EMILY DICKINSON AND NATURE

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EMILY DICKINSON AND NATURE

THESIS

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PREFACE

Judged by most of her poems, Emily Dickinson can logically be termed a nature poet. Her love of nature is obvious to even the most casual reader. It is the purpose of this writer to show upon what aspects of nature her poems touch, to what extent and in what manner she uses nature terms in expressing her philosophy of life, what ideas she expresses through these terms, and finally what her own philosophy of nature is.

With the exception of a few quotations in the first chapter, all of Emily Dickinson’s poems quoted are taken from the 1938 edition of The Poems of Emily Dickinson, edited by Martha Dickinson Bianchi and Alfred Leete Hampson. Much of the research for this thesis was completed before the publication in 1945 of Bolts of Melody, a collection of hitherto unpublished poems of Emily Dickinson, edited by Mabel Loomis Todd and Millicent Todd Bingham. The writer has read these additional poems, however, and finds that they add nothing new to the general philosophy or style of the poet. Almost no critical works are included in the bibliography of this thesis, as the writer preferred to base her conclusions upon primary sources.

In some of the quotations cited in this thesis, the
grammar, capitalization, or punctuation appears faulty or old-fashioned. These quotations are given exactly as printed in the sources mentioned, for the writer has not felt at liberty to change even the most minute detail.

D. J. R.
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CHAPTER I

NATURE IN EMILY DICKINSON'S LIFE AND WRITINGS

To Emily Dickinson nature was not only a near neighbor but also a very intimate friend. Nature was to her a constant companion, a refuge, and an unfailing source of inspiration. Nature was her frequent vehicle of thought and her customary, almost habitual, mode of expression. Her love of nature gleams through her life, her letters, and her poetry. To think of Emily Dickinson is to think of nature; the two are inseparable.

Early in life Emily Dickinson began to manifest a love of nature through her childhood love of pets, orioles, robins, crows, daffodils -- a "quickened sense of all beings, all creatures, all beauty."¹ In 1845, when Emily was only fifteen, her flowers already played a definite part in her life, and she spent many afternoons on the hillsides, looking for specimens for her herbarium. In 1846, on her first visit to Boston, she attended a horticultural exhibition. By the time she was nineteen, she delighted in nothing more than long wanderings in the woods with her young friends. She knew exactly where

¹Martha Dickinson Bianchi, The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson, p. 16.
the first faint arbutus clung to the grey rock under a protecting bank in Pelham, and the wet, inaccessible spot the rare yellow violets chose as their home in the South Amherst swamp; the cumbine and adder's-tongues had their own haunts fixed in her mind, and she could walk straight to the trillium, the bloodroot, even the pink lady's-slipper, as if their homes had street and number. There was no faint frail evidence of the shy New England spring that was not rejoiced over by this flower-sister, hardly less a creature of Nature than they.\(^2\)

In Washington, in 1853, the soft spring of a milder climate enchanted her, and it was hard for her to realize that it was still winter in Amherst. When, as an adult, she appeared at commencement festivities, she wore diaphanous white and carried a flower in her hand. During most of her adult life, she took a particular delight in her "little conservatory where her ferns and yellow jasmine and purple heliotrope made an atmosphere more tropical for the dwelling of her imagination. The scent of her cape jasmine and daphne odorosa is forever immortalized to those who breathed it, transporting them back to the loveliness of her immortal atmosphere."\(^3\) When winter nights were unusually cold, Emily even sat up, watching over her plants and doing all in her power to save them from freezing. Her conservatory was

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 28.  \(^3\)Ibid., p. 39.
majestic cape jasmine, exotics kin to her alien soul. She tolerated none of the usual variety of mongrel house plants. A rare scarlet lily, a resurrection calla, perhaps — and here it was always summer with the drails dripping from hanging baskets like humble incense upon the heads of the household and its frequenters. ⁴

Emily frequently gave gifts of flowers or enclosed fragrant leaves in a letter to a friend. It was her custom to send evening gifts often to the children of her brother Austin, who lived next door. Whether the cardboard box contained some of her chocolate caramels or perhaps three tiny, frosted, heart-shaped cakes, it was sure to be topped with a flower — heliotrope, a red lily, or cape jasmine in all probability — and to have tucked underneath the gift a note or a poem for the children's mother, the beloved "Sister Sue" whose lifelong friendship meant so much to Emily.

Her niece's childhood memories of Sunday mornings spent with "Aunt Emily" while the others were at church are expressed as follows:

First of all she let me water her plants in her little conservatory — Cape jasmine, heliotrope, and ferns — reaching up to the higher shelves by a tiny watering-pot with a long, slender spout like the antennae of insects, which had been made for her after an idea of her father's. Whatever it was we were doing, she was intent upon it — taking it seriously or making fun of it all. I had only to look up into her eyes to be sure she was having just as good a time "playing together" as I was. And to me it was enchantment.

⁴Ibid., pp. 52-53.
In summer we watched the orioles outside -- or the cherries ripening -- or the bees -- or a random hummingbird at the honeysuckle by the east window where her little writing-table stood; for in Aunt Emily's time there were three tall cherry trees in a line just bordering the flagstone walk at the east side of the house, and all the way down to the garden plum and pear trees, very white and garlandly in the spring. Where the slope in the grass came, to the lower terrace, the orchard began, with appleblossoms for Whit-Sunday, which we called "White-Sunday," being "dissenters." But this is all changed now, and the wild flowers in the long grass, violets and "innocents" and their kind have long since given way to lawn and lawnmower, unknown when she dwelt there. There was a picket fence outside the high hemlock hedge.  

The lasting impression made by Emily upon the mind of a child with whom she was closely associated is summed up by that child many years later. "She was not daily-bread," says her niece, "she was stardust."

Her writings continually reflect Emily's love of nature. It is interesting to note that in 1848, while she was a student in Amherst Academy, she edited a comic column called "Forest Leaves." Her letters are full of references to nature; much of her news was of nature, not of persons. In an 1848 letter she says, "The asters are pretty well. How are the other blossoms?" Some letters to the family contain the following quotations:

5Martha Dickinson Bianchi, Emily Dickinson Face to Face, pp. 4-5.

6Amy Lowell, Poetry and Poets, p. 108.

7Martha Dickinson Bianchi, The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson, p. 29.
Nothing is gone, dear, nor no one that you know. The forests are at home, the mountains intimate at night and arrogant at noon. A lonesome fluency abroad, like suspended music.

Come home and see your weather; the hills are full of shawls.

Twilight touches Amherst, with his yellow glove.\(^8\)

In March, 1851, she wrote to Austin:

It's a glorious afternoon -- the sky is blue and warm -- the wind blows just enough to keep the clouds sailing, and the sunshine -- oh such sunshine! It isn't like gold, for gold is dim beside it; it isn't like anything which you or I have seen! It seems to me It Marvel was born on such a day; I only wish you were here.\(^9\)

In October of the same year she wrote him:

We are having such lovely weather -- the air is as sweet and still -- now and then a gay leaf falling -- the crickets sing all day long -- high in a crimson tree a belated bird is singing -- a thousand little painters are tingeing hill and dale. I admit now, Austin, that autumn is most beautiful, and spring is but the least, yet they "differ as stars" in their distinctive glories. How happy if you were here to share these pleasures with us -- the fruit should be more sweet, and the dying day more golden -- merrier the falling nut if with you we gathered it and hid it down deep in the abyss of basket.\(^10\)

To her cousins, Louisa and Fannie Norcross, after the death of their father in January, 1864, Emily wrote:

It is not dying hurts us so, --
'Tis living hurts us more;
But dying is a different way,
A kind, behind the door, --
The southern custom of the bird
That soon as frosts are due
Adopts a better latitude.

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 63.  \(^9\)Ibid., p. 152.  \(^10\)Ibid., pp. 164-165.
We are the birds that stay,
The shiverers round the farmers' doors,
For whose reluctant crumb
We stipulate, till pitying snows
Persuade our feathers home.

Later in the same year she wrote them:

Be sure you don't doubt about the sparrow.

Would it interest the children to know that crocuses come up, in the garden off the dining-room, and a fuchsia, that pussy partock, mistaking it for strawberries? And that we have primroses, like the little pattern sent in last winter's note, and heliotrope by the aprons full — the mountain colored one — and a jasmine bud, you know the little odor like Lubin — and gilliflowers, magenta, and few mignonette, and sweet alyssum bountiful, and carnation buds?

When her niece, Martha Dickinson, was eighteen and was at Farmington, Connecticut, Emily wrote her:

We almost question where we are, without our martial Mattie, Flag and Drum in one, and without a deceiving shower just at Ned's departure, should have assured her so in Flowers. One bin in the ancestral cellar was filled with Jessamine last night for that enchanting purpose — but Destiny mistook — so they shall go again.

The Bluebirds are singing cherubically, and all the colors "we know or think" are prancing in the trees.

Over a period of several years, Emily wrote frequent letters to her friends, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Bowles. It was probably in late August, 1858, that she wrote to Mr. Bowles, "The men are mowing the second hay. The cocks are smaller than the first, and spicier. I would distil a cup, and

11Ibid., p. 253. 12Ibid., p. 263.
13Martha Dickinson Bianchi, Emily Dickinson Face to Face, p. xxiv.
bear to all my friends, drinking to her no more astir, by
beck, or burn, or moor!"14 She wrote to Mrs. Bowles, per-
haps in the winter of 1858, "Remembrance is more sweet than
robins in May orchards,"15 and again, in 1859, "Today is
very cold, yet have I much bouquet upon the window-pane
of moss and fern. I call them saints' flowers, because
they do not romp as other flowers do, but stand so still
and white."16 In a letter to Mrs. Bowles in August, 1861,
she says, "How is your garden, Mary? Are the pinks true,
and the sweet williams faithful? I've got a geranium like
a sultana, and when the humming-birds come down, geranium
and I shut our eyes and go far away."17 To Mr. Bowles she
wrote in August, 1862:

We reckon your coming by the fruit. When the
grape gets by, and the pippin and the chestnut --
when the days are a little short by the clock, and
a little long by the want -- when the sky has new
red gowns and a purple bonnet -- then we say you
will come.18

It was also in 1862 that she wrote him:

While asters
On the hill
Their everlasting fashions set
And covenant gentians frill!19

About 1863, Emily remarked in a letter to Mrs. Bowles:

14 Martha Dickinson Bianchi, The Life and Letters of
Emily Dickinson, p. 203.
15 Ibid. 16 Ibid., p. 205. 17 Ibid., p. 220.
18 Ibid., p. 235. 19 Ibid., p. 236.
Nature and God, I neither knew,  
Yet both, so well knew me  
They startled, like executors  
Of an identity.

Yet neither told, that I could learn:  
My secret as secure  
As Herschel's private interest,  
Or Mercury's affair.  

That same year she sent this tempting invitation to Mr. Bowles:

Would you like summer? Taste of ours.  
Spices! Buy here!  
Ill! We have berries for the parching!  
Weary! Furloughs of down!  
Perplexed! Estates of violet trouble ne'er looked on!  
Captive! We bring reprieve of roses!  
Painting! Flasks of air!  
Heaven for Death, a fairy medicine.  
But, which is it, sir?  

Enclosing a bit of pine in a letter to Mr. Bowles about  
1865, she explained:

A feather from the whippoorwill  
That everlasting sings!  
Whose galleries are sunrise,  
Whose opera the springs,  
Whose emerald nest the ages spin  
Of mellow, murmuring thread,  
Whose beryl egg, what school-boys hunt  
In "recess" overhead!  

Emily even described herself in nature terms, for in  
July, 1862, when her friend and admirer, Colonel T. W. Higginson, requested a likeness of her, she replied, "I had no  
portrait now, but am small, like the wren; and my hair is  
bold, like the chestnut burr; and my eyes, like the sherry

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Ibid., pp. 246-247.  
Ibid., p. 247.  
Ibid., p. 266.
in the glass that the guest leaves."\(^{23}\) In a letter to Colonel Higginson about 1874, she said:

I find you with dusk, for day is tired, and lays her antediluvian cheek to the hill like a child.
Nature confides now.
I hope you are joyful frequently, these beloved days, and the health of your friend bolder.
I remember her with my blossom and wish they were hers

Whose pink career may have a close
Portentous as our own, who knows?
To imitate these neighbors fleet,
In awe and innocence, were meet.\(^{24}\)

To Mrs. Strong, in a letter of May 7, 1850, Emily spoke of "the sweet, still woods."\(^{25}\) In a letter to Mrs. J. G. Holland, written perhaps in 1857, Emily said:

The lawn is full of south and the odors tangle,
and I heard today for the first the river in the tree.
You mentioned spring's delaying -- I blamed her for the opposite. I would eat evanescence slowly.

---
Yours was my first arbutus. It was a rosy boast.
I will send you the first witch hazel.\(^ {26}\)

It was at the end of a letter to Mrs. Holland in the late summer of 1856 that she had written, "P. S., The bobolinks have gone."\(^ {27}\)

A letter written to Mrs. Edward Tuckerman in July, 1878, contained the following lines:

Go not too near a house of rose,
The depredation of a breeze
Or inundation of a dew
Alarm its walls away;
Nor try to tie the butterfly,
Nor climb the bars of ecstasy.
In insecurity to lie
Is joy's insuring quality.\(^ {28}\)

\(^{23}\)Ibid., p. 241. \(^{24}\)Ibid., p. 292. \(^{25}\)Ibid., p. 143.  
\(^{26}\)Ibid., pp. 201-202. \(^{27}\)Ibid., p. 200.  
\(^{28}\)Ibid., p. 313.
On New Year's Day, 1881, Emily wrote Mrs. Tuckerman:

My bird, who is "today"?
"Yesterday" was a year ago, and yet
The stem of a departed flower
Has still a silent rank,
The bearer from an emerald court
Of a despatch of pink. 28

In a letter to Miss Marie Whitney, probably written in 1884, was this information: "There are scarlet carnations, with a witching suggestion, and hyacinths covered with promises which I know they will keep." 30 Emily told Mrs. Joseph Sweetser, in a letter of April, 1886, "Morning without you is a dwindled dawn." 31

Speaking of snakes, Emily stated in a letter, "I love those little green ones that slide around by your shoes in the grass, and make it rustle with their elbows." 32 In one letter she wrote, "The wind blows gay to-day and the jays bark like blue terriers," 33 and in another, "The moon rides like a girl through a topaz town." 34 A note to -- --, with a gift of flowers about 1884, said, "With the leave of the bluebirds, without whose approval we do nothing." 35

Emily Dickinson's poetry is replete with nature imagery. Some of her poems are solely about nature; some are on other topics, but the thoughts are expressed in terms of nature; still others contain merely some slight reference to nature.

28Ibid., p. 332. 30Ibid., p. 364. 31Ibid., p. 370.
32Lowell, op. cit., p. 97. 33Ibid., p. 98. 34Ibid.
Very few contain no mention of nature at all. The poet usually expresses her ideas in a series of figures of speech, and almost all of these figures of speech deal with nature.

In a volume containing 909 poems, there are comparatively few direct references to nature as a whole. In almost all of these references nature is clearly personified, usually as a mother or a ruler, but sometimes as a judge or an innkeeper.

An entire poem characterizing nature as a mother is as follows:

Nature, the gentlest mother,
Impatient of no child,
The feeblest or the waywardest, --
Her admonition mild

In forest and the hill
By traveller is heard,
Restraining rampant squirrel
Or too impetuous bird.

How fair her conversation,
A summer afternoon, --
Her household, her assembly;
And when the sun goes down

Her voice among the aisles
Incites 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.36

36Emily Dickinson, The Poems of Emily Dickinson, I, p. 65. Hereafter, all references to Emily Dickinson's poems will be made to this volume. When an entire poem is quoted, it will be cited by giving the number of the poem and the page on which it is to be found; when only part of a poem is quoted, line numbers will also be cited. A few poems, used as prefaces to original volumes, are not numbered.
In another poem in which nature is described as a mother, the poet asks whose are the little beds in the valley, and nature replies that they are the beds of the various flowers.

\[
\text{Meanwhile at many cradles} \\
\text{Her busy foot she plied,} \\
\text{Humming the quaintest lullaby} \\
\text{That ever rocked a child.}
\]

"Hush! Epigaea wakens!
The crocus stirs her lids, 
Rhodora's cheek is crimson, -- 
She's dreaming of the woods."

Then, turning from them, reverent, 
"Their bed-time 'tis," she said; 
"The humble-bees will wake them 
When April woods are red." 37

Another poem portrays nature as a tolerant mother with a sense of humor:

\[
\text{If Nature smiles -- the Mother must,} \\
\text{I'm sure, at many a whim} \\
\text{Of her eccentric family} \\
\text{Is she so much to blame?} 38
\]

Nature is pictured as a combination mother and ruler when the poet, speaking of one who is no longer missed, says:

\[
\text{Even Nature, Herself,} \\
\text{Has forgot it is there --} \\
\text{Too elate of her multitudes} \\
\text{To retain despair.} 39
\]

An indirect reference to nature as a ruler is found in the following lines:


38LXII, 11. 5-8, p. 322.
To my quick ear the leaves conferred;
The bushes they were bells;
I could not find a privacy
From Nature's sentinels. 40

Speaking as though nature were a ruler, the poet also says:

Several of nature's people
I know, and they know me;
I feel for them a transport
Of cordiality. 41

Nature is introduced as a most hospitable innkeeper in
one poem:

These are the signs to Nature's inns,
Her invitation broad
For whosoever famishing
To taste her mystic bread.

These are the rites of Nature's house,
The hospitality
That opens with an equal width
To beggar or to bee.

For sureties of her staunch estate,
Her undecaying cheer,
The purple in the east is set
And in the North, the star. 42

Nature is again mentioned as a hostess in a reference by
the poet to

the crumb
The birds and I had often shared
In Nature's dining-room. 43

A glimpse of nature in the role of busy housekeeper is af-
forded the reader in the lines:

40xcxi, 11. 1-4, p. 114. 41lxiv, 11. 17-20, p. 79.
42lxvi, p. 313. 43lxvii, 11. 10-12, p. 36.
Nature was in her beryl apron,
Mixing fresher air. 44

Still another quaint, though indirect, reference to nature as an innkeeper is the following:

They registered in Nature's book
As Robin -- Sire and Son. 45

In Emily Dickinson's poems nature is sometimes characterized as a judge. One usually scrutinizes closely a person or a thing upon which he is preparing to pass judgment, and in this sense nature is suggested as a judge in the following lines:

You cannot even die,
But Nature and Mankind must pause
To pay you scrutiny. 46

Again, in speaking of making an important decision, the poet says:

'Twas face to face with Nature forced,
'Twas face to face with God. 47

One poem charmingly portrays nature as a painter with the proverbial eccentricity of an artist:

Nature rarer uses yellow
Than another hue;
Saves she all of that for sunsets, --
Prodigal of blue,

Spending scarlet like a woman,
Yellow she affords
Only scantily and selectively
Like a lover's words. 48

44 XXXIV, ll. 7-8, p. 84. 45 LXII, ll. 5-6, p. 243.
46 V, ll. 5-7, p. 224. 47 LXXXII, ll. 7-8, p. 424.
48 XXXI, p. 83.
Nature is also pictured as a showman, when, in speaking of death, the writer says, "As Nature's curtain fell." 49

In personifying nature, the poet has shown her as from time to time exhibiting a wide variety of human characteristics and moods. In different poems the reader sees nature as keeping secrets well, as being merciful, as presenting a mystic appearance, as liking solitude occasionally, as desiring to be fashionable, as at times being disagreeable, as exhibiting chagrin, as having a bad temper, as becoming worried, as being jolly, as being forgetful, and as displaying indifference to the sorrows of mankind. The following lines show nature as a model of reticence for men to follow:

If nature will not tell the tale
Jehovah told to her,
Can human nature not survive
Without a listener?

Admonished by her buckled lips
Let every babbler be. 50

Here nature is personified as one who cannot be other than merciful:

Had nature any outcast face,
Could she a son contemn,
Had nature an Iscariot,
That mushroom, -- it is him. 51

Speaking of the song of the crickets in August, the poet

49CV, l. 4, p. 48. 50CVII, ll. 5-10, p. 49.
51XXV, ll. 21-24, p. 30.
ascrives a somewhat mystic quality to nature when she says:

   Remit as yet no grace,
   No furrow on the glow,
   Yet a druidic difference
   Enhances nature now. 52

In describing summer's departure, Emily Dickinson represents nature as occasionally enjoying a little time to herself:

   A quietness distilled,
   As twilight long begun,
   Or Nature, spending with herself
   Sequestered afternoon. 53

A picture of nature as a person not without vanity is given the reader in some lines addressed to the arbutus:

   Fold little beauty,
   Bedecked with thee,
   Nature forgives
   Antiquity. 54

After describing a dreary, disagreeable winter day, the poet concludes:

   Nature, like us, is sometimes caught
   Without her diadem. 55

Another very human quality is ascribed to nature in the following brief poem:

   I bet with every Wind that blew, till Nature in chagrin
   Employed a Fault to visit me and scuttle my Balloon! 56

In referring to nature's bad temper, the poet exclaims:

   How good to be safe in tombs,
   Where nature's temper cannot reach,
   Nor vengeance ever comes! 57

52XLIV, 11. 13-16, p. 88. 53XLV, 11. 5-8, p. 89.
54LIll, 11. 9-12, p. 93. 55LXXX, 11. 7-8, p. 107.
56XXX, p. 231. 57XVI, 11. 6-8, p. 163.
At the close of another poem describing a storm, she says:

\[
\text{When Nature falls} \\
\text{Upon herself,} \\
\text{F'ware an Austrian;}^{58}
\]

Nature is portrayed as worried when Emily Dickinson, in telling about a lark, continues:

\[
\text{And then he spied a breeze,} \\
\text{And situated softly} \\
\text{Upon a pile of wind} \\
\text{Which in a perturbation} \\
\text{Nature had left behind.}^{59}
\]

The fact that nature is a jolly person in spring and summer is suggested when autumn and winter are described as

\[
\text{The lower metres of the year,} \\
\text{When nature's laugh is done.}^{60}
\]

Speaking figuratively of a personal grief, the poet shows an absentminded nature when she declares:

\[
\text{I thought that storm was brief, --} \\
\text{The maddest, quickest by;} \\
\text{But Nature lost the date of this,} \\
\text{And left it in the sky.}^{61}
\]

That nature is apparently unsympathetic and indifferent to the sorrows of individual human beings is brought out in the following lines:

\[
\text{The morning after woe,} \\
\text{'Tis frequently the way,} \\
\text{Surpasses all that rose before} \\
\text{For utter jubilee;} \\
\text{As Nature did not care} \\
\text{And piled her blossoms on,} \\
\text{The further to parade a joy} \\
\text{Her victim stared upon.}^{62}
\]

\[
^{58} \text{L, 11. 10-12, p. 239.} \\
^{59} \text{XCIV, 11. 4-8, p. 114.} \\
^{60} \text{CXI, 11. 5-6, p. 123.} \\
^{61} \text{CXXXII, 11. 9-12, p. 214.} \\
^{62} \text{CXVI, 11. 1-8, p. 446.}
\]
That nature herself is sometimes in need of cheer is suggested when Emily Dickinson, describing in detail the spell of enchantment cast by the reading of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry, says:

And just the common tunes
That Nature murmured to herself,  
To keep herself in cheer,  
I took for Giants practising  
Titanic opera.  

As has been said, most of the poet's direct references to nature as nature are in the form of personifications. Others deal with Emily Dickinson's philosophy and will be discussed in a later chapter. Still others have no particular significance. The following lines, however, illustrate the importance the poet attaches to nature, when, in telling how much a friend means to her, she emphasizes her declaration of love by saying:

Home effaced, her faces dwindled,  
Nature altered small --  
Sun if shone -- or storm if shattered,  
Overlooked I all.  

Since her love of nature was one of the dominating factors in Emily Dickinson's life, it is not surprising that it should be continually reflected in her letters and reflected even more in her poetry. So many are the nature-based figures of speech and other references to nature in

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63 XXXIII, 11. 12-16, p. 394.

64 CXXXIV, 11. 9-12, p. 355.
her poems, and so few are her poems with no mention at all of nature, that it might truly be said that she spoke a nature language.
CHAPTER II

COSMIC NATURE

There seems to be no phase of nature which Emily Dickinson's poetry does not touch. In her poems are multitudinous references to cosmic nature, elemental nature, biological nature, and seasonal and meteorological nature, with numerous variations on each of these major themes.

The poet's allusions to cosmic nature can be roughly classified under the following heads: the universe and its divisions; night and day; the sky and the clouds; the sun; the moon and the stars. Each of these topics includes two or more -- usually more -- subtopics.

In her treatment of the universe and its divisions, Emily refers to the universe as a whole, to the planets, to the spheres, to the world, to the earth, even to the poles, and to meteors. At times she uses some of these terms interchangeably, but at other times she uses them with distinctly different meanings.

As is Emily's habit in her allusions to the various phases of nature, she frequently personifies the universe as a whole, sometimes apparently meaning only the universe
itself, but at other times apparently meaning the universe and the living creatures thereof, with emphasis on the latter. The poet is probably referring more to the creatures of the universe when, in describing a small stone in the road, she says:

Whose coat of elemental brown
A passing universe put on.¹

She probably means the universe itself when, in speaking of the sunset as a theatrical performance, she makes the following personification:

'Twas universe that did applaud
While, chiefest of the crowd,
Enabled by his royal dress,
Myself distinguished God.²

Emily is undoubtedly referring to all living creatures when she calls the jay "the brother of the universe";³ but she is speaking of both nature and mankind when she comes to the following conclusion:

The right to perish might be thought
An undisputed right,
Attempt it, and the Universe upon the opposite
Will concentrate its officers.⁴

"The universe" means mankind in both this humorous comment upon a well-known aspect of human nature:

A diagram of rapture
A sixpence at a show!
With Seraphim in cages
The Universe would go!⁵

¹LXXXIII, ll. 5-6, p. 83.  ²XII, ll. 5-8, pp. 87-88.
³LI, l. 7, p. 92.  ⁴V, ll. 1-4, p. 224.
⁵LXXIII, ll. 5-8, p. 419.
and in the serious reflection of the poet when she speaks with awe of the crowd at Resurrection and asks:

What duplicate exist --
What parallel can be --
Of the stupendousness of this
To universe and me?  

The universe is definitely limited in scope in the following partial description of a mountain:

When, tent by tent, her universe
Hung out its flags of snow.  

In a metaphorical reference to the universe, Emily adds these details to a personification of the moon:

Her bonnet is the firmament,
The universe her shoe.  

Two other examples of impersonal allusions to the universe are to be found in the poem quoted below:

Immured in Heaven! What a Cell!
Let every bondage be,
Thou Sweetest of the Universe,
Like that which ravished thee!  

and in the lines in which the poet describes a butterfly's actions upon emerging from a cocoon:

A moment to interrogate,
Then wiser than a "Surrogate"
The universe to know!  

Indirectly referring to the universe, Emily concludes a poem on the vastness of time with these lines:

6C, 11. 17-20, p. 331.  7LVII, 11. 5-6, p. 408.  
6CIII, 11. 17-18, pp. 118-119.  8LXXXVIII, p. 254.  
10XLVIII, 11. 10-12, p. 405.
To His exclusion,
Who prepares by rudiments of size
For the stupendous volume
Of his Diameters.¹¹

A few times the poet mentions creation, her allusions
to it being almost synonymous with her allusions to the
universe. Like her references to the universe, her refer-
ences to creation are respectively both in the form of per-
sonification and in impersonal form. A personification of
creation is to be found in the statement:

It is too late for man,
But early yet for God;
Creation impotent to help,
But prayer remained our side.¹²

An impersonal mention of creation is contained in the open-
ing lines of another poem:

It's easy to invent a life,
God does it every day --
Creation but a gambol
Of His authority.¹³

The only direct reference to a planet is insignificant:

Harmless as streaks of meteor
Upon a planet's bound.¹⁴

Of the few fleeting references to the spheres, one is the
question:

Also who leads the docile spheres
By withes of supple blue?¹⁵

¹¹XXVI, 11. 5-8, p. 391. ¹²XXXII, 11. 1-4, p. 171.
¹³XXXV, 11. 1-4, p. 295. ¹⁴XXXVIII, 11. 7-8, p. 20.
¹⁵XXXIX, 11. 14-15, p. 86.
In an attempt to describe the vague, unidentifiable music of nature as a whole, the poet remarks that "some say it is the spheres at play." An eclipse is mentioned a very few times. An allusion to an actual eclipse is contained in the following lines:

Nature is what we see,  
The Hill, the Afternoon --  
Squirrel, Eclipse, the Rumble-bee,  
Nay -- Nature is Heaven.  

Speaking metaphorically, the poet represents wifehood as an eclipse when she says:

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

Emily Dickinson often mentions the world in her poetry, sometimes speaking of it simply as this world itself, sometimes alluding to other worlds, sometimes representing its inhabitants as the world, and sometimes speaking figuratively of the world. An example of a simple reference to the world is as follows:

How much can come  
And much can go,  
And yet abide the world.  

An allusion to another world is found in this simile:

16LXXXII, l. 13, p. 40.  
17XXXIV, ll. 1-4, p. 233.  
18XVI, ll. 5-8, p. 135.  
19XXVI, ll. 15-17, p. 80.
What mystery pervades a well!
The water lives so far,
Like neighbor from another world
Residing in a jar.\textsuperscript{20}

An instance in which the inhabitants of the world are represented as the world is the question quoted below:

Cocoon above! Cocoon below!
Stealthy Cocoon, why hide you so
What all the world suspect?\textsuperscript{21}

Several of the poet's figurative references to the world have to do with death, as in the following short poem concerning the death of a loved one:

I lost a world the other day.
Has anybody found?
You'll know it by the row of stars
Around its forehead bound.

A rich man might not notice it;
Yet to my frugal eye
Of more esteem than ducata.
Oh, find it, sir, for me!\textsuperscript{22}

Emily uses the world as a metaphor for the pleasures of life in these poignant lines:

To put this world down like a bundle
And steady walk away
Requires energy -- possibly agony;
'Tis the scarlet Way

Trodden with straight renunciation
By the Son of God.\textsuperscript{23}

Still another type of figurative use of worlds is found in

\textsuperscript{20}XCVI, 11. 1-4, p. 115. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{21}XLVIII, 11. 1-3, p. 405.
\textsuperscript{22}XXXVI, p. 173. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{23}LXIX, 11. 1-6, p. 413.
the following lines:

I told him worlds I knew
Where monarchs grew
Who recollected us
If we were true.24

In only one poem is the globe mentioned. Here it is personified and actually refers to the inhabitants of the globe. In speaking of the century, Emily Dickinson says:

He keeps his secrets safely, very --
Were he to tell, extremely sorry
This bashful globe of ours would be,
So dainty of publicity!25

Emily alludes many times to the earth, in much the same manner in which she alludes to the world. At times she speaks of the earth in the ordinary acceptance of the term, at times she has the earth represent this life as contrasted with the life hereafter, in one poem she has the earth represent death in a personification, and again she personifies the earth as her companion. A reference to the earth as simply the earth is to be found in the following lines:

And the earth, they tell me,
On its axis turned, --
Wonderful rotation
By but twelve performed!26

Earth represents life in the line, "I reason, earth is short."27

In the poet's rather unusual use of the word "earths" in the poem below, however, she seems to mean either worlds or

24CXLIX, 11. 9-12, p. 361. 25V, 11. 5-8, p. 278.
26XXXVI, 11. 9-12, p. 85. 27XXIII, 1. 1, p. 166.
lives to come:

I have no life but this,
To lead it here;
Nor any death, but lest
Dispelled from there;

Nor tie to earths to come,
Nor action new,
Except through this extent,
The realm of you.\textsuperscript{28}

In the following selection, the earth is personified as
death or death's helper, pitying and compassionate:

The Earth lays back these tired lives
In her mysterious drawers
Too tenderly that any doubt
An ultimate repose.\textsuperscript{29}

In another poem the earth is personified as the poet's com-
panion, a fellow spectator at the theatricals of sunset and
sunrise, respectively:

The Sun went down --
No man looked on,
The earth and I alone
Were present at the majesty;
He triumphed and went on.

The Sun went up --
No man looked on,
The Earth and I and One --
A nameless bird, a stranger,
Were witness for the Crown.\textsuperscript{30}

Parts of the earth, such as the hemispheres, continents,
the Orient, and even America, are mentioned in various poems.
An example of a reference to hemispheres is

\textsuperscript{28}XX, p. 137. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{29}C, l1. 5-8, p. 438.
\textsuperscript{30}XIV, p. 303.
The midnight's dusky arms
Clasp hemispheres and homes.\textsuperscript{31}

One of the references to continents -- a figurative reference -- is contained in these lines:

The Heart is the capital of the Mind,
The Mind is a single State.
The Heart and the Mind together make
A single continent.\textsuperscript{32}

There are three direct and indirect allusions to the poles. Emily's whimsicality is evident in this stanza from a poem which contrasts the scientific approach with the poetic approach to nature:

What if the poles should frisk about
And stand upon their heads!
I hope I'm ready for the worst,
Whatever prank betides!\textsuperscript{33}

A rare reference to a meteor is found in some lines quoted in another connection earlier in this chapter:

Harmless as streaks of meteor
Upon a planet's bound.\textsuperscript{34}

The general topics of night and day are covered in Emily Dickinson's poems through numerous allusions not only to night and day themselves but also to dawn, morning, noon, afternoon, evening, midnight, light, and dark. Many times night or day is mentioned merely as a time when something happens, but often a night or a day is described in bold and glowing imagery or is used in a figurative sense.

\textsuperscript{31}CXXXVI, 11. 13-14, p. 354.  \textsuperscript{32}CXXIII, 11. 1-4, p. 346.

\textsuperscript{33}XX, 11. 17-20, p. 75.  \textsuperscript{34}XXXVIII, 11. 7-8, p. 20.
Quite frequently the poet speaks of dawn, daybreak, or Aurora. A reference to dawn simply as a time when something occurs is contained in these lines:

Musicians wrestle everywhere;
All day, among the crowded air,
I hear the silver strife;
And -- waking long before the dawn --
Such transport breaks upon the town
I think it that "new life."

A vivid description of the dawn is the following poem:

The day came slow, till five o'clock,
Then sprang before the hills
Like hindered rubies, or the light
A sudden musket spills.

The purple could not keep the east,
The sunrise shock from fold,
Like breadths of topaz, packed a night,
The lady just unrolled.

The happy winds their timbrels took;
The birds, in docile rows,
Arranged themselves around their prince --
(The wind is prince of those).

The orchard sparkleth like a Jew, --
How mighty 'twas, to stay
A guest in this stupendous place,
The parlor of the day.

A whimsical little poem about the dawn is given below:

Not knowing when the dawn will come
I open every door;
Or has it feathers like a bird,
Or billows like a shore?

Emily uses a rather curious figure when, in speaking of a mountain, she says:

37LXXXIX, p. 113.
Grandfather of days is he,  
Of dawn the ancestor.  

The poet often mentions dawn in connection with the death 
of a loved one. One such reference follows: 

On such a dawn, or such a dawn,  
Would anybody sigh  
That such a little figure  
Too sound asleep did lie  

For chanticleer to wake it, --  
Or stirring house below,  
Or giddy bird in orchard,  
Or early task to do?  

Of two striking metaphorical uses of daybreak in reference 
to death, one is contained in these lines:  

Morn is supposed to be,  
By people of degree,  
The breaking of the day.  

Morning has not occurred!  
That shall aurora be  
East of eternity;  

One with the banner gay,  
One in the red array, --  
That is the break of day.  

Like dawn, morning is sometimes described with vivid 
imagery, is mentioned with a touch of whimsy in at least one 
poem, and is often used in striking figures. A whimsical 
inquiry concerning morning might well serve as an introduc-
tion to Emily Dickinson's treatment of the subject: 

Will there really be a morning?  
Is there such a thing as day?  
Could I see it from the mountains  
If I were as tall as they? 

36LXXII, 11. 7-8, p. 103. 39LXIV, 11. 9-16, p. 186.  
40XXXVIII, 11. 7-15, p. 173.
Has it feet like water-lilies?
Has it feathers like a bird?
Is it brought from famous countries
Of which I have never heard?

Oh, some scholar! Oh, some sailor!
Oh, some wise man from the skies!
Please to tell a little pilgrim
Where the place called morning lies. 41

A poem in which morning is described as a person is the following:

The sun just touched the morning;
The morning, happy thing,
Supposed that he had come to dwell,
And life would be all spring.

She felt herself supreme, --
A raised, ethereal thing;
Henceforth for her what holiday!
Meanwhile her wheeling king

Trailing slow along the orchards
His haughty, spangled hems,
Leaving a new necessity, --
The want of diadems!

The morning fluttered, staggered,
Felt feebly for her crown, --
Her unpointed forehead
Henceforth her only one. 42

Still another description of morning is analytical:

"Morning" means "Milking" to the Farmer
Dawn to the Apennines --
Dusk to the Maid.
"Morning" means just Chance to the Lover --
Just Revelation to the Beloved.
Epicures date a breakfast by it!
Heroes a battle,
The Miller a flood,
Feint-going eyes their lapse
From sighing,
Faith, the Experiment of our Lord. 43

An example of the poet's allusion to morning in connection with the death of loved ones is cited below:

And worn a new politeness took
And failed to wake them up,

But called the others clear,
And passed their curtains by.
Sweet morning, when I over-sleep,
Knock, recollect, for me!\textsuperscript{44}

Personification is used in both of the following representative examples of many brief but striking figures in which morning is mentioned:

Night is the morning's canvas.\textsuperscript{45}

Morning's bold face stares in the window.\textsuperscript{46}

At times Emily Dickinson simply speaks of noon as a time at which things happen, at times she describes noon, and often she speaks of noon figuratively. As is her habit, she frequently alludes to noon in some connection with death. Two brief descriptions of noon which give the reader quite different impressions are as follows:

And noon should burn,
As it has usual done.\textsuperscript{47}

A something in a summer's noon, --
An azure depth, a wordless tune,
Transcending ecstasy.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{44}LX, ll. 3-8, p. 183. \textsuperscript{45}LXXXIV, l. 13, p. 252.
\textsuperscript{46}XC, l. 3, p. 430. \textsuperscript{47}LXVII, ll. 5-6, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{48}LXIII, ll. 4-6, p. 98.
A practical Emily states in one poem, "Corn is made at noon." Speaking figuratively of death, she says:

If night stands first, then noon,
To gird us for the sun,
What gaze --

When, from a thousand skies,
On our developed eyes
Noons blaze! 50

Two contrasting ways in which she personifies noon are given in these two quotations:

The farthest thunder that I heard
Was nearer than the sky,
And rumbles still, though torrid noons
Have lain their missiles by. 51

The noon unwinds her blue. 52

The poet's striking use of metaphor is well illustrated by the following two allusions to noon:

Or butterflies, off banks of noon,
Leap, plashless, as they swim. 53

The mornings blossom into noons,
And split their pods of flame. 54

Afternoon is mentioned quite frequently in Emily Dickinson's poetry, but usually only as a time at which something occurs. A description of a winter afternoon is contained in this stanza:

49XCI, 1. 2, p. 114. 50LXXXI, 11. 7-12, p. 251.
51CIX, 11. 1-4, p. 50. 52CXXXVI, 1. 4, p. 354.
53XXIII, 11. 19-20, p. 78. 54LXI, 11. 3-4, p. 103.
There's a certain slant of light,  
On winter afternoons,  
That oppresses, like the weight  
Of cathedral tunes. 55

The whimsical Emily remarks:

God permits industrious angels  
Afternoons to play. 56

The poet expresses her sincere admiration for a contemporary writer when she says:

Oh, what an afternoon for heaven,  
When Bronte entered there! 57

Although many of the numerous references to day as a whole are merely references to a time when something happens, quite a number are descriptions. Some allusions to day are figurative. Many of the descriptions are of days at certain seasons of the year. A brief general description of day is the following poem:

Of this is Day composed --  
A morning and a noon,  
A Revelry unspeakable  
And then a gay Unknown;  
Whose Poms allure and spurn --  
And dower and deprive,  
And penury for glory  
Remedilessly leave. 58

This statement about day is also made:

Two lengths has every day,  
Its absolute extent --  
And area superior  
By hope or heaven lent. 59

One of several allusions to a summer day is contained in these appreciative lines:

The one that could repeat the summer day
Were greater than itself, though he
Minutest of mankind might be. 60

Autumn days of one type are described in the following quotation:

Besides the autumn poets sing,
A few prosaic days
A little this side of the snow
And that side of the haze.

A few incisive mornings,
A few ascetic evens. 61

In sharp contrast, however, is the description of autumn days of another type:

These are the days when birds come back,
A very few, a bird or two,
To take a backward look.

These are the days when skies put on
The old, old sophistries of June, --
A blue and gold mistake. 62

One of several personifications of day occurs in a poem written by Emily upon reading Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poems:

The days to mighty metres stept,
The homeliest adorned
As if unto a Jubilee
'Twere suddenly confirmed. 63

Aside from the expected references to evening as a time

60XXIX, 11. 1-3, p. 82. 61XLIX, 11. 1-6, p. 91.
when things happen, there are several poems devoted entirely to detailed descriptions of evening. Representative of these descriptive poems is the following:

    How the old mountains drip with sunset,
    And the brake of dun!
    How the hemlocks are tipped in tinsel
    By the wizard sun!
    How the old steeples bend 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 if a duchess pass!
    How a small dusk crawls on the village
    Till the houses blot;
    And the odd flambeaux no men carry
    Glimmer on the spot!
    Now it is night in nest and kennel,
    And where was the wood,
    Just a dome of abyss is nodding
    Into solitude! --
    These are the visions baffled Guido;
    Titian never told;
    Domenichino dropped the pencil,
    Powerless to unfold.64

Emily's marked flair for the whimsical is apparent in this brief, charming poem about evening:

    Lightly stepped a yellow star
    To its lofty place,
    Loosed the Moon her silver hat
    From her lustral face,
    All of evening softly lit
    As an astral hall --
    "Father," I observed to Heaven,
    "You are punctual."65

64CX, pp. 122-123. 65IVIII, p. 242.
A figurative concept of evening is exemplified in this personification of twilight:

The twilight stood as strangers do
With hat in hand, polite and new,
To stay as if, or go.66

There are comparatively few allusions to midnight in Emily Dickinson's poetry. In speaking of a loved one's death, the poet gives this brief impression of midnight:

And 'twas like midnight, some,
When everything that ticked has stopped,
And space stares, all around.67

Midnight is frequently mentioned in a figurative sense. One such figurative use is to be found in the following short poem about death:

At last to be identified!
At last, the lamps upon thy side,
The rest of life to see!
Past midnight, past the morning star!
Past sunrise! Ah! what leagues there are
Between our feet and day!68

Referring to sorrow or pain, the poet exclaims:

To whom the mornings stand for nights,
What must the midnights be!69

Allusions to night as a whole are very numerous. Many of these allusions are merely to times of happenings, but many are figurative. Metaphor is frequently used. An example of the metaphorical use of night is found in these lines:

---

66CVI, 11. 6-8, pp. 120-121. 67LXXV, 11. 16-18, p. 192.
68XXIX, p. 170. 69XIII, p. 382.
Our share of night to bear,  
Our share of morning. 70

Another metaphorical use of night is contained in the following lines, in which the poet looks forward to the approach of death:

Enamoured of the parting west,  
The peace, the flight, the amethyst,  
Night's possibility! 71

Light and dark are often mentioned by the poet, sometimes in their original sense and sometimes figuratively, in a few instances the terms "blond" and "violet" are also used, apparently as synonyms for light. One entire poem is devoted to a description of the light of spring:

A light exists in spring  
Not present on the year  
At any other period.  
When March is scarcely here

A color stands abroad  
On solitary hills  
That science cannot overtake,  
But human nature feels.

It waits upon the lawn;  
It shows the furthest tree  
Upon the furthest slope we know;  
It almost speaks to me.

Then, as horizons step,  
Or noons report away,  
Without the formula of sound,  
It passes, and we stay:

A quality of loss  
Affecting our content,  
As trade had suddenly encroached  
Upon a sacrament. 72

70 II, 11. 1-2, p. 3.  
71 XXXIV, 11. 10-12, p. 172.

72 LXXXV, p. 110.
Quite distinct is the light of spring from the light of winter described in the following poem:

There's a certain slant of light,
. On winter afternoons,
That oppresses, like the weight
Of cathedral tunes.

Heavenly hurt it gives us;
We can find no scar,
But internal difference
Where the meanings are.

None may teach it anything,
'Tis the seal, despair, --
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the air.

When it comes, the landscape listens,
Shadows hold their breath;
When it goes, 'tis like the distance
On the lock of death.73

An example of the figurative use of light is this metaphor:

The light His Action and the dark
The Leisure of His Will.74

Another illustration is the simile, "gay like Light."75

As most of the allusions to the dark are figurative, one example, in addition to that cited in the preceding paragraph in regard to light, will suffice. This figure also is a metaphor:

What need of day to those whose dark
Hath so surpassing sun,
It deem it be continually
At the meridian?76

There are a few figurative references to shadows. One is a

73LXXXII, pp. 108-109. 74CXLV, 11. 5-6, pp. 271-272.
75CXLII, 1. 22, p. 357. 76LXXIX, 11. 13-16, p. 250.
complete poem in which the shadows are personified:

Like men and women shadows walk
Upon the hills today,
With here and there a mighty bow,
Or trailing courtesy
To neighbors, doubtless, of their own;
Not quickened to perceive
Minuter landscape, as ourselves
And Boroughs where we live.\textsuperscript{77}

A very striking figure is the following metaphor:

\textbf{Presentiment is that long shadow on the lawn
Indicative that suns go down.}\textsuperscript{78}

"Can I expound the skies?"\textsuperscript{79} asks the poet. In her poetry she makes numerous allusions to the skies -- morning skies, evening skies, clear skies, dark skies, and just skies in general, -- not to mention such phenomena of the sky as the rainbow, lightning, and the aurora borealis.

The morning sky is personified in the line, "Still rears the East her amber flag."\textsuperscript{80} The following is a metaphorical reference to death:

\textbf{Death but the drift of Eastern gray
Dissolving into dawn away
Before the West begins.}\textsuperscript{81}

A brief but effective description of the evening sky is contained in these two lines:

\textbf{Nor noticed that the ebbing day
Flowed silver to the west.}\textsuperscript{82}

Two interesting similes alluding to the evening sky are as

\textsuperscript{77}XLI, p. 236. \textsuperscript{78}LXVII, ll. 1-2, p. 101.
\textsuperscript{79}XIV, 1. 8, p. 9. \textsuperscript{80}LXIII, 1. 16, pp. 98-99.
\textsuperscript{81}CLXXIII, ll. 4-6, p. 373. \textsuperscript{82}XLIX, ll. 3-4, p. 24.
follows:

Like mighty footlights burned the red
At bases of the trees, --
The far theatricals of day
Exhibiting to these. 83

Portraits are to daily faces
As an evening west
To a fine, pedantic sunshine
In a satin vest. 84

One short poem provides a colorful comparison of evening and morning skies:

A slash of Blue, a sweep of Gray!
Some Scarlet patches on the way
Compose an evening sky!

A little Purple slipped between,
Some Ruby trousers hurried on,
A wave of Gold, a Bank of Day, --
This just makes out the morning sky! 85

Speaking figuratively of clear skies, the poet demands:

Tell me what time the weaver sleeps
Who spun the breadths of blue! 86

On another occasion she speaks metaphorically of the moon's "dimmities of blue." 87

Dark skies are mentioned in several poems. The darkness of the sky before a thunderstorm is described in the following lines:

A cap of lead across the sky
Was tight and surly drawn,
We could not find the Mighty Face,
The figure was withdrawn. 88

83XLI, 11. 1-4, p. 87. 84LVIII, p. 28.
85XXXVIII, pp. 398-399. 86XXXIX, 11. 5-6, p. 86.
87CIII, 1. 20, pp. 118-119. 88LIV, 11. 1-4, p. 241.
The dark sky of winter is personified in a poem in which the poet, while speaking of the jay, says:

The snow and he are intimate;  
I've often seen them play  
When heaven looked upon us all  
With such severity,

I felt apology were due  
To an insulted sky,  
Whose pompous frown was nutriment  
To their temerity.  

Of the very frequent general references to the sky, many are figurative. One of the metaphors used is found in the lines below:

Christ will explain each separate anguish  
In the fair schoolroom of the sky.  

Personification of the sky occurs in these lines:

The skies can't keep their secret!  
They tell it to the hills.  

The poet alludes to the rainbow several times, in one poem demanding to be told "who laid the rainbow's piers." In another poem she says of each life's goal:

To reach  
were hopeless as the rainbow's raiment  
To touch.  

She describes the approach of spring as "some rainbow coming from the fair!"
A rare reference to lightning is contained in the following lines:

Omnipotence had not a tongue:
His lisp is Lightning and the Sun. 95

On another occasion an allusion is made to "the lightning's jointed road." 96

One entire poem is devoted to praise of the aurora borealis. The poem begins with these descriptive lines:

Of bronze and blaze
The north, to-night! 97

Usually in describing clouds Emily Dickinson gives a graphic picture of them in a very few words. In describing a storm, she says:

An awful tempest mashed the air,
The clouds were gaunt and few;
A black, as of a spectre's cloak,
Hid heaven and earth from view. 98

At one time she speaks of "royal clouds" 99 and at another, of "the color on the cruising cloud." 100 In one instance she tells of "great clouds like ushers leaning"; 101 and a simile in a different poem states:

The clouds, like listless elephants,
Horizons straggled down. 102

One example of the metaphor which she frequently employs in describing clouds against the sunset occurs in the lines below:

95LXXII, 11. 9-10, p. 419.         96LXII, 1. 14, pp. 30-31.
99XXIX, 1. 8, p. 16.              100LXXXVIII, 1. 5, p. 42.
101III, 1. 3, p. 158.             102V, 11. 3-4, p. 159.
Where ships of purple gently toss
On seas of daffodil,
Fantastic sailors mingle,
And then -- the wharf is still. 103

The sun is a topic very often mentioned by the poet; and frequently vivid figures of speech are used to portray sunrise, sunset, sunlight, and the sun itself.

The poet makes this comment upon the sunrise:

The doomed regard the sunrise
With different delight
Because when next it burns abroad
They doubt to witness it.

Joyful to whom the sunrise
Precedes enamored day. 104

In speaking of a bit of pine, she makes the following metaphorical allusion to sunrise:

A feather from the whippoorwill
That everlasting sings,
Whose galleries are sunrise. 105

She uses another metaphor when she says of a grave:

Let no sunrise! yellow noise
Interrupt this ground. 106

Emphasizing an ecstasy of happiness, she concludes a poem with this stanza:

No seasons were to us --
It was not night nor noon,
For sunrise stopped upon the place
And fastened it in dawn. 107

103XLIII, p. 88. 104LXXXIV, 11. 1-4, 9-10, p. 323.
In what is for her a rare mythological allusion, Emily, mourning the dead, expresses a wish:

Would but the Memnon of the desert
Teach me the strain that vanquished him
When he surrendered to the Sunrise --
Maybe that would awaken them.\textsuperscript{108}

Lavishly using personification and metaphor, the poet paints many entrancing pictures of sunset. Not only does she often depict it in unforgettable terms, but she praises it as well. Her praise of sunset finds expression in the following lines:

And who could reproduce the sun,
At period of going down --
The lingering and the stain, I mean --
When Orient has been outgrown,
And Occident becomes unknown,
His name remain.\textsuperscript{109}

Sunset is personified as a juggler in this vivid bit of description:

Blazing in gold and quenching in purple,
Leaping like leopards to the sky,
Then at the feet of the old horizon
Laying her spotted face, to die;

Stooping as low as the kitchen window,
Touching the roof and tinting the barn,
Kissing her bonnet to the meadow, --
And the juggler of day is gone!\textsuperscript{110}

A very different but none the less graphic personification is given in the poem below, in which the sunset is portrayed as a housekeeper:

\textsuperscript{108}CXII, ll. 5-8, p. 449. \textsuperscript{109}XXIX, ll. 4-9, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{110}XLIII, p. 88.
She sweeps with many-colored brooms,
And leaves the shreds behind;
Oh, housewife in the evening west,
Come back, and dust the pond!

You dropped a purple ravelling in,
You dropped an amber thread;
And now you've littered all the East
With duds of emerald!

And still she plies her spotted brooms,
And still the aprons fly,
Till brooms fade softly into stars --
And then I come away. 111

One of the poet's metaphorical descriptions of sunset is contained in the following brief poem:

This is the land the sunset washes,
These are the banks of the Yellow Sea;
Where it rose, or whither it rushes,
These are the western mystery!

Night after night her purple traffic
Strews the landing with purple bales;
Merchantmen poise upon horizons,
Dip, and vanish with fairy sails. 112

The whimsical Emily is again evident in this quaint portrayal of both sunrise and sunset in the same poem:

I'll tell you how the sun rose, --
A ribbon at a time.
The steeplees swam in amethyst,
The news like squirrels ran.

The hills untied their bonnets,
The bobolinks begun.
Then I said softly to myself,
"That must have been the sun!"

111 XL, p. 87. 112 LXIV, pp. 99-100.
But how he set, I know not.  
There seemed a purple stile  
Which little yellow boys and girls  
Were climbing all the while  

Till when they reached the other side,  
A dominie in gray  
Put gently up the evening bars,  
And led the flock away.113

The poet is in a serious mood, however, when she says:

An ignorance a sunset  
Confer upon the eye  
Of territory, color,  
Circumference, decay.

Its amber revelation  
Exhilarate, debase, --  
Camipotence' inspection  
Of our inferior face.

And when the solemn features  
Confirm, in victory,  
We start, as if detected  
In Immortality.114

In quite a number of poems sunshine is mentioned. Evening sunlight is pictured as "a long, long yellow on the lawn."115 Metaphor is used in the statement, "Light laughs the breeze in her castle of sunshine."116 Speaking of the reappearance of the sun after a shower, Emily says, "The sunshine threw his hat away."117

When used in a figure of speech, the sun itself is usually personified. One of many personifications is found in the poem below:

113LXXIII, p. 104.  114XLII, p. 401.  115XC, l. 5, p. 113.  116IV, l. 5, p. 158.  117LXII, l. 11, p. 98.
To intercept his yellow plan
The sun does not allow
Caprices of the atmosphere;
And even when the snow
Heaves balls of specks like vicious boy
Directly in his eye,
Does not so much as turn his head --
Busy with majesty!
'Tis his to stimulate the earth,
And magnetize the sea,
And bind astronomy in place --
Yet any passer-by
Would deem Ourselves the busier,
As the minutest bee
That rides supports a thunder,
A bomb to justify! 118

In another poem constancy is emphasized by this brief personification:

Falter? When the sun
Question if his glory
Be the perfect one. 119

Emily Dickinson's references to the moon are far from numerous, and frequently they are figurative. One poem speaks of the face in the moon, and several poems mention the connection between the moon and the tides. A graphic description of the moon as a person is given in the following poem:

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 blond;
Her cheek like beryl stone;
Her eye unto the summer dew
The likest I have known.

118 LVI, p. 309. 119 III, 11. 2-4, p. 127.
Her lips of amber never part;
But what must be the smile
Upon her friend she could bestow
Were such her silver will!

And what a privilege to be
But the remotest star!
For certainly her way might pass
Beside your twinkling door.

Her bonnet is the firmament,
The universe her shoe,
The stars the trinkets at her belt,
Her dimities of blue.\(^{120}\)

A metaphorical allusion to moons is found in the line, "Proud of my night since thou with moons dost shake it."\(^{121}\) The moon is mentioned in a simile in this poem:

Each that we lose takes part of us;
A crescent still abides;
Which like the moon, some turbid night,
Is summoned by the tides.\(^{122}\)

Upon one occasion the poet makes this statement:

The moon upon her fluent route
Defiant of a road,
The stars Etruscan argument,
Substantiate a God.\(^{123}\)

Much more frequently mentioned than the moon are the stars. At times Emily even mentions by name particular stars, such as Arcturus, Orion, the Pleiades, and the Star of Bethlehem. In regard to the names of the stars, however, she has this remark to make:

Arcturus is his other name, --
I'd rather call him star!
It's so unkind of science
To go and interfere.\(^{124}\)

\(^{120}\text{CIII, pp. 118-119.}\)
\(^{121}\text{XXXV, 1. 3, p. 145.}\)
\(^{122}\text{XCVII, p. 200.}\)
\(^{123}\text{LIX, 11. 1-4, p. 242.}\)
\(^{124}\text{XX, 11. 1-4, p. 76.}\)
To emphasize how much she misses a friend, she says:

I had a star in heaven;
One Pleiad was its name,
And when I was not heeding
It wandered from the same.
And though the skies are crowded,
And all the night ashine,
I do not care about it,
Since none of them are mine.\textsuperscript{125}

In another personification Emily reminds us of the Psalmist:

The morning stars the treble led
On time's first afternoon!\textsuperscript{126}

She speaks metaphorically of the stars as "the wampum of the night,"\textsuperscript{127} and in a simile she describes a railroad train as "punctual as a star."\textsuperscript{128} She concludes one poem with the prayer:

\textit{Low amid that glad Belles Lettres}
Grant that we may stand,
Stars, amid profound Galaxies,
At that grand "Right hand"!\textsuperscript{129}

Emily Dickinson's deep interest in cosmic nature is manifested again and again in her numerous references to the various aspects of it. Not only does she refer to them often, but she very frequently gives detailed descriptions of even such a comparatively minor aspect as the sunset. Furthermore, to express herself adequately, she is continually employing them in a rich and complex pattern of figures of speech.

\textsuperscript{125}CII, 11. 17-24, p. 47. \textsuperscript{126}LXXXII, 11. 11-12, p. 40. \textsuperscript{127}XXXIX, 1. 17, pp. 86-87. \textsuperscript{128}XLIII, 1. 14, p. 22. \textsuperscript{129}XCIV, 11. 17-20, p. 44.
CHAPTER III

ELEMENTAL NATURE

Nothing in nature seems to have been too small or insignificant to escape Emily Dickinson's notice and her consequent mention thereof in her poems. Even such infinitesimal objects as atoms and grains of sand were subject to the scrutiny of her eager mind and served as material for her facile pen.

The major aspects of elemental nature considered in her poetry include mountains, hills, valleys, plains, the sea, rivers, rocks, and minerals. Many minor aspects, such as volcanoes, deserts, swamps, brooks, and precious stones, also receive their share of attention, however.

In speaking of mountains, the poet employs both description and figures of speech. She mentions not only mountains in general but also specific mountains and mountain ranges, including the Alps, Himmaleh (elsewhere Himalah), the Appenines, the Pyrenees, and Ararat. She frequently alludes to the light of the rising sun or of the setting sun upon a mountain. Her description of a mountain usually takes the form of personification, as in the following instance:

51
The mountain sat upon the plain
In his eternal chair,
His observation omnifold,
His inquest everywhere.

The seasons prayed around his knees,
Like children round a sire:
Grandfather of days is he,
Of dawn the ancestor.¹

Another description in the same form is given below:

The mountains grow unnoticed,
Their purple figures rise
Without attempt, exhaustion,
Assistance or applause.

In their eternal faces
The sun with broad delight
Looks long -- and last -- and golden,
For fellowship at night.²

Picturesque allusion is made to mountains in this simile:

The thought beneath so slight a film
Is more distinctly seen, --
As laces just reveal the surge,
Or mists the Appenine.³

In a metaphorical allusion the poet pointedly describes a
trait in human nature:

Give balm to giants,
And they'll wilt, like men.
Give Himmaleh, --
They'll carry him!⁴

Another metaphor is to be found in a poem listing some of
the subjects of the Bible. Here Emily, with a touch of her
inimitable whimsicality, includes:

¹LXXII, p. 103. ²LXX, p. 315.
Sin -- a distinguished Precipice
Others must resist. 5

Her general attitude toward mountains is probably very well
expressed by the following poem:

Ah, Teneriffe!  Receding Mountain!
Purple of Ages pause for you,
Sunset reviews her Sapphire Regiment,
Day drops you her red Adieu!

Still, clad in your mail of ices,
Thigh of granite and thw of steel --
Headless, alike, of pomp or parting,
Ah, Teneriffe!
I'm kneeling still. 6

Volcanoes seem to intrigue the poet, who usually speaks
of them figuratively. She mentions Vesuvius and Etna
specifically. A brief personification is given in these lines:

The reticent volcano keeps
His never slumbering plan;
Confided are his projects pink
To no precarious man. 7

Etna is personified as a vicious cat:

When Etna basks and purrs,
Naples is more afraid
Than when she shows her Garnet Tooth;
Security is loud. 8

A longer poem, in which a volcano is used to represent life,
is the following:

A still volcano -- Life --
That flickered in the night
When it was dark enough to show
Without endangering sight.

5CIV, 11. 9-10, p. 259.  6XXXV, pp. 233-234.
7CVII, 11. 1-4, p. 49.  8VII, p. 224.
A quiet, earthquake style,
Too smoldering to suspect
By natures this side Naples.
The North cannot detect

The solemn, torrid symbol,
The lips that never lie,
Whose hissing corals part and shut
And cities slip away.

Therefore we do Life's labor
Tho' Life's reward be done --
With scrupulous exactness
To hold our senses on.  

In *Emily Dickinson's* poetry, hills are very often mentioned, but frequently without any special significance.

Hills are described as they appear at different seasons of the year, and many times they are personified. Describing spring, the poet alludes to "a purple finger on the slope"; describing autumn, she says:

> Autumn begins to be inferred
> By millinery of the cloud,
> Or deeper color in the shawl
> That wraps the everlasting hill.  

In another bit of description, she says:

> And when again at dawn
> A mighty look runs round the world
> And settles in the hills.  

One of the frequent personifications of hills follows:

> Frequently the woods are pink,
> Frequently are brown;
> Frequently the hills undress
> Behind my native town.  

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9XXXIII, p. 292.  10IX, l. 6, p. 69.
11LXV, l. 5-6, p. 244.  12XLVII, l. 4-6, p. 304.
13XXXVI, l. 1-4, p. 85.
In a reference by the poet to approaching death, the hills are again personified:

Good-by to the life I used to live,
    And the world I used to know;
And kiss the hills for me, just once;
    Now I am ready to go. 14

Speaking figuratively, Emily says of her beloved sister-in-law, Sue:

Today is far from childhood
But up and down the hills
I held her hand the tighter,
Which shortened all the miles. 15

More than once she refers to the hills as a symbol of constancy, as in the lines:

Some things that stay there be, --
    Grief, hills, eternity. 16

She repeats this idea in an affirmation of her own constancy:

"Alter? When the hills do." 17

Contrasting topographically with mountains and hills, valleys and plains also receive a great share of attention. Deserts, swamps, peninsulas, meadows, fields, and even the landscape as a whole are mentioned. In spite of the fact that she speaks of valleys from time to time, the poet never actually paints a picture of them. Perhaps her nearest approach to a picture is a brief reference to "dappled cow-slip dells." 18 A poem about a journey through life offers

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14CXVIII, 11. 13-16, p. 208.
16XIV, 11. 4-5, p. 9. 17III, 1. 1, p. 127.
18CXXXV, 1. 14, pp. 353-354.
a personification in the line, "The valley murmured, 'Come.'"19
The concluding stanza of a poem praising the last of summer makes this allusion to a valley:

To meet it, nameless as it is,
Without celestial mail,
Audacious as without a knock
To walk within the vale.20

Only occasionally are plains, prairies, moors, or pampas mentioned, and then briefly. The Emily who sees chiefly with the inner eye of the imagination explains:

To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee, --
And revery.
The revery alone will do
If bees are few.21

She also begins a statement of faith with this stanza:

I never saw a moor,
I never saw the sea;
Yet know I how the heather looks,
And what a wave must be.22

She alludes to deserts a few times, usually figuratively, and names the Sahara specifically in one poem.
The following is an example of a metaphorical use of desert:

Strong draughts of their refreshing minds
To drink, enables mine
Through desert or the wilderness,
As bore it sealed wine --
To go elastic, or as one
The camel's trait attained,
How powerful the stimulus
Of an hermetic mind.23

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19XCIX, l. 14, pp. 257-258. 20LXXVII, ll. 5-8, p. 318.
21XCVII, p. 116. 22XVII, ll. 1-4, p. 163.
23XI, p. 281.
Revealing as to Emily's intimate knowledge of nature are two of her fleeting references to swamps. Anticipating the coming of summer, she lists among its delights:

The bees will not despise the tune
Their forefathers have hummed;
The wild rose redden in the bog.24

She begins another poem with the lines:

Sweet is the swamp with its secrets,
Until we meet a snake.25

Occasional mention of peninsula, headlands, shore, or port is usually figurative. A figurative allusion to a peninsula is found in the following stanza:

It might be easier
To fail with land in sight
Than gain my blue peninsula --
To perish -- of delight.26

Frequently the poet refers to meadows or fields. In a figurative poem about the brook of life, she says:

And later, in August it may be
When the meadows parching lie.27

A personification of meadows occurs in the stanza:

When broad sun-burned acquaintances
Discourse between the toil
And laugh, a homely species,
That makes the meadows smile.28

In a description of autumn these details are given:

The maple wears a gayer scarf,
The field a scarlet gown. 29

At the close of one poem, Emily reflects:

I wonder if the sepulchre
Is not a lonesome way,
When men and boys, and larks and June
Go down the fields to hay. 30

She speaks of both fields and meadows as representative of
the joys of nature when she says:

It's all I have to bring to-day,
This, and my heart beside,
This, and my heart, and all the fields,
And all the meadows wide.
Be sure you count, should I forget, --
Some one the sun could tell, --
This, and my heart, and all the bees
Which in the clover dwell. 31

She mentions in her poetry not only land but such minor
related subjects as the ground, sod, soil, mud, clay, sand,
and dust. When referring to land, at times she means land
as distinguished from the sea, and at other times she means
countries. The first meaning is illustrated in the lines:

As wrecked men deem they sight the land
At centre of the sea. 32

The second meaning is brought out in the stanza below:

To stay the homesick, homesick feet
Upon a foreign shore
Haunted by native lands, the while,
And blue, beloved air. 33

29 LXXIX, 11. 5-6, p. 107. 30 CXXIV, 11. 17-20, pp. 210-211.
32 LXXIII, 11. 3-4, p. 35. 33 LXXVIII, 11. 5-8, p. 37.
In the following figure of speech there is an allusion to lands:

There is no frigate like a book
To take us lands away.34

One of several references to the ground is contained in this statement:

Longing is like the seed
That wrestles in the ground,
Believing if it intercede
It shall at length be found.35

Speaking of clover, the poet interprets the sod by saying:

Contending with the grass,
Near kinsman to herself,
For privilege of sod and sun,
Sweet litigants of life.36

In a figurative use, she speaks of the dead as "wearing the sod gown."37 One of her rare references to the soil is found in the lines:

Soil of flint if steadfast tilled
Will reward the hand.38

Although mud might be generally considered a subject far from poetic, Emily incorporates it in a poem when she says of March, "Maketh he mud for dog and peddler."39 Her few allusions to clay are figurative, usually in connection with death, as in the concluding stanza of a poem on the

34XCIX, 11. 1-2, p. 46. 35CLIV, 11. 1-4, p. 363.
37LXXIII, 1. 3, p. 248. 38CX, 11. 5-6, p. 50.
39LXXXVIII, 1. 3, p. 111.
dignity of the dead:

A lord might dare to lift the hat
To such a modest clay,
Since that my Lord, "the Lord of lords"
Receives unblushingly! 40

There are several references to sand -- sometimes in connection with the desert, sometimes in connection with the sea, and sometimes in no particular connection with any place or element. A figurative use of sand in connection with the sea is the following stanza:

The Caspian has its realms of sand,
Its other realm of sea;
Without the sterile perquisite
No Caspian could be. 41

Emily's allusions to dust are fairly numerous. Sometimes they are factual, as when she mentions "wiping away the velvet dust" 42 which has collected on an ebony box. She uses dust in a simile in speaking of an approaching storm:

The dust did scoop itself like hands
And throw away the road. 43

She often uses dust figuratively when speaking of the body or death, as in the lines:

He knew no more that he was poor,
Nor that his frame was dust. 44

The poet frequently refers to the landscape as a whole.

In one poem she conjectures:

40LXXI, 11. 13-16, pp. 189-190.
41XLIII, 11. 5-8, p. 148. 42LVIII, 1. 3, p. 408.
43XXXVII, 11. 7-8, p. 85. 44XXI, 11. 3-4, p. 15.
Could we stand with that old Moses
Canaan denied, --
Scan, like him, the stately landscape
On the other side, --

Doubtless we should deem superfluous
Many sciences
Not pursued by learned angels
In scholastic skies!45

An instance of her personification of the landscape occurs when she speaks of

The eager look on landscapes
As if they just repressed
Some secret that was pushing,
Like chariots, in the breast.46

The sea, like the sunset, seems to be a favorite subject of Emily Dickinson's, for she mentions it often. She also alludes to rivers, brooks, streams in general, rills, pools, and wells.

Although from time to time she names four specific seas -- the Caspian, the Mediterranean, the Yellow Sea, and the Baltic -- she usually refers to the sea in general. She often speaks figuratively of it -- frequently in connection with death or eternity, and frequently in connection with the sunlight. Several times her attention is focused upon the tides. A brief metaphorical description of the sea is contained in the following poem:

An everywhere of silver,
With ropes of sand
To keep it from effacing
The track called land.47

45XCIV, li. 9-16, p. 44. 46XLVI, li. 13-16, p. 303.
47XXII, p. 78.
An example of the poems which mention the sea figuratively in connection with death and eternity is quoted below:

On this wondrous sea,
Sailing silently,
Knowest thou the shore
Ho! pilot, ho!
Where no breakers roar,
Where the storm is o'er?

In the silent west
Many sails at rest,
Their anchors fast;
Thither I pilot thee, --
Land, ho! Eternity!
Ashore at last! 48

A conception of the meaning of eternity itself is expressed in this simile:

As if the sea should part
And show a further sea --
And that a further, and the three
But a presumption be
Of periods of seas
Unvisited of shores --
Themselves the verge of seas to be --
Eternity is these. 49

Of several instances in which the sunlight is spoken of as a sea, one is the following description of sunset, which closes a poem about a butterfly:

Till sundown crept, a steady tide,
And men that made the hay,
And afternoon, and butterfly,
Extinguished in its sea. 50

The relation of the moon and the tide is brought out by means

50 VII, 11. 21-24, pp. 68-69.
of personification:

The moon is distant from the sea,
And yet with amber hands
She leads him, docile as a boy,
Along appointed sands.

He never misses a degree;
Obedient to her eye,
He comes just so far toward the town,
Just so far goes away. 51

Scattered among the poet's occasional references to rivers are the names of four particular rivers: the Don, the Dnieper, the Jordan, and the Rhine. Usually the allusions to rivers are figurative, as in the mention of "life's swift river" 52 and in the following contrasting lines, in which the river represents death:

The River reaches to my feet,
And yet my heart be dry!
Oh Lover, Life could not convince,
Might Death enable Thee!

The River reaches to my breast, --
Still, still my hands above
Proclaim with their remaining might --
Dost recognize the Love?

The River reaches to my mouth, --
Remember, when the Sea
Swept by my searching eye the last --
Themselves were quick with Thee! 53

Rivers are personified in this brief comment:

The Hills erect their purple heads,
The rivers lean to see --
Yet man has not, of all the throng,
A curiosity. 54

51XXI, 11. 1-8, p. 143. 52XXII, 1. 2, p. 386.
53XCV, 11. 5-16, p. 433. 54IVII, p. 242.
Frequently Emily speaks of the sound of the brook, usually in a personification. In one instance she remarks, "The brooks laugh louder when I come"; and in another, she says, "The brooks brag all the day." The relation of the brook to the sea, on which she touches more than once, is brought out in the personification below:

The Sea said "Come" to the Brook,
The Brook said "Let me grow!"
The Sea said "Then you will be a Sea --
I want a brook, Come now!"

A very good description of an actual brook is given in this poem, throughout which the brook is mentioned in a figuative sense:

Have you got a brook in your little heart,
Where bashful flowers blow,
And blushing birds go down to drink,
And shadows tremble so?

And nobody knows, so still it flows,
That any brook is there;
And yet your little draught of life
Is daily drunken there.

Then look out for the little brook in March,
When the rivers overflow,
And the snows come hurrying from the hills,
And the bridges often go.

And later, in August it may be,
When the meadows parching lie,
Beware, lest this little brook of life
Some burning noon go dry!

Of the few references to streams in general, this

55LVIII, l. 5, pp. 95-96.  56LXII, l. 6, p. 103.
57CXIV, p. 263.  58IX, p. 130.
metaphorical use will serve as an example:

    Down Time's quaint stream
    Without an ear,
    We are enforced to sail,
    Our Port -- a secret --
    Our Perchance -- a gale. 59

A rare allusion to rills is found in the lines:

    But longer than the little rill
    That cooled the forehead of the hill
    While other went the sea to fill,
    And other went to turn the mill,
    I'll do thy will. 60

Almost equally rare is the mention of pools. Contrasting glimpses of pools are offered when the poet speaks of a time "before the ice is in the pools" 61 and when, in describing the coming of spring, she says:

    Lethargic pools resume the whir
    Of last year's sundered tune. 62

A metaphorical use of pools is contained in the statement:

    I can wade grief,
    Whole pools of it --
    I'm used to that. 63

"Droughtless wells" -- apparently springs of water -- are pictured in the following manner:

    I know where wells grow -- droughtless wells --
    Deep dug for Summer days,
    Where mooses go no more away,
    And pebble safely plays.

61CXXVII, 1. 1, p. 212. 62LIX, 11. 8-9, p. 96.
They're made of fathoms and a belt,
A belt of jagged stone
Inlaid with emerald half way down,
And diamonds jumbled on.\textsuperscript{64}

The poetry of Emily Dickinson abounds in allusions to such diverse elements and combinations of elements as stone, minerals, gems, the air, phosphorus, and fire.

The quantity of rock mentioned at one time varies from an entire quarry to a pebble; even stalactites are mentioned more than once. Flint, alabaster, marble, granite, agate, slate, coral, and adamant are specific types of rock to which reference is made. A great many of the allusions to stone are in connection with the dead or with tombs. A quaint description of just an ordinary stone is found in this short poem:

\begin{quote}
How happy is the little stone
That rambles in the road alone,
And doesn't care about careers,
And exigencies never fears;
Whose coat of elemental brown
A passing universe put on;
And independent as the sun,
Associates or glows alone,
Fulfilling absolute degree
In casual simplicity.\textsuperscript{65}
\end{quote}

Stone is spoken of in connection with death in the following stanza:

\begin{quote}
Was ever idleness like this?
Within a hut of stone
To bask the centuries away
Nor once look up for noon?\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{64}XLIV, ll. 1-8, pp. 402-403. \textsuperscript{65}XXXIII, p. 83.

\textsuperscript{66}CXXXIX, ll. 5-8, p. 217.
A striking metaphor is employed by the poet when she speaks of the intangible barrier between herself and the person she loves as "a cobweb wove in adamant."67

Besides referring frequently to mines and ore in general, Emily mentions such minerals as gold, silver, lead, coal, and oil. On one occasion she even alludes to pyrites. Among her figurative uses of mines in general is one in which she tells of entertaining

A rapture as of legacies --
Of introspective mines.68

The two metals, gold and silver, receive more of her attention than do the other minerals, with gold ranking first.

She has this comment to make concerning gold:

How destitute is he
Whose Gold is firm,
Who finds it every time,
The small stale sum --
When Love, with but a pence
Will so display,
As is a disrespect to India.69

Metaphorically, she speaks of "a word of gold,"70 and in another metaphor she mentions both gold and the mine:

Slow gold, but everlasting,
The bullion of To-day
Contrasted with the currency
Of Immortality.

A beggar here and there
Is gifted to discern
Beyond the broker's insight --
One's Money -- One's the Mine.71

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67CXLVIII, 1. 11, p. 361. 68CXXIV, 11. 7-8, p. 266.
68CXXII, p. 265. 70LXXXV, 1. 18, pp. 426-427.
71III, 11. 5-12, pp. 277-278.
She usually alludes figuratively to silver, often employing it to describe music. It is in this sense that she uses it when she says of Mrs. Browning: "Silver perished with her tongue." 72

Among precious and semi-precious stones, the poet refers to pearls, rubies, diamonds, beryl, onyx, chrysoprase, amber, sapphires, amethysts, garnets, emeralds, and topaz. She frequently mentions gems or jewels. An allusion to a gem is contained in the lines:

To have a smile for mine each day,
How better than a gem! 73

There are more references to pearls than to any other precious stones, although diamonds and amber are quite often mentioned. Of the raindrops, Emily says:

Myself conjectured, were they pearls,
What necklaces could be! 74

In a more serious vein, she asks:

Are we that wait sufficient worth,
That such enormous pearl
As Life should be dissolved for us
In battle's horrid bowl? 75

She alludes to a diamond in the comparison with which she emphasizes the idea in the following poem:

Reverse cannot befall that fine Prosperity
Whose sources are interior.
As soon Adversity
A diamond overtake,

74IXII, 11. 7-8, p. 98. 75LXXXIII, 11. 13-16, pp. 322-323.
In far Bolivian ground;  
Disfortune hath no implement  
Could mar it, if it found.\textsuperscript{76}

Speaking of the diadem of love, she contrasts it with several gems:

'Tis little I could care for pearls  
Who own the ample sea;  
Or brooches, when the Emperor  
With rubies pelleteth me;

Or gold, who am the Prince of Mines;  
Or diamonds, when I see  
A diadem to fit a dome  
Continual crowning me.\textsuperscript{77}

Her poetry contains numerous allusions to air, to which she sometimes refers as "atmosphere" or "ether." She speaks of the dead as being "o'er-take-less as the air";\textsuperscript{78} and, describing the indefinable music of nature, says:

All day, among the crowded air,  
I hear the silver strife.\textsuperscript{79}

Typical of the whimsical Emily is this enchanting poem:

I taste a liquor never brewed,  
From tankards scooped in pearl;  
Not all the vats upon the Rhine  
Yield such an alcohol!

Inebriate of air am I,  
And debauchee of dew,  
Reeling, through endless summer days,  
From inns of molten blue.

When landlords turn the drunken bee  
Out of the foxglove's door,  
When butterflies renounce their drugs,  
I shall but drink the more!

\textsuperscript{76}\textsuperscript{VIII}, p. 224. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{77}\textsuperscript{LXXXIV}, p. 41.  
\textsuperscript{78}\textsuperscript{LXXX}, l. 8, p. 321. \hspace{1cm} \textsuperscript{79}\textsuperscript{LXXXII}, ll. 2-3, p. 40.
Till seraphs swing their snowy hats,
And saints to windows run,
To see the little tippler
Leaning against the sun.\textsuperscript{80}

A rare -- and figurative -- mention of phosphorus is
found in the following lines:

\textit{More life went out, when He went,}
\textit{Than ordinary breath,}
\textit{Lit with a finer phosphor}
\textit{Requiring in the quench}

\textit{A power of renowned cold --}
\textit{The climate of the grave}
\textit{A temperature just adequate}
\textit{So anthracite to live.}\textsuperscript{81}

Fire is mentioned frequently, usually in a figurative
sense. In a simile, the poet, speaking of danger, says:

\textit{There's Fasiss there}
\textit{Begits an awe,}
\textit{That searches Human Nature's creases}
\textit{As clean as Fire.}\textsuperscript{82}

A description of the sunset as a fire is given below:

\textit{The largest fire ever known}
\textit{Occurs each afternoon,}
\textit{Discovered is without surprise,}
\textit{Proceeds without concern;}
\textit{Consumes, and no report to men,}
\textit{An Occidental town,}
\textit{Rebuilt another morning}
\textit{To be again burned down.}\textsuperscript{83}

Emily Dickinson employs an infinite variety of aspects
of elemental nature with which to express herself. She
uses even so apparently prosaic a subject as dust to enhance

\textsuperscript{80}CXX, p. 12.  \textsuperscript{81}II, 11. 1-8, p. 377.
\textsuperscript{82}VI, 11. 4-7, p. 224.  \textsuperscript{83}XLVI, p. 238.
her vivid imagery and emphasize her ideas. With such manifestly poetic subjects as the mountains and the sea, she paints magnificent pictures and impresses her thoughts indelibly upon the mind of the reader.
CHAPTER IV

BIOLOGICAL NATURE

Biological nature plays an important role in Emily Dickin-son's poetry. Of the two major aspects, flora and fauna, the plant life plays a slightly more predominant role than does the animal life.

The poet's treatment of plant life can be roughly di-
vided into the following heads: flowers, fruits, trees, and other plants. Her treatment of animal life divides it-
self naturally into three classifications: animals, birds, and insects. She bestows more attention upon flowers and
birds than upon any other phases of plant and animal life.

To Emily Dickinson, who could find a place even for
land in her poetry, such a manifestly poetic subject as
flowers offered limitless possibilities. Her poems are
rich in allusions to flowers, blossoms, blooms, bouquets,
nosegays, gardens, and Eden. Her poetry abounds in refer-
ences not only to general terms for flowers but also to
the names of many specific varieties. The varieties she
mentions include violet, foxglove, clover, water-lily,
daisy, leontodon, iris, aster, anemone, bell, batschia,
deaffodil, crocus, rhodora, dandelion, lily (in general),
lily of the field, gentian, rose, golden-rod, fuchsia, orchis, rhododendron, buttercup, lilac, jasmine, harebell, morning glory, rosemary, asphodel, carnation, marigold, "Hearts' Ease," geranium, cactus, hyacinth, cowslip, primrose, and stock. One poem describes the arbutus, and another pays tribute to a tulip; but neither flower is mentioned by name. Of the varieties listed, the poet alludes most frequently to the rose; but she also refers quite often to the daisy, the clover, the daffodil, and the buttercup. Quite a number of short poems were written to accompany gifts of flowers.

The poet seems to have favorite flowers to mention under given circumstances. She often alludes to the clover in connection with the bee. Although she refers to several different flowers in relation to death, she seems to prefer the daisy in this connection. She also uses the daisy as a symbol of humility.

She gives this interpretation of the meaning of a flower:

This bauble was preferred by bees --
By butterflies desired --
At heavenly hopeless distance
Of bird was justified --
Did Noon embellish in herself --
Was Summer to a score
Who only knew of Universe
It had created her.1

1LIV, p. 407.
Of the meaning of flowers to her she says:

My flowers turn from forums,
Yet eloquent declare
What Cato couldn't prove to me
Except the birds were here! 2

Speaking figuratively of her own poems, she announces:

My nosegays are for captives;
Dim, long-expectant eyes,
Fingers denied the plucking,
Patient till paradise.

To such, if they should whisper
Of morning and the moor,
They bear no other errand,
And I, no other prayer. 3

In one poem Emily states the purpose of the indoor garden which gave her so much pleasure:

Flowers to keep the eyes
From going awkward when it snows. 4

In the following poem she describes that garden with a richness of imagery which reminds the reader of Keats:

I tend my flowers for thee,
Bright Absentee!
My fuchsia's coral seams
Rip, while the sower dreams.
Geraniums tint and spot,
Low daisies dot,
My cactus splits a beard
To show its throat.

Carnations tip their spice
And bees pick up.
A hyacinth I hid
Puts out a ruffled head,
And odors fall
From flasks so small
You marvel how they held.

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2XLVIII, 11. 5-6, p. 305.

3Prefatory poem to Part Two, "Nature," p. 64.

Globe roses break
Their satin flake
Upon my garden floor,
Yet Thou not there --
I had as lief they bore
  No crimson more.
Thy flower be gay
Her Lord away!
It ill becometh me,
I'll dwell in calyx gray
How modestly, alway
Thy daisy,
Draped for Thee.\(^5\)

Representative of the spring flowers which she describes is the arbutus, to which she says:

Pink, small, and punctual,
Aromatic, low,
Covert in April,
Candid in May,

Dear to the moss,
Known by the knoll,
Next to the robin
In every human soul.

Bold little beauty,
Redecked with thee,
Nature forswears
Antiquity.\(^6\)

Anticipating the delights of summer, she states that

The lilacs, bending many a year,
Will sway with purple load.\(^7\)

One of the autumn flowers which she describes is the gentian, personified in the poem below:

God made a little gentian;
It tried to be a rose
And failed, and all the summer laughed.

\(^5\)CXXVI, pp. 347-348. \(^6\)LIII, pp. 93-94.

\(^7\)LXXXIII, ll. 9-10, p. 109.
But just before the snows
There came a purple creature
That ravished all the hill;
And summer hid her forehead,
And mockery was still.
The frosts were her condition;
The Tyrian would not come
Until the North evoked it.
"Creator! shall I bloom?"8

To the rose, as has been said before, Emily Dickinson devotes more of her attention than to any other flower. She often refers to it rather casually and at other times describes it or uses it in metaphor, simile, or personification. She whimsically analyzes it in one delightful little poem:

A sepal, petal, and a thorn
Upon a common summer's morn,
A flash of dew, a bee or two,
A breeze,
A caper in the trees, --
And I'm a rose!9

In speaking of a blushing girl, she says metaphorically that "the rose did caper on her cheek."10 Of the dead, she states in simile:

They dropped like flakes, they dropped like stars,
Like petals from a rose,
When suddenly across the June
A wind with fingers goes.11

She employs personification of the rose in this tribute to the joys of youth:

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8XLVIII, pp. 90-91.  9XCIII, p. 114.

10XXIX, 1. 1, p. 142.  11XLIX, 11. 1-4, p. 178.
Inquire of the closing Rose
Which Rapture she preferred,
And she will tell you, sighing,
The transport of the Bud. 12

Using a rose as an illustration, she makes the following observation upon the value of suffering to human life:

Essential oils are wrung:
The attar from the rose
Is not expressed by suns alone,
It is the gift of screws.

The general rose decays;
But this, in lady's drawer,
Makes summer when the lady lies
In ceaseless rosemary. 13

The daisy is apparently second only to the rose in Emily's favor. In one of her very frequent allusions to the daisy in connection with death, she says:

When I am, long ago,
An island in dishonored grass,
Whom none but daisies know. 14

Sent with a daisy, this poem speaks of it as representative of all the joys of summer:

A science -- so the savants say,
"Comparative Anatomy",
By which a single bone
Is made a secret to unfold
Of some rare tenant of the mold
Else perished in the stone.
So to the eye prospective led
This meekest flower of the mead,
Upon a winter's day,
Stands representative in gold
Of rose and lily, marigold
And countless butterfly. 15
The daisy is personified in the following outlook toward the close of life:

The daisy follows soft the sun,
   And when his golden walk is done,
   Sits shyly at his feet.
He, waking, finds the flower near.
"Wherefore, marauder, art thou here?"
   "Because, sir, love is sweet!"

We are the flower, Thou the sun!
Forgive us, if as days decline,
   We nearer steal to Thee, --
   Enamoured of the parting west,
The peace, the flight, the amethyst,
   Night's possibility.16

One of the flowers to which Emily pays the most marked attention is the clover. Besides mentioning it frequently, she devotes what is for her quite a long poem to a description of its virtues:

There is a flower that bees prefer,
   And butterflies desire;
To gain the purple democrat
   The humming-birds aspire.

And whatsoever insect pass,
   A honey bears away
   Proportioned to his several dearth
   And her capacity.

Her face is rounder than the moon,
   And redder than the gown
   Of orchis in the pasture,
   Or rhododendron worn.

She doth not wait for June;
   Before the world is green
   Her sturdy little countenance
   Against the wind is seen,

   Contending with the grass,
   Near kinsman to herself,

16XXXIV, p. 172.
For privilege of sod and sun,
Sweet litigants for life.

And when the hills are full,
And newer fashions blow,
Doth not retract a single spice
For pang of jealousy.

Her public is 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
When cancelled by the frost.17

Seldom does Emily Dickinson refer to fruit, either generally or specifically, in her poems. The specific fruits to which she alludes most frequently, however, are the nut, the apple, and the berry. She also mentions the cherry and the grape.

She explains:

None but the Nut October fits,
Because through dropping it
The seasons flit, I'm taught.18

Speaking metaphorically, she states her basic rule for classifying the people with whom she comes in contact:

Experiment to me
Is every one I meet.
If it contain a kernel?
The figure of a nut

Presents upon a tree,
Equally plausibly;
But meat within is requisite,
To squirrels and to me.19


19LIV, p. 27.
As in a poem quoted earlier in this chapter, in which she uses a rose as an illustration, the poet, in the lines given below, expresses from a slightly different point of view the value of adversity to the human life:

There are two ripenings --
One of sight, whose forces
Spheric wind,
Until the velvet product
Drops, spicy, to the ground.

A homelier maturing,
The process in the burr --
That teeth of frosts
Alone disclose
On far October air. 20

Emily's gift for whimsicality again comes to the fore when, in a poem about winter, she states that

The Apple in the cellar snug
Was all the one that played. 21

Using the apple to emphasize her idea in the following stanza, she says:

Heaven is what I cannot reach!
The apple on the tree,
Provided it do hopeless hang,
That "heaven" is, to me. 22

Speaking in the same vein, she thus re-words the old saying about "forbidden fruit":

Forbidden fruit a flavor has
That lawful orchards mocks. 23

Although the poet alludes to woods, forests, or orchards quite often, many of her references to them are rather

casual. Among her infrequent references to specific kinds of trees are allusions to sycamore, palm, oak, apple, hemlock, fir, elm, pine, maple, laurel, and cedar. Of these, she thinks enough of the hemlock and the pine to devote one poem to a description of the former and two poems to descriptions of the latter. She even speaks of autumn as a time "before the Christmas tree".  

Typical of her frequent descriptions of the woods at different seasons of the year is this poem about the woods at the approach of winter:

Who robbed the woods,
The trusting woods?
The unsuspecting trees
Brought out their burrs and mosses
His fantasy to please.
He scanned their trinkets, curious,
He grasped, he bore away.
What will the solemn hemlock,
What will the fir-tree say?

Speaking of an approaching storm, she says:

The leaves unhooked themselves from trees
And started all abroad.

Elsewhere, in describing a storm, she includes the fact that "the forests galloped till they fell"; and again she mentions that

The trees held up
Their mangled limbs
Like animals in pain.

24CXXVII, l. 6, p. 212.  
25XVII, p. 75.  
26XXXVI, ll. 5-6, p. 85.  
27XVI, l. 3, p. 163.  
28L, ll. 7-9, p. 239.
More than once she refers to an indefinable music in the woods. On one such occasion she alludes to it in the following terms:

A murmur in the trees to note,
Not loud enough for wind.\(^{29}\)

One of her references to individual trees is this figurative allusion to the oak:

To invest existence with a stately air,
Needs but to remember
That the acorn there
Is the egg of forests,
For the upper air.\(^{30}\)

The poet's description of the hemlock is as dignified as that particular tree itself:

I think the hemlock likes to stand
Upon a margé of snow;
It suits his own austerity,
And satisfies an awe

That men must slake in wilderness,
Or in the desert cloy,—
An instinct for the hoar, the bald,
Lapland's necessity.

The hemlock's nature thrives on cold;
The gnash of northern winds
Is sweetest nutriment to him,
His best Norwegian wines.

To satin races he is nought;
But children on the Don
Beneath his tabernacles play,
And Dnieper wrestlers run.\(^{31}\)

The following description of the pine tree, however, -- sent

\(^{29}\text{XC, ll. 1-2, p. 113.}\) \(^{30}\text{XC, ll. 7-11, p. 43.}\)

\(^{31}\text{LXXXI, p. 108.}\)
to Mr. Bowles with a bit of pine and quoted in an earlier chapter -- is a delightful piece of fantasy:

A feather from the whippoorwill
That everlasting sings,
Whose galleries are sunrise,
Whose stanzas are the spring,
Whose emerald nest the ages spin
With mellow murmuring thread,
Whose beryl egg what schoolboys hunt
In "recess" overhead! 32

Other plants besides flowers, fruits, and trees of various types which Emily Dickinson mentions in her poetry include maize, wheat, corn, and grain in general, ferns, briars, the mushroom, grass, spices, seaweed, moss, weeds, mistletoe, reeds, heather, sedge, the herb, and the vine. She also mentions different parts of plants, such as seed, stem, leaf, pod, thorn, stubble, and straw. The plant to which she alludes far more frequently than to any other is the grass.

She speaks of the "seamless grass" 33 and tells of "the low grass loaded with the dew" 34 at evening. Describing the approach of a storm, she states that

The wind begun to rock the grass
With threatening tunes and low. 35

Emily frequently refers to the grass in connection with graves. One such instance is the following:

32 II, p. 457. 33 XLIX, l. 5, p. 178.
34 CVI, l. 5, p. 120. 35 XXXVII, lI. 1-2, p. 85.
'Tis well, the looking back on grief,  
To re-endure a day 
We thought the mighty funeral 
Of all conceived by joy; 

To recollect how busy grass  
Did meddle, one by one,  
Till all the grief with Summer waved  
And none could see the stone. 36

In a poem about a well, she says:

The grass does not appear afraid;  
I often wonder he  
Can stand so close and look so bold  
At what is dread to me.

Related somehow they may be, --  
The sedge stands next the sea,  
Where he is floorless, yet of fear  
No evidence gives he. 37

The grass is again personified in the following charming description:

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,  
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! 38

Although the mushroom is rarely mentioned in poetry, Emily devotes an entire poem to the quaint eccentricities of this fungus:

The mushroom is the elf of plants,
At evening it is not;
At morning in a truffled hut
It stops upon a spot

As if it tarried always;
And yet its whole career
Is shorter than a snake's delay,
And fleeter than a tare.

'Tis vegetation's juggler,
The germ of alibi;
Doth like a bubble antedate,
And like a bubble hie.

I feel as if the grass were pleased
To have it intermit;
The surreptitious scion
Of summer's circumspect.

Had nature any outcast face,
Could she a son contemn,
Had nature an Iscariot,
That mushroom, -- it is him. 39

Of the fairly frequent references to different parts of plants, one is a simile in which a person who is dead is compared with a seed:

Then when adjusted like a seed
In careful fitted ground
Unto the Everlasting Spring. 40

38LX, p. 97. 39XXV, p. 80.

Another interesting simile is contained in a short poem about leaves:

The leaves, like women, interchange
Sagacious confidence;
Somewhat of nods, and somewhat of
Portentous inference.

The parties in both cases
Enjoining secrecy, --
Inviolable compact
To notoriety.\textsuperscript{41}

Of three striking figurative uses of the pod, one is also a simile:

A window opens like a pod,
Abrupt, mechanically.\textsuperscript{42}

A brief metaphorical use of the pod is as follows:

How luscious lies the pea within
The pod that Duty locks!\textsuperscript{43}

The thought-provoking little poem below is another metaphor in which the pod is employed:

Revolution is the pod
Systems rattle from;
When the winds of Will are stirred,
Excellent is bloom.

But except its russet base
Every summer be
The entomber of itself,
So of Liberty.

Left inactive on the stalk,
All its purple fled,
Revolution shakes it
For test if it be dead.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41}XXXII, p. 83. \textsuperscript{42}CXXX, ll. 7-8, p. 213.
\textsuperscript{43}LXXXVII, ll. 3-4, p. 42. \textsuperscript{44}XXX, p. 290.
In comparison with her allusions to flowers or birds, the poet does not mention animals very often; but the list of animals she does mention is quite imposing. This list includes such diverse species as deer, squirrel, dog, mouse, cat, cattle, rat, leopard, bat, elephant, horse, lamb, reindeer, wolf, turtle, ferret, hare, mole, antelope, fox, camel, and chamois. It also includes, as representatives of the reptile world, snake, frog, and toad. Emily refers to squirrels, snakes, dogs, and horses the most. On one occasion she alludes to the traditional dragon.

Although she speaks frequently of the squirrel, it is always fleetingly. She refers to nature's admonition as "restraining rampant squirrel" and relates that the news of the sunrise "like squirrels ran."

Speaking of approaching death, the poet alludes to horses in the following figurative lines:

Tie the strings of my life, my Lord,
Then I am ready to go!
Just a look at the horses --
Rapid! That will do!

By far her most striking figure of speech referring to horses, however, is the simile in the stanza given below:

There is no frigate like a book
To take us lands away,
Nor any coursers like a page
Of prancing poetry.

\[45^{\text{I, I. 7, p. 65.}}\]
\[46^{\text{LXXIII, I. 4, p. 104.}}\]
\[47^{\text{CXVIII, I. 1-4, p. 208.}}\]
\[48^{\text{XCIX, I. 1-4, p. 46.}}\]
Referring from a slightly different point of view to the lure of the unattainable, which, as noted earlier in this chapter, she treats in figures involving fruit and the pod, respectively, the poet here employs a metaphor involving animals to express the same idea:

The deer invites no longer
Than it eludes the hound.\(^{49}\)

In speaking of a winter night, the poet includes among its sounds this realistic and onomatopoetic description of a dog's footsteps:

A dog's belated feet
Like intermittent plush were heard
Adown the empty street.\(^{50}\)

The hound is mentioned metaphorically in the following epigrammatic statement:

Adventure most unto itself
The Soul condemned to be;
Attended by a Single Hound --
Its own Identity.\(^{51}\)

Among Emily's quaintest and most delightful references to animals are those which deal with the mouse. On one occasion she remarks that "the lightning skipped like mice."\(^{52}\)

This whimsical little stanza begins a brief poem about remembrance:

Remembrance has a rear and front, --
'Tis something like a house;
It has a garret also
For refuge and the mouse.\(^{53}\)

\(^{49}\)LXXV, 11. 7-8, p. 36.  \(^{50}\)XXVI, 11. 10-12, p. 141.
\(^{51}\)I, p. 223.  \(^{52}\)XVI, 1. 4, p. 163.
\(^{53}\)CXXIV, 11. 1-4, p. 56.
What may be regarded as the climax to her allusions to the mouse, however, appears in the following prayer:

Papa above!  
Regard a Mouse  
O'erpowered by the Cat;  
Reserve within thy Kingdom  
A "mansion" for the Rat!

Snug in seraphic cupboards  
To nibble all the day,  
While unsuspecting cycles  
Wheel pompously away.\(^5\)\(^4\)

As to reptiles, the poet says:

A snake is summer's treason,  
And guile is where it goes;\(^5\)\(^5\)

but it interests her so much that she mentions it frequently -- not only the snake but occasionally also the frog and the toad. In a figurative poem depicting the hazards of a journey through life, she says:

The serpent's sat\(\)in figure  
Gild stealthily along.\(^5\)\(^6\)

In an entire poem about the snake, she thus describes it:

A narrow fellow in the grass  
Occasionally rides;  
You may have met him, -- did you not?  
His notice sudden 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.  
Yet when a child, and barefoot,  
I more than once, at morn,

\(^5\)\(^4\)XCIII, pp. 255-256. \(^5\)\(^5\)CI, 11. 7-8, p. 117.

\(^5\)\(^6\)XCIX, 11. 7-8, p. 257.
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.\textsuperscript{57}

In a brief poem expressing disdain for fame, Emily employs
the frog in an amusing simile:

How dreary to be somebody!
How public, like a frog
To tell your name the livelong day
To an admiring bog!\textsuperscript{58}

Speaking of the democracy of death, she declares:

A toad can die of light!
Death is the common right
Of toads and men, --
Of earl and midge

The privilege.\textsuperscript{59}

As has been stated earlier in this chapter, birds vie
with flowers for attention in Emily Dickinson's poetry.
Without any doubt, Emily's favorite -- judging by the number
of times it is mentioned -- is the robin; but she also re-
fers to bobolink, lark, sparrow, hummingbird, whippoorwill,
jay, wren, oriole, eagle, blackbird, bluebird, woodpecker,
linnet, nightingale, crow, phoebe, owl, vulture, cuckoo,

\textsuperscript{57}XXIV, p. 79. \textsuperscript{58}XXVII, ll. 5-8, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{59}CXXXVII, ll. 1-5, p. 217.
plover, flamingo, swan, eider duck, peacock, and chanticleer. Among the particular birds to which she devotes entire poems are the lark, the wren, the jay, the robin, the oriole, and the hummingbird.

Representative of her numerous allusions to birds in general is the following description of the song of a bird at dawn:

At half-past three a single bird
Unto a silent sky
Propounded but a single term
Of cautious melody.

At half-past four, experiment
Had subjugated test,
And lo! her silver principle
Supplanted all the rest.

At half-past seven, element
Nor implement was seen,
And place was where the presence was,
Circumference between.  

A description of a bird's song under different circumstances is given in the brief poem below:

A train went through a burial gate,
A bird broke forth and sang,
And trilled, and quivered, and shook his throat
Till all the churchyard rang;
And then adjusted his little notes,
And bowed and sang again.
Doubtless, he thought it meet of him
To say good-by to men.

She pictures the flying of a bird in vivid figures of speech:

And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home

---

60III, p. 66.  
61IX, p. 160.
Than ears divide the ocean,
Too silver for a seam,
Or butterflies, off banks of noon,
Leap, splashless, as they swim.62

Referring to her two "sisters," her sister Lavinia and her
beloved sister-in-law Sue, Emily employs a bird in this
beautiful and touching simile:

One came the way that I came
And wore my last year's gown,
The other as a bird her nest,
Builted our hearts among.63

Another distinctive example of her figurative references to
birds is the interpretation given below, in which hope is
metaphorically represented as a bird:

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.64

Emily gives a concise but graphic picture of her friend,
the robin:

The robin is the one
That interrupts the morn
With hurried, few, express reports
When March is scarcely on.

The robin is the one
That overflows the noon
With her cherubic quantity,
An April but begun.

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62XXIII, 11. 15-20, pp. 78-79.
63Prefatory poem to Part Five, "The Single Hound,"
11. 5-8, p. 222.
64XXXII, 11. 1-8, p. 17.
The robin is the one
That speechless from her nest
Submits that home and certainty
And sanctity are best.65

Her high regard for this particular bird is manifest in this quaint personification of two robins:

Forever cherished be the tree,
Whose apple Winter warm,
Enticed to breakfast from the sky
Two Gabriels yestermorn;

They registered in Nature's book
As Robin -- Sire and Son,
But angels have that modest way
To screen them from renown.66

Indicative also of her love for the robin is Emily's plea:

If I shouldn't be alive
When the robins come,
Give the one in red cravat
A memorial crumb.67

Of two poems devoted to the description of the hummingbird, one presents this vivid picture:

A route of evanescence
With a revolving wheel;
A resonance of emerald,
A rush of cochineal;
And every blossom on the bush
Adjusts its tumbled head, --
The mail from Tunis, probably,
An easy morning's ride.68

The shorter of two poems depicting the character of the jay is given below:

65VI, pp. 67-68.  
66LXII, pp. 243-244.  
67XXXVII, ll. 1-4, p. 173.  
68XV, p. 74.
A prompt, executive Bird is the Jay,
Bold as a Bailiff's hymn,
 brittle and brief in quality —
Warrant in every line;
Sitting a bough like a Brigadier,
Confident and straight,
Much is the mien
Of him in March
As a Magistrate. 69

The following lines are part of an entire poem portraying in
rich imagery the oriole:

One of the ones that Midas touched,
Who failed to touch us all,
Was that confiding prodigal,
The blissful oriole.

So drunk, he disavows it
With badinage divine;
So dazzling, we mistake him
For an alighting mine.

A pleader, a dissembler,
An epicure, a thief,—
Betimes an oratorio,
An ecstasy in chief;

The Jesuit of orchards,
He cheats as he enchants
Of an entire altar
For his decamping wants.

The splendor of a Pariah,
The meteor of birds,
Departing like a pageant
Of ballads and of bards. 70

The poet's work is filled with a wealth of other bits of
brilliant description of birds, as well as of figurative
allusions to them.

69 LXVI, p. 245. 70 XIII, 11. 1-20, pp. 72-73.
Emily mentions the butterfly, but more frequently than she alludes to any of these, she alludes to the bee. Although she does not refer to such a wide variety of insects as of flowers or of birds, her references to insects are quite numerous. Besides the butterfly and the bee, she mentions fly, bumblebee, cricket, beetle, spider, worm, firefly, moth, midge, caterpillar, and gnat.

In vain Emily tries to explain her own enchantment by the bee:

The murmur of a bee
A witchcraft yieldeth me.
If any ask me why,
'Twere easier to die
Than tell. 71

Her jeweled portrait of the bee is given below:

Like trains of cars on tracks of plush
I hear the level bee;
A jar across the flowers goes,
Their velvet masonry

Withstands until the sweet assault
Their chivalry consumes,
While he, victorious, tilts away
To vanquish other blooms.

His feet are shod with gauze,
His helmet is of gold;
His breast, a single onyx
With chrysoprase, inlaid.

His labor is a chant,
His idleness a tune;
Oh, for a bee's experience
Of clovers and of noon! 72

71 LIV, 11. 1-5, p. 94. 72 LXV, p. 100.
One of her most concise descriptions of the bee is contained in two short lines:

It's like the bee, --
A dateless melody.\textsuperscript{73}

Using the bee in a simile, she gives an interesting and accurate picture of his flight:

The heaven we chase
Like the June bee
Before the school-boy
Invites the race,
Stoops to an easy clover --
Dips -- evades -- teases -- deploys;
Then to the royal clouds
Lifts his light pinnacle
Needless of the boy
Staring, bewildered, at the mocking sky.\textsuperscript{74}

She characterizes the bee as a true democrat:

The pedigree of honey
Does not concern the bee;
A clover, any time, to him
Is aristocracy.\textsuperscript{75}

Emily has a great deal to say about butterflies. She also speaks frequently, with both awe and delight, of the miracle of the cocoon. She even devotes an entire poem to a description of the caterpillar and his metamorphosis. The charm of the butterfly is epitomized in the following brief poem:

The butterfly's assumption-gown,
In chrysoprase apartments hung,
This afternoon put on.

How condescending to descend,
And be of buttercups the friend
In a New England town!\textsuperscript{76}

The habits of the butterfly are set forth in detail in the lines quoted below:

\textsuperscript{73}XCVI, li. 3-4, p. 116. \textsuperscript{74}XXI, li. 2-11, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{75}VI, p. 95. \textsuperscript{76}LXXIV, p. 104.
He parts himself like leaves,
And then he closes up, --
Then stands upon the bonnet
Of any Buttercup.

And then he runs against
And oversets a Rose,
And then does nothing, --
Then away upon a jiff he goes,

And dangles like a mote
Suspended in the Moon,
Uncertain to return Below
Or settle in the Moon.

What came of him at night,
The privilege to say
Be limited by ignorance
What came of him that day.

The Frost obtain the world,
In cabinets be shown,
A Sepulchre of quaintest floss,
An Abbey -- a Cocoon.77

Emily defends the butterfly in this sly comment upon human nature:

The butterfly obtains
But little sympathy,
Though favorably mentioned
In Entomology.
Because he travels freely
And wears a proper coat,
The circumspect are certain
That he is dissolute.
Had he the homely scutcheon of modest Industry,
'Twere fitter certifying for Immortality.78

Among the other insects besides the bee and the butterfly, the poet pays tribute to the spider:

The spider as an artist
Has never been employed
Though his surpassing merit
Is freely certified

77XLVII, pp. 404-405. 78XLII, p. 236.
By every broom and Bridget
Throughout a Christian land.
Neglected son of genius,
I take thee by the hand. 79

She also interprets the familiar summer song of the crickets:

Farther in summer than the birds,
Pathetic from the grass,
A minor nation celebrates
Its unobtrusive mass.

No ordinance is seen,
So gradual the grace,
A pensive custom it becomes,
Enlarging loneliness.

Antiquest felt at noon
When August, burning low,
Calls forth this spectral canticle,
Repose to typify.

Remit as yet no grace,
No furrow on the glow,
Yet a druidic difference
Enhances nature now. 80

In the following statement she obtains striking emphasis by her reference to the tiny gnat:

I know lives I could miss
Without misery,
Others -- whose instant's wanting
Would be Eternity.

The last a scanty number,
'Twould scarcely fill a two,
The first -- a gnat's horizon
Could easily outgrow. 81

One cannot read Emily Dickinson's poems without becoming increasingly aware of her keen and sympathetic observation of plant and animal life. The reader becomes acquainted

78XCV, p. 115. 80XLIV, pp. 88-89.
81CXLIV, pp. 359-360.
not only with Emily's intimate friends, the rose, the robin, the bee, and the butterfly, but also with such comparatively unfamiliar plants and animals as the mushroom and the bat. So well known were these creatures of nature to the poet and so beloved by her were they, that it is small wonder that she often expressed her philosophy of life in terms of her plant and animal friends.
CHAPTER V

SEASONAL AND METEOROLOGICAL NATURE

Seasonal and meteorological nature -- the seasons and the weather -- lends added interest to biological nature and, to a great extent, to elemental nature because it creates continually shifting and varying sets of circumstances for them. The brook in winter is quite different from the brook in summer, just as the forest through which the brook runs is quite different in winter from what it is in summer.

Emily Dickinson found much material for her poems in the seasonal and meteorological aspects of nature. The pageant of the passing seasons is reflected again and again in her poetry. Her poems describe, upon occasion, an awesome rainstorm, a disagreeable winter day, a torrid summer noon.

The poet has much to say about the seasons. She finds some new delight in each season as it presents itself. Many are her descriptions of the seasons and even of their approach or departure. As is to be expected, she uses numerous colorful figures of speech in her portrayal of them.

In her frequent references to spring, she often mentions March, April, May, or June. She devotes one entire
poem to April and three poems to March. Her most charming poem about March is a delightfully informal picture of the month as a caller who actually represents the return of spring:

Dear March, come in!
How glad I am!
I looked for you before.
Put down your hat --
You must have walked --
How out of breath you are!
Dear March, how are you?
And the rest?
Did you leave Nature well?
Oh, March, come right upstairs with me,
I have so much to tell!

I got your letter, and the bird's;
The maples never knew
That you were coming, -- I declare,
How red their faces grew!
But, March, forgive me --
And all those hills
You left for me to hue;
There was no purple suitable,
You took it all with you.

Who knocks? That April!
Look the door!
I will not be pursued!
He stayed away a year, to call
When I am occupied.
But trifles look so trivial
As soon as you have come,
That blame is just as dear as praise
And praise as mere as blame.1

In one poem on the joys of spring, Emily asks:

When it is May,
If May return --
Had nobody a pang
Lest on a face so beautiful
He might not look again?2

1LXXXVII, pp. 111-112. 2LIX, 11. 11-15, p. 311.
One of the most detailed descriptions of the coming of spring as a whole is contained in the lines quoted below:

An altered look about the hills;
A Tyrian light the village fills;
A wider sunrise in the dawn;
A deeper twilight on the lawn;
A print of a vermilion foot;
A purple finger on the slope;
A flippant fly upon the pane;
A spider at his trade again;
An added strut in chanticleer;
A flower expected everywhere;
An axe shrill singing in the woods;
Fern-odors on untravelled roads, —
All this, and more I cannot tell,
A furtive look you know as well,
And Nicodemus’ mystery
Receives its annual reply. 3

Perhaps the poet’s most triumphant portrayal of spring is to be found in the following poem, rich with imagery:

Some rainbow coming from the fair!
Some vision of the World Cashmere
I confidently see!
Or else a peacock’s purple train,
Feather by feather, on the plain
Fritters itself away!

The dreamy butterflies bestir,
Lethargic pools resume the whir
Of last year’s sundered tune.
From some old fortress on the sun
Baronial bees march, one by one,
In murmuring platoon!

The robins stand as thick to-day
As flakes of snow stood yesterday,
On fence and roof and twig.
The orchis binds her feather on
For her old lover, Don the Sun,
Revisiting the bog!

3IX, pp. 69-70.
Without commander, countless, still,
The regiment of wood and hill
In bright detachment stand.
Behold! Whose multitudes are these?
The children of whose turbaned seas,
Or what Circassian land?\(^4\)

Emily Dickinson speaks often of summer and devotes many complete poems to it, with especial emphasis upon the waning of summer. In contrast with the months of spring, she seldom mentions the individual months of summer. One of her best descriptions of summer gives numerous particulars evident to the interested observer on any typical summer day:

The trees, like tassels, hit and swung;
There seemed to rise a tune
From miniature creatures
Accompanying the Sun,

Far Psalteries of Summer,
Enamouring the ear
They never yet did satisfy —
Remotest when most near.

The Sun shone whole at intervals,
Then half, -- then utter hid,
As if himself were optional
And had estates of clouds

Sufficient to enfold him
Eternally from view,
Except it were a whim of his
To let the orchards grow.

A bird sat careless on the fence;
One gossiped in the lane
On silver matters, charmed a snake
Just winding round a stone.

\(^4\)LIX, p. 96.
Bright flowers slit a calyx,
Or soared upon a stem
Like hindered flags, sweet hoisted,
With spices in the hem.

'Twas more I cannot mention.
How mean, to those that see,
Van Dyke's delineation
Of Nature's Summer day.5

In the introduction to another poem, the poet tells of her own reactions to summer:

A something in a summer's day,
As slow her flambeaux burn away,
Which solemnizes me.

A something in a summer's noon, --
An azure depth, a wordless tune,
Transcending ecstasy.

And still within a summer's night
A something so transporting bright,
I clap my hands to see;

Then veil my too inspecting face,
Lest such a subtle, shimmering grace
Flutter too far for me.6

The last days of summer, which Emily apparently loved so much, are interpreted in the following stanza:

The last of summer is delight
Deterred by retrospect,
'Tis ecstasy's revealed review,
Enchantment's syndicate.7

The transition from summer to autumn is picturesquely described in the poem given below:

Summer begins to have the look,
Feruser of enchanting Book
Reluctantly, but sure, perceives --
A gain upon the backward leaves.

5XLIII, pp. 401-402. 6LXIII, 11. 1-12, pp. 98-99.
7LXXVII, 11. 1-4, p. 318.
Autumn begins to be inferred
By millinery of the cloud,
Or deeper color in the shawl
That wraps the everlasting hill.

The eye begins its avarice,
A meditation chastens speech,
Some Dyer of a distant tree
Resumes his gaudy industry.

Conclusion is the course of all,
Almost to be perennial,
And then elude stability
Recalls to immortality, 8

In a letter to her brother Austin in October, 1851 -- part of which was quoted in an earlier chapter--Emily refers to a discussion they once had as to the relative merits of spring and autumn and admits that autumn is the more beautiful. Whether, when the following spring arrived, she still concurred in her brother's predilection for autumn is extremely doubtful in view of her many poems in praise of the beauties of spring. Be that as it may, in the following poem she pays a rare and moving tribute to Indian summer:

These are the days when birds come back,  
A very few, a bird or two,  
To take a backward look.

These are the days when skies put on  
The old, old sophisticated of June, —
A blue and gold mistake.

Oh, fraud that cannot cheat the bee,  
Almost thy plausibility  
Induces my belief,
Till ranks of seeds their witness bear,
And softly through the altered air
Hurries a timid leaf!

Oh, sacrament of summer days,
Oh, last communion in the haze,
Permit a child to join,

Thy sacred emblems to partake,
Thy consecrated bread to break,
Taste thine immortal wine! 9

In lighter vein, she quaintly sets forth some of the well-known characteristics of autumn and comes to a typically whimsical conclusion:

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 should be old-fashioned,
I'll put a trinket on. 10

Emily calls autumn and winter

The lower metres of the year,
When nature's laugh is done, --
The Revelations of the book
Whose Genesis is June. 11

She also describes winter as "the white of the year." 12 She does not praise winter so enthusiastically as she praises the other seasons, probably because it robs her of so many of the plants, birds, and insects that she loves. Indeed, in one poem she mentions winter in a highly derogatory manner

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11CXI, 11. 5-8, p. 123. 12CVI, 1. 1, p. 203.
when she makes the statement that

A thunder storm combines the charms
Of Winter and of Hell. 13

A rather harsh but nevertheless accurate description of a
winter day in New England is contained in the following
brief poem:

Like brooms of steel
The Snow and Wind
Had swept the Winter Street,
The House was hooked,
The Sun sent out
Faint Deputies of heat --
Where rode the Bird
The Silence tied
His ample, plodding Steed,
The Apple in the cellar snug,
Was all the one that played. 14

The poet epitomizes winter by saying:

These are the days that Reindeer love
And pranks the Northern star,
This is the Sun's objective
And Finland of the year. 15

Each of the four seasons of the year, summer, spring,
winter, and autumn -- named in reverse order instead of nat-
ural order -- is briefly characterized in the following
rather unusual poem:

"Answer, July! --
Where is the Bee --
Where is the Blush --
Where is the Hay?"

"Ah," said July,
"Where is the Seed --
Where is the Bud --
Where is the Hay? --
Answer Thee me!"

13LIV, 11. 7-8, p. 241. 14LXVII, p. 245.
15LXVIII, p. 246.
"Nay," said the May,
"Show me the Snow --
Show me the Bells --
Show me the Jay!"

Quibbled the Jay,
"Where be the Maize --
Where be the Haze --
Where be the Burr?"
"Here!" -- said the Year. 16

The poet thus affirms the constancy of the seasons:

New feet within my garden go,
New fingers stir the sod;
A troubadour upon the elm
Betrays the solitude.

New children play upon the green,
New weary sleep below;
And still the pensive spring returns,
And still the punctual snow! 17

Of Emily Dickinson's numerous references to the weather, the second major aspect of seasonal and meteorological nature, those references having to do with the sun, the lightning, and the rainbow have already been discussed in a preceding chapter. The poet makes many allusions to the wind, the storm, and the snow, and quite a number to the cold, the frost, and the dew. Her allusions to the mist, the fog, the haze, the heat, the thunder, the rain, the sleet, and the ice, however, are infrequent. Although they cannot exactly be classified as parts of the weather, it is to be noted that she mentions the earthquake, the avalanche, and the glacier also.

16XLVI, pp. 403-404. 17LI, p. 93.
Emily speaks of both pleasant winds and unpleasant winds. She begins one poem with the playful query and answer:

Good night! Which put the candle out?
A jealous zephyr, not a doubt.\textsuperscript{18}

In describing signs of the coming of spring, she says:

The tidy breezes with their brooms
Sweep vale, and hill, and tree!
Prithee, my pretty housewives!
Who may expected be?\textsuperscript{19}

Contrasting types of breezes are described in the statement that "the day was warm, and winds were prosy"\textsuperscript{20} and in the statement that a ghost's laughter was

like the breeze
That dies away in dimples
Among the pensive trees.\textsuperscript{21}

Tribute to the music of the breeze is paid in a somewhat lengthy poem beginning with these two stanzas:

Of all the sounds despatched abroad,
There's not a charge to me
Like that old measure in the boughs,
That phraseless melody

The wind does, working like a hand
Whose fingers comb the sky,
Then quiver down, with tufts of tune
Permitted gods and me.\textsuperscript{22}

In a rather unusual poem, the wind is characterized as the poet's guest:

\begin{enumerate}
\item LXXV, 11. 1-2, p. 32. \quad \textsuperscript{18}
\item LXXXVI, 11. 5-8, p. 111. \quad \textsuperscript{19}
\item XXXIII, 1. 3, p. 144. \quad \textsuperscript{20}
\item L, 11. 10-12, p. 179. \quad \textsuperscript{21}
\item LXXV, 11. 1-8, pp. 104-105. \quad \textsuperscript{22}
\end{enumerate}
The wind tapped like a tired man,
And like a host, "Come in."
I boldly answered; entered then
My residence within

A rapid, footless guest,
To offer whom a chair
Were as impossible as hand
A sofa to the air.

No bone had he to bind him,
His speech was like the push
Of numerous humming-birds at once
From a superior bush.

His countenance a billow,
His fingers, if he pass,
Let go a music, as of tunes
Blown tremulous in glass.

He visited, still flitting;
Then, like a timid man,
Again he tapped -- 'twas flurriedly --
And I became alone. 23

The unpleasant winds mentioned by the poet include
stormy gales and cold winds of winter. A vivid portrayal
of a stormy gale is to be found in the following poem:

There came a wind like a bugle;
It quivered through the grass,
And a green chill upon the heat
So ominous did pass
We barred the windows and the doors

As from an emerald ghost;
The doom's electric moccasin
That very instant passed.
On a strange mob of panting trees,
And fences fled away,

And rivers where the houses ran
The living looked that day.
The hell within the steeple wild
The flying tidings whirled.
How much can come
And much can go,
And yet abide the world! 24
In telling of a disagreeable winter day, Emily states that

A narrow wind complains all day
How some one treated him. 25

The reader can almost hear the cold wind mentioned in this
partial description of a winter night:

The wind pursued the little bush,
And drove away the leaves
November left; then clambered up
And fretted in the eaves. 26

The poet sums up a few of the ideas usually associated with
the wind by remarking:

The Duties of the Wind are few --
To cast the Ships at sea,
Establish March,
The Floods escort,
And usher Liberty. 27

The effect of a storm upon people is graphically de-
scribed in the following short poem:

It sounded as if the streets were running,
And then the streets stood still.
Eclipse was all we could see at the window,
And awe was all we could feel.

By and by the boldest stole out of his covert,
To see if time was there.
Nature was in her beryl apron,
Mixing fresher air. 28

There are also frequent allusions to floods, often the re-
sults of storms. A vivid picture of floods is included in
this striking comparison:

25 LXXX, 11. 5-6, p. 107.  26 XXVI, 11. 5-8, p. 141.
27 XLIX, p. 239.  28 XXXIV, p. 84.
The brain within its groove
Runs evenly and true;
But let a splinter swerve,
'Twere easier for you
To put the water back
When floods have slit the hills,
And scooped a turnpike for themselves,
And blotted out the mills.29

The rain which is often a part of a storm is portrayed
in the following lines:

There came one drop of giant rain,
And then, as if the hands

That held the dams had parted hold,
The waters wrecked the sky,
But overlooked my father's house,
Just quartering a tree.30

Quite a contrast is this delightful description of a summer shower:

A drop fell on the apple tree,
Another on the roof;
A half a dozen kissed the eaves,
And made the gables laugh.

A few went out to help the brook,
That went to help the sea;
Myself conjectured, Were they pearls,
What necklaces could be!

The dust replaced in hoisted roads,
The birds jocoser sung;
The sunshine threw his hat away,
The orchards spangles hung.

The breezes brought dejected lutes,
And bathed them in the glee;
The East put out a single flag,
And signed the fete away.31

31LXII, p. 98.
For Emily, a very fascinating subject was the snow. She mentions the "snow's tableau,"\textsuperscript{32} and elsewhere refers to

That other prank of snow
That covers mystery with tulle
For fear the squirrels know.\textsuperscript{33}

She often speaks of snow in connection with the dead, as in the lines:

All these did conquer; but the ones
Who overcame most times
Wear nothing commoner than snow,
No ornament but palms.\textsuperscript{34}

Frequently she mentions the flakes of snow, as in the simile, "The thought is quiet as a flake."\textsuperscript{35} A detailed and beautiful description of the snow is as follows:

It sifts from leaden sieves,
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 stem, --
The summer's empty room,
Acres of seams where harvests were,
Recordless, but for them.

\textsuperscript{32} \textsuperscript{LI}, l. 13, p. 307.  \textsuperscript{33} \textsuperscript{XLVI}, ll. 18-20, pp. 303-304.
\textsuperscript{34} \textsuperscript{LXXIX}, ll. 5-6, p. 194.  \textsuperscript{35} \textsuperscript{CIX}, l. 17, p. 50.
It ruffles wrists of posts,  
As ankles of a queen, --  
Then stills its artisans like ghosts,  
Denying they have been.36

Frost is frequently mentioned in Emily Dickinson's poetry, and two entire poems are devoted to it. "Jack Frost" is here charmingly characterized:

A visitor in March --  
Who influences flowers  
Till they are orderly as busts  
And elegant as glass, --

Who visits in the night --  
And just before the sun,  
Concludes his glistening interview,  
Caresses -- and is gone.

But whom his fingers touched --  
And where his feet have run --  
And whatsoever mouth he kissed --  
Is as it had not been!37

Speaking to a friend, Emily says:

The cold will force your tightest door  
Some February day.38

One of her frequent allusions to the cold is found in the following graphic description of the brook in late autumn:

Still is the bustle in the brook,  
Sealed are the spicy valves;  
Mameric fingers softly touch  
The eyes of many elves.39

She seldom mentions hot weather, but includes both hot and cold weather in this metaphorical comment upon human nature:

36L, pp. 91-92.  
37XXXIX, p. 399.  
38CXLIII, ll. 25-26, pp. 358-359.  
39XLIX, ll. 9-12, p. 91.
A shady friend for torrid days
Is easier to find
Than one of higher temperature
For frigid hour of mind.

The vane a little to the east
Scares muslin souls away.40

Among the poet's infrequent references to fog, mist, and haze is the allusion to "a mist's slow colonnade."41 Speaking figuratively of the languor that is the aftermath of pain, she says:

A drowsiness diffuses,
A dimness like a fog
Envelops consciousness
As mist obliterates a crag.42

"Morning is the place for dew,"43 asserts Emily, who scatters numerous allusions to dew throughout her poetry. Speaking of the tide as a person, she tells that he

made as he would eat me up
As wholly as a dew
Upon a dandelion's sleeve.44

Relating the antics of a bird, she adds:

And then he drank a dew
From a convenient grass.45

The brief life of the dew is narrated in this personification:

A dew sufficed itself
And satisfied a leaf,
And felt, "how vast a destiny!
How trivial is life!"

40LX, 11. 1-6, p. 29. 41CXXIV, 1. 8, pp. 346-347.
42CLIX, 11. 5-8, p. 366. 43XCI, 1. 3, p. 114.
44XIX, 11. 13-15, p. 76. 45XXIII, 11. 5-6, p. 78.
The sun went out to work,  
The day went out to play,  
But not again that dew was seen  
By physiognomy.

Whether by day abducted,  
Or emptied by the sun  
Into the sea, in passing,  
Eternally unknown.  

To emphasize an affirmation of her own constancy, the poet says:

Surfeit? When the daffodil  
Doth of the dew:  
Even as herself, O friend!  
I will of you!  

Emily Dickinson's poetry reflects an almost ecstatic delight in the brilliant pageantry offered by spring, summer, and autumn. With the coming of each of these seasons she finds new beauties to extol, and with the coming of each year she finds slightly different ways to describe, interpret, and use as media for expressing her philosophy of life these recurrent beauties. Even winter, apparently disliked by Emily, offers her compensation and inspiration in the form of the snow which so fascinates her. Other aspects of the weather which seem to hold a peculiar fascination for her are the wind, the storm, and the dew. Her enchantment by the wind's music, her awe of the storm, and her delight in the dew are reflected again and again in her poems. Seasonal and meteorological nature, in all of its varying aspects, lends added charm to Emily Dickinson's poetry.

\[^{46\text{XCIX, p. 117.}}\] \[^{47\text{III, ll. 5-8, p. 127.}}\]
CHAPTER VI

PHILOSOPHY THROUGH AND OF NATURE

"Too much of proof affronts Belief,"¹ says Emily Dickinson. In the preceding chapters ample proof has been cited of the facts given. This chapter, however, will be devoted almost entirely to discussion, without any attempt on the part of the writer to verify each statement with a quotation.

Emily Dickinson looks upon nature itself from four different points of view. At times, in a whimsical mood, she speaks of nature in a poem of sheer fantasy. At other times, in a more serious mood, she employs nature as a whole or the specific elements of nature in personification. Again, nature as a whole, with all of its beauties, is to her an intimate friend and neighbor, a source of happiness and inspiration. To the reverent Emily, nature is the expression of God -- an ever-present and irrefutable testimony to the fact that He is.

Aside from voicing a philosophy of nature which will be discussed in the latter part of this chapter, Emily Dickinson expresses a great deal of her general philosophy of

¹XLIV, l. 1, p. 300.
life in terms of nature. In only a relatively few of her poems does she fail to use nature pictures to express her views, and in these poems the general philosophy of life is the same as that expressed in the rest of her poetry. The specific ideas cited in this chapter, however, are all taken from poems in which nature terms are employed.

The poet voices philosophical ideas on the general subjects of life, death, immortality, time, and eternity, and on such more limited subjects as adversity, sorrow, pain, love, happiness, and other life experiences. These other life experiences, upon each of which the poet bestows relatively little attention, have to do with hope, liberty, democracy, beauty, character, fame, outlooks, poets, and books.

One of Emily's favorite realms of thought is that which concerns life, death, immortality, time, and eternity -- an almost inseparable quintet. She states that each personal life has some goal -- perhaps unexpressed -- toward which the person constantly strives and that if he fails to achieve the goal during his lifetime, eternity will provide another opportunity. She expresses the ideas that the soul must bear itself company, that the growth of an individual begins with an inner propulsion which causes it to put forth the effort necessary to achieve an ideal, that the heroes of the inner struggles are those who are the most gallant, that a person should make repeated efforts to follow an
inner urge toward something higher, and that the individual does not usually realize his own potentialities because he is fearful of trying his powers to their limits. More than once she voices her conviction that Heaven is reached through a life struggle along a rugged path beset with difficulties. The poet also asks the question which thoughtful people must ask themselves during time of war: "Are we worthy of the sacrifice of so many precious lives that are being given for us on the battlefield?" Her ideas of the inner struggle and its worth are perhaps best summed up in the short poem:

No matter where the saints abide,
They make their circuit fair;
Behold how great a Firmament
Accompanies a star!^2

Emily asserts that our lifelong thirst for water is symbolic and suggestive of our deeper thirst for immortality. She says that the beauties of nature are signs of a Heaven supposedly even fairer and that to him who perseveres the joys of the evening will be infinitely greater than those of the morning. She intimates that as we approach the evening of life, we draw nearer to God and long for the peace of death.

Although the poet suggests that the loss of a person sometimes goes unnoticed by others, she also states that the

^2CXXX, p. 267.
death of even the tiniest creature is an irreparable loss to some other creature. She asserts that only upon the loss of an individual do we realize his true worth to us and, in a thought reminiscent of that expressed by Gray in his "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," that we cannot truly evaluate any life.

That death is powerless to dissolve the spirit, which merely departs from the body, and that it makes us proud yet humble to realize our heritage of immortality are two of the thoughts voiced by Emily. She pictures death as a tender shepherd and Heaven as a sheepfold, as well as a place of rest for weary hearts. She also pictures Heaven as a safe harbor. Although she speaks of the grave as a refuge from the dangers and difficulties of life, she expresses pity for the lonely dead, who cannot take part in the friendly, happy bustle of haying time in June! In a magnificent figure of speech, the poet portrays death as the real daybreak!

Many of Emily Dickinson's poems concern sorrow, pain, and adversity; and an oft-repeated theme of these poems is the merit of adversity and pain. Probably in reassurance to herself, she dwells upon this theme in almost endless variations. She compares the refining of the soul with the refining of metal by fire. She asserts that defeat prepares the individual for victory and even that it makes eventual victory sweeter. The poet states that the gentian is most
beautiful after the coming of the frost and that the ripening of certain fruits is disclosed only by the frost. She affirms that, given a heavy burden, the soul will develop strength to bear it, that adversity cannot harm an inner strength, that steadfast effort ultimately wins a reward, and that suffering ennobles the character. She contends that danger not only reveals the true character of the individual but also discloses the soul's relation to immortality. She suggests that one who has just come face to face with death appreciates more the beauties of life. Emily states repeatedly that the value of something is taught by the want of it. She sums up her ideas on this subject by saying:

'Tis when
A nature struggle, it exist.
A power will proclaim,
Although annihilation pile
Whole choases on him!3

Speaking of suffering, Emily says that the greatest anguish is to learn the joy through the pain -- to know that the joy exists but is unattainable. She asserts that great suffering is followed by a numbness of mind and emotion -- an apathy -- induced by the fact that the individual is unable, for a time, at least, to bear any further pain. One grows accustomed to suffering, learns to adjust himself to

3LXXI, ll. 4-8, p. 415.
it, and after a while is able to walk almost straight in the dark, according to the poet. She comments upon the fact that it is hard to find friends who will remain faithful in time of trouble. She states that a part of us is lost with the loss of each of our loved ones. She is impressed with the fact that, despite our personal bereavement, spring returns and the beautiful pageantry and joyous music of nature continue, accentuating our grief by contrast. Emily derives a bit of comfort from picturing flowers as the ministry between herself and the dead.

Among her poems concerning happiness and love, one of the oft-recurring themes is that happiness, gained after a prolonged and apparently hopeless struggle, is too overwhelming to be borne. To one too long deprived of it, even the hint of the possibility of happiness is more than he can endure, according to Emily. Happiness achieved after a hard struggle, she also notes, brings with it the fear that it will be lost. She nevertheless states repeatedly in variations that love bestowed by the beloved makes the recipient indifferent to all other riches, no matter how dazzling.

Another of the poet's favorite themes is the old idea of the lure of forbidden fruit. She asserts that "heaven" is what is beyond the reach of the individual, but it no sooner becomes attainable than the desire for it vanishes.
Pursuing the same idea in reverse direction, she says that we learn to value a person just as death takes him beyond our reach. She states that delight is great in proportion to its unattainability. According to Emily, one person loved and lost is valued more by the loser than are all other persons; indeed, the very loss of the beloved is worth more than the gain of all others.

The poet declares that love cannot find words with which to express itself adequately and that it gives no reasons for its existence and its choice. She also states that love can neither be extinguished nor put aside and forgotten. Love knows no standard of measurement but itself; and to it distance is absence from the beloved, parting is night, and presence is dawn, Emily asserts. She notes that after the loss of the beloved, the bereft fills in the empty hours and days with multitudinous insignificant little tasks and activities, performing each as precisely as though it were of the utmost importance. She pities the individual whose wealth is material, since his riches, no matter how vast, are poverty in comparison with love.

Although Emily Dickinson does not treat the life experiences of hope, liberty, democracy, beauty, character, fame, outlooks, poets, and books in such detail as that in which she treats life, death, immortality, time, eternity, adversity, sorrow, pain, love, and happiness, she expresses
definite ideas on each. She says that hope, undaunted by storms, demands nothing of the individual yet continues to cheer him even on dark days.

For the person who has once known the taste of freedom, the loss of liberty is harder than is the lack of it to the person who has never known it, according to the poet. She states that when the liberty of a people is left too long inactive, it is shaken by revolution -- the test of whether it is still alive. Like Lovelace, in his "To Althea, from Prison," she attests to the fact that the freedom of the spirit cannot be curbed by physical captivity.

Emily cites the democracy of the bee, who judges the source of honey only by the fact that it produces honey. She notes that death is the right of all living creatures, great and small, and that it democratically erases all of time's marks of color, caste, and denomination.

Asking whether beauty is an affliction, Emily refers to tradition for the answer. No matter what the answer of tradition, there is no doubt of Emily's delight in beauty. She declares that one who could reproduce the beauties of a summer day or of a sunset would indeed be worthy of remembrance and affirms that she herself would rather be a rose than be an earl. Her personal desire is to bring beauty into the lives of others. She states that beauty is more convincing than philosophy. Reminding us of a slightly
different thought expressed in Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," she comments upon the fact that many flowers perish without the privilege of being conscious of their own beauty. Her awareness of beauty and her love of it are emphasized in the following brief poem:

Beauty crowds me till I die,
Beauty, mercy have on me!
But if I expire today,
Let it be in sight of thee.4

To her, says Emily, everyone she meets is an experiment, in which she tries to determine whether real character is present. When she is disappointed in someone, she blames herself for having placed too high an estimate on his character. She states that when we find ourselves ostensibly taking one attitude and mentally taking another, we can presume that other individuals sometimes do the same. She remarks upon the fact that the bird which bursts into joyous song as a remedy for care affords quite a contrast to the way in which we react to responsibility. She also comments upon Man's lack of curiosity and makes whimsical reference to the fact that a mutual enjoinder to secrecy often results in notoriety. She asserts that one has not lived in vain if he has rendered even the smallest service. The poet declares that the great are ill at ease in the company of lesser characters, but characters of smaller stature are

4XLIII, p. 236.
serenely unaware of their own comparative insignificance!

Emily derides the seeker of publicity. She declares vehemently that thought belongs first to God who gave it and that it is a disgrace to set a price upon the human spirit by the publication of thoughts. She states that fame is fickle and that men who eat of this food die. Glory is to her a tragic thing because it no sooner casts a bright glow upon a name than it drops that name again into oblivion.

Several different outlooks, or viewpoints -- each held by many people -- are mentioned by the poet. She calls attention to the fact that people can look at the same thing from varying points of view when she states that to the farmer "morning" means "milking," to the epicure it means "breakfast," and to the hero it means "battle." She emphasizes this idea by saying that to the man doomed to die tomorrow, the sunrise and the song of the bird have an entirely different meaning from what they have to other persons. She asserts that we see comparatively, since what assumed gigantic proportions yesterday looks very small to us today. She also says that we discern provincially, each judging by that with which he is familiar. Emily declares nevertheless that we do not appreciate the familiar: we become so accustomed to both men and stars that we take them for granted until they are taken from us. She alludes to
the tendency of many persons to judge the worst of others, when she notes that because of his gay dress and his habit of traveling freely, the butterfly is thought by the circumspect to be dissolute. She observes that when the dangerous, such as the volcano, appears harmless, the people most familiar with it -- far from being lulled into a false sense of security -- fear it the most. She comments upon the fact that mature people look wistfully back upon the joys of youth. Each person believes in his own importance; according to Emily, even a drop of dew feels that it has a vast destiny in satisfying a leaf.

It is with reverence that Emily regards poets, for, according to her, they comprehend the sun, summer, God's Heaven -- all that is beautiful. She says that the poet interprets ordinary things in such an extraordinary way that he is infinitely, though unconsciously, richer than we are. The thoughts of a poet provide a powerful stimulus for other persons. Emily tells of the spell of enchantment which fell upon her when first, as a child, she read the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning: all of the ordinary things of life seemed more beautiful! Her attitude toward poetry is perhaps best expressed in the following lines:

To pile like Thunder to its close,
Then crumble grand away,
While everything created hid --
This would be Poetry:
Or Love, -- the two coeval came --
We both and neither prove,
Experience either, and consume —
For none see God and live.\textsuperscript{5}

Closely akin to her feeling for poetry, of course, is Emily's feeling for books in general. Speaking of Charlotte Bronte's death, she intimates that there must have been unusual rejoicing in Heaven when Bronte arrived there! She states that, although a book takes us on magic journeys to other lands, even the poorest person has access to it. The words contained in a book are so nutritious to the spirit, according to Emily, that they bring it liberty.

Aside from the general philosophy of life which she voices through the medium of her own peculiar and almost habitual nature language, Emily Dickinson expresses in her poetry a definite philosophy of nature. Her own definition of nature is that it is not only what we see, such as the squirrel and the eclipse, and what we hear, such as the thunder and the cricket, but also what we know but have not the power to express because nature's simplicity baffles us. At times she refers to nature as an aggregation of its component physical parts, such as the planets, the trees, and the insects; at times she speaks of nature as an imaginary pervasive and unifying spirit, guarding and representing, more than guiding, all of these component parts. At times she alludes to nature in a spirit of pure fantasy, and at

\textsuperscript{5}CXLIII, p.271.
other times she speaks of it reverently as the evidence of God.

Although the minute details often given in Emily's poems prove that she was an unusually close observer, she looked upon nature from the esthetic rather than from the scientific point of view. If she had read anything of the Darwinian theory of evolution, for example, its influence is not apparent in her writings. She even scoffs gently at the scientists for making prose out of the poetry of nature. She speaks objectively of nature when it suits her purpose, but she frequently admits quite frankly that she is speaking subjectively. These admissions that she looks at nature from a subjective point of view show that, like Coleridge, she believed that the nature we see is to some extent the creation of our own minds. Indeed, she makes a flat assertion to this effect when, in speaking of the oriole's song, she says:

The fashion of the ear
Attireth that it hear
In dun or fair.

So whether it be rune,
Or whether it be none,
Is of within;

The "tune is in the tree,"
The sceptic showeth me;
"No, sir! In thee!"

Emily alludes to a "feeling" for nature, which is perhaps

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6XII, 11. 7-15, pp. 71-72.
roughly equivalent to what Wordsworth calls "sensitive reason" (the reason, or insight, of the heart), as opposed to "intellectual reason" (cold logic). Her attitude toward science, when it dissects and dissects at the expense of beauty, is also similar to that of Wordsworth.

Emily's descriptions of nature are not merely pretty pictures, for she knows nature too intimately and loves it too well. Her portrayals of nature reveal a fellow feeling for the bee and the butterfly. She labors under no delusions, however, that they have any feeling of sympathy for her, for she remarks time and again that in her time of personal grief the gaiety and beauty of nature are so marked as to seem heartless.

In the myriad infinitesimal component parts of nature, as well as in a convenient conception of nature as an entity, Emily finds the most adequate vehicle for the expression of her thoughts. Her use of cosmic nature, elemental nature, biological nature, and meteorological nature for this purpose has been demonstrated in the preceding chapters, and many of the ideas to which she gives voice in terms of nature have been discussed earlier in this chapter. To serve her purpose better, she often refers to the component parts

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7Joseph Warren Beach, The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry, p. 193. In this chapter the ideas given concerning Emily Dickinson's philosophy of nature are those of the writer, but the ideas concerning the nature-philosophy of other nineteenth-century poets are chiefly those of Professor Beach.
of nature, such as the sun, the sea, the robin, and the bee, or to nature as an entity, in personification.

Frequently Emily alludes to nature as a gentle mother, tenderly caring for the squirrel, the bird, the cricket, and the flower; but nowhere does she intimate that nature takes a maternal attitude toward us. She finds in the beauties of nature an almost ecstatic joy and an endless source of inspiration. Although she states plainly in one poem that she is retelling news which was told by nature, she gives no slightest indication in any of her poems that she considers herself the child of nature. The facts that she cherishes highly the beauties of nature and that her love of nature forms an essential integral part of her life are evident to even the casual reader of her poetry.

Emily looks with awe upon the magnificent spectacles of nature, such as the thunderstorm or the sunset, and upon the multitudinous miracles of nature, such as the emergence of the butterfly from the cocoon. She ponders the mysteries of nature and says that, seeing nature's surface beauties, we comment upon them, mistaking the outside for the inside of the show which nature presents. She asserts that nature is still a stranger and that her mysteries have never been solved by those who speak of her the most. She adds significantly:
To pity those that know her not
Is helped by the regret
That those who know her, know her less
The nearer her they get. 8

Far from considering the soul the flower of the body, as did the naturalists, Emily Dickinson, like Tennyson and Browning, believed that the soul is immortal and that in this life it is merely preparing for a higher life to come. To her, nature's beauties and wonders were obvious and irrefutable proof that God exists. She speaks of God not merely as the Creator but also as One who watches approvingly the progress of His creation, intervening when necessary to carry out His plan for it. God is the loving Father, watching over and caring for even the smallest of His creatures. Emily finds Him eccentric at times and does not agree with all of His decisions, but she assures us that even His eccentricities are beneficent.

She refers to Biblical characters and themes as easily and familiarly, though not so frequently, as she refers to nature. Occasionally she speaks of God or of some Biblical incident in such an unorthodox manner as would have shocked some of her Puritan ancestors. At times she addresses God familiarly and informally or pleads with Him as a child would do with a loved and trusted but sometimes stern parent; at

other times she worships Him in reverent silence.

Emily looks with boredom upon the conventional idea of Heaven as a place of eternal rest. She does look forward to it, however, as a place where she will be reunited with her loved ones and where her unfulfilled desires will be fulfilled -- for the fulfillment of which her soul will have been prepared through the discipline of suffering. Although her attitude toward religion is not always conventional, her faith is Christian, as is evidenced by the fact that she alludes not only to God the Father but also to God the Son and God the Holy Spirit as though it were as natural to believe in the Trinity as to breathe.

Emily Dickinson's interests are so many and her poems embrace such a wide variety of subjects that she cannot be termed merely a nature poet. She is certainly a nature poet of distinction, however. She is a nature poet in the sense that she loves nature and finds in it a continually renewed joy, a constant source of inspiration, and a convenient and individualistic mode of expression; but she is not a nature worshipper. She is the child of God.
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