

comprehensive study guide  
to  
TWENTY POEMS BY EMILY DICKINSON

狄瑾蓀的詩

Comprehensive Study Guide  
to  
Twenty Poems by Emily Dickinson

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COMPREHENSIVE STUDY GUIDE TO  
TWENTY POEMS BY EMILY DICKINSON

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*"After Great Pain, a Formal Feeling Comes" by Emily  
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狄  
瑾  
蓀  
的  
詩

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Emily Dickinson (1830—1886)

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## Introduction

This issue of Study Guides contains twenty of the 1775 poems written over a period of thirty years by Emily Dickinson (1830—1886), a spinster and a recluse by choice. After a normal school life in her small hometown of Amherst, Massachusetts, a hundred miles from Boston and the experience of forbidden love for a married clergyman, Emily Dickinson withdrew from the world to her family estate in Amherst and spent the rest of her life in self-imposed confinement in her father's house and garden, refusing the visits of members of her own family. She stayed apart from the world in the company of her father, mother, sister, nature, her books, and the burning love she knew was unrequited. She was known by the Amherst citizens as the recluse dressed in white.

After her death at 56, her sister Lavinia discovered in Emily's bureau drawer and other recesses bundles of loose leaves of paper tied with ribbons on which Emily had written her poems, unknown even to her immediate family. Numerous letters were also found.

These writings were a revelation. They showed the rich and deep inner life the recluse had experienced. Her externally uneventful life had been filled with intense emotions, feelings and thoughts—a quiet pond teeming with invisible life.

For a temperament like Emily's, a thought or a feeling was a more meaningful visit than that of usual friends. She looked for people with whom to communicate them

and finding none about her, entered into correspondence with choice personalities. Her letters fill three volumes of the Harvard University edition of her writings.

Her poems are the story of a soul in which a feeling or an emotion created its own shaping thought, and the whole was transmuted into art. This spinster composed little poems as another would do needlework.

Her subjects range from the most trivial to the highly metaphysical. She was obsessed with death and immortality; she suffered anxieties that wounded her deeply, but in the midst of these pains she experienced deep down the joy of creating, of transposing her inner experience into words and rhythms. She delighted in words. She tried to make them mirror as exactly as possible the subtle movements of her soul.

Her art, like her life, was unconventional by choice. Her rule was the truth of what she saw and felt. Sending some of her poems to a critic for evaluation she asked him anxiously: is my poetry truly alive? The conventional critic, ignoring the burning question, gently indicated misuses of punctuation, rhyme, and meter. She replied with great respect, even reverence, calling herself his scholar, but made none of the corrections suggested, feeling, no doubt, that Higginson, the critic who admired Longfellow, Emerson, and Whittier, had missed the point. Her peculiar use of grammar, punctuation, rhyme, and meter was intentional. It was necessary to say what she wanted to say. What she wanted to say is still what modern criticism is trying to understand. Her unconventionality was not due to ignorance.

She had been to school, she knew traditional poetry, she was familiar with some seventeenth century poets. For her, beauty was in truth, the truth of what she had to say.

She did not write for publication and perhaps this helped her truthfulness—she did not have to preserve a public image. Yet who knows the recesses of a feminine mind? Could she have had in mind posthumous publication? She was obsessed with immortality, and fame after death may have been the kind of immortality she ambitioned to secure.

If this was the case, her wish has been amply satisfied. Her poems have become one of the main subjects of study of modern criticism. Since 1955, when Thomas H. Johnson published all of her poems, few poets have received more critical attention; modern readers of poetry memorize the lines the recluse of Amherst composed in her little room more than a century ago. This issue of the Study Guides series offers some of the best known among them.

The number assigned each poem in this issue is the same as that used in the Thomas H. Johnson edition of *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*.



## 第一組詩：自然 (Poems of Nature)

文學的活力，常常表現在它的語言之中。倘若一位作家的語言平淡乏味，該作家很可能就是缺乏獨創的能力。假如一個時代的作品，多為模仿，毫無新穎獨特之處，該時代很可能就是文學創作的低潮時期。Emily Dickinson 就正好趕上美國文學創作的低潮時期。因為在她之前，美國的第一次文學上文藝復興時期，已近尾聲。大作家們像Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson, Thoreau 等，都已過時。而內戰後的新作家羣，像 Mark Twain, Henry James 等人的創作生涯，還在萌芽階段，尚未受人注意。然而 Emily Dickinson 却能不受時代的影響，以其獨來獨往的姿態，為美國詩壇立下新的里程碑。她不為傳統形式所局限，也不為時代風尚所左右；以其獨特的風格、敏銳的觀察、及理念的思考，寫下了一千七百多首醒人耳目的短詩。

為了討論方便起見，我們把這本小集子裏所選註的廿首短詩，大略分為四組。第一組有六首，主要在描寫自然，或對自然的觀感，可列為自然詩。第二組有五首，主要在發抒詩人對悲與歡的看法，絕望及狂喜都是她急欲探知的情感。第三組有五首，這五首顯示了Emily Dickinson 急欲領悟的另外兩種經驗，那就是死亡與永生。第四組有四首，此四首說明了 Dickinson 對藝術及文字看法的一部份。事實上，很難一一加以嚴格的劃分。像在第四組中的第 214 首，也可歸在第二組的詩中。而且在討論第二組的絕望與狂喜等情感時，死亡的意念也不時可從詩中體會出來。所以這樣也可以放在第二組中討論。

第一組裏的詩，所以可稱為自然詩，是因為他們或多或少的，都在表現自然。與十九世紀大部份的英美詩人一樣，自然在 Emily Dickinson 的創作中，佔很重要的地位。可是她的自然觀，與一般浪漫詩人的看法，却渾然不同。她不在尋求自然的原始性及其浪漫之點，以舒展其憂鬱的心境，也不在藉自然以求超脫世俗。對她來說，自然既不為循循善誘的誨教者，也不是供人探求神性真理的泉源。她

是對自然的本身感到興趣，對她耳目所及的四周，都能細心觀察，深刻體認。所以她總希望能精確的描繪出自然的現象，以及她對自然的感知和了解。

Emily Dickinson 與其同時代的詩人，另一不同之處，是她深信，人可以藉詩的創作模仿自然，但却絕無法實際擁有自然。她認為自然並無永恒不變的實質，而它的本質僅為一種改變的過程。她這種看法，與現代人的自然觀頗為接近。她是以藝術家的態度來細觀自然，而不是以哲學家或道德家的眼光來判審自然。像 Emerson 及 Wordsworth 等詩人認為，人如能做到「天人合一」，就能探知自然的內涵，領悟自然的真意。而 Dickinson 則認為自然的真意，或存在於客觀的事實之中，或存在於觀視者的心目之中。像本組第 526 首「黃鶯之歌」，即為一例。外界自然事物的存在，全由內心的洞察而定。

一種新的看法，往往要用一種新的技巧來表現，才能顯示出詩人的創作力。像 Wordsworth 等浪漫時期的詩人，為了求得超越現實，以臻天人合一的境界，就在此大千世界裏，尋求未經琢磨的原始自然，或為常人所忽視且微不足道的事物，以便證實人與自然所具有的共同性。在這點，Dickinson 與他們頗為相似；她也是從通俗，為常人所忽略的地方，來描繪自然。像在第 333 首裏，她就寫到為常人所忽略的青草。不過在此詩中，她並沒有表明自然、人、與青草有合而為一之意，反而認為它們各自孤立。她這種人與自然各自孤立的看法，在她描寫動物的自然詩裏，表現得更為清楚。從第 328 首及第 986 首裏，我們可看出，鳥見人而驚慌飛去、蛇見人而惶惶逸失。凡此種種，都似乎表示人與自然之物，是各自孤立，不易相容並蓄。同時人僅為自然界的一種形態，不易真正了解自然的全貌。因為自然界的各種形態，都以動的姿態表現之。如第 328 首中的鳥，在空中振翼翱翔，就像隻小船，划行大海之中。又如第 986 首中的蛇，在草中時停時竄，既像散開的辮子，又像失落的馬鞭，但在你彎身俯拾之際，它却急速溜走，不知去向。在季節的變換中，Dickinson 還發現了另一

種道理，像在第 540 首中，她說明季節變換之微妙，不為常人所察覺。其中的道理就是，自然為一周而復始的過程，時間既在此過程中逝去，又同時在此過程中誕生。此一似非而是的道理，可從 Dickinson 自己的一句警語（Epigram）中體味出來。她說：“Changelessness is Nature’s change.”（大自然的現象就是：寓萬變於不變之中。）當我們感到自然的改變時，不免也想到自己的改變，因而引起哀傷之情。這時我們就會聯想到第 1540 首中所提到的 grief。可是人若能像荒野青草或路旁小石，那樣無知無感，不知哀傷之為何物，那該是何等的快樂。這大概就是 Dickinson 寫第 1510 這首短詩的用意吧！此詩道出，小石求生之樂趣，以其最單純的生活方式，完成了大自然求生之道。

A bird came down the walk:  
 He did not know I saw;  
 He bit an angle-worm in halves  
 And ate the fellow, raw.

And then he drank a dew 5  
 From a convenient grass,  
 And then hopped sidewise to the wall  
 To let a beetle pass.

He glanced with rapid eyes  
 That hurried all around - 10  
 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 15  
 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. 20

Line	Word or phrase	Annotation
1.	walk	小徑。
3.	bit. . . halves	將一隻蚯蚓咬成兩半。
4.	fellow	指蚯蚓，此處詩中人稱之爲「傢

- 伙」，顯示她與大自然之蟲獸草木相近熟稔。
- 生的，指鳥生吞蚯蚓。
5. dew 原應作 a drop of dew 或 the dew, 因 dew 係一不可數名詞。
6. a convenient grass 原應作 a blade of convenient grass 或 the convenient grass, 與上註情形相同。Convenient 近便，就近。
7. hopped sidewise 向一邊跳。
- 9-10 rapid. . . /That hurried 指小鳥有所警惕，因此眼睛向四處張望。
11. frightened beads 驚慌的珠子。Dickinson 慣以日常家居、人人熟諳的意象描寫大自然，此處將鳥的眼睛視為珠子即為一例。
12. velvet head 天鵝絨的頭，形容小鳥滿頭茸毛。
13. Like one in danger 如同身處險境的人（或動物）。此片語修飾第十二行的動詞。Dickinson 的詩固然維持工整的段（stanza）的單元，但兩段之間意義却經常打成一片，無法加以嚴格分割。本詩之第四段與第五段即為一例。
13. cautious 小心翼翼。修飾下一行之“I”。
14. crumb 麵包屑，餅屑。
15. unrolled his feathers 攤開他的羽翼（如打開卷軸或包袱）。Dickinson 使用日常意象另一例，似有親切可喜的效果。

16. rowed him 此地 him 原應作 himself，指鳥本身。  
softer ==more softly
- 16-17. And rowed. . . ocean ==And rowed himself home  
more softly than oars divide  
the ocean
17. divide 分劃，指船槳划過留下一道波浪，宛若將海洋切分爲二。當然此處之船槳與鳥翅相形之下，後者較爲輕盈 (soft)。
18. too silver for a seam 指海洋，天空一派銀白，而鳥過處體態輕盈，因此不留任何痕跡，也就是「天衣無縫」的意思。seam: 縫合處。
19. Or butterflies . . . Noon ==or than butterflies . . . noon  
banks of noon 指鳥飛之輕逸遠勝船槳或蝴蝶。正午的堤岸。天空被喻爲海洋而蝴蝶泅泳其中。
20. splashless ==splashless，指姿態優美，不濺起任何浪花。

本詩的內涵並無任何獨特之處，談的也無非是人與自然界的關係，但就表現方法而言，值得一提的有下列兩點：一、詩人使用的意象自然而不誇張，頗收輕描淡寫的効果；二、就情節的發展而言，詩人也能配合意象的進展而安排了一個插曲式的故事（詩中人旁觀小鳥的活動→詩中人向小鳥示好→小鳥飛去），也相當明快生動。

這首詩的意象大抵指向這隻既可愛而又不可捉摸的小鳥。前兩段 (stanza) 寫鳥怡然自得，旁若無人的神情 (He did not know I saw)，詩人對鳥日常生活片段的描述大致保持著旁觀者的客觀，意

象也相當明晰易解，純樸輕快，如第一段：A bird, the walk, angleworm, halves, fellow, raw; 第二段：drank, dew, convenient grass, hopped sidewise, wall, beetle, pass。第三段不論就意象或情節的發展，均可視為一過渡階段；第一、二段中小鳥雖暗地受到觀測，本身並未察覺，因此也不失其自由人的身份（小徑上走路，將蚯蚓咬成兩半，生吞那個傢伙，然後就近的草葉上喝滴露水，之後跳到牆邊，讓甲蟲過），可是到了第四段，他的自由受到了善意的干擾（我給他麵包屑），而很顯然小鳥無法接受這種安排，因此在第五段中展翅飛去。當然，第三段只是一個緩衝；在此之前的小鳥安祥而自得，他的生命確切而實在，但在此之後小鳥驚慌逸失，他的存在一變而為不可捉摸的空靈。而同樣的道理，第三段的意象可以說一半屬於具象（glanced, rapid eyes/That hurried all around）；另一半屬空靈（They looked like frightened beads, I thought/He stirred his velvet head）。最後兩段形容小鳥乍遇詩中人善意的表示，驚慌之際迅速逃離現場，詩人處理此一瞬時的動作，手法既抽象又主觀，因此這兩段之意象與前兩段相形之下，較為遙遠、繁複，但也更富一股無牽無掛的活力，無形中勾劃出小鳥生命的另一面（unrolled his feathers, rowed him softer home, oars divide the ocean, too silver for a seam, banks of noon, plashless as they swim）。

The grass so little has to do, —  
 A sphere of simple green,  
 With only butterflies to brood,  
 And bees to entertain,  
 And stir all day to pretty tunes 5  
 The breezes fetch along,  
 And hold the sunshine in its lap  
 And bow to everything;  
 And thread the dews all night, like pearls,  
 And make itself so fine, 10  
 A duchess were too common  
 For such a noticing.  
 And even when it dies, to pass  
 In odors so divine,  
 Like lowly spices lain to sleep, 15  
 Or spikenards perishing.  
 And then in sovereign barns to dwell,  
 And dream the days away,  
 The grass so little has to do,  
 I wish I were a hay. 20

Line	Word or phrase	Annotation
1.	The grass. . . .	＝The grass has so little to do. 表面上說草的活動很少，但事實上這首詩的主題談論的正是草渺小的生存與充實的生命。



2. A sphere of simple green 一片綠色的領域。Sphere 指葉子的小千世界，內含一片純綠。
- 3-4. With . . . brood . . . entertain 修飾第二行的 sphere，寫小千世界中的活動。
3. brood 孵，指葉上結有蝴蝶的繭。
4. entertain 招待。此兩行用 brood 與 entertain 表明草與蟲之間的關係近似人與人之間的主客關係；也可以說，草具有動物性，而蜂蝶對此也有相當的認識。
5. stir 顫動，另含振奮之意。
- to 隨着。
6. fetch 帶來。
7. in its lap 在草葉上。將草喻爲人，因此能將日光置於他腿上。
8. bow to everything 對萬物鞠躬致敬。另可作「向萬物屈服」解。
9. thread the dews 將露珠串起（如串珍珠般）。
10. fine 優雅。
11. duchess 伯爵夫人。貴婦與草芥相形之下，貴賤分明，但 Dickinson 突出驚人之語，全盤推翻傳統看法，而推崇自然之高貴。
- were 爲假設語氣，指貴婦可能如此。
- common 庸俗。
12. For such a noticing 接受這種禮遇。
- 13-16. And . . . perishing 此段寫草之死，雖賤如香草與五加，却也香味撲鼻。
13. pass 一pass away, 逝世。