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**EACH AGE A LENS: A TRANSPERSONAL PERSPECTIVE
OF EMILY DICKINSON'S CREATIVE PROCESS**

by

Kelly Sue Lynch

A dissertation submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Transpersonal Psychology

Institute of Transpersonal Psychology

Palo Alto, California

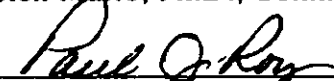
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Abstract

Each Age A Lens: A Transpersonal Perspective of Emily Dickinson's Creative Process

by

Kelly Sue Lynch

This study explored how Emily Dickinson lived into her self-actualizing creative process. By employing a method of psychobiography, her life was studied, and by employing a method of hermeneutics, her poems and letters were studied. At the start of the study, creativity was defined as integral to the way Dickinson lived her daily life. Transpersonal was defined as beyond and through the self. Psychobiography was utilized to study transformative and transpersonal experiences that follow her process of revisioning her own life through becoming a poet, what poet means, and living the poet's life. A hermeneutical method was developed to focus on the meaning of her words and particular meanings as generated through four hermeneutic lenses, namely, Through One's Body, Compassionate Listening, A Relational Reading, and Hermeneutics of Creative Engagement. Thirty-two poems, along with particular readings, were presented with letter quotes beginning in 1850 through 1886. Both methods were integrated through a transpersonal lens that defined Dickinson's creative process as embodied, engaged, relational, and creative. A model of living the creative life through dwelling, distilling, and disseminating was presented, suggesting how Dickinson was able to live into her self-actualizing creative process. Terms such as self-actualizing creative process and transcending self-actualizing were applied to the findings, suggesting corroboration with Maslow's theories and the uniqueness of Dickinson's creative process. A definition for transpersonal as embodied, engaged, relational, and creative was suggested by the

findings. The theoretical and applied aspects of this study have the potential for expanding the integrated study of psychology and literature, the study of lives, and the study of texts, from a psychological and creative perspective.

Preface

“These are my introduction,” Emily Dickinson said to the man of letters, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, upon their first meeting of 16 August 1870, while pressing two day lilies into his hand. Her introduction to me was in high school in the year 1980. Through her poems I found a poet who spoke to me in a language which was at once rich, vital, and full of feeling. I wondered who is the person who wrote such verses? Soon after I graduated, I read Richard Sewall’s formative biography, *The Life of Emily Dickinson* (1980). In his introductory chapter he quotes Jay Leyda, another formative Dickinson scholar, as suggesting that Dickinson’s life calls less for the imposition of a pattern and more for the engagement of the reader—as I would describe it—as a kind of co-traveler in the “magnificent mystery of words” (Higginson, 1862, p. 403) which Dickinson plummeted. Heeding Leyda’s advice, I have attempted over the years not to cast a net around her poems; I have allowed her words above all to guide me. I have returned in times of crisis and solace to find her words as a kind of touchstone for my own deepening love of language.

I bring a love to this topic which has engendered love; it has opened doors. Years later, in 1994, I was fortunate to meet and exchange letters with Carlton Lowenberg, the author of two books devoted to Dickinson scholarship: *Emily Dickinson’s Textbooks* (1986), and *Musicians Wrestle Everywhere: Emily Dickinson and Music* (1992). Our meeting could not have occurred at a better time, for I had just started a graduate psychology program and was seriously pondering doing a

dissertation on Emily Dickinson (but needed a little push in that direction). I shared with Carlton my interests in studying Dickinson, and his reply, in a letter dated October 9, 1994, is worth quoting:

Do you see a paper on the psychology of Emily Dickinson, in some aspect, in your studies? She is a rich subject for many such inspections. And timely, I'd say, in that she, in her time, was subjected to the male ego shell of indifference all the while creating such verse that outlives their now forgotten names.

Carlton's kind and insightful words confirmed my resolve to study some aspect of Emily Dickinson's life. I returned to that age-old persistent question, who is the person who wrote such verses; and I became an itinerant traveler through the magnificent mystery of Dickinson's words.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my committee members, Robert Frager, Rosemarie Anderson, Helen Marlo, and Cynthia Hallen. Without the assistance of each of you I would not have been able to write my dissertation. The Institute of Transpersonal Psychology has supported my growth and research, has allowed me to go to the edge and fly. Numerous fellow students have journeyed with me, our paths crossing: Charlotte St. James, Maryanne Murray, Harriet Craske, Beth Stein, Aliya Haeri, Louis Wang, Fritz Fehrer, Carolyn Mitchell, Ron Russell, and Mary Horgan. Certain teachers have helped me along the way I think of my high school teacher Georgette Cerrutti, who introduced Emily Dickinson to me years ago; Elaine Hoem, who supported my growth, interest in women's psychology; Anne Howard, who taught a class devoted solely to Dickinson; Jan Tallman, who nurtured my love of literature and writing; Marilee Stark, who introduced me to relational theory in women's psychology; Helen Khoobyar, whose being and philosophical explorations nurtured my own; Jill Mellick, who created the Creative Expression program at ITP, has supported my curiosity and the connection of dreams in the research process; Jim Fadiman, whose course on Sufism prompted me in ways which are difficult to describe to define my engagement with poetry. Genie Palmer and William Braud have helped me clarify my path. Peter Hirose and Sharon Hamrick have always been available and interested and kind. Kathleen Wall has supported my writing into wholeness. Paula Yue has always been supportive. Brian Lieske has always been kind and helpful.

Dana House walked with me and encouraged my writing and creative being. The research group of Spirituality and the Body, with participants Holly Brannon, Jay Dufrechou, Kat McIver, Rosie Kuhn, Courtney Phelon, and Joyce Lounsberry, with Rosemarie Anderson as teacher/fellow traveler, helped me re-connect with my body in writing and research. I learned in Aikido with Robert Frager, founder of ITP, that psychology is literature and to write from the center with heart. Helen Marlo helped me extend my understanding of synchronicity, symbol, and metaphor into my research and life, and my therapy clients became living poems. Cynthia Hallen walked with me in nature near Dickinson's home, and nurtured my love of words with her kind being. Jeanne Shutes has helped me in my growth to wholeness, has nurtured my whole being, love of literature, and has helped me create the path I walk on. Povi, thank you for being a dog, for knowing and not telling! I am fortunate to have met Carlton Lowenberg, who supported and prompted me to do a dissertation on Dickinson; Albert and Barbara Gelpi have been supportive, encouraging me to write and do the real work; Barbara Kelly and I engaged in the longest conversation I've ever had about Dickinson, which I enjoyed! My friend Jean Fargo asked me years ago how Dickinson could know so much without really leaving home her question led me on a journey to answer. My cooking teacher, Yannette Fichou introduced me to the joy of cooking, which is very much like writing. My hairdresser, Garry Bailey, over the years has listened to and supported numerous stories about Dickinson, always encouraging me to create. Certain people in my community have supported my growth, Angela Haight, Patricia Markee, Mr. Kaboga-Miller, Anne G. Moser, Bob Glessing, Ira J.

Sandperl, Pema Gyaltsen, Mei Lien Loh-Lee, Mark C. Loy, and Herb Aceituno.

Fran Drake and Alan Javuarick introduced me to the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology years ago, and helped set the course for my life-work. My Aunt Sandy has believed in me, walked with me over the years; my Aunt Karen and Uncle Bill have supported my growth over the years; my Uncle Dick and Aunt Susi have supported my love of literature, and prompted me to follow my love and complete the project! When my father died on Emily Dickinson's birthday, December 10, 2001, I felt deeply saddened and was made sharply aware of the mystery of life and death—it will be a day to remember. My mother, whose love of gardening is probably equal to Dickinson's, has taught me about following the living thread that only connects. Thank you to all. Of course, thank you to Emily Dickinson and the numerous people the world over who have kept her words alive. Grateful acknowledgment is also made to the following: Selections of poems are reprinted by permission of the publishers and the Trustees of Amherst College from THE POEMS OF EMILY DICKINSON, Ralph W. Franklin, ed., Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1998 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Copyright © 1951, 1955, 1979 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Selections of letters are reprinted by permission of the publishers from THE LETTERS OF EMILY DICKINSON edited by Thomas H. Johnson, Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1958, 1986 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

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—

(Emily Dickinson, poem # 930, early 1865)

The General Topic

A transpersonal perspective of Emily Dickinson's creative process begins with the realization that the best way to know about her creative process is to study the texts of her poems and letters. The approximate dating and reference numbers of Dickinson's texts quoted throughout follow Ralph Franklin's 1998 variorum edition of Dickinson's complete poems, and Thomas Johnson and Theodora Ward's 1986 edition of Dickinson's letters, unless otherwise stated. Richard Sewall's (1980) *The Life of Emily Dickinson* provides an excellent introductory source of information on Dickinson's life and suggests that no study is complete without studying the facts or background of her life. Yet I need only open to the nearly 1,800 poems and 1,100 letters to hear Dickinson tell about her life in a language that Adrienne Rich (1979a) describes as "more varied, more compressed, more dense with implications, more complex of syntax, than any American poetic language to date" (p. 163). The question naturally arises, how am I able to understand another who writes differently from another time (Emily Elizabeth Dickinson was born December 10,

1830, and died May 15, 1886) and place (Amherst, Massachusetts)? Dickinson herself answers part of the conundrum, for when she writes in the above poem, “Each Age a Lens,” I interpret that she had a premonition of her poems as being understood differently in different times and by different people. In order to appreciate fully the significance of the poet and her poetry, one of the purposes of my study is to portray an understanding of her and the meaning of her words in her time, however incomplete my understanding may prove to be. It is worth noting though that along with her poems, she may have foreseen herself as being understood differently too. For as Albert Gelpi (1991) points out, in the above poem, “The double reference of the pronoun ‘their’ shows that in the end—in the long run of the future, at least—the poet’s circumference and the circumference of the poems are coextensive and equally abiding” (p. 299). To study her life is to study her poems, for Dickinson’s life was, in many ways, her creative process. The main purpose of my study is to offer an interpretation of her poems and letters from a transpersonal perspective and to present her creative process as a vehicle for expressing her own light or circumference. My transpersonal perspective thus reflects back on her significance while projecting this into the future.

Research Questions

For the purposes of my study, Emily Dickinson’s creative process is posited as a self-actualizing creative process, with self-actualization defined by Abraham Maslow (1987) as

the full use and exploitation of talents, capabilities, potentialities, and the like. Such people seem to be fulfilling themselves and to be doing the best that they are

capable of doing. . . . They are people who have developed or are developing to the full stature of which they are capable. (p. 126)

This striving to actualize her full talents and to be doing the best really took the form for Emily Dickinson of becoming the best poet she could be. In my understanding of Dickinson's self-actualizing creative process, I have focused on what being a poet means to Dickinson as this is expressed through her life and texts, in order to understand her unique expression of her self-actualizing creative process. This has involved studying Dickinson's life through a method of psychobiography, and her texts through a method of hermeneutics. As Dickinson is generally regarded as a great poet (Sewall, 1980, p. 722), it follows from Maslow's imperative that it is "more accurate to generalize about human nature from studying the best examples. . . . By studying the best and healthiest men and women, it is possible to explore the limits of human potential" (cited in Fadiman & Frager, 1994, p. 472). My following research questions are framed to include my study of Dickinson's life and texts: (a) How did Emily Dickinson live into her self-actualizing creative process, (b) what does she say about this experience in the texts of her poems and letters, and (c) what can this study contribute to the study of the self-actualizing creative person?

Developing a Transpersonal Perspective

I have developed a transpersonal perspective that integrates Transpersonal Psychology, narrative studies, women's psychology, and Dickinson's own views on creativity in order to address the breadth and depth of Dickinson's life and texts. In developing a transpersonal perspective that is congruent with my methods and my

own values as a transpersonal researcher, I have found it useful to begin with how I define and intend to use certain terms, such as creative process and transpersonal.

In defining the word creative, I read that “the root of the words create and creativity is the Latin *creatus* and *créâre*, meaning ‘to make or produce’ or literally ‘to grow’” (Piirto, 1998, p. 6). Thus I define *creative process* as an integral part of Dickinson’s daily life if understood as the capacity to make, produce, or grow (Piirto, p. 6). I do not confine the term to just the creation of her poems and letters, but attempt to understand her creative process as part and parcel of the way she lived her entire life. Jane Piirto further defines creativity as “directly tied to its earliest root meaning, the creation (i.e., God, or earth itself) and the process of creativity as recapturing the ancient unity of all creatures, including humans, with all life” (pp. 66-67). Perhaps an apt description of Dickinson’s creative process is suggested by Maslow’s (1987) term “self-actualizing creativeness,” which springs “more directly from the personality” and finds its expression in “the ordinary affairs of life, . . . in a certain kind of humor, a tendency to do anything creatively” (p. 160).

Dickinson’s sister-in-law, Susan Dickinson, who wrote the obituary for Dickinson shortly after her death (Hart & Smith, 1998), suggests an example of Dickinson’s self-actualizing creativity by situating Dickinson’s creative process in the context of her day-to-day life. Susan’s obituary of Emily reads, in part:

Not disappointed with the world, . . . not from any lack of sympathy, not because she was insufficient for any mental work or social career—her endowments being so exceptional—but the “mesh of her soul,” as Browning calls the body, was too rare, and the sacred quiet of her own home proved the fit atmosphere for her worth and work. . . . One can only speak of “duties beautifully done”; of her gentle tillage of the rare flowers filling her conservatory, . . . and which was ever

abloom in frost or sunshine, so well she knew her subtle chemistries; of her tenderness to all in the home circle; . . . her quick and rich response to all who rejoiced or suffered at home, or among her wide circle of friends the world over. This side of her nature was to her the real entity in which she rested. . . . Her talk and writings were like no one's else. . . . Her swift poetic rapture was like the long glistening note of a bird one hears in the June woods at high noon, but can never see. Like a magician she caught the shadowy apparitions of her brain and tossed them in startling picturesqueness to her friends. . . . So intimate and passionate was her love of Nature, she seemed herself part of the high March sky, the summer day and bird-call. Keen and eclectic in her literary tastes, she sifted libraries to Shakespeare and Browning; quick as the electric spark in her intuitions and analyses, she seized the kernel instantly, almost impatient of the fewest words by which she must make her revelation. To her life was rich, and all aglow with God and immortality. With no creed, no formalized faith, hardly knowing the names of dogmas, she walked this life with the gentleness and reverence of old saints, with the firm step of martyrs who sing while they suffer. How better note the flight of this "soul of fire in a shell of pearl" than by her own words?—

Morns like these, we parted;
Noons like these, she rose;
Fluttering first, then firmer,
To her fair repose. (pp. 266-268)

Susan's obituary provides a portrait of Dickinson's self-actualizing creative process as expressed in her care and nurturing of home, plants, relationships, and poems. James Fadiman and Robert Frager (1994) also note that "Self-actualization is not a static state. It is an ongoing process in which one's capacities are fully, creatively, and joyfully utilized" (p. 471). In providing a multiperspectival view of Emily Dickinson's life, Susan's obituary supports an understanding of Dickinson's creative process from a transpersonal perspective.

In defining the word *transpersonal* I read that it has "its etymological roots in two Latin words: '*trans*,' meaning beyond or through, and '*personal*,' meaning mask or façade—in other words, beyond or through the personally identified aspects of self" (Anderson, 1998, p. xxi). Dane Rudhyar (1983), a pioneer in using the term *transpersonal*, defines another meaning of the word *transpersonal*:

I have used the term . . . to represent action which takes place through a person, but which originates in a center of activity existing beyond the level of personhood. . . . A “transpersonal action” can refer to the release through a person of either a stream of transformative energy, . . . or of information not normally available to the present-day mind. Nevertheless, the person through whom the power or information is released cannot be merely anyone, any more than a lens can be any piece of glass. The personhood of the human being must have a special kind of form as well as unimpaired translucency. It must be sensitive to transpersonal impressions and attuned to the quality of being of the active source of what is conveyed, transmitted, or “transduced.” (pp. 219-220)

The word transpersonal may also be applied to the study of Dickinson’s texts as suggested by her use of “symbols and metaphors of transformation” (Metzner, 1998, p. 5). Ralph Metzner defines and draws a distinction between symbol and metaphor when he writes:

A symbol is more likely to be an object or thing, whereas a metaphor usually stands for a process that extends through time. Thus, the tree is a symbol of the human being, standing vertically between heaven and earth, linking the upper world of Spirit and the lower world of nature. On the other hand, the growth of the tree from the seed to flowering maturity is a metaphor for the growth of the individual, the unfolding of a human life from seed-conception to full creative expression. The path, or road, is a symbol of development of consciousness; traveling on the road is a metaphor for the process of expanding the horizons of awareness. (p. 7)

Dickinson’s texts are replete with symbols and metaphors of transformation, one example being the recurrent metaphor of a cocoon turning into a butterfly (see poem # 1107, “My Cocoon tightens—Colors tease—” late 1865). When read within the context of Transpersonal Psychology (see, for example, Metzner, 1998, pp. 1-19), Dickinson’s use of a certain symbol or metaphor sheds light on the transpersonal and transformative nature of her creative process.

Based upon the above definitions of creative process and transpersonal, I define Dickinson’s self-actualizing creative process as a way to work both beyond and through

personal aspects of self, in the process becoming a lens through whom “transpersonal action” (Rudhyar, 1983, p. 219) may be released or expressed. It follows, in my study, that an understanding of Dickinson’s life experiences as expressed through her poems and letters leads to an understanding of how she was able to live into her self-actualizing creative process.

Utilizing the above definitions of creative process and transpersonal, I answer my research questions and build upon the above definitions by incorporating into my perspective Transpersonal Psychology, narrative studies, and women’s psychology, as well as Dickinson’s own views on creativity. I utilize the different disciplines to approach her creative process from varying angles of meaning, hence fulfilling my role of “Disseminating their/ Circumference—” (poem # 930, early 1865).

From a Transpersonal Psychology approach, which studies a broader spectrum of human experience (Braud & Anderson, 1998), I study a broader spectrum of Dickinson’s experiences and focus on experiences that seem transpersonal and “potentially transformative” (Anderson, 1998, p. xxiii). Maslow (cited in Fadiman & Frager, 1994) distinguishes between peak and plateau experiences:

Peak experiences are especially joyous and exciting moments in the life of every individual. . . . Virtually everyone has had a number of peak experiences, although we often take them for granted. . . . Understood in the broadest sense, peak experiences are those moments when we become deeply involved, excited by, and absorbed in the world. . . . The plateau experience represents a new and more profound way of viewing and experiencing the world. It involves a fundamental change in attitude, a change that affects one’s entire point of view and creates a new appreciation and intensified awareness of the world. (pp. 476-477)

Maslow (1987) further describes the peak experience:

An essential aspect of the peak experience is integration within the person and therefore between the person and the world. In these states of being, the person becomes unified; for the time being, the splits, polarities, and dissociations within him tend to be resolved; the civil war within is neither won nor lost but transcended. In such a state, the person becomes far more open to experience and far more spontaneous and fully functioning, essential characteristics, . . . of self-actualizing creativeness. (p. 163)

I view Transpersonal Psychology as a way of understanding how Dickinson, through her creative process, was able to attend to her whole self, i.e., body, mind, and soul, with her experiences finding expression in her poems and letters.

I view a narrative studies approach as a way of understanding how Dickinson, through her creative process, created an ongoing narrative account of her experiences. Edward Bruner (1986) approximates a definition of narrative when he draws a distinction between “life as lived (reality), life as experienced (experience), and life as told (expression)” (p. 6). Bruner writes:

We create the units of experience and meaning from the continuity of life. Every telling is an arbitrary imposition of meaning on the flow of memory, in that we highlight some causes and discount others; that is, every telling is interpretive. The concept of an experience, then, has an explicit temporal dimension in that we go through or live through an experience, which then becomes self-referential in the telling. (p. 7)

Central to a narrative approach is the understanding that Dickinson could reflect on her own experiences through her texts, essentially creating her own narrative “from the continuity of life” (Bruner, p. 7). The narrative is viewed as a way to “live into our stories, not in a deterministic manner, but imaginatively. This movement, the projectory of the narrative, may even create new events in awareness—possibilities and realities scarcely imagined without the stories’ thrust” (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 23). A narrative approach suggests the process of writing and reflecting

allowed her to gain knowledge of herself and re-vision her self in new ways, creating utterly new possibilities for being. Adrienne Rich (1979b) writes:

Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: it is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name—and therefore live—afresh. (p. 35)

When I read Dickinson's poems and letters within the context of a narrative approach, I hear the threads of multiple narratives based upon her experiences; her texts become more like a tapestry reflecting the texture of a woman's life. When Rich (1979b) writes, "Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves" (p. 35), I hear in Dickinson how "language has trapped as well as liberated" (p. 35) her through her own act of re-visioning herself.

From the approach of women's psychology, Dickinson's development of voice and self are central to the development of her creative process. Carol Gilligan (1993) gives a succinct definition of voice when she writes: "To have a voice is to be human. . . . Speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act. . . . By voice I mean something like what people mean when they speak of the core of the self" (p. xvi). The relational aspect of voice that Gilligan refers to is central to the model of women's development that Janet Surrey (1991) proposes:

Our conception of the self-in-relation involves the recognition that, for women, the primary experience of self is relational, that is, the self is

organized and developed in the context of important relationships. . . . The self-in-relation model assumes that other aspects of self (e.g., creativity, autonomy, assertion) develop within this primary context. (pp. 52-53)

In order to use the above model as a guide, I have found it useful to expand upon the definition of relationship in order to delineate the full context of relationship in Dickinson's life. Therefore relationship may refer to all human relationships Dickinson experienced as well as her relationship with all aspects of herself, such as body, mind, and soul. It may also refer to her relationship to nature, God, her dog Carlo, her creative process, and her reader, which includes me. Using the above self-in-relation model, I have found that Dickinson's creative process is best understood by studying how her sense of self developed in relationship. Indeed, I have felt that by engaging in a close relationship with Dickinson through her texts I have been able to hear the fuller and I want to say more relational aspects of her self-development, and hence her creative process.

Another important way of focusing my transpersonal perspective comes directly from Dickinson's texts: it is what I call the *coda of creativity*, coda because she returns to the subject of creativity in numerous poems and letters. Poem # 930, "The Poets light but Lamps—" (early 1865), is one such example. In this poem Dickinson writes of the role of the poet which also offers a unique insight into how she conceived of her creative process. As it did for her, her words about her creative process form a coda for this study, helping to posit her creative process as an expression of her self-actualizing creative process.

Developing a Transpersonal Lens for the Study

In order to integrate the diversity of approaches under the rubric of a transpersonal perspective, I have developed an overall transpersonal lens for the study, one that accurately reflects my transpersonal orientation. Following the image of circumference that Dickinson writes about, I view my involvement of understanding Dickinson's creative process as a journey around and within the circle or circumference of her life and texts. Each approach—Transpersonal Psychology, narrative studies, women's psychology, and Dickinson's coda of creativity—becomes a way in, a way of understanding her creative process, and reflects part of my journey. Drawing from the approaches, I define my *transpersonal lens as embodied* (transpersonal), *engaged* (narrative studies), *relational* (women's psychology), and *creative* (creative process). The image of the circle, which becomes the image of a lens when applied to a study of her life and texts, accurately reflects my journey in that it is not static; in its dynamic quality it resembles more of a spiral. Such a journey has charged me to follow the energy and aliveness—to use Dickinson's fine phrase, "If vital Light" (poem # 930, early 1865)—of what I'm studying. Thus have I journeyed to Amherst, Massachusetts, Dickinson's hometown, and walked the grounds of her house and town; thus have I journeyed, and continue to journey, through the texts of Dickinson's poems and letters. The terrain of her texts has become less unknown yet still may yield surprises. I am cognizant that what I bring to the study is a transpersonal perspective that reflects my journey of understanding Dickinson's creative process. I am also aware that Dickinson has her own views about her life. I have discovered that one

way of framing Dickinson's life is to follow, through her poems and letters, her process of becoming a poet, what being a poet means to her, and her living the poet's life. This way of framing her life allows for her creative process to unfold through her poems and letters, culminating in an analysis—through my transpersonal lens—of how she was able to live into her self-actualizing creative process.

My Guiding Values

Part of my intention, as a transpersonal researcher, has been to create an environment free of encumbering theories so that I may leave enough space in the research process in which to hear the breadth and depth of Emily Dickinson's voice. My values as a researcher can be extrapolated from my basic intention of hearing one woman's story as told in the texts of her poems and letters. To this aim I believe that one woman's life matters; further, that a life lived deeply—as Emily Dickinson's life was—has much to offer. To hear her fullness of expression I have developed an approach to her life and texts that suggests, as a transpersonal researcher, I cannot pretend to leave myself out, in an objective manner, in any portion of the research process. I have recognized that to come to some understanding of her creative process I must engage her on a personal level. This means that as I seek to treat her in a holistic way—recognizing that she too experienced and wrote about her body, mind, and soul—I must bring the whole of my self to meet her. This full-bodied knowing, which has variously been called “connected knowing” (Clinchy, 1996, p. 222), “intuitive inquiry” (Anderson, 2000,

p. 31), or simply *embodied knowing*, has encouraged me to attend to my full range of thoughts, feelings, intuitions, and even my dreams, in the research process.

Rosemarie Anderson (2000) writes:

I define intuition to include the more commonplace forms of intuitive insight such as novel thoughts and ideas, together with insights derived from nonrational processes such as dream images, visions, kinesthetic impressions, a felt (or proprioceptive) sense, an inner sense or taste accompanying contemplative practices and prayer, and spontaneous creative expressions in dance, sound, improvisation, writing, and visual art. (pp. 31-32)

Indeed, I have been reaching out and connecting with Dickinson through a deep and *embodied reading* of her words, which have become alive through my very reaching. It is precisely when I have felt a word become alive in my body that I have known I am on the right track. Essentially, my intention has been to make Dickinson's voice more explicit, understandable, and alive.

Other values that have guided my research process or were inspired by my research process are a sense of play, puzzlement, and love. I have imagined that Emily Dickinson played with language, played with its meanings, and yet her play was serious. She developed her poetic craft with a lot of hard work over many years, and she had a wonderful sense of the play of words. Dickinson's playful use of words and use of Noah Webster's 1844 dictionary, which was her primary dictionary according to Willis Buckingham (1977), is suggested by Richard Benvenuto (1983):

One can assume that she did not refer to the dictionary cursorily, to check spelling or syllabication, but that she read it as one does who loves words. She would learn all that she could about a particular word, including words similar to it in spelling or sound, and collateral words related to it in meaning or origin. When Webster instructed her to "see" another word, she would look the word up. She drew especially upon the etymologies of words; and

though Webster's etymologies have been long discredited by linguists, there is no evidence that Dickinson questioned them. She would have accepted the etymons in Webster as the roots of the words she was using, as their buried past meanings, and hence as integral parts of those words and legitimate for poetic use. In fact, the etymons of a word, as well as collateral words and different connotations or definitions of a word, often function in her poems as a word or words within the original word, with meanings that add to, enrich, and clarify the more apparent meaning. (p. 47)

Because she was so creative in her use of words, I have been challenged to be just as playful and creative in my response to her. It follows that Dickinson's own words, for instance, "Blessed are they that play, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (letter # 690, to Loo and Fanny Norcross, early spring 1881), support a playful and creative approach to her life and texts. Thus I have been encouraged through this sense of play in using an *embodied writing* approach in response to Dickinson's life and texts.

Puzzlement has arisen for me when I have tried too hard to understand something. One instance is beauty: When I am struck by the image of a poem, I may never be able to figure out why it moves me, yet I may partake of it with my whole being. In utilizing puzzlement as an approach to Dickinson's life and texts, I have found it useful to allow for the multi-layered and sometimes paradoxical meanings inherent in her words to emerge, as suggested by Benvenuto's (1983) article, without adhering to any one strict interpretation. Puzzlement, as a response, has thus allowed for a deeper reading, the capacity to hold paradoxical meanings, which has in turn led to fresh understandings of her life and texts.

Love is simply what has allowed me to view Dickinson in a whole way, for love engages the whole of me, it shifts my energy allowing me to embody more of my senses. Through bringing a great deal of love to this study, I have not been able

to hide behind any theory that would seem to distance me from Dickinson's life and texts. If it seems that I am only adding one more piece of scholarship to the field of Dickinson studies, I am really attempting to see and hear with the eyes and ears of my heart, from the center out. Only through love may a person, or a poem, reveal herself.

This sense of love as a guiding value has been encouraged by Dickinson's own multifarious words about love. In writing to her friend Mrs. Holland, "My business is to love" (letter # 269, summer 1862), Dickinson is describing an aspect of her poetic—and therefore life—mission. In a letter to her Aunt Katie, upon the death of Katie's eldest son, Dickinson consoles and asks, "who knows how deep the Heart is and how much it holds?" (letter # 338, late February 1870). She writes to her friend Thomas Wentworth Higginson what may be interpreted as a transpersonal understanding of love: "Love is it's own rescue, for we—at our supremest, are but it's trembling Emblems—" (letter # 522, early autumn 1877). She could write, in the final months of her life, to her beloved Norcross cousins, what is perhaps rudimentary advice on any understanding of her life and texts: "I scarcely know where to begin, but love is always a safe place" (letter # 1034, about March 1886).

This sense of love as a guiding value in which to approach Dickinson's life and texts was also encouraged by a dream I once had. In the dream I am on my way to Dickinson's house. I meet an old woman; she smiles at me and points to a flowering plant that is drooping by the side of the road. She walks over to the plant and puts both her hands—with a great deal of love—around the plant and the plant comes back to life, in fact, blossoms. When I awaken, I interpret the dream to be a

way of working with Dickinson's poems: to treat them as something that is very much alive, in need of love and attention—the human touch—to make them blossom into their fullest meaning.

Understanding Dickinson's Self-Actualizing Creative Process

Through a background study of Emily Dickinson's life and a close reading of her poems and letters my objective has been to hear and tell the unfolding narrative of her creative process from a transpersonal perspective. My *transpersonal lens*, as developed through my transpersonal perspective, utilizes a method of psychobiography, defined as the "application of psychological concepts, data, and methods from any branch of psychology to biography" (Runyan, 1982, p. 202), and suggests ways of understanding Dickinson's self-actualizing creative process as embodied, engaged, relational, and creative. My *transpersonal lens* is extended to a study of Dickinson's texts through a method of hermeneutics, "defined as the theory or philosophy of the interpretation of meaning" (Bleicher, 1980, p. 1). My hermeneutic method follows the ontogeny (Anderson, 2000, p. 34) of my experience of Dickinson's creative process, what I call *Dwell*, *Distill*, and *Disseminate*. In the process of dwelling, distilling, and disseminating the possibility of meaning inherent in Dickinson's life and texts, I utilize four "hermeneutic lenses" (Anderson, 2000, p. 37), which I have created and call *Through One's Body*, *Compassionate Listening*, *A Relational Reading*, and *Hermeneutics of Creative Engagement*. Each lens is a way of understanding Dickinson's experiences and engaging with her texts and reflects

my values as a transpersonal researcher through an *embodied knowing*, *embodied reading*, and *embodied writing* approach to the study of Dickinson's life and texts.

Guided by my interpretations of her texts, as developed through my *transpersonal lens* and concomitant *hermeneutic lenses*, I have integrated psychobiography and hermeneutics to form one narrative. This narrative follows Dickinson's process of becoming a poet, what being a poet means to her, and her living the poet's life, and is organized into the following three sections: *To Be A Poet, 1850 to 1862: Forging the Creative Spirit*; *What Poet Means, 1862 to 1879: A Matter of Distilling*; and *Living the Poet's Life, 1870 to 1886: "Life's Portentous Music."* I present a poem, followed by my interpretation of the text in relation to her development as a poet. I also present letters to situate her creative process in the context of her day-to-day life. The integrated narrative of Dickinson's unfolding creative process forms the basis of my analysis of how she was able to live into her self-actualizing creative process in my Discussion chapter. Thus a transpersonal perspective of Dickinson's creative process emerges through understanding a broader spectrum of her experiences as told through her poems and letters.

The Relevance of the Research

Implicit in my study of Emily Dickinson's creative process is the awareness and intention that the study of an extraordinary life "can help the rest of us understand our options, perils, and opportunities" (Gardner, 1997, p. 138). Calling for the study of extraordinary lives, of which I would include Dickinson, Howard Gardner asks, "Does it make sense to continue on our life paths without having rich knowledge of the heights and the depths of which other human beings are capable?"

(p. 138). What, I ask, may Dickinson offer to the field of Transpersonal Psychology if not the extraordinary texts of her poems and letters, a testament of a life lived deeply and fully?

In studying Dickinson's creative process from a transpersonal perspective, I have utilized Transpersonal Psychology, and thus introduced the term transpersonal psychobiography into a study of Dickinson's life. Such a novel approach contributes new insights into the study of Dickinson's life and hence the study of the self-actualizing creative person. Through a method of hermeneutics, I have reconstituted the text as the focus of analysis in a psychological study. My transpersonal perspective, as developed through my method of psychobiography and extended to a reading of Dickinson's texts through my method of hermeneutics, is a novel method of understanding the experiences and expressions of a remarkable poet. Through this study I also encourage a dialogue between poetry and psychology, and offer new ways of communicating about what transpersonal means.

Chapter 2: Review of Relevant Literature

There is no Frigate like a Book
 To take us Lands away
 Nor any Coursers like a Page
 Of prancing Poetry—
 This Traverse may the poorest take
 Without oppress of Toll—
 How frugal is the Chariot
 That bears the Human Soul—

(poem # 1286, 1873)

I have organized my review of relevant literature into six different sections. I am labeling the six sections, in the order I present them, *Emily Dickinson's Texts*, *Emily Dickinson Studies*, *Language Arts*, *Psychology*, *Narrative Studies*, and *Method Explorations*. Each of the six sections reflects my process of choosing texts to increase my understanding of Emily Dickinson's creative process, and therefore may be framed as a journey of understanding, much as Dickinson envisions "a Book" and "a Page/ Of prancing Poetry" as "Traverse" in the above poem. The books I have chosen thus reflect my journey to develop a transpersonal perspective in my study of Dickinson's creative process as expressed through her life and texts.

Emily Dickinson's Texts

I begin my first section, *Emily Dickinson's Texts*, with a review of selected Dickinson manuscripts, which includes the corpus of her poems and letters. My rationale for surveying the state of Dickinson's texts is to identify the sources for my study of her poems and letters. At the outset, I have primarily relied upon Ralph Franklin's (1998) edition of Dickinson's complete poems and Thomas Johnson and Theodora Ward's

(1986) edition of Dickinson's letters, although I include other sources I have used to show how Dickinson's texts continue to be published in different forms.

A primary source of Dickinson's poems is published in Franklin's (1981) *The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson*, which offers facsimile reproductions of over 1,100 of Emily Dickinson's poems. Franklin presents Dickinson's poems in her original handwriting, and explains how she organized her poems into 40 fascicles and 15 sets of poems in which "no internal sequence belonging to the poet" (p. xiv) has been identified. Franklin identifies the fascicles as Dickinson's own form of bookmaking. In Franklin's (1998) variorum edition of Dickinson's complete poems, he writes of Dickinson's form of bookmaking:

To bind, Dickinson stacked the assembled sheets, with the overflow leaves (if any) in place, and punched two holes through the group, threading it with string, tied on the front. She did not put her name on the fascicles, give them titles or title pages, or label, number, or otherwise distinguish them. They bear no pagination or signature markings to establish an internal order. The poems are not arranged alphabetically, and there are no contents lists or indexes to aid in locating a particular one. It is apparent that she did not keep them in a particular order and that browsing was the chief means of dealing with them. (pp. 7-8)

The importance of Franklin's scholarship exists in the publication of Dickinson's poems along with her variant word choices in accordance with his best estimate of their approximate order and dating. In Franklin's (1999) one-volume reading edition of Dickinson's poems, he chooses from Dickinson's variant word choices the "latest version of the entire poem" (p. 6) for publication. Franklin's work, as representative of perhaps the most authoritative source of Dickinson's poems, provides the primary source for my selection of Dickinson's poems.

A different way of understanding Dickinson's texts is represented in what William Shurr (1993) calls *New Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Shurr suggests that "the

borders between Dickinson's poetry and prose, between her poems and their contexts, are quite moveable, and editing practices should take into account her actual practice" (p. 10). Shurr thus extracts "segments of her work" (p. 10) from her letters, which may be read as poems. The strength of Shurr's scholarship exists in reading Dickinson's letters with an ear toward her poetic voice, and the result is that he extracts what he calls 498 new poems from her letters. Although Shurr's approach is controversial, he raises questions of how Dickinson's letters may express her poetic voice, especially as she develops as a poet.

Johnson and Ward (1986), similarly, note in regards to Dickinson's letters:

Early in the 1860's, when Emily Dickinson seems to have first gained assurance of her destiny as a poet, the letters both in style and rhythm begin to take on qualities that are so nearly the quality of her poems as on occasion to leave the reader in doubt where the letter leaves off and the poem begins. (p. xv)

In presenting Dickinson's letters in their chronological order, Johnson and Ward (1986) provide an excellent complement to a reading of Dickinson's poems. Johnson and Ward also include undated prose fragments, which may be mined for their significance in Dickinson's life. After Johnson and Ward's edition of Dickinson's letters was originally published in 1955, new letters came to light and are published in Richard Sewall (1965). The letters along with Johnson and Ward's edition are particularly interesting in what biographical information they reveal about Dickinson. Another publication of letters, Franklin's (1986) *The Master Letters of Emily Dickinson*, provides a closer approximation, compared with Johnson and Ward's edition, of the dating of Dickinson's three love letters to an unidentified person addressed simply "Master." In providing new information about Dickinson's letters, both Sewall and Franklin's work suggest the importance of also reevaluating Dickinson's life and texts. Ellen Louise Hart and Martha

Nell Smith (1998) utilize this form of scholarship in their rendering of Dickinson's poems and letters to her sister-in-law Susan Dickinson with attention to Dickinson's chronological order and original lines breaks. By printing Dickinson's words as she wrote them on the page, the result is a book wherein the extent of Dickinson's correspondence with Susan Dickinson emerges in freshness and vitality.

Ward (1951), similarly, presents an important correspondence of Dickinson's, her letters to Mr. and Mrs. Josiah Gilbert Holland. What is characteristic about Dickinson's letters to the Hollands and to Susan Dickinson is the degree of intimacy and duration of her correspondence: over 30 years with each. Because of the duration and depth of Dickinson's correspondences, an argument could be made to study the texts of her letters in some depth. Because her letters lend themselves to a deeper reading in terms of her relationships, it may also be important to read them in terms of her creative process, and the relationship between her creative process and her relationships.

Other publications of letters provide similarly a source of information concerning Dickinson's family members, such as Polly Longworth's (1984) book of letters of Dickinson's brother Austin's correspondence and relationship with Mabel Loomis Todd. In Vivian Pollack (1988), the courtship letters of Dickinson's parents are presented. Both Longworth and Pollack, by publishing letters of Dickinson's family, substantiate the importance of letter writing as an important form of relating in Dickinson's culture and family.

Emily Dickinson Studies

My second section, *Emily Dickinson Studies*, surveys the primary documents related to a thorough understanding of Dickinson's life and texts. I have divided this section into four subsections, *Biographical Studies*, *Psychological Studies*, *Cultural-Historical Studies*, and *Critical-Literary Studies*. My rationale for studying a broader context of Dickinson's life and texts is to create an historical as well as a personal context from which to begin to understand her creative process from a transpersonal perspective.

Biographical studies. An important source of information concerning Dickinson's life is Richard Sewall's (1980) *The Life of Emily Dickinson*. Sewall methodically reconstructs the time-line of Dickinson's life history, filling in information about her family, friendships, and education. Sewall writes, "Thus the biographer must . . . give her a lineage, a background and foreground; a believable family, home, and friends; an education, culture, and (above all) a vocation" (p. 11). The vocation Sewall alludes to is her vocation as a poet. What emerges from Sewall's study of Dickinson is a familial and cultural context in which to chronicle Dickinson's development as a poet. Although Sewall does not directly address the question of Dickinson's creative process, he does offer insights into a study of Dickinson the poet. Certain of Sewall's insights inform my study of Dickinson's creative process, such as the importance of studying relationship in Dickinson's life, how "each relationship gives back a phase, or facet, of her character, her personality, and her literary purpose" (p. 12). Indeed, my study of Dickinson's creative process is an attempt to answer Sewall's question, "must we leave her as a fascinating weaver of words, an impressionist of many moods and startling perceptions but with no

clear direction, or central thrust, or unifying principle?” (p. 722). My transpersonal perspective, which is a unique perspective, is an attempt to study her creative process as a “unifying principle” (p. 722) in her life. I am studying both her life and texts and how she was able to essentially unify her life through her process of becoming a poet, as reflected in her poems and letters and lived out in her day-to-day life.

Another biographer, Jay Leyda (1960) provides details of what the day-to-day life of Dickinson may have been like. Leyda draws upon newspaper accounts, Dickinson’s sister Lavinia’s diary, Dickinson’s school records, indeed, every bit of information is used to reconstruct the happenings of Dickinson’s life. What emerges from Leyda’s study is a rendering of the ordinary affairs of Dickinson’s life writ large. The lives of those around Dickinson are also chronicled so that Dickinson may be viewed as part of a larger web of relationships. Subsequently, inferences about Dickinson’s creative process may be drawn from Leyda’s work by simply recognizing the influence of Dickinson’s day-to-day life upon her creative process. Leyda, in situating Dickinson within her time, has thus provided me with a way of also contrasting Dickinson—as utterly unique in her creation of poetry—as existing outside of or ahead of her time.

A biography of Dickinson by Thomas H. Johnson (1955) focuses on and explores Dickinson’s creative process. Johnson quotes from a letter of Dickinson’s in which she writes, “My Business is Circumference” (p. 134) to posit that Circumference is a term that helps explain her “theory of poetics” (p. 134). What Johnson’s biography signifies for me is the importance of studying Dickinson’s words with attention to her meanings in order to understand her creative process. Johnson writes:

It seems to have been in 1860 that Emily Dickinson made the discovery of herself as a poet and began to develop a professional interest in poetic techniques. Her

thoughts about poetry and the function of the poet can be gleaned from her own poems and from occasional snatches in her letters. Her writing techniques were self-taught. She did not follow traditional theories, but developed her own along highly original lines. Though she could write excellent prose, easy, clear, unmannered, the fact is that she thought in poetry. (p. 84)

In suggesting that Dickinson “thought in poetry” (p. 84), Johnson intimates that Dickinson’s creative process became integrated into and arose out of her way of being and thinking as she developed her “writing techniques” (p. 84).

The importance of the word Circumference is also explored in Albert Gelpi’s (1966) study of Dickinson. Gelpi uses “the poems and letters to get beyond the biographical data to the design of the poet’s mind” (p. vii). Gelpi writes:

In its various contexts and multiple associations Circumference comes to serve as a complex symbol for those disrupted moments when in some sense time transcends time. Circumference signifies ecstasy in its expansiveness, in its self-contained wholeness, in its self-ordered coherence, in its definition of the individual’s capacity for being (and for Being). (p. 123)

Gelpi’s work points out the importance of not only studying the meaning of Dickinson’s words, but also the multiple contexts and associations of her words; in this way I may arrive at an understanding of the poet’s mind. Gelpi also supports a transpersonal perspective of Dickinson’s creative process through studying the fuller implications of her use of certain words, such as circumference, and how this may be applied to her life.

George Whicher’s (1938) biography of Dickinson explores her life and texts, situating Dickinson in her time and yet as an utterly unique and individual poet in her creations. Whicher writes:

The resemblances that may be noted in Emerson, Parker, Thoreau, Emily Dickinson and several other New England authors were due to the fact that all were responsive to the spirit of the time. Their work was in various ways a fulfillment of the finer energies of a Puritanism that was discarding the husks of dogma. . . . All the writers who were the spokesmen of the generation when the

frost was coming out of the Puritan soil gave voice to a single master thought, the conviction of self-sufficiency. (pp. 198-199)

Whicher writes that Dickinson's unique style was "neither imitated nor capable of facile imitation. She earned it by the whole tenor of her life, and it was hers unmistakably, hers only" (p. 224). By using the words "whole tenor of her life" (p. 224), Whicher encourages me to study Dickinson's creative process as the expression of her whole life and being; Whicher also suggests Dickinson may only be understood, ultimately, as an individual.

Alfred Habegger (2001) provides a biography of Dickinson that essentially updates and fills in information about her life and relationships while in essence still positioning her as avoiding "public life" (p. xii). Habegger does not address, from my understanding, the complexity of Dickinson's so-called avoidance of public life. For instance, Dickinson could have chosen a life devoted to poetry, and through poetry, she may have been able to voice her truths, thus not so much avoiding public life but finding her way of contributing to public life. Habegger also claims it "is generally a mistake" (p. xii) to read her in an embodied knowing way. He writes,

Again and again, readers feel that, remote and difficult as she is, they are on the track of *knowing* her. They feel a heartbeat; they receive the words as primal and immediate, as coming straight from life. Sadly, this way of reading is generally a mistake, especially if we succumb to the illusion that we can zoom into her life and penetrate her secret being. One of Dickinson's paradoxes is that she both invites and deflects such intimacy. "Not telling" was one of the things she did to perfection. (pp. xii-xiii)

I would argue that Dickinson does tell about her life, in her own way, and that to view her as inviting and deflecting all the time, is to miss those poems and letters, which span her entire life, as very revealing of her life. I would also argue that to not read in an embodied way is to further miss an understanding of Dickinson herself as being once embodied,

breathing, following her own senses, and weaving a broader spectrum of experiences into her poetry. Habegger further denounces the importance of Dickinson's relationship with her sister-in-law Sue, claiming the importance of the "poetry workshop" (p. 368) between Sue and Emily is overrated; he states, "Emily was basically on her own" (p. 368). By stating that Dickinson was on her own, he suggests Dickinson received minimal if no support from those around her, such as Sue, her sister-in-law living next-door. Habegger notes in regards to Sue being present next-door yet unavailable, "it fit a basic rule of life for Dickinson: always seeking intimacy and finding it withheld. The pattern shows up not only in her friendships but in her orientation to nature and religion" (p. 369). Clearly, Habegger positions Dickinson as isolated, yet I would argue her poetry is a way of relating and to view her as isolated is to miss her as a part of a wider web of relationships, i.e., with Sue, nature, God, and herself.

Interestingly, in an article that Susan Dickinson (1981) wrote, she described "the personal influences which have stimulated and delighted me, my relations with rare people who have given me their best wealth and sympathy, sometimes a life of devoted friendship" (p. 8). The essay is informative in that it describes many people who influenced Emily Dickinson's life as well. It is also informative in that it is written by someone who was indeed close to Emily Dickinson over a span of nearly four decades, and therefore may reflect certain shared values that both Susan and Dickinson shared, such as friendship and a fascination for "rare people" (p. 8).

Martha Dickinson Bianchi (1932), Sue's daughter, provides personal reminiscences of her "Aunt Emily." What Bianchi has to share is extremely useful in understanding Dickinson because Bianchi offers first-hand accounts. Bianchi dispels the

myth of Dickinson's isolation as her acceptance of her own way of life; she writes, "I cannot tell when I first became aware that she had elected her own way of life" (p. 48). Dickinson emerges from Bianchi's book with much more of a human face. The importance of Bianchi's reminiscences exists in the fact that she knew Dickinson and had access to Dickinson, and therefore may in fact be describing first-hand her experiences of Dickinson.

Millicent Todd Bingham (1945), in her chronicle of the history of publication of Dickinson's poems and letters, provides useful information, especially in letters written by Higginson, Dickinson's sister Lavinia, and Dickinson's sister-in-law Sue. The book also exhibits the care, difficulty, and concern that went into the publishing of Dickinson's poems and letters. The mere fact that Dickinson's poems and eventually letters were published suggests that publication was on the minds of many people, especially Higginson, Lavinia, and Sue, and in publishing her poems, those with a direct connection to Dickinson essentially grasped the importance of making her work available to the world.

Polly Longworth (1990) provides a glimpse of Dickinson's world through a pictorial study of Dickinson's life in her time, which covers the history of her family, her acquaintances, and the town of Amherst in which she lived. The result is a book rich in detail that subtly hints at the complexity of information and images associated with Dickinson's life. As I have studied the pictures in some depth, i.e., spending time with them, pulling the book out to revisit images of Dickinson's time, I have been fascinated by the stark simplicity of her time. For example, there were numerous streets of simple mud, a growing town of Amherst that included a college, and a persistent meadow (that

exists to this day) of frogs and grasses. I have also been perplexed with looking at the pictures in my realization and ultimate inability to fully know what it was like in her time.

In her essay “The ‘Latitude of Home’: Life in the Homestead and the Evergreens” (2001), Longworth takes the reader through an updated version of the history of Dickinson’s house and her sister-in-law Sue’s house (the Evergreens). Of particular importance is the description of gardening (pp. 48–49), how Dickinson’s mother, Sue, and Dickinson’s sister Lavinia, all shared a love of gardening. The value of growing a garden I believe was shared not only between the women but also the men, for the land provided in large part most of the food, yet it also provided especially for Dickinson, a sense of beauty which she cultivated, developed, and celebrated through her poetry.

Psychological studies. In this section I explore particular works that approach the study of Dickinson’s life and texts from a psychological perspective. Although the majority of works cited utilize a psychoanalytic approach in the study of Dickinson’s life and texts, I include a Jungian study of her life (Snider, 1996), which incorporates a transpersonal perspective, and what may be termed a transpersonal study of her life (Houston, 1993). I have also added my own interpretation of Dickinson from a transpersonal perspective through utilizing the mythic or archetypal figure, “Hestia, Goddess of the Hearth” (Demetrakopoulos, 1979).

I have used the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (1994) as a reference in which to read of particular disorders in order to make clear assessments of psychological studies that do in fact diagnose Dickinson (see, for example, Cody, 1971;

McDermott, 2000). The tendency to diagnose Dickinson according to a certain school of psychology, whether psychoanalytic, Jungian, or Transpersonal, may be viewed as a way to understand Dickinson more fully. Regardless or perhaps as a result of which school of psychology is used, I suggest the strength of a certain diagnosis, and hence the understanding of Dickinson, may come to rest entirely on the depth of reading Dickinson's complete poems and letters. Therefore I understand how each school of psychology may offer insights into an understanding of Dickinson, yet as I am creating a transpersonal perspective in which to understand her, I am focusing primarily on her self-actualizing creative process (Maslow, 1987) and what this may mean to her.

John Cody's (1971) psychoanalytic psychobiography of Dickinson utilizes her poems and letters and biographical information to study her life in some depth. The strength of Cody's analysis exists in his close reading of Dickinson's texts with the intention of understanding her underlying psychological process. A weakness of Cody's analysis exists in his tendency to read too much of his psychoanalytic perspective into Dickinson's life and texts. An example of Cody's over-reliance on his psychoanalytic perspective is his later retraction, noted in John McDermott (2000, p. 82), of his diagnosis of Dickinson's psychotic breakdown (Cody, p. 291).

McDermott (2000) analyzes Dickinson in large part according to her "letters" (p. 71). McDermott writes,

Certainly poetry cannot be taken as autobiography, nor can it, as a form of fantasy, simply be used to project an image of the artist on a screen. The letters, on the other hand, with all their limitations and incompleteness as a diary of events, at least can off a skeleton of life experience. (p. 71)

McDermott thus points out a major theme of Dickinson's letters, her "self described reclusiveness" (p. 71), which in turn becomes over the course of Dickinson's life a kind

of “Agoraphobia” (p. 71) and “Nervous prostration” (p. 72). McDermott claims certain experiences as read in the letters may “if considered sequentially . . . form a pattern” (p. 72) or diagnosis. McDermott then goes on to suggest that Dickinson suffered a series of “panic attacks” (p. 72) which he substantiates through a reading of Dickinson’s letters. McDermott also notes that “poetry may be an ideal medium for this transformation of inner life into symbolic representation” (p. 80), and I view this as the strength of McDermott’s article, his ability to understand how Dickinson worked through her illness. In light of this, I think that the poetry most assuredly can be read as autobiography, even if in symbolic form. McDermott thus concludes his article, “If Panic Attack with Agoraphobia was her lot, then by struggling with it through poetic expression, she herself ascended beyond it. If her body was trapped by an illness, it is clear that her spirit was free” (p. 81).

Norbert Hirschhorn’s (1991) article explores the speculation that Dickinson was an incest victim. Hirschhorn’s article offers, like Cody’s (1971) study, a careful reading of selected Dickinson poems and letters in accordance with his hypothesis. Such a careful reading of Dickinson gives some credibility to the possibility that she was a victim of incest, yet it should be noted the article is based on limited information derived from Dickinson’s texts. Hirschhorn encourages “continuous exploration of this event” (p. 261). Hirschhorn does not limit his exploration to Dickinson’s supposed experience of incest, but draws conclusions from this experience to Dickinson’s capacity as a poet and her ability to relate to others. Hirschhorn writes, concerning Dickinson’s capacity as a poet,

I can accept that ED knew she had the capacity to be a great poet; and that she held a highly original, if precocious philosophy of life. But given the emotional turmoil many of her letters betray, and those examples of erratic behavior we have, the notion of a “wise, rational choice” of reclusion is not credible. (p. 264)

Following this notion of reclusion, Hirschhorn writes:

Emily Dickinson could not bring the control she had over her art to her relationships. In modern parlance, ED had trouble with boundaries. She fell passionately in love (feelings of joy, rage, physical desire, jealousy, infatuation) with several people in her lifetime, kept at safe distance by letter. She had unrealistic expectations of most of her loves, consummated none, and fell out with nearly all. (p. 265)

Thus Hirschhorn's (1991) article suggests the necessity of understanding the nature of Dickinson's so-called reclusion along with the role of relationship in her life. Furthermore, in stating that Dickinson "fell out with nearly all" (p. 265) of her relationships, he fails, in my view, to fully read and understand Dickinson's relationships over a longer period of time as expressed through her poems and letters.

A psychoanalytic study of Dickinson by Susan Kavalier-Adler (1991) explores the subject of Dickinson's seclusion. Kavalier-Adler writes of how Dickinson "chose a life in poetic metaphor as an alternative to life within her body and within the world of interpersonal relations" (p. 36). Because I have found numerous mistakes of facts in Kavalier-Adler's article, it is difficult to know if Kavalier-Adler actually read the texts of Dickinson's poems and letters, or if she researched Dickinson's life utilizing accurate sources. For instance, Kavalier-Adler refers to Mabel Todd Lewis (p. 22), when in fact her name was Mabel Loomis Todd. Similarly, she refers to Otis P. Lord as "Otis T. Lord" (p. 25). Kavalier-Adler also misquotes and misinterprets the context of a letter of Dickinson's. Kavalier-Adler writes, "On one hot day, after both her parents died, and her sister was out, she wrote letters in a stifling hot room, exclaiming to friends, 'I've a snarl in my brain that aint untangled yet'" (p. 22). The correct quote is "these gave me a snarl in the brain which don't unravel yet" (letter # 281, to Louise and Frances Norcross, late May 1863). In 1863 both of Dickinson's parents were alive; reading the complete letter

also reveals that Dickinson's sister was probably at home when Dickinson was writing her letter, and that Dickinson writes of the hot night, not hot day (as Kavalier-Adler suggests), in past tense. Kavalier-Adler in effect views Dickinson's writing of poems as a withdrawal from the world, and because there are so many mistakes in her article, it is difficult to validate the assumptions of her argument. Thus Kavalier-Adler prompts me to read Dickinson's texts more fully and accurately, taking into consideration the context of her poems and letters.

Simon Grolnick's (1990) psychoanalytic study of Dickinson explores Dickinson's poetic process. Grolnick writes, "Dickinson's poetic images and themes and her 'lived life' were inextricably interwoven and, at times, isomorphically interconnected" (p. 111). Grolnick's study informs my own study in my attempt to understand Dickinson's life and texts as interconnected. Grolnick views Dickinson's poetic process as a way to "dramatize her dilemma and attempt a solution, lived out in a dialogue between life and poetry" (p. 115). Yet Grolnick writes that this solution provided "a limited opportunity for new organization . . . that could be applied to her life" (p. 124). Grolnick bases his understanding of Dickinson on the work of D. W. Winnicott, especially Winnicott's views of the "individual's formation of object relations and the capacity to create meaningful, affective symbols" (p. 111). As such, Grolnick understands Dickinson as one who succeeded in creating meaningful poetry yet did not always live out this meaningfulness in her life. Grolnick writes:

Certain artists like Dickinson live out, and play out, their poetic and psychological themes, and, at the same time, externalize these psychological themes into art while they attempt to communicate with affectively laden symbols. Some of these artists, and Emily Dickinson seems to be among them, have concomitant difficulty in the area of object relations. With them, others are related to in a transitional manner—they are treated as much as inanimate objects as actual

people. I believe Dickinson's lived life was poetized, and correspondingly her poetry was alive, lived out. (pp. 112-113)

A strength of Grolnick's study of Dickinson exists in his perception of her poetry as helping her live out her life more fully. A weakness of Grolnick's study exists in his representation of her life (and therefore all the relationships in her life), and hence her poetry, as fixated on being merely "transitional objects" (p. 112). It is difficult to accept Grolnick's assertion that Dickinson treated others merely as "inanimate objects" (p. 113) when her relationships—as expressed through her poems and letters—are studied in some depth.

Clifton Snider's (1996) study of Dickinson departs from a psychoanalytic study in its attempt to study Dickinson's life and texts from a Jungian perspective, which may also be termed transpersonal. Drawing from Jung's works, Snider writes of Dickinson as a "'visionary' artist, who compensates for collective psychic imbalance through an archetypal vision of another possibility" (p. 33). This archetypal vision Snider equates with shamanism and writes:

Dickinson's personal quest—her personal myth as expressed in her poetry—compensates for contemporary imbalance in that it is a search for natural meaning in the face of the breakdown of collective Christian myths. She is concerned with the very mysteries that traditionally concerned shamans at the dawn of religious practice and investigates these mysteries using the imagery of shamanism. These mysteries include death and the afterlife, as well as suffering, loss, and healing. (p. 34)

The essence of this quest for Dickinson, writes Snider, was her ability to work "in isolation to create her own inimitable poetry" (p. 35). Snider's work informs my own in his exploration of Dickinson's so-called isolation as an expression of her intimacy with nature (p. 37). Snider has also prompted me to understand what form "Dickinson's

personal quest—her personal myth as expressed in her poetry” (p. 34) may take in her life.

Jean Houston (1993) explores Dickinson’s life and texts through what she calls the mystery school (p. xix), which I understand to be an invitation to engage in the mysteries of Dickinson’s life and texts in an experiential way. Houston thus informs my study of Dickinson by encouraging a sensory and imaginative exploration of my own responses as evoked by Dickinson’s life and texts. Houston interweaves this personal exploration with substantive information concerning Dickinson’s culture and personal life. Houston’s approach is also decidedly transpersonal; she writes of Dickinson: “She forces us to value ourselves as givens—givens in brain and body before and beyond any educational additions” (p. 2).

I have added to my transpersonal study of Dickinson a study of “Hestia, Goddess of the Hearth,” by Stephanie Demetrakopoulos (1979). Through her descriptions of Hestia, Demetrakopoulos provides information that, when applied to a reading of Dickinson’s poems and letters, provides a way of understanding Dickinson as a Hestia figure. Demetrakopoulos notes that there are “two Homeric Hymns addressed specifically to Hestia, short enough to quote here in their entirety:”

The Hymn to Hestia

**Hestia,
you who have received the highest honor,
to have your seat forever
in the enormous houses of all the gods
and all the men who walk on the earth,
it is a beautiful gift you have received,
it is a beautiful honor.
Without you, mankind would have no feasts,
since no one could begin the first and last drink
of honey-like wine without an offering to Hestia.**

And you, too, Argeiphontes, Son of Zeus and Maia,
messenger of the gods with your gold wand,
giver of good things, be good to men,
protect me along with the venerable and dear
Hestia.

Come, both of you inhabit this beautiful house
with mutual feelings of friendship.
You accompany good work with intelligence
and youth.

Hello, daughter of Cronos,
you too, Hermes, with your gold wand.
As for me, I will remember you in another song.

The Second Hymn to Hestia

Hestia,
you who take care of the holy house of Apollo
who shoots so far,
the house at sacred Pytho,
a liquid oil flows forever from your hair.
Come on into this house of mine,
come on in here with shrewd Zeus.
Be gracious towards my song. (p. 57)

My inclusion of Hestia into a study of Dickinson suggests that Dickinson's personal myth (Snider, 1996, p. 34) may be interwoven with the myth of Hestia. Demetrakopoulos (1979) positions Hestia as "The Forgotten Goddess" (p. 55) and explores Hestia as representative of "ideals of sanctity of family, the common hearth of the city" (pp. 55-56). Hestia becomes the "hearth Goddess" (p. 56); "Zeus does grant her wish never to marry and she is said to have 'her place in the center of the house to receive the best in offerings'; the center of the house is where the hearth would be located" (p. 56). Hestia is also linked with Hermes, "the kindler of fires" (p. 56). In reading the word "hearth" I am delighted that it contains both the words heart and earth. In positioning Dickinson as being close to the center of the hearth-heart-earth, in her dwelling in language, especially

in my reading of her poem “Dare you see a Soul at the ‘White Heat’?” (poem # 401, summer 1862), I also see her as a kindler of the fires of language, a Hermes figure. Demetrakopoulos thus enlightens my study of Dickinson by bringing light to a mythic figure.

Cultural-historical studies. In this section I review certain works that have been useful in order to understand the cultural and historical significance of Dickinson’s life and texts. I begin with Willis Buckingham’s (1989) work that chronicles the “reviews and notices” of Dickinson’s poetry in the 1890s. Buckingham writes,

For Dickinson herself, the nineties reviewers were her contemporaries or near contemporaries, and their horizon of expectations could not have been wholly un presupposed by her. Whether she shared or rejected those literary attitudes, they shaped her projection of an ideal reader. Moreover, these documents illustrate the interaction between readers, texts, and norms of valuation by which literary meaning is established and disestablished. (p. xii)

Buckingham encourages a study of Dickinson’s cultural and historical context, as well as an examination of the present “interaction between readers, texts, and norms of valuation” (p. xii). Buckingham thus encourages me to reevaluate and question how I read Dickinson’s texts. One question that has arisen for me is do I read Dickinson’s texts in her original handwriting, with her original line breaks (Franklin, 1981), or do I read Dickinson in how she is more commonly presented and accepted in printed form (Franklin, 1998)? As I have elected to read Dickinson in printed form, for this study, I must remember that this is what I have chosen, and I may be neglecting meanings inherent in reading her in her original hand.

I also include in this section an article by Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1862), “Letter To A Young Contributor.” In reading this article in 1862, Dickinson initiated a

correspondence and relationship with Higginson that lasted the rest of her life. The article, it may be inferred, moved Dickinson to reach out to someone because it spoke to her in a powerful way. Mining the contents of the article may reveal insights into Dickinson's development as a poet. Dickinson may have been particularly struck, as I was, by Higginson's description of the "magnificent mystery of words":

Human language may be polite and powerless in itself, uplifted with difficulty into expression by the high thoughts it utters, or it may in itself become so saturated with warm life and delicious association that every sentence shall palpitate and thrill with the mere fascination of the syllables. . . . And as Ruskin says of painting that it is in the perfection and precision of the instantaneous line that the claim to immortality is made, so it is easy to see that a phrase may outweigh a library. (p. 403)

I also found in the *Sermons* by the Rev. Charles Wadsworth, D. D. (1882), valuable information on imagery and terminology, particularly of the soul (p. 76), which I use to understand and suggest meanings for imagery and terms as used in Dickinson's poetry. The fact that Dickinson was very interested in and most likely read Wadsworth's sermons also lends credibility to the meaning of certain imagery and terms as used in her poetry. Wadsworth's descriptions of the soul are particularly apt because I have found transpersonal psychology, for example, as represented in the work of Charles Tart (1997), Michael Washburn (1988), and Ken Wilber (1990), often includes the soul as inclusive of looking at the whole person—body, mind, and soul.

Carlton Lowenberg (1986) provides a work of historical importance in his scholarship, which chronicles the texts that Dickinson used in school, as well as books in her household. The extent of Dickinson's education becomes apparent by simply reading the titles. In reading through the titles, I chose to examine some of Dickinson's textbooks: Almira Lincoln's (1832) *Lectures on Botany*, contains an Appendix, the "Symbolic

Language of Flowers” (cited in Lowenberg, p. 70), which Lowenberg notes may have been an important text for Dickinson. The “Language ‘may also be regarded as emblematic of the affections of the heart and qualities of the intellect,’ e. g. acacia/friendship; anemone/anticipation; broom/humility; sweet william/finesse; and lilac/first love” (p. 70). I have thus paid particular attention in my reading of Dickinson’s poems and letters to her language of flowers, to the fact that she conveyed through her poems and letters certain associations as expressed through her love of flowers and nature.

Another textbook, by Thomas Upham (1845), *Elements of Mental Philosophy*, “has been described as ‘One of the first original and comprehensive contributions of American scholarship to modern psychology’” (cited in Lowenberg, 1986, p. 98). Lowenberg further notes, “Upham’s book described the meditative discipline [Ignatius Loyola, Francois de Sales, Thomas a Kempis et al.] in a way that was palatable to New England Protestants, and ED may well have been influenced by Upham’s book” (p. 98). In suggesting that Dickinson may have been influenced by Upham’s book, Lowenberg positions Dickinson within a meditative discipline, which in my view she shapes and develops through her creative process, in her love and contemplation of words.

Lowenberg (1992) provides another important work of scholarship that chronicles what he calls the “Musical Settings of Emily Dickinson’s Poems and Letters” (p. 1). Lowenberg writes, “To date, more than 275 composers have written music to over 650 poems and letters of Emily Dickinson” (p. xxvi). One such musical composition, “‘The White Election: A Song Cycle for Soprano and Piano on 32 Poems of Emily Dickinson’ by Gordon P. Getty” (p. 40), I attended on May 6, 2000. Gordon P. Getty was in

attendance, and the performance was beautiful, bringing Dickinson's poems alive, with a great deal of feeling. Not only was an operatic singer present who sang Dickinson's poems, but a ballet dancer as well, who moved in choreographic steps to the music and Dickinson's poems. Lowenberg's work and my attendance at a musical performance reminds me how Dickinson's life and texts continue to find expression and interest in current culture.

Robert Gross (1983) provides an historical study when he explores the subject of seclusion in Dickinson and Thoreau as a response to "Emersonian self-reliance" (p. 2). Gross concludes that each writer's business "lay in the interior life, voyaging out on the sea of imagination to track the laws of nature and the soul. Their business was charting consciousness" (p. 2). Not only does Gross link Emerson, Thoreau, and Dickinson, he also gives credence to the view and importance of examining Dickinson as engaged on her own particular journey of "charting consciousness" (p. 2).

Barton Levi St. Armand (1984) provides an insightful window into how to study Dickinson's culture, which extends to an understanding of her life and texts. St. Armand writes:

More important is what I come out of: a training in American studies and a belief that every deep consideration of a work of art must develop an approach to that art which is interdisciplinary as well as unique; that is, "organic" in the largest and perhaps most romantic sense. In an overly cerebral and technical age of theory, modern scholarship needs a holistic approach to literary texts as much as modern medicine needs a holistic approach to the human body. (p. 2)

The tone of St. Armand's scholarship carries this holistic approach throughout so that he touches upon numerous facts of Dickinson's life, which may evade the attention of other scholars. Partly what St. Armand's work signifies for me is the complexity and difficulty of understanding Dickinson's culture. For instance, St. Armand notes, "John Morley

reminds us that ‘Victorian beliefs, and especially Victorian religious beliefs, were corporeal; religion had little of the abstract quality of modern religious thought’” (p. 60). St. Armand’s work signifies the importance of continual study as well as the realization that understanding is always incomplete; yet a holistic approach, St. Armand suggests, may come closer to an understanding of Dickinson’s life and texts.

Critical-literary studies. In this section I explore critical-literary approaches to Dickinson’s life and texts in order to develop my own approaches to Dickinson’s life and texts. Specifically, I am interested in insights into Dickinson’s development as a poet, which includes her creative process and the role of relationship in her development as a poet.

I read in Albert Gelpi’s (1991) work about the poet, “The artisan, therefore, was no mere technician, important as that skill was. The artisan was a skilled alchemist or a psychic midwife, transmuting and delivering herself” (pp. 294-295). Gelpi notes Dickinson’s process of distilling:

Thus the artist must fix upon the rose not merely to see it (or into it) or to light it by his imagination but to take the rose in so metamorphically that his conscious apprehension of it is rendered (“distilled” suggests the alchemical translation, scientific yet mysterious) into the materials of his medium. (p. 295)

Gelpi views Dickinson’s creative process as her “own best creation and revelation” (p. 298) through which she may be known. I have incorporated Gelpi’s views of Dickinson’s process of distilling, and have extended and developed his perception of Dickinson’s process of “transmuting and delivering herself” (p. 295) through my study of Dickinson’s creative process from a transpersonal perspective.

Donald Thackrey (1954) suggests a way of understanding Dickinson's creative process:

Emily Dickinson herself gives us ample warrant for studying her poems a word at a time. Her constant practice of compiling a thesaurus of word choices for a single line, while constituting grave editorial difficulty, is at least an indication that each word was a veritable dynamo of implications and associations. (p. 10)

Thackrey notes, "The most evident characteristic of words, as far as Emily Dickinson was concerned, is their startling vitality" (p. 12). Thackrey concludes, "Thus Emily Dickinson attempted to develop a shorthand system of poetic language which would combine the advantage of conciseness with the capability of connoting a rich complex of suggestions" (p. 17).

Sharon Cameron (1992), in her study of Dickinson's poetry, writes of Dickinson's identity,

For identity as deployed in the these poems, in the fascicles that organize them, is neither wholly relational nor wholly self-referential—thereby precluding the exclusivity of either of these interpretations. Thus if subjects, conventionally understood, are redefined in Dickinson's poetry, so too—in the last of these evaded choices—is subjectivity. (p. 155)

Cameron informs my understanding of the role of relationship in Dickinson's creative process as a subject that is expressed and worked through, even if it is an "evaded choice" (p. 155), in her poetry.

I have extended and developed the idea of relationship in Dickinson's poetry by broadening my definition of relationship to include Dickinson's relationship to her body, mind, and soul, as well as her relationship to humans, nature, God, her dog Carlo, her creative process, and to her reader, which includes me. By not limiting my definition of relationship in Dickinson's life and therefore texts, I may get a better sense of how Dickinson did choose certain relationships and expressed through her poems and letters a

deepening relationship, for instance, with her body, mind, and soul. Janet Surrey (1991), through her self-in-relationship model of women's development (p. 52), would situate Dickinson's development of self within her experience of important relationships, thus providing a way of viewing Dickinson the poet as engaged in many different kinds of relationships.

Michele Mock (1997) informs my understanding of the relationship between Dickinson and her sister Lavinia. Mock writes, "The dialogic and interanimative sphere the sisters forged for themselves served as a survivalist response to traditional Romanticism's dictates regarding genius and gender that threatened to negate the woman artist" (p. 69). Mock refers to "the dialogic and interanimative sphere" as Dickinson's "relational space" (p. 69), and writes, "The discourse derived from the Dickinson's relational space could most assuredly energize Emily's artistic creations, ultimately transforming her 'private' work into art exposed to the public gaze" (p. 69). Through her study of Dickinson's relationship with her sister Lavinia, Mock informs my understanding of the role of relationship in Dickinson's creative process. Mock sheds light on Dickinson's relationship with her sister Lavinia and underscores the importance of viewing relationship as vital to and supportive of Dickinson's creative process.

Martha Nell Smith (1992) supports my intuition of examining Dickinson's close relationships, especially with her sister-in-law Susan Dickinson, as part of her "poetry workshop" (p. 155). Smith writes:

As literary critic, I concern myself with Emily and Sue's surviving writings and survey them to see how each characterizes herself and her correspondent in the letters they compose for and about each other. What these characterizations tell about biography will ever be open to question, but these literary and epistolary exchanges do reveal much about Dickinson's immediate presentation of herself and her immediate reception as writer. (p. 158)

Susan Howe (1985) makes statements, which may be read as particularly potent questions in regards to an understanding of Dickinson's life and texts:

Dickinson and Stein meet each other along paths of the Self that begin and end in contradiction. . . . In prose and poetry she explored the implications of breaking the law just short of breaking off communication with a reader. . . . Who polices questions of grammar, parts of speech, connection, and connotation? Whose order is shut inside the structure of a sentence? What inner articulation releases the coils and complications of Saying's assertion? . . . How do I, choosing messages from the code of others in order to participate in the universal theme of Language, pull SHE from all the myriad symbols and sightings of HE. (pp. 11-18)

Howe informs my understanding of Dickinson's life and texts through her ability to ask questions that bring Dickinson's life and texts into focus, connecting Dickinson's identity more closely with her texts—not reading life and texts as separate, but connected in the “complications of Saying's assertion” (pp. 11-12). Howe also encourages me to question how I read Dickinson: do I read Dickinson in her original handwriting or do I read her in printed form? Do I take into consideration the full impact of Dickinson's use of dashes and spaces in her texts, or do I simply view the dashes as to where to place emphasis? Howe suggests the importance of questioning the premises of how reading Dickinson from a particular perspective and in a particular way may in fact change the very intent and meaning of Dickinson's texts.

Adrienne Rich (1979a) incisively portrays her understanding of Dickinson's life and texts through the sharp lens of her own poetic sensibilities. Rich writes:

What I have tried to do here is follow through some of the origins and consequences of her choice to be, not only a poet but a woman who explored her own mind, without any of the guidelines of orthodoxy. (p. 183)

Rich informs my own study of Dickinson's life and texts through her ability to examine Dickinson's creative process as an act of courage on Dickinson's part to explore “her own mind, without any of the guidelines of orthodoxy” (p. 183). Rich views Dickinson as

“a mind engaged in a lifetime’s musing on essential problems of language, identity, separation, relationship, the integrity of the self; a mind capable of describing psychological states more accurately than any poet except Shakespeare” (p. 167). Rich also suggests that Dickinson, while knowing her own “measure, regardless of the judgments of others” (p. 171), was nevertheless constrained by her times which treated women more as perpetual children (p. 166). Rich suggests Dickinson was essentially taught to “disguise—her actual dimensions as she must have experienced them” (p. 166). I have thus tried to show, following the example of Rich, Dickinson’s transpersonal dimensions—to read Dickinson’s particular expressions of the transpersonal through her poems and letters.

I also include in this section reference books that I have found useful in a study of Dickinson’s texts, such as Noah Webster’s 1844 *American Dictionary of the English Language*, which Dickinson used, according to Willis Buckingham (1977). Jane Eberwein (1998) provides a useful resource in her book *An Emily Dickinson Encyclopedia*. The encyclopedia is a compendium of information, organized in alphabetical order, and explores such subjects as “Ambiguity” (p. 3), “Bright’s Disease” (p. 33), “Colloquialism” (p. 49), etc. Information on Dickinson’s life and texts is made readily available through the book’s format. Another important resource of information is *The Emily Dickinson Handbook* by Gudrun Grabher, Roland Hagenbüchle, and Cristanne Miller (1998). The handbook explores in depth certain subjects, such as “Dickinson and the Visual Arts” (pp. 61-92), and “Dickinson’s Manuscripts” (pp. 113-137), which relate to a study of Dickinson’s life and texts. The handbook thus chronicles changes and developments in Dickinson studies without adhering to a certain set of interpretations of

Dickinson's life and texts. I have included in this resource list the *Handlist of Books Found in the Home of Emily Dickinson at Amherst, Massachusetts Spring, 1950* (The Houghton Library, 1951). The sheer quantity and quality of books found in Dickinson's home is remarkable (the handlist contains 93 pages with nearly 10 books mentioned on each page). The handlist provides an excellent window into the interests and intellects of Dickinson's family and therefore suggests a relational component. For instance, certain books, which seem to have been passed between, for example, Dickinson and her sister-in-law Susan, strengthen the idea that Dickinson's sense of self developed within important relationships (Surrey, 1991, p. 52).

Language Arts

In my third section, Language Arts, I consider the words of certain philosophers and poets about either their own work, other poets, or about language in general. My rationale was to get a sense of poetry as a field in which language is always in flux, to create a context in which to situate Dickinson in this field, and to develop ways of understanding Dickinson's uniqueness as a poet from within this larger context.

David Abram (1996), an ecologist and philosopher, explores how language develops out of a connection between the sensing and perceiving body and the earth. He writes: "A living language is continually being made and remade, woven out of the silence by those who speak. . . . And this silence is that of our wordless participations, of our perceptual immersion in the depths of an animate, expressive world" (p. 84). He introduces the concept that language is nourished not only by the body but that it is the "whole of the sensuous world that provides the deep structure of language" (p. 85).

Abram supports my intuition to study Dickinson's connection to the earth and her body as an important element of her creativity. This idea of language as connected to the "sensuous world" (p. 85) is expressed in a slightly different way in the work of the poet Robert Bly (1991):

We often feel elation when reading Homer, Neruda, Dickinson, Vallejo, and Blake because the poet is following some arc of association that corresponds to the inner life of the objects he or she speaks of, for example, the association between the lids of eyes and the bark of stones. The associative paths are not private to the poet, but are somehow inherent in the universe. (p. 47)

In reading Bly's description I understand how poetry is a shared experience; that the reader is invited to participate in the experience of poetry; and that poetry is intimately connected to the earth and my body. Within this understanding, I have been able to better recognize and appreciate Dickinson's connection to the earth and her body as expressed through her poems and letters.

In order to increase my understanding of this notion that language is somehow connected to the body and the larger world, I felt I needed to reacquaint myself with my own sensing and perceiving body. I read *Sensory Awareness: Rediscovery of Experiencing Through the Workshops of Charlotte Selver*, by Charles V. W. Brooks (1986), as a way to bring a level of awareness to my sensory experiences, such as touching, tasting, smelling, hearing, and seeing. I was also encouraged in exploring my own sensory awareness, or what could be called embodiment, by reading the words of the poet Robert Pinsky (1998):

The medium of poetry is a human body: the column of air inside the chest, shaped into signifying sounds in the larynx and the mouth. In this sense, poetry is just as physical or bodily an art as dancing.

Moreover, there is a special intimacy to poetry because, in this idea of the art, the medium is not an expert's body, as when one goes to the ballet: in poetry, the medium is the audience's body. When I say to myself a poem by Emily

Dickinson or George Herbert, the artist's medium is my breath. The reader's breath and hearing embody the poet's words. This makes the art physical, intimate, vocal, and individual. (p. 8)

As I became more aware of my sensing and perceiving body, I became sensitized to descriptions of the creative process that included the idea of embodiment. In *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (1952), by the philosopher Jacques Maritain, I read another description of the creative process that includes the body as part of a totality of which poetry is an expression:

And because poetry is born in this root life where the powers of the soul are active in common, poetry implies an essential requirement of totality or integrity. Poetry is the fruit neither of the intellect alone, nor of imagination alone. Nay more, it proceeds from the totality of man, sense, imagination, intellect, love, desire, instinct, blood and spirit together. And the first obligation imposed on the poet is to consent to be brought back to the hidden place, near the center of the soul, where this totality exists in the state of a creative source. (p. 111)

Maritain's description explores the idea of totality and the different ways it may be expressed. Brooks (1986) views the body as a "dimension" (p. 9) of which the mind is a natural extension. In pointing out the origin of the word spirit as referring to the breath, he suggests a connection between body and soul, and asks, "is it not the flesh that breathes?" (p. 9). The idea of totality I began to develop into a way of understanding how Dickinson worked with her body, mind, and soul, and her connection to the earth, to create images of wholeness to guide her development (see, for example, poem # 142, "Cocoon above! Cocoon below!" early 1860).

The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of the Soul in Corporate America (1994) by the poet David Whyte, expresses Maritain's idea of totality in another way:

Inhabiting the full body, the long body, as many North American Native traditions say, with the voice, may be one of the great soul challenges of adult life. . . . A

courageous word itself is an act, and a word spoken with the whole body the literal wish to embody that act. (pp. 127-129)

Whyte essentially encourages me to attend more fully to Dickinson's words as acts, which she speaks and embodies. Whyte encourages me to question also how the idea of wholeness may have expressed through Dickinson's embodiment of her own body, voice, and words.

The philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey's (cited in Makkreel & Rodi, 1985) description of the creative process also contains this almost implicit idea of totality:

The poet's creative work always depends on the intensity of lived experience. Through his constitution, which maintains a strong resonance with the moods of life, even an impersonal notice in a newspaper about a crime, a dry report of a chronicler, or a strange, grotesque tale can be transformed into lived experience. Just as our body needs to breathe, our soul requires the fulfillment and expansion of its existence in the reverberations of emotional life. Our feeling of life desires to resound in tone, word, and image. (p. 59)

The different philosophers and poets in short express how poetry is created through an embodiment of the whole self and an immersion in the phenomenal world.

The relationship between self and world is also expressed in *What is Found There:*

Notebooks on Poetry and Politics by Adrienne Rich (1993). In describing her own creative process, Rich writes:

I have never forgotten that taste. In writing a poem, beginning perhaps with a painful dream, an image snatched from riding a bus, a phrase overheard in a bar, this scrap of private vision suddenly connected—and still connects—with a life greater than my own, an existence not merely personal, words coming together to reveal what was unknown to me until I wrote them. . . . Yes. And, in the act of writing, to feel our own "questions" meeting the world's "questions," to recognize how we are in the world and the world is in us— (pp. 25-26)

The philosophers and poets thus use language to describe similar experiences in totally unique ways and poetry, through its almost implicit awareness of the wholeness of the human being, encourages a kind of on-going experimentation with language. The

different philosophers and poets thus help me situate Dickinson, as a poet, as involved in experimenting with and exploring the limits of what she can say artfully and truthfully about her experiences through her poetry.

Richard Benvenuto (1983) informs my understanding of Dickinson's use of Webster's 1844 dictionary and encourages my use of this dictionary in my study of Dickinson's words. Benvenuto writes, "To know that information enriches the text of her poems, just as finding the enclosed words increases our understanding of how Dickinson's mind operated when she wrote poetry" (p. 54). In using Dickinson's 1844 dictionary I have essentially gone to the source of her meaning of particular words and have thus allowed for a closer approximation as to her meanings.

Susan Danly (1997) offers essays and pictures of artwork, created and written by different artists who have explored their connections with Dickinson's life and texts.

Each of the artists

More than interpret her life and poems, they translate—transporting an idea, an expression from the medium of the written word to other forms and other materials. In such a move, of course, everything changes. Materializing her poetics, these works make palpable a condition of writing that constantly fascinated Dickinson: her poetry is largely committed to the effort of providing abstract ideas and emotions with an apprehensible form. (p. 16)

In the examples of "materializing her poetics" (p. 16), I discovered that Dickinson's life and texts are open for interpretation and amenable to a wide variety of arts. Hence my own responses to Dickinson's life and texts may incorporate an artistic or creative response as a way of understanding her. For example, on February 27, 2002, I attended a concert in which Michael Tilson Thomas of the San Francisco Symphony had set some of Dickinson's poems to music. Renée Fleming, the renowned soprano, sang the songs, and combined with the music of Thomas, her particular tonality brought the poems alive,

underscoring the emphasis on different words and providing me with the opportunity to hear anew Dickinson's poems through the medium of music.

Adrienne Rich (1979b) explores the process of writing as re-vision, "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (p. 35). Rich writes, "if the imagination is to transcend and transform experience it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life you are living at that moment" (p. 43). Rich informs my understanding of Dickinson's creative process as an imaginative process of re-visioning herself through the creation of her poems and letters.

Psychology

My fourth section, Psychology, is divided into the subsections of Transpersonal Psychology, Women's Psychology, and Creativity Studies. My rationale for utilizing an interdisciplinary approach to the study of Dickinson's life and texts is based on the understanding that each approach offers and supplements the insights of the other approaches. Thus Transpersonal Psychology introduces the word transpersonal and self-actualization into the study of Dickinson's life. Women's psychology understands Dickinson's creative process in a relational way, with relationship being defined in accordance with Dickinson's experience of relationship. Creativity studies examine and support the position that Dickinson's creative process, which includes her identity as a poet, was central in her life, and in fact it was her life.

Transpersonal psychology. Denise Lajoie and S. I. Shapiro (1992) offer a succinct definition of Transpersonal Psychology: “Transpersonal psychology is connected with the study of humanity’s highest potential, and with the recognition, understanding, and realization of unitive, spiritual, and transcendent states of consciousness” (p. 91). This definition applies to my study of Dickinson’s life and texts through the recognition that she was living out of her highest potential through her creative process.

Dane Rudhyar (1983), offers another definition of the word transpersonal “to represent action which takes place through a person, but which originates in a center of activity existing beyond the level of personhood” (p. 219). This understanding of the word transpersonal may be applied to Dickinson’s life and texts through an understanding of how she conceived of herself as an agent of her creative process.

Rudhyar (1977) further suggests what he means by transpersonal:

By this term I do not refer to something “beyond” the human as much to what, operating “through” a human form, draws sensitive individuals toward a higher state of consciousness and a supersensual type of relationships in which the exclusiveness of the tribal and strictly personal level is replaced by the inclusiveness of pure and unwavering compassion. (p. 57)

In another book, Rudhyar (1982) explores his understanding of transpersonal living. He writes,

Think of transpersonal living as an unceasing *performance*—as activity through (*per*) a form. This form is the archetype of one’s essential being, which is inspirited by what I have called a spiritual Quality. . . . In the beginning of the universe, these Qualities are only potential. The destiny and purpose of the entire cosmos, and particularly of Man (archetypally speaking), is to actualize and give substance to them.

Human life, once it has reached the level of fully conscious, autonomous, and responsible personhood, should be understood and evaluated as a performance. (p. 38)

Rudhyar thus supports my intuition to study Dickinson's creative process as an expression of how she lived.

Abraham Maslow (1987), through his study of self-actualizing creative people, would probably include Dickinson as a self-actualizing creative person. If Transpersonal Psychology is the study of "humanity's highest potential" (Lajoie & Shapiro, 1992, p. 91), Maslow offers ways of understanding the self-actualizing creative person. Maslow's work informs my study of Dickinson through his recognition of the importance of identifying and studying in depth individuals who may offer new insights and information into the study of the self-actualizing creative person. Maslow writes,

Self-actualizing creativeness is "emitted," like radioactivity, and hits all of life, regardless of problems, just as a cheerful person emits cheerfulness without purpose or design or even consciousness. It is emitted like sunshine; it spreads all over the place; it makes some things grow (which are growable) and is wasted on rocks and other ungrowable things. (p. 167)

Maslow (1987) notes certain qualities that he has recognized in the self-actualizing person which he applies also to the self-actualizing creative person: "a special kind of perceptiveness. . . . These people can see the fresh, the raw, the concrete, the ideographic, as well as the generic, the abstract" (p. 160). Maslow notes his subjects "were relatively more spontaneous and expressive" (p. 160). Maslow has observed a certain kind of "second naiveté" (p. 160) comprised of an "'innocent' freedom of perception and 'innocent,' uninhibited spontaneity and expressiveness" (p. 160). Maslow also notes an "affinity for the unknown" (p. 161); Maslow writes, "Self-actualizing people are relatively unfrightened by the unknown, the mysterious, the puzzling, and often are positively attracted by it" (p. 161). Maslow also observed in his study of self-actualizing people a "resolution of dichotomies" (p. 161), such as "cognition versus

conation (heart versus head, wish versus fact) had become cognition ‘structured with’ conation, just as instinct and reason had come to the same conclusions” (p. 162). Maslow also noticed an “absence of fear” (p. 162) in his subjects; Maslow writes, “It was this approval and acceptance of their deeper selves that made it possible to perceive bravely the real nature of the world and also made their behavior more spontaneous” (p. 162). Maslow also includes his realization that his study of “peak experiences” (p. 163) strengthened his findings on self-actualizing people. Maslow states, “the main finding . . . was that an essential aspect of the peak experience is integration within the person and therefore between the person and the world” (p. 163).

Maslow (1968) also describes aspects of the “fully matured person (authentic, self-actualizing, individuated, productive, healthy)” (pp. 180-181), which informs my study of Dickinson’s self-actualizing creative process. Maslow writes, “the fully matured person . . . may be called autonomous, i.e., ruled by the laws of their own character rather than by the rules of society (insofar as these are different)” (pp. 180-181). Maslow notes these people turn “away from the outer world in order to listen to the inner voices . . . in which the path to health is via turning into the fantasies, the primary processes, that is, via the recovery of the intrapsychic in general” (p. 182). Another aspect of the fully maturing person Maslow notes as “archaic or mythological thinking” (p. 183), what he calls “primary process” (p. 182), which supports a “healthy” (p. 182) relationship to the unconscious.

Maslow (1971) further suggests studying the creative person in a holistic (p. 72) way. Maslow writes,

If you think of the person, the creative person, as being the essence of the problem, then what you are confronted with is the whole problem of

transformation of human nature, the transformation of the character, the full development of the whole person. (p. 74)

Maslow also defines what he means by transcendence, which may be applied to the study of the creative person. Maslow defines transcendence as “Transcendence in the metapsychological sense of transcending one’s own skin and body and bloodstream, as in identification with the B-Values so that they become intrinsic to the Self itself” (p. 269). Certain “Being-Values” or “characteristics of being” (p. 133) include, “Truth. . . . Goodness. . . . Beauty. . . . Wholeness” (pp. 133-134). In studying Dickinson’s self-actualizing creative process, I have included Maslow’s insights into the study of the self-actualizing creative person, as well as his definitions of transcendence and Being-Values.

Maslow (1971) also describes a specific kind of self-actualizer, the “transcending self-actualizer” (p. 283). I have found through my study of Dickinson’s life and texts that Maslow’s definition of the transcending self-actualizer may be more descriptive of Dickinson’s creative process than simply using the term self-actualizer. A primary difference between the two descriptions is the transcender’s tendency to consider “peak and plateau experiences . . . *the* most important things in their lives, the high spots, the validators of life, the most precious aspect of life” (p. 283). Maslow then describes in some detail 24 characteristics differentiating nontranscending self-actualizers and transcending self-actualizers, which may offer a way of further characterizing Dickinson as a transcending self-actualizer.

James Fadiman and Robert Frager (1994) note that “Self-actualization is not a static state. It is an ongoing process in which one’s capacities are fully, creatively, and joyfully utilized” (p. 471). In choosing to study Dickinson’s self-actualizing creative

process, I am recognizing that this was a lifelong process, expressed through her poems and letters, and not confined to the creation of her poems. Fadiman and Frager note that

Maslow found that self-actualizing people are dedicated to a vocation or a cause. Two requirements for growth seem to be commitment to something greater than oneself and success at one's chosen tasks. Creativity, spontaneity, courage, and hard work are all major characteristics of self-actualizing people. (p. 471)

Michael Piechowski (1978), in his self-actualization study of the writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, provides a way of applying Maslow's ideas about self-actualization to Dickinson's life. Piechowski clarifies what Maslow describes as transcendents as being in fact self-actualizing people who have peak experiences (p. 184). He writes:

The transcendents are more familiar and more at home with peak experiences and attach great significance to such experiences independent of their frequent or rare occurrence; the transcendents' existence is governed primarily by the Being needs of truth, beauty, justice, and perfection. (p. 184)

Piechowski, in situating Saint-Exupéry as a transcendent through a study of the traits of a self-actualizing person, including the experiences of truth and beauty, as noted in Maslow (1971, pp. 133-134), provides a model of studying a writer using both biographical and autobiographical sources.

Piechowski and Cynthia Tyska (1982), in their study of Eleanor Roosevelt as a self-actualizer, provide a model of examining a life using Maslow's ideas of self-actualization. Piechowski and Tyska note that in their decision to study Roosevelt "there has been virtually no study of self-actualization (SA) since Maslow first described it" (p. 98). Piechowski and Tyska further note the reason for their study is that "the logical implications of Maslow's proposal that self-actualizing people represent the ideal norm of mental health had been ignored in empirical studies" (p. 100). Essentially what Piechowski and Tyska learn is that Roosevelt was a self-actualizer who also exhibited

other traits, such as “Humility and Equitableness” (pp. 144-146), traits which Maslow did not mention. Thus Piechowski and Tyska add to an understanding of Maslow’s theory of self-actualization while encouraging further research using Maslow’s theories.

Ralph Metzner (1998), a transpersonal researcher, elucidates in his book what he calls “the underlying metaphoric structures—which have been variously referred to as archetypes, deep structures, or primordial images” (p. xi). Metzner calls this the “language of symbols” (p. xi) and writes, “It is the language we still use and understand—in dreams, in poetry and art, in the visions and voices that tell us of the sacred and the mystery” (p. xi). Dickinson is a voice of “the sacred and the mystery” (p. xi) for me, and Metzner’s book explores different transformative experiences, expressed as metaphors, that may be applied to Dickinson’s life and texts in order to understand her creative process.

Murray Stein (1998), a Jungian analyst, in his study of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, informs my study of Dickinson’s life and texts through studying the transformative symbol of the butterfly in Rilke’s life and texts. Stein writes,

Rilke had to suffer through the actual experience of his own transformation. Finally he was able to break into the Open, which for him is a term implying full realization of the imago. In the Open, butterflies can spread their wings and soar. It is the realm of complete freedom to be oneself in the deepest possible sense. To arrive at the Open, however, the poet must take one further step. He must journey *through* the land of the Laments and go on, alone. It is only through such radical isolation that this poet—a veritable pupa encased in a shell and enclosed in an impermeable cocoon—comes to his ultimate self-realization. (p. 37)

Stein writes of transformative images as “engaging and even arresting metaphors. To live through the transformational processes they often engender is a special experience” (p. 41). Stein suggests the transformative image may “capture the element of wholeness in an individual’s life and give it specific shape and direction” (p. 63). I have used this

understanding of the transformative image to guide my understanding of Dickinson's use of transformative images.

Michael Washburn (1988), a transpersonal researcher, also provides a model of transpersonal development, wherein Dickinson's life may be understood from a transpersonal perspective. Instead of calling an image a "transformative image" (Stein, 1998), Washburn calls the images "visionary symbols" (p. 222). Washburn writes,

Visionary symbols, rather than being incomplete concepts, particulars attempting to be universals, are instead completely instantiated concepts, universals succeeding in being particulars. . . . Visionary symbols are concrete exemplars or models. . . . Visionary symbols alone embody a genuine synthesis of the concrete and the abstract, of particularity and universality. (p. 222)

Through Dickinson's creations of visionary symbols, such as the butterfly, Washburn suggests Dickinson's creative capacity to consciously live out of such symbols.

Carl Jung (1972) informs my study of Dickinson's creative process by stating "the practice of art is a psychological activity and, as such, can be approached from a psychological angle. . . . Considered in this light, art . . . is a proper subject for psychology" (p. 65). Jung also writes, in contrasting his view of art with Freud's "medical psychoanalysis" (p. 70),

In order to do justice to a work of art, analytical psychology must rid itself entirely of medical prejudice; for a work of art is not a disease, and consequently requires a different approach from the medical one. A doctor naturally has to seek out the causes of a disease in order to pull it up by the roots, but just as naturally the psychologist must adopt exactly the opposite attitude towards a work of art. Instead of investigating its typically human determinants, he will inquire first of all into its meaning, and will concern himself with its determinants only in so far as they enable him to understand it more fully. (p. 71)

Jung informs my study of Dickinson in my attempts to "inquire first of all into its meaning" (p. 71), to view Dickinson's creative process as a healthy response, a way for her to grow into her wholeness as an artist.

Jung (1979) near the end of his life wrote a portrait of himself that in many ways resembles Dickinson's coming to live and write from the soul. Jung writes,

At Bollingen I am in the midst of my true life, I am most deeply myself. . . . At times I feel as if I am spread out over the landscape and inside things, and am myself living in every tree, in the splashing of the waves, in the clouds and the animals that come and go, in the procession of the seasons. There is nothing in the Tower that has not grown into its own form over the decades, nothing with which I am not linked. Here everything has its history, and mine; here is space for the spaceless kingdom of the world's and the psyche's hinterland.—I have done without electricity, and tend the fireplace and stove myself. Evenings, I light the old lamps. There is no running water, and I pump the water from the well. I chop the wood and cook the food. (p. 192)

Gerhard Adler (1963), an eminent Jungian analyst, suggests the “artist's growing concern with fantasy, associations, dream images, and symbols, is an attempt to take the inner world as seriously as the outer world of objects, and to give it equal if not greater importance” (p. 8). He positions the “genuine artist . . . intuitively ahead of his time” (p. 7) and concerned with an orientation toward the “beyond” (p. 8). A central idea of Adler's which may be applied to a study of Dickinson is in her orientation to her “inner center” (p. 8), and in her orientation to the “beyond” (p. 8). In the artist's “concentration on inner images and events, and their insistence of the necessity of inner experience” (p. 10), Adler notes the artist engages in a “method of healing” (p. 10) called “analysis” (p. 10) or “Jung's analytical psychology” (p. 11). Interestingly, Adler situates Jung's analytical psychology as “even though directed toward the sickness of the individual, it goes beyond the bounds of a pure therapy of the neuroses and expands into a cultural psychology, in which ‘sickness’ is a symbol and starting point for wider insights” (p. 11). A major aspect of Jungian analysis is “a process of inner education . . . to see through the foreground aspect of the symptom to the deeper suffering that lies hidden behind” (pp. 11-12). This suffering is essentially calling, Adler writes, “the individual back to himself

and opening the way into the unconscious” (p. 12). Adler thus supports my view of understanding Dickinson’s creative process as an orientation inwardly, toward her unconscious and soul, and outwardly, toward the beyond. In this process, I contend, Dickinson engaged in a healing process through her reorientation and use of metaphors and symbols.

Hillevi Ruumet (1997), a Jungian psychotherapist, offers a way of understanding Dickinson’s life from a transpersonal perspective through her integrated model of psychospiritual development. Ruumet writes, “This article presents a model of psychospiritual development that describes the psyche/spirit connection as an ongoing relationship in which both have to grow in tandem to accommodate the unique life tasks that each soul faces” (p. 7). Ruumet goes on to write her “Helix Model . . . is, so to speak, a ‘voice from the trenches’ rather than an intellectually formulated theory. Spirit embodies; all the rest derives from that” (p. 7). In applying Ruumet’s model to a study of Dickinson’s creative process, I essentially situate Dickinson as living more and more out of the heart or “Aloha” center in creating a “‘home base’” (p. 17) through her dwelling in language. I also understand Dickinson as living out of the “Star” (p. 17) center, as in following her “‘Star of Destiny’” (p. 17), and the “Sophia” (p. 19) center, wherein the “dichotomy of body and spirit, mind and matter, sacred and profane disappears, and all polarities are reconciled into Oneness even as they still also manifest in duality” (p. 19). Ruumet’s descriptions of the “Star,” “Aloha” (p. 17), and “Sophia” (p. 19) centers are particularly apt when compared with Dickinson’s own descriptions of her “business” as a poet: “My Business is Circumference” (letter # 268, to T. W. Higginson, July 1862), and

“My business is to love. . . . My business is to sing” (letter # 269, to Dr. and Mrs. J. G. Holland, summer 1862). Ruomet writes,

This movement toward Self-expression that flows from the truth of our Being (as opposed to ego-expression) is fueled by divine energy. Its goal is to manifest, in our life and in our creative work, that embodiment of spirit which we call “I” and create our unique, personal soul expression in the world, as a conscious act of devotion to the Divine. (p. 17)

Charles Tart (1997), as a transpersonal researcher, informs my study of Dickinson from a transpersonal perspective when he writes, “Transpersonal psychology rests on an understanding that a ‘successful’ spiritual life needs a solid basis in deep experience” (p. 48). Tart writes that an essential ingredient of the transpersonal may be an experience of God that “transcends your ordinary self, that shakes you to your foundation” (p. 48). Tart supports my study of Dickinson through an essential understanding of the importance of how experiences of a spiritual nature may in fact shake the very foundations of the ordinary self (p. 48).

Ken Wilber (1990), a leading transpersonal researcher, outlines his ideas about art when he writes, “art is not just a way of doing, it is fundamentally a way of knowing” (p. 201). Wilber writes,

Men and women possess at least three different modes of knowing: the eye of flesh, which discloses the material, concrete, and sensual world . . . ; the eye of mind, which discloses the symbolic, conceptual, and linguistic world . . . ; and the eye of contemplation, which discloses the spiritual, transcendental, and transpersonal world. (p. 201)

Wilber then asks, “When it comes to a critical theory of art, what eye, or eyes, is the particular artist using?” Another question Wilber poses is “How competent is the artist in depicting or evoking a particular phenomenon?” (p. 202). If the artist is using the “eye of contemplation” (p. 201), Wilber notes that “art, then, becomes not just technical skill, not

just observation and execution, not even just creativity, but a method of spiritual growth and development on the part of the artists themselves” (p. 207). Wilber’s questions and description of the artist engaged in spiritual growth and utilizing the “three different modes of knowing” (p. 201) may be applied to an understanding of Dickinson’s creative process.

Carl Rogers (1959) offers insights into my study of Dickinson’s life and texts through his definition of creative process:

My definition, then, of the creative process is that it is the emergence in action of a novel relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life on the other. (p. 71)

Rogers writes of the creative act, “In almost all the products of creation we note a selectivity, or emphasis, an evidence of discipline, an attempt to bring out the essence” (p. 77). Thus Rogers informs my study of Dickinson’s creative process as a way for her to bring out her essence through the “emergence in action of a novel relational product” (p. 71), which I define as her poems and letters, the response of her interaction between self, world, and other.

Women’s psychology. Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule (1986) inform my understanding of women’s psychology, and thereby my study of Dickinson, through the exploration of how the “development of a sense of voice, mind, and self” (p. 18) are intertwined. Belenky et al. write:

By telling us about their voice and silences, by revealing to us how much they could hear and learn from the ordinary and everyday (“hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat”), women told us about their views of the world and their place in it. (p. 19)

Belenky et al. frame my own work as the understanding of Dickinson's creative process within the context of her development of "voice, mind, and self" (p. 18).

Carol Gilligan (1993), similarly, writes about "women's psychological development as centering on a struggle for connection" (p. xv). Gilligan introduces the term "relational voice" (p. xv), and studies "how the voice works in the body, in language, and also psychologically" (p. xv). Gilligan informs my understanding of voice as a connection "with breath and sound, psychologically with feelings and thoughts, and culturally with a rich resource of language" (p. xvi). A study of Dickinson's rich source of language and her development of her relational voice, may provide a way of understanding how her creative process developed within her body, through her language and relationships.

Jean Baker Miller and Irene Pierce Stiver (1997) would write that the "path away from mutual connection, and simultaneously away from the truth of one's own experience, is the path to psychological problems" (p. 81). In light of this insight it is interesting to note how Dickinson's creative process could be understood as a way of attending to the truth of her own experiences, and therefore a healing path.

Janet Surrey (1991), through her introduction of "The Self-in-Relation" (p. 51) model of women's development, has been instrumental in helping me to define what self and relationship may mean in Dickinson's life, and how relationship may contribute potentially to Dickinson's creative process. Surrey writes,

The inquiry into the nature of self as an organizing principle in human development has been a fundamental aspect of psychological, philosophical, and spiritual investigation. . . . For present purposes I will propose a working definition of self: a construct useful in describing the organization of a person's experience and construction of reality that illuminates the purpose and directionality of her or his behavior. (pp. 51-52)

Surrey (1991) positions the self in relationship through her understanding that “the self-in-relation involves the recognition that, for women, the primary experience of self is relational, that is, the self is organized and developed in the context of important relationships” (p. 52). In light of Surrey’s working definitions, it is interesting to explore how Dickinson defined herself as poet, and how her identity as a poet was developed in the context of certain relationships in her life. Exploring the nature of Dickinson’s relationships, while broadening the definition of relationship to include what Dickinson means by relationship, is an important way of establishing how Dickinson discovered her-self in relationship.

Creativity studies. Sigmund Freud (1981), in his study of the life of Leonardo da Vinci, informs my study of Dickinson’s life through his examination of Leonardo’s tendency to play “even as an adult” (p. 127). Thus Leonardo displayed a “playful delight in harmlessly concealing things and giving them ingenious disguises” (p. 127). Freud follows this playful strain in Leonardo’s life and suggests that as he grew older, “Leonardo’s play-instinct vanished . . . into the activity of research which represented the latest and highest expansion of his personality” (pp. 128-129). Thus Freud conceptualizes Leonardo’s highest expression of his personality as a development and continuation of his childhood delight in play. By incorporating Leonardo’s playful side, Freud prompts me to attend to aspects of Dickinson’s creative process, such as play, as not only a form of childlike play, but in its more serious aspects as understood in her development of her poetic craft.

Edward Edinger (1965) informs my study of Dickinson's life from a transpersonal perspective when he writes in his study of Ralph Waldo Emerson,

One of the best ways to promote an understanding of the new psychological view is to compare its discoveries with the intuitions of the wise men and poets of the past and thus to throw new light on old and familiar material. Such a procedure serves two purposes. It holds up to general view the new *weltanschauung* by demonstrating its application to a particular subject matter, and at the same time it contributes to the long-range process of assimilating the old culture to the new orientation. (pp. 78-79)

Edinger thus quotes liberally from Emerson's works throughout his article and gives interpretations of his works in light of Jungian analytical psychology. Edinger writes, in this respect, "The psychology whose aim is to make man conscious of his wholeness must itself encompass the whole" (p. 78). Thus I understand if I want to understand Dickinson in a whole way, I must develop an approach to the study of her life and texts that seeks to understand her as a whole human being.

Otto Rank (1989), in his book *Art and Artist*, writes of a certain kind of artist, one who is able to evoke a sense of oneness through his or her creations:

This very essence of a man, his soul, which the artist puts into his work and which is represented by it, is found again in the work of the enjoyer, just as the believer finds his soul in religion or in God, with whom he feels himself to be one. . . . The self-renunciation which the artist feels when creating is relieved when he finds himself again in his accomplished work, and the self-renunciation which raises the enjoyer above the limitations of his individuality becomes . . . the *feeling of oneness* with the soul living in the work of art, a greater and higher entity. . . . They have yielded up their mortal ego for a moment, fearlessly and even joyfully, to receive it back in the next, the richer for this universal feeling. (pp. 109-110)

Rank thus positions the artist in his psychology in relation to what he calls the "creative type" as representative of the "new human type" (p. 431):

In place of his own self the artist puts his objectified ego into his work, but though he does not save his subjective mortal ego from death, he yet withdraws himself from real life. And the creative type who can renounce this protection by art and can devote his whole creative force to life and the formation of life will be the

first representative of the new human type, and in return for this renunciation will enjoy, in personality-creation and expression, a greater happiness. (pp. 430-431)

Rank essentially helps me position Dickinson as representative of the “new human type” (p. 431) through her living out of her self-actualizing creative process.

D. W. Winnicott (1989), similarly, writes in his definition of creativity and the creative person:

Whatever definition we arrive at, it must include the idea that life is worth living or not, according to whether creativity is or is not a part of an individual person's living experience.

To be creative a person must exist and have a feeling of existing, not in conscious awareness, but as a basic place to operate from.

Creativity is then the doing that arises out of being. It indicates that he who is, is alive. (p. 39)

Winnicott continues, “In creative living you or I find that everything we do strengthens the feeling that we are alive, that we are ourselves. One can look at a tree (not necessarily at a picture) and look creatively” (p. 43). In applying Winnicott's definition of creativity and creative living to Dickinson's life, I may describe her as truly living into her creativity. Elsewhere Winnicott notes, “Each of us has his or her own private world, and, moreover, we learn to share experiences by use of all degrees of cross-identifications” (p. 54). Essentially Dickinson may be viewed according to Winnicott as sharing her world through her poems and letters.

Thomas Ogden (1989) describes what may be termed a creative process when he writes about the space between reality and fantasy. He writes:

Reality does not supersede fantasy any more than the conscious mind replaces the unconscious mind in the course of development. Rather, reality enters into a mutually defining and enriching relationship with fantasy. It is only in the space between reality and fantasy created in this way that subjectivity, personal meaning, symbol formation, and imagination become possible. (p. 117)

Ogden provides a way of understanding Dickinson's creative process as a dialectical process between reality and fantasy, wherein she was able to create meaning and symbols, while using her imagination.

Rollo May (1980), in his book *The Courage to Create*, positions the creative act as a courageous act when he quotes from the novelist James Joyce, "Welcome. O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race" (p. 20). Dickinson may be understood as essentially forging her creative spirit through an encounter with her soul (see poem # 401, "Dare you see a Soul at the 'White Heat'?" summer 1862). May writes of the encounter with experience as the "basis for all creativity" (p. 20); he positions the artist as authentic if he or she offers something of value to human life (p. 20).

Similarly, Erik Erikson (1964) asks, "What do we mean when we speak of the recognition of and the adjustment to reality?" (p. 162). Erikson defines what he means by "reality" and compares it with "actuality":

Reality, then (to repeat this), is the world of phenomenal experience, perceived with a minimum of distortion and with a maximum of customary validation agreed upon in a given state of technology and culture; while *actuality* is the world of participation, shared with other participants with a minimum of defensive maneuvering and a maximum of mutual activation. (pp. 164-165)

Following Erikson's ideas, it could be understood that Dickinson, even though limited in terms of her day in what she could do outwardly, was able to go within herself and actualize her potentials through her creative process. Dickinson, in essence, through the exploration of her inner self, found a language that helped her connect with others—and even if she did not overtly publish her poems, she continued to write and included many poems in her letters that she shared with others.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996) provides a foundation for my study of

Dickinson's creative process as a poet when he writes:

Fragile thoughts and feelings are transformed by words into concrete thoughts and emotions. In this sense, poetry and literature allow the creation of experiences that we would otherwise not have access to; they take our lives to higher levels of complexity. (p. 238)

In choosing to study Dickinson's identity as a poet, I am drawing upon

Csikszentmihalyi's study of writers, when he writes, "All of them feel that it is writing that gives them their identity; that if they could not write, their life would lose much of its meaning" (p. 239). Csikszentmihalyi thus prompts me to consider how Dickinson's identity as a poet and life are intertwined.

Howard Gardner (1993), through his study of creativity, provides a portrait of the exemplary creator (E.C.), which may be applied to an understanding of Dickinson's creative process:

E.C. discovers a problem area or realm of special interest, one that promises to take the domain into uncharted waters. This is a highly charged moment. At this point E.C. becomes isolated from her peers and must work mostly on her own. She senses that she is on the verge of a breakthrough that is as yet little understood, even by her. Surprisingly, at this crucial moment, E.C. craves both cognitive and affective support, so that she can retain her bearings. Without such support, she might well experience some kind of breakdown. (p. 361)

Gardner (1997) provides further insight into the study of the creative person when he writes, "I believe that human beings cannot develop without some sense of possibility, some landmarks by which one can judge one's own growth or stagnation" (p. 138). This understanding may be applied to Dickinson's creative process by studying her process of becoming a poet.

Shaun McNiff (1998) informs my understanding of distilling, which may be understood as an aspect of Dickinson's creative process, when he writes:

All forms of creative perception extract essential features from nature. Artists strive to get to the heart of life, to the core of matter, and they are known as much for what they omit from their interpretation of nature as for what they include. (p. 100)

McNiff's insights on distilling I have applied to my understanding of Dickinson's poem "This was a Poet—" (poem # 446, late 1862). As Dickinson describes this as an important part of her poetic process, I explore this term as a major component of Dickinson's creative process.

Jill Mellick (1996) writes, "many dreams are not stories at all but natural plays, paintings, poems" (p. 23). Mellick encourages me to approach my understanding of Dickinson's creative process as I would a dream when she writes, "The more I read dream theory, the more convinced I am that opting for a single approach to dreams usually excludes other valuable approaches" (p. 25). Mellick encourages me to use "many lenses through which to view your dreams" (p. 29), in this case, as applied to my understanding of Dickinson's creative process. In using a Tewa word "po-wa-ha, which translates as 'water-wind-breath,' the creative force that moves through the waters and the earth" (p. 41), to define creativity as "the spirit of life itself" (p. 41), Mellick informs my understanding of Dickinson's creative process as a central component of her life.

Jane Piirto (1998) informs my understanding of Dickinson's creative process through understanding creativity in the root meaning of the word and in a transpersonal sense. Piirto writes, "Here we see creativity directly tied to its earliest root meaning, the creation (i.e., God, or earth itself) and the process of creativity as recapturing the ancient unity of all creatures, including humans, with all life" (pp. 66-67).

Narrative Studies

Tell all the truth but tell it slant—
 Success in Circuit lies
 Too bright for our infirm Delight
 The Truth's superb surprise
 As Lightning to the Children eased
 With explanation kind
 The Truth must dazzle gradually
 Or every man be blind—

(poem # 1263, 1872)

In studying how I may develop a narrative approach to Dickinson's life and texts, I was seeking a way to hear and tell the unfolding story of her creative process. I was asking, essentially, what is a transpersonal narrative and how may I apply this to Dickinson's life and texts? I decided to approach each poem as resplendent in its own way, for each contains a ray of truth; taken together, the poems and letters may reveal some truths about Dickinson's life.

Yet what is true or being truthful? Is it, as Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) states, "being in the in-between of all regimes of truth" (p. 121)? Minh-ha writes:

Poetry, Aristotle said, is truer than history. Storytelling as literature (narrative poetry) must then be truer than history. If we rely on history to tell us what happened at a specific time and place, we can rely on the story to tell us not only what might have happened, but also what is happening at an unspecified time and place. (p. 120)

What a vantage point, Minh-ha seems to be saying, to speak from a time and place unspecified of the truths of one's life that do not fit any one idea of truth! "An oracle and bringer of joy, the storyteller is the living memory of her time, her people. She composes on life but does not lie, for composing is not imagining, fancying, or inventing" (Minh-ha, p. 125). Expanding my conception of what is true and being truthful allows me to hear what Michael White and David Epston (1990) call "aspects of experience that fall

outside of the dominant story” (p. 15), that is, unspecified experiences that fall outside of how a life is ordinarily understood. In this way, I can view Dickinson, as a poet, as someone who creates her own narrative—composes her own life. Mary Catherine Bateson (1990) writes about the improvisational art of “composing a life” (p. 29):

A good meal, like a poem or a life, has a certain balance and diversity, a certain coherence and fit. As one learns to cope in the kitchen, one no longer duplicates whole meals but rather manipulates components and the way they are put together. The improvised meal will be different from the planned meal, and certainly riskier, but rich with the possibility of delicious surprise. Improvisation can be either a last resort or an established way of evoking creativity. Sometimes a pattern chosen by default can become a path of preference. (p. 4)

Dickinson may be viewed as creating a kind of self-narrative, composing—out of her life experiences—poems and letters, that when read together reflect her improvisational art of composing her life. White and Epston (1990) would call this process creating a “story or self-narrative”:

In striving to make sense of life, persons face the task of arranging their experiences of events in sequences across time in such a way as to arrive at a coherent account of themselves and the world around them. Specific experiences of events of the past and present, and those that are predicted to occur in the future, must be connected in a lineal sequence to develop this account. This account can be referred to as a story or self-narrative. (p. 10)

Of course, Dickinson’s narrative does not follow a “lineal sequence” (White & Epston, 1990, p. 10), per se, as the above poem suggests, “Tell all the truth but tell it slant—/ Success in Circuit lies” (poem # 1263, 1872). As a transpersonal researcher, I have struggled with how not to impose a lineal narrative structure on Dickinson’s experiences. This has prompted me to explore unconventional ways of hearing the breadth and depth of Dickinson’s voice as told through the texts of her poems and letters. For instance, when I read in Dickinson “a Pen has so many inflections and a Voice but one” (letter # 470, to T. W. Higginson, August 1876), I became aware of how “a

narrative can never encompass the full richness of our lived experience” (White & Epston, p. 11). In fact, because the narrative can be read in so many ways, with so many inflections, it is difficult to know for certain the exact meaning of the words. The human voice that would seem to pull it all together, pronouncing words in accordance with the lived experience, is absent—or if not absent, at least contained in the many layers of meaning which the narrative produces. I found this sentiment echoed in the work of Mary-Ellen Jacobs, Petra Munro, and Natalie Adams (1995):

Like Austen, Brontë, and Dickinson, contemporary women who participate in a patriarchal culture ascribe multiple—seen and unseen—layers of meaning to their lives. . . . Resisting conventional notions of objectivity, narrative research seeks to restore the complex, storied nature of human existence. . . . Only by recognizing the multivalences, ambiguities, and contradictions threaded through our life stories can women learn to reread the layered meanings of their lives, to question—and subvert—taken-for-granted patriarchal norms. (pp. 327-342)

I have sought to hear, as Jacobs et al. (1995) suggest, “the complex, storied nature of human existence” (p. 329) in Dickinson’s texts. If I read Dickinson herself as composing her own life through reflecting upon and reading her own lived experience, I can begin to hear her texts as expressions of the multidimensional quality of her lived experience. It is within this broader perspective of hearing that I have been able to discern in Dickinson’s texts what may be termed a transpersonal narrative, what William Braud and Rosemarie Anderson (1998) call “stories of spiritual experiences” (p. 24). Thus I understand Dickinson’s poem “I dwell in Possibility—” (poem # 466, late 1862) as an expression of her transpersonal narrative, i.e., the poem expresses her coming to dwell in possibility, suggesting the expansiveness of poetry as lived out in her life. Braud and Anderson write, “the more we can imagine ourselves experiencing the ineffable, the more possible the experiences seem. . . . Through the telling of stories, a more fully enriched

spiritual awareness seems not only possible but more probable” (p. 24). As transpersonal researchers, Braud and Anderson suggest studying how “spiritual experiences affect personal and consensual realities to support their validity” (p. 24). Thus Dickinson’s perception through her poem of dwelling in possibility may actually support her continued dwelling in possibility.

Jean Houston (1996) gives voice to a certain kind of narrative, which may be defined as a transpersonal narrative. Houston writes:

This autobiography is what I have come to call a learning narrative, organized not around linear chronology but around a series of themes and the events that opened up understanding of those themes and have come to symbolize them. Learning is not linear, for it involves the combination and recombination of insights in reckless disregard of sequence, so that the past is reconfigured by growth—and perhaps only lies flat on the page when growth has ceased. (p. x)

Houston (1996) writes, “It is our privilege and our particular challenge to witness and assist a new story coming into being” (p. 135). One way of doing this, Houston writes, is “to see beyond circumstances into an individual’s essential self. . . . I believe that what we think of as greatness is something innate to humans seeking to move beyond a limited or outmoded condition and pushing us beyond our old edges” (p. 118). I have applied Houston’s understanding of hearing a new story coming into being through attempting to see and hear Dickinson’s essential or transpersonal self.

The work of Jeanne Shutes and Jill Mellick (1996) encourages me to examine “how a narrative is structured reflects the belief system of the narrator” (p. 226). In seeking to understand Dickinson’s life and texts from a transpersonal perspective, I recognize, as Shutes and Mellick do, that “influences on narrative structure are philosophical, cultural, and personal” (p. 226). Shutes and Mellick inform my own work

through the recognition that how I structure my study depends in large part on how I understand and interpret Dickinson's life and texts.

Victor Turner (1986) views meaning as created both by the writer in the expression of experiences, and by the reader in the reading of these experiences. Turner writes, "Meaning arises when we try to put what culture and language have crystallized from the past together with what we feel, wish, and think about our present point in life" (p. 33). Thus in applying Turner's understanding of meaning to a study of Dickinson's narrative, it is through meaning—both composed by Dickinson and understood by me in the present—that her narrative as expressed through her poems and letters may be understood.

Edward Bruner (1986), similarly, underscores the importance of understanding meaning. Bruner sees the writer and reader as "active agents in the historical process who construct their own world" (p. 12). From the writer's point of view, the "everyday is transformed into the extraordinary through narration" (p. 17). From the reader's point of view,

Meaning is always in the present, in the here-and-now, not in such past manifestations as historical origins or the author's intentions. Nor are there silent texts, because once we attend to the text, giving voice or expression to it, it becomes a performed text, active and alive. (pp. 11-12)

I have applied Bruner's understanding of meaning to my study of Dickinson through the recognition that I may attempt to understand Dickinson in her historical context, yet I meet her in the present, in my participation, and performance of her texts.

Method Explorations

In my sixth section I explore the different resources I have drawn upon in order to develop my qualitative methods of psychobiography and hermeneutics. I have divided this section into four subsections: Qualitative, Psychobiography, Hermeneutics, and Transpersonal. Each subsection accurately reflects my process of choosing texts in order to develop a method that addresses my study of Dickinson's life and texts.

Qualitative. John Creswell (1994) provides useful information that suggests a design for the final project of my qualitative approach. Creswell writes:

The final project will be a construction of the informant's experiences and the meanings he attaches to them. This will allow readers to vicariously experience the challenges he encounters and provide a lens through which readers can view the subject's world. (p. 169)

Yvonna Lincoln's (1995) article encourages me to examine my criteria for my qualitative research, while suggesting that an emerging criterion in qualitative research is "relational, that is, they recognize and validate relationships between the inquirer and those who participate in the inquiry" (p. 278).

O. Fred Donaldson (1993) encourages me to play in my research—to develop a playful approach to Dickinson's life and texts. Donaldson defines play as engaging in "a mystery that is beyond the power of language to divulge" (p. xiv), wherein play is comprised of "curiosity, trust, resilience, awareness" (p. 31). Through applying these qualities of play, I become an apprentice, filled with curiosity about that which I do not know; I begin to trust that I am attending to Dickinson's life and texts, and in this way I enter into a relationship with Dickinson through her texts. In exercising my resilience, I expand my ability to be flexible and open to information and ways of knowing that

resembles a playful approach to mystery. Awareness is what allows me to record those instances or that quality of play that informs my research process.

Renata Tesch (1990) provides an important point that informs my qualitative design. Tesch writes, “Attending to data includes a reflective activity that results in a set of analytical notes that guide the process” (p. 95). If I am attending to the data, Tesch writes, this may “provide accountability” (p. 95).

Psychobiography. William Runyan (1982) provides certain psychobiographical guidelines that may be applied to the study of Dickinson’s life. In studying Dickinson’s self-actualizing creative process, I am essentially engaging in an idiographic study of Dickinson’s life, with idiographic defined as “what is particular to the individual” (p. 169). This approach to the study of Dickinson’s life allows me to develop my own method and interpret the results of my study in an idiographic fashion. The results of my idiographic study may be interpreted, according to Runyan’s guidelines, as “(1) what is true of all human beings; (2) what is true of groups of human beings, distinguished by race, sex, social class, historical cohort, and so on; and (3) what is true of individual human beings” (p. 169). Another guideline that Runyan introduces is the importance of utilizing “the most extensive body of evidence . . . incorporating the variety of relevant perspectives,” (p. 37).

Norman Denzin (1997) offers insights into the study of lives when he writes, “Qualitative research, however, is back where it started—seeking to find a space and a voice for those studied. That space will never be found as long as stable observers insist on producing stable pictures of reality” (p. 45). Denzin views the self as “a constantly

shifting process” (p. 38), so that the reader of the text is studying “a mobile consciousness recording its relationship to an ever-changing external world” (p. 46). In choosing to study Dickinson’s creative process, I am seeking to give a space and voice to a process in which her self was constantly in process, as Denzin writes, “a mobile consciousness” (p. 46).

Erik Erikson (1956, 1969) provides ways of studying Dickinson’s life through the examples of his studies of the extraordinary individual. Erikson’s (1956) study of George Bernard Shaw suggests the utilization of Dickinson’s own words as a way of understanding her creative process; and Erikson’s (1969) study of Mahatma Gandhi supports an examination of both the personal and historical influences of Gandhi’s life. Erikson writes:

From the moment in January of 1915 when Gandhi set foot on a pier reserved for important arrivals in Bombay, he behaved like a man who knew the nature and the extent of India’s calamity and that of his own fundamental mission. A mature man of middle age has not only made up his mind as to what, in the various compartments of life, he does and does not care for, he is also firm in his vision of what he will and can take care of. He takes as his baseline what he irreducibly is and reaches out for what only he can, and therefore, must do. (p. 255)

In applying Erikson’s insights of Gandhi to a study of Dickinson’s life, I am seeking to illuminate that moment in her life when she made up her mind as to what she did and did not care for; what she must do. I center this moment on Dickinson’s process of becoming a poet, and what poet means to her. In this way I seek to understand how Dickinson sought to actualize her potentials (Erikson, 1964, pp. 164-165) through her creative process, or her self-actualizing creative process (Maslow, 1987, p. 160).

Erikson (1975) also provides a guideline for the study of lives, when he writes:

Thus, we once more come up against that circular chronology, which forces us to begin with Gandhi’s general situation and state of mind at the time when he wrote

the autobiography for purposes both political and spiritual. Only then can we follow him back into his childhood, as seen from that vantage point. And only in having established a number of themes reaching from the dim past of his origins to the days of historical greatness can we begin to guess what the Ahmedabad event meant to him. After that, we can begin to attend to those who joined him in that event, and primarily to the millowner, who, in fact, found himself joined in battle with him in his own domain. (p. 120)

Erikson informs my study of Dickinson through his study of Gandhi's life through the intention of understanding the importance of a particular event in Gandhi's life, an event that ultimately extended beyond his life, touching the lives of others.

Robert Lifton (1974) informs my study of Dickinson's life through his method of psychobiography that situates an individual within a "shared-themes approach" (p. 31). Lifton suggests that a study of an individual is best conducted through situating that individual within a larger cultural-historical context, which includes understanding the individual within the present context of the researcher.

Robert Coles (1974) suggests, through his study of lives, attending to "Lives, as opposed to problems" (p. 171). Coles informs my study of Dickinson's life through my focus on her creative process as essentially a self-actualizing creative process. Coles also encourages a method that calls upon the researcher to attend to what "I feel inside me, . . . maybe in my bones rather than my head" (p. 171).

Hermeneutics. I have also surveyed the scope of hermeneutics in order to create a viable method that I may apply to my study of Dickinson's texts. I began my study of hermeneutics with an understanding of the Greek God Hermes. Karl Kerényi's (1996) approach to hermeneutics was through Hermes, "the inventor of language" (p. 145).

Kerényi (1996) writes:

Hermes is hermeneus (“interpreter”), a linguistic mediator, and this not merely on verbal grounds. By nature he is the begetter and bringer of something light-like, a clarifier, God of ex-position and interpretation which seeks and in his spirit is led forward to the deepest mystery. (pp. 145-146)

Charles Boer writes about Kerényi’s approach to hermeneutics in the preface to

Kerényi’s (1996) book:

One of his methods was not to stand upon the texts alone, but to go to the sites, to feel the invisibles in the place, to look carefully at images. He was a reader of images, and not mere philology. For instance, once Hillman remembers his saying that the way to grasp Dionysos was to lie down in a vineyard under the staked vines in hottest summer and see the shimmering heat glowing off the ripening bunches of swelling grapes. (p. 19)

Thus Kerényi (1996) could define Hermes as “a ‘way of being’ who is at the same time an ‘idea’” (p. 32). Kerényi’s approach to hermeneutics informs my own as a journey of understanding Dickinson’s life and texts, which has involved visiting the grounds—walking the land—of her house and town.

Richard Palmer (1969) informs my method of hermeneutics by encouraging me to find a “means of being led by the phenomenon through a way of access genuinely belonging to it” (p. 128). Incorporating the whole self, body, mind, and soul, as a way of knowing, into a method of hermeneutics has become for me an imperative because I recognize as perhaps Kerényi (1996) does that understanding is a way of being and an idea (p. 32) involving the whole human being. Thus I have found that if I engage my whole self, I have found a way through myself of being “led by the phenomenon” (p. 128), i.e., Dickinson’s life and texts.

In seeking to develop a language to write about the body as a way of knowing I was first drawn to *The Word’s Body: An Incarnational Aesthetic of Interpretation* by Alla Bozarth-Campbell (1979). Bozarth-Campbell writes: “All literature exists only within the

human body, mind, and feeling spirit, for as the primary metaphor of this book indicates, the word exists only as it comes alive in our flesh” (p. 1). Bozarth-Campbell also stresses the fact that her “study does not take an antirational position but seeks to build upon the rational and conceptual approaches to literature and interpretation by adding the dimension of the bodily and the pararational” (p. 6). Rosemarie Anderson (2000) would include this bodily dimension of knowing in what she calls “intuitive inquiry” (p. 31), which incorporates both objective and subjective ways of knowing. H. P. Rickman (1988) phrases for me what is perhaps the clearest summation of what hermeneutics strives to encompass: “The sustained effort to analyze and interpret the interconnected totality of our experience, which is life, is the ultimate aim of hermeneutics” (p. 137).

I have also discovered that this bodily dimension may suggest a spiritual dimension. I discovered this in my reading of *Hermeneutics: Ancient & Modern* by Gerald Bruns (1992). Bruns writes, “Do not think of yourself as an analytical spectator situated outside the text; think of yourself as belonging to the text” (p. 116). This way of reading allows the text to surround us, fill “the space we inhabit, take it over and ourselves in the bargain” (p. 126). The goal of this way of reading is to experience text (p. 127), and differs from reading a text in a critical way. Bruns writes, “in a critical reading one reflects oneself out of the space of the text and places it in a space of one’s own, before one’s gaze, under one’s scrutiny—makes it, literally, a suspect” (p. 126). The “space of the text” (p. 126) that Bruns mentions, in my understanding, includes a complete involvement of body, mind, and soul, in order to more fully relate with the text.

Josef Bleicher (1980) provides a contextual framework in which to understand how hermeneutics figures in the study of the experiences of another, which may also be

applied to the study of textual analysis and provide the basis for a psychological study.

Bleicher writes:

Access to other human beings is possible, however, only by indirect means: what we experience initially are gestures, sounds, and actions and only in the process of understanding do we take the step from external signs to the underlying inner life, the psychological existence of the Other. Since the inner life is not given in the experiencing of sign we have to reconstruct it; our lives provide the materials for the completion of the picture of the inner life of Others. The act of understanding provides the bridge for reaching the spiritual self of the Other and the degree of enthusiasm with which we embark on this adventure depends on the importance the Other has for us. (p. 9)

Blythe Clinchy (1996) provides a framework, within women's psychology, of understanding text. Clinchy writes:

A poem does not belong solely to its author. "Poems are written," a student explained, "but you also have to interpret them." A poem is not something "that sits there and does nothing. It has to be interpreted by other people, and those people are going to have to have their own ideas of what it means." Those ideas, however, must be grounded in the text: interpretation is "a two-person activity," involving the poet as well as the reader. (p. 223)

Martin Packer and Richard Addison (1989) inform my method of hermeneutics by integrating hermeneutics into the study of psychology. A central tenet of hermeneutics is noted by Packer and Addison as "scientific method is not interpretation-free procedure and technique" (p. 33). Following Packer and Addison, my method of hermeneutics attempts to delineate my own values as a researcher in order to clarify my procedures and techniques of interpretation.

Robert Romanyshyn (1991) provides a way of reading a text when he asks,

Could we read these texts in a way that gave a place to our involvement with the text without that involvement eclipsing the text? Could we . . . make a place for the bodily feelings, memories, and even the dreams stirred by the readings without, however, forgetting or ignoring the text? (p. 17)

Romanyshyn calls his way of reading “complex reading” (p. 17), and suggests to read and “to wait for an image, a memory, or a bodily felt sense and then to work with it and back into the text” (pp. 17-18). Romanyshyn informs my method of hermeneutics by, as he writes, “getting the body of the reader back in touch with the body of the text” (p. 18).

Robert Steele (1989) informs my method of hermeneutics by encouraging me to “read critically . . . texts from odd angles, from perspectives that do not square with an authorized reading or a conventional view” (p. 224). Thus my transpersonal perspective is an expression of reading Dickinson’s life and texts from an angle that is unconventional.

Phyllis Tribble (1984) provides guidelines for hearing and telling stories through her method of hermeneutics. Tribble writes of the importance of viewing art as an imitation or mirror of life, thus viewing stories as a reflection of life (p. 2). Tribble also suggests that a text or story can be used to help guide the understanding of the text/story (p. 2). In applying these guidelines, Tribble suggests developing a perspective and a method in order to hear and tell a story (p. 3).

Angelo Spoto (1995) informs my method of hermeneutics by viewing the “human personality as a ‘sacred text,’ and therefore innately worthy of careful attention and interpretation” (p. 60). Thus my understanding of text is expanded through Spoto’s definition, and my methods of psychobiography and hermeneutics find a stated focus in the study of a life as a text—and the study of texts (poems and letters) as the expressions of a life.

Transpersonal. Rosemarie Anderson (1998) underscores the importance of “bringing the compassionate heart to scientific inquiry” (p. 71). Anderson writes:

Compassion allows us to ask the most significant questions and guides our hypotheses and speculations toward rich and expansive theories regarding the nature of human experience. Compassionate listening allows our research participants to speak to us freely and honestly about the depth and value of their human experiences. Of course, it takes skill to learn to analyze data, yet compassion allows us to see the value and significance of the data as they shape themselves before us. (p. 71)

Anderson (2000) also provides a way of conceptualizing objective and subjective data within a transpersonal and hermeneutic approach. Anderson writes:

Intuitive inquiry was first inspired by the challenges of conducting research in the field of transpersonal psychology. In exploring “farther reaches of human nature,” transpersonal psychology seeks to delve deeply into some of the most inexplicable aspects of human experience, including mystical and unitive experiences, experiences of transformation, extraordinary insight, meditative awareness, altered states of consciousness, and self-actualization. (p. 32)

Anderson informs and guides my own research when she writes, “intuitive inquiry encourages a more inclusive and connected manner of conceptualizing research topics, collecting and analyzing data, and presenting research findings in the study of human experience” (p. 32).

Michael Keller (1977) provides a study of Henry David Thoreau from a transpersonal perspective. Keller gives biographical information and uses Thoreau’s writings to understand his life experiences using Evelyn Underhill’s “three-stage view of psychospiritual development—Illumination, Dark Night, Unitive Life” (p. 43). Keller’s work informs my study of Dickinson in my attempts to understand her life and texts from a transpersonal perspective.

Ken Wilber (1996) introduces in his article the term “transpersonal hermeneutics” (p. 63). In his discussion of “the nature and meaning of art in general and artistic/literary

interpretation in particular” (p. 63), Wilber writes, “I offer this as an explicit example of transpersonal studies in general, or the application of the transpersonal orientation to fields other than the specifically psychological” (p. 63). Wilber understands hermeneutics in terms of “holons,” and writes,

Holons . . . indicate wholes that are simultaneously parts of other wholes: a whole quark is part of a whole atom; a whole atom is part of a whole molecule; a whole molecule is part of a whole cell; a whole cell is part of a whole organism. . . . In linguistics, a whole letter is part of a whole word, which is part of a whole sentence, which is part of a whole paragraph . . . and so on. (p. 65)

Wilber’s understanding of hermeneutics informs my own method by directly applying a transpersonal perspective to his understanding of hermeneutics. Thus Wilber can write, “We exist in fields within fields, patterns within patterns, contexts within contexts, endlessly” (p. 65). Wilber also recognizes that meaning is context-dependent, that “the internal thought only makes sense in terms of my cultural background” (p. 67).

In applying transpersonal hermeneutics to artwork or a literary text, Wilber (1996) writes: “The various artwork approaches (which are true but partial) suffer by overlooking the primal holon (the maker’s intent in all its levels and dimensions). But they also attempt to ignore the viewer’s response” (p. 84). Wilber informs my method of hermeneutics through my attempts to understand Dickinson’s life and texts on a “physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual” (p. 65) level, both from my perspective as the reader, and from Dickinson’s perspective as the writer. Thus in stating that “meaning is in fact context-dependent, and perhaps contexts are indeed boundless” (p. 65), Wilber encourages me to examine my full responses as an interpreter, and to consider how the text I read contains “hidden contexts and meanings” (p. 65). Hence Wilber can write in encouraging a transpersonal interpretation, “the various artwork approaches (which are

true but partial) suffer by overlooking the primal holon (the maker's intent in all its levels and dimensions)" (p. 84). Thus, by considering Dickinson's original intent, the impetus for her creativity, I may in fact reinterpret her life and work in light of the transpersonal.

Chapter 3: Research Method

I think we all discover her first as a puzzlement—her poetry reveals itself and her self slowly. Just as important, however, was her practical sense of developing a craft using language. She became a mistress of it.

(Carlton Lowenberg, personal communication, January 9, 1995)

My objective has been to hear and tell the unfolding narrative of Emily Dickinson's creative process, which I am positing as a self-actualizing creative process, utilizing the methods of psychobiography and hermeneutics. My transpersonal perspective of Dickinson's creative process is developed through a psychobiographical method that focuses on Dickinson's life using Transpersonal Psychology, narrative studies, women's psychology, and Dickinson's own views on creativity. My transpersonal perspective forms the basis of my *transpersonal lens*, which understands Dickinson's self-actualizing creative process as an *embodied, engaged, relational, and creative* process. My *transpersonal lens* thus examines a broader spectrum of her experiences in order to understand what this process may mean to her. In order to understand her meanings, as expressed through her words, I utilize a method of hermeneutics in which to dwell, distill, and disseminate my interpretations of selected texts that shed light on her creative process. My interpretations of Dickinson's texts are guided by my *transpersonal lens* as developed through four "hermeneutic lenses" (Anderson, 2000, p. 37), which I have created and call *Through One's Body, Compassionate Listening, A Relational Reading*, and *Hermeneutics of Creative Engagement*. Each of the four lenses suggests ways of understanding Dickinson's experiences and engaging with her

texts, thus reflecting an *embodied knowing*, *embodied reading*, and *embodied writing* approach to the study of Dickinson's life and texts. In structuring Dickinson's life around her process of becoming a poet, what being a poet means to her, and her living the poet's life, both psychobiography and hermeneutics result in an integrated narrative of Dickinson's creative process. The narrative forms the basis of my analysis, through the use of my *transpersonal lens*, of how Dickinson was able to live into her self-actualizing creative process. As Carlton Lowenberg suggests in the above quote, a study of Dickinson's life is a study of her texts: "her poetry reveals itself and her self slowly." Her creative process resides not only in her craft, her delight in words, but also in the interplay of meanings that emerge from her life, through her texts.

Research Design

"Biography first convinces us of the fleeing of the Biographied—"

(letter # 972, to T. W. Higginson, February 1885)

A word is dead when it is said,
Some say—
I say it just begins to live
That day

(poem # 278, 1862)

Emily Dickinson's life has been the subject of previous psychobiographies (Cody, 1971; Grolnick, 1990; Hirschhorn, 1991; Kavalier-Adler, 1991), all falling primarily within the purview of a psychoanalytic approach. As there are few (Houston, 1993; Snider, 1996) studies of Dickinson from what may be called a

transpersonal perspective, a transpersonal psychobiography of Dickinson's life may offer new insights and ways of understanding her life. My approach is thus unique in that I seek to incorporate both Dickinson's life with her poems and letters into a narrative of her creative process.

At the outset, Dickinson is an excellent subject for a transpersonal psychobiography, for throughout her nearly 1,800 poems and 1,100 letters there is a profound record of a life lived deeply. Adrienne Rich (1979a) writes:

More than any other poet, Emily Dickinson seemed to tell me that the intense inner event, the personal and psychological, was inseparable from the universal; that there was a range for psychological poetry beyond mere self-expression. . . . Dickinson was a great psychologist; and like every great psychologist, she began with the material she had at hand: herself. She had to possess the courage to enter, through language, states which most people deny or veil with silence. (pp. 168-176)

Rich's words encourage for me a study of Dickinson's life and texts that attends to Dickinson's words, "beyond mere self-expression" (p. 168), i.e., as transpersonal expressions, "inseparable from the universal" (p. 168). The basis of Dickinson's expressions, Rich also notes, is "the material she had at hand: herself" (p. 176).

John Cody (1971), in his psychoanalytic psychobiography of Dickinson's life, also underscores Dickinson's ability to express her "inner experiences" (p. 6). This expressive quality, notes Cody, allows him to make inferences, based on his psychoanalytic perspective, in order to understand Dickinson's psychological processes. Cody points out that even though he does not have a living patient before him, and therefore whatever records he has are "necessarily incomplete" (p. 5), he nevertheless has available through her poems and letters "a broader spectrum of behavior through more decades of life" (p. 5). The poems, letters, and miscellaneous

biographical information that Cody bases his analysis on are still readily available; what differs is the way this information may be interpreted.

In creating a method of psychobiography in my study of Emily Dickinson's life, I have drawn primarily from the work of William Runyan (1982), Erik Erikson (1956, 1969), Robert Lifton (1974), and Robert Coles (1974). Runyan posits that the challenges of the psychobiographer consist "in representing the course of experience in a life, in drawing upon background knowledge from the social sciences in interpreting that experience, and finally, in evaluating the adequacy of particular accounts and interpretations" (pp. 4-5). Runyan further notes that "A biography is a portrait painted by a specific author from a particular perspective, using a range of conceptual tools and available data" (p. 36).

Erikson (1956, 1969) provides two models of psychobiographies. One "describes a Westerner's and a psychoanalyst's search for the historical presence of Mahatma Gandhi and for the meaning of what he called Truth" (1969, p. 9). Another psychobiography (Erikson, 1956) utilizes George Bernard Shaw's autobiographical writings in a study of Shaw's identity. Erikson notes, "The autobiographies of extraordinary (and extraordinarily self-perceptive) individuals are a suggestive source of insight into the development of identity" (p. 65).

Lifton (1974) draws upon his own psychobiographical work and the work of Freud, Erikson, and others to posit a method of psychobiography that situates the individual within a "shared-themes approach" (p. 31):

Within this perspective, all shared behavior is seen as simultaneously involved in a trinity of universality (that which is related to the psychobiological questions of all men in all historical epochs), specific cultural emphasis and style (as evolved by a particular people over

centuries), and recent and contemporary historical influences (the part of the trinity most likely to be neglected in psychological work). My point is that any shared event is all of these. The weighting of the components may vary, but nothing is purely universal, or cultural-historical, or contemporary-historical; everything is all three. (p. 32)

Coles (1974), similarly, explores in depth his method of psychobiography, which, he writes “I feel inside me, . . . maybe in my bones rather than my head” (p. 171). He writes of his method as the study of lives:

Lives, as opposed to problems, may puzzle the fixed notions of theorists, while at the same time adding confirmation to what has been revealed by such keenly sensitive (“methodologically untrained”) observers as Dostoevsky or Zola, Orwell or Agee, who have managed, regardless of time and place, to set down something both comprehensible and enduring about human beings. (p. 171)

Runyan (1982), Erikson (1956, 1969), Lifton (1974), and Coles (1974) suggest a framework that I have used to guide my method of psychobiography. Drawing from Runyan’s work, I have created a portrait of Dickinson’s creative process from a transpersonal perspective. When Runyan suggests “representing the course of experience in a life” (p. 4), I have represented Dickinson’s life experience in the form of a narrative (Bruner, 1986). Such a narrative approach follows the chronology of her process of becoming a poet, while allowing for the emergence of her own voice—through her poems and letters—to inform or guide the telling of the narrative. To this aim, I have been encouraged in the work of Mary Catherine Bateson (1990) to hear women’s lives “as an improvisatory art . . . following an underlying grammar and an evolving aesthetic” (p. 3), and the work of Jeanne Shutes and Jill Mellick (1996) to allow Dickinson’s own words to structure her narrative (pp. 225-231).

Utilizing Erikson's (1969) psychobiography of Gandhi, I have identified a central event in Dickinson's life, her process of becoming a poet, and have attempted to explore the full meaning of this event in her life, "with the intention of illuminating it" (Erikson, 1975, p. 114). Likewise, Erikson's (1956) psychobiography of George Bernard Shaw has encouraged me to utilize Dickinson's own words in my study of her process of becoming a poet. In order to situate this unfolding event in the chronology of Dickinson's life, I have utilized Ralph Franklin's (1998) three-volume variorum edition of Dickinson's complete poems, and Thomas Johnson and Theodora Ward's (1986) approximate ordering of Dickinson's letters.

In choosing to understand Dickinson's creative process as a self-actualizing creative process, I have drawn upon Lifton's (1974) "shared-themes approach" (p. 31). Such an approach suggests her self-actualizing creative process may be studied across times and cultures, therefore from the perspective of her own culture, and from the perspective of the present culture. In creating my transpersonal perspective, I have applied Lifton's approach through the recognition of the broader context, i.e., that self-actualizing creative persons are not limited to a certain time or culture, as well as the specific cultural context of Dickinson's self-actualizing creative process. The shared-themes approach allows me to understand anew Dickinson's self-actualizing creative process and therefore make a contribution to the study of the self-actualizing creative person.

Coles (1974), through his own psychobiographical studies, has encouraged a psychobiographical approach that is more attentive to the truths of a life, "so many

that no one mind or viewpoint . . . can possibly encompass and comprehend them all” (p. 166). My transpersonal perspective is an attempt to attend to the many truths of Dickinson’s life. Coles has also prompted me to explore my own living connection to Dickinson’s life and texts, to feel my method in my bones. I have followed the example of Coles by incorporating into my method a way of listening to Dickinson’s voice through her poems and letters that both honors a broader spectrum of her experiences (Braud & Anderson, 1998) and engages my whole self in the research process.

In representing Dickinson’s experience of becoming a poet, through her poems, letters, and miscellaneous biographical information, Runyan (1982) suggests drawing “upon background knowledge from the social sciences in interpreting that experience” (p. 4). In developing a transpersonal perspective, utilizing Transpersonal Psychology, narrative studies, women’s psychology, and Dickinson’s own views on her creativity, I have integrated the approaches through my *transpersonal lens* which understands Dickinson’s self-actualizing creative process as an *embodied, engaged, relational, and creative* process. As Runyan posits, “Those accounts based on the most extensive body of evidence, best incorporating the variety of relevant perspectives, and most effectively organized and interpreted, are to be preferred” (p. 37).

In framing Dickinson’s life in terms of becoming a poet, what being a poet means to her, and her living the poet’s life, my transpersonal lens seeks to understand Dickinson’s process of becoming a poet as a way of living into her self-actualizing creative process. Transpersonal Psychology is utilized through the work

of Braud and Anderson (1998), Maslow (1971, 1987), and Metzner (1998), as a way of understanding particular experiences that may seem potentially transpersonal and transformative. A narrative studies approach views Dickinson as engaged through her writing in reflecting upon her experiences (Bruner, 1986, p. 6), and potentially re-visioning herself (Rich, 1979b, p. 35) in new ways, creating a narrative that she could live into (Braud & Anderson, p. 23). Women's psychology offers, through the "self-in-relation model" of women's development (Surrey, 1991, pp. 52-53), a way of understanding how through relationship, with herself and others, Dickinson was able to live into self-actualizing creative process. This process is further understood by incorporating Dickinson's own views on her creativity, her coda of creativity. Particular poems and letters, which express aspects of her creative process, when read within the broader context of a transpersonal perspective, help establish her creative process as the expression of her self-actualizing creative process.

Before completing Runyan's (1982) next step, "evaluating the adequacy of particular accounts and interpretations" (pp. 4-5), I found it necessary to deepen my understanding of Dickinson's creative process through a close reading of selected poems and letters. When Dickinson writes, "Biography first convinces us of the fleeing of the Biographied—" (letter # 972, to T. W. Higginson, February 1885), it can be inferred that she is suggesting biography can never capture the essence of the person in print. Perhaps she was also hinting that any understanding of her life is only an approximation, and must come to rest, in time, on a close reading of her poems and letters, as she writes elsewhere, "The Poets light but Lamps—/ Themselves—go out—" (poem # 930, early 1865). Therefore I've developed a method of hermeneutics that

focuses on the meaning of Dickinson's words in my study of her creative process. Drawing initially from the work of Richard Palmer (1969), Norman Denzin (1997), and Phyllis Trible (1984), I integrate my psychobiographical approach, and develop novel ways of reading Dickinson's texts from a transpersonal perspective, in order to arrive at an understanding of her self-actualizing creative process.

Palmer (1969) suggests a way of integrating my psychobiographical approach with hermeneutics by viewing psychobiography as a form of "preunderstanding" (p. 25), i.e., a necessary precursor to understanding Dickinson's texts. Palmer writes:

For the interpreter to "perform" the text, he must "understand" it: he must preunderstand the subject and the situation before he can enter the horizon of its meaning. Only when he can step into the magic circle of its horizon can the interpreter understand its meaning. This is that mysterious "hermeneutical circle" without which the meaning of the text cannot emerge. But there is a contradiction here. How can a text be understood, when the condition for its understanding is already to have understood what it is about? The answer is that somehow, by a dialectical process, a partial understanding is used to understand still further, like using pieces of a puzzle to figure out what is missing. (p. 25)

My method of psychobiography extends through my method of hermeneutics by studying how the meaning of Dickinson's texts develop in relation to her process of becoming a poet. My transpersonal lens suggests ways of understanding Dickinson's experiences and engaging with her texts. A dialectical process between psychobiography and hermeneutics ensues, which informs and guides the telling of the narrative. For example, when Dickinson writes in a letter to T. W. Higginson "—for several years, my *Lexicon*—was my only companion" (letter # 261, 25 April 1862), it can be inferred that she is expressing an aspect of her creative process that is very important to her, the study of words. This information is used as a way to

begin to move into her texts. Utilizing Noah Webster's 1844 dictionary, the *American Dictionary of the English Language*, provides a way of beginning to understand the meaning of her words.

An example of utilizing Dickinson's dictionary in order to understand the word "book" may be found in my understanding of Dickinson's creation of the so-called "fascicles" (Franklin, 1981, p. ix). In fact, the word "book" as defined in her dictionary may more accurately describe her "fascicles" (Franklin, p. ix) as the actual creation of books. When I add the psychobiographical information that Dickinson was focused on becoming a poet, her creation of poetry books substantiates this knowledge.

Another example of utilizing Dickinson's dictionary in order to understand the word "aisles" may be found in my reading of Dickinson's poem "Nature—the Gentlest Mother is" (poem # 741, 2nd half 1863). I was surprised to read that the word referred only to the aisles in a church. Dickinson uses the word in reference to the aisles in nature. If I add the psychobiographical information that Dickinson stopped attending church and that she had a great love of nature (as expressed in the poem), I may understand the word aisle in a broader and more individual sense as an expression of her church as being in nature. Such an understanding suggests that Dickinson found in her relationship to nature an experience surpassing what she could feel by attending church.

My psychobiography method thus offers "pieces of a puzzle" (Palmer, 1969, p. 25) about Dickinson's life, which are used to further an understanding of her texts. My hermeneutic method in turn attempts to bring Dickinson's meanings into

the present context of my transpersonal perspective. When Dickinson writes “A word is dead when it is said,/ Some say—/ I say it just begins to live/ That day” (poem # 278, 1862), she echoes Palmer’s description of the hermeneutic process as one of “performing” (p. 25) the text. Denzin (1997), in describing this process, writes, “No text or utterance can be repeated without a change in meaning and in context. The reproduction of the text is a new . . . link to the historical moment that produced it” (p. 36).

As the interpreter, performer (Palmer, 1969, p. 25), and reproducer (Denzin, 1997, p. 36) of Dickinson’s texts, I become the lens or medium through whom Dickinson’s texts may begin to live (see poem # 278, “A word is dead when it is said,” 1862). Palmer further describes this process as the “merging” (p. 25) of the text’s and the interpreter’s horizons, “a basic element in all explanatory interpretation” (p. 25). This merging of horizons presupposes that I identify my “own world of intentions, hopes, and preinterpretations” (p. 25) as an interpreter, i.e., my perspective and values as a transpersonal researcher. A central value that I hold is expressed by Denzin when he suggests, if I wish to understand another, I must “build up an understanding based on a deep involvement in the subject’s worlds of experience,” and abandon a “neutral spectator” (p. 35) stance.

An example of the ways I’ve devised to “build up a deep involvement in the subject’s worlds of experience” (Denzin, 1997, p. 35) has been to utilize numerous biographical, psychological, cultural-historical, and critical-literary sources to familiarize myself with Dickinson’s life. I have also visited the grounds of Dickinson’s house and town to get a feel for the land. I have stood in her bedroom on the second story and

looked out through the windowpanes, the glass of which is quite old. I have walked through her house and noticed the numerous doors and windows, the many rooms—front and back parlors—and the old stone steps leading up to her house along Main Street. I have spent time looking at old pictures of Dickinson’s time (Longworth, 1990); and I have spent a great deal of time reading or dwelling in Dickinson’s poems and letters. This re-search process has engaged my whole being—it is an approach that is “interdisciplinary as well as unique; that is, ‘organic’ in the largest and perhaps most romantic sense” (St. Armand, 1984, p. 2). Engaging my whole being has allowed me to treat of Dickinson in a holistic way, recognizing that she too experienced and wrote about her body, mind, and soul.

It is with this intention that I have developed four hermeneutic lenses. I call the lenses *Through One’s Body*, *Compassionate Listening*, *A Relational Reading*, and *Hermeneutics of Creative Engagement*. Each lens reflects my *transpersonal lens*, which focuses and integrates my study of Dickinson’s life and texts through the methods of psychobiography and hermeneutics. Although the word *lens* may denote a sense of distancing from Dickinson’s life and texts, it has been my intention, as Denzin (1997) posits, to create “a more fully grounded, multisensual, multiperspectival epistemology that does not privilege sight (vision) over the other senses, including sound, touch, and taste” (p. 36). I also include the sense of smell, and add intuition, as used in “intuitive inquiry” (Anderson, 2000, p. 31), as a subjective way of knowing. I label this way of knowing *embodied knowing* which becomes *embodied reading* when applied to a text.

An example of utilizing embodied knowing is when I visited Dickinson's garden, I was able to use all of my senses to nourish a deep and embodied reading of poems which contained images of her garden and flowers. I became attentive to images and sensations around descriptions of flowers in her texts, and through this process I was able to grasp a sense of the importance for Dickinson of nature and floral imagery. When I carried this awareness in my body-mind into a deeper reading of her poems, I was able to discover, for example in the poem "I tend my flowers for thee—" (poem # 367, autumn 1862), how Dickinson gave her flowers a tongue to speak. Interestingly, her flowers were a way of connecting and relating with others, as in the poem, "Flowers—negotiate between us" (poem # 829, 1864). My embodied view of Dickinson thus grew as I dwelled in her poems and letters.

I have incorporated this embodied knowing into my hermeneutic lenses, which become the instruments, with myself as the medium, by which Dickinson's creative process achieves a degree of "focal depth" (Anderson, 1998, pp. 85-86), i.e., emerges in its transpersonal significance. Through a deep and embodied reading I have integrated my psychobiographical approach with methods of understanding and engaging with Dickinson's texts which constitutes entering the hermeneutic circle, a dialogic process that "unites writer, text, and reader in a collage of understanding" (Trible, 1984, p. 1). This "collage of understanding" (Trible, p. 1) is precisely the narrative account of Dickinson's self-actualizing creative process that I arrive at in my Results chapter.

Participants

Trible (1984) posits three participants in the act of narrative: a “writer, text, and reader” (p. 1). Through a preliminary reading of Dickinson’s poems and letters, I have identified a way to frame her life in terms of her process of becoming a poet. Picking up the thread of this narrative in Dickinson’s life has allowed me to follow her development through a close reading of her poems and letters; and it is through her texts that I begin to hear the voice of Dickinson the writer. Palmer (1969) writes, “A work of literature is not an object we understand by conceptualizing or analyzing it; it is a voice we must hear, and through ‘hearing’ (rather than seeing) understand” (p. 9).

For example, as I became familiar with Dickinson’s poems and letters, I could almost hear her voice, the tone and emphasis she placed on certain words. When Dickinson writes, “My business is to sing” (letter # 269, to Dr. and Mrs. J. G. Holland, summer 1862), there is a way that her poetry becomes a song, held in the cadence of her voice. When I speak her poems aloud or silently to myself, my voicing of her poems helps bring her voice alive. This connecting thread of the voice has allowed me understand how voice is “something like what people mean when they speak of the core of the self” (Gilligan, 1993, p. xvi). Through listening and hearing Dickinson’s voice, I am led not only to the core of Dickinson’s self, but to the core of myself. Voicing becomes a way of reading, of amplifying, of connecting words to flesh in the immediacy of the spoken word.

In selecting the texts for this study, I have chosen from Dickinson’s complete poems, letters, and what Ellen Louise Hart and Martha Nell Smith (1998) describe

as “letter-poems,” Dickinson’s “making poems of letters and letters of poems” (p. xxvi). As Smith (1992) notes, “By producing letter-poems Dickinson makes her poetry seem immediate, part of everyday experience” (p. 111). The primary data for my study of Dickinson’s texts is provided by the following sources. Ralph Franklin’s (1998) three-volume publication of Dickinson’s complete poems provides extensive information about the context of each poem: the number of manuscripts, the different variants of a manuscript, a probable dating, and the name of the recipient, if it was sent to someone. Thomas Johnson and Theodora Ward (1986), in their publication of Dickinson’s letters, provide similar contextual information about each of Dickinson’s letters, which may also contain a poem and be read as a letter-poem. After Johnson and Ward’s edition of Dickinson’s letters was originally published in 1955, new letters came to light and are published in Richard Sewall (1965). Franklin (1986) provides through his publication of *The Master Letters of Emily Dickinson* a closer approximation, compared with Johnson and Ward’s edition, of Dickinson’s three love letters addressed to Master. In another publication, Franklin (1981) provides facsimile reproductions of over 1,100 of Dickinson’s poems, allowing the reader an intimacy with her handwriting, which in my experience is only surpassed by a reading of the original archival manuscripts.

My challenge as the reader of Dickinson’s texts has been to develop a perspective and method that adequately addresses the dimensions of her life and texts. If I can imagine that Emily Dickinson was once a living, breathing, human being, who loved and cried, laughed, and felt “great pain” (poem # 372, 1862), I am better prepared to read a broader spectrum of her experiences. If I can imagine that

Dickinson chose words, often a word, deliberately, with attention to her craft, I am better prepared to read her words with a sense of deliberateness, paying attention to the her multi-layered, and sometimes paradoxical, meanings.

Dickinson's self-actualizing creative process emerges through the wider contextual reading of her life and texts, a process that "unites writer, text, and reader" in a "collage of understanding" (Trible, 1984, p. 1). Trible writes, "If without stories we live not, stories live not without us. Alone a text is mute and ineffectual. In the speaking and the hearing new things appear in the land" (p. 1). As the reader of Dickinson's texts, it has been my intention to make her voice—and the narrative of her self-actualizing creative process—more explicit, understandable, and alive. As Denzin (1997) writes, "Every transcription is a retelling—a new telling of a previously heard, now newly heard voice" (p. 43).

Instruments

My instruments comprise four hermeneutic lenses: *Through One's Body*, *Compassionate Listening*, *A Relational Reading*, and *Hermeneutics of Creative Engagement*. Each lens reflects my intention to create a method that is both congruent with my values as a researcher, i.e., play, puzzlement, and love, and what I feel is called for in an understanding of Dickinson's life and texts. Each lens therefore incorporates a multiperspectival, multisensual (Denzin, 1997, p. 36), and intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 2000) approach through an *embodied knowing*, *embodied reading*, and *embodied writing* method of hermeneutics. Each lens also suggests ways of understanding Dickinson's

experiences and engaging with her texts, and has guided my selection of poems and letters to read in greater depth.

The first lens, *Through One's Body*, is based on the understanding that information from the text is accessed in a variety of ways through one's body. This may include an intuitive sense of knowing (Anderson, 2000), understanding as a visceral experience (Denzin, 1997, p. 46), and the awareness that "all literature exists only within the human body, mind and feeling spirit, for . . . the word exists only as it comes alive in our flesh" (Bozarth-Campbell, 1979, p. 1). This lens is also informed by the work of Charles V. W. Brooks (1986), which encourages me to attend to my own sensory experiences; the work of Robert Pinsky (1998), which encourages me to value my body as the "medium of poetry" (p. 8); the work of Karl Kerényi (1996), which encourages a hermeneutic method of engagement, as a "way of being" (p. 32); and the work of Robert Romanyshyn (1991), which encourages an engagement with the text based on a full-bodied reading. My intention has been to utilize this lens to be receptive to a broader spectrum of experiences involving the whole body, which may in turn open up possibilities of meaning within the text.

My experience of developing the lens *Through One's Body* arose from the awareness that I have found in the literature of poets (Bly, 1991; Rich, 1993; Whyte, 1994) and philosophers (Abram, 1996; Maritain, 1952), and in Dickinson's texts, a kind of language of the body. This language of the body, and by inference, the body of the reader and writer, is often negated or understated in the study of Dickinson's life and texts.

In utilizing the lens *Through One's Body* to guide my selection of poems and letters, I have been attentive to my intuitive and bodily felt sensations in my reading. I have also been attentive to words and images that suggest Dickinson's bodily felt experiences. An example of a poem chosen using this lens includes "Must be a Wo—" (poem # 538, spring 1863). Dickinson describes in this poem an "eye" that "bends"; I imagined while reading it that if the eye is bending, the whole body—body, mind, and soul—is bending with this eye; the eye becomes expressive of a whole body state. An example of a letter chosen using this lens includes the letter, with line, "Where my Hands are cut, Her fingers will be found inside" (letter # 288, to Susan Dickinson, about 1864). In reading this letter I became aware of how the body is an often-unstated yet powerful presence in Dickinson's poems and letters.

An example of utilizing the lens *Through One's Body* in the reading of a poem is when I visited Dickinson's home, and walked the grounds of her garden, I was able to feel a sense of connection in my body with poems that contained images of nature. One poem (# 370, autumn 1862), with the first line "Within my Garden, rides a Bird," played in my body-mind as I walked through Dickinson's garden, her garden creating a ground from which I could experience the poem in its immediacy. The poem when I read it became an experience of walking with words through her garden in my body-mind.

The second lens, *Compassionate Listening*, is based on the awareness that, as Denzin (1997) writes, "the unsaid, the assumed, and the silences in any discourse provide the flesh and bone—the backdrop against which meaning is established" (p. 38). *Compassionate Listening* listens not only with my physical ears, but with the ears of my heart, with a sense of care and concern, for the unsaid and the silences that are intimated

in a text or can only be fully understood in a nonverbal way. Susan Howe (1985) writes of Dickinson in this respect, “Emily Dickinson suggests that the language of the heart has quite another grammar” (p. 13). Attending to Dickinson’s language of the heart has required me to work with images, metaphors, and a whole spectrum of experiences, both my own experiences and what I understand to be Dickinson’s experiences. My intention has been to utilize this lens in order to deepen my understanding of her texts, which requires me to listen, reflect upon, and hear in a deeper way.

My experience of developing the lens *Compassionate Listening* arose from the awareness that I found in the literature of hermeneutical inquiry and Transpersonal Psychology a stated need to abandon a “neutral spectator” (Denzin, 1997, p. 35) stance and bring the “compassionate heart” (Anderson, 1998, p. 71) into research. This in turn has become an expression of my value of love as a transpersonal researcher, a way of acknowledging that I cannot leave myself out of the research process and in fact I am being led by my love into a deeper understanding of the topic.

In utilizing the lens *Compassionate Listening* to guide my selection of poems and letters, I have attended to words and images that may only be intimated or worked with in a nonverbal way. This has included utilizing a variety of sources, such as historical, cultural, and literary, in order to understand the unsaid and silences in Dickinson’s texts. Such sources have included Almira Lincoln’s (1832) *Lectures on Botany*, a textbook used by Dickinson as noted in Carlton Lowenberg (1986, p. 70), and Polly Longworth’s (1990) *The World of Emily Dickinson*, which provides pictures associated with Dickinson’s life. An example of an image chosen using this lens includes the image of light in the poem “The Poets light but Lamps—” (poem # 930, early 1865). In a sense I

circled this image and stayed with it, until it became alive for me. I pictured the image; I played with the image of light, in a sense studying its properties; I imagined Dickinson lighting a lamp at night in her room. The light became for me a metaphoric and transcendent symbol of her as a poet, yet also a concrete and vital experience.

One example of utilizing the lens *Compassionate Listening* is when I began to read about Dickinson and her relationship with her mother I was struck by how Dickinson's mother transmitted the shared value of growing a garden, including flowers, to her daughter. This unsaid value made me become aware of how the silences, in any text, can only be perhaps intimated or worked with in a nonverbal way and must come to figure in any understanding of Dickinson's life and texts.

The third lens, *A Relational Reading*, is based on the awareness that as a reader of Dickinson's texts, I am essentially engaging in a relationship with her. A relational reading allows me to put all authorized readings of the text aside and value my own knowing voice along with the knowing voice of the text. As Gerald Bruns (1992) writes, "reading is participation. . . . It is an encounter with the text that is unmediated by any construction of meaning, whether traditional or otherwise" (pp. 126-127). This lens is also informed by the work of Yvonna Lincoln (1995), which encourages me to value a relationship between "the inquirer and those who participate in the inquiry" (p. 278); and the work of Robert Steele (1989), which encourages me to "read critically . . . texts from odd angles, from perspectives that do not square with an authorized reading or a conventional view" (p. 224). As in all relationships that grow and change over time, there may be silences, miscommunications, and confusion, and these should be honored as a part of the process of a relational reading. Blythe McViker Clinchy (1996) describes this

reading as “connected reading” (p. 222), and writes, “connected reading is to encourage absent authors to speak and to join them in a semblance of collaboration. . . . Reading becomes a kind of conversation, and the reader apprentices herself to the writer” (p. 222). My relational role as an apprentice to Dickinson, and the recognition that any interpretation I make is only an approximation, has allowed the text to speak to—breathe into—me in new ways.

My experience of developing the lens *A Relational Reading* arose from the awareness that I found in some of the psychological studies of Dickinson a stated denial of her ability to relate (Grolnick, 1990; Hirschhorn, 1991; Kavalier-Adler, 1991). This view is not shared by others (Houston, 1993; Rich, 1979a; Snider, 1996) and does not square with my reading of Dickinson’s life and texts.

In utilizing the lens *A Relational Reading* to guide my selection of poems and letters, I have attended to words and images that are suggested by my relationship with Dickinson’s texts and that suggest relationship within Dickinson’s life and texts. An example of a poem chosen using this lens includes “Experiment to me” (poem # 1081, 1865). In this poem Dickinson writes about what draws her to another—the “Kernel” and “meat within”—and the poem gives a glimpse of her interests in engaging in a relationship that has substance and meaning. An example of a letter chosen using this lens includes the line, “Mines in the same ground meet by tunneling” (letter # 792, to Mrs. Holland, mid-December 1882). Dickinson is expressing a connection and depth that she values in relationship; she may also be suggesting this as a way of coming to know her.

An example of utilizing the lens *A Relational Reading* is, in taking the above example of the value of growing a garden that is shared between mother and daughter, a recognition of the rich complexity of relationships that exist within Dickinson's life and texts. This sense of the complexity of Dickinson's relationships is also hinted at in an essay by her sister-in-law Susan Dickinson (1981), and in the *Handlist of Books Found in the Home of Emily Dickinson at Amherst, Massachusetts Spring, 1950* (The Houghton Library, 1951), wherein numerous books appear to have notations that suggest they may have been shared and passed between the different family members. Thus I may only grasp the importance of Dickinson's relationship with, for example, her mother by entering myself into a relationship with Dickinson's life and texts in a way that allows me to begin to understand the ever-widening circle of relationships in her life and texts.

This understanding of relationship I have further extended to an exploration of the relationship between Dickinson's words: for instance, how one word may inform the understanding of another word, one poem may inform the understanding of another poem, and a letter-poem may inform the understanding of another letter-poem. My study of Dickinson's words is encouraged by the work of Donald Thackrey (1954) when he suggests "The most evident characteristic of words, as far as Emily Dickinson was concerned, is their startling vitality" (p. 12). Thus I have discovered in my reading, when certain words elicit my attention, it is important to allow the word or words the full breadth of my body so that the meaning of the text may find expression. Thus my relationship with the text has deepened and the text has come to speak in a new way through my engagement with it. This fourth lens, *Hermeneutics of Creative Engagement*, is based on the understanding, write Martin Packer and Richard Addison (1989), that

Practical understanding is not an origin for knowledge in the sense of a foundation; it is, instead, a starting place for interpretation. Interpretive inquiry begins not from an absolute origin of unquestionable data or totally consistent logic, but at a place delineated by our everyday participatory understanding of people and events. We begin there in full awareness that this understanding is corrigible, and that it is partial in the twin senses of being incomplete and perspectival. Understanding is always moving forward. (p. 23)

My experience of developing the lens *Hermeneutics of Creative Engagement* arose from the awareness that I am engaging in an *embodied reading* of Dickinson's texts. Thus an embodied reading provides images, sounds, feelings, thoughts, smells, and intuitions which, in the words of Wilhelm Dilthey, desire "to resound in tone, word, and image" (cited in Makkreel & Rodi, 1985, p. 59). Learning to trust my senses in the process of reading and through *embodied writing* is an expression of my value of play as a transpersonal researcher, a way of engaging fully with Dickinson's texts while following my own body, mind, and soul.

In utilizing the lens *Hermeneutics of Creative Engagement* to guide my selection of poems and letters, I have attended to words and images that allow for a creative engagement in the exploration of the endless possibilities of meaning inherent in the texts and in my responses to the texts. An example of a poem chosen using this lens includes "I dwell in Possibility—" (poem # 466, late 1862). When I visited Dickinson's home I became aware of the numerous doors and windows in her house, which added to my understanding of "Possibility." I also witnessed a play, "The Belle of Amherst," with Julie Harris acting as Dickinson. Harris spoke this poem, motioning with her whole body, bringing the poem alive for me.

An example of utilizing the lens *Hermeneutics of Creative Engagement* is also found in the book *Language as Object* (Danly, 1997), in which different artists

explore in dance, poetry, and artwork their own responses to Dickinson's "textual radicalism" (p. 16). Another example of creative engagement is recorded in Carlton Lowenberg's (1992) book which chronicles the "Musical Settings of Emily Dickinson's Poems and Letters" (p. 1). Through the lens *Hermeneutics of Creative Engagement* I have explored the endless possibilities of meanings inherent in her texts, the possibilities finding fruition in the meeting of my full and authentic self with the texts.

Although the four hermeneutic lenses seem to suggest a sequential ordering in the way that they are engaged, just the opposite is true. When I am truly engaged in reading the text, I am present to my body, fully attentive and listening to the other, and able to allow meanings to emerge that suggest the endless possibilities of meanings inherent in Dickinson's life and texts.

Throughout my reading of Dickinson's texts, I have been surprised to discover how all four hermeneutic lenses often came into play. I have discovered how the body can be a hidden text, "being in the in-between of all regimes of truth" (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 121). Through compassionate listening I have heard "aspects of experience that fall outside of the dominant story" (White & Epston, 1990, p. 15). A relational reading has allowed me to begin to hear "the complex, storied nature of human existence" (Jacobs, Munro, & Adams, 1995, p. 329). A hermeneutics of creative engagement has allowed me to open the possibility of meanings, to witness Dickinson "composing" (Bateson, 1990, p. 29) her own narrative.

Procedures

In framing Dickinson's narrative around her process of becoming a poet, what being a poet means to her, and her living the poet's life, I have selected poems and letters to read in greater depth that suggest her unfolding creative process. As I am seeking an understanding of her creative process from a variety of approaches, my transpersonal perspective and concomitant hermeneutic lenses have also guided my selection of poems and letters. This has taken the form of choosing poems and letters that express Dickinson's transpersonal and transformative experiences; that suggest her process of revisioning herself and creating her own narrative from her experiences; that suggest the role of relationship in her life; and that express aspects of her creative process.

I have identified three procedural steps which I call *Dwelling Within the Text*, *Distilling the Meaning of the Text*, and *Disseminating the Meaning of the Text*, as ways of understanding Dickinson's unfolding creative process as expressed through her poems and letters. Each procedural step incorporates an *embodied knowing* and *embodied reading* approach as developed through my hermeneutics lenses. Each procedural step in essence follows the ontogeny of my experience, i.e., *Dwell*, *Distill*, and *Disseminate*, of Dickinson's creative process, with the third procedural step resulting in a narrative of Dickinson's creative process through my process of *embodied writing*.

I include in *Dwelling Within the Text* my selection of poems and letters to read in greater depth. In one notebook I have kept quotes of poems I have selected. I originally selected 265 out of nearly 1,800 poems and through utilizing my

hermeneutic lenses, narrowed my selection to 32 poems. I then typed the poems into my computer, utilizing Franklin's (1998) edition, and printed the poems, placing them in chronological order according to Franklin. I included in my poem quotes the context of each poem, if it was sent to someone, if it included a variant reading, and the probable dating of the poem. In another notebook I have kept quotes of letters I have chosen to read in greater depth. I then typed the quotes into my computer and printed them out organizing them chronologically according to Johnson and Ward (1986). I also used other sources of letters (Franklin, 1986; Hart & Smith, 1998; Sewall, 1965). I included with my letter quotes the context of each letter, who it was sent to, and the probable dating. My letter quotes comprised 26 pages of typed quotes.

After selecting my poem and letter quotes, I cycled through my hermeneutic lenses, and thus cycled through my reading of particular poems and letters. I kept detailed notes of my readings in what I call *The Emily Dickinson Notebooks*, numbering four in total. The first three notebooks were devoted to *Dwelling Within the Text*, and the fourth notebook was devoted to *Distilling the Meaning of the Text*. Each notebook of unlined white paper with a black cover contained approximately 200 pages of hand-written notes. I include in the notebooks the date of my reading, the poem and letter reference number, the engagement of my four hermeneutic lenses, as well as what I call provisions or tools for the journey. These tools have included, but are not limited to, Webster's 1844 dictionary, and various cultural (St. Armand, 1984), historical (Buckingham, 1989), and biographical (Sewall, 1980) sources. I have also used a tape recorder, in addition to the notebooks, to record and

hear myself reading Dickinson's poems. Through my voicing of Dickinson's poems I have facilitated my understanding of her texts through hearing nuances of meaning in my own voice. My intention has been to use the various sources of information generated by my engagement of the hermeneutic lenses and tools as a way to move into a deeper, and more embodied, reading of Dickinson's texts. After the following descriptions of each procedural step I include a brief example of reading a poem using my hermeneutic lenses as contained in *The Emily Dickinson Notebooks*.

In my first procedural step, *Dwelling Within the Text*, the word dwell comes from Dickinson's poem # 466, late 1862, with the first line "I dwell in Possibility." By using the word dwelling I am defining my first procedural step as dwelling within the possibility of meaning inherent within Dickinson's life and texts. In framing my journey of understanding as a transpersonal journey I have included in this step my pre-understanding of Dickinson's life and texts, i.e., the awareness that I am not entering the terrain of her texts unaware.

Utilizing the hermeneutic lens *Through One's Body* within *Dwelling Within the Text* has comprised being fully attentive to the possibility of meaning as expressed through a broader spectrum of experience, both in Dickinson's texts and in my experience of her texts.

Utilizing the lens *Compassionate Listening* within *Dwelling Within the Text* has comprised listening for the silences and the unsaid in a compassionate way. This has included working with Dickinson's texts in a nonverbal way.

Utilizing the lens *A Relational Reading* within *Dwelling Within the Text* has comprised being attentive to the multitude of relationships within Dickinson's life and texts, as well as my relationship with her.

Utilizing the lens *Hermeneutics of Creative Engagement* within *Dwelling Within the Text* has comprised being attentive to a creative engagement I experience with Dickinson's words. This engagement has encouraged a fuller expression and recognition—through music, silence, and artwork—of responses to Dickinson's life and texts.

On August 21, 2001, I recorded in my second *The Emily Dickinson Notebooks* my reading of poem # 500; here is the poem as it was originally contained within a letter to T. W. Higginson in 1863:

I was thinking, today—as I noticed, that the “Supernatural”—was
Only the Natural, disclosed—

Not “Revelation”—’tis—that waits,
But our unfurnished eyes—

Impt. to read this poem, so-called by R. W. Franklin, in context, in a letter to Higginson.

unfurnished—(I read in Dickinson's dictionary this means:) empty not supplied with necessity. *EYES*

supernatural only natural *disclosed*

We wait for that which helps us see—

getting past the negative

It is a change that must happen in us: *we change* echoed in

other poem it passes & we stay—

I think it's important to recognize the

uniqueness of ED's thought—she

thought— She

[paint—

me using this imagery, metaphor—

image picture paint truth
 tell—

→ to “*Portrait*”

that true likeness of herself—
 what carry . . . after death,
 mixed with fame—carry (too)
 in heart—the goodness,
 the striving to be—

Supernatural

natural

disclosed

Revelation
 make known
 truths—

told
 made open to
 view—
 V
 Something in
 nature, central to
 her telling.

Letter # 280

gnome

this supernatural is really quite common, she notices it all around. It's a *gnomic* (maxim) saying—like proverbs—she creates her own—in *nature* learns—*Scholar*. signature Learned. →How she conceives of herself. Higginson's *Procession of flowers*. This poem-proverb allows for a glimpse into the thought-processes & intentions of ED—she felt strongly about nature & people—How she learned—conceived of herself—Where she “set her sights” Training mind, heart, eyes to see—who discloses? active element—eyes needing something to help them see—This is an image/picture I have of Dickinson, being conscious awake and noticing that which is happening around her & within her. I think in this poem she sets the burden of doing & being within, and less with an imaginary god. Being & becoming take center stage and cool around thoughts of a distinctly remote god/religion. The Bible dealt with the center, not with circumference. We must make meaning of it—and unravel our lives in this daily drama of sun—The center has to do with us becoming our utmost so we may expand our true natures into circumference, our utmost, and beyond ourselves—

I've decided at this point to extract letter fragments to hang my narrative on—and I'll make notes too as I go along.

After essentially *Dwelling Within the Text*, I typed up my first three *The Emily Dickinson Notebooks* into a chronological reading of her poems and letters; this combined chronology of poems and letters, along with my particular readings, comprised 76 typed single-spaced pages. I organized the poems and letters into

three sections, according to creative periods I recognized in Dickinson's life and texts: *To Be A Poet, 1850 to 1862*; *What Poet Means, 1862 to 1870*; and *Living the Poet's Life, 1870 to 1886*. I then started a fourth notebook labeled *Distilling the Meaning of the Text*.

My second procedural step, *Distilling the Meaning of the Text*, with the word distill, comes from Dickinson's poem # 446, late 1862, with the lines "This was a Poet—/ It is That/ Distills amazing sense/ From Ordinary Meanings." Utilizing my typed notes, as originally recorded in *The Emily Dickinson Notebooks*, I reflected on the meanings generated by my readings of poems and letters in an attempt to distill or present the meanings in a clear and concise form. The process of distilling included my underlining of or giving emphasis to words, phrases, and images, which conveyed for me Dickinson's distilled essences in a clear and concise form.

Utilizing the hermeneutic lens *Through One's Body* within *Distilling the Meaning of the Text* has comprised attending to particular experiences in depth, such as transpersonal and transformative experiences, both my own and what I understand to be Dickinson's.

Utilizing the lens *Compassionate Listening* within *Distilling the Meaning of the Text* has comprised attending to particular silences and working with Dickinson's life and texts in perhaps a nonverbal way, in order to give voice to the silences.

Utilizing the lens *A Relational Reading* within *Distilling the Meaning of the Text* has comprised attending to particular relationships, both my own relationship and especially relationships of particular importance to Dickinson the poet.

Utilizing the lens *Hermeneutics of Creative Engagement* within *Distilling the Meaning of the Text* has comprised my attending to certain words in order to give full expression or recognition of a creative engagement as an expression of the endless possibility of meanings inherent in Dickinson's life and texts.

This procedural step, *Distilling the Meaning of the Text*, represents my attempt at an integrated reading of Dickinson's particular meanings as understood through the lens of my transpersonal perspective.

As an example of my second procedural step, on October 25, 2001, I began typing up my three notebooks, putting the poems and letters into chronological order, and in the process made notes on the context of poem # 500, "Not 'Revelation'—'tis—that waits" (1863):

Context:

Transpersonal: change in us; "shadow of brain which casts it" (inner reality); how see, New Englandly; sanctifying of life;

Narrative: telling about coming to earth, down down in the terrestrial, writing from earth, love of each particular and the whole; finding beauty in the walk in nature—basis of getting to know, intimacy, and necessary to process of distilling; intuition as picking up sense of whole, how fits together; a pivotal poem, emerging from an abyss, to weave heaven and earth; revelation, eyes, round; taking a journey through literature, through life, nature; how literature and life interweave;

Self-in-relation: finding mystery, life, in relationship, self and world, self and other, self and self; something in us;

Coda of creativity: sheer excitement of writing creating and sharing, wanting/hoping words will touch deeply; enlivening process of words, tied to body and elemental world;

I combined the above contextual notes with my reading of poem # 500, and began to add emphasis by underlining certain words and making further notes (by drawing around the margins of the page) of connections I had noticed between the

context of the poem and the poem. The emphasis on certain words and notes around the margins included:

(modeling) open up vision in relation can't conceal truth, yet slowly reveal Letter-poem *close to life* in-Everyday ever-present how to see—training quality of consciousness [light carried] *We* must make meaning of it; change that must happen in us; this poem-proverb allows for glimpse into the thought processes and intentions of Dickinson, she felt strongly about nature and people; how she learned, conceived of herself, where she set her sights, training the mind, heart, eyes to see—and who discloses? being conscious, awake, and noticing; burden of doing and being within, and less with an imaginary god.

My third procedural step I call *Disseminating the Meaning of the Text*, with the word disseminate which comes from Dickinson's poem # 930, early 1865, with the lines "Each Age a Lens/ Disseminating their/ Circumference—". This procedural step comprises my Results chapter in that it gathers the meanings, as distilled through my second procedural step, of particular poems and letters into an integrated, chronological, and concise narrative. The narrative is organized into three sections, following Dickinson's process of becoming a poet, what poet means, and her living the poet's life. I also realize that the process of disseminating is carried into my Discussion chapter as I attempt to interpret Dickinson's self-actualizing creative process.

Utilizing the hermeneutic lens *Through One's Body* within *Disseminating the Meaning of the Text* has comprised being attentive to words and images within the narrative from within a broader spectrum of my experiences and what I understand to be Dickinson's experiences. This has involved allowing for new responses to Dickinson's texts to emerge and be included in my narrative.

Utilizing the lens *Compassionate Listening* within *Disseminating the Meaning of the Text* has comprised being attentive to the different forms of silence and the unsaid that have emerged from my particular reading of Dickinson's life and texts, and perhaps giving these a voice.

Utilizing the lens *A Relational Reading* within *Disseminating the Meaning of the Text* has comprised being attentive to the emergence of the networks of relationships I have discovered in my reading of Dickinson's life and texts.

Utilizing the lens *Hermeneutics of Creative Engagement* within *Disseminating the Meaning of the Text* has comprised being attentive to the multitude of forms of creative engagement, as well as how this contributes to my understanding of Dickinson's life and texts.

This narrative, as expressed in my Results chapter, forms the basis for my later Discussion chapter, in which I analyze, drawing from the narrative, how Dickinson was able to live into her self-actualizing creative process.

Treatment of Data

My study of Dickinson's creative process from a transpersonal perspective results in a narrative that begins within the context of Dickinson's life, beginning in the year 1850. I utilize primarily Dickinson's own words as recorded in her poems and letters, and other biographical sources, such as Alfred Habegger (2001), Ralph Franklin (1981), and Martha Dickinson Bianchi (1932), to follow her process of becoming a poet, what being a poet means to her, and her living the poet's life. I include in this narrative my selection of relevant poems and letter quotes that

pertain to her process of becoming a poet with relevant information in which to begin reading the texts.

Runyan's (1982) step of "evaluating the adequacy of particular accounts and interpretations" (pp. 4-5), now may be understood as a process that encompasses both psychobiography and hermeneutics. Because my primary source of data on Dickinson is Dickinson's texts, any account or interpretation must be substantiated by her own words. Through my psychobiographical approach, I utilize her texts as the primary source of information, and utilize secondary sources of information, such as biographies (including first-person accounts), psychobiographies, and literary interpretations of her work, to support, add to, or challenge my findings. Runyan (1982) states that the method of psychobiography "requires not only the formulation of explanations consistent with some of the evidence but also that preferred explanations be critically examined in light of all available evidence, and that they be compared in plausibility with alternative explanations" (p. 49).

My hermeneutic method relies upon similar but different sources of evaluation. For instance, I may attempt to understand Dickinson's meanings through the use of Webster's 1844 Dictionary which she used; yet I must also be aware of how her meanings developed over time and most importantly how her life experience shaped her meanings. In addition, the meaning of Dickinson's words may be understood differently today than in her time; as Denzin (1997) notes, interpretations are always mediated by the interpreter's values (p. 35).

In my Discussion chapter, I analyze, drawing some conclusions, according to the narrative, as to how Dickinson was able to live into her self-actualizing creative

process. I also include the evaluation of my particular accounts and interpretations of Dickinson's life and texts, comparing and contrasting them with other accounts of Dickinson. In allowing for an understanding of her self-actualizing creative process to find expression through her life and texts, I also note my contribution to the study of the self-actualizing creative person.

Chapter 4: Results

To Be A Poet, 1850 to 1862: Forging the Creative Spirit

In mid-January, 1850, Emily Elizabeth Dickinson is given the gift of a book of Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Poems* (letter # 30, to Jane Humphrey, 23 January 1850). Ben Newton, the person who gave Dickinson the gift, taught her, Dickinson writes four years later, "what to read, what authors to admire, what was most grand or beautiful in nature, and that sublimer lesson, a faith in things unseen, and in a life again, nobler, and much more blessed—" (letter # 153, to Edward Everett Hale, 13 January 1854). Newton provides Dickinson with a model of a poet, Emerson, and also with an encouragement to develop her own particular skills as a poet, which has much to do with a noble and blessed life, according to Dickinson.

In a letter written years later to T. W. Higginson, Dickinson reflects on Newton's untimely death in 1853 and writes, "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" (letter # 261, 25 April 1862). In this letter Dickinson suggests the importance of her relationship with Newton and also her keen and what would become a lifelong interest in the definition and use of words. When Dickinson next writes to Higginson, "My dying Tutor told me that he would like to live till I had been a poet, but Death was much of Mob as I could master—then—" (letter # 265, 7 June 1862), she may be hinting in these letters that, as a poet, the scope of her poetry includes all of life, death, and life after death. Clearly, Newton helps establish and

shape Dickinson's path of becoming a poet; now it is simply her journey to continue on this path.

Dickinson's path of becoming a poet, beginning sometime in 1850, becomes a way for her to work with and develop her whole being: body, mind, and soul. She is training her eye to see what is beautiful in nature, her mind what to read, whom to admire, and her soul, an intuitive sense of knowing of what cannot be seen (letter # 153, to Edward Everett Hale, 13 January 1854). This training constitutes Dickinson's poetic apprenticeship, so that her use of language begins to reflect the engagement with her body, mind, and soul, and her vision of a noble and blessed life becomes enfolded into her path of becoming a poet.

Another important influence, during the years 1851-54, is Dickinson's friendship with Henry Vaughan Emmons. Alfred Habegger (2001) writes:

Like Ben Newton, this young man—her close student friend—helped call out the poet in Dickinson and then moved out of the way. The difference between these mentors was that Newton, an imposing older brother and Unitarian, presented her with Emerson's hard-to-assimilate poems, whereas Emmons, more of an equal and operating within orthodoxy, brought a viable female model. (p. 321)

The "viable female model," Habegger notes, is Elizabeth Barrett Browning (p. 321). By introducing Dickinson to Elizabeth Barrett Browning through his essay "Poetry the Voice of Sorrow," which quotes from "A Vision of Poets" by Barrett Browning (Habegger, p. 317), Emmons is helping her envision a world in which she as a woman poet can eventually belong.

Years later, in 1859, Dickinson is actively imagining her life of poetry when she writes to her cousin Louise Norcross, "Loo,"

I have known little of you, since the October morning when our families went out driving, and you and I in the dining-room decided to be distinguished. It's a great thing to be "great," Loo, and you and I might tug for a life, and never accomplish it, but no one can stop our looking on, and you know some cannot sing, but the orchard is full of birds, and we all can listen. (letter # 199; Habegger, 2001, dates this letter "about December 1859," p. 388)

This "tug for a life" may be represented by Dickinson's beginning to assemble in 1858 her poems into "her own form of bookmaking: selected poems copied onto sheets of letter paper that she bound with string" which "may have served privately as publication" (Franklin, 1981, p. ix). In this way, Dickinson gathers over 800 poems, ending her bookmaking in 1863-64, as Franklin notes, perhaps because "her need for self-publication declined" or due to "the eye trouble of 1864 and 1865" (p. xii). As Dickinson continued to write and read her own poems, keeping her poems perhaps in a dresser drawer in her room, she at some point elected not to publish, and she never in fact prepared her poems for print. Interestingly, Franklin's description of Dickinson's bookmaking matches a definition for "book" as "any number of written sheets when bound or sewed together" which she would have read about in her Webster's 1844 *American Dictionary of the English Language*. Dickinson's form of bookmaking may in fact be a conscious decision to create poetry books and thus view herself as a poet.

Because Dickinson's collected poems, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Franklin, 1998), which span the years 1850 to 1886, are presented and read primarily with a best estimate of their chronology, it is easy to overlook the significance of Dickinson's creation of poetry books during an important time in her life. Reading the published form of Dickinson's poetry books, *The Manuscript*

Books of Emily Dickinson (Franklin, 1981), which are facsimile reproductions of Dickinson's poems, allows an intimacy with her handwriting which the printed word cannot convey. In fact, the manuscript books raise significant questions on how Dickinson is read, in her own hand according to her own placement of words on the page, or in the printed form, which she never authorized. Although Dickinson ends her form of bookmaking in 1863-64, she continues to write until her death in 1886, the creation of the poetry books perhaps serving to facilitate a lifelong perception of herself as a poet. As a private form of publication, the poetry books also allow for the opportunity of self-reflection: Dickinson can read and reflect on her poems over time, select certain poems to copy and send to correspondents, and sometimes change a word or words to create a variant reading of a poem. The poetry books thus foster, in my perception, a continued engagement with her body, mind, and soul, and a deepening reflection on her creative process, which contributes to her awareness of herself as a poet.

In addition to the creation of the poetry books, it is important to note that Dickinson conceives of herself as creating and becoming a poet within important relationships. Before she writes to her sister-in-law Sue, "Could I make you and Austin—proud—sometime—a great way off—'twould give me taller feet" (letter # 238, summer 1861), in earlier letters there is evidence of Dickinson's intention to develop herself, which eventually leads to her path of becoming a poet. In 1851 she writes to her brother Austin, "Dont take too much encouragement, but really I have the hope of becoming before you come quite an accountable being!" (letter #

44, 22 June 1851). Months later she writes to her friend and future sister-in-law Susan, "Susie,"

But for our sakes dear Susie, who please ourselves with the fancy that we are the only poets, and everyone else is prose, let us hope they will yet be willing to share our humble world and feed upon such aliment as we consent to do! (letter # 56, 9 October 1851)

Soon after Dickinson writes to Susie, she writes to her brother Austin:

We dont have many jokes tho' now, it is pretty much all sobriety, and we do not have much poetry, father having made up his mind that its pretty much all real life. Fathers real life and mine sometimes come into collision, but as yet escape unhurt! (letter # 65, 15 December 1851)

Here, Dickinson is turning to poetry as a form in which to express her own real life. Five months later, in a letter to Susie, Dickinson describes in almost a lyrical voice, her prose leaning toward poetry, a typical scene of housecleaning, and asks, "Do I paint it natural—Susie, so you think how it looks?" (letter # 85, 5 April 1852). Dickinson is learning, in certain relationships, that she can incorporate her own real life into her language and, more and more, her poetry.

Dickinson is also learning how to distinguish herself. She writes to her brother Austin:

Now Brother Pegasus, I'll tell you what it is—I've been in the habit myself of writing some few things, and it rather appears to me that you're getting away my patent, so you'd better be somewhat careful, or I'll call the police! (letter # 110, 27 March 1853)

Dickinson's "patent" is perhaps a call for privacy, a desire to be taken seriously, and an expression of her own budding abilities as a poet. Dickinson has been playfully experimenting with forms of expression, especially metaphor's capacity to convey multiple meanings. In a letter written in 1850, Dickinson announces, "I am Judith the heroine of the Apocrypha, and you the orator of Ephesus. That's

what they call a metaphor in our country. Don't be afraid of it, sir, it won't bite" (letter # 34, to George H. Gould?, February 1850). In writing to her "Brother Pegasus," Dickinson is asserting the discovery of her own voice, her ability to name and describe experiences in her own way. Nearly a month later she writes to Austin, "Perhaps I am mistaken, but I can most always tell anything that I want to" (letter # 115, 12 April 1853). Dickinson is here suggesting that her ability to tell can encompass everything that falls within her purview.

Three years later, in a letter to her cousin John L. Graves, Dickinson writes, "I'll tell you what I see today, and what I would that you saw" (letter # 184, late April 1856). Telling, for Dickinson, becomes a way of sharing, a way of practicing her writing skills, and a way of inciting the interests of her reader. Dickinson even imagines herself a painter. In the first of three letters, found among her papers after she died, addressed to "Master," an unidentified person Dickinson expresses an intense love for, she writes, "I wish that I were great, like Mr. Michael Angelo, and could paint for you" (letter # 187; Franklin, 1986, dates this letter "Spring 1858," p. 15). To her uncle, Joseph A. Sweetser, she writes, "I would you saw what I can see, and imbibed this music" (letter # 190, early summer 1858).

Dickinson is reveling in the images and sounds her words can create; her use of language begins to reflect and include a broader spectrum of her experiences.

As an inveterate writer of letters, Dickinson is increasingly turning to poetry to describe her inimitable truths. In 1858, when Dickinson begins to assemble her poetry books, she is making a conscious space in her life for the truths which poetry can express. Whether hearkening back to "standing alone in

rebellion” (letter # 35, to Jane Humphrey, 3 April 1850), or forward to “Dare you see a soul at the ‘White Heat’?” (poem # 401, summer 1862), Dickinson is exploring the limits of what she can say truthfully and artfully. Similarly, when Dickinson begins to send her poems in letters to correspondents (another form of private publication), she is asking her readers to make a space in their lives for poetry and to take her seriously as a poet. Her letters, not incidentally, may serve in part as a way for her to measure and assess her growth as a poet. Consequently, her letters complement a reading of her poems in that they both offer a frame of reference in which to understand her process of becoming a poet and situate her creative process in the context of her day-to-day life.

As a reader of Dickinson’s poems and letters, I have found that I must create a space for poetry in my life. This means that I must create the time and physical space in which to give poetry and the truths that poetry may reveal a stated importance and value in my life. Creating a space in my life for poetry also includes nourishing and deepening my enjoyment and understanding of words. In viewing this space in Dickinson’s life as her creative process, whereby she is able to attend to the truth of her whole experience, inclusive of body, mind, and soul, I too am brought back to a place of intimacy and engagement with my body, mind, and soul. From here I can trace Dickinson’s love of language as beginning in a love of nature. She writes to Higginson,

When much in the Woods as a little Girl, I was told that the Snake would bite me, that I might pick a poisonous flower, or Goblins kidnap me, but I went along and met no one but Angels, who were far shyer of me, than I could be of them, so I hav’nt that confidence in fraud which many exercise. (letter # 271, August 1862)

In her attention to images and sounds of nature, she is able to connect with her self, her soul, and create metaphors and symbols to guide her development. For instance, in a poem written in 1860, Dickinson intimates her unfolding creative process, from cocoon to chrysalis to butterfly:

Cocoon above! Cocoon below!
Stealthy Cocoon, why hide you so
What all the world suspect?
An hour, and gay on every tree
Your secret, perched in extasy
Defies imprisonment!

An hour in chrysalis to pass—
Then gay above receding grass
A Butterfly to go!
A moment to interrogate,
Then wiser than a “Surrogate,”
The Universe to know!

(poem # 142, early 1860)

Here Dickinson writes about an experience of nature; she addresses a common mystery anew, the mystery of the cocoon, chrysalis, and the expectation of the butterfly. Dickinson is getting to know nature; the “world” seems to know about this process, yet Dickinson must try her hand at describing it. Her world like the cocoon extends above and below. It seems to be a rapid process, “an hour” each in the cocoon and chrysalis states, and then an almost endless state of butterfly.

The butterfly escapes; this beyond imprisonment state exists in potential within the cocoon. What will the butterfly learn? A moment to interrogate, to inquire about flight perhaps of the wind; what is my direction, my intention? The image I see is of going to the edge of the universe and touching the unknown. The

poem is about awakening; flight. Dickinson transposes language into a living metaphor. Metaphor arises out of grasping the whole with a felt-sense, grasping the whole denotes experiencing a realm of the metaphor, the metaphor impacts the body, then, the body speaks the language of the soul.

Dickinson takes an outward worldly word, surrogate, and turns it into an inner reality. The cocoon is a veil that protects a whole psychic inner state that exists in potential within the psyche. *Psyche* is the Greek word for butterfly and the butterfly is a symbol of the soul. Defying imprisonment, the possibility of being a butterfly (affirming the soul) is suddenly open.

In comparing this poem to Dickinson's creative process, she is engaged in assembling her poems into poetry books at this time. This is a "secret" and possibly secluded act, akin to being in a cocoon state. Following this metaphor, it is possible that Dickinson is describing an aspect of her creative process, perhaps a sense of freedom which poetry releases in her, which involves transformation (the state of chrysalis), and an intimation of the movement of the poem and therefore herself as a poet-butterfly into the world. The "world" looks on, "suspects" the mystery of the cocoon. Dickinson watches perhaps from a place on the grounds of her garden, catches only glimpses of this process (within herself too); tries to measure in time, hours, yet in a moment everything changes, the universe is suddenly open to the butterfly. The butterfly carries the knowledge of the poem into a wider universe, as the knowledge of the poem and the process of becoming a butterfly is carried within the soul of the poet.

It is not difficult to imagine Emily Dickinson standing in her bedroom—on the second floor of her father’s house on Main Street in Amherst, Massachusetts, in 1861. She is watching through the westerly facing windows the sun going down over the Pelham Hills. There are not that many trees on the hills because people have been using the wood for their fires all winter—yet there is new growth now that it is almost spring. She can see the outline of the rolling hills that resembles a woman’s body—or two women’s bodies, or a man and a woman’s body, resting head-to-head—looking up at the sky. The colors of the sunset linger before her eyes—streaks tinged with orange and red changing to crimson and purple—better than any painting she thinks.

In the morning she awakens early, proceeds downstairs to the kitchen to light the hearth fire and make the bread for her family, for her father only likes her bread. She looks out through the east window and catches the sun rising. She pauses; as the bread rises in the oven she sits down at the kitchen table with paper and pen ready and writes,

I’ll tell you how the Sun rose—
 A Ribbon at a time—
 The Steeples swam in Amethyst—
 The news, like Squirrels, ran—
 The Hills untied their Bonnets—
 The Bobolinks—begun—
 Then I said softly to myself—
 “That must have been the Sun”!
 But how he set—I know not—
 There seemed a purple stile
 That little Yellow boys and girls
 Were climbing all the while—
 Till when they reached the other side—
 A Dominie in Gray—
 Put gently up the evening Bars—
 And led the flock away—

(poem # 204, early 1861)

A year later in late March or early April 1862 Emily Dickinson receives her April edition of *The Atlantic Monthly*, a magazine of “Literature, Art, and Politics.” She reads an article, that does not mention the author’s name, addressed simply “Letter To A Young Contributor” (Higginson, 1862, p. 401). Perhaps Dickinson discovers the author’s name by reading a shining review in the newspaper, the *Springfield Republican* (Leyda, 1960, p. 50). The author, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a man-of-letters, is soliciting manuscripts. In his article he writes about “the magnificent mystery of words”:

There may be phrases which shall be palaces to dwell in, treasure-houses to explore; a single word may be a window from which one may perceive all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them. Oftentimes a word shall speak what accumulated volumes have labored in vain to utter: there may be years of crowded passion in a word, and half a life in a sentence. Such being the majesty of the art you seek to practise, you can at least take time and deliberation before dishonoring it. . . . Charge your style with life. . . . Literature is attar of roses, one distilled drop from a million blossoms. . . . War or peace, fame or forgetfulness, can bring no real injury to one who has formed the fixed purpose to live nobly day by day. (pp. 403-410)

Dickinson reads the article, is moved by it, and writes her first letter to Higginson on 15 April 1862. Their correspondence will continue until Dickinson’s death in 1886; and Higginson will be instrumental in getting Dickinson’s poems published after her death. In her letter to Higginson, Dickinson encloses “I’ll tell you how the Sun Rose—” as one of four poems and asks him, “Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?” (letter # 260, 15 April 1862). She asks him if her verse “breathed.”

In my reading of Dickinson’s poems and letters I have discovered I must slow down to get to know each word—not simply with my mind, but to use words

from her own vernacular—with the bone, breath, and brain. Slowing down in order to know I begin to listen and hear and develop a relationship with her words that is alive. My breath is the living connection to her words. I bring the poem into my present understanding and allow my understanding to deepen. The poem ceases to occupy the flat, dark, and uniform words on the page—and moves instead with my breath into the play of my body, mind, and soul.

In “I’ll tell you how the Sun rose—” (poem # 204, early 1861), Dickinson asks her reader to look and listen again—with words—using the whole body as a vehicle of comprehension. She tells slowly with the Sun, “A Ribbon at a time—”. She has experienced the sun and the images and sounds attendant upon the sun’s rising and setting—and she has developed associations to words that reflect her experiences and particular word choices.

In this poem Dickinson tells of an experience of light as an incredible mystery playing all around, moving the squirrels to run and the bobolinks to sing. Dickinson wants to tell the “news”: the sun is light, life. It is a recent event yet distant now. She will tell in the past tense and bring into the present, just as the sun rises and sets each day. As she waits for the sun’s return, she will tell softly, gently, of how the sun enters her head, stays with her, affects her knowledge, and is accorded a higher place in her being. He becomes the sun on her head, a crown of nature she wears like a bonnet. He does not set for her; she does not know how he set. From experiencing a living connection to light, Dickinson develops a sense of light within herself and a lifelong interest in experiences and words associated with light.

In this poem Dickinson tells slowly; time is compressed, how to measure, tell? The man, clergyman, “Dominie in Gray,” signals the night, yet he can’t put out the light, because the light glows within her. The poem is like a chant, childlike, yet not because it speaks of children. Dickinson has positioned herself low enough in the grass, in her relation to nature, to notice how the squirrels run in the morning, and she has climbed a stile to view the colors of sunset. People appear around the edges of this vision; while the flock is led away, Dickinson captures and contains a powerful sun carrying the message of eternal light and life.

That Higginson’s response to her poems is less than she expects is evidenced by her comment to him in her next letter: “Thank you for the surgery—it was not so painful as I supposed. I bring you others—as you ask—though they might not differ—” (letter # 261, 25 April 1862). Higginson has also asked about her companions, and Dickinson replies in the same letter:

You ask of my Companions Hills—Sir—and the Sundown—and a Dog—large as myself, that my Father bought me—They are better than Beings—because they know—but do not tell—and the noise in the Pool, at Noon—excels my Piano. I have a Brother and Sister—My Mother does not care for thought—and Father, too busy with his Briefs—to notice what we do—He buys me many Books—but begs me not to read them—because he fears they joggle the Mind. They are religious—except me—and address an Eclipse, every morning—whom they call their “Father.”

Dickinson’s letter to Higginson is revealing in what it tells about her poetry and her self. That Higginson is interested in her life suggests that he understands that poetry is rooted in the life that tries “to live nobly day by day” (Higginson, 1862, p. 410). He is assessing her pulse and the pulse of her poetry. Dickinson may share his perception, while she is also quick to point out how her life differs from that of her family. In being unwilling to address an “Eclipse,” Dickinson is

expressing a struggle to move beyond religion—or a religion devoid of light and life—and affirm her place as a poet, inclusive of nature.

In her insistence to nurture a living light in her creative process, I have found that Dickinson's life suggests interesting parallels with the life depicted of the ancient Greek Goddess Hestia. As the Goddess of the Hearth, Hestia occupies "the center of the house" (Demetrakopoulos, 1979, p. 56) where the hearth is located. Hestia lights the fire and is the source of nurturance—she turns "nature (raw nature) into a human product (a feast)" (p. 58). Stephanie Demetrakopoulos writes, "Hestia's primary function was the bonding of the family" (p. 62). Yet there is a paradox in that Hestia is perceived as being alone. Demetrakopoulos writes, "This aloneness in the house, as the hands work at crafts, sewing, cooking, gives time for introspection, the reflection that perhaps gives enough sense of self to obviate the need for public recognition" (p. 60). Hestia is thus "the inviolate private source, the solemn center in which exists the ultimate mystery of being human" (p. 64). Her "homebase is a place to replenish the soul" (p. 65), and "the soul issues from Hestia and at the end of each day returns to her" (p. 67). As the "glowing heat in the center of life, home, and body" (p. 61), she teaches that "the soul is burnt out of, in, and through the body" (p. 66). She is connected to the round shape of the hearth, and thus symbolized by the circle (p. 71). Demetrakopoulos notes that to give Hestia a place of importance today is to "re-sacralize Hestia, to make her as culturally central and apparent as the ancients did" (p. 70). This involves giving

public credence and worth to the work in the family household that women do. If we could re-sacralize this aspect of life, enjoy it as part of the activity

of being, it might be a recovering of connections between the mind and the body, public and private, and of the worlds of men and women, traditionally so separate. (p. 70)

What Hestia symbolizes and reiterates is the central importance of home for Dickinson's life. Susan Dickinson, Dickinson's sister-in-law who knew Dickinson for nearly forty years, gives a rich testament to the importance of home when she writes in Dickinson's obituary,

The sacred quiet of her home proved the fit atmosphere for her worth and work. . . . One can only speak of "duties beautifully done"; of her gentle tillage of the rare flowers filling her conservatory, . . . and which was ever abloom in frost or sunshine, so well she knew her subtle chemistries; of her tenderness to all in the home circle; . . . her quick and rich response to all who rejoiced or suffered at home, or among her wide circle of friends the world over. This side of her nature was to her the real entity in which she rested. (Hart & Smith, 1998, pp. 266-267)

Sue's daughter, Martha Dickinson Bianchi (1932) recalls, writing of her family, that in growing up around her Aunt Emily "it became a constant influence in the life of each one of us to know she was always there in her own place—a fixed entity" (p. 54). In her care and concern of plants, and people, and in the writing of her poems and letters, Dickinson, like Hestia, is engaging in a self-reflecting process, a deepening in place. She is coming to live, and dwell, in the soul. Dwelling—with nature, within herself, in her house and grounds—becomes a way of dwelling in language. Dickinson's creative process of dwelling is thus reflected in her day-to-day life. When Dickinson writes to Higginson, she is seeking to understand and see herself in a wider circle without giving up her creative process, her place and identity as occupying the "glowing heat in the center of life, home, and body" (Demetrakopoulos, 1979, p. 61).

It is true that Dickinson's pallet is of, and she knows this, a decisive New England color, as she writes, "I see—New Englandly" (poem # 256, 1861). She is preoccupied with death and the afterlife, and looking at the soul—and yet she is also looking outwardly on an ever-changing colorful—and beautiful—world. Higginson, in his 1862 article "Letter to a Young Contributor," admonishes the would-be writer to "organize." He writes, "Thus the American writer finds himself among his phrases like an American sea-captain amid his crew: a medley of all nations, waiting for the strong organizing New-England mind to mould them into a unit of force" (p. 406). He may have instructed Dickinson to be more organized, for she replies in a letter of August 1862, "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—" (letter # 271). Dickinson's way of organizing is different, she essentially returns, circling "a metaphor, a paradox, a riddle" (Bianchi, 1932, p. 40) that she lives into, not simply with her mind but with her whole being. There is an intense sense of living that dictates how she writes. She may be wondering if Higginson does not feel life pulsing ever so near? In her third letter addressed to "Master," Dickinson writes, "and did the sea—never come so close as to make you dance?" (letter # 233; Franklin, 1986, dates this letter "Summer 1861," p. 39). To be a poet, Dickinson suggests in a poem written in late 1861, is a matter of ripening, of sharpening her skills and being ever attentive as she puts it in her letter to Higginson, "Then there's a noiseless noise in the Orchard—that I let persons hear" (letter # 271, August 1862):

**I shall keep singing!
Birds will pass me**

On their way to Yellower Climes—
 Each—with a Robin's expectation—
 I—with my Redbreast—
 And my Rhymes—

Late—when I take my place in summer—
 But—I shall bring a fuller tune—
 Vespers—are sweeter than matins—Signor—
 Morning—only the seed—of noon—

(poem # 270, late 1861)

With attention and concentration Dickinson sings with her “Redbreast” and her “Rhymes” of a place called summer. In singing, Dickinson suggests, it is important to be able to listen and hear from the depths of the soul, “the tune without the words” (poem # 314, 1862). Dickinson also intimates the tune is within (poem # 402, 1862). “I shall keep singing!” (poem # 270, late 1861) speaks of her journey to live and sing from the soul.

Summer is a place of ripening—a place of internal soul ripening. Her intention is to continue to sing—not letting anyone stop her in her journey. Just because one poem is finished doesn't mean poetry is finished or her development as a poet is finished. In staking her claim to be a poet, she will give her experience a “fuller,” and “sweeter,” shape. “Sweeter” has associations of fruit, a sense of ripening, involving many senses. To be a poet takes time, development, growth, bypassing simple conceptions of religion or poetry. The “Robin's expectation,” becomes more to come, the journey—Dickinson is a robin.

Morning is the light that beckons the soul to start and the robin to sing. Noon is when the sun is at the meridian, a moment of decision, shall—I will—bring a fuller tune—I will be a poet. Dickinson foresees herself singing and

writing at night. During the day there is a change, a transformation, she is growing, maturing, learning a fuller tune, as morning is included in noon. Of what will this tune consist? It is that which still needs saying, is still unsaid. It is the soul's song as "Vespers" are an evening song or evening service; a "fuller tune," that speaks of fullness and wholeness, and this is Dickinson's vision: to live and write from a place of depth—with soul.

The relationship of this poem to Dickinson's creative process is in her intention to continue in a pursuit of knowledge, of poetry, of questioning, beyond what is considered polite, or beyond what is expected of her. She is venturing into climes unknown; yet there is sense too of Dickinson staying in place, even when it becomes dark. She will sing the dark way—while other birds travel on their way to yellower climes—she will remain, until truly summer. Dickinson will continue to bring more poems, for she is climbing knowledge, journeying; she is passing. Summer is a place like a grove through a forest or an orchard where there is light, a certain kind of dignified light—where things are seen and heard clearly (sounds like Dickinson's definition of "Heaven," "The Orchard, when the Sun is on—" in poem # 544, 1863).

In late January of 1863 when Dickinson writes to her cousins, Loo and Fanny Norcross, "Let Emily sing for you because she cannot pray" (letter # 278), she is hinting that through her poetry she can best direct and convey her fullest intentions. For her cousins who have just experienced the death of their father, Dickinson intimates her singing is a way of finding what is life affirming and positive—even in the face of death. Singing is Dickinson's praying; singing is

Dickinson's appropriation of religion. In fact, singing may suggest a way through religion, for singing as poetry focuses on the power of words, the power of telling, and allows for her intention to direct the life of the word, so that what is truly within her attention becomes alive. Five months later in late May, 1863, Dickinson writes to her cousins, "Tell the doctor I am inexorable, besides I shall heal you quicker than he. You need the balsam word" (letter # 281). Dickinson is here suggesting that the person, life, behind the creation, can imbue the word with its healing properties and that the healing word can convey the life of the spirit that breathes them. Similarly, in a poem written in 1862, and sent to her cousins, Dickinson firmly places her intention on the saying, the life, and the breath of the word. She writes,

A word is dead, when it is said
Some say—
I say it just begins to live
That day

(poem # 278, 1862)

Dickinson speaks with a sense of exclamation, discovery, a feeling of continuity and living beyond, and through, saying. Who says a word is dead? Dickinson aligns herself with those who say it begins to live. She is also speaking to the present-day reader, saying, you can bring this word-poem to life by your very saying. The poem extends across time and space to the space opened up by the writer to include the reader, allowing language to become alive with the saying. What power the human contains, to be able to say a word and bring to life! The poet brings to life by bringing life to a word. It is a process of enlivening of attending to the unit of the word, honoring the importance of a word. The word

becomes associated with life; what is intimated through the poem is the importance of living—and hence forth—living this truth.

The word is brought into my body and is made alive. A word is brought to life through my relationship with it. This is a resurrection, a death and rebirth, a transformation. What happens in the human being? Is it the way said—way embodied—the importance of the person who reads, receives the word and says it? I see Dickinson seeking to understand the word, giving deep thought to it, the life of words, asking what does it mean? Where in the body, mind, and soul does the word live? How does it live? The word, any word? Brings to mind how did Dickinson live her creative process, the life of words? Not simply by saying a word, but certain words—and living a word—She says—it is what I say—

The voice becomes important, how to make the voice heard, to be assertive? There is a joy in telling with the full voice. “That Day” it begins to live, that day—is it necessary to keep saying again and again? Because of rhyme, it is a poem; a poem lives when it is said, so the poem shows and tells. Dickinson has thought about and examined how a word becomes important, takes on new life. A word begins to live by associations, by new usage; the associations may in fact grow—and build, like memories. This is how a poem lasts; it is an oral and written tradition. Dickinson enters the pantheon of poets with this poem.

I enter the poem anew, through particular words. The words leap off the page—want to be said—spoken aloud with emphasis in my body, mind, and soul. The words do not want to stay still but move about—I discover configurations of words, like recipes for a new dish. In my attention to the word, my body and the

breath, I develop a view that words may live—an understanding of the life of Dickinson's words—and this is the excitement of poetry, of staying with the process and following the breath.

When Dickinson is writing to her cousins, Loo and Fanny, she is seeking to align herself with a living word; she is also seeking to align herself with people who share her excitement with a language that is connected to life. Martha Dickinson Bianchi (1932), Dickinson's niece, writes of her Aunt Emily's catch phrase:

By the time I was sixteen, I would tell her about the party of the night before, in which she never forgot to be interested—informal little affairs they were, with a few college boys asked in, and dancing as long as any of the girls would play the piano to keep the music going. "Did you love the party, dear?" she would ask, to set me off; and once, when I failed to enthuse, she nodded shrewdly as she explained the trouble to me—"I see, Coroner's verdict—Dead!"—a phrase for a dull person or party that was never to fall into disuse in our intimate circle. (pp. 31-32)

Martha also notes, writing of Dickinson, how "the superfluous dropped from her as her habit of thought strengthened" (p. 32). What Martha's observations illustrate, is that in Dickinson's connection with a living language she finds strength in and chooses relationships that foster or nurture this connection. Martha notes, "We did not merely learn her from her poems and letters, but knew her as part of our every day" (p. 44). There is an inseparable quality that is difficult to name that emerges between Dickinson's life and her poems and letters. Whereas Dickinson may be understood as preserving a kind of privacy, there is also a way she reaches out and seeks to connect with others. Martha writes,

Even my father would never go nearer her sacred centers than she indicated. Lovely as she was to us all, we stood in awe of an indefinable quality in her. I have seen her face stern, as if in judgment of her own soul

or fate. She looked like my grandfather then—trying the Providence above her, perhaps, before her own tribunal. Hers was a rigor of personality quite consistent with complete affection for each one of the home circle, and this became increasingly apparent. (p. 43)

It is within this home circle that Dickinson expands her sense of love to include, writes Susan, “a wide circle of friends the world over” (Hart & Smith, 1998, p. 267). The inseparable quality between Dickinson’s life and her poems and letters emerges as love. Love is the driving force—the impulse that, Martha notes, becomes “increasingly apparent” (p. 43).

In 1862 Dickinson writes a poem intended for Susan to read, yet it may never have been sent (Franklin, 1998, p. 303). The poem, with first line, “The Love a Child can show—below—” (poem # 285, 1862), explores a value of love shared between Susan and Emily. The poem traces how love is important, valuable, and worthy to be put into a form that can be shared. When Dickinson a year later enters the poem into one of her poetry books, she changes the word “Child” to “Life” in the first line. By changing the word, Dickinson is perhaps expressing her own connection with a love that quite literally expands her heart:

The Love a Life can show Below
Is but a filament, I know,
Of that diviner thing
That faints upon the face of Noon—
And smites the Tinder in the Sun—
And hinders Gabriel’s Wing—

’Tis this—in Music—hints and sways—
And far abroad on Summer days—
Distills uncertain pain—
’Tis this enamors in the East—
And tints the Transit in the West
With harrowing Iodine—

’Tis this—invites—appalls—endows—

Flits—glimmers—proves—dissolves—
 Returns—suggests—convicts—enchants
 Then—flings in Paradise—

(poem # 285, 1862)

Dickinson tells in this poem about love, above and below, in a broad way. Dickinson hints at this love in her second letter addressed to “Master”: “A love so big it scares her, rushing among her small heart—pushing aside the blood—and leaving her faint (all) and white in the gust’s arm—” (letter # 248; Franklin, 1986, dates this letter “Early 1861,” p. 22). This great love is within and projected outwardly through the poem; is displayed around her, making it so much bigger, colorful. This love branches out like the blood branches out through the veins in her hand and touches through different forms of loving. Central is a pain, a discomfort that somehow awakens to an acute sense of discomfort—which includes a sense, sharpened, of beauty. This love connects by a filament, a thread; the thread wending its way through the body, the heart and mind—to heaven. A filament—is a fiber, connected to the flesh—is a way of connecting with the whole through love. It is most likely a love Dickinson feels that continues to grow larger, diviner—as Dickinson expresses in a letter, “We are all human—Mary—until we are divine” (letter # 235, to Mrs. Samuel Bowles, about August 1861). Dickinson follows her own mind and body.

This love is in the east and west, above and below, abroad, indeed everywhere it encircles, leads, connects. Her poem reflects the texture of her life—a love surpassing brings pain, harrowing iodine. She is merging—nature and metaphor—blending, assigning this power of sun to enamor, inflame with love.

Her words are inclusive of proportions of her life, even the spirit; she does not block out the sun; she is not closed to the messages received, the experiences, including new information. Does this love hinder Gabriel's wing because he is pulled back to earth, held by a tether?

She is faint, very feeble, in the face of this flammable love. What impedes, stops, obstructs is what enamors, tints her world. The color is slight like the face of noon—her face—in summer. Like a numbing refrain, music helps her recall and bring to mind what is difficult to express. One after another, pining after truth, Dickinson takes a word and bends it against the sky, the sky of the mind-body. She releases a cap and words flow like blood—the soul comes gushing out, non-stop. It is a torment she cannot escape from. Love gets language to flow; it springs from a rich-overflowing source. She celebrates the greater love to come; then she flings in paradise, for she knows what human and divine love is, and she will trace and describe. Something in her faints upon the center of light, and love is brought into the realm of her creative life force.

Dickinson's love is transpersonal, beyond and through herself. She works, as she later writes in a poem "The Love of Thee—a Prism be—/ Excelling Violet" (poem # 442, 1862), to set off in deep relief an image of love that she will crystallize in her life. When love is awakened in her it is expressed as a need for the person; it also feeds and is channeled through the deep reservoir of her creative process. In a letter to Mrs. Samuel Bowles, Dickinson writes about their mutual affection for Samuel Bowles, who is on a trip abroad, "The Heart wants what it wants—or else it does not care. . . . Not to see what we love, is very terrible—and

talking—does’nt ease it—and nothing does—but just itself” (letter # 262, spring 1862). The following poem “I tend my flowers for thee—” (poem # 367, autumn 1862) may have been written in response to his departure in April, 1862. The “Bright Absentee” of the poem may refer to Samuel, for years later Dickinson still refers to his “phosphorescence” (letter # 438, about 1875). The “Bright Absentee” may also refer to the present-day reader who is not there—yet in reading the poem, brings light, life, and meaning to her words. The word “flask” in the poem may also hold a clue, for in a couple of letters (# 256, to Samuel Bowles, late March 1862, and # 259, to Samuel Bowles, early April 1862) Dickinson mentions through Susan that she would like to give Samuel a drinking flask to take with him on his trip abroad. The image of the flask, in the poem, is contained within a flower, and this suggests it is a container that can hold and pour out her love for him as he journeys and eventually returns to quench his thirst. Because he is married, propriety admonishes her not to show too much emotion around his leaving; here in this poem she gives her flowers a tongue to speak—as she writes elsewhere, “Flowers—negotiate between us—/ As ministry” (poem # 829, 1864). She is also known by the nickname “Daisy” to Samuel Bowles (letter # 249, early 1862). As the poem takes place in a garden, which may also include her conservatory where she tends plants—a place of transformation and change, generation, growth, expansive, yet contained—it displays a remarkable sense of the education of her senses, catches her—so to speak—listening to her own heartbeat.

I tend my flowers for thee—
 Bright Absentee!
 My Fuschzia’s Coral Seams
 Rip—while the Sower—dreams—

Geraniums—tint—and spot—
 Low Daisies—dot—
 My Cactus—splits her Beard
 To show her throat—

Carnations—tip their spice—
 And Bees—pick up—
 A Hyacinth—I hid—
 Puts out a Ruffled Head—
 And odors fall
 From flasks—so small—
 You marvel how they held—

Globe Roses—break their satin flake—
 Opon my Garden floor—
 Yet—thou—not there—
 I had as lief they bore
 No crimson—more—

Thy flower—be gay—
 Her Lord—away!
 It ill becometh me—
 I'll dwell in Calyx—Gray—
 How modestly—alway—
 Thy Daisy—
 Draped for thee!

(poem # 367, autumn 1862)

This poem explores love and human nature. It explores a life decision for Dickinson, a way of dwelling—a way of being—in a certain color, as “Calyx—Gray—” may be interpreted according to her dictionary as containing the color white, and perhaps it was around this time that she thought to wear exclusively white. The poem is floral, expressive. Calyx is the outer covering of the flower, not yet opened. Dickinson uses words denoting the body: head, throat, beard. The poem exudes odors, a very powerful reminder, suggestive. I marvel, stop, wonder at the crimson, deep red. “I tend my flowers for thee—” by the end of the poem

“thee” has a heightened meaning. She is a flower being tossed about by a great love—writing the poem helps her to clarify what she will do, how she will act in this great drama, storm of feeling. Red is love; working with the poem is working with a great deal of life and feeling overflowing. The eye that sees the flowers exploding in color and scent, the rampant bee on its errand, this eye is the eye that loves and speaks across distances of a love in muffled but not mute tones. It is a stirring; it becomes a dialogue with another, yet also with herself—putting her love into a form that contains yet overflows. She is here playing with form; words suggest, evoke, plead, cajole, entice, entreat. Flasks are small, yet her hands are small—here is the body, the bleeding heart—everything is seemingly contained in this garden, which later becomes Eden for Dickinson. There is death and life, for the garden regenerates—Dickinson likes perennial flowers, she likes the life that flowers generate, their associations meandering across social borders, propriety; giving flowers is giving love. Here she knows her flowers; she is swayed, moved, experiencing a change in relationship yet she will continue to tend. There is a dream world the poet inhabits—an invitation to dream—Hiding a Hyacinth, it comes out of hiding—nothing is contained for long; irrepressible desire to speak, be heard, to love and be loved. Dickinson writes in another poem “If it had no word—/ Would it make the Daisy,/ Most as big as I was—/ When it plucked me?” (poem # 184, 1861). Invitation understood. It is a secret language, involves a great deal of secret touching, through words. Dickinson uses the poem to describe what happens when she loves—her tending for another—and the light he gave endows her with light (meaning)—and she gives light (meaning) through the poem.

Dickinson's friends of particular importance, Sue, Samuel, and Higginson, offer her a way to see herself and imagine herself in a larger context. Sue shares her love of poetry and gardening and is a steady presence and active audience living next-door as Dickinson engages in her writing. Samuel is worldly, commanding her attention as an editor of a large newspaper, the *Springfield Republican*, and is not an infrequent guest at Sue's house or Dickinson's house covering for his paper the annual commencement exercises of Amherst College.

Higginson, in turn, is a man-of-letters and author in his own right. By reciprocating an interest in Dickinson and her writing, Higginson prompts her to temper and refine her own self-reflection process in her writing and to, in essence, set the timbre of her work in terms of a larger audience. This is not an easy process for Dickinson, as she writes to Higginson, referring to her creative process, "I thanked you for your justice—but could not drop the Bells whose jingling cooled my Tramp. . . . You think my gait 'spasmodic'—I am in danger—Sir—You think me 'uncontrolled'—I have no Tribunal" (letter # 265, 7 June 1862). It almost sounds as if Higginson has referred to Dickinson as a horse in need of training. A month later, when Dickinson writes in a letter to Higginson "My Business is Circumference" (letter # 268, July 1862), she may be affirming the intended scope of her poetry and, by implication, the manner in which she reaches circumference. It is also in this letter that Dickinson refers to herself as "the only Kangaroo among the Beauty." The image of the Kangaroo accords with accounts of Dickinson's general sensitivity and movement as "flitting" (Bianchi, 1932, p. 17) about. When Higginson next calls her, as Dickinson notes,

“Wayward” (letter # 271, August 1862), she gives Higginson a salient view of her inspiration or motivation as a poet: “I suppose the pride that stops the Breath, in the Core of Woods, is not of Ourselves.” In recognizing an unseen presence or dimension to her writing, which may be termed transpersonal, Dickinson is circumventing Higginson’s perception of herself as not being knowledgeable enough about her creative process, as she writes, “You say ‘Beyond your knowledge.’ You would not jest with me, because I believe you—but Preceptor—you cannot mean it?” By the end of the letter Dickinson is offering Higginson one of three portraits she has acquired of Mrs. Browning. It may also be at this time that Dickinson places a portrait of “Browning-Barrett” on her bedroom wall (Longworth, 1990, p. 80). Clearly, Higginson surreptitiously helps Dickinson define her self as a poet in her own right.

A poem written in 1862, if read within the context of Dickinson’s coming to terms with her own creative process—and seeking to define herself as a poet—shows Dickinson getting to know her thought processes. Dickinson takes the reader into her creative process—through her brain—on what seems to be a typical ramble in her garden. The difference is the garden is now a place charged with symbolism; the garden for Dickinson is a fertile bed of relationships. In this poem, “Within my Garden, rides a Bird” (poem # 370, autumn 1862) there is a love that comes out for the bird, the rose, and her dog. Dickinson explores her relationship with herself within her relationship to nature and all the creatures in her garden. The image of a revolving circle or circuit, including the ground beneath her feet, Dickinson carries away with her to form a deeper apperception of relationship.

The poem traces Dickinson's lesson of coming to trust her own senses, what she sees, hears, touches, smells, tastes, and intuitions. Her senses provide the images and sounds that make up her own creative process—for things happen so quickly in this garden—her “clumsy eye” takes in moment by moment, yet sometimes she suggests it is difficult to trust. There is also a sense of play Dickinson expresses in the poem. In a letter written to Sue three years earlier this sense of play is also palpable: “I should love dearly to spend the evening with the girls, but have made calls this afternoon, and accidentally left my mind at Prof Warner's” (letter # 201, about 1859).

Within my Garden, rides a Bird
 Opon a single Wheel—
 Whose spokes a dizzy music make
 As 'twere a travelling Mill—

He never stops, but slackens
 Above the Ripest Rose—
 Partakes without alighting
 And praises as he goes,

Till every spice is tasted—
 And then his Fairy Gig
 Reels in remoter atmospheres—
 And I rejoin my Dog,

And He and I, perplex us
 If positive, 'twere we—
 Or bore the Garden in the Brain
 This Curiosity—

But He, the best Logician,
 Refers my clumsy eye—
 To just vibrating Blossoms!
 An exquisite Reply!

(poem # 370, autumn 1862)

Dickinson is exploring in this poem the inner and outer play with nature—the bird is free, can taste all, a desire of the poet's? Dickinson captures a moment in time, of what is happening outwardly and inwardly. Where is the garden, in the brain? What is real? Dickinson elsewhere uses the word “Wheel” as a description of how her brain works (poem # 61, 1859); here she describes the workings of her brain. Dickinson encourages me to follow my bodily felt experiences in order to find a way of understanding her words. “Logician” means toward truth; if the garden is in her brain, so too is the bird, and she is the one partaking. “Rejoin,” is to answer to a reply, to join again. There is a play of religion, the bird “praises,” reels, makes music. The fairy gig, fairy ring, is a circle. What I see with my own curiosity is a lot of circles, and movement. Dickinson captures a movement that is exquisite, very sensibly felt. My dog can see things, and I can see things. The mind-body connection in Dickinson moves quickly, she thinks and feels quickly. She plays with the boundaries of truth—affirming the imagination. She notices, and hears, vibrating blossoms creating music. She feels a relationship with her dog—she notices the relationships, within the self and the brain, and describes this play. Dickinson allows the reader to travel with her—into the brain. Years later she would write, “It is solemn to remember that Vastness—is but the Shadow of the Brain which casts it—” (letter # 735, to Higginson, about 1881). Dickinson is exploring how thought is important, truth is important. She also suggests that we cannot escape the by-ways, the inner and outer journeys that we are taken on. This willingness to journey allows for a deep conversation. Dickinson explores her playful side, rogue side. She allows the garden (imagery) to enter her deeply. She

describes, in this way, circles—all that revolves, circles, comes around, a circuit complete, yet open, broken—in remoter atmospheres—always traveling beyond, or deeper, the bird too being a part of this unbroken web of life—and death—and life. When I first visited Dickinson's home, stepping foot on her property, this poem came springing to life in my brain. I was hearing the poem in my brain, and observing my own experience, my thoughts traveling out through the eyes—capturing a moment. Her garden contains spices, a Mill, where she transforms spices. What transformation happens through the brain? Through experiencing the ground of her garden in my brain I learn about transformation through the movement of a metaphor in my body. This whole inner and outer play of image, metaphor, and sound—makes sense of what is dizzy—becomes praises. Dickinson is transforming the raw material of nature into a form—nature becomes a powerful ally for her; she studies nature to learn; and getting the ring of it, she expresses an enjoyment with the images and sounds that words evoke.

Dickinson's creative process may thus be understood as her ability to use what materials she has at hand. Susan writes to "Col. Higginson," concerning a mistake in the word "ajar" when Dickinson's poems are first published in 1890:

In the verse, "An almanac's aware" &c the vol. has it "the spectacles afar." Emily wrote and meant it, "ajar." I wish it might be changed for her sake. Sitting up late at night long after her family had retired, I can easily see, as she came on the unclasped spectacles of her Father, how that, and the other expressions came. (Bingham, 1945, p. 92)

Martha (1932) recalls, "Aunt Emily was busy, always busy. When she read, she was next busiest to when she wrote" (p. 46). Rich (1979a) also notes that Dickinson "began with the material she had at hand: herself. She had to possess

the courage to enter, through language, states which most people deny or veil with silence" (p. 176). Not only is Dickinson using the materials she has at hand, she is transforming her materials, including herself, through her dwelling in language. Through taking her experiences and giving a language to them that accords with her experiences, Dickinson is creating a conscious vision of herself as a poet—she is undergoing a change in perspective—which requires fortitude of spirit. Years earlier she hints at this change in a letter to Catherine Scott Turner: "Dare you dwell in the East where we dwell? Are you afraid of the Sun?" (letter # 203, about March 1859). Essentially Dickinson's creative process, as the following poem "Dare you see a Soul at the 'White Heat'?" (poem # 401, summer 1862) testifies, is about forging—making strong, hardy, resilient—the spirit, and able to continue to create. Dickinson's poem and therefore life may be read as a challenge, a dare, which takes courage, to live and write from the soul. A transpersonal perspective of Dickinson's creative process incorporates such terms as soul and transformation and the meanings, which may be used in a fuller understanding of her life.

For Dickinson, the soul is a reality. She writes in numerous poems about her soul, and some of the imagery she uses, such as "Gem" and "Diadem" as in the poem "One life of so much consequence!" (poem # 248, 1861), she may have become familiar with through the writings of the minister Charles Wadsworth. Dickinson probably meets and hears Wadsworth preach in 1855 while visiting her friend Eliza Coleman in Philadelphia (Johnson & Ward, 1986, p. 320). There is also evidence in letters (see, for example, letter # 487, to Mrs. Holland, early 1877, "The Sermon you failed to hear, I can lend you—though Legerdemain is

unconveyed”) that Dickinson continues a lifelong interest in his sermons. She also corresponds with Wadsworth, although none of her letters to him survive (Sewall, 1980, pp. 444-462). Wadsworth (1882), in his sermon “My Jewels,” likens the soul to a “gem”:

There is within the body, apart from its physical, functional life, a sentient, immaterial principle, capable of living and acting separate from the body. . . . What marvelous art and science and literature, what grand philosophies and civilizations and religions it has wrought out among men! . . . And who can even dream of its immortal future? Of the mighty possibilities it embodies, as the cedar in the cone, the oak in the acorn; of the ineffable thoughts it shall think, and the stupendous works it shall achieve, and the enrapturing affections it shall feel and share when it has crossed the threshold of the eternal world? This soul! . . . The value of a gem is not in its composition, but in its crystallization. . . . Even the diamond is composed mainly of carbon, and differs from the black coal of our furnaces only in this mysterious transfiguration. . . . The natural man may be only a black coal, absorbing heavenly light, and therefore only fit for the fire. But the spiritual man has, through gracious crystallization, become a gem, reflecting Divine light, and thus fitted for a diadem. (pp. 76-77)

The “mysterious transfiguration” of the black coal of the furnace into the “Divine light” (Wadsworth, 1882, p. 77) is reflected in Dickinson’s poem “Dare you see a Soul at the ‘White Heat’?” (poem # 401, summer 1862). Here Dickinson uses the village blacksmith and the materials of the blacksmith to forge a relationship to her soul. She works with the light that is there; it heats up. Suffering, Dickinson suggests, is conducive to the creative process; the suffering that is inherent in life becomes the material of creativity. In the recently discovered alleged photograph of Dickinson published in Habegger (2001, following p. 366) there is a visible sense of suffering, which is similar to the pose her mother takes in her only known photograph (see Longworth, 1990, p. 41; or Habegger, 2001, following p. 366). Dickinson’s process of writing is an intense

act, akin to the blacksmith who makes something enduring, a metal ring—a symbol of the soul. I see and hear in this poem Dickinson listening fully to her soul-voice. She is describing an atmosphere she has created for her work—the poet that works with the materials, who is relied upon, sought after, for the product. It is but a small leap she takes, like the leap of a flame, when she describes her “business” to Higginson, “My Business is Circumference” (letter # 268, July 1862); and to Dr. and Mrs. J. G. Holland, “My business is to love. . . . My business is to sing” (letter # 269, summer 1862). The blacksmith must love her materials, make them sing—round them out, and sound them out into the world—never quite a finished, complete project.

Dare you see a Soul at the “White Heat”?
Then crouch within the door—
Red—is the Fire’s common tint—
But when the vivid Ore

Has vanquished Flame’s conditions—
It quivers from the Forge
Without a color, but the Light
Of unannointed Blaze—

Least Village, boasts it’s Blacksmith—
Whose Anvil’s even ring
Stands symbol for the finer Forge
That soundless tugs—within—

Refining these impatient Ores
With Hammer, and with Blaze
Until the designated Light
Repudiate the Forge—

(poem # 401, summer 1862)

Dickinson explores in this poem an inner soul heat. It is a heart-glow, revolving around a warm hearth, and other heated moments. The light is vital; it

expresses that which leaps from the page after being pressed. It is then but a small step to being a poet, to hear this even ring. I can hear the ring, the tugging within. First lines in Dickinson's poems are powerful. Dickinson realizes herself as the poet blacksmith; the projection stands symbol. This process takes place in the ordinary, least village, for the light is present, near-by—just crouch within the door. Dickinson opens the door to her soul. She is refining the heat. The village is her audience. These impatient ores of suffering not endured, she will lift up and give a shape to with her anvil—lifting up, falling. She will measure her product by how bright, alive, vivid, strength of coloring.

The human poet gives shape to this creative process—what is created? What shape? Fire burns to soul level—very much a religious light, a refining, a purifying of impure ores—bringing out the essence—it is a fiery process—soundless, that cannot be fathomed, having no sound; the tug, pull, is Dickinson's desire of becoming a poet, what carries her into the realm of poet. Visualizing, hearing, yet hearing stops in this inner realm, so that it must be felt, intuited. I must trust the poet's words, if she is a poet at all, to carry me beyond and through this realm—she is giving me a vehicle, a way through—of understanding. It is a process that can be endured—she will describe—bending low, I find her there, soul aflame, heart aflame; symbol can convey but not without my participatory reading and adherence to the challenge to crouch within the door and watch the soul, live from the soul.

I think that Dickinson recognizes in this poem that there is a certain sign or light which she is aiming for in the creative process—which involves a letting go,

a repudiating; Dickinson herself is going within and creating a place for the poet to grow. She is answering her own question she poses to Higginson, “Could you tell me how to grow—or is it unconveyed—like Melody—or Witchcraft?” (letter # 261, 25 April 1862). She is forging her creative spirit “Without a color, but the Light/ Of unannointed Blaze—”.

What Poet Means, 1862 to 1870: A Matter of Distilling

Dickinson is crossing a threshold in 1862—not only within herself, but without, through a process of distilling which is actually an expression of her creative process of dwelling. She is capturing essence in form through her poetry, moving as a poet from image to essence. She identifies herself with circumference, loving, singing, how she describes her business. She defines herself as poet through defining what a poet is, and she thus grows into her own meanings—she discovers, as she writes to Joseph Lyman, “fathomless gulfs of meaning” (Sewall, 1965, p. 73). In defining herself as a poet, she is discovering a depth, a quality of being—that gets expressed, for example, through her distillations of beauty, love, truth, light, attar of roses, words, heaven of God, summer, experiences, definitions, and poet.

Dickinson is weaving the poet into her everyday life. She integrates play, her daily chores, into her profession of poet. She engages her whole being—body, mind, and soul—in the creation of her poetry. The actual physical act with reflection is beneficial. In distilling what poet means, she is creating a vision of the poet she can live. Poetry becomes a way for her to call out, remember, and

reflect upon her essence. For Dickinson, when something is distilled it is pervasive—entering and reflecting every part of her life—like the smell of a flower. Her niece Martha (1932) recalls that the smell of Hyacinths was what she remembered most about Dickinson's room (p. 45).

Dickinson projects herself as a poet into a space she creates and opens up by sharing a language through her poems and letters that expresses the amazing sense she distills from ordinary meanings (see poem # 446, "This was a Poet—" late 1862). The poet begins through her process of distilling to speak to a larger audience. The poet, through her creations, allows the reader to re-experience a sense of these larger distilled truths. The poet creates a picture of the world in miniature. Her poems affect the eyes, ears, heart, mind, touching the soul, awakening the soul, so the poet also soothes, yet provokes into greater learning and being. The poet, in creating from her dreams, her life, entices, stimulates to ponder, ask, and wonder. The poem read (this way of telling, hearing) is a journey to live one's fullest potential, the poet creating a constancy of light of creation—writing in the body, mind, and soul, a light—sun—word.

The poems develop a story line of creativity; when lived in, the story becomes much more manifold. Words are experiences, tinged with mystery, many meanings; and paradox gives way to new meanings. Her poems thus explore the possibilities of human potential, and they are the exponents of a mind that thought. Here Dickinson places the poet as central, ultimate purveyor. Poetry can create, play, imagine, inspire, tell—as Dickinson says to Higginson, "Truth is such a rare

thing it is delightful to tell it" (letter # 342a, letter of Higginson upon meeting Dickinson, August 16, 1870).

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—

Of Pictures, the Discloser—
The Poet—it is He—
Entitles Us—by Contrast—
To ceaseless Poverty—

Of Portion—so unconscious—
The Robbing—could not harm—
Himself—to Him—a Fortune—
Exterior—to Time—

(poem # 446, late 1862)

The poet defines distilling, of the inner and outer. This was a poet—this—that, amazing sense distills. I get lost in the maze. The poet is and contains a process, from and to. Attar of roses is immense, unlimited, unbounded, infinite—huge in bulk, vast, the sense is it is everywhere. The poet arrests, she stays and dwells and waits to seize, and fix at the door. She discovers amazing sense is contained within ordinary meanings, the day-to-day, one's surroundings, this is what the poet extracts. Meanings, she discovers, are contained within words, which carry a signification. Amaze, arises from fear surprise wonder. It is in the doing. It is a very complex poem with turns and twists: to a-maze is to perplex.

Through extracting, the poet becomes rich while all others are poor, except those who partake in this distilled, amazing, sense. The poet discloser reveals with words. By telling, she brings to light, uncovers, and opens to view. She makes something known, and shows in her own manner. She creates a picture, a likeness, to represent in a form.

Dickinson steps for a moment outside herself as poet, and aligns with her reader. She asks, is it poverty—or do I see poetry contained therein? The poet expresses a change in perspective through embodying with awareness her senses. She creates a form to place attar in. Without the form of the body there is ceaseless poverty. A portion of the poem is separate, contained, but not disconnected from the body of the reader. The poet takes what is unconscious, having no mental perception, and learns the proportions as she goes along. She reaches for the dimensions of circumference. She asks herself how far does my kingdom go, how far do I dare speak, what is the extent that I can disclose?

It is a process happening within, distilling and changing the self. No one can take away the self, the soul that is exterior, outside, time. The poet finds herself in time, yet she is also out of time. The poet lives in both worlds, experiences and contains both worlds within her self. The poet collects timeless essence in time. The soul is perceived as a timeless essence, and living out of the soul, a process of distilling soul in time. She does not exclude others from this vision so much as offer hints toward engaging in a transformational process. She says that if you bring the process of distilling, the process of the poet into yourself, you too will begin to define, distill, and build up a fortune within.

The poet is precariously perched partly in time and out—by the time we read the poem, she is out of time and we are in time. It is difficult to measure our portion that is given; the process too is timeless. The poet becomes a part of this meaning process, takes hold of it. She writes what happened, what is happening. The poet—through this poem—becomes the cornerstone of her identity.

Dickinson exhibits a healthy response through her creative process to what must be difficult circumstances in her life, as her niece Martha (1932) notes, “‘Self-expression’ was not in vogue in her day” (p. 37). In reading the following poem, “I dwell in Possibility—” (poem # 466, late 1862) I describe the sensation of holding in my body-mind-soul the complexity of Dickinson’s whole text, wherein different meanings merge in my body-mind-soul, creating an effect of stereo, depth, and circumference. This way of reading, embodied knowing, allows Dickinson’s life as expressed through her text to emerge in greater depth and perspective, and suggests a way of following her process of becoming her own person, living out of her fullest potential—what I call her self-actualizing creative process.

In the poem “I dwell in Possibility—” (poem # 466, late 1862) Dickinson embodies a transpersonal stance as a way of being that opens the chest—the heart opening and connecting her with heaven and earth. It is an unlimited stance, inviting. When I attend the play “The Belle of Amherst,” November 7, 2000, I see Julie Harris, acting as Emily Dickinson, speaking this poem and motioning with her whole body, raising and opening her arms slowly as she speaks. She embodies the stance in the poem of open arms, open heart.

I can really see how this poem develops, comes into being, the constellation of different meanings; the fact that Dickinson's house has many windows, many doors; I wonder, what is it like to occupy this house? To occupy is connected to her occupation of poetry. I also see the poem as an expression of her choosing what relationships she wants to engage in, and the different ways or forms of relationship—with nature, herself, and others. Dickinson is including in her definition of poet, possibility—and possibility gives her a larger house in which to dwell.

The poem explores how life is a force that cannot be contained neatly. Similarly, any attempts to contain Dickinson in a theory or concept will inevitably fail as life itself surpasses theory. Dwelling in possibility is a language house and more: it is the possibility of experiencing and creating the worlds that language—through the shaping of it, through the very hands—opens; it is inhabiting the worlds that language opens. This way of being moves beyond any limiting thought concept process of naming. Dickinson, through her creations, follows her thought-processes until they become a part of her being. Susan writes in Dickinson's obituary that Emily was "a part of the high March Sky" (Hart & Smith, 1998, p. 267).

**I dwell in Possibility—
A fairer House than Prose—
More numerous of Windows—
Superior—for Doors—**

**Of Chambers as the Cedars—
Impregnable of eye—
And for an everlasting Roof
The Gambrels of the Sky—**

Of Visitors—the fairest—
 For Occupation—This—
 The spreading wide my narrow Hands
 To gather Paradise—

(poem # 466, late 1862)

Dickinson writes of possibility as a combination of inner and outer realities. She dwells in its place. There is an amazing sense distilled in this dwelling which is more than simply a house, it is possibility. This house is not closed to the world; it is private, yet open, inviting. “I dwell in Possibility—” is a proclamation, and a continuation, she will continue to dwell in possibility. She is dwelling into her true self. It is a step along the way to defining herself: she will live into the poet. She distills, gathers paradise, with narrow hands; what happens is that each word becomes significant, as meaning (paradise) is enfolded. Dickinson, in the process of distilling, is clarifying her process of dwelling all around, of finding a place to work out possibility, the meaning being plumbed, brought out, through dissemination, telling and disclosing a picture. For Dickinson, it is a larger story, larger picture she captures—she asks who is this “I” of “I dwell in Possibility—”? It is a vision of the poet she is creating here, through writing what poet means. She hints that if you’re engaged with what is happening around you, near, then if your experience impacts how you think and feel, then if you are open to this, it allows a freshness, a vitality. It is like having an opening in the unconscious, allowing for images, symbols, the unknown; so this poem speaks to me of the poet’s intention to stay, be open to visitors, with the hands gathering paradise, intentionally finding the beauty around her.

This is her occupation, “A fairer House than Prose—”. She is a weaver of light (fairer); poetry is a house, a way of dwelling that becomes the very air she breathes. Dickinson defines her occupation again, her hands are open, simply working, busy yet not closed to the sense of immensity all around her. Dickinson connects with, invites, all whose inclination is toward poetry. This is the sense, the meaning, Dickinson has discovered, a place where soul dwells and tills the soil of possibility; allows in, yet contains. Dickinson does not mention the word poet, yet it is implied as the opposite of prose. This poem discloses a transpersonal, transposable, inclination, as Paradise—a greater possibility of being—is open to those who would partake of it. She includes those who can reach paradise. Dickinson also hints that words don’t find their fullest meaning until they are brought into the orbit of poetry. Possibility to me means space, more opportunity—encouraging a beginner’s mind, open to possibility. How does one dwell in a word? What is possible, really exists, so it is a deepening in place. Dickinson explores the power of being or existing—alive. Impregnable means not to be stormed or taken by assault; not to be moved or shaken.

The question arises, how did Dickinson grow and live into her self-actualizing creative process? Through love, she probed the meaning of words until she found in her life the connections; she then continually defined in accordance with her experience, her life. Dickinson’s words are multidimensional, bend meaning, and with each poem, she explores an event, a chronicle on the inner life meeting the outer life. I ask, can I, as a reader, enter the poem, knowing a sense of its meaning, which for me comes into play through applying it to my life? How

can I know the meaning of the poem unless it becomes alive in some sense? This poem changes the direction of Dickinson's life and poetry for me, moves her into a living word form, sets the course and challenge of her thought. Here meaning is given significance, is uplifted; it is almost as if the word possibility becomes lived in, capable of sustaining the dreams and intentions of a poet's life. Seeing where one's intentions, where one's challenge is—this is the practice. I see her creating a new domain—feeling the excitement of this, experiencing a great deal of energy. Distilling is a process of paring life down to the essential elements; it is a journey from impossibility to possibility. Possibility becomes a place of refuge, a fortress, it both describes and allows for experience; it is an open-ended process. Dickinson is feeding off and storing up sustenance; she feeds off the light that her poems give off.

Years earlier Dickinson writes to Joseph Lyman about the “yearning for a oneness” (Sewall, 1965, p. 73). In “I dwell in Possibility—” (poem # 466, late 1862) I read multiple levels, Dickinson's journey to oneness. The poem conveys a sense of momentous experience. It shows Dickinson in the midst of life, describing the physicality of what poet means. She has awakened an expressed sense of appreciation for life. In the saying, using the tongue, appreciation is expressed with the whole body. While moving about and being active, Dickinson is developing as she reflects on her whole life; she comes around again with a depth, a perspective, like the movement of a spiral, on her creative process. Her work and play is this gathering of paradise. The work is enduring like the cedar, an ever-green, ever-lasting, lasting forever. In the preparation, creation of her art, she

gathers her heart too; she is gathering all her faculties for the benefit of creation. The poem is a meditation on the movement of the heart—with the hands, an embodied stance—as a way of being, doing, and knowing.

Dickinson explores how poetry and life interweave; in the following poem “Not ‘Revelation’—’tis—that waits” (poem # 500, 1863) she incorporates her love of nature to describe a change that happens in us. Years earlier, she tells about coming to earth, writing “down, down in the terrestrial” (letter # 77, to Susan, about February 1852), writing from earth. Her words over the years continue to express a growing love of each particular and the whole—for the poet can “Comprehend the Whole—” (poem # 533, 1863). She finds beauty in the walk in nature—she writes to Higginson, “I think you would like the Chestnut Tree, I met in my walk. It hit my notice suddenly—and I thought the Skies were in Blossom” (letter # 271, August 1862). The basis of getting to know nature, experiencing an intimacy, Dickinson suggests, is necessary to a process of distilling. She uses all of her senses to pick up a sense of the whole, how it all fits together. She weaves a vision of heaven and earth. She is taking a journey through words, through life, nature, and in the process is teaching to see, hoping her words will touch and reveal deeply. She thus enlivens her process of words, through a connection to the body and the elemental world.

Dickinson incorporates into a letter to Higginson (letter # 280, February 1863) her poem about “Revelation”:

I was thinking, today—as I noticed, that the “Supernatural,” was only the Natural, disclosed—

Not “Revelation”—’tis—that waits,

But our unfurnished eyes—

(poem # 500, 1863)

Dickinson writes of how she sees, unfurnished till fortified with sight.

Dickinson notes we wait, out of necessity, for that which helps us see—a revelation happens, yet in truth is happening all the time. It is a change that must happen in us; we change. This thought is echoed in another poem, “The Southern Custom—of the Bird—/ That ere the Frosts are due—/ Accepts a better Latitude—/ We—are the Birds—that stay” (poem # 528, 1863). Dickinson says this more than once, how change happens in us. Dickinson thinks and paints with words what she sees, notices. She discloses, tells, makes open to view. It is a revelation to make known truths.

Something in nature is central to Dickinson’s sight and therefore her telling reflects the mysteries she experiences and reveals. She is a teacher, creating her own lessons from the schoolroom of nature (and her inner nature). She values the intellect; and this poem allows for a glimpse into the thought processes and intentions of Dickinson, how she feels strongly about nature and people. In another poem, “We learned the Whole of Love—” (poem # 531, 1863), she places revelation as something that happens within relationship: revelation stimulates a mystery between people through a participation in the unknown, “that Wisdom is so large—/ And Truth—so manifold!” Dickinson conceives of herself as learning, and setting her sights, by training the body, mind, and soul to see, and she wants to awaken this in her reader.

The poet discloses, is an active element. This is an image, picture, I have of Dickinson: she is conscious, awake, sitting on the porch of her house and is noticing and thinking about the great mystery of what is happening around her and within her. Her gaze is intent, focused, yet pervasive, open. I think in the poem “Not ‘Revelation’—’tis—that waits” (poem # 500, 1863) Dickinson focuses on and sets the burden of being and becoming within. She includes in this letter-poem to Higginson the poem “The Soul unto itself” (poem # 579, 1863), with line “The Soul should be in Awe—”. Central to her developing thought, she voiced near the end of her life in a letter to Mrs. Holland, “The Bible dealt with the Centre, not with the Circumference” (letter # 950, late autumn 1884). We, Dickinson suggests, must make meaning of life—we must be in the soul with awe till fortified with sight—and unravel the truth of our lives in accordance with this great mystery, this daily drama. The center, soul, has to do with us becoming our utmost, while circumference is Dickinson’s expression of her utmost, her self-actualizing creative process.

Sometime in early 1864 Dickinson’s eyes are troubling her enough that her father sends her to Boston for eye treatments. It is possible her eye trouble begins earlier, perhaps is hinted at in the poem “Must be a Wo—” (poem # 538, spring 1863). The poem explores what she does with suffering—how suffering opens the heart-eye—and what she sees. She likens her suffering to the transformation on the cross felt by Jesus; she hints that what comes out of suffering, if truly felt, is an awakening, a re-awakening. She also notes that feeling joy is not easy either! Later in her life she writes to Higginson, “To be human is more than to be divine, for

when Christ was divine, he was discontented till he had been human” (letter # 519, September 1877). Suffering, Dickinson suggests, is inherent in life. Jesus is not fulfilled until he becomes human; in a later letter she writes, “For the comprehension of Suffering One must ones Self have Suffered” (letter # 416, to Mrs. James S. Cooper, June 1874). This poem begins to incorporate this strain. In fact the poem tells about how to emerge from suffering, it is her personal slant. She is the sufferer and now the healer; she explores the power of words to touch, ignite, and heal. Her voice is strong—even in face of suffering. I can hear Dickinson’s voice in this poem. Dickinson suggests suffering can open the chest, that seeing beauty can open the heart, that poetry can open the channel of heart-eye. This sense of working with suffering is conveyed in a letter Dickinson writes to her cousins, Loo and Fanny:

I noticed that Robert Browning had made another poem, and was astonished—till I remembered that I, myself, in my smaller way, sang off charnel steps. Every day life feels mightier, and what we have the power to be, more stupendous. (letter # 298, 1864?)

The poet for Dickinson is a recurring part of life and death; a drama that words call to mind in her poem with poignant imagery; images and sensations intermingling within, registered without:

Must be a Wo—
A loss or so—
To bend the eye
Best Beauty’s way—

But—once aslant
It notes Delight
As difficult
As Stalactite—

A Common Bliss

Were had for less—
 The price—is
 Even as the Grace—

Our Lord—thought no
 Extravagance
 To pay—a Cross—

(poem # 538, spring 1863)

“Best Beauty’s way—” is the poet’s way, it involves deep feeling, and explains how she sees. Stalactite is a form of icicle and may resemble the sharp shape that pierced the body of Jesus. Bending the eye motivates the poet, this is the practice: beauty, a quality of being to experience. Wo, is sorrow, grief, loss; through saying twice (wo is loss), Dickinson brings it home, brings it deeper, pounding in the brain. The transformation of suffering Dickinson writes of is something she experiences and transforms into best beauty’s way; there is beauty in suffering. A channeling of sorrow, loss; suffering inherent in pursuit of beauty; is this a belief or an experience? Bending the eye, goes downward, sideways, in my view Dickinson is noticing what is simple and profound in beauty; she does not tire of noticing beauty. In an undated poem Dickinson writes, “Beauty crowds me till I die” (poem # 1687). It is a symbolic death: the small I dies, the transpersonal I is being born through beauty. She writes of how to make lucid this suffering, by finding the beauty tinged on the path of suffering. Wo, loss, accompany her on her path that is not hers alone. She lifts her eye, it bends, the body bends, the mind and heart bend. What is contained in this eye? All, plus ignorance; almost have to remember to stay connected to body, thread; grasping, breathing, sinking—tight cold winter, delight opposite summer; the poem dips into

a feeling of sadness. Dickinson writes to remember the cross, death, rebirth; she celebrates the mystery. This poem is intimate, records Dickinson's eye movement, and gets me, the reader, inside Dickinson's gaze (which is not static). Seeing through her eyes, there is a strange mixture of pain and pleasure like a fixed frozen state, engaging body and soul. This poem revels in sound, wherein similar sounds create a ring. The ring, like the eye, is round, broken by differing sensations yet caught transfixed for a moment on the beauty of the sound—different paths of beauty through different senses, hearing beauty the meaning tinged with sorrow; yet like sorrow we can't but help it when beauty seeps in. Also the poem is like a round, tells of a journey, it is a quest, it asks, how is my sorrow like that of Jesus? Dickinson here looks at her own suffering, reflects upon it, and brings it into her creative process: "Best Beauty's way" is a channel, a path she will tread, and tell the reader what is there, what she has found. The poem is beautiful, so you must pay, I must pay, high price to hear message of beauty. If my eye is bent to beauty I must hold my eye, my very being, accountable. Then the threshold of experiencing beauty may increase, with pain, so with pleasure, if it doesn't have tinges of both it doesn't quite move one. Dickinson is finding her own emotional balance, health. Her ear becomes finer, sight more acute, senses tuned (it is not a numbing out, as in depression). I imagine myself into the poem (as I imagine Dickinson imagined herself into the experience) and I wonder how do I get out? It is a path of struggle and beauty. Creativity is a way, in truth, to say there is no escaping the central reality of death and suffering. It is almost fortitude to take beauty as one's path.

Not escaping but looking into it, examining experience; really have to attend to the loss, the wo—real beauty is deeper.

Dickinson likes to explore the power of creativity to contain a truth or truths that can be re-experienced, and thought about—reflected upon, giving way to deeper truths. Often this play is reflected in her play of words. As Dickinson develops her skills as a poet, and accumulates life experiences, her words often convey multiple meanings. For instance, in the following poem, “I send Two Sunsets—” (poem # 557, summer 1863), she creates a sunset to carry in the hand (the poem), which propels the reader to look at the sunset in nature, and back at the poem, and at the sunset, until seemingly, both sunsets merge.

I send Two Sunsets—
Day and I—in competition ran—
I finished Two—and several Stars—
While He—was making One—

His own was ampler—but as I
Was saying to a friend—
Mine—is the more convenient
To Carry in the Hand—

(poem # 557, summer 1863)

Dickinson explores in this poem her creative element, light, as a human creation. The day conspires with her to make it beautiful. She feels an interconnection with nature, as simple as the one and the two. She creates a picture of the sun to inspire. Imagination and observation are her building blocks. The sun in hand is timeless. I take her literally, yes, I will carry in my hand her poem. For Dickinson it is important to create a sun, to re-create a sun; poetry expresses the mystical and profound. I imagine Dickinson sending, giving to a friend. She is

looking back, “Was saying,” and bringing into the present, face-to-face; this movement is what I too want to be able to do—read her poem by looking back, yet bringing into the present. The poem is a distilled essence in the present, and a description of that process. It gives a sense of what is passed, and what is just coming into view, and this is what is created, the distilled product and the process underneath following similar routes.

What is this creating art—Dickinson seems to ponder—that we see ourselves in wider ampler breadths? I get the sense that after she writes the poem, hot off the press, she takes it to Susan next-door and shares it with her (Hart & Smith, 1998, p. 109). She finishes the poem before sunset, and hands it with love to Susan. Dickinson carries her poems in the pocket of her white dress. Dickinson carries poems to inspire, as creative acts. She lifts and carries words in her hand. She extends her hands out. She touches, masters, the sun. She attains a zenith point, and goes beyond. In addition to the sun, she creates stars, points of light to guide her on her journey into night. Dickinson is making a statement on the written poem that the poem is a distillation of the light around. The poem points outside of the poem toward the sun. Dickinson can encompass both, the poem and the sun. Being able to encompass both is the circumference of the poem; Dickinson gets the ring of it. Her hand too is round, in its way—the sunset and poem arriving on the round disc of her hand. Another poem expresses a similar idea: “I took my Power in my Hand—/ And went against the World—” (poem # 660, 1863). A poem, Dickinson suggests, is radical, a shape she can play with,

reshape, a concept that is workable; Dickinson pours herself into the creation of poetry, her words become an elixir.

Dickinson's idea of circumference she takes hold of in her life. When something is comprehended it is included, the poet includes, makes anew, probes, the understanding and essence of. The word circumference conveys a larger round, our place in it, the very growth of the soul. Circumference becomes her way of saying she is continuing to grow, and develop as a poet, as a human being. In a letter Dickinson writes to Higginson on 7 June 1862 (letter # 265), she thanks Higginson for his evaluation of her poems, and the letter hints that he has called her a poet. She also gives a sense of what impels her to create: "a sudden light on Orchards, or a new fashion in the wind troubled my attention—I felt a palsy, here—the Verses just relieve—". The letter exhibits a developing trust between Dickinson and Higginson. The image Dickinson uses to express her trust is of putting her hand in his: "The 'hand you stretch me in the Dark,' I put mine in, and turn away—I have no Saxon, now—". Johnson and Ward (1986) note that the comment "I have no Saxon" means, "Language fails me" (p. 409). Dickinson includes the poem "As if I asked a common Alms" (poem # 14, 1858), which contains an image of a sun as a "Kingdom" being pressed in her hand. In a letter written to Higginson years later (letter # 316, early 1866), Dickinson continues this strain of seeking Higginson's guidance while telling him, through the following poem, that she will continue to improve, and grow:

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 Summer of Hesperides
 Are long.

(poem # 606, summer 1863)

In this poem Dickinson writes about continuation as development. She is making a point about growth; some hurry to a sphere, which is a smaller circumference. She is on a journey toward wholeness. We imitate the sun, flowers, all that is round and growing. Through a process of reflection—looking back at childhood—we make sense of, sum up, through art. Being a work in progress herself, she will “slower grow” and learn in the garden of Hesperides where golden apples grow how a larger understanding takes time. Dickinson is seeking a constancy of light in her creations. She is waking from a dream, moving from darkness to light. She is exploring ways of hearing and understanding tied to nature and her experience. She is moving through nature, and her nature, coming upon what is divine. She is writing here from her observation, experience in the garden; she wants to know when the process is finished, complete, like a perfect golden apple. She answers that the process is not complete, but involves the growth of the body, mind, and soul—a ripening of all her faculties. Dickinson is brought back into this garden, through her relationship with Higginson, back to herself, to the process of creating, which comes from a sense of her turning raw experience into her own truthful and artful poems.

In response to Higginson’s questioning the authenticity of a line written by her, Dickinson writes that she does not “consciously touch a paint, mixed by another person—” (letter # 271, August 1862). She continues, writing concerning

a line, "I do not let go it, because it is mine." Dickinson here suggests a strong connection she has forged with her own soul. Elsewhere she writes, in an undated letter to Joseph Lyman, "My Country is Truth. . . . It is a free Democracy" (Sewall, 1965, p. 71). Dickinson's idea of truth may extend to her own free expression, her ability to name and describe experiences that ring true for her. It is possibly around this time in the early to mid-1860s that Lyman writes a portrait of Dickinson, based on a friendship of many years, and a meeting one "Night in Midsummer" (p. 69):

A library dimly lighted, three mignonettes on a little stand. Enter a spirit clad in white, figure so draped as to be misty [,] face moist, translucent alabaster, forehead firmer as of statuary marble. Eyes once bright hazel now melted & fused so as to be two dreamy, wondering wells of expression, eyes that see no forms but gla[n]ce swiftly to the core of all thi[n]gs—hands small, firm, deft but utterly emancipated from all claspings of perishable things, very firm strong little hands absolutely under control of the brain, types of quite rugged health [,] mouth made for nothing & used for nothing but uttering choice speech, rare thoughts, glittering, starry misty figures, winged words. (p. 69)

Lyman's portrait of Dickinson shows her interested in understanding and describing the ineffable, almost delighting in the engagement of her whole body to express her thoughts. In showing the human face of Dickinson, Lyman supplies a key to the current of her thoughts, how she is bent toward the spiritual. Similarly, in a letter to Samuel Bowles, Dickinson writes, "So few that live—have life. . . . For Gold—may be bought—and Purple—may be bought—but the sale of the Spirit—never did occur" (letter # 275, mid-November 1862). In the following poem, "The Tint I cannot take—is best—" (poem # 696, 2nd half 1863) Dickinson gives color, shape, and embodiment to the spirit. She has moved from I "never consciously touch a paint, mixed by another person—" (letter # 271, to T. W.

Higginson, August 1862) to creating her own color scheme, which includes the impalpable. The poem expresses how poetry cannot be sold, if it contains the free spirit; she also hints, as Lyman may have understood, a way of knowing and relating to her is on her terms, soul to soul.

The Tint I cannot take—is best—
 The Color too remote
 That I could show it in Bazaar—
 A Guinea at a sight—

The fine—impalpable Array—
 That swaggers on the eye
 Like Cleopatra's Company—
 Repeated—in the sky—

The Moments of Dominion
 That happen on the Soul
 And leave it with a Discontent
 Too exquisite—to tell—

The eager look—on Landscapes—
 As if they just repressed
 Some secret—that was pushing
 Like Chariots—in the Vest—

The Pleading of the Summer—
 That other Prank—of Snow—
 That Cushions Mystery with Tulle,
 For fear the Squirrels—know.

Their Graspless manners—mock us—
 Until the Cheated Eye
 Shuts arrogantly—in the Grave—
 Another way—to see—

(poem # 696, 2nd half 1863)

Dickinson writes in this poem about her creative process, her experimenting with color, tint, until she arrives at one she cannot make. She pours everything difficult to express to explain into the tint—to elevate emotion—yet she arrives

finally at mystery, death (a prank). So it becomes a listing of everything she can't take, which is best not to be able to take, and only someone who has tried to take a great deal could say this.

Tint is color tinged with another color. Dickinson carries the reader through a bazaar, marketplace, to the east. Even with a guinea or gold, we cannot buy. Dickinson moves toward describing the essence which can only be intimated, hinted at, like the butterfly slipping from one's hands—one wonders if it was ever there—or just a dream? Dickinson creates an array, an order on the eye of a swaggering, boastful Cleopatra in the sky. Dickinson has no claims of self-importance; she is witness to the litany that passes before her eyes: all company, ideas, Egypt; dominion, the governing; the sense of being repressed, with no restraint—she is the squirrel—graspless, pleading.

What is death, the other way to see? Dickinson writes years later, "Science will not trust us with another world" (letter # 395, to Mrs. Holland, about September 1873). Because Dickinson can express herself so well, it is a tribute that she writes of what she can not take, distill, express; it is probable that no one else can express either. Dickinson goes to the source, perhaps no matter what it is, watching herself, putting back in essential ingredients of an experience, trying to describe what others have not; enjoying the process of being original, reveling in the fact that poetry, if it contains the soul, is ultimately free. In an undated prose fragment Dickinson writes, "I should think a faded spirit must be the most dreadful treasure that one could possess, as a spirit always in bud must be the sweetest" (Johnson & Ward, 1986, prose fragment # 83, p. 924). Dickinson's

poems may be understood as expressions of her blooming spirit, the growth of her soul.

Dickinson's path is perhaps focused in her intention to convey the soul without all the trappings of conventional form, and her poems do not fit the conventions of her day. She organizes and creates her expressions based on knowledge derived from all of her senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and intuiting. Higginson (1862), in contrast, as he expresses in his article, "Letter to a Young Contributor," may be more concerned with an intellectual, rather than a soul, organization:

A man dreams for years over one projected composition, all his reading converges to it, all his experience stands related to it, it is the net result of his existence up to a certain time, it is the cistern into which he pours his accumulated life. (p. 408)

In her poem, "Each Life converges to some Centre—" (poem # 724, 2nd half 1863) Dickinson adds her own touch, flair, to Higginson's thoughts—"the Rainbow's Raiment." Dickinson's poem tells about her process of gathering all her talents into the profession of poet that is really her life, not just the writing of poems—the poet, Dickinson suggests, captures and lives out of larger truths.

Each Life converges to some Centre—
Expressed—or still—
Exists in every Human Nature
A Goal—

Embodied scarcely to itself—it may be—
Too fair
For Credibility's presumption
To mar—

Adored with caution—as a Brittle Heaven—
To reach
Were hopeless, as the Rainbow's Raiment

To touch—

Yet persevered toward—surer—for the Distance—
How high—
Unto the Saints' slow diligence—
The Sky—

Ungained—it may be—by a Life's low Venture—
But then—
Eternity enable the endeavoring
Again.

(poem # 724, 2nd half 1863)

Dickinson is noticing in this poem the internal nature of others, how each life converges, expresses a thought, converges, like lines to a point. She is not just looking at her own nature, but studying the nature of others—each life; each life is therefore important. Her life is to be a poet, to tell a truth, focused and yet taking in—taking in and expressing the whole. It is not always easy to see the path of others, what centre, goal, end design, or purpose the person seeks. Everything stretches before her; she explains why it might be difficult. She questions, shall I embody it, live it? What is my goal? Her questioning is like a ripple effect, the poem a pebble dropped in my soul.

The first line of her poem catches me, my attention, speaks to me—I align with it, am carried by its message, melodious music of lines tumbling their truths shaking my assumptions lifting me up carrying me, letting me go on toward what I desire, dream—endeavoring, to try, essay. I am pulled into my center; where do words and deeds go? What gives shape to my life? I speak of centering, setting my goals; here Dickinson is garnering her forces, talents. Being a poet is like coming around again, and speaking from a new vantage point, one who knows a little more

about being and becoming. I think it is a vision of fulfilling one's soul, human nature, Dickinson writes about. This vision includes people, for it is transpersonal, not just concerned with self. We use words to define words; yet within words or a word, there is a full range of experiences—how to catch and describe? Where do I enter a poem; the work that goes into choosing words, that itself is a goal, a converging.

Eternity—does she intimate that we live again? Reaching, she suggests, doesn't bring eternity any closer because it is all around; a goal never achieved only experienced—one must by-pass intellect how ordinarily perceive to include other realms other ways of knowing and experiencing, the poem taps into this knowledge, speaks from this source. Dickinson is questioning existence, telling about a path through the wilderness that helps one make sense of—she is living the question for us, telling about the terrain; cannot grasp, yet can a poem, a way of knowing. She is describing the spark in the soul that wants to go home, that knows its true nature.

There is a space—spaciousness—created in this poem involving the actual interplay of concepts like eternity, infinity, and immortality brought home to the poet through her exploration of her own nature. She writes words, and certain words, when read, weigh down, keeping me, as the reader, on course. I discover a ground to the poem—there is sky and earth—which I can read into my life. I see Dickinson always working with and reading the texts of nature, the *Bible*, other people, reading lives with an eye toward their fullest potential, as Dickinson writes

in another poem, “And so with Lives—/ And so with Butterflies—” (poem # 317, 1862).

Nature is a current that runs through Dickinson’s life—she studies nature to learn about herself, her place in the world, and she tries to impart in her poetry a felt-sense, an aliveness that she finds in nature:

Nature—the Gentlest Mother is,
 Impatient of no Child—
 The feeblest—or the Waywardest—
 Her Admonition mild—

In Forest—and the Hill—
 By Traveller—be heard—
 Restraining Rampant Squirrel—
 Or too impetuous Bird—

How fair Her Conversation—
 A Summer Afternoon—
 Her Household—Her Assembly—
 And when the Sun go down—

Her Voice among the Aisles
 Incite the timid prayer
 Of the minutest Cricket—
 The most unworthy Flower—

When all the Children sleep—
 She turns as long away
 As will suffice to light Her lamps—
 Then bending from the Sky—

With infinite Affection—
 And infiniter Care—
 Her Golden finger on Her lip—
 Wills Silence—Everywhere—

(poem # 741, 2nd half 1863)

Dickinson in this poem is hearing and singing nature’s song. She is noticing her relationship with nature, and she will emulate nature the gentlest mother is.

Dickinson's voice, like the voice of nature, carries on a conversation with an assembly of people and creatures. Dickinson creates a beautiful, caring, picture of nature. The poem expresses her intimacy with nature, which is an achievement. Dickinson is entrusted with telling "The simple News that Nature told—/ With tender Majesty" (poem # 519, 1863).

Lest she is perceived as being too rampant, overleaping restraint, like squirrel, she takes even the unworthy flower, to show nature's love. She takes the word waywardest, which means liking own way, and embraces it as her way. It is a vision of nature that fits into her way of believing and understanding: this is how I see, what I've seen, what I've come to understand. How do people fit with this vision? I can hear in reading this poem the tenderness in Dickinson's voice, the love is equal between Dickinson and mother nature. I think that Dickinson's own mother's voice is kind and imparts with tenderness nature to her. Dickinson personifies nature as being benevolent—finger, lip. To me it's also a different vision of survival of the fittest, not such a harsh vision; here there is a push toward becoming and a tremendous listening going on, hearing nature's song. She suggests to get into the hearing and it will teach, the touching, will teach, the being that allows for other beings, Mother Nature, will teach. Dickinson expresses a desire not to tear apart what is already together and perfect and beautiful.

The poem is a continuation of the vision in "I dwell in Possibility—" (poem # 466, late 1862) of gathering paradise. Mother Nature encompasses, is expansive (everywhere). Dickinson extrapolates from her experience to the surrounding world. Mother Nature watches over, is an enveloping presence. It is a strong poem,

incites the reader as something incites the cricket, as something incites Dickinson to write the poem. She moves beyond timid, here stating strongly her vision, how she feels.

The poem in my mind speaks of continuity, there is a generous spirit, a unique vision in Dickinson's canon, an acceptance for less than perfect. As Nature wills, Dickinson wills, silence everywhere. As Nature lights her lamp, the night's moon and stars, Dickinson lights her lamp. Her lamp contains curiosity, wanting to stay up and see what night is like—is there silence at midnight? Dickinson walks the aisles of nature—it is her church, for church is everywhere. The poem is similar to the poem “I'll tell you how Sun rose—” (poem # 204, early 1861), when children sleep, Dickinson is the one awake. She will tell. Dickinson is participating through poetry, and receives from nature, in turn, a bounty, a vision, a dwelling place; nature is a part of her, us, not separate, woven into us, the fabric of life. In another poem she writes, “Growth of Man—like Growth of Nature—/ Gravitates within—” (poem # 790, 1863). Is there such a thing as an unworthy flower? Dickinson explores her interdependence and appreciation. I follow my eyes, mind, along the lines of the poem to see if what Dickinson says is true. I see Nature bending from the sky—and Dickinson bending in so many ways, trying to see at odd angles, grasp what is there from a unique and individual perspective.

The uniqueness of Dickinson's vision is the result of her life experience and the fact that she worked at her craft of poetry writing:

Essential Oils—are wrung—
The Attar from the Rose
Be not expressed by Suns—alone—
It is the gift of Screws—

**The General Rose—decay—
But this—in Lady’s Drawer
Make Summer—When the Lady lie
In Ceaseless Rosemary—**

(poem # 772, 1863)

Dickinson writes of how the work of the poet is essential. The oil is the essence distilled. It is what Dickinson expresses, utters, says, and presses. Attar of roses is a gift of screws—what is pressed—wrung, squeezed—to make summer. Summer is ceaseless, endless; I think of a person’s essence too as ceaseless, unending. Rosemary is an emblem of fidelity or constancy; summer is scent; Dickinson will show fidelity to her lover even in death.

The poet is needed, because if too general attar, the poem will decay. The poem needs essence, something boiled down, in order to survive. The essence in Dickinson is like the essence of the rose in the drawer, and her poems continue to give off essence. The general rose, love decays, but not this love. It is a lot of work, pressing—pressing in order to make them survive. There is work, and the rest is a gift. The poem shows Dickinson’s elements of creativity, sees her working, and waiting for the gift. In a later poem Dickinson writes about choosing a word, waiting, for “That portion of the Vision/ The Word applied to fill” (poem # 1243, 1872).

It takes the human element with a connection to an unseen presence to bring into being. The rose is secret; speaks of a transformation, a question, what of our essence, do we too get pressed wrung expressed? In my reading I take a second and third look at words that seem simple, yet signify much. Each of her

words is important. The poet wrings, yet the poet is wrung; the screw that presses holds the flesh to spirit, so the soul gets pressed. Strength is needed to press; I extract the soul from her poems.

Dickinson describes in this poem the essential center that is expressed in circumference—how it lasts; how does the poem’s scent hold up? Does it last? The poem contains essence while describing it. The same process in the poem is in me, and I find traces of her. Dickinson suggests we get pressed, like poetry. She writes how common experiences make up our lives and get pressed through poetry:

Drama’s Vitallest Expression is the Common Day
That arise and set about Us—
Other Tragedy

Perish in the Recitation—
This—the best enact
When the Audience is scattered
And the Boxes shut—

“Hamlet” to Himself were Hamlet—
Had not Shakespeare wrote—
Though the “Romeo” left no Record
Of his Juliet,

It were infinite enacted
In the Human Heart—
Only Theatre recorded
Owner cannot shut—

(poem # 776, late 1863)

Look out, the common day holds all, and mystery. It contains something of the tragic, something of the romantic. Dickinson is saying the poem will live on in the drama of everyday. Dickinson notices a poem is an inspiration of the everyday. She examines life and realizes it moves us because it is in us—it is enacted in the

human heart. We therefore all own it. Dickinson leaves a record of her heart, what does it say for poetry?

Dickinson sees drama as the enactment of poems. More and more Dickinson places an importance on living, and living from the heart. We play a part, yet we also live it, Dickinson suggests, for to enact is to represent in action. A poem creates a box, perceived as being owned and closed, yet the box, the poem, is open. Dickinson plays in this poem with opposites: recorded, no record; best, common day; scattered, box, contained. It is like Dickinson gives a picture of what happens around the edges of a poem, yet it is difficult to describe, pinpoint, because it is continually being enacted. A poem is vital to the degree that it is common and to the degree it is enacted from the heart and true to the self. Hamlet is Hamlet to all of us now.

The poem almost seems to negate the written, in fact my attention is drawn around me, in what arises and sets about me—like the sun, a day. The poem is something that happens to you and it is something that happens to me; vitallest includes tragedy; there are better (more passionate) actors, Dickinson suggests, in day-to-day life. The poem also notes how utterly difficult it is to simply put into words, to capture the essence of life. It is a tribute to Dickinson that she describes vistas, has a sense of the limitation of art. Years later she writes about how “Existence has overpowered Books” (letter # 413, to T. W. Higginson, late May 1874). Dickinson writes to Higginson later in her life, “Nature is a Haunted House—but Art—a House that tries to be haunted” (letter # 459a, 1876). This can be understood as we are always stepping out of nature, changing into divinity; but

we cannot leave art, we are always tied to art, it is in us, contains the personality. Yet Dickinson also notes the importance of being true to self because it is out of being true to the self that what is vital is enacted.

Dickinson makes herself known through her creations; she sheds her personality to arrive at a timeless essence, which may be termed transpersonal, which she relates more and more through her poems and life. Dickinson is also experiencing this in her relationships, as she writes to Susan, "There is no first, or last, in Forever—It is Centre, there, all the time—. . . Where my Hands are cut, Her fingers will be found inside" (letter # 288, about 1864). Dickinson expresses this connection which expands beyond time into a timeless realm in many instances to Susan: "To include, is to be touchless, for Ourselves cannot cease" (letter # 292, June 1864). In an undated prose fragment Dickinson writes, "Were Departure Separation, there would be neither Nature nor Art, for there would be no World—Emily" (Johnson & Ward, 1986, prose fragment # 52, p. 920).

Dickinson works on herself, through her poetry, to arrive at a depth, a way of connecting words to flesh, flesh to people, and people to a timeless essence.

Severer Service of myself
I hastened to demand
To fill the awful Vacuum
Your life had left behind—

I worried Nature with my Wheels
When Her's had ceased to run—
When she had put away Her Work
My own had just begun—

I strove to weary Brain and Bone—
To harass to fatigue
The glittering Retinue of nerves—
Vitality to clog

To some dull comfort Those obtain
 Who put a Head away
 They knew the Hair to—
 And forget the color of the Day—

Affliction would not be appeased—
 The Darkness braced as firm
 As all my strategem had been
 The Midnight to confirm—

No Drug for Consciousness—can be—
 Alternative to die
 Is Nature's only Pharmacy
 For Being's Malady—

(poem # 887, early 1864)

Dickinson works on herself, the wheel of her life, which contains a purpose expressed as a movement in her body-mind-soul. Dickinson works to quell the body's pain; she defines her creativity in relation—being's malady encompasses work and relationships. This vacuum contrasts with the glittering (showy, shine, sparkle with light) flesh. A clog is anything that hinders her work, so she must use her strategem, like a trick of war, to alter her consciousness, for it is something in her as well as outside. It is an emptiness that motivates her creativity that moves through her—She tells about her growth through this experience—how she comes out of darkness, the shadow interwoven with life—her nerves moving her body-breath. She does not solve the problem of relationship but creates a bridge of suffering and hope. She works at night, with a slim light, to appease, make quiet, and calm, this inner war with peace. The war, within and without (The Civil War), makes her worry with fatigue—so she must labor, with affliction and pain. She works to cover-over, dull comfort, what cannot be covered, like a revealing

wound. Words punctuate feeling and thought—she knows with an acute degree what she wants to say—and gives it a form.

Years later, when Samuel Bowles dies, Dickinson expresses thoughts similar to this poem in a letter she writes to Mrs. Samuel Bowles in early 1878:

I am glad if the broken words helped you. I had not hoped so much, I felt so faint in uttering them, thinking of your great pain. Love makes us “heavenly” without our trying in the least. ’Tis easier than a Saviour—it does not stay on high and call us to its distance; its low “Come unto me” begins in every place. It makes but one mistake, it tells us it is “rest”—perhaps its toil is rest, but what we have not known we shall know again, that divine “again” for which we are all breathless.

I am glad you “work.” Work is a bleak redeemer, but it does redeem; it tires the flesh so that can’t tease the spirit.

Dear “Mr. Sam” is very near, these midwinter days. When purples come on Pelham, in the afternoon we say “Mr. Bowles’s colors.” I spoke to him once of his Gem chapter, and the beautiful eyes rose till they were out of reach of mine, in some hallowed fathom. (letter # 536)

To Maria Whitney, a friend of Samuel’s, Dickinson similarly writes upon Samuel’s death, “I have thought of you often since the darkness,—though we cannot assist another’s night” (letter # 537, early 1878).

Dickinson herself is weary in this poem—teasing the spirit—yet she finds work is good. She works with what comes up, emotions. When she looks back, yes, her pain is under control; it is good this creative act, she compares death to it—those who forget the color of the day—wearing black, with thoughts of death, while she weaves through her work a living thread, she can’t help but confirm midnight. In the middle of the night she experiences a transformational time, a death and rebirth through her work, this redeeming flesh. She sings off charnel steps. Life is sharp and bright compared to death, which is a waylaying light. She

is turning her brain and bones over to create, over and over; like a lead weight, phrases repeating, sounding out and out until out loud.

A sensation forms into sound, is spoken aloud; carouses through the brain and blood very much like a lover whose image hangs before her eyes. To appease, she says similar things over and over in slightly different ways. She is making sense of pain, or seeming to, of something that is sense-less (numbing), bordering on emptiness she is giving words to, to fill a gap. She is becoming conscious of her separateness and the fact that nothing can make up for the person, flesh and bone. This malady, disorder of understanding, in her mind, she is trying to set straight, yet life never does go straight. She brings the dark tones of death to life. This makes her stronger. She brings into focus a painful experience; it is a consciousness that knows night. There is a sense of awakening at the end, waking from a dream, seeking to understand what is before her—the work to do. Dickinson suggests nothing can take away human malady.

It is an important poem because it shows Dickinson alone with her pain—she doesn't run away from darkness; she wants to get to know it (many kinds of darkness as many kinds of light)—perhaps it expands her capacity for joy and love. She ponders how do I become alive in this process, this work? She cannot muster the other, only the darkness in herself (yet she makes a poem of it); she brings to consciousness what is there—waking through it; working at day, working at night; developing insight; seeing inwardly.

Dickinson can redefine her purpose as a poet at different times; giving a new impetus for her work, here she is motivated to create to seek solace. By re-

owning a part of herself, darkness, she is reclaiming, interestingly, the source of her light, the oil and sol-soul, of her creativity. She suggests, as in the next poem, “The Poets light but Lamps—” (poem # 930, early 1865), that the duty of the poet is to light lamps, perhaps to ease the darkness that causes suffering if read in connection with “Severer Service of myself” (poem # 887, early 1864). Like Hestia, the ancient Greek Goddess, Dickinson is lighting through this poem and hence her poetry, a lamp that will burn long after she is gone. She writes of the poet, as a source of light, lighting her community; nourishing and stimulating others with this light gift of lightning words going out—and out. She is here capturing light for an instant, challenging her reader to find the light, life, of her image of light.

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—

(poem # 930, early 1865)

Dickinson writes in this poem of a wick—in the poet and reader—that may be stimulated by a vital word that ignites an essential oil and awakens by raising the level of consciousness (light). As representative of this light, she will go out—and out—as light travels across ages, times, and cultures. The light of the poem comes from the poet, from her own life lived. Light is symbolic of her waking consciousness. In fact light becomes through this poem a transcendent light: it

helps her understand her purpose as a poet and her place in a wider universe. In reading the poem I may partake of a light undimmed by time. For me this light is changeable, shifting with external nature and my internal state of consciousness—shifting yet pervasive like a constant growing awareness that light is always present in some form. Light is what allows me to read the poem, channeling out and reflecting through my eyes. This is how I begin to see and understand how the poet's light comes and moves out from a shining living center, is always in motion, each time I read I am "Disseminating" her "Circumference" with my own. I am casting my own light into her poem in the hopes that I may understand what she means by light. Where is the light this moment? Light is in her poem and in me; it is between us. Light plays in the spaces between her words, it plays in her words; it is in the cells of my body; it is outside in the sun, moon, and stars, yet every living thing speaks in its own way of light. It is in the universe, it is in here (within); it is expressed by multiple "Suns" and "Poets"; it is light, life, and possibility.

It seems to be a simplified vision of the poet, this light. Yet all light entails, in the wake of light, all that is seen and hoped for—a wakening dream of the poet to light a lamp in darkness, to bring out the light in things and people, finding light even in herself. Dickinson is a Hestia figure, carrying light into all ways, into the dark corners of body, mind, soul, to find the light that invigorates, gives off heat.

Light becomes constant for a moment. Dickinson then shakes up the scene; she says she lives through her poems, yet she also says her poems don't always

say the same thing—"Each Age a Lens." Light somehow changes the meaning by continually expanding to include; light touches, physically, mentally, spiritually, and spreads in expanding circles. For Dickinson all light is one within the central metaphor of the poet lighting lamp. Similarly, Dickinson encourages her reader to live with a poem over time, to arrive at a timeless understanding.

Dickinson holds herself up to the light to see her soul, asks what is contained within this mystery? She discovers more light—an unending light—which defies precise definition as words themselves exist only due to light. In recognizing the light this instant playing off the page, my eyes, I understand how the poet opens possibility. She explores light within and without; how light is transferred, passed between eyes and hearts, the poet passing a word, sharing an enlightening thought, a metaphor, that lives on in the heart and is passed on from generation to generation.

Later in her life, Dickinson asks her cousin Loo,

What is it that instructs a hand lightly created, to impel shapes to eyes at a distance, which for them have the whole area of life or of death? Yet not a pencil in the street but has this awful power, though nobody arrests it. An earnest letter is or should be life-warrant or death-warrant, for what is each instant but a gun, harmless because "unloaded," but that touched "goes off"? (letter # 656, September 1880)

Dickinson touches upon the power of her creativity and the mystery of words, how in a moment the light contained therein may be ignited. Her questioning in 1880 is the accumulation of her quest, an understanding that it may take a long time, which she seems to hint to her cousin, to unravel the mystery of life and death. In her poem "The Poets light but Lamps—" (poem # 930, early 1865), Dickinson expresses her quest to symbolize a glowing central consciousness that impels "the

hand lightly created” behind the poem to imbue her words with meaning (light). She suggests in the poem that it is not just a matter of putting words together, but, rather, a deepening and living vitally, engaging the whole (body, mind, and soul) to know the whole (circumference).

Light becomes a metaphor for Dickinson, yet a concrete experience, a way for her to expand and include more of her experiences. She moves toward light, gravitates, like toward beauty, seeking to describe. When light is tinged with an impending sense of darkness, as in the following poem, “A Light exists in Spring” (poem # 962, 1865), it creates images difficult to feel—troubling nerves—and Dickinson projects her emotions into nature beautifully. She can live with the light and dark. She lifts her hand, her forehead, and gives light to the lamp—to wicks, to ideas. She carries a light awareness, consciousness within, that she projects outwardly:

A Light exists in Spring
Not present on the Year
At any other period—
When March is scarcely here
A Color stands abroad
On Solitary Fields
That Science cannot overtake
But Human Nature feels.

It waits upon the Lawn,
It shows the furthest Tree
Upon the furthest Slope you know
It almost speaks to you.

Then as Horizons step
Or Noons report away
Without the Formula of sound
It passes and we stay—

A quality of loss

**Affecting our Content
As Trade had suddenly encroached
Upon a Sacrament—**

(poem # 962, 1865)

There is a light in spring—only felt in human nature. Science seems remote, out of touch with light; what is it like to feel a certain kind of light? I will never see this light but I may see a light that affects me. Dickinson suspends a light in the poem, it waits in the poem; it reaches to the furthest slope of what is known; almost speaks, what does it say—what would it say—only human nature feels. The poet has an obligation to speak, give a voice to her strong connection to nature. I can imagine some of the fields around Dickinson's house were beautiful in her time when certain kinds of light played on them, the colors shifting with the seasons, hills visible in the growing light of day. In spring when the days are becoming longer, a light generating principle awakens and stirs within the soul. Slabs of light on fields of growing grain topple the mind's conception of light—shattering attempts to bring it under the control of reason—light carries with it associations of spring, pregnant growth. Light passes and we stay. We see and tell. We feel a quality of loss—affecting our content. Is the mind like a solitary field? Is the loss of light, like the loss of sight? Not having sound even (to hold onto) so the poem must supply.

This light traverses like a sacrament, something sacred in my mind. I can only witness, as Dickinson does, an expanse of mind like a shadow cast on a solitary field that elevates light beyond reason. The perception of shadow and light, whether in my mind or on solitary fields, may only be seen silently in the

small motioning steps of nature—in seasons at certain times this mystery is made visible. It is very difficult to grasp, this light—as Dickinson writes later in her life, “All we secure of Beauty is it’s Evanescences” (letter # 781, to Emily Fowler Ford, about November 1882).

True to form, Dickinson speaks clearly of her experience, nothing can touch the mystery and fully contain, and explain it, therefore, not only is light transcendent—like Dickinson ultimately, how the spirit flits—so is spring, our loss, sound, the color, unnamed here—perhaps because it cannot be named. I hear Dickinson saying the “sale of the Spirit—never did occur” (letter # 275, to Samuel Bowles, mid-November 1862). Yet the poem makes an impression on my mind of the waylaying light; the light distinct, that pauses long enough for me to catch my breath and begin to ponder—(it invites, allows me to enter—I see) loss and grief, in short, the mysteries that underlie my very existence.

As the poet pauses and attends, my mind pauses on the word solitary; a questioning and wondering imbue my mind with a mute desire to know. How odd, to look right at the mystery, to watch it pass before the eyes. I discover in “Slope you know” the word know is brought to life, means to know in an intimate way, as meeting upon one’s walk a chestnut tree in full bloom. This knowing is intimate—suggests urgency in writing; Dickinson gives her words a brush feeling—she creates words as images to be lived into, which change with light.

When I expand my understanding of this poem, I see Dickinson teaching about getting to know and study one’s surroundings, the dwelling place. This dwelling provides a rich source, and giving words to this place is giving one’s life

a place in a wider universe. Poetry is a matter of deepening, getting to know birds, trees, insects, weather, seasons, light, shadow, textures, sounds, tastes, people, souls, all are a part of the world. It is a practice of attending, that is expanded upon, like growing a garden, year after year, knowing one's neighbors; trying to preserve one's connection with nature; examining one's soul. From this place of dwelling and distilling the essences within the soul, here dwelling in the possibility of being—living out of the essences—is not such a far step.

I hear in this poem music of deep tones, not heavy but with light drifting in; I turn and reflect on Dickinson's poems, as she turns on her life, what does each teach about dwelling? I must change the way I think of words, they do not simply name, they are fluid, light, healing, connected to spirit energy; this is what draws me to Dickinson, a depth of dwelling—quickenings—her Hestia nature. This is so glossed over in Dickinson research, the connection between her life and words. Stay, she says, stay and notice your connection to breath, body, earth, spirit; you will discover the steps of living your self-actualizing creative process. Don't forget relationship—how everything touches and becomes a riddle when try to explain and give linear prose to. The needed information, the vital information, to understanding is supplied with an education of the whole—body, mind, and soul.

In an undated prose fragment found after Dickinson died, she writes:

Tis a dangerous moment for any one when the meaning goes out of things and Life stands straight—and punctual—and yet no content(s) (signal) come(s). Yet such moments are. If we survive them they expand us, if we do not, but that is Death, whose if is everlasting. When I was a little girl I called the Cemetery Tarrytown but now I call it Trans—a wherefore but no more and the if of Deity— (Johnson & Ward, 1986, prose fragment # 49, p. 919)

Dickinson's prose fragment suggests that she has experienced moments of meaninglessness. She captures a glimpse of her own growth and transformation by writing, "If we survive them they expand us"; her poems are reflections on the meaning of such moments, giving them significance in terms of her growth:

I heard, as if I had no Ear
 Until a Vital Word
 Came all the way from Life to me
 And then I knew I heard—

I saw, as if my Eye were on
 Another, till a Thing
 And now I know 'twas Light, because
 It fitted them, came in.

I dwelt, as if Myself were out,
 My Body but within
 Until a Might detected me
 And set my Kernel in—

And Spirit turned unto the Dust
 "Old Friend, thou knowest Me",
 And Time went out to tell the News
 And met Eternity

(poem # 996, 1865)

Dickinson writes I am brought back to myself with words and light—and this is also how I speak to you. What are the properties of a vital word? Dickinson has found out, detected, and she can no longer hide her essence, light. She is celebrating hearing, seeing, and dwelling within as the essence of experiencing and expressing a vital light giving word. Things fall apart and things coalesce, through the flesh and spirit—like in the poem "After great pain, a formal feeling comes—" (poem # 372, 1862). The central ingredient of awakening to words is bringing some consciousness to the engagement of body, mind, and soul.

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Dickinson has expanded her awareness, her spectrum of light, to include the experimental, metaphorical. She reflects on, redefines, revisions, self and other through her conversation between flesh and spirit, time and eternity. She is enlivening the whole mystery of life, death, and life after death. She is walking through the riddle, celebrating a transformation in words; enlarging upon life. The kernel is somehow intangible, Dickinson suggests, yet through the engagement of body, mind, and soul, a conversation may be carried on that leads one within, and leads one to the kernel, spirit, of another:

Experiment to me
Is every one I meet
If it contain a Kernel?
The Figure of a nut

Presents upon a Tree
Equally plausibly
But meat within is requisite
To Squirrels and to me

(poem # 1081, 1865)

Dickinson says I am drawn to you—when you are alive to your body-mind-soul. Experiment is to try to know by trail. Dickinson is giving voice to her lineage of the spirit. She defines what is requisite, “meat within.” It is probable that those who contain “meat within” move and motivate her on all levels of her being: body, mind, and soul. Certainly, it is true that Dickinson loves many people in her widening circle of family and friends. She discovers ways of loving and connecting. Years later she writes, after her mother dies, “Mines in the same Ground meet by tunneling” (letter # 792, to Mrs. Holland, mid-December 1882). Here, in this poem, Dickinson is joining with herself and others in a new way,

signaling the importance of the “kernel” in relationship. Not only is Dickinson firmly in control of her hand in choosing her words, she is choosing what relationships she would like to pursue.

In an undated prose fragment, Dickinson suggests the role she plays in her household: “I dont keep the Moth part of the House—I keep the Butterfly part” (Johnson & Ward, 1986, prose fragment # 80, p. 924). Her role as a butterfly is a conscious decision, an expression of her creative process as a poet that she has merged into her family. Perhaps as a measure of her growth, in an earlier poem, “Cocoon above! Cocoon below!” (poem # 142, early 1860), Dickinson sees from the perspective of a butterfly, but in the following poem, she is a butterfly:

My Cocoon tightens—Colors tease—
I’m feeling for the Air—
A dim capacity for Wings
Demeans the Dress I wear—

A power of Butterfly must be—
The Aptitude to fly
Meadows of Majesty concedes
And easy Sweeps of Sky—

So I must baffle at the Hint
And cipher at the Sign
And make much blunder, if at last
I take the clue divine—

(poem # 1107, late 1865)

Dickinson writes Nature has taught me about Divinity—I turn Butterfly—
“My Cocoon tightens—Colors tease—”. She embodies the mystery between nature and divinity. It is a whole body transformation, clothing her soul with nature. She works to break out through the metaphor in her body—“I’m feeling for the Air—”. A living poet, she is consciously using the metaphor for herself. There is a friendly

transport Dickinson experiences with nature—"A dim capacity for Wings" they share. The butterfly and Dickinson are both engaged in the work, opus, of transformation and creation. What "Demeans the Dress I wear—" changes into "A power of Butterfly must be—" and Dickinson helps me see: she is transforming her soul through singing, loving, and the central metaphor of circumference, "The Aptitude to fly." The "Meadows of Majesty concedes/ And easy Sweeps of Sky—" let the butterfly fly. Dickinson's measuring—"So I must baffle at the Hint"—and engagement—"And cipher at the Sign"—between self, world, divinity—"And make much blunder, if at last/ I take the clue divine—" is paradoxically calling her both within herself and out beyond circumference.

Living the Poet's Life, 1870 to 1886: "Life's Portentous Music"

Dickinson in 1870 moves into living her self-actualizing creative process, where life sometimes overpowers books, and words seem to touch the mysteries of heaven and earth, life, death, and life after death. As she writes to Higginson, "I would like to thank you for your great kindness but never try to lift the words which I cannot hold" (letter # 330, June 1869). Writing, of poems, letters, and letter-poems, is an act that engages her whole being. When Higginson visits her for the first time in August 1870, Dickinson tells him, he writes,

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 I know it. Is there any other way. . . . I find ecstasy in living—the mere sense of living is joy enough. (letter # 342a, letter of Higginson upon meeting Dickinson on August 16, 1870)

When Higginson visits Dickinson a second time in 1873, it seems he is not so taken with Dickinson as he is on his first visit. He records few of Dickinson's words, of importance her saying "there is always one thing to be grateful for—that one is one's self & not somebody else" (letter # 405a, Higginson writing to his sisters, 9 December 1873). He also tells his sisters, in the same letter, that his wife "Mary's other remark 'Oh why do the insane so cling to you?' still holds." What Higginson fails to see and hear in Dickinson's life and words is that she is now living the poet's life. She notes this playfully yet seriously in a letter to Higginson,

I thought that being a Poem one's self precluded the writing Poems, but perceive the Mistake. . . . You kindly ask for my Blossoms and Books—I have read but a little recently—Existence has overpowered Books. . . . The broadest words are so narrow we can easily cross them—but there is water deeper than those which has no Bridge. (letter # 413, late May 1874)

It is possible that Higginson does not know in what frame to understand Dickinson and her words. I understand her as living the poet's life and essentially disseminating what she has distilled in her life. She provides through her poems and letters ways of understanding her. Near the time the following poem is written, it is probable that Higginson calls her great, for she writes to him, "Thank you for Greatness—I will have deserved it in a longer time" (letter # 353, about October 1870):

The Life we have is very great.
 The Life that we shall see
 Surpasses it, we know, because
 It is Infinity.
 But when all space has been beheld
 And all Dominion shown
 The smallest Human Heart's extent
 Reduces it to none.

(poem # 1178, early October 1870)

Dickinson writes that the human heart—and love—cannot be surpassed; no knowledge, no science can surpass the human heart. Heart is the root seed, contains knowledge surpassing all. Dickinson is expressing in this poem a sense of power of living from the heart. In order to understand this love, it is important to see it in her life, displayed through a sampling of her letters.

During the 1870s and 1880s, Dickinson seems to relish disseminating in her letters what she has distilled in her poems. The heart is a topic she returns to over and over again; it never becomes timeworn. When she phrases her knowledge of the heart, it is always fresh and vital and captures the sense of immensity within the heart as expressed in the poem “The Life we have is very great” (poem # 1178, early October 1870). I recall the words of Higginson (1862) in his “Letter to a Young Contributor”: “Oftentimes a word shall speak what accumulated volumes have labored in vain to utter: there may be years of crowded passion in a word, and half a life in a sentence” (p. 403). To read the heart as an expression of Dickinson’s love is to understand and see her life as multidimensional, transpersonal, and expansive.

In a letter to Mrs. Holland, Dickinson writes, “The Giant in the Human Heart was never met outside” (letter # 399, autumn 1873). Dickinson often intimates that the heart is spacious: “How spacious must be the Heart that can include so many” (letter # 566, to Mrs. J. Howard Sweetser, about 1878). She writes to Higginson, “Till it has loved—no man or woman can become itself” (letter # 575, December 1878). She encourages her cousin Fanny to tell her when she is unhappy: “Tell us when you are happy, but be sure and tell us when you are

sad, for Emily's heart is the edifice where the 'wicked cease from troubling'" (letter # 737, about November 1881). Again, to Mrs. Holland she writes, "For each new width of love largens all the rest" (letter # 740, December 1881). She also turns her knowledge of the heart into her love of words. She writes to her cousins Loo and Fanny, "Amazing human heart, a syllable can make to quake like jostled tree, what infinite for thee?" (letter # 710, about 1881?). She refers to God in a letter as "the Source of Love" (letter # 828, to Mrs. Joseph A. Sweetser, about 1883). She writes to Mrs. James S. Cooper, "Nothing inclusive of a human Heart could be 'trivial'" (letter # 970, early 1885). She also sums up her own heart in a letter to Joseph K. Chickering, "The Amherst Heart is plain and whole and permanent and warm" (letter # 989, July 1885).

In the following poem, "We never know how high we are" (poem # 1197, 1871) Dickinson gives a picture of her growth to wholeness. She suggests in human nature there is an internal plan, a personal plan, which is a transpersonal plan to rise, becoming in the form of nature a fully blossoming being. I can only imagine all the ways she hears this message of rising in her life. There are hints scattered throughout her life, expressed in poems and letters. Her father saying, as she recalls, when she had to recite at Mt. Holyoke, "that I shall not disgrace myself" (letter # 20, to Abiah Root, 17 January 1848). Her mother perhaps encouraging her not so much with words, but to grow her garden, till the soil of her soul, to find the quiet—the love—the spaces in herself to create, to follow the seasons and connect through the heart. It is her mother's duty to show kindness to family members and neighbors with fruit and perhaps a note of condolence; this

also becomes Dickinson's way. Dickinson writes of her mother, "Mother congratulates Mr. Emerson on the discovery of the 'philosopher's stone.' She will never divulge it. It lay just where she thought it did—in making others happy" (letter # 618, to Forrest F. Emerson, 1879?). This way of rising is different from being asked to rise as an adolescent because one wants or is ready to be a Christian (Sewall, 1980, p. 269). Here, in this poem, "We never know how high we are" (poem # 1197, 1871) she embodies the child's "faith" which is "whole" (poem # 701, 1863) with an acknowledgement that she is a grown woman using consciously her own full talents in the creation of her life and poems and letters. I also see her involved in the creation of her community—she works, has a purpose, something to do. This vision is the opposite expressed in the poem with line "How noteless—I could die—" (poem # 473, 1862). Her community of Amherst and especially Amherst College creates an environment in which work is a channeling of good works. Dickinson writes in her poem,

We never know how high we are
Till we are asked to rise
And then if we are true to plan
Our statures touch the skies—

The Heroism we recite
Would be a normal thing
Did not ourselves the Cubits warp
For fear to be a King—

(poem # 1197, 1871)

Dickinson writes, We are called, I have been called—I am calling you—to rise (become a butterfly). Poetry uplifts and is a way; the poem incorporates sky imagery. Dickinson is ascending to something grand. She is traversing the sky like

a bird. She is coming to terms with her own stature, what is it to touch the skies? Poetry is a stimulus; Dickinson is prodding us on to rise, true to plan, to live our fullest potential. Dickinson suggests we cannot weigh ourselves, we hold ourselves back with fear; we need a mirror, to recite, to tell what we can be. Poetry is a mirror. So too are people who have ascended the sky. The challenge is to imagine oneself into the place of touching the sky. The poem becomes an imaginal space to enter; it asks one to rise to do the very best one can.

Dickinson may be understood as slowly growing, and expanding her imagery, so that her imagery has dimension and depth. In a letter, date unknown, Dickinson writes to Mrs. Jonathan L. Jenkins, “Area—no test of depth” (letter # 811). The “Cubits warp” because we fail to elevate the everyday and uplift the divinity within the soul that wants to rise “true to plan.” Later in her life she writes, “How little of our depth we tell, though we confide our shallowness to ‘every passing Breeze—’” (letter # 955, to Mr. and Mrs. E. J. Loomis, 1 December 1884). Dickinson suggests through recitation, through hearing and telling, we can bring out the basic goodness within to live our circumference. Circumference adds a visual component, it is the design, shape, our lives may take if we answer the call to grow and extend our lives out into their fullest circumference. Here Dickinson is writing from experience, she is the one uplifting, carrying on a tradition of encouraging those around her to develop themselves to their fullest potential.

Years earlier Dickinson writes to Higginson, “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—” (letter # 265, 7 June 1862). Dickinson skirts fame, a growing curiosity about her life and work, by always returning to herself. She writes to Mrs. Holland, “In adequate Music there is a Major and Minor—should there not also be a Private?” (letter # 370, about 1872). She reveals herself through her poems and letters slowly. She fixes in verse her ideas about “telling”:

Tell all the truth but tell it slant—
 Success in Circuit lies
 Too bright for our infirm Delight
 The Truth’s superb surprise
 As Lightning to the Children eased
 With explanation kind
 The Truth must dazzle gradually
 Or every man be blind—

(poem # 1263, 1872)

Dickinson writes of how to tell the truth of the inner, outer, above and below in a slowly turning musical fashion—like the sun and the seasons. Truth is delightful to tell. Dickinson writes, “My Country is Truth” (Sewall, 1965, p. 71). She gives a sense that life is worth living. Soon she will write to her cousins, Loo and Fanny, “Life is a spell so exquisite that everything conspires to break it. . . . The mysteries of human nature surpass the ‘mysteries of redemption,’ for the infinite we only suppose, while we see the finite” (letter # 389, late April 1873). Telling “slant” includes all that poetry can tell us. There is a sense in the poem, when Dickinson writes, “dazzle gradually,” that if the light is too bright it is difficult to bear. In a previous letter to her cousins, Loo and Fanny, Dickinson writes, “Could we see all we hope, or hear the whole we fear told tranquil, like another tale, there would be madness near. Each of us gives or takes heaven in

corporeal person, for each of us has the skill of life" (letter # 388, April 1873?).

Dickinson writes, with the skill of life, about living from a place of having experienced the darkness and light, and light mixed with darkness. She writes of and from a true experience of the depths of human nature, her soul. The illumination, soul-light reflecting off her words, which she shares, comes from this depth, a kindness. I can imagine Dickinson talking and playing with children; she makes the light "With explanation kind" strong enough to bear in one's body-mind-soul. She takes one through the darkness to an experience of gradual growing light.

Often Dickinson writes to Higginson some of her most central thoughts, perhaps with an eye toward the eventual publication of her poems and letters. In a letter of 1872 she writes to Higginson, "To live is so startling, it leaves but little room for other occupations though Friends are if possible an event more fair" (letter # 381, late 1872). She also puts similar thoughts into a poem, written about the same time:

I thought that nature was enough
Till Human nature came
But that the other did absorb
As Parallax a Flame—

Of Human nature just aware
There added the Divine
Brief struggle for capacity
The power to contain
Is always as the contents
But give a Giant room
And you will lodge a Giant
And not a smaller man

(poem # 1269, 1872)

Dickinson suggests that she is not satisfied until she discovers divinity dwells within herself and that you should not be satisfied until divinity dwells within you. She asks what does it mean to bring the divine into life and live it? She recalls a “Brief struggle for capacity,” a struggle for wings. She remembers how transformation harkens others to grow—it is something she has lived. She calls to mind an image of the butterfly and flame. She is absorbed into her divine nature as a moth into a flame. She is remembering the steps she has taken in her life, her growth. Suddenly she finds herself in a room to house a giant. She reviews her contents, her body-mind-soul and poetry, and finds “the power to contain.” Her words are flame—her soul aflame.

Dickinson is living outside of any imposed categories of culture and religion. Her thought, like her being, is original. Clearly, she enjoys capturing thoughts and images in words that fall outside of how experience is ordinarily conceived. She essentially creates a place for herself by including places in nature that contain silence, joy, contentment, and a presence difficult to name:

In many and reportless places
We feel a Joy—
Reportless, also, but sincere as Nature
Or Deity—

It comes, without a consternation—
Dissolves—the same—
But leaves a sumptuous Destitution—
Without a Name—

Profane it by a search—we cannot—
It has no home—
Nor we who having once waylaid it—
Thereafter roam.

(poem # 1404, 1876)

Dickinson suggests everywhere and nowhere can we hold joy—it slips into everything, everyone—like a circle enclosing yet open. This joy is sincere, and pure, yet costly. Dickinson tries to tell without displaying her destitution. She writes to her cousins, Loo and Fanny, “It is true that the unknown is the largest need of the intellect, though for it, no one thinks to thank God. . . . Without any body, I keep thinking. What kind can that be?” (letter # 471, August 1876).

Dickinson’s need for the unknown makes her traverse all the spaces of her body-mind-soul. She comes upon the divine within herself and tries to name—with wonder and surprise—she discovers the place beyond place. She sits on a bordering fence—sees nature and deity on each side and herself in the middle—she is transported through joy. She hallows this joy, it is holy without a name; telling seems to hold the joy yet it cannot be contained. Dickinson looks at her experience with fresh eyes, reflects on her experience and gives it a place—“reportless.”

We too are passing through. It is precisely the finest of joys that defies imprisonment—it cannot be pinned down because it is connected with the spirit. The poem is difficult to grasp, meaning slips. Dickinson detaches herself from wanting to capture, and therefore she makes herself available to places unknown or least occupied. This is how she occupies the spaces within her poem, so too with nature, she comes into a new meaning of the word. She takes the word joy and the reverse, wanting, and finds this joy difficult to name; she does not polarize her journey but includes a joy beyond this joy. The poem traverses traverseless

space—it takes her to the edge of her world, where she touches with a sense of wholeness and wonder the unknown.

When I visited the grounds of Dickinson's house, I found a place to sit quietly, in the shadow of a canopy of trees. I was sitting on the earth, a place with no recognizable important features, a place halfway between Sue and Emily's house, and earth below and sky above. There are many places to sit—and places could be internal places too—in Dickinson's poems and letters that play in the spaces between what is real and fictional. It is almost a riddle she poses, once we find out, we do not "roam." I want to continue to roam. Is the poem like a house of possibility that expands to include every inch of heaven and earth? If it is real it leaves a fleeting emotion. In coming to this house of possibility, I may never be able to capture my experience in words.

Dickinson repeatedly suggests that life is difficult to define—far from being a negation of poetry, her words include recognition of the mystery of living life. She writes, to Mrs. Holland, "The vitality of your syllables compensates for their infrequency. There is not so much Life as talk of Life, as a general thing. Had we the first intimation of the Definition of Life, the calmest of us would be Lunatics!" (letter # 492, about March 1877). Dickinson seems to enjoy in her relationships the exploration of mysteries, especially the mystery of what cannot be named or touched. She writes to Samuel Bowles, "I went to the Room as soon as you left, to confirm your presence. . . . It is strange that the most intangible thing is the most adhesive" (letter # 515, about 1877). In an undated prose fragment, which may refer to her relationship with Bowles, she writes, "Spirit

cannot be moved by *Flesh*—It must be moved by *spirit*—It is strange that the most intangible is the heaviest—but Joy and Gravitation have their own ways. My ways are not your ways—” (Johnson & Ward, 1986, prose fragment # 44, p. 918). The prose fragment suggests that Dickinson is experiencing a struggle with Bowles—perhaps he has not reciprocated a spiritual interest. Far from closing the book on this issue of spirit and flesh, Dickinson seems to extrapolate from her experience giving it new words and thoughts.

She writes to Higginson, “To be human is more than to be divine, for when Christ was divine, he was uncontented till he had been human” (letter # 519, September 1877). Similarly, she writes to Richard H. Mather, “That the Divine has been human is at first an unheeded solace, but it shelters without our consent” (letter # 523, November 1877). She is turning an idea of heaven as remote into something palpable through words that touch with love. As she writes to Mrs. Holland, “God seems much more friendly through a hearty Lens” (letter # 492, about March 1877). She includes in a letter to Higginson this sense of love, “Do not try to be saved—but let Redemption find you—as it certainly will—Love is it’s own rescue, for we—at our supremest, are but it’s trembling Emblems” (letter # 522, early autumn 1877). I understand redemption in this context as coming back to the self, to a source of love within the heart that connects the heart with God.

For Dickinson, life is an open book wherein she can read of the mysteries of nature and human nature. She in fact revels in mystery as a condition of life and living. She writes to Sue, “But Susan is a Stranger yet” (letter # 530, about 1877). To Mrs. Holland she writes, “I suppose there are depths in every Consciousness,

from which we cannot rescue ourselves—to which none can go with us—which represent to us Mortally—the Adventure of Death—” (letter # 555, June 1878). Again, she writes to Sue, “In a Life that stopped guessing, you and I should not feel at home” (letter # 586, about 1878). Years later she writes to Maria Whitney, “Is not an absent friend as mysterious as a bulb in the ground, and is not a bulb the most captivating floral form?” (letter # 824, May 1883?).

Dickinson always returns to the mysteries contained in the meaning of words. When she falls in love with Otis P. Lord, she hints once again at what impels her to create. She writes in a letter fragment to Lord: “I sometimes have almost feared Language was done between us—if you grew too dear, except for breath, then words flowed softly in like some a shining secret, the Lode of which the miner dreams” (letter # 645, about 1880). Dickinson has essentially moved beyond reproach, for she writes to Mrs. Holland, “Austin and I were talking the other Night about the Extension of Consciousness, after Death and Mother told Vinnie, afterward, she thought it was ‘very improper.’ She forgets that we are past ‘Correction in Righteousness—’” (letter # 650, July 1880). Dickinson always returns to her writing, as she writes to Mrs. Elizabeth Carmichael, “I am studying music now with the jays, and find them charming artists” (letter # 665, about 1880). To Higginson she writes, “What sweetest use of Days!” (letter # 653, August 1880).

In a poem written in 1882, Dickinson turns her own suffering, her own quest to know, into a meditation on the death of Christ. The poem is also a meditation on the recent deaths in 1882 of Charles Wadsworth, her “Shepherd

from ‘Little Girl’hood” (letter # 766, to James D. Clark, August 1882), and her mother. As she writes to her cousins, Loo and Fanny, concerning her mother’s death, “The great mission of pain had been ratified—cultivated to tenderness by persistent sorrow, so that a larger mother died than had she died before” (letter # 785, late November 1882).

Obtaining but our own extent
In whatsoever Realm—
'Twas Christ's own personal Expanse
That bore him from the Tomb—

(poem # 1573, 1882)

Dickinson suggests her life, personal and transpersonal, has expanded through the simple days, her barefoot rank, the loving you. The shortness, compactness, of the poem speaks volumes. Dickinson discovers the personal expansive heart contained within those she loves—she also sees this in herself. She is following Christ’s example of turning suffering into a way of describing, reaching, and telling her story of expansiveness—it is not exactly a story of seeking personal fame.

I read in her story a story about the countless lives that look to Christ’s life. Through her example I cannot help but connect to the lives that pulse within her words. Between her life and her words there is no longer a gap—her creative process redeems flesh and spirit; the poem is a door into Dickinson’s life. It is a round door, speaks of circumference and love and a singing that transcends time. In a sense I’ve been following Dickinson’s personal expanse all along—her becoming human, suffering through the depths. I am meeting her in the body, meeting her in the mind, meeting her in the soul. I have been reading her poems

and letters to obtain an expanse, a depth of understanding—of meaning—depths obtained (each testing how deep the other has been).

Upon the death of her mother Dickinson writes to Mrs. J. Howard Sweetser the words “Oh, Vision of Language!” (letter # 782, November 1882). Suddenly words are not only synonymous with life—they are life. Dickinson writes to Mrs. Holland, “But a Book is only the Heart’s Portrait—every Page a Pulse” (letter # 794, after Christmas 1882). To Mrs. Henry Hills, she writes, “We often say ‘how beautiful’! But when we mean it, we can mean no more—a Dream personified” (letter # 797, January 1883). Her words touch her so that she writes to Joseph K. Chickering, “I had hoped to see you, but have no grace to talk, and my own Words so chill and burn me, that the temperature of other Minds is too new an Awe” (letter # 798, early 1883). She is also concerned with how her words touch others. In sending some poems to Thomas Niles, she writes, “I am glad if the Bird seemed true to you. Please efface the others and receive these three, which are more like him—a Thunderstorm—a Humming Bird, and a Country Burial” (letter # 814, April 1883). An undated prose fragment interestingly may be a rough draft of her letter to Niles: “I cannot tint in Carbon nor embroider Brass, but send you a homespun rustic picture I certainly saw in (at) the [hight of the storm] terrific storm (awful storm). Please excuse my needlework—” (Johnson & Ward, 1986, prose fragment # 28, pp. 915-916). When Dickinson writes “needlework” she is expressing a way of creating that involves the use of her hands, something close to a woman’s life—she is showing how her work is her life—how flesh and spirit create together.

It is a sense of knowing the whole, a sense of intimacy she shares in her work. As she writes to Mrs. J. Howard Sweetser, “I have long been a Lunatic on Bulbs, though screened by my friends, as Lunacy on any theme is better undivulged, but Emerson’s intimacy with his ‘Bee’ only immortalized him” (letter # 823, early May 1883). She writes in the midst of life as she writes to Charles H. Clark, “The Humming Birds and Orioles fly by me as I write” (letter # 825, mid-May 1883). She pauses to take in the mystery of a word: she writes to Mrs. Holland, “Forgive the personality. It seemed inevitable, and thank you again for the full sweetness, to which as to a Reservoir the smaller Waters go. What a beautiful Word “Waters” is! (letter # 833, summer 1883?). To Sue she writes, “Your little mental gallantries are sweet as Chivalry, which is to me a shining Word though I dont know its meaning” (letter # 856, about 1883). Words are weighty and consume her being. To Mrs. Holland she writes, “I hesitate which word to take, as I can take but few and each must be the chiefest, but recall that Earth’s most graphic transaction is placed within a syllable, nay, even a gaze” (letter # 873, late 1883).

Dickinson is sharing her vision of life—as she writes to Maria Whitney, “You speak of ‘disillusion.’ That is one of the few subjects on which I am an infidel. Life is so strong a vision, not one of it shall fail” (letter # 860, summer 1883). To Mrs. Holland she writes, “I have made a permanent Rainbow by filling a Window with Hyacinths” (letter # 882, early 1884). She again tells her cousins, Loo and Fanny, why she works: “I work to drive the awe away, yet awe impels the work” (letter # 891, late March 1884). Dickinson is clear that she is her own

person with her own voice, as she writes to Sue, “Except for usurping your Copyright—I should regive the Message, but each Voice is it’s own” (letter # 909, about 1884). She revels in Sue’s words and I imagine Sue revels in her words, “No Words ripple like Sister’s—Their Silver genealogy is very sweet to trace—” (letter # 913, about 1884). Of course Dickinson can trace Sue’s love in her words, just as she traces her own. Life is a prism, as she writes to Helen Hunt Jackson, “The Summer has been wide and deep, and a deeper Autumn is but the Gleam concomitant of that waylaying Light—The Prism never held the Hues,/ It only heard them play” (letter # 937, September 1884).

I cannot hold Dickinson, I can only hear her playing “Life’s portentous Music” (letter # 950, to Mrs. Holland, late autumn 1884), the soul’s song. As she writes to Loo and Fanny, “That we are permanent temporarily, it is warm to know, though we know no more” (letter # 962, 14 January 1885). In a letter to Mrs. Holland I see Dickinson fully blossoming in her element of nature. She writes, “Tell Katrina about the Buttercups that Emily tills, and the Butterflies Emily chases, not catches, alas, because her Hat is torn—but not half so ragged as her Heart, which is barefoot always” (letter # 966, February 1885). It is not difficult to understand what Dickinson means when she writes to Higginson, “Biography first convinces us of the fleeing of the Biographied” (letter # 972, February 1885), for she is recognizing the immensity of her life, and how difficult it is to grasp. She also notes this in a poem: “To see the Summer Sky/ Is Poetry, though never in a Book it lie—/ True Poems flee—” (poem # 1491, 1879).

In an undated prose fragment addressed to Susan, Dickinson writes, “The import of that Paragraph ‘The Word made Flesh’ Had he the faintest intimation Who broached it Yesterday! ‘Made Flesh and dwelt among us’” (Johnson & Ward, 1986, prose fragment # 4, p. 912). My intimation is that Dickinson broaches it! It is a vision of language and life she weaves. In an undated poem she writes,

A word made Flesh is seldom
And tremblingly partook
Nor then perhaps reported
But have I not mistook
Each one of us has tasted
With ecstasies of stealth
The very food debated
To our specific strength—

A word that breathes distinctly
Has not the power to die
Cohesive as the Spirit
It may expire if He—

“Made Flesh and dwelt among us”
Could condescension be
Like this consent of Language
This loved Philology

(poem # 1715, no date)

Dickinson writes, Make a word flesh—breathe it, it is not low—it will not die but will affirm the spirit. God cannot die if cohesive as spirit; she gives and takes in corporeal person; who was Jesus? Who are we? She shares a love of words. It is enough to do. There are moments that expand us; this love of language is very much like making a word flesh. The poem leaves an unfinished thought—it needs the root of love and the body-mind-soul of the reader to make it alive. This philology is Christ’s spirit made tremblingly visible. The shaking in the body, the ecstasies of stealth, brings the spirit alive in the body. With this experience, the

spirit is cohesive, resists any separation. By bringing the spirit alive through a metaphor of the word in the body, this strength, elixir, allows the spirit to live eternally. I taste this food of the spirit in Dickinson's poems and letters. I deepen a connection to my body-mind-soul with words. I discover a place of celebrating life, a joy in creation. Perhaps this is what Dickinson means by "To gather Paradise" (poem # 466, late 1862). She writes in an undated prose fragment, "Paradise is no Journey because it (he) is within—but for that very cause though—it is the most Arduous of Journeys—because as the Servant Conscientiously says at the Door We are (always—invariably—) out—" (Johnson & Ward, 1986, prose fragment # 99, p. 926). Paradise is within and projected outwardly through Dickinson's poems and letters, her self-actualizing creative process.

Chapter 5: Discussion

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,
One clover, and a bee,
And revery.
The revery alone will do,
If bees are few.

(poem # 1779, no date)

A Transpersonal Perspective of Emily Dickinson's Creative Process

In the above poem, “To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee,” (poem # 1779, no date), Emily Dickinson is really asserting her creativity—her ability to create. Revery is a dreamy yet wakeful state of mind, an ability to perceive one’s place in the world as capable of creating. In reading the poem, I too may feel a sense of revery. In taking Dickinson seriously, reading her definition and use of words as the expression of her creative process, I have come to understand that her life requires a deeper understanding, and her texts require a deeply engaged and embodied reading. The word revery, in the above poem, suggests a reverence for life, which includes a sense of revelation or unveiling of what is there. Dickinson may be understood in this broader transpersonal perspective as creating a reverence for life and weaving a vision of language and life that is a revelation of the depths of her soul.

I have essentially developed a *transpersonal lens*, which recognizes Dickinson’s self-actualizing creative process as an *embodied, engaged, relational, and creative* process. In creating four hermeneutic lenses, *Through One’s Body, Compassionate Listening, A Relational Reading, and Hermeneutics of Creative Engagement*, I have applied my *transpersonal lens* through a novel method that incorporates an *embodied*

knowing, embodied reading, and embodied writing approach to the study of Dickinson's life and texts. I have attempted to "illuminate" (Erikson, 1975, p. 114) and illustrate how her creative process was a "unifying principle" (Sewall, 1980, p. 722) by following her process of becoming a poet, what poet means, and living the poet's life. Because her creative process engaged her body, mind, and soul, what Ken Wilber (1990) calls the "three different modes of knowing" (p. 201), I contend her growth into living her self-actualizing creative process is reflected and contained within her poems and letters.

I have thus framed my research questions to include the dimensions of Dickinson's life and texts: (a) How did Emily Dickinson live into her self-actualizing creative process, (b) what does she say about this experience in the texts of her poems and letters, and (c) what does this study contribute to the study of the self-actualizing creative person? In answering my research questions, I have followed the ontogeny of my experience of Dickinson's creative process, and through my experience I have come to define her creative process as to dwell, distill, and disseminate; she lived her self-actualizing creative process through dwelling, distilling, and disseminating.

I have recognized that through dwelling—with nature, within herself, in her house and grounds—she was dwelling in language, creating a dwelling for her soul, a place of living and singing out of the depths of her soul. To distill for Dickinson, in my interpretation of distilling, is to capture essence in form. Essence may be described as her distillations of beauty, love, truth, light, attar of roses, words, heaven of God, summer, experiences, definitions, and the poet, all expressed through her poems and letters. Reflecting on her distillations through reading her poems allowed her to call out and remember her essence—her soul. Distilling is the job of the poet, a timeless and creative

meaning-making process; the job of the poet is to write and build up a fortune within (see poem # 446, "This was a Poet—" late 1862) as Dickinson did with her nearly 1,800 poems. My interpretation of disseminating includes the understanding that Dickinson was, especially throughout the 1870s and 1880s, bringing her ideas or distillations of the poet alive in her everyday life. Another aspect of disseminating is the fact that even though Dickinson did not overtly publish her poems, she did share her ideas, and perhaps the very essence of herself, through her poems and letters. Dickinson journeyed within and found paradise; she wrote, "Paradise . . . is within" (Johnson & Ward, 1986, prose fragment # 99, p. 926), and she shared her paradise.

What has emerged from this study of Dickinson's creative process is a model of dwelling, distilling, and disseminating that may answer in part how she was able to live into her self-actualizing creative process. Her life thus offers a model of living the creative life. A question arises: Have I accurately described Dickinson's creative process? Have I illuminated her creative process? One way of testing this is to compare and contrast what I have found with the ideas of different theorists. In initially calling her creative process a self-actualizing creative process, I have thus discovered that Abraham Maslow's (1971) description of "transcending self-actualizers" (p. 283) may also be applied, perhaps more accurately, to Dickinson's creative process.

A major difference that Maslow (1971) makes between "nontranscending and transcending self-actualizers" is the transcender's greater "number and importance of peak experiences and B-cognitions and . . . plateau experiences (serene and contemplative B-cognitions rather than climatic ones)" (p. 283). As in the above poem, "To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee," (poem # 1779, no date), Dickinson

seems to revel in an increasingly sustained appreciation for life. Maslow would probably define this experience as a plateau experience, “a new and more profound way of viewing and experiencing the world” (cited in Fadiman & Frager, 1994, p. 477). As a transcending self-actualizer, Dickinson, according to Maslow’s theory, would be “more often aware of the sacredness of all things, the transcendent dimension of life, in the midst of daily activities” (cited in Fadiman & Frager, pp. 477-478). What evidence is there for Dickinson being a transcending self-actualizer?

Beginning sometime in 1850, Dickinson begins turning “away from the outer world in order to listen to the inner voices . . . in which the path to health is via turning into the fantasies, the primary processes, that is, via the recovery of the intrapsychic in general” (Maslow, 1968, p. 182). Numerous theorists also share this view of a pathway to health via the unconscious. Gerhard Adler (1963) writes, the “artist’s growing concern with fantasy, associations, dream images, and symbols, is an attempt to take the inner world as seriously as the outer world of objects, and to give it equal if not greater importance” (p. 8). Murray Stein (1998), in a study of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, writes of Rilke’s use of the transformative image of the butterfly, which may be applied to Dickinson’s use of the butterfly image:

Rilke had to suffer through the actual experience of his own transformation. Finally he was able to break into the Open, which for him is a term implying full realization of the imago. In the Open, butterflies can spread their wings and soar. It is the realm of complete freedom to be oneself in the deepest possible sense. To arrive at the Open, however, the poet must take one further step. He must journey *through* the land of the Laments and go on, alone. It is only through such radical isolation that this poet—a veritable pupa encased in a shell and enclosed in an impermeable cocoon—comes to his ultimate self-realization. (p. 37)

The symbol of the butterfly provides an excellent example of Dickinson’s use of “symbols and metaphors of transformation” (Metzner, 1998, p. 5). When Dickinson

wrote the poem “Cocoon above! Cocoon below!” (poem # 142, early 1860), she was creating a metaphor of the cocoon turning into the butterfly that mirrored or reflected her own psychic growth as a poet. When she placed quotation marks around the word “Surrogate,” she was symbolically taking a word that belonged to her father’s world (as he was a lawyer and surrogate may be interpreted as a legal term), and making it her own. The poem also reflects her process of training all her senses—eye, mind, and soul—to create a language that engaged her whole being, a language that breathes and is alive (see poem # 278, “A word is dead, when it is said,” 1862).

Stein (1998) suggests viewing the transformative image as able to “capture the element of wholeness in an individual’s life and give it specific shape and direction” (p. 63). Thus the butterfly image may be seen as a soul image in Dickinson’s life, giving her growth direction and intention. In noting it is a journey “*through*” (p. 37), Stein supports a definition of transpersonal shared by Dane Rudhyar (1977):

By this term I do not refer to something “beyond” the human as much to what, operating “through” a human form, draws sensitive individuals toward a higher state of consciousness and supersensual type of relationships in which the exclusiveness of the tribal and strictly personal level is replaced by the inclusiveness of pure and unwavering compassion. (p. 57)

Adler (1963) may describe this process as the artist’s orientation to her “inner center” (p. 8) through a “concentration on inner images and events” (p. 10), which may create an orientation to the “beyond” (p. 8). Maslow (1971) might call this orientation to the beyond “transcendence” (pp. 269-279). Maslow writes of one of his definitions of transcendence,

Transcendence of ego, self, selfishness, ego-centering, etc., when we respond to the demand-character of external tasks, causes, duties, responsibilities to others and to the world of reality. When one is doing one’s duty, this also can be seen to be under the aspect of eternity and can represent a transcendence of the ego, of the

lower needs of the self. Actually, of course, it is ultimately a form of metamotivation, and identification with what “calls for” doing. (p. 271)

Utilizing Maslow’s (1971) above definition of transcendence, an example of Dickinson as a transcending self-actualizer may be found in her poem, “The Poets light but Lamps—” (poem # 930, early 1865). In this poem Dickinson describes the duty of the poet, to light lamps; she also creates a transcendent symbol or “visionary symbol” (Washburn, 1988, p. 222) that gives her a place and purpose as a poet across ages, times, and cultures. The light of the poem, according to my interpretation, may also be representative of her inner soul light. The poet lighting lamp metaphor becomes a way for her to view herself as moving beyond and through herself, in the process becoming a lens through whom “transpersonal action” (Rudhyar, 1983, p. 219) may be released or expressed. Her transcendent and self-actualizing creative process emerges through her process of lighting a lamp in darkness, and nourishing others with her light gift of lightning words.

In Dickinson’s poem “Tell all the truth but tell it slant—” (poem # 1263, 1872) she expresses how she tells about and reveals the truth, which includes her life and texts, slowly. Her “truth” is a “light” she tells in a circular and “slant” manner. Maslow (1971) describes a central characteristic of the transcending self-actualizer as

They are much more consciously and deliberately metamotivated. That is, the values of Being, or Being itself seen both as fact and value, e.g., perfection, truth, beauty, goodness, unity, dichotomy-transcendence, B-amusement, etc. are their main or most important motivations. (p. 287)

Dickinson’s interest in truth and beauty take many and multiple forms and as a poet she is motivated to tell of her experiences. Dickinson may be understood as living out—expressing—her own unique transcending self-actualizing creative process.

Rudhyar (1982) would call this “transpersonal living . . . an unceasing *performance*—as activity through (*per*) a form. This form is the archetype of one’s essential being, which is inspirited by what I have called a spiritual Quality” (p. 38). In defining her business as “Circumference” (letter # 268, to T. W. Higginson, July 1862) and “to love . . . to sing” (letter # 269, to Dr. and Mrs. J. G. Holland, summer 1862), she positions herself as a poet and develops a widening circle of relationships around what being a poet means. She places herself at the center of her world—a witness, participant, and recorder of inner and outer states. She is remembering the form and essence of things—light, beauty, truth. The poet, for Dickinson, comprehends the whole (poem # 533, “I reckon—When I count at all—” 1863). The poet exists paradoxically in and out of time (poem # 446, “This was a Poet—” late 1862) and essentially is part of a timeless meaning-making creative process. Because Dickinson essentially grew and lived into her idea of the poet, her words contain a multidimensional lived quality. As Albert Gelpi (1966) has noted, in defining the word “Circumference,”

In its various contexts and multiple associations Circumference comes to serve as a complex symbol for those disrupted moments when in some sense time transcends time. Circumference signifies ecstasy in its expansiveness, in its self-contained wholeness, in its self-ordered coherence, in its definition of the individual’s capacity for being (and for Being). (p. 123)

Dickinson was appropriating language, her use of words, to say what she wanted to say, and in the process, she came to inhabit her own body, mind, and soul from the perspective of the poet. There is a way that she comes to embody language, which transforms not only language, but also herself in the process. Gelpi (1991) notes, “The artisan was a skilled alchemist or psychic midwife, transmuting and delivering herself” (p. 295). In forging her creative spirit (see poem # 401, “Dare you see a Soul at the

‘White Heat’?” summer 1862). Dickinson was creating a way of engaging self, world, and other. By listening to herself, her soul, and the truth of her experiences, Dickinson was moving toward health, the opposite of which is the “path away from mutual connection, and simultaneously away from the truth of one’s own experience . . . the path to psychological problems” (Miller & Stiver, 1997, p. 81). Erik Erikson (1964) describes this process as one of moving toward “actuality” rather than “reality” (pp. 164-165) i.e., actualizing her inner potentials in response to an outer reality that is limiting.

There was a way, as a “skilled alchemist” (Gelpi, 1991, p. 295), that Dickinson was able to project her self into her work, and by reflecting on her words, create an on-going narrative account of her experiences (Bruner, 1986). She recorded her deep experiences (Tart, 1997). Living the poet’s life gave Dickinson a larger house in which to dwell. Clifton Snider (1996) and Jean Houston (1993, 1996) both suggest that Dickinson was on a personal quest and engaged in living out of her myth. This journey was between worlds—between the known and the unknown—life, death, and life after death.

When I read the myth of Hestia (Demetrakopoulos, 1979), I recognized Dickinson’s process of dwelling as a process of deepening in language through her body, mind, and soul, by which “the soul is burnt out of, in, and through the body” (p. 66). I could see Dickinson as occupying a deeper, soul, center in her home, and finding a way of connecting with others through her body, mind, and soul. When I read Carl Jung’s (1979, p. 192) description of his life, I could understand—hear—Dickinson’s Hestia nature—as expressed through her daily life—as a way of dwelling within her own true nature. Jung writes,

At Bollingen I am in the midst of my true life, I am most deeply myself. . . . At times I feel as if I am spread out over the landscape and inside things, and am

myself living in every tree, in the splashing of the waves, in the clouds and the animals that come and go, in the procession of the seasons. There is nothing in the Tower that has not grown into its own form over the decades, nothing with which I am not linked. Here everything has its history, and mine; here is space for the spaceless kingdom of the world's and the psyche's hinterland.—I have done without electricity, and tend the fireplace and stove myself. Evenings, I light the old lamps. There is no running water, and I pump the water from the well. I chop the wood and cook the food. (p. 192)

A model of psychospiritual development as presented by Hillevi Ruumet (1997) uses the image of a helix to describe the journey or path of coming home to the self, the soul. In suggesting a shape for the journey, Ruumet helps me envision the shape that Dickinson's journey takes, through her process of becoming a poet. I understand Dickinson as continually returning to the heart ("Aloha" center, p. 17), the truth of her experience ("Star" center, p.17), and coming to live in the "Sophia" (p. 19) center. Ruumet writes of the person at the Sophia center,

They emanate a quiet light and serve the world through their everyday presence, without fanfare. . . . Fulfillment of the Sophia Center tasks creates a synchronized energy web that connects the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. This brings security on earth and within your body, without identification with either. Here, a person is without fear, has total trust in the Divine, loves and acts spontaneously, freely and compassionately in relationships. A person expresses inherent talents in a way that echoes the "Voice" of the Creative Source and resonates with the needs of others. We might image this person as a bright sphere of light within the universal Light, with all the centers lit up and energy moving freely across the intricate web of interconnections in a full spectrum of colors. (pp. 20-21)

A description of the creative process or person, which may also be applied to an understanding of Dickinson, is presented in the theories of D. W. Winnicott (1986) and Carl Rogers (1959). Winnicott suggests any definition of creativity must include "the idea that life is worth living. . . . To be creative a person must exist and have a feeling of existing, not in conscious awareness, but as a basic place to operate from" (p. 39).

Rogers, similarly, writes of the creative process as "the emergence in action of a novel

relational product, growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstance of his life on the other" (p. 71). Similarly, Rollo May (1980) writes of the creative act as a courageous act, and measures the artist by what he or she offers of value to human kind (p. 20). Otto Rank (1989) positions the artist as representative of the "new human type" (p. 431), illuminating Dickinson's creative process further, when he writes,

The self-renunciation which the artist feels when creating is relieved when he finds himself again in his accomplished work, and the self-renunciation which raises the enjoyer above the limitations of his individuality becomes . . . the *feeling of oneness* with the soul living in the work of art, a greater and higher entity. . . . They have yielded up their mortal ego for a moment, fearlessly and even joyfully, to receive it back in the next, the richer for this universal feeling. (pp. 109-110)

In her process of becoming a poet I contend that Dickinson sought out relationships that moved or motivated her on all levels of her being—body, mind, and soul. I have extended my understanding of relationship to include her relationship with herself. She essentially forged a relationship with her soul through her creative process, creating a place in which to write and an identity as a poet that would allow her to continue to create and grow. In this way she grew into her self-actualizing creative process with the assistance of others, such as Ben Newton, T. W. Higginson, Sue Dickinson, her sister Lavinia, Charles Wadsworth, Dr. and Mrs. J. G. Holland, Samuel Bowles, and many others. Dickinson thus moves from envisioning a noble and blessed life (letter # 153, 13 January 1854) to living the life of a poet.

In *Living the Poet's Life, 1870 to 1886: "Life's Portentous Music,"* I have attempted to give a glimpse of how Dickinson was able to disseminate through her life and texts the breadth and depth of living the poet's life. She never stopped being a poet.

She may have lessened in her later years her creation of poems, yet like “Mother Nature” in her poem “Nature—the Gentlest Mother is,” (poem # 741, 2nd half 1863), she became the being that allowed for other beings. She turned the tremendous listening of nature, of her soul, into “Life’s portentous Music” (letter # 950, to Mrs. Holland, late autumn 1884), her soul’s song. She could say to Higginson “I find ecstasy in living—the mere sense of living is joy enough” (letter # 342a, letter of Higginson upon meeting Dickinson on August 16, 1870), and write to Mrs. Holland, “There is not so much Life as talk of Life, as a general thing. Had we the first intimation of the Definition of Life, the calmest of us would be Lunatics!” (letter # 492, about March 1877).

Does Dickinson’s self-actualizing creative process offer a new definition for Transpersonal? My interpretations of her life and texts may suggest new understandings, as language becomes alive with the sayer, as a word takes on new associations, is spoken aloud with emphasis in the body, mind, and soul. Perhaps Dickinson’s creative process, as I have interpreted it, as *embodied, engaged, relational, and creative*, may suggest the ingredients for a definition of Transpersonal.

When William Runyan (1982) writes “A biography is a portrait painted by a specific author from a particular perspective, using a range of conceptual tools and available data” (p. 36), I find myself putting the finishing touches on a portrait of Dickinson which is incomplete. My research questions, by their very nature, seem to impose an artificial order onto my subject of research; without intending I have placed a net around her poems, tried to describe her life, to pin her down into some form, some shape that is palatable to a transpersonal perspective. By framing her life in terms of her own process of becoming a poet, I have also attempted to create an order from the

research, to hear the voice of the poet, to allow the story to be told as it unfolds. I am reminded of the words of Dickinson in a letter to Higginson. “It is solemn to remember that Vastness—is but the Shadow of the Brain which casts it—” (letter # 735, about 1881). I can only imagine what Dickinson was really like; yet if her words are any clue, she was vast indeed.

Susan’s (Hart & Smith, 1998) obituary-portrait of Dickinson is telling in that it supports moving beyond the “ego shell of indifference” (Carlton Lowenberg, personal communication, October 9, 1994) to understanding the “soul of fire in a shell of pearl” (Hart & Smith, p. 268). Dickinson was the poet-blacksmith-butterfly; she loved her materials, made them sing, rounded them out and sounded them out into the world, never quite a finished, complete project. As Dickinson writes,

“And so with Lives—/ And so with Butterflies—” (poem # 317, 1862).

Contributions to the Literature, Both Psychological and Literary

In Dickinson’s poem “There is no Frigate like a Book” (poem # 1286, 1873) she writes, “How frugal is the Chariot/ That bears the Human Soul—”. What psychology and literature share in common is the soul. As Jung (1972) writes, “the practice of art is a psychological activity and, as such, can be approached from a psychological angle” (p. 65). Transpersonal Psychology is a way of studying the whole person—body, mind, and soul. Literature bears the soul, speaks the language of the soul. Psychology draws sustenance from literature (Adler, 1963; Edinger, 1965; May, 1980; Stein, 1998). Literature gives back to psychology insights, and truths, “revealed by such keenly sensitive (‘methodologically untrained’) observers as Dostoevsky or Zola, Orwell or

Agee, who have managed, regardless of time and place, to set down something both comprehensible and enduring about human beings” (Coles, 1974, p. 171). I would also include Dickinson, who contributes—through my interpretations—to the psychological literature a model of living the creative life, her own self-actualizing creative process.

I describe the model Dickinson contributes as dwelling, distilling, and disseminating. She actualizes her creative potential through her day-to-day life (dwelling), using what materials she has at hand (distilling), becoming the best poet she could be (disseminating). Dickinson contributes her words and a life lived deeply. I think that she offers her forged creative spirit, which is resilient, able to endure the impatient ores of suffering she gives a shape to with her anvil (see poem # 401, “Dare you see a Soul at the ‘White Heat’?” summer 1862)—lifting up, falling. Dickinson gives a shape to this creative process—and creates the enduring ring of her poems and letters that expand out—and out.

Dickinson found ways of writing, speaking, and living the symbolic and metaphorical language of her soul. As a “complex, storied nature of human existence” (Jacobs, Munro, & Adams, 1995, p. 329), her song may be heard in the many layers of truth contained in her poems and letters. As Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989) writes,

Poetry, Aristotle said, is truer than history. Storytelling as literature (narrative poetry) must then be truer than history. If we rely on history to tell us what happened at a specific time and place, we can rely on the story to tell us not only what might have happened, but also what is happening at an unspecified time and place. (p. 120)

Transpersonal Psychology and poetry meet through my study of Dickinson, in the broadest sense, within the understanding that there exist “words within words” (Benvenuto, 1983, p. 46) and “fields within fields, patterns within patterns, contexts

within contexts, endlessly” (Wilber, 1996, p. 67). Each time I read her poems and letters I am disseminating her circumference (wholeness) with my own (wholeness). I meet her when a word becomes alive in my flesh; I meet her in the mind, the complex metaphor, that suggests other ways of knowing and being; I meet her in the soul, in the quiet intensity of a word spoken—resounding through the chambers of my being.

In developing my transpersonal perspective, I began to notice a gap between what established poets (Bly, 1991; Pinsky, 1998; Rich, 1979a) have written about Dickinson and how she has been portrayed or diagnosed through different psychological studies (Cody, 1971; McDermott, 2000; Grolnick, 1990). A difficulty I encountered in reading works that diagnosed Dickinson was a subtle denial of the power of poetry to express truths; poetry was either dismissed as fantasy or the creation of a brilliant yet troubled poet. The denial of poetry is the denial of the creative process and therefore the denial of poetry to express the truths of a life. Robert Coles (1974) suggests attending to the truths of a life, “so many that no one mind or viewpoint . . . can possibly encompass and comprehend them all” (p. 166). I contend that through her creative process Dickinson was able to live out of and express her fullest potential—the truths of her life.

I have tried to view language as something central in Dickinson’s life, really as a meditative discipline that she may have encountered in Thomas Upham’s (1845) *Elements of Mental Philosophy* and in her reading of the dictionary and *Bible*. She studied words with a great deal of love and weaved words into the fabric of her everyday life. In her process of becoming a poet, and defining herself as a poet, she was “re-visioning” (Rich, 1979b) herself. I have been revisioning her through my transpersonal

perspective in order to situate her as creating fully from within her time, using all of her materials she had at hand.

Instead of viewing Dickinson as isolated (Hirschhorn, 1991), I hear her sense of intimacy with nature (Snider, 1996). Instead of isolation through poetry (Grolnick, 1990), there is a sense of creating through self-reliance, charting the “interior life” (Gross, 1983, p. 2). Instead of isolation from her body through poetry (Kavaler-Adler, 1991, p. 36), there is a deep engagement with the world, self, and other, through her poetry and the life she lived. David Abram (1996) writes about the sensual connection with the earth and the body as a basis for writing and creating, and this would certainly apply to Dickinson. Robert Bly (1991) also touches upon the relationship of what I would call the knowing body, the senses within, including an intuitive sense, as a way of knowing in a fuller sense.

In fact, different poets and philosophers have helped shape my understanding of how Dickinson was able to live into her self-actualizing creative process. Jacques Maritain (1952) writes,

And because poetry is born in this root life where the powers of the soul are active in common, poetry implies an essential requirement of totality or integrity. Poetry is the fruit neither of the intellect alone, nor of imagination alone. Nay more, it proceeds from the totality of man, sense, imagination, intellect, love, desire, instinct, blood and spirit together. And the first obligation imposed on the poet is to consent to be brought back to the hidden place, near the center of the soul, where this totality exists in the state of a creative source. (p. 111)

In her dwelling in her soul, in language, Dickinson was living words. As the poet David Whyte (1994) writes, “A courageous word itself is an act, and a word spoken with the whole body the literal wish to embody that act” (p. 129). When I take Dickinson’s words seriously, I can understand how, as Snider (1996) writes, Dickinson was concerned

with mysteries and the afterlife (p. 34). Houston (1993) also encourages an engagement with Dickinson in terms of body, mind, and soul; by viewing Dickinson as whole, Houston invites a whole response to Dickinson, and I have found that this is how my transpersonal understanding of Dickinson has developed. Thus if I fail to view Dickinson in a whole way, I may be denying her creative capacity for joy and love. When Dickinson embodied a word, her life as a poet began to resound “in tone, word, and image,” as Wilhelm Dilthey notes (cited in Makkreel & Rodi, 1985, p. 59).

Houston (1996) also writes of the ability to “reconfigure” (p. x) the past in the process of telling one’s story. Dickinson was able to do this I contend by answering a call to rise (see poem # 1197, “We never know how high we are” 1871). Dickinson also mentions, in an undated prose fragment, “Tis a dangerous moment for any one when the meaning goes out of things and Life stands straight—and punctual—and yet no content(s) (signal) come(s). Yet such moments are. If we survive them they expand us,” (Johnson & Ward, 1986, prose fragment # 49, p. 919). Dickinson’s ability to read and reflect upon her own experiences through her writings gave her added insight into her creative process, and I contend this facilitated her process of living and writing from the depths of her soul.

From the perspective of Rich (1993) “the act of writing” is “to feel our own ‘questions’ meeting the world’s ‘questions,’ to recognize how we are in the world and the world is in us” (p. 26). So the act of writing for Dickinson may be viewed as a holistic act that engaged her whole self and brought her into a fuller engagement with herself and the world.

In understanding her creative process from a transpersonal perspective, I have chosen to understand her creative process as lifelong, and I have chosen poems and

letters that follow her process of becoming a poet, what poet means, and living the poet's life. Gelpi (1966) suggests a transpersonal perspective when he writes of her capacity for "Being" (p. 123). I am suggesting that in her movement from being a poet to living the poet's life, she is arching and reaching for this greater being which is expressed through her life and texts. I have used a language amenable to a transpersonal perspective in order to describe this process and extend this process out, into the future. I thus view, through my transpersonal perspective, Dickinson's life and texts as being a unique expression of what transpersonal can mean.

George Whicher (1938) also shares this view of Dickinson's unique expression, which he understands as Dickinson's taking the idea of self-reliance and making it her own. Even in Dickinson's day, when her poems first came out in the 1890s, responses to her poems ranged along a broader spectrum of experience, as recorded by Willis Buckingham (1989). Some of the words used include, in responses to her life and texts, "Emily Dickinson was a poet, if a poet ever lived" (p. 179); "These poems are, in relation to poetry, what the drawings of Blake are to pictorial art. Violating every canon of the mechanism and rules, they are yet its very essence and spirit" (p. 135). Another reviewer from the 1890s writes, "She plays with nature as many a poet has done before her. In these poems she is no longer abnormal" (p. 86).

What Buckingham (1989) records and what I have attempted to express, is that placing her outside of the norm, "in her daring unconventionality" (p. 87), is not a justification for diagnosing her as being abnormal, but a cause to seek to understand her in a broader transpersonal way. It is a way to meet her, as Rich (1979a) writes, as "a

woman who explored her own mind, without any of the guidelines of orthodoxy” (p. 183).

What I contribute to an understanding of Dickinson is an attempt to understand her in a transpersonal way. I have essentially engaged in a dialogue with her texts, works about her, and psychological approaches in order to understand and find a language to write about her creative process. The basis of my study suggests that the best way to know about her is to study her texts in some depth. I have discovered in the process of reading that I am re-enlivening a language that is already there; I am re-enlivening Dickinson’s language through my engagement with it, and in the process coming upon new interpretations of her life and texts. My study follows the work of others (Gelpi, 1966; Johnson, 1955) who have similarly sought to study the meaning of Dickinson’s words in relation to her life.

I realized early in my journey of understanding Dickinson’s creative process that I am always returning to her poems and letters. I have been circling her texts; in the process of reading I have been simply recording my experience of her texts, while broadening my focus to include a study of her life. In my focus to understand her creative process, I have created a way—transpersonal perspective—of understanding her life and texts that attends to and incorporates the creative elements of her language and life.

William Shurr (1993) also encourages this form of scholarship when he suggests “the borders between Dickinson’s poetry and prose, between her poems and their contexts, are quite moveable” (p. 10). I have broadened and included his understanding of a shifting border between Dickinson’s poems and their contexts by including a transpersonal perspective and a re-evaluation of Dickinson’s creative process through my

methods of psychobiography and hermeneutics. By shifting between the focus on Dickinson's life lived and texts I have thus created a narrative that follows Dickinson's process of becoming a poet as this is expressed in her poems and letters.

The connection between Dickinson's life and texts is also explored in the work of Ellen Louise Hart and Martha Nell Smith (1998) wherein Dickinson's correspondence with her sister-in-law Sue is recreated. This form of scholarship supports a fresh evaluation of how Dickinson conceived of herself as creating in relationship. The "self-in-relation" (Surrey, 1991, p. 52) model of women's development would situate Dickinson's "primary experience of self" in relationship, and this suggests that Dickinson came to define herself as a poet-in-relationship. Dickinson's extensive letter writing (Johnson & Ward, 1986), which is an estimated fraction of her known correspondence, also suggests the importance of evaluating letter writing as a valid way of relating in her time. The importance of letter writing is also explored in the work of Theodora V. W. Ward (1951), Polly Longworth (1984), and Vivian Pollack (1988).

The story of Dickinson's self-actualizing creative process when lived out in her day-to-day life as expressed through her poems and letters became so much more manifold for Dickinson. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996) writes, "poetry and literature allow the creation of experiences that we would otherwise not have access to; they take our lives to higher levels of complexity" (p. 238). William Braud and Rosemarie Anderson (1998) also note that "the projectory of the narrative, may even create new events in awareness—possibilities and realities scarcely imagined without the stories' thrust" (p. 23). The projectory of Dickinson's narrative I have identified as her process of becoming a poet. Adding a narrative component to my study is an attempt to hear the

complexity of Dickinson's life through what she tells through the voice of her texts.

When Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule (1986) situate the voice in the development of self and mind (p. 18), Dickinson becomes for me a living, breathing human being, who thought, felt, imagined, dreamed, and created her poems and letters through the engagement of her whole self. Whereas Sharon Cameron (1992) fixes on an almost decisive indecisiveness in Dickinson, I am suggesting that Dickinson inhabits her own place, that she really becomes her own person, inhabiting her own body, with her own voice.

The incentive to view Dickinson as creating a healthy response through her creative process arose out of the convergence of different lines of research, particularly Transpersonal Psychology, narrative studies, women's psychology, including Howard Gardner's (1993) portrait of the exemplary creator (E.C.):

E.C. discovers a problem area or realm of special interest, one that promises to take the domain into uncharted waters. This is a highly charged moment. At this point E.C. becomes isolated from her peers and must work mostly on her own. She senses that she is on the verge of a breakthrough that is as yet little understood, even by her. Surprisingly, at this crucial moment, E.C. craves both cognitive and affective support, so that she can retain her bearings. Without such support, she might well experience some kind of breakdown. (p. 361)

I contend that Dickinson probably felt a breakthrough into a new domain of her work in 1862, especially with the poem "I dwell in Possibility—" (poem # 466, late 1862). When she wrote to T. W. Higginson I also contend that she was seeking a way to, as Gardner writes, "retain her bearings" (p. 361). Dickinson was seeking support to see herself as a poet creating original and unique works. Gardner helps me understand how Dickinson's isolation was not so much isolation, but again, an engagement with her materials in order to create something new.

I have essentially been incorporating and expanding upon different creative studies to create insights into Dickinson's creative process. Shaun McNiff (1998) has expressed that "Artists strive to get to the heart of life, to the core of matter" (p. 100) and this is what Dickinson essentially did through her process of distilling. Jill Mellick (1996) has expanded my way of conceiving of poems as "dreams"; she writes, "The more I read dream theory, the more convinced I am that opting for a single approach to dreams usually excludes other valuable approaches" (p. 25). Thus in utilizing different approaches and creating different lenses in order to understand Dickinson's life and texts, I have allowed for unique interpretations of her life and texts to emerge in the process of research.

I have also focused on works about Dickinson in order to illuminate her uniqueness while giving emphasis to her relationships. I think there was a natural sense of isolation and a unique way of relating in Dickinson's day that is suggested, for example, in the work of Michele Mock (1997). Mock describes a "relationship space" (p. 69) that the poet inhabited with her sister Lavinia. I also recognize that there is a wider relational space that the poet inhabited; recognizing this space involves reading her texts or texts associated with her from odd angles, as Robert Steele (1989) suggests. In reading the *Handlist of Books Found in the Home of Emily Dickinson at Amherst, Massachusetts Spring, 1850* (The Houghton Library, 1951), I discovered there was extensive sharing of literature within Dickinson's immediate circle (according to the notations within certain books), which included Sue and her brother Austin. I have also realized in reading Dickinson's complete poems and letters that although Dickinson's relationships with her parents are complex and difficult to discern, that doesn't mean that they were not

important to the poet. Just because a relationship is not written about by Dickinson extensively does not mean that it did not hold meaning for the poet.

The research of Jane Eberwein (1998), and Gudrun Grabher, Roland Hagenbüchle, and Cristanne Miller (1998) also hint at the complexity and breadth of Dickinson studies; yet they do not provide a broader transpersonal perspective in which to understand Dickinson's life and texts. Perhaps my research will facilitate a greater understanding of Dickinson from a transpersonal perspective.

Contributions to the Method, Both Psychobiography and Hermeneutics

Method begins at a place delineated by my everyday participation with (Packer & Addison, 1989, p. 23), a curiosity, a wondering: who is the person who wrote such verses? A question asked in the depths of one's being becomes an adventure—not simply to diagnose, categorize, but to know, understand, value, and honor. Later, the question may be asked aloud, formulated. Research does not begin at that moment, but starts in the first gleanings of an intuition as yet unformulated in thought. Research begins often from someone passing a question—a poem opening a space in the psyche—a dream two steps ahead—the wind whispering, carrying a seed from far away, landing in the open palm of the hand. I ask myself, why so drawn to reading Dickinson's words? How do I give words to my wordless participations (Abram, 1996, p. 84) in the process of giving words to my participation? Our lives complete the lives of others (Bleicher, 1980, p. 9).

As research becomes more formal, there is a sense developed of the way to approach the subject; gaps in literature are recognized; the inclination to not trust the self, the senses, though, becomes great, yet I remember, that which seeks to be known asks for

a fuller participation. I begin to follow my senses; how do I see? Is it just sight, seeing as understanding, or all senses, suggesting other ways of knowing? If I am using a psychobiography method, I may gather glimpses of the whole human life being studied that suggest the whole person sometimes becomes buried in what has been written about her. When I begin to trust these glimpses of the whole human being, a method of knowing may develop that attempts to understand the person as whole. Intuitions are followed, such as, the way is *through* the whole self; the body is relational; I may never be able to fully understand—only stand in the presence of or stand under. I glimpse the immensity of a life in such moments that never can be reduced to print. “The sale of the Spirit—never did occur” (letter # 275, to Samuel Bowles, mid-November 1862). This awareness may be extended to an understanding of text through a method of hermeneutics; what differs is way read, way embodied. I learn to read a text anew, to approach in a fresh and vital way, trusting my senses to pick up sense of whole. I listen; recognizing how I put a structure on; yet in following sense of, like a dream, I may hear anew.

I recognize I am using transpersonal tools, theories; and tools for the journey, books about Dickinson, her dictionary. I develop ways of understanding; speaking and listening, questioning and answering, a kind of traveling back in time and returning into the present moment; trusting an image to speak. My methods resemble the way a poem is created,

In writing a poem, beginning perhaps with a painful dream, an image snatched from riding a bus, a phrase overheard in a bar, this scrap of private vision suddenly connected—and still connects—with a life greater than my own, an existence not merely personal, words coming together to reveal what was unknown to me until I wrote them. (Rich, 1993, p. 25)

I ask myself if what is known about Dickinson makes sense in terms of what I have read. I trust my senses to tell and my journey becomes a questing; languaging; traveling, yet staying, deepening, and dwelling, distilling, disseminating; a voicing; and a dreaming and waking.

I discover that there is a way to bring together what is known about a life, and add my reading of texts, and through this method of *embodied knowing*, *embodied reading*, and *embodied writing*, arrive at a new understanding. I discover through my participatory reading how life and text work together—life and text and life and text interweaving. My journey resembles not so much a circle, but a spiraling, journeying within and without. For instance, when Dickinson defined her “Business” as “Circumference” (letter # 268, to T. W. Higginson, July 1862) and “to love . . . to sing” (letter # 269, to Dr. and Mrs. J. G. Holland, summer 1862), I placed these letters in chronological order with her poems. I discovered in reading the letters and the poem “Dare you see a Soul at the ‘White Heat’?” (poem # 401, summer 1862) an image in the process of writing: The blacksmith must love her materials—make them sing—round them out and sound them out—into the world.

“In the speaking and the hearing new things appear in the land” (Trible, 1984, p. 1). I recall the words of Norman Denzin (1997), “Every transcription is a retelling—a new telling of a previously heard, now newly heard voice” (p. 43). I do not arrive at a new understanding so much as open understanding. I discover a book long lost now found in a library that contains a page that completes part of the riddle, answers part of the question, and attempts to see and hear with the eyes and ears of the heart from the center out. I am simply a co-traveler in the magnificent mystery of Dickinson’s words.

There is a way of reading, of slowing down and taking in wherein the very shapes of the letters and words contain subtle hints of feeling with life surging—pulsing within—breaking through. Gelpi (1991) writes of the artist, which may be applied to the reader,

Thus the artist must fix upon the rose not merely to see it (or into it) or to light it by his imagination but to take the rose in so metamorphically that his conscious apprehension of it is rendered (“distilled” suggests the alchemical translation, scientific yet mysterious) into the materials of his medium. (p. 295)

Reading becomes a way of asking, where in the body, mind, and soul is this text? Journey becomes a way of asking, questioning, and allows for new questions in act of research. In creating my methods I have essentially increased my capacity for understanding Dickinson’s life and texts. I have followed the journey of a remarkable poet. My methods have become a way of hearing Dickinson’s voice, while also allowing for silences and my own voice in the process. I am giving words to a process of creativity that is timeless. I am gathering my idea of poet; using all of my senses to figure out what meanings develop out of my engagement with Dickinson’s life and texts. In staying close to Dickinson’s texts and my engagement, I have developed an appreciation for mystery, for not knowing; and I have left spaces in the research process for the unknown and the unknowable. My journey is a way of celebrating and conveying my experience through Dickinson’s words, my body and breath, a sense I experience of utter aliveness and openness, connected to the heart. I have come to realize that only through love may a person or a poem reveal herself. My methods—like a flowering plant—have shape-shifted, developed, grown in terms of my understanding. I measure my methods—my understanding—by how embodied, engaged, relational, and creative.

In defining the word transpersonal, I have integrated the definition of transpersonal presented by Denise Lajoie and S. I. Shapiro (1992), through the “recognition, understanding, and realization” (p. 91) of the transpersonal in Dickinson’s life and texts. I have come to understand that self-actualization was an ongoing process (Fadiman & Frager, 1994) in Dickinson’s life. The challenge for me has been to be receptive to the different ways this ongoing and “improvisatory” (Bateson, 1990, p. 3) process was expressed in her life and texts. Through choosing to study her process of becoming a poet, I understand that, for Dickinson, the poet was the ultimate purveyor in her life. She situated the poet as central in her life and this is also an expression of her self-actualizing creative process. Thus Robert Lifton’s (1974) “shared-themes approach” (p. 31) aptly fits into an understanding of Dickinson’s self-actualizing creative process as existing across ages, times, and cultures.

Through a method of psychobiography, I have discovered that in the complexity of understanding Dickinson’s creative process she essentially tells about her life through metaphors and symbols. A narrative approach to her life, I discovered, must take into consideration all the ways she tells the truths of her life; therefore I understand that each poem and letter is a way of telling. Dickinson’s life resides in the telling and in between the lines of her life lived. This way of viewing her life and texts has allowed me to hear what Michael White and David Epston (1990) call “aspects of experience that fall outside of the dominant story” (p. 15).

In seeking to understand Dickinson’s narrative from my present understanding, I have utilized the words of Victor Turner (1986) when he suggests I create meaning from

my “present point in life” (p. 33). My narrative of Dickinson’s creative process follows the words of John Creswell (1994), when he writes,

The final project will be a construction of the informant’s experiences and the meanings he attaches to them. This will allow readers to vicariously experience the challenges he encounters and provide a lens through which readers can view the subject’s world. (p. 169)

In creating a transpersonal lens through which to view Dickinson, I have attempted to attend to the data (Tesch, 1990, p. 95) and allow the data of Dickinson’s poems and letters to guide my understanding. I have followed the words of Barton Levi St. Armand (1984) when he writes, “every deep consideration of a work of art must develop an approach to that art which is interdisciplinary as well as unique; that is, ‘organic’ in the largest and perhaps most romantic sense” (p. 2). In recalling a mythic figure, Hestia, I have been reflecting back on Dickinson’s significance as a poet and casting the central image of lighting the lamp into the future.

Possible Applications and Implications of the Study

I have explored a number of possible applications and implications of this study as ways of disseminating Dickinson’s circumference, which may find expression through education, both teaching and research; therapeutic modalities; implications for further research; method exploration and speculation; and my personal reflections on my journey.

Educational applications. If I were to teach hermeneutics from a transpersonal perspective, I would encourage an expanding understanding of what a text is and can be. I have extended my understanding of text to include not only a written text, but the text of

the body, mind, and soul; a life; nature; dreams; different art mediums, such as paintings and music. In fact, my understanding of what a text is or can be is suggested by a definition of hermeneutics by H. P. Rickman (1988): “The sustained effort to analyze and interpret the interconnected totality of our experience, which is life, is the ultimate aim of hermeneutics” (p. 137).

In teaching hermeneutics, I would encourage a way of understanding the text that recognizes that “reading is participation. . . . It is an encounter with the text that is unmediated by any construction of meaning, whether traditional or otherwise” (Bruns, 1992, pp. 126-127). A relationship with the text may develop that is nonhierarchical in that one does not place one’s self above or below a text but creates a way of engaging with it. Participatory reading is suggested by the awareness that

Practical understanding is not an origin for knowledge in the sense of a foundation; it is, instead, a starting place for interpretation. Interpretive inquiry begins not from an absolute origin of unquestionable data or totally consistent logic, but at a place delineated by our everyday participatory understanding of people and events. (Packer & Addison, 1989, p. 23)

I would also teach about narrative as a way of listening with the compassionate heart of research (Anderson, 1998, p. 71), to hear as Wilber (1996) writes, how “we exist in fields within fields, patterns within patterns, contexts within contexts, endlessly” (p. 65). In studying lives and texts “from odd angles, from perspectives that do not square with an authorized reading or a conventional view” (Steele, 1989, p. 224), somehow this allows the compassionate and knowing heart a firmer voice in the research process.

I would encourage the importance of an embodied way of knowing. This includes bringing the body, mind, and soul fully into the classroom, bringing the body into reading and writing. This way of “complex reading” (Romanyshyn, 1991, p. 17), or embodied

reading, allows language to become alive through the engagement of all the senses. A poem read (this way of reading) becomes a way to stimulate—ponder—ask. As Rich (1979b) writes, “if the imagination is to transcend and transform experience it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life you are living at that moment” (p. 43). Language can create a way of seeing and understanding; can introduce new ways of being, knowing, and doing. Language can broaden the scope of what can be imagined, what is known. Language needs the whole body and imagination to bring it alive.

I would also encourage creative thinking—I would give the permission to think and feel in images. Through my lens *Hermeneutics of Creative Engagement*, I suggest responses to reading Dickinson may include the creation of one’s own poetry, music, artwork, and even silence as valid ways of engaging with her texts. There is a way that if the creative process is followed, if the senses are trusted, a new image, thought, or word may naturally flow into a new way of knowing, being, and doing. Dickinson models this creative process, this new way of being, through her life and texts.

Therapeutic applications. My understanding of what text is has expanded to include the “human personality as a ‘sacred text’” (Spoto, 1995, p. 60). Dickinson’s life and texts call for a depth of understanding, an engagement of the whole self, a journey of understanding, and a way of working with images and symbols. In utilizing compassion, the compassionate heart, as a way of connecting in research and life, this process may be applied in a therapeutic relationship. In fact this process may be applied in any

circumstance in which I encounter the unknown, for is not a person a living process, like a poem or flower, requiring a depth of compassion?

The understanding of text requires the ability to work with images and symbols in verbal and nonverbal ways, and this ability may be useful in a therapeutic relationship. This ability may be applied to narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990), wherein the stories we hear, tell, and improvise may include images, symbols, silences, and even the unknown. In fact, the use of literature, the creative arts, and dreams (Mellick, 1996) is especially useful in therapy and is simply a way to nourish a relationship with the body, mind, and soul, a kind of “method of healing” (Adler, 1963, p. 10).

Implications for further research. My study of Dickinson’s self-actualizing creative process creates a model of dwelling, distilling, and disseminating, that may be useful in studying other creative individuals—other lives—and perhaps other poets, such as Rainer Maria Rilke, Jelaluddin Rumi, and Adrienne Rich. Evidently, there is a need, as cited in Edward Edinger (1965, p. 78), Howard Gardner (1997, p. 138), and Abraham Maslow (cited in Fadiman & Frager, 1994, p. 472), of studying lives using a psychological and creative perspective. Other studies of self-actualizers (Piechowski, 1978; Piechowski & Tyska, 1982) support the continued application of Maslow’s theories to the creative person while also suggesting Maslow’s theories may be expanded upon. Such studies differ, for example, from Sigmund Freud’s (1981) study of Leonardo da Vinci not so much in intent but in what theories or lenses are utilized. While different psychological perspectives may have much to offer in the study of a life, for instance, Thomas Ogden (1989) explores states of reverie, I suggest certain lives would find a

greater depth and comprehension through a transpersonal perspective, which may in fact incorporate different psychological theories.

As such, utilizing an approach of Transpersonal Psychology in the study of a life is relatively novel. A transpersonal perspective of Henry David Thoreau by Michael Keller (1977) creates a way of understanding Thoreau through the lens of a transpersonal perspective—and the lack of such studies suggests the need for the study of more lives from a transpersonal perspective.

Similarly, Ken Wilber (1996), a transpersonal researcher, introduces the term “transpersonal hermeneutics” (p. 63) and essentially paves the way for a deeper understanding of what a transpersonal hermeneutics may encompass. Wilber integrates “physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual” (p. 65) approaches to the study of texts, and the approach he suggests may be developed further by applying it to the study of different texts.

Method exploration and speculation. “Whose order is shut inside the structure of a sentence?” (Howe, 1985, p. 11). I will study her poems “a word at a time” (Thackrey, 1954, p. 10). “And this silence is that of our wordless participations, of our perpetual immersion in the depths of an animate, expressive world” (Abram, 1996, p. 84). The butterfly escapes; this beyond imprisonment state exists in potential within the cocoon (see poem # 142, “Cocoon above! Cocoon below!” early 1860). “I dwell in Possibility—” (poem # 466, late 1862). I dwell in possibility. It is a language house and more. What does the butterfly learn? She reaches the edge of the unknown—the circumference of her boundless world—and touches with wonder and wholeness (see poem # 1107, “My

Cocoon tightens—Colors tease—” late 1865). I want to continue to roam (see poem # 1404, “In many and reportless places” 1876). Dickinson weaves a vision of language and life; she shares her love of words. “A word that breathes distinctly/ Has not the power to die” (poem # 1715, no date).

Through my research I am broadening the scope of Transpersonal Psychology to include the study of literature and a life lived deeply. When Dickinson wrote, “Each Age a Lens” (poem # 930, early 1865), there is a way that I am defining “Age” as being Transpersonal. (A hundred years from now, what will “Age” look like?) A dialogue and relationship between poetry and psychology is facilitated by my willingness to explore the meaning of words and experiences through the engagement of my whole self. Dickinson’s words find new life through my engagement with them; my transpersonal perspective is broadened through my understanding of the multiple ways the transpersonal is expressed through an individual life.

Dickinson lived in a time (1830 to 1886) and place (Amherst, Massachusetts) that seems remote and distant, yet the essence—the uniqueness—of her life and texts continues to find a connection with people from all over the world. Dickinson found a language to hold her dreams; she lived her dream of becoming a poet. When one person lives her dreams, she encourages others to create and live their dreams—to make dreams a reality. Dickinson was an individual, yet I feel she also learned to see in terms of community, for she wrote not just for herself but for an audience both near and far in time.

One of the intentions of my research has been to make a place for the body as a way of knowing in my research. This is reflected in my willingness to become engaged in

the research, to value my own knowing voice in the process of hearing the voice—and getting in touch with—the body of another. The body gives me the means through which to express; with the body I see, hear, touch, taste, smell, and intuit. I return to my body, never having left my body, and I discover, in this movement between text, body, and writer, the vitality in the process of research. What seems like a plurality of approaches through my transpersonal perspective, and therefore perhaps disjointed, finds a certain unity in the engagement of my body, mind, and soul. A stated focus on the integration of the whole body through *embodied knowing*, *embodied reading*, and *embodied writing*, in the research processes arises from the awareness that the body is often left out of research. Research, in my view, almost by its very definition, calls for the engagement of my whole self. As Josef Bleicher (1980) writes,

Access to other human beings is possible, however, only by indirect means: what we experience initially are gestures, sounds, and actions and only in the process of understanding do we take the step from external signs to the underlying inner life, the psychological existence of the Other. Since the inner life is not given in the experiencing of sign we have to reconstruct it; our lives provide the materials for the completion of the picture of the inner life of Others. The act of understanding provides the bridge for reaching the spiritual self of the Other and the degree of enthusiasm which we embark on this adventure depends on the importance the Other has for us. (p. 9)

What Bleicher signifies for me is the way to understand another is *through* my whole self. Dickinson's life and texts thus require a holistic way of knowing and a way of treating her in a holistic way. As this is perhaps more of a subjective approach, based on my individual experience, it also suggests that there are numerous and untold possibilities for understanding and disseminating her life and texts.

I have thus discovered research is an enlivening process and a process that is pervasive. Research influences and is influenced by dreams, ways of knowing, and

perhaps an unseen presence. In fact the very words that make up the research process from beginning to end are a part of the journey. A transpersonal perspective becomes a way of participating with and applying a theory, thus carrying an idea into other disciplines, such as teaching, therapy, literature, and history. A transpersonal perspective adds ways of knowing, and adds a new way of understanding.

Personal reflections on my journey. I have been on a journey in search of symbols; I have been following the vital light of Dickinson's words. I have been "led by the phenomenon through a way of access genuinely belonging to it" (Palmer, 1969, p. 128).

The word journey encompasses my traveling to Amherst, Massachusetts, and walking the grounds of Dickinson's house and town; it also includes my journey through her texts, which includes a willingness to journey into spaces unknown, "reportless" (poem # 1404, "In many and reportless places" 1876), as Dickinson notes. In this process of journeying I have sought a language that can begin to describe my engagement with her texts. What language I have found has found me through my process of attending to Dickinson's words and my process of reading. I have stayed with my reading of particular poems and letters until they have unfolded, begun to speak through my engagement with them.

This journey has included giving new life to old symbols, for instance finding the light, life, of Dickinson's image of light (see poem # 930, "The Poets light but Lamps—" early 1865). I have become a reader of words and images. Karl Kerényi (1996) would say, "the way to grasp Dionysos was to lie down in a vineyard under the staked vines in

hottest summer and see the shimmering heat glowing off the ripening bunches of swelling grapes” (p. 19). On one beautiful hot summer day, while visiting Dickinson’s garden, I took a nap on the grass, near the overflowing flowerbeds abloom. After an indeterminable period of time, a large dog romping through the garden woke me up. I took up my camera and crouched low to the ground, finding a place between two flowerbeds. I must have hit the button on my camera—perhaps out of curiosity—that allows for three pictures in quick succession to be taken. All three pictures, it turns out, were framed on the same scene: low grass, arching flowers, hint of sky. Yet the first photo was out of focus, shimmering like a ghost with round bubbles, grass-flower-sky barely discernable. The second photo was somewhat clearer, yet strained eyes and seemed to probe a world that exists yet is rarely seen. The third photo no doubt was perfectly clear, concise, revealing, yet incomplete without the other photos, just like a mark on a page or a turning point in a journey that suddenly becomes clear in the order of experience. I come closer to myself in such moments, even looking back, and perhaps this is what Dickinson meant when she wrote, “Emerson’s intimacy with his ‘Bee’ only immortalized him” (letter # 823, to Mrs. J. Howard Sweester, early May 1883).

Dickinson is a model of a transcending self-actualizing creative person. I feel I have been apprenticing myself to her, not only as a model of the poet, but in how she lived her life. She was a strong woman, who forged her creative spirit at a time when most women were confined or constricted in what they could be, do, and say. She worked with the light and dark in herself and the world and revealed the truth of her own light. She created a place in which she could continue to create and live from her soul with depth and integrity. In her dwelling in language, she has taught me about attending to my

own experiences through my body, mind, and soul. There is a way that language, through the body and soul, and the connection to the elemental world, is nourished in Dickinson and both draws me to her and supports this process in my own life. As Ruumet (1997) writes, "Spirit embodies; all the rest derives from that" (p. 7).

Embodied writing is about slowing down and attending to my surroundings and developing all my senses and ways of knowing. Dickinson, who brought a level of awareness to this process, teaches me through the example of her life how creativity is not separate from life, but can become the very air I breathe. It is a journey that is continuous, pervasive, and lifelong—a growth to wholeness.

I have followed the ontogeny of my experience of Dickinson's creative process and have arrived at a place of dwelling and tilling the soil of possibility in my soul. It is like experiencing a continuous blossoming of my being from within. Different poems and letters, when read as seeds to be planted in the soil or field of one's life, can grow and reveal lessons on living the creative life. Following Dickinson's process of dwelling, distilling, and disseminating, in my own life, is one way of living the creative life. As Dickinson writes, "To have been made alive is so chief a thing, all else inevitably adds" (letter # 937, to Helen Hunt Jackson, September 1884).

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

An important limitation of this study includes the fact that because I have used two qualitative methods, psychobiography and hermeneutics, the findings that I may generalize from my study contain a certain degree of subjective interpretation and therefore may not be easily replicable. Any way that I structure my understanding of

Dickinson necessarily reflects my own “philosophical, cultural, and personal” (Shutes & Mellick, 1996, p. 226) beliefs. In choosing to study a person, Emily Dickinson, who is no longer alive, I am also limited in any findings by the obvious fact that she cannot speak for herself.

Utilizing my methods of psychobiography and hermeneutics, I have attempted to thoroughly study her life and texts, yet the material available on her life and texts is not conclusive and unavoidably contains gaps in what is known about her. For instance, the letters that are available (Johnson & Ward, 1986) are only a fraction of letters she is known to have written. In basing my knowledge of her primarily on a reading of her texts, I am further limited because the emphasis and perhaps meaning she places on words with her voice is ultimately a matter of interpretation on my part. Another limitation of this study is suggested by the fact that my understanding of her within her historical time period is limited because I did not live in her time period. Therefore, my understanding of her words according to how she originally meant them is also limited. Furthermore, in choosing to study one life in-depth through the methods of psychobiography and hermeneutics, any generalizations suggested by my findings require further research into Dickinson’s life and the study of lives.

The delimitations of this study include the obvious fact that I have not attempted a purely historical analysis of Emily Dickinson’s life, but have attempted to understand a broader psychological context that includes viewing her within her own place and time. I have also not attempted a purely literary study of her poems and letters, but have attempted to understand her creative process from within a broader psychological context that has included a reevaluation of her poems and letters. To this aim, I have utilized

Transpersonal Psychology, narrative studies, women's psychology, and Dickinson's own views on her creativity in order to understand her creative process from a transpersonal perspective. This approach to Dickinson's creative process has emphasized Dickinson's creative process as an unfolding narrative centered on her process of becoming a poet. This approach has not offered an exhaustive analysis of Dickinson's creative process outside of a transpersonal perspective. Another delimitation of my research design is suggested by the simple fact that by choosing to understand Dickinson's creative process from a transpersonal perspective, I am excluding other perspectives, even from within Transpersonal Psychology, and hence other narratives, which may yet be told.

Epilogue

Upon completion of my Discussion chapter, I attended on the evening of February 26, 2002, a talk between Albert Gelpi and Michael Tilson Thomas, the conductor of the San Francisco Symphony. The talk was centered on the creation of songs Thomas had written to Emily Dickinson's poems. The following evening I attended a performance by the San Francisco Symphony, with Renée Fleming, the renowned soprano, singing the songs that Thomas wrote. One song included the poem, "To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee," (poem # 1779, no date). During the talk the night before, Gelpi spoke of returning to a reading of the "holographs" of Dickinson's poems; and Thomas told the story of how he wrote the song cycle "Nature Studies," which included the prairie poem.

Thomas spoke of how he had changed the ending of the cycle instead of integrating the nature study poems into one song, he returned to the prairie song. Inspired by a picture he saw of a prairie, by Albrecht Dürer, he was moved to bring the actual sounds of the prairie sweeping through the music. I could hear and see the prairie, the wind brushing against my body; I could smell the tall golden wheat ripening in the sun. My heart was filled with joy, the joy a child feels in playing with what is familiar, near, puzzling, and beautiful. As I stood in the tall grass listening to the sounds of the prairie, I could feel the weight in my hands of two day lilies, pressed there by some unseen yet strongly felt presence. I can only say thank you, thank you.

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Appendix A

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3 April, 2002

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Appendix B

Poems Quoted

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