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艾米莉·迪金森诗歌中

对象征再现的批评

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Emily Dickinson's Poetry



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Preface and Acknowledgements

This book explores how Emily Dickinson looks at things and life from a cross-cultural perspective. Based on my research on the typological and symbolic view of nature in the New England cultural tradition, I perceive that Emily Dickinson's poetry undermines this representational tendency by presenting things and life in her response to them. Although her language still employs a New England vocabulary, it ceases to assume its Calvinistic and Transcendental meanings; she speaks through a lyric voice, a representative poetic persona, to reveal her *zhi*, an ancient Chinese literary term, which means what is intent in the mind.

In order to show Dickinson's non-representational perception of things and life, I read her poetry together with that of a major ancient Chinese lyric poet, Du Fu. This comparative reading is conducted with the interpretative model of ancient Chinese literary thoughts of Liu Xie and Wang Guowei. They bring forth the concepts of *wen* and *worlds*, which see poetry in its fulfillment of the aesthetic pattern of the universe and in its manifestation of the essence of things and human emotions in the poetic situations. Du Fu and Emily Dickinson show reverence towards life and respond to ordinary facts with a sense of ecstasy. The lyric self in their poems speaks to readers beyond the cultural representation of their historical selves. The lyric self sees aesthetic pattern in things in a *world* without a self, or shares true feelings with things in a *world* with a self. In this way, Du Fu and Emily Dickinson present a beautiful *world* or a sublime *world* to give peace and encouragement to readers.

This book is based on my dissertation completed in May of 2004 as the harvest of my seven years of doctoral study at the State University of New York at Binghamton. For the publication of this work, I revised the titles of chapters, changed the format for the convenience of reading as a book and did some necessary editing in main arguments and contents. Upon the completion of this book, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my advisors: Dr. Frederick Garber, Dr. Gisela Brinker-Gabler, Dr. Zoja Pavlovskis-Petit, Dr. Zuyan Chen and Dr. Martin Bidney. Dr. Frederick Garber introduced me to Emily Dickinson's world with his illuminating lectures on this unique American woman poet. Dr. Gisela Brinker-Gabler's persistent support and insightful guidance on my study and writing led me to move forward to accomplish this work. Dr. Zoja Pavlovskis's teaching of Greek thoughts and her positive response to my study and work gave me knowledge and confidence. I am very grateful for Dr. Martin Bidney, who carefully read my dissertation and edited its grammatical expressions. He was always there for me when I needed his help. Dr. Zuyan Chen lent me his collection of Du Fu's poetry, and his discussion with me concerning the comparative study between Emily Dickinson and Du Fu helped me to think more deeply. In addition, I extended my deep gratitude to Xiuying Zou, the Chinese librarian at Binghamton University, for her prompt help in getting and finding Chinese materials related to the writing of this book. All these compassionate instructions and support made this book possible.

During my study in Binghamton, I encountered my Chinese Christian pastor, Yaqian Zhang and his wife Zhenzhen Chen. Their care and love opened my eyes and my heart to see and feel the light of God. My friends prayed for me, made food and took me on trips for rest. Their friendship brought joy and support to my journey abroad.

My deep love and gratitude extended to my parents, who have given their life time to nourish and love me and encourage me to study abroad to improve myself. My elder sister's strong love, my sister-in-law's help and my little

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Ultimately, the source and inspiration for writing this book belong to God who is my daily "bread and breath".

Dongxin Qin

Jinan, Shandong

July, 2014

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Introduction

In 1870 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, an editor from Boston's prestigious *Atlantic Monthly*, visited Emily Dickinson in her father's house in Amherst, Massachusetts. Afterwards, he wrote to his wife about the poet:

A step like a pattering child's in entry & in glided a little plain woman with two smooth bands of reddish hair & a face a little like Belle Dove's; not plainer—with no good feature—in a very plain & exquisitely clean white pique & a blue net worsted shawl. She came to me with two day lilies which she put in a sort of childlike way into my hand & said "These are my introduction" in a soft frightened breathless childlike voice—& added under her breath Forgive me if I am frightened; I never see strangers & hardly know what I say—but she talked soon & thenceforward continuously—& deferentially—sometimes stopping to ask me to talk instead of her—but readily recommencing. ①

Recalling the meeting with his poet correspondent, Higginson wrote in *Atlantic Monthly* in 1891:

The impression undoubtedly made on me was that of an excess of tension, and of an abnormal life. Perhaps in time I could have got beyond that somewhat overstrained relation which not my will, but her needs, had

① Emily Dickinson, *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1958), 2: 473.

forced upon us. Certainly I should have been most glad to bring it down to the level of simple truth and every-day comradeship; but it was not altogether easy. She was much too enigmatical a being for me to solve in an hour's interview, and an instinct told me that the slightest attempt at direct cross-examination would make her withdraw into her shell; I could only sit still and watch, as one does in the woods; I must name my bird without a gun, as recommended by Emerson. ①

Higginson feels that Dickinson's childlike behavior and her continuous, deferential talk are queer and that he is unable to name her like aiming at a bird. However, Gabriela Mistral (1889-1957), the Chilean woman poet, understands this American poet by her view of poetry:

Poetry comforts my senses and that which is referred to as "the soul"—but another's poetry more than my own. Both make my blood flow better. They defend the childlike quality of my character, rejuvenate me, and make me feel a sort of asepsia in regard to the world. Poetry simply exists within me, and on my lap; it is the thirst of a submerged childhood. Although the result is bitter and hard, the poetry I make cleanses me of the world's dust and even the inscrutable, essential vileness similar to what we call original sin. I carry it with me; I carry it with affliction. Perhaps original sin is nothing more than our fall into the rational and anti-rhythmic expression, which has lowered the human race. It hurts us women more because of the joy we lost, the grace of a musical and intuitive language that was going to be the language of the human race. ②

Gabriela Mistral's poetic remarks defend Emily Dickinson's character. Poetry is their existence, which feeds their childlike souls with musical and intuitive words. When Higginson asks her whether she feels want of employment,

① Dickinson, *Letters*, 2: 476.

② Gabriela Mistral, *A Gabriela Mistral Reader*, ed. Marjorie Agosin, trans. Maria Giachetti (Fredonia, New York: White Pine Press, 1993), pp. 223-224.

visitors or traveling, Dickinson replies that “I never thought of conceiving that I could ever have the slightest approach to such a want in all future time” and “I feel that I have not expressed myself strongly enough”.^①

The purpose of Dickinson's existence is to express herself in her poems and letters. She regards herself as a bird, which cannot help singing. In 1862, she wrote to Dr. and Mrs. J. G. Holland:

Then, I shall understand, and you need not stop to write me a letter. Perhaps you laugh at me! Perhaps the whole United States are laughing at me too! I can't stop for that! My business is to love. I found a bird, this morning, down—down—on a little bush at the foot of the garden, and wherefore sing, I said, since nobody hears?

One sob in the throat, one flutter of bosom—“My business is to sing”—and away she rose! How do I know but cherubim, once, themselves, as patient, listened, and applauded her unnoticed hymn?^②

This letter was written in the American Civil War period when bells were tolling. And her friend Mrs. Holland was ill at that time. It is a letter to send her love and care for her friend. In the same year, Dickinson was sure of her life vocation as a poet whose business is to love and to sing.

Similarly, the ancient Chinese definition of poetry in *The Book of Documents* (*Shu Jing*) states that “The Poem (*shih*) articulates what is on the mind intently (*chi*); song makes language (*yen*) last long”.^③ Stephen Owen points out that his translation of *shih* (*shi*)^④ is for the sake of convenience. According to his understanding of this statement, *shih* is not a “poem” made by the writer, a text of the writer's will. *Shih* is the writer, for it articulates what is on the mind, *chih* (*zhi*). *Zhi* is a response to the

① Dickinson, *Letters*, 2: 474.

② Dickinson, *Letters*, 2: 413.

③ *The Book of Documents*, quoted in Stephen Owen, *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 26.

④ *Shi* is the current spelling of *shih* in *pin yin* system. The same with *zhi* (*chih*) and *qing* (*ch'ing*).

existence. Stephen Owen tries to approach *zhi* in some other possible ways:

Chih is a subjective relation to some content, a relation of a certain intensity and of a certain quality. *Chih* is that condition when the mind is fixed on something, a “preoccupation”. *Chih* is tensional, yearning for both resolution and for external manifestation. Very often *chih* takes on a public, political sense as “ambition”—the desire to do something or accomplish something in the political sphere. In other cases it has a broader moral frame of reference, as “goals” or “values” to be realized. ①

In terms of its tensity and preoccupation, *zhi* is a force in one's mind, and has to be articulated. When it is expressed in public it becomes ambition, and when in moral frame, value. *Zhi* as ambition or value assumes a social responsibility, yet it is not a privilege of any class of humanity. *Zhi* belongs to people who have thoughts. It is the same question, which Dickinson asks Higginson, “How do most people live without any thoughts. There are many people in the world (you must have noticed them in the street) How do they live. How do they get strength to put on their clothes in the morning”② Without *zhi*, one is not really living, and therefore, *zhi* expresses one's response to living.

The authoritative statement of the nature and function of poetry can be found in the “Great Preface” (*Da Xu*) to *The Book of Songs* (*Shi Jing*). The “Great Preface” gives *shi* another definition. Stephen Owen translated:

The poem is that to which what is intently on the mind (*chih* *) goes. In the mind (*hsin* *) it is ‘being intent’ (*chih* *); coming out in language (*yen*), it is a poem. The affections (*ch'ing*) are stirred within and take on the form (*hsing*) in words (*yen*). If words alone are inadequate, we speak them out in sighs. If sighing is inadequate, we sing them. If singing them

① Owen, *Readings*, p. 28.

② Dickinson, *Letters*, 2: 474.

is inadequate, unconsciously our hands dance them and our feet tap them. ①

This definition introduces *ch'ing* (*qing*), which refers to emotions or feelings. When affections are stirred within the mind, they are uttered through words, and when words fail to express them, one sighs, and sings, and dances to make them fully manifest. The relation between *zhi* and *qing*, according to Stephen Owen's understanding, is that "the affections, *ch'ing*, are stirred; and when that stirring is intense, continuous, and directed to some end or goal, the tensional condition *chih* occurs, which manifests itself externally as *shih*". ② The nature and function of *shi* is lyrical (*shu qing*), for it is the articulation of one's tensional feelings and thoughts.

Stephen Owen compares the Western poetic tradition with ancient Chinese poetics in his book, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: Omen of the World*:

Concepts of imitation, representation, or even expression can never entirely free literature from its status as a secondary phenomenon, later and less than some "original" (in the case of expression, the "original" is a state of mind). Western theories of literature are the children of the Platonic critique, and though they rebel and marry into less tainted lines, they cannot escape their ancestry. If the "originals" belong to this sensible world, the deficiencies and deviations of the imitation are all too apparent. To escape the foredoomed failure, a most ingenious revision was devised: the "original" was displaced out of this world and became a hidden Something Else to which the poem gives unique access. By this strange inversion, the "original" significance becomes epistemologically contingent on the secondary representation. The history of Western literary thought develops in a melancholy competition between determining representation and a determining but hidden "original" content. Each lineage takes its

① "Great Preface," quoted in Owen, *Readings*, p. 40.

② Owen, *Readings*, p. 40.

turn in partial dominance. And our art of reading is founded upon these shifting ratios in the power of word versus the “truth beyond language”.^①

The concept of representation in Western tradition gives literature a secondary role in its relation to things. Literature imitates things and is the reflection of things. In the inversion, although literature is given a unique access to some hidden original significance, it still cannot get rid of its secondary representation of the original. Besides, this competition either elevates things above literature or sacrifices things and literature for the sake of the “original”.

In ancient Chinese poetic tradition, Owen finds the freedom from the dominance in Liu Xie's view on literature, *wen*:

But if literature (*wen*) is the entelechy of a previously unrealized pattern, and if the written word (*wen*) is not a sign but a schematization, then there can be no competition for dominance. Each level of *wen*, that of the world and that of the poem, is valid only in its own correlative realm; and the poem, the final outward form, is a stage of fullness.

The process of manifestation must begin in the external world, which has priority with-out primacy. As latent pattern follows its innate disposition to become manifest, passing from world to mind to literature, a theory of sympathetic resonance is involved.^②

Literature or *wen* is a pattern to be manifested and realized. The world of things is a process of actualization of possibilities. *Wen* dwells in things and becomes fully manifest in poetry.

Based on the difference between the ancient Chinese literary thought and the Western literary tradition, I read Emily Dickinson's poems from a non-representational perspective in this book. I use ancient Chinese literary

① Stephen Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: Omen of the World* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 21.

② Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry*, p. 21.

thought to approach Emily Dickinson's poetics, which has the tendency to break through the Western literary tradition from within. This comparative study may contribute to reading Dickinson's poetry from a different perspective.

The first chapter serves as a framework. It introduces Liu Xie's literary thought in his literary criticism, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, which shows a fresh, spontaneous beauty in the universe. It is called aesthetic pattern, *wen*. Liu Xie sees aesthetic pattern in things on the earth and in the sky. The design of the dragon and phoenix, the brightness of the tiger, the lush spots of the leopard manifest aesthetic pattern in the way vegetation shows natural splendor; forests and brooks reveal *wen* in sounds like pipes and chimes. Man with his spiritual nature is the mind of the universe. He is able to contemplate and examine aesthetic pattern and express it in language. It is mind that generates language and it is language that calls forth aesthetic pattern. All this is natural. Liu Xie sees things in their own unique ways of displaying aesthetic pattern, which is literature (*wen zhang*). In this way, the whole universe is a natural expression of aesthetic pattern. Things affect poets' minds, their mood changes with things in seasons, and words convey what they see and feel according to their penetration of the appearance of things. Things reveal what they are in words. The spiritual thought of the poet transcends space and time to reach things far away, and brings them right in front of his eyes. At the same time, his imagination never submerges the vitality of things.

Wang Guowei, in his *Poetic Remarks in the Human World*, further criticizes rational and self-conscious language and establishes rejuvenating *world*. Wang Guowei describes *world* as that which depicts true scenes and true emotions. It depends on the poet's true observation of things with his genuine feelings. In a *world* with a self, things seem to assume the poet's feelings. In a *world* without a self, the poet sees things as an object looking at other objects. In both cases the poet does not see things as representations of some higher spiritual facts or his own spirit; rather things are seen as what they ought to be or what they are. Liu Xie and Wang Guowei's literary

thoughts on ancient Chinese poetry open a traditional and modern view of the poet's relation with things. They are in contrast with American Puritan and Transcendental views of nature in the New England tradition, which molds and confines Emily Dickinson's poetic thinking.

The second chapter maps a geographical and cultural background for reading Emily Dickinson. I choose Jonathan Edwards and Ralph Waldo Emerson as the major thinkers, whose works show the source of the New England traditional way of looking at things. I collected some essays on Jonathan Edwards's life to illustrate the beautiful New England scenery around Northampton, where some of Dickinson's correspondent friends lived, and Mount Holyoke, where Dickinson attended college. These places were close to Amherst, where Dickinson lived. Against this rhythmic rural life, Edwards is involved in his theological thinking and in his preaching of his Calvinistic faith. In his essay "Personal Narrative" and his notebook "Images or Shadows of Divine Things", Edwards clearly declares his experience of conversion to God and his view of things as types of spiritual things. Natural images become types of Calvinistic doctrines. His typological view of things makes everything mean "more than appeared at first inspection, where each idea dragged with it another idea presumed by him to be a higher truth".^① This method leads to Emerson's symbolic view of nature, which Emerson illustrates in his essay "Nature".

In this essay, Emerson divides the universe into nature and the soul. Unlike Liu Xie's thought on nature's impact on human feelings, Emerson's thought focuses on nature's correspondence to the human spirit. Nature ministers and consoles the human mind. It reflects and acquiesces with his moral state when, in the wood, he feels he is part of God and the center of all existence. Nature loses its own independent position and becomes the symbol of spirit. Natural elements become shows and mirages. The beauty of things lies in their combination with human deeds and intellect. Nature is molded by

^① Clyda A. Holbrook, *Jonathan Edwards, The Valley and Nature: An Interpretative Essay* (London: Associated University Press, 1987), p. 73.

spirit. In his essay “The Poet”, Emerson shows that things are dumb and dead before the poet puts “eyes and a tongue” into them and turns them into symbols to convey his own thought. ① The poet’s vision is in accordance with the core of things, for he sees clearly and says the symbolic meaning of things. However, Emily Dickinson challenges this transcendental, symbolic way of looking at things. In the third chapter, I read Emily Dickinson’s poems in contrast to Edwards’s typological images and the symbols in Emerson’s poems.

Chapter three is divided into two parts. The first part concentrates on revealing Dickinson’s vision to see things such as the bee, the rose, the snake, the sunrise, the sunset as riddles, while Jonathan Edwards sees them as types to represent biblical meanings. Dickinson’s descriptions of these natural things are word portraits of things. These things are seen in their relation to the human condition, but their natural existence is confirmed without moral judgment and religious meanings. Things are beyond human imagination of their being. The second part focuses on Dickinson’s anti-visionary poet in contrast with Emerson’s symbol-making poet. I read Emerson’s poems to examine his idea of the symbol-making poet. Emerson regards himself as the least of bards, who sing ideas through constraining things to say their thoughts. The bard has the power to transform things in his mind, and brings forth a new, ideal world of symbols.

When reading Emerson’s poems with Dickinson’s poems, there exists a close link between them, and on the surface, Dickinson expresses the same idea on the role of the poet as Emerson’s; the poet is at the center of the universe and finds symbolic meanings in ordinary things. However, Dickinson subtly undermines this symbolic tendency to reduce the vitality of things to conform to the poet’s thought. When Emerson sings the song for the bee, which is the symbol of the poet’s will to ignore human calamity, Dickinson

① Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Poet,” in *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), p. 230.

sees a single bee tossed around in “the Billows of Circumference”^① and sinking into the indifferent grass. Or while Emerson depicts the child poet roaming in the forest which corresponds to him and regains him when he dies, Dickinson’s poetic persona sees a rose that does not tell and a bird that flies away. In this chapter, I show that Dickinson does not try to interpret nature by types and symbols. She tends to respond to things which have their own vitality and to accept their silence and illuminations. This leads to my exploration of Dickinson’s resolution to shut the door to the dominant representations of things and to choose her own society.

The fourth chapter is meant to read Dickinson’s poems in the context of Du Fu’s poems within the literary framework of Wang Guowei’s *world* and Liu Xie’s literary thought. In the first part of this chapter, I ask the question: what is poetry for? Is it for the demonstration of the poet’s moral character or for the creation of a certain poetic situation as a naked fact in life and things? Du Fu is a lyric poet of feelings, whose sensibility touches things and renders them in ordinary, striking images. Both Du Fu and Emily Dickinson show reverence for life and express their response to life in their poems. In the second part of this chapter, I read Du Fu’s poem, “Gazing at the Mountain” to show that Du Fu is an autobiographical poet, who presents himself as a lyric poet in the circumference of Heaven and Earth beyond his cultural role of a Confucian man. I use Daniel Hsieh’s collection of different comments on “Gazing at the Mountain” to illustrate that although biographical and cultural elements may help to understand the many facets of the meanings of the poem, they are the construction of the poet’s thoughts and feelings in a specific Chinese literary tradition. This reading leads to the symbolization of Du Fu’s poignant images. Therefore, in the third part of this chapter, I focus on exploring the common ground, which Du Fu and Emily Dickinson share in their expression of their *zhi*, and in their creating *world* to present the beauty

① Emily Dickinson, “A single clover of plank,” in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1961). I use the number of each poem of Emily Dickinson indicated in Johnson’s book.