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## EMILY DICKINSON IN LIFE AND POETRY IS THE SUBJECT OF A MAJOR EXHIBITION AT THE MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM

### *I'm Nobody! Who are you? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson*

January 20 through May 21, 2017

**EXTENDED: through May 28, 2017**

**New York, NY, December 13, 2016** — One of the most popular and enigmatic American writers of the nineteenth century, Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) wrote almost 1,800 poems. Nevertheless, her work was essentially unknown to contemporary readers since only a handful of poems were published during her lifetime and a vast trove of her manuscripts was not discovered until after her death in 1886.

Often typecast as a recluse who rarely left her Amherst home, Dickinson was, in fact, socially active as a young woman and maintained a broad network of friends and correspondents even as she grew older and retreated into seclusion. Bringing together nearly one hundred rarely seen items, including manuscripts and letters, *I'm Nobody! Who are you?*—a title taken from her popular poem—is the most ambitious exhibition on Dickinson to date. It explores a side of her life that is seldom acknowledged: one filled with rich friendships and long-lasting relationships with mentors and editors.

The exhibition closely examines twenty-four poems in various draft states, with corresponding audio stops. In addition to her writings, the show also features an array of visual material, including hand-cut silhouettes, photographs and daguerreotypes, contemporary illustrations, and



The only authenticated image of Emily Dickinson, Daguerreotype, ca. 1847. Amherst College Archives & Special Collections. Gift of Millicent Todd Bingham, 1956, 1956.002.

other items that speak to the rich intellectual and cultural environment in which Dickinson lived and worked. The exhibition is organized in conjunction with Amherst College.

“Emily Dickinson’s work—and life—remain endlessly compelling to literary scholars and to the larger artistic community,” said Colin B. Bailey, director of the Morgan Library & Museum. “With its experimental poetics and vivid language, her verse continues to be a source of critical inquiry, while her quiet, unassuming years in Amherst are celebrated in music, theatre, and the cinema. The Morgan’s exhibition explores a less well-known aspect of her life—her personal and professional friendships—that will surely delight and surprise exhibition-goers.”

## **THE EXHIBITION**

### **I. Childhood Years**

#### ***“I attend singing school.”***

Born in 1830, Emily Dickinson was part of a tight-knit family at the social center of Amherst, a small college town in western Massachusetts. She lived almost her entire life in the shadow of Amherst College, which was cofounded by her grandfather and where her father served as treasurer between 1835 and 1873. Life in such an environment brought a steady stream of visitors from far and wide, and Dickinson lived within an intellectually stimulating community that would later be reflected in her letters and poetry. Her father was protective, yet encouraged his children to pursue educational opportunities. Primary schooling for young women was not uncommon in Dickinson’s time, and she formed many strong attachments to her schoolmates and instructors at Amherst Academy, where she was part of a close group of friends known as the circle of five. Her exposure to poetry and keen use of language dates to her youth, as does her interest in the natural world and aesthetic presentation, evident in the books from her library, early letters, and her herbarium, an album of carefully pressed botanical specimens.



Top: Left: Emily Dickinson's house in Amherst, Massachusetts. Emily Dickinson Museum. Photography by Michael Medeiros. Bottom: Otis Allen Bullard (1816–1853), Emily Elizabeth, Austin, and Lavinia Dickinson, Oil on canvas, ca. 1840. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

## II. A Year at Mount Holyoke

***"Everything is pleasant & happy here."***

At the age of sixteen, Dickinson left home to study at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, a women's college, in nearby South Hadley, Massachusetts. She tested into the first of three academic levels but was promoted to the second by midyear and took courses in chemistry, botany, history, and languages. She was roommates with her cousin Emily Norcross and her time there is well documented in the surviving letters she sent to her brother, Austin, and friend Abiah Root, one of the circle of five friends from Amherst Academy. It was not unusual for women to attend only a single year of higher education, and Dickinson returned to Amherst at the end of the academic year.

## III. Companions and Correspondents

***"Stay! My heart votes for you."***

Dickinson was not a student at Amherst College—which was established in 1821 with the explicit goal of educating, in Noah Webster's phrase, "indigent young men of promising talents and hopeful piety" for the Christian ministry—but, as the daughter of the college treasurer, she was expected to attend public events such as commencement and to assist with the annual trustee's reception hosted at her father's house. After the Civil War, the college drifted away from its focus on missionary training, but during Dickinson's lifetime it was a hotbed for religious revivals. She led a socially active life when she was young, attending performances, concerts, and lectures and remaining close to friends she had made as a child at Amherst Academy. She also formed new relationships, often through her brother, Austin. He introduced her to his social circle and Dickinson would have a brief flirtation with one member. Later, Austin's wife, Susan, would become one of the poet's dearest friends. Even as she became more reclusive, and increasingly



Left: Emily Dickinson's bedroom, featuring the floral wallpaper which will be on view at the Morgan. Emily Dickinson Museum. Photography by Michael Medeiros. Right: Swinging seal engraved *Emily*, Gold and citrine; English or American, ca. 1850. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

withdrew from society in the 1860s, Dickinson maintained an active correspondence, composing more than one thousand letters in her lifetime.

#### IV. Literary Influences and Connections

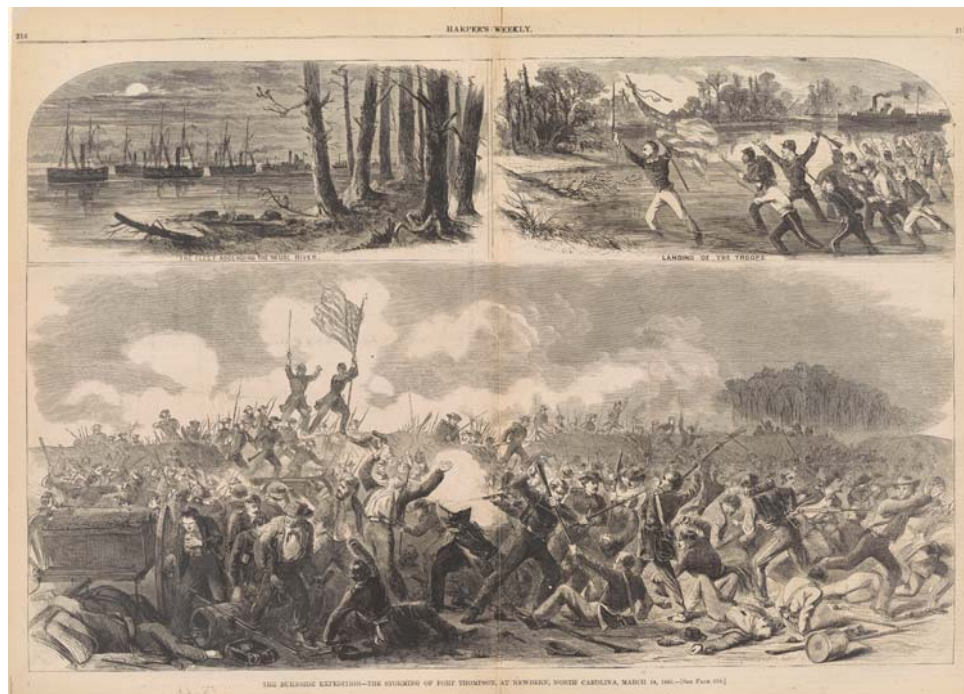
***“After long disuse of her eyes she read Shakespeare & thought why is any other book needed?”***

One benefit of life in a college town was access to books, newspapers, and magazines that might not otherwise be readily available. The Dickinson family kept a respectable library in their home, and Dickinson also borrowed books from friends. In addition to her wide-ranging reading habits, she was acquainted with some major figures in the worlds of publishing and literature, chief among them the editors Samuel Bowles, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and Thomas Niles, as well as the writer and activist Helen Hunt Jackson. Although Bowles and Higginson both championed women writers, their views were far from universal. Helen Hunt Jackson forged her own career as an author and urged Dickinson to publish her poetry, with one small success.

#### V. Civil War Years

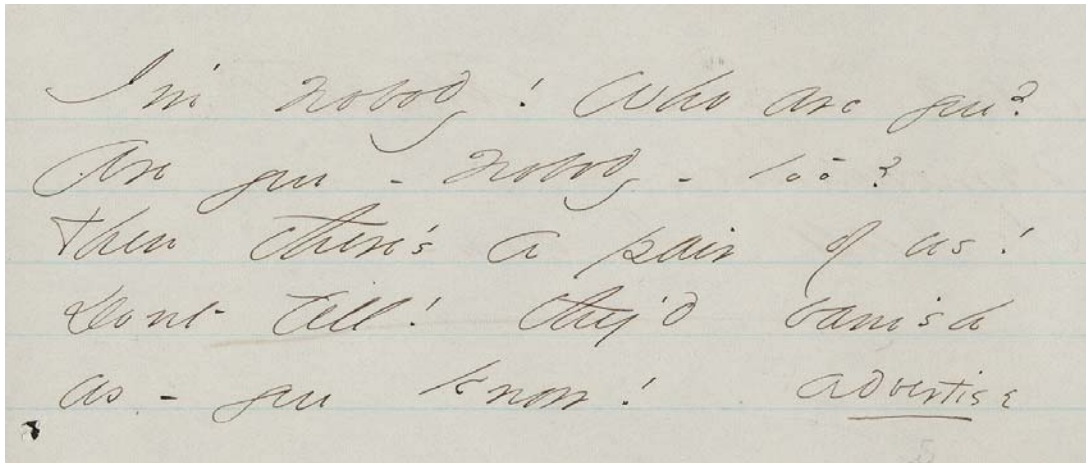
***“I heard a Fly buzz—when I died—”***

Massachusetts played an important role in the Civil War, politically and militarily. For a brief time, the state’s Springfield Armory, not far from Amherst, was the sole government manufacturer of muskets and other arms. Hundreds of local residents, both white and African American, joined



*The Burnside Expedition—The Storming of Fort Thompson at New Bern, North Carolina, March 14, 1862, Printed in Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization, Vol. 6, no. 275 (April 5, 1862), pp. 216–17. Amherst College Archives & Special Collections. Digital image courtesy of The Morgan Library & Museum. Photography by Janny Chiu.*





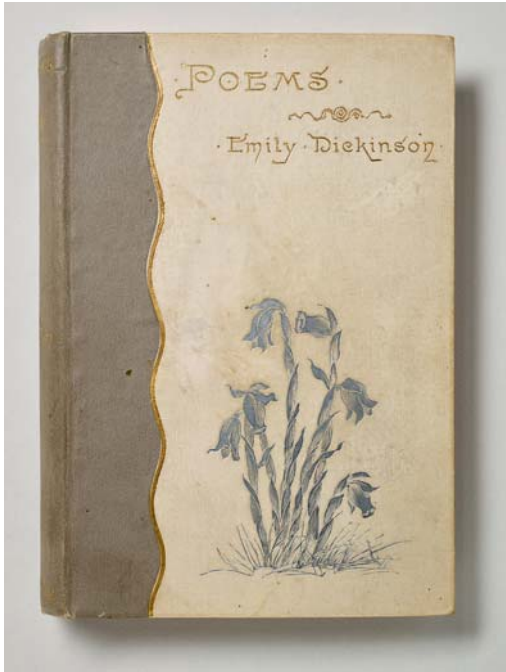
Emily Dickinson (1830-1886). *I'm Nobody! Who are you?* Poem (detail), ca. late 1861. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

the Union army, although Dickinson's brother Austin avoided service. Students and faculty from the college also joined the conflict. Charity events related to the war became a regular feature of daily life. Dickinson began collecting her rapidly increasing output of poems into hand-sewn manuscript booklets, known as fascicles, as early as 1858, but the war years saw a sharp increase in her productivity. Thirty out of forty fascicles and at least five unsewn sets of poems—each of which could include more than twenty drafts—date from the years 1861-65. Most of Dickinson's poems that were published during her lifetime also appeared during this period.

## VI. Lifetime Publications

### ***"I had told you I did not print."***

Closely examining Dickinson's unique manuscript practices provides a partial answer to the question of why she did not pursue publication. While Dickinson's social network included supporters of her writing and the work of women writers in general, there were equally strong voices arguing the opposite position. She regularly exchanged letters with influential editors, including Bowles, Niles, and Higginson. But, for all of their progressive views—Bowles, for instance, hired Fidelity Hayward Cooke as literary editor at *The Springfield Republican* in 1860—Dickinson was constrained by the disapproval of her father and of other figures she admired. Only ten of Dickinson's 1,789 poems were published during her lifetime but always with added titles and altered punctuation. With one exception, the poems appeared in newspapers and periodicals on densely printed pages and surrounded by articles and advertisements, as was typical for the period. Dickinson is never credited—her poems all were published anonymously—and it is probable they were printed without her consent. At the same time, she did not shun publication altogether. She submitted several poems to Niles who never printed them while Dickinson was alive, but would later publish the first three posthumous editions of her work to great success.



Left: Emily Dickinson (1830–1886), *Poems*, Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1890. Amherst College Archives & Special Collections. Right: Mabel Loomis Todd (1856–1932), *Indian Pipes*, Oil on card, 1882. Amherst College Archives & Special Collections.

## VII. Posthumous Publications and Legacy

### ***“It was not death for I stood up.”***

Emily Dickinson died at her home on May 15, 1886, possibly of kidney disease. Of her trove of poems, hundreds had been shared with her network of friends and correspondents, but Dickinson had kept sets and fascicles entirely private. These poems were only discovered by her sister, Lavinia, after her death.

Lavinia looked to Susan Dickinson, her sister-in-law and one of the poet’s closest friends, to publish them. But work proceeded slowly, and Lavinia eventually turned the manuscripts over to Mabel Loomis Todd, Austin’s mistress. Todd dedicated much of the rest of her life to editing and publishing Dickinson’s poetry. The first two books—in 1890 and 1891—were coedited by Higginson, the poet’s old literary mentor. Todd and Higginson faced many difficulties when interpreting Dickinson’s challenging manuscripts and were further hindered by technology (Todd’s typewriter did not have lowercase letterforms). They worked to regularize Dickinson’s lines and alter her punctuation in order to make the verse “look” more like conventional poetry. Nevertheless, more than four hundred poems were brought out within ten years of Dickinson’s death, and her indisputably strong literary reputation was quickly established.

Today, Dickinson is widely recognized as one of the most important poets of the nineteenth century and her work is acknowledged as a precursor to modernism. She profoundly influenced later generations of poets, writers, musicians, and visual artists, including Hart Crane, Robert Frost, Elizabeth Bishop, Adrienne Rich, Charles Wright, and Susan Howe; Aaron Copland and Dawn Upshaw; Joseph Cornell and Jen Bervin.

### **Audio Feature**

The exhibition will be accompanied by an audio feature in which noted contemporary poet and publisher Lee Ann Brown reads the 24 poems included in the exhibition:

1. "The sun kept stooping – stooping – low –"
2. "Two – were immortal – twice –"
3. "Distance – is not the Realm of Fox"
4. "The Wind begun to knead the Grass –"
5. "The Day undressed – Herself –"
6. "I suppose the time will come"
7. "Light is sufficient to itself –"
8. "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –"
9. "Bless God, he went as soldiers –"
10. "My friend attacks my friend!"
11. "I'm Nobody! Who are you?"
12. "A little madness in the Spring"
13. "Of our deepest delights"
14. "Soul, take thy risk"
15. "Alone and in a Circumstance"
16. "A Route of Evanescence"
17. "Success is counted sweetest"
18. "A narrow Fellow in the Grass"
19. "Blazing in gold and quenching in purple"
20. "These are the days when Birds come back –"
21. "Some keep the Sabbath going to church"
22. "'Tis whiter than an Indian Pipe –"
23. "It was not Death for I stood up"
24. "A Pang is more conspicuous in Spring"

### **Associated Publication**

*The Networked Recluse: The Connected World of Emily Dickinson* will be released in conjunction with the exhibition *I'm Nobody! Who are you? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson*. Published by Amherst College Press, the richly illustrated volume offers an account of the exhibition along with contributions by curators, scholars and poets.

### **Public Programs**

#### **LECTURE      Emily Dickinson: The Networked Recluse** *Mike Kelly*

In celebration of the opening of the exhibition *I'm Nobody! Who are you? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson* join curator Mike Kelly, Head of the Archives & Special Collections at Frost Library, Amherst College, for an illustrated talk revealing the deeper stories of several objects included in the exhibition. Kelly will also discuss the ongoing efforts to make the full range of Dickinson's manuscript and editorial history widely available and better understood. In 2012 Kelly worked with Amherst College to share the 1,200 Dickinson poems, fragments, and letters in the collection free online. Learn how these efforts continue and their effect on Dickinson scholarship around the globe.

**Thursday, January 19, 6:30 pm\***

**Tickets: \$15; \$10 for members; free for students with valid ID.**

\*The exhibition *I'm Nobody! Who are you? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson* will open at 5:30 pm for program attendees.

**GALLERY  
TALK**

**I'm Nobody! Who are you? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson**

Carolyn Vega, Assistant Curator, Literary and Historical Manuscripts

**Friday, January 27, 6 pm**

**Tickets: Free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary.**

**LECTURE**

**Dickinson's Manuscripts**

*Susan Howe and Marta Werner*

Join poet and essayist Susan Howe and Marta Werner, associate professor of English at D'Youville College, for an evening of lecture and discussion centered on Emily Dickinson's unique manuscript practice. Howe and Werner will chart the visual and sonic topographies of Dickinson's poetry and letters, while also raising questions about writing, the limits of privacy, and the indecipherable nature of final intentions. Audience members are encouraged to be active participants in the conversation.

**Friday, February 10, 6:30 pm\***

**Tickets: \$15; free for members and students with valid ID. Tickets include free museum admission for the day of program.**

\*The exhibition *I'm Nobody! Who are you? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson* will open at 5:30 pm for program attendees.

**GALLERY  
TALK**

**I'm Nobody! Who are you? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson**

Carolyn Vega, Assistant Curator, Literary and Historical Manuscripts

**Friday, March 3, 1 pm**

**Tickets: Free with museum admission; no tickets or reservations necessary.**

**CONCERT**

**In Poetry and Song: An Evening with Patti Smith and Jesse Paris Smith**

Patti Smith, writer, performer, and visual artist, appears with her daughter, pianist Jesse Paris Smith, in a special evening of poetry and music inspired by the works of Emily Dickinson.

**Tuesday, March 21, 7:30 pm\***

**Tickets: \$45; \$35 for members.**

\*The exhibitions *I'm Nobody! Who are you? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson* and *Delirium: The Art of the Symbolist Book* will be open at 6:30 pm for program attendees.

**FAMILY  
PROGRAM**

**Exceptional Expressions**

Inspired by the exhibition *I'm Nobody! Who are you? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson*, the Morgan is collaborating with Poets House to present a creative writing workshop for families. You will explore the unconventional work



of Dickinson with the poet, author and professor Matthew Burgess, then write your own poetry and craft its display.

**Saturday, March 25, 11 am–1 pm**

**Tickets: \$20; \$15 for members. Each ticket is valid for one child and up to two adults; Program consists of a thirty minute exhibition experience followed by a ninety minute writing and art-making activity. Appropriate for ages 8–14.**

## FILM

### **A Quiet Passion**

Director: Terence Davies  
(2016, 125 minutes)

Cynthia Nixon delivers a triumphant performance as Emily Dickinson as she personifies the wit, intellectual independence and pathos of the poet whose genius only came to be recognized after her death. Acclaimed British director Terence Davies (THE DEEP BLUE SEA, HOUSE OF MIRTH, THE LONG DAY CLOSES) exquisitely evokes Dickinson's deep attachment to her close knit family along with the manners, mores and spiritual convictions of her time that she struggled with and transcended in her poetry. *The New Yorker's* Richard Brody calls it "an absolute drop-dead masterwork". The cast also includes Jennifer Ehle and Keith Carradine. Join director Terence Davies for a post-screening discussion. A Music Box Films release (in theaters April 14, 2017)

**Tuesday, March 28, 7 pm**

**Tickets: \$15; \$10 for members**

\*The exhibition *I'm Nobody! Who are you? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson* will be open at 6 pm for program attendees.

## ADULT WORKSHOP

### **"This is my letter to the World": Writing Poetry with Emily Dickinson**

*Lee Ann Brown*

Join Lee Ann Brown, poet and professor of English at St. John's University, for an interactive poetry workshop featuring individual and collaborative writing exercises that take their inspiration from the works featured in the exhibition *I'm Nobody! Who are you? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson*. Compose your own poetry as well as read and analyze Emily Dickinson's unique language world, form, and musicality. Following the workshop the group will share their original compositions in Mr. Morgan's Library.

**Friday, April 7, 7–9 pm**

**Tickets: \$20; \$15 for members.**

\*The exhibition *I'm Nobody! Who are you? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson* will open at 6 pm for program attendees.

**CONCERT      First Songs**

*Dawn Upshaw and the Bard College Conservatory Graduate Vocal Arts Program*  
Dawn Upshaw, internationally renowned soprano and Bard Graduate Vocal Arts Program Artistic Director, will perform with pianist and Associate Director Kayo Iwama, the singers of the program, and the Bard Conservatory Collaborative Piano Fellows. The concert will feature premieres by various composers and will include some newly composed songs set to the poems of Emily Dickinson.

**Thursday, April 13, 7:30 pm\***

**Tickets: \$35/\$25 for Morgan members and affiliates of Bard College.**

\*The exhibition *I'm Nobody! Who are you? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson* will open at 6:30 pm for concert attendees.

**FAMILY PROGRAM**

**Spring Family Fair**

Celebrate art and literature at our annual Spring Family Fair! Inspire your family's love of books with a visit to Mr. Morgan's historic library, dress-up for a 19th century photo-shoot, write your own poetry on our family poetry wall, create crafts inspired by hand-cut silhouettes, and explore our spring exhibitions *I'm Nobody! Who are you? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson* and *Treasures from the Nationalmuseum of Sweden: The Collections of Count Tessin*.

**Sunday, April 30, 2–4:30 pm**

**Tickets: Free with museum admission. Appropriate for ages 3–14.**

**Organization and Sponsorship**

The curators of the exhibition are Mike Kelly, Head of the Archives & Special Collections at Amherst College, and Carolyn Vega, Assistant Curator in the Morgan's Department of Literary & Historical Manuscripts.

*I'm Nobody! Who are you? The Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson* is made possible with generous support from the Ricciardi Family Exhibition Fund, the Lohf Fund for Poetry, the Caroline Macomber Fund, and Rudy and Sally Ruggles, and assistance from the Acriel Foundation and the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation.



The programs of the Morgan Library & Museum are made possible with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, and by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.

### **The Morgan Library & Museum**

A complex of buildings in the heart of New York City, the Morgan Library & Museum began as the private library of financier Pierpont Morgan, one of the preeminent collectors and cultural benefactors in the United States. Today it is a museum, independent research library, music venue, architectural landmark, and historic site. A century after its founding, the Morgan maintains a unique position in the cultural life of New York City and is considered one of its greatest treasures. With the 2006 reopening of its newly renovated campus, designed by renowned architect Renzo Piano, and the 2010 refurbishment of the original library, the Morgan reaffirmed its role as an important repository for the history, art, and literature of Western civilization from 4000 B.C. to the twenty-first century.

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