



# NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Donna M. Abelli

Development & Marketing Manager

t. 413/542-5084

f. 413/542-2152

[dmabelli@emilydickinsonmuseum.org](mailto:dmabelli@emilydickinsonmuseum.org)

## **Love, Art, Scandal and the Hummingbird: Book Signing with Christopher Benfey April 21**

AMHERST, Mass.—Critic and essayist Christopher Benfey will share the alluring story of his newest book, *A Summer of Hummingbirds: Love, Art, and Scandal in the Intersecting Worlds of Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Martin Johnson Heade*, at the Emily Dickinson Museum on Monday, April 21, at 4 p.m. A book-signing and reception will follow the event, which is free and open to the public.

In *A Summer of Hummingbirds*, Benfey maps the intricate web of friendship, family and romance that connected Emily Dickinson, Mark Twain, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Martin Johnson Heade. His complex tale of interconnection comes to an apex in Amherst, Mass., during the summer of 1882, a time when loyalties were betrayed and thoughts exchanged with the speed of a hummingbird's wings. As infidelity and lust run rampant, the incendiary ghost of Lord Byron is evoked, and the characters of *A Summer of Hummingbirds* find themselves caught in the crossfire between the Calvinist world of decorum, restraint and judgment and a romantic, unconventional world in which nature prevails and freedom is all. Benfey unveils how, through the art of these great thinkers, the hummingbird became the symbol of an era, an image through which they could explore their controversial ideas of nature, religion, sexuality, family, time, exoticism and beauty—all of which would come to shape American thought.

Benfey is Mellon Professor of English at Mount Holyoke College and a prolific critic and essayist who writes for *The New York Times Book Review*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Review of Books* and the online magazine *Slate*. He has published three books set in the American Gilded Age: *The Double Life of Stephen Crane*, *Degas in New Orleans* and *The Great Wave: Gilded Age Misfits, Japanese Eccentrics, and the Opening of Old Japan*. He has held fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Council of Learned Societies.

The Emily Dickinson Museum, comprising the Dickinson Homestead and The Evergreens, two historic house museums in Amherst, is devoted to the story and legacy of poet Emily Dickinson and her family. Both properties are owned by the trustees of Amherst College. The museum is overseen by a separate board of governors charged with raising its operating and capital funds. The Dickinson Homestead was the birthplace and residence of the poet Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), while the Evergreens was the 1856 home of the poet's brother and sister-in-law, Austin and Susan Dickinson.

The Emily Dickinson Museum is located at 280 Main Street in Amherst, Mass. Hours are Wednesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., March through December, with extended hours, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., June through August.

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