

Being with Poets: Emily Dickinson

Location: 131 Florence Road, Florence, MA 01062 (near Northampton)

April 22-23, 2017, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. each day

\$350 (lunch included)

Limited to six participants: first come, first served

To register contact: Baron Wormser at baronwormser@gmail.com

There are few poets who leap as much from line to line as Emily Dickinson. To explore Dickinson's poetry properly, it helps to participate in that leaping sense as much as possible. Accordingly, when I discuss a Dickinson poem, I do it line by line, that is to say I dictate the first line of the poem and we stop there and talk about what's occurring in that line. Then I dictate the second line and we talk about what's occurring in that line and how it relates to the first line. We don't read the whole poem beforehand. We move through the poem very gradually—line by line—and build up a sense of what Dickinson is doing. We talk about word choices, pronouns, rhymes, rhythm, but we do it experientially as we accrue one line after another.

Dickinson's energy is American in the sense that Jackson Pollack and John Coltrane, to name two artists, are American. Her poems have an improvisational quality, a feeling for the moment, and a very special fearlessness. She is making poetry her own in the way that Pollock made painting his own or Coltrane made jazz his own. She has to do that in order to come to her own conclusions, however provisional those conclusions may be. The sheer wealth of poems shows an incredible formal imagination: someone who could work within modest confines—the quatrain—but keep finding new paths of expressiveness.

In the course of two days we may do no more than a half-dozen of her poems. What we will be doing, however, is a thorough reading in a way that shows how much is there. To do that is, in my experience, breathtaking.

Here is what one recent Dickinson workshop participant had to say: "The experience of reading a poem in Baron Wormser's Emily Dickinson workshop is an encounter. Something like receiving a letter from the poet herself – to be opened with exquisite care, every line cherished, each word unfolding in our minds and penetrating our spirits. I came away feeling this is the only way to appreciate the dazzling ferocity of Dickinson's vision. It will change the way you read poetry."

Baron Wormser is the author/co-author of fourteen books, including two books about teaching poetry. He teaches in the Fairfield University MFA Program and was the founding director of the Frost Place Seminar and the Frost Place Conference on Poetry and Teaching. He has taught dozens of workshops in many different venues throughout the United States. His novel *Tom o' Vietnam* about a Vietnam veteran obsessed with *King Lear* will be published in the fall of 2017.