

THE EMILY DICKINSON INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

Bulletin

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



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Front Cover: Emily Dickinson, artprint by architect, designer, musician, and illustrator Jedi Noordegraaf. See interview, p4.

Back Cover: Printers – to accompany the images of Juan Carlos Calvillo’s father at his 1887 Chandler and Price printing press (see p6) is an image of André Chaves, owner of The Clinker Press, at the console of his Intertype hot lead typesetting machine. Chaves printed the two broadsides, one of the first stanza of “I died for Beauty” (Fr448), and the other of the complete “Unto my Books – so good to turn” (Fr512). Chaves writes that The Clinker Press is “a private letterpress studio” devoted to “printing material relating to the art of printing as well as the Arts and Crafts Movement” including “subjects relating to art and literature.” He does all the printing himself. More information about The Clinker Press can be found here: <https://clinkerpress.com/about-clinker-press/>. The Bulletin thanks EDIS member Steve May for calling The Clinker Press to the attention of the Society.

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Jedi Noordegraaf, Illustrator

The image on the front cover is a portrait of Emily Dickinson by Jedi Noordegraaf, who describes his process thus: “The starting point for an illustration is always the text. The purpose is to express the essence of the article so that the message is extra powerful.” Noordegraaf’s prints are available on *Etsy* at www.etsy.com/nl/shop/StudioVandaar. A print of the Emily Dickinson portrait may be purchased for a mere €48.

The following interview is reprinted from *White Heat*, a blog edited by EDIS Board member Ivy Schweitzer: <https://journeys.dartmouth.edu/whiteheat/2018/09/21/september-17-23-1862-translation/>

White Heat: Where did you get the inspiration for your beautiful and detailed portrait of Emily Dickinson?

Jedi Noordegraaf: My inspiration started with an idea to make a series of portraits of people that I admire. I wanted to make portraits that illustrate the essence of someone’s work and life. I started with the portrait of Emily Dickinson, since she is one of the greatest poets for me. For me, the essence of Emily is: a rich inner world, hidden from the outside world, full of life, plants and birds. Of course, this relates to her life in reclusive isolation.

WH: Are you familiar with her poetry, her letters, her life, and if so, how did you learn about her?

JN: Yes, I am familiar with most of her work and became more familiar with her life while doing research for the portrait. It started for me when I was 20 years old and came across a little book of poems in a second-hand bookshop in my hometown Ede. I was immediately visually attracted by the special use of dashes and capital letters. Her poems are punctual and crisp – I love that. That’s why they have a certain incomprehensibility, a kind of mys-

ticism: you can interpret them in many ways. After that first booklet, I collected most of her work.

WH: What is your favorite poem of hers, and why?

JN: “Growth of Man – like Growth of Nature” (Fr790). For me, this poem is about growth that happens in silence. That is quite a truthful observation, I think, and I recognize it in my own life. I start my day in silence; reading some poetry or texts from a prayer book. Simply: being with God, being quiet, thinking things over. Emily Dickinson’s poems often express the joy about art, imagination, nature, and human relationships, but in her poetic world there is also room for suffering and the struggle to evade, face, overcome, and wrest meaning from it. I think in “modern western society” there is great lack of space for suffering. I notice that we are completely focused on the happy and positive things in life, and hide the difficult things we all are experiencing. But it is not always summer, it is also autumn and winter.

In a way, Emily Dickinson’s descriptions show some sort of “mindfulness.” Dickinson used her solitude to live her real self. Her own life was silent and for a long time Dickinson lived in solitude in Amherst. In this society of entertainment, fulfilling our dreams, experiencing & consuming all the things we want, Emily helps me to stand still, and to stay in touch with myself and the things that matter to me.

WH: Elements of the portrait look like flowers she collected in her Herbarium. Are you familiar with that work and how has it influenced your view of Dickinson?

JN: Yes, I know she had an Herbarium. In a way, I think she started her “writing Poetry” with collecting flowers. From there, she start-

ed to observe nature. From her gardening, she developed her aesthetic sensibility, and her vision of the relationship between art and nature. The gardener’s intimate understanding of horticulture helped to shape Emily’s choice of metaphors for every experience: love and hate, wickedness and virtue, death and immortality.

* * *
WH: How is Dickinson regarded in the Netherlands? Do your friends, family, colleagues know about her work and if so, what do they think of it?

JN: Emily Dickinson is made known in Holland by Simon Vestdijk (1898-1971), one of the greatest writers of the Netherlands. All her poems were translated by translator Peter Ver-
tegen, together with commentaries [*Poems 1 and 2*, 2005 and 2007; *Collected Poems* 2011]. Willem Wilmink (1936-2003), a poet himself, translated some poems as well but did that with a more personal interpretation. Some friends & family love her poetry also, some don’t, some even don’t know her.

WH: How does Dickinson speak to you as an artist in the 21st century? What specifically about her work or life resonates with you?

JN: I like the mysticism in her life and poetry. Another connection is that as an illustrator, I’m also working mostly “alone,” in solitude. She, like me, also is a wrestler. She went off the beaten path, and for me as an illustrator, I’m always searching for a concept that is new, a different “angle” or perspective.

Like Emily, I have the same desire for silence and nature. I need silence to come into a flow of creativity. I live near the national park “*de hoge veluwe*” [in the province of Gelderland near the cities of Ede, Wageningen, Arnhem, and Apeldoorn]; for me it’s essential to walk or ride on my bike through nature once in a while.

What’s Your Story?

Series Editor, Holly Norton

Recently elected to the EDIS Board of Directors (see New Board Members, in the Fall 2022 Bulletin), Juan Carlos Calvillo lives in Mexico City and works at the Center for Literature and Linguistics at The College of Mexico. His Dickinson-related publications are Emily Dickinson: Un estudio de poesía en traducción al español [Emily Dickinson: A Study of Poetry in Spanish Translation] (*Universitat de València, Spain, 2020*) and Las Ruedas de las Aves [The Wheels of Birds] (*Aquelarre Ediciones & Los Otros Libros, Mexico, 2020*). The title of his forthcoming book is Emily en nuestra lengua: Retratos de traductores [Emily in Our Tongue. Portraits of Translators].

Translating Dickinson – One Glyph at a Time

By Juan Carlos Calvillo

As long as I can remember, I have always wanted to read and write literature. Since I was a child, I knew I wanted to devote myself to letters: my father is a typographer, you see, and the happiest evenings of my youth were those in which he took me to his printing house and I watched him setting type, one leaden glyph at a time, as he composed a word, then a sentence, then a paragraph, and then had the whole page printed in century-old machines whose rhythmic clanking has stayed with me ever since. The letters to which I have dedicated myself are quite different, but the principle of composing, of arranging a text a word at a time has never changed, and my passion for them has only gotten keener as years go by.

It feels weirdly conspicuous to talk about oneself in the first person, but I do believe that the study of literature shouldn’t forget the spirit and the human energies that were its driving force from the very beginning. If poetry were a means and not an end in itself, I wouldn’t be interested in studying it, let alone teaching it, translating it or, even less, producing it. Doomed as we are to live only once, to experience the world with a single pair of eyes, and to try to understand it by way of an intellect inevitably chained to our own circumstance, every book, every short story, every poem is, and should be, an encounter with what’s foreign and fraternal, an experience of life that is, at the same time, sublime and authentic.

I graduated in 2006 with a BA in English Language and Literature

from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and went on to earn an MFA in Creative Writing. In the meantime, though, I was awarded the first of two Fonca (that is, the Mexican equivalent of the National Endowment for the Arts) fellowships in the field of translation of which I have been lucky to be the recipient. With that first fellowship I was able to select, translate, introduce, and annotate an anthology of three Elizabethan poets, most of whose work had not been published in Spanish before. A second fellowship enabled me to translate the early poems of Robert Lowell, whose correspondence with Elizabeth Bishop I had worked on a while earlier alongside Pura López Colomé, my good friend and godmother, the much-celebrated translator of Seamus Heaney and Robert Hass and Alastair Reid, from whom I learned much of what I value the most and remind myself as I set myself to work every single morning.

Of course, I learned from a lot of people to whom I am extremely grateful, but the greatest teachers I had in my youth were two: Nick Costopoulos, a Vietnam veteran who still ducked for cover every time a helicopter happened to pass by, a passionate reader who taught me Eliot and didn’t shrink from showing me “fear in a handful of dust” at fifteen; and Colin White, a real-life man-of-the-world who had been a lumberjack, a soldier, a miner, and a shipwright – not to mention one of Ted Hughes’ comrades at the launching



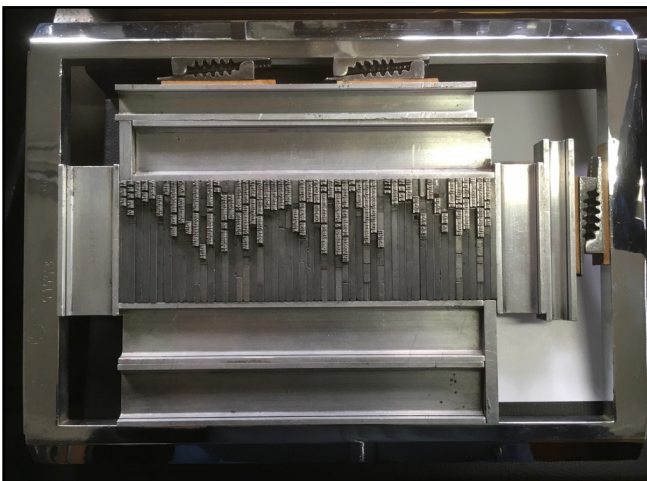
Juan Carlos Calvillo in his father’s printshop

What's Your Story?

party of the *St. Botolph's Review* where he met Sylvia Plath – before somehow landing in Mexico and teaching literature wherever he could for the sheer sake of it, because he truly believed in it. I think of Camus' letter to Monsieur Germain as I write these lines, hoping my debt of gratitude is conveyed, however humbly in comparison. "No man is an island entire of itself," they would be the first to remind me.

Shortly before I started my work on Emily Dickinson, I was deep into Shakespeare. I taught Shakespearean tragedy at two different universities and had started, with my best friend and colleague, Mario Murgia, a project on translating into Spanish the newest works in the canon that hadn't yet been translated in Latin America: *Cardenio* (*Double Falsehood*) and *Sir Thomas More*. I had read fascinating articles on the impact that reading Shakespeare has on the human brain and even intended to team up with a group of neuropsychologists to investigate whether or not reading Shakespearean poetry and drama in Spanish translation had a comparable effect – suspecting, in my deep heart's core, that it didn't; that is, that Robert Frost was right when he said that "poetry is what gets lost in translation." It pains me to acknowledge that I used to believe then, and to a much lesser extent still believe now, that there's something to that widespread prejudice that it is better to read poetry in the original language because translators often betray poetry, or, to put it differently, that they are usually not as mindful of the effect it is meant to produce.

In any case, I thought I had reasons, back then, to believe Shakespeare had done things better than anyone ever had. He was, for me, the perfect embodiment of Coleridge's shorthand definition of poetry, "the best words in the best order," which is a kind of principle I particularly like because it captures just as well the essence of the work of printers like my father: they, too, are concerned with setting "the best words in the best order." The first draft of my PhD project, then, was all about Shakespeare in Spanish translation and about the much different experiences – poetic, aural, cognitive – readers and playgoers have in Spanish as opposed to English. But in the early stages of my research I found my half-baked theory challenged: I read and reread Shakespeare's sonnet 73 ("That time of year thou mayst in me behold") and remembered as an undergrad I had read, among a few others, an Emily Dickinson poem on the coming of winter, an observation of a natural landscape as an omen of decline and death, and thought I should take a second look at it. I even remembered that line about "a certain Slant of light," because in Mexico, in late October, and just as we're preparing for the Day of the Dead, there's always a specific morning in which the inclination of sunlight suddenly shifts, and the air begins to feel sharp against one's cheeks quite unexpectedly. I went back and reread Dickinson's poem (Fr320, M153) ... and that was "the be-all and the end-all."



From top, Carlos Calvillo, Juan Carlos' father, compositor and letterpress printer; an 1887 Chandler and Price printing press in the family's workshop; a galley of type ready for proofing.

What's Your Story?

I never left. I had found a poet who had outdone Shakespeare writing (kind of) the same poem. A few months later my PhD project was completely changed in order to study that wonderful poet who had struck a chord so deeply with me.

Years went by and I eventually earned my PhD with a dissertation on Dickinson's Spanish translations which was later published as a book in Spain. I did maintain the basic hypothesis: that the poet we read in Spanish is different not only from the one we read in English but also from the one we could have read had we chosen another edition, particularly given that the prosody and musicality, the fractured grammar, the semantic indeterminacy and the mysterious power characteristic of Dickinson's poetry are features that encourage translators to interpret in myriad ways. And since then I have gone on – in articles, chapters, and, recently, in another book-length study entitled *Emily in Our Tongue* – to investigate what scores of translators have done in order to identify and reproduce the various technical peculiarities which, combined with an exceptional subject matter, distinguish Dickinson's lyrical output; that is, the forms and contents that define an exclusive and challenging personal poetics.

And yet, my greatest joy, the work that gives me something akin to the experience of the sublime, is translation itself. In 2019 I was lucky to be invited by a small, independent publishing house, Aquelarre Ediciones, based in Xalapa, to offer an edition of Dickinson of my own choosing. I wanted to do something that hadn't been done before, to present to a Spanish-language readership an image or a portrait of a Dickinson that was unknown to them. I corresponded with Marta Werner, who has always been as lovely and encouraging as she is brilliant; I wrote to the Houghton Library and to our most helpful colleagues in charge of the Emily Dickinson Collection at Amherst College, and ended up

publishing the first Spanish translation, in facsimile, of the envelope poems, along with a personal selection of other rough drafts and fragments – the scrap of wallpaper, the chocolate wrapper, etc. The book, entitled *Las Ruedas de las Aves* [*The Wheels of Birds*], has done very well in terms of sales and is now about to be reprinted. I wish we could do a luxury bound, hardback edition, for which Marta generously agreed to write a brief prologue, but the sad fact is that it is difficult to sell such an expensive book in a country like Mexico, in which most people don't have that money to spend.

I'm now working on a translation of Max Beerbohm's *Enoch Soames* which was commissioned and with which I'm having enormous amounts of fun, but as soon as I'm done I'll go back to Dickinson and prepare a new anthology, to be published in Spain, based – for the first time in my mother tongue (can you believe that?) – on Cris Miller's edition. She also has been wonderfully generous and supporting of my work. I look forward to translating those *Selected Poems*, much the way I did the envelope poems and fragments: it's a Wordsworthian or Thoreavian routine I have grown extremely fond of. I learn by heart the poem I will be translating that day and then go out for a stroll, translating in my mind as I walk. Dear Eliza Richards and I have talked about this method. The pacing of the body infuses the rhythms of the line. I look at the trees, at the wind high up in the branches; I run into an occasional stray cat for whom I packed some food before setting out, and rhymes seem to come to me somehow more easily. I go over the poem in my mind, now in Spanish, and then come back home to type it down on my Olympia – the typewriter that used to belong to my grandfather, then to my dad, and now belongs to me. Composing poems, a line, a word, a letter at a time, hopefully the best and in the best order. A lonesome Glee, Delight without a Cause.



The above concertina – accordion poem – is an artisanal edition of Dickinson's "Water, is taught by thirst" (Fr93, M61), translated by the author and set, printed, and bound by his father.

Series Editor, Ivy Schweitzer

One definition of imaginative power is the ability to see possibilities and renewal in the familiar, the everyday. To feel beyond the callus of routine to the tender potentiality of new skin. Teri Cross Davis demonstrates this power when she frames her account of the isolating and intensifying effects of the pandemic with the familiar lines of Dickinson’s impeccable argument for agency, “The Soul selects her own Society.” Her lyric essay describes the unexpected complications caused by the threat of illness, social distancing, and working from home on the adult pressures of work, love, motherhood, and raising children of color in present-day USA. But through these quotidian challenges, Teri learns from Dickinson’s voluntary withdrawal from the world’s conventionalities not just “self-care” but the deeper necessity of “soul care.” The aptness of this insight shook me to the core. In her poetic accompaniment, “Poet to her notebook,” we see the struggle and sacrifice it requires. Teri is the author of a more perfect Union, winner of the 2019 Journal/Charles B. Wheeler Poetry Prize (Mad Creek Books, 2021) and Haint (Gival Press, 2016), winner of the 2017 Ohioana Book Award for Poetry. She is a Cave Canem Fellow and currently serves as the O. B. Hardison Poetry Series Curator and Folger Poetry Programs Manager for the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. She shares her creative and domestic life with the poet Hayes Davis and their two children.

“The Soul selects her own Society”

By Teri Cross Davis

Emily Dickinson is always teaching me. Early on in my life, I interpreted Dickinson’s famed solitude and home life as more tied to her desire to write and observe than to be weighed down and possibly drowned in the traditional roles of wife and mother. Now Dickinson is teaching me what some would call self-care, but I call soul care. She knew to be present for herself, to be active and vigilant in caring for her love and gift of writing.

The Soul selects her own Society —
Then — shuts the Door —

In March of 2020, despite the whispers of COVID-19 and a looming shutdown, a daring audience showed up at the National Museum of Women in the Arts. The event featured Tina Chang, Camille Dungy, and Beth Ann Fennelly reading their poems about motherhood; it would be the last in-person Folger Shakespeare Library O.B. Hardison Poetry series reading of that year. Afterward, the poets and I retired to a nearby restaurant to dine and commune. The next day, Folger employees were told to work from home. By the next week, my poet educator/administrator husband was told to work from home for two weeks. Both of my children, each in different independent schools at the time, were told to bring their school-issued electronic devices home and that they too, would be learning from home. “Two weeks,” everyone said.



Photo Credit: Mignonette Dooley Johnson

For me, those two weeks have turned into three years as I near my March anniversary of working from home.

To her divine Majority —
Present no more —

Early on, how lovely the world seemed without humans creating traffic jams, the absence of car horns, how quiet seemingly swallowed the city. We even heard phantom reports of dolphins returning to the canals in Venice; fact or fiction, the symbology was not lost on me. Without humans, this was a beautiful world. But I knew this when I looked in my backyard. I knew this when I gazed into the brown eyes of my loved ones. I knew this despite the violent outbursts of this country, the shaky camera phone videos of Black people dying. I knew this like I knew Breonna Taylor didn’t need to die. It was a documented fact.

Unmoved — she notes the Chariots — pausing —
At her low Gate —
Unmoved — an Emperor be kneeling
Upon her Mat —

As a virus made the world outside my home more deadly, the world inside of it bloomed. Puberty continued its winning streak as I quickly became the shortest person in the house. My children’s inner worlds became clingy, their health, a constant vortex of worry and fear. I kept a thermometer on my hip like a gunslinger, hand at the ready on foreheads. I could let out that pent up breath at midnight, I am, when all was quiet like a tomb and the world shuddered then went still. Experts called it “revenge bedtime procrastination.” I just understood I needed a moment to hear my own thoughts, to grab the words and write them, to find the corner pieces of this puzzle and begin making a frame in which everything would fit.

I’ve known her — from an ample nation —
Choose One —

I was in high school in a Cleveland suburb when I first encountered Emily Dickinson. I felt a fierce protectiveness over her, would offer commentary during class discussions if my peers fell quiet, so silence would not allow for the turning of the page, the moving on to another poet. While it was Edna St. Vincent Millay and Shakespeare that incited the most passionate responses from me at the time, Dickinson offered a kinship I had yet to fully understand or explore. I knew she felt near, like a conversation overheard two seats away on a plane. Nearby Lorain, Ohio, native Toni Morrison’s *Bluest Eye* saved me from a descent into colorism, but it would take more years

The poet to her notebook

When I should be reaching for you
Dear notebook, trying to pick my dream’s

ephemeral lock, instead I slip from sleep-arrayed
warmth to the floorboards’ cold denial.

I hear my spawn stirring, I
resign into this necessary contact.

(If there is lack of stirring
that’s a broken contract.)

Morning taps their sullen pubertal energy
its jolt makes my synapses fire, mother

the blood contract invoked, smothers
other me, resigned to daydream feverishly.

At school, masked face but determined eye contact.
The SchoolPass displayed (no COVID

no fever, no cough — please keep them
safe and teach them, this is our contract.)

Sometimes notebook, I hear you in the background-
but The kitchen (cleaning just to make a cup of tea)

but The laptop (flaunting its economic wares, brazen
begging me to work whenever, wherever).

Then it’s another shift before I think of you again.
Offspring finally wedded to sleep, exhausting as that has been

I want to pick up the pen, Oh, I want it but The kitchen
The cat, The dog, That piece of trash on the floor.

of living and loss for me to read and be emotionally broken by Morrison’s *Beloved*. Dickinson’s poems, too, had a way of slowly revealing themselves to me, as I would often return to her work for pleasure or for class, yet there was something holding me back from feeling as if I knew her, why she made the choices to shun some of the traditional roles for women, why she preferred her own society.

In 2014, after weaning my second child, I received a fellowship to the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. It felt like an

Poet to Poet

awakening. Between the second child and my first, I had spent the last four years of my life either pregnant or nursing. To remember a poet lived under the nursing bras and toddler tantrums was a gift to itself – the silence I could fill with my own words and not another conversation on Inspector Gadget or Paw Patrol or the never-ending question “what’s for dinner?”

Then — close the Valves of her attention —
Like Stone —

I understood the life my choices had made for me, and it allowed me to see with even more clarity what not making those choices would mean for me as a poet. While I could have chosen not to have children, I would not be able to see, in a deep way that matters to me, the physical and genetic investment of my love with my husband. My children enrich my life for the better but that doesn’t mean I still don’t want time for myself as a poet. It is not as if motherhood and writing can’t be balanced. My favorite poet, Lucille Clifton, managed a writing career and raised six children. But when the pandemic hit,

I knew those quiet moments – when I could know my own mind, when I could rediscover my poet self at a residency like Hedgebrook – were now on pause as artist colony after artist colony postponed their summer openings. Dickinson, in those moments, seemed a prescient genius to recognize that a pretty silk ribbon can be made into a bow or a binding for one’s wrists.

During quarantine, Dickinson appeared everywhere to me, from people baking bread from scratch to writers tending their backyard gardens. I kept saying to friends (and admittedly to strangers online) that Dickinson was the perfect pandemic poet. I understood anew and re-interpreted Dickinson’s solitude as a goal to furnish one’s personal interiority, and to make a life inside a home as bright, colorful, and thriving as the world outside it. From her em dashes to the way she knelt and dwelled in an emotion, I felt the kinship that had eluded me when I was younger. Like I had done with Toni Morrison, I had to live to understand Dickinson better. It only took a pandemic.

Emily Dickinson in Guarani

By Adalberto Müller

Ñe’ẽ ndaje omano oje’e ramo,
Oĩ he’íva –
Che katu ha’e ñe’ẽ oñepyrũ oiko
Upe árape.

A word is dead, when it is said
Some say –
I say it just begins to live
That day

[c. 1862, Fr278, M702]

Translated by Adalberto Müller
(assisted by Graciela Chamorro)

Guarani (or avañe’ẽ) is a native language from South-America spoken by c.6.5 million people in Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia and Uruguay. Guarani languages belong to the Tupi-Guarani family, in which the word *ñe’ẽ* (verb root: -’e) plays a fundamental role: it means word, language, speech, but also soul, and it’s a sacred word to the Tupi-Guarani cultures. As the Soul, the Word is supposed to be immortal, and the shamans are the ones who are supposed to deal with it, because they master the *ñe’ẽ porã*, the good-beautiful healing words. For many Guarani cultures such as the Mbyá or the Kaiowá, the Word-Soul is what really connects the actual Ava (people) with the ancestors and their knowledge of well living (*teko porã*) together and with other species. The first stanza of Dickinson’s poem would seem blasphemous to the Guarani, because if the word dies, there is no culture, and no life. Therefore we use “*ndaje*,” or maybe, to attenuate the utterance, in the translation of

the first sentence. On the other hand, and surprisingly, the true Guarani or Ava would easily accept the second stanza, which reaffirms the power of language and the fact it can “begin to live” (*oñepyrũ oiko*) when it is performed.

To my knowledge, this is the first time Dickinson has been translated to a native language from South America, where Guarani is so important. In Paraguay, Guarani is spoken in everyday life by c.80% of the population (not only by indigenous people). It is taught at school and there is a tradition of writers and scholars who write in Guarani or in jopara, a creole that mixes Guarani and Spanish. Today, a new generation of writers such as Paraguayans Jorge Kanese and Cristino Bogado and Brazilian Wilson Bueno and Douglas Diegues are writing a combined language, expanding the borders of Guarani, Spanish and Portuguese, but also connecting readers of other continents to the power of *ñe’ẽ*.

Voices Outside the US

Series Editor, Adalberto Müller

A Brazilian Poet and Emily Dickinson An Interview with Paulo Henriques Britto

Paulo Henriques Britto (born in Rio de Janeiro in 1951) is one of the most important Brazilian poets today, and is also an assiduous and productive reader of Dickinson's work: he has cited her in the epigraph to three of his books, translated her poems, and written about the translation of her "ballad meter" into Portuguese. Britto has published nine books of poetry, which have been awarded the most important literary prizes in Brazil and Portuguese-speaking countries, such as the Jabuti, the APCA, and the Portugal Telecom. He is also one of the most respected and prolific translators in Brazil, having translated over a hundred titles, including works by Thomas Pynchon, Phillip Roth, Don DeLillo, Henry James, and William Faulkner. Among poets, his translations of Wallace Stevens and Elizabeth Bishop have become a reference in the Brazilian poetry scene.

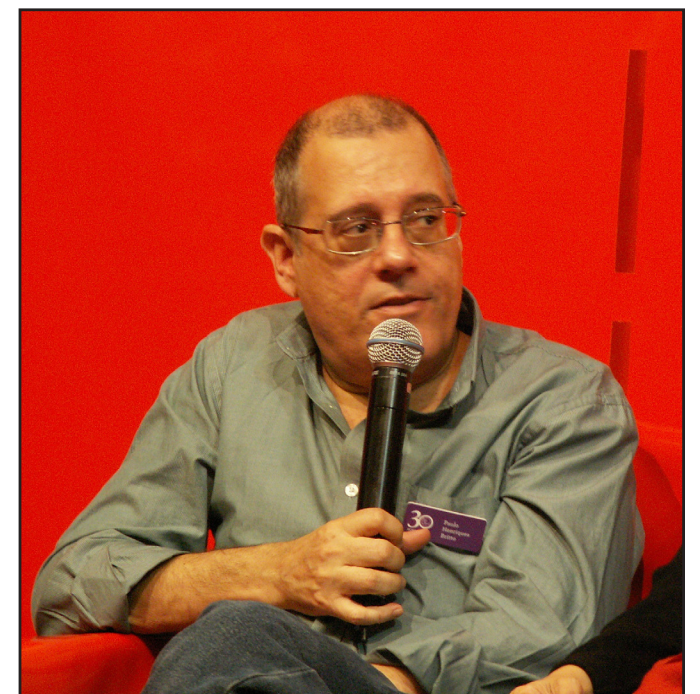
Since the 1980s, when he began to publish, Britto has attracted attention in a context marked by concrete poetry or free verse, for his systematic use of classical forms (such as the sonnet) and rigorous metric patterns, which paradoxically combine with a very colloquial language (including a Rio de Janeiro accent) and a mixture of banal scenes and philosophical themes. Having lived in the US during his childhood and adolescence, he maintained a strong relationship with the English language, and in almost all his books he publishes poems written in English – which he sometimes translates himself.

The Clean Shirt of It, a collection of his poems translated by award-winning poet and novelist Idra Novey, was published in 2007 in Rochester, NY, by BOA Editons. We publish here an interview from January 2023, a poem originally written in English, and a translation.

Adalberto Müller: we know that your commitment to Emily Dickinson's poetry is longstanding, both as a translator of her poems, in journals such as Inimigo Rumor (1999), and as a refined reader of Dickinson's ballad meter in scholarly articles on poetry translation. When and how did your first encounter with Dickinson take place?

Paul Henriques Britto: It began in 1964, when I was in seventh grade in a Washington, DC, junior high school. Back then students who did best in the first half of the school year were “promoted” to what was called an “honors class.” In the old class we were taught arithmetic, and all of a sudden I was being introduced to the base-two numeral system. And in English, rather than grammar exercises, we got real literature. Our teacher was an old lady who had a genuine love for poetry, and she made us read Shakespeare (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You Like It*), Poe, Whitman, and Dickinson. This was my first real contact

with poetry, and I was fascinated. In elementary school in Rio, we were exposed to mostly sentimental and patriotic verse by Olavo Bilac, Júlia Lopes de Almeida and such; the only poem I had read in Portuguese that had really impressed me was Gonçalves Dias’ “I-Juca-Pirama” (still one of my favorites); and I had absolutely no knowledge of Modernist poetry. I bought a paperback edition of four Shakespearean comedies in the school shop, and in some other bookstore I got a Conrad Aiken anthology of US poetry; these two volumes are



Paul Henriques Britto. Photo Credit, A.J. Andersson, <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via *Wikimedia Commons*.

still on my shelves. The Dickinson poems in the anthology are printed with regularized spelling and punctuation – it came out in 1944, almost ten years before Johnson’s edition. It includes “There’s a certain slant of light,” one of the poems I translated a few decades later and published in *Inimigo Rumor*.

AM: *We know that out of the more than one hundred books you have translated there are works by Wallace Stevens and Elizabeth Bishop. Do you think that one can find anything in common with these poets and Dickinson? In the same sense, is Dickinson modern to you?*

PHB: Stevens, whom I first read in the anthology I’ve mentioned, and whom I rediscovered only in the early Seventies, when I was in film school in San Francisco, certainly had an impact on me. By the time I began to read Bishop, in the mid-Nineties, I pretty much had developed my “voice,” as they say, though I’m sure she reinforced my tendency to work with formal verse and colloquial language. But Dickinson was one of the very first poets I read, and I’m sure the impact was tremendous. She taught me concision, a love for off-rhymes and for popular verse forms, a lesson that was reinforced when I began to read João Cabral de Melo Neto, at about the same time as my rediscovery of Stevens, in my early twenties.

AM: *In your last two books, you include Dickinson’s poems as epigraphs (namely “Had I not seen the Sun” [Fr1233]; “Pain – has an Element of Blank –” [Fr650]), and furthermore, you translate those poems in the epigraphs. Are the epigraphs keys to reading these books?*

PHB: Actually, the first of my books to use a Dickinson poem as an epigraph was *A tradução literária*, an essay on literary translation that came out in 2012. In this particular case it was a private expression of grief: my wife had died a few months before, and “They say that ‘Time assuages’” (Fr861) captured my feelings better than anything I myself could come up with. And “Had I not seen the Sun” (Fr1249) is certainly a key to *Nenhum mistério* (2018), which also includes a number of poems dealing with grief.

AM: *What do you think of the reception of Dickinson’s work in Brazil compared to other English-speaking poets?*

PHB: Dickinson is one of the English-language poets who have been most widely translated in Brazil. Even before Adalberto Müller’s extraordinary project of translating the entire corpus, we had several excellent anthologies, the best of which are, I think, the ones translated and edited by Augusto de Campos and by José Lira. And mention must be made of the late Prof. Carlos Daghljan, a Dickinson scholar who published a fine study of Dickinson’s poetry (*Emily Dickinson: a visão irônica do mundo*) in the year of his death, 2016.

Paulo Henriques Britto
(from Liturgia da Matéria, 1982)

“Doze sonetos sentimentais,” II
[Twelve sentimental sonnets, II]

Can one compare oneself to something else?
A door without a key, perhaps – although
a key that fits no lock might do as well,
or even better: for a door is more
than what it means; there’s some existence to it
beyond the key it may or may not have.
A key without a lock is next to nought,
a shape deprived of all purpose.
And yet a door alone, removed from any wall,
stranded in space, might be an image apt
as any key. But key or door, there’s still
some substance there. Perhaps a doorway’s best:
a blade of empty space caught in a frame.
If one removes the frame, there’s nothing left.

(Originally written in English)

“Pain – has an element of Blank – ”

A Dor – contém um Vazio –
Seu início desconhece –
Nem sabe se houve um tempo
Em que ela não houvesse –

Seu Futuro – é ela própria –
Seu infinito é portador
De seu Passado – a perceber
Novos Domínios – de Dor.

Translated by Paulo Henriques Britto, published as the epigraph of *Último Verão* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2022)

Dickinson on Cats

By Steve May

“Great persons are not soon learned, not even their outlines, but they change like the mountains in the horizon as we ride along.” (Thoreau Journal entry for March 25, 1842)

Emily Dickinson’s written comments about house cats or cats as pets are not consistent and range from warm and positive to extremely cold and negative. A simple way to address the inconsistency is to speculate that Emily’s opinions about cats evolved over time and that she became less tolerant of having cats around the house and grounds and even grew to truly dislike them as she aged. Allow the evidence to speak for itself. Borrowing from the late art historian Abraham Davidson, allow, also, some measure of latitude for the range of opinions of an “eccentric visionary,” even a “cosmic visionary.”

“Vinnie has a new pussie the color of Branwell Bronte’s hair. She thinks it a little ‘lower than the angels,’ and I concur with her. You remember my ideal cat has always a huge rat in its mouth, just going out of sight – though going out of sight in itself has a peculiar charm.... It is true that the unknown is the largest need of the intellect, though for it, no one thinks to thank God...” (L471, to Louise and Frances Norcross, August 1876).

In an October 5, 1851 letter to Austin, Emily noted “It is Communion Sunday, and they will stay a good while – what a nice time pussy and I have to enjoy ourselves!” (L54). In another letter to Austin the following year, Emily notes, “We have never told you that Pussy has gone – she disappeared about four weeks ago, and we can find nothing of her, so we presume she is dead. We miss her very much, and I think you will miss her, when you come home” (L76). In a letter to Susan Dickinson, 28 February, 1855, Emily noted “The cats I will confess, have not so absorbed my attention as they are apt at home, yet do I still remember them with tender emotion....” (L178).

Certain aspects of the critical record regarding Emily Dickinson’s attitude toward domestic cats are sometimes at odds with what she had to say about them in her poems and letters. Her opinions about cats, in my view, were initially largely positive – as reflected in the letters to the Norcross sisters and Austin quoted above – at least until well into the 1850s, if not later. I believe that she felt toward them “a transport Of Cordiality” as she did other of “Nature’s People.” More broadly, as Aaron Shackelford noted in his essay “Dickinson’s Animals and Anthropomorphism” (EDJ 2010), “Encounters with the animal provide important insight and knowledge throughout Dickinson’s poetry and letters, and it seems apparent that she valued animals both in her life and verse.”



“Her eyes increased to Balls – “

In Emily’s practice as a writer, cats appear often. According to Rosenbaum’s *Concordance to the Poems of Emily Dickinson*, the word “cat” appears in four poems (Fr151, Fr485, Fr1218 and Fr1236). The word “pussy” appears in two poems (Fr351 and Fr1110). There are no known uses in the poems of “kitty,” “kitties” or “kittens.” In her letters, according to MacKenzie’s *Concordance to the Letters of Emily Dickinson*, the word “cat” appears eight times between 1852 and 1876 (L97, L228, L262, L317, L318, L375, L409, L471). “Cats” appears six times between 1851 and 1880 (L52, L178 [twice], L225, L267, L682) . “Catty,” as in “pussy catty,” appears in one 1851 letter (L45). “Kitties” appears twice in 1845 and 1874 (L5 and L409). The word “kitty” only once in 1851 (L58). “Puss” appears twice: 1854 (L166) and 1869 (L337). “Pussies” appears 5 times: 1880 (L682), 1881(L685), 1882 (L746 and L771) and 1885 (L969). “Pussy” appears thirty times between 1845 and 1881 (L5, L20, L45, L54 (twice), L58, L63, L76, L116 (three times), L129, L139, L146, L213, L244, L259, L279, L295, L339, L364, L388, L398, L471, L473, L589, L664, L665 (twice) and L690). “Pussy’s” appears three times: 1870 (L340) and twice in 1880 (L664 and L665). “Purring” appears once in 1872 (L375) and “purrs” once in 1866 (L315). The word “cat” or synonyms for it and words associated with cat behavior, therefore, appear sixty-six times between the poems and letters, typically in positive contexts.

Though she may not have loved cats as much as Vinnie, Emily at least appreciated the role they played in the natural world and found some comfort in them for the sake of keeping peace in the Homestead. It is entirely possible, too, that Emily grew tired of constantly having multiple cats underfoot as she aged. But to find “Assassins for them ...” as she stated in a letter to Mrs. J.G. Holland, circa January 1881, could be taken as pure hyperbole (L685). If not, this is evidence that by the 1870s and 80s, Emily’s view of cats soured considerably. As Millicent Todd Bingham noted, though, in her book *Emily Dickinson’s Home, Letters of Edward Dickinson and His Family*, “Emily was whimsically indulgent toward her sister’s love of ‘pussies....’”

The idea espoused in some of the critical material that Emily Dickinson disliked and even hated cats might have originated with Martha Dickinson Bianchi in her book *The Single Hound, Poems of a Lifetime*, published in 1914. In her Preface, Bianchi states “[Emily] once put four superfluous kittens on the fire-shovel and softly dropped them into the first convenient jar the cellar offered, her family being in church – her chosen time for iniquity. This especial jar happened to be full of pickle brine.” If the anecdote is accurate, Lavinia would have certainly discovered the crime, an unforgivable malfeasance, and there would have been repercussions. Could the empress of consolation stoop to kitten murder? It makes no sense and doesn’t add up. The idea that Emily disliked cats was echoed in George Frisbee Wheeler’s *This Was a Poet, A Critical Biography of Emily Dickinson*. He notes, “She viewed askance the cats fostered by her sister and deigned

to name the detested animal only three times.” The theme of cat-hatred was subsequently picked up by Barton Levi St. Armand, in *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture: The Soul’s Society*. He noted that “Surely Dickinson would have agreed with Edith Wharton’s definition of a cat as nothing more than ‘a snake in furs.’” St. Armand also notes that “Dickinson was not above small acts of sabotage and reprisal in this comic war of the cats that divided the otherwise devoted sisters.”

Among the great poems about cats that leaves a clear impression of their spirit and essence, is the lyric that begins “She sights a Bird – she chuckles –” (Fr351), circa summer 1862. It is a sublime anthropomorphic picture drawn with words about how a cat behaves when it is about to attack and how its wary prey responds to save itself. It is also a journey from the concrete (“sights,” “chuckles,” “flattens,” “crawls,” “runs,” “twitching,” “leaps”) to the abstract (shifting “Sand,” “Hopes,” “Bliss”). “Feet” and “Toes” are the engines of pursuit and escape, “without the look of feet” a blur like a whirligig in a windstorm. The poet herself or “she-cat” may even be patiently “stalking,” “paws” tucked, senses tingling and eyes enlarged, to “pounce” on just the right words before they flee.

She sights a Bird - she chuckles -
She flattens – then she crawls –
She runs without the look of feet –
Her eyes increase to Balls –

Her Jaws stir – twitching –hungry –
Her Teeth can hardly stand –
She leaps, but Robin leaped the first –
Ah, Pussy, of the Sand –

The Hopes of juicy ripening –
You almost bathed your Tongue –
When Bliss disclosed a hundred Toes –
And fled with every one –

– Fr351

Steve May has been a frequent contributor to the Bulletin, under the pseudonym, Krans Bloeimaand, often discussing discoveries he has made as a collector of Dickinson memorabilia. Currently he is working with the proprietor of The Clinker Press, André Chaves, on a chapbook project, the working title of which is “Emily Dickinson on Books.”

Finding Common Ground with Emily Dickinson

By Margaret H. Willison

Common Ground¹, a travel organization that specializes in running immersive retreats patterned after religious pilgrimages, is offering a pilgrimage dedicated to Emily Dickinson’s life and work² this summer in Amherst. From July 14th to 17th, Professors Amy Hollywood and Stephanie Paulsell of Harvard Divinity School will lead a group of twenty-four participants in close study of Emily Dickinson’s poems, hikes through the surrounding area, and reflective journaling, all while contemplating the question, “what is the purpose of our solitude?” We have invited the organization’s communications manager, Margaret H. Willison, to share more about both Common Ground’s ethos and this trip in particular.

The idea that guides our Emily Dickinson pilgrimage, and our company’s approach to literature generally, is that the sacred practices which developed through centuries of religious observance serve critical human needs. As religious belief has receded, these practices have receded as well, but the human needs they developed to address are just as pressing today as they once were, if not more so. Widespread religious faith once created space for these practices in everyone’s day-to-day existence and gave believers a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. As that faith has fallen away for so many of us, we have lost both the physical time and space needed to observe sacred rituals and have been left with sole responsibility for making meaning in our lives that religious leaders and communities would previously have supplied. Our organization came into existence to address this gap: to bring sacred practices back into the lives of people for whom religion – or religion alone – does not provide the necessary support.

Our pilgrimages are the most complete realization of this goal our organization has achieved thus far. Lasting just under a week, each trip is centered on a writer or piece of literature, visiting a particular place that’s deeply tied to that subject, and staffed by

both a faculty member (who leads participants in sacred contemplation of the text) and a chaplain (who provides each participant with a session of one-on-one counseling). Our faculty draw a theme out of the subject of the pilgrimage and tie it to our participants’ real lives. For example, with our Emily Dickinson pilgrimage, we will of course be visiting Amherst, to engage with the material world that inspired so much of Dickinson’s work, and the thematic lens Professors Amy Hollywood and Stephanie Paulsell settled on is “solitude.” Using Dickinson’s work and life as a reflective guide, they will prompt our pilgrims to dwell on questions about their own life such as: what work do I do for myself alone, and what do I do to secure notoriety? Where is my practice of solitude giving me space to develop my own thoughts, and where is it leaving me closed-off and isolated? Through a combination of rigorous group discussion, private journaling, and meditatively-focused hikes, we want these trips to give participants the time to practice deep contemplation, a space that can generate joy and inspiration, and the tools needed to make meaning from the literature they love and this collective study of it.



Pilgrims from the June, 2022, *Pride & Prejudice* Pilgrimage

Photo Credits: Margaret Willison

¹“Literature is no one’s private ground; literature is common ground.” – Virginia Woolf

²<https://www.readingandwalkingwith.com/emily-dickinson-july-2023>

Simon Edmondson: A Portal

By Maryanne Garbowsky

British born and raised, Edmondson knew from the age of 8 that he wanted to be a painter. He studied art in London where he received his B.A. He came to America as a post-grad and studied at Syracuse University. In America he met other artists like Anthony Caro, Kenneth Noland, and Helen Frankenthaler. Upon his return to England, his work was exhibited by the Nicola Jacobs' Gallery, one of London's most prestigious galleries. He has lived in Madrid since 1991 where he keeps his studio. Looking back over his career, he realizes that becoming an artist is "a continual, lifelong process." He admits that his "really important influences have come ... from literature" and poetry. The comments by the artist come from email correspondence that took place with the author in 12/2022 and 1/2023.

It started back in middle school when he was 14 or so. That was the beginning of his love of poetry, specifically the poems of Emily Dickinson and T.S. Eliot. Thanks to his teacher, F. McEachran, he had to memorize poems. When the chalk was thrown to him, he would begin to recite – for as long as he could. When he ran out of verses, he tossed the chalk back to his teacher, who in turn tossed it to another student. Thus, artist Simon Edmondson amassed a storehouse of poetry which has stayed with him throughout his career and eventually became a part of his paintings.

Edmondson remembered Dickinson's poems, one in particular, "There's a certain Slant of light" (J258). He recalls, "it stayed in my head although I didn't remember the name of the author." But, he continued, "I wanted to read more by the same hand." The result is that the poem surfaced in his painting *Pendiente de Luz* (A Slant of Light) (1992). In the poem, the reader is made aware of the light of "Winter Afternoons," which the speaker compares to the pause between "Cathedral Tunes." The result is "Heavenly Hurt" that goes to the speaker's core. It is "the Seal

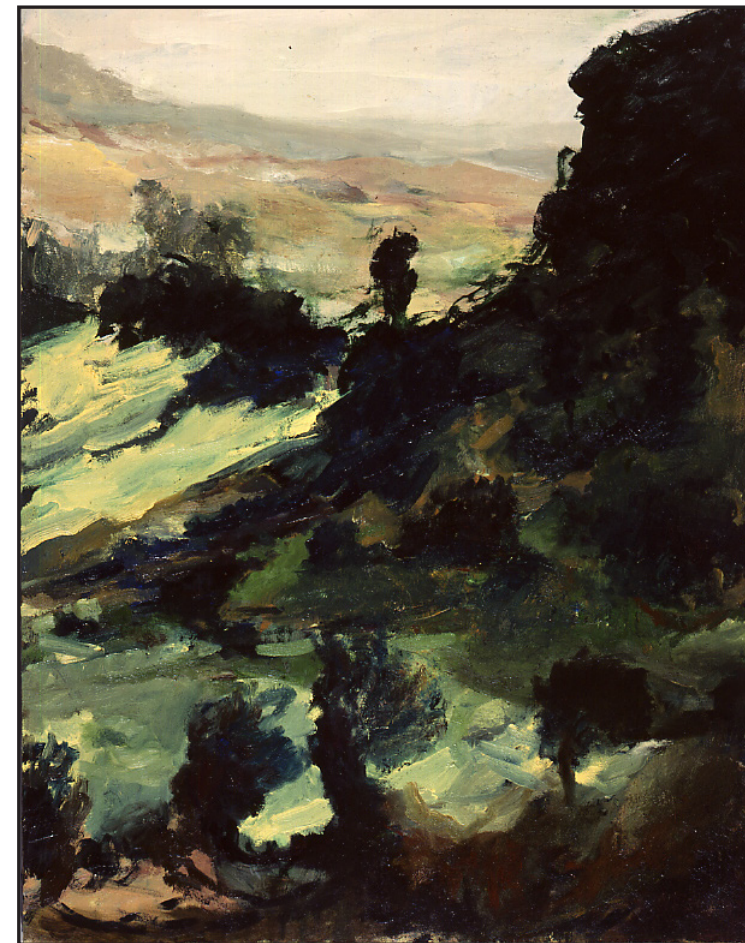
Despair" that comes on "the Air" and leaves one with an impression of "the Distance / On the look of Death –."

What we notice about the poem is its subtle but accurate articulation of an emotional

state, a mood that comes on unbidden, but changes us, leaving "no scar, / But internal difference / Where the Meanings, are." Edmondson admires "how the poet can take an everyday observation like a slant of light," and lead us "to the profoundest thoughts in a

few lines. She has the uncanny ability to take us in a few short stanzas to something much deeper." The artist sees a correlation between his method, his process, of working and Dickinson's writing. He, too, "starts with looking and ends with an act of really seeing." We see this especially in this poem, which moves from a ray of light at a particular angle at a certain time of day to a much darker dimension: is it guilt, depression, hopelessness?

In his painting, a large oil seascape, we see a dramatic contrast of light and dark, of earth and sea. The light strikes across the scene like a jagged bolt of lightning illuminating the upper third of the painting. The remaining two thirds of the scene is darker, a blend of blacks, dark browns, and greens. The sea is wild, windswept, with trees tossing and blurred. There is no one in sight, just a rocky outcrop that inclines sharply into the sea below. There is a



Simon Edmondson, *Pendiente de Luz*, 1992

ate about literature, but accustomed to approaching it from an academic angle. I had spent years feeling that personal identification with the text was at best a distraction, if not a handicap, in performing meaningful analysis (not that this belief prevented me from forming deep personal attachments to the books I studied). In addition to that, I was a reflective person with a stronger than average hunger for moral understanding. I had already developed the habit of turning to art to help me make sense of the world and judge my actions within it, but I had never done so in a formal or deliberate manner. It was simply that literature held deep meaning for me, which made using it to create meaning feel natural to me.

When I was first exposed to the sacred practices that define our pilgrimages, from sacred reading to our contemplative hikes, it was a



A view from Stanage Edge in England's Peak District, *Pride and Prejudice* Pilgrimage, June 2022

somewhat revelatory experience for me. Instead of being a distraction or handicap, sacred practices transformed my personal identification with the literature I love into an asset: because the books mattered to me profoundly, honoring their connection to my life granted my self-reflection a sense of profundity in kind. Because I already took Austen seriously, viewing my emotional identification with her work as sacred rather than frivolous gave me a way to take myself seriously. This sense of meaning was strengthened even further by sharing this practice with a community of like-minded readers, people who conferred sacredness upon texts through rigorous engagement rather than unquestioning deference. And finally, I was astonished by how experiencing the material reality of places featured in the text deepened and pleurably complicated my understanding of books I know backwards and forwards. Getting my hiking boots six-inches deep in mud made me consider differently what having petticoats similarly afflicted might feel like. Seeing the ostentatious glory of Chatsworth, the home whose gardens are thought to have inspired Pemberley and whose somewhat tasteless grandeur is seen in Rosings Park, gave me a visceral sense of how brave Elizabeth Bennet had to be to remain obstinate and headstrong in the face of such physically overwhelming displays of wealth and power.

This is the kind of experience we are hoping to create for those who participate in our Emily Dickinson Pilgrimage this July. For a host of reasons, she feels uniquely well-suited to be the subject of this kind of embodied, meditative study. First, the degree to which she is rooted in Amherst is a

tremendous strength. When we hike from Amherst to Northampton, we know not only that we are retracing her footsteps, but also that this specific landscape is the one which inspired so much of the writing we cherish. The small scope of her existence supercharges the material significance of everything we can observe. Intensifying that significance yet still more is the ecstatic importance Dickinson herself ascribed to the natural world. As our pilgrimage leader Dr. Stephanie Paulsell put it, the woods and hills of Western Massachusetts are "a landscape that she loved and that she paid really close attention to. It was the landscape in which she experienced the sacred much more than in any religious community." Dickinson's status as one of the great "nature poets" makes combining her writing with meditative walking highly apt. Being able to combine study of that writing with the exact meditative walks from which Dickinson derived such rapture is that much more powerful.

Finally, as stated earlier, we understand our pilgrimages as a chance for our pilgrims to give themselves a time outside of time, where they can look inward and nurture their spiritual and creative selves free from the material concerns that make such meditation so difficult in our day-to-day lives. For many who participate in our trips, it can be the first time since having children that they have traveled alone, or the first time they have traveled alone since the dissolution of a marriage or loss of a job. They come to us at moments of personal transformation, hoping to reconnect with themselves and thereby root their future choices in true self-understanding. It is hard to imagine an artist whose work speaks more directly to the value of creating this kind of solitude – the "finite infinity" of "a soul admitted to itself" – than Emily Dickinson. We truly hope that Drs. Stephanie Paulsell and Amy Hollywood will be able to help our pilgrims connect with Emily Dickinson's iconoclastic spirit, guiding them towards a practice of making art and meaning, not for popular consumption, but to strengthen and delight their own selves.

Dickinson and the Visual Arts

feeling of quiet, of reserve, though the scene is not calm or calming.

The poet’s influence is apparent. Edmondson attempts to do what Dickinson has done: “I want my work to lead one into more interesting thoughts, to work as a portal, to something more profound.” The painting, like the poem, creates an emotional atmosphere as we spiral down under its weight. Here Dickinson’s words take on a visual form. Even the Spanish title adds heaviness as well as dark shading to the mood, “*pendiente*” meaning not only “slant,” but also “pending,” hanging down. There is a similar tension in each: This bend of light subtly but significantly opens up a void, a vacuum, an emptiness within us, exposing the depth of oneself, the abyss that like a black hole emits no light and feels inescapable. Anyone who has experienced this emotion recognizes it. However, most of us do not have Dickinson’s ability to verbalize it. The poet and the painter articulate it so well that we understand and feel it anew.



Simon Edmondson, *Amherst Interior*, 2017

Edmondson’s paintings are large and done in oil, his preferred medium which he describes as “marvelous” because of its transparency and fluidity. They are not illustrations, but rather a link to the poet – “a form of comradeship” as both poet and painter pursue similar goals: “My paintings have always been more about creating an atmosphere or a mood, which is more akin to the taste a poem leaves in one’s mind.”

We see this emphasis on atmosphere and mood especially in another painting related to the poet – *Amherst Interior* (2017). Here the artist places Dickinson in her bedroom, perhaps “curled up on a sofa.” She may have gone there to be alone in the private, interior space she valued so much. The artist depicts her from the back, looking out the window at “the last dying embers of afternoon light.” Here he imagines that she might be in the act of composing, writing “a last line, a first line.” Edmondson, who has never visited Amherst but would like to one day, sets the poet “at home, in her special place.” For creativity to

flourish, an artist needs time alone to think, to meditate in order to create.

Another contemporary artist offers a comparable perspective on Dickinson’s use of light. Spencer Finch takes us to Amherst, into Dickinson’s room, where he photographs the light at various times of day. Finch’s current exhibition, *Lux and Lumen*, at the Hills Art Foundation in New York City, explores the light as it comes through her window. In the seven photographs that make up *The Outer – From the Inner (Emily Dickinson’s Bedroom)*, Finch documents the varying effect of the light at different times of day. “The final shot,” similar to Edmondson’s painting, “taken after sunset, shows the whole lamp-lit room in the reflection” (Review, *New York Times*, 1/13/23). Atmosphere is key. Both Edmondson and Finch highlight the importance of light and use it to suggest the poet’s poetic space.

Like Dickinson, Edmondson can get imagery “from anywhere. Something will ring a

bell to draw my attention and I will follow it.” The artist quotes another Dickinson poem that resonates with him:

Of Consciousness, her awful Mate
The Soul cannot be rid – (J894)

“I call my new paintings ‘Disparities or Discrepancies.’” In our modern world, there is a “vast disparity.” “Our inner and outer realities are manacled together ... each impeding the other.” The couplet speaks to the artist’s method of having his “paintings ... operate bilaterally...The two extremes coexisting on the same canvas as a glimpse of a proposed fleeting moment when one presence hovers inexplicitly with the other.” Dickinson’s poem underlines the “duality” that the artist suggests in his art, the disparity and dissonance between “what we think we understand and the inexplicable.” In his paintings he tries to suggest this incongruence and “serve as metaphors or symbols of this relationship.” For him, “reality is our great mystery.”

Reviews of Publications

Elizabeth Petrino, Book Review Editor

Cristanne Miller and Karen Sánchez-Eppler, eds.
The Oxford Handbook of Emily Dickinson
Oxford University Press, 2022

By Amy Yue-Yin Chan

If I were only allotted a punchy aphorism to describe *The Oxford Handbook of Emily Dickinson*, I would choose the phrase “time and place.” This newly released compendium of essays on Dickinson, edited by Cristanne Miller (SUNY at Buffalo) and Karen Sánchez-Eppler (Amherst College), firmly situates Dickinson’s poetics in their time and place, yet the historicizing is not as restrictive as it might seem. What Miller’s and Sánchez-Eppler’s collection of essays reveals about Dickinson, time, and place is the intensely interconnected and interwoven fabric of the space-time continuum unearthed by Dickinson’s poetic practice – how a moment’s creation of a poem in 1860s Amherst can reverberate from 17th century Indian settlement in the Connecticut Valley to 20th century tea ceremonies in Japan to our temporary climate crisis. “Forever – is composed of Nows –” (Fr690, M334), Dickinson writes, kicking off the introduction to the *Oxford Handbook*, but the *Handbook*’s following essays demonstrate, too, how Dickinson’s “Forever” is composed of “Heres.”

The logic of the *Handbook*’s organization then follows from a process of becoming or “emergence,” a term appearing in Renée Bergland’s entry. The essays roughly move

from an examination of the historical, literary, and personal influences on Dickinson’s poetic vocation to her immediate media and production contexts to her later publication and reception to her evocative ways of understanding reality and our ways of understanding through her.

Each of these movements is confined to its own section. Part I, “Do they know that this is Amherst,” features some of the ethnic, economic, and religious history of Dickinson’s Amherst. Part II, “Essential Oils,” involves a full account of Dickinson’s manuscripts from creation to publication, with particular attention to implications for Dickinson’s lyric. Part III, “You’ll find the Music,” primarily concerns itself with ways of reading in the 19th century US and how Dickinson herself is read across time, media, and cultures. Part IV, “Such are the inlets of the mind – ,” investigates the philosophical influences and implications of Dickinson’s poetry. Lastly, a closing coda written by the late scholar Jed Deppman, probes thoughtfully and subtly the lessons of Dickinson’s poems about dying. All in all, the *Handbook*’s continual emphasis on reading Dickinson in relationality converges upon a Dickinson who, though entrenched in her era and ours, remains deeply personal.

The focus on Dickinson’s person is nowhere more evident than in the collection’s restoration of Dickinson as poet. A good number of the essays recenter Dickinson’s work as poems by illuminating the networks between Dickinson’s inner life and archival processes.

Cristanne Miller, with her formidable detective work, spearheads the strongest trio of essays reconsolidating Dickinson’s poet status. Miller’s “Writing for Posterity” traces Dickinson’s complicated pattern of poem circulation and retention to find, from the majority of writing Dickinson copied to retain primarily for herself, that “what she wrote first and foremost were poems” – not correspondence. Marta L. Werner’s essay, “The Material and Editorial Condition of Dickinson’s ‘Master’ Documents,” following on the heels of Miller’s, further destabilizes the notion of “correspondence” for Dickinson by hypothesizing her “Master” works as a literary experiment in “otherness.” Branka Arsić rounds out this trinity of subtle rebuttals to de-poeticizing Dickinson in “Butterfly Tropics,” in which she considers the material extraneity of Dickinson’s poetry, dead butterflies and all, as “vertiginous,” boundary-breaking modes of lyricization. Arsić aptly characterizes Dickinson’s poetic calling in naming “the ontological investment of Dickinson’s poetics: to make poems phenomena that both enable and belong to a different metaphysics.” In other words, Arsić defines Dickinson’s poetic techniques as those saturating different levels of being, surpassing the formalist notion of poetry as a very specific instantiation of language (the personal utterance). For all three scholars – representing the general undercurrent of the *Handbook*’s critical attitudes – life and its material conditions do not suppress Dickinson’s poetics; Dickinson’s poetry overflows into life. Miller, Werner, and Arsić invert the historicity-trumping-poetry formulation of recent Dickinson studies to

The *Bulletin* welcomes notices of all Dickinson-related books, including those published outside the U.S.
Send information to Elizabeth Petrino, Department of English,
Fairfield University, 1073 N. Benson Road, Fairfield, CT, 06824-5195, U.S.A.
Email: epetrino@fairfield.edu

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show the symbiosis of Dickinson’s poetry with its historicity.

Nonetheless, the *Handbook* never allows its recentering of Dickinson’s lyric to erase the colonialist and racist contexts around her. What the *Handbook* does particularly well is acknowledge the financial and racial privilege Dickinson had in order to explore her avant-garde poetics. The *Handbook* thus begins, after its introduction, by paying respect to the Native history of the Connecticut Valley before colonial settlement. In “Whose Native Place?,” a detailed and riveting account of the Anglo-Abenaki Wars, Lisa Brooks recounts the grounds on which Dickinson and her family were able to become Amherst elite – through unmitigated expansion, underhanded land resale, and continually re-brokered deals overwriting the original terms of agreements. As Brooks writes, “These strands of colonization remain inextricably intertwined.... This was the foundation upon which the Dickinson family’s security, property, and wealth rested.” This was subsequently, too, the “foundation” that allowed Dickinson to write to her taste only, with no regard for the market nor “the Auction / of the Mind” (Fr788, M386). Brigitte Fielder’s entry in the *Handbook* similarly adds to the conversation on disparities surrounding Dickinson’s poetics by attending to “the Black literary contexts contemporary to hers.” In “Emily Dickinson’s Black Contexts,” Fielder juxtaposes Dickinson beside Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Angeline Palmer, a young Black woman kidnapped for sale into slavery, to ask pointed questions about the racial inequities underpinning the formation of cultural canons. With their unflinching attestation of the privilege afforded by Dickinson’s identity, both Fielder and Brooks demonstrate a mode of engaging with inequality vis-à-vis Dickinson’s poetics without oversimplification or untruth.

While Fielder and Brooks represent the *Handbook*’s most clear-eyed ways of grappling with Dickinson’s complex social history, some essays fall to the temptation of reading Dickinson in light of our present

moment. An eagerness to position Dickinson as socially sympathetic manifests in an especially speculative posture regarding Dickinson’s aesthetic motivations. Nan Wolverton, for example, in “‘The Wanderers came Last Night,’” suggests that Dickinson’s poems about roving were inspired by encounters with travelling Indian basket-weavers – a conclusion that is difficult to substantiate from the scattered epistolary mentions and acutely non-referential lyrics that Wolverton furnishes as evidence. Wolverton herself seems aware of the tenuousness of her stance as she couches her interpretations in qualifications (the consistent uses of “perhaps” and “probably”). Although Wolverton’s readings tend too closely toward speculation, she nonetheless provides a well-researched history of Indian basket-weaving and the ambiguities of Native race in Dickinson’s Amherst, giving more background against which Dickinson’s basket poems emerge fully-fleshed, if not her poems about wandering.

Though the *Handbook*’s objective of presenting Dickinson through contemporaneity can at times obscure her, at other times, the relationality foregrounds the pervasiveness of Dickinson’s influence. Lesley Dill explains in “How ruthless are the gentle – ” how she consciously derived her visual art from Dickinson, but Dill also demonstrates, in the manner in which she writes, a secondary effect of reading Dickinson. Gorgeous phrases in Dill’s essay could have originated from Dickinson herself, with Dill describing how she “actually saw [Dickinson’s] words as blue light” and “had meaning living inside me already, and this woke up with her words.” Dill’s im/material and synesthetic figurations, in their near regurgitation of Dickinson’s style, demonstrate what readers of Dickinson know to be true: Dickinson’s words crawl inside us and change us, whether we are aware of the metamorphosis or not. As Dill exemplifies, Dickinson’s embeddedness in our voices and the culture – literary, visual, and otherwise – is so interwoven as to be almost indistinguishable, Dickinson’s words embodying “the soft space behind language.”

If the *Handbook* attempts to uncover the “soft space” Dickinson inhabits in American poetry, it simultaneously reveals how entangled Dickinson is and always will be in our literature – that Dickinson is, as the kids say, our bias. In nothing if not reshoring Dickinson’s importance, the *Handbook* accomplishes its task.

Amy Yue-Yin Chan is working on her doctorate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. A recipient of a Dickinson Critical Institute Grant in 2022, she presented a paper about Dickinson’s silences at the EDIS international conference in Seville.

George Boziwick
Emily Dickinson’s Music Book and the Musical Life of an American Poet
University of Massachusetts, 2022

By Gerard Holmes

The basic facts of Emily Dickinson’s musical life have been known for decades, adding spice to memoirs of her friends and family, commentary by editors of her poems and letters, biographies, and essays. Beginning in the 1990s, when Judy Jo Small devoted the long first chapter of her monograph *Positive as Sound* to a discussion of the musical qualities of Dickinson’s verse, critics began to ask why it mattered that Dickinson was a musician and collector of music. Many journal essays and book chapters, and a couple of excellent monographs later, *Emily Dickinson’s Music Book and the Musical Life of an American Poet* significantly adds to and advances the critical conversation. George Boziwick has published only a few essays on the subject, but these proved immediately essential to scholars of Dickinson and music. His monograph will be interesting even to scholars without an organic interest in Dickinson’s musical life for at least three

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reasons, two related to subject matter, and one methodological.

1. Dickinson’s musical life was even richer and more vibrant than previous scholarship has shown, a prompt for new biographical writing.

2. Music was integrated into virtually every corner of everyday life in the nineteenth-century U.S., even in rural Amherst, shifting our understanding of Dickinson’s sonic and cultural ecosystem.

3. Reading Dickinson, or any other musically-engaged writer, through a musicological lens defamiliarizes what we think we know about their lives and work.

Boziwick shows that music was inextricable from Dickinson’s childhood, education, family life, the political life of her family and community, and on and on, allowing us to see in new ways Dickinson’s world and her contributions to it. For example, Boziwick’s extended discussions of musical education, authorship, publication, and distribution in Chapter 3, “The Avid Music Collector,” and Chapter 5, “Home Music-Making” offer alternative frameworks for thinking about interconnected nineteenth-century networks of education, authorship, and commercial distribution. Eye-opening, if unsurprising in retrospect, is Boziwick’s demonstration that composers taught in schools of the kind Dickinson attended while establishing their careers as writers of popular songs of the kind Dickinson collected.

Boziwick wisely distributes his discussion of individual pieces of sheet music across chapters devoted to music collecting, home performance, and other subjects. Doing so helpfully situates perhaps-unfamiliar musical forms and methods into settings familiar to literary critics. Knowing that “When the first troops were mustered out of Amherst,” in the earliest days of the Civil War, “Edward Dickinson helped to preside over their departure [...] to the heroic strains of ‘The

Girl I Left Behind Me’ and ‘Yankee Doodle,’” lets us see the extent to which songs in Dickinson’s music collection functioned in her community. It has long been established that Dickinson played and sang certain songs on a few incontrovertibly-documented instances at home, in school, or otherwise among family and friends; and that she heard certain professional musicians perform on a given date. Boziwick’s contextual information enriches our understanding of these experiences, as well.

As Boziwick points out, music performance is ephemeral, making it difficult to document compared with activities such as writing. Even so, critics generally agree that Dickinson wrote letters and poems now lost. Yet there has been reluctance to consider that she heard or played music not referred-to, specifically in letters, memoirs, or other extant media. Boziwick shows that, on the contrary, music would have been hard to avoid. Knowing its prevalence in Amherst, Springfield, Boston, and other places Dickinson visited, and the relative quiet of nineteenth-century New England compared to today, how might we reimagine Dickinson’s soundscape? How would doing so change the way we treat music and other sounds in the surviving writing?

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Emily Dickinson’s *Music Book and the Musical Life of an American Poet* joins a small but growing set of recent monographs that give serious, sustained attention to both musicology and literary criticism.¹ In addition to refreshing familiar Dickinson scholarship, this approach reminds us that neighboring fields engage in illuminating ways with many of the same critical concerns. Dickinson scholars interested in race, feminism, celebrity, manuscript studies, the social lives of creative works, and more will find allies in mu-

¹See, for example, Brent Hayes Edwards’ 2017 *Epistrophies*, Dana Gooley’s 2018 *Fantasies of Improvisation*, and Melina Esse’s 2021 *Singing Sappho*.

sicology. Boziwick shows the critical value of creative interdisciplinarity.

My one significant quibble is that Boziwick sometimes seems hesitant to follow through the implications of the new information and methods he provides, letting familiar but inaccurate tropes stand. For example, Boziwick seems to assent to the idea that hearing the superstar soprano Jenny Lind in 1851 had a profound effect on Dickinson, such that she “identified herself with the image of Lind and her white dress.” Yet Dickinson’s only known comments on Lind – rather skeptical, possibly parodic, in my reading – were written immediately after hearing her perform in 1851, at age 20, while she is said to have started consistently wearing white decades later, in her 40s and 50s. Boziwick writes that it “speaks volumes” that “Dickinson collected little of Lind’s repertoire,” and I am inclined to agree. If so, is there any reason to think Lind in any way influenced Dickinson’s choice of dress twenty or thirty years later?

Books that advance understanding of Dickinson’s musical life tend to stick around, continuing to be cited even by those not intensely interested in the details of her musical education, sheet-music collecting, or piano performances. Music shares many sonic properties and mechanical tools with poetry, so a musically-sophisticated poet is likely to be a subtle prosodist. Also, anecdotes of Dickinson the musician dramatically show that she was not gloomily reclusive or culturally impoverished. She played at parties! She laughed at superstars! She danced! We see and hear the music Dickinson knew in fresh ways thanks to Boziwick’s research, writing, and – if you can believe it – recordings. Accompanying the book’s useful printed appendix is one freely available online that annotates every piece in Dickinson’s music book, with recent recordings of several songs by Boziwick and other musicians. Another online appendix provides a checklist of music not bound in Dickinson’s music book but named in Dickinson family correspondence, so likely familiar to her. I am excited to see what Dickinson

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scholars make of the wealth of information and new paths of critical inquiry *Emily Dickinson's Music Book and the Musical Life of an American Poet* provides

Gerard Holmes recently completed his dissertation, "'Discretion in the interval': Emily Dickinson's Musical Performances," at the University of Maryland on .An article based on this work appears in the Oxford Handbook of Emily Dickinson, reviewed above.

Michael Snediker
Contingent Figure: Chronic Pain and Queer Embodiment
University of Minnesota, 2021

By Samuel Yates

How do we apprehend – figure, refigure, feel – chronic experiences of embodiment: pain, pleasure, disability, or the normative? Michael D. Snediker's *Contingent Figure: Chronic Pain and Queer Embodiment* is a lyric exploration of aesthetic and embodied duress that reshapes, stretches, and challenge notions of figuration or its slippage into metaphor. Across a hybrid archive including Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener"; Emily Dickinson's posthumously published letters and poems; Henry James's autobiographical writing; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's enmeshed practices as poet, scholar, and textile artist; and the cultural critiques of Elaine Scarry and Leo Bersani reading Rothko, Snediker's project is to capture somehow the "patience of empirical observation and the fidelity of bearing witness" to the ways we figure chronic pain. "The substance of chronic pain," he writes, "is substantively...figurative in both its movement and work." In doing so, *Contingent Figure* attempts to disrupt the phenomenologically and discursively normative notions of identity we mobilize to conceptualize and attend to the materiality of pain and queer embodiment.

Chapter 3, "'The Vision – pondered long': Chronic Pain and the Materiality of Figura-

tion," considers Emily Dickinson's visits in 1864 and 1865 to a Boston ophthalmologist to alter the mythos of the poet's field of vision as limited to the Amherst community. Drawing on Dickinson's epistolary corpus, Snediker shows how the resulting "eye trouble" vexed the poet's creative and ordinary activities, as Dickinson's chafing description of her doctor's mandate that she "cannot yet walk alone" (L295) reveals. Speculatively reading Dickinson's letters, we are disallowed both diagnosis and cure, causing Snediker to observe the possibilities that Dickinson's diminished eyesight became a chronic – and therefore unremarkable – condition, or that her changing sight "eluded her interpretive efforts."

Attempting to account for the inability to interpret chronic pain, he draws on Sharon Cameron's *Lyric Time* in his analysis of "Twas like a Maelstrom, with a notch" (Fr425) and "We send the wave to find the wave" (Fr1643) as unfolding events through time, marking the repeated gerund forms of "kept" in "Maelstrom" and the "sending" in "Wave" as emissaries marking the durational quality of pain of Dickinson's blindness that renders it unremarkable, quotidian. This double reading helixes around a challenge to Scarry's landmark study *The Body in Pain* (1987), drawing attention to the redolence of Dickinson's ocular anxiety. In this vein, a surprising absence in this study is "Pain has an Element of Blank" (Fr656), given how Dickinson's assertion that "It has no Future – but itself – / Its Infinite contain / Its Past – enlightened to perceive / New Periods – of Pain" seems a neat fit for Snediker's goal of establishing pain as a fundamental and ongoing part of the speaker's life, a disruption that defies conventional notions of temporality and identity. Pain, Snediker reminds us, is not just an emotional or psychological experience but a physical one that alters the figuration of time and reality.

This move upends the figuration of chronic pain through metaphor and allegory to instead entertain "the possibility that chronic pain is how it feels differently." At times auto-theoretical, drawing on his experiences

of chronic neck pain, Snediker excavates the borders between debility and disability, ultimately moving literary and disability studies towards a more expansive somatic experience. *Contingent Figure*, like its arguments about Dickinson's poetry and Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, is a text that doesn't merely capture the likeness of debility; it is an extension of the author's "pain and its figurative substance." As a disabled person myself, I felt a kind of "access intimacy" – a shared understanding of the embodied experience and access needs in response to various manifestations of ableism, first articulated by disability justice writer Mia Mingus – throughout Snediker's interpellations of pain, chronicity, and normative notions of embodiment and identity.

Although firmly grounded in a familiar nineteenth-century archive, Snediker's masterful juxtaposition of well-trod texts with an unexpected cadre of voices – the performer Sally Field, the playwright Edward Albee, the poet Claudia Rankine – and a host of contemporary disability, queer, and ecocritical thinkers makes *Contingent Figure* a welcome contribution to disability studies, queer theory, and literary studies. The sequence of chapters is more or less chronological, though Snediker eschews a historicist approach that might further distance chronic pain as a condition of material circumstance. *Contingent Figure's* scope and rigor demand an attentive readership, though the style may prove challenging for the lay reader or those wishing to teach excerpts in undergraduate courses. Indeed, the book's argument unfolds as palimpsests across its six chapters, so when Snediker posits that he "think[s] about style as theory" in his final chapter, we are invited to return to earlier theorizations and consider their stylistic impact anew as imperatives to meaning-making.

In this sense, Snediker's approach abuts the "representational conundrums" that Carrie Sandahl, in her recent essay on disability, argues are "challenging, puzzling, or paradoxical issues that are unique to or complicated by disability's presence" in cultural

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production ("Using Our Words: Exploring Representational Conundrums in Disability Drama and Performance," *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 2018). Sandahl theorizes these conundrums from an embodied performance practice, phenomenologically rooted in affective and visceral responses that work against unwieldy or circuitous metaphors for disability. For Snediker, however, the representational conundrum of "figuration isn't external to the variable experience of lived embodiment: it is lived embodiment" (emphasis original). Through his nuanced and empathetic analysis, Snediker challenges us to conceptualize the writing of Dickinson, James, Melville, and others as creating space for others to share their physical experiences, thereby challenging the assumptions that often underlie our perceptions of pain.

Samuel Yates is a scholar of the aesthetics of disability and performance. Their current book project, "Crippling Broadway: Producing Disability in the American Musical," asks how our notions of disability and the able body inform and transform theatrical performance. This autumn, Samuel will join Penn State's School of Theatre as an Assistant Professor of Theatre Studies.

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

By Claudia Stokes

In her important new book, *In Plain Sight: Nineteenth-Century American Women's Poetry and the Problem of Literary History*, Alexandra Socarides begins by asking a crucial question: what happened to nineteenth-century American women poets? These writers ranked among the century's most popular figures, so why don't we remember them? For decades, scholars have attributed the historical erasure of nineteenth-century women writers to a combination of literary patriarchy

and modernist aesthetics, which together enabled the depiction of the century's women writers as unoriginal, mawkish, and underserving of scholarly attention. *In Plain Sight* seeks to analyze the history of this erasure more carefully and examines in particular the fate of nineteenth-century women poets, who, within a span of a few decades, went from omnipresent to invisible. In a deeply researched, wide-ranging study, Socarides considers how literary convention helped these women to achieve renown while also providing a pretext for their later disappearance. Literary convention has long been overlooked and even dismissed, but Socarides instead takes poetic convention seriously and seeks to gloss its particular utility to the century's women poets. With this undertaking, Socarides makes a major contribution to the recent rise of scholarship examining literary unoriginality, which includes work by William Hunting Howell, Jennifer Putzi, and Ezra Tawil.

Socarides examines women poets' enlistment of such conventional poetic genres as the ballad, but she also considers the conventional forms and modes in which women poets commonly appeared in print. For instance, Socarides pays careful attention to the frontispieces that depicted women poets as well as the prefaces in which they explained the personal circumstances that underlay their authorship. In Socarides's capable hands, the often overlooked paratexts that framed these writings provide crucial information about these women's marketing and public presentation. With these considerations, *In Plain Sight* beautifully integrates the study of nineteenth-century women poets with the fields of book history and the material book.

Composed of four chapters and an afterword, *In Plain Sight* resists focusing on any one particular poet or text but instead examines a remarkable range of poets as well as forms, styles, and conventions in wide use. Socarides draws from a notably broad archive of women poets that includes not only such well known figures as Frances Harper, Elizabeth Oakes Smith, and Lydia Sigourney but also such less-studied writers as Elizabeth

Margaret Chandler, Emma Embury, and Caroline Gilman. *In Plain Sight* also impressively examines the poetry publications of smaller, regional presses as well as those issued by prominent urban presses, an inclusion that produces a broad, representative sample of women's poetry publications.

Each chapter examines a different convention, ranging from the "paratextual [and] generic" to the "compositional," and in each chapter Socarides carefully shows how these various conventions initially buttressed women poets' careers but ultimately contributed to their erasure. For instance, the book's first chapter examines the numerous 1840s anthologies that collected and showcased the period's women poets. These anthologies ostensibly sought to elevate and preserve the varied work of the century's many women poets, but Socarides shows how they ended up depicting these women as interchangeable and indistinct, a view that would underlie later dismissals of women poets. This chapter also includes a wonderfully perceptive discussion of the frontispieces included in these anthologies: Thomas Buchanan Read's *The Female Poets of America* included illustrations of nearly identical white women poets while Rufus Griswold's *The Female Poets of America* depicted a generic, unidentified white woman. Both of these illustrations, Socarides notes, forecast and enabled the eventual anonymity of these women writers.

The second chapter considers what Socarides terms the "sick preface," in which women poets commonly described their ill health and presented their poetry collections as a kind of fundraiser. Socarides carefully glosses the complexities of these prefaces, which allowed women to invoke humility and privacy just as their poems are made public. Socarides finds ample evidence that these women were by no means confined to the sick room, as they suggested, but were instead active participants in public life: for instance, these collections often included occasional poems written in honor of major civic events. These prefaces, Socarides observes, proved enormously useful in the short-term, but their stated disavowal of

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readership or ambition would, over the long term, contribute to the disappearance of these women from literary memory. No less impressive are the third chapter, on women poet’s contribution to the ballad, and the fourth, on poetry-writing sisters whose partnerships fell so far afoul of the modern emphasis on individuality and solitary genius.

Hovering at the margins of Socarides’s book is Emily Dickinson, the century’s one female poet to achieve renown and whose work seems to reject convention at every turn. In

a masterful afterword, Socarides carefully shows how Dickinson’s career registers the influence of the very conventions she seemed to reject. This afterword is a genuine feat, for it shows how even the exceptional poet was bound by conventions that have gone unnoticed and unexamined.

In Plain Sight is a genuinely important contribution to the field: resourceful, well-researched, and wonderfully lucid, it invites us to expand the canon of nineteenth-century women poets, to look more carefully at the

margins of nineteenth-century literary history, and to regard conventions of all kinds with the seriousness with which they deserve.

Claudia Stokes is Professor of English at Trinity University. Her most recent book is Old Style: Unoriginality and Its Uses in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Literature. She is currently preparing a scholarly edition of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s religious writings for the Collected Writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe (Oxford University Press).

Emily Dickinson in the Arts

The list of current and recent appearances of Emily Dickinson in the visual, theatrical, and musical arts is presented by George Boziwick, Chair of the EDIS Dickinson and the Arts Committee. If nothing else, the list shows how much artwork Dickinson continues to inspire.

VISUAL ART:
“Sketchy Ideas” from TNW Ensemble Theater showcases the art of Randall Berndt, at Overture Center’s Wisconsin Studio Feb. 10-12.

ARTS INTERVIEWS:
“Classics Rock.” Jonathan Salem Baskin has written a rock song for each book of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. He has previously done Emily Dickinson, John Donne, and William Carlos Williams.

DANCE:
MorDance Celebrates 10th Anniversary With Two World Premieres, April 28 & 29, 2023, Gerald W. Lynch Theater at John Jay College. Choreographer Morgan McEwen joins forces with composer Polina Nazaykinskaya to create a new work inspired by Emily Dickinson’s poem, “They shut me up in Prose” (Fr445).

MUSIC PERFORMANCES:
Madison Youth Choirs’ Spring Concert Series, *The Little Prince*, set for May 13-14 at the Verona (WI) High School Performing Arts Center, features music that reflects the timeless lessons of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s beloved and complex novella. The performance will include C.H. Johnson’s musical setting of Emily Dickinson’s poem, “Will There Really Be A Morning?”

Adrift, a new opera based on the poetry of Emily Dickinson, March 18 at 8 pm, 19 at 3 pm at Boston Center for the Arts Plaza Black Box, Boston, MA.

Honoring the Voices of Women, Susan T. Rodriguez creates a blend of music, landscape, and history for a new bell tower at Indiana Uni-

versity. The new bells’ inscriptions celebrate the voices of women, including Emily Dickinson, Hildegard of Bingen, Sappho, and Maya Angelou.

“Concert: ‘You Don’t Own Me!’ Singing For Equality.” The Teaneck Community Chorus performs “You Don’t Own Me,” the classic 1963 pop song by Lesley Gore. The Chorus will also sing a Suffragettes’ song for voting rights, as well as the powerful, beautiful poetry of Langston Hughes and Emily Dickinson set to song. Sunday, January 22, 2023, Teaneck High School (Teaneck was Lesley Gore’s hometown).

RECORDINGS
Ben Walker, *Banish Air From Air*. Folkroom Records. The title track is a setting of Dickinson’s “Banish Air from Air –” (Fr 963).

THEATER
The Belle of Amherst. Buntport Theater, Denver, CO, starring Jessica Robblee, Friday March 3, 2023

What Keeps Us Going, a play by Barbara Dana. The Schoolhouse Matinee Reading Series *Zoom* production

The Belle of Amherst, at Arcata (CA) Playhouse, Jan. 28 at 8 p.m. and Sunday, Jan. 29 at 2 p.m. With Humboldt County veteran actress Toodie Boll as Emily Dickinson.

The Belle of Amherst: Minnesota Native and Five-time Emmy nominee and *Lou Grant* actor Linda Kelsey channels Emily Dickinson at the Woman’s Club in Minneapolis, January 13-15.

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Solemn Industries

The Cookies in a House

The cookies in a house
The morning after Lent
Could hardly be more welcome if
From Heaven they were sent.

The yielding to desire
Without a second thought
Has rendered us – predictably –
Distended and distraught.

The Crying in a House

The crying in a house
The morning after birth
Makes limpid peace a blissful state
Of which there’s now a dearth.

The baby’s endless needs
With which we’re now beset
Have made us wish we’d settled for
A furry little pet.

By
Felicia Nimue
Ackerman

Kylan Rice: Winner of the 2023 EDIS Graduate Fellowship Award

Biography

Kylan Rice is a PhD candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he is writing a dissertation on nineteenth and early twentieth-century American women’s poetry. His peer-reviewed scholarship on poetry and poetics is published or forthcoming in *ELH*, *Arizona Quarterly*, *CR: The New Centennial Review*, *Leviathan*, and *Women’s Studies*. He is also the author of *An Image Not a Book* (forthcoming Fall 2023), a collection of poetry, and *Incryptations* (2021), a collection of creative nonfiction.

Project Description

“Available Glory: On Value and Race in Dickinson’s Jewel Poems” is a chapter from my dissertation, “Gem Tactics in American Women’s Poetry.” The chapter examines time-crystallization in Dickinson’s jewel poems. I am particularly interested in Dickinson’s sense of the limitations of poetry as a medium for valuing moments of daily experience. The attempt to “distill amazing sense” from the “ordinary” has an abstracting effect that Dickinson associates with whiteness, which she tries to renounce in a flawed yet meaningful attempt to mitigate its effects on perception.

An Interview with Kylan Rice

EDIS Bulletin: You’re a grad student at UNC. How long till you finish your degree?

Kylan Rice: I’m in the process of finishing my dissertation and plan to graduate within the year.

EDB: You have published a collection of poetry and a collection of creative non-fiction. How far back does your creative writing go? Did you do an MFA before going into your PhD program?

KR: I’ve identified as a creative writer for most of my literate life! My first official publication was in the school newsletter as a first-grader. I wrote an adaptation of one of Aesop’s fables. More recently, I received an MFA in Poetry from Colorado State University (2017) and I’ve published poems and essays in literary magazines such as Kenyon Review, Colorado Review, Denver Quarterly, and Quarterly West, among others.

EDB: Is there a relation between Kylan Rice, poet, and Kylan Rice, scholar? How do you think your creative voice infuses your critical voice, or vice versa?

KR: I like to think that my creative voice infuses my critical voice at the level of the prose sentence; I’m interested in critical writing that breaks, despite itself, into (restrained) passages of readerly rapture.



One of my earliest encounters with literary criticism was Roland Barthes’s *The Pleasure of the Text*. As an emerging scholar, I’m still preoccupied with Barthes’ sense that certain texts invite and even demand a literary or lyrical response on the part of the critic. I understand this as an involuntary condition – evidence that the critic has been disarmed or seduced by the text. I think of creative writing in similar terms: poetry as an expression of helpless receptivity, or as a rushed response to the exigencies of an encounter.

EDB: Do you teach, or want to teach, creative writing as well as poetry?

KR: I’ve had the opportunity to teach a few semesters of introductory-level poetry writing. It’s a profound joy and privilege to work with students on their poems. It’s different from teaching argumentative writing, which doesn’t (on its surface) stake as much of the whole person. That being said, I’ve come to find that literary criticism is often highly motivated by personal concerns, and I try to incorporate this new understanding into my courses on composition and literature. Along these lines, I often think about a remark in Naomi Schor’s *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics of the Feminine* (2006), in which she claims that “all literary methodologies, all critical theories and histories of critical theory serve to validate idiosyncratic relationships to the text.” Schor’s

book, which opens with a photograph of a bracelet made by her father, a goldsmith, is framed by her personal (i.e., idiosyncratic) relationship to ornamental detail.

EDB: Was Dickinson an early interest, or did you come to her as a student?

KR: I don’t think I developed a real relationship with Dickinson’s poetry until my MFA. I was enrolled in a course on form and technique in poetry and I decided to write a term paper on intersubjectivity and Dickinson’s idea of lyric poetry. The essay, eventually published in *Women’s Studies*, was actually inspired by a (mis)reading of a line in King Lear: “See better, Lear; and let me still remain / The true blank of thine eye.” The line seemed to suggest that other people can mediate or intervene in our perception of the world (in lyric terms, the “I” sees the world through the “you”; personal experience is framed by the structure of address). I continue to be interested in proxy or vicarious experience – and I think Dickinson was, too.

EDB: I think about an early letter Dickinson wrote to Henry Emmons thanking him for “the pearl, and then the onyx, and then the emerald stone” (L171). How far back does her interest in jewelry go? What might have been the source of an interest in jewelry in a woman who (as far as I know) seldom wore any?

KR: The letter to Emmons is clearly thanking him for a book, likely a book of poems or “gems” of poetry – a very common conceit in nineteenth century print culture. The first chapter of my dissertation includes a discussion of jewelry tropes in gift book culture – though comparisons between poems and gems goes at least as far back as ancient Greek epigrammatic poetry. I’m enduringly fascinated by the impulse on the part of poets and readers of poetry to compare poems to physical objects. There is a deep aspirational objectivism at the heart of poetry.

As for Dickinson’s interest in jewelry: later in life she claimed not to wear it. And yet, her poetry abounds with jewelry, particularly during the Civil War years. I explore the reasons for this in “Available Glory: On Value and Race in Dickinson’s Jewel Poems,” a chapter from my dissertation. Dickinson used gems to think about the poet’s impulse to “distill amazing sense” from the “Ordinary” (M224) – or the impulse to “condense” the “results of experience and observation” into “diminutive, agreeable, and striking forms” that the poet’s lifelong friend Josiah P. Holland compared to the process by which “carbon” is transmuted into “a diamond that flashes fire from every facet” (Gold-Foil, 1859). In other words, Dickinson examines what it means to use poetry to extract value from aspects of experience that are commonplace or otherwise value-neutral.

EDB: Do you have any interest in jewelry outside of Dickinson’s poems? What led you to this topic?

KR: I think what interests me most about the gem right now – though this isn’t necessarily what has always interested me about it – is its charisma as a portable object. There is kind of gem-like charisma in all portable items: that which is fitted to the hand has a special aura in the mind. The gem is an elite object, but also strangely a representative one for this very reason. Nothing else can occupy the space an object takes up. It is supreme, even aristocratic, in its specific individuation (which is different, I suppose, from arguing that things exist in democratic assemblages, as the new materialists do).

More simply: the gem is so small yet so vivid. The excess of vividness that it produces as an effect of compact form seems to me to be a powerful metaphor for what poems manage to accomplish.

EDB: Your project description says that Dickinson used her jewel imagery in an effort “to abandon arbitrary hierarchies of value to achieve a full, unthinking or un-self-conscious immersion in the world.” We’re way beyond the old image of the reclusive spinster; still, is there something counter-intuitive, or extravagant, about asserting that Dickinson was un-self-consciously immersed in the world?

KR: I’m not necessarily saying Dickinson was un-self-consciously immersed in the world (that would surely be an extravagant claim to make on anyone’s behalf, including one’s own), but that she seems to communicate a desire for this mode of being.

As a poet myself, I sometimes feel that my experience of the world is endlessly mediated through poetry. I have experiences and then I write about them (alternatively, I sometimes seek out experiences in order to write about them; other times I have experiences as a result of poems I’ve written) – and the poems that emerge from this process are often as much about the act of writing poetry as the experiences themselves. At a certain point (and maybe this is extravagant to say), it gets hard to tell life apart from art, where one begins and the other ends. A lot of the poetry that I admire most implicitly asks the question at the end of John Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale”: “Do I wake or sleep?” A poet is a person who can’t quite tell.

All this is to say that Dickinson was a poet, and poets have a murky relationship to reality (an ancient idea). I’m interested in thinking about the ways in which Dickinson, and poets in general, aspire to wake up from poetry as a fatal (fateful) condition. Keats again: “And he’s awake who thinks himself asleep.”

EDB: Who are some of the other poets in your study? Have you discovered interesting, surprising connections between them and Dickinson? Who will we understand better if we read her in connection with Dickinson’s “gem-tactics”?

KR: I’m also writing about Frances Sargent Osgood, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Henrietta Cordelia Ray, Marianne Moore, Elinor Wylie, and

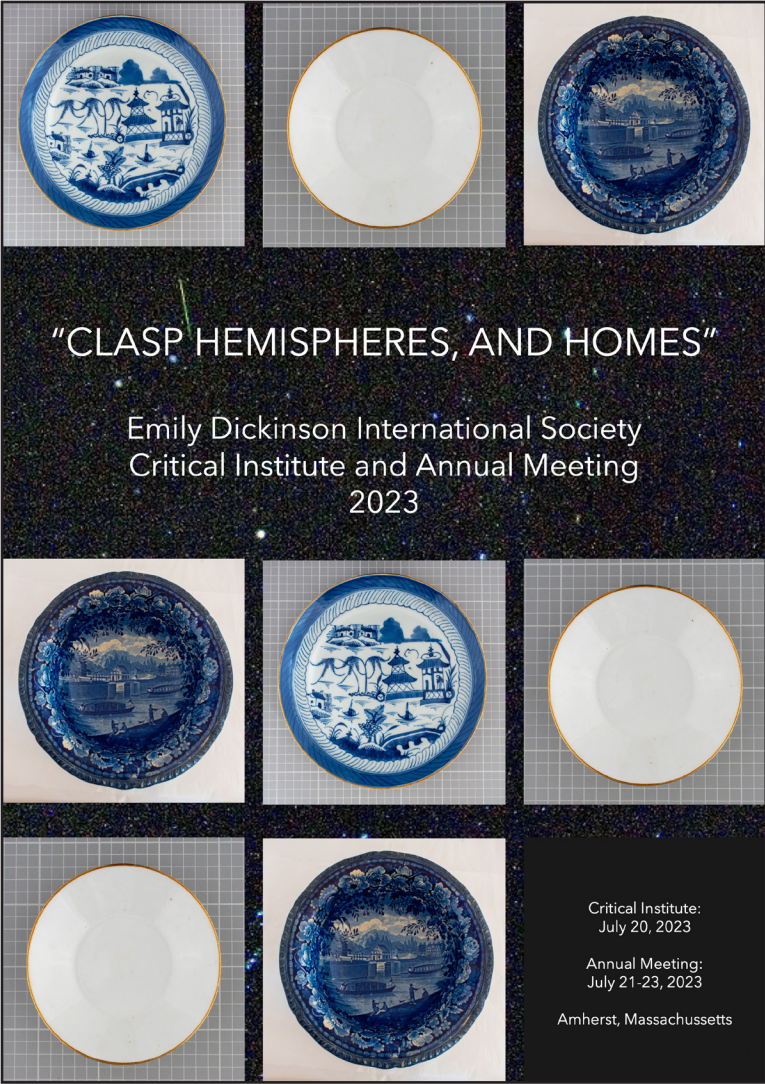
H.D. One surprising connection for me is between Dickinson and Osgood. My chapter on Osgood is about her relationship with gift book culture and the use of poems as mementoes or forget-me-nots that oblige women and women poets in particular to perform memory work on behalf of others. By contrast, Osgood was interested in practices of forgetting. As it

turns out, Dickinson has a large number of poems in conversation with Osgood on this point. She writes, for example:

Oh if remembering were forgetting –
Then I remember not!
And if forgetting – recollecting –
How near I had forgot! (M40)

I’m interested in the ways that Osgood uses tokens of remembrance (specifically gems) to subvert gendered imperatives to remember. There is a similar inversion happening in this passage from Dickinson, who observed elsewhere that “know[ing] how to forget” is “the Art, most of all, / I should like to know” (M208).

“Clasp Hemispheres, and Homes” 2023 Annual Meeting, Amherst



The 2023 Annual Meeting of the Dickinson Society, titled “Clasp Hemispheres, and Homes” (Fr765) will feature open house tours of the newly restored Homestead, and a picnic banquet in the Homestead gardens. The meeting will feature a film screening of two recent Dickinson operas: Lesley Dill’s *Divide Light* (2018, film 2020) and Dana Kaufman’s a cappella pop opera, *Emily & Sue* (2022). Lesley Dill and filmmaker Ed Robbins will attend the annual meeting and speak about the creation of *Divide Light*, and composer Dana Kaufman will also come to Amherst to speak about *Emily & Sue*. In total the annual meeting will offer a dozen panels with more than forty presenters, including a presentation featuring the Museum’s collections manager, Megan Ramsey, of objects discovered in storage, as well as a wildflower walk to accompany a panel on Dickinson’s herbarium. EDIS will hold a critical institute workshop for young scholars the day before the Annual Meeting, and on Sunday, along with the annual members meeting, EDIS will host not just the longstanding “research circle” but also “pedagogy,” “translation/international,” and “arts” circles for participants to talk together about their work. There will be a reception celebrating the founding of EDIS 35 years ago and commemorating the visionary work of the founders and early members.

EDIS Membership Form

Membership in the Emily Dickinson International Society (EDIS) enables you to participate in the Society’s meetings and conferences, to receive the Society’s publications (the *Bulletin* and the *Emily Dickinson Journal*), and to help foster the goals of the Society. EDIS membership comes with unlimited admission to the Emily Dickinson Museum for the individual member.

Thanks to our generous donors, EDIS sponsors memberships for those who are unable to afford regular membership. Students, scholars without adequate institutional research support, participants in local and online EDIS communities, and others who would be unable to join without sponsorship are encouraged to join the society as sponsored members (no questions asked). If a sponsored membership is out of reach, please contact the treasurer directly.

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In Memoriam

Greg Mattingly, 1946 – 2023

Greg Mattingly was known to many EDIS members for his 12 years of service as a guide at the Emily Dickinson Museum. His interest in Dickinson led him to write Emily Dickinson as a Second Language (2018), which is available at the Museum store and online. While a full obituary recounting his fascinating life can be found on legacy.com, the Bulletin would like to share the tributes of some of his fellow Museum guides and members of the Amherst Emily Dickinson Conversation Group..

Whenever I walked into the Museum and saw Greg greeting visitors, I knew those folks were in good hands. He was kind, patient, wise, and witty. Visitors and fellow guides learned from him, but the lessons were meant to open up, not close down, a chance to keep learning. His appreciation of Emily Dickinson was profound, all the more because it kept growing. I will always be grateful for his example – and a presence I know will abide in me and my fellow guides. – Susan Snively, Emily Dickinson Museum Tour Guide



Greg was a good man, a fascinating group leader, and he wore his devotion to Emily Dickinson proudly on his sleeve for all to see. I loved to watch his quiet yet powerful effect on visitors. My mental image of Greg was that he was large, in many ways. Physically and intellectually, he was a big guy, slightly and unintentionally intimidating. Until he smiled. Or started reciting or discussing an ED poem. As I came to know him, his incredible knowledge and love of all things Dickinson was apparent. But I never remember him dominating a discussion; I came to realize and appreciate that he was also a listener – such a rare quality in humans. He’s one of those people who stays in my collection of happy memories, and I’m glad I had the chance to know him. – Jeanne Shumway, Emily Dickinson Museum Tour Guide

Greg was a devoted and brilliant Dickinson scholar. What impressed me about Greg was that he was always so generous and willing to quietly share his knowledge and enthusiasm with humility, patience and kindness to anyone who expressed an interest in the poet’s life and work. – Casey Clark, Emily Dickinson Museum Tour Guide

One of Greg's first connections to the Emily Dickinson Museum, as I recall, was with the Poetry Marathon. He was a true marathoner, present for practically the entire event. We always had a few participants who vied to arrive first, in the hopes of reading the very first poem. Greg was one of those readers. I remember the year he arrived even before I did, before the sun was even up, to make sure he was there for the first poem. I can still picture him sitting on the back porch of the Homestead, in the grey light of

dawn, ready to get underway. “Awake ye muses nine, sing me a strain divine.” – Cindy Dickinson, former Emily Dickinson Museum Director of Programs, Education, Interpretation

In Memoriam

During my years at the Emily Dickinson Museum, I was privileged to work with many exceptional guides, whose understanding and love of Dickinson truly inspired me. I participated in Greg’s training way back when, and I must say there was no one whose enthusiasm for and knowledge of all things ED surpassed his. It was always a joy to be in his company as a colleague and friend. – David Barnes, Emily Dickinson Museum Tour Guide

Greg and I met in 2008 while he was still commuting from his Boston area home and I had moved to Amherst. It was a poetry discussion group led by Cindy Dickinson for the Emily Dickinson Museum. In years since, when he and I recalled that introductory meeting, he said the warmth he felt from everyone in the room charted his destiny. He said when he went to his first EDIS meeting later that summer, he was surprised with the feeling of having come “home.” Soon after, Greg and his devoted partner Cynthia, moved within a thirty minute drive to Amherst. A love of Emily Dickinson’s poetry was the motivation to relocate that we shared. His eagerness and excitement when I started the EDIS Poetry Conversation in May 2009 meant the world to me. His belief in this startup and its “maintenance” showed me what power there is in being a (real) gentleman who cherishes the words of Dickinson and is relentless in throwing open the doors of Dickinson inquiry to everyone. Others will share our loss of him who could quickly recite any of hundreds of Dickinson poems; he who wrote a marvelous book, *Emily Dickinson As A Second Language*, inspired by the innocence of foreign visitors to the Museum; his dedication as guide at the Museum. I, too, miss all of those ingredients that were part of Greg. The camaraderie and respect I felt, built on love for the words of our beloved poet is a perfect memory. – Lois Kackley, EDIS Dickinson Poetry Conversation Group Founder

As one of the Museum’s most knowledgeable and dedicated guides, Greg was frequently tasked with mentoring new guides in training. In this role he was gentle, but conscientious and detailed in his feedback. My old email files are full of follow-ups he sent to questions that arose: How many times did she use the word “circumference”? 16. “Transport”? 30. “29 of them conveying strong emotion or being emotionally carried away.” One email contains useful visual aids illustrating “gables” vs. “gambrels.” Greg delivered content sessions on Dickinson’s language, on issues of faith, but probably my favorite was a session for summer interns on the reactions of Museum visitors to the poems. “Why does Emily Dickinson’s poetry matter?”, he asked, and then quoted David Porter, T.W. Higginson, and Susan Dickinson. But it was Greg’s own assertions that day that made the biggest impact on those students, that her relevance is deeply personal, speaking directly to us across a lifetime if we let it. – Brooke Steinhauer, Emily Dickinson Museum Program Director

Greg Mattingly was the quintessential Emily Dickinson enthusiast and knew everything about Emily Dickinson's poetry, her life, and who she was. As a fellow guide at the Emily Dickinson Museum, Greg Mattingly was my go-to expert on any question. I will always treasure advice Greg gave me on how to recite Emily's poetry and how to interpret her life, poetry, influence, and her world. I am so proud that I had the opportunity to introduce Greg at his book event at The Bookstore in Lenox in 2018 for his groundbreaking work, *Emily Dickinson as a Second Language – Demystifying the Poetry*. – Colin Harrington, Emily Dickinson Museum Tour Guide

I spent many hours reading the ED poems with Greg during the last days. Greg was a mentor for me. I was grateful to be at the EDIS discussion group with him monthly at the Jones for years. By example, he inspired me to memorize the poems as a way of being with them; to use the lexicon as a way to get at meanings. The studiousness, curiosity, and generosity Greg brought to our EDIS sessions through the years – did not change at the bedside sessions. At Greg’s direction, I was frequently turning to the lexicon, repeating the readings, looking at a variant, sharing my view of a poem, checking a reference in Greg’s book – It was as if we were at the discussion table, but I had a tutorial all to myself. I am grateful for being a reader of Emily Dickinson with Greg during these final days; for witnessing the tenacity of the poems in offering joy, wonder, surprise, and aliveness. I am grateful for having witnessed, in such a personal way, the solace. – Robert Raymond, EDIS Dickinson Poetry Conversation Group Member

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Unto my books
so good to turn

Unto my books, so good to turn
Far ends of tired Days;
It half endears the Abstinence,
And pain is missed in Praise.

As Flavors cheer retarded Guests
With Banquetings to be,
So Spices stimulate the time
Till my small Library.

It may be Wilderness without,
Far feet of failing Men,
But Holiday excludes the night,
And it is Bells within.

I thank these Kinsmen of the Shelf;
Their Countenance Kid,
Enamor in Prospective,
And satisfy obtained.

Emily Dickinson

Thanksgiving 2021

Andrew C. Hayes



Idied for beauty,
But was scarce
Adjusted in the tomb,

When one who died for truth
was lain in an adjoining room.
Emily Dickinson

Andrew C. Hayes

