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The Language of Paradox in the Ironic Poetry of Emily Dickinson¹

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Abstract

Emily Dickinson's poetry is characterized by her emphasis on ironic use of discourse that amounts to her persistent manifestation of individuality against hypocrisy and vanity. She exerts her peculiar poetic language in a way that helps deplore as well as explore the paradoxical human condition. This paper argues that Dickinson produces a language of poetry, which, in Cleanth Brooks' terms, provides the reader with the "language of paradox." Dickinson's ironic poetry exemplifies Brooks' idea that ironic poetry is self-conscious and satiric in nature and is made up of a language of paradox. The study, therefore, aims to reveal how the language of paradox in Dickinson's poetry yields to irony which is primarily associated with her salient assertiveness, isolation and strong individuality.

Keywords: Cleanth Brooks, Language of Paradox, Irony, Poetry of Emily Dickinson.

Emily Dickinson'ın İronik Şiirlerinde Paradokslu Dil

Öz

Emily Dickinson'ın şiirlerini söylemin ironik kullanımı karakterize eder ve bu özellik onun şiirlerinin toplumdaki iki yüzlülük ve riyakârlığa karşı sürdürdüğü kararlı bireysel duruş ve isyanının dışavurumudur. Dickinson, kendine özgü şiirsel dili insanlık durumunun

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paradoksal niteliğini arařtırmak için olduđu kadar eleřtirmek için de etkili biçimde kullanmıřtır. Dickinson'ın řiiri, Cleanth Brooks'un "paradokslu dil" olarak tanımladıđı bir dil kullanır. Brooks, ironik řiirin öz-farkındalıđı olan ve dođası geređi eleřtirel tonu yüksek ve temelde paradokslu dilden oluřmuř olduđunu ileri sürer. Bu çalıřma, Dickinson'ın ironik řiir dilinin Brooks'un bu kanısını dođruladıđını ortaya koymaktadır. Dolayısıyla bu çalıřma, Dickinson'un řiirlerindeki paradokslu dilin yazarın dikkat çekici sesi, kendini toplumdan soyutlaması ve toplum karřısındaki güçlü bireyselliđinin dıřa vurumunu imleyen ironiyi incelemektedir.

Keywords: Cleanth Brooks, Paradokslu Dil, İroni, Emily Dickinson řiiri.

The Language of Paradox in the Ironic Poetry of Emily Dickinson

The language of poetry is the language of paradox.

Cleanth Brooks

Assent, you are sane –

Demure-- you're straightway dangerous

Emily Dickinson

Emily Dickinson's poetry is characterized by her emphasis on ironic use of discourse that amounts to her persistent manifestation of individuality against hypocrisy and vanity. She exerts her peculiar poetic language in a way that helps deplore as well as explore the paradoxical human condition. Dickinson's poetry produces a discourse, which, in Cleanth Brooks' terms, pleases the reader with its "language of paradox." This paper argues that Dickinson's ironic poetry exemplifies Brooks' idea that ironic poetry is self-conscious and satiric in nature and is mainly made up of a language of paradox. The study, therefore, aims to reveal how language of paradox in Dickinson's poetry yields to irony which is closely associated with her salient assertiveness, mere isolation and strong individuality.

Brooks' conception of poetry is merely focused on the use of language.³ He questions the referential relationship between the poet and the language of the poem. Still, the bond between the poet and discourse may be compared to that of "the sculptor's to amorphous stone" (Lentricchia 236). However, what Brooks is concerned with is not a historical bond or biographical connection; rather, he focuses on the poetic language that associates itself with certain self-consciousness of the artist. He argues that paradox is a natural outcome of poetic language and mostly appears as a crucial device in poetry. It can be a "key" at the hand of the poet indirectly⁴ conveyed to the reader and if the reader wants to find the key, it demands "close reading" (Brooks 3). Brooks rejects the use of language "as if it was a notation" and states that "paradox in the language of poetry is not perversion" (10).

According to Brooks, paradox can be regarded as "intellectual rather than emotional, clever than profound, rational than divinely irrational." He suggests that paradox "is the language appropriate and inevitable to poetry" (3-4). Lentricchia in this context underlines the fact that "irony, wit and paradox are inherent qualities of poetry" (248). Paradox and irony are, therefore, vital constitutive elements that Brooks considers in a qualified and unified work of art. In fact, Brooks conceives paradox and irony as characteristic qualities of poetry within the act of "meaning construction." He argues that a critic should concern himself with "the paradoxes [that] spring from the very nature of the poet's language" (8). As Lentricchia states, poetic language "play[s] off the connotations and denotations of words against each other" so that, as Brooks suggests, the poet would create an "endlessly qualified, self-reflexive entity of myriad shadings of meaning that is necessarily witty, paradoxical, and ironic in the character" (248).

³Brooks developed a new perspective on the interpretation of poetry by analyzing the words of the text. And he showed his ancestors the importance of "Word" while reading and evaluating the poems (Weaver 92). Brooks, describes the structure of poem as follows: "The structure of a poem resembles that of a ballet or musical composition. It is a pattern of resolutions and balances and harmonizations, developed through a temporal scheme... most of us are less inclined to force the concept of "statement" on drama than on a lyric poem; for the very nature of drama is that of something 'acted out'—something which arrives at its conclusion through conflict—something which builds conflict into its very being" (186-187). Like all New Critics, Cleanth Brooks also focuses on the text and the poem. He reviews the "intentional fallacy" and states that author's intentions should be excluded from the interpretation of the poem and rather than the author's intentions, the poem itself should be included in it. (Brooker 122). Lentricchia states that Brooks, not ultimately removing the artist from the text, persists that "the poet is a maker who brings a lens rather than a mirror to the world of experience" (243).

⁴In his seminal article "Language of Paradox," he maintains "... science makes use of the perfect sphere and its attack can be direct. The method of art can, I believe, never be direct - is always indirect" (10). Bové, therefore, argues that the primary stress falls upon the indirectness in the arts and that there is no origin; everything is "integrated in itself" (732).

Moreover, Brooks regards paradox and irony as among certain qualitative features of good poetry and delineates them as a tool of measurement. Instead of simply tackling with the words in a text, he insists on paradox and irony in line with his attentive consideration of “close reading” (Weaver 90). Such close reading shows that “the parts of a poem have an organic relation to each other... a poem is not merely a collection of poetic images and sublime truths” (232) and that self-conscious poetry like that of Dickinson goes beyond mere “actuality,” having a capacity to deal with as well as represent variable complexity of human experience. Brooks’ primary aim is therefore to test the poet’s use of language of paradox and his close reading is primarily based upon the analysis and investigation of the patterns of paradox preset in the ironic poetry. Brooks argues that “Even the apparently simple and straightforward poet is forced into paradoxes by the nature of his instrument... The method is an extension of the normal language of poetry, not a perversion of it” (9-10).

What we call ironic extension is possible with contradictory ideas and images, which are employed through the language of paradox encompassing a great deal of diversity. However, what is peculiar to the language of paradox is that seemingly opposing ideas and discordance are deliberately designed to be at the service of ultimate unified view in the poems. A good poem, suggests Brooks, reveals a meaningful unity through the language of paradox. Unified sensibility in ironic poetry is closely associated with unified vision of the world; however, this envisages a more sophisticated world than the one presented by the scientific conjecture. The dichotomy “the World-the Word” then signifies the power of paradox that over whelms the so-called order in Nature. Bové states, irony enables the poet to “accommodate the irrelevant elements of experience” and “create an ordered and [somewhat] rationalized Word” thereby achieving “re-discovering and re-representing” contradictory ideas and images (Bové 731-734) and combining them into a unified whole.

Furthermore, as Weaver suggests, paradox and irony bring about “ambiguity” and they all “served as the central pillars of Brooks’s critical vocabulary” (88). Brooks is concerned with contradictions, keeping on his interest in the idea of “conflict” implanted in the very nature of qualified poetry, in a supposed world of discrepancies as well as resemblances, which helps to “indicate that recognition of incongruities” (192). Bové asserts that “if a poem is based on a qualified irony, there is no chronologically priority or hierarchy among parts” (Bové 732).

As Dickinson's poetry is characterized by its language punctuated with paradox, her poems satisfy Brooksonian close reading and meet the expectations of the attentive reader of good poetry employing the qualitative language of paradox. "Of all poets writing in English in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries," argues Harold Bloom, "I judge Emily Dickinson to present us with the most authentic cognitive difficulties" (1). Language of paradox appears to be a controlling device over her ironic poetry and Dickinson is seen to use a language of paradox that nurtures irony in their works. Irony and paradox are intrinsic features of Dickinson's poetry and these intermingled, intertwined, intricate and integrated elements indicate essential concomitants of the language of paradox in her poems. This difficulty mainly arises from her language, which, in Brooks' terms (3), exhibits the language of paradox.

Historically a recluse poet, Emily Dickinson is marked with the use of flourished yet economic language of paradox and mostly conceived as a rebellious genius, almost always rejecting the desire to attain social conformity. Her poetry, can be read as a manifestation of such rejection that brings forward its status as "self-conscious" discourse that is directed against society to violate traditional concepts and viewpoints. She, as a poet (ess), has a "voice of her own," strongly asserting itself, consciously calls into question established norms and expectations. In Dickinson's poetry, the attentive reader can see the footprints of the historical author that deliberately alienates herself from mainstream conventions and use of language. Her cognitive strength, therefore, is of consideration in reading her poetry. Harold Bloom adds:

Vast and subtle intellect cannot in itself make a poet; the essential qualities are inventiveness, mastery of trope and craft, and that weird flair for intuiting significance through rhythm to which we can give no proper name. Dickinson has all these, as well as a mind so original and powerful that we scarcely have begun, even now, to catch up with her (1).

The readers encounter not only rebellion against the norms of society but also existing conceptions of nature, love, religion and death. The various themes are seen to be explored through the language of paradox that is consolidated with irony.⁵ As O'Hara states,

⁵ Irony is a crucial and effective rhetorical device for literature. The traditional conception of irony conceives this rhetorical device as "a figure of speech in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed by the words used; usually taking the form of sarcasm or ridicule in which laudatory expressions are used to imply condemnation or contempt" (qtd. in Hutchens 352). To put simply, irony is "speaking otherwise" indicating a

“Dickinson uses irony to ridicule the very defensive, aesthetic mindset [that] her major critics find so central to her work” (179). In fact, Dickinson uses irony as an attack to such defensive and aesthetically determined viewpoints in society. She ridicules them by using irony which allows and requires her to manipulate double meanings. What is interesting is that even though Dickinson as a poet (ess) is concerned with social criticism, the way she derides, parodies, criticises and ridicules society signposts her effective use of the language of paradox, which is responsible for the impact upon the implied reader regardless of the social background or nonverbal context of her poetry. Her language of paradox, then, gains a considerable significance as, Martin, in dealing with Dickinson’s rhetoric and style, points to the debate that stresses “the paradoxes of language and construction of meaning” (123).

Dickinson reveals herself to be, in Brooks’ terms, a “self-conscious” poet (232). The attentive reader carrying out a close reading will observe that Dickinson’s irony shows the traces of self-confidence and in deeper sense, she pays utmost attention to the Self. Joan Burbick also stresses this: “Dickinson’s poetic language is characteristically laden with pronominal terms and seeks a language of the self that seems to question the very ability of language to represent consciousness” (83). Furthermore Charles R. Anderson reveals that the nature of mind is explored by Dickinson in her poem and the concept of consciousness is critical, therefore, her purpose is to describe the Self and tries to identify it (290).

However, she seems not only self-conscious about what she is criticising but also “how” she does it. Due to her marked self-consciousness of linguistic medium (style) and keen insights into the relationship between the individual and society (content), which cannot be differentiated from a formalist point of view, she is seen to develop some certain intimacy for isolation, which makes her a social satirist as well. Her ironic view of society is directed against phoniness and hypocrisy and her strong self-assertiveness turns her isolation into the

gap between what is said and what is meant. In this context, an ironist for Muecke is supposed to “see the wood in spite of trees and being alert to connotations and verbal echoes” (42). This implies that the ironist should be witty and discriminate the resemblances. Modern irony, however, suggests “an attitude, a perception of incongruity, futility or false pretense” (Hutchens 357). This complicates the issue because in modern literary criticism irony also turns out to be a term that contradicts to a great extent with humour yet retaining a considerable commonplace. Both irony and humour can be aimed at violating the incongruity or inappropriateness while they, as mechanical discursive praxis, are observed to move in opposite directions, on the one hand exerting direct criticism while on the other hand indirect subversiveness. Moreover, irony is closely associated with contradiction; real meaning is hidden behind the surface meaning. If there is a wider disparity between the two, there will be a great irony (33). A successful ironist is a verbal economist as well, avoiding from extravagancy (53). From a stylistic perspective, irony has its own aesthetical structure; the ironist plays a leading role in this sense. Sperber & Wilson reveals “the speaker echoes an implicitly attributed opinion, while simultaneously dissociating her from it” (41).

ironic ground for her ironic and satiric poetry. Greene states that she “worked under the psychological and social handicaps imposed by that sexist concept of her inherently limited potential as an artist. She had to sustain her self-esteem and her will to write against nearly universal presumption that she would be- and ought to be- mediocre” (63).

Emily Dickinson’s wit also has a place in her language of paradox. Nancy Walker states “Capable of myriad guises and voices, she has a wit, a parodist, and a ‘wise fool’ in both her poems and her letters” (57). Emily Dickinson wears a mask and by means of wit, she plays as if she was a fool and under this mask, tells realities. And Walker adds that “she mocked instead, and in doing so declared both her rejection of her superiority to them. Her satiric stance presupposes a strong self-confidence” (59).

A Brooksonian close reading by an attentive reader considering certain discrepancies, opposing ideas, conflicts, that is to say, paradoxes presented in Dickinson will show that her ironic poetry progresses along the language of paradox, which arouse irony aimed not only at ridiculing and derision but also hurting and offence. In other words, irony in Dickinson’s poetry is not humorous in nature but also cruel in its intended satire. Such close reading will also uncover the fact that unified nature of her poems owe much to her invented discrepancies as well as resemblances.

First, a close reading of “I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed,” reveals that the author, adopts a strong ironic mood. Particularly her elevated and exaggerated simile “alcohol” that can be associated with sort of oblivion and loss of consciousness is considerably significant in this context. This is also an ironic reference to rationalized codes of conduct of society imposed upon the individual to make him/her show full conformity with the existing patterns. At this point arises the paradox that contradicts the very idea of sanity and state of consciousness:

I taste a liquor never brewed –
From Tankards scooped in Pearl –
Not all the Frankfort Berries
Yield such an Alcohol!
Inebriate of air – am I –
And Debauchee of Dew –

Reeling – thro’ endless summer days –

From inns of molten Blue – (18)

The paradoxical human condition, therefore, presents itself having lost its sanity and consciousness implied through the humorously used figures “alcohol” and “inebriate.” What society seeks is to cultivate reason and ratio so as to consolidate the established scheme of values and norms. In this case, there appears a strong underlying act of denial since the author removes herself from the realm of the so-called roles and responsibilities (inebriate) and declares her personal emancipation from social control and grip over herself.

Another striking paradox is revealed in the tension between “endless summer days” and “molten blue.” The ironic tone is stressed with the idea of liberation from the confines into the open space under the sun and is unified with the ironic somewhat interrogative statement “– am I –” which refers to self-conscious state of the self-assertive voice being heard.

In the third stanza of the poem, the narrator tells us about the crucial yet vital shift in her mental state. Dickinson uses images of objective correlative: “bee,” for example, stands for herself, that is, her self-assertiveness, and foregrounds the fact that she is different from “butterflies” which represent those who are in conformity with the norms of society. The speaker is compared to a bee which can be hurting for or pain on the others. Todd states “the meaning is so veiled that only the most sympathetic will apprehend the hidden reality” (qtd. in Burbick 83).

When “Landlords” turn the drunken Bee

Out of the Foxglove’s door –

When Butterflies – renounce their “drams” –

I shall but drink the more!

Till Seraphs swing their snowy Hats –

And Saints – to windows run –

To see the little Tippler

Leaning against the – Sun! (18)

Furthermore, the images “bee” and “butterfly” reveal the use of the objective correlative and mark a paradox, surprising the reader’s imagination. As can be seen through the bee-butterfly dichotomy, Dickinson mocks society and its existing and established norms. The strong sense of irony and ironic view of life provide a shelter for the speaker. Dickinson, a persistent advocate of self-reliance, deliberately isolates herself away from society and her alienation turns out to be a device for attack as well as a healing source particularly in the poems exploring death, love, nature and social institutions such as religion. As Anderson suggests, even in her status as a “recluse” and as “a social satirist” appears a paradoxical situation (147). Anderson states that Dickinson’s “wit and talents” and her “intelligence and verbal skills” add up to satire. Moreover, she is a distinguished author since she ridiculed society under “a brilliant light” (147).

By involving in a close reading of Dickinson’s “I am Nobody,” the attentive reader is indirectly invited to contemplate on historical context behind the curtain of Dickinsonian irony. Her use of the language of paradox, therefore, can be marked with somewhat “cruelty” – if such an emotive stance were to be possible– which is implied through her verbal indicators. Her apparent strategy of setting up a paradoxical arrangement to arouse sense of irony is of note in the following lines:

I’m Nobody! Who are you?
Are you – Nobody – too?
Then there’s a pair of us!
Don’t tell! they’d advertise – you know!
How dreary – to be – Somebody!
How public – like a Frog –
To tell one’s name – the livelong June –
To an admiring Bog! (21)

Here, the paradox lies in the word “nobody.” Nobody is not used in its literal sense and does not imply a pejorative meaning; however, it has an ameliorative meaning because the author is contented with being “nobody.” And the paradox is not perversion but an extension which describes the author’s mood and perspective for the outside world and individuality. Brooks’ theory of ironic poetry defines it as “self-conscious.” In order to illustrate this in the poem, “I”

refers to the individual entity /suje (subject) existence, then “to be” refers to existence and lastly, “nothingness” refers to negation of being. These are also examples of verbal indicators that underlie ‘cruelty’ in her poetry since her irony is concerned with hurting rather than mere ridicule. She is seen to be concerned with “nobody” in one of her poems as having a strong resistance to society and in the very ironic context of the poem “nobody” is illustrated as having a praised status of individuality. The speaker seems to be contented with being “nobody” while s/he conceives “somebody” as having a pejorative and belittling meaning.

The striking paradox of “Nobody / somebody” is a device to criticize existing human model. Moreover, these words are verbal indicators of cruel irony; the author means people choose to be “somebody” because of the fear of being isolated or being out of the circle. In the paradox, the person loses his real identity and his soul in order to be acceptable for society’s norms and ironically this person is pleased with this situation. Therefore, the author chooses to be “nobody” instead of being “somebody.” For Brooks, ironic poetry is satirical. Dickinson’s use of “admiring bog” and “frog” exemplifies his theory because the author stresses that she does not care about society.

As regards “Much Madness is Divinest Sense,” the paradox is manifested through the very title that brings together the words “madness” and “divine.” The very paradox manifested at the title bringing the words “madness” and “divine” together evokes a sense of irony because madness is not used in its literal sense but transformed into an instrument of isolation from society:

Much madness is divinest sense
To a discerning Eye
Much Sense—the starkest Madness –
‘Tis the Majority
In this, as All, prevail
Assent, you are sane –
Demur -- you’re straightway dangerous
And handled with a chain. (13)

As far as linguistic elements are concerned, Dickinson uses the superlative form of the adjective “divine” which also explores how the cruel irony is manifested. The author praises

madness as having a quality of divinity and elevates it to a level of praising. The author distinguishes herself from society by using that paradox. Madness therefore turns into a sign of rejection of the norms of society and marks the full-grown individual entity (the speaker) having a voice of her own disappointing the expectation of the reader whose consciousness has already been shaped by society, and creates an ironic gap between the speaker and the society she was born into. The combination of the opposites evokes a sense of irony because madness is not used in its literal sense but transformed into an instrument of isolation from society. As Brooks prospects, the poet can accommodate opposite ideas through irony and it is the poet who can create extraordinary meanings from the ordinary words. So, Dickinson's point of view may sound eccentric but this, exploiting the language of paradox, may satisfy Cleanth Brooks' close reading. The poet is able to surprise the readers' expectations by means of irony. For that reason, "Much Madness is Divinest Sense" (453) is a distinctive illustration that well applies to Brooks' theory.

In the second line of the poem, "to a discerning eye" may refer to the narrator's discerning "eye," and its self-asserting homophone, the first person pronoun "I." Madness seems the divinest sense and third line explains how it makes sense to the poet. Employing irony, the poet can bring contradictory elements. In this context, "assent and demur" or "sane and dangerous" exemplifies Dickinson as a supreme ironist, as well. It is suggested that if an individual seeks to find a secure place for himself/herself in society, this person should "assent" and this will show that s/he is sane. As long as s/he complies with or obeys the expectations of society and existing codes of conduct, s/he will be considered sane. So, sanity turns out to be a "normative" concept rather than mental or moral. On the other hand, Dickinson also states that if the person denies, s/he is dangerous. She will be marked as "insane." Society conceives this individual as mad; s/he should be handled with a chain; yet, intelligence is to be concealed by their madness. However, the poet seems to disregard these so-called moral expectations.

One more thing, Referring to Brooks Bové states that in an ironic poem, language is "autotelic" and "self-purposive." Bové adds that "in aesthetic apprehension of such an object, the observer remains "caught," rapt in attention, as he contemplates the order within the image which irony re-creates" (739). Dickinson, in this context, can be claimed to achieve such autotelic and self-purposive ironic poems. As Brooks suggests, the poet recreates/ rediscovers "unity and order" in the verbal realm so as to provide the reader with a new array

of that constellation. Dickinson's works depict this unity with certain yet provoking arrangement of contradictory ideas/images: "Assent, you are sane – /Demur -- you're straightway dangerous" (453. 6-7). Here, it is seen that such opposing images invoke, evoke and provoke a sense of irony that underlies the surface decorum of the verbal linguistic pattern. "Sane" becomes meaningful with the modifier "dangerous" and the implications of "assent" can be met by the word "demur." The poem, then, signposts, in Brooks' terms, a qualified poetry because of well-arranged dichotomy leading to irony. However, irony not only changes the context of the poem but also affects the form and use of language that the poet uses.

As for "What Soft- Cherubic Creatures," in this poem Dickinson defies traditional concepts of womanhood. In the case of Dickinson's poetry, it can be debated that even the term "poet" may trigger up certain critical remarks calling for the counterpart the "poetess." Greene states that "most of us continue to use the term "poetess" to designate women who write "feminine poems" – meaning insipid, conventional verses; and we promote exceptional women such as Emily Dickinson to the rank of "poet" (Greene 63). Indeed, as a "poet (ess)" she challenged conventions and thematically wrought sensibilities of faibles by overwhelming weak and whining discourse. This is explored in a fashion of strong irony questioning womanhood:

What Soft -Cherubic Creatures-
These Gentlewomen are-
One would as soon assault a Plush-
Or violate a Star-
Such Dimity Convictions-
A Horror so refined
Of freckled Human Nature-
Of Deity-ashamed-
It's such a common-Glory-
A Fisherman's-Degree-
Redemption-Brittle Lady-
Be so-ashamed of Thee- (76)

The analysis of this poem can be divided into two parts: on the surface and under the surface. The author describes the gentlewomen's features with adjectives such as "soft,

cherubic, refined, brittle” and nouns such as “plush and star.” The speaker elevates the status of womanhood and sounds remarkably concerned with how they are pleasant in terms of body and soul. On the surface she praises her feminine contemporaries in the conventional vocabulary of gentility. They are angelic and chaste, refined and lady-like. But these are manikin words to be knocked down. Almost every phrase is a pairing of opposites (153). Here, Dickinson exploits and exerts the potential inherent in the language of paradox. What is explored here is artificiality, rather than reality. The second stanza reveals that people are afraid of being refined since they do not want to show their real identities behind their masks. The people are seen as “cherubic, soft or plush” yet; the speaker manifests “freckled” nature of human being. These verbal indicators are used to imply her cruel irony. The title “What Soft-Cherubic Creatures” provides the reader with a paradoxical and ironic implication intertwined with the artificiality of the so-called angelic creatures. As Brooks discussed above, the discrepancies and opposite ideas brought together in the poem create a spirit of unity and harmony. Here, the following pairs serve for poetic unification: “Dimity-Convictions,” “refined Horror-freckled human,” “human-deity,” “deity-ashamed,” which all uncover certain ironic mood and help reinstate the unity in the realm of poetry. Then, it is seen in this unified and qualified poem that, paradox and irony are ostensible; what is implanted in the structure is unity. Thus, the poet is seen to have re-created the constituent elements of the language of paradox, restored the gaps between the concepts after recuperating the tension aroused by irony and re-gaining eventual harmony.

Emily Dickinson’s poetry, all in all, is characterized by her emphasis on the use of verbal irony and the language of paradox, which amount to her persistent manifestation of individuality. She exerts her peculiar poetic language in a way that helps deplore as well as explore the paradoxical human condition. Dickinson’s poetry produces a language of poetry, which, in Cleanth Brooks’ terms, provides the reader with a “language of paradox” (1947). Brooks suggests that ironic poetry is self-conscious and satiric in nature and mainly made up of a language of paradox. The paper has shown that Dickinson’s poetry meets Brooks’s idea of poetry. What Brooks calls language of paradox is employed in Dickinson’s ironic poetry, which recurrently associates itself with salient assertiveness, mere isolation and strong individuality.

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