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## Review: W. Barker, *Lunacy of Light - Emily Dickinson and the Experience of Metaphor* (Carbondale, IL, 1987)

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**Lunacy of Light: Emily Dickinson and the Experience of Metaphor.** By WENDY BARKER. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987.

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The pathbreaking studies of Emily Dickinson's life and work by such scholars as Joanne Feit Diehl, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Margaret Homans, Suzanne Juhasz, Wendy Martin, and Barbara Mossberg are being refined and enhanced by yet another generation of scholars including Wendy Barker. Building on earlier feminist scholars' interpretations of Dickinson's cosmology, Barker explores the interplay of images of light (representing male force) and dark (representing female energy) in Dickinson's poetry. As Barker points out, the metaphorical use of light occurs more than one thousand times in Dickinson's 1,775 poems and undergoes subtle transformations in the course of Dickinson's career.

In an effort to describe Dickinson's poetic strategies, Barker argues that, although Dickinson initially felt imprisoned by the darkness, ultimately she found imaginative and creative strength in the realm of night. Describing the complexity of darkness for Dickinson in both its negative and positive aspects, Barker makes effective use of the widely accepted interpretation that, on the one hand, Dickinson feared the "satanic" implications of autonomy, and, on the other, she loved her freedom from the domestic responsibilities of traditional womanhood. However, Barker minimizes Dickinson's ambivalence about personal and artistic autonomy, as well as the sometimes extraordinary anxiety Dickinson experienced in an effort to create a world of her own.

In general, *Lunacy of Light* is well written and presents an elegant recasting of established analytical frameworks. Barker's graceful and often dramatic prose vividly depicts Dickinson's poetic vision. For example, Dickinson's sun is described as "an abandoning seducer, a strutting figure, swelled with his own self-importance but paradoxically unreliable, incapable of affecting or warming her. At the extreme end of this spectrum of light as metaphor, she perceives the sun as an overpowering foe, an enemy whose light burns and blackens, devours and paralyzes; at such moments she views the same sun that brings life to a planet as a punitive whip" (55). Unfortunately, Barker perpetuates the mistaken notion that Dickinson was an agoraphobic. This representation of Dickinson as a neurotic recluse is simply wrong, as anyone who reads her letters carefully will conclude, and this insistence on applying twentieth-century standards of mobility to nineteenth-century domestic norms does Dickinson a grave disservice.

Although many readers may have a sense that they have heard Barker's arguments before and wish that she had taken more risks of her own, Barker does provide a helpful application of recent work in Dickinson studies to the analysis of specific poems. Indeed, Barker's astute and sensitive interpretations constitute the book's greatest strength. Like her predecessors, Barker sees Dickinson as part of a female countertradition and concurs with critics like Alicia Ostriker that Dickinson's work is a link in the chain that continues through writers like H. D., Sylvia Plath, Margaret Atwood, Marge Piercy, and Adrienne Rich.

**Women in College: Shaping New Feminine Identities.** By MIRRA KOMAROVSKY. New York: Basic Books, 1985.

**Educating Men and Women Together: Coeducation in a Changing World.** Edited by CAROL LASSER. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987.

**Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present.** By HELEN LEFKOWITZ HOROWITZ. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987.

Sara Coulter, Towson State University

The college experience of American students is the subject of these three books on education. *Campus Life* by Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz takes the broad view, surveying the development of three competing subcultures in college life from the end of the eighteenth century to the present. Carol Lasser's edited collection focuses on women's education in coeducational institutions from its tentative beginning at Oberlin to its current acceptance as the norm. And Mirra Komarovsky's book provides a detailed analysis of the impact that attending a women's college can have on the aspirations of contemporary students as they confront rapidly changing gender roles.

As portrayed in these three books, both men and women college students are currently experiencing confusion and conflict as they try to shape new gender roles. Komarovsky, both in her study of college women and her essay on college men in the Lasser collection, finds that students frequently hold incompatible views in their attempts to combine the old and the new. For instance, college men admire women who want a career and give a low priority to housewifery, but the same men believe that a mother must stay at home to raise her children. For their part, college women may experience "intrapyschic conflicts in regard to gender" (Komarovsky, 248) when