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SHELF LIFE

The Boston Globe

A poet, and immortality

By Jan Gardner | July 8, 2007

More than a century after her death, Amherst poet Emily Dickinson (below) still inspires, as evidenced by a handful of new books, as well as the appearance of the poet's recipe for "black cake" (made with 19 eggs and a half-pint of brandy) in "American Food Writing: An Anthology With Classic Recipes" edited by Molly O'Neill (Library of America).

"The Sister," a novel by Argentine Paola Kaufmann (Overlook/Rookery), views Dickinson through the eyes of her younger sister, Lavinia. It was translated from the Spanish. In "Afternoons With Emily" (Little, Brown), Rose MacMurray imagines a friendship -- between Dickinson and a young woman -- gone awry.

"Shaggy Muses: The Dogs Who Inspired Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Edith Wharton, and Emily Bronte," by Maureen Adams (Ballantine), due out at the end of the month, pays tribute to Dickinson's beloved Carlo. She called him "my Shaggy Ally."

Dickinson also found inspiration in her own home . In "The Pantry: Its History and Modern Uses" (Gibbs Smith), Catherine Seiberling Pond tells us that Dickinson is thought to have written poems in her pantry. She quotes Louise Norcross, a cousin: "I know that Emily Dickinson wrote most emphatic things in the pantry, so cool and quiet, while she skimmed the milk; because I sat on the footstool behind the door, in delight, as she read them to me."

Uproar on the greens

Three years ago, PEN New England honored JoeAnn Hart (right) of Gloucester with a Discovery Award for her fiction. That recognition led to the publication of her first novel, "Addled," a hilarious sendup of WASP culture, in which a stray golf ball fells a Canada goose at Eden Rock Country Club, leading an animal-rights activist to face off against the club's chef .

PEN hosts a reading by Hart at 6 p.m. Wednesday at Hotel Marlowe, 25 Edwin Land Blvd., Cambridge.

Rhymers and friends

Every Monday for many summers, Jean Pedrick hosted fellow poets at her Skimmilk Farm, in Brentwood, N.H. "When it wasn't black fly season, we could sit under the apple tree," said Elizabeth Knies, poet laureate of Portsmouth , N.H., and a longtime participant. "We'd meet and then we'd have lunch, which was equally important [as critiquing each other's work]."

The gathering's most well-known writer was Pedrick's niece, Nancy Mairs , a poet and essayist whose books include "Waist-High in the World ."

Filmmaker Ken Browne chronicled the workshop in a new documentary, "Mondays at Skimmilk: 30 Years of Writers at Work." It is a fitting tribute to Pedrick, who died last July at age 83 . Knies said the poets -- determined to keep the tradition alive -- have continued meeting.

Coming out

"American Legacy: The Story of John and Caroline Kennedy," by C. David Heymann (Atria)

"The Gatecrasher," by Madeleine Wickham (St. Martin's)

"High Noon," by Nora Roberts (Putnam)

Pick of the week

Suzanne Strempek Shea , author and bookseller at Edwards Books in Springfield, recommends "Paula Spencer," by Roddy Doyle (Viking): "Layered over the socioeconomic realities of a still-settling modern Ireland are Paula's new realities, including fledgling sobriety. . . . Doyle revisits some of his work's toughest territory, but produces his most

hopeful book."

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