

Emily Dickinson's Ecocentric Pastoralism

by

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Preface

My companionship with Emily Dickinson had started early in my undergraduate education. I was born and raised in Pusan, South Korea, until my family moved to Seoul when I was nine. My early childhood in Pusan was full of joy because of the nearby mountains and sea. I feel fortunate that I had a close contact with nature when I was young. When I reentered Sogang University for a second undergraduate degree in American literature in 1994, my early love of nature drew me to Dickinson's nature poetry. For my senior thesis, I compared Dickinson's nature poems with those of Korean catholic poet Sister Hae-in Lee. Although I was first interested in Dickinson's charming and riddle-like nature poetry, as I became more familiar with her work I grew increasingly attracted to her poems about her struggles with the Christian faith. The result was my master's thesis, "Perspectives on Christian Motifs in Emily Dickinson's Poetry."

When I started my doctoral studies at Marquette University in August 2001, I was looking for a larger theoretical frame that would provide an umbrella for my two interests in Dickinson's nature poetry and her ambivalent attitudes toward Puritanism. I found my answer when I took a course in "American Landscape Writing" in the spring of 2003 from Dr. Milton Bates. He assigned an impression paper about one of the American landscape paintings exhibited in the Milwaukee Art Museum. When I saw the Hudson River School painter Frederic Edwin Church's "A Passing Shower," I became transfixed before it. I couldn't move because I was deeply enchanted by the peaceful scene spread before me. I stood so long before the painting that a guard approached me. For me, it was a good chance to ask him about the small white dots at the shoreline of the lake. I

thought of them as horses, but he asserted that they were cows. I read the painting's description on a plaque and encountered the word "pastoral." It was an epiphany.

When I spoke with Dr. Bates about this discovery, he showed me two of his books: Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* and Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land*. I didn't know then that these books would be foundational for my dissertation. I found what I had been searching for when that summer I read the first sentence of Marx's book: "The pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the age of discovery, and it has not yet lost its hold upon the native imagination" (3). I can still remember the joy that I felt at seeing the possibilities for combining my interests that Marx's words opened up for me. Before my encounter with this sentence, I believed that Puritanism provided the central meaning of America as well as of Dickinson's poetry. Thanks to Marx, I came to see that pastoralism is also an important factor in the identity of America. This new perspective allowed me to approach Dickinson's poetry from both Puritan and pastoral perspectives. This time the result was my term paper, "Varieties of Pastoral in Emily Dickinson," which Dr. Bates encouraged me to expand into a dissertation in his comments.

Yet as I got acquainted with pastoralism, I came to realize that most modern ecocritics have criticized the Old Pastoral as anthropocentric, and called for a New Pastoral in which nature and human beings are treated as an equal member of an earth community. Glen A. Love has provided cornerstones for this study with his call for a New Pastoral and his two contrasting concepts of ego-consciousness and eco-consciousness. Since I have noted Dickinson's sense of interrelatedness in her letters and

poems, I wanted to thoroughly examine her perception of nature to see if it prefigures a New Pastoral.

The central idea in Emily's ecocentric pastoralism is interrelatedness among living beings. This concept of "interrelatedness" is the common thread of my three theoretical devices: ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and ecotheology. In particular, although I employ insights from ecofeminism, my study does not follow the usual path of feminist criticism. I strongly believe that, despite gender difference, both men and women can have an ecologically sensitive consciousness. Dickinson's poetry invites both men and women to share an ecocentric consciousness.

This study portrays Dickinson as an ecocentric pastoral poet whose poetry sometimes partakes of the anthropocentric pastorals of Virgil, Jonathan Edwards, and Ralph Waldo Emerson but ultimately departs from them and moves toward an ecocentric pastoralism similar to that of Henry David Thoreau. Yet Dickinson separates herself from her kindred spirit Thoreau with her full acceptance of the animal aspect of the human body as well as with her Trinitarianism from her Puritan heritage. My main argument in this study is that Dickinson's ecocentric pastoralism evolves into a spirituality of nature in which God, nature, and human beings are interconnected in a loving relationship paralleling that of the Christian Trinity.

The objective of this dissertation is to shed new light on what most Dickinson scholars have often overlooked: an ecological aspect in her poetry. In contrast to anthropocentric Old Pastoral, Dickinson's ecocentric pastoral acknowledges nature's separate identity as an equal creature of God. Dickinson considers all creatures of God neighbors, whom Jesus commands his followers to love as themselves. Unlike most

modern ecocritics, she also ushers in God as an indispensable factor in her ecoconsciousness. Dickinson longs for an image of a loving and nurturing God, which is different from that of the Puritan God, and anticipates modern ecotheologians' search for a new model of God who cares for all His creation. Dickinson's wholesome ecocentric spirituality can console those who have an aversion to organized religion. Instead of adhering to church dogmas, Dickinson suggests an alternative spirituality through her poetry.

Her belief in the power of language and words to transform ego-consciousness to eco-consciousness finds expression in her poetry. We can read her poetry for inspiration to see nature as our life companion. Not only does Dickinson's poetry speak to us even today when we face serious environmental crises, but it also affects the way we live by challenging our unexamined anthropocentric belief systems and encouraging us to see the world in an ecocentric way and to live in it consciously and harmoniously.

PREVIEW

Acknowledgements

To begin with, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my adviser Dr. Milton Bates. He opened my eyes to the pastoral tradition and ecocriticism and has supported me from the inception to the fruition of my dissertation. His generosity with his expertise and time in every phase of my journey has sustained me and made this study possible. A living example of a dedicated scholar and teacher, he has invited me to a deeper understanding of American literature and people. Dr. Angela Sorby has shared her insightful and encouraging comments on the drafts. As a scholar poet, she has helped me to savor Dickinson's poetry using my head and heart. Dr. Ed Duffy's meticulous editing and resourceful feedback, his astounding knowledge of classical literature and pastoral, and his love of Thoreau and the Bible have enriched my dissertation. My committee's willing sacrifice of their time and energies has enabled my project to bloom beautifully.

Many people have helped me in the process of writing my dissertation. Dr. Patrick W. Carey kindly shared his knowledge of Jonathan Edwards's theology. Dr. Janice E. Schaefer and Fr. D. Thomas Hughson, Ph. D. welcomed my questions regarding ecotheology. Dr. Karen J. Warren introduced me to various kinds and aspects of ecofeminism. Dr. Michael P. Branch's thoughtful electronic mail correspondence directed my attention to a proto-ecocentric awareness in early American literature. Many friends in the English department have read my drafts at various stages and aided me with excellent proofreading, editing, and feedback: Rebecca Parker-Fedewa, Nancy Metzger, Dana Edwards, Christina Williams, Dr. Donna Schuster, and Sr. Bernadette Prochaska,

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My teachers in Korea have laid a foundation for my life as a scholar. My high school teacher, Minister Jong Yong Lee led me to the Christian faith and made me realize my love of English. Fr. Daniel Kister directed my M.A thesis and has been at my side ever since. By his example, Fr. Mun Su Park has guided me how to follow Jesus wholeheartedly as a scholar. Prof. Duck hee Shin strongly encouraged me to study

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Thank you all, indeed! Emily in heaven would chime with me: "In the name of the bee / And of the butterfly / And of the breeze. Amen."

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Introduction Chapter One

I. Introduction

If I can stop one Heart from breaking
I shall not live in vain
If I can ease one Life the Aching
Or cool one Pain

Or help one fainting Robin
Unto his Nest again
I shall not live in vain. (J 919; F 982, c. 1865)¹

This poem challenges the typical image of Emily Dickinson as a “half-cracked” reclusive poet who secluded herself from the outer world in her father’s house during the last two decades of her life and lived in her own imaginary world. The speaker of the poem perceives the well-being of other creatures to be closely connected with her fulfillment in life. If we interpret “one Heart,” “one Life,” and “one Pain” as exclusively referring to human beings, we could sense a condescending tone when the speaker tags on “one fainting Robin” as an afterthought. Despite this seeming hierarchy, however, if we do another reading, the speaker actually places a brokenhearted human being and a fainting robin more or less on the same level by opening a possibility of including the robin in the “one Heart,” “one Life,” and “one Pain.”

Moreover, Dickinson makes our caring about nature an ethical issue by declaring it one of the determining factors in one’s quality of life. Richard B. Sewall, Dickinson’s chief biographer, reads this poem as her “[espousal of] the doctrine of poetry as message, or service” (*Life* 711). Since Dickinson declares her poetry to be her “letter to the world”

(J 441), we can assume that this poem delivers her message. However, this message consists not only of Dickinson's aesthetic of poetry as comforting people, as Sewall contends, but also of her bold advocacy of equality between human beings and other living creatures.

While throughout her life she sometimes revealed an anthropocentric attitude toward nature, Dickinson more importantly showed an ecocentric consciousness in her relationship with nature. While anthropocentrism upholds human beings as the center of the universe and perceives nature as lacking its own identity and subservient to humankind, ecocentrism² understands that human beings and nature are interrelated, equal members in an earth community. This coexistence of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism in Dickinson at once reveals her limitations and exemplifies one of her pronounced characteristics — her habit of embracing both sides of things. She often takes a “both / and” stance, rather than an “either / or” position. The poet demonstrates a “both / and” mindset in her inclusive attitude towards faith and doubt as well as nature and culture.³ Even though most scholars tend to categorize Dickinson as an anthropocentric poet, she presents both ways of perceiving nature in her poetry and invites readers to an ecocentric relationship with nature. Scholars thus need to engage fully her ecocentric dimension, which has been neglected, so that we may benefit from her eco-vision in our time of environmental crisis. By thoroughly examining her ecocentric aspect, we can learn how to relate to nature ecocentrically and broaden an understanding of the pastoral tradition in American literature.

My goal in this study is to explore how Dickinson's love for nature separates her from various anthropocentric pastoral traditions and leads her to an ecocentric

pastoralism. Dickinson, despite her anthropocentric moments, departs from anthropocentric pastorals of the classical, Puritan, and Transcendental kinds, and moves toward an ecocentric pastoral in which the poet celebrates fellowship with other creatures on earth and discovers the possibility of a spirituality of nature. However, my understanding of Dickinson's departure from anthropocentric pastoral conventions to ecocentric pastoralism is not chronological. I will show not only how both kinds of pastoralism coexist throughout her life, but also how she demonstrates her ecocentric pastoralism.

Although the long history of the pastoral tradition prevents us from finding any simple definition of the term "pastoral," most scholars of pastoral tend to agree with the following as the standard understanding. They define *pastoral* as a literary mode that deals with a human longing for peace in idyllic nature in opposition to civilization, whereas they define *pastoralism* as a worldview that includes this perception of nature as idyllic. Differentiating pastoral from pastoralism, Leo Marx argues that since the death of the old pastoral that lasted roughly from 1550 to 1750⁴, pastoralism – the spirit of pastoral – was liberated, and consequently the boundaries of pastoral have been expanded to include poems with no shepherds in them. Marx notes that pastoral as a literary mode originated with Theocritus (c. 316-260 B. C.) and Virgil (70-19 B.C.), but pastoralism, or "a pastoral perspective" existed as early as roughly 3100 B.C. ("Pastoralism" 42). By contrast, Peter V. Marinelli understands "pastoral" to include Marx's definition of pastoralism: "the word pastoral refers both to form and to content" (*Pastoral* 9). In other words, "pastoral" can mean both the shepherd poem and its ethos.

When it comes to the kinds of pastoral, scholars vary in their categories. Terry Gifford explains the three uses of the term “pastoral”: First, the specific literary form with shepherds at its center; Second, any literature that touches on pastoral themes in content; Third, a skeptical and pejorative use of the term. Gifford goes on to divide pastoral as a literary form into three categories: pastoral, anti-pastoral, and post-pastoral. For Marx, there are two kinds of pastoral: sentimental (or popular) and complex (or imaginative).⁵ Gifford’s “pastoral” and Marx’s “sentimental pastoral” fit well with the standard view of pastoral. Gifford’s “anti-pastoral” is closer to Marx’s “complex pastoral” in that they both “enforce the poet’s ironic distance from the pastoral dream” (*Machine* 129). Due to its emphasis on the environment, Gifford’s “post-pastoral” echoes the “new pastoral” that Glen A. Love has called for to address our modern environmental crisis. Dickinson’s ecocentric pastoral can belong to “complex pastoral,” “post-pastoral,” and “new pastoral” in its departure from an anthropocentric aspect of the pastoral tradition.

My understanding of the pastoral and pastoralism is taken mainly from Marx and Love’s works. Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden* (1964, 2000) and “Pastoralism in America” (1986) and Love’s essay “Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism” (1990) have laid the foundation for this study. Marx’s concept of the pastoral middle landscape helps me to envision Dickinson’s gardens from a pastoral perspective. In his article, Love calls for a new pastoral that is grounded in an ecocentric relationship between nature and humankind. He introduces pivotal contrasting concepts, “ego-consciousness” and “eco-consciousness” (232), which provide the blueprint for my research in this study of Dickinson’s ecocentric pastoralism. Love explains eco-

consciousness as an “awareness of interconnectedness between humankind and the non-human world” (232), whereas, by “ego-consciousness,” he refers to an anthropocentric perspective on nature.

The reassessment of pastoral has been under way since well before Love. In *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935, 1950), William Empson initiates liberating the spirit of pastoralism from the pastoral conventions. He understands the gist of the pastoral as a “process of putting the complex into the simple” (23). Thus, various kinds of literature that contain “a ‘complex in simple’ formula” (140) can be called pastoral even though they do not include any shepherds. Following Empson’s lead, when Marx deals with Thomas Jefferson’s pastoral ideal, he is able to say that “[the noble husbandman] is the good shepherd of the old pastoral dressed in American homespun” (*Machine* 127). Marx explains this broadened view of pastoral as follows: “all of the business about shepherds was the mere outward expression of some deeper propensity of mind and spirit” (“Pastoralism” 45). Like American farmers laboring in their fields, Dickinson as a “shepherd” poet tends her flowers and plants in her home gardens, which parallel what Marx calls “a miniature middle landscape” (138) when he speaks of Jefferson’s garden. This idea of the garden as the rural “middle landscape” is foundational for American pastoralism and agrarianism.

Eighteenth-century agrarianism shares with pastoralism the concept of “the middle landscape” between wilderness and civilization. The rural area is the foundation of self-sufficient agriculture in agrarian philosophy. In his pioneering book *Virgin Land* (1950, 1970), Henry Nash Smith argues that the agrarian ideal of the “Garden of the World” played a pivotal role in shaping American history. Smith traces the stream of

agrarianism that “flows from eighteenth-century England and France through Jefferson to the men who elaborated the ideal of a society of yeoman farmers in the Northwest” (251). These idealized farmers were believed to have an independence resulting from “economic self-sufficiency and integrity of character” (193). The capital features of agrarianism, among others, can be summarized as follows: “agriculture is the only source of real wealth” and the land mysteriously makes the cultivator “virtuous and happy” (126). The agrarian ideal promotes a specific type of subsistence agriculture, which is “the cultivation of family-sized farms by virtuous yeoman” (188). Smith states that St. John de Crèvecoeur and Thomas Jefferson are “the best known expositors of the agrarian philosophy in the generation after Franklin” (126).

Although Marx agrees with Smith’s contention that Jefferson was one of the pivotal figures in promulgating the ideal of the garden of the world and that this ideal was a dominant symbol in nineteenth-century America, he separates himself from Smith’s standpoints in his understanding of Jefferson’s ideal and the garden from a pastoral perspective. First, Marx points out that “[a]lthough the term *agrarian* ordinarily is used to describe the social ideal that Jefferson is endorsing here [Query XIX],⁶ to call it *pastoral* would be more accurate and illuminating” (*Machine* 125; italics in original). The crucial reason for Marx’s argument is that although Jefferson’s ideal is based on an agricultural economy, his chief concern is not with an economic factor such as productivity and wealth, but with “rural virtue” such as contentment and happiness (126). For the Jeffersonian farmer as for the Virgilian shepherd, “[t]he goal is sufficiency, not economic growth — a virtual stasis that is a counterpart of the desired psychic balance or peace” (127). Second, Marx views the garden as the master symbol of pastoral. He

distinguishes two garden metaphors: one is “a wild, primitive, or pre-lapsarian Eden” and the other is “a cultivated garden embracing values not unlike those represented by the classic Virgilian pasture” (87). He connects the latter to the pastoral middle landscape: The garden is “the [middle] landscape of reconciliation, a mild, agricultural, semi-primitive terrain” (87). Dickinson’s gardens are the middle landscape, both agrarian and pastoral, in which she develops an ecocentric relationship with nature.

Despite their use of different terms, Smith’s agrarianism and Marx’s pastoralism describe the same New World condition. Unlike the Old World, the New World of the American continent was transformed from “a wild, primitive, or pre-lapsarian Eden” to “a cultivated garden,” to borrow Marx’s words. The major figure in the New World is not the shepherd, but the husbandman. Since agrarianism and pastoralism in America deal with the farmer, they are inevitably based on agricultural economy. Just as Marx’s pastoralism focuses on the virtues of the farmer, Smith’s agrarianism emphasizes the image of the “virtuous yeoman.” Thus, although the two ideals differ in their degree of emphasis on agriculture, they are based on the garden and converge in their praise of the virtues of the farmer.

Exploring Dickinson’s ecocentric pastoralism will benefit us in four ways. First, Dickinson’s ecocentric dimension helps us to understand the poet in a new way. Unlike the usual image of Dickinson in isolation, this ecocentric aspect of Dickinson relates to the world, to persons, and to nature. Second, the ecocentric pastoralism revealed in her poetry shows us fuller possibilities within the pastoral mode. Dickinson’s ecocentric pastoralism retains the pastoral ideal and corresponds to ecocritics’ call for a new pastoral, which will help transform egoconsciousness to ecoconsciousness. Third, this

study facilitates a reconsideration of a literary canon in American literature by ushering in Dickinson, one of the firmly established canonical writers, to the arena of environmental literature, nature writing, and ecopoetry, which have been considered marginal but growing genres.

Fourth, by including Dickinson's poetry in environmental writing, we can draw on her works to cultivate an ecoconsciousness that will in turn help us to cope with our environmental crises in a practical way. Just as Dickinson suggested an alternative to the anthropocentric relation to nature to her nineteenth-century contemporaries, she would call for a fundamental paradigm shift in our relation to nature in the face of a continual ecological crisis. In *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (1991), James A. Nash deals with various kinds of ecological crises: pollution, global warming, ozone depletion, resource exhaustion, population growth, maldistribution of resources, radical reductions and extinctions of species, and genetic engineering.⁷ Studying Dickinson's poetry helps us become mindful of the well-being of nature and humankind in the face of these phenomena.

In what follows, I begin with Dickinson's reception by ecocritics and Dickinson scholars, which leads to my approach to the poet's ecocentric pastoralism. After this, I explain the parallel between Dickinson's poetry and the pastoral, which sheds new light on Dickinson as an ecocentric pastoral poet. In order to help our understanding of Dickinson as an ecocentric pastoral poet, I introduce key concepts from ecocriticism, ecofeminism, and ecotheology. A brief overview of the chapters concludes this introduction.

II. Dickinson, the Ecocritics, and Dickinson Scholars

It is well-known that Emily Dickinson resists categorization. Dickinson scholars as well as her readers are both fascinated and puzzled by the volatile multi-dimensionality of Dickinson and her poetry. Is Dickinson a Puritan, Romantic, post-Romantic, Victorian, post-Victorian, or modern? Is she a poet prophet, poet gardener, contemplative visionary, or poet shepherdess? Is she a poet of nature and the real world or a poet of abstraction? Dickinson is all of these and more. This study is an attempt to elucidate an ecocentric facet of Dickinson's complex poetry.

And yet, most of today's ecocritics fail to see this ecocentric dimension of Dickinson. As far as I know, there are two studies on the poet from an ecocritical perspective: Rachel Stein's ecofeminist approach to Dickinson in one chapter of her book, *Shifting the Ground* (1997) and Christine Gerhardt's article "'Often seen – but seldom felt': Emily Dickinson's Reluctant Ecology of Place" (2006).⁸ Except for these, Dickinson is not mentioned in critical books dedicated to an ecological consciousness: *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism* (1998), or even *Ecopoetry* (2002). When Lawrence Buell, an eminent ecocritic in our time, in *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), includes Dickinson's robin among the examples of an anthropocentric treatment of a bird, he typifies the ecocritics' interpretation of Dickinson's nature poems as products of her anthropocentric mind. By contrast, Buell praises other writers' identification with nature in their works as a sign of their ecological consciousness.⁹

However, Dickinson's relation to nature is more complicated than Buell contends.¹⁰ We sometimes see Dickinson's anthropocentric attitude toward nature, which can be traced back to her New England Puritan heritage, but she also departs from it, showing an ecocentric consciousness in which human beings and other natural beings are fellow creatures on earth. In "If I can stop one Heart from breaking," the speaker does not imagine the robin existing for her benefit or yielding a moral for her sake. Buell notes Dickinson's alienation from nature in her poems about the robin but fails to see her frequent identification with natural beings in other poems.

Furthermore, most critics fail to recognize the poet's inclination toward the concrete and the scientific in observing nature, mainly because they focus on the abstract component in Dickinson's poetry. Although Buell praises Dickinson as "the only New England premodern whose poetry needs no defense,"¹¹ he emphasizes that the capital characteristic of Dickinson's poetry is abstraction, a product of the human mind apart from physical nature. He goes on to say, "The 'habitual motion' of her revisions, and indeed of her whole poetic career, is, as David Porter shows, a process of 'abstracting away from perceived reality,' sometimes to the point of unintelligibility" (112). Though the very process of writing poetry inevitably involves abstraction in terms of translating thoughts into language, Dickinson often writes concrete poems from her acute and almost scientific observation of nature. Richard Sewall points out the poet's scientific interests: "Certainly one of the strengths of her nature poems lies in their firm substratum of knowledge and accurate observation . . . her poems show a knowledge of chemical process, of botanic and especially geologic lore far beyond the usual nature poet's stock in trade" (*Life* 345). Moreover, the obliquity and unintelligibility in some of her poems

do not always result from “abstracting away from perceived reality.” They also result from Dickinson’s humorous and playful experiments in words and grammar.

Meanwhile, Buell, among other ecocritics, emphasizes the importance of place in ecocriticism. As Cheryll Glotfelty says, “Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman” (*Ecocriticism Reader* xix). Place is thus important because unlike space, a place shows an interrelatedness between humankind and the physical world. Our awareness of this connection in turn helps us to be concerned about external nature. For Buell, the “place-sense” is “self-conscious attentiveness to the importance of place as a shaping influence in [one’s] writing” (*Environmental Imagination* 257-8). This “place-consciousness” (260) requires a concrete and particular place or “humanized space” (253) in the external world. Representing most critics’ reading of Dickinson’s poetry, Buell cites part of Dickinson’s prairie poem (J 1755, ?) as an example of literature that lacks “place-sense.” He writes, “As an Emily Dickinson poem has it, to make a prairie requires only a clover, a bee, and reverie – and ‘revery alone will do, / If bees are few’ ” (254). Buell uses this one poem as his example of Dickinson’s lack of place-consciousness.

Notwithstanding Buell’s critique, Dickinson wrote many poems revealing her sense of place. She was keenly aware of her place—New England and, specifically, Amherst, and she knew the significant role of place in human beings’ perception of the world. In “The Robin’s my Criterion for Tune – ” (J 285; c. 1861), she writes: “But, were I Britain born, / I’d Daisies spurn – / . . . / Because I see – New Englandly – / The

Queen, discerns like me – / Provincially – .” This poem fits Buell’s criterion for place-sense well because it shows the poet’s awareness of the significance of place in her worldview, which will in turn influence her writing. Similarly, in “What is – ‘Paradise,’” the poet reveals an appreciation of her hometown Amherst as a physical place by comparing it with imaginary places such as “Paradise” and “Eden”: “What is – ‘Paradise’ – / Who live there – / Are they ‘Farmers’ – / Do they ‘hoe’ – / Do they know that this is ‘Amherst’ – / And that I – am coming – too –” (J 215; c. 1860).

Furthermore, the prairie poem itself has another reading. Suzanne Juhasz expands the boundary of the place to include the brain as a location. “To make a prairie” can be a poem about the poet’s mental experience, but at the same time the brain is a real place for Dickinson. Juhasz argues that “[a] prairie in the mind is another kind of real Idea and thing exist in a simultaneous, interdependent relationship, as do the conceptual and dimensional vocabularies in Dickinson’s poems on the subject of mental experience.”¹² In other words, Juhasz argues for a harmony between the mind and the external object in Dickinson’s prairie poem.

Moreover, “To make a prairie” can be read from an ecocritical perspective. Even if the poem is not about prairies in a geographical sense, it is about one of the central issues of ecocriticism, the nature versus culture debate. How to represent nature in literature, which is a major product of culture? This issue is congruent with the tension between the external and the internal place. Can our imagination create a place? There are many related questions: What is nature? Are human beings a part of nature or independent of it? Is nature a moral entity and a subject of ethics? What is a desirable

relation between nature and human beings? These questions are lurking behind “To make a prairie,” in which Dickinson suggests that culture is a product of nature.

To keep these questions in mind, Dickinson often reveals her awareness of this human limitation that our perception of nature comes via the perceptions of our mind, and, as a result, we cannot know nature itself apart from our mind. Even though we make a prairie by “revery alone,” this prairie cannot be the same as the prairie in the external world. This realization of nature’s otherness leads Dickinson to respect nature on its own terms. She distinguishes the image in her mind from external nature in another robin poem. Her use of a pun on poetic feet in “Her Foot” reminds us of the poet’s acknowledgement that the robin is her criterion for tune (J 285). Here is the last stanza of “You’ll know Her – by Her Foot –”:

She squanders on your Ear
Such Arguments of Pearl—
You beg the Robin in Your Brain
To keep the other –still—(J 634, c. 1862)

Here, we see two robins, one in the brain and the other outside, which represent culture (imagination) and nature, respectively. Although at first glance “the Robin in Your Brain” seems to have the power to control the actual robin outside, the poet implies that such a petition is futile because the robin outside sings as it wishes, independent of any human desires. Dickinson actually makes us realize our common practice—to rely on our own mind as the ultimate authority over nature, which is one of the major arguments of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Nature* (1836). Being skeptical of nature’s independent existence, Emerson believes that the nature which we see is “in our own eye,” an idea

(73). This idealist view of nature is closely connected with Emerson's anthropocentric attitude towards nature. Portraying nature as man's servant, Emerson says, "It [Nature] is made to serve. It receives the dominion of man as meekly as the ass on which the Saviour rode. It offers all its kingdoms to man as the raw material which he may mold into what is useful" (40). He concludes "Nature" with his optimistic prophecy that humankind "shall enter" "the kingdom of man over nature" (77). By contrast, Dickinson dethrones human beings by suggesting that they cannot keep the robin outside mute by controlling the image in their mind. The poet further implies that the mental image of the robin depends on the robin in external nature because without it they cannot form the image in the first place.

Rachel Stein is the first ecocritic who calls attention to Dickinson's ecofeminist aspect. In her groundbreaking book *Shifting the Ground: American Women Writers' Revisions of Nature, Gender, and Race* (1997), Stein adds her ecofeminist slant to the feminist Dickinson scholarship that was crystallized in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979).¹³ Though she does not envision Dickinson as a madwoman, Stein follows Gilbert and Gubar in her emphasis on Dickinson's rebellion against her patriarchal society and on Dickinson's strategic performance in her poetry. Stein reveals her ecofeminist standpoint when she writes that "Dickinson's poetry links nineteenth-century white women's secondary social status and domestic confinement to Puritan and Transcendentalist views of nature's subservience to the will of God and man" (11). Although I find Stein's approach to Dickinson from the ecofeminist perspective in terms of the double domination of nature and women convincing, my study focuses on the poet's all-inclusive ecocentric sense of