

PARADOX, THE MAKING OF POETRY

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Abstract

This paper presents a detailed account of paradox and how it makes a piece of work as a poem. Every one speaks language to communicate something to his fellow people; Poets speak differently and they communicate beautifully to the environment; it is totally different from the language of a common man; 'What makes this difference' is this paper's theme. This paper deals with language of science and language of poetry in terms of denotation and connotation and thus explains how paradox creates poetry; Brooks says 'Language of Paradox is language appropriate to poetry and poet speaks through paradoxes only.' This paper delineates the paradoxes prevailing in Wordsworth's "Lines Composed upon Westminster Bridge" and in Donne's Canonization. Brooks quotes that Wordsworth sees the unanimated houses as animated since these houses in London were sleeping; Brooks sees the title Canonization itself is a paradox as it refers to the theme of religion, contrary to the actual theme of love. Such contrary ideas, this paper substantiates, are yoked together to create paradox and these paradoxes make poetry. This paper establishes the difference between the situational paradox and the rhetorical paradox. All poems will have both paradoxes and it stresses the beauty of any poem lies only on paradox. This paper throws light on the significance of paradox in poetry.

Introduction

This universe comprises all living and non living things. The living things are flora and fauna. There is a special mention for human beings in this universe, since man rules this universe with his knowledge. Man is considered the crown of creation. His language is the symbol of his wisdom. Perhaps the language he speaks may be his first invention. Language only distinguishes man from animal beings. Every living thing communicates something to the fellow creatures continuously and man uses language as a medium of communication. Animals, science says, also use their own language but we can't understand it. Man can use his language in the written form. Something which is written with aesthetic sense is literature.

Literature

Literature, Wikipedia defines in its broadest sense, is “any single body of written works. More restriction in writing that is considered to be an art form or any single writing deserved to have artistic or intellectual value often due to deploying language in ways that differ from ordinary usage”.

The word literature is derived from the Latin word ‘litteratura’ which means writing formed with letters. The word litteratura is drawn from littera, Latin word again. From littera, litteratura to French letter and in English also letter and literature. A work created in letters is literature. One who knows letters is a literate and an illiterate is one who does not know letters. So literature is full of letters. Literature is in so many genres called poetry, drama, novel and so on. In those days poetry was commonly used to denote all genres of literature.

What Makes Poetry?

Poetry according to Cleanth Brooks speaks through paradox. If there is no paradox, there is no poetry at all. Paradox distinguishes poetry from other writings like history, psychology, science and so on. In fact, paradox makes a piece of work as poetry. Para means beyond and doxum is meaning. So, paradoxum in Latin is beyond meaning. Paradox is drawn from paradoxum which means unbelievable. A poem should have an opinion or statement or message contrary to commonly accepted opinion, there comes paradox in poems. Thesaurus defines paradox as a seemingly contradictory statement that may nonetheless be true and one exhibiting inexplicable or contrary aspects. It further says an assertion that is essentially self-contradictory; though based on a valid deduction from acceptable premises, and it is a statement contrary to received opinion.

In literature, Cleanth Brooks defines that the paradox is an anomalous juxtaposition of incongruent ideas for the sake of striking reposition or unexpected insight. It functions as a method of literary composition and examines the apparently contradictory statements for reconciling them with the presence. This makes the difference between the poetic language and scientific language. Use of metaphor in poetry represents a synthesis of opposite or discordant qualities. This synthesis defines poetic languages ambiguous, ironic, paradoxical and connotative, but in the language of science, there is no ambiguity, no contradictions, no paradox but denotative. Languages of science are descriptive but a poetic autonomy functions in poem. It creates its own purpose and fulfills it. Paradox makes poetry an auto telic.

Kinds of Paradox

Brooks discusses in his essay about two paradoxes: situational paradox and rhetorical paradox.

A paradox which arises out of situation present in a poem is situational paradox. It can be seen in Wordsworth's poem 'Composed upon West Minster Bridge,' the paradox is born when the man made London is seen as an organic one. This poem offers a situation to the speaker to see London as a landscape composed entirely of nature though it is in opposition to nature in many aspects. The speaker in this poem does not view London as an artificial landscape. As man is a representative of nature, the man made London as Brooks points out is a natural phenomenon. The houses in this poem are sleeping rather than dead as they are vivified with natural spark of life granted to them by the men who built them.

Brooks in his essay 'Language of Paradox' declares that the speaker sees the most beautiful scene of the world. If at all any one passing it without writing it, he should be with no soul. To Brooks this is the paradox. To highlight the beauty of London, Wordsworth says there is no beauty than this on this earth which is quite contrary to nature. There are so many beautiful sceneries in this world.

"Earth has not anything to show more fair Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty"

From these lines, the reader realizes Wordsworth is attracted by the beauty of London when the city is shone on the sunlight in the morning. Wordsworth makes a juxtaposition of two different ideas the touching and the majestic. Touching is usually a small thing where as majesty is connected to huge thing. A friend gives you a book for your birthday is a touching one but when you see the beauty and holiness of Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple that is majesty. Poetry can accommodate contradictory things as in Wordsworth's line.

'A sight so touching in majesty'. This juxtaposition brings the paradox to make that line poetic. We know that no city can wear anything on its own; a city will look like as it is, with its nature of form, buildings, bridges, places of worship and so. But from the lines, "This city now doth, like a garment wear the beauty of the morning"

We could understand this London city, quite contrary to nature, wears the beauty of the morning as a garment. It's a pleasant shock to every reader to know as a beautiful girl, the city of London wears the beautiful gown of morning. This beauty is a momentary one since often it changes its dress morning, noon, evening and night. The one word 'now' in this line suggests that the city adorns now itself with morning and it will change its dress some time after keeping itself on changing. The sudden changes are captured in the lines,

'Silent, bare
Ships, towers, domes theaters and temples lie
Open unto the fields and to the sky.
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air'

The whole city is silent and bare. Silent and bare are not two individual words but they denote the cause and effect situation. The city is silent because it is bare (i.e.)

empty. Things which are empty will be silent always. The poet lists other important things in London, the ships, tower, domes, theaters and temples and says they are not hidden but open to the sky and to the fields, but they are silent as they don't have anything. But suddenly they start to glitter and becomes bright in the smokeless air with the beautiful golden light of the sun. A city which is always clogged by the fog in the mornings is now glittering in smokeless air. It is again contrary to nature creates paradox. A fogless London is contrary to the nature of London.

The sun is as usual in London, it rises in the east at its own time and spreads its light on every part of London say the valley, rock, or hill. People see these and pass it peacefully but the same thing appears to Wordsworth as a different scenery and he jumps into joy. His mind is over whelmed with the joy and says,

“Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendor valley, rock or hill.
Never saw I, never felt, a calm so deep.”

The sun is new to him; the splendor light is new to him; the valley, the rock, the hill, everything is new to him and on seeing these things, he himself is new to him because such a calmness so deep he enjoys. This is the paradox we see here to make poem these lines.

We can never imagine that a river will run at its own will but Wordsworth beautifully describes the Thames in London

‘glideth at his own sweet will.’
And address to God,

“Dear God? The very houses seem asleep”. Houses are lifeless objects; but Wordsworth sees that all houses are sleeping. The houses have life and for making the dead houses life things God has become very close to him as his friend so he addresses ‘Dear God’. Sleeping is a characteristic feature of living things; the houses, in the poem, are living creations; on seeing this Wordsworth writes.

“And all that mighty heart is laying still”.

This is the contradiction that the ever beating heart is lying dead but the ever dead houses are sleeping as living things. This creates the paradox. This paradox makes these lines a poem. And so Cleanth Brooks says such paradoxes are rhetorical paradoxes since these paradoxes are created with their rhetoric. The same poem, according to Brooks, has situational paradoxes also when the speaker is suddenly surprised to see the city wears the beauty of the morning at all Mt.Snowden, Skiddaw, Mount Blanc, these wear it by natural light and this is the shocked exclamation the poet had in his life.

Unconscious Association with Nature

Brooks points out in Wordsworth’s poem a ‘Beauteous Evening’. Wordsworth shows though the girl is not wondering at the beauty of that evening, she is living in nature. She is unconsciously associated with nature all the years. But the speaker in the poem

does not understand it. The girl is not worshipping; the speaker is self-conscious in the poem.

The speaker compares the beauty of the evening to a nun. This evening time is holy. So the girl should respond to the holy time and she herself transforms to a nun. This did not happen and the girl doesn't worship and the poet says the inanimate nature is more worshipped than the girl.

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
The holy time is quite as a nun
Breathless with adoration...

If thou appear untouched by solemn thought
Thy nature is not therefore less divine
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year:

Though the girl is less worshipful, she is always a bosom on Abraham. The paradox as Brooks claims, here is 'Abraham's bosom all the year'. The underlying paradox is the girl's unconscious sympathy towards nature. So, the girl does not need to worship nature more deeply than the speaker. Every human being is the part and parcel of the nature and they are in communion with nature naturally. There is no need for a separate worship. The poet's worship of nature is unnatural since he is a self-conscious one. Poet's worship of nature is evident where as the girl's worship is to be understood. The juxtaposition of these kinds of incongruent ideas makes a piece of writing as a poem. Paradox is the juxtaposition of incongruent ideas as seen in this poem and as Brooks says it is language appropriate to poetry.

Paradox in Canonization

The title of the poem 'canonization' itself is a paradox. That is the underlying metaphor of the poem. Donne treats the theme of love in his poem but the title suggests a saintly thing. When we have a close reading of the poem we realize the theme of love is treated as sainthood. Donne compares lovers renounce the world as saints do; and renounces the bodies as saints do; lovers do for the sake of love and saints do for the sake of God but renouncing the world and the body is common for both saints canonize their life but lovers canonize their love so the title is canonization. Now canonization becomes more a love term than religious term or love becomes as religious as sainthood.

Two Worlds

Brooks says that Donne has presented two worlds which are contradictory to each other. One the world which is real and the other one is the world of lovers. In the first world, the speaker asks the addressee to pay attention to his own welfare, go on get wealth and honor for himself. He says to cultivate the court and gaze at the king's face

there, or if he prefers, he can get into business and look at king's face stamped on coins.

In the second world, the lovers are living and they are absorbed in it. The lovers (i.e) the speaker requests the addressee to let him live his world of love; and he can hold his tongue for talking about his love as infirmity a disease, he can confine himself to his other infirmities, his poetry, his approaching old age and his ruined fortune. The speaker tells the addressee that he will stand a better chance to cure the infirmities and he is wasting his time and the speaker's by chiding him for his love since the lovers live in a different world, a world of lovers which will never affect the real world, a world on this earth at all. A conflict is thus seen between the two worlds, the real world and the lovers' world.

- ...and let me love or chide my palsy or my gout,
...My five gray hair or ruined fortune flout,
- ...so you will let me love.

Petrarchan Absurdities

Brooks points out that Donne in the second stanza fills with the conventional figures of the petrarchan tradition; the wind of the lovers' sighs, the floods of lovers tears are the extravagant figure with which the contemptuous secular friend might be expected to tease the lovers. We understand this absurdity is recognized by Donne and used for his argument. These absurdities do not harm the real world and so the addressee needs not to have fears. While Donne is keen to fill with Petrarchan absurdities, now he turns to fill the third stanza with fantastic comparisons. The poet says, 'call us what you will, we are made such by love'.

The friend can call the lovers as he likes for it is love that makes them so and the comparison supplied here are

"Call her one, me another fly
We're tapers too and at our own cost die,
And we in us find the eagle and the dove,
The phoenix riddle hath more wit
By us, we too being one, are it"

They are candles burn by themselves by feeding upon their own selves, they find the eagle and dove in each other and they together become phoenix as they 'die and rise the same'.

Brooks continues to say "the last one, the likening of the lovers to the phoenix is fully serious."

So the images in the third stanza are no longer the continuation of Petrarchan absurdities; they have are very sharp and kindling our emotions also. Donne deviates from absurdities to comparisons so that he can highlight the status of the lovers how they transform by love from one stage to the next one as tapers by consuming

themselves are both eagle and dove to each other and finally they become one by uniting themselves in spiritual world. The renunciation of the world is symbolized by burning themselves as candles. They don't stop with that but rise again as one as a phoenix. Renunciation of this world by the lovers is compared to the renunciation of this world by the saints. Here Donne makes, according to Brooks, love serious as religion. It seems apparently that love and religion are not treated seriously by Donne; but when we apply close reading we realize Donne treats both love and religion seriously; this is contradicting and this is paradox and this makes it poetry.

The Unworldly becomes the Worldly

In the last stanza, Brooks sees death as life. The lovers reject life so as to win the most intense life. By becoming hermits, the lovers have gained the world in each other which is more intense and more meaningful. From the following lines, 'Who did the whole world's soul contract and drove Let's the glasses of your eyes' we perceive, as Brooks says that the lovers actively achieve this world and it is evident that these worlds do not come to them passively. The lovers drive into each other eyes countries and towns. The countries referred to here are the ones which the lovers renounced in the first stanza of the poem. Brooks thus proves that the unworldly lovers become worldly of all.

The Paradox of Phoenix

The comparison of lovers to phoenix reminds us the death of the lovers. Though the lovers die, they do it for life. In general, death is the end of life; here an end becomes the beginning of a new life. In the earlier comparisons of eagle and dove, they were two in physique, but now from the image of phoenix, they become one both physically and mentally. They enter into the spiritual world with a new life. The lovers die for a rebirth.

'So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit,
We die and rise the same'

The poet, Brooks points out, literally justifies the fantastic assertion. During sixteenth and seventeenth centuries 'to die' meant experiencing the wholesome act of sex. After experiencing sexual intercourse, their love is as fresh as it was early. Brooks quotes Shakespeare and Dryden for using 'to die' to mean to experience the consummation of the act of life. This sexual sub meaning of love does not demean the holiness of their love;

'We can die by it, if not live by love'

Love is to live only; Love symbolizes living; the lovers are ready to die if they are not able to live by love; they die; by dying they give up this world, the world of wealth and power. Brooks finally contends that death is the consummation of life but the paradox of phoenix brings the idea of death along with life. This life after death is more intense

one and Brooks quotes as the poet is saying, "one death is really a more intense life", we can afford to trade life (the world) for death(love) for that death is consummation of life. "After all one does not expect to live by love one expects and wants to die by it". But in the total passage, he is also saying that because our love is not mundane, we can give up the world" because our love is not merely lust we can give up the other lusts, the lust for wealth and power." we are a minor miracle, we are love's saints" this passage with its ironical tenderness and its realism as Brooks says, 'feeds and supports the brilliant paradoxes in this poem.'

The Poem Itself is A Well Wrought URN

The poet Donne constructs rooms for the lovers to live in. The lovers maybe rejected by this material world

"And if unfit for tombs and hearse
Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;"

As the lovers are rejected by this world, they are ready to die. After their death, the bodies of the lovers will be denied tomb and hearse to sing; instead the lovers are ready to accept an insubstantial 'sonnet'. They feel if it is a well wrought urn that will do for them to carry the finer memorial for one's ashes and a gigantic, half acre tomb will not serve their purpose. And so the lovers want to relinquish the ponderous and stately chronicle. Now the lovers reject the world instead they are to be rejected by the world. The world 'which the lovers rejected' will turn into a world of vulgar. The life depicted in the sonnet will hold their legend. Their legendry story will gain them the canonization; the lovers then be approved as love's saints and other lovers invoke their legend to portray their love.

By rejecting tombs, they live in the poem which acts itself as an urn. The poet has constructed rooms in his poem to make the lovers to live in it; now the poem becomes an urn to capture and to portray their love to the human society. The ashes which the urn of poem holds is not the remains of dead bodies but a leash of new life of the lovers; this new life is earned by burning themselves; The lovers live in the form of ashes, it is the ash of phoenix means rebirth, a new journey of a new life. The tombs and memorials are replaced with this poem and this poem portrays the lovers and the legend of their love better than monuments. Urn speaks the best; but this Urn of poetry speaks better than the best. Hence this poem as a whole is a good example for paradox. To the eyes of the reader, the poem seems to be an urn structurally.

Conclusion

Brooks submits 'the only way by which the poet could say what "the Canonization says is by paradox; the Canonization is a good example; so is most of the language of religion". We realize paradox makes anything poem and it is the 'making of poem' as we find paradoxes everywhere in any poem. Poets are carefully employs words to

create paradoxes. It is the juxtaposition of incongruent ideas; it brings the unexpected expositions to taste the poetic beauty in any form of writing. If there is no paradox, there is no poetry since paradox is the Making of Poetry.

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My Daughter...!

My golden light,
 Started from the Heaven.
 A preacher of childhood
 And a practitioner of Godliness!

The reminder of my future;
 The educator of my smile;
 Even at the age of any number,
 The only one day old
 Who can never be polluted
 And who will never pollute the world
 Which makes the world beautiful
 And my world meaningful;

My heart outside my body
 Beats for me making me holy!
 The compressed form of my mother
 Speaks the language of my mother's lullaby!
 This darkened world is illuminated for me
 When I hold her small finger for an evening walk!

The moon, the stars, the breeze,
 The earth, the river, the tree,
 The plant, the flower, the buds,

The rain, the fire, the life all are
my daughter, my daughter, my daughter...

The moment you came to me,
The husband of your mother disappeared;
Only the father is me
And I find there is a place, a holy place
More than wife in this world-equal to God-you!

My house becomes a home because of you;
My spouse becomes a mother because of you;
My street becomes a Raj Path because of you;
My village becomes the most beautiful because of you;
I become a man because of you;
My life becomes holy because of you;
Because of you only, India is my country!

Nights are golden when you open your eye lids;
The sun is softened when you look at it;
All buds are blossomed when you cross them;
Flowery trees bend their heads
And stretch their hands to shake with your hands
To inject softness to the flowers;
They seek the touch of your breath
For emitting the fragrance;
I am a wonder to me when you are with me!

You are a pearl in our sea;
And a full moon in our night sky;
You are the root for our family
And the future of our family;
You are the wind in our breath
And the beat in our heart;
You are my all directions
And the soul in my body...!