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EMILY DICKINSON'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE CLASSICAL AND EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHERS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON HER PROSE AND POETRY

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Emily Dickinson's
Knowledge of the Classical and European Philosophers
and
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Mary G. Baker

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1933
Much has already been said by critics and biographers regarding Emily Dickinson's philosophy. So far, however, the material on this subject has been confined to a discussion of her mysticism or transcendentalism. Most authors have given the entire credit for the Amherst poetess' philosophy to Emerson, the transcendentalist; or to Blake, the mystic. No hint has been made that she might have been influenced by other philosophers. It is my purpose to prove that she was, or at least had sufficient knowledge of them for their teachings to affect her work. Not that she was uninfluenced by Emerson or the mystics, but that she was influenced also by the classical and European philosophers.

Work Done Regarding Emily's Philosophy

Two of her biographers, Genevieve Taggard and Josephine Pollitt, consider important her Consolation Upside Philosophy, which was Emily's habit of discounting disappointment by anticipating it. In leading commentaries on her work it is often listed as Emily Dickinson's philosophy of life. (1) This theory closely resembles Emerson's Doctrine of Compensation, "Know light by darkness, fullness by hunger," and so it is attributed to him. (2) Conrad Aiken says, "She (Emily) became prey to Emerson's doctrine of mystical individualism." (3) Aiken says further, "Emily Dickinson was the most perfect
flower of New England transcendentalism." (4) Other writers consider her, "A symbolist having an environment of spirituality evident; one who found new objects of worship as did Emerson;" (5) "An escaped Puritan... a mystic;" (6) "A mystic through love." (7) Her poem, "I Taste A Liquor Never Brewed" is compared to Emerson's Humble Bee and also to poems by Blake and Heine. (8) MacGregor Jenkins considers Emily Dickinson as having had, "A mystic kinship with nature." (9)

**Emerson**

Of the contemporary philosophers the only one in whom Emily Dickinson shows any interest seems to be Emerson. Emily does not definitely mention possessing his works, but Madame Bianchi says that Emily owned a copy of Emerson. He was the outstanding literary man of her day and one in whom she probably would be most interested. In fact he came to Amherst to lecture in December 1857, when Emily was 27 years old, (10), and stayed overnight with Emily's brother, next door to the Dickinson homestead. There is no record of Emily's meeting him, but she did mention his visit in one of her frequent notes to Sue, her sister-in-law. (11) Critics are constantly comparing Emily to Emerson, (12), and it seems the consensus of her biographers that she was influenced by him. (13) However, she never mentions him in her poetry, nor attributes any of her ideas to him.
Adler

Madame Bianchi speaks of Stanley Coit, a disciple of Felix Adler, the founder of the Society of Ethical Culture and a forerunner of many modern philosophic tendencies, who visited at the Austin Dickinson home. Madame Bianchi does not give the date of this visit, nor does she say that Emily met Mr. Doit. (14) However Adler's works were reviewed at that time in the Atlantic Monthly, which was the principal magazine in the Dickinson home. (15)

Thoreau

Miss Taggard feels strongly that Emily Dickinson may have been influenced by Thoreau's philosophy of life, or at least by his attitude toward solitude. (17) However, Emily mentions Thoreau only twice in the works published to date: in her letters, "The firebells are oftener now than the churchbells. Thoreau would wonder which would do the most harm" (18), and in a note to Sue during Sue's visit to the sea shore, "Was the sea cordial? Kiss him for Thoreau". (19) Neither is a very profound utterance, but interesting in that she evidently thought about Thoreau.

Contemporary European Philosophers

Emily Dickinson was contemporary with Schelling, Schopenhauer, Bergson, Spencer and Nietzsche, European philosophers who have greatly influenced modern thought. She read the Atlantic Monthly which carried reviews of
the works of some of these men (20), and while she does not refer to them definitely she must surely have had some knowledge of their existence and work; yet no critic or biographer has yet shown enough interest to find just how much or how little the poetry and prose of Emily Dickinson were influenced by these men, their fore-runners, or members of the classic school of philosophy, some of whom she mentions by name.

My Own Research

In order to accomplish this end I have read all the available published material by and about Emily Dickinson. (21) For the background for the philosophical study I have used The Story of Philosophy by Will Durant supplemented by other material. (22) In an effort to find out just what opportunities Emily Dickinson had for philosophical study and reflection, I have reviewed Amherst records, newspapers, and books dealing with Amherst during her lifetime. (23)

Plan of Presentation

I have used the following outline in the preparation of my paper.

I. Introduction:

1. Record of work done in this field:

A. Literary criticism of Emily Dickinson's mysticism and transcendentalism
1. Examples (references to books and articles).

2. Justification of my thesis:
   A. Emily's relation to contemporary philosophers:
      a. Emerson.
   B. No interest shown thus far in the effect of Greek or European Philosophers on her work.

3. Summary of work done:
   A. Research:
      a. Through all available published material by and about Emily Dickinson.
      b. In the field of Greek and European philosophers.

II. Background:
   1. Amherst College:
      A. Instructors and students of influence:
         a. Austin.
         b. Humphrey.
      B. Courses offered.
      C. Lectures given.
   2. Emily's education:
      A. Amherst Academy.
      B. Mount Holyoke.
      C. Books and magazines.
3. Other influences:  
   A. Lyceum courses.  
   B. Family friends.  
   C. Austin's household.  

III. Influence of Emily's philosophical background on the literary content of her work:  

1. Definite references:  
   A. To philosophers.  
   B. To philosophies.  

2. Pictorial use of knowledge:  
   A. Analogies.  
   B. Phraseology.  

3. Debt to Socrates and Plato:  
   A. Examples.  

4. Possible debt to modern European philosophers:  
   A. Examples.  

5. Debt to the philosophy of Keats.  

IV. Summary and Conclusion.  

V. Notes.  

VI. Bibliography.  

Amherst College  

"Emily Dickinson grew up with Amherst College", (24), for there had always been a Dickinson connected with the College. Her grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson, was
closely connected with the college at the time of its founding, and gave of his personal fortune as well as of his time toward establishing it. Emily's father, Edward Dickinson, was treasurer of Amherst College, and his son, Emily's brother Austin, followed him in this position. Town and college were so intimately connected that the two main events in the year were considered by the townspeople to be the College Commencement and the Cattle Show held yearly on the village green. (25) In fact, the only public gathering at which Emily Dickinson was seen after her retirement was the annual Commencement Tea given in the Dickinson home by Squire Dickinson for the graduating seniors. Here she, "Acted the part of the hostess, naturally...receiving in the darkened parlor." (26)

Austin Dickinson

Austin entered college in 1846, and was pledged and later initiated to the Alpha Delta Phi fraternity, the same one to which Emily's tutor, Leonard Humphrey, had belonged for the preceding four years. Austin was enrolled in the regular courses open to students at the college during his day, but few of them until his senior year have any great bearing on my subject. However, in his senior year Professor Joseph Haven, whose connection with the Dickinions I shall take up later, returned to Amherst and held a professorship in the Department of
Science at the college. His courses were largely of a philosophic nature, dealing mostly with the history of philosophy and including the Greek and Roman philosophers and such modern Europeans as had gained fame during the preceding century. (27) Heretofore the courses offered under the heading of Philosophy had dealt largely with the mind, and with religious creeds. Courses of this nature taught when Austin was in college were Philosophy of the Mind and Evidences of Christianity. In the course on Philosophy of the Mind two texts were used. One text was known as Brown's lectures, and included in its first volume treatises on precepts, sensations, etc., and in its second, material on general behavior, desires, etc. Brown was an eighteenth century psychologist. (28) The other text used in this course contained, despite its misleading name of Stewart's Philosophy of the Human Mind, many references to Plato, Gocrates, Descartes, Bruno, Zeno, the Stoics, and other early philosophers. In the Evidences of Christianity, Austin studied Paley. There was no text book listed in the catalogue for Professor Haven's newly-introduced course, and it was taught by lectures. (29)

**Influence on Emily**

That Austin had at least a philosophical background is evident. Of course we have no way of knowing how much of his knowledge was transmitted to his sister at home.
But we do know that they were very close to each other. MacGregor Jenkins says, "Between Miss Emily and her brother Austin a very tender affection existed." (30) Mabel Loomis Todd in an article for Harper's Magazine says, "Austin was devoted to his unique sister, and appreciated her as perhaps no one else did." (31)

Emily was at home during her brother's freshman year at Amherst, but during his sophomore year she was a student at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. Brother and sister corresponded a great deal, and Emily showed an interest in Austin's affairs. During his Christmas vacation, she wrote, "...And what are you doing this vacation? You are reading Arabian Nights according to Viny's statement. I hope you have derived much benefit from their perusal, and presume your powers of imagination will vastly increase thereby.....Cultivate your other powers in proportion as you allow your imagination to captivate you." (32) Later in writing of her disappointment at not being allowed by the teachers to visit at home she says, "We shall only be the more glad to see one another after a longer absence, that will be all. I was highly edified with your imaginative note to me, and think your flights of fancy indeed wonderful at your age." (33)

Leonard Humphrey

Leonard Humphrey, Emily's tutor, was graduated from Amherst in 1846. He was a brilliant student, and a
favorite of President Hitchcock with whom he resided. (34) He was valedictorian of his class, and spoke on The Morality of States, "A plea for the supremacy of the intellect and for the free expression of an honest, unborrowed opinion."

(35) It was this oration which later helped to secure him his position as principal of the Amherst Academy. (36) Miss Taggard says of the student Humphrey, "He was a well read young man, fond, it seems, of moral philosophy and hair splitting dissertations". (37) He was a member of Austin's fraternity, and, aside from Alpha Delta Phi, formed a freemasonry of his own with six of his friends. An interesting substantiation of this study group may be found in a letter in the Amherst College Library from Humphrey's niece now living in Weymouth. This group shared one another's "food, thoughts, sufferings, and ecstasies....they kept their lamps burning late into the night as they filled their notebooks with indexed material on every conceivable subject". (38) His Index Rerum, now in the possession of his relatives, contains facts about the lives of the following European philosophers, Locke, Leibnitz, Hobbes, and Voltaire. (39) The courses he pursued at Amherst were much the same as those Austin was to take three years later, with the exception of Professor Haven's course which came only in Austin's time.

In 1847, the year Emily left Amherst to enter Mount Holyoke, Humphrey also left to enter Andover. Miss Pollitt says of this period, "He now determined upon a career devoted
to philosophy, took his master's degree and was made tutor at the college". (40) His philosophical career was not destined to be long lived, for in the fall of 1850, while on a visit to his home in Weymouth, he died suddenly of a congestion in the brain. His death was mourned in Amherst, where he had made many friends, and was considered by older and wiser men to have had a brilliant future before him. Francis March of the college wrote to Humphrey's brother, "May I direct you to our friend's papers? I hope someone will examine them with a view to their literary merit, and to giving a portion of them to the public". (41)

**Humphrey's Influence on Emily**

Humphrey was principal of the Amherst Academy during a part of Emily's attendance there. He was, according to Miss Pollitt's paraphrase of Emily's letter, "the earliest friend who penetrated to the root of Emily Dickinson's problem and whose mind was compelling enough to dominate hers." (42) It was he of whom Emily spoke in a letter to her literary advisor Col. Higginson, many years later, "My tutor told me he would like to live till I had been a poet, but Death was as much a mob as I could master, then." (43) Twenty-four years after her tutor's death and two months after the death of her own father, Emily wrote to Col. Higginson, "My earliest friend wrote me the week before he died, 'If I live, I will go to Amherst; if I die, I certainly will.'" (44) There is little doubt that Humphrey exerted a strong influence on the youthful Emily. As Miss Taggard says,
"There are many poems which mention his ghost." (45)

**George Gould**

Another Amherst student who may have talked to Emily of his philosophy courses, was George Gould. He was taking the same subjects as Austin, but in addition was editor of the Indicator during his senior year. The Indicator was the college literary publication and showed a definite philosophical trend. It is difficult to attribute specific utterances of Emily Dickinson to these articles, but they contributed to her philosophical knowledge and may have, in some cases, given her an actual philosophy. For example, in one of the articles mention is made of Descartes' doctrine "Cogito ergo sum". Emily says, "I cannot see my soul but know 'tis there." (46) Other articles in the Indicator which may have influenced Emily's philosophic thought are: Merits of Ancient Philosophy which says, "Toil is cheered and souls strengthened by ancient philosophy"; one which mentions Plato's doctrine of uncreated ideas; and a series of seven lectures by Emerson on Representative men. Included in these is one on Plato or the Philosopher, which says, "Plato is the prototype of all philosophers". (47) While it is rather difficult to attribute specific utterances of the poet Emily to the prose of the Indicator, still it was one more means of her acquiring a philosophical background. For it is evident that the editors and all who read the Indicator were 'exposed' to philosophical doctrines.
Much has already been said of the subjects pursued by Austin, Humphrey, and Gould while they were in Amherst College. A short resume may suffice here. The subjects of philosophical intent from 1841 to 1847 as listed in the college catalogue include Moral Philosophy, Intellectual Philosophy, Mythology, and Demosthenes. In 1850 Professor Haven's course on the History of Philosophy was initiated. In 1852, two years after Austin's graduation, the juniors at the college were taking Plato. (48) I have examined the texts used during this period which are included in a collection in the Converse Library, and these texts on the history of philosophy and moral philosophy are similar to each other and give much the same information regarding the older philosophers as do those of today. (49)

That these courses in philosophy impressed the students is brought out in their Commencement addresses. Some of the subjects chosen were Progress of Philosophy; German Philosophy; Socrates in the 19th Century; Skepticism, is it Permanent in Philosophy; Truth, Mind and Matter; Voltaire; Philosophy of the 17th Century; and The Greek Sophists. (50) Emily heard these addresses. She mentions Commencement in her letters (51), and Miss Taggard says of Commencement, "Of course Emily went to the Exercises; it was the year's event". (52) Impressionable as she was, these philosophical prations could not have passed over her without leaving some trace of their content in her mind.
Emily's Education

Concerning Emily Dickinson's education we know little until the time she entered Amherst Academy. Among the famous pupils listed by Professor Tuckerman in his History of Amherst Academy is Emily Dickinson. Her time at the school is accounted for in the following manner, "Emily Dickinson was a student during 1831 to 1847 (now and then dropping out because of sickness). She re-entered for the last time in 1848". (53) The courses offered in the Academy were Latin, Greek, French, and Intellectual Philosophy. (54) The textbook in use in 1847 in the philosophy course was Upham's Mental Philosophy. It was here at the Academy that Emily came under the influence of Tutor Humphrey. He was principal of the Academy with "personal oversight of each department". (56)

Mount Holyoke

In 1847 Emily entered Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. In the catalogue for this year Alexander's Evidences of Christianity was the only philosophical subject listed for the middle term. For the senior term Paley's Natural Theology, Upham's Mental Philosophy, and Wayland's Moral Philosophy were listed. (57) Entrance to the Seminary was preceded by examinations which a candidate must pass to gain
admittance. Emily mastered these, and her work in the Amherst Academy had prepared her so well that she was able to finish the required junior work in a short time and also to complete all the middle term work in the length of time most students spent on the junior work alone. (58) It is difficult to note specific utterances arising from her courses at the Seminary but her year here greatly added to her general knowledge of philosophy.

**Philosophical Background**

During her year at the Seminary Emily roomed with her cousin Emily Norcross, from Monson. Miss Norcross was a senior. Emily says of her, "She is an excellent room mate and does all in her power to make me happy". (59) There is no doubt that the two cousins discussed their courses together, so Emily had perhaps as good a knowledge of at least the important points in the senior Mental and Moral Philosophy courses as though she had herself been studying them. No doubt the two Emilys were studying much the same subjects at the Female Seminary that Austin and Gould were studying at Amherst, for Miss McLean says, ",...,with a curriculum that included the study of such textbooks as were used in the contemporary men's colleges...for example, Whately's Logic, etc." (60)

There were other sources of education at Mount Holyoke besides textbooks. "Amherst College was Mount Holyoke's
faithful ally; its president (Dr. Hitchcock) served on the 
seminary board of trustees, its professors came sometimes 
to lecture the Seminary students." (61) "It was said that 
Professor Hitchcock himself had one day suggested to Miss 
Lyon that plan for a woman's college to which she so 
wholly dedicated herself." (62)

Then, through Emily's formal education, she did have 
an opportunity to learn at least something of the old 
philosophers and their teachings. Aside from the courses 
taken at Mount Holyoke and the Amherst Academy she was ex- 
posed to those taken by her brother and his friends, and 
by her tutor Humphrey as well as to those taken by her 
junior room mate at the Seminary.

Books and Magazines

Aside from these, however, there were the books and 
magazines which Emily read. The Atlantic Monthly, first 
published in 1857, was taken in the Dickinson home. In 
paraphrasing an unsigned review, Miss Pollitt says, "The 
Atlantic was not a channel for American literature - it 
was American literature". (63) Speaking of Emily in 1860, 
Miss Taggard says, "She read the Atlantic Monthly". (64) 
We are certain of course that she was reading it in 1862, 
for that is when Col. Higginson's article, "The Letter to 
a Young Contributor", appeared. It was after reading his 
article that Emily sent to Col. Higginson four of her 
poems for criticism, the first criticism she ever sought. 
(65) Throughout her life he remained her only critic.
Not that she followed his suggestions that she be more conventional as to form, punctuation, and subject matter, but with a few exceptions he was the only one ever to see her poems, and certainly the only one ever to view them critically except Helen Hunt who on one occasion asked that Emily publish under the No Name series, and was refused. (66)

**Atlantic Monthly**

In going through the files of the Atlantic Monthly from the time of its publication until within a few years of Emily's death, I came upon a great many articles having to do with philosophy, both modern, mainly German, and classical. These Emily could have read. It would be unwise to attribute specific utterances to articles read in the Atlantic, but they were contributory to her general knowledge of philosophy. In an article entitled *The New World and the New Man* is a discussion of Socrates with this statement, "Socrates had a sacred impulse to test his neighbors". (67) Emily says, "Experiment to me is everyone I meet". (68) Many of the books reviewed in the Atlantic are those written by or about philosophers. Bacon comes in for a large share of these, (69), as do also, Herbert Spencer (70), Kant, Fichte, Schelling (71), and Schopenhauer (72). One article entitled *Women's Rights in Ancient Athens* remarks that there "exists only a German and Grecian philosophy". This same article mentions Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Protargoras, Zeno, and Demosthenes.
Another article gives a resume of Voltaire's life and work, (74), and still another a synopsis of Felix Adler's creed (75).

Springfield Republican

The Atlantic is the only periodical which we are sure came regularly to the Dickinson home. Emily read the issues of the Springfield Republican avidly. "Emily waited for the step on the path that meant that someone was bringing the Springfield Republican. When it came, after father and mother had read it, Emily read it, every evening, devouring every crumb of detail." (76) The family was intimate with Samuel Bowles, the editor of the paper, and he said of Austin's home, "This, I guess, is as near heaven as we shall ever get in this life". (77) Obviously he was a frequent visitor there. Emily corresponded with the Bowles family, being on friendly terms with both Mr. Bowles and his wife, as her letters to them show. (78) However, whether Samuel Bowles was particularly interested in philosophy, I cannot say. A careful search through the files of the Springfield Republican after the death of Schopenhauer in September 1860, and of Schelling in August of 1854 failed to produce any references to either German philosopher. Either Bowles was uninterested or engrossed in other affairs at the time. His biographers tell of his trips abroad, but he did not seem interested in meeting the contemporary German teachers. So it is extremely doubtful
that Emily Dickinson broadened her philosophical education by reading the Springfield Republican.

**Books**

Critics have felt for some time that there has never been a complete list given of Emily Dickinson's books. Perhaps her biographer does not know what they were, or has merely neglected to enlighten the public. That there may be more books which have not been mentioned thus far we surmise from a reference by Madame Bianchi in "Face to Face" which had hitherto not been made, "And among Emily's books still treasured is the copy of Emerson's poems...." Lavinia notes in her diary, "Began David Copperfield, Finished Life of Schiller, and commenced the Caxtons. Finished the House of Seven Gables". Madame Bianchi says further of her Aunt Emily, "When she read she was next busiest to when she wrote. Downstairs with the family it was oftenest the Boston paper or the Springfield Republican...." (80) Then Madame Bianchi speaks of Jean Paul Richter, the German, saying that Emily was, "Influenced to an incredible degree by his Life, and later his Titan", which were eagerly read and marked by them all, as old copies attest. (81)

**Family Friends**

There were family friends who, no doubt, influenced Emily Dickinson. Those who are of most interest to us in this study are Professor Joseph Haven, already mentioned as professor of Philosophy at Amherst College, and President Hitchcock.
Professor Haven

Haven was a graduate of Amherst in 1835, and lived in the village, but was not on the college staff until 1850, when he accepted a post to teach the History of Philosophy. In 1852 he was included in the new science department founded that year. He was associated with President Hitchcock in governmental instruction. (82) That he was evidently interested in his subject in his college days is emphasized by his choice of a commencement oration, The Sources of Superstition. The philosophical courses offered at the time he was in Amherst were, Intellectual Philosophy, and Moral Philosophy. (83) I could find no texts for these courses.

That Professor Haven was a very good friend of the Dickinisons we have ample proof. Madame Bianchi in speaking of the social activities of the winter of 1848, says, "A party at Professor Tyler's or a rumor of one to come at Professor Hazen's (a misspelling of Haven) filled them all with girlish zest". (84) In a letter to her brother while he was in Boston Emily says, "A senior levee was held at Professor Haven's on Tuesday of last week - Vinnie played pretty well," and again, "There is to be a party tomorrow night at Professor Haven's for married people....Mother will go." (85) In Lavinia's diary she records, "John invited me to attend Professor Haven's lecture. Refused". Her entry for June 17th records, "Attended Professor Haven's party." (86)
As has been said, Haven's course in the history of philosophy which included a study of Grecian classical philosophers, was a new one in Amherst and of course the Dickinsons discussed it with their friend. Haven remained in Amherst until 1858 when he accepted a post of Professor of Intellectual and Moral Philosophy at the Chicago Theological Seminary.

**Doctor Hitchcock**

Doctor Hitchcock was made president of Amherst College in 1845, but prior to this time he had been a professor there, and a neighbor and friend of the Dickinsons. He was a geologist and the leader of various expeditions through the countryside around Amherst, and, as Miss Pollitt suggests, it is highly probable that Emily went on these trips. She says, "Nor did the professor confine these adventures altogether to his class. He tried to make them community affairs...There can be little doubt that Emily Dickinson was part and parcel of the fun.....above all, was not Professor Hitchcock their neighbor?" (87)

In 1876 Emily wrote to Col. Higginson, "When flowers annually died and I was a child, I used to read Dr. Hitchcock's book on the Flowers of North America. This comforted their absence, assuring me they lived". (88) Miss Pollitt says, "We do not find a book of precisely this title, but Dr. Hitchcock's exposition of immortality as illustrated in the return
of spring is given in the publication of his Religious Lectures on Peculiar Phenomena in the Four Seasons... These lectures were given in Amherst College in 1845-49 and were heard by the townsfolk generally. In Dr. Hitchcock's philosophy of a natural religion as opposed to the purely scriptural doctrine, Emily's mind took its first great stride. There follows a resume of Dr. Hitchcock's philosophy as regards nature. (89)

President Hitchcock's knowledge of classical and modern European philosophy is shown in his address at the time of his installation as president. He mentions Kant, the pantheism of Spinoza, Schelling, the idealism of Fichte, Bacon, and Hegel whose spiritual philosophy and moral argument he considers defective. (90) Emily almost certainly heard this address as well as the address of President Stearns when he was inaugurated in 1855 when he mentions Leibnitz, Bacon again, Socrates, and Plato. (91)

Austin Dickinson's Household

Emily Dickinson and Sue Gilbert had been friends during their girlhood as Emily's letters indicate. Madame Bianchi is the only biographer who has reprinted any of these, but there are several scattered through the introduction to the Life and Letters, and more in the new book, Emily Dickinson Face to Face. Once in writing to Sue when Sue was living in New York state with a relative, Emily says, "I have thought of you all
day and I fear of but little else and when I was gone to Meeting you filled up my mind so full I couldn't find a chink to put our worthy pastor in, when he said, 'Our Heavenly Father,' I said O Darling Sue". (92) Small wonder if when Sue married Emily's only brother in 1856, and came to live in the house next door - 'a hedge away' - the two remained close friends.

Sue

Madame Bianchi has exhausted the topic of Sue's influence on her gifted sister-in-law. Some critics disagree and consider Sue as a "blind alley" who did not offer Emily the help or advice she sought. (93) However, be that as it may, we do know that after Emily was no longer seen in Amherst, or received callers in her home, she did go to the Austin Dickinson home and, when she did not go, kept in contact with the doings there by means of notes to Sue and her children.

Visitors

That Sue was a brilliant woman there can be no doubt, and many were the celebrities who visited at the Austin Dickinsons. We do not know whether Emily met many of these, but she at least knew of them. Madame Bianchi says, "In the winter of 1857, Emerson was her brother's guest. There is no record of Emerson's having met Emily, inexplicable as it seems - but in a note to Sister Sue Emily says, "It must have been as if
he had come from where dreams are born". (94) Later a Stanton Coit, a disciple of Felix Adler visited at the Austin Dickinsons (95), Samuel Bowles was there frequently, Maria Whitney, Emily's close friend, fresh from her travels in Germany, was there, and the gifted Kate Anthon, a friend of Sue's along with many more. Sue herself was a brilliant woman. (116) The Austin Dickinson household was always full of books to which of course Emily had free access, and in fact many of her own books were given her by Sue. (96) The house next door was indeed an important factor in Emily's education.

The Lyceum

As was the custom in most New England towns of that period Amherst had its Lyceum or lecture courses. (97) Madame Bianchi says of these, "Before Emily ceased to mingle with the other young people, she shared the lectures upon which the village thrived. The professors all gave of their best....and even wise men from Europe occasionally appeared". (98) In looking through the files of the village paper, I found record of a meeting for organization of the Lyceum called in 1852, but it did not really get under way until 1853, and then was more of a village debating society than an organized lecture course. (99) It was evidently to something of this sort that Emily referred in a letter to Austin about this time, "and I at work by my window on a
In 1854 the town paper gives a list of the speakers and their subjects, and by this time the Lyceum was known as a Lecture Course. Professor Haven, teacher of History of Philosophy, spoke on *The Ottoman Empire*, a record of his own travels. Dr. Holland, the Dickinsons' friend, spoke. Professor Jewett spoke on the *Theory of the Beautiful*. Professor Cleveland of Northampton mentioned Rousseau, and Hume in his talk. This seemed to be the most interesting year of the Lyceum as the lectures were not held regularly afterwards, though there were some noted men who came to talk to the town-folk, among them Emerson, but about whom the newspaper says, "He was a disappointment to most"...as he talked on rural life and the listeners had expected to hear of his philosophy. There may have been many more of these lectures than were recorded in the files of the town newspapers for these years, but there is no record of them elsewhere. In the History of the Town of Amherst we read regarding the Lyceum that a "careful search has failed to discover any manuscript record of its doings". But the Lyceum did play an important part in the life of the Dickinsons as of other villagers.

**Emily's Use of Her Philosophic Knowledge**

But to what use did Emily Dickinson put her knowledge of philosophy gained through her contact with Amherst College, through her own schooling, her books, friends, and lectures? Some of it she absorbed and it influenced her
thoughts and outlook on certain definite problems, giving her a different viewpoint from that of those around her. Some of it never became deeply a part of her thinking, but she kept her knowledge in use, displaying it in the turn of a phrase, in the grouping of words, but not letting it influence her individual meaning. This I have chosen to call pictorial phrasing. She likes to throw in words which she has, no doubt, learned from her textbooks on the mind, so that they baffle or amuse the reader. Some of these instances from her poems, when she uses the terms in analogies follow:

**Remembrance** has a rear and front,

'Tis something like a house; (104)

Another which is not at all humorous but slightly baffling:

**Presentment** is that long shadow on the lawn

Indicative that suns go down;

The notice to the startled grass

That darkness is about to pass. (105)

One where she uses to the same end a motto of Lord Bacon's is:

Fame is a fickle food

Upon a shifting plate

........................

Men eat of it and die. (106)

There are many other examples of Emily's pictorial use of knowledge to be found in her poems, but the few mentioned serve to illustrate the point. There are examples of Emily's pictorial use of her knowledge in her letters. To Col. Higginson she once said, "It is delicate that each mind is itself,"
like a distinct bird". (107) To Maria Whitney she remarked, "Changelessness is nature's change". (108) The imagination could be stretched to consider this remark as harking back to one of the old philosophers of the cosmological period, but it is doubtful whether she really meant anything by it, save that she was fascinated by its sound and so repeated it in a letter without feeling deeply about the remark at all, though she probably knew its source. In other letters to the same friend she says, "Dear arrears of tenderness we can never repay till the will's great ores are finally sifted..." (109) This is purely pictorial use of knowledge, written because Emily liked the prettiness of it, as is, "Remembrance is the great tempter". (110)

**Phraseology**

A few of the examples appearing in her poems of her use of this philosophical knowledge pictorially to add zest to a phrase or to pique the imagination are:

> The heart asks pleasure first,
> And then excuse from pain; (111)

which might be considered as a precept of the Epicurean school, but is obviously just a coined phrase denoting no deep feeling for Epicurus;

> Much Madness is divinest sense
> To the discerning eye;
> Much sense the starkest madness. (112)

is delightful, but hardly shows serious thought on the philosophical precept involved.
For each ecstatic instant
We must in anguish pay
In keen and quivering ratio
To the ecstasy. (113)

sounds quite stoic, but was probably again merely pictorial use of knowledge.

Examples from her letters show much the same use. To Mrs. Strong she says, "Don't let your free spirit be chained by them," (114) which might even smack of Rousseau, but was not used in a sense of coming from his teachings at all. To her Norcross cousins in Boston she says, "That we are permanent temporarily, it is warm to know, though we know no more". (115) which she may have gleaned from her readings of some optimistic philosopher, perhaps Socrates, but in whose teachings she shows only a passing interest. Another phrase showing her use of words gleaned from her old Philosophy of the Mind occurs in a letter to Col. Higginson, "To hope with the imagination is inevitable, but to remember with it it is the most consecrated ecstasy of the will". (116)

There are other examples of this pictorial use of knowledge, but I hope that those have made it sufficiently clear. She was interested in philosophy but often in a detached sort of way, which made her draw on knowledge of philosophical words, and meanings, to clothe an idea she wished to express when she was not deeply interested in the philosophy itself.
Philosophy Mentioned

That she did think about philosophy we can see from her works. One poem seems to bring out her feeling of need for a definite philosophical guide,

Down Time's quaint stream
Without an oar,
We are enforced to sail,
Our Port - a secret -
Our Perchance - a gale.
What Skipper would
Incur the risk,
What Buccaneer would ride,
Without a surety from the wind
Or schedule of the tide? (117)

In another she is wondering how much of philosophical thought she can fathom to use as a guide,

The rainbow never tells me
That gust and storm are by;
Yet is she more convincing
Than philosophy. (118)

In still another she shows the same tendency,

The bat is dun with wrinkled wings
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
His small umbrella quaintly halved,
Describing in the air
An arc alike inscrutable, -
Elate philosopher. (119)
Still in a semi scoffing vein,

This world is not conclusion;
A sequel stands beyond,
Invisible as music,
But positive as sound.
It beckons and it baffles;
Philosophies don't know,
And through a riddle at the last,
Sagacity must go. (120)

She shows sympathy for the philosopher's struggle against things which he cannot prove to the satisfaction of science,

Too much of proof affronts Belief, -
The turtle will not try
Unless you leave him;
Then return -
And he has hauled away. (121)

Another evidence of her belief in some guide to living, follows:

Faith is the pierless bridge
Supporting what we see
Unto the scenes that we do not,
Too slender for the eye. (122)

In her letters she makes no profound reference to philosophy. Although this utterance to Abiah may be an exception: "What shall we do, my darling, when trial grows more and more, when the dim lone light expires, and it's dark, so very dark, and we wander and know not
where...whose is the hand to help us, and to lead, and forever guide us?" (123)

Schools of Philosophy Mentioned

Occasionally she mentions in her poems some school of philosophy, but usually the name of the school has none of its original meaning. She speaks of, "The old, old sophistries of June, - " (124)

Scarlet experiment sceptic Thomas,

Now, do you doubt that your bird was true? (125)

"Epicures date a breakfast by it." (126)

To look at thee a single time,

An Epicure of me,

In whatsoever Presence, makes. (127)

...........

To hear an oriole sing

May be a common thing,

Or only a divine,

.............

The "tune is in the tree,"

The sceptic showeth me;

"No, sir. In thee." (128)

Philosophers Mentioned

It is significant that the only philosophers she mentions by name are Socrates and Plato. She says in a letter to Abiah, "You may be Plato and I will be Socrates, provided you won't be wiser than I am". (129) In her poem on the pleasure of reading, she says:
What interested scholars most,
What competitions ran
When Plato was a certainty. (130)
In listing books and authors which had an effect on her aunt, Madame Bianchi includes Socrates and Plato..."Long-fellow, Tennyson, the Brownings, Socrates, Plato, Poe and the Bible sift through her conversation". (131)

**Influence of Socrates and Plato**

There are frequent passages in the letters and poems of Emily Dickinson which may be traced directly to the teachings of Socrates or of Socrates through Plato. There are others too which are similar but whose source does not seem so direct,

Experiment to me
Is every one I meet. (132)
and in the same mood,
The show is not the show,
But they that go,
Menagerie to me
My neighbor be. (133)

These poems reflect Socrates' method of teaching: he was the questioner, he wanted to know of the men about him, what they were thinking, and why they thought as they did. He had little use for the philosophers before him who had been chiefly interested in the physical universe. Durant paraphrases him thus, "There is an infinite worthier subject for philosophers...there is the mind of man. What is
man, and what can he become?" (134)

Socrates' love for his fellowman, "He would talk with anyone, rich or poor, and without remuneration", (135) is shown in some of Emily's poems and letters.

I had no time to hate, because
The grave would hinder me,
And life was not so ample I
Could finish enmity. (136)

To Austin, Emily says, "And believing, and acting, on the doctrine that everyone gains good in their own mind by imparting good to others." (137)

That such have lived enables us
The tranquilizer to die; (138)

Socrates' attitude toward death shown in Plato's Phaedo was a tranquil one, he welcomed death as a security. This attitude is paraphrased in one of Emily's poems,

Let down the bars, O Death.
The tired flocks come in
Thine is the stillst night,
Thine the securest fold; (140)

Cushman refers to Socrates' absolute love for truth,
"And (Socrates) mentioned that the truth is in all men to-
gether... an ideal to be striven for..." (141) Emily says in writing to Col. Higginson, "That it is true, Master, is the power of all you write". (142) And again to the same,
"But truth like ancestor's brocades can stand alone". (143)
Truth is as old as God,
His twin identity -
And will endure as long as He. (l44)

Of the unassumingness of truth she says,
He preached upon "breadth" till it argued
him harrow, -
The broad are too broad to define;
And of "truth" until it proclaimed him a liar, -
The truth never flaunted a sign. (l45)

Cushman paraphrases Socrates' love of life and delight
in living, "The purpose of Socrates was to teach men to be
happy". (l46) Emily speaks similarly,
How happy is the little stone
That rambles in the road alone,
And doesn't care about careers
And exigencies never fears. (l47)

Droll Emily, how Socrates would have enjoyed this "little
stone's" life with no Xantippe to scold and pour hot water
on him for being a poor provider.

To Col. Higginson Emily wrote, "To live is so startling
it leaves but little room for other occupations". (l48) To
Professor J. K. Chickering she wrote, "Life never loses its
startlingness, however assailed". (l49) Socrates according
to Cushman, would have said, "Humanity is the measure of all
things". (l50)
To be alive is power,
Existence in itself,
Without a further function,
Omnipotence enough. (151)

Some of Emily's poems and letters seem to reflect Plato's teaching during the latter part of his life, but they may be just Plato's paraphrasing of Socrates; it is hard to know.

Reverse cannot befall that fine Prosperity
Whose sources are interior. (152)

shows Plato's idea of genius rising above the common man, as found in the Phaedo. It may reflect Socrates' teaching, "Gnothi seauton" (know thyself). (154)

Plato's idea that life continues after death, but in another sphere as shown in the Phaedo, "The hope of another life gives us courage to meet our own death," (155) comes out in Emily's poem, These fair, fictitious people.

Where are they - can you tell?
Perhaps in places perfecter,
Inheriting delight
Beyond our small conjecture,
Our scanty estimate. (156)

In another poem which embodies two teachings of Plato, that we are all working toward a goal, and that life goes on after death, as shown in Cushman (157), Emily says,
Each life converges to some center
Expressed or still;
Exists in every human nature
A goal,
Ungained, it may be, by life's low venture,
But then, Eternity enables the endeavoring
Again. (158)

We never know how high we are
Till we are called to rise;
And then, if we are true to plan,
Our statures touch the skies. (159)

shows Plato's precept of individuality, that in each person is a hidden ability which may be brought out only by his environment, "Citizens, you are brothers, yet God had framed you differently". (160)

In a letter to her brother Emily speaks of "government as a science". (161) She may have been thinking of Plato's ideal state where government was certainly a science according to Durant's paraphrase of Plato's Republic. (162) Later, in a letter to Col. Higginson, Emily says "Truth is such a rare thing, it is delightful to tell it....I find ecstasy in living; the mere sense of living is joy enough". (163) These may both be attributed to Socrates' love of truth and joy in life or to Plato paraphrasing his teacher.
Influence of Modern European Philosophers

Aside from the influence upon Emily's work of Socrates and Plato there are passages in both the letters and poems which may be regarded as springing from thought induced by Emily's knowledge of modern European philosophers or of philosophers of Grecian schools other than Plato.

In a letter to Mrs. Holland Emily says, "And wherefore sing, since nobody hears?....My business is to sing". (164) which reflects Spinoza's determinism which "reconciles us to the limitations within which our purposes must be circumscribed". (165) To her Norcross cousins Emily says, "What would become of us, dear, but for love to reprieve our blunders?" (166) Spinoza's philosophy was, "an attempt to love even a world in which he was outcast and alone". (167)

To these same cousins Emily says,

I cannot see my soul but know 'tis there

Nor ever saw his house nor furniture, (168) which might reflect Descartes' teaching that all "philosophy must begin with the individual mind and self". (169) Spinoza's idea of nature that "God and nature are one acting by necessity and according to the invariable laws", (170) is shown in Emily's statement to Col. Higginson, "Who knocks not, yet does not intrude, is nature". (171) Rousseau's idea that man is "good by nature" (172) is paraphrased when Emily says in a note to a friend, "We have no statutes here, but each does as it will, which is the sweetest jurisprudence". (173) Mrs. Todd in quoting one of Emily's poems suggests
that Lord Bacon and Emily are saying the same thing after their own manner. Lord Bacon says, "Whoever is delighted in Solitude is either a Wilde Beast or a God". (174) Emily writes,

Never for society
He shall seek in vain
Who his own acquaintance
Cultivates; of men
Wiser men may weary,
But the man within
Never knew satiety, - (175)

In a letter to her cousins Emily says, "It is true that the unknown is the largest need of the intellect". (176) Voltaire says, "Que sais-je?" and, "Doubt is not a very agreeable state, but certainty a ridiculous one". (177)

This merit hath the worst, -
It cannot be again. (178)

may reflect Spencer's equilibration disintegration theory that things go from worse to better and back again, "An entire history of anything must include its appearance out of the imperceptible and its disappearance into the imperceptible". or "Every motion must sooner or later come to an end". (179)

Superiority to Fate
Is difficult to learn
'Tis not conferred by any,
But possible to earn
A pittance at a time. (180)

may show John Locke's theory that freedom of the will is
conditioned to a certain extent by physical surroundings. Locke says, "all our knowledge comes from experience". (181) Nietzsche's tragic optimism, "I am worth nothing" (182) is reflected in the following,

Finite to fail, but infinite to venture.
For one ship that struts the shore
Many's the gallant, overwhelmed creature
Nodding in navies forevermore. (183)

More of the precepts of Kant were taught in Emily Dickinson's day than now, and it may be that his doctrine of relationships, that "Experience tells us what is, but not that it must be what it is and not otherwise". (184) influenced her in a small way to say,

Who never wanted, - maddest joy
Remains to him unknown;
The banquet of abstemiousness
Surpasses that of wine. (185)

Spencer's attempt to educate his followers out of egoism into altruism could have been stated in this manner,

Not what we did shall be the test
When act and will are done,
But what our Lord infers we would -
Had we diviner been. (186)

Spencer says, "The highest truth he sees he will fearlessly utter knowing that if he can effect the change he aims at - well; if not, well also;" (187)
To lose one's faith surpasses
The loss of an estate,
Because estates can be
Replenished, faith cannot.

Kant taught that we have to accept some things on faith
in order to have anything to believe or base our thinking on.

(188) Emily's poem continues,

Inherited with life,
Belief but once can be;
Annihilate a single clause,
And Being's beggary. (189)

Bruno, the monk of the sixteenth century who "glorified
nature" (190) might well have said had he had Emily's power
of expression,

'Tis little I could care for pearls
Who own the ample sea;
Or brooches, when the Emperor
With rubies pelteth me;

Or gold who am the Prince of Mines;
Or diamonds, when I see
A diadem to fit a dome
Continual crowning me. (191)

Keats

The influence of a philosopher not belonging to this
group is that of the poet Keats. Emily Dickinson repeats
the thought voiced in his Ode on a Grecian Urn,

"Beauty is truth — truth beauty," — that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.
in several poems, among them,

He questioned softly why I failed?
"For beauty," I replied.
"And I for truth, - we two are one;
We brethren are," he said. (192)

or

Beauty crowds me till I die,
Beauty, mercy have on me.
But if I expire today
Let it be in sight of thee. (193)

and also

Beauty is not caused, - it is; (194)

These then are some illustrations from Emily Dickinson's prose and poetry which would seem to show that she had a knowledge of both the European and classic philosophers, and was to a certain extent influenced by them in her work.

Summary

I shall briefly summarize my thoughts. In order to answer any questions regarding work previously done in this field I took up the material already presented on Emily Dickinson's philosophy which consisted of commentaries on her relations to Emerson, the transcendentalist and Blake, the mystic. As a justification for my thesis I pointed out the relation to contemporary philosophy which had already been discussed and the fact that no work had as yet been done which showed her knowledge of the European and Grecian philosophers or any influences of these philosophers on her work.
To illustrate the philosophical influences at work on the mind of Emily Dickinson I showed her connection with Amherst College and its philosophical courses through her brother Austin, George Gould, Tutor Humphrey, and public lectures. Next I took up Emily’s own education at Amherst Academy, at Mount Holyoke and through the medium of books and magazines. Other influences on her were from friends of the family, particularly Professor Haven and President Hitchcock both of Amherst College, her brother Austin’s household, and the town Lyceum courses.

In an effort to bring out the direct influence which this philosophical knowledge so gleaned had upon the poetry of Emily Dickinson I presented her use of this knowledge pictorially in her work through analogies and phraseology. To illustrate the definite impression her study of philosophical subjects had upon her mind I brought out illustrations in which she definitely refers to philosophers, philosophy, or philosophic cults.

I devoted the remainder of my paper to her definite mention of Socrates and Plato, and their influence upon her as shown in her poetry and letters, and to the lesser influence of Spinoza, Locke, Descartes, Rousseau, and Spencer. As a sidelight I included the direct influence of the poet Keats’ philosophy of beauty upon her work.
Conclusion

From the evidence presented I conclude that Emily Dickinson did have a knowledge of the classical and modern European philosophers and that they did influence her prose and poetry.
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Approved by:

[Signature]

A. Anderson, Committee

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Graduate Committee

Date: ____________________