

Detailed Poem - **A Bird Came Down The Walk** (1893)
By Emily Dickinson



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

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

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

Like one in danger; cautious,
I offered him a crumb,
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home

Than oars divide the ocean,
Too silver for a seam,
Or butterflies, off banks of noon,
Leap, plashless, as they swim

Structure of the poem: ‘A Bird, came down the Walk’ by Emily Dickinson is a five stanza poem that is separated into sets of five lines. It is common with the works of Dickinson that she uses quatrains, or sets of four lines to structure the piece.

Analysis: The poem begins with the narrator noticing a bird coming down the sidewalk. The bird cuts a worm in two pieces and eats it. The bird then drinks water from the dew on the grass and casually moves out of the way of an oncoming beetle. The bird then becomes frightened; its eyes and head move rapidly. The narrator cautiously offers the bird a crumb, but the bird just opens his wings and, more graceful than a boat moving through water or a butterfly flying through the air, the bird flies away.

In the first stanza of this piece the speaker begins by describing the simple, yet beautiful movements of a bird. This particular bird is coming “down the Walk.” This is likely sidewalk or path of some kind near the speaker’s home, or where she is situated. The speaker is able to observe the bird’s actions without it immediately becoming frightened. This says something about humans and their interactions with nature. Birds are rightfully wary of the presence of humans. They will not behave in the same way if they are knowingly being watched.

The speaker does not have any ill intentions though. She is simply reporting on what she’s seeing, and finding importance in the instinctual actions of the bird. It finds a worm, noted here as an “Angle Worm,” and eats it raw, biting it in half.

The next thing the speaker sees is the bird drinking the “Dew” from the grass. It doesn’t have to go anywhere else to find water, making the “Dew” and “Grass” “convenient.” So far, its life has been presented as a simple movement from need to need.

The bird’s reactions to its world are carefully studied by the speaker. It is clear she is truly watching this creature and taking sound mental notes on what it is doing. She notices its inherent anxiety. No matter what it’s doing it looks around “with rapid eyes.” They move quickly, “all abroad,” trying to see everything at once. It is very on edge and aware of the variety of dangers it might face.

The fourth stanza of A Bird, came down the Walk describes the one interaction the speaker attempts with the bird. She reaches out to him and offers “him a crumb” of food. The bird does not react positively to this intrusion on its space and as its instincts require, flies away.

The last stanza is more metaphorical than those which came before it. The speaker is interested in how the bird’s wings move through the air. She describes this process as being similar to “Oars dividing the Ocean.”

Questions: Emily Dickinson as a Lyric Poet / As a Nature Poet/ As a Confessional Poet / As a Mystic Poet / As a poet of Death

Ans: Like most writers, Emily Dickinson wrote about what she knew and about what saw around her. A keen observer, she used images from nature, religion, law, music, commerce, medicine, fashion, and domestic activities to probe universal themes: the wonders of nature, the identity of the self, death and immortality, and love.

Emily Dickinson is a poet of love and nature not in the traditional sense of the term. She lived a life of secrecy and self chosen confinement. Human society was never a matter of interest to her. Rather she found the solace and comfort in the lap of nature. She is also mainly known as a mystic poet because of the macabre poems she had written. Mysticism is considered to be the vital part of the Christian heritage and the core of Christian spirituality.

Dickinson's poems are lyrics, generally defined as short poems with a single speaker (not necessarily the poet) who expresses thought and feeling. As in most lyric poetry, the speaker in Dickinson's poems is often identified in the first person,

Emily Dickinson's poems have an effect of making the readers move towards her feelings as they make emotions such as love, hope, death and immortality, loneliness so closer to them. She is a poet in whom the mystic qualities are deep-rooted.