



## Eco-Feminism in Emily Dickinson's Poetry

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### Abstract

Through the study of Emily Dickinson's life and her works as well as the comments on her, the thesis is intended to find out that how Eco-feminism influences her works and life deeply, and the perspective of Eco-feminism in her poetry. As one of the most prominent poetesses in the nineteenth century, Emily Dickinson made a great impact on American literature, and she was praised as "the most topping poetess in the west since Sapphic". She was outstanding among the contemporary poets for her unique writing style, creating images and profound ideology. This thesis begins with the fundamental introduction of Emily Dickinson and the Eco-feminist criticism. Based on the former researches on Dickinson and her poetry, this paper further discusses Dickinson's Eco-feminism, mainly exploring Dickinson's rebellion and challenge on the religious belief, literary trends and social tradition in the nineteenth century. After that, this thesis analyzes the themes and styles of Dickinson's poetry from Eco-feminism. Through the Eco-feminist reading of the themes and styles of Dickinson's poetry, Dickinson research not only means to make a detailed description and analysis of her life and poetry, but also means to provide new interpretive methods and appreciating perspectives. In the first chapter of this essay, I just explain the Eco-feminism idea in a whole way. The reflection of Eco-feminism to Dickinson's life and her poems writing are discussed in the second and third chapter. In the last chapter, I mainly analyze the Eco-feminist style in Dickinson's poems.

**Key words:** Emily Dickinson; poems; Eco-feminism

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### INTRODUCTION

#### A. Definition of Eco-Feminism

Eco-feminism represents the union of the radical ecology movement and feminism. As Rosemary Ruether wrote in her book in 1975, *New Woman/New Earth*: "Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to the ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination." "Eco-feminism", a "new term for an ancient wisdom" grew out of various social movements — the feminist, peace and ecology movements — in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Though the term was first used by Francoise D'Eaubonne, it became popular in the context of numerous protests and activities against environmental destruction, sparked-off initially by recurring ecological disasters. Francoise D'Eaubonne believes that there is a direct link between the oppression of women and the denigration of nature; the liberation of women and nature can not be separated. The meltdown at Three Mile Island prompted large numbers of women in the USA to come together in the first Eco-feminist conference — "Women and Life on Earth, which was a conference on Eco-feminism in the eighties" — in March 1980, at Amherst. At this conference the connections between feminism and militarization, healing and ecology were explored. As Ynestra King, one of the Conference organizers wrote: "Eco-feminism is about connectedness and wholeness of theory and practice. It asserts the special strength and integrity of every living thing. For us the snail darter is to be considered side by side with a community's need for water, the porpoise side by side with appetite for tuna,

and the creatures it may fall on with Skylab. We are a woman — identified movement and we believe we have a special work to do in these imperiled times. We see the devastation of the earth and her beings in the corporate warriors, and the threat of nuclear annihilation by the military warriors.

As to Eco-feminism, there are two kinds of understanding, i.e. the Ecology of feminism and the feminism of Ecology. Eco-feminism is produced under the influence of both the internal impulse of Eco-feminist theories and the external force of ecological movement, and it is based on the feminists' meditation on the environment and their participation in the environmental movement (Cooper, 1999, p.56).

## B. Definition of Eco-Feminist Criticism

New achievements were obtained in the 1990s. Karen J. Warren made a detailed illustration of the core assumption of ecological feminists; then she pointed out: (a) The oppression of women and the oppression of nature had important linkages; (b) Understanding the essence of these links was essential for the full understanding of the oppression of nature and women; Eco-feminist Ariel Kay Salleh pointed out that men's hatred against women led to their hatred against nature, which dominated men's action, and also was the principle mechanism dominates western/patriarchal culture as a whole, however, Australia ecological feminist, Val Plumwood, expressed her concerns on women. She suggested that women can not obtain true personal development though they had the opportunity to become real partners of men, and participated in the battle of controlling and dominating nature. The duality between men and women either can be bridged or become a harmonious whole. Furthermore, the female members in this long-term confrontation with the dual structure can only be inoculated to be male members.

## C. Main concepts and arguments of Eco-Feminist Criticism

Eco feminists argue against anthropocentrism and androcentrism, and advocate changing the thought that human beings rule nature. They believe that this thought originates from the thought that men control men. Eco-feminists criticize the male-cultural values, and praise the nature of women and oppose those which can lead to exploitative, dominative, and offensive values. Eco-feminism criticizes the male-centered knowledge framework, and its goal is to establish a Utopia which follows ecological concerns and feminist principles.

The arguments of Eco-feminist criticism are as follows:

(a) Both the exploitation of nature and of women arises for the same reason. Eco-feminists to establish this reason by showing that in both cases it is the masculinist and patriarchal drive for dominance. Iris Marion Young puts

it in this way: Since the exploitation of nature is bound to social processes that oppress people, and since the logic of all these systems of domination is not modeled on the basis of the logic of male domination, neither nature nor women will be liberated without an explicit confrontation with the structures of male domination. This exploitative dominance arises from the hierarchical thinking that characterizes patriarchy and justifies the subordination of an "inferior" group of their "superiors". Eco-feminists encourage us to see beyond the patriarchal hierarchy that Eco-feminism allows dominance and exploitation of less valued toward a feminist vision that might both free women and save the planet.

(b) The reason for the connection of ecology and feminism is the objectification of nature and women. The destruction of the environment and the oppression of women is easy to do because nature and women have been objectified as "others". In the present case, nature and women become an object and commodity. One of the most basic misconceptions, reinforced by thousands of cultural details, is that we are autonomous individuals who observe and make rational decisions about a world that is "others" to us. Eco-feminists argue against such dualistic modes of thought and the dichotomous separations. The dualism of self and nature or self and women is replaced by a complexity of interrelatedness, the world as symbiotic unity is more powerful for its variation.

(c) Science and technology are tools of patriarchal dominance. Eco-feminists are against science and technology as presently practiced, These patriarchal beliefs blind us to the deterioration of the natural social ecosystem and therefore should be seen as a part of pathological philosophy derived from an anthropocentric and, Eco-feminists would stress, androcentric culture.

(d) The feminine must be restored for natural, personal and social wholeness. This Eco-feminist whole is not the traditional transcendent and abstract biotic oneness, as well as the old masculinist dodge of mystics and poets. It is a new sense of wholeness based on revaluing the whole person in the natural world. The whole of woman and nature must be revalued.

(e) The spiritual dimension of life must be restored. Eco-feminists call for restoration of the spiritual dimension of living which is lost in the productive and consumptive materialism of our "white and white" world. Eco-theologians call for a re-enchantment of the natural world so that we might be truly moved by the transcendent spirituality of nature and honor it in a profound way. Many spiritual Eco-feminists see the major problems of our times as not political, economic, or social, but spiritual and they call for rethinking of the relation of humanity and spirituality in nature. For Eco-feminists and Eco-theologians, humans must reacquire themselves with the sacred text of the natural world and see spirituality as participation in the spiritual quality of the universe itself. They see this spiritual quality in which

they call an “ecological process theology” that asserts the interconnection between things, organisms, and their environment, as well as the necessity of human reverence for and kinship with other things and creatures.

(f) Patriarchal institutions and ideologies in our culture, and in the environmental movement itself, must be challenged. Eco-feminism is an activist political ideology.

## 1. ECO-FEMINISM REFLECTED IN EMILY DICKINSON'S LIFE

### 1.1 Emily Dickinson's Challenge of Religion

The majorities of American people in the nineteenth century were under the remaining influence of Puritanism, being strict with moral and religion, and depended firmly on God's save.

Emily Dickinson was a product of the New England tradition of moral Calvinism, her dissatisfaction with the tradition led to her questioning most of its theology and discarding much of it, and led to her by reinterpreting some of it. Perhaps her most rebellious behavior of protesting religion was that she refused to fast in the morning of Christmas Eve and was punished to stand before her classmates for a long time. Thus she was sent home and finished her education at school. Her letters from 1848 to 1854 reflect her struggles against the forces which challenge her to give herself openly to Christ. The letters move from hopeful consideration of church membership, through rebellion and fear of its outcome, to a resigned determination to stand apart from her community.

Dickinson was born in a religious family, and her father was a Christian. Her father was generous and frank, so Dickinson devoted her worship and daily hard work to him, but he still held contradictory attitudes to them. In her mind, her father was severe and imperious. From her memory as a child, her father always evolved in the law business and never cared her. She thought her father like Crowell and ancient Roman general. Before she was 20 years old, her father was the main person who influenced her personalities. She always talked about her father in the letters to her friends and relatives.

After she grew up, she felt dissatisfied to her father's stern education way. On the one hand, her father's firm preference to her elder brother Edward and frequent ignorance of her intellectual advantages hurt her, and gradually came out collusion. On the other hand, the authoritative position and personal enchantment still played the dominative role. Jane Eberwein summarizes in her work *Dickinson: Strategies of Limitation* as follows:

Dickinson's father-master-lover figure elicits awe, terror, even rage. She finds him fascinating but cruel and knows that she must somehow evade his dominance that reduces her to a condition of feminine victimization even as she gathers to herself his power.

An analysis of the representation of the Deity in Dickinson's poems confirms the parental archetype: rejecting, absent, absent-minded, careless, businesslike, incompetent, contradictory, and pernicious. Edward Dickinson came first: God is simply a blown-up version, a ballooned Edward Dickinson on a string whom the daughter addressed as “Father in Heaven”.

Furthermore, British poet Issac Watts also played an important role in Dickinson's religious thought. Watts made great contribution to the broadcast of religious for his widespread anthems. However, his disrespectful attitude towards God and Bible also was criticized at large (Zhou, 2002, p.165). Watts refused to accept Bible and also attempted to recompose it. English professor and writer Martha Winburn England believes each anthem of Watts can be regarded as the criticism or annotation of Bible, so these poems are the expression of his startling individualism and the mockery of tradition. When Dickinson was in the middle age, she mentioned that these anthems gave her deep impression: How precious Thought and Speech are! “A present so divine,” was in a Hymn they used to sing when I went to Church. From Watts, she found a sort of devotional and challengeable religious spirit, and was driven to explore her own poetic styles consistent with her own characteristics.

Moreover, the influence from some people surrounds her, such as her friends Benjamin Franklin Newton and Charles Wadsworth who had much in common with her, particularly in the opinion towards God, was also an important factor that makes her does not believe in God. Newton's attitude towards God is commensurate with Dickinson's religious belief. It is attracted Dickinson by his special sermonizing way. In some sense, it is Wadsworth who changed her religious attitudes. Wadsworth might have been the model for the lovers in her poems, though it is likely that the literary figure is purely imaginary.

Emily began her adult life, therefore, with the conscience and the heart of a Christian but without the faith and the hopes that sustained other Christians when they were faced with the suffering and complexity of living.

### 1.2 Emily Dickinson's Rebellion of Society

Literally speaking, women in Victorian Age, especially those married women in the upper-class families should have lived a happy life, because they do not need to do a lot of housework. However, it can not prove that they are happy, because they do not have any right in the society, but waste their life in emptiness. Women are the toy of their husbands.

Emily's childhood was not so different from the early years of many New England girls in the nineteenth century ideal of American womanhood. Her parents wished her to be a Christian, to attend household duties, to enjoy in a limited culture and education, and to devote herself someday to a husband of her own. However,

her originality of soul caused her to frustrate every one of their expectations for her in later life. In choosing to devote herself to the pursuit of great art, she challenged and rejected the psychic and social stereotyped images of the woman of her era. Dickinson said, "If wife is my entitlement, then can I be a poet? What is good for obtaining a family but losing soul?"

Clearly, Dickinson was attracted to masculine forms of power. She wrote approvingly of a portrait of Italian actor Tommaso Salvini in 1884 because it brought to her mind about her father: "The brow is that of Deity — the eyes, those of the lost, but the power lies in the Throat — pleading, sovereign, savage — the panther and the dove!" Her admiration for her father and the Master letters further confirm their attraction to stimulate versions of male force. She had fallen in love with the intimidating Judge Lord when she was young. She described his face in these terms in 1885: "Had I not loved it, I had feared it, the Face had such ascension."

Dickinson's mother, Emily Norcross Dickinson, who appeared to have been a reticent and submissive wife, had attended a finishing school for young ladies in New Haven; she appeared to have been a submissive, gentle woman who was drawn instinctively to the intense masculinity of Edward Dickinson; and they were married on May 7, 1828. She was devoted to her husband and understood her role to be one in which she simply served her husband and maintained a well-ordered home for him. A year after her husband's death, Mrs. Dickinson became paralyzed and remained an invalid for seven years, largely under the care of her daughter, Emily; and not until this time did her daughter begin to accept and cherish her.

In 1861, American civil war broke out. As a member of a family with strong political atmosphere, Dickinson must have known of civil war. However, among all her poems, seldom poems concern about this influential event. Feminist critics believe that Dickinson's life is not a kind of escape, elusion, sacrifice or substitute; it is a kind of strategy or creation of remaining self (Thoreau, 1992, p.39). Dickinson's construction of a self is particularly focused on issues connected with power, authority, and control. Consequently, her own intelligence and ambition present a difficulty regarding identity, since these qualities signified "male" not "female" in the culture into which she was born.

In the U.S, in nineteenth century, women were politically considered inferior to men. It was widely accepted that men dominated the pens of writing, so female writers were few. Dickinson's attempts to create herself, therefore, had to do with finding a way to be a woman who had authority and authenticity in relation to all that are external to her. On the other hand, Dickinson found herself attracted to those already in possession of that power: to strong male figures like fathers, husbands, judges, generals, editors, clergymen, and, of course, God. Their love and admiration would give her power negates and

denies her own. She would have no separate identity if she gave herself over to them. And so she struggled to make a new space for herself. That struggle usually resulted in denying women access: keeping herself inviolate.

Individuality played a pervasive role in Dickinson's life as a result of her bout with separation. Emily did not conform to society. She did not believe it was society's place to dictate to her how she would lead her life. Her poems reflect this sense of rebellion and revolution against tradition. She chose to recluse herself from the public. For a long period, critics tried to discover the real reason, but each has their own understanding.

Even when Dickinson dealt directly with gender issues, clear statement on these issues is abrogated on behalf of jaunty stylistic gamesmanship, signaled by total fusions and shocking images. Take the poem "*I'm Wife — I've Finished that*" as an example:

I'm wife, I've finished that,  
That other state;  
I'm Czar, I'm woman now  
I'm Czar, I'm woman now  
It's safer so

How odd the girl's life looks  
Behind this soft eclipse!  
I think that earth seems so  
To those in heaven now.

This being comfort, then  
That other kind was pain;  
But why compare?  
I'm wife! Stop there!

This being comfort, then  
That other kind was pain;  
But why compare?  
I'm wife! Stop there!

(Dickinson, 1890, p.199)

Some critics have interpreted this as awry, anti-marriage poem extremely unusual in a day when marriage is extolled as the highest good. The fact is that American women's literature has long portrayed the suffering of wives. Indeed, the year before Dickinson wrote the above poem there had appeared a novel, *The Autobiography of a Married Woman*, whose heroine became so disillusioned with marriage that she exclaimed:

O, mothers! Train your daughters to self-reliance, and not to feel that they are to marry simply because everyone does marry...There are very few happy marriages; there can be but few, where interest and self-love of the tie.

Emily Dickinson might not mean to behave in the feminist way, but her reclusion and her being a poetess is really a slap of the traditional men and women dualism, and an expression of her female awareness subverting patriarchy.

### 1.3 Emily Dickinson's Eco-Feminist Idea Influenced Her Poems

The Eco-feminist idea expressed in Dickinson's poetry is one of the modern features of her poetry. She loves nature, goes close to nature and becomes friends with

flowers, trees, birds and insects in nature. In her nature poems, Dickinson depicts nature and the lives in nature, displaying the harmony between man and nature and the lives in nature, showing her respect and fear to nature. Dickinson adores nature, because nature in her spiritual bailment. Her detailed description of nature owes to her careful observation and being close to nature. Her love for nature originates from her respect for nature. Her love for nature is the starting point for the love of life and mankind, without which, there will be no love for life and mankind. Dickinson's love for mankind in her nature poems is embodied in her great concern for human beings' living conditions. Her nature poems contain striking modern consciousness.

Beclouded  
THE sky is low, the clouds are mean,  
A traveling flake of snow  
Across a barn or through a rut  
Debates if it will go.  
A narrow wind complains all day  
How some one treated him;  
Nature, like us, is sometimes caught  
Without her diadem.

(Dickinson, 1890, p.1075)

In the above two poems, we can see bird, cloud, sea and so on all the time. Dickinson loves expressing her motions by describing nature. In her poems, all the different things in nature have specific symbolic meanings. The air represents nothing; the wind represents that one can walk even without feet, can stand without bones, can come and go freely.

## 2. ECO-FEMINISM IN EMILY DICKINSON'S NATURE AND RELIGIOUS POEMS

### 2.1 Feminine Perspective In Dickinson's Nature Poems

#### 2.1.1 Value of Nature Reflected In Dickinson's Nature Poems

Influenced by Emerson's naturalism, she believes nature is everywhere. She spends most of her time in her garden and chamber, but she would never confine her thoughts in a limited scope. Actually she shows people a vivid nature in her eyes by her acute discernment and creative talent.

I never saw a Moor —  
I never saw the Sea —  
Yet know I how the Heather looks  
And what a Billow be.  
I never spoke with God  
Nor visited in Heaven —  
Yet certain am I of the spot  
As if the Checks were given —

(Dickinson, 1890, p.1052)

#### 2.1.2 Ecological Ethics of Harmony in Dickinson's Nature Poems

Human beings' aesthetic emotion to the nature's complete humanity contains several factors, namely the yearning for love, the appreciation to the sense of peace and the rhythm and beat of nature. Dickinson spent the most of her life in the countryside of New England, and the life in the countryside made her have full love to nature. She was familiar with the forest, grass, flowers, birds, animals, wind, rain, thunder, light, sun, moon, and stars. She observed and experience the nature deeply, and the nature poems written by her implied affluent ecological ethics thoughts. She gives nature such definition:

"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 important. Our Wisdom is  
To her Simplicity

(Dickinson, 1914, p.668)

The poetess applies some familiar objects in nature to define nature.

In her mind, the scene of nature is spread before the readers, and it is felt and perceived by individual sensation. This poem reveals the influence of Emerson's transcendental nature view on the poet, that is, nature is the harmonious coexistence of all the things we have known by our senses and intuition, and a dwelling place for so many fascinating creatures, emotions and vistas. (Moore, 2003, p.132)

She regularly uses the sensational expressions to freshly illuminate themes related to nature. Dickinson utilizes these common images not to concoct some adventurous plot but to praise the beauty of nature. ("Images of nature as female are deeply encoded into the texts of American history, art, and literature and function as ideologies for settlement.") Dickinson had written to Mary Bowles, "Nature is our eldest mother, she will do no harm", she portrays nature as the gentlest mother:

Nature — the Gentlest Mother is,  
Impatient of no Child —  
The feeblest — or the waywardest —  
Her Admonition mild —  
In Forest — and the Hill —  
By Traveler — be heard  
Restraining Rampant Squirrel —  
Or too impetuous Bird —

(Dickinson, 1891, p.790)

Nature is, here, personified as the gentlest mother, her vigilance never gets relaxed. Her incomparable love even

indulges the “Rampant Squirrel” and “Impetus Bird”, and her admonition becomes “mild”. In poem 219, she compares the striking and beautiful sunset to a diligent housewife who swings colorful broom and cleans the water pool. As this paper illustrated in the Introduction part, Eco-feminism considers nature is the mother of our human beings. Women and nature are closely related and this relationship is decided by the physical characteristic and the nature of women. Men can not be closely related to nature as women (Emmerson, 1994, p.54). However, Dickinson chooses to be a poetess unconsciously or subconsciously.

However, Dickinson's attitude toward nature is not like those of Wordsworth or Emerson. She holds a complete attitude. On the one hand, she loves nature and tends to praise it; on the other hand, she is scared of nature for its mystery and even hostile to it. Not all the creatures of nature can give the poet great affection and appreciation, such as snake. The poem “*A Narrow Fellow in the grass*” has received a good deal of critical attention, which literary critic Daniel Hoffman calling Dickinson's “*Zero at the Bone*” the finest image in American poetry.

### 2.1.3 Respect and Responsibility of Nature in Dickinson's Nature Poems

Dickinson expressed her respect and responsibility to nature by the rhythm in her poems. She described the members of nature with concise language. In her poems, she described the robin in the forest, the heavy sea, adorable children, simple and honest people. All the things she described are belong to the nature, which forms a harmonious movement full of vitality. At the same time, Dickinson was rational, the content of her poems was not only about the natural scenery and personal emotion, but also implied Dickinson's strong moral and responsible consciousness.

Dickinson expressed a kind of idea that everything in the world is equal and the philanthropic ethics by caring the life. She wrote, “If I can stop one heart from breaking/ I shall not live in vain/If I can ease one life the aching/ Or cool one pain/Or help one fainting robin/Unto this nest again/I shall not live in vain.” This poem penetrates strong life consciousness, caring consciousness and equality consciousness. Dickinson thought that human being is a part of nature; all the things in the world have life. In this little poem, she expressed her sympathy and love to the whole nature. She respected every life just as she respected her own life. She experienced others' lives as she experienced her own life. On the one hand, she accepted the kindness of life: sustained life, improved life and saved life; on the other hand, she knew the evil of life: ruin life and harm life. This moral code implied the sprout of ecological holism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which is a benign interaction between human beings and the nature.

Dickinson's poem and poetics thought are from the reflections on her own life. She's been putting her life into the nature, and felt the true, the good and the beautiful with a pure heart.

The Battlefield  
They dropped like flakes, they dropped like stars,  
Like petals from a rose,  
When suddenly across the June  
A wind with fingers goes.  
They perished in the seamless grass —  
No eye could find the place;  
But God on his repealless list  
Can summon every face.

‘Twas such a little — little boat  
That toddled down the bay!  
‘Twas such a gallant — gallant sea  
That beckoned it away!  
‘Twas such a greedy — greedy wave  
That licked it from the Coast —  
Nor ever guessed the stately sails  
My little craft was lost!

(Dickinson, 1891, p.409)

## 2.2 Religious Subjects in Dickinson's Poems Reflected Her Eco-Feminist View

Dickinson did not accept the religious thought from her father. However, she still can not get rid of the influence of religion.

She takes her to Christianity not as she finds it but as she alters it. She reads her Bible as a rhetorical manual. Her poems and letters are full of references to Genesis, Revelation, the Psalms, and the Gospels, but the references are invariably rhetorical. Nothing is necessary to be believed, only entertained as a trope. Dickinson often uses poetic language to narrate the procession of Jesus' birth, suffering and revival. Charles R Anderson regards these poems as “The Bible in American version”. In Dickinson's poems, God often appears in a kind and divine images as the contemporary poets sing.

The Savior must have been  
A docile Gentleman —  
To come so far so cold a day  
For little Fellowmen —

The road to Bethlehem  
Since he and I were boys  
Was leveled, but for that would be  
A rugged Billion Miles —

(Dickinson, 1915, p.1487)

The first stanza describes the birth of Jesus while the second one illustrates the scene of his staying with common people. He dares to “come so far so cold a day” Calvinism, an essential constitute of Western culture, is an ancient and traditional convention that connects man with culture and women with nature. Therefore, more and more feminists tend to regard religion as an oppressive tool and remain of patriarchy. They hold that nature and culture are not antithetical but mutually interdependent. Eco-feminists believe the appearance and flourish of religion originate from the masculinity and patriarchal drive for dominance. Patriarchal institutions and ideologies in our culture, and in the environmental movement itself, must be challenged.

### 3. ECO-FEMINIST STYLES IN EMILY DICKINSON'S POEMS

#### 3.1 Eco-Feminist Images in Dickinson's Poems

##### 3.1.1 Poems Portraying Animals

Emily Dickinson loved animals, and no doubt animals are the frequent roles in her poems, such as robins, bees, butterflies, birds, frogs, snakes, and even flies. The animals she describes are very lively. The following poem describing "bird" is quite evident:

A bird came down the walk;  
He did not know I saw;  
He bit an angle-worm in halves  
And ate the fellow, raw.

And then he drank a dew  
From a convenient grass,  
And the hopped sideways to the wall  
To let a beetle pass.

He glanced with rapid eyes  
That hurried all abroad, —  
They looked like frightened beads, I thought  
He stirred his velvet head

Like one in danger; cautions,  
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, plashless, as they swim.

(Dickinson, 1891, p.328)

The poetess' language is so delicate that it seems there is really a bird walking on the ground. But on the contrary, if devoid of love of little bird, she wouldn't have such trivial observation. The poetess offers the bird a "crumb", yet the bird flies away. The bird is so comfortable with the "convenient grass", and "let the beetle pass", nevertheless, it acts as distant with human beings. Maybe at that point, the poetess was asking herself the relationship between humankind and nature. The relationship is so subtle that once the balance was broke out, the reestablishment would be a difficulty. This poem expresses her attitude towards the fragile relationship between human and nature. The following poem "snake" may say more:

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

(Dickinson, 1866, p.986)

This is a quite famous poem, in which Dickinson calls it as "A narrow fellow in the grass" instead of the disgusting and slippery impression the snake usually make upon people's mind. The poetess speaks in a very peaceful tone as talking about an old friend. So her attitude toward animals is equal and friendly, treating them not as something eccentric.

##### 3.1.2 Poems Depicting Plants and Flowers

Emily loves plants and flowers. And she usually bestows friends with flowers as gifts, or poems portraying flowers. However, different from mainstream romantic poets who often metaphorized flowers as beautiful and soft fair lady, she but saw the cultural significance and underlying features of the flowers. There were many kinds of plants in her little yard bred by the poetess, so to some extent, the garden actually did some contribution to creation of her plants poems. The following poem describes grass:

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 how to everything —  
And thread the dews all night, like pearl —  
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 —  
As lowly spices gone to sleep —  
Or amulets of pine —  
And then to dwell in sovereign barns —  
And dream the days away  
The grass so little has to do  
I wish I were a hay!

(Dickinson, 1890, p.333)

In this poem the poetess does not hide her envy for a grass, since she has noticed that a woman have to burden too much, heavy housework in family, obedience to her own husband, and even morality rules the male prescribes.

Therefore, this poem clearly depicts her desire of hoping to be free from all the society. If the previous poem is a grass simile, the next should be a rose metaphor:

Nobody knows this little rose —  
 It might a pilgrim be  
 Did I not take it from the ways  
 And lift it up to thee.  
 Only a bee will miss it —  
 Only a butterfly,  
 Hastening from far journey —  
 On its breast to lie —  
 Only a bird will wonder —  
 Only a breeze will sigh —  
 Ah little rose — how easy  
 For such as thee to die!

(Dickinson, 1891, p.35)

Rose should be the most frequent role in the Victorian poems, and they often stand for love piety and sweet romance. Nevertheless Emily metaphorizes this rose as herself, trying to represent her beautiful but fragile female youth which could be easily destroyed by power. The poetess relates the rose with her seclusion and single life, producing sympathy for the plant and herself. That is also a metaphor for the androcentric society, where woman locates in a weak position but easily could be damaged by the patriarchal power. At this point the poetess once again found the similarity between women and nature, both delicate and fragile, both inferior to a more powerful existence.

### 3.1.3 Poems Describing Natural Wonders

There are many poems describing natural wonders in her poetic writings. The sun rise, change of seasons, storms and lightnings are all the subjects of these nature poems. The natural wonders in her writings are incredibly exquisite and charming:

As imperceptibly as grief

The summer lapsed away, —  
 Too imperceptible, at last,  
 To seem like perfidy.

A quietness distilled,  
 As twilight long begun,  
 Or nature, spending with herself  
 Sequestered afternoon.

The dusk drew earlier in,  
 The morning foreign shone, —  
 A courteous, yet harrowing grace,  
 As guest who would be gone.

And thus, without a wing,  
 Or service of a keel,  
 Our summer made her light escape  
 Into the beautiful —

(Dickinson, 1891, p.1540)

This “summer” poem is trikingly beautiful, and probably it's her best poem on the movement of summer into fall, a transition that matters deeply to her and always triggered feelings of loss. Dickinson's poetry

is full of love of summer, for her it is a time when life is most intense. In *I Reckon — When I Count*, she places the season on the highest rung of things she values; in *The Gentian Weaves Her Fringes*, she simultaneously celebrates summer, tracing and mourning its disappearance. In this poem she measures alterations of sound in terms of light, i.e. “A quietness distilled, as twilight long begun.” And in her final lines, summer is a beautiful woman making her “Light escape/Into the Beautiful —” These lines demonstrated that she mingles physical observation of metaphor in her quest to capture the many dimensions of summer's departure. The summer season means the nature's fruitfulness and lushness, afraid of autumn depression, the same as young women scaring of loss of youth. This poem was written in 1865 when she was 35 years old, and maybe in her writing she mingles her worry of fading youth along with her sorrowful love stories. With the change of summer days, she naturally connected herself with nature, mutually embracing their fates. Although she mourns for the summer fading away, the winter is not a bleak and merciless season in her literary world. The following poem is one of her most famous riddle one describing winter. If anyone names this poem, it probably would be “The Snow”:

It powders all the wood,  
 It fills with alabaster wool  
 The wrinkles of the road  
 It makes an even face  
 Of mountain and of plain, —  
 Unbroken forehead from the east  
 Unto the east again.

It reaches to the fence,  
 It wraps it, rail by rail,  
 Till it is lost in fleeces;  
 It flings a crystal veil

On stump and stack and stern, —  
 The summer's empty room,  
 Acres of seams where harvests were,  
 Recordless, but for them.

It ruffles wrists of posts,  
 As ankles of a queen, —  
 Then stills its artisans like ghosts,  
 Denying they have been.

(Dickinson, 1891, p.311)

Obviously, “The Snow” in her poem is full of female features. It is so soft that “it fills with alabaster wool” and the “crystal veil” conveys some female mystery and attractiveness. Moreover, it touches the post so gently like touching “ankles of a queen”. No wonder that Dickinson idealizes this snow lady, gentle and white, soft and tender, just like this “Moon” lady:

The moon was but a Chin of Gold  
 A night or two ago —  
 And now she turns her perfect face



Upon the world below —

Her forehead is of amplest blonde —  
Her cheek — a beryl hewn —  
Her eye unto the summer dew  
The likest I have known —

Her lips of amber never part —  
But what must be the smile  
Upon her friend she could confer  
Were such her silver will —

And what a privilege to be  
But the remotest star —  
For certainty she take her way  
Beside your palace door —

Her bonnet is the firmament —  
The universe — her shoe —  
The stars — the trinkets at her belt —  
Her dimities — of blue —

(Dickinson, 1896, p.737)

This “Moon” lady is amazingly beautiful in the poetess’ description: she has a “chin of gold” and “Her forehead is of amplest blonde”. Besides, Dickinson views the whole universe as a unity: “The universe” is “Her shoe”; “The stars” are “the trinkets at her belt”; the sky is her blue “Dimities”. Apparently in Dickinson’s mind all existences and creatures are harmoniously living together, all being important implement for each other. Still her thought could be an urgent warning for the present society, where environmental deterioration and nature pollution are threatening the continuity of human existence.

### 3.2 Childish Narration and Unconventional Rhyme of Dickinson’s Poems

The narration of Dickinson’s poetry is also special. She prefers to make her narrators appear as children who can indicate the similar characteristics of women. They are weak, changeable, submissive, clever and innocent. There is no exception that Dickinson applies a child as the narrator when she describes the relations with men. In this way, she can pioneer some space between the confrontation against men and acquiesce to them. The characteristics can be revealed in the following poem:

Over the fence —  
Strawberries grow —  
Over the fence —  
I could climb — if I tried, I know —  
Berries are nice!

But-if I stained my Apron —  
God would certainly scold!  
Oh dear, I guess if he were a boy —  
He’d — climb — if he could!

(Dickinson, 1945, p.251)

The girl, wearing her apron and eager to eat the strawberries, dares not to cross the fence but scold the God in her heart. Associated with cultural voices that told young women not to gather their own fruits, not to hike

up their skirts to climb over an obstacle to reach what they desired, God is also associated with those who would see and criticize what she has been up to. God is also associated with those who would see and criticize what she has been up to. The girl is one of the typical characters in Dickinson’s poems. They always appear as innocent people, but challenge the masculine authority as a soldier with courage and wisdom.

Brilliant and beautiful transcripts of bird-life and of flower-life appear among her poems, although there is in some cases a childish fancifulness that disappoints the reader. Among the touches of unforgettable vividness there are:

These are the days when skies put on  
The old, old sophistries of June, —  
A blue and gold mistake;  
Nature rarer uses yellow  
Than another hue;  
Leaves she all of that for sunsets, —  
Prodigal of blue,  
Spending scarlet like a woman,  
Yellow she affords  
Only scantily and selectly,  
Like a lover’s words.

(Dickinson, 1891, p.1045)

It is obvious that the narrator in Dickinson’s poems plays some certain of famine role who is accord the culture at that time. Sacrificially, they are tender and obedient, and their language is always indirect and not frank; in fact, they always struggle with the men’s dominant. For woman, the inferiority complex takes the form of a shamed rejection of her femininity. It is not the lack of the penis that causes this complex, but rather woman’s total situation. They plead the God, fathers, lovers or death. Facing these tall, authoritative and powerful masculine images, they are weak and helpless.

Dickinson stands detached away from traditional conventions, but she gains independence within the traditional structure and empowers her being as a human, a woman and a poetess. Her poetic creation roots in the structure of biblical hymn and oral style of religious prophetic sermons since she grows up to in the Christian environment and education. In his traditional structure, a stanza usually composes of four lines with three feet or four feet iambuses, rhymed in the even lines. Dickinson does not follow the traditional structure completely, but dresses her thought with her original individual poetic forms.

There is no doubt that critics are justified in complaining that her work is often cryptic in thought and unmelodious in expression. As a teenager, Dickinson wrote to a friend, “you know how I hate to be common”. The statement is a telling one, for it marks a trait in her temperament that proves to be permanent: cultivation of an elite self defiant of conventional authority. Her deliberate separation from the common world extends to stylistic revision of traditional practices of the literary

establishment. Her peculiar rhymes in particular are part of a "full-tune" that she aims out to give to the sounds of poetry. This sort of characteristic can be seen in her masterpiece *Cocoon*:

Cocoon  
Drab habitation of whom?  
Tabernacle or tomb,  
Or dome of worm,  
Or porch of gnome,  
Or some elf's catacomb.

(Dickinson, 1890, p.1099)

This poem is full of unspeakable sound and chaotic rhymes. However, such poems are exceptions.

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## CONCLUSION

In the nineteenth century, the United States was full of political, religious and cultural movement. As a member of a family filled with political atmosphere, Emily Dickinson was not influenced by these events. In addition to her reclusion from the outside world, maybe it was considered she had lost the trace of her time. However, as one of the greatest American poets in the nineteenth century, Emily Dickinson made great breakthrough to the traditional writing style, so she was ahead of her era. She was outstanding among the contemporary poets for her unique writing style, creative images and profound ideology. Therefore she was praised as "the most topping poetess in the west since Sapphic".

This paper employs Eco-feminism as the critical theory to explore Dickinson's ecological thought and female awareness. Eco-feminism advocates challenging the patriarchal institutions and ideologies in our culture and environment, and it reminds human beings should have ecological awareness of protecting the environment

and female awareness of protecting women's human rights. Dickinson's Eco-feminism idea is presented in her life from her challenge of religion and society, and her writing style and so on.

As an important female poet in the nineteenth century and a devote of nature, Emily Dickinson had the sense of being an independent woman and protested the western tradition of being a wife and a Christian. This is considered as an essential principle of the ideology of Eco-feminism emerged in the next century.

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