

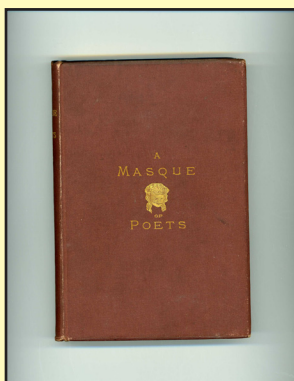
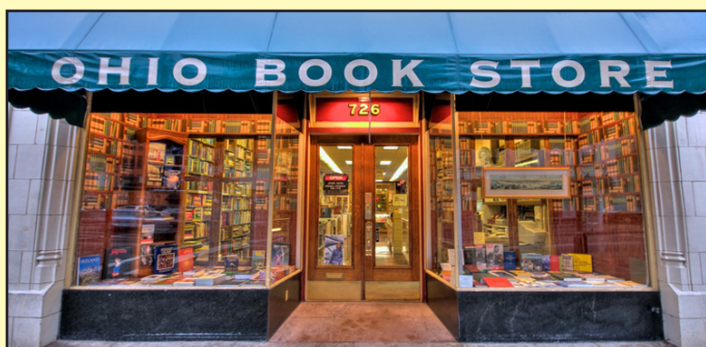
# Bulletin

Volume 25, Number 1

May/June 2013

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

## The Romance of Certain Old Books



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*Front Cover, counter-clockwise: A favorite bookstore of the editor, in Cincinnati, Ohio; George Monteiro's second-edition copy of A Masque of Poets; a shelf of old books, photographed by a covetous collector; some volumes from the Dickinson family library; the legendary Hardings Books in Wells, Maine; and two early editions of Dickinson's poems from the Emily Dickinson Museum (photo credit, Donna Abelli).*

*Back Cover: Three works to be featured at the EDIS Conference, "Emily Dickinson, World Citizen," this summer in College Park, Maryland, and Washington, DC: The Gorgeous Nothings, by Jan Bervin and Marta Werner (Granary Books; reviewed in the Fall 2012 Bulletin); a bust of Emily Dickinson by Valentina Mattei; and a painting by Gretchen Cline, based on an 1859 daguerreotype that many believe represents the poet as a mature woman and author.*

*The fourth image on the back cover is from the series of paintings by EDIS member Ellen Beinhorn, featured in the Fall 2012 Bulletin. Ms. Beinhorn was scheduled to present a lecture about her Dickinson-inspired paintings at this summer's conference, but unfortunately, she suffered a heart attack this Spring and will not be able to attend. The Bulletin extends fond get-well wishes on behalf of the EDIS.*

*Spots: Elyse Elliott*

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Following upon the reflections published in the last issue by “Krans Bloemaand” about experiences collecting Dickinson materials in the digital age, this is the second in a series of, currently, four articles by collectors of books, letters, and other objects related to the poet. Any other collectors who would like to discuss their experiences are encouraged to contact the editor of the Bulletin.

## Accumulating Dickinson, Not Collecting

By George Monteiro

I am not a Dickinson collector. I have never been a Dickinson collector. But I do have several shelves of Dickinson-related books that I have accumulated over many decades. “You’re not a collector, you’re an accumulator,” was the wise observation of my twelve-year-old son, who at that age had already started collecting Sylvia Plath. He was right, of course. Still, as an accumulator who acquired books, old and new, that might (or might not) be useful today, tomorrow or never to a teacher of literature, it was inevitable that I would gather up some Dickinson titles. Indeed, had I not sensed the scarcity of the three volumes of Dickinson poetry published in the 1890s and followed that up by preparing a reprint edition (three volumes in one) for Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, the copies reproduced by copy-machine from copies in the Harris Collection of Poetry and Plays, at Brown University?

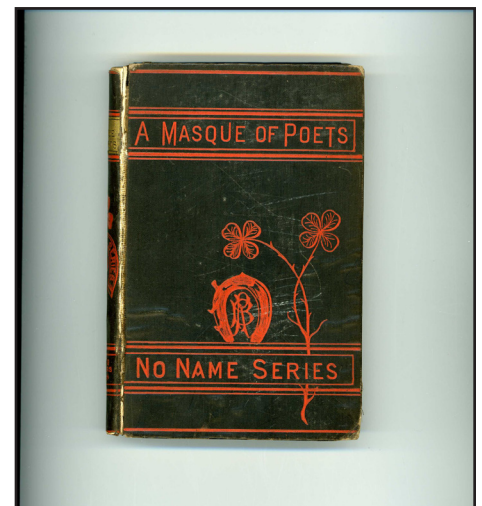
So, I began to look out for first-edition copies of the first three editions of Dickinson’s poetry, though never once finding them, neither in the bookstores and junk shops around Providence, nor along Route 1 in southeastern Maine, from Kittery Point through Kennebunkport and as far as Wells – my particular Gold Coast for less-than-pecunious buys. I had to settle for later-edition copies, and over the years I picked up nine of them (I just got up and walked downstairs to count them) always at no more than a dollar or so. It was in that way that I also stumbled upon a very nice first edition of the two-volume letters edited by Mabel Loomis Todd. For-

tunately, the two volumes were right there together.

I was just as lucky on another occasion, though, as it turned, it took a while. In a roadside bookshop near Taunton, Massachusetts, I came across a first volume of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun* and spent a half-hour going through all the books in the shop looking for volume two without finding it. I was about to walk away without buying volume one when it occurred to me that I could come back another time and look for volume two. So I paid the dollar for volume one, and did come back later – several times, in fact – but had no success. Finally, after I had told the shopkeeper how frustrated I was in my quest, he let me into the shed where he had his overflow stock. Eureka, there was volume two, which he sold to me for a dollar.

By the way, ultimately I was lucky enough to find another first-edition set of the 1894 *Letters* as well as Gillian Webster Barr Bailey’s copy of the 1906 one-volume re-issue for five dollars. It was in Maine also that I found copies of the 1915 *Single Hound* and *A Masque of Poets*, for which I shelled out fifteen and ten dollars, respectively. They were purchased at different times and at different places, and in both instances I did not buy the books the first time I spotted them. But I bit the bullet and went back for them, having buckled under the nagging thought that in not snapping them up right off I had made a grievous mistake. Only later would I determine, after consulting Joel Myerson’s *Emily Dickinson: a Descrip-*

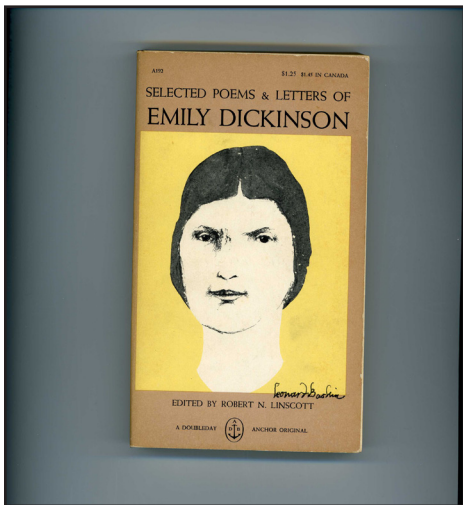
*tive Bibliography* (1984), that my *Masque of Poets* (“Red Line Edition,” according to its publisher) was a second edition copy. My suspicions had been aroused when I came across a copy of the true first, with the indication in red lettering against a black background that it



The coveted first edition of *A Masque of Poets*

belonged to the “No Name Series.” I noticed it sitting on a shelf with all the more expensive items in the seller’s little office complete with his half-empty bottle of Early Times bourbon, the place where you paid for books. This copy was priced at sixty-five dollars, despite the fact that the front cover was close to being entirely detached. The price? Sixty-five dollars. No thanks. Several visits later I noticed that the book was gone. Surprise. On my birthday, there it was at home, a gift from my wife.

Along the way, of course, I picked up numerous editions of Dickinson's poetry, always at bargain prices. I did not shop from booksellers' catalogues nor, if memory serves me, did I query any bookseller about a specific title. I also bought, until the mid-nineties, secondary works on Dickinson, these deemed useful to my teaching and writing. Thus my horde grew. But it became highly specialized in another way, one that I never anticipated. In June 1969 I arrived in Brazil, to take up duties as a visiting Fulbright lecturer in Ameri-



*Selected Poems and Letters of Emily Dickinson*, Anchor Press 1959, autographed by US artist, Leonard Baskin, who designed the cover.

can Literature at the University of São Paulo. To practice my Portuguese I hit upon the idea of examining and reading Portuguese translations of American literary works. As luck would have it, I came across *Poesias Escolhidas de Emily Dickinson*, a modestly-sized bilingual edition with translations by Olívia Krähenbühl, first published in 1956. Thus when asked, a few months later, to choose a topic for a presentation in Rio de Janeiro to speak at a conference of English-language teachers, I thought of reporting on translations of Dickinson's poetry in Brazil.

Besides Krähenbühl's, I had also discovered a handful of translations by the recently de-

ceased Manuel Bandeira, "THE poet here," as the American poet Elizabeth Bishop, then living in Brazil was quick to recognize. Rather righteously (and pompously) I dubbed these two Brazilian translators as Dickinson's "privileged and presumptuous guests." Long story short, this public presentation went a long way to setting me up as a student of Brazilian translations of Dickinson. From then on – from 1970 to the present – whenever a new book of Dickinson translations has appeared in Brazil, I have been sent a copy by my friend Carlos Daghlian, who himself is the author of a dissertation on Dickinson as well as the compiler of an on-line worldwide bibliography of Dickinson translations. These number about a dozen, along with copies of the program for the Brazilian production of William Luce's "Emily, the Belle of Amherst." The program reproduces the translations of Dickinson's poetry done by Maria da Julieta Drummond de Andrade, who is the daughter of Carlos Drummond de Andrade, one of Brazil's most important poets of the twentieth century.

I have acquired two Dickinson artifact art books by Walter Feldman, one by purchase, the second a gift. I purchased *Emily Dickinson 7 Poems* (8 of 14), a miniature "concertina" book. But *Summer Diary 1989 for Emily Dickinson* is a one-of-a-kind book comprised of the artist's sketches of trees, bushes, and vines within his ken during, I believe, a period of convalescence.

I have never come across signed or inscribed copies. (I recall a Channel 2 auction when the famed owner of the Brattle Book Store offered up a copy of the 1890 *Poems*, asserting that it was signed by the poet. Of course I did not bid. How could I after such a claim?) The one exception that I recall is that I paid three dollars for an inscribed copy of *Austin and Mabel: The Amherst Affair and Love Letters of Austin Dickinson and Mabel Loomis Todd* by Polly Longworth, even though I already owned a copy of the book and would never have asked Polly, a fellow trustee of the Martha Dickinson Bianchi Trust, to sign it.

I've already mentioned that for quite a while I bought secondary works (which now fill more than three shelves in my library) when they came out. (I rented my house for the time I was in Brazil, and when I moved back in the only book that I noticed was missing, obviously taken by the graduate student in English literature who had rented the place from me, was Charles R. Anderson's splendid study *Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise*. I couldn't wait to replace it.) Then there was the book of criticism I had read about somewhere but could not find, not in the libraries I had access to or the booksellers I frequented. In fact, when I asked for J. V. Cunningham's book on Dickinson at the Grolier Poetry Book Shop, I was told that not only did they not have the book but I must be mistaken about it since they had never heard of it. In fact, they seriously doubted that such a book existed. I began to doubt it myself. You can't imagine what pleasure it gave me to find and purchase, a few years later, Cunningham's *Dickinson: Lyric and Legend*, published by Sylvester & Orphanos in Los Angeles in 1980.

And have I mentioned that I own a copy of *TV Guide* for December 18, 1976, showing John Chancellor and David Brinkley on the cover, but featuring Anthony Hecht on "The Belle of Amherst"? How many Dickinson collectors have one of those?

All this happened, I point out, before the advent of on-line bookselling and search-engines for data-bank explorations and, subsequently, the now seemingly inevitable demise of my occupation and pleasure in looking around for antique shops and junk stores where I can ferret around for more books to add to the insatiable accumulator's horde.

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*George Monteiro is Professor Emeritus of English and Adjunct Professor of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies at Brown University. He is the author of many studies of US, Brazilian, and Portuguese literature, including, most recently, a translation of the Iberian Poems of Miguel Torga (2005).*

Series Editor, Cindy MacKenzie

## The Mind and Life of Genevieve Taggard

By Jane Donahue Eberwein

*This is the second in a series of articles about early Dickinson biographers, including Josephine McIlvain Pollitt Pohl and George Frisbee Whicher.*

Genevieve Taggard’s 1930 biography, *The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson* (Knopf), is remembered now almost exclusively for the melodramatic love story at the heart of her narrative – a story even Taggard recognized as “legend.” The key figures were George Gould (a distant cousin and promising but impoverished Amherst College student who later became a clergyman in Worcester, Massachusetts), Emily herself (just recently returned from her year at Mount Holyoke), and Edward Dickinson (a father fixated on the child in whom he saw a heightened version of himself). A formidable public speaker and editor of *The Indicator*, a student literary publication, Gould presumably played a role in publishing Dickinson’s comical valentine beginning “Magnum bonum, ‘harum scarum’” in the February 1850 issue (L34). He was the likely recipient of that witty missive, which bespoke more delight in language than amorous passion. Yet Taggard believed that Gould, Austin’s classmate and friend, played a key role in whatever crisis accounted for the sharp disparity between Emily Dickinson’s uneventful outer existence and her intensely rich inner drama, a contrast Taggard described as “two lives in one person – lives that interlocked, but did not interfere” (xiv).

Taggard, who was teaching at Mount Holyoke College while preparing this book, relied on Amherst lore for key elements of her story. Even while warning that “we



Courtesy of Sarah Lawrence College Archives

must be wary of legend; it contributes very little and is often false or obtuse” (82), she drew on written and/or oral accounts by three sources identified as X, Y, and Z (with X since identified as Mary Lee Hall, who relayed a story from Aurelia Hinsdale Davis). X’s account of Dickinson’s love crisis focused on the 1850 College commencement celebration, when “Emily sent word to her lover to meet her at a certain hour, in a part of the grounds, after the reception was over. She was dressed in white, and when her lover appeared she told him that her father had forbidden her to see him, or to write to him, and declared that love was too vital a flower to be crushed so cruelly. She promised to love him as long as she lived, said she would answer every letter he wrote, arranged to have Mr. Sweetser receive and deliver the letters to Maggie, told him she would dress in white, fall, winter, spring, and summer, and never again would

go outside the gate, but live the life of a recluse – for his sake” (108). Another version had the lovers meeting in the garden only to turn and discover her father standing behind them with a lantern to order her into the house. Emily’s defiant reply was “very well, father, if you do not trust me out of your sight, I will never leave your garden again” (82). A third version characterized the lover as an attorney, which raises doubts about Gould.

Taggard’s living sources, all aged women, relied on their own or their mothers’ memories of conversations with Lavinia Dickinson, Margaret Maher, or Mrs. Austin Dickinson, and two claimed that they had it on good authority that the lover’s name was George Gould. Building on this groundwork, Taggard added subsequent elements to the story, which included speculation on a possible meeting between Dickinson and Gould when he was preaching in Philadelphia during her visit there, an assumed pattern of surreptitious mail delivery over many years from Gould through Deacon Luke Sweetser to Maggie and thence to Emily, and closing emphasis on Gould’s comments after the 1890 *Poems* appeared. Gould himself proved less central to this tale than Edward Dickinson and the family dynamic Taggard intuited on the basis of Emily’s letters and Lavinia’s bitter late-life comments about their father. Taggard held that Edward recognized his own physical and mental traits in his brilliant elder daughter.

# DICKINSON SCHOLARS



Jane and Robert Eberwein  
Photo Credit: Steve Fratoni

ter and jealously claimed her for himself. Taggard knew the risks of relying on memories of persons who were children at the time of the poet's death. Her goal, however, was to counter stories she regarded as even more suspect that had been advanced by Martha Dickinson Bianchi, with her sentimental account of her aunt's heroic renunciation of a married clergyman whom she had met in Philadelphia, and Josephine Pollitt, with her case for Lieutenant Edward Hunt as the object of Dickinson's unattainable love. Bianchi retaliated in *Emily Dickinson Face to Face* (1932) by disparaging Taggard's case for Gould as lover, and she flatly rejected the representation of her grandfather as a cruel, controlling parent.

Even sympathetic early reviewers zeroed in on deficiencies they recognized in Taggard's biography. Anna Mary Wells, reviewing it for *American Literature* (2, 4: 455-58) along with Pollitt's *Emily Dickinson, the Human Background of Her Poetry*, Macgregor Jenkins's *Emily Dickinson Friend and Neighbor*, and Alfred Leete Hampson's *Emily Dickinson: A Bibliography* – all published for the centennial of the poet's birth – rec-

ognized the problems biographers faced when she observed that “the technique of the mystery story does not lend itself readily to biography. Moreover, very little happened to Emily Dickinson. She lived in Amherst and wrote poetry; in those two lines we have almost her whole biography” (455). Frederic I. Carpenter, reviewing the first three of these books for the *New England Quarterly* (3, 4: 753-57), commented that “the fault of Miss Taggard's method is that, having refused credence to Mme. Bianchi's story, she then adopts as much of it as suits her needs, rejects the rest of it (George Gould was not married and did not die prematurely), and finally bolsters up her own version with the sworn statements of various correspondents, signed, respectively, ‘X,’ ‘Y,’ and ‘Z,’ asserting that George Gould was the man in the case. The story is made coherent more by the strength of Miss Taggard's imagination than by her reasoning.” Yet, he concluded, “one feels that, if not demonstrable by fact, it is at least true to the spirit of Emily Dickinson and her poetry” (756).

Later biographers have rejected Taggard's story. George Whicher had lived too long in Amherst to trust contradictory folklore. Of Gould, Whicher declared in *This Was a Poet: Emily Dickinson* that “there is not the slightest ground for supposing that her love poems were addressed to him” (321). Richard Sewall judged in *The Life of Emily Dickinson* that the story did not seem to fit either of the two Dickinson principals while noting that “there is no hint of a quarrel or misunderstanding between Mr. Dickinson and young Gould” (422, 421). Cynthia Griffin Wolff corrected Taggard's account by observing in *Emily Dickinson* that “George Gould was still calling at the Dickinson house to see Emily, and he continued his relationship with the family at least until 1852” (114). Even though Alfred Habegger agreed with Taggard that Edward Dickinson might have intervened in an ill-timed courtship, he thought it more likely that the father objected to his daughter's exposure to public remark through the *Indicator* publication

than to any romantic overtures (238-39). As we know, Emily did not wear white exclusively in the 1850s nor confine herself to the Homestead in the years when she visited Washington, sought eye treatment in Cambridge, and attended frequent social events at the Evergreens. In general, however, biographers have been willing to add Gould to the list of young men who were objects of Dickinson's “girlish crushes” (Wolff, 387).

This was the only biography Genevieve Taggard wrote in a long and richly productive literary career. Although chiefly a poet, she displayed remarkable scholarly resourcefulness in tracking down and marshaling evidence as well as in calling attention to deficiencies even in her own imagined reconstruction of bygone events (supplying a note, for example, questioning whether Maggie Maher had joined the Dickinson household early enough to serve as an eye-witness). Taggard's “Acknowledgment” indicates careful research at the Jones Library and Converse Library in Amherst, the Mount Holyoke College Library, and the Boston Public Library as well as conversations and correspondence with knowledgeable persons including George Whicher and Mabel Loomis Todd. She acknowledged Pollitt's book, which must have seen print even as Taggard was concluding her work, and pointed out errors in that as well as Madame Bianchi's memoirs of her aunt. If Taggard relied too heavily on memories of aged ladies, her eagerness to avail herself of their testimony before that generation disappeared was surely understandable. In any case, she cautioned her readers that “we do not remember much but legend of a person when we have only half seen a hurrying whiteness” (xii).

As a poet, Taggard relied most insightfully on Dickinson's own poems and letters, which she read with close attention. Even with this material, however, she found herself stymied by missing evidence. Only the 750 poems printed by 1929 were available to her, and for letters she had to rely

on a borrowed copy of the rare 1894 edition. From these sources, she arrived at another story of young Emily's loss of an important masculine influence – in this case reproaching other writers for ignoring Leonard Humphrey, although Taggard applied to him epistolary comments that later scholars have applied to Benjamin Newton. Anticipating the editorial scholarship that would transform Dickinson studies from the middle decades of the twentieth century, Taggard called attention to possibilities of dating poem manuscripts on the basis of penmanship and association with letters, and she discerned by comparing the published facsimile of a poem with its appearance in print that serious questions should be raised about Todd's transcription of manuscript material, introduction of altered language, and choices among variant manuscripts of a poem.

Taggard pointed toward other directions in Dickinson scholarship that have become central to our understanding: anticipating Shira Wolosky in identifying the Civil War as a crucial force in the poet's artistic emergence, James Guthrie in recognizing the centrality of legal language to Dickinson's writing, and Aife Murray by intuiting the influence of servants' speech habits on the poet's linguistic experiments. Murray acknowledges that generative insight in *Maid as Muse: How Servants Changed Emily Dickinson's Life and Language*, where she credits Taggard along with Pollitt and Jay Leyda as important forebears. On the other hand, this biography by a woman poet actively engaged in the literary scene of the 1920s and 1930s fails to anticipate feminist approaches to Dickinson. The personal relationships Taggard stressed as central to the poet's life were all with men: her father, Humphrey, Gould, and later Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Of Higginson's role, Taggard declares, "he focused what otherwise would have remained deranged: Emily's picture of father and teacher and lover. Otherwise she would have had only God" (180-81). Taggard writes disparagingly of

Dickinson's sister, sister-in-law, women friends, and even Elizabeth Barrett Browning (though no more disparagingly than she writes of Thoreau, whom she mentions frequently as a Transcendental parallel to Dickinson).

Although Taggard focused intently on Dickinson's self-awareness as a poet, her own experience of poetic vocation differed drastically. Taggard saw her first poems in print as a student at Berkeley, where her editorial experiences prepared her for entry into the New York writing scene and vigorous involvement in left-wing literary circles. By the time she wrote her Dickinson biography, Taggard had already authored *For Eager Lovers* (1922), *Hawaiian Hilltop* (1923), *Words for the Chisel* (1926), and *Traveling Standing Still: Poems, 1918-1928* (1928), collected California poems in *Continent's End* (1925), edited several magazines, and co-founded *Measure: A Magazine of Verse*. In 1925, she also edited *May Days*, an anthology of poems that had first appeared in the *Liberator* and *New Masses*. Another collection, *Circumference: Varieties of Metaphysical Verse*, appeared in 1929 and reveals her engagement with Emily Dickinson at that time, not only in its allusive title but also in her linkage of Dickinson to John Donne as the only poets in the entire history of English and American literature with a masterful gift for conveying "the form of an idea" (10).

Among Taggard's writings, both before and after *The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson*, were short autobiographical pieces that reveal how little of her own experience the later poet could have discovered in Dickinson's. Where Dickinson remained firmly rooted in Amherst, Taggard moved frequently and rootlessly: from Waitsburg, Washington, her birthplace; to Hawaii, where her parents served as missionaries; back to Waitsburg; back to Hawaii; to Berkeley, New York, California, and many areas around the world – including Mallorca and the south of France. Teaching assignments at Mount Holyoke,

Bennington College, and Sarah Lawrence drew her to the northeast. In her *Collected Poems, 1918-1938* (1938), poems are fol-

*Continued on page 22*

## "Dedication"

*Emily!*  
*The book is bound*  
*The pages cut.*  
*Index says: Emily.*  
*Where are you found?*

Deity will see to it  
 That you never do it.

*Deity did.*  
*You are vexed.*  
*You vanish, with a text.*

*Still you have been*  
*Some months my shy companion. While*  
*I wrote*  
*The slow prose,*  
*You watched, alert, amused. Your words*  
*Fell on the page, consenting, with my*  
*words.*

*Index offended you,*  
*The binding, and the print,*  
*The sold book, possession, the review.*  
*Emily, where are you?*

*Go to her verse, reader;*  
*To the great verse.*  
*Here is nothing of hers.*

*She will elude us all,*  
*Run from any but her own call.*  
*Read her own page, reader.*  
*Wait . . . read the great verse. Do not*  
*look up if you think you hear her.*  
*Do not for a moment stir:*  
*She will come near, confidently nearer;*  
*Even as I write this, she is here.*

Genevieve Taggard's "Dedication" to *The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson*



Series Editor, Jonnie Guerra

## Waiting for Dickinson

By Kate Daniels

*I was mesmerized when I read Kate Daniels' story of her journey with the poetry of Emily Dickinson and am confident that the Bulletin's readership will be too. Daniels is the author of four volumes of poetry. The first two – The White Wave (1984), which won the Agnes Lynch Starrett Poetry Prize, and The Niobe Poems (1988), recipient of honorable mention for the Paterson Poetry Prize – were published by the University of Pittsburgh. Her two later volumes, Four Testimonies (1998) and A Walk in Victoria's Secret (2010), were published by Louisiana State University Press as part of its Southern Messenger Series (selected by Dave Smith). Daniels is Director of Creative Writing at Vanderbilt University. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals and magazines and are frequently anthologized.*

My mother was born in 1933 in Lancashire, England, part of one of the last generations of British schoolchildren required to memorize long passages of poetry in grammar school. As a child of the working class, she left school at fifteen, and never set foot in a classroom again. A year later, only one month past her sixteenth birthday, and five months pregnant, she boarded the Queen Mary ocean liner, crammed full of young English, Irish, and Scottish women – girls mostly – who were all traveling to the United States to be reunited with their American military husbands. By the time she was twenty one, she was settled in the U.S. as a British war bride and mother of four American children. As a Resident Alien, life was hard for her in the American South of the 1950s. In that era, she stood out vividly as “an Other” and was regarded as exotic, but suspicious in that parochial time and place. Her manner of speaking was “different”; she had a strong feeling for the arts; she was outspoken and feisty; and –perhaps most threatening of all – she was Catholic. Her neighbors, coworkers, and even some of my father's family members didn't hesitate to single her out as a “foreigner.” It must have been hard for her to hold onto a coherent sense of herself. Perhaps that was why she clung, lifelong, to so many poems she remembered from her early childhood.

Out of the dozens of poems she had memorized from the pages of Palgrave's Golden Treasury, my mother built my love of poetry and furnished my childhood with her recitations of the poems she loved. On the sim-



Photo Credit: Vanderbilt University

plest level, I believe they took her back to a happier period of her life. In a more complicated way, perhaps they temporarily arrested the destabilizing influence of external assaults on her personal identity that kept on telling her she was not at home, that she did not belong in the place she had chosen to make her life and raise her family.

Of course, the poems she knew, and which she recited to me with great flourish and

overdone affect, were poems of a certain type: longish, rhymed and metered narrative pieces with detailed character development and powerful terminal closure. They tended to be didactic as well and to end in a highly moralizing manner. Thus, the resolution of the poems not only provided a compelling rhythmic experience of finality, but often a stinging warning, or even a rebuke, that solidly gilded the lily of traditional poetic form. A prime example, and the one I loved the most, was Hillaire Belloc's “Matilda.” A poetic rendering of the boy (in this case, a girl like me) who cried wolf by falsely reporting house fires, the poem ends with its eponymous “heroine” burning to death as punishment for her former lies:

That Night a Fire did break out--  
You should have heard Matilda Shout!  
You should have heard her Scream and  
Bawl,  
And throw the window up and call  
To People passing in the Street –  
(The rapidly increasing Heat  
Encouraging her to obtain  
Their confidence) – but all in vain!  
For every time she shouted “Fire!”  
They only answered “Little Liar!”  
And therefore when her Aunt returned,  
Matilda, and the House, were Burned.

It must be obvious, then, that Mother's repertoire did not include anything by Emily Dickinson – and not only because Dickinson was from the “wrong” side of the pond (many of Longfellow's poems would have fit easily into Palgrave's), but because of everything

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that makes Dickinson Dickinson: her subversive grammatical strategies, her addiction to ambiguity, her utter disinterest in straightforward utterance, and her disdain for narrative (“tell it slant”). Although my mother loved poetry unabashedly – all its music and mysteries – the poems she gave me carried the distinctive, imperial imprint of centuries of literature emphasizing the importance of “being British.” They were tonally unambiguous, often oratorical in voice, and tended to thematically reinforce the collective virtues of duty and self denial, and – above all – of keeping one’s doubts to oneself. In other words, the poems she recited emphasized the importance of being a team player, of sticking with the pack. What – finally – could be less like Emily Dickinson?

So it was that I grew into poetry at a very early age – beginning to “write” poems during kindergarten before I could read anything at all, and when I could barely print the letters of my name. My mother encouraged me: I dictated, and she transcribed my words onto pieces of construction paper that I folded into “books” and illustrated with my crayons. For several years, my introduction to poetry took place in an imaginative space completely uninhabited by Emily Dickinson. I have been trying for the past several months to remember when I first read anything by her, but I can’t recall. I am sure, however, that I had some defined sense of her by fourth grade. That year, I had a remarkable teacher who noticed my love of reading. She filled a small bookcase just for me in the back of the classroom with dozens of books of poetry and fiction, and then released me from the dreary routines of class work to sit by myself in a small glass-walled office, reading myself to paradise. I know I knew Emily Dickinson by then because I recall sitting there on a sunny winter day, looking out through the glass at bare gray branches, and wondering what kind of poet would write: “I’m Nobody! Who are you?” (Fr260) Words that attracted but repelled me, too, with their confident embrace of self-erasure . . .

Thus, the first Emily Dickinson I recall having in mind was barely of interest to me at all – a mere blip on the screen of my literary imagination. The earliest poems I read – “I’m Nobody”; “I like to see it lap the Miles –” (Fr383); “A narrow Fellow in the Grass” (Fr1096) – are the ones that many of my baby boomer generation first knew – the more easily assimilated, supposedly child-like verses that the editors of mid-twentieth century elementary readers must have calculated would appeal to us – or those that they wanted to appeal to us. They were poems that (on the surface, anyway) seemed to be about the intense, but essentially very common experience of being “little” in a large, grown up world; a poem about a snake; a poem about a train . . .

Of course, that is not really what these poems are “about,” but these easily-swallowed, thematic tags provided a convenient way for editors (possibly perplexed by the complexity of the work overall) to introduce Dickinson to a post-war readership that remained traumatized by World War II, the Holocaust, the bomb. Striving to calm themselves by returning to pre-war “normality,” the era strove for political security, social conformity, and personal ease in the scheme of all things. Meant to reassure, these were the public virtues of our Cold War childhood. The real Emily Dickinson with her incisive depictions of psychic terror and transgressive explorations of personal identity and the fragility of religious belief was anything but reassuring. Her poems provided no balm for a public that was trying to pat itself back into order, in order to go on believing that the world would continue more or less as before – surely it would. When I go back and look at the anthologies and readers now, it seems to me that the editors plucked out a few cover poems that provided a way for Dickinson to pass into the mainstream of American poetry during a time that was not psychologically prepared to read her, even as it recognized her special position in our national literature. In disguise, she passed into our midst, posing as a benign nature

poet, an unthreatening, diminutive lady versifier/devotional writer. We read her little stanzas, and turned the pages of our readers, barely ruffled . . .

Probably because my earliest introduction to poetry was so heavily slanted in favor of narrative, I didn’t warm to Dickinson for decades. Because of my strong orientation to the storytelling aspect of poems, I tended to veer away from verse that didn’t get started moving in a dramatic fashion right away. I loved characters, place descriptions, action. I loved the old fashioned, rhetorical voices of public poetry, proclaiming, orating, preaching, and poems that didn’t waste any time getting started. Thus, the quiet, brittle, psychologically incisive voice of the unassuming lady poet from Amherst Village that carried the barely-buried ability to psychically annihilate any reader’s self-delusions did not attract me when I was younger.

I wrote poetry, myself, all though elementary and high school, and though I was diverted often enough by Dickinson’s syntactical oddities and her arresting tropes, I never tarried in her depths. Now, of course, I wonder if my own lack of attachment to Dickinson during those years had some kind of built in warning device that shooed me away from the invitation to plunge inside one’s own psyche and confront the riches and the rot residing there, side by side. Unstable enough in my own identity, surrounded by family members struggling with substance abuse, schizophrenia, and severe depression, and striving to lift myself up out of the working class environment that I had been born into, I consciously experienced no temptation to enter Dickinson’s tiny, pouch-like poems that closed up immediately upon entry, drawing poet and reader into an impossibly close interaction. Unconsciously, perhaps, I feared being trapped in the bag with lines that left no possibility of misinterpreting their depiction of mental breakdown.

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,  
And I dropped down, and down –

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And hit a World, at every plunge,  
And Finished knowing – then –  
(Fr340)

Although I could not consciously perceive the threat of psychic dissolution that her poems both explored and carried the potential to enact, I have come to believe that it was this very characteristic that warned me away from Dickinson. During all those years that I more or less dismissed her as a poet of pastoral and religious subject matter that “didn’t interest me,” perhaps I was really invoking some kind of unconscious self-protection. I like to think that Dickinson and her poetry waited for me until I was psychologically strong enough to endure encounters with poems like this:

I felt a Cleaving in my Mind –  
As if my Brain had split –  
I tried to match it – Seam by Seam –  
But could not make it fit –

The thought behind, I strove to join  
Unto the thought before –  
But Sequence unravelled out of Sound –  
Like Balls – upon a Floor –  
(Fr867)

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From the beginning, my personal preference in poetry has been for an expansive verse line. The poets who set my heart on fire – Pablo Neruda, Walt Whitman, Muriel Rukeyser, William Wordsworth, Allen Ginsberg, Adrienne Rich – wrote long, generous, meandering poems. Many of them had a gift for narrative, and I tried to build my own work along the models they provided. I carried this preference without question until I was fifty years old. That year, however, in classic American midlife fashion, the center stopped holding. I broke down, and in order to put myself together again, I entered psychoanalysis. The therapy I chose was old fashioned, expensive, and highly narrative. Four times a week, I traveled to a small office to lie down on a couch, with a mostly silent cipher of an analyst sitting behind me out of sight. I talked; she listened. One of the first effects

of this new experience was a distinct turn in my aesthetic taste. Immediately, I found myself drawn into a brand new, very intense identification with Dickinson’s poetry which I now saw as extraordinary beyond anything else ever written by an American poet. Although I had taught Dickinson to college students for twenty years by the time I entered analysis, I had most often taught her as a kind of object lesson for American women writers. As a feminist, I focused on the example of her queer life, of the obstacles she faced to authorship, of her perseverance, of what Adrienne Rich called, in “Vesuvius at Home,” the first American woman poet’s “life deliberately organized on her [own] terms.”

Sliding rapidly down into the psychic depths that opened to me early in my analysis, however, the inspiring, iconic facts of Dickinson’s life slid away from me as irrevocably as water from a clenched fist. Suddenly, she was nothing but an interplay of language and silence: pure poetry. Her dense and enigmatic verses—characterized by tightly compressed imagery, precise meter, and baffling conundrums, paradoxes, and reversals – compelled me both in and out of sessions. At home, I awoke from sleep with entire poems of hers that I did not know I had memorized zooming through my mind. And in sessions, as I lay on the couch, struggling with vertigo and with the intensity of my transference feelings for my analyst, snippets of Dickinson began flying through my head: “To fill a Gap / Insert the Thing that caused it – ” (Fr647). “I like a look of Agony,” (Fr339). “A Prison gets to be a friend – ” (Fr456). “Suspense – is Hostiler than Death – ” (Fr775). And, of course (the context being psychoanalysis), “I’m Nobody! Who are you?”

“They look like birds,” I reported to my analyst. “They look like birds flying through my mind, startled by gunshot out of a tree.” For perhaps the first time, I entered deeply into the experience of lyric form, pulled into that

exquisite pleasure by Dickinson’s psychic insistence.

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For many decades now, poets and psychoanalysts have remarked upon the correspondences between their intensely contemplative, language-based disciplines. Besides a talent for rendering ideas and feelings into memorable speech, both require a robust ability to endure alone-ness, to sit with failure and uncertainty, and to return to the same texts again and again, re-imagining, revising, rewriting. “The poets were there” – meaning the discovery of the unconscious mind – “before I was,” Freud said on many occasions. And in one of the most perfect descriptions of the psychoanalytic dimensions of poetry writing, Yeats described the “moment of creation” as a psychic space on the border between sleep and wakefulness. Working there, he believed, poets were drawn into a state of “trance, in which the mind, liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols.” Perfectly, this describes the process of free association – work that is as essential to psychoanalysis as it is to writing poetry. In the words of the contemporary analyst, Christopher Bollas, both poetry and psychoanalysis allow patient and poet alike “to hear from his or her own unconscious life.” It is an absolute truism, then, that those uninterested in hearing the news from their unconscious should neither write a poem, nor go into therapy... Nor should they read the poetry of Emily Dickinson . . .

Dickinson, of course, lived and wrote before the advent of psychoanalysis. But one of the many remarkable features of her work is its pre-psychoanalytic prescience. Like analysis, her poetry is remarkably solitary and insight-oriented. It pursues its insights by the continual reframing of context and received content. Although it is a quiet practice, it is relentless in its ability to disturb, and it requires enormous psychological courage in order to engage with it. Over and over, her poems decenter and de-

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# DICKINSON AND THE ARTS

*Series Editor, Barbara Dana*

*This is the first in the new series DICKINSON AND THE ARTS. We are seeking articles by artists in all fields of the Arts whose work has been inspired by Dickinson and by scholars and writers who have studied a Dickinson inspired artist and could share the artist's experience of the poet. If you would like to contribute, please contact the editor of the Bulletin.*

## Wasn't She Just a Recluse?

### The Influence of Dickinson on the Life of the Artist She Inspires

By Barbara Dana

Writers and actors tend to identify with the characters they portray. I know this from experience, which is why I had misgivings about beginning a novel based on the childhood of Emily Dickinson. One of the first questions we ask ourselves (after "Can I actually do this?") is whether we want to spend weeks, months, or possibly years in the emotional space required. The fact that Dickinson became one of the greatest poets in history was a perk, but spending years inside the skin of a spunky young girl who was headed for the life of an anxious recluse was not my idea of a good time. Childhood experience would at the very least have played some part in the reclusiveness of the poet. I would have to immerse myself in all parts of her life.

Ultimately my immersion would lead me not only to write about Dickinson, but to inhabit her life on the stage. The book came first, however, and starting to write proved difficult. My marriage of thirty-five years had just ended, my father had just died, and my spiritual advisor had just hanged himself in his mother's bathroom. You can laugh. My Aunt Bernice used to

laugh when telling the story of a Thanksgiving guest who announced, "I'm going to have another piece of that apple pie if it kills me," took a bite of pie and dropped dead. "It's awful," Bernice used to say every time she told the story, "but you have to laugh."

Following these simultaneous traumatic events, I entered a deep depression. I needed to get out, not live the life of someone who, however brilliant, ended up not leaving her bedroom. The book would take at least two years! (It took ten.) Why not

write about someone like Margaret Mead, or Hillary Clinton, someone who really got out there? I was beginning to make progress! I had just figured out that I could get myself to leave my cave of many covers by setting one simple goal: Get from the bed to the coffee maker. That was all I asked of myself, not to be happy, or hopeful, not to buck up, not to force myself to do something for someone less fortunate than I, just to get to the coffee machine. Things would move along from there. I would push the "on" button. I would lean against the counter and wait. I could handle that.

I was "getting my groove back," "moving on," as we hear so much about these days. Did I really want to go backwards?

In the midst of my indecision I was asked by a friend what I was going to write next. "I'm considering a novel about Emily Dickinson," I replied.

"Wasn't she just a recluse?"

Not supportive, I thought. And not true! Emily Dickinson may have been reclusive, but she was also a great poet! And she did leave the house. Not in the manner to which we



The author in *The Belle of Amherst*. Photo Credit: Sam Masinter

# DICKINSON AND THE ARTS

are accustomed, but her verses, her light, her very Essence spread out into the entire world!

My friend's comment only served to confuse my decision-making process. Maybe it was crazy to write a novel about someone who never left the house. Where's the plot?? She becomes the greatest woman poet in the history of America! But is that enough?

I continued to doubt my ability to write the book, especially in my condition. Still I thought that if I could manage to work it might provide a reason to get out of bed – one that reached beyond a cup of coffee. I have a friend who sometimes writes in bed on her iPad, but that method had never appealed to me. It didn't feel like real work even though my friend already had two published books that had been written that way. Perhaps the need to write would get me out of bed, but it wouldn't get me past the front door. (Who sounds like Emily now?). I honestly didn't think I could concentrate well enough to work anyway. I could put it off for a while, but why do that? I was never going to recover. My writer friend with the iPad told me I would be well in time, but I didn't believe her. Other friends told me the same thing. I didn't believe them either. They didn't know how I felt.

But Emily did.

Pain- has an Element of Blank –  
It cannot recollect  
When it begun – Or if there were  
A time when it was not –

It has no future – but itself –  
It's Infinite contain  
It's Past – enlightened to perceive  
New Periods - of Pain. (Fr760)

After weeks of indecision – without warning – all reasoning stopped and I found myself beginning the book. I can't tell you

why. It was “a happen” beyond reason. I was being drawn to Emily Dickinson. Little did I know that our lives were about to be interwoven for Eternity.

The greatest surprise as I worked on the book and later when I played Dickinson on stage was that contrary to being drawn further back into reclusiveness, my identification with Emily did just the opposite. I usually knew what to expect. When playing Joan of Arc and in writing my novel Young Joan there was no surprise. In each instance, as I had expected (and hoped!), I found myself touched by Joan's power. Living in the center of her bravery was a call to my own. It wasn't theoretical. I actually experienced what I felt to be Joan's strength, her daring, the power of her simplicity and devotion. Each time my work ended I felt like a shadow of my former self. When one has saved France, how can she be satisfied with deciding which paper towels to buy at the A&P?

While playing a young girl in William Inge's play *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* I spent months inside the panic she felt attending her first dance at the country club, the overwhelming shyness, the fear that froze her mind and made her mute. I knew what that was! Remember how I felt at the Freshman Dance at Dalton in the white dress with the strawberries on it, when not one boy from Calhoun asked me to Dance? That's me! Oh, God! Oh, No!

Writers and actors search for these connections. We strive to recognize them and hold fast, blurring the lines of distinction between our selves and the people we portray. My acting teacher, Uta Hagan, told us to look for a time when we were like the character. There was a scene in which Joan of Arc had to bellow at the English troops, commanding them to get out of France. I would never do that, I thought. That color is not on my palette. I would never have the guts. Or the balls! But wait! When my dog got into the garbage, where I thought

there were chicken bones, didn't I tear into the kitchen, screaming in my deepest, most death defying voice, “GET OUT OF THE GARBAGE!!!” ??? Of course I did. That was me! Saving my dog's life was as important to me as chasing the English out of France! I know that feeling! Now get those bloody, murderous English bastards the hell out of France!!! Yes! And I was there and I had found that color within myself and I had lived it!! I do the same thing when I write. To make something live I need to know what it feels like.

Sometimes we inhabit the skin of a character without knowing it. This is what I most feared in portraying Emily – the magnet that would draw me inexorably into the center of an oft-times tormented soul. During a rehearsal of “*The Belle of Amherst*,” William Luce's play about Dickinson, I was having trouble with the opening scene. I was anxious, uncomfortable, self-conscious. When I shared these thoughts with my director Austin Pendleton, he smiled. “What's Emily feeling?” he asked. Of course! I had just described what Emily was feeling. She had just entered the parlor with a platter of black cake to face a group of visitors when she had seen virtually no one in years! (Except Vinnie and Maggie and the cats!) I got us mixed up! This is what happens, and an artist better be ready for it.

I have been deeply affected by Dickinson, but not in the way I had expected. What has influenced my life most strongly is not her reclusiveness, but her courage. I have been living with Emily for over fifteen years now and the changes in my life have been astounding. I know that therapy, along with my own once-invisible-to-me strength, played a major role in my healing, but Emily was without a doubt a strong catalyst. This morning I made a list of the changes, most of which would never have happened without her.

1. Left the house
2. Able to shop for food

# DICKINSON AND THE ARTS

3. Returned to acting
4. Joined EDIS, made new friends
5. Travelled to Japan, England, Canada, Hawaii, etc. for EDIS meetings & conferences
6. First non-fiction book published (*Wider than the Sky*, co-edited with Cindy MacKenzie)
7. Finished Dickinson novel, published 2009 (*A Voice of Her Own*)
8. Addressed large groups around the U.S. (Dickinson workshops, lectures, book signings, etc.)
9. Served on a panel at Oxford University (never went to college)
10. Learned about myself
11. Learned about life and philosophy
12. Led funeral service (with minister) exclusively containing the poems and thoughts of ED
13. Did extensive research at Harvard and Amherst College (never went to college)
14. Lectured on ED's power to heal at the Geisinger Medical Center in PA (with Cindy MacKenzie)
15. Acted throughout the US and in Canada in *The Belle of Amherst* (four years)

Fifteen changes in fifteen years! And that was just the beginning!

The first change was the most surprising. Emily Dickinson helped me leave the house?? Ironic, but true. I attribute this to many factors, not the least of which is her uncanny ability to verbalize the unsayable, to look squarely into the darkest, innermost chambers of her mind and tell it like it is. She knew where I was. I was not alone. She saw me. She had been there and had survived to tell the tale: "After great pain, a formal feeling comes—" (Fr372); "Will there really be a "morning"?" (Fr148); "We grow accustomed to the Dark—" (Fr428); "Heart! We will forget him" (Fr64); "A great Hope fell" (Fr1187); "I got so I could take his name—" (Fr292); and on and on, messages from my sister in Eternity.

Second on the list was another major change. I had been living on Power Bars and suppers at the local café to avoid the panic attack I inevitably suffered in the parking lot of the neighborhood supermarket. After a couple of months of Dickinson research I tried again. I was filled with the same panic. And then – a lifesaving thought! Emily had panic attacks. I can use this in my book. A witness! Who was watching the panic attack? Me! There existed a part of me that was not inside the panic! The next day I bought some fruit. (I've been shopping ever since.)

Another change was returning to the stage where I hadn't been for a long time, not just playing the lead, but as the only person on the stage! It was at the 2009 EDIS meeting in Regina, hosted by Cindy MacKenzie. The night before the performance I was terrified. What was I thinking? Had I actually agreed to portray Emily Dickinson alone on stage for two hours in front of an audience of Dickinson scholars? Was I mad? "Much madness is divinest Sense—" (Fr620) came the whisper from Infinity. That calmed me down a bit. As I lay in bed in my darkened hotel room I thought about Emily. What would she have to say about all this? My first thought was surprising: "I dwell in Possibility." How would that apply? My brain raced ahead. OK. This could be a disaster. But it could also be adequate. Or excellent. I have no way of knowing. If I'm going to do this, I have to be willing to go "out there" accepting that each of these outcomes is possible. I have to look all three scenarios squarely in the face and go out on that stage and do the show anyway. And, thanks to Emily, I did.

When I did the play a few months ago an extraordinary thing happened. As I got to the moment of reciting "Wild Nights," I found myself soaring on the back of Emily. I wasn't performing the play. She was. I was along for the ride. I felt a kind of power, an ecstasy that I had never known and it was hers and it was mine and we were

one. I learned something about myself that night, that my spirit, my power, my daring was far greater than I had ever imagined, even when playing Joan of Arc!

My time with Emily is teaching me a lot about life, including the importance of being true to one's self, of speaking one's truth, of admitting what one sees and experiences and not hiding from that. I have learned about the power of words, the preciousness of life, the power of devotion to one's work, and the wisdom of paradox. I often see things in Emily that I can't see in myself, but seeing them in her serves as a bridge to discovering them in the map of my own psyche, things like the complexity of her feelings toward her parents; the breadth of her passion for writing; her take on religion; her dislike of dusting; her inability to picture her own death. In a letter to Abiah Root in January, 1846 (L10), Emily states "it does not seem to me that I shall ever cease to live on earth – I cannot imagine with the farthest stretch of my imagination my own death scene –." She expresses these thoughts in *The Belle of Amherst*. In experiencing Emily's difficulty in picturing her own death scene, I remembered a conversation I had with my mother when I was four in which I asked her if everyone died. "Yes," she said. "But not me," came the response from deep within the omnipotence of my four year-old self. "You will too," said my mother. How furious I became, how betrayed I felt! How could my mother say such a thing? Isn't she on my side anymore?

A recent birthday was shocking for me. Something about the round number, the demarcation in my stubborn mind: I am now an old person, close to the age of death. (I was exaggerating, but unaware of the fact.) Not me, I protested! In some ways I was still four! But my journey with Dickinson flows in many directions. I'm just finishing work on a play with music in which

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Series Editor, Marianne Noble

## Supposed Persons: Emily Dickinson and “I”

By Joy Ladin

*Joy Ladin, Gottesman Professor of English at Stern College of Yeshiva University, is the author of six books of poetry, including recently published The Definition of Joy, as well as a memoir, Through the Door of Life: A Jewish Journey Between Genders. She has written a book-length study of Dickinson's place in American poetry, Soldering the Abyss: Emily Dickinson and Modern American Poetry.*

I made my way across the frozen lawn of The Emily Dickinson Homestead to the Amherst Women's Club and squeezed myself into one of the last seats left in a large oval of people who braved the bitter January cold to explore the shortest, most frequently used and most important word in Dickinson's poetic lexicon: “I.” Though I'd been leading occasional sessions of The Emily Dickinson Museum Poetry Discussion Group for years, I was nervous, and not just because I'd missed the notification that the group had been moved from the Homestead to the Amherst Women's Club and so was arriving late. I knew that while we were talking about Dickinson's “I,” I would be thinking about mine.

I had solid academic reasons for planning a discussion on this subject. The “I” in Dickinson's poems seems both idiosyncratic and uncomfortably familiar (few of us introduce ourselves, as one of Dickinson's speakers does, by saying “I am alive – I guess,” but many of us have muttered something like it to ourselves). She was simultaneously a self-abasing “Nobody” and a confident exemplar of Shelley's vision of the poet as “legislator of reality,” effortlessly inverting, subverting and rewriting the terms of life, death, soul, God, and eternity.

But I also had a personal stake in this subject. I hoped that our exploration of Dickinson's first-person pronoun would teach me what I meant by mine.

When I began teaching Dickinson's poetry at what was then The Emily Dickinson Homestead back in 1998, my first-person pronouns referred to “Jay,” a male persona I created to hide the female gender identity that, since early childhood, had estranged me from my male

body and the life that went with it. In other words, my “I” referred to someone I both was and wasn't, to a body and biography that never felt like mine. My “I” also referred to the ironic consciousness hiding behind and pulling the strings of my male persona. This binary “I” was remarkably stable – I lived that way for decades – but my two “I”s whirled around one another in irresolvable cycles of self-doubt. Was I my lived male persona, or my unlived gender female identity, or, perhaps, the whirl of doubt, the consciousness of my inability to establish a unitary sense of self?

Now that I live as a woman – it's been almost six years – my “I” refers neither to a persona nor to ironic distance but to me, Joy, my true self. But as I was reminded during pre-discussion chitchat, it's still not clear what it means when I say “I.” One discussion group member, who'd taken a class I'd taught years ago as a man, introduced herself as though we'd never met. I didn't explain. Even I am not sure how “I” can signify both my life as a woman and my life as a man, whether the supposedly unitary female “I” that I presented to her conceals, reconciles, or heightens the contradiction between my past persona and present self. My “I” doesn't represent a fixed conjunction of biology, biography, and consciousness, but an ongoing process of self-definition. That sounds marvelously post-modern, but I'd be much more comfortable if I knew more about what, or perhaps how, my “I” means.

Whatever existential wildernesses I wander, I count on Dickinson to have been there and done that, to have written poems that provide pungent, precise language for what seems to me unspeakably confusing and mysterious. I don't think Dickinson was transgender, but the speakers in her poems, like many trans people, tend to locate themselves along margins and boundaries – at home while everyone else is in church, dying while everyone else is alive, bemusedly embarking on the interminable carriage-ride toward “Immortality.” Rather than withdrawing because they don't fit into the usual social slots, Dickinson's marginal speakers rhetori-



Photo Credit: Lisa Ross

# TEACHING DICKINSON

cally plant themselves at the center of signifying and significance, forcing us to wrench our values and perspectives out of our usual frames to construe their mesmerizing soliloquies.

I wanted to learn to say “I” to this student in that way, but couldn’t see how to translate the power of Dickinson’s poetic “I” into practical strategies of self-articulation. It would have been socially and pedagogically disastrous to explain to my former student that she had indeed met me before, back when I had been afraid to own a body and afraid to own my soul, when my life had stood in corners like a loaded gun. But Dickinson’s speakers introduce themselves in these very terms, and somehow persuade us to try to figure out what they mean by “I” rather than imposing our usual assumptions upon them.

I decided to begin this class with Dickinson’s own explanation of what “I” in her poems means in her July 1862 letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson: “When I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse – it does not mean – me – but a supposed person.” Dickinson, not otherwise known for stating her poetics, seems determined to teach her “Preceptor” to distinguish her poetic I from her biographical I, the selves she “supposes” on the page from the living, breathing self that supposed them. It’s a dance teachers and critics have been doing since the heyday of New Criticism – the very heyday that, not coincidentally, also included Dickinson’s relocation from regionalist marginality to the canonical center of American literature. Dickinson’s poetic achievement couldn’t be recognized until readers learned to forestall the impulse to read her engrossingly idiosyncratic, intimate first person as biography (there she is, forever pining over lost love, effusing ecstatically in a meadow, staring down a patriarchal God), and respond to it as art.

Of course, that’s easier said than done. Every semester, my students and I spend hours learning to navigate the labyrinths between literary and authorial “I”s. But the Dickinson Museum Poetry Discussion group has been at this for years; participants took it for granted that “I” in Dickinson’s poems was referred to a “supposed person” rather than Dickinson herself. How-

ever, as we examined Dickinson’s statement of this principle, we noticed how peculiar her terms are, how hard it was to pin down what she means by “state myself” and “Representative of the Verse.” Like Walt Whitman, Dickinson seemed to be trying to turn the language of democracy into the language of poetics. But does “Representative of the Verse” mean that the “I” in Dickinson’s poems is analogous to an elected political representative, as her father had been? If so, what constituency does “I” represent? Does Dickinson’s poetic “I,” like Whitman’s, “contain multitudes”?

We noticed that the epistolary “I” through which Dickinson “states herself” in the letter, seems to contain, if not multitudes, at least two distinct subject positions – the self-abasing self, who, pathetically grateful for Higginson’s instruction, insists, “You see my posture is benighted,” and the self-aggrandizing self who instructs Higginson on how to read her poems. It was clear that Dickinson wanted Higginson to read “I” in her poetry as signifying “supposed persons” rather than her biographical, epistle- and poem-writing self, but it wasn’t clear what kind of self the first-person pronouns in the letter signified.

To explore these questions, we turned to one of Dickinson’s most accessible poems, one which translates her theory of a non-biographical poetic “I” directly into practice:

I’m Nobody. Who are you?  
Are you – Nobody – too?  
Then there’s a pair of us!  
Don’t tell! they’d advertise – you know!

How dreary – to be – Somebody!  
How public – like a Frog –  
To tell one’s name – the livelong June –  
To an admiring Bog! (Fr260)

As we noticed, the informal contraction “I’m” immediately made us feel close to the speaker. “I’m,” our most intimacy-promoting form of self-definition, suggests minimal distance between signifier and signified, “I” and the identity of the speaker who feels comfortable enough with us to say “I’m” even in the rhetoric-inflating arena of poetry. The word

“Nobody” heightens our sense of intimacy, confessing a lack of social status that most of us would try to hide when introducing ourselves to a stranger. But though the unguarded “Nobody” makes us feel close to the speaker, “I’m Nobody” (Dickinson may have borrowed it from Homer’s tale of Odysseus outsmarting the Cyclops) also erases the speaker’s biographical self, turning “I” from a sign of identity into a sign of lack of identity – a lack of identity the speaker embraces as an identity.

Though I didn’t share this with the group, the self-erasing self-definition “I’m Nobody” crystallizes what I meant by “I” when I was living as a man: “I” referred to the consciousness that I had no visible, lived identity, no place in the social order, no way to name myself except by negation (“I’m not a man. Who are you?”). I would never have voiced this self-definition, would never have turned “I’m Nobody” from shamed self-awareness into a declaration of identity. But the speaker of “I’m Nobody” isn’t ashamed to lack socially sanctioned identifiers. Far from it. The speaker seems to equate that being “Nobody” with being a “Representative” self, a self with which others can identify. The speaker’s cheerful abdication of social status is followed by an invitation to another (“Who are you? / Are you – Nobody – too?”) to join the “I’m Nobody” bandwagon. All of us in the class felt the pull of this invitation. By the third line, we all seemed to have signed onto the speaker’s populist campaign to invert the social hierarchy and redefine being “Nobody” as an exclusive social club (“Then there’s a pair of us! / Don’t tell!”) and being “Somebody” as an exercise in public self-humiliation, a sign, as one participant put it, that one is “acting like a frog in heat.”

By “stating the self” as “Nobody” – by severing the link between “I” and biographical identity – the speaker stages a small-scale coup, establishing a two-quatrains rhetorical polis open to all willing to renounce their identifications with social categories and hierarchies, and snicker at “Somebodies” who continue to cling to them.

As we marveled over the power of Dickinson’s non-biographical poetic “I,” we noticed that



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the poem's "I" has a lot in common with the presumably biographical "I" in Dickinson's letter to Higginson. As in the poem, in the letter Dickinson is preoccupied with self-definition and social hierarchy: her biographical "I" signifies a literary nobody whose recognition as a poet is entirely in the hands of the official literary Somebody she addresses. Like the poem, the letter uses self-definition to invert social hierarchy. Sometimes "I" abases itself ("Preceptor, I shall bring you – obedience"), creating something akin to a master-slave relationship with her "Preceptor." In other phrases, "I" reverses the see-saw, putting Higginson in his place with lordly rhetoric that borders on condescension: "Perhaps you smile at me. I could not stop for that – My Business is Circumference." Like the "I" in "I'm Nobody," the "I" in the letter "states itself," creating a rhetorical "state" in which "I"'s passive-aggressive self-definitions define her addressee.

But what, we wondered, do these similarities mean about the "I" in the letter, in which Dickinson declares, "When I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse – it does not mean – me – but a supposed person." What about that first "I"? Does that refer to "the real Emily"? Or is the "I" that states the theory of supposed persons itself a supposed person? Or maybe the similarity between letter and poem works the other way – maybe the "I" in the poem is closer to Dickinson herself than she wanted her readers to think.

To explore this conundrum, I suggested that we turn to "I'm 'Wife,'" a poem in which "I" clearly signifies a supposed person whose life differs crucially from Dickinson's:

I'm 'Wife' – I've finished that –  
That other state –  
I'm Czar – I'm 'Woman' now –  
It's safer so – (Fr225)

Like "I'm Nobody," "I'm 'Wife'" is a poem of self-definition; both poems begin with the intimacy-engendering contraction "I'm," and in both poems, the second words of self-definition make it clear that what the speakers mean by "I" is more complicated than the rhetorical ease of "I'm" suggests. But as the group im-

mediately noted, while the speaker of "I'm Nobody" delights in being a "Nobody," the quotation marks around "Wife" show us that "I" is reluctant to embrace the identity of "Wife" even though, as she says, "Wife" moves her to the top ("I'm Czar – I'm 'Woman' now –") of the female status hierarchy.

Those quotation marks frustrate the process of self-definition, noting the speaker's difficulties in defining herself as "Wife." But we found that the quotation marks themselves define the speaker, locating her "I" in the liminal space where biographical identifiers such as "Wife" and "Woman" (also pincered between quotation marks) are, or aren't, internalized as terms of self-definition. The speaker isn't allergic to self-definition per se; we noticed that she has no typographically-denoted qualms about the non-biographical assertion "I'm Czar." But from first line to last, whenever she tries to define herself in the terms by which her society denotes mature female identity, she breaks out in quotation marks.

In "I'm Nobody," the speaker turns a marginalizing social identifier into an exuberant, coalition-building, hierarchy-upending self-definition. In "I'm 'Wife,'" the speaker's inability either to embrace the terms through which her society defines her, or, like the speaker of "I'm Nobody," redefine them, strands her in self-doubt and isolation. She is a "supposed person" who isn't willing to acquiesce to the biographically-based suppositions that she is "Wife" and "Woman," a person who sees those suppositions, whatever their social benefits, as misrepresenting the "I" they define.

If the speaker were simply uncomfortable with female identity, we could supply the self-defining word she and her culture lacked: "transgender." But since she speaks wistfully and without quotation marks of "the Girl's life" in the second stanza, we can't tell if her problem is gender identity, or the more general problem all people, trans or not, confront, when socially, biographically apt terms for our identities don't fit our sense of who we are. The speaker of "I'm Nobody" solves this problem by embracing a social identifier that erases the link between "I" and biography. But in "I'm

'Wife,'" Dickinson supposes a person who can't solve the problem, can't erase, escape or redefine the terms of female identity, only hold them at arm's length, between quotation marks.

The very biography that made it hard for the speaker to define herself should have made it easy for us to define the difference between her "I" and Dickinson's. The speaker is married; Dickinson was single. The speaker has been elevated to a commanding, "Czar"-like social position; Dickinson lived as an unmarried daughter in her father's house. The speaker feels as distant from "the Girl's life" as "folks in Heaven" feel from life on Earth; Dickinson's recurring presentation of herself in child-like rhetorical poses suggests that for her there was never a decisive break between "the Girl's life" and that of "Woman."

Here, then, is the clear distinction between poetic and biographical "I" that Dickinson decreed in her letter to Higginson. But as we strove to bring this supposed not-Dickinson into focus, we kept running aground on those quotation marks.

As one participant pointed out, putting "Wife" in quotation marks constitutes a scorched-earth critique of the term, the social status it denotes, and the gender hierarchy that sustains that status. But as another noted, the speaker herself doesn't seem to be making this critique. She is painfully sincere in her efforts to understand herself as "Wife" and "Woman," and sincerely pained by her failure to fully "state herself" in those terms. In other words, the quotation marks reflect two different perspectives, two different speakers jostling within the first-person pronoun: a supposed "I" who can't figure out what's going wrong in her effort to define herself as "Wife," and an authorial "I" who holds the term "Wife" up for satirical inspection by the reader. In other words, "I" is both a biographical signifier that points to the life of a supposed, married woman, and a non-biographical signifier that points to the actual intellectual perspective of the author.

The more we discussed these meanings of "I," the harder it became to clearly distinguish be-

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tween them. The supposed-person “I” shares her author’s alienation from the socially defined terms for female identity. The authorial “I” shares the supposed person’s experience of the tragic inadequacy of those terms, her bitter failure to recognize herself in them.

When we turned to the speaker’s emphatic declarations in the last two lines of the poem, the meaning of “I” fractured further. The first stanza’s halting, dash-riddled reflections attest to the speaker’s internal argument, her struggle to convince herself that the power, or at least protection, that “Wife” confers should overcome her sense that it doesn’t fit her. In the second stanza, this argument dissolves into a dreamy reflection analogizing speaker’s now-ended “Girl’s life” to “Earth” remembered by “folks in Heaven”:

How odd the Girl’s life looks  
Behind this soft Eclipse –  
I think that Earth feels so  
To folks in Heaven – now –

But in the third stanza, internal argument turns into a shouting match, as the speaker’s “I” begins to split under the strain of trying to define herself as “Wife”:

This being comfort – then –  
That other kind – was pain –  
But why compare?  
I’m ‘Wife!’ Stop there!

With “But why compare?,” we saw that the speaker’s inability to define herself by either fully embracing or completely rejecting the identity of “Wife” had fractured her into two competing perspectives. Technically, the poem is still a monologue spoken by a single “supposed person,” but in the last line’s exclamation points, our group heard one voice within the speaker – the voice insisting she accept “Wife” as her identity – attempting to shout down the skeptical, alienated side that continues to question the implications and consequences of being “Wife.”

As we discussed the end of the poem, we realized that we couldn’t tell which voice was

the “I” in the last line. Does the exclamation “I’m ‘Wife!’” represent the pro-“Wife” voice’s triumph in defining the speaker’s identity, despite the hesitation represented by the quotation marks? Or, does it show the alienated side’s triumph in showing that even if the speaker can’t escape what one participant called “the life sentence” of “I’m Wife,” the speaker will never fully define herself that way?

But if “I” can simultaneously represent self-definition and rejection of self-definition, what does “I” mean? Not the coherent, univocal identity most of us, including Dickinson in her instruction to Higginson on how to read her poetic “I,” act as if the first-pronoun represents. In “I’m ‘Wife,’” “I” is a microphone tussled over by competing definitions of self: “I’m Wife – that’s how others see me, and that’s how I see myself”; “I might as well be Wife – that’s how others see me, that’s the role I play and those are the privileges I enjoy, and ‘it’s safer so’”; “No matter how biography and social status define me, I will never define myself as ‘Wife.’” This “I” represents not a self but an ongoing struggle for self-definition that can never be resolved because there are no terms that enable the speaker to whole-heartedly complete the sentence “I’m ...”

The speaker of “I’m Nobody” avoids this struggle by performing social jujitsu on the term “Nobody,” flipping it from a term of denigration into a term of superiority. But to the speaker of “I’m ‘Wife,’” the term “Wife” doesn’t seem denigrating or marginalizing; for reasons she doesn’t, and probably can’t, articulate, the identity of “Wife” simply doesn’t fit. As a result, self-fragmenting argument is the closest she can come to self-definition – and only those who recognize that will understand what she means when she says “I.”

This seemed clear to me from my first reading of the poem. I was in my mid-twenties, and I had been stuck on the gerbil wheel of frustrated self-definition since childhood. “I’m ‘Jay,’” I’d say, when I introduced myself. No one heard the quotation marks, no one recognized

that the body, biography, and male roles toward which my first-person pronouns pointed weren’t what I meant by “I.” In fact, until I read Dickinson’s poem, I didn’t think anyone else knew, or that language could represent, the hell of uncompletable self-definition. Dickinson, I realized, with a rush of gratitude that still brings tears to my eyes, had used the very inadequacy of the language of self-definition to articulate what her speaker and I meant by “I.”

As I had throughout the class, I kept my trans perspective on Dickinson to myself. We’re still a long way from the time when someone can say “I’m transgender” and expect the sort of response I get when I say “I’m middle-aged” or “I’m Jewish.” The discussion wasn’t about what my “I” meant; it was about the meaning of “I” in Dickinson.

Several participants were openly disturbed by the self-fragmentation we glimpsed in “I’m ‘Wife.’” They wondered whether this “supposed person” was an individual case study, or “Representative” of Dickinson’s understanding, or even biographical experience, of identity. Did Dickinson think all identities were multiple and incoherent, one asked. Or was she writing out of her personal experience of disintegration?

It was somewhat reassuring to them to remember that Dickinson’s portrayal of “I” as ongoing process rather than static signifier places her firmly in the line of American thought that stretches back to Emerson and forward to the Pragmatist philosophy and psychology of William James, and that, as we had seen in our discussion of the letter to Higginson, Dickinson’s “I” is akin to Whitman’s. But Whitman’s “I” is a centrifugal process of expansion through identification; his speakers never complete their self-definitions not because they lack terms with which to identify, but because they identify with every term they can think of. Despite the populism of the speaker of “I’m Nobody,” Dickinson is less interested in self-expansion than in the

*Continued on page 24*

*Emily Dickinson has been fictionalized many times (a quick survey by the Bulletin's book review editor produced eighteen titles). Fictionalizing the poet is one of the ways in which readers throughout the world have sought to realize their imaginative engagement. It is thus exciting to learn about the most recent writer to explore and publish her fascination in this way, Despina Lala Crist, a Greek author of novels, short stories, and fiction, most recently Nostos: A Voyage of the Heart's Return (1992; translation, Seaburn 2001). Her husband, Robert Crist – Professor Emeritus, University of Athens – is her translator. The biographical novel Emily Dickinson: Goddess of the Volcano (to be published on-line by Amazon in 2013) presents Dickinson's psychological and poetic world.*

## Erotic Melodies

By Despina Lala Crist

Translated from the Greek by Robert L. Crist



The author with her translator and husband, Robert Crist.

Exhilaration – is within –  
There can no Outer Wine  
So royally intoxicate  
As that diviner Brand . . . (Fr645)

From the niche under the stairs in the Homestead – the Northwest Passage, as they called it – Sue called out: “Emily! Emily! Come down!” She would not go up to Emily because what she had to say was so wonderful she wanted to share in their special retreat. Emily descended, a forced smile on her face. She was hard at work. Time was always

wanting, the poem demanding, and the least interruption of feeling and thought was distressing.

She stood before Sue, questioning, waiting. “Kate Scott Anton is coming!” Sue excitedly announced. “We are expecting you for dinner at six! Don’t refuse! Isn’t it wonderful! Don’t refuse, dear. . . .” She was so excited by the coming of her friend that she did not wait for a reply, but – blowing Emily a kiss – dashed gaily off, as Emily continued to

concentrate on the word she was seeking for a poem.

It was a gentle spring afternoon in 1859, and soft reddish-yellow sunlight permeated the parks and gardens of Amherst. Within an hour she was at Sue’s door wearing the new dress that her father had brought from Washington. She knocked and entered at once, finding herself in a celebrative atmosphere. Sue had filled the living room with flowers and sweets. Dressed in her finest clothes, she was standing by a tall, striking young woman whom she enthusiastically brought forward. “Here’s

our dear Emily!” she exclaimed, “And here’s my good friend and classmate, Kate Anton!” The two women looked at one another. Their observations, keen and quick, spun through their minds. “What a beautiful woman!” Emily thought. “What a spiritual presence!” Kate perceived. Spontaneously the two embraced and kissed, and the three of them began to laugh spiritedly.

Like a heroine from the pages of Henry James, Kate had declared her freedom by frequent trips to Europe. She always visited only the capitals, her aim knowledge of European culture and the enjoyment of select company. She took long vacations in luxurious hotels, going to museums, visiting galleries, and attending theatrical productions without concern for expenses or social disapproval. She had inherited much at the cost of great pain from the death of her husband, her brother and beloved sister. Death had marched through her life, but now life belonged to her, and she compensated for the absence of loved ones through close ties to friends like Sue and acquaintances in Europe. Whenever she returned to her home city of Albany, fifty miles from Amherst, she was sure to visit The Evergreens.

The select company that evening began their menu with special appetizers – caviar, lobster, and shrimp. They continued with beef or trout, with a green salad from Sue’s garden, and they concluded with ice cream with strawberries, also from the garden. It was a dinner of exquisite flavors. The girls arose from the table,

having already drunk two glasses of red wine. Carrying a third, they proceeded to the living room flushed with pleasure that flowed from their deep affinity. Austin's tie to Sue and Emily was deep, but he was unable to participate fully in the excitement of the evening. Emily sat down at the piano and played a medley of old-time favorites as the light of sunset which had tinted the room in gentle pink-orange modulated to dark purple, leading the hosts to light the lamps in the house.

Suddenly Emily stepped to the lamp on the small table by the piano, and blew out the flame, and before she could get to the lamp on the table by the wall, Sue had blown it out, laughing in a tone filled with significance as a thought took her breath away, "Now Kate will understand what 'Goddess of the Volcano' means!"

Lighting candles throughout the room, Austin sank into a comfortable armchair as far as he could get from the piano. Kate chose a seat on the piano bench very close to Emily and, mesmerized, she watched the suggestion of a smile play on her dimly lit face. As Emily's long fingers stroked the keys like a caress, with quick pants Kate breathed the rising notes.

The soft waves of a gentle sea drenched their faces and refreshed their bodies. They shivered with deep feeling as the fingers continued to dance in a special way, sometimes with a powerful thrust, and sometimes barely skimming the keys in singing waves that induced a stirring excitement. Each note added to the feeling as the ripples of music suddenly shot into the air and then fell on bodies with a powerful splash that penetrated the soul and flesh with delicious poignancy.

The candle light danced quickly in the ecstasy of sound and grew calm as the notes soothed. Emily added her voice to the melody. Filled with erotic joy, arpeggios mounted higher and higher, wrapping her spirit in velvet; her insatiable soul kept expanding. Time was cancelled, place was erased, her friends transformed, absorbed into the throbbing unity of the moment. Erotic vitality, splendid within

her, raised Emily high in intense personal joy. It elevated her to the ecstasy of the highest sensual excitement.

Transcendence – that matchless ineffable sensation – had seized her!

With a life of their own, her fingers deftly ranged the keys. Her notes and those of the instrument, like sparkling fireworks, lifted her and delivered her to the colors of transcendence – scarlet, indigo, and azure streaked with yellow. In her own world, body throbbing in volcanic explosions, she beheld flames made of notes, and within her she felt the quaking of the eruption, syllables flashing like fire and crescendos burning fountains of ecstasy. Incredible sensuality reigned. The words, the notes, were exhaustless within her. The volcano erupted and lava dissolved, melting all ties to mundane things.

The others – souls and bodies magnetized – could not endure the pressure. First, Austin sprang to his feet and fled up the stairs. Kate was trembling. The primal journey had enmeshed her to exotic folds of desire, and panting she remained fixed to the piano bench beside the shooting flames. Sue, who had experienced such moments before, breathlessly imbibed her wine, drinking in the rare moment of liberation and joy, unable to extricate herself from the rule of the Goddess of the Volcano, who mercilessly swept her to matchless heights and pushed her to terrifying limits. Fearing she had reached the breaking point, she turned her head toward the window and glimpsed a figure rushing toward The Evergreens' door. She breathed a sigh of relief.

With a lantern to light his way on the path, Emily's anxious father was coming to rescue her. Sue gratefully slipped into the hall, opened the door, briefly greeted her father-in-law with relief, and with head lowered stepped to Emily's side. "Emily," she whispered, "your father . . ." – and then, more loudly, "Your father, Emily!"

Though she was jolted, Emily's voice lingered in the melody and her fingers dwelt a moment on the keys. Unable to grasp what the

words meant – or what relation they bore to the region in which she found herself – she remained suspended, and then she felt the grip of a hand on her arm, the fingers tightening. Her mind as yet distant, she neither heeded the irrelevant contact, nor recognized the voice which insisted, "Your mother wants you, Emily. . . ." The voice repeated, "Emily, your mother wants you," as the hand guided her out of the living room, into the hall, and down the stairs. She lifted her eyes to the star-filled sky and saw the stars beholding her with wonder, but before she had time to react, her father shouted, "Let's go home, now, Emily!" and Emily suddenly crumbled. The moment of ecstasy was shattered, joy scattered to the winds, and the weight of her flesh dragged her into an alien, absurd place that shook her spirit and wrenched her body.

She heard the thump of her soul falling, and sensed the hand of the man they called her father on her arm. He had pulled her away from the piano, away from the living room, away from ecstasy, saying in a caring voice, "Watch your step, Emily!" as he raised the lantern to light the way which she knew with her eyes shut. It was the familiar path she had taken time and time again, but now she saw the whole scene from far above – her father's long arms, his fingers tense on her arm. He was guiding her in a peculiar manner that was a blend of authority, protectiveness, and tenderness. The lantern cast a dim light on his face, which was dour, determined, filled with sadness and concern for her welfare – and she saw that his was an arrested, automatized being: rigid, distant, completely alone, he was wasting his life on an idol he fashioned in his mind and which he imposed on himself and others. Himself its slave, he called it "responsibility," and it led his entire family to the dark, narrow path of his making.

What irony, what a lie, what a trap! Who could throw off such a yoke of "protection"? Emily beheld her mother, Vinnie, herself, and Austin – who had such promise of glowing life – swept round in the orbit of an extinguished sun. Terrified, Emily was seized by knowledge she had always possessed but had been unable to drag to the light. Now, however,

the thought rose and lay bare the world as it was. She saw the ways of mankind, especially when it came to belief – how they imprisoned God and kept Jesus nailed on the cross, replacing spiritual enlightenment with empty words. It was a sudden and terrible revelation for Emily: imprisoned by words, people laid down the path of their fate and followed it blindly. There was a flaw in human perception that distorted the natural world, society, the family and even what was called the Divine! That was the original sin, which had marked human existence over the ages and had waylaid even the ecstasy of love.

Weighed down by sadness, Emily climbed the stairs one-by-one to her bedroom thinking, “Nevertheless, my father is a good man who always desires our welfare. His heart is pure and terrible and I think no other like it exists.” She felt the despair of a dead-end. In her room, she leaned her forehead on the window pane and gazed at the path which cut through the trees by her house toward the home of her beloved Sue and Austin. The moon, ignoring the clouds that passed before it, illumined the path which she had fashioned from the love which soared in her heart. She suddenly froze. Like an ill spirit the shadow of Sue appeared before her eyes the moment she had shouted, “Emily, your father! Your father, Emily!” She asked herself, “Could it be there was relief in her voice, and triumph in her eyes?” She set the thought aside and wrote:

Is Bliss then, such Abyss,  
I must not put my foot amiss  
For fear I spoil my shoe?  
I'd rather suit my foot  
Than save my boot –  
For yet to buy another Pair  
Is possible,  
At any store –

But Bliss, is sold just once.  
The patent lost  
None buy it any more –  
Say, Foot, decide the point –  
The Lady cross, or not!  
Verdict for Boot! (Fr371)

The boot, indifferent, awaited for the lady to take command – an event that had already begun to take shape.

Weeks had passed and still thoughts of Sue's party brought an erotic shiver. Kate, a sweet memory, was already on other side of the Atlantic. Resuming her partying, she neglected writing Emily. Yet Emily still felt the embrace of her fiery farewell. She still tasted her burning kiss.

The day after the party, right after twelve noon, Emily had gone to The Evergreens to be with Sue and Kate. They said nothing about the evening before – the vibrant piano, the intense singing, Edward Dickinson's rushing to the scene. Not a word of all that – just a few hints and looks filled with significance. But they had thrown themselves into conversation of the kind that fills the heart with affection and encloses the body in an avid embrace.

They were talking and laughing, when suddenly Emily looked out of the window and saw the pastor of their church, with his pious air, stepping through the gate. A moment later there was a knock at the door. Emily took Kate's hand whispering, “Come quickly!” and controlling their laughter, they hastily took the stairs to the second floor. As Sue opened the door to the formal visitor, the two girls slipped into the first bedroom at hand and threw themselves prone behind the bed. It was as if the minister was about to ascend the steps and they wished to be hidden from his view. Hugging, they giggled scandalously. In the meantime, the pastor – who on entering had seen the two girls going upstairs – sat down patiently in the living room expecting that they would be coming back down to greet him as was proper. He spoke with Sue for some time, not daring to utter the name of Emily or Kate, who, dizzy with erotic feelings, were holding hands oblivious to the outer world as they released a stream of words about their lives. Kate told of her European adventures – the flirtations, concerts, galleries – and Emily visualized it all in detail, recalling then the recital she had attended in Northampton with

her father – how much she had adored Jenny Lind and her fiancé, Otto Goldschmidt. The couples' divine love, Jenny's heavenly voice, and her splendid gown had sealed a radiant image in Emily's heart: “Her heavenly eyebrows, her plaintive notes, wild and commanding, the panther and the dove, each so innocent.”

Thus Emily described the couple she had viewed that unforgettable night. Recalling Jenny and looking at Kate, she said, “But you are even more beautiful!” As she tenderly caressed Kate's cheek, the trembling of her hand was transferred to her friend. It was a moment of overpowering emotion, and as Kate bent and pressed her face against Emily's deeply flushed cheek, the door opened and Sue entered glaring in anger. “Is that a way for proper young ladies to behave – to rush away from a visitor? Emily, your brother is beside himself!” Her voice was stern, her face frowning. “You must beg the pastor's pardon. He left affronted by your contemptuous behavior!”

Emily assumed an attitude of childlike remorse, though her blush of deep excitement refused to go away. “Of course I will ask his pardon,” she breathed. Still glaring, Sue spoke no more. She turned on her heel and exited, slamming the door, and Kate – as if she had impatiently awaited Sue's departure – hugged Emily and joined in a warm kiss. It was then that she promised she would keep in touch, and Emily waited months which stretched beyond a year. She was continually in Emily's thoughts but she wearied of writing and awaiting a response which never arrived. Her last letter contained a poem with the lines, “Why Kate, Treason has a Voice – / But mine – dispels – in tears” (Fr1429). She received news of her from Sue, who often wrote Katie.

When memories of faces and experiences had faded in the past and Kate was still alive, questioned about her times in Amherst, she answered excitedly, as if she were reliving beautiful moments: “O-O-O-O-O-Oh! – those blissful days at Sue's. O-O-O-O-O-Oh! – the joys of life and the memories they leave!”

Taggard, continued from page 8

lowed by an indication of where (often multiple places) each was written. Although Taggard represented Dickinson's family dynamics in Freudian terms involving a powerful, controlling father and a daughter who defied him through exaggerated obedience, her own memories focused on childhood humiliation as a poor relation in an extended family dominated by a conniving uncle who took advantage of her father's physical and emotional weakness; it was her mother whose control Taggard had to defy. Whereas Dickinson remained unmarried, despite romantic attachments shrouded in legend, Taggard had two marriages, to Robert L. Wolf and then to Kenneth Durant, and was the mother of a daughter.

What linked Taggard to Dickinson may well have been the self-sufficiency she had been forced to cultivate internally since childhood, even though Taggard ac-

tively sought out community as an adult and highlighted shared human concerns for rights and dignity in her poetry. Perhaps it was that sense of intense personal struggle that led to this extraordinary insight into the Amherst poet: "Emily felt a quiet will to triumph, a will towards immortality. But her beginnings were all fragile and human and, in the world's phrase, queer. No poet ever came so close to failure; no one ever walked so near insanity and yet remained sane, or held in so desperate a war such contending obsessions, vanities, aversions, shames, or fierce desires for splendour and applause" (239). That applause, rightfully, has come to Dickinson's own writings rather than to the biography written by a poet with prescient scholarly gifts and a penchant for story-telling. Ultimately, as Taggard advised her readers in the dedicatory poem she placed at the front of her book, "Go to her verse, reader, / To the great verse. / Here is nothing of hers. // She will elude us all."

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Daniels, continued from Page 11

stabilize – all qualities the very opposite of those my early introduction to poetry led me to expect. It is one of the most profound astonishments of my life that I now regard Emily Dickinson as indispensable – both to my life as a human person, and as a poet.

Although I no longer wake in the night in the acoustic grip of her poems, Dickinson occupies an ever-enlarging place in my imagination. I believe that it was my firsthand experience of psychoanalysis and its peculiar use of language that opened me up to Dickinson's own language acts: her parsimonious and oblique way of saying the hard things, of confronting psychological terror, and admitting the possibility of mental collapse. Her willingness to ac-

knowledge that there just might not be an ultimate answer to anything gave me the courage to admit more ambiguity to my own poetry and to relinquish, finally, my tight grip on the poems of my mother's and my childhoods – those unambiguous narratives that proclaimed not just an answer, but the answer. Psychoanalysis toughened me up enough to bear the poetry of Dickinson and gave me the courage to explore more challenging material in my work. It cannot be an accident that shortly after telling my analyst early in treatment that the Dickinson poems flying through my head looked like birds startled by gunshot out of a tree, a memory from my early twenties began calling to be written about. It was the story of a fellow college student who had survived an attempt to kill himself with a shotgun. He was left with the wretched fa-

cial rags of his failure that plastic surgeons at the university's medical center tried, over the course of several years, to mend. Between surgeries, this unfortunate wandered the campus, eliciting revulsion, pity, and admiration alike for his willingness to reenter life in such a horrifying form.

For decades, I carried this memory around like a buried germ, shying away each time it strove to surface. Partly, I was repelled by the dreadful narrative itself, but I was also motivated by shame. A friend of mine with a macabre sense of humor, an aficionado of John Waters films and fascinated by the trial of Charles Manson, had nicknamed the unfortunate Shotgun Face. Through several decades, I burned with the stuffed-down shame of having participated in this terrible objectification of a fellow human creature, so suf-

fused with misery he took a shotgun to his own head. It was not until I read with new clarity the poems of Emily Dickinson that I found myself able to withstand the strong feelings that arose from my engagement with the subject matter. Here is the poem that resulted from that engagement, with gratitude to Emily Dickinson and to psychoanalysis for giving it to me.

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#### Shotgun Face

*Tell me* – Emily Dickinson demanded –

*How do people live without thoughts* –

But how do people live without *faces* was the question  
Clamoring in the shattered mask of cyclopic, resewn flesh  
beneath the long, blond hair of the boy we anointed  
our local horror. Once, he'd been one of us – strolling  
barefoot to class, sharing a joint. Now, on medical leave,  
he patrolled the campus, belligerent and unapologetic,  
encased within a shroud of stitched-together scars  
he had learned to inhale through, and eat around,  
and had somehow figured out how to live in spite of . . .

Because we couldn't look away,  
we memorized his image – the missing eye, the absent  
infrastructures of chin and jaw. Compulsively, we rehearsed  
his act: what used to be his mouth – a twisted crescent  
gash of open flesh, dripping like the entrance to a cave –  
suggested he'd placed the weapon there, but then misfired.  
Rocked back (we'd heard) in his father's recliner,  
speakers blasting, he'd have been so high  
(we theorized) he never even registered  
the bone-rattling clack of the shotgun's muzzle  
settling itself on his lower row of teeth. *Something*  
*went wrong*, we kept repeating, parsing it out,  
comparing our different readings. Resolute  
to the end? or had he changed his mind,  
but failed to abort after his toe, wedged  
in the trigger, had already flexed?

Barely past childhood,  
we knew almost nothing then, and spent our days  
doing close readings of esoteric texts, irrelevant  
to almost everyone on the planet. Thus, when we ferreted  
down inside our undeveloped critical theories  
and applied them in search of a plausible interpretation,  
the proximity of a man who'd willingly destroyed  
his very own face, and survived to ruin our world  
with his horrifying image, wrenched out of orbit  
our evolving philosophies . . .

Now I think we didn't really want  
to know what he'd been thinking, or what he'd felt  
at that moment we could not imagine anyone  
but a literary character would ever reach. And *that's*  
why we resented the brazen, unvictimized way  
in which he occupied our field of vision. Enough of him  
and his blaring image, his *real politik* . . . We wanted back  
our text-based certainties about the structures of tragedy,  
and to move through that world undisturbed by his man-sized  
facsimile of self-destruction, our debate about his hands  
with their long, guitar-picking nails, and how they must have  
clattered noisily through the box of shells. How was it possible  
they had failed to call him back with their promise of music?

So when he wheeled about  
on the green lawns unfurling from the college grounds,  
and positioned his monstrous remnant of a head so it was pointing  
in our direction and strolled forward as if he were an ordinary  
person, we couldn't take it. But all we could combat him with  
were words: "Failed Suicide Walking," our lips pursing  
around too many syllables, our tongues taking so much time  
we couldn't help but disappear inside the structural dynamics  
of how he got that way. When someone in a class on Latin  
prosody, blurted SHOT GUN FACE, we hunkered down  
inside those three brief beats he called amphimacer.  
They stalled us on the image and drove our minds away  
from narrative. Perhaps we thought, enclosed within the strictures  
of a language obsolete for centuries, the triad of the tragedy  
was dead and buried, and wouldn't rise again  
to prick us from the restless sleep of middle age  
and carry us back over the years to the boy who couldn't  
surmount his image, to wonder – *finally* – how he had  
managed to live, how anyone at all is able to live –  
much less like him without a face – through all those years  
that stretch ahead completely alone with the self you ruined  
and the life you failed to kill . . .

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*Dana, continued from page 14*

the poet faces her own death. In exploring what it might have been like for Emily, my own feelings about the inevitable are coming to the surface.

I am often asked what drew me to Emily Dickinson. I think the primary thing was this: her strong sense of her own inner truth and the refusal to give it up. From Joan of Arc to the black-footed ferret who escapes from the Bronx Zoo in search of that “something more,” every protagonist I have ever written about, every cherished role I have ever played, clings to that inner knowing in the face of immense challenges. Emily fits

extraordinarily well into my family of interest. What overwhelming challenges she faced. Imagine! A woman in 19th century New England, knowing in the depth of her heart that she is a poet and being true to that? It’s hard enough now. But then! What courage! It takes my breath away!

It wouldn’t occur to me to suggest that the lives of scholars are not also influenced in profound ways as a result of their deep connection to Dickinson. Artists, scholars, devoted readers – we are all affected as we travel with our beloved Emily. Poet, healer, teacher, woman, genius, sister, baker, gardener, friend! Emily Dickinson was indeed not just a recluse!

I think of the inscription remaining in Emily’s Latin book, a gift from Austin, shared with Abby Wood:

“When I am far, far away then think of me -”

I will.

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*Ladin, continued from page 18*

fragmentation that occurs when the language of self-definition fails and selves struggle and fail to “state themselves”:

I felt a Cleaving in my Mind –  
As if my Brain had split –  
I tried to match it – Seam by Seam –  
But could not make them fit –  
The thought behind, I strove to join  
Unto the thought before –  
But Sequence unravelled out of Sound  
Like Balls – upon a Floor. (Fr867)

The participant who had been most resistant to the idea that Dickinson represents “I” as a self-fragmenting process threw up his hands in surrender when we turned to “I felt a Cleaving in my Mind.”

I knew how he felt, and so, I suspect, did Dickinson. For many post-modernist thinkers, and for many transgender people, the idea that identity is, as Dickinson might say, merely “Representative” of an ongoing process of irresolvable fragmentation seems exciting, liberating, a “Get Out of Jail Free” card that guarantees that we will

never be limited to the self-defining terms offered by social conventions, roles and hierarchies. William James cheerfully rejected the idea that we have unified selves governed by what he mockingly called “the pontifical neuron.” Recent studies of the brain and mind support his theory that we all contain multitudes of competing voices, perspectives, and priorities, that “selves” are processes for juggling, expressing and suppressing these multitudes, and that our first-person pronouns assert an essential identity none of us actually have.

But as “I felt a Cleaving” suggests, when Dickinson dramatizes the self’s recognition of its failure to define itself, she, like the speaker of “I’m `Wife’,” and like me, tends to see it as a crisis – a failure not only of socially provided terms of self-definition but of the very syntax of cognition. We didn’t have time to explore the perspectives jostling within the “I” of “I felt a Cleaving in my Mind,” or to clarify the relationship between the “I” that feels the “Cleaving” and the “Mind” that is cloven. How do we distinguish the self rooted in “Mind” from the self rooted in “Brain” from the self that stands outside “Mind” and “Brain” and unsuccessfully attempts the phe-

nomenological equivalent of neurosurgery to “match” the “Seams” along which “Mind” and “Brain” have split? Nor did we manage to do more than speculate about the connection between this speaker’s supposed “I” and Dickinson’s biographical experience of self-fragmentation. But as we tried to make sense of the gorgeously ravelling (or is it unravelling?) final sentence, we noticed that the failure of its “seams” of syntax and metaphor to “fit” enacted the very failure of coherence the speaker was describing. In representing the speaker’s failed process of self-definition, Dickinson, once again, had fashioned language for an “I” that has no language.

As we pulled on our coats, I thought about what Dickinson had taught me: that I can “state myself” by claiming and redefining terms and syntax that aren’t intended to represent selves like mine; that “I” can signify “Nobody” selves that don’t fit the existing terms, roles, and hierarchies; that “I” can mean, and enact, a sometimes sputtering, sometimes triumphant processes of becoming. What, I wonder, will I say the next time I realize I’ve introduced myself to a student who doesn’t know what I mean when I say, “I’m Joy”?



# NEW PUBLICATIONS

## By Barbara Kelly, Book Review Editor

**Burak, Kathryn**

*Emily's Dress and Other Missing Things.* New York: Roaring Book Press, 2012. 234 pp. Cloth, ISBN 1-59643-736-4, \$17.99.

In Burak's debut novel, nominated for the 2013 Edgar Award in Young Adult Mystery, Claire Salter is a confused and troubled teenager trying to understand her mother's recent suicide and her best friend Richey's mysterious disappearance. Claire and her professor father move to Amherst for a fresh start. Added to her personal trauma is the challenge of entering a new school in her senior year. Claire consoles herself reading her mother's poetry books, "patting them as if they were small pets," and writing poetry herself. In school her writing attracts the attention of Tate, a student teacher, who calls the writing "dark." Claire visits the Dickinson Homestead alone at night, entering through a window left ajar. She explains, "I go there because . . . I feel close to my mom. Like she's there, too." One night Claire tries on Dickinson's dress, but Tate has followed her, accidentally setting off an alarm that forces their quick escape. Now partners in crime, Claire and Tate must find a way to return the dress, while at the same time, Claire pursues the mystery of Richey's disappearance. This complex and fast-moving adventure will engage readers but also provides the author with a way to gracefully and sensitively explore loss and sadness, unresolved guilt and grief, friendship,

trust, new-found hope, strength, and resiliency. Not to be missed are Burak's unique metaphors and sense of humor. This book should appeal to young adults and to those who appreciate Dickinson's impact on the contemporary creative imagination.

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**Johnson, Claudia Durst**

*Death and Dying in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson.*

Farmington Hills, MI: Gale/Greenhaven Press, 2012. 171 pp. Paper, ISBN 0-7377-6376-8, \$28.45.

This fifteenth volume in Gale's Social Issues in Literature series is a concise anthology that gathers excerpts from the works of thirteen Dickinson scholars and five other scholars interested in contemporary issues of death. The works span 55 years from 1955 to 2010. The excerpts, most running from seven to ten pages, are easily read, each beginning with an introductory abstract. The anthology, illustrated with eleven black and white photographs, is divided into three sections: "death in Dickinson's life; death in her poetry; and contemporary issues involving death." The first section, "Background on Emily Dickinson," contains excerpts from the biographical works of John Cody, Alfred Habegger, and Ruth Miller. The second section, "Death and Dying in Emily Dickinson's Poetry," features excerpts from the literary criticism of Jane Do-

nahue Eberwein, Paul Ferlazzo, Clark Griffith, Thomas H. Johnson, Patrick J. Keane, Joan Kirby, Bettina L. Knapp, Wendy Martin, David Porter, and Robert Weisbuch. The final section, "Contemporary Perspectives on Death and Dying," presents excerpts from modern psychological studies by Maurice Abitbol, Darlene F. Cross, Russell Friedman, John W. James, and Randy Pausch. The book includes an introduction, chronology, suggestions for further discussion and reading, a bibliography, and an index. With only two exceptions, the excerpts that focus on Dickinson (17-131) draw from twentieth-century scholarship, but in exposing readers to these books, the well presented, accessible excerpts might motivate readers to look further for more recent publications.

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**Legault, Paul.**

*The Emily Dickinson Reader: An English-to-English Translation of Emily Dickinson's Complete Poems.*

San Francisco: McSweeney's Books, 2012. 247 pp. 5 x 7 inches. Cloth, ISBN 1-936365-98-2, \$17.00.

McSweeney's Books deserves credit for presenting Legault's idiosyncratic work in an attractive, cloth-covered book embossed with Mabel Loomis Todd's drawing of Indian Pipes, also providing artful end papers, gold-edged pages, and a sewn-in ribbon bookmark; however, reaching up from the weeds and through

The *Bulletin* welcomes notices of all Dickinson-related books, including those published outside the U.S.  
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the Indian Pipes, a skeletal arm and hand signals that this is no ordinary Emily Dickinson Reader. This comic jab at Dickinson's "flowers of life" is but the first taste of Legault's brash humor. He begins earnestly, "Emily Dickinson wrote in a language all her own, thus the need for this English version of what she meant." Having read and condensed each of Dickinson's 1,789 poems into predominately one-sentence summaries, Legault explains his project as an "attempt to rewrite her poems "(with their foreign beauty intact) in 'Standard English.'" Some readers will dispute this claim. His cheeky quips and contemporary comments will offend, even rile, some Dickinson devotees, though Twitter users may appreciate Legault's concision: "Surgeons must be very careful" (Fr 156); "Hope is kind of like birds, / In that I don't have any" (Fr 314); "There's a little zombie inside of each and every one of us" (Fr 1455). Zombies reappear throughout the book. Although an index of first lines to Dickinson's poems is included, Legault's summaries are best used with Franklin's edition of Dickinson's original poems. Some readers may find Legault's approach amusing and fun, but the redeeming value of his translations lies in their potential for returning readers to Dickinson's original poems.

meditation features one of Dickinson's less familiar poems (Fr 166, 197, 261, 270, 273, 346, 436, 454, 559, 623, 652, 670, 698, 743, 996, 1012, 1082, 1094, 1117, 1344, 1556, 1573A, 1620, 1641, and 1671), carefully chosen and closely read to reinforce LeMay's lucid, often persuasive, discussions of Dickinson's beliefs about conversion, scripture, doubt, proof, hymn, intercession, Jesus, incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, silence, ecstasy, humor, being grasped by God, and revelation. Many other Dickinson poems and letters are referenced throughout the meditations. Although Dickinson insisted that she could not pray, LeMay has a broad understanding of what constitutes prayer. She says, Dickinson "met the world, its grief and joy, with song: 'The first Day's Night had come - / And grateful that a thing / So terrible - had been endured - / I told my Soul to sing - ' (Fr 423). Her song rises first from trouble and then from gratitude. . . . The question of why she sang fades before the sheer, gratuitous gift that she sang, as well as the overwhelming beauty of what she sang." To be read and reread one essay at a time, this book is worth a permanent place on the bookshelf of any reader seeking spiritual engagement regardless of religious or secular affiliations. Included are an introduction and 35 pages of notes.

romp about a memo-writing Dean, a bureaucratic English Department, and the neurotic lives of four graduate students and their falsely humble, egocentric professor whose latest paper is entitled "The Agency of Transgender Normative Transfixed or Transmitted: the Use of Vowels in the Poems of Emily Dickinson." Into this manic, insular world steps Bob Forger, claiming to have a newly-found poem written by Emily Dickinson. This turn of plot will resonate for Dickinson aficionados who remember the newly-discovered Dickinson poem auctioned at Southeby's in 1997, later revealed to be a forgery. The operetta, however, has a different and surprisingly antic climax in store for readers of *Oh No, Not Emily!* McLaughlin correctly says that the operetta will appeal to those who "have spent time in an English department, know what a paradigm is, exist in large bureaucracies, are in grad school and need to laugh about it, are thinking of going to grad school and want to know what it is really like, [or] are paying for grad school and are curious about what they are spending all that money for." Featuring songs such as the "Yellow Rose of Emily," *Oh No, Not Emily* debuted on stage in 2003, in Burbank, California, and is now available in paperback or Kindle editions, and on CD.

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## LeMay, Kristin

### *i told my soul to sing: finding God with Emily Dickinson.*

Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, www.paracletepress.com, 2012. 291 pp. Paper, ISBN 1-61261-163-1, \$17.99.

Le May offers 25 cogent, openhearted meditations on belief, prayer, mortality, immortality, and beauty, occasionally sharing her personal spiritual journey while exploring Emily Dickinson's struggle between doubt and faith. Each

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## McLaughlin, Dan

### *Oh No, Not Emily! An Operetta of Academia, Fraud and Emily Dickinson.*

Seattle: Create Space Independent Publishing, 2012. 83 pp. Paper, ISBN 1-4681-0477-6, \$9.99.

In the lively spirit of Gilbert and Sullivan, McLaughlin has written a light, amusing, satirically subversive operetta, a combination of dialogue and 20 songs, all making good-natured fun of academia. The operetta is a silly, oh-so-true

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## Ruedelee, Rodney

### *Echoes of Emily.*

Seattle: Create Space Independent Publishing, 2012. 225 pp. Paper, ISBN 1-4700-7898-0, \$10.00.

The echoes in Ruedelee's title refer to the poems he writes in response to his readings of 87 Dickinson poems printed in full from the Franklin edition. Ruedelee writes neither "as a scholar" nor as "a poet by inclination," but he admires Dickinson's work and hopes that his

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“blunt poetry will provide easier appreciation” of Dickinson’s “complicated and abstruse” originals. His novel takes the form of an extended conversation between Reggie Reitter, a retired engineer in his late sixties with a curmudgeonly outlook on life and an interest in philosophy and poetry, and 50-year-old Harriet Bensen, who cares for her ailing father and teaches high school English, comparing herself to a football linebacker when dealing with her unruly students. In Ruede’s novel, Reggie and Harriet, two “Unitarian-type heathens,” agree to meet once a week after choir practice to discuss Reggie’s poems written in response to reading Dickinson’s poetry. Harriet offers to be Reggie’s reader and frank critic. He describes her as “Harriet the hulk, hard on the eyes, yet kindred in spirit, flush with poetic sensitivity” and himself as sarcastic, wearing “untucked shirts, beard and long hair.” Their conversations echo the format of the 1981 film, *My Dinner with Andre*, an extended conversation between two old friends about the nature of art and life. Harriet admires and praises Reggie’s project but is not always keen on his poems. Reading them, however, does encourage readers to return to the originals, included within the text, and appreciate their beauty.

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## NEW PUBLICATIONS

### *Letter to the World: Randi Laubek Sings Emily Dickinson*

By Niels Kjaer

*Letter to the World*. Sony Music, 2012. CD and book of accompanying text.  
Sony 88725438962. UPC/EAN: 0887254389620.

From decade to decade Emily Dickinson enjoys new waves of interest in Scandinavia. The first wave of attention was in the 50's and 60's, the second was in the 80's and 90's, and right now a third and even stronger wave is rolling over Scandinavia. It includes both new translations of Dickinson's poems and new adaptations of her poetry in art, music and drama (see my reviews in *The EDIS Bulletin* 23/1 and 24/1).

In June 2012 the Danish singer-songwriter Randi Laubek released a new album with her own musical interpretations of thirteen Emily Dickinson poems. In Scandinavia, Randi Laubek is a popular music celebrity, because of her distinctive voice. Her debut album *Ducks and Drakes* (EMI, 1997) was awarded the Danish Grammy (now the Danish Music Award) in 1998 for Best

Album, and Randi Laubek herself was named Best Female Artist and Best Songwriter. Her subsequent albums have all resided at (or near) the top of the Danish album charts. Her new Emily Dickinson album, *Letter to the World*, immediately entered the Danish Top 20 Album Chart.

The thirteen Dickinson poems Laubek has put into music are Franklin #s 94, 178, 278, 338, 349, 368, 387, 479, 519, 550, 557, 656 and 905. Unfortunately Randi Laubek has chosen to use the Dickinson texts from *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (first published in 1924) as her lyrics. The reason is that Laubek many years ago received a copy of this book from her primary school teacher, and consequently knows these early versions of Dickinson's poems by heart. Even so, it would have been much preferable if Laubek had chosen to sing the Franklin versions of Emily Dickinson's poems. That said, Randi Laubek's *Letter to the World* is a great album. Laubek's unique jazzy voice is excellent for interpreting both Dickinson's tender and her passionate feelings, and her tunes complement the poems without dominating them.

On *Letter to the World* Randi Laubek is accompanied by the classical woodwind quintet Royal Danish Winds. Laubek sings, and she and Gustaf Ljunggren play guitars on most of the tracks, while all Laubek's tunes are arranged for Royal Danish Winds by the Swedish composer and arranger Per Ekdahl.



Ekdahl has also composed an "Interval" between the first six and the last seven Dickinson songs.

This album will allow a wider Scandinavian audience to become familiar with Dickinson's poetry, and it is to be hoped that many people after having listened to Laubek's songs will start reading Dickinson's own poems.

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*Niels Kjaer serves as a minister in the Danish Lutheran Church. He is also a poet. Since 1976 he has published 8 collections of his own poetry plus Danish translations of selections of Emily Dickinson's and Gerard Manley Hopkins' poems. He has been a member of EDIS since the start in 1988. He contributed articles and reviews to Dickinson Studies in the 1980s and he has continued to write regularly for the Bulletin.*



Randi Laubek in a lyrical moment  
Photo Credit: Katrine Rohrberg

## George Gleason, Lawyer, Lately Dickinsonian, Goes “Out Upon Circumference”

By Eleanor Heginbotham

When he died suddenly following a procedure to help a heart condition, in the blossomy burst of a Maryland Spring, April 6, George Gleason was building a doll house to the scale of the Homestead. It was not for one of his many grandchildren but to help the Dickinson Museum raise funds during the 200th anniversary of the building. It was but one way he entered energetically into the work of EDIS and the Museum. Described by his four children as a dynamic model for pursuing excellence, growth and joy, he had come to Dickinson after practicing law in governmental areas of environmental protection, then in consulting for private business, and, in retirement, not only volunteering but training other volunteers in Hospice care. One of his self-appointed tasks at the Hospice would have pleased Emily Dickinson: he kept the bird feeders full.

A lifelong reader of poetry – his children spoke of the well-marked Frost collection he left behind – Gleason came to the serious study of Dickinson when a particular poem in the gift from his wife Diane piqued his curiosity. As he was an exact and exacting lawyer and hobby carpenter (among much else), he was a close and careful reader. He brought the question, “what did Dickinson mean by a ‘Blue Peninsula’ in ‘It might be lonelier’ (Fr535)” to a class (on Dickinson’s birthday) in 2007. When the “teacher” (this writer) could not answer, he pursued the idea on his own, combing the other poems and letters and critical studies until he had gathered information and thoughts to share in an article in the May/June 2009 *EDIS Bulletin*. He followed that essay with “Is It Really Emily” in the *Emily*



George Gleason at the EDIS Annual Meeting in Regina, Saskatchewan in 2009.  
Photo Credit, Eleanor Heginbotham

*Dickinson Journal* (XVIII.2, 2009). He shared a third article, one comparing artist Georgia O’Keefe and Dickinson, with an Amherst-area Dickinson group, and he attended annual meetings and conferences in Amherst, Regina, and Oxford. He also took an active and generous interest in the Museum.

Gregarious as he seemed and as active as his family described him to be, perhaps a hint of his turn to Dickinson in his later years lies in the “Blue Peninsula” article in which he said that the early loss of his parents enabled him to “relate to the sense of isolation Dickinson’s speaker was suffering.” Having learned

that many interpreted the term as Dickinson’s reference to Italy, he concluded that, in combination with other poems, the phrase was a metaphor for “the poet’s contentment in the isolation of her family home . . . where she exercised ‘unprecedented imaginative freedom.’” Along with his wife, children, grandchildren, and fellow Dickinsonians, George Gleason leaves his colleagues in many volunteer activities, most especially his work at Montgomery Hospice, Casey House in Rockville, Maryland, toward which the family directed any gifts in his honor.

It might be lonelier  
Without the Loneliness –  
I’m so accustomed to my Fate –  
Perhaps the Other – Peace –

Would interrupt the Dark –  
And crowd the little Room –  
Too scant – by Cubits – to contain  
The Sacrament – of Him –

I am not used to Hope –  
It might intrude upon –  
It’s sweet parade – blaspheme the  
place –  
Ordained to Suffering –

It might be easier  
To fail – with Land in Sight –  
Than gain – my Blue Peninsula –  
To perish – of Delight –

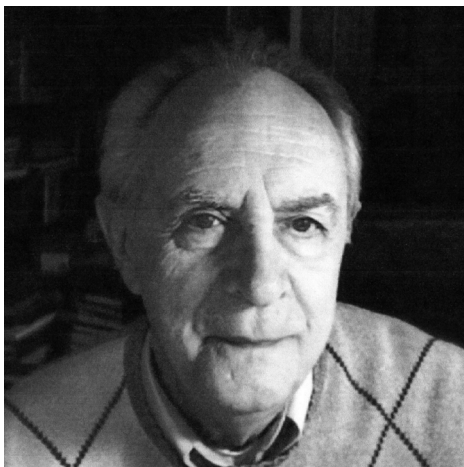
Fr535

*George Gleason’s article for the Spring 2009 issue of the Bulletin, entitled “My Blue Peninsula,” reflected upon his favorite Dickinson poem.*

## Harold Bond, 1931-2013

By Georgiana Strickland

Early last spring I received in my mailbox a charming article for the *Bulletin* describing one Dickinson enthusiast's story of discovering her poetry and the importance of reading it aloud. The value of an



oral approach was not a new idea, but Harold Bond's saga of his own route to appreciating Dickinson's poetry – dashes, “bumpy road,” and all – struck me as something many Dickinsonians could relate to. He suggested that Thomas Wentworth Higginson might have better appreciated her “spasmodic” verse if he had read it aloud. The article appeared in the Spring 2012 issue. I had looked forward to meeting Harold at one of the EDIS gatherings. He obviously had more to tell, much to contribute. I'm sorry now to report that Harold died at his home in Reading, Massachusetts, on April 22.

Harold was a teacher of English, specializing in Shakespeare and poetry, and also a track and field coach, at Reading High School from 1956 until his retirement in 1994. Given his enthusiasm for reading literature aloud, it's

no surprise to learn that he was also an award-winning actor, director, and playwright with the Quannapowitt Players in Reading during those same years. Among his writings was a one-act play about Thomas Wentworth Higginson's relationship with Emily Dickinson. Also a music lover and active in many book clubs and civic organizations, Harold collected first editions, and he and his wife, Theresa, ran an on-line business in books and ephemera.

The Bond family has suggested that memorial contributions may be made to EDIS. They should be sent to Jim Fraser at 159 Prospect St., Unit 7, Acton, MA 01720.

We extend sympathy to Harold's wife and children and other members of the Bond family.

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## EDIS Scholar in Amherst and Graduate Student Fellowship, 2014

The Emily Dickinson International Society (EDIS) invites applications for the 2014 Scholar in Amherst Program. We wish to support exciting new research on Dickinson. The award of \$2,000 may be used for expenses related to that research such as travel, accommodations, a rental car, or reproduction fees. Upon completion of their research, recipients will write a letter to the EDIS Board outlining what they achieved with EDIS support, and we appreciate acknowledgment in any resulting publications. We encourage recipients to consider a visit to Amherst, but residency is not a requirement. Preference will be given to persons with completed PhDs who are in the early stages of their careers.

To apply for the 2014 Scholar in Amherst Award, please submit a cv, a letter of intro-

duction (written by the applicant), a two-page project proposal including preliminary budget and brief bibliography, by January 15, 2014, to Paul Crumbley at paul.crumbley@usu.edu. Letters of recommendation are not accepted as part of the application packet. Applications will be acknowledged upon receipt and applicants notified of final decisions by March 1. For more information, see [www.emilydickinsoninternationalsociety.org](http://www.emilydickinsoninternationalsociety.org)

The EDIS announces a fellowship award of \$1,000 in support of graduate student scholarship on Emily Dickinson. The award may be used to fund travel to collections or conferences, to support book purchases, or for other research expenses (such as reproduction costs) necessary to the project. Preference will be given to applicants enrolled in

doctoral programs and engaged in the writing of dissertations or other major projects directed toward publication. Applicants should be aware that a dissertation project need not be focused solely on Dickinson; however, a substantial part of the work should significantly engage Dickinson's work. To apply, please send a cv, a project description, the names and contact information of two references, and a dissertation prospectus or other relevant writing sample of no more than 25 pages to Paul Crumbley at paul.crumbley@usu.edu. Applications are due by January 15, 2014. Letters of recommendation are not accepted as part of the application packet. Applications will be acknowledged upon receipt and applicants notified of final decisions by March 1. For more information, see [www.emilydickinsoninternationalsociety.org](http://www.emilydickinsoninternationalsociety.org)

## Eleanor Heginbotham

### New EDIS Board Member-At-Large

Eleanor Elson Heginbotham, author of *Reading the Fascicles of Emily Dickinson* (2002) and many articles, including one this Fall in the *Emily Dickinson Journal* on Dickinson's George Eliot, is at work this year with Paul Crumbley, co-editor, of a collection of essays, *Dickinson's Fascicles: A Spectrum of Possibilities* (for Ohio State UP). Although she is Professor Emerita from Concordia University Saint Paul, she continues to teach in the DC area. She has taught in Liberia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and, as a Fulbright Senior Scholar, in Hong Kong. Between these exotic sites and before her ten years in St. Paul, she taught for 18 years at Stone Ridge, an academy in the Maryland suburbs where early versions of a local EDIS chapter met. In Saint Paul she co-directed "To Make a Prairie," the 2000 Annual Meeting. There she also directed international conferences on Laura Ingalls Wilder and F. Scott Fitzgerald. She received four NEH fellowships for summer study and three teaching awards. For her Member-at-Large statement she shared her continuing vision for EDIS:

As an EDIS member since its first year, a participant in each of its conferences and all but two of its annual meetings through

the years, an absorbed reader of the *Bulletin* and an always humbled reader of the flagship *Journal*, I would be honored to serve on its Board again, this time as Member-at-Large. For all the miles (literally and figuratively) the Society has come, I see that there are miles to go. As I have taught and spoken about Dickinson around the world, I am aware of the thousands beyond our several-hundred members who delight in and know a great deal about Emily Dickinson. A primary goal would be to invite as many of such Dickinson readers as we could reach with invitations to join us and then to help plan local events that would keep them engaged in our goals between the meetings and conferences which, in turn, we might plan with more attention

to the potential diversity they would surely bring to us. With greater numbers we might then consider ways to expand our already generous support for young scholars and for the historic homes and libraries in Amherst. Also, we could share with them the inspiration I have gained from our veteran, distinguished founding members, from the talented, productive newer scholars – and from the enthusiastic readers who bring other professional skills (lawyers, scientists, therapists) to our gatherings.



Eleanor Heginbotham with Beefeaters

## EDIS Fellowships Support Rising Scholars

The EDIS Awards Committee is pleased to announce the winners of the 2013 Scholar in Amherst Award and the Graduate Student Fellowship.

The Graduate Student Fellowship goes to Judith Scholes, who is currently completing her PhD at the University of Vancouver, in Vancouver, British Columbia. Through her dissertation, "Emily Dickinson and the Ethos of Nineteenth-Century American Women's Poetry," Scholes examines the ways material aspects of editing, publishing, and circulating poetry rhetorically shape its ethos and help us better understand Dickinson's response to the question of publication. Scholes will use the fellowship to travel to Amherst before attending the international conference in August.

The Scholar in Amherst Award goes to Anne Mondro in support of her proposed series of digital prints inspired by Dickinson poems. Mondro completed her M.F.A. at Kent State University in 2002 and immediately moved from there to the School of Art and Design at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor where she currently holds the rank of associate professor. Professor Mondro has mounted eight solo exhibits since 2008 at galleries and universities across this country and in São Paulo, Brazil. For her Dickinson project, she will base each work on a single Dickinson poem that she will combine with photographs of found and fabricated objects. She plans to visit Amherst in order to gather materials for her series.

## A Conversation with the Amherst Chapter

By Lois Kackley

*Since May 2009, it has been my privilege to facilitate two Emily Dickinson “poetry conversations” each month in Amherst for the Emily Dickinson International Society. Recently, in an effort to get a cross-section of group members based on personality and background, I asked six group members if they would answer a few questions about their experience with these discussions. My aim is to encourage (or, discourage – if that is where their answers lead) EDIS members elsewhere who are thinking about starting a local chapter.*

*I have included mention of their backgrounds for insight into the diverse and engaging people that they are. Three live in Amherst. The others live in surrounding towns:*

*Lois Barber – Founder/Director of Earth Action, a global action network of over 2,000 environment, peace and human rights organizations*

*Greg Mattingly – Retired from Training/Course Development in the high-tech sector; a guide at the Emily Dickinson Museum*

*Jeff Morgan – Emily Dickinson Museum Guide*

*Robert Raymond – Criminal Defense Attorney*

*Adreanna Scussel – Librarian, Public Library (Connecticut)*

*Larry Williams – Engineer and PhD candidate, University of Massachusetts, Amherst*

*The interviews, like all the conversations of the Thursday and Friday groups, took place in the Amherst Room of the Jones Library in Amherst.*

*Lois Kackley*

*When or how did you become interested in Emily Dickinson’s poetry?*

*Lois Barber*

I visited her house and garden several times, but when I tried to read her poems by myself . . . they were “out of reach.” I thought that maybe I just wasn't smart enough. Yet, I knew that so many people love her poetry and recognize her genius. Then, about five years ago, I attended a (Dickinson Museum sponsored) workshop. People had varying ideas about words and lines, but slowly, with each person building upon the ideas of others, the poem was “unwrapped.” By the third poem, I was an active participant. Not long after, I started to participate in the EDIS Poetry Conversations that are held monthly at the Jones Library (Amherst public library).

*Greg Mattingly*

At the suggestion of my wife, in the mid-



The Thursday Group: Left to right, Victoria Dickson, artist; Robert Raymond, attorney; Greg Mattingly, Museum Guide; Eileen Kennedy, professor; Lois Kackley, facilitator.



# MEMBERS' NEWS – CHAPTER GROUPS

1980s. "I taste a liquor never brewed" was the first Dickinson poem that I met, and it made me want to find more. Gradually, I was enthralled.

Adreanna Scussel

I used to take trips from time to time to Amherst to explore the shops downtown. I discovered there was going to be a talk at the museum, and since I'm passionate about anything literary, I attended the program and from then on attended talks and programs at the museum including monthly discussions of the poetry with speakers. From then on, I became a regular and added the EDIS conversations as I became aware of the meetings.

Robert Raymond

Four or five years ago. Reading Helen Vendler's commentaries pulled me in.

Lois Kackley

*What is it about Dickinson poems that you find most attractive?*

Larry

Imagery, the musical use of words, her ignoring of convention and creation of a brilliant new style, doses of eroticism, and emotional power.

Greg

She uses words to say what words themselves can't say alone. (She tells us that "Shadows hold their breath!" Really?) She observes life unflinchingly, minutely, profoundly – what Col. Higginson must have been referring to as "such flashes as come to you." These observations seem to appear in her poems as nonchalantly as one might observe the weather.

"I could not have defined the change –  
Conversion of the Mind" (Fr627)

Jeff

Her poetry is wonderfully concise; philosophically deep; full of original imagery, interesting English usage, surprise,

ambiguity, universality, feeling. More and more, I'm impressed with her playfulness; in many poems you can see that she was having a lot of fun. Emily rocks.

Lois Barber

I respond to her questioning attitude about the whole world including people, animals, plants, clouds, life, death, and God. When I read her poems, I often feel like I am being held by a toe, and dipped into her world. And a quietly dazzling world it is.

Robert (blending his own words with the poet's:)

"Can we keep track of the attractive?"

To this benign creator ascribe no less the clue  
"Like butterflies off banks of noon...leap  
plashless"

As you swim!

Lois Kackley

*What is it about EDIS Poetry Conversations that you like most? Least?*

Adreanna

I like the Poetry Conversations as they are – it's evolved now with purposeful selections, such as an early poem with a couple of later poems and occasionally the addition of a letter.

Jeff

The EDIS conversations follow the format that seems to me essential for enjoying and appreciating ED, i.e. open discussion rather than set lecture. A dozen people around a table will discover endless facets in what may seem like her simplest poems. It's a common experience of participants to begin a discussion with little or no idea of what to say about a given poem, and then bit by bit we open up the poem, and in the end we're awed by the riches uncovered.

The EDIS participants are mostly amateurs ("lovers"), not scholars, and this encourages all to participate unabashedly, with astonishingly productive results.

Lois Barber

I appreciate that there is a regular time and place to meet each month in a lovely room in our conveniently located public library. We begin and end on time, and the discussions are well organized and well facilitated. Interesting people always show up. We have Dickinson scholars, and occasional readers who just drop by. Everyone is encouraged to participate. I travel a lot and attend when I can, but always feel welcomed.

I like the simple format: a few poems have been chosen in advance, someone reads one aloud, we discuss it, and then that same person reads it again. In the second reading, you can hear the "discoveries" we have made during our discussion about the language and the meaning of each poem. We may focus on the tiniest details, and/or get the farthest away and see the big picture that Dickinson may well have been seeing herself. We try to stick to the words she wrote, and not get caught in psychological or sociological analysis. I always learn from the others in the group. People respectfully disagree with or question the opinions of others in the spirit of community exploration. Our discussions are rooted in the belief that there are many ways to read and understand these poems. Only Ms. Dickinson is the real expert.

What's most exciting is the way each poem is "unwrapped" during our 20 to 30 minute discussion. It is a good example of learning by doing together. What was opaque, becomes visible, sometimes even sparkingly clear. There are little triumphs of discoveries, or acceptance of mysteries. The energy and excitement of the group is tangible, and there is often a lot of laughter.

Robert

Only most. One thought that I have had recently is that I would enjoy talking about why some poems we review are

# MEMBERS' NEWS – CHAPTER GROUPS

two on a ten point scale and others ten. What is the difference?

Larry  
Most enjoy the dissections and views offered by people with a broad literary background, and the sharing of published comments of scholars that enlighten.

Less enjoyed are the letters unless they have a bearing on a significant poem, but it is not a problem.

Greg  
It was often a struggle reading the poems in isolation, as I had for so many years. I



The Jones Library, in Amherst

joined EDIS in 2008. Like other participants in the Poetry Conversations, I have been wonderfully surprised by the clarity, the deepened appreciation for, and new insights into the poems that emerge whenever we convene. The simple act of sharing this passion with kindred spirits is probably the greatest reward.

We do not argue. We exchange views, and we ask questions. We do not try to impose our views on the group, or establish our own readings as final. What do I like least? How about well-padded and plushly upholstered Queen Anne chairs to sit in, and a hand-hewn

oak table with plenty of leg room beneath? A crackling fire would be nice, in the winter months, and a lavatory a few steps away would complete the picture. (I will not push for wine and cheese.)

Lois Kackley  
*How has your participation in the Conversations affected your reading of Dickinson?*

Adreanna  
Rereading the poem with the group helps in understanding. With (Dickinson), one can revisit again and there's more depths to plumb. I guess I'm lazy, because I rely on the group discussion to understand and appreciate the poetry.

Lois Barber  
Being in the Poetry Conversation group has made Dickinson's poems more accessible, more alive, brighter, deeper, mysterious, intriguing, and closer to my heart.

Overall, I feel more connected to Emily Dickinson: the person, the woman, the Amherst resident, the New Englander alive during our nation's

Civil War, the questioner, the observer, the artist, and the person who wanted to share her world with others, including me, through her poems.

I still struggle with reading Dickinson's poems on my own. I want to ask questions of others on the spot and hear their take on the words and ideas on the page.

Greg  
In most cases, it's been on a poem-by-poem basis. After our meetings, I like to return to the poems that we discussed and reconsider them in the light of what other participants have said, and in light

of any notes that I may have taken. I try to see the poem in new ways.

Another affect has been to inquire more deeply into the roots and origins of the words that the poet chooses, even familiar words. This was largely inspired by participants in Poetry Conversation with a strong focus on etymology.

Larry  
Improved my understanding, partly due to looking up published analysis as preparation.

Jeff  
The discussions impress me over and over with Emily Dickinson's subtlety, her substance, her perception of significance in little things, her expressive power – and in the endless variety of responses that she stimulates from readers.

Robert  
Being part of Poetry Conversations has reinforced my reading of the poems, both reading and memorizing.

*In 2014, we will celebrate five years of Poetry Conversations. Until then I hope to build on the academic community's enthusiasm for these groups. Early in 2013, the English chair at the University of Massachusetts, Bill Moebius, referred to us a second (in two years) visiting scholar from Paris, France. Sophie Mayer is a refreshing visitor and delightful contributor to our conversations.*

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*Lois Kackley first read Dickinson for a literature class at Salem College (NC) in 1973. "That evening," as she describes it, "after getting the children tucked into bed, I sat before a fireplace in a club chair and read the poems by Dickinson that were in the assigned textbook. I laughed and cried and hugged myself." She began reading Dickinson with friends the very next day.*

## Emily Dickinson and the East

By Nelly Lambert

On October 19th, 2012, a small group gathered in the conference room at the Freer Museum to relaunch a Washington, DC chapter of the Emily Dickinson Society. We introduced ourselves, and shared our general interests in as well as our more immediate connections to the event's theme, "Emily Dickinson and the East." The theme was a match for the museum venue, which specializes in Asian art, and the venue was a perfect match for the theme.

To inaugurate our newly reformed chapter, Eleanor Heginbotham and Judith Farr had helped spread the word about this first event, and Judith Farr had agreed to speak about her work on the general topic, "Dickinson and the East." In her introductory remarks, Farr told the story of her nearly lifelong association with Emily Dickinson. Farr spoke of her as a most rewarding subject, whose integrity as both an artist and a person she had always admired.

Derived from her work on Emily Dickinson's care of plants and flowers, Farr spoke about the poet's nurturing of semi-exotic "eastern" plants, the Star Jasmine flower in particular. To keep her jasmine alive, Farr explained, Dickinson would stay up all night in the winter so that the fire warming her conservatory did not go out. Dickinson was not snobbish about her taste in plants: she tended semi-exotic flowers like the jasmine as well as commoner, local flowers like the daffodil. We paused on the image of eastern and western plants cared for side by side in Dickinson's conservatory, as it illustrated something special to Dickinson in her fascinations with the East. The East was not only an exotic other for her; it was also and perhaps more so a welcome diversifying ingredient, to be blended with the equally cherished flora and fauna of her New England surroundings. She then decoded some of Dickinson's references to the East in her letters as her way of speaking to Samuel Bowles, or of referring to Susan

Dickinson or to the Evergreens or, later, to Mabel Loomis Todd.

Farr's talk flowed into an active question-and-answer session, during which she listed useful ways of (and reasons for) employing biographical research in Dickinson studies. Her prepared lecture had seamlessly interwoven historical research, art history, botany, biography, and poetic analysis, and it served as a wonderful model for scholars just starting out, many of whom were present at the event. We concluded our two-hour gathering by reading a small selection of Dickinson poems containing references to "the East" (broadly defined). Then, we tasted baked goods inspired by Dickinson's own gingerbread and rice teacakes, with added Persian accents.

Future events are planned with the hope that more of the many local writers, teachers, and lovers of Dickinson who were invited to this first meeting might attend.

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## A Memorable November Meeting of the San Antonio Chapter Group

By Nancy List Pridgen

On the evening of November 6, 2012, the EDIS San Antonio Chapter Group was honored to receive a really special guest to our meeting – EDIS President Jonnie Guerra! President Guerra was in town attending a conference and had asked in advance to meet our chapter group. We chose the party room at La Madeleine French restaurant on Broadway for our unique meeting. Our genial hosts provided us with both privacy and delicious refreshments as we shared favorite poems.

President Guerra regaled us with the story of how she became involved with Dickinson's poetry. It seems that Ms. Guerra was planning to write her doctoral dissertation on Keats and Dickinson. Her primary interest was Keats. She began work on Dickinson in order to get

that part out of the way because she assumed it would be easier! Not surprisingly, she never got to Keats. And since then, Ms. Guerra has never left Dickinson behind. She has been active in the Emily Dickinson International Society, serving on the Dickinson board of directors for many years, serving as president of the board for two sessions of several years each.

After President Guerra's talk, she read a favorite Dickinson poem, "The Crickets sang" (Fr1104), and each local member also introduced him or herself and read a favorite Dickinson poem, which the group then discussed briefly. In attendance were Bill and Nancy Pridgen; Rebeca Frees, who has published a volume of poems herself (*Echoes: A Collection of Free Verse Poems*); Angela Seagraves;

Don and Marian Swellander; Len Wheeler; Sandy Barnwell; Peggy Lippert; and Bill Waddington, who has been featured in a *Bulletin* article presenting his calligraphy of myriad Dickinson poems.

In addition to beverages, special refreshments, and French dinners for those who chose to purchase them, Bill and Nancy provided a batch of Dickinson gingerbread.

The members of the San Antonio EDIS Chapter Group were delighted to meet the EDIS president and expressed their deep appreciation to Jonnie Guerra for attending our group. Several members have spoken fondly of our unique November meeting. It was an evening we will cherish for years and years to come.

## Emily Dickinson, World Citizen

EDIS 2013 International Conference, August 8 - 11, College Park, Maryland

I'm confident that Bravoos –  
Perpetual break abroad  
For Braveries, remote as this  
In Scarlet Maryland –  
(Fr518)

So wrote Emily Dickinson, describing the heartbreaking death of a woman's "only boy" during the Civil War. This summer, "bravoos" will break out again in Scarlet Maryland, but this time for intellectual and artistic braveries. In August, over 100 scholars from all over the world will gather in College Park, MD, for our international conference exploring the theme of "Emily Dickinson, World Citizen."

Dickinson may have seen "New Englandly," but as a cosmopolitan reader, she also crafted and cultivated numerous affiliations beyond the local. Her imagination is global as well as minute, and this conference explores her politics, her understanding of citizenship, her engagements with international cultures and theirs with her. The conference coincides with the 25th anniversary of EDIS. Numerous receptions will provide ample opportunities to toast not only Dickinson but the organization that is passionate about spreading her work across the world, helping her become the Global Citizen we now understand her to be.

Among the many celebratory events planned will be the presentation of Distinguished Service Award to Georgie Strickland, long-time editor of the *EDIS Bulletin*.

In the evenings, participants will be treated to Dickinson-related performances. Following the opening reception on Thursday, at which Diana Wagner will offer lovely guitar background, soprano Jane Sheldon and pianist Nicole Panizza will perform a selection of musical settings from Dickinson's own music folio. Also featured will be an excerpt from the stage adaptation of Barbara Dana's *A Voice of Her Own: Becoming Emily Dickinson*, which combines text from the novel with new musical settings of Dickinson poems (see Barbara Dana's article about her artistic engagement with Dickinson, in this issue). Bill Andrews will perform a couple of original musical compositions, including "I'm Nobody."

Friday will feature a keynote presentation, "Escaping Emily," by Alexandra Socarides and a special luncheon address by Judith Farr, entitled "Emily Dickinson



Alex Socarides will deliver a keynote address titled "Escaping Emily."



Poet Joseph Donahue will read as well as delivering a keynote.  
Photo Credit: Rose Vekony

and the Tropical Eden," as well as a variety of special sessions, including one in which graduate students will offer pecha kucha presentations focusing on Emily Dickinson and popular culture.

As part of the Friday evening reception and banquet, Sofie Livebrant will offer, with accordion accompaniment, a selection of songs from her *Emily and I* (reviewed in the Spring 2012 *Bulletin*), and poets Marilyn Nelson, David Keplinger, and Elizabeth Arnold will read from their work. After dinner Joseph Donahue will offer a keynote on Dickinson's poems' travels through various hands and before us onto the printed page and digital screens.

Saturday activities will include a poetry reading by Joseph Donahue and possibly Susan Howe, and "An Evening of

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The Willard Hotel, 1859 and 2013: Dickinson stayed at the Willard when she visited her father in Washington.



The White House in Springtime. Conferees will be able to take advantage of the many historical and cultural resources in the DC area.  
Photo Credit: Scott Abelman

“the Vitallest Expressions,” when participants will be entertained with a wide range of dramatic, musical, and multimedia responses to Dickinson’s life and work: Barbara Mossberg’s “Flying with Emily Dickinson,” Walter Davis’s “Aberration of Starlight” (with actress Bethany Ford), Laurie McCants’s “Industrious Angels,” Mimi Zannino’s, “Time Travel with Emily Dickinson,” Emily Anderson’s “Sincerely, Master,” and Stephanie Strickland and Nick Montfort’s “Sea and Spar Between.”

Co-sponsored with American University, the conference events will be held on the flagship campus of primary sponsor, the University of Maryland, and conference housing will be on campus at the newly renovated Marriott Inn and Conference Center (where special ginger martinis will be available in the lounge!).

Conferees will also be able to take advantage of the many historical and cultural

# MEMBERS' NEWS

resources in the DC area. Those who would like can participate in a lovely coda to the conference by taking high tea at the Willard Hotel, where Emily Dickinson stayed when she visited her father when he was his district's representative to Congress, and where Julia Ward Howe wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" (be sure to make your reservations by July 1st). Also available in DC are the National Gallery, the Corcoran Museum, the Phillips, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, the White House, U.S. Capitol, the numerous Smithsonian museums, and the other gardens, delight-

ful shopping, and sporting events readily available in the area. All participants will be receiving an "EDIS guide to Washington and Maryland" over the summer to help plan such outings.

In order to allow for maximum engagement with one another's ideas, detailed abstracts for all of the papers for this conference will be available in full on the conference website well before August, and those abstracts will also be printed in the program. In this way, participants will be able to discuss one another's ideas more fully than is usually

possible. A more than the usual amount of time will be given over to Q&A during the sessions, again allowing for extended, deep dialogue.

Among the topics to be covered in sessions: 21st Century Pedagogies; Emily Dickinson's Transatlantic, Transtemporal Contexts; Dickinson & Children's Literature; Affect; Ecocriticism; Citizenship; Knowing ED through the Arts; Orientalisms; Transdisciplinary Poetics; Transoceanic literatures; ED & Politics; ED & Religion. A full schedule will be available on the EDIS website after June 1.

## EDIS Membership Form

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

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

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Use additional page for further gift memberships.

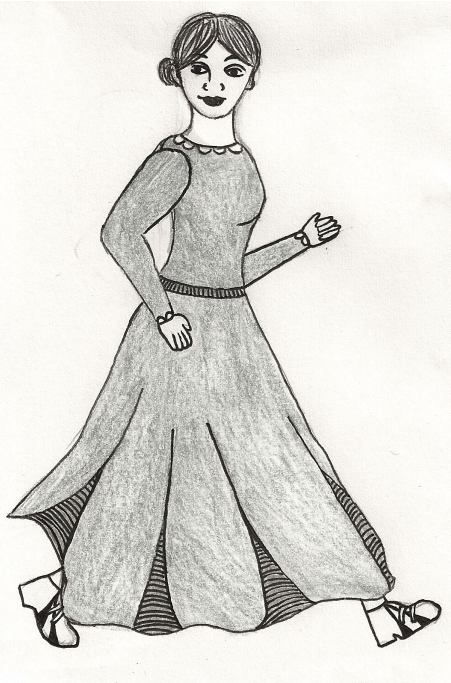
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# THE SWEETS OF PILLAGE

I started early - took my Jog  
Along South Pleasant Street -  
I heard but just the soft Kerflop  
Of Sneakers on my Feet -

No Man must know I run before  
The Ribbons fringe the skies -  
Don't tell! My purple Shirt and Shorts  
Just might surprise their eyes!



## Felicia Nimue Ackerman

### A Fluffy Fellow in My Lap

A fluffy fellow in my lap  
Continually purrs --  
You may have heard him -- did you not  
His purring joyful is --

He cares not if I'm rich or poor --  
Or if I'm fat or slim --  
Or if I'm tidy or unkempt --  
Why can't you be like him?

I passed the Haberdashery -  
I passed the Nelsons' door -  
Until the only other Boy  
Alive in Town - as 'twere -

Came by me - did a Double Take -  
As "Emily don't run" -  
And whispered - doubtless - to himself -  
"That must have been the Son"!

When cobbled byways beckoned rough  
My Ancles disobeyed -  
The Notice on the startled Grass -  
"Keep Off" - my Shoes defied -

Circumference completed - then -  
Athletic as a Hare -  
I bounded - undetected yet -  
To my own Homestead door.

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### Unto a Prowling Cat

Unto a prowling cat  
No barking dog may go  
Without the expectation of  
A claw-extended toe.

### If I Can Find

If I can find one mouse to batter  
I shall not stalk in vain  
If I can make some sparrows scatter  
Till none remain

Or take one tasty robin  
Into my mouth again  
I shall not stalk in vain

## Andrew Gaylard

In Winter – Midnight – in my Room,  
My problem bending o'er –  
A Raven tapped, then stepped inside –  
And perched above my door.

At first no syllable he spoke –  
A Spectre's Cloak he wore –  
I dared inquire its Owner's Name –  
He answered "Nevermore".

I asked if he my Bridegroom knew –  
It might be one of four –  
And was there balm – in Gilead –  
To soothe my trouble sore?

Again quoth he his sole reply.  
I fear me what's in store –  
That Beak and Claw – unmoving then –  
Will leave me – Nevermore –

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### Purring is Far More Wonderful

Purring is far more wonderful  
Than the attempt to speak.  
A purr is greater than a roar,  
More subtle than a squeak.

Purrs lift and soothe your spirit  
And brighten your abode,  
Until you lose the company  
Of purrs that eased your load.

Your kitty's cordial purring,  
However much embraced,  
Must cease, and you will wonder  
If it can be replaced.



# Emily Dickinson, World Citizen

College Park and Washington DC, August 8 - 11



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