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Abstract	<p>As Jack L. Capps mentions, although Emily Dickinson says of her poetry, "This is my letter to the World/That never wrote to Me," she also declares that "There is no Frigate like a Book/To take us lands away" (vii). Considering the Book as what the World wrote to her, one is certainly inclined to speak of the first citation as "an overstatement" (Capps 1). And yet, this logic takes us to a couple of necessary proposi-tions : first, the World that never wrote to her makes her "letter" quite marginal, "circumferential" in the Dickinsonian sense, to the World, and, second, it is not the World but the Book that wrote its "letter" to her. Indeed Dickinson might have kept reading books, all the more because the World never wrote back to her, but, simultaneously and paradoxically, it might have been her reading that made her writing marginal. We are unable to decide whether her alienated life in the world led her into the life within the Book or whether her (mis ) reading of books led her into her (mis) writing in the World (Paul de Man 69). This paper is concerned with clarifying how the cause and effect relationship between writing and reading becomes indeterminate in the poet. Here the place to start may be with a reconsideration of herkey-concept of "circumference". Did she write (about) circumference or read (something into) it ? In one of her famous "letters" Dickinson writes: "...My business is Circumference" (To T. W. Higginson, July 1862, Selected Letters 176). And her original intention of circumference has often been located in Poem 883: The Poets light but Lamps- Themselves-go out The Wicks they stimulate If vital light Inhere as do the Suns Each Age a Lens Disseminating their Circumference -A conventional way of interpreting this poem has long been based upon theological perspective. Charles Anderson states: "The literal meaning of `Circumference' as the boundary of a circle (like the disks of the lamps) has been expanded by her special meaning into a sphere like the sun, radiating its light outward to infinity. If poets can light such lamps they are content to `go out' themselves, for death then becomes a means of going outward to illuminate the darkness surrounding the genera-tions of man. The mortal life has been transfigured into the enduring life of their poems" (Emily Dickinson's Poetry: Stairway of Surprise 58-59). The poets are, however, not necessarily religious. Anderson's mistake lies in his regarding this poem as representative of her visionof infinity. This poem rather reflects Dickinson's poetics, revealing its self-reflexive and metapoetical characteristics. Accordingly, it might be more aptly suggested that as the poets go out and their poems' margin invites the dissemination of meaning, so it is not the wicks of the lamp but their circumference that enjoys its dissemination. Another metapoem of hers makes this point clearer:This was a poet -it is That Distills amazing sense From ordinary Meanings-And Attar so immenseFrom the familiar species That perished by the Door-We wonder it was not ourselves Arrested it-before-(P 448)What attracts us here in the first place is the metaphorical equation of "sense" with "Attar" and of "Meanings" with "species". In terms of distilling "Attar so immense/From the familiar species" Dickinson</p>

	<p>allegorizes the act of writing as well as the act of reading ; although poetry always smells sweet, distilling its amazing and immense sense is, just like reading (amazing and immense sense into) /writing (amazing and immense) poetry, not so easy as it looks at first glance. To find the extraordinary (= "amazing") in the ordinary ("sense") is precisely to hover around the circumference of the ordinary, prolonging the dura-tion of the "extra-ordinary". This hovering of the poet is skillfully expressed in another poem about poems: Shall I take thee, the Poet said To the propounded word? Be stationed with the Candidates Till I have finer tried- The Poet searched Philology And when about to ring For the suspended Candidate There came unsummoned in- That portion of the Vision The Word applied to fill Not unto nomination The Cherubim reveal(P 1126) While the Poet writes a poem, he reads Philology, suspending "the propounded word" as the "Candidate". Then, he succeeds in reading "That portion of the Vision" into "The Word". This formula cannot but remind us of her reading something into "circumference"; if the Poet primarily writes a poem out of Philology which consists of numerous candidates, he is invariably confronted with circumferential words, not central. Exactly as words precede intentions, so circumference precedes center. In this respect the Dickinsonian writing and reading converge, as will be examined later. Put simply, her rhetoric springs from the obsession of "decentering".</p>
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## In Emily's Case The Rhetoric of Circumference

Takayuki Tatsumi

### I

As Jack L. Capps mentions, although Emily Dickinson says of her poetry, “This is my letter to the World/That never wrote to Me,” she also declares that “There is no Frigate like a Book/To take us lands away” (vii). Considering the Book as what the World wrote to her, one is certainly inclined to speak of the first citation as “an overstatement” (Capps 1). And yet, this logic takes us to a couple of necessary propositions: first, the World that never wrote to her makes her “letter” quite marginal, “circumferential” in the Dickinsonian sense, to the World, and, second, it is not the World but the Book that wrote its “letter” to her. Indeed Dickinson might have kept reading books, all the more because the World never wrote back to her, but, simultaneously and paradoxically, it might have been her reading that made her writing marginal. We are unable to decide whether her alienated life in the world led her into the life within the Book or whether her (mis)reading of books led her into her (mis)writing in the World (Paul de Man 69). This paper is concerned with clarifying how the cause and effect relationship between writing and reading becomes indeterminate in the poet. Here the place to start may be with a reconsideration of her

key-concept of “circumference”. Did she write (about) circumference or read (something into) it?

In one of her famous “letters” Dickinson writes: “...My business is Circumference” (To T. W. Higginson, July 1862, *Selected Letters* 176). And her original intention of circumference has often been located in Poem 883:

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

Inhere as do the Suns——  
 Each Age a Lens  
 Disseminating their  
 Circumference——

A conventional way of interpreting this poem has long been based upon theological perspective. Charles Anderson states: “The literal meaning of ‘Circumference’ as the boundary of a circle (like the disks of the lamps) has been expanded by her special meaning into a sphere like the sun, radiating its light outward to infinity. If poets can light such lamps they are content to ‘go out’ themselves, for death then becomes a means of going outward to illuminate the darkness surrounding the generations of man. The mortal life has been transfigured into the enduring life of their poems” (*Emily Dickinson’s Poetry: Stairway of Surprise* 58–59). The poets are, however, not necessarily religious. Anderson’s mistake lies in his regarding this poem as representative of her vision

of infinity. This poem rather reflects Dickinson's poetics, revealing its self-reflexive and metapoetical characteristics. Accordingly, it might be more aptly suggested that as the poets go out and their poems' margin invites the dissemination of meaning, so it is not the wicks of the lamp but their circumference that enjoys its dissemination.

Another metapoem of hers makes this point clearer:

This was a poet—it is That  
Distills amazing sense  
From ordinary Meanings——  
And Attar so immense

From the familiar species  
That perished by the Door——  
We wonder it was not ourselves  
Arrested it——before——

(P 448)

What attracts us here in the first place is the metaphorical equation of "sense" with "Attar" and of "Meanings" with "species". In terms of distilling "Attar so immense/From the familiar species" Dickinson allegorizes the act of writing as well as the act of reading; although poetry always smells sweet, distilling its amazing and immense sense is, just like reading (amazing and immense sense into)/writing (amazing and immense) poetry, not so easy as it looks at first glance. To find the extraordinary (= "amazing") in the ordinary ("sense") is precisely to hover around the circumference of the ordinary, prolonging the duration of the "extra-ordinary".

This hovering of the poet is skillfully expressed in another poem

about poems:

Shall I take thee, the Poet said  
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While the Poet writes a poem, he reads Philology, suspending “the propounded word” as the “Candidate”. Then, he succeeds in reading “That portion of the Vision” into “The Word”. This formula cannot but remind us of her reading something into “circumference”; if the Poet primarily writes a poem out of Philology which consists of numerous candidates, he is invariably confronted with circumferential words, not central. Exactly as words precede intentions, so circumference precedes center. In this respect the Dickinsonian writing and reading converge, as will be examined later. Put simply, her rhetoric springs from the obsession of “decentering”.

## II

The seed of her tendency toward “circumference” and “decentering” can be easily located in Dickinson’s life. It is well-known that the father, Edward Dickinson, that emerges from her letters remains to the end “the awesome patriarch” (Margaret Homans 131). He was a successful lawyer and Amherst’s chief citizen by virtue of his imposing personality, his connection with Amherst College as its treasurer, his two terms in the state legislature, his one term in the United States Congress, and his leadership in civic endeavors. Besides being an “earnest God-fearing” citizen of Amherst, he was “a classic American entrepreneur, a boldly...even Satanically...ambitious man whose passion for self-advancement must have been simultaneously attractive and frightening to a daughter steeped in Romantic poetry” (Gilbert and Gubar 597). But, for this “terribly dry Puritan martinet” (Daniel T. O’Hara 189), she wrote an epitaph as follows: “His Heart was pure and terrible and I think no other like it exists” (L 418, To T. W. Higginson, July 1874). As has been examined by a number of critics, this father represents “the Sun” as the symbol of patriarchal tradition, whereas the daughter represents the “Daisy”, one of Dickinson’s nicknames for herself, which is defined by her as “an ambivalently light-loving/sun-fearing flower” (Gilbert and Gubar 596).

This contrast between father and daughter becomes most remarkable when compared with her celebration of “an exact leveling of differences that occurred towards the end of her mother’s life” (Homans 132): “We were never intimate Mother and Children while she was our Mother...but Mines in the same Ground meet by tunneling and when she became our Child, the Affection came...” (L792 To Mrs. J. G.

Holland). It has been assumed, following John Cody's psychoanalytic biography, that it was Dickinson's inaccessibility to her mother and her mother's inadequacies as a woman that caused the poet's failure as a woman, her inability to assume normal female identity (Suzanne Juhasz 3). Recent feminism, however, does not accept this approach but offers another way, as lucidly shown in Homans' conclusion: "The interchangeability of terms (Mother and Child)...recalls the poems about two women in which, without hierarchy of any kind, the two figures are both queens, and both conqueror and slain" (*Ibid.*). In Juhasz' words, Dickinson must be investigated from the viewpoint which conceives her identity as consisting of both "woman" and "poet", not splitting it into two mutually exclusive elements. Such a viewpoint deconstructs in the form of chiasmus the relationship between the poet as the writer and the woman as the reader: Dickinson is either a woman as writer or a poet as reader.

As far as this point is concerned, Thomas W. Higginson, a Unitarian clergyman, who had corresponded with Dickinson since 15 April 1862, was right, at least when he contributed to the *Atlantic Monthly* a "Letter" of encouragement and advice to the young, especially female, writers of America (Linscott [ed.], *Selected Poems and Letters* 3). His critical limitation, however, can be attributed to the fact that, no matter how deeply he appreciated Dickinson's genius, Higginson did not publish her collected works during her lifetime: on the other hand, Helen Hunt Jackson insistently tried to persuade her to publish. Karl Keller is so excited about this that he goes so far as to regard Higginson as "the villain/daemon of the self-conscious security of Emily Dickinson's poetic privacy" (*The Only Kangaroo among the Beauty* 219).



Although Keller's evaluation is too extreme, Higginson as the second father led her into what Zacharias Thundylil calls "Extreme Situations" ("Circumstance, Circumference, and Center" 73-92). Like her own father, he was such a righteous and punctual patriarch, "that the poet continually attempts to escape" (Gilbert and Gubar 598). Higginson himself noted: "I remember to have ventured on some criticism which she afterwards called 'surgery', and on some questions, part of which she evaded...with a naive skill such as the most experienced and worldly coquette might envy" (Linscott[ed.], *op. cit.* 6). Higginson tried to steer her towards conventional form and expression in vain; pretending to accept all his criticism and pleading for a continued tutor-student relationship, Dickinson actually did not correct her poetical works at all. To sum up, both her fathers, whether biological or poetical, disclosed "Victorican patriarchy's urge to silence women" (Gilbert and Gubar 629) ...that is, "woman's traditional identification with 'otherness' in society and in language" (Juhasz 15). In Gilbert and Gubar's opinion, Dickinson was, like other Victorian women, socially "buried alive" (646), but simultaneously, she, unlike other Victorican woman writers, became "both ironically a madwoman (a deliberate impersonation of a madwoman) and truly a madwoman (a helpless agoraphobic, trapped in a room in her father's house)" (583). Thus, Dickinson was literally and metaphorically forced to live on the "circumference".

### III

The entire history of Western culture as Michel Foucault defines it, is revealed to be the story of Reason's progressive conquest and consequent repression of that which it calls madness, but what matters here most is that, as Shoshana Felman explains, "whenever it 'explains'

literature, particularly when it locates *madness* in literature, psychoanalysis is in danger of revealing nothing more than its own madness: the madness of the interpreter" (*Writing and Madness* 38 and 30). The same can be said of the ironical relationship between Dickinson and Higginson. Reading and criticizing her poetry, he was doomed to read and criticize himself. Therefore, their relationship becomes less educational than conflictive, in that it finally carries out "the *reading effect* as a *transference effect*" (Felman 30). Now we might be reminded as well of the relationship between Freud and Dora. This will be better endorsed by the fact that the period 1862-1865, during which Dickinson went through her major phase of what Thundyil calls "Extreme Situations" poems, coincides with the period during which she began corresponding with Higginson and instituted the tutor-student relationship. Her third letter to him exemplifies this point very well:

Your first——gave no dishonor, because the true——are not  
ashamed——I thanked you for your justice——but could not drop  
the Bells whose jingling cooled my Tramp——Perhaps the Balm,  
seemed better, because you bled me, first. ...

You think my gait "spasmodic"——I am in danger——Sir——  
You think me "uncontrolled"——I have no Tribunal. ...

As if I asked a common Alms,  
And in my wondering hand  
A Stranger pressed a Kingdom,  
And I, bewildered, stand——  
As if I asked the Orient  
Had it for me a Morn——  
And it should lift it's purple Dikes,

And shatter me with Dawn !

But, will you be my Preceptor, Mr. Higginson ?

(P 265, 7 June 1862)

Refusing to drop the “Bells” (=verses), Dickinson turns down Higginson’s suggestion that she attempt a more controlled rhymed scheme. Although her poems seem to him “spasmodic” or “uncontrolled”, she does not intend to change her style, because of having “no Tribunal”. Moreover, she identifies him with “A Stranger” who, pressing “a Kingdom”, makes her “bewildered” and shatter her “with Dawn !”

What is presented in this letter is nothing less than the struggle between two readings: one is firmly rooted in a classical and patriarchal perspective, while the other easily brackets it, just as “circumference” brackets “center”. In this act of bracketing might be found the reason why Dickinson wrote quite a few poems in which she herself appears as a dead person—as a person socially “buried alive” within the circumference:

I heard a Fly buzz——when I died——

The Stillness in the Room

Was like the Stillness in the Air——

Between the heaves of Storm——

The Eyes around——had wrung them dry——

And breaths were gathering firm

For that last onset——when the king

Be witnessed——in the Room——

I willed my keepsakes——Signed away  
 What portion of me be  
 Assignable——and then it was  
 There interposed a Fly——

With Blue——uncertain stumbling Buzz——  
 Between the light——and me——  
 And then the Windows failed——and then  
 I could not see to see——

(P 465, written in 1862)

One of the most salient characteristics of such poems is an underlying paradox, as is also seen in Poem 470, in which the narrator is “alive”, although/because she is lying in a coffin, discovering “two-fold” structure of life. Such a recognition may be attained only by a person who experienced being “buried alive” on the margin of society. What is significantly paradoxical in P 465 is, then, the Fly’s “Blue——uncertain stumbling Buzz” the narrator heard when she died. This synesthesia represents the fusing of color and sound by the dying person’s diminishing senses. And, this dying person being reminiscent of the socially buried alive woman, Dickinson here allegorizes the very sensibility of repressed femininity, whose power is to put into question any male-centered reading. By means of confusing ordinary senses, she undertakes to produce extraordinary signification. This is particularly illustrated by the last two lines “And then the Windows failed——and then/ I could not see to see”. Sharon Cameron interprets these lines in the De Manian fashion: “Death is survived by perception, for in these lines we are told that there are two senses of vision, one of which remains to see and document the speaker’s own blindness...The poem thus penetrates

to the invisible imagination which strengthens in response to the loss of visible sight" (*Lyric Time* 115).

Cameron, nevertheless, fails to recognize that this last line, "I could not see to see...", makes the poem much more Dickinsonian; it exemplifies her tendency towards verbal repetition which brackets the original meaning of a word, forming a linguistically concentric circle. Dickinson must have kept in mind Emerson's "circle", parodically reinterpreting it on another level: "The life of man is a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end" (Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* 404). This formula recalls "The Sea said 'Go' to the Sea" (P 1210) or "We send the Wave to find the Wave" (P 1604). In the case of P 1210, the former "Sea" wanted the "Brook" to grow into a Sea, and no sooner had the "Brook" become another Sea (=the latter "Sea") than the former Sea deserted it. P 1604 also juxtaposes two waves, in spite of the difference between the former "Wave" (=the immortal Wave) and the latter "Wave" (=the little Wave). To be brief, in these examples the poet gives priority to the musical aspect of a word over the intentional aspect of it. In consequence, "I could not see to see—" also makes the signifier of the verb "see" precede the signified of it. Cameron only semantically translated the last line, without enjoying the signifier's dynamics. Just as "With Blue—uncertain stumbling Buzz" deconstructs organic senses, so "I could not see to see—" deconstructs linguistic senses. Thus, the undecidability of language metaphorically reflects that of sensibility.

We have examined P 465 chiefly because here Dickinson typically debunks herself as the poet of "sense", who always deals/plays with the possibility/impossibility of sense. Cristanne Miller illustrates the rela-

tionship between such radicalness and her femininity with “How many times these low feet staggered” (P 187) in which “the ‘low feet’ of the tired housewife...become the burning words of a secret poet when we remember that a housewife’s ‘feet’ may also be iambic, and note that ‘low’ also means ‘flame’ in Dickinson’s 1841 Webster’s dictionary” (“How ‘Low Feet’ Stagger: Disruptions of Language in Dickinson’s Poetry” 135). What is more important is that “the staggering ‘low feet’ of weakness, read differently, become the staggering ‘low feet’ of poetic power” (*Ibid.*). Dickinson displaces existing and familiar structures with new and decentered structures, simply by means of shifting emphasis from male to female.

We are easily induced to guess that it is such a tendency of hers that must have confused Higginson. Her writing consists of (mis)reading of words, disclosing his reading as male-centered and tradition-obsessed. As far as her poetics is concerned, there should be no “truth” but only “capsule”:

Best Things out of Sight  
The pearl—the Just—Our Thought.

Most shun the Public Air  
Legitimate, and Rare—  
The Capsule of the Wind  
The Capsule of the Mind

Exhibit here, as doth a Burr—  
Germ’s Germ be where?

(P 998)

The word "Capsule" used here is a synonym of "circumference"—just like "Disk" (949), "Illocality", "Suburb" (963), "Candidate" (1126)—as opposed to "center", that is, "The Pearl—the Just—Our Thought". It decenters the existence of "Germ's Germ". In these lines, "The Capsule of the Wind/The Capsule of the Mind", Dickinson even displays a more playful device, juxtaposing "Wind" with "Mind". Despite the classic linkage of spirit with breath or mind, it should not be overlooked that between these two words there is even a typographic kinship. The word "Mind" must have occurred to the poet's mind only when she inverted the initial "W" of the word "Wind". Dickinson once wrote "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—/Success in Circuit lies" (P 1129), and here she literally "slanted" the very form of the letter. In this poem "circumference" functions on the level of grammatology as well as on the level of philosophy.

#### IV

Hence Dickinson was a woman poet obsessed with entrapping existing signification at the circumference of language, which must have given Higginson the impression of "an excess of tension, and of something abnormal" (Linscott [ed.] 20). Of her "interior schisms", what might be called her "interior circumference" in our words, Gilbert and Gubar speak: "it is no wonder that she felt herself the victim to be haunted by herself the villain, herself the empress haunted by herself the ghost, herself the child haunted by herself the madwoman. Confronting a murderous or, at least, inexplicably grim interior Other, she wrote a poem about her supposed self..." (624). Madness very often produces literature and literature very often creates otherness. In this point Dickinson was an extremely fortunate woman writer. However, as we

already noted, the otherness Dickinson had to recognize within herself was the very femininity the Victorian women had repressed within themselves, and that, as far as her recognition of such otherness triggered her madness, Higginson, the first reader of her poetry, was forced to play the role of psychoanalyst.

Now we arrive at the opportunity of reexamining an analogy between Dickinson=Higginson and Dora=Freud. In both cases, the analyst/reader's own wishes and fears are provoked by the patient/writer. To begin with, although it would be revised later, Freud's Oedipus complex was "a simple set of relations in which the child desires the parent of the opposite sex and feels hostility for the same-sexed parent" (Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane 21-22). And yet, Freud's primary failure in analyzing Dora as an analyst is equivalent to his primary failure in reading the story of Dora as a reader; he failed to resolve the problem of transference. What Dora's case unveiled was not that Dora's hostility for Herr K., who was later to be linked with Freud himself in the transference, was exceptional in the system of psychoanalysis, but that it is Freud who had long occulted in the theory of the Oedipus complex "the repression of the mother at the root of Western civilization itself" (Bernheimer and Kahane 27). Therefore, as far as Frau K., not Herr K., is a significant love object for Dora, she must be part of the transference (*Op. cit.*).

Higginson's reading of the poetry of Dickinson reveals not that her case is exceptional in those days, but that he himself had long repressed femininity as otherness in the Victorian way of thinking. And, Emily Dickinson's was also the case which annuls the theory of Oedipus complex. As was earlier confirmed, while she felt sympathy with her mother, she was only scared by her father. So, if she needed any father



figure at all, whether biological or poetical, Dickinson needed it in order to complete the feminist scenario in her poetry, by means of bracketing the patriarchal. Allow us to discuss the following poem:

My life had stood—a Loaded Gun—  
In Corners—till a Day  
The Owner passed—identified—  
And Carried Me away—

And now We roam in sovereign Woods—  
And now We hunt the Doe—  
And every time I speak for Him—  
The Mountains straight reply—

And do I smile, such cordial light  
Upon the Valley glow—  
It is as a Vesuvian face  
Had let its pleasure through—

And when at Night—Our good Day done—  
I guard My Master's Head—  
'Tis better than the Eider-Duck's  
Deep Pillow—to have shared—

To foe of His—I'm deadly foe—  
None stir the second time—  
On whom I lay a Yellow Eye—  
Or an emphatic Thumb—

Though I than He——may longer live  
 He longer must——than I——  
 For I have but the power to kill,  
 Without——the power to die—— (P 754, written in 1863)

As has been the case with Dickinson, the first person might as well be identified with Dickinson herself as the “Loaded Gun”. In addition, unless Freud’s later revised but still logocentric interpretation of Dora is denied, the “Loaded Gun” may be ontologically considered as produced out of her “phallic desire” (Bernheimer and Kahane 28). But we should not ignore the last stanza, in which we are informed that the “Owner” is destined to die, while the “Loaded Gun” is destined to kill. Although the gun is used to “hunt the Doe”, guarding the owner’s “Head” at night, this final proposition leads us to recognize the possibility that the “Loaded Gun” comes to kill its “Master”, instead of guarding him. Gilbert and Gubar observe: “the Gun’s Vesuvian smile is directed outward, impartially killing the timid doe, all the foes of the Muse/Master, and perhaps even, eventually, the vulnerably human Master himself” (610). Precisely as Dora’s slapping Herr K.’s face confused later “phallogocentric” analysts, the Loaded Gun’s killing its Master, that is, Dickinson’s killing Higginson, must confuse traditional readers. Now at least the “phallic desire” portion of Freud’s interpretation of Dora turns out to be inappropriate for “Emily’s case”. It must be revised much more radically.

Then, what does the “Loaded Gun” signify? A casual glance at Dickinson’s letters to Higginson written around this period would be more useful:

Perhaps Death——gave me awe for friends——striking sharp and early, for I held them since——in a brittle love——of more alarm, than peace. I trust you may pass the limit of War. ...

Should you, before this reaches you, experience immortality, who will inform me of the Exchange? Could you, with honor, avoid death, I entreat you——Sir——It would bereave

Your Gnome

(L 280, February 1863)

Dear friend,

Are you in danger——

I did not know that you were hurt. Will you tell me more? ...

I am surprised and anxious since receiving your note.

The Only News I know

Is Bulletins all day

From Immortality

Can you render my Pencil?

The Physician has taken away my Pen. ...

E-Dickinson

(L 290, early June 1864)

The Civil War took Higginson to South Carolina, in command of a Negro regiment, in November 1862, and, having been wounded in July 1863, he left the army in May 1864 (Johnson, *Letters* 424 and 431). Then, P 754 may have been inspired by this series of real incidents. And yet, reading these letters, we are abruptly confronted with the reference to the “Pencil” and “Pen”: here Dickinson writing about the War abruptly becomes Dickinson writing about writing. The war between the South and the North necessarily might have reminded her of Dickinson's own

civil war within writing. As far as the Pen is for her the only weapon with which to deal with “pretty words like Blades” (P 479), the “Loaded Gun” must be the metaphor for the Pen. We are forced to transfer from ontological reading to grammatological.

## V

To be more correct, Emily Dickinson already began her battle with the correspondence with Higginson, as examined above. Accordingly, what interests us most in P 754 and L 290 is that she starts oscillating between the actual war and the literary—the war between two wars. We cannot decide whether the literary war with Higginson made her quite nervous about the actual war or whether the actual war between the South and the North made her quite nervous about the literary war. In other words, we cannot decide whether the Loaded Gun is the metaphor for the Pen or whether the Pen is the metaphor for the Loaded Gun (Cf. Barbara Johnson [1983] 89). They invariably translate each other, debunking the war between sexes and deconstructing the binary opposition between a male soldier with the Loaded Gun and a female writer with the Pen. Paul de Man remarks: “It is no mere play of words that ‘translate’ is translated in German as *‘übersetzen’* which itself translates the Greek *‘meta pherein’* or metaphor” (de Man [1984] 17). Hence, as the Loaded Gun and the Pen are metaphors for each other, so male and female are metaphors for each other. Dickinson’s metaphorical oscillation was brought about by exactly such a translational (=transferential) dynamics, and it relies upon the liberation of femaleness as otherness. In Barbara Johnson’s opinion, “The problem of understanding the woman is here a problem of translation. Even her name can only be expressed in another tongue. The sexes

stand in relation to each other not as two distinct entities but as two foreign languages" (Johnson 2) 108). I find this perspective highly useful for reconsidering the typographical and grammatological aspects of Emily Dickinson.

Let me rethink the problem of circumference in this context. Obsessed with "circumference", Dickinson decentered (=translated) the ordinary sense of language, telling it slant. This tendency labelled her a madwoman, who was to be "buried alive" by being exiled to the social circumference. And such a destiny has much to do with Dickinson's recognition of femaleness as otherness. According to Jonathan Culler, "...the coding of this radical otherness as feminine makes possible a new concept of 'woman' that subverts the ideological distinction between man and woman, much as proto- or arch-writing displaces the ordinary distinction between speech and writing" (174). But, even then, can we decide whether Dickinson's recognition of femaleness as otherness preceded her becoming a madwoman in the attic or whether her becoming a madwoman in the attic preceded her recognition of femaleness as otherness?

It is useful to reconsider the significance of Dickinson's withdrawal from the world in the early 1860s. Linscott depicts her in those years: "Now she dressed only in white; ventured less and less, and finally not at all, from her home; saw fewer friends, and, at last, none:" (Linscott [ed.] iv). The reason has never been so clarified. But, even after this reclusion, Dickinson kept in touch with the outer world, chiefly through her correspondences with friends, including Higginson. Of course, it is natural to think that the poet became a recluse because she recognized that femininity as otherness had to be circumferential, and yet, it is also natural to think that she recognized femininity as otherness because she

began corresponding with a phallogocentric critic during her reclusion. Just as in P 754 and L 290, in which the factual war is metaphorically displaced by the fictional war, the cause and effect relationship between her reclusion and her feminism has to be suspended. Reading and reading about Emily Dickinson cannot do without making circumferential even the distinction between (auto)biography and writing.

In this respect the whiteness of her dress gains importance. This color has been investigated in a number of relations—relations to Melville's white whale, Milton's "universal blank", Shelley's "Mont Blanc", Snow White, and whiteness as "the Victorian ideal of feminine purity" (Gilbert and Gubar 614). However, let us add to them Jean Ricardou's concept of whiteness as the whiteness of the page ("The Singular Character of the Water" 1-6). By invariably dressing in white, she became the circumference of the page itself. Furthermore, viewing Dickinson as having become the loaded Gun as the Pen, we see now that she represents both what to write with and what is written into. In this sense, Dickinson is an automatic literary machine, which functions alone, leaving behind her Master, as was seen in the last stanza of P 754, "For I have but the power to kill, /Without—the power to die—". The poet herself seems to have noticed this automatism also in a letter: "Indebted in our talk to attitude and accent, there seems a spectral power in thought that walks alone—I would like to thank you for your great kindness but never try to lift the words which I cannot hold" (L 330, To T. W. Higginson, June 1869). And it is this linguistic automatism that made her free from any Master or manipulator—the father figure.

When Higginson first visited her, Dickinson, as usual, was wearing a white dress: "A Step like a patterning 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; not plainer—with no good feature—in a very plain & exquisitely clean white pique & a blue net worsted shawl" (L 342a). Higginson did not speculate on the meaning of the whiteness of the dress, although he must have read P 365 "Dare you see a Soul *at the White Heat*?" and only spoke of their first meeting as follows: "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" (L 342 b). What he could not read into this whiteness of her dress, or, what Dickinson virtually wrote about and read into this whiteness of her dress, is not simply her becoming the circumference of the page as well as the pen but the fact that it is the whiteness as circumference, the whiteness as femininity, or the whiteness as otherness, that he himself had persistently suppressed at the root of the Victorian civilization. Moreover, we should not ignore that, by deconstructing the distinction between (auto) biography and writing, Dickinson succeeded in making illegible whether her poetry is the metaphor for her whiteness or whether her whiteness is the metaphor for her poetry. She deconstructs the very metaphorical causality, probably because of her curse upon time:

They say that "Time assuages"—

Time never did assuage—

An actual suffering strengthens

As Sinews do, with age—

(P 686)

This invalidation of temporality makes the writing of the poetry of circumference the metaphor for the reading of circumference into

poetry, and *vice versa*. "Circumference" always already carries out the "transference" of metaphor. Accordingly, when he first visited her, Thomas Higginson might have met not merely Emily Dickinson as the woman poet herself but the circumference as whiteness itself. The reason why he was destined to fail in doing so is that her rhetoric of circumference must have further seduced him into the circumference of rhetoric, owing to its central function of decentering. (5 May 2000)

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