

**Philosophical and Religious Approach to Creative Writing  
Case study: Islamic Hints in Selected poems by Emily Dickinson**

المنهج الفلسفي والديني لتحليل المختارات الشعرية لايميلي ديكينسون

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**Abstract:**

This paper aims to shed light on the religious side of the American poetess Emily Dickinson; not as a typical Christian believer but a knowledgeable female intellectual towards Islam. Through Philosophical and Religious Approach, we are going to detect certain Quranic teachings such as Belief in only One Divine, Angles, Holy Books, Messengers, Last Day, and Destiny in a good deal of her work. Despite the fact that the Bible had been the basic relevance for her Christian conservative community, she attempted to widen and differentiate her culture religiously as well as stylistically. So, this paper provides an overview of Dickinson's creative writings based on literary-critical responses combined with some relevant selected poems so as to assert the relevance of her work into Islam.

**Keywords:** Emily Dickinson, Islam, Poetry, Quran.

**ملخص:** تهدف هذه الورقة إلى تسليط الضوء على الجانب الديني للشاعرة الأمريكية إيميلي ديكينسون، ليس كمؤمن مسيحي نموذجي وإنما كشخص مثقف واسع المعرفة تجاه الإسلام. من خلال النهج الفلسفي والديني سنكتشف بعض التعاليم القرآنية مثل الإيمان بالإله الواحد في المختارات الإبداعية للشاعرة وذلك لأن الدين الإسلامي مبني على القرآن. على الرغم من حقيقة أن الكتاب المقدس كان ذا صلة أساسية بجماعتها المحافظة المسيحية، فقد حاولت توسيع وتغيير ثقافتها من خلال وجهات نظر مختلفة. ستكون هذه الورقة مصدرًا مفيدًا للأساتذة والطلاب المهتمين بالأدب الأمريكي وعلاقته بالعقائد الشرقية مثل الإسلام. هذا لأنه يوفر نظرة عامة حول كتابات ديكينسون الإبداعية تجاه الإسلام بناءً على ردود أدبية نقدية مقترنة ببعض القصائد المختارة ذات الصلة لتأكيد توجهها الإسلامي.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** الإسلام، إيميلي ديكينسون، القرآن، الشعر.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Emily Elizabeth Dickinson is an American poetess lived during the nineteenth century. By tradition, she had been carrying out reclusive life; far away from the formal. Unlike other American intellectuals who had dared to criticize sacred conceptions such as God and Bible, she had devoted a good deal of her poetic production to celebrate religious rituals yet depending on her private doctrine that is similar to Islam in order to worship only One Divine. This paper investigates the relevance of Selected Poems by Dickinson to Islam by studying the themes of those poems through religious-philosophical approach so as to detecting some Islamic hints and describing how she could present her spiritual views throughout such models and word diction.

### 1.1. Pillars of Faith in Islam

#### 1.2. Oneness of Divinity

Though she has not referred to God by Allah, she admits His uniqueness, unity, and most of all oneness. She had deduced such greatness through meditation in nature. Islamically speaking, God addresses believers to perceive deeper in the earth system and how this world runs through such an organized way in order to be ensured that behind such an organized world there is only one Creator.

For example, in Surat The Overwhelming Calamity God urges His people to deduce His unique existence through wise gazes at nature:

[88.17] Will they not then consider the camels, how they are created?

[88.18] And the heaven, how it is reared aloft,

]88.19[And the mountains how they are firmly fixed

]88.20[And the earth how it is made a vast expanse?

Similarly, Dickinson kept searching for such one God in every single even she confronts by.

#### 2.1. 1. I know that He exists

In this poem she shows her certainty about the Divine existence and even as one supreme entity:

I know that He exists

Somewhere - in Silence

He has hidden his rare life  
From our gross eyes.  
'Tis an instant's play.  
'Tis a fond Ambush  
Just to make Bliss  
Earn her own surprise!  
But-should the play  
Prove piercing earnest  
Should the glee – glaze  
In Death's-stiff-stare  
Would not the fun  
Look too expensive!  
Would not the jest  
Have crawled too far!

#### **2.1.1.1 Oneness and Onlyness**

To begin with, she refers to God by 'He' so as to admit that He is one male entity and fully respected. To add, though there is no scientific prove justifies her faith, she gazes deeply into a mood of serenity until she overcomes her doubts and finds the answer near to the Quranic verse that says: '[2.163] And your God is one God! There is no god but He; He is the Beneficent, the Merciful' (Surat the Cow).

Though the word 'God' is not directly mentioned, one can deduce that she aims to calm down her inquiries about Him by using 'He'. This Creator is so merciful in the sense that He approaches His people when they are in need. This is because He wants them to keep on thinking about Him, in their prayers, actions, words, and thinking in order to be close to Him all the time. In parallel with Quran, it is mentioned that: '[2.255] Allah is He besides Whom there is no god, the Everliving, the Self-subsisting by Whom all subsist; slumber does not overtake Him nor sleep; whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His;' (Surat the Cow).

Finally, she succeeds to overcome her uncertainties and gets inspired that: [2.269] He grants wisdom to whom He pleases, and whoever is granted wisdom, he indeed is given a great good and none but men of

understanding mind (Surat the Cow). That is to say, only blessed people would be inspired and become wise to deduce the truth.

### III.2.1.3. I'M ceded, I've stopped being theirs

From the title to the end of the poem, she declares her disobedience to the church rituals and Christian convictions, because for her, they were outdated; anymore convincing those mature intelligent people:

I'M ceded, I've stopped being theirs;  
The name they dropped upon my face  
With water, in the country church,  
Is finished using now,  
And they can put it with my dolls,  
My childhood, and the string of spools  
I've finished threading too.  
Baptized before without the choice,  
But this time consciously, of grace  
Unto supremest name,  
Called to my full, the crescent dropped,  
Existence's whole arc filled up  
With one small diadem.  
My second rank, too small the first,  
Crowned, crowing on my father's breast,  
A half unconscious queen;  
But this time, adequate, erect,  
With will to choose or to reject,  
And I choose—just a throne.

Alternatively, she thinks that church is not the only place to worship God because He is everywhere starting from the human heart that is full of faith. Ironically, she mocks at those 'dolls' representing Christian God; Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ in Churches, and supposes that they do not convince even a clever child than to represent Divinity. Besides, all those Baptizing procedures are no more than joyful play done in vain since faith is felt by hearts and has no relationship with 'drops of water' for example.

Oneness and Onliness

The speaker gradually rebels against Christian faith starting from apparent habitual performance towards essential tenets. She declares her own authentic selfhood, and in return insists to worship one, powerful, and authentic God. To add more, comparatively speaking between Charles Baudelaire and Dickinson, Cathrine Clark states that here the poetess rejects social control over her voice that would react against Baptisms and alter her resume about Trinity towards something different (Cathrine 6). Accordingly, Rowena Revis Jones in her comment A Taste for "Poison": Dickinson's Departure from Orthodoxy claims that Dickinson's use of Christ figure is different and more likely compared to Unitarian departure to new liberalism portraying uniqueness and oneness of the Divine and in return admits humanization of Christin connotative meaning (1).

Besides, in Emily Dickinson and the Art of Belief, it is mentioned that she refers to Christ merely as a prophetic representation of humanity and creates a sense of Romantic optimism for those who are not satisfied with Orthodox doctrine and seek for more persuasive elements about another God (Lundin2004, p5). This could refer to another omnipotent Creator, different and more powerful than Christ. In parallel with Islam, it is affirmed that God is one, has neither son nor father and says that:

[112.1] Say: He, Allah, is One.

[112.2] Allah is He on Whom all depend.

[112.3] He begets not, nor is He begotten.

[112.4] And none is like Him.

At the same time, she agrees with the Islamic argument that Christ is like any other prophet and all in all normal human being and all his power is gifted by God. This leads one to deduce, '[3.59] Surely the likeness of Isa is with Allah as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him, Be, and he was' (Surat The Family of Imran).

God made no act without a cause

Through the connotative message, she conveys that God is present in life and is the one had created earth throughout systematic organization placing every single element in its correct place. That is to say, she focuses

on the greatness of God in creating that order in life more than describing God Himself as to say He is the most powerful rather than a human:

God made no act Without a cause,  
Nor heart without an aim,  
Our inference is premature,  
Our premises to blame.

One has to be grateful to God when he discovers the truth behind the creation and how this world runs organized. However, untrue believers look for superficial prejudging to complain against whatever hardships they confront.

#### Organization vs Chaos

Throughout the poem, she advocates the assurance of life organization and instability refers to human's wrong decisions. Simply, she states that behind every event there has been a cause and will lead certainly to a specific result. Consequently, if life is running through perfect order, certainly, there should be perfect Creator managing it. Therefore, in Long Shadow: Emily Dickinson's Tragic Poetry it is mentioned that the notion of life in her poetry indicates the bright image of hope towards one true end, one wise creator (Griffith 1964, p 232).

#### Predestination vs Free Will

She declares that one can confront all life difficulties except the inevitable death; the human free will to escape it becomes useless. Simply, death is linked with Predestination and the latter denotes that every event in life is planned before by powerful God; able to control people's lives. In that way, humans are not totally free in the presence of such divine sovereignty though they mistakenly think they are totally free, and this idea would be considered for some philosophers: a universal tragedy (Leiter2007, p 145). However, true believers shall be deeply satisfied because they are sure everything has been already planned and organized beforehand in perfect way by God Whom they trust to plan them the best. In parallel to Quranic verse, they '[9.51] Say: Nothing will afflict us save what Allah has ordained for us; He is our Patron, and on Allah let the believers rely' (Surat the Immunity).

## 2. Belief in Angels

The Belief in Angels is one of the main pillars of faith in Islam and as essential as faith in divinity. As far as Islam is concerned, it is declared that it is Angles who had delivered the Divine message to prophets since God says: '[77.5] Then I swear by the Angels who bring down the revelation' (Surat the Sent Forth)'. This leads one to say, they are near and beloved by God, and have played a sufficient role in the history of religions. Initially, those unseen creatures are known for being innocent, powerful, and obedient. Besides, they are near to humans to write down their deeds and show them to God who said '[68.1] I swear by the pen and what the angels write' in order to decide either their reward or punishment so as to represent their precise and detailed remarks(Surat The Pen).

### 3.1 Angels, in the Early Morning

This poem celebrates the high value of 'sun' that would become like God and its rays are His Angels (Keane 2008, p132). Those sprinkling rays symbolize flying pure Angels come to enlighten people's life and reflect the presence of divinity since rays reflect the presence of the sun.

She admits that Angels had been created to perform very essential role; that is, to serve the humankind and obey God who said to them: '[15.28] Surely I am going to create a mortal of the essence of black mud fashioned in shape. [15.29] So when I have made him complete and breathed into him of My spirit, fall down making obeisance to him. [15.30] So the angels made obeisance, all of them together' (Surat the Rock). To add, she links them to nature and all what is original, pure and brings relief to the spirit:

Angels, in the early morning  
May be seen the Dews among,  
Stooping - plucking - smiling - flying  
Do the Buds to them belong?  
Angels, when the sun is hottest  
May be seen the sands among,  
Stooping - plucking - sighing - flying  
Parched the flowers they bear along.

To begin with, the title denotes a positive connotation about life, morning activities, nature, and dynamism of Angels themselves. She begins with ‘Angels’ to show her respect and admiration for their energy, power of work, and worship as the whole poem reflects. That is to say, she thinks they approach nearer to her from birth to death and from ‘early morning’ to late night to record her deeds with every single detail. Similarly to Islamic version, it is said that God ‘[16.2]...sends down the angels with the inspiration by His commandment on whom He pleases of His servants, saying: Give the warning that there is no god but Me, therefore be careful (of your duty) to Me’ (Surat The Bee). Meanwhile, they warn people before doing bad but if they insist angels write down the sin.

### **3. Belief in Holy Books and Messengers**

‘[22.75] Allah chooses messengers from among the angels and from among the men; surely Allah is Hearing, Seeing. [22.76] He knows what is before them and what is behind them and to Allah are all affairs turned back’

(Surat the Pilgrimage).

In several poems Dickinson seems to believe in all Holy Books and Messengers and differentiates between God; the Creator, and Christ as merely human being prophet. However, she still examines the Holy Bible in her poems like the Bible in an Antique Volume. In that sense, to a certain extent, she admits some biblical instructions through away equals between all messengers like Jesus and David and their Books, and this pertains to Islam.

#### **3.1. Sweet Mountains Yet tell me no lie**

Here, she admires the natural scene, fresh air, green grass, and high mountains and Amherst was among those towns full of gardens, forests, mountains, and hills. And it was such great nature that led her to believe in the existence of one powerful God, who sends His Messengers everywhere by Holy Books to guide people to the right path. In the poetic imaginative sense, ‘mountains’, stand erect and powerful like true Holy Book that represents the divine wisdom that she glorifies as the source of credibility:

Sweet Mountains - Ye tell Me no lie



Never deny Me - Never fly  
Those same unvarying Eyes  
Turn on Me - when I fail-or feign,  
Or take the Royal names in vain  
Their far-slow-Violet Gaze  
My Strong Madonnas-Cherish still  
The Wayward Nun-beneath the Hill  
Whose service - is to You  
Her latest Worship-When the Day  
Fades from the Firmament away  
To lift Her Brows on You

### **3.1.1 Holy Books:**

#### **3.1.1.1 Psalms**

The poetess has mentioned 'Psalms' in several poems referring to those religious songs and hymns that praise God in Churches whether seriously or ironically in order to show her influence by their content. Otherwise, she includes hymns' connotations to acknowledge indirectly her sincere belief in God and His religious Books. In brief, she admires to look at those next high 'Hills' especially when the sun disk is set down in order to deliver her hidden message to the Divine out of the others' knowledge. Those 'Hills' are the center of interest among town men who are like a 'Nun' lifting her eyes up to gaze at 'strong Madonna'. Here, the impression one would have is about the glory of an omnipotent divine upon believers. In that sense, people look at nature through the same highly respected vision they consider God towards Whom they direct their 'far\_Slow\_Violet Gaze'. This poem indicates to mind the words of the Psalmist when he says: 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help' (Palm 121:1). Equally to the Bible, Quran estimates that mountains can be witnessing eye of God who '[2.63] took a promise from you and lifted the mountain over you: Take hold of the law (Tavrat) We have given you with firmness and bear in mind what is in it, so that you may guard (against evil)'(Surat the Cow).

To sum up, this poem is just an example that embodies her belief on all prophets and their Holy Books and equally respecting them. And the similarity between the Bible and Quran could be detected in several motifs like ethics, meditation, obedience, and devotion to God.

#### **4.1.2 Messengers:**

##### **4.1.2.1 Abraham to kill him**

She dealt with different stories of David and Moses and others such as Abraham. Abraham had been ready to offer sacrifice in order to gain the Divine satisfactory:

Was distinctly told  
Isaac was an Urchin  
Abraham was old  
Not a hesitation  
Abraham complied  
Flattered by Obeisance  
Tyranny demurred  
Isaac - to his children  
Lived to tell the tale  
Moral-with a Mastiff  
Manners may prevail

Simply, through precise word diction, she attempts to narrate the story of Abraham and his son Ishmael according to her understanding of the prophecy that is similar to Islam.

##### **4.1.2.1. Abraham**

Abraham is considered the father of all prophets believed by Jews, Christians, and Muslims and could be the common link to which those religious groups refer. In that sense, there would have been several points of similarity between her original Orthodox and the Islamic version. Here, she sheds light on Abraham's characteristics such as wisdom, patience, intelligence, obedience, faith, sacrifice, and most of all devotion to the Divine. In his youth, Abraham had refused to worship what his clan was doing and '[21.52] he said to his father and his people: What are these images to whose worship you cleave?' (Surat the Prophets).

Like other prophets, God had been sending Abraham to embody certain good traits in order to teach people lively lessons. His miracle is exemplified in his sacrifice by his son 'Ishmael' and offered him to the Divine just to satisfy Him. However, when Abraham was about to do, God sent him a ram to slaughter instead of the son in order to save him and show how much He is merciful when He said: '[37.107] And We ransomed him with a Feat sacrifice' (Surat the Rangers). At that moment, 'Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and beheld a ram caught in a thicket by his horns.' (Genesis 22:1-18). Eventually, the story represents the prophet's obedience to whatever God asks him and at the same time signifies the Divine mercy upon His people so when one is passing through hard dilemma, He sends His angels to solve the problem even at the last moment (Vendler 2010, p452, 453). To sum up, this poem shares Islamic tendency towards Abraham's sacrifice and faithful devotion towards God, who prefers him among others and says: '[16.120] Surely Ibrahim was an exemplar, obedient to Allah, upright, and he was not of the polytheists. [16.121] Grateful for His favors; He chose him and guided him on the right path' (Surat the Bee).

Indeed, Quran has given high importance to Abraham and his sons until the Day of Judgment since God said that He: '[29.27] granted him Ishaq and Yaqoub, and caused the prophet hood and the book to remain in his seed, and We gave him his reward in this world, and in the hereafter, he will most surely be among the good' (Surat The Spider).

#### **4. Belief in Day of Judgment**

Religiously speaking, she shares similar beliefs to Islam that afterlife is determination end to this world:

##### **4.1 There is a Solitude of Space**

Poetically speaking, her true faith in the Day of Judgment led her to imagine that she had passed the Day of Judgment and is able now to establish her own realm just free and satisfied:

There is a solitude of space,  
A solitude of sea,  
A solitude of death,

But these Society shall be,  
Compared with that profounder site,  
That polar privacy,  
A Soul admitted to Itself:  
Finite Infinity.

Here the sense of infinity is relevant to religious books when they deal with Paradise and the afterlife combined with her poetic imaginative language.

#### **4.1.1. Heaven vs Hell**

Though she seems moderate compared to some conservative believers who exaggerate in describing God and Paradise and glorify those religious beliefs, Dickinson hints that in 'solitude of Death' one is going to 'more profound' place referring to Heaven; the place of idealism. In that sense, her personal understanding of Heaven and eternal life is based on love, optimism, and imagination to compare religious Eden to her garden (Farr 1992, p124). In resemblance to Quran, believers think of themselves as the elite '[2.111] And they say: None shall enter the garden (or paradise)' (Surat The Cow). This indicates the total similarity between earthy gardens and paradise when paradise is compared to an earthy garden. However, disbelievers will go to hell where they will pass through severe punishment because of their sins and disobedience. When heaven is compared to a garden, hell has no equivalent place in this universe just to reflect that the punishment there is out of imagination.

### **5. Belief in Destiny and Fate**

#### **5.1 Fate slew him, but he did not drop**

Another poem comes to ensure the relevance of Dickinson poems to Islam:

“Fate slew him, but he did not drop; She felled --he did not fall –  
Impaled him on her fiercest stakes –

He neutralized them all.

She stung him, sapped his firm advance,

But when her worst was done,

And he, unmoved, regarded her,

Acknowledge him a man.”

Here, Fate is embodied in a hazardous element examining the capacity of the human to bear harmful traps and each time fate pushes him into another dilemma. However, true believers like the poetess here have to take on their faith and ask God only for help.

### 5.1.1 Personification of Fate

Mystery and seriousness lead the reader to decode the and connotative message about life and fate. At first ‘Fate’ is embodied as an evil female using whatever tools and tricks to push ‘man’ to fall down. Meanwhile, the latter resists the infinite sequence of tests until he won the merit at last. Another possibility comes to the mind of the reader is that such female is not fate but ‘[3.175] It is only the Shaitan that causes you to fear from his friends, but do not fear them, and fear Me if you are believers’ (Surat the Family of Imran).

In details, in the first stanza, the description of the scene makes one imagine he is watching a movie of horror in which the hero is standing at the edge of a sharp height tottering about to fall, and the image is dark, and suddenly someone violently comes to impale him to fall down. All through the coming lines, the reader is waiting for the hero to fall, yet all the unexpected would happen, and he might resist until the last moment. Courageously, the hero is convinced that he is capable to resist all those ordeals if he asks for Divine help and ‘[3.176] surely they can do no harm’ (Surat the Family of Imran).

The man in this poem had not passed by normal examinations and hardships i, e. he had not given the opportunity to prepare himself but at a glance found himself in the dilemma. Thus, there is no way to escape misfortune and though his fate turns into a violent enemy, the speaking mature voice of the female overcomes the circumstance and provokes his modest strategy of resistance that reminds the reader by Christ when he got wounded yet sooner stood up again and became in better state out of divine blessings (Halttunen2008,p69, 70).

## 6. Conclusion

At the end, one can deduce that she had rejected admitting the belief is the Christian Trinity and instead turned her interest to think of the existence of One and Only God though she was not allowed to declare it openly. This fear and hesitation had created a sense of confusion and timidity in her mind reflected in her poems concerning Divine, who she thinks is One entity and different from Jesus Christ though she still classifies him among favorite prophets

Unlike other papers, this one aims to show her work through Islamic vision by representing those poems embodying her faith in one divine, Angels, Holy Books and Prophets, Day of Judgment, and Destiny, taking into consideration the influence of her community, readings, curiosity, and personal views of life.

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