EUROPEAN ACADEMIC RESEARCH
Vol. I, Issue 11/ February 2014

ISSN 2286-4822
www.euacademic.org

Impact Factor: 3.1 (UIF)
DRJI Value: 5.9 (B+)

# "Learning from the Bad Guys of the Bible": Biblical Characters Embodying Sin and Evil in Emily Dickinson's Poetry

ARBEN BUSHGJOKAJ
English and American Studies Department
Faculty of Foreign Languages
"Luigj Gurakuqi" University of Shkodra
Sheshi "2 Prilli", Shkoder
Albania

**Abstract:**

*When reading Emily Dickinson's poetry one cannot miss the recurrence of certain obvious characters embodying sin and evil. Such character choices by the poet seem to have come as a result of careful consideration and fine observation. Emily Dickinson selects a representative group of individuals who stand in opposition to the divinely established system of values, morals, and relationships as recorded in the Bible. This representative group includes characters starting from Satan, who used to be Lucifer, to Pontius Pilate in the New Testament. They all provide Dickinson with examples, illustrations, or embodiments of artistic, mental, intellectual, or spiritual concerns and form, in time, a logical connection to the beginning, development, possible solution, and the future of the concern of the poet, namely the quest for truth, meaning, and fulfillment in life*

**Key words**: Emily Dickinson, Negative Bible characters, Sin, Evil

Spiritual concerns, emotional turmoil, physical calamities and mental laboring on the part of the poetic personae in Emily Dickinson's poetry are very often interwoven and melted into the images of negative Bible characters. They appear for Dickinson's sake. The poet has a specific time and reason to call on any of such characters. They are all part of the mosaic or big

puzzle which in the end aids the anguished soul to make a distinction between good and evil and put her life in balance by virtue of such awareness.

The first of such characters who embody sin and evil is certainly the devil, the originator of the idea. The first point to be treated here is the original problem of the created beings, namely the fall of Lucifer, "the son (or day star) of the morning", who is later called the Devil, and his angels (Is. 14:12)[1]. The section will also deal with the subsequent emergence of sin in the Garden of Eden, which became mankind's problem to the present and into eternity. The first period is known in biblical accounts as the "cut[ting] down to the ground" of Lucifer and his followers (Is. 14:12).

In a poem that Emily Dickinson sent to family relatives and friends, one reads some fine lines about her current reading of the Bible. The poem quoted below, for the purpose of analysis, was sent to her nephew Ned. Sending poems to people, sometimes enclosed with letters, or in the letter itself, was Dickinson's common practice.

In this particular poem, the first impression that is created is that of a light consideration of the Bible on the part of the speaker in the poem. But this is not something new, or rare, in Dickinson's poems. Her rhetorical devices are not always, in fact hardly ever, that simple so as to come up with immediate inferences about the intended meaning of any particular poem.

The Bible is an antique Volume -
Written by faded men
At the suggestion of Holy Spectres -

[1] *The King James Version of the Bible*, Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge UP, 1769. All references to the Bible will be from this version unless specified otherwise. From this point onwards, biblical references will appear with the name of the book of the Bible and the respective chapter and verse numbers as in this instance (cf. Gen. 6:9, Gen. 5:22). "Star" or "day star" in this verse are translation variants of the "son", meaning someone who is highly estimated and endowed with power and rights (cf. *Baker's Theological Dictionary*). See also *New International Version of the Bible*.

Subjects - Bethlehem -
Eden - the ancient Homestead -
Satan - the Brigadier -
Judas - the Great Defaulter -
David - the Troubador -
Sin - a distinguished Precipice
Others must resist -
Boys that "believe" are very lonesome -
Other Boys are "lost" -
Had but the Tale a warbling Teller -
All the Boys would come -
Orpheus' Sermon captivated -
It did not condemn -

(1545)[2]

In this case, however, what interests this study is the reference to Satan, and the very significant title that Dickinson attributes to him. Among the many subjects that this "antique Volume" explores is the picture and character of the Devil. His title as "Brigadier" is well depicted and conveys a rather accurate biblical connotation. The military term that has been employed here matches very well the pictures of the Devil in the Bible, which she was quite familiar with. Besides, the tendency of Dickinson to use powerful terms and definitions is a result of her companionship with the "Lexicon"[3], making it clear that she really studied and made use of the available copy of Webster's Dictionary.

The biblical accounts tell that Satan, in his original state, was an extremely beautiful creature, endowed with

[2] Thomas H. Johnson ed. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1961. All the poems cited or referred to will be from this edition and will be referred to by the number of the poems appearing in this edition unless specified otherwise

[3] Thomas H Johnson. ed. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. Cambridge. Mass.: Harvard UP, 1965, Vol 3, letter 404. Letters of Dickinson cited or referred to in this paper will be from this edition and will be referred to by L, then the number of the volume and finally by the number of the letter, as in (*L* III, 404).

power, and attained a very high status in heaven. Most Bible scholars agree that his original name was Lucifer. The word Lucifer appears only once in the Bible: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *how* art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!" (Is. 14:12). Lucifer was endowed with a high status and great power, but his pride to be first and highest led to his banishment from heaven. Many angels followed him. Job, in the Old Testament, referred to them as "the morning stars [who] sang together" (Job 38, 7), while Dickinson modifies the terms of reference according to the thematic background when she writes about the "stars - / who quit their shining" (1369).

Literally, the passage mentioning Lucifer describes the overthrow of a tyrant, the king of Babylon. But most Bible scholars see in this passage a description of Satan who rebelled against the throne of God and was "brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit" (Is. 14:15). The same kind of interpretation is often given to Ezekiel 28:11–19. The description of the king of Tyre thus is believed to reach beyond that of an earthly ruler to the archangel who was cast out of heaven for leading a revolt against God.

As such, Satan's influence in worldly affairs is also clearly revealed. According to the Bible, His various titles reflect his control of the world system - "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31), "the god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4), and "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). The Bible declares: "The whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 John 5:19).

Satan also has high intelligence. Through it he deceived Adam and Eve (this, however, will be treated in more detail later in the section) and took over their rule of the world for himself (Gen. 1:26; 3:1–7; 2 Cor. 11:3). His cleverness enables him to carry out his deceptive work almost at will.

The connection between the "Brigadier" and the biblical image of the Devil is made more relevant by Dickinson's reference to the angels that followed him after his celestial

rebellion.

Trusty as the stars
Who quit their shining working
Prompt as when I lit them
In Genesis' new house,
Durable as dawn
Whose antiquated blossom
Makes a world's suspense
Perish and rejoice.

(1369)

The stars in this poem are the fallen angels, who are "heavenly beings or divine messengers created by God who rebelled against Him and were cast out of heaven" (Youngblood, c1995). The lord or prince of these fallen angels is Satan (Rev. 12:7–9). He persuaded one third of the angles in heaven to follow him in rebellion. These fallen angels, or messengers, continue to serve Satan; but their power is limited. Judgment awaits them in the future (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:9). Here one should notice that there is no real distinction between fallen angels and demons.

The allusion in the poem above is to the fallen angels who were endowed to do the "shining working" in the "new house" (ll. 2, 4). They have their brigadier or military leader. He is the Devil himself. Here is an instance of Dickinson applying the advice and expertise she gained from her companion, "the Lexicon" (*L,* II, 404), because knowing well the meaning and definition of a word, she can use it to its best in her poem. This "Brigadier" and his followers make an important theme in her poems. She can trace the problem back to its very genesis.

This depiction of the Devil and his angels leads one to believe that Dickinson was quite familiar with the biblical background of most themes, characters and symbols she chose to import in her poems. These issues were a major concern, especially for the society of her time. The problem of sin and its consequences were almost always a daily talk in the religious and social circles of nineteenth century Amherst.

In other references to Satan, only the origin of the problem is not sufficient for the poet. She takes her analysis further, as in poem 1479, where she presents the most evident features of Satan's character and his cunning ways. She portrays him as one who "has ability" and who could be a "best friend" if he "had fidelity", but this lack of trustworthiness is what made him fall and is part of his character and practice.

The Devil - had he fidelity
Would be the best friend -
Because he has ability -
But Devils cannot mend -
Perfidy is the virtue
That would but he resign
The Devil - without question
Were thoroughly divine

(1479)

These definitely negative features of the Devil will not allow him to be a glorious creature, as he originally was.

The poet realizes that the problem of humanity is not "an instant's Act", but, according to Virgina Oliver, it is "a rather organized process of attrition", and the individual in particular and the society in general, experience "crumbling" because first there is the Devil's "Cobweb on the Soul" (997), and second, "man allows himself, under the influence of the Devil, to 'slip'" (Oliver 1989, 173).

Through the striking metaphor in the next poem, she communicates that she was a witness of the social, moral and religious confusion and chaos the world was drowned into.

Crumbling is not an instant's Act
A fundamental pause
Dilapidation's processes
Are organized Decays.
'Tis first a Cobweb on the Soul
A Cuticle of Dust
A Borer in the Axis
An Elemental Rust -

…Ruin is formal - Devil's work
Consecutive and slow -
Fail in an instant, no man did
Slipping - is Crash's law.

(P-997)

The "Ruin" that the individual and the society find themselves in is the "Devil's work". This ruin is not just for a moment, and then everything is fine, but it is "consecutive and slow", which means that these evil powers are at work every day and every hour. The Bible makes further comment on the vigilance of the Devil to take advantage of any opportunity to put his "Cobweb" at work. In II Peter 5:8, we read: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour". In many instances, in fact, the Bible exhorts people to be strong and well prepared against "the wiles of the Devil" (Eph. 6:11).

Another label Dickinson attaches to the Devil is "Vagabond". Consider the following poem, which will make a good connection with the next subsection in this analysis.

The Clock strikes one that just struck two -
Some schism in the Sum -
A Vagabond for Genesis
Has wrecked the Pendulum –

(P-1569)

Whatever happened to the human race is all the well planned work of the "vagabond" of Genesis. Everything had been created "good," which in other words means perfect, since at the time of the creation there was no flaw in anything, "and God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, *it was* very good" (Gen. 1:31). But Satan, being an adversary and enemy as he is described in the Bible, apparently did not like it to be good.

The definition of the word "vagabond" allows for some comment. Being a wanderer, the Devil does not care about time

or orientation. He caused disorder and he likes it that way. It is clearly indicated that he did not want the perfect creation to continue as such, so by wrecking the "Pendulum" he wants to create some more "schism" in the universe; not only a division, but also an overthrow of order and perfection, resulting thus in a reversal of everything, where even the clock strikes backwards. In this world, many things go wrong and there is a lot of evil and suffering. The biblical claim is that all this is a result of the fall of man which was partly as a result of the woman's deception by Satan (cf. Genesis 3).

It is important to note here that the picture, or the image that Dickinson creates of the Devil, is hardly, if at all, influenced by the traditional doctrines of the church of the age. The poet is quite realistic when capturing the moment as it appears in her sources, but always giving it the touch of the artist, with some irony as to the traditional imaginary picture of the Devil. In a letter to her Norcross cousins, most probably written in 1881, she describes this image as follows:

> We read in a tremendous Book about "an enemy," and armed a confidential fort to scatter him away. The time has passed, and years have come, and yet not any "Satan." I think he must be making war upon some other nation. (*L*, II, 693)

It is interesting to read the plural pronoun "we" in the letter. This indicates that what she is saying here is the traditionally preached and accepted image rather than her own. However, this does not mean that we have grounds for two possible genuine portraits of the Devil: one by the tradition, and one by Dickinson. Relying on the poems that were considered above and on verses from the Bible, it becomes evident that Dickinson's portrayal of the Devil is much more truthful, authentic and closer to the real picture of Satan in the Bible. Dickinson manages to combine opposite features of the Devil. In the Bible, he is presented as the "roaring lion" (2 Pet. 5:7), but, at the same time, we are informed in 2 Corinthians 13 that he may be transformed into an "angel of light".

Dickinson's acquaintance with the biblical figure, the traditional portrayal of Satan, and her poetic insight produce a very fine poetic presentation of the character of the devil. Dickinson achieves this through remarkable elaboration of language and employment of powerful imagery. Lexical and semantic choices in combination with structural arrangements match the poet's intention. Thus, Dickinson is able to depict the hackneyed images and symbols with freshness of meaning and style.

*** * ***

Dickinson's allusions continue with the followers of this rebellious path initiated by the Devil and his celestial followers. Such allusions and references continue with a selected list of humans. Dickinson depicts Adam, the first man, and his subsequent fall as a result of disobedience to God and "enticement by the Devil" (Youngblood et al. 1995, 380; Gen. 5:28-9:29), as a major figure of the appearance of evil in the world. He was tempted and fell in sin, and this is an evident concern in the poems of Dickinson. This act leads to the eternal problem of mankind: sin, evil, corruption, and eventual destruction. This was taken up by people through the generations of mankind and is seen in the lives and acts of several people in the history of the Bible, among them Goliath, Belshazzar, Judas Iscariot, and Pontius Pilate. Such figures are not only alluded to but also considered carefully and analyzed in the poems of Emily Dickinson. These images serve both as a source for the poems and as embodiment of spiritual and intellectual concerns of the poet.

The event that took place in the Garden of Eden is but a continuation of what had already started in heaven. In her further treatment of the theme of fall and the problems humans had and still have to face, Adam is another point of reference in some of Dickinson's poems. The few allusions to this figure,

however, are the crux of the matter. If in most cases her occupation was the endless circles of circumference, here, Dickinson, just like the Bible, deals with the heart of the matter.

In a poem trying to provide a definition of Paradise, Dickinson brings into the scene the first human being, Adam. The main concern of the poem is to present a picture of Paradise by giving an interrupted order of the historical events.

Paradise is that old mansion
Many owned before -
Occupied by each an instant
Then reversed the Door -
Bliss is frugal of her Leases
Adam taught her Thrift
Bankrupt once through his excesses -

(1119)

As it can be clearly seen, in the beginning, the poet recalls the original image of paradise on earth by drawing an intentional analogy with an "old mansion". That she was addressing the special value she held of it or remoteness of the theme is hard to infer. This image of the paradise before the fall had been elaborated by Anne Bradstreet, her verse giving a picture of the perfection and plentitude of heaven before the fall of Adam:

For then in Eden was not only seen,
Boughs full of leaves, or fruits unripe or green
Or withered stocks, which were all dry and dead,
But trees with goodly fruits replenished;
Which shows nor Summer, Winter, nor the Spring.

(Hensley 1967: 70)

Strangely enough, however, the poet moves to the second line in the poem with the indefinite pronoun "many". Who were these many? The command to Adam and Eve was to multiply and fill the earth. Thus, their offspring would inherit the perfect earth and the life they were created to live. This did not last long, and it is implied by the third line where the poet introduces the

timeline of the period. This "old mansion" (l. 1) was occupied only for "an instant" (l. 3), since Adam and Eve sinned, and the biblical account between the creation and the fall is interpreted in the poem as brief.

In this "old mansion" Adam did not need anything. He had all he wanted at his disposal. Yet, he chose to go into "excesses" (l. 7), which, in fact, lead to his and, as a result, to human deprivation from the "Bliss" that was originally intended for us (l. 5). Line 4, which contains the image of the door being reversed, alludes to the account provided in the book of Genesis 3, when the two humans disobeyed God. The story recounts that Eve was tempted by the Devil and ate of the fruit that was forbidden, and she gave of it also to Adam, who took it and ate it. This was enough for God to expel them from the Garden and "reverse" the door. God put a sword of fire east of Eden to keep humans out the garden (cf. Genesis 3). That meant that Paradise was not to be the home of humans, at least on earth, and sin entered the world to be inherited by generations.

The emphasis of Dickinson's poem rests on the one before last line where Adam is mentioned. In this context, "Bliss is frugal," because the human race has been banished because of treading on the agreement. Everyone wants the blessings of heaven, but do people always get blessed the way they want? The answer goes without much thinking: NO. Adam "taught her thrift," which means that from the very beginning people had to learn that every act of excess is followed by consequences.

The language of the second half of Dickinson's poem quoted above matches the theme very well. All of the key terms that are employed there are related to the field economy and management. One reads words like, bliss, frugal, leases, thrift, bankrupt, excess, which all indicate dealing with things. What concerns the speaker in this poem is that the human race, here Adam, has caused the manager of all blessings to be thrifty.

The whole issue is brought about by Adam's "excesses", which caused his and our bankruptcy once and for all.

In another poem, belonging to her early years, Dickinson attempts to start a discussion with Adam through an apostrophe.

> […] Put down the apple, Adam,
> And come away with me,
> So shalt thou have a pippin
> From off my father's tree! […]
>
> (3)

The appeal of the poet here is for Adam to "put down the apple" that was not meant to be eaten and go with the poet and eat of the "pippin" from the "father's tree". The second option is less harmful to all, including Adam himself. The image of the apple is fairly traditional and has been used over centuries in literature to refer to this particular event, or similar ones in later history. But the poet here inserts another term, *pippin* (*American Heritage* 1996)**,** standing for one of the varieties of the apples which probably grew even in her own father's garden in Amherst. One understanding of this is that it would have been better for Adam, and the entire human race that followed him, if he had eaten of the "pippins" from his "father's tree" (3: ll.20), which were given him to enjoy and live off. All the "thrift" on the part the divine manager, as far as the "frugal bliss" is concerned, comes because Adam wanted more (1119). Human dissatisfaction with the limitation of wanting is embodied in Adam's figure.

Another reference to Adam comes later in her poems. During her later years she seems to "prefer profound seriousness based on doubt to shallow faith" (Philips 158). In the following poem, the poet aims at giving one perception or vision of the future that lies ahead of her. The poem is permeated by profound doubt and uncertainty about the coming days.

> What we see we know somewhat

Be it but a little -
What we don't surmise we do
Though it shows so fickle

I shall vote for Lands with Locks
Granted I can pick 'em -
Transport 's doubtful Dividend
Patented by Adam

(1195)

It seems clear that the point Dickinson is making here is that the whole course of human history, past, present, and future has been overthrown by the first man on earth. The reason why men are not sure and do not know of the future is the event that was discussed previously: Adam's fall.

The poet desires a "Land with Lock" so that she "can pick 'em", since now she is "doubtful" about the "Dividend". The element of irony can be identified in the line. What is the "Dividend – Patented by Adam"? The reason she wants to "vote" for a secure land is because she realizes that what Adam did in Genesis has affected her future as well. The inference is that God is not going to throw unexpected blessings at people who continue living in their sins. Quite the opposite is the case. This is where subtle irony makes Dickinson's point more emphatic.

In these poems, Adam does not appear as a model for Dickinson. The speaker does not identify herself with him. Instead, she chooses to be "Eve, alias Mrs. Adam" (*L, I,* 24). Yet, Adam's figure is very significant in understanding the depth of the human dilemma and eventual destiny. References and allusions to Adam are limited to the fall of the human race. For Dickinson, Adam remains at the heart of the "world drama," whose "fall brought man to sin" and with him was the "covenant of works" established (Brumm in Bercovitch 1974, 197).

Eve, being the first woman on earth as recorded in Genesis, is alluded to in two poems and in a few letters. In a

poem which is listed first in the Johnson edition, among other references, we find Eve alongside her husband Adam. God had made "nothing single" (1) but Adam. Then, since the "Earth was *made* for lovers" (l. 1), there was the need for a match for Adam.

> Oh the Earth was *made* for lovers, for damsel, and hopeless swain,
> For sighing, and gentle whispering, and *unity* made of *twain*.
> All things do go a courting, in earth, or sea, or air,
> God hath made nothing single but *thee* in His world so fair!
> The *bride*, and then the *bridegroom*, the *two*, and then the *one*,
> Adam, and Eve, his consort, the moon, and then the sun […].
>
> (1)

Here we see how God fulfilled the need of man for courtship and what He meant the man-woman relationship to be like (cf. Gen.1:26-28, 2:18-24). This appearance of Eve in Dickinson's poem serves the moment when the poet is recalling the origins of love. A later poem brings Eve to closer analysis.

> Better - than Music! For I - who heard it -
> I was used - to the Birds - before -
> This - was different - 'Twas Translation -
> Of all tunes I knew - and more -
>
> […] So - Children - told how Brooks in Eden -
> Bubbled a better - melody -
> Quaintly infer - Eve's great surrender -
> Urging the feet - that would - not - fly -
>
> Children - matured - are wiser - mostly -
> Eden - a legend - dimly told -
> Eve - and the Anguish - Grandame's story –
> But - I was telling a tune - I heard – […]
>
> (503)

The poet here attempts at a "Translation / of all the tunes" (ll. 3-4) she knows. The task of translating nature's music into language seems to have been part of Dickinson's poetic mission.

Among different sounds in nature, she tries to bring the "better – melody" that once "Bubbled" in Eden (ll. 5-6). The implication is made clear by "Eve's great surrender" in the next line, which changed all aspects of human life radically, even the musical sounds of nature. The story of Eden goes towards the direction of "a legend – dimly told" (l.10), and "Eve – and the Anguish" that was experienced as a result of her surrender have turned into a "Grandame's story". (l. 11) The poet concludes her comments with "But – I was telling a tune - I heard" (l. 12).

What is more interesting to see is that in one of her letters the poet identifies herself with Eve, even though the identification is "sometimes whimsical" (Sewall 1980, 699).

> I have lately come to the conclusion that I am Eve, alias Mrs. Adam. You know there is no account of her death in the Bible, and why am not I Eve? (*L*, I, 24)

And since death was a life-long concern in her poems, Emily Dickinson thought that the best solution to it would be not to die at all, but join Elijah in his wagon. The rhetorical question at the end of the letter is both "parodic and serious" (Bloom 1985, 134). But as Sewall continues his argument, with the passing of the years things changed a little, since age does its own work. In apologizing to some friends for not seeing them she writes: "In all the circumference of Expression, those guileless words of Adam and Eve were never surpassed, 'I was afraid and hid Myself'" (*L*, III, 847). Sweet relates this to "the idea of affection which in the presence of friends gives way to panic," which might have made her feel guilty (Sweet 1952, 53). It is supported by her assertion that "Shame is so intrinsic in a strong affection we must all experience Adam's reticence" (*L*, III, 847). This dilemma and intrinsic shame she identifies with Eve's discovery (*L*, III, 847).

Another significant figure alluded to in a late poem is Belshazzar. He was the oldest son of Nabonidus and the last king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire (cf. Dan. 5:1–2; 7:1; 8:1). According to Daniel, Belshazzar was a king given to sensual

pleasure. He held a drunken banquet involving his wives, concubines, and a thousand of his lords, or "nobles" (Dan. 5:1). At the banquet Belshazzar and his guests drank from the sacred vessels that his "father" (Dan. 5:2), or grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, had brought from the Temple of Jerusalem, thus insulting the captive Jews and their God.

In the midst of the revelry, the fingers of a hand began writing these words on the wall: "MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN" (Dan. 5:25). Daniel tells us that upon seeing these words Belshazzar became troubled "so that the joints of his hips loosened and his knees knocked against each other" (Dan. 5:6). At the queen's advice, Belshazzar sent for Daniel, who interpreted the writing as a signal of doom for the Babylonian Empire: "MENE: God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it; TEKEL: You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting; PERES: Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians" (Dan. 5:26–28). That very night, the soldiers of Darius, the Mede, possibly another name for Cyrus of Persia, captured Babylon and Belshazzar was killed (Youngblood et al. 1995).

Belshazzar had a Letter -
He never had but one -
Belshazzar's Correspondent
Concluded and begun
In that immortal Copy
The Conscience of us all
Can read without its Glasses
On Revelation's Wall -

(1459)

In these eight lines of the poem Dickinson manages to capture a significant moment in the history of the people of Israel and of the kingdom of Babylon. This "letter" that Belshazzar received was a revelation from God (l. 1). The moment of Belshazzar's confrontation with the divine presence became the source for Bradstreet, too, when she wrote:

> […]But he [God] above, his doings did deride,
> And with a hand soon dashed all this pride.
> The king upon the wall, casting his eye,
> The fingers of a hand writing did spy,
> With quaking knees and heart appalled […]
>
> (Hensley 1967, 90)

The question could be raised: How does this relate to anything Dickinsonian? Being a poet of revelation she makes a clear and simple point. We have received our letters. The "immortal copy" is exposed to the "Consciousness of us all", and one does not need any further explanation about it (ll. 5-6). We need no "Glasses" (l. 7) to see and be able to read and understand the revelation that has been given. This can be a personal and collective revelation. Personal, because everyone has his or her own letter to read, be that an artistic, social, or religious revelation, and then collective, because we are all introduced to this large print message. It is true that Belshazzar was the first one to worry about the meaning of the writing on the wall, but this does not exclude the concern and fear of the other people present at the banquet. In life people receive revelations that have to do with their own consciousness, but in most cases this is not only a concern of one individual, but of all people in general, "of us all" (l. 6).

In a poem considered before in connection to Satan we find another follower of the Devil's "Cobweb on the Soul" (997) of people, Judas Iscariot. This character is alluded to in Dickinson's poems. However, the brief descriptions in the form of definitions, resembling her "Lexicon" (*L,* II, 404), create a quick, fine picture of the target objects or characters. Poem 1545, quoted in full above, provides the readers with a brief, insightful reference to Judas Iscariot. Who was this Judas Iscariot, and why does Dickinson call him "the Great Defaulter?" (l. 7). Judas Iscariot was the disciple who betrayed Jesus. Betraying Jesus Christ who was the promised Messiah of Israel and the entire world was really a great default. In

relation to this Jesus said: "The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born" (Matthew 26:24). This, of course, was an act of sudden and, at the same time, high opposition to Jesus, and eventually, to God and his work.

In relation to this biblical figure, Dickinson captures one object of nature to draw a significant analogy. In a definition-like poem, "The Mushroom is the Elf of Plants" (P-1298), there is a disguised reference to this abruptness of the appearance of Judas as the betrayer. In this instance, "the Mushroom" (l. 1) is the "Apostate" of nature. Just as no one knows when and how the mushroom appears, no one knew either that Judas was going to betray Jesus. They are both depicted as abrupt, sudden and unexpected, but there seems to have been some previous preparation for this emergence.

> The Mushroom is the Elf of Plants -…
> […]
> Had Nature any supple Face
> Or could she one contemn -
> Had Nature an Apostate -
> That Mushroom - it is Him!
>
> (P-1298: ll. 1, 17-20)

Betrayal and disappointment are definitely encoded in the image of the unexpected apostate disciple and the ephemeral appearance of the mushroom. The analogous image of the "Apostate" and the "Elf of Plants" (ll. 1) incorporates the speaker's concern to depicts transitory moments and objects of the natural world with similar experiences among humans. Whatever the inner concern of the speaker, the enduring image is that of "Great Default […]" (1545) and apostasy. If in the first instance, in poems 1545, the reference conveys religious tones and connotations, in poem 1298, the speaker employs the image of the "Apostate" (l. 19) to highlight one of the seemingly insignificant natural objects and its "transitoriness and

alienation from Nature" (Anderson 1960).

In a letter written to Frances Norcross, we find one of Dickinson's observations which reflects admirably the poet's feelings during the time of crisis. "The loveliest sermon I ever heard was the disappointment of Jesus in Judas. It was told like a mortal story of intimate young men. I suppose no surprise we can ever have will be so sick as that. That last 'I never knew you' may resemble it" (L II, 385).

The betrayal of Jesus was followed by his trial and judgment. He was tied up and taken to the governor, who was Pontius Pilate (cf. Matthew 27:1-2). He was "the fifth Roman prefect of Judea (ruled a.d. 26–36)" (Youngblood et al 1995) who issued the official order sentencing Jesus to death by crucifixion (cf. Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 18–19)".

Since the Jews could not execute a person without approval from the Roman authorities (cf. John 18:31), the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to Pilate to pronounce the death sentence (cf. Mark 14:64). Pilate seemed convinced that Jesus was not guilty of anything deserving death, and he sought to release Jesus (cf. Matt. 27:24; Mark 15:9–11; Luke 23:14; John 18:38–40; 19:12). Neither did he want to antagonize the Jews and run the risk of damaging his own reputation and career. Thus, when they insisted on Jesus' crucifixion, Pilate delivered Jesus to be executed (cf. Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:12–15; Luke 23:20–25; John 19:15–16).

One crown that no one seeks
And yet the highest head
Its isolation coveted
Its stigma deified

While Pontius Pilate lives
In whatsoever hell
That coronation pierces him
He recollects it well.

(P 1735)

Pilate is a good example of the unprincipled achiever who will sacrifice what is right to accomplish his own selfish goals. Although he recognized Jesus' innocence and had the authority to uphold justice and acquit Jesus, he yielded to the demands of the crowd rather than risk a personal setback in his career, his "crown" (l. 1). This is a real temptation to all people who hold positions of power and authority.

The poem relies on a twofold image of the crown. First, it refers to the crown of thorns that the soldiers "had platted" and "put … upon [Jesus'] head" (Matthew 27:29), as he was being tortured and trialed.[4] This was a "coronation that no one seeks" (l. 1), because it is the coronation of agony, suffering, and pain. The second connotation of the crown image is the idea of position and status, especially as a leader. This relates to Pontius Pilate and the position he held as governor at the time of Jesus' trial and a crucifixion.[5]

Dickinson imagines him "to be an undoubted candidate for Hell" (Oliver 1989, 170). He was deeply involved and had a major role in the trial, judgment and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. "In whatsoever hell" he may be he is unable to forget that event. It all slipped through his hands. In this poem, Dickinson is making the point that when people are quite clear in their consciousness that they are doing a major wrong, this is unforgivable, therefore unforgettable.

*** * ***

All of these provide Dickinson with examples, illustrations, or embodiments of artistic, mental, intellectual, or spiritual concerns. Satan is depicted as the one who fell from his original glorious position leading mankind into sin. He is also depicted as possessing high intelligence and deceiving power. The

[4] "And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!" (Matthew 27:29).
[5] Pontius Pilate was governor of the Kingdom of Judea (cf. Luke 3:1).

qualities of Satan's character soon will appear embodied in the humans, namely, Adam and Eve. By Adams fall the door of heaven was reversed and the humans were expelled from the garden and from the presence of God. All this is the result of what Dickinson calls Adam's "excesses" (1119). Eve's story and experience are relevant and match the thoughts of the writer when it comes to the expression of the human relationship to the divine and the evil, and also the image of the female perspective.

The power of evil and opposition is depicted by other figures, too. Goliath, for instance represents an antagonistic, cold world around the poet. This enemy seems to be too large for the persona, yet, she has the courage and gathers all of her powers, but surprisingly, in the end, she is "all the one that fell" (1119). Belshazzar, another biblical character who followed the evil ways of his predecessors, functions as an image of man witnessing the direct revelation of a divine message. The immortal copy sent to him will incite the consciousness of all and one does not need any further explanation about it. We need no additional lenses to see and be able to read and understand the revelation that has been given. The character of Judas Iscariot, also, is employed by Dickinson to highlight the abruptness of his appearance as the betrayer. Drawing an analogy between Judas and "The Mushroom [which] is the Elf of Plants" (1298), Dickinson implies the abruptness and unexpectedness of the appearance of Judas who was going to betray Jesus. Pilate is an example of the unprincipled achiever who will sacrifice what is right to accomplish his own selfish goals. Although he recognized Jesus' innocence and had the authority to uphold justice and acquit Jesus, he yielded to the demands of the crowd rather than risk a personal setback in his career, his "crown" (1735). As Dickinson presents it, Pilate must be in hell. He was deeply involved and played a major role in the trial, judgment, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This image typifies people who are not clear in their consciousness when

they are doing a major wrong. He also represents the indecisive and unprincipled leader.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

_____. 1986. *The International Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdamns.

_____. 2004. *The New International Version of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

_____. 1769. *The King James Version of the Bible*, Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge UP.

_____. 1985. *New American Standard Bible*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

Anderson, Charles R. 1960. *Stairway of Surprise: Emily Dickinson's Poetry*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Bloom, Harold. ed. 1985. *Emily Dickinson: Modern Critical Essays*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers.

Brumm, Ursula. 1974. "Christ and Adam as 'figures' in American Literature." In *The American Puritan Imagination*, edited by Sacvan Bercovitch, 196-245. New York: Cambridge UP.

Easton, M. G. MA, DD. 1995. *Easton Bible Dictionary*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

Hensley, Jeannine. ed. 1967. *The Works of Anne Bradstreet*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP.

Johnson, Thomas. ed. 1965. *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. Cambridge. Mass.: Harvard UP.

_____. *Introduction to the Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP. 1962.

_____. ed. 1961. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.

_____. ed. 1955. *Emily Dickinson: An Interpretive Biography*.

Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP. 1955.

Oliver, Virginia. 1989. *Apocalypse of Green: A Study of Emily Dickinson's Eschatology*. New York: Peter Lang.

Sewall, Richard B. 1980. *The Life of Emily Dickinson*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP.

Sweet, William Warren. 1952. *Religion in the Development of American Culture 1765-1840*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Youngblood, Ronald F., F. F. Bruce, R. K. Harrison and Thomas Nelson Publishers. 1995. *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Nashville: T. Nelson.