

Exploring the Interplay of Nature and Religion in Emily Dickinson's Poetry

Jamal Assadi

Department of English Language and Literature, The College of Sakhnin (R.A), Academic College for Teacher Education, Galilee, Israel
Email: jamal-a@sakhnion.ac.il

How to cite this paper: Assadi, J. (2024). Exploring the Interplay of Nature and Religion in Emily Dickinson's Poetry. *Advances in Literary Study*, 12, 88-106. <https://doi.org/10.4236/als.2024.122006>

Received: January 19, 2024

Accepted: March 26, 2024

Published: March 29, 2024

Copyright © 2024 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

This research project undertakes a comprehensive examination of the intersection between nature and religion in Emily Dickinson's poetry. Employing an ecofeminist position, the study meticulously analyzes five pivotal poems: "A Bird came down the Walk", "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass", "Because I could not stop for Death", "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church" and "The World is not Conclusion". The research includes a comparative analysis, not only within Dickinson's own body of work but, when pertinent, with the works of other poets sharing similar thematic elements. This dual approach aims to unveil patterns and themes that underscore the intricate interconnectedness of gender, nature, and spirituality within Dickinson's verses. The findings contribute significantly to existing scholarship by addressing gaps in the literature and illuminating Dickinson's unique contributions to 19th-century American poetry. The discussion extends beyond historical contexts, emphasizing the relevance of Dickinson's insights to contemporary discussions on the interplay between nature and religion.

Keywords

Emily Dickinson, American Poet, Reclusive Lifestyle, and Ecofeminism, Interplay between Nature and Religion

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Emily Dickinson, a prominent 19th-century American poet, continues to enchant scholars and readers alike with her mysterious and imaginative poetry. Distinguished as one of America's greatest poets, Dickinson challenged conventional definitions of poetry and the poet's role. In the 1930s, New Critics such as R.

P. Blackmur, Allen Tate, Cleanth Brooks, and Yvor Winters recognized the significance of Dickinson's poetry, with their tenets shaping subsequent scholarship (Grabher, 1998: pp. 358-359).

Born in 1830 in Amherst, Massachusetts, Dickinson led a reclusive life, yet her nearly 1800 poems have left an indelible mark on American literature (Miller, 2016). Scholarly interest has been piqued by the intersection of nature and religion in Dickinson's work, notably explored by Judith Farr. Farr's groundbreaking study examines Dickinson's connection to flowers and gardening, revealing the impact of her dual roles as poet and gardener on her metaphors and themes, including love, hate, wickedness, virtue, death, and immortality (Farr, 2004: pp. 3-5).

Dickinson's poetry also inspects religious themes, often intertwining them with the concept of death. Her reflections on the teachings of Jesus Christ, addressed to him directly, highlight her unique contribution to the Christian poetic tradition (Oberhaus, 1987: pp. 105-119). This intertwining of nature and religion in her verses provides a detailed knowledge of Dickinson's multifaceted expressions.

Emily Dickinson penned the majority of her poems within the context of antebellum culture and the Civil War, actively engaging in contemporary discourse. Her work reflects a distinctive experimentation with form that aligns with the practices of her peers. Contrary to focusing on the postbellum decades, Dickinson's poetry is comprehensively tied to the cultural milieu of the Civil War era. Notably, her poetry stands as the apex of innovation in stanzaic and metrical structures within the prevalent short-lined verse of her time (Miller, 2012: pp. 1-18). During this time, Dickinson experienced significant personal changes, including her family's relocation to the Homestead, her birthplace. The Homestead became part of an expanded Dickinson estate, reflecting her brother's marriage and the construction of The Evergreens next door.

Against this backdrop, Dickinson's poetry weaves a rich tapestry, exploring the intertwined relationship between nature and spirituality. This project aims to unravel the subtle interplay of these themes within Dickinson's body of work, providing a deeper understanding of her artistic vision in its cultural context.

1.2. Rationale for the Study

The juxtaposition of nature and religion in Dickinson's poetry is a compelling subject for inspection due to its recurrent presence and the profound implications it holds for interpreting her works. By examining the convergence of these themes, I aim to unravel the philosophical underpinnings of Dickinson's unique standpoint and contribute to the broader discourse on the connection between nature and spirituality in American literature.

1.3. Research Questions

The research aims to inquire Emily Dickinson's poetic reconnoitering of nature and religion, unraveling the intricacies of her conceptualization and representation of the natural world. By scrutinizing her verses, the study seeks to discern

the ways in which Dickinson intertwines these themes, investigating how her poetic lens captures the essence of nature and weaves it into sacred contemplations. Furthermore, the research endeavors to analyze the intersections of nature and religion in Dickinson's poetry, contemplating whether her representations reflect or challenge the cultural and intellectual currents prevalent in the 19th century. This investigation is grounded in an appreciation of Dickinson's life and contextualizes her work within the broader historical and cultural milieu of the 19th century, shedding light on the intellectual and societal influences that shaped her distinctive poetic expressions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Outline of Emily Dickinson's Life and Works

Emily Dickinson's life (1830-1886) was characterized by an unusual degree of seclusion, yet her poetic output demonstrated an unparalleled mastery of language and a profound expedition of the human experience. Despite her limited exposure to the public eye during her lifetime, Dickinson's works have garnered increasing attention posthumously. Her poems often explore themes of love, death, nature, and spirituality, showcasing a keen intellect and a distinctive voice in American literature. Dickinson's writing style, marked by unique punctuation, vivid imagery, and unconventional use of dashes, challenges traditional poetic norms. The study of her life and works provides crucial insights into the context that shaped her poetic vision and the thematic threads woven into her verses.

2.2. Former Scholarship on Dickinson's Nature and Religious Themes

Scholars have extensively explored the multifaceted nature of Dickinson's poetry, with a particular focus on her engagement with the natural world and religious thought. Criticism has ranged from interpretations that emphasize Dickinson's transcendentalist influences to those highlighting her questioning of conventional sacred doctrines. Works such as Cynthia Griffin Wolff's *Emily Dickinson* and Richard B. Sewall's *The Life of Emily Dickinson* have contributed foundational analyses of Dickinson's life and poetic themes. Wolff's illuminating literary biography of Emily Dickinson stands as the first comprehensive unearthing of the entangled connection between the poet's life and her profound body of work. This remarkable portrayal not only captures the essence of Dickinson and her era but also serves as an insightful interpretive study of her poems, providing readers with a renewed outlook and appreciation. Despite Dickinson's enigmatic nature, Wolff's biography breaks new ground by untying the complex interplay between the poet's life experiences, her mental landscape, and the poetic voice that emerged from this union (Wolff, 1986). And Richard B. Sewall's *The Life of Emily Dickinson* is a foundational analysis of both the poet's life and her recurring poetic themes. This detailed biography provides a thorough insight of Dickinson's brilliant mind. Sewall goes beyond examining the poet and her verses, offering insights into the woman behind the poetry. In this work, Dick-

inson emerges not only as one of America's greatest poets of the nineteenth century but also as an extraordinary and authentic human being (Sewall, 1998).

Additionally, critics like Cheryl Walker and Cristanne Miller have studied the intersectionality of gender, nature, and spirituality in Dickinson's poetry. In *The Nightingale's Burden: Women Poets and American Culture before 1900* Walker explores a distinct tradition of women's poetry in America, highlighting the often overlooked literary heritage. Inspired by Philomela, the nightingale of mythology, Walker identifies archetypal motifs in women's poetry and discusses poets such as Anne Bradstreet, Phillis Wheatley, Lydia Sigourney, Frances Osgood, Julia Ward Howe, Margaret Fuller, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, and Louise Guiney. The book offers a fresh view on individual poems as manifestations of a rich literary tradition shaped by women poets before 1900 (Walker, 1982). And in Miller's 2016 edition, *Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them*, readers encounter a landmark collection widely regarded as the definitive edition of Dickinson's poetry. It presents the poems in the order Dickinson intended, distinguishing meticulously copied versions from rougher drafts and including alternate words and phrases chosen by Dickinson. This edition eliminates challenges posed by her handwriting, providing a close look at her creative process. It stands as a major contribution, bringing readers closer to Dickinson's intentions and the unadorned brilliance of her language (Miller, 2016). The existing body of scholarship has laid a solid foundation, but there remains a need for a focused reconnoitering that synthesizes these perceptions and identifies nuances within Dickinson's treatment of nature and religion.

2.3. Detection of Gaps in the Existing Literature

Despite the wealth of scholarship on Emily Dickinson, there exists a notable gap in the comprehensive examination of the complex association between nature and religion in her poetry. While some studies have touched on individual aspects of these themes, a holistic analysis that integrates diverse critical angles is lacking. This project aims to address this gap by providing an in-depth exploration that synthesizes existing insights and unveils new dimensions of Dickinson's engagement with nature and religion. Moreover, there is a need for a more explicit application of ecofeminist theory to Dickinson's work, a view point that can shed light on the interconnectedness of gender, nature, and spirituality in her poetry.

This literature review section provides a detailed overview of Emily Dickinson's life and works, surveys previous scholarship on the themes of nature and religion in her poetry, and identifies specific gaps in the existing literature that the proposed study aims to fill.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Critical Theory: Ecofeminism

The selected critical framework for this study is Ecofeminism. Originating in the late 20th century, Ecofeminism explores the interconnected oppressions of

gender and the environment. Within this theoretical take, the exploitation of women and the degradation of the environment are seen as intertwined manifestations of a patriarchal mindset that views both nature and women as exploitable resources. Through Ecofeminism, Emily Dickinson's poetic analysis of the intersection of nature and spirituality is analyzed through a unique vantage point.

Ecofeminism, situated within the realms of feminism and political ecology, utilizes the concept of gender to scrutinize the knotty alliances between humans and the natural world. The theory advocates for a feminist point of view within Green politics, envisioning an egalitarian and collaborative society devoid of a singular dominant group (MacGregor, 2006: p. 286; Merchant, 2005: pp. 193-221).

The Ecofeminist analysis inspects various aspects, exploring connections between women and nature across culture, economy, religion, politics, literature, and iconography. It particularly emphasizes the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women, elucidating themes such as viewing women and nature as property, perceiving men as the custodians of culture and women as the custodians of nature, and examining the dominance of men over women and humans over nature. Echoing the sentiments of Ecofeminist thinker Carol J. Adams in "Ecofeminism and the Sacred", the theory underscores the vital call for the respect and recognition of both women and nature.

3.2. Elucidation of Ecofeminist Approach

Ecofeminism, as applied to literary analysis, focuses on the ways in which gendered views influence our awareness of nature and the environment. In the context of Dickinson's poetry, an ecofeminist approach involves examining how gender roles, societal expectations, and power dynamics are reflected in her depiction of nature and religion. By scrutinizing the ecological metaphors and the treatment of the natural world in Dickinson's verses, the ecofeminist approach enables a deeper investigation of the implicit connections between the feminine, the natural, and the spiritual. Moreover, ecofeminism prioritizes the need to challenge hierarchical dualisms, such as nature/culture and female/male, that perpetuate systems of oppression. In applying this framework to Dickinson's work, the study will unveil how her poetry both challenges and reinforces these dualisms, contributing to a detailed comprehension of her engagement with nature and religion.

3.3. Relevance to the Study of Dickinson's Poetry

Ecofeminism emerges as a crucial lens for exploring Emily Dickinson's poetry, intricately weaving together aspects of gender, nature, and spirituality. Dickinson's distinct voice, defying traditional categorizations, finds a dynamic framework in ecofeminism, shedding light on how her verses both challenge and reinforce societal norms concerning women and the environment. This study employs ecofeminism to uncover subtle undertones in Dickinson's work, pro-

viding fresh perspectives on her intricate relationship with nature and religion. Beyond thematic exploration, the framework facilitates a comprehensive analysis, considering linguistic and symbolic elements, enriching our comprehension of Dickinson's contributions to ecological and feminist discourses.

However, applying a late twentieth-century framework like ecofeminism to a mid-late nineteenth-century writer presents challenges. Exploring how gender and the environment intersected in Dickinson's time, compared to ecofeminism's typical approach, becomes pivotal. Additionally, examining the intersection of Dickinson's religious perspectives with ecofeminism offers a nuanced understanding of her poetic landscape. This study seeks to navigate these challenges, fostering a deeper exploration of Dickinson's work within the contextual nuances of her era.

4. Methodology

4.1. Selection Criteria for Poems

The selection of poems for this study is guided by a careful consideration of thematic relevance and representativeness of Dickinson's scrutiny of nature and religion. Criteria for inclusion include the prominence of nature and religious themes within the selected poems, diversity in poetic styles employed by Dickinson, and a balance between well-known and lesser-studied works. By adhering to these criteria, the study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis that reflects the breadth and depth of Dickinson's engagement with the chosen themes.

4.2. Selected Poems

- *"A Bird came down the Walk"*
- *"A Narrow Fellow in the Grass"*
- *"Because I could not stop for Death"*
- *"Some keep the Sabbath going to Church"*
- *"The World is not Conclusion"*

These poems were selected for their thematic richness, variation in tone and style, and their recurrent reconnaissance of nature and religion. Each poem offers a unique scene on the interplay between these themes, allowing for a holistic grasp of Dickinson's refined treatment of nature and spirituality.

4.3. Comparative Scrutiny

To provide a broader context and deepen the analysis, this study will incorporate works by other poets that share similar themes of nature and religion. The selection of comparative poems will be guided by the thematic resonance with Dickinson's chosen pieces. This comparative framework will enable a subtle expedition of how Dickinson's treatment of nature and religion aligns with or diverges from contemporary and historical poetic expressions. The comparative analysis will involve identifying common motifs, stylistic choices, and overarching philosophical viewpoints within the selected poems. This method aims to highlight

the distinctiveness of Dickinson's voice while placing her works in conversation with broader literary traditions.

4.4. Close Analysis

The study will employ a close reading approach to conduct an in-depth analysis of the selected Dickinson poems. This involves a meticulous examination of linguistic choices, structural elements, and the interplay of symbols. The focus will be on identifying nature and divine elements within the poems, unpacking their symbolic significance, and apprehension how Dickinson employs language to convey her unique picture. Through close reading, the study looks into the stylistic nuances, such as Dickinson's use of dashes, unconventional punctuation, and vivid imagery, to uncover hidden layers of meaning. This methodological approach aims to provide a nuanced insight of Dickinson's artistic choices and the ways in which she intertwines nature and religion in her poetic expression.

This methodology section outlines the criteria for selecting poems, specifies the chosen poems, details the approach to comparative analysis, and explains the close reading methodology employed in the study of Emily Dickinson's poetry on the themes of nature and religion.

5. Findings

In Emily Dickinson's "A Bird, came down the Walk" (Franklin, 1999), the speaker offers a poignant unearthing of nature, weaving together elements of beauty, danger, and spirituality. Through the attitude of ecofeminism, the poem becomes a canvas on which the interconnected oppressions of gender and the environment are delicately painted.

The speaker's observations of nature unfold with vivid imagery, capturing both the serene and brutal aspects of the natural world. The initial lines, "He bit an Angle Worm in halves/and ate the fellow, raw", present a stark rendering of the bird's predatory nature, reminiscent of ecofeminism's assertion that both women and nature are often perceived as exploitable resources. This representation aligns with ecofeminist thought, unveiling the primal, yet harmonious, dance of life within nature.

The bird emerges as a symbolic entity, embodying the delicate balance between humanity and the natural realm. Dickinson personifies the bird, stating, "And then, he drank a Dew/From a convenient Grass", creating an intimate connection between the bird and the environment. The ecofeminist perception underscores the vulnerability of nature, symbolized by the bird, when confronted by human presence. This vulnerability is echoed in ecofeminist discourse, where patriarchal mindsets exploit both women and nature.

As the speaker approaches the bird, a subtle dance of fear and grace unfolds. "Like one in danger, Cautious, /I offered him a Crumb" portrays the cautious yet

¹All poems discussed in the text are derived from: (Franklin, 1999) *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press.

receptive nature of the bird, akin to how ecofeminism envisions an egalitarian society. The bird's unrolling of feathers becomes a symbolic gesture, revealing its vulnerability, much like nature itself. This interaction reflects an ecofeminist standpoint, highlighting the need for a collaborative and respectful rapport between humanity and the environment.

Spiritual undertones weave through the poem, transforming nature into a conduit for spiritual reflection. "I offered him a Crumb, /And he unrolled his feathers" takes on a ritualistic quality, resembling a communion between the observer and nature. This echoes ecofeminism, which advocates for viewing nature not as a resource to be exploited but as a sacred space deserving of respect. The spiritual reflection in the poem underscores the interconnectedness of humanity and the natural world, a theme central to ecofeminism.

In a nutshell, "A Bird, came down the Walk" becomes a rich web of nature, symbolism, and spirituality when viewed through the ecofeminist insight. Dickinson's convoluted presentation of the bird and its interaction with the human world unveils the delicate dance between exploitation and reverence, calling for a harmonious and egalitarian coexistence between humanity and the environment. Through poignant quotations, the poem stands as an ecofeminist quest of the varied partnerships that bind gender, nature, and spirituality.

However, in Dickinson's "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass", the poet intricately weaves a delineation of a snake as a "narrow Fellow". The imagery of the snake, camouflaged in the grass, is pregnant with symbolic implications, prompting a subtle reconnoitering of nature, existential concerns, and linguistic choices. Connecting this analysis with Dickinson's "A Bird, came down the Walk", one can also consider the ecofeminist outlook. In essence, both "A Bird, came down the Walk" and "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass" emerge as eloquent expressions of nature and its manifold dimensions when scrutinized through an ecofeminist approach. Dickinson, with her adept use of language and vivid imagery, unfurls a rich interweaving that interlaces the entangled attachments among gender, nature, and spirituality.

In "A Bird", the bird's interaction with the human world unfolds a delicate dance, revealing the interconnectedness between exploitation and reverence. This calls for a harmonious and egalitarian coexistence, echoing the core tenets of ecofeminism. Similarly, in "A Narrow Fellow", the representation of the snake as a "narrow Fellow" amid the grass prompts an elaborate reconnaissance of nature, existence, and linguistic choices, aligning with the ecofeminist view. Dickinson's poems collectively stand as affecting ecofeminist explorations, unraveling the complexities that intertwine human experience, the natural world, and spiritual reflection.

The snake, symbolically veiled as a "Fellow", resonates with ecofeminist themes, subtly challenging conventional perceptions of gendered language. Dickinson's choice of the term "Fellow" serves to depersonalize the snake, rendering it less threatening and allowing readers to approach the creature with a sense of fami-

liarity. This linguistic strategy echoes the ecofeminist inclination to reevaluate and redefine associations between humans and the natural world, often portrayed in patriarchal terms.

The snake's sinuous movement, likened to a comb dividing the grass, is a captivating image. This vivid characterization, reminiscent of Dickinson's characteristic linguistic double-takes, offers a concrete and visual representation of the snake's subtle and mysterious nature. The slithering motion elicits both fascination and unease, highlighting the delicate balance in the ecosystem and mirroring the ecofeminist concern for the exploitation of nature.

As the grass closes and opens with the snake's passage, Dickinson captures the ephemeral and elusive quality of the creature. This linguistic play, involving terms like "divides" and "closes", mirrors the ecofeminist discourse on the interconnected oppressions of gender and the environment. The snake's ability to disappear swiftly, leaving only fleeting glimpses, underscores the challenges of comprehension and addressing the complex issues raised by ecofeminism.

Dickinson's speaker, who claims familiarity with "Several of Nature's People", reveals a notable exception in the case of the snake. The speaker's visceral response, a "tighter breathing/And Zero at the Bone", alludes to the deep-seated fear and discomfort associated with encountering the snake. This response can be interpreted through an ecofeminist viewpoint as a reflection of the historical patriarchal narratives that have demonized both women and nature, drawing parallels with the exploitative treatment of both.

Comparing "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass" with "A Bird, came down the Walk", the ecofeminist thread becomes more pronounced. Both poems engage with nature, showcasing the knotty bonds between humans and the environment. However, while "A Bird" surveys the delicate balance in nature, "A Narrow Fellow" investigates the sinister and mysterious aspects, emphasizing the potential dangers posed by an environment perceived as harmonious.

Dickinson's "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass" offers a rich fabric of imagery and symbolism, inviting readers to contemplate the complexities of nature and the interconnectedness of gender and the environment. The ecofeminist assessment illuminates the subtle nuances in Dickinson's language, emphasizing the need for a paradigm shift in our grasp and treatment of nature.

Building on Dickinson's discerning contemplation of nature and gender dynamics in "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass", her analysis of mortality in "Because I could not stop for Death" takes us on a transcendent journey from the intricacies of the natural world to the inevitability of human mortality. In the continuum of Dickinson's poetry, these themes intertwine seamlessly, urging readers to navigate the interconnected threads of existence, gender, and the eternal cycle of life and death.

In Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death", a thorough quest unfolds at the intersection of life, death, and eternity, revealing the poet's contemplative engagement with the inevitability of mortality (Gerlach, 1996: pp. 121-123). The

opening line, “Because I could not stop for Death”, sets the tone for a reflective journey that transcends the physical realm. Dickinson crafts a complex rendering of the inexorable progression from life to death, intertwining the mundane with the eternal.

The carriage ride with Death emerges as a central metaphorical journey in the poem, symbolizing the transition from life to the afterlife (Spencer, 2007: pp. 95-96). Dickinson employs vivid imagery to depict Death as a patient suitor, creating a surreal scene where “He kindly stopped for me”. This metaphorical journey unfolds with a deliberate slowness, encompassing the stages of life—the “School”, representing youth, and the “Grain of Eternity”, signifying the final resting place. The carriage ride becomes a poignant reconnaissance of life’s transitory nature, urging readers to contemplate the inevitability of their own mortal journey.

Quotations such as “We slowly drove—He knew no haste” and “The Carriage held but just Ourselves—And Immortality” encapsulate the meditative pace of the journey and the timeless quality of the destination. Dickinson’s careful choice of words, laden with rich symbolism, serves to emphasize the interplay between life, death, and eternity, inviting readers to reflect on the cyclical and inevitable nature of existence.

Ecofeminist standpoints can be woven into this contemplation by considering the interconnectedness of life and death with the natural world. The cyclical aspects of nature, such as seasons and life cycles, echo the themes inquired in Dickinson’s poem. The Earth’s capacity for renewal and regeneration, as celebrated in ecofeminism, finds resonance in the broader metaphysical context of Dickinson’s work. The carriage ride, in its metaphorical journey, mirrors the ecological cycles within nature, suggesting a harmonious integration of life and death within the larger ecosystem.

Comparatively, juxtaposing “Because I could not stop for Death” with Dickinson’s “A Bird, came down the Walk” and “A Narrow Fellow in the Grass”, reveals a thematic consistency in her unearthing of nature, mortality, and spirituality. In “A Bird, came down the Walk”, nature is presented as simultaneously beautiful and brutal, offering a fine-grained angle on the interconnectedness of life and death. Meanwhile, “A Narrow Fellow in the Grass” introduces the metaphor of the snake, symbolizing the hidden dangers in the natural world and further contributing to Dickinson’s convoluted network of life’s complexities.

In essence, Dickinson’s scrutiny of life, death, and eternity in “Because I could not stop for Death” transcends the temporal and seeks the metaphysical. Supported by poignant quotations and enriched by an ecofeminist frame of reference, the poem becomes an insightful meditation on the cyclical nature of existence, inviting readers to reflect on their place within the broader context of the natural world. This thematic continuity resonates across Dickinson’s works, creating a cohesive discovery of life’s mysteries and the inexorable march toward eternity.

In shifting from Dickinson's contemplation on mortality in "Because I could not stop for Death" to her unconventional perspective on worship in "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church", a thematic shift occurs from the inevitability of death to a sagacious reimagining of sacred practice and spirituality. In "Because I could not stop for Death", Dickinson digs into the intersection of life, death, and eternity, providing a reflective journey that transcends the physical realm. This investigation sets the stage for a fine-grained examination of the speaker's approach to the Sabbath in "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church". In "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church", Dickinson presents an unconventional characterization of worship, challenging traditional faith-based practices. The speaker adopts a personal and intimate connection with spirituality, choosing to engage with the sacred outside the confines of a formal church setting. The poem accentuates the speaker's preference for communing with the divine in nature, transcending the conventional notion of attending church services. This unconventional approach aligns with an ecofeminist evaluation that seeks to break free from rigid structures and embraces a more harmonious companionship with the natural world.

Nature takes center stage in "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church", serving as a sacred space for the speaker's spiritual communion. The poem scrutinizes the idea that the natural world, with its unspoiled beauty and tranquility, can be a more authentic place of worship than traditional spiritual institutions. Dickinson's language vividly captures this connection between spirituality and nature, as seen in the lines:

"God preaches, a noted Clergyman—
And the sermon is never long."

Here, nature becomes the pulpit, and the divine is found in the beauty of the world, suggesting a more direct and unmediated connection with the sacred. The speaker's choice to keep the Sabbath in nature reflects an ecofeminist inclination towards a spirituality that is intertwined with the environment, free from hierarchical structures and dogmas.

The poem offers an underlying commentary on the restrictive nature of conventional spiritual practices, implying that true spirituality can be found in a personal and unbounded connection with the natural world. Dickinson's ecofeminist stance encourages a reevaluation of the patriarchal and hierarchical structures embedded in traditional religious institutions, proposing an alternative path to spiritual fulfillment that respects and honors the interconnectedness of all living beings.

As we shift from Dickinson's reflections on mortality to her reimagining of Sabbath practices, the common thread lies in the inquisition of spirituality and connection, both with the eternal and the natural. The ecofeminist interpretation continues to illuminate Dickinson's elaborate sides, inviting readers to reconsider their companionships with death, spirituality, and the environment.

Building upon the contemplation of the Sabbath in "Some Keep the Sabbath Going to Church", Emily Dickinson's "The World is not Conclusion" propels us

into an erudite discovery of an open-ended world and its far-reaching implications for spirituality.

The poem begins with a striking declaration that “The World is not Conclusion. A Species stands beyond”. This opening line sets the tone for a philosophical inquiry into the limitless nature of existence. Here, Dickinson introduces the concept of an expansive world that extends beyond what can be definitively concluded. The term “Conclusion” suggests finality, yet the poet challenges this notion, proposing that a mysterious “Species” exists beyond our comprehension.

This idea of an open-ended world carries insightful implications for spirituality. In ecofeminism, interconnectedness and harmony with nature are pivotal, and Dickinson’s assertion aligns with this stand point. The world becomes a realm of ongoing discovery, where spirituality transcends rigid boundaries and embraces the continual unfolding of existence.

Dickinson’s speaker engages in a philosophical reflection, comparing the elusive “Species” to the intangible quality of music—“Invisible, as Music—but positive, as Sound”. This metaphor invites readers to perceive spirituality as a subtle force, much like music that resonates beyond what the eyes can see. This echoes themes found in “Some Keep the Sabbath Going to Church”, where the poet finds solace in personal, internal communion rather than adhering to societal norms.

Furthermore, Dickinson’s departure from conventional holy dogma is evident in the poem’s rejection of a neatly defined conclusion. Unlike traditional divine narratives that propose definitive answers, the poet suggests that the world’s mysteries and spiritual dimensions are infinite. This departure is consistent with Dickinson’s earlier work, challenging societal expectations in favor of a more personal, introspective spirituality.

Comparing “The World is not Conclusion” with “Some Keep the Sabbath Going to Church”, we observe a progression from questioning societal norms to a broader, metaphysical inquiry. Both poems invite readers to reconsider their alliance with spirituality, emphasizing personal connections and the inherent mysteries of existence.

At heart, “The World is not Conclusion” condenses Dickinson’s ecofeminist outlook by envisioning a world that defies conclusive explanations, celebrating the ongoing, mysterious journey of spirituality.

5.1. Designs and Themes Evolving from Comparative Analysis

In exploring the interplay between nature and religion in Emily Dickinson’s poetry from an Ecofeminist angle, a comparative analysis offers a complex inquisition. By juxtaposing Dickinson’s work with that of other poets sharing similar thematic concerns, patterns and themes emerge, shedding light on the intertwined partnership between nature, spirituality, and femininity. One notable pattern and theme are that nature is portrayed as a feminine entity. In Dickinson’s poems and those of comparable poets, nature often embodies feminine

qualities. This portrayal aligns with Ecofeminist principles that recognize the interconnectedness of women and the natural world. Through vivid imagery and metaphors, nature becomes a canvas on which the feminine is celebrated, emphasizing harmony and balance.

For instance, in Mary Oliver's "Wild Geese", the natural world is depicted as a nurturing force, echoing Dickinson's celebration of nature's feminine qualities. Oliver inquires the healing power of the wild, emphasizing a connection between women and the Earth.

Another significant pattern is the fact that one finds sacred femininity in natural elements. The comparative analysis may reveal a shared tendency to ascribe sacred and divine attributes to natural elements. In Sylvia Plath's "Tulips", the poet uses the image of tulips to symbolize a retreat into a natural, feminine space, similar to Dickinson's treatment of flowers and landscapes. This theme underscores the Ecofeminist notion that the reverence for nature intertwines with the celebration of femininity.

More importantly, a deep reader will notice there is a severe critique of patriarchal religious constructs. Dickinson's verses, when compared to works with parallel themes, might collectively critique patriarchal religious constructs. Margaret Atwood's "Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing" challenges traditional views of femininity and critiques societal expectations, paralleling Dickinson's critique of patriarchal norms.

In addition, there is a sense of eco-spiritual transcendence. The analysis may uncover a shared inclination towards eco-spiritual transcendence. Denise Levertov's "Talking to Grief" surveys spiritual moments in nature, akin to Dickinson's moments of divine connection. This theme resonates with Ecofeminism's emphasis on spirituality rooted in ecological consciousness.

Readers will also discern a cyclical nature of life and renewal. Commonalities may arise in the scrutiny of the cyclical nature of life and renewal. Anne Sexton's "Rowing" metaphorically presents the cyclical nature of life, mirroring Dickinson's use of nature's cycles as metaphors. The comparison may unveil a shared appreciation for the regenerative power inherent in both the feminine and the natural world.

And deep reading will reveal ecofeminist language and symbolism. The analysis may highlight the use of specific Ecofeminist language and symbolism. Joy Harjo's "An American Sunrise" employs symbols like the sunrise and animals to convey the interconnectedness of women and nature, akin to Dickinson's symbolic language.

The comparative analysis enriches our apprehension of Dickinson's Ecofeminist themes by placing them in a broader literary context, revealing patterns that speak to a collective eco-conscious discovery among poets.

5.2. Challenges to Outmoded Religious Standards

Exploring the challenges posed by Emily Dickinson to traditional faith-based norms offers an erudite insight into the complex interplay between individual

spirituality and organized religion. Dickinson's poetic expressions, often regarded as enigmatic, provide a unique argument through which to examine these challenges. This analysis does not only unravel Dickinson's perception but also draws comparisons with other poets who engage with similar themes, shedding light on shared concerns or divergent viewpoints.

We have already noticed that in "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church", Dickinson articulates her divergence from conventional divine practices. In her poem, "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church," she states:

"Some keep the Sabbath going to Church—
I keep it, staying at Home—
With a Bobolink for a Chorister—
And an Orchard, for a Dome—"

This excerpt highlights Dickinson's preference for a more intimate and nature-infused spirituality over organized holy rituals. The choice of the orchard as a metaphor for her spiritual space underscores the interconnectedness of women and nature. Ecofeminism, which recognizes the parallels between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the environment, finds resonance in Dickinson's celebration of the natural world as a sacred and personal sanctuary.

Moreover, in "The Brain—is wider than the Sky", (1862) Dickinson challenges the limitations of traditional godly constructs:

The Brain—is wider than the Sky—
For—put them side by side—
The one the other will contain
With ease—and you—beside—

Here, Dickinson expansively defines the human mind, suggesting that the vastness of individual consciousness surpasses traditional notions of the divine. This aligns with ecofeminist principles by emphasizing the intrinsic connection between the human intellect and the broader ecological consciousness. Dickinson's elevation of individual spirituality over prescribed religious boundaries resonates with ecofeminism's advocacy for a holistic apprehension of human existence within the natural world.

In comparing these ideas with Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself", where he declares: "I celebrate myself, and sing myself." Whitman's exuberant celebration of the self aligns with Dickinson's rejection of organized religious practices. Both poets embrace a more personal and direct communion with the divine, fostering a sense of unity with the natural world. From an ecofeminist scale, this celebration of the self can be seen as an assertion of agency, reflecting the interconnectedness of human identity with nature.

Similarly, John Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" surveys the limitations of organized religion in providing solace in the face of mortality:

"Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tramp thee down;

The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown...”

Keats’ contemplation of the nightingale’s immortality echoes Dickinson’s skepticism toward traditional godly narratives. This shared theme underscores the poets’ recognition of nature’s enduring cycles, contributing to the broader ecofeminist discourse that prioritizes the regenerative power inherent in both the feminine and the natural world.

Quintessentially, Dickinson’s specific quotations reveal her ecofeminist inclinations by emphasizing the interplay between personal spirituality, nature, and the rejection of traditional faith-based norms. These ideas resonate with ecofeminism’s call for a reevaluation of the rapport between humanity, the feminine, and the environment, fostering a deeper connection with the natural world.

In examining these pictures, it becomes clear that Dickinson, Whitman, and Keats share a common thread in challenging the rigidity of traditional holy norms. They emphasize the importance of personal experience, nature, and the inner self as conduits to the divine. This collective scrutiny among poets enriches our appreciation of diverse eco-conscious perspectives, highlighting the in-depth alliance between nature, spirituality, and the feminine across different literary landscapes.

However, nuances emerge in their approaches, with Dickinson’s introspective and often skeptical tone differing from Whitman’s exuberant celebration and Keats’ melancholic contemplation.

5.3. Symbolism of Death and Eternity

The symbolism of death and eternity in Dickinson’s poetry provides a thorough inspection of existential themes, and a comparative analysis with other poets deepens our realization of these motifs across diverse literary landscapes. Dickinson’s treatment of death as a metaphorical theme is marked by its unique view point, often portraying death as a journey or a suitor. This stands in contrast to the conventional presentation of death in literature, and when examined alongside other poets, such as John Donne or Christina Rossetti, the distinctive ecofeminist interpretation emerges.

In Dickinson’s verses, death is not merely an end but a transition, a carriage ride with Death personified. This metaphorical inquisition is analogous to ecofeminist principles, emphasizing the cyclical nature of existence and the interconnectedness of life and death within the larger ecosystem.

Joint symbols and linguistic devices become apparent when comparing Dickinson’s work with other poets. The use of nature imagery, seasons, and ecological metaphors, common in Dickinson’s poetry, echoes ecofeminist themes that celebrate the symbiotic partnership between women and the natural world. For instance, in contrast to Donne’s “Death, be not proud”, where death is challenged as a powerless force, Dickinson’s approach, as well as that of ecofeminist poets, often sees death as an integral part of the larger ecological composite.

Quotations from Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death" capture the essence of this unique outlook: "Because I could not stop for Death—He kindly stopped for me." This personification of death and the gentle, patient rendering is parallel to ecofeminism's emphasis on interconnectedness, blurring the boundaries between life and death, and emphasizing a harmonious integration within the larger natural order.

Hence, critics such as [Spencer \(2007\)](#) accentuate Dickinson's contemplation of the afterlife and delayed reconciliation of the soul with God, linking her work to Christian beliefs. However, an ecofeminist interpretation expands this viewpoint, connecting the themes of death and eternity to the broader cycles of nature. The intertwining of life and death within the natural world, reflected in Dickinson's verses, resonates with ecofeminism's recognition of the Earth's capacity for renewal and regeneration.

Dickinson's symbolism of death and eternity, when examined in conjunction with other poets and through an ecofeminist perception, reveals a complex and interconnected realization of mortality, spirituality, and the enduring cycles within the natural world.

5.4. Feminist Perspectives on Nature

Exploring the intersection of gender dynamics and the delineation of nature in Dickinson's poetry, alongside works of other poets, divulges an enchanting dialogue that vibrates ecofeminist principles. Moreover, it sheds light on the interconnectedness of gender and nature and reveals collective themes that ring the tenets of ecofeminism.

In Dickinson's verses, as well as those of comparable poets, nature is often personified and imbued with feminine qualities. Quoting from Dickinson's "Nature is what we see", we encounter lines such as "The Hill-the Afternoon-/Squirrel-Eclipse-the Bumble bee-", where nature is not only an entity but is presented with vitality and agency. This characterization parallels ecofeminist notions, emphasizing the recognition of the feminine within the natural world.

Correspondingly, other poets, like Mary Oliver, often depict nature as a nurturing and maternal force. Oliver's poem "Wild Geese" speaks to the interconnectedness of all living beings and the inherent wisdom of nature, embodying ecofeminist ideals. The lines "You do not have to be good. /You do not have to walk on your knees/for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting" convey a sense of acceptance and harmony with nature, reflecting ecofeminism's call for a balanced and inclusive worldview.

Critics such as [Walker \(1982\)](#) have noted Dickinson's subversion of traditional gender roles in her poetry, accentuating a defiance of societal expectations. This defiance extends to her representation of nature, where traditional gender norms are disrupted. For instance, in "Because I could not stop for Death", nature, personified as a male figure, accompanies the female speaker on her journey. This defies conventional gender dynamics and mirrors ecofeminism's criti-

que of patriarchal structures.

Ecofeminism, with its stress on interconnectedness and the celebration of the feminine, finds resonance in the thematic threads woven through Dickinson's poems and those of other poets. The combined subject of nature as a feminine entity, possessing agency and vitality, serves as a testament to the erudite connection between gender dynamics and the portrayal of nature in these works.

Dickinson's consideration of nature and gender crescendos, when examined alongside other poets and through an ecofeminist idea, discloses an abundant diversity of interconnected themes. Quotations from these poets, juxtaposed with critical insights, illumine the sagacious interaction between the feminine, nature, and the societal constructs that form our perception of both.

5.5. Stylistic Inventions in Nature Poetry

In learning about the stylistic innovations of nature poetry, particularly in the works of Dickinson and other poets, a refined assessment emerges. It not only sorts out the distinct stylistic choices but also tells allied poetic techniques that contribute to the picture of nature and religion. Within this stylistic panorama, ecofeminism offers a lens through which we can appreciate the interconnectedness of these themes.

Dickinson, recognized for her enigmatic dashes and unconventional punctuation, employs a fragmented syntax that mirrors the unpredictability of nature. In "A Bird came down the Walk," she writes, "And he unrolled his feathers-/And rowed him softer Home-." The dashes create a sense of fluidity and unpredictability, mirroring the varied and unpredictable nature of the bird's flight. This stylistic choice contributes to the characterization of nature as a dynamic and evolving force.

Similarly, Mary Oliver, known for her accessible yet profound style, often employs vivid and sensory language to depict nature. In "Wild Geese", Oliver writes, "You only have to let the soft animal of your body/love what it loves." This direct and visceral language serves to connect the reader intimately with nature, emphasizing the ecofeminist idea of a harmonious relationship between the human and natural worlds.

Critics, such as Farr (2004), have noted Dickinson's use of vivid imagery and metaphorical language as a departure from conventional nature poetry. In "A narrow Fellow in the Grass", Dickinson's portrayal of the snake as a "Whip lash" and "Zero at the Bone" adds a layer of metaphorical complexity. This stylistic innovation contributes to the ecofeminist prospect by challenging traditional gendered associations with nature, presenting it as both beautiful and potentially threatening.

Ecofeminism, with its prominence on interconnectedness, finds resonance in the shared poetic techniques across various nature poets. The use of vivid imagery, unconventional syntax, and metaphorical language serves to elevate nature beyond a mere backdrop, positioning it as a dynamic and essential force in-

tertwinced with the human experience.

The stylistic innovations in nature poetry, as observed in the works of Dickinson and other poets, contribute to a deeper realization of the themes of nature and religion. Quotations from these poets, coupled with critical insights, brighten the deliberate choices these poets make to convey the knotty companionship between humanity, nature, and spirituality.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, our exploration into Emily Dickinson's poetic corpus has unraveled a nuanced tapestry, revealing recurring themes that underscore her distinctive stance on the interplay between nature and religion. Through meticulous examination and interconnected readings, Dickinson's oeuvre emerges as a cohesive expression of Ecofeminist ideals, challenging conventional notions of gender roles and critiquing patriarchal constructs.

This study positions itself within existing scholarship, offering unique insights and addressing gaps in the literature. By adopting an Ecofeminist perspective, it contributes to the broader discourse on 19th-century American poetry, enriching our understanding of Dickinson's treatment of nature and religion.

The comparative analysis with other poets extends our comprehension of Dickinson's work within a larger literary context, highlighting shared themes and stylistic innovations. This not only deepens our insight into thematic and stylistic influences in nature and religious poetry but also prompts avenues for future research.

Relevance to contemporary discussions becomes evident as Dickinson's insights resonate with ongoing dialogues about the interconnectedness of nature and religion. Her exploration of gender, ecology, and spirituality offers valuable contributions to current cultural and environmental discussions.

In essence, this research deepens our awareness of Dickinson's poetry, contributes significantly to Ecofeminist literary criticism, and enriches contemporary conversations on the enduring themes of nature, religion, and gender.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Farr, J. (2004). *The Gardens of Emily Dickinson*. Harvard University Press.
- Franklin, R. W. (ed.) (1999). *The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition*. The Belknap Press.
- Gerlach, J. (1996). Emily Dickinson's Fascicles: Method & Meaning (review). *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, 5, 121-123.
- Grabher, G., Hagenbüchle, R., & Miller, C. (1998). *The Emily Dickinson Handbook*. University of Massachusetts Press.

- MacGregor, S. (2006). *Beyond Mothering Earth: Ecological Citizenship and the Politics of Care*. University of British Columbia Press.
- Merchant, C. (2005). *Radical Ecology the Search for a Livable World*. Routledge.
- Miller, C. (2012). Reading in Dickinson's Time. In *Reading in Time: Emily Dickinson in the Nineteenth Century*. University of Massachusetts Press.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vk9d0.6>
- Miller, C. (ed.) (2016). *Emily Dickinson's Poems: As She Preserved Them*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Oberhaus, D. H. (1987). "Tender Pioneer": Emily Dickinson's Poems on the Life of Christ. *American Literature*, 59, 341-358. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2927120>
- Sewall, R. B. (1998). *The Life of Emily Dickinson*. Harvard University Press.
- Spencer, M. (2007). Dickinson's Because I Could Not Stop for Death. *The Explicator*, 65, 95-96.
- Walker, C. (1982). *The Nightingale's Burden: Women Poets and American Culture before 1900*. Indiana University Press.
- Wolff, C. G. (1986). *Emily Dickinson*. Alfred A. Knopf.