"A Bird, came down the Walk" by Emily Dickinson -Comprehensive Analysis

Context

Emily Dickinson's *A Bird, came down the Walk* is a vivid, detailed observation of a small, everyday occurrence: a bird moving about, feeding, and ultimately taking flight. The poem's tone shifts from curiosity and gentle observation to a moment of connection between the speaker and the bird, before the bird flies away, leaving the speaker with a lasting image of its grace and freedom. The poem explores themes of nature, the delicate balance between wildness and gentleness, and the beauty of seemingly ordinary moments.



Stanza by Stanza Analysis

Lines 1-2

- "A Bird, came down the Walk / He did not know I saw -"
- The poem opens with the speaker observing a bird walking along a path. The bird is unaware of the speaker's presence, allowing the speaker to watch its actions up close without interrupting its natural behavior. This sets up the central theme of the poem: the quiet, unobtrusive observation of nature. The speaker's detached but attentive position emphasizes the tension between human curiosity and the natural world's indifference.

Lines 3-4

- "He bit an Angle Worm in halves / And ate the fellow, raw,"
- The speaker's detailed observation continues as the bird catches a worm, bites it in half, and eats it. The rawness of the act serves as a reminder of the bird's wild nature, even in this tranquil setting. Dickinson does not shy away from depicting the bird as a predator, emphasizing the balance between beauty and violence in nature.

Lines 5-6

- "And then, he drank a Dew / From a convenient Grass -"
- After the bird's predatory act, it drinks dew from a blade of grass, an action that contrasts with the earlier violence of eating the worm. This shift from the rawness of survival to the gentleness of drinking dew highlights the duality of nature.

Lines 7-8

- "And then hopped sidewise to the Wall/ To let a Beetle pass -"
- The bird's next action is to hop aside to make room for a beetle, an act that anthropomorphizes the bird, suggesting politeness or consideration. This line subtly hints at the bird's awareness of its environment and the other creatures in it.

Lines 9-10

- "He glanced with rapid eyes, / That hurried all abroad -"
- Here, the speaker focuses on the bird's quick, nervous glances. The bird is alert and cautious, constantly surveying its surroundings, as though aware of the potential for danger.

Lines 11-12

- "They looked like frightened Beads, I thought, / He stirred his Velvet Head -"
- The speaker describes the bird's eyes as "frightened Beads," a simile that emphasizes the bird's vulnerability despite its earlier predatory action.

Lines 13-14

- "Like one in danger, Cautious, / I offered him a Crumb,"
- In these lines, the speaker attempts to bridge the gap between themselves and the bird, offering it a crumb. The speaker's cautious approach reflects the difficulty of connecting with nature.

Lines 15-16

- "And he unrolled his feathers, / And rowed him softer Home -"
- Instead of accepting the crumb, the bird unfurls its feathers and flies away. The imagery evokes a sense of elegance and control, emphasizing the grace and quietness of its departure.

Lines 17-18

- "Than Oars divide the Ocean, / Too silver for a seam,"
- The speaker compares the bird's flight to oars dividing the ocean, but notes that the bird's movement is even smoother—"Too silver for a seam." The word "silver" suggests something precious and beautiful.

Lines 19-20

- "Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon, / Leap, plashless as they swim."
- In the final lines, the speaker likens the bird's flight to that of butterflies leaping "plashless" as they move through the air, evoking a sense of lightness and beauty.

Key Themes

The Beauty and Violence of Nature

Throughout the poem, Dickinson explores the balance between the beauty and violence of the natural world. The bird is both predator and delicate creature, acting on instinct to survive while also displaying grace and gentleness.

The Tension Between Human and Nature

The speaker's attempt to connect with the bird by offering it a crumb reflects the tension between human beings and the natural world. While humans may desire to bridge the gap, the bird's flight suggests that this connection is often fleeting.

The Elegance and Freedom of Flight

The bird's flight is depicted as an act of grace and freedom. The comparisons to oars dividing the ocean and butterflies leaping through the air suggest that the bird's movements are smooth, seamless, and free from constraints.

Mood of the Poem

The mood of *A Bird, came down the Walk* is one of quiet wonder and reverence for the natural world. The speaker observes the bird with a sense of curiosity and awe, noting both its wildness and its grace.

Literary Devices

Metaphor

The bird's flight is compared to "Oars divide the Ocean" and butterflies "plashless as they swim," highlighting the elegance and seamlessness of its movements.

Imagery

Dickinson uses rich imagery to describe the bird's actions, from biting a worm to drinking dew and flying away. These detailed, vivid descriptions bring the scene to life and emphasize the contrasts in nature.

Simile

The bird's eyes are compared to "frightened Beads," capturing both their physical appearance and the bird's sense of alertness and vulnerability. Personification

The bird is anthropomorphized through its cautious actions, such as stepping aside to let a beetle pass, suggesting politeness that mirrors human behavior.

Conclusion

Emily Dickinson's *A Bird, came down the Walk* is a beautifully detailed exploration of nature's duality, capturing both its violence and its grace. The poem serves as a reminder of the beauty and mystery of the natural world, as well as the limits of human interaction with it.