

Visiting Emily

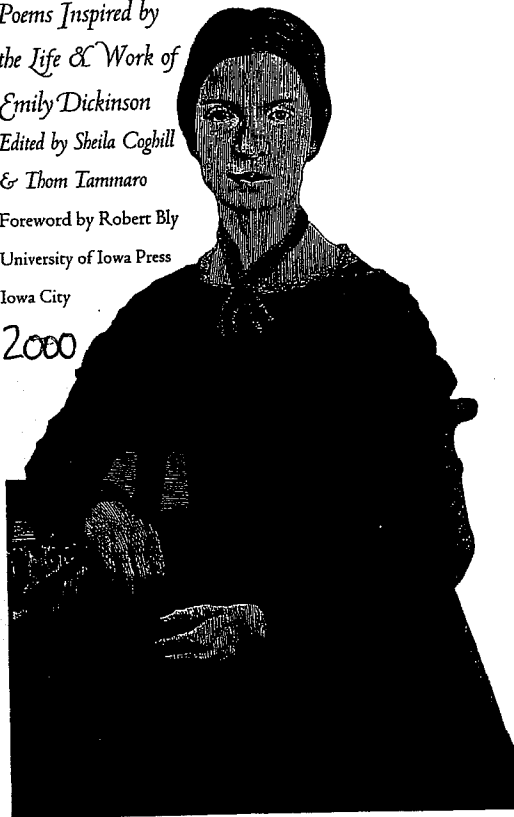
Poems Inspired by
the Life & Work of
Emily Dickinson
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Emily Dickinson's Writing Table in Her Bedroom at the Homestead, Amherst, Mass.

SHARON OLDS

The chair next to her writing table
is the chair my parents tied me to
that day. Not the same chair,
but a cousin of it,
a Hitchcock from Connecticut,
factory beside sluice gates
through which shad leap, rubefacted
with roe. My cervical vertebra
feels the peneblum. My swayback sways
away from the lower bar, and I can almost
still feel, with my buttocks, the maze
of glazed string in the seat. My wrists
do not remember being tied
to the struts rising from the seat, it makes me
uneasy to try to remember that.
But I remember the alphabet soup she fed me,
the pleasure of being spoon-fed, I wanted
to read each dense message as if it were
falling, intelligible manna. When I was
alone in the room I would drift . . . I had never
been without pencil or paper — no scissors,
no Scotch tape. I would sing, sometimes,
loaf-shaped quatrains from the hymnal, but when someone
approached I'd be silent. When my father came in,
I wonder what it was like for him
to come into a room with his child tied to a chair in it,
I think he liked it, I think it felt
right to him, he had great faith in me.
I would be a chair that grew up
and spoke well and went to his college.
I was the maple they tapped, troughed,
I was their Druid, they trusted me, they
knew if there was to be sweetness ever come
out of that house, it would have to come from me.