A keen sense of the natural and profound exists in the poetry of Emily Dickinson. She is truly a poet’s poet in that one wishes to have not only possessed her mind; but also, written her very work! Indeed, her poetry exists in a class completely of its own. She is a true forerunner of direct literary expression inspiring poets after her to bring themselves to the work. In an era of repressive gender spheres and protocols of existence, the poetic voice of Emily Dickinson was revolutionary in the schema of the genre. She was not only a woman; she was an intellectual maverick of thought and execution in displaying the poetic mind. In the introduction of Susan Howe’s, My Emily Dickinson it is of interest to note a quote by William Carlos Williams when it comes to harnessing the essence of Dickinson, “A poet is never just a woman or a man. Every poet is salted with fire. A poet is a mirror, a transcriber.” Upon this notion, I here purport the poetry of Emily Dickinson boldly disrobes humanity and skillfully articulates intense occurrences in its collective soul.

Akin to the fine art movement of Impressionism which revolutionized painting and enlarged the concept of what constituted art (from idealistic images in traditional art to real-life events and scenes), so the poetry of Emily Dickinson transformed the genre of poetry from the academic salon styled idealism to the personal poignant voice of reality from the poet’s point of view. Although Dickinson’s life spanned the artistic era of Romanticism, the dynamics of her poetic style seems to parallel the artistic disposition of Impressionism. Indeed, “she built a new poetic form from her fractured sense of being eternally on intellectual borders...” Dickinson’s pivot on the stage of
literature and life ushered in the broad use of the personal perspective and execution in poetry. Although traditional publishers denounced Dickinson’s irregular meter, rhyme, and unconventional grammar, it made an historical impact. Her work released an artistic freedom held hostage by traditional allusions to the ancient. Subsequently, it granted the “poetic license” of language and freedom of opinion we have currently come to know in the Modern Era of literature.

Dickinson’s departure from the established rules of poetry and language without permission of the “establishment” is beautifully scandalous! She gives us concepts of the unfathomable in her day as she writes:

**Wild nights – Wild nights! (269)**

Wild nights - Wild nights!

Were I with thee

Wild nights should be

Our luxury!

Futile - the winds -

To a Heart in port -

Done with the Compass -

Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden -

Ah - the Sea!

Might I but moor - tonight -

In thee!

Dickinson’s use of words in this piece may be innocently worshipful or masterfully seductive. Like John Donne and the English Metaphysical Poets before her, she utilizes physical elements to
express an operation of spiritual longing and places a surrendered created persona in the arms of
the sea,

… Done with the Compass -
   Done with the Chart!

   Rowing in Eden -
   Ah - the Sea!

   Might I but moor - tonight -
   In thee!

In speculation, the persona is referring to the company of a lover or God and regrets the opportunity
in real life to be with him and can now only dream of being reconciled. Bringing her power as a
woman writer to display such helpless abandon is brave and fresh in the face of the male-dominated
sphere of literature during her time. The biblical reference to Eden could denote the presence of
both male and female. The poet’s use of the verb “rowing” could very well signify the rhythmical
act of procreation. Hypothetical or not, Dickinson’s language in “Wild Nights (269) is bold,
personal and revolutionary for any woman of the Victorian era. The subordinate relegation of
women to the domestic sphere during her time had to be frustrating to Dickinson. Her ability to
think and express herself as an educated woman of her day (she attended Amherst Academy, a
school affiliated with Amherst College) cost her as she was a victim of her society’s exclusion of
women from the literary sphere and remained an unpublished writer until her death.

Biographically striking is the intentional reclusive state of her personal existence, which in
many ways may have allowed her to illuminate the universal and timeless essence of her work.
However, in concurrence with Susan Howe, “Dickinson was neither the helpless victim of male
supremacy, nor the cloistered recluse of legend, but a bold and confident explorer — an
independent thinker as well as a poet of genius — who was keenly aware of the upheavals of her
time.” Her creative candor and honesty of expression is never more greatly respected than when she is able to articulate the very process of raw human agony:

**After great pain, a formal feeling comes – (372)**

After great pain, a formal feeling comes –
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs –
The stiff Heart questions ‘was it He, that bore,’
And ‘Yesterday, or Centuries before’?

The Feet, mechanical, go round –
A Wooden way
Of Ground, or Air, or Ought –
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone –

This is the Hour of Lead –
Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow –
First – Chill – then Stupor – then the letting go –

True human emotion reverberates through this selection. “After great pain, a formal feeling comes – (372),” catches its reader by throat in a revelatory crisis mode. It brilliantly articulates the texture and literal journey within the universal process of emotional pain. Like Impressionist painters, Dickinson here captures the image and emotional experience of a universally defined human moment in time by means of her poetic expression. She is here the prototypical “transcriber” and “mirror” of man’s soul as deemed though the earlier quote by William Carlos Williams in the introduction of Susan Howe’s, *My Emily Dickinson*. It is this piece “After great
pain, a formal feeling comes – (372) by Dickinson which most inspires the very premise of this discourse and boldly disrobes collective humanity.