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Emily Dickinson Writes Again

Six volumes—600 poems in all—posthumously dictated by the great American poet have been published—to critical acclaim.

By Paola Giovetti

WHEN THE voice of a deceased poet speaks, Emma Conti writes exactly what she hears. The poems she has recorded this way are so beautiful that they have won almost 50 literary awards—an amazing feat for an unassuming woman who claims that the poetry really comes from the spirit of

Emily Dickinson, the great American poet.

Emma Conti says, "I simply write down the verses that she dictates to me from the hereafter."

I first met this extraordinary woman in Savona, Italy, in March 1982. She is a charming 40-year-old who struck me as sensitive and shy, yet aggressive at the same time. Emma spends most of each



Emma Conti, divorced and the mother of an 18-year-old son, runs a souvenir shop in Arenzano, a town near Savona, Italy. The psychic aspects of her personality include mediumship and clairvoyance but her greatest gift is automatic writing.

day in the souvenir shop she owns in nearby Arenzano where she must necessarily talk with other people. But she prefers to live her personal life in solitude. She has few friends and has not seen her husband in many years. Her son Ivano, a handsome 18-year-old student, lives with an aunt in Savona.

Despite this self-imposed solitude, the psychic aspects of her personality make Emma's life unusual: She is a medium, a clairvoyant and an astral traveler. She sees into the future and the past and can describe your deceased relatives to you.

Emma's greatest gift, however, is automatic writing. Although she did not attend high school, she has written both romantic and realistic novels—but the poems predominate. These poems, which she is prone to dash off between customers, have won 46 literary awards. When the spirit dictation comes, Emma uses any scrap of paper she can find on which to take down the words. She has little interest in the poems once they are written and never reads them over.

Were it not for her sister Mirella Conti, Emma's poetry probably never would have come to public attention. Mirella, who lives in Savona, has been collecting the poems for years. She organizes them, types them and submits them to literary contests.

I met Emma through Mirella and also met Emma's son Ivano, a six-foot-tall teenager who writes songs with lyrics that he too receives through automatic writing. During this meeting I learned about Emma's background as well as her current activities. We met for lunch in Mirella's Savona home and I spoke at length with her before her sister arrived.

"Emma always wrote a lot," Mirella



For a time, Emma embroidered as if compelled by an outside force. She made 18 large ornamental works, of which this is one. Dickinson's poetry reflects similar interest in needlework.

told me, "and I have collected her poems. I have preserved almost everything." But it was only a few years ago, in 1975, that Mirella learned about the psychic nature of the poetry.

"She confessed to me," Mirella explained, "that while she was writing, she was listening to a voice which dictated everything word by word. But she had no idea whose voice it was. The scenery and settings she was describing in her compositions were unusual and old-fashioned: long lace dresses, petrol lamps, a mysterious house with a gravel path and roses along a white railing and so on. I didn't really care about this

oddity because my sister's life has been filled with strange phenomena, but I made up my mind to have these poems published. I picked a hundred that I judged the most interesting and took them to an editor."

The editor liked them and the poetry was about to be published when the next chapter in the strange story began. One day in 1975 Emma confronted her sister with the news that the "voice" dictating the poems had identified herself. Emma asked Mirella to find out if such a writer ever existed or whether the message was merely a fantasy. The automatic writing read: "Emily Dickinson, Amherst, New England, December 1830 - May 1886."

Mirella did not know the name but in reference books she soon discovered that Emily Dickinson had existed and that the town and vital dates were correct.

"My sister never went to high school and I've only attended a technical school, so you can easily guess how inexpert we are in the literary field," Mirella said.

Emily Dickinson didn't waste any time once she had announced her presence. Soon she was signing Emma's poems and dictating the foreword for the collection about to be published.

"At this time," Mirella continued, "I realized that all this was not a dream. I started a search in all the local bookstores for books on the poet—but I didn't find much. I did find a record on which some of Dickinson's poems were read and I bought it. The record jacket carried a photograph of Emily Dickinson which, I later learned, is the only one in existence. And so, in a way, we met. My sister's 'voice' finally showed her face to us."

Playing the record, Mirella was intrigued by the similarities between Dickinson's poetry and her sister's. One of Dickinson's poems begins, "I have never felt myself at home" Emma started a poem with the very same words. There were other correspondences in the poems as well as similarities in their overall mood.

The record was the last development until 1979 when Mirella found a fine biography of the American poet, Margherita Guidacci's *Life and Poems of Emily Dickinson*. The book contained photos of the poet's house—the house Emma had been describing in verses for years. It also turned out that many of Emily Dickinson's idiosyncrasies were shared by Emma Conti.

Emily Dickinson was born in Amherst, a picturesque little town in Massachusetts, where she was raised in strictly Puritan tradition. Apart from the time she spent in college, she always lived in the town of her birth. Her personality was complex and strange. She separated herself from the world and remained in contact with her friends only by cards or letters. She visited few people, dressed only in white and always gave flowers to the handful of individuals who called on her.

It has long been thought that her voluntary isolation followed upon two unrequited love affairs, one as an adolescent which her father wouldn't tolerate and the second, an unexpressed longing for her (married) minister. Her naturally introverted personality and religious conflict resulted in her social isolation.

Poetry was Emily's only vehicle of expression. She wrote more than 1500 works and tended to write on anything

at hand—loose sheets of paper, backs of envelopes; she even wrote notes on cookbooks. She herself never published any of the poetry. Emma Conti seems to be undergoing this same retreat from life as well as writing in the same haphazard way.

Mirella told me about several other correspondences between Emily Dickinson's life and her sister's.

"I gradually started to observe a series of extraordinary links between her life and my sister's. The poetess often spoke of the secrets of the soul, human loneliness, death, time and love. These themes are all in my sister's writings. Emma and Emily show religious feeling and a common love for solitude. Emily was afraid of the external world and was unable to live among others. She was insecure. So is Emma—even if she appears aggressive at times. Included in Emma's poems are detailed descriptions of Emily's home and other evidential material. For instance, in one of her published letters Emily described her Christmas gifts—a scented bag, a pottery glass inscribed with the words 'Forget me not' and an embroidered bookmark. Going back over my sister's poems, I found references and descriptions of all these gifts. You have to read Emily's and Emma's poems and know both lives to realize how similar they are, even in personal traits and attitudes."

Mirella pointed out that the only photograph of Emily Dickinson was taken when she was 17; she hated having her picture taken. Emma does too. Dickinson family members were fond of red hair; Emma Conti has been dying hers red for years. Emily loathed domestic work and Emma hates it so

much that she lives like a gypsy. It is also notable that Emily's sister took charge of collecting her poems, which were found in her bureau drawers after her death.

Even the handwritings of Emily and Emma are similar; Mirella finds this particularly interesting.

"When my sister takes down the dictation," Mirella told me, "her usual calligraphy—which is large and rounded—turns thin and sharp like Dickinson's. We found analogies even in the use of punctuation marks. Emily preferred dashes to commas and so does my sister. During her lifetime Emily published only one poem and it was dedicated to St. Valentine's Day. The first prize my sister won was for a poem in honor of St. Valentine."

Nonetheless, Emma's poems do not seem to be direct imitations of Emily Dickinson's. "It is not a question of style but one of atmosphere," Mirella explained. "But there is a certain similarity in the verse. It's like looking at two brothers who are different in most respects but sometimes reveal their kinship in the way they move or smile."

* * *

AT THIS point in our conversation the doorbell rang and Emma joined us. She entered the room and looked at me suspiciously at first—but it didn't take her long to relax. She explained that she had closed her shop early just to visit with us. She became very friendly and seemed to be taking genuine pleasure in telling us about her psychic life which began when she was a little girl.

Emma's mediumship blossomed after she suffered a head injury as a child. One morning soon thereafter she dis-

exploited after her death. "Do you know that her relatives quarreled over the rights to her poems?" Emma asked. "Emily tells me that everything she owned has been sold. Now she wants revenge. She wants me to have what she didn't. It isn't important that she became famous after her death. She says that when I get not money but recogni-

tion of the works she dictates to me, she will be at peace."

This seems logical enough. To date six volumes of Emily Dickinson's posthumously dictated poetry have been published, some 600 poems in all. Is it coincidental that Emma's (or Emily's) most dramatic poem *The Revenge* won a literary prize?



ENGLAND'S YEAR OF THE CAT

By Jenny Randles

IT WAS about four feet long and between three and four feet high. It had a thick bushy tail which was dark brown to black in color. It also had dark hindquarters and ears but a patchy tan and brown coat on its back, shoulders, belly and legs." So said Phillip Viccars of Stokenchurch, Buckinghamshire, England, who on the morning of April 16, 1983, became one of the few close observers of the British "wildcat."

Viccars, his wife Eileen and a young neighbor Margaret Brookes watched the animal from a distance of about 100 feet for more than 15 minutes. They had an excellent view as the creature rummaged around near a school and at one point sat on a wooden fence.

"It was much too large for a domestic cat," Brookes told Richard Adams, a local investigator of these "alien" animals.

Adams uncovered five other well-supported observations of the beast during the next few weeks and wildlife experts decided from observers' sketches that it was most likely a puma. But according to official zoological doctrine, Britain has no wild pumas, indeed no large cats of any description.

Nevertheless, exactly one month later, on May 16, 1983, 25 miles away in neighboring Hertfordshire, a similar tan-colored animal was seen. David Messling of Cuffley watched it leap over a hedge from his garden and head into

a copse. He was sure of what he had seen. "It was a full-grown lioness," he told Michael Lewis, an investigator for the Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena (ASSAP).

The local police were called to Cuffley and after one officer himself saw the beast, a full-scale lion hunt got under way, involving a helicopter, 20 patrol cars and any number of tranquilizer darts. The animal vanished as mysteriously as it had arrived and the police issued a statement that it had probably been a large dog—although they admitted having no evidence to this effect.

Then, in the adjacent county of Essex, pumas and panthers appeared between August and November 1983. These sightings were investigated for ASSAP by Andy Collins who discovered no physical evidence of the beast. He cited the phantomlike elusiveness of all such animals.

After ASSAP conducted extensive research, Collins took psychic Carole Young to the locations of some of the cat sightings. "She picked up the word 'gateway,'" he reported, "implying a portal between two worlds. Then she had the distinct impression that the beast was parapsychical in nature, that it could 'blink in and out.'"

While ASSAP remains alert for further reports, the magazine *TV Times* has offered a reward for the capture of the first British "wildcat."

covered she had a number of odd talents. She began to see visions and apparitions that no one else could see. Some of her visions foretold future events. At first she thought she was going crazy, an idea reinforced by the persons in whom she confided. Finally, though, she realized that some of the apparitions represented discarnate agencies. "I can see them the same way I see the living," she explained to me.

Despite the realization that she possessed unusual psychic gifts, Emma was still perplexed. After a psychiatric consultation and two clinical EEG examinations, she was relieved to learn that there was nothing wrong with her. Only after these tests did Emma decide that she was normal and simply blessed with strange new powers, powers that she now accepts nonchalantly—although not everyone else does. "The only one who accepts me totally is my sister," Emma said, smiling at Mirella.

Emma sometimes helps her few friends with her psychic gifts. "One day, for example," she said, "a salesman told me that he couldn't find his car. I replied that he shouldn't worry, because his car, which I described, was parked on a country road. He stood in front of me shocked. He had rented the car so I couldn't have known what model it was. The car was later found on a country road out of gas."

Other people come to her with less pressing problems. "Some people ask me to foresee numbers of lottery drawings, but I can't give that kind of help," she said.

It is her writing, however, that serves as the focal point of her life. She can write up to 20 pages a day nonstop. Although Emily Dickinson is her

psychic mentor, other intelligences communicate through her writings as well. These are the agencies responsible for the novels she has drafted. But it is the spirit of Emily Dickinson that seems to influence her life most directly.

"During the time Emily's identity was still unknown to me," Emma explained, "I did ornamental needlework. I embroidered constantly day and night. Later I discovered that Emily did this too and a lot of her verses talk about needles, thread and embroidery. I couldn't leave home without a bag filled with colored thread. I had never before embroidered but suddenly I couldn't help sewing—even without a design. I have made 18 large ornamental works and I have been asked to sell them. But I can't make them anymore so I don't want to sell them. One day, in fact, I suddenly stopped embroidering and from then on I've never used a needle.

"Now I am used to having Emily near me. I can feel her dresses on me, her high collars, her unlucky loves, and I can see her house and the things she collected."

Emma feels that Emily Dickinson chose to manifest through her because they are so similar emotionally and psychologically. She even feels possessed at times by the ghost of the celebrated poet.

"I can't help driving her away sometimes," Emma said. "I can't live as she did in the 19th Century. Emily doesn't understand today's life but we live together anyway and I like it. I have difficulties only with her temperament because she's a real old-style lady."

Emma also feels that there is meaning behind the poet's return. Emily Dickinson was mistreated during her life and

objects (eight at one time) by reliable technical observers. Furthermore, the document clearly states that *several* films were made of the objects. It seems to me that any reasonable person would conclude that the observed phenomena, whatever they were, were real and worthy of further investigation.

Capt. Edward J. Ruppelt, the original director of Project Blue Book, apparently felt the same way. In his famous book *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects* (1956) he writes that these two reports "made me wonder how the UFOs could be sloughed off so lightly." He describes the events as follows:

On April 27, after a guided missile had been tracked from launch until it fell back to earth, the air force technicians were preparing to unload their cameras when "one of them spotted an object streaking across the sky. By April 1950 every person at White Sands was UFO-conscious, so one member of the camera crew grabbed a telephone headset, alerted the other crews and told them to get pictures. Unfortunately only one camera had film in it, the rest had already been unloaded, and before they could reload, the UFO was gone. The photos from the one station showed only a smudgy dark object."

Following this event, the camera crews got official permission to film UFOs if they should appear. A month later, on May 24, a call went out over the communication system that another UFO had been spotted and this time two camera crews managed to film "as the shiny, bright object streaked across the sky." But when the Mathematical Reduction Unit analyzed the films from the two cameras, it discovered that the cameras had filmed different objects.

Ruppelt says that when he became Blue Book director, he tried to find the film and the analyses. He talked with a major who in turn talked with the men who had analyzed the film. The major couldn't tell Ruppelt much about the objects "except that the UFOs were unknowns." Ruppelt writes, "He did say that by putting a correction factor in the data gathered by the two cameras they were able to arrive at a rough estimate of speed, altitude and size. The UFO was 'higher than 40,000 feet, traveling over 2000 miles per hour, and it was over 300 feet in diameter.' He cautioned me, however, that these figures were only estimates, based on a perhaps erroneous correction factor; therefore they weren't proof of anything—except that something was in the air." Unfortunately Ruppelt never did get the original films, nor did he get the final analyses for the Blue Book file.

The air force's seemingly blase reaction to these films is nothing less than an affront to science. It may even have intentionally covered up the matter. Let me explain.

Project Twinkle was set up in 1949 to obtain data on green fireballs and other "phenomena" observed by military personnel starting in December 1948 and continuing through 1950. These phenomena were moving through the skies around the sensitive installations in the southwest, areas such as the White Sands Proving Ground and Holloman Air Force Base. In the final report of this project the films mentioned above and other films were "evaluated" as not worthy of further analysis.

To quote from the report, written by Louis B. Elterman of the Atmospheric

Physics Laboratory of the Air Force Cambridge Research Laboratory: "Some photographic activity occurred on 27 April and 24 May, but simultaneous sightings by both cameras were not made so that no information was gained. On 30 August 1950, during a Bell aircraft missile launching, aerial phenomena were observed over Holloman Air Force Base by several individuals; however, neither Land-Air nor Project personnel were notified and, therefore, no results were acquired. On 31 August 1950, the phenomena were again observed after a V-2 launching. Although much film was expended, proper triangulation was not affected [sic], so that again no information was gained."

Dr. Elterman's claim that "no information was gained" during the April 27 and May 24 sightings because "simultaneous sightings by both cameras were not made" is ridiculous. These sightings proved the *existence* of the objects. Furthermore, an azimuth reading during the April 27 sightings was used to calculate the altitude and approximate size of the objects photographed that day. The Data Reduction Unit declared that there were four objects about 30 feet in diameter moving at an "undeterminable, yet high speed" over the

Holloman mountain range just after the rocket test. How could Dr. Elterman not be interested in data such as these?

Contrary to Elterman's claim, it is clear that Project Twinkle *did* confirm the existence of some as-yet-unexplained phenomenon (besides the green fireballs). Evidently, however, the scientists and the air force officers in charge of Project Twinkle couldn't bring themselves to admit it. The official air force conclusion on these sightings, as reported in the Blue Book file, is that there wasn't enough information for evaluation ("insufficient data").

Therefore, from the point of view of Project Grudge (which preceded Project Blue Book) these sightings should have been labeled "unidentified," not "insufficient data." The air force's refusal to admit that the films show unidentified objects suggests that it did not want anyone to know that such phenomena had indeed been filmed. To me this seems tantamount to a "cover-up" of the existence of unidentified flying objects.

Without having seen the films myself (they seem to have been "lost" or destroyed), I can only conclude that the objects should be classified as PEI.

All right, Air Force Cambridge Laboratory, where *are* those films?



THE SOFTER SIDE OF HUMAN NATURE

WOMEN ARE almost twice as likely as men to believe in astrology, UFOs, faith healing and ghosts, according to a *Psychology Today* poll reported in its September issue. Of approximately 600 persons who responded, 43 percent of the women believe their lives are influenced by the positions of planets and stars, as compared with only 24 percent of the men. The nonskeptics believe in the Bermuda Triangle, numerology, the Second Coming, out-of-body experiences, time travel, mermaids, and thought transference from humans to animals. Many also think that aliens from other planets are here on earth. Only 10 percent of the respondents were complete nonbelievers, according to the poll.—*Claire Metzger.*



Emily Dickinson.

A los 100 años de la muerte de Emily Dickinson

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considerazioni del Prof. E. Servadio per iniziare un discorso molto importante e interessante sui «romanzieri di genio ed eroi da romanzo analizzati in rapporto alle indagini psichiche». Rimandiamo invece il lettore, per mancanza di spazio, allo studio del Bozzano relativo a tale argomento (10).

In merito alle sedute medianiche, poi, mentre non sappiamo se siamo al cospetto di un «fiabesco dimostrabile», certamente ci troviamo di fronte ad un «mondo» ancora in gran parte da scoprire: una «fiaba» che merita di essere vissuta.

Stefano Beverini

NOTE E BIBLIOGRAFIA

(1) A.C. Doyle, «Avventure e ricordi», Cogliati, Milano, 1926. — (2) William Barrett: celebre fisico, fu fra i fondatori della S.P.R. — (3) Traduzione italiana: F.W.H. Myers, «La personalità umana e la sua sopravvivenza», Gattopardo, Roma 1971 — (4) Upton Sinclair, «Radio Mentale», Armenia, Milano, 1976 — (5) Op. cit., «Avventure e ricordi» — (6) A. Bruers, «Luce e Ombra», 1930, pagg. 325-326 — (7) Questo argomento verrà trattato nella prossima ultima puntata — (8) Conferenza ai membri dell'«Alleanza Spiritualista» (1931) — (9) E. Servadio, «L'avventura di Conan Doyle», in «Luce e Ombra» n. 1, 1947, pag. 42 — (10) E. Bozzano, «Indagini sulle manifestazioni supernormali», 6° serie, Dante, Città della Pieve, 1940, pagg. 43-77; «Pensiero e volontà», Ed. Luce e Ombra, Verona, 1967, pagg. 152-181.

Si rivolge l'invito ai lettori che volessero cortesemente cedere documenti storici riguardanti lo spiritismo (carteggi originali, articoli di quotidiani d'epoca, libri molto rari, fotocopie) di corrispondere con l'autore dell'articolo.

In libreria

Lo strano revival di Emily Dickinson

EMMA CONTI

**EMILY DICKINSON
 SCRIVE ANCORA**

 ISPIRAZIONE O MEDIANITÀ?
 PRESENTAZIONE DI PAOLA GIOVETTI E LUGO DETTORE
 INTRODUZIONE DI MARIO PINCHERLE

Segnalare da queste righe il libro di Emma Conti «Emily Dickinson scrive ancora» non significa solo partecipare in qualche modo alle commemorazioni, di attualità nel centenario della morte, di una grande poetessa, ma soprattutto presentare un singolarissimo caso di esistenze parallele che, a distanza di un secolo, sembrano risponderci in maniera tanto palese da far pensare ad una probabile affermazione di ipotesi trascendenti.

L'autrice, della cui eclettica sensitività ora tralasciamo, è in particolare la protagonista di una fenomenologia che riconduce la sua stessa vita, con inequivocabili riferimenti, alla vita della Dickinson. Scrive in proposito Detto: «(...) non si tratta delle solite poesie dettate per scrittura automatica o chiarouidienza; abbiamo dinanzi un fenomeno che presenta qualche affinità con altri della casistica, ma che in sé è sostanzialmente unico, almeno per quanto mi risulti: due personalità psicologicamente affini che, a distanza di circa un secolo l'una dall'altra, vivono due esistenze in gran parte parallele, trovandosi nelle stesse condizioni, affrontando esperienze simili, e di cui l'una sembra agire sull'altra cercando in essa una propria continuità».

Quando Emma Conti cominciò a scrivere «ispirata» da una voce non sapeva neppure chi fosse Emily Dickinson e solo dopo la «rivelazione», ottenuta medianicamente, ha potuto confrontare e confrontarsi: confrontare il suo stile poetico con quello della «guida», confrontarsi come donna, con le stesse sensazioni inferiori, gli stessi elementi caratteriali, la stessa percezione esistenziale. C'è, nei versi della Conti, tutta la densità dei componimenti dickinsoniani, brevi e intensi, quell'immediatezza nel cogliere l'immagine, l'uso frequente del simbolo, nonché l'evidente interesse per i temi del mistero, del rapporto fra vita e morte. Ma se un tentativo di critica letteraria può apparire insufficiente alla pretesa di collegare queste due vite, altrettanto non può essere per tutta le concrete coincidenze riscontrate, troppo rilevatrici per essere facilmente attribuibili al caso.

Sappiamo che la Dickinson ebbe notorietà solo dopo la morte, e solo perché la sorella Lavinia provvide alla raccolta e alla pubblicazione delle sue opere; così è la sorella Mirrella, che si occupa del riordino, della battitura e della diffusione delle opere di Emma, vincitrice tra l'altro di circa settanta premi letterari. Ben conosciuta è la natura schiva di Emily, di cui si possiede un'unica foto-

grafia scattatale in collegio a 17 anni, ed Emma ha sempre detestato farsi fotografare; pare, inoltre, che in casa Dickinson vi fosse una vera predilezione per i capelli rossi e non v'è da stupirsi se si dice che Emma Conti se li è sempre tinti di quel colore.

Un lungo elenco di piccole e grandi «casualità», che vanno dalle abitudini ai gusti comuni, quasi inutili a riferirsi se si pensa al fatto che, quando la propensione non viene naturalmente, ci pensa la medianità a farla venire: Emma, che non aveva mai preso un ago in mano in vita sua, improvvisamente un giorno si mette a ricamare ininterrottamente ed esegue, senza disegno, una serie di quadri nello stile ottocentesco, nè più nè meno che come faceva «l'altra».

È una sincronicità di emozioni artistiche, fatti, destini, qui peraltro appena accennati, che imporrebbero, a prima vista, l'accettazione di una interpretazione fin troppo facile ma, per l'esplicazione continua ed evidentemente genuina del fenomeno, ancor più e ancor meglio offre possibilità e materiale d'indagine per un approfondimento. E a chi volesse far osservare che al titolo del testo che trattiamo, forse, si poteva aggiungere un punto interrogativo, rispondiamo che la chiarezza dell'esposizione è tale da mettere il lettore stesso in condizioni di stabilire, secondo impostazione e convincimenti propri, se deve apporvisi o meno.

Fulvia Cariglia

«Emily Dickinson scrive ancora» di Emma Conti, Filelfo Editore, Via Fornetto 107, Ancona, Pagg. 105, L. 20.000.

necessità sopraumana (12.10.84/g. 231)
Ma l'ottimismo prevale:

* Eh già, ci potrà anzi studio - ormai so possibile che noi trova quei strumenti che le forme schiuda(no) - tutte le possibilità di cui s'aveva, eccelso ha la maggioranza delle persone, fornito dalla generale consapevolezza: con il quale (eccelso), prima o poi, ognuno dovà fare il ponte (25.1.85/g. 57)

Domanda sesta: qual è l'apporto degli sperimentatori?

Sembra che si tratti - a parte i meriti spirituali e karmici di cui si è già accennato - di una sorta di aiuto energetico, se è a loro che vien detto:

* Fate energia necessaria (27.4.85/g. 119)

ma non parrebbe un grande aiuto:

* Tu, amico, m'accompleti (si rivolgo all'avvocato Capitani): spesso avete fatto apricolo (apertura?), se non prova di potenza (12.4.85/g. 131)

Del resto, rivendicano un ruolo primario nel contatto: udite quel che dicono a Bacci, che chiede un messaggio per il congresso di Milano:

* Il fatto ha importanza: stato tutto di qua (8.5.84/g. 67)

* Vostro alloro fu pei nostri: ve l'offro, per il vostro vivere materialista l'è congedibile (8.5.84/g. 70)

Domanda settima: vi è effettivo colloquio con gli sperimentatori?

In generale i presunti comunicanti, anche se dimostrano costantemente di vedere quel che sta accadendo nel locale dove vien tenuta la seduta, di udire quel che vien detto e di leggere nel pensiero dei presenti, comunicano assai più fra di loro che con gli sperimentatori. Ma in taluni casi si producono delle immediate e pertinenti risposte. Eccone degli esempi:

— mentre Bacci tiene le dita sull'oscillatore:

* Lo fa per tentativo (28.4.85/g. 49) osserviamo

— a Capitani che dice «siamo i vecchi giovani», rispondono:

* Lo dice spesso, questo, (il) mio amico Luciano (11.4.85/g. 52)

— si chiede notizia di quattro defunti, osservano con una certa ironia:

* Qui dal fronte d'entro terra il suolo ha una lista passabile di gente (23.11.84/g. 83)

— alla domanda, come avvenga il fenomeno della morte, rispondono argutamente:

* Tu presto ti ci trova (12.10.84/g. 53)

— alla domanda, se esista la reincarnazione, sembrano voler sfuggire:

* Chiudo, se questi domandano (12.10.84/g. 63)

— a Capitani, che chiede l'eliminazione di una emittente che disturba, osservano:

* Occupazion da solo (18.9.84/g. 135)

— allo stesso Capitani, che chiede una certa notizia asserendo che «i nostri cervelli non la sanno», rispondono con acume:

* Sanno che si può dartela (18.9.84/g. 256)

— ancora a Capitani, che chiede ragguagli su un celebre fatto di cronaca criminale, spiegando «lo scopo di questo esperimento...», tagliano la parola, esclamando:

* Uno scherzetto! (18.9.84/g. 187)

— e siccome egli prosegue affermando che «la nostra non è curiosità...», osservano:

* Naturale. È un evento straordinario (18.9.84/g. 301)

Domanda ottava: quale attività viene svolta dai comunicanti in ordine alle sedute?

Sembra in primo luogo una attività di ricerca delle entità con le quali i presenti desiderano parlare, e di una loro istruzione, per così dire, preparatoria:

* Tu te l'ha scordato di imparare esperimento e respigne ancor lontano le suona (12.4.85/g. 104)

così rimproverano una entità; ma in secondo luogo sembra che provvedano a certe «manipolazioni» sulla entità chiamata:

* Ti risarà aggiunta anche (l')ugola (12.4.85/g. 106)

promettono ad un chiamato, e ci richiamano alla mente gli organi ectoplasmatici di fonazione nelle sedute a voce diretta.

Domanda nona ed ultima: qual è il ruolo dei comunicanti nel loro piano di esistenza?

Sembrerebbe quello di accogliere i disincarnati al loro ingresso di quello che si direbbe il piano astrale più vicino al piano fisico. Ascoltate come si rivolgono ad un nuovo arrivato: (23.11.84/g. 37)

* Mondo il tuo è finito - qui è forma che non vorresti - tu (sei) morto, nell'infinito non ti fu mostrato che con infinito non c'era denari? Finalmente risali, ecco il commento. Ti illuse (il) nome: qui tu provi la morte - già, vedi, giocò con la vita - distogli (la) mente - seguisti la linea eterna - tu, oggi, che ascolti, ti sei fatto (il) trasporto - sapete cosa m'ha detto? Questo ho (del) battesimo più ridente - capisci? Vuota il petto - tu sei stato un uomo - ascolta, tu non credi. Tu (sei) colpito - pregherai, tu risorgi presto - questo è il mondo, il mondo grande - dimenticati la informazione

mentita: te l'ha storgiuta conflitto d'opposte menti - Cristo informaci anche di sue intenzioni.

Quali conclusioni?

Mi fermo qui. Le domande sarebbero ancora molte, e molte altre risposte potrei citare, offerte dalle «voci». Ma ritengo che gli esempi sin qui mostrati bastino a giustificare l'affermazione che a Grosseto siamo di fronte ad un tipo nuovo ed eccezionale di fenomeno medianico (intendendo per «medianico» ogni fenomeno che coinvolga, *presuntivamente*, i disincarnati), *un tipo nuovo che si impernia sulla fenomenologia psicofonica*.

La novità e l'eccezionalità consistono a mio avviso nel fatto che il fenomeno psicofonico si produce nella apparente assenza di «filtrazione» attraverso le strutture fisiche del medium vivente, quale avviene nella trance ad incorporazione. Qui sembra che basti, e forse non è indispensabile, un apporto di ignota energia da parte degli sperimentatori; e sembra che occorra da parte loro una capacità di comprendere l'inusitato linguaggio, non facile ad acquistare, perché è un linguaggio che li trascende, *al di fuori della loro esperienza*. Sembra trattarsi, in definitiva, di una «presa diretta» sul piano dei presunti disincarnati, che ce li mostra, per così dire, in azione nel loro ambiente. Riesce difficile credere ad una proiezione animica degli sperimentatori: anche se l'ipotesi psicodinamica è ineliminabile. Se a tutto questo aggiungiamo che i fenomeni di Grosseto presentano caratteri di *continuità* lungo l'arco di quindici anni, e di persistente *coerenza* nonostante l'avvicinarsi di vari partecipanti alle sedute; se teniamo presente che essi configurano un «quadro» spiritico che è conforme agli schemi classici e all'esperienza storica dello spiritismo; possiamo concludere che i fenomeni di Grosseto sono da inglobare nella categoria dei fenomeni medianici, e che in tale accezione non sono secondi, per importanza, a quelli del Cerchio Firenze 77, a quelli di Napoli e a quelli di Genova (Cerchio IFIOR), sia per la novità della «presa diretta», sia per l'inusitata presenza del «magico» («una congrega» di sette persone, quattro uomini e tre donne dice pur qualcosa a chi conosce, anche superficialmente, la storia della magia...)

Carlo M. Trajna

Books

A Room of Their Own

A BOOK OF WOMEN POETS FROM ANTIQUITY TO NOW Edited by Alik Barnstone & Willis Barnstone; Schocken; 612 pages; \$29.95

In the 6th century B.C. Sappho foretold it all:

*Someone, I tell you,
will remember us.
We are oppressed by
fears of oblivion
yet are always saved
by judgment of good men.*

The poem was chosen as the epigraph for this splendid, pioneering collection of verse by women. Sadly, Sappho's fears of oblivion have proved valid. For each poet represented in this anthology there are uncounted others whose work has been diminished, dispersed or utterly lost. In A.D. 1073, virtually all existing copies of Sappho's work were burned in Rome and Constantinople, because the church perceived her lesbian love lyrics as a threat to Christian morality. In 12th century China the parents of Chu Shu-chen incinerated the body of the poet's work after her death, for reasons unknown. A few poems rescued by Chu's friends, and published in this book, are of luminous beauty.

Far greater losses than these occurred through indifference and neglect. In ancient Rome, which abounded in male poets from Livius to Virgil, an entire poetic culture was wiped out because the writings of women were not esteemed enough to be copied and preserved. The lone female survivor of the Latin classical period is Sulpicia (1st century B.C.) whose known corpus consists of six poems.

Still, patriarchal societies have weighed unevenly upon creative women in different times and places. In China and Japan, women poets have usually been highly regarded and their work is wonderfully well represented in this volume. The authors spring from all classes and conditions of life: an empress, an imperial courtesan, a Taoist priestess. In the 9th century, a legendary Japanese beauty, Ono no Komachi, voiced this complaint about her lover:

*Doesn't he realize
that I am not
like the swaying kelp
in the surf,
where the seaweed gatherer
can come as often as he wants.*

In England and America women poets have often fared poorly. Bemoaning the inequalities that have dogged their sex, Virginia Woolf wrote in *A Room of One's Own*, "When one reads of a witch being ducked, of a woman possessed by devils, of a wise woman selling herbs, or even of a very remarkable man who had

a mother, then I think we are on the track of a lost novelist, a suppressed poet or some Emily Brontë who dashed her brains out on the moor crazed with the torture that her gift had put her to."

The first important American poet was a woman: Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672), who produced re-

markable poems in addition to eight children. Her publisher billed her as "The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America," but she herself made clear the cost of attaining that exalted title:

*I am obnoxious to each
carping tongue
Who says my hand a needle
better fits,
A poet's pen all scorn I
should thus wrong,
For such despite the case on
female wits:
If what I do prove well, it
won't advance,
They'll say it's stol'n, or else
it was by chance.*

In spite of Bradstreet's



Clockwise: latter-day sculptor's conception of Sappho; early engraving of Louise Labé; Alik Barnstone; Ruth Stone; Emily Dickinson.



Emily Dickinson, la dama de Amherst

28-7-85

ANDRÉS TRAPIELLO

POEMAS

Emily Dickinson.
Ediciones La Misma. Madrid.
86 páginas. 1.100 pesetas.

"Amherst, en Nueva Inglaterra, tendría de 400 a 500 familias al nacer allí Emily Elizabeth Dickinson, el 10 de diciembre de 1830". Cuatrocientas o quinientas familias. Roma, en el tiempo en que la conoció Stendhal, contaba, tras las campañas napoleónicas de Italia, con 130.000 habitantes. El mundo, entonces, más apasionado que nunca, del romántico siglo XIX, era muy pequeño.

Por esos mismos años, los escritores del norte de Europa y de Inglaterra, para olvidar la nieve y el abeto sombrío, para dejar atrás la niebla venenosa, bajaban hasta Nápoles y Atenas, hasta Sevilla y Tánger. Desde Goethe a Byron, desde Elizabeth Barret a Keats, aquellos hombres, inclinados por partes iguales al amor y al dolor, viajaron tanto, persiguiendo el sueño errante de encontrar para sus vidas un lugar sagrado, silencioso y lejano donde morir en paz, viajaron tanto, que todo lo impregnaron de su melancolía. Emily Dickinson, por el contrario, apenas se movió de su pueblo natal, en Connecticut, Nueva Inglaterra. Sólo

tres viajes, en casi 60 años, realizó esta extraña mujer: a Boston, a Worcester y, para ver a su padre, diputado de la Asamblea Nacional, a Washington. Su vida fue gris, provinciana, solitaria; sin los éxitos literarios y las aventuras amorosas de la Sand, y sin la turbulencia maldita del alcohólico Poe. Fue la suya una existencia perfectamente vulgar, y sin embargo...

La necesidad del tedio

Esos 60 años los vivió en una casa vieja, grande, imponente, entre olmos melancólicos, lilos y un jardín donde correteaban niños, la única presencia humana que la poetisa, al final de sus días, toleraba. En esa mansión nació, y en ella murió, en 1886. Estudió algo en la escuela puritana de la localidad y luego en la calvinista de Mount Holyoke, sin que jamás abrazara la religión de sus antepasados, lo que prueba que era una mujer de carácter. Llevó una vida familiar intensa, estrechamente unida a sus hermanos, y más tarde cuidó, hasta que murió, de su madre paralítica. Yo creo que a una vida así, marcada por la endiablada monotonía, puede calificársela de oscura, con una opacidad que no se corresponde en nada al brillante y cristiano sentir de sus versos, apasionados y originales, como si necesitase de la ceremonia y del tedio, del alto laurel que es la

costumbre, para dejar en la sombra su visión exaltada del mundo.

De los casi 2.000 poemas que escribió, muchos nos resultan hoy, más que misteriosos y profundos, incomprensibles, raros y de difícil alcance, debido tal vez a su problemática escritura sin nexos lógicos, con rimas caprichosas, aunque deliberadas, y una gramática descoyuntada. Otros, en cambio, tienen fuerza y esa virtud de terminar refiriéndose a nuestras propias vidas, que ellos ponen en claro, lo cual siempre conmueve e inquieta. Emily Dickinson gastó la suya cortando tulipanes amarillos, que ofrecía, jadeando y vestida de la cabeza a los pies de blanco inmaculado, a quien llegaba a verla. Al parecer, se enamoró, pero sus amores debieron de ser más bien cosa epistolar, platónica y de mucha idealidad, a lo que le ayudaban sus versos, escritos tal vez para huir de "esta breve tragedia de la carne".

Emily Dickinson cantó las insignificancias, las secretas astillas de los días, la poquedad y menudencia de una vida sin sobresaltos, rutinaria y aburrida. Lo dice: "¿Yo no soy nadie! ¿Quién eres tú? / ¿Tú eres nadie también? / Entonces somos dos, mas no lo digas; / porque, ¿sabes?, vendrían a expulsarnos". ¿Quién la expulsaría? Ese sentido de lo misterioso es, sin

duda, lo que hace que uno la tenga por uno de los más grandes poetas del siglo pasado.

Físicamente debía ser poco llamativa. Tenemos una descripción de su persona, que ella misma le envió a su gran amigo y sostenedor, el coronel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, que le había pedido una fotografía suya: "No tengo ahora ningún retrato", escribe ella, "pero soy pequeña como el reyezuelo y tengo el cabello rebelde como el caparazón de las castañas, y los ojos como el jerez que el huésped deja en la copa". ¿Cabe más precisión y misterio? Bien pudo haber dicho: como el jerez que se deja en la copa. Pero ella añade: "Como el jerez que el huésped deja en la copa". ¿Qué huésped? ¿De quién se trata, que así deja, como al descuido, inconscientemente, una tan perfecta imagen de los ojos de Dickinson?

Enterrada en vida

De todos sus poemas, panteístas, franciscanos, yo prefiero los más escalofriantes, los más fuertemente sinceros y que ella ha referido a la muerte, a los muertos y a ella misma, enterrada en vida. De alguien, tal vez amado y frío en su presencia, describe esa hueca mirada, los blancos ojos de ese muerto "como un lago con gente patinando". De nuevo ese enigma inal-

canzable nos sacude, estremecida ella y estremeciéndonos. ¿No podía hablar, no le era suficiente, sólo de un lago helado para describir los ojos de alguien que se ha muerto? Ella, no conforme, desliza en el poema un puñado de hombres y gentes que van patinando en ese lago helado, dejando en él la fría cuchilla de sus vueltas. ¿Quiénes recorren la visión de ese cadáver?

De Emily Dickinson había en castellano algunas traducciones. Una, ya clásica, imprescindible, del catalán Marià Manent, escogida y fundamental, con los más emocionantes fulgores de su obra. Otra, publicada en México, por Domenchina y Ernestina de Champourcin, y ahora, esta nueva, traducida con esmero y delicadeza por Julia Castillo en un libro que es rara flor.

Son versos provincianos y hondos, desdeñosos de gloria y hermanos de la serena vida tan callada. Frágiles como una rama pequeña de ciprés, pero oscuros igualmente y religiosos. Ejemplares, cristalizados, como el diamante, a mil pies bajo el suelo, en umbría caverna. Imperfectos, a veces, como lo es la verdad. Vagos, como los sueños. Suenan todos como el aire en un negro crespón; ese aire de otoño del que Elizabeth Browning decía: "Callad; ya se le oye".

POESÍA

La mujer que quiso ser poema

En el centenario de Emily Dickinson

A GARCÍA ORTEGA
Hay tres fechas particularmente importantes en los orígenes de la literatura norteamericana. En 1837, Emerson dicta su *The American Scholar*. En 1855, Whitman comienza a hacer públicos los primeros poemas de *Hojas de hierba*. Y en 1862, un crítico literario de un periódico local, Thomas Higginson, recibe una carta con cuatro poemas de una tal Emily Dickinson, iniciando una correspondencia que duraría toda la vida. Aquellos poemas fueron para el crítico, como más tarde lo serían para la historia literaria, imposibles de clasificar en orden alguno. Y escribiría en un artículo, muchos años después: "La impresión de un genio poético original y completamente nuevo era tan clara en mi mente cuando lei por vez primera estos cuatro poemas como lo es ahora, después de 30 años de mayor conocimiento, y con ello llegó el problema aún no resuelto sobre qué lugar debía asignarse en literatura a lo que es tan destacable e incluso tan difícil de criticar". Sin embargo, la fascinación que 100 años después de su muerte (centenario que ahora se celebra) sigue produciendo el talento de los breves poemas de Emily Dickinson no se corresponde de manera comprensible con la lisura de su vida, casi monacal, que apenas si registra cuatro o cinco hechos medianamente descolantes.

Emily Dickinson nació el 10 de diciembre de 1830 en Amherst, Nueva Inglaterra, en el seno de una familia cuyo padre era un abogado y político de prestigio con talento liberal, y en medio de una sociedad eminentemente puritana, representante del egocentrismo propio de lo americano de la primera mitad del siglo XIX. Su padre habría de ser una de las personas que más influyera en la personalidad de Emily, a pesar de que ella lo respetara temerosamente. Su madre, en cambio, permanece gris, y, al quedar parálitica, su hija la cuidó hasta su muerte. Emily, salvo en un par de viajes cortos, jamás salió de su pequeña ciudad natal, y llevó la vida más semejante a la de una monja, retirada, solitaria y excéntrica. Tales excentricidades, algunas fruto de leyenda más que una realidad, como las que hablan de que espantaba a las visitas, hallaron amparo en sus hermanos Austin y Lavinia, a los que estaba muy unida.

Se educó en el Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, próximo a Amherst, cerca de donde —cosas del

destino— mucho tiempo después habría de llegar Luis Cernuda, contento porque una de las dos cosas que más le alegraban de Estados Unidos era poder leer todos los poemas de Emily Dickinson. El ombligo de aquella sociedad calvinista era la religión, y en ese caldo de férrea severidad teológica transcurrieron la infancia y la adolescencia de Emily. No obstante, ella mantuvo siempre un rechazo hacia el ambiente de rigidez religiosa de su época, lo cual es paradójico en una poeta en la que precisamente la religión será uno de sus temas mayores, si bien con muchas matizaciones. Una anécdota es significativa. Cuando contaba 18 años, la directora, miss Lyon, preguntó: "¿Quien quiera ser cristiano, que se levante". Emily no se levantó, y supuso que pensarían que era extraño, pero para ella lo realmente extraño habría sido una mentira. Y en una segunda carta a Higginson, en abril de 1862, escribe: "Ellos [mi familia] son religiosos —excepto yo— y se dirigen a un eclipse, todas las mañanas, al que llaman su Padre".

En 1854 se enamoró del pastor presbiteriano Charles Wadsworth, casado y bastante mayor que ella. Sin embargo, la relación entre ambos, duradera hasta el final, no pasó de un fuerte platonismo, quintaesencia de toda la obra y toda la vida de la Dickinson. Lo mítico, y la figura de este hombre, al que sólo vio cuatro veces en su vida, influiría decisivamente en sus poemas. Los años siguientes serían de una productividad febril. Al irse Wadsworth a California —distancia insalvable para entonces—, ella se "enluta", tomando su famosa decisión de vestir para siempre de blanco. Fue un duro golpe que aumentó la amargura, la reclusión y el aislamiento.

Benjamin Franklin, amigo de su padre, ejerció un cierto papel de preceptor con Emily, induciéndola a lo que sería algo definitivo en su vida: la lectura de Emerson, un hito de la poesía y el pensamiento americanos. Su doctrina de redención por la naturaleza, uso benéfico de la incomprensión y el poder de la propia conciencia, dejó una huella profunda en Emily. La mezcla de vitalismo y soledad que tiene el tranquilocurrir del tiempo provinciano en la Dickinson siendo, por el contrario, torturadamente llena su poesía, parece provenir de una cita de Emerson: "Las palabras son acciones también, y éstas son una especie de palabras". Como se ve, platonismo puro.



JUSTO BARROSA

Obras de Emily Dickinson en castellano

Poemas

Traducción de Silvina Ocampo. Prólogo de Jorge Luis Borges. Tusquets Editores. Barcelona, 1985. 368 páginas. 1.200 pesetas. Contiene 596 poemas y es hasta ahora la edición más completa. La autora publicó en vida siete poemas, aunque su producción fue muy superior, superando los 1.700 poemas.

Poemas

Versión de Marià Manent. Colección Visor de Poesía. Madrid, 1979. 138 páginas. 400 pesetas.

Poemas

Versión de Julia Castillo. Ediciones La Misma. Madrid, 1984. 86 páginas. 1.500 pesetas. Contiene 43 poemas.

En vida sólo publicó siete poemas, los cuatro que envió a Higginson en la primera carta, y tres más, en la segunda. Moriría el 15 de mayo de 1886, tras una larga enfermedad agravada desde noviembre del año anterior. Cuatro

años después de su muerte se publicó una antología de los 1.775 poemas que escribiera, y en 1894 apareció una selección de sus *Cantos*. La obra de esta mujer sin relieve, intensa, extraña, con aire adolescente, no muy agradada en

el físico, se llamó tan sólo *Poemas*, y es una obra densa, desconcertante y copiosa. Sólo se puede entender en alguien que viviera únicamente para ser poema, y ese es el caso de Emily Dickinson. Pero es aquí donde la historia se divide, donde aparece la esquizofrenia interior de su alma. A su dejarse existir, viviendo con liviandad, se contraponen la riqueza interna del poeta, como si sólo hubiera vivido en realidad en los versos. El resto no era más que trecho entre poema y poema. Richard Chase ha visto en su obra la consecución de *status* a través de experiencias cruciales sólo existentes en las palabras. Así, podía ser "reina", "esposa", "mujer", "poeta" o "inmortal".

En contra de lo que puede hallarse en la obra de Whitman, Emerson o Poe, en la poesía de Dickinson no existe una tensión dialéctica entre uno mismo y el mundo, no constituye un sistema que vuelva otra vez al mundo. Estos poemas son intransitivos, y a ella sólo le interesa ser ella misma. De ahí que todo intento de singularizar su obra a una corriente filosófica yerra el tiro, porque si hay meditación o hermetismo en sus versos, es sólo resultado de la tozonería inventada en su universo de lo pequeño, trascendente e imaginado.

Desde lo que ve y vive, ella construye una gran aglomeración inacabada en miles de versos. Su poesía es algo abierto y caótico, trascendentalismo de lo efímero cercano. Sus temas serán, por tanto, aquellos que están junto a ella. Las estaciones y sus cambios en la naturaleza, el amor en todas sus fases (lo cual contribuyó a achacarle amantes inexistentes), lo religioso y su relación estrecha con la muerte y la inmortalidad. A este tema, el central de su poesía, dedicó 500 poemas con el tono más variado, desde la desesperación elegiaca, hasta el horror por la descomposición de la carne.

Trabajaba mucho sus poemas, para alguna de cuyas palabras tenía una lista de 16 combinaciones posibles, alejándose así de la imagen de poeta intuitiva.

Al leer su poesía se tiene la impresión de algo cuya belleza sólo pueden imponer ciertos vegetales, y en ese sentido era plenamente contemporánea, es decir, una romántica, una romántica prometedora, nacida de sí misma para vivir en la quieta ensañación de un verso.

CENTENARIO DE UNA AUTORA FASCINANTE

Emily Dickinson, el ángel de la guarda de las letras norteamericanas

CÁNDIDO PÉREZ GÁLLEGO
Hoy se cumple un siglo de la muerte de Emily Dickinson. Fue el ángel de la guarda de las letras norteamericanas y está en el centro de la línea que va desde Anne Bradstreet hasta Sylvia Plath, a la mitad del camino entre el puritanismo y el suicidio. Pero amaba la vida y aquéllos eran tiempos heroicos, con el estruendo de la guerra civil al fondo y el fragor de los balleneros o las emboscadas de los indios. Eran los días de *Moby Dick* y *El último mohicano*. La época dorada de *Hojas de hierba*, y en el centro de aquel vendaval creativo, una chica se encierra en su casa de Amherst, en Massachusetts, no lejos de Boston, y se pone a escribir, se dedica a hacer literatura y cuenta a un papel lo que le pasa. Hace unos textos intelectuales, pese a su apariencia de sencillez, llenos de unos jadeantes guiones que dan una sensación de cadencias temblorosas. Crea una escritura difícil y exigente donde se narran las pequeñas tragedias de la vida cotidiana, sin títulos, sin pretensiones editoriales. Se repiten las preguntas obsesivas, se vuelve a la autocensura y a la compasión, en un indefinible paisaje de pérdida y soledad, en un marco de naturaleza inminente. Los árboles no nos impiden ver el texto, y escondida, como un pájaro herido, realiza una ceremonia de intimación con el mundo que parece a la que hicieron las Brontë o Virginia Woolf.

Escribe 1.775 poemas, aunque sólo publique siete durante su vida. Se enfrenta con sus pensamientos —“Tú eres el sol, la flor somos nosotros”—, entra en una ceremonia de definiciones y crea su propia metafísica ingenua. Una chica que sufre y cuenta lo que le pasa —“Mi historia tiene una enseñanza / tengo un amigo ausente”. “Por qué no me dejas entrar en el cielo?”. “Amor, eres alto y yo no puedo alcanzarte”—. Una joven busca en la escritura su salvación, y estas líneas, que se repiten en pequeños poemas, son como su diario, un monólogo con su intimidad y una sublimación mística. En el fondo hay un amargo desencanto, una infinita búsqueda de comprensión y compañía. Le falta sentirse amada, y además el ambiente familiar la oprime. Su padre, un prestigioso abogado de Amherst, la trata con distancia. Ella misma pasa por Mount Holyoke para acabar pronto escondida en la madriguera de sus pensamientos. Conoce algunos hombres, lo mismo fueran tutores, como clérigos o profesores, y pronto entran en sus poemas, dándoles la respuesta críptica inmediata, como amores o decepciones. Una reclusa que se pregunta por Dios, el amor o la muerte, y que esboza una *sacra conversatione* consigo misma, que llevará hasta Rilke y que unirá a Holderlin con Wallace Stevens.

Apenas salió de Amherst como no fuera para ir en una ocasión a

Boston, y en otra a Filadelfia y Washington. No quería la menor complicidad con el mundanal ruido y vivía protegida por las consignas de Emerson, una búsqueda ardiente de la plenitud interior, de la *self-reliance* y de la exploración de sus sentimientos. Escribía sin descanso y envió sus poemas al reverendo Higginson, quien apreció cómo en aquellas páginas había auténtica creación y ecos directos de John Donne. Vestida de blanco, la imaginamos al atardecer leyendo sus autores favoritos. La espléndida *King James version* de la Biblia, que le proporciona el punto de partida; Shakespeare que le encanta, aunque apenas le refleje en sus poemas, y después Keats, Tennyson, los Browning y las Brontë. Esas lecturas dejan su mella, y el reverendo Higginson le espera el 16 de abril de 1862, pues ella necesita saber si sus poesías están vivas o muertas. Poco después se inicia una correspondencia entre ambos. Cuatro meses más tarde el preceptor y crítico le pide un retrato y ella se excusa, asegurándole ser “pequeña como un búho” y con unos ojos “como el vino de Jerez que el huésped deja en el fondo de un vaso”. Su vida es una renuncia.

Una lírica con problemática religiosa surgida tal vez por una necesidad de escribir, de llevar un diario o de responder las cartas. Hay en su arte un tenaz autoanálisis nacido en la imagen del padre,



Emily Dickinson.

una búsqueda de amor donde sea posible encontrarlo, hombres o mujeres, y una necesidad acuciante de compañía. Se habla del *amigo ausente* o de las veces que mendigó a las puertas de Dios, o de la dulzura del pantano con sus misterios. Éxtasis y angustia se funden en el corazón de una muchacha que busca su propio lenguaje confesional y sabe huir de todo lo que se hacía en la época y crear su etilo personal y así construye su *ars amandi* con esas confidencias —“Sentí un funeral en mi cerebro”, o “tu riqueza me enseñó pobreza”. Otras veces tiene la ironía exquisita de la concisión: “Una pradera puede hacerse con un trébol y una abeja / un trébol, una

abeja y ensueño. / El ensueño basta si son pocas las abejas”. No es un texto de Robert Frost, pero podía serlo. Su poema número 1775 se abre como un sublime epitafio: “La tierra tiene muchas llaves. / Donde no está la melodía / está la desconocida península. / La belleza es la realidad de la naturaleza”.

Una chica vulnerable e indefensa que está abriendo los rumbos de la gran poesía americana. Que parece decir al oído a Harold Bloom cómo la poesía es la angustia de las influencias, un romance familiar, una interpretación errónea de la vida, una perversión disciplinada. Su obra es un sublime malentendido entre creación y lector. Éste es el terror de sus moribundos tigres, de sus suburbios secretos y de las montañas que crecen inadvertidas. Estamos ante la más pura tensión lírica, ante una autora que ama la vida y huye de la erudición, que jamás hubiera hecho los *Cantos* del siglo XIX, pero sí una versión atenuada para recitar en voz muy baja de sus íntimas *Hojas de hierba*. No sabe publicar, se refugia en el acto creativo y desde esa gloriosa actitud de disciplina y silencio conmueve a las letras americanas. Ama la literatura como si fuera su amante secreta, incluso mantiene con ella una relación adúltera. Y hasta sucumbe en esa aventura. Muere soltera, el 15 de mayo de 1886, en Amherst, a los 56 años, pero sus poemas a veces ocultan sus íntimas contradicciones: “El demonio, si fuera fiel, / sería el mejor amigo”. Parece como si William Blake visitara de repente su casa rodeada de árboles. Una autora fascinante. Tal vez la mayor escritora norteamericana.

Epistolario
Biografía

La Renuncia a lo Accesible

Las cartas de Emily Dickinson a T. W. Higginson reflejan las intensas dudas de la poetisa.

EPISTOLARIO. CARTAS A T. W. HIGGINSON

EMILY DICKINSON. INTRODUCCIÓN Y TRADUCCIÓN DE PAUL

S. DERRICK Y CRISTINA BLANCO OUTÓN. TEXTO BILINGÜE

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VALENTÍ PUIG

Se llamaba Higginson y había estudiado teología en Harvard. Iba a ser, a la vez, hombre de letras y hombre de acción. Escribió ensayos, memorias y biografías; luchó en la guerra de secesión y como ferviente abolicionista fue coronel del primer regimiento de esclavos emancipados. Tal vez se le recordaría menos si en 1862 no hubiese recibido una carta de una joven damisela que tenía veleidades poéticas. Ella se llamaba Emily Dickinson y sus poemas breves y deslumbrantes nunca entusiasmaron a Higginson. Aun así, la visitó varias veces en su domicilio familiar de Nueva Inglaterra y ella le recibió con un par de lirios. En términos elementales, Higginson era un hombre que se ganaba la vida con la literatura, mientras que Dickinson, mucho más apasionadamente, hizo de la literatura su vida, como se dice en el prólogo de *Cartas a T. W. Higginson*. De 1996 es la traducción del volumen *Cartas poéticas e íntimas*, de Dickinson.

Higginson es un hombre de perspicacia y sentido común, pero no alcanza a comprender la figuración mental de aquella damisela pálida que enviaba sus poemas con una flor del jardín de olmos junto a la calle mayor.

Ella no había aceptado el calvinismo de sus antepasados. En un momento de su vida, estuvo platónicamente enamorada de un pastor presbiteriano. A Higginson le recibió vestida de piqué blanco, con un chal azul y dos lirios. Aquella muchacha de aspecto frágil estaba escribiendo poemas de tensión tectónica por tanta contradicción como llegaban a formular en sus pausas y ritmos truncados. El goce y la amargura no son los polos más extremados de su energía lírica: ni el contraste entre la monotonía de su vida y la intensidad de sus versos explican la "breve tragedia de la carne". "Yo no tenía ningún Monarca en mi vida, y no puedo gobernarme a mí misma, y cuando trato de organizar mi pequeña Fuerza, explota y me deja desnuda y chamuscada", escribe Emily, y añade: "Supongo que el orgullo que corta la Respiración, en el Corazón de los Bosques, no es de Nuestro ser". Emily Dickinson murió a los 55 años.

En la poesía norteamericana son impresionables un puñado de poemas de aquella solterona aparentemente chiflada que permaneció inédita y renunció a las satisfacciones inmediatas de la vida, para buscar en esa soledad rarefacta la terrible lógica de lo imposible. "Canto como un niño que pasa por delante del cementerio: porque estoy espantada", le escribe a Higginson. El terror casi nunca es ajeno a sus poemas, incluso en los instantes de aceptación. "Hallo el éxtasis en vivir, la mera sensación de vivir es suficientemente dicha", le dice a Higginson. No hace falta una extrapolación del pensamiento poético de Emily Dickinson para constatar las concomitancias del placer y el dolor. Higginson le cuenta a su mujer: "Nunca había esta-

do con nadie que agotase tanto mis fuerzas. Sin tocarla, me absorbía. Me alegro de no vivir cerca de ella. A menudo le parecía que yo estaba cansado y parecía muy considerada con los demás". La tensión excesiva y la vida anormal que Higginson observa en Emily Dickinson algo tiene que ver —como dice el prólogo de *Cartas a T. W. Higginson*— con la densidad y complejidad extremas del severo minimalismo de su poesía.

Dickinson quizá fue el cupo de excentricidad que Higginson se permitió en su vida de hombre de letras. "¿Podría usted decirme cómo crecer, o se trata de algo indescriptible como la Melodía o la Brujería?". Él, en cambio, la invita a Boston: "Me pregunto si sería posible tentarla con las tertulias del tercer lunes de cada mes en casa de la señora, Sargent Chestnut St., 13, a las diez de la mañana, donde alguien lee un ensayo y los demás hablan o escuchan". Un lunes hablaba Emerson y luego, en el club de mujeres, el propio Higginson leía un ensayo sobre las diosas griegas.

En una devastadora incursión en la poesía de Dickinson, Philip Larkin la consideraba un ejemplo clínico de pseudoimadurez concretada en versos de escaso sentido, crípticamente explosivos pero sin conclusión significativa. En términos antitéticos, Harold Bloom sostiene que, a excepción de Shakespeare, Dickinson manifiesta más originalidad cognitiva que cualquier otro poeta occidental desde Dante. Ésa es una afirmación bastante voluminosa, pero sostenida por la idiosincrasia de la visión poética de Emily Dickinson, su insólita complejidad intelectual y su intensidad inimitable. A Higginson esta poesía le pareció algo espasmódica e incontrolada.