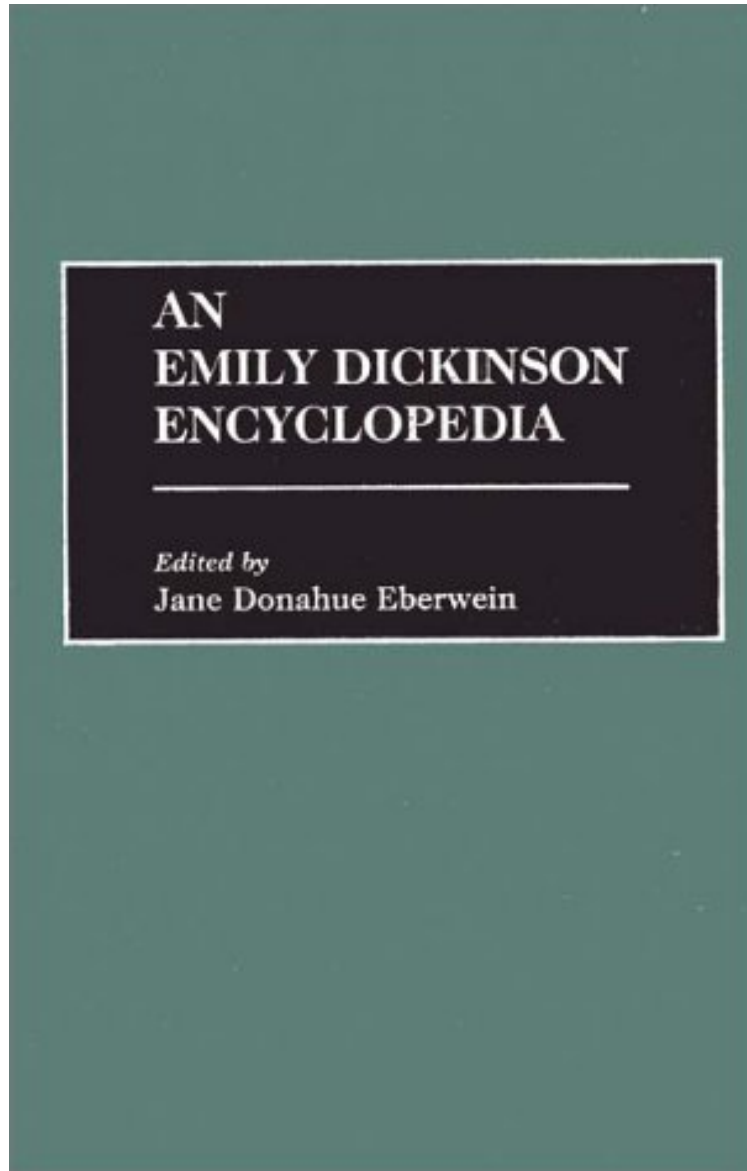


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An Emily Dickinson Encyclopedia

Jane D. Eberwein

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Jane D. Eberwein : An Emily Dickinson Encyclopedia before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised An Emily Dickinson Encyclopedia:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Emily Dickenson perfection in thoughtBy Elizabeth T. Savinobook met my expectations. As a Dickensonophile any thoughts or ideas written by a person who shares my love of this poet are anticipated , reviewed and filed in my memory for comparison to my own reactions to Ms.Dickenson's

incomparable thought processes. 15 of 18 people found the following review helpful. Skimpy, squeaky-clean orthodox, and a big disappointment. By tepi Considering its high price and the fact that it calls itself an 'Encyclopedia,' and considering the incredible importance of Emily Dickinson's writings and the vast amount of research and criticism they have given rise to, one would have expected this book to have been a rather hefty and substantial volume. One would have expected, for example, many interesting photographs, illustrations, useful tables, maps, genealogies, discussions of many of her important poems, detailed and classified bibliographies of early editions, modern editions, biographies, criticism, etc. And one would have expected much more. After all, this book is supposed to be an 'Encyclopedia.' Unfortunately we get very little of the above. What we get is a standard 8vo-size volume (6.5 by 9.5 inches) of just 395 pages of bare and unadorned text. After a brief Preface, a Chronology, and a list of Abbreviations, 312 pages of articles follow. The articles vary from paragraph to essay-length, and the book is rounded out with two Appendices, an 18-page Bibliography (of which 16 pages are devoted to Critical Books, Articles, and Dissertations), an Index of Poems Cited, and a General Index. Interestingly, in a book already top-heavy with biographical entries, and that might have included so much else - I personally expected to find many more discussions of individual poems, for example - it concludes with 9 pages 'About the Contributors' - their affiliations, major publications, and interests. The articles are arranged alphabetically. Here is the entire crop for 'A': "A narrow Fellow in the Grass" (P986); "After great pain a formal feeling comes -" (P341); Aldrich, Thomas Bailey; Ambiguity; American Dictionary of the English Language; Amherst; Amherst Academy; Amherst College; Anthon, Catherine (Scott) Turner (1831-1917); Aphorism; "Apparently with no surprise" (P1624); Asian Responses to Dickinson; The Atlantic Monthly, A Magazine of Literature, Science, Art, and Politics; Austin. So much for the letter 'A.' To properly evaluate the scope of this book and the quality of its articles (some of which read quite well), one would of course have to be a Dickinson scholar, which I'm not. I do note, however, the absence under 'A' of an entry on 'Animals,' which in view of the many animals we find in Dickinson's poems seems very strange. I also note, on turning to the entry for 'Carlo,' Emily Dickinson's pet dog, the following statement: "He is the only animal in her entire corpus given human emotion and intelligence" (p.41). This statement is utterly and completely false, and could easily be shown to be so, by, for example, an analysis of a poem such as "The waters chased him as he fled" (P1749). I've also run into other highly dubious statements in this book, particularly ones that seem determined at all costs to claim Dickinson for the Christian camp, whereas it seems perfectly evident to me that her mind was far too subtle to be contained by Christianity, or indeed by any official religion. This book is very much a product of the official world of Dickinson scholarship. Its orientation is squeaky-clean orthodox, and it has either rejected or distorted much that isn't to its taste. It will prove a handy (though misleading) reference work for students, and the few ED cultists who stumble upon it will no doubt approve of it. The book is bound in full cloth, stitched, and beautifully printed on excellent strong paper, but to me its contents came as a terrible disappointment. Gudrun Grabher's 'The Emily Dickinson Handbook' (1998) turned out to be a far better book, a superb collection of articles from which I feel that I'm actually learning something about Emily Dickinson. Some of its contributors are also found in the 'Encyclopedia,' but perhaps they weren't operating under quite the same constraints.

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) was a mystery in her own lifetime, and her poems continue to challenge their readers. For many, she remains a mythic recluse always dressed in white. Although factual knowledge has corrected that image, it was firmly established in Amherst long before the poet's death. Her works were largely neglected during her lifetime as most of her poems were published posthumously. Since *Poems by Emily Dickinson* appeared in 1890, readers have been raising questions about the poet, her world, and the works that have established her as a famous literary figure. An innovative writer who blurred the distinctions between poetry and prose, Dickinson is attracting a growing amount of scholarly attention. Critics have found her works elusive to interpret, and therefore, focus much research on her artistry and the practices of her editors. Now that Emily Dickinson's poetry has taken its place at the heart of the American literary canon, readers continue to examine the poet herself, the environment that sustained and challenged her, her artistic choices, and the implications of her poems. This encyclopedia features several hundred entries on persons, places, and institutions connected with Dickinson; cultural influences affecting her; stylistic aspects of her poetry; editorial and publication history; reception of her poems; critical approaches to her art; and modern responses to her in other art forms as well as thoughtful commentaries on a representative selection of poems. Recommendations for further reading follow each entry, and the book includes a general bibliography of cited Dickinson scholarship. The volume also features a chronology, appendices, and a guide to centers for archival research.