

”a bird came down  
the walk” by emily  
dickinson essay  
sample



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## A Bird Came Down the Walk by Emily Dickinson

### Theme:

The poem deals, among other things, with the relationship between nature and humanity. At the start the poet is just observing the bird (" He did not know I saw"). She does not interfere, but she is not passive, as her observations are quite detailed e. g. noticing the Beetle. She is a presence in the poem from line 2, but we don't find out much about her as the focus is on the bird. The human interference, finally, in line 14 (" I offered him a crumb") disturbs the scene - the bird flies away (" he unrolled his feathers"). Yet this is not necessarily or entirely seen as a bad thing - it is at this stage, when the bird takes off that her writing takes off into metaphor (" Too silver for a seam"). It is as if the whole scene has been transformed, and her writing reflects that. Is she suggesting that good can and does come from human interference in nature e. g. civilisation? Note the way the bird is presented - beautiful in its appearance (" Velvet Head") and flight (" rowed him softer home"), courteous (or is it fear?) to the Beetle, but predatory, even savage to the worm (" ate the fellow, raw"), again suggesting the need for a civilising influence on nature. Apart from the bird and the beetle, butterflies are also mentioned, but this is more of a metaphor, but a soft metaphor taken from nature (" splashless as they swim").

### Imagery:

The bird's eyes are compared to " frightened beads". The bird's flight is compared to rowing (" rowed him softer home"), and this image is sustained into the next verse - " Oars divide the Ocean", another image that suggests the bird doesn't disturb its environment as it flies - no more than you see the

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mark an oar makes in silvery water. The unobtrusive flight of the bird is also compared to butterflies leaping into water, swimming noiselessly ("plashless"). Is the bird a symbol? It exists in the poem as a real bird that the poet sees, but does it stand for anything else? Is it meant to represent nature in general, as the poet perhaps represents humanity? Or is this just a curious incident with no wider implications.

#### Tone/Mood:

The poet is distant, uninvolved, factual, to start with. There is no sense of sympathy for the worm that was eaten – the bird comes across as mannerly and courteous – "drank a Dew ... let a Beetle pass". The takes on a slightly darker mood then – the bird is "frightened", there's a sense of "danger". There may be an implied sense of rejection when the bird refuses the "Crumb" and flies away, but the poet once again does not reveal any emotion. There's a sense of gracefulness in the last verse as the bird's flight is described.

#### Links/Comparisons:

A bird is the centre of attention as in Hope is the thing with feathers, but in that poem the bird was just a metaphor – the abstract concept of hope was compared to a bird. This time the bird was real, and may or may not be a symbol of something greater. Both poems show her interest in the little creatures – in this poem there is not only the bird, but a beetle and butterflies. Similarly there was the fly in I heard a fly buzz when I died – this was more likely a symbol, but as with the bird could have been just a random thing (or apparently so). As in the other poems there is also the

usual Dickinson quirkiness, her eye for the smallest detail, the apparent emotional detachment.