

one of the finest dancers the world has ever seen, a figure who is inseparable from such masterpieces as Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and Debussy's *Afternoon of a Faun*—ballets that Diaghilev organized. However, on an ocean voyage to South America, Nijinsky deserted him for a Hungarian ballerina. Diaghilev replaced him with the sixteen-year-old Léonide Massine, who, though heterosexual, was willing to go along with the relationship to learn what Diaghilev could teach him.

In the meantime Diaghilev's first efforts at establishing the ballet were difficult, though he did present the world with the genius of Igor Stravinsky through *The Firebird*. In 1911 he formed his own company, which from its base in Paris reached other Western European cities. World War I caused problems, but Diaghilev was nonetheless able to keep things going from Rome. Throughout his career as an impresario Diaghilev had the ability—through his matchless self-confidence—to rescue triumphs from seemingly impossible situations.

The last decade of his life was the time of achievement that has made his name virtually synonymous with ballet. He had not only a sure instinct for dancers, but also for conductors, composers and artists. He was able to utilize avant-garde artists such as Pablo Picasso, André Derain, and Georges Rouault in such a way as to make them accessible to a middlebrow public. In this way he made a decisive contribution to the emergence of modernist painting from its earlier constricted environment. During his last years Diaghilev had non-exclusive affairs with three young men: the English dancer Patrick Healy Kay (who became known by the name that the impresario gave him, Anton Dolin); the Russian dancer Serge Lifar; and the Russian conductor Igor Markevitch. In August 1929, after completing twenty years of ceaseless creativity in Western Europe, Diaghilev died suddenly in Venice, his favorite city, where he was buried.

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Ward Houser

## DICKINSON, EMILY (1830-1886)

American poet. After brief periods at Amherst Academy and Holyoke Female Seminary, she settled into an outwardly uneventful life keeping house for her family. Dickinson never married. The real events in her life are her writings, which have assumed classic status in American literature.

Emily Dickinson's letters to several of her female acquaintances convince us that throughout her life she had strong emotional attachments, which may be described as love relationships, with other women. A comparison of such love letters with letters which she wrote at about the same time to women who were merely good friends indicates that her impassioned language was not simply sentimental rhetoric of the period, and that these involvements, while probably non-genital, were clearly homoerotic. Those letters help to explain the forty or fifty poems in the Dickinson canon which cannot be understood unless recognized as love poems from one woman to another.

Certainly Dickinson had heterosexual interests as well—the Master letters, those to Judge Otis Lord, and many of her poems are irrefutable proof. But it is impossible to doubt the intensity of her involvement with women when one reads letters such as those to Emily Fowler:

I cannot wait to be with you . . . I was lonely without you, and wanted to write you a letter MANY times, but Kate [Hitchcock] was there too, and I was afraid you would both laugh. I should be stronger if I could see you oftener—I am very puny alone.

You make me so happy, and glad,  
 life seems worth living for, no  
 matter for all the trials.—early 1850  
 But another spring, dear friend, you  
 must and shall be here, and nobody  
 can take you away, for I will hide  
 you and keep you—and who would  
 think of taking you if I hold you  
 tight in my arms?—spring 1854

and to Kate Anthon:

Distinctly sweet your face stands in  
 its phantom niche—I touch your  
 hand—my cheek, your cheek—I  
 stroke your vanished hair. Why did  
 you enter, sister, since you must  
 depart? Had not its heart been torn  
 enough but YOU must send your  
 shred?—summer 1860

and especially those to the woman who  
 became her sister-in-law, Sue Gilbert, with  
 whom, if her letters and notes are any  
 proof, she ostensibly had the most intense  
 and enduring emotional relationship of  
 her life:

Oh my darling one, how long you  
 wander from me, how weary I grow  
 of waiting and looking, and calling  
 for you; sometimes I shut my eyes,  
 and shut my heart towards you, and  
 try hard to forget you because you  
 grieve me so, but you'll never go  
 away.—February 1852

To miss you, Sue, is power. The  
 stimulus of Loss makes most  
 possession so mean. To live lasts  
 always, but to love is firmer than to  
 live.—September 1871

The sentiments, and sometimes  
 even the imagery, of such letters are occa-  
 sionally adopted in Dickson's poems and  
 may help in the explication of those poems.  
 For example, the poem: "The Day she  
 goes/ Or Day she stays/ Are equally su-  
 preme—/ Existence has a stated width/  
 Departed, or at Home." (Poem 1308,  
 Johnson edition) is more easily understood

in the context of a brief note to Sue: "To  
 the faithful Absence is condensed pres-  
 ence" (about 1878). The poem "Wild  
 Nights—Wild Nights!" (poem 249), which  
 caused many critics to observe a puzzling  
 "reversal of the lover role," becomes clearer  
 in the light of an early letter to Sue (about  
 February 1852):

The wind blows and it rains. . . . I  
 hardly know which falls fastest, the  
 rain without, or within—Oh Susie, I  
 would nestle close to your warm  
 heart, and never hear the wind blow,  
 or the storm beat, again. Is there any  
 room there for me, or shall I wander  
 all homeless and alone?

While the language of the letter  
 lacks the poetic energy and sophisticated  
 imagery of the poem which was written  
 nine years later, both seem to suggest the  
 same thing: "If I were moored in you, I  
 would not be lost or lonely or afraid of the  
 storm." When understood as a love lyric in  
 which the principals, both being women,  
 have no pre-defined roles or set sexual  
 functions, the poem no longer contains  
 the puzzling role-reversal that has so often  
 been observed.

Several biographers, most nota-  
 bly Rebecca Patterson, John Cody, and  
 Richard Sewall, have dealt with Emily  
 Dickinson's homosexuality. Patterson, in  
 fact, suggests as a major thesis in her book,  
*The Riddle of Emily Dickinson*, that Dick-  
 inson had a love affair with Kate Scott  
 Anthon which, at its conclusion in the  
 1860s, crushed Dickinson and accounted  
 for her "peculiarities" during the remain-  
 ing twenty-odd years of her life.

Cody adopts a Freudian approach  
 and argues that while Dickinson's Puritan  
 heritage would not have permitted her to  
 indulge in homosexual love-making, she  
 had no wish to fulfill a female role since  
 she despised her weak mother and feared  
 her tyrannical father; thus well into adult-  
 hood she experienced "pre-pubescent"  
 crushes on other women, particularly Sue

Gilbert, who served as a mother-surrogate to Emily.

Sewall, while seeming at first to reject Cody's suggestion that Emily was in love with Sue and hurt and upset when she lost her to Austin, later refers to Emily's letters to Sue as "nothing less than love letters."

All of these writers cite ostensibly lesbian poems to support their biographical narrative. Dickinson's homoerotic poetry seems to span the entire length of her literary career, from one of her first poems, written in 1854 ("I have a Bird in spring") to one of her very late poems, written in 1883 ("To see her is a picture" in the third variant). While the subject of these poems is sometimes identifiable (it is frequently Sue), most often she is not. This is not surprising since, as several scholars have observed, we probably have only about one tenth of the letters Dickinson wrote and less than a thousandth of those written to her. But, while we may have no idea who the persons were who evoked some of Dickinson's most moving love lyrics, of one thing we may be certain: many of them were women.

The speaker in Dickinson's homoerotic poems is usually the lover and pursuer in the relationship. Such a relationship is often represented by the symbol of a nest in which the speaker finds (or at least expects to find) comfort and "home" with the other. But she recognizes that she cannot expect permanence in her love, not because it is an inherently flawed kind of love, but generally because the beloved other woman will eventually marry, as it was assumed most women would in the nineteenth century, being without an independent source of income or a profession that would make them self-sufficient. The speaker accepts the reality of this situation, but not without difficulty. What is much more difficult for her to accept, of course, is a beloved woman's cruelty which has no basis in custom or pragmatism. In such a situation the speaker usually cries out bitterly against the other woman, but

she is willing to return to her and apparently to be hurt again. She is frequently self-pitying. Only occasionally does she perceive herself victorious in love, and then it is a poor victory, having conquered the other woman by arousing her pity. These homoerotic poems are never joyous, but that is to be expected in a society where heterosexual marriage was virtually believed inevitable and there was little possibility of two unrelated women establishing a life together if they were not wealthy through independent inheritance.

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## DICTIONARIES AND ENCYCLOPEDIAS

Because of the knowledge explosion of recent decades, there has been an increasing demand for works of reference, both generalized and specialized, which will serve not only the interested lay public but also those engaged in primary research who would otherwise be unable to keep up with advances in neighboring fields.

The history of the great reference book enterprises goes back to the eighteenth-century **Enlightenment**. Stimulated by several lesser British exemplars, the great French *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* began to appear in 1751. Edited by Denis Diderot and Jean d'Alembert, this work strove not only to provide a storehouse of factual information, but also to bring to readers the latest conceptual advances. It comes as something of a shock to find that the major article on "Sodomie" largely concerns masturbation,