

# Bulletin

Volume 33, Number 1

May/June 2021

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

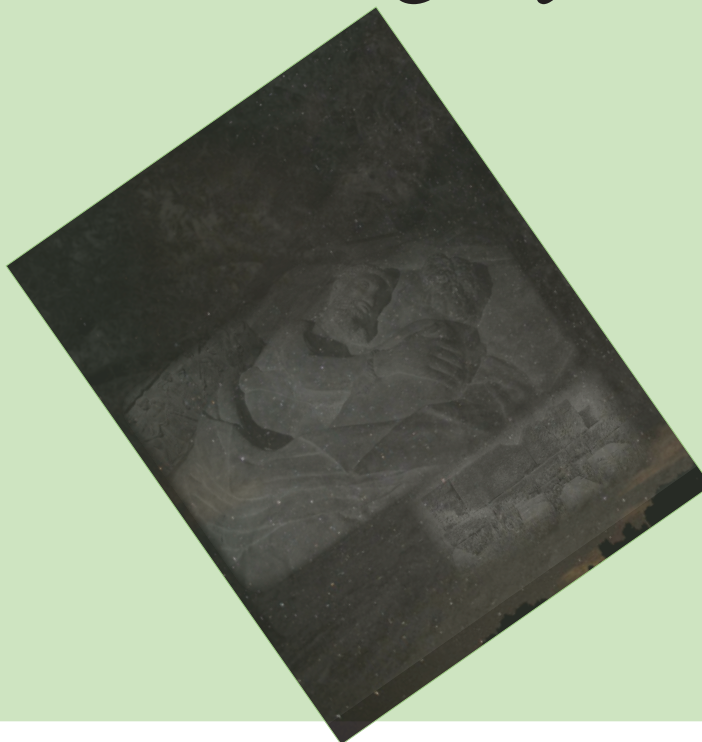


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*For Privilege of Play*

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*Emily Dickinson has long been recognized as a playful poet and as a poet interested in the dynamics of play. Openness to play enriches a reading of just about any poem, and play enabled her to address some her most serious topics. Several contributions to this issue show an interest in play. Cynthia Kreuz-Uhr's inaugural essay in a new series, "Under the Microscope," shows the poet's playfulness with the ampersand. Katherine Humes writes about Dickinson and mid-19th century children's games. Several contributors who taught courses on Dickinson during the pandemic found playful invention to be a way to overcome the challenges of sometimes depersonalizing online platforms.*

*The images on the front cover reflect different aspects the topic, "For Privilege of Play" (Fr625). Clockwise from the bottom left are Northern Kentucky University student Kathleen Bryant's fascinating conceptual depiction of Dickinson's "I am afraid to own a body" (Fr1050 – see p20); a virtual Cornell Box representation of "Ample make this Bed" (Fr804); some images of cards from the moralistic children's game "The Good and Bad Passions" (see Humes, p21); all joined by playful representations of the infinitely various ampersand.*

*On the back cover are more examples from an assignment in which students at Centre College studied Joseph Cornell's "Toward the Blue Peninsula" and then made virtual Cornell boxes representing different poems. Readers are free to guess at the poems represented.*

*The Assistant Editor for this issue is Kennedy Bailey*

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# Poet to Poet

*Series Editor, Ivy Schweitzer*

*For my inaugural column in this series, I am delighted to feature David Keplinger, a poet and professor in the MFA program at American University. David's work came to my attention when he won the 2020 Poetry Society of America Emily Dickinson Award for his poem, "Reading Emily Dickinson in Amherst Massachusetts," reprinted here. Seeming to inhabit the rhythms and poignancies of Dickinson's verses about the Civil War, David explains in his essay how this came to be: through genealogical research about his great-great grandfather Isaac Anderson, who was a casualty of the War in more senses than merely the physical. Shedding light on Anderson's experiences allows us to glimpse a sensitive young man, someone Dickinson might have known from Amherst, who went through the hell of battle and its aftermath. Setting his ancestor's poems to music, David gives these expressions an unforgettable form. I highly recommend sampling them at <https://music.apple.com/us/album/by-and-by/479967780>. David is the author of six collections of poetry; the most recent are *The Long Answer* (Texas A&M, 2020) and *Another City* (Milkweed Editions, 2018), which received the 2019 University of North Texas Rilke Prize. He has also translated poetry from Danish, collaborated with the German poet Jan Wager, taught poetry internationally and won several prestigious awards.*

*I also want to bid farewell to Jonnie Guerra, who edited this series for many years and thank her for her inestimable service and generous support in the transition.*

## Collaborations with the Dead

By David Keplinger

In late August of 1862, near Warrenton, Virginia, and on the eve of what is still known in the North as the battle of Second Bull Run, my great-great grandfather, Isaac P. Anderson, feeling woozy from a combination of typhoid fever, longstanding lead poisoning from his career as a sign painter, and a general malaise, left the war. From his Commanding Officer, Captain Dunham, he received what he calls a "descriptive" – presumably a formal note allowing him to seek discharge at a later date – and, after a time in the hospital on Wolf Street in Alexandria, he made his way home to Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, effecting the transition from soldier in the Pennsylvania 88th regiment Company F, to civilian.

But it wasn't so easy as all that. With his "descriptive" note in hand, Anderson traveled to Philadelphia that fall, when he was well enough, where he met a claims

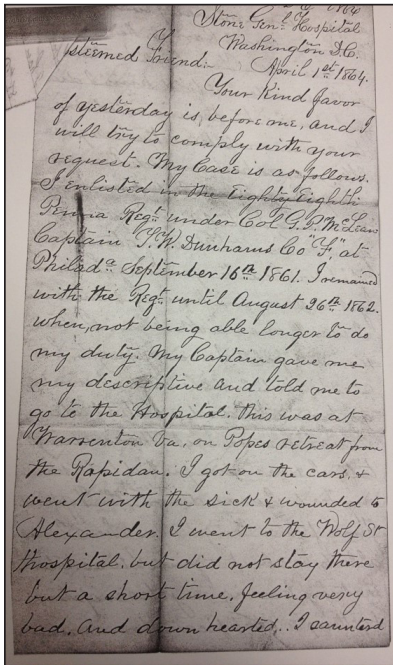
agent by the name of DeWitt. This man accepted the \$40 charge for processing his discharge, but never submitted the paperwork, making off with Anderson's money – and the next several years of his life. By November, 1863, when President Lincoln was riding in the cars up to Gettysburg for a speech, Anderson was coming down to Washington in the opposite direction, complete with shackles, under arrest. He was taken to Forrest Hall military prison, a building still standing on Wisconsin Ave. and M street in Georgetown (now a Gap store), held there for some weeks, but later transferred to Stone General Hospital, which Walt Whitman was said to frequent in those years. Anderson stayed at Stone General for six more months before he was exonerated from charges of desertion in June, 1864. The entire journey encompasses the heart of the Civil War, from 1861 when he enlisted, until its closing year. He spent much of it detained.

\*

I had known some of Anderson's story through family lore, and I owned a copybook of his, filled with poems and songs from the years preceding his crisis. I became fascinated with this gentle figure whose sense of humor was communicated in his original lyrics, and whose heart (an abolitionist and devout Episcopalian) was translated through the popular poems and songs he set down in his book, among them, "The Indian's Lament," and "I'll Remember You, Love, in my Prayers." I was so moved by his spirit that I wrote melodies to some of his original work and arranged a few of the poems into musical compositions. "Kiss me on my cheek / Steal the rose-red stain away... / Run your fingers through my hair / Say the sunshine's tangled there / Days will your features wear / Reality is, that day is here." Those are Anderson's words, in the opening verse of the title piece of my roots album, *By*



# Poet to Poet



Page one of Isaac Anderson's letter to his attorney, April 1, 1864



Photo Credit: Czarina Divinagracia

& By. In May, 2011, I released the record, which (I believed) completed the project for me.

It wasn't until I began performing the work that I went further and, through my research at the National Archives, discovered the horrific details of his story.

One day a letter, crisp as the day it was mailed, fell from a folder released to me at the Archives, wherein Anderson explains to his lawyer the moment-by-moment details of his journey. "I swear to God in Heaven I thought it was genuine," he writes, underlined for emphasis, speaking of the paperwork given him by DeWitt. He was writing for his life. As a deserter, he could be executed or sent back to the war, a death sentence either way.

I have no record of Anderson after June, 1864 until 1869. I should say, the source I used for my musical collaboration were actually two books. One was the hard-back copybook I mention above, with dates ranging from 1851-1860. There was another notebook, a makeshift one: it was a black leather book on the veterinary care of horses dated 1869, in which Anderson gathered pressed leaves

(still intact) and doodled in the margins and back pages, also drawing faces and sketching samples for his signs. I had mostly veered away from this later book when writing my songs because the material here revealed a less gentle character, one which lacked the kindly humor of the younger man. Whatever had happened to him five years earlier had seemed to be pressed down inside, flattened and preserved and as fragile as the leaves themselves.

Now I see that the mark of extremity had seemed to carry over into these later writings and sketches, which were bur-

dened with a harsher, coarser flavor. As I reflect on the story of Anderson's life – he died of complications from those early illnesses in the war, at the age of 47 – I see someone who carried the war with him everywhere he went, whose sparser writings after the war seemed to grow more fragmentary, contradictory, hesitant. They came less as annunciation than as codex, smoke signal, whisper – and so it is no coincidence that, around that time, my commitment to reading with devoted attention the war poetry of Emily Dickinson really began.

\*

In the last week of August of 1862, when Anderson was leaving Warrenton, Emily Dickinson was writing the following lines at the end of her "There is a flower that / Bees prefer"<sup>1</sup>:

The Bravest – of the Host –  
Surrendering – the last –  
Nor even of Defeat – aware –  
When cancelled by the Frost –

I imagine Dickinson, though removed from the fighting, dearly moved by war; I hear the war in her description of bees, with this language of combat: "Bravest," "Surrendering," "Defeat." I hear the language of institutions that instigate wars: "Host," and "cancelled." In these years I have knelt at the feet of this poet, I have come to understand the ways that witness can be mapped in the sounds of words, associations, contradictions, and formal departures. As much as a Shoah-survi-

<sup>1</sup>This thanks to the scholarship of Ivy Schweitzer, who documented that year, week by week, in her blog, *White Heat: Emily Dickinson in 1862*. The reference is from August 20-26. While Dickinson's work that year was populated by bees, Anderson's poetry leans towards the grasshopper, as in the earliest entry in his copybook: "A Little Boy's Address to a Grasshopper in October," which became the third track on our 2011 album, *By and By*.

# Poet to Poet

vor poet like Paul Celan (who translated Dickinson into German while interned in a forced labor camp) had to reshape his language in order to translate the shatteredness of his inner and outer worlds, Dickinson's deftly hesitant, quickened breath-work embodied a spirit that to my ear seemed deeply discerning of the liminal spaces, the thin places, in which the truth – in a time whose Beauty and Truth can no longer be sensed, let alone died for – can sometimes hide.

Thus, when I set out to write, a few years after the release of my album, a series of poems from Isaac P. Anderson's point of view, poems that later appeared in my fifth poetry collection, *Another City*, I read Dickinson more than Whitman to capture the prosody that would have served to translate Anderson's quiet survival in the aftermath. Dickinson was labeled an introvert, a shut-in; but she was not. Her monastic qualities were balanced with ecstatic curiosities, the joys of music, conversation, and correspondences. Anderson was labeled a deserter, even after his exoneration (there are still records that indicate him so); but he was not. I quickly saw that Dickinson's *in-spoken-ness*, a quality of introspection and skepticism mixed with the language of hymns, was the key means of grasping Anderson's post-war experience. In the following poem, I consider Anderson's journey back to Phoenixville and the reception awaiting him there:

After Charges of Desertion, June 1864

I saw my river, one kid  
stood fishing there,  
not even waving  
to a passing man

in uniform. My long  
coat brushed

the ground, I was taller,  
in my boots,

maybe my feet  
weren't touching, my beard

the only weight,  
like leader fishing line,

my hair like tippet,  
and that's

my story, that's when  
the cough discharged,

the sad, black  
blood—exit ink.

*Another City*, Milkweed Editions, 2018.

Reprinted by permission of the author.

The enjambments and the language – I fell upon “tippet” without consciously trying to invoke Dickinson – grew out of my sense of the quietness that can hold enormity, as it must have done, too, in poems she wrote during those years

of 1861-1865. Sometime later, while working on a new collection, I visited Dickinson's home in Amherst and stood in the room where she had composed the life's work. My grasp of her gift, if it were possible, expanded to include the whole experience she had lived, beyond her work with words. The evidence of that life, from the hawthorn cone to the wisps of notes the piano had seemed to leave stenciled in the air, hung all around me.

Living now in a time of rage and outrage as she did – and in a city in the center of it all – her prosody began to reach into me, in collaboration, as I set out to engage with my new work. I've included one example in the inset, a poem whose broken-opened lines mean to echo the feeling of spacious awareness I discovered in Amherst. It is a memory so vivid. It is a conversation with her music that does not ever seem to end.

## Reading Emily Dickinson in Amherst, Massachusetts

I know how it feels to live in a small leaden room,  
with only snakes and birds as consolation. I know how  
to imagine death by falling through stories  
of floorboards like a poem flutters through molecules, air  
and time. It never lands in the yard. The trick  
is not to die while dreaming of death. That's why  
the circle of doors and windows here remain open  
a little. That's why the poems seem always to end  
on slant rhymes, and dashes. That's why the hawthorn cone  
is never quite in full bloom but almost. I too come here  
respectfully. I bow, halfway at thresholds. I know how to wait  
at a completely empty window, holding out my hands.

David Keplinger  
(Reprinted by permission of the author)

Series Editor, Adalberto Müller

## Jazz and Bossa Nova Dickinson in Brazil: Interview with Augusto de Campos and Cid Campos

Emily Dickinson was first translated in Brazil in 1928, when the outstanding modernist poet Manuel Bandeira published a couple of poems in a prestigious woman's magazine. Since then, she has been one of the most translated poets in the country, by poets from different periods and styles. Among them, Augusto de Campos, one of the founders of the *Concretismo* movement in the fifties (together with his brother Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari). De Campos's translation of eighty Dickinson poems in *Não sou ninguém* is nothing but a precious book, where every translated poem is a gem. Inspired by these translations, Cid Campos, Augusto's son, worked to recreate the translated poems in song, and he recorded – with his father's collaboration – the independent album *Emily* in 2017. In songs like “*Ata-Me Eu Canto Assim*” (“Bind me – I still can sing –” [Fr 1005]), Dickinson's elliptical rhythm is rendered into a jazzy melody, quite close to the great standards. Other poems are presented as a mix of samba and bossa nova and manifest the inner strength of Dickinson's verse to be reshaped in different latitudes and contexts of reading. Additionally, almost every song includes a recording of Augusto de Campos himself reading out loud his translated pieces by Dickinson. In the following interview, both Augusto de Campos and Cid Campos talk about these charming experience of “transcoding” Dickinson to the digital era (as the album can be heard on streaming platforms like *Spotify* and *Deezer*).

*Adalberto Müller:* The translation of Dickinson's poems in *Não sou ninguém* seems to place the American poet in a more constructivist and concretist trend or vogue of poetry. One notices in the translations, for instance, emphases on the iconic proximity between words. At the same time, the use of the Portuguese *redondilha* stanza seems to bring poems closer to popular traditions of Lusophone poetry. How do you understand this tension between the constructive and the popular or traditional in Dickinson's translations?

*Augusto de Campos:* There is certainly a lot of proximity between the minimalism of concrete poetry and that of Dickinson. Perhaps the first one to realize this was Décio Pignatari, who included in his most complete collection of poems, *Poesia Pois É Poesia*, the splendid, and unorthodox, translations he made of “There's a certain slant of light” (Fr320), in 1952, and “I asked no other thing –” (Fr687), in 1967. I transcribe the latter below because it is the most daring and already quasi-semiotic, with its humorous exchange of signs:

*Pedi um artigo apenas,  
Só ele estava em falta.  
Propus pagá-lo em \$er:  
Sorry-me o caixa-alta.*

*Brasil? Botãotorcendo,  
Cerrou, sem ver-me, o cenho:  
— A minha cara senhora  
Não quer mais nada por ora?*

Emily's poem was published posthumously in 1890. She herself died in 1886. It is, therefore, more than 130 years old. And it looks very up to date.... Some of my translations were first printed in *O Anticrítico* (1985), now re-edited, in the chapter, “Emily – the difficult anonymity.” There, I wrote:

the density  
of her poetic language  
makes it more up to date than whitman's  
no north american poet  
(not even emerson or poe)  
had taken so far with  
the ellipse & the condensation of thought  
or the syntactic ruptures  
she even set the punctuation free  
dashes intercept texts  
replacing commas & points  
and giving the poems  
a fragmentary physiognomy  
already totally modern<sup>1</sup>

My translations tried to foster – without a specific project, because my poetic interest was disseminated across other poetic fields – this awareness of concision and precision of which Emily was a precursor, until I reached my last translations of Emily, *Não sou Ninguém*, first edited in 2008, and then expanded in the 2015 edition. Since Emily herself did not have an orthodox criterion in terms of versification – she seemed

<sup>1</sup>Thanks are due to Juan Carlos Calvillo (COLMEX), who helped me with the translation. Augusto de Campos follows e.e. cummings (whom he translated) in avoiding the use of capitals.



# Voices Outside the US

primarily to have in mind the brief, almost epigrammatic verse – I needed not to worry, in my translations, about traditional verse, following the rhythm of the breath, almost natural to the short lines, using at times the slant [*toante*] rhymes or the full rhymes, and the tension in the sound of the words. Portuguese verse is syllabic and not accentual, unlike English. Thus I wrote “Senti um féretro em meu cérebro” (“I felt a funeral in my brain,” [Fr340]) and “Uma palavra se abre / Como um sabre” (“There is a word / that bears a sword” [Fr42]). In my conception, I only translated what I thought could stand on its own, as an autonomous poem, in Portuguese. I believe sometimes I have met this difficult ideal.



Photo Credit: Isabel D'Elia

Augusto de Campos and Cid Campos in 2013

*AM:* Emily Dickinson’s poetry has already been set to music by composers like Aaron Copland and Judith Weir, and many other musicians and singers have flirted with her work. In the album *Emily*, was there any interest in other compositions, or was the work kindled directly by the encounter with the translations?

*Cid Campos:* I first read Emily Dickinson in *Não sou ninguém*, by Augusto de Campos, in 2008. I was impressed by the subtlety and minimalism of her poetry, very much ahead of her time, and also by Augusto’s sensitive and metrically perfect translations. As soon as I felt this musicality in Emily’s poetry, I composed, first, *Como se Mar Rompesse* (Fr720), *Se o meu Riacho é Fluente* (Fr1235) and *Nossa Porção de Noite* (Fr116), all of which were made during my first reading of the book, but released only in 2014, on the record NEM. I had no previous knowledge of other composers who had worked her poems, but a few years ago I was able to watch the biopic about Emily, *A Quiet Passion*, by Terence Davies.

*AM:* We know that Dickinson was an excellent pianist, and that she played spirituals, an African American music genre that is one of the sources of jazz and blues. On the other hand, in her verse one is also able to feel echoes of the Protestant hymn (since she uses the so-called “hymn meter”). How do you perceive the musicality of Dickinson’s poems?

*CC:* Since the early 90’s I have been working with great intensity in poetry, especially in everything concerned with the concrete poems and art/translations performed by Augusto de Campos. I work with both experimental and popular music. Although I had no knowledge of Emily’s talent for piano and her interest in spirituals, the modernity and delicacy of her poems, with all their freedom of expression, intuitively led me at times towards an approach to blues, jazz and bossa nova. I ended up composing a very intimate repertoire, but with rhythmically stronger and more balanced moments also.

*AM:* In songs like *Ata-Me Eu Canto* (“Bind me – I still can sing –” [Fr1005]), the tribute to the great jazz and blues tradition becomes more evident. One could say that Dickinson, if she had been a jazz singer, would have been a Billie Holiday! Anyway, how do you see, if there is any, the relationship between Dickinson and this musical tradition?

*CC:* In my opinion, Dickinson’s poems already contain some ingredients of jazz and blues. I feel it in her poems. These songs that you refer to came out exactly in this line, as well as *Sépala, Pétala and um Espinho*, (“A sepal – petal – and a thorn” [Fr25]), where I play the base and a solo with a Resonator guitar, a typical instrument of blues. Surely, we can draw an imaginary connection between the poet and the singer! Emily also had a dose of sadness, loneliness and suffering that leads us directly to the blues.

*AM:* We know that syncopation is a fundamental element of both African American music (gospel, blues, jazz) and Afro-Brazilian music (samba, bossa nova). Is there in the album *Emily* any attempt to meet the syncopation of poetry itself and these musical traditions?

*CC:* Yes, without a doubt! The song *Nossa Porção de Noite* (“Our share of the night to bear –” [Fr116]) is a bossa nova-bolero, where I made a point of doing a very jazzy bass solo, in order to mix musical styles. There is also the participation of Augusto de Campos reading the poems. At first it would be in one track or another, but we ended up liking it so much that his voice eventually went through the whole album, bringing even closer the poetry of the music.

*EMILY* (2017)

Links

*Tratore:* <http://www.tratore.com.br/cd.asp?id=7898619142364>

*Smartlink:* <http://trato.red/emily>

*Deezer:* <http://www.deezer.com/album/49554212>

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*iTunes:* <http://itunes.apple.com/us/album/id1293390873>

*Spotify:* <http://open.spotify.com/album/5QXeTQhlevsTkeiyNMHwVa>



# Under the Microscope

An essay by Cynthia Kreuz-Uhr inaugurates a new occasional series, *Under the Microscope*. The Bulletin invites submissions of roughly 1000 words, no more than 1500, that show what microscopically close attention to Emily Dickinson's language can reveal. Essays should focus on no more than one poem. Ideally, essays should be engaged in a spirit that balances ingenious reading and play – revealing the delights of inventiveness. Anyone who would like to submit a possible contribution to the series – or better still, serve as series editor – should contact Dan Manheim, Bulletin editor.

Some readers may remember the version of this essay from the 2020 EDIS Annual Meeting. Cynthia Kreuz-Uhr is the Associate Director of Education at The Arc San Francisco, a lifelong learning center for people with intellectual disabilities. She has an MA in Transpersonal Counseling Psychology from Naropa University, where she has also been an instructor. She has taught Dickinson to a wide range of people including preschoolers and people with Alzheimer's disease.

## Reading the Letter Never Written

By Cynthia Kreuz-Uhr

The Dickinson poem “This is my letter to the world.”<sup>1</sup> is a riddle poem – one that invites and rewards experimentation. (Fig. 1: illustrations appear on the following pages.) The poem embodies multiple meanings of the word “letter,” as a metaphor for the interconnected, fractal nature of the “world,” an embodiment of the whole of reality, the “all.” The letter (epistle) is composed of letters (characters of the alphabet). What is “my letter”? Through an exploration of Dickinson's wordplay, negation, paradox, reversal, and compression, the answer to the riddle of the letter can be summed up: “&.”

In the 19th century, “&” was often considered a letter of the alphabet. It is read as “and” and is named “ampersand.” In Emily Dickinson's copy of *The New England Primer* it is the 27th letter (Figure 2). When children recited the alphabet, it was awkward to end with “X, Y, Z, and.” Instead, they were taught to say “and, per se, and,” meaning “and” in and of itself, which became “ampersand.” The character “&” originated as ligature of the Latin letters E and T which make up “Et”, the Latin word for “and.” (Figure 3). The form of “&” embodies its meaning, since it is a union of two letters, and it takes the shape of a knot.

Dickinson uses many kinds of wordplay in her poems. She wrote riddle poems. She

does not tell her readers that her “route of evanescence” is a hummingbird or what it is that “neighs like Boanerges” (a train) and it means more to us when we discover it ourselves. It gives us the surprise and pleasure of expanding our awareness and seeing from a new perspective. Dickinson also uses word play with letters of the alphabet. She uses the word “noon” (a palindrome) as a symbol of eternity in, for example, the “perpetual noon” of “There is a zone in even years” (Fr1020). The two O's in the center of “Noon” are literally circles, symbols of eternity.

Letters of the alphabet have a powerful history as symbols. In the Hebrew kabbalistic tradition letters are emanations of the divine power. It is through these letters that the world was created, as recounted in the first chapter of Genesis. Dickinson is not known to have studied Hebrew, but the study of the Bible in its original languages, Hebrew and Greek, was highly valued in her culture. One of her known literary influences, the 17th century polymath Sir Thomas Browne, studied kabbalistic and hermetic symbolism, along with science and Christian theology. He also used letters as spiritual symbols. In *Religio Medici* (found in the Dickinson family library) he writes that “heathens” are better at reading the “mystical letters” of nature, than Christians.

In the Christian tradition one of the most powerful letter symbols comes from Dickinson's favorite book of the Bible, Revelations,

in which Jesus Christ, the incarnation of the divine Word, is called “Alpha and Omega” (Fig. 4), the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet – a powerful symbol of the “all.” Dickinson radically appropriated the symbolism of the divine incarnate Word (Fig. 5) and applied it to her words – to poetry. She describes poetry as “a word made flesh” (Fr1715). Like the Greek alphabet, her poem has a first letter and a last letter. To symbolize the whole of that fractal poem letter, the reader can combine its first letter and with its last. Applying the biblical principle of reversal: “The last shall be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:16), we can take the last letter E and join it to the first, T. We create the word “Et,” “and” in Latin. “&” is its abbreviated ligature. Since “Et” can be pronounced as “A” (as in the French pronunciation), “&” is a paradoxical symbol of both the beginning and the end of the alphabet. It is as if Dickinson took the biblical symbolism of Alpha and Omega, applied it to her own poem letter, and compressed the maximum amount of meaning into the smallest literary unit – a single letter that represents the whole: “&.”

The conjunction “and” is the essential element of the fractal poem letter. The poem, in its most fundamental structure, is a series of letters, one after the other: T & H & I & S etc. The poem is also fractal in which parts embody the whole, like the branching fronds of a fern. Dickinson's lexicon gives several definitions for “letter.” The poem can be a

<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise noted, poems are quoted from the transcriptions provided at the *Emily Dickinson Archive* (edickinson.org)

# Under the Microscope

letter in the sense of an epistle. It is also composed of letters of the alphabet (characters, signs, marks). It is a letter made up of letters. It is also a piece of and a part of “literature” from the Latin *litera*, the origin of the English word “letter.” Noah Webster’s first definition of “letter” is as an agent of letting:

LETTER, n.1 [from let.]

1. One who permits.
2. One who retards or hinders.
3. One who gives vent; as, a blood-letter.

Agents of letting include the writer who lets words represent her thought. It includes Dickinson’s poem which lets itself become a “word made flesh” with what she calls the “consent of Language,” (Fr1715). And it in-

cludes God who says in Genesis 1: “Let there be light”: “&” is an apt symbol for these fractal interconnections.

While Dickinson used the cursive ampersand in her letters (Fig. 6), she never used the ampersand character in her poems. Not surprisingly, she did often use the word “and” in her poems, sometimes in a way evocative of an unknown fractal eternity, as in “As if the Sea should part.”:

As if the Sea should  
Part  
And show a further Sea –  
And that – a further – and  
the Three  
But a Presumption be –

There are several reasons why the ampersand might have been an intriguing symbol for Dickinson. Like her distinctive dashes, “&” both unites and separates. The questions, what happens after death? and is there “more”? were crucial for Dickinson. “&” comes at the end but represents “more.”

Dickinson’s poem tells us that “This” is my letter. What is “this”? “This” is this present moment and all it is connected to. It is the present moment of reading the poem. It is the moment of connection between the reader’s mind and the mind of the poet. It can be a moment of connection to the all that lies within each moment. As Dickinson wrote, “Forever is composed of nows” (Fr690). This moment now, & now, & again, now.

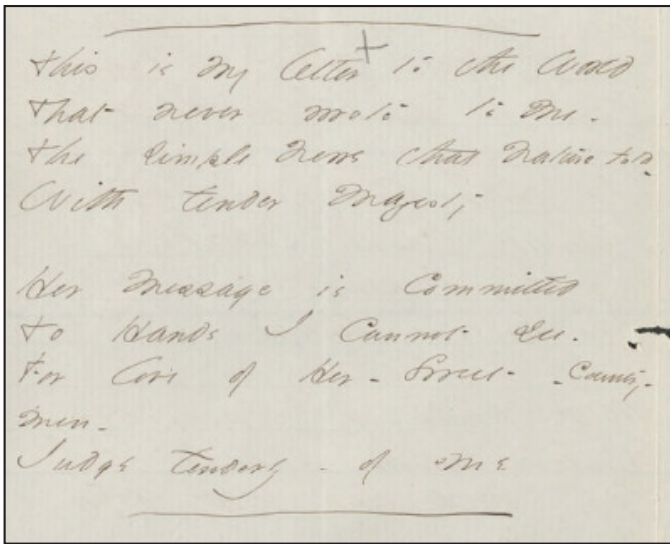


Figure 1. Poems: Packet XIV, Houghton Library.

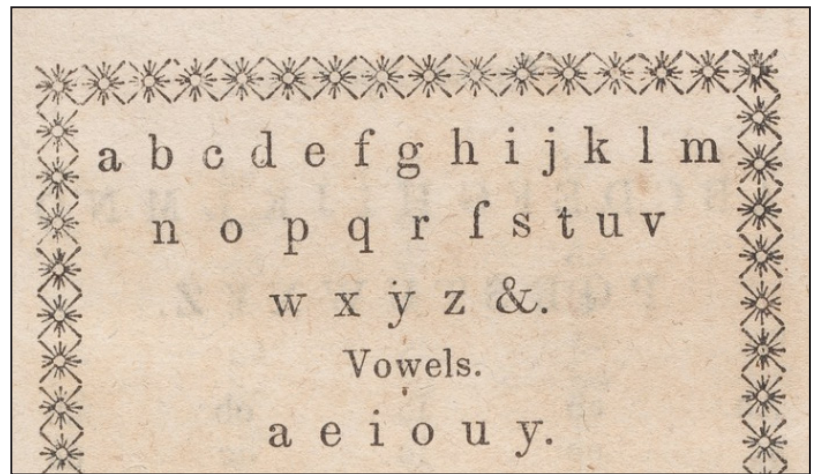


Figure 2. *The New England Primer*, Hartford 1843. Dickinson Family Library; Houghton Library,

Figures from the article appear on this and the following page. Figure 1) the holograph of “This is my letter to the World” from the *Emily Dickinson Archive*; Figure 2) an image of the alphabet from *The New England Primer*. On the opposite page, zigzagging from the top right, Figure 3) evolving representations of the ampersand; Figure 4) an image of the Alpha and Omega with the two letters intertwined (the window is in St. Patrick Catholic Church in Junction City, Ohio [cropped; photo credit: Nheyob, standard *Wikimedia Commons License Agreement*]); Figure 5) The opening lines of the Gospel of St. John from the King James Bible; and Figure 6) a holograph of L203, to Kate Scott Anthon.

More information about the history of the ampersand can be found in *Shady Characters: The Secret Life of Punctuation, Symbols, and Other Typographical Marks* (Norton 2013).

# Under the Microscope



Figure 4

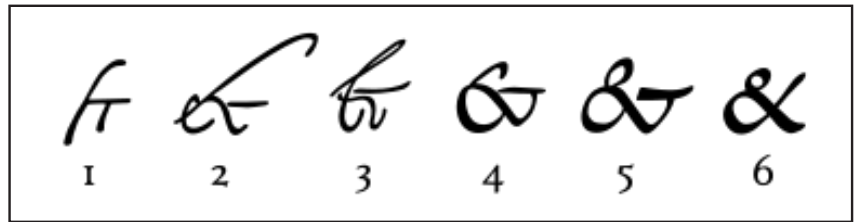


Figure 3. The Evolution of Ampersand

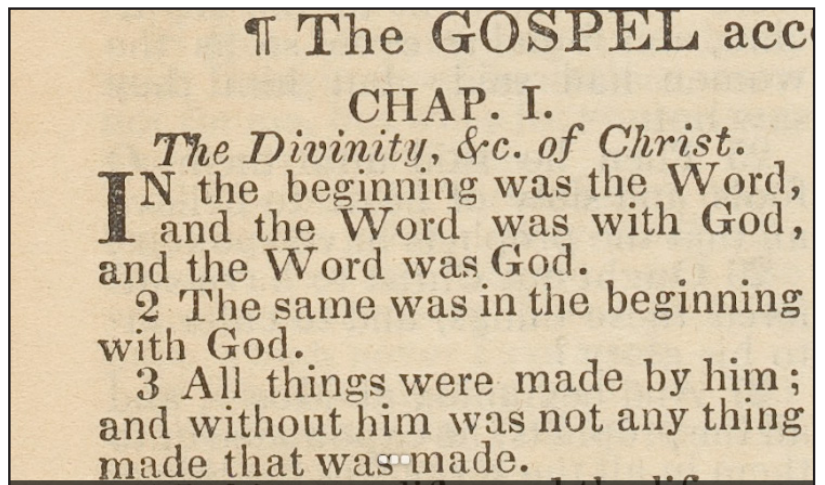


Figure 5

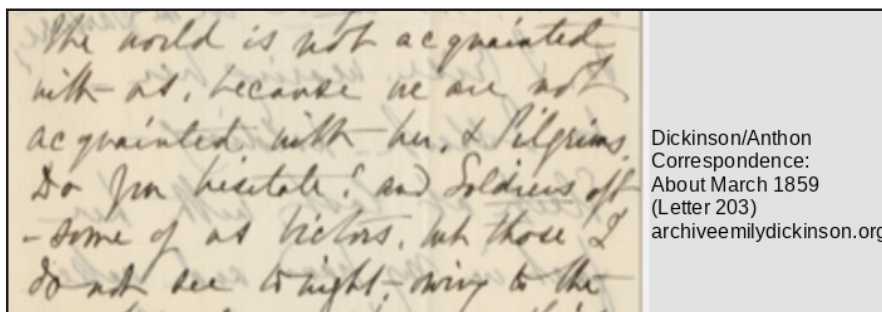


Figure 6



# Teaching Dickinson

Series Editor, Marianne Noble

## Teaching Emily Dickinson in Japan

By Hiroko Uno

Last year, I taught the last course of my long career as a professor in the English Department of Kobe College. Naturally, I wanted my last course to be on Emily Dickinson. Although I had had two courses, one undergraduate and one graduate, since retirement from full professorship in 2015, last year there were no graduate students, and the undergraduate class I was offered was not exclusively for English majors. In fact, it enrolled eighteen students, ranging from freshmen to seniors, from both the departments of English and Cultural Studies. I worried that Dickinson would be too difficult for some of these students, and I wondered how to structure a course for a group comprised both of students who had never read a poem in English as well as students who were writing senior theses in English. The challenge for me was even greater; because of the Covid-19 pandemic I had to teach the class online, the first time for me. I wanted the class to meet face to face, even if it had to be through computer screens. I decided to teach the Zoom sessions in Japanese, while distributing materials and information in English in advance through a software package called Moodle.

Teaching Japanese students who have never read English poetry presented difficulties. There was not only the difficulty of the poetry itself but also more basic problems. First of all, the roots of English and Japanese are completely different. Teaching English to – say – German students must be much easier. For example, you can translate *I love you* to *Ich liebe dich*. You just exchange each English word for a German



Author and series editor in Japan in 2016

one whose roots are the same, and keep them in the same order: in this case subject, verb, and object. However, Japanese not only has different roots from English, but also a different word order: subject, object, and verb. It also uses suffixes to signal the function of each word. Furthermore, Japanese offers various ways to express the same notion. For example, if we want to say, *I love you*, we can say: *Watashi-wa* (I, as the subject) *anata-wo* (you, as the object) *ai-shite(i)ru* (love, as the verb). In Japanese it is possible to omit the subject and say: *Anata-wo ai-shite(i)ru*. In fact, we can omit the object, too: *Ai-shite(i)ru*, which is a quite informal way of saying *I love you*. Alternatively, we can be more formal: *Watashi-wa anata-wo ai-shite-imasu*, or just *Ai-shite-imasu*. In Japanese, men often use different terms from women, so a man might say to a woman: *Boku-wa anata-ga suki-desu*, or perhaps *Anata-ga suki-desu*,

or perhaps less formally *Anata-ga suki-da*. He might even say, very briefly, *Suki-da*, which sounds very masculine and rough to Japanese ears. Contrast that aggressive tone with that of the famous Japanese novelist Rhūnosuke Akutawgawa, in an extremely formal letter to his future wife: *Watakushi-wa anata-wo ai-shite-orimasu*. Thus, there is a wide variety of Japanese translations for the expression *I love you*, depending upon the translator's understanding of the speaker's gender, character, status, dialect, and so on.

Translators also encounter another difficulty: difference in culture. For example, the standard morning greeting in English is *Good Morning* and in German is *Guten Morgen*. There is no other way. However, in Japan the morning greeting can be *Ohayō* or *Ohayō-san*, or more politely *Ohayō-gozaïmasu*, which literally means: "It is early" ("hayo" derives from "hayai" meaning "early"). Thus, the work of translation also requires a knowledge of cultural differences and customs, and a translator must use a Japanese expression conveying the same message and tone after considering context and cultural background. As a result, there can be many different Japanese translations of a single English literary work, depending upon the translator's ability and personal choices. Each translated work is a kind of literary collaboration between the original author and the translator.

Finally, another problem of teaching English poetry to Japanese students who are not English majors is that most of them



# Teaching Dickinson

cannot understand prosody and rhyme in English poetry at all. Apart from English majors who have studied phonetics, Japanese students cannot easily pronounce English words because the pronunciation of Japanese and English are completely different. For example, Japanese has only five vowel sounds: [a], [i], [u], [e], and [o]. There are no pure consonants: every sound other than these five pure vowels combines a consonant and a vowel. In English, by contrast, there are syllables, which combine vowels and consonants. For example, the word *English* consists of two syllables: *Eng* and *lish*. The first consists of one vowel [ɪ] and one consonant sound [ŋ], and the second of two consonant sounds [l] and [ʃ] as well as a vowel [ɪ]. Since every Japanese sound is either a vowel or a combination of a consonant and a vowel, Japanese people tend to pronounce English words by adding unnecessary vowel sounds after each consonant. In this case they might pronounce *English* as if it were a four-syllable word “engulishu.” Moreover, Japanese words do not have “stress” or “accents”; each sound is pronounced at an even speed. There is no sentence stress either. In an English sentence, words are pronounced almost without breaks, while in a Japanese one each word is pronounced separately. As a result of such differences, it is quite difficult for Japanese both to comprehend and pronounce spoken English. For these reasons it is quite difficult for Japanese students to understand prosody, especially meter, in English poetry. It is impossible to reproduce the effects of English prosody in a Japanese translation, and there is no way to replicate the sound effects created by alliteration, rhyme, and so on. It is therefore virtually impossible to translate into Japanese the poems of Emily Dickinson, a poet who skillfully used those techniques of sound to suggest delicate shades of meaning.

As I contemplated this course, it seemed almost impossible for me to teach Dickinson’s poetry to students who had never read a poem in English. They would never be able to see how Dickinson skillfully or

boldly produces subtle meaning or suggests hidden implication by breaking the rules of conventional English poetry – for example, by using an unconventional mark, a dash, or by using slant rhyme. Without knowing the traditional rules of poetry, they would never be able to appreciate what is unique about her work.

However, I clung to a tiny hope that I could still interest the students in her poetry because of some similarities between her work and Japanese poetry. Dickinson often lamented the impossibility of expressing her feelings in words, and did not completely rely upon language but instead used several unconventional techniques to compensate for its inadequacies. For example, she would sometimes deliberately produce ambiguity by leaving things unwritten or by leaving silent spaces to allow readers to imagine for themselves. She also used dashes and other unique methods to involve readers in understanding her intention. It is very common in her concise and condensed poetry for a word to convey more than one meaning at the same time. We the readers have to consider all the meanings of each word to understand the whole of the poem. Many poems seem open to readers’ interpretation; the reader is free to choose one from many possible meanings of a given expression. Dickinson skillfully exploits silent spaces as well as sounds in her short poetry. She understood that communication needs both language and silence. The uses of silence and ambiguity and resonance in her poetry opened opportunities for my Japanese students to understand it, since these characteristics resemble those of Japanese *Haiku* poetry. *Haikus* are very concise and condensed, consisting of lines of only five, seven, and five syllables, and they rely upon resonance and readerly interpretation. Because of its

<sup>1</sup> See *Emily Dickinson’s Marble Disc: A Poetics of Renunciation and Science*. Tokyo: Eihōsha, 2002, and “Silence in Emily Dickinson’s Poetry.” *Essays and Studies* (Tokyo Woman’s Christian College) 21.1 (1973): 17-64.

この床はたつぷり広げ  
かつ威厳を持たせなさい  
公平無比なる神のお裁きの下るまで  
どうぞそこでお待ちなさい  
敷布団をととのえ  
枕を高くなさい  
朝日の黄色いざわめきなど  
この地に忍ばせてはなりません

死の床を広くつくるがよい  
畏れと敬いでつくるがよい  
優れて公正な審判の日の始まるまで  
そこで待つがよい  
褥を真っ直ぐに  
枕をふくらませよ  
日の出の黄色い騒音から  
この場所を守れ

この床を充分にのべなさい  
畏敬をもってこの床を敷きなさい  
やがて審判が公正無比に始まるまで  
ただその中で待ちなさい  
その布団をまっすぐに揃えなさい  
その枕をふくよかにしなさい  
日の出の黄色い騒音で  
この大地を乱してはいけない

Three translations of “Ample make this Bed”: (top) Takao Oka (Takao Furukawa) trans., *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Tokyo: Kirihara Publishing House, 1978), p152; (middle) Tamotsu Nakajima trans., *The Poems of Emily Dickinson – Third Series* (Tokyo: Kokubun-sha, 1983), p103; (bottom) Toshikazu Niikura (and Ichiro Ando) trans., *The Poems of Dickinson, Frost, and Sandburg* (Tokyo: Shincho-sha, 1968), p86.

# Teaching Dickinson

brevity, *Haiku* poetry utilizes various techniques, such as *taigen-dome*, literally meaning “noun-stop”: a *Haiku* can be “stopped incompletely and ambiguously by the use of a noun instead of the expected verb.” As I have noted elsewhere, Dickinson “probably did not know *Haiku*, but she did know the effects of pauses or spaces like the spaces in *Haiku*. She knew that a blank space could stimulate the imagination of the reader, produce reverberation, and intensify the effect of the expression.”<sup>1</sup> Since most Japanese students are used to reading and composing *Haiku* poems, I thought they might be able to imagine the effects of the silent spaces and in this way find an approach to Emily Dickinson’s poetry.

I designed the course with these difficulties and aptitudes in mind. Of the fifteen weekly class sessions, each one ninety minutes, I devoted the first three to teaching English prosody, not through Dickinson’s poems but by using a typical English poem in traditional form with traditional techniques. Actually, I used the Disney song “When You Wish Upon a Star,” which consists of four quatrains, as do many of Dickinson’s poems. The simple song enabled me to show the students the structure, the effect of meter, rhyme scheme, and alliteration. What’s more, it was fun for them to hear the effects of those techniques when they also sang the song after learning about them. Or, to be more precise, it was fun in the past when I had classes on campus. However, this time on Zoom it turned out to be a disaster: our voices did not harmonize at all.

I devoted the fourth session to a brief history of the Puritans and American Puritanism, and the fifth to the life of Emily Dickinson. The rest of the semester, we read the poems themselves. In each session we read one or two poems, together with a lecture I gave on some topic related to the poems we were discussing, such as Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Helen Hunt Jackson, or the railroads in those days. One time I introduced the website of the Emily Dick-

inson Museum so that the students could access it on their own.

Near the end of the course, I had a degree of success. After we read “Because I could not stop for Death” and “Ample make this bed,” I instructed the students to watch the movie *Sophie’s Choice* (adapted from the novel by William Styron) at home over winter vacation and write a paper about how the two poems are used in the film and what they each mean. When I taught Dickinson’s poetry to English majors in the past, I always pointed out that “I,” “Death,” and “Immortality” in “Because I could not stop for Death” are parallel to the characters: Sophie, who was a survivor of Auschwitz, Nathan, who loved her but committed suicide with her, and Stingo, who would make the couple immortal by writing of them later. Dickinson plays a role in the film. In the beginning of the poem, Nathan encourages Sophie to live – by reading her “Ample make this bed.” He reads it in bed, and that bed is where they eventually kill themselves. Stingo also reads the poem to pray for their peaceful sleep until “the Judgment break / Excellent and Fair” at the end.

Unfortunately, this time few students truly understood the role of the two poems in the story. I explained my interpretations in class and again told them to write their comments. After that I could see that most of the students discovered the pleasure of interpreting literary works. For example, one student was impressed by my analysis that what the three see from the carriage in the third stanza (suggesting the stages of life) was reflected in the movie scenes where the three characters enjoy various activities. She proposed that scenes in which Sophie recollects and confesses her past dreadful experiences one by one also might have derived from the stanza. Another student saw connections in a scene in which the couple is frolicking as if to dispel the shadow of death. Another student initially took Stingo for “just a story-teller like Nick in *The Great Gatsby*,” but after my explana-

tion she came to believe that Stingo would immortalize not only the couple but also himself by writing of them in his novel, so that he might be more suitably compared to “Immortality” in the poem. Eventually, many of the students got interested not only in analyzing works but also in exploring how one literary work inspires another literary work, even one in another form. One student was deeply impressed by my brief introduction to the author William Styron, who might have been a descendant from slave owners in the South and wrote novels dealing with awful sins, such as slavery as well as the Holocaust, as if he himself had felt guilty. Thus, the course stimulated my students’ interest not only in Emily Dickinson’s poetry but in the unlimited possibility of literature.

After reading “I died for Beauty” with my lectures on John Keats, I gave them one final assignment, which was to comment on “This was a Poet – ” without any prior explanation. I told them not to translate the poem but to write what the poet wanted to say and how she managed to express it in the poem. I found most of the students, albeit roughly, grasped its meaning and discussed the various techniques, such as metaphors, dashes, and alliterations used in the poem to support their interpretations. Most of them understood Dickinson’s ideal of a poet, and some of them believed she herself was close to it. Above all I was happy to see the students using in their discussions what they learned in this class and freely stating their own opinions. One student wrote that she liked “This was a Poet – ” best since the metaphors used in it are “cool.”

And on that upbeat note, I retired.

*Former Board Member and the gracious host of an EDIS international conference in Kyoto, Hiroko has written extensively on the poet, including Emily Dickinson Visits Boston (1990) and Emily Dickinson’s Marble Disc (2002).*

# Teaching Dickinson in a Digital Environment

*At last summer's online Annual Meeting, the coordinators found ways to make a virtue of the necessary social distance that the pandemic entailed. Once the academic year started, instructors were faced with the same challenge, often with a less indulgent, receptive, and well-prepared audience. Lecture on Zoom can prove much less effective than in person; group discussion may turn out to be far from a reassuring alternative, when half the group make themselves invisible, and all are in a space where their habitual comforts supersede the discipline of concentrated and creative learning. Everyone new to teaching online had to devise a range of methods for presenting materials – new ways of putting students in positions from which they could not get free without contributing to the conversation and learning something. What follows are several accounts of creative problem-solving and experiments gone right.*

*The Bulletin is proud to have former EDIS President Barbara Mossberg introduce this feature about various experiments teaching Dickinson during the pandemic. Professor of Practice at the Clark Honors College, at the University of Oregon, Professor Mossberg has taught in a multitude of contexts on several continents, and was undaunted by this new challenge.*

## **“I have no life but this, to live it here”: A Collaborative Critical Laboratory**

**By Barbara Mossberg**

It would be logical to wonder whether teaching Emily Dickinson “remotely” is a good idea. Today’s students are already stressed by a pandemic threatening their families and communities, lives turned inside out and expectations in chaos as they enter adulthood, often depressed and anxious, campusless, in childhood rooms or parents’ basements.

Complicating teaching in virtual classrooms “online” due to campus shutdowns is the nature of Dickinson’s poetry. It’s one thing to love her poetry. It’s another to teach it. I have dedicated most of my life to advocacy and admiration of her work, but her poems, even after all these years, are wildlife eluding interpretive capture. Her language use is idiosyncratic, her vocabulary outrageously exotic, her syntax wrenched, her rhetoric complex (a polite word for flagrant unruliness), her meaning unstable: her poems are quantum, changing over each reading with new features detected. Teaching Dickinson is a challenge in the best of times.

Then there is the challenge to make the case for the relevance of Dickinson in the Anthropocene, in terms of intersectionality, race, class, and gender, and climate change, within the context of her life of apparent cloistered white privilege, including maid and gardener.

But who is more poignant and prescient about identity struggle and earthly value and predicament than Emily Dickinson? In spite of the difficulty they present, her poems illuminate today’s

world crises. Socially distanced, confined, housebound, masked, and whispering in class so as not to wake their roommates, our students find Emily Dickinson not at all remote: her poems are homeland; her poetry is a magic mirror. In her trauma and drama, enforced isolation and voluntary seclusion, keeping to her bedroom and garden, ill and afraid, accessing food and messages by baskets out the window, talking through a door ajar, entertained by nature out the window, and wistful for love and belonging, Emily Dickinson is their “people.”

And to my surprise, learning experiments in online Zoom formats make Dickinson’s challenge and triumph as a remote and isolated poet not only come to life, but represent hope for their own restricted lives. Look what she made of her restrictions and life “in a line!” Indeed, Dickinson becomes an encouraging mentor, urging them to see the world through words, in the company of writers and people in her heart and mind, always knowing that “the brain is wider than the sky.”

Online teaching through Zoom enabled me to experiment with pedagogy to bring Dickinson to immediate relevance. First, we could overturn a traditional classroom. I opened our class, with everyone on screen, showing in their own “home rooms,” with Dickinson’s own bedroom and desk, connecting each person’s place of confinement with Dickinson’s own place of writing. On the Whiteboard Shared Screen I had Emily Dickinson’s “A route of evanescence.” I asked students to write in their journals their

interpretation of this poem. In the privacy of their rooms, the students used technology of the internet to look up “evanescence” and “cochineal” and some even consulted critical readings. They compared in break-out rooms their interpretations, and we were able to then discuss as a whole what accounts for the same words resulting in different readings, including critics’ analyses.

Realizing that things could happen in an online class I did not anticipate, I quickly adjusted to the idea that students’ access to the internet opened up “Possibility.” It would make it possible to bring critics and works to our attention as a class at the stroke of a key: authority and diverse ideas a click away. We could simulate writing as Dickinson did with thesaurus and dictionary at one’s knee, Homer and Shakespeare and Eliot an arm’s length away. We could do “word swarm” analyses of her work as a whole, illuminating the frequency of words used to make mental maps. We could access Dickinson’s reading, her day’s news, art on her walls, piano music in her bench. We could “sleuth” and connect these works and current events to construct theories of the poems, and take topics such as war’s destruction or civil rights and scan Dickinson’s poems for examples; the class could become a collaborative critical laboratory, a research endeavor making the

reading experience dynamic and generative of a learning community.

What I valued about teaching Dickinson online was that each student was in the front row in an intimate format; everyone was visibly equal as a contributor, and at the same time, people could opt out of being seen and “hide within a flower” image on screen that they could construct. Ideas about everyone as Nobody, presence, visibility, membership in a society and other key Dickinson themes were demonstrated in our class structure.

As I imagine returning to the classroom in person, I realize my new challenge is to recreate the online realm of Possibility in imaginative assignments using technology to bring Dickinson’s world and scholarship to immediate use. I also imagine an assignment whereby students prepare four poems for submission to a contemporary journal, research an editor, write a cover letter, and write back from the editor critiquing their poems. My next challenge arising from this experience is to bring Emily Dickinson to prison as she imagined herself: we have an Inside Out program in which our students join incarcerated students to read a work in common. Emily Dickinson in prison? Already my mind is Dwelling in Possibility.

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## From CFPs to Scraps

by Virginia Horvath

*Professor of English at Kent State University, Virginia Horvath invites questions and further conversation about her experiments. Her email address is vhorvat1@kent.edu.*

When I was asked to teach an online senior seminar on Emily Dickinson at Kent State, I knew it would be an extraordinary experience. What I did not fully know, in agreeing to teach this capstone due to the death of a colleague, was that I would have an exceptional group of 18 women – curious about Dickinson but not well acquainted with her life and work. Although I have been teaching for more than 40 years, this would be my first online course. Having retired from an administrative position in 2019, I had not yet shared the challenge faced by faculty around the globe in shifting to a virtual platform due to the pandemic. The online format – so strange and frustrating – was an ideal platform for this course. Reading and ruminating in isolation, communicating primarily through writing and brief reflections, sending messages in the hope of connection and affirmation: we were like Dickinson, alone in our rooms, turning to poetry for insights about our place in an uncertain and sometimes frightening world.

My goal was to design a course that would be a professional transition for students completing the English major. The department requirement for this seminar is that students study a subject in depth and write a research paper of 16-20 pages, so I wanted to replicate the format of professional conferences. I reached out to Dickinson scholars from around the world, asking to use CFPs that they had developed for recent conferences or to write a CFP for these students. Thanks to the generosity of EDIS members and other scholars, students had excellent topics from which to choose. They wrote proposals as if competing for a place on a scholarly panel, and the research project included working and annotated bibliographies, as well as the completed essay and oral delivery of the paper on a panel.

For the experiential learning requirement, students would design and install a Dickinson display in the campus library. Students would read



Alfred Habegger's *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books* and all 40 fascicles presented in Cristanne Miller's *Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them*. They would develop their expertise about Dickinson's life, plunge into reading her poems, and then engage in independent research. Balancing the digital format, they would create fascicles of their own: hand-lettered chapbooks of reflections to be shared during the final exam period.

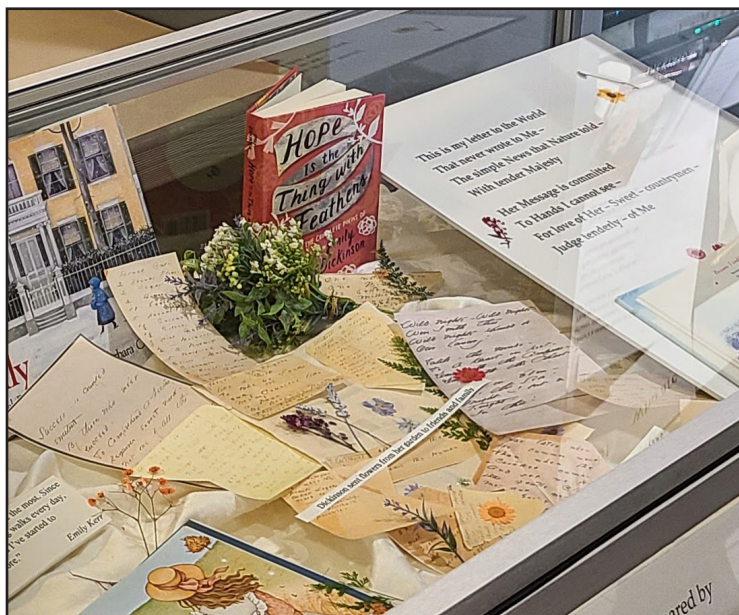
The word "seminar" suggests a highly interactive, discussion-based course. I soon learned, however, that even though they submitted a journal reflection on the assigned reading before each class, students would log on but keep their microphones and cameras off. My lecturing on Dickinson would not cultivate the expertise I sought in these students, so I designed ways to engage them with the poet and her work. I asked them to use the chat to introduce themselves and tell their location: in my childhood bedroom, in an apartment with roommates, in our family room with my kids driving me crazy. Sometimes I asked simple questions, such as "Who is the Carlo in your life?" or "What scraps would you use for writing poetry?"

As we read Habegger's biography, students worked together in breakout rooms to complete Google slides about the assigned chapters. Using prompts on the slides, each group provided information about

parts of the assigned reading and then presented the slides. They thus demonstrated their ability to support claims with textual references and to select and organize compelling examples. And with the short polls and prompts in the chat box, students shared their growing connections with the poet.

When we read the poems, we began with creative exercises to consider Dickinson's themes and stylistic choices. Students wrote about animals, about God, about losing someone they love, about poetry, about seasons and nature. We also tried imitating some distinctive features of her poetic style: pronouns with mysterious antecedents, extended metaphors, dramatic lists. The responses were vivid and passionate, including such topics as neurodiversity, racial justice, women's education, privilege, and gender identity and expression. Although these exercises generally took only about 10 minutes, they established a rich platform for discussion, and the chat box was lively after that. Students remarked that they were understanding Dickinson better and better, and their journal entries reflected this as well.

In their writing and full use of the digital environment, these remarkable students showed their attachment to Dickinson, their curiosity about the enduring puzzles of her work, and their interest in continuing to expand their knowledge.



Above and right, two parts of the library display prepared by Virginia Horvath's seminar students. For some instructors, the once-routine "experiential learning requirement" took on a new vitality, all else confined to virtual environments.

## Dickinson and the Arts, Pandemic Semester

By Robert Wallace

This year in Dickinson and the Arts I had twelve students from eleven different majors (two from Molecular Biology). Living through the pandemic made students more appreciative of Dickinson's attentiveness to the dead and the dying in the natural cycle of life. Living more than ever indoors helped students share Dickinson's embrace of the natural world as a material and spiritual inspiration. Being deprived of social life made students more appreciative of Dickinson as a model for cultivating one's inner life and outward imagination. Being children of the 21st century, these students are deeply appreciative of Dickinson's gender fluidity in who and why we love.

For their Final Projects, presented on Zoom, ten students chose to create artistic projects accompanied by artist statements. One student presented a theatrical monologue. Another performed a Copland song on a fully produced YouTube video. Eight students presented works of visual art through the screen-sharing function. These included a suite of 12 photographs, a 5-panel drawing, 3 acrylic paintings, a large digital collage, a large crayon drawing, and a black-out poem on scraps of paper mounted on a canvas painted in rainbow colors over black.

*Robert K. Wallace is Regents Professor of English at Northern Kentucky University, where he has taught since 1972. Artwork by his students has appeared previously in the Bulletin. The four projects featured below were selected by the editor.*



The above still is from Music major Kate Suekoff's video of her beautiful rendition of Aaron Copland's setting of "The World – feels Dusty" (Fr491), filmed by Lexington St. Francis. The full video can be seen on *YouTube*: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cerYv8Sv\\_ic](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cerYv8Sv_ic).

Suekoff performs this war poem ("Flags – vex a Dying face –") as being simultaneously about the quieter deaths from the pandemic and about the universal experience of mourning:

"I'm portraying a part of Emily that is mourning the loss of so many people as she walks through fields. She tries to bury her sorrow in Mother Nature and is reciprocated with the sky crying rain. . . . I couldn't possibly imagine losing someone in war, but I can understand losing loved ones. Death is swift and unforgiving and can make us feel like life is moving in slow motion. Part of me was portraying myself, mourning for the loss of too many Americans that have died from the pandemic. Every life is precious and deserves to be honored."



Unable are the Loved to die  
 For Love is Immortality,  
 Nay, it is Deity –

Unable they that love – to die  
 For Love reforms Vitality  
 Only scantily and selectly  
 Into Divinity.

Fr951

To die – takes just a little while –  
 They say it does'nt hurt –  
 It's only fainter – by degrees –  
 And then – it's out of sight –

A darker Ribbon – for a Day –  
 A Crape upon the Hat –  
 And then the pretty sunshine comes –  
 And helps us to forget –

The absent – mystic – creature –  
 That but for love of us –  
 Had gone to sleep – that soundest time –  
 Without the weariness –

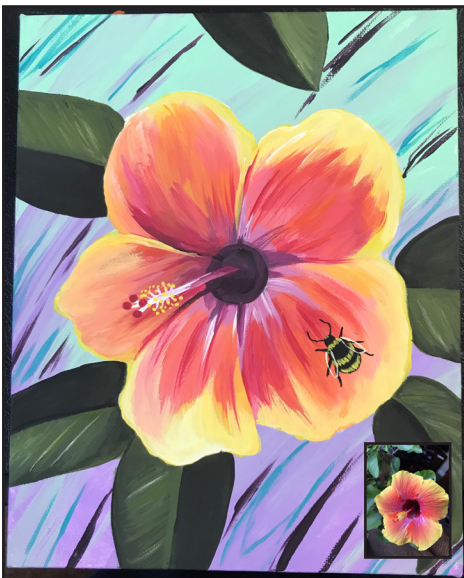
Fr315



Liat Ungar, *Love is Immortality*, 5-panel drawing in pen, markers, and acrylic paint on paper, each drawing 4 x 4 inches, April 2021.

Molecular biology major Liat Ungar took inspiration from three Dickinson poems about death and from her mother's stories about her work in palliative care:

"My piece is a five panel mixed-media representation of a dead bird that gets carried from the harsh site of its death to a more comfortable place where it can rest and begin to grow new life as flowers. The artwork is supposed to represent two different themes. The first is that death is not unpleasant and can be a source of comfort for the dead or those about to die. The second is that death is not the end of life and that we live on through the love and memories others have of us. The themes I chose for this poem are inspired from a couple of Dickinson poems, mainly "To die – takes just a little while –" (Fr315), "Unable are the Loved to die" (Fr951), and "Love – is anterior to Life –" (Fr980). My mom works in palliative care and so she often says that death can be of great comfort to those dying and it tends to be much harder on the loved ones the dying leave behind. In making the actual artwork, I was initially inspired by the piece *The Garden of Death* by [Finnish Expressionist] Hugo Simberg. In Simberg's piece, skeletons representing death are tending very gently to rows of flowers in pots. The flowers are the only element in the piece that is in color. The purpose of this was to show that love and life persevere after death and the color is to remind the viewer of the happiness of the love and memories that live on."



Clementine Farrell, *Blossom and her Visitor*, acrylic on canvas, 8 x 10 inches

Clementine Farrell majors in Computer Science. Her painting of the hibiscus (left) was inspired by the inset photograph and the poem, "Nature rarer uses Yellow" (Fr1086):

"The hibiscus flower [is] from the tree which our household inherited in the days after my grandmother died. I have very few things of my grandmother's, and a departed person's possessions make a sore substitute for the loved one herself. The hibiscus tree made me cry to look at, four years ago when we brought it home. It seemed already dead on arrival; having been far from the chief concern, it was neglected in her house the week of the funeral. My grandma couldn't wake up and open the curtains for it or give it any water, so it sat in the corner and withered. Luckily my older brother inherited something of her green thumb. It took months of tender care and special attention, but he solicited a bloom from

that near-dead tree. I never would have hoped for it; I walked over and ran my thumbs over the leaves from time to time, and they were always rough and dry and marked with holes from insects. It seemed like a miracle to wake up and see that single flower finally peek out and grab the sun."

Nature rarer uses Yellow  
 Than another Hue –  
 Saves she all of that for Sunsets  
 Prodigal of Blue –

Spending Scarlet, like a Woman  
 Yellow she affords  
 Only scantily and selectly  
 Like a Lover's Words –

Fr1086

Kathleen Bryant is a Library Informatics major:

*"I am learning to own a Body* is an interpretation of Emily Dickinson's poem "I am afraid to own a Body –" (Fr1050) through a perspective of feminism and gender theory. The poem describes Dickinson's knowledge that "owning" a body is not optional. It is not a piece of property that can be given away. Much of Dickinson's work speaks on perception – be that her perception of nature, of others, others' perceptions of her, or her own perceptions of herself. This poem also deals with fear. I interpret this poem within that idea of perception, particularly perceptions from others, and how this can lead to a disconnect between selfhood and body that so many women and gender nonconforming (GNC) people experience which starts in adolescence.



Kathleen Bryant, *I am learning to own a body*, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 20 inches, April 2021.

"Gender performance in women and GNC people at some point becomes about how you can best present yourself in order to be consumed by others. As a result, many of these people stop feeling like they are the owner of their bodies, and they look at their bodies only in the ways that they can serve other people. This involves looking at their bodies critically, analyzing their faults and imperfections to the point where they feel like they're on the outside looking in. This leads to the idea that you aren't a body, but that you own one. In this poem, the 'fear' comes from women being expected to have and hold a body and call it theirs when it might be more accurate to say that it belongs to everybody else. This painting is about the searching and exploring for yourself within your body after so many years of your body existing for someone else. I use the three heads in the painting to represent the body as a whole, and the small black figures climbing over the heads are the inner voices, attempting to understand the body and come back into it as their own.

*"I am learning to own a Body* shows a very specific part of the journey of possessing your body again. The figures are hesitant and apprehensive to fully accept the body, but they are voraciously curious to find out everything they can about what the body can do. I show this through their playful actions of swinging between earlobes, crouching on the forehead and looking at the head from upside-down, scaling the face, and hanging from the chin. This represents the experimentation in gender performance and identity that is so inherent in people re-possessing their bodies. As Dickinson says, owning a body is not a choice. While this is a process that many women and gender-nonconforming individuals find themselves going through during their lives, it unfolds differently for everyone. This painting is meant to be an extension of "I am afraid to own a Body." In analyzing this poem, along with much of Dickinson's work, and creating this painting, I have begun to own my body again. It is a heartening and beautiful process that I hope everyone gets the chance to experience."

I am afraid to own a Body –  
I am afraid to own a Soul –  
Profound – precarious Property –  
Possession, not optional –

Double Estate, entailed at pleasure  
Upon an unsuspecting Heir –  
Duke in a moment of Deathlessness  
And God, for a Frontier.

Fr1050



# She Played Us the Fool: Emily Dickinson and Children's Games

By Katherine Humes

Emily Dickinson loves to play. She toys with her readers' attempts at interpretation ("My life had stood – a Loaded Gun," [J754], the poster child poem for evading dissection); plays with theological principles ("Eden – a legend – dimly told," [J503] reducing a theological pillar to mere legend); and entertains solemn topics with theatrics ("I heard a Fly Buzz – when I died –," [J465]). Her equally contemplative and jocund approach to poetry culminates in a marriage of perspicacious subjects and humorous critiques, such as depicting a gentlemanly Death offering a joyride and Hope as a flighty bird who might abandon one at any given moment.

What possible historical evidence suffices to demonstrate her mischievous approach to such disturbing subjects? I propose to illuminate Dickinson's playfulness within her poetry by looking for comparisons and contradictions between her work and children's games (especially those manufactured between 1830 and the 1860s). I will demonstrate the connection between her approach (or reproach) to morality and the agendas for teaching morals within the games. In doing so, I will explore the materiality of her work in the context of games.

Dickinson, in effect, preserved the visual factor of children's games in her works, as well as their apparent purpose of entertainment, but entertainment with an ulterior agenda.

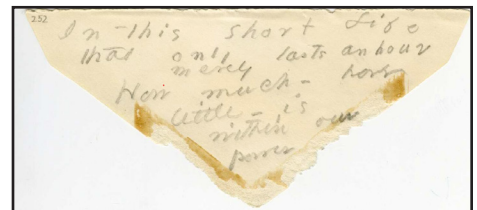
Howard P. Chudacoff's *Children at Play: An American History* argues, "free white children grew up attentive to parental authority

and to the devil's temptations, a consciousness that shaped and even curtailed their play." The board-and-card games children played during the period between 1840 and the later 1860s often incorporated moral, theological, and educational schemata. Because many parents looked to their children as, in Chudacoff's words, "guarantors of, not just the family's survival but also the nation's future," children's play was deeply influenced by the attitudes and ideals believed essential for the preservation of the United States. Educating and moralizing governed the play of white children; games and toys lacking in moral or academic agendas distressed society at large and became the subject of critique. Through their experience with games, children were inculcated with bourgeois ideals of right principles and the "proper" livelihood (though many more children besides Emily Dickinson probably rebelled against these inculcations). Given the prevalence of such ethical and domestic manipulation within children's play, it is no surprise Dickinson's poetry addresses these overt agendas within games as a reflection of societal mores and expectations, though not necessarily interacting with the games themselves. Her rejection of the traditional right/wrong binary and Christian doctrines exhibits a rejection of not only church teachings but also the informal (and yet highly influential) teachings of childhood play.

An antiquarian version of Hasbro's classic *Life, The Checkerboard Game of Life* incorporates conventional stages of life – "to college," marriage, poverty, crime, moral failings, old age. The goal of the game is to complete each of these stages. With-

out matrimony, players cannot proceed to "happy old age," and therefore cannot hypothetically "win" the game of life. A simple but effective tactic for manipulating children into the appropriate and expected stages of real life, this game presents matrimony and virtuosity as both "fun" and essential to life, positioning vices and bad behavior as directly impacting final happiness. The implication that life is a game requiring strategic play in order to win unsettles Dickinson, who quips,

In this short Life  
That <sup>merely</sup> only lasts an hour  
How much – how little – is  
Within our power <sup>1</sup>



"How little" choice remains "Within our power" exhibits itself on the gameboard, as winning requires avoiding poverty, ruin, and suicide and depends on matrimony. These games represent perhaps the first encounter with physical, printed media children interacted with independent from direct supervision of their parents and teachers; however, the game covertly per-

<sup>1</sup> J1287, Amherst ms #252. Poems quoted from the *Emily Dickinson Archive* (edickinson.org) follow the transcriptions of whatever ms was used by the named editor, as the transcriptions appear on the site.



Figure 1: *The Checkerboard Game of Life*, 1866, Content compilation (c) 2020, by the American Antiquarian Society.

suares players to practice the rules of the game in “real” life.

Dickinson defied nearly all of these life stages and took a sardonic attitude toward the expectation of marriage and motherhood. Marriage (both to a husband and as the “bride” of Christ) was particularly detestable to Dickinson. Her poem “Given in Marriage unto Thee” addresses marriage irreverently, its sacrilege originating partially from its being written and sent to her sister-in-law Susan Dickinson and partially from its distortion of the sacrosanctity of the marriage act:

Given in Marriage unto Thee  
 Oh thou Celestial Host –  
 Bride of the Father and the Son  
 Bride of the Holy Ghost.

Other Betrothal shall dissolve –  
 Wedlock of Will, decay –  
 Only the Keeper of <sup>the Seal</sup> this Ring  
 Conquer Mortality – (J817, EDA)

she doubts the possibility of a trinitarian marriage, clandestinely replacing the Trinity with Susan, “Only the Keeper of [the Seal] this Ring / Conquer Mortality.”

Spiritual salvation requires no ring, but a temporal and carnal marriage does. In conquering mortality, she allows all other marriages to “dissolve” and “decay.” Her subversion of theological mores reflects her almost comical relationship with traditional marriage, as the “Wedlock of Will” (God’s will being that she be given as a bride to “the Father and the Son”) will “decay” in the enactment of the mortal marriage between herself and Susan. Furthermore, even if Susan were not the intended subject of the betrothal, Dickinson’s third-person voice establishes her as an observer in both senses of marriage, equally as scandalous as women were expected to marry and bear children.

Games such as *The Checkerboard Game of Life* attest to the popular ideals held by nineteenth-century society. Children played

The first stanza establishes the traditional marriage of an individual to the Trinity – an analogy for salvation – and the apparent dissolution of all other betrothals or marriages, presumably earthly ones. The distinct lack of personal pronouns raises the question of whether Dickinson is the subject or whether she assumes the position of observer; part of the irreverence in this poem lies in Dickinson’s inability to name herself as a bride of the Trinity. In the final lines

games hoping for respite from academic duties and domestic chores, but in a subverted way found themselves being educated and moralized to even in their play. Similarly, Dickinson plays with her readers until they reach the penultimate or final lines of her poems, which often reverse, question, or doubt her opening thesis. “The Wind didn’t come from the Orchard – today –” (J316) catalogs various items, “Little Boys’ Hats,” “a Bur,” thrown about by the wind. Dickinson dupes us into thinking her poem offers a pithy distraction from life’s challenging and sinister questions. However, in the final stanza, “an occasional Steeple” appears tossed by the wind. The wind snatches an apparently firm and immovable structure – representative of God and Christian virtue – whisking it away as easily as a straw hat. In a poem supposedly about the Wind and its transitive nature (i.e., the wind demands an object or objects), Dickinson questions the stability of an entire social institution. Her final lines ask, “Who’d be the fool to stay? / Would you – Say – / Would you be the fool to stay?” Is the one who remains within the church in spite of its temporality and false promise of immortality the fool? Or is the fool one who remains steadfastly within the church even when it perpetuates misogyny, sexism, and suppression? However, looking back at the first line tells us that the wind didn’t come to the orchard, so the steeples and hats and sticker burs have remained unmoved. Does this mean the fool is one who does not see the possibility of the wind returning? Dickinson’s poem presents itself as an appealing distraction from tyrannical morals, only to engage in a disturbing agenda about the truth or falsity of such morals and theologies.

Dickinson also employs a reversal of this procedure, miming a moralizing schoolmarm, achieving an ironic parody of the morals and manners trope within games. Dickinson likewise introduces her own set of ante-morals. A tactic often used in children’s games, game makers present explicit moral concepts draped in quaint pictures





Figure 2: "AFFECTATION," *The Good and Bad Passions*, 1845, Content compilation (c) 2020, by the American Antiquarian Society.

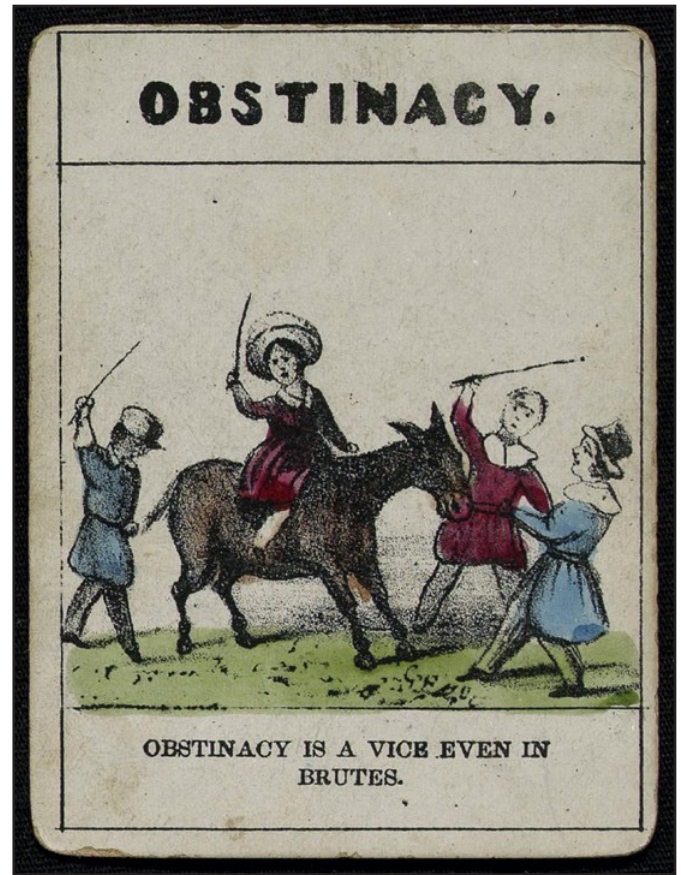


Figure 3: "OBSTINACY," *The Good and Bad Passions*, 1845, Content compilation (c) 2020, by the American Antiquarian Society.

and colorful graphics. Another children's game popular during Dickinson's teenage years was a deck of cards containing the *The Good and Bad Passions*.<sup>2</sup> Teaching children to distinguish between and identify the "passions" as either "good" or "bad" appears the unofficial goal of the game. The cards depict sketches of children enacting the different passions and a short proverb-like descriptor. An example of a comically blunt card, "AFFECTATION," is described as "AT BEST A DEFORMITY" (what, then, is Affectation at its worst?).

Young children interacting with the cards are unconscious of the moral compass

<sup>2</sup>Unfortunately, we do not know the rules of play because the instructions for the game did not survive with the rest of the playing cards.

directing their play. Take, for example, Dickinson's poem "The Child's faith is new –," which depicts the faith of the child as "new," "whole" and "Wide – like the Sunrise." However, children grow into adults, and the faith they "Never once had a Doubt" about turns into "Prickly Things," Paradise morphing into the "sham" the child once emphatically believed existed. Thus, faith becomes a childish fancy and a foolish enterprise for adults.

Ironically, children's games intent on moralizing fall into the same trap Dickinson herself lays in her poems: children outgrow their games and morals along with them. When moral education becomes synonymous with activity and entertainment, it is hardly unimaginable children view the former as childish once they outgrow the

desire to play. Parodying the child's faith, likely as whole and naïve as faith could ever be, Dickinson follows these lines with the child's belief in their own "Sovereignities" [sic], only to grow older and realize how their reign was equally as fanciful as their faith. Dickinson satirizes the Christian adult, essentially calling them children because they have not outgrown faith nor their sense of self-importance. Furthermore, the cards unintentionally poke fun at their own moral intimations, as on the card that reads "EXCITABILITY MAKES OLD AND YOUNG APPEAR RIDICULOUS," as if being ridiculous truly equals obstinacy or negligence in its badness. The almost idiotic itinerary within this game teaches students to distinguish between the good and bad passions, but that some of the passions labelled "bad" are as menial

as “excitability” and “vanity” makes Dickinson’s irreverence for morals and moral designations not only understandable but warranted.

Dickinson’s material and visual writing style, in addition to her irreverence of theology and its corollaries, in effect mirrors the physical printed game board or cards. The physicality of the cards reveals striking similarity between Dickinson’s poetry and children’s games. Dickinson’s poetry exists as a visual production, a prototype of concrete poetry. Her poems written on small envelopes or receipts or the backs of newspaper advertisements often incorporate elements of the chosen paper in the lines. If we look for a moment at the image of the “OBSTINACY” card, we see the title at the top with end punctuation, an image in the center depicting the passion, and a final group of words describing obstinacy. From the macro perspective, this card contains an idea with an arguably poetic depiction of the idea in both image and word. The card both tells and shows obstinacy, similarly to how Dickinson both tells us about the steeple’s import in the poem and subsequently shows it by giving the steeple its own line and by underlining the word; she also shows the steeple’s import through its singularity

in being a fixed object, unlike all the other objects within her poem. Her placement and artistic marks designate a visual project.

Let us quickly turn to the poems J1629 and J1620, written in a puzzling and puzzle-like presentation (see Figure 4). The words written around the page upside-down, descending letters, and in subscript become part of the poem and part of our interpretation. “Arrows enamored of his Heart” appears on the page next to a word descending down the page, acting as the physical “arrow” directing us to the next line. Additionally, the diagonal lines on the right of the folded page direct the “Arrows” to the line “Possessed by / Every hallowed / Knight.” Often these lines are split and divided into two poems, but given they are written on the same page and with a directive to interact with both sides of the page, the presentation appears a single poem. Though only one example of her many visual productions, this poem exhibits both Dickinson’s materiality and playfulness, directing us through her poem as a piece is directed through a game.

Dwelling on the question of whether or not Dickinson played these games herself proves irrelevant. Dickinson’s poems reflect a knowledge of childhood play and how it was moderated by the physical game pieces rather than by adult supervision. Her materiality, as well, reflects that of childhood games, as she counts on images, words, and spaces to enhance or even create meaning within her work. She subverts biblical stories (as the garden of Eden becomes only a legend which adults assure children “Bubbled a better – Melody” [J503]) and disturbs the ideal of matrimony (“A Wife – at Daybreak I shall be – / Sunrise – Hast thou a Flag for me?” [J461]). Children’s

games represent a physical object with images and words meant to guide the player through the process of the game while posing obstacles that children could possibly encounter in adulthood. The game enables children to question the “fairness” of such obstacles as they prevent them from winning. Dickinson directs us through a serious game, presenting obstacles such as doubt and disbelief, hopes to trip us up, play with us, or have us question our own agenda, is perhaps all part of her game.

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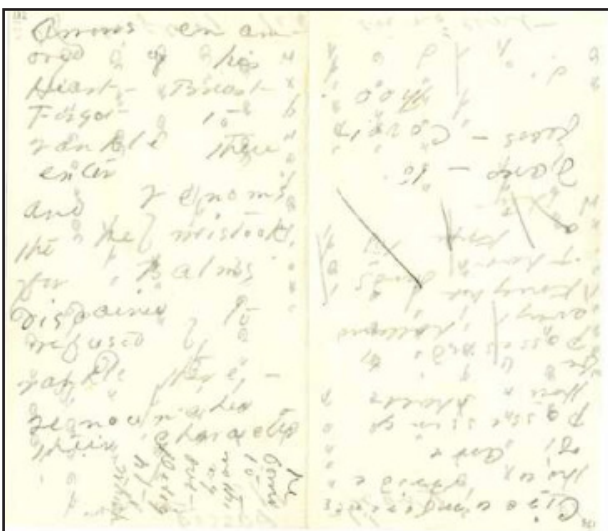


Figure 4: Amherst Manuscript #132, 133; image retrieved from *The Emily Dickinson Archive*.



At least as far back as Sister Mary James Power's *In the Name of the Bee*, in 1943, readers have discerned in Dickinson a streak of Catholic mysticism (See John P. Collins' "Merton and Sister Power" in *Bulletin* 26.2 and Brother Paul Quenon's "Emily Dickinson, Soul Sister," in *Bulletin* 31.1). In 2014 *The Catholic Worker* published Bill Antalics' reflection on a "progress of the soul" he finds in certain poems – a journey that he connects with the fervor of St. Teresa of Avila as well as the sweetness of St. Therese of Lisieux. Dickinson said she was at best a "Wayward Nun" (J722), but the passion of the mystic is one of the many voices through which she reaches readers.

## Mystical Journey of a Poet

By Bill Antalics

Some time ago I was talking with a friend about mystical figures, Sts. Francis of Assisi and Teresa of Avila, and the amazing amount of solace they provide for us. I also mentioned an Emily Dickinson poem who had always fascinated me:

Exaltation is the going  
Of an inland soul to sea,  
Past the houses – past the headlands –  
Into deep Eternity –

Bred as we, among the mountains,  
Can the sailor understand  
The divine intoxication  
Of the first league out from land? (J76)

I was always puzzled and filled with wonder by this poem, and then somehow the discussion morphed into an appreciation of Emily Dickinson's entire output of poems.

In his *Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*, X.J. Kennedy writes: "In its suggestion of an infinite realm that mortal eyes cannot see, but whose nature can be perceived fleetingly through things visible, Emily Dickinson's poetry resembles the late 19th century poets called symbolists. To a symbolist the shirrtail of truth is continuously seen disappearing around the corner."

I read the following poem Emily Dickinson wrote about God, and X.J. Kennedy's ideas about her similarity to the symbolists became more believable:

I know that He exists.  
Somewhere – in Silence –

He has hid his rare life  
From our gross eyes.

'Tis an instant's play,  
'Tis a fond Ambush –  
Just to make Bliss  
Earn her own surprise! (from J338)

This poem is the geography and progress of a soul always searching and questing. When I read this poem I had a mental picture of Emily, her eyes full of wonder, her heart full of questions: Just who is this wondrous God? Where does one look for God? What happens if this exercise proves too piercing and expensive?

During the 1860s in Emily Dickinson's life, a picture continuously emerges of a person whose existence was narrowing to such a degree that one might almost want to say her life had become monastic. I thought of the biblical, cave-dwelling Essenes completely absorbed with prayer and the study of Scripture, living on the barest necessities of food and water and this tiny, birdlike figure so completely dedicated to studying the mysteries of life and death in poetry. The first stanza of this poem might describe a nun's cell:

I was the slightest in the House –  
I took the smallest Room –  
At night, my little Lamp, and Book –  
And one Geranium – (J486)

The second half of this poem is a description of herself, a picture in words so quiet that the lines barely registered in my mind, like a

sigh, as if her death wouldn't leave any trace of a life or history:

I never spoke – unless addressed –  
And then, 'twas brief and low –  
I could not bear to live – aloud –  
The Racket shamed me so –

And if it had not been so far –  
And any one I knew  
Were going – I had often thought  
How noteless – I could die –

How does one even begin to understand the frightened, scared heart of this person? Emily wrote to her friend Higginson: "I had a terror – since September – I could tell no one – and so I sing, as the Boy does by the Burying Ground – because I am afraid" (L261).

After reading these first three poems, I wasn't prepared for the next two I call her passion play works. Number four resembles the appearance of bloodless stigmata:

He strained my faith –  
Did he find it supple?  
Shook my strong trust –  
Did it then – yield?

Hurled my belief –  
But – did he shatter – it?  
Racked – with suspense –  
Not a nerve failed!

Wrung me – with Anguish  
But I never doubted him –  
'Tho' for what wrong  
He never did say –

Stabbed – while I sued  
His sweet forgiveness –  
Jesus – it’s your little “John”!  
Don’t you know – me? (J497)

The feeling here is violently kinetic – the sound of a mind and body battered and tossed in a life and death ordeal. Emily cries out in pain and may have just realized the cost of her spiritual quest. You play with heavenly fire by opening your heart and soul to these eternal questions, and you may have to endure a long, dark night of the soul before you emerge.

The next of these poems – number five – is also filled with pain, but here her faith seems stronger, her courage and fortitude more than capable of dealing with these trials. If the previous poem was the anatomy of John of the Cross and his dark night of the soul, the following poem reminds me of the tested, courageous heart of a martyr with the gloriously hopeful words, “Christ will explain each separate anguish:”

I shall know why – when Time is over  
And I have ceased to wonder why –  
Christ will explain each separate anguish  
In the fair schoolroom of the sky –

He will tell me what “Peter” promised –  
And I – for wonder at his woe –  
I shall not forget the drop of Anguish  
That scalds me now – that scalds me now!  
(J193)

The next four poems I call her paradisiacal works. The first poem reads like a foretaste of heaven. The words are so suffused with grace and humility and wide-eyed expectation from a soul so close to the next life that the images of Thérèse of Lisieux – the Little Flower – and Emily seem nearly interchangeable. Emily pleads, “Did I sing too loud?” passionately imploring the angels to consider her gentle heart once again and to carry her into paradise:

Why – do they shut Me out of Heaven?  
Did I sing – too loud?

But – I can say a little “Minor”  
Timid as a Bird!

Wouldn’t the Angels try me –  
Just – once – more –  
Just – see – if I troubled them –  
But don’t – shut the door! (from J248)

Poem number seven in Emily Dickinson’s paradisiacal series – quoted at the beginning of this essay – is a description of her journey to paradise, as if the gentle pleadings and supplications of the poem above were heard and answered. The words are dizzying – “past the houses, past the headlands, into deep eternity” – the wildly jubilant journey of a soul from a limited world to a spectacular new reality.

If poem seven stretches human reasoning to the breaking point, poem eight – her arrival into paradise – forces one to put that faculty aside and just sit in a quiet, meditative state. I only wish I had more information on the state of Emily’s mind as she wrote this poem, “Otherworldly Bliss.” Some amazing and incomprehensible serenity? Direct communication with an ultimate reality?

I went to Heaven –  
‘Twas a small Town –  
Lit – with a Ruby –  
Lathed – with Down –

Stiller – than the fields  
At the full Dew –  
Beautiful – as Pictures –  
No Man drew.  
People – like the Moth –  
Of Mechlin – frames –  
Duties – of Gossamer –  
And Eider – names –  
Almost – contented –  
I – could be –  
‘Mong such unique  
Society – (J374)

Poem number nine in the series as I conceive it feels restrained, as if in 1863 some shattering vision of God had rendered her speechless. The gentle pleadings in poem six and the

joy that blazed like a wildfire in poem eight have been replaced by a quiet certainty that she has seen the face of God:

I live with Him – I see His face –  
I go no more away  
For Visitor – or Sundown –  
Death’s single privacy

The Only One – forestalling Mine –  
And that – by Right that He  
Presents a Claim invisible –  
No wedlock – granted Me –

I live with Him – I hear His Voice  
I stand alive – Today –  
To witness to the Certainty  
Of Immortality –

Taught me – by Time – he lower Way –  
Conviction – Every day –  
That Life like This – is stopless –  
Be Judgement – what it may – (J463)

These poems are magical, like some faintly remembered dream we’ve tried to decipher time and time again. And the questions that seem to explode in my mind! Emily’s words strain our rational minds to the breaking point, but isn’t this, paradoxically speaking, the real normal, since she is dealing with ideas that are timeless, universal, and transcendent? Is it at all possible then to believe that this humble poet had a beatific vision? If we seriously consider the possibility of this vision, what sort of Thérèse-like person are we dealing with?

These poems written by Emily Dickinson offer us something like a grand poetical triptych – a high altar of prayer – such a breathtaking and dazzling view of the eternal! Emily Dickinson has long been regarded as one of our great poets by literary scholars. Surely now she should be studied as a genuine mystic by theologians.

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*Bill Antalics is a homesteader and tenant organizer in New York. He has long been connected to the Catholic Worker.*

# REVIEWS OF PUBLICATIONS

## Renée Bergland, Book Review Editor

Melanie Hubbard

*Emily Dickinson: Poetics in Context*. New York, Cambridge UP, 2020, 268pp.

By Renée Bergland

Melanie Hubbard's extraordinarily fine new book is a little hard to classify. It carefully situates Dickinson in historical context; readers with new historicist leanings will love it, though they may be surprised by Hubbard's emphasis on intellectual history (as opposed to cultural or political history). It is about poetics; readers inclined toward formalist modes will also enjoy it, though they might not expect Hubbard's focus on the processes of composing and experiencing poems (as opposed to analyzing them). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, *Emily Dickinson: Poetics in Context* is about philosophy; readers who incline toward philosophy or literary theory will adore it, though here again, they may be in for some surprises. Hubbard does not invoke the usual suspects. Twenty-first-century readers (like me) will probably be unfamiliar with many of the book's thinkers and ideas.

*Emily Dickinson: Poetics in Context* is very well written. Hubbard's sentences are graceful, pointed, clean. Many of her chapters begin with simple yet provocative declarations. The introduction starts, "Emily Dickinson grew up in the middle of an ideological war." After this pithy statement, Hubbard outlines the turbulent

nineteenth-century debates about "what it means to be human," centering her discussion on Scottish Common Sense philosophy. Hubbard builds on Jed Deppman and others who have discussed Dickinson's philosophical thinking, but she leans more toward intellectual history. She offers a clear yet detailed explanation of the grand debate between Kant's (*a priori*, idealist) emphasis on human intuition and Hume's (*a posteriori*, empirical) emphasis on the associations human beings make among their experiences and impressions. As Hubbard explains it, the great question was, "Were we welcomed into an already meaningful universe, or are we making it all up as we go along?" Convinced by Hume and his school, the associationists who educated Emily Dickinson rejected the presumption of a stable (ideal) meaning of life, and focused on the process of building meaning out of the accretion of related experiences.

Throughout the volume, Hubbard guides readers through the intricacies of nineteenth-century associationist thought (which lived at the intersection of old-school philosophy and newly developing psychology and neuroscience). She deftly puts Dickinson scholarship in conversation with associationism, offering fascinating reframings of many key debates in Dickinson studies. If Hubbard is right, and Emily Dickinson grew up in the midst of a philosophical battle, then the conclusion was that Kantianism won the war, and Common Sense grew unfamiliar and strange.

Hubbard's deep dive into associationism offers a new way to make sense of Dickinson and her culture.

"Lightning in the Mind," the chapter on electricity, sympathy, and nineteenth-century understandings of neuroscience, begins, "Words have power." From this punchy, if somewhat general opening, Hubbard proceeds to examine the entangled political and physiological aspects of the nineteenth-century concept of "electric sympathy." She uses Alexander Bain's 1855 book on *The Senses and the Intellect* as a touchstone "for Dickinson's synthesis of widely available neuroscientific ideas with associationist philosophy of mind and rhetoric." Here, Hubbard's deep archival work and her careful explanation of nineteenth-century popular science really shines.

"Why are Dickinson's poems so abstract?" Hubbard asks, at the start of the chapter on "Thinking in the Body." Before she offers her own answer, she leads us through the various responses of Paula Bennett, Robert Weisbuch, Sharon Cameron, Karl Keller, Shira Wolosky, Virginia Jackson, and Cristanne Miller. She charts their critical conversation quickly and gracefully, and then she puts her oar in and changes the direction of the entire discussion. Instead of framing abstraction in terms of privacy, Hubbard proposes to frame it in terms of sympathy: "How shall she elicit the widest, most enduring sympathy for her poems?" Hubbard argues that Dickinson's

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

“generalizing and analogizing are at the heart of an empiricist approach.” Dickinson experiments with abstraction in order to find what works to elicit strong responses in the bodies (including but not limited to the brains) of the most readers. In other words, for Dickinson it’s not about writing private or public poetry, but about writing physiologically effective poetry.

The third major question that Hubbard tackles (after “poetics” and “context”) is the question of “drafts, fragments, and disconnected jots scribbled on ... ‘scraps’.” In this part of her book she elegantly summarizes another key critical conversation, citing Marta Werner, Martha Nell Smith, Ellen Hart, Susan Howe, Jeanne Holland, Sally Bushell, Alexandra Socarides, and her own earlier work and then turns to nineteenth-century associationist psychology to provide an entirely new perspective. She describes a broad cultural obsession with

“finding meaning in the artifacts of everyday life, with memorialization of loss, and with memory’s power to constitute a self’s identity over time.” Capping off the structure that she has built in earlier chapters, Hubbard describes Dickinson’s manuscripts as “simultaneously abstract and specific, wedded to their sites and not wedded to them, influenced by a chance association and ready for further associating.” Although early chapters of the book are quite valuable in their own right, Hubbard’s synthesis in this final chapter on manuscripts is really the payoff. It is brilliant.

*Emily Dickinson: Poetics in Context* also opens the door to a possible intervention in current new materialist approaches. Hubbard’s ideas resonate with Jane Bennett’s recent book on Whitman (*Influx and Efflux: Writing Up with Walt Whitman*) and Branka Arsić’s book on Thoreau (*Bird Relics: Grief and Vitalism in Thoreau*). Hubbard

does not explore these associations, but in my own mental library *Emily Dickinson: Poetics in Context* will go on the shelf with Arsić and Bennett. Hubbard’s work can certainly stand shoulder to shoulder with theirs. Personally, I prefer it, partly because it is based on Emily Dickinson and partly because it is so thoroughly grounded in the deeply unfamiliar philosophies and theories of the nineteenth century.

As Hubbard reminds us, Emily Dickinson defined poetry in terms of mind-blowing. Readers of Hubbard’s book may find her scholarship mind-blowing in a similar way. Despite Hubbard’s graceful prose and generous spirit, reading her book can be hard work. But the rewards are substantial. My own understanding of the relationship between science and philosophy in Dickinson’s work expanded and changed as I studied Hubbard. I can truthfully say that *Poetics in Context* blew my mind.

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Alexandra Socarides, *In Plain Sight: Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Poetry and the Problem of Literary History* (Oxford University Press 2020)

Christian P. Haines, *A Desire Called America: Biopolitics, Utopia, and The Literary Commons* (Fordham 2019)

Marianne Noble, *Rethinking Sympathy and Human Contact in Nineteenth Century American Literature* (Cambridge University Press 2019)

As Alexandra Socarides eloquently explains, studying Emily Dickinson presents literary historians with a problem: representation versus exceptionalism. “Some critics treat Dickinson as a kind of representational stand-in for all nineteenth-century American women poets. . . . But more often than not, Dickinson . . . is seen as the exception

to the rule, the woman poet who did not fit the mold into which all of these other women were so easily cast.” Since Dickinson’s poems were first published in the 1890s, Socarides shows, critics have celebrated her by belittling her contemporaries. In order to avoid getting distracted by the putative Dickinson exception, *In Plain Sight* removes Dickinson from its book-length discussion of the conventions that shaped Nineteenth-Century American Women’s poetry, placing its Dickinson discussion into a separate Afterword. This is just one of Socarides’ many brilliant rhetorical moves.

The main body of the book discusses four conventions that shaped nineteenth century American women’s poetic activity: “Anthology Publication,” “The Sick Preface,” “Ballad Knowledge and the Poetics of Repetition” and “Collaborative Composition and Sororal Poet-

ics.” Socarides argues that all of these conventions worked positively to help women writers achieve widespread readership, and negatively to erase them as individual authors, resulting in their overwhelmingly present absence in American literary history (ubiquitous, yet unacknowledged). Her pointed analysis builds on work by Eliza Richards, Elizabeth Petrino, Cristanne Miller, and many others, offering a crystal clear framework for understanding nineteenth-century women’s poetic culture. In the afterword, when Socarides turns back to Dickinson, she makes a remarkably effective case for the importance of situating Dickinson’s poetic activity within a much larger poetic culture.

Christian P. Haines’s *A Desire Called America* also addresses exceptionalism, although he argues that United States exceptionalism is a ground of possibility as well as a problem. In chapters on



# REVIEWS OF PUBLICATIONS

William S. Burroughs, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson and Thomas Pynchon, Haines claims, “there is a tradition of U.S. literature, going back to at least the nineteenth century, that pushes the revolutionary potential of American exceptionalism to the point where its nationalist-capitalist frame breaks. This literature invents what I call a singular America – a counter-nation in which statist and capitalist social structures give way to the commons (an egalitarian and radically democratic form of social solidarity).” Haines turns to Dickinson for a Marxist feminist take on the United States, linking her to the Wages for Housework movement, Silvia Federici, and others who study the commoning of women’s labor. In this exhilarating chapter, he explains, “Whereas Whitman writes poems that affirm the nation’s limitless promise, Dickinson dwells in the betrayal of national promise. She composes a counter-nation, small but intense, secret but tactile. She writes a commons in which women refuse to play wife.” He starts with an 1885 letter from the poet to Mabel Loomis Todd (travelling in Europe) that begins, “‘Sweet Land of Liberty’ is a superfluous Carol till it concern ourselves – then it outrealms the Birds.”

From his discussion of “outrealming,” Haines moves to an analysis of a series of Dickinson poems about marriage, which he frames in terms of Sara Ahmed’s concept of the feminist killjoy. It is a brilliant reading, particularly valuable because it works against the critical enclosure of Dickinson, bringing her into conversation with a wide range of political and biopolitical theorists and activists. Haines concludes, “Dickinson’s marriage poems experiment with egalitarian ways of living together and with forms of love, care, passion, and support that have no need for domination or exploitation. Outrealming liberty thus comes to mean not only refusing

to play wife but also refusing the entire system of capitalist social reproduction. Dickinson imagines a queer commons – a counter-nation of Nobodies – in which America might finally live up to its Carol of Liberty.”

Marianne Noble’s magisterial *Rethinking Sympathy and Human Contact in Nineteenth Century American Literature* argues that Nathaniel Hawthorne, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Emily Dickinson approach the question of sympathy in a different way from their Romantic forebears. According to Noble, they “all explore the conviction that there is no authentic self on the other side of a mask. They do not therefore conclude that there is no such thing as human contact, however. Instead, each one comes to propose a different way of thinking about human contact, conceiving it not as an epistemological experience (“I know it’s true”), but as an affective one. In her profound and original exploration of sympathy and affective indeterminacy, Noble engages with a wide array of philosophers and theorists, from David Hume and Adam Smith to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Lauren Berlant.

Noble offers her own reading of Dickinson’s housewife, which resonates surprisingly well with Haines. According to Noble, “Dickinson encourages the reader to empathize with her struggle without claiming that her essential nature is to thrive in housework, as Stowe and Hawthorne might have done, but also without claiming that housework is ‘mere.’ Dickinson affirms selves as dynamic, plupotential beings with whom the onlooker is intersubjectively intertwined. . . . The disruptions of coherence that are a signature of Dickinson’s poetics promote this sympathetic end by splintering what is known, opening up the plenitude and dynamism that a culture of pretense occludes. They undo

coherent norms, destabilize all of the grounds upon which readers achieve social recognition, and open up new identities and identifications. Readers are co-creators of the poems, called to their own plupotent and relational being.”

Socarides, Haines and Noble all present Emily Dickinson as a poet who incites intoxicating (if sometimes occult) forms of relationality among readers, critics, and thinkers. Each of them is exciting, but taken together they are truly thrilling. Socarides (re)situates Dickinson among a large group of sister poets, Haines puts her in conversation with the Wages for Housework movement (as well as Burroughs and Pynchon), and Noble shows us how Dickinson’s sweet skepticism intertwines with philosophy, economics, and psychology, as well as with nineteenth-century literature. In light of their arguments, I hesitate to describe these smart, beautifully written books as exceptional, but I have no hesitation at all about giving them my highest recommendation.

## Upcoming Reviews

Colleen Glenney Boggs, *Patriotism By Proxy: The Civil War Draft and the Cultural Formation of Citizen-Soldiers* (Oxford 2020).

Michelle Kohler, ed., *The New Emily Dickinson Studies*, (Cambridge 2019).

Sandra Runzo, “*Theatricals of Day*”: *Emily Dickinson and Nineteenth-Century American Popular Culture* (UMass 2019).

*The Poetry of Emily Dickinson: Philosophical Perspectives*, Elisabeth Camp, ed. (Oxford 2021).

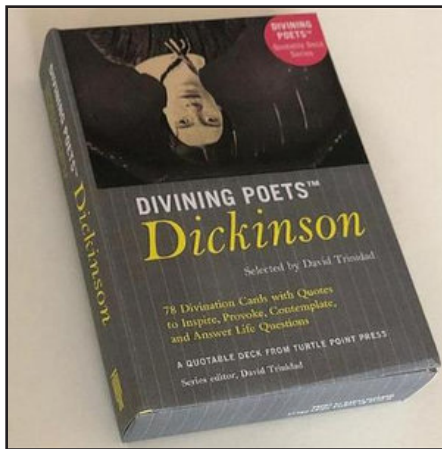
*The Language of Emily Dickinson*, Nicole Panizza and Trisha Kannan, eds. (Vernon 2021).

# REVIEWS OF PUBLICATIONS

## Dickinson and the Tarot

By Annelise Brinck-Johnson

In a time of welling uncertainty, Emily Dickinson's words are often surprisingly apt. *Divining Poets: Dickinson*, a Tarot deck comprised of lines from Dickinson, is not the worst of tools for navigating an ever-evolving pandemic. For the past few



weeks I have been using it to answer any and all questions that spring up in my life. What should I make for breakfast? “Like Sailors fighting with a Leak / We fought Mortality –” I had a banana. Should I adopt a 100-pound dog while living in a tiny New York City apartment? “The soul there – all the time.” I decided to hold off on a constant canine companion.

In addition to pulling individual cards to answer simple questions, David Trinidad, the selector of the lines, suggests a few other modes, such as pulling four cards and composing a quatrain. After a few attempts, fate – or the guiding hand of Thalia – composed the following:

Passenger – of Infinity –  
It’s finer – not to know –  
Beauty – be not caused – It Is –  
Forever might be short

While composing Dickinsonian doggerel is entertaining, it is really not where the

strength of the cards lies. Trinidad has said that he was inspired by the “Magic 8 ball quality” of many of Dickinson’s lines, and during my time with the deck I was struck by how rich with meaning a single line could be. My favorite method of engaging with the cards is to pick one at random, and return to it throughout the day. I spent a day ruminating on the idea that “To be a Flower, is profound / Responsibility –” and another considering that “Heaven is shy of earth – that’s all –”. It feels wrong to consider a line excised from the rest of its poem, but it is also an expansive exercise in its own right.

I wouldn’t go so far as to say that *Divining Poets: Dickinson* helped me see the future, but it was truly pleasurable to inject a bit more poetry into every day, and to think deeply about my life in relation to Dickinson. Trinidad’s final advice is to “[t]ake the cards to parties, classrooms, literary events. Bring along a basket of gingerbread.” More than any of the quatrains I composed I will hold that future possibility close.

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## “‘Stratford on Avon’ – accept us all!” – Remotely 2021 Annual Meeting

In collaboration with the Emily Dickinson Museum, the 2021 EDIS Annual Meeting will be held 6-7 August 2021 remotely. This year’s focus is Dickinson’s great love of Shakespeare and this theme will shape a variety of synchronic and asynchronous scholarly panels, lectures, and workshops using Zoom and YouTube as platforms.

We will discuss aspects of Dickinson’s reading of or response to Shakespeare, and compare Dickinson’s and Shakespeare’s writings. We will consider Shakespeare’s place in Dickinson’s society and literary culture and how Dickinson’s contemporaries engaged with Shakespeare.

Highlights include a keynote lecture by Adeline Chevrier-Bosseau, seminar-discussions led by Páraic Finnerty and Martha Nell Smith, Shakespeare readings, special Shakespeare-related tours of the Dickinson Museum and an exhibit of watercolors by Victoria Dickson.

Other entertainments will include folk music and a theatrical performance of Shakespearean scenes. More details will be forthcoming in the next few weeks. Join us for an opportunity to discuss the con-

nections between these two extraordinary writers in Amherst this summer!



# REVIEWS OF PUBLICATIONS

## John Hinshelwood's *Called Back*

By Diana Wagner

*Called Back*  
John Hinshelwood  
Little Roots Records 2021

With the release of Scottish musician John Hinshelwood's *Called Back*, Emily Dickinson aficionados will find a musical interpretation of Dickinson that is neither superficial nor self-consciously over-composed. Dickinson's verse, along with Hinshelwood's excellent song-writing and experienced musicianship, combine in a refreshing duet of poetry and traditional acoustic music forms, which will ring familiar to both American and Anglo-Celtic ears. With a wide pallet of acoustic instruments from double bass to dobro and from lapsteel to mandolin, this collection has a broad poetic and musical appeal. The large roster of highly accomplished musicians on this project is impressive. American musicians and listeners may recognize the contributions of singer-songwriter Barbara Nesbitt, percussionist Steve Forman, and Nashville singer/songwriter Cathryn Craig.

Three of the fourteen tracks on this CD are instrumental, and it is these tracks which are the most deeply realized. "Let It Breathe," with Hinshelwood accompanied by Dave Currie on dobro and Laura-Beth Salter on mandolin, is an acoustic treat which might make one think of the path between the houses – a bit winding but always sure of itself as it invites the listener down the path to come. Salter's mandolin descants emerge gently throughout this track and, on a Spring day, evoke the memory of Dickinson's beloved bobolink.

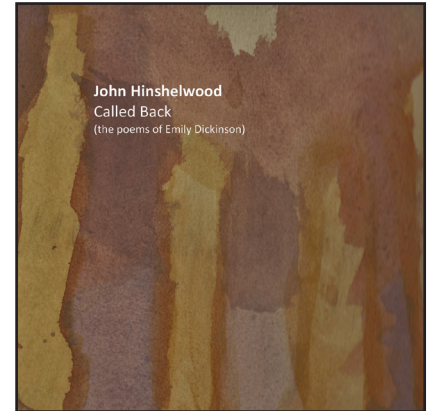
"Something Precious" is an upbeat and rhythmic piece that isn't sure if it wants to be contemporary or jazzy, but it evokes a kind of hopefulness and gratitude. The instrumentalists seem to talk to each other in a subtle call-and-response. This musical dialogue is fun

to follow, especially when the calls of Colin Macfarlane's lap steel emerge.

The CD's final title track, "Called Back" (after the inscription on Dickinson's headstone), is thoughtful and hopeful, reflecting Dickinson's optimistic curiosity about the afterlife. Hinshelwood is to be commended for not succumbing to cheap musical death metaphors and, instead, producing a musically complex and carefully arranged instrumental title track to close out this CD. He should also be commended for not succumbing to the too-easy and inaccurate caricatures of Dickinson that posit her as a hopeless, mournful neurotic. The music is neither mournful nor phrenetic – it simply unfolds as Dickinson's poetry does, telling one interesting and often sweet tale after another.

A reading of the liner notes reveals the biggest surprise of this CD: Hinshelwood is a relative newbie to Dickinson, delving deeply into her work only since 2016. Once again, he is to be commended for not engaging in the obsessive and bright-eyed breathlessness that is so common in people newly in love with Dickinson and her work. As he indicates in the liner notes, the poem choices and song order are arbitrary – resulting in a delightfully un-self-conscious and authentic musical collection.

Those familiar with Dickinson will certainly recognize her verse in the vocal arrangements on this CD. Especially lovely is "Goblin Bee," an easy acoustic ballad of watching and waiting for a beloved. Mairi Orr's vocal harmonies on this track are subtle and lovely and, again, we are treated to Laura-Beth Salter's mandolin. The pieces are thoughtfully arranged, and there is never a sense that Dickinson's words are being forced into a musical phrase. In fact, some of these tracks represent Dickinson's themes without many of her words at all. While Dickinson's use of the Watts hymn



forms in many of her poems makes it almost too easy to force her poems into songs, Hinshelwood has resisted that route and, instead, given us a collection that is part poetry reading, part musical reflection, and part thematic musical quilt.

It is fitting that the remaining vocal tracks and the rest of this project – from the liner notes to the lovely cover art – are careful and precise. No wasted words or gratuitous notes. There is a gentle precision in this collection that reflects and respects Dickinson's own careful precision. Whether a fan of Dickinson or a fan of excellent acoustic music, listeners will find in *Called Back* a lovely poetic and musical stroll along Dickinson's many paths.

*Called Back (The Poems of Emily Dickinson)* has now been released on littleroots records. If you visit [johnhinshelwood.bandcamp.com](http://johnhinshelwood.bandcamp.com), you can stream, download or purchase a CD. The latter is recommended, as it includes the 16 page booklet (designed by Michael Mullen) containing musician listings, selected quotes by and about Dickinson, and all song lyrics.

Diana Wagner is a Dickinson scholar, folk musician, and radio host. Readers can find out more about her musical journeys at [www.dianawagnermusic.com](http://www.dianawagnermusic.com)



## Betty Bernhard: Remembrances

By Georgiana Strickland

On Christmas morning 2020, the worldwide Dickinson community lost one of its warmest supporters and most valued scholars with the death from lung cancer of Mary Elizabeth Kromer Bernhard at the age of 102. A former EDIS Member-at-Large and for thirty years a guide at the Dickinson Homestead/Museum, Betty, as she was known to her myriad friends, was the author of important explorations into Dickinson's maternal ancestry and other areas of wide interest to Dickinsonians. She is also remembered most fondly for her gracious hospitality to Dickinson scholars visiting Amherst.

Born in 1918 in Upper Arlington, Ohio, to parents who early encouraged her literary interests, Betty was taught by private tutors during her teen years because of delicate health. She eventually recovered and graduated from City College of New York in 1956 with a degree in American and English literature. While working as registrar at Union Theological Seminary she met Winfred Bernhard, who was completing his doctorate in American history at Columbia University. They married in 1958 and moved first to Durham, North Carolina, where Win taught at Duke University and where their daughter, Elizabeth, was born. Then, in 1962, the family settled in Amherst, where Win would teach at the University of Massachusetts for the remainder of his career. Betty meanwhile immersed herself in the life of the town and its many historic and literary resources, especially those focusing on Emily Dickinson.

"Mother had an amazingly strong spirit," says her daughter, "and never accepted the passage of time." Even after her cancer diagnosis at age 99, "she and Dad resisted leaving Amherst!" They were fortunate to find an assisted living facility near Boston in which they could remain together until just before Betty's

death. Win is now "inching his way toward age 100 and seems to be holding up remarkably well," Elizabeth reports.

The announcement of Betty's death brought forth an immediate outpouring of tributes from Dickinson scholars who had been beneficiaries of her hospitality and encouragement over many years. Martha Nell Smith, for example, recalled that "dining with Betty and Win was always a pleasure, and the real feast was their kind, warm, generous company." She recalled also Betty's letters, "which were always filled with witty insights, pointers on where I might find more information...and encouragement to persist."

Ellen Louise Hart expressed her appreciation for Betty's encouragement of younger scholars like herself, even when their research and their views did not necessarily agree with Betty's own views. "When I was researching the Susan Dickinson materials at the Evergreens...I found Betty to be Interested and

open-minded. She did not shy away from controversies ... and at the same time expressed her curiosity about views and interpretations she herself did not necessarily share."

Cindy MacKenzie recalled that during a sabbatical spent in Amherst she received an invitation to dinner at the Bernhard home, "where I enjoyed good wine and food and stimulating conversation." Talking to Betty about Dickinson's life was "a genuine gift.... Because of her, I could visualize Dickinson's life in Amherst.... Betty's legacy will survive." Like many other dinner guests at the Bernhard home, she departed also with one of Betty's treasured recipes.

Hiroko Uno remembers how much, as a young scholar thousands of miles from home, she appreciated Betty's friendship. "I'm sure she is now watching over us fondly from above."

Betty was also, in the words of Eleanor Heginbotham, "one heck of a scholar" – notable for her "careful, precise writing voice, her use of primary material, and her canny skepticism of some secondary material." As Martha Nell Smith also notes, "Betty's is the kind of scholarship that has been quietly but profoundly influential." She made several invaluable contributions to our understanding of Emily Dickinson's life. She was responsible, for example, for identifying the daguerreotypist who in 1846 took the only authenticated photograph of the poet, described by the Smithsonian Institution as "one of the most important of all American photographs."

Betty also expanded our knowledge of the two Dickinson houses through her friendships with those who lived in them. Priscilla Parke, whose parents bought the Homestead



Betty Bernhard with her husband, Win Bernhard, near her 101st birthday. The *Bulletin* is grateful to their daughter, Elizabeth Figueroa, for the photograph.

# In Memoriam

from Martha Dickinson Bianchi in 1916, recalled for Betty a “whirlwind of renovation” in the early years and the fun of growing up in the large house, especially playing in the cupola and in the barn before it was demolished, much as Dickinson must have done in her childhood. The Parkes sold the Homestead to Amherst College in 1965, and Priscilla’s guided tours, says Betty, “revealed the mystique of her association with the house for more than seventy years.”

In addition to Priscilla Parke, Betty also became friends with Mary Landis Hampson, who had indirectly inherited the Evergreens – the home of Austin and Susan Dickinson – from their daughter, Martha. She was a devoted friend and fierce guardian of Martha’s reputation as a “literary force in her own right.” Betty’s first efforts to meet Mrs. Hampson were rebuffed, but her eventual success reveals much about Betty’s tenacity and her skill at illuminating previously dim corners of the Dickinson story. “Ultimately,” she says, “I contacted her on a November morning to tell her I was leaving for Cairo at 5 p.m. that day and that I hoped to see her before I left. She was amazed. ‘Really?’ ‘Not really’ I answered, ‘but you told me that you would have to see me at once if I were someone who was en route back to Egypt or just passing through Amherst.’ She was sufficiently intrigued by this ruse and urged me to come that afternoon. By chance I had discov-

ered her wry sense of humor.” Thus began another remarkable friendship.

Mrs. Hampson, “individualistic and eccentric,” in Betty’s words, “braved the high wind of public curiosity to live in the Evergreens” and was “haunted” by the provision in Martha’s will that the house should be “razed” after Mrs. Hampson’s death. Betty, at the time chair of the Amherst Historic Commission, was one of several in the Dickinson community to advise that the house should be preserved as “a remarkable historic asset to the town.” In writing her own will, Mrs. Hampson subsequently opposed that provision in Martha’s will. Ultimately the courts ruled in favor of the Hampson will, and the Evergreens was saved for posterity. Mrs. Hampson was, in Betty’s words, “indirectly a beneficiary of Martha’s estate. Martha Dickinson Bianchi was, on the other hand, a beneficiary of Mary Landis Hampson’s rare friendship.”

Betty’s most important contribution to Dickinson studies was to

## CHICKEN PACIFIC

Recipe of Helen Kromer (aka Aunt Holly) and Betty Bernhard

2 cups sour cream  
1 teaspoon salt  
½ teaspoon leaf tarragon  
½ teaspoon thyme  
½ teaspoon paprika  
¼ teaspoon garlic powder

4 boneless chicken breasts, split if large  
1 ½ cups cornflakes, crushed  
¼ cup butter  
1 cup cooked small shrimp (optional)  
¼ cup chopped black olives

Combine first 6 ingredients. Dip chicken in sour cream mixture, then cornflake crumbs (separate bowl). Place extra sour cream mixture in a small pan for warming later and drizzling over the chicken. Melt butter and place in Pyrex type dish, placing chicken in melted butter.

Bake at 350 degrees for 40-45 minutes (does depend upon size of chicken breasts), turn chicken over and bake an additional 15-20 minutes.

Add the shrimp (optional) and black olives (also optional) to the sour cream mixture. Heat slowly and pour over the chicken before serving.

Several EDIS members remembered Betty Bernhard’s warm hospitality and her cooking, and some remain grateful for her recipes. Her daughter offers the above favorite.

## An Invitation from EDIS Past President and Former Board Member Jonnie Guerra

In light of Betty Bernhard’s many years as a Homestead/Museum guide as well as her independent research on Emily Dickinson and Emily Norcross Dickinson, I developed a proposal to honor her memory. During the pandemic, the Museum has launched the Homestead restoration project. One goal of the restoration is to restore the northwest chamber to the bedroom space Emily Norcross Dickinson occupied after her stroke in 1875 until her death in 1882. Museum Director Jane Wald estimates that the restoration project will cost \$35,000, possibly more. I invite Betty’s friends to join me in making a memorial gift to be used for the Homestead restoration project and, more specifically, for the Emily Norcross bedchamber. Checks should include a notation of “Bernhard/Homestead restoration” on the memo line; for online gifts, you can clarify your intentions in the “Additional Information” box of the Donation Form. Checks may be mailed to Emily Dickinson Museum, 280 Main Street, Amherst, MA 01002. The deadline for memorial gifts in Betty’s honor to be used for the restoration project would be December 31, 2021.

Please note that this project is not an EDIS-sponsored idea. It is one that I have shared with Betty and Win’s daughter Elizabeth. Please feel free to be in touch with me if you have questions and/or want some additional information. If you have already made a memorial gift to the Museum in Betty’s memory but are now interested in the bedchamber project, let me know. Finally, feel free to share information about this project with anyone else who might be interested. You may contact me by email: [jguerrajnn@aol.com](mailto:jguerrajnn@aol.com).

illuminate the poet's matrilineal inheritance. Her articles on the Norcross family, published in the *New England Quarterly* in 1987 and the *Emily Dickinson Encyclopedia* in 1998, reenvisioned our portrait of the poet's mother. No longer seen as a "vapid presence" whose "maternal incompetence" was the cause of her daughter's "lifelong deprivations" (in John Cody's view), Emily Norcross Dickinson emerges in Betty's portrayal as well educated, cultured, and "robust in her opinions and convictions" – a worthy partner to Edward Dickinson. Her sister Lavinia, moth-

er of Dickinson's "little cousins" Fanny and Lou, is revealed as "articulate and animated – a luminous figure...who would in time exercise subtle but powerful influence on the artistic development of her niece." And Joel Norcross, the poet's grandfather, is portrayed as "an exceptionally lively, bright-minded, vigorous man who participated in civic and religious activities, promoted quality education, and succeeded in a multiplicity of entrepreneurial enterprises" – hardly the "respectable but dull" label previously accorded the Norcrosses. In sum, Betty's portrayal of the

Norcross family proves that "only by including the Norcrosses as well as the Dickinsons in Emily Dickinson's heritage can the poet's life and artistic accomplishments be seen in perspective."

Betty Bernhard's own luminous presence will be greatly missed in Amherst and among her many admirers in the worldwide Dickinson community. In the words of Dickinson Museum director Jane Wald, "We can only be grateful for her extraordinary life and her time devoted to Emily Dickinson."

### 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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# Call for Papers

## The 2022 Emily Dickinson International Society Conference in Seville

### “Dickinson and Foreignhood”

The Emily Dickinson International Society invites proposals for papers and panels at its international conference “Dickinson and Foreignhood,” scheduled at the College of Philology, University of Seville, Spain, from Tuesday, July 12, to Thursday, July 14, 2022. Because the academic calendar for 2021-2022 at the University of Seville is pending, conference dates will be confirmed in July 2021.

In “A South Wind – has a pathos” the poet refers to “much not understood – / The fairer – for the farness – / And for the foreignhood –” (Fr883). These lines represent the unknown as more beautiful when distant and unfamiliar, or foreign. The conference seeks to develop knowledge of how Dickinson understood the foreign, how she has been understood as foreign, and how foreign peoples have understood her.

The Program Committee welcomes all work on configurations of the foreign, broadly understood, in Dickinson’s writing, including:

- Conceptions of the foreign (or what we might call otherness) in Dickinson’s culture and historical moment, including e.g., race, ethnicity, class, disability, gender, sexuality
- Dickinson, geography, navigation, and foreign travel
- Parts of Dickinson’s environment, culture, or identity that seemed foreign to her
- Immigration, emigration, and exile
- Dickinson’s reception abroad
- Dickinson, foreign languages, and translation
- Lyric alienation and the poetics of estrangement
- Invasion, contagion, and infection as encounters with the foreign

All proposals engaging serious scholarship on Dickinson’s work will also be welcome. Please send abstracts of no more than 300 words, along with a brief biography of 100 words maximum, to Jefferey Simons ([dickinsoninseville@dfing.uhu.es](mailto:dickinsoninseville@dfing.uhu.es)) and to Cristanne Miller ([ccmiller@buffalo.edu](mailto:ccmiller@buffalo.edu)) before November 1, 2021. The conference Program Committee will respond to proposals by December 15, 2021.

For further information, please see the EDIS website: <http://www.emilydickinsoninternationalsociety.org/>.

## Little Things

It's such a little thing to bear –  
So short a thing to ask –  
And so – by cloths – the size of these  
We men and women mask!

By Felicia Nimue Ackerman

It's such a little thing to mew –  
So small a thing to purr –  
And yet – by sounds – the size of these  
Such peace and joy occur!

*After Fr220*

It's such a little thing to shrug –  
So short to turn away –  
And yet – by trades – the size of these  
We men and women stray!



Art Credit: Pablo Picasso



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