UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA

“My business is circumference”: Threading the human-nature continuum in Emily Dickinson’s nature poetry

Aitana Cano Trilla

TFG Estudis Anglesos

2021-2022

Supervisor: Rodrigo Andrés
Barcelona, Setembre 2022

UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA

Coordinació d'Estudis
Facultat de Filologia i Comunicació

Gran Via
de les Corts Catalanes, 585
08007 Barcelona

Tel. +34 934 035 594
fil-coord@ub.edu
www.ub.edu

Declaració d'autoria

Amb aquest escrit declaro que soc l'autor/autora original d'aquest treball i que no he emprat per a la seva elaboració cap altra font, incloses fonts d'Internet i altres mitjans electrònics, a part de les indicades. En el treball he assenyalat com a tals totes les citacions, literals o de contingut, que procedeixen d'altres obres. Tinc coneixement que d'altra manera, i segons el que s'indica a l'article 18 del capítol 5 de les Normes reguladores de l'avaluació i de la qualificació dels aprenentatges de la UB, l'avaluació comporta la qualificació de "Suspens".

Barcelona, a 5 de setembre 2022

Signatura [redacted]

Title: “My business is circumference”: Threading the human-nature continuum in Emily Dickinson’s nature poetry

Abstract: This text proposes an exploration of the natural-human continuum in Emily Dickinson’s nature poetry through different theoretical approaches. In the present moment where the climatic crisis seems no longer possible to obviate, revisiting how culture has historically represented nature can provide us with valuable insights on how to redefine our relationship with the natural world. This paper gathers different theoretical approaches to open up the conversation of how the natural and the human world interact in her poems. By reading her poetry from these multiple points of view, her nature is revealed as an entity that retains its autonomy, with which Dickinson deems necessary to engage emotionally, and that is able to challenge social conventions about personhood and gender.

Key words: Emily Dickinson, nature, poetry, ecocriticism, gender studies, affective theory

Título: “My business is circumference”: Trazando un continuo entre lo humano y lo natural en la poesía sobre naturaleza de Emily Dickinson

Resumen: Este texto explora el continuo entre lo natural y lo humano en la poesía de Emily Dickinson inspirada en la naturaleza a través de diferentes perspectivas teóricas. En el momento actual en el que ya no se puede seguir obviando la crisis climática, reevaluar como se ha representado históricamente la naturaleza a través de la cultura puede resultar útil a la hora de redefinir nuestra relación con ella. Este texto aúna diferentes enfoques teóricos para ampliar y enriquecer el debate de cómo interactúan el dominio humano y el natural en los poemas de Dickinson. Mediante esta lectura, que combina varios puntos de vista, la naturaleza de Emily Dickinson se revela como una entidad autónoma, con la que se interactúa emocionalmente y que es capaz de desestabilizar convenciones sociales sobre identidad y género.

Palabras claves: Emily Dickinson, naturaleza, poesía, ecocrítica, estudios de género, teoría del afecto

Table of contents

“To him who keeps an Orchis' heart –
The swamps are pink with June.”
Emily Dickinson
(J22)

“The scientist keeps the romantic honest,
and the romantic keeps the scientist human.”
Tom Robbins
Another Roadside Attraction

Introduction

This project is born from an interest in widening my knowledge of poetry, in particular that which is inspired by nature. In the present moment where the climatic crisis seems no longer possible to obviate, revisiting how culture has historically represented nature can provide us with valuable insights on how to redefine our relationship with the natural world. Emily Dickinson seemed a perfect candidate for my research: she wrote extensively on nature, but she was often not categorized as a nature poet (Knickerbocker, 2008, p. 185). Therefore, the first question that prompted the research was: is her description of nature environmentally aware? If so, is it different from all of those (Romantics, Transcendentalists, scientists) that wrote about nature at the same time as her? After approaching her poetry from an ecocritical perspective, the answer to those questions appeared quickly: yes, Dickinson poetry was thought to be environmentally aware and different from her contemporaries.

However, I found this information of little use. If it was consensually agreed, if there was no room for debate, there was not much more to do with these findings than paraphrasing them. Moreover, the more I focussed on the referential aspect of her poetry, the less interesting I found it. Why resort to poetry for an accurate realistic description of nature? That should be the preoccupation of other literary genres. The power of figurative language is not its potential to describe but its ability to suggest and create new meaning from the interrelation of two unconnected domains. If figuration is to be political, it is not by refusing its more powerful trait. Moreover, Dickinson poetry resisted the prosaic, her interest was "Circumference", the border between categories, "the point of convergence where oppositions are collapsed, boundaries are explored, and meaning originates" (Gribbin, 1993, p. 2).

This was, thus, my new object of study: not the representation of the natural world in Dickinson's poetry, nor the strictly symbolic meaning that nature could take on, but the point of convergence of both worlds. The approach of this study includes different theoretical perspectives like ecocriticism, affective theory, gender studies and cuteness studies. What this multidimensional perspective reveals is that Emily Dickinson engages affectively with an empirically described nature as an invitation to imagine alternative ways of social organization. In her poems, nature is not reduced to a vehicle for human values; nature stands for nature, it retains its autonomy and idiosyncrasy. It is because it does so, that it can then also acquire

powerful metaphorical meanings as well as it can provide the poet with alternative models for social and gender categories. Nature is a source of inspiration for subversion and not merely the means to express that subversion. Because in her poetry the natural and the human are not two categories of a binary opposition but a continuum, she is able to bridge the distance between realms by including affective experience: affect is the shared trait between the human and the natural, a trait that allowed humans to engage with nature and to learn from it.

The objective of this text, thus, is to be a guide, a proposal of a journey to travel that continuum guided by different critical approaches. These theoretical views might seem initially without much in common, however, when put together they enrich one another and generate a more complete portrayal of Dickinson's nature poetry. Therefore, this should not be thought of as a paper that applies literary theory onto Dickinson's poetry, but instead a paper that threads together different voices, with different perspectives in order to better understand how the realms of the natural and the human relate to each other in Emily Dickinson's poetry.

This guide is structured around three main blocks: the natural, the affective and the human. Each block is aimed at understanding how that domain is read nowadays by Emily Dickinson scholars, in comparison to how it has been treated historically and also in relation to the other domains explored in this project. Thus, each chapter defines the concept that is analyzed, it is contextualized in Dickinson's work through a varied array of secondary sources, and it is applied onto a poem. Each section is accompanied by a larger selection of poems that can be found in the appendix.

1. The natural

Every journey must have a departure and the (nature-human) continuum of Emily Dickinson is no different. The starting point will be located at the natural end of the continuum because it will prove useful to understand how Emily Dickinson constructs nature before exploring any other additional symbolic meaning it might take on. Before moving forward, it is necessary to define and delimit how the word "nature" (and all other words derived from it) will be used in the pages that follow. For this, I will resort to the first entry of "nature" in Léxico.com: "The material world, especially as surrounding humankind and existing independently of human activities" (Oxford University Press, 2022). The content of this first chapter will consequently be limited by this definition, in the sense that it will focus only on how the poet is read as a nature poet and on how she portrays the nonhuman world.

The truth is that the way Emily Dickinson has been read as a nature poet has changed throughout time. For a long time, in fact, she was not even considered a serious "nature poet" although her poetry is full of plants, flowers, animals, and weather conditions (Knickerbocker, 2008, p. 185). This was, in part, because the two main trends of Dickinson scholarship up until the 21st century "prioritized the symbolic realm" and saw in the natural scenery of her poems just a vehicle for human experience (Gerhardt, 2017, p. 331): nature was either seen as a metaphor for the poet's epistemological and theological skepticism (Knickerbocker, 2008, p. 185) or, later on by feminist critics, as "a realm of relationships, a women-centered space of healing, and a source for a language of female desire" (Gerhardt, 2017, p. 331). However, as both Knickerbocker and Gerhardt agree, those interpretations seemed to obliterate the importance of the nonhuman world as a real existing environment (p. 331) as well as discredit Dickinson's "active perception and consideration of a physically real natural world" (Knickerbocker, 2008, p. 185).

With the environmental turn in Dickinson studies that takes place in the early 2000s the metaphysical and feminist readings do not disappear, yet novel ways of reading the poet as environmentally aware emerged, sometimes in conjunction with other approaches such as affect theory, gender studies, or new materialism among others (Gerhardt, 2017, p. 331). These new approaches were aimed at "reveal[ing] fresh ways in which the larger-than-human world matter[ed] not just symbolically but also as a complex physical presence in Dickinson's work" (p. 332). These approaches are going to be the first lens that the guide will

employ to approach Emily Dickinson's nature poems, borrowed from 21st century ecocritical studies. The objective of this first part will be, hence, to identify how the poet looks at the physical world, where she places her attention and what she chooses to emphasize.

"You'll know Her — by Her Foot —": Emily Dickinson's naturalist's eye

Since she was a child, nature and science were present in Emily Dickinson's life. In her schooling days, she trained among other subjects in botany and geology; from an early age she was exposed to natural history essays, including works by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, that she would read in the newspaper the *Atlantic Monthly*. Her interest in nature and science continued throughout her life with her long term instructive relation with the naturalist Thomas Wentworth Higginson (Gerhardt, 2006, pp. 58-60). Her interest in science can also be traced in her more than 200 poems that touch on specific scientific themes, drawing from almost all sciences, including physics, astronomy, chemistry, geology, botany, physiology, medicine, psychology, mathematics and technology (White, 1992, p. 121). This interest leads Robin Peel to even suggest that Dickinson's poetry can be read as texts that participate in the scientific discourse as much as in the religious or literary themes with which she is usually related (2010, p. 14).

Although it is not as accepted that her poems "[had] scientific intentions and [made] scientific claims" (p. 14), there is a consensus among the majority of Dickinson scholars that "[d]espite the layers of mediation and metaphor in her poetry … Dickinson takes nature as a real locale seriously" (Knickerbocker, 2008, p. 186). Unlike her contemporaries the Transcendentalists, Dickinson draws attention to nature's material existence that is noteworthy in itself, and not just a route to transcendental spiritual or philosophical truths" (Martin, 2007, p. 86). For her, nature is grounded on the physical world, so consequently she needs to approach it empirically, using her senses as gateways to the material world and basing her observations on her scientific knowledge. Before nature becomes anything, nature needs to be itself.

This referential aspect of Emily Dickinson's nature poetry is explored by Jeffrey Simons in "Dickinson's Lyric Ornithology " in the poet's poems on birds. Simons argues that Dickinson follows a three-step process in the construction of these texts: a first literal reference

to the natural world, a symbolic meaning added to the literal reference, and a final third "hermeneutic step" where both meanings "fit into the notional whole of the poem where they appear" (2019, p. 6). With this procedure, Dickinson manages to "blen[d] a naturalist's close observation with an allegorist's sense of human meaning" (p. 1) so that the relation between the natural meaning and the metaphorical one cannot be reduced to a one-to-one correspondence. For Simons, the accuracy of the poem's literal references to different bird facets (such as song, flight, species, migration, description, integument, walking, nesting, reproduction, and sustenance) is so significant that it cannot be underplayed (pp. 5-6). An instance of this, he argues, can be seen in "You'll know Her - by Her Foot -":

You'll know Her — by Her Foot —
The smallest Gamboge Hand
With Fingers — where the Toes should be —
Would more affront the Sand —

Than this Quaint Creature's Boot —
Adjusted by a Stern —
Without a Button — I could vouch —
Unto a Velvet Limb —

You'll know Her — by Her Vest —
Tight fitting — Orange — Brown —
Inside a Jacket duller —
She wore when she was born —

Her Cap is small — and snug —
Constructed for the Winds —
She'd pass for Barehead — short way off —
But as She Closer stands —

So finer 'tis than Wool —

You cannot feel the Seam —
Nor is it Clasped unto of Band —
Nor held upon — of Brim —

You'll know Her — by Her Voice —
At first — a doubtful Tone —
A sweet endeavor — but as March
To April — hurries on —

She squanders on your Ear
Such Arguments of Pearl —
You beg the Robin in your Brain
To keep the other — still — (J634)

This “minute depiction of a robin” (2019, p. 6), Simons locates it as more on the naturalist referential pole than the poetic allegorical side (p. 19). For him, the layer of referential meaning that encompasses the bird’s “species naming, description, integument, and song” (p. 3) weighs almost more than the metaphorical one, that associates the figure of the bird with the figure of the poet, and the robin’s song with the poet’s vocation. However, what is interesting from this disassociation of meanings is not so much finding out which meaning overpowers which, but to understand that they both coexist. The natural world that she describes is not a product of her imagination, it is a world that is physical and autonomous and predates her poetry.

“Our little Kinsmen”: Dickinson interest on the small

Because Dickinson is equipped with a naturalist eye and not only a poet’s, her empirical attention to detail allows her to see beyond the bombastic natural phenomena that the Romantics were often more attracted to (Gerhardt, 2014, p. 31). Them, unlike her, “cherished nature in its sublime magnitude, its overwhelming grandeur” (Martin, 2007, p. 86). Even the American Romantics like Emerson Bryant, or Whitman seemed to praise the "perfect whole" of nature, in which the otherness of the small “each” disappeared in the encompassing “all”

(pp. 5-6). Instead, “Dickinson appreciation for nature includes an appreciation for its details, its minute and often overlooked inhabitants, and its tiny pleasures” (Martin, 2007, p. 86).

More than a quarter of her poems are devoted to flowers, birds, grasses, insects and other small creatures which were not common subject matter of “the genteel imagination” (Gerhardt, 2014, p. 36). But what is significant is not simply that Dickinson notices the often overlooked beings, it is, instead, the way she “urges attention to and indeed childlike astonishment at what received “adult” knowledge degrades to a place of insignificance.” (p. 36). She brings the small, the peripheral, into the center and calls her speakers and readers out when they are not moved by them as by the sublime. In fact, Gerhardt finds “a sense of guilt over not paying attention” (p. 42) in many of the poems about the small. She argues that Dickinson transfers traditional ideals of “humility and care from interpersonal behavior to human ways of treating small, insentient beings”, hence taking part of a discussion that will lead “to a serious consideration of moral accountability toward “The most unworthy Flower” (Fr741)” (p. 44).

In the chapter “Dickinson’s Frequent Acts of Noticing Small Nature” form her *A Place for Humility: Whitman, Dickinson, and the Natural World* (2014) Christine Gerhardt explores how Dickinson expresses “a sense of humility that stems not only from the sheer act of noticing the smallest creatures beneath one’s feet, but also from their identification with the small”. An idea that is perfectly exemplified in the poem “Our little Kinsmen – after Rain”:

Our little Kinsmen – after Rain
In plenty may be seen,
A Pink and Pulpy multitude
The tepid Ground upon.

A needless life, it seemed to me
Until a little Bird
As to a Hospitality
Advanced and breakfasted –

As I of He, so God of Me

I pondered, may have judged,
And left the little Angle Worm
With Modesties enlarged. (J885)

Gerhardt does not deny the metaphorical reading of the poem, that "human existence is no more relevant than that of worms, but part of larger webs of significance" (p. 34). However, she will argue that its "apparently plain moral" hides several significant observations that go beyond its human correspondence" (p. 34). To start with, Dickinson's choice of protagonist exemplifies her interest in beings that were overlooked by poets and artists but also even by mid-nineteenth century scientists who more often than not thought of invertebrates as not "worthy of study" (p. 32). The speaker of the poem also sees beyond the apparent dullness a "tepid" spot, that is in reality filled with vitality. And finally, the speaker bestows a seemingly "needless life" into a central place in a larger ecosystem, highlighting "the time's novel interest in the interconnectedness of vegetation, birds, and insects" (pp. 32-33).

2. The affective

As we have seen, Dickinson approaches the natural world from an empirical place that recognizes nature as an autonomous entity. However, "[i]n spite of her intense interest in the theories and methods of science, … [she] also resisted and critiqued a tendency within science to presume to solve the mysteries of the universe. … [which] also negates, for Dickinson, the wonder one feels in relationship to a natural world not wholly explainable." (Knickerbocker, 2008, pp. 188-189). Science, for the poet, is a tool to approach nature but it is by no means sufficient to engage with it: Dickinson includes affective experience in her relation with nature, something that the majority of "mid-nineteenth century professional scientists" excluded (Sorby, 2017, p. 307).

This sentimental way of relating to nature has actually troubled Dickinson scholars as if somehow tainted her reputation as a serious poet and/or naturalist. Scholars "steeped in the gendered aesthetics of the mid-century canon" cast it as an affliction product of her femininity (Sorby, 2017, p. 297), something that readers disliked (Dickey, 2004, p. 12) and that it was better when suppressed (Anderson, 1960, as cited in Gerhardt, 2014, p. 39). After them, feminist critics also minimised the poet's "kittenish" tone in order to "affirm Dickinson's status as a strong woman poet": in the twentieth century Dickinson could only be powerful if her poetry was not too "cute" (Sorby, 2017, pp. 297-298). Similarly, those scholars who were interested in studying Dickinson's scientific language have also found it difficult to reconcile it with her sentimental representation of nature, often leading to a dismissal of the rigor of her scientific knowledge (Kuhn, 2018, p. 142).

However, the views on the role that emotions play in Dickinson's poetry have been reassessed in recent years, especially since the so-called "affective turn" that aims to include emotions into the studying of humanities and social sciences, including literary studies (Boggs, 2014, p. 198). In this context, Dickinson's sentimentalism is no longer a by-product of her femininity but a powerful device used consciously by the poet. The aim of this chapter will be, thus, to explore how current scholarship reads the inclusion of affective experience in Dickinson's nature poetry: as a character trait that links the human-natural continuum together (Kuhn, 2018, p. 161), and as a mechanism to engage and create relations with both the human and the nonhuman world (Sorby, 2017, p. 299).

"a Mourner, like Myself": Affect as the link between the human and the natural

Although affect theory is usually interested exclusively in the human realm, there have been scholars like Rai Terada that have expanded its scope and consider that emotions should be re-evaluated as "nonsubjective". Terada rejects the distinction between human-emotion and nonhuman-affect and states that emotions should include "the psychological experiences of human beings but also the physiological sensations of all living creatures" (2001, pp. 4-6). For her, the only difference between both categories is that human emotions are "an interpretive act" (p. 17), but the ability to feel remains the same across kingdoms. This affirmation, argues Colleen Glenney Boggs, blurs the boundaries between kingdoms and invites one to re-examine the affective relationships between humans and the natural world (2014, p. 199).

That plants were sentient and had the capacity to feel was a debated theory at the time Emily Dickinson wrote her poetry (Kuhn, 2018, p. 154). Many scientists accepted that plants could feel, but they diverged on how to understand this sentiency (pp. 154-155), since where the line was drawn could potentially have political and social consequences (p. 161). Mary Kuhn argues that Dickinson had encountered such theories of plant sentience and they, along with her interest in gardening informed her "own imaginative engagement with plant life" that escaped from conventional nineteenth-century poetic figuration (p. 157). According to Kuhn, Dickinson's "sentimental connection" is different from the conventional interpretation of flowers because it "challenges the notion that feeling is essentially a human characteristic" granting plants, and other beings, an autonomy they lack in traditional sentimental poetry (p. 160).

Still, what Kuhn finds significant is not that Dickinson acknowledges the capacity of other beings to feel, but that she considered the shared traits across kingdoms "a way to connect the human condition to that of birds, flowers, and the natural environment at large" (p. 156). One of the ways Dickinson explores this cross-kingdom sentience is through the use of personification and anthropomorphism. Although these devices could seem at first glance tools to understand the natural world in strictly human terms, Dickinson constructs them in such an informed way that they grant the phenomena perceived agency and autonomy instead (Gerhardt, 2014, p. 38). The result is that the speaker-reader is drawn "toward an emotionally charged attention to small nature in place, imagining human-nature relationships that include

ethical considerations" (p. 39). An example of this liaison through affection can be seen in “The Birds reported from the South—”:

The Birds reported from the South—
A News express to Me—
A spicy Charge, My little Posts—
But I am deaf—Today—

The Flowers—appealed—a timid Throng—
I reinforced the Door—
Go blossom for the Bees—I said—
And trouble Me—no More—

The Summer Grace, for Notice strove—
Remote—Her best Array—
The Heart—to stimulate the Eye
Refused too utterly—

At length, a Mourner, like Myself,
She drew away austere—
Her frosts to ponder—then it was
I recollected Her—

She suffered Me, for I had mourned—
I offered Her no word—
My Witness—was the Crape I bore—
Her—Witness—was Her Dead—

Thenceforward—We—together dwelt—
I never questioned Her—

Our Contract

A Wiser Sympathy (J743)

Kuhn argues that this poem rejects a "firm distinction between the civic and the natural through language that overlays the conflict of the Civil War … with the progression of the seasons" (2018, p. 159). Dickinson certainly draws a parallelism between the natural world and the speaker, but she is not simply anthropomorphizing the landscape to mirror the speaker's feelings: nature is a separate "mourner" that mourns next to the human voice. Yet, the landscape and the speaker are not completely separate either, they are united in their grief (p. 159). This relation is summarized by the poem's last stanza in which nature and the speaker are bound in a contract by their capacity to feel, by a shared "Sympathy". This sympathetic contract proves for Kuhn that the poet's natural world "refuses the rigid separation of human, animal, and plant that shaped nineteenth-century conceptions of personhood" (p. 161), which in turn, challenges nineteenth century theories of life, like the great chain of being or the argument from design, that saw "the world as an orderly and stable hierarchy with humans at the top" (p. 142).

"A fuzzy fellow, without feet": Cuteness as an affective strategy to engage with the other

In "The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals", Darwin points at this same capacity of beings to connect through feeling as a key element to their survival. He argues that although species might resort to violence to assert their power, their ability to adapt, evolve and, ultimately, survive depends on their ability to develop emotional bonds. All beings need them to compensate for the helplessness they will experience at some point, especially at an early stage of their life (as cited in Sorby, 2007, p. 314). For those small, physically or figuratively, strength is achieved by kinship, and "kinship", affirms Angela Sorby paraphrasing Darwin, "is felt" (2007, p. 314).

One of the ways in which affective relationships are established among humans is through cuteness. Konrad Lorenz, was the first to suggest that people have evolved to respond to cuteness in order for adults to connect with the young so they can build beneficial relationships (as cited in Sorby, 2007, p. 299). Lorenz thought of cuteness as a "direct releaser of caretaking behaviors" but more recently, Gary Sherman and Jonathan Haidt have argued

that what cuteness triggers is "human sociality." (2011, p. 245). Their theory is based on the fact that the moment when babies are cutest is not at birth but around five months old: their cuteness would not only be directed to their parents, but to as many adults as possible to elicit play and to reinforce social bonds. In this way, cuteness would support the baby's development but, more importantly, it would spur kinship, not by blood but by affinity.

Cuteness, though, cannot be reduced just to a primal instinct since it is "subject to intense and variable cultural mediation" (Sorby, 2007, p. 302). This explains why the human response to it is so exceptionally varied: babies are perceived as cute, but so can rubber ducks or handwriting (p. 300). The capability that almost everything has to become cute is what Angela Sorby believes Emily Dickinson exploits in her "cute" nature poem. According to her, "[she] uses cuteness to engage, not just with conventionally fluffy animals but also with insects, graves, and corpses; with an endangered Protestant God; and with questions of time, space, and scale" (p. 299). Cuteness is no longer a "smirking" or "weak" or "cloying" or "annoying" (p. 322), it is now reassessed as a powerful rhetorical device to "embrace the opportunity to feel emotional affinities" (p. 307) with a nonhuman alterity.

Thus, Sorby affirms that Dickinson consciously chooses cuteness over aesthetic beauty because she does not want to produce an "experience of the sublime, or the transcendent, or the ethical", she wants to trigger play that will in its turn spark relationships (p. 305). This goal can be seen in one of her best known "cute" poems "A fuzzy fellow, without feet –":

A fuzzy fellow, without feet,
Yet doth exceeding run!
Of velvet, is his Countenance,
And his Complexion, dun!

Sometime, he dwelleth in the grass!
Sometime, upon a bough,
From which he doth descend in plush
Upon the Passer-by!

All this in summer.
But when winds alarm the Forest Folk,

He taketh Damask Residence —
And struts in sewing silk!

Then, finer than a Lady,
Emerges in the spring!
A Feather on each shoulder!
You'd scarce recognize him!

By Men, yclept Caterpillar!
By me! But who am I,
To tell the pretty secret
Of the Butterfly! (J173)

Sorby is aware that this poem can be confused with one of the didactic songs that were so popular in the nineteenth-century, yet she argues the poem is only pretending to be one, as a game, and that it lacks the final moral that these pieces would always have. The poem is a game that invites one to feel an affinity that crosses boundaries; a game that invites the speaker-reader-passerby to enlarge the kinship circle, a game where the caterpillar tries different dwellings (the grass, a branch), clothing (velvet, damask), "and even genders" as it is once referred as a fellow, and once as a Lady (p. 306). The point is neither to master the "pretty secret of the butterfly" but to feel a "fleeting" emotional affinity "when the interspecies gap narrows" (p. 307).

Sorby believes that Dickinson was aware that to be cute could lead to being belittled and condescended, "to risk disempowerment" (p. 309-310). However, she believes the poet was more interested in its beneficial power since she was aware that "to be small is to depend on others", and it is through cuteness, through play, and through the formation of interpersonal and interspecies emotional bonds, that the small can acquire their power (p. 314).

3. The human

So far we have seen that Dickinson's nature is defined by its materiality and its autonomy from the human world. In spite of this, pure reason and a strict empirical approach are insufficient to engage and comprehend the natural world in her poems. Dickinson deems it necessary to include emotions and affective experiences in our involvement with nature. These emotions are, in fact, *the* trait that links us to the nonhuman, and that allows us to create strengthening connections when we risk disempowerment. But what if, on top of this, this emotional engagement with nature produced other more eccentric results? Could this invitation to play at border-crossing blur social boundaries too?

Nowadays, it is well accepted that Dickinson "wrote more in time, that she was much more involved in the conflicts and tensions of her nation and community, than we have thought," (Leyda, 1960, as quoted in Gerhardt, 2017, p. 332). Despite not being a Transcendentalist, she was closely aligned with them (Martin, 2007, p. 32) and deeply influenced by the ideas discussed by Emerson and Thoreau (Asahina, 2005, p. 106). Among these, there was the conviction that nature had the capability to redeem society. Transcendentalism thought, in fact, that the ills caused by capitalism and industrialization could only be solved by getting back in touch with the restorative force of nature (Newman, 2005, p. 42). Although Dickinson's conception of nature differed greatly from the "divinely ordained laws of nature" of the Transcendentalists (p. 42), scholars agree that she too turned to nature for alternative social models (Kuhn, 2018, p. 142).

This theme, that nature can be looked at as a source of inspiration for humans to reinvent themselves, is what the articles appearing in this third chapter will explore. With this last step, we seem to be connecting nature to culture again, as if the continuum that we were traveling was nothing more than a circumference. However, it should be noted that this encounter between nature and the human is different from the 20th century trends described in the first chapter where nature had no other role than being a vehicle for human values. The line between the two is subtle but evident: in these readings, nature, in its autonomous idiosyncrasy, is read as an inspiration, an influence that can trigger play. A game through which Dickinson invites the reader to transgress with her nineteenth-century social conventions about gender and personhood. The following texts seem to suggest that interacting with the alterity of the non-human might teach us something about our own human alterity (Terada, 2001, p. 354).

“Of such a little Dog am I Reminded by a Boy”: Didactic nature

That nature, and in particular, animals could be didactic was already an established idea by the nineteenth-century. Colleen Glenney Boggs traces the origin of this trend in John Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, a text “recognized as inaugurating the fields of pedagogy, child psychology, [and] children’s literature” among others (2012, p. 199). Boggs explains that Locke sees children’s affective relationships with animals as a key feature of their development as compassionate, benign and sensible adults. For Locke, humanity is not a quality that humans are born with but “the product of an educational process that relies on the relationship to animals to elicit and direct emotions” (p. 202). Boggs then draws a line and links Locke’s claims to the birth of a new type of sentimentalist literature that instead of linking the reader’s ability to feel deeply for other people, creates emotional connections with animals pressing the reader “beyond the human and the humanist pale” (p. 203).

Didactic songs, tales and fables became a popular genre in nineteenth-century America. In them, animals were used to teach children how to be kind thanks to their “double role”: as models for behavior and as vulnerable beings “whose vulnerability and exposure to potential cruelty” taught children to be kind (p. 206). In these texts, children relate to animals “through a double sense of identification and separation”: because children identify with animals, they treat them kindly, but this same kindness is the trait that will differentiate them from the animals (p. 207). As Angela Sorby puts it, in this type of literature animals aided children to assert their identity as human “by ultimately reinforcing, human-animal boundaries” (Sorby, 2007, p. 308).

Boggs affirms that, in Dickinson’s writings, the relationships between people and animals are used for exactly the opposite function. As we have seen previously, Dickinson would not consider kindness a strictly human emotion. Since the poet’s natural environments are sentient, emotions cannot be the defining trait that makes a human humane. It is because of this blurring of boundaries that Boggs believes the human-animal relation in her poems “provides modes of resisting social orders and for imagining alternative subjectivities” (Boggs, 2012, p. 203).

In “A little Dog that wags his tail” Dickinson uses the form, meter and rhyme of a didactic song but with a completely opposed aim: to “suspen[d] the child’s entry into an adult symbolic order that turns animals into dead metaphors” (p. 207):

A little Dog that wags his tail
And knows no other joy
Of such a little Dog am I
Reminded by a Boy

Who gambols all the living Day
Without an earthly cause
Because he is a little Boy
I honestly suppose —

The Cat that in the Corner dwells
Her martial Day forgot
The Mouse but a Tradition now
Of her desireless Lot

Another class remind me
Who neither please nor play
But not to make a "bit of noise"
Beseech each little Boy — (J1185)

Here, like in a conventional didactic song, the boy is like the dog. But the moral lesson which would suggest that "such likeness obliges [the boy] to a kindness that ultimately separates him from the dog" is missing: the trope is reversed, and boy and dog "resist their didactic separation from one another" (Boggs, 2012, p. 208). Dickinson boundaries are ampler, and less moralistic; this, in turn, creates relationships that are not anthropomorphic because they are not asking to imagine the nonhuman as human and the human as differentiated and stable, but on the contrary "the play of affections involves unsettling individualistic identities" (Sorby, 2007, p. 308). For Dickinson, like for Locke, "being human" is not a stable state but a process "that entails dwelling in what Dickinson calls "Possibility". And there is no better way to generate this possibility than playing (Sorby, 2007, p. 304).

“Wading in the Water For the Disobedience’ Sake”: Transgressive nature

In her poem “I dwell in Possibility —” (J657) Dickinson opens with an opposition between possibility and prose. Possibility in the poem suggests multiplicity, opportunities, freedom and, ultimately, poetry. Prose, on the other hand, stands for everything that poetry is not: the matter-of-fact, the dry, the serious, the dull, the limiting (Barker, 2003, p. 77). For Dickinson, prose is too oppressive, the only way to “gather Paradise” is through possibility. This preference for what is not fixed, for what changes is perfectly exemplified in “I dwell in Possibility -” but the poet’s “lifelong conversation with the ambiguous, fluid, and wild natural world” can be traced in many other poems (Parks, 2013, p. 1).

If there was ever a landscape in New England that resisted prosaic definition, where to “dwell in possibility” and experience fluidity and ambiguity, it was the swamp. David C. Miller identified the nineteenth century swamp as a new location for psychological projection, a place where the natural world resisted any imposed order (1989, pp. 8-9). Swamps are “hybrid and multivalent”, “a continuum between terra and aqua" (Howarth, 1999, as cited in Parks, 2013, p. 2), a “glorious and bewildering impropriety”, “where Nature has raptures and frenzies” (Stowe, 1873, as cited in Parks, 2013, p. 5), “intensely and luridly green, yet overlaid with the pale gray of last year’s reeds”, “weird and dazzling”, “the spirit of the place appear[ing] live, wild, fantastic” (Higginson, 1889, as cited in Parks, 2013, p. 5), “ the marrow, of Nature” (Thoreau, 2010, as cited in Parks, 2013, p. 4). In the swamp, nature excels at possibility, defies dichotomies as rigid as land and water, or life and death. For Dickinson it may have been *the* place “for fecund and transgressive play” (Parks, 2013, p. 5).

In “The Swamps of Emily Dickinson", Cecily Parks explores the nineteenth century fascination with swamps in Dickinson’s poetry. Parks argues that the poet was inspired by the swamps, first as a place for adventure, as many of the flowers in her herbarium prove (2013, p. 2), and later on as a fertile imaginary location in which to dwell in possibility (p. 12). Because the swamp refuses to be classified, Parks thinks it “would have encouraged Dickinson to explore unconventional gendering” inspired by “the fluidity, illegibility, and disorderliness that the swamp proposes” (p. 2). The product of this influence is Dickinson’s swamp-inspired poems, which “do not describe swamps; rather … what it feels like to be a woman nature poet who admires the natural world at its most liminal, illegible, and wild" (p. 12).

This idea, that in the swamp Dickinson can explore the possibility of performing multiple identities can be seen in “So I pull my Stockings off”:

So I pull my Stockings off
Wading in the Water
For the Disobedience’ Sake
Boy that lived for “or’ter”

Went to Heaven perhaps at Death
And perhaps he didn’t
Moses wasn’t fairly used—
Ananias wasn’t— (J1201)

The speaker of this poem appears to be female, pulling off her stockings “[those] feminine trappings whose removal in this poem emerges as both literal and symbolic” (Parks, 2013, p. 18). Once her feet are naked she is able to sensually experience the "Wading in the Water" that Parks connects with the swamps. After this first “Disobedience”, the speaker suffers a double transformation: first, the assumed female speaker is discovered as a child who is disobeying adult orders. Then, a line later, he transgresses gender and transforms into a “Boy” “who has broken free from the duty of what "'Ought to'" be done” (p. 18). In the second stanza, “Dickinson likens gender disobedience to religious disobedience”, emphasizing “the speaker's doubt as to what rewards earthly disobedience … might yield after death” (p. 19), as if suggesting that the true rewards are indeed in the transgression and never in the following of the rules.

Conclusion

The journey through the human-nature continuum in Emily Dickinson's nature poetry concludes here, where it started, with the human, proving that "although we cast *nature* and *culture* as opposites, in fact they constantly mingle, like water and soil in a flowing stream" (Howarth, 1994, as cited in Newman, 2005). This guide has traced an arc that links both sides of the continuum, both sides of the metaphor. It has attempted to avoid preference for one pole over the other, looking at the vehicle (nature) and the tenor (human) in the same way, since the interest is in seeing how they interact and affect on another.

In order to do so, we first have torn the two dominions of meaning apart, so that we could then focus our attention on nature without the influence of the symbolic meaning attached to it. The readings and poems analyzed have demonstrated how Emily Dickinson was an environmentally aware poet, who approached the natural world empirically, and described it as an autonomous entity. The nature that populates her poetry has agency and it exists beyond the symbolic realm. Moreover, thanks to her naturalist eye, we have seen how Dickinson was able to see that nature is made out of small things that were usually overlooked in the poetry and science of her time. With her poems she tries to bestow them back to their righteous place as equal members of a larger ecological network.

The second chapter of the guide has covered how science for Dickinson, though useful, was not enough to engage and comprehend the natural world. Affective experience is recurrently included in her nature poetry as the means to interact with the nonhuman. This trait, after having been dismissed historically, has lately been reassessed as a key element of her poetry. For Dickinson, emotions need to be included because they are what we share with the other, the only possible way to communicate and to create strong bonds. Because it is not a strictly human characteristic, this affect challenges any hierarchical order that humans try to impose on nature. Moreover, it is thanks to affect, and cuteness in particular, that the small and overlooked can acquire their power. Dickinson, thus, invites the reader to engage, through emotions, with the non-human alterity to rescue the small from disempowerment and to challenge fixed and stable categories.

Finally, the articles and poems appearing in the third chapter explore how Dickinson finds inspiration in the fluidity, ambiguity and mutability of the natural world. Because she believes that the boundaries are artificial human constructs, she problematizes those social conventions which are based upon them. If what it means to be human cannot be defined as something stable, it means that the door to a more open, malleable construction of subjectivities is opened. Dickinson's nature is always playing, changing and transforming, and so, the speakers and characters that are in touch with the non-hierarchical force of nature see how they too can perform multiple identities.

Thus, this journey, or guide, has invited the reader to approach nature and its representation in a responsible environmentally aware way. However, it has proven too, that a strict referential approach that might be useful for a scientific text is insufficient for a literary one. Poetry needs emotion because affective experiences are what allows us to connect with the other. Dickinson's poetry is an invitation to play, to resist definition, to explore multiplicity; an invitation to be brave enough to step outside the security of the planks, to submerge ourselves in the swamp so that we can be transformed and "dwell in Possibility" (J657).

References

Primary source

Dickinson, E. (2015). *Poesías Completas. Tomo I, II, III.* Visor Libros.

Secondary Sources

Asahina, M. (2005). Fascination' Is Absolute of Clime': Reading Dickinson's Correspondence with Higginson as Naturalist. *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, 14(2), 103-119. https://doi.org/10.1353/edj.2006.0001

Barker, W. (2003). Emily Dickinson and Poetic Strategy. In W. Martin (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson*, pp. 191-214. Cambridge University Press.

Boggs, C. G. (2014). Animals and the Formation of Liberal Subjectivity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature. In R. Castronovo (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, pp. 197-216. Oxford University Press.

Dickey, C. (2004). *Classes on Modern Poets and the Art of Poetry*. University of South Carolina Press.

Gerhardt, C. (2006). 'Often Seen-but Seldom Felt': Emily Dickinson's Reluctant Ecology of Place. *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, 15(1), 56-78. https://doi.org/10.1353/edj.2006.0020

Gerhardt, C. (2014). *A Place for Humility: Whitman, Dickinson, and the Natural World*. University of Iowa Press.

Gerhardt, C. (2017). Emily Dickinson now: environments, ecologies, politics. *ESQ*, 63(2), 329-355. https://doi.org/10.1353/esq.2017.0012

Gribbin, L. (1993). Emily Dickinson's Circumference: Figuring a Blind Spot in the Romantic Tradition. *The Emily Dickinson journal*, 2(1), 1-21. https://doi.org/10.1353/edj.0.0142

Knickerbocker, S. (2008). Emily Dickinson's Ethical Artifice. *Interdisciplinary studies in literature and environment.* 15(2), 185-197. https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/15.2.185

Kuhn, M. (2018). Dickinson and the Politics of Plant Sensibility. *ELH*, 85(1), 141-170. https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.2018.0005

Martin, M. (2007). *The Cambridge Introduction to Emily Dickinson.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Miller, D. (1989). *Dark Eden: The Swamp in Nineteenth-Century Culture*. Cambridge University Press.

Mitchell, D. (2003). Emily Dickinson and Class. In W. Martin (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson*, pp. 191-214. Cambridge University Press.

Newman, L. (2005). *Our Common Dwelling: Henry Thoreau, Transcendentalism, and the Class Politics of Nature.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Oxford University Press. (2022). Nature. In *Lexico.com.* Retrieved May 11, 2022. https://www.lexico.com/browse/nature

Parks, C. (2013). The Swamps of Emily Dickinson. *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, 22(1), 1-29. https://doi.org/10.1353/edj.2013.0004

Peel, R. (2010). *Emily Dickinson and the Hill of Science*. Farleigh Dickinson University Press.

Sherman, G. D. & Haidt, J. (2011). Cuteness and Disgust: The Humanizing and Dehumanizing Effects of Emotion. *Emotion Review*, 3(3), 245-251.

Simons, J. (2019). Dickinson's Lyric Ornithology. *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, 28(1), 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1353/edj.2019.0000

Soper, K. (2001). *What is Nature? Culture, Politics, and the non-Human.* Blackwell.

Sorby, A. (2007). ‘A Dimple in the Tomb': Cuteness in Emily Dickinson. *ESQ*, 63(2), 297-328. https://doi.org/10.1353/esq.2017.0011

Terada, R. (2001) *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the “Death of the Subject.”.* Harvard University Press.

White, F. D. (1992). ‘Sweet skepticism of the heart’: Science in the poetry of Emily Dickinson. *College Literature*, 19(1), 121-29.

Bibliography

Buell, L. (1999) The Ecocritical Insurgency. *New Literary History.* 30(3), 699-712.

Coupe, L. (2000). *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism.* Routledge.

Emerson, R. W. (1983). *Essays and lectures*. Literary Classics

Evans, M. (2011). "Itself is all the like": Selfsameness in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson. *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, 20(2), 83-105.

Freeman, M. H., McLoughlin, N. (2021). "To pile like Thunder": The Advantages of Reading Emily Dickinson's Poetry from a Cognitive Perspective. *The Emily Dickinson Journal*,30(1), 1-26.

Jung, E. (2015). The Breath of Emily Dickinson's Dashes. *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, 24(2), 1-23.

Lanham, M. (2015). *Writing the Environment in Nineteenth-Century American Literature: The Ecological Awareness of Early Scribes of Nature.* Lexington Books.

Larson, K. (2011). *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Poetry*. Cambridge University Press.

Liu, X. (2020). Emily Dickinson and Her Metonymical Way of Knowing Nature. *Fudan journal of the humanities and social sciences*, 13(4), 573-590.

Martin, W. (2003). *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stocks, K. (1988). *Em*ily *Dickinson and the Modern Consciousness.* Macmillan Press.

Pollak, V. R. (1986). *Dickinson: The Anxiety of Gender*. Cornell University Press.

Appendix

Additional poems

“You'll know Her — by Her Foot —”: Emily Dickinson’s naturalist’s eye

"Nature" is what we see —
The Hill — the Afternoon —
Squirrel — Eclipse — the Bumble bee —
Nay — Nature is Heaven —
Nature is what we hear —
The Bobolink — the Sea —
Thunder — the Cricket —
Nay — Nature is Harmony —
Nature is what we know —
Yet have no art to say —
So impotent Our Wisdom is
To her Simplicity. (J668)

*

Four Trees — upon a solitary Acre —
Without Design
Or Order, or Apparent Action —
Maintain —

The Sun — upon a Morning meets them —
The Wind —
No nearer Neighbor — have they —
But God —

The Acre gives them — Place —
They — Him — Attention of Passer by —
Of Shadow, or of Squirrel, haply —

Or Boy —

What Deed is Theirs unto the General Nature —
What Plan
They severally — retard — or further —
Unknown — (J742)

*

How the old Mountains drip with Sunset
How the Hemlocks burn —
How the Dun Brake is draped in Cinder
By the Wizard Sun —

How the old Steeples hand the Scarlet
Till the Ball is full —
Have I the lip of the Flamingo
That I dare to tell?

Then, how the Fire ebbs like Billows —
Touching all the Grass
With a departing — Sapphire — feature —
As a Duchess passed —

How a small Dusk crawls on the Village
Till the Houses blot
And the odd Flambeau, no men carry
Glimmer on the Street —

How it is Night — in Nest and Kennel —
And where was the Wood —
Just a Dome of Abyss is Bowing
Into Solitude —

These are the Visions flitted Guido —
Titian — never told —
Domenichino dropped his pencil —
Paralyzed, with Gold — (J291)

*

A Murmur in the Trees — to note —
Not loud enough — for Wind —
A Star — not far enough to seek —
Nor near enough — to find —

A long — long Yellow — on the Lawn —
A Hubbub — as of feet —
Not audible — as Ours — to Us —
But dapperer — More Sweet —

A Hurrying Home of little Men
To Houses unperceived —
All this — and more — if I should tell —
Would never be believed —

Of Robins in the Trundle bed
How many I espy
Whose Nightgowns could not hide the Wings —
Although I heard them try —

But then I promised ne'er to tell —
How could I break My Word?
So go your Way — and I'll go Mine —
No fear you'll miss the Road. (J416)

“Our little Kinsmen”: Dickinson interest on the small

Pink — small — and punctual —
Aromatic — low —
Covert — in April —
Candid — in May —
Dear to the Moss —
Known to the Knoll —
Next to the Robin
In every human Soul —
Bold little Beauty
Bedecked with thee
Nature forswears
Antiquity — (J1332)

*

The Grass so little has to do —
A Sphere of simple Green —
With only Butterflies to brood
And Bees to entertain —

And stir all day to pretty Tunes
The Breezes fetch along —
And hold the Sunshine in its lap
And bow to everything —

And thread the Dews, all night, like Pearls —
And make itself so fine
A Duchess were too common
For such a noticing —

And even when it dies — to pass

In Odors so divine —
Like Lowly spices, lain to sleep —
Or Spikenards, perishing —

And then, in Sovereign Barns to dwell —
And dream the Days away,
The Grass so little has to do
I wish I were a Hay — (J333)

*

There is a flower that Bees prefer —
And Butterflies — desire —
To gain the Purple Democrat
The Humming Bird — aspire —

And Whatsoever Insect pass —
A Honey bear away
Proportioned to his several dearth
And her — capacity —

Her face be rounder than the Moon
And ruddier than the Gown
Or Orchis in the Pasture —
Or Rhododendron — worn —

She doth not wait for June —
Before the World be Green —
Her sturdy little Countenance
Against the Wind — be seen —

Contending with the Grass —
Near Kinsman to Herself —

For Privilege of Sod and Sun —
Sweet Litigants for Life —

And when the Hills be full —
And newer fashions blow —
Doth not retract a single spice
For pang of jealousy —

Her Public — be the Noon —
Her Providence — the Sun —
Her Progress — by the Bee — proclaimed —
In sovereign — Swerveless Tune —

The Bravest — of the Host —
Surrendering — the last —
Nor even of Defeat — aware —
What cancelled by the Frost — (J308)

*

Dew — is the Freshet in the Grass —
'Tis many a tiny Mill
Turns unperceived beneath our feet
And Artisan lies still —

We spy the Forests and the Hills
The Tents to Nature's Show
Mistake the Outside for the in
And mention what we saw.

Could Commentators on the Sign
Of Nature's Caravan

Obtain "Admission" as a Child
Some Wednesday Afternoon. (J1097)

"a Mourner, like Myself": Affect as the link between the human and the natural

Flowers — Well — if anybody
Can the ecstasy define —
Half a transport — half a trouble —
With which flowers humble men:
Anybody find the fountain
From which floods so contra flow —
I will give him all the Daisies
Which upon the hillside blow.

Too much pathos in their faces
For a simple breast like mine —
Butterflies from St. Domingo
Cruising round the purple line —
Have a system of aesthetics —
Far superior to mine. (J137)

*

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

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

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

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

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

With infinite Affection —
And infiniter Care —
Her Golden finger on Her lip —
Wills Silence — Everywhere — (J790)

*

Bloom — is Result — to meet a Flower
And casually glance
Would scarcely cause one to suspect
The minor Circumstance

Assisting in the Bright Affair
So intricately done
Then offered as a Butterfly
To the Meridian —

To pack the Bud — oppose the Worm —
Obtain its right of Dew —
Adjust the Heat — elude the Wind —
Escape the prowling Bee

Great Nature not to disappoint
Awaiting Her that Day —
To be a Flower, is profound
Responsibility — (J1058)

*

I robbed the Woods —
The trusting Woods.
The unsuspecting Trees
Brought out their Burs and mosses
My fantasy to please.
I scanned their trinkets curious — I grasped — I bore away —
What will the solemn Hemlock —
What will the Oak tree say? (J41)

"A fuzzy fellow, without feet": Cuteness as an affective strategy to engage with the other

Bee! I'm expecting you!
Was saying Yesterday
To Somebody you know
That you were due —

The Frogs got Home last Week —
Are settled, and at work —
Birds, mostly back —

The Clover warm and thick —

You'll get my Letter by
The seventeenth; Reply
Or better, be with me —
Yours, Fly. (J1035)

*

Pigmy seraphs — gone astray —
Velvet people from Vevay —
Balles from some lost summer day —
Bees exclusive Coterie —
Paris could not lay the fold
Belted down with Emerald —
Venice could not show a check
Of a tint so lustrous meek —
Never such an Ambuscade
As of briar and leaf displayed
For my little damask maid —

I had rather wear her grace
Than an Earl's distinguished face —
I had rather dwell like her
Than be "Duke of Exeter" —
Royalty enough for me
To subdue the Bumblebee. (p. 138)

*

The morns are meeker than they were -
The nuts are getting brown -
The berry's cheek is plumper -

The Rose is out of town -

The maple wears a gayer scarf -
The field - a scarlet gown -
Lest I sh'd seem old fashioned
I'll put a trinket on! (J12)

“Of such a little Dog am I Reminded by a Boy”: Didactic nature

A Bird came down the Walk —
He did not know I saw —
He bit an Angleworm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,

And then he drank a Dew
From a convenient Grass —
And then hopped sidewise to the Wall
To let a Beetle pass —

He glanced with rapid eyes
That hurried all around —
They looked like frightened Beads, I thought —
He stirred his Velvet Head

Like one in danger, Cautious,
I offered him a Crumb
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home —

Than Oars divide the Ocean,
Too silver for a seam —

Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon
Leap, splashless as they swim. (J328)

*

A narrow Fellow in the Grass
Occasionally rides -
You may have met Him? Did you not
His notice instant is-

The Grass divides as with a Comb -
A spotted shaft is seen,
And then it closes at your Feet
And opens further on -

He likes a Boggy Acre -
A Floor too cool for Corn -
But when a Boy and Barefoot
I more than once at Noon

Have passed I thought a Whip Lash
Unbraiding in the Sun
When stooping to secure it
It wrinkled And was gone -

Several of Nature's People
I know, and they know me
I feel for them a transport
Of cordiality

But never met this Fellow,
Attended or alone

Without a tighter Breathing
And Zero at the Bone. (J986)

*

Many a phrase has the English language —
I have heard but one —
Low as the laughter of the Cricket,
Loud, as the Thunder's Tongue —

Murmuring, like old Caspian Choirs,
When the Tide's a' lull —
Saying itself in new infection —
Like a Whippoorwill —

Breaking in bright Orthography
On my simple sleep —
Thundering its Prospective —
Till I stir, and weep —

Not for the Sorrow, done me —
But the push of Joy —
Say it again, Saxon!
Hush — Only to me! (J276)

“Wading in the Water For the Disobedience’ Sake”: Transgressive nature

Sweet is the swamp with its secrets,
Until we meet a snake;
'Tis then we sigh for houses,
And our departure take

At that enthralling gallop
That only childhood knows.
A snake is summer's treason,
And guile is where it goes. (J1740)

*

I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you — Nobody — too?
Then there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! they'd advertise — you know.

How dreary — to be — Somebody!
How public — like a Frog —
To tell one's name — the livelong June —
To an admiring Bog! (J288)

*

A Burdock — clawed my Gown —
Not Burdock's — blame —
But mine —
Who went too near
The Burdock's Den —

A Bog — affronts my shoe —
What else have Bogs — to do —
The only Trade they know —
The splashing Men!
Ah, pity — then!

'Tis Minnows can despise!
The Elephant's — calm eyes

Look further on! (J229)

*

A Prison gets to be a friend —
Between its Ponderous face
And Ours — a Kinsmanship express —
And in its narrow Eyes —

We come to look with gratitude
For the appointed Beam
It deal us — stated as our food —
And hungered for — the same —

We learn to know the Planks —
That answer to Our feet —
So miserable a sound — at first —
Nor ever now — so sweet —

As plashing in the Pools —
When Memory was a Boy —
But a Demurer Circuit —
A Geometric Joy —

The Posture of the Key
That interrupt the Day
To Our Endeavor — Not so real
The Check of Liberty —

As this Phantasm Steel —
Whose features — Day and Night —
Are present to us — as Our Own —
And as escapeless — quite —

The narrow Round — the Stint —
The slow exchange of Hope —
For something passiver — Content
Too steep for looking up —

The Liberty we knew
Avoided — like a Dream —
Too wide for any Night but Heaven —
If That — indeed — redeem — (J652)

*

Betrothed to Righteousness might be
An Ecstasy discreet
But Nature relishes the Pinks
Which she was taught to eat — (J1641)