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Escape from Amherst: Emily Dickinson's Life of Freedom

A Capstone fulfilling criteria for Honors in Vocal Performance

© (Maria Whitcomb – April 24, 2016)

Renée Crown University Honors College

Class of 2016

Abstract

Through *Escape from Amherst: Emily Dickinson's Life of Freedom*, I endeavored to create an immersive art song recital experience through which I explored the character of Emily Dickinson, hopefully rendering her ambiguous, iconic character somewhat more comprehensive to modern day audiences. Enclosed in the following chapters, please find the formal research I performed in examining Emily Dickinson's character, an explanation of my own artistic journey, the program that I distributed to audiences during the concert (containing analyses of the Emily Dickinson texts that I performed), stage directions illustrating actor/singer intention and movement onstage, and lastly an explanation of my inspiration for the visual components of set and props that appeared onstage during the concert event. An audio recording of the concert will also be made available to the committee through the link below, as well as an appendix at the conclusion of this work.

<https://soundcloud.com/maria-whitcomb/sets>

Also included is a video recording, of slightly lesser quality than the audio recording, but this submission will suffice for the committee to discern that the *Escape from Amherst* project culminated in a live performance, with dramatic and visual as well as musical components.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_5gcdQ-](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_5gcdQ-Jbc&list=PLpd2jIYrF1JZ7D5bGWYiUIvSvzgr7ecG1)

[Jbc&list=PLpd2jIYrF1JZ7D5bGWYiUIvSvzgr7ecG1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_5gcdQ-Jbc&list=PLpd2jIYrF1JZ7D5bGWYiUIvSvzgr7ecG1)

If necessary please use the following login information to view all videos:

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Executive Summary

The poetry of Emily Dickinson has both inspired and mystified audiences for generations. Her short, insightful poems are at once aphoristic, and clouded with metaphor, providing little windows into a world filled with beauty, rebellion, love and freedom. Though her uses of vocabulary and wording are unconventional – careful reading always yields beneath the broken lines and dashes the clarity of simple, pure, human emotion. Audiences everywhere are willing wear to a smile of curious patience while reading Dickinson, and to accept that the poetry of this American treasure has many layers. However, few are willing to extend that same courtesy to Dickinson herself.

A beautiful, complicated mind held the brilliance behind these poems that inspired countless works of art- paintings, poems, novels, plays, films and songs; but as years wear on and the often conjecture-filled work of biographers goes unread on library shelves, the essence of who Emily really was has retreated into her little bedroom in Amherst, Massachusetts. Educators simplify her into a “reclusive poet” known for her “unusual use of form and syntax” (Emily Dickinson Biography.com (n.d.)) and biographers romanticize her as a tragic would-be artist, stifled by the rigid societal conventions of 1800s New England. To adopt either of these opinions is to diminish one of America’s greatest poets to an unbearably boring cliché.

My purpose in developing the *Escape from Amherst* project has been to create an in-depth character study of Emily Dickinson, and become empowered to delve deeper into every character I will ever create onstage as a performer. I could have chosen straight theater as my medium, for there are many beautiful plays such as William Luce’s *The Belle of Amherst* or Chris Cragin-Day’s *Emily: An Amethyst Remembrance*, but as a vocal performance major, it made more sense artistically for me to use music to tell Emily’s story- and express the final

product as a staged art song recital.

Art song is known as the practice of setting pre-existing poetry to music, and its performance is essential to the education of every young singer. Because it is in this medium that most young artists learn proper technique and how to gain control of their voice and develop musical artistry through their own unique instrument, recital music is often viewed as an art form that is purely musical or technical, like an instrumental etude. In fact, art song itself has been treated much like Emily's poetry- legendary songs and voices mystify and delight, but not many audience members, or even young performers, seem willing to go deeper. However, the best displays of this art form showcase artists with the dramatic integrity of any lauded stage actor. The human nature of the poetry-especially Emily's poetry demands that the human, dramatic element be visceral and intact.

As someone who has had more training as a musician than as an actor, I grew insecure when I realized the kind of acting chops it would take to pull off a program of this kind. However, it was last summer when I traveled to Los Angeles to attend for a prestigious auditioned art song intensive entitled SongFest, hosted at Los Angeles' esteemed Colburn School, that I realized that the tools I needed laid in my own imagination- a purer understanding of my texts that lent intention to every phrase.

I had only imagined that I would be lucky enough to achieve fly-on-the-wall- status at SongFest, the level of musicianship of my fellow students, as well as the fame of many of the faculty members, including Jake Heggie, one America's most popular composers was overwhelming at times. However, faculty and peers alike were generous with their time and assistance, passionate about developing new programs and having new music heard. I genuinely thought no one would care that much about my small venture, but Mr. Heggie spent a half hour

with me talking about my project, and sent me a PDF of five as-yet-unpublished songs to use on my program. I also got the wonderful opportunity to profit from his critique of my own performance of his works in a master class.

SongFest set me free with regards to this project in every way imaginable. Not only did I hear first-rate performances of the Dickinson text settings of Jake Heggie, Aaron Copland, and Lori Laitman, that I would later become inspired to perform, but I also improved my approach to performance by participating in coursework on poetry analysis in vocal performance. During this class, our group of young singers worked on dividing our poems into smaller fragments that we could endow with different emotional intentions, thereby enhancing our performance's believability and our audience's interest. Every different stanza or line of the poem inspired a different emotion, a different action, a different story, and we used these personal narratives to guide our musical and physical actions onstage. We all chose English language songs and texts to work with, and of course I chose works by Dickinson, as did many of my other classmates. Her poems were harder to break apart because most of them were small and short, but in doing this activity, we discovered emotional depth in the poetry that we had never found before.

The concert that celebrated the conclusion of our poetry analysis class was by far my favorite event of the program. We spoke our poems before we sang them, as if they were straight pieces of theater, and our voices were made all the more powerful. Our movements were staged as we sang, and it was in this careful dramatic choreography that I conceptualized the approach I would take with every song in the Dickinson recital, and indeed every song that I will ever perform in the future.

When I left SongFest, the process began of crafting an original recital program began. After combing through the selections I had fallen in love with at the SongFest, as well as the vast

expanse of Dickinson settings by American composers (these are *hundreds* of songs, for indeed setting Dickinson is practically a rite of passage for American composers of vocal music) I settled on select works of Jake Heggie, Aaron Copland, and Lori Laitman breaking apart original sets of poems that these composers grouped together to craft sets of Emily's poetry that I thought best represented four strong aspects of her remarkable character. I did this not in the intent of diminishing the original vision of these composers, but rather marrying the intentions of them, Emily, and myself more perfectly.

For me, these aspects of character were a keen eye for detail, manifested in a heightened awareness of the natural world, a willingness to question and reject societal norms, a tendency to create strong emotional attachments with others, and a strong sense of self. Though Emily stated during her lifetime that her poems were not autobiographical, and that first person tense often used in her poems was meant to be interpreted in a ubiquitous manner, I challenged that for an artist, it is inevitable that a bit of his/her own character will seep into a poem, painting, or song of their creation regardless of absence of a professed personal testimony.

My work involved careful examination of her biography as well as the texts and music of my chosen American composers. The composers did not necessarily take Dickinson's biography or personality into account as they crafted their songs, but as I had predicted, the aforementioned character traits of Emily shone through this music for me. The fortitude and complexity of Emily's character is articulated in her texts, and in art song, the intentions of the poet and composer exist side by side in equal strength, regardless of whether or not they are always in concurrence. Therefore, even today, Emily's voice is still heard loud and clear through the inspired works created by artists today.

By expressing Emily's powers of observation, quiet insurrection, peerless heart, and

mental fortitude and clarity, I hoped to not only slough off the unimaginative characterizations of recluse and caged bird that have plagued the poet for generations, but to encourage audiences to see the relationship between Emily and the generations of artists she inspired posthumously.

The observations I made in my studies of Emily's biography as well as my own interpretations of Emily's texts also made for an interesting approach to my program notes- a physical guide given to the audience to enhance their understanding of the performance. I placed my interpretations of Dickinson's poetry alongside her luminous texts, and added the explanations of her character that were certain to communicate the purpose of the *Escape from Amherst* project to my audience. A copy of this program is included in the projects' appendix.

In working on the staged elements of the *Escape from Amherst Project*, I also decided that since her bedroom was the chief place in Emily's world where she felt the most able to be herself, no picture of Emily's character would be complete unless it were rendered in her home environment. Thus, I took it upon myself to physically recreate Emily's pre-Victorian era bedroom onstage as a visual component of my recital. For inspiration, I traveled to Amherst, Massachusetts, so I could visit the carefully preserved and restored Homestead and Evergreens, the two remaining residences of the Dickinson estate today. I also visited Houghton Library at Harvard University, another important destination for Dickinson scholars that contained many relics of Dickinson past, including treasured family heirlooms, her piano, a wonderful collection of books from her library, and her exceptional herbarium- detailed drawings and collections of plants that were almost scientific in nature.

The experience of holding objects that belonged to Emily, walking where she walked, and standing in the bedroom where in the 1850s, she underwent her most prolific period of writing- was invaluable to my artistic process. I discovered that her room was not the place of

safety and colorless seclusion that I had always imagined it to be, but rather a safe haven filled with light color, and imagination-one could feel energy pulsing through the walls. Looking through her window at the serene backyard, I imagined this space as a one where Emily would have been glad to while away her years. In fact, Emily once said of locking herself away in her room: “It’s just a turn, and freedom[!]” (“Restoration of Emily Dickinson’s Bedroom”- Emily Dickinson site).

When I arrived back to Syracuse, I teamed up with my parents, a carpenter and a middle school teacher to craft a backdrop of 1850s Amherst, painted onto large 4’X7’ plywood panels. We used these as the scenery for our set, and added props of a desk, chairs, pens, paper, books, and even an inkwell to create a more realistic space. In order not to hinder any communication between musicians during the program, the piano was also fully incorporated into the set.

Following my designs, my dad also crafted a movable window so that I could repeatedly change Emily’s perspectives during the performance- the points at which her imagination released her into the world, it could be turned, and “opened”. At other points, she stood behind it, looking through the glass. To further enhance the visual experience, I also elected to appear onstage in the likeness of Emily Dickinson, clad in her typical white housedress as opposed to traditional recital garb.

Escape from Amherst: Emily Dickinson’s Life of Freedom was an enlightening artistic experience for me. It showed me all the necessary steps involved with creating a character of dramatic clarity and honesty, and although I truly believe that the project should have required more time to develop profound artistry, it is a project that I will use for the rest of my life as a performer. I chose to include a comprehensive character study of Emily Dickinson, as well as an essay reflecting on the process in this folio. In the appendixes, there is enclosed the program with

poetry analyses, an explanation of the visual components of the staging, and a full script with stage directions.

I hope that my project will encourage other singers to realize that they are few rules in the realm of art song. Singers are given this big, beautiful catalog of centuries-old of music to learn, and somehow the heart behind it has gotten lost in translation for students who grip the piano in fear, standing in front of jurors for college evaluations. I hope that young singers will push what can be done dramatically and physically with their art form to the brink of what is traditional or acceptable, and then pull back in the quest to create a perfectly balanced delivery and product. That is what continues to be my journey as an artist- and the *Escape from Amherst* project has been integral to my development as a performer.

Works Cited (For quotations)

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Acknowledgements (Optional)

Many deserve extensive thanks for their help in crafting the *Escape from Amherst* project. This was a labor of love, but also a time of intense introspection and at times doubt. As an artist, this was the first time that I have ever attempted to curate a project of this scope, and I have realized that I can never glean too much input from the wonderful network of assistance that I have amassed at Syracuse University.

To Dr. Kathleen Roland-Silverstein, my fearless, candid, and patient advisor: Thank you for being so generous with your time even while you were abroad in Oxford, and for consistently giving me the kind of feedback I deserve as an artist with a desire to improve. In the same vein, I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Professor Janet Brown, my voice teacher and capstone reader, and Professor Kathleen Haddock. Thank you for assisting me in bringing this ambitious repertoire to the stage, and for the work you have done throughout my undergraduate years to bring my vocal technique and musicianship to the next level. Thanks are also in order for Dr. John Warren and Dr. Joeseeph Downing, who at separate intervals both stepped in to evaluate the performance of the *Escape from Amherst* Concert component at different stages in its development. Michelle Taylor, the Director of Operations for the Setnor School of Music, was also extremely generous in granting me access to the auditorium for a rehearsal space, and allowing me to store my scenery near the performance venue.

It is essential to recognize the musical and logistical contributions of pianist Sabine Krantz, my musical and performance *partner* in every respect. Truly, no better word exists for this tremendous collaborator and artist. I learn something new from her whenever we play together, and I can only hope for more in the future. Thank you for consistently going above and beyond, performing some of the most demanding music in the art song repertoire, coming in for

extra rehearsals, waiting patiently for payments, and even driving me back home after late night rehearsals.

The incredible faculty at the Colburn School's SongFest program also contributed greatly to my artistic development while the project was still in its conceptualization stages. Edwin Cahill revolutionized the way I analyze the combination of texts and music in performance, and for that I am endlessly grateful. I also owe tremendous gratitude to Jake Heggie, who granted me access to three songs on the final concert program that are yet to be published, and created a safe space to grow as an artist in masterclass. It takes a lot to be brave onstage, and I am only just beginning to grasp that concept.

The team at the Renée Crown University Honors Department has also been a tremendous asset to me. I was tremendously thankful to have been awarded a Crown-Wise Marcus Award, and I thank Professor Stephen Kuusisto, as well as the entire award committee for believing me worthy of such an honor. Thanks are also in order for Karen Hall, who has consistently tolerated me popping into her office to ask questions, and Kate Hanson, who has constantly assured me that I am not as behind as I think I am. I am also grateful to Samir Malovic, who helped me sort out the logistics in obtaining my Crown-Wise award.

Last, I need to thank my parents for their tremendous and endless support throughout my life and throughout this project. To my father, Ben Whitcomb, thank you for helping us paint, and somehow building a set for me out wood and my crazy ideas. You are the only dad I know who built his daughter a window on wheels. My mother, Lisa Whitcomb, read me poetry from a very young age, and it is likely that I never would have discovered Emily Dickinson without her. From paying for my tuition for SongFest to painting sets to setting up a post-concert reception, she has expressed her belief in my craft in many ways. I know I will always have your love.

Advice to Future Honors Students

The sky is the limit with your capstone project, and despite the doubts and frustrations that you will encounter in crafting this work, I hope that you never lose sight of the fact that this is your first chance to do something big. It is a work that you may fall back on or utilize throughout your life, so make it something that you care about and put effort into. This is about way more than an extra line of writing on your diploma. Completing a capstone is about expanding your professional/artistic/philosophical worldview. This project will change the way you think, and if you complete it, you will feel equipped to take on any real-world obstacle.

Plan your time, and start ahead. I truly began this process a year ago, and in all honesty, I wish I had had another six months. Find an advisor who will be supportive and nurturing, who is as excited about your project as you are. In the same vein, choose an advisor who cares enough about you as a professional to not sugarcoat their idea of the quality of your work. Although it can be difficult, to obtain success in your field, candor is the best medicine. Ask for input and advice from a variety of people, and then ask again. Do not be too afraid or arrogant to seek the counsel of others, for out of all the people whose offices I have walked into on this campus, I have never found an instructor who was unwilling to help me.

You are stronger and smarter than you know, with a tremendous work ethic and a relentless capacity for creativity. Ready yourself for the gifts that you will give to the professional world by completing a project that you can be proud of. You are ready.

Emily Dickinson: A Character Analysis

An artist's temperament is as unique as his or her aesthetic, and often as iconic. It is widely acknowledged that the task of creating art is performed by those with complex personalities who exhibit a number of predispositions in character. Often they are intensely humanistic, noble to a fault, or they harbor deep tendencies towards depression and introspection. Even a finely tuned sense of humor can elevate an artist's work from the ordinary to the legendary. One could argue that if an artist is not a truly interesting or complex person on the inside, their creations may not be that interesting. Perhaps, unless created by a man or woman with an appropriate number of bizarre personality traits, works will fail to pass into the vault wherein humankind places the esteemed works of art known as "classics".

Ironically, even though these complexities in personality are what elevate artist's work to immortality, posthumously, art consumers (students, readers, audience members – those who only glimpse the surface of an artist's world) are often willing to reduce their perceptions of an artist's character to a single (often very general) personality trait. Instead of considering the myriad of life experiences that shaped an artist's catalogue of work, certain audiences are only willing to classify them based on only one greatest work, or a single life event. There is a direct correlation between vernacular recognition of a work of art, and reduction in artist personality perception.

Biographers, researchers, and historians have largely exempted themselves from this gross misconduct, but common public ignorance has led many people to reduce great artists to clichés and parodies. For many, Whitman's image will shine for posterity with the stoic, sunny nobility of his poem "I Hear America Singing", despite the fact that many of his peers did not view his dangerous and radical political views in this light. Certain passages in *Walden* make it

difficult to remember that Thoreau possessed a transcendentalist faith in humankind, rather than the disillusioned outlook of a man tramping grumpily through the woods. It will always be difficult to reconcile that Vincent van Gogh was able to see his beautiful, ethereal, calm masterpiece *The Starry Night* in the window view from an asylum room.

Posthumously, artists often cease to exist as “real people” to the general public. Although historical sites and museums devote themselves to rectifying these wrongs, they are working within a limited geographic scope, and it is not everyone who will make a long trek to Camden, Concord, Amherst, or even Amsterdam to discover the truth for themselves. Thus, the beautiful and complex imperfections of these artists are often glossed over by public perception and the passage of time, and they become classified as flat, colorless “legends”, “icons” or “myths”.

One artist who has been most egregiously wronged by this practice is Emily Dickinson, the myth herself. Hers was a brilliant, complicated mind, filled with different ideas, emotions, and opinions. All of these entities found their home in Emily’s mind and heart. She recognized them, acknowledged them, and often found them a place in her poetry. Each one was of miraculous clarity, for Emily was a woman who “seized on essentials”. (Taggard p. xiii) Here, the word “essentials” should not refer to views, realizations, and emotions that are merely black and white – but the willingness to articulate and differentiate every shade of grey within one’s personality. She was a being of uncommon strength in that she was able to pinpoint her virtues and faults with equal exactness, and embrace them all as important parts of her character.

How then, has Emily Dickinson often been simplified into a “reclusive poet” known for her “unusual use of form and syntax” (biography.com) or romanticized as a tragic would-be artist, stifled by the rigid societal conventions of 1800s New England? To adopt either of these opinions is to diminish the incredible character of Emily Dickinson to an unbearably boring

cliché.

The mistake of educators, students, *select* biographers (such as her biased niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi) and the general public is that they attempt to assign Emily an extreme identity based on her external environment rather than her internal environment. The Amherst, Massachusetts of the nineteenth century was a charming but conflicted land, where nature did its best to coexist with booming industry, farmers and their wives gave out prizes for the best livestock and preserves in town (in fact, Emily's blackberry pie once garnered the second prize.) For those who could afford it, the university and local private school turned out carefully educated individuals who led modest, prudent lives in their shops or offices and then went home to their families for relaxation.

The best characterization of Amherst's upper class lay in Edward Dickinson, Emily's father, a lawyer and Massachusetts politician whose family lineage had birthed Amherst College and practically the town itself. Emily described him mostly aptly with her solemn admission that "He never played." (Sewall, p. 64) and he seemed to wear the yoke of the town's stern lawyer proudly, for he was a man who saw nobility in hard work and a degree of suffering. He rarely gave into bouts of strong emotion or passion, and even in his "love letters" to his then-fiancée, Emily Norcross Dickinson; the rhetoric was that of restrained practicality:

"Let us prepare for a life of rational happiness. I do not expect or wish for a life of pleasure. May we be happy and useful and successful and each be an ornament in society and gain the respect and confidence of all with whom we may be connected."
(Taggard, p. 51)

The upper class men of Amherst would have perhaps been equated with the "clock punchers" of the 1950's era, and although many of these high-class women were college-educated, conscious beings, they would have seemed quite similar to the housewives of that era. The Dickinson household had one maid, Maggie, as well as men who worked the grounds and

tended the chickens, but the ladies of the house (Emily's mother, sister, and herself) were expected to at least assist with the domestic tasks of cooking and cleaning. In fact, early in their marriage, Emily's formidable father, Edward Dickinson, gifted to his young wife a copy of the then popular household guide, Lydia Maria Child's *The American Frugal Housewife*, a text that lauded these virtues (emilydickinsonmuseum.org). Emily's mother must have employed these practices in an exacting fashion, for in one letter, Emily characterized her mother as "oppressively tidy." (Taggard, p. 38)

When they were not at these tasks of cooking, cleaning, or relaxing through the noble pursuits of art, embroidery, music, botany, reading or letter writing (nearly all pursuits that Emily enjoyed) women of the time were expected to keep exhausting calendars of entertaining, and to keep "calling hours" during which members of the community (mostly fellow housewives) would drop by for conversation or other activities. In this regard, all women in the community seemed to serve the purpose of keeping each other entertained, which was indeed a full time occupation.

Today, a view of women as docile but sociable domestics paints a picture of a life of isolation and deprivation. Had Emily Dickinson kowtowed to these societal practices; she might have felt the rub of shackles. However, she enjoyed being home, and truly loved Amherst, her father, and her siblings, her older brother, Austin, and her younger sister, Lavinia.

In her mostly accurate but somewhat romanticized biography *The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson*, Genevieve Taggard continually questions whether or not it was the power of Edward Dickinson or the poet's own lack of mettle that prevented Emily Dickinson from quitting Amherst altogether, but the answer lies in an account of her returning home from her first

semester at the nearby Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. Emily never left Amherst simply because she did not want to.

“We rode swiftly along & soon the Colleges and the spire of our venerable Meeting House, rose to my delighted vision. Never did Amherst look more lovely to me & gratitude rose in my heart to God, for granting me such a safe return.”

(Sewall, p. 59)

Emily Dickinson’s escape from the trials of society life lay in a rather à la carte lifestyle that was left rather unhindered by familial input. She deigned not to take a part in the household cleaning (perhaps the only domestic task that she truly abhorred) or to receive visitors. She chose to participate more in the life she lived in her small sanctuary of a bedroom rather than the life outside of it. When one enters Emily’s bedroom in the Dickinson homestead where she passed many of the hours of her life, they are given the impression of a space where it would be pleasant to while away the years.



Figures 1 and 2: Emily's Bedroom (Emily Dickinson Site)

The above figures display images of Emily Dickinson’s newly restored bedroom (as of August 2015) at the original Dickinson Homestead in Amherst, Massachusetts, which has since become the Emily Dickinson Museum. Down to the flowered wallpaper and original furniture the room is a historically accurate reproduction of a room filled with calm and joy. It is tidy and cozy yet airy, filled with natural light. And, although the picture does not show it through the gauze of the curtains, a beautiful view of what would be nineteenth century Amherst, a city

nestled in the Berkshire mountains of Massachusetts that was just beginning to establish itself in the scene of New England commerce. Emily so loved this room, that her niece, Martha Dickinson Bianchi, described a conversation regarding the space with her aunt in the following manner:

“She would stand looking down, one hand raised, thumb and forefinger closed on an imaginary key, and say, with a quick turn of her wrist, “It’s just a turn –and freedom, Matty!””
(emilydickinsonmuseum.org)

That room was her creative haven, her gateway to the world, and in this manner not only was the living Emily Dickinson ill-suited for the image of lackluster prisoner attributed to her by legend –makers today, but it becomes clear that Emily’s life was one of freedom rather than captivity. To see the world through the lens of her poetry and her room was a direct and clear choice. The outside world was there for her to observe, document, and paint with her words, for Emily was an exceptionally perceptive human, acutely aware of herself and her surroundings.

Emily never escaped Amherst physically, for her retreat was *inwards*. She sought refuge from the constraints of society within her home, her room, and above all, *herself*, for she was a being whose tempests she could brave and whose questions she could answer. Her intense perspicacity led her to the ways in which she sought and attained a more freedom-filled lifestyle than many women of nineteenth century of New England, most of whom effectively were “...at once stimulated and limited by a social environment which is [was] serious, virtuous, and deficient of amusement.” (Taggard, p. 220)

Her life of observation led her to achieve freedom through an intense and sympathetic connection to nature, a quiet but almost rebellious rejection of many of the human practices of war and religion, intense feelings of connection and love fostered with many of her friends and family, and lastly a strong and grounded sense of who she was as a person.

Mrs. Emily Norcross Dickinson, an active gardener, cultivated a love of nature in her

children, and this most likely built the foundation for Emily's strong connection with the natural world. Her mother was renowned for her figs, and Emily surely inherited this green thumb, exhibiting the patience necessary for growing flowers as a child.

Furthermore, Edward Dickinson, who was a strict and never indulgent man, took an opportunity to forget himself where matters of his daughter's love of flowers were concerned. Not only was the Dickinson homestead where Emily resided for the majority of her life (from 1855 to her death in 1886) equipped with rolling grounds that housed some of the community's loveliest gardens, but upon their arrival, Edward fashioned her a modest, but beautiful conservatory attached to the side of their house, an expression of pure love for his favorite child. Thus, Emily spent many days of her life crouched behind the garden hedge, planting, or in winter, tending to the flowers in her conservatory.

She grew all manner of flowers – New England natives, tropical flowers, and even herbs in this sweet glass haven, and, to her delight, all of them flourished. These exotic bursts of color served as her ticket to foreign lands, and she jubilated “I have but to cross the floor to stand in the Spice Isles.” (emilydickinsonmuseum.org) Her finer abilities to sense subtle changes in the wind, and to consider the activities of bees and butterflies in relation to her flowers, had given Emily the skill to create flowers so brilliant that they served as a vehicle for her imagination – another way in which she obtained freedom.

Furthermore, plant life served as an important part of Emily's education. While attending the local Amherst Academy (an institution founded in part by the Dickinson family) and shortly after completing a year at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, Emily studied a variety of engrossing subjects, including philosophy, Latin, geology and chemistry. Although she was seen as a bright and inquisitive student in all of her classes, after so many years of dirt under her

fingernails, it is unsurprising that she excelled particularly in botany.

The leading text of the day on the subject of botany, Ms. Almira H. Lincoln's *Familiar Lectures on Botany* was also incredibly influential in further igniting Emily's interest in the plant world. Botany was a popular subject, especially for young ladies, as it catered to their finer sensibilities in a manner that smelly animal dissection or the mathematical rigors of physics did not. Encouraged by Lincoln's text, like many well-bred, educated young women of her day, Emily joined in the dainty practice of keeping an herbarium, a book containing collections of carefully dried plants, organized and carefully labeled with their scientific Latin nomenclature as well as with significant scientific details as to their use or history in the realm of medicine.

However, Emily had an attachment to her herbarium that seems unique. Emily kept her herbarium among her most prized possessions throughout her life. Even today, the intricacy and care that is clearly exhibited in its assembly is a source of wonder. Not only are Emily's senses of detail and powers of observation abundantly clear here, but also her sympathetic view of nature is brought to light. Emily's careful preservation shows that she cherished these flowers as one would a human life.



Figure 3: Emily Dickinson's Herbarium - Harvard University Gazette

If anything, Emily's strong perception of the natural world gave her a unique empathy for all aspects of this planet. Thus in her poetry, she would adopt extensive metaphors, and attribute very human characteristics to non-human entities, often animals, exhibited in poems such as "Fame is a bee-" She was also able to see distinct similarities between occurrences in human nature, and events in the natural world, such as storms or the changing seasons. This is clearly exhibited in texts such as "There came a Wind like a Bugle."

This nearly religious reverence for the natural world might have been another piece of influence garnered from *Familiar Lectures on Botany*. In this text, the identification of plants was not only extolled as an invaluable study for furthering the practices of sensible agriculture and commerce, but was elevated to a strangely, almost fervent, doctrine of theology. For the presence of God in science was a widely accepted principle in nineteenth century public education. In the excerpt below, Lincoln expands upon this principle of the subject:

"The study of Botany naturally leads to greater love and reverence for the Deity. It may not always produce this effect [...] but those who feel in their hearts a love to God, and who see in the natural world the workings of His power can look abroad, and, adopting the language of a Christian poet, exclaim,
"My Father made them all."
 (Lincoln, p.12)

Emily latched on to this gentle indoctrination, but in an unexpected manner. She possessed a unique, spiritual view of the realm of nature, and believed that the small and beautifully intricate details of the natural world, such as a butterfly's wing or a flower's stamen, were all expressions of God's glory. It also stands to reason that with this view of natural splendor around her, Emily began to see God's sky as the ceiling of her chapel, and began to rejection many of the standard mores of institutionalized religion, a practice that could have proved dangerous to someone who lived a less quiet and sheltered life.

Emily was born in 1826, when Christian revivalism was sweeping the country. From Calvinists to Evangelists to Methodists and the Baptists all Protestant sects took advantage of a

turbulently changing America to spread their gospel. As tensions grew between Northern and Southern states and the frontier expanded via the railroad, people grew more anxious for a force of permanence in their lives. For some, they found it in a newfound relationship with the Lord. This revivalist energy spanned decades, and even the steadfast Edward Dickinson succumbed to religious conversion during an 1850 sermon in Amherst. Emily, however, never swayed in her resolve, and refused to adhere to this school of thought.

Emily's first fight against the religious fervor of nineteenth century New England life began with her time at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. During her first and only year at this venerable institution, Emily and her fellow students were often subjected to bouts of religious oration, after which they would be asked to profess their faith. After the girls expressed their thoughts, they would be divided into three groups. Those who committed themselves entirely to God and the church were considered as "professed". Those who had made progress were considered to be "with hope" and those who refused to agree to the teachings were subsequently labeled "without hope".

"Dickinson was among eighty without hope when she entered and was among twenty-nine who remained so by the end of the year. She wrote her friend Abiah Root, "There is a great deal of religious interest here and many are flocking to the ark of safety. I have not yet given up to the claims of Christ, but trust I am not entirely thoughtless on so important and serious a subject."
(emilydickinsonmuseum.org)

Indeed, Emily's inability to profess did not at all indicate spiritual inferiority on her part. Emily simply saw her relationship with God as that of an open dialogue, rather than of blind servitude. Emily adored and devoured the King James Bible that her father gave her at age thirteen. In a rather à la carte fashion, she seemed to subscribe to the idea of glorying in God's creation and love rather than accepting doctrines of sacrifice for his benefit. In this manner, She accepted and worshipped God on her own terms, preferring to "keep the Sabbath staying at home" (Dickinson catalogue #236) as opposed to joining a congregation. In this regard, Emily

stated, “I stand alone in rebellion.” (Sewall p. 66) She questioned God on her own terms, about His love for the world, and His love for herself, a not-so-meek presence before Him.

Emily was heavily invested in her “...personal theology, in which the World and Man and God were all but coordinate” (Sewall, p. 67) In her conversations with Him, exhibited in many of her poems, she was frank, bold and cheeky, and innocently inquisitive. However, in these discourses she was also often filled with sadness, confusion, and anger. Even as it existed all around her throughout her life, each death of a family member or friend caused devastating depression.

Her first experience with death occurred in 1846, when her mentor, friend, (and often posited potential love interest,) Leonard Humphrey, died in the street from a brain hemorrhage. This event left her with the words “...when the un-reconciled spirit has nothing left but God, that spirit is lone indeed.” (Taggard p. 72). Her last loss, the death of her father, devastated her in the greatest fashion.

Though her relationship with her father was filled with complexity, Edward Dickinson was a giant in her life, and the love and awe she bore for him was incredible. For her, despite her joyfully cheeky admissions of his sternness and fits of temper in her letter (She jokingly refers to him as “Vesuvius” in a particularly mischievous letter to her brother (Sewall, p.62) her father was a mortal manifestation of God himself. His authority was upheld in her mind even as it was defied by the small rebellious acts of reading romantic novels or putting a chipped plate before him at suppertime.

Although the following observation is indeed mere speculation, considering that Emily Dickinson claimed her poetry was non-autobiographical, the relationship between God, Edward Dickinson, and herself seems inherently present in many of her religious poems. In these, Emily

places herself in the role of a child, and God in the role of a parent, perhaps *her* father as well as *the* father. The last stanza from the seventieth poem in her catalog, “Arcturus is his other name-” offers an interesting example of this phenomenon.

I hope the Father in the skies
Will lift his little girl—
Old fashioned—naught—everything—
Over the stile of "Pearl."
(Taggard, p. 285)

Edward Dickinson’s own approach to religious authority was perhaps an influence on the young Emily. Although Edward Dickinson led an upright, societally acceptable lifestyle, a relationship with the church was glaringly absent from his life. Although the aforementioned religious revival swept New England for a grand part of his life, Edward Dickinson’s steadfast pride and established manner of being prevented him from making an honest commitment to God until he was nearly fifty years old.

“ “When Hon. E.D. of Amherst was converted—who had been long under conviction—His pastor said to him in his study—“You want to come to Christ as a *lawyer*—but you must come to him as a *poor sinner*— get down on your knees and let me pray for you, & then pray for yourself.” It was not easy for Dickinsons to get down on their knees and pray before others—or to be demonstrative even before God.”
(Sewall, p. 66)

Emily was the only member of her family who did not give into religious conversion. Perhaps the biggest reason was because she did not want to imagine an entity that was capable of besting even the mighty Edward Dickinson. Perhaps her consistent questioning of God may serve only as a reflection for a degree of rebellion towards all authority that surrounded her.

The Civil War also brought another picture of death into the life of Emily Dickinson. Freedom indeed from her Amherst life was accomplished through contemplation of this war, for it was hard for all members of the community to focus on their careful lives of social calls and preserve-making whilst local boys marched off to fight for the Union cause. However, this welcome seclusion for her may have also instilled a very different fear. Following the battle of

Gettysburg, every small Northern town held their breath, paralyzed by the fear that their quaint life would be the next to be disturbed. As a key strategic state containing the port and major trade and manufacturing center of Boston, the fear felt by Massachusetts was particularly real.

Although many of the men from Emily's upper crust Amherst society (including her brother Austin) paid for substitutes to fight for them in the war, those who did choose to wield the bayonet were missed, and as they fell, their names were glorified in the *Springfield Republican*. The whole town wept at the death of Frazar Stearns, the son of the then president of Amherst College. As Emily watched the young men who had apprenticed in her father's law office slowly disappear, it became apparent that God's will was not always just. This part of American history never failed to stir the anger of the quiet Emily, who nevertheless fingered her beloved Bible and studied it at home with her family.

Concerning these issues of her heart, while Emily Dickinson outwardly played the part of dutiful child of God, she stoked radical fires in her soul. Anger was the emotion that induced Emily's most prolific writing period, coinciding exactly with 1864, the bloodiest year of the Civil War, marred by General William Tecumesh Sherman's "March to the Sea." In this manner, Emily's poems are found not only to defy many conventions of modern poetry in their construction, but also to be full of rebellious fire. Emily lived through these poems and died through them as she wrote; her pen was her bayonet, and her ink the blood she spilled. As soldiers afar killed with machine-like accuracy, she asked even the most taboo questions of her day with an equally steady hand. Her anger at the atrocities of the Civil War freed her verse, and freed her from Amherst life.

"The war upset the ideas by which she lived, it tilted life from a level of understanding to an oblique angle and so seesawed issues which had seemed in equilibrium that she found herself writing without leave, without premeditation, forced to put things down while they still burned..."

(Taggard, pp. 7-8)

However, the bravery and audacity that freed Emily mentally and emotionally, allowing her to question God regularly was not born only of her indefatigable spirit, but was also a result of the intensity with which she cherished all in her life. She adored her family and friends wholly, holding some in almost holy esteem, and kept a religious practice of writing letters. All of them are signed with passionate openings and closings, including “Treasured (Name)”, “Darling (Name)”, “Lovingly”, “Your Dearest Friend”, “Your Sister”, or as a short remark, “Take!” No matter how long Emily had known a person for, what role they had in her life, or when she had last seen them, the tomes of letters she left behind give indication of a mind with a scrupulous memory for details and dates, never missing a chance to commemorate a birthday, anniversary, or death that impacted one of her correspondents. She loved openly and freely, and while she never showed her poetry to her mother, father, or Lavinia some of these friends were awarded poems, among them Samuel Bowles, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and her sister-in-law, Susan “Sue” Huntington Gilbert Dickinson.

The relationship that existed between Emily and Sue was surely one of the strangest in her life; it remains among the most significant to the poet. The tone of their letters is consistently desperately and emotional, but also marked by the cool calm of intellect that allowed these two women to consistently exchange ideas and books and that allowed Emily to seek Susan’s critical input on what would come to be many of her most famous poems, including “Sleep is supposed to be” (Catalog #13) and “A Narrow fellow in the Grass” (Catalog # 24), and “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers” (Catalog #216).

They met as schoolgirls during a summer term at Amherst Academy, thus Emily knew Sue even before Austin began to court her. When the two finally married, Emily was overjoyed to have been given one of her dearest friends as a sister. However, a life of unpredictable

conflicts also rose ahead of them, as Sue navigated Amherst's complicated social world and juggled her duties to her husband and children. As close as they were, it was sometimes difficult for these two women to read the other's actions. At times, when Sue was too overwhelmed to write, Emily might have seen it as neglect, or conversely, Sue, an authoritative figure who enjoyed her freedom and social lifestyle, might have felt tied down by Emily's emotional devotion.

Sue and Emily were both complicated personalities, but despite long periods of estrangement (up to two years at a time) over the course of their nearly lifelong correspondence, it seems that the sister-in-laws made an effort to work at their relationship. Neither was a model of feminine perfection, considering Sue's will was sometimes subject to her rather unpredictable temper, and Emily's nearly spiritual nature of attachment to her friends might have been *too* familiar for Sue, however, for most of their lives, the women drew on this friendship of decades as the root of their interactions with each other.

Emily said it best in a note to Sue written in 1885, wherein she stated: "The tie between us is very fine, but a Hair never dissolves." Thus, despite their bouts of disagreement, the two remained somewhat close until the death of Gilbert Dickinson, Austin and Sue's youngest child, in 1883. This blow proved to be too great for the family to recover from, and Emily died somewhat un-reconciled to her sister-in-law in 1886.

Emily was doubtless capable of great powers of forgiveness to thrive in the tempestuous relationship like the one she shared with Sue. Perhaps Emily somehow intrinsically knew, with an extraordinary empathy, far ahead of her time, that sometimes the action of love does not constitute consistent, great acts, but sporadic little actions that make the world more secure for another being, one moment at a time. Perhaps she was able to deal with Sue by learning to lean

in when her sister-in-law needed her, and to pull away when she did not.

This understanding capacity in love must have given great buoyancy to Emily's life, and this may have been one of her greatest sources of freedom. It is true that Emily garnered a reputation for being a loner through her reluctance to receive company in her later years. However, the vision of a cold, withdrawn, disassociated Emily that the cliché of "the myth" perpetuates does not seem to equate with the character that has been presented above. Though Emily's worldview may have been quite small, her capacity for love and kindness proved to be enormous. One of Emily's defining traits was a strong, passionate, even romantic heart that was prone to quick, sometimes unfounded attachment.

The Dickinsons were not an overtly emotional family. As mentioned before, her father was an almighty, steadfast, rock of a man. Her mother was a quiet, nervous soul, mostly bound by the will of her husband. Perhaps the lively flirt Lavinia and her brooding brother Austin had some empathy for the depths of Emily's emotions, but emotional expression was not something widely encouraged in the Dickinson household. How, then, did a girl bred in a proper, staunch, New England fashion manage to develop this emotional nature? Perhaps it began with her love of romantic English Victorian literature, of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and, in particular, the Brontë sisters.

As Emily made her way through Amherst Academy and Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, she was given *Jane Eyre* by a young law student who worked in her father's office. At that time, a phenomenon that elders disparagingly quipped "*Jane Eyre* Fever" (Taggard, p. 88) was sweeping New England, for the Brontë sisters had launched a new era of "psychological fiction" (emilydickinsonmuseum.org) and re-romanticized the idea of a new brand of hero, the *heroine*. It is quite possible that the biggest reason for the surge of popularity in these novels laid

in the idea that Emily, like many others young girls of her day, saw much of herself in the protagonists of these classic novels.

The Brontë heroine is a peculiar breed in that rarely are they physically strong, Joan of Arc archetypes that are so lauded in literature. These characters are not those who will be brandishing swords to lead an army into battle. Rather, these women, the Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe, and even Catherine Earnshaw characters of literature are physically small, and often described as “plain” or “peculiar” rather than beautiful. They are also given to strong bouts of emotion, and are exceptionally quick-witted, or even manipulative, as in the case of Catherine Earnshaw.

Little Emily Dickinson, with a countenance that was lively around friends even as it was meek around strangers, who was barely five feet tall, with dark hair, and odd, sherry – colored eyes fit nearly every criterion that the Brontë sisters sought to establish in their characters. Although she doubtless had the facility to understand these novels were mere fiction, the picture of these women, rising above their own shyness, fears, and weaknesses to become capable of winning the triumphs of their hearts, and moving the souls of the mighty, stormy, otherwise unreachable men like Mr. Rochester or Heathcliff, doubtlessly affected Emily greatly. Perhaps it was outbursts like Jane Eyre’s indignant and bold admission of love to Mr. Rochester that gave Emily the courage to free her strong emotions through writing – a habit that she began in sincerity during these impressionable years of her life.

“Do you think I am an automaton? — a machine without feelings? and can bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips, and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! — I have as much soul as you — and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you. I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh: it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal — as we are!”

(Brontë, Charlotte, p. 252)

It is also possible that these novels colored greatly what Emily's ideal of true love was. The meaningful romantic relationships between Brontë characters are rarely born of solely physical attraction or even a connection born of flirtation, appreciation of one's sense of humor, or a love of the other's company. The connectedness of the characters in these stories is on the level of the metaphysical. They are brought together because of an almost holy connection through their *souls* that makes their union seem preordained by God. Not even the potent emotions of grief, anger, or hatred can sever this bond, as proclaimed by Heathcliff upon Catherine's death in *Wuthering Heights*.

"Oh! you said you cared nothing for my sufferings! And I pray one prayer—I repeat it till my tongue stiffens—Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living; you said I killed you—haunt me, then! The murdered do haunt their murderers, I believe. I know that ghosts have wandered on earth. Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad! only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! it is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!"
(Brontë, Emily, p. 151)

With this ideal of love firmly ingrained in her head, why would the young Emily settle for anything less in her own life? Could she settle for the practical courtship of the kind her parents had? For "[o]bviously these two young people [Emily's parents] looked upon marriage less as romantic fulfillment than as a contractual agreement to fulfill together certain social and religious aims and obligations." (Sewall, p. 78) Clearly, this was not enough for Emily Dickinson, and if she were to love in that way, she would not settle for anything less than a spiritual connection to the one she was bound to love.

Perhaps it was this unrelenting view of the holiness of love that enabled her to suspend judgment in the latter part of her life, especially concerning the relationships of her brother, Austin. Emily was not only endlessly understanding, but fiercely loyal, and nowhere in her writings and letters does Emily decry the torrid, thirteen-year affair between her married brother Austin and the young Mabel Loomis Todd, a woman twenty years his junior, that rent their home

and the Amherst community in two.

The question of whether or not the affair affected Emily personally cannot be dismissed. Mabel Todd was a frequent guest at the Dickinson homestead, where Emily lived. Mabel Todd did not arrive in town until 1881, well into the period of Emily's life in which she refused to see visitors. However, there is no doubt that this young wife of an Amherst astronomy professor at first brought life to Amherst, into the Dickinson homestead, and to the Evergreens, where Austin, his wife Susan, and his children resided.

The community described her as bright, lively, and beautiful, and loved the vibrancy she brought to Amherst's quiet elegance. She was a talented writer, painter, and musician, who had studied piano and voice at the New England Conservatory for two years. She latched on right away to Amherst's culture of calling hours and first befriended the Dickinsons by playing music in their drawing rooms.

It would have been easy for Emily to feel betrayed when the affair between Austin and Mabel first came to light. Mabel had been a friend and confidante to both Lavinia and Susan upon her arrival into town, but the commencement of the affair exacerbated a rift that already begun to grow over the hedge between the Dickinson Homestead and the Evergreens, particularly the rift that continuously rose and fell in Emily and Sue's complicated relationship.

Tensions arose particularly from how obvious it all was. It was not a question of whether Austin and Mabel's spouses knew of the affair. Secrets were difficult to hide in a town as small as Amherst, and "The War Between the Houses" was an obvious topic of gossips. Rather, it was the cross to bear of the wronged spouses as they learned to live with it. The frankness of the situation lent itself to the necessity that all involved, especially the children of Austin and Sue, as well as the elder Dickinson sisters, take clear sides. Either one would take up the cause of Susan,

or of Austin and Mabel.

Emily chose her brother, and when Austin was not hiding in Mabel's arms from Susan's wrath, he sought refuge behind the walls of the Homestead, confiding in his sisters, with whom he had always been very close. Emily's inability to rise directly to Sue's defense or to shame Austin does not speak to weakness or indecision, but rather to a strong empathy for Austin's plight. Mabel and he had the connection of the soul that she had read about and believed in so strongly, and likely she did not believe it her role to indict him for his acts of unfaithfulness.

One has to only read parts of Austin and Mabel's correspondences to know that the lovers themselves certainly saw their relationship in this light, for in one note, Mabel writes "Do you not know that my soul is knit to yours by an Almighty hand? Through you I see God." (Sewall, p. 182) and for Austin, the torrents of love break forth in this fashion:

"That I have given myself to you, or that I have found myself yours! outside of all will or intent. That with you I breathe a new air, move up in new realms, that by you I am enlarged, enriched, uplifted. That I thank God for you every hour. That I find in you everything most beautiful, most dear, most rare, and in you the promptest response to every subtlest feeling and movement of my nature- or do we not rather move toward each other by a common impulse! and in perfect unison! No words can express, dearie, the depth and strength of my love for you, its sacredness, its holiness."
(Sewall, p. 183)

The question of who exactly was Emily's primary subject of romantic attachment during the poet's lifetime remains a great mystery. Leonard Humphries, her first literary mentor and the principal of Amherst Academy, could have been her first girlish love and his aforementioned death in 1850 cast a dark shadow over her early years. George Gould, a talented writer and orator, as well as a classmate of her brother Austin's could have been an infatuation – she even went as far as to write a valentine to him that was published in the Amherst College newspaper *The Indicator*.

However, none of them quite matched the ardor Emily perhaps felt for Judge Otis Lord, a much older friend of her father's who shared his politics in the then dying ideology of the Whig

party. However, despite this, Judge Lord had a successful political career that was truly the hallmark of his life as he rose in 1859 to gain appointment to the Massachusetts Superior Court and then later served on the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts from 1875-1882 (emilydickinsonmuseum.org). He was a distinguished public figure, called “one of the very ablest men in this State” but then Massachusetts Congressman Rufus Choate, (Sewall, p. 642) and thrilling orator.

Lord is the popular choice of many biographers for the pivotal love interest in Emily’s life. Though their friendship and correspondence supposedly persisted over many years, from the time Lord held her on his knee as a baby to his death in 1884, Lord may have only afforded Emily a last opportunity for love in later years. In the beginning, what prevented them from joining in union was not their large age difference of eighteen years, but rather the fact that Lord was married to Elizabeth Farley Lord, a member of Boston high society whose predecessors included a president of Harvard College (Sewall, p. 643).

Although some biographers sensationalize circumstances that placed Emily and Judge Lord in the same geographic location at the same time, most notably during Emily’s treatments for an eye condition in Boston in 1864 and 1865 (Walsh, p. 71), it is likely that Emily and Judge Lord never consummated their relationship, but stuck mainly to letters to keep their relationship alive. In fact, the topic of love was not broached at all until after Mrs. Lord’s death in 1877. Fifteen letters survive of the correspondence between Emily and Lord, and this one mounts the strongest feeling. Here, she calls him “Salem”, after the town in Massachusetts in which he resided.

“My lovely Salem smiles at me. I seek his Face so often- but I have done with guises. I confess that I love him- I rejoice that I love him- I thank the maker of Heaven and Earth-that gave him me to love- the exultation floods me. I cannot find my channel-the Creek turns Sea-at thought of thee- Will you punish me? “Involuntary Bankruptcy” how could that be Crime? Incarcerate me in yourself-rosy penalty-threading with you this lovely maze, which is not Life

or Death-though it has the intangibleness of one, and the flush of the other-waking for your sake on Day made
magical with you before I went...”
(Sewall, pp. 653-654)

Since so few letters survive of the correspondence between Judge Otis Lord (he ordered that many of his personal letters and documents be burned after he died) and Emily Dickinson, and no record survives of their meetings, it is difficult to ascertain what exactly it was about Lord that drew him to Emily on this level. From quotes from *Henry V* and *Othello* that appear in the fifteen surviving letters we can assume that each respected the intellect of the other, and perhaps loved the same literature, but beyond this, it is clear from the language Emily uses in the above letter that Lord may have offered for her the metaphysical connection that she so desired, and meditating on this love may have proved to be a large part of her internal escape from Amherst life.

Three drafts of different letters, never sent or formally addressed, also survive in the Dickinson oeuvre, and these are known as the “Master” letters. They were written in 1862, over a decade before Emily’s profession of love and just on the cusp of the decade that marked her most prolific period of writing, 1864-1874.

Though no concrete evidence exists that can tie these to Lord, but thanks to key phrases in one such as “Low at the knee that bore her once unto royal rest” (Walsh, p. 31) scholars speculate that they are indeed addressed to him, or at least some figure of fatherly age, a characteristic that Judge Lord surely matched. The tender language, slightly more desperate, coming from a younger, more impetuous Emily, also bears some similarities to the previously referenced letter addressed directly to Lord:

“Oh, how the sailor strains when his boat is filling. Oh how the dying tug till the angel comes. Master, open your life wide and take me in forever. I will never be tired. I will never be noisy when you want to be still. I will be your best little girl-nobody else will see me but you, but that is enough. I shall not want anymore, and all that Heaven will only disappoint me because it’s not so dear.”
(Walsh, p. 31)

Perhaps Emily never sent this letter out of embarrassment for its raw, unbridled emotion, or perhaps she herself did not care for the rhetoric she had decided to place on the page. At that time she was only just beginning to discover her poetic voice, that everlasting companion that she truly knew to be her own, far above any fellow earthly presence.

In fact, it seems plausible that it was the presence of this “higher calling” that simultaneously untied and divided Lord and Emily Dickinson more than anything else. “About Lord she wrote: “Abstinence from Melody was what made him die” and apparently Lord was consigned to be a part of that special class of New England male (much like the Edward Dickinson that “never played”) that insisted upon working until they dropped dead. (Sewall p. 649)

Ultimately, Judge Lord and Emily Dickinson never consummated their relationship because they genuinely believed that if they were to throw their obligations to the wind and thrown themselves fully into the commitment of their relationship, this would be the equivalent of him abandoning his calling as a judge, and hers as a poet. (Sewall, p. 655) Thus, in choosing to risk nothing, each party eventually lost all of what could have been their greatest love. To Emily’s great grief, Judge Otis Lord died in 1884, and she followed him a mere two years after, in 1886.

However, the same resolve that denied her true love, what could have been her biggest happiness, was also her strongest escape from Amherst life. From her schoolgirl days, when her friends and tutors Benjamin Newton (a student in her father’s law office) and Leonard Humphrey encouraged her literary talents, to her later years, Emily Dickinson always held onto a strong sense of identity. She was aware of her place in the community, her worth as a person of class and intelligence, an educated woman in a time when the suffrage movement was in its infancy.

Emily knew her calling for the majority of her life. Her desperate desire to become a poet initiated her aforementioned *à la carte* lifestyle and her propensity to remain indoors in her later years.

Emily had always known that the people of Amherst regarded her with scrutiny. As a Dickinson, expectations ran high for the granddaughter of the legendary Samuel “The Squire” Fowler Dickinson. This local legend was known through the town history as a charismatic force of nature who began to practice law in Amherst in 1797, and then devoted most of his life to the role of a founding partner of Amherst College, an entity that fostered growth of the whole community of Amherst.

Indeed to be a Dickinson was to expect greatness, but in this role weighed the expectancy of others that one would break under enough pressure. Amherst College was a hard-won success, and in his lifetime, he saw it in its infancy of dire financial straits, rather than its later glory among the nation’s greatest small liberal arts colleges. Samuel was also humiliated in that he sacrificed his family’s landholdings on the founding of Amherst College. Most embarrassingly, Samuel lost the Dickinson Homestead, which he sold in 1833. This was a great blow, and although Edward Dickinson would glorify his father’s name by purchasing the same house in 1855, and it was here that Emily would write her greatest poems, Samuel would have thought his home to be lost forever. His heart and health were broken, and he retreated to a position in the West, where he died in 1835.

Amherst held its breath, waiting for another brilliant, troubled Dickinson genius, but Edward Dickinson, Emily’s father, squared his jaw and solemnly refused to grant his community this satisfaction. Samuel’s responsible, eldest son was the foil to his father’s reckless energy, and Edward expected all of his children to adopt this role in their lives, and become responsible,

conventional, pillars of the community.

However, even the strongest fortresses have cracks in their walls, and there is surely no doubt that behind a stern façade, Edward Dickinson had a passionate nature. We know he loved his children with a force that drove him to buy The Evergreens, a property that adjoined his own, for his son's family. He also managed to keep his daughters safely ensconced in the Homestead for their entire lives. There is even a tale of a legendary sunset in Amherst, during which Edward Dickinson allegedly rang the steeple bells (only to be sounded in an emergency) to ensure that all citizens would turn to look upon Nature in all her fiery glory.

Austin and Emily Dickinson were most likely equal parts in their heart Edward and Samuel (mild Lavinia was more her mother's child) but Emily was the sibling with the mental fortitude, grace, and empathy needed to calmly accept this part of herself, without rage or judgment. Austin spent his life toiling away at a law practice, marrying a girl whom he thought to be lovely and sensible, and settling down next to his father. He threw away the shameful failings of his soul that belonged to Samuel, and struggled to shove himself into a mold that he simply could not fit. Thus, he lost himself, and nearly destroyed his family in his tumultuous quest for fulfillment with Mabel Loomis Todd.

This is not to say Emily never felt the pressures of being a Dickinson weighing heavily upon her. In fact, as a young child, she confided to Austin a nightmare that the family's "rye...field was mortgaged to Seth Nims" (the local postmaster and a political opponent of her father's)" (Sewall, p. 41).

Her grandfather's demons were ever present to Emily and Austin, and, although she was given to a host of strange behaviors in her later life, she mostly tucked these issues away in her Pandora's box of poetry. Biographers do not document apparent examples of fear, anxiety,

passion, or fluctuations of mood in Emily's actions in life. Rather, they are present in her writings which she preserved and hid away so carefully. Much like these mountains of covert scrawling on paper, wrappers, and the backs of old documents discovered only after her death, Emily kept her emotions similarly safe from the public eye. Rather than subject her most inner feelings to the criticism of the outside world, Emily held these parts of herself inward into her heart, where she could value them and where they would sustain her.

“Compared with the rest of her family, Emily was one of the best composed of all, perhaps because she understood the problem better than any of them and through the discipline of her writing brought it under tolerable control. Nevertheless, the shifts in mood and tone in her poems, from despair to ecstasy, from a sense of the mastery of life to complete helplessness; the strange defenses that she eventually threw up to guard her privacy-the “fiery mist” as Higginson put it, with which she enshrouded herself; the behavior that even the most charitable could hardly call normal-all these signified, surely, an inner life that (to put it in the mildest terms) gave her a great deal of trouble. In this too, she was very much a Dickinson.”
(Sewall, p. 40)

Indeed, Emily not only used her writing as a vital tool for self-preservation, but also as a key part of her identity. She saw herself as a humble artist, poet, and intellectual, with a quiet strength and a healthy sense of wonder that could sustain her despite bouts of human self-doubt. If she had acquiesced to the persona of Emily Dickinson that Amherst society imposed upon her, she would not have been able to devote herself entirely to this noble pursuit. Before any reader knew this truth, Emily knew the vast scope of her mind, and the importance of her voice.

By hiding her poetry, never making a truly honest effort to publish and only asking critique of those whom she adored, Emily Dickinson, in a seer-like manner, acknowledged that her art might only receive recognition after her death. She displays this sentiment in a letter to Sue regarding a poem, wherein she states: “Could I make you and Austin –proud –sometime –a great way off –‘twould give me taller feet.” (Sewall, p. 201)

Perhaps Emily's biggest exhibition of self- assurance and clarity laid in the one time Emily ventured beyond her private circle of friends to gain an opinion on her work. She sought recognition for her poems when she sent them to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a prolific writer

who was a frequent contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly*, a prominent publication of the time.

His April 1862 article “Letter to a Young Contributor” inspired Emily, particularly through the manner in which he addressed the note. He began with the introduction “My dear young gentleman or young lady”, immediately setting himself apart from other old fashioned editors as a feminist, encouraging new writers by requesting submissions from “new or obscure contributors”, and by his insistence that editors were “always hungering and thirsting after novelties.” Through his declaration of love to the “magnificent mystery of words” and his brilliant rhetoric that “a book is the only immortality,” Emily was also convinced that she had found a kindred spirit, who placed the art of writing and words on the same holy pedestal that she did.

She plucked up her courage and sent four poems to this illustrious gentleman, “Safe in their Alabaster Chambers”, “The nearest Dream recedes unrealized”, “We play at Paste” and “I’ll tell you how the Sun rose”. In her signature intimate style of correspondence that was at once meek and humorously bold, she also enclosed the following inquiry asking whether or not her treasured verses might be considered suitable as art:

“MR. HIGGINSON,--
Are you too deeply occupied to say if my verse is alive? The mind is so near itself it cannot see distinctly-
and I have none to ask-
Should you think it breathed- and had you the leisure to tell me, I should feel quick gratitude-
If I make the mistake- that you dared to tell me- would give me sincerer honor-toward you-
I enclose my name- asking you, if you please- Sir- to tell me what is true?
That you will not betray me-it is needless to ask-since honor is its own pawn-”
(Sewall, p. 541)

Upon receiving these mysterious, small, masterpieces of verse, and an introductory letter that was far sparser than etiquette of the time dictated, Higginson was immediately intrigued by Emily Dickinson. However, his approach was one of wariness as well as wonder. There was no denying that her style was not conducive to audiences of the time. “He called her gait ‘spasmodic’ and ‘uncontrolled’ and urged her to delay to publish.” (Sewall, p. 533).

There is also a distinct possibility that Emily had missed the mark entirely in her assessment of Higginson's character through her reading of "Letter to a Young Contributor". She had perhaps endowed him with more faith than he deserved, and casually believed that her impossibly profound powers of empathy were also common in others. The reality is that despite all of his learning and politics, Higginson existed on a far more superficial humanistic, emotional and intellectual level than Emily did.

"It was eight years before he finally reached Amherst, and even then he was miles away from her [Emily] imaginatively. He had none of her inquiring, groping, experimental spirit. To judge from his words and actions, he seems never to have been "haunted" (to use a favorite word of hers) by mysteries or doubts. He knew frustration and loss, and his many causes did not always triumph. But he knew they were just."
(Sewall, p. 550)

To this established Massachusetts, author, editor, and orator, Emily was a novice in the literary world. Nevertheless, Higginson saw no need to terminate what could prove to be a promising mentorship – perhaps evolving into a professional relationship outside of the publishing sector later. Thus, his first response to her was not discouraging, but purposely veered away from the subject of her poetry to inquire more about her life, her education, her age, and her appearance, anything but her poetry. One may argue that this "myth", the *character* of Emily Dickinson, whose answers to these letters contained as much playful evasiveness as that of an "accomplished coquette" (Sewall, p. 542) was just as interesting to Higginson as any of the strange verse she laid out.

However, over the course of the correspondence, it became apparent that the Dickinson and Higginson motives differed on a fundamental level. Emily sought an opportunity to be heard, while Higginson sought another protégé. He was no stranger to the inner circles of Boston literary high society, and had Emily edited her poems to Higginson's liking, or deigned to be paraded about by her mentor for the likes of Ralph Waldo Emerson, her life might have been

quite different. Higginson was no stranger to the task of lifting talented young writers from obscurity into prominence.

However, Emily never adjusted a single line or lack of rhyme to adhere to her mentor's suggestions. She perhaps took a bit of pride in her eccentricity, and knew that giving in to this kind of temptation would sacrifice the integrity of her work and character. At a time where a career engineered by Higginson would have meant certain success and freedom for a young woman like Emily, the mental fortitude and self-possession needed for her to refuse this must have been extraordinary. Or perhaps, an offer of this kind had never even occurred to her, so lofty was her ideal of "art". Later in 1862, she wrote to him:

"I smile when you suggest that I delay "to publish"- that being foreign to my thought, as Firmament to Fin- If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her- if she did not, the longest day would pass me on the chase, and the approbation of my Dog, would forsake me-then- My Barefoot-Rank is better."
(Sewall, pp. 553-554)

Emily's extraordinary sense of self-definition shows itself the greatest in this instance, and she eventually settled for a blooming, true friendship with Thomas Wentworth Higginson that lasted twenty-four years, from that first fateful letter of 1862 to her death in 1886. He visited Amherst twice, once to converse with his eccentric Amherst poetess, and the last to read the stirring Emily Brontë text "No Coward Soul is Mine" at her funeral. Higginson saw the true enduring nature of Emily's poetic style only after her death-when he took on the role of co-editor of the first two collections of her poetry-along with Mabel Loomis Todd. Thus, began the privilege of readers everywhere to hold conversation with her extraordinary mind.

From her strong powers of observation, to her quiet insurrection against the injustices of God and the world, to her peerless, ever loving heart and intense powers of empathy to her steadfast, almost holy sense of self-definition, Emily Dickinson re-defines herself continually in history, not as the weak-willed, mild, fearful, enigmatic myth, but rather as one of the most red-

blooded women of her time. In a life that could have produced naught but small joy, and, perhaps a little idleness, Emily chose a higher calling. She retreated inward to escape from Amherst, and thus establishes herself as an icon of American literary history.

Artist Reflection

Art song, or vocal music set to preexisting poetry or prose, lies at the foundation of any singer's education. From the time that a young musician expresses an interest in the world of classical voice, they are accosted with songs that seem to exist solely for the purpose of setting them on the road towards garnering a healthy vocal technique and providing an first introduction to foreign languages; Giordani's "Caro mio ben" for the beginning Italian scholar, Brahms' "Wie Melodien" for German, and for French, doubtless something by Fauré will most likely be present in a young singer's repertoire.

This was my introduction to singing in a group voice class in high school with other students, all of us singing the same song multiple times in a row until the overall effect was rather unpleasant. However, despite hearing Italian phrases butchered daily and singing along to recorded accompaniments that made it difficult to make a performance one's own, I knew that these little pieces of music existed for some higher purpose rather than to simply be a stepping stone towards the mastery of Mozart arias.

It was art song that taught me that singing is about more than achieving an ideal tone or executing every rule of foreign language diction perfectly. Every sung text exists for the purpose of telling a story, and the performer's challenge is to decide what that is for themselves through the comprehensive analysis of poetry in music.

Fast forward five years later, and I am completing my vocal performance degree more in love with art song than ever before. The artistry and complexity of this music goes deeper than I will likely be able to transcend in my lifetime. The relationship between words and music has never ceased to amaze me, so there was no question in my mind that my capstone project would be entrenched in this fascinating world.

My studies at Syracuse in foreign language diction and art song literature had encouraged me to think of the art song genre as a strong indicator of national identity, and the prospect of building a capstone around this philosophy excited me. I knew resources concerning this topic would be abundant for me, because music and literature are both widely accepted as a part of the characterization of nations. I discerned that for every culture in the world that has bred poets, there are composers who have brought their words to life.

Thus, the aesthetic variety that exists between German *lieder*, French *mélodie*, and Italian, English, Spanish, Russian, and American art song is truly astounding. Weighted down by the philosophical gravity of Goethe and inspired by the pastoral pictures of Schiller, the *lied* genre tends to lean towards overbearing emotions, such as the devastation of forsaken love or the abundant joy in a beautiful spring day. The esoteric impressionism of Baudelaire and Verlaine is echoed in the ambiguous tonalities of Debussy, and in the beautiful lines of Zuaznábar's poetry, one can hear Granados' florid interjections, indicative of flamenco. Through this lens I saw many options for research, and I knew that in order to narrow my capstone topic, I first had to settle on one of these key geographic areas.

Although I had a great love for all of these repertoires, I knew that American art song was the music that truly thrilled me to my fingertips. Not only did American art song lie closest to my own cultural identity, but also I appreciated the vast differences between every composer's compositional aesthetic. From the harmonic brashness and humor of Aaron Copland, Charles Ives, and Leonard Bernstein to the lyricism of Jake Heggie, Lori Laitman, and John Harbison, every song was as unique as a fingerprint. Because the American art song genre derives inspiration from many different musical genres, it is the most difficult art song genre for which to pin down concrete, defining characteristics. Intrigued by this challenge, I chose to perform a

recital of exclusively American song coupled with research concerning the evolution of this genre.

However, it took one meeting with my advisor to realize that with this idea, I would be attempting a project that was nearly impossible in scope. Examining the evolution of the genre of American art song would mean exploring a catalog of repertoire that spanned centuries, familiarizing myself with the folk music of various regions of America, the influence of European composition aesthetics on American schools of musical thought, and the historical development of the genres of musical theatre and jazz, all of which played an enormous part in the creation of the genre of American art song. Rather it would be more palpable to narrow my scope to one composer, one group of composers, or music set to the texts of one poet.

Because for me picking a favored composer was a task akin to a mother choosing her favorite child, I set about scouring art song catalogs for a poet whose texts spoke to me. While the scores set to texts of Walt Whitman, e.e. cummings, Carl Sandburg, and Robert Frost stood out as favorites for me, I found myself drawn to the words of the enigmatic and renowned poetess Emily Dickinson.

Dickinson's texts have endured for over a century because their meaning is almost as opaque as the myths surrounding much of her biography. Within her poems one may discover infinite characters, stories, styles, and possibilities. These same traits also make her texts equally attractive for composers to set to music. While other poets of the English language such as Shakespeare use great quantities of descriptive words, leaving little room for doubt as to their interpretation, Dickinson's incredible economy of language and fluid verse structures – lyrical and smooth one moment, and coarse and jagged the next – give artistic freedom for composers to create and interpret, making every setting of Dickinson's words radically different. (Heggie,

06/02/2015)

While these aspects of Dickinson's poems made for an interesting and rewarding study for me, they also constituted a small problem. There are hundreds of songs set to texts by Emily Dickinson, written by composers whose catalogs reflect over a century of American music history – and I had now tasked myself with the undertaking of combining a very small part of these into a comprehensive concert event.

Furthermore, I was far from the first musician to be inspired to create a recital of this nature. For example, soloists from the Grammy – Award winning choral ensemble Conspirare compiled an all – Dickinson concert as per their 2014-2015 concert series entitled *The Poet Sings*, in which the works of different poets and composers are featured every concert. Another 2014 event at Pasadena City College, *This, and My Heart: A Portrait of Emily Dickinson* utilized the work of a singer, pianist, and an actress to tell the story of Emily Dickinson's biography. As I struggled towards a final vision for my project, I became more and more discouraged as my Internet searches yielded even more events curated by organizations such as Boston Singer's Resource and mounted at a variety of universities including Smith College, Western Washington University, Williams College, and even University of Southern California. I began to feel a lot of pressure to create an individual work of art – and very little room to do so.

This led to a time of uncertainty throughout the spring and part of the summer of 2015, when I was listening to countless recordings, reading biographies, and rifling through sheet music in search of something, anything, that I could say that had not been said before. The musical catalogs of Ernst Bacon and Aaron Copland were of great interest to me during this period, because the majority of their art song input had utilized Emily Dickinson texts. However, these works were so widely performed that I feared that if I were to program them, I

would be accused of trying to duplicate the format of another artist's event! Unfortunately, I believe that this fear ultimately hung up my progress, and I became a little too concerned with creating something different, eliminating viable options for repertoire earlier on, only to bring them back later.

A matter of my own taste was also a problem for me. For some composers such as Jake Heggie, the text settings captured me immediately, and I could not resist making a few purchases to begin my studies. For other composers such as Libby Larsen and Lori Laitman, it was their text settings that drew me in. Without any kind of a theme or dramatic arc in place, I was unsure of whether to choose my program according to my musical preferences, or whether to make an effort to create a dramatic or thematic correlation between the texts of each song. Discovering a lot of new music was a joyful part of this process for me, but it was also a venture that I found quite frustrating. In some ways, I truly had no idea what I wanted to find through all of this searching.

Although this was a time of discouragement for me, I had a bright event ahead of me that I was sure would bring me progress. In January 2015 I had traveled down to New York City with some friends to audition for SongFest, a competitive young artist program in Los Angeles completely devoted to the study of art song. The classes looked wonderful and the faculty was a star-studded mix of famous composers, singers, pianists and directors. Among these luminaries was Jake Heggie – whose compositions I had already begun to learn.

I was thrilled to hear of my acceptance in March, and I eagerly sent in a list of repertoire that I would be prepared to perform. Of the many songs that I submitted for consideration, only about ten were selected for master classes and concerts, and I was relieved to see my Dickinson texts among them. Furthermore, I was thrilled to see that I was to perform one of my Heggie-

Dickinson works in a master class for the composer himself.

The gifts of learning I received at SongFest were more than I could have ever hoped for. For one month, the venerable Colburn School, one of the finest institutions for instrumentalists in the nation was transformed into a veritable playground for singers. There were over one hundred of us in the small recital hall each morning, scribbling furiously on our notepads as our colleagues sang, and apart from discovering new repertoire and expanding my knowledge of all aspects of the art song genre by leaps and bounds, I learned three particularly valuable lessons concerning artistic individuality, the importance of text in art song, and the relationship between this text and all the artists involved in the creation and performance of a song.

The first lesson centered on the principle of inevitable artistic individuality. One hundred and twenty singers and about thirty pianists participated in SongFest that summer. Singers were mainly within the age range of seventeen to thirty four, and over the course of four weeks I heard hundreds of songs. It was inevitable that I would encounter other singers who sang repertoire similar to my own; for nearly every soprano had studied Schubert's *Gretchen am Spinnrade* and Leonard Bernstein's *Five Kid Songs*. However, as I listened to every singer at the festival, I realized that not only did every singer possess a unique instrument that lent a slightly different vocal color to every piece of music, but the way each singer used their special instrument to express the text was different. Even if each of us had been given the same song to sing every day, the performance would have been completely different.

I had initially shied away from selecting any of Aaron Copland's *Twelve Songs of Emily Dickinson* for any part of my final recital not only because of their intense musical difficulty, but because they were popular choices for many Emily Dickinson themed recitals that I had discovered online. However, as I heard the songs performed by a variety of young singers at

SongFest, I became more confident that I could manage to make them my own. It was silly of me to allow the popularity of beautiful music to dissuade me from performing it.

The second lesson I learned laid in the finer nuances in expressing text. My favorite course at SongFest was taught by a director named Edwin Cahill, and for each lesson, he encouraged us to unpack our texts more thoroughly than any of us had in the past-effectively treating each song as a one-act play. Upon closer examination, we realized that most of our texts, no matter how esoteric or bizarre the language, seems to follow the basic conventions of a plot line: within these stanzas, there was exposition, rising action, a climax, falling action, and a conclusion – one simply had to have imagination enough to see it.

The program had selected different songs from our repertoires for us to perform in concert, and while some students had arbitrarily been assigned songs with longer stanzas and more language to make a story out of, some of us were saddled with texts of just one stanza that somehow had to be stretched into a comprehensive storyline. Dickinson was known for her economy of speech, so unsurprisingly, I found myself grappling with a very beautiful, but short and efficient text set to a Jake Heggie song with the length of a minute and a half.

*At last to be identified!
At last the lamps upon thy side
The rest of life to see!
Past Midnight, past the morning star!
Past sunrise! Ah! What leagues there were
Between our feet and day!*

With this, I was completely at a loss. Without the breaks of stanzas to guide me, it was difficult for me to see beyond what the poet wanted me to feel. It took careful thought for me to realize that within my performance, I had more creative control than I dreamed possible. I had never before truly realized that I was not only a vessel of the artists who wrote the text and

music, but rather what they had written had crafted the perfect tools for *me* to convey my message as a performer.

Edwin encouraged me to turn to the musical framework that Heggie had attributed to the text to guide my endeavors, and it only took me a short while to realize how liberally Heggie had treated the text in his musical setting. The song was set in a loose ABA format with similar material in the accompaniment at the beginning and end of the work, broken apart in such a manner:

- Section A: *At last to be identified/At last the lamps upon thy side/The rest of life to see!*
- Section B: *Past Midnight, past the morning star! Past sunrise!*
- Section C: *Ah!*
- Section D: *What leagues there were/Between our feet and day!*

A driving piano accompaniment ushers in the first section, and these rushes in the piano are exchanged in a somewhat call and response manner with the declamatory text. This serves as the piece's exposition. The rising action lies in the B section, the accompaniment becomes more urgent and driving, and the vocal line starts quietly but grows louder, leading to a complete stop in the piano and the dramatic vocalise in section C that serves as the climax. Section D sees the reemergence of harmonic and rhythmic material from the accompaniment in section A, and with this bookend, the piece and story reach their conclusion. The song now really was a one-act-play – with a much more compelling storyline than I had ever realized before.

It was now up to me to relate to the piece by crafting my own personal narrative to go with this framework. I had to decide the level of investment of this speaker in the words that were being said, and most importantly to whom they were addressed. Though imagination played a part in crafting a storyline and intention for every character in my songs, I was also encouraged to look deep inside myself, and to unearth deep personal happiness and deep sadness

that I could draw from to enhance the text that I was meant to communicate. It was even suggested that I go as far as to mentally place myself in a familiar physical environment in order to more effectively tell this story. *At last to be identified!* was one of Emily's more cosmic and esoteric poems concerning self-definition and a place in the universe, but now I had to discover exactly what the grandiose imagery that she used meant to me.

For me, the act of intertwining real memories with imagined circumstances and then mentally implementing them in a known physical environment was a strange but effective phenomenon. The more I thought about it, I realized that I had ventured far away from my home in New York not to only gain knowledge about music, but also to gain some clarity regarding certain personal problems that I had at school the previous year. It had been a year of academic pressure, artistic doubt, and familial struggle. On top of that, I had also gone through the struggle of falling in love with one of my fellow students, with a rather sad result. Strangely, I found myself physically three time zones ahead in Los Angeles, but more often than not, mentally I was also still living life in my South Campus apartment at Syracuse. In some ways it was more effective for me to tell my stories imagining that I was standing in the location where they occurred, rather than on a stage at the Colburn School.

While going deeper into this text was emotionally difficult for me at first, it was ultimately rewarding and helped me move beyond the initial hurt of what I was feeling to discover some strength that I did not know I had. It was empowering to realize –even if I was the furthest thing from a finished artist- that I held the potential to translate my grief, anxiety, and doubt into something that was artistically fulfilling and constructive.

Putting this kind of emotional investment into the text not only augmented my performance in a way that made it more sincere and believable for an audience, but it also helped

me enjoy the performance even more. Through engaging deeper parts of myself that I had previously refused to acknowledge, I had found a way in which to be more giving of myself to my audiences. *At last, to be identified* is now one of my favorite songs to sing.

On the other side of matters, another lesson that I learned here (as that I unfortunately keep learning) as a performer was that the intensity of what one feels in their heart while singing or performing is not always immediately translatable to an audience. I first became familiar with this frustrating truth in the Jake Heggie master class that I performed in at SongFest. I got up to sing *As Well as Jesus*, another short, but thankfully much more emotionally transparent text than *At Last to be identified*, and having organized the text and music in a similar manner that I had done in my “Song as a One-Act Play” class, I was convinced that I had done the necessary work.

However, after I completed my song, the composer walked up to the piano with me, told me to take off my shoes so that I would be more comfortable, and asked if I was a shy person. I was absolutely floored. I certainly was victim to the occasional bout of stage fright if I felt underprepared, but now was not one of those cases. Although I am not the type of person who deliberately seeks out attention, most people consider me warm, enthusiastic, caring, and outgoing. Still dumbfounded, I mutely shook my head, perhaps further proving Mr. Heggie’s point.

“Well I’m not getting that vibe.” Mr. Heggie said to me. “In fact, I am getting the sensation that you were really uncomfortable up there. Tell me where you are and what you are doing in this song. I want you to convince me. I need you to be stronger.” He went on to explain the necessity of portraying a strong character onstage, no matter what your emotional context was. “Don’t be a victim!” he empowered us. “Nobody wants to watch a victim onstage, nobody

cares. What people want to see is a strong person get brought to their knees because that is what is real – and it’s going to be *twice* as heartbreaking”.

I had been playing the song from the standpoint of a particularly sad experience that I had, but going solely with this emotion had caused me to project a shut-down, closed-off, defeated looking image that I had not realized. One emotion is not going to be enough onstage – in fact, when humans react to real life situations, rarely is only one emotion present. In heartbreak, there is not only sadness, but probably a bit of anger as well, directed both externally and internally.

In different classes besides the one I performed in, Mr. Heggie also brought up the concept of “Going to the Well”. Within a single song, the intentions (water in the well) of up to three different artists – the poet, composer, and performer are mixed. When an artist creates a new work, they not only draw upon the intentions of the artist who first poured their water into the well, but they also add their own. The artist who performs the work then forms the third tier of this ritual, pouring their own intentions (made up of their personal narrative- the one act play) into the well, in addition to being inspired by the intentions of the poet and composer. No one’s creativity is diluted, and I loved the imagery of the artistic energy mixing together in one beautiful and deep container.

In a way, it was specifically this image that inspired the creation of the *Escape from Amherst* project. The “well” process would always be an essential part of my performance experience, but the idea struck me that maybe I could create a truly unique project if I used every element of what I had learned in my young performing life to create a full circle and get back to the true and first source of art song – the poet.

I wanted to use music set to Emily Dickinson’s texts to redefine her personality for

audiences and create a snapshot of her life. I decided that it would not be enough to tell her story from my perspective, and that through this performance I would venture to *become* Emily Dickinson. Although she repeatedly claimed to one of her most treasured correspondents, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, that her poetry was not autobiographical, I trusted that she drew on the nature of her life – if not her own life events as part of her poetic source material.

I now began to read the biographies of Emily Dickinson in earnest, and discovered that many of them created an image of her that was rather clichéd. In fact, apart from Richard B. Sewall's 1974 publication *The Life of Emily Dickinson*, many of these huge tomes, such as Genevieve Taggard's *The Life and Mind of Emily Dickinson* and John Evangelist Walsh's *Emily Dickinson in Love: The Case for Otis Lord* seemed to paint a picture of her solely as a peculiar recluse, victimized by the strict hand of her father and a stifling New England community.

I had undergone an artistic pilgrimage to discover parts of myself when I ventured to Los Angeles, and now it was to make another journey for the sake of Emily. I could imagine endeavoring to represent her onstage if I had never stood where she stood. With this idea in mind, I traveled to Amherst Massachusetts in order to visit the Emily Dickinson Museum. Under the ownership of Amherst College, this institution is devoted to the careful study of all personal and environmental aspects of the poet's life.

The quaint, peaceful property of the museum consists of charming gardens behind an iron fence and two properties, known as the Homestead (where Emily lived) and the Evergreens (where her brother Austin lived with his wife Susan and children). The museum is also committed to restoring all aspects of the house to as it appeared in mid 19th-century Amherst – at the height of Emily Dickinson's literary productivity. I trod through the house expecting to find dull, lifeless rooms equipped with dusty books and cobwebs. However, instead I found a space

that was perhaps a little musty smelling, but overall cozy, warm, and comfortable, offering a delightful feeling of home.

Dickinson's bedroom was perhaps the biggest shock of all. I was not so fortunate as to visit the bedroom by the time that the restoration was completed in late August of 2015, but I was astounded to discover a calm, yet joyful room, filled with natural light, displaying a full view of the mostly forested property of the homestead. However, my guide informed me that in the mid-1800's Emily would have been able to see pastures stretched out to the west, and perhaps a bit of the campus of the venerable Amherst College to the south. It was a space one would gladly stay and work in for a long period of time.

It occurred to me that perhaps Emily's life of isolation and deprivation did not quite seem so to her. Perhaps it was an act of protest, or maybe she simply endeavored to fulfill the role of quiet observer and documenter rather than that of active participant in the realm of the living. Whether the answer laid in either of these hypotheses or a mixture of both, I realized that my event and my studies would seek to answer the question of how much control Emily had over her own decisions; and whether or not hers truly was a life of freedom.

The more I learned, I found Emily to be an altogether fascinating character. She lived through observation – through her keen attention to the action of insects and the flowers she cared for. She read books of a poetic and religious nature, and while her personal conscience was not saddled with many of the hyper-Puritan conventions of New England society, she was a spiritual person. Indeed, during the few outings of her later life she caught waves of the Evangelist revivals sweeping the country. A voracious reader of the news, mostly the popular *Atlantic Monthly*, she was also painfully aware of the civil war sweeping the country, and felt acutely the emotional impact it had on her community. She decried the painful aspects of war

and religion in her poetry.

Who was the primary subject of romantic attachment during her lifetime remains a great mystery. Leonard Humphries, her first literary mentor and the principal of Amherst Academy, could have been her first girlish love and his death in 1850 cast a dark shadow over her early years. George Gould, a talented writer and orator, as well as a classmate of her brother Austin's could have been an infatuation. Judge Otis Lord, a much older friend of her father's might have vied for her affections in later years. However, even if Emily never had a true romantic relationship during her relatively short life, she was subject to feelings of strong attachment, and keen to observe it in others. Despite her later propensity towards staying at home and neglecting to receive visitors, she wrote to friends she had made at school in her early years religiously, and pending this, as an older woman, she was a firsthand observer of a torrid affair between her brother Austin and the young Mabel Loomis Todd, a woman twenty years his junior.

Amidst all of the confusion that wracked Emily's heart and that poured into her head from the outside world, however, she did remain steadfast in one aspect: her strong sense of identity. She was aware of her place in the community, her worth as a person of class and intelligence, an educated woman in a time when the suffrage movement was in its infancy. She also knew well the microscope that the community placed her under, as the daughter of Edward Dickinson, a lawyer and at times prominent town politician, and in turn the daughter of Samuel "The Squire" Fowler Dickinson, a local legend and community who sacrificed his family's landholdings and ultimately his health on the founding of Amherst College. Edward, the responsible, eldest was the foil to his father's reckless energy, and Emily was expected to fill the same shoes. In her own queer way, she both shrugged off these expectations, and fulfilled them as her father's favorite child.

With a growing character in mind, my search for music to perform became much simpler, and much more of a creative joy. I delved further into the texts of the great variety of her poems that I knew had been set to music, and after setting the texts I liked the best alongside the music I liked the best, I settled on the beautifully intricate musical organisms that were the songs of Lori Laitman, the sweepingly lyrical pieces of Jake Heggie, and when I reconciled in my mind the first lesson I had learned at SongFest, I added seven of Aaron Copland's *Twelve Songs of Emily Dickinson*. Even if they were the most popular pieces in the Dickinson art song repertory, I could not resist their beauty, or the challenge of performing them.

Based on this information concerning Emily's personality (which I will elaborate on further in my companion study) I ventured to take these texts and use them to create the song sets to create the picture of Emily's life. In my vocal literature class at Setnor, I had learned of the idea of a themed recital, utilizing sets of songs that would ultimately create a dramatic arc. I strove to do that with this project, and I titled the sets *A Keen Eye*, for her love of nature and observing habits, *Quiet Insurrection* for her rage, confusion, and ultimately quiet strength while weighing the world's injustices, *Peerless Heart* for her own private attachments as well as those she observed secondhand, and last *Clarity*, for her strong sense of self and ability to settle the madness that rages inside us all.

I was truly pleased with this idea, but after visiting Emily's room at Amherst, I was also struck with a separate need to add a visual aspect to my performance. Somehow, I could not reconcile the idea of creating Emily without also creating the space that was a part of her, in which she ultimately found herself and her freedom. It was a wonderful idea, but it came to fruition in my mind far too late on my project timeline –it was now mid-September, and the projected recital date was the first weekend of December. I now see that a project of this scale

should have been fully put into motion much sooner in order to make it truly incredible, but I was completely determined to see it through. I would create a set of Emily Dickinson's bedroom onstage, complete with modest props and costuming all elements fitting a staged show.

The procuring of music, a willing pianist, and materials was the easier part. I hired an incredible local professional, Sabine Krantz, to be my collaborative pianist, and she and I began to rehearse one or twice a week on a regular basis, increasing to three times a week or more as the show time drew nearer. Using my memory of the view from Emily's window, the 1850's view as described by the museum tour, and the maps of old Amherst on the Emily Dickinson museum website, I designed a backdrop of nineteenth century Amherst, drawn on paper. With the help of my father, a carpenter, as well as my mother, a teacher, this design was translated into five seven foot plywood panels, intricately painted to represent nineteenth century Amherst.

I also designed a white window that could be moved across the stage on wheels. This would be used as a physical representation of the times when Emily felt freedom, or a struggle to obtain it, during the program. My father also helped me construct this piece of the set. He also had a lot of heirloom furniture and artifacts in his house, and many of these were used to create Emily's desk area – complete with a chair, books (including my Dad's own old King James bible!) a newspaper, nib pens and a vintage inkwell. The piano/pianist were integrated into the set rather than hidden behind it (for performance practicality as well as a desire to highlight her incredible artistry) and a chair was placed in the crook of the piano.

During the performance, my purpose was to live as Emily in the space that I created physically and musically onstage. Overall, I believe that what can be described as the beginning of that process was achieved. I am proud of the way the stage looked, the quality of my program notes in which I analyzed the poetry, and learning, memorizing, and making an emotional

connection with this program of music was a feat that required every bit of my mental effort and training. I was pleased with the number of my family and friends who attended, and those who were in the audience sincerely enjoyed it. In these ways, in my heart I do count my project as a success.

Although I am proud of this project, at my current ability level as a singer and actress, I am also able to admit that it was a far too ambitious project for the timeline that I crafted. In order to present music of this difficulty at a truly professional (rather than a typical student) level, I should have realistically had all music chosen before I left for summer vacation, and finished preparing it while at SongFest. In reality, the program of music was not solidified until returned back to school, and I was learning music in the fall, up until three weeks before my recital when the music went before faculty. Now more than ever before, I am aware of the immense effort and incredible number of steps involved in not only learning the musical aspects of a piece, but going into the emotional aspects- creating a “One Act Play” for each text and piece of music. Although I have taken the initial steps to learn and perform these pieces of music, I trust that I will be perfecting them throughout my career as a singer.

I also was enormously proud of my visual/theatrical concept, but I will also admit that I was too ambitious in this venture and did not seek as much help as I needed. My advisor informed me that a director was needed for this production, but as time wore on, and I received an ever increasing number of lukewarm responses (largely because my timeline included rehearsal periods during Thanksgiving break), I became more and more convinced that I could do it myself, writing my own stage directions and enjoying discovering what in the text could motivate particular movements or emotions of Emily’s. In this department, I did receive some help from my voice teacher, and had one long rehearsal where we gathered ideas, motivations,

and the translations of my ideas into something that would work well onstage.

However, what I had not taken into account was that I truly needed more time, as well as a second set of eyes to help me along with this project. This aspect taught me more than ever about the two-sided reality of performing. What you hear, feel, and see on the stage as a performer is a completely different experience for an audience member. Perhaps a performer may believe that their *piano* dynamic was quiet enough, or that the amount of inflection put in one phrase was enough to make a difference in vocal quality from the line previous. Perhaps they thought one gesture or move would hold significance while the other would be too gaudy. The reality is that quite often the audience thinks the opposite.

These were the realities explained to me during a post-recital meeting with my advisor. While she respected my efforts, she also gave me a firm and honest critique regarding them. Although it was very difficult to hear initially, I am grateful that she shared it with me. She told me that she thought my ideas were strong, and that if I kept working on it and sought greater directing assistance for the next performance, she would like to watch it grow.

What this capstone project has cemented in my mind is that becoming a performer means embracing a process of never-ending workshop. Artists work for their entire lives to perfect their craft, and as a twenty-one year-old soprano, I cannot pretend that my voice is anything close to a finished product. My teachers at Syracuse are still studying with their teachers, always maintaining an open, curious mind, and constantly discovering new music to add to their repertoires. They, like so many others artists that I also admire, are in constant search of improvement and perfection, always striving to take their vocal technique to the next level. When one commits to becoming an artist they commit to the lifelong pursuit of excellence, and I am just beginning my artistic journey.

Furthermore, it is nearly impossible to reach the highest levels of excellence regarding any project without a spirit that is somewhat collaborative. There is time when an artist must work alone in a practice room or a studio, doing their best to hone the techniques that they have learned from others, but overall, the best artists seek to surround themselves with a team. It is important to acknowledge that an important part of the artistic process is to get your work in front of others to get a variety of opinions as to whether or not the maximum impact of your performance has been obtained. It is not weak to consistently ask for help; in fact it is a form of arrogance to deny yourself this tool if it is available to you.

In conclusion, the creation of truly great art is not an endeavor to be accomplished as a side project. Any project, no matter how big or small, cannot be viewed simply as a box to check off on the to-do list. It is necessary to live with the material you are creating, and throw yourself into a truly all-encompassing process. Upon graduation from Syracuse University, I look forward to embracing a life as a performer, and knowing anew the necessity of absolute dedication to the craft. I am grateful for Emily Dickinson, and my experience in creating the *Escape from Amherst* project. It has taught me the true scope of what it means to craft a project from the ground up as a performer.

Escape from Amherst

Emily Dickinson's Life of Freedom

Maria Whitcomb, Soprano

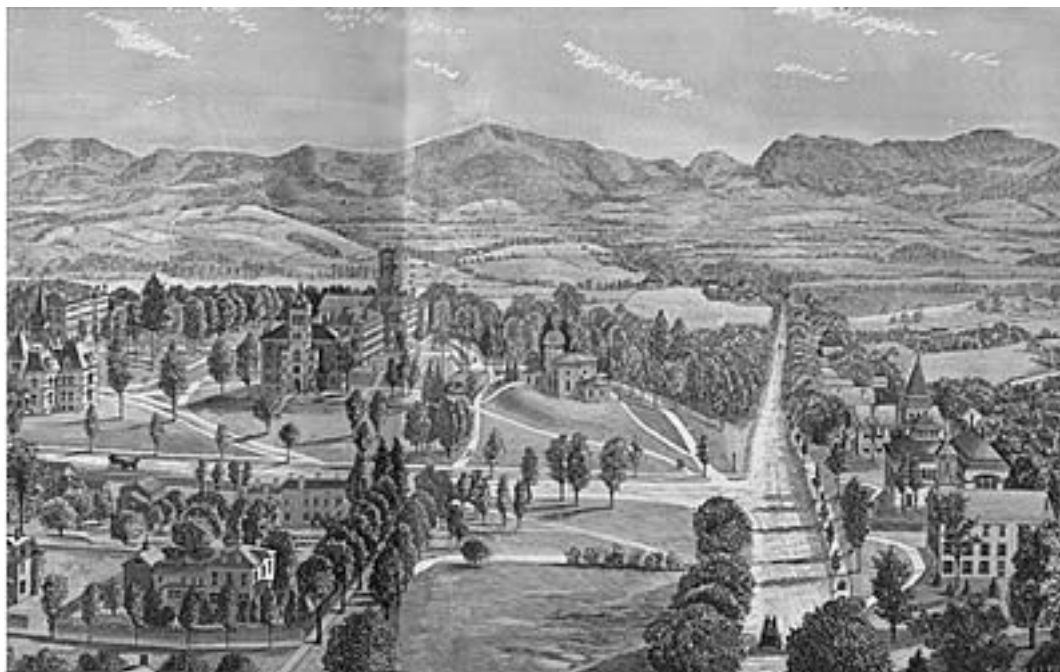
Sabine Krantz, Piano



December 5th, 5:00 pm
Setnor Auditorium

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Source: heritagesurveys.com/Amherst

Credits

Concept: Maria Whitcomb

Performers: Maria Whitcomb and Sabine Krantz

Composers: Jake Heggie, Aaron Copland, Lori Laitman

Texts: Emily Dickinson

Capstone Advisor: Dr. Kathleen Roland-Silverstein

Visual Direction: Janet Brown

Set Design and Construction: Maria Whitcomb, Lisa and Benjamin Whitcomb

Graphic design: Marisa Frigoletto

With Funding Provided By: The Renée Crown Honors College



Source: Official Emily Dickinson Museum Website

Artist Statement

The “Escape from Amherst” project was conceived out of my own love of American art song, and my desire to delve deeper into this fascinating genre. When the idea of focusing on the genre as a whole proved to be too monumental for me, my advisor suggested that I focus my work around a single composer or poet. I settled on Emily Dickinson, a woman whose words my mother introduced me to.

My final decisions in terms of the musical selections were made largely through my month studying at SongFest at Los Angeles’ Colburn School, for it was there that I fell in love with the music sung by my colleagues, and was granted access to some music that otherwise would have been impossible to find. I also garnered a brand new approach to performing poetic texts, giving them personal specificity that will relate to audiences.

However, for Emily, these texts must have resonated much more deeply than with me. I could not help but realize how little I knew about this fascinating artist, and wondered, in the realm of text-setting, how much of an original poet’s heart and intention remains as their words are appropriated and enhanced by music. In her letters to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Emily claimed that her poems were not autobiographical, but I firmly believe that something of her soul and past remained in every word she penned.

Emily has been immortalized as a “myth”, a shy, shadow of a person clad in white, but through biographical research and careful inspection of the following texts, I have found a way of viewing this character in a slightly different light- a woman whose circumstances granted her freedom rather than imprisonment. It is my hope that my work onstage will offer a creative snapshot of Emily’s world.

About the Composers

Jake Heggie – (b. 1961) - With a prolific output spanning over 250 songs, 8 operas, and various works for choral, orchestral, and chamber ensembles, Jake Heggie has cemented his status as a modern American master, earning a Guggenheim Fellowship and a horde of high-profile commissions from Houston Grand Opera, Dallas Opera, and San Francisco Opera, and from champions of his music such as American mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade. ***Newer Every Day***, the song cycle from which three pieces in this program come, was commissioned by famed New Zealand Soprano Kiri te Kanawa, and was premiered in 2014 at the Ravinia Festival. Other songs in this program are taken from the 1999 collection ***Faces of Love***, one of Heggie's earliest publications crafted for the luminous voices of Renée Fleming, Kristin Clayton, Carol Vaness, and Nicole Folland.

Aaron Copland – (1900-1990) – Known for the pursuit and development of a distinctly American musical aesthetic, Aaron Copland became one of the most influential voices in music of the 20th century. His experimentation with indigenous music of North America and fascination with American history led to various iconic works for orchestra, such as the expansive *Fanfare for the Common Man*, the exuberant *El Salón México*, and the ballets *Billy the Kid*, *Rodeo*, and the 1954 Pulitzer Prize winner *Appalachian Spring*, commissioned by Martha Graham. His 1950 song cycle ***Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson*** was one of the composer's few forays into writing for solo voice and piano, and the composer hoped to create a character sketch of the enigmatic poetess through the themes of nature, death, life, and eternity. Large parts of this program are these songs, appropriated to fit the themes of *A Keen Eye*, *Quiet Insurrection*, *Peerless Heart*, and *Clarity*.

Lori Laitman - (b. 1954) - Lauded for her "...music of depth and richness that connects with the soul." Lori Laitman's exquisite vocal music has made her a favorite for critics and audiences alike. Her inventive instrumental/voice combinations have filled an aching void in the American art song repertoire, and rest of her catalog includes three operas, choral works, and over 250 compositions for solo voice and piano. Among these are over twenty settings of Emily Dickinson, and the works in this program are taken from her cycles ***Between the Bliss and Me***, ***One Bee and Revery***, ***In this Short Life***, and ***Two Dickinson Songs***.

Program List

A Keen Eye

Nature, the Gentlest Mother *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson*..... Aaron Copland
The Butterfly Upon *One Bee and Revery* Lori Laitman
It Makes No Difference Abroad *Faces of Love*..... Jake Heggie
There Came a Wind Like a Bugle.... *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson*..... Aaron Copland
To make a Prairie *One Bee and Revery*..... Lori Laitman
Fame *Newer Every Day*..... Jake Heggie

Quiet Insurrection

Why do they shut me out of Heaven? - Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson-. Aaron Copland
Some Keep the Sabbath *In This Short Life* Lori Laitman
The world feels dusty *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson*..... Aaron Copland
I felt a Funeral in my brain *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson* Aaron Copland
Going to Heaven! *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson* Aaron Copland

Peerless Heart

If you were coming in the Fall *Faces of Love*..... Jake Heggie
As Well As Jesus – Jake Heggie *Faces of Love* Jake Heggie
Heart, we will forget him *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson*..... Aaron Copland
I Shall Not Live in Vain *Faces of Love* Jake Heggie

Clarity

Silence *Newer Every Day* Jake Heggie
I'm Nobody, Who Are You? *Newer Every Day* Jake Heggie
Wider than the sky *Two Dickinson Songs* Lori Laitman
A Book *Between the Bliss and Me* Lori Laitman
At Last, to Be Identified! *Faces of Love* Jake Heggie

A Keen Eye

Mrs. Emily Norcross Dickinson, an active gardener, cultivated a love of nature in her children. Thus, Emily spent many days of her life crouched behind the garden hedge, planting, tending to the flowers in her conservatory, or simply gazing at the sky through her bedroom window. Clearly, she inherited her mother's green thumb and the many skills required of a expert observer – an ability to sense subtle changes in the wind, and to consider the activities of bees and butterflies in relation to her flowers. Like many well-bred, educated young women of her day, she also kept a herbarium (a book containing a named collection of carefully dried plants) among her prized possessions.

However, Emily also possessed a unique, spiritual view of the realm of nature – and believed that the small and beautifully intricate details of the natural world, such as a butterfly's wing - were all expressions of God's glory. However, this did not diminish the intensity of love she felt for human aspects of this world - the emotions, expressions, and accomplishments of those closest to her.

If anything, Emily's strong perception of the natural world gave her a unique empathy for all aspects of this planet, thus in her poetry she would attribute very human characteristics to non-human entities, such as creatures, plants or the weather. She was also able to see distinct similarities between occurrences in human nature, and events in the natural world, such as storms or the changing seasons. With this mindset, she must have truly seen the world as her home. Her only ceiling would have been the sky, not that of her small bedroom at the Dickinson homestead.

Nature, the gentlest
 mother,
 Impatient of no child,
 The feeblest or the
 waywardest,
 Her admonition mild

In forest and the hill
 By traveller is heard,
 Restraining rampant
 squirrel
 Or too impetuous bird.

How fair her conversation,
 A summer afternoon,--
 Her household, her
 assembly;
 And when the sun goes down

Her voice among the aisles
 Incites the timid prayer
 Of the minutest cricket,
 The most unworthy flower.

When all the children
 sleep
 She turns as long away
 As will suffice to light
 her lamps;
 Then, bending from the sky

With infinite affection
 And infiniter care,
 Her golden finger on her
 lip,
 Wills silence everywhere.

Using perhaps the most well-known nature analogy in literature, this musical text describes Mother Nature in the truest motherly fashion: benevolent, mild, and trusting. Her patience and temperance are infinite, and in an almost Christ-like fashion, she graces all of her charges with an equal amount of affection.

She knows her creations are imperfect, and even expects them to become unruly. Rather than exhibiting disappointment or doling out punishment, she remains unfazed, carefully outstretching a hand to reign in the “rampant squirrels”, “impetuous birds” or truly, the people of the world who do so much damage. In gratitude, all worship her without exception, their loving mother who puts each one to bed at sunset.

Copland’s treatment of this text is delicate and ingenious, creating a universe for this character with no consistent directions, only the daily ebbs and flows of life. One can hear the birds singing, the earth stirring, and the Mother’s repeated command of calm with every unison B Flat.



The Butterfly upon the
 Sky
 That doesn't know its
 Name
 And hasn't any tax to
 pay,
 And hasn't any Home
 Is just as high as you
 and I
 And higher, I believe,
 So soar away and never
 sigh
 And that's the way to

It makes no difference
 abroad—
 The Seasons—fit—the same—
 The Mornings blossom into
 Noons—
 And split their Pods of
 Flame—
 Wild flowers—kindle in the
 Woods—
 The Brooks slam—all the
 Day—
 No Black bird bates his
 Banjo—
 For passing Calvary—
 Auto da Fe—and Judgment—
 Are nothing to the Bee—
 His separation from His
 Rose—

In this text, the speaker considers with amusement, admiration and rueful wonder the carefree and resilient nature of the butterfly. She supposes that the most ideal humans are the same way, and are able to easily overcome their trials in life.

Laitman's saturation of delicate, high resonances and soft dynamics make for a perfect musical photograph of a passing butterfly.

The frustration of this text is conveyed not only through the dashes that consistently break up the lines, but also in the speaker's consistent iteration of the same idea: when a being is troubled, even if the rest of the world keeps turning – their trouble remains their sole focus in life. Even the worst punishment would not impact the bee (person) as much as this singular trouble – here the absence of his beloved (Rose).

The way Heggie's melody and accompaniment grind and turn over each other with the same harmonic motifs, and rhythmic ostinatos endure through the piano's right hand are perfectly indicative of the speaker's growing exasperation throughout.



There came a Wind like a
 Bugle,
 It quivered through the
 grass,
 And a green chill upon the
 heat
 So ominous did pass.
 We barred the windows and
 the doors
 As from an emerald ghost
 The doom's electric
 moccasin
 That very instant passed.
 On a strange mob of panting
 trees
 And fences fled away.
 And rivers where the houses
 ran
 The living looked that day.
 The bell within the steeple
 wild
 The flying tidings whirled.
 How much can come
 And much can go

To make a prairie it takes a
 clover and one bee,
 One clover, and a bee.
 And revery.
 The revery alone will do,
 If bees are few.

Fame is a bee.
 It has a song-
 It has a sting -
 Ah, too, it has a
 wing.

As much as this text is an ode to the awe-inspiring power of Mother Nature's fury, it is also a ground-shaking assertion of the speaker's faith in the tenacity of the human spirit. She starts the text in terror as she watches this fantastic "storm" take hold of her world, threatening to uproot all that she holds dear. However, as her descriptions grow more detailed, her fear lessens, and she realizes that while the grasses and trees of the world are bending, nothing has broken, and with difficulty, houses can be rebuilt. The last three assert that she and the world are both strong enough to weather any physical or emotional storm.

Copland's angular, incongruous tonalities and lack of melodic line make for seamless transitions between the speaker's extreme fear and intense fortitude, and the wild accompaniment is every bit the tempestuous storm.

One has only truly found peace when it exists solely in the mind of the beholder, unaided by personal surroundings. Here the speaker seeks internal quiet akin to the serenity she feels outdoors, and finds in a humorous twist they are one and the same. Laitman's flowing, familiar melody, juxtaposed with a musical joke, reflects this sentiment perfectly.

Fame is a difficult, multifaceted principle, with sweetness in the potential for greatness, and sourness in its all-consuming nature. Similarly, a bee makes honey, but also produces venom that is painful when one is stung.

Clearly Heggie wanted to emphasize the later part of this analogy, changing the place of "wing" and "sting" in his setting.

Quiet Insurrection

Born into an upper middle class woman in pre-Victorian New England, Emily Dickinson was practically destined for a life of complacent obedience. While outwardly playing the part of dutiful daughter and sister, Emily stoked radical fires in her soul. Upon her death, Emily's poems were found not only to defy many conventions of modern poetry in their construction, but also to be full of rebellious fire. Emily lived through these poems, died through them as she wrote, and asked even the most taboo questions of the day with a steady hand. Emily was in disagreement with many of the institutions of her time, particularly the Civil War (1864 began her most prolific period of writing) and the Protestant Church. Emily even went so far as to question God about his practices through her poetry, an act that would have seemed heretical in her day.

Emily truly loved the world, but it was very strange to her. She could not reconcile a life where local boys enlisted to fight for a cause, only to have their names appear in the newspapers weeks later. She could not abide the real terror felt by the Massachusetts countryside after the Battle of Gettysburg, the fear of residents that their small Northern town would be next.

Above all, Emily could not believe entirely in a God who would permit such atrocities and who snatched from her two dear friends, Leonard Humphries and Benjamin Newton in their prime of life. Therefore, she found it even more difficult to communicate with him through the stiff lens of Church ritual. She questioned God on her own terms, about his love for the world, and his love for herself, a not-so-meek presence before him.

Why — do they shut Me out of
 Heaven?
 Did I sing — too loud?
 But — I can sing a little "Minor"
 Timid as a Bird!

Wouldn't the Angels try me —
 Just — once — more —
 Just — see — if I troubled them —
 But don't — shut the door!

Oh, if I — were the Gentleman
 In the "White Robe" —
 And they — were the little Hand —
 that knocked —
 Could — I — forbid?

Some keep the Sabbath going to
 Church —
 I keep it, staying at Home —
 With a Bobolink for a Chorister —
 And an Orchard, for a Dome —
 Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice
 —
 I, just wear my Wings —
 And instead of tolling the Bell,
 for Church,
 Our little Sexton — sings.

God preaches, a noted Clergyman —
 And the sermon is never long,
 So instead of getting to Heaven,

Here, our speaker grapples with the conflicted manner in which she view herself with respect to her creator. In some respects she is defiant, resentful that there seems to a set of guidelines in order to be considered an admirable follower of God's word.

In other respects our speaker views herself as a sinner, and is self-conscious before the lord about this trait. She is a sinner in that she questions and doubts the presence of God, and she also questions her own worthiness to stand before him. She views herself as a meek soul, and since she has given little to the world, she doubts that God will want to accept her.

Copland declamatory, recitative-like style of composition for the singer, with jagged intervals, sparse accompaniment, and intense variations in dynamics provide the singer with the dramatic tools needed to alternately challenge and beseech her creator.

Here, our speaker emphasizes the inherently spiritual part of her nature, asserting that she does not require the institution of a church or the confines of traditional religious practice to solidify her relationship with God. It is not the rituals of the church that bring her closer to God but rather the miracle of the blue of the sky, or the complexity of a leaf.

Laitman's carefree singsong melody and spritely accompaniment highlight the lighthearted simplicity in these sentiments, and enable a straightforward delivery of the text.

62 The World—feels Dusty
When We stop to Die—
We want the Dew—then—
Honors—taste dry—

Flags—vex a Dying face—
But the least Fan
Stirred by a friend's
Hand—
Cools—like the Rain—

Mine be the Ministry
When they Thirst comes—
And Hybla Balms—
Dews of Thessaly, to
fetch—

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading - treading - till
it seemed
That Sense was breaking through
-

And when they all were seated,
A Service, like a Drum -
Kept beating - beating - till I
thought
My mind was going numb -

and then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my Soul
With those same Boots of Lead,
again,
Then Space - began to toll,
As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
and I, and Silence, some strange
Race,
Wrecked, solitary, here -

The images of dust, death, flags and honors call forth ideas of war, and this text stands clearly as a eulogy for those who died in vain. The grief felt by the speaker is immense here, and the weight and injustice of death weighs heavily on her mind. Stirred to act, she discovers that her role is only to soothe those who suffer from loss.

The images of “Hybla balms” and “Dews of Thessaly” are allusions to ancient Greek and Sicilian images of comfort that add an element of antiquity to the poem, by Copland chooses in his setting not only to reverse the last two lines, but to replace the word “Hybla” with “holy” and “Thessaly” with “thysself”, removing these images from the poem entirely.

This text is the fervent, darkly frustrated chronicle of the speaker’s descent into madness. Certain aspects of her world are overwhelming and incongruous, among them death, destruction, war and the inhumanity of others.

Despite this, her day –to –day life proceeds with a measured, predictable, infuriating tread, as reliable as the tread of mourners at a funeral, or the tolling of a bell.

Her helplessness to change her situation is another aspect of her life that our speaker finds unbearable, concluding that her only escape from her life is to leave it entirely. The reality of suicide is voiced in the last stanza.

Copland’s measured bass ostinatos and harsh chromatic passages make for a devastating funeral march that captures the spirit of the text perfectly. However, he chooses to omit the last stanza from his setting, creating a bleak musical ending without the aid of suicide.



Going to heaven!
 I don't know when,
 Pray do not ask me how,—
 Indeed, I 'm too astonished
 To think of answering you!
 Going to heaven!—
 How dim it sounds!
 And yet it will be done
 As sure as flocks go home at
 night
 Unto the shepherd's arm!

Perhaps you 're going too!
 Who knows?
 If you should get there
 first,
 Save just a little place for
 me
 Close to the two I lost!
 The smallest "robe" will fit
 me,
 And just a bit of "crown";
 For you know we do not mind
 our dress
 When we are going home.

I 'm glad I don't believe
 it,
 For it would stop my breath,
 And I 'd like to look a
 little more
 At such a curious earth!
 I am glad they did believe
 it
 Whom I have never found
 Since the mighty autumn
 afternoon
 I left them in the ground.

The speaker here grapples with her relationship with God from a variety of different angles. In the first stanza, she ricochets between her awe and fear of God's great majesty, and the other image that she would prefer to be true – that of the gentle shepherd guiding his flocks through the world. The prospect of eternity, the life after death is also an idea that both excites the speaker and frightens her. She realizes it is necessary to fear God enough to be governed by him, and to love him enough to have a desire to follow him.

Followers of religion also must solidify their relationship to sin. Our speaker sees herself as a meek presence before God, and is somewhat insecure as to her place in the world. She has perhaps committed small sins in the eyes of the world that seem large in her own, and in her request for the smallest "robe" and "a bit of "crown"", she prays that these will not forego her admission into her "home" of the kingdom of heaven, alongside those who have been taken from her before.

The last mental reconciliation needed to establish a true following in religion is an acceptance of the idea of death. Though our speaker may not know her place in the world, she can admit that she loves it, and the notion that she will one day have to leave it is exceedingly difficult for her to bear. She cannot reconcile a God who would put someone in this world only to take them out. Her final resolution is that the great theological concerns of God, life, death, and heaven are too monumental for her to believe at this moment in time.

These are the balances that our speaker is currently trying to find in her mind, and Copland's indecisive key and meter changes, and abrupt switch from a bounding refrain to a emotional halt.

Peerless Heart

Emily has garnered a reputation for being something of a loner, and while the poetess may have developed a certain reluctance to receive company in her later years, the vision of a cold, withdrawn, disassociated Emily does not seem to equate with the character presented here. One of Emily's defining traits was a strong, passionate, even romantic heart that was prone to quick, sometimes unfounded attachment.

How did a girl bred in a proper, staunch, New England fashion manage to develop this emotional nature? Perhaps it began with her love of romantic English Victorian literature, of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and in particular the Brontë sisters. Perhaps it was her intense loyalty to her friends and family, particularly to her father Edward Dickinson, but also to the dozens of slight acquaintances with whom she built strong relationships through letter writing. Stories also abound about the various potential love interests that might have presented themselves to Emily over the years, but Emily never indulged these pangs of romance, and perhaps this provided her with even more inspiration for writing.

Though Emily's worldview may have been quite small, her capacity for love and kindness proved to be enormous. The passion of Emily's peerless heart shone through in her poems, as well as in her one small corner of the universe in which she filled her home and letters with love and comfort. Emily knew that true love does not always constitute great acts, but sometimes consists of little actions that make the world more secure, one little life at a time. It was ultimately this understanding that allowed Emily to feel secure in the life she chose for herself, and ultimately to understand all types of love through intense empathy.

If you were coming in the Fall
 I'd brush the Summer by
 With half a smile, and half a
 spurn,
 As Housewives do, a Fly.

If I could see you in a year,
 I'd wind the months in balls-
 And put them each in separate
 Drawers,
 For fear the numbers fuse

If only Centuries, delayed,
 I'd count them on my Hand,
 Subtracting, till my fingers
 dropped
 Into Van Dieman's Land.

If certain, when this life was
 out-
 That yours and mine, should be
 I'd toss it yonder, like a Rind,
 And take Eternity-
 But now, uncertain of the length
 Of this, that is between,
 It goads me, like the Goblin
 Bee-
 That will not state - its sting

So well that I can live without -
 I love thee - then How well is that?
 As well as Jesus?
 Prove it me
 That He - loved Men -
 As I - Love thee -

This speaker displays an excitement that is almost childlike as she awaits a chance reunion with a loved one. The magnitude of the speaker's emotion is extreme, her love and devotion are so that there is almost as much joy in the anticipation of the meeting as in the meeting itself.

In her rash excitement, she draws out the waiting longer with every verse, first seasons, then years, and on two separate occasions, the piano stops its frantic whirling for her bold declaration that centuries could pass and still she would wait for this sweet return. Even eternity does not seem too long at first, and she waxes into a blissful, romantic bubble of blind devotion with the music's repeated iterations of the phrase "And take eternity."

However, eventually it is revealed that the text truly operates around the idea of "If". "If" is the word that commences each of the first four verses, but the speaker is so blinded by her imagined joy, that the gravity of this "If" does not hit her full force until the final verse.

At this time, her mood drops into devastating anxiety, and in a moment of lost innocence, she realizes that the love may never return, and her passions may have been unfounded. However, the speaker is not allowed the luxury of a quick, definitive, ending, of an expediency of heartbreak. This same anticipation that previously sent her into a whirlwind of mad joy now "goads" her "like the goblin bee", a force that is intangible, but nonetheless heartbreaking and anxiety inducing.

A more defiant view of love – having much to do with the idea of sacrifice, is present in this text. To adapt to the tone of her poem, Dickinson chooses to depart from her usual transcendent regard of God and instead uses holy references to display the fortitude, pride and perhaps misguided stoicism in the speaker.

There is arrogance in the speaker, but there is also the deepest sincerity that lends this poetry a strong undertone of heartbreak, desperation, and devotion. This poem is a strong example of Dickinson's tendency towards emotional economy-an ability to pack a tremendous amount of meaning into very few words. Releasing this love is difficult for the speaker, perhaps they are watching a family member die, or else saying goodbye to their first love.

Heart, we will forget
 him!
 You and I to-night!
 You may forget the
 warmth he gave,
 I will forget the light.

When you have done, pray
 tell me,
 That I my thoughts may
 dim
 Haste! lest while you're
 lagging,
 I may remember him!

If I can stop one
 Heart from breaking
 I shall not live in
 vain
 If I can ease one Life
 the Aching
 Or cool one Pain
 Or helping one
 fainting Robin
 Unto his Nest again
 I shall not live in
 vain

When a relationship ultimately ends, there are stages of grieving that one goes through in order to reestablish normalcy in their life. There is unbridled grief, the emotional tumult that one encounters immediately after losing a loved one, be it through a death, a departure, or a conflict, but after there are no more tears, there is simply loss.

Readjusting to a life without this person may be so difficult for the speaker, that even if she wants to move on, the smallest occurrence can trigger a memory that sets her back emotionally, related here by Copland's heartbreaking rents in tonality. While she uses affirming, insistent language to reassure herself, such as "we will forget him" she is doubtful that her words are true. With the closing line, "Haste! lest while you're lagging, I may remember him." she pleads to be released from the memories that haunt her.

The speaker here tells of love in one of its purest forms – the desire to improve the life of another through kindness and understanding. Dickinson does not succumb to heroic language here, instead adopting a tone simultaneously gentle and resolute. The hopeful, pure attitude of this speaker conveys the belief that this particular brand of love-love for love's sake is the sole purpose of all of humankind.

It is not the amount of love that one is able to give that matters, rather that something was given at all. Some will follow the example of Christ and other prophets by devoting their lives to many. Others will only give their whole souls to one person, for a short period of time, making Heggie's emphasis of the word "one" in this setting particularly intelligent. Each contribution is unique and beautiful, and equally meaningful in the giver's context. It is this type of devotion alone that brings about the repeated declaration "I shall not live in Vain."

Clarity

The greatest way in which Emily Dickinson sought and found freedom in her outwardly sheltered life was through her stoic sense of self. Rather than choosing to be satisfied with a self-image determined by others- a common plague of women in the Victorian era, Emily took strength in her attributes. She saw herself as a humble artist, poet, and intellectual, with a quiet strength and a healthy sense of wonder that could sustain her despite bouts of human self-doubt. She knew the vast scope of her mind, and the importance of her voice.

Emily only sought recognition for her poems once, when she sent them to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a prolific writer who was a frequent contributor to the *Atlantic Monthly*, a prominent publication of the time. His April 1862 article “Letter to a Young Contributor” inspired Emily, and she sent four poems to the author, along with a meek inquiry as to whether or not they would be considered suitable for publication. Higginson’s response was kind but critical, and he sent her suggestions for edits to her poetry, beginning a friendship that was to endure until her death in 1886.

Had Dickinson followed Higginson’s advice, her life might have been quite different. Higginson was no stranger to the task of lifting talented young writers from obscurity into prominence. However, Emily never adjusted a single line or lack of rhyme to adhere to her mentor’s suggestions. She perhaps took a bit of pride in her eccentricity, and had no interest in being paraded around the literary elite of Boston as an up-and-coming protégée. Higginson realized the enduring nature of her style only after her death-when he took on the role of co-editor of the first two collections of her poetry.

Silence is all we
dread
There's Ransom in a
Voice - -
But Silence is
Infinity
Himself have not a
face.

This poem has been subject to a religious interpretation by scholars, but it also serves as a strong indicator of Dickinson's self-possession and sense of identity. Humans live with the inherent desire to be heard, and often this is not accomplished until their purpose, or "voice" is found. One's purpose is considered valuable, and sometimes will lead to a life beyond death, as a family endures through generations, or a business or a great work of art endures through the centuries.

However, one must not go through life believing in the right to such a monumental presence in the world. Even the greatest success will someday fade into a faceless oblivion, and only God will know the individual owner of each small victory, each small life in this world.

The speaker here clearly asserts her place, but also displays a calm acceptance that it will not be hers forever. All that is to be done is to carry out the small work one person can do, and Emily exercised this belief through her humble faith and in her writing. Heggie's ethereal accompaniment creates this transcendent world that the speaker believes to herself to be passing through, and while her voice may occasionally rise out of the texture, it eventually fades away into the "Infinity."

I'm Nobody! who are you?
Are you -Nobody - Too?
Then, there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! they'd advertise,
you know.

How dreary- to be -Somebody!
How public- like a Frog-
To tell one's name -the
livelong June-
To an admiring Bog!

In this innocent and cheeky commentary on modern society, the speaker revels in her own eccentricities, and how they make her different from a typical conformist. Many things may cause a person to be ostracized by others, but few people are so different that they will not one day find someone else just like themselves.

When this occurs, the fun lies in laughing at those who would rather falsely blend in with the masses than allow their own true beauty to shine through – one may find the latter option to be less exhausting than keeping up with the garish waltz of conformism that Heggie aptly illustrates with a jagged, awkward emphasis in the wrong places within the musical phrases at the bridge.

The Brain-is wider than the
 Sky-
 For – put them side by side –
 The one the other will
 contain
 With ease-and You -beside

The Brain is deeper than the
 Sea
 For- hold them- Blue to Blue-
 The one the other will
 absorb-
 As Sponges-Buckets do-

The Brain is just the weight
 of God-
 For-heft them- Pound for
 Pound-
 And they will differ- if they
 do-
 As Syllable from Sound

He ate and drank the
 precious words,
 His spirit grew robust;
 He knew no more that he was
 poor,
 Nor that his frame was
 dust.
 He danced along the dingy
 days,
 And this bequest of wings
 Was but a book. What
 liberty

At last - to be identified!
 At last - the lamps upon thy
 side -
 The rest of Life - to see-
 Past Midnight - Past the Morning
 Star -
 Past Sunrise - Ah, what Leagues
 there were -
 Between Our Feet - and Day!

Each individual human has an enormous capacity for consciousness, for intelligence, for memory and for talents. Perhaps that is the fundamental thing that makes all human minds alike- that their abilities of understanding span far beyond each human's capacity for differentiation and self-identity.

Emily may not have had an extensive education in neurology, but she understood that she was an intelligent, conscious being, and was consistently humbled by her ability to learn, grow, and produce ideas. Furthermore, she was humbled by the fact that other human minds- greater and lesser than her own – held the same capabilities. Laitman's meandering melody and accompaniment never seem to settle on one key, sonically creating the vastness of space that so astounds the speaker.

The ultimate escape for a true intellectual is that of a book. Responsibilities and cares are ignored or forgotten, and the world fades away in the thrill of a story or of discovery.

Perhaps this "bequest of wings" precluded Emily's need in her eyes for the traditional sense of "freedom", which would have involved mobility or independence. The music in Laitman's setting is irrepressible and uncontainable, threatening to bubble over as the speaker's jubilation sets her free.

This expressive, explosive text is a being's cry of jubilation as the whole of life – her purpose, destiny, and desires are laid out before her in splendid glory. The speaker may have just met the love of her life, finished her favorite book, or written her finest poem – regardless, she feels no question of her path – and has complete faith in the winding journey that her life may take to obtain her end. These not-so-quiet words represent Emily's quiet faith as the queen of her chosen kingdom – her little home in Amherst.

In Gratitude

Renée Crown University Honors College

Sabine Krantz

Lisa Whitcomb

Ben Whitcomb

Dr. Kathleen Roland-Silverstein

Janet Brown

Michelle Taylor

Jake Heggie

Edwin Cahill

Kathleen Haddock

Stephen Kuusisto

Kate Hanson

Karen Hall

Jolynn Parker

Samir Malovic

Jonathan English

Dr. John Warren

Dr. Joseph Downing

Marisa Frigoletto

SongFest

Stage Directions

(Stage is set with charming pieces indicative of the world that would have been most familiar to Emily Dickinson, circa 1864 – the start of her most prolific writing period. The background scenery is made up of five panels, together displaying Amherst on the rolling Berkshires, and they are described them as they stand Stage right (SR) to stage left (SL). The first displaying pastures and a church, the second houses, a gate, and the beginnings of a garden, which extends to the third panel, end next to a conservatory. A large tree, showing signs of autumn is also featured on the third panel. The fourth panel displays pine trees, more houses, and the distinct chapel of Amherst College, while the Amherst cemetery dominates the fifth and final panel.

The piano is firmly anchored stage right, and a cushioned wooden chair is located just stage left of the piano's crook. Slightly right of center to the left of the chair and piano is a movable white window attached to a sill, which the actor/singer will use to change perspectives as Emily moves in or out of doors. In the center a space is left in which the actor/singer can move about, or stand to declaim a particularly straightforward text.

Furthest to the left is another cushioned wooden chair with a small writing desk in front of it. On this desk, there is an inkwell and pen on the right downstage corner, with some paper and an unopened letter underneath it. On the left downstage corner there are three books. These are a journal on the bottom, above, a novel, and above that, a bible. The desk has a lower shelf, on which is located a newspaper.

Emily enters downstage left from a visible staircase as the intro for “Nature, the Gentlest Mother begins. She is wearing a simple white housedress, white stockings and black women's shoes. Her hair is done in a simple low chignon, identical to the iconic 1847 daguerreotype. She crosses slowly to window happily and wondrously contemplating the sounds of the birds, and stands at the window – looking out.)

Emily:

Nature the gentlest mother is,
Impatient of no child,
The feeblest or the waywardest.
Her admonition mild

In forest and the hill (*peeks SR side, turns frame slightly, growing excited*)
By traveller be heard,
Restraining rampant squirrel (*completes window turn for illusion of going outside*)
Or too impetuous bird.

How fair her conversation (*crosses in front of window, remaining relatively stage right*)
A summer afternoon,
Her household her assembly;
And when the sun go down, (*The excitement of nightfall thrills her- leans on window*)

Her voice among the aisles
 Incite the timid prayer
 Of the minutest cricket,
 The most unworthy flower. (*returns inside, spinning window during piano tremolos*)

When all the children sleep, (*looks calmly out the window, similar to at start of song*)
 She turns as long away
 As will suffice to light her lamps,
 Then bending from the sky (*fingers the panes of the window lovingly*)

With infinite affection
 An infiniter care,
 Her golden finger on her lip, (*lays head against pane on SL side*)
 Wills silence everywhere. (*Calmly closes eyes as if in happy sleep*)

(*With first note of intro comes in for "The Butterfly Upon" Emily's eyes open*)

The Butterfly upon the Sky, (*looks out of window, but more upward fashion than before,*
 That doesn't know its Name *as if following a butterfly*)
 And hasn't any tax to pay
 And hasn't any Home
 Is just as high as you and I, (*follows the butterfly with eyes still*)
 And higher, I believe,
 So soar away and never sigh
 And that's the way to grieve— (*Mellow and contemplative, goes to SR chair and sits*)

It makes no difference abroad—
 The Seasons—fit—the same—
 The Mornings blossom into Noons—
 And split their Pods of Flame—

Wild flowers—kindle in the Woods—
 The Brooks slam—all the Day— (*slow rises from chair, paces from window to chair*)
 No Black bird bates his Banjo—
 For passing Calvary—

(*turns window flat front during interlude*)

Auto da Fe—and Judgment—
 Are nothing to the Bee—
 His separation from His Rose— (*looks out of window in exasperation, hands on sill*)
 To Him—sums Misery— (*places fist under chin and leans on window*)

(*holds pose for part of postlude, but eventually angles window towards SR. Still, she looks out and suddenly her eyes widen on the first chord of "There Came a Wind like a Bugle"*)

There came a Wind like a Bugle – (*terrified, staring out window*)
 It quivered through the Grass (*ducks under sill*)
 And a Green Chill upon the Heat (*slowly rises up until in peeking position*)
 So ominous did pass
 We barred the Windows and the Doors (*Grabs panes of windows*)
 As from an Emerald Ghost -
 The Doom's electric Moccasin
 The very instant passed – (*slowly releases hands from window*)
 On a strange Mob of panting Trees (*slowly backs away from window until center stage*)
 And Fences fled away
 And Rivers where the Houses ran
 Those looked that lived - that Day - (*slowly regains composure, fear fades to wonder*)
 The Bell within the steeple wild
 The flying tidings whirled -
 How much can come (*resolute and now strong, faces front*)
 And much can go,
 And yet abide the World!

(Pause about five seconds, Emily creeps slowly to window and peers out anew, relieved that the storm has passed. Gazes calmly out for introduction of “To Make a Prairie”)

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee, (*Remains staring calmly out of window*)
 One clover, and a bee.
 And revery.
 (*Angles window slightly to front during interlude, leans dreamily against stage left side*)
 The revery alone will do,
 If bees are few.

(Shakes head in sudden startled irritation with first chord of “Fame”, as if a bee has just been felt buzzing near her ear)

Fame is a bee. (*tilts head up, following bee with her eyes in an annoyed fashion*)
 It has a song— (*looks away from bee, becoming thoughtful*)
 It has a wing— (*looks again, focusing on corner of pane where bee has landed*)
 Ah..... (*Tries to reach up to shoo bee from the corner*)
 Ouch! (*draws back hand in pain, quickly turns from window, walking SL*)
 too, it has a sting. (*examines finger, sucking it ruefully during postlude, reaches stage left and sits in chair*)

(Piano waits. Whilst still in chair, Emily reaches over to pile of books, first picking up the Bible. She quickly becomes engrossed, following the passages with her finger, until she suddenly stops, upset by the passage she has just read. She rises, agitated, still staring at the book. She finally grows incensed, snapping the book shut, and slamming it down on the desk.)

Why — do they shut Me out of Heaven? (*exasperated,*)
 Did I sing — too loud? (*snarls, stares to SR as if through window, expression softens*)
 But — I can sing a little "Minor"
 Timid as a Bird! (*almost apologetically*)

Wouldn't the Angels try me — (*leaves Bible, begins slowly, intensely to cross to window*)
 Just — once — more —
 Just — see — if I troubled them — (*reaches window at last*)
 But don't — shut the door! (*Grabs desperately at pane*)

(*During interlude slowly lets hands slip down and turns away from window, thoughtfully walking toward center*)

Oh, if I — were the Gentleman
 In the "White Robe" — (*fingers dress*)
 And they — were the little Hand — that knocked — (*looks toward windows again, looks away during chord.*)
 Could — I — forbid? (*center, questioning*)

Why – do they shut Me out of Heaven? (*Desperate*)

Did I sing – too loud? (*begging, looks anguished at sky, walks away to desk SL*)

(*There is a longer pause as her head hangs down whilst standing at desk. Gradually she picks up her head and looks toward window thoughtfully, cuing the pianist to begin "Some Keep the Sabbath"*)

Some keep the Sabbath going to Church—
 I keep it, staying at Home— (*straightens up fully*)
 With a Bobolink for a Chorister—
 And an Orchard, for a Dome—
 (*During this short interlude tears gaze from window to Bible on table in front of her*)

Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice— (*picks up Bible without opening it*)
 I just wear my Wings— (*turns it over in her hands*)
 And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church,
 Our little Sexton—sings. (*smiles sweetly at Bible, puts it down on the desk*)

God preaches, a noted Clergyman—
 And the sermon is never long, (*Pulls out chair as if to sit*)
 So instead of getting to Heaven, at last— (*sits at end of phrase*)
 I'm going, all along. (*peacefully relaxes and picks up paper*)

(*Slight pause, perhaps five seconds while her expression shifts again into one of worry. With the first chords of "The World Feels Dusty" she rises, and begins slowly pacing between the desk and the window while reading the paper.*)

bible again, opening it with some trepidation. She grows engrossed again, and this time, finds a passage that pleases her, and she stands quickly, cuing the piano to begin)

Going to Heaven

Going to Heaven!

I don't know when, (*pacing around desk*)

Pray do not ask me how – (*slowly begins to move away from desk, SR, Bible still in hand*)

Indeed, I'm too astonished

To think of answering you!

Going to Heaven -

Going to Heaven!

How dim it sounds! (*Halts center, regards closed Bible with a shred of doubt,*)

And yet it will be done

As sure as flocks go home at night, (*contemplating, crosses in front of window*)

Unto the shepherd's arm!

Perhaps you're going too! (*Halts, just before chair SR*)

Who knows? (*sits, looking thoughtful during interlude, rises as she delivers next line*)

If you should get there first,

Save just a little place for me

Close to the two I lost!

The smallest "robe" will fit me

And just a bit of "crown"

For you know we do not mind our dress

When we are going home. (*Reaches window*)

Going to Heaven, (*Halts, center*)

Going to Heaven!

(*takes deep, contemplative breath*)

I'm glad I don't believe it,

For it would stop my breath, (*intensely*)

And I'd like to look a little more (*resumes movement walking SL*)

At such a curious earth!

I am glad they did believe it (*Halts, at last at desk*)

Whom I have never found

Since the mighty autumn afternoon, (*looks slightly upstage, regarding tombstones*)

I left them in the ground.

(*During postlude, Emily lies closed Bible on desk, fingering its edges before halfheartedly reaching for the closed letter. There is a thirty seconds pause between the songs as Emily opens the letter. As she reads, her expression instantly changes, and she gasps, which is the cue for the piano to sound first chord of "If you were coming in the Fall"*)

If you were coming in the Fall, (*looks up, face filled with joy*)

If you were coming in the Fall, (*crosses quickly to slight left of center, by autumn tree*)

I'd brush the Summer by

With half a smile, and half a spurn,
As Housewives do, a Fly.

If I could see you in a year, (*paces back to desk, places letter down as if to calm herself*)
I'd wind the months in balls---
And put them each in separate Drawers,
For fear the numbers fuse--- (*snatches letter up*)

If only Centuries, delayed, (*hugs it to her chest*)
I'd count them on my Hand,
Subtracting, til my fingers dropped
Into Van Dieman's Land,
(*Eagerly crosses to center during interlude*)
If certain, when this life was out--- (*Halts center*)
That yours and mine, should be (*Holds letter out before her, arms, stretched out straight*)
I'd toss it yonder, like a Rind, (*folds letter in half, and strolls care-free to window*)
And take Eternity--- (*eagerly stares out, as if expecting someone*)
And take Eternity –
And take Eternity – (*leans against SL side of pane, smiling blissfully*)

Eternity... (*expression gradually changes to doubt*)

But, now, uncertain of the length (*uncertainly unfolds letter*)
Of this, that is between, (*reads it, walking slowly back to desk*)
It goads me, like the Goblin Bee---
That will not state--- its sting. (*reaches desk, places letter down face-up, crumples edges in her fists.*)

(*Fades into utter despair as the song ends. As the next begins, she dejectedly folds up letter, puts it back in the envelope, and looking up as if she has something important to say to someone, crosses to center to deliver her declaration. Remains still for entirety of this song.*)

So well that I can live without—
I love thee—then How well is that?
As well as Jesus?
Prove it me
That He—loved Men—
As I—love thee—

(*Does not move, but it is clear that she has lost the fight. Does not break hopeless gaze front as the next song begins*)

Heart! We will forget him!
You and I — tonight!
You may forget the warmth he gave — (*Slowly turns towards window SR*)
I will forget the light! (*stretches out arm towards window, quivering, lets it fall*)

When you have done, pray tell me (*continues walking SR towards chair*)
 That I, my thoughts may dim! (*Sits after "dim"*)
 Haste! lest while you're lagging (*brokenly pulls legs up to chair, under her dress*)
 I remember him!
 (*Pause about thirty seconds after postlude finishes*)

If I can stop one Heart from breaking (*Still curled on chair, but expression changes.*)
 I shall not live in vain (*As if to give herself courage*)
 If I can ease one Life the Aching
 Or cool one Pain (*shakily begins to put legs on the floor*)
 Or help one fainting Robin
 Unto his Nest again (*Holds sides of chair, in attempt to straighten her seat*)
 I shall not live in Vain. (*looks resolutely forward*)

(*During interlude, Emily slowly rises from chair, and gaining courage, makes her way to center, delivering the rest of the text in this manner, and gaining resolution all the while*)

If I can stop one Heart from breaking
 I shall not live in vain
 If I can ease one Life the Aching
 Or cool one Pain
 Or help one fainting Robin
 Unto his Nest again
 I shall not live in Vain

(*Another slight pause as Emily holds stance until the end of the song. Calmer, she walks back towards SR chair and stands by it during prelude to "Silence" with a bowed head.*)

Silence is all we dread. (*Begins quietly, picks up head*)
 There's Ransom in a Voice – (*Resolutely moves from chair to SR side of window*)
 But Silence is Infinity. (*turns it slightly SR*)
 Himself have not a face. (*leans calmly against window*)
 Ah.....

(*looks at last as if she has found serenity during final vocalise. During prelude of next, she fixes her stance to be straighter, looking slightly more mischievous*)

I'm nobody! Who are you?
 Are you nobody, too?
 Then there's a pair of us -- don't tell! (*steps away from window, jauntily crosses to center*)
 They'd advertise –
 You know! (*Pauses, giggles slightly*)

How dreary to be somebody! (*continues crossing SL to desk*)

How public like a frog
 To tell one's name the livelong June
 To an admiring bog! (*reaches desk, places hands down firmly on "bog"*)

La dee dah... (*putters around desk, shaking head, moving journal to middle of desk*)
 You know – (*Pauses her fussing, looks knowingly out front*)

(*sits during prelude of following song*)

The Brain—is wider than the Sky— (*opens journal*)
 For—put them side by side—
 The one the other will contain
 With ease—and You—beside—

(*opens inkwell, dips and shakes pen contemplating what to write*)

The Brain is deeper than the sea—
 For—hold them—Blue to Blue—
 The one the other will absorb—
 As Sponges—Buckets—do— (*begins to write*)

The Brain is just the weight of God— (*writing*)
 For—Heft them—Pound for Pound—
 And they will differ—if they do—
 As Syllable from Sound— (*pauses, looking up and deeply considers thought*)

As Syllable from Sound – (*smiles*)

(*calmly resumes and finishes writing during interlude, shakes out pen, places it next to inkwell, leaning back and relaxing.*)

And they will differ- if they do -

He ate and drank the precious Words – (*sits up straighter, excitedly reaches for book*)
 His Spirit grew robust – (*pushes out chair and stands by desk*)
 He knew no more that he was poor,
 Nor that his frame was Dust – (*pulls book closer to chest*)

He danced along the dingy Days (*opens it, enraptured.*)
 And this Bequest of Wings
 Was but a Book – (*smiles, places book down, and crosses to center*)
 What Liberty
 A loosened spirit brings – (*center, and remains so to deliver last text.*)

At last, to be identified!
At last, the lamps upon thy side
The rest of Life to see!

(Carefully considers implication of her words, moves further downstage)

Past Midnight! Past the Morning Star!
Past Sunrise!
Ah, What leagues there were
Between our feet, and Day!

(Curtain)

Explanation of Onstage Visual Presentation



(Above: Emily Dickinson's Bedroom restoration in Amherst museum)

Her love of being alone up in her room was associated with her feeling for a key, which signified freedom from interruption and the social prevention that beset her downstairs. She would stand looking down, one hand raised, thumb and forefinger closed on an imaginary key, and say, with a quick turn of her wrist, "It's just a turn--and freedom, Matty!"

Words of Emily Dickinson's niece-Martha Dickinson Bianchi

Emily Dickinson's bedroom was not only the site of her greatest literary achievements, but a place where she spent most of her time throughout her life. It was not to her a confinement, but freedom- an ideal, simple, comfortable setting for a woman who was unapologetic about her way of life.

I believe that a room says much about the man or woman who inhabits it, and what strikes me the most about this dwelling is that it is open, homey, uncluttered, and filled with natural light. Though the above picture is a restoration and lacks the appearance of certain "lived-in elements" the room does not lend itself to the vision of an inhabitant with a delicate constitution or an unquiet mind. Rather, it is easy to imagine a being equipped with calm and prudence, who could perhaps use her sparse surroundings as a canvas for the imagination.

Even today, Amherst, Massachusetts is not a city that is considered to be overdeveloped, but in the nineteenth century, the nature of New England offered much inspiration to Emily. She had a view of trees and flowers outside of her window, and these might have encouraged her

keen powers of observation and deep affinity for nature. Beyond her home she saw pastures, the newly established Amherst College, and the expansive town graveyard- impressing an image of mortality and encouraging philosophical musings (and arousing questions) about religion, war, death, and human nature. Her little desk is where she formed many of her strongest attachments through letter writing, and formed a beautiful idea of love in her mind by reading Victorian literature. It was also at this little desk that she discovered exactly who she was – Emily the intellectual, the friend, a poet with a voice.

The idea of the presentation of these songs in the specified format (see insert *Recital Program and Organization of Repertoire*) is to recreate the character of Emily Dickinson in her natural environment utilizing beautiful songs by American composers -works that were inspired by her words. However, I would like to take this idea a step further by showing how her beautifully complex personality and genius that could craft such texts will shine through even in works created other artists (composers) as well as this stage show created by myself.

Adapting this room for the art song stage will present challenges, but I believe it is possible to recreate the ambiance and environment of Emily's room onstage by maintaining the elements I like best about the space that I think are the most reflective of her character: the openness, the natural light, and simplicity. My set will be an inspiration as opposed to a direct recreation. I will not go as far as to craft a true "room" equipped with bed, bureau, woodstove, and writing desk, but rather take parts of this overall image and present them in a way that promotes openness to the audience, and integrates all necessary elements of art song performance.

Stage Right: Seeing as the piano is an integral part of the performance of these songs, I would like to incorporate it directly into the set. The crook of the piano will face inward towards stage

action, but the pianist will still be situated in a way that is conducive to making contact with the singer if the need arises.

Center Stage: Emily's desk was the creative center of her room, and it was here that she composed her exhaustive catalog of over 1,800 poems, as well as hundreds of letters that were an important vehicle for relationships outside of her home. Placing a small writing table/desk, equipped with a chair, inkwell, pen, oil lamp, and paper center stage will be symbolic of the precedence of her writing in her life.



Desk/window ambiance that inspired Center Stage and Stage Left setting

Stage Left: Here, a window frame will be the main feature. This set piece will be comprised of a window pane- cutout, mounted on a platform, and put on wheels. With this flexibility, the performer will be able to operate this piece, moving it around the stage as she pleases, able to stand to the side of it, look out of it, or be behind it if she so desires. As I adjust it periodically throughout the music to tell Emily's story, I hope to further communicate my interpretations of the poetry, whether certain lines make me feel closed in or stifled, other make me feel pensive and introspective, and others set me free.

Costuming: Although Dickinson spent much of her life wearing black due to quick successive deaths of friends and family members, and one letter even suggests that her brother procured colored fabrics for her while on business in Boston, the myth of Emily Dickinson's consistently white attire endured throughout her late life and after her death. Visitors recall seeing her in

white, often in solely a vision fleeing up the stairs earning her the nickname “the myth”. The fact that her family chose to bury her in white also gave credence to the moniker, and created an indelible image for all posterity. I will adopt the same attire of a long-sleeved white gown, as I think it represents not only her historical image, but also her desire to start all creative processes with a blank canvas.



Restoration of Emily Dickinson's White Housedress at Emily Dickinson Amherst Museum

Lighting: In favor of the natural light that permeated Emily's bedroom I will not employ standard lighting in the production, but instead use the natural light through the windows of Setnor auditorium to create a simple, daytime setting.

Background: For background, I plan to use wooden paneling downstage of the organ and stage left grand piano of Setnor auditorium. The paneling will be painted as if with a natural setting: sky, grass, trees, and in the distance, the graveyard that Emily could see from her window. It will be a simple and humble rendering of the natural New England landscape that often inspired Emily to write.

The setting of *Escape from Amherst* will be akin to the environment where the poet resided, but endowed with my own artistic impression of the environment of this poet lived in: simple, with natural light, with a balance of colors between the furniture foreground and the colorful background.

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Appendix

Enclosed please find audio and video recordings from December 5th, 2015 – the date of the

Escape from Amherst Concert Event. Please Enjoy.

<https://soundcloud.com/maria-whitcomb/sets>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_5gcdQ-

[Jbc&list=PLpd2jIYrF1JZ7D5bGWYiUIvSvzgr7ecG1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_5gcdQ-Jbc&list=PLpd2jIYrF1JZ7D5bGWYiUIvSvzgr7ecG1)

If necessary please use the following login information to view all videos:

Email: mariakwhit@gmail.com

Password: Mus\$c101