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## Review of "Poetry and Public Discourse in Nineteenth-Century America"

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shows repeatedly how well he knows their texts, I would have preferred more close readings, especially of poems. A great poem like Dickinson's "Dont put up my Thread & Needle -" (Fr681) illustrates Kearns's argument for women's labor as an analogy to writing better than anything he adduces. Similarly, I would like to have seen more focus on Melville's late poems published only for friends, quintessential examples of portfolio poetry. In poems such as "Pebbles," "Art," "The Night March," and "Shelley's Vision" he is a kindred spirit with interesting differences from Dickinson. Instead, Kearns succeeds in illuminating shadowed corners of Melville's work in mid-career, especially his letters and such subversive texts as *Pierre*, "Bartleby," and "The Tartarus of Maids," where labor is desperate and goes unrewarded.

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ELIZABETH PETRINO

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Wolosky, Shira. *Poetry and Public Discourse in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. \$80.

Shira Wolosky's *Poetry and Public Discourse in Nineteenth-Century America* ambitiously examines nineteenth-century poetry as a public forum. Readers of Emily Dickinson's poetry will be disappointed that more of her poems are not subject to the same extended and informative analysis that they have received in Wolosky's previous scholarship, but her argument ultimately reflects the contention that Dickinson's aesthetic can be explained best in dialogue with other writers. It is perhaps for this reason that Wolosky's volume, as part of a series on British, American, and continental literary works and public figures, explores an expansive literary tradition. In discussing an exhaustive list of nineteenth-century writers—from the romantics Dickinson, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman, to the popular female poets Frances Harper, Lydia Sigourney, and Adah Isaacs Menken, to the "Harvard formalists" George Santayana and Trumbull Strickney, and finally to late nineteenth-century writers, such as Stephen Crane—Wolosky makes her greatest gains in broad claims about how each of the writers struggles with the multiple identities that inhabit the notion of being an "American."

In a single chapter devoted to Dickinson, "Emily Dickinson and American Identity," Wolosky claims Dickinson's central place in the canon is distinctive because she brings "to a kind of consummation the trends and contradictions within women's evolving social and literature positions" (15). Gender and religion surface as two of the major challenges to American identity. Challenging assumptions about Dickinson's reputation as "the most private of poets," Wolosky contends that Dickinson recognized that the self-fulfillment and expression afforded to men would not be available to women (15). On the other hand, she questioned this "liberal paradigm of self-fulfillment . . . [and] contests the American model of self-reliance not only as gendered male, but also as incomplete, untrue to experience, and psychologically, metaphysically, and morally vulnerable" (24-25). Against this backdrop of "reclusion," Dickinson's work "reflects and enacts the cultural concerns and challenges of the world in which she lived" (15). Her answer was to write lyric poems, traditionally considered outside of time, that contest these political and social values while conforming outwardly to the dictates of Victorian womanhood.

While such contentions are familiar to readers of feminist criticism, Wolosky departs from other critics in arguing that Dickinson's poems advocate neither theological conversion and redemption nor deliverance through art but represent "a poetry of disputation" (18). These ideas were subtly explored by Wolosky in an earlier article called "Emily Dickinson: Reclusion against Itself," which argues that Dickinson's conflicted position about her "reclusion" was a traditional solution to the problem of temporality and phenomenal uncertainty in the world (*Common Knowledge*, 2006; reprinted in *Critical Insights: Emily Dickinson* [Ed. J. Brooks Bousson, Salem P, 2010.]). Religious, specifically Christian ascetic traditions, inform Wolosky's reading of Dickinson's turn inward and toward poetry, as one poem memorably elevates the "Martyrs" who "trod - / Their feet opon Temptation - / Their faces - opon God - " (Fr187). In the current book chapter, Wolosky contends that Dickinson enters into solitude and simultaneously challenges and fulfills the expected position of female modesty, a stance of submission that became for many nineteenth-century female writers a literary self-representation. Wolosky also provides some refreshing examples of less well known poems, including "I meant to have but modest needs - " (Fr711). Arguing that Dickinson exposes the contradictions embedded in feminine restriction, Wolosky concludes that her "poetic thus constitutes not a formalist self-reflexive aesthetic, but a register of the world" (30).

The major strength of the volume lies in its chapters on religion and typological discourse, which also provide opportunities for Dickinson and a

wide range of writers to define themselves. Popular discourses of nineteenth-century America, particularly religious, allowed individual writers to carve out their individual identities from the national psyche. Spanning African-American responses to typology within the hymnal tradition to women's reframing of Old Testament stories, Wolosky discusses the exegetical practices of different, often competing, groups that nevertheless lay claim to the Bible as their central authority. Many female writers, such as Harper, Sigourney, and Helen Hunt Jackson, to name a few, are discussed informatively at length for their ability to redeploy creatively female archetypes, including Vashti and Esther. In contrast, Wolosky's description of Dickinson's religious beliefs suggests that she engaged in a struggle over faith throughout her life and sought to challenge conventional religious dictates. Hers was an oblique religious vision, which saw the Bible not as "proof text" but as a "skeptical warning against any such clear cut claims fully to possess meanings" (112). Claiming "there are no women Biblical figures in her work" (108), though Dickinson refers to Eve, Wolosky argues that "Dickinson's uses of the Bible are framed by the fact that she is a woman" (108) and that the Bible could provide justification for the war as easily as it could express doubts about conflict.

References to current scholarship would have been helpful in defining more clearly Wolosky's original contribution. Public sphere theory, such as Michael Warner's *Public and Counter Publics* (2000), has explored the notion that the "public" was not a single entity but plural, discourse rather than class based, and more inclusive of marginal voices and dissent. This definition of the public sphere would have supported Wolosky's contention that poets entered into political and social debate. Building on the work of a group of scholars she only briefly mentions, such as Paula Bernat Bennett, Mary Loeffelholz, and Angela Sorby, Wolosky does not fully acknowledge the impact such work has had on our understanding of the production and circulation of poems in institutional and artistic settings such as schools and salons as well as through the wider readership offered by newspapers and magazines. Furthermore, given her previous research as author of *Emily Dickinson: A Voice of War*, one might also have expected grounding in more recent work by Eliza Richards, Faith Barrett (mentioned in a footnote), Jessica Roberts, Benjamin Friedlander, and others that has opened Dickinson's poetry to the permeable borders of the political, religious, and aesthetic discourses surrounding the Civil War. Readings of poems are often sacrificed in favor of claims about identity and discursive voice, with the noteworthy exceptions of the sections on Emma Lazarus, Whitman, and Stephen Crane. Nevertheless, this book offers a substantial rethinking of many important writers who engaged with the political

and social debates of their eras. The value of this approach for Dickinson readers may lie in Wolosky's affirming that, even in her enormous originality, Dickinson's relationship to the public discourses of her century was much closer than we had realized.

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EMILY SEELBINDER

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Bayley, Sally. *Home on the Horizon: America's Search for Space, from Emily Dickinson to Bob Dylan*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010. \$48.48.

In this exploration of "America's search for space," Sally Bayley uses the life and work of Emily Dickinson as her "lead" to "trace the figure of the threshold in American literature and culture—the doorways, passageways, windows and crossing points that negotiate the relationship between ideological fixtures and fittings of the home life and the imaginable but unforeseeable out of doors" (3). Though her subtitle implies a linear or chronological search, Bayley ranges freely among a wide variety of cultural artifacts, arriving eventually at an intriguingly Dickinsonian conclusion: "In the American imagination, to be at home is to dwell perpetually in the possibility of leaving" (174).

Among the many artifacts Bayley touches on are plays by Tennessee Williams, Dorothy Parker, Arthur Miller, Sam Shepard, and David Mamet; novels by Henry James, Zora Neale Hurston, Willa Cather, Carson McCullers, John Updike, Vladimir Nabokov, Phillip Roth, Cormac McCarthy, Marilynne Robinson, Mark Twain, Don DeLillo, and Frank Baum; memoirs by Annie Dillard and Siri Hustvedt; poetry by Anne Bradstreet, Charles Olson, W. H. Auden, and Sylvia Plath; songs by Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Robert Earl Keen, and the Dixie Chicks; paintings and drawings by Frederick Church, Edward Hopper, Andrew Wyeth, and Bob Dylan; architectural and landscape designs by Andrew Jackson Downing, Frederick Law Olmstead, and Frank Lloyd Wright; films by Alfred Hitchcock, Billy Wilder, John Ford, David Lynch, the Coen brothers, and Quentin Tarantino; and several television series, one of them a 1950s portrayal of "sunny suburbia" incorrectly identified as *Beaver Knows Best* (85). In a discussion of under 200 pages, including notes, it is not surprising that only a few of these receive more than a brief mention.