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## Lyndall Gordon to speak about her controversial new biography of poet Emily Dickinson on October 14

Amherst, Mass.--On Thursday, October 14, biographer Lyndall Gordon will discuss her controversial new book, *Lives like Loaded Guns: Emily Dickinson and Her Family's Feuds*, in a talk at Amherst College. In "Abyss has no biographer?: Can we risk the Abyss?" Gordon will address the limitations of biography and its risks and gains by focusing on several of the story's principal players. The talk is free and open to the public, begins at 7 p.m. at Johnson Chapel. The event is co-sponsored by three Amherst institutions with strong ties to Dickinson's legacy: the Amherst College Archives and Special Collections, the Emily Dickinson Museum, and the Jones Library Special Collections Department.

*Lives like Loaded Guns: Emily Dickinson and Her Family's Feuds* has received much critical attention since its publication earlier this year. The provocative work proposes epilepsy as the cause of the poet's enigmatic behavior and creativity, offers controversial characterizations of some of the key participants in Dickinson's story, and examines in detail the multi-layered family saga that surrounded the publication of Dickinson's poems after her death. The title of Gordon's talk comes from a letter written by Emily Dickinson in 1884: "To attempt to speak of what has been, would be impossible. Abyss has no Biographer-Had it, it would not be Abyss." (L899)

No stranger to literary biographies, Gordon is the author of three works about T.S. Eliot and several biographies of British women writers: *Virginia Woolf: A Writer's Life* (1984), *Charlotte Brontë: A Passionate Life* (1994) and *Vindication: A Life of Mary Wollstonecraft* (2005). A native of Cape Town, South Africa, Gordon studied history and English there and American literature at Columbia University in New York. For many years she was a tutor and lecturer in English at Oxford, where she is now Senior Research Fellow at St Hilda's College. She regularly participates in summer writing seminars at Bennington College in Vermont.

A booksigning and reception will follow Gordon's lecture. For more information about the event, including suggestions about parking, visit [www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/events](http://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/events).

Archives and Special Collections at Amherst College is one of the major repositories for Dickinson's manuscripts. Located in Frost Library, the collection includes original poems, manuscripts, and letters from Dickinson to family and friends; images of the poet, including the daguerreotype and silhouette; physical artifacts related to Dickinson; manuscript transcriptions; printers' copies and proofs; Dickinson editor Mabel Loomis Todd's correspondence and writings; and material from or about Dickinson's friends and family, including correspondence, photographs, objects, and scrapbooks.

The Special Collections Department of the Jones Library places the poet within the context of her community in Amherst during the mid-nineteenth century. The collection consists of approximately 7,000 items, including original manuscript poems and letters, Dickinson editions and translations, family correspondence, scholarly articles and books, newspaper clippings, theses, plays, photographs, and contemporary artwork and prints. The Jones Library also maintains Digital Amherst, a site prepared for the Town of Amherst's 250th anniversary that celebrates the town through images, multimedia and documents.

The Emily Dickinson Museum, comprising the Dickinson Homestead and The Evergreens, 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 Homestead was the birthplace and residence of the poet (1830-1886). The Evergreens was the home of the poet's brother and sister-in-law, Austin and Susan Dickinson. The official museum website is [www.EmilyDickinsonMuseum.org](http://www.EmilyDickinsonMuseum.org). Regular museum hours are Wednesday through Sunday 11 a.m. until 4 p.m., March 31 through December 31, 2010. The Emily Dickinson Museum is located at 280 Main Street in Amherst.

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