

Figurative Language in William and Emily Dickinson's Poem

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Abstract - The term "literature" is a comprehensive term that typically refers to works that fall within the primary genres of epic, play, lyric, novel, short story, and ode. Poetry is a form of written communication that utilises a distinct style and cadence to convey the writer's concepts and perspectives to the audience. Due to the intricate employment of language in poetry, there exist numerous schools of thought concerning the methods by which language can or ought to be employed in poetic contexts. The incorporation of figurative language is a pivotal element in the comprehensive framework and configuration of a poem. The utilisation of language in a distinctive and often unorthodox manner has led to William and Emily Dickinson being recognised as two of the most noteworthy poets of their time. The present investigation endeavours to examine the varieties of figurative language employed by poets in their literary works. This study focuses on the life of Emily Dickinson and her utilisation of figurative language in her poetry. Various figures of speech were employed, including but not limited to metaphor, personification, simile, hyperbole, and imagery.

Keywords - Literature, Poetry, Figurative Language, Metaphor, Personification, Simile, Hyperbole, Imagery

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

When a piece of writing combines intellectual content with beautiful form in order to depict language in a way that is distinct from how it is used in day-to-day life, we call that piece of writing a literary work (Gill, 2006). Literary works are regarded to be works of art. In the words of J.A. Cuddon (2013), "Literature is a broad word that frequently means works belonging to the main genres: epic, play, lyric, novel, short story, and ode." Poetry is given a significant position among the various forms of literary works because of the imaginative ways in which it utilises the English language (Abrams, 1999). Poetry is a kind of written expression that employs a unique style and rhythm to transmit the author's thoughts and ideas to the reader. The point that is being made here is that poetry is a more complicated kind of innovation, but the fact that it is more complicated does not automatically make it more important (Kennedy, 1983).

According to the findings of a number of academics, a sizeable percentage of poets have produced "witty and humorous poetry." Because poetry makes such sophisticated use of language, there are a great many different schools of thought regarding the ways in which language may or should be utilised in poetic ways. One of these schools of thought is known as the

linguistic minimalist school. Poetics, as most people understand the term, refers to a philosophical approach to poetry that lays an emphasis on the compositional and structural aspects of poetry. It is generally agreed that Aristotle's conception of poetry (384–322 BC) was the most influential of its day. Since that time, a number of authors, critics, and poets have spent their time and attention to exploring this subject; the conclusions that they have formed often point the finger at a particular philosophical or literary trend (Kennedy, 1983). The definition of the word has been enlarged to incorporate an awareness of creative hermeneutics, cultural activities, political discourses, and social realities in modern theory. This expansion of the meaning of the term may be found in a number of different areas (Rahmawati, 2019).

The term "poem" refers to the many different ways in which man has given a rhythmic expression to the most creative and impassioned observations on his environment, himself, and the interplay between the two. Poems may take many different forms. A poem is a phrase that is used to the many different forms of expression that man has offered.

Because a poem has the potential to serve as an effective form of instructional media for students, there are numerous connections that can be made between education and poetry. This enables the

researcher to communicate their educational findings to the students, which is one of the many connections that can be made between education and poetry (Baldick, 2001). In addition to this, in the process of learning a poem in a novel way, in order to keep students engaged in the process and prevent them from getting bored in the classroom, it is important to study the poem in a manner that is unique. It is possible to evaluate and comprehend the historical, cultural, linguistic, and other meanings connected with a poem by breaking down the components and elements of a poem using different theories of poetics. These theories may be used to break down the components and aspects of a poem (Abrams, 1999).

Figurative Language

The utilisation of figurative language is a crucial aspect of a poem's overall structure and composition. The notion is conveyed with greater clarity and effectiveness through nonverbal means than through verbal communication. Figurative language is employed not only in colloquial discourse but also in more refined modes of literary representation. According to Baldick's (2001) definition, a figure of speech is an expression that deviates from the conventional literal meaning or typical word order, and instead emphasises certain sounds or patterns. Chaisilwattana (2009) posits that the utilisation of language in a manner that elicits analogies is illustrative of figurative language. As a result, figurative language communicates a non-literal interpretation. Figurative language is a literary technique employed by authors to render abstract concepts more concrete through the use of words. As a result of this phenomenon, poets frequently employ the use of analogies to establish parallels between their literary compositions and widely recognised entities. The efficacy of figurative language in conveying emotional sentiments surpasses that of factual language, thereby eliciting profound affective responses from readers.

The literary genre of literature incorporates a significant aspect known as figurative language. The utilisation of figurative language is a highly efficacious technique for augmenting the comprehensibility of a written work. Poetry is a form of literature, and figurative language pertains to linguistic constructions that employ metaphorical devices. The utilisation of metaphor by the poet throughout the poem serves to enhance the diversity of the content (Aprilianti, 2020).

Table 1: Figurative Language and Definition

Type	Definition
Allusion	A figure of speech that briefly and inexplicably alludes to a well-known someone, location, object, event, literary work, political figure, or passage from the Bible (Baldick, 2001).
Apostrophe	A metaphorical language used to address a deceased or absent person directly as if they were alive and present in the moment (Baldick, 2001). It is also used to address non-human objects as if they were alive and human.
Hyperbole	A figure of speech that entails speaking more dramatically than necessary to highlight or underline a speaker's significance, to convey seriousness or comedy (Baldick, 2001).
Irony	A rhetorical device where the use of language highlights the discrepancy between literal and intended meaning.
Litotes	A figure of speech that distorts the meaning of the subject or uses words that are less meaningful than the truth (Baldick, 2001).
Metaphor	A figure of speech comparable to the simile that compares two dissimilar objects without using conjunction words or other comparison-indicating terms (Baldick, 2001).
Metonymy	a figure of speech in which the name of one object is swapped out for the name of another that is closely related to it (Baldick, 2001).

Oxymoron	A figure of speech that combines two opposing concepts to produce an impact and evoke two distinct emotions at once, such as "living death" (Baldick, 2001).
Paradox	A rhetorical device used to make statements seem contradictory to the listener.
Periphrasis	a form of speech that uses many words to allude to something indirectly without really mentioning it (Baldick, 2001).
Personification	a figure of speech that is employed to represent or allude to non-human entities like animals, objects, or abstract ideas as if they were people (Baldick, 2001).
Simile	a figure of speech that uses connecting verbs or phrases, such as "like" or "as," to compare two dissimilar things (Baldick, 2001).
Symbol	a figure of speech that, in the most basic sense, refers to something that stands for or symbolises something outside it, generally a concept that is usually connected to it (Baldick, 2001).
Synecdoche	It is a typical figure of speech to refer to something indirectly by specifying merely a component or element of it (Baldick, 2001).

William and Emily Dickinson's Poems

William and Emily Dickinson are regarded as two of the most significant poets of their era due to their unique and frequently unconventional employment of language. The poets employed a diverse array of figurative language techniques to aptly convey their concepts, emotions, and perspectives to their intended readership (Sewall, 1980).

Emily Dickinson was born on December 10, 1830, into a family that would later gain significant recognition in Amherst, Massachusetts. Emily Norcross and Edward Dickinson were parents to three children, with the birth of their second child being the subject of discussion. The individual's father held a notable position as a legal professional, having obtained a degree from Yale University (Mcintosh, 2013). Additionally, he served as the Treasurer of Amherst College and held a seat in the United States Congress. In addition, the subject had a sibling of younger age who was commonly referred to as Lavinia, and a sibling of older age who was commonly referred to as Austin. Samuel Fowler Dickinson, the great-grandfather of the individual in question, achieved professional success as a lawyer and obtained a degree from Dartmouth College. Additionally, he played a pivotal role in the establishment of Amherst College as one of its original founders. Furthermore, he erected one of the earliest brick dwellings in the New England

municipality situated on Main Street (Halimah, 2015). The edifice, commonly referred to as "The Homestead," has attained the status of a National Historic Landmark and is among the preserved Dickinson residences situated in the Emily Dickinson Historic District.

From 1834 to 1847, Emily Dickinson attended the Amherst Academy, an esteemed educational establishment. In 1847, the individual in question enrolled in courses at the Hadley Female Seminary. However, after a duration of no more than one year, she departed from the institution and returned to Amherst, where she subsequently commenced a life of seclusion. During this period, she initiated the practise of creating poetic works. Initially, the artist's early endeavours were characterised by conventional techniques. However, over the course of time, she progressively engaged in more exploratory approaches, ultimately culminating in the development of her distinctive and recognisable style (Dickinson, 1980).

Emily Dickinson authored close to 1,800 poems over the course of her career, yet a mere ten of them are recognised to have been disseminated during her lifetime. Despite sending hundreds of poems to friends and correspondents, she appeared to have kept the majority of her poetry to herself. Emily Dickinson's literary works have been acknowledged to have exerted a significant influence on modern-day poetry. The commonly held belief that female poets are introverted and eccentric has contributed to the perception that they possess a heightened level of intellectual and creative aptitude. The development of her imaginative capacity was notably influenced by various factors such as her familial environment, religious beliefs, social circle, and the surrounding natural environment. These elements played a crucial part in the conversion of her ideas into literary works, including poems and letters. Emily Dickinson is widely regarded as one of the most exceptional and distinctive poets to emerge from the United States. In her personal life, the individual in question composed numerous correspondences and an estimated 1800 poetic works, (Sewall, 1980).

The subject in question was recognized for her penchant for donning white attire and remained unmarried throughout her lifetime. The development of her imaginative capacity was significantly influenced by various factors such as her familial background, religious beliefs, social circle, and the surrounding natural environment. These factors played a crucial role in the process of translating her ideas into written works, including poems and letters (Dickinson, 1958).



Figure 1: Emily Dickinson, artwork from the Mount Holyoke daguerreotype taken in December 1846 or early 1847, from laphamsquarterly.org.

Figurative Language in Dickinson's Poem

Emily Dickinson, a renowned poet, was recognised for her extensive utilisation of figurative language in her literary works. The poet's literary works frequently explore themes such as the inevitability of death, the environment, religious beliefs, and amorous relationships (Wulandri, 2015). The enduring popularity of Emily Dickinson's poetry can be attributed to her adept utilisation of metaphorical language, which imbues her works with a lasting and memorable quality. The subsequent instances illustrate the utilisation of metaphorical expressions in her poetic compositions (Colston, 2015).

- **Metaphor:** The "*Hope is the thing with feathers*" uses the analogy of hope being similar to a bird that resides in the heart and sings a melody that never ends, regardless of how severe the weather may be. With the use of this extended metaphor, we can see how the notion of hope may serve as a source of comfort and resilience when circumstances are tough.
- **Personification:** In "*I heard a Fly buzz - when I died,*" the personification of death is a fly that buzzes about the room as the speaker is on their deathbed. Notwithstanding the role that death plays in human life, this personification draws attention to the monotony and mundanity of its existence.
- **Simile:** In "*I'm Nobody! Who are you?*" the speaker uses a simile in which they compare themselves to a frog in a swamp to emphasise their experience of being alone and insignificant in relation to society. The reader's imagination is painted with a more detailed picture as a result of the use of the simile, which also helps to effectively portray the speaker's feelings.
- **Hyperbole:** The use of hyperbole occurs in "*I'm Nobody! Who are you?*" in which the speaker

exaggerates their lack of celebrity by claiming that it is "much safer" for them to be nothing rather than a famous person. This exaggeration highlights the speaker's yearning for seclusion and alone in their own space.

- **Imagery:** The speaker in "*Because I could not halt for Death*" recounts the landscape that they see while travelling in a carriage with Death. The images of the fields, the setting sun, and the cold of night symbolise the passage of time and the phases of life that the speaker encounters on their trip. The journey begins with the speaker's childhood and ends with their adulthood.

Emily Dickinson frequently enhanced the calibre of her poetry and its exegesis through the use of figurative language, a customary technique she employed. The subsequent enumeration comprises the figurative expressions recurrently present in her poetic works, accompanied by select illustrations and corresponding explications (Richards, 2013).

CONCLUSION

The term "literature" is an all-encompassing term that generally pertains to works that belong to the fundamental genres of epic, play, lyric, novel, short story, and ode. Poetry is a literary genre that employs a unique style and rhythm to express the author's ideas and viewpoints to the readership. The intricate utilisation of language in poetry has resulted in the emergence of various schools of thought regarding the techniques that can or should be employed in poetic contexts. The inclusion of figurative language is a crucial aspect within the comprehensive structure and composition of a poem. The idiosyncratic use of language has resulted in the recognition of William and Emily Dickinson as two of the most notable poets of their era. The current study aims to analyse the diverse forms of figurative language utilised by poets in their literary compositions. The present investigation centres on the biography of Emily Dickinson and her implementation of figurative language in her poetic compositions. The text utilised diverse rhetorical devices such as metaphor, personification, simile, hyperbole, and imagery.

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