

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

REPORT ON THE ANNUAL MEETING

By Stephanie Tingley

Standing in the late-summer Saturday morning sunshine in the garden of The Homestead delighting in listening to Richard Wilbur recite a favorite Dickinson poem on the eloquently-produced audio tour of the Dickinson grounds, I took a moment to reflect on the richness and diversity of the EDIS annual meeting in Amherst (held August 1-3 2008). The weekend marked the twentieth anniversary of the society and proved to be a fitting celebration for both the organization and the poet. The conference featured both academic and non-academic tributes to the poet and EDIS and offered participants rich opportunities to read, reflect, and honor Dickinson's work at the three-day birthday party.

At the opening plenary on Friday morning, President Paul Crumbley offered a warm welcome and introduced the theme for the featured speakers and the first Discussion Institute scheduled for the afternoon (where scholars with work in progress shared papers about

Dickinson's poetry with small working groups of colleagues or gathered in small clusters to discuss individual poems). The focus on narrative in Dickinson's work is timely, Crumbley noted, and mentioned the recent (January 2008) issue of *PMLA* which focuses on the connections between narrative and lyric poetry. "What is

the aims of the institute was to give young scholars and those who need institutional support for travel to an EDIS annual meeting an opportunity to attend and participate.

Following these prefatory remarks, the group enjoyed plenary speeches by three prominent contemporary poet/critics. First, Michael Ryan, who teaches English and Creative Writing at UC Irvine, spoke about Dickinson's reading of spiritual literature, especially the Bible, and how this reading informed her spiritual life and linked her to her contemporaries. His brilliant readings of how the narratives work in three of his favorite Dickinson poems, "I heard a fly buzz—," "There is a pain—so utter," and "These—saw visions," asked listeners to consider elements

of narratives such as character, plot, theme, setting, and point-of-view.

Speaking next was poet and critic Elizabeth Willis, Associate Professor of English at Wesleyan University. Her focus was on how many Dickinson poems offer readers a truncated narrative. There are temporal markers that point to a story,



*Stephanie Tingley, Ellie Heginbotham, and others enjoy the reading circle
Photo by LeeAnn Gorthey*

lyric poetry?" he asked, and "what does it mean to read it?" and "why," more particularly, "do we take pleasure in reading Emily Dickinson?" Past President Cristanne Miller then spoke about the concept of the Discussion Institute and said that one of

but Dickinson's work, she argued, is as much about seeing as about telling. She tied Dickinson's poem "This World is not Conclusion" to Charles Darwin's theories in *The Origin of Species* and demonstrated how Dickinson's poem is an active reading and response to texts of her time. Perhaps the best modern analogy for how Dickinson's poems work, Willis noted, is hypertext, for readers of Dickinson's work are encouraged to follow threads or links that take them beyond the poem's texts. Dickinson's work, then, becomes a collaboration between reader and poet to "finish" the poem.

The last of the three plenary speakers, Benjamin Friedlander, an Associate Professor of English at University of Maine, Orono, spoke about Dickinson's "Devious Truths." Friedlander showed those in the audience, through close readings of several key poems, how Dickinson's poems work as methodically worked out arguments, for logic, rhetoric, and narrative are linked in her most complex lyrics.

After lunch, conference-goers participated in one of the Institute discussion sessions. Groups discussed some of the ways in which the morning's speakers' ideas about lyric and narrative enriched their understanding of Dickinson's art or presented short

papers which had been circulated before the meeting to other participants. Late Friday afternoon attendees were invited to stop by the Jeffrey Amherst bookstore for a special display which featured books about Dickinson. Many of the scholars/authors were present to visit and sign their books. The day ended with a screening of *Amherst Sabbath*, a video rough cut of a theatrical per-



Margaret Freeman introduces the presentation of the chair
Photo by LeeAnn Gorthey

formance that focused on issues of belief and rebellion in Dickinson's work and world and integrated Con-

gregational hymns the author of the play, Noel Tipton, argued the poet would have heard from the church across the street.

While the EDIS Board held their meeting, conference-goers had the opportunity to take in a variety of exhibits and tours around Amherst. I chose to visit the Emily Dickinson Museum and try out the self-guided outdoor audio tour, "Grounds of Memory," while others saw the Museum's newly-produced documentary film *The Poet in Her Bedroom*, which introduces viewers to the work and world of Emily Dickinson. (The 30-minute film is available for purchase on DVD. I ordered a copy and plan to use it in the classroom). The Amherst History Museum offered a special exhibition exploring the town of Amherst during Dickinson's lifetime Saturday morning as well.

After lunch the whole group gathered for the annual EDIS membersmeeting, followed by the lively reflections of the five past presidents of the society: Margaret Freeman, Vivian Pollak, Cristanne Miller, Jonnie Guerra, and Gudrun Grabher. Grabher was presented with the gift of a Dickinson chair created by visual artist Jane Chang, whose work was later featured at Sunday's research circle.

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It was fascinating to hear about the origins of the society and to take a few moments to celebrate and appreciate the hard work of the founding members and society leaders.

Before the twentieth-anniversary banquet held on the Amherst College campus, many attended the gala opening of artist Alberto Mancini's exhibition of 29 paintings inspired by Dickinson poems: *Emily Dickinson Suite: 'I'll tell you how the Sun rose—.'* Since the poem texts that inspired the paintings were posted alongside the images, viewers were invited to compare, contrast, and make connections as they enjoyed the wine and cheese reception.

EDIS members and friends ended Saturday at the birthday party banquet, complete with wonderfully rich and dense coconut cake, a cake Dickinson herself may have made and served. It seemed good to be among

friends, both old and new, to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the society. The banquet ended with a lively open mic poetry reading on the theme of celebration. Members read poems of their own or favorite poems by others.

Sunday morning found many back at the Alumni House on the Amherst College campus for the annual EDIS Research Circle. Here members are invited to share their current research projects and interests and to hear about the work of others. Each year the research circle group grows, both in number of participants and energy. This year the group was larger than ever and the projects diverse and fascinating. The excitement was palpable as person after person took a turn. In fact, time ran out before everyone was heard from.

Before participants left to travel home, the annual meeting ended

with a choral celebration by the Da Camera Singers. They performed original choral works (with texts by Emily Dickinson) which had been composed by Alice Parker for the occasion. We all left on a high note—this final program was a fitting end to the celebratory weekend.

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First Experiences of a New Member

By Greg Mattingly

When I took my seat in The Amherst College Alumni House on Friday, August 2nd 2008, I was ready for anything. I'd found and joined EDIS via the web, and had until then been listening to, yearning toward, besieging Emily Dickinson on my own.

That solitary feeling vanished when the first speaker that morning, Michael Ryan, just a few minutes into his talk, described the poems as "experiences," and "a thrill ride I never tire of."

I was not alone!

You don't just read these poems, you don't merely admire them as lovely works of art, apart from yourself. They happen to you! I don't always trust myself with such thoughts. One may be getting a little unbalanced. But no, here were others, apparently sound of mind, who shared the same thoughts and feelings, confirming what I heard asserted twice over the weekend; "Once she grabs you, she doesn't let go."

"In Emily Dickinson's poetry, so it seems to me, it is ambiguity of diction and imagery that most powerfully charges the poems with many-leveled meaning; it is from grappling with this kind of obscurity that the reader derives most pleasure and is most copiously rewarded for his pains" (Brita Lindberg-Seyersted, *The Voice of the Poet* 241).

Having no kindred spirit to turn to when puzzled, I was often like a technical or scientific writer without a proof reader. I would re-read the words, and re-read again, unable to fill in the lacunae of my own mind. One wistful objective that I'd brought to Amherst was that I might fill a lacuna or two with meaning. So, it was with satisfaction as well as delight that I found that "unnumbered satins" refers to the hair of the person described in "These saw visions," not numerous strokings of some vaguely imagined satin garment, and that the word "peer" in "I like to see it lap the miles" is a verb, not a

noun, as I'd kept stubbornly reading it. ("What peers would a train have in shanties?" I'd asked myself).

Fear not, Gentle Reader, there were more substantive revelations as well. I knew I didn't really get "I heard a fly buzz when I died." For me, it was like listening to Indian sitar music—pleasing and fascinating, but I knew I wasn't hearing everything. That began to change in Polly Longworth's afternoon workshop. A participant ventured that there might be a comic element to the poem. "Oh, it is comic," came the reply. "It is comic." I'm still saying that poem to myself and stretching my mind around that huge joke, and expanding my own sense of humor while I'm at it.

Thank you, EDIS, for welcoming this wayfarer in.

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AN ANNUAL MEETING COLLAGE

Photos by Jim Fraser and LeeAnn Gorthey



In Memoriam Roland Hagenbüchle

By Marietta Messmer

*"Behind Me – dips Eternity –
Before Me – Immortality –
Myself – the Term between –"* (J721)

*"The unknown is the largest need of the
intellect"* (L471)

On January 14, 2008, Roland Hagenbüchle died after a brief illness at the age of 75. With him, the world has lost a great humanist thinker and one of the most knowledgeable and inspiring Dickinson scholars. When the Emily Dickinson International Society was a young and fledgling organization, Roland became its staunch supporter: he gave keynote lectures at its first two international conferences (in Washington, D.C. and Innsbruck); he published several of his influential contributions to Dickinson scholarship in the *Emily Dickinson Journal*; he served on the journal's editorial board; he brought promising European scholars to the society's attention; and he personally mentored several generations of Dickinson scholars. Throughout his life, Roland was not only an internationally renowned scholar, but an inspirational teacher, a brilliant writer, and a most engaging conversationalist whose capacity to listen and understand made every encounter with him unforgettable.

Roland was born on October 13, 1932, in Frauenfeld, Switzerland, as the last of seven children. His father died when Roland was only three years old, but Roland nonetheless always referred to his childhood as an intensely happy one, which he spent visiting the local schools and

learning how to play the violin. Having earned his A-levels in 1951, Roland first began to study architecture at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, but after a sojourn at Nancy, France, to improve his French language skills, he discovered that his true passion lay elsewhere and decided to study German and French Literature at Zurich University in order to become



*Roland and Helen Hagenbüchle
Photo by Susana Basler*

a high school teacher. During his first job at the public high school of Frauenfeld, he threw himself into instilling a passion for learning in his pupils, but his vivacious and inquisitive mind was not fully occupied. In 1959 he therefore decided to start all over again, this

time taking up the study of English Language and Literature as well as German Literature and Linguistics. In order to be admitted to English, however, he first had to take a crash course in London to learn basic English, having chosen Classical Greek rather than English during his high school years. After receiving his MA in 1963, he embarked on a PhD at the Universities of Zurich and Cambridge (England). Accepting a dare from his brother Otto, who promised to pay him 3,000 Swiss francs in cash if he managed to finish his dissertation within six months — which happened to coincide with the date set for his wedding with Helen Imfeld—the intrepid Roland, pale and exhausted, did indeed submit his summa-cum-laude dissertation on *Sündenfall und Wahlfreiheit in Milton's Paradise Lost* at Zurich University on April 1, 1964, just minutes before the wedding ceremony was to start.

While teaching English at Zurich's Litera-rgymnasium, Roland also began offering courses in Old and Middle English at Zurich University. Moreover, in 1965, he also started to work on a Habilitationsschrift (a post-PhD degree) on Geoffrey Chaucer, which was to be entitled *Normen als Schlüssel zum Verständnis einer Zeitenwende: Das Feld der Verstöße in Chaucers Werk*. With the aim to complete this book, Roland and his wife travelled to Yale University in 1970 on a Swiss National Science Foundation research fellowship. One evening, as Roland sat in Yale's library, he stumbled upon a small anthology of poems. In addition to

works by Emerson, Whitman, and Stevens, it also contained poems by Emily Dickinson. This evening changed Roland's life forever.

He put his (almost completed) book on Chaucer aside and started anew with a Habilitation on Emily Dickinson. As his Swiss grant was about to end, he successfully applied to the American Council of Learned Societies for another fellowship to enable him to stay for a second year of research at Yale, during which he delighted in discussing his work with Paul de Man, Geoffrey Hartman, and Harold Bloom, as well as Richard Sewall. The result of this fruitful time was submitted to Zurich University in 1973 under the title of *Emily Dickinson: Wagnis der Selbstbegegnung* and firmly established the direction of Roland's future career. In keeping with his lifelong interest in epistemological questions, the book's emphasis lies on Dickinson's negotiation of the "dialectics of negativity." Dickinson's response, according to Roland, was an intense and almost ecstatic engagement with death as a way to master the unfathomable. As Roland remarked years later about Dickinson's unique ability to confront death in this way: "Is it not amazing that the same woman who deliberately withdrew from social life had the courage to pioneer into realms we all shy back from: our mortality and the divine gift in us?"

While this influential study was not published in book form until 1988, one groundbreaking article, which contained the distillation of Roland's thoughts at the time, was published in 1974 and, according to many Dickinson scholars, revolutionized Dickinson scholarship. "Precision and Indeterminacy in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson" (published in the *Emerson Society Quarterly* 20.1, 1974) offered a felicitous synergy of Roland's literary, linguistic, and philosophical interests to demonstrate that Dickinson's strategy of indeterminacy, rather than being merely accidental, as

many critics of the time had argued, fulfills a decisive function in foregrounding the nineteenth-century crisis in epistemology. In detailed readings of a wide range of poems, Roland illustrated how the metaphoric method of comparison gives way to the metonymic method of inference because, for Dickinson, the world and nature have become enigmas. Roland thus read many of Dickinson's poems as allegories of their own reading (foregrounding the impossibility of a definitive interpretation), suggesting that in this way, "indeterminacy assumes an ontological significance and appears as [an essential] characteristic of the *conditio humana*" (21).

Based on this article, many leading American Studies journals invited Roland to contribute to their pages, and many universities began to be interested in this gifted young scholar. After visiting professorships at the University of Göttingen, Germany (1974), the John F. Kennedy Institute at the Free University of Berlin, Germany (1975-76) and the University of Bern, Switzerland (1976-77), Roland became Associate Professor of American Studies at Bergische University Wuppertal, Germany, in 1977, before being appointed Chair of American Studies at the Catholic University of Eichstätt, Germany, in 1980 — a position that he held for sixteen years, until his retirement and return to his home country in 1996.

The early 1980s were a dynamic time of growth for Eichstätt University, and from the start, Roland contributed his indefatigable energy and keen vision to build up what would become one of Germany's most progressive American Studies departments. At the same time, he was always eager to get people involved in intellectual endeavors beyond the walls of academe and hence initiated the Eichstätter Wintergesprächskreis — an interdisciplinary weekly lecture cycle inaugurated in 1988 and still going strong in 2008 — which

regularly attracted large audiences from both inside and outside the university and contributed substantially to enhancing Eichstätt's reputation far beyond the boundaries of academe. On the international scene, Roland organized and hosted a total of eight conferences that attracted scholars from all over the world. While Roland branched out into many different aspects of American literature and culture during these ventures, focusing in particular on cultural crises or turning points, many of his conference titles easily recall their inspiration by Dickinson: "Poetic Knowledge: Circumference and Center" (with Joseph T. Swann, 1980); "American Transcendentalism" (with Herwig Friedl, 1983); "American Poetry Between Tradition and Modernism" (1984); "Poetry and Epistemology: Turning Points in the History of Poetic Knowledge" (with Laura Skandera, 1986); "Poetry and the Fine Arts" (with Jacqueline S. Ollier, 1989); and "Das Paradox: Eine Herausforderung des abendländischen Denkens" (with Paul Geyer 1992). In more recent years, he focused on topics such as "Geschichte und Vorgeschichte der modernen Subjektivität" (with Reto Luzius Fetz and Peter Schulz, 1998) and "Negotiations of America's National Identity" (with Josef Raab and Marietta Messmer, 2000). The published results of all of these conferences have become landmarks in their field which will determine the direction of research for decades to come.

After his retirement, Roland followed with increasing concern the developments within Western cultures, in particular their seeming inability to negotiate the challenges of immigration, and to engage in a genuine and meaningful intercultural dialogue. Exchanging passionate correspondences with Swiss politicians and newspapers, Roland was inspired by Dickinson's "compound vision" to develop a theory of intercultural under-

standing, published under the title *Von der Multikulturalität zur Interkulturalität* (2002). His subsequent volume, *Kultur im Wandel* (2005) contemplated the ways in which we can respond to the increasing deterioration of Western cultural values. A sequel was planned under the title *Gegenwartstendenzen*, and in this book, as well as in what he conceived of as his most crucial publication of recent years ("Analogie – Metapher – Symbol: Dimensionen ästhetischer Erfahrung," 2005), Roland illustrated the extent to which art and literature are central to human development and thus have to be placed center stage in the education of young people all over the world — an insight he always attributed to Dickinson.

It is for this reason that, no matter what Roland worked on, he also regularly returned to his most important source of inspiration with publications in American, German, Swiss, Austrian, and Polish journals. In 1997, he coedited a special issue of *The Emily Dickinson Journal* with Margaret Freeman and Gudrun Grabher on Translating Emily Dickinson. And a year later, he published, together with Gudrun Grabher and Cris Miller, the award-winning *Emily Dickinson Handbook*, which brought together a select group of leading Dickinson scholars and constitutes just one example of the fact that Roland would only ever accept the best, and that whatever he undertook, his rigorous and exacting scholarship inevitably set and continues to set new standards.

For this reason, EDIS honored him — as the fourth Dickinson scholar after Richard Sewall (1992), Ralph Franklin (1999), and Brita Lindberg-Seyersted (2001) — with its Distinguished Service Award in 2004, "[i]n recognition of his impressive scholarly accomplishments in opening new vistas of possibility in Dickinson Studies for scholars around the world and of his importance as a generous mentor to Dickinsonians

throughout his career." In addition to a wall plaque, Roland was presented with a Dickinson doll, which



Roland and Helen Hagenbüchle
Photo by Susanna Basler

he lovingly installed and kept on his desk until his death. His award speech, intended as an ardent tribute to Dickinson, became most of all a reflection of Roland's own engaging humility: "[Dickinson makes] us acutely aware that the lives we normally lead are a degraded version of the real thing: our ownmost true potential," because through her poetry, "she adds a 'sovereign' dimension to existence, lacking which life appears weightless and stale." Until his death, Roland always considered himself not so much a Dickinson scholar but a "guest at the rich table of" Dickinson's work.

It was Roland's greatest gift to share those riches as a teacher and mentor with whomever he came into contact with. Roland had an unwavering faith in his students' potentials and was thus able to develop their talents in ways that they themselves would never have considered possible. Those of us who were fortunate enough to work with him most of all admired his

generosity of heart as well as his formidable mind, his passion for his work, his openness to new approaches and ideas, and his erudite knowledge of Western literatures and cultures, which made his lectures and seminars a challenging yet thrilling intellectual experience. As both a teacher and a scholar, Roland always demonstrated that taking the risk of crossing borders and exploring the unfathomable can be one of the most enriching and stimulating endeavors. Always ready to learn from others and to subject his own point of view to the most critical scrutiny, Martin Buber's claim that every "self" requires an "Other" to come into his/her own has become a leitmotif in Roland's scholarly and personal life. To each and every one of his colleagues and students, Roland has always given so much more than he could possibly receive in return. Until his death, he was a voracious reader, and he eagerly engaged in passionate and exciting conversations by phone or email. Yet, like Dickinson, he often could not find a partner who was up to the intellectual challenge he sought. As Roland said about Dickinson: "We feel impoverished by her riches — yet enriched in our poverty through the shining example of her life and work.... Thank you Emily Dickinson for your priceless gift!" Most of us cannot but feel the same about the shining example of Roland's own life and work: Thank you, Roland, for your priceless gift! For subsequent generations of Dickinson scholars, therefore, and especially for those who were privileged to have known him, "To be worthy of what we lose is the supreme aim" (L765).

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Emily's Dress

By Janet McCann

Although I no longer remember which of my poetry friends brought Janet McCann and her collection of poems, Emily's Dress, to my attention, I remain grateful for the discovery. I am confident that "Poet to Poet" readers will enjoy McCann's story of engagement with Dickinson's life and work beginning when she was in the fourth grade and culminating in the twenty poems included in her Dickinson-inspired volume.

Jonnie Guerra, Series Editor

I arrived in South Hadley, Massachusetts in a May downpour, having been so preoccupied with visiting Emily that I had paid no attention to the gathering storm. Sheets of water hit the windshield as I tried to figure out parking—always a problem on a strange campus, and Mount Holyoke seemed to have cars strewn around everywhere. I finally left my car behind a sodden bush and braved the onslaught to look for the archives. The archives? The few raincoated hurrying students around had never heard of them. Finally I got to the library—at least they knew where that was—and was redirected to the archive. I stood outside the glass door of the archive shaking myself like a big dog. I couldn't go in there like that! But finally I did.

Emily's white dress had first captured my attention, even before her poems became part of my baggage forever. I was in the fourth grade, and the teacher told us a bit about "the Belle of Amherst" before reading us a handful of her simplest poems. "She always wore a white dress," the

teacher, no friend of mine, explained. "Whatever the weather, she always wore it. People saw her in the distance in her white dress, and invented stories about her." I thought of her as a kind of ghost, slipping around the town in the evening, wearing her long, silky white dress. I imagined her frightening townspeople, entering stores just as they were about to close, to make some eccentric purchase. Emily's town looked to me like Chatham, New Jersey, which is where

was open two to four every Tuesday.

When the teacher read Dickinson's poems, the other students dozed; in the forties we were too polite to express boredom any other way. Or so I remember it. But I sat up at my desk in a way I usually didn't, and almost startled the teacher into silence. She read us "I never lost as much but twice," and "Because I could not stop for death," and others, but those two stayed with me. She told us the latter was about God stopping to pick up the dying on the way to Heaven, but I did not quite believe it. It seemed a tad scary for that, and not at all comforting, like the hymns we sang in my church. Certainly nothing like "What a friend we have in Jesus." But I loved the poem anyway, and soon after found a copy and memorized it, even though I hadn't an idea of what "gazing grain" or "tulle" were.

None of my later poetic passions displaced Emily, even though those I ran with in high school made fun of her and substituted e.e. cummings, especially the randier verses. I liked old e.e. too. We declaimed "the boys i know are not refined" and "may i feel said he" over mixed orange soda and root beer, which was rebellion in the fifties. (We smoked cigarettes too.) But by now Emily had hold of me. No one else seemed to care for her. She appeared in our textbooks, yes, but again only the easiest poems—with one exception:

"I heard a fly buzz when I died." This poem terrified and excited me. We were going to skip it in the class—having said a few words about the little tippler, we were going on to Whitman's "Song of Myself." I did



Janet McCann

I began grade school in the forties. It had a Woolworth's, I imagined, and a grocery, and probably a library that

an unprecedented thing—raised my hand and asked if we could discuss the fly poem. The teacher glared at me, then asked me if I had something I wanted to say about it. I stammered that I just found it, um, interesting, and wondered what she and everyone else thought. She said she didn't really have the time to spend on it, and off we went to the Barbaric Yawp. I then thought Whitman overrated—he was given so much time because there was so much of him; he flowed and eddied into other people's domains.

As an adult and as a poet I studied Emily in eccentric ways. I always wanted to touch her somehow. I liked Billy Collins's poem about taking off her dress, but I wanted to put it on. I wondered if the museum attendants at her restored home ever succumbed to the temptation to touch it, finger the row of buttons, even try it on. I have always mixed up the literal and figurative, wanting to get into her skin. Putting on her dress would be a satisfying symbolic act, and I am surprised you can't find copies of it on the Internet. I figured the only way I could put on her dress was to enter into her life.

So I became interested in her year at Mount Holyoke, and went up there to read the letters from her year there—there is only one Emily letter, it turns out, actually at Mount Holyoke, but I was intrigued by the other letters in the collection, which created for me an image of her life. Once I went into the archive, relatively dried off, the curator brought me everything I wanted, most especially the letters from Emily's classmates and near-classmates, written in tiny script to save paper, sometimes even writing across the lines as the Victorians did.

Listening to the long-silenced voices chattering of classes and domestic chores, clothing and God, I felt drawn into the scene of Emily's year. The attitude toward death encouraged by the evangelical school held me spellbound: the students were not supposed to mourn, but to

EMILY JUMPING

By Janet McCann

"One girl wished to be excluded from Calisthenics because she wanted more time to read and pray, but Miss Lyon told her exercise was a religious duty." (One of Emily Dickinson's classmates at Mount Holyoke, writing home.)

is not like Emily seated, Emily reading,
Emily walking. Perhaps this does give pleasure
to God, the rows of girls with flying hair
and flushed faces, the stern voice of the
instructor-leader: *Catherine, lift those arms!*
Don't be so lazy, Martha, you're not Mary now,
you're Martha! Emily leaps
high as the rest, though her mind hovers elsewhere—
no letter from Abiah, and it's been
nearly a month! And how long evenings are
in winter in her room when she lies still
on her bed narrow as a coffin, and whispers,
Father, won't you come get me? Emily's leaps
and stretches make her tall as Catherine,
she swings her arms to the right, the left,
the right, her auburn hair a signal flag,
arms batting the air for health and God.
It's like dance, they write home, but without the fiddle.
The music is inside. She prefers science
and geometry's her friend, but calisthenics does
make her heart pound, until she would jump out
of herself, land next to herself. *Emily, reach,*
you're reaching for His love! She stretches arms
far as they will go, straining her muscles,
but she's too aware of her hands, pulsebeats in fingers,
a will and life of their own. The others are
transported. Emily jumps. However high she jumps,
she comes back where she is.

(Epigraph courtesy of The Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections.)

be happy for a soul ascended to Heaven. When students died at the school itself—a not uncommon occurrence—they were surrounded and observed by their friends, and every detail of the deathbed was noted, as the girls looked for signs of God's presence visible in the demeanor of the departing. Letters home chronicled the progress of the illness. If a daughter did reach home before dying, the parents sent the details of her death back to her teachers. Emily's poem "I heard a fly buzz when I died" reflects this kind of uneasy yet eager waiting, and her own distance from it, not only in the dying persona but in the tone of the poem.

I hadn't realized how literal the frame story of this poem was: the watchers did expect for Christ to be present, if not as an apparition, as a sign in the dying person. "May this death be sanctified to us," they said to each other. But Emily was traumatized and horrified by witnessing death. We don't know if she was one of those forced to walk past the beds of the dying, but if she was, she would not have felt lifted up by the experience.

And the whole evangelic fervor would have bruised her sensibility. Mary Lyon, the school's founder, professed that the whole motive for her enterprise had to do with saving souls. The classes in everything from astronomy to chemistry to calisthenics were heavily laced with the kind of basic Christianity Lyon believed in. There was no escape: even the materials for leisure reading (often a period of ten minutes) were religious tracts.

The witnessing of deaths at school was a strong stimulus to conversion; many of the girls who had not undergone the full "born-again" experiences demanded by the evangelical administration found the awe and revelation of witnessing death the means to move from the group designated "hopeful" to the steadily growing number of those who were "saved." The observation of the

child's deportment in the face of death, and the solemn procession past the body, had its desired effect on many. But Emily Dickinson, in the sparse group labeled "those without hope" or "no-hopers," did not have her emotions moved in the desired direction. Rather, her sense of exclusion from the general stream of the faithful intensified, and she became confirmed in the apprehension that she was truly alone in the presence of finality.

I spent a week in the archives at her school. My days at Mount Holyoke helped me to "put on" Emily's year there, and the sense of freedom and relief I felt as the campus disappeared in my rearview mirror may have been much like what Emily may have felt when her family came to fetch her in the carriage. She didn't start writing her poems right away, but a couple of years later—yet I find the marks of her experience of school, of "education," upon them.

When the archives closed each day—archives keep bankers' hours—I went to the regular library and re-read the poems. Ahh, the poems! The secrecy in them, the sense of peeling off layers and finally arriving at a translucent, impenetrable center—this has always bewitched me. Emily may have been the first apostle of indeterminacy, and yet she goes beyond the postmodernists by providing a transparent illusion of closure. Are her feet metrical feet? What's eternity, at the end of "Because I could not stop for death?" Can anyone but Freud explain her snakes?

I went to Mount Holyoke to nourish a myth, imbue it with life. Emily's interior rebelliousness, her outward conformity—to an extent—her private visions and the poems in the linens—this was a myth I could live with. I was always inarticulate in public; I imagined Emily too struggling for words before company. I was always fighting with issues of faith and doubt—wanting faith desperately but not being able to accept any manifestation of it that was offered me by others—I thought of her

in the same situation. Was this arrogant? Of course. But comforting, inspiring.

Emily remains a mysterious woman who was her own person in a time when this was almost impossible, and if she had to remain her own by keeping the world at bay, I respect her for it. There is only one photo of Emily Dickinson. I firmly reject the second photo that Alfred Habegger believes in (according to *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books*). Surely, Emily never got tubby and comfortable looking; the dress in the home/museum proves it. Though, if you look at the dress very closely, it is not quite as narrow as one might expect. I don't look into mirrors. My color is beige. Emily, if I ever meet you somewhere, I would like to have tea with you. Perhaps a glass of sherry—your eyes, you once said, were the color of sherry left in the glass.

Janet McCann is Professor of English at Texas A&M University, where she has taught since 1969. Her poems have appeared in Poetry New York, Southern Poetry Review, Poetry Australia, New Letters and other literary reviews and anthologies. She received a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in 1989. Her collection, Emily's Dress, was published by Pecan Grove Press in 2004.

BECOMING EMILY

By Barbara Dana

This issue's story of a personal encounter with Dickinson comes from Barbara Dana, recipient of many honors for her performances on stage, screen, and television. Barbara is also the author of a stage play, two screenplays, and several books for young readers, including a novel based on the young life of Emily Dickinson. Most recently she served as co-editor, with Cynthia MacKenzie, of *Wider than the Sky: Essays and Meditations on the Healing Power of Emily Dickinson*. Here she offers us a glimpse of why and how an actress comes to take on the challenging role of Emily Dickinson in William Luce's *The Belle of Amherst*. To submit your own personal story, please contact me at georgiestr@aol.com

Georgiana Strickland, Series Editor

When my friend and colleague Cindy MacKenzie asked me to play Emily Dickinson in William Luce's *Belle of Amherst* at the 2009 EDIS conference in Regina, Canada, I said, "Absolutely not." I had seen my idol, Julie Harris, play the poet perfectly, I explained, and would not consider it.

But I thought about it. Yes, Julie had played Emily magnificently—perfectly, if such a thing were possible—but did that mean the play should never be done again? There was something wrong with that equation. Let's say Julie had not been magnificent, merely credible and honest. Might it still have been a nourishing experience for the audience, glimpsing aspects of the poet's life, enjoying her wit, her sense of

humor, feeling her pain, listening to her words? Perfect or not, wouldn't an evening spent in the theatre with William Luce's thought-provoking play, based on Emily's own words, have something to offer? Might it



Barbara Dana
Photo by Mark Kwiatek

touch someone? Might it encourage members of the audience to get to know Emily Dickinson better, to read her poetry and her letters, to explore the many fine biographies about her? I had to admit the answer was yes.

"Are you crazy??"

My voice resounded in my head as I drove north on Route 91, approaching Northampton, where Emily had

wondered at the high, pearly tones of songbird Jenny Lind in a performance more than a hundred and fifty years ago. As I headed for nearby Amherst to join Cindy in a program we were giving at the Emily Dickinson Museum, my thoughts continued. You have wanted to play the "role" for decades! Now is the time! You have been immersed in Dickinson for the last ten years, working on your novel (*A Voice of Her Own: Becoming Emily Dickinson* [HarperCollins, 2009]). Emily is in your blood! And Cindy asked you!

My reasons for accepting Cindy's offer were mounting up, but I was scared. Emily's words echoed in my brain: "We never know how high we are / Till we are asked to rise" (Fr 1197).

When I reached the Lord Jeffery Inn in Amherst, Cindy was sitting at a corner table in the restaurant, enjoying a calamari appetizer and going over her notes.

"I'll do it," I said.

Cindy smiled. "I thought you'd come around."

My first meeting with Emily Dickinson took place at the Longacre Theatre in New York City on December 28, 1976. My birthday. I was overwhelmed by Julie's transcendent performance and by the spirit, spunk, power, and shimmering, wrenlike magnitude of the poet. I am both an actor and a writer. In each medium I am drawn to characters who follow their own inner voice. When no one around them thinks or behaves as they do, they don't buckle. What's true for them in their deepest heart is what they cling to. Whether I'm portraying Joan of Arc—a wild,

restless, and insightful young girl growing up in an ultraconventional family—or a black-footed ferret who, despite what he is told, knows there must be more to life than the confines of the Creatures of the Night House at the Bronx Zoo, my themes are the same: “Don’t let your free spirit be chained by them” (L6).

Emily Dickinson! Here was a woman who could do no other than follow the deepest promptings of her heart. No matter how many obstacles were in her path, she persevered, standing in the truth of her own Soul. At the time of my first encounter with the poet I was concentrating on my acting. That being the case, as I watched *The Belle of Amherst* that cold December night, Julie’s masterful performance was uppermost in my mind. How could she portray this extraordinary poet with such insight, passion, humor, and grace?! Once again I was inspired by the brilliance of my idol. And now the poet herself held an important place in my heart as well.

Thirty years later, when my life was falling apart, she returned to take “center stage.” It was a dark time. My thirty-five year marriage had ended and my father had died in the same month. My depression was deep. The best thing about that time, in addition to the loving support of my German shepherd, Jesse, was that my son, Matthew, and his wife, Pamela, were staying with me in my house in Connecticut. Both actors, they had been living in Los Angeles. Matthew had just gotten a part in a Broadway play, and they were living with me until they could get settled on the East Coast. Their companionship was invaluable.

Pamela had been directing at the time and asked if she could direct me in *The Belle of Amherst*. I answered in my usual fashion. “Julie Harris has done it perfectly. I wouldn’t presume.” Pamela insisted that the matter of whether or not Julie Harris had been perfect in the play had nothing to do with my playing the part. I stuck to my guns.

Then she suggested we read the play out loud. I reminded her of the facts. There was only one role and we were two actors. She said she didn’t mind. She wanted to hear the play. She would read the stage directions. For some reason, I agreed. I’m not sure why. Perhaps it was just that it was something to do. I had been numb for months, feeling nothing, at least nothing that I was aware of. I was going through the motions of life without actually being there. “Therefore — we do life’s labor — / Though Life’s Reward — be done — / With scrupulous exactness — / To hold our Senses — on —” (Fr522).

I remember we were sitting in my studio above the garage. As Emily, I read... “Will there really be a ‘morning’? / Is there such a thing as ‘Day’?” (Fr148). And then it happened. I broke apart—tears, anger, shame, loneliness, grief—pouring out in a seemingly endless stream. I felt as if I had come home, home to the truth of myself, however painful, home to what was real. No longer floating alone in the sea of nowhere, I had a place to stand and I was “there.”

The next day I called my editor at HarperCollins and told her I wanted to write a novel based on the young life of Emily Dickinson. It would tell of her journey to becoming a writer, explore what it might have felt like to grow up as the famous poet. My editor liked the idea. She had been suggesting I write a new book for a while, but in my listless state of mind the idea had held no interest. I had previously written a novel for Harpers about the young life of Joan of Arc (*Young Joan* [HarperCollins, 1991]) and my editor had wondered if I might want to write about the young life of another strong, accomplished woman. I had been less than intrigued. Who would be as interesting as Joan? Now I knew.

I had approached the writing of *Young Joan* in much the way I approach an acting role. I had played Joan of Arc twice. My research for acting Joan and writing Joan was nearly identical. Study the time pe-

riod. What did they wear? How did they talk? What was Joan’s house like? Her town? What was the religious expression of the period? What kind of transportation did they have? What kind of plumbing, if any? Was there school? What was that like? Learn about her family, her friends, her pets, her hobbies, the politics of the time, the customs, the furniture, the cooking utensils, the diseases, the cures. The list was endless.

I figured I would approach the research on Emily in the same way. The work would keep me busy, I thought, give me a ‘real’ job, help me to become enthusiastic about living, to move on. I was right, but the benefits were more than I could have imagined. Not only was I busy, working hard, concentrating on something I enjoyed, but as I spent time with Emily Dickinson I found myself in the process of rewiring my emotional life. My connection to the poet was helping me to experience many new things, the most important of which was that I was not alone. I had seriously believed that to be the case. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, I was alone. Born alone. Waiting for death alone. No one knew me. Not really.

But Emily did. She had been there. She knew that “Funeral” in the brain, that “Element of Blank,” that time when “The Heart wants what it wants — or else it does not care — /” that “Plank in Reason” breaking, that question, “Will there really be a ‘morning’?” She had told her heart to forget—no “lagging.” She had “cautious, scanned” her “little life,” put the things that would last in a barn, only to return and find them gone. She had felt that “terror — since September” which she could “tell to none.” She knew.

As I was about to begin my work, I was heading for a visit with another daughter-in-law, who lived in Seattle. While I was there we visited a bookstore. I, of course, immediately headed for the poetry section to see

Becoming Emily, continued on page 30

Alabaster Chambers

By Jane Chang

A young woman crouches in front of a gated family cemetery plot in Amherst. A brisk wind is blowing and it takes the assistance of her two companions to hold the large paper still so she can complete her task. At last she finishes, carefully pulling the sheet of paper between the iron bars. She stands, and with a satisfied grin displays her work. It is a rubbing of Emily Dickinson's headstone. "Emily Dickinson—Dec. 10, 1830—Called Back . . ."

Now she sees me and makes apologies for holding me up. There is no room for cars to pass each other on the narrow road that wanders through West Cemetery in Amherst. I assure her that I am in no hurry and admit I come here often to check on Emily's headstone. In the winter of 2007 I began to photograph the tokens of appreciation that admirers leave for Emily. As a visual artist, I was inspired to create a collage from these efforts, and my Amherst residence allows for frequent visits.

"I just love Emily's poetry so much" she gushes. "After we saw the grave I just had to do this. I hope it's not illegal." It is the young woman's second visit this day to the gravesite. She'd returned after a trip into town to scout out an art supply store and purchase a large newsprint sketchpad and package of charcoal sticks. Now her hands were black and her aunt was searching her car for a means to clean them. I offered a Handiwipe from the stash I keep on hand. I also offered to take her photograph, promising to send it to her later when she emailed me her address — North Carolina, I think. Six months have passed but I've not heard from her. Just 19 years old, a college student on her first spring break, and already moved enough by Emily's words to visit her final resting place. I am not really surprised.

It is clear that Emily has touched even younger souls. On a tiny scrap

of torn paper, a child's uneven hand has written "this pease of paper is for Emily Dick inson" (the gap in the name is due to limited space on the scrap of paper and the rest of the surname continues on the next line). A full sheet torn from a spiral binder is covered with what first appears to be simply a list of words. Closer inspection suggests this is original poetry—the style of spacing, word choice, and lack of punctuation are reminiscent of Emily's writing.

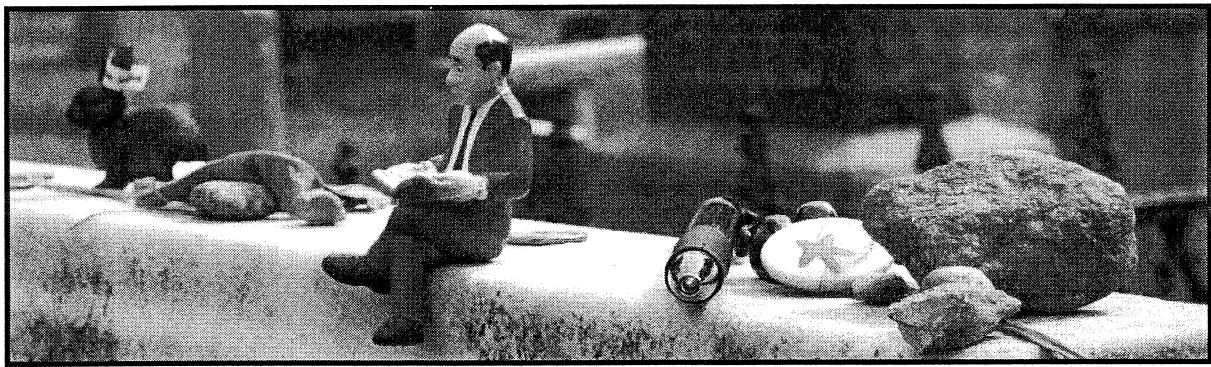
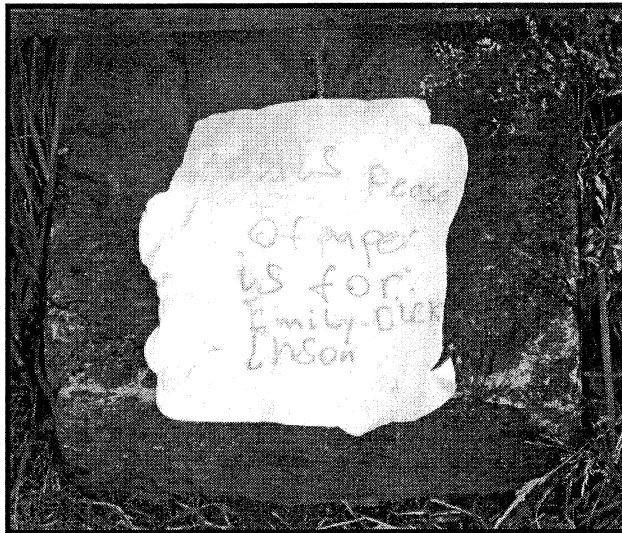
The gifts to Emily range from the expected to those which defy categorization. I've witnessed everything from a single violet, drawing its last breath of life draped over the edge of the tombstone, to an entire bouquet placed at the base. Attempts have been made to plant perennial blooms, but these seem to disappear after the groundskeeper's next mowing, or, perhaps by the means of some grateful, hungry wildlife. I've found handfuls of pens and pencils and so many little tokens. The surface landscape on one day included a penny, a dandelion blossom, a stone, and a tiny shell. This was a small cache compared to the mother lode I discovered which netted 7 stones, 3 dimes, a penny, a clover blossom, 2 leaves (one fresh, one dried), an expensive pen, a button featuring 2 shells on a sandy shore, a tiny rabbit figurine, and. . . the figurine of a bald gentleman perched on the edge of the grave-stone, legs crossed, reading a book.

I puzzled aloud to fellow Dickinson fans, "Why would people leave money — pennies, nickels, dimes, quarters?" A woman said simply, "I think people just want to leave SOMETHING — anything, really, and that's all they have with them." She's probably right, but that doesn't explain the really odd tokens I've seen. Certainly the person who left the tiny (one inch) telephone didn't just happen to have it along that

day, and I just don't know what to make of the visitor who left a lighter on the top of the stone and a cigarette at its base. My favorite discovery was a row of miniature animal figurines that included an owl, a parakeet, a goose, a penguin, and a rabbit. The list goes on, and a few of these "landscape" photos are scattered throughout my collage, along with bits of Emily's poems on death.

Otherwise serious folk have stood with psychics before Emily's resting spot, hoping for some message from the poet. As far as I know, she remains silent, her words spent before death. After one such hopeful homage, I found a psychic's calling card — the word "BOO!" featured in large, bold letters. Handwritten around the word was "Emily I love you write from the heart." That same day I photographed a Harry Potter Wizard's License resting in the shadows behind the tombstone.

In late May, 2007, I gently extracted a piece of paper which had been wedged into the ornate ironwork of the fence. I photographed the heart-felt message to Emily and then replaced the note. It reads, "Dear Emily, I visited you almost 10 years ago. I read 4 of your poems at my mother's funeral. You have made the world (a) wonderful place for us all. You have changed the world in your quiet, amazing way. We all love you. Most love, John Biebel." I knew I would include this note in my collage, but decided I should not use the author's name. Technology being the grand thing that it is, I couldn't wait to Google "John Biebel." I was rewarded with a link to a man of that name living in the Boston area. I wondered if this could be the same John Biebel, but I took the thought no further at that time. In preparation for this essay, however, I sent him an email message, explaining my connection with him and asking permission to reveal his identity.



Photos by Jane Chang

Excerpted from John's note to me: "... thank you for hunting me down, and yes, it is I that left the note at the gravesite. ... My mother had been a long fan of Dickinson's work, and it was from my mother that I'd first been introduced to her poetry. I have been reading her work ever since, and have only found my interest to grow as the years pass. It had been important to me that I read some of her work at my mother's funeral service — mainly because Dickinson spoke so often about the promises and mystery of an after-life, a realm beyond, and it helped me to think that my mother had passed into this place, some place where there was no pressure and pain, things that had afflicted my mother for a great deal of time during her life. Dickinson has stayed

very close to me for many reasons. ... besides her incredible work and its resonance, I am greatly affected by her life."¹

One day this past April I found only a tiny cherub resting on his belly, alongside a real harmonica. At the beginning of August, the cherub has disappeared, but the harmonica remains, now crowded among the largest collection of gifts I've yet seen. I would expect no less of the visitors who had just convened in Amherst to attend the Emily Dickinson International Society annual meetings. I'd say this is the world's response to Emily's question, "Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?"

I was rewarded on one visit to Dickinson's plot when I noticed something leaning against the back corner of the fence. That day, for the first

time, I walked the perimeter of the plot. Resting on the ground and wired to the fence was a small door, about 24 inches by 14 inches, made of scraps of weathered wood and rusted metal parts. I'm sure an assemblage artist fashioned this door. For someone, it simply isn't enough that Emily is safe within her alabaster chamber. She just might want to venture out someday.

¹ Quoted with permission from John Biebel.

Jane Chang is a paper artist living in Amherst. Her work includes decorative boxes, paper quilts, and mixed-media collages, all making use of her lifetime collection of found treasures. According to Jane, "Above all, art should make you smile."

Alberto Mancini's *I'll tell you how the Sun rose* A Visual Correspondence

By Beth Staley

A much-anticipated highlight of this year's EDIS meeting, Alberto Mancini's painting exhibit featured a vivid and exceptional response to his encounter with Emily Dickinson's poems. While EDIS members, Amherst locals, and art-lovers alike gathered in the Eli Marsh Gallery of Amherst College for Mancini's opening reception on August 2, it became clear how appropriate the exhibit was to the meeting's theme of "celebration." Mancini's paintings offer an intelligent and inspired engagement with Dickinson's poems, which were printed separately alongside each canvas—thus inviting viewers into their unique correspondence.

The affinities they share run deep, connecting Mancini to Dickinson's poetic "mythology," which, he verifies, "speaks to the eternal transcendental needs of all human beings."¹ Likewise, he believes in art with a similar aim—art that "trac[es] new paths, new directions for humanity." Mancini's words remind us that the power of celebration is a double-movement honoring both the past, especially Dickinson's here, and the future, keeping in mind how we re-enter and converse with her work. Even more appropriate and impressive is the fact that each of Mancini's twenty-nine oil paintings accomplishes such celebration, allowing viewers to re-access Dickinson's poems in abstract, utterly vibrant compositions that visually recall her sensibility as a poet receptive to nature, meditation, and the ineffable. Upon viewing the exhibit, Paul Crumbley confirms, "Even the most dedicated student of Dickinson will see her work in a new light."

And indeed, Mancini's actual use of light emerges with sophistication and precision both on and in the paintings. What strikes one initially is the consistent and smooth luminosity of

surface across them; Mancini's paint strokes are expertly and exactly applied for textural cohesiveness, emphasizing the depth of his composition and color just under the surface. These aren't the kind of paintings with so much paint build-up that you just want to touch them. Instead, their spatial build-up of image, scape, and color achieve a kind of psychic weight; you just want to linger in them, suspended in the emotive and evolving discoveries they yield.

In the painting based on Dickinson's "My Cocoon tightens — Colors tease —" (Fr1107), Mancini visually improvises the line, "A dim capacity for Wings." Amidst a milky light tinged with gentle hues of oranges, yellows, and blues, the close-up center of a wingspan suggests itself in the lower half of the canvas, marked by delicate black veins and the right amount of transparency between them. Rather than emphasize the long, literal wings of a butterfly, Mancini focuses on their connection and initial emanation—with an indigo-violet circle hovering just behind their dark bodily meeting-point. The eye lingers here for a while. Framing the composition from above is a thin blue-grey horizon that perfectly balances the painting's realm of depicted light and wings. And what it organizes is not quite a landscape or skyscape, but what you might call a "poem-scape," thus allowing the viewer to reflect on the perspective rendered. In his introduction to the exhibit's book, Crumbley sees the horizon as "the lower lid of an eye admitting light after long darkness." As in Dickinson's poem, the painting allows us to be in awe of form, the transfiguration of/into a butterfly's wings, and in awe of how form affects perception, the transfiguration

of/into how we see—especially if we, like Dickinson's speaker, can "take the clue divine." All at once, and successfully so, this painting is both wings and eye—their imbricated "capacit[ies]."

To Mancini's credit, there is no simple way to describe the *modus operandi* behind his powerful sense of composition; his manner of abstraction is neither severe nor capricious. He takes what is recognizable about a wing, a flower, a sunset, or a field and deconstructs it so as to admit the fascinations, emotions, and meditations that Dickinson's poems bring to bear on them. If anything, his abstraction is serious yet also sensitive. As Italian writer Alfonso Cardamone reflects, "Mancini masters his technique. . . he is modern because he meticulously deconstructs images. . . he goes beyond every post-modernism and is never influenced by banality and self-complacent insignificance."

Meanwhile his conversation with Dickinson is motivated not only by his commitment to making art but also his conviction in what it restores for artist and viewer alike. Mancini generously shared some of his thoughts about art and poetry in a brief address during the exhibit; about Emily Dickinson, he stressed that "every moment of her life was a moment of poetry." While commending her ability to access all the potential of a given moment, Mancini also admired her ability to express it, saying, "She holds my hand into nature. . . as a kind of meditation." Though Mancini's family has called the small Italian town of Atina home for four hundred years, he spent the first four years of his life in Newton, Massachusetts. Thus Dickinson's work brings Mancini's childhood back to him; he finds "the woods, the mountains,

the breeze, the breath, the sense of the entire."

It is this "sense of the entire" that pervades Mancini's paintings; in so many of them, the movement he composes feels ongoing, as if it might surpass even the canvas's boundaries. The painting based on Dickinson's "When Roses cease to bloom, Sir" (Fr8) is a strong example. The gardens or fields that might have once born roses and violets are evoked with various color planes extending up and back toward an expanse of bright, open space suspended in the upper half of the painting. The strongest, lowest plane is an earthy green with hints of orange, red, and violet interspersed therein. The other planes are almost transparent, admitting different modulations of light and color, their layering seeming to recall Dickinson's successive yet distinct "When[s]"—"When Roses" and "Violets," "When Bumblebees." Rich shadows move in from the lower left and bottom of the composition, ushering the eye counterclockwise around to a double swarm or air-stream rushing across the color planes into the light-filled distance.

Mancini's handling of the dot and dash marks through the swarm is subtle enough to conjure the "Bumblebees" of Dickinson's poem or any swift movement of leaves, seeds, debris, dust; it is the momentum of that which is "pass[ing] beyond the Sun" that resonates here—as well as Mancini's employment of fine, almost script-like marks through both this swarm and the color planes. Some of the most delightful and often surprising details of Mancini's paintings are these faint lines and specks, usually evoking, or shall I say punctuating, motion and flight. They cite Dickinson's marks, dashes, and crosses in aptly restrained yet revealing ways.

Overall, Mancini's project as a visual artist innovatively coincides with Dickinson's power as a visual poet, especially in terms of how they express observation. In responding

to any given Dickinson poem, Mancini selects one line or so to invoke in a painting. Upon scanning across these highlighted lines, one can't help but admire the phrases chosen; nearly all of them are observations mediated by imaginative assertion or exclamation. Such lines include: "And I'm a Rose!" (Fr25), "'That must have been the Sun!'" (Fr204), "The Clovers—understood" (Fr610), "The Wind does not require the Grass" (Fr459), "The 'Tune is in the Tree — '...No Sir! In Thee!'" (Fr402). The observations that Mancini performs with paint are likewise mediated by imaginative assertions that often seem exclamatory; as he creates form, he inflects it with close-ups, added horizons, light beams, varied color planes, angled perspectives, gathered flecks. Like Dickinson, he is a keen observer whose manner of expression will "[t]ell all the truth but tell it slant" (Fr1263). Hence the title of Mancini's exhibit: *I'll tell you how the Sun rose* — (Fr204). Indeed, for both Dickinson and Mancini, it's less the "what" and more the "how" of their disclosed observations. And it's easy to remain dazzled by them—by how they tell us of this world—sunrises, winds, and wings in tow.

¹ All quotations are from the exhibit's printed booklet *I'll tell you how the Sun rose* —, which includes introductions by Paul Crumbley and Alberto Mancini as well as an artist biography; the only exceptions are those words spoken by Mancini in the gallery during his address to everyone.

Beth Staley is pursuing a Ph.D. in English, with emphasis on nineteenth and twentieth century American poetry. She also writes poems; some of them have recently appeared in Kestrel, Hamilton Stone Review, and Crate, which named her this year's Tomas Rivera selection for her work as a poet and teacher.

UNTOLD TALES (Dickinson Fr754)

By Cynthia Hallen

Everyone should be a poet—
Revise the Upper Case!
Let Lower Case bards and ballads
Have their season and place—

Democratize rhymes and rhythms—
Formulate ancient Themes—
Dash lines in stanzas — Write
visions—
Stitch them in short, straight seams—

Switch syntax—Change morphemes—
Drop sense
On a microscope slide—
Illustrate sound—Adjust the lens—
Let old and new collide.

Let music flow like Springs in dells.
Let songs wake us like birds.
Be elliptic—Make light—Ring
bells—
Elect Philology—Love words—

Celebrate nature's endless fame—
Define the infinite—
Give remembrance to the nameless —
Help robins to their nest.

(2 August 2008, Amherst, Massachusetts)

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Barbara Kelly, Book Review Editor

Benfey, Christopher. *A Summer of Hummingbirds: Love, Art, and Scandal in the Intersecting Worlds of Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Martin Johnson Heade.* New York: Penguin Press, 2008. 288 pp. Cloth, ISBN 1-59420-160-8, \$25.95.

Benfey explores the lives of an intellectually dynamic group of known and less well-known nineteenth-century personalities connected by family, friendship, adulterous affairs, professional interests, or sheer coincidence. His overarching theme is the hummingbird. Emily Dickinson and Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote about hummingbirds; Stowe and Martin Johnson Heade (one of the great American bird painters who "aspired to be the Audubon of hummingbirds") painted them and kept pet hummingbirds; and Stowe's brother the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher collected stuffed hummingbirds. Regarding the national obsession with hummingbirds and their significance, Benfey explains, "Americans during and after the Civil War gradually left behind a static view of existence, a trust in fixed arrangements and hierarchies. In science and in art, in religion and in love, they came to see a new dynamism and movement in their lives, a brave new world of instability and evanescence. This dynamism, in all aspects of life, found perfect expression in the hummingbird." Like a hummingbird, Benfey dips, hovers, retreats, and circles back to his characters in a style that has the charm and intimacy of a memoir but also reflects his research and passion for

interesting details. He provides insightful analyses of Heade's paintings and Dickinson's poems, and in an epilogue discusses Dickinson's influence on Joseph Cornell's box constructions. Illustrated with 17 black and white archival photographs, this attractive volume includes notes and an index.

Bennett, Paula Bernat, Karen L. Kilcup, and Philipp Schweighauser, eds. *Teaching Nineteenth-Century American Poetry.* New York: Modern Language Association, 2007. 402 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-87352-821-4, \$40.00. Paper, ISBN 0-87352-822-1, \$22.00

Part of the MLA's Options for Teaching series, this collection of essays from 25 contributors celebrates neglected or forgotten nineteenth-century American poets William Cullen Bryant, Stephen Crane, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Margaret Fuller, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Emma Lazarus, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Frances Osgood, Alexander Posey, Lydia Huntley Sigourney, John Greenleaf Whittier and others. Part I (Teaching Various Kinds of Poems) focuses on American Indian poetry, sorrow songs, erotic poetry, working-class poetry, Civil War poetry, postbellum realist poetry, and schoolroom poetry. Part II (Teaching Poets in Context) concentrates on individual poets within social, personal, religious, literary, or political contexts. Part III (Strategies of Teaching) offers various classroom approaches to teaching poetry. Part IV (Resources) provides a well-

organized bibliographical review essay of selected books and Web sources for studying nineteenth-century American poetry. Contributors include Edward Brunner, Jane Donahue Eberwein, Paul Lauter, Elizabeth Petrino, Katharine Rodier, Angela Sorby, Cheryl Lawson Walker, and others. Notes on contributors, works cited and recommended, and an index are included. For teachers wishing to tell "the rest of the story" and present Dickinson or Whitman in the context of the nineteenth-century's dominant popular and democratic culture, this volume of well-written essays is a practical and valuable resource.

Bloom, Harold, ed. and introd. *Emily Dickinson: New Edition.* New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008. 231 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-7910-9613-0, \$45.00.

Part of Bloom's Modern Critical Views series, this volume contains thirteen essays demonstrating a variety of approaches to the study of Emily Dickinson. Arranged chronologically from Richard Wilbur's "Sumptuous Destitution" to John Felstiner's "'Earth's Most Graphic Transaction': The Syllables of Emily Dickinson," the volume also includes contributions by Douglas Anderson, Timothy Morris, Margaret Dickie, Domhnall Mitchell, G. Thomas Tanselle, David S. Reynolds, Carolyn Lindley Cooley, Logan Esdale, Shira Wolosky, Deirdre Fagan, and Jay Ladin. Esdale's and Fagan's essays first appeared in the 2005 *Emily Dickinson Journal*. Introducing the volume, Bloom writes, "Of all poets writ-

The *Bulletin* welcomes notices of all Dickinson-related books, including those published outside the U.S.
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ing in English in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I judge Emily Dickinson to present us with the most authentic cognitive difficulties." He considers her "more original even than Whitman, indeed more original than any poet of her century after (and except) Wordsworth." From her many strong poems, he selects "The Tint I cannot take — is best —" (J627) as "achieving an absolute aesthetic dignity" and asks, "What precedents are there for such a poem, a work of un-naming, a profound and shockingly original cognitive act of negation?" Bloom's notable collection includes a concise Dickinson chronology, contributor's notes, a bibliography, and index.

Christensen, Lena. *Editing Emily Dickinson: The Production of an Author.* New York: Routledge, 2008. 192 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-415-95586-7, \$95.00.

Focusing on editorial projects from the twentieth century to the present, Christensen's study aims "to show how each editorial project and subsequent critical body of work shape the Dickinson text and, as a consequence, the figure of Dickinson, in important ways." She argues "that each edition of Emily Dickinson's work is bound to be unedited, is bound to be cancelled by a subsequent edition: there is no Dickinson text to which we can 'return' as 'proper' or 'best.'" The author develops her argument in three chapters. Chapter One describes the early editions resulting from the "war of the houses," the New Critics' formalism, and the vexing issues of inaccuracy preceding and following Thomas H. Johnson's 1955 scholarly edition. Chapter Two reviews Dickinson's manuscripts and manuscript criticism, "emphasizing the variant, the version, the fragment . . . the flux in which texts exist." Christensen cites R. W. Franklin's 1981 *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* as a catalyst for questioning the printed page and privileging

the handwritten page. Chapter Three examines digital editorial practices, "asking how such practices shape the poems and other writings of Emily Dickinson." Developed from a doctoral dissertation, this sophisticated survey of editorial theory and practice (metacriticism, genetic criticism, poststructuralist theory, et al.) might interest manuscript scholars.

Faust, Drew Gilpin. *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War.* New York: Knopf, 2008. 348 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-375-40404-7, \$27.95.

Faust's study of the Civil War contrasts the pre-war Christian concept of "the Good Death" and consolatory mourning rituals with the raw brutality and horror of anonymous death on the battlefield. She discusses the psychological and spiritual changes caused by the overwhelming carnage — an estimated 620,000 soldiers dead or two percent of the total population; today the equivalent would be six million deaths. She also explores how the war "transformed society, culture, and politics," and created what Frederick Law Olmsted called a "republic of suffering." To show the "belief and unbelief that grew from the war," Faust examines the works of Walt Whitman, Ambrose Bierce, Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson (204-08), and others. Added to Dickinson's earlier concerns about death, the war gave her "a new language and a new context in which to contemplate its meaning"; it supplied her with "inexhaustible material for her metaphysical speculations." Faust concludes, "Americans had not just lost the dead; they had lost their own lives as they had understood them before the war." Informed by diaries, letters, newspapers, sermons, poems, and stories, Faust's well-researched, analytical, and powerful study, accompanied by archival photographs and drawings, both moves and disturbs. This

accessible, and thought-provoking book provides context for Dickinson studies and should also appeal to Civil War buffs and general readers.

Máté, Ferenc. *A New England Autumn: A Sentimental Journey.* New York: Albatross Books/Norton, 2007. 158 pp. 13.25 x 10.5 x .75 inches. Cloth, ISBN 0-920256-55-8, \$39.95.

In this oversize coffee table volume, Máté combines his 100 sensuous, color-saturated autumn photographs with compatible literary works by Elizabeth Bishop, E. E. Cummings, Emily Dickinson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, Robert Frost, Sarah Orne Jewett, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Sylvia Plath, Edgar Allan Poe, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Ann Sexton, Henry David Thoreau, Frederick Goddard Tuckerman, and John Greenleaf Whittier. Among the artfully composed photographs, 24 on double-page spreads, readers will find valleys filled with morning mist, pastoral hillside farms, Boston rocking chairs sharing a porch with fat orange pumpkins, white-steeped clapboard churches, a cemetery with nineteenth-century tombstones, rocky brooks and waterfalls, lichen-covered tree roots, lakeside forests with a tapestry of bright autumn colors reflected in the water, and village harbors at sunset with the water turned a molten gold and fishing boats casting long purple shadows. A New England Planner at the back with hand-drawn maps offers suggested road trips. A worthy companion to Jerome Liebling's *The Dickinsons of Amherst*, Máté's celebration of New England's natural world includes six Dickinson poems from the Johnson edition: "As imperceptibly as Grief," "I reason Earth is short —," "This is my letter to the world," "To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee," "Nature — sometimes sears a Sapling —," and "I died for Beauty —." The publisher correctly calls this book "a visual and literary feast."

Parisi, Joseph, ed. and introd., and Kathleen Welton, ed. *100 Essential Modern Poems by Women*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008. 289 pp. Cloth, ISBN 1-56663-741-1, \$24.95.

This anthology contains poems written by 48 women over a span of 150 years. The poets are arranged chronologically by birth dates, from Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti to Rita Dove and Louise Erdrich. Parisi provides a prefatory essay for each poet and notes to the poems. Most poets are represented by fewer than four poems except for Dickinson, represented by Fr 260, 312, 339, 372, 448, 466, 479, 591, 620, and 861 (15-27). Included are well-known canonical poets Amy Lowell, H.D., Marianne Moore, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Gwendolyn Brooks, Anne Sexton, Adrienne Rich, and Sylvia Plath; poets once known but now neglected, such as Elinor Wylie, Edith Sitwell, Sara Teasdale, and Phyllis McGinley; and contemporary poets Adrienne Rich, Mary Oliver, Marilyn Hacker, Sharon Olds, Louise Glück, and Ellen Bryant Voigt among others. Exhibiting a variety of writing styles and addressing a range of topics from relationships with family, community, and nature to larger philosophical and cultural issues, the poems “are not for women only.” Having chosen the poems because they are modern, meaningful, and memorable, Parisi says, “These are poems to read and re-read, to treasure, and above all to enjoy” with “degrees in literature not required.”

Priddy, Anna. *Bloom's How to Write About Emily Dickinson*. New York: Chelsea House, 2008. 262 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-7910-9492-1, \$45.00.

Part of a series designed to instruct young adults on how to write essays about literary figures and their works, Priddy's volume on Emily Dickinson begins with a valuable, reader-friendly chapter on how to write a good general essay (1-40). In

this first comprehensive chapter, she clearly discusses seven key concepts: theme; character; form and genre; language, symbols, and imagery; history and context; philosophy and ideas; and compare and contrast essays. She offers specific advice about preparing a thesis statement, an outline, unified and coherent paragraphs, introductions and conclusions, and citations and documentation, including useful online sources for MLA guidance. She also discusses plagiarism and provides a sample essay on Dickinson. Referencing the various principles discussed, the core of the book contains an overview of Dickinson (41-60), followed by chapters on each of 20 often-anthologized Dickinson poems and suggested multiple writing approaches. The poems themselves are not printed. Following each discussion is a bibliography including online resources with citations through 2006 (61-255). This accessible, clearly formatted, and indexed volume, with step-by-step writing advice, is an excellent guide to clear thinking and a useful resource for teachers and students engaged in studying and writing about Dickinson and her work.

Schreier, Benjamin, ed., introd. *Studies in Irreversibility: Texts and Contexts*. Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars, 2007. viii, 276 pp. Cloth, ISBN 1847182050, £39.99; \$79.99.

Eleven scholars interested in the concept of irreversibility examine literature, art criticism, history, philosophy, ethnic studies, and ethics, using a variety of methodologies to explore present experience “from the perspective of its uncompromising and irreducible past, finding in irreversibility a key to an interpretation of futurity.” In Monica Pelaez's “Reversing the Irreversible: Dickinson and the Sentimental Culture of Death” (28-60), the author refers to over a dozen Dickinson letters and as many poems to show how Dickin-

son resisted mid-nineteenth-century sentimentalism. While popular poems “turned death into a harbinger of heavenly rewards,” Dickinson's unconventional poems question this tradition and “often exacerbate the uncertainties that sentimentalism hoped to alleviate by redefining loss as gain.” J374 and 495 illustrate Dickinson's unease with the sentimental tradition. She recognized a need for consolation against loss but “her acceptance of loss defines a modern, progressive consciousness — one that does not resist, but embraces change.” Pelaez concludes, “What links Dickinson to her time is the tone of reassurance that underlies her defiance. What makes her so innovative is that she found this reassurance by insisting that ‘the unknown is the largest need of the intellect’ (L471; 1876) at a time when it was perceived to be the largest threat.”

Smith, Martha Nell, and Mary Loeffelholz, eds. *A Companion to Emily Dickinson*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2008. 523 pp. Cloth, ISBN 1-4051-2280-1, \$199.95.

With the heft and comprehensiveness of an encyclopedia, this volume contains twenty-six essays divided among five sections: “Biography — the Myth of ‘the Myth’”; “The Civil War — Historical and Political Contexts”; “Cultural Contexts — Literature, Philosophy, Theology, Science”; “Textual Conditions: Manuscripts, Printings, Digital Surrogates”; and “Poetry & Media — Dickinson's Legacies.” The essays show the breadth, depth, and vitality of current scholarship in Dickinson studies. Contributors are Faith Barrett, Renée Bergland, Max Cavitch, Sandra Chung, Tanya Clement, Paul Crumbley, Sandra M. Gilbert, Gudrun M. Grabher, Ellen Louise Hart, Eleanor Elson Heginbotham, Virginia Jackson, Connie Ann Kirk, Mary Loeffelholz, Michael L. Manson, Nancy Mayer, Cristanne Miller, Tim Morris, Aife Murray,

Alicia Ostriker, Eliza Richards, Ingrid Satelmajer, Martha Nell Smith, Alexandra Socarides, Lara Vetter, Jane Wald, Joshua Weiner, and Marta L. Werner. The editors encourage readers to visit <http://emilydickinson.org/BlackwellCompanion> to view a “perpetually updatable bibliography, to post a comment about any or all essays in this volume or see what others have said, and to view illustrations and photographs accompanying these essays, as well as other related essays and notes.” Indexed and selectively illustrated with black and white photographs, this volume merits a place alongside *An Emily Dickinson Encyclopedia* and *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*, but is unique in offering readers the benefits of digital collaboration.

Visser, Irene, ed., introd., and Helen Wilcox ed., introd. *Transforming Holiness: Representations of Holiness in English and American Literary Texts*. Louvain, Belgium: Peeters, 2006. pp. xxii, 217. Cloth, ISBN 90-429-1755-2, •45,00; U.S. \$66.00.

Eleven essays explore the ways that holiness has been represented in literary texts for 500 years. Intended to be neither comprehensive nor a historical survey, the essays reveal “a series of momentary cross-sections which together suggest changes and continuity in the concept of holiness.” In the late nineteenth century, holiness moved beyond the boundaries of theological doctrine and became “more grounded in earthly rather than heavenly origins.” Of particular interest, innate holiness residing in the living human body inspired “awe, reverence, and gratitude.” In Mary Farrell Bednarowski’s “Imitations of Bodily Holiness in Selected Poems by Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Wallace Stephens” (147-60), the author regards these poets as “kindred souls whose arena of religious creativity was not organised religion but poetry.” About Dickinson

she says that although religion provided her with raw materials, she came to understand that “neither body nor soul exists without the other.” The author discusses “The Spirit lasts — but in what mode — ” (J1576) and “To be alive — is Power — ” (J677) to suggest “how Dickinson’s dialogues between body and soul/self stir up new possibilities for thinking about the holiness of the body.”

White, Fred D. *Approaching Emily Dickinson: Critical Currents and Crosscurrents since 1960*. New York: Camden House, 2008. 229 pp. Cloth, ISBN 1-57113-316-8, \$75.00.

White’s attractive, meticulously researched review of Dickinson criticism “aims to provide new and veteran students of the poet with a detailed and up-to-date map of the scholarly terrain and to trace lines of inquiry that have evolved . . . since Thomas H. Johnson made the complete poems available to the public.” White expresses “an urgent need for a new survey” because Klaus Lubbers published “the only other book-length discussion of Dickinson’s critical reception” (1862-1962) forty years ago in 1968. Among other details, we learn that “the first foreign language in which Dickinson criticism appeared was German” and that a scholar’s 1984 recommendation for “a more complete record of foreign scholarship of Dickinson” has not yet been achieved. White surveys critics who focus on formalism, rhetorical and stylistic strategies, biography and psychology, feminism, the manuscripts, cultural context, spirituality, philosophy, postmodernism, and individuals who manifest their interest in Dickinson through belles lettres, music, and art. He says the approaches overlap and often fit together like “Chinese boxes.” Most published Dickinson scholars will find themselves discussed in this reference work. Also discussed are the Emily Dickinson International Society, the

Journal, the *Bulletin*, and the Dickinson Electronic Archives. This well-organized, indexed volume, part of the Literary Criticism in Perspective series, is a must-read and should appeal to anyone interested in the lively and still developing history of Dickinson criticism.

Book Notes

Now available in library binding: Michael Bedard and Barbara Cooney’s *Emily*, Doubleday Books for Young Readers, ISBN 0385905398, \$19.99.

Now available in paperback: Paria Finnerty’s *Emily Dickinson’s Shakespeare*, Univ. of Mass. Press, ISBN 1558496705, \$28.95.

Book Reviews

Lehman, David, ed. *The Best American Erotic Poems from 1800 to the Present*. New York: Scribner, 2008. xxv + 300 pp. Cloth, ISBN 1-4165-3745-8, \$30.00

Reviewed by Ellen Louise Hart

“Come slowly — Eden ! / Lips unused to Thee —” In the introduction to *The Best American Erotic Poems*, editor David Lehman explains that the idea for the theme came from the “recognition that there exists a vital American tradition of erotic poetry” beginning with “Walt Whitman celebrating the human body and Emily Dickinson contemplating the nectars of Eden” (xx). Work by 134 poets, 61 women and 73 men, appears in order of the poets’ dates of birth. “I decided to limit each poet (except Emily Dickinson) to one poem,” Lehman writes, without explaining why he makes Dickinson the exception (xxiv). He chooses five Dickinson poems: “Come slowly — Eden,” “Wild Nights — Wild Nights,” “He fumbles at your Soul,” “I groped for him before I knew,” and “In Winter in my Room.”

The volume provides a chronological range of work with a variety of erotic representations, emotional tones, and prosodic forms. Along with Dickinson and Whitman are many poets well known for writing on the erotic: W.H. Auden, Charles Bukowski, E.E. Cummings, Robert Duncan, Allen Ginsberg, Louise Gluck, Sharon Olds, Edgar Allan Poe, Edith Wharton, and Tennessee Williams. Two surprises are Francis Scott Key and Emma Lazarus (known for her poem on the Statue of Liberty.) The publisher's promotional materials claim that Dickinson is among the "unexpected poets" whose presence in the volume will surprise readers. But those who know Dickinson's work know her erotic power and are not likely to be surprised, or to be "baffled" — as Dan Chiasson describes himself in his *New York Times* review of the anthology (March 16, 2008) — that Dickinson is the exception to the one-poem limit.

The collection accomplishes key goals for any anthology: promoting new interest in known writers, and introducing readers to poets they have yet to encounter, Elizabeth Alexander, Sarah Arvio, Dorianne Laux, Jeffrey McDaniel, and Harryette Mullen, among others. Dickinsonians will also find work by women writers we often read and study in relation to Dickinson: Lucille Clifton, Amy Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich, Muriel Rukeyser, Gertrude Stein, Ruth Stone, May Swenson (and there are poems by Robert Frost and Richard Wilbur). To borrow from Elizabeth Bishop's "It Is Marvellous" — "It is marvellous to wake up together / At the same minute; marvellous to hear / The rain begin suddenly all over the roof, / To feel the air clear . . ." (53) — this is a marvellous gathering.

Regarding the questions of how to define "erotic poetry," and who is to say what the "best" erotic poems are, Lehman frankly states that these are matters of personal taste: "It is finally a matter of judgment, instinct, and nerve, and the editor has no

choice but to trust his own responses. Every poem in this book has given me pleasure . . . and the general assembly delights me with its variety and energy" (xxi).

Yet the volume has some objectionable flaws. The editor occasionally comments with an inclination to shock that seems silly and distracting. More disturbing is the issue, left unexamined, that a poem "delighting" one reader may leave another feeling objectified and humiliated. When figures in these poems look ridiculous — Lehman notes that in the realm of the erotic "the sublime and the ridiculous converge" (xviii) — the ridiculed are most often women, in heterosexual situations. Men in the poems may appear vulnerable or ashamed in certain moments, but they are not portrayed with the snide disgust that characterizes John Updike's view of "clean secretaries at night" preparing for oral sex with their lovers, or J.V. Cunningham's man in a strip club who watches a dancer's body "twitching," "grinding," and "twirling," then finds "it was enough to stop a man from girling."

Lehman wrote the notes for contributors no longer living, and the quality is uneven: some are informative, but others are dominated by sensationalized biographical detail (the note on Plath, for example). The note on Dickinson is problematic in that it opens with several distortions characteristic of reductive versions of her life story: the "reclusive 'Belle of Amherst,'" "unknown in her lifetime," "dying without an inkling of her posthumous fame" (246). Lehman correctly points out that her poems "communicate sensual pleasure" and a kind of ecstasy, but then he claims to discover "a terrifying but longed for violent consummation" (246) — a reckless oversimplification of desire in her work.

Lehman is vague on the "complicated relations" in Dickinson's poetry between the "imperatives of Eros and those of a personally conceived heaven," but turns to an ar-

gument, made by Cynthia Griffin Wolff in her 1986 biography, that Jacob wrestling with God, as an angel, serves as Dickinson's "biblical archetype." If Lehman finds an erotic element in Dickinson's poem, "A little East of Jordan, / Evangelists record, / A Gymnast and an Angel / Did wrestle long and hard" — "gymnast" derives from the Greek word for "naked" — he leaves the point unmade. The note moves on to the last poem, "In Winter in my Room," which "may illustrate Freud's program of dream interpretation on the one hand and his theory of the uncanny on the other." (John Cody gave this poem a Freudian, phallic interpretation in his 1971 psychological study, *After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson*.)

Whereas *The Best American Erotic Poems* provides a good mix of heterosexual poems and homoerotic poems, this cannot be said of the Dickinson set: "Come slowly — Eden" and "Wild Nights — Wild Nights," are perfect choices, while the next three poems add up to a heterosexual presentation that neglects the range of Dickinson's erotic vision. "For Largest Woman's / Heart I knew," she writes to Susan Dickinson. A poem from their passionate correspondence — "The luxury to / apprehend / The luxury 'twould / be / To look at Thee / a single time . . ." — is essential to a representative selection of Dickinson's erotic writing. With a better informed section on Dickinson, *The Best American Erotic Poems*, a valuable addition to topical anthologies of American verse, would have been even more valuable.

Ellen Louise Hart, retired from the University of California, Santa Cruz, teaches at Portland State University, Portland, Oregon. She writes on prosody and the visual line in Dickinson's manuscript poems and letters, and is a contributing editor to the Dickinson Electronic Archives.

Oates, Joyce Carol. *Wild Nights! Stories About the Last Days of Poe, Dickinson, Twain, James, and Hemingway*. New York: Harper Collins, 2008. 238 pp. Cloth, ISBN: 0-06-143479-2. \$24.95.

Reviewed by Maryanne Garbowsky

Imagine your very own Emily Dickinson courtesy of RepliLuxe. As the salesman explains to Mr. and Mrs. Krim, it is a "manikin empowered by a computer program that is the distillation of the original individual, as if his or her essence, or 'soul' — if you believe in such concepts — had been sucked out of the original being, and reinstalled, in an entirely new environment . . ." (43). But he warns, "the RepliLuxe you've purchased is not identical with the original individual" (43).

This is the premise on which Joyce Carol Oates builds her short story "E Dickinson RepliLuxe," the second of five stories which the book's subtitle reveals are "stories about the last days of Poe, Dickinson, Twain, James, and Hemingway." The title of the collection comes from Dickinson's poem "Wild Nights." The stories introduce readers to a world that is surreal, fictional, and highly imaginative — a world described in the poem as "Done with the Compass — Done with Chart." We are in for a wild ride!

One of the best stories of the collection, "E Dickinson RepliLuxe" parallels the poet's life, echoing her words and actions with a futuristic science fiction twist. However, we "must not expect . . . anything like a 'real' human being, as of course 'they' are not equipped with gastrointestinal systems, or sex organs, or blood, or a 'warm, beating heart' . . ." (44)

Of course, this is exactly what happens. While Maddie Krim hopes to become a "sister-poet" to Emily (56), Harold Krim resents her presence and even becomes jealous of the time "it" spends with his wife. The story gains momentum as the manikin

Emily, who at first is shy and withdrawn like her prototype and is rarely seen except in fleeting "wraithlike" moments (49), becomes more comfortable and even joins Maddie for tea (though she cannot drink!) (51).

The reader senses that something is going to happen but must wait as the complication and emotional instability build. Rather than divulge the ending, which comes quickly and in shocking fashion, let us focus on the author who is having great fun. Oates, a Dickinson aficionada, delights in this opportunity to have one's own living, breathing Dickinson doll; it is a unique ploy. She has the story consciously and cleverly parallel the poet's life, not only in broad outlines — dress, behaviour, etc. — but also in subtle ways: the name Maddie recalls Dickinson's niece Martha — or Mattie; Grandmother Loomis from Maine echoes Mabel Loomis Todd, who died in Maine; and the climactic request for "freedom" recreates the poet's own words and desires.

Oates, who is known for bringing sex and violence into her stories, does not disappoint here, for the plot involves rape, violence, sexual repulsion as well as lesbianism. So, too, there is something sinister in the poet who seems to come to life: her eyes, her warm breath, her sobs. Even her teeth, which Maddie describes as "childlike . . . discolored as aged piano keys" (51) take on a "carnal" look in a "smile" that is "deeply disturbing to the wife" (51). A vampire, flesh-eating Emily?

The story is strong, bizarre, and filled with dark humor. Well written with words neither too few nor too many, the story is a fast read. Oates corrals her reader's imagination and does not let go until the very end when we realize that the final two words "So lovely" repeat the first two words at the beginning of the story. This repetition presents a darker, deeper chord relating the story to the theme of loneliness that runs through the other four stories.

On the back of the title page,

there is a note cautioning that this "is a work of fiction. The characterizations and incidents presented are totally the product of the author's imagination and have no basis in the real lives of the authors depicted." However, we know better. Although Oates exercises (or is it exorcises?) her ample imagination, it is her knowledge and love of the shy poet that provides the foundation on which this clever and unique story rests.

Maryanne Garbowsky is a professor at the County College of Morris, Randolph, New Jersey. She has published two books on Dickinson, The House Without the Door and Double Vision.

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- Baskett, Sam S. "The Making of an Image: Emily Dickinson's Blue Fly." *New England Quarterly* 81.2 (2008): 340-43. [Baskett contends that Dickinson reworked the fly image found in Tennyson's "Mariana" and in chapter 18 of Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* "with consummate skill to fit her own purposes."]

- Brown, Fleda. "On Poetry: A Matter of Life and Death." *Traverse City (Mich.) Record-Eagle* 20 Apr. 2008.

[Brown reflects on "I heard a Fly buzz — when I died —" concluding that life (the buzzing fly) and death occupy the same room, needing each other, just as "the speaker needs to be both dead and alive, to speak the poem."]

• Cahill, Pat. "Paintings Echo Dickinson's Poems." *Republican* (Mass.) 27 July 2008. [Cahill asks, "What happens when a 21st-century Italian painter falls under the spell of a 19th-century New England poet?" and she describes Alberto Mancini's *I'll tell you how the Sun rose*, an exhibition of 29 oil paintings inspired by Emily Dickinson, on view at the Eli Marsh Gallery at Amherst College, August 3-10. The exhibit is sponsored by the Emily Dickinson International Society and the Dickinson Museum.]

• Cohen, Patricia. "Kay Ryan, Outsider with Sly Style, Named Poet Laureate." *New York Times* 17 July 2008: B1. [Kay Ryan, a self-described recluse who has been compared to Emily Dickinson, has been chosen to succeed Charles Simic as the nation's sixteenth poet laureate. A native Californian, she has published six volumes of poetry.]

• DeBard, Amanda. "Grad Room Gets a Facelift: Anonymous Professor Pays for Remodeling Graduate Lounge." *Daily Texan*, University of Texas at Austin 24 March 2008. [A professor, not associated with the English department but motivated by his love for literature and Emily Dickinson, had the English department's graduate student lounge renovated and renamed the Emily Dickinson Graduate Student Lounge.]

• Eberwein, Jane Donahue. "'Earth's Confiding Time': Childhood Trust and Christian Nurture." *Emily Dickinson Journal* 17.1 (2008): 1-24

• "Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)." Online: guardian.co.uk 11 June 2008.

[*The Guardian* offers a biographical tutorial on Dickinson including recommended biographies and online links to further study.]

• Fitts, Daniel. "Thomas Wentworth Higginson: Radical Leader of the Antislavery Movement." *Worcester (Massachusetts) Telegram* 1 June 2008. [Fitts compiles known and little known biographical facts about Higginson: he was six feet tall at age 14 and a lifelong fitness buff; he is thought to have been the first to compile a collection of black spirituals; and one of his pallbearers was financier Andrew Carnegie.]

• Freedman, Linda. "'Meadows of Majesty': Baptism as Translation in Emily Dickinson's Poetry." *Emily Dickinson Journal* 17.1 (2008): 25-42.

• Grabbe, Nick. "Emily Dickinson on Receiving End in 'Prairie Home Companion.'" *Amherst Bulletin* 18 Apr. 2008. [Garrison Keillor's National Public Radio show includes a skit in which Keillor plays Guy Noir auditioning for a gender-blind role as Emily Dickinson in a New York musical called "Stop for Death".]

• Hannah, Liz. "Biggs Breaks Down Dickinson." *Signal: College of New Jersey Student Newspaper* 2 Apr. 2008. [Professor of English Mary Biggs, addressing an audience of students and faculty, explicates Emily Dickinson's "Split the Lark — and you'll find the Music —"; offering several interpretations, she suggests that "it could easily be read as an emotional expression of anger" toward T. W. Higginson.]

• Hawley, David. "Rhyme, Reason behind Emily Dickinson Marathon Reading." Online: MinnPost.com 22 Apr. 2008. [To celebrate National Poetry Month, Dickinson scholar Erika Scheurer organized a "populist model" of an Emily Dickinson marathon reading, open to all readers, on April 25, at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul.]

• Holman, Bob and Margery Snyder. "Emily's Pearls Still Shine in the 21st Century." Online: about.com:poetry 12 June 2008. [Holman and Snyder reflect on Dickinson's poetry in light of 9/11 and contemporary events, concluding with "I many times thought Peace had come" (J739).]

• Izenberg, Oren. "Theories and Methodologies: Poems Out of Our Heads." *PMLA* 123.1 (2008): 216-22. [Izenberg asks, "What is it to be enchanted by a poem?" He discusses Dickinson's "The Tint I cannot take — is best —" (J627), its "search for an adequate language of description or explanation, and "qualia . . . the subjective or phenomenal aspects of conscious experience — what it is like to see a color or hear a sound."]

• Karr, Mary. "Poet's Choice." *Washington Post* 18 May 2008: BW12. [Karr disliked Emily Dickinson's "cutesy and coy" voice, but Dickinson devotees pique her interest; she learns to appreciate and briefly explicates "After great pain, a formal feeling comes —" (J341).]

• Kajiwaru, Teruko. "Whitman to Dickinson no 'basho no kankaku.'" *Eigo Seinen* 152.7 (2006): 515-16. [Ecocriticism; written in Japanese.]

• Koch, Michelle. "Decoding Dickinson." *Provincetown (Mass.) Banner* 22 July 2008. [A revised version of Noel Tipton's *Amherst Sabbath*, a costumed staged reading with music, directed by Dan Lombardo with Leslie Bennett playing Emily Dickinson, was presented July 25-26 in Wellfleet; and the video was shown August 1 at the Emily Dickinson International Society's annual meeting in Amherst.]

• Koczwara, Kevin. "Amherst Cinema Answers Local Film Enthusiast's Prayers." *Massachusetts Daily Collegian* 10 April 2008. [Koczwara reports current plans for Amherst Cinema and its history as

part of Amherst Academy, where Emily Dickinson and Sylvester Graham (inventor of the graham cracker) attended school.]

- Koplos, Janet. "Leslie Dill Creates an Opera." *Art in America* 96.6 (2008): 214. [Visual and performance artist Leslie Dill has created *Divide Light*, an innovative new opera that incorporates all 1,775 of Dickinson's poems and includes a string quartet and choir, three operatic voices, and visual elements; it debuted at the Montalvo Arts Center, Saratoga, California, August 13.]

- Kwan, Michael. "College Textbooks Coming to Amazon Kindle?" Online: mobilemag.com 26 June 2008. [Kwan considers the proposal that college textbooks be offered in e-book form, as is being done at Oxford, Yale, University of California, and Princeton. He reports a lack of color the major drawback, creating "a very scary-looking grayscale Emily Dickinson."]

- Ladin, Joy. "A Little East of Eden: Yona Wallach and the Shores of American Poetry." *Parnassus* 1 Jan. 2008. [Asserting that Israeli poet Yona Wallach's work "has much to teach us about American poetic tradition and ambition, Ladin considers the affinities and differences among Wallach, Emily Dickinson, and Walt Whitman.]

- Malroux, Claire. "Préhensions de la mort: Baudelaire et Emily Dickinson." *Poesie* 122-23 (2006): 71-75. [Written in French.]

—."Entretien avec Philippe Manoury." *Poesie* 120 (2007): 202-06. [Written in French.]

- Matzke, Amy. "Tech Professor Works in 'Dreams and Nightmares.'" *Roanoke (Virginia) Times & World News* 24 April 2008. [Bob McGrath's *Lightning at Our Feet*, an original multimedia music and theater work

based on Emily Dickinson's poetry and letters, opened at Virginia Tech in April, travels to Houston in October, and will be part of the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Festival in New York, Dec. 10-13, 2008.]

- "Memorial Service Scheduled for WFU Professor Elizabeth Phillips." Wake Forest University News Service 25 August 2008. [Elizabeth Phillips, professor emerita of English and author of *Emily Dickinson: Personae and Performance*, died June 24. A memorial service was held Sept. 3 at Wake Forest University, where she taught from 1957 to 1989. Additional information: <http://www.wfu.edu/news/release/2008.08.25.p.php>]

- Monaco, Dan. "Enough of Your Yankee Bloodshed." *The Straddler* 1.1 (2008); www.thestraddler.com. [Monaco, co-editor of *The Straddler*, an online quarterly, opens the debut issue with an anti-war essay that juxtaposes Emily Dickinson's "Victory comes late" with Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, asserting that while both draw from the same religious and cultural national discourse, they radically differ in tonality and judgment.]

- National Public Radio. "Summer Books 2008: Excerpt: *A Summer of Hummingbirds*." Online: NPR.org 3 June 2008. [NPR excerpts chapter 9 of Christopher Benfey's *A Summer of Hummingbirds* and provides an audio of the author reading Emily Dickinson's "A Route of Evanescence" (Fr1489).]

- "Poetry Everywhere." PR Newswire 20 March 2008. [The Poetry Foundation announced the launch of *Poetry Everywhere*, a series of 32 poetry films, including one on Dickinson, distributed online, on public television, and on transit systems. More information at www.pbs.org/poetry; search "Emily Dickinson" at www.poetryfoundation.org]

- Poetry Foundation Announcement. Online: poetryfoundation.org 27 Sept. 2006. [The Poetry Foundation named Jack Prelutsky the first Children's Poet Laureate in 2006 for a two-year term. The Children's Poet Laureate Medallion is inscribed "Permit a child to join," taken from Emily Dickinson's "These are the days when the Birds come back — ." More information at: http://www.poetryfoundation.org/foundation/release_092706.html]

- Sielke, Sabine. "'The Brain — is wider than the Sky — ' or: Recognizing Emily Dickinson." *Emily Dickinson Journal* 17.1 (2008): 68-85.

- Southwick, Albert B. "From Abolition to Dickinson, Rev. Higginson Made His Mark." *Worcester (Mass.) Telegram* 26 June 2008. [Although Higginson is best known for his relationship with Dickinson, Southwick, adding to an earlier article in this newspaper, traces the "astonishing" life and career of "the radical Worcester Unitarian minister."]

- Suvini-Hand, Vivienne. "'The Spheres at Play!': Intorno a Dieci versi di Emily Dickinson di Giacomo Manzoni." *Italianist: Journal of the Department of Italian Studies*, Univ. of Reading 27.2 (2007): 251-62. [Musical settings by Manzoni; written in Italian.]

- Uno, Hiroko. "Emily Dickinson's Encounter with the East: Chinese Museum in Boston." *Emily Dickinson Journal* 17.1 (2008): 43-67.

- Wells, Bonnie. "Lunch and Laurels." *Amherst Bulletin* 22 August 2008. [David Porter, professor emeritus of English at the University of Massachusetts, was honored at a surprise lunch at the Jeffery Amherst Inn on August 17, and given a festschrift, a book created by his colleagues to celebrate his contributions to Dickinson scholarship.]

• Wineapple, Brenda. "When Emily Dickinson and Her Radical Friend Thomas Wentworth Higginson Met for the First Time." *American Scholar* 77.3 (2008): 81-87. [With an uncanny ability to view Dickinson and her work through the sensibilities of Higginson, Wineapple examines "the nooks and crannies of

[their] unusual friendship," finding Higginson's one and only novel, *Malbone*, particularly relevant.]

• Wolosky, Shira. "Emily Dickinson: Reclusion Against Itself." *Common Knowledge* 12.3 (2006): 443-59. [Wolosky asserts that Dickinson withdrew from a world that she found "unpredictable, violent, and

terrifying." Regarding heaven as "a swindle," she withdrew as "a defensive measure," but "interiority becomes for her a prison, not a liberation." Wolosky cites J657 as Dickinson's "most exuberant reclusion poem."]

UPDATE ON THE EMILY DICKINSON GARDEN II

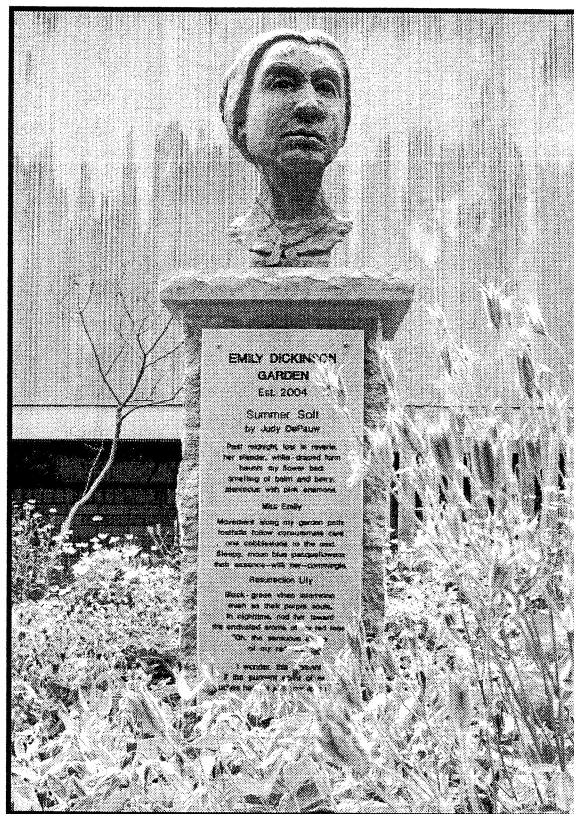
By Hedy N.R. Hustedde

At the EDIS annual meeting in Amherst, Massachusetts, this past summer, *Bulletin* editor Michael Kearns asked me to write another update on the Emily Dickinson Garden dedicated May 15, 2004, at the Library where I am an information librarian. The most important thing: it is still there. Go to our homepage on the Web: www.bettendorflibrary.com, click on "About Us," then "Visit the Emily Dickinson Garden" to see a few photos.

We are simply enjoying it now—it blooms a lot in the spring with daffodils and primroses and in the fall with asters. It's hard to keep some plants in check and hard to keep others alive. Emily would know just what I'm talking about. In Amherst, my husband and I took the delightful landscape audio tour of the Homestead and Evergreens narrated by Richard Wilbur, complete with poetry read by Mary Jo Salter. I noticed parts of the Dickinson House garden were also overrun by renegade plants, so I don't feel too bad about our garden.

One of the programs I have inaugurated to support the Garden is twice-a-year poetry discussions attended by 8-12 avid—or potentially avid—Dickinson lovers. So far the discussions have always been led by Dr. Beatrice Jacobson who is a professor of English and director of the

Women's Studies Program at St. Ambrose University in Daven-



port, Iowa. She once told me that leading those discussions is one of the highlights of her year as participants are so engaged and all of us end up in awe of Dickinson more than ever.

We discuss poems around the time of Dickinson's birth, December 10, and her death, May 15. We have always had a loose theme, such as

Winter and Snow, Culinary, Animals, and Plants and Flowers. This December the theme will likely be Music and we'll have some singing and/or instrumentation to accompany the discussion. Next May the theme will be Love and Forgiveness because I used the Emily Dickinson Poetry Discussion as ancillary programming in an American Library Association/Fetzer Institute grant application funding a series of book discussions on that theme.

We have lots of ideas for future themes: bodies of water, mountains/volcanoes, time (morning, noon, night), seasons, trees, death . . . things to look forward to.

Because I always bake Emily's gingerbread or black cake for refreshments at the discussions and want to make them even more special, I recently teamed with my daughter, Kat, to decorate mugs and plates with text from Dickinson's poetry and a simple illustration. Their first use will be this December.

Finally, I'd like to bring more art and words into the Garden. When it comes to Dickinson, you simply can't separate words from the rest of the natural world—they are intimates. I'd like them to commingle.

MEMBERS' NEWS

EDIS Annual Business Meeting
Amherst College Alumni House
Amherst, Massachusetts
August 2, 2008

Approximately 55 members present

EDIS President Paul Crumbley convened the meeting at 1:00 p.m., welcoming all and mentioning the new format with the business meeting moved from Sunday to Saturday. He called attention to the evaluation sheet and encouraged members to fill it out. He expressed his appreciation for those attending the annual meeting and announced that the number of registrations covered the meeting's expenses. Crumbley said the Board had made a decision about future conferences that would be discussed later. He thanked Cindy Dickinson and Jane Wald for making the Museum available to the membership during the weekend.

Secretary Barbara Kelly said that the minutes from the 2007 annual meeting in Kyoto had been posted on the EDIS website for the past year. She asked for and received approval of the 2007 minutes.

Treasurer Jim Fraser reported a June 30, 2008 balance of \$13,456.56. The balance reflects a beginning balance (July 1, 2007) of \$17,155.05, plus income of \$17,052.77 (from conference registrations, memberships, and contributions), and expenses of \$20,751.26 (the major expenses being approximately \$11,985.85 for the 2007 Kyoto conference and \$4,756.14 for the *Bulletin*).

Nominations Committee Chair Ellen Hart welcomed the two newest members of the Board, Jed Deppman and the newly elected Member-at-Large Nancy Pridgen, and thanked all the candidates who stood for election. She also thanked Cindy MacKenzie for her term as Member-at-Large. Hart announced the election of Paul Crumbley, President; Martha Ackmann, Vice Presi-

dent; Stephanie Tingley, Secretary; and James Fraser, Treasurer. She thanked Barbara Kelly for her years of service as Secretary. Hart also announced the re-election of Marianne Noble, Vivian Pollak, and Martha Nell Smith to three-year terms on the Board and thanked all for their continued service to EDIS.

Membership Committee Chair Jonnie Guerra reported a total of 332 members, an increase of 18 members since July 2007. She announced that Nancy Pridgen will join Barbara Dana, Eleanor Heginbotham, Marietta Messmer, Georgiana Strickland, and Hiroko Uno on the Membership Committee.

Crumbley announced that Aife Murray received the 2007 Scholar in Amherst Award, honoring Jane Eberwein and Suzanne Juhasz. The 2008 Scholar in Amherst Award will honor Roland Hagenbüchle. Crumbley explained that the 2008 Graduate Student Fellowship, like the Scholar in Amherst Award, is a competitive award supported by members, not supported by membership dues; the deadline for applying for the Graduate Student Fellowship is October 15. Check the EDIS website for more information.

Cindy MacKenzie reported that the meeting in Regina, Canada, July 30–August 2, 2009, will have the theme of "Queen" and will focus on teaching Dickinson. Watch the website for further details.

Crumbley announced that the Board had selected the dates and locations for the next two international conferences: 2010 in Oxford, England, and for the twenty-fifth anniversary of EDIS in 2013, the University of Maryland near Washington, D.C. He described the informal policy of planning conferences alternately on and off U.S. soil. The Board is considering some kind of affiliation with another single author society for the 2010 conference at Rothermere American Institute in

Oxford. Until that has been resolved, a conference theme cannot be chosen. For the 2013 conference, Crumbley said a transatlantic theme is being considered. That conference will be held at the University of Maryland with a special event scheduled at American University in Washington, D.C.

Stephanie Tingley reported that the American Literature Association (ALA) met in San Francisco, May 22–25, 2008. EDIS sponsored two sessions: "Emily Dickinson and Place" and "Emily Dickinson's Correspondence." She said that the two Dickinson sessions were among the best-attended at the conference.

Jed Deppman reported on the Modern Language Association (MLA) convention in Chicago in December 2007, noting that it is important for EDIS to reach out to the wider academic community. EDIS sponsored two panels: "Emily Dickinson and Specialized Vocabularies: Architecture, Law, and Physics" and "Emily Dickinson and the History of Ideas." The MLA conference in San Francisco in December 2008 will include two panels: "Emily Dickinson as World Poet" and "Emily Dickinson Moving toward Modernity."

Emily Seelbinder announced that the South Atlantic MLA will meet in Louisville, Kentucky, November 7–9, 2008; she appealed for papers, adding that Georgiana Strickland will chair a panel on drama. Marcy Tanter appealed for papers for the South Central MLA meeting in San Antonio, Texas, November 6–8, 2008.

Journal Editor Cris Miller reported increased *Journal* submissions. She announced a special fall 2008 issue edited by Jed Deppman and Joy Ladin and an upcoming special issue edited by Marianne Noble and Dan Manheim.

Bulletin Editor Michael Kearns solicited contributions to the *Bulletin* from members who would like to write about any of the weekend meet-

ing events.

EDIS Website Director Martha Nell Smith passed around a paper for members to add their e-mail addresses if they would like to receive EDIS listserv messages.

Executive Director of the Dickinson Museum Jane Wald congratulated EDIS on its twentieth anniversary, mentioning that it was also the fifth anniversary of the Museum in its current profile. She said the Museum has engaged in thoughtful and disciplined planning for the future and shares a mission with EDIS to promote Emily Dickinson worldwide. Paul Crumbley added that the EDIS Board had voted to give the Museum \$1,000 and the Jones Library \$500.

Research Circle leader Ellen Hart reminded everyone that the Research Circle would meet Sunday morning, and all are welcome to attend.

Crumbley adjourned the business meeting and announced that to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of EDIS, past EDIS presidents Margaret Freeman, Vivian Pollak, Cristanne Miller, Jonnie Guerra, and Gudrun Grabher would each speak about their EDIS experience.

These lively talks were followed by a general discussion among the membership about new directions for EDIS. Much of the discussion focused on EDIS chapter formation, interest being expressed by members from Maryland; Hilton Head, South Carolina; Portland, Oregon; Claremont, California; and Bettendorf, Iowa. Michael Kearns invited members to submit chapter news to the *Bulletin*; Martha Nell Smith said members can contact the EDIS website and she will post a list of chapter announcements; Emily Seelbinder said local independent bookstores might be receptive to group meetings; Marcy Tanter suggested that local chapters could give annual meeting presentations.

Responding to Cris Miller's question about possible topics for future EDIS Institutes, members suggested

Dickinson's letters, Dickinson and intertextuality, interdisciplinary studies celebrating Dickinson and other occupations, a particular scholarly book, a book Dickinson read and loved, articles and chapters in books, Dickinson and ethics, and Dickinson and politics.

Martha Nell Smith announced that the University of Virginia Press is looking for testers for a digital publication. Anyone who is interested should e-mail Smith for the URL and password; she suggests that testers "be ruthless in feedback."

Crumbley asked what members thought about the policy of holding EDIS meetings in and out of the U.S. Marcy Tanter said that having an international option is good. Cynthia Hallen said, "let EDIS grow," but she advised "cautious, wise growth." She suggested holding annual meetings where the chapters are located, but also mentioned that her Lexicon work has introduced her to Dickinson readers in Sweden, Poland, Australia, Brazil, and New Zealand. When Jonnie Guerra cited the pattern of holding an annual meeting in Amherst every third year, members applauded with a lively, positive response, as if to say, this is something about which we can all agree.

Crumbley adjourned the meeting at 4 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Kelly, EDIS Secretary

Chapter News from Portland

By Holly Springfield, with Ellen Louise Hart

The focus of this chapter report is to offer some ideas for people who might be interested in starting an EDIS chapter in their area, as well as sharing an overview of why and how I got a chapter up and running in Portland, Oregon.

I started the Portland chapter about three years ago out of my home. My driving force was my love of

Dickinson's poetry and my wish to form a small group of people to study and appreciate her poetry together. To get the news out, I posted flyers in my local libraries, bookstores, schools, and coffee houses, and I recruited family members. At the events, I provided refreshments and handouts of 5 or 6 poems to read and discuss, and I set up a table with EDIS *Bulletins* and *Journals*, as well as Dickinson Museum newsletters.

When Ellen Louise Hart, who is on the Board of EDIS, first moved to Portland a couple of years ago, she spotted my flyer in a local library, and attended the second meeting at my house; we have been working together ever since.

The first year we held a Dickinson birthday event in mid December at a local branch library on a Sunday afternoon; there we discussed a bit of biography and read poems. Publicity for the gathering included flyers and a notice in our city newspaper, *The Oregonian*. Last year at my house, we celebrated the birthday with what we called a "creativity party," modeled after a gathering that past EDIS president Margaret Freeman hosted in the Amherst area. People brought examples of their art form (not necessarily Dickinson related) and talked about their creative process. By this time, my own interest in Dickinson had expanded to include a project of learning many poems by heart and working with an acting coach, because I wanted to find a way to use my own voice to bring the poems to life for others. So this was the perfect venue to share Emily's poetry through performance. Ellen discussed the role of manuscript scholarship in learning to read visual lines in the poems, deepening an awareness and appreciation of rhythm and emphasis. Others shared beadwork, photography, glassblowing, painting, and a video. We had an eighty year old demonstrating cartwheels and a five year old discussing his drawings. It was a lot of fun and we will do it again this year.

Our chapter has succeeded in an-

choring a spring event at a local library around the date of Dickinson's death. The first year we approached the library with a proposal, but the second year they contacted us, wanting to get us into their spring calendar. These events have each had a theme, reflected in a title, such as Dickinson and Spring Resurrections, and Emily Dickinson: Nature, Renewal and the Healing Power of Poetry. We provided handouts of poems relating to our theme, asked those who attended to read a favorite poem, and distributed EDIS literature.

By having two annual events, one in December and one in May, people are beginning to remember and anticipate these gatherings. At our spring event this year more people attended than the year before, and many of these were returning because they had enjoyed the event the previous year.

We have also connected with the poetry community in Portland. It's rare to find a poet who doesn't like Dickinson and admit to her influence and inspiration. One of our points of entry has been to team up with the Friends of William Stafford. Stafford was the poet laureate of Oregon in years past and has a large and devoted following in and around Portland. By collaborating with a well established author society in our area, we have discovered a rich source of guidance, models, and shared activities. In January of 2009, at a Stafford birthday celebration at Portland's Central Library, Ellen and I will read some Stafford poems that speak of Dickinson and make some remarks about the Stafford/Dickinson connection.

Finally, lifelong learning programs for retired people are another avenue of approach for inspiring interest in Dickinson's writing and for drawing people to local chapter activities. In October, Ellen and I will be giving a presentation/workshop at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute of the University of Oregon. The purpose of our workshop will be

to open up not only the world of Dickinson, but the riches of poetic language for people who may be highly knowledgeable in other fields, but new to poetry.

This list of ideas for getting a local group together is by no means exhaustive. As I said at the beginning, my driving force is my love of Dickinson's poetry. You may not have someone in your area who is both a Dickinson scholar and on the EDIS Board to partner with, and you may not live in a cosmopolitan, literature-loving city filled with colleges and universities and a public library system with one of the highest circulation rates in the country. These advantages have been a boon to me, for sure. But they aren't necessary for you to start your own chapter. It all begins with love and dwelling in Possibility.

If you would like a sounding board for your own ideas on how to get started in your area, please feel to email me, Holly Springfield, at metacoyote@pacific.net

Folger Tribute

Among the many birthday celebrations in the Washington, D.C. area is the annual Folger Poetry Emily Dickinson Birthday Tribute on Monday, December 8 featuring Elizabeth Spires, acclaimed Baltimore poet and also the author of *The Mouse of Amherst*. After her reading, she will be "in conversation with" EDIS member Eleanor Heginbotham.

Nominations Committee Call for Names

The Nominations Committee welcomes nominations, including self nominations, for candidates who will stand for election to serve a three year term as an EDIS Board Member at Large.

The Members-at-Large have the same responsibilities and opportunities for service to the organization that all EDIS Board members have.

These include: becoming familiar with the By Laws; conducting Society business by serving on committees; reading the *EDIS Bulletin* and the *Journal*; following discussions on email; attending annual meetings as often as possible; checking the Society's web site for information and updates; staying current with Homestead and Museum activities; writing for the *Bulletin*; depending on location, participating in activities with local chapters. An ongoing issue for EDIS is finding ways to increase membership, and Members-at-Large are asked to contribute to this goal by having their ears tuned to members' preferences, interests, and concerns.

Please submit names to Ellen Louise Hart, Chair of the Nominations Committee, at ehart@ucsc.edu, by January 31, 2009. The election will be held in February.

Call For Papers: Emily Dickinson's Reading

What happened when Emily Dickinson sat down to read, and what did she do with what she found? For a special issue of the *Emily Dickinson Journal*, we seek essays exploring her deep immersion in the written word. How did her reading influence her thinking and her writing? Essays might—though are not obliged to— theorize what Dickinson did with what she read. According to one biographer, Dickinson's engagement with literature was "burrlike"—choice bits would attach to her and stick. Other scholars have suggested that she engaged more deliberately with the ideas and aesthetics of her "kinsmen of the shelf." The essays in this volume might address this distinction. Why did she claim she never touched "paint mixed by another person" when clearly she did? Contributions could argue for traces of semi-conscious influence or for a more sustained and earnest engagement with what she read. We welcome studies of still-unexhausted warhorses like

hymnody and the Bible; perennially rich areas such as contemporary fiction and poetry; juvenilia like primers, textbooks, conduct manuals, and gift books; as well as any discourses in the wider world that filtered through Amherst in any conceivable fashion: legal documents, marketing and advertising materials, travel literature, journalism, philosophy, political polemics, reports of war and combat, comic performance, agricultural pamphlets—all manifestations of the burgeoning print culture of her time.

Finished essays will be 25-35 pages, including notes and bibliography (double-spaced, 12-point font).

Please send a one-page proposal and an abbreviated CV by April 1, 2009, to the Co-Editors, Dan Manheim and Marianne Noble, at dan.manheim@centre.edu and mnnoble@american.edu. Finished papers will be due August 15, 2009.

Call for Papers: SSAWW

For the Society for American Women Writers Conference (Philadelphia, October 21-24, 2009), EDIS invites proposals on any topic related to Dickinson, especially in relation to other American women writers (topics might include influence, affiliations, reception, conditions of writing practice, and more). Send one-page proposals by December 1 to either vrpollak@wustl.edu or mnsmith@umd.edu.

Call for Papers: ALA

EDIS will again sponsor two panels at the 2009 American Literature Association conference, to be held in Boston, May 21-24, 2009. Please send proposals and abstracts by email to both Ellen Louise Hart (ehart@ucsc.edu) and Stephanie Tingley (satingley@ysu.edu). Deadline for submissions: January 9, 2009.

1. Dickinson's Reading

In collaboration with a call for essays for a special issue of the *Emily Dickinson Journal*, this panel will explore issues concerning the wide range of Dickinson's reading—hymnody and the Bible; contemporary fiction and poetry; Shakespeare; book reviews; primers, textbooks, conduct manuals, and gift books; other discourses, including marketing and advertising materials, travel literature, journalism, philosophy, theology, political polemics, reports on actions in the war between the states, legal documents, agricultural pamphlets. All of these were manifestations of the burgeoning print culture of her time. How and where did Dickinson's reading influence her thinking and writing?

2. Dickinson's Erotic Writing

The recently published *Best American Erotic Poems: From 1800 to the Present*, edited by David Lehman, includes five Dickinson poems, whereas every other poet included has been limited to one. Lehman explains that the idea for the theme came from the "recognition that there exists a vital American tradition of erotic poetry" beginning with "Walt Whitman celebrating the human body and Emily Dickinson contemplating the nectars of Eden." Papers for this panel will explore sexuality in the poems and letters, making the case that Dickinson's writing is central to an erotic tradition in American literature.

Scholar in Amherst Award

EDIS invites applications for the Scholar in Amherst Program. The program, which is awarded annually, is designed to support research on Emily Dickinson at institutions such as the Frost Library of Amherst College, the Jones Public Library, the Mount Holyoke College Archives, the Dickinson Homestead, the Ever-

greens, and the Amherst Historical Society. The award is a \$2,000 fellowship to be used for expenses related to that research, such as travel, accommodations, or a rental car. Upon completion of their research in Amherst, recipients will write a letter to the EDIS Board outlining what they achieved as a result of EDIS support. A minimum stay of one week in Amherst is required. Recipients also may use the fellowship to initiate a lengthier stay in the area. Preference will be given to persons with completed PhDs who are in the early stages of their careers.

The Scholar in Amherst Program was inaugurated in 2002 by a generous donation from Sylvia F. Rogosa, made in honor of her daughter, Vivian Pollak, second president of EDIS. The 2003 award was named in honor of Myra Fraser Fallon, mother of EDIS Treasurer Dr. James Fraser. The 2004 award was named in honor of renowned Dickinson scholar Brita Lindberg-Seyersted and those in 2005 and 2006 for Professor Everett Emerson to recognize his contributions to Dickinson studies as well as early American literature. The 2007 Scholar in Amherst Award honored Suzanne Juhasz and Jane Donahue Eberwein, Dickinson scholars and founding members of EDIS. The 2008 Scholar in Amherst Award will honor Roland Hagenbüchle, an influential international Dickinson scholar and avid supporter of EDIS.

To apply for the 2008 Scholar in Amherst Award, please submit a curriculum vitae, letter of introduction (written by the applicant), a two-page project proposal, and a brief bibliography, by November 1, 2008, to Paul Crumbley at paul.crumbley@usu.edu; inquiries may also be directed to Martha Nell Smith at mnsmith@umd.edu and Eleanor Heginbotham at heginbotham@csp.edu. Letters of recommendation are not accepted as part of the application packet.

what they had on Emily. There I spotted *The World of Emily Dickinson* by Polly Longworth (W.W. Norton, 1990), a soft-cover book containing many photographs. This would be a good way to start my research, I thought—pictures and simple text, nothing dense. I was soon to realize that, although perhaps not dense, the book held precious insights, was full of information, and was imbued with the essence of Emily. I opened the book to browse for a while and didn't put it down for the five-hour duration of the flight home. Thank you, Polly!

I continued my work by reading the letters, an extraordinary resource for immersing oneself in the voice of the poet. I had decided to write the book in the first person, a bold choice, to say the least. That was the way I felt I could make the book most real, most personal. It was important to get her voice into my blood, a grand if daunting endeavor. I read the letters every day for two years, then less regularly but continually after that. Julie Harris has an incredible set of tapes, now a CD (*Essential Dickinson* [Caedmon Audio, 2006, LearnOutLoud.com]). Here she reads the poems and letters, capturing the spirit of Dickinson. Along with reading the letters, I played the tapes constantly, walking, napping, making the bed, and washing the dishes.

My acting teacher, Uta Hagen, had an exercise called "History," which served me well for this project. It took many months to prepare. In it one picks a character—a real person or a character from a play—who lived in a different time. We were to explore two questions: First, how was life different then? And second, how was life the same? Answering the second question always brought me closer to the character. We all get sick, have birthdays, toothaches, fears, joys, crushes, holidays, and friends. We get hungry and tired, too hot, too cold. Girls get their periods. Boys live under the threat of being

called to war. Much remains the same.

As I did my research I found myself living with Emily in very real and deep ways. She had looked her fears in the face and had lived. I could too. "The Province of the Saved / Should be the Art — to Save —" (Fr659).

My research took many forms. I read the poems, the letters, several biographies, reminiscences, and essays. I listened to the tapes. At Harvard I saw Emily's bureau, the one in which she kept her poems, her piano, her writing desk, and several of her manuscripts. I contacted owners of Newfoundland dogs, spending time with the huge bear-like creatures in an effort to get closer to Emily's Carlo. And I spent much time in Amherst. At the Jones Library I read letters written by Emily's father, Edward Dickinson; sermons by the Reverend Charles Wadsworth, her beloved "Philadelphia"; articles on tuberculosis, Bright's disease, conditions of the eyes, hypertension, lupus, and anxiety disorders and depression, along with family orders from the local Amherst pharmacy and records of the eye doctor in Boston who treated Emily for a mysterious eye condition.

At the Frost Library I thrilled to the vision of a lock of her hair, like spun gold, and the copy of her Latin book, reported to be a gift from Austin and shared with Abby Wood. I especially enjoyed finding the comment in one of the margins, "Due Monday — how mean!" along with a drawing of a man with a large nose and a serious expression whom I took to be the professor of Emily's Latin class.

I went to Mount Holyoke College where I talked with Martha Ackmann. I stood at Emily's gravesite in Amherst, silent beside the stone, the letters speaking of eternity: "Called Back." I walked her walk from Amherst Academy (a plaque in a parking lot marks the spot) to the Mobil gas station on North Pleasant Street, the site of the

house in which the poet lived between the ages of nine and twenty-four. How irreverent to replace her house with a gas station! Time marches on.

Best of all was my time at the Emily Dickinson Museum. I spent many hours in her bedroom, her parlor, sitting in her garden, talking with Cindy Dickinson, Jane Wald, Betty Bernhard, David Garnes, and the various and helpful guides, year after year, in all seasons; taking the path to the Evergreens, walking through her brother's Italian style, "hedge away" house that she had so often visited—before she didn't anymore.

As I continued getting to know Emily and ultimately writing about her, I was healing all the while. Many people came into my life who not only helped with my research, but also brought new companionship, new life.

One was not new. Charlotte Zolotow had been my editor at HarperCollins for six books and fifteen years. Retired by the time I began my research, she lent me her entire collection of Dickinson books, along with her support and an introduction to an Amherst resident, author Shulamith Oppenheim. Shulamith became a close friend, in addition to introducing me to Polly Longworth. Before I knew it, Polly was not only a colleague but also a friend, answering my many questions for more than ten years. She knew all the answers except one: Where did Carlo sleep? I have never found anyone anywhere who could answer that question, although David Garnes from the Museum sent me material on pets in New England in the mid-1800s. Thank you, David!

Another new friend, professor/poet Joy Ladin, spent hours with me going over the poems on a trip I made to Amherst one cold winter to spend a week alone there with my dog, walking those same roads walked by Emily and Carlo when the temperature dipped below 10 degrees and snow was everywhere.

In the summer of 2002 I joined the Emily Dickinson International Society. It was a bold move. I had gone directly from high school to the New York stage. While many of my peers were in college, I was “treading the boards,” as my father used to say, doing eight shows a week, going to rehearsals and auditions and training for the theatre. Except for acting, movement, voice production, classical singing, music theory, dance, and horseback riding, I am entirely self-trained. That being the case, I was more than intimidated at the thought of joining EDIS. A room full of scholars—and I?! It was an awesome consideration. But I wanted to learn all I could about Emily. I knew that these professors of English, these Dickinson experts, could offer me insights I was sorely missing. (Which turned out to be the case!) I took my courage in my hand and headed for the 2002 annual meeting in Amherst entitled Emily Dickinson in Song, beautifully “orchestrated” by Georgiana Strickland.

I hardly dared to speak. These people had written dissertations on things like cognitive linguistics, phenomenology, and synaesthesia. They had presented papers with such titles as “Amplitude of Queer Desire in Dickinson’s Erotic Language” and “Dickinson at the Limits of Philology.” They knew what they were talking about. I only felt it.

On Saturday afternoon, after the last workshop, having learned much about Dickinson’s use of hymn meter in her poetry, I stood up and stretched my arms high in the air to relieve the tension in my back and shoulders. An attractive, cheerful woman sitting to my right smiled. Her nametag said Cindy MacKenzie. When she asked if I had been to Zanna’s, a clothing store in Amherst, I told her yes, and that I was considering making a return trip to pick up a pair of boots I had admired. We met up there later. Amidst the unstructured jackets, trendy pants, and jewelry, she told me about her idea for an edition of essays on the heal-

ing power of Dickinson, explaining that she had been helped by the poet at the time of her divorce. “Me too,” I said. And our book, *Wider than the Sky: Essays and Meditations on the Healing Power of Emily Dickinson* (Kent State University Press, 2007), was conceived.

My work with Cindy as co-editor on the edition was a joy, frustrating at times, exhausting, but also exhilarating. We were fortunate to be working with extraordinary contributors from many different fields, possessing varied approaches to the experience of Dickinson’s life-affirming and at times life-changing work.

During this same period Julie Harris was performing *The Gin Game* in Stamford, Connecticut, near where I was living. I wrote her a note, telling her I was coming to see the play and that I was writing a book about Emily Dickinson and was there any way I could take her to lunch. We had met a few times and had talked some years earlier when I was working on my book about Joan of Arc. She quickly wrote back saying yes, she would love to join me for lunch. My excitement knew no bounds!

The upshot was that we met on Valentine’s Day at an Italian restaurant in Stamford. We talked for more than two hours about “our Emily,” as we liked to call her—I, deep in my novel, she, preparing to tour in *The Belle of Amherst*, recreating her performance of nearly twenty-five years before. I remember asking her a question I knew better than to ask, but I couldn’t help it. “You may not want to answer this,” I said.

“What?”

“In *The Belle of Amherst* Emily talks to the audience. The play is mostly Emily talking to a theatre full of people.”

“Yes.”

“Emily would never have talked to a theatre full of people.”

“Oh, no!”

“So, in your mind, as you played the part, to whom was Emily speaking?” I suddenly felt the error of my ways. “I’m sorry,” I said. “I shouldn’t

have asked that. You’re about to do the play again. What was I thinking?”

She looked down at the red and white tablecloth, paused for a moment and then she told me. I won’t reveal her answer—an actor’s secret—but I will say that when I do the play next summer I will follow her lead and in my mind I will imagine exactly what she imagined.

Now, of course, I must learn the “lines”—if one may call them that. Since most of the play is taken from Emily’s letters and poems, the words are in my blood, if not in my brain. But then, since “The Brain — is wider than the Sky —” (Fr598), the words must be in there somewhere.

LIGHTNING AT OUR FEET

Beginning on December 9, the Brooklyn Academy of Music in Brooklyn, New York will be featuring a new, multimedia song cycle based on the life and works of Dickinson. Entitled *Lightning at our feet*, the cycle, written by composer Michael Gordon and directed by Bob McGrath, features four women, various instruments, and video projections. Ticket prices start at \$20.00.

For more information on the production, see <http://www.bam.org/view.aspx?pid=127>

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EDIS Bulletin

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