



Read the following and then do the assignments at the bottom.

Please be prepared to discuss and defend your answers.

The choreography of *Letter to the World* is governed structurally by the stream-of-consciousness revelations of a sedate Emily and the persona of her alter ego — the hidden self— a high-spirited, passionate, longing-to-live-life-fully Emily.

The outward Emily (One Who Speaks) moves in dance cadence, intermittingly reciting selected lines, passages and full scores of Dickinson poems. The other Emily (One Who Dances) dances out mind stream memories, dreams, fears, frustrations, longings and disappointments of the hidden self.

The narrative of the choreography opens with the two Emilys, dressed alike as twins, appearing in a New England-type trellised doorway. They speak to each other by reciting lines of the first stanza of Dickinson's *I'm Nobody! Who are you?*

The narrative is extended through dance articulations of the comings and goings of concrete images embedded in the inner landscape of Emily Dickinson's mind —illuminated by the recitation of the poetry — fragments of:

- childhood memories with her two selves at play;
- adolescence, with young men and women (and selves) dancing at a party;
- images of the anticipations, expectations, joys and hopes of a more mature Emily, briefly encountering love;
- images of her disappointments, frustrations and the heartbreak of unattainable love.

The psychological and dramatic forces of the narrative are elevated by sustaining and interrelating the two Emilys — substance and alter ego shadow: the One Who Speaks and The One Who Dances — throughout the inner landscape revelations,

The Ancestress, a stern, foreboding, ambiguous matriarchal figure dressed in black is a presence throughout a large segment of the dance development. She is symbolic of the Puritan conscience that encircled Dickinson's life and her the fascination with Death. The figure even evokes a fearful Emily to envision her own funeral (a strong dance link to Dickinson's many poems on death). Although briefly seemingly comforting, the Ancestress is predominately rigid, rebuking and smothering. She is in tension with and working to stamp out the free and natural (alter ego) Emily, who is embedded in the poet. Another forceful presence in the choreography is that of a Lover, identified with the connotative properties of spring that recur in Dickinson's poetry.

The denouement of choreography's narrative — following a passionate, tormented crying out, in dance movement, for lost love — is that of the quiet and eloquent return of the Emily of substance to a New England bench. The closing is a powerful symbol of Dickinson's withdrawal from the non-responding outer world, so she can give her true self —the high-spirited poet-artist — full reign within the creative universe of her poetry.

Assignments:

- Return to your notes on the explanation of Dickinson's poetry, essay and inner landscape profile. Compare your assessment of Emily Dickinson's inner landscape with the projection of Martha Graham's vision, as expressed in *Letter to the World's* choreography.
- Write an essay (minimum 3 –5 pages) where you identify select Emily Dickinson poems that project the mind dream aspects you've defined. Explain why you've made these selections, using quotes from the poems. Consider using other Dickinson poems in addition to those assigned.

Think of yourself as the dance/theatre choreographer — choosing the selections to be read and danced in your choreography of an inner landscape profile of Emily Dickinson poetry. Indicate why you made the selections you did.

Include a brief overview of your vision of a narrative, structural pattern for developing a narrative — that would project the two Emilys.

- Share your essay with group members. As a group, select on essay and develop patterns of recitations and dance movement that the group thinks captures the essence of the essay's choreographic ideas.
- Perform the choreographic vision of the selected essay.