

The Poetics of Emily Dickinson

— an approach through her birds' songs —

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According to Clinton Scollard and Jessie B. Rittenhouse, compilers of *The Bird-Lovers' Anthology*, the earliest recorded English lyric on birds with notable charm is conjectured to have been written 700 years ago.¹ Since then, not to mention since much earlier if we include non-Anglo-Saxon cultures, many songs have been written on birds. Birds are celebrated as harbingers of delightful seasons, carefree and happy creatures, objects of affection as domesticated pets, and so on. Birds sometimes symbolize poets, and their songs become an appropriate metaphor of poetic art.

It is natural for the Romantics, who liked to ramble among the woods in the Lake District to be enchanted by birds' songs. Many more poems on birds are left with us by American Transcendentalists, Thoreau, Emerson, and later poets, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, and the moderns. It is of great interest to recognise that the treatment of birds differs from age to age, and from poet to poet. By way of an exploration of various poetic attitudes towards the song of birds, I will approach a definition of the essence of Emily Dickinson's poetic art.

I

In an attempt to refute the criticism of Dickinson's imagery as being imprecise, Roland Hagenbüchle advocates a phenomenological approach to the poet's mind.² The critic starts analyzing the problem through a comparison of her poems on birds with those by Keats, Wordsworth, and Shelley. The Romantic poems referred to are "Ode to a Nightingale," "To the Cuckoo," and "To a Skylark," respectively by each poet. The critic asserts that Dickinson "evidently begins where the Romantic quest ends and fails", on the basis of his observation that the poems by the Romantics mentioned above start only after the birds are gone out of sight.³ The poets are allowed only to hear the birds' songs, never to see the birds themselves. In contrast, the critic

points out that Dickinson, in some poems on birds, concentrates on the moments of the creatures' disappearance. Discussion of the contrast between the Romantics and Dickinson is not further developed nor does the critic make it his major argument. However, since his statement is provocative as well as suggestive, in acknowledging the difference in the manner of appreciation of nature by the Romantics and Dickinson, it is profitable to explore this issue to a more extensive degree. How does the disappearance of birds affect the Romantic poets? Is the disappearance of birds considered by the Romantics to be a failure? Do they regard the absence as a deprivation of privilege? How does Dickinson deal with this situation?

II

It should be agreed that in Wordsworth's "To the Cuckoo" the bird is indeed out of the poet's sight, as Hagenbüchle points out:

O blithe New-comer! I have heard,
I hear thee and rejoice.
O Cuckoo! Shall I call thee Bird,
Or but a wandering Voice?

.

The twofold shout I hear;

.

. . . thou art to me
No bird, but an invisible thing,
A voice, . . .

.

The same whom in my schoolboy days
I listened to; that Cry
Which made me look a thousand ways
In bush, and tree, and sky.
To seek thee did I often rove
Through woods and on the green;
And thou wert still a hope, a love;
Still longed for, never seen.

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And I can listen to thee yet;
Can lie upon the plain
And listen, . . .⁴

It is clear that the poet emphasizes the bird's absence by frequent usage of the words "hear" and "listen." Hagenbüchle's interpretation of absence as a cause for a "feeling of loss" which is a "profoundly Romantic element," is not acceptable here. For, in this poem, the cuckoo's being out of the poet's sight works in a positive way. It is because of its very absence that the bird is regarded as a "mystery," with the earthly sordidness, which pertains to physical existence, taken away. The fact that the poet can only listen to the bird heightens the "unsubstantial" and "faery" quality of the bird. The more the poet looks for the bird with his physical eyes, the more in vain his effort turns out to be. As a result, though it sounds contradictory, he is led into a blissful state, represented by this heavenly creature, purified of present sufferings. He is brought back to his school-boy days of innocence through the same experience. If the poem deals with a feeling of loss, it is not a loss of the bird, but that of the "golden time." The poet in this poem does not feel as badly as the poet in "Tintern Abbey" in which he again laments the loss of the sensitive and creative self of his youth. For the poet here can still appreciate the bird's song. The feeling of loss is not present in his voice when he says:

Though babbling only to the Vale
Of sunshine and of flowers,
Thou bringest unto me a tale
Of visionary hours.

He retains the power to render the bird's mere "babbling" into a sensible "tale." Finally it is not the bird but he himself who "beget[s]" "that golden time." The poem as a whole can be read as rather a confident remark on the poet's creativity, which is aroused by the bird's song.

The invisible presence of the bird functions in a similar, positive way in Shelley's "To a Skylark." Here despite the fact of the absence, the bird is depicted vividly through synaesthetic descriptions. Its song is felt as if it rendered colors:

What thou art we know not;

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What is most like thee?
From rainbow clouds there flow not
Drops so bright to see
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.⁵

Also against the background of the “blue deep,” “the golden lightning / Of the sunken sun,” the “pale purple even,” “that silver sphere,” “the white dawn clear,” the bird is described as to build a concrete image in the reader’s mind. Through vivid, and sensuous descriptions, the poet tries to present a keen sense of joy which is created by the bird’s song. The terms used in the similes for the cuckoo—poet not appearing before the public, but still moving them, lady kept in a tower, composing a sweet song for consolation, glow-worm hidden in the grass, but emitting the “aerial light,” rose, though unseen, attracting bees by its sweet honey—emphasize the fact that the state of being unseen increases the power of the influence, rather than diminishes it. It is the function of mystification through negation of physicality. The invisible presence leads the poet to call the bird a “scourner of the ground” and “blithe Spirit.” Here would be seen a tension between the bird as natural creature and as symbol of poetic bard. The bird is transformed into an ideal for the poet, who seeks to attain the “unpremeditated art” of the bird. The nature of art is the poet’s goal. The blissful state brought forth through the carefreeness of the bard will surely elate the reader:

Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow,
The world should listen then—as I am listening now.

Again in Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” the felicity of the carefree bird is clearly contrasted with the pains of human sorrow and despair. It is natural for the poet to desire to “fade away,” and “leave the world unseen” with the bird.⁶ The state of being unseen, as in Wordsworth’s and Shelley’s poems, induces the high mystification of the bird: “. . . here there is no light, / Save what from *heaven* is” (italics mine). The nightingale is encased beyond time in “Charm’d magic casements” as an “immortal Bird.”

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!

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No hungry generations tread thee down;
Thy voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Among the Romantics observed here, Keats is the most vulnerable to the pain incurred by the disappearance of bird, and suffers from a feeling of loss. However, when we realize that this experience leads him to a recognition of our mortal nature which in contrast shows him the everlasting quality of the bird's song—the immortality of art—the disappearance of the bird should not be dismissed as cause for a simple sorrow.

As is clear by now, it is a common feature for some Romantics to attribute heavenly nature to unseen birds. Their ebbing out of physical sight does not impair the feeling of joy, rather it is a favorable state in heightening the sense of mystery, avoiding the sordidness or limitation which the physicality brings forth. An unseen bird can be easily transcended to a mysterious and heavenly bard.

To go back to Hagenbüchle's statement, we encounter a second misleading observation:

Unlike the Romantics, Emily Dickinson prefers not to mythologize the bird into an "immortal bird," or "blithe Spirit," although for her too, the bird remains "a mystery."⁷

We have to recognize, first of all, that she adopts two different approaches in her poems on birds. One is in a group of poems where the poet treats birds as a symbol of a particular season and so describes them against the background of natural phenomena. Here sometimes we see a similar tendency to the Romantics' to "mythologize" birds. Dickinson's robin barely retains physicality since its substantiality is subtly balanced by heavenliness: "cherubic quantity" (828).⁸ Its nest is an ideal place for spiritual as well as physical satisfaction. The happy family life renders not only a firm base to come back to, but also has something sacred:

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The Robin is the One
That speechless from the Nest
Submits that Home—and Certainty
And Sanctity, are best.

Again in Poem 1465 (“Before you thought of Spring”), we find another expression of the divine quality of the little creature. “God bless(es)” a bluebird which “shouts for joy to Nobody / But his seraphic self—.” Its feathers are of “Inspiriting habiliments / Of Indigo and Brown.” The expression “inspiriting,” since it appears following the name of God, naturally bears religious association and, as a result, heightens the transcendental quality of the bird. The bird as heavenly guide reenacts what Wordsworth’s skylark does whose constant soaring flight encourages man to aspire for something beyond this life.

Alas! my journey, rugged and uneven,
Through prickly moors or dusty ways must wind;
But hearing thee, or others of thy kind,
As full gladness and as free of heaven,
I, with my fate contented, will plod on,
And hope for higher raptures, when life’s day is done.

Contrasted with man’s time-bound existence, just as man’s earthliness and bird’s heavenliness are clearly contrasted, birds in the poems of Dickinson’s first group, like the Romantics’ assume out-of-time-ness. Mystification is a way to attribute them with transcendental nature.

III

It is in the poems of the other group where Dickinson goes far away from the Romantics. By refusing to attribute birds with romantic, transcendental qualities, the poet in those poems establishes a unique relationship with birds. One’s own appreciation, not according to prescribed ideas, is the most significant for the poet. Dickinson’s bird is transformed, thus, freely, according to the mood of the observer.

A Route of Evanescence
With a revolving Wheel—

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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— (1463)

Unsentimental, objective, though indeed highly subjective, observation of birds' activities leads her to contemplate how the bird affects the situation around it. As a result, she attains an understanding about involvement with the external world. The Poem 1084 illustrates this point:

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 Iplement, be seen—
And Place was where the Presence was
Circumference between.

Different from the Romantics, the poet here describes objectively the appearance and disappearance of the bird. It is important to pay attention to the words used here: experiment, test, principle, element, implement, etc.. They create a feeling that the poem is like a scientific treatise. No romanticization is involved in the flight of the bird. The main concern is to reveal the reader the difference between the two modes of existence: presence and absence. The state of deprivation concretized by the fact of the bird's disappearance highlights the importance of "presence."⁹ The poet is making a point of the significance of experience, as she warns the reader in another poem: "Out of sight? What of that? / See the Bird—reach it!" (703).

Experience is important to her since it alters one's outlook of a situation. What we have experienced is retained in our mind, and constantly though most of the time unconsciously, influences our appreciation of the external world. Things around us

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bear no existential significance in themselves. It is only after we appreciate and find a place for them in our mind that they become "true."

Split the Lark—and you'll find the Music—
Bulb after Bulb, in Silver rolled—
Scantily dealt to the Summer Morning
Saved for your Ear when Lutes be old.

Loose the Flood—you shall find it patent—
Gush after Gush, reserved for you—
Scarlet Experiment! Sceptic Thomas!
Now, do you doubt that your Bird was true? (861)

At the same time, it should be recognized that a moment of experience is to be lost immediately. The poet is well aware of the transitoriness of any kind of ecstasy. However, though the sensation is fleeting, the fact of having experienced it matters since it decides our future relationship with the external world. Therefore, she strives to recapture the momentary impressions which are to construct crucial experiences in her life.¹⁰ Here we have to acknowledge the value of Hagenbüchle's criticism: his suggestion is accurate of a phenomenological interpretation of Dickinson's poetic creativity and of her concentration on critical moments.

The loss of the present moment, of time in general, is caught by Dickinson in the dramatic event of the peripety itself. What previously could be experienced as sustained mood by the Romantics is now compressed into a single moment; the myth is reduced to an act of pure consciousness.¹¹

It should also be noted that the greatness of the poet resides not only in reconstructing the situation as exactly as how it happened, but a more significant point is that her idea of the importance of experience is embodied in the reader through literally sharing the exciting moment. Her view of experience and the practice itself are fused into one.

A comparison with Robert Frost's poetic mode will reinforce our understanding of Dickinson's message and how it is transmitted to the reader. It is clear now that a recognition of the importance of experiencing crucial moments enables Dickinson to accept the fact of absence without any emotional involvement. The poet—projection of Frost—in "The Minor Bird" also tries to accept the absence as a fact. But he differs greatly from Dickinson from the start since he feels a sense of loss and

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needs to alleviate the pain. He tries not to fall into sentimental lamentations since he is well aware that it is he who made the bird fly away by shutting the door to it. His solution is to regard the experience as an opportunity for self-knowledge. For the sake of mental equilibrium, the feeling of loss should be compensated by that of gain. He comes to terms with the fact of absence by dealing with the situation in a rational way—by recognizing the foolishness of his arrogance and the limitation of cognizance in assuming superiority of man's power over that of nature: "The fault must partly have been in me / The bird was not to blame for his key."¹² This personal learning is next generalized so that it also applies to the reader's experience:

And of course there must be something wrong
In wanting to silence any song.

The poet's concern is to bestow the reader with knowledge about how to cope with life as well as to calm his own mental agony. Thus, he tends to moralistic teaching. A relief from pain is achieved through his belief in the reader's attainment of knowledge.

A citation of another poem will support our point: aspiration to overcome painful event through rationalization of human experience in general, the wisdom of which is rendered to the reader with a kind of aphorism, is characteristic of Frost.

There is a singer everyone has heard,
Loud, a mid-summer, and a mid-wood bird,
Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again
He says that leaves are old and that for flowers
Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten.
He says the early petal-fall is past
When pears and cherry bloom went down in showers
On sunny days a moment overcast;
And comes that other fall we name the fall.
He says the highway dust is over all.
The bird would cease and be as other birds
But that he knows in singing not to sing.
The question that he frames in all but words
Is what to make a diminished thing.

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It is important to recognize that the oven-bird is described as rational by referring to its song as “words” and its singing as “say(ing).” The bird is treated in terms of a human being, or as a teacher, not a revealer of mystery (or mystery itself, as the Romantics put it). The bird is “singing,” but it sounds as “words” to the poet who strives to interpret the event in a rational way.

A difference between Frost and Dickinson is now clear: while the former, in an attempt to cope with life, and therefore, to accommodate the fact of loss within his view, tries to rationalize it, the latter finds no necessity (in some of her poems on birds, though not in all) to ponder on it. She rather deems any particular moment of experience as cherishable in itself. It is nothing but by means of verbal commentaries, in a form of lesson, that Frost reveals his understanding, since rationalization or moralization tends to involve interpretative preaching. On the contrary, our poet advocates the importance of experience rather than verbalization, and renders the message in such a way as to be actualized in the act of reading.

Behind the daring effort to recapture the moment of experience is found a solid faith in our poet’s self in the relationship to nature. She takes a self-centered view of nature, able to change her perspective at will, not determined by nature. It is the poet that determines the relationship with nature, the world outside herself, not the reverse. The following poem verifies this poetic stance of hers:

To hear an Oriole sing
May be a common thing—
Or only a divine.

It is not of the Bird
Who sings the same, unheard,
As unto Crowd—

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 Skeptic—showeth me—

"No Sir! In Thee!" (526)

Again in this regard, it is significant to view her in a historical perspective since it shows her uniqueness with a clear contrast to the Romantics and Transcendentalists. While Dickinson involves herself with nature at each moment, her relationship to nature being therefore not stable but fluid with her self at the center, her predecessors formed their attitudes towards nature on a solid basis of belief in the blissful, celebratory marriage between nature and self. Nature is their guide, deciding their relationship, as we saw in Wordsworth's skylark. The poets' task is keep themselves ready for the infusion of influence of nature. They are, in a way, receptacles of natural power.

In comparing our poet with Keats, Joanne Feit Diehl points out that the former is afraid of losing the capability of communication while the latter the capability of listening:

Fear of separation from nature joins with a sense of horror at the thought that she will be deprived of the ability to communicate, that the voice of the poet will be silenced. What Keats, however, most fears is his failure to hear, the power of death to interrupt the fluent voice of nature.¹³

Their fears naturally reflect their placement of self in the relationship with nature. It is clear that in hearing we are passive, and that in communication, we are active, taking initiative, or at least on equal terms with the other.

To recall what Thoreau did in his *Walden* will further clarify Dickinson's poetic mentality. Thomas W. Ford makes a convincing argument on the difference of attitudes towards nature of Thoreau and Dickinson, by comparing "Where I lived and what I lived for" in *Walden* and "I heard a Fly Buzz."¹⁴ Numerous resemblances clarified by his detailed observation convince us that Dickinson must have been well acquainted with Thoreau's piece. And the large number of adaptations by Dickinson of Thoreau's ideas and words highlights the aspects in which her poem differs from its model. The greatest difference is in the replacement of a wood-thrush in Thoreau's piece by an annoying busy fly. There can be found no mystification in the latter's work.

. . . mid-afternoon had all the serenity of evening, and the wood-thrush sang around, and was heard from shore to shore . . .¹⁵

The passage is changed into

. . . — and then it was
There interposed a Fly—
With Blue—uncertain stumbling Buzz—
Between the light—and me—
And then the Windows failed—and then
I could not see to see— (465)

A conclusion made by the critic is that the difference derives from the absence in Dickinson of faith in the divinity of man's intuition. She does not trust in the Transcendental idea that through correspondence with nature man can become visionary. "She chose to remain the realistic, tough-minded observer. Her *modus operandi* was to rely on her own senses, . . ." ¹⁶ Diehl describes this inclination of hers as "solipsistic usurpation of nature."¹⁷ However, it should not be taken negatively that the poet depends on her senses as touch-stone in establishing relationship with the external world. Although it is true that she builds a "dominion" "triumphant(ly)" (1265), it at the same time bears such a humble quality as "A self denying Household" for the "Robin" (1483). She is not as tyrannical as to enjoy a full control of the surroundings. The following poem will lead us to consider more about her poetic scheme. What kind of pleasure does she, and does the reader in turn, find in her poetic excursions? How is it made possible?

The most triumphant Bird I ever knew or met
Embarked upon a twig today
And till Dominion set
I famish to behold so eminent a sight
And sang for nothing scrutable
But intimate Delight.
Retired, and resumed his transitive Estate—
To what delicious Accident
Does finest Glory fit!

IV

We have seen that there are two kinds of poems on birds in Dickinson's poetry—one is of the Romantic strain and here the poet idealises birds through mystification,

and the other is more neutral in its stance, and she represents them as she perceives. It does not, however, mean that there is no link between those groups. There are poetic principles which underlie her writing mode whatever aspect of life she is concerned with. It is significant to know that a Romantic piece, "Before you thought of Spring" (1465) referred to above, includes a few lines which seem to show the poetics of our poet. The second stanza deserves due consideration here.

With specimens of Song,
As if for you to choose—
Discretion in the interval
With gay delays he goes
To some superior Tree
Without a single Leaf
And shouts for joy to Nobody
But his seraphic self—

The bird sings not to others but only to itself. It does not care which song will please the listener: "As if for you to choose." It has no intention to flatter the audience, but only sings what it really feels like. This nonchalant way renders a genuine felicity, "Delight without a Cause" (774).¹⁸ It is a state of supreme art, complete in itself, with all the affectation completely removed. This explains the "intimate Delight" brought forth by "delicious Accident" in the Poem 1265, cited at the end of the last chapter.

The idea of self-contentment in birds' singing finds its expression in another poem which greatly resembles "At Half past Three, a single Bird" in theme and treatment. The birds' unaffectionate state of self-satisfaction is regarded so highly as to be attributed with an almost religious quality:

Nor was it for applause—
That I could ascertain—
But independent Ecstasy
Of Deity and Men— (783)

Fulfillment is the only object to be attained without any other worldly intention such as memorization and commemoration by people, which would endanger the purity of the chorus:

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The Miracle that introduced
Forgotten, as fulfilled.

Recognition of purity or the unaffected state leads us back to an expression in Poem 1465 cited above. The tree on which the bird perches is described as "Without a single Leaf." The leafless tree does not merely reflect the early-spring season. It also bears the meaning that the artist (here, the bird) works under circumstances where there is no decoration. Abstraction is an elemental factor in Dickinson's poetry, as is revealed in the second group of her poems. She singles out one particular moment in her experience, and concentrates on that, with all the unnecessary circumstances stripped off. She tries to grasp the core of the experience.

It is also meaningful to recall that the bird in "At Half past Three, a single Bird," as well as in "The Birds begun at Four o'clock—," bears a quintessential quality but no particularity, as is revealed in its being treated as a universal "Bird." It is an embodiment of an abstracted concept of the creature as a species.

V

Birds—representing the external world in general— bear different qualities not by themselves but through the poet's sensibility. Natural phenomena are transformed into pure artifact through the poet's imagination, as with Midas' touch an ordinary oriole is changed into an "alighting Mine." It is a poetic mine where the bird is, as we have seen in "A Route of Evanescence," transformed moment after moment into

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 Attar
For his decamping wants—

The Splendor of a Burmah

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The Meteor of Birds,
Departing like a Pageant
Of Ballads and of Bards— (1466)

This swift transformation of the oriole reflects the poet's mind, flexible enough to attribute abstracted concepts with any kind of transfiguration. Then finally the bird culminates into a mythic creature, and thus attains a universal quality: Jason's "Aggrandizement / Upon the Apple Tree." It is "lost" to Jason, but it is restored to us through the poetic imagination. Here resides the essence of Dickinson's art: she extracts the essence of nature and crystalizes fleeting moments within verse form to transcend time, to be raised to the level of myth. Mythologizing, for her, is a process of abstraction, instead of romantic attribution of idealistic and transcendental qualities. It goes without saying that to grasp a core of things requires great deal of concentration, abandoning all the unnecessary circumstances off the vision. This is a purification enabled only with the absence of ambition—a pure mind. It is right to call her principles the poetics of purity—purity in the mind as well as in the act.

Notes

1. *The Bird-Lovers' Anthology*, compiled by Clinton Scollard and Jessie B. Rittenhouse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1930).
2. Roland Hagenbüchle, "Precision and Indeterminacy in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson," *ESQ*, 20 (1974), 33-56. It should be acknowledged that I was greatly influenced by Hagenbüchle's phenomenological approach to Dickinson's poetry. The present article is a development with adjustments of one of the topics raised in his article.
3. Hagenbüchle, p. 38.
4. All the subsequent quotations from Wordsworth's poems are from *Wordsworth: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. Ernest De Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).
5. The quotations from Shelley's poems are from *Shelley: Selected Poetry*, ed. Neville Rogers (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).
6. All my quotations from Keats are taken from *Selected Poems and Letters*, ed. Douglas Bush (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1959).
7. Hagenbüchle, p. 38.
8. All the subsequent quotations from Dickinson's poems are taken from *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960).
9. See Poem 1279 :
By Contrast certifying
The Bird of Birds is gone—

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How nullified the Meadow—
Her Sorcerer withdrawn!

10. David Porter, "The Crucial Experience in Emily Dickinson's Poetry," *ESQ*, 20 (1974), 280-90.
11. Hagenbüchle, p. 38. David Porter purports that many of Dickinson's poems are written in hindsight perspective, and that she preoccupies herself with "living in the aftermath" and tries to actualize the "post-crisis state." However, too much emphasis on the static quality of moments crystalized in the "post-crisis state" sometimes misleads us. The word "after-math" creates a feeling that the experience is irretrievably gone. But this is not right as Douglas Anderson points out, since some of Dickinson's poems present the very moment of the experience. Douglas Anderson, "Presence and Place in Emily Dickinson's Poetry," *The New England Quarterly*, 57 (1984), 205-24.
12. All the quotations from Frost's poems are from *The Bird-Lovers' Anthology*.
13. Joanne Feit Diehl, *Dickinson and the Romantic Imagination* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 119.
14. Thomas W. Ford, "Thoreau's Cosmic Mosquito and Dickinson's Terrestrial Fly," *The New England Quarterly*, 48 (1975), 487-504.
15. The quotation is taken from the passage cited in the above-mentioned article by Ford.
16. Ford, p. 487.
17. Diehl, p. 50.
18. See Poem 774 :

A Bird to overhear
Delight without a Cause—
Arrestless as invisible—
A matter of the Skies.

The idea of self-efficiency of Dickinson's poetry is well explained by Diehl, especially in pp. 89-92.