captivating voices.

Book Review

Mitchell, Domhnall. *Measures of Possibility: Emily Dickinson's Manuscripts*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2005. xv + 425 pp. Cloth, ISBN 1-55849-456-1, \$80.00; paper, ISBN 1-55849-462-6, \$29.95.

Jackson, Virginia. *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005. xvii + 298 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-691-11990-2, \$55.00; paper, ISBN 0-691-11991-0, \$19.95.

Reviewed by Ellen Louise Hart

In 1963, Edith Wylder, in "Emily Dickinson: Poetry and Punctuation," claimed to have identified the origin of Dickinson's dash: the poet had adapted a "unique notational system" presented by elocutionist Ebenezer Porter in his *Rhetorical Reader*, a collection of instructions and exercises for declamation taught at Amherst Academy. Wylder explained that the dashes—

some horizontal, others slanted or angled, yet rendered as conventional print punctuation by editors – were based on symbols indicating voice inflection, rising and falling tones and monotone. In 1971, in *The Last Face: Emily Dickinson's Manuscripts*, Wylder elaborated more fully. Her findings were widely rejected by Dickinson readers, and this discredited theory had been her legacy, until now.

Whereas Dickinson probably did not design the dash to approximate Porter's markings, some editors and critics now find that the dashes do function in certain patterned ways, and, to quote Wylder, they assist Dickinson in "creating in written form the precision of meaning inherent in the tone of the human voice" (*The Last Face* 4). In "Emily Dickinson's Punctuation: The Controversy Revisited" (2004), Wylder again defends her thesis. In the conclusion, she looks forward to a time when manuscript images will be available online to enable further explorations. Wylder was ahead of her time in turning from print to manuscript. Today, studies of the manuscripts are indebted to her pioneering work, including two new books: Domhnall Mitchell's *Measures of Possibility: Emily Dickinson's Manuscripts*, and Virginia Jackson's *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading*.

Mitchell challenges the position that "the layout of a Dickinson autograph is deliberate or motivated" (21), arguing against the idea that the visual aspects of the manuscripts, such as the dash and the division of metrical lines, have meaning. Instead, manuscript features are "accidental" and "nonsignificant." Refuting Wylder's claim, he asserts that the poet's use of the dash "represents a sustained habit of the handwriting and not a deliberate rhetorical procedure" (59). Overall, he objects to the current trend of placing manuscript study at the center of Dickinson scholarship, and takes manuscript scholars to task for many of the critical, textual theories they (myself included) have put in circulation.

Mitchell believes that focusing on Dickinson's writing in manuscript leads to a concentration on textual detail detrimental to the poetry. On the question of genre and its fluidity in Dickinson's writings, he argues that she did distinguish between poetry and prose in measurable ways. He maintains that reading the poems in correspondences or in fascicles is distracting, that this contextualization limits interpretive possibility. Editions of "diplomatic transcriptions" (type translations representing manuscript features) confuse readers about Dickinson's intentions, obscuring the aural and metrical structure of the poetry, causing readers to overlook "the nineteenth-century emphasis on the auditory," and to mistakenly align Dickinson with "the twentieth-century triumph of the ocular" and the experiments with typography by modernists such as e.e. cummings and William Carlos Williams (262).

A major area of inquiry in this study involves rhythm and meter, which recently has become one of manuscript scholarship's central concerns. In fact, poetics in the last two decades has seen a revival of attention to form. Mitchell writes: "The sophistication of Dickinson's play with rhyme and rhythm seems architectural to me – it is a structured polyphony. Emphasizing the visual places a disproportionate semantic weight on local areas" (21). He argues that "the codes in Dickinson's script show that manuscript design is regulated by principles of meter and rhyme, and not by prerogatives of visual patterning" (282).

A strength of the book is Mitchell's call for editing standards: he points out errors, oversights, inconsistencies in the work of current editors, myself included, and his calls for accuracy, for a "rigorous and precise means of testing insights," are a valuable contribution to the developing field of manuscript scholarship (277).

Much of Mitchell's forcefully driven argument is relatively well tempered, yet as the end of the book approaches, warnings against reading the visual line as meaningful become dramatic

and hyperbolic: "One of the consequences of the graphic approach to the manuscripts is that the significance of sound in her writing generally has to be underplayed. Meter exists as a *dead* structure that is then fractured and rearranged to create vital alternatives" (261) [italics in the original]. "Emphasizing the rhythm of the eye over the rhythms of the ear in reading Dickinson's poems is, I am persuaded, equivalent to switching off the music: what's left is silence" (264). Some readers will find the contentiousness here disappointing.

Occasionally Mitchell makes claims that cannot be substantiated. In one instance he says of a writing surface: "This variation in shape is not meant to affect the poem's meaning" (200). In similar commentary, "it was the contours of the paper, and not the mind, which helped shape the physical topography of the writing" (8). Throughout *Measures of Possibility*, Mitchell speaks literally and precisely as he works "Toward a Culture of Measurement," the title of a culminating chapter. So it should go without saying that he can know only "the contours of the paper" and not the "contours of Dickinson's mind."

Concerning electronic editions, Mitchell's position is that the presentation of "Dickinson's manuscripts in apparently unmediated forms accompanied by diplomatic transcriptions" "represents a corruption of the originals," since "regarding the physical layout of a Dickinson autograph as fully integral suppresses the kinds of signals it may be construed as supplying about the significance of its appearance." He maintains that "if the information compiled in this book is accurate, then the publication of diplomatic transcriptions amounts to a serious distortion of Dickinson's practices equivalent only to the tampering evident in the very early editions of her work" (311). Here he refers to Mabel Loomis Todd's efforts at changing words in lines of poetry to alter Dickinson's rhymes.

In evaluating Mitchell's positions for themselves, readers face difficulty

in testing his analysis since the book provides no photographic images of manuscript poems and letters to accompany his discussions, an omission that for some will work against the accumulated evidence, but is perhaps consistent with his view that reading the poems in manuscript will not serve his audience.

It is not clear how Mitchell conceives of Dickinson's readers when he writes that "allowing the reader to decide whether irregularities were deliberately expressive devices" is a "gesture [that] can be seen as democratically enlarging the territory within which choice might be exercised, then, or as prompting the reader to find intentions for manuscript features that may well be casual—and thus placing a greater burden of responsibility on the reader than is necessary" (271-272). Some readers may feel burdened while others are excited by opportunities to see Dickinson's poems in new ways. This is an interesting question: how can we gauge readers' capabilities and limitations, and determine how much textual work they are willing to do?

"The future of Dickinson studies depends a great deal on the early settlement of the debates about the logic of her manuscript appearances," Mitchell writes as he concludes that "the study of Dickinson's manuscripts has been and remains an interesting prelude to, or accompaniment of, the reading of her letters and poems" (324).

While some readers may agree that viewing manuscripts as an accompaniment to standard editions will work best for them, there can be no "early settlement of the debates." The present phase of the debate began at least forty years ago. Furthermore, the manuscripts draw attention to themselves: they intrigue and invite speculation; they are beautiful and irrepressible, certain to appeal to many twenty-first century readers attuned to the visual and adept at using technology. Each time a reader observes, "This looks interesting, I wonder why it's there," the debate will begin again.

Manuscript study is likely to remain in the center of Dickinson scholarship,

continuing to generate new lines of critical inquiry, of which Virginia Jackson's *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* is an outstanding example. Defining lyric as an "organizing pattern" "that takes distinctive shape in nineteenth-century print culture and shapes the growth of American literary criticism in the twentieth century" (242 n7), Jackson points out that Dickinson's writing includes "various lyric genres (songs, notes, letters, lists, postscripts, elegies, jokes, ads, dead crickets, valentines, stamps, Poetess verse, pressed flowers, printed paper cut-out birds)" (235). The objectives of this study are "to show how capacious retrospective lyric reading can be" (235), and to suggest that Dickinson, like Whitman, saw the lyric as a "genre of personal identification" that she sought to "re-vise or redeem" (197).

Enabling readers to view texts in relation to her points of discussion, providing opportunity to observe the beauty and playfulness and oddness of the papers and enclosures, Jackson includes more than forty photographs as illustrations, a generous number for such a reasonably priced book. Some images appear in print publications here for the first time.

In delineating her theory of lyric reading, Jackson points out that editors have "printed what has been read rather than what was written" (4). She explains that "by the early nineteenth century, poetry had never before been so dependent on the mediating hands of the editors and reviewers who managed the print public sphere, yet in this period an idea of the lyric as ideally unmediated by those hands or those readers began to emerge and is still very much with us" (6). In sum, "The reading of the lyric produces a theory of the lyric that then produces a reading of the lyric" (10).

The result for readers, Jackson maintains, is lost opportunity for encountering work that defies genre, a kind of writing often found in Dickinson's letters to friends and family members. The correspondents, or

"figures of address," are themselves lost to us when lines of verse are extracted from letters and appear as lyrics stripped of historical contexts and textual surroundings—including such enclosure as a dead cricket (a photo of which Jackson provides). *Dickinson's Misery* shows us that when the lyric became an abstraction, Dickinson's writing became detached from original readers, including herself, and from us, reading today. The title "is intended to gain significance as this book progresses." It "evokes the pathos not of Dickinson herself but of her writing as a lost object" (13), and connects her with the genre some nineteenth-century critics called "the literature of misery" and with writing Jackson terms "the discourse of vicarious feeling" that developed around the genre (212). In her discussion of "lyric alienation," Jackson explains that as Dickinson's writings were "collapsed" into the category of the lyric, the lyric became elevated above the "ordinary poet and ordinary reader." In the process, Dickinson became a "fiction" rather than an historical person.

To help readers reclaim the diversity of Dickinson's writings, Jackson turns to a range of theorists, from John Stuart Mill to Paul de Man and Helen Vendler, tracking the move from the private to the public role of lyric poetry. The brilliance of her argument is that she offers readers a theory of reading lyrically that takes into account the complexity of Dickinson's genres, the extraordinary scope of the work. This book can deepen a reader's understanding of what has been described as the "message quality" of poems sent in or as letters, contributing to further appreciation of two of Dickinson's correspondences, in particular—the "Master Letters" and the correspondence to Susan Dickinson. Jackson asserts that "the hand-to-hand economy of written correspondence [will] mediate our future reception of Dickinson's writing" (163).

Jackson asks readers to "think both historically and theoretically"—acknowledging that this is not easy to do, to "think through the differences

between what Dickinson's texts might have been at other moments (notes of consolation, say, or newspaper verse, or commentary on enclosed flowers, elegies for soldiers or a dog or a culture or a season, or thank-yous, or appeals for publication, or scandalous secret winks, or language surrounding a dead insect) and the lyrics they have become," while "keeping their material and contingent as well as their abstract and transcendent aspects in view" (116).

Another challenging role she posits for readers is to "keep bringing into being" Dickinson's "lyric subjectivity" (234), her self-representation as a writer and not as a divided self. Jackson points out that readers may "anticipate" Dickinson's self splitting as a result of traditional interpretive practices where the lyric poet becomes an abstraction separated from herself and from readers (223). One of the stunning accomplishments of the theoretical position laid out in *Dickinson's Misery* is the feminist reconstruction of Dickinson as a literary subject, restoring the person to the poems (178).

"Sentimental" as an adjective applied to almost any utterance has generally appeared as a strong negative. As a critical term it has lowered—sometimes nearly irrevocably—a work's value. How this happened—the Latin root of "sentiment" simply means "to feel"—has occupied decades of feminist criticism. In teaching us to appreciate American lyric sentimentalism in radically new ways, Jackson achieves her goal of turning around the idea that Dickinson worked against the grain of female sentimental lyricism, showing that Dickinson's writing is "immersed" in it (212).

Dickinson's Misery ends by reminding us of the power of poetry to protect personal, individual identity and to preserve the world. A "premise" from Susan Stewart's *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* is "suggestive for the reading of Dickinson I have begun here," Jackson notes. Stewart writes that "it is precisely in material ways that poetry is a force against effacement" (269,

n2). And, in a sense, this is what Wylder, too, is saying in a sweeping statement she makes in her 2004 essay: "My own study of [Dickinson's] work convinces me that Dickinson was a great poet who wrote out of love, not anger, and not for her own sake, or personal salvation, but in the tradition of all great poets, for the salvation of the civilized world from its otherwise inevitable self-destruction. To understand her poetry more fully in this light demands another look at the way she punctuated it."

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• Amare, Nicole. "Finding Dickinson: Linguistic Sexism and Inconsistent Indexing in Masterplots." *Women and Language* 29.1 (2006): 37-42. [Amare tries to help a student locate Emily Dickinson in Masterplots and finds that certain editions list male authors, using last-names-first in the table of contents, while women authors are listed using first-names-first, an inconsistency leading to confusion and linguistic sexism.]

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• Davinroy, Elise. "Tomb and Womb: Reading Contexture in Emily Dickinson's 'soft prison.'" *Legacy* 23.1 (2006): 1-13. [Davinroy says that reading each Dickinson letter as part of a unified whole or "book" addressed to a specific recipient gives a "more nuanced understanding of [its] aesthetic power." She closely reads a letter to Elizabeth Holland (L432) and the poem within it (Fr 1352).]

- Ganze, Alison L. "Dickinson's 'Twas like a Maelstrom, with a notch.'" *Explicator* 64.2 (2006): 86-89. [Ganze discusses the maelstrom, goblin, and execution in J414 "as lenses through which to perceive and understand the phenomenon of despair." She concludes that the poem helps us empathize with the speaker's final query: "Which Anguish was the utterest— then — / To perish, or to live?"]
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- Reddy, Srikanth. "'All We Secure of Beauty Is Its Evanescence': The Ratio, the Rainbow, and Dickinson's Theory of Value." *Denver Quarterly* 39.4 (2005): 66-76. Reddy says using the language of economics helps Dickinson avoid sentimentality. Yoking her idea of "fading ratio" (J88) to worth, she assigns value to "that which vanishes" (J257). She values evanescence over "the governing paradigms of worth within her culture."]
- Ryan, Kay. "A Consideration of Poetry." *Poetry* 1 May 2006: 148-58. [Examining the comic aspects of poetry in Frost, Lear, and Dickinson, Ryan says "Dickinson is a natural in thinking about the cool, ungummifying effects of nonsense on poetry and the liberation nonsense introduces to the spirit. 'The Morning after Woe' is a grief-giddy poem, dazzled with loss and filled with extreme invention."]
- Todd, Richard. "Emily Enshrined: After a Century of Wrangling, a Great Poet's Family Home Opens Its Doors." *Preservation* 58.4 (2006): 34-40. [Archival prints and Cary Wolinsky's golden-hued photographs illustrate each page of Todd's essay describing the past occupants of the Evergreens, the Dickinson-Todd affair, the settling of the Dickinson estate, and the proposed \$13 million plan to restore the Dickinson houses and grounds.]
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- ---. "Wrestling with Silence: Emily Dickinson's Calvinist God." *American Transcendental Quarterly* 20.1 (2006): 379-98. [Zapedowska examines Fr101, 145B, 365, 426, 1300, 1436A, and 1500, concluding that Dickinson's religious poetry offers an alternative to Calvinist teaching and "is both a re-examination of the tenets of Calvinism and a dynamic account of a quest for religious experience structured by the Calvinist heritage."]

MEET THE NEW EDIS MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

At its annual meeting on August 3, 2006, the EDIS Board of Directors appointed a new Membership Committee: Jonnie Guerra, Eleanor Elson Heginbotham, and Jay Ladin. Guerra will chair the committee.

All three members hope the Society can engage more scholars and other Dickinson enthusiasts in the United States and around the world, creating hospitable spaces (electronic and face to face) for meeting across a Dickinson text. They ask your assistance to identify new members and offer their assistance if you are interested to start a local chapter in your area. Please contact any or all of them to share your interests, ideas, and concerns.

With that in mind, they'd like to introduce themselves. Jonnie Guerra is Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of English at Cabrini College in Radnor, PA. Long-term EDIS members will remember her as the director of the Society's first international conference, "Translating Dickinson in Language, Culture, and the Arts," held in Washington, DC in 1992. Since then, Guerra has served on the board and held the offices of secretary, vice-president, and

president. She also has been active in planning annual meetings, including the 2003 Philadelphia meeting, "Emily Dickinson and Marianne Moore," hosted on the Cabrini campus, and this summer's "Economy of Pain," in College Park. Her research and writing on Dickinson has focused primarily on adaptations of the poet's life and work in the arts, especially theatre. Since 1993, she has edited the *Poet to Poet* series for the *Bulletin*. Contact information: jguerra@cabrini.edu or jguerrajnn@aol.com.

Eleanor Elson Heginbotham, Professor Emerita, Concordia University, Saint Paul, MN, now resides in Rockville, MD. Over her forty-year teaching career, Heginbotham shared her love and knowledge of Dickinson with students on every educational level; in retirement, she continues to do so through lectures to senior citizens and other audiences. She is the author of *Reading the Fascicles of Emily Dickinson: Dwelling in Possibilities* (Ohio State University Press, 2003), and of numerous scholarly and popular articles—some of which appeared in EDIS publications. She also served EDIS formerly as both

membership chair and board member. In addition, Heginbotham hosted the 2000 meeting, "To Make a Prairie," at her university in Saint Paul and established and led a local EDIS chapter. Contact information: heginbotham@csp.edu.

Jay Ladin is David and Ruth Gottesman Professor of English at Stern College of Yeshiva University and has taught Dickinson's poetry at the Emily Dickinson Homestead, Princeton University, Tel Aviv University (as a Fulbright Scholar), and Reed College. Ladin has published on Dickinson in *The Emily Dickinson Journal* and elsewhere. Currently, he is completing a study that argues for Dickinson's place as the progenitor of modernist American poetics. Ladin also is a poet, with one collection, *Alternatives to History* (Sheep Meadow Press, 2003), out; a second, *The Book of Anna* (Sheep Meadow Press, 2007), forthcoming; and a third, *Life Blow*, just completed. In addition, Ladin's poetry has been widely published in journals, including *Parnassus: Poetry in Review* and the *North American Review*. Contact information: ladin@usadatanet.net.

MEMBERS' NEWS

EDIS Annual Business Meeting

EDIS Annual Business Meeting
August 6, 2006
Music Lecture Hall, Room 2200
Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center
University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland
Approximately 47 present

EDIS President Gudrun Grabher convened the meeting at 11:10 a.m., thanking Jonnie Guerra for organizing a stimulating meeting, Martha Nell Smith for hosting the meeting,

Jim Fraser for scheduling the Meisha Bosma Dance Performance, and Ellie Heginbotham, Marianne Noble, Diana Fraser, and Laura Lauth for their work. She then highlighted some of what had been discussed at the Board meeting, explaining there would be a rotation of three kinds of meetings in the future: a traditional meeting, a Dickinson Institute more focused on scholarship, and an international conference. She described the upcoming international conferences and meetings:

- The 2007 EDIS International Conference will take place in Kyoto, Japan, from August 3 to 5. The theme will be "Like Fabrics of the East." Japan has the largest EDIS membership outside

the U.S., and the Emily Dickinson Society of Japan offered to host this conference.

- The 2008 Dickinson Institute, celebrating the 20th anniversary of EDIS, will take place in Amherst, Massachusetts. Dates are yet to be determined.
- The 2009 Annual Meeting will take place in Regina, Canada, resulting from Cynthia MacKenzie's offer to organize it. Dates are yet to be determined.
- The 2010 EDIS International Conference will take place in Oxford, England, organized by Paul Crumbley and Cristanne Miller. Dates are yet to be determined.

Grabher announced the Scholar in Amherst Award winner: Alexandra

Socarides. The award will be offered again next year in honor of retiring Professors Jane Eberwein and Suzanne Juhasz. Contact Mary Loeffelholz for information about the Graduate Student Fellowship. Information about the award and fellowship may also be found on the EDIS website. Grabher announced that the Board was giving \$1,000 to the Dickinson Museum and \$500 to the Jones Library in Amherst. She said that future Business meetings would be moved forward to Saturday and be allotted more time. She noted that Martha Nell Smith will circulate the new EDIS website addresses to the membership and conference registrants. Smith and Martha Ackmann will manage the website and are looking for an advisory committee. All back issues of the *Bulletin* will be posted on the website. Smith would like feedback on the conference to pass along to the president of the University of Maryland.

Vice-president Paul Crumbley, having written the minutes in the absence of Secretary Barbara Kelly last year, asked for and received approval of the minutes from the 2005 Annual Meeting at Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts.

Treasurer James Fraser distributed copies of his written report to the membership, reviewed the details, and announced a balance of \$20,681.00 for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2006.

In the absence of EDIS Membership Chair Erica Scheurer, Crumbley reported that the total EDIS membership of 323 is down by seven members, but that there is usually an increase in membership before the international conferences. He announced that Scheurer is stepping down and Jonnie Guerra will be Chair of the Membership Committee consisting of Ellie Heginbotham and Jay Ladin (granted his consent).

Nominations Committee Chair Ellen Louise Hart announced the re-election of Board member Suzanne Juhasz for 2007-2009. She also announced the re-election of officers: Gudrun Grabher, President; Paul Crumbley, Vice-president; Barbara

Kelly, Secretary; Jim Fraser, Treasurer. She explained that there would be a total of three members-at-large elected by the membership, two to be elected in 2007. She read a statement from current Member-at-Large Cynthia Mackenzie. Grabher thanked Vice-president Paul Crumbley, Secretary Barbara Kelly, Treasurer James Fraser, retiring Membership Chair Erika Scheurer, and Nominations Committee Chair Ellen Louise Hart for their work.

Grabher then opened the discussion to comments and questions from the membership. Jane Eberwein suggested giving the members an idea of what a member-at-large does. Grabher mentioned attending annual meetings and bringing in ideas from the membership. She said there would be more in the *Bulletin*. Cristanne Miller clarified that the Scholar in Amherst Award specifies that the scholar do work in Amherst. The award is named for the donor or a person the donor wishes to honor. She invited the membership to consider contributing to the award. Amanda Gardner suggested videotaping the meetings, making them available to teachers and students. Douglas Evans enjoyed the interview of Jane Eberwein and suggested more interviews. B.J. Bluth enjoyed the Research Circle and said it should be allotted more time. She wanted to know the meaning of the "turtle card" she received from Smith. Smith said that it's from a letter from Susan Dickinson to Mabel Loomis Todd. Bill Weaver said not to cut workshops in an effort to expand other things. Juhasz thanked Marcy Tanter for originating the Research Circle. Grabher encouraged everyone to spread the word in order to expand EDIS. Hart said members who have institutional support and know promising undergraduates might encourage them to attend EDIS meetings. She noted Lynn Welch who googled "poetry" and found the EDIS meeting. Someone mentioned that a workshop on teaching Dickinson would draw teachers to the meetings.

Grabher called on Mary Loeffelholz to preview the 2007 International Con-

ference in Kyoto, Japan, August 3-5. Loeffelholz said she was soliciting papers for "Like Fabrics of the East," but that the theme was not restrictive and could encompass Dickinson and intercultural exchange or any aspect of new work. The deadline for paper and panel proposals is September 15. Plenary speakers will be Barton Levi St. Armand, Christopher Benfey, Rebecca Copeland, and Toshikazu Niikura. There will be a banquet, a demonstration of the traditional Japanese wrapping cloth, and a tea ceremony. Marianne Noble is arranging a four-day excursion following the conference. Although details have not been finalized, Noble estimated a total package price of \$3,500.

Grabher thanked the membership for their participation and adjourned the meeting at 12:05 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Barbara Kelly
EDIS Secretary

Members-at-Large Election

At its last meeting the EDIS Board of Directors decided to seat three Members-at-Large on the Board (instead of only one) with elections each year to replace one person rotating off. We thereby hope to increase participation of the membership in decision-making. The term of the current Member-at-Large, Cindy MacKenzie, was extended another year. In early 2007 two Members-at-Large will be elected (the person with the most votes will serve three years, the runner-up will serve two years). In early 2008 the third member will be elected for a three-year term. Members can be re-elected. EDIS members are invited to present themselves as candidates.

Members-at-Large are expected to attend the Board's annual meetings, which take place in the summer in conjunction with the Society's annual meeting. Candidates should expect to fund annual meeting attendance ei-

ther on their own or with institutional assistance. In addition, Board members work during the year on Society projects and frequently communicate via email, regular mail, or telephone, at their own expense.

If you are interested in providing leadership for the EDIS and supporting its mission of promoting interest in Dickinson and her poetry, you are invited to submit your name for consideration for the position of Member-at-Large. Members are eligible without regard for geography or profession. Nominations are also welcome. By February 2007, the Nominations Committee, headed by Ellen Louise Hart, will compile a list of candidates to present to the general membership. There will be an election by mail in late February 2007, with the winner announced in the spring *Bulletin*.

Anyone wishing to become a candidate should contact Gudrun M. Grabher by January 31, 2007, at gudrun.m.grabher@uibk.ac.at or Department of American Studies, University of Innsbruck, Innrain 52, A-6020 Innsbruck, Austria. Include a brief statement of goals and qualifications pertinent to your candidacy. If you wish to nominate a candidate, please ensure that the person is willing to run and ask him or her to forward the aforementioned statement to Gudrun M. Grabher.

T-Shirts, Anyone?

As our members know, EDIS often sells souvenir t-shirts in conjunction with its annual meetings and conferences. Since we know many members enjoy collecting the t-shirts as much as or more than wearing them, we are pleased to offer members unable to attend the August 2006 College Park meeting the opportunity to purchase the t-shirt created to commemorate that event. The t-shirt comes in two styles: a ladies style with a scoop neck and a regular, unisex variety. Both are lavender/periwinkle blue imprinted in white and have the same design and lettering as the meeting website.

The the ladies style is available in medium and large (\$15.00 + \$3.00 shipping/handling), the unisex style in medium, large, and extra-large (\$10.00 + \$3.00 shipping/handling). Shipping outside the continental U.S. may require an additional fee.

Is your collection missing a t-shirt from the 1999 International Conference at Mount Holyoke College (light blue with navy blue design and lettering front and back), from the 2001 International Conference in Trondheim, Norway (black with tan design front and back), or from the 2003 15th Anniversary Annual Meeting in Philadelphia (light blue with annual meeting logo)? Commemorative t-shirts are available as follows:

- Mount Holyoke: Medium, Large, Extra Large
- Trondheim: Small, Medium, Large
- Philadelphia: Small, Medium, Large

These can be purchased with the College Park t-shirt for an additional \$3.00 per shirt. The cost for just the shirts from 1999, 2001, and/or 2003, is \$6.00 for the first shirt (price includes shipping/handling) and \$3.00 for each additional shirt. Please address questions or orders to jguerrajnn@aol.com.

Emily Dickinson's Birthday Tribute in Washington

Carolyn Forché will keynote the Emily Dickinson Birthday Tribute on Monday, December 11 at 7:30 p.m. This annual event, always followed by a reception, usually featuring the "black cake" made from Emily's recipe is sponsored by the Folger Poetry Series and The Poetry Society of America. Forché is the author of *Blue Hour, Against Forgetting: Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness, The Angel of History, The Country Between Us, and Gathering the Tribes*.

The Folger poetry office notes, "The contemplation of life's quiet moments also found in Emily Dickinson's work is also found in Carolyn Forché's graceful and strong poetry. Forché resurrects history's quiet details and allows

them to resonate in the ears of her readers." The Folger is located close to the Library of Congress and the Capitol at 201 East Capitol Street S.E. Tickets (\$12 general admission) may be ordered from (202)544-7077 or www.folger.edu.

What's Your Story?

Unlike many author societies, the Emily Dickinson International Society has achieved broad appeal to people outside of academe. Beginning with the May/June 2007 *Bulletin*, the Membership Committee will inaugurate a new series to feature individual EDIS members who exemplify our diversity and whose stories of connection to Dickinson are fascinating. You are invited to nominate yourself or another member as a candidate for presentation in this series. Please contact Jay Ladin at ladin@usadatanet.net.

Call for Papers

The EDIS is sponsoring two panel sessions at ALA in May, 2007. Please send proposals by January 10 to the session organizers, Cindy MacKenzie (cindy.mackenzie@uregina.ca) and Marianne Noble (mnoble@american.edu). The conference will take place in Boston, May 24-27, 2007. For further information about the conference, go to www.calstatela.edu/academic/english/ala2.

- Panel #1: Teaching Dickinson. What are the challenges and rewards of teaching Dickinson's poetry? What strategies have and have not worked? What makes Dickinson popular (or not) with students?

- Panel #2: New Approaches to an Old Question: What is Dickinson's "Circumference"? What does it mean that Dickinson's business is circumference, the "bride of awe," the entity between "place" and "presence"? This is one of the most vexing questions, one worth revisiting in light of new readings of Dickinson's poems, letters, and life.

Calling All "Chapters"

Your Membership Committee is curious. Do you belong to a group of Dickinson enthusiasts who meet from time to time in your city? In Minnesota, California, and Saskatchewan we know of such groups. Sometimes they gather in December to celebrate the birthday, sometimes in April during National Poetry Month. Sometimes they invite speakers; sometimes they share new Dickinson films; sometimes they take the greatest pleasure in reading the poems with each other. Groups include everyone from undergraduate students to retired people. We wonder if you belong to such a group or if you are interested in forming such an interest group. Along with the simple desire to share news and ideas, the Committee and the Board want your help as they discuss such questions as what it would mean to such a group (and to EDIS) to call itself "The EDIS ____ Chapter." Please send your experiences about such local gatherings and thoughts about encouraging others in similar activities to Jonnie Guerra, Chair of the Membership Committee at jguerra@cabrini.edu or jguerrajnn@aol.com.

Polak, continued from page 7

Notes

¹I am indebted to Dr. Fiona Green for introducing me to Emily Dickinson, and to Dr. Gene Moore and Dr. Michael Kearns for their comments on this article.

² Though Dickinson sent some of her poems to multiple recipients, we should remember that, during her lifetime, the majority of Dickinson's poetry was read by no one except Dickinson herself.

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EDIS gratefully acknowledges these members' generous financial contributions.

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