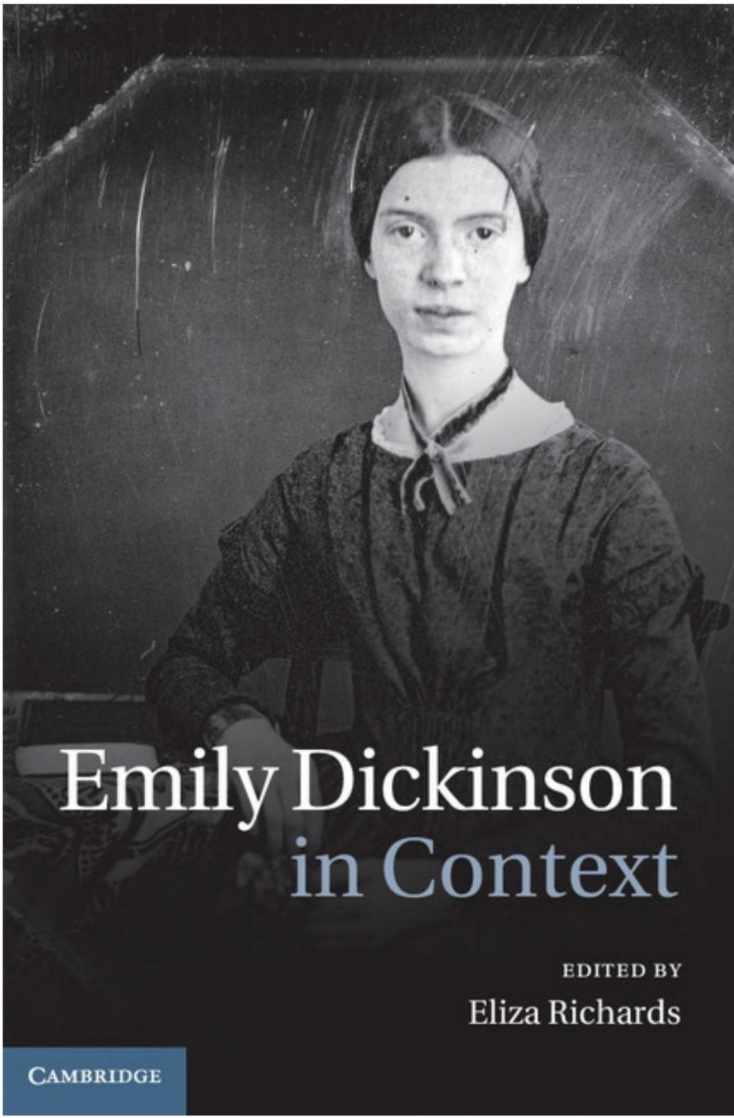

Emily Dickinson in Context

EDITED BY

Eliza Richards

CAMBRIDGE

Emily Dickinson in Context

Edited by
Eliza Richards
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.
It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107022744

First published 2013

Printed in the United States of America
A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.
Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data
Emily Dickinson in context / [edited by] Eliza Richards, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-107-02274-4 (hardback)
1. Dickinson, Emily, 1830–1886 – Criticism and interpretation. I. Richards, Eliza, editor of compilation.
PS1541.Z5E3966 2013
811•.4–dc23
2013009542

ISBN 978-1-107-02274-4 Hardback

Contents

Illustrations

Contributors

Faith Barrett is Associate Professor of English at Lawrence University. She is the author of *To Fight Aloud Is Very Brave: American Poetry and the Civil War* (2012) and coeditor with Cristanne Miller of *Words for the Hour: A New Anthology of American Civil War Poetry* (2005).

David Cody is Professor of English at Hartwick College. His articles on Dickinson, Hawthorne, Melville, Poe, Cooper, Whitman, Henry Adams, Faulkner, and other American and British authors have appeared in numerous scholarly journals, books, and annual volumes.

Paul Crumbley is Professor of English at Utah State University. He is the author of *Inflections of the Pen: Dash and Voice in Emily Dickinson* (1997) and *Winds of Will: Emily Dickinson and the Sovereignty of Democratic Thought* (2010).

Theo Davis is Associate Professor of English at Northeastern University. She is the author of *Formalism, Experience, and the Making of American Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (2007).

Gabrielle Dean is the Curator of Modern Literary Rare Books and Manuscripts at Johns Hopkins University. She is working on a book titled *Picturing the Grid: Emily Dickinson, Gertrude Stein and the Photographic Turn*.

Jed Deppman is Irvin E. Houck Associate Professor in the Humanities and Director of Comparative Literature at Oberlin College. A former vice president of the Emily Dickinson International Society, he is author of *Trying to Think with Emily Dickinson* (2008) and coeditor of *Emily Dickinson and Philosophy* (2013).

Jane Donahue Eberwein is Distinguished Professor of English (Emerita) at Oakland University. She is the author of *Dickinson: Strategies of Limitation* (1985), editor of *An Emily Dickinson Encyclopedia*(1998), and coeditor with Cindy MacKenzie of *Reading Emily Dickinson's Letters: Critical Essays* (2009).

Páraic Finnerty is a Senior Lecturer in English and American Literature at the University of Portsmouth. He is the author of *Emily Dickinson's Shakespeare* (2006); he is currently working on his second monograph, *Dickinson and Her British Contemporaries*, and a co-authored book, *Victorian Celebrity Culture and Tennyson's Circle*.

Margaret H. Freeman is Emeritus Professor of Los Angeles Valley College and Co-Director of Myrifield Institute for Cognition and the Arts. She has published widely on cognitive poetics and the poetry of Emily Dickinson.
Thomas Gardner is Alumni Distinguished Professor of English at Virginia Tech. His most recent books are *John in the Company of Poets: The Gospel in Literary Imagination* (2011) and *A Door Ajar: Contemporary Writers and Emily Dickinson* (2006).
James Guthrie is Professor of English at Wright State University. He received his doctorate from University at Buffalo / SUNY. He is the author of *Emily Dickinson's Vision* (1998) and *Above Time: Emerson's and Thoreau's Temporal Revolutions* (2001), as well as several articles concerning Dickinson's poetry.
Eleanor Elson Heginbotham Professor of English (Emerita) at Concordia University St. Paul, is the author of *Reading the Fascicles of Emily Dickinson* (2003) and coeditor of a forthcoming collection of essays on the fascicles, along with some dozen essays in other collections and journals, including *EDJ* and the *ED Bulletin*. In "retirement" she teaches in the Washington, DC, area.
Elizabeth Hewitt is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at The Ohio State University, Columbus. She is author of *Correspondence and American Literature, 1770–1865* (2004).
Melanie Hubbard is an independent scholar writing a book on Emily Dickinson's rhetoric and poetics, for which she won a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant; she has published articles in the *Emily Dickinson Journal* and *MOSAIC*. Essays are forthcoming in *Dickinson and Philosophy* (2013) and *Spectrum of Possibility*, a collection of essays on Dickinson's fascicles. She has also published a book of poems, *We Have With Us Your Sky* (2012).
Joan Kirkby is the author of *Emily Dickinson* (1991). Recent publications include "[W]e thought Darwin had thrown 'the Redeemer' away: Darwinizing with Emily Dickinson" (*EDJ*, 2010) and "'A crescent still abides': Emily Dickinson and the Work of Mourning" (in *Wider Than the Sky: Essays and Meditations on the Healing Power of Emily Dickinson* [2007]).
Mary Loeffelholz is Professor of English and Vice Provost for Academic Affairs at Northeastern University. She is the author of *From School to Salon: Reading Nineteenth-Century American Women's Poetry* (2004).
Cindy MacKenzie teaches nineteenth-century American

literature at the University of Regina in Saskatchewan, Canada. She is the author of *A Concordance to the Letters of Emily Dickinson* (2000), coeditor of *Reading Dickinson's Letters: Critical Essays* (2010), and coeditor of *Wider Than the Sky: Essays and Meditations on the Healing Power of Emily Dickinson* (2007).

James McIntosh is Professor of English and American Culture (Emeritus) at the University of Michigan. His most recent book is *Nimble Believing: Dickinson and the Unknown* (2000).

Cristanne Miller is SUNY Distinguished Professor and Edward H. Butler Professor of Literature at the University at Buffalo SUNY. Author of *Emily Dickinson: A Poet's Grammar* (1987) and coeditor of *The Emily Dickinson Handbook* (1998), her most recent book is *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century* (2012). She is currently preparing a new reading edition of Dickinson poems for Harvard University Press.

Domhnall Mitchell teaches nineteenth-century American literature at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. He is the author of *Emily Dickinson: Monarch of Perception* (2000) and *Measures of Possibility: Emily Dickinson's Manuscripts* (2005). With Maria Stuart, he edited *The International Reception of Emily Dickinson* (2009). His essays have appeared in *American Literature*, *EDJ*, *Legacy*, and *Nineteenth-Century Literature*.

Alexander Nemerov is the Carl and Marilynn Thoma Provostial Professor in the Arts and Humanities at Stanford University. His most recent book is *Wartime Kiss: Visions of the Moment in the 1940s* (2012).

Elizabeth A. Petrino is Associate Professor and Chair of English at Fairfield University. She is the author of *Emily Dickinson and Her Contemporaries: Women's Verse in America, 1820–1885* (1998). She has published articles on Dickinson and her female literary peers in several journals and anthologies. Her research interests include Dickinson's transatlantic influences and literary allusion, especially relating to British and Continental writers.

Eliza Richards is Associate Professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is the author of *Gender and the Poetics of Reception in Poe's Circle* (2004) and is completing a book entitled *Correspondent Lines: Poetry and Journalism in the US Civil War.*

Sandra Runzo is Associate Professor of English at Denison University. She has published several essays on Emily

Abbreviations and Textual Note

Capps	Capps, Jack, *Emily Dickinson's Reading, 1836–1886* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966).
EDJ	*The Emily Dickinson Journal* (Johns Hopkins University Press).
F	Franklin, R.W., ed., *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Variorum Edition*. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).
Habegger	Habegger, Alfred, *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books: The Life of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Random House, 2001).
Handbook	Grabher, Gudrun, Roland Hagenbüchle, and Cristanne Miller, eds., *The Emily Dickinson Handbook* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998).
J	Johnson, Thomas H., ed., *The Poems of Emily Dickinson, Including Variant Readings Critically Compared with All Known Manuscripts* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955).
L	Johnson, Thomas H. and Theodora Ward, eds., *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958).
Leyda	Leyda, Jay, *The Years and Hours of Emily Dickinson*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960).
Reception	Buckingham, Willis J., *Emily Dickinson's Reception in the 1890s: A Documentary History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh

Press, 1989).

Sewall — Sewall, Richard, *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980 [1974]).

Whicher — Whicher, George Frisbee, *This Was a Poet: A Critical Biography of Emily Dickinson* (New York and London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939).

Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from Dickinson's poems follow the text of Franklin's variorum edition; both Franklin and Johnson numbers are cited parenthetically within the text for the convenience of readers. When the particular version of a poem is important to the essay's argument, the letter has been added in addition to the number. Dickinson's letters are cited by Johnson's letter numbers. Dickinson's idiosyncratic spelling, capitalization, and punctuation have been retained throughout, and her dashes are represented by spaced hyphens, as in Franklin's edition. Some contributors have chosen to represent line breaks as they appear in Dickinson's manuscripts, though neither Johnson nor Franklin editions represent them in this way.

Chronology

1828 Dickinson's parents, attorney Edward Dickinson of Amherst and Emily Norcross of Monson, marry.

1829 (William) Austin, Dickinson's brother, is born in Amherst.

1830 Edward buys one half of the brick Homestead on Main Street that belongs to his father. Emily Elizabeth Dickinson is born here on December 10.

1833 Lavinia Norcross (Vinnie), Dickinson's sister, is born.

1835 Dickinson begins four years at Amherst Female Seminary. Edward Dickinson is appointed treasurer of Amherst College.

1838 Edward Dickinson begins first term in the Massachusetts legislature. Samuel Fowler Dickinson, his father and a founder of Amherst College, dies in Ohio.

1840 Dickinson enters Amherst Academy, with Lavinia: "I have four studies. They are Mental Philosophy, Geology, Latin, and Botany. How large they sound, don't they?" (L6). The Dickinsons move to West Street (now North Pleasant Street).

1846–7 The only known daguerreotype of Dickinson was made by William C. North in Amherst.

1847 Dickinson graduates from Amherst Academy and enters Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, where she completes a single year of studies: "I am now studying 'Silliman's Chemistry' & Cutler's Physiology, in both of which I am much interested" (L20). There she refuses to confess faith publicly during a period of evangelical

Protestant religious revivalism.

1850 The Amherst College *Indicator* publishes a valentine by Dickinson, “Magnum bonum.” Dickinson continues to resist religious conversion, even though many of her loved ones convert: “I am standing alone in rebellion” (L35). During Dickinson’s lifetime a handful of poems were published, always anonymously, and some perhaps without her permission.

1852 The *Springfield Republican* publishes Dickinson’s “Sic transit gloria mundi” (F2 J3) as “A Valentine.” Edward Dickinson is elected to the US House of Representatives. Emily writes to Susan Gilbert: “Why cant *I* be a Delegate to the great Whig Convention?” (L94).

1853 Austin enters Harvard Law School.

1855 With Lavinia, Dickinson travels to Washington, DC, and spends several weeks there in February and March. On the way home they visit Philadelphia, where Dickinson meets the Reverend Charles Wadsworth. In November, the Dickinsons move back to the Homestead on Main Street. Emily and Lavinia never marry; they live their adult lives with their parents in this house.

1856 Austin marries Susan Huntington Gilbert. They move into a house built for them next door to the Dickinson Homestead, which they call The Evergreens, where they raise a family and have an active social life. The relationship between Dickinson and Susan is important: “Dear Sue - With the exception of Shakespeare, you have told me of more knowledge than anyone living - To say that sincerely is strange praise” (L757).

1857 Ralph Waldo Emerson lectures in Amherst and is entertained at The Evergreens: “It must have been as if he had come from where dreams are born!” (Prose Fragment 10, in *Letters*).

1858 Dickinson begins recording poems in hand-sewn

booklets later known as fascicles. The practice continues until 1864. After this, she gathers some poems in loose anthologies called sets (in 1865, and from 1871 until 1875, when she stops). "Nobody knows this little Rose" (F11 J35) appears in the *Springfield Republican* as "To Mrs. - - , with a Rose. [Surreptitiously communicated to The Republican]." Circa 1858–1865: Dickinson's poetic production increases dramatically, reaching an estimated peak of 295 in 1863, and more than 200 in 1862 and 1865. She becomes increasingly reclusive, but maintains an extensive and engaged correspondence with family and friends, many of whom are also prominent public figures (Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Samuel Bowles, Josiah Gilbert Holland, Helen Hunt Jackson, Judge Otis P. Lord). The "Master Letters," drafts of love letters with an unknown recipient, are probably composed during this time (it is unknown if the letters were sent).

1861 US Civil War begins. "I taste a liquor never brewed - " (F207 J214) is published in the *Republican* under the title "The May-Wine." Elizabeth Barrett Browning dies: "Silver - perished - with her Tongue - " (F600 J312).

1862 "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers - " (F124 J216) is published in the *Republican* as "The Sleeping." Dickinson begins correspondence with Thomas Wentworth Higginson, responding to his essay in the *Atlantic Monthly* that offers advice to young writers: "Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?" (L260). Higginson departs for South Carolina as the Colonel of the first black Union army regiment. Amherst native Frazar Stearns is killed in action, "his big heart shot away by a 'minie ball'" (L255).

1864 Dickinson suffers from eye problems and moves to Cambridge, MA, for treatment, April–November: "yet I work in my Prison, and make Guests for myself - " (L290). Austin is drafted to fight in the Civil War and pays for a substitute. "Flowers - Well - if anybody" (F95 J137)

manuscripts in a wooden trunk – no one seems to have been aware during her lifetime of how many poems she was writing (more than 1,700 are extant, many in multiple versions) – and decides to enlist help in publishing them.

Introduction

Eliza Richards

Unlike Charles Dickens, “a man so imbricated in his age as to be synonymous with it,” Emily Dickinson does not obviously demand to be read within historical contexts.[1] Indeed, when asked to imagine Dickinson, readers may picture a woman dressed in white, sitting at a small desk in her bedroom, receiving “Bulletins all Day / From Immortality,” and writing them down in the form of her “letter to the World / That never wrote” to her (F820 J827, F519 J441). A famously retiring poet, dubbed “Queen Recluse” by her close friend Samuel Bowles, Dickinson witnessed just a handful of her poems published in newspapers and magazines during her lifetime, often without her permission (quoted in Sewall, 474). More of her poems circulated in letters to a diverse array of friends. But not even her sister Lavinia, with whom she lived, knew of the extent of her opus until after her death, when hundreds of poems were discovered, many of them neatly sewn into little booklets later known as fascicles. This scenario of consummately private poetic production framed the early publication of her “portfolio” poems, as one of her correspondents and earliest editors, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, called them.[2] From 1890 to 1945, competing factions of Dickinson’s family and friends offered this treasure trove to the public bit by bit, in volume after volume, underscoring the poet’s eccentric, isolated genius all the while, setting terms of reception that endure to the present day. (Martha Nell Smith discusses this history and argues for its continued relevance in Chapter 26.)

This image served Dickinson’s reputation well in the early periods of recognition. Turn-of-the-century readers were fascinated with her strange writings, which seemed “like poetry torn up by the roots, with rain and dew and earth still clinging to them” and presented to the public.[3] Speculative biographies followed the earlier family memoirs, as readers entranced by the riddling poems and letters sought to piece together a narrative of Dickinson’s outwardly uneventful, inwardly spectacular life. Who or what motivated the great crisis of the early 1860s that

spurred such a powerful outpouring of poems? Who was the "Master" addressed in three of her letter drafts; was he or she the motivating force? Until the present day – three book-length biographical studies and a historical novel entitled *The Secret Life of Emily Dickinson* (2011) have been published in recent years – people have enthusiastically inquired into the mysteries of Emily Dickinson, arriving at a range of more or less plausible, more or less intriguing answers.[4]

If the first decades of criticism cast Dickinson as an eccentric, idiosyncratic genius, criticism of the mid-twentieth century confirmed and extended that picture by casting her as a protomodernist, a writer who had more to do with the twentieth century than with the one in which she lived. In the 1930s and 1940s the New Critics sharply countered psychological and biographical studies, insisting that Dickinson's work should be judged by "the poetic relation of the words" alone.[5] (Theo Davis offers a fascinating analysis of New Critical engagements with Dickinson in Chapter 30.) Dickinson's compact, compressed "fusion of sensibility and thought" made Dickinson an ideal poet for these formalists, who devoted their energies to intensive explications of individual poems, modeling an influential strategy of close reading that remains one of the most rewarding and commonly practiced approaches to reading Dickinson, especially in the classroom.[6] As much as close reading strategies have enriched the study of her complex poems, however, they have also tended to reinforce the tendency to think of her as work as context-less, as if her world of words swung free, its "Boundaries - forgot - ," like the spider in one of her poems whose web was swept away by a housewife's broom (F513 J605). These context-less readings themselves constitute a somewhat paradoxical historical context, for the formalist strain in Dickinson criticism continues to flourish in transformed ways, allying itself with linguistic, psychological, philosophical, and even some historicist approaches.[7]

Starting in the 1960s, New England religious life offered one of the earliest historical and intellectual contexts for analyzing Dickinson's poetry – particularly Puritanism and Calvinism, the Second Great Awakening, and Transcendentalism.[8] Although the range of theological frames for reading her work has multiplied over the years, there is no abatement of interest in the topic. It is clear that Dickinson's poetry is an exercise in "nimble believing," but it is not as clear how to define that process or the goals of her

rigorous but open-ended spiritual inquiry.[9] It is therefore not surprising, and certainly not redundant, that dozens of articles and at least four monographs published recently have concentrated on spiritual issues: on religion's role in Dickinson's writing process, on the "problem of human suffering," and on Dickinson and "hymn culture."[10] Several of the essays in this volume take up the question of Dickinson's engagements with religious traditions and writings: Jane Donahue Eberwein writes on Dickinson's New England heritage; Emily Seelbinder examines the particular copy of the King James Bible that Dickinson owned; Joan Kirkby discusses ideas about death and immortality in the poet's time; and James McIntosh evaluates her conflicted thinking about Christian traditions.

Feminist criticism initiated a comprehensive revolution in Dickinson studies in the 1970s and 1980s, as scholars became increasingly interested in finding ways of locating Dickinson's complex verbal artifacts within their gendered cultural surroundings. From Susan Gilbert and Sandra Gubar's landmark study *Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), to Margaret Homans and Cristanne Miller's deconstructionist-inspired readings of Dickinson's language and poetic practice, to Cheryl Walker and Joanne Dobson's historicist studies of Dickinson's relation to her female contemporaries, feminist criticism opened Dickinson studies to new forms of historically, politically, and psychologically inflected approaches.[11] Mary Loeffelholz offered a Lacanian reading not only of Dickinson, but also of her feminist critics in 1991; Martha Nell Smith's 1992 study *Rowing in Eden* powerfully raised the possibility of Dickinson's same-sex attraction to and love for Susan Dickinson as a motivating force in her poetic production; and Elizabeth A. Petrino explored the relationships between Dickinson and her popular female poetic peers in 1998.[12] Though studies of gender and sexuality have become increasingly alloyed with other approaches in recent years (as Shira Wolosky in Chapter 16 argues they should be), the conceptual frameworks established by the feminist legacy in Dickinson criticism are a powerful force that continues to shape work on a range of topics today.

Because Dickinson's poetry was so long approached through meditative, presentless, dislocated modes of reading, the energies drawn from historicist and cultural approaches have taken time to infuse that intensely private and individualized atmosphere. If Dickinson was long figured as "the exception," and if she

continues to impress readers as startlingly original, critics have nevertheless been increasingly fascinated with the ways in which she comments on contemporary events and surroundings.[13] Barton St. Armand's landmark study *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture* (1984) helped inaugurate the historical trend, with chapters on Victorian death rituals, the popular hobby of scrapbooking, and the aesthetics of John Ruskin.[14] Shira Wolosky's study of Dickinson and the U.S. Civil War appeared the same year and set the terms for an ongoing inquiry into the poet's oblique commentary on the war that continues unabated today (Faith Barrett has contributed an excellent essay on the topic for this volume).[15] During the late 1980s and 1990s, substantial work on Dickinson's relation to popular literary culture, abolitionist and feminist rhetoric, and visual culture emerged.[16] These pioneering studies persuasively demonstrated that although her work may be private, it nevertheless registers important intellectual, social, and political currents of her time.

In the twenty-first century, contexts for the study of Dickinson have multiplied as never before. Domhnall Mitchell's *Monarch of Perception* (2000) considers Dickinson's work in relation to contemporary contexts such as railroads, domestic space, and autograph anthologies. Alfred Habegger's biography, *My Wars Are Laid Away in Books* (2001), takes a decidedly cultural turn. In *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (2005), Virginia Jackson deconstructs the iconography of Dickinson as the isolated lyric poet and powerfully raises the question of precisely what contexts are appropriate for reading her work; Páraic Finnerty examines cultures of reading and performance surrounding Dickinson in *Emily Dickinson's Shakespeare* (2006); Aife Murray undertakes a full-scale excavation of the lives of the family's servants and their influence on Dickinson's work in *Maid as Muse* (2009). In *Winds of Will* (2010), Paul Crumbley explores the ways democracy informs the poet's work. In the same year, Robin Peel published the first book-length study of the impact of nineteenth-century sciences – paleontology, natural theology, geology, astronomy, and so forth – on Dickinson's thinking. Most recently, Cristanne Miller's *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century* (2012) situates the poet within nineteenth-century literary culture, examining the ways she engages contemporary forms, conventions, and writing practices.[17] Other recent book-length studies address Dickinson's international reception, her engagements with textiles and clothing, and her critical reception history since 1960.[18] A special

Dickinson's transformations of nature into metaphor, Cristanne Miller's comparative approach to metrical innovation, Alexander Nemerov's striking comparison of the use of "pentimento" in Winslow Homer's paintings and Dickinson's poems. Other contributions stand out for offering a provocative argument even while presenting a responsible overview of a topic: Emily Seelbinder stresses the importance of the aberrant spelling of a single word for understanding Dickinson's engagements with the King James Bible; Mary Loeffelholz emphasizes Dickinson's competition with her female contemporaries over writing a "modern" form of literature; Sabine Sielke argues that Dickinson critiques the limitations of scientific inquiry, championing poetry's alternative forms of knowledge; Cindy MacKenzie thinks about the ways Dickinson's letters are haunted by the writer as well as by her readers; Theo Davis challenges the longstanding assumption that Dickinson's poems were strange and incomprehensible to her earlier readers while estranging common understandings of new critical modes of inquiry; and Thomas Gardner traces the ways that writers since Dickinson have engaged in conversations with her poetry in their own work.

Several of the scholars contributing to this volume live and work outside the United States, one indication of Dickinson's growing reputation around the world. In Chapter 33, Domhnall Mitchell discusses this global expansion of interest, offering an overview of the trends in international reception and the challenges posed by translating Dickinson into very different languages and cultures. It is my hope that this volume abets the expanding circulation of Dickinson's work by offering accessible and well-informed critical insights to students, teachers, and scholars everywhere.

If the book itself could continue expanding, many more essays might have been written: on Dickinson's fascination with foreign places, for example, or on her deep engagement with the flora and fauna that populated her immediate surroundings. Her family relationships and close friendships, many of them mediated through her extraordinary letters, merit more extensive treatment than they could receive here. Luckily, readers can look to studies that lie outside the scope of this volume, and I begin to offer suggestions for additional reading in the notes to this introduction. Other recommendations are available in the list of further readings, arranged by chapter, at the end of this book. There is much to offer here as well, however, and I hope readers linger over the information and ideas in this volume, offered by a

thoughtful, innovative, and deeply knowledgeable group of scholars.

Notes

1 Preface, *Charles Dickens in Context*, ed. Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

2 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "An Open Portfolio" (1890), *The Recognition of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Caesar R. Blake and Carlton F. Wells (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), 3.

3 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Preface to Poems by Emily Dickinson" (1890), Blake and Wells, eds., *The Recognition of Emily Dickinson*, 11.

4 Jerome Charyn, *The Secret Life of Emily Dickinson* (New York: Norton, 2011); Lyndall Gordon, *Lives Like Loaded Guns: Emily Dickinson and Her Family's Feuds* (London: Virago, 2010); Christopher Benfey, *A Summer of Hummingbirds: Love, Art, and Scandal in the Intersecting Worlds of Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Martin Johnson Heade* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008). Brenda Wineapple, *White Heat: The Friendship of Emily Dickinson and Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

5 R. P. Blackmur, "Emily Dickinson: Notes on Prejudice and Fact" (1937), Blake and Wells, eds., *The Recognition of Emily Dickinson*, 209.

6 Allen Tate, "New England Literary Culture and Emily Dickinson," *Symposium* (April, 1932). Blake and Wells, eds. *The Recognition of Emily Dickinson*, 161.

7 See, e.g., Sharon Cameron, *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979); Helen Vendler, *Poets Thinking: Pope, Whitman, Dickinson, and Yeats* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

8 See, e.g., Charles Anderson, *Emily Dickinson's Poetry:*

Stairway of Surprise (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960); Albert Gelpi, *Emily Dickinson: The Mind of the Poet* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

9 James McIntosh's book title, a paraphrase of something Dickinson wrote in L750 to Judge Lord. *Nimble Believing: Dickinson and the Unknown* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

10 Aliki Barnstone, *Changing Rapture: Emily Dickinson's Poetic Development*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 2006); Linda Freedman, *Emily Dickinson and the Religious Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Patrick Keane, *Emily Dickinson's Approving God: Divine Design and the Problem of Suffering* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008); Victoria Morgan, *Emily Dickinson and Hymn Culture: Tradition and Experience*. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010).

11 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000 [1979]). Margaret Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity: Dorothy Wordsworth, Emily Brontë, and Emily Dickinson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980); Cristanne Miller, *Emily Dickinson, a Poet's Grammar* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); Cheryl Walker, *The Nightingale's Burden: Women Poets and American Culture before 1900*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Joanne Dobson, *Dickinson and the Strategies of Reticence: The Woman Writer in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

12 Mary Loeffelholz, *Dickinson and the Boundaries of Feminist Theory* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991). Martha Nell Smith, *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); Elizabeth A. Petrino, *Emily Dickinson and Her Contemporaries: Women's Verse in America, 1820–1885* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1998).

13 Max Cavitch, "Dickinson and the Exception," *A Companion to Emily Dickinson*, ed. Martha Nell Smith and Mary Loeffelholz (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008).

14 Barton Levi St. Armand, *Emily Dickinson and Her Culture: The Soul's Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

15 Shira Wolosky, *Emily Dickinson: A Voice of War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984).

16 David Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Judith Farr, *The Passion of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

17 Domhnall Mitchell, *Emily Dickinson: Monarch of Perception* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000). Páraic Finnerty, *Emily Dickinson's Shakespeare* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006); Aife Murray, *Maid as Muse: How Servants Changed Emily Dickinson's Life and Language* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2009); Paul Crumbley, *Winds of Will: Emily Dickinson and the Sovereignty of Democratic Thought* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), Robin Peel, *Emily Dickinson and the Hill of Science* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010). Cristanne Miller, *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).

18 *The International Reception of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Domhnall Mitchell and Maria Stuart (London: Continuum, 2009); Fred White, *Approaching Emily Dickinson: Critical Currents and Crosscurrents Since 1960* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2008).

19 Angela Sorby, *Schoolroom Poets: Childhood, Performance, and the Place of American Poetry, 1865–1917* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005). Diana Fuss, *The Sense of an Interior: Four Writers and the Rooms that Shaped Them* (New York: Routledge, 2004). Eliza Richards, "'Death's Surprise, Stamped Visible': Emily Dickinson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Civil War Photography," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 54.1 (2009), 13–33. Jerusha Hull McCormack, "Domesticating Delphi: Emily Dickinson and the Electro-Magnetic Telegraph," *American Quarterly* 55 (2003): 569–601.

Eliza Richards, "'How News Must Feel When Traveling': Dickinson and Civil War Media," *A Companion to Emily Dickinson*, ed. Martha Nell Smith and Mary Loeffelholz (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008); Joan Kirkby, "Dickinson Reading," *EDJ* 5.2 (1996); Colleen Boggs, "Emily Dickinson's Animal Pedagogies," *PMLA* 124.2 (2009), 533–41; Aaron Shackelford, "Dickinson's Animals and Anthropomorphism," *EDJ* 19.2 (2010), 47–66; Paul Giles, "'The Earth Reversed Her Hemispheres': Dickinson's Global Antipodality," *EDJ* 20.1 (2011), 1–21.

20 *Poems; Including Variant Readings Critically Compared with All Known Manuscripts*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson. 3 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1955); *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. R. W. Franklin. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1981; *Emily Dickinson's Open Folios : Scenes of Reading, Surfaces of Writing*, ed. Marta L. Werner (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); *Emily Dickinson's Correspondences: A Born-DigitalTextual Inquiry*, ed. Martha Nell Smith and Lara Vetter (available at: http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/edc/default.xqy); *Radical Scatters: Emily Dickinson's Fragments and Related Texts, 1870–1886*, ed. Marta Werner (available at: http://libxml1a.unl.edu:8080/cocoon/radicalscatters/default-login.html).

subjects taught included arithmetic and algebra, botany, chemistry, composition, foreign languages, geography, geology, history, Latin, mathematics, "mental philosophy," religion (including the hymns of Isaac Watts), rhetoric, and science.[1] Biographer Alfred Habegger has argued that the school "stimulated Emily's ambition by turning essay writing into a public contest," with the best examples included in *Forest Leaves*, a class anthology made up of handwritten contributions (Habegger, 164). But it stimulated in other ways too: pupils of the Academy were occasionally allowed to attend lectures given by Professor Edward Hitchcock (1793–1864) of Amherst College, a leading geologist of the day and the author of several textbooks used in the Academy – but also someone for whom science was a powerful explanatory tool in the cause of religion, enriching rather than undermining belief. His textbooks were also set reading at the Academy: "When Flowers annually died and I was a child," Dickinson wrote in 1877, "I used to read Dr Hitchcock's Book on the Flowers of North America. This comforted their Absence - assuring me they lived" (L488).

Dickinson's education was supplemented further by the family library, which amounted to five hundred volumes and included four sets of Shakespeare, the writer she referred to most often, as well as a "Lexicon," her "only companion" (L261).[2] Though there were several small libraries serving the (six) school districts of the town by 1840, the Dickinsons typically had no need of them: books were either purchased privately (in L261 she describes her father buying her "many Books - but [begging her] not to read them"), or received as gifts; private loans; or in exchange with friends, especially Dickinson's sister-in-law Susan Huntington Gilbert Dickinson. The Dickinsons subscribed to fifteen magazines and newspapers, more than the family average in Amherst; the multiple references in her poems to foreign places, history, and geological phenomena, including volcanic activity and mountain formation, is profoundly mediated both by an education that was fairly comprehensive by the standards of her day and by the stories Dickinson read in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, and *Scribner's*. Amherst's books and print culture, in short, provided her with a set of references that extended well beyond the local – Cristanne Miller counts "around seventy poems referring to the 'Orient' or mentioning people, animals, or products from Asia" between 1858 and 1881; she argues convincingly that periodicals helped Dickinson understand and question "her New England identity in direct relation to multiple aspects of global exchange."[3]

Amherst was a religious town – the impact of the Second Awakening manifested itself in the foundation of the college, designed to educate and train young ministers, and, slightly further afield, Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, which Dickinson attended as a boarder from 1847 to 1848: at the funeral of its founder, Mary Lyon, in 1849, it was revealed that there had been "eleven revivals in twelve years" there (quoted in Habegger, 198). Dickinson's family did not remain untouched by successive waves of revivalism: her mother, Emily Norcross Dickinson, joined the First Church in 1831; her father and younger sister Lavinia (Vinnie) converted in 1850; and her brother Austin followed them in making a profession of belief in 1856, in part under the influence of his bride-to-be Susan, who was to become one of Dickinson's most important familiars. Dickinson, then, was surrounded on both sides of her family by men and women who were religiously active and prominent. Her maternal grandfather, Joel Norcross, was a "bright-minded, vigorous man who participated in civic and religious activities, promoted quality education, and succeeded in a multiplicity of entrepreneurial enterprises," while her paternal grandfather Samuel Fowler Dickinson "stood at the heart of the village's religious life; clerk and treasurer of the town and frequent delegate to the state legislature, he was at its political center; his legal practice kept him engaged in local commerce, especially the buying and selling of local land."[4] Emily Dickinson herself, though, remained unwilling to express any experience of grace during her year at Mount Holyoke, and never formally belonged to a church. It is perhaps telling that her brother had been deeply skeptical before meeting his future wife, and that her father had run the business affairs of the First Church for around twenty years before his own conversion. There is a (possibly apocryphal) story about Edward being reprimanded for wanting "to come to Christ as a lawyer" when he had to do so "as a poor sinner"; something of that proud reserve finds its way into the occasionally skeptical and aloof voices of Dickinson's religious poems, as when a speaker asks of God in F1675/J1601 "that we may be forgiven - / For what, he is presumed to know" (quoted in Sewall, 66). Nevertheless, her poetry shows the impact of Amherst's religious culture in both its subject matter and form. A concern with the meaning of death and the possibility of an afterlife is often dramatized in poems that are spoken posthumously, as well as the struggle between a yearning to believe and a refusal to do so on unequal terms. Her basic unit, the quatrain, was taken from hymns, and she adopted and adapted various structures of rhythm and rhyme from Watts's hymns.

Sermons were another influence, from which Dickinson learned a great deal about poetic effects. Responding to one given by Edwards Amasa Park (1808–1900) at the First Church on November 20, 1853, she wrote:

> I never heard anything like it, and don't expect to again, till we stand at the great white throne …. And when it was all over, and that wonderful man sat down, people stared at each other, and looked as wan and wild, as if they had seen a spirit, and wondered they had not died.
>
> (L142)

Park was associated with a "theology of the feelings" that emphasized a creative and imaginative use of language rather than careful rational exposition, and Dickinson's own writing often creates a cumulative emotional impression on the reader that begins with a strong opening line and intense, sometimes violent, imagery: "He fumbles at your Soul" (F477 J315) is a famous example. Dickinson's poetic method can therefore be related more broadly with currents of nineteenth-century theology that originated in Germany and found their way to Amherst. Park had been Professor of Moral Philosophy and Metaphysics at Amherst College from 1835 to 1836; he was influenced by the Higher Criticism associated with Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who stressed the importance of intuition, mystery, and personal feelings in religious experience. Henry Boynton Smith (1815–77), whose preaching Dickinson noted in a letter to Austin (L22), was Professor of Moral Philosophy and Metaphysics at Amherst College from 1847 to 1850, and "had studied in the universities of Halle and Berlin" (where Schleiermacher had taught) (Sewall, 359). Lyman Coleman (1796–1882) was married to Dickinson's maternal first cousin, Maria Flynt; a minister of the Congregational Church in neighboring Belchertown, he too had studied in Berlin before becoming principal of Amherst Academy (from 1844 to 1846), where Dickinson took German with him (her habit of capitalizing certain nouns is believed to have been influenced by German convention). The Rev. George Henry Gould (1827–99), an early family and personal friend, was another minister who "had an ear for music – the 'music of words'," which finds its corollary in Dickinson's F1577/J1545 "The Bible is an antique Volume," where the speaker aligns herself with Orpheus, who captivates and charms through music, rather than the Scripture that

condemns.[5]

Emily Dickinson is not obviously like Walt Whitman ("I'm Nobody!" from F260/J288 seems at first glance to be very far removed from the "I sing myself" of *Leaves of Grass*), but in fact her inner gaze ("I" is the most often-used word in her poetic vocabulary) is made at least partly possible by a self-confidence generated by her family's prominence in a regionally vital town. Many of her references to Amherst are in the context of invitations to visit that reveal pride as much as attachment, the earliest in 1842 (L3, "I do wish you would come to Amherst…"). There are even times when Dickinson becomes a self-appointed spokesperson or ambassador for the place, as in August 1878 when she represents her own concern as that of "Amherst's Face" in responding to news of an accident involving Mrs. Sarah Jenkins, wife of the former pastor of the First Church, who had only recently relocated to Pittsfield after eleven years (L564). At one level, this identification of town and self was derived from her family's long and distinguished association with Amherst's most significant institutions. In reaction to the perceived encroachment of liberalism from elsewhere, her grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson, had helped finance and found Amherst College in 1821, and her father and brother served as its treasurers – Edward from 1835 to 1872, and Austin from 1873 to 1895. The three generations of Dickinson men were all lawyers, with the poet sometimes serving as a witness to legal documents, and to a greater or lesser extent politically active: Samuel and Edward both served on the state legislature, and Austin was a driving force behind new buildings in the town and college, as well as the landscaping of the town Common (in consultation with Fredrik Law Olmsted, designer of New York's Central Park) and Wildwood cemetery. The poet's mother, Emily Norcross Dickinson, was also very well educated and a supremely gifted gardener who in 1858 was mentioned in the local paper for her ability to grow figs, a "great rarity … in this latitude." In the same note, "Mr. D" was praised for "the extreme beauty of the house and grounds" and for "the great variety and beauty of the fruits and plants" that Mrs. Dickinson, in truth, was responsible for (Leyda I, 359). Commencement Week activities in the autumn included events and visits hosted by the Dickinson family, with Emily's sister-in-law Susan assuming the role of social leader from 1857 onwards. An early and shared sense of familial distinction is clearly articulated in an 1853 letter to Austin, in which Emily observes that their cousins "The Newmans seem very pleasant, but they are not *like us*. What makes a few of us so different from others? It's a question I often ask myself" (L118).

Edward Dickinson's own leading role in Amherst as a lawyer and politician carried over into the personal sphere; in July 1851 he took an active part in helping to extinguish a fire in town, but also rang the church bells (often a fire alarm) in October of the same year to draw attention to a rare instance of the Aurora Borealis (L53). And of Austin it was said that "nobody in the town could be born or married or buried, or make an investment, or buy a house-lot, or a cemetery-lot, or sell a newspaper, or build a house, or choose a profession, without [him] close at hand."[6] The same remarks could be applied equally well to Emily Dickinson herself – except that where her male relatives had roles that were public and institutional, hers were epistolary, literary, and informal: for example, in 1853, her brother became the first secretary of the Amherst Ornamental Tree Association, but Dickinson kept an extensive herbarium, cultivated plants (as did her sister Lavinia), and wrote about flowers extensively and knowledgeably in both letters and poems.[7] In an 1866 letter to her close friend Elizabeth Holland, Dickinson remarked that "My flowers are near and foreign, and I have but to cross the floor to stand in the Spice Isles" (L315). In 1862, she repeated this sense of the exotic in describing "Carnations" that "tip their spice" along with daisies, fuchsias, geraniums, hyacinths, and "Globe Roses" (F367 J339).[8] In a letter (L53) to her brother, she celebrated exactly the same Northern lights as had her father: "The sky was a beautiful red, bordering on a crimson, and rays of a gold pink color were constantly shooting off from a kind of sun in the centre." She later turned to them again in two poems, F319/J209, "Of Bronze - and Blaze" and F321/J228, "Blazing in Gold - and / Quenching - in Purple!," both dating from 1862.

The extent to which the Dickinson family interests and attitudes overlap in relation to Amherst can be seen in F383/J585 "I like to see it lap the Miles - ," another 1862 poem that may take some of its impetus from the description of a train in Charles Dickens's *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842) but much more from the successful part played by Edward Dickinson in securing the extension of the railroad network to Amherst in 1852. On the day that the first train arrived, Edward led a parade that is memorably described by the poet in a letter of June 1853:

> Father was as usual, Grand Marshal of the day, and went marching around the town with New London at his heels like some old Roman General, upon a Triumph Day. Mrs Howe got a capital dinner, and

poems. Edward's repurchase and refurbishment of the homestead, and his commission of a second one for Austin and Susan in the Evergreens next door, was a powerful and public statement that the family fortunes had been restored, but the long-term effects of his risk-taking and that of his father made themselves felt in Dickinson's poetry, where evanescence and loss can be linked to the specter of social and financial failure – for example, in F1144/J1119, "Paradise is that old mansion," where an Edenic state is made "Bankrupt once through [Adam's] excesses." By contrast, she identified poetry (in a memorable image that invokes John 14:2 "In my Father's house are many mansions") as a "fairer House than Prose - / More numerous of Windows - / Superior - for Doors - " (F466 J657) – a space associated with status, but removed from its anxieties. One of Dickinson's most famous lyric utterances, "Publication - is the Auction / Of the Mind of Man - " (F788 J709), makes a very clear pronouncement of abhorrence at the prospect of subjecting the pure products of the "Human Spirit" to the "Disgrace of Price"; the poem's aesthetic and class-related distance from a potentially compromising encounter with the literary marketplace has some of its background in her family's mixed economic and civic history.[11]

The Dickinsons had fourteen acres of meadowland, with a barn behind the house where they kept a cow, horses, and chickens. The family "wintered their stock on hay from their own field, visible from the poet's south window," and took part in different cattle shows during the 1850s and 1860s (as the town gained a reputation for agricultural innovation that would eventually result in the formation of the Massachusetts Agricultural College in 1879) (Habegger, 376). Although rural life was never far away, Amherst evolved over the course of the nineteenth century from a predominantly agrarian economy to a mixed one that included manufacturing on a small but notable scale. Two streams that ran through the town provided natural power for mills, particularly in North Amherst, and the industries included paper (from 1814 onwards, and especially from the 1830s to the end of the century), wood-working and wire goods, textiles (cotton from 1809 and wool from 1830), and hoop-skirts (in 1863). When Dickinson writes "I tie my Hat - I crease my Shawl" in 1863 (F522 J443), it is useful to know that ladies' bonnets had been produced in Amherst from the 1840s, and that hat making was an important town industry, especially from 1829, when her neighbor Leonard M. Hills arrived. By 1871, a year before his death, his workforce numbered more than one hundred, and his first factory was established in East Amherst, on Main Street –

not far from where the poet lived. When another of Dickinson's speakers reports that the "Carriage held but just Ourselves - / And Immortality," the tension between the everyday and supernatural is given added weight when one considers that fine-quality carriage-making was an established industry in Amherst at the time of the poem's composition (in 1862), having begun as early as 1827. Even the reference (in F475 J488) to the act of writing as "the Art of Boards," with "Tools" and a "Plane" for its instruments of labor, can be seen in this context – for specialist tool making, and particularly the manufacture of highly sought after planes, started in Amherst in 1835.[12] Amherst's greatest period of productivity overlapped to some extent with her own (in the 1860s) – but small businesses came and went, so that by drawing on images of crafts and implements that had a locally specific as well as a personal resonance, Dickinson was able to promote a sense of her own skills and excellence in relation to a larger community of artisans and workers, within the nexus of a wider awareness of competition, limitation, and transience.

By the 1870s, as her poetic output dwindled (from more than two hundred poems in 1865 to fewer than fifty every year after) and she withdrew from the possibility of any broader public attention or encounter, Dickinson's epistolary version of her brother's centrality in Amherst expanded: "two-thirds of [her] surviving notes and letters date from her last sixteen years," and many of these went to neighbors in and from the town on the occasion of births, deaths, and marriages, or as acknowledgement for acts of kindness (Habegger, 541). "Expulsion from Eden grows indistinct in the presence of flowers so blissful," she wrote to Mrs. Thomas P. Field in 1878 (L552). To her neighbor Mrs. Lucius Boltwood, whose son died at the age of 34 in July of 1871, she offered the thought that "flowers might please him, though he made like Birds, the exchange of Latitudes" (L363). Again in 1873, she consoled Mrs. Hanson L. Read on the drowning of her two teenage sons by reporting her sister Lavinia saying that "your martyrs were fond of flowers" and hoping that a bouquet would not "profane their vase" (L404). These short and beautifully written notes, gnomic and too original to be understood as routine, comprise some of her most tender and moving pieces; they also reveal Dickinson contributing to and benefitting from a culture of informal exchange with Amherst at its core. Although she published only ten poems in her lifetime (and all of those anonymously), Dickinson did have a contemporaneous audience, a group of people in or from her local community who were to a greater or lesser extent aware that she wrote: though the record is necessarily incomplete, more than 500

poems that we know about were circulated separately to friends, 252 of them to Susan, and this is a not insignificant aspect of the history of her reception. Even the physical materials on which she wrote, as a number of commentators have pointed out, are visibly related to Amherst life: compositions survive on the backs of envelopes, advertising flyers, and pharmacy wrappers from businesses in the neighborhood and farther afield.

But we need to be careful here: a tender, apparently intimate, elegy such as F1641/J1599 “Though the great waters sleep” was sent in condolence to separate recipients who would have thought that they referred only to newspaper editor Samuel Bowles, nephew Gilbert, Judge Otis Lord, or (possibly) Edward Tuckerman, the Amherst College botanist. Amherst was vitally important to Dickinson’s identity and that of her family, but she related to it (as Adrienne Rich so memorably puts it) “on [her] own premises.”[13] There were occasions when she connected poems directly to public events in town: she sent F1514/J1474 “A Counterfeit - A Plated Person” to her brother and sister-in-law’s house, The Evergreens, and signed it “Lothrop,” thus linking it to a sensational case of physical abuse involving the daughter of an Amherst minister, Charles D. Lothrop.[14] But, intriguingly, she retained no copy for herself: in the 1870s and 1880s Dickinson sent many poems without keeping any personal or archival record, suggesting either that she did not value them herself (which is not the same as saying that they are without value) or trusted that recipients would conserve them. Perhaps the provenance of this particular composition made it unappealing or limited in her eyes, but whatever the cause of the indifference, we need to remind ourselves again of the distinction mentioned at the beginning of this essay: Amherst is mentioned almost a hundred times in that portion of the correspondence that is extant, but only twice in the poems. Thus, when Jerome McGann writes of “Because I could not stop for Death” (F479 J712) that “the journey being presented is not some unspecified drive in the country, but a funeral ride which is located quite specifically in relation to Emily Dickinson and her Amherst world” and goes on to name the streets and the cemetery that he presumes are being described in that poem, one stops short: the fact is that Dickinson did *not* name those streets, and recovering them runs counter to the practice of this and most of her other poems.[15] Reading F260/J288 “I’m Nobody! Who are you?” with its imperious dismissal of being “public - like a Frog,” it is interesting to know that Amherst Common before her brother’s intervention had a frog pool and was sometimes used as the venue for rallies and

agricultural festivals, but the significance of the poem relies on the tension it independently seeks to generate between a "Somebody" or somebodies associated with (commercial, political, and sexual) self-aggrandizement and a withdrawn and selective minority whose work and value are more refined and exclusive. Emily Dickinson did not date or place her poems precisely because she wanted them to be as timeless and free of local context as possible – in order to survive her. The paradox of Dickinson is that she was very much of her time and town in believing that poetry was a form of immortality – a belief that depended in its turn on the assumption that culture would remain permanent and stable, with verse the sun at its center – and she worked very hard, and successfully, to cover the tracks of her poems' provenance. For example, the events of the Civil War (1861–5), including the loss of Amherst natives such as Frazer Stearns, son of the Amherst College president, are not mentioned directly, but can be detected more obliquely in some of her themes, tropes, and images. In the end, Amherst's greatest gift to her, in addition to a local field of study for her favourite topics of "Love and Death" (L873), was its own significance – and the additional success of her family within that municipal success: her father and grandfathers, her brother and sister-in-law, in Richard B. Sewall's words, were "River Gods" of the Connecticut valley (Sewall, 120). And as the Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh puts it, river gods – and literary ones especially – "make their own importance."[16]

Notes

1 Carlton Lowenberg, *Emily Dickinson's Textbooks* (Lafayette, CA: Carlton Lowenberg, 1986); Habegger, 139–66, 191–212.

2 Edward Carpenter and Charles Morehouse, *The History of the Town of Amherst, Massachusetts* (Amherst, MA: Press of Carpenter & Morehouse, 1896), 347–9; Daniel Lombardo, *A Hedge Away: The Other Side of Emily Dickinson's Amherst* (Northampton, MA: Daily Hampshire Gazette, 1997), 75–6; Daniel Lombardo, "What the Dickinsons Read," *Tales of Amherst: A Look Back* (Amherst, MA: The Jones Library, 1986), 100–2.

3 Cristanne Miller, *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century* (Amherst, MA: The University of

Massachusetts Press, 2012), 119, 145–6.

4 Mary Elizabeth Kromer Bernhard, "Portrait of a Family: Emily Dickinson's Norcross Connection," *The New England Quarterly* 60.3 (September 1987), 364. Polly Longsworth, "The 'Latitude of Home': Life in the Homestead and the Evergreens," *The Dickinsons of Amherst* (Hanover, NH: The University Press of New England, 2001), 23.

5 Nellie Gould-Smith, "Introduction," *What Life Consists, and Other Sermons*, by Rev. George H. Gould (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1903), 3.

6 Polly Longsworth, *Austin and Mabel: The Amherst Affair and Love Letters of Austin Dickinson and Mabel Loomis Todd* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1984), 356.

7 *Emily Dickinson's Herbarium: A Facsimile Edition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

8 Judith Farr, *The Gardens of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

9 "'You're Painting the Homestead?!? Why?!' at Emily Dickinson Museum July 22." News Release of the Emily Dickinson Museum, June 21, 2004.

10 Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780–1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 203.

11 Betsy Erkkila, "Emily Dickinson and Class," *American Literary History* 4 (1992), 1–27.

12 Carpenter and Morehouse, *The History of the Town*, 276–301.

13 Adrienne Rich, "I Am in Danger - Sir - ," *Necessities of Life* (New York: Norton, 1966), 33.

14 Lombardo, "Amherst and the Dickinsons' Fight against 'Gross Brutality'," *A Hedge Away*, 256–8.

Reading Spaces for a Reading Family

Gathering such a collection was the natural enterprise of a family of educators on both the Dickinson and Norcross sides. The seeds of such a passion show up in the courtship letters between Emily's future parents. The sober law student besieged young Emily Norcross with borrowed books and sermons. He urges her to read, for example, "a new novel," *Hope Leslie*, "which I presume you will find interesting," following up three weeks later with new reading material, noting that he needs to return the book to its owner.[3] When they married, the home became "a fortress," with its independent "monarchs" constantly reading.[4] Letters from daughter Emily created what I have called her "Epistolary Book Club" and speak of a literal "Reading Club" (L43, L44);[5] a less-remarked list of literary activities made by Vinnie records her, and possibly also Emily's, attendance at book groups at least once a month (Sewall, 249).

Books in the "fortress" came from many sources. Although there were the beginnings of libraries in the town (notes in the *Hampshire and Franklin Express* for November 25, 1853 and May 18, 1855 announce plans for reading cooperatives), although at least once Emily attempted to use the college library (L191), and although books were shared among friends, the family generally purchased books. In Amherst, as Jane Wald reports, the family could buy from JB and C Adams; from Boston, the Norcross sisters could send books purchased from Burnham Antique Bookstore.[6] The newspapers advertised booksellers, and the family could also order by mail in response to "subscription" notices (such notes appear in the back of many of the extant books). Some of the most valued books were gifts; for example, the poet daughter's "seriousness of purpose was fostered … by friends such as Benjamin Franklin Newton [who] sent her Ralph Waldo Emerson's poems, 'a beautiful copy' (L30)."[7]

Given the vastness of the current collection, one struggles to picture where the books were located in the Dickinson homes. From 1840 to 1855, the family moved from the Homestead to a large house on North Pleasant Street. Although it was "a grand old house,"[8] there is no mention of a library other than Emily's teasing note to Austin that "Father says your letters are altogether before Shakespeare, and he will have them published to put in our library" (L46). Writing to Austin in 1851, Dickinson describes

the family scene: “Father and mother sit in state in the sitting room perusing such papers only, as they are well assured have nothing carnal in them” (L63). In another scenario the family gathers in the kitchen, “Mr. Dickinson reading a ‘lonely and rigorous’ book … Austin studying …Vinnie scanning the columns of the newspaper for items of local gossip,” while, according to family lore, “Emily sits, trying with all her might to keep up with the thoughts rushing past.”[9]

When the Dickinsons moved back to the Homestead in 1855, their books had a room of their own. The “library” in the front of the house on the Main Street side was opposite to and as large as the front parlor (Leyda II, 2). A table “behind the door” held wine and an “unclaimed flower” that Dickinson told Samuel Bowles she would leave him (L205). There must also have been a soft chaise or reading chair: “Mother is asleep in the Library - Vinnie - in the Dining Room,” Emily reports to Mrs. Holland (L432). Open to the hallway and the conservatory, the room’s three doors, two windows, and fireplace afforded little wall space for the numbers of volumes currently counted as Dickinson family books. Books must have been everywhere: in the four bedrooms and in the two parlors, in one of which “Higginson noticed among other books, copies of his *Out-Door Papers* and *Malbone: An Oldport Romance.*”[10]

After Austin’s 1856 marriage to Sue and their move to the Evergreens a hedge away from the Homestead, space doubled for books that passed between the households. Symbolically, the French doors of the library at the Evergreens were kept open, so that Austin’s sister could enter the house through this sacred room.[11] The Jerome Liebling photographs of the library and the parlor in the Evergreens reveal shelves mounting to about chest height and topped with objets d’art.[12] Books were probably stacked on tables as well, especially the beautiful oversized flower book given to Emily by her father on New Year’s Day, 1859 (Figure 1).[13] This flowery treasure is one sample of the pleasures of mining the Dickinson library now scattered to the four new repositories.[14] In an age when “literature and trade books advanced at a rate ten times faster than that of population growth,” it was not surprising that the Dickinson library grew almost boundlessly.[15]

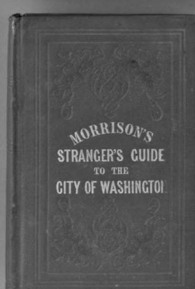

Figure 1. *Wild Flowers Drawn and Colored from Nature*, ed. Mrs. Badger (New York: Scribner, 1859; EDR 467) and *Morrison's Stranger's Guide to the City of Washington* (Washington: Morrison, 1852; EDR 222). Reproduced by permission of Houghton Library, Harvard University.

The Collections

I began at the Jones Library. In addition to a taped conversation with the longest inhabitant of the Evergreens and a poetic book on astronomy that was used as a textbook at the college, the library offers riches within newspaper microfilms.[16] Dickinsonians know the influence of editors on the Dickinson family: *Scribners'* Josiah Holland; the *Springfield Republican*'s Samuel Bowles, who "brought the sense of this 'yeasty time' into their very living rooms" (Sewall 466); and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, whose *Atlantic* editorial, "Letter to a Young Contributor" "saved" Dickinson's life (L330). Aife Murray has noted the shifting class awareness brought to the Dickinson home through the family's newspapers, and Alfred Habegger, the shifting gender awareness brought particularly by the *Springfield Republican*.[17] In the Jones Library one realizes that journals not only brought news *to* the Dickinsons; they also provided news *of* the Dickinsons. In the *Hampshire and Franklin Express*, one reads, for example, of Edward's generosity to the church: a donation of $100 for each $1,000 expended (June 29, 1860); of his speeches to students and soldiers' families; and of his legal work on behalf of a defendant in a rape case (July 20, 1860). Emily could not escape the fame that belonged to her father, news of which entered the family library, where newspapers were well read.

If "Bulletins all Day" came from newspapers, they also came, as Dickinson said, "From Immortality" in scores of religious volumes (F820 J827). That the Dickinson household owned so many bibles, hymnals, and diverse devotional material does not make them oddly zealous. To most at that time and place "the Bible was … at hand throughout the day, beside the bed at night," said Millicent Todd Bingham, adding that Edward Dickinson led his family in worship "each morning, like other householders."[18] His daughter's mind was "saturated" with the Bible.[19] Her poetic beat was that of the meters in Isaac Watts's hymnals, such as the Houghton's green morocco edition that belonged to Dickinson's mother.[20] The 1810 Watts volume at Harvard is pocket-sized. In

contrast, one of the dozens of religious texts – this one at Brown – intrigues for its largeness: Henry Ward Beecher's 1871 *Life of Jesus the Christ*, with its rich paintings by William E. Marshall. Although this book is unmarked, it is tempting to think of Dickinson's maturing theology encountering Beecher's emphasis on Jesus as a socially aware teacher with a "sudden addiction … to parables."[21]

Five secular works, selected from the four libraries, illustrate the breadth of the family interests and the nourishing of Emily's grasp of the material world. The jewel of the Jones collection – an 1838 book that, if Dickinson read it (it was a text at the Academy) – must have opened her eyes to the heavens. The first page of Elijah H. Burritt's *Geography of the Heavens and Class Book of Astronomy* linked the science to Dickinson's art: "Astronomy is a science which has, in all ages, engaged the attention of the poet, the philosopher, and the divine." The astronomy book is unmarred, but across town at the Frost Library is a battered, much marked copy of another 1838 textbook, *Publii Virgilii Maronis Opera; or The Works of Virgil. With copious Notes*. In pencil, next to this subtitle, is an exclamation point from the saucy student, Emily. On the free flyleaf page of the Latin text are algebraic formulations, as though the student took the book to more than one class and used it for scratch reckoning. Something like chocolate fell on pages 236–7, and a flower was inserted between pages 342 and 343.

From the heavy boxes brought from a satellite warehouse at Brown's John Hay Library, one pulls out a crumbling *Amherst Record* for August 21, 1895: the obituary for Austin, who "hated sham and hypocrisy … and despised the cheap wit and shallow 'smartness' which some employ to curry favor." Emily Dickinson would not have read that, but she may well have read the other contents, a pamphlet transcript of the 1865 "Trial of the Conspirators for the Assassination of President Lincoln," and a splotched pamphlet containing "Mr. Dickinson's / Agricultural Address" (October 1831).

In contrast to the boxed surprises at Brown, the Houghton's meticulously organized collection offers such pleasures as the two books pictured (see Figure 1): the small brown leather 1858 guidebook, *Morrison's Stranger's Guide to the City of Washington*, and a heavy, ornately decorated coffee-table-sized book on tiny flowers. The first, with its catalogue of rooming houses, schools, burial sites, and parks, is fascinating as a history

(1880–1968), who earned a Radcliffe doctorate in geography, and Martha Dickinson Bianchi, poet and musician. Both daughters dedicated their lives to Emily Dickinson and to the memories and rights of their respective mothers. Their rivalry influenced the destination of the treasures in their keeping.

Although her ownership rights were challenged by Dickinson heirs and, later, by Harvard University, Mrs. Todd's collection – the manuscripts and letters entrusted to her by Lavinia and Austin – went to Amherst's Frost Library. Although most of the Bingham collection comprises manuscripts, The Frost Library has since purchased such valuable Dickinson family books as that thoroughly marked-up Latin textbook and a number of sets of collected literary works: Longfellow in two volumes, Mrs. Browning's *Essays on Greek Christian Poets*, Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, and more, all bound handsomely in matching blue covers with gilded lettering.

Most Dickinson materials – those from the house of Sue and Martha Dickinson Bianchi – had already ended up at Harvard's Houghton and Brown's John Hay. The story of how they did so involves a third cast of characters. The last surviving member of her household, Martha, who "was well on my way to becoming an author, when I was forced to become a niece!" asked a literary friend, Alfred Leete Hampson (1890–1952), for assistance with the legacy in 1923.[29] His help in editing Bianchi's Dickinson collections in the 1930s merged into cataloguing the works. At a New York arts event Martha met Mary Landis (1894–1988), who joined her and Hampson in caring for the documents. In 1943, when Martha Dickinson Bianchi died, "Hampson inherited her [Bianchi's] copyrights and her parents' house in Amherst, the Evergreens and all its contents, including the Dickinson papers."[30] In 1947, Landis married Hampson.

The next year, 1948, the Hampsons considered selling the Dickinson collection, thus adding a fourth cast of characters to the story of the disposition of manuscripts – and books: William H. McCarthy, who had helped Madame Bianchi with the 1930 centennial celebration of Dickinson, was a friend of the Hampsons and worked at the Rosenbach Company, rare book dealers in New York, who became agents for the Hampsons; William A. Jackson, Librarian of the Houghton, suggested purchasing the Hampson Dickinson collection to Gilbert Holland Montague (1889–1961), who, with a gift of $50,000 (honoring

his alma mater and his wife), became the donor of the collection at Harvard that would make possible most subsequent scholarship on Emily Dickinson, including that unmined lode of books. Beginning in 1950, during negotiations for storing and copyrighting, treasures from Amherst began arriving. Along with the manuscripts and the letters, which would become the basis for the volumes edited by Thomas H. Johnson, were many books from the Dickinson family library. Today Harvard's 591 volumes await more scholars to decide which books made Dickinson "a great reader and a dainty reader" (quoted in Sewall, 270).

Mary Hampson, who scoured the Evergreens for material and sent it to Harvard in small increments, lived alone in the Evergreens for some thirty years after Alfred died in 1952. Her determination to exorcise the influence of the Todd/Bingham family and to protect the reputation and possessions of the Dickinsons leads to a sad coda. The Hampsons and Montague appended a condition to the use of the material they gave the Houghton: in return for giving up all rights to the materials themselves, they stipulated that Millicent Todd Bingham, who had once spoken in hope of conjoining the materials, and one or two scholars who used the Todd material, could not have access to them. Mrs. Hampson, "keeper of the keys," as St. Armand called her, had also become responsible for the enormous collection of books, pamphlets, and other material that is now at Brown University's John Hay Library. Hampson, who threw away nothing but rather added her own books, left the jumble that eventually found a home at Brown, thanks largely to the work of Barton St. Armand and George Monteiro; in the boxes they rescued are three generations of Dickinson books and a plethora of books belonging to Hampson. In a building adjunct to the John Hay Library, some 232 closely packed cartons of items – hundreds of them political and legal documents mysteriously marked from the "buttery" – remain to be examined. Future doctoral worksurely lies in doing what the caretakers at Harvard have done with their share of the Dickinson materials: organizing and annotating the contents. Indeed, the mining of the Dickinson Library has just begun. As Little Eva told Tom, "Don't you see, – there?"

Notes

1 Interview with Leslie A. Morris at Houghton Library, August 2, 2011.

2 Gary Lee Stonum, "Dickinson's Literary Background," *Handbook*, 45.

3 Quoted in Vivian Pollak, *A Poet's Parents: The Courtship Letters of Emily Norcross and Edward Dickinson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 121, 131.

4 Millicent Todd Bingham, *Emily Dickinson's Home: The Early Years as Revealed in Family Correspondence and Reminiscences* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 5.

5 Eleanor Elson Heginbotham, "'What are you reading now?': Emily Dickinson's Epistolary Book Club," *Reading Emily Dickinson's Letters: Critical Essays*, ed. Jane Donahue Eberwein and Cindy MacKenzie (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 126–60.

6 Jane Wald, "'Pretty Much Real Life': The Material World of the Dickinson Family," *Handbook*, 44–60; Sewall, 628, n. 3.

7 Vivian R. Pollak, "Emily Dickinson, 1830–1886: A Brief Biography," *A Historical Guide to Emily Dickinson*, ed. Vivian R. Pollak and Marianne Noble (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 37.

8 Bingham, *Emily Dickinson's Home*, 63.

9 Ibid., 255.

10 Benjamin Lease, *Emily Dickinson's Readings of Men and Books, Sacred Soundings* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 89.

11 Barton Levi St. Armand, "Keeper of the Keys: Mary Hampson, the Evergreens, and the Arts Within," *The Dickinsons of Amherst*, ed. Jerome Liebling, Christopher Benfey, and Barton Levi St. Armand (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2001), 132.

12 Ibid., 117.

13 Mrs. C. M. Badger, *Wild Flowers Drawn and Colored from Nature* (New York: Scribner, 1859). The copy consulted is from

the Houghton Collection, EDR 467.

14 For use of rare materials in this essay thanks to the following: at Harvard's Houghton, Leslie Morris, Rachel Howarth, Mary Haegert, and others; at Brown's John Hay, Rosemary Cullen and Timothy Engels; at Amherst's Robert Frost, Peter Nelson, Michael Kelly, Mimi Dakin, and others; and at the Jones Library, Tevis Kimball and Kate Boyle.

15 David S. Reynolds, "Emily Dickinson and Popular Culture," *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson*, ed. Wendy Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 209.

16 Taped interview with Mary Landis Hampson conducted by Sheila Rainford (December 17, 1978); Elijah H. Burritt, *Geography of the Heavens and Class Book of Astronomy* (New York: FJ Huntington & Co, 1838).

17 Aife Murray, *Maid as Muse: How Servants Changed Emily Dickinson's Life and Language* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2009), 142–8; Habegger, 382–92.

18 Bingham, *Emily Dickinson's Home*, 31.

19 Fordyce R. Bennett, *A Reference Guide to the Bible in Emily Dickinson's Poetry* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 1997), Preface.

20 Isaac Watts, *Watts Psalms carefully suited to the Christian Worship* (New York: Williams and Whiting, 1810).

21 Henry Ward Beecher, *Life of Jesus the Christ* (New York: J. B. Ford, 1871), 300.

22 Badger, *Wild Flowers*. Dickinson's "Herbarium," also in the Houghton, has been re-created in facsimile: *Emily Dickinson's Herbarium* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

23 *The Power of Christian Benevolence Illustrated…in Mary Lyon* (Northampton & Philadelphia, 1851).

24 Bingham, *Emily Dickinson's Home*, 109.

25 Lease, *Emily Dickinson's Readings*, 35.

26 Elizabeth Horan, "Mabel Loomis Todd, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, and the spoils of the Dickinson legacy" in *A Living of Words: American Women in Print Culture*, ed. Susan Albertine (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 65–93.

27 Ibid., 65, 68.

28 Leslie A. Morris, "Foreword," *Emily Dickinson's Herbarium*, 7–14; St. Armand, "Keeper of the Keys," 107–67; Lyndall Gordon, *Lives Like Loaded Guns: Emily Dickinson and her Family's Feuds* (New York: Viking, 2010), 345–405.

29 Quoted in St. Armand, "Keeper of the Keys," 138.

30 Morris, Foreword, 9.

a tender introspection in the region of the heart, a kind of studious cosseting of one's finer feelings. Perhaps it is not generally recognized how much more abundant was

this sort of thing forty years ago than now, and how it moulded the very temperaments of those who were born into it, and grew up under it.[4]

During her education, Dickinson wrestled with Calvinism and experimented with Romanticism, but she also cultivated a vast archive of emotional responses that made everything she learned personal almost to the point of pain. This sentimental education served as an overarching frame for all of her other lessons, and ultimately infused her poetry with a life-or-death urgency that went beyond teleological questions of spiritual salvation or transcendence.

Dickinson's education began at home. The Dickinson family owned two editions of the *New England Primer*, from 1830 and 1843. The *Primer* was frequently updated during its long reign, but Webster's 1843 *Primer* is "certified" as an exact reprint of the 1691 Benjamin Harris version, indexing the Dickinson family's allegiance to "true and fundamental doctrines" that were otherwise on the wane. To learn from the *Primer* was to read against the expansively liberal grain of Jacksonian America. However, as Pat Crain has argued, even the conservative *Primer* is an internally inconsistent document that reveals tensions within Calvinism, and here Dickinson found provocative raw materials for her imagination.[5] For instance, in February of 1850 Dickinson sent a valentine to William Cowper Dickinson, containing an original verse that begins: "Life is but a strife / 'Tis a bubble / 'Tis a dream" (L33). To illustrate, she pasted in a woodcut of a sleeping king, clipped from the *Primer*. Such repurposing, from textbook to valentine, registers Puritan individualism, while also marking the human connections that were so crucial to Dickinson's art.

The *Primer* also contains hymns and verses by Isaac Watts, whose meters echo through Dickinson's quatrains. As late as 1882, Dickinson was reworking Watts's famous lines, "Now I lay me down to sleep," from the *Primer:*

Now I lay thee down to Sleep -

I pray the Lord thy Dust to keep -
And if thou live before thou wake -
I pray the Lord thy Soul to make -

(F1575 J1539)

Dickinson's prayer is disconcerting because the body – dust – takes precedence over the soul; indeed, the speaker hopes that the dead person will remain at peace as a physical corpse, inverting the Christian dream of resurrection. To use Watts prayer – and his familiar meter – is to mark the distance between her early training and her later heterodoxies.

Ironically, Dickinson's confidence in her creative powers probably stemmed in part from her Calvinist upbringing, which stressed the profundity of every soul. As another Watts poem from the *Primer* begins:

Though I am young a little one,
If I can speak and go alone,
Then I must learn to know the Lord
And learn to read his holy word.[6]

If anyone learned well how to "speak and go alone," it was Emily Dickinson. Dickinson was sent to a District common-school at the age of seven, but her serious institutional education began at the age of nine, in September of 1840, when she and her sister Lavinia enrolled in Amherst Academy. Amherst Academy was a rigorous school that had been co-founded by her grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson, in 1814. Its published aims were Calvinist, but its pedagogical approach was progressive, reflecting the influences of Romantic educators who tried to engage children's natural passions and interests. As early as 1827, a school flier announced that "Languages will be taught in such a manner, that the study of text books may be a study of interesting *facts* and *sentiments* as well as of words and their grammatical relations."[7] Dickinson attended the school on and off for seven years, between 1840 and 1847. Her letters reflect an ardent enthusiasm for her classes; as she wrote to Abiah Root in 1845, "We have a very fine school…. I have four studies. They are mental Philosophy, Geology, Latin, and Botany. How large they sound, don't they?" (L6).

In the 1840s it was unusual for girls to be classically trained, but Dickinson took the Academy's Latin course for three years,

and Alfred Habegger suggests that she "would have been a very different poet if she hadn't studied the language." Citing Lois Cuddy, he argues that her background in Latin explains Dickinson's "extreme dislocations of standard English word order and her use of such grammatical terms as 'ablative'" (Habegger, 141–2). However, Dickinson's stylistic quirks cannot be solely rooted in her classical training. After all, the classically educated Higginson was confounded by these very dislocations. Rather, as with the *New England Primer*, Dickinson wrestled with her school textbooks, intellectually and emotionally, breaking the barrier between "*facts* and *sentiments*." On the flyleaf of her copy of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dickinson wrote:

> Forsan et haec olim memnisse juvabit.
> Aeneid 1–203
> Afterwards you may rejoice at the remembrance of these (our school days)
> When I am far away then think of me
> – E. Dickinson (quoted in Habegger, 141)

This inscription reveals several nascent habits of mind. First, Dickinson is fusing a "feminine" genre, the autograph album, with a "masculine" genre, the Latin textbook. Second, she is not just translating Virgil *verbatim*, but also adding her own addendum of *our school days*. And third, she is imagining reading and writing as intimate, affective strategies: "When I am far away then think of me." Virgil may have influenced Dickinson, but she in turn inflected Virgil, applying both the literal pressure of her pencil and the interpretive pressure of her highly personalized gloss on the *Aeneid* as a token of girlhood friendship.

Ironically, Dickinson's gender, which restricted her on so many fronts, may have helped her cultivate idiosyncratic habits of mind precisely because her educational goals were less fixed than those of most boys. For instance, her brother Austin (and, for that matter, T. W. Higginson) had to master Latin to succeed at college. But because Dickinson was not Harvard-bound, she could pick and choose among "college prep" subjects. Indeed, in her final year at the Academy, she switched from the Classical course back into English, a zigzag she also performs in one of her earliest poems:

> "Sic transit gloria mundi,"
> "How doth the busy bee,"

"Dum vivimus vivamus,"

I stay mine enemy!
Oh "veni, vidi, vici!"
Oh caput cap-a-pie!
And oh "memento mori"
When I am far from thee!

(F2 J3)

Dickinson's parodic recitation mixes Latin phrases with Isaac Watts, whose didactic "busy bee" diligently "improves each shining hour."[8] But she also inserts a plea that she be personally remembered, just as she did in her copy of the *Aeneid.*

This poem is animated by an ironic voice that overwrites even stock phrases with its cheeky individuality. Textbook passages lose their original meaning when breathlessly juxtaposed, working to express the speaker's own idiosyncratic vision. For instance, "Dum vivimus vivamus" technically means "while we live, let us live," but in Dickinson's poem the v-v-v alliteration links it to the noise a bee makes. Isaac Watts's insect is no longer a Calvinist worker-bee; rather, he buzzes aimlessly in a pagan tongue. Likewise the speaker is not a child of Amherst, where evangelical Christianity pervaded every school textbook. Rather, she is a discursive product of the nineteenth-century marketplace of ideas, in which everything is possible but nothing is certain. Random phrases, thrown together, create an amusing pastiche that lampoons authorities from Isaac Watts to Isaac Newton but never settles on any fixed truth.

Amherst Academy did not rely solely on the kind of mindless recitation that Dickinson parodies in "Sic transit gloria mundi." Teachers also required students to write and perform original compositions. In an 1842 letter to Jane Humphrey, Dickinson described one such performance:

> …this Afternoon is Wednesday and so of course there was Speaking and Composition - there was one young man who read a Composition the Subject was think twice before you speak - he was describing the reasons why any one should do so - one was - if a young gentleman - offered a young lady his arm and he had a dog who had no tail and he boarded at the

> tavern think twice before you speak …. I told him I thought he had better think twice before he spoke - .
>
> (L3)

Two critical aesthetic tendencies are evident in this early letter. First, Dickinson is delighting in the split between the cliché "think twice before you speak" and its potential undoing by an incompetent speaker. Also, she is observing that ordinary language can quickly devolve into nonsense, and that nonsense can destabilize consensus reality. Later she would use these insights to unpack social bromides; for example, "They say that 'Time assuages,' / Time never did assuage" (F861 J686). Conventional phrases – think twice before you speak, time heals all wounds – are a source of inspiration precisely because they contain (but do not assuage) troubling ambiguities.

Erika Scheurer makes a case that these Wednesday composition sessions contributed to Dickinson's original voice. She points out that Amherst Academy's approach was Pestalozzian, reflecting "the beginnings of a larger nationwide transition in the area of writing pedagogy from a focus on rote learning and correctness to more of an emphasis on the actual practice of original composition, with the goal of students gaining fluency and agency as writers."[9] However, although Dickinson was surely capable of fluent prose, her poems and letters frequently disrupt their own flow. Indeed, her leaps of logic, twisted syntax, and dislocated imagery echo the roughness of the passage about the dog with no tail, although of course her textured style is deliberate.

Science pedagogy was especially strong at Amherst Academy, and also at Amherst College, where Academy students could attend lectures. One important figure in Dickinson's early scientific education was Edward Hitchcock, a geologist who became president of Amherst College and a close friend of the Dickinson family. Hitchcock had discovered the world's largest collection of dinosaur tracks, but he was a lifelong anti-Darwinist and offered science courses predicated on the "argument from design," that the natural world proves the existence and majesty of God. At the same time, Hitchcock's *Elementary Geology* (used at both Amherst Academy and Holyoke) proceeds carefully from physical evidence, distinguishing between science and religion: "Revelation does not attempt to give instruction in the principles of science: nor does it use the precise and accurate language of

In many of Dickinson's poems, intersubjective emotions do not merely facilitate learning. Rather, in keeping with her sentimental outlook, the full articulation of emotional experiences is one key purpose of education. Here she works out the possibilities:

> We learned the Whole of Love -
> The Alphabet - the Words -
> A Chapter - then the mighty Book -
> Then Revelation closed -
> (F531 J568)

At first, the learners seem fixed on a path toward conversion, but Revelation closes and they veer off course. By the final two stanzas they are gazing on each other rather than at their book:

> But in Each Other's eyes
> An Ignorance beheld -
> Diviner than the Childhood's
> And each to each, a Child -

In the first line, "Each Other" is capitalized and the focus is on the students as they try to talk about "What Neither - understood - / Alas! that Wisdom is so large - / And Truth - so manifold!" Have the students in this poem wasted their education? No: the first stanza asserts that they have learned something – love – even if they remain suspended in partial ignorance. The very act of studying together results in a "conjoint metamorphosis," whereby the divine self – the Child – is revealed. Dickinson is often celebrated as an isolated autodidact. Her poetry and her letters, however, show that she also saw education as an ateleological emotional process: a way to encounter, but not necessarily to understand fully, the self and the world through others.

Notes

1 Jed Deppman, *Trying to Think with Emily* Dickinson (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 110.

2 Cotton Mather, *Corderius Americanus: A discourse on the good education of children, &c. &c. delivered at the funeral of Ezekiel Cheever, principal of the Latin school in Boston; who died, August, 1708, in the ninety-fourth year of his age. With an*

elegy and an epitaph (1708, reprint 1827), 13.

3 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Education," *Emerson's Complete Works*, ed. JE Cabot (New York: Riverside Edition, 1883), 142.

4 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "The Decline of the Sentimental," *The New World and the New Book* (New York: Lee & Shepherd, 1891), 178.

5 Patricia Crain, *The Story of A: The Alphabetization of America from the New England Primer to the Scarlet Letter* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 15–38.

6 *The New-England Primer: improved for the more easy attaining the true reading of English: to which is added The Assembly of Divines, and Mr. Cotton's Catechism* (Ira Webster, 1843), 44.

7 Quoted in John Luke Parkhurst, *The Teacher's Guide and Parent's Assistant* (1827), 332.

8 Isaac Watts, "Against Idleness and Mischief," *Divine and Moral Songs for Children* (1715), n.p.

9 Erika Scheurer, "'[S]o of course there was speaking and Composition - ': Dickinson's Early Schooling as a Writer," *EDJ*, 18.1 (2009), 1–2.

10 Edward Hitchcock, *Elementary Geology* (New York: Dayton and Saxton, 1840), 281.

11 Amanda Porterfield, *Mary Lyon and the Mt. Holyoke Missionaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

12 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Emily Dickinson's Letters," *Atlantic Monthly*, (October 1891), 450.

13 Naoko Saito, *The Gleam of Light: Moral Perfectionism and Education in Dewey and Emerson*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 16.

Chapter 4 New England Puritan Heritage

Jane Donahue Eberwein

When Edward Dickinson escorted his wife and daughters to the Edwards Church in Northampton, in July 1851, it was to hear not a sermon but a concert by Jennie Lind. Emily's letter to her brother, Austin, specifically mentioned "the old Edwards Church," so it seems likely that the contrast between Jonathan Edwards's reputation as a formidable Puritan preacher and this musical experience heightened her amusement (L46). Passing quickly over Lind's performance, she focused on their father's reaction, which struck her "as if old Abraham had come to see the show, and thought it was all very well, but a little excess of *Monkey*." Dickinson's comments indicate attraction to Lind herself despite resistance to unfamiliar musicianship, but she concluded with the judgment, "I'd rather have a Yankee."

Three decades later, the poet referred again to Jonathan Edwards in a humorous assemblage composed for her little nephew. After copying the poem she titled "The Bumble Bee's Religion," Dickinson attached a dead bee to the paper and then added a brief dialogue, with "All Liars shall have their part" ascribed to Edwards and "And let him that is athirst come" credited to Jesus (L712; F1547 J1522). As Karl Keller points out, this comment facetiously misattributes to the Puritan writer a threatening biblical passage actually drawn from Revelation 21.8.[1] She used Edwards to represent the cruelly judgmental side of Christianity in contrast to Jesus' magnanimity and the bee's instinctive tribute to "the divine Perdition / of Idleness and spring."

This message exemplifies Dickinson's habit of embellishing writings to close friends with flowers or cut-out pictures that amplified verbal imagery. Martha Nell Smith calls attention to two situations in which Dickinson clipped woodcut illustrations from *The New England Primer* to amuse her sister-in-law Susan, a reader sure to recognize visual allusions to the region's most traditional alphabet book.[2] In the first example, a clipping of a