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“I am Eve”:  
Emily Dickinson’s Identification with Eve in the Genesis Narrative

Nudity, power, beauty, paradise, knowledge, authority, rebellion, anger, punishment, and injustice: these are all themes that Emily Dickinson’s poetry grapples with and repeatedly explores. They are also themes that she found in the Genesis narrative of Adam and Eve in her King James Version of the Bible.

As a central influence in Dickinson’s Nineteenth Century, Puritan, New England society, the Bible was a primary text at both Amherst Academy and Mount Holyoke, where Dickinson attended (Sewell 362). At home, Dickinson’s father read a chapter a day to his family (Sewell 694), and at age 14, he gave her a copy of the King James text (Seelbinder 18). Everyone in her life encouraged Emily Dickinson to study the Bible, hoping it would bring her close to God and would convince her to join the church. In Dickinson’s hands, however, the Bible had the opposite effect.

At age sixteen, Emily Dickinson wrote a letter to her friend Abiah Root, which contained the following passage:

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? If

you find any statements which you think likely to prove the truth of the case, I wish you would send them to me without delay. (L9)

Why would Emily Dickinson choose to call herself Eve, the woman responsible for original sin and the fall of humankind? Dickinson's intimate knowledge of the Bible did lead her to identify with Eve. Through this identification, Emily Dickinson found a way to make the Bible work for her: it pushed her further away from God and from the beliefs of the Puritan church. Dickinson's poetry illustrates her identification with Eve and how this identification influenced her faith.

The Bible inspired Emily Dickinson, though not in the way her teachers had hoped. Her sexual, "thoroughly orgasmic" (Ostriker 64) poems seem to be written in defiance of biblical teachings, however they may have been inspired by the story of Eden in the Bible. In its description of Eden and its inhabitants, Genesis 2:25 states: "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and they were not ashamed." This open attitude about the body is radically different from the confining, repressive attitude prevalent in Dickinson's society. In some of her poems, she uses Eden to celebrate this state of perfection that Adam and Eve experienced. They were free to be naked and enjoy the flesh without shame. Jack Capps says that, in Dickinson's poetry, "Eden is one of the most meaningful of symbols. It implies the supernal bliss of prelapsarian existence" (31). This garden of paradise represents sensuality and freedom. Ostriker notes that Dickinson "lets [scripture] stand for pleasure, eroticizing it by inserting herself in the story, by identifying its spiritualities with her sensualities" (66). In

Eden, Dickinson found a place where the body and soul are not separate, opposing entities; rather, they are combined to experience the fullness of a spiritual, sensual life.

Poem 249J/269F<sup>1</sup> (“Wild Nights - Wild Nights!”) illustrates Dickinson’s celebration of the sensual state of Eden. It metaphorically expresses the speaker’s desire for sexual union with the person being addressed. Short words, five exclamation marks, and eight dashes give this 12-line poem an impatient, exciting tone. “Were I with thee,” the speaker proclaims, “Wild Nights should be / Our luxury!” (2-4). If the speaker and the person addressed were in the same place, they would enjoy “Wild Nights” and would not be confined by rules of propriety. The second stanza of Poem 249J/269F indicates that the speaker has arrived at Eden, the place she was looking for and feels that she belongs. The lines “Done with the Compass - / Done with the Chart!” (7-8) suggest that the speaker does not need any more tools or directions from others. Just as Eve had no people to look to as examples nor human rules to follow, the speaker will set her own course and follow her own heart. The final stanza of the poem captures a sense of urgency and physical longing:

Rowing in Eden -  
 Ah, the Sea!  
 Might I but moor - tonight -  
 In thee! (9-12)

“Rowing in Eden” implies the speaker’s freedom to explore at her will this paradise she has found. The two exclamation marks in this stanza intensify the longing and sensual tone.

<sup>1</sup> In an effort to preserve Dickinson's original work, poems discussed in this paper come from Franklin's versions, which most closely resemble Dickinson's manuscripts.

Were the speaker able to get to Eden, she says, she could freely be with her lover. Poem 249J/269F conveys a sense of natural freedom and independence that Dickinson saw Eve enjoying in the Garden of Eden.

Poem 211J/205F, another sexual fantasy, also alludes to Eden. The first line, "Come slowly - Eden!" implies a sexual climax and the excitement of anticipation. The words "Lips" (2), "sip," and "Jessamines"(3) also suggest sensuality. This poem contains no hint of shame or repression; rather, the speaker feels free to play with a sexual fantasy and to become "lost in Balms" (8). Through these poems, Dickinson expresses a longing to enjoy the shameless state of Eden.

Emily Dickinson interprets Eve's paradise as "a locus of gratified sexuality" (Ostriker 64). Here, sex and flesh are not things to be ashamed of, as her Puritan society insists. Rather, in Eden—the state of perfection—they are relished and enjoyed. Dickinson preferred the ideas of flesh and sexuality that she found in prelapsarian Eden to the confining Puritan ideas of sex.

Besides identifying with Eve's sensuality in Eden, Emily Dickinson also identified with her knowledge of God's instructions. Dickinson and Eve were both very familiar with the words of God. Genesis 3:1-3 states:

And [the serpent] said unto the woman, Yea hath God said, Ye shall not eat

of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

Eve responds to the serpent's question without any hesitation, and she even quotes God directly. These verses show that Eve knows God's commands well.

Emily Dickinson was also familiar with God's commands. The Bible that she used was "well-thumbed, even mutilated in places . . . this Bible withstood a lifetime of study" (Seelbinder 18). Dickinson was exposed to the Bible in every area of her life: home, church, and school. In his book *Emily Dickinson's Reading: 1836-1886*, Jack Capps notes that the Bible was the biggest influence in Dickinson's work. He says that "Biblical quotations in her letters and poems far exceed references to any other source or author," and that the Bible stories she learned in her childhood "were securely embedded in her consciousness" (30). Sewell agrees, saying that the Bible "was in and through her consciousness like no other book" (694).

Dickinson's cannon, saturated with biblical allusions, clearly illustrates her intimate knowledge of the Bible. Fordyce R. Bennett's *Reference Guide to the Bible in Emily Dickinson's Poetry* suggests that almost all of Dickinson's 1775 poems contain biblical allusions. Eighteen poems explicitly mention Jesus Christ, and at least 42 other poems contain names of biblical characters. At least 26 poems mention biblical locations, such as

Calvary (313J), Gethsemane (1432J), the Red Sea (1642J), and Bethlehem (1487J). Poem 1545J/1577(C)F demonstrates Dickinson's biblical knowledge and her willingness to criticize it. The poem begins with the lines, "The Bible is an antique Volume - / Written by faded Men" (1-2). It goes on to quickly summarize the subjects and main characters of the Bible, implying Dickinson's belief that she knows and understands the entire book. The poem shows that, to Dickinson, the Bible is a book "she feels quite free to criticize, to mock, to rewrite, and to use for her own purposes" (Ostriker 63).

Both Eve and Emily Dickinson are well aware of God's word. Eve quotes God's commandment not to eat the fruit of a certain tree, and Dickinson uses God's word as material for most of her poems. For both these women, their disobedience to God does not occur out of ignorance. It is a conscious, well-informed choice.

In Eve, Emily Dickinson found an example of woman who rebels against God. Genesis 3:6 states: "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took the fruit thereof, and did eat." Upon the serpent's suggestion, Eve looks at the tree with her own eyes, makes her own judgement call about the tree, and directly disobeys God by eating the fruit and gaining knowledge.

Emily Dickinson identified with Eve's act of defiance against God and with her desire for more knowledge. According to Capps, Dickinson had "an unyielding devotion to truth"(29). She did not accept anyone else's truth, and she would not settle for anyone else's

interpretation. Dickinson looked at the world, the church, and the Bible through her own eyes. She then refused to join the church and proceeded to cut herself off from society.

In Poem 1518J/1566F, Dickinson describes a state of ignorance. Not seeing and not knowing turn into fear. The last two lines ask: “Is Eden’s innuendo / ‘If you dare?’” (9-10). She suggests here that God does not want people to dare to search for knowledge. If we want to know the truth, we must, like Eve, dare to defy God and the rules He gives us.

Dickinson reveals her enticement by the forbidden and her desire to rebel in the following poem:

Forbidden Fruit a flavor has  
 That lawful Orchard mocks -  
 How luscious lies within the Pod  
 The Pea that Duty locks - (1377J/1482F)

Dickinson uses this poem to demonstrate that she knows conventional rules, yet she still desires to break them. The poem follows the rules of conventional poetry more strictly than most of Dickinson’s poems. Its four lines of unbroken hymn meter contain no internal dashes. They pack in three examples of alliteration: “Forbidden,” “Fruit,” and “flavor,” in line 1, “luscious” and “lies” in line 3, and “Pod” and “Pea” in lines 3 and 4. Ending in “mocks” and “locks,” lines 2 and 4 give the poem a perfect, tight rhyme. These lines, however, also end in dashes. Next to the perfect, conventional rhymes, Dickinson carefully places her rebellious dashes, showing a desire to follow her own artistic rules. Just like Eve, she knows the rules,

but she is not afraid to break them.

The poem begins by alluding to the “Forbidden Fruit” that Eve eats in the Garden of Eden. It does not condemn Eve’s decision to rebel against God and partake of the fruit; it celebrates this decision. To the speaker, that which is forbidden is inherently better than that which is “lawful.” The speaker knows exactly what is lawful and what is not. She prefers what is not. The poem denounces “Duty” and celebrates rebellion, not only as an act of defiance, but as a statement of freedom and independence. Both Eve’s decision to eat the fruit and Dickinson’s defiant lifestyle represent self-expression and the refusal to accept the laws and labels of anyone else.

Dickinson explicitly declares her desire to disobey God in Poem 103J/157F. Lines 15-17 state: “And I omit to pray / ‘Father, thy will be done’ today / For my will goes the other way.” Despite Jesus’ instructions to pray for God’s will to be done as part of the Lord’s Prayer, the speaker here refuses to do so. She does not accept this biblical instruction, but blatantly defies it. She hopes that her own will, not God’s will, will be done in her life.

In Poem 503J/378F (“Better - than Music!”), Dickinson both commits and celebrates rebellion. This account of Eve’s departure from the Garden of Eden (Capps 33) again undermines the authority of the Bible. While Genesis tells this story as the dismal, tragic fall of humanity, Dickinson interprets the same story as a joyful victory. The knowledge that Eve receives from the forbidden fruit does not ruin her life, but greatly enriches it. The third stanza implies the value of knowledge:

Children - so - told how Brooks in Eden -

Bubbled a better - melody -

Quaintly infer - Eve's great surrender -

Urging the feet - that would - not - fly - (9-12)

According to this stanza, Eve's story and her "great surrender" should encourage us to seek knowledge. Eve gives up the bubbling brooks of Eden so that she can gain wisdom. The poem shows that Eve does not regret her rebellion; instead, she enjoys the new discoveries it enables her. In this poem, Dickinson celebrates Eve's disobedience and finds inspiration for her own.

While both Dickinson and Eve are familiar with God's word, they both question its authority and choose to disobey. Lawrence Buell states: "The scriptural antecedent continues to be structurally central in such a way as to raise questions about the authority of the source, even while acknowledging its compellingness (9) Many poems, like 1545J/1577(C)F ("The Bible is an antique Volume"), demonstrate the freedom Dickinson felt to criticize the Bible and undermine and question its authority. Dickinson "mistrusts, resists, and attacks the embodiment of patriarchal power" she finds in the Bible (Osktriker 66). Like Eve, she constantly refused to be constrained by God's laws and sought new ways of seeing the world.

Throughout her poetry, Emily Dickinson focuses on injustice in her characterizations of God, and her identification with Eve helps Dickinson see God as unjust. God expels Eve from paradise, saying to her: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule

over thee” (Genesis 3:16). Eve receives this punishment because she sought knowledge and ate a piece of fruit. Emily Dickinson sees this punishment as unfair.

In Poem 1461J/1500F, Dickinson blames God for human sinfulness. She places the first two words, ““Heavenly Father,”” inside quotation marks, implying that she does not see God as a “Heavenly Father;” this is only the title that others give to Him. The speaker in this poem reminds God that He made humans, so he is to blame for our sins:

Fashioned by thy candid Hand  
 In a moment contraband -  
 Though to trust us - seem to us  
 More respectful - “We are Dust”- (3-6)

Line 6 above refers to Genesis 2:7, which states: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

Since God makes Eve from one of Adam’s ribs (Genesis 2:22), she, too, comes from dust.

The poem points out that God should not blame us for being the creatures he created. As our creator, God is to blame for our sins. In her article on prayer poems, Dorothy Oberhaus notes that critics have called Poem 1461J/1500F a revelation of Dickinson’s “unconcealed bitterness” towards God and her belief that “original sin and constant guilt” are “absurd and hateful” (165). This view makes Adam and Eve’s punishment even more unfair, because their sins were God’s fault, not theirs.

Emily Dickinson again demonstrates God’s injustice in Poem 116J/101F. Told from

Eve's point of view, this poem asserts that God does not have the right to banish Eve from Eden. The garden belongs to Eve because she has cared for it. The second stanza states:

The property, my garden,  
Which having sown with care -  
He claims the pretty acre -  
And sends a Bailiff there. (4-7)

Legal influence is prevalent throughout the poem (Thomas 514). Dickinson alludes to human law with words such as "claim" (3), "property" (5), "Bailiff" (8), "parties" (9), "Justice" (11), "institute" (13), "vindicate the law"(14), and "counsel" (15). She threatens to take God to court to dispute his claim of the "property" in Eden. This allusion to human law suggests that the speaker thinks human law, which is fair, should take precedence over God's law, which is unfair.

Dickinson continues to note God's injustice in numerous poems about other biblical figures, including Abraham, Isaac, and Moses. In Poem 1317J/1332F, Dickinson retells the story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac. She asserts the unfairness of God's command to kill Isaac, and calls God's authority "Tyranny" (8). In Poem 168J/179F, Dickinson alludes to the injustice Moses suffers having to die before entering Canaan. She asks: "Could we stand with that Old 'Moses' - / 'Canaan' denied -" (9-10). She states: "Moses wasn't fairly used" (7) in Poem 1201J/1271F. And in Poem 597J/521F, she again describes God's cruel injustice to Moses. "It always felt to me - a wrong" (1), she says, that

Moses can see Canaan but can never enter it. In the fourth stanza, she compares God's "tantalizing Play" (14) with Moses to a boy's harsh treatment of a younger boy "To prove ability" (16). Criticizing God's actions and comparing him to a boy both undermine the authority of God. Dickinson says that she would have treated Moses more fairly than God. She would have "ushered Grand Old Moses / In Pentateuchal Robes" (23-24) into Canaan. Just like Eve, Dickinson does not accept God's laws, which she considers unfair, without examining whether she agrees with them first.

According to Ostriker, Dickinson sees God as a "biblical bully," who is "manipulative, brutal, and indifferent to human suffering" (63). Emily Dickinson identifies with Eve as a victim of God's injustice. She resents God's authority, as she imagines Eve would have, and she refuses to worship him, choosing instead to undermine and criticize him through her poems.

The next point in Dickinson's identification with Eve appears in Genesis 3:20: "And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living." Not only does Eve care for the living things of Eden, but, according to Genesis, she is the female to whom all people can trace their ancestry. Dickinson admired Eve's position as "the mother of all living," and through her garden and her poetry, she, too, sought to create life.

Gardening was a very important part of Emily Dickinson's life. According to Paula Bennett, she kept an herbarium, which still exists and is "distinguished for its beautiful and careful arrangement." In the Summer, she worked in the outdoor garden with her mother and

sister. She also maintained a conservatory, in which she grew many types of exotic flowers (115). Dickinson was always giving life to plants and flowers and working daily to maintain that life. In her garden, she was the “mother of all living.”

Dickinson emphasizes her role as a creator by repeatedly referring to her garden in poems. She includes the phrase “my Garden” in the first lines of both Poem 484J/469F and Poem 500J370F. In Poem 2J/A13-2F, Dickinson coaxes her brother, Austin, into her garden. This poem describes why Dickinson feels that the world she has made (here, her “garden”) is better than the outside world, with its “darkness” (4), “faded forests” (5), and “silent fields” (6). In her garden, she says, the sky is “ever serene and fair” (2), and the “leaf is ever green” (8). Hers is a “*brighter* garden / where not a frost has been” (9-10), and the “unfading flowers” (11) and the “bright bee” (12) make her garden even more attractive. She offers Austin this special, “brighter garden” she has made, saying “prithee, my Brother, / into *my* garden come!” (13-14). Dickinson places emphasis on her ownership of the garden and her role as its creator.

Emily Dickinson also created her own world with poetry. Making her poems live was a primary concern to Dickinson, as she reveals in a letter to Thomas Wentworth Higginson: “Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive?” (L260). She knew that great poetry has a life of its own, apart from the poet. She wanted her verse to breathe with vitality and energy and to live on forever. Through her poetry, she wanted to create life.

Emily Dickinson claims in Poem 724J/747F that, “It’s easy to invent a Life - / God

does it - every Day -" (1-2). Dickinson creates countless lives within her poetry that help it to move, breathe, and speak. She invents hundreds of flowers, plants, insects, and animals. Dickinson also uses poetry to give life to abstract ideas. In Poem 1033J/988F, she gives life to "Death" and "Passion" by giving them words. She also gives birth to many characters in her poems, and often breathes life back into characters who have died. For example, the speaker in Poem 465J/591F has died and describes how death feels. Though dead, the speaker is very much alive in this poem, still thinking about memories and feeling loss. Similarly, the speaker in Poem 1020J/1031F has died and tells a grieving mother that she has met her dead son. She adds that he has made "so many smiling / New Acquaintance" (7-8), implying a joyful life after death. In these types of poems, Dickinson gives thoughts, feelings, words, and actions to dead characters. She creates life where life has ceased. In her poems live hundreds of people, creatures, and ideas, all created by the imagination of Emily Dickinson, their mother.

Dickinson tried to keep her poetry alive in another way. By resisting publication, she ensured that most of her poems would only exist in manuscript form during her lifetime. Compared to a typed document, handwritten documents, like Dickinson's manuscripts, preserve more personality and distinguish one author from another. In this way, they are more alive than uniform, typed words that come from a machine and not from a hand. The manuscripts show the closest connection to the living mind of Emily Dickinson because they have not been changed or distorted by others, and because all of her marks and variants, however unconventional, remain. Perhaps this resistance to having her poems published as

typed documents instead of manuscripts could help explain her refusal to publish. She wanted her verse to remain as alive as possible. In her world of poems, just as in her garden, Dickinson is Eve: “the mother of all living.”

Dickinson identified so strongly with Eve that she wanted to live in paradise as Eve had. She soon realized that she did live in paradise, but not God’s version—her own. In a letter to her brother, Austin, at age 21, Emily Dickinson describes her affection for home:

“Home is a holy thing—nothing of doubt or distrust can enter it’s [sic] blessed portals. I feel it more and more as the great world goes on and one and another forsake, in whom you place your trust—here seems indeed to be a bit of Eden which not the sin of *any* can utterly destroy—smaller it is indeed, and it may be less fair, but fairer it is and brighter than all the world beside” (L59).

To Dickinson, home is her own paradise, her own Eden. She cut herself off from the world and created paradise at home, in her mind, with her flowers and poetry.

In Genesis, Chapter 3, God banishes Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, and He will not let them or any other humans live in an earthly paradise. Dickinson, however, uses this banishment from paradise to again resist God’s authority in her life. She seems to say to God, “I can live in paradise if I want! Watch me!” Ostriker notes that “Fantasies of heaven and paradise stream through her work . . . as a figure for earthly and immanent joy” (64).

Dickinson suggests earth’s superiority over heaven in the following two-line poem: “A Letter is a joy of Earth - / It is denied the Gods -” (1639J/1672F). In Poem 324J/236F, the speaker

stays home on the Sabbath, listens to the birds sing, and realizes that, “instead of going to heaven at last, / I’m going all along” (11-12, Ostriker 64). Dickinson believes that she can experience heaven now and does not need to wait for God’s permission.

Compared with God’s promise of heaven, Emily states in a letter to Abiah Root that she prefers the world (L13). The idea that earth is paradise and we already live in heaven speaks against Christian teachings about sin, salvation, and heavenly rewards. Dickinson, however, asserts this subversive idea in numerous poems which celebrate an earthly paradise and deny the need of God’s heaven.

Poem 1657J/1734F uses Eden as a symbol of an earthly state of perfection and illustrates Dickinson’s belief that we can enjoy heaven on earth:

Eden is that old fashioned House  
 We dwell in every day  
 Without suspecting our abode  
 Until we drive away (1-4)

The word “old-fashioned” suggests that an earthly home is tested by time, but that we may overlook its value. We are not content with what we have; we constantly strive for something better. In this case, we think we have to go somewhere else on God’s terms to enjoy heaven, but we do not realize that we can enjoy heaven here and now.

Emily Dickinson did not accept God’s banishment from earthly paradise. Instead, she insisted that she could make her own paradise. In Poem 503J/378F (“Better than Music!”),

mentioned earlier, Dickinson places Eve in the same position, making her own paradise on earth. Although the Bible shows Adam and Eve suffering after God banishes them from Eden, the story turns out differently in Dickinson's imagination. This poem shows Eve rejoicing over the new wisdom with which she sees the world. Just like Eve in this poem, Emily Dickinson's refusal to submit to God's authority does not ruin her life; it enhances it. According to Dickinson's imagination, both woman can create their own earthly paradise.

Another point in the Genesis narrative that captures Dickinson's interest and leads her to identify with Eve is the omission of any information about Eve's death. Genesis records Adam's death in 5:5, but never mentions Eve's. In the letter to Abiah Root in which she calls herself Eve, Dickinson highlights this point to prove her case. She says, "You know there is no account of her death in the Bible, and why am not I Eve?" (L9). Dickinson feels such a strong identification with Eve that she playfully wonders if Eve is living in her. The story of Eve in the Bible provides many rich points that Emily Dickinson could have used as evidence to prove her self-identification as Eve. However, she only mentions that the Bible does not record Eve's death, a detail which, to Dickinson, implies Eve's immortality.

Throughout Dickinson's cannon, immortality appears as a central theme. She tells Higginson that immortality is "the Flood subject" (L319), indicating its importance in her life and work. Sylvia Hennenberg's discussion of immortality in Dickinson's poetry notes that 55 poems and many letters contain explicit references to immortality (159). In most of these references, Dickinson points to the uncertainty associated with immortality. For example, in

Poem 1646J/1683F, she calls immortality “A bland of uncertainty” (8) that we can never escape. Poem 1417J/1440F muses on human nature’s gravitation toward mysteries, like immortality, that we cannot solve. The last lines ask: “Where go we - / Go we anywhere / Creation after this? (11-13). Poem 501J/373F echoes this theme, saying of immortality: “To guess it, puzzles scholars” (9), and faith “Plucks at a twig of Evidence” (15) that might prove immortality.

In this poem, however, the speaker seems to know something that no one else does. She opens the poem with the following bold sentence: “This World is not Conclusion” (1). She says that immortality is “Invisible, as Music - / But positive, as Sound -” (3-4). The speaker’s belief in immortality suggests that Dickinson shared that belief, even though she repeatedly questions it. This belief and the wealth of references in her work to immortality combine to explain why Dickinson only uses the fact the Bible does not record Eve’s death to prove her assertion that she is Eve.

In Dickinson’s work, immortality “signifies subliminal and empowering uncertainty” (Hennenberg 159). The omission of Eve’s death in the Genesis narrative creates for Dickinson an “empowering uncertainty” because it leaves open the possibility that Eve may still be alive. Eve’s possible immortality attracted Emily Dickinson, who was also concerned with her own immortality. While Dickinson hid herself and her work from the outside world, Hennenberg argues that “she actively sought worldly, poetic immortality by leaving behind an impressive, creative legacy, the discovery of which she was evidently not particularly determined to

prevent” (159). Whether Dickinson actively sought immortality or not, she has achieved it through her poems. And whether Eve dies or not, she achieves immortality through her rebellious act against God.

The legacies that both Eve and Dickinson leave behind share striking similarities. Both Dickinson’s poems and Eve’s original sin represent subversion to authority by an independently thinking woman. Both came about because of a search for wisdom, truth, and understanding. Both legacies have been widely influential. And they both have far reaching consequences and implications that we have yet to fully comprehend.

In the second chapter of the first book of the most influential text of her life, Dickinson met Eve. She found in this woman a role model for subversive behavior and a source of great inspiration. She identified with Eve through her sense of sex and sensuality, her knowledge of God’s word, her disobedience to God, her characterization of God as unjust, her desire to be “the mother of all living,” her characterization of Earth as Eden, and her belief in immortality. This identification enables Dickinson to criticize and question God’s word and authority, as she saw Eve doing in Genesis, Chapter 3. Herbert Schreidau comments on the subversive nature of Dickinson’s treatment of the Bible: “She used [the Bible] wholly against the grain of its accepted interpretations in her time. She sloughed off the orthodox Calvinism and conventional piety of her religion and her family early in life, and went on to challenge concepts of ‘Heaven,’ ‘Eden,’ and ‘Eternity’ with her own bold definitions” (26). Dickinson read her Bible devoutly and came to know it intimately. However, she used it for her own

purposes, not to grow closer to God, but to challenge him and resist his authority, just as Eve does when she decides to eat the fruit in the Garden of Eden. Eve's subversive act gives all humans knowledge, wisdom, and the power of discernment between good and evil.

Dickinson's subversive act of writing also gives us tools (in the form of poems) to question ourselves and our God and to learn about our world.

The impact Eve has shows Dickinson how much power one person, even a woman, can have.

"I am Eve," Emily Dickinson declares. With these three words, she suggests that she has the power to change the course of humanity. Like Eve, she understands sensuality without shame, she will be disobedient to God, she is not afraid to disregard God's word or to use it for her own purposes, she sees herself as a creator, she believes she lives in paradise, and she may be immortal. These words also tell us that Emily Dickinson has looked at the world with her own eyes, and that she has tasted the fruit of the tree of knowledge for herself.

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