

**CHAPTER-I**  
**"HOMELESS AT HOME"**

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## "Homeless at Home"

Deeply attached to her home and family, Emily Dickinson was a home bound recluse throughout her life. She loved her home intensely. Her father's house at Amherst was her "My own dear Home" (Sewall, The life of Emily Dickinson 59). Her poems often celebrate the feeling of warm security we generally associate with home. She can imagine vividly the ecstasy of one who reaches home when "Night" descends "Dumb and dark" (207)<sup>1</sup>:

Transporting must the moment be-

Brewed from decades of Agony- (207)

Many of her poems also frequently derive their power from a fitting use of the imagery of home as a multifaceted symbol covering all her major concerns such as God, heaven, love, faith and fulfilment. This symbolic use of home in her poetry is almost Shakespearean in the sense that Shakespeare associated home with fulfilment, worthiness or effectiveness in many of his plays such as Hamlet, Macbeth and Othello. In its richness of meaning, her home symbol is much like her valuation of her literal place at home : "Area no test of depth" (The Letters of Emily Dickinson Vol. III: 764). Her letters are no less enthusiastic in celebrating the sanctity of home :

Home is a holy thing-nothing of doubt and distrust can enter it's blessed portals ... here seems indeed to be a bit of Eden, which not the sin of anyone can utterly destroy-smaller it is indeed, and it may be less fair, but fairer it is and brighter than all the world beside. (letters Vol.I: 150)

<sup>1</sup>Poems will be cited according to Thomas H. Johnson's numbering in The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson.

"Home", she is certain, "is the definition of God" (Letters Vol. 11: 483).

However, ironically enough, despite her intensely private home-life and her celebration of home and family in her poems and letters, Dickinson's authentic inner self, the "Volcano" within, remained beyond the understanding of even the closest people around her. She was, to use her own words, "alien, though adjoining" (1219). Her insistence that "Consciousness is the only home of which we now know" (Letters, Vol.2: 634) perhaps indirectly points to the sense of inadequacy she felt in her interaction with her home and family. Jean McClure Mudge observes in this context that Emily Dickinson's "early recognition of two selves, 'me' and 'my spirit', may have meant that her second consciousness was the one she chose for a sole companion" (Emily Dickinson and the Image of Home 7). Living in a kind of psychic isolation from others, Dickinson perhaps found her haven in her own mind. So she observes :

Exhilaration-is within -  
 There can no Outer Wine  
 So really intoxicate  
 As that diviner Brand  
 The soul achieves - Herself - (383)

Her family consisted of her parents and two other siblings. An analysis of her relationship with each of them as documented in her letters and in some reliable biographies confirms above observations to a significant extent. Dickinson's father, Edward Dickinson, was a typical nineteenth century gentleman with conservative ideas about women. Women, he was convinced like many others of his time, should have no intellectual aspirations and should remain satisfied within their defined social sphere. In his opinion, "Modesty and sweetness of disposition, patience and forbearance and fortitude are the cardinal

virtues of female sex. ...These will atone for the want of brilliant talents" (qtd. in Wolff 120-121). This mindset blocked Edward Dickinson's understanding of the creative aspirations of his extraordinary daughter. For him, Emily had no vocation outside the domestic sphere. Dickinson writes to her brother Austin Dickinson, lamenting their father's inability to comprehend her struggle to carve out a new course for herself: " We do not have much poetry, father having made up his mind that it's pretty much all real life. Father's real life and mine sometimes come into collision, but as yet, escape unhurt!" (Letters Vol.I:161). To T.W. Higginson, her literary mentor, she writes rather humorously about her father's ideas about the books his children should read: "He buys me many Books but begs me not to read them-because he fears they joggle the Mind". (Letters Vol, II: 404-5). The same strain continues in her letter to John Lyman, a close family friend: "My father seems to me the oddest sort of a foreigner. Sometimes I say something and he stares in a curious sort of bewilderment" (Sewall, Lyman Letters 70). In fact, Dickinson's letters frequently bring to the fore her acute sense of her emotional distance from her father. Nowhere in her correspondence we see any indication of paternal praise for her poetry. It is indeed ironical that after more than a hundred years, he is solely remembered because of his illustrious daughter of whose literary genius he was entirely ignorant. Her feeling of emotional alienation from her father perhaps had some indirect impact on her image of God as a distant and uncaring father in some of her poems (376, 836). God, in her vision, is a stern, cold father, who sits in his remote seat in heaven while his "Perturbless Plan" (724) ruins human existence. A distant, stately father, God does not answer the prayer of the needy :

Of course I prayed.-

And did God Care?

He cared as much as on the Air

A Bird-had stamped her foot — (376)

God is an "old neighbor" who, most of the time, recedes "more than a firmament from Me" (240). The child persona in no. 576, yearning for a protective, heavenly father, seems to echo her creator's own wishful dream for a more fulfilling relationship with her father :

And often since, in Danger,

I count the force 't would be

To have a God so strong as that

To hold my life for me (576)

Albert Gelpi says justly of Dickinson and her God that "In His remote seat he seemed a Father to others but not to her-parentless in heaven as she sometimes seemed on earth" (The Mind of Emily Dickinson 37).

Modern researches assert on the basis of recently available materials that contrary to previous assumption, Mrs. Dickinson was fairly well-educated. However, it cannot be refuted in the light of Dickinson's letters that her mother was no better than her father so far as understanding and appreciation were concerned: "My mother does not care for thought" (Letters Vol.II: 404). Dickinson pours out her anguish to Higginson, her literary mentor: "I never had a mother. I suppose a mother is one to whom you hurry when you are troubled". (Letters Vol.II: 475). Her mother loved her no doubt. But mere love could not compensate for the necessity of comprehension which her gifted daughter needed most. "She seems to have had little idea of what Emily was up to" reflects Sewall and quotes a contemporary in support of his surmise: "Dickinson was perhaps a 'mystery and a constant surprise' to her mother". ( Life Vol.II:85). Her youthful

letter to Jane Humphrey tells us of her unhappy sense of isolation : "Vinnie [her sister] you know is away and that I'm very lonely is too plain for me to tell you - I am alone - all alone" (Letters Vol.I:83). No less revealing is her curious observation in one of her letters to Mrs. J.G.Holland. Writing about her sister, she tells her:"She has no Father and Mother but me, and I have no Parents but her" (Letters Vol.II:508). Letter after letter thus underscores this emotional distance from her parents notwithstanding their physical proximity.

This childhood lonesomeness leaves its stamp on her poetry. Child persona in many of her poems is often a lonely and neglected child or an orphan or a beggar. The child in 959 is a "Mourner walked among the children" and is always haunted by a "loss of something". The child speaker in 801 voices her feeling that her lot in her life is "too hungry to be borne". No.579 continues in the same vein: "I had been hungry, all the Years". Here we have the image of a lonely child who "when turning,hungry, Home/I looked in Windows, for the Wealth/ I could not hope for Mine" (579). The poem goes on to speak about "the Crumb the birds and I,had often shared/In Nature's Dining room-". The anxiety and the deprivation of a lonely child is no less touching in no.215. The child in the poem wishfully dreams of "Paradise" as a happy, loving home, free from the cold indifference she is used to in her earthly home, where she "never felt at Home"(413):

Is it always pleasant - there -

Won't they scold us - when we're homesick -(215)

She longs for an affectionate father in her heavenly home :

You are sure there's such a person

As a "Father" — in the sky — (215)

The loneliness of the child comes out tellingly in her innocent revelation in the last two lines :

May be- "Eden" — a'n't so lonesome  
As New England used to be! (215)

All this endorses John Cody's diagnosis of the cause of Dickinson's supposed destructiveness: "Much of the potential violence seems to have been a reaction to a sense of affectional deprivation for which both parents in different ways were responsible" (Cody 98).

We notice on the part of her siblings too the same intellectual incomprehension of her personality even though the three Dickinson children were very close to one another. Lavinia, her sister, was almost a mother to her, sheltering her from outside intrusion. But she was hardly Dickinson's equal in intelligence and sensitivity. Dickinson reflects on her sister's astonishment in one of her letters to Joseph Lyman at "Some things I say" (qtd. in Sewall, Life Vol.I: 151). Sewall writes on their relationship : "Above a certain level, there was little communication between them" (Life Vol.I:130).

Austin Dickinson, her brother, however, was closer to her in "temperament and taste" ( Sewall, Life Vol.II:428). He was, perhaps, as Sewall observes, "Emily's greatest resource" ( Life Vol.II:428). When Austin Dickinson was away at Harvard Law school, she wrote him numerous letters that reveal her deep concern for his well-being. But how much the brother cared for her, or understood her "can only be surmised" ( Sewall,Life Vol.II:428). Sewall rather doubts whether the brother was very much of a "sustaining" force "on matters that troubled her most during these early years and later ..." ( Life 428). Perhaps, he also

understood very little of her literary aspiration and abilities. From one of her letters to her brother, we learn that Austin found her writing style too complicated: "You say you don't comprehend me, you want a simpler style". (Letters Vol.I:117). Austin's literary tastes, observes Sewall, were rather conventional, nourished by the poetic cadences of Tennyson and Longfellow. So "He had no ear for Emily's poems" (Sewall, Life Vol.1: 225). The emotional bond between the two also gradually decreased with Austin's marriage and his absorption in his professional and social life while Dickinson gradually withdrew from the surrounding world into the world of her own mind. So her brother too, though intimate, was in a way, estranged from her. Dickinson felt this acutely and this comes out in her sad remark about their relationship: "I guess we shall Journey separately" (Sewall, Life Vol.II: 442). Thus for all her attachment to her family, Dickinson always suffered from lack of understanding inside the family circle. Not surprisingly, she sometimes felt herself "homeless at home" (1573). Frequently, in her letters she appears to be rather ambivalent about her home. To Jane Humphrey, her girlhood friend, she grumbles about being stereotyped and so expected to cultivate "meekness - and patience and submission" (Letters Vol.1:82). To Higginson, she poses a telling question, "Could you tell me what home is?" (Letters Vol.II:475), suggesting perhaps her complex and ambivalent attitude to home. Evidently, she conceives of home as a psychic space where the inmates enjoy the same sense of belonging, understanding and congeniality. Perhaps by the time she made these remarks, her Amherst home seemed alien to such a vision. Eventually her wishfulness about home evaporates: "I have read of Home in the Revelations - Neither thirst any more" (Letters Vol.II: 635). However, as with all truly creative minds, her sense of psychic isolation transforms itself into touching poetry. Her turbulent inner life is like a "quiet volcano" which seems like a meditative spot, "and a proper place for the birds to choose" while



actually it hides the "firerocks below". The poem ends with this warning:

How insecure the sod

Did I disclose

Would populate with awe my solitude. (1677)

From this feeling that people fail to understand her come up such lines as the following :

Between My Country and the Others-

There is a Sea- (905)

Equally touching is her pensive thought about her poems that "This is my letter to the World/ That never wrote to Me" (441). May be, her observation about herself to Higginson in one of her famous letters springs from this acute sense of loneliness : "You ask of my Companions - Hills - Sir - and the Sundown - and a Dog -large as myself, that my Father bought me -"(Letters Vol.II:404-5). Perhaps, she turned to nature "in her despair over humans" (Sewall, Life Vol.II:544). Sewall seems to be quite right when we read " my best Acquaintances are those/ With whom I spoke no word-" (932). Her quest for a "rare ear / not too dull" mostly ended in dissatisfaction (842).

Not only in her interaction with the people closest to her, her sense of isolation continued through all her relationships. To quote Sewall, "There are problems in almost everyone of Emily's important relationship" (life Vol.II:429). She had a number of close female friends, her "family of sisters" as she called them fondly. But as she matured and discovered her poetic vocation, Dickinson started drifting apart from her intimates. This is perhaps because of her growing realization that she was to gravitate towards the forbidden. This she adumbrates

to Jane Humphrey : "I have dared to do strange things-bold things, and have asked no advice from any – I have heeded beautiful tempters, yet do not think I am wrong" (Letters Vol.I:95). She further confides to her friend Abiah Root that "I have come from 'to and fro, and walking up and down' the same place that Satan hailed from ." (Letters Vol.I :99). Dickinson's aversion to conformity also shows through when she pictures to herself her correspondent as a female stereotype : "I presume, you are loving your mother, and loving the stranger, and the wanderer, visiting the poor, and afflicted, and reaping whole fields of blessings" (Letters Vol.I:99). By the late 1850, she ultimately confronted the reality, as her letter to Abiah Root evidences, that with her growing sense of poetic vocation and quirky personality she was destined to live in a separate reality unable to be comprehended by her friends : "We are growing away from each other, and talk even now like strangers. You are growing wiser than I am, and nipping in the bud fancies which I let blossom - perchance to bear no fruit, or if plucked, I may find it bitter" (Letters Vol.I:104). The serenity and peacefulness of her friends made her aware of her psychological separation from them. Unlike her friends, she woke up to the emergence of a new self, of a different sense of power within herself.

The thrill and fear at this self discovery we notice in her letter to Abiah Root also : " My rebellious thoughts are many and the friend I love and trust in has much now to forgive. I wish I were somebody else - I would pray the prayer of the 'Pharisee' but I am a poor little 'Publican-' " (Letters Vol.I:103).

However, the fear and the apprehension turn into solid conviction that "It's a great thing to be 'great' ... you know some cannot sing, but the orchard is full of birds ... what if we learn ourselves someday" (Letters Vol. II:345). Here is an implicit declaration of her adoption of an off-beat vocation-"the golden dream"-

that brings seclusion in its train. Expectedly, her singularity further increased with the passage of time. She puzzled people as "She was not like everybody else of that day and place" (Bianchi, Emily Dickinson : Face to Face 37). The final upshot was the popular image of the "Rare and mysterious Emily" (Leyda Vol.I:376). No wonder, Dickinson makes loneliness her direct concern in some of her verse. The speaker in 405 is so accustomed to her aloneness that "it might be lonelier without the loneliness". To the poet, loneliness is like standing "in a Cavern's Mouth/Widths out of the Sun - And look - and shudder and block your breath-/ And deem to be alone" (590). The nature of loneliness comes out with an awful sense of fear in No.777:

The loneliness one dare not sound -  
 And would as soon surmise  
 As in its Grave go plumbing  
 To ascertain the size.

The final lines of the poem define "loneliness" as the "Maker of the soul". Its "Caverns and Corridors illuminate - or seal - "( 777). In her case, however, loneliness illuminated and fostered her poetic self. Martha Dickinson Bianchi, her niece, reasons on this point that her kind of loneliness was the gift whose riches she herself pronounced "beyond the power of mortal numeral to divulge" (Emily Dickinson : Face to Face 66).

Added to the estrangement from her family and friends was that from Dickinson's literary colleagues. T.W. Higginson, Samuel Bowles, Josiah Holland were some of her most important acquaintances. These gentlemen, all distinguished in their own fields, however, were all staunch conformists while Dickinson was an aggressive individualist. Her outward equanimity concealed

a rebellious soul impatient of the counterfeit and the derivative. An iconoclast that she was, she remained an inaccessible loner even among those people whose friendship she treasured. A brief discussion of her relationship with them will throw into sharp relief her position as a spiritual solitary.

T. W. Higginson, for instance, exemplifies a nearly tragic failure in understanding Dickinson's authentic self. Higginson, her dear preceptor, was an outstanding literary critic of the time and also a well-known supporter of the liberal cause including feminism. His sympathetic article "Letter to a young contributor" in the Atlantic Monthly (April 1862) encouraged Dickinson to initiate correspondence with him. She sent him four of her poems with a letter for comments. These four poems were "I'll tell you how the sun rose" (318), "We play at paste" (320), "Safe in their Alabaster Chambers" (216) and "Nearest Dream Recedes unrealised" (319). She wanted to know "Is my verse alive?". Her reason for the query was that "the Mind is so near itself-it cannot see distinctly and I have none to ask" ((Letters Vol.II:403). Unfortunately, Higginson held that current taste and conventions determined poetic merit. His literary standards were conventional and hardly appropriate for evaluating Dickinson's radical technique. Higginson, Chase observed, "was the essence of nineteenth-century Boston gentility and a combination of all that was bland and easily accomplished in Emerson and Matthew Arnold" (Chase 275). He got seven of her best poems including a very remarkable one - "There came a day at Summer's full" (322). But Higginson, "miles away from her imaginatively" as Sewall observes, failed to respond to her individuality with supportive encouragement (Life 550). He thought her "wayward", "Eccentric", "Enigmatic," etc. and wrote to his colleague James T. Field that Dickinson's poems were "fortunately not to be forwarded for publication". He even told his mother that her poems were "effusions" that quite "overwhelmed" him (Leyda 2:55). We can infer from

Dickinson's replies to his letters that Higginson dismissed her work as "crude", "unruly" and "rough". She offers her explanation for her supposed awkwardness: "you think my gait 'spasmodic' - I am in danger Sir - you think me 'uncontrolled', I have no Tribunal". (Letters Vol.II:409). Referring to Higginson's failure to comprehend Dickinson's striking originality, Sewall writes: "He was as much mystified by her poetry as he was by her person, and as a literary advisor he failed her completely" (Life Vol.I:6). Assuming a kind of subservient pose to Higginson, she called him her "preceptor", "mentor", "Monarch" etc. She writes to him : "But will you be my Preceptor, Mr. Higginson?" ( Letters Vol.II:409). In view of Higginson's rejection of her poems, Dickinson also renounced her ambition to be a published poet. Perhaps, she realised that if Higginson represented the best contemporary judgement, she had no hope for her "wayward" and "eccentric" poetry in the publication circuit. Resigned to her fate, she accepted the "Barefoot-Rank" of a private poet (Letters Vol.II:408). She did not, however, accept his literary advice and kept her faith in herself: "I thanked you for your justice but could not drop the Bells whose jingling cooled my Tramp -" (Letters Vol.II:408). Higginson's advice notwithstanding, she chose to be her own "self and not somebody else" (Letters Vol.II:519). Her "conviction," "that Granitic Base", saved her "though None be on our side" (789). The quiet confidence she had in her own worth perhaps reflects itself "slantly" in the last stanza of a poem she sent to Higginson with one of her letters:

Nor any know I know the Art  
 I mention -easy - Here —  
 Nor any Placard boast me —  
 It's full as Opera — (326)

It was indeed unfortunate for Dickinson to choose Higginson as her literary mentor. His wrong evaluation of her personality and her poetry to a great extent

aggravated her isolation and sealed her fate as a professional poet. His baffled responses to her poetry confirmed her belief that she was an anomaly : "A Kangaroo among the Beauty" (Letters Vol.II:412). Karl Keller aptly comments on this : "The Higginson - Emily Dickinson relationship is one of American Literature's shocking examples of the lack of recognition" (Keller 215).

Dickinson's personal relationship with two other illustrious men of the time also demonstrates how all her close relationship is marked by a mixture of intimacy and distance, of affection and incomprehension. Samuel Bowles and Josiah Holland were both family friends and knew her intimately. But both men showed the same Higginsonian attitude in their dealings with Dickinson. Samuel Bowles was the handsome and intelligent editor of the Springfield Republican, one of the most influential newspapers of her contemporary America. An active and vigorous man, he was a very stimulating company; Dickinson valued his friendship until the day of her death. Recent critics such as Ruth Miller, David Higgins and Richard Sewall believe that Bowles was the recipient of her three passionate love-letters. Dickinson thought Bowles understood her and expected his assistance in publication. Perhaps she wanted him as a kind of philosophical, moral and literary guide. Her two very short letters, written to him in April 1860, show her attempt to communicate to him the central subject of her poetic venture, her anxieties and confusions about religion. She writes : "you spoke of the 'East'. I have thought about it this winter. Don't you think you and I should be shrewder, to take the Mountain Road? That bare-headed life-under the grass worries one like a wasp" (Letters Vol.II:364). But Bowles hardly responded to her urgent feelings. He was a practical and worldly man with little interest in her complex ideas about faith and afterlife. The religious views expressed in the consolation literature of the time were sufficient to solve his religious problems, if any.

Dickinson the poet was also beyond Bowles's reach. His taste in literature was poor and conventional. He liked the predictable and conventional poetry of the type published in the Springfield Republican. He considered Helen Hunt Jackson, a mediocre contemporary poetess, a writer "who stands on the threshold of the greatest literary triumph ever won by an American Writer" (Keller 196). He had no respect for intellectual women and artists. His writings in the Springfield Republican amply prove that he could not think of women beyond the conventional terms :

The only thing to be feared is that too many susceptible women will at once think they were born artists, and only need development, and will put themselves outside the pale of domestic life and the society which they naturally require, to nourish their mistaken endeavours. But the sensible women of taste will outnumber the foolish ones, and it will be no more terrible to have the country flooded with mistaken women-artists, so called, than with mistaken women-poets, who are so numerous lately. (qtd. in Wolff 245)

Obviously, Bowles was too obtuse to appreciate Dickinson's conceptual and stylistic complexities, used as he was to the stereotyped pattern of contemporary women's poetry. He could comprehend her neither as a person nor as a poet. The Springfield Republican published six of her poems only after modifications. Writing on these editorial modifications, Sewall comments : " — the hospitality of the Republican was anything but cordial. Only five of her poems were printed, all anonymously, all with manufactured titles, most with petty alterations towards conventionality ..." ( Life 476). Those changes show Bowles's mistrust of her abilities. He found Dickinson's poem on the snake "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass" (986) impressive because he thought that the poet

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was aware that corn would not grow in boggy soil. Dickinson was very fond of Mr. and Mrs. Bowles. She exchanged letters with them for over twenty years and still remained an unknown quantity to them. This leads Richard Chase to observe that Mr. and Mrs. Bowles were actually "some what baffled partners in a relationship of whose distant range and possibilities they cannot have been more than partly aware" (273).

Dickinson's friendship with J.G. Holland, co-editor of the Springfield Republican and later editor of the Scribner's Monthly, demonstrates again how much of an enigma she was to any of her intimates. Holland was thoroughly conservative in religious and literary matters. Allan Nevins wrote : "Dr. Holland wrote truisms insipid enough for young ladies' boarding school and religious enough for the most bigoted sectarian" (The Emergence of Modern America 232). Expectedly, his views on women and women writers were in conformity with the traditional outlook of the time. On women's role in society, he wrote :

Have women a sphere ? I think they have; but we will compromise and call it a hemisphere. Her mission is to love and it argues depravity of soul when a woman pants to enter the race and contend with men in the labour of life ... The hard work is to be done by man : Woman's apostleship is to cheer him in his struggle.  
(Peckham 55)

Dr. Holland, like Samuel Bowles and Dickinson's family members, was only familiar with Dickinson's quiet external life that resembled that of the usual home-bound spinster. He little suspected the rebellious individual, the 'quiet volcano' below the surface. He was also unaware of the worth of her poetry. Dickinson was very much fond of the Hollands, particularly Mrs. Holland. But both of them



had hardly "any conception of Emily Dickinson as poet" (Sewall, Life Vol.II: 608). Holland's favourite poets were Longfellow, Whittier, Byrant, etc. With his concept of poetry embodying piety, morality and responsibility, he was unable to evaluate the depth of her "eccentric" verse. We know from Richard Chase's book that though Dr. Holland had seen Dickinson's poems, he thought "Mrs. Stowe and Mrs. Whitney are our best living writers of America" (qtd. in Chase 274). As editor, Holland Judged Dickinson's poetry "really not suitable" because they seemed to him too "ethereal" ( Chase 275). Dickinson the poet, thus, was too strong, too unreal for him. So her desire for a proper response to her subtlety and sensitivity remains a will-o'-the-wisp. She could never be her own self with anybody as she had no genuine soul mate. Naturally, she suffered from inescapable loneliness, the outsider's fate.

Dickinson's relationship with Susan Dickinson, her closest female friend since her girlhood and later her sister-in-law, was no exception. Supposedly, Susan Dickinson was the only person who understood Emily Dickinson's complex personality and her poetry. A number of Dickinson's letters and poems evince her passionate attachment for Susan Dickinson. Doting language of poem 1401 is a good example:

To own a Susan of my own  
 Is of itself a Bliss-  
 Whatever Realm I forfeit, Lord,  
 Continue me in this !

Some of her early letters to Susan also testify to her fondness for her.

Susan, though intelligent and sensitive, was a woman of the world and was

free from Emily's insatiable curiosity, her spiritual restlessness. She also did not share Emily's religious scepticism. Dickinson's sense of identity with Sue began to evaporate on the score of their sharp difference over religious faith. A letter to Susan written in 1854 clearly shows this growing sense of estrangement. She writes : "Sue -you can go - or stay - There is but one alternative - we differ often lately and this must be the last ... I shall remain alone" (Letters Vol.I:305-306). The letter ends with her acute sense of pain at the sharp difference between their views and its consequent loss of earlier intimacy : "we have walked very pleasantly - Perhaps this is the point at which our paths diverge - then pass on singing Sue, and up the distant hill I journey on" ( Letters Vol.I:306). Dickinson and Susan differed as much in their attitude to marriage. Dickinson viewed marriage with a curious mixture of apprehension and expectation, desire and anxiety. Fear of losing autonomy was also a major concern for her. An extract from her famous letter to Susan on this subject illustrates this ambivalent attitude to marriage, revealing both fear and attraction:

... You have seen flowers at morning, satisfied with the dew, and those sweet same flowers at noon with their heads bowed in anguish before the mighty sun; think you these thirsty blossoms will now need nought but - dew ? No they will cry for sunlight, and pine for the burning noon, tho' it scorches them, scathes them; they have got through with peace-they know that the man of noon is mightier than the morning and their life is henceforth to him. (Letters Vol.I:210)

A practical woman that she was, Susan did not subscribe to Dickinson's peculiar attitude to marriage. She had a passionate love-affair with Dickinson's brother

Austin Dickinson and married him while Dickinson remained single throughout her life. Dickinson gradually realized the difference between them at the deepest level : "The tie between us is very fine but a Hair never dissolves" (Sewall, Life Vol.I: 203). This sense of estrangement comes out tellingly in poem No.1219 :

Now I knew, I lost her  
 Not that she was gone -  
 But Remoteness travelled  
 On her Face and Tongue  
 Alien, though adjoining  
 As a foreign Race- . . .

Susan Dickinson too, like others in Dickinson's close circle, failed to appreciate her poetic originality. She did not try much to publish her poetry as she feared that the public would not care for her verse. Determined to strike out on her own, Dickinson could not help being an outsider. She reveals in her poems her despair at living like an alien in her own home. Her search for the "rare Ear/ Not too dull-" (842) remained unfulfilled, and her poems were written as "Letters to the World" that never understood her. However, Dickinson ultimately overcame her sense of alienation and the consequent mental suffering through her uncompromising devotion to truth and poetry. She expressed her sense of truth in brilliant poetry which, we may presume, was her real home. Mudge observes perceptively : "She builds a life - sustaining temple of poetry which became her own sanctified house" (Mudge 119). Her success lies in the fact that she transcends her personal pain in the process and makes it convey general truths about the human condition.

Available documents about Emily Dickinson indicate that she tried to

have a meaningful love-relationship in her mature years with Otis Phillips Lord, who was a friend of her father and a distinguished public figure. Letters from Judge Lord do not exist. But Dickinson's letters to him prove beyond doubt that she achieved a real sense of communion with him and that her feelings towards him were those of abandonment in love. She got at least a much-needed relief for her spirit. Emily Dickinson complained that "All men say 'what' to me " and stayed away from society. (Letters Vol.II:415). "But in Otis Lord's presence 'thronged only with music like the Decks of Birds' - she 'sang'" (Sewall, Life Vol.II:667). Sewall comments : "As if after years of reticence, she had found someone in her maturity to whom she need not varnish the truth" ( Life Vol.II:654). Her letters are shot through with this glorious sense of new found freedom:

My lovely salem smiles at me. I seek his Face so often - but I have done with guises. I confess that I love him — I rejoice that I love him-I thank the maker of Heaven and Earth - that gave him me to love - the Exultation floods me. I cannot find my channel — the Creek turns Sea — at thought of thee-. (Letters Vol.II:614-15)

It is obvious from her letters that her feelings of intimacy with Judge Lord were genuine and shared. Perhaps she had never known a similar experience before: "Oh : had I found it sooner, yet tenderness has not a date - it comes and overwhelms" (Letters Vol.III:728).

Despite all this, Dickinson spurned the opportunity for self-fulfilment as a woman. She rejected Lord's offer of marriage : "Don't you know you are happiest while I withhold and not confer - Don't you know that 'No' is the wildest word we consign to language?" ( Letters Vol.II: 617). She was never able to lose her self to another completely. She needed to preserve her privacy intact for her vocation as a poet. We notice this fear of self-loss in a letter : "Oh my too beloved, save

me from the idolatry which would crush us both" ( Letters Vol II : 616). When it came to the crunch, she did not hesitate to sacrifice the woman in her to the poet. Sewall rightly thinks that "the idolatry which would crush us both" was Emily's realization that complete abandonment to their love would destroy each of them in their vocation, "he as judge, she as poet" ( Life Vol II : 655). Anyway, the feeling of alienation was her life-long companion. The causes of it are many and complex, sometimes external and very often internal. Even in her closest relationship, there was always a barrier, however thin. The following poem perhaps best expresses the subtle nature of this psychological barrier :

But 'tis a single Hair —  
 A filament - a law —  
 A Cobweb - wove in Adamant  
 A battlement-of Straw — (398)

A congenital isolate, Dickinson naturally excels in the poetry of isolation.