



“Nature” According to Emily Dickinson: Seeking Alternative Meanings to Mitigate the Climate Crisis

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ABSTRACT

The climate crisis provoked by human action has global warming as its main cause, due to high emissions of greenhouse gases and the degradation of the environment in the name of progress. As a result, heat waves, hurricanes, floods, wildfires, among other disasters, are becoming more common and will likely be part of our routine in the future. Believing that literary studies can and should take action to mitigate the crisis, this paper proposes an ecocritical reading of two poems by Emily Dickinson that address “nature”: “Nature – the Gentlest Mother is,” (Fr741), enhanced by Krenak’s (2019) views of nature, and “‘Nature’ is what We see –” (Fr721), accompanied by Murphy’s (2019) PAN and DIM theory. The poems allow us to challenge the assumption that nature is a gentle and dedicated mother, and accept that everything about nature will never be known, thus providing alternative meanings to this once-believed stable term. Following Martin Puchner’s (2022) ecocritical proposal, this paper understands that re-reading older texts can lead us to understand “nature” in multiple ways and thus change our life practices that contribute to the climate crisis and encourage us to take action.

KEYWORDS: Ecocriticism; Emily Dickinson; Nature; Climate Crisis.

“Natureza” de acordo com Emily Dickinson: em busca de significados alternativos para mitigar a crise climática

RESUMO

A crise climática, provocada por ações humanas, tem como suas causas principais o aquecimento global devido a emissões de gases do efeito estufa e a degradação do ambiente em nome do progresso. Ondas de calor, furacões, enchentes, incêndios florestais, entre outros desastres, estão ficando mais comuns e, provavelmente, farão parte da rotina no futuro próximo. Acreditando que os estudos literários podem e devem agir para mitigar a crise, esse artigo propõe uma leitura ecocrítica de dois poemas de Emily Dickinson que tratam da “natureza” e podem tanto ajudar-nos a repensar os significados que construímos ao longo do tempo quanto a agir para mudar nosso meio de vida: “Nature – the Gentlest Mother is,” (Fr741), potencializada pelas ideias de Krenak (2019) sobre natureza, e “‘Nature’ is what We see –” (Fr721), acompanhada da teoria PAN e DIM de Murphy (2019). Os poemas nos permitem desafiar a premissa de que a natureza é sempre uma mãe gentil e carinhosa e questionar se a natureza pode ser compreendida em sua plenitude, o que constrói significados alternativos para um termo que se pensava estável e fixo. Embasando-se na proposta ecocrítica de Martin Puchner (2022), deve-se reler textos mais antigos e entender que eles são, ao mesmo tempo, cúmplices da crise e fontes de produção de conhecimento que podem reformular nossas crenças. Isso pode levar a entender a “natureza” de múltiplas maneiras e provocar mudanças em práticas das nossas vidas que contribuem para agravar a crise climática, bem como nos encorajar a agir.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ecocrítica; Emily Dickinson; Natureza; Crise Climática.



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1. Academic writing as activism: ecocritical readings at a moment of crisis

The most alarming emergency that must be tackled in the 21st century is the climate crisis. It is caused by the concentration of greenhouse gases such as CO₂ and CH₄ in the atmosphere, which puncture the planet's protections against the sunrays and this in turn allows these rays to penetrate the Earth with more intensity, causing the phenomenon we refer to as global warming. One result of this was January 2025 pointed as the hottest month since 1850, with the average global temperature peaking at 1,75°C above preindustrial rates (Pacheco, 2025). This shows that direct and effective action should be taken immediately to mitigate the effects of climate change otherwise more dire effects will eventually hit every life on the planet.

At first glance, the modern division of “human” and “natural” sciences may lead to the belief that the former should only let the latter work and stay away from anything that addresses the climate crisis, dealing rather with “human-related issues” or whatever other issue that does not hinder the “hard sciences” work. What this fails to acknowledge is that everyone is directly involved in the crisis in as much as everyone is a contributor to it — whenever a car is turned on and disposable goods are bought for the sake of the consumerist lifestyle —, as well as a victim of it — since the tragic events caused by climate change may (and probably will) affect everyone, not forgetting that some are more vulnerable than others. Hence, no field of knowledge production should consider itself exempt from tackling the crisis. It is a human crisis, caused by humans and suffered by humans. Acting to mitigate it is therefore acting to save lives — every life.

What role can literary studies play in assisting to mitigate the climate crisis? As Martin Puchner (2022) states, literature deals with stories; those have power and leave an everlasting mark in human history. It is here that literary studies can make the biggest contributions: by analyzing stories that have been told since the dawn of time, as well as stories that address the climate crisis directly, literary criticism may offer insights regarding the thoughts and beliefs that circulated and still circulate in the works of literature, thus highlighting the discourses that have given the exploitation of the planet's resources enough licensing and support to keep happening. For instance, even after proving that the burning of fossil fuels is one of the main causes of global warming leading to climate change because it increases the levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, we still burn it, buy it, use it, and defend it. Puchner (2022, p. 9-11) proposes that older texts should be re-read with new lenses to gather insights into important concepts that guide our understanding of life on Earth and make us support exploitation and degradation when we should be looking for alternative lifestyles that are less damaging to the planet.

While the climate crisis and human-nature relationships may seem like a 21st century phenomenon, writers have been addressing it for a long time. From the 5,000 BC Epic of Gilgamesh and its concern with population control, taming the environment and regular floods in Mesopotamia, and the sovereignty of city life over the forest/nature (Puchner, 2022, p. 20), to 19th century perspectives in America such as Walt Whitman's, Henry David Thoreau's, and Ralph Waldo Emerson's commitment to nature writing and addressing the environment in connection with individual experiences. William Wordsworth's use of natural symbols to convey “incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them [...] in a selection of language



really used by men [sic] [...] and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them [...] the primary laws of our Nature" shows that nature and the environment have been important topics throughout literary history ([1802] 2013, p. 96-97). What may be a newer approach is the idea to re-read those texts with the specific objective of calling readers to action against climate change.

The field of literary criticism that looks at literature and its relationship with the environment is ecocriticism, and therefore, it will be this paper's theoretical and analytical framework to analyze two poems by Emily Dickinson. Dickinson wrote more than 1,800 poems that dealt with varied issues in a unique way, nature among them. Dickinson's ideas may offer new insights into the ways nature is addressed and hopefully may be encouraging and inspiring to deal with the climate crisis with the seriousness it requires.

2. Ecocritical readings of Emily Dickinson's poems

Analyzing poems in general, and Dickinson's work in particular, with emphasis on poetic constructions of nature is not new. Jonathan Bate (1991) was one of the first to propose an ecocritical reading of Romanticism and one of its landmark poets, William Wordsworth. Bate affirms that "poetry continues to have any effect on how we understand ourselves, how we think about the ways in which we live our lives" (1991, p. 1). He analyzes Wordsworth's poetry considering Romanticism as "a theory of ecosystems and unalienated labour" (Bate, 1991, p. 10) that has more to contribute under ecocritical lenses than previously believed. Cynthia Hogue (2005) presents a reading of Dickinson's poems through the lenses of Susan Howe, another poet who was born in 1937 and published *My Emily Dickinson* in 1985, adding new perspectives to Dickinsonian criticism that revolved around the poet's intellectual reach. In the poems Hogue (2005, p. 60-61) analyzes, nature is related to a variety of concepts and each combination results in different meaning constructions. For instance: nature changes with time, therefore it conveys not a fixed idea but a fluid one; nature is annihilation, not a projection of human ego; nature is a design that does not have meaning; and nature is not natural but humanized by perception (Hogue, 2005, p. 61; 63; 64; 67). This points to the fact that there is not an immutable concept of nature in Dickinson's poems, but a multiplicity of ideas that are intertwined, contradictory, paradoxical, intriguing, and beautiful.

Christine Gerhardt (2014) compares Dickinson's and Walt Whitman's poems in a movement that joins their environmental consciousness, the development of ecological sciences in the 19th century, and their poems that address nature. Ecocriticism is Gerhardt's (2014) theory of choice because it offers a reading of nature that does not reduce literature to a mere repetition or representation of the world; it understands that nature and literature are concepts that both affect and are affected by sociohistorical factors that circulate discourses informing people's beliefs, behaviors, imaginations, and perspectives; it accepts the critical analysis of any literary text, not just nature writing per se; and it allows for discussions of environmental ethics that are not reduced to anthropocentric or ecocentric readings or works.



Since this paper follows Puchner's (2022) take on ecocriticism, some comments should be made about Gerhardt's (2014, p. 3) propositions. For her, "ecocriticism denotes diverse ways of reading that emerge from a set of environmentally oriented questions about literature and the world, as well as related methodological and theoretical debates" (Gerhardt, 2014, p. 3). The ecocritical reading Gerhardt proposes combines an analysis of poetic form and style with 19th-century scientific discourses about nature. She hopes to provide new readings of well-known poems as well as to bring lesser-known poems to light. This is similar to Puchner's idea of re-reading older texts to understand how concepts of nature and culture, for instance, were constructed by the texts and how they can lead us to reflect on our current problems and think about viable and fair solutions. What Gerhardt's (2014) approach does not address is ecocriticism's potential to open new possibilities of reading multiple genres, considering more than just nature representations could be taken one step further to be more responsive to the crisis we face today.

Emily Dickinson's perspective and writing techniques make her an interesting poet to analyze through ecocritical lenses. Her poems are puzzles that, once partially solved — as it is impossible to fully solve one at all — something changes in the reader. This is what this paper hopes to achieve: to provoke change in the way we think, deal with, relate to, and understand nature, to mitigate the climate crisis. As Greta Thunberg wrote, "[some] people believe that if they were to join the climate movement now, they would be among the last. But that is very far from true. In fact, if you do decide to act now, you would still be a pioneer" (Thunberg, 2022, p. 5). No one will tackle climate change alone. Communities that will work together for the sake of future generations must be formed. The best conclusions that need to be drawn to take the best course of action are not known. What we do have is a considerable amount of information. Following Thunberg (2022), we are the ones who will hopefully reach the fairest conclusions.

3. What can the poems say about nature?

The following ecocritical analyses of Dickinson's poems are based on Miller's (2012) proposition that originality and innovation were desired in 19th-century America, and thus it is common to find some irregularities and variation in poetic form. Content was most important at the time, hence the poems are sequences of ideas being developed as if we were talking to someone who was just considering a theme and thinking about it at that same moment. Miller (2012) argues that the lyric genre in the 19th century was more related to sound than the expression of subjectivity as we understand it today. This is why special attention to sound patterns of syllable, rhyme, rhythm, and foot will be paid in the poems, to help establish assumptions under ecocritical lenses of the meanings of nature that are constructed in the poems.

The poems are presented in tables with their verses numbered. Rhymes are labelled according to their final sound. Rhythm is classified according to syllable stress. Syncopation, that is, a disruption in rhythm, is marked by a "*." The syllables are separated by "[]" and foot is separated by "[]". For phonetic transcriptions, the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) was used.



3.1. Can nature be a gentle mother?

The first poem analyzed is “Nature – the Gentlest Mother is,” (Fr741). It constructs a familiar image of nature as an entity that takes care of its creations — one that is compared to how a mother would behave regarding her children. In so doing, the poem personalizes nature in a similar way to how Ailton Krenak (2019) posits that everything is nature and there is no separation between nature and humanity. Humanity is nature, is part of nature, is in nature, and it is wrong to think that humans are the only creatures who have souls. Everything on Earth has a soul and a personality, according to Krenak (2019, p. 49), and denying this leads to the precarization of lives other than human as it constructs them as less than human and hence disposable.

The poem’s first stanza (lines 1-4) starts with an 8686 syllabic pattern that Miller (2012, p. 59) describes as “Dickinson’s most often repeated form.” The rhyming pattern throughout the poem varies from the ABCB one, which is also pointed out by Miller (2012) as the most common in Dickinson’s work. An exception is detected in the fifth stanza (lines 17-20): there is no rhyming pattern at all, unless “away” (line 18) could be read as /ə’wai/ and rhyme with “Sky” (line 20). However, disrupting rhyme schemes can be meaningful. Therefore, “away” will be read /ə’wei/ and not rhyme with “Sky.” The poem follows an iambic rhythm, which means that an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed one. For instance, the first verse (line 1) would be read /nei’ʃəɪ.ði:.’dʒen.tləst.’məðəɪ.’iz/ with a long pause after “Nature” signaled by the dash. In the first stanza, there is an alternation between 4 feet in lines 1 and 3, a tetrameter, and 3 feet in lines 2 and 4, a trimeter, which is not repeated in the poem. The regularity in the first stanza suggests that nature follows a code and will not bend it regardless of the circumstances. Mother Nature will always act the same way. However, nature’s regularity will never be fully captured by human knowledge based on the remainder of this poem and also the second poem, “Nature’ is what We see –” (Fr721) which will be analyzed.

In terms of meanings in the first stanza, nature is addressed as “the Gentlest Mother” (line 1) in capital letters and the superlative “Gentlest” suggesting that there is no other figure that is gentler and more tender than Nature. To support this, the poem states in the first stanza that “the feeblest – or the Waywardest –” (line 3) of Nature’s children will not be severely reprimanded for their poor choices of action as Nature’s “Admonition” will always be “mild” (line 4). In one version of the poem, Dickinson replaced “feeblest” for “dullest” (line 3), both words constructing the notion of lacking vitality and vigor. Wayward, on the other hand, constructs the idea of a rebel who refuses to follow rules and guidelines. Either way, both opposites on the scale, the ones who do not act at all and the ones who act too much, will be treated kindly by Mother Nature, and will never be severely punished, but warned and taken care of. Nature thus accepts everyone and intends to help them make the best choices for their lives. Nature is patient and understanding, and the regular sound pattern in the first stanza sustains this interpretation.

In the second stanza (lines 5-8), the number of syllables in each verse drops to 6, forming a 6666 pattern. The rhymes still follow the ABCB pattern but shift its final sounds so they form a DEFE sequence. The iambic rhythm is still in place, but as there are less syllables in verses 5 and 7

TABLE 1. Analysis of the poem “Nature – the Gentlest Mother is,”

		[Syllables]	Rhymes	Rhythm	[Foot]
1	[Na ture –] [[the Gen][tlest Mo][ther is,]	8	A	Iambic	4
2	[Im pa][tient of][no Child –]	6	B	Iambic	3
3	[The fee][blest – or][the Way][war dest –] [The dullest	8	C	Iambic	4
4	[Her Ad][mo ni][tion mild –]	6	B	Iambic	3
5	[In Fo][rest – and][the Hill –]	6	D	Iambic	3
6	[By Tra][ve ller –][be heard –]	6	E	Iambic	3
7	[Res trai][ning Ram][pant Squirrel –]	6	F	Iambic	3
8	[Or too][im pe][tuous Bird –]	6	E	Iambic	3
9	[How fair] [Her Con][ver sa]tion –	7	G	Iambic*	3*
10	[A Su][mmer Af][ter noon –]	6	H	Iambic	3
11	[Her House][hold – Her][A ssem]bly –	7	I	Iambic*	3*
12	[And when][the Sun][go down –]	6	H	Iambic	3
13	[Her Voice][a mong][the Ai]sles	7	J	Iambic*	3*
14	[In cite][the ti][mid pray]er	7	K	Iambic*	3*
15	[Of the][mi nu][test Cri]cket –	7	L	Iambic*	3*
16	[The most][un wor][thy Flow]er –	7	K	Iambic*	3*
17	[When all][the Chil][dren sleep –]	6	M	Iambic	3
18	[She turns][as long][a way]	6	N	Iambic	3
19	[As will][su ffice][to light][Her lamps –]	8	O	Iambic	4
20	[Then ben][ding from][the Sky –] [Then stooping –]	6	P	Iambic	3
21	[With in][fi nite][A ffec]tion –	7	Q	Iambic*	3*
22	[And in][fi ni][ter Care –]	6	R	Iambic	3
23	[Her Gol][den fin][ger on][Her lip –]	8	S	Iambic	4
24	[Wills Si][lence – E][very where –]	6	R	Iambic	3

Source: Made by the author.

when compared to verses 1 and 3, each verse in the second stanza has 3 feet. This shift in pattern, when compared with the first stanza, suggests that an irregularity in meaning starts to take place, but still relates to Nature’s motherly character as 6666 is indeed more regular than 8686, as the footing 3333 is more regular than 4343. Nature is always aware of how her creations behave regardless of where they are — whether “In Forest – and the Hill –” (line 5). Whenever she sees a Squirrel acting violently, or a Bird being too impulsive, she acts in a way that a Traveller will hear her Restraining sounds with the sole purpose of taking care of her children and justifying the title of Gentlest Mother (lines 6-8).

Stanza 3 (lines 9-12) presents a break point: the syllables follow a 7676 pattern, and the rhymes follow the ABCB as a GHIH pattern. Nature’s sounds are like a fair Conversation during a Summer Afternoon, light, soothing, comfortable, familiar, and kind (lines 9-12). Nature enjoys a moment of relaxation in “Her Household – Her Assembly –” (line 11) which is the whole world. Nature is fully aware and zeal for her children, all the time, everywhere. This is especially true when the last verse in the third stanza, “And when the Sun go down –” (line 12), is taken into consideration. This is the moment in which the morning and the afternoon start to fade

and the evening begins taking place. The last verse in the stanza (line 12) is completed by the following stanzas, which signals an enjambement is disrupting the structure that has been being built so far. The rhythm is also affected: syncopations can be detected in lines 9 and 11, with a last syllable on each disrupting the "perfect" iambic meter that had been taking place so far.

As the day reaches an end, and the Sun starts to go down in the fourth stanza (lines 13-16), Nature shows that she does not forget anyone as she encourages "the timid prayer / Of the minutest Cricket –" (lines 14 and 15) as well as "The most unworthy Flower –" (line 16). Having already paid close attention to the feeblest/dullest and the waywardest children, the rampant squirrel, the impetuous bird, Nature now incites her creations that could be excluded by humans and termed useless under a utilitarian point of view. If humans understand themselves as Nature, not against it, as Krenak (2019, p. 16-17) affirms, they will understand the cricket and the flower as having the same rights to live and exist as they so often claim they are entitled to. While the syllables in this stanza follow a regular 7777 pattern, it is not so when compared to the other stanzas. Rhymes still show a variation of the regular ABCB pattern as JKLK. The most striking differences in this stanza are the syncopations; there is not a single verse that follows the regular iambic meter, with the seventh syllable in each verse being separated from and used to stress the preceding sounds: /ai/, /pɛi/, /kɪ/, and /flau/. It is interesting to note that in this stanza are the elements that would be rendered "useless" by human eyes; yet they are highlighted and thus gain special treatment from Nature, who does not turn her back on anyone or anything.

The last two stanzas (lines 17-20 and 21-24) reach the end of the day when night comes and it is time to sleep, rest, and get ready for the next day. Nature knows exactly the movement she must make "to light Her Lamps –" (line 19), which could be the stars, that bend or stoop from the Sky, that calms her children that need to relax to sleep. This Nature does with endless Affection and Care as she has always provided her children throughout the day and the poem. Her last movement is to touch her Golden finger on Her lip and orchestrate silence everywhere so that everyone and everything can sleep peacefully. Nature makes sure of that.

The last stanza almost repeats the patterns found in the first stanza: its syllable pattern is 7686, almost an 8686, its rhymes QRSR are a variation of ABCB, and its meter is almost a perfect iambic, except for line 21 when there is a syncopation and only 3 syllables instead of 4. A poem that starts following a certain regular pattern and concludes in a somewhat irregular fashion suggests a multitude of meanings. Following an ecocritical approach, this irregularity responds to nature's course. She is not an aggressive being but the gentlest; she is understanding, she is aware of her children, but she is not as predictable as it would seem. The last dash in the poem may suggest that this routine will repeat itself the next day, but the irregularity in its sounds suggests otherwise.

Nature is an active agent that has as her sole purpose to take care of every creation without exception. This is why she is personalized and compared to a Gentle Mother; a figure identified as a woman who has as her goal to dedicate herself to others' well-being. On one hand, this idea of nature as a tender female licenses her exploitation in the same way as uncharted territories were treated as female virgins that had to be discovered by male European colonizers. In a patriarchal

world, women are often objectified and vulnerable to the male gaze and exploitation. When Nature becomes this female figure, she is also vulnerable to exploitation by male ideals. On the other hand, when Nature is constructed as a Gentle Mother, we could think that it provides her with some degree of agency as to what her function in the world is. She is the creator who treats her children equally and shows nothing but love and support. Whether this was her choice to make or her acceptance of unchanging fate is up to debate.

An ecocritical analysis of this poem that aims at reconsidering how 19th-century poems have constructed nature suggests that she can be non-exploitable due to her unending love and affection. Another path would be to consider the destruction of nature as having direct consequences for the imbalance in her actions that take care of everything. If Nature starts to worry about regaining balance, maybe some of her children will be left unattended. If we are somehow subordinated to Nature, as the poem suggests, it becomes impossible to see Nature and humanity as the same entities following Krenak (2019, p. 22-23), because it is not humanity that takes care of itself, but Nature as a separate and larger being. One interesting way to solve this apparent contradiction is for humanity to take responsibility for Nature and the environment since humans and Nature are the same. Humans need to acknowledge their negative impact on the planet's balance, and to act to effectively change the means of production and way of life. If that happens, then both Nature and humanity become the Gentle Mother, being one and the same that take care of the planet for the sake of every life that inhabits it.

3.2. Can nature be fully grasped?

The second poem analyzed is “Nature’ is what We see –” (Fr721) and it will deal with the illusion that humans will someday understand nature in its entirety and be able to control her. Murphy’s (2019) PAN and DIM theory will complement the ecocritical interpretative frame of it.

PAN stands for “Present as Always Normal” and it provides the illusion that everything that happens in the present is ahistorical, thus not the continuing result of any process that has been happening for some time. PAN makes the present moment feel like it has been the same way since the dawn of times and it causes inaction since everything has always been the same and cannot/does not need to change or be changed. It is false solace that PAN provides. When nature is submitted to PAN logic, it is believed that she has always been exploited, thus there is no need to change the way she is thought of and dealt with because she will always be here, she has always been. DIM means “Discrete Incident Mentality” and it constructs the illusion that events are unique, unprecedented, and unpredictable. Whenever evidence that Nature is being destroyed comes to light, it is interpreted as an isolated event that will not have long-lasting impacts and does not need anyone to take responsibility for it.

The poem constructs Nature as being everything but also ungraspable by human minds, even though humans can see, hear, and produce knowledge about it. Following PAN and DIM, this could be both a dangerous idea and an interesting opportunity to rethink human relationships with Nature.



TABLE 2. Analysis of the poem “‘Nature’ is what We see –”

		[Syllables]	Rhymes	Rhythm	[Foot]
1	["Na ture"] [[is what]][We see –]	6	A	Trochee	3
2	[The Hill –][the Af][ter noon –]	6	B	Iambic	3
3	[Squirrel –][E clipse –][the Bum][ble bee –]	7	A	Iambic*	4*
4	[Nay –][Na ture] [[is Hea]ven –]	6	C	Trochee*	3*
5	["Na ture"] [[is what]][We hear –]	6	D	Trochee	3
6	[The Bo][bo link –][the Sea –]	6	A	Iambic	3
7	[Thun der –][the Cri]cket –	5	E	Iambic*	2*
8	[Nay –][Na ture] [[is Har][mo ny –] [is] Melody	7	A	Trochee*	3*
9	["Na ture"] [[is what]][We know –]	6	F	Trochee	3
10	[But have] [[no Art]][to say –]	6	G	Iambic	3
11	[So im][po tent] [[our Wis][dom is] [Wisdom] be –	8	H	Iambic	4
12	[To Her] [[Sin ce][ri ty –]	6	A	Trochee	3

Source: Made by the author.

The poem's rhythmic pattern is a variation of trochee — stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one — in the first and last verses of each stanza (lines 1 and 4, 5 and 8, and 9 and 12) and iambic — unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one — in the middle verses (lines 2 and 3, 6 and 7, and 10 and 11). The first verse would thus sound like /'nei.ʃəɫ 'iz.wət 'wi.si:/. The interplay between rhythms, following Miller's (2012, p. 40) suggestions, “might hint at the paradox of the speaker's extraordinary lucidity” facing an incomprehensible and overwhelming truth about Nature: that humans will never fully understand it. The poetic I is lucid when admitting that Nature will never be fully understood.

Compared to the first poem analyzed, this one is apparently more regular, except when it comes to the rhyming pattern: the only sound that is repeated through its verses is the long / i:/ in “see” (line 1), “Bumblebee” (line 3), “Sea” (line 6), “Harmony” (line 8), and “Sincerity” (line 12). Analyzing the rhythmic footing of the poem also reveals an irregularity: the first stanza (lines 1-4) follows a 3343 pattern that varies in lines 3 and 4 as they have first syllables that function by themselves: “Squirrel” (line 3) and “Nay” (line 4); the second stanza is also irregular when it comes to its last two verses, following a 3323 pattern that varies its syllables (6657) and its metric in lines 7 and 8. Like in the first stanza, “Nay” also breaks the pattern to deny every idea that was defended before and introduces a counterpoint to the reasoning that precedes it. The last stanza (lines 5-8) is the most regular one as its syllables follow a 6686 pattern and its footing is 3343 without sudden disruptions. It is interesting to note that regularity appears when the poetic I finally realizes that we can never fully know everything about Nature, because she has her own set of rules and meaning-making processes that are not meant for humans to understand. Regularity here could mean coming to peace with this realization.

In the first stanza (lines 1-4), sight is invoked, and Nature is defined by being everything that can be seen, like the Hill, the Afternoon, the Squirrel, the Eclipse, and the Bumble Bee. This array of inanimate and animated entities shows that everything considered to be natural

is the manifestation of Nature, and not houses, mills, bridges, fences, that would be human constructions using and modifying natural resources. The last verse in this stanza (line 4), however, denies what has been said before — “Nay –” — and summarizes at the same time as it elevates nature to the religious status of Heaven. This disruption is also seen in the rhyming pattern: while lines 1 and 3 repeat an A pattern, this does not happen in lines 2 and 4. Disruption is also seen throughout the stanza as dashes are the last elements in every line. This suggests that the poetic I at first thinks Nature is everything in material ways, but as the thought progresses, the poetic I interrupts it and corrects the previous idea: Nature is not what we, human beings, can see; Nature is precisely the opposite, something we cannot see, only believe it exists: Heaven.

In the second stanza (lines 5-8), hearing is invoked and thus elements that make characteristic sounds are listed: the Bobolink, the Sea, Thunder, and the Cricket. Like in the first stanza, the last verse’s “Nay –” (line 8) denies the idea that Nature can be heard and constructs it in a more general idea of it being a Harmony, that is, the conjunction of three or more notes produced by natural elements. In a similar movement as that of the first stanza, the poetic I starts wondering about the possibility of Nature being captured by the human sense of hearing. The last line disrupts this idea by suggesting that Nature cannot be captured in its totality by human ears, just like it cannot be trapped by human eyes.

It is interesting to note that in some versions of the poem, Dickinson chose “Melody” instead of “Harmony” (line 8). The shift in meaning that it entails is that a melody is a sequence of isolated, single notes, like the sang melody of a song, while a harmony is a group of simultaneous notes that operate in a pleasant way, like a G major chord played by a piano. If Nature’s sounds are a melody, the Bobolink makes a sound, then the Sea, then Thunder, then the Cricket, not all at the same time. But if Nature’s sounds are a harmony instead, every sound is played at the same time and composes a pleasant soundscape. Either way, both are related to music, and if “Harmony” is in focus then Nature’s sounds cannot be easily distinguished, as it is harder to detect every note in a harmony than in a melody. And since PAN-DIM is applied to the reading of this poem, a “Harmony” being a mass of sounds makes it harder to grasp that Nature will not be here if humanity’s lifestyle does not change.

In the last stanza (lines 9-12), Nature is defined by human knowledge of what is thought nature is but cannot be fully grasped. Nature’s Sincerity is more than humans can ever hope to understand. The longest line in the poem, “So impotent our Wisdom is,” (line 11), is the *coup de grace* for those who believe humans are the only species capable of producing knowledge in the planet. Whatever humans think can be done, Nature in her totality will never be fully grasped and this is the poem’s biggest conclusion. What can be done with this now that it is known it must be accepted?

PAN-DIM will assist further with the ecocritical analysis. If Nature is treated as PAN, it can be inferred that what is known about Nature does not respond to historical processes and has been known forever. If Nature is DIM, knowing about Nature is an isolated event that has no relation to human existence. It would be like stating that Nature has always been around and humans must only accept it. When this logic is reversed to change the ways Nature is thought



about, what comes to the fore is that humans, "have no Art to say" (line 10) what Nature really is; humans can only guess and create metaphors. Disrupting the PAN-DIM logic thus leads to accepting that Nature is bigger than humans and start acting to halt destructive behaviors so that the planet does not need to recourse to hurricanes and other catastrophes to rebalance its system and take some lives while at it.

4. So... have we changed yet?

It is recognized that to change people's lifestyle and belief system is a difficult thing to achieve. It will not be a single paper that will make the biggest impact in the world. The smallest chance of success lies in starting to work together in a group of people concerned with the climate crisis who acknowledge their scholarly practices may add interesting contributions. As professor Scott Slovic (2023) defended in his opening talk at the VI International Conference of Literature and the Environment promoted by ASLE-Brasil, better ways to communicate with people who do not want to hear about the crisis need to be found. Poems are a good genre to reach other people and make them more aware of the escalating crisis humans are provoking. Few feelings are better than the glimpse of an eye that just felt how a poem talks to one's soul. What this paper attempted to achieve was to bring to light an ecocritical reading that could touch someone's soul and invite this person to take action to mitigate the climate crisis.

In the first poem analyzed, "Nature – the Gentlest Mother is," the idea that nature is a mother should be reconstructed. Mothers are usually the sole figures responsible for the well-being of their children. A shift would mean that humans must take full responsibility for every life on the planet with nature. Humans play a role in overusing natural resources because humans believe they are theirs to take. Humans are not the only inhabitants in the planet, as there are other lives that have every right to exist on Earth. Furthermore, humans are one and the same with nature (Krenak, 2019, p. 16-17).

In the second poem analyzed, "Nature' is what We see –," humans must accept that they will never know everything about nature; laboratories, books, and theorems will never be enough to fully grasp nature. Because there is nothing inherent in humans that licenses them to grasp nature. This realization leads to accepting the PAN and DIM illusion (Murphy, 2019, p. 173) as a means to comfort humanity, believing that nature has always been here and always will be (Present As Normal), and every event is particular to a certain time and place, not the result of processes (Discrete Incident Mentality). This cannot happen. What is needed is to embrace that humans have been acting in every possible way to destroy nature and every life within it in the name of progress and/or profit.

Ecocritical readings of literary texts are one way scholars may join the discussions and spread the word about mitigating the climate crisis and hopefully diminishing the impacts the increase of temperature will have in the future. More than conducting ecocritical readings we must share those with the community and use every resource in our power to play our part. It is the moment to act as one, towards one goal, for those who have come before, for those who are here, and for those who come after.



CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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