

Emily Dickinson International Society (EDIS)

Call for Papers

American Literature Association 37th Annual Conference

Chicago – May 20-23, 2026

Dickinson in an Age of Revolution

Born into a young nation, Emily Dickinson was not yet seven years old when Ralph Waldo Emerson asked the members of the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Harvard, “If there is any period one would desire to be born in, – is it not the age of Revolution; when the old and the new stand side by side, and admit of being compared; when the energies of all [people] are searched by fear and by hope; when historic glories of the old, can be compensated by the rich possibilities of the new era?” (“The American Scholar”)

Though it was long thought that Emily Dickinson demonstrated little awareness of history, politics, and world events, we now know that Dickinson, along with many of her contemporaries also, examined and explored the many possibilities of a new era. As she did so, she was aware that her thoughts and her writing were informed by her own time and place, that were one not “Britain born,” a robin might be one’s “Criterion for Tune” or that “Without the Snow’s Tableau,” one might have a different view of winter than that of a New Englander (M 126, Fr256, J285).

As the sescentennial of the U.S. Declaration of Independence approaches, we invite papers that consider how Dickinson’s living in an age of revolution shaped her life and work, as well as how her work anticipates and reflects subsequent ages and modes of “revolution.” We are, however, open to other lines of inquiry and, assuming a critical mass of other proposals, would take a second panel in a different direction.

Among the circumstances that might be considered revolutionary in Dickinson’s era are these:

- Religious revivals in her youth
- The rise of New Biblical Criticism and the transformation of Congregationalism and other faiths in her lifetime
- The expansion of women’s educational opportunities in the 19th century (Mount Holyoke being one of the first to offer higher education for women)
- Edward Dickinson’s term in Congress and his terms in the Massachusetts legislature
- The arrival and expansion of railroad travel
- Dickinson’s reading of *The Springfield Daily Republican* and her friendships with the publisher and editors of that paper, as well as with their families
- The formation of the Republican party (reportedly in Edward Dickinson’s room at the Willard Hotel in Washington)

- Shifts in interpreting the Constitution of the United States, which Frederick Douglass in 1852 deemed “a GLORIOUS LIBERTY DOCUMENT” (“What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?”)
- Dickinson’s reading of *The Atlantic Monthly*, to which the Dickinson family subscribed from its founding in 1857 until her death in 1886
- Geological discoveries in and around Amherst, as well as all over the globe, and the rise of science as a field of study
- The Civil War (still some new material here)
- The celebration of the nation’s centennial in 1876 and that year’s contested presidential election, dubbed by W.E.B. DuBois “The Revolution of 1876,” because its resolution by Congress ended the Reconstruction

Paper proposals (max. 300 words) should be submitted by **Thursday, January 8, 2026, midnight (EST)** to both Dr. Nicole Panizza at nicolepanizza@gmail.com and Dr. Emily Seelbinder at seelbine@queens.edu. Please include a **bio** of no more than one paragraph/ c. 100 words. Subject line for proposals should read: **[Your Name] | EDIS-American Literature Association, Chicago 2026.**

We look forward to your participation in these and other exciting EDIS initiatives in 2026.

Kind regards

Dr. Nicole Panizza and Dr. Emily Seelbinder