

# Emily Dickinson and the Poetics of Nature: A Proto–Eco-feminist Perspective

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## Abstract:

This paper looks closely at some of Emily Dickinson's poems through the lens of eco criticism. It traces how her verses touch on nature, people, and their place within the living world around them. Though known for quiet reflections on inner life, she also dwells deeply on green things, seasons turning, soil breathing - moments that invite environmental readings. By studying meadows, birds, trees, and skies in her lines, the analysis uncovers blurred edges between person and landscape. Her words quietly pull apart old ideas about humans standing above the rest of creation. What emerges is not loud protest but soft insistence - a different kind of closeness with earth, one built on awareness, balance and respect. Out in her verses, Emily blurs where self stops and world begins - life links tightly, not just near but far. Power lives within woods, streams, stones; they respond, feel and act. One idea pulls another: dominance fades when seeing beings as kin. Ethics shift once nature speaks back. Thought grows rooted in soil, shaped by weather and moved by seasons. What we see in her work are careful observations of nature, driven by wonder mixed with deeper questions about existence - blurring lines long held apart: body and spirit, growth and ending, earth and idea. Her verses track slow falls and quiet returns, hinting at cycles now central to today's views on balance in nature. One might say she fits alongside green thinkers, though rooted in one small town where daily walks fed a sharp attention to soil, light, and seasonal shifts. When ethics meet reverence in these writings, something clear emerges - not prophecy, but poetry that quietly shapes later voices in ecology and feminist reflection. A fresh look at Dickinson casts her not just as someone who wrote about inner life and dying, but as someone who saw further. She draws people into noticing more carefully - slowing down, showing respect, staying small in thought. This grounds her place in current writings on ecology without force or flourish.

**Keywords:** Eco-critical Analysis, Human-nature relationship, Ecological Sensibility, Literary Representation.

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson born in 1830, she kept close to trees, flowers and seasons all through life. Poems about these things poured out of her, shaped by real moments outside. From childhood onwards, she walked among plants alongside her sister, learning soil and stems beside their mother. Growing up felt like living inside a quiet bloom and later, words

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from one letter showed it clearly - she said, "I was reared in the garden, you know." That green world stayed with her until the end. By April 1859 in Amherst - life shaped her early world where short lines mark Emily Dickinson's work, sharp and apart. Slant sounds instead of clean rhyme - that was her way. Slant rhyme didn't show up much back then, nor did others around her try it. Her bold twist on capital letters jumps out - so do odd pauses shaped by dashes and stops. Punctuation bent rules, just like rhythm choices that refused to follow patterned beats. Dying appears again and again across her work, woven deep into thought. By the 1800s' end, grief touched her often through people close being gone. That pain likely fed poems soaked in shadows, dark but calm. A graveyard sat nearby where daily views might stir such reflections. In one well-known piece, "Death" rides in as a polite man offering a slow drive. He brings her past fields and sunsets toward some kind of after-place - maybe peace. Love also flows through many stanzas even though marriage stayed absent from her life. It happens that Emily Dickinson wrote a striking poem about love called "That I did always love." This feeling, she suggests, outweighs everything else life has offered her. Only through loving does she feel she truly began to exist. A steady presence across her work shows up in how she sees the natural world. What catches her eye - trees swaying, bees drifting, birds darting - is rendered strangely vivid. Her attention lingers on creatures, skies, fields, each detail treated like a secret. Reading these lines, one can sense someone deeply tuned to what grows, flies or crawls. The land matters, not as idea but presence. It might pull you in, how carefully she picks each word when writing her poems. Not just that, but she gives life to trees, rivers, winds - like they feel and think. Take "Nature, The Gentlest Mother" - there, nature becomes a quiet caregiver, watching over every creature without favor. Whether it's a tiny insect or a bloom nobody notices, none are left out. Some call this way of reading texts in ecocriticism, and Glotfelty describes it as looking at how books relate to the living planet.

Even though Emily Dickinson lived before green movements began, her verses pay close attention to animals, plants, skies - not as background, but as presence. Her work questions if humans should always stand at the centre. Instead, everything else breathes on equal ground. What stands out is how Dickinson fits into early eco-poetry, long before terms like eco-poetics existed. Her words point ahead to ideas that thinkers like Buell and Morton would name much later. Gardens, birds, bees - these aren't just pretty images in her lines but they move, act, exist on their own terms. Snakes slip through grass without warning, storms arrive with force and seasons turn regardless. One poem shows a bird stepping onto dirty path as if claiming space while another frames nature as both tender and distant. The snake appears quiet yet unsettling. Frost kills a flower with blank expression where each image holds weight. She watches closely, records precisely. There's power in what grows, crawls, flies, fades. These poems suggest balance where people do not dominate. Meaning hides in small things when seen clearly. Tiny things - a bug, a sliver of grass, a passing shade - hold deep weight in her verses and not simply painted as some gentle muse, nature here breathes on its own terms. It offers comfort at times, true, yet just as easily jars perception loose. Her vision matches modern thinking that insists we step back, let earth speak for itself. Life unfolds through rise, rot, fade; people simply move inside that rhythm. What grows, what

breaks - it all sits level under her gaze and meaning hums quietly beneath soil, skin and silence.

“A small bird stepped along the path” - Emily Dickinson captured this moment in one of her finest works. Five stanzas in the poem unfold, each holding a quiet mirror to nature just as it exists. Sharp images rise through the lines, showing life bare, unpolished yet she watches, still and silent; the animal goes on, careless. Its ease comes from not sensing eyes upon it - the words “He did not know I saw” reveal that truth. Looking at how the poem unfolds, one notice right away the bird lost in what it does. It grabs an angleworm, snaps it apart, then eats each piece without cooking - just takes it straight. What the narrator sees matches a way of watching life closely, like scientists did back in the 1800s when studying nature felt more like collecting than feeling. As Ursula K. Heise points out in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* (2008), eating the worm shows both connection and harshness in ecosystems - one depends on another, yet harms it too (Heise, 71). Even though seeing the worm vanish into the bird’s beak left her disturbed, the soft gloss of its head held her attention. In *Eco criticism* (2012), Greg Garrard labels such scenes a “Darwinian moment,” where Dickinson faces raw truths - nature both cruel and striking (Garrard 121). Unaware at first, the creature lingered until a scrap of bread appeared; then it jerked, stretched out its wings, and vanished skyward. Stacy Alaimo, writing in *Bodily Natures* (2010), interprets this escape as resistance - a turning from human reach, echoing deep ecology's core: let-be (Alaimo 89). Flight followed awareness - the instant it sensed eyes upon it, survival instinct took over, fearing now itself might feed another mouth. What the speaker notices points straight to how she sees things. From an ecological viewpoint, it quietly questions human-centred thinking when human life is seen as a top priority - the idea that shapes much of what happens here. It just comes easy to act like people matter more than anything else around. This occurs since humans can think and grasp ideas, while most creatures cannot. Still, scripture tells Adam and Eve to multiply and hold dominion over sea life, flying beings, and everything crawling on earth - according to the New International Version, Genesis 1:28 - which strengthen their worldview. Even though the speaker sees fear in the bird and gives it food, hoping to bring calm, the animal's reality stays distant, quiet and full of awe beyond reach. Dickinson watches without speaking, keeping still so as not to break the moment or scare it away.

When rain falls in “A Drop Fell on the Apple Tree,” nature acts with intent, shaped like a being aware of itself, moving on its own instead of just lying behind the scene. Water moves and it slips off the Apple Tree, touches rooftops next, slides down stone walls after that, finds a brook soon enough, keeps going until it meets the sea again. Each drop follows paths shaped by earth and people alike - roots, gutters, streams - all part of how nature renews itself. Like earlier work we’ve seen, here too Dickinson watches closely. Line by line, image after image, she paints what she sees: rain speaking without words, streams breathing slow rhythms. Her eye catches detail others might miss. The way light clings to wet bark, how puddles swell and vanish - it all gets noted. Even small things feel alive in her lines. Back then, folks saw forests and rivers like storehouses waiting to be emptied. People took what they wanted, long before clocks measured hours. A creature stirs where grass bends low - Emily Dickinson paints it without naming. Wonder trails close behind discomfort when the

figure appears where fancy shapes form through hints rather than facts. Its presence glides between lines, never fully held. One moment seen, next gone like breath on glass. Out of nowhere, the figure appears, sliding between blades, much like a streaked rod or something quick as a flick. That motion grabs hold, wild and strange, each shift sharp, splitting the green rows clean, almost like running a comb straight down. It moves on its own, makes the skin prickle, stirs wonder mixed with unease - that tension gives weight to the lines. The way words fall across the page, their rhythm, how pauses land - it all wobbles mirrors how hard it is to truly grasp what lives beyond us. Structure bends, mimics drift, surprise, things slipping away before we name them. Another piece shows feathers at work: pecking, sipping moisture, stepping off balance. A small moment begins it - someone holds out a crumb, watching softly yet the sudden flutter of wings breaks the quiet, pulling distance back into view. What seemed near now feels separate again

“And he unrolled his feathers

Farther he drifted, oars dipping quiet in the darkening water”.

Out past the clouds, a rowing motion turns air into water, shifting boundaries we thought were fixed. Not built for our gaze, the creature moves without permission. Instead of softening what lives beyond us, Dickinson lets it remain apart, whole on its own terms. Such thinking sidesteps old habits that place people at the centre, making room for ways of seeing that unseat dominance. Buell argues green-themed writings should treat nature not as backdrop but as participant. The bird in Dickinson's work shows this idea - alive on its own terms, not just a literary flourish.

Few would guess that verses penned alone in a small town so long ago could echo today's unravelling natural world. Not merely watching but feeling the pulse of earth, she recorded what most overlooked - life holding itself together without asking permission. One poem shows rain meeting tree, another a bird stepping cautious on soil, then a snake slipping through grass like thought through silence. These are not just moments - they become quiet warnings dressed as observation. Instead of preaching balance, her lines show it by example, creature by creature, season after season. Some call her romantic; others say visionary - either way, her words now feel like messages left behind. Studying certain works by Emily Dickinson shows exactly how nature and humans appear together. Her lines show nature not as kind, not as cruel, yet always separate somehow. With Earth breaking down fast, these writings push us toward hearing - not leading, just standing quiet - near a planet that talks in silence. Birds, flowers, snakes - these aren't just images in Emily Dickinson's lines, frost creeps through her stanzas; bees hum without asking permission, nature acts on its own here, never reduced to metaphor. Complexity thrives where simplicity seems to reign. A bee matters as much as a thought and silence between words speaks of balance. Readers find themselves inside nature, not looking outside. The poems resist grand gestures, favouring small truths and what emerges is awareness older than labels. Long before the terms like "ecology" stuck in the minds of men, she saw connections and responsibility hides in plain sight. What makes Dickinson ecologically aware isn't loud protest, yet her way of writing poems shows it clearly. Birds, bees, flowers - she watches them closely, like data collected by feeling instead of tools. Storms arrive, frost spreads; each detail held without judgment and

Nature does what it must, not out of kindness or cruelty, simply following unseen rules. She skips turning trees into symbols of virtue, avoids painting death as sin. Life breaks down then takes a pause and rebuilds again; she sees tenderness exists beside ruins in her lines of poetry. She lets that fade, offers something sturdier instead and balance emerges quietly - not preached, merely shown through how things actually behave.

Emily Dickinson's verse feels like nature itself - sparse, efficient and alive. Not one term sits alone; each links quietly, like roots beneath soil. Her retreat in Amherst wasn't escape - it fed a deep noticing of what grew nearby. Place by place, backyard sights opened onto wider living patterns. Attention became resistance: not loud, but firm against human-centred views. Balance emerges - not rule, not control, just being alongside. Today's world faces deep environmental troubles - shifting climates, vanishing species and broken natural rhythms - and in light of these, Dickinson's verses feel startlingly close again. Not mastery but modesty: that is what her lines suggest when facing nature's tangled depths. She saw people woven into living networks long before such ideas spread widely. Reading her through an ecological lens does more than reframe old poetry - it reveals foresight sharp enough to cut across centuries. Her words stay with us, insisting we belong within life's delicate mesh rather than rule above it. What lingers is this truth, quiet yet unshakable, spoken softly in meter and slant rhyme.

Emily Dickinson's poetry serves as a powerful embodiment of deep introspection and innovative writing. Her works, characterized by their conciseness, non-traditional punctuation, and compact imagery, elevate everyday experiences—such as nature, mortality, love, suffering, and spirituality—into significant philosophical reflections. Dickinson's distinct style, featuring dashes and slant rhymes, defies conventional poetic structures and foreshadows modernist experimentation. At the core of her writings is a profound engagement with life's mysteries, as she delves into themes of immortality, the soul, and the unseen aspects of existence with remarkable intensity. Her meticulous observations of nature not only show an aesthetic appreciation but also reveal a keen awareness of humanity's delicate connection with the natural world. Despite her largely solitary existence, her voice resonates on a universal level, providing readers with a personal yet profound insight. Emily Dickinson's impact remains as a uniquely original and transformative element in American poetry. Her poetry confronts strict Victorian gender norms. She converts minor domestic details into expansive philosophical insights, and ambiguity is a hallmark of her stylistic approach. Her work allows for various interpretations over time, and she conveys profound emotional resonance through succinct language.

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