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A Wounded Deer: The Effects of Incest on the Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson

Wendy K. Perriman

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A Wounded Deer: The Effects of Incest on the Life and Poetry of Emily Dickinson Wendy K. Perriman What made Emily Dickinson the reclusive woman she was, and the dynamic poet she became? A Wounded Deer concludes that her enigmatic poetry may have originated from a personal exposure to incest, and examines how she used her craft to make the transition from victim to survivor at a time when the medical profession failed to acknowledge any damage related to this event. Research into the Dickinson family background, evidence from letters and poems, and the testimony of people who knew the poet, indicate that she apparently displayed at least 33 of 37 Incest Survivors Aftereffects from a diagnostic tool used internationally by many therapists; when a client exhibits over 25 of these behavior patterns sexual abuse is strongly suspected. The second section of the book deals with the three stage of recovery from complex post-traumatic stress, as outlined by trauma expert Judith Herman. Remarkably, Dickinson seems to have completed stages one and two, but was unable to complete stage three because she could not reconnect with the outside world. Writing was Dickinson s way of identifying the nature of her trauma, coming to terms with its impact, breaking the silence to inspire future women writers, and reconstructing a new persona albeit from the sanctuary of her self-imposed isolation. The final section of A Wounded Deer examines what the poet might have discovered about sexual abuse from the literature she read, and how she responded to this information in her own work. It discusses The Bible, Shakespeare, Byron, Hawthorne, (Charlotte) Brontë, (George) Eliot, and Barrett Browning. 'A Wounded Deer is fascinating, clearly written, difficult to put down, and a must for Dickinson scholars, psychologists and anyone interested in psychological interpretations of literature.' Marilyn Berg Callander, President-Elect of the Fulbright Association. 'A Wounded Deer is well worth reading: its argument is clear, cogent and at times riveting. Although we will never know the truth of the poet's life, this study offers readers a very plausible suggestion of what may be at the core of Dickinson's 'omitted center'.' Maryanne Garbowsky, English professor at the County College of Morris (NJ) and Dickinson scholar 'This is a 'groundbreaking' book, a fascinating and revealing read.' E. Sue Blume, LCSW, Diplomate in Clinical Social Work Author, Secret Survivors: Uncovering Incest and Its Aftereffects in Women (1990: Ballantine Books) 'How many multitudes of women have been terrorized into silence, withholding the truth of their damning accusations rather than face their fear, condemnation and shame of incest. Emily allows her soul to reach over time and space to tell others tortured by life's tragedies that they are not alone, and doing so the poet triumphs.' Sandra Bloom has served as President of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, President of the Philadelphia Physicians for Social Responsibility, and Chair of the Task Force on Family Violence for the Attorney General. She is the author of two books.

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