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EMILY DICKINSON'S PEPPERCORN INFORMATIONS:  
SELF-CREATED MEAN OF TWO EXTREMES

BY HILLARY CAMPBELL '00

*Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

-Dylan Thomas

When Emerson described the perfect American Poet, he immediately and consciously withdrew himself from the possibility of filling that position. His Poet would possess magic, would possess indescribable talent, would speak to the world as it had never been spoken to before—and all in the form of poetry. But Emerson was not a poet. And because of this, in what must have been a heartbreakingly difficult moment for him, Emerson passionately put to paper all that this Poet would do for the human soul...and then stepped back. And did this Poet come? Was Emerson's personal disappointment—that he could not be the great Poet he knew the human race needed—assuaged by the *coming* of such an Artist? Well, perhaps. We of course have Whitman. But regardless of whether or not Emerson's great dream was fulfilled in one superior person, there was certainly no shortage of mere Transcendental followers.

The Transcendentalists were not a normal bunch. They argued; they fought; they spoke to the public; they contemplated in solitude. Their one common foundation, Emerson, served as a link tying them together, but by no means tying them down to similar ideas. The Transcendentalists were nothing if not independent and original individuals, each taking Emerson's words and interpreting them in their own ways. Whitman, Hawthorne, and Dickinson are perfect examples of such differing points of view. Living in a time at which Transcendentalism was floating around, these three had their own ideas, and their own ways of expressing them. Regardless of whether each was an actual, full-blooded, loyal Transcendentalist, Whitman, Hawthorne, and Dickinson all had his/her own way of doing things, and it is in fact these ways on which I intend to focus in this paper. Whitman was the endless-line poet, the landscape poet, the people poet, the body poet, the soul poet. He took Transcendentalism and became its second master, its second teacher (Emerson being, of course, the first). Hawthorne chose a different medium, prose, and applied the practice of Transcendentalism on a fictional community bearing no small resemblance to the actual tried-and-failed Utopian Brook Farm. Dickinson did neither of these. She, I propose, can be seen as a product of Whitman and Hawthorne's ideas/styles, formulating her own medium, her own meaning, her own art. Dickinson was like no other, and she liked it that way. While Whitman professed that he knew the Truth, and intended to spread it to all his pupils, Dickinson intended no such teacher-student relationship with her poems. She was not a teacher, she was not a student. She didn't apply Transcendental-

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ism to her work, hoping, as Hawthorne hoped, that her work might force some aesthetic reality onto her readers. Dickinson wrote for herself, for she herself *was* the poetry. She “dwelled” in it. If Whitman and Hawthorne are the two extremes of Transcendentalism, Dickinson is the mean of these extremes, creating, in her house next to her bed and writing desk, a unique, comfortable place for only herself and only her poetry.

In three ways might we compare the work of Whitman, of Hawthorne, of Dickinson, so that we might also illustrate the relationship between them. In purpose, in “why” each artist did what s/he did; in content, in “what” each did; and in style, in “how” each artist did what s/he did. Whitman, to begin with, chose a lofty purpose. He saw himself as, in fact, that great American Poet Emerson so lovingly foresaw and described. His poetry emphasized not only Emerson's ideas of nature, of the spirituality which *comes* from connection with nature, of the ability of art (poetry) to “embody [the beauty of nature] in new forms” (*Nature* 30), but emphasized also his *own* ideas of body, of touch, of coexistent place and time. In *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*, this coexistence is explained in the metaphor of a ferry full of people traveling from one shore to the other. This ferry, for Whitman, represents the individual, and the river represents the distance between individuals. The distance, then, symbolizes both the actual space between two bodies (two souls), as well as the chronological, historical time between peoples and cultures. “And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are more to me, and more in my meditations, than you might suppose” (*Crossing Brooklyn Ferry* 160), he writes, illustrating the fact that we are all the same no matter where we are in time or place. Whitman thrives on this truth—that we are all unique but connected. It is *this* uniqueness, this individuality of each one of us, in fact, that Whitman sees as the very characteristic which binds us together (“Just as you feel when you look on the river and sky, so I felt, / Just as any one of you is one of a living crowd, I was one of a crowd” (*Brooklyn* 160)). Whitman encourages us, and urges us *as our teacher* to embrace our independence, but not to forget to reach out to those around us who share that same sort of unique nature: “For enough people to be able to be in a crowd, each without losing self-identity, self-respect, and dignified particularity, would be to transform the meaning of ‘crowd’ utterly” (Hollander 180). Emerson's idea of self-reliance is Whitman's central theme and purpose for writing. By learning what Whitman has to say, he claims, we will then reach out and *touch* (always touch) and connect with the other souls around us, and, accordingly, transcend. We receive “identity” (*Brooklyn* 162) by our bodies, and hence we *need* to touch one another in order to “feel” that thing—skin—which both separates us and, in touching, also has the ability to unite us. Whitman writes his poetry because he believes himself to be the teacher of transcendence, of soul-realization, of humanity. He believes he has found the Truth.

Hawthorne, on the other hand, seems to say, in his *The Blithedale Romance*, that Whitman's lessons oftentimes have too much tendency to go awry. “Of all varieties of mock-life, we have surely blundered into the very emptiest mockery, in our effort to establish the one true system” (*The Blithedale Romance* 203), Zenobia cries, having realized, too late, that their efforts to create a Transcendental community have tragi-

cally failed. *This*, Hawthorne claims, is the reality of Transcendentalism. *This*, he says, is what happens when you try to force anything (even if it be Whitman's Truth) onto human nature. Like Thoreau, Hawthorne began a literary experiment of Transcendentalism. However, Hawthorne's experiment failed because it tried to create a "formula" for humanity. His experiment, the literary Blithedale Farm, took un-transcended persons and foolishly stamped "enlightened" onto their foreheads, hoping that this would be enough to create a perfect community. Interestingly, it seems that Whitman never considered the "un-transcended," or, rather, the effects of forced supposed "Truths" about humanity *on* these "un-transcended." Hawthorne sees the repercussions of such an assumption. His *Blithedale* is a way for him to show the public, and Transcendental reformers, that it is nearly impossible to begin perfection of the soul (in strictly Transcendental terms, at least) without "bringing baggage" with you, without ignoring the self, the soul, and thereby unnaturally *forcing* some sort of transformation into transcendence. In fact, the doom of failure is sure to come to *any* Transcendentalist-wannabe who takes Emerson's, or Whitman's, or any Transcendentalist's preachings, to be scripture, and *does not form his/her own unique ways to transcend*. Hawthorne writes *Blithedale* to show us the way Transcendentalism can be mishandled, so that we may not make the same mistake ourselves.

If Whitman was an observer by choice, Dickinson was an observer by force—"she had, professionally, nothing to do but *look*" (Kazin 159). How thankful we all are, then, that she decided to put her observations on paper. Dickinson literally *lived* in her poems—they were all she had, all that made up her life, all the *product* of her life. As Kazin again puts it, "what unites all her writing...are the power and depth of her solitude" (Kazin 143). Her thoughts, her imagination, her poetry were her entire self and soul, her entire personal means of transcendence. Dickinson doesn't worry that there are other people around her, that there are other writers, other thinkers, other "lonely women" who might teach her something about herself. Nor does she worry that she might have something to teach *them*. "I dwell in Possibility— / A fairer House than Prose— / More numerous of Windows— / Superior—for Doors—" (#657), she writes, telling us point-blank that her poetry *is* her body and brain and heart. And this subject—herself—is endless enough in its brilliance and complexity to create 1775 just-as-brilliant-and-complex poems. She writes to transcend beyond all the other voices of the world—to make a place for her own voice: "[Dickinson] knows...that we are always besieged by perspectives. Dickinson's entire art at its outer limits...is to think and write her way out of that siege" (Bloom 285). One way to do this is to reject supposed self-proclaimed teachers. She does not allow Whitman's ideas of Transcendentalism to affect her writing, or to teach her how to "find" her soul. And, by relying wholly on herself in this way, she avoids what Hawthorne says is the result of such complete dependence on the ideas of others, i.e. by pasting another person's—the teacher's—meaning onto oneself, it is like trying to blot out one's *true* meaning, and, in the end, only winds up tragically failing. In #670, Dickinson describes herself (living in her body of poetry, in her own personal "Haunted" house) as "Ourself behind ourself, concealed—", and she *means* this—she *means* that she has fallen into her own soul by writing her poetry, and, in doing so, is struggling with her

own humanity by dealing with such major (and horrifying) themes as erotic approaches to death, God, and love. Death, for this poet, was her very reason for living (or for writing—both are, in her case, the same). "In its finality and futile heartbreak, death remained all too real to Dickinson, its ancient promise turned about in her ultimate recognition of life's limits—and the limits of death" (Kazin 146)—in other words, Dickinson wrote for herself and herself only. It just so happened that "herself" was obsessed with mortality.

Content-wise, Whitman chooses a number of ways of making his message clear. One of these is to unite all of time—just as he unites all of the human race—into one. Whitman is in love with the past, the present, and the future, and he sees them all as exactly the same thing because "It avails not, time nor place—distance avails not" (*Brooklyn* 160). In order to convey to us, his students, that we are just as connected with our own souls as we are connected to the person who sits next to us, as we are to Whitman as he sits writing his poetry, he paints a picture of "the similitudes of the past and those of the future...strung like beads" in "the simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, [himself] disintegrated, every one disintegrated yet part of the scheme" (*Brooklyn* 160). The words he uses, the "barbaric yawp" (*Song of Myself* 89) he specializes in, are no different than the simple, original words used in primitive times by newborn-humans. "The past and present wilt—I have fill'd them, emptied them, / And proceed to fill my next fold of the future" (*Song of Myself* 88)—Whitman knows time is circular, and wants us to reach back and touch him just as he reaches forward to touch us.

He seeks to reform us in this way, however, not only by emphasizing the simultaneous past, present and future, but by cataloguing all the details that make any time the glorious creation it is. "The poet insists that he stands for all America—that he is America, and lest you not believe him, he will play out that theme in energetically crowded detail" (Hollander 178), and o how this is true. At this very moment, millions of things are happening simultaneously, and yet Whitman shows us how many of these things are astonishingly similar: "The squaw wrapt in her yellow-hemm'd cloth is offering moccasins and bead-bags for sale...The conductor beats time for the band and all the performers follow him...The bride unrumpled her white dress, the minute-hand of the clock moves slowly...The Missourian crosses the plains toting his wares and his cattle" (*Song of Myself* 42-43). As we act, others act. We are united by what we do. But Whitman does not stop there. We are also united by who we are, he says, what we are made of. Before we may transcend by touching one another, we must first understand *why* we are able to reform ourselves this way, *why* the body in its details is so beautiful. And, as he has told us a thousand times before, the answer to this is that *we share* our bodies, as well as the beautiful parts that come with it: "Leg-fibres, knee, knee-pan, upper-leg, under-leg, / Ankles, instep, foot-ball, toes, toe-joints, the heel; / All attitudes, all the shapeliness, all the belongings of my or your body or of any one's body, male or female" (*I Sing the Body Electric* 100). The land in its parts, the body in its parts, the soul in its parts, time in its parts...all of these are parts of the *Truth* Whitman seeks to teach us so that we may reform ourselves.

This expansion, this transcendence, this comprehension of touch Whitman speaks of are all insured if we do one thing, and that is *listen to the Poet*. And this makes

Whitman seem as haughty and arrogant as he really was. However, *he* would claim that every one of us should be so arrogant, should be so proud of him or herself so that we may revel in the beauty of the human race *together*. The Poet Emerson spoke of is the Poet Whitman has become (or so Whitman believes), and the goal of this Poet is to expand his knowledge to those who will listen, and thereby create a nation of poets: "The messages of great poets to each man and woman are, Come to us on equal terms, Only then can you understand us, We are no better than you, What we enclose you enclose, What we enjoy you may enjoy" (*Preface 1855—Leaves of Grass*, First Edition 719). Walking around in Whitman's poems, we get the sense that we have been here before, and that he knew we would come. We belong with him just as we belong with each other, embracing the Truth—transcendence of the human soul—and becoming as Adam was: newborn, powerful, wholly unique, *naming* things and making them his own. Whitman is a master at naming things, detailing them, cataloguing them, repeating them over and over until our heads spin. Hopefully, he thinks, this spinning will be a good thing, and we will want more and more until, finally, we are on his level, having transcended and seen the light.

I bring up light because I think it is so inherently important in Whitman, Hawthorne, and Dickinson's work. Light embodies many things for each of these writers, but in only Whitman's case does light seem to embody goodness, and goodness only. Once we have reached this light, so to speak, we have reached the epitome of what Whitman has to teach us. Literally, light in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* represents a variety of things—all "good." Take *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry* and *Song of Myself*, for example. The time of day during which *Brooklyn* takes place is sunset: "Clouds of the west—sun there half an hour high..." (*Brooklyn* 159). Why is this important? It is the end of the day, people rush home to their families, another day is done, and *another one will soon begin*. Sunset is the end of the cycle of days, of weeks, of months and years and centuries—this cycle represents the circularity of time and soul and humanity. The sea-gulls Whitman describes in this poem fly in "slow-wheeling circles" (*Brooklyn* 161) as the light fades and prepares to brighten again. Like the light, we may fade, but we will always brighten again, and may indeed brighten permanently if we read Whitman and achieve transcendence. At the end of *Song of Myself*, Whitman becomes the dirt beneath our feet, dying, in essence, and becoming part of yet another cycle. But, again, this death takes place at sunset: "The last scud of day holds back for me / ... It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk. / I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun..." (*Song of Myself* 89). Light represents sex, soul, nature, *all* of what Whitman writes about because sex, soul, nature are all pathways to, or the results of, *enlightenment*. *Whitman's* light, unlike some forms of light portrayed in Hawthorne's work, is not artificial, and cannot be faked.

Hawthorne's light we shall get to a bit later, after first giving attention to his terribly obvious affliction with the past. He is burdened by it. Can't get rid of it. The past weighs Hawthorne down. Right away we should see the contradiction between him and Emerson, who believed Transcendentalism to be the letting-go of the past, and embracing of the present. The reason Hawthorne is so burdened by the past is because he believes such a "letting-go" to be almost virtually impossible. As foremen-

tioned, Hawthorne wrote *Blithedale* to prove, among other things, that one cannot leave the past behind—it irrevocably follows you. Within the first few chapters of *Blithedale*, Coverdale is already asserting his past prejudices and past beliefs regarding the society in which now he finds himself: "Neither did I refrain from questioning, in secret, whether some of us—and Zenobia among the rest—would so quietly have taken our places among these good people, save for the cherished consciousness that it was not by necessity, but choice" (*Blithedale* 54). If this were truly a Utopian society, and the members truly trying to transcend, shouldn't they have released themselves of all such past feelings and beliefs, and *immediately try to refrain* from thinking the way they used to? What use is becoming one with nature if you're going to pine away your hoeing-time dreaming about the crowded sidewalks of the city? It seems that neither Coverdale, nor anyone else at Blithedale Farm ever become part of the society they have "built"—instead, all remain representatives of their past (which is, of course, who they really *are*), glued together in a group that pretends to believe in what it is doing, but all the while wonders why it ever got involved in such a project in the first place ("What, in the name of common-sense, had I to do with any better society than I had always lived in! It satisfied me well enough" (*Blithedale* 65)).

Hence, the personal-reform all had been initially seeking in coming to Blithedale is almost immediately dead and buried, and such will always be the way of things, Hawthorne says, when you take on beliefs that are someone else's. Transcendentalism, he claims, should not be a teacher-student sort of deal, but rather should be a truly personal struggle in which *you* come up with your *own* beliefs and ways of transcending. Reform is only a dream for those who don't also reform themselves on their own terms. Like Whitman says, everyone is unique, and such a truth, Hawthorne asserts, should *not* warrant that we "follow" a teacher, but rather that we should stay true to our uniqueness and forego conformity as students. Or, at least, if we decide to form a "perfect community," we should be willing to transform our own souls, which is something the people at Blithedale do not at all seem willing to do. Coverdale is absolutely obsessed with people's clothing and appearances—a practice which does not cohere very well with the practice of looking to the *insides* of people, to their inner souls and humanity. But Hawthorne's critique of Utopias and substitute-beliefs does not stop there—it continues to those who do take their own beliefs, but then go too far. I speak, here, of Hollingsworth. Hawthorne mercilessly ridicules the reformer who lets his/her beliefs *become* who s/he "is." "Self, self, self! You have embodied yourself in a project. You are a better masquerader than the witches and gipsies yonder; for your disguise is self-deception" (*Blithedale* 197), Zenobia hurls at Hollingsworth, speaking words which might as well be coming from Hawthorne's own mouth. The Transcendental reformer, or even simply the Transcendentalist, who ignores the need, first, for reform *of his/her own self* is doomed to fail at reforming others. Belief must be taken in the correct dose, and from the correct source, before it can work wonders.

Whereas Whitman's idea of transcendence and expansion of the self/soul can be done by recognizing the simple beauty of the self/soul, Hawthorne warns against too-quickly believing that transcendence can come so easily. Belief in the soul's ability to transcend, to become perfect, to reach happiness is not a terrible thing, he would say,

for it can indeed be achieved, and, even if it is not, can still cause some sort of temporary pleasure. But those who falsely believe that a Utopian community can exist (for Hawthorne certainly seems to think it is impossible) are only fooling themselves: "It was, indeed, a foolish dream! Yet it gave us some pleasant summer days, and bright hopes, while they lasted. It can do no more; nor will it avail us to shed tears over a broken bubble" (*Blithedale* 203-204). Those who came to Blithedale were good actors who experienced tragedy as soon as they began to tire of playing parts ("What an actress Zenobia might have been!" (*Blithedale* 212)). This tragedy, of course, came with Zenobia's loss of Hollingsworth, Coverdale's loss of those he wrote about, and Hollingsworth's loss of "innocence," so to speak. Earlier in the book Coverdale again and again mentions that Hollingsworth's obsession with the reform of others would work better if Hollingsworth were to "commit a crime" and instead work on the reform of himself. Well, Coverdale gets his wish: "'Up to this moment,' I inquired, 'how many criminals have you reformed?' 'Not one!' said Hollingsworth, with eyes still fixed on the ground. 'Ever since we parted, I have been busy with a single murderer'" (*Blithedale* 215). Transcendence can be an evil thing, if forced or misapplied.

For Hawthorne, as with Whitman, light may be seen as a representation of love, individuality, and soul. However, again, this light *must* be attained on one's own terms, and no one else's. Zenobia's "light," feminism, was killed by her other "light," love. Contrarily, one might also say that her whole light—both feminism and love—was killed by forced Transcendental education and an unnatural setting. From the very beginning of the book, we see the lack of light at Blithedale and accordingly accept this lack of light as a bit of foreshadowing on the Farm's eventual success: "The snowfall, too, looked inexpressibly dreary, (I had almost called it dingy)" (*Blithedale* 45). Hawthorne himself experienced such snow during his own stay at Brook Farm, and, in a letter to his fiancé, expressed his own disheartened nature at what the weather might mean for his future stay: "Through faith, I persist in believing that spring and summer will come in their due season; but the unregenerated man shivers within me, and suggests a doubt whether I may not have wandered within the precincts of the Arctic circle, and chosen my heritage among everlasting snows" (*Letters to Sophia Peabody* 416). But the light which interests me most in this novel is the contrast Hawthorne has created between fake and natural light. I speak here of fire versus transcendental light/the enlightenment of the soul/true happiness. Fire is a created light—it keeps out the cold and, eventually, dies. Pure, spiritual "light," on the other hand, creates itself and *deals* with the cold—it does not merely cover the cold up, and *this* light never dies. Anyone with glowing eyes in this novel has a passion burning within them ("Hollingsworth looked at me fiercely, and with glowing eyes" (*Blithedale* 136)), and whether that passion be good or bad, it is undeniably *honest* (pure) passion. The light of hope is given forth in this novel in examples such as a scene involving Zenobia, who is currently fired-up and driven by her feminist passion, as well as by her love for Hollingsworth—this light, before it is put-out by the effects of the Utopia, is cheery and heartening: "Zenobia... looked as bright as the very day that was blazing down upon us" (*Blithedale* 102). Misfortune in this novel is always a persistent "shadow" (*Blithedale* 143), easily blotting-out the fake light (abundant at the

Farm), and eventually approaching just about every member of Blithedale. In the city, a place where Coverdale feels most at home and most himself (which is why he should remain there, Hawthorne would say), sun shines cheerily over the rooftops, beckoning Coverdale to stay where he and his soul belong: "The blighting winds of our rigid climate could not molest these trees and vines; the sunshine, though descending late into this area, and too early intercepted by the height of the surrounding houses, yet lay tropically there, even when less than temperate in every other region" (*Blithedale* 147). Light serves as the ultimate metaphor for forced truths and failed Transcendental beliefs in this novel, for though fire can warm us for an evening, light—sunshine—can warm us for an entire lifetime.

"Because I could not stop for Death— / He kindly stopped for me—" (#712)—Dickinson loves death, loves looking forward into time for it, loves the future. She is obsessed with the future, maybe even burdened by it as Hawthorne is burdened by the past. Additionally, just as Whitman sees happiness in the past, present, and future, Dickinson sees happiness in the future, but it is a quite different happiness than Whitman's: "Her starting point was always mortality and her protest against it. She never got over the impermanence of everything she saw, the fragility of human relationships, the flight of the seasons, the taste of death in winter" (Kazin 143). Many, many of her poems have to do with just this impermanence, as well as the seduction she felt emanating from such a terrible thing. Death fascinated her, as did God, and yet it was the one thing she *could not know about* in the present. She needed, then, to focus always on the future, always on that moment when death would finally embrace her ("'Heaven'—is what I cannot reach! / The Apple on the Tree— / Provided it do hopeless—hang— / That—'Heaven' is—to Me!" (#239)). Dickinson sees "life as the fullness of our struggle against extinction" (Kazin 160), and so is always looking both to "put off" death with her erotic croonings about its evil sexiness, as well as to beckon it closer with her longings to know that which she cannot yet have. But then does this not suggest that Dickinson is not obsessed with the past, the present or the future at all, but, in being concerned with death, uses her poetry to deal with the *ceasing* of time altogether? "What fascinated Dickinson in all her greatest poems about death coming was exactly its coming. This is finally all we know, and as happens in life, it is the knowing we cannot escape. And on that topic she triumphed" (Kazin 147)—in other words, Dickinson's life, and therefore her poems, were filled with the soft, silent footsteps of approaching Death. She loved it. But she was not crazy. She was not insane. She was perfectly rational, and this is how she is able to keep on such a subject with such clarity, such sensuousness, and such humor: "I heard a Fly buzz—when I died—..." (#465). That moment of death, that moment of "ossification," of "First—Chill—then Stupor—then the letting go—" (#341) captivates her like no other moment. The "certain Slant of light" (#258), the "look of Agony" (#241), all these descriptions refer to some sort of comprehension—in life—of death, or, in a different way, refer to some sort of life *in* death.

Dickinson makes fun of those who seek to reform themselves or to reform others. *That*, she would probably say, is the quickest way to death. Reforming is changing, most probably according to someone else's (Emerson's, Whitman's) idea of a "better"

person, and this is suicide, she would say. And, if not suicide, is simply entirely too painful, or entirely too impossible. The reformer, the Transcendentalist, who believes him/herself better than all the rest is made fun of in #214, as Dickinson plays the part of the Transcendentalist. In this poem, she taps into that golden knowledge of the Transcended ("I taste a liquor never brewed"); and then grows to giant-height as she becomes the "drunk" of transcendence, "the little Tippler / Leaning against the—Sun—". But this Transcendentalist is fooling herself because no one can become that which is not natural to him/her. On this point she would agree with Hawthorne, but she would not, and does not, publicize her views so that everyone will listen. Instead, she turns this idea over in private, contemplating its meaning *for her*, taking a person who tries to reform his/herself and comparing this person's struggle to Dickinson's very own pain at not being able to be with a lover. In #640, Dickinson's longest poem, she immortalizes the pain she feels at not being willing to change herself and be with the one she loves. She cannot live with him, for "It would be Life—", she cannot die with him, for one of them would be left behind to suffer without the other ("For One must wait / To shut the Other's Gaze down—"), she cannot share his views because he is religious and she is not ("They'd judge Us—How— / For You—served Heaven— You know, / Or sought to— / I could not—"). That pain which separates them is as large as an "ocean," is "that White Sustenance— / Despair—". And yet even this pain might not be as painful as the one she would feel if she *were* to change for him and conform to his ideals, letting herself go and denying her true self, becoming like the Blithedale farmers and living one life but longing for the old one. Dickinson likes who she is and does not need to be a student. Nor does she need to be a teacher and join the ranks of the feminists around her. "She certainly did not celebrate poets who constantly wrote about one another because they were all women" (Kazin 153)—she was brilliant not because of those around her, but because of who she was ("[Her canonicity] ensues from her cognitive strength and rhetorical agility, not from her gender or from any gender-derived ideology" (Bloom 288)). Dickinson and Zenobia would not have gotten along.

"If I could, I would use ['She Unnames Them'] as the title instead of *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*" (Bloom 288). In this sense, as in many others, Dickinson is the exact opposite of Whitman. While *he* tries to give everything a name, tries to incorporate absolutely everything into his being and into his classroom, *she* takes the names away, making the poem *her own* and not at all intending to incorporate anyone else under her pen. Dickinson's transcendence is just that—*Dickinson's* transcendence. It is not a lesson for others to learn, but for only her to learn. Her transcendence is "her thing"—*she* feels the pains of death and love and God and isolation; *she* sets out to understand the truth of poetry, beauty and truth. This is no one else's journey but her own, and no amount of time in a Brook or Blithedale Farm, no amount of time reading the work of Whitman, can give her the knowledge she learns from writing her poetry. Her own personal expansion and private enlightenment is what happens to her soul when she writes: "The Soul selects her own Society— / Then—shuts the Door— / To her divine Majority— / Present no more—" (#303). There is no question that Dickinson attempted to transcend, to achieve some sort of higher knowl-

edge, but *did she get there?* "We can tell from her manuscripts that she regarded both 'terror' and 'rapture' as alternative words for 'transport'" (Bloom 277)—does this mean, since she used these words and ideas so much in her writing, that she did indeed succeed in transporting herself, in transcending herself? Or did hope give out? Kazin seems to think hope gave out and cites #254 as evidence of this giving-out; his interpretation of this poem is of a hope-bird "that perches in the soul" and sings beautiful songs, but never achieves anything more than that ("She was just past thirty when she seems to have given up hope that her outward life would somehow be transformed" (Kazin 160). But this is her outward life, not her inward life. She never married, never did much of anything except live always in the same house, go out every once in a while, and write poems. Outwardly, perhaps she was disappointed. Inwardly, I propose that the transcendence she was looking for, the hope for something more, was fulfilled.

Bloom points out that Dickinson's "best biographer, Richard Sewall, remarks in a fine understatement that 'she was something of a specialist on light'" (Bloom 282). However, her light is quite different from Whitman's (which always brings good), and Hawthorne's (which sometimes brings bad, but has the potential to bring good). Dickinson's light is always blinding. Love, knowledge, God...all these might be represented in light, but one thing is for sure, once you have seen this light (as Dickinson undoubtedly did) you can never "go back." The damage is done: "Before I got my eye put out / I liked as well to see— / As other Creatures, that have Eyes / And know no other way— / ...So safer—guess—with just my soul / Upon the Window pane— / Where other Creatures put their eyes— / Incautious—of the Sun—" (#327). In this poem, we're given the person who once saw as the other un-transcended did—normally, easily, comfortably. However, some sort of transcendence has hit and the light has poured forth from the sun which once seemed so harmless when s/he "knew no other way." Perhaps this light was always visible to Dickinson, and this is why she was able to write like she did. Or perhaps her writing *caused* this transcendence, and suddenly she *had* to write in order to create some outlet for all this blinding whiteness coming her way. "Had I not seen the Sun / I could have borne the shade / But Light a new Wilderness / My Wilderness has made—" (#1233), she writes, suggesting that although she might have enjoyed the shade, this new light has made her life more complex in a way that encourages her to explore the "wilderness." What is this light made up of? The usual Dickinson stuff. Death ("There's a certain Slant of light, / Winter Afternoons—" (#258)), God ("There interposed a Fly— / With Blue—uncertain stumbling Buzz— / Between the light and me—" (#465)), etc., etc. However, in death there is no light, and in this respect perhaps Dickinson preferred no light at all—she had already had enough of it. The light in her outward life was snuffed out when she became a woman ("How odd the Girl's life looks / Behind this soft Eclipse—" (#199)) because a) there were few choices for women in Dickinson's time, and b) one of her choices, marriage, never happened. Perhaps, her outward life being dark, and her inward eyes being painfully-blinded by the very personal, transcendent light, she wanted nothing more than no light, no *anything* at all. And there is no light in a coffin: "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers— / Untouched by Morning / And un-

touched by Noon—" (#216).

In style more than anything, I think, do I see the Whitman + Hawthorne = Dickinson equation. Whitman published his work in *Leaves of Grass* over and over and over again. He wrote his poems to be read, and read they were. In Whitman's mind, as in Emerson's, the Poet's job was to encapsulate absolutely everything—not just the human aspect—in his poetry. "He spans between [the Atlantic and Pacific coasts] also from east to west and reflects what is between them" (*Preface 1855* 713), and, therefore, since the Poet writes about the land, those who live on the land should read his poems and learn what they can from them. Whitman published his poems to get his message across, and he knew the exact Transcendental reasons for this: "The master knows that he is unspeakably great and that all are unspeakably great... that nothing for instance is greater than to conceive children and bring them up well... that to be is just as great as to perceive or tell" (*Preface 1855* 722). He wanted to bring us up to his level, and he did this using language we could understand.

This language is what makes Whitman the poet he is. He uses raw words, rough words, uncommon words—"...rest the chuff of your hand on my hip" (*Song of Myself* 83)—that grab our attention. He also uses very sensual language to convey to us his ideas of touch and contact and body: "Throb, baffled and curious brain! throw out questions and answers! / Suspend here and everywhere, eternal float of solution! / Gaze, loving and thirsting eyes, in the house or street or public assembly!" (*Brooklyn* 164). He is repetitive and repetitive and repetitive and gets his catalogues through to us if it kills him—he *wants* us to remember his words. He *wants* us to use them.

He chooses poetry, of course, because that is the form of the truest Transcendental art. Poetry is the way through which we the public will recognize the genius of the Artist and flock to him as we would flock to Christ. Whitman is a poet because, as Emerson says, "as we go back in history, language becomes more picturesque, until its infancy, when it is all poetry; or all spiritual facts are represented by natural symbols" (*Nature* 33). Poetry corresponds with some primitive chord in all of us because it represents nature and all its beauty, just as a song does, just as the opera which Whitman so loved does, just as the bird does with its sweet song "in the swamp in the secluded recesses" (*When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd* 330).

What made Whitman so different, so unique, so noticeable, however, was the way in which he revolutionized the poem. Whitman breaks the mold of standard rhyme, meter, and *length of line*, and, in doing so, extends poetry into his own personal realm. Each line is like speech—endless, like one breath, like the words of an orator standing before a crowd of hundreds. What stopped Emerson from being the Poet he predicted was the fact that he did not see what Whitman saw, that "the poetic quality is not marshalled in rhyme or uniformity or abstract addresses to things nor in melancholy complaints or good precepts, but is the life of these and much else and is in the soul" (*Preface 1855* 716). Nothing holds Whitman down, and yet his poems still have some sort of magical rhythm that continues to make his poetry sound like music, making it that much more appealing to his readers: "But the fixer and finisher, the poet himself, is far more crafty a puller of waves than the coldly regular moon. [Whitman] might just as well have likened his long anaphoric catalogues to urban

crowds through which the reader himself will pass, jostling, pushing, sometimes striding, sometimes pausing" (Hollander 183).

Hawthorne, like Whitman, published his work, as well. He *wanted* his words to be read. More specifically, he wanted people to hear what he had to say about Transcendentalism, Brook Farm, Utopias in general. He hated them. And this was not the voice of an outsider—he himself had once liked the idea of a Transcendental community, had joined one, had realized he did not belong there, and, intelligently, left. He did not need to take on Brook Farm's problems—had his own beliefs and goals to attend to, and one of these was to write a book so that no one would make the same mistake he did. Hence, his part as Coverdale in *Blithedale*: "In my own behalf, I rejoice that I could once think better of the world's improbability than it deserved. It is a mistake into which men seldom fall twice, in a lifetime; or, if so, the rarer and higher is the nature that can thus magnanimously persist in error" (*Blithedale* 51). In Hawthorne's own letters to his fiancé, he states quite bluntly the disenchantment he had run into at Brook Farm—the disenchantment which probably fanned the first flame of *Blithedale* ("But really I should judge it to be twenty years since I left Brook Farm; and I take this to be one proof that my life there was as unnatural and unsuitable, and therefore an unreal one" (*Letters* 420-421)).

Hawthorne has no rhythm. He has no meter. He has no rhyme. But there is reason for this—he is a novelist. However, why choose prose over poetry, if, as Emerson said, poetry is the language of nature? Perhaps because Hawthorne wanted anyone and everyone to understand what he had to say, and putting it into the context of "everyday speech" was the best way to do so. *Blithedale* was written for the present-day, and therefore his readers would have been able to identify with the lives and personalities portrayed in it (mesmerism, Transcendentalism, Utopias, Margaret Fuller, and so on). And yet there is an undeniable fiction that comes to us when we read this novel. First, it comes in the actual words he uses: "[Hawthorne's] narrator, Coverdale, uses words and phrases that are archaic, quaint, far from the America of the 1840s and 1850s" (*Introduction: Cultural and Historical Background* 20). These words (such as "shoon" as the plural for "shoes") add a slightly fanciful-, fantasy-feel to the novel. Second, *Blithedale's* fiction comes to us from its label as a "romance."

The fact that Hawthorne termed his novel a romance instantly gives it an almost-but-not-quite feeling, gives us the assumption that the novel will be "careering on the utmost verge of a precipitous absurdity" (*Introduction* 20). But does this make *Blithedale* less convincing? Or does it simply say that any *Utopia* is a romance, and always will be a romance, because any Utopia will "almost succeed, but not quite?" Coverdale himself says that "real life never arranges itself exactly like a romance" (*Blithedale* 114), and this novel certainly does not end with lovers loving and happinesses overflowing. *Blithedale* Farm, like Brook Farm, was a failure and only a "foolish dream," as Zenobia puts it. Utopias were the Romances of the Transcendentalists.

"Emily Dickinson did not have a career, a publisher, or an audience in her own time" (Kazin 142), and, in all probability, she didn't want one. As already stated, Dickinson did not write her poems to be read by others. After all, she *dwells* in her poems—she is not going to sell herself. She makes this idea quite clear in #709 when

she writes that publishing one's work is to "reduce [the] Human Spirit / To Disgrace of Price—". Publishing would be too much like conformity, which Dickinson hated. In her opinion, Transcendentalists "leaning against the sun" become too much like one another when they receive money for their writing, and she wanted to be anything but in "the Majority," in which all one needs to do is to "Assent—and you are sane—". Dickinson *was* "Demur—", and, by God, she *was* "straightway dangerous—" (#435). She "selects her own society."

The world had not run into anything then, nor has it run into anything since, that is like the language used in Dickinson's poetry. If Whitman's "poetry...looks easy and proves hard" (Hollander 178), Dickinson's is downright agonizing. Seemingly random capitalizations, dashes in the middle of sentences (which, according to one critic, "[enable Dickinson] (and the reader) to breathe" (Kazin 155), mysterious rhymes, sing-song Bible-like meter—all these make for one complicated poem. She uses the smallest number of words she can, and yet somehow creates *so* much meaning; her words seem to take on lives of their own in our heads, growing uncontrollably until one poem has fifty interpretations. Is this not *brilliance*? Like Whitman, Dickinson creates a poetic-language for herself...and why shouldn't she? If only *she* was reading the poems, shouldn't they be particularly-suited to her own unique way of thinking? Isn't this what transcendence is all about?

Perhaps the reason Dickinson chose poetry over prose was the same as Whitman's reason—poetry is rawer than prose, more musical and natural than prose. Maybe she felt that only poetry could do justice to describing death, God, and love the way she wanted to describe them. The poet to her, after all, "distills amazing sense / From ordinary Meanings—" (#448). Prose has too many words, too many distractions and instructions about what to think and feel. As Kazin puts it, "fiction seems to have been as foreign to her as it was to Emerson. She was so far from belonging to any literary sorority that she would not have understood Hawthorne's rage at best-selling women novelists crowding him out of public favor: 'A damned lot of scribbling women. I wish they were forbidden to write on pain of having their faces deeply scarified'" (Kazin 152). Dickinson "wanted poetry" (Bloom 279), and poetry she got—poetry she could change and make her own—poetry she could use to draw from the ideas of Emerson, but in a starker sense than did Whitman.

And, indeed, Dickinson takes this "starker sense" as far as she can possibly go. Her poems are not like standard poetry, and even less are they like Whitman's poetry. Her poems are stripped to the bone—quick, concise, saying as much as she can in three or four words per line ("Dickinson demands so active a participation on the reader's part that one's mind had better be at its rare best" (Bloom 277)). With no titles, the poems become even shorter, even more difficult to figure out. They are virtual mysteries in themselves, and once you solve them, even *more* mysteries seem to present themselves. Her poetry haunts you both because it is so good and because it is so creepy in subject. Take Whitman's "lines of breath," add in a little of Hawthorne's extensive prose, and you get the synthesis, the child who learns what she can from each writer, the artist who draws her own conclusions. You get Dickinson's barest of "peppercorn informations" (*Nature* 34).

The result of all this hocus-pocus might be to conclude that Dickinson is *the* true Transcendentalist Poet—that she has taken the best from both Whitman and Hawthorne, two extremes of Transcendentalism, and become her own creation. But is this so accurate? Is she the voice of the people which Emerson described—full of magic, talent, and speaking to the world as it had never been spoken to before? In this respect, such might be true, for she certainly possessed these qualities. But is this all it takes to make the great American Poet? Or does she contradict that title in too many ways? Yes, Dickinson is a woman, and she writes about this fact in her poetry quite often: "I'm 'wife'—I've finished that— / That other state— / I'm Czar—I'm 'Woman' now— / It's safer so—" (#199). Who better to speak for the people than a woman, or, rather, who better to speak for the people who haven't, as yet, been heard? Did Emerson overlook something when he called the upcoming Poet a "he?" Chances are, yes he did. But that Dickinson is this Poet, *because* of the fact that she writes about women, I am not so sure about. Why? Because women are not all she writes about (and she would not agree that simply because she is a woman, her poetry speaks to the feminists both of her time and ours). Death, love, God, loneliness, and self (among other things) serve as the subjects which populate *the majority* of her poems—the subject of "woman" is not nearly as rampant as would be necessary if we were to call her a Poet of the People because she writes about women. *However*, death, love, God, loneliness, and self *are* universal issues that affect us all, and in this respect she might indeed be said to write of the human condition, as well as of ways in which we may transcend and accept death and knowledge and the true meaning of pain. But, even so, she did not ever *consciously* write "for us all" in the way that, say, Whitman did. "She did not use her poetry as prayer; she did not write to mollify God, to ward off evil; she wrote because she and she alone could find in religion the adventures of her utterly independent, endlessly speculative soul" (Kazin 151). Whatever reasons she had for writing were reasons relating to *herself*, and not to the People. If she is a Transcendentalist, it is only because we have made her one.

And yet there is still something more to be said—on the subject of Dickinson-as-Poet—because of the undeniable fact that she scares us to death. She terrifies us. *Why is this so?* Why does a poet who was not insane, who wrote *only* for herself, who did not consciously write about the human race or about us...*why* do her poems send chills up our backs? Well, there is the literal reason—that she writes about freaky, spooky things ("I heard a Fly buzz—when I died—" (#465)). There is the poetic reason—that she eerily, almost magically packs pounds of meaning into ounces of words (the metaphor for the stiffening of a dead body in #341). And, finally, there is the psychological reason—that she speaks what we are ourselves afraid to admit ("We wonder it was not Ourselves / Arrested it—before—" (#448)). As Blooms says, "Whitman...stays ahead of us... Dickinson waits for us" (Bloom 273). She is *with* us more than Whitman is, for he is far too "superior than us" to really speak our language, and, additionally, she is *with* us more than Hawthorne, for he also assumes superiority in his "tsk-tsking" of the situation in which *he* believes Transcendentalism has placed us. When we read Dickinson, we read our deepest, darkest secrets *not* as a lesson, *not* as an application of those secrets on others, but simply *as themselves*.



In this respect, Dickinson does speak for us all. After all, she was not stone or marble (in life, anyway...)—she was a sponge like everyone else, and no doubt absorbed many of the Transcendental ideas that were going on around her in her own time. But, disregarding Whitman's sweet demand that we take him by the hand and learn from him, disregarding Hawthorne's fervent need to turn his writing into a critique of society, she created a way of transcending that was her very own, that dealt with her own pressing issues and questions. Maybe Emerson's Poet *has* come, but maybe it was destined that this Poet never know her own identity. Dickinson is not a Transcendentalist in the strictest sense, following Emerson and Thoreau exactly and precisely and to-the-mark, but she certainly is transcendent. She certainly is fighting, like the rest of us, against whatever mortal, human stones that persist in weighing her down.

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