

## Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Her Eccentric Form and Language

"Halfcracked" to Higginson, living,  
afterward famous in grabled versions—  
your hoard of dazzling scraps a battlefield—<sup>1)</sup>

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Until 1890, four years after her death, when the first volume of poems by Emily Dickinson was published, edited by Mabel Loomis Todd and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, few ever saw her poems and the critical response to the poems after the first publication has been mixed.

Although many critics are unsympathetic with her first critical preceptor, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, about his inability to appreciate her genius and originality, he was right, at least, at pointing out some of the characteristics of her poetry and thought what her poems needed was some polish:

Her verses are in most cases like poetry plucked up by the roots; we have them with earth, stones, and dew adhering, and must accept them as they are. Wayward and unconventional in the last degree; defiant of form, measure, rhyme, and even grammar; she yet had an exacting standard of her own, and would wait many days for a word that satisfied.<sup>2)</sup>

But since the 1930's, though some critics such as R.P. Blackmur and Yvor Winters still called her poems "chaotic"<sup>3)</sup> and "abominable,"<sup>4)</sup> her reputation has grown steadily and her stature is now firmly established in American literary history.

Subjects and themes of Emily Dickinson's poetry are not quite different from those of other poets, they being nature, love, life, anguish, time, eternity, beauty, faith, and death, etc. But she was a poet who

Distills amazing sense  
From ordinary Meanings—  
And Attar so immense

From the familiar species  
That perished by the Door— (No. 448)

1) A poem by Adrienne Rich quoted by Albert J. Galpi as an epigraph in his book *Emily Dickinson: The Mind of the Poet* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965), p.xiii.

2) Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "An Open Portfolio," *The Recognition of Emily Dickinson: Selected Criticisms Since 1890*, ed. Cassir E. Blake and Carlton F. Wells (Ann Arbor: The Univ. of Michigan Press, 1964), pp.9-10.

3) R.P. Blackmur, "Emily Dickinson: Notes on Prejudice and Fact," *ibid.*, p.204.

4) Yvor Winters, "Emily Dickinson and the Limits of Judgment," *ibid.*, p.188.

And the irregularities and abruptness of her poems and the bold expressions of her thoughts—that is, her use of language, startling figures of speech, noticeable liberties with grammar, eccentric form of dash and frequent use of capitalization, etc. make her unique in American literary tradition. And it is my purpose to examine these characteristics, which Inder Nath Kher called “the metaphoric-metamorphic,”<sup>5)</sup> through a close analysis of a selection of her poems.

The following poem(No. 40),

I never lost as much but twice,  
And that was in the sod.  
Twice have I stood a beggar  
Before the door of God!

Angels—twice descending  
Reimbursed my store—  
Burglar! Banker—Father!  
I am poor once more!

is a companion piece of “My life closed twice before its close”(No. 1732):

My life closed twice before its close—  
It yet remains to see  
If Immortality unveil  
A third event to me

So huge, so hopeless to conceive  
As these that twice befell.  
Parting is all we know of heaven,  
And all we need of hell.

Both poems concern two lost lovers or friends who are now dead, possibly Leonard Humphrey and Benjamin Franklin Newton, both of whom died young. The form and style of the poems are also similar: both stanzas are composed of four lines with alternate-closing rhymes, rare in her poems. The phrase “as much” in the first line of “I never lost as much but twice” is further developed into an anticipation of another loss in the first stanza of “My life closed twice before its close.”

Despite these similarities, the tone in the two poems is different. “My life closed twice before its close” is somewhat tinged with resignation (“Parting is all we know of heaven/ And all we need of hell.”), whereas “I never lost as much but twice” is rather colloquial and sarcastic. Standing “a beggar before the door of God,” for ~~example~~ is a vivid and homely image. It also illustrates Emily Dickinson’s ability to combine the familiar with the sublime or abstract, the technique which is typical of the metaphysical poets. In fact, Theodore Spencer notes that Emily Dickinson’s “hard, sharply defined” eccliptic poems,

5) Inder Nath Kher, *The Landscape of Absence: Emily Dickinson's Poetry*(New Haven: Yale Univ. press, 1974), p.1.

packed with meanings, are more "stark" than the poets of the seventeenth century.<sup>6</sup> The combination of "Angels" with "Reimbursed" in the second stanza exhibits the same technique. The same effect is seen again in the third line of the second stanza, "Burglar! Banker—Father!" I am not sure the last word "Father" is a dual image of God and the poet's Puritanical father, but in either case the effect is the same—sarcastic, though light in its tone, colloquial, and even slightly resentful. It is conventional to address God as Father, but it is unconventional to call God a "Burglar" and a "Banker." (Elsewhere Emily Dickinson called God "Papa," "Telescope" and even "Mastiff.") These words, "Burglar! Banker—Father," however, describe God as one who can take away and give back at a whim and at will, which is the conventional Christian rendering of the Almighty. But again the poet's distinction here lies in her unique choice of words: "Burglar" and "Banker." Without the poet's unusual choice of language and expression (a "beggar" standing "Before the door of God," "Angels" "Reimbursed my store" of love, "Burglar! Banker"), the poem would lose most of its charming image of intimation. The closing line, "I am poor once more!" is also colloquial in tone. It suggests her passive resignation to her fate, and the line sums up the pathetic mood of the poem without any remorse.

"Success is counted sweetest" (No. 67) is one of the few poems published during Emily Dickinson's lifetime:

Success is counted sweetest  
By those who ne'er succeed.  
To comprehend a nectar  
Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple Host  
Who took the Flag today  
Can tell the definition  
So clear of Victory

As he defeated—dying—  
On whose forbidden ear  
The distant strains of triumph  
Burst agonized and clear!

The first two lines of the poem are simple enough and hardly need explication and so are the next two lines. But the understatement of the stanza is puzzling. Does the poet desire success and fame? Or do the first two lines mean that she is satisfied and contented with her own creation of "Splendors," and is in no need of fame nor literary opinions of the day? Or, on the contrary, does she regret (in the last two lines of the first stanza) that the literary conventions of the day have not yet matured; and hence are not yet in the "sorest need" of the "nectar" of her kind of poem? It seems that we must find the

6) Theodore Spencer, "Concentration and Intensity," *The Recognition of Emily Dickinson*, p.132.

answer in the stanzas that follow.

Despite a few metaphorical allusions, the meaning of the second stanza is simple and clear. The poet is defiant of the arrogant victors, and says in the final stanza that though she is defeated and dying, her forbidden ears hear clearly "the distant [future] strains of triumph." "Agonised" in the last line is important, because the word "agonized" prevents the triumphant sweet "strains" from falling into a mere sentimental ecstasy.

Sometime later when Emily Dickinson wrote "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" (No. 288):

I'm Nobody! Who are you?  
 Are you—Nobody—Too?  
 Then there's a pair of us?  
 Don't tell! they'd advertise—you know!

How dreary—to be—Somebody!  
 How public—like a Frog—  
 To tell one's name—the livelong June—  
 To an admiring Bog!

she wrote to Higginson (June 7, 1862): "I smile when you suggest that I delay 'to publish'—that being as foreign to my thought as Firmament to Fin."

"You" in the first stanza seems to refer to her poem with a sarcastic undertone, but "You" also have a magic force of drawing the readers into the poem. In either case she herself is determined to stay hidden from publicity. Dashes and the capitalization of "Nobody" and "Too" are very effective. The line stands like a tower in the stanza. By capitalizing the word "Nobody" and then isolating the word by dashes effects a full pause for the recognition of the word: "Are you—Nobody—Too?" No one can ignore the word "Nobody" which stands like a huge boulder in the middle of the sentence. It is paradoxical to emphasize the word "nobody" for its identification, but the intention is evident and the purpose serves perfectly well.

Let us see what happens if we replace dashes with commas and then retract capitalization of the two words: "Are you, nobody, too?" Or take all the punctuations out entirely as Austin Warren suggests:<sup>7</sup> "Are you nobody too?" The first example: "Are you, nobody, too?" is wholly a nonsense. The sentence is clogged with unnecessary stops. The second example: "Are you nobody too?" is like riding a slide. Dashes in Emily Dickinson's poetry are sometimes like beams or pillars in a house. The house would crumble the moment they are pulled out.

In the second stanza, the satirization of the vulgar public as frogs calling all summer to the abominable multitude is another distinction of Emily Dickinson's bold poetic style—"her almost contemptuous detached manner of stating [the naked] truth."<sup>8</sup> Emily Dickinson's aversion to publication, however, is, as the title of the poem suggests, best expressed in "Publication—is the Auction" (No. 709):

7) Austin Warren, "Emily Dickinson," *ibid.*, p.271.

8) A.C. Ward, "A Major American Poet," *ibid.*, p.149.

Publication—is the Auction  
 Of the Mind of Man—  
 Poverty—be justifying  
 For so foul a thing

Possibly—but We—would rather  
 From Our Garret go—  
 White—Unto the White Creator—  
 Than invest—Our Snow—

Thought belong to Him who gave it—  
 Then—to Him Who bear  
 Its Corporeal illustration—Sell  
 The Royal Air—

In the Parcel—Be the Merchant  
 Of the Heavenly Grace—  
 But reduce no Human Spirit  
 To Disgrace of Price—

“Publication—is the Auction” of what? It is the auction “of the Mind of Man,” she says. The “Snow” in the last line of the second stanza probably means pure soul, and the overall meaning of the poem implies the poet’s determination that she starve rather than “Sell” her pure soul for publicity.

The first “White” in the third line of the second stanza seems to mean “purity,” and the second “White” in the same line, “divine.” The interpretation enables us to recognize her desire to stay pure in her humble “Garret” (unnoticed and poor) and meet the divine Creator unstained.

In the third stanza, we note a highly abstracted image of man—“Corporeal illustration,” which implies God’s sovereignty over our ephemeral life as well as our soul. The “Sell” at the end of the third line of the third stanza, set off by a dash, stands out like a coastal island and with the capitalization, this technique helps emphasize the importance of the word “Sell.” In the final stanza are combinations of “parcel”—“Merchant”—“Heavenly Grace,” and “reduce”—“Human Spirit”—“Price.” This transparent jargon must be what A.C. Ward called a “corrosive wit.”<sup>9)</sup>

Conrad Aiken writes that “the lapses and tyrannies [of Emily Dickinson’s poems] become a positive charm—one even suspects they were deliberate.”<sup>10)</sup> We do not have to suspect; they *are* deliberate, and as Aiken writes in the same context, we must “accept them, with a ‘sigh’ as inevitable parts of the strange and original genius.”<sup>11)</sup>

“Much Madness is divinest Sense—” (No. 435) not only explains the reason why Emily Dickinson did not want to publish her poems in her lifetime, but it also explains her

9) *Ibid.*, p.145.

10) Conrad Aiken, “Emily Dickinson,” *ibid.*, p.115.

11) *Ibid.*

aversion to the gross materialism of the age:

Much Madness is divinest Sense—  
 To a discerning Eye—  
 Much Sense—the starkest Madness—  
 'Tis the Majority  
 In this, as All, prevail—  
 Assent—and you are sane—  
 Demur—you're straightway dangerous—  
 And handled with a Chain.

As Granville Hicks remarked, "The fact that she would not publish her poems in her own lifetime...indicates, among other things, that she was aware of the impossibility of coming terms with her own age."<sup>12</sup> Instead of submitting herself to the convention of the age, she shunned society.

The ironic picture of the juxtaposition of two radically different views of the individual and society is vivid and very engaging. In the age of madness, "divinest Sense" becomes "Madness," whereas "Madness" becomes normal. This poem is more sophisticated and wittily ironic, as well as more scornful toward society and its systems of conformity, than the girlish passive attitude of "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" (No. 288).

The entire poem is vivid and plain, and it too speaks for itself. This poem is one of the good examples of her tight argumentative poems except those short aphoristic poems which remind us of Japanese "Haiku." Its succinct argument is even, perhaps, too neat and mechanical. The blunt closing lines, "Demur—you're straightway dangerous—/And handled with a Chain—" locks firmly the idea introduced in the beginning of the poem.

"Faith" is a fine invention" (No. 185) is another good example of such neat epigrammatic poem of Emily Dickinson. It is composed of four lines in mere sixteen words:

"Faith" is a fine invention  
 For Gentlemen who *see*—  
 But *Microscopes* are prudent  
 In an Emergency.

In this short poem, we notice the sarcastic witticism of a new image of "Faith" as a mechanical "invention," comparing it with "Microscopes," which is, in fact, a ridicule of the traditional religion. The adjective "fine" gives a sharp turn of sarcasm. The emphatic "*see*" renders another turn of ridicule with a double shade of meanings: "Faith" as something perceivable and few succeed in their effort of finding it. The emphatic "*Microscopes*" with the capital letter affords a more prominent status than "Faith," the point of argument, with a quotation mark which is not an emphasis but a modification of the meaning of the word. Emily Dickinson not only thought that God has no face and His "Right Hand" is "amputated now" (No. 1551), but thought that "The Bible is an

12) Granville Hicks, "Emily Dickinson and the Gilded Age," *ibid.*, p.172.

antique Volume—/Written by faded Men/At the suggestion of Holy Spectres—” (No. 15 45). But according to Charles R. Anderson, in such poems Emily Dickinson is not merely making fun of the Almighty, but is poking “the Scripture to make them come alive”<sup>13</sup> in her own way.

Emersonian and existential importance of “Self” is shown in such poems as “The Drop, that wrestles in the Sea—” (No. 284), “He who in Himself believe” (No. 969):

He who in Himself believes—  
 Fraud cannot presume—  
 Faith is Constancy’s Result—  
 And assumes—from Home—

Cannot perish, though it fail  
 Every second time—  
 But defaced Vicariously—  
 For Some Other Shame—

and “Behind Me—dips Eternity” (No. 721):

Behind Me—dips Eternity—  
 Before Me—Immortality—  
 Myself—the Term between—  
 Death but the Drift of Eastern Gray,  
 Dissolving into Dawn away,  
 Before the West begin—

’Tis Kingdoms—afterward—they say—  
 In perfect—pausless Monarchy—  
 Whose Prince—is Son of None—  
 Himself—Himself diversify—  
 In Duplicate divine—

’Tis Miracle before Me—then—  
 ’Tis Miracle behind—between—  
 A Crescent in the Sea—  
 With Midnight to the North of Her—  
 And Midnight to the South of Her—  
 And Maelstrom—in the Sky—

One characteristic of “He who Himself believes” besides its exclusive use of dash is the omission of the subject of the second stanza, feasible only by the use of dashes instead of conventional punctuation. This renders compactness and economy of the words of the poem. To the poet, “the Term between,” in “Behind Me—dips Eternity—” everything around her—“Behind Me,” “Before Me,” “With Midnight to the North of Her—/And

13) Charles R. Anderson, *Emily Dickinson’s Poetry: Stairway of Surprise* (New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1966 [1960]), p.20.

Midnight to the South of Her—/And Maelstrom—in the Sky—” seems a “Miracle.” But what is important here is that the poet in the poem is “A Crescent in the Sea—” a culminating point among the “Miracles” and the microcosm of the universe—the “Self.”

“Dips” (lapses) in the first line of the first stanza, “pauseless” (eternal) in the second line of the second stanza, “None” (none existence of God?) in the last line of the second stanza, all indicate the poet’s insistent effort of experiment with the common words for fresh images.

In the first two lines of a short poem “A Death blow is a Life blow to Some” (No. 816), the poet pictures a life now dead, and to such life “A Death blow is a Life blow;” that is, after such a blow the life which was seemingly dead comes to life:

A Death blow is a Life blow to Some  
 Who till they died, did not alive become—  
 Who had they lived, had died but when  
 They died, Vitality begun.

In the last two lines, on the other hand, she sees a dead life in the ordinary sense of life—a paradox. But again, when such life ceases to live, the real vitality of the life-begins becomes evident. In both cases the death blow becomes the vital motif for the real life.

Pains and death carry special meanings to Emily Dickinson. They are primordial and constant existential conditions of life, though Clark Griffith is trying to see them through Freudian interpretation—sexual oppression and frustration.<sup>14</sup> In an existential point of view, horror or death enlivens one’s consciousness or, for a divine sense, they, paradoxically, set themselves free by defeating them:

Looking at Death, is Dying—  
 Just let go the Breath—  
 And now the pillow at your Cheek  
 So Slumbereth—  
 Others, Can wrestle—  
 Your’s, is done—  
 And so of Woe, bleak dreaded—come,  
 It sets the Fright at liberty—  
 And Terror’s free—  
 Gay, Ghastly, Holiday! (No. 281)

Some critics try to link Emily Dicknson’s seclusion and waywardness with her frustrated love and regard such painful experience as vital source for her poetry. But she says,

One need not be a Chamber—to be Haunted—  
 One need not be a House—

14) Clark Griffith, *The Long Shadow: Emily Dickinson’s Tragic Poetry* (Princeton, N.J.: Princetom Univ. Press, 1964), p.294.

The brain has Corridors—surpassing  
Material Place—

(No. 670)

Then Clark Griffith surely exaggerated when he said, in his book *The Long Shadow*, that Emily Dickinson's frustrations are important, "since, lacking them, [she] might never have written a line of verse."<sup>15</sup> Still the significant fact is that she did outlive any pains she might have suffered. And in the first stanza of "A Wounded Deer—leaps highest—" (No. 165), the hurt is transcended an aesthetic leap and ecstasy:

A Wounded Deer—leaps highest—  
I've heard the Hunter tell—  
'Tis but the Ecstasy of *death*—  
And then the Brake is still!

The *Smitten* Rock that gushes!  
The *trampled* Steel that springs!  
A Cheek is always redder  
Just where the Hectic stings!

Mirth is the Mail of Anguish—  
In which it Cautious Arm,  
Lest anybody spy the blood  
And "you're hurt" exclaim!

But the "Brake" stops after the pathetic leap and ecstasy, and unlike in "A Death blow is a Life blow to Some," we find no intimation of immortality in this poem.

As in the "Wounded" in the first line, the verbs "*Smitten*" and "*trampled*" in the second stanza motivate the appalling reactions of symbolic life, and we find the same motivation in the "Hectic stings" of the last line of the same stanza. But in the final stanza, we notice the poet hurt and bleeding from the wound, though she hides the "anguish" in her "Mirth." The significant quality of the poet's pains and ecstasy is, as Charles R. Anderson writes, that "if Emily Dickinson had adopted either extreme of ecstasy or despair as her whole view, out of some compulsive need, this would have resulted in sentimentalism. Instead, she created her poems out of the tensions that issue from the clash of such powerful opposites."<sup>16</sup>

Although some of her most successful poems are affirmation of immortality, Emily Dickinson was far from the orthodox view of God as we have already observed above. Albert J. Gelpi sees that her rejection of church was "virtually complete."<sup>17</sup> She also parodied the Lord's Prayer<sup>18</sup> and joked about herself being a "Pagan." As she was thus skeptic and rebellious about the traditional religion, she was sarcastic about Romantics and

15) *Ibid.*, p.301.

16) Charles R. Anderson, "Introduction," to *American Literary Masters*, ed. Charles R. Anderson (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1957), I, 981.

17) Gelpi, p.45.

18) *Ibid.*, pp.49-50.

rediculed their view of nature. Unlike nineteenth-century Romantic poets, Emily Dickinson sought neither wild and romantic aspects nor a moral teacher in nature as Wordsworth did. "More than any of her contemporaries," Charles R. Anderson writes, "she took toward nature the approach of the artist rather than that of the philosopher, the moralist..."<sup>19)</sup>

"A little Madness in the Spring" (No. 1333) is a nature poem, the intent of which is perhaps to satirize those Romantic poets who took nature seriously:

A little Madness in the Spring  
Is wholesome even for the King,  
But God be with the Clown—  
Who ponders this tremendous scene—  
This whole Experiment of Green—  
As if it were his own!

In this poem we notice again Emily Dickinson's love of conceit: "King"—"Clown," and "Experiment" of "tremendous scene" of "Green." God experimenting with green gives us a new concept of the traditional image of God. The phrase "tremendous scene," which describes the splendors of the spring, also provides a fresh image.

Many critics compare Emily Dickinson with the seventeenth-century English metaphysical poets; others hail her as an amazing forerunner of the modern imagist. The following poems show some of such qualities, and such conceits as contained in the first poem almost surpass those of metaphysical poets by projecting "a yellow Fork" for lighting and "Tables" for the dark threatening sky:

The Lighting is a yellow Fork  
From Tables in the sky  
By inadvertent fingers drop  
The awful Cutlery  
  
Of mansions never quite disclosed  
And never quite concealed  
The Apparatus of the Dark  
To ignorance revealed. (No. 1173)

"Of Bronze—and Blaze—" (No. 290) illustrates an abrupt shift from one level of discourse to another, which makes for irony or rhetorical surprise:

Of Bronze—and Blaze—  
The North—Tonight—  
So adequate—it forms—  
So preconcerted with itself—  
So distant—to alarms—  
An Unconcern so sovereign  
To Universe, or me—

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19) Anderson, "Introduction," to *American Literary Masters*, pp.972-73.

Infects my simple spirit  
 With Taints of Majesty—  
 Till I take vaster attitudes—  
 And strut upon my stem—  
 Disdaining Men, and Oxygen,  
 For Arrogance of them—  
 My Splendors, are Menagerie—  
 But their Competeless Show  
 Will entertain the Centuries  
 When I, am long ago,  
 An Island in dishonored Grass—  
 Whom none But Beetles—know.

Closely allied to this strategy are the rearrangement of word order to secure emphasis and surprise; the colloquial or slangy usage of familiar words in contrast to those majestic or abstract terms, as we have observed earlier; the collapsing syntax; the condensation or economy of words, that is, omission of many words in the sentence, leaving only the essential words (as in Chinese poetry) from which the meaning must be deduced, which in turn lend intensity; the insistent use of the dash and capital letter; the shifting of grammatical categories to coin forms that are both shortened and novel, such as “adequate” in the third line of this poem where the word is used as an adverb and “Cautious” in the third stanza of “A Wounded Deer—leaps highest—” where the word is used as a verb.

From line one to seven of this poem, Emily Dickinson describes the calm, harmonious northern sky blazing with the brilliant moon or star, unconcerned with the majestic universe itself and the poet. This splendor of the night “Infects” the poet’s “simple” spirit/With Taints of Majesty—” in the eighth and ninth lines. The Muse must have touched her genius; she assumes an arrogance: “Disdaining Men, and Oxygen,/For arrogance of them—” “Oxygen” may mean the daily necessities for life, another good example of her conceit. The last six lines are somewhat congested with subtle metaphors, ironies, paradoxes, and pomp. Her little poems are safely put away in a “Menagerie,” and the precious gems are not for “Show.” The poet is confident, however, as in “Success is counted Sweetest,” that her poems will be recognized after she is gone, though she and her gems have now taken refuge in order to shun the unappreciative society.

As Granville Hicks notes, “literary convention did not exist for her; as a poet she was quite untroubled by public opinion,<sup>20)</sup> and her weakness was her strength as well as her strength her weakness. Emily Dickinson’s experiments with the form and language are sometimes too bold and embarrassing. But for her they were “more/Than...symptom/[s]/—” They were “condition[s] of being.”<sup>21)</sup> They were not symptoms of a mere whimsical playfulness as some critics claim or “neurotic symptoms<sup>22)</sup>” as Clark Griffith asserts. On

20) Hicks, p.172.

21) Rich, p.xiii.

22) Griffith, p.283.

the contrary, she was extremely serious about her form and language:

I read my sentence—steadily—  
 Reviewd it with my eyes,  
 To see that I made no mistake  
 In its extremest clause—  
 The Date, and manner, of the shame—  
 And then the Pious Form  
 That “God have mercy” on the Soul  
 The Jury voted Him—  
 I made my soul familiar—with her extremity—  
 That at the last, it should not be a novel Agony—  
 But she, and Death, acquainted—  
 Meet tranquilly, as friends—  
 Salute, and pass, without a Hint—  
 And there, the Matter ends— (No. 412)

Emily Dickinson was not writing poetry to pass her idle time either. She thought it her calling and destiny to “sing” and “love—that is, love poetry:

Perhaps you laugh at me! Perhaps the whole United States are laughing at me too! I can't stop for that! My business is to love. I found a bird, this morning, down—down—on a little bush at the foot of the garden, and wherefore sing, I said, since nobody *hears*?

One sob in the throat, one flutter of bosom—“My business is to *sing*”—and away she rose!<sup>23)</sup>

The artists must be judged by their merit, not by their flimsy fault. At its best Emily Dickinson's poetry is “terse, compact, concrete—and yet oblique, cryptic, surrendering its secret only in lighting-flashes of word and metaphor.”<sup>24)</sup>

We might say that Whitman and Emily Dickinson took off from Emerson, though it is of course ridiculous to think her as “a feminine Whitman”<sup>25)</sup> and, as Hicks notes again, Emily Dickinson complements Whitman. Where Whitman was merely expansive, Emily Dickinson was intensive, and the two of them form the greatest original poets in American literary history. Like most original geniuses, Emily Dickinson was far ahead of her time to be appreciated by her contemporary and even by some later generation. And if there is anything that might account for the eccentricity and wilfulness of Emily Dickinson, it is, besides the Calvinistic and Transcendental influences, perhaps her proud and rebellious will in its “polar privacy” (No. 1695) revealed as early as in her Mount Holyoke Female Seminary days. She called herself “The Mutineer” (No. 1617) who walked up and down “the same place that Satan hailed from, when God asked him where he'd been.”<sup>26)</sup>

Emily Dickinson's secluded life of deliberate choice, not “caused,” for “infinite to-

23) Emily Dickinson's letter quoted by Kher, p.29.

24) Gelpi, p.149.

25) Griffith, p.7.

26) Emily Dickinson's letter to her friend Abiah Root quoted by Gelpi, p.41.

Venture" (No. 847) was perpetual momentary acts of living in "the existential acts of consciousness."<sup>27)</sup> As Henry David Thoreau, Emily Dickinson, the "Empress of Calvary" (No. 1072), was not an ordinary eccentric recluse, and her intent was "to break through the surface of existence,"<sup>28)</sup> not excepting its pains and agonies, as Thoreau went to the Concord woods so that he could live "deliberately" and "front only the essential facts of life."<sup>29)</sup> And above all, Emily Dickinson's treatment of such pains and agonies is a testimony of her humanity as she understood Christ mainly through His crucifixion and grief, and her merit lies in her painful effort to express all these through "the creative power of words"<sup>30)</sup> and daring forms. Finally Emily Dickinson was her own prophet and her slim "Shadow" now seems longer than, at least, any other female poet in the literary history.

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27) Gelpi, p.153.

28) Kher, p.30.

29) Henry David Thoreau, *Walden in American Literary Masters*, ed. Charles R. Anderson, I, 695.

30) Anderson, *Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise*, p.322.