

GREENWICH

E N T E R T A I N M E N T



Wild Nights With Emily

Written and Directed by Madeleine Olnek

Starring Molly Shannon, Amy Seimetz, Susan Ziegler, Brett Gelman



85 minutes / Color / English / USA

Wild Nights with Emily is the winner of the prestigious Guggenheim Award

Theatrical Release Nationwide April 2019 by Greenwich Entertainment

VOD, DVD, and streaming by NBCUniversal

South American distribution by MGM

National Canadian Theatrical release by "Films We Like" / German release by Salzgeber /

UK release by Alarm / India release by Miners Inc.

100 Word Synopsis

Beloved comic Molly Shannon leads in this irreverent yet ground-breaking portrayal of Emily Dickinson; a meticulously researched biopic that brings to light Dickinson's lifelong passionate relationship with another woman. While seeking publication, Dickinson faces a troupe of male literary gatekeepers, too confused by her genius to take her work seriously. Instead, her work attracts an ambitious woman editor, who sees Emily as a cover for her own role in buttoned-up Amherst's most bizarre love triangle. Deconstructing the popularly held image of the brilliant Dickinson as a half-cracked recluse; the film is a timely critique of how women's history is rewritten.

THE DICKINSON FAMILY AND ASSOCIATED LITERARY FIGURES

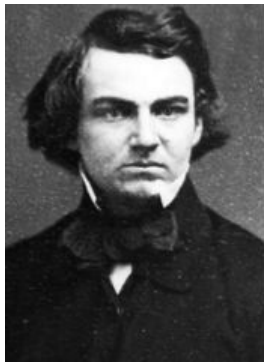
Shown With Their "Wild Nights With Emily" Counterparts



Emily Dickinson



Susan Gilbert Dickinson



Austin Dickinson



Lavinia Dickinson



Mattie Dickinson



Gilbert (Gib) Dickinson





Maggie Maher



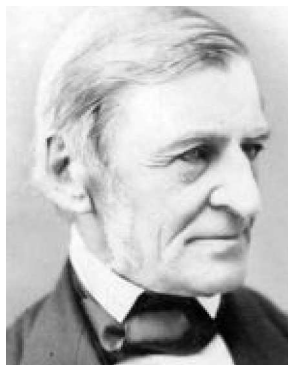
Mabel Loomis Todd



Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson



Helen Hunt Jackson



Ralph Waldo Emerson

ABOUT THE CAST

MOLLY SHANNON | “Emily Dickinson”

Molly Shannon spent six seasons as a member of the repertory company on “Saturday Night Live,” primarily known for the eclectic characters she created, such as Mary Katherine Gallagher and Sally O’Malley. In 2000, she received an Emmy nomination for “Outstanding Individual Performance in a Variety or Music Program.” Additionally, Molly was awarded the 2017 Independent Spirit Award for “Best Supporting Actress,” in the highly-acclaimed drama *Other People*, written and directed by SNL writer, Chris Kelly; Molly received the award for her heartfelt performance as a mother who is struggling with terminal cancer. Molly recently reunited with Chris Kelly and fellow former SNL head writer, Sarah Schneider, in their irreverent new comedy, “The Other Two,” (Comedy Central); Molly plays a Hollywood hungry stage mom to an overnight internet star and his two older siblings who suddenly find themselves in his shadow.

Molly was in the popular HBO comedy, “Divorce,” opposite Sarah Jessica Parker and Thomas Haden Church. She reprised her role of Val Bassett on NBC’s revival of “Will & Grace;” her performance resulted in an Emmy nomination for “Outstanding Guest Actress in a Comedy Series.” She also voiced the character of Murna in the Netflix animated series, “Spy Kids: Mission Critical.” Molly recently wrapped production on the crime drama, *Promising Young Woman* with Carey Mulligan and Bo Burnham and this fall she will be seen in a key cameo role in the film, *Jay and Silent Bob Reboot*. Molly was also seen in Tamara Jenkins’ Netflix original film, *Private Life* alongside Paul Giamatti and Kathryn Hahn. Additionally, she reprised her role as Wanda in the animated comedy, *Hotel Transylvania 3: Summer Vacation* and was recently seen on the Netflix comedy film *Sextuplets*.

Additional television credits include the “Wet Hot American Summer” miniseries for Netflix, an eight-episode series which served as a prequel to the cult comedy classic film of the same name (that Shannon also starred in); a guest arc on the HBO series, “Enlightened” for which she received an Emmy nomination for ‘Outstanding Guest Actress in a Comedy Series.’ She also made several guest appearances on “Raising Hope,” CBS’s “Life in Pieces,” HBO’s comedy “Getting On,” the ABC Rebel Wilson comedy, “Super Fun Night,” the IFC mini-series “The Spoils of Babylon” alongside Tobey Maguire and Kristen Wiig, “Up All Night,” “The Middle;” Lisa Kudrow’s “Web Therapy;” a recurring guest starring role on the Fox hit “Glee,” the TBS animated series “Neighbors from Hell,” the U.S. version of the popular Australian sitcom “Kath and Kim,” as well as “Cracking Up,” “Will & Grace,” “Sex and the City,” “Seinfeld,” “Pushing Daisies,” and “30 Rock,” among many others. Her television movies include “More of Me,” “12 Days of Christmas Eve” and “The Music Man.”

Film credits include the comedy *Half Magic* directed by Heather Graham; *The Little Hours*, an ensemble comedy about a young servant who takes refuge at a convent full of emotionally unstable nuns which also stars Alison Brie, Dave Franco, Aubrey Plaza, John C. Reilly and Fred Armisen; *Fun Mom Dinner*, a comedy that follows four moms (played by Shannon, Toni Collette, Katie Aselton and Bridget Everett) who get together for a harmless ‘fun mom dinner’ despite having

nothing in common except their kids' preschool class; William H. Macy's comedy *The Layover*; the independent feature film *Miles* from director Nathan Adloff; *We Don't Belong Here*, a drama about a crumbling family that also stars Catherine Keener and Anton Yelchin; *Me, Earl and the Dying Girl*, an independent drama which won the Grand Jury Prize as well as the Audience Award at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival; the American zombie comedy, *Life After Beth*; the 5th installment of the popular *Scary Movie* franchise; the animated comedy, *Hotel Transylvania* and the sequel *Hotel Transylvania 2*; *Bad Teacher* alongside Cameron Diaz, Jason Segel and Justin Timberlake; *Superstar*, portraying everybody's favorite Catholic schoolgirl Mary Katherine Gallagher; Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*; *Year of the Dog*; *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby*; *Evan Almighty*; *Igor*; Keenen Ivory Wayans' *Little Man*; *Scary Movie 4*; Ron Howard's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*; *A Night at the Roxbury*; *Analyze This*; *Happiness*; *Never Been Kissed*; *The Good Boy!*; *Serendipity*; *Osmosis Jones*; *The Santa Clause 2* and *Wet Hot American Summer*.

In 2011, Abrams Books for Young Readers, an imprint of ABRAMS, released Molly's first children's picture book, [Tilly the Trickster](#). In 2010, Shannon made her Broadway debut replacing Tony Award winner Katie Finneran in the hit musical "Promises, Promises" alongside Sean Hayes and Kristin Chenoweth.

In 2018, Shannon teamed up with Will Ferrell to provide commentary on the 2018 Rose Parade in character as eccentric broadcasters, Cord Hosenbeck and Tish Cattigan. Presented by *Funny or Die*, the parody, *The 2018 Rose Parade Hosted by Cord & Tish* was live streamed on Amazon Prime Video. The duo returned to cover Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's nuptials with *The Royal Wedding Live with Cord and Tish!* which aired on HBO and this year, they covered the Rose Parade for the second year in a row.

Born in Shaker Heights, Ohio, Molly earned a BFA in drama from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, where she was honored to give the commencement address for the graduating class of 2019. She currently lives in California with her husband and two children.

AMY SEIMETZ | "Mabel Loomis Todd"

Actor/filmmaker Amy Seimetz is best known as the co-creator and executive producer of the critically acclaimed Starz series *The Girlfriend Experience*. Based on the Steven Soderbergh feature of the same name, the show premiered in 2015 and was nominated for a Golden Globe and quickly renewed for a second season which aired in 2017. *Sun Don't Shine*, Seimetz's directorial debut feature film, won a special jury prize at South By Southwest in 2012 and was nominated for two Gotham Awards. In 2018, Seimetz directed two episodes of the acclaimed FX series "Atlanta" and subsequently signed a first look television production development deal with the network.

Seimetz's notable film credits in front of the camera include Shane Carruth's acclaimed *Upstream Color* (for which she was nominated for a Gotham Award), Kevin Kolsch and Dennis Widmyer's *Pet Sematary*, Ridley Scott's *Alien: Covenant*, and Madeleine Olnek's *Wild Nights with Emily*. Seimetz's television acting credits include Netflix's *Stranger Things*, the AMC

series *The Killing*, Christopher Guest's HBO comedy series *Family Tree* and the upcoming second season of *Get Shorty*.

SUSAN ZIEGLER | “Susan Gilbert Dickinson”

A graduate of NYU’s Experimental Theatre Wing, Susan has performed in numerous venues internationally, Off-Broadway, and in Los Angeles. She has a long history of working with Ms. Olnek, both in her plays and in film. Susan played the therapist in the award-winning short film COUNTERTRANSFERENCE (Sundance, Outfest-Grand Jury Prize, Newfest- Grand Jury Prize). She originated the lead role in the stage version of CODEPENDENT LESBIAN SPACE ALIEN SEEKS SAME which she then reprised in the Sundance – and Gotham Award nominated-- cult hit film. She also had a featured role in the Independent Spirit Award nominated Sundance comedy THE FOXY MERKINS. Recent projects: SEARCH PARTY on TBS (Charles Rogers, Sarah-Violet Bliss, Michael Showalter), HELLO MY NAME IS DORIS, GOOD GIRLS GET HIGH and INEFFABLE. Aside from numerous television and film appearances, she is also a member of the critically-acclaimed New American Theater Company, where she has collaborated with fellow company members Alfred Molina, Jack Stelhin and Eric Pierpoint.

BRETT GELMAN | “Colonel T.W. Higginson”

Brett is currently guest starring on Netflix’s award-winning series, “Stranger Things” and can also be seen as the brother-in-law on Amazon’s smash hit, “Fleabag.” He also appears in episodes of David E. Kelley’s “Mr. Mercedes.” He also is in the Locarno 2019 opening night film “If Only” directed by Ginevra Elkann. Other recent projects include his return as ‘Dr. Greg’ on the new season of Judd Apatow’s critically acclaimed series, “Love,” and the release of his third comedy special for Adult Swim, “Brett Gelman’s Dinner in America.” He can also be seen in the return of David Lynch’s hit show, “Twin Peaks.” Brett Gelman’s film, “Lemon,” which he stars in and co-wrote with director Janicza Bravo, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival; the film was also the opening night film for the 2017 International Film Festival - Rotterdam with the high praise continuing through its screenings at the SXSW Film Festival. Brett's television credits include his “Dinner Specials” that he and Jason Woliner created for Adult Swim. He also co-starred on the Adult Swim cop parody “Eagleheart” opposite Chris Elliot, the critically acclaimed FX comedy, “Married,” opposite Nat Faxon and Judy Greer, Comedy Central’s “Another Period,” Starz’s critically acclaimed series “Blunt Talk” opposite Patrick Stewart, and NBC’s “Go On” opposite Matthew Perry. Film credits include roles in the Columbia-distributed comedies “The Other Guys” and “30 Minutes or Less,” the Sundance selection, “Joshy,” and the Docu/Fiction film, “Drib” that premiered at this year’s South By Southwest Film Festival. Brett graduated with a BFA in drama from North Carolina School Of The Arts. Brett is a long time company member of The Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre.

JACKIE MONAHAN | “Lavinia Dickinson”

Jackie Monahan is a comedian, actor, writer, and producer. She toured the country featuring for Amy Schumer which included opening for her monthly show in Vegas. Jackie has since been headlining clubs, colleges, and cruise lines such as Atlantis and Olivia. She can be seen live at:

The Comedy Store, The Improv and alternative rooms throughout Los Angeles. You may have seen her on Adult Swim's "The Eric Andre Show," Last Comic Standing, or Comedy Jam on Showtime. In addition, Jackie starred in and co-wrote Madeleine Olnek's beloved Sundance feature film "The Foxy Merkins" which was also nominated for an Independent Spirit award. Jackie was an alien in Olnek's Sundance cult hit "Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same" which received rave reviews from both Variety and The Hollywood Reporter. Roger Ebert called Monahan "A delight, and the Queen of Deadpan. " She has been professionally trained at UCB and Groundlings. Jackie won Time Out New York Joke of the Year and was voted comic to watch by Esquire magazine who said "Jackie has the looks of your friends hot older sister with the jokes of a deranged serial killer. She will kill you and you will be smiling"

KEVIN SEAL | "Austin Dickinson"

Kevin Seal was an MTV VJ and host of the show *Kevin Seal: Sporting Fool* (Cable Ace Award). Kevin worked with Madeleine Olnek for many years in downtown theater, starring in many of her plays, including the lead in "Help Police" at Soho Rep, and he also played Santa Claus in "The I'm Not Welcome Anywhere Christmas Special," and slow danced with Jesus in "How To Write While You Sleep." 20 years ago, he played a drunk plastic surgeon, married to his Wild Nights With Emily wife (actor Susan Ziegler) in Olnek's play "Three Stories High," set in group therapy in the afterlife.

JOEL MICHAELY | "Edward Dickinson"

Joel Michaely is in several upcoming films, including playing Andre in "The Comeback Trail," starring Robert De Niro, Tommy Lee Jones, and Morgan Freeman. Joel is perhaps best known for the lesbian film "But I'm A Cheerleader" opposite Natasha Lyonne and Rupaul.

DANA MELANIE | "Young Emily Dickinson"

Dana Melanie is a classically trained award-winning actress currently appearing in the Netflix series "Greenhouse Academy." New projects include the currently shooting show "That One Time" with Dermot Mulroney, and the feature film "Glass Jaw." She played an axe murderer in 'Lissy Borton had an Axe', and a lonely teenage hypochondriac in the comedy short 'Waiting to Die' in Bayside, Queens. Dana also co-stars in the 2018 thriller 'By Dawn.'

SASHA FROLOVA | "Young Susan Gilbert"

Sasha plays Mrs. Hummel in Greta Gerwig's "Little Women." In 2016 Sasha played series regular role of young Cathy in the Amazon pilot *The Interestings*, directed by Mike Newell and adapted from the award-nominated novel of the same title. She then went on to star as a lead in Dark Rabbit's feature BLOOD SURF, produced by James Franco and 20th Century Fox's THE EMPTY MAN opposite James Badge Dale, coming soon. She most recently appeared in Netflix's *The OA* and guested on CBS's *Blue Bloods*. Sasha appeared in FOX's RED SPARROW opposite Jennifer Lawrence, directed by Francis Lawrence. In Television, Sasha joins the cast of *Snowpiercer* for TNT in the series regular role of Pixi Aariak, opposite

Jennifer Connelly and Daveed Diggs. She was also in Autumn De Wilde's latest short film series *The Postman Dreams* for Prada opposite Elijah Wood.

COLE ESCOLA | cameo

A comedian, actor, and writer, Cole currently plays Chassie Tucker on "At Home with Amy Sedaris." He originated the role of Bridget Everett's fetus in "Rock Bottom" for The Public Theater in a performance Variety referred to as "heroic."

ABOUT THE CREW

MADELEINE OLNEK | Writer / Director

Madeleine Olnek is a New York City based playwright and filmmaker. She was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship for her third feature film, *Wild Nights With Emily*. The film was also awarded a grant from Cinereach. Her second feature *The Foxy Merkins*, included screenings at Sundance 2014, BAM Cinemafest, Lincoln Center, and an NYC theatrical run at IFP. The film had its international premiere at the Moscow Film Festival, and was nominated for an Independent Spirit award. Her debut feature *Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same* premiered at Sundance 2011. Now translated into eleven languages, its screenings included MoMa and The Viennale. Nominated for a Gotham award, it had theatrical runs in LA and NYC. Her award-winning and widely screened comedy shorts, *Countertransference* (2009), and *Hold Up* (2006), were official selections of Sundance; *Make Room For Phyllis* (2007) premiered at Sarasota. Olnek was awarded best female short film director at Sundance in 2009, by LA's Women In Film organization. As a playwright, Olnek has been commissioned by Dixon Place, the Atlantic Theater, The Actor's Theater of Louisville, and the Public theater. She is one of the authors of "The Practical Handbook for The Actor" (with a foreword by David Mamet), a widely used acting textbook. Olnek graduated from NYU with a BFA in drama, where she trained in the acting conservatory program. She holds an MFA in playwriting from Brown University, which she attended on a full merit-based scholarship. She has an MFA in film from Columbia University, where she was awarded the prestigious William Goldman Screenwriting Fellowship, and the Adrienne Shelly award for Best Female Director. She is currently in pre-development for a series with Roadside Attractions.

ANNA STYPKO | Cinematographer

Anna Stypko is a Los Angeles based filmmaker. She was born in Gdynia, Poland in 1982 and emigrated to the USA in 1992 with her family. She studied painting and sculpture at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia. In 2010, Anna began to pursue her MFA in writing/ directing at NYU Tisch School of the Arts in New York City. Prior to working as the Director of Photography for WILD NIGHTS WITH EMILY, Anna was the DP for Madeleine Olnek's previous feature, THE FOXY MERKINS, which premiered at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival.

ANNA MARGARITA ALBELO | Producer

Anna Margarita Albelo is an out, Cuban-American writer, director and producer working in film, television, and digital content. Based in Los Angeles, Anna works as a development writer for

show creator, Dmitry Lipkin (HBO "Hung", FX "The Riches") and is currently developing 2 projects: an original half-hour comedy with Wanda Sykes' and Page Hurwitz' Push it Productions, and a feature film optioned by Issa Rae and Deniese Davis' Color Creative. Her 2014 award winning feature, "Who's Afraid of Vagina Wolf?" was released theatrically in France and her 2008 short film, "The Turkey" screened at the Cannes Film Festival. As a producer, Anna works in film, notably producing films for Guinevere Turner, Amy Adler, as well as, in digital, coordinating an 8-part series for Anthony Bourdain/The Perfect Dish Asia/CNN, Summer, 2017. Anna spent the first 15 years of her career in Paris, France and was a regular collaborator for French network, Canal Plus, writing and directing several broadcast documentaries and shorts on LGBT culture, also appearing as a recurring correspondent for the series, "L'Oeil de Links." Her body of work, screened in over 150 international festivals, blends narrative, documentary, and comedic elements into a unique story-telling style that has become her trademark. LA Weekly calls her work, "Riveting" and IndieWire spotlighted her as a "Filmmaker to watch!"

CASPER ANDREAS | Producer

Casper Andreas is an award-winning writer, director, actor and film producer, who has been selected as one of the 100 most influential and newsworthy LGBT people by Out Magazine. Casper wrote, directed, and produced his first feature, the romantic comedy *Slutty Summer* in 2003. Since then Casper produced and directed another seven feature films (four of which he also wrote): *A Four Letter Word* (2007), *Between Love & Goodbye* (2008), *The Big Gay Musical* (2009), *Violet Tendencies* (2010), *Going Down in LA-LA Land* (2011), *Kiss Me, Kill Me* (2015) and *Flatbush Luck* (2016). His first six features had NY/LA theatrical runs, and all of them have been released on VOD and DVD internationally.

MAX RIFKIND-BARRON | Producer

Max Barron holds an MFA from Columbia where he wrote and produced the short film *Pipe Dream*, which screened at over 20 film festivals, including Frameline and Outfest. *Pipe Dream* is currently in development as a web series at Warner Brothers Television. Max co-produced the short film *Invisible Spaces*, which premiered at Cannes, in Competition, in 2015. He serves on the board of Film Forum and on the board of Queer-Art, a critically-acclaimed monthly screening series and mentorship program for LGBTQ artists, curated by Ira Sachs and Adam Baran.

LEE EATON | Editor

Lee Eaton has worked as a colorist on acclaimed films such as Francis Bodo's "Afronauts." This is his third time colorizing -- and first time editing -- for director, Madeleine Olnek, having worked as a colorist on her features, "Codependent Lesbian Space Alien Seeks Same" and "The Foxy Merkins" both of which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival.

TONY CLEMENTE JR | Editor

Tony began as an intern on "Wild Nights with Emily" and ended up as one of the two editors of the film.



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FILMMAKER LETTER



Wild Nights With Emily

by writer/director Madeleine Olnek

One day I came across an article in The New York Times entitled “Beethoven’s Hair Tells All!” It was about how advances in science are allowing us to understand new things about historical figures. There was a story in it about the iconic American poet Emily Dickinson, which documented how spectrographic technologies were restoring erasures to Emily’s letters. These centered around the name “Sue”—a woman who eventually married Emily’s brother, and with whom Emily was in love and had a lifelong relationship.

I was shocked to read this—I had never heard anything like this about Emily Dickinson. I had heard the same story everyone else had—that she was a recluse, miserable, unloved. Also that she wrote thousands of poems that she hid away in a trunk and wanted no one to see. I

remember in college someone telling me that Emily Dickinson had agoraphobia. So morbid was this image that I had no desire to read her poems.

The article in *The New York Times* went on to explain that the posthumous publication of Emily's poems had been edited by a woman who was the mistress of Emily's brother. The whole story suddenly turned into a soap opera—but also a history that was the opposite of everything I had ever heard. How odd! I immediately made it into an award-winning play that ran in a theater in downtown New York.

That was twenty years ago; in the interim the entire world has changed. All the reasons people had to censor this part of Emily's life are far less relevant. And I found I had changed also—when I was younger I was so outraged that history did not remember this great love story. Now, coming back to it at an older age, I found that I was equally interested in her journey as a writer. By the historical excision of Emily's central relationship with Sue, who was her muse, her strategist, her intellectual companion, and her closest associate, Emily became a cipher who created poems in a void. She was unrelatable. And her poems—especially those about love, joy and passion—were so overwhelmed by the image of her as the nutty recluse that they almost made no sense.

In my desire to present a truthful and revealing portrait of Emily Dickinson so different from what had been seen before, I knew I needed to bring a very special actress to the role. SNL's Molly Shannon was my only choice to play her. The director Robert Altman once said of Molly Shannon, that she was "some kind of genius." A perfect description, and just like Emily. You can't even characterize what it is about Molly—*sui generis*—but it's brilliant. Emily Dickinson's niece Mattie said that no one talked longer or funnier than "Aunt Emily," and I knew that if Molly, with all her warmth and her original mind, played her, then the world would finally understand who Emily Dickinson was. The rest of the cast is so wonderful: Susan Ziegler as Susan, Amy Seimetz as Mabel Todd (the editor/mistress), Brett Gelman as Thomas Wentworth Higginson, comedienne Jackie Monahan as Lavinia Dickinson, Lisa Haas as Maggie, Dana Melanie and Sasha Frolova as teenage Emily and Sue respectively; and the cast is rounded out by Stella Chesnut (Molly Shannon's real-life daughter) in the important role of Emily's niece.

The movie is a 'dramatic comedy' with equal parts humor and seriousness. That seemed the only form that would do justice to Emily's voice. We enlisted classical musicians and lavish costumes and—thanks to our Guggenheim award that supported the research—we were given entrée by many different historical societies to properties built in the 1800s. But at the center of this movie are Emily Dickinson's own words. Understanding Emily's vision as a writer, and Sue's support for her work, is the central concern of the movie. I wanted to make a film that parents could go to with their teenage kids. On the festival circuit I was amazed that this movie appealed not only to the young but also to an audience in their 80s & 90s. Dickinson's words, written in the 1800s, and experienced on the screen in *Wild Nights with Emily*, are as resonant as if they were written today.

LANDMARK THEATRES

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PRAISE FOR *WILD NIGHTS WITH EMILY*

“This is an irreverent film, but its lightness is meaningful. With each silly flourish, Olnek offers joy and companionship to a figure whose history was more conveniently presented to generations of readers as solitary.”

- Teo Bugbee, *The New York Times*

“Molly Shannon breathes wickedly funny life into Emily Dickinson.”

- Joey Nolfi, *Entertainment Weekly*

“Wild Nights With Emily” may be Olnek’s most political film to date, one that could forever change the narrative of the world’s most famous woman poet.”

- Jude Dry, *Indiewire*

“[Olnek’s] movie reclaims Emily’s identity...she was ahead of her time and the men who ran the literary world weren’t interested in keeping pace.”

- Amy Nicholson, *Variety*

“As entertaining and thought-provoking as Dickinson’s poetry.”

- Tinu Thomas, *The Austin Chronicle*

“...this is one of the best comedies I’ve seen all year.”

-Richard Whittaker, *The Austin Chronicle*

“Wild Nights is a comedy through and through but is still emotionally resonant. Heartfelt and genuine, the film understands the unbreakable love Emily and Susan shared. A significant portion of time is dedicated to readings of Dickinson’s poetry and letters to Susan (in voiceover, reenactments or on-screen text), many of which are so romantic it’ll make the most stubborn of cynics swoon.”

- Iana Murray, *The Skinny*

“Olnek presents a different, more vivacious side to Emily (played beautifully by Molly Shannon) that challenges how society views her and utilizes comedy instead of drama to really hit the mark on sexism throughout history...Olnek’s style of comedy perfectly blends her film’s message, the characters’ acting, and the untold story of Dickinson. Shannon and Zeigler’s connection is palpable, and their expression of Emily and Susan’s love story is both sweet in its longevity and sorrowful in its concealment. The tone of the film is primarily comedic and has a Drunk History feel ...[Olnek’s] balance of satire and feminist ideals are executed extremely well...Wild Nights playfully sheds away the confinements of Dickinson’s life and restores an appreciation for her true self...Wild Nights With Emily is refreshingly liberating in its laughter, but also rich in worthwhile lessons.”

- Marisa Mirabel, *Birth. Movies. Death*

“The deepest challenge of any dramatization of Emily Dickinson’s life is to reconcile the poetry, which is dark, bold and strange, with Dickinson’s legend as a meek and mild recluse. Wild Nights

accomplishes reconciliation by showing the disparity between Dickinson's public and private selves...Much is done in 84 minutes. Olnek explains Emily to us in a way that makes sense, while giving her a life worth living, one much better than sitting in her room all day.”

- Mick Lasalle, *San Francisco Chronicle*

“A gorgeous mix of passion, comedy and bizarre true crime, Olnek’s new work mines poet Emily Dickinson’s creative and love lives—and the stranger-than-fiction rewriting of her reality—to create a startling, lyrical and utterly original film.”

- Helen Eisenbach, *Medium.com*

“[Susan Gibert] played here by a wonderful actress named Susan Zeigler, while Molly Shannon brings life, spark and humor to the portrayal of Emily Dickinson...the movie is fascinating to watch and the sparks between the two excellent leads seem real, undeniable - even profound.”

-Michael Medved, *The Michael Medved Show*

“Refreshing...intelligent...a relentless geyser of humor...Olnek puts on display a series of poems that seem to make revelations about Dickinson’s affair with Susan. Hearing the suggestive poetry recited throughout the film made me think back to high school English when our male teacher explained that Dickinson was writing about the love of a woman from a man’s perspective. Personally, I believe Olnek’s reading of Dickinson’s writing is probably more on target than my high school English teacher’s.”

-Don Simpson, *Hammer to Nail*

“Dickinson is portrayed in a way that brings life to a writer who wrote such lively poetry...Period pieces are no easy feat, but director Madeleine Olnek does it excellently...so hilarious...Dickinson fan or not, the premise is interesting and the history fascinating.”

Natalie Mokry, *Film School Rejects*

“There’s more to Emily Dickinson than meets the eye. Though the famed poet is remembered as a stiff writer who shut herself from the outside world in the later years of her life, the new period comedy *Wild Nights with Emily* paints a much different story of one of the world’s most famous female writers. Played by Molly Shannon, Dickinson is funny and strong and deeply attached to Susan Huntington Gilbert Dickinson (Susan Ziegler) — the purported real muse behind her poems... “She’s perceived as a spinster recluse who wanted her poems burned upon death,” Shannon, 54, told *Entertainment Weekly*. “That story was fabricated.... She was a lively woman who 100 percent wanted to be published and went up against big men at the head of literary journals, [while] she had a love life””

Ale Russian, *People Magazine*



The New York Times



With a Rebel Yell, Molly Shannon Claims Collusion



Emily Berl for The New York Times

By **Kathryn Shattuck**

April 12, 2019



Love did not come easy for Molly Shannon and Emily Dickinson.

“In all honesty,” said Shannon, “I had the image of her that was presented to the public” — an apparition in white, shuttered in her bedroom in 19th-century Amherst, Mass., and loath to share her talents with the world. “She sounded so dark and dreary.”

Then she was offered the lead in [“Wild Nights With Emily.”](#) and suddenly her passions flared.

Written and directed by Madeleine Olnek, the dramatic comedy presents Dickinson as a lesbian who minced no words expressing her desire for her sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert Dickinson. And who desperately longed to see her nearly 1,800 poems in print, stymied by men at every step.

“It’s like, wow, we were fed a story about a spinster recluse who apparently didn’t want to be published and was rocking in her chair, peeking out her window at funerals, when really it’s the opposite,” Shannon said. “She’s a trailblazer rebel artist who pushed the envelope with a poetic form.”

Shannon is something of a rebel herself. From 1995 to 2001 on “Saturday Night Live,” she rivaled the physical humor — and influence — of her male co-stars with characters like [Mary Katherine Gallagher](#), a Catholic schoolgirl with superstar dreams, and [Sally O’Malley](#), a high-kicking 50-year-old dancer (impersonated by [Hugh Jackman](#) on Twitter in October when he hit the milestone birthday).

In 2017, she won an Independent Spirit Award as a dying mother in Chris Kelly’s “[Other People](#)” — then recently joined him and Sarah Schneider, former “S.N.L.” co-head writers, to play the momager of a Bieber-esque pop star in Comedy Central’s “[The Other Two](#).” And later this year she’ll return as Diane, the high-strung confidante of Sarah Jessica Parker’s uncoupled Frances, in HBO’s “[Divorce](#).”

On a call from Tokyo, where Shannon, 54, and her husband, the painter [Fritz Chesnut](#), were spending spring break with their teenagers, Stella and Nolan, she spoke about Emily Dickinson as an unlikely L.G.B.T.Q. hero and the collusion that tried to silence her.

Here are edited excerpts from the conversation.

[Madeleine has said](#) that casting you was extremely important to her — that with Emily Dickinson she knew that she finally had a part worthy of your stature.

Madeleine and I met at N.Y.U. drama school. She directed this show called “The Follies,” which was scripted comedy in a black box theater at midnight, and Adam Sandler was in it and we would do impersonations. I created the character of Mary Katherine Gallagher in that show, so early on I just thought Madeleine was amazing. And she knows how hard I struggled to make it in comedy, so I think that’s why she thought I would be great to play Emily Dickinson.

After Emily’s death, Susan’s name was erased from their correspondence. How did their relationship come to light?

Through spectrographic technology, we were able to examine erasures in Emily’s letters. And I think the presence of shame around the feelings that Emily expressed in her letters of love would not just be there in a friendship. This was Puritan New England, where there was no way that they could talk about this. We have this story that she wanted her poems burned upon death when in reality she’s an L.G.B.T.Q. hero. She’s a model for new wave feminism, which talks about equality for all. [Screams] It makes me want to start a riot.

The poems as you read them in the movie feel fresh.

You're understanding that she's writing about her romantic life, which she was scared about initially when she was younger because she's writing erotic poems about a woman she loves. When you read them with that lens, you are hearing them differently. I think [her editors] were worried when she became so successful after her death that if the reading public found out that she was in love with a woman it might not be as interested in her. So there was collusion.

Emily got a lot of pushback from male mentors and editors, who seemed not quite to understand her writing. Have you experienced the same?

When I did first start "Saturday Night Live," I was trying to get Mary Katherine Gallagher on television. I had done the character in my stage show for years and I knew — this works. But I went to different writers — men — and I said, "I have this character," and I wrote up a sketch and — I don't want to say who it was — people would look at it on paper and go, "That will never work." I'd use my frustration and anger to fuel me forward. And then finally I did go to one guy, Steve Koren, who said, "O.K., tell me what you do." He basically typed up a version that I did in my stage show and that was the first sketch.

I remember I was like, "I'm going to be physical, I want to be like those boys, I want to be like Chris Farley and I'm going to *fall* into chairs and I'm going to make my heart *bleed* and make them understand this." And when [the sketch] got on the air it was huge. And I was like, *Yes!*

"The Other Two" has an "S.N.L." pedigree, with Chris Kelly and Sarah Schneider as the creators and Lorne Michaels as an executive producer. Is that why you signed on?

I'm very close to Lorne. He is truly the greatest, and he completely changed my life. And Chris Kelly is very special, and because we did "Other People" together, I just jumped at the chance to get to work with Chris again and to meet Sarah Schneider, his partner. So when I read the pilot, I had a feeling about it. They're one-of-a-kind writers.

What drew you to play the character Pat Dubek?

I love that she is having a Chapter 2. It was revealed that her husband was a terrible alcoholic who died with his penis frozen to the roof of the house. She moved to New York City with her son, so she's experiencing a whole new kind of reinvention. She's going to get her own talk show. She's not cynical at all about showbiz, so I relate to that part of her and her family values.

Mary Katherine Gallagher had that school uniform. Pat has that funky hair. Do you come up with your own costumes?

[With Mary Katherine Gallagher] Lorne came right into the dressing room and he goes, "I think you should make the skirt a little shorter because that will be funny when you lift your leg up to sing a song and it will show your underwear." [With Pat] they said, "We want a Kate Gosselin kind of Ohio-comes-to-New York City look with a certain type of coloring that would be done in the Midwest but maybe not as cool as somebody who's lived in New York City for a while." I love changing myself. As a matter of fact, I always felt less self-conscious when I was playing a character. I just look at the character and don't see myself in it.

Before you go, can you recite your favorite Emily Dickinson poem?

*You must let me
go first, Sue, because
I live in the Sea
always and know
the Road —
I would have drowned
twice to save
you sinking, dear,
If I could only
have covered your
Eyes so you would'nt
have seen the Water —*

Oh, I love it. Isn't it *gorgeous*? Ahh, I can't get enough.

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Portrait of a Lady on Fire' Understands Queer Desire

Céline Sciamma's lush period piece is one of several movies this year that get intimacy between women right.

By Ren Jender

Ms. Jender is a filmmaker.

Dec. 9, 2019

In the film "Portrait of a Lady on Fire," set in 18th-century France, a glance, a stare is everything. The artist Marianne (Noémie Merlant) is commissioned to paint the noblewoman Héloïse (Adèle Haenel) so that the man Héloïse's mother has arranged for her to marry can approve or disapprove of her before the wedding. Héloïse — opposed to the impending nuptials — has refused to sit for portraits before, and at first Marianne must do her job surreptitiously, studying her subject carefully during outings under the guise of having been hired as her companion.

This initial deception is conveyed through the intent, searching looks Marianne casts toward Héloïse and the curious, wary glances Héloïse returns to her — exchanges that reveal a mutual attraction and cement a powerful bond over time.

To paraphrase Sonic Youth's co-founder Kim Gordon, in her memoir "Girl in a Band": To be a woman is to observe others observing you. Likewise, to flirt as a queer person is to immerse one's self in the act of looking and being looked at, sometimes in secret. For many of us, that gaze at someone or some image is how we first realized our sexuality.

"Portrait of a Lady on Fire" was written and directed by Céline Sciamma and captures the essence of queer women's desire in a way many other movies have tried and failed. Such depictions can walk a fine line between representation and exploitation, and when male directors are behind the camera, the results are typically more creepy than sexy, as seen in "Blue Is the Warmest Color" and "The Handmaiden."

In those movies, the filmmakers leer at the actresses' bodies; the joyless, naked spanking in "Blue" and the emphasis on bodily fluids in "The Handmaiden" make these scenes more like pornography than a show of intimacy and pleasure between the characters.

What these men are unable to capture is this: The woman who is being looked at must look back at the woman (or camera) looking at her for any real connection to take place. And the look she gives has to be one that communicates not only pleasure in being looked at, but pleasure in what she sees.

Ms. Sciamma's film has an exceptionally refreshing vision of both emotional and physical intimacy (which is not necessarily explicit). And it reminded me of two other movies directed by women released in the United States this year that demonstrate thoughtful ways of looking at queer women: Madeleine Olnek's "Wild Nights With Emily" and Wanuri Kahiu's "Rafiki."

Each filmmaker takes a unique approach in countering the male gaze. A scene in "Portrait of a Lady" shows Héloïse's bare breasts alongside her raised arm, so we also see her unshaven armpit. Body hair on a woman is true to the period, but I can't help thinking Ms. Sciamma also wanted to emphasize the difference from the countless clips (in porn and otherwise) featuring pretty, thin and conventionally feminine white women. Perhaps she wanted to throw a monkey wrench into male fantasies about female nudity onscreen — Claire Mathon's cinematography renders the scene painterly, beautiful and yes, sexy. But it's not the kind of sexiness we're used to seeing onscreen.

In "Wild Nights With Emily," a comedy examining Emily Dickinson's decades-long relationship with her sister-in-law Susan Gilbert, we never see the two characters, played in older age by Molly Shannon and Susan Ziegler, naked. But we do frequently see them in bed together. The cinematographer Anna Stypko admires them in their vintage lingerie, and doesn't shy away from the way Emily's décolletage gently creases when she turns over in bed (a change in physiology many of us in our 50s have also noticed) or the lines on her and Susan's faces.

The film has some elements of farce, but never makes the sexual desires of the 50-something women the punch line. The light in their eyes during stolen moments alone together, the ease with which they express joy and tenderness while touching — these elements make love between women who are long past their 20s seem not just possible, but also deeper and better than love at a younger age.

And the Kenyan film “Rafiki” captures the electric stares and ensuing relationship between a young couple, Kena (Samantha Mugatsia) and Ziki (Sheila Muniyiva). Kena, a butch, short-haired woman, is transfixed by the playful, regal Ziki and her long, bright pink yarn locs, blue and pink manicure and the inviting roll of her shoulder as she practices dance moves with her friends. Ziki notices Kena’s stare and, as many femmes might do, makes the first move.

In one of their early conversations, Ziki suggests they break with their homophobic neighborhood’s norms: “Let’s make a pact that we’ll never be like any of them down there.” The romance is a secret from their close-knit community where both their fathers are running for the same political seat. When Ziki and Kena are together, time seems to slow down, the colors around them seem to get softer as the two characters are saturated in the pleasure — and the relief — that many queer people will remember from their own first loves.

Ziki is stunning, but the camera doesn’t gawk. In the intimate scenes, we see an impressionistic mix of the two characters’ intertwined hands — a knee, a face, a kiss, with slightly out-of-sync audio recreating the disorienting but glorious feeling of first having sex with someone you really want, and who really wants you. We see the sex as the two partners — not an outside voyeur — might.

The couples in each of these films are forced by circumstance to engage in romance covertly, yet what comes through in the performances is the pleasure of being — truly — *seen*. This goes beyond the bedroom: In “Wild Nights With Emily,” Emily refers to Susan as her muse — but Susan is the muse who talks back, lending her sharp, discerning eye to Emily’s poems, offering suggestions and reassurance that they should be published.

Héloïse in “Portrait of a Lady on Fire” talks back, too. When Marianne remarks that Héloïse never smiled during their initial encounters, Héloïse flirtatiously pushes back: She had not smiled because Marianne had yet to say anything funny.

“Rafiki” concludes on an optimistic note, and the Kenya Film Classification Board banned the film because of its “clear intent to promote lesbianism in Kenya contrary to the law” — in May, the nation’s high court upheld laws criminalizing gay sex — though the ban was temporarily lifted last year so that it would be eligible for an Academy Award. Ms. Kahi, the director, refused to put a damper on the film’s ending. There’s “such joy, kindness and softness in the relationship with the girls,” she said in an interview. “It was important to show that.”

Queer women who love films know they often don’t love us back — we’re used to having to ignore certain scenes about us in order to enjoy the rest of the movie. Around the time of its release, I gave “Blue Is the Warmest Color” a mostly positive review while acknowledging the exploitative nature of the intimacy scenes, as well as accusations of on-set abuse the lead actresses made against the director, Abdellatif Kechiche.

But this wave of “Portrait of a Lady on Fire,” “Rafiki” and “Wild Nights With Emily” makes me cautiously optimistic that queer women might see more films in the future where we can take everything in, and never once have to look away.

Ren Jender (@renjender) is a film critic, filmmaker and producer.

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10 Streaming Movies to Keep Your Summer Interesting

You may not have considered (or heard of) these out-of-the-box selections. We'll make you familiar.

By Jason Bailey

July 24, 2020

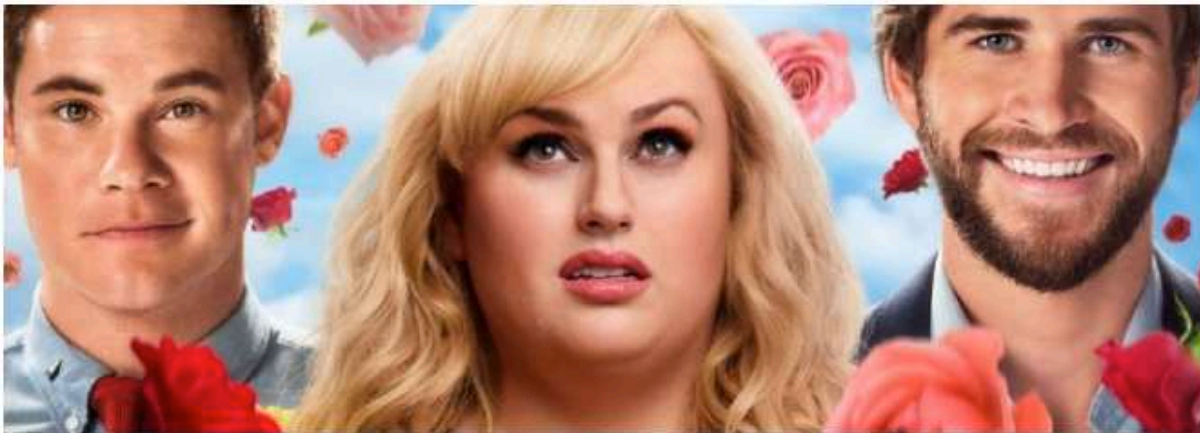
As the summer of quarantine continues apace, the streaming services are upping their game, offering the kind of blockbuster entertainments we'd normally flock to the multiplex to consume with a box of popcorn and an ice-cold drink. But they only have a handful of those in the tank, and there are still *many* hours in the day. So, once again, it's time to recommend a few out-of-the-box selections from your subscription streaming services — the offbeat biopics, quirky comedies, gritty dramas and cuckoo documentaries worth digging around for.



'Wild Nights With Emily'

Stream it on Hulu.

Another unexpectedly ribald biopic, this giggly treat from the writer and director Madeleine Olnek stars Molly Shannon as the notoriously reclusive poet Emily Dickinson, here reimagined as a cheerfully gregarious party girl. (The film predates the similarly conceived Apple series "Dickinson.") The title, and casting of the "S.N.L." alum Shannon, suggests a jokey sendup for literary types — and though Olnek's script and execution are winking and witty, she wrestles with serious themes, dramatizes fully realized relationships and poses pointed questions about how legacies are devised and maintained.



THE BEST COMEDY MOVIES OF 2019 (AND THE WORST)

Need a laugh? Then you were wise to visit Rotten Tomatoes, because we're presenting our guide to the best comedies of 2019 so far, ranked by Tomatometer! (We're also including the worst comedies of 2019, so you know what to avoid, or what to seek out if you're in for a chuckle of a different variety.)

In the first half of 2019, comedy has come in the form of star vehicles (*Long Shot*, *The Dead Don't Die*, *The Professor*), rom-com satires (*Isn't It Romantic*), actual actual rom-coms (*Plus One*, *Always Be My Maybe*), and female-led efforts that range from the raucous (*Booksmart*) to the literary (*Wild Nights With Emily*) to the glamorous (*The Hustle*). The only stipulation for films being included on the list is that they needed at least 20 reviews—whether they were theatrical or streaming was not a factor.

As the year rolls on with more yuks in the form of *Yesterday*, *Good Boys*, and *Where'd You Go, Bernadette*, look back in laughter with our guide to the best comedies of 2019 (alongside the worst)! And check back every week as new movies are added when they're released!



WILD NIGHTS WITH EMILY (2019)

🌈 90%

#6

Critics Consensus: Silly yet deceptively smart, *Wild Nights with Emily* approaches its oft-investigated subject from a unique -- and utterly entertaining -- vantage point.

Synopsis: In the mid-19th century, Emily Dickinson is writing prolifically, baking gingerbread, and enjoying a passionate, lifelong romantic relationship with another... [More]

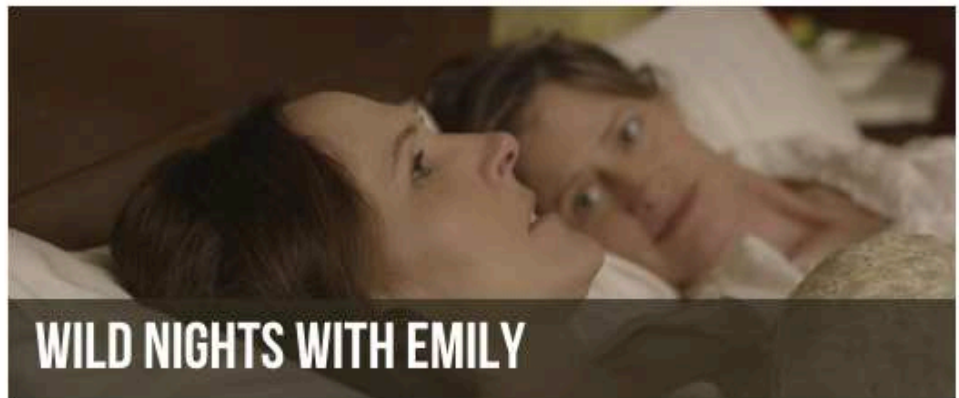
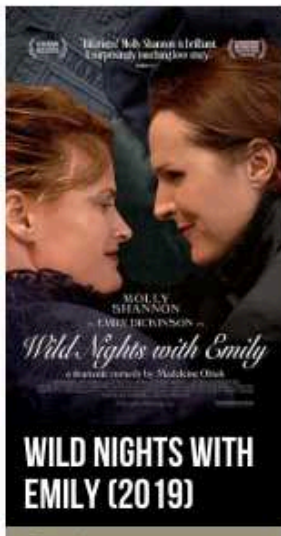
Starring: Molly Shannon, Amy Seimetz, Susan Ziegler, Brett Gelman

Directed By: Madeleine Olnek



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REVIEWS



★★★★☆ | Sheila O'Malley

April 12, 2019 | 5

Wild Nights with Emily – RogerEbert.com Review

rogerebert.com/reviews/wild-nights-with-emily-2019

By Sheila O'Malley

Anyone with a preconceived notion of Emily Dickinson as a painfully shy reclusive Victorian-era lady is likely to feel a shock when they actually read her work, when they dig into the 1,800 poems she left behind when she died. Whatever Dickinson's circumstances may have been, her work shows a life widely lived and deeply felt. She was not sentimental or genteel in any way, shape or form. This was a woman who sent the following note to a friend whose house had burned to the ground:

*"Dear friend,
I congratulate you.
Disaster endears beyond Fortune —
E. Dickinson"*

It's so *brutal*, so funny! Emily Dickinson? Funny? Oh yes! Her poems often have great wit! Why has her narrative been so limiting? This is the problem with being a woman who doesn't conform to the role society deems appropriate for her. This is also the problem with posthumous fame. You're not around to control the narrative. One of the real delights of Madeleine Olnek's "Wild Nights with Emily," with Molly Shannon playing the so-called "belle of Amherst," is how funny it is, fresh and funny and absurd. Olnek takes one of the many Emily Dickinson theories - that the famous "spinster recluse" had a lifelong love affair with Susan Gilbert, her childhood friend and eventual sister-in-law - and runs with it, has fun with it, flings open the doors, letting in light and passion and life. This could have been a

dreadfully dreary affair if the approach had been didactic. In Olnek's hands, it's a romp, but it's a romp with real bite.

Emily and Susan are first seen as girlhood friends, taking long walks together, talking, experimenting with kissing. Kissing leads to passionate embraces. When Susan suddenly decides to marry Emily's brother Austin, Emily is heartbroken, but Susan reassures her she's doing it for them. It will be perfect. She and Austin will live in the house right next door to the Dickinson family home, and she and Emily can go on as before. This is just what happens. As grown women, Emily and Susan (Susan Ziegler) steal passion when they can, and send hundreds of notes back and forth to one another throughout the day. Austin (Kevin Seal) never suspects, although the children appear to be hip to what's going on. Meanwhile, Emily writes poetry, and so much of it is about Susan, so much of it calls out Sue by name. ("From out the wide night's numbers - / Sue - forevermore!"), Sue is flattered, impressed. She urges Emily to try to get published.

All along the way, Olnek knocks over commonly-held myths about Dickinson, and she does so with gleeful relish. One of the persistent myths is that Dickinson didn't care about getting her work published, that she wandered around scribbling brilliant verse, cringing at the thought of anyone reading it. This is complete rubbish. When editor Thomas Wentworth Higginson (played with amusing condescension by Brett Gelman) put out advice to "young contributors" in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Dickinson sent him a batch of her poems with a note: "Are you too deeply occupied to say if my verse is alive? The mind is so near itself it cannot see distinctly, and I have none to ask." This does not sound like a woman who shrank from publicity.

Olnek sets up how the rumors got started with an entertaining and effective framing device. Mabel Todd (Amy Seimetz, in a breezily funny performance), the woman responsible for bringing out Dickinson's poems posthumously, gives a lecture to a ladies' group, reiterating that Dickinson was a "spinster-recluse," and only wanted fame if it came after her death. Mabel Todd had ulterior motives, and here is where the story careens into real-life "Real Housewives of Amherst" territory. Todd positioned herself as the expert in all things Emily Dickinson, even though she and the poet had never met. What she failed to mention on the lecture circuit was her long-term and fairly brazen love affair with Emily's brother Austin. As Olnek imagines it, Emily and Sue fall into bed together, while Austin and Mabel grind against one another in the parlor, and it's as plausible as any other theory. When Mabel finally gets her hands on all of Emily's poems, she sets about "correcting" them, editing out Dickinson's signature dashes, smoothing the idiosyncratic punctuation, and - crucially - erasing the name "Sue" wherever it appeared. The "spinster-recluse" narrative started to solidify. While we should be thankful to Todd for working to bring these poems to the public, her handling of them was an act of butchery. In "Wild Nights with Emily," particularly in the final scene, the term "erasure" - and what that really entails - has never been depicted with such clarity.

Terrence Davies' beautiful "A Quiet Passion" focused on the "quiet" part of Emily's life, a life lived in one location, echoing with time being marked off, an expansive inner life, an awareness of mortality (Dickinson was one of the most death-focused of poets). It's difficult for people to imagine, still, why a woman might "opt out" of marriage and motherhood. Olnek's approach is different, and refreshing. This isn't a story of star-crossed lovers or tragic renunciation. It's the story of two women who figure out the best way to keep seeing each other, who madly embrace in the kitchen before running back to their chores. Susan checks in with Emily every day, asking to read whatever she's working on. Matter-of-factly, Emily pulls a batch of poems out of her belt, removes a scrap of paper from her bun, opens her locket to take out a tiny slip of paper hidden inside, handing it all over. She is literally *covered* in poetry. This is a great example of Olnek's style. It's respectful, but it's also alive. It's serious, but it's also tongue-in-cheek. Olnek's approach gives Emily room to breathe. At last.

How Molly Shannon Brought Emily Dickinson Out of the Closet as a 'Lesbian Feminist Hero'

By [RAMIN SETOODEH](#)



CREDIT: SXSW

South by Southwest isn't typically associated with movies that have a literary pedigree. But the film festival scored a coup this year, by bringing Emily Dickinson all the way to Austin. In "[Wild Nights With Emily](#)," Shannon plays the 19th century poet as the opposite of her pop-culture archetype of a lonely hermit.

Madeleine Olnek's comedy offers a Dickinson who is a confident romantic. Between composing reams of poetry, she falls in love with her childhood best friend Susan (Susan Ziegler), only to have her true identity erased by a meddling acquaintance (Amy Seimetz), acting as her posthumous publisher. After the premiere of "[Wild Nights With Emily](#)" at SXSW, Shannon and her director (and long-time pal from NYU Drama School) Olnek spoke to *Variety* about making the film and why it's particularly timely in the era of Time's Up.

Molly, after the Q&A, you called Dickinson a “lesbian feminist hero.”

Molly Shannon: Yeah, she is. I think she made the most of the time she was born in history. It breaks my heart to think homosexuality has been around for centuries, but we just don't have studies on it because people had to be closeted. We've come a long way. I think she was so fearless and strong for her time. She was true to herself for being gay and wanting to be a writer.

How did the two of you first get interested in telling Emily's story?

Madeleine Olnek: I read an article in the New York Times about how advances in science have shed light on historical figures. And one of them was Emily Dickinson and how infrared technologies are restoring erasures to her papers. What was being uncovered in these erasures were things she had written about Susan. And then there were all these other letters Emily wrote to Susan that were just sitting there. The image of Emily Dickinson as this recluse spinster was so big in people's minds, they couldn't see the letters for what they were.

Shannon: I'm so attracted to these types of stories. She was born in 1830 and she did the best she could for what was expected of women. And the fact that she had to be sold as a virgin spinster when she was so lively and aggressive and hungry to be published. Most people have only heard of the other version of Emily. I feel like it's such an important movie for writers of female voices. It's so timely.

Because of everything that's been happening with Time's Up and #MeToo?

Olnek: I think right now we're having a reckoning where people are finally facing the fact that not having women as equal participants has a real cost. We are seeing that cost. Donald Trump is our president. Horrible things are happening. Will the country ever recover? I don't know. Women's issues were always seen as this weird aside. And we're understanding that the way we perceive women has to do with what we know about history. With the history of Emily Dickinson being so re-written and her being turned into the opposite of what she was, her life is almost held up as an example.

Shannon: People think, she held herself back. If you do that, and you're demure and quietly writing and not expecting anything, then maybe you too shall be rewarded in the end. It's such a bad message.

Olnek: It makes it so that when someone like Hillary Clinton comes along, there's no context for her. An ambitious woman? That's never happened before. This comes from the erasure and misrepresentation of women for reasons that have to do with not wanting to acknowledge their full humanity.

Did you always know that the movie would be a comedy? Or did you think it could be a drama like “Sylvia” starring Gwyneth Paltrow?

Olnek: I like that movie. I thought that was a good movie about a poet. But in her case, she stuck her head in the oven. That's sad. It was important that this was a comedy and included humor because Emily Dickinson herself had a great sense of humor and there was love in her life. There was happiness and joy. The idea of making a drama would reinforce her as having had this miserable life.

I was an English major in college, and I don't ever remember learning that Emily Dickinson was a gay poet.

Olnek: We are the first people to tell the story. Part of how second-class citizenship happens is not through force but through systems of language and having control of language. That why this moment with female directors is so important.

Molly, did you ever feel like you didn't get the same opportunities in Hollywood because of your gender?

Shannon: I struggled so much when I was little with my mom dying in a car accident, I was very tough with Hollywood. I was like, "Nothing can be that bad." I remember moving to LA and having no money. This is nothing against boys. I don't know if they know how to write for girls. And we need to figure out how to write for ourselves. I didn't consider myself a formal writer. But I could perform orally and somebody was like, "That's writing." Madeleine and I did this comic show at NYU, and people were like you should be on "Saturday Night Live." When I first started at "SNL," there were a lot of Harvard Lampoon guys who were formally trained as writers. And I was like, "Oh no, I'm in over my head." But I had characters and drive and I was forced to pull from within. I relate to Emily's drive and desire and plowing through that world. It's different now, but I do feel it was a little bit hard then. There were more boy-dominated groups. And the girls had to be tough.

Has your career changed since you won an Independent Spirit Award for "Other People?"

Shannon: I do feel that way. Most comedians I think are very serious. They have a dark side or a sad side or they've been through stuff. I think that movie gave me an opportunity to really pull from parts of myself that are true and real and who I am. People think of me as a comedian, but I'm really an actress that got into comedy. That's what I love about Madeleine's work. This is a dramatic comedy, which is always my favorite thing. I always like to play the emotional truth even when I'm doing comedy.

Do you think this movie will be considered controversial?

Olnek: That's a good question. I'm sure there's room for lots of Emily Dickinsons in the world. One thing that we've found, I've done works-in-progress screenings in my apartment as I'm working on it. Young people love the movie. There's something among the older generations, where we almost have PTSD from having gone through the AIDS crisis. Young people are honestly more progressive to the point where they are genuinely interested in seeing stories that aren't necessarily about their life. The straight kids are interested in seeing gay stories.

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CELEBRITY

Molly Shannon Talks Emily Dickinson, Wild Nights, Ambition and Becoming a Role Model

APRIL 16, 2019 – 1:30 PM – 0 COMMENTS



By **DEBRA WALLACE** @debrawallace215



Molly Shannon portraying poet Emily Dickinson in the movie, *Wild Nights with Emily* (Courtesy Greenwich Entertainment)

Molly Shannon boldly reveals a different side of herself—and poet **Emily Dickinson**—in her latest movie, a treat to inspire women to head outside of their comfort zone.

Best known for six seasons as a cast member on *Saturday Night Live*, Shannon has also appeared in the films *Other People*, *Never Been Kissed* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*.

Now she has teamed up with college chum **Madeleine Olnek**, the writer/director of *Wild Nights with Emily*, an indie biopic from Greenwich Entertainment, that offers a dramatically new twist on the life of the world renowned poet.

With Shannon in the leading role of the prolific poet, who penned a stunning 1,775 poems in her lifetime, the movie addresses the central question—how did this woman emerge from nowhere to become one of the few women counted as worthy to be included in the literary canon?

“I think that the film spotlights Emily’s romantic life, as well as her daring poetry, and because of the time of her life the publishing industry was not keen to reward women or anyone who did not conform to social norm,” Shannon exclusively explained to Parade.com.

“People thought they were doing something positive by hiding Emily Dickinson’s romantic life,” Shannon added, “but now the world has changed and we can tell the truth.”

Talk about Emily Dickinson as a trailblazer, as opposed to her longstanding reputation as a spinster recluse.

It’s interesting because the idea that I always thought of her, and knew of her, was that she was presented as a victim, as a frightened woman who spoke to people through walls, and had no desire to have her voice heard in her lifetime. And that she wanted her poems burned upon her death. This is what I grew up

thinking about her so I wasn't that interested in her. I thought, "Oh, she sounds so dreary." But what the director of this movie, Madeleine Olnek, and I wanted to do was to really tell the truth about her life.

What was the approach?

This former idea of her that we have of her really sabotages women today who are looking to have their voices heard, and looking for a role model. The truth about Emily is that she had a long friendship and romantic relationship and also a creative collaboration with Susan, the wife of her brother Austin. But this was kept hidden from the public and these letters that she wrote to Susan have been under people's noses for years and years, but people just didn't want to look at that.

How did you physically and mentally get into character?

Well, Madeleine Olnek is amazing. She's so smart and we worked with a scholar, **Martha Nell Smith**, and both of them helped me because they really know so much about her. I would often ask Madeline what a particular poem meant. I really got into Emily Dickinson's poetry; I almost felt like I was taking a history class.

I really wanted to read as many of her poems as I could, and constantly asked questions about her life. And then the wardrobe helps you get into the character too; wearing the big skirts and the hair pieces. The costumes and the shoes always help put me into a character.

Did you relate it to other work of yours?

Yes. When I first started *Saturday Night Live*, I remember trying to get my character of Mary Katherine Gallagher on the air and everybody was so nice and I love the show, but there were definitely writers there who were saying, "Oh,

the reason Mary Katherine Gallagher can't work is because this isn't really a joke."

How would you respond?

I would go, "No, no, no. It works. It works. I've done it in my stage show." So, I related to Emily, in the way she was actively trying to get her poems published with the help of [author] **Thomas Wentworth Higginson**, but this was up against the male establishment. I also related to her story as a woman, as a performer and a writer, trying to have her voice heard, too.

How did you see Emily and Susan's 30-year love affair? Obviously, it was a collaboration, she was her gentle reader and adviser. I studied Emily Dickinson and I had never heard about this love affair before. Do you think you were you tampering with history?

It's definitely not tampering with history. There are poems that have existed for so long. Poems that she wrote that were so obvious that she was in love with Susan. She would say, 'If you were here, or that you were my Susie, we need not talk at all. Our eyes would whisper for us.' These loving, romantic poems have been under our noses for a long, long, time but people just chose to not look at it. But there was also collusion because I think people thought that might hurt her poems being read. So, it was just kind of kept quiet. People thought that they were doing something positive by hiding it, but now the world has changed and we can actually tell the truth about her.

There was a book that came out in 1951 about Emily's affair with a second woman, Kate, but since it took place in 1951, at the height of the Red Scare when homosexuality was equated with communism, it could have threatened Emily Dickinson's poems being read in schools. So, I think that there was a feeling that she was one of the few women who was in the literary cannon and her love for women would be used as dirt on her to discredit her.

I loved the line in the movie that not only was Emily plain, which would keep a man at bay at that period of time, but she was also considered to be “too clever.” Do you think there are men in 2019 who would still be scared of a woman who is too clever?

Absolutely, that still exists now. There’s some men that don’t want to deal with that at all, but I do think the smarter men would pick women who are more clever than them because that would be better for them.

When you were starting out, would you have imagined *Saturday Night Live*, and movies and everything you have accomplished?

No, I did not imagine *Saturday Night Live*. Growing up in Ohio I remember thinking I would like to be an actress but I was kind of shy to admit it back then. I was like, “Do I have the talent to really admit that I want to do this?” I remember getting up in high school and singing in front of the entire high school.

How did that go?

Well, I was in 10th grade and it was a Friday where students could do a 3 or 4 minute performance, and my mic went out and it was a total bomb and I was like, “Oh, God.” But by my senior year, I got more confidence. I had done plays and musicals, and in my senior year I went up and sang *Zing! Went the Strings of My Heart* in front of the entire school, and I’d gotten into New York University Drama School and things were clicking along for me, and I thought, “Maybe I could do this.”

Did you have big acting dreams back then?

No. When I was really young, I just thought maybe I could be a waitress at my favorite Bob Evans, serving people sizzling sausage and hot cakes. That would be a fun life.’ To be honest I didn’t think I would do more than that.

Do you feel that you’ve been a role model for women in comedy?.

I have had people tell me that and I think because I did characters that people really related to, especially characters that I've pulled from inside myself. The first time I did Mary Katherine Gallagher on *Saturday Night*, I was basically doing an exaggerated version of myself and so many people come up to me saying, "I'm like that" or "I have a sister like that" or "That reminded me of my cousin," or they loved how nervous and unsure of herself she was, but also that she was so determined.

What else did they relate to?

I think people liked seeing and relating to a real character like that. Her imperfections and flaws, and her desires and passions. I wrote it from my heart.



Molly Shannon as Emily Dickinson and Susan Ziegler as her sister-in-law Susan in Wild Nights with Emily (Courtesy Greenwich Entertainment)

Why should people come to see *Wild Nights with Emily*?

It's a dramatic comedy and I think the film examines sexism through the lens of comedy making it more appealing and approachable to a broader audience. The movie addresses the question of how a woman in the mid-1800's was able to eventually rise out of obscurity and become recognized as part of a literary cannon. While she's an

historical figure, her story is so important to women today; to anybody trying to get their voices heard.

Was your father the one that inspired you and believed that you could achieve your biggest dreams?

He did. He was like my Mama Gypsy Rose, from the musical *Gypsy*. He was so positive and when I first went out to Hollywood he was like, “Molly, you go into those Hollywood agents and managers, you doll yourself up, put on your high heels, march into those offices and you tell them, “Hey, hold the phone. I’ve got talent.” And he would say, “Use your singing voice.” So, that was his showbiz advice, and that is exactly what I did.

Did it work?

Yes. I remember I had my first meeting with **Barbara Jarett**, who was a big talent manager at the time representing Jerry O’Connell. So, I went into her office and I sang a Judy Garland song. That’s what I knew from my dad and I watching Judy Garland movies like *Easter Parade* and *Meet Me in St. Louis*, and I sang “Chicago... Chicago... that toddlin’ town,” and she started clicking her fingers and then I jumped on her desk because the song was going well, and then I finished the song in a big flourish and she said, “You’ve got it kid!” and then she signed me, and that was the beginning!

Wild Nights with Emily is playing in theaters nationwide.

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'Wild Nights With Emily' Review: Emily Dickinson as Romantic Comedy Heroine



Molly Shannon in "Wild Nights With Emily." Greenwich Entertainment

Wild Nights with Emily Directed by Madeleine Olnek | Comedy, History | PG-13
1h 24m

By Teo Bugbee

April 11, 2019



In Madeleine Olnek's "Wild Nights With Emily," the life and work of Emily Dickinson are subject to a delightfully droll — even gay — reinterpretation. For believers in the legend of the hermetic poet who never left her bedroom, it may come as a surprise that the Emily (Molly Shannon) of Olnek's film is not a melancholic recluse, but the heroine of a romantic comedy.

Olnek's version of events is supported by [studies of Dickinson's poems](#) which revealed that references to possible lovers were covered up. Historians debate the meaning of such findings, but Olnek's film is free of equivocation. Her Emily is a woman who loves women, and her film details one version of how her life might have differed from her legacy.

The film is largely narrated by Mabel Todd (Amy Seimetz), who assembled and edited the first posthumous collection of Dickinson's poetry. A faithless reader — and, notably, the mistress of

Emily's brother — Mabel erases Emily's dashes and scrubs out the poet's loving dedications to her sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert (Susan Ziegler). As Mabel presents a sanitized version of Emily, Olnek undercuts her account with scenes of Emily and Susan in love, in bed and in correspondence.

The tension between what we see and what we hear of Emily's life provides the film with much of its levity. As the gaudy, pink-clad and ill-tailored Mabel delivers her chaste accounts of the Dickinson household, Olnek gleefully cuts to scenes of petticoats and hoop skirts akimbo. This is an irreverent film, but its lightness is meaningful. With each silly flourish, Olnek offers joy and companionship to a figure whose history was more conveniently presented to generations of readers as solitary.

Wild Nights with Emily

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Director Madeleine Olnek

Writer Madeleine Olnek

Stars Molly Shannon, Susan Ziegler, Amy Seimetz, Brett Gelman, Jackie Monahan

Rating PG-13

Running Time 1h 24m

Genres Comedy, History



Movie data powered by IMDb.com

Rated PG-13 for sexual content. Running time: 1 hour 24 minutes.

A version of this article appears in print on April 12, 2019, Section C, Page 7 of the New York edition with the headline: Wild Nights With Emily. Order Reprints | Today's Paper | Subscribe



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Wild Nights with Emily

The long-buried story of Emily Dickinson's great love affair — and passionate pursuit of success — is now in theaters.

By Alissa Wilkinson | @alissamarie | alissa@vox.com | Apr 12, 2019, 4:32pm EDT

Wild Nights with Emily is a lot of things: A comedy, a historical drama, a romance, and a re-imagining of a woman familiar to and beloved by many. Molly Shannon plays Emily Dickinson, who — [as relatively recent scholarship seems to indicate](#) — had a lifelong love affair with Susan Gilbert (played by Susan Ziegler in the film), her youthful friend who also became the wife of Dickinson's brother Austin. The affair was covered over and even literally erased by Mabel Loomis Todd (Amy Seimetz), who was both Dickinson's first posthumous editor and Austin's mistress. (Yes, it's a little confusing.)

All of this provides writer and director Madeleine Olnek with ample fodder for a film about their relationship, which swings at times toward farce as the two women live next door to one another and try to hide their affair, with varying degrees of success. But in telling this story, Olnek also unseats another part of the Dickinson mythology, which suggests Emily was a lonely spinster who wrote her poems and shut them away. Instead, we see Emily sending out her poems and passionately pursuing success in her own lifetime. It's a bracing, often funny reclamation of a famous woman's life as her own — and one that, in the end, packs a true gut punch.



WILD NIGHTS WITH EMILY | APR. 18, 2019

Behind the New, Gloriously Queer Emily Dickinson Movie

By Rachel Handler



Photo: Greenwich Entertainment

About midway through *Wild Nights With Emily*, Molly Shannon, playing the iconic American poet Emily Dickinson, sneaks away from a party to meet with her brother's wife, Susan Dickinson. Giggling mischievously, the two lock themselves in a bedroom above the festivities, fall onto a pile of coats, and begin passionately making out. After a few minutes of kissing, interspersed with joyful gossip about the guests below, Susan pauses. "We should go downstairs," she says with a trace of sadness. "I want to stay here, on the coats," says Emily. "Forever."

It's one of many such scenes in the funny, sexy, bold new film from writer-director Madeleine Olnek. The story kicks off just as Emily and Susan's romance does: The two fall in love as schoolgirls performing a play; they pretend to be having chaste sleepovers while they're peeling off one another's petticoats; when Susan marries Emily's brother, she says she's doing it so that they can live next door to one another for their entire lives; as an adult, a disheveled, grinning Emily races across the lawn at dawn after a hot night at Susan's.

As a queer woman and an English major who read Emily Dickinson in several classes, I'd only heard light rumblings about her sexuality — and never anything about her being remotely fun. I'd been taught that she was antisocial, afraid of being published, and that she obsessed over mysterious men but never married or found love. Even as recently as three years ago, Terence Davies's movie *A Quiet Passion* portrayed Dickinson this way: a lonely woman wracked with vulnerability, in love with a married reverend and, as she grew older, profoundly unable to confront the outside world.

So I was confused and completely intrigued by Olnek's *Wild Nights*: Who was this carefree, queer Emily? It turns out, as Olnek tells me, she'd been "hiding in plain sight" this whole time. All it took to bring the real Emily to screen was two women who were willing to do their homework, one being the director herself and the other being the distinguished scholar-teacher, professor of English, and founding director of the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities, Martha Nell Smith.

Smith has devoted most of her career to studying Emily Dickinson. She and Ellen Louise Hart published a book in 1998 called *Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson's Letters to Susan Huntington Dickinson*. The book is a compilation of Emily's letters to Susan, which began a few years before Susan married Austin Dickinson and continued until the end of Emily's life. The letters are erotic and beautiful and undeniably expressions of romantic love; Emily writes about wanting to hold, kiss, and caress Susan and, as Smith puts it, "expresses self-consciousness about that desire."

Smith found the subject of her book almost by accident. Originally, she was on a mission to figure out if Emily ever tried to publish her poetry when she was alive. But in the process of attempting to read copies of every letter Emily had written, Smith got distracted. "I start coming across things like seven lines erased, half of the page cut out, words erased," she tells me. "And I'm like, *What in the world is this?* And so I asked to go see the manuscripts at Amherst College — that's where most of the mutilated manuscripts are." Once there, new spectrographic technology made it possible for Smith to recapture what had been censored on the pages and to quickly realize that the lines being erased were "these affectionate expressions about her sister-in-law, Susan."

"When I started reading the correspondence to Susan, I was like, *This stuff is pretty sexy*," Smith recalls. "I found myself thinking: *If all of this was sent to any man in*

Dickinson's life, there wouldn't be any kind of argument about who was the love of her life."

Wild Nights With Emily spends significant time with the person Smith now knows is responsible for mutilating Emily's letters: Mabel Loomis Todd, a woman who was having an affair with Susan's husband (and Emily's brother), Austin. Despite never having met Emily face-to-face, Todd acquired the letters after Emily's death via Austin and Emily's sister, Lavinia, and set about removing Susan from them before publishing them. "When I showed this movie to the Emily Dickinson International Society last summer," Olnek recalls, "the president of the board said, 'What people need to understand is that when Emily Dickinson scholarship started, people didn't know that Mabel was Austin's mistress. They just thought she was the nice, young wife of a faculty member at Amherst College. They didn't understand her stakes in spinning a certain kind of story about Emily.'"

According to Olnek, Mabel's redacted versions of Emily's letters set into motion a kind of bias — "Once there was this image of Emily Dickinson, she was a very safe woman to champion, the myth version of her." This mythical Emily is at the center of Davies's film, with which Smith is quite familiar: Before *A Quiet Passion* premiered, Harvard invited Smith to screen it and offer feedback. Just as Olnek eventually did, Smith found the film to be "miserable." "I was like, *Holy shit — I can't stand this*," Smith says, laughing. "So when he asked me afterwards what I thought of the movie, I said, 'Everybody who has a passion for Emily Dickinson is just very invested in their particular [vision] of her. And your vision and mine are very, very different from one another.' I thought, *I just don't want to have a huge fight with him right here.*"

Comportment aside, Smith was angry. "Because I knew that he's a gay director," she says. "And [Davies's movie] seemed to me kind of homophobic. But you and I both know that a lot of gay people have internalized homophobia. So I point-blank asked him. We were staying in the same hotel, and we got on the elevator at the same time. He said, 'You really didn't like my movie, did you?' And I said, 'I didn't say I didn't like it, Terence.' And I just repeated that we had different visions. But I said, 'By the way, I'm just curious about you reading her letters. How do you square the fact that she wrote Susan Dickinson far more than she wrote anybody else?' And he looks at me and says, 'Oh, I didn't have time to read the letters.'"

One of the major differences between *A Quiet Passion* and *Wild Nights*, Smith says, is that Olnek did her homework. "She asked me so many questions as she was working on the film, and wouldn't just accept my answers, but would double-check them to make sure I was right," says Smith. "If you're gonna make a movie like this, I think you should do your homework." Nonetheless, Olnek has already faced naysayers. "There wasn't a single review of *A Quiet Passion* that said, 'This is not accurate,' whereas I've gotten that a lot: 'Oh, what's this based on?' And really angry responses, like, 'She's making this up,'" Olnek says. "Considering how much time

I've spent researching this, and considering how many resources that movie had — there's one movie about Emily Dickinson, and they can't get it right? I feel like [the real] story has just been hiding in plain sight."



Photo: Greenwich Entertainment

Smith isn't the first scholar to posit that Emily was a lesbian, or that she'd had a romantic relationship with Susan. In 1951, Rebecca Patterson published *The Riddle of Emily Dickinson*, which suggested the subject of Emily's poems was a woman; as a 2010 New York Times piece put it, she "took a lot of heat for it" and "scholars demolished its thesis." "The Lavender Scare was at full tilt," explains Smith of the book's public rejection. "It's just good old homophobia." She adds that she has old correspondence of Patterson's, in which Patterson wrote to publishers about a second book focusing on the homoerotic, "clitoral" imagery in Emily's poems, but the publishers rejected both the book and the notion.

In the 1970s, Lillian Faderman tried yet again to demonstrate the truth of Emily's queerness and love for Susan, but, as Smith explains, "I think she got caught up in trying to concede the relationship between Emily and Susan in the context of 'women's relationships.' And it's true that many women's relationships did lead to expressions of great affection in letters exchanged between women in the 19th century. But what separates Dickinson's from other people's is that Dickinson is very self-conscious about what she says to Susan."

Susan's own daughter, Mattie, was one of the first to publicly state the nature of her mother's relationship with Emily. She dedicated the first collection she published of Emily's, *The Single Hound*, as follows: "This is my inspiration for a volume, offered as a memorial to the love of these 'Dear, dead women.'" But, as Smith explains, by the time this volume was published in 1914, homosexuality had been pathologized. Smith believes Mattie's friend Alfred Hampson ("Who was gay, by the way," adds Smith) persuaded Mattie to take some of the focus off Susan and Emily's relationship, because then she'd be able to find a wider audience for the book.

Those who make a case for Emily's heterosexuality often point to her "Master Letters" — a series of letters addressed only to a mysterious "master" — as well as her correspondence with a family friend named Judge Otis Phillips Lord. Many scholars believe these constitute proof that Emily was interested exclusively in men. Or at the very least, in men *as well as* women. "There is evidence for her loving both women and men," another Dickinson scholar, Professor Peggy McIntosh, tells me. "My feeling is that human beings who are in touch with their feelings will feel affinities with whoever they are attracted to, regardless of the person's gender. I hope you will not be convinced by those who portray Emily Dickinson only as a lesbian."

After studying these letters intensively, Smith believes the "Lord letters" are less full-fledged correspondence and more illegible scraps. As for the "Master Letters," well, Smith says those are Emily's attempt at epistolary fiction. (She's not the first scholar to argue this.) Olnek adds that there's significant evidence — including in *The Riddle of Emily Dickinson* — that "Master" was actually Kate Scott Turner, a woman pictured in the only existing daguerreotype of Emily, who is believed to have had a brief, passionate affair with Emily. The date of her drafts to "Master" coincide directly with the dates that Turner visited Emily at her home in Amherst. Most tantalizingly, Emily once mailed Turner (who ended up living an openly gay life in Europe) a poem alongside a pair of garters.

Meanwhile, her letters to Susan, which the two sent back and forth daily despite living next door to one another, are undeniable in their nature. One points to the beginning of their relationship: "I love you as dearly, Susie, as when love first began, on the step at the front door, and under the Evergreens." Smith points out this letter, in which Emily waxes rhapsodic about nights spent together, as particularly telling; in another, Emily writes, "Now, farewell, Susie ... I add a kiss, shyly, lest there is somebody there! Don't let them see, *will* you Susie?" When Emily died, Susan was asked to wash her body, an intimate act reserved for those closest to the dead, depicted heartbreakingly in *Wild Nights*.

Meanwhile, in *A Quiet Passion*, Susan is not only a straight woman but a "church mouse," her famously erudite and well-attended literary salons completely ignored. When I reached out to Davies to ask him to hop on the phone for a conversation about his film and about Emily's sexuality, his assistant replied as follows:

“As far as Terence is concerned the only person who knew, definitively, about Emily Dickinson’s sexuality was Emily Dickinson; and she may very well have been as confused and conflicted about that as we all can be at times throughout our life. One thing that is certain about the human condition is that nothing is ever new, and whatever she may or may not have felt about her sexuality is just as relevant now as it was, for her, then: as is her poetry. One can see whatever one wants to see when picking through the details of someone else’s existence; but the fact remains that we just don’t know, and Terence believes that it is wrong to try and reach a ‘definitive’ conclusion, because that ‘definitive’ conclusion will always be only speculative; no matter how much circumstantial evidence one puts forward. She was what she was. An incredibly interesting human being and an astonishingly brilliant poet; the only relevance her sexuality had (or has) is how it influenced her poetry, and that we will never know. She remains, and always will be, a beautiful, unknowable, enigma ...”

Smith took serious umbrage at this. When I asked for her to respond to Davies’s comment, she wrote back in an email, “If he had read her letters, he would know that Emily changed poems at Susan’s behest. Sad to say that Terence didn’t do his homework (that was painfully obvious in so much that was WRONG with his film). He has a very fixed idea about her and didn’t want to learn more (evidently). But that he didn’t read her letters astonishes me.”

“As much as the world has changed, I think there are still even very liberal people who say, ‘Well, yeah, she had this relationship with Susan. But do we have to use the word *lesbian*?’ There’s still some who are threatened by that,” says Smith. “And they’re also threatened by their intellectual companionship.” She pauses for a moment. “I’ll just say it: I think a lot of men in particular don’t like that.”



Photo: Greenwich Entertainment

Smith concedes that as Dickinson aged, she grew “pickier about who she’d spend time with,” but on the whole, she was a social, loving, and deeply funny woman whose relationships were profoundly important to her. She hates that Davies’s portrayal of Emily was “crabby and mean,” and points me to a specific example of Emily’s singular wit: a joke about flatulence in a letter to Susan that reads, “Dear Susie, I send you a little air.”

Mabel Loomis Todd — who never met Emily (Emily refused to meet her on account of the fact that Mabel was having an affair with her brother), yet became a vocal advocate for her work — had reason to perpetuate a vision of a sheepish, antisocial Emily. Enlisted by Emily’s sister, Lavinia, to help bring Emily’s poems to light, Mabel became an unlikely (and later contested) editor tasked with explaining away her lack of a relationship with the author. “One way to explain [the fact that they never met] is to say she was reclusive,” says Smith. “And the characteristic of being reclusive was one that was easily attached to a woman poet at the time. The composite biography for a woman poet in late-19th-century America was that she was probably writing her poetry because she was suffering some secret sorrow.”

Today, early editions of Emily’s work are in the public domain, including versions edited by both Mabel and Susan’s daughter. Olnek and Smith are hopeful that their deeper dive into the truth of Emily’s life will supersede the image of a lonely, morose spinster who hovers over her American canon. “We lose her humanity, not understanding how she worked, how she lived her life. Emily Dickinson did not die miserable and alone as Terence Davies would have you think,” says Olnek. “That almost seems like the price she paid in order to write this way. Who would want that? What young person would want that? She lived on her own terms, which is different than living ‘crazy.’”

“Davies’s fixed idea about Emily is that she was writing out of lack,” says Smith. “The record shows that she was writing out of abundance.”

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'Wild Nights with Emily' Film Review: Molly Shannon Brilliantly Reimagines Emily Dickinson

Writer-director Madeline Olnek rescues Dickinson from biased history, painting the poet as a woman brimming over with love and life

April Wolfe | April 10, 2019 @ 10:38 AM

Last Updated: April 10, 2019 @ 10:48 AM



Greenwich Entertainment

Terence Davies did a fine job writing and directing “A Quiet Passion,” a biopic about the life of the late poet Emily Dickinson, whose legacy has been shrouded in a blanket of tales about chronic pain, unrequited love, and a generally dismal existence of literary obscurity. The accepted story of Dickinson and the one Davies stuck with is that she toiled in solitary self-confinement, refusing to see visitors. But in “Wild Nights With Emily,” writer-director Madeleine Olnek proffers an alternative — and perhaps much more truthful — history of this iconic lesbian of literature: What if Emily actually had fun? With a tone evocative of “Drunk History,” the film approaches storytelling with a whimsical air, where period authenticity of every object and costume isn’t necessarily the focus. They filmed in Los Angeles (at the Heritage Square Museum), so Olnek clearly had to contend with harsher SoCal natural light than Dickinson would have had in New England, but that too-bright lighting, both indoors and outside, becomes innocuous.

The tone and the visibly low budget are, at first, jarring: Is this a light comedy? But Olnek’s script, which she’d honed over a number of theatrical productions, becomes the rock of this film, allowing the actors to wildly shift from one-liners to poignant heartbreak.

Molly Shannon plays Emily as an anxious, but kind-hearted writer who doesn’t so much rebel against the patriarchy as she simply butts her head into it again and again, asking “yeah, but why” until the men retreat. Some of the film’s greatest humor comes from Shannon playing Emily not for laughs, but with

ultimate sincerity. Olnek often lets these scenes play out mercifully sans music, relishing the discomfort of characters who realistically would have been quite bored by all the sitting and talking.

In one scene in a sitting-room parlor, Emily is straining to listen to her elderly male guest, who doesn't even remember her name. She leans forward, squinting like she's trying to comprehend some cruel joke, but she is ultimately polite, if confused. Meanwhile, her brother Austin (Kevin Seal, "Laggies") is speculating that the old man may be courting Emily; he's so preoccupied by his assumption that Emily needs a man, any man, that he doesn't realize that Emily's already in a loving relationship — with his own wife, Susan (Susan Ziegler).

Clearly, a great deal of research went into crafting this story, which is as much about Dickinson's life as it is about how her legacy came to be so corrupted. To convey that these events happened as depicted in the film, Olnek deploys a kind of narrator device, with Amy Seimetz's opportunist Mabel Loomis Todd addressing a book club and answering questions after Emily's death. Todd, as the story goes, was the "editor" who "found" Dickinson's trove of 1,800 poems after Dickinson's death and decided to heavily edit and then publish them. It's also Mabel's accounts of (non)interaction with Dickinson that have survived and formed the folklore of this lonely, reclusive woman, despite the fact that Mabel's perceptions of Emily were likely colored by her own affair with Dickinson's brother.

The film kindly makes this hypocrisy clear, painting Mabel not as a villain, but as a woman with a malleable sense of the truth. Still, it's the sendup of the male characters, dim-witted and high on themselves, that draws the biggest laughs. Brett Gelman plays The Atlantic editor Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who visits Emily to tell her that her poems are inscrutable and that he shan't be publishing them. Dickinson doesn't fight with him, but she does pace the room, eager for an intellectual connection, equivocating for a time-lapse of, likely, hours about her thoughts on the written word. Thomas is shell-shocked. Emily, again, gives that squinty look, and it's a perfect encapsulation of male-female non-communication.

Jutting into the narrative are Dickinson's actual poems, read by Shannon's Emily, often as a disembodied head speaking directly to the camera. Not everyone dares to read or try to understand poetry, but with the context of this humorous film, one can easily see the wit in Dickinson's verse. Her poems may be full of dashes, and they may not rhyme, but they are often stinging and funny once you get them. The film is often so light, occasionally hitting upon screwball themes as Dickinson and Susan try to keep their love affair even marginally secret, that I was not prepared for such a touching conclusion that left me teary-eyed, not for its tragedy but for the depiction of a love so full and enduring.

There are so many reasons to adore "Wild Nights With Emily," but the top may be Olnek's refusal to adhere to the accepted history. It is as though our culture cannot imagine that queer people could possibly feel an easy joy with their romantic partner, that their lives must have been bereft without all those glorious heterosexual pleasures. The same goes for women who don't marry, whether hetero or queer. The culture must imagine them as sad and exploit their supposed tragedy. Olnek instead depicts a woman who loved and was loved, and who felt annoyed, ebullient, impatient, and, above all, full of life.



FILM

Review: *Wild Nights with Emily* Playfully and Necessarily Reimagines Dickinson's Story

Its playful tone is a corrective to a century of scholarship that insisted on projecting the image of a moody spinster onto the poet.



Published 6 months ago on April 8, 2019

By **Pat Brown**



Photo: Greenwich Entertainment

“**E**mily Dickinson wished to be published posthumously,” Mabel Loomis Todd (Amy Seimetz) lectures to a female audience in *Wild Nights with Emily*. Todd was Dickinson’s first

editor and promulgated the self-serving myth that she was the one to “discover” a trove of poems in a bedside chest in the Dickinson family home. Cheekily, writer-director Madeleine Olnek’s film cuts to Dickinson (Molly Shannon) decades before, digging in the garden, as if preparing her own tiny grave from which to enjoy her post-death fame. There’s something fairly obvious about the film’s “unreliable narrator” shtick—throughout, Todd tells us one thing, the camera the opposite—but Olnek’s acute, feminism-inflected irony keeps the trope from feeling like a crutch.

The point, of course, is that Dickinson’s legacy has been distorted, at this point for well over a century, by Todd’s mendacity, which was fueled in equal measure by her personal ambition and her Victorian prudery. Historical indications that Dickinson may have been in a lifelong relationship with her neighbor and sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert Dickinson (played in the film by Susan Ziegler), were granted credence in the 1990s when new imaging technologies revealed that someone—likely Todd—erased Susan’s name from erotic letters and several poems penned by Dickinson. *Wild Nights with Emily* extrapolates from this still-emerging evidence a story of a collaborative romantic partnership, two women who found a private space for themselves within the secluded confines of upper-class New England.

Olnek’s comedy does two favors to Dickinson: First, it reclaims one of few women poets firmly in the literary canon as a distinctly queer voice, and second, it revitalizes a corpus of poems familiar to every American schoolchild. The film contextualizes Dickinson’s works within the life of a woman secretly devoted to another woman, bridging its scenes with montages over which characters intone some of her best-known work—much of which, the film argues, was intended for Susan’s eyes first or exclusively. Despite the seriousness of its intent, *Wild Nights with Emily* always strikes a playful tone; the most memorable of these poem-montages proposes that the poet composed her “Because I Could Not Stop for Death” in the meter of the folk ballad “The Yellow Rose of Texas” because Todd, also the lover of Emily’s brother, Austin (Kevin Seal), , was playing the folk ballad on the family piano as the poet was writing.

The droll tone of that sequence, which sees the members of the main cast brightly singing the gloomy poem while addressing the camera directly, is *Wild Nights with Emily* in a nutshell, as the film is committed to irreverently disregarding standard biopic-isms and clichés about suffering artists. Throughout, Olnek’s screenplay filters the patrician diction of the 19th-century Massachusetts upper crust through the codes of neurotic indie comedy. At one point, a smash cut brings us from the Dickinson household to the Civil War battlefield, where the editor of the *Atlantic*, Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson (Brett Gelman), pedantically enumerates his professional experience editing poems and championing abolitionism in response to a question. The reverse angle shows a small assemblage of unimpressed black troops. “No,” one of them says, “I meant, what is your military experience?”

Introduced here, Higginson will prove to be one of the antagonists in Emily Dickinson’s life, characterized as a self-styled woke bro who offers her patronizing advice instead of taking her work seriously. He’s one of several men the film ridicules for preventing Dickinson’s recognition before her death. He’s also part of the film’s farcical treatment of most characters

who aren't Emily or Susan: Austin is a mediocre bourgeois outmatched by the clever women around him; Emily's sister, Lavinia (Jackie Monahan), is a mildly insane cat lady; and Ralph Waldo Emerson (Robert McCaskill) speaks with a quiet rasp that forces party guests to incline their entire bodies toward him in order to hear what he says. Olnek's staging of interiors emphasizes the film's sardonic stance toward Dickinson's society. The camera often maintains a dry distance from the characters, highlighting their sparse, blandly lit, stage-like settings.

The film's playful tone can be understood as a corrective to a century of Dickinson scholarship that insisted on projecting the image of a moody spinster onto her, combining Victorian ideals of femininity with the romantic image of the solitary poet. One might argue that Olnek's consistently farcical take on Dickinson's life represents something of an overcorrection, but it helps that *Wild Nights with Emily* is also consistently funny. The dramatic tonal shift may be necessary to replace the persistent image of Dickinson as a timid recluse unlucky in love with that of a queer woman with a (relatively) healthy social life, with ultimately thwarted ambitions to be recognized—not at all posthumously—as a serious poet.



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Narrative Spinning on *Wild Nights*

By [Grace Hadland](#)

05/04/2019

I saw *Wild Nights with Emily* alone on a Sunday night — a kind of ritual in my life for that night of the week. I head to the movies right around the time I start to get nervous, at 5:30 or 6, about dying, never being loved, impending doom, and so on. Movie outings get me out of that funk, and sometimes takes me above and beyond. This one certainly did. I wrote in an email to a friend after I saw it: “i am so moved by History ha ha. i guess more so i’m moved by disruptions of history; i guess more so im moved by truth and lesbians.”

The central themes of Madeleine Olnek’s newest film are just that: disruptions and truth and lesbians. It is a retelling of the life and career of Emily Dickinson (played by Molly Shannon) focusing on her life-long relationship with her sister-in-law, lover, and muse, Susan Dickinson (Susan Ziegler). Olnek pulls back the curtain to reveal the mechanics and conventions of history at work, bringing to the surface details of Dickinson’s biography that have been often, probably deliberately, omitted.

As the film tells, Susan Dickinson capitalized on the union of matrimony by marrying Emily's brother so that the two could live next to each other and no one would be suspicious of their close friendship and rather, charmed by their sisterly affection. The cinematic depiction of the relationship between the two women is based upon a collection of letters and poems Emily sent to Susan over her lifetime. The film was extensively researched, using the Dickinson archives at Harvard and Amherst that house her library and papers.

The film is laced with wit and dark humor. It debunks old wives' tales about Dickinson while entertaining the small possibility of their truth. Who we thought we knew as a reclusive spinster working from divine genius we come to know as a lesbian intellectual. Of her choice for the leading role, **Olnek says**, "I felt if Molly Shannon played Emily Dickinson people would finally understand who she was." And Olnek's choice worked to great effect. Shannon's appeal and familiarity successfully advance this "new" version of Dickinson as a likeable, nuanced figure.

Mabel Todd (Amy Seimetz), an eager and self-absorbed young woman, based on a real figure, becomes the publisher of her work and the producer of her "brand" after Dickinson's death. Todd "discovers" her poems, swiftly spinning a narrative in which Emily is a modest and depressed woman who never wanted her poems published, rather than a working lesbian poet who was subjected to misogynistic prejudice by those with the power to publish her work.

Olnek gets at the dark absurdity of misogyny: how bizarre, how preposterous it is, but simultaneously, the ludicrousness of posthumous idolatry. In her depiction of Mabel Todd, whose intentions may seem benign, Olnek exposes her to be destructive and driven by self-interest. The film critiques a contemporary trend in the art and film world: the exhuming of careers, the cleansing of histories, and the simplification of narratives in which She is always the underdog who becomes the hero.

When a publisher, Higginson, condescendingly poses the question "What is Poetry?" Emily promptly replies with a list of the things that are poetry, including something along the lines of: "When the top of my head gets cut off and everything pours out, I know that is poetry." A comedic yet poignant moment, in which Higginson's ignorance is revealed and Dickinson asserts her wit. The question is only rhetorical because he does not in fact have any ideas about what poetry could be. But Emily does. He leaves their meeting, rejecting her request to be published in his paper.

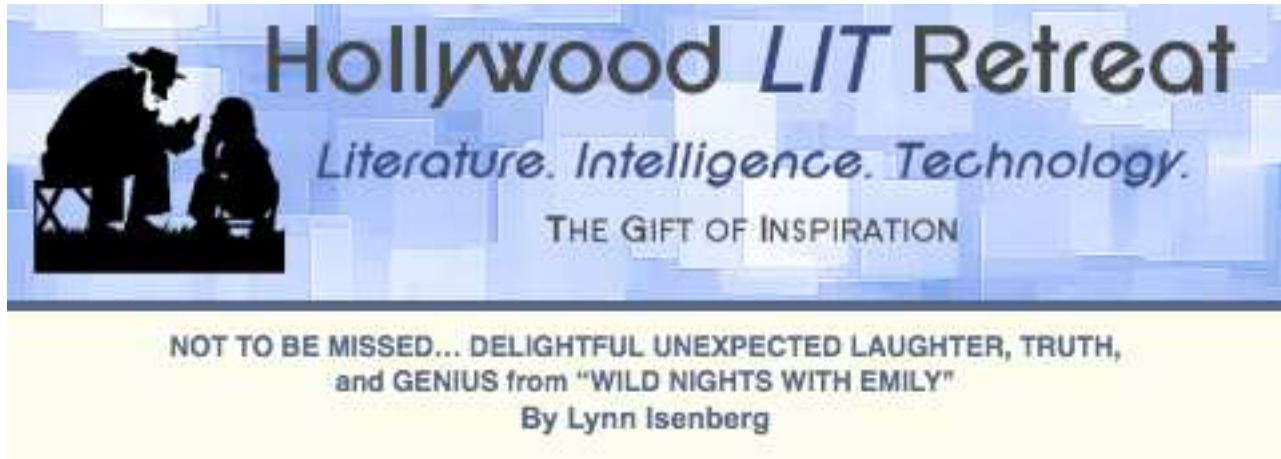
This film also challenges the tired and lazy "powder-puff" reboot trend in which previously male-centric blockbusters are "reimagined" (with little to no imagination, mind you) starring all-female casts, brazenly exploiting contemporary concerns with representation and identity politics. The motto being: Slap a pair of tits on Captain Marvel and you've got a feminist hit! *Wild Nights* refuses to indulge in that kind of pathetic navel-gazing remake and does just what those films fail to do: wrestle with the ambiguous histories of women and queer people and explore the malleability that that ambiguity affords.

As I see it, *Wild Nights* introduces a new genre — a kind of mock period piece biopic with a lesbian feminist bent. The film pokes fun at the often bland or unimaginative attempts to represent an era with historic authenticity: the wigs and costumes and strict adherence to

antiquated language. In the style of Miloš Forman's *Amadeus* and Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*, both films that incorporate contemporary colloquialisms and aesthetics, *Wild Nights* expands the possibilities of the historic biopic. The art direction features obviously hokey props (plastic flowers, fake cats) and cheap looking costumes and set pieces, almost breaking the fourth wall, reminding the audience of the dramatic conventions that these films often follow. With this playfulness, the film critiques the obsession to (re)construct biographies of cultural icons, to make their lives out to be more significant than their work. The film observes our compulsion to sensationalize — to ascribe our icons our own desires and to simplify them in order to understand and explain the existence of their work. Of course, while these reconstructed biographies might entertain us, they ultimately detract from the truth, performing a kind of erasure. In the striking final sequence, the screen is split in two: one shot shows Susan tenderly washing Emily's corpse; the other, Mabel erasing Susan's name from Emily's poems and letters. Olnek revels in the irony, the discrepancy between what we want to believe happened and what probably really happened.

When the movie let out I went to the bookstore next door in search of the book of letters between Emily and Susan. I wasn't in the mood to look very hard, so instead I bought a copy of *Not Me* by Eileen Myles, the first book of theirs I encountered in college. To me Myles is essentially a cultural descendant of Dickinson, another Yankee lesbian poet, and the first I fell in love with.

I hopped
on an Amtrak to New
York in the early
'70s and I guess
you could say
my hidden years
began. I thought
Well I'll be a poet.
What could be more
foolish and obscure.
I became a lesbian.
Every woman in my
family looks like
a dyke but it's really
stepping off the flag
when you become one.
While holding this ignominious
pose I have seen and
I have learned and
I am beginning to think
there is no escaping
history...
(*An American Poem*)



Dear Hollywood LIT Retreaters:

I almost didn't go to the opening of this fantastic indie film. I had glanced at the trailer and thought it, well... odd. What was this unusual take on the life and times of the famous reclusive spinster poet Emily Dickinson? And therein lies the problem. I had been brainwashed by the very myths and legends this 'comedy of manners' film was now proposing to debunk for truth and so much more; "so much more" being the very serious matter of how generations have been misled to believe the "fake news" of Emily Dickinson written by the greed and ambition of a critical publisher and shadow writer from her inner circle who squashed recognition of her talents during her lifetime, then later redacted the truth of her literary genius to reshape it posthumously to their benefit.

But not only did they reshape the truth within the poems themselves, they fabricated a myth about the poet to meet with their perceptions of what society at that time would consume. And so, the myths stuck. Without realizing it, I had been shaped by those persistent myths. I had been taught to buy into the false legends of Emily and her poetry (a collection of her poems which rests inside my bookshelf from my college days of New England Literature studies). Those legends hid the object of her attention, the love of her life and the muse of her work. Those legends support what is innately not so—the desire to share one's work, the desire to be recognized for one's work, the desire to be remunerated for one's work... alas, not just for men, but for women, too. And for women who dare to break the mold of their times in literature and in love. And so, I am so very glad I went to the opening of this film, which included the added treat of hearing a Q&A that featured the three female leads; Molly Shannon as Emily Dickinson, Susan Ziegler as Susan Dickinson, and Amy Seimetz as Mabel Loomis Todd. This film is clearly a labor of love, and a feat of artistic genius for the way in which the filmmaker has woven in Emily's poetry through visual storytelling. The very talented actresses in these roles would clearly go to the ends of the earth for director Madeleine Olnek, whose gift for storytelling with social commentary inside a clever comedic framework is masterful. It is a refreshing take on a truth whose time has come to be resurrected. Indeed, this film packs both a fun and important punch for all to see and no doubt will become joyful viewing for all English Literature curriculums worldwide in exposing the pentimento of its truth.

– Lynn Isenberg, Reporting for The Hollywood LIT Retreat (LIT: Literature. Intelligence. Technology.)

Los Angeles Times

MOVIES

Indie Focus: Going big with ‘Little’

By MARK OLSEN | STAFF WRITER APRIL 12, 2019 | 11:30 AM

Hello! I'm [Mark Olsen](#). Welcome to another edition of your regular field guide to a world of Only Good Movies.



Molly Shannon, left, and Susan Ziegler in "Wild Nights With Emily." (Greenwich Entertainment)

‘Wild Nights With Emily’

Written and directed by Madeline Olnek, “Wild Nights With Emily,” is based on recent historical research that Emily Dickinson (played by Molly Shannon) in fact wrote many poems about her sister-in-law, Susan Gilbert (Susan Ziegler), and the two had a long affair. The true

subject of Dickinson’s work would be written out of the historical record by her earliest publisher and public champion, Mabel Todd (Amy Seimetz).

Reviewing for The Times, Katie Walsh wrote that Olnek “issues a corrective to the historical record with her Emily Dickinson biopic ‘Wild Nights With Emily.’ Using historical research and records, Olnek systematically dissects the myth that the poet was a sexless and unloved recluse, peeling back the layers of narrative that surround her personal life to reveal a long-term romance.”

Reviewing for the New York Times, Teo Bugbee wrote, “The tension between what we see and what we hear of Emily’s life provides the film with much of its levity This is an irreverent film, but its lightness is meaningful. With each silly flourish, Olnek offers joy and companionship to a figure whose history was more conveniently presented to generations of readers as solitary.”

For the Wrap, April Wolfe said, “There are so many reasons to adore ‘Wild Nights With Emily,’ but the top may be Olnek’s refusal to adhere to the accepted history. It is as though our culture cannot imagine that queer people could possibly feel an easy joy with their romantic partner, that their lives must have been bereft without all those glorious heterosexual pleasures Olnek instead depicts a woman who loved and was loved, and who felt annoyed, ebullient, impatient, and, above all, full of life.”

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Wild Nights with Emily

A funny, sexy look at a great literary injustice.

Sherilyn Connolly / Wed Apr 17th, 2019 1:14pm / **FILM**



Courtesy of Greenwich Entertainment

After more than a century of no films about Emily Dickinson, we've been blessed with two within a few years. (Still not as many as Winston Churchill has received overall, but who's counting?) **Madeleine Olnek's** comedy ***Wild Nights with Emily*** focuses on the secretive, often-giddy romantic relationship between Emily (**Molly Shannon**) and her sister-in-law

Susan (**Susan Ziegler**). Told mostly in contradictory flashback via a speech given by Emily's first posthumous editor Mabel Todd (**Amy Seimetz**), Olnek uses Dickinson's original letters and poems as primary sources to demonstrate how Susan was promptly erased — in the literal sense of the word — from Emily's writings, and thus from history.

Wild Nights is considerably lighter in both tone and cinematography than Terence Davies' more autumnal biopic *A Quiet Passion*. Olnek's film is photographed with the bright key lighting traditionally associated with comedies, and at times feels like a series of workshopped sketches. This is not a bad thing, and the brilliance of *Nights*' cast singing Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death" to the tune of "The Yellow Rose of Texas" cannot be understated. Both films are ultimately howls of anger at how Dickinson's work and life was regarded both before and after her death, but *Wild Nights* has got both jokes and Molly Shannon, so it wins.

Rated PG-13. Opens Friday at the Embarcadero Center Cinema.

SFWEEKLY

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16 Poet Biopics, Ranked

"Dead gay poets? Erotic violence? Sounds like a DiCaprio project."

By Emily Temple

May 8, 2019

Most movies about poets are . . . not great. Writing is a famously difficult pursuit to capture on screen, and artists in general—but poets in particular—are too often subject to a tender, teary cultural mythologizing that winds up bleeding into their biopics, which means that more often than not, traditional treatments of famous poets wind up being treacly or boring or both. This is not to say that I do not watch them. Or rank them. So, to get you through the middle of your week (no, I won't say it), I have ranked 16 of them for you to argue about. Sorry, Leo. For the rest of you: enjoy.

5. *Wild Nights With Emily* (2019)

The best genre of biopic may be the romantic comedy biopic—especially when applied to Emily Dickinson, whom we so often imagine as this withdrawn, reclusive, sexless person. Here, portrayed by Molly Shannon, she is irreverent, brilliant, and in love. Sure, it's only one version of Dickinson, and we can't know the truth—but director Madeleine Olnek has some [data in her corner](#) and serious charm in her style.

CREDITS

Written and Directed by
Madeleine Olnek

Producer
Casper Andreas

Producer
Max Rifkind-Barron

Producer
Anna Margarita Albelo
Madeleine Olnek

Line Producer
Alex Peace

Executive Producers
Jennifer Kriz
David Moscow
Todd Remis

Co-Executive Producers
Rufus Parker
Kunal Rajan
Edwin Scharlau
Jim Stephens

Director of Photography
Anna Stypko

Additional Director of Photography
Mika Altskan

Production Designers
Allison Fry
Eimi Imanishi

Original Music By
Karl Frid
Pär Frid

Music Director
Kenny Wang
Music Supervisor
Jasmine Flott

Supervising Sound Editor, Re-recording Mixer, Dialogue Editor
Bumi Hidaka

Costume Designers
Linda Gui
Christine Casaus
Courtney Newman

Casting By
Carol Rosenthal

Edited By
Lee Eaton
Anthony Clemente

Associate Producers
Anthony Clemente
Anthony James Faure
Lisa Franklin
Jasmine Presson
Missy Laney
Jayne Baron Sherman
Philippa Calnan
David Albiero
Julia Moser

Dramaturg
Deb Margolin

Legal Services
Kathleen Conkey, Esq

Additional Editors
Ravi Kiran
Ali Muney
Curtis Grout

***Presented by Embrem Entertainment In
Association with P2 Films Salem
Street Entertainment
UnLtd Productions***

*This film is dedicated to Martha Neill Smith, whose scholarship
helped bring the relationship between Susan and Emily to light.*

MOLLY SHANNON as EMILY DICKINSON

WILD NIGHTS WITH EMILY

CAST

Susan Dickinson SUSAN ZIEGLER

Mabel Todd AMY SEIMETZ

Col Thomas Wentworth Higginson BRETT GELMAN

Lavinia Dickinson JACKIE MONAHAN

Austin Dickinson KEVIN SEAL

Young Emily DANA MELANIE

Young Susan SASHA FROLOVA

Maggie LISA HAAS

Mattie Dickinson STELLA CHESNUT
Elizabeth Holland GUINEVERE TURNER
Josiah Holland MICHAEL CHURVEN
Ralph Waldo Emerson ROBERT MCCASKILL
Adult Mattie LAUREN MODIANO
Judge Lord AL SUTTON
Young Austin JOHN GRISWOLD
The Widow Kate ALLISON LANE
Young Lavinia MARGOT KISTLER
Helen Hunt Jackson CYNTHIA KAPLAN
Samuel Bowles, Jr. CHARLES ROGERS
Questioning Soldier DERRICK T. TUGGLE
Dweeby Reader COLE ESCOLA
Emily Norcross CELESTE PECHOUS
Edward Dickinson JOEL MICHAELY
Head Shakespeare Lady RAE C WRIGHT
Parson Mudd LEE EATON
Clara Newman Turner KATHERINE WILLARD
Gib Dickinson NICK FISHER
Ned Dickinson NOLAN CHESNUT
Adult Ned CHRISTIAN IZZIARY
Abby Farley SALLY SOCKWELL
David Peck Todd DAVID ALBIERO
Amherst Lady 1 BETSY FARRELL
Amherst Lady 2 BABARA DAVY
Joseph Lyman CASPER ANDREAS
Distinguished Party Guest MARC AUSTEN
Wedding Guest SALLY SOCKWELL
Wedding Guest MORNA RYAN
Wedding guest MATTHEW R. OSSENFORT
Ophthalmologist RON LYNCH

Party Guest DAVID MEYERS

Sport the Dog LULU

TEA LADIES

STACEY ALYSE COHEN • BRITTINI SCHRIEBER • KATHLEEN WILCE • MELISSA BARTON RYAN •
PAN FERGUSON • ELAINE CARBERRY • ANNA LAROCHE • ALANNA STRONG •
ALINA CHEREDNYCHENKO • CAITLIN RODSTEIN • LINDA VEGA • ROWANN GILMAN •
SAMANTHA PASCALE • SOFIA SENECA • STACEY COHEN • FREIA TITLANS •
KATHLEEN ETAWNEY • CAROLINA PARRA MORENO • HOLLY BATTAGLIA •
NATHALIE BAER CHAN • JO-ANN B VICTOR • CAMELIA CASSIN • CASEY ROREN •
JULIA DRAHOS • STEFANIE SPANX • KATIE CONTINI • BETSY WINSLOW • CARMEN COOPER •
KATRINA MATTSON • BAILIE DE LACY • ANNIE PISAPIA

SHAKESPEARE READING SOCIETY

SALLY SOCKWELL • JACQUELINE BRASLOW • MORNA RYAN • BETSY FARRELL • BARBARA DAVY

WEDDING GUESTS

AUSTIN KASE • JEFFERY DENKE • MATTHEW R. OSSENFORT • FRANK BERMAN

Whist Party Players

JAY OLNEK • LISA FRANKLIN • KATHERINE WILLARD
The First South Carolina Volunteers Army Regiment

KHALIEL ABDELRAHEI • ADRIAN KNIGHT • DARREN CAMPBELL • CHRISTIAN LOGAN •
JACK TAYLOR • ERNEST PHILLIPS • HENOK TEFERA

Grief Waders

ELIZABETH EVERETT • CHRISTINE MCCANN • JACK MCKEANE • FRANZ BRUN •
SOPHIE OVERWATER • CHANEL KINERY • WIN WILLIAM • SAM KELLO • FIONA NUNN

Neighborhood Children

FREYA ROBERTSON • LILY ROBERTSON • KIMBERLY WOODS • PRESLEY WILSON •
LILY WINCHESTER • JEMMA GOODMAN • JORDAN GOODMAN • PIERRE SMITH • ALEX SMITH •
ATHENAREM • CAMERON STANCIU • CARTER APPELYARD • SAMANTHA PASCALE

Churchgoers

CLAUDIA SERSANTI • COURTNEY DENK • KATIE OSBORN • KATRINA MATTSON •
NATALIE PAIGE • ROSA CALLEJAS • THAIS DRASSINOWER • JILL PATRICOT • JOANNA ROSES •
KATHERINE WILLARD • KELLY BROWN • MICKEY ROBINSON • ROSE COSCH • STACEY BROWN •
JESSE LEGON • CHRISTIAN IZZI • BOB WILLET • DORI BRUNO • SHARON LITWINOFF •
JANE FASTIGGI • BILLY TILLISTRAND • MARGY TILLISTRAND • NATASHA DEVITA •
ANTOINETTE TROY-DAMIANO

Party Attendees

TIM SNOHA • REBA BEESON • KSENIA MOLLER • EVELYN FRYLEN • SAM SKOLNIK • NICK DIAZ •
CRAIG HORLBECK • VICTORIA SCOTT

Hospital Orderlies

ANTHONY CLEMENTE • JESSIE POOLE

**HERITAGE SQUARE SUMMER UNIT
HERITAGE SQUARE SUMMER**

Line Producer/Unit Production Manager

VALERIA LOPEZ

Art Director PHI TRAN

First Assistant Director SOPHIE FINKELSTEIN

Second Assistant Director EDOUARD MARCHAND

Second Second Assistant Director SOPHIE LIVESEY

Production Coordinator ALEX COFFEY

Additional Production Coordinator DARA YUEH

Office Production Assistant MIRANDA HAEICK

First Team Production Assistant DOROTHY LEE

Director's Assistant BRETTE RAGLAND

Set Dresser JORDON FINK

Art Production Assistant ROXANNA SUAREZ

Assistant Costume Designer MARY STEIN

Costume Assistant JAMIE COSTIN

Seamstresses ANDREA MEHEFKO

VICTORIA GOKUN

Makeup Artist JESSICA EISENMAN

Hair Stylist MORGANMCDONNELL

Sound Mixer BILL WHITE

First Assistant Cameras DAVID L. RIVERA

BRIAN CALLAGHAN

DANIEL CAPLAN

Camera Production Assistant ANNA ORCHIER

DIT MELANIE RAMOS

Gaffer AXEL JOHANSSON

Grips WOJTEK STYPKO

STEFFANIE WALK

ERIC STERN

Extras Casting GINA YOUNG

Production Assistants ROBERT MARTIN

MITCHELL GRANESE

RENÉ VARGAS-MADRIGAL

LAURA CHERNICKY

AHLEEA ZAMA

ROBERT BENNETT

JOHNNIE LEE

ALEX PEREZ

AUSTIN BATES

NEW ENGLAND SUMMER

1st AD ANTHONY JAMES FAURE

Second Assistant Director NICK DIAZ

DEBBY CAPLUNIK

1st Assistant Camera PAULA PALUMBO

Steadicam Operator MIKE KLEIN

Gaffer DANNY VALENTINE

Key Grip TOM FESTO

Grip CRAIG HORLBECK

Grip Production Assistant JEAN-PAULO CALLENTA

Grip SAM SKOLNIK

Script Supervisor ANTHONY CLEMENTE

Key Hair / Key Make Up CAROLYN WALTER

Make Up MARINA BASKOVA

Make Up KRISTINA AFRIDES

Make Up JAN MURPHY

HMU MONATANA CESARE

HMU MAIKO ANDO

HMU DANIELLE DIXON

HMU LAUREN BRIDGES

HMU STEPHANIE BROWN

Costume Assistant / Tailor FULYA TURKMENOGLU

Costume Assistant ELENA MARGULIS

Costume Assistant CHANEL KINERY

Costume Assistant ALEXANDRA JANINEZ

Costume Assistant BEVERLY LAW

Costume Assistant MERRIL LANAHAN

Costume Assistant CHRISTY BRADLEY

Costume Assistant LAUREN BILODEAU

Costume Assistant JESTINA ODELL

Costume Assistant CASSIE BURNLEY

Costume Assistant ALEXANDRA ZAJACZKOWSKI

Sound Mixer FRANZ BRUN

2nd Boom Operator DEBORAH CHAI

Dance Choreographer STORMY BRANDENBERGER

Horse Carriage Driver BLAISE ANELLO

Prop Master ANDREW MUHART

Set Dresser JAMES BARTOL

Set Decorator YALITZA ROSARIO

Art Assistant DANIEL RINGLE

Props Buyer DEANNA ECKE

Production Coordinator SARAH DONAHUE

Production Assistant TERENCE DIGAN

Production Assistant ALEXANDRA BAERCHAN

Production Assistant ALENA BERGMANN

Production Assistant FEMI ANDERSON

Production Assistant RAMONA MILES

Production Assistant SHANTAL CABA

Production Assistant MATTHEW BEEBY

HERITAGE SQUARE SPRING

Costume Designer ISABEL MANDUJANO

Line Producer CASPER ANDREAS

First Assistant Director NATALIE BRITTON

Producer's Assistant/ DIT MOHIT SONI

Director's Assistant/ Continuity LUISA NOVO

B Camera Operator ELNAR MUKHAMEDYARO

1st Assistant Camera KELALA RAE JENSEN

2nd Assistant Camera HEATHER FLYNN

Gaffer AXEL JOHANNSSON

Key Grip JEFF CHASSLER

Grip BART GILLET

Key Make Up JESSICA EISENMAN

Key Hair KATHERINE BARBER

Wardrobe Assistant MORGAN DEGROFF

Sound Mixer NATHANAEL LENTZ

Set Design ABIGAIL CHILDS

Key Production Assistant ROBERT DANIEL MARTIN

Production Assistants JASON TOZIER

TOM EDWARDS

SAVANNAH SIVERT

NEW ENGLAND FALL

Key Make Up MARINA BASKOVA

ASHLEY PALMER

LEANNA CHO

Make Up Artist PRINCESS EZRA ABARDO

Sound Mixers GREG MAILLOUX

ANDREY RADOVSKI

SUMIT SHAHRIAR

Boom Operator TRISTAN POLLACK

Assistant Costumer SARAH LAPINSKI

Costume Assistants ALEXANDRA TENNBAUM

SARAH DIXEY

ERICA PAUL

HEATHER FREW

Additional Production Design JAMES BARTOL

First Assistant Camera CHRIS CRUZ

Additional Assistant Camera CHARLIE MUENTES

Gaffers COLLEEN KWOK

VALERIE SCHENKMAN

Art Assistant BOB JEFFERY

Production Assistants SIMON PENZER

BARBARA CIGARROA

YOTAM TUBUL

On Set Catering provided by NIKI KEKOS

MABEL'S LECTURE

Cinematography NIRAMON ROSS

Location Manager QUINCY MORRIS

2nd Cam Operator MIKA ALTSKAN

1st Assistant Camera KINGKAN SIRIPIRIYAKUL

1st Assistant Camera CHEYENNE PASQUER

Gaffer VALERIE SCHENKMAN

Key Grip SASHANK SANA

Key Make Up LAUREN BATES JAFFE

Assistant Hair TRACEY HUSSEY

Wardrobe Assistant CLARE ZIERHUT

Tailor FULYA TURKMENOGU

Sound Mixer FRANZ BRUN

Production Assistants ALEXANDRA BAER CHAN

TERENCE DIGAN

NICK DIAZ

SALMAGUNDI CLUB SPRING

First Assistant Director ANTHONY CLEMENTE

Production Design ROSA CALLEJAS

Art Assistant GARBRIELA BRISENO

1st Assistant Camera DAVID OSPINA

Gaffer SASHANK SANA

Wardrobe Assistant CLARE ZIERHUT

Key Hair and Make Up KRISTINA AFRIDES

Sound Mixer TAI COLLINS

Production Assistants AMINE BOUKERROU

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ANDREW FREEDMAN

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First Assistant Director ANTHONY CLEMENTE

2nd Camera Operator BRANDON YOON

1st Assistant Camera JAKE SHAPIRO

Additional Assistant Camera PETER SIKKENS

Gaffer KIOOMARS DOROODI

Grip SASHANK SANA

Sound Mixer FRANZ BRUN

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2nd Assistant Director MOHIT SONI

1st Assistant Camera SAMANTHA KELLY

2nd Assistant Camera BRANDON LEE

B Camera Operator DAVID NEWBERT

Gaffer AXEL JOHANSSON

Key Grip JEFF CHASSLER

Grip BRANDON DIAZ

Key Hair and Make Up KATHERINE BARBER

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MUSICAL COMPOSITIONS

PIANO SONATA NO. 30 IN D MAJOR HOB.16-19

Music by Joseph Haydn

PRZEBUDZENIE JAKUBA

Music by Krzysztof Penderecki

REQUIEM: LACRIMOSA & CHORALS

Performed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

EMILY SWEET WALK

Music by Frid & Frid

PIANO SONATA NO. 30 IN D MAJOR HOB. 16-19_03 FINALE. ALLEGRO ASSAI

Music by Joseph Haydn

EMILY OP.311 PIZZ

Music by Frid & Frid

EMILY MENUETT IN G

Music by Frid & Frid

LAVENDER BLUE (DILLY DILLY)

Arranged by Frid & Frid

THE WELL TEMPERED CLAVIER, BOOK 1, PRELUDE NO2, IN C MINOR

Music by Johann Sebastian Bach

VARIATIONEN UBER 6 VOLKSWEISEN” OP 105-4 (THE LAST ROSE OF SUMMER)

Music by Ludwig van Beethoven

EMILY SWEET SUSAN PIANO

Music by Frid & Frid

HIGGINSON WALTZ

Music by Frid & Frid

THE LAST ROSE OF SUMMER

Performed by Lawfame Violin

THE WELL TEMPERED CLAVIER, BOOK 1, PRELUDE NO2, IN C MINOR

Music by Johann Sebastian Bach

THE YELLOW ROSE OF TEXAS

Performed by Lee Eaton

IMPROMPTU #4 IN A FLAT MAJOR, D.899

Music by Franz Schubert

BILL CHEATHAM - THE FIDDLER DIVERTIMENTO IN C MAJOR "DER GEBURTSTAG"

Music by Joseph Haydn

LA CAMPANELLA

Music By Franz Liszt

EMILY PLAY PIZZ

Music by Frid & Frid

FOUR HANDS ONE PIANO

Music by Frid & Frid

ACH HERR MICH ARMEN SÜNDER BUXWV 178

Music by Dietrich Buxtehude

INTRODUCTION AND VARIATIONS ON DI TANTI PALPITI

Music By Gioachino Rossini

EMILY SWEET SUE ELEGY G 60 BPM

Music by Frid & Frid

EMILY OP. 311 PORTAMENTO

Music by Frid & Frid

MUSICAL ENSEMBLE

Violin PAULINE KIM

Violin FILIP PAGODY

Bass CARLOS BARRIENTO

Flute ANNAURREY

Cello CLARICE JENSEN

Viola KENNY WANG

Oboe RYAN WALSH

Piano KARL FRID & PAR FRID

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WILD NIGHTS WITH EMILY

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