

DICKINSON'S QUEST FOR THE LIGHT OF TRUTH AND HER RELATIONSHIP WITH THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON

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The correspondence between Emily Dickinson and Thomas Wentworth Higginson is often read in terms of the Scholar-Preceptor relationship between an immature poet and a man of letters, and the correspondence is said to have had a crucial effect on her vocational awareness. It is usually assumed that Dickinson initiated the correspondence with Higginson, seeking opportunities for publishing her poems, and that because of his inability to appreciate her poems he failed to recognize the talent of a great poet.

However, it should be understood that Dickinson did not initiate the correspondence with Higginson in order to seek opportunities for publishing her poems. Karen Dandurand, revising the traditional view of Higginson's mentorship, argues that "contrary to the general assumption that she wrote to Higginson hoping he would help her publish her poems and that he failed her, she in fact initiated her correspondence with him to enlist his support in resisting pressure on her to publish" ("Why Dickinson Did Not Publish" 130). Dickinson did not ask Higginson for the chance to publish and thus the reason why Higginson did not push her to publish follows Dickinson's will, as Dandurand states, to "[continue] to withhold [her poems], resisting all but a few requests" (133). The correspondence can be read as a record demonstrating Dickinson's growing self-awareness as a poet, which was, as Sewall interprets it, a consequence of "a restless search for identity and vocation" (532-33).

What kind of role, then, was Higginson playing in relation to Dickinson's literary career? Dickinson's early correspondence with Higginson specifically offers us essential viewpoints in terms of where to begin our speculation. Dickinson sent her first letter to

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Higginson on April 15, 1862, shortly after Higginson's essay "Letter to a Young Contributor" appeared in the April issue of the Atlantic Monthly. That the essay had a great impact on Dickinson's sense of identity as a poet is obvious; his message motivated her to write immediately to a person she had not even seen. From the beginning, Dickinson expresses that she is confident about her choice. She states in the letter that she sent him ten days after the first one: "I read your Chapters in the Atlantic--and experienced honor for you--I was sure you would not reject a confiding question" (405). Dickinson knew, at this point, that her vocational awareness profoundly relates to her self and self-exploration, which may inevitably involve a "confiding question" of the poet's inner life and privacy.

The first letter from Amherst came to Higginson's hand at the post office in Worcester, Massachusetts, on the following day, April 16. Enclosed were four poems and her signature on a card enclosed in a separate envelope. Their correspondence thus began:

Mr Higginson,

Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?

The Mind is so near itself--it cannot see,

distinctly--and I have none to ask--

Should you think it breathed--and had you the
leisure to tell me, I should feel quick gratitude--

If I make the mistake--that you dared to tell me--
would give me sincerer honor--toward you--

I enclose my name--asking you, if you please--Sir
--to tell me what is true? (403)

In this first letter, Dickinson asks two primary questions of Higginson. She wants Higginson to tell if her "Verse is alive" and "what is true." These two questions are not irrelevant to each other. As we shall see later, assuring the life of her verse and seeking "her" truth closely interrelate when Dickinson develops her identity as a poet, which forms the core of her self. Why, then, are those questions important to Dickinson's professional awareness? First, I shall speculate what the idea of "truth" means to Dickinson, a private poet, and then I shall trace how her attitude toward "truth," the life of her verse, and her self-exploration interrelatedly create her

poetic vision.

Dickinson's question, "What is true?" induces our question of what Dickinson meant by the word "true." Inquiry about the truth was the start of the Dickinson-Higginson relationship. Dickinson means by "truth" the public evaluation that authoritatively tells the poet what is good. As a private poet who composes poetry not for a wide, public audience, but for herself and close friends, Dickinson's poetry writing was free from the authority of public evaluation. Joanne Dobson states: "Dickinson did not write, as a professional poet would, for public distribution. She wrote for herself and a small circle of friends and acquaintances, and in the role of feminine literary amateur she would find herself recognized and appreciated" (51).

Dickinson, however, did not know about the public scale, since she had been writing her poems within her private sphere, free from public evaluation. In the letter of June 7, 1862, Dickinson expresses her self as a private poet with the image of a "Sailor" who needs to depend on a compass in order to gain a sense of direction: "The Sailor cannot see the North--but knows the Needle can--/ The 'hand you stretch me in the Dark,' I put mine in, and turn away . . . /But, will you be my Preceptor, Mr Higginson?" (409). The chaotic image of the tremendous space of the sea is juxtaposed with the chaos of the "Dark." Describing her self as a "Sailor" and someone left out in darkness, Dickinson regards Higginson as "the Needle" which points to the North, a symbol of the truth, and as someone who can introduce the light of truth.

Dickinson did not intend to change her position as a private poet by publishing, but could not resist asking for the truth of a public evaluation of her poems. Dickinson simply wanted to improve her artistic skills and expects Higginson to instruct her. Dickinson hopes to be liberated from the affliction of blindness about the truth of the quality of her work. Dickinson writes to Higginson in July 1862:

Will you tell me my fault, frankly, as to your
self, for I had rather wince, than die. Men do
not call the surgeon, to commend--the Bone, but to
set it, Sir, and fracture within, is more

critical. And for this, Preceptor, I shall bring
you--Obedience--the Blossom from my Garden, and
every gratitude I know (412).

That she brings him "Obedience" was her promise of loyalty and an expression of her hope to become his scholar. In about seventy letters that Dickinson sent to Higginson during twenty-four years, the predominant patterns of her signature to Higginson were, "Your Scholar," "Your Pupil," and at one time "Your Gnome," and they all show Dickinson's willingness to identify herself as a scholar of Higginson. However, Dickinson did not take the subordinate position of a scholar all the time. Often she identifies herself as his "friend," and signs simply "E. Dickinson" or "Dickinson." The patterns of signature imply that there were dual aspects of Dickinson's self-representation to Higginson. Mixing both sides of identification--his "obedient" scholar and friend--she creates a persona especially kept for presenting herself to Higginson.

Dickinson writes to Higginson, knowing that he lives in a different sphere from that where her self is. As a publishing author, Higginson experiences more public moments than Dickinson who withdrew into the house and thus lived in a domestic sphere. The difference between the spheres can be attributed to their gender difference, since, as Dobson states, "in nineteenth-century America, domesticity was the arena in which a woman's active life was expected to be played out" (40). Dobson emphasizes that "feminine privacy and domesticity" was "the cultural ideal" of women in the nineteenth century (41). Dickinson's status as a private woman poet may have been culturally appropriate. Yet, in asking Higginson for mentorship, Dickinson faces a different sphere: the sphere of public male-dominant ideology. The passage from the letter of July 1862 continues to express not only Dickinson's view that her sphere of living is different from his, but also her needs of seeing what is true in the other sphere:

Perhaps you smile at me. I could not stop for
that--My Business is Circumference--An ignorance,
not of Customs, but if caught with the Dawn--or
the Sunset see me--Myself the only Kangaroo among
the Beauty, Sir, if you please, it afflicts me,

and I thought that instruction would take it away. (412)

Dickinson's business is "circumference," the sphere surrounding her self and the sphere of darkness, where the sunlight cannot reach. Dickinson perceives that the light of truth exists outside of her sphere, in the world where there is the light of "the Dawn" and "the Sunset."

For Dickinson, Higginson is a representative of the public sphere who supposedly is able to tell her what truth is. In the first letter to Higginson, Dickinson states: "The Mind is so near itself--it cannot see, distinctly--and I have none to ask" (403). Actually, Dickinson could have asked Susan for criticism. Although Dickinson never mentions it in any extant letters to Higginson, she shared with Susan a large number of her poems, and, as we have seen in chapter two, Susan did play the role of critic of a poem. However, by the time Dickinson started writing to Higginson, Susan's married life had become a busy one with her child.

Asking Higginson for mentorship did not mean Dickinson's distrust of Susan's ability to understand her poetry. Dickinson simply may have tried not to bother busy Susan; or Dickinson merely needed a different critical view, which was not "near" to Dickinson's "Mind." As we have seen, Susan's ability to comprehend Dickinson's poetry can be attributed to the fact that Dickinson and Susan for a long time shared the same sphere of private experience. Susan may have been as "near" as Dickinson herself and may not have been able to evaluate her poetry with the public scale, in other words, with a stranger's eye. Dickinson needed critics from both private and public spheres. Both Susan and Higginson may have contributed to form an important aspect of Dickinson's idiosyncrasy. Her idiosyncrasy is, indeed, the vision doubled by the different patterns of perception through her relationship with both spheres.

Dickinson's perception was doubled through reciprocation of knowledge between the different spheres. For Dickinson, setting up the Scholar-Preceptor relationship with Higginson was a strategy of reciprocation. Her knowledge about poetry was firm, but inexplicable. Dickinson's knowledge was subjective: "If I read a book [and] it makes my whole body so cold no fire ever can warm me I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only way[s] I know it. Is there any other way[?]"

(Letters 473-74). Dickinson is sure that her poetic energy is strong, but unsure whether or not only possessing that energy qualifies her to be a poet. Bringing "Obedience" as his scholar, Dickinson in the meantime charges him with the responsibility to tell the truth by the scale of his knowledge: ". . . I can see Orthography--but the Ignorance out of sight--is my Preceptor's charge" (Letters 415). Dickinson depended upon Higginson's ability not only to critique her poems but also to provide her with another way to perceive her self as a poet. In other words, the Scholar-Preceptor setting enables her to discover the different selfhood from that which she already knew. What the reciprocation between Dickinson and Higginson depicts is her attempt to establish her selfhood as a poet. It also meant for Dickinson an exploration of poetic energy in her "circumference" in the public context which she finds in Higginson's preceptorship.

The difference of the spheres between Dickinson and Higginson necessarily causes a tension in their communication. In representing her self, Dickinson was also making efforts to hide her self, as if she plays hide-and-seek with Higginson. In her relationship with Higginson, Dickinson carefully and persistently chooses to present herself as an immature poet only. Dickinson deliberately limits her persona in order to present the aspect of herself exclusively as a poet; her choice of persona and its persistence necessarily limit Higginson's perception, too. As Sewall also suggests, if there are real and mythical Dickinsons, her consciously created self-image as a poet and Higginson's perception of her interrelatedly contribute to create the figure of "the legendary recluse" (536). Yet Dickinson, especially in later correspondence, also presented an aspect of her self as his friend and they shared personal events with each other. The "legendary" aspect of her persona, therefore, is only a part of Dickinson's self-representation to Higginson. After he has exchanged a few letters with Dickinson, Higginson seems to become interested in this earnest applicant to be his scholar. Higginson shifts their topic from her exclusive interest in poetry to some questions which were, perhaps, more personal than that subject. But Dickinson consciously avoids direct answers and creates, in a somewhat playful tone, answers which present the aspect of her self as a poet. For instance, Dickinson associates her age with her career and states: "You asked how old I was? I made no verse--but one or two--until this winter--Sir" (Letters 404). Playing a rhetorical game with Higginson enables Dickinson to present exclusively the legendary aspect of her self, but it is such a created image

of her self that she wanted Higginson to perceive.

On Higginson's side, a curiosity about the "real" Dickinson, who may possibly be different from the image that she has been creating in her letters, has grown. As far as a few of the surviving letters from Higginson to Dickinson tell it, Higginson has a strong wish to see her. When he invites Dickinson to come to Boston and join in listening to Emerson's reading and in a meeting of the New England Women's Club, for instance, Higginson states: ". . . I should still rather have you come on some [da]y when I shall not be so much taken up--for my object is to see you, more than to entertain you" (Letters 462). Dickinson did not come to Boston, and Higginson eventually arranged a chance to see her in Amherst in 1870. They met each other only twice: first, in August 1870, and the second time, three years after that. On the day of the first meeting, Higginson enthusiastically wrote to his wife about his impressions of the reclusive poet:

A step like a pattering child's in entry & in
glided a little plain woman with two smooth bands
of reddish hair & a face a little like Belle
Dove's. . . . She came to me with two day lilies
which she put in a sort of childlike way into my
hand & said "These are my introduction" in a
soft frightened breathless childlike voice--&
added under her breath "Forgive me if I am
frightened; I never see strangers & hardly know
what I say--" (Letters 473)

Higginson thus vividly wrote to his wife about his long-awaited first meeting with the myth of Amherst. The detailed description in his letter indeed tells us his excitement to have realized his meeting with the reclusive poet. However, Higginson later confesses: "but this interview left our relation very much what it was before; --on my side an interest that was strong and even affectionate, but not based on any thorough comprehension; and on her side a hope, always rather baffled, that I should afford some aid in solving her abstruse problem of life" ("Emily Dickinson's Letters" 453). Implying that Dickinson's character seemed to be too complex to

understand in a single meeting, Higginson at the same time recognizes that their first meeting did not make their relationship closer. As Dickinson stated, Higginson was regarded as a "stranger" to whom she "hardly [knew]" what to say.

The "affection" on Higginson's side reflects his sense of responsibility as a preceptor. As we have seen, although Dickinson was thirty-nine when they first met, Higginson emphasizes the childlike quality of the way she talks and acts. Higginson may not have thought of her as an immature poet who needed his help; rather, he understood that accepting her childlike persona was part of his responsibility as Dickinson's preceptor. Such a persona, however, seemed fictitious to someone who knew her well, for example, Austin. Mabel Todd, in her journal, tells of an episode concerning this: shortly before the 1894 edition of Dickinson's letters was to come out, when Todd told Austin that someone spoke "strongly to her against making public the letters of that 'innocent and confiding child,'" Austin "smiled." Todd states that Austin smiled because he knew that in the letters to Higginson "Emily definitely posed" (qtd. in Sewall 538). Truly, Dickinson in her letters to Higginson attempts to create a different self-image which may not be the same as the figure that Austin and Todd believe reveals Dickinson's private aspects. Austin smiles because he thinks he knows about the poet better than the person who made that comment. But Austin is also blind, since he did not recognize that Dickinson simply presented different personas to Higginson and to Austin. In other words, Dickinson's created image of her self in the letters to Higginson was also real; Dickinson presented to Higginson an aspect of her real self with which even Austin was unfamiliar.

A deliberate "pose" is, thus, the reality of Dickinson's self presented to Higginson. Dickinson led Higginson to perceive what she wanted him to perceive. Although Dickinson was extremely shy at the beginning in the first meeting, Higginson remarks that she did not remain in silence: ". . . she talked soon & thenceforward continuously--& deferentially--sometimes stopping to ask me to talk instead of her--but readily recommencing" (Letters 473). Higginson did not know what to say. Higginson was overwhelmed by the tension lying between their spheres to the extent that he thus confessed: "I never was with any one who drained my nerve power so much. Without touching her, she drew from me. I am glad not to live near her" (Letters 476).

Listening to her was all he could do to communicate with this eccentric reclusive poet. Higginson perceived that there was no other way to deal with the tension between them. Thus he states: "The impression undoubtedly made on me was that of an excess of tension, and of an abnormal life. Perhaps in time I could have got beyond that somewhat overstrained relation which not my will, but her needs had forced upon us" (my emphasis, "Emily Dickinson's Letters" 453). Higginson, thereafter, gave up his needs to seek the figure of Dickinson, which he expected to see, and concentrated on the role that she wanted him to enact:

She was much too enigmatical a being for me to
 solve in an hour's interview, and an instinct told
 me that the slightest attempt at direct cross-
 examination would make her withdraw into her
 shell; I could only sit still and watch, as one
 does in the woods; I must name my bird without a
 gun, as recommended by Emerson. Under this
 necessity I had no opportunity to see that human
 and humorous side of her which is strongly
 emphasized by her nearer friends. . . . Hence, even
 her letters to me show her mainly on her exalted side. . . .

("Emily Dickinson's Letters" 453)

Higginson understood that Dickinson presented him her "exalted side," the side which leads one to create "the myth of Amherst." Higginson, however, did not further seek to fulfill his desire to see a different aspect of Dickinson's self-representation. As if he were a mirror reflecting Dickinson's self-image as a poet, he silently accepted any kind of representation of her self. Thus the legend is generated by an interaction between Dickinson, a performer, and Higginson, an audience. The self that Dickinson expressed in that tension was, indeed, real; Higginson testifies to Dickinson's serious search for identity as a poet. It was the self that Dickinson only reveals in her relationship with Higginson: a fragmented piece of her real self.

The reason why Dickinson trusted Higginson's understanding deeply relates to his view

of literature expressed in his essays, especially "Letter to a Young Contributor." Although Dickinson regards him mostly as a representative of the public sphere and develops their relationship through the careful rhetorical game in terms of how she represents her self, Dickinson's trust in and respect for Higginson was profound. Dandurand, for instance, observes Dickinson's sincerity in "her repeated attempts to thank him for his willingness to act as her private literary tribunal, and for his encouragement and friendship" (146).

Higginson in "Emily Dickinson's letters," in which he gives a retrospect of their relationship, states that Dickinson regarded him as "a literary counselor and confidant," but he at the same time suggests that he has "little ground for [that role]" (444). For Dickinson, sharing the concern for her poetic career was as private as sharing her personal matters. Higginson's essay contained the key messages to understanding what makes a basis of common perception and philosophy of art between them--between the friends from different spheres--and what convinced her that he could become her "confidant" as well as her "private literary tribunal."

One of the most crucial points that Higginson addressed to "young contributors" in his essay and that Dickinson willingly followed was about the perfection of the work. Higginson advises the "young contributors," literary amateurs, to take time and labor in order to create more perfect work:

Such being the majesty of the art you seek to practise, you can at least take time and deliberation before dishonoring it. Disabuse yourself especially of the belief that any grace or flow of style can come from writing rapidly. Haste can make you slipshod, but it can never make you graceful. (403)

The essay hardly can be read as a strong encouragement of publishing. Its emphasis on the strong recommendation of "revision" even warns young writers not to hurry themselves to publish their work without making efforts to perfect it:

Labor, therefore, not in thought alone, but in utterance; clothe and reclothe your grand conception twenty times, until you find some phrase that with its grandeur shall be lucid also.

("Letter to a Young Contributor" 404)

In his attitude toward art, as Dandurand points out, Dickinson "saw support for her determination to protect her poems from premature publication" (132). Higginson's advice to "delay `to publish'" has made him subject to severe criticism, yet was an expected reply for Dickinson. Higginson only "confirmed the choice she had already made" (Dandurand 134). Thus Dickinson, smiling, states that the idea of publishing was "foreign to [her] thought" (Letters 408). Higginson did not fail Dickinson. As Dandurand suggests, "he urged that she wait, not because the poems were not good enough to be published, but because they were too good to be published hastily" (135). Dickinson, too, fully agrees with him: "You are true, about the `perfection.'/ Today, makes Yesterday mean" (Letters 412).

Higginson was able to "feel" the "strange power" of Dickinson's poems and their excellence. But Higginson knew that her power was uncontrollable, as Dickinson once wrote to him: "I had no Monarch in my life, and cannot rule myself, and when I try to organize--my little Force explodes--and leaves me bare and charred" (Letters 414). For Higginson, Dickinson's private sphere seemed remote from his, and he was baffled by that strange power, which makes his mentorship almost impossible. Higginson confessed to Dickinson: "[I am] always feeling that perhaps if I could once take you by the hand I might be something to you; but till then you only enshroud yourself in this fiery mist & I cannot reach you, but only rejoice in the rare sparkles of light" (Letters 461).

In spite of Dickinson's strong need of Higginson as a literary mentor from the public sphere, Higginson felt limited in his ability to "be something" to her. He wrote to Dickinson: "I should like to hear from you very often, but feel always timid lest what I write should be badly aimed & miss that fine edge of thought which you bear" (Letters 461). For Dickinson, it was not her intention to embarrass him. Thus Dickinson sometimes had to reconfirm their positions: "You place the truth in opposite--because the fear is mine, dear friend, and the power your's--" (Letters 481). Higginson's attitude throughout his relationship with Dickinson implies that his contribution was not actively guiding her but rather passively listening to her, understanding her, and reflecting her self-image like a mirror. Higginson himself does not believe that his role was

as a preceptor of Dickinson: From this time [early 1860s] and up to her death (May 15, 1886) we corresponded at varying intervals, she always persistently keeping up this attitude of "Scholar," and assuming on my part a preceptorship which it is almost needless to say did not exist. Always glad to hear her "recite," as she called it, I soon abandoned all attempt to guide in the slightest degree this extraordinary nature, and simply accepted her confidences, giving as much as I could of what might interest her in return. ("Emily Dickinson's Letters" 450)

The statement indicates that Higginson, although identified by Dickinson as her preceptor, finds Dickinson an "extraordinary nature" and thus beyond his control. Listening to her "recite," he was rather a private audience for Dickinson's poems. But as an audience from a different sphere, he could be her "private literary tribunal," to use Dandurand's phrase (146). On other occasions, Higginson actively shared the poems and even letters from Dickinson with his friends and family; he also presented her poems, along with his deceased sister's, at a meeting of the New England Women's Club in 1875. According to Dandurand, "the membership of the New England Women's club in the mid-1870s included many writers, reform activists, and women distinguished in other fields" (161). Higginson records that the poems' "weird & strange power excited much interest" (Leyda 2:239). As Dandurand points out, it is noteworthy that "Higginson thought it appropriate to present Dickinson's poems" to, and that "her poems 'excited much interest'" among, an audience where the list of members read "like a compendium of notable women in nineteenth century New England" (162).

We cannot be sure about the number of people at the club meeting when Higginson presented Dickinson's poems, but we are sure that the presentation of the poems anonymously at that public meeting still possesses the nature of private sharing. According to Dandurand, "newspaper reporters were routinely excluded from club meetings" and there was no publication except for "the annual report of the Women's Club appearing in the Woman's Journal" (161). As Dandurand suggests, it is possible to say that "later requests for her poems may have resulted from his reading of them in this important 'private' forum" ("Dickinson and the Public" 20), the presentation may have been an indirect cause to draw public attention to Dickinson's poems. However, the reading itself did not put the poems under the risk of publication. Therefore,

Higginson did not really endanger her poems to the public but enlarged her "small sphere."

Higginson understood that Dickinson's "weird & strange power" came from her self. Higginson felt that Dickinson poured her life into her poems and cherished them as if they were the shared part of her self. A correlation between a poet's language and life is, in fact, a crucial idea in Higginson's view of literature expressed in "Letter to a Young Contributor." Higginson writes:

Charge your style with life, and the public will not ask for conundrums. . . . [F]ight to render your tatement clear and attractive, as if your life depended on it: your literary life does depend on it, and, if you fail, relapses into a dead language. . . .
(404)

The idea of "literary life" may have induced Dickinson's question--if her verse is "alive" and "breathes"--in the first letter to Higginson. Asking if her creation was alive, Dickinson at the same time wanted to know if her poetic self, the self as a creator, was alive. Higginson did not urge her to publish, and even protected her from the demand of publishing, since he knew that publishing was fatal for Dickinson's "literary life."

Charging the poems with life, Dickinson parallels her art's life with her own life. By sharing her own literary life, the poet can give life to her creation. As Dickinson expressed her self in the letter of July 1862, as "the Representative of the Verse," her creation becomes her alter-ego when she charges it with her literary life (Letters 412). When Dickinson urgently seeks his diagnosis for her poems, she expresses her question with an overtone that her own life is in danger. Assigning him the role of a physician, Dickinson counted on Higginson's diagnosis to the extent that she would risk, metaphorically, the life of her art and her life as an artist as well. In the second letter to Higginson, Dickinson expressed her gratitude. Dickinson sounds as if she had the "surgery" herself and felt pain: "Thank you for the surgery--it was not so painful as I supposed" (404). Although Higginson did not believe that he was able to become her mentor, Dickinson expressed the considerable degree of her dependency upon his diagnosis. Seven years after that letter, Dickinson writes to Higginson: "You were not aware that you saved my Life"(Letters 460).

The image of her self and her creation, poetry, are interchangeable in her representation. When she is not sure of the style of her poems, she does not understand her self; asking about her poems was at the same time asking about her self. In the letter of April 25, 1862, Dickinson informs Higginson that she was asked to publish by "two editors," according to Dandurand, probably Richard Salter Storrs and Samuel Bowles ("Why Dickinson" 134). Dickinson expresses her perplexity:

Two Editors of Journals came to my Father's House,
this winter--and asked me for my Mind--and when I
asked them "Why," they said I was penurious--and
they, would use it for the World--
I could not weigh myself--Myself--
My size felt small--to me-- (Letters 404-05)

Whether or not the editors really said to her that she was "penurious" is not known. However, Dickinson could not share her life for the use of "the World." Dickinson recognized that premature publication was fatal, since it would terminate both her literary life and the life of her art.

The comparability between the quality of her poems and the weight of her self and the emphasis on her smallness indicate her belief that both her poetic self and her verse are still immature and need to grow. The smallness Dickinson identifies was also true of her poems' style: "Would you have time to be the 'friend' you should think I need? I have a little shape--it would not crowd your Desk--nor make much Racket as the Mouse, that dents your Galleries--" (Letters 409). Dickinson thus asks Higginson: "I would like to learn--Could you tell me how to grow--" (Letters 404). The discourse of self-representation is inseparable from her representation of her poems, and when she represents her poems, she at the same time is conscious of her poetic self. She, at one time, perhaps asked to send her picture, replied: "Could you believe me--without? I had no portrait, now, but am small, like the Wren, and my Hair is bold, like the Chestnut Bur--and my eyes, like the Sherry in the Glass, that the Guest leaves--Would this

do just as well?" (Letters 412). The image of an immature, small person who, perhaps, is left alone after the "Guest" has gone has some implications about her self as a poet: Dickinson believes that she is inexperienced in terms of poetry writings and depicts herself as a small bird ("the Wren"), and implies that she lives her artistic life in solitude as if she is left out by people ("the Guest").

Dickinson's emphasis of immaturity of her poetic self is also seen in the letter of April 25, 1862. Perhaps asked her educational background, she only expresses it in terms of Higginson's "manner of the phrase," in other words, in terms of how she had formed her background as a poet: "I went to school--but in your manner of the phrase--had no education. When a little Girl, I had a friend, who taught me Immortality--but venturing too near, himself--he never returned--Soon after, my Tutor, died--and for several years, my Lexicon--was my only companion--Then I found one more--but he was not contented I be his scholar--so he left the Land" (Letters 404). Dickinson writes that the place where she attained her "education" was not a public sphere but the realm of private experience in which her close friends and the "lexicon" have intensified her creative power.

The position as an immature poet, or a scholar, promises her an eternal process of growing. However, Dickinson's personal quest for her identity as a poet may not be visible to the public audience. Although Dickinson hoped for an infinite growth, the outside pressure sometimes ignored her thoughts and deformed her small "circumference." When the poem "A narrow fellow in the grass" appeared in the February 17, 1866, issue of the Springfield Weekly Republican, Dickinson was shocked, partly because the poem was sent to the publisher by someone without her permission, and partly because the poem was deformed. The passage written in the letter to Higginson is calm in its tone, but the word choice uncovers her resentment: "Lest you meet my Snake and suppose I deceive it was robbed of me--defeated too of the third line by the punctuation. The third and fourth were one--I had told you I did not print--I feared you might think me ostensible" (my emphasis, Letters 450).

At another time, in 1876, when Helen Hunt Jackson urged Dickinson to contribute

poems to a volume of anonymous poetry in the "No Name Series," Dickinson asked Higginson to support her position as a private poet who resists publishing her poems. Such a demand of helping may have come to Higginson quite a few times, since he recognized his role in this situation. "Sometimes . . . her verses found too much favor for her comfort, and she was urged to publish. In such cases I was sometimes put forward as a defense," Higginson states in "Emily Dickinson's Letters," in introducing the letter Dickinson sent to him in order to ask him to support her position as a private poet (451):

Dear friend--
Are you willing to tell me what is right? Mrs.
Jackson--of Colorado--was with me a few moments
this week, and wished me to write for this--I told
her I was unwilling, and she asked me why?--I said
I was incapable and she seemed not to believe me
and asked me not to decide for a few Days--
meantime, she would write me--She was so sweetly
noble, I would regret to estrange her, and if you
would be willing to give me a note saying you
disapproved it, and thought me unfit, she would
believe you--I am sorry to flee so often to my
safest friend, but hope he permits me--

(Letters 562-63)

Being Higginson's "obedient child" (Letters 480), Dickinson expected him to protect her from the danger of the pressure on her to publish. Jackson suggested, "Surely, in the shelter of such double anonymousness as that will be, you need not shrink" (Letters 563), but the decision whether or not the poems should be in print was not so simple an idea to Dickinson. She understands that publishing terminates the process, since the growth of her poetic self will cease at the same time when her literary life ends up with the "dead language." Dickinson's poem "Success is counted sweetest" was, however, eventually published anonymously in the volume entitled *A Masque of Poets*. There is no record that Dickinson consented to contribute the poem, and we do not know how Jackson got a copy of the poem, which she gave to the editor,

Thomas Niles. In any case, when the volume was published, no one but Higginson and Dickinson herself knew the profound relation between publishing and Dickinson's literary growth--the growth of her self and art.

Dickinson had self-confidence as a private poet who slowly but steadily grows toward what she had called "the perfection." Her self-confidence was, however, not pride, as she writes to Higginson in her early letter: "I suppose the pride that stops the Breath, in the Core of Woods, is not of Ourselves--" (Letters 415). Dickinson knew that pride, a sense of accomplishment, concludes poetic growth. Dickinson chooses to be a humble scholar who ceaselessly asks Higginson to help her "improve" (Letters 415) and keeps her literary life moving forward. In the poem enclosed in the letter to Higginson written in early 1866, Dickinson represents her art as well as her self with the image of the Hesperides' golden apple. The image of ripening fruits is the most significant pattern of Dickinson's self-representation:

Except the smaller size
 No lives are round--
 These--hurry to a sphere
 And show and end--
 The larger--slower grow
 And later hang--
 The Summers of Hesperides
 Are long. (Letters 451)

What we really see in Dickinson's self-representation in the Scholar-Preceptor setting is not only her obedience and dependency as Higginson's scholar, but also her self-confidence as a private poet. Dickinson in an early letter to Higginson written on June 7, 1862, positively means that fame, for her, has nothing to do with the purpose of pursuing a literary career and that she can be "better" without fame: "If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her--if she did not, the longest day would pass me on the chase--and the approbation of my Dog, would forsake me--then--My Barefoot-Rank is better--" (Letters 408). The "dog" is Carlo whom Dickinson characterizes as "dumb, and brave" (Letters 415). Since he is a dog, Carlo, of course, does not

know or care about public authority, the producer of fame. But using the word "approbation," which sounds rather serious and formal, Dickinson makes Carlo the real authority in her private sphere. Dickinson may have only been humorous, but it is possible that she mentions Carlo to mean something important to her. When Carlo died on January 27, 1866, Dickinson sent a mysterious note to Higginson: "Carlo died./ Would you instruct me now?" Higginson regards this note as "the announcement of some event, vast to her small sphere" ("Emily Dickinson's Letters" 450). Carlo's death was indeed a "vast" event for Dickinson, since the absence of Carlo means the absence of authority within her small sphere.

In the note about Carlo's death, Dickinson asks Higginson to take over Carlo's position, or to continue to be her preceptor as an agent who judges the quality of her art. Nominating Higginson to be that agent, however, the choice is Dickinson's. In the letter of November 1871, Dickinson writes to him: "Dear friend, I trust you as you ask--If I exceed permission, excuse the bleak simplicity that knew no tutor but the North. Would you but guide [?]"(491). Although Dickinson humbly asks him to instruct or guide her, actually nobody else but her self can control her sphere and evaluate her poems. At another time, when she writes to Higginson and asks him to "instruct" her, Dickinson states, "I have no Tribunal" (Letters 409). Yet her tribunal, in fact, was her self.

As Higginson suggested, their relationship as scholar and preceptor may not have existed from the beginning; or it may not have been a power relationship grounded on mutual agreement. Dickinson portrayed herself as dependent upon Higginson to improve her style and grow her self, but she was actually completely free from control by anybody. The following poem depicts the tension between the self and others. The speaker, desperately resisting restrictive force, is reminiscent of the resistance of Dickinson herself in protecting her private sphere:

They shut me up in Prose--
As when a little Girl
They put me in the Closet--
Because they liked me "still"--

Still! Could themself have peeped--
 And seen my Brain--go round--
 They might as wise have lodged a Bird
 For Treason--in the Pound--

Himself has put to will
 And easy as a Star
 Abolish his Captivity--
 And laugh--No more have I-- (Poems 613)

The relation between the majority as controller and the speaker, an individual, as controlled is interestingly expressed in her language: "They," the majority and agents of most of the verbs in the poem, and "me," an individual and mostly the object of the sentences. Throughout the poem, "me" resists the pressure from "They," and finally, at the very last line, establishes the status of "I." In transforming her self from "me" to "I," the speaker attains the triumph of her self over the restrictive force of the majority, perhaps, the public. The moment echoes Dickinson's confidence in her status as a private poet. Since Dickinson's confidence comes from her vision of the eternally growing self as a poet, she was afraid to be stopped or confined in her growth. It was nobody else than Higginson, the preceptor himself, who understood that aspect of her self.

Dickinson's internal "little force" and confidence about it enables her to create another aspect of her self: her self as Higginson's "confidant." In so doing, Dickinson reverses their hierarchical positions when necessary. Once Dickinson expresses her gratitude for Higginson's encouragement, saying that she "was much refreshed by [his] strong Letter" (Letters 481), but sometimes she takes her turn as his friend. While Dickinson persistently keeps her position as his scholar, she also creates her persona as his friend and writes about personal matters, for example, family illnesses and deaths. Dickinson could talk with him about her father's death and her mother's illness. When Higginson's brother died in 1872, also, Dickinson showed him her deep sympathy: "I am sorry your Brother is dead" (Letters 494). Dickinson sometimes sent

poems--elegies--to console Higginson's grief. When the preceptor's first wife Mary died on September 2, 1877, a scholar, Dickinson, sent him a "strong" letter:

Dear friend.
If I could help you?
Perhaps she does not go so far
As you who stay--suppose--
Perhaps comes closer, for the lapse
Of her corporeal clothes--
Did she know she was leaving you? The Wilderness is
new--to you. Master, let me lead you. (Letters 590)

Dickinson also sent him a poem when his infant daughter Louisa died in March 1880 (Letters 657). Even though they met only twice, Dickinson's compassionate tones as well as Higginson's understanding and supportive attitude toward her literary career reveal their spiritual closeness. The physical distance remains, but the spiritual relationship develops. In such developing closeness, their emotional support was mutual, and the hierarchical Scholar-Preceptor relationship can turn out to be friendship--a relationship without a sense of hierarchy.

Dickinson's consoling words for Higginson, "Perhaps she does not go so far/ As you who stay--suppose," manifests Dickinson's view of death and immortality. Higginson was a friend with whom Dickinson could share something else than a view of literature: a religious vision. Higginson's role as literary preceptor becomes complicated when Dickinson fuses her view of literature with her religious vision. For instance, Higginson's role is multiplied at the time of the death of Edward Dickinson in 1874. Higginson is now her literary preceptor with whom Dickinson can attempt to share her religious thoughts: "I was told you were once a Clergyman. It comforts an instinct if another have felt it too" (Letters 583). Higginson, a Harvard Divinity School graduate, was a radical unitarian and social reformer. Now Dickinson creates Higginson's stance as a mixture of literary preceptor and religious preceptor.

Sharing the moments of someone's death was an important practice for Dickinson to create the common basis of understanding life and immortality. In other words, Dickinson

attempted to share with Higginson the same poetic and religious vision through the concept of immortality. Believing in the parallelism between the growth of her art and her poetic self, Dickinson's literary life keeps growing. Thus Higginson's message about "life" in his "Letter to a Young Contributor" had a double meaning for Dickinson: immortality of her soul and her art. In the essay, Higginson states, "Of all gifts, eloquence is the most short-lived" and "Literature is attar of roses. One distilled drop from a million blossoms" (410). Higginson emphasizes how carefully created literature ("one distilled drop from a million blossoms") can possess the message and quality to be read over and over and to be passed on from generation to generation and finally attain immortal life. Taking Shakespeare as an example, Higginson creates the message with a timeless and spacious perspective in terms of creating literature. His vision is a fusion of immortality of a human life with immortality of literature: The difference between Shakespeare and his contemporaries is not that he is read twice, ten times, a hundred times as much as they: it is an absolute difference; he is read, and they are only printed.

Yet, if our life be immortal, this temporary distinction is of little moment, and we may learn humility, without learning despair, from earth's evanescent glories. (410) Higginson's message and vision were doubtless conveyed to his scholar. The two elements--her soul and art--become integrated into one when the poet pours her soul's energy--life--into her art. In the letter of June 1869, Dickinson implies her view of immortality of her art and soul: "A Letter always feels to me like immortality because it is the mind alone without corporeal friend. Indebted in our talk to attitude and accent, there seems a spectral power in thought that walks alone--" (Letters 460). The letters give Dickinson opportunities to express her self within a different kind of relationship with different kinds of people whom she loves. The message from her self is the message from "the mind" which possesses "a spectral power." The power held within "the mind" becomes Dickinson's creative power: the power to transform her inner experience to poetry. To express her "mind," Dickinson gains her power from language; poetry writing enables her to express the "mind" in language distilled from the vision of her vast and profound experience. When she can fully envision her "mind" with her language, the vision remains and her art becomes free from the restriction of language.

In this way, Dickinson, as Higginson's scholar, faithfully followed his message in his "Letter to a Young Contributor": "If your work does not vindicate itself, you cannot vindicate it, but you can labor steadily on to something which needs no advocate but itself" (407). Charging her literary life, Dickinson gives birth to her poems, and her art that inherits the power of her "mind" attains autonomy and immortality. The light of truth was, indeed, inside of her self:

The Poets light but Lamps--
Themselves--go out--
The Wicks they stimulate--
If vital Light

Inhere as do the Suns--
Each Ages a Lens
Disseminating their
Circumference-- (Poems 883)

Dickinson's letters displayed how her life affected her poetic vision. The letters were a significant source of biographical information about how Dickinson lived her life as a woman in the nineteenth century. The purpose of reconsidering the biographical aspects of Dickinson is to integrate her life as a woman and a poet. The portrayal of her life offers us more realistic pictures of Dickinson's female experience, and looking at Dickinson's writings in relation to her life in the socio-historical contexts of nineteenth-century New England, we can understand that there is a relation between her being a woman and her texts.

The letters are, however, more than a "source of biographical information" with which we can construct Dickinson as a person and can "contextualize" Dickinson's poetry. The letters as well as the poems are also Dickinson's writing--literary texts--and more specifically they are the texts of her autobiographical writing: the texts that reveal Dickinson's evolving self and poetics. The letters are the texts which project Dickinson's subjectivity as a woman poet. By reading the letters in relation to the theory of women's autobiographical writing, we can see how Dickinson progressively constructs and represents her self.

Thus, reading the letters as texts enables us to discover Dickinson's poetics in another form of writing. Examining the interrelation between the poetics in letters and that in poems, we can move toward understanding the "whole" of Dickinson's poetics or language. If Dickinson's self represented in the letters presents an integration of Dickinson's aspects as a woman and a poet, her language of self-representation in the letters leads us to seek the wholeness of her writing. In seeking the wholeness, Dickinson's poetics encompasses the forms and genre which makes a distinction between prose and poetry.

Stylistically, Dickinson's poetry and prose are not dramatically different, although not the same. Dickinson did not write the letters with a conscious distinction from poetry writing. Dickinson weaves some passages written in the letters into her poems; at other times, she copies parts of poems and puts them into the texts of letters; or she sends brief notes or poems as letters. There are so-called "prose fragments" in Dickinson's writing: pieces of writing that we cannot identify to whom Dickinson addressed them. These pieces are either notes or letters or poems, but, in any case, Dickinson's language.

The Dickinson-Higginson relationship may easily be stereotyped as the woman poet's confrontation with the patriarchal ideology. Dickinson's deliberate self-representation to Higginson can be interpreted as a secretive strategy that she created in order to deal with a tension caused by the different spheres of men and women. Yet Dickinson did not create a deliberate persona for Higginson in order not to present her self. On the contrary, the persona that she presented to Higginson reveals the aspect of her self as a poet, which she thought that she could present only to Higginson. Choosing Higginson as her private literary mentor is her way of including him within her private sphere; Higginson was indeed Dickinson's trusted and selected private audience.

Complexity of the Dickinson-Higginson relationship is attributed to the very capacity of Dickinson's language, such as tone and imagery. Dickinson could represent a different persona to each correspondent, in other words, her capability of creating the different types of

discourse allowed her to "personalize" the discourse depending on to whom she was writing. Thus letter writing allows Dickinson to include or draw the person she loves into the private sphere of her self in the context of the relationship between the two. In doing so, her metaphoric language, which projects her idiosyncrasy, becomes the strategy to attain oneness with each correspondent. Dickinson's small universe has the power to absorb the tremendous outside world through the individual basis of communication.

In exploring the relation between Dickinson's life and language, a feminist perspective is indispensable. Dickinson's internal and external experience as a woman is inseparable from reading her poems, and the critical framework can give an effective way to contextualize her poetry and to look at her writing. It is true, however, that her mysterious lifestyle and metaphoric language make our attempt to fix the textuality difficult. Many of the details of Dickinson's biographical information are still under investigation, and the mysteries of her life cause openness of the textuality of her writings and ambiguity in our reading.

This thesis also leaves many problems to be examined. First of all, there may have been more aspects in Dickinson's relationships with the correspondents than I discussed. I believe that biographically and aesthetically my research in a future project can become more elaborate and deeper than the present state. The issue of the Master letters, in this respect, particularly leaves many mysterious and interesting points of investigation in terms of not only the identity but also the gender of the Master. Second, in order to gather more fragments of Dickinson's self and language, her self-representation in her letters to other correspondents needs to be investigated. Dickinson's relationships with other female friends, for example, can be important to expand our view of women's sphere and culture. The attempt to "gather" the pieces of Dickinson thus ends in realizing what is left out. It is impossible to scoop up the tremendous space of Dickinson's poetic universe, but a handful of Dickinson is enough to recognize the power and immensity of her self as a private woman poet.

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