

The White Election

The White Election is meant to tell Emily Dickinson's story in her words. It is the story of a poet, and the business of poets is to observe and invent. She had studied voice and piano and often played at home. A friend of hers remembered that on her (the friend's) father's visits to the Dickinson home, he "would be awakened from his sleep by heavenly music. Emily would explain in the morning, 'I can improvise better at night.'" Another visitor recalled that Emily was "often at the piano playing weird and beautiful melodies, all from her own inspiration." Emily herself told a friend, "I play the old, odd tunes yet, which used to flit about your head after honest hours." All this inspires the conjecture that Emily may have set her own poems to music, or even conceived of some of them as songs in the first place. I have set them, in large part, just as Emily might have if her music had found a balance between tradition and iconoclasm something like that in her poems.

Gordon Getty, 2009