

THE EMILY DICKINSON INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

# Bulletin

Volume 24, Number 2

November/December 2012

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



# EMILY DICKINSON INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

## Officers

President:	Jonnie Guerra
Vice-President:	Martha Nell Smith
Secretary:	Nancy Pridgen
Treasurer:	James C. Fraser

---

## Board Members

Antoine Cazé	Jonnie Guerra	Nancy Pridgen
Paul Crumbley	Suzanne Juhasz	Eliza Richards
Cindy Dickinson (Honorary Board Member)	Barbara Mossberg	Martha Nell Smith
Páraic Finnerty	Marianne Noble	Alexandra Socarides
James C. Fraser	Elizabeth Petrino	Hiroko Uno
	Vivian Pollak	Jane Wald (Honorary Board Member)

---

Legal Advisor:	Barbara Leukart	Chapter Development Chair:	Nancy Pridgen
Nominations Chair:	Suzanne Juhasz	Book Review Editor:	Barbara Kelly
Membership Chair:	Elizabeth Petrino	<i>Bulletin</i> Editor:	Daniel Manheim
Dickinson and the Arts Chair:	Barbara Dana	<i>Journal</i> Editor:	Cristanne Miller

---

## Sustaining Members

Richard Brantley	Niels Kjaer	Martha Nell Smith
Jane D. Eberwein	Cristanne Miller	Gary Lee Stonum
David H. Forsyth	Jo Ann Orr	Ethan Tarasov
Jonnie G. Guerra	Emily Seelbinder	Robin Tarasov

---

## Contributing Members

Yoshiko Akamatsu	Marie Esteve	Daniel Manheim
Paul Beckley	Judith Farr	Gregory Mattingly
Mary Elizabeth K. Bernhard	Alice Fulton	Jonathan Morse
Carolyn L. Cooley	David Jamieson	Burleigh Muten
Nick Crump	Suzanne Juhasz	Richard Tryon
Barbara Dana	Mary Loeffelholz	Hiroko Uno
Everett S. Decker	Cynthia MacKenzie	Michael Wall

*EDIS gratefully acknowledges the generous financial contributions of these members.*

EDIS *Bulletin* (ISSN 1055-3932) is published twice yearly, May/June and November/December, by The Emily Dickinson International Society, Inc. Standard Mail non-profit postage is paid at Lexington, KY 40511. Membership in the Society is open to all persons with an interest in Emily Dickinson and her work. For further information, contact Jonnie Guerra, President, EDIS, 1812 Garden Street, West Lafayette, IN 47906 USA or jgguerra@purdue.edu. Annual dues are \$50.00 for regular members, \$30.00 for students, \$200.00 for sustaining members, \$113.00 for institutional members, \$100.00 for contributing members (all of whom receive the *Bulletin* and the *Emily Dickinson Journal*), or \$20.00 for associate members (*Bulletin* only). Membership inquiries should be directed to James C. Fraser, 159 Prospect St., Apt 7, Acton, MA, 01720-3654, USA. Membership applications and changes of address should be sent to The Emily Dickinson International Society, c/o Johns Hopkins University Press, P.O. Box 19966, Baltimore, MD 21211-0966, USA. Direct changes of address to jrnlcirc@mail.press.jhu.edu, 800-548-1784 (U.S. and Canada), or 410-516-6987; fax to 410-516-3866. Address submissions for the *Bulletin* to Daniel Manheim, Centre College, 600 West Walnut St., Danville, KY 40422, USA or dan.manheim@centre.edu. Submission deadlines are March 1 (Spring issue) and September 1 (Fall issue). All articles become the property of the *Bulletin*. Back issues are available for \$5.00 each from the editor. Copyright © 2012 by The Emily Dickinson International Society, Inc. The *Bulletin* is indexed in EBSCO, Humanities International Complete, and the MLA Bibliography.

# IN THIS ISSUE

## Features

- 4 **A New Daguerrotype of Emily Dickinson?** 16  
*By Martha Nell Smith*
- 6 **Cleveland 2012: Emily Rocks**  
*By Daniel Manheim*
- 11 **Trying to Think with Jed Deppman**  
*By Melanie Hubbard*
- 18 **Collecting Emily Dickinson Out West: The  
Cyber-Trail to Oregon**  
*By Krans Bloeimaand*
- 20 **Getting Creative in the Kitchen: Dickinson  
Inspires Student Art** 33  
*By Robert K. Wallace and Nicci Mechler*
- 24 **Facing Emily Dickinson** 35  
*By Ellen Bienhorn*
- 31 **Emily Dickinson's Secret Language: The Work  
of Hans W. Luescher** 35  
*By Rolf Amsler and Margaret Freeman*

## Series

- 8 **Poet to Poet** 36  
**The Ecstatic Clocks of Emily Dickinson**  
*By Lisa Russ Spaar*  
*Series Editor, Jonnie Guerra*
- 14 **Teaching Dickinson** 37  
**Subjects Hinder Talk: Dickinson's Class-  
room of Possibility**  
*By Robert Weisbuch*  
*Series Editor, Marianne Noble*

## Series, cont.

- Dickinson Scholars**  
**Josephine McIlvain Pollitt Pohl**  
*By Aife Murray*  
*Series Editor, Cindy MacKenzie*
- 26 **Dickinson and the Visual Arts**  
**The Little White House Project: "Dwell in  
Possibility"**  
*Maryanne Garbowsky*  
*Series Editor, Maryanne Garbowsky*

## Reviews

- New Publications**  
*By Barbara Kelly, Book Review Editor*
- 35 **Review of Jen Bervin and Marta Werner,  
The Gorgeous Nothings**  
*Reviewed by Polly Longworth*
- 35 **Review of Michael Kearns, Writing for the  
Street, Writing in the Garret**  
*Reviewed by David Garnes*
- 36 **Review of Cristanne Miller, Reading in Time**  
*Reviewed by Margaret H. Freeman*
- 37 **Review of Jadwiga Smith and Anna Kapusta,  
Writing Life: Suffering as a Poetic Strategy**  
*Reviewed by Magdalena Zapadowska*

## Members' News

- 39 **New Board Members**
- 43 **Residue of Adz**

*Front Cover: Many Bulletin readers will have already seen the new image believed by many to represent Emily Dickinson, seated with her friend Kate Scott Anthon. The image was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Emily Dickinson International Society in August in Cleveland, Ohio. Martha Nell Smith's discussion of the image appears in this issue, beginning on page 4.*

*Back Cover: Three images from the featured book in the Book Reviews section, The Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson's Envelope Poems, by Jen Bervin and Marta Werner. Granary Books is a New York City based publisher of artist's books and more. Visit the website at: [www.granarybooks.com](http://www.granarybooks.com).*

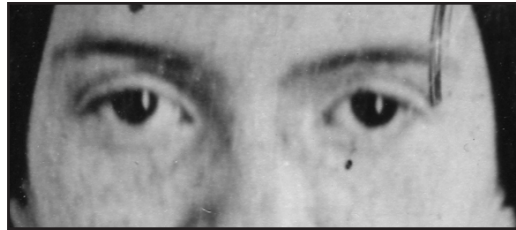
*All three images are from the Emily Dickinson Collection at Amherst College.*

Dickinson poems are reprinted by permission of the publishers and the Trustees of Amherst College from the following volumes: *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Thomas H. Johnson, ed., Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1951, 1955, 1979, 1983 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College; *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition*, Ralph W. Franklin, ed., Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1998 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College; *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*, Ralph W. Franklin, ed., Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1998, 1999 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College; *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Thomas H. Johnson, ed., Copyright © 1929, 1935 by Martha Dickinson Bianchi, Copyright © renewed 1957, 1963 by Mary L. Hampson: Little Brown and Co., Boston. Dickinson letters are reprinted by permission of the publishers from *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, Thomas H. Johnson, ed., Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1958, 1986 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College; 1914, 1924, 1932, 1942 by Martha Dickinson Bianchi; 1952 by Alfred Leete Hampson; 1960 by Mary L. Hampson.

# A New Daguerreotype of Emily Dickinson?

By Martha Nell Smith

Readers of the *Bulletin* have likely already heard about or seen the image on the front page of this issue. Presented on August 3rd at the EDIS 2012 meeting in Cleveland, and then published in the *Guardian* on September 5th,<sup>1</sup> the new daguerreotype that possibly might be a nearly 30 year old Emily Dickinson has been excitedly featured in numerous news stories, has careened around Facebook, has been tweeted and retweeted so much that one of my dear Philadelphia friends wrote, “It’s everywhere.” All of this buzz speaks to keen, widespread interest in what this poet dead more than 125 years looked like, and leaves us with the question, “So what difference does it make what Emily Dickinson looked like?”



Detail of Dickinson’s eyes, from the 1847 daguerreotype and from the image of the poet seated with Kate Scott Turner Anthon.

As a story in the *Washington Post* on the National Portrait Gallery’s “Poetic Likeness: Modern American Poets” notes in its opening sentence, “There is something almost paradoxical about an exhibition devoted to portraits of poets,” since poets seem the “most inward” of all artists, “not given to advertise their material presence in the world.”<sup>2</sup> For the poet who wrote “I’m Nobody,” that certainly seems to be the case. The subject itself – the bodily appearance of an icon whom we remember for her embodiment of wild emotion, profound thought, anguish, elation (I could go on) in poetic expression – seems a lesser one in the hierarchies of scholarly inquiries, tied as it is to biography, and lending itself to gossip – good, bad, and seemingly mostly irrelevant to Dickinson’s writings and compositional practices.

What’s written on those papers of many kinds (gilt-edged formal stationery, envelopes, shopping bags, and more) and trans-

lated to literary books of Poems and Letters is, after all, the reason what she looked like can be any kind of subject at all. As was the case when previous possible new images of Emily Dickinson emerged, this new one of her and perhaps friend Kate Anthon, has created quite a stir and much publicity. Why?

My interest in the appearance of the icon Emily Dickinson and what difference that might make for our readings did not begin with this new daguerreotype but has been clearly voiced over the last couple decades. “Perusing triangular intertextualities, or the influences of biography, reception, and textual reproduction upon one another, *Rowing in Eden*, my story of reading Dickinson” has repeatedly explored the dynamics of literary authority, authenticity, genre, and intentionalities (of authors and readers).<sup>3</sup> In other words, long convinced that readers produce a biography of any writer whose works they are reading, I have sought to count at least some of the ways that readers’ imaginations

regarding writers and any intentions they could possibly have influence interpretations of what the words left on a page might be understood to say.

So I have long been interested in the disjuncture between the teenager Emily Dickinson whose image festoons so many conference posters, book covers, and is now ubiquitous – not only in scholarly productions but on postage stamps, throw pillows, t-shirts, tattoos, CD, DVD, album jackets, cookies, coffee mugs – and powerful poems such as “My Life had stood – a / Loaded Gun – ” (Fr764) and “Wild Nights – Wild Nights!” (Fr269) (again, I could go on . . . and on). The rather jarring separation that has intrigued me is obvious, I suppose – that a teenage image presides over hundreds of wonderful, powerful, exhilarating, vexing, life-experienced writings seems at the very least ironic. Having read Dickinson for quite a few years before I saw a picture of her, I was stunned to see a wan figure who looked younger than my senior high school yearbook picture when I first set eyes on the known daguerreotype that seems everywhere.

Early promoters of the poet Emily Dickinson were concerned about her appearance, how she was represented to the world, and promoted the daguerreotype we all know so well. As familiar as the image is to us, it is not a representation that pleased her intimate family and friends who knew her well, saw her often, and over decades. The iconic teenage image is anachronistic, and even something of a forgery, if you will, when understood to be a likeness of the adult woman poet. Sister Lavinia had miniaturist Laura C. Hills retouch a photograph of that daguerreotype twice. Vinnie was finally pleased with the second image, which niece

Martha Dickinson Bianchi retouched a bit more and published in *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson* (1924).<sup>4</sup> Beyond those early interests of editors and biographers, Dickinson's readers have repeatedly demonstrated fascinated interest in what she looks like. In 2000, Philip Gura brought forward a photograph that he believes is Emily Dickinson, and whether she is or is not has been hotly contested.<sup>5</sup>

So what about this new daguerreotype that might just be an Emily Dickinson who is not 16 but is 28, nearing 30? What about the fact that this "Emily Dickinson" is not alone? Where did this picture come from and how did it surface? What difference could it possibly make if the image is Emily Dickinson? What difference does it make that the image has been purported to be Emily Dickinson? Readers can consult three different archive-oriented scholarly websites to learn about the discovery of the daguerreotype in 1995, about analyses under way of the clothing on the two women, about the tests run by a trustworthy, conscientious ophthalmologist that led her to conclude, "After a thorough examination of both of these women's facial features as viewed from the 1847 and 1859 daguerreotypes, I believe strongly that these are the same people" (Susan M. Pepin, M.D., Professor of Surgery [Ophthalmology] and Pediatrics, Director of Neuro-Ophthalmology, Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center).<sup>6</sup>

Whether we can bring ourselves to say it out loud, a writer's (indeed, anyone's) appearance seems to tell us about his or her character – the kind of dress suggests how vain one might be, or how particular, and the styling of hair and posing for the camera perhaps suggests how arrogant or reticent, pompous or humble an individual is. As far as Emily Dickinson's readers go, we all have some investment in what we imagine her disposition, her ethics, her personality to be. For some, the new picture is very inconvenient, while for others it appears all too convenient.

The conditions in which we read Emily Dickinson, whether as scholars, fans, devotees, or casual browsers, are far removed from the conditions in which she wrote her wonderful poems, letters, and letter-poems. Just as the Emily Dickinson Museum helps us imagine her writing environs, her bedroom, her kitchen, her garden, her outhouse, and the kinds of traffic that passed through her own Homestead and the house next door, her brother and sister-in-law's Evergreens, an adult picture of her seems to take us closer to her world and to her.

To some readers, the very suggestion that this new picture, which features Dickinson as a bold, assertive woman, and one who is not solitary, violates the integrity of "My Emily Dickinson." For other readers who are suspicious that the stories of withdrawal just might be a bit overblown and who have concluded that she loved at least some women as passionately as any stories about her loving a mysterious man suggest, this image holds out the possibility of restoring some integrity to audiences' sense of a real person rather than a myth. Those are but two polarized kinds of responses of the myriad that this new picture has evoked, and the picture will be championed and challenged, often passionately.

What we have at this point is a preponderance of current evidence suggesting that there's a strong possibility this picture is Emily Dickinson with her friend Kate Scott Turner Anthon. We now need additional scientific comparisons and testing to verify whether the picture is the real thing or not. More than that, what's needed is an awareness that the ontology of the picture may never be reliably concluded and also an embrace of another kind of research question – why does what Emily Dickinson looked like make such a difference to her audiences? What are we imagining her appearance tells us? Whether this picture turns out to represent Emily Dickinson or not, it has enabled audiences to imagine her as an adult woman.

---

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Flood, Alison. "Emily Dickinson Gets a New Look in Recovered Photograph," *The Guardian* (September 5, 2012), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2012/sep/05/emily-dickinson-new-photograph>. To view a number of the news stories printed in the wake of this first one, see "1859 Daguerreotype in the News," Dickinson Electronic Archives <http://www.emilydickinson.org/node/13>.

<sup>2</sup> Kennicott, Philip. "American Poets, On the Surface," *Washington Post*, (November 4, 2012), E7. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/exhibit-review-poetic-likeness-at-the-national-portrait-gallery/2012/11/01/e9d89caa-2399-11e2-8448-81b1ce7d6978\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/exhibit-review-poetic-likeness-at-the-national-portrait-gallery/2012/11/01/e9d89caa-2399-11e2-8448-81b1ce7d6978_story.html)

<sup>3</sup> *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson* (Austin: U of Texas P 1992), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Polly Longworth, *The World of Emily Dickinson* (New York & London: W. W. Norton 1990), 124-125.

<sup>5</sup> George Gleason, "Is It Really Emily Dickinson?" *The Emily Dickinson Journal* (18.2 [2009] 1-20). Another possible picture of Emily Dickinson featured as a frontispiece for Richard Sewall's volume two of *The Life of Emily Dickinson* was contested by Joe Nickell, "A Likeness of Emily? The Investigation of a Questioned Photograph," *EDIS Bulletin* 5.2 (November/December 1993), 1-3, 15.

<sup>6</sup> The three articles can be found at Amherst College Special Collections ([https://www.amherst.edu/library/archives/holdings/edickinson/new\\_daguerreotype](https://www.amherst.edu/library/archives/holdings/edickinson/new_daguerreotype)), the Emily Dickinson Museum ([http://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/new\\_daguerreotype](http://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/new_daguerreotype)), and the Dickinson Electronic Archives 2 (<http://www.emilydickinson.org/1859daguerreotype>).

---

*Martha Nell Smith is Professor of English and Founding Director of the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH) at the University of Maryland. Her latest book is Emily Dickinson, A User's Guide (forthcoming from Wiley 2013), from which the preceding article was excerpted.*

# Cleveland 2012: Emily Rocks

*The Bulletin gratefully acknowledges Nathaniel Allen and Kate Dunning for the photographs. More photographs appear on page 23.*

When Alan Freed risked playing the taboo music of African-American artists on WJW, his Cleveland radio station, in 1951, he started a process of fusion, incorporation, and assimilation of hitherto hostile cultural forces that, whatever else its result, created a world in which innumerable hitherto discrete categories and hierarchies could no longer be maintained.

Thus the seemingly incongruous elements in the title of the 2012 Annual Meeting of the Emily Dickinson International Society, “Emily Rocks,” turn out to go together better than might appear. Though separated by a century, an artistic medium, and a whole panoply of social strata, rock and roll and Emily Dickinson perform a number of similar kinds of cultural work, particularly in the imaginations of those who study them most closely.

The meetings, held at Case Western Reserve, included some familiar popular and vital elements, such as gatherings of groups of graduate students, emerging scholars, and

people seeking reactions to developing manuscripts. Several non-academic members of the society admitted they most keenly anticipated the master sessions on individual poems, where an observer noted more than one seasoned professor relishing the opportunity to recall glorious days of undergraduate and graduate class discussion.

Evenings provided opportunities not only for animated dinner conversations, but for members to display their hidden euterpian talents. A Friday night extravaganza witnessed readings, recitations, burlesques, dramatic performances, and one merry band of troubadours singing madrigals.

Nevertheless, it was the plenary sessions, particularly the keynote addresses, that justified the oxymoron of the title. If EDIS members came to Cleveland ready to rock and roll, they were not disappointed. One of the two keynote speakers, Kevin Dettmar of Pomona College, gave a talk about rock that was at once confessional, esoteric, witty, and dizzily erudite. Fusing William Bur-

roughs and Lori Anderson, the Sex Pistols and a contested North Atlantic ledge called Rockall, Dettmar presented an original reading of the politics of rock lyrics and intelligibility.

Some of the most fiercely socially engaged rock bands, who turned out to have had their heyday during the speaker’s impressionable youth, seemed deliberately to try to confuse audiences – to write and sing provocative lyrics that prove more elusive the harder one tries to follow them. The result is the notorious phenomenon of the Mondegreen (a corruption of a line from an old ballad, “and laid him on the green”). When we can only barely comprehend a lyric, Dettmar argued, we substitute our own – the Mondegreen. The substituted lyrics, invariably more politically or psychologically charged than the elusive actual lyrics that provoke them, mark not our responses to the song’s actual (implicitly unrecoverable) lyrics, but something deeper within us that is released by our imaginative engagement with the song. These

misprisions then serve as an “ink blot of ideological critique”: an expression of political and social resistance to the banal official narratives according to which we reluctantly construct our lives.

From left, actress Laurie McCants performs a portion of a theatrical work, and Dongxin Qin leads a discussion of “The grass so little has to do.”

An audience member, struggling to remember what he ever knew about Gang of Four and Anthrax, began to wonder whether Dickinson was being targeted as likewise fundamentally unintelligible. What Dettmar referred to, however, was not the incoherence of words and phrases, but rather the openness of syntax. Dickinson’s Mondegreen, he suggested, was (for want of a better term) the dash – the place-holder in a poetic line marking where sense breaks



through, where verse and reader simultaneously come alive.

Two other plenary sessions were as fascinating in their contrasts of manner and content as they were in their arguments. James Guthrie, of Wright State University, drew from his current research on the significance of the law in Dickinson's life and work, to discuss the importance of Ohio, and even of Case Western Reserve University itself, in the life of the poet. In doing so, he exposed the inadvertent but crucial role played by the poet's grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson, in the emergence of the crucially American doctrine of Free Speech. The issue concerned debates over abolition at Cincinnati's Lane Seminary. Dickinson, serving as a "glorified shop teacher" at the seminary in

the 1830s, maintained a policy that social work counted as manual labor, and though no abolitionist himself, effectively enabled abolitionist students, the so-called "Lane Rebels," to go off to the inner city to develop and articulate their positions.

Guthrie's learned history was followed by Barbara Mossberg's almost jazz-like riff on Emily Dickinson's poetics of irregularity. Invoking chaos theory, Mossberg called reading Dickinson's poetry "an informed, formless experience"; "ad-hocness working for immortality." Her presentation – declaimed, occasionally sung, almost danced – defies summary, but the enthusiastic uprush of commentary at the end of the formal part of the presentation indicated that something further may follow of the convergence of Dickinsonian poetics and fractal mathematics.

Unquestionably, though, the moment that has generated the most post-meeting buzz came during the very first presentation, when EDIS vice-president Martha Nell Smith delivered her address titled "Tramps Like Us (they cool our tramp)." Calling Dickinson a kind of "curator of our deepest intellectual, emotional, and spiritual attentions," Smith explained her terms by noting how remarkably wide-spread Dickinson has come to be in our popular culture. She played excerpts from artists such as Trailer Bride ("Hope is the thing with feathers") and Eva ("Hour of Lead"), who perform musical interpretations of Dickinson poems or incorporate her lines into their own lyrics; and she described uses of Dickinson's cultural legacy in

television, from *The Meeting of the Minds* to 30 Rock, theatre, and fiction.

The sheer number of allusions, Smith suggested, indicates how fully Dickinson has entered our popular, collective imagination – how deeply we need something she represents. Behind all the allusions, however, lie a surprisingly small number of canonical poems, many of them evocative of the familiar, static daguerreotype of the 17-year-old future poet, the only image known surely to have survived. Pale, demure, the Dickinson of that image encodes a particular idea of female creative power, yet at the same time remains elusive, unfathomable. She has become a sort of "cultural palimpsest of our emotions" – we read our own desires onto that somewhat vacant, malleable image.

What if, Smith asked – what if a different image lay behind our fascination with Dickinson, and our impulses to invite her into our psychological hinterlands? Here Smith showed a different daguerreotype, the one reproduced on the cover of this issue of the *Bulletin*. The woman on the right can easily be identified as Dickinson's friend Kate Scott Anthon. The figure on the left sits slightly elevated, with an arm around her companion, gazing at the camera with a commanding attitude, fully controlling the terms of her own representation. The face of the woman in this image was compared by Susan Pepin, a neuro-ophthalmologist at Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center, detail by detail, with that of the 1847 daguerreotype. After a thorough comparison, Pepin said she felt "99% certain" that the two images represent the same woman.

Have we reached that long-sought goal: an accurate visual picture of the fully mature, practicing poet? And if so, what does it tell us? How will this new image of Emily Dickinson provoke our spiritual attentions? Or is the woman in the photo a sort of visual Mondgreen, another elusive cipher upon which we impose our ideologically insubordinate misprisions? Such questions are bound to be engaged for a long time to come.



Above, Jane Eberwein reads carefully to test the ideas presented in a master session. Below, the audience responds to Barbara Mossberg's vision of Dickinson's chaotic imagination.

*Series Editor, Jonnie Guerra*

*Lisa Russ Spaar is the author of many collections of poetry as well as professor of English and Creative Writing at the University of Virginia. Her awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Rona Jaffe Award, the Carole Weinstein Poetry Prize, an Outstanding Faculty Award from the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, and the Library of Virginia Award for Poetry. Thanks are due to editor Daniel Manheim for suggesting Spaar to be featured in the Poet to Poet series. I am delighted to present Spaar's provocative meditations on her connection to Dickinson.*

## The Ecstatic Clocks of Emily Dickinson

By Lisa Russ Spaar

Emily Dickinson's poems and letters – restive, interior, aggressive, private, anguished, erotic, linguistically breath-reaving, witty, explosive, elliptical, noetic, daring, concentrated, complex, veiled in “Codes of Bliss” and cast in a language put under such pressure and in possession of such psychic and somatic torque as to feel entirely original – were the first texts that invited me to try to make the poems, inchoate within me, for which I had found no antecedent.

\*

Dickinson's poems “tell” a lyric time of interstice, awakening, and wake – aftermath – in an inimitable, elusive matrix characterized by abstraction, figuration, and a lexicon so palpable it bodies forth, resisting page, margin, print, and eluding the notion of any fixed message.

I'll tell Thee All – how Bald it grew –  
How Midnight felt, at first – to me –  
How all the Clocks stopped in the  
World –  
And Sunshine pinched me – 'Twas so  
cold – (Fr431)

\*

After Great Pain. Paradox. Compression. “Extatic Contract!”  
(Fr266) Revolt.

\*

“Split the Lark – and you'll find the Music – ” (Fr905). Larks. Clocks. Letters. Poems. In nearly every Dickinson text there is a node, an organ, an escapement of language, perception, troping that eludes explication, deciphering, unpacking – a qualia that



Photo Credit: Jen Fariello

is ultimately untranslatable. Her deviant syntax, what William Carlos Williams called her “structural warping” (Boruch, 27), her transgressive coinages of diction, manipulation of metonymy, and disruption of grammatical expectation are intensely physical, ushering in a sensation of witness and an experience of language at its most primal registers. The lyricism in these poems owes to riddling, but the most provocative among them is a puzzle with no answer, offering instead a select design of implacable discovery, discerned fleetingly in the frisson separating “Syllable from Sound” (Fr 598): an ecstatic and, to me, irresistible precinct.

\*

Was any realm of ecstasy – Eros, Thanatos, Terror, Vision/Mysticism, Necromancy, Illness, Madness, Despair, the Via Negativa, Reading, Writing – beyond the reach of her poetic “Campaign inscrutable / of the Interior” (Fr1230)?

Paul Valéry points out that “a poet's function . . . is not to experience the poetic state: that is a private affair. His function is to create it in others” (Valéry, 60). By what ruses does Dickinson create her ecstasies? Wondering about this has shaped my reading of her, and my own writing, for at least two decades.

\*

Without a trace of irony and in syntax so contorted that it makes a kind of meta fetish of its telling, Gerard Manley Hopkins responded this way to a charge that his poems were obdurate: “Obscurity I do and will try to avoid so far as is consistent with excellences higher than clearness at a first reading” (Hopkins, xv).



## POET TO POET

Elizabeth Bishop writes in a letter to Anne Stevenson about a poem she is working on about Dickinson and Hopkins: "I never really liked Emily Dickinson much, except a few nature poems, until that complete edition came out a few years ago and I read it all more carefully. I still hate the oh-the-pain-of-it-all poems, but I admire many others, and, mostly, phrases more than whole poems. I particularly admire her having dared to do it, all alone – a bit like Hopkins in that. (I have a poem about them comparing them to two self-caged birds, but it's unfinished.) This is snobbery – but I don't like the humorless, Martha Graham kind of person who does like Emily Dickinson . . ." (Bishop, 858).

\*

Dickinson showed me that I am the kind of person who likes Emily Dickinson. I also believe her capable of shrewd whimsy and deep play, as in the gallows humor here:

If I could'nt thank you,  
Being fast asleep,  
You will know I'm trying  
With my Granite lip!

(Fr210)

I also find that I like difficulty in poems.

\*

Though it has been said of Dickinson that she is one of the only American poets without a "program" or poetics manifesto, many of her poems concern her relationship with language and its materiality ("Many a phrase has the English language – / I have heard but one . . . / . . . Breaking in bright Orthography / On my simple sleep –" [Fr333] and "I found the words to every thought / I ever had – but One – / And that – defies Me – / As a Hand did try to chalk the Sun" [Fr436]). One thing that compels me to Dickinson's work is the way she floats in any one poem a stereoscopic mix of God-hunger, erotic longing, and the "Vision of language!" itself (L782). "Dare you see a Soul at the 'White Heat'?" (Fr401) strikes me forcibly as a poem about Dickinson's poetic process and obsession with consciousness, its peril and its expression. The poem begins with a question and a dare, and then invites us, with typical distortion of scale and perspective (one of the chief ways Dickinson achieves ecstatic effects in her poems), to "crouch within the door." Where are we in this moment, liminal, yonic, ajar? It is in a crucial/crucible place of in-between-ness that is both aftermath and prelude. What will we witness as we contort to see? What has happened to the person that we were? What will we become? To what vanquishing, veto, and victory will we be privy as the poem itself, "symbol for the finer Forge / That soundless tugs – within –," wields its hammer and blaze to make, to design, a thing so powerful that its "designated Light / Repudiate the Forge"? This could be a poem of sexual arousal and invitation. It could well be about the soul ascending from the

body at death. But it is also, certainly, an intrepid poem about making poetry.

\*

Herself to her a Music

The day protracted, tasking –  
then sleep, brutal in its brevity.  
But nonetheless this drunken heart

in a moon-milked parlor,  
the upstairs all asleep,  
mouth unmooring her ideas

in off-key descant at the piano  
as fingers tink the weird  
stillness of silled wasp's wings,

of lamp's electric lapping,  
silo of glass,  
tongue torqued at the dark pain,

and at her nape  
a voice – from where –  
whispering turn over.

Her restless fingers  
seek a fissure,  
the chafed, ardent pew

that opened when she entered  
this world. She sings  
the metallic sting of a key

broken in its lock, phantom voltage,  
her wild, sleepless hymn  
humming heaven.

("Herself to her a Music" from *Satin Cash*, by Lisa Russ Spaar. Copyright © 2008 by Lisa Russ Spaar. Reprinted by permission of Persea Books, inc., New York. All rights reserved.)

\*

In a letter written in 1854 to her brother Austin (Emily was 23 years old), she warns him that she is so tired from working in the garden and from visiting that she must write her epistle "just as it happens . . . you mustn't expect any style. This is truly extempore, Austin – I have no notes in my pocket" (L165). Clearly keeping scraps of paper handy for notes jotted during the crush of other activities, for the rush of ideas she would then craft into the performances of poems and letters, was part of Dickinson's practice from early on. In particular, though, perhaps because,

# POET TO POET

at 56, I have now been alive longer than Dickinson lived, I have been especially enthralled to explore, through the work of Marta L. Werner, Jerome McGann, Virginia Jackson, Alexandra Socarides, and others, the late “visible language” of Emily Dickinson – facsimile leaves of the open folio work, draft and fair copies, phrases, drawings, scribbles, passages inscribed on chocolate wrappers, telegrams, envelope flaps, flyleaves, most often in pencil – ecstatic texts, muddled, hybrid, urgent, sometimes mutilated by cut-outs, hypertextual variants, cross-hatchings, marginalia, and scissorings of unknown origin:

Different guise when  
my fingers make  
it – It is Anguish  
I long conceal  
from you to let  
you leave me,  
hungry, but you  
ask the divine  
Crust and that  
would doom the  
Bread -

(from A740, transcribed by Marta Werner in *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios*).

\*

Hunger. Renunciation. Trespass. Freedom. “An ablative estate” (Fr1761).

\*

Dickinson was a hunger artist. She could wade “Whole Pools” of grief, but the slightest “push of Joy” (Fr312) unnerved her. What was fulfillment, after all, compared to the electric, ecstatic currents of desire, to poetry?

It was the limit of my Dream –  
The focus of my Prayer –

A perfect – paralyzing Bliss –  
Contented as Despair –  
(Fr767)

What is style if not profound solitude? And so, after being “hungry, all the Years,” and finally tasting a “Plenty” (Fr439) that hurts her, she chooses another, almost apostatic way: poetry – an estranged and heightened consciousness italicized by renunciation. Hard not to see in Dickinson’s “bowls” the enormity of her inner ocean over-brimming those tidy hymn-haunted fours and sixes (“A love so big it scares her, rushing among her small heart – pushing aside the blood – and leaving her faint [all] and white in the gust’s arm –,” from the Master Letters, L248):

Why Bliss so scantily disburse –  
Why Paradise defer –  
Why Floods be served to Us – in Bowls –  
I speculate no more –  
(L767)

\*

David Porter in *Dickinson: The Modern Idiom*: “There is no boredom in Dickinson because there is no prose” (4).

Emily Dickinson:

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

\*

Marianne Boruch, from “Dickinson Descending”: “On and on the homage continues by reference or explanation, or more directly by imitation, until it seems something crucial to our survival to remember her, something the Chinese know by their

*Continued on page 28*

## Emily Dickinson Takes the Freight Elevator

The world premiere of *An Emily Dickinson Sense Surround* had an audience of nearly 50 New Yorkers. With LitCrawl NYC programs in hand, those game literature-seekers braved long white echoing corridors on the way to the 7th floor at 195 Chrystie Street, HQ for ArtStar Gallery, for an unusual take on Emily Dickinson:

Figs and flowers to smell and touch;  
Emily’s cake recipes – and poems that resembled recipes – to hear;  
Coconut cake – from Emily Dickinson’s family recipes – to taste;  
Old fashioned apple cider, as if pressed in Emily’s kitchen, to drink;  
And songs from her own playbook to sing.

The sensate materials were provided by Marta McDowell, Cindy Dickinson, David Giovacchini, and Aife Murray.



Author: Aife Murray

Photo Credit: Thomas Altfather Good

# Trying to Think With Jed Deppman

An Interview by Melanie Hubbard

Melanie Hubbard: Here is a silly question to get us started, but I can't resist: Is your name really Jed, as in short for Jedidiah?

Jed Deppman: That's a great question! (laughing) My given name is John Erickson Deppman, so it's JED. All my life, until I was twelve, I thought my name was Jed, everybody calls me Jed, and then my parents let me in on the secret that no, officially your name is John, but we'd never call you that.

MH: What got you interested in Dickinson?

JD: I went to Amherst College and graduated in 1990, so she's in my blood a little bit, but I didn't really read her seriously until I went to graduate school in comparative literature and was absorbing a lot of theory and philosophy. I went to France to pursue a DEA (diploma) and there I was reading lots of French theory and history of philosophy. At the same time I was thinking about my dissertation and what kind of academic career I wanted to have. I was reading lots of James Joyce and I also sort of picked up Emily Dickinson. I knew and respected her work already. But then I saw so much in it that responded to all the questions I was learning about from the theory and philosophy I was studying, and I have always connected the two ever since.

MH: So you've been doing Dickinson and philosophy since grad school?

JD: I remember reading the Johnson edition then and thinking, OK, I'm going to read all of these. Making my way through the 1860s and the 1870s and just thinking how voluminous and amazing she was, and then, getting toward the end of the 1880s finally, reaching those poems, I ran across "Of Death I try to think like this." And I



Photo Credit: Steve Fratoni

thought, now that is a poem. I wonder where that starts, that is really something. I really thought about that poem. I looked at it carefully; it fit with a lot of what I was studying with the works of George Bataille and Jacques Derrida and some other French philosophers I was reading at the time, Jean Luc Nancy in particular; and I thought, OK, fine, I'm going to go look at what all the Dickinson scholars have said about this poem and figure it out. Because to my mind it was so clearly a kind of summary statement of Emily Dickinson's attitude toward death, her great flood subject. And so when I came back to the U.S., I went to the University of Wisconsin library to track down everything I could find, and I remember going through all of the indexes – there are great Dickinson resources at the

UW-Madison library – and I couldn't find anybody! Nobody had talked about this poem, and I thought, what is happening? Is my Emily Dickinson somehow different from other people's Emily Dickinson? So that was really a sparking point for me, when I realized I couldn't not think about that poem, and that I had to write something about it.

\* \* \*

MH: As for your book, *Trying to Think with Emily Dickinson*, what makes you think philosophy is a vital way to look at this poet?

JD: To my mind, it's an honest way, in the sense that you don't need to impose upon her writing philosophical or other theoretical discourses that have been subsequently developed. She was trained in philosophy, as were many of her peers; philosophy was a central discipline at Amherst College. Amherst College taught a tremendous amount of mental and

moral philosophy, the discipline itself was very prestigious, and all of her interlocutors or friends were all sort of saturated in it – her brother, Benjamin Franklin Newton, and Henry Emmons in the early 1850s – she had a lot of discussions with them, and it was just how they were trained. It was an absolutely natural, organic kind of vocabulary which she had known ever since she was a teenager. She had read Watts's *Improvement of the Mind* many times as a teenager, and she read it again in order to be able to go to Mary Lyons' Seminary. I thought, this is something that I know is in her DNA.

MH: Why was the college, or really her whole milieu, so interested in giving her a philosophical education?

JD: One reason was just sort of structural. Amherst Academy, where she went, was very closely linked with Amherst College. The college trained supervisors at the Academy, so what the college prized often found its way very quickly into what the Academy was thinking about. The discipline had such a high moral value because it was in two stages: there was mental philosophy, which was the science of the mind, and then there was moral philosophy, which was the higher and the more important; it was absolutely necessary for anybody who was being trained to be a minister. Also, Dickinson's family had a lot of social contacts with Amherst College faculty and she knew a lot of the children of the faculty there and was friends with them, so there were a lot of local, small town connections with philosophers. It would become quite lighthearted at some points; it would find its way into Dickinson's Valentines, and it was a natural vocabulary that she uses in her letters. But one great central location for the importance of philosophy was its perceived link to the Christian faith.

MH: One thing that I think is vital is that Dickinson has been called a "Puritan" in a lot of the early critical literature, and I wonder if that is the reason why critics don't seem to have paid any attention to her philosophical background?

JD: You're right about that, of course. She has been construed largely in a Puritan tradition in the biographies. I think one of the reasons is that we don't see how much philosophy was part of that tradition, because by now, things are quite different. People who are coming to the question of Dickinson as a writer, as a person who is educated, don't see how closely linked philosophical inquiries were with religious inquiries. We see them as very very separate now. That's one thing that plays into the idea that Dickinson is somehow more religiously trained, and her background was all religious; we fail to see the strong philosophical component to that. There was certainly a much stronger or-

ganic link between philosophical and religious questioning.

MH: To what extent does ED accept, and kind of agree with, the Common Sense philosophy that she's being taught?



Melanie Hubbard received an NEH a few years ago and is finishing a book on Dickinson's philosophical and rhetorical education. Her new full-length collection of poems, *We Have With Us Your Sky*, won the 2011 Book Award in Poetry from Subito Press and will appear in October 2012. Photo Credit: Ann Mohin

JD: (laughing) Here I would like to reference your own work, which I find absolutely admirable. She was very familiar with Common Sense philosophy. It was the backbone of her training, it's central to many of the books that you find in the library, her letters are full of Common Sense distinctions. I think that what you point out really crucially is that there's a real problem in Common Sense philosophy about dealing with language, how language works. And I think she came to this recognition partly through reading, partly through her own independent thought, and she came to a kind of crisis about the extent to which Common Sense philosophy could answer

her questions. I think she used it, she understood it very well, she accepted a lot of its questions and distinctions, but when it came to answering the very hardest questions of her life, it came up short. Questions about how thinking actually works, questions about how we think about death, how we think about life and the possibility of after-life, all the really difficult questions seem to be solved almost by fiat in the Common Sense tradition.

MH: Indeed. They acknowledge the difficulty of the answers, actually, but then they just say, Well. But, you know, God made it so, so there you are!

JD: They stop questioning at a point sometimes where Dickinson wants to start questioning.

MH: And that must provide to a certain extent the basis for your title, if not your book, *Trying to Think*.

JD: I just noticed that in her letters and poems, it's a phrase that she herself uses. And

it couldn't have cropped up, I thought, so many times, if it were an innocent problem; I also wanted to reference the difficulty we have in understanding and thinking with Dickinson, trying to understand where her questions came from, and what philosophical traditions they might emerge from. I wanted to give the sense that she herself spent her life trying to think.

MH: Even when one poem might settle, or seem to settle, on one pole of an answer, the next poem is likely to contradict it. You talk to a certain extent in your book about the openness of her poems.

JD: First, I think I mean that she has a kind of reader-oriented or propositional way of thinking. She doesn't think she has the answer, and her poems almost never present themselves as the result of a set of conclusions that have been reached, or a philosophical analysis. But they give the problem and her thinking to their readers, I mean in both the letters and the poems, so that's one important sense of openness. There's also a poststructuralist sense which Umberto Eco talks about, the "open work" as one where a lot of the work remains to be done by the audience or reader.

\* \* \*

JD: Maybe I could sketch a short intellectual biography of Dickinson that speaks to where her openness might have come from: Dickinson in the late 1850s has a lot of resources available to help her try to think: she has her brother Austin, that she's writing letters to, she has Susan Gilbert that she's writing letters to, she's still attending meeting every Sunday, she's hearing different speakers, she's just finished her schooling in the late 1840s, so there are a lot of ways that she can continue to worry and think about things. She has a lot of childhood friends she's writing letters to (and Henry Emmons and Benjamin Franklin Newton to talk and write to) who are very important to her. Slowly throughout the 1850s, all of these sources of help for her to think are gone. Susan and Austin get married and move in next door, so there's no need to write them letters anymore; Emmons and Newton are gone – one of them gets married, another one dies; her schooling is more and more distant, she stops going to church, and so there's a sense that she has to find an outlet for her thinking, that she has a tremendous amount of mental energy and she has questions that are not going away. So increasingly she writes poems, starting in the late 1850s, that do not get circulated in letters. Throughout the 1850s a lot of her poems are circulated in letters, but as time goes on into the 1860s, 1861, 1862,

fewer and fewer get actually sent out, and it's my sense anyway that she's using this space, whether we call it a lyric space or a poetic space, this writing activity, to deal with these hard questions that she has no other outlet for.

MH: Why didn't Dickinson simply do philosophy? Why did she turn to poetry instead?

JD: I don't think we're going to have an easy answer. One reason might be that to the extent that she is a philosopher in a stricter sense, she has already philosophized in the epistolary project. She wrote a tremendous amount of letters trying to think with other people through prose. I think that she didn't get the response that she needed.

MH: I think she risked her friendships, really.

JD: You're absolutely right, she did do that.

MH: She lost friends.

JD: She knew she was doing it, too, but she couldn't stop herself. She wrote a letter to Jan Humphrey where she writes a long paragraph about death, and she says, I've been trying to think about death, she uses that phrase, and then instantly she says, Oh, but please forgive me, I've been very naughty to think about this, I shouldn't have written this. Her thinking and her trying to think are causing crises that are both personal and epistolary. She can't perform, it's not working for her.

MH: Don't you think that, given the slipperiness of language, it becomes part of the problem of thinking?

JD: That's really true, but I don't think that recognition comes until the epistolary project fails. I think if you look at the first 200 poems, they take place in a kind of Valentine mode. Dickinson isn't expecting so much from the lyric project. Then, as she gets better and better at writing poems, she sees what they can do; she has perhaps greater consciousness of the limits of language, and the utility of lyric language in all of its suppleness,

its tropes, figures, performativity, and all those things that she can manage there, I think that there's a slow realization that comes to her that that is the form she needs, and nothing else will suffice. The problem with writing philosophy, too, is that it's reader-directed in another way. It doesn't have that playful, free, open state; it's trying to convince people; they have to follow you in where you're going. Whereas I think at some point, she has tried out so many audiences, so many vocabularies, for working on these hard philosophical questions that tormented her, that eventually, the lyric, poetic space turned out to be the best, richest, most supple one.

\* \* \*

MH: I'd like to move now to the forthcoming collection of essays, "Emily Dickinson and Philosophy," that you've edited with Marianne Noble and Gary Lee Stonum. Tell us what's in the book?

JD: This book is a collection of twelve essays; the first six situate Dickinson in her time and look at the way she grew out of or responded to existing vocabularies, philosophical traditions that were available to her, that she made something of, in one way or another. So there – well you have a wonderful essay on Common Sense philosophy, we also have an essay on mental philosophy and the early psychology that was available to Dickinson. And then the second half of the book is devoted to philosophical thinking that has developed since Dickinson's day, but to which her poetry seems to respond very well. So there we have an essay on pragmatism, an essay on Martin Heidegger, Nietzsche, where subsequent philosophical trends seem to reveal things about Dickinson, perhaps she was a precursor, perhaps she came to certain awarenesses of her own that were subsequently developed. We wanted a balance in the book between historically situated essays and then those that explore where her thought might have consequences outside what she herself had thought.

*Continued on page 29*

# TEACHING DICKINSON

*Series Editor, Marianne Noble*

## “Subjects Hinder Talk”: Dickinson’s Classroom of Possibility

By Robert Weisbuch

Last spring, I was invited to guest-lecture on Emily Dickinson for a couple of English classes at my son’s high school in Montclair, New Jersey. It was 8 a.m. I was in a recalcitrant mood. It was one in a string of down days that we all endure on experience’s roller coaster and I could not easily countenance taking on the public stance that we as teachers assume. Worse, my son, Gabe Weisbuch, was horrified to have his Dad speaking to so many of his peers.



Photo Credit: Gabriel Weisbuch

But by 9:30 that morning, everything was different. I had pep in my step for the first time in a week. As soon as that class began, some other me tuned out the static and tuned in the teaching signal. The kids had been great, their attention unflagging and their questions and ideas engaging. And I had been great too, not because I am, but because anyone is irresistible when they are crazy about a poet. I gave a silent blessing to the saving nature of classroom teaching. But the salve was due as much to the subject, due to Dickinson.

Dickinson is so ready to take on any mood, including the November in the soul I brought to class that day. Dickinson proposes that agony enlarges the self: “Power is only pain” (J252). “A wounded deer leaps highest” (J165). But she always knows that any benefits to our suffering do not nullify our experience. One day, she writes, Christ will explain in his “fair schoolroom of the Sky” why one must undergo the pain “that scalds me now/That scalds me now!” (J193). Our immediate pain always takes priority over its eventual justification.

Dickinson had more to tell me that day. “If your nerve deny you/ Go above your nerve” (J292). To tell the truth, I was facing a lot of life changes, and it was these that had brought on my bad mood. But she reminded me that I could go above all of that. “A Bomb upon the Ceiling/Is an improving Thing – / It keeps the Nerves progressive / Conjecture flourishing – ” (J1128). I understood those lines in a new way that day. I don’t mean to suggest that we value Dickinson most for little Victorian nuggets of wisdom, but I do mean that teachers have lives, too, and that Dickinson’s poems speak superbly to one’s self while connecting that self to something larger, including other selves.

As teachers, one of our first lessons is to remind our students – and ourselves – not to relate everything to ourselves, for our own interests and obsessions may well misshape the text’s meaning. And yet, as theorists from Plato on acknowledge, without one or another form of the partaker’s self-interest, meaning is dormant, inert. Teachers, like their students, continue to experience life’s

drama. And sometimes, lost in the administrative tasks of filling forms and attending endless committee meetings, we can become “the lonesome for they know not what” too, routinized and missing what Dickinson called “the missing All” (J985). We are so lucky to have Dickinson and all the others to teach, for even as they speak to our lifeless moments, they provide the fresh breath of life and help us to be more human, over and over. That’s why this career is better than selling real estate.

In fact, Dickinson applies so readily because her poems address our own specific issues without imposing their own. This is hard to grasp, but one of the first lessons I offer students is that if Dickinson’s poetry is going to be able to mean more largely, we need to relax our demand for specifics. Our students want to know what Dickinson believes, but I show that Dickinson, like Whitman, is large and contains multitudes. I encourage them to come to know her not by pinning down what she believes but by learning what she cares about.

For instance, in many poems Dickinson expresses a religious faith earned by individual thought. She is the mariner who leaves taught doctrine to sail seas of thought on her own, but then she earns her way back to that initial faith, now on her own terms: “Though I get home how late – how late/ So I get home ‘twill compensate” (J207). Or again, in “I’m Ceded – I’ve stopped being Theirs,” the speaker sees her baptism in a country church as something childish to be stored “with my Dolls.” But now “Baptized, before, without the choice,/But this

# TEACHING DICKINSON

time, consciously, of Grace,” the speaker has “Will to choose, or to reject,/ And I choose – just a Crown” (J508). Yet elsewhere, “The Bible is an Antique Volume – / Written by faded men” (J1545). How much belief is there in that? More generally, in some poems, to be “owned” by someone or something greater is “my one glory” (J1028), whereas in “My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun” (J754), being owned leads to a false sense of power and finally to not having lived at all. This desire to scout all the positions of an issue is one reason why “Adjourns are all – ,” why all of Dickinson’s poems deal with endings, with death, in one form or another – because death is available to such a spectrum of possibility, from nothingness to immortality.

Probably her most frequent self-debate concerns experiences that take one beyond one’s common-place self. Sometimes transcendence seems to be as available as air. “Paradise is of the option,” Dickinson writes in her Emersonian moods. But elsewhere she vetoes her vision – “The power and the glory are the post mortuary gifts.” Do we really want to be transcendent? “One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted. . . . Ourself behind ourself, concealed / Should startle most –” (J670). To have an overwhelming experience is to sacrifice the everyday self who enjoys good old life:

The Brain, within its groove  
Runs evenly and true;  
But let a splinter swerve,  
‘Twere easier for you  
To put the water back  
When floods have slit the hills,  
And scooped a turnpike for themselves,  
And trodden out the Mills – (J556)

Some poems vigorously express her devotion to transcendent experiences while others, like this one, say “no thanks.” “Fathoms are sudden neighbors,” Dickinson wrote to a friend (L804), but not always welcome ones. Dickinson knows that the special moments affirm and maximize our humanity, and she can mourn the fact that they are temporary and then disappear into

the merely commonplace: “Had I not seen the Sun/I could have borne the Shade” (J1233). But she can also demur and argue against the overwhelming experience in its capacity to destroy creatureliness and the enjoyments of the everyday.

This can be seen as a legitimate reading of “I started early, took my Dog – / And visited the Sea” (J520). The speaker playfully begins a journey to the shore with her comforting domestic pet; but as the tide rises beyond her control, “past my Apron – and my Belt/And past my Bodice – too – ,” she runs fearfully back to “the Solid Town.” The tide had been following closely, but there, he discerned “No one He seemed to know – ” because, one takes it, the wild, the id, cannot recognize the restrained and common. And so the sea-tide bows and “withdraws” but with a “Mighty look,” as if to say, getcha next time.

This poem, which poses as a story, takes us to the third job we have in letting go as we introduce Dickinson to students. Just as “what Dickinson believes” is a question that needs to be restated in terms of what she cares about, so too what the poetry is “about” needs to be rephrased into the question of how a poem can be about any number of subjects at once. Helping students to think about town and sea in “I started early, took my Dog” can help to illustrate how Dickinson’s images manage to suggest subjects without being confined by them. The sea as a masculine, enticing, even assaulting figure may indeed suggest a sexual desire and fear, but the sea also could be whatever fantasy life, whatever wild intelligence, whatever notion of transcendence contrasts to the solidity of our own common sense.

Years ago, I wrote that Dickinson’s poetry is like a pattern in the carpet that then makes the carpet disappear to leave you face to face with the pattern. I still find this a meaningful way to teach Dickinson. “Subjects hinder talk” (L397), Dickinson wrote, and her poems tend to forego subjects and offer instead designs that can

apply to any possible subject. They are typically not about love or God or nature or death but about any and all of those subjects and all others too. That gets her, as I wrote earlier, beyond the whats of experience to the felts, to “internal difference, / Where,” as Dickinson insists, “the meanings are” (J258). That is why students love Dickinson despite her difficulty. The poems are impersonal, and yet they speak more intimately to them than anyone has ever spoken to them heretofore.

Every poem works in this way, but this one seems to me an especially striking example:

Did the Harebell loose her girdle  
To the lover Bee  
Would the Bee the Harebell hallow  
Much as formerly?

Did the “Paradise” – persuaded –  
Yield her moat of pearl –  
Would the Eden be an Eden  
Or the Earl – an Earl? (J213)

Somehow in this poem we move from a domestic garden and a question that sounds the fear of a mom to a daughter – as the Shirelles sing, “Will you still love me tomorrow?” – to a justification of God’s non-appearance in the world. The first stanza ostensibly concerns a masculine bee romancing a feminine flower while the second stanza raises the bet from an ordinary garden to The Garden, Eden, which is simultaneously described as a medieval castle. By poem’s end, the question of whether a beau will still value a maiden once he has had his desire fulfilled in her has become the question of whether the Earl of Eden, perhaps God, would still be God if his paradise could be entered and his presence directly known. From the sexual to the metaphysical with everything in between, the poem ultimately argues that the attainment of what is desired does not so much provide bliss as it does deflate the value of the desired object. You can’t have your cake and eat it, and this also explains

*Continued on page 30*

# DICKINSON SCHOLARS

Series Editor, Cindy MacKenzie

## Josephine McIlvain Pollitt Pohl

By Aife Murray

*I am indebted to Josephine Pollitt for being the first scholar to discover the letters of Margaret Maher and to note the importance of the Boltwood Family Papers in the Detroit Free Public Library's Burton Historical Collection. These materials enabled me to fill in many blanks in the life of Margaret Maher as well as imagine, through the meticulous records of her peers, Emily Dickinson's daily existence with servants. I am also grateful for Josephine Pollitt's singular mind and lively prose, especially what is found in her essay "Emily Dickinson - Loaf Giver" which appears in print for the first time as an appendix in my book Maid as Muse: How Servants Changed Emily Dickinson's Life and Language (UPNE/UNH, 2010). Margaret Dakin and Marjory Allen Perez contributed to this article.*

*This is the first in a series of articles about early Dickinson biographers, including Genevieve Taggard and George Frisbee Whicher.*

On November 12, 1890, when Roberts Brothers printed the first edition of Emily Dickinson's Poems, future Dickinson biographer Josephine McIlvain Pollitt was one month old. Perhaps her mother Lula, with infant daughter in her arms, was among the first in Indianapolis to purchase the volume of Dickinson's poems. If it wasn't the recitation of these poems that sealed her daughter's interest, then Lula Pollitt provided other vital support, for she is the one to whom Josephine Pollitt (1890-1978) dedicated her only published book, *Emily Dickinson: The Human Background of Her Poetry* (New York: Harper, 1930).

It took five years after high school graduation for Josephine Pollitt to matriculate at Butler College, but her widowed mother made sure she got there. When she taught college in Kentucky, her mother kept house for her until Pollitt, admitted to Columbia as a grad student, headed off to New York in 1923. It was at Columbia, from which she took her M.A. in English on June 3, 1925, that Pollitt began her research on Dickinson, writing her thesis on the poet. The May following graduation she married playwright, scholar, and Boys High School English teacher Frederick Julius Pohl (1889-1991). With his research help, Pollitt concluded the writing of her centenary biography which appeared alongside Genevieve Taggard's volume, *The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson* (A.A. Knopf, 1930).

In the course of her thesis research, Pollitt became well-acquainted with Martha Dickinson Bianchi, Mabel Loomis Todd, and Millicent



Class Photo, Shortridge High School, 1909.  
Photo Credit: Indiana Historical Society

Todd Bingham. Pollitt's unpublished essay "A Swan Song" provides keen insight as to what it meant to conduct Dickinson research while those three women were alive. Pollitt describes her encounters, especially with the Todd women, with the detail of a novelist. While acknowledging Todd's and Bianchi's pivotal roles in bringing Dickinson's poetry to the public's attention, she takes pains to articulate differences and similarities such as that both Todd and Bianchi "enjoyed immensely the prestige of their position." Pollitt

found Bianchi to be "unfailingly courteous" but also "treacherous" and not as intelligent as Todd, whom she described as having a better understanding of poetry than Bianchi but as possessing a "monstrous egotism." Pollitt notes that both Todd and Bingham were fearful of Bianchi and suggests that mental illness inherited from David Todd might be at root in Bingham's erratic behavior. Conducting research with the cooperation of these key players appears to have been a minefield. Twice Pollitt seriously considered abandoning the biography subsequent to meetings with Todd and Bingham.

The plan had been for the well-regarded poet Genevieve Taggard and Pollitt to "polish" the latter's thesis, turning it into a jointly authored biography. Eventually the two parted ways over, presumably, their differing beliefs regarding the poet's elusive lover (George Gould versus Edward Hunt). That Genevieve Taggard was allowed, by Martha Dickinson Bianchi, to quote from the poet's writings, and Pollitt was not, suggests that Pollitt was not successful in picking her way through the terrain of the Dickinson-Todd feud. There is a penciled note, in the upper right hand corner of Pollitt's typescript of "A Swan Song," that reads "Keep for ultimate use - after Mrs. T's demise."

Pollitt's biography was considered flawed because of a focus on the poet's elusive lover and what later critics found to be a blurring of biography with poetry. Martha Ackmann, however, in the 1998 *Emily Dickinson Handbook*, praises Pollitt and Taggard for rendering "a



# DICKINSON SCHOLARS

sense of the life actually being lived. There is an immediacy and freshness to their narratives that make the academic literary biographies of the late twentieth century seem almost torpid” (14).

While Todd and Bianchi continued to publish actively in the early 1930s, Pollitt’s husband and fellow playwright Vincent York were busy collaborating on a theatre script based upon Pollitt’s biography. Their play *Brittle Heaven* opened on November 13, 1934 at New York’s Vanderbilt Theater with Dorothy Gish playing Emily Dickinson, Edith Atwater as Helen Hunt, and Albert Van Dekker in the role of Hunt’s husband. Arthur Pollack, reviewing it the next day in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, called their performance “childish, false, prim, and pedestrian.” On December 1, *Brittle Heaven* quietly closed.

Thereafter it would seem that Josephine Pollitt was through with Dickinson or with the Dickinson-Todd feud, which she compared to the previous generation’s Froude-Carlyle controversy. Like Froude, after the publication of her biography, Pollitt found solace in numerous trips abroad. But perhaps with Todd out of the picture and Bianchi all but gone (Todd died in 1932 and Bianchi in 1943), Pollitt got her second wind by the 1940s. From perusing the catalog of manuscripts at Columbia, Josephine Pollitt learned that the Burton Historical Collection at the Detroit Public Library had the best records on Amherst, Massachusetts outside the town. These were the Boltwood Family Papers, the product of scrupulous collection and preservation work by Lucius Manlius Boltwood, librarian and genealogist (son of Lucius and Fanny), who had settled with his family in Michigan. Pollitt was eager to learn more about Edward Dickinson and Amherst College, so she visited the Burton Collection in the summer of 1942.

Josephine Pollitt sifted through a rich collection that included hundreds of letters, photographs, and childrens’ cut-out figures. She exchanged over a dozen letters with Elaine Stones, chief of the Burton Collection. In her letter of August 9, 1942, written from her home in Brooklyn Heights, Pollitt details the collection’s value, particularly in family

correspondence describing domestic life in nineteenth-century Amherst and a cache of letters written by the Dickinson’s maid of 30 years, Margaret Maher. These letters made Pollitt pause “with keen anticipation.” She added that “Maggie comes alive, definitely.” Within two months Pollitt had determined to “write a biographical memoir of Miss Maher, in connection with [her] study of the imagery of Emily Dickinson’s poetry, and its sources” (10/8/1942).

Nine years later, in 1951, Josephine Pollitt’s husband retired and she became fully involved in his productive writing career. Book after book – he authored a dozen in addition to numerous articles including at least one piece on Dickinson – is dedicated to Pollitt for her involvement from “shaping the substance and spirit,” and her “wise counsel,” to her “unfailing support that steeled me to persevere.”

Before her husband’s research got underway, however, Pollitt made another effort to pursue her own lines of inquiry. In November 1951 she made plans for a return visit to Detroit. By then, a “young man,” as collection chief Elaine Stones described the 41-year-old Jay Leyda (1910-1988), was scheduled to use the Boltwood Papers in December so Pollitt, 20 years his senior, postponed her trip for later that winter. Leyda was conducting research for *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson* (Yale, 1960) and had been alerted by Fanny Boltwood of Goshen, Massachusetts (Lucius Manlius’ youngest child) of the extensive archive in Detroit. Leyda was so taken by the Maher letters in the Burton Collection that he immediately put pen to paper. His essay “Miss Emily’s Maggie” appeared in a 1953 Mentor Edition. Nothing more seems to have been heard from Pollitt while Dickinson research moved apace, with the appearance of Rebecca Patterson’s 1951 biography followed by Thomas Johnson’s and Theodora Ward’s complete versions of the poems and letters. Richard Sewall’s prize-winning biography appeared four years before Josephine Pollitt died, in 1978, at the age of 88.

Leyda scooped Pollitt, but the question on my mind, as I sat in Detroit reading the Stones-Pohl correspondence, with a wet spring snow

on the ground in April 1996, was what happened to Josephine Pollitt’s promised essay? It didn’t appear to have ever been published but, if written, where was it?

After Pollitt’s death her husband donated both of their papers to Amherst College but held back several essays with the intention of getting them into print. He never succeeded. In the mid-1990s, his second wife and widow, Loretta Champagne Baker-Pohl, sold any remaining papers of value to an antiquarian book dealer specializing in Dickinson materials. Polly Longworth circled one item in the book dealer’s catalog and mailed it to me. The piece, authored by Pollitt, made references to Dickinson maid Margaret Maher. By the time I heard from the book dealer, the item had been sold. He referred me to Loretta Baker-Pohl for more information. Writing from her home in Westfield, MA, on her husband’s letterhead, she indicated that Amherst College had any papers related to Josephine Pollitt. Frost archivist, John Lancaster, however, didn’t have the document in question and suggested I contact Brown University’s John Hay Library.

After searches and delays due to a “cataloging error,” wrote Mark Brown, the item was located. I finally held, perhaps five or six decades after it was drafted on a manual typewriter, a copy of the slender nine page, double-spaced article, “Emily Dickinson – Loaf Giver.” Here was the promised piece on Maher. Brilliantly conceived – acknowledging the domestic and aural space of the Homestead kitchen – this brief and lovely essay concurred with my own theories that the work of the kitchen and those who populated that space had definitive impact on the language and form of Dickinson’s poetry. Pollitt compares some of the poems to the brevity of Dickinson’s family recipes and considers that her slant rhymes in the mouths of “Miss Imlay’s” servants are perfect rhymes. As soon as I read it I knew I had to publish it.

It was not easy being a Dickinson scholar in the early years when many informants from the Dickinson, Todd, Higginson, and Wadsworth families were alive. Feelings ran high; the wrong word said could close off access to

*Continued on page 27*

This is the first in a series of reports from collectors of Dickinson-related materials. If you have interesting items that you would like to boast about, or if you have stories to tell of exploits in the field, please send them to the editor of the Bulletin.

## Collecting Emily Dickinson Out West: The Cyber-Trail to Oregon

By Krans Bloemaand

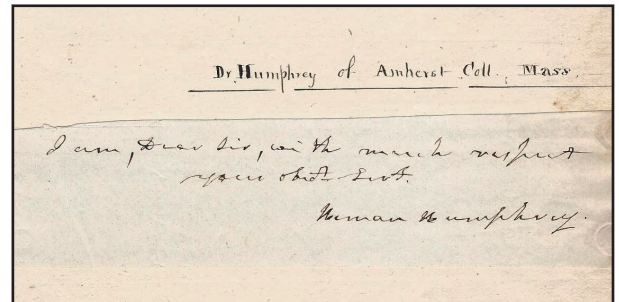
*In the eyes of some, all collectors are more or less crazy.*

*Charles Eliot Goodspeed,  
Yankee Bookseller*

The bibliographer, author, librarian and bookseller David A. Randall once observed that “Poe was, and is, the glamor boy of the American collecting scene.”<sup>1</sup> It could also be argued that Emily Dickinson is “the glamor girl” of the collecting scene, for few authors offer the prospect of so many pleasures for the modern book collector as she does, especially to enthusiasts so far removed from the hub of Dickinson-related activities in New England. The internet is the critical factor that has made it possible to build, on a modest budget, an interesting working collection of material by and about Emily, her circle and her community. The ability to assemble such a collection via the internet has also altered the relationship between booksellers and buyers. In the pre-internet days, passionate Dickinson collectors such as Margaret Jane Pershing formed close partnerships with booksellers

such as the late John S. Van E. Kohn and Michael Papantonio who eagerly filled the want lists of their patrons and dispensed sage guidance along with their sale catalogs. Due to this modified relationship between seller and buyer, my own browsing, scouting and actual acquisition on the cyber-trail have been accomplished with little outside guidance. Fully 90% of my collection had to be imported from the East and Mid-West through web-based enterprises such as eBay and AbeBooks, using Dickinson bibliographies and other reference materials for road maps. Indeed, this self-guided traverse along the “Dickinson trail” to Oregon has been filled with adventure and surprises. More importantly, it has been an education and a revelation.

I accepted the challenge of collecting Dickinson and only Dickinson in earnest in late 2007, so I am fairly new to the game. Few authors haunt me the way Dickinson does, for as Charles Goodspeed noted in his autobiography, “Dickinson found the secret of crystallizing carbon into diamonds.”<sup>2</sup> Dickinson was, like all great writers, a master at decoding and revealing the essence of her humanity. Reading her poems and letters, I soon learned, is a process, not an event, for she makes many demands on us as readers and collectors. Indeed, I think sometimes that

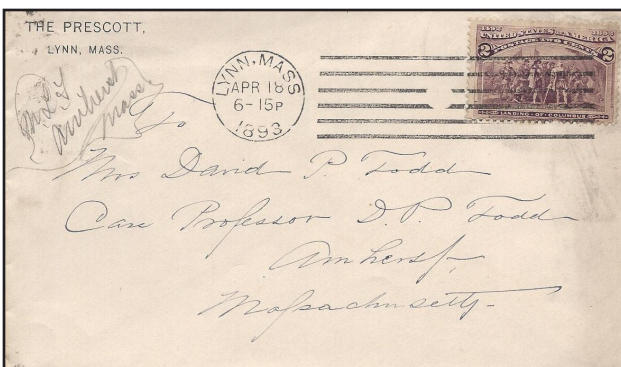


Autograph of Dr. Heman Humphrey, Amherst College

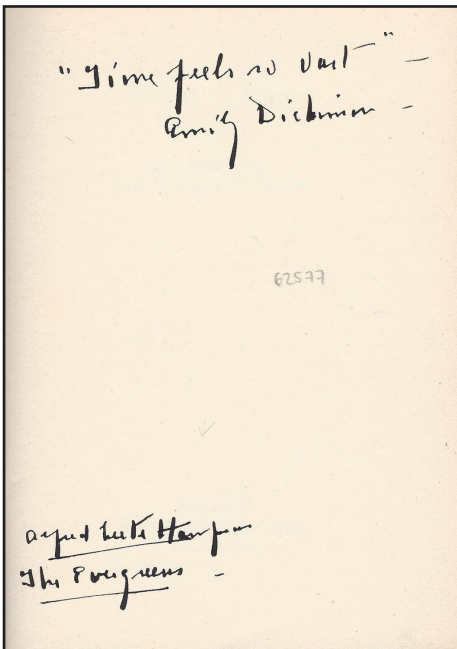
reading and collecting Dickinson is akin to capturing fog in a bottle. There is the element of the raven, or trickster, in Dickinson’s writing that is truly captivating.

Every collection, though, begins with a first item. In my case, a well-loved first edition of George F. Whicher’s *This Was a Poet: A Critical Biography of Emily Dickinson* found its way to my shelves. That was the “seed book” of my collection which has, at last count, grown to 350 items. Because I decided to focus my energy on one author, I can, to borrow from fellow-collector Nick Basbanes, exercise an abundance of “patience and fortitude.” Means and passion and a bit of luck, of course, are the other key ingredients for any collector. It also helps, I think, to be among the select souls of the “gently mad.”

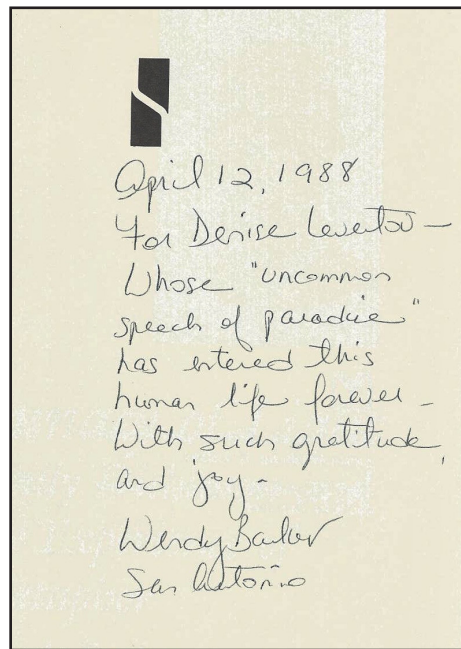
Emily Dickinson collectors today owe a great debt of gratitude to the latter-day virtuoso pathfinders in the field beginning in the 1920s with Charles Green, then later the aforementioned Margaret Jane Pershing, William White, Carleton and Territa Lowenberg, Barton Levi St. Armond, George Monteiro and



Postal cover addressed to Mrs. David P. Todd, postmarked Lynn, Mass., April 18, 1893. The handwritten notation beneath the return address, “MLT Amherst Mass.,” was probably written by Mabel Loomis Todd.



Inscription in black ink by Alfred Leete Hampson, the Evergreens, in my copy of *Guests in Eden*. Note the brief quotation from Fr858.



Denise Levertov's copy of Wendy Barker's *Lunacy of Light*, warmly inscribed to the poet by the author.

Joel Myerson. The first generation of preservationists, of course, were those close to Emily, among them the Todds, Madame Bianchi, T.W. Higginson, Abiah Root and, of course, Sue and Lavinia Dickinson. Because most of the material assembled by these and others are permanently housed in libraries large and small, holograph material in Emily's hand is difficult to find and when found, costly to acquire. Two Dickinson letters, for instance, were sold by Sotheby's in 2011 for \$18,750 and \$12,500.<sup>3</sup> Naturally, libraries with large Dickinson holdings are eager and able to acquire such material, and are in competition with private collectors in search of such gems. The sheer magnitude of the amount of material in the larger institutional collections is staggering and totals some 192 linear feet of boxes.<sup>4</sup> The upside, of course, is that the rare items in these archives will be forever carefully preserved and made available to Dickinson scholars and other researchers.

As a collector, I am keenly interested in literature about collecting, especially articles by my fellow Dickinson collectors. There, too, the field is rather sparse, but a few pieces stand out: R. Eden Martin, whose chief passion is collecting Russian literature, wrote an essay

published in *The Caxtonian* titled "Collecting Emily Dickinson."<sup>5</sup> Eden, with whom I corresponded regarding his essay, stated that he is "far from an ED specialist," though his piece does a fine job of briefly chronicling Dickinson's life story. Another essay that takes a different slant is one titled "Giving Emily Dickinson to the World," by John S. Van E. Kohn.<sup>6</sup> This essay deals with the Margaret Jane Pershing Collection of Emily Dickinson and its formation as reflected in the early publishing history of the poet's books. Collector William White, a Dickinson devotee, wrote several pieces touching on Dickinson, one of the best being "The Emily Dickinson Industry,"<sup>7</sup> in which he decries the advance in prices paid for the early Roberts Brothers printings of the poet's books. A cursory glance through various bookseller's catalogs from the 1940s to the 1970s illustrate his point.

How, then, does one begin to collect an author whose books can be scarce and often costly? In today's collecting environment, for instance, one could expect to pay in the high four-figure range or more for a very good copy of the first printing of *Poems*, 1890, a price out of reach for most collectors. This is a product of the relatively tiny press runs of the

early editions and printings and Dickinson's increasing reputation as an author. Collectible books they may be, but very little space on my shelves is devoted to them. I've taken to heart Emily's statement that it is "Sweet to have had them lost / For News that they be saved" (J901), for, as tempting as these early editions are, there remain areas in this specialized sphere of collecting worthy of attention that are moderately priced or even inexpensive. I sincerely believe that affordable, undervalued treasures still beckon, so my focus as a collector is on autographed books about Dickinson, signatures of persons of interest, association copies of books concerning Dickinson, books about Dickinson once owned by Dickinson scholars, periodical literature associated with Dickinson during her lifetime, offprints of scholarly articles concerning Dickinson, non-print items, Dickinson-related philatelic items such as old letters, postal covers and period Amherst-ana.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>David A. Randall, *The J.K. Lilly Collection of Edgar Allan Poe: An Account of Its Formation*. The Lilly Library, Christmas, 1964.

<sup>2</sup>Charles E. Goodspeed, *Yankee Bookseller: Being the Reminiscences of Charles E. Goodspeed*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937.

<sup>3</sup>Sotheby's web site. James S. Copley Library auction, 2010-2011. Lot 19, Emily Dickinson letter, Spring, 1871, to Mrs. Henry Hills on the subject of love and charity, sold for \$18,750, June 17, 2011. Lot 20, 4 page letter to Mrs. Jonathan L. Jenkins, late May, 1877, sold for \$12,500.

<sup>4</sup>192 linear feet of boxes, a figure derived from adding up those numbers provided on the web sites for the Emily Dickinson Collection, Jones Library, Amherst, Millicent Todd Bingham Papers and Mabel Loomis Todd Papers, Sterling Memorial Library at Yale, Amherst College Emily Dickinson Collection, the Carlton and Territa A. Lowenberg Collection on Dickinson, University of Nebraska, Lincoln. This sum does not include other major Dickinson archives that do not provide measurement figures in linear feet on their web sites.

<sup>5</sup>R. Eden Martin, "Collecting Emily Dickinson," *The Caxtonian*, Vol. XV, No. 11, 2007.

<sup>6</sup>John S. Van E. Kohn, "Giving Emily Dickinson to the World," *The Princeton University Library Chronicle*, Volume XXXI, Number 1, Autumn 1969.

<sup>7</sup>William White, "The Emily Dickinson Industry," *American Book Collector*, Vol. XIX, No. 5, January, 1969.

# “Getting Creative in the Kitchen”: Dickinson Inspires Student Art

Robert K. Wallace and Nicci Mechler

I taught a graduate course in Emily Dickinson and Henry James at Northern Kentucky University for the first time during the 2011 Fall Semester. As with my undergraduate class, I gave students a choice between writing a research paper and creating an artistic expression for their final projects. Ten of my thirteen graduate students did their final projects on Dickinson, and all ten of those chose the creative option. One of those students, Nicci Mechler, collaborated with me in this co-authored essay. After I provide an overview of the Dickinson-inspired projects, she will discuss her creative experience in the class.

Nicci Mechler’s final project was a painted portrait on tissue and canvas entitled “Susie’s Girl: An American Flirt.” Visually striking and emotionally evocative, “Susie’s Girl” presents Emily as a young woman we could know and love today, her whitened flesh revealing shadows of text only if you get so close you could touch it. Nicci compared the process of painting this portrait to “getting creative in the kitchen,” whereas writing a research paper would have been more like “following a recipe.” Her primary ingredients were “ink and a brush,” mixed with love for Emily and Susie.

Halfway through the semester Heather Braley asked if she could create an Emily Dickinson Quilt. Doing so allowed her to pay tribute to eight favorite poems while participating in a family tradition deeply meaningful to her. Heather had been taught to sew by her grandmother when she was ten, and for this quilt she used thread that had belonged to her step-grandmother, who had died when she was six. The lines she stitched include “Immortal is an ample word.” Heather can now herself say, with both grandmothers and Emily, “Don’t put up my Thread and Needle.”

Carola Bell had created art before but she had never written poetry. Inspired by Dickinson’s emotional honesty, she created her own artist

book “Only Safe in Ashes.” Inside her hand-colored cover for the book, she hand-printed each letter of her eight-page autobiographical poem, beginning with “Drink me with invisible ink. / I am / Yours – Even if / No one can / See me.” The last page reads, “Burning the Love Letters, / She understood how much / Detached emotional / Masochism / Suited her.” You could smell the book as well as see and touch it because each page had been seared with actual flame.

Tom Clark’s goal in “Emily’s Civil War” was to “showcase the verses in which Dickinson captured the sense of loss and majesty that filtered from the battlefields all the way back to Amherst.” He did so in a sophisticated powerpoint slide show that weaves phrases from 13 Dickinson poems through 84 Civil War photographs accompanied by music from the Civil War period. The period photos are all in black and white, but somehow that made all the more effective the photo of soldiers standing in a field accompanied by Dickinson’s “A slash of Blue – A Sweep of Grey.”

The other Dickinson projects utilized a variety of media. Beth Coyle combined words, image, and music in the power-point soundscape she presented as “Punk Emily and Indie James.” Lauren Magee took Emily to the 2012 London Summer Olympics for her Emily Dickinson Podcast. Megan Deeter used “It’s coming – the postponeless Creature” as the frame for a ghost story set on a college campus. Justin Williams created a spoken-word performance inspired by “It’s such a little thing to Weep / So short a thing to Sigh.” Sharon Price created an artist book in which thirty-seven Dickinson first lines are juxtaposed against images from contemporary popular culture. Danielle Owens displayed eight Dickinson poems on eight vertical sheets framed with contrasting styles of scrapbooking.

What follows is Nicci’s account of the experience.

Literature class has always been made me want to draw. I think in a visual way, though the skill of execution varies depending on the pace of conversation, and the prowess of the writer to describe interesting characters. I will confess here and now to being an artist.

This past fall (2011), we spent the semester immersed in the texts of two well-respected authors of the late 19th century, exploring their works not only directly, but also through biography and contemporary criticism – contemporary to their time and to ours. We explored reproductions of artworks specifically mentioned in James’ prose – the author himself was quite a fan of painters and painting – and discussed the books Dickinson favored and the recipes mentioned in her letters. Through these readings, we began to connect in a full and sensory way with the stories. How better to understand the quality of light in the opening scene of *Daisy Miller* than to look at atmospheric watercolor studies of the same vistas? This practice gives us the best opportunity to see what James saw when he put his descriptions to paper. James’ interest in art was a doorway for me, an artist, into his sometimes difficult prose.

My experience with Emily was different from the start; indeed, I refer to her as Emily rather than Dickinson. I do not think she would mind the liberty. After an initial immersion in the lengthy sentences favored by James, her quick wit and the brevity of her lines were refreshing to the mind – the white space of her pages restful to the eye. I sat with her more easily, and found myself drawn into her world.

Where did she write?

What did her world look like?

Enticed by the spectrum of subjects covered in her poems, I was inspired to study her more closely, to absorb the Brazilian reds and morning-sky blues of her poetry, and delve into her life and letters. I began with Susan, and thus accessed her passion and lifelong friendship

– a thirty-year love affair in ink. I looked up her herbarium, which is scanned and available online. I scoured journals and websites looking for things her hands created – the pasting of a leaf with a hand-lettered label, the creases of her letters and her longhand script, the hand-sewn bindings of her fascicles – these things provided a view of her intimate life, and I began to think of her as a friend, perhaps someone I knew, and a fellow adventurer on the path of living and discovery.

And then I learned about her baking.

Emily's recipes do not include oven instructions, strict measurements, or mixing orders. She provides a list of ingredients, and it's understood that one already knows how to bake. Everything's optional, and sometimes different versions of the same recipe appear in letters, tailoring taste to a friend's palate. One evening, our graduate class indulged in a sweet coconut cake recipe from letter 665, exploring Emily's spiciest letters and love poems alongside another labor of her love – food. In this way, we invited the poet into our world, but also took a step deeper into hers.

In the classroom, students learn differently, express differently. Anyone who's ever sat in a classroom, let alone taught in one, knows this about us. We're distracted and overloaded beings, maddeningly curious about things; sometimes those things aren't covered in the text. We follow our passions, and it is the valuable professor who opens his or her door to allow us to delve into art, who trusts us to absorb information, to immerse ourselves in the material so far that we're able to generate our own pathways to understanding literature. Yes, we use the same building blocks on the journey, those pieces of information that essayists do – we look at criticism, read through supplementary texts, enter into discourse via respected scholars, check out news articles, gather up books on 18th Century architecture, decorative arts, and interiors. We bake coconut cakes from Emily's recipes, rail against Henry's long sentences, devise complicated revenge plots for Osmond, and imagine a world where Emily and Susan didn't have to

live with the space of a hedge between them for thirty-some years.

Some of us put them to music, choosing from a vast array of contemporary sounds to imagine what a young punk rock Emily would listen to, or how Henry might favor dark, alternative music and a smart vest. We pen seemingly fantastical tales of time travel and poetical duress. In these imaginings there is a fundamental truth – we are inspired.

In the flavor of our work, in the attention to detail, one can find sensitivity to Emily's line or Henry's mood. We interpret – filter these works through ourselves as we understand them, as we understand their critics and possibility, to create new works. We weave through the scholarship, into ourselves, and come out again with a stitched world of literary understanding, borrowing ancestral threads to tie these knots tight, binding our own lives to those we read. We see these works and writers differently, and come to be friends with them. Rather than repeat excerpts of the works that have come before us, in the same dusty style, we can take that Brazilian red and put it to canvas next to what we imagine to be the blue Emily mentions so much, and bring her to life again. We carry with us this thread of conversation, inherited from a shared American history. The graduate classroom is the perfect place to put it to the test, because the skills are there, and there are so many spices waiting to be tried.

I see my world visually. I translate everything through this filter, and I've been writing essays for most of my life – argument, evidence, and extrapolation. Though I'm trained that way, I find the art adds interpretation and translation, and allows me to go to new places. When I saw the line on our Dickinson and James syllabus about a creative option for the final, I was elated. I figured the creative writers in the room might opt to do something fictional or poetic, but I had no idea that almost everyone would opt for the creative approach. The quality of the thinking didn't suffer from a lack of training in art, and the class was fearless. We discovered things about ourselves and our

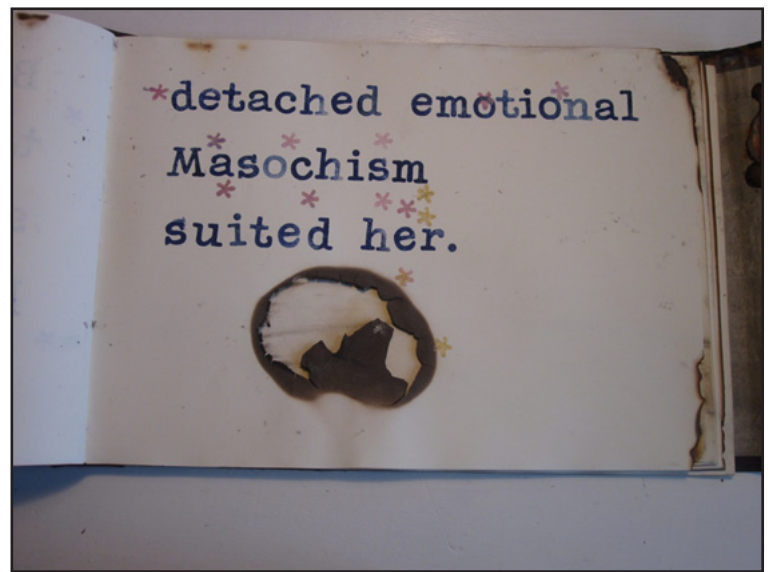
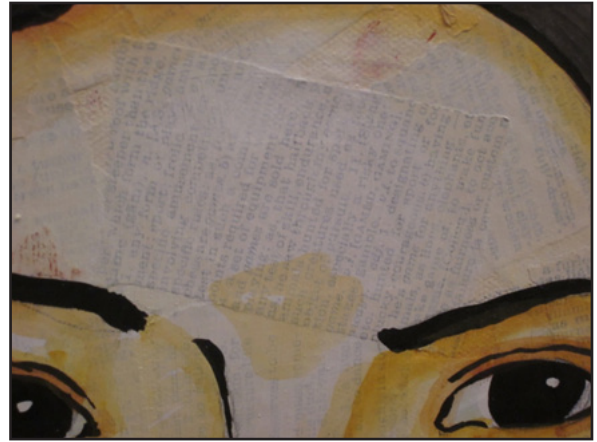
relationship to literature. We came away enriched, discussing and informing each other to the last.

My thirty-by-forty inch portrait of Emily as the young American flirt was inspired by Susan Gilbert Dickinson, Emily's letters and poems, and Henry James' "Daisy Miller," as well as by my history with bookmaking and writing, and the presentations of my fellow students who spoke the session before I did, integrating the music of one student, and the sass of another's interpretation. I thought of the passion deferred, and self-control the poet displayed in her life and poems, and again and again returned to her letters. I found Richard Wilbur's essay "Sumptuous Destitution" in which he writes of Emily, "her chief truthfulness lay in her insistence on discovering the facts of her inner experience." In this critic, I found a spiritual fellow. My inner experience is ever evolving, changed a little by everything I read – by research, by discussion. As I put brush and color to canvas, I thought about these words, revisiting what I thought might have been Emily's experience – I translated my idea of her character into a portrait, her passion to color and line, as if she were sitting in the studio with me. These new ingredients fleshed out the flavor, and imparted a more complex understanding of the text and poet.

This is the best gift we can give each other.

*Robert K. Wallace is Regents Professor of English at Northern Kentucky University. His interdisciplinary books include Jane Austen and Mozart, Melville and Turner, and Frank Stella's Moby-Dick. His book on Jake Heggie and Gene Scheer's Moby-Dick opera is forthcoming from University of North Texas Press in Spring 2013.*

*Nicci Mechler is an MA English candidate at Northern Kentucky University. Recent publications include fiction in the anthology Rapunzel's Daughters, and poetry in The Pinch. Nicci is currently working on a series of prints and mixed media illustrations about Emily Dickinson's relationships, recipes, and poems.*



Clockwise from lower left: Heather Braley with Emily Dickinson quilt; Nicci Mechler with Susie's Girl; detail, Susie's Girl; detail, Carola Bell's Only Safe in Ashes; Lauren Magee, Nicci Mechler, Carola Bell, and Heather Braley after presenting at Celebration event.

# A SCRAPBOOK OF IMAGES FROM CLEVELAND



# Facing Emily Dickinson

By Ellen Beinhorn

*FACING EMILY*



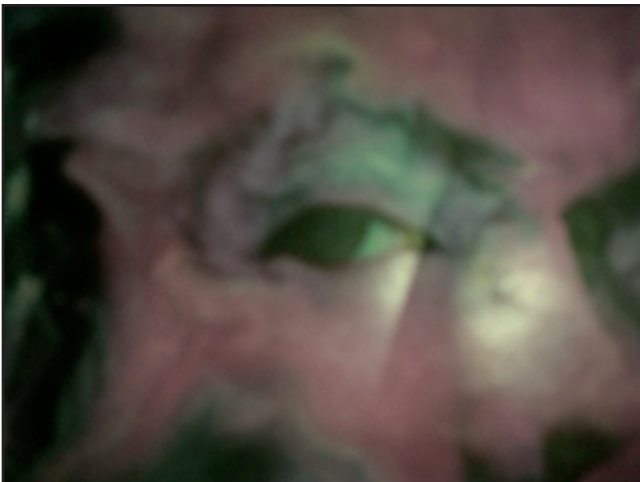
*WHY DO THEY SHUT ME OUT OF HEAVEN?*



*THE SOUL HAS BANDAGED MOMENTS*



*THE FACE YOU CHOOSE TO MISS*





Being a portrait artist and a lover of verse, I have long been drawn to the magic of Emily Dickinson's words. Her poems have continually conjured up faces and they have finally inspired me to do a series of portraits based upon phrases from her writings.

Questions have long been with me as to what made this singular person produce a well of thought which she was able to put into words. Was it ambition? Challenge? Frustration? Was it because the given genius was just there?

Given the context of her life it would appear that her creativeness was the incontestable drive in all her poems that reveal a depth of universal understanding which is a marvel. She wrote about what she felt and observed.

Perhaps the absence of others in Dickinson's life enabled her to know herself. Dickinson's thoughts partnered her life, as she translated them into astounding words.

Did Dickinson see faces as she wrote? Her poems describe thoughts that are readily transcribed into portraits. There are quite a few quiet faces as you pass by such phrases as, "Why – do they shut me out of Heaven?" (Fr268)

In her letters Dickinson herself sometimes used pictorial cut-outs to help form mental pictures of her poems and words. In this poem, contained in a letter, she uses four illustrations to give further meaning to her words:

Life is but a Strife –  
T'is a bubble –  
T'is a dream –  
And man is but a little *boat* –  
Which paddles down the stream. (L33)

In another, to Susan Gilbert, she draws a staff with music notes and writes,

Dear Susie – I send  
you a little air –  
The "Music of the Spheres."  
They are represented above  
as passing thro' the sky.  
(L134, lineation, Smith and Hart, *Open Me Carefully*)

My mission in transposing Dickinson's mastery of poetic thought into portraits is to enlarge her audience. Faces of thought can draw people out and into the meaning of the poem's words.

When we read Dickinson's words, they change us. My object in creating the faces of her poetry was to do the same. I selected phrases and poems to put into my sketchbook and began the

game of interpreting words into countenances that would evoke additional understanding.

Sometimes my brushes were silent, and I listened to her words and I learned. The faces began to evolve, revealing the complexities and details of the poems. Something unique was happening. The tensions of good and evil, reality and dreams in humanity, became clear in the portraits, as if the poems had literally spoken to the faces.

All artists feel a responsibility to their creativeness, and I like to believe that Dickinson, in command of her thoughts, must have known peace and serenity in her uniqueness and privacy. She never knew that she was to enlarge lives of individuals who accept the task of living life as completely as they are capable.

I feel privileged to have been given the opportunity to communicate the greatness of Dickinson in my faces of her words. As curator of a North Carolina art gallery, I was asked to speak to a senior fellowship group of the University of North Carolina at Appalachia. The subject was left to my discretion, providing a perfect opportunity to launch "The Faces of Emily Dickinson."

Here was to be an audience mature, and probably wise and open to receive something other than the blah-de-blah of current fashion. As the presentation of chosen Emily Dickinson poems along with my portraits translating her words proceeded, the room quieted into self-absorption.

The landscape of faces in the audience was, in reality, her poems. For Dickinson's poems are men and women with their experiences in the inextricable circumstances of time, place, flesh and blood. They are not history – they are of today – they are everyman.

When my offering closed, I was caught up in a fear I had gone over their heads, but no such thing. One elderly man commented, "I'm too full to speak." Another said the portraits brought the poems to life, and another said, "Dickinson is never out of step." I decided to reinforce the concept into a book – *Emily and Me* (Dancingfish Press 2008).

My portraits, begotten by the poems, hopefully depict thought – between breakfast and supper – between life and death. As a poem is a secret about a secret – a face reveals the secrets.

*Educated at the University of Oxford in England, Ellen Beinhorn is an artist and educator. Her paintings and sculptures range from portraits to wind blown steel forms for gardens. Beinhorn founded the Sculpture House & Gardens in the Carmel Highlands of California before moving to Banner Elk, NC. She is the author of Emily and Me and recently completed for publication her memoir with her poems and creative portraits.*

Series Editor, *Maryanne Garbowsky*

## The Little White House Project: “Dwell in Possibility”

When Emily Dickinson first wrote “I Dwell in Possibility,” she could not have imagined how her words would inspire a Deerfield Academy student or what he would do with them. What began with the seed – the words of her poem – blossomed into “The Little White House Project: ‘Dwell in Possibility,’” thanks to the fertile imagination of a young Peter Krasznekewicz.

As described in his personal website, the purpose of the Little White House Project, roughly 40 houses, 4’x7’x8’, installed first on the campus of Deerfield Academy and then, from May 12 to June 30, 2012, at the Emily Dickinson Museum, was threefold:

- Create artwork to reinvent and complement the landscape of two historical sites;
- Showcase Emily Dickinson’s quotes and share her profound view of the world;
- Demonstrate green building materials and minimal waste using Forest Stewardship Counsel (FSC) approved materials to build the small houses and then use the panels in the construction of a house in partnership with Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity.

In the end, he hoped that “The combination of these themes [might create] an exhibit that interacts with the surroundings and provides viewers with something to enjoy and think about. The exhibits are built within the community and then used to contribute permanently to the community” (*Action Art*).

Peter traces his “early exposure” to Dickinson’s poems back to his sister Allegra, a junior at Yale, who helped with the project. “When we were very young, my sister Allegra and I created a

slideshow based on a small white cardboard house named Emily” after the poet (*Action Art*). He also recalls that he always had “a desire to build and design houses,” something that may have begun when his father “built a green house for me based on the Monopoly houses,” a favorite childhood game (*Action Art*).

In an interview, Peter states that “the houses . . . mirror local barns in the area.” They “are white” and “easy to set up and install.” He planned them to act as “a canvas” for the poet’s words, so that the quotations themselves became the “focal point” (*Asakiyume*). While he stenciled the words on the houses, he “spent a lot of time thinking intensely about a single word.” The individual word “makes each panel unique” but at the same time the words can be put together in a new way by the viewer – almost as if the words are “new phrases or thoughts,” (*Asakiyume*)

For the construction of the houses, Peter hired local carpenters, a father and his two sons, to work with him. The houses are simple in design, requiring few cuts and panels. They were

constructed of sustainable “formaldehyde-free plywood panels” (*Lederman*). The houses were “laced throughout the downtown” of Amherst as well as at the Homestead, The Evergreens, and Sweetser Park. When Peter first approached Jane Wald, the executive director of the Emily Dickinson Museum, about the project, she was struck with the young man’s vision and “the creative imagining of Emily Dickinson’s poetry, and the words, words that are the building blocks of expression.” Using houses as a canvas for words, she explained, allowed a viewer “to become a participant in the art” (*Lederman*).

Peter, an enterprising and entrepreneurial young man, was able to raise “over \$50,000 in cash and services to fund the project” (*Asakiyume*). His nonprofit website, Action Art Inc., allowed him to get his project off the ground. “In the initial stages of the project most people were hesitant to give donations to a 15 year-old high school student,” but after Deerfield Academy and the Emily Dickinson Museum approved the exhibit and gave permission for it to be shown on their grounds “donations were easier to get” (*Asakiyume*).



Photos are from the entries on the installation in the *Asakiyume Live-journal*, a wide-ranging blog on arts and ideas.

As difficult as it was to get donations, there were other obstacles to overcome. He not only shattered his collarbone and had two subsequent surgeries, there were other problems when “300 sheets of the wrong wood” were delivered (*Asakiyume*), or when two weeks before the houses were to be set up on the Deerfield campus, the flooding from Hurricane Irene forced the exhibit to be relocated (*Weisstuch*). Thus Dickinson’s words “Dwell in Possibility” took on more personal meaning: “I’m encouraging people to think about the words . . . and realize anything is possible no matter what gets in your way” (*Asakiyume*).

# DICKINSON AND THE VISUAL ARTS



Kraszneckewicz crafting a little house.

The “Little White Houses,” built for this exhibit are now on sale by the Pioneer Valley Habitat for Humanity for \$250 each. The money will be used by the organization “for the next Habitat home built in the Valley” (*GazetteNet*). It is suggested that they may be used as “garden storage sheds or as children’s playhouses” (*GazetteNet*).

Moreover, “over 600 1’ by 1’ panels have been donated to schoolchildren and artists to paint on and eventually will be sold to raise money for local charities” (*Asakiyume*). Some of these panels will be canvases for paintings based on Emily Dickinson’s poems and will be shown in coordination with “Emily’s Rhapsody” as part of the 2012 Amherst Biennial in the fall (*Emily Dickinson Museum*).

Peter notes in a personal interview that he hopes to encourage viewers to believe in themselves and in their abilities, but also to bring beauty into their lives “through art and words.” The individual words stenciled on the houses become “more powerful and poignant,” creating “poetry from the poetry of Emily.” They will make people stop and think; they may see nature differently. Perhaps they will think about our society and its many conflicts, or they will become more aware of the environment and take better care of it. “By making the project green and creating no waste,” Peter has tried to parallel the poet’s own appreciation for nature.

Peter’s future plans include working with local communities as much as he can. “I want my projects to be good investments for the donors as well as the communities involved” (*Asakiyume*). He has already been approached by foundations in California to work with other writers like poet Robinson

Jeffers and author John Steinbeck. He admires “people who get things done and aren’t afraid to try new things,” people like the artist Christo, whom he studied in the eighth grade, as well as Frank Lloyd Wright, Frank Gehry, Steve Jobs, and his own father (*Asakiyume*).

But for now, Peter still has another year of high school to complete. He has many years ahead to work on other creative ventures. He will certainly keep Dickinson’s words close as they continue to inspire him that “anything is possible” (*Asakiyume*). The poet herself would be proud.

---

## Works Cited

*Action Art, Inc.* Web. 21 August 2012

*Asakiyume.livejournal.* Web. 22 June 2012

*Emily Dickinson Museum.* Web. May 2012

“Emily Dickinson Museum Installation being Sold to Benefit Habitat for Humanity.” *GazetteNet.* Web. 21 August 2012.

Kraszneckewicz, Peter. E-mail message to author. 29 June 2012.

Lederman, Diane. “Amherst Showcases the Words of Emily Dickinson in Environmental Art Project.” *The Republican.* 12 May 2012.

Weisstuch, Liza. “Homing in on Dickinson’s Poems.” *The Boston Globe* 22 May 2012.

---

*Continued from page 17*

original documents or key people and thwart cooperation. This appears to have been the case for Josephine Pollitt and played a role in her holding back from publication her keen and insightful articles as well as prematurely ending her career as a scholar in her own right. The “revolution” in Dickinson studies – led by Harvard men – most notably Johnson, who was aided by Leyda – also helped push to the side and denigrate the contributions of early, mostly women, biographers including Bianchi, Pollitt, Taggard, and Bingham. Pollitt deferred to her husband’s research and to the

Harvard and Yale men who began dominating Dickinson scholarship by the 1950s. It’s too bad. She had something unique to contribute.

Materials of Josephine Pollitt (and her husband) are archived at Amherst College’s Frost Library. Harvard’s Houghton Library possesses some Pollitt correspondence in their Bianchi Papers. Finally, the holdings of Brown’s John Hay Library contain additional Pollitt correspondence and several unpublished papers in their Bianchi holdings including “A Swan Song” and “The Lovers of Emily Dickinson.”

---

*A former EDIS Scholar-in-Amherst, Aife Murray is the author of Maid as Muse: How Servants Changed Emily Dickinson’s Life and Language. She has led public walking tours of Amherst from the Dickinson servants’ perspective and has created a mixed media installation and public art for The Mead Museum’s Word as Object: Emily Dickinson and Contemporary Art. She collaborated with the Dickinson Museum’s house cleaners and gardeners on the artists’ book, Art of Service.*

# POET TO POET

*Continued from page 10*

hurried care, in the hours following a death, to put out food for the new ghost, to appease its inevitable anger at such abandonment . . . Hungry ghosts, they are called. And the small tables heaped with gleaming colorful vegetables and steaming chicken outside the mourning houses are not mere gestures of hospitable provision, but calculated stays against danger. Such danger, nevertheless, and certainly such hunger, are what serious writing, particularly poetry, honors. The strain and silence in Dickinson's best work suggest something not finally and perfectly etched, but willfully incomplete, broken off – sometimes violently. Her power is costly, and continuing, because it seems only partly visible, yet for all that believable to us, compelling us forward, a curious machinery with its immediate, eternal spins and hums" (Boruch, 34 – 35).

\*

## Outliving Emily

When it is May, if May return.  
– Emily Dickinson (10 December 1830 – 15 May 1886)

Knobby corms buried  
above the buried dog. Three.  
One for each child grown and gone away.

"This is freedom!" you mimed with a key in air.  
And bulb noses poked emerald through secret black leaves  
last March. Asphyxiation. Horrible dragging

of breath in and out before the chaired watchers,  
all privacy choked. Early April: Poet's Narcissus  
above the dog's grave. Don't touch.

May advanced. Austin's diary: "would not wake again  
this side. The day was awful."  
Summer stormed in, wild goddess,

stone wall toppled, shingles stripped off,  
electric stakes plunging. But rain  
brought the day-lilies for which you were "Lunatic."

My mother, crone in unmatched shoes  
on the wrong feet, cut a divot through the forehead  
of her paper doll. Ulysses S. Grant.

My father and I canned tomatoes, ten bushels.  
Seeds in my hair and clothes for days. Fortnight later,  
long bridge back from a week at the beach,

I can't stop crying. Your Norcross, one of few  
from whom you did not run, had travelled away.

Hours, weeks, the futile saving of daylight.  
"Homeless at home," you wrote. And yet.  
And yet, to disappear enhances –  
Peeper canticles. Crickets. The last mourning rags

dangle on the rosehips. Cinnamon bits.  
Frosted fence. Then winter,  
brutal, voweled, but returning light,

bringing my gypsy, despair  
dispelled. This year my blade's  
a yes among the stems. A new dog pulls

back outside. Moon-globe streetlamps  
make cul-de-sacs exotic. Insects ignite my leash arm,  
fly. Abide. Unadjourned. And you ever by.

(Lisa Russ Spaar, forthcoming in *Vanitas, Rough*, Persea Books, 2012)

\*

"Great Hungers feed themselves" (L652).

---

## Works Cited

Bishop, Elizabeth. *Elizabeth Bishop: Poems, Prose & Letters*. Library of America, 2008.

Boruch, Marianne. "Dickinson Descending" in *Poetry's Old Air*. Ann Arbor, U of Michigan, 1995.

Hopkins, Gerard Manley. *Poems and Prose*. 1954: London and New York, Penguin, 1985.

Porter, David. "Introduction" to *Dickinson: The Modern Idiom*, Cambridge & London, Harvard, 1981.

Valéry, Paul. "Poetry and Abstract Thought" in *The Art of Poetry*. Trans., D. Folliot, 1939: Princeton, 1989.

Werner, Marta. *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios: Scenes of Reading, Surfaces of Writing*. Ann Arbor, U of Michigan, 1995.

---

*Among Spaar's publications are two recent collections of poetry, Satin Cash (2008) and the forthcoming Vanitas, Rough (2012), both published by Persea Books, the edited volumes Acquainted with the Night: Insomnia Poems and All that Mighty Heart: London Poems, and a collection of essays, The Hide-and-Seek Muse: Annotations of Contemporary Poetry, due out from Drunken Boat Media in 2013.*

Continued from page 13

MH: How does thinking about Dickinson in these ways complement or critique other approaches?

JD: It's a matter of supplementing them. One way to measure the impact of the topic of Dickinson and philosophy is to look at the biographies. "Dickinson" has been largely constructed by the people around her, the impact of others on her, her relationships with Sue and other figures in her family, her potential lovers and that kind of thing, so looking at Dickinson and philosophy quite seriously helps to reshape the conversations that exist already. It could encourage people to follow Dickinson more philosophically, to look more deeply into the texts that she read, to try to follow how she read them, how she acquired the vocabulary. It will really change the way readers understand the poems and how Dickinson herself understood poems; and, in the economy of readers' own mental exercises, the Dickinson poems have a chance to become something much more important and significant, I think, than simply being testimony to biographical development or other kinds of arguments.

\* \* \*

MH: To what extent is Dickinson a consistent philosopher?

JD: I think there's a very important sense in which she is a consistent philosopher, and by that I mean, that she returns to certain kinds of inquiries, certain patterns of thought, and certain leitmotifs; certain questions continue to bother her and inspire her throughout her whole life. Having said that, there's a sense in which she is not in the least a systematic philosopher or a committed, dogmatic philosopher of one kind or another. Philosophy, if you look at her poems, often gets represented as a kind of unique, interesting source of erudition, but ultimately one that doesn't answer the questions that it itself provokes. "Philosophy don't know,"

she puts it in one poem. You realize she understands different philosophies as different vocabularies, or different, limited resources. She appreciates them, she uses them, but never commits in any essential way to any particular vocabulary. This makes it very hard for critics. Dickinson was perfectly capable of reading the New Testament in the morning, Isaac Watts on mental philosophy in the afternoon, and a Gothic novel later, and using vocabulary from all of them, simultaneously. So in that sense, she's an extremely open-minded and wide-open philosopher.

MH: I agree with you, but I think that your book has established, and if I'm not mistaken, I bet most of the essays in the collection would agree, that she's anti-metaphysical and anti-foundationalist, you know?

JD: Yes, I think we could definitely say that. The idea that philosophy reinforces Christian doctrine, which is exactly the message that was driven home at Amherst College in hundreds and hundreds of hours of lectures for students, she came to distrust that completely, I think that's fair to say; and the idea of a strong metaphysics or the possibility that humans could develop a single God's-eye perspective on all human and non-human events, she came to see as almost totally incorrect. So to that extent she falls into a pragmatic philosophical tradition.

MH: Yeah, I would probably push that way. And then, of course, to be contrary, I want to say, But there are moments of some kind of unaccountable bliss! But they're rare.

JD: There are moments when she seems to commit to a sort of strong metaphysical or Christian metaphysical discourse, and if you take them by themselves, those poems can be read into that tradition quite easily. The trick, of course, is that they never stand alone, in the economy of all her writing and all her thinking.

MH: She doesn't stay there, right.

JD: They take their place as experiments or attempts; they don't stand for the rest of things that she's thinking.

MH: Right, well, and maybe that's pragmatic also.

JD: Exactly.

The following poem by Melanie Hubbard will appear in her forthcoming collection, *We Have With Us Your Sky*, from Subito Press.

*A description of John Tawell, who murdered his mistress in Slough in 1844, was wired ahead of him as, disguised as a Quaker, he fled by rail to London. The telegraph code at the time did not include the letter Q. – Carolyn Marvin*

#### DRESSED LIKE A KWAKER

You were five: a lie.  
You were ten. Have you ever lost

a friend, slowly or suddenly?  
You strive to spin a quarter

on its edge: fillet of light: a face  
and a house inside each other.

Mobled Queen, Mundo Lindo.  
What a fabulous air you have about you.

Bullets ricochet to the north. Divine  
a neater way, blast off in those glass

galoshes peeling mud.  
Suck the spit from your teeth

toward your tongue. In the dark,  
we'll identify you by that sound.

You cannot fail, you can only vary  
from yourself like a coelacanth.

We have you in the nets.

# TEACHING DICKINSON

*Continued from page 15*

Dickinson's law elsewhere of "sumptuous destitution," the idea that the transcendent is by necessity not to be attained. Once attained, no longer transcendent. And any student who has lusted after an I-Pod for a year and then taken it for granted two days after being thrillingly presented with one is included in that design without a subject.

This versatile, analogical quality of a poem, encompassing whatever subject you bring to it, is what Dickinson must mean when, in "I Dwell in Possibility/A fairer House than Prose –," she describes her "Occupation" as "The spreading wide my narrow Hands / To gather Paradise –" (J657).

I know some teachers encourage their students not to seek Dickinson herself in her poetry, and I agree wholeheartedly, in the superficial sense of seeking "real-life" clues. Dickinson clearly tells Higginson that her speaker is "an imagined person." But someone did write these words, an essential Dickinson. And so teaching Dickinson requires keeping the eye on the "I," the overall life experience and consciousness – the soul – expressed in the poems that binds the poet and the reader.

When I first read Dickinson, after the initial compound of alarm and delight at a new way of encountering language, I had a revelation that is both startling and banal: she's really nice. Dickinson was, is, a lovely person. Her fellow-feeling is implicit in the poems and proven in the letters. She is kind beyond any norm, generously and expertly empathic. Especially in consoling the bereaved, she assigns her enormous, acute intelligence to the service of comfort. She does well at sharing joy but she does best at embracing pain. Real empathy requires confession; and when, in "I measure every Grief I meet," Dickinson writes, "The grieved are many – I am told –," she pretends to a distance and disinterest that she quickly undercuts:

A piercing Comfort it affords  
In passing Calvary –

To note the fashions – of the Cross –  
And how they're mostly worn –  
Still fascinated to presume  
That some – are like my own – (J561)

We all have a cross to bear, she knows. The language of cold analysis – measuring grief, noting the fashions of the Cross, even being "fascinated to presume" – communicates a red-hot pain no histrionic exclamations could convey as effectively. The seemingly analytical language does not really imply a collected calm but its opposite, a reaction of repressed agony. In "After great pain, a formal feeling comes" (J341), and in many other poems, Dickinson's persona is a wounded logician. But the logic matters too, for it makes her grief a version of everyone's. This makes being nice a rigorous and even fierce philosophy of being. We are all "lonesome for we know not what," each in our individual "fashion."

Dickinson's healthy, large soul is why I have always reacted angrily to the biographical descriptions of her eccentricities. The Dickinson of the poetry is in one crucial sense the opposite of quirky, eccentric. She generalizes experience while particularizing it; the poetry simultaneously feels intimately personal and general. Readers find their own most particular experiences in it while recognizing that this experience extrapolates to a universal class.

Commentators extrapolate all kinds of supposed life events from faint evidence or else criticize her for apparently not having lived a life at all. But the poetry insists that what matters is not the event but how it makes a mark on the self. When she writes "The Grieved are many – I am told –," she continues, "There is the various Cause," suggesting that what matters is how grief or any other emotion gets experienced; the event, the cause, is irrelevant, narrowing.

But when I introduce Dickinson to students, I'm aware that they need something of the life first, if only to get it mostly out of the way. I even start with the myths about her person, in the service of establishing the humanity behind the eccentric manner. Yes, she sometimes spoke to people from behind a door, but that was because she found each new one of us so startlingly unique, because she saw into each person and lacked whatever protections most of us erect against the startling encounter with individuality. "I never was with anyone who drained my nerve power so much," her professional friend and editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* Thomas Wentworth Higginson wrote of her to his wife after a short visit (L342b). Dickinson's distance was thoughtful, then, too, for she presented an intensity hard on her and on those she encountered. Her nerve endings were as if on the surface of her skin, and this absence of defenses no doubt contributed to the greatness of the poetry: "A thought went up my mind today –" (J701) like a physical creature. To express how a person can be meaningfully eccentric, strange but in a humane cause – to get beyond a scorn for weirdness – is to offer students something truly worth pondering.

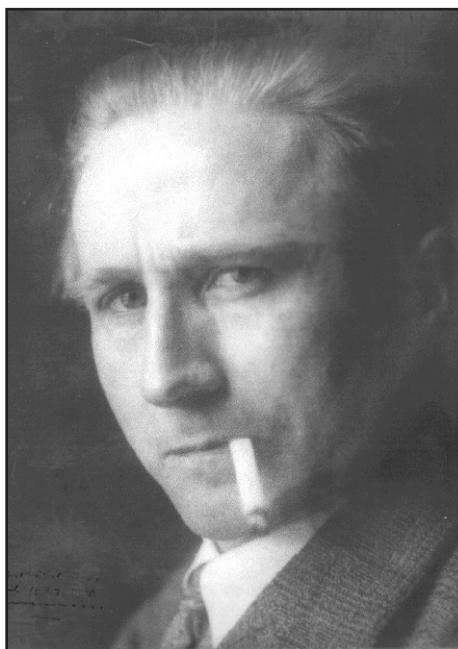
If the words are about the poet's "I," they are about us too, and we shouldn't make a secret of it. Our students must understand that they have a stake in this meaning and in this moment in the classroom. As we address the challenging complexities of language and social context, we must not lose sight of literature as a primal aid to our experience. What follows won't matter enough if we do not begin with that.

*The author of Emily Dickinson's Poetry (1975), Robert Weisbuch taught and chaired the English Department for many years at the University of Michigan before serving as President of the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship Foundation, and subsequently, as President of Drew University, leaving the post in June 2012.*

# Emily Dickinson's Secret Language: A New Website Devoted to the Work of Hans W. Luescher

By Rolf Amsler and Margaret Freeman

Responding to an English reviewer who claimed that Dickinson's poetry lacked eroticism, Rebecca Patterson writes: "There is . . . no more erotic poetry in the English language. This is the secret of her drive, of its febrile energy, of the inexplicable fascination it has for many baffled readers."<sup>1</sup> Long before Patterson penned these words in 1951, Hans W. Luescher, a Swiss emigrant to the United States, had not only independently discovered the poetry's erotic quality in the course of his translating Dickinson's poems into German, but had painstakingly set out to provide evidence that would account for it, concluding that Dickinson had created a double language, at one level writing the masterpieces of poetry, and on another, using the poetry as her diary, describing, in lush detail, her erotic experiences. Hans describes the problem of Dickinson's enigmatic writing as follows:



probing research could work out the symbol-meanings, their correlations . . . and the ways of their articulation.

Hans devoted more than thirty years of his life to deciphering Dickinson's secret language through the creation of a complex symbol system, long before the advent of concordances or computers. The result of Hans's labors is a massive database which he was never able to publish in his lifetime. This database, among his many other prolific writings, he bequeathed to his relative, Rolf Amsler, in the hopes that Rolf would be able to make his findings available to the world.

This Rolf has now done in creating a website, *Emily Dickinson's Secret Language* (<http://www.emily-dickinson.net>), that contains much, though not all, of the material on Dickinson that Hans created. (They do not as yet include Hans's translations of almost 400 Dickinson poems into German, approximately 10,000 pages of early analyses, nor his many other writings that include philosophical essays, travel reports, and daybooks). Among these materials, one intriguing manuscript is described in the following account Hans gave of his initial encounter with Dickinson:

In spite of beautiful, easily translatable language . . . , the poems of Emily Dickinson are very often obscure to the point of unintelligibility. An element of odd expressions and bizarre poetic situations pervades them which tend to emerge from translation as senseless, even absurd statements. I began to conjecture that these poems might carry hidden esoteric freight which could elucidate their inner meaning. But how could one fathom such disguised communications?

[A] literal, word-for-word translation in a just slightly elevated prose . . . brought a deepened acquaintance with the work in its totality, but little new enlightenment and no solution. So, at long last, I asked, "what is happening here? what is the hidden secret? Wonderingly I began to search out certain oddities . . . . There were above all groups of words throughout the work whose meanings would appear as abstract unrealities in one instance and as highly personified concrete carriers of poetic action in another. To mention but a few: "sun," "heaven," "earth,"

"clouds," "wind," "water," "windowpane," "fly," "spider," "birds," "bees," "butterflies," "pebble," "sea," "coast," "morning," "noon," "evening," "night," and again and again: "day," "day," "day"! The frequent repetition of these words and several hundreds more gave rise to mental discomfort. Finally I could not get rid of an impression that a nimbus of symbolic double meanings hovered around a great number of nouns and about some verbs, adverbs and adjectives likewise.

And so, then, I began to prospect for possible second meanings in her usage of such words. In doing so it became quite necessary to subject the personality and the life experience to conjectures about any and all possible and admissible human frailties. . . . In tracing them, it also soon appeared that I had before me a word- and sense-labyrinth created by an incredible gift for dissembling and sense for double meanings, a private language within the language so to say, in whose inter-related sense-alignments, sense-deductions and sense-combinations only a tenaciously

I was attracted to Emily Dickinson's poems around 1944, at the beginning of a highly emotional experience of many years duration, which found copious expression in a diary written in English. This experience, as well as the expression of it, has striking similarities with what must have been the Dickinson experience during the years 1859-64. I believe it gave me some special key to the inside understanding of the Dickinson experience.<sup>2</sup>

The decision to publish Hans's database electronically rather than trying to attempt an edited volume resulted from the realization that much work needs to be done with the commentaries

scattered throughout the corpus. These commentaries include an historical construction of Dickinson's relationships with Samuel Bowles and Kate Scott Anthon, Hans's descriptions and evaluations of his methodology, identification and explanation of the symbol system, as well as the poetic analyses themselves. Among these analyses are to be found what Hans called "Rosetta Stone" poems, those poems that are particularly instructive in guiding readers into the way Dickinson steered her poetic images toward their erotic meanings.<sup>3</sup>

Presenting these materials electronically will enable researchers to follow particular strands of enquiry that Hans opened up in his work. For example, Hans believed that the chronology of poems in the Johnson variorum edition needed to be adjusted. He based his conclusion on the historical reconstruction he made in his analyses and commentaries of Dickinson's meetings with Samuel Bowles and Kate Scott Anthon. One might study whether Hans's re-ordering corresponds with Franklin's chronology based on different principles. In an unpublished essay, "A Riddle Person and Her Riddle Work," Hans comments on the difficulties of chronologically ordering Dickinson's poems:

I have endeavored to accommodate my insights as well as possible in the translation. I aimed at moderate elucidation of the secret contents, I avoided however to relate the actual circulatory coins of the secret language to their bare hidden sense. Every elucidation necessarily leads to a slight shift in the sense of the analogon and thus to blurring of image and effect of the outer poem. I attempted to leave both untouched as far as possible.

Unfortunately I encountered huge problems when determining the new order. *Per se* it is a hazardous undertaking to attempt to extract from the piece meal of so many poems the

**PARTIAL INDEX TO HANS' GERMAN TRANSLATIONS**

1. BAND

WEIB OHNE DAS ZEUGNIS

Der Jungferntod  
Der dunkle Freund  
Die weisse Frau  
Die vergessene Seele  
Komm langsam Eden  
Dem Wunder zum Gleichnis

2. BAND

DER GRILLE SANG

Das Jahr im Jubelrund  
Ich kann nicht mit dir leben  
Ein Flecken im entehrten Gras  
Die Saat im Lebensfeld

story of a long lost great love and to elucidate these to the reader, especially when these poems are masked by a secret language. It not only assumes a faultless interpretation of the secret messages – and how would this be possible? – but also a good share of practical psychological philosophy.

A second difficulty was [that] . . . the poetess felt obliged by the constraints of the secret language to continuously use her past experiences as analogon for the present. . . This mixing of composition can go so far as to have heterosexual meanings stand for homosexual aspects and vice versa. [Likewise,] two opposing syndromes, "Death and Dyeing [sic]" on one and "Life and being born" on the other hand, bear the apparent contradiction that they are often interchanged in the secret sense, Death meaning Life and Life standing for Death. This astonishing aspect is explained by the changing standpoints in

observation of events in which two persons participate and in which each "wins" or succumbs," "must die" or "comes to life" and both simultaneously with changing points of view.

We do not know what prompted Hans's own ordering of poems in the various packets he created. Close research into both the two German volumes and Hans's own packets may reveal chronological support for his historical construction of Dickinson's experiences. Hans himself was puzzled during the first stage of his work by various word patterns and analyses that did not seem to fit the heterosexual encounters that literary critics and biographers assumed characterized Dickinson's love relationships. When he read Patterson's thesis suggesting a lesbian relationship between Dickinson and Kate Scott Anthon in *The Riddle of Emily Dickinson* (1951), the remaining pieces of the puzzle fell into place, and he meticulously redid his earlier analyses to accommodate the homoerotic into his symbol system.

<sup>1</sup>Rebecca Patterson, *Emily Dickinson's Imagery*. Edited, with an introduction, by Margaret H. Freeman (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts, 1979), p. 30.

<sup>2</sup>From a letter to Thomas J. Wilson, Director of Harvard University Press, August 22, 1959. An introduction to Hans's background that includes his own commentaries on his Dickinson work can be found under "Critical Essays" on the website and would serve as a good starting point for readers wishing to learn more about Hans and his discoveries.

<sup>3</sup>Opening up the page for each symbol will give Hans's brief definition, plus a list of poems containing that symbol. Rolf and his webmaster, Andee Link have provided "Research Options" for all pages in the database. These enable the viewer to search according to 1) alphabetical or numerical order of poems, 2) the dates of Hans's recorded entries, and 3) Hans's organization of poems into the packets he created, or Mabel Loomis Todd's fascicle order from which Hans worked.

It is hoped that the materials provided in these databases will provide ample and varied sources for critical essays that can be posted on the site in order to provide a lively interactive exchange among Dickinsonians, whether general readers, students, or scholars. We also encourage licensed users to consider sponsoring and assisting in the program to add the rest of Hans's work to the site. Although visitors to the site may access the dictionary of symbols and most other pages, Hans's poem analyses are restricted to licensed users. However, the first twenty poem analyses listed on the "Poems" page are freely available for viewing to give readers a sense for Hans's approach and methods. Registration information is provided on the "Home" page under "How to Access the Archives." Individual users may purchase unlimited access to the entire website for an annual fee of \$8.00. Multi-user licenses are available to institutions for an annual fee of \$350. Revenue from the website will go to the HANS W. LUESCHER MEMORIAL FOUNDATION whose aim is to create a complete electronic archive of all Hans's materials. We very much hope that you will visit *Emily Dickinson's Secret Language* at [www.emily-dickinson.net](http://www.emily-dickinson.net) and enjoy browsing through Hans's remarkable research into this remarkable poet.



## By Barbara Kelly, Book Review Editor

**Brown, Julie**

*Writers on the Spectrum: How Autism and Asperger Syndrome Have Influenced Literary Writing.*

Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishing, 2010. 236 pp. Paper, ISBN 1-84310-913-6, \$55.95.

Longtime writing instructor and mother of an autistic child, Brown studies “the impact that Asperger’s Syndrome has on literary writing.” Finding common symptoms of autism and Asperger’s Syndrome in a number of authors, she provides a chapter each on Hans Christian Anderson, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson (95-116), Lewis Carroll, William Butler Yeats, Sherwood Anderson, and Opal Whitley. Brown explains that autism presents itself as a spectrum of developmental disorders from severe to very mild. At the milder end of the spectrum, those with Asperger’s Syndrome “exhibit high intelligence levels.” Brown says, Dickinson was an original genius who exhibited “both the impairments and gifts typical of those with Asperger’s Syndrome.” Among her impairments were sensory issues, poor handwriting, and problems with boundaries between herself and others; however her autism enabled her intense focus on poetry and influenced it in four ways: “an autistic disregard of audience; a quirky use of language that wrestled against conventions; a reliance on metaphor and symbol; and the exploration of themes and ideas related to autism.” Brown supports her cogent study with analysis of Fr 242, 340, 512, 563, 706, 867, 1286, 1570, and references to other poems and letters. She concludes, Dickinson “is an important part of autistic history and culture, and her poetry has much to teach us about the ‘complex corridors of the mind’ and ‘the secret chambers of the human heart.’” An introduction, works cited, and further read-

ing are included in this lucid, well researched study.

**Henderson, Desirée**

*Grief and Genre in American Literature, 1790-1870.*

Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011. 189 pp. Cloth, ISBN 1-4094-2086-6, \$99.95.

Focusing on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American representations of death and mourning in literature, oratory, and culture, Henderson examines how authors engaged with conventional responses to loss and grief by challenging traditional modes, adapting, revising, and innovating. Following an introduction are five chapters: “The Imperfect Dead: Funeral Sermons, Fallen Women, and the Early American Novel,” “American Elegy: William Apess and National Mourning,” “Geographies of Loss: Frederick Douglass and the Slave Cemetery,” “Lincoln’s Unrest: Walt Whitman and the Civil War Cemetery,” and “Mourning Books: The Conduct Literature of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and Emily Dickinson” (127-57). Henderson argues that Dickinson suspended “her usual descriptive methodology in favor of prescriptive discourse about what is proper, appropriate, or necessary after death.” Providing close readings of Fr 472, 647, 657, and 1037, she says that her analysis of Dickinson’s conduct poems “require[s] a rethinking of the lyric genre” and “provides insight into the function of her manuscript books or fascicles.” Dickinson’s variants are notable because they “undercut the authoritarian stance of her conduct poems, acting as a release to the tension . . . between each poem’s directions about proper mourning behaviour and her pessimism about its efficacy. Whereas the poems establish themselves as figures of authority, the variants return the power to the reader.”

Henderson’s well researched, clearly written work is rich with information and includes an afterword on the modern genres of grief, 11 black and white illustrations, a 21-page bibliography, and an index.

**Hoberman, Mary Ann, ed. Illustrated by Michael Emberley**

*Forget-Me-Nots: Poems to Learn by Heart.*

New York: Little, Brown, 2012. 144 pp. 11.25 x 8.75 x .625 inches. Cloth, 0-316-12947-3, \$19.99.

Drawing from 88 classic and contemporary poets, Hoberman selects 123 poems – short and long, simple and complex, humorous and serious – chosen “because they are memorable,” both “easy to remember and worth remembering.” Intended for children and illustrated with Emberley’s lively, often humorous, color illustrations, this large format book will delight anyone young at heart and will serve as a resource for teachers wanting to revive memorization and recitation of poetry. Hoberman introduces each of seven sections: “The Short of It,” “One and All,” “Beautiful Beasts,” “Delicious Dishes,” “It’s About Time,” “Happiness Is,” “Weather and Seasons,” “Sad and Sorrowful,” “Strange and Mysterious,” “Poems from Storybooks,” and “The Long of It.” She includes Dickinson’s “A word is dead” (J1212) and “I’m nobody! Who are you?” (J288). Among a dozen of Hoberman’s own poems is “A Poem for the Reader”: “You’re on an adventure / About to start, / You’re going to learn / Some poems by heart! / Short ones, and long ones, / Old ones and new, / Happy ones, sad ones, / Some silly ones, too. / You’ll pick out your favorites / From those that you’ve read / And invite them to live in / The house in your head. / This house is called Memory, / Everyone knows. . . .” She concludes, “And your

The *Bulletin* welcomes notices of all Dickinson-related books, including those published outside the U.S.

Send information to Barbara Kelly, 444 Washington Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94301, U.S.A.

Email: [barbarakelly@psualum.com](mailto:barbarakelly@psualum.com)

poems will live with you / As long as you live.” Included are practical suggestions for memorizing poetry, a list of the poets, and an index of first lines. Hoberman’s enthusiasm for learning poetry by heart is contagious.

---

**Holmes, Janet**

***The MS of M Y Kin.***

Exeter, U.K.: Shearsman Books, 2009. 169 pp. Paper, 1-84861-035-4, \$19.00.

The curious title of Holmes’s book of poems comes from erasing selected letters from *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, thus creating The MS of M Y Kin. Inspired by Dickinson’s “If it had no pencil, / Would it try mine --” (Fr184), Holmes erases words from Dickinson’s Civil War period poems of 1861 and 1862 and leaves the remnant words in place to comment on current Middle East controversies, hoping readers will return to Dickinson’s originals and notice their resonance with the erasure poems. She identifies each of her 87 poems by the year the original poem was written, its order in this book, and the Franklin numbers in parentheses. Thus, 1861.1 (185-186): “at / Sunrise – a Flag / How short it takes to make / Victory / hear them / bustle / fumble at Prayer – / coming / before / the / country.” And 1861.12 (247): “It matters / that the oil / is gone.” The erasures create white spaces that cause the words to float isolated from one another on the page. Critic Susan M. Schultz says that Holmes’s erasure “dramatically frees instances of prophecy, voices from 1861–62 rediscovered in contemporary political discourse. It seems that the best of the embeds in Iraq was Emily Dickinson; read her reports from the (af)front here.” Erasure poetry is not new, but Holmes’s provocative, experimental project may interest the Dickinson community and provide writing teachers with a novel classroom exercise.

---

**Thompson, Jon**

***After Paradise: Essays on the Fate of American Writing.***

Exeter, U.K.: Shearsman Books, 2009. 134 pp. Paper, ISBN 1-84861-041-5, \$17.00.

Described as “part cultural reflection, part lyrical criticism, part idiosyncratic literary history,” Thompson’s five essays focus on William Bradford’s retrospective history, *Of Plymouth Plantation*; Melville’s short story, “Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street”; Whitman’s Civil War journal, *Speciman Days*; Dickinson’s Letters; and Michael Herr’s Viet Nam War memoir, *Dispatches*. Thompson sees the fate of American writing manifested in its “fraught relationship” with “a culture of violence and war,” the writing often met with individual or communal silence. He reflects on “the aspirations that key American writers have had for their writing, the work they want it to do in a society hostile – or indifferent – to artistic expression, and the stylistic inventiveness it displays in facing a culture marked by violence, war, death, and materialism.” Amidst these male activists, Dickinson may seem oddly placed; however, in “The Treason of an Accent: Emily Dickinson’s Letters” (78-103), Thompson explores Dickinson’s Master Letters, finding both fanatical love, “desire that runs off the page,” and “the pain of separation . . . an agony of anticipation: a passion for an indivisible being that borders on the violent.” A poet and professor, Thompson’s writing style has been compared with D. H. Lawrence’s *Studies in Classic American Literature* and Susan Howe’s *My Emily Dickinson*. His essays are said to “push the boundaries of the essay form.” Howe says, the book’s “passionately unsettling reading of American literary history is both an act of exorcism and an elegy.” Works cited are included in this book for serious readers.

---

**Walsh, John Evangelist**

***Emily Dickinson in Love: The Case for Otis Lord.***

New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012. 201 pp. Cloth, ISBN 0-8135-5275-0, \$25.00.

Walsh’s argument that Otis Lord was the intended recipient of Emily Dickinson’s Master Letters (1858-61) and her primary love interest long before the death of his wife “expands, refines . . . and strengthens” the nar-

ative that Walsh suggested in his 1971 *The Hidden Life of Emily Dickinson*. The opening chapter of his current book imagines a meeting between Austin Dickinson and black-mailer Gardner Fuller, from whom Austin, to avoid a scandal, bought more than twenty “intimate” letters of “rosy-romance” written by Emily Dickinson to Lord. Austin authenticates the letters using a draft letter in his possession that matched a fair copy in Gardner’s possession. According to Walsh, Austin and sister Vinnie destroyed all the pre-1878 letters and scissored many of those written after Mrs. Lord’s death in 1877. Walsh discusses Dickinson’s three Master Letters and connects them to seventeen poems of “frustrated yearning,” seven of which lead to Lord: J47, 196, 217, 1237, 1290, 1507, and 1514. He says that the Dickinson-Lord relationship began no later than 1857 and intensified with meetings during Dickinson’s 1864-65 visits to Boston, followed by frequent correspondence until Mrs. Lord’s death. Walsh traces and documents the Dickinson-Lord relationship “from its unexpected start to its mournful conclusion.” Inviting readers to make up their own minds about the Dickinson-Lord relationship, he identifies his speculations and supports his narrative with 18 black and white illustrations; 81 pages containing three appendices, notes and sources; an index of 40 poems; a bibliography; and a general index.

---

**Book Notes**

Now available in paperback edition:

Pollak, Vivian R., ed.

*A Poet’s Parents: The Courtship Letters of Emily Norcross and Edward Dickinson*, University of North Carolina Press, \$45.00.

Vendler, Helen

*Dickinson: Selected Poems and Commentaries*, Belnap Press/Harvard University Press, \$19.95.

*A list of recent journal articles will appear in the next issue.*

## Book Reviews

**Bervin, Jen, and Marta Werner**

*The Gorgeous Nothings: Emily Dickinson's Envelope-Poems.*

New York: Granary Books, 2012. 180 pp. Boxed portfolio, \$3,500.

*Reviewed by Polly Longworth*

*The Gorgeous Nothings* is both a stunning artist book and an intriguing work of textual scholarship devoted to the late inscriptions Emily Dickinson set swiftly onto scraps of envelope interiors she kept close at hand to enable jotting her thoughts as quickly as they occurred.

A limited edition of 50, *The Gorgeous Nothings* is a boxed portfolio of some fifteen 11" x 14" sheets portraying high resolution, double-sided color manuscript facsimiles of forty-seven Dickinson poems or poem fragments that the poet penciled on used envelopes slit open for scrap paper. These are assembled by artist Jan Bervin to display the addressed and inscribed sides as verso and recto, together with smaller visual transcriptions of the poet's words. Accompanying the artist's sheets is a three-part essay, "Itineraries of Escape: Emily Dickinson's Envelope-Poems" by Dickinson textual scholar Marta Werner. The essay, bound fascicle-like in blue, provides contextual analysis for the assemblage and holds numerous tipped-in poem replicas that illustrate the author's sensitive observations. A range of beautiful papers incorporated into the work alerts the reader to the beauty of the undertaking.

The work comes wrapped in a facsimile of prose fragment A821/821a (it contains the source for the title) and includes a comprehensive bibliographic Guide that elucidates the mechanics of the work. Artistic in itself, the Guide's index orders the forty-seven penciled scraps according to form (shape), and several other criteria, and includes a directory with notes and publication data for each poem. All but one of the envelope poems are from the Dickinson Collection at Amherst College.

A "postscript" by artist Jen Bervin included within the Guide reminds that Dickinson defined "nothing" as "the force that renovates/ the world - ." The artist speaks of the poet's eye for compositional space in creating on envelope scraps "a visual composition" in which thought and form manipulate each other. Ever attracted by fragments (her grandmother's family once ran a scrap yard) Bervin notes as well the influence of the "wafer thin" envelope manuscripts, which seem to her as if Dickinson was "reading light." Bervin's earlier artist book, *The Dickinson Composites*, focused on a series of large-scale quilts she had created as an abstract display of the poet's idiosyncratic punctuation and manuscript markings.

The Guide concludes with a description by the publisher (Granary Books is a press that produces works exploring the intersection of word, image, and page) of the papers, print forms, and considered choices of replicated images selected by and with the artist to create the portfolio.

In her remarkable 1995 book of textual analysis, *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios*, Marta Werner argued persuasively that we consider Dickinson's fragments and scraps as signals of her working mind – as close to the poet's creative process as we can get. Werner's lyrical essay within *The Gorgeous Nothings* pursues her meaning in three segments. The first focuses on Dickinson's unsent last letter draft to Helen Hunt Jackson, the above-mentioned envelope prose fragment A821, "Clogged only with music like the wheels of Birds," of which the phrase "Afternoon and the West and the gorgeous nothings" is a part. Tipped in is the replica, suggesting a bird and its wing, to demonstrate Werner's belief, which she goes on to explore in the next part of the essay, in the strong bond between text and carrier. Her point is the "astounding recklessness" with which the poet's mind worked in her late years. "The whirl of the envelopes is part of the message they are sending" she writes in the essay's final segment, her contention being that the envelope poems form a "scatterfield," a new way in which this poet released or liberated her thoughts into the world.

Whether the envelope poems represent Dickinson's workshop in undestroyed form or whether, as Werner believes, this is an entirely new, freed phase of the poet's late life, simply cannot be known. What the scholar cares about is the poet's mind – what she believed and spent her life and artistic powers trying to express. For Dickinson, it was the tremendousness of life, suggests Werner, and the power to appreciate it all – to suffer and feel pain and deprivation yet understand it, to withstand it, and in expressing it help others do the same.

All Dickinson scholars, especially those unable to hold an original manuscript in her hand, will want to see this glowing work. Prohibitively expensive for most, it's fortunate that institutions across the country are acquiring it – among them Amherst and Smith Colleges; Brown, Chicago, Columbia, Emory, Harvard, Princeton, Stanford, and Yale Universities; the Library of Congress and the New York Public Library. The work will be exhibited at the 2013 EDIS International Conference at the University of Maryland, and during the 2014 EDIS annual meeting in Amherst it will be displayed in the Amherst College Archives.

*Polly Longworth is a Dickinson biographer and member of the Board of the Emily Dickinson Museum.*

---

**Kearns, Michael.** *Writing for the Street, Writing in the Garret: Melville, Dickinson, and Private Publication.*

Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 2010. xii, 171 pp. Cloth, ISBN 978-0-8142-1140-3. \$45.95.

*Reviewed by David Garnes*

Except for their place in the American literary pantheon and the approximate concurrence of their dates, Emily Dickinson and Herman Melville may seem an unlikely pairing as the subjects of a book-length study of authorship. Michael Kearns, however, offers a penetrating analysis of the ways in which these two

giants of nineteenth-century literature navigated, often in strikingly similar ways, the turbulent, oftentimes solitary, waters of their respective literary careers.

*Writing for the Street, Writing in the Garret* consists of five cogent, intellectually demanding chapters dealing equally with Dickinson and Melville on such topics as publishing by manuscript, author ownership, the physical process of writing, the “writing” self vs. the “biographical” self, marketing the image of the author, and the posthumous careers of each writer from the perspective of popular culture.

Kearns, Professor of English at the University of Southern Indiana and former *Bulletin* Editor and member of the EDIS Board, begins with a concise yet detailed review of the introduction of the daguerreotype into the United States in 1840. Interestingly, both Melville and Dickinson denied requests for their photographic likenesses, he to an editor of a magazine, Dickinson famously to Thomas Wentworth Higginson (“Could you believe me – without? I had no portrait, now . . .”).

Kearns goes on to develop his thesis that Melville’s and Dickinson’s refusal indicates “distaste for the marketing of art and artists, especially marketing by ‘mug.’” Additionally, both preferred private or limited publication (“the garret”) to mass readership (“the street”) – Dickinson, in her more advantageous economic circumstances, from the start and Melville, gradually, as his economic capital began to diminish in the years following the publication of his commercially successful South Seas novels.

In discussing the inclinations, tensions, and consequences inherent in Dickinson’s and Melville’s publication choices, Kearns refers extensively to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, the renowned twentieth-century social scientist. It is Bourdieu’s conceptual theory of “capital” as it relates to society, culture, and economics that provides the framework for Kearns’s study of the capital/resources Dickinson and Melville used (or rejected) during their writing careers.

Kearns is also meticulous and generous in citing a wide variety of Dickinson and Melville scholars, ranging from Leyda, Whicher and Sewall to more recent criticism by writers such as Jonnie Guerra, Domhnall Mitchell, Martha Nell Smith, Alfred Habegger, and Hershel Parker, among many others. Progressively drawn in and increasingly convinced by Kearns’s arguments, I frequently found myself copying citations of particular articles and books for future perusal.

As its subtitle – *Melville, Dickinson, and Private Publication* – indicates, *Writing for the Street* concerns itself mainly with avenues through which the two writers disseminated their work. Interspersed among Kearns’s theoretical arguments, however, are fascinating facts and anecdotes on any number of eclectic topics: Melville’s early sales figures; the tight rein by Harvard over the years on Dickinson manuscripts held by the university; references to Helen Hunt Jackson and her attention to her own market value (she said she “wrote for love but printed for money”); and Melville’s vehement requests – sometimes honored, more often not – that he not be identified as the author of *Omoo* and *Typee* on the covers or title pages of subsequent published works.

*Writing for the Street, Writing in the Garret* is beautifully designed, inside and out. Handwritten cover and chapter titles and 11 carefully selected illustrations enhance Kearns’s textual comments concerning the choices writers, editors, and publishers make in terms of form and content. The stunning cover depicts a facsimile proof-sheet of the iconic Dickinson daguerreotype and an etching of the Eaton portrait of Melville superimposed on a sepia-hued photograph of a dimly lit, brick-paved alley (the “street,” but a narrow one).

For students of Dickinson, Kearns’s book is perhaps most significant for its contribution to the increasing recognition of the poet as a self-identified writer who made conscious, deliberate, and sometimes unorthodox choices as to how, when, and where she would circulate her work. The earlier marketed image of the

frail, timid, nosegay-carrying spinster of Amherst recedes as its capital – social, economic, and cultural – loses currency.

Postscript: As I submit this review, the eagerly awaited verdict concerning the newly surfaced Dickinson / Kate Scott Turner daguerreotype is still out (see cover image). Whatever the outcome, it is clear, to paraphrase Kearns’s words, that “Dickinson as cultural icon has come to be an ‘object of desire’ within popular culture.” One wonders how Dickinson would react to such zealous attention. As the poet further wrote in her refusal to Higginson’s request for a likeness, “I . . . am small, like the Wren, and my Hair is bold, like the Chestnut bur – and my eyes, like the Sherry in the Glass, that the Guest leaves – Would this do just as well?”

*David Garnes is the author of three books. A former English teacher and academic librarian, he works at the Emily Dickinson Museum, where he has been guide, trainer, workshop facilitator, and house manager.*

---

**Miller, Cristanne. *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century*.**

Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012. xi, 279 pp. Paper, ISBN 978-1-55849-951-5, \$28.95.

***Reviewed by Margaret H. Freeman***

Over her long and intimate association with Emily Dickinson’s poetry and Dickinson scholarship, Cristanne Miller in her latest publication, *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century*, has taken up questions that are, in her words, “essentially unanswerable.” With a focus on Dickinson’s writing up to and including the Civil War years, Miller documents her findings of what counts as “reasonable evidence” for Dickinson’s composition strategies, circulation and retention of poems, and choice not to publish, placing Dickinson’s poetic practices within her nineteenth century milieu. This includes contemporary ideas about lyric genre, ex-

perimentation with metrical forms by other nineteenth century poets, oscillation between oral and written poetry, fascination with the Oriental and the exotic, and the effect of the Civil War on poets of the period. As a final coda, Miller uses evidence and conclusions from these various explorations to revisit the question of Dickinson's attitudes toward and decisions about publication.

The first chapter, "Reading in Dickinson's Time," lays out one of Miller's major objectives: to "point toward the correction of some assumptions and the rethinking of some scholarly hypotheses about Dickinson's aesthetic and practices" (p. 2). Her methodology comprises detailed examination of the books, magazines, and newspapers Dickinson read, the metrical characteristics of her poems both before and after 1865, the poetic practices of other nineteenth-century writers, and the contemporary social, cultural, and political environment prior to the Civil War. Miller's strategy is one of elimination: rather than providing definitive answers to issues raised in Dickinson scholarship, she refutes several speculative assumptions and hypotheses by applying rigorous analysis to documentary evidence.

Chapter 2, "Lyric Strains," argues that scholars tend to "retroproject" modern views of the romantic/post-romantic lyric genre onto nineteenth-century norms. In contrast, Miller shows how the poet built on the lyrical practices of contemporary poets. Close analysis of early reviews reveals that, contrary to received opinion, most were laudatory.

Chapter 3, "Hymn, the 'Ballad Wild,' and Free Verse," examines the metrical forms of ballads and hymns that appeared in popular poetry of her day and which Dickinson herself employed with incomparable skill. Noting Dickinson's familiarity with free verse through the markings of appropriate passages in her readings, Miller argues that the poet's experiments in writing poems with no consistent rhythmic patterns sprang from the rhythmic units of stanzaic forms that Dickinson heard as "[t]unes in her head" (p. 78).

That Dickinson's poems are predominately oral is one of Miller's major arguments and forms the theme of her fourth chapter on "Spoken Poetry and the Written Poem." Here, Miller's innovation is to introduce the idea of the poetic line, described in a footnote as a "scripted variation of metrical lines, such that a split metrical line constitutes two poetic lines, or a combination of two metrical lines in a single poetic line" (p. 232, n. 33). Since this constitutes a significant element in the way she perceives run-on lines, it would have been more appropriate to spell this out clearly in the text itself. Similarly, it would have been more helpful to this reader if Miller had introduced and explained her unorthodox scansion system when discussing certain metrical patterns, rather than demoting it to a footnote.

The chapters, "Becoming a Poet in 'turbaned seas'" and "Reading and Writing the Civil War," show, respectively, how Dickinson shared nineteenth-century interest in and obsession with Orientalism, and the nature of Dickinson's engagement with the Civil War.

In "Coda: Portrait of a Non-Publishing Poet," Miller addresses the vexing question of publication and presents a more complex picture. Rather than ask why Dickinson did not publish, Miller asks, why would she? Dickinson didn't need the fortune (to make money) and didn't want the fame (to draw attention to herself). In this context, we see rather that Dickinson hesitated, on several occasions tentatively exploring the idea before drawing back. Miller's statistical documentation of the numbers of poems Dickinson kept and the number she circulated but did not keep, plus Dickinson's awareness of the publishing mores of her time which gave printers and publishers greater control to freely reprint and adapt original work, provide a different picture of the poet's motivations which, Miller believes, focused more on immortal recognition than immediate fame.

Miller's admission that she wrote the book quickly is belied by the 54 pages of extensive notes but explains inaccuracies I found,

especially in reports of statements made by others. Nevertheless, her study provides new approaches to many still-unanswered questions and will doubtless provoke further lively exchange among Dickinson scholars.

*Margaret H. Freeman, founding president of the Emily Dickinson International Society and professor emeritus at Los Angeles Valley College, is currently co-director of the Myrifiield Institute for Cognition and the Arts, located in Heath, Massachusetts.*

---

**Smith, Jadwiga, and Anna Kapusta. *Writing Life: Suffering as a Poetic Strategy of Emily Dickinson.***

Cracow, Poland: Jagiellonian University Press, 2011. 92 pages. Pdf. Kindle Edition, \$12.00.

*Reviewed by Magdalena Zapiedowska*

In their short book, *Writing Life: Suffering as a Poetic Strategy of Emily Dickinson*, the Polish scholars Jadwiga Smith and Anna Kapusta discuss Dickinson's life and work in terms of Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytical theory of the depressive subject. Describing the poet as a recluse who made her turbulent inner life the subject matter of her poetry, the authors treat Dickinson's writings as symptoms of her psychological states and compensation for her personal unhappiness. In doing so, they draw extensively on John Cody's controversial psychobiography *After Great Pain* (1971) and on David Porter's argument, in *Dickinson: The Modern Idiom* (1981), that Dickinson's poetry lacks clarity and control.

The book is divided into two parts, one devoted to suffering as a theme, the other to suffering as a strategy of language and compositional practice. Following Kristeva's idea that artistic creation results from mourning for the irrecoverable loss of union with the maternal body, Smith and Kapusta argue that Dickinson's creativity was stimulated by various forms of biographical deprivation, from the lack of maternal love to the lack of physical and mental health. Dickinson's poetry,

they claim, oscillates between the desire for union with the mother, which underlies the depressive stance, and the resolve to become separated from the mother, which motivates artistic expression. It is the desire for separation that compels Dickinson to transform the various forms of lack into their empowering equivalents. Thus, the lack of love prompts the poet to reject marriage as a form of patriarchal oppression; the “lack of God” leads her to develop a new spirituality focused on nature and friendship; and the “lack of health” leads to a focus on immortality. While Smith and Kapusta’s discussion of the “empowering side of suffering” usefully emphasizes Dickinson’s agency, the suggested correspondence between forms of lack and forms of empowerment will strike some readers as too categorical, leaving them to wonder how the authors would account for the emotional complexity of poems like “Because I could not stop for Death” or “The Soul selects her own Society.”

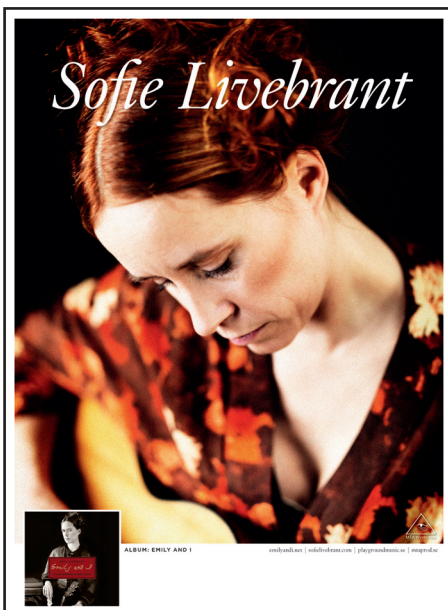
Part two develops the claim that Dickinson’s poetry, like the speech of depressive persons, is dominated by what Kristeva calls the semiotic dimension of language. For Kristeva, the semiotic represents the bodily instincts and mysterious maternal energies that manifest themselves through rhythm, intonation, alliteration, and word-play, disrupting the logical

flow of speech. Smith and Kapusta identify a range of “clinical symptoms” (59) in Dickinson’s poetic language, presenting the idiosyncrasies of Dickinson’s style as depressive characteristics. These analyses constitute the most controversial aspect of the book, and few readers will agree with the view of Dickinson as overpowered by emotion and unable to control her own creativity. The final section, however, focuses on Dickinson’s control over suffering through its formal representation in poetry. Drawing on Kristeva’s discussion of painterly representation of melancholia, Smith and Kapusta propose that suffering becomes for Dickinson “a form of poetic expression” (81), realized through such techniques as minimalism of language and form, irony as an expression of defiance, or realistic representation of death. They conclude that Dickinson “managed to gain control over her overpowering emotions and use them successfully as the subject matter of her poetry” (80).

Readers may object to Smith and Kapusta’s psychological approach not only because it perpetuates the negative image of Dickinson as isolated, lonely, and oppressed, but also because it rarely distinguishes between the poet and the speaker of the poems, instead viewing them as direct expressions of Dickinson’s own emotional struggles. Combined with the method of using poems to illustrate various

aspects of Kristeva’s theory, this approach does not leave much room for nuanced interpretation. I would like to see extended close readings of poems that show the interplay of the thematic, stylistic, and formal elements Smith and Kapusta discuss separately. The argument would also be richer if it engaged the large body of scholarship on Dickinson’s use of personae and her immersion in nineteenth-century popular culture, especially the sentimental discourse of female pain. While their readings of individual poems rely on a variety of critical sources, it is surprising that the authors do not acknowledge the Polish scholar Agnieszka Salska, whose work on Dickinson’s elegies directly pertains to the subject of loss. Nonetheless, the main value of Smith and Kapusta’s book lies in bringing Kristeva and Dickinson into dialogue, and readers interested in psychological studies of poetry or studies of literature and illness will be intrigued by this interpretation of Dickinson’s writings.

*Magdalena Zapędowska works at the Writing Center at Amherst College. Before moving to the United States in 2008, she was a faculty member in American Literature at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, Poland. Her most recent article, “Dickinson’s Delight,” appeared in the Spring 2012 Emily Dickinson Journal.*



### A CHRISTMAS OFFER FOR EDIS MEMBERS

Buy the CD-Book “Emily and I” by Sofie Livebrant for 25 USD

The first 100 buyers also get a free gift – a handmade Emily-quotation-bookmark!

Order at <http://sofielivebrant.com>  
Click on “Emily Dickinson Society Members”  
Enter EDIS membership number

# Meet the New Members of the EDIS Board

## Páraic Finnerty

Páraic Finnerty was elected to fill a vacant seat on the EDIS Board for a one-year, renewable term. A native of Ireland and, since 2004, a lecturer in English and American literature at the University of Portsmouth, Finnerty is the author of *Emily Dickinson's Shakespeare* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), in which he examines Shakespeare's reception in nineteenth-century America and locates Dickinson's allusions to his writings in this context.

He is currently working on his next book, "Dickinson and her British Contemporaries," in which he explores connections between Dickinson's writings and the works of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Browning, Alfred Tennyson, the Brontës, and George Eliot. The book is scheduled to be published in early 2014 by Edinburgh University Press as part of its Studies in Transatlantic Literatures series.

Finnerty has been a member of the EDIS since 1998 and has given papers at its international conferences at Mount Holyoke, Trondheim, and Oxford. In 2002, he was the first recipient of the EDIS Scholar in Amherst Award; and in 2004 he received a Copeland Fellowship from Amherst College. In May 2004, he gave a talk entitled "'Stratford on Avon – accept us all': Emily Dickinson's Bardolatry" at the Dickinson Museum; the talk was co-sponsored by the Dickinson Museum and the Massachusetts Center for Renaissance Studies.

As a member of the EDIS Board, Finnerty hopes to increase the appreciation and study of Emily Dickinson in the UK and Ireland, and to expand membership and member activities on his side of the Atlantic. He proposes to create a UK/Ireland-based chapter of the Society, which would hold regular meetings and organize an annual one-day Dickinson symposium. These events would be aimed at both academics and general readers; teachers and students; Irish and British poets; and others who wished to increase their knowledge of Dickinson. He also has visions of forging links between EDIS and UK-based literary societies such as the George Eliot Fellowship,



Photo Credit: Andrew Camilleri

the Browning Society, the Tennyson Society and the Brontë Society, with a view toward promoting the study of transatlantic connections in nineteenth-century poetry.

## MEMBERS' NEWS

### Eliza Richards

Eliza Richards was elected to a new, three-year, member-at-large position on the EDIS Board. Associate Professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Richards specializes in nineteenth-century poetry of the United States, but teaches a wide range of courses in American literature and culture before 1900, and in poetry and poetics.

In her research, she analyzes poems within the terms of their circulation and reception in ways that render them legible and meaningful to readers of today. Her first book, *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle* (Cambridge 2004), argues that Poe's status as an exceptional genius figure was forged in literary transactions with his female peers, who were celebrities in their time though largely forgotten today.

Thanks in part to the support of a fellowship from the National Humanities Center (2010-2011), she is currently completing her second book project, "Correspondent Lines: Poetry and Journal-

ism in the US Civil War." Taking a cue from her intensive reading of newspapers and magazines, Dickinson treated the question of what it means to experience war at a distance. She is also currently editing "Emily Dickinson in Context," to be published by Cambridge University Press in 2013. The volume includes essays on Dickinson's engagements with the law, the visual arts, economics, and popular culture among other topics.



As a member of the EDIS Board, Richards hopes to bring more light to the sometimes obscure but important ways the poet engaged other writers, current events, and broader cultural movements. She proposes that, following the cue of other author societies such as the Melville Society, the EDIS might consider planning joint conferences with other groups in order to explore the relationships among Dickinson and other nineteenth-century figures.

She also is interested in promoting further international interest in Dickinson's writings, and recognizes the vital importance of cross-fertilization between non-academic readers and scholars working on Dickinson in colleges and universities.

---

## Henry Thoreau & Emily Dickinson Meet in Manhattan

Join Them April 5th - 7th, 2013  
Stage Left Studio, 214 W. 30th St, NYC

The play, *Henry & Emily: The Muses in Massachusetts* is an imagined encounter between Henry David Thoreau and Emily Dickinson. The drama centers on the two artists' conflicting needs for communion and solitude. A good half of the play is in the language of these iconic New England writers. The general tenor is serious, but the play has comic moments as the famous recluses struggle to find something to chat about over tea. They persevere and discover their own kind of union in an ecstatic finale.

*Henry & Emily* was written by Jim Stapleton, who stars in the production with his wife, Diana Bigelow. The couple first performed the play in Port Angeles, WA in 1998. Since then they have taken it to many venues in the Pacific Northwest and most recently to Middlebury, Vermont. On the first weekend in April, 2013, they'll bring the production to New York City.

For more information: [www.jimstapleton.com](http://www.jimstapleton.com)<<http://www.jimstapleton.com/>>;

For reservations: [www.stageleftstudio.net](http://www.stageleftstudio.net)<<http://www.stageleftstudio.net/>>.



## EDIS 2013 International Conference: "Emily Dickinson, World Citizen"

University of Maryland and American University  
College Park, MD and Washington, D.C.

On August 9-11, 2013, the University of Maryland and American University will co-sponsor an EDIS international conference. To celebrate 25 years of EDIS fostering intellectual and artistic exchange, "Emily Dickinson, World Citizen" will explore Dickinson's various forms of belonging and ways in which multiple constituencies "belong" to her, her world. The poet herself may have seen "New Englandly," but as a cosmopolitan reader, she crafted and cultivated numerous affiliations beyond the local. The focus of the conference's critical and artistic inquiries is the global reach of her mind and verse from the nineteenth century to the present.

"Emily Dickinson, World Citizen" will take extensive advantage of the many historical and cultural resources in the D.C. area. Anticipated highlights include high tea at the Willard Hotel, where Emily Dickinson stayed when she visited her Representative father and where Julia Ward Howe wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"; a lecture and/or exhibition, followed by a reception, at the National Museum of Women in the Arts; and what Emily Dickinson would surely demand if she were coming—a crabfest, with alternatives of course for those who do not eat shellfish.

For this conference in "Scarlet Maryland," we invite proposals for papers, performances, panel sessions, and other critical and artistic responses to the theme "Emily Dickinson, World Citizen." Innovative and alternative presentation modes are encouraged. Presentations of research not directly related to the conference theme are also invited. Our "worlding" of Emily Dickinson includes using 21st century media for our knowledge exchange. To that end, abstracts of the presentations will be made available to all participants at least 30 days before the conference. Please submit proposals for papers, performances, panels to [edis-2013-conference@umd.edu](mailto:edis-2013-conference@umd.edu) by February 1, 2013. Notifications of acceptances will be sent no later than February 28, 2013.

Look for updates on the conference at <http://www.emilydickinsoninternationalsociety.org/node/123>.

---

## EDIS Chapter Group Update

By Nancy List Pridgen and Lois Kackley

It's an exciting time to join an Emily Dickinson International Society chapter group -- or to start one in your area -- with ongoing research into the newest candidate for a second Dickinson daguerreotype!

The San Antonio EDIS Chapter Group did not meet over the summer because of scheduling conflict. The group will begin meeting again at the end of September, and the first meeting will be devoted to discussion of this daguerreotype, as well as to letters and poems sent to Kate Scott Turner.

Massachusetts has two meetings each month in Amherst at the Jones Library. EDIS Amherst continues its schedule -- established in 2009 -- with "Poetry Conversa-

tions" year-round at 2 p.m. on the first Friday of each month, and at 5:45 p.m. on the third Thursday of each month.

The EDIS Amherst's Poetry Conversation that meets on Friday is typically made up of 12 to 15 members and friends; while the Thursday group, though it is growing, is smaller, with four to eight. The format is informal, with Lois starting off the roundtable discussion of three poems and one Dickinson letter by calling attention to the benefits of membership in EDIS. Membership applications and reprints of Jonnie Guerra's *Bulletin* article written some years ago on the origins of EDIS are always on the table, along with sample *Journals* and *Bulletins* for anyone to take/borrow. "This

is a community outreach activity of EDIS for any and everyone to enjoy a conversation with others that is unique for readers of Dickinson poetry": these are the first words participants hear from Lois at the start of the session.

Completely separate from EDIS, the Emily Dickinson Museum sponsors Poetry Discussion each month on third Fridays from September through May, excluding December.

The Emily Dickinson Reading Circle, sponsored by the Myrfield Institute for Cognition and the Arts since 2004, meets in Heath, Massachusetts, on the second Friday of each month from September to May. While this

# MEMBERS' NEWS

group is not affiliated with EDIS, Margaret Freeman keeps Circle members updated on the Museum's and the Society's activities and encourages them to join EDIS. All three Massachusetts groups have overlapping members and occasionally meet together for special events in Amherst.

Ellen Beinhorn has left her very successful Hilton Head chapter group in Beaufort, South Carolina, in good hands with Mary C. Leto, and it will resume meeting soon after a summer off. They too will discuss

the new daguerreotype at their September meeting.

Meanwhile, Ellen Beinhorn has moved back to her home in the mountains of North Carolina and is planning to start another Emily Dickinson chapter group at the Appalachian State University in Boone.

A new EDIS chapter group is being organized in Washington, DC, and is planning its first event in October: "Emily Dickinson and the East." Judith Farr, Eleanor Hegin-

botham, and Nellie Lambert are working to launch this group.

With so much excitement surrounding the new daguerreotype, what could be a better time to start an EDIS chapter group in your area? For information about how to start a group, contact EDIS Chapter Group chairs Nancy List Pridgen, [possibility@satx.rr.com](mailto:possibility@satx.rr.com); or Lois Kackley, [edis.amherst@gmail.com](mailto:edis.amherst@gmail.com). A list of steps for starting an EDIS chapter group is available on the EDIS website, <http://www.emilydickinsoninternationalsociety.org/>

## EDIS Membership Form

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

Name, title & affiliation \_\_\_\_\_  
Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone (home) \_\_\_\_\_ (office) \_\_\_\_\_ (fax) \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_  
Please check if this is: new address \_\_\_ membership renewal \_\_\_

### Annual Membership Categories:

Sustaining Member (added to joint or regular membership) \_\_\_\_\_ \$150 or more  
Institutional Member \_\_\_\_\_ \$115  
Contributing Member (added to joint or regular membership) \_\_\_\_\_ \$100  
NEW: Joint EDIS/Dickinson Museum \_\_\_\_\_ \$100  
Regular Member \_\_\_\_\_ \$50.00 Student Member \_\_\_\_\_ \$30.00  
(All of the above Members receive both the *Emily Dickinson Journal* and the *Bulletin*)  
Associate Member \_\_\_ \$20.00 (*Bulletin* only)

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

### Gift Memberships

Name, title & affiliation \_\_\_\_\_  
Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone (home) \_\_\_\_\_ (office) \_\_\_\_\_ (fax) \_\_\_\_\_  
Email \_\_\_\_\_

Use additional page for further gift memberships.

Please make check or money order payable, in U.S. dollars, to EDIS, Inc., and send to:  
EDIS; c/o Johns Hopkins University Press; P.O. Box 19966; Baltimore, MD 21211-0966  
[www.emilydickinsoninternationalsociety.org](http://www.emilydickinsoninternationalsociety.org)

## Professor Todd, the Transit of Venus, and the Sounding of Mars

Thanks to Jonathan Morse for calling the Dickinson Society's attention to an interesting piece of information that circulated at the time of the recent Transit of Venus, on June 5, 2012. Amherst College Professor of Astronomy David P. Todd (husband of Mabel Loomis Todd) made a series of images of the 1882 Transit, which can be viewed as a film at <http://media.skyandtelescope.com/video/Transit1882Todd320.mov>.

The photograph at right, from Todd's later years, shows him with C. Francis Jenkins (seated), listening to radio signals from Mars. The photograph appeared on a page from Shorpy.com, <http://www.shorpy.com/node/12482>, and is explained in a 1924 article from the *Washington Post*:

The mystery surrounding strange radio signals heard in various parts of the world in the "nearest-to-earth" visit of Mars on Friday and Saturday was deepened yesterday, when the film in the special machine operated here to record such "signals" was developed photographically.

The result was a curious picturization of radio phenomenon. Thirty feet long and six inches wide, the chemically treated film showed, black on white, everything that was "picked up" out of the air in about 29 hours with a receiving apparatus adjusted to a wave length of 6,000 meters. . . .

C. Francis Jenkins, inventor of the "radio photo message continuous transmission machine" used in the experiment in his laboratory . . . doubted that the recorded radio sounds had anything to do with Mars. He declared, however, that it was the most curious phenomenon ever photographed by his apparatus.



In his own contribution to the Shorpy string, Morse quoted Polly Longworth's sad assessment of Todd's last years:

During his late fifties David's behavior grew increasingly erratic, which led in 1917 to his being eased off the Amherst faculty into early retirement. . . . David was institutionalized in 1922, and spent his last seventeen years in a series of hospitals and nursing homes. The endless schemes and designs that always preoccupied him culminated during those final years in a great plan he called "Vital Engineering," a program for eternal life.

## GIB'S OBITUARY

By George Monteiro

In *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (1974) Richard B. Sewall reprints "Death of a Promising Boy," the obituary of Thomas Gilbert Dickinson that appeared in *The Amherst Record* on October 17, 1883. Sewall does not identify its author, commenting only that the unsigned piece is evidence that "Gib," the eight-year-old boy, had become "something of an idol of the town's, beloved by all." Years later, John Evangelist Walsh remarks that this "fine" obituary "was written by some Amherst acquaintance of the family, strangely never identified." That identification can now be made. The author of that obituary was H. Humphrey Neill, who, at the time, was Williston Professor of Rhetoric, Oratory, and English Literature at Amherst College, and a friend of Gib's father Austin Dickinson.

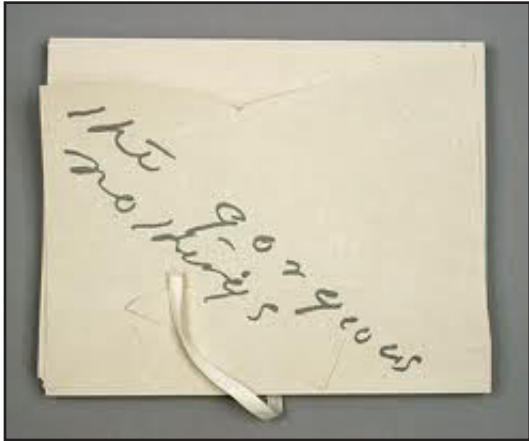
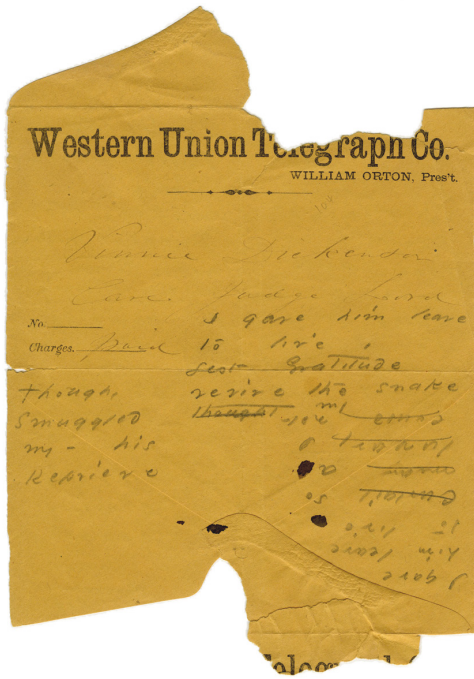
On October 4, 1883, as the young son of Susan and Austin Dickinson lay gravely ill (he died the next day), Professor Neill wrote to Austin Dickinson:

If there is anything in the wide world I can do for you I would like to do it. If I can go anywhere or stay anywhere that will help you tell me  
– There are times when a man has the right to let his heart out, and mine has gone to you.

Don't answer unless you can use me –

Yours

The envelope, postmarked "Amherst/ Oct. 5 1883," is addressed, "Mr. A. Dickinson Esq/ Amherst/ Mass." In the same folder, first seen at "The Evergreens" but now part of the Martha Dickinson Bianchi Papers, Special Collections, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, is the clipping from *The Amherst Record* for October 17, 1883, entitled "Death of a Promising Boy." At the bottom, in Susan Dickinson's hand, is the notation "written by Prof. Neill."



Follow us on [facebook](#)  
"Emily Dickinson International Society (EDIS)"

[www.emilydickinsoninternationalsociety.org](http://www.emilydickinsoninternationalsociety.org)