UNIT 9: EMILY DICKINSON: 'I TASTE A LIQUOR NEVER BREWED' AND 'SHE SWEEPS WITH MANY COLORED BROOMS'

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9.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Learn about the life of Emily Dickinson
- Know about the personal influences of people and society on Dickinson's poems
- Critically understand the poem *I Taste A Liquor Never Brewed*

- Connect the poem with biblical elements and decode the structure and diction of the poem
- Critically understand the poem *She Sweeps with Many-Colored Brooms*
- Understand the theme of feminism and domesticity in 19th century America through the poem

9.1 INTRODUCTION

9.1.1 Short Biography of Emily Dickinson

In the draft of a letter addressed to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Emily Dickinson said, "Thank you for Greatness. I will have deserved it in a longer time" (Lyric Contingencies 58). She was indeed prophetic in her statement. Though she was not recognised during her own period, her poetry was published posthumously and she won the hearts of many readers later on. Her poetry gave the editor the impression of "what place ought to be assigned in literature to what is so remarkable, yet so elusive of criticism"[1] (An Open Portfolio 3). Just for the sake of publication Dickinson did not like anyone to make changes in her writing. She was more insistent on her own exclusiveness: "I marked a line in One Verse because I met it after I made it_ and never consciously touch a paint mixed by another person" (Dickinson, The Letters, L II 415).

Dickinson was born in Amherst, Massachusetts in 1830. She attended Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in South Hadley but severe homesickness led her to return home within one year. In the years that followed, she seldom left her house and visitors were scarce. The people with whom she did come in contact with, however, had an intense impact on her thoughts and her poetry. She was particularly stirred by Reverend Charles Wadsworth, whom she met on a trip to Philadelphia. He left for the West Coast shortly after a visit to her home in 1860 and his departure gave rise to a heart-sick flow of verse from Dickinson who deeply admired him. By the 1860s, she lived almost in total physical isolation from the outside world but she actively maintained many correspondences and read widely. She was extremely prolific as a poet and regularly enclosed poems in letters to friends. But she was not publicly recognized during her lifetime. The first volume of her work was published posthumously in 1890 and the last in 1955. She died in Amherst in1886.

9.1.2 Influences on Emily's Life

The testimony of Emily Fowler Ford, one of Emily Dickinson's closest girlhood friends indicates that as early as the mid 1840's, before the poet had met Benjamin Newton or Henry Vaughan Emmons, the two girls were reading Byron, Lowell, Emerson, Motherwell and Emily Dickinson was particularly "steeped" in Emerson's Essays.

Among Emily's Amherst friends, Leonard Humphrey was interested in Wordsworth and Carlyle. Her acquaintance with Dr. Josiah G. Holland dates from the early fifties and Holland, like Higginson later, was a genteel liberal

1. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "An Open Portfolio", quoted in Buckingham, *Emily Dickinson's Reception,* 4.

who was interested in "Women in Literature" and had written an article on the subject for the Springfield Republican. He stood for a personal "creedless, churchless, ministerless Christianity." In 1881 Emily warmly recalled to Mrs. Holland about the time when she had first heard her husband praying, and how she had felt "a different God" who was also a friend. Emily gave some idea of Emerson's influence upon her thought in her comments on the *Poems*, *Representative Men* and in several allusions to his "immortal" poems. Emerson spoke in Amherst in 1855 on "A Plea for the Scholar," in 1857 on "The Beautiful in Rural Life," in 1879 on "Superlative Mental Temperance," and led off a course of lectures in 1865 with "Social Aims". Although there is no evidence that she attended any of these lectures, she must have listened from a distance, and after the 1857 visit when Emerson stayed at the house next door with Austin and Sue (her brother and sister-in-law), she wrote to her sister-in-law: "It must have been as if he had come from where dreams are born!" (Bloom 42) In her last years, she copied out several scraps of Emerson's verse. This was a special tribute, for she rarely did it with other poets, even her favourites.

Emily's indebtedness to Thoreau is revealed through her library copies of his works: *Letters to various Persons* and *A Week on the Concord* and *Merrimack* and two copies of Walden. Besides, she must have read the essays which appeared in the pages of the Atlantic during 1862: *Walking*, *Autumnal Tints*, *Wild Apples* and others. Her remark to Sue and Austin on a seaside vacation in 1865 "Was the Sea cordial? Kiss him for Thoreau" (Bloom 42) also shows her fondness for Thoreau. Another charming incident also gratifies her deep kinship with Thoreau. As a lady who visited Edward Dickinson's house happened to quote from Thoreau's writings, Miss Dickinson hastened to press her hand and said with enthusiasm: 'From this time on we are acquainted'; and this was the friendship that lasted till the death of the poetess.

Emily also read Theodore Parker and she knew about William Ellery Channing among the transcendentalists. She had made use of the verse of the latter as the basis for a poem of her own (Dickinson, Final Harvest 858). From all these writers she had absorbed, as early as 1850, the main features of transcendentalism: the optimism, the emphasis on experimentation and originality, the metaphysical and mystical speculations, the pulse of rhythm and imagery. Though the poet was born in New England and the flora and fauna she observed were different from that of England, she could easily imagine herself in other locales writing the poems that would be appropriate to such climes. She loves daisies, but she writes, "…were I Britain born, / I'd Daisies spurn" (285). Dickinson saw herself not as a literary rebel but as an heir to a recognizable wing of the nineteenth century English poetry and her style was designed to carry out the aims generally ascribed to that wing which was known as the poetry of sensation. She was singularly unaffected by the continual campaigns in favour of a distinctively American literature. Hence it would be a grave mistake if we just read her work exclusively in the American context which will violate her own more catholic tastes and the actual continuities of American and English writing at the time. She refers to admired English writers as often as to Americans in poems and letters and her only poem that raises the question of national affiliation is

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"the robin's my criterion for tune" that carefully limits importance of the regional differences. The poem's most memorable phrase is the declaration by the poet that she sees "New Englandly" which in isolation may be taken as patriotic or provincial affirmation. The world acknowledged her locale, but the author calls attention to the origin of the place name by transforming the proper noun into an adverb. This definitely undercuts the usually instantaneously denotative or referential power of the proper name and it correspondingly amplifies the phrase's textuality and its implications in a network of contexts and associations.

9.1.3 Her Interest in the Romantics

Dickinson owed her allegiance to the poets of the romantic wing. There is some reason to believe that she stretched that she admired the poets of that school. This can be read through her letter to Higginson, the editor of her poems: "You inquire my books. For poets, I have Keats and Mr. and Mrs. Browning . For prose, Mr. Ruskin, Sir Thomas Browne and the Revelations" (Dickinson, The Letters 404). The main evidence for Dickinson's sense of filiations comes from her response to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry and especially to her death in 1861. During the crucial and extraordinarily productive year immediately following the Englishwoman's death, Dickinson at times imagined herself as invisibly bidding to fill the place Browning had occupied in English poetry. She seems in part to have seen Browning as the last eminent representative of a particular literary tradition or school, one which Arthur Hallam had baptized. It was the poetry of sensation which might also be thought of as the romantic faction in English culture after the reign of George III. Hallam had referred to Keats, Byron, Shelley and the young Tennyson. Other writers who were identified with the romantic wing in early Victorian literary debates included De Quincey and the Bronte sisters all of whom Dickinson is known to have been familiar with.

Dickinson did not model her verse on Browning, nor is her style inspired directly by any of the earlier Romantic poets. Her affinity is only with the aim, motives, and effects that were ascribed to those poets' work in opposition to the emergent values of Victorian literary culture.

9.1.4 Emily and Elizabeth Browning

She expressed greater admiration for Browning than for any writer except possibly Shakespeare. Her interest in the woman writers of the era is explained through her enthusiasm for their writings. One of the poems Dickinson wrote about Browning, for instance, describes her as a nonpareil among woman artists: "Not on Record-bubbled other-/ Flute or Woman-/ So divine"(312). But in style and theme, Browning is more possibly Dickinson's opposite than her model. Browning's poems are copious, fluent in manner and sometimes clearly prolix. They directly address the social and political issues of the day; they cultivate a consistent moral earnestness and they avoid venturing into new or idiosyncratic forms and techniques. Browning's poetry differs from Dickinson's in other respects too. The English poet wrote dramatic and narrative verse and lyric most notably in Aurora Leigh, the work Dickinson mentions most often. Besides, Browning is also an impressively learned, allusive poet who drew on a wide range of classical and modern European literatures.

Browning's death precipitated a marked increase in the appeal she held for Dickinson. The American poet had no doubt been reading Browning's poetry over some years but only in death did the English poet assume a central place in her imagination. Poem 312 concludes with the extraordinary fantasy of becoming the dead poet's bereaved bridegroom: "…Our self a bridegroom / Put her down in Italy?" The actual bridegroom is Robert Browning as Dickinson would have known. Comparing Robert's grief to her own, Dickinson effectively places herself alongside him as Elizabeth Barrett Browning's literary heir. Dickinson's pronoun is "Ourself," the conspicuously royal plural including herself.

Browning was a formidable moralist and her poetry sounds to modern ears the edifying note stereotypically associated with Victorian moralism. Dickinson read Browning's poetry for its power to enchant, not its didactic wisdom and through Browning, she saw the romantic wing as legitimizing poetry designed to stimulate rather than to instruct. It is important to specify here that the main feature of Dickinson's poetry is to separate the reader's experiences from the author's intentions and authority. She even suggests that poetry can dispense with representation or communication, thus radically divorcing the reader's response from anything the poet might have designed: "Merely flake or petal / As the Eye beholds / Jupiter my father (165).

The lines may refer to what the speaker beholds while she writes, then asserts the poet's identifications. I behold the rose, you behold the sunflower, and it beholds snowflake or hyacinths. The lines also place the speaker/poet in a reader's position in relation to the divine author of nature. In responding to Jupiter's creations she insists that what she perceives really competes in validity with whatever he may have set before her. In this perspective of laying emphasis on the reader's response, Dickinson differs from the American poet Edgar Allan Poe, though both of them share the common trait of articulating 'affective theory of literature' which stressed on moods, feelings, and attitudes. Moreover, both these American poets were militantly anti-didactic.

Further Dickinson chose not to publish to keep her poems "alive". She often went back to revive poems written years before, every poem was potentially a work in progress. As this sense of process gave life to her poems, it was essential to keep them within her own control where she could freely and privately revise them. For Dickinson, while there was life, there was the possibility of revision. In such shaping and polishing the work, she was similar to Shelley who set himself the task of writing a certain number of lines which he thereafter polished. Likewise Charles Dickens the famous Victorian novelist too honed his sense of words and their specific meanings and power in this attention to language. But, contrary to the American poet Dickinson, the English fiction writer married and raised a large family, responded to a demanding audience, participated in literary and philanthropic circles, and continued his dramatic readings. Thus, his art was prolific, public, and popular in direct opposition to Dickinson's limited publishing, minimalist innovative poetry, and decades of retreat from society.

9.1.5 Emily's Approach towards Poetry

As Chaucer, Keats and Byron expressed themselves in narrative poems, Dickinson on occasion tried to write narratively, but her genius was of a different order. She is much more akin to such seventeenth century poets as Donne, Vaughan and Marvell in her ability to make the word itself become flesh and she concentrated her effort to such a degree that she rarely wrote a poem of more than twenty lines. Her longest one is of fifty lines, titled *I Cannot Live With You.* Emily Dickinson appeared on the literary horizon at the end of poetic movement which had its own themes and also a language in which they were expressed. Poetic movements, however, are not isolated phenomena. They are based on certain social realities. As the social pattern changes, the modes of poetic expression also undergo transformation. If the contents dissolve and the variables assume an overwhelming proportion, then new constants are formed in the social spectrum. Therefore, if a writer wants to produce literature with a difference, he/she must use language as an instrument of adjustment with reality. Such a writer would use diction instead of poetic diction. The Renaissance writers had, therefore, discarded the poetic diction of the authors of the Medieval Age and had invented their own lively verbal strategy which is full of life in the pages of Shakespeare, Marlowe and other Renaissance writers. The same attitude had been taken up by Wordsworth when he had criticized the poetic diction of the writers of the Age of Reason. Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot gave up the twentieth century static word and with new situations added significance to the words by putting them somewhere else in the syntax. Emily Dickinson stands with these pioneers in her endeavour to adjust language to reality and bringing it out of the verbal doldrums. This brought about a semantic rejuvenation.

Emily Dickinson had no formal theory of poetics but she had a consistent idea of the manner in which the poet is inspired, explicitly set forth in *Alone, I cannot be* (298). Inspiration comes as a grace, overleaping regular channels. The poet is thus like Keats perhaps, a being possessed, who reveals truth out of the agony of travail. And the anguish of such possession enables the receiver to partake of reality and reveals at least a fragment of the mysteries that the heart perceives. Uncontrolled, such possession leads into the sheer nonsense of automatic writing and Dickinson had no more success than any other artist had ever had in giving form to this very creative impulse. She persistently laboured to file her lines and to sharpen the images. An example of a failure is her poem about two butterflies (533) in which she seems to have intended to portray their lightness and darting motion. But by the time she reaches the end, her focus is so blurred that the reader has forgotten what she is writing about. She was aware of the failure and many years later began it over again. But inspiration was not with her. The pencilled worksheet draft survives and is rare in the degree of its complication. She never completed the poem. It remains a fascinating document of poetic creativeness in travail.

On another occasion however, the muse sustained her inspiration after some eighteen years. She wished, sometime about 1862, to sketch the portrait of a hummingbird. She sees a vibration and hears a whir so rapid that only the stir of blossoms after the bird's departure assures her of the truth of its presence. But the lines of "Within my Garden, rides a Bird" (500) have been

assembled laboriously and the figures remain awkward: the bird praises and the rejoined dog is perplexed whether he too saw the bird like the poet. She never forgot what she wanted to express about the hummingbird, as sound, iridescent colour, vibration. Some eighteen years later she returned to the theme, reduced the twenty lines to eight and created the excellent poem: *A Route of Evanescence* (1463).

As a prosodist experimenting in metres, rhyme, capitals, grammar and punctuation, Emily Dickinson exhibited a boldness which doomed her to obscurity in her lifetime. Yet the stature she continues to take merely as a technician is notable in the history of literary reputations. Her manner of writing gives the assurance of the infinite adaptability of language. An innovator is of necessity unorthodox and Dickinson forces the reader to get familiar with unexpected levels of concept. She used dashes as a musical device and capital letters as means of emphasis. Her readers are gradually accommodating themselves to such eccentricities since they know they are inheriting the legacy of a private poet who deliberately fractures grammar to achieve specific effects.

But the chief contribution of Dickinson to English prosody was the extension she gave to metrical and rhyme patterns. Her metres she derived from the hymn-book measures of her day adapted to her own requirements of suppleness and variety, retardment and acceleration. She uses constant use of identical rhymes (stone-stone), vowel rhymes (see-buy), imperfect rhymes (time-thine), and suspended rhymes (thing-along) to the English verse. The flexibility thus gained enormously extends the range of variations and creates rich overtones. For example, *We Play at Paste* (320), a poem of two quatrains, uses varieties of rhyme: identical, suspended and exact. Further, the alternate iambic dimetre-trimetre regularity of the first stanza is abandoned in the second where the meter follows its own convention, striking out in a new direction.

9.1.6 Nature in Emily's Poetry

As Emily Dickinson was attracted towards the eccentricities of the usage of English language, she was enamoured of the beauty of nature too. She had written more than five hundred poems on the subject of nature. There are three categories of attitude in her nature poetry. The first is the type that she shares with the Romantics and transcendental contemporaries and her predecessors who believed that mystical bond exists between man and nature. The second and most philosophically challenging category is anti-transcendentalist for she declares that an un-breachable separation exists between man and nature and that nature is indifferent toward the life and interests of mankind. The third one is occupying a kind of philosophical middle ground between the opposing first and second categories. It affirms the sheer joy and the appreciation that she feels with the diversity and spectacle of nature. This last division of her nature poetry is by far the largest in number, accounting for at least four-fifths of all her nature poetry. In these poems, Dickinson does express the numerous forms and characteristic of the natural environment with loving detail and emotional genuineness. These poems remain unaffected by intellectuality and philosophical speculation and range from the simple sketches of flowers, birds, and insects to the fully detailed portraits of the summer storms, the changing seasons, the

sunrise and the sunset. Many of them are minor masterpieces noted for their striking imagery and succinctness of expression. The daily drama of sunrise and sunset was delineated in many poems. The arresting conceit of beauty and intensity are expressed through her poem number 228:

> Blazing in Gold and quenching in Purple
>
> Leaping like Leopards to the Sly
>
> Then at the feet of the Old Horizon
>
> Laying her spotted Face to die.

There is an interplay of the sun's heat, colour and movement captured by the opening two lines and intensified by the image of the mighty leopard. His gold body with dark spots leaping across man's field of vision is a vivid analogy of the majesty and grandeur of the sun's passage across the sky. The poem closes by referring to the sun as the "Juggler of Day," an apt image for the sun's ability to suspend and rotate planets throughout the universe in seeming defiance of the laws of gravity. Regarding the sunset, great Renaissance painters like Guido Reni, Titian, and Domenichino were unable to render the sunset on canvas because its beauty and its colour overwhelmed their mimetic abilities. She admits with humility that her attempts at capturing in language the essential beauty and the grandeur of the sunset are weak and imprecise.

Besides this, the larger seasonal cycles of the year also became an attractive subject for her poetry. The poem *New Feet within My Garden Go* (99) speaks about the poet's garden being rejuvenated and stirred with the appearance of squirrels, worms, and birds in the first stanza:

> New feet within my garden go-
>
> New fingers stir the sod-
>
> A Troubadour upon the Elm
>
> Betrays the solitude

She is also reminded that despite the apparent show of new life and beauty, the dead still lie beneath the ground and the snows of winter will just as surely fall again. An early attempt, *The Gentian Weaves Her Fringes* mourns the passing of summer with a mock-heroic sermon, a funeral, and a burial service which are attended by some of her favourite summer creatures: the bobolink, the bee, and the butterfly among others. The poem ends with an often quoted, playfully pantheistic blessing: "In the name of the Bee/ And of the Butterfly /And of the Breeze/ Amen!" (18). One of her finest poems about the transitional season of autumn, *These Are The Days When Birds Come Back* (130) focuses on what is popularly known as Indian summer. Those occasional days that follow the first frosts of late autumn but which, because of their warm and hazy weather, remind one of early summer: "These are the days when Birds come back/A very few a Bird or two/ To take a backward look." Although there is no scientific evidence for believing the birds actually return from their southern homes, the image is meant to convey how the few hardy breeds which do remain later than usual take advantage of the mild climate and make themselves conspicuous. Like other seasons the winter did not hold much attraction for Emily Dickinson.

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Mostly, she dreaded the winter and all that it symbolized for her. In the deepest part of a long New England winter, spring and the joy of living may be virtually unimaginable. In a remarkable poem, *There's a Certain Slant of Light,* she recreated the sense of intolerable isolation and affliction that can accompany the winter season. For her "Slant of light/Winter Afternoons" oppresses the Heft/Of Cathedral Tunes" (258).

Although Emily Dickinson loved flowers and had knowledge regarding them, her poems on flowers are not distinctive. She wrote more poems about her favourite flower, the rose than any other flower, but most of them are usually conventional and sentimental. Although many of her poems on birds do not refer to specific species by name, she has written exuberant portraits of the oriole, the blue jay, the robin, the bobolink and the hummingbird. Her caricature of the bee's appearance, his incessant activity, and his monotonous buzzing are wittily alarming and graceful. Bees fancily dressed in black and gold swagger across the countryside while plundering and looting treasures that Dickinson describes in a novel metaphor as "Marrows of the Hill." Her skill at burlesque is continued in the second stanza in which she contemplates their food on a mock metaphysical level. "Fuzz ordained not Fuzz contingent" is a sophisticated scholastic distinction to simply affirm that their foods areessential to their nature. In this category of nature poems, also appear the poems allotted in your syllabus and you are fortunate to have them.

9.2 THE POEM : *I TASTE A LIQUOR NEVER BREWED*

I taste a liquor never brewed-
From **Tankards** scooped in Pearl-
Not all the Vats upon the **Rhine**
Yield such an Alcohol!

Inebriate of Air - am I -
And **Debauchee** of Dew -
Reeling – thro' endless summer days -
From Inns of **molten Blue -**

When "Landlords" turn the drunken Bee
Out of the **Foxglove's** door -
When Butterflies - renounce their **"drams"** -
I shall but drink the more!

Till **Seraphs** swing their Snowy Hats -
And Saints - to windows run -
To see the little **Tippler**
Leaning against the - Sun

9.2.1 Glossary

Tankard: a tall beer mug; vat vast tank or tub used to hold liquid in industry

Rhine: river in western Europe which rises in Swiss Alps, flows through Germany and Netherlands and wine got in this place has the same name

Debauchee: a person given to excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures

Molten Blue: idyllic summer skies being bright blue and fairly cloudless

Foxglove: Eurasian plant shaped like fingers of gloves and it is also the source of the drug digitalis

Drams: small drink of whiskey or other spirits

Seraph: the highest ranking angel

Tippler: habitual drinker of alcohol.

9.2.3 Relevance of the poem for the present days

One thing that makes this poem special is the quirkiness of the subject matter. During Dickinson's period, it was not considered proper for a young lady to drink to excess. In 1860, even if she did take a sip or two, a young lady (actually the poet was pushing thirty when she wrote this poem) would never find herself inebriated especially in a pub. Thank heaven! It's just a metaphor about the joys of nature. We all need a reminder once in a while to just unplug and get out in the natural world. With all our fancy technology nowadays that keeps us inside, her poem may actually be more valid and important now than it was when she first wrote it. She wrote this poem in the height of the Victorian era. Victorian culture was the rave then and had made its way across the pond to inspire American culture too. The Victorians loved a good round of croquet, on the lawn or taking tea by the lake; they loved it as long as they could take all their furniture, awnings, umbrellas, blanks, china, and servants. They loved nature as long as it stayed at a comfortable distance. In modern times our experiences of nature are even more detached. We can experience breathtaking views of anywhere on the planet in panoramic 3-D right down the road at our local movie theatre. The poet wants us to come out of the air-conditioning and remember how glorious it feels to have the sun on our face. We definitely can get a nice breath of fresh air and some sunlight.

9.2.4 Summary and Analysis of the poem:

This was one of the ten poems published in her lifetime under the title *The May-Wine*. We know as "I Taste A Liquor Never Brewed" only after Thomas H. Johnson (214) published the collection of Dickinson's poems in 1890. Traditionally, readers have assumed that "I" in the poem refers to the author herself, who intoxicated by summer air and flowers reels drunkenly through her garden. Some critics have found this attitude of childlike drunkenness too strained to be successful. Richard Chase for example, objects to the affectation of "adults who like to play at being children but have not the relaxation or the sympathetic insight to succeed" (229). But Dickinson's letters prove how much she liked to behave like a child. Even in her early twenties she wrote to her brother Austin: "I wish we were children now. I wish we were always children, how to grow up I don't know"(L115). In another letter she observes that her friend "is more of a woman than I am, for I love so to be a child" (L 39). Further, in a patriarchal society she could only express freely through her poem the enjoyment of intoxication.

In the first stanza**,** the poet speaks in a puzzled manner that she tastes liquor that was never brewed, filling the tall mug "scooped in Pearl". She asserts that her drink is far superior to the best "Alcohol" that can be attained from the tanks upon the Rhine. In the second stanza she refers to herself as the 'Debauchee', a chronically drunk person who excites in the mixture of mountain dew with some fancy new liquor air. Having consumed the excess of her drink she just reels through long summer days from the taverns of idyllic summer skies that look bright blue and fairly cloudless.

In the next stanza she explains how the innkeepers chase the drunken Bee out of the Foxglove flower which got its name due to its appearance like a glove. The butterflies have decided to turn over a new leaf and give up drinking ever; but the speaker is clearly happy to take up their place and drink their share too. The stanza as a whole can be likened to the passage of time in nature. Autumn comes to shut the pollen factories of flowers so the bees leave. Even during summer when the sun goes down, the bees move from flower to flower to find a more sensible place to take rest for the night. Here the author refers to the non-alcoholic drinking game of pure awe and appreciation. The speaker suggests that the speaker's admiration of nature is purer than that of the industrious insect bee and butterflies. Although they do often get drunk, they do the weird and gross stuff, they are still doing it out of necessity. On the other hand, the speaker gets drunk off nature for the sheer pleasure of it. After the bees and butterflies are done with their work, she'll be still there drinking in all the glory of nature.

In the last stanza, the speaker describes her exhilaration of being drunk with spiritual energy. She is watched by creatures which are in proximity with God: the seraphs and the saints. Seraphs are the highest ranking angels. Dickinson probably chooses this word lightly here. Their role as the choir of angels is to sing the praise of God. Since their only job is to hang out and sing the praise of God' glory, it would be a big deal for them to stop doing their job long enough to watch the speaker revelling in her inebriation. "The snowy hats" most likely represent the cloud, since the angels tend to fly around in the sky. Seraphims are supposed to have three sets of wings: one set to cover their faces, one to cover their feet and one set to fly. The first set of wings would make a hat fit for a royal wedding. It's also possible that Dickinson meant that the seraphs lifted their wings from their heads in order to see our speaker's nature-fest. It seems that the saints wanted to look out of their windows as a pastime. They come to the windows to check out our speaker 'Tippler', as she calls herself. The little tippler comes from Manzanilla, a small town in Spain. It's also the name of a sherry-wine made in Spain though not actually in Manzanilla. Perhaps Dickinson was not alluding to the town or to the literal alcohol of Manzanilla, but to a little white flower named chamomile that is used in teas according to the Spanish language. She has been talking about getting drunk off nature all along after all, and chamomile tea has muscle-relaxing properties, resembling the effects of alcohol. Before revising, Dickinson had written the last line as "come staggering against the sun" instead of "Leaning against the sun". The pre-revised line in fact gives us a better vision of a drunkard staggering.

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9.2.5 Comparison of the poem with Emerson's poem "Bacchus"

Dickinson mocks several aspects of conventional religious belief with a very light touch. She remarks that "Faith" is fine for "Gentlemen" already blessed with sight, when they are without immediate problems. In a state of emergency, presumably the natural state of all those who are not gentlemen or without confidence in their native vision, it is best to keep a more practical invention more handy than "faith" (185). Likewise, she is willing to take on literary Brahmins in this poem "I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed" which has long been recognised as a witty poetic response in Emerson's "Bacchus." Similar to Emerson's, her poem draws on the analogy likening poetic vision to the state of intoxication. But while Emerson elevates his view by allying it with Greek mythology, Dickinson's tippler smirks at the mythic and the sacred, deflating pretentious characterizations of poets' endeavours. Yet she does this not in a scoffing or belittling way, but with charming, delightful description. Both poems move from a preoccupation with the mystical to a focus on the diminutive and earthbound and then conclude with cosmic, heavenly imagery. Emerson's poem, however, is very sober and serious, while Dickinson's is comic, as revealed in the alliteration in "Debauchee of Dew" and "Seraphs swing their snowy Hats" and in the likening of a flower to a tavern and a bee to a customer. While "tippler" connotes a dizzy, gleeful spirit as well as a local character who savours his or her cocktails, "reeling" brings to our mind a lively country dance and implies a state of vertigo not relieved by the lyric's end: "I" is, in the final line," Leaning" not standing upright. Significantly, while Emerson writes of "dancing Pleiads and eternal men" as if he enjoys some union or kinship with them, Dickinson's speaker does not join the heavenly inhabitants or seraphs, but grins from a distance, amazing them and the saints with her drunken reverie. The "Saints" or eternal men of her poem even assert a kind of superiority to the angels, for she leans, unscathed, against the sun which would melt their "snowy Hats", dissolving and evaporating them. The idea of heavenly, presumably comfortable inhabitants donning hats made of an earthly, chilly substance is enticingly ridiculous.

9.2.6 Intemperate temperance in the poem

Dickinson was interested in temperance literature which also stimulated many other writers of the American Renaissance, including Whitman, Melville, Thoreau, and Poe. To combat America' extraordinarily high alcohol consumption, which by 1830 reached the staggering amount of around ten gallons of absolute alcohol per adult citizen annually, waves of temperance orators and writers swept the country between 1835 and 1860. In the prescribed poem, the poet transforms images and themes of popular temperance reform. This process of transformation is visible in the opening verse where she presents an "I" who is a wonderfully fresh avatar of the intemperate temperance advocate. The speaker is both completely drunk and temperate. She can exult in her drunkenness because hers is a liquor "never brewed," filling tankards "scooped in Pearl," an image suggesting the pearl-like whiteness of the air she loves and the extreme preciousness of her love for nature.

The speaker is not the hypocritical intemperate temperance, advocating staying sober publically but is privately debauched. The speaker is actually the happily open one, proclaiming a debauchery that is allied with the highest form of temperance. Dickinson, who was fully aware of antebellum popular culture in all its dimensions, seems to be intentionally playing on well-known temperate images. A central sequence in Timothy Shay Arthur's 1854 temperance best-seller *Ten Nights in a Bar-room* involves a landlord, Simon Slade, who kicks out of his saloon the drunken Joe Morgan, who later renounces alcohol due to the ministrations of his dying daughter. Dickinson uses similar imagery in her reference to "'Landlords'" who turn drunks out their doors and to alcoholics who "renounce their 'drams.'" Her use of quotation marks underscores the fact that she is "quoting" or borrowing images from others, specifically from writers like Arthur. But she uses these images only to transform them. The drunkard being dismissed here is a bee that has extracted nectar from a flower. The renouncers of drams are butterflies that are leaving their resting places and fluttering through the air. And the "I" watching this beautiful spectacle only gets more drunk for having enjoyed it. Finally, the images of the hat swinging angels, the gaping saints, and the "little Tippler" leaning against the sun give the poem a metaphorical energy that leaves the reader intoxicated, as it were, with the poet's imaginativeness. The poet's creative toying with temperance images continues in the "We Bee And I Live By The Quaffing" as well.

9.2.7 Influence of the Bible in her poetic language:

A technique that Dickinson modelled in the biblical prophetic and wisdom literature was paradox or more generally, indirection. For both the poet and the scriptural prophets, particularly Christ, paradox (the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas) results in messages that are enigmatic, indirect, even puzzling. In Christ's prophetic exhortations, the paradox usually turns on some contrast between a scriptural truth and a more material or earthly understanding, as in Matthew 11.29: "Take my yoke upon you—and ye shall find rest unto your souls". Christ implicitly calls on his listeners to decipher the meaning underlying his puzzling statements. Similarly, Emily Dickinson has made use of paradox, completely being absorbed by the beauty of biblical language. The lines of the very first stanza draw the good example of paradox. The opening line of the poem "I taste a liquor never brewed" prepares the reader to understand her enigmatic language.

As the poet was influenced by hymns, she makes use of dashes, which create the same kind of musical rhythm that would be present if the poems were sung as a hymn. We find dashes in the particular poem also. The dashes create a rhythm that might not be as apparent if the lines were written with plain old commas or periods.

9.2.8 Usage of unconventional method

The unconventional capitalization also puts visual emphasis on certain words like "Tankards," "Pearl," "Debauchee," "Dew," and "Tippler". They almost shout like "Hey! Look at me!" giving those sounds more punch as we read through.

9.2.9 Rhymes in the poem

The words at the end of second and fourth lines in all stanzas rhyme: Pearl, Alcohol; Dew, Blue; Door, More; Run, Sun.

9.3 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS : POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. How exactly can the speaker in the poem feel drunk without consuming alcohol?

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2. What does it say about the speaker that she will continue drinking even after the bees and the butterflies have gone home?

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3. How do the word choices in the poem help to illustrate the idea of drunkenness?

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4. Does the idea of inebriation lend itself to the concept of awe? How?

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5. Do you believe that the attitude towards drinking would have changed since Dickinson wrote this poem? If so how? If not, why not?

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9.4 THE SECOND POEM : *SHE SWEEPS WITH MANY-COLORED BROOMS*

Another nature poem prescribed in your text is ***She Sweeps with Many-Colored Brooms*.** The poem is given below:

She sweeps with many colored Brooms-
And leaves the Shreds behind-
Oh Housewife in the Evening West-
Come back and dust the Pond! You dropped a Purple in-

You dropped an Amber thread-
And now you've littered all the East
With Duds of Emerald!
And still, she plies her spotted Brooms,
And still the Aprons fly,
Till Brooms fade softly into stars-
And then I come away-

9.4.1 Meaning of the poem

You must have had the privilege of watching many sunsets and know how the setting sun casts different colours in the sky and tints the clouds and landscape. Think of the progression of a sunset. It should enable you to see what physical change each image describes. This is one of Dickinson's several sunset poems. In previous poems, the poet has used the imagery of coloured gemstones such as "chrysolite," a "shroud red," the "evening blood," and a "purple stile," that children cross at the end of the day. But in this poem, it is the housewife who creates the colours as she sweeps the sky with her "many coloured brooms. The opening lines "She sweeps with many colored Brooms/ And leaves the Shreds behind-" simply refer to the dramatic colours of the sunset as it sweeps across the horizon, leaving shreds of colour everywhere. By using the housewife she is referring to the sun and its rays being swept away below the horizon: the sun that sets in west. "Come back and dust the Pond" refers to the colours the setting sun casts upon the surface of the water.

In the second stanza, the poet playfully chastises the housewife for leaving behind some of the broom whisks in the pond, creating purple and amber streaks. The speedy but careless housewife, like an artist with a paint-filled brush, leaves strips and drops of colour wherever she swings her "Broom". The "Purple Ravelling" and "amber thread" refer to multiple strokes and hues in the sky at sunset. As a result, the sun has littered all the "East /With Duds of Emerald". These would be the ear-rings of pale green stars that begin to appear on the eastern horizon as night falls. With "East" being her east America home in Amherst.

According to the third stanza "And still, she plies her spotted Brooms" refers once again to the multi-coloured rays of the sun. "And still the Aprons fly" refers to the brightly coloured clouds moving in the wind. "Till Brooms fade softly into stars-" explains the final setting of the sun into night. "And then I come away-" discloses the fact that she has finished viewing the majestic beauty of the horizon since the sun has departed. Without minding anything, the housewife just continues one of her chores that is sweeping. It finally grows so dark that her effort scan longer be seen or the poet adds "contemplation fails." Watching the sunset, she conjures up image after image as the evening sky changes. She keeps this up until it is dark or until her imagination runs out.

The poem is an extended metaphor: comparing the life of a housewife to a sunset. Even though the day might be over, her work will never be done. The work will always come back. The last lines describe that the housewife will continue to do this, clean the mess and the work will not stop until she comes away, i.e. dies. The sunset leaves, but it must return to do more work in the morning, just like the housewife's work is never ending. Perhaps the wife is Emily Dickinson herself. She is comparing her life's work to the passing day. The last lines: "Brooms fade softly into stars-/And then I come away" may be the end of her own work and her own life.

9.4.2 Domesticity as subject in Dickinson's poems

Similar to the work of other nineteenth century women poets, Dickinson's verse is replete with images of domestic life, allowing the female poet to fuse her inner and outer lives. Domestic activity and the domestic locus inform much of her nature poetry. In poem 824 she writes: "The Wind begun to knead the Grass- / As Women do a Dough." and in her exploration of death in the poem 1743, she welcomes death: "'keeping house 'for thee / I make my parlor orderly/And lay the marble tea". Domesticity is the centre of her religious contemplation: "To mend each tattered Faith / There is needle fair" (1273). Likewise in this particular poem, nature is most beautiful when it resembles an untidy home as she praises the exquisite "litter" of the fall season.

In the context of domesticity, one cannot forget her letter to Susan Gilbert written in June of 1852, some days before she was going to get married to Dickinson's brother Austin. "They are cleaning the house today, Susie, and I've made a flying retreat to my own little chamber, where with affection, and joy, I will spend this precious hour." She adds that "Oh, Susie, it is dangerous" to become a wife (L 1). Joanne Dobson in her essay "'Oh, Susie, it is dangerous ': Emily Dickinson and the Archetype," reads the passage of her letter suggestive of Dickinson's attempted realization of her own masculine self, her animus that is "struggling for life against deadly odds" (85). According to the poet, a girl loses her identity and her life becomes very dull after marriage. One needn't go very far to find a model for such fears. Her father, professionally ambitious, often left his wife to cope with three children and a large house, just leaving insistent instructions as to how she should carryon in his absence. When he was at home, his behaviour was demanding and judgemental. No wonder Dickinson may very well have seen her mother as a "wife forgotten".

9.4.3 Feminism in the poem

Having surveyed a number of the cultural elements that fed into Dickinson's poetry, it is fitting to conclude by considering her in light of other American female writers' works like Mary Lousie Hankins' *Women of Newyork* (1860), Lillie Devereux Blake's *Southwold* (1859) and Louisa May Alcott's *Behind a Mask (*1866). These works constituted a real literary flowering between 1858 and 1866, the very years were her most productive as a poet. In the extreme fertility of American women's culture, it is understandable that almost sixty-two percent of those 1800 poems Dickinson was to write in her lifetime were produced in the1858-66 period. Dickinson made the era's boldest quest for specifically artistic exhibitions of woman's power through her poetry. In the poem "She sweeps with many colored Brooms-"

she portrays that the housewife's work of sweeping continues every day just as the sun that sets will continue its work by rising the next day. Only after finishing such household chores she could find time for her creative art of writing. By venting forth her feeling of pain, she longs for gender-free universal poetry that is reflected in her great radical democrat declaration: "My country is Truth... It is a very free Democracy" (Richard B.Sewall's The Lyman Letters 71).

9.4.4 Structure of the poem

This is a three stanza poem made up of four lines that forms a quatrain. The second and fourth lines of each stanza are rhymed: behind, Pond; thread, emerald; fly, away. It is another poem in hymn or common ballad form. It can be sung to the tune of "Amazing Grace" or "The Yellow Rose of Texas."

9.4.5 Colloquialism in the poem

Colloquialism is a term derived from Latin words for informal conversation and speech. Colloquialism was an almost insurmountable barrier to publication during her lifetime. Dickinson saw the world around her "New Englandly-" and "Provincially-" (285). Provincialism and laconic wit are central features of her poems. "Elijah's Wagon knew no thill" (1254) the fact that the prophet's chariot of fire was not a New England buggy (thills being the regional term the shafts of wagon wheels). In the poem "The Auctioneer of Parting" (1612) the coarse language of the market place is deployed to an agony likened to that of Crucifixion: "His 'going, going, gone'/ Shouts even from the Crucifix, / And brings his Hammer down." In this poem "She sweeps with many colored Brooms" Dickinson deploys feminine (never ladylike) vernacular of domestic tasks. A sunset is personified as a careless "Housewife in the Evening West- "Who should" come Back, and dust the Pond.

9.5 QUESTIONS

1. How does the poet portray the pageantry of the sunset?

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2. What is the metaphor used to explain the beauty of the sunset?

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