



## Editorial Introduction: Testing our Horizons

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### ► To cite this version:

Adeline Chevrier-Bosseau, Li-Hsin Hsu, Eliza Richards. Editorial Introduction: Testing our Horizons. Emily Dickinson Journal, 29, pp.ix - xiv, 2020, 10.1353/edj.2020.0019 . hal-03931806

**HAL Id: hal-03931806**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03931806>**

Submitted on 3 Feb 2023

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The Emily Dickinson Journal, Volume 29, Number 2, 2020, pp. ix-xiv (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/edj.2020.0019>



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ADELINE CHEVRIER-BOSSEAU, LI-HSIN HSU,  
AND ELIZA RICHARDS

*Editorial Introduction: Testing our Horizons*

These tested Our Horizon -  
Then disappeared  
As Birds before achieving  
A Latitude.

(Fr934)

Although Dickinson claimed to see “New-Englandly,” her localized perspective has not impeded the broad and varied reception of her “letter to the world.” However, because Dickinson is an American author, because the United States is historically a center for Dickinson scholarship, and because English is a dominant language globally, excellent scholarship in other languages does not gain the recognition or carry the impact and influence that it merits. As Domhnall Mitchell and others have noted, interest in Dickinson’s writing continues to grow in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and other parts of the world. Major translation projects have been undertaken recently, for example, in Brazil, China, Spain, Mexico, Japan, and Taiwan.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, global interest in Dickinson’s work has surpassed scholarly communication networks, which tend to be restricted by national and linguistic boundaries. For that reason, this special issue of the *Emily Dickinson Journal*, “International Dickinson: Scholarship in English Translation,” seeks to promote scholarly dialogue across languages and cultures. It indicates the international diversity of Dickinson studies by presenting scholarly work published in other languages now translated for the first time into English. We include abstracts as well as essay-length translations of peer-reviewed work published in China, France, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, Taiwan, and Spain. To



highlight the work of younger scholars, we feature abstracts of Ph.D. dissertations recently defended in Germany, Spain, India, and Mexico. (With the exception of Rocío Saucedo Dimas' work, these dissertations were written in English.) The first-ever digital Annual Meeting of the Emily Dickinson International Society in August 2020 was exceptionally diverse in terms of international participation; it is our hope that this special issue will continue to broaden the available range of scholarly perspectives on Dickinson in English and to promote opportunities for discussion and collaboration across national and linguistic boundaries by making the work of scholars publishing in other languages available to a wider readership through translation into English.

Several of our contributors reflect on the linguistic, cultural, and even ontological challenges that translation poses, as well as the way the act of translation changes how we approach Dickinson's writings. For María-Milagros Rivera Garretas, who translated Dickinson's poems into Spanish, translating female writing is an experience of embodiment that amounts to "becoming intimate" with the text, in a continuum of experience which allows the female translator a particular closeness with Dickinson's writing. Mexican scholar Juan Carlos Calvillo challenges the frequently "alleged untranslatability" of poetry and proposes a method to evaluate the many translations of Dickinson's works into Spanish; he aims to provide "stable criteria" that will afford a means of determining the ways in which translations fall short. Paul S. Derrick, summarizing his work with Nicolás Estevez and Francisca González Arias, offers insight into the themes and techniques that emerge in their annotated translation of fascicles nine and ten and assesses the role of these fascicles within Dickinson's poetic corpus. Min-Hua Wu translates a classic 1961 essay by Yu Kwang-chung, whose highly influential translation of Emily Dickinson's poems into Chinese aims at optimal fidelity with the source text. Yu's introduction to his translation, "A Bee Gatecrashing Eternity," contextualizes Dickinson's poetry within a Euro-American literary tradition and introduces her work to readers in Taiwan and Hong Kong; his work, however, was not available in China in the 1960s and 70s, largely for political reasons. Cuihua Xu translates twenty-two early letters from Dickinson to Abiah Root into Chinese and explores their role in the development of Dickinson's unique poetic voice through a study of the way themes like death, religion, and life choices discussed in these letters later blossom in her poetry.

Other contributions provide insights into the formal and rhetorical aspects of Dickinson's poetic writing: Enikő Bollobás' book about Dickinson's poetry testifies to the popularity of the Amherst writer in Hungary and focuses on



Dickinson's daring experiments with poetic form. Bollobás reads Dickinson's subversions and innovations as modes of catachresis, whether as a trope or as a gesture typical of the modern(ist) mind. In her Ph.D. dissertation defended in 2017 at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Rocío Saucedo Dimas concentrates on the origins of free verse and devotes an important part of her study to Dickinson's experimentation with form, particularly her treatment of the ballad and hymn stanza and the interaction between syntax and meter. She delineates how Dickinson's resistance to poetic convention relates to her resistance to three major patriarchal institutions: marriage, religion, and the literary marketplace. Adeline Chevrier-Bosseau's recent book studies the influence of Shakespearean theatricality on the poet's writing and literary imagination, offering a new perspective on Dickinson's conception of the lyric. Chevrier-Bosseau argues that Dickinson's conception of the lyric self and of the physical space of the poem is essentially dramatic; her dramatization of voice, meaning, address, trope, and the poems themselves should be considered in the light of a Shakespeare-inspired conception of theatricality that relies on the power of language more than on stage devices such as props, costumes, or sets. Baihua Wang's article, "'Will You Ignore My Sex?': Emily Dickinson's 1862 Letters to T. W. Higginson Revisited," examines the self-dramatization at work in Dickinson's letters to her literary "Preceptor." She argues that Dickinson systematically enacts an implicit plea throughout her correspondence with Higginson to consider her as a writer without a gender—a poet rather than a female poet—thus revealing profound anxieties about gender identity in relation to the act of abstract artistic thinking.

Several contributions to this issue explore Dickinson's rich engagements with philosophy and theology. Jasmin Herrmann's 2016 Ph.D. dissertation, defended at the University of Cologne, Germany, offers a reading of Dickinson's work from a Deleuzian perspective, confronting the critical inclination to associate Dickinson's poetry with transcendentalism by setting it in the light of philosophical immanence. Ser Habil's Ph.D. dissertation, defended in 2019 at the University of Valencia, Spain, shows how love and loss appear in fascicles eleven, twelve, and thirteen and explains what sets these three fascicles apart in Dickinson's corpus. Gianna Fusco, who teaches at the University of L'Aquila, Italy, concentrates on the persistent figure of the Eucharist in Dickinson's poetry, demonstrating its inextricable connection to the ways nature marks the passing of time. Joby Thomas Chirayath's Ph.D. dissertation, defended in 2016 at Barkatullah University, Bhopal, M.P., India, examines how Dickinson's Christian themes resonate with a Christian Indian readership.



In a moment of global anxiety like ours, marked by environmental crises, a pandemic, political disfunction, and other overwhelming challenges, the publication of this special issue holds a wider social and cultural significance. The necessity of social distancing on a global scale, for example, has transformed the literary landscape in a number of unexpected ways. The recent remote Dickinson conference, the latest *Bulletin*, and the 2020 online Dickinson poetry reading marathon testify to the persistence and resilience of Dickinson's words, which have brought together people from various countries at a time of imposed isolation and international political stress. Dickinson's poem, "A Word dropped careless on a Page" (Fr1268), written around 1872, captures the spirit of this desire for more international scholarly collaboration via Dickinson's writings. This poem about the power of words draws an analogy between literature and malaria to articulate the contagious force of reading at a temporal (as well as spatial) distance:

A Word dropped careless on a Page  
May consecrate an Eye  
When folded in perpetual seam  
The Wrinkled Author lie

Infection in the sentence breeds  
We may inhale Despair  
At distances of Centuries  
From the Malaria -

In poems like this, the metaphoric existence of words becomes corporeal, with an unintended, and yet real-life, consumptive consequence: "We may inhale Despair." While a word may "drop careless on a Page" a lifeless creature, its revitalizing energy may arise at any given moment of poetic encounter, when our "Eye" is "consecrate[d]" by the words of "The Wrinkled Author."

Is Dickinson trying to warn us that "a word" (and "a sentence," with its not-so-subtle pun) can be as life-threatening as malaria? It seems that the poem resists such an interpretation by smuggling in an implicitly more positive message. It reveals to us the potentially therapeutic effect of reading—the fact of reading as one of the most intimate interactions between two individuals—through their exchange of breaths and their mutual understanding of shared suffering. It makes this readerly malaria one's ultimate consolation, through the closeness (as well as immortality) that words embody. A word can outlive its writer; or in the language of pathology, its carrier. Did Dickinson anticipate how her works, also like malaria,



would transcend not only the barrier of life and death but also the restrictions of time and space? While pandemics caused by malaria and Covid-19 have resulted in thousands and thousands of deaths, the contagious sociability of Dickinson's works provides a potential route out of the claustrophobic situation that many of us are facing during this period of intense political disquiet and social lockdown. For Dickinson scholars, studying, translating, and thinking together with Dickinson "At distances of Centuries" and continents, turn this "breed[ing]" and thriving "Malaria" into a communal experience of global interconnectedness.

The collected essays and abstracts in this special issue provide an example of how the transmissible and transferable—if not fully "translatable"—nature of Dickinson's works might ease the physical and emotional constraints of our time. This special issue thus invites Dickinson scholars and lovers to "inhale" her joy as well as "Despair" by embracing the multiplicity and proliferation of poetic meanings in her works across societies, cultures, genders, languages, and geographies. While communicating, discussing, and negotiating with our contributors and with each other in several different time zones in the past several months has proven to be a complex and at times confusing process, the result is no less rewarding. Hopefully, the collective contribution of these sixteen authors across four separate continents will not only illuminate how internationalized Dickinson scholarship has become but also how our worldview has been globalized through our shared experience of reading Dickinson.

### Notes

1. A full bibliography of recent translations of Dickinson's work is beyond the scope of this issue, but we will offer here some especially relevant examples that provide a sense of a burgeoning field of interest. Translation of Dickinson has thrived in Japan, Taiwan, and China recently. Yuichiro Azuma, Yumiko Koizumi, Takaomi Eda, and Midori Asahina recently completed the first Japanese translation of R. W. Franklin's *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition* [完訳エミリー・ディキンソン詩集] (フランクリン版) (Kinseido, 2019). And working from Cristanne Miller's edition, *Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them*, Midori Asahina, Nobuko Shimomura, and Masako Takeda will publish *Selected Poems: Emily Dickinson among the Artists* (『エミリー ディキンソン詩集 (ミラー版) 一芸術家を魅了した50 篇』) (Takanashishobo, 2021). In Taiwan, Dorothea Tung, along with her mentor George Lytle, collaborated on *Selected Poems by Emily Dickinson in Chinese Translation* 《艾蜜莉·狄金森詩選》 (Ecus Publishing House, 2017), published in two volumes with the Chinese titles 《我是個無名小卒》 ("I'm Nobody") and 《我居住在可能裏》 ("I Dwell in Possibility") respectively. Tung also published a collection of Dickinson's letters 《狄金森詩全集》 "This is my Letter to the World": *Selected Letters by Emily Dickinson in Chinese Translation* (Azoth Books, 2017). *The Complete Poems of Dickinson*, translated by Long Pu in three volumes 《狄金森詩全集》 was published in China last year (Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2020). Recent Chinese translations of Dickinson's poems and letters include Cuihua Xu's 《我重今生 狄金森致魯特書信集》 (« The World Holds A Predominant Place In My Affections »: *Emily Dickinson's Letters to Abiah Root*) (Shanghai People's Press, 2016), a project highlighted



in this issue; Li Shi's 《天空中的紫丁香 艾米莉·狄金森诗选》(*The Firmamental Lilac*) (Foreign Languages Press, 2016); Wei Wang's 《安于不定之中 狄金森诗选》(*In Insecurity to Lie: Selected Poems of Dickinson*) (Shangdong Publishing House and Art, 2018); and An Tu's selection of Dickinson's poems 《狄金森诗选》(*Selected Poems by Emily Dickinson*) (The North Literature and Art Publishing House, 2019), to name just a few. Baihua Wang, who has an essay included in this special issue, collaborated with a number of Chinese and international Dickinson scholars on a selection of Dickinson's poems 《栖居于可能性 艾米莉·狄金森诗歌读本 英汉对照》(*I Dwell in Possibility*) (ed. Baihua Wang and Martha Nell Smith, Sichuan Literature & Art Publishing House, 2017); it is going through a third reprinting at this moment.

Dickinson translation in the Spanish-speaking and Lusophone world is equally exciting. In Spain, the complete poems of Dickinson were translated recently by Enrique Goicolea (*Obra poética completa*, Ediciones Amargord, 2012), José Luis Rey (*Poesías completas*, Visor libros, 2013), and Ana Mañeru Méndez and María-Milagros Rivera Garretas, in three volumes (Sabina, 2012, 2013 and 2015). In Latin America, recently published selections of Dickinson's poems include *Carta al mundo: poemas de Emily Dickinson*, translated by Hernán Bravo Varela (Tierra Adentro, 2016) in Mexico; *Emily Dickinson: Zumbido*, translated by Rodrigo Olavarría, Enrique Winter, and Verónica Zondek (Universidad de Valparaíso, 2018) in Chile; *Purple Traffic*, translated by Rafael Ramírez (2015) in Cuba; and Argentinian poet María Negroni's rewriting of Dickinson in *Archivo Dickinson* (Vaso Roto Ediciones, 2020). Recently, Adalberto Müller in Brazil relied on Crisanne Miller's edition of *Emily Dickinson's Poems as She Preserved Them* (Harvard, 2016) for his translation of Dickinson's fascicles in the first volume of *Emily Dickinson. Poesía Completa, v. 1. Os Fascículos* (Editora Universidade de Brasília, 2020). In Mexico, Juan Carlos Calvillo, who has an essay included in this special issue, recently published a collection of Dickinson's envelope poems, scraps, and other fragments in a facsimile edition entitled *Las Ruedas de las Aves (The Wheels of Birds)* (Aquelarre Ediciones and Los Otros Libros, 2021). Calvillo is currently working on a book-length research project entitled *Emily Dickinson en nuestra lengua. Retratos de traductores (Emily Dickinson in Our Tongue. Portraits of Translators)*, a historical survey of all the poets and translators who have rendered Dickinson into Spanish.