“The Only News I know / Is Bulletins all Day / From Immortality.”
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Year Book

By Krums Bloemimaand

The Bulletin is particularly grateful to Laurie McCants for her contribution to the Dickinson and the Arts series, “Industrious Angels. Yes.” The collage appearing on the front cover contains the “thematic threads” she found herself drawing together as she worked on her play. It features two works by Mexican artist Remedios Varo, Encounter (1959) and Unsubmissive Plant (1961). The images on the back cover include, clockwise from the left, three photographs taken by Sharon Hamilton at the Annual Meeting, and at the bottom, one of the water colors that Victoria Dickson created to demonstrate Amherst’s “Edenic Possibilities.”

The Assistant Editor for this issue is Allyson Weglar

Edenic Possibilities: 2017 Annual Meeting

On August 11th and 12th, Dickinson Society members convened in Amherst for a concentrated and illuminating exploration of the 2017 topic, “Edenic Possibilities.” The principal highlights were discussion groups and keynote addresses by two graduate students taking Dickinson studies in new directions, as well as a variety of musical and dramatic performances. There was also another session of the increasingly popular Critical Institute, for young scholars wanting criticism of works in progress.

The three Discussion Groups took place on the first afternoon of the Annual Meeting. In one, titled “Dickinson’s Soundscape,” Marta Werner and Beth Staley (a doctoral candidate at West Virginia University) described Staley’s project of reproducing the soundscape of Dickinson’s garden. Staley is in the process of recording the current soundscape at the Homestead, which she plans to compare to evidence of the surrounding sounds in letters and poems. She hopes to produce a record of the “soundscape ecology” of the Homestead as a way of contributing to our sense of what it meant for Dickinson to “listen to the world.”

In another group, Terence Davie’s film A Quiet Passion was the subject of a Discussion Group called “Emily Dickinson on Screen – Feature Films,” moderated by Barbara Mossberg. Society members pondered Barbara Mossberg’s pairing of Dickinson and Gilgamesh. My Letter to the World, Susan Snively’s review of the film appears on page 23 of this issue.

Equally engaging was the session called “Quiet, Martha Nell Smith, Barbara Dana, Jonnie Guerra, and Jane Wald led a discussion that considered what it means when a “biopic” is presented as a work of fiction (or vice versa). Those familiar with Dickinson’s biography (that is, anyone attending the Annual Meeting and many others likely to see the film) were ready to discuss the biographical dimension of the work, and they could hardly have been surprised to learn that Davie admitted to never having read the poet’s letters. Hurricane Films, producer of A Quiet Passion, who released the companion documentary (a production initiated in response to anxious queries from Dickinson Museum Director Jane Wald, who watched in alarm as the inaccuracies multiplied during the filming of Davie’s work). The new documentary, whose working title was “Wild Nights with Emily,” has now been released as

Society members ponder Barbara Mossberg’s pairing of Dickinson and Gilgamesh.

Grant Rosson

The other keynotes were by Clare Mulaney, recipient of the Irving K. Zola Award for Emerging Scholars in Disability Studies, and winner of the 2017 Graduate Student Scholarship awarded by EDIS for her work on Dickinson and disability studies. Mulaney’s paper was a portion of her University of Pennsylvania dissertation, “Textual Conditions: Disability and the Material Text in Turn-of-the-Century America, 1858-1932.”

The paper, entitled “ ‘Not to discover weak / n e s s i s / The Artifice of strength / ‘E m i l y Dickinson, Strength, and Disability Theory,’” opened with a citation from a notorious early review of Dickinson’s Poems that referred to the author’s apparent “pathetic dumbness” and “arrested development.” Poetic innovation in the nineteenth century was not infrequently characterized in terms drawn from physical or mental disability. Dickinson, Mulaney suggested, antici-
Annual Meeting

Music at the Annual Meeting: Jane Ira Bloom and The Red Skies Ensemble
By Emily Seelbinder

The Jane Ira Bloom Quartet

The Jane Ira Bloom Quartet performed the entirety of Bloom’s most recent composing and recording project on Friday night in Buckley Recital Hall on the Amherst College campus. Wild Lines: Improvising Emily Dickinson, a thirteen-part work for jazz quartet and spoken word, is a reimagining of poetry and prose adapted from Roger Lundin’s Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief. This inspiration might seem an unusual choice until one remembers that the art of belief, as Lundin characterizes it, must be improvisational if one wishes to “keep Believing nimble” (L750).

Bloom’s compositions are nimble indeed, requiring superb musicianship. The quartet more than met this challenge, delivering an energetic and complex performance. On soprano saxophone Bloom was always in motion, immersed fully in the music. Dawn Clement balanced that intensity with a finely nuanced performance on the piano, while Dean Johnson plumbed the depths on bass and Bobby Previte wove intricate rhythms on drums.

Each selection included a reading by Deborah Rush of the text that had inspired it. Rush’s soft delivery was sometimes overwhelmed by the music, making it hard to connect the words and their reimagining. I found I enjoyed the concert most when I stopped trying to make these connections and allowed the music to swirl around me.

This resulted in an appreciation of what attendee Laurie McCants identified as “the vibrant artistry” of Bloom and her quartet. “Like Dickinson,” McCants said, “Bloom is an iconoclast – a female artist in a male-dominated field; an improvisor, like the poet who, late at night at her piano, created ‘weird and beautiful melodies.’ Each of us has our ‘own Emily, and I felt Bloom honored her kinship with Dickinson with her music–powerfully dynamic, weaving together rage, and grace, and wonder.”

The Red Sky Music Ensemble

The sloping, dappled lawn of the Dickinson Homestead was a delightful setting for the final gathering of the meeting: a picnic and a performance by The Red Sky Ensemble of “Dickinson’s Musical Eden.” One of six programs developed by Red Skies founders George Boziwick and Trudy Williams exploring Dickinson’s relationship to music, “this program presents rarely performed vocal and piano pieces that Emily loved and played from her own collection of sheet music, as well as selections of the popular sentimental songs sung by Lavinia” (program notes).

The performers’ joy and sincerity helped to convey the appeal of parlor songs such as “Charity,” which praises its title virtue as “Meek and lowly, pure and holy, / Chief among the ‘blessed three.’” Turning sadness into gladness / Heaven-born thou art, . . . ” (words by Charles Jeffreys, music by Stephen Glover, ca. 1846). It might have been cloying, but for the superb musicality of the performers.

Technical coordinator Mark Russo and sound engineer Jared Libby deserve special mention for ensuring that the music came through with remarkable clarity—no easy feat in an outdoor venue. Director Trudy Williams set a lively pace, while curator and musical director George Boziwick varied the nine selections well and elicited energetic performances of each one.

The highlight of the evening for me was Rodolphe Kreutzer’s “The Celebrated Overture to Lodoiska,” arranged for piano four hands by Charles Czerny (ca. 1846) and performed with vigor and virtuosity by Miller and Banleigh. They performed with such gusto that one could easily imagine the young Dickinson sisters relishing the challenge of this showpiece and of making music together in the Homestead parlor.

The Red Skies Music Ensemble’s mission is “to present programs that combine music and scholarship, making archives and special collections come alive through research and performance.” They certainly achieved that mission with “Dickinson’s Musical Eden.”

Emily Seelbinder frequently writes about music for the Bulletin.
Annual Meeting

Stop 6: White Oak
By Sharon Hamilton

For me, the tree was the revelation. Just before the 2017 annual Emily Dickinson International Society meeting in Amherst, the EDIS Bulletin’s editor asked me if I would be willing to write about Richard Wilbur’s scheduled tour of the Homestead Museum grounds. As those who attended the meeting this year will know, that event turned out to be not an in-person walk with this famous American poet, but rather the Museum’s invitation for EDIS members try out its audio guide, which Wilbur narrates. At first I was a bit disappointed. My assignment had been downgraded to a review of an audio guide! But I decided to undertake this task anyway, and I began my self-guided tour of the grounds. I was glad I did; the experience turned out to be a wonder.

Beginning my tour of the Homestead grounds, I quickly discovered that using the guide meant looking for little numbered signs on the ground—which had the delightful effect of making me feel like a child on a scavenger hunt! When you spot these little signs, you are instructed to enter the appropriate number and hear a description from Wilbur of what this place meant to Dickinson and her family. You have the option of pressing additional keys to hear Dickinson poems relevant to that spot. This process proved magical, stop after stop. I especially loved it when the audio guide directed me to look out at something that no longer existed, but that I was invited to imagine I could see.

My favorite instance of that kind of imagined vista linked to the audio guide’s instruction to look out at Main Street and try to picture the vast eleven-acre Dickinson family meadow that had once occupied the other side of the street. “The hired men cut the meadow grass at least twice a year,” Wilbur’s mellower voice said in my ear, “to make hay for the livestock.” I felt moved by the impression of how much of the natural world Emily Dickinson could take in by taking no more than a few steps beyond her own front door. I smiled at the poem the audio guide linked to this scene: “To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee” (Fr1779).

My strongest emotional reaction to the audio guide’s contents came, though, from something that did not require my imagination because it is still very much present on the front lawn. “Stop 6: White Oak.” The audio guide informed me that white oak trees are native across Massachusetts and that Austin Dickinson often brought wild saplings he found in the forest home to the Dickinson grounds. This great tree might have grown out of one of Austin’s small, found saplings. The gnarled grey tree loomed above me, its strong branches latticed against the blue sky. I thus found myself in the presence of something that had been on the property when the Dickinson family had lived in this house—literally a living connection to the past.

On the audio guide, the Museum’s Director, Jane Wald, adds her touching observation that this tree bears important symbolism for us today. “Its widespread branches,” she says, “suggest Emily’s fame, grown quite far-reaching since her death.” I had not expected a self-guided tour to form such a central part of my emotional reaction to the Annual Meeting. It served as a reminder to me that every year this event brings its own sweet surprises—the sort of experience that Dickinson referred to as the joy that comes with “Bright Wednesday Afternoons” (Fr373) as Jane Ira Bloom reminded us so beautifully in her Jazz rendition of these words. Although I was initially disappointed not to have a live tour to report, it turned out (in a twist appropriate to an artist who seems always to be startling us anew) that even something so seemingly prosaic as a self-guided audio tour ended up creating for me its own form of bright Wednesday afternoon by bringing me in closer contact with the life of this remarkable poet.

Richard Wilbur, winner of multiple Pulitzer Prizes among other major awards, taught at Smith College and was always deeply engaged with Dickinson’s work. Wilbur passed away on October 14. A memorial will appear in the Spring Bulletin.

The Scholars’ Circle
By Eleanor Heginbotham

For 25 years, no matter where EDIS meets (Europe, Asia, various cities in the U.S., including Hawaii), one agenda item has been constant: early on the last morning a large circle of Dickinsonians gathers. Emerging scholars share dissertations; senior scholars explain their latest books; artists, musicians, general readers, those with specializations outside the literary describe why Emily Dickinson has absorbed their time and interests and elicited their talent and imagination. Everyone chip in with relevant tips, and often the conversations spread throughout the day—and the following year(s).

Two dozen enthusiasts gathered this year with projects of such variety and significance that a plea that this part of the weekend, one Barbara Moosberg declared central to the goals of EDIS, be moved to a more open-ended time slot and that it be re-named to invite even greater inclusivity. With apologies for the necessary simplifications, here are samples of 2017’s academic studies: one on bees—ruminations and echoes of classicism; one linking Dickinson to the “visionary” tradition of British Romanticism; one on the biographical background for Dickinson’s ephemeral metaphors; and another, a study of the studios and practices of daguerreotypes that can shed information on those of the Dickasons. Books and monographs in process include Richard Brantley’s further work on Dickinson’s experiments in intersections of religion and science; Marta McDowell’s modified reissue of her garden book; and Stephanie Farrar’s interest in the letters and poems of Lavinia Dickinson.

Creative and cross-disciplinary projects included a “Journal” of Emily melded with one of its true writer Emma; two different projects from a husband and wife team, his, a fully realized opera, hers a personal approach to the “Still Volcano”; and the work of George Hovitz and Trudy Williams in finding and arranging sheet music in preparation for performances like the one the team offered later that night.

A number of other projects focused on moving Dickinson further into “The World” beyond the music-filled parlor. One, for example, was an extended close reading of “This is my Letter.” Participants reported on forays into medicine (more diagnosing of Dickinson in light of current practices); into teaching in Taiwan; and into discussing Dickinson in Japan, where Masaka Takeda has helped to translate the film (another topic of hot discussion, but not in this session), A Quiet Passion.

The not-so-quiet passions of participants in the Scholars’ Circle, like those in all the years since Ellen Hart invited colleagues into it, allow early airings of future material proof of EDIS scholarship, creativity, and friendship.
By Liza Wieland

This issue’s featured poet, Liza Wieland, is Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor of English and Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs and Development at East Carolina University. She is the author of a collection of poetry, Near Alcatraz (2005), as well as of three volumes of short fiction and four novels, including, most recently, Land of Enchantment (2015). Wieland is also the fiction editor for the North Carolina Literary Review. She has been the recipient of two Pushcart Prizes, the Michigan Literary Fiction Prize, a Bridport Prize in the United Kingdom, and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the North Carolina Arts Council, and the Christopher Isherwood Foundation. In November, she received the 2017 Robert Penn Warren Award, from the Southern Writers. I know EDIS Bulletin readers will enjoy the engaging essay and riveting poem that follow.

I was a student in New York City, I went to a costume party dressed as Emily Dickinson. I found some punk-ethereal combination of white blouse and skirt, pulled on a pair of New Keds and marched three blocks up Broadway to 117th Street to my friend’s apartment, silently let myself in the front door and hurried across the hall and into the bathroom. I shut the door. Upon myself, we were a literary crowd; everyone got the joke. A little while later, someone coaxed me out with a drink.

Emily Dickinson has been a force in my life, beginning in 11th grade when I routinely taught Dickinson, Bishop, and Anne Bradstreet as a kind of surrealist abyss of possibility. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly. I thought Salvador Dali. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly. I thought Salvador Dali. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly. I thought Salvador Dali. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly. I thought Salvador Dali. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly. I thought Salvador Dali. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly. I thought Salvador Dali. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly. I thought Salvador Dali. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly. I thought Salvador Dali. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly. I thought Salvador Dali. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly. I thought Salvador Dali. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly. I thought Salvador Dali. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly. I thought Salvador Dali. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly. I thought Salvador Dali. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly. I thought Salvador Dali. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly. I thought Salvador Dali. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly. I thought Salvador Dali. I was just beginning to write poems myself, and it came to me quite suddenly. I thought Salvador Dali.

Yet perhaps my most profound experience with Emily Dickinson has to do, oddly enough, with motherhood. Studying Dickinson in New York, I developed an obsession with the poet’s mother, Emily Norcross Dickinson, whom I had assumed was dead, a specter in her daughter’s life. Motherlessness would, I thought, certainly account for the unmoored quality of the poems, the deep sense of loss. I was surprised and relieved to discover that Emily Norcross was mostly there all along, renowned for her cooking and her cultivation of roses and figs, and dying only four years before her poet-daughter Emily Elizabeth. As my poem “Mrs. Dickinson,” printed here, attests, I thought a lot about what it must have been like to be the mother of a poet—especially that poet. I myself had such a mother, who at times must have wondered what I was doing, alone in my room, long silences punctuated by the ding of the typewriter.

And in time I had a daughter (whom I did not name Emily, but Georgia, for another solitary iconoclast). When she was four, on a cross-country road trip, Georgia learned two poems by heart: Robert Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” and “I’m Nobody! Who Are You?” (Fr260). She loved and spoke with hilarious and eneuring emphasis two particular parts: “the sweep” in the third stanza of Frost’s poem rose as a grace note, and “admiring Bog,” the last syllable in Dickinson’s poem, she nearly shouted, like the clang of a joyous bell.

I have long understood “I’m Nobody!” to be about privacy and anonymity, and the sheer nonsense of fame, as if Dickinson had been here all along, though my daughter might not know it and might have made me spectral, a comic ghost, scaring myself, but it is really for her that I am frightened, she who is more whisper than girl’s body, a sensation in the house, a hot spirit.

Mrs. Dickinson

(Emily Norcross Dickinson, mother of the poet)

By Liza Wieland

I have been here all along, though my daughter might not know it and might have made me spectral, a comic ghost, scaring myself, but it is really for her that I am frightened, she who is more whisper than girl’s body, a sensation in the house, a hot spirit.

Flesh of my flesh and yet—
like looking into a well
and seeing myself, but distant,
darker, with the strange halo
water gives when the sun’s behind it.
To understand her, I had to be like her:—
to be shadowless, or all shadow, I don’t know—
to see her fully, I had to be mystifying,
as she wanted, be a sightless knot
of taking her small self in my arms
and in the combustible force
down to the atom of our one name
burn me, burn through me
and I just disappear.

Some evenings, the silence is terrible, beating from her room, but I can’t break it. In my head, questions clutter like the tongues of held bells, fall like stones inside my chest, choking me while I lie here, listening for the skreek of her chair, the gasping pulse of her thoughts, her breath filling the lungs of the house.

At midnight, asleep, she’s nearer, yet I dream of finding her far from home, of taking her small self in my arms and folding up its fluttery wings, kissing the hard beak of her face and making her a girl again, saying, “Emily, Mother’s here. You know your mother, don’t you?” But her great dark eyes glow, burn me, burn through me down to the atom of our one name and in the combustible force of my love and my longing, we both twist shut our mouths and I just disappear.
Teaching Dickinson

Marianne Noble, Series Editor

“Old the Grace, but new the Subjects —”

By Jane Donahue Eberwein

Teaching Dickinson

Jane Donahue Eberwein is Distinguished Professor of English,emerita, at Oakland University. She is the author of Dickinson: Strategies of Limitation, as well as many other works, most recently, as co-editor with Cristanne Miller and Stephanie Farrar, Dickinson in Her Own Time (Iowa 2014).

Jane Eberwein with husband Robert Eberwein.

Teaching Dickinson

In the year or so before my fall 2007 retirement from Oakland University, I found myself wondering when or whether I'd find opportunities to teach some of my favorite literary texts — works like Walden, Of Plymouth Plantation, and poems by Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor. I didn't worry about Dickinson's poems, perhaps because EDIS itself provides opportunities. If I'd wanted to keep grading papers, I could have accepted invitations to teach in the Honors College, but I wanted the freedom of Howard Nemerov's "Absence-Minded Professor," "who'd burn the papers and correct the leaves."

It has turned out, luckily, that metropolitan Detroit offers me frequent opportunities to share literary passions with fellow retirees. The first invitation came from the Society of Active Retirees (SOAR), operated through Wayne State University. They needed somebody to talk about poems. One of the students there immediately enlisted me to repeat that class for another Elderhostel group in the same area. Other invitations followed from a Lunch and Learn program at a Jewish Community Center, and a dinner gathering of an African-American arts sorority. A group of local friends requested an intensive series of discussion sessions focused on Dickinson. Such invitations all require planning on my part by way of choosing poems, preparing handouts, and organizing my thoughts, but there is never any grading. An advantage of teaching poetry rather than novels or autobiographies turns out to be that students don't have to do advance preparation either, although some want to. These haven't been sustained programs of study like classes Eleanor Heginbotham and Carolyn Cooley have been offering for senior citizens in college settings.

Teaching at Oakland prepared me well for teaching seniors. The university's suburban location always made it convenient for older women in our area to return to school after raising their families. From my first semester, back in fall 1969, I'd found that such students were often the most insightful and involved, even if they needed a little fluelling up to build confidence after years out of the classroom. And then there was the owner of a local tire company, about to retire himself, who wangled his way into one of my closed classes by identifying himself as a "geriatric freshman." In his words, he loved to comment on how a passage came across as "obscura to the freshman mind," and I doubted he'd stick it out until he had to call himself a "senior." He did, though, and even went on to earn a master's degree and co-author a book with one of his professors. That kind of freedom to study whatever one wants with whatever passion one feels turns out to be a reward of retirement for the people I've been teaching seniors. The university's suburban setting back in fall 1969, I'd found that such students don't have to do advance preparation either, although some of my former colleagues have been among my students (from the sciences as well as English) and we have music experts, engineers, and health professionals all happy to be discussing poetry even when it is a fresh experience. There's quite a range of knowledge in the room. Somebody knows where bebopology may be seen and heard at a Michigan nature preserve; someone else thinks of yeast when Dickinson asks Higginbotham to proof the life of her poems. When we're stumped by an allusion, deft fingers ply smartphones for references. Even better, I notice that mature learners approach poems more respectfully than typical undergraduates: less likely to grasp at one word or image as explaining everything and not assuming that a poem means "whatever I see in it." They share in lyric poets' sensitivity to the complex layering of time.

I learned quickly, though, that such occasional teaching stints expose one to surprises. When I agreed to offer a comparative discussion of Keats's "Ode to Autumn" and Frost's "After Apple-Picking" for my initial SOAR class, I envisioned sitting with a dozen or so people for intensive conversation. Then came a notice from the office indicating our room assignment and reporting that there were sixty-some registrants. Luckily, many of these people welcomed opportunities to speak up, ask questions, and offer insights. Yet when I was asked to revise that class for the neighboring Elderhostel group, I anticipated the same level of involvement only to be told upon arrival that what the organizers wanted was for me to give a talk that would be followed by a short period of questions. There was even a ritual of passing around a microphone to each person with a question, which pretty much assured no sustained conversation (microphones, deployed somehow, come with the territory; we have our infirmities). I gather this group had encountered problems with one or two people dominating discussion and had built protections against such behavior even then. My own protections stifled health conversation. It turns out also that program sponsors often consider one session on a poet sufficient, and I have learned to plan differently when there may not be a follow-up. When uncertain of focus, I sometimes begin with Dickinson's "Redemption," reading her 15 April 1862 letter to Higginbotham and the four poems she enclosed to get a feel for what she wanted to convey about herself — and how she managed to hide. For the SOAR/SIS group of exceptionally accomplished women of color who wanted to share in Detroit's Big Read of Emily Dickinson, my goal was to give them a sample of poems reflecting the range and brilliance of her imagination. As it happened, I had just finished reading Alie Munroe's biography of a poet able to call attention to myself into how some of Dickinson's phrasing might have been influenced by speech habits of African-Americans in Amherst. For the sessions with readers especially interested in psychology, we devoted a night to poems of emotional extremity.

Not all of these events have met my hopes. The first time I talked about Dickinson with elderly residents of an upscale retirement community near campus, I thought it would be interesting to reflect on how we look for different experiences from poetry as we get older. I structured the session to match each Dickinson poem I recalled from my own childhood reading with one that I now see as related to it thematically but richer and more interesting (also, in some cases, less likely to win approval from teachers interested in pupils' moral formation). Among the matches were "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" (Fr260) with "I'm caged — I've stopped being Their's" (Fr535), "I never saw a Moor" (Fr800) with "To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee" (Fr1779), and "If I can stop one Heart from breaking" (Fr982) with "The Poets light but Lamps" (Fr930). That experiment might have worked better if among other things I had remembered some childhood exposure to poetry except for a lady who grew up in a Slavic-speaking country.

My happiest experiences have been with SOAR. At the end of that introductory session on Keats and Frost, I asked if people would be interested in a few sessions devoted to Dickinson's poetry. Definitely yes! We are still at it ten years later, although there have been detours to some other poems. "We" varies gradually; some students have been there since 2007, but almost every session draws ten or more newcomers. At first, we encountered familiar questions about how the poet used dashes and capital letters and why she secluded herself. The first topic someone in the class suggested was Dickinson's love poetry, so we spent a session on that. To counteract (or maybe heighten) assumptions about her fixation on death, we spent a morning on her consolatory metaphors of souls taking wing (one that Dickinson herself drew on) and "light but Lamps" (Fr930). That experiment might have worked better if among other things I had remembered some childhood exposure to poetry except for a lady who grew up in a Slavic-speaking country.

Our spring 2017 class was planned purely as fun. "Some things that fly there be" freed us to consider virtually anything capable of flight. There were bird poems, of course, but also a bat, and a host of insects: bees, butterflies, spiritual fliers included both angels and souls. "We pray — to Heaven:" (Fr746) invited us to critique the familiar metaphor of souls taking wing (one that Dickinson herself drew on) and "light but Lamps" (Fr930). Among us there are that resting, rise.

There are that resting, rise. Can I expound the skies?

How still the Riddle lies! (Fr68)

What next? The woman who introduced me at that session did more than introduce me. She asked if there might be a follow-up. When uncertain of focus, I sometimes begin with Dickinson's "Redemption," reading her 15 April 1862 letter to Higginbotham and the four poems she enclosed to get a feel for what she wanted to convey about herself — and how she managed to hide. For the SOAR/SIS group of exceptionally accomplished women of color who wanted to share in Detroit's Big Read of Emily Dickinson, my goal was to give them a sample of poems reflecting the range and brilliance of her imagination. As it happened, I had just finished reading Alie Munroe's biography of a poet able to call attention to myself into how some of Dickinson's phrasing might have been influenced by speech habits of African-Americans in Amherst. For the sessions with readers especially interested in psychology, we devoted a night to poems of emotional extremity.

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There are that resting, rise. Can I expound the skies?

How still the Riddle lies! (Fr68)
“God permits industrious Angels – Aftemoons – to play – ” (Fr245)

As I prepare to once again perform Industrious Angels, my solo play, this coming summer in Amherst, Massachusetts, the place of its birth (and yes, the birthplace of Emily Dickinson), it strikes me that my play’s builders, its mother-nurturers, its inspirational “industrious angels” were all women. I drew breath from their work – artists, performers, thinkers, animators, cartoonists, poets, and yes, I share a legacy with my own mother, who had a bit of all of these bound up in her complex being.

To begin at the beginning. Summer, 2007. I was driving to Amherst, feeling guilty, as I had just emerged from an Egyptian shadow puppet theatre workshop in which I was learning to make a character – a child, my own mother, and myself – among them a witch. It’s not really about Emily Dickinson.

But something happened in that house. As I stepped out of that bedroom into that hallway (in a certain slant of light), I was suddenly struck with a loaded memory. Actually, two memories. One, my mother read Emily Dickinson poems when I was little, and two, I was actually reading an Emily Dickinson poem to my mother at the moment of her death. Bang. Bang. YES.

Those two memories always manifest themselves in my body. Whenever I describe that striking moment to anyone, I find my left hand opening, rising to the sky, my right hand opening, lowering to the earth, my entire body doing – what? “Spreading wide” to “gather Paradise”? Perhaps. Perhaps preparing to birth my play.

It’s not really about Emily Dickinson. Yes, she’s in it. As a shadow. She’s in it as one of my many mothers – among them a witch, a child, my own mother, and myself, mother to my self.

I developed my play over the next few summers in Amherst, in collaboration with my director, composer, and designers, and I premiered it in Amherst in 2011 at the Ko Festival. I have performed it since at worksho...
I had Village Voice book: found on the “new arrivals” shelf this despair, because I wasn’t at all sure I had bravery from what might seem a most “she studied Terror.” I also borrowed from Emily – “Nature is a Haunted to make my play, I breathed in inspiration To face my fear, which I really had to do within. This glass jar what’s in it – a glass jar, hidden self) and reveal small chest (much like of the play, I open a per flowers which will folding and cutting pa– Varo’s biologist’s desk), self at a desk (much like encorse arrives, I busy my– Industrious Angels manifest themselves in plays. Varo’s images science, in poetry, in art, in sort of experimental the search for mean–

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I got the jar. The jar is in the play. I was made bold by Barry’s words: “Monsters and dangerous tasks seem to be part of it. Courage and terror and failure or what seems like failure, and then hopelessness and the approach of death convincingly. The happy ending is hardly important, though we may be glad it’s there. The real joy is knowing that if you felt the trouble in the story, your kingdom isn’t dead.”

At the center, Mama

The image in the middle of my collage is a very blurry photograph of my mother as a child. She is holding her favorite doll. That doll is on the set of my play. Along with a lot of other mementos that now live in my house. I live in my house because my mother had the forethought to save up money for me. She saved for me something that she called by its old-fashioned name, a “legacy.”

I was quite surprised to discover that my play has a happy ending. Considering that I had initially identified my “central conflict” (we are taught in school that all plays must have a “central conflict”) as “Loneliness vs. Soliditude,” the outlook for a happy ending was not very promising. And then I really got down on myself where realization that really, the “central conflict” was my mother and me. “Oh, no,” I thought to myself another summer later, wandering once again around downtown Amherst, “I’m NOT making a play about my mother. That’s been done to DEATH. No, no, no. I’m NOT making a play about my mother. No.” So, I stumbled into Food for Thought again and bought another book, a then-newswish volume by the renowned (and much admired by me) poet Anne Carson. I walked a half block away, sat down at the bar at ABC (Amherst Brewing Company), ordered a drink, and opened up the book. The very first poem was about her mother.

Dreamchases

Who can sleep when she – hundreds of miles away I feel that vast breath fan her restless decks. Cricicrance by cricicrance all the links rattle once. Here we go no mother on the shipless ocean. Pity us, pity the ocean, here we go. So, OK. Here we go.

And as it turned out, the Ko Festival workshop that I was taking that summer was led by another terrific writer-clown, Sara Felder, who kicked off the first class by saying, “I’ve been thinking about mothers. Let’s all make plays about our mothers.” So, OK. Here we go.

I found other mothers that summer along the way to making my play. Cindy MacKenzie and Barbara Dana, editors of Bigger Than the Sky: Essays on the Healing Power of Emily Dickinson (a book I bought at the also sadly no longer existing Jeffery Amherst Bookshop) led me to the realization that my play would, indeed, have a happy ending. And that to earn that happy ending, the journey of the play, just as wise cartoonist Lynda Barry had warned me, would require “Courage and terror” and facing “failure or what seems like failure…”

Unlike Emily, who, even though she hid her writings away in chests and drawers, knew she was good (there’s plenty of evidence that Emily was proud of the work of her hand), my mother thought of herself as a failure because very little of her writings had been published. After my mother’s death, I found her poems, essays, short stories hidden away in chests and drawers. I chose to read/share/action of her stories, Underneath the Garden, as the culminating event of my play. It’s a powerful story – funny, sad, moving, beautifully written. My mother should have been proud of the work of her hand.

Underneath the Garden is good. Audiences love it. It gives me great joy to share it with them. I have found, in the sharing of my mother’s story, that she shares imagery with our shared beloved poet – there are references to hands, and dirt, and blood, and terror, and shame, and gardens, and Paradise.

A moment I will ever cherish occurred following my performance of Industrious Angels at Allegheny College. After the play, I always invite the audience up on the stage to explore the set, playfully c rammed with enticing chests and drawers, nooks and crannies. That night, amid the milling about of folks young and old, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I turned, and a young man, a creative writing student who had been in one of our previous workshops, whispered to me: “If I can ever write a story half as good as your mother’s, I will be in heaven.” I looked up and said, “Mama, did you hear that?”

I’m not sure I actually believe in heaven. Like Emily, my church is here on earth. But take a look at my collage, the one I created several years before, at the beginning of my making Industrious Angels. There is a snippet of my mother’s handwriting, matched up with a snippet of Emily’s handwriting. The word that they share is “heaven.”

Most special thanks to Lynda Barry, Anne Carson, Barbara Dana, Lesley Dill, Sara Felder, Mary Frank, Sabrina Hamilton, Susan Howe, Cindy MacKenzie, Michelle Matlock, Lotte Reimiger, Remedios Varo, Elaine Williams, and, of course, Emily Dickinson and Billie Lee McCants.

Laurie McCants co-founded the Bloomsbury Theatre Ensemble (BTE) in 1978, where she co-created Hard Coal, Our Shadows, (with Egypt’s) shadow-puppet theatre company Wamda), and Shadows of Hannama: Mighty, Muddy, Crooked River of the Long Reach. BTE was named the 2016 “Outstanding Theatre” by the National Theatre Conference. In 2010, Laurie was named an “Actor of Distin- guished Achievement” through a Fox Foundation Resident Actor Fellowship, funded by the William & Eva Fox Foun- dation and administered by Theatre Communications Group. She served as co-President of the Board of the nation- al Network of Ensemble Theaters. She recently directed the world premiere of Anthony Clavaro’s play, Gunpowder Joe. She has produced Industrious Angles, pre- miered at the Ko Festival of Performance in Amherst, Massachusetts.

https://edisonarts.org/
Singing through the forests,
Rattling over ridges,
Shooting under arches,
Rumbling over bridges,
Whizzing through the mountains,
Buzzing o’er the vale,—
Bless me! this is pleasant,
Riding on the Rail!

Men of different “stations”1
In the eye of fame,
Here are very quickly
In the eye of fame,
Men of different “stations”1

Ancient maiden lady
Anxiously remarks
Turning to a stranger,
Ancient maiden lady
Anxiously remarks
Turning to a stranger,

Woman with her baby,
Sitting vis-à-vis—
Baby keeps a-squalling,
Woman looks at me;
Asks about the distance,
Says it’s tiresome talking,
Noises of the cars
Are very shocking!

Market-woman careful
Of the precious casket,
Knowing eggs are eggs,
Tightly holds her basket;
Feeling that a smash,
If it came, would surely
Send her eggs to pot
Rather prematurely!

Singing through the forests,
Rattling over ridges,
Shooting under arches,
Rumbling over bridges,
Whizzing through the mountains,
Buzzing o’er the vale,—
Bless me! this is pleasant,
Riding on the Rail!

Notes
1 Pun: “station” can mean either rank in society or the place where a train stops.
2 There is a mood pattern called “temperance.”
3 “Stupid” means stupided, and “association of ideas” is a philosophical theory of how one thought leads to another. It was influential among the Transcendentalists, but you see Steve wasn’t a Transcendentalist.
4 See there was. On warm days, with the windows in the cars open, steam engines were hazardous to passengers’ clothes. But in nineteenth-century slang, a spark is also a flirtatious man.
5 In the nineteenth-century the term referred to a pair of vehicle seats arranged with the rear one facing forward and the front one facing backward.

Renee Bergland, Book Review Editor

Pictures of Possibility
Rosanna Bruno
The Slanted Life of Emily Dickinson. Andrew McMeel, Riverside, NJ 96pp.
Charles Bukowski, Emily Dickinson, et. al.

Poetry for Kids: Emily Dickinson

Reviewed by Annelise Brück-Johnson

It was my pleasure to review three very different books that framed Emily Dickinson with visual arts: a graphic novel/comic book, an art photography book, and an illustrated children’s anthology. Reading them together allowed me to consider the fraught relationship between art, episteme, and egress. Questions of factual accuracy, artistic expression, and even straightforward instruction are particularly pressing in 2017. The books I review here bring these questions to the fore.

In The Slanted Life of Emily Dickinson (2017), a graphic novel/comic book written and illustrated by Rosanna Bruno (profiled in the Fall 2015 issue of the Bulletin), the reader is confronted by a vividly imagined world of what we in 2017 might call “alternative facts.” Taking her starting point in Emily Dickinson’s life, Bruno manages to combine surface level understanding of Dickinson (there is an OKCupid profile, where Dickinson writes “I spend a lot of time thinking about Death!”) with whimsical “alterative facts” (such as Dickinson asking for an Easy-Bake oven for Christmas) and a mocking attitude towards Dickinson Scholarship (mock-ups of “scholarly” works detailing facts and imaginary situations that has become common in popular debate. The discussion of Dickinson presented in The Slanted Life of Emily Dickinson is interesting enough to be highly reproducible, but not far enough from reality to clearly function as satire to those with little specialized information.

Bruno writes about the affection that Dickinson felt for her dog Carlo – quoting directly from a Dickinson letter – then a few pages later writes of Dickinson’s failed attempts to “develop some lines of her poetry into reality TV shows,” and then about Dickinson’s “short lived stint as an advice columnist,” and her dabbling in writing detective stories. Some of these ideas are cleanly meant to derive their humor from their ridiculous implausibility, but others are less clearly marked as fiction, and what exactly they are meant to mock is unclear. The book often juxtaposes facts and counter-facts without distinguishing between them. The overall effect is unsteadying and confusing for a reader familiar with Dickinson; my guess is that readers who don’t know much about the poet’s work would be even more baffled. For example, while it could be amusing for a Dickinson scholar to imagine (as Bruno does) that “Hope is the thing with feathers” was inspired by a sociable parrot named Hope, an uninitiated reader would have no way of knowing that Bruno was joking. Indeed The Slanted Life of Emily Dickinson might be viewed as the most definitively 2017 book about Dickinson published this year, drawing as it does on a combination of what has been termed “meme culture” and a careless with regard to clear delineation of facts and imaginary situations that has become common in popular debate. The discussion of Dickinson presented in the book is interesting enough to be highly reproducible, but not far enough from reality to clearly function as satire to those with little specialized information.

This is not to say that The Slanted Life of Emily Dickinson is a bad book. The drawings are well done, and the slanty life presented is wonderfully imagined. However, with attacks on made-up scholarship and humor consisting primarily of presenting inaccuracies as facts, the experience of reading this book is immensely uncomfortable. There may well be a time for joking about Dickinson’s life, but for this reader the effect here is timely in the worst way - and the political and philosophical implications of such work are far from amusing.

At another end of the epistemological spectrum I turn to the truly gorgeous Rue Des
Theo Davis
Ornamental Aesthetics: The Poetics of At-
ている in Thoreau, Dickinson, & Whitman

Reviewed by Kyle Rice

Theo Davis’s new book, Ornamental Aes-
thetics, reveals striking aesthetic congru-
ence between Thoreau, Dickinson, and
Whitman, while making philosophically
radical claims about “counter-poetics.” Da-
vis engages with a diverse group of critics
and philosophers, including Anne Carson,
Susan Stewart, Martin Heidegger, and
Buddhist connoisseurs. She reproduces
recent trends in materialist and historicist
criticism in favor of connections “between
and across texts from different time peri-
ods and even different cultures” as she
tries to establish “the substantive identity of
the artistic and philosophical commitments
at stake” in particular works without regard
for temporal or historical partitions.

Davis describes Thoreau, Dickinson and
Whitman’s artistic and philosophical com-
mitments as an “ornamental aesthetics,” ar-
guing that all three advance poetic projects
that dwell on “the relationship of attention
... to objects” (116). Further, she asserts
that these writers offer a “counter-poetics”: a
turning away from aesthetic modes that
stress correspondence theories of truth or
representation as the basic functioning
relationship between mind and world
(hereafter the mainstream approach to
aesthetic and metaphysical questions in
Western circles). This counter-poetic prac-
tice offers a strategy for “how to adjust,
approach, and encounter” that Davis links
with more classical models of poetry (11).
She suggests that Thoreau, Dickinson, and
Whitman saw the poet’s task much as the
Greeks did: as an occasion-based mode of
response to the world. Insofar as poets
use language as “a means of marking out
persons, places, and the real or virtual
self itself – for attention and praise,” they
perform an existential and metaphysical
process that Davis describes as ornamental.

Davis describes the shift to ornament as a
radical realignment in the larger history of
aesthetics. “At issue here is not some
emphatic claim: that Thoreau, Dickinson, and
Whitman are concerned with the aesthet-
critical claim,” she writes, “but the
possibility of thinking of poetry as a way
of relating to the world, rather than as a
expressive object.” Sketching out the his-
tory of this notion, Davis shows how the
poetry of attending carries inherently polit-
ical freight and further links this model of
ornamental aesthetics to Marxist-Hegelian
and Heideggerian traditions – epistemics
that foreground the individual and her
pneumatic experience of the world as a
way of making her individual legible in her re-
olutionary milieu.

In her prose style, Davis practices what
she preaches. She explains that she uses
“a more individual, if not personal, way
of writing, partly in resistance to the new
models of knowledge production that per-
severe contemporary universities, and part-
ly out of a commitment to retaining the
individual element of reading” (32). Thus,
Davis attempts to “get closer to the life of
experience, and hence the life of persons” (35)
in her own writing, emulating the
inhabitancy of the poet-subject. She
asserts that she describes as attempts to “redeem
human experience from modern conditions
of alienation and individualization” (11) by ad-
dressing “how an object carries and even
carries out human attention.”

After treating Thoreau and his “poetics of
touch” in Chapter 1, Davis turns to simi-
lar qualities in Dickinson’s writing, argu-
ing that “the work of noticing, and loving
what is seen” is a “shared poetic project” for
both writers as “that makes their work at once poetic and ornamental.” Here
Davis associates poetry with ornament
based on what she sees to be the essential,
classical function of each: that is, to “mark
out” objects for praise, or to draw attention
by adorning. This work of ornamenting at-
tention foregrounds interaction, contact
and interrelation between a poet and her object
as opposed to the poet’s doubtful capaci-
ty to represent or reconstitute that object.
Drawing on Heidegger, Davis argues that
Dickinson’s concern with the political
ornament depends largely on distance from
(or a loss of contact with) the object by the
poet-subject.

Davis’s most provocative claim is that
“Dickinson’s ornamentation looks past the
centrality of loss to representation that has
been critical not only to Christianity but also to Western culture and poetic history.”
Rather than claiming her distance-oriented
aesthetic heritage, Davis argues, Dickinson
is connected to a “Western favorite of her
own ornamental aesthetics by asking
‘what being grounded in the
mind or a subject’s phenomenal experi-
ence, and hence the life of persons’” (297).

In her discussion of Dickinson, Davis ar-
gues that contemporary modes of criticism
that focus on historical or material condi-
tions reinforce the same mind-world her-
meneutic that Dickinson worked against.
According to Davis, questions concerning
the nature of manuscript, craft, and genre
as they are materially-inflected simply miss the point. She claims that Dickinson
saw poetry as engagement with an ineff-
able material world, not as a separate
world on an equal plane, but as the
world from a distance (heretofore the
mainstream approach to
the transient nature of all phenomena, lead-
ing to an at times painfully vibrant sense
of resonance)

Theorizing the specificity of counter-
poetics in her discussion of Dickinson,
Davis is the photography. Divided into sections by
the house belongs to “the specialist in Amer-
Provençal town-house turned artists’ resi-

The, true or false. Instead there are beauti-
Cordeliers: Portraits of a House

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mainstream approach to
the transient nature of all phenomena, lead-
ing to an at times painfully vibrant sense
of resonance)
The Heart’s Many Doors: American Poets Respond to Metka Kranšovec’s Images

Richard Jackson, ed. Wings Press, 128pp
Reviewed by Jordan Greenland

To read Dickinson’s poetry is often to imagine abstractions taking solid shape. Love, hope, despair, faith, time, grief: by word and image. In some cases, that correspondence is easy to decipher: above “I’ve seen a Dying Eye” as a brooch custom made for a woman whose husband is having an affair. In a poem titled “There’s Something Very Unscientific About Zombies,” Josh Mensch riffs on one of Kranšovec’s images: “You find a branch growing out of your back / Unlike you, it has a future.”

Devotes of Dickinson’s poetry, readers of contemporary poetry, and those with special interest in ekphrasis will all find much to appreciate in this volume.

Jordan Greenland is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at Berkeley.

Noteworthy Publications

Long-time Dickinson Society member Richard Brantley has published Transatlantic Trío: Empiricismo, Evangelicalismo, Romanticismo (Culicidaea Press), a collection of his essays and reviews, spanning his full career. One entire section, “Essays, Third Series,” is devoted to Emily Dickinson.

Marta Werner, with Jen Bervin the author of The Gorgeous Nothings (New Directions and Christine Burgin Gallery 2013), has published a selection of the images from her own work in a new cloth edition called Emily Dickinson, Envelope Poems (New Directions and Christine Burgin Gallery 2016).

Reviews of Publications

By Susan Snively

A Quieter Passion: a Review of My Letter to the World

Emily Dickinson has inspired artists in many genres: drama, biography, fiction, documentary films, songs, dances, paintings, sculpture, and works that mix them up. Her “letter to the world” arrived first in November, 1890, edited by Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson. Todd and Higginson altered her spelling, punctuation, and word choice to evade criticism of her unconventional ways. Yet Higginson got it right in his introduction to the poems’ second edition in 1891, when he called her “a wholly new and original poetic genius.”

In 1955, when her 1,789 poems, by Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward, were collected and published by Harvard, readers saw Dickinson’s letter to the world in the poet’s original spelling, punctuation, and vocabulary. Surprises appeared on every page. Since then, evidence of Dickinson’s shape-shifting has attained a kind of divine wackiness. Re-reading the poems in manuscripts, in print, or online, we never know from poem to poem which Dickinson we are going to meet: the brilliant schoolgirl, the mischievous playmate, the flirtatious young woman, the lover whose “heart had many doors,” the poet who reshaped the English language. Her “infinite variety” – to quote her favorite author, Shakespeare – brings energy and joy to My Letter to the World, a new documentary film from Hurricane Films, directed by Sol Papadopoulos and produced by Roy Boulter and Andrea Gibson. The film premiered in Amherst on September 14 to a rapt audience of Dickinson friends, fans, and obsessives.

Hurricane Films produced A Quiet Passion in 2016. Directed by Terence Davies, it garnered much praise, including an extravagant claim that it was “the best film ever made.” My Letter to the World is resolutely a documentary, steadier in its pace than A Quiet Passion, and more subtle in its voice. Narrated by Cynthia Nixon, who reads the poems in a mild, dutiful manner, the new film avoids the melodrama of the earlier film, with its ghostly death-scene and an almost unbearable depiction of the poet’s 

supposed (but non-credible) epileptic fits. Although brief scenes from A Quiet Passion appear in My Letter to the World, they do not intrude on its narrative integrity. Instead, the film awakens viewers’ desire to dwell among the poet’s unanswerable questions – antic spiders that dance among her intricately spun webs.

The dozen or so Dickinson scholars interviewed for the film don’t try to construct a unified field theory of Emily Dickinson. Their respectful, imaginative, often funny interviews take the audience in many directions at once, an approach that seems exactly right for the poet who “dwelled in Possibility” (Fr466). Among the experts are film director Terence Davies, scholars Christopher Benfey, Polly Longsworth, Martha Ackmann, Marta Werner, Martha Nell Smith, Leslie Morris, Elisa New, and Cristanne Miller; novelist Jerome Charyn; Amherst College archivist Mike Kelly, Jen Benka of the American Academy of Poets, George Bozwick, composer and musical director of The Red Skies Music Ensemble, and Dickinson Museum Executive Director Jane Wald. These experts discuss the poet’s loves, friendships, family, home, education, religion, passion for nature, musicality, writing habits, and posthumous publication. Each blooming subject buzzes with contradictions that shine and sting – the shine from Dickinson’s radiant imagination, the sting from her readers’ humbling attempts to penetrate her enigmas.

Scholar and writer Martha Ackmann, whose interview opens the film, speculates
that Emily Dickinson was “a kind of outlaw” in both her biographical life and her poetry. The phrase sets the theme for others’ variations. Novelist Jerome Charyn calls Dickinson “powerful” in her radical, explosive effects. Her dashes, he says, “express violence.” Scholar Marta Werner, who has delved into Dickinson’s texts, calls her “a terrifying force.” Harvard professor Sarah Jane Newsack sees Dickinson’s “uncompromising process,” a radical authority achieved by breaking rules. About Dickinson’s religious life, Leslie Morris, Curator of Modern Books and Manuscripts at Harvard’s Houghton Library, observes that Dickinson “speaks of a God of Nature, not of the Church.”

Harvard professor Elisa New speaks of Dickinson’s texts, calls her “a terrifying force.” Werner, who has delved into Dickinson’s world, mentions “by wishing them away. A hunger to have all unanswered questions settled at last. Emily Dickinson – or to defy mystery to make definite pronouncements about the poet.”

As with the earlier film, A Quiet Passion, My Letter to the World omits some subjects important to those familiar with Dickinson’s biography. Although her sister Vinnie, her father Edward, and her brother Austin, and her sister-in-law Sue appear as important actors in the poet’s emotional life, we miss the presence of Maggie Maher, her friend and servant – “warm and wild and mighty” – who aided in the preservation of her poems. Maggie surely deserved a larger part, as did Judge Otis Phillips Lord, her father Edward’s best friend and the recipient of the poet’s frisky letters to the man she called “my lovely Salem.” Lord, Edward Dickinson’s best friend, has been described by scholars Richard Sewall and James Guthrie as the great love of the poet’s later years.

The Amherst area, with its five colleges, was the tiny kingdom to watch a chrysalis develop. “Bianchi in the early twentieth century. The proliferation of Emily Dickisons, like the fecundity of the poet’s garden, has become perennial. Harvard scholar Lisa New draws an analogy between Dickinson’s poems and her garden, sources of love and labor combined. Visitors to the Dickinson Museum are often startled to learn how expert the poet was at digging in the dirt and bringing forth flowers and fruit. Today, after the Museum’s impressive reconstruction of Emily’s conservatory, visitors can behold one of her kingdoms, rich with southerly light. Reportedly she grew jasmine and pomegranate there, and allowed neighborhood children into the tiny kingdom to watch a chrysalis unfold into a butterfly. My Letter to the World features stunning graphics of the poet’s herbaceous world that bleed through the background, and include plants Emily found on her home ground: clammy locust, interrupted fern, cannabis sativa, and hundreds of other native plants. The poet’s skill at cultivation, her welcoming ways with children, and her appearance, described by her young friend MacGregor Jenkins as “overflowing with fun,” would have been visible to observant passersby through the clear panes of the conservatory. “Secretive ways” aside, her eagerness to learn the mysteries of nature gave the poet the privilege of revealing her generous self.

Sol Papadopoulos, Terence Davies, Andrea Gibson, Mary MacLeod, and their colleagues have the gifts not only of filmmaking, but of devotion to the poet. The images of natural miracles produce a breathtaking joy. We see images of light-struck, rippling water – an actual pond, or the sea Dickinson claimed never to have seen? A windswept field of golden grass recalls the “gazing grain” of “Because I could not stop for Death” (F479).

The film’s interior scenes recreate 19th century staid familial tableaux, complete with lace curtains and thick chairs that close off the public space. Other images remind us that Dickinson witnessed the masteloms and miracles peculiar to New England, especially in changing seasons. My Letter to the World reawakens the audience to the small-town Amherst known to many of its citizens, and invites others to visit the homestead where a great poet reinvented poetry, for the world.

Author of four collections of poetry and founder of the Writing Center at Amherst College, Susan Sweeney has been screenwriter and narrator of two documentaries; Seeing New England (2010) and “My Business is to Sing” (2012). She has also written one novel, The Heart Has Many Doors.
Emily’s Economies

Sometimes on a sheet of wrapping paper
Often on a fragment of stationery
Occasionally on an invitation
The fold of an envelope
A torn bill or advertisement,
On a receipt, or discarded message of sympathy,
Once on the flyleaf of her father’s copy of Washington Irving’s Sketch Book,
But always with a generous heart.

Her methods could appear eccentric,
But she saw “New Englandly” So practiced strict economy.

Her words that soared into the ether
Were often cramped like postscripts
Between performances of household tasks.
Modestly, she would not accord them
The benignant latitudes of space.

The Muse, however, who also knew how to bake,
Sew, garden and launder, was never offended,
For she knew how earnestly, how lavishly, how perfectly
Emily would always serve her.

Judith Farr

in the bog. This poem suddenly sounds to me a little “the lady doth protest too much,
full-on mother for 18 years – it feels sometimes like blank, nothing, absence, a huge hole
in these first weeks without her, I am experiencing that poem in a whole new way, as a
Nobody!” ending with the laughing ring of “Bog.”

For me – I breathe – I breathe the air of Bahia –
Mr. Higginson – I thought you would like – to know –
Your Scholar

Judith Farr, Professor of English emerita at Georgetown, has long been a celebrated critic of Emily Dickinson’s poetry. She is best known as the author of The Passion of Emily Dickinson (1992) and, with Louise Carter, The Gardens of Emily Dickinson (2004). Her more recent work explores the connections between poetry and painting, particularly the Hudson River School. However, she began as a poet and won a contest sponsored by Marianne Moore when she was a teenager. Moore’s advice to her: “If you want to be a poet, never get married and steer clear of the Giants.”

Now it is almost evening in the grand salon. They read on.
In her father’s house, however, in the hallowed room
Where Emily’s dress hangs, there is silence.

The shadow of her light form flits, luminous, across the page
As they read. She is present here. She speaks to them.

Judith Farr

The Other Hemisphere

Professor of

Salvador, Brazil, 1986

George Monteiro

Dear Preceptor –
The word – said – lives, say I, and my word
Said here, in this place – lives still – a century
to the year when my head was first turned
Away from the things of this world –
Against evanescence –
to last long – to bear the spirit
of the body, to hear my
letters echoing in the blues
and reds of Brazil –
where the sun arcs
across Northern skies –
Themselves go out – I said –
Speaking of poets whose
words do not yet have
the right to expire –
As for me – I breathe –
I breathe the air of Bahia –

George Monteiro’s poetry has frequently appeared in the Bulletin, Professor of English emeritus at Brown, he has written critical works on topics in US, Portuguese, and Brazilian literature, including, of course, Emily Dickinson. He has also written many poems about other writers.
Members’ News

New EDIS Board Member-At-Large

Stephanie Farrar

Stephanie Farrar is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire. After doing her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees at the University of California, Davis and San Diego campuses, she did her PhD at the University of Buffalo. Now a junior scholar transitioning into her first tenure-track job, she is pleased to have the opportunity, as a member of the EDIS Board, to contribute to the profession beyond her campus and to foster interest in Dickinson beyond the academy.

With Cristanne Miller and Jane Donahue Eberwein, Farrar co-edited Dickinson in Her Own Time (Iowa 2016). The collection, subtitled, A Biographical Chronicle of Her Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, and Memoirs by Family, Friends, and Associates, is just that—an assortment of materials presenting a documentary biographical portrait of the poet that complicates some of even the more subtle impressions conveyed by the standard biographies, as well as those in the popular imagination.

Farrar’s Dickinson-related work also includes a chapter on the poet’s use of popular discourses of masculinity in the context of the Civil War, which she presented at the conference, “Emily Dickinson Dwells in China,” co-sponsored by EDIS and the Literary Translation Research Center at Fudan University, in Shanghai in 2014. Also, on an EDIS sponsored Modern Language Association panel, she presented a paper about Lavinia Dickinson’s 1898 typeset manuscript of experimental poems. She recently wrote a book chapter on narrative black poetry during Reconstruction, and she continues her research on the poetry of the Civil War.

In addition to engaging members of the public in the delights of poetry in general, Farrar particularly looks forward to helping the organization grow even more inclusive, to helping the Society to honestly engage in diversity, and reworking identity issues. She frequently avoided telling her students who an author was, so they would not classify the work before they had read it.

The Belle Behind Bars: Teaching Dickinson in Prison

Susan Goldwitz moved from university teaching to the “Changing Lives Through Literature” program in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and from there to various positions teaching incarcerated inmates. Not long ago, at the state prison in Concord, she was teaching a course in poetry and essays, to introduce “new ways of thinking, developing decision-making skills, and reworking identity issues.” She frequently avoided telling her students who an author was, so they would not classify the work before they had read it.

One man began the class sitting in the back row with his arms crossed and an expression I interpreted as, “try to show me this is worth it,” a mixture of defiance and defense. He was large, maybe in his 30s or 40s, black, muscular, and silent. I noticed, though, that he came to every class, and after a few weeks passed, he moved up to a row. When this event occurred, he chose a seat all the way up in the front row.

The poem we discussed was “The Brain – is wider than the Sky – ” (Fr632). The discussion was lively; enough time had passed for the class to be comfortable speaking with me and each other about weighty subjects of self, thought, and God; hands went up without my calling. When we were finished, the silent student in the front row raised his hand for the very first time. “Who wrote this poem?” he demanded. I took a breath, asked for divine assistance, and said that her name was Emily Dickinson and that she lived in the 19th century in Amherst, not far from where we were; she wrote almost two thousand poems, just a handful published during her lifetime, and those often edited without her approval, many about religious ideas, and others about nature; she lived in her father’s house and rarely left it. Whew.

He pushed his chair away, stood up, pointed two fingers on the end of an outstretched arm to the floor in two big swoops and said, “That CHICK is REAL!”

EDIS MLA 2018

“Of Strangers is the Earth the Inn”: Still Life, Scale, and Deep Time in Emily Dickinson

This year’s EDIS session at MLA, “Of Strangers is the Earth the Inn,” will feature a cluster of papers sounding the intertwining motifs of still life, deep time, and scale for reading Dickinson in the shadow of the anthropocene.

Chair: Marta L. Werner, Professor of English, D’Youville College

Presenters:
Isabel Sobral Campos, Assistant Professor of Literature, Dept. of Liberal Studies, Montana Tech
Zachary Tavlin, PhD candidate, Dept. of English, University of Washington
Amy R. Nestor, Assistant Professor of Literature, Dept. of English, Georgetown University – Qatar

Respondent: Keith M. Mikos, Lecturer, Dept. of English, DePaul University

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Respondent: Keith M. Mikos, Lecturer, Dept. of English, DePaul University

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**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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Members are invited to endow a named award. To do so involves a gift of $1000 to the Society.

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**Retouching Mabel**

Jonathan Morse, using an Adobe Photoshop program and Lucis filter, has re-touched the familiar image of the aspiring editor and journalist Mabel Loomis Todd. The filter is used to produce High Dynamic Range effects, increasing contrast and general luminosity. HDR techniques are designed to create effects similar to those experienced by the human iris, which receives considerably more complicated information from the world than a normal camera can simulate.

Compared to the Lovell image, the HDR version shows more of the texture of the dress and the hat, as well as a greater sense of the composure and expressiveness of the face.

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**The Many “Lives” of An Emily Dickinson Year Book**

By Krans Bloeimaand

In a letter dated 3 December, 1894, Mabel Loomis Todd pitched the following idea to E. D. Hardy of Roberts Brothers, Publishers: “how does the idea of an Emily Dickinson Year Book strike you? I talked with Mr. Niles over a year ago about it, and he thought it a fine idea, and seemed to think it would sell largely.” (see Millicent Todd Bingham’s *Ancestors’ Brocades*, p311). Todd envisioned a book “daintily bound for Christmas 1895,” with a text consisting of what she called “365 flashes” or epigrams taken from Emily’s poems. As we all know, fifty-four years passed before Mabel’s idea came to fruition. The *Year Book* was finally published under the imprint of The Hampshire Bookshop, Inc., with a publication date of 15 May, 1948, the sixty-second anniversary of Emily’s death.

With the book’s text edited by Helen Arnold and illustrations drawn by Emily Dickinson’s second cousin, Louise B. Graves, two issues were marketed: a signed, limited edition of 100 copies with a hand-colored circular design in green on the title page, and a regular trade edition that lacked the above-named special features. Both issues contained the same number of illustrations, twelve. Moreover, the book seemingly generated enough interest over the years to warrant its re-publication three more times under different imprints between the years 1976 and 1992.

Of interest to Dickinson bibliophiles is a possible sixth “life” for the *Year Book*, for in my collection is a copy of the second issue with a warm inscription from Helen Arnold to the book’s illustrator, Louise B. Graves. Of singular significance is the fact that the illustration for December used in both issues opposite page 113 and printed on dull paper was augmented in the Graves copy with a different illustration printed on clay-colored paper. This thirteenth illustration incorporated an alternate ED quotation and appears at the end of the December section. Thus, the artist possibly adorned her personal gift copy from Helen Arnold with a drawing that Graves most likely tipped-in. Whether this thirteenth drawing was initially rejected or meant to be used in a later edition remains a mystery.

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A reproduction of the “thirteenth illustration,” included in the *Year Book*, sent from Helen Arnold to Louise B. Graves.