“The Only News I know / Is Bulletins all Day / From Immortality.”
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The Assistant Editor for this issue is Allyson Weglar
How did you first meet Emily Dickinson?

I first met Emily Dickinson in ninth grade English class. Like an exchange student, her presence was brief but magnetic; her language odd yet compelling: a mix of tongue-sing, idiomatic punctuation, and re-arranging ordinary word pairings – phrases that sent a jolt to the brain. I remember puzzling over the imagery in “Because I could not stop for Death” with my classmates, finding new meaning with each reading.

I enjoyed “A Bird came down the Walk” so much, and read it so many times, that I could recite it from memory. It was not until a few years ago, however, that I returned to Dickinson's work in earnest, and not until last year that I decided to read her collected poems in chronological order, as well as several biographies. I met Emily as a teenager, but I did not get to know her until adulthood.

Ferris Jabr is a writer based in Portland, Oregon. He is known in Dickinson circles for his 2014 book “The Natural History of Emily Dickinson,” which examined the archeological explorations of the orchard and conservatory. His work is found regularly in Scientific American, The New York Times Magazine, The New Yorker, Outside, Slate, Foreign Policy, New Scientist, Medium, Aeon, Nautilus, Hakai, The Awl, and McSweeney’s. Mr. Jabr holds an MA in journalism from New York University and a Bachelor of Science degree from Tufts University. This interview took place just as the crocuses were bracing against winter’s last fury and as the Conservatory Restoration Project at the Emily Dickinson Museum was nearing completion.

A Conversation with Ferris Jabr

In your New York Times story, “The Lost Gardens of Emily Dickinson,” you wrote about how science and history have combined to bring ED’s orchard “back to life.” Why do you think it is important that we recreate the natural history of our authors?

Yes, the Emily Dickinson Museum and its archeological collaborations are doing some wonderful work at the Homestead, rebuilding the Dickinson’s greenhouse (where Emily spent many hours tending plants year-round), resurrecting an orchard of apples and pears on the property (similar to the original family orchard Emily called the “Dome” of her personal church), and trying to find remnants of the once vast vegetable and flower gardens. In Emily Dickinson's case, understanding her ardent interest in botany and gardening, as well as the natural history of Amherst—in particular the plants and animals Emily studied in school and encountered on a daily basis (she called them “Nature’s people”)—is essential to understanding who she was as a person and poet.

Does your lens as both a science writer and a biographer allow you to see Dickinson in a different way?

This is precisely the aspect of her life and work that most fascinated me when I read her collected poems last year. The experience of gardening—its toil and responsibilities, its struggle to reconcile the wild and cultivated, its frequent joys and unexpected losses—coupled with observations of nature during frequent walks through the woods, was a near limitless source of inspiration for Dickinson. In her 1,789 known poems, she refers to animals about 700 times and to plants around 600 times. The vast majority of species she names are not exotic creatures from far-flung locales but rather common-place residents of the garden, forest, and household: the squirrel, robin, bumblebee, worm, spider, and bobolink; the rose, daisy, clover, and buttercup. These organisms became her metaphors, her epiphany, her way of understanding life and other people, and the subjects of some of her most beloved poems; think of the robin in “A Bird came down the Walk” or the snake (probably a garter snake) in “A Narrow Fellow in the Grass.” After early adulthood, Dickinson did not venture far from her family’s property. Instead, she was a self-described “Balboas of house and garden.” We need to understand the natural history of Emily Dickinson because so much of her genius was nurtured in nature—in her personal Eden at the Homestead.

What was Emily Dickinson’s relationship with science?

Dickinson definitely had the instincts of a naturalist, especially with regard to botany. She studied botany in school and made an extensive herbarium with more than 420 dried, pressed, artfully arranged, and carefully labeled plant specimens collected and burned. On occasion, she even names plants by genus or species in her poems. One poem in particular, “Whose are the little beds—I asked,” showcases Dickinson’s scientific knowledge. She seeds the stanzas with copious botanical nomenclature in the original Latin: Epigaea repens (a.k.a. a flowering shrub known as trailing arbutus), Leontodon (hawkbit, a dandelion relative), Bartsia (a genus in brommace family), and Anemone and Aster (both large genera of flowering plants). In her poetry, Dickinson also burrows the language of geology, astronomy, and physics.

Some people think Dickinson wants science to get out of the way of her wonderment. What do you think of that?

Dickinson is sometimes perceived as anti-science. Her poem “‘Arcadia’ is her other name” is the classic example. In it, Dickinson bemoans “Science” for interfering with unadulterated adoration of nature. She wants to simply admire the flower and butterfly, but science would dissect, label, and preserve them beneath glass. She wants to gaze in wonder at the starry sky, but science needs to chart it all and name every pinprick of light. She is so “old-fashioned” (i.e. against the progress of science) that she worries she might not make it into Heaven! Unless God forgives her “naughtiness,” and she can’t stay mad at her beloved but spoiled daughter.

Do you ever find Dickinson to be funny?

This poem and others Dickinson wrote on similar topics are suffused with hyperbole and self-aware humor. We know Dickinson does not take this anti-science stance too seriously. After all, she devoted a great deal of time to learning plant taxonomy and preserving specimens. And elsewhere, she recommends “microscopes”—that is, careful examination—over blind faith. Still, one imagines the world of 19th-century scholars could get a bit stuffy and tiresome at times, especially for a secret revolutionary poet. What better antidote than a little comedy?

Do you have a favorite poem, letter, or fragment of Dickinson?

I am particularly fond of “Further in Summer than the Birds.” This poem utterly baffled me the few times I read it. Consider that opening line: “Further in Summer…than the Birds?” And later: “Antiquated at Noon?” What is Dickinson on about? But the more you read it, the more you decipher, and the more beautiful, profound, and compelling the poem becomes. I won’t spill this poetic poem’s core secret—the source of the “spectacular Caitie” arising from the grass. I will only say that it is one of Dickinson’s most mysterious, evocative, and innovative poems, one that resists a complete decoding, urging you to return again and again.

I also love the “Liquid Feet” and “imperial Veins” of the hot air balloons in “You’ve seen Balloons set down hasn’t ye?”; the brilliant metaphor in “A Clock stopped—not the Mantle’s”; the morbidly hilarious image of “A Gast’s minutest fan/Sufficient to obliterate/A Tract of Citizen” in “More Life—went out of style”; and the idea of lightning as a giant yellow fork dropped from some table in the sky.

If there is one thing you want people to know about Emily Dickinson, what is it?

She’s probably not who you think she is. When many people hear the name Emily Dickinson, they think of “Hope is the thing with feathers”—a lovely poem, but one that is a little more maudlin than is typical for Dickinson, and does not properly convey the rebellious character of Dickinson’s poetry or the full range of her linguistic prowess. If Jane Austen is mistakenly perceived by some as the bored spinster turning her marital fantasies into sappy romance novels, then Dickinson is the odd aunt in the attic, scribbling nursery rhymes and cryptic quatrains. I urge anyone curious about Dickinson to abandon all preconceptions and sit down for a proper first meeting—just you and Emily. If a poem seems childish and trivial at first, or too arcane to comprehend, don’t give up; Dickinson demands and rewards persistence. There is always something hidden, something delightful, beautiful, or electrifying waiting to be discovered.

Jabr has also written about Dickinson in Slate, “How Emily Dickinson Grew Her Genius In Her Family’s Backyard,” May 17 2016. He describes the scope of his fascination with the poet’s gradating and attachment to nature generally.

I decided to record every single reference to a living creature of any kind in Dickinson’s poetry. … What I learned is that Dickinson’s single biggest source of inspiration was not “Nature,” that grand abstracted entity supposedly external to human society, but quite simply—and quite literally—her backyard. From childhood until death Dickinson cultivated an intense passion for gardening and observing local wildlife. … She grew up among gardeners in … a patchwork of forest, pastur, and residential areas where it was common for families to own orchards and small working farms. Her mother was renowned in town for her “delicious ripe figs”; her brother and father added fruit trees and handsome flower gardens. What a woman of many interests! …

Citations from “Emily Dickinson and Gardening” on the Emily Dickinson Museum website, and “Emily Dickinson’s Garden,” Bulletin 2.2, 1900.
Emily Dickinson, Death, and the Irish: Musings by Tom Daley

I met Tom Daley in 2010 at EDIS’s Oxford conference when he participated in a roundtable discussion that focused on Dickinson-inspired plays. I and others were mesmerized by the excerpt Daley performed as Tom Kelley from his play Every Broom and Bridget — Emily Dickinson and Her Irish Servants. Since then I have come to appreciate Tom’s talents as a poet, photographer, calligrapher, and teacher in addition to his gifts as a playwright and performer. He leads writing workshops in the Boston area and online for poets and writers working in creative prose. Daley’s poetry has appeared in numerous journals including the Harvard Review, Massachusetts Review, Prairie Schooner, Witness, and Poetry Ireland Review and has earned him the Dana Award in Poetry and the Charles and Reese Fay Wood Prize from the Academy of American Poets. In addition to his play about Dickinson, Tom is the author of In His Ecstasy — The Passion of Gerald Manley Hopkins, which he also performs as a one-man show. In 2015, FutureCycle Press published his first full-length collection of poetry, House You Cannot Reach — Poems in the Voice of My Mother and Other Poems. I am pleased to feature Tom Daley, one of the nicest men I know, in the Poet to Poet series.

When I was a morbid young man drawn to the death-obsessed poetry of Plath, Sexton, and Berryman, it was Emily Dickinson’s own conjuring with death that won my ferocious allegiance. I still shudder when I imagine the winds as they draw “quivering and chill” around the neck and shoulders of the tulle-clad speaker of “Because I could not stop for Death” (Fr479). My eye stretches to unimaginably far fields under the impetus of that curious formula, “Gazing Grain.” And those horse’s heads still rear in my mind, snorting and champing in the direction of forever.

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Even when I am impatient and want to step away, there is something that keeps tugging me back — a coy little wink, an exclamation point that incites a mysterious thrill (“The Smitten Rock that gushes! / The tramped Steel that springs!” [Fr181]), a distillation of observation into some apt aphorism, an image that bridges and muffles the chaos of longing in my meager heart. Dickinson’s poetry is often at the back of my mind (and often in the forefront) when I am leading workshops on poetry writing. I once devised an exercise in which work- shop participants were instructed to use fifteen words I had chosen from “As imperceptibly as Grief” (Fr935) in a poem. I explained the etymology of each word and then asked them to use the words with the original or earlier meanings in mind.

Dickinson ends the poem, “Our Summer made Her light Escape / Into the Beautiful” — I like to think that she knew the origins of “escape,” explained by the Online Etymo- nology Dictionary: “Vulgar Latin *escapare*, literally ‘get out of one’s cape, a pursuer with just one’s cape.’” One witty participant cooked up a poem replete with stock images of dastardly villains from a Western. The etymology of “escape” in- spired the poet to have the hapless maiden who is tied to the railroad track manage, Houdini-like, to wriggle out of her dress, and the dress was all that remained bound with rope for the oncoming train to flatten.

As an amateur producer of poetry perfor- mance extravaganzas (including something called “The Poetry Vaudeville Show”), I decided a number of years ago that I wanted to showcase a panoply of interpretations of Dickinson. I imagined flamenco-infect- ed trappings of a Spanish translation of “I felt a Funeral in my Brain” (Fr340); Tu- van throat-singers whipping up the surf of “Wild Nights — Wild Nights!” (Fr269); a taunting, Yiddish-accented mugging of “What Soft — Cherubic Creatures — Those Gentlewomen are” — (Fr675); a blues harp brazening the howls of “There came a Wind like a Bugle” (Fr1618); and an Afri- canulation rendering those essential oils in “Essential Oils are — wrung” (Fr772) into a “Gift of Screws.” (How disapprov- ed I was, as a working machinist, to learn that someone else had already published a book of poems with that marvelous phrase as the title — I had want- ed it for my own col- lection of poems about unrequited homosor- tic lust in the machine shop?) In the course of doing research for some blue-collar angle for the project, I stum- bled upon Jay Leyda’s and Aille Murray’s studies of the Dickin- son family servants and Miss Emily’s re- lationship with them. Fascinated, I turned my energies towards writing a play on the subject, which became Every Broom and Bridget — Emily Dickinson and Her Irish Servants.

The play’s central character is Tom Kelley, the Irish immigrant who was a groundskeeper (and probably property manager) for the Dickin- sons. He and Dickin- son must have had as close as a platonic relationship as was possible between a Yankee mistress and her servant. Kelley and the Irish cohort who worked for the family would have been considered at best second-class citizens by the “enlightened” Yankees of the day, including Samuel Bowles, who published (in the Springfield Republican) hideous caricatures of the Irish and mock ing accounts of hapless “Paddys” in factories, who, as Kelley did in a fall while working on a roof, lost limbs in horrifying accidents. Dickinson appointed Kelley to be her chief pallbear- er, a snub at proper Amherst society, the equivalent of a contemporary Westchester county socialite arranging for a member of her Laotian floor-sanding crew to be the lead man carrying her coffin to Woodlawn Cemetery.

When she received the news of the grave illness of Judge Otis Lord, presumed by some scholars to be her paramour, Dickin- son collapsed in Kelley’s arms. In a letter to Lord she writes, “Meanwhile, Tom had come, and I ran to his Blue Jacket, and let My heart break there — that was the warm- est place. ‘He will be better. Don’t cry Miss Emily. I could not see you cry.’” (L322).

In the lyrical center of my play, Kel- ley wanders away from a gathering after Dickinson’s funeral and stands outside her house looking up at her bedroom windows, rhapsodizing over their attachments. In places, Kelley is articulating my own rapt attention to and affection for Dickinson and her strange genius: “Just around the corner is your garden where we committed our first confidences . . . There you told me of your squelched yearnings, and I told you of my terrible feeling that I am nothing more than a tenant in the garret of my own heart.” “. . . I think of you now as some well-oiled, prefabricated — cromagnon bird — a corrugator — slugging itself through water tension and slamming itself into air darker than time’s bone. You were a vorative bat, blink- ing out of small caves. A torch fus- ing pollen and horseshair. A marsh drowned in the thaws of April.”

The Emily Dickinson I cherish and am startled by ladges somewhere in between the beguiling quintessential of the character in The Belle of Amherst and the cruelty-obsessed presence conjured by Camille Paglia in her chapter, “Amherst’s Madame De Sade” in Sexual Personae. I grit my teeth at the nineteenth-century “lady” who seems manifest in the lines “Lest I stl’d be old-fashioned / I’ll put a trinket on,” which end “The momes are meeker than they were” (Fr32), but then imagine that Dickinson is making a little dig at social convention. The ache in me bristles at the notion of a “Sequel” in “This World is not Conclusion” (Fr737), but smiles at the wit of the finish of that poem: “Narcotics cannot still the Tooth/ That nibbles at the Soul.” Having studied a little Buddhism, I am intrigued by the way in which Dickinson’s poems often align with what might seem a very Buddhist notion of the ephemerality of experience (“ephemera” derives from Medieval Latin ephemera [febrid] “[fever lasting a day”), as in that muscular finish to “Dare you see a Soul at the ‘White Heat’?” (Fr401):

Refining these impatient Ores
With Hammer, and with Blaze
Until the Designated Light
Repudiate the Forge.

All of these colliding reactions manifested themselves while I was granted the privi- lege of writing in Dickinson’s bedroom for an hour while it was undergoing renova- tions several years ago. Here is the poem, composed in her room, that grew out of those collisions. It is reprinted with the kind permission of Michael Medeiros, editor of the anthology, This is a Mighty Room: Po- etry Written in Emily Dickinson’s Bedroom.

Tom Daley’s poem “Writing in Emily Dickin- son’s Bedroom as It Is Being Restored on the 128th Anniversary of Her Death” appears on the following pages.

Poet to Poet

Photo Credit: Devon Alimbelli

Jonnie Guerra, Series Editor
Writing in Emily Dickinson’s Bedroom as It Is Being Restored on the 128th Anniversary of Her Death

By Tom Daley

Published by permission of Michael Medeiros, editor, This is a Mighty Room: Poetry Written in Emily Dickinson’s Bedroom

i.
Is that your scent, a smoke that coaxed creation from the exhumation of a fire too riffing to flee or leaf out? At the fringe of the renovation, tattered, tottering paper reliquaries still grip their wallpaper paste in a muddy, barely discernible pattern that flags down all your Rhenish vats and your Franklin stoves. Floorboards widen further than the dew barely discernible pattern that flags down your caretaker heart bridled the world and drifted, like so much plaster dust, between the patching cement and the chapters. Here you made your turns, your nut-brown rocking chair, your memories, the leaf blower tending the grass. The latter day beams that shore up your ceiling are snaked through and through corrugated steel tunnels to wire the light that speculates but cannot confirm.

ii.
Leggy ghost, speak to me of spectral amorphous shapes that overlap and echo that amorphous shapes. Here a potpourri—sandalwood? Without sound or movement as the forms pass by. What if we have erased your grace notes of extravagant blasphemies. Here in my remaining half hour, I seek a work that has a similar effect is an untitled ink drawing by Melissa Randall. “Ghost #4” has a cloak of mystery which surrounds the shapes depicted. There is a feeling of terror and the unknown lurking in the northeast corner of Scotland. She remem- bered Sundays being taken to church by her parents and seeing the same slanting light in the poem. There was a sense of darkness, of melancholy, of doom.

The poem became the impetus for an invita- tional art show that Ms. Macdonald and Bill Conger co-curated. Both reviewed slides submitted by other artists and chose six add- itional artists to complete their show. The exhibit included work in various media: painting, drawing, sculpture, collage, and photography. The artists are not illustrating the poem, but rather responding to it visual- ly and emotionally, attempting to create in imagery the mood that Dickinson’s poem conveys. The mood is one of foreboding with an “under-current of affliction” as Macdonald describes in the gallery notes. The notes also address the poem’s con- struction which, despite its appearance of “fragility,” is complex with a toughness about it.

Macdonald’s silverpoint drawing entitled “Ghost #4” has a cloak of mystery which surrounds the shapes depicted. There is a feeling of terror and the unknown lurking within. Macdonald’s drawing is in actu- ality blueberry bushes covered in gauze to protect them from the winter cold. They correspond with the poet’s words “the Soul Despair” and “The Look of Death.” How- ever, they appear to the viewer as ghostly presences, unrecognized shapes that loom up to mystify the viewer.

Macdonald chose silverpoint since it has a “silvery diaphanous quality” which over time will change in color from a cold gray to a “silvery diaphanous quality” which over time will change in color from a cold gray to a warm sepia. The medium is transparent like the subject of the poem, subtle and fleeting, difficult to hold and preserve.

A work that has a similar effect is an untitled ink drawing by Melissa Randall. “Ghost #4” has a cloak of mystery which surrounds the shapes depicted. There is a feeling of terror and the unknown lurking in the northeast corner of Scotland. She remem- bered Sundays being taken to church by her parents and seeing the same slanting light in the poem. There was a sense of darkness, of melancholy, of doom.

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The poem became the impetus for an invita- tional art show that Ms. Macdonald and Bill Conger co-curated. Both reviewed slides submitted by other artists and chose six add- itional artists to complete their show. The exhibit included work in various media: painting, drawing, sculpture, collage, and photography. The artists are not illustrating the poem, but rather responding to it visual- ly and emotionally, attempting to create in imagery the mood that Dickinson’s poem conveys. The mood is one of foreboding with an “under-current of affliction” as Macdonald describes in the gallery notes. The notes also address the poem’s con- struction which, despite its appearance of “fragility,” is complex with a toughness about it.

Macdonald chose silverpoint since it has a “silvery diaphanous quality” which over time will change in color from a cold gray to a warm sepia. The medium is transparent like the subject of the poem, subtle and fleeting, difficult to hold and preserve.

A work that has a similar effect is an untitled ink drawing by Melissa Randall. “Ghost #4” has a cloak of mystery which surrounds the shapes depicted. There is a feeling of terror and the unknown lurking in the northeast corner of Scotland. She remem- bered Sundays being taken to church by her parents and seeing the same slanting light in the poem. There was a sense of darkness, of melancholy, of doom.

The poem became the impetus for an invita-
Creative Appropriation

By Marianne Noble

Last semester, I taught American Literature at Sogang University, in Seoul, Korea, on a Fulbright Fellowship. I loved teaching Korean students, whom I found smart, ambitious, and dedicated. Overall, their serious mindset paid off when we were studying Emerson, Hawthorne, and literature about slavery, but I discovered that it was not the perfect attitude for appreciating Whitman and Dickinson. To improve this part of the course, therefore, I revised the syllabus mid-semester, replacing a midterm exam with a creative assignment. This essay is about our experience with that assignment.

Analytical essays represent the majority of the writing I assign in all of my courses, but they do not tap everything a student brings to the experience of poetry, and they do not bring out the best in every student. In the United States, my upper-level course on Whitman and Dickinson therefore culminates in a creative project of the students’ own choosing. Almost without exception, students’ creative imagination surprises and delights everyone involved. They revel in the freedom to think and invent in their own ways, and to respond to the poetry on their own terms. My Korean students are justly renowned for working very hard. Grades matter tremendously to them, and they feel great anxiety about them. The students at Sogang are justly renowned for working very hard.

Though well-trained in literary interpretation, my Korean students found reading complex literature in English difficult. I was surprised how difficult they found Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Likewise, given that I’m accustomed to students reveling in the freedom and enthusiasm of Whitman, I was surprised when quite a few of my Korean students were troubled by the overt sexuality of Whitman, replicating perhaps the sensibilities of Whitman’s first readers. I had also expected that the poem-like poetry of Dickinson would resonate with their own literary sensibilities, but if it did, they did not report this to me. Instead, they found Dickinson very difficult; she confirmed all of their fears about poetry. Overall, I would say, both poets made them anxious.

I wanted my Korean students to experience literature — and education — with less anxiety. I also wanted them to discover the poets on their own, rather than permitting me to deliver up crucial knowledge nuggets. With Whitman’s work from the previous semester in the forefront of my memory, I charted my plan for a midterm and instead asked them to write a Dickinson poem as Whitman might have written it or vice versa.

Here are some of their poems:

Dickinson’s poem “Why do I love you sir?” as Whitman might have written it, by Eun Shim.

I mind how once my dearest friend my lover turned to me, And how you settled your head on my bare-stript chest And how you asked why I loved you Swiftly arose and spread around me the wisdom that passes all arguments The wind does not ask the grass why he shudders And the lightning does not ask the eye why it blinks And the sunrise does not ask me why I watch And my voice goes after what my reasons cannot reach And with the twirl of my tongue I plunged your heart And answered, as the waves eternally kiss the shores, therefore, then, I love you

Another student, Jackie Simeit, tried to write Dickinson’s “If I can stop one heart from breaking” like Whitman. She did a good job, but we realized together that Whitman would never have written the sentiments in that poem. The closest he would come to easing someone else’s pain might involve becoming it, I thought:

Fast forward four months. Now, I’m teaching Korean students. I’m giving more A’s than I usually do, which my ambitious students are earning through sheer hard work. Grades matter tremendously to them, and they feel great anxiety about them. The students at Sogang are justly renowned for working very hard.

Teaching Dickinson

Marianne Noble, Series Editor

Creative Appropriation

By Marianne Noble

One student photographed sites in Rock Creek Forest, the setting for “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” and then developed them using 1850’s photographic technology.

In this Spring 2016 class, one student, Brittany Jones, invented a creative project that I later came to realize was perfect for my Korean students. Brittany chose poems by Whitman and Dickinson and rewrote them as the other might have written them. First, she rewrote “The Sleepers,” by Dickinson. Then, she wrote “A Bird, came down the Walk,” by Whitman. Here is Brittany describing that component of her project:

As this self-analysis indicates, Brittany came to a keener understanding of Dickinson’s artistry by trying to capture it in another voice. Here are two of the poems Brittany produced:

The Sleepers by Emily Dickinson

I watch them - Sleepers - in the dark While solemnly they play Like Children in their cradles born And in their cradles dream

[. . . ]

The homeward bound and outward bound, The swimmer and the ship Each Beautiful in dreams and sleep, Each find here Heaven’s peace

Hand in hand we pass and wake Each night a different World And though we pass back into Day Let not this World unfar!

A Bird, came down the Walk by Walt Whitman

[. . . ]

Beheld a robin! Stretch’d on the ground, loathing on the grass, I watch as a robin – lonely, arrest’d, needing the earth – lights softly on the ground.

His legs thim’d and reedy, twigs gripping the ground, holding an orb, stumbling, lunging, loving the dirt, He walks away from me, not seeing me though my eyes stroke and embrace him.

He pecks at the dirt, digging his beak into the plush of the earth, and the earth yields to him as the grass yields itself to the curvatures of my arms and stomach and legs. Taking a worm into his beak, he bites it into halves; The worm multiplies, becomes two, doubles itself before dividing, receding into the bird and the earth. The robin, son of two planes, lungs of earth and bosom of sky, washes down the worm and the world with dew softly sipp’d from the grass.

Before hopping, buoying himself over a blind beetle, reaching his thin’d legs over the beetle’s thin’d legs, letting the beetle pass.

The robin, careress of air, inhales the world from the safety of dirt, His bright eyes darken, beaded and keel’d, His brown head ruffling, trembling, quivering, wavering, turning to his own head.

I gaze into his eyes, he knows I am looking at him, knowing him, fondling him.

He knows he has been let out for me and by me, as I am let out for him and by him.

I offer him bread from my lunch, I toss it to him as like an offering, a promise that his world is bountiful and perfect as he is bountiful and perfect.

And the robin, purveyor of breezes, unrolls himself, billing his feathers, letting go the earth, He sails over the dirt and the grass and the beetle and my body loathing, He dives into the arms of an atmosphere that is there only to hold him, hold him.

He rows his wings through waves of light and floats on the surface of the sun, He lists to the edges of my morning, shimmering, silver, stitch’d to my morning.

I stay with him though I cannot see him, Though he swims out of my eyes and steers his body softly home.

Brittany’s creative fusion of the two poets is not only sensitively attuned to both poets, but beautiful in its own right.

I stay with him though I cannot see him, Though he swims out of my eyes and steers his body softly home.

Brittany’s creative fusion of the two poets is not only sensitively attuned to both poets, but beautiful in its own right.

I stay with him though I cannot see him, Though he swims out of my eyes and steers his body softly home.
Teaching Dickinson

I myself have the power
With every atom of my being,
To keep your heart from breaking;
Let the warmth of my hand ease your aches,
Let the whisper of my breath cool your pains;
I shall pick you up like a fainting robin. And keep you in the nest of my heart
A place of tenderness, padded with grass,
Where you will stay, a place to heal;
To feel this love, no act would be in vain.

I suggested that the simile in the sixth line did not sound much like Whitman. (Though the original has never sounded much like Dickinson to me, either.) This poem was not a perfect end-product, but the process of writing this poem revealed as much in its false movements as in its right ones.

One student selected the “marriage of the trapper” section from Section 10 of “Song of Myself.” Her revision captured how Dickinson might have approached this them.

I’m “wife” – after I pass the bank
And join the main in skins
Burdensome beard - luxuriant curls
And now I’m to be his
Master he’s called he lounges soft
While Father sits on a bank
And dumbly smokes with friends around
Thick moccasins to their feet.

Through lashes long I see my steps
My course straight locks down hang
I’m wawing upon my limbs
I’m “wife” – once I hold his hand. (by Wonji Woo)

I encourage readers to try this assignment. Students learn a great deal about the formal methods of both poets, and the project develops a fun class spirit. Readers are welcome to use my assignment sheet, which you can acquire by contacting me at mnoble@american.edu

Marianne Noble teaches US Literature at American University in Washington DC. The editor of the Bulletin series Teaching Dickinson, she is the co-editor of Emily Dickinson and Philosophy (2013), and author of The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature (2000) as well as many articles on 19th-century US authors. Anyone wishing to see the unique and preservation quite seriously. I wanted some aspects of the assignment were stereotypically American. It refuses the hierarchical nature of Korea’s Confucian culture by privileging the student’s interpretation over mine. It values creativity over correctness. It is out of the box, while Korean education is in the box. It individualizes the student’s learning, putting induction before deduction. There’s even something democratic, or egalitarian, about taking creative liberties with iconic poems. All of that seemed fitting for a course in American literature, and it was part of the de-stressing and self-reliant experience I wanted for my Korean students. For three hours a week, they had a cross-cultural experience too.

An Interview with Dr. Cristanne Miller on Emily Dickinson’s Poems: As She Preserved Them

Cristanne Miller

What provoked the creation of this edition? There was a combination of reasons. The first was a kind of frustration with the Johnson and Franklin one-volume reading editions: all of the information I needed was in the variusm, but getting a precise answer to any question required reading through a large amount of detail. I thought it would be good to have a reading edition that provides key information in a relatively simple, clear way. In addition, I was unhappy with not having access to fascicle poems in the order that Dickinson copied them. It has longed seemed to me that we should have an edition of the poems in fascicle order.

It also seems to me that the typical Dickinson poem is not the poem that is now most widely represented in popular imagination and some scholarship. The widespread assumption seems to be that Dickinson wrote primarily on scraps of paper and in very draft-y form, but in fact most of her poems remaining to us are written on clean paper and preserved in a way that suggests she took the process of copying and preservation quite seriously. I wanted to create an edition that would make clear at a glance the poems Dickinson was writing that had no alternatives written onto their pages and those that included alternatives, or were more fluid or draft-like.

At the same time, I agree with most manuscript scholars that Dickinson is very interested in an ongoing process of composition or revision, and it seemed to me important to represent that emphasis on her work in process.

I thought about it, the more it seemed to me that, given the directions of current scholarship, it would be useful and interesting to have a volume in which you could see Dickinson at work, on individual manuscripts and throughout her lifetime – how did she keep her poems? order them? how can we understand her poems in relation to periods of time in her life? My edition attempts to get us closer to what Dickinson was like as a composer of poems and what she hoped or thought about the future of those poems.

Why did you structure the edition the way you did? The fascicles are the single most important work that Dickinson left us. She left us actual booklets of poetry that she took a lot of time to inscribe onto clean stationary and then to bind into booklets. That project of copying, binding, and preserving is quite extraordinary to me. In order to get at how Dickinson herself preserved and handled her work, one needs to begin with the fascicles.

The second group of poems (what I call the poems on folded “Sheets” and Franklin calls “Sets”), following that same logic, are carefully preserved but not bound. These and the fascicles are the two units I wanted to start with in my edition. The section following those contains poems
Dickinson retained in some form for herself, but not systematically copied onto folded sheets of stationery – which I call “Loose Poems.” Some of these are written cleanly, in fair hand, on stationery, and others are written on scraps of wrapping paper, or envelopes, or any other type of paper that was at hand. Because I wanted the edition to be “complete” (that is, to contain what I and other scholars have interpreted to be Dickinson’s complete extant poems), there also needed to be an acknowledgment of poems we have only in transcription and of poems Dickinson circulated to friends but to our knowledge did not retain a copy of for herself.

The poems in my edition are in rough chronological order. 1858-1864 are fascicle poems; in 1864-1865 and in the early 1870s, Dickinson was copying onto folded sheets of stationary. Starting in around 1866, Dickinson also started keeping loose copies of poems (she kept only a few loose copies before this date). Most of the poems she circulated and didn’t keep a copy of were sent in her later years.

I very much hope that my edition fills a gap in existing editions of Dickinson’s poems – not to replace other editions but to add to them. I have found the work of editors and scholars like T. H. Johnson, R. W. Franklin, Martha Nell Smith and Ellen Louise Hart, and Marta Werner to be extremely stimulating and provocative in the best sense, and I’m grateful for every acknowledgment of poems we have only in transcription and of poems Dickinson circulated to friends but to our knowledge did not retain a copy of for herself.

I wanted to show Dickinson at work, copying, preserving, and to some extent (as close as we can get) to composing the poems through a representation of the fascicle orderings, sheets not bound, poems left in loose form, and then the poems that she circulated to people that she did not apparently herself keep a copy of.

The other main difference is that my edition contains information that is usually only available in a variorum, intended primarily for scholarship, and presents it in an accessible way. You could call it a “reading” edition because it does not contain extensive detail, but it’s sort of a cross between the two kinds of editions, and I hope it is useful to casual and to scholarly readers. It is, for example, the only reading edition that gives alternative words that Dickinson wrote on the manuscripts. It is a “reading” edition that actually provides information about whether a poem was circulated, and to whom. This is the only reading edition that really shows Dickinson at work on the poems.

How is your edition different from other editions? Johnson and Franklin constructed three-volume variorums in which they tried to give all the information available to them about manuscripts: how many are extant, how to locate them, how they differ from each other, etc. This is far more information than my edition contains. Their reading editions, however, simply present one version of each poem with no commentary about whether it is an early or late version, whether Dickinson mailed it, whether it is part of a fascicle, etc., and the organization is chronological.

For example, Open Me Carefully reproduces Dickinson’s correspondence with her sister-in-law and perhaps lover, Susan Dickinson. That’s a very particular focus on a subset of Dickinson’s writing that makes a particular kind of argument about ways that poems coincide with or overlap with the function of letters. That volume has a completely different kind of focus than mine. Another example is Merta’s A Poet’s Life, I think one of the finest edition of Dickinson’s manuscripts – the poems she wrote or copied onto envelopes. These are examples of editions that have different intentions than mine in relation to the poems.

Finally, while other editions contain various annotations, mine attempts to give brief notes on Dickinson’s reading and possible biographical or historical contexts for the poems. It provides no notes on where manuscripts are located, and very few about possible relationships among poems or between poems and letters, but it is the only “complete” reading edition that provides annotation. My notes let you see, for example, how much of Dickinson’s verse alludes to biblical passages or stories.

How does this edition come out of your own work on Dickinson? Over the last decade, I have spent a lot of time thinking about the extent to which other poets in the 19th century, and especially poets whose work Dickinson would have known, used the same kind of metrical deviation that Dickinson did. It became clear to me that research for Reading in Time that the 1840s-1850s was a period of extraordinary experimentation with poetic forms and rhythms. In some ways, Dickinson’s experiments with poetic form and meter were a part of what interested many poets of her time – she and Whitman weren’t alone in pushing the boundaries of poetic form. They just pushed them farther, and more consistently, than other poets.

I wanted to make clear to readers what’s characteristic of Dickinson and what isn’t. This led me to other kinds of questions, such as “how many poems does Dickinson circulate?” and “do most of her poemsтекстовыми контекстами?” Then, once I had a contract to go forward with my edition, I continued to do research, especially on the annotations. Some of that research came out of the kinds of exploration I had been doing on what Dickinson was reading during her lifetime – her cultural context in the 19th century – but I also started taking a different kind of notes on Dickinson criticism and other nineteenth-century poems.

Do you think a common reader should own only your edition? I wouldn’t say they should only own my edition, but I think someone with my edition only would find it adequate. My edition gives all of the poems and lots of information about them. If one regards various presentations of a poem as being essentially one poem rather than lots of different poems, then my edition represents each poem in at least one form.

What are the deficiencies of your edition? They are not deficiencies but rather where I placed my focus. I didn’t want something overwhelmingly scholarly but instead something that would be useful to general readers. If you want scholarship, my edition is less useful than Franklin’s, for example.

What is left out of your edition, and is there anything you would add in an expanded edition? One regret that I have is that I wish I had included a bibliography of the scholarship that was useful to me in annotating the poems. There are also two tiny errors to correct.

It seems extremely unlikely to me that I would ever do another edition of Dickinson’s poems. This one does basically what I wanted it to do. Of course, it’s altogether possible that new information might be found that would change my opinion.

Do you think this edition will alter scholarship? I hope very much that it will provoke people to ask new questions and pursue new directions of scholarship.
Morgan Library Exhibition: “I’m Nobody! Who are You? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson”

Reviewed by Ivy Schweitzer


Nothing confirms the visual nature of manuscripts— or poems as aesthetic objects—like viewing them framed on a wall with accompanying commentary in a show at a prestigious museum. This is one of the major goals of the exhibition, “I’m Nobody! Who are You? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson,” on display at the Morgan Library and Museum from January 20 through May 28, 2017. Carefully chosen and beautifully curated, this set of "objects" not only reinforces the importance of consulting Dickinson’s manuscripts for a fuller and more accurate experience of her achievements, but immerses us in the complex layers of connections.

Created around a small group of Dickinson's manuscripts in the Morgan's holdings, but drawing on the major collections at Amherst College, Houghton Library at Harvard, the Boston Public Library, New York Public Library and the Emily Dickinson Museum, the exhibition challenges several myths that continue to distort Dickinson's biography and history. As Colin Bailey, Director of the Morgan Library and Museum, notes in his "Foreword," both show and publication "contextualize" and "trace the development of Dickinson’s career as writer. In doing so, they challenge the persistent beliefs that Dickinson was morbidity isolated by situating her firmly in her historical moment, and that she did not evolve as a writer by showing drafts alongside more finished work. The exhibition manages to be an excellent introduction to Dickinson’s life and work while also offering insights for scholars and aficionados.

The exhibition catalogue, sold in a paper version but also available as a free download, is aptly named The Networked Recluse: The Connected World of Emily Dickinson. This title alludes to and builds on the scholarship presented in the Special Issue of The Emily Dickinson Journal, v23, Fall 2014, which connects the poet, long considered detached from the world, "to an array of nineteenth-century information networks," as well as reflects on the implications of emerging digital networking methodologies for studying Dickinson (Ellia Richards and Alexandra Sociardis, "Editorial Note"). Mike Kelly, head of Archives and Special Collections at Amherst College, one of the architects of the exhibition and author of the catalogue’s "Introduction," notes the revolutionary effect of the accessibility of digital surrogates on Dickinson scholarship. It has engendered a fruitful new set of approaches to Dickinson's work that emphasizes the materiality and performativity of her texts, as well as the salience of manuscripts in the ongoing process of "unediting" Dickinson's work. This process unsettles the very borders between poem, letter, fragment, envelope poem, draft and finished work (if such a thing exists in Dickinson's canon). But Kelly also cautions against "the limits of the digital" and offers the exhibition as a reminder that "scale" is often distorted in digital representations, and "that these pieces bear many marks of their journey," which disclose valuable details in the unfolding story of Dickinson's lived networks.

Kelly reinforces the revisory approach of the exhibit and catalogue by calling attention to the four-page facsimile of a poem titled "Reminiscence" (“There came a day – at Summer’s full –”) included as the frontispiece to Poems: Second Series, published in the fall of 1891 by Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson. These first well-meaning editors explain in their prefatory note that this poem illustrates Dickinson's handwriting at a transitional period, but they could not have been unaware of how this poem's theme, emphasized by their inventing title, highlighted Dickinson's mythic repudiation of the world. We now know that as the physical borders of Dickinson's world contracted in the 1860's, she became even more heavily connected to an extensive, vital and prestigious web of correspondents, visitors, and cultural, national, global, even cosmic events. The paradox of a "networked recluse" asks us to rethink remission as strategic withdrawal and necessary protection.

But there was more at stake in the publication of this manuscript, according to Carolyn Vega, Morgan Library’s Assistant Curator of Literary and Historical Manuscripts. In the next essay in the catalogue, Vega points out that Milette Todd Higginham, Mabel Todd’s daughter, explained in 1945 that the facsimile served to illustrate "mistakes" in a version of the poem published in Scribner’s Magazine in 1890 in order to bolster the "correctness" of her mother’s version printed in Poems. The story is even more complex, Vega continues, because different editors were working from different versions of this poem, driving her to affirm "the huge importance of examining the work in manuscript." It is also possible that Todd and Higginson included the manuscript to illustrate the generally unorthodox and "crude" state of Dickinson’s canon, thus justifying their meddling with the texts. Included in the exhibition is a letter Higginson wrote to Todd on June 11, 1890, mentioning a letter passed on to him by the publisher Thorn as Niles from Mr. Baxter, who opined: "There is hardly one of these poems which does not bear marks of unusual and remarkable talent; there is hardly one of them which is not marked by an extraordinary crudity of workmanship." In light of this criticism, Higginson asks Todd to further "revise" some of the poems.

Higginson's letter appears in the extensive "Checklist of the Exhibition" that follows Vega's essay. It is divided into five categories organized chronologically, and includes helpful transcriptions of letters and commentary. While all the sections are well done, and include a wide variety of contextual materials, carefully placed, with well-chosen accompanying poems, I found section five, "Lifetime Publications," the most visually dazzling and insightful. Viewing a huge page of closely printed newspaper in which even a six stanza poem like "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass" is almost entirely obscured, next to the poem's manuscript version of large looping letters and fertile open spaces emphasizes the enormous differences in scale between 19th century print publication and Dickinson's self-publication in letters and fascicles. The curators include several different versions of the poem as well as the letter Dickinson wrote complaining to Higginson about how the poem was revised without her consent. Likewise, the section on Posthumous Publications and Legacy has important examples of Todd's initial typescripts on an early type-writer that had neither lower case letters nor punctuation.

Following the Checklist is the lead essay by co-curator/editor Marta Werner, which represents a significant expansion of her well-known, groundbreaking approach to Dickinson’s later works and envelope poems, an appreciation by poet Richard Wilbur from a volume that appeared in 1960. Werner’s interview with her teacher and noted scholar and poet Susan Howe, and finally a "Textual Preface" in which Werner explains her theory and practice of transcription, followed by a note on the transcriptions and the transcription of manuscripts in the exhibit.

Werner’s lead essay, “Emily Dickinson: Manuscripts, Maps, and a Poetics of Cartography,” represents a new generation of Dickinson scholarship, one based solely on the manuscripts rather than printed texts, and focusing on scale and spatialization through mapping. We come to understand that the turn to manuscripts and materiality, ironically facilitated by the virtualization of digital surrogates, is part of a spatial turn. The carefully conceived exhibit embodies this insight by including as its last "object", an 1873 map of the town of Amherst, enlarged to fill the entire right wall of the entrance to the show. Thus, we literally begin and complete the exhibit by entering a map of Dickinson's town. (Several visitors complained to me that they wanted a little arrow on the map pointing out the Home- stead; having just visited there with my class, I could find it, but think now that the searching and not knowing are part of the experience.)

Abby Wood Bliss (1830–1915), letter to Abiah Root, signed and dated Amherst [Massachusetts], March 29, 1850. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, 2009.002.

All information about images comes from the catalog of the exhibit.

Orra White Hitchcock (1796–1863), Amherst College in 1821 ink and watercolor on paper, ca. 1845. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Edward and Orra White Hitchcock Papers, MA.00027.
And indeed, not knowing where we are is a key part of Werner’s new “poetics of cartography.” In this ambitious project, Werner reimagines Dickinson’s writings in spatial terms as a “new atlas” in which “the legend is missing, not rays of sunlight, but rays of questions.” Drawing from recent theories of mapping as dynamic and orienting, Werner also includes the cartography of Dickinson’s own day, illustrated by a gorgeous reproduction of the hand-colored frontispiece to Edward Hitchcock’s The Religion of Geology, which fittingly shows a volcanic eruption.

In order to conceptualize and visualize a Dickinson manuscript or “pagescape,” Werner proposes that we think of it as a “new deep map,” which is always in process, is multi-layered and three dimensional, entailing “the inscription of a subjectivity that shapes the subjectivity and circulates around it.” With an exquisite attention to shifting borders, scale, space and time, she argues for abandoning the conventional terms we use to label manuscripts, such as “rough draft” and “fair copy,” because “they do not fully reflect the varied textual conditions of Dickinson’s manuscripts.” In order to more accurately map the shifting borders between letters and poems, Werner divides Dickinson’s writing into six provisional stages and, given her career-long work with the later writings, shifts the emphasis from the Civil War years of “white heat” to the last years of elegiac poems and monumental letters.

DICKINSON MANUSCRIPT OR “PAGESCAPE”

In their ideas of what should be represented, the two authorized male editors have failed to account for or represent. Dickinson is a poet of terrifying “excess” and “that’s what her poetry is,” according to Werner. “The burden of this interview, titled “Transcription and Transgression,” is not only to promulgate the ideas of the teacher who set Werner on her scholarly path, but to tackle the perennial problem of transcription in Dickinson studies from the most experienced of readers. Both Werner and Howe agree that it is a topic that cannot be dismissed: “There’s always something about the transcript — and something like the exile from Eden — ‘But the transcript is fallen. It is always fallen!‘” It must be done. Werner spices a solution in the Cornell editions of Yeats and the Garland Shelley where it “wasn’t one male editor constructing the final version of a poet but groups of editors collaborating, perhaps even differing in their ideas of what should be represented and how.” She labels the transcripts she includes in the catalogue “thin maps” because “they can only ever partially capture something of the poem’s existence in suspension,” and approaches them as a form of translation, trying “to harness print technology against itself.”

Despite its thematic relevance, if the inclusion of Wilbur’s essay was driven by the desire to have more sympathetic male voices in the mix, the influential male editors of Dickinson’s work, Thomas Johnson and Ralph Franklin, though acknowledged and thanked, come in for a bit of a (deserved) burying in Werner’s interview with Susan Howe, whose unusual “acous-tic” approach to Dickinson paved the way to a new vision of the manuscript “pagescape” as visual objects and objects of art. While Howe acknowledges the crucial importance of Franklin’s publication of the manuscripts and Johnson’s retention of dashes and capital letters, she claims Dickinson as a poet of terrifying “excess” and “that’s what her two authorized male editors have failed to account for or represent. Dickinson is a poet of excess, a boundary-crosser. Often the scholarly apparatus of these editions functions like a net to trap her. Of course she who refused title and number ultimately escapes all nets.”

The burden of this interview, titled “Transcription and Transgression,” is not only to promulgate the ideas of the teacher who set Werner on her scholarly path, but to tackle the perennial problem of transcription in Dickinson studies from the most experienced of readers. Both Werner and Howe agree that it is a topic that cannot be dismissed: “There’s always something about the transcript — and something like the exile from Eden — ‘But the transcript is fallen. It is always fallen!‘” It must be done. Werner spices a solution in the Cornell editions of Yeats and the Garland Shelley where it “wasn’t one male editor constructing the final version of a poet but groups of editors collaborating, perhaps even differing in their ideas of what should be represented and how.” She labels the transcripts she includes in the catalogue “thin maps” because “they can only ever partially capture something of the poem’s existence in suspension,” and approaches them as a form of translation, trying “to harness print technology against itself.”

And so we arrive at a new plate, created in part by feminist, materialist and queer approaches to Dickinson and by digital technology, which is always collaborative, processional, performative and incomplete. It is not coincidental that Howe concludes her encomium of Dickinson by calling her the ultimate “nasty woman.” We are finally getting a Dickinson worthy of that compliment.

**Program for an Organ Concert by Howard Parish**, June 1873, with notes by Emily Dickinson. Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, Emily Dickinson Collection, AC868.

**Special thanks to Book Review editor Renée Bergland for help in arranging this review.**
young wearer has the entire text of the poem printed on the right side of her back, while another has the first stanza on the inside of her right arm.

Other poems are tattooed too. One young woman has the two stanzas of “Tell All the Truth” (Fr1263) on her upper thigh. Another has “I Dwell in Possibility” (Fr166) tattooed on her lower back, a rainbow and bird accompanying the letters. A third uses the lines “Unable am I to die / For Love is Immortality” (Fr951) on her left upper back, memorializing Corey, whose name appears beside the poem and is joined by flowers and a bird holding a rose in its beak.

Although many Dickinson poems are used, by far the most popular choice is “Hope is the thing with feathers” (Fr314). The words are printed or written in script with various designs, such as small birds, an owl on a branch, a feather, or a quill. Some wearers choose the entire text of the poem, while others only use the first two lines. This particular poem’s popularity stems from the fact that it is for many a source of strength and courage, a reminder that no matter how difficult life can be, it will get better. Whether there has been a major trauma in one’s life, an illness, or a lifestyle change, the poem seems to help and heal. One young woman overcame breast cancer, making this poem especially “speak volumes” to her. Others have dealt with the loss of loved ones, rejection, or loneliness.

As you can see, Dickinson is many things to different people, and this meaning extends even to art forms such as tattoos.

Despite the fact that we envision the poet from so many different perspectives, we can all agree that she is a significant resource for all of us. Whether we read her poems in a printed text or on someone’s skin, Emily Dickinson continues to inspire, to provoke, to challenge, and to heal.

Maryanne Garbowisky edits the “Visualizing Dickinson” series for the Bulletin, and contributes articles on a wide range of topics.

### Reviews of Publications

**Neighbors and Warriors: New Thinking About Birds and Bees**

Jeff Karnicky

*Scarlet Experiment: Birds and Humans in America*

University of Nebraska Press 2016, 221pp.

Ursula K. Heise

*Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meaning of Endangered Species*


Branka Arsić

*Bird Relics: Grief and Vitalism in Thoreau*


James Lentferstey, ed.

*If Bees are Few: A Hive of Bee Poems*


Carolyn Merchant

*Spare the Birds: George Bird Grinnell and the First Audubon Society*

Yale University Press, 320 pp.

Reviewed by Renée Bergland

Readers averse to the lady-like Dickinson sometimes wince at the bird poems. But if Dickinson is lady-like, then her bird poems shows that ladies can be sharp, clear, and ruthless - surgically precise. The ornithological Dickinson is not romantic. She is less akin to John Keats, with his waking dream of the nightingale, and more akin to the avian assassin/artist John James Audubon, whose art was predicated on collection and dissection.

Jeff Karnicky’s *Scarlet Experiment: Birds and Humans in America* takes its title from “Split the Lark,” the most explicitly surgical of Dickinson’s bird poems. Kar- nicky’s book is a direct response to Chris- topher Cokin’s *Hope is the Thing with Feathers*, published in 2000. Karnicky begins by remarking, “I am not convinced that hope is the thing with feathers, or that the things with feathers have much hope if they need to depend on human benevolence. Rather, I take my inspiration for this book about birds and humans from another Dickinson poem, not about hope and souls, but about doubt and blood.” The book that follows is a remarkable syn- thesis of environmental studies, ornithology, and literary criticism, composed in the key of profound and bracing skepticism.

Like Cokin, Karnicky organizes his book into chapters that focus on bird species. Cokin poignantly mourned the ex- tinct Carolina Parakeet, Heath Hen, Pas- senger Pigeon, Labrador Duck and Great Auk. In contrast, Karnicky gives us the species we live with today: Blue Jay, Eu- ropean Starling, Red Knot, Canada Goose, and Titmuse. This is an interesting move – Karnicky points out that the vanished birds tend to inspire sentimental nostalgia for most of us though we have never seen them, but the live ones, who commonly flock our feeders, soil our windshields and walkways, and crash our jetliners, tend to inspire less sentimental feelings. We mourn the Great Auk and curse the Can- ada Goose.

*Scarlet Experiment* is not merely a work of ornithology or environmental studies with a Dickinsonian title. It is also a book about Emily Dickinson. The book offers focused readings of Dickinson’s poetry as it engages with a broad range of literature and critical theory. The first chapter begins with Karnicky’s “strong feeling of histor- ical continuity” with Dickinson when he glimpses a blue jay on the grounds of the Dickinson Museum in Amherst. The blue jay chapter that follows discusses Dickin- son, Thoreau, Audubon, Formato, and De- Lillo, alongside philosophers from Fried- rich Nietzsche to Donald Griffin and many ornithologists, including the 29 scientists who co-authored a 2004 paper on “The Avian Brain.”

The central question of *Scarlet Experiment* comes from Donald Griffin, a cognitive ethologist who focuses on questions about nonhuman conscious awareness. Karnicky’s goal is to map out how human perceptions of birds “have altered in the past two hundred years in ways that lead to a rethinking of human-animal relations.” Although human-animal relations may seem impossibly vast, the book succeeds by focusing on a few bird species. It is lucid, intelligent, provocative, and elegantly succinct (clocking in at 176 pages). And it also opens up many avenues of inquiry.

Some readers will turn to Karnicky for a Dickinson-inflected response to the hu-
Thinking Dickinson
By George Monteiro

It’s time to say things.
Dickinson often built better than she knew or, at the least, other than she knew if we are to believe the academics, the poets, the feminists, the code-breakers, etc. and so on.
Often her difficulty—or her difficulty in poems—lies less in achievement than in flat-out distraction of the poet’s attention or the whim of just swiping away at a last line or a slanted verse.
Often her lifeline was that of Amherst gossip nothing more or less.
At her best, though she fired up her lexicon to make those lines that take the top of your head off.

March 29, 1999

Vivian R. Pollak

Reviewed by Jennifer Leader

At this point, no one needs to be reminded that many of our institutions of higher learning have abandoned humanistic understandings of education in favor of a business-minded embrace of data-driven analysis and scientific positivism. While the study of Arts and Letters has suffered by unconscious assimilation of these values, feminist philosophers such as Sandra Harding, Jane Flax and Donna Haraway gave us vital insight into neighboring nineteenth-century consciousness, living and dead, human and otherwise.

Our Emily Dickinsons: American Women Poets and the Intimacies of Difference
Vivian Pollak’s new book, Our Emily Dickinsons: American Women Poets and the Intimacies of Difference, offers one approach towards studying poetry in a way that incorporates these collective and relational ways of knowing. At the heart of her “experimental, collective psychohistory,” as she calls it, is the notion that poets are influenced not only by the traditions they inherit, but also by their own biographical circumstances and proclivities that highlight for them some aspects of their literary precursors’ lives and poetry while blinding them to other aspects. Taking the relationship between Dickinson and Helen Hunt Jackson as her starting point, Pollak carefully arranges and examines poems, letters, journals, and other documents connected to Dickinson, Jackson, Mabel Loomis Todd, Marianne Moore, Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, and Elizabeth Bishop so as to revivify their intimate reflections and conversations. She depicts these poets as dynamic, moving targets who, in their ongoing appraisals of Dickinson, created “fractured self-portraits” that “affirmed particular versions of themselves.” In particular, Pollak contends, there are two powerful factors that especially fostered the poets’ impulses to create Dickinson in their own images: first, the ambiguity that is inherent to Dickinson’s artistry (and especially insofar as her ambition or intimate relationships are concerned), and second, the slow and incremental release of Dickinson’s poetry and letters, which Pollak traces from Higginson and Todd’s 1890 edition of Poems, through Todd’s 1931 edition of the Letters, and finally to John Son’s 1955 edition. Along the way, Pollak finds certain recurring and thematic tenets in the poets’ own lives that further complicate their reception of Dickinson; these include the poets’ varying resistances to or affirmations of the relations between a woman poet’s life and her art and the poets’ relations to their own mothers, be they biological or literary.

Arranged chronologically, Pollak’s first two chapters depict the way Dickinson’s contemporaries responded to her life and her work. Chapter one delineates the fascinating triangulation of relationships between Dickinson, Helen Hunt Jackson and Thomas Wentworth Higginson and illuminates the two women’s conflicting values concerning the nature of artistic success. One sympathizes with the frustrated Jackson in Pollak’s telling—she seems to have been singularly prescient in her insight that she was reading not just Emily Dickinson, but Emily Dickinson. Chapter two lays out the timeline of the War Between the Houses, showing how “Dickinson’s death created imperfect reader-allies” (72). Pollak’s sympathetic Mable Loomis Todd is “a literary woman in crisis” whose own frustrations with the feminists, the code-breakers, etc. and so on.

Chapter three maps Marianne Moore’s growing embrace of Dickinson from her first reading of the poet while a student at Bryn Mawr to her review of the 1931 Letters. Pollak reconstructs the inter-relations of Moore, Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes and, through Todd’s editing, Dickinson emerges as a highly self-conscious and crafted poet.

Chapter four and five Pollak reconstructs the inter-relations of Moore, Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes and, through Todd’s editing, Dickinson in relation to her own powerful mother figure, and that she works to normalize Dickinson as a fellow “resilient” single artist for whom separateness from hetero-normality is not a problem. In chapters four and five Pollak reconstructs the inter-relations of Moore, Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes and, through Todd’s editing, Dickinson in relation to her own powerful mother figure, and that she works to normalize Dickinson as a fellow “resilient” single artist for whom separateness from hetero-normality is not a problem.
Dickinson’s Letters to Doctor and Mrs. Josiah Gilbert Holland and Rebecca Patterson’s The Riddle of Emily Dickinson. According to Pollak, Bishop disliked Dickinson’s vul-
nerable expressions of intimacy in the letters and resisted Patterson’s exposé style that
trained attention on the poet rather than her work. Pollak makes a sensitive argument here for “Bishop’s aversion to gender criticism and her stereo-
typing.” “She deeply con-
flicted response to the emergence of a public discourse of queerness in her time,” and
her “internalized homophobia” (212, 235). Yet she finds that “for both poets, writing
becomes a partial “solution to the problem of love’s migration” (256).

Amidst what must have been an enormous challenge to connect the dots between the
manced, push-pull moments of these poets’ intimate responses to Dickinson and each
other, Pollak freely admits that Dickinson’s “multifaceted achievement exceeds any
critic’s ability to define it . . . . Thus, my Emily Dickinson is both singular and represen-
tative, a person and a symbol” (265). Even if a reader may quibble over an interpretation
of a particular poem or letter, one gets the sense that Pollak is inviting us to a timely
new stance towards scholarship in which we are more willing to think out loud about
our own partialities and personal inclinations towards our subject, both out of humility
and as a way to foreground the role our relationship to a poet always affects our inter-
pretations.

In his book Culture Care: Reconnecting with Beauty for Our Common Life, internation-
ally acclaimed artist Makoto Fujimura asserts that if we can find ways of linking artistic
creativity to a hospitable generosity that brings others into relation with that art, we will
promote an environment of human flourishing in place of culture wars. Since we are
presently threatened with the loss of federal funding for the N.E.A. and other non-profit
cultural organizations, now might be a good moment to enjoy Pollak’s text and then to
begin to imagine how we might continue to invite others into our literary conversations,
advancing relational ways of knowing beyond the merely data-driven.

Jennifer Leader is Professor of English at Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut, CA. Her book
Knowing, Seeing, Being: Jonathan Edwards, Emily Dickinson, Marianne Moore, and the Amer-
ican Typological Tradition, was published last year by the University of Massachusetts Press.

Noted with Pleasure

From Elisa New’s New England Beyond Criticism: In Defense of America’s First Liter-
ature (Blackwell 2014):

So much wind blows through Dickinson’s work, it is as though the whole oeuvre is
unsettled by it. Ever turning, ever troping, this wind stands in Dickinson’s work for the
force poems can discharge, the force true Spirit fills with breath. These skies liberate
nature

The Value of Emily Dickinson is that it offers all those who
study, teach, and read Dickinson new insight into this great American poet and
presents a wonderful model for engaging with the complexities and difficulties that
accompany any investigation of her life and writings.

For those unlucky enough not to pos-
sess a copy of Jay Leyda’s The Years
and Hours of Emily Dickinson (1960),
hope is offered by the publication of new
affordable scholarship that supplements
and becomes in various ways a substitute
for or alternative to his important vol-
ume. Dickinson in Her Own Time makes a
significant and invaluable contribution to
the documentation of Dickinson’s life
and afterlife by providing new and dif-
finnery

Loeffelholz has written one of the
best introductions to Emily Dickinson
currently available. She offers readers a
clear, concise, and eloquent ex-
ploration of why Dickinson is so highly
valued as a writer, while at the same
time making accessible important contextu-
lar issues that are essential for understanding this poet. Importantly, readers are also in-
 reintroduced to many recent controversies
in Dickinson scholarship, including ongo-
ing debates about how and if her manus-
script poems can be translated into print.
The central power of Loeffelholz’s book
is her argument for and demonstration of
the benefits and importance of viewing
the poems as “sounded verbal” objects,
deserving of a form of “close and careful
reading that is attentive to the inextrica-
able connections between their rhythm,
rhyme, assonance, and alliteration, and
their language, imagery, and ideas (10).

While appreciating why many scholars
and readers place such value in Dickin-
son’s manuscripts, and acknowledging the
importance of what they reveal about her
practice as a poet, Loeffelholz argues that
these visual artefacts should not be
prioritized over and above the rhymed
and metered poems. What is to Loeffel-
holz’s great credit is that she deals with
these and other debates within Dickinson
criticism in such an even-handed way,

Mary Loeffelholz

The Riddle of Emily Dickinson

Loeffelholz engages with the poems and
their manuscript forms to underscore
Dickinson’s “changing conception of her poetic project over time,” her “evolving,
ever-revised aesthetic commitments,” and
her shifting attitudes towards her own
vocation and to questions of recognition
(33, 35). Throughout the book, Loeffel-
holz draws “on historical, cultural, and
biographical contexts,” but she “seeks
interpreting useful” for an understand-
ing of Dickinson’s life and work as a poet
(10).

In each chapter, we see evidence of
Dickinson’s relationship to a range of
aspects of her nineteenth-century
American culture and how these shape her
representations of love, gender, sexuality,
nationality, transnationality, war, faith, and
doubt. For example, Loeffelholz foregrounds the idea
that “Dickinson’s liberties with poetic form
and style assert in a different aesthetic and
political register her inalienable individual
right to craft discourse, difficulty, and
rarity out of common American materials” (85).
Although making provocative connections
between Dickinson’s attentiveness to literary
myth-making and self-fashioning, and
her concern about the life and afterlife
of her writing, Loeffelholz is also alert to,
and takes delight in, the indeterminacy
of Dickinson’s poetry; she admits “how
difficult it is to tolerate the uncertainty
in which [so many of Dickinson’s texts] leave us about their biographical referents,” yet
acknowledges that it is the complexity of these texts that makes them interpretively rich, “potentially
boundless space”(38) for readers.

The value of The Value of Emily
Dickinson is that it offers all those who

For which the inquirers in these
Although there is much here to demon-
strate Dickinson’s sociability, particular-
ly as a correspondent, it is also evident
that she was able to maintain her distance from society into a restricted and protective
familial circle generated much curiosity and speculation among those who knew her.
Yet we also see her contemporaries emphasizing her seclusion as “the normal blossoming of
a nature introspective to a high degree, whose best thought could not exist in pre-
tence” (xvi). A major contribution of this collection is that it helps readers under-
stand the trajectory of Dickinson’s post-
mature reception. We see the ways in
which criticism that emphasizes her fail-
ure to adhere to poetic standards of meter
and rhyme, and to follow grammatical
rules, becomes slowly eclipsed by praise
for her as an original, innovative, and ex-
perimental writer associated with power-
ful examinations of the natural world and
provocative explorations of metaphysical
issues. This excellent volume challenges
an earlier tendency to position Dickinson
as a proto-modernist poet by underlining
her position as a nineteenth-century writ-
er whose life, works, and reception were
shaped by the changing literary and aesth-
etic values of the nineteenth and twen-
tieth centuries.

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and American Literature at the University
of Portsmouth. He is the author of Emily
Dickinson: The Shakespeare and of the forth-
coming “Dickinson and her British Con-
temporaries.”

May 2017
**Dickinson in Fiction**

From Sublime to Ridiculous

Max Porter

_Grief is the Thing with Feathers_. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2016.

Amada Flower


Shannon Yarbrough

Emily Dickinson: Mad Scientist. Amazon Digital Services.

Reviewed by Annette Brink-Johnson

Ma’s Poetic’s tyrannical raw debut novella _Grief is the Thing with Feathers_ locates itself firmly within the Dickinson tradition with its title, but quickly moves beyond allusion to literary predecessors to become a sublime interrogation of the intertwined nature of art and grief. Although this brilliant novel takes its title from Dickinson, Porter changes “hope” to “grief.” He opens with a similarly altered epigraph from Dickinson:

That Love is all there is. Is all we know of Love; It is enough, the freight should be Proportioned to the groove.

The verse is laid out on the page, with the words “Love,” “Freight,” and “groove,” scratched out and replaced by the word “crown” in a child’s scrawl. This epigraph serves to introduce the central conceit of the novel: A scholar of Ted Hughes struggles to complete his book _Ted Hughes’ Crow_ on the Couch: _A Wild Analysis_ after his wife dies, leaving him to raise his two boys alone. A spectral Crow enters the book as a father-monster hybrid, a clannish trickster who is by turns wise and feral. Crow is the alter ego of a grieving husband and embattled father, the kind of coping mechanism that could only be imagined by someone who has internalized a poetic tradition.

Even though the book begins with a title drawn from Dickinson’s poetry and an epigraph from Dickinson, the specter haunting this book is undeniably closer to Ted Hughes than to life’s mysteries. And Faber, the publishers of _Grief is the Thing with Feathers_, also published Ted Hughes’ edition of Dickinson in 1968, followed by Hughes’ own _Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow_ in 1970. Hughes’ Crow was written in the three years after Sylvia Plath’s death. Here, Porter brings to the forefront the sense of loss that infuses Hughes’ work from that period. But since Hughes himself was immersed in Dickinson, her work also structures this post-modern novel.

_Grief is the Thing with Feathers_ is a very British book. The boys miss their “mum,” they vacation in the Chilterns, and are given “lasagne” by well-meaning friends. Beyond these small details, the book embraces a particularly English version of a European, post-modern aesthetic. In a touching description of grief immediately after the funeral, Buddha says:

I felt it would be years before the knotted-string dream of other people’s performances of woe for my dead wife would thin enough for me to see any black space again, and of course—needless to say—thoughts of this kind made me feel guilty. But, I thought, in support of myself, everything has changed, and she is gone and I can think what I like. She would approve, because we were always over-analytical, cynical, probably disloyal, puzzled. Dinner party post-mortem bitches with kind intentions. Hypocrites. Friends. (5)

This emotional embrace of gently ironic urbanity follows in the tradition of Auden and Larkin. In sharp contrast, the novel highlights the interplay of American history with poetry, the eroticism with galvanism, the tender-hearted Dickinson builds a machine so that she can resurrect innocent little woodland creatures.

Unfortunately, Dickinson reveals her experiments to two of the men she has adopted as mentors—the aforementioned scientifically-minded Leonard Humphrey, and the religious but inquisitive Charles Wadsworth. Like Victor Frankenstein, these men are driven to use Dickinson’s invention to interfere in the human—though Dickinson’s scarples. In a somewhat murky plotline, one of these men (it is never specified which) becomes the man referred to in the Master letters, and when Newton dies, Dickinson and her Master decide to steal his corpse and revive it. In the grand tradition of gothic fiction, Dickinson realizes that her erotic desires have overwhelmed her traditional piety and good sense, and no sooner is Newton revived than Dickinson realizes she must kill him. Dickinson accomplishes this, burning down the Amherst train station and setting free a chimpanzee in the process. Repentant, she terminates her relationship with her Master and decides never to dare with science again. After Dickinson’s death, her sister Lavinia burns all record of her ventures into corpse-reanimation. Imaginatively conceived, if had hazardously executed and at times jarringly confusing, Yarbrough’s novel highlights the interplay of Dickinson’s scientific and religious thoughts, but falls short of its speculative potential by discounting its uncanny imaginations. Instead it has the reader imagine Dickinson’s creativity and agency to her unresolved lust for less brilliant men. I wouldn’t go so far as to recommend this novel, but I love the fact that Yarbrough has plotted Dickinson into such a ridiculously wild speculation.

Annette Brink-Johnson is an undergraduate at Dartmouth. She presented a paper at the EDNS International Conference in Paris in 2015, sponsored by Dartmouth as a James O. Freedman Presidential Scholar.

Recovering Emily Dickinson

When Zeus was boasting Leda’s rape—
His mind was dull—His eyes were dim—
He could not see her clean escape—
Her Modesty—in spite of him.

He thought he held her by the hair—
He felt he had her in his hand—
But she still wore a garment fair—
A gown he could not understand.

While he was lying of her bed—
The Bird was gliding in the sky—
And humming songs of Hope instead—
To which he could not make reply.

Her head was crowned with gauzy lace—
Her gloves were lamb—Her shoes were fawn—
A spotless veil set off her face—
She had Eden apron on.

Her wedding dress immaculate—
Her word a verse—Herown a poem—
Her dignity involute—
And every stitch was made at home.

Invested in Eternity—
She wore her love in fresh bouquet—
And when her Gentleman could see—
She slipped with Him into the Day.

Cynthia Hallen
**Film Review**

**Dickinson in Film: A Quiet Passion**

By Stephanie Tingley

The long-anticipated Terence Davies-directed Emily Dickinson biopic, *A Quiet Passion* (2016), is currently making the transition from North American film festivals and special screenings to wide distribution. The film has much to recommend it. Dickinson scholars and readers will find things to quibble about, certainly, but overall the film provides a long-overdue rich, nuanced, and psychologically-attune three-dimensional portrait of the poet.

We enter the adolescent Emily Dickinson’s world (after a hushed credit sequence) at a key moment in her young life. Mary Lyon, Headmistress at Mt Holyoke Female Seminary, addresses a group of young women, Dickinson among them. She asks those students who have professed their Christian faith and joined the church to move to one side, and those who have hope of becoming Christians to move to the other side. Only one student stands still and alone – Emily Dickinson. She stands firm as a “no-hoper,” strong-willed, resourceful, and able to match wits with and stand up to the headmistress, despite persistent questioning and scare tactics from Lyon. She refuses to do what she does not feel and believe, despite being pressured to do what she “ought.” Alone in the frame in the soon-abandoned classroom, we hear, in voice-over, the first of what will be a series of monologues and some Dickinson speaks aloud. Terence Davies’ filmography includes directing a well-regarded adaptation of Edith Wharton’s novel *The House of Mirth* (2000), starring Gillian Anderson as Lily Bart. Davies is successful at situating Lily Bart in her time, place, and social milieu in Gilded Age New York, but also gives us access to the conflicted and tragic inner life of her heroine. *A Quiet Passion* uses some of these same strategies to good effect, and the film certainly benefits from his astute, sensitive, subtle direction and nuanced dialogue, which is crafted to incorporate familiar phrases and images drawn from Dickinson’s poems and letters.

The screenplay takes some risks to explore Dickinson’s inner life. In one powerful sequence near the middle of the film, for example, framed by the slow opening and closing of the door to her bedroom, Dickinson is framed in the doorway deep in reverie at her small writing desk. The film shifts from realism to a poetic and impressionistic set piece as we see a montage (as a plaintive and haunting ballad sung by a solo soprano plays on the usually-sparsely soundtrack) that reflects the aging poet’s desires and fears, including a shadowy silhouetted outline of a faceless male figure framed by the doorway – Lover? Muse? Gentleman Caller Death? Real? Imaginary? We are left to draw our own conclusions.

The film’s production is richly detailed, down to the pictures on the walls and the delicate stitching and sheen of the costume fabrics. The film darkens the poet’s face, warms the poet’s heart. Dickinson’s losses and frustrations mount. Her literary and personal ethics, and the opportunities and obstacles surrounding female authorship, publi-...
Emily Dickinson, Astronaut!

By Sharon Hamilton

On February 22, 2017, the media unexpectedly lit up all around the world with news arising from an article published in the science journal Nature, which reported that scientists had discovered a dwarf star in a distant solar system orbited by seven earth-like planets. This situation is not unlike what Emily Dickinson knew, because she too lived during a time of unprecedented scientific discovery concerning outer space. Dickinson’s interest in astronomy as it appears in her poetry fascinates me, so I was delighted to discover on a recent visit to Washington DC an exhibit at the Smithsonian Museum of American History on science-fiction in the 1780-1910 period, a kinaesthetic view this exhibit found myself, quite unexpectedly, walking with Emily Dickinson – on the moon.

In the 1770s, brother and sister William and Caroline Herschel began making something remarkable in the basement of their shared home in Bath. Working together, they cast and polished six-inch diameter mirrors. No one had ever before managed to produce reflective mirrors of this size. The process of taking process allowed William to hand-craft reflector telescopes of enough power to begin to make celestial observations of a type that had never before been possible. This was how he first began to measure the height of the mountains on the moon and how he came to discover a previously unknown planet: Uranus.

The exhibit I caught, “Fantastic Worlds: Science and Fiction, 1780-1910” at the National Museum of American History, reminded me just how profoundly Herschel’s telescopes came to affect progress and experience about astronomy in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, including in Emily Dickinson’s immediate cultural and intellectual environment. Amherst College’s “Lawrence Observatory to house Edward Hitchcock’s collection of natural history artifacts as well as the college’s first telescope. Photograph by the author.

I learned from Richard Holmes’s terrific The Age of Wonder that Caroline fed William’s interest in astronomy as it appears in her poetry fascinates me, so I was delighted to discover on a recent visit to Washington DC an exhibit at the Smithsonian Museum of American History on science-fiction in the 1780-1910 period, a kinaesthetic view this exhibit found myself, quite unexpectedly, walking with Emily Dickinson – on the moon.

I was born only a few years after the moonwalk, so the Apollo missions occupied a magical part of my childhood, including my early memories of seeing re-broadcasts of that famous televised image of Earthrise: our small green-blue planet in the background with the moon in the foreground, as first captured in 1968 by the American astronauts on Apollo 8. It never occurred to me before seeing this exhibit that Dickinson could have viewed an almost identical visual image over a hundred years before the first successful space missions! But there it was in the display case – a small, round, painted glass plate bearing the inscription “Imaginary view of earth from the moon, ca. 1850.” On it I saw virtually the same image as from Apollo 8. On the glass plate our planet appeared in the background, with the moon in the foreground, just as it viewed from deep space. Only for Dickinson, instead of on a television screen, she would have seen this image projected from a lantern slide – the mass media of her day.

As this Smithsonian exhibit demonstrates, observations of the Cape of Good Hope using a 20-foot reflector telescope, the largest working telescope of the time, made by Sir John Herschel (William’s son), and announced in 1847, provided the most detailed celestial observations to that time. This activity resulted in a kind of moon-craze in the 1830s that strongly paralleled the effect on American popular culture created by the NASA missions of the 1960s.

This activity resulted in a kind of moon-craze in the 1830s that strongly paralleled the effect on American popular culture created by the NASA missions of the 1960s. The 19th-century mass media picked up on this popular interest so Dickinson would not only have been exposed to science textbooks and teaching that educated her to the latest developments in astronomy but also would have seen things exactly like the objects in this display case: visual artifacts from imagined voyages from the earth to the moon and back again.

The Smithsonian display revealed to me, for example, that 19th century pictorial images of cosmic voyages took many forms, including speculative woodcuts in newspapers, such as an illustration in Dickinson’s poem “Nature and God.” But I had not recognized before, that this was something Dickinson could have seen for herself!

 Dickinson joined such virtual space travelers by making her way into the night sky the same way they did: in her head, from the ground. “The Brain – is wider than the Sky” (Fr598), as she famously wrote. The astronomy text she studied at Mount Holyoke (Denison Olmsted’s Compendium of Astronomy, 1839) contained information credited to both Herschels, father and son, and one of them – it is not clear which – even makes a named appearance in Dickinson’s poem “Nature and God.”

In her imagination, and based on her knowledge of scientific advances of the time, this astronaut of a poet regularly ventured out beyond our planet, somewhere out there, through her verse crammed with references to stars, comets, constellations and, of course, the moon.

Sharon Hamilton is a writer who divides her time between Ottawa, Ontario, and Spring Brook, Prince Edward Island. Her last contribution to the Bulletin was “Nec-tar of Infatuation: A Mennonite Coming-of-Age,” in Spring 2016.
Edenic Possibilities: 2017 Annual Meeting

The 2017 EDIS Annual Meeting will be held August 11-13 in Amherst. It will include the usual popular features, such as reading groups facilitated by well-known scholars, musical performances, tours of the museum, and a walk along the Emily Dickinson Trail. A special feature this year will be presentations of new scholarship by past participants in the Dickinson Critical Institute. The Institute, which will be in its fourth year, is an afternoon-long seminar-style discussion in which emerging Dickinson scholars workshop their research in a group with an established scholar in the field.

The talks will be delivered by Grant Rosson and Clare Mullane – recipient of the 2017 EDIS Graduate Student Scholarship. Grant Rosson, a graduate student in US Literature at UCLA, will deliver a talk entitled “Dickinson’s Interiors: A Theory of Authorship in the Todd Correspondence,” about the letters exchanged between the poet and Mabel Loomis Todd and Dickinson’s conception of authorship that emerges in it.

Clare Mullane will deliver “‘Not to discover weak – /ness is /The Artifice of strength – ’: Emily Dickinson, Constraint, and an Early History of Print Disability.”

African-American Inflexions

By Vivian Pollak

The following report on a session from the 2016 International Conference in Paris was mistakenly left out of the Fall 2016 issue of the Bulletin. The editor regrets the omission of this account of what was plainly a lively and inventive group of presentations.

The session on “African-American Inflexions” was well attended and contained three papers that took different approaches to this seldom-discussed topic. Amanda Licato developed the idea that race is no longer absent from readings of Dickinson but that more needs to be done. In “‘Upon a foreign shore / Haunted by native lands’: Emily Dickinson and Racial Masquerade,” she argued that public racial conflict is replayed in D’s poetic production, adding an example from an 1853 letter to her brother (L127) and connecting it to the minstrel mask as described by Houston Baker. She stated that Dickinson is very much aligned with a major track in African American literature that likened identity or subject positions to the concept of wearing masks, before offering a detailed reading of “The Black Berry – wears a Thorn in his side -” (Fr548). Licato is a Ph.D candidate at Stanford University. The talk drew on her emerging dissertation, “Out from Behind this Mask: Persona in African American Poetry, 1830-1930,” which merges formal attention to poetics with cultural history during the slavery era and into Jim Crow.

In “‘Odd secrets of the line’: The Poetics of Emily Dickinson and African American Spirituals,” Wendy Trudnor noted that at least since 1950 a number of scholars such as Russell Ames, John Lovell, and William Dargan have heard Dickinson in African American spirituals. Building on their insights, Trudnor suggested a number of key intersections such as a vocabulary of movement; a context of physical confinement; the use of animal symbolism; quick, internal shifts in voice and tone; and speaking in code, particularly by way of animal symbolism; and the use of animal symbolism; quick, internal shifts in voice and tone; and speaking in code, particularly by way of animal symbolism; quick, internal shifts in voice and tone; and speaking in code, particularly by way of animal symbolism; quick, internal shifts in voice and tone; and speaking in code, particularly by way of animal symbolism; quick, internal shifts in voice and tone; and speaking in code, particularly by way of animal symbolism; quick, internal shifts in voice and tone; and speaking in code, particularly by way of animal symbolism; quick, internal shifts in voice and tone; and speaking in code, particularly by way of animal symbolism; quick, internal shifts in voice and tone; and speaking in code, particularly by way of animal symbolism; quick, internal shifts in voice and tone; and speaking in code, particularly. The latter paper by Joseph Crouse offered a reading of Dickinson’s abortion tropes as defined by William Shurr in “African-American Poetry of Experience” and “The Map of Lyric: Dickinsonian Moments in African-American Poetry of Experience.”

Maria Muresan is a Ph.D candidate at the CUNY Graduate Center who teaches at Queens College and Cooper Union, both in New York City. She describes herself as a committed educator.

All the papers generated lively discussion, with the audience members engaged in debates about Dickinson’s multiple connections and helping to define her African-American inflexions.

Members’ News

2017 EDIS Scholarship Awards

Graduate Student Scholarship

The 2017 EDIS Graduate Student Scholarship of $1000 has been awarded to Clare Mullane, of the University of Pennsylvania. Clare works on nineteenth- and early-twentieth century American literature, disability studies, and material text and material culture studies. Her dissertation, “American Imprints: Disability and the Material Text, 1858-1932,” addresses how disability emerges as a sociopolitical identity in response to the growth of print culture.

In her project, “‘Not to discover weak–ness is /The Artifice of strength – ’: Emily Dickinson, Constraint, and a Crip Editorial Theory,” she proposes that Dickinson’s poems, from her early fascicles to her later scraps, work to register the presence of disability through the material text. Beginning the project by turning to late nineteenth-century literary critics who name Dickinson’s relationship to disability in explicit – if not troubling – ways, she then attends to the physical environment in which Dickinson wrote, positioning the poet’s bouts of eyestrain and temporary blindness in the mid-1860s alongside the temporal restrictions imposed by Amherst’s industrialization and the nearby Hills Hat Factory to suggest that Dickinson was a poet whose poems were premised on constraint rather than “Possibility.”

Scholar Award

The recipient of the 2017 EDIS Scholar Award of $2000 is Christa Holm Vogelius, assistant professor of American Literature at the University of Copenhagen, where she teaches and works on nineteenth-century literature and culture. Her articles have appeared in such publications as Amerikastudier, ESQ, and the Emily Dickinson Journal (2009).

Her project, “Dickinson’s Transnational Landscapes,” is a chapter in her book manuscript, Fair Copy: Gender, Originality, and the Making of American Literature, which positions ekphrasis, or the literary description of visual art, and copying practices more generally, as a means for writers to interrogate literary nationalism. In Dickinson’s canon, she argues, ekphrasis and textual transcription practices serve as ways of engaging with contemporary ideas around originality and the developing American canon. What critics have called Dickinson’s planetary verse, she suggests, is both provincial and transnational, but also haunted by the spectre of the nation and literary nationalism that circulated in her exchanges with contemporaries like Higginson.

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Emily Dickinson Undergraduate Essay Prize

The Emily Dickinson International Society offers a prize for undergraduate research on Emily Dickinson. We seek critical essays by undergraduates from institutions of all kinds, focusing on Dickinson’s poems or letters. Students at all levels are eligible to submit. Papers should be 15 pages maximum. The winning essay will be published on the EDIS website, and the author will receive an award of $100.

To submit an essay for the prize, send copies of articles as anonymous word attachments, plus a cover letter with contact information to the following address by June 5, 2017: epetino@fairfield.edu. The essays will be distributed electronically to a panel of nationally recognized scholars for judging. All submissions will be acknowledged and receive a response within a month.
I never fired a gun –
Nor used a knife to kill –
Yet know I that in time I could
Develop either skill.

I never had your love.
You've only been my friend –
Yet certain am I this could change
If Laura's life would end –

I like a look of Agatha,
Because it comes from her –
Cats do not sham affection,
Nor simulate a purr –
The eyes light up – and that is bliss
Impossible to feign.

To offer fancy cookies
To lives that binge alone –
When one has failed to guide them
Into a healthy zone
Is sweeter than resuming
One's effort at reform –
The feelings they accord one
Will surely – be more warm –

I started early - took my cup -
I started early – took my cup –
And headed for the punch
And all the chips, and cookies too –
It's time for me to munch –

The party starts an hour from now –
Crumbs dribble as I eat –
No time to rest – I chew and chew
I do not miss a beat

My ears are perked – but not a sound
In my perception lies –
No time to waste – another plate –
Already piled high
I gorged – until I ate it all –
And now I feel quite gay
The party starts – the food is gone –
And I have – slipped away –

I started early - took my cup -
I started early – took my cup –
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To offer fancy cookies
To lives that binge alone –
When one has failed to guide them
Into a healthy zone
Is sweeter than resuming
One's effort at reform –
The feelings they accord one
Will surely – be more warm –

I never fired a gun –
Nor used a knife to kill –
Yet know I that in time I could
Develop either skill.

I never had your love.
You've only been my friend –
Yet certain am I this could change
If Laura's life would end –

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Yet certain am I this could change
If Laura's life would end –
I suppose the time will come
aid it in the coming
when the tree will grow
the tree
and the bee is coming
I suppose the time will come
the tree on it a city
when the corn in silk
will blow
and in chintz and
cotton pink
I observe the gay mile
when the gay mile
frippery
at his new while
house the Earth
that, to, here - a
letter

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