

Blasphemy and Islamic Sophism in Selected Poems

by Emily Dickinson*

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In spite the fact that Emily Elizabeth Dickinson lived during the 19th century Amherst among conservative community that gave less chance to female voice to gain a share in social and political life, she paved the way for the coming female thinkers to obtain more freedom of thought and expression. In other words, since she was convenient that “Abdiction of Belief makes the Behaviour Small”, she undercut social conventions and moved under gradual shift from Orthodox Trinitarianism into new thoughts of liberalism. However, in good deal of her work, she still pertains to religious conservatism in wider sense than Amherst Church had been dectated.

Keywords: Blasphemy, Islamic Sophism, poetry, faith, religion

Introduction

This paper is going to investigate certain blasphemous and Islamic Sophistic tendencies in Emily Dickinson’s Selected Poems. Meanwhile, this will be combined with certain critical literary responses so as to assert her belief in the metaphysical world and determine her relationship with Divine.

On the one hand, in Emily Dickinson’s Selected Poems, one would detect some elements of Islamic Sophistic beliefs such as: overall Divine existence, return of human souls to Creator after death, isolation and meditation of human mind as the best way to reach truth besides to the priority of human spirituality in order to reach unification with Divine that lead to immortality.

To begin with, most poems show her deep faith in Divine as the creator of this world and to whom every human soul will turn back after death. This belief refers to Islamic trend called Sophism. Similarly to Christianity, in Islam, Sophism in Introduction to Sufism the Inner Path to Islam refers to the deep belief in an inner spiritual power leading to discover the truth and controlling the world under no scientific proves (Geoffroy, 2010, pp. 1-2).

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Simply, one can reach truth only when he/she believes deeply that human inner power reflects higher power of Divine. Hence, the way towards truth is both spiritual and individual led under no formal prayers at any religious institution. For instance, in one poem she declares “some keep the Sabbath going to Church” while “I keep it, staying at Home”...

Besides, Personally, she presumes that God exists everywhere and His presence is better felt by human heart, especially when one is near to magnificent natural scences that symbolise Heaven and reflect Divine glory for her. In addition, in Bloom’s *How to Write about Emily Dickinson*, it is stated that she uses personal religion different from Orthodox yet still celebrates the unity of God, the creator over everything and the human partial part of that divine (Priddy, 2008, p. 124). In that sense, the world including human kind is divided into equal parts that together refer to Divine.

Then, belief in duality of every single element in this universe as symbol of wisdom and divinity. In Valentine poem, she personifies this universe into duality of everything so as to represent perfect justice reflects the presence and domination of Divine over His creatures. Here, no part will be better than the other but the relationship becomes complementary to achieve the sense of divinity.

Furthermore, in her personal life as well as writings she had celebrated isolation indoors so as to carry on personal spiritual prayers similar to Sophistic performance. Islamically speaking, Sophists believe in what is called Mysticism, that is, the preferance to leave away all material benefits of life to spend more time praying to gain God’s satisfaction. Instead, one will find the real enjoyment from within the human heart only through the spiritual communication with God far away from formal rituals of religious institutions (Mark, 2007, p. 10). Emily Dickinson’s isolation indoors have led several critical resources: like *Emily Dickinson in Love, Life of Emily Dickinson, Securing the Information infrastructure* and others to link her philosophical attitude with this religious trend just like in her poem *Tell all the truth but tell it in slant*. For example, *The Soul's Superior instants* reflects her interest in mystic isolation looking for unification with the creator :

The Soul’s Superior instants
 Occur to Her—alone—
 When friend—and Earth’s occasion
 Have infinite withdrawn—
 Or She—Herself—ascended
 To too remote a Height
 For lower Recognition
 Than Her Omnipotent—

 This Mortal Abolition
 Is seldom—but as fair
 As Apparition—subject
 To Autocratic Air—
 Eternity’s disclosure
 To favorites—a few—
 Of the Colossal substance
 Of Immortality (Dickinson, 1862, p. 144)

In this poem, she elevates the value of the human being not as sign of disrespect to God, but to express her eagerness to become closer to the creator.

As female poetic voice, she had passed through several problems, yet she insists all along on her potential to pass them towards success. Here she celebrates the individual spirituality and priority of human individuality:

Title divine—is mine'
The Wife-without the Sign'
Acute Degree—conferred on me
Empress of Calvary!
Royal-all but the Crown! (Dickinson, 1862, p. 487)

In that sense, in Panentheism is *The Other God of Philosophers: from Plato to the Present*, it is argued that man is aware of universal soul within one's heart urging for justice, truth, love, and freedom (Cooper, 2006, p. 136). Similarly to Greek philosophy and American Transcendentalism, Islamic Sophism states that the human is partial part of divinity since God is present in every believer's heart that is as pure and powerful as Divine (O'Gray, 2008, p. 209). That is to say, it is through poetry, imagination, and spirituality Emily Dickinson reaches certainty that the human being is similar to Divine and eventually could easily reach greatness (Martin, 2014, p. XXIV). Moreover, she insists on the importance of spirituality on the human heart to enjoy self relief. Despite the religious conservatism of her community, the poetess had established personal spiritual bond between her soul and God. For example in *By Intuition and Death is Potential to Man* she advocates certain likeness to Divine, yet in the integral potential rather than the physical appearance (Martin, 2007, p. 32). Comparatively to Sophism, Here like in other poems, she does not refer to logical interpretations and scientific proves rather that her spiritual intuitive certainty from within her heart :

By intuition, Mighty Things
Assert themselves—and not by terms—
“I'm Midnight” —need the Midnight say—
“I'm Sunrise” —Need the Majesty?
Omnipotence—had not a Tongue—
His lisp—is lightning—and the sun—
His Conversation—with Sea—
“How shall you know”?
Consult your eye! (Dickinson, 1862, p. 201)

To sum up, Emily Dickinson refers the sublime nature to the existence of Supreme Creator who had made the system of life perfectly organised (Wayne, 2006, p. viii).

Next, Unification with Divine and eternity will be reached only through death. In the below poem, she argues that the human soul gets unified with the eternal divine then reach immortality:

Death is potential to that Man
Who dies—and to his friend
Beyond that - unobscured
To Anyone but God
Of these Two—God remembers
The longest—for the friend
Is integral—and therefore
Itself dissolved—of God (Dickinson, 1862, p. 267)

Another element of Sophism in Emily Dickinson work is importance to perceive Heaven. Since the latter is the great reward for her, Eden, Heaven and paradise have been recurrently mentioned in her poems such as: “There is another sky, I went to Heaven, There is a Solitude of Space” and other poems, in which she celebrates magnificence of Heaven as wide and fresh green land wherein people will enjoy happiness and perfection:

There is another sky,
 Even serene and fair,
 And there is another sunshine
 Though it be darkness there;
 Never mind faded forests, Austin,
 Never mind silent fields
 Here is a little forest,
 Whose leaf is ever green;
 Here is a brighten garden,
 Where not a frost has been;
 In its unfading flowers
 I hear the bright bee hum;
 Prithee, my brother
 Into my garden come! (Dickinson, 1851, p. 04)

To sum up, good deal of her poems have been studied through various critical responses which admit that she is spiritual intellect insisting on the presence of Divine over all creation.

On the other hand, comparatively to Sophism and faith in divinity, other critics argue that her poems deeply skeptic and blasphemous. First, in Blasphemy is Verbal Offence against the Sacred from Moses to Salman Rushdie blasphemy is defined as the disrespectful attitude against sacred elements like God (Levy, 1995, p. 3). So, this tendency runs against religious conservatism and permits the total free thinking about God like His appearance and efficiency of His power.

Moreover, according to American Modernism, Kalaidjian (2006) states that the poetess had been frequently questioning the importance of religious institutions and doubting in the deeply believed faith (p. 298). Here, the uncertainties lead her to be self deceived since she acts as if she believes despite she had never been persuaded. Hence, in Emily Dickinson’s Approving God Keane adds that ED poetic tendency towards Divine has remained skeptic similar to Friedrich Nietzsche’s expression ‘God is Dead’ as if God had never existed (1). In addition, in Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson, Martin (2007) presumes that ED attitude towards holy concepts is blasphemous such as in *The Bible is an Antique Volume* in which she disrespectfully compares holy concepts with the common and treats the Bible like a piece of fiction or music (pp. 58-59). Besides, in those dying then she skeptically thinks of Divine existence and sovereignty over creation. Here like in other poems, she seems doubtful and such attitude leads her towards lost and anxious (Martin, 2014, p. 95). Disrespectfully, in *God is Indeed a Jealous God* then she reconsiders the creator as invalid:

God is indeed a jealous God
 He cannot bear to see
 That we had rather not with Him
 But with each other play. (Dickinson, 1862, p. 698)

All in all, as if she challenges God’s will and accuses Him of jealousy since humans can live freely and

independently without His assistance.

In the coming poem, she assumes that people will find nothing after death neither God nor Heaven, then they will be shocked and discover that faith is fake:

Those-dying then
 Knew where they went
 They went to God's Right Hand
 That Hand is amputated now
 And God cannot be found
 The abdication of Belief
 Makes the Behavior small
 Better an ignis fatuus
 Than no illumine at all (Dickinson, 1832, p. 646)

So, human life is vainly lived since no God—if He exists at all—is going to either reward or punish.

Conclusion

Finally, after this controversial combination between presence of religious sophism and blasphemy one would deduce that Emily Dickinson had succeeded to converge and diverge between paradoxes depending on her poetic imagination, religious, and literary background. On one way, she seems deeply certain that God is the Supreme Creator and human soul are part of that supreme soul. This is because some poems come in formal style as if she finally reaches persuasive interpretations about truth and God. While on the other, she dares to express her disrespectful responses against religious beliefs and presence of Divinity. Stylelistically speaking, her free verse reflects her rebellious temper and skeptic inquiry against social conventions like religion in order to liberate herself from traditional standards.

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