

Visiting Emily

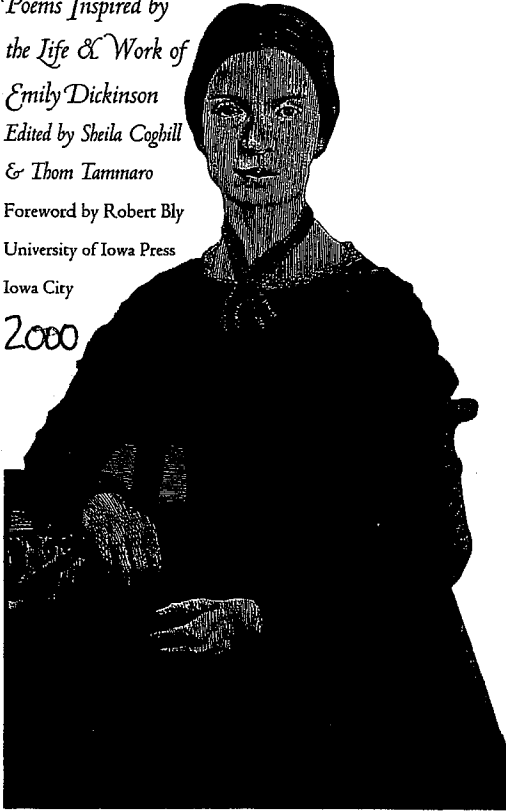
Poems Inspired by
the Life & Work of
Emily Dickinson
Edited by Sheila Coghill
& Thom Tamnaro

Foreword by Robert Bly

University of Iowa Press

Iowa City

2000



Amberst

AMY CLAMPITT

May 15, 1987

The oriole, a charred and singing coal,
still burns aloud among the monuments,
its bugle call to singularity the same
unheard (she wrote) as to the crowd,
this graveyard gathering, the audience
she never had.

Fame has its own dynamic, its smolderings
and ignitions, its necessary distance:
Colonel Higginson, who'd braved the cannon,
admitted his relief not to live near such
breathless, hushed excess (you cannot
fold a flood,

she wrote, and put it in a drawer), such
stoppered prodigies, compressions and
devastations within the atom — *all this
world contains: his face* — the civil
wars of just one stanza. A universe
might still applaud,

the red at bases of the trees (she wrote)
like mighty footlights burn, God still
looks on, his badge a raised hyperbole —
inspector general of all that carnage,
those gulfs, those fleets and crews
of solid blood:

the battle fought between the soul and No
One There, no one at all, where cities
ooze away: unbroken prairies of air
without a settlement. On Main Street
the hemlock hedge grows up untrimmed,
the light that poured

in once like judgment (whether it was noon
at night, or only heaven at noon, she wrote,
she could not tell) cut off, the wistful,
the merely curious, in her hanging dress discern
an ikon; her ambiguities are made a shrine,
then violated;

we've drunk champagne above her grave, declaimed
the lines of one who dared not live aloud.
I thought of writing her (Dear Emily, though,
seems too intrusive, Dear Miss Dickinson too prim)
to ask, not without irony, what, wherever she
is now, is made

of all the racket, whether she's of two minds
still; and tell her how on one cleared hillside,
an ample peace that looks toward Norwottuck's
unaltered purple has been shaken since
by bloodshed on Iwo Jima, in Leyte Gulf
and Belleau Wood.