

# An Analysis of Figurative Language on the Poem of William and Emily Dickinson

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**Abstract** - The incorporation of figurative language is a crucial aspect of the literary components that contribute to the comprehensive structure of a poem. The notion is conveyed with greater eloquence and clarity through nonverbal means. Figurative language is employed in both formal literary contexts and in everyday communication. The primary focus of the researcher centres on Emily Dickinson's utilisation of figurative language and its correlation to the thematic content of her poetic works. William and Emily Dickinson are widely recognised as highly influential poets of their era, owing to their unique and frequently unorthodox employment of language. The study's data collection process involved a thoughtful consideration of the discrete categories of primary and secondary data. The assessment of information requires the implementation of a content analysis, which entails a thorough examination of the textual environment of a literary work or manuscript. The objective of the present investigation is to analyse the incidence of figurative language in a representative subset of 30 poems. The results suggest that metaphors were the dominant form of figurative language utilised with a considerable degree of frequency. The research yielded four statistical results, among which 31% demonstrated that the aforementioned metaphorical device was the most widespread. The research findings revealed that personification ranked as the second most prevalent form of figurative language, constituting 23% of all occurrences. The following aspect pertains to the utilisation of alliteration and imagery, both of which yielded analogous outcomes for two instances with a frequency of 15%. The last classification pertains to simile and symbolism, wherein only one occurrence was identified, constituting 8% of the entire dataset.

**Keywords** - Literature, Figurative Language, Metaphor, Personification, Alliteration, Imagery, Simile, Symbolism

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

When a piece of writing combines intellectual depth with beautiful form to depict language in a way that differs from how it is often used in everyday life, such work is said to be literary. "Literature is a broad word that frequently means works belonging to the main genres: epic, play, lyric, novel, short story, and ode," claims Cuddon, 2013. A wide word, "literature" often refers to works that fall within the main genres. Poetry is one kind of literary expression. Poetry is accorded a significant position among the other sorts of literary works because it employs language in such creative ways. Poetry is a kind of writing that uses a unique rhythm and style to convey ideas and thoughts to the reader (Abrams. 1999).

There are many links between poetry and education since a poem has the potential to be a powerful teaching tool for students, enabling the researcher to share their educational results with the students. Additionally, in order to engage students in the learning process and keep them from getting bored in

class, it is important to teach a poem in a novel way (Kennedy, 1983).

One of the literary elements that contributes to the overall composition of a poem is figurative language. It conveys the concept more eloquently and plainly than words can. Figurative language is employed in both more formal literary expression and common speech. A figure of speech is a statement that, as defined by Baldick (2001), "deviates from the usual literal meaning or from the regular sequence of words or in which an emphasis is generated by patterns of sound." Using language in a manner that comparisons may be formed is an example of figurative language, claims Chaisilwattana (2009). As a result, figurative language communicates a meaning that is not literal.

With regard to Emily Dickinson's use of figurative language and how it relates to the message of her poems, the author of this study is primarily interested. A significant component of the literary genre is figurative language. One of the best methods to make a piece of writing easier to read is to use figurative language. Literary works like poems

are instances of figurative language, which is used to describe metaphoric expressions. In order to give the poem's substance greater variation, the author uses metaphors often (Mcintosh, 2013)).

Due to their unique and sometimes unconventional use of language, William and Emily Dickinson are regarded as two of the most significant poets of their time. For the purpose of clearly expressing their thoughts, sentiments, and feelings to the readership they were writing for, they employed a wide variety of figurative language techniques in their poetry (Rahmawati, 2019)). The works of Emily Dickinson are said to have had a significant influence on modern poetry. The research offered a description of how metaphorical language may be used in poetry. The application of figurative language in literary works can manifest in various manners, encompassing a range of possibilities, such as, but not restricted to, the subsequent examples (Colston, 2015):

**Table 1: Figurative Language and Explanation**

Type	Definition
Allusion	A figure of speech that alludes abruptly and inexplicably to a well-known person, place, object, event, literary work, political figure, or Bible passage (Baldick, 2001).
Apostrophe	A figure of speech used to address a deceased or absent person as if they were alive and present in the present moment (Baldick, 2001). It is also used to refer to nonhuman entities as if they were alive and human.
Hyperbole	A figure of speech that involves speaking more dramatically than necessary to emphasise or emphasise a speaker's importance, to convey gravity or humour (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 one thing is called by another that is conceptually similar (Baldick, 2001).
Oxymoron	One example of a double entendre is the phrase "living death," which combines the ideas of "death" and "life" (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 in which anything other than a human being (such as an animal, an object, or an abstract notion) is used to symbolise or refer to a human being (Baldick, 2001).
Simile	a figure of speech in which two unrelated objects are compared using a linking verb or phrase (Baldick, 2001).
Symbol	a figure of speech that, at its most fundamental level (Baldick, 2001), alludes to something within it that stands for or symbolises something outside it.
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 use of Figurative Language**

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 related to mortality, the environment, spirituality, and romantic relationships. The enduring popularity of Emily Dickinson's poetry can be attributed to her adept use of metaphorical language, which imbues her works with a lasting and memorable quality. The subsequent instances are representative of the figurative language employed by the poet in her literary compositions (Aprilianti, 2020).

- **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.

"Hope is the Thing with Feathers" is the title of another poem that Emily Dickinson penned that was inspired by the circumstances of her own life. Both Chairil Anwar and Emily Dickinson have shown their own unique characters in the poems that they have written. When it comes to creating a poem, the authors will be distinguished mostly by their gender.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

- The data necessary for this study was sourced from scholarly literature and other publications that feature the poem. The derived materials encompassed in the textbook comprise a comprehensive understanding of poetry, including its general nature, inherent characteristics, constituent elements, diverse forms, and notably, the textbook's own content, featuring a poem penned by Emily Dickinson. The present investigation utilises a descriptive qualitative research approach to examine the various forms of figurative language employed by Emily Dickinson in her poetry, as well as the connotations associated with these figures of speech. The utilization of the descriptive qualitative approach is deemed as a suitable methodology for identifying and comprehending the descriptive elements present in Emily Dickinson's poetic works (Dickinson, 1890).
- The study employed a decision-making process for data collection, taking into account the

distinct categories of primary and secondary data. The primary source of data for the study on the application of figurative language in the poem will be Emily Dickinson's work, "I'll Tell You How the Sun Rise." Secondary data sources, such as historical books and articles found in encyclopedias, are utilized to enhance the clarity of data (Dickinson, 1958).

- The process of data evaluation involves conducting a content analysis, which entails examining the context of a book or document. As per Michael Huberman's definition, the process of analysis involves the simultaneous execution of three actions, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drafting and verification (Wulandari, 2015).

## RESULTS

- The investigation of different types of figurative language has led to a conclusion. The scholar performs a scrutiny of the employment of figurative language in this particular section, drawing upon the scholarship of M.H. Abrams and buttressing it with the viewpoints of Charles Dillon Perine, Wellek Warren, and Leech. The present study undertakes an analysis of the poem titled "I'll Tell You How the Sun Rise."
- The present study aims to analyse the occurrence of various types of figurative language in a sample of 30 poems which can be seen in Figure 1.

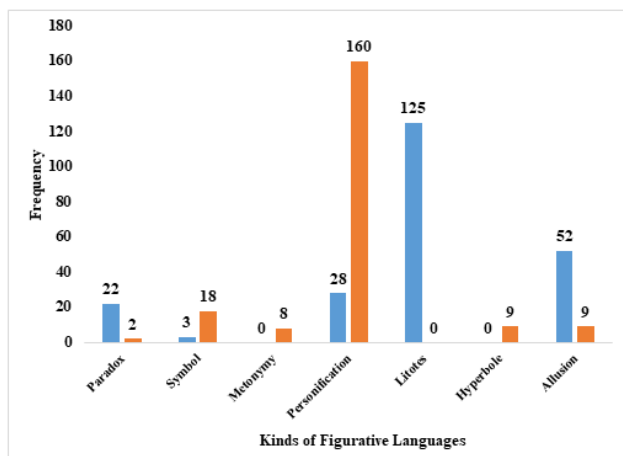


Figure 1: Counts of figurative language in 30 poems

The following are some instances that will serve as samples of some of the most characteristic forms of figurative language that can be found in the chosen poems written by Emily Dickinson:

### 1) Personification - "T was such a little – little boat"

*"T was such a greedy, greedy wave  
That licked it from the Coast –"*

The poet imagines that the wave may "lick" the boat for flavour as it moves away from the beach, much like

a human could lick a popsicle stick or a piece of candy.

### 2) Metaphor- "A Drop fell on the apple tree --"

*"Myself Conjectured were they Pearls –  
What Necklaces could be --"*

*"Myself conjectured were they Pearls – What Necklaces could be –"* In her mind, the raindrops might be pearls and, strung together, would make a beautiful necklace.

### 3) Apostrophe- "Heart! We will forget him!"

*Heart! We will forget him!*

As if the "heart" were a real person, the poet addresses it directly in the third person. The next phrase, in which she addresses the speaker and the listeners collectively, uses the word "we."

### 4) Simile- "They dropped like Flakes --"

*They dropped like Flakes –  
They dropped like Stars –*

She uses the term "like" to imply the parallel between the many men who died in the American Civil War and the snowflakes and stars. The comparison is drawn between the snowflakes and stars.

### 5) Periphrasis- "There is a flower that bees prefer --"

*Nor even of Defeat – aware –  
When cancelled by the Frost –*

Even when it is blanketed in frost, the flower is shown as having a powerful presence in the author's writing. In this poem, the verb "to die" is replaced with the indirect and circumlocutory term "cancelled." This choice was made for stylistic reasons.

### 6) Symbol- "Heart! We will forget him!"

*You may forget the warmth he gave –  
I will forget the light!*

The word "light" appears in the last phrase, where it also serves as a metaphor for love. The world of the lover is made more beautiful by love. The happy disposition of the lover is a direct result of love.

### 7) Allusion- "All overgrown by cunning moss,"

*Gathered from many wanderings –  
Gethsemane can tell*

The "Gethsemane" mentioned by Dickinson is the garden in Jerusalem where Jesus and his disciples spent the night before his crucifixion and

resurrection. The mood in this place is one of profound sadness and pain.

**8) Hyperbole-** *“All overgrown by cunning moss”*

*All overgrown by cunning moss,  
All interspersed with weed,*

The poet employed hyperbole to emphasise her point. To emphasise how covered with weeds and moss Charlotte Bronte's grave was, for instance, she uses the word "all" in lines one and two.

**9) Metonym-** *“My country need not change her gown,”*

*Great Britain disapproves, "the stars";  
Disparagement discreet, –*

A figure of speech known as metonymy involves substituting one word or phrase with another that is conceptually similar to the original. Dickinson refers to "Great Britain" rather than the government of the United Kingdom, and she refers to "the stars" as a symbol for the fifty states that make up the United States of America.

**10) Paradox-** *“I like to see it lap the Miles --”*

*And neigh like Boanerges –  
Then – punctual as a Star  
Stop – docile and omnipotent  
At its own stable door –*

As the train comes to a halt, Dickinson combines seemingly opposing characteristics, much like a horse that is gentle and readily taught but yet strong and omnipotent.

**11) Synecdoche-** *“All overgrown by cunning moss,”*

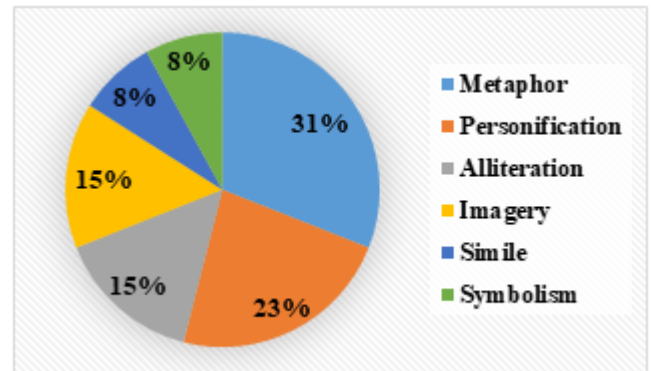
*The little cage of “Curren Bell”  
In quiet “Haworth” laid.*

There is a synecdoche in the final sentence, which reads "In peaceful Haworth lay." The location of Charlotte Bronte's grave is referred to by the phrase "laid."

**Table 2: Types of Figurative Languages used in “I'll Tell You How The Sun Rose”**

Sr. No.	Poems	Types of Figurative Language
1.	<i>A dominie in Gray</i>	Symbolism
2.	<i>A ribbon at a time</i>	Metaphor
3.	<i>And let the flock away</i>	Metaphor
4.	<i>But how he set I know not</i>	Alliteration
5.	<i>I'll tell you how the sun rose</i>	Personification
6.	<i>That little yellow boys and girls</i>	Imagery
7.	<i>The Bobolink begun</i>	Alliteration
8.	<i>The hills untied their Bonnets</i>	Personification
9.	<i>The news, like squirrels ran</i>	Simile
10.	<i>The steeples swam in Amethyst</i>	Personification
11.	<i>The steeples swam in Amethyst</i>	Metaphor
12.	<i>There seemed a purple stile</i>	Imagery
13.	<i>We're climbing all the while</i>	Metaphor

- The findings of this research, which can be seen in Table 2 up above, indicate that metaphor is the most common kind of figurative language that can be found in the four lines of the poem *“I'll Tell You How the Sun Rose.”* There is personification in three different lyrics. The identical outcome appears in 2 lyrics, and it has both alliteration and imagery. while the same result of 1 lyric was returned when searching for metaphor and symbolism.



**Figure 2: Percentages of Figurative Language**

- Metaphors were the predominant form of figurative language utilised with significant frequency in the given context. The study yielded four statistical findings, of which 31% indicated that the gadget (metaphor) in question was the most widely used. The utilisation of personification was discovered to be the second most prevalent form of figurative language, comprising 23% of all occurrences. The subsequent element pertains to the application of alliteration and imagery, both of which yielded identical results of 2 observations with a frequency of 15%. The final category is that of simile and symbolism, for which only one instance was identified, comprising 8% of the total data.

**CONCLUSION**

Thus, it can be inferred from the research that the integration of figurative language is a vital element of the literary constituents that enhance the holistic framework of a poem. Nonverbal communication is a more effective and precise way of conveying a

concept. Figurative language is utilised in both formal literary settings and in everyday discourse. The researcher's main area of interest pertains to the utilisation of figurative language by Emily Dickinson and its association with the thematic substance of her poetic compositions. The literary contributions of William and Emily Dickinson are widely acknowledged as having a significant impact on the poetic landscape of their time, due to their distinctive and often unconventional use of language. The data collection methodology employed in the study involved a meticulous deliberation of the distinct classifications of primary and secondary data. The evaluation of data necessitates the execution of a content analysis, which involves a comprehensive scrutiny of the textual milieu of a literary composition or manuscript. The aim of the current study is to examine the prevalence of figurative language within a representative sample of 30 poems. The findings indicate that metaphors were the primary type of figurative language employed with a significant level of frequency. The study produced four statistical findings, one of which indicated that the aforementioned metaphorical device was the most prevalent, with a percentage of 31%. According to the research findings, personification was identified as the second most commonly used form of figurative language, accounting for 23% of all instances. This aspect concerns the implementation of alliteration and imagery, which produced similar results in two cases, each with a frequency of 15%. The final categorization pertains to the implementation of simile and symbolism, whereby a solitary instance was detected, comprising 8% of the complete dataset.

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