

THE EMILY DICKINSON HANDBOOK

Edited ву Gudrun Grabher Roland Hagenbüchle Cristanne Miller

THE EMILY DICKINSON HANDBOOK

EDITED BY

Gudrun Grabher Roland Hagenbüchle Cristanne Miller

University of Massachusetts Press Amberst

Copyright © 1998 by
The University of Massachusetts Press
All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
LC 98-29853
ISBN 1-55849-169-4
Designed by Dennis Anderson
Set in Janson Text with Poetica display by Keystone Typesetting, Inc.
Printed and bound by BookCrafters

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The Emily Dickinson handbook / edited by Gudrun Grabher, Roland Hagenbüchle, Cristanne Miller.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-55849-169-4

1. Dickinson, Emily, 1830–1886 — Handbooks, manuals, etc. 2. Women and literature — Massachusetts — History — 19th century — Handbooks, manuals, etc. 3. Women poets, American — 19th century — Biography — Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Grabher, Gudrun. II. Hagenbüchle, Roland. III. Miller, Cristanne.

PS1541.Z5E396 1999

811'.4 — dc21

611 .4— uc21 [b]

98-29853 CIP

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data are available.

Passages from *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* are reprinted by permission of the publishers and the Trustees of Amherst College from *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Thomas H. Johnson, ed., Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Copyright 1951, 1955, 1979, 1983 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College, and from *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* by T. H. Johnson. Copyright 1929, 1935 by Martha Dickinson Bianchi; copyright © renewed 1957, 1963 by Mary L. Hampson. By permission of Little, Brown and Company.

Passages from *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson* are reprinted by permission of the publisher from *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*. R. W. Franklin, ed., Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Copyright 1981 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Copyright 1951, 1955, 1978, 1979, 1980 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Copyright 1914, 1924, 1929, 1932, 1935, 1942 by Martha Dickinson Bianchi.

Two lines from poem 1486 are reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Co., from *Emily Dickinson Face to Face*, ed. Martha Dickinson Bianchi. Copyright 1932 by Martha Dickinson Bianchi, © renewed 1960 by Alfred Leete Hampson. All rights reserved.

The translation of Dickinson's poem "Because I could not stop for Death" into German by Paul Celan, "Der Tod" in Almanach S. Fischer, no. 73, 1959, p. 59, and Gesammelte Werke, V, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983, p. 383, by permission of Eric Celan.

"Dickinson's Fascicles" by Sharon Cameron is an adaptation of portions of the introductory chapter to Choosing Not Choosing, by Sharon Cameron, © 1992 by The University of Chicago Press. All rights reserved.

Editors' Preface

Students of Emily Dickinson have often regretted the fact that there is no one source for quick reference containing basic and up-to-date information on the poet's life, her art, the manuscripts, and the current state of Dickinson scholarship in general. The essays collected here are meant to fill this gap. They reflect the many facets of Dickinson's œuvre as well as the principal trends in current Dickinson studies. The editors have been fortunate to persuade a number of internationally known critics from both the United States and overseas to write essays expressly for this *Handbook*, scholars who represent their several fields with authority and expertise. Their contributions to this volume reflect the fact that the field of Emily Diskinson studies has been thoroughly internationalized at the same time that the poet's œuvre has gained an international readership. Translation of Dickinson's poems into other languages and discussion of her works are now truly global and intercultural phenomena.

The overall organization of the *Handbook* is self-explanatory. For ease of use, individual essays have been structured as follows:

Each essay provides a historical overview of the relevant issues under scrutiny. The essays offer detailed discussions of important aspects pertaining to the fields in question.

Unlike encyclopedic entries, each of the several essays reflects the author's own perspective, presenting a distinct point of view, at times a controversial one.

The Handbook has not adopted a standard convention of reference to Dickinson's texts since this is an area fiercely debated at present. To simplify reference for our readers, however, we have asked all contributors to include reference to Thomas H. Johnson's numbering, even if they use Franklin's facsimile edition of the Manuscript Books in citing Dickinson's texts. Where there is no specific mention of a text source, reference is to the Johnson editions of the Poems (cited as P) and the Letters (cited as L). Franklin's edition of the poems is cited with fascicle or set number as F, followed by the page number(s). Prose

fragments are cited with PF, following Johnson's numbering in the *Letters*. References to Johnson's introductory remarks to the *Poems* appear as *P*, followed by the roman numeral page number(s).

The bibliography at the end of the volume does not aim at completeness. It provides bibliographical information for the primary and secondary works cited in this volume and hence may serve as a guide to both earlier and current studies of Dickinson without being comprehensive. Our index, primarily of names but also including a few repeated topics, will guide readers to some of the multiple connections between the essays and within the fields of Dickinson study.

We intend this collection of essays to provide a useful source of information for both undergraduate and graduate students needing an introduction to the various aspects of Dickinson scholarship. At the same time, we hope that the essays included in this *Handbook* will also prove useful to scholars who are looking for a quick review of, or entry into, areas of Dickinson studies with which they are less familiar. While the *Handbook* cannot represent all aspects of Dickinson study, it should give general and scholarly readers a solid introduction to a number of aspects of the field that have proved most crucial and enduring. The reader will emerge with a clear grasp of how critical thinking on Emily Dickinson has evolved in recent times.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editors want to express their gratitude to the University of Massachusetts Press, to its director, Bruce Wilcox, for his confidence in this venture, and to Pamela Wilkinson for her editorial assistance. Additionally, we are grateful for the support provided by our institutions, the University of Innsbruck, Austria, the Catholic University of Eichstätt, Germany, and Pomona College in Claremont, California. Barbara Clonts and Maria Meth deserve special thanks, as does Martina Antretter for setting up the index.

Gudrun Grabher, Roland Hagenbüchle, Cristanne Miller

Contents

Editors' Preface	vi
Introduction	
The Continuing Presence of Emily Dickinson Richard Sewall	3
BIOGRAPHY	
Biographical Studies of Dickinson Martha Ackmann	11
HISTORICAL CONTEXT	
Dickinson's Local, Global, and Cosmic Perspectives Jane Donahue Eberwein	27
Dickinson's Literary Background GARY LEE STONUM	44
Dickinson and the Visual Arts JUDITH FARR	61
Dickinson's Dialogic Voice Paul Crumbley	93
THE MANUSCRIPTS	
Dickinson's Manuscripts Martha Nell Smith	113
Dickinson's Fascicles Sharon Cameron	138
The Letters	
Dickinson's Letters Agnieszka Salska	163

DICKINSON'S POETICS

Searching for Dickinson's Themes David Porter	183
Prisming Dickinson, or Gathering Paradise by Letting Go ROBERT WEISBUCH	
Dickinson's Lyrical Self	197
Gudrun Grabher Dickinson's Experiments in Language Cristanne Miller	224
A Cognitive Approach to Dickinson's Metaphors Margaret H. Freeman	258
The Metapoetic Element in Dickinson Josef Raab	273
RECEPTION AND INFLUENCE	,,,
Dickinson's Critical Reception Marietta Messmer	299
American Women Poets Reading Dickinson: The Example of Helen Hunt Jackson	
Vivian R. Pollak Feminist Conceptions of Dickinson Margaret Dickie	3 ² 3
Dickinson and Literary Theory ROLAND HAGENBÜCHLE	356
Dickinson Adaptations in the Arts and the Theater Jonnie Guerra	385
Dickinson's Poetry in Translation: The Example of Paul Celan	
Kerstin Behnke	408
NEW DIRECTIONS IN DICKINSON SCHOLARSHIP Materiality and the Poet	
Suzanne Juhasz	427
Works Cited	441
Notes on Contributors	463
General Index	466
Index of Poems	474

INTRODUCTION



The Continuing Presence of Emily Dickinson

am glad to welcome this *Handbook* into the world. It is another answer to the question proposed by a prominent American banker (and a man of literary inclinations) in 1891 when Dickinson's poems were first seeing the light of day. In October of that year, the banker, Samuel G. Ward, wrote a letter about Dickinson to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who promptly sent it to Mabel Loomis Todd, whose daughter, Millicent Todd Bingham, in turn included it in her *Ancestors' Brocades* of 1945 (169–70). In a covering note to Mrs. Todd, Higginson began: "This is the most remarkable criticism yet made on E.D." It strikes me, a century later, as still remarkable (if only for its prophetic third sentence), and, as a reminder of certain essentials about Emily Dickinson, an apt introduction to the special studies of this book.

Leaving Narragansett Pier Oct 11, '91

My dear Mr. Higginson:

I am, with all the world, intensely interested in Emily Dickinson. No wonder six editions have been sold, every copy, I should think, to a New Englander. She may become world famous, or she may never get out of New England. She is the quintessence of that element we all have who are of Puritan descent pur sang. We came to this country to think our own thoughts with nobody to hinder. Ascetics, of course, & this our Thebaid. We conversed with our own souls till we lost the art of communicating with other people. The typical family grew up strangers to each other, as in this case. It was awfully high, but awfully lonesome. Such prodigies of shyness do not exist elsewhere. We got it from the English, but the English were not alone in a corner of the world for a hundred and fifty years with no outside interest. I sat next to Jones Very for three years [in a Boston school] & he was an absolute enigma till he flashed on me with the Barberry Bush. [?] Afterwards he sought me at my office one day with his heart in his hands & said he had come to lay axe at my root, to bring to me the Spiritual Life. I was deeply touched to find that he had all the time thought me good enough for the axe! Did you know Ellen Hooper (born Sturgis) & do you know her poems? If the gift of articulateness was not denied, you had Channing, Emerson, Hawthorne[,] a stupendous example, and so many others. Mostly it was denied, and became a

family fate. This is where Emily Dickinson comes in. She was the articulate inarticulate. This is why she appeals to so many New England women.

You were fortunate and skillful in drawing her out.

Believe me Sincerely yours Sam'l G. Ward 1608 K St., N.W.

1608 K. St., N.W. Washington, D.C.

P.S. Was it one of your family or mine that came up from Salem one day and said to a "mutual" friend, "John is dead. He died yesterday. He didn't want much said about it."

In his note to Mabel Todd, Higginson added a few words about Ward: "... an early transcendentalist & writer in *Dial* but for many years a N.Y. banker & agent of Barings—a rich man with a wife." He might have added that Ward was an old-line New Englander (grandson of the colonial General Artemas Ward), that he had grown up in Boston with Jones Very and Ellery Channing (namesake and nephew of the great Unitarian), that he lived with his wife near Concord and was a close friend of Emerson and Thoreau (whom he helped financially). Ward's ranking Channing as first among the great New England "articulates" is, of course, a sheer anomaly, to be explained possibly by Ward's desire to please Higginson, whose first wife was Channing's sister. As a poet, Channing was honored in Concord mostly for his "promise" and his sociability. (He was near brother to Thoreau after the real one died.) Emily Dickinson wrote at least five letters, one of them accompanied by a copy of Emerson's essays, to Mary Channing Higginson.¹

It is not by chance that Ward's interest in Dickinson's poetry should lead him at once into a little essay on New England Puritanism. Being "pur sang" himself, he understood the New England brand of "asceticism" (from Gr. askein, "to exercise" — in this case, one's talents); its tendency toward discipline and self-denial; its particular inwardness ("we conversed with our own souls," as Dickinson did in well over a hundred poems); its "shyness," which Ward equates with the lost art of communicating with others; and what it means to be "articulate" (born with a gift for words) in a community of "inarticulates" — all qualities, I suggest, essential to an understanding of Dickinson. Ward applies them to Dickinson long before they could be documented by her letters, which were not to appear in print until 1894 — for instance, Emily's relations with members of her family ("The typical family grew up strangers to each other"). Emily confirms this in letter after letter: "My father seems to me the oldest and oddest sort of a foreigner. Sometimes I say something and he stares in a curious sort of bewilderment though I speak a thought quite as old as his

daughter. . . . And so it is, for in the morning I hear his voice and methinks it comes from afar & has a sea tone & there is a hum of hoarseness about [it] & a suggestion of remoteness as far as the Isle of Juan Fernandez"—which is about as far from Amherst, Massachusetts, as you can get. Sister Lavinia fares no better:

Vinnie, Joseph, it is so weird and so vastly mysterious, she sleeps by my side, her care is in some sense motherly, for you may not remember that our amiable mother never taught us tailoring, and I am amused to remember those clothes, or rather those apologies made up from dry goods with which she covered us in nursery times; so Vinnie is in the matter of raiment necessary to me; and the tie is quite vital; yet if we had come up for the first time from two wells where we had hitherto been bred her astonishment would not be greater at some things I say. (R. Sewall, *Lyman Letters* 70–71)

Her mother may have been "amiable," but, as Emily told Higginson, "I never had a mother. I suppose a mother is some one to whom you hurry when you are troubled." Brother Austin seems to have been closer to her than the others, but one picture of him still clings: standing over his father's coffin, he kissed him on the brow, saying: "There, father, I never dared do that while you were living" (Sewall, *Life* 1: 61). Cousin Clara Newman (Turner), who, with her sister Anna, lived with the Austin Dickinsons for ten years after she and her sister had been orphaned, said that she had never seen any outward sign of affection between members of the Dickinson family (cf. Sewall, *Life* 2: 324). As Ward says, "It was *awfully* high, but awfully lonesome."

For all his perception into the realities of Dickinson's family life and even her reclusiveness (surely there was more to it than "shyness"), it is still remarkable that he should have been interested in her poetry to the extent of associating her with the New England "Thebaists" and predicting its ultimate worldwide fame. (I take the "may" of the third sentence to be a banker's hedge.) But why he could think well enough of Channing's poetry to rank him, too, with the greatest (even if he did it partly to please Higginson) is hard to explain. Channing wrote a great deal, published mostly in The Dial, was devastated by one of the severest reviews Poe ever wrote, and never got beyond utter conventionality. And this was at the same time (1891) when most of the reviews were critical of Dickinson's "barbarisms," her faulty rhymes, skewed syntax, and bumpy rhythms - that is, her unconventionality - all of which bothered Higginson's conventional taste, too, and explain why he urged her not to publish. He was even reluctant to help in the editing. So his delight at this letter from Ward, a man of standing, is predictable. As if those "six editions" weren't enough - there were five more within a year - Higginson seems to be assuring Mable Todd that the current was going their way. Emily Dickinson was becoming a "presence."

It is good to have Ward's hearty, nonprofessional, on-the-spot response to the poems as they first became known to the world. His interest was "intense"—and he a banker. There was something prophetic, in view of to-day's developments, in his sense that Dickinson, as an "articulate inarticulate," was providing a voice for women. But his great distinction was that he saw her as a *popular* poet not only for New England, and for New England women, but for the world, a "presence" here to stay.

That her presence is continuing - and growing - hardly needs documenting. The evidence is on every hand as book after book and essay after essay roll off the presses. In my small Massachusetts college (Williams) in the late 1920s, only a range of hills from Amherst, she wasn't even mentioned - and I majored in American literature. As time went on, a few of her lyrics appeared in anthologies and from there in survey courses. Then, in the 1950s, after several decades of piecemeal publication, the complete poems and letters made it possible to see her work steadily and see it whole. It was as if America (and now the world) had discovered a new treasure. As a colleague of mine, a specialist in American poetry, said, "I never knew what was there." Two major studies in recent years, Alfred Kazin's An American Procession (1984) and Harold Bloom's The Western Canon (1994), contain chapters on Dickinson (a phenomenon unheard of in the 1920s) that give what could be called official sanction to her continuing presence - Kazin in America, Bloom in the world. Kazin: "She was the first modern writer to come out of New England." Bloom: "Except for Shakespeare, Dickinson manifests more cognitive originality than any other Western poet since Dante."

The few poets who speak a New Word, who re-create and refresh the language, are often difficult, "strange" (Bloom's word).³ It takes time to accommodate ourselves to the shock of their new idiom, new rhythm, the "inner music" that, for instance, Mabel Todd was the first to hear in Dickinson's poems. Such poets, in a sense, have to be domesticated, given shape and form and meaning before we take them to ourselves; before teachers feel confident enough to present them to their classes and parents don't think twice before giving their collected works as graduation gifts; before, that is, they become a presence in our lives. In the 1920s we wrestled with T. S. Eliot for longer than I like to admit; even our teachers didn't know what to say about him, or about Faulkner, whose convoluted, sometimes page-long, sentences seemed outrageous. Now we talk with (relative) assurance among their pages — and among Dickinson's poems.

But, as with the greatest, the strangeness never wears off. Shakespeare is still a mystery, and so is Dickinson. We still argue about *Hamlet*, and those poems will never let us rest. But we have, at least, a sense of direction. In play after play, Shakespeare challenges a mystery, Dickinson in poem after poem;

and from each we learn a little more about *what it means to be alive*. The purport of Kazin's "modern" and the dynamic of Bloom's "cognitive originality" are embedded in a quatrain of Dickinson's maturity that has become, for me, a continuing presence:

Experiment escorts us last — His pungent company Will not allow an Axiom An Opportunity (P1770, late 1870)

Notes

- 1. Frederick T. McGill, Jr.'s *Channing of Concord* (1967) gives a lively picture of Channing's life in Concord and his friendship with Thoreau and Emerson. It is frank about his failure as a poet. Ward's relationship with the Concordians is amply documented.
 - 2. From Higginson's report to his wife about a conversation with ED (see L342b).
- 3. "Strangeness, as I keep discovering, is one of the prime requirements for entrance into the Canon" (Bloom 202).



BIOGRAPHY