

A Pragmatic Analysis of Paradox in Donne's Sonnets

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Abstract

This paper examines the poetry and poetics of Donne in order to elucidate the ways in which he balances the use of paradox and gives its reconciled resolution. The model proposed to analyze paradox in this study is an eclectic model depends mainly on Grice's model of cooperative principle and implicature to analyse the extent to which Grice's conversational maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner are flouted by Donne in his sonnets. In addition to that Searle's model of speech acts will be examined since each of these paradoxes has a certain illocutionary force in their specific context. Hence, the context is an important factor to figure out the poet's main intention.

الخلاصة

تتناول هذه الدراسة الشعر لدى (دون) والصورة الشعرية في قصائده، ابتغاء توضيح الطرق التي من خلالها يتم التوازن فيما بين استخدام المتناقضات وإيجاد الحلول المناسبة لها. إن الأنموذج المقترح لتحليل المتناقضات الظاهرية لهذه الرسالة هو عبارة عن أنموذج انتقائي يعتمد بشكل أساسي على مبدأ (غرايس) التعاوني لاكتشاف المدى الذي يلجأ إليه (دون) لخرق مبادئ الكلام في قصائده. بالإضافة إلى ذلك سوف تطبق نظرية (سيرل) على هذه المتناقضات باعتبارها تحمل قوة أو دافع معين في سياقاتها. وبهذا يعد السياق عاملاً مهماً يساعد في معرفة المغزى الرئيسي للشاعر.

1.1. Problem of the Study

The most commonly used figure of speech in literary discourse – particularly in poetry is paradox; a statement which seems contradictory, yet it turns to be interpretable in a way that makes sense. It is used occasionally by the majority of poets but is a persistent and central device in seventeenth – century metaphysical poetry. Donne is considered the pre – eminent representative of the metaphysical poets. His works are distinguished for their strong, sensual style, love poetry, religious poems, Latin translations, epigrams, elegies, songs, satires and sermons. His poetry is noted for its vibrancy of language and inventiveness of metaphor, especially when compared to that of his contemporaries. Donne's style is characterized by abrupt openings and various paradoxes, ironies and dislocations. The problem that should be probed in this study is that paradox bears two contrastive ideas which both give one intended meaning but this intended meaning cannot be observed unless a suitable approach is used in order first to determine the two contrastive subjects, then finding out the intended meaning which lies behind this contrastive relationship. The other problem is that, when reading paradox, the readers may interpret it differently because it creates a sense

of ambiguity and thus cannot be resolved without understanding the speaker's intended meaning. An example of paradox is in Donne's "Death be not proud", where the two contrastive ideas are 'death' and 'pride' through which the poet states that death has no right to be proud, for it is merely a slave to wars, murder, accidents, etc. Thus, it is necessary to make a pragmatic analysis in order to encipher Donne's intentions and sort out the two contradictory ideas which are mapped in clear images set out in a juxtaposition.

1.2. Aims of the Study

The study aims at:

1. Presenting a viable framework within the limits of the pragmatic theory to provide an appropriate model for the analysis of Donne's paradoxical statements that represent a remarkable technique which reflect the poet's own experience in life.
2. Showing the metaphorical relationship in each of these paradoxes relating them to the suitable context of situation of the sonnet in question.
3. Illustrating the meaning of paradox as a rhetorical device used widely in poetry to find out its ambiguous meaning within the pragmatic approach proper in order to be easily interpreted by the readers.

1.3. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are set down:

1. Donne employs a combination of techniques within his poems – particularly paradox which layers a plethora of different meanings. Donne's sonnets are considered as pieces of drama in which he always addresses entities directly like God, death, Christ, soul, etc., by using violent images.
2. Paradox is a context dependent phenomenon and cannot be interpreted without relating it to its appropriate situational context.
3. Donne's paradox mirrors his almost life experience which proves that each paradox uttered by him conveys an intended meaning –a message that must be recognized in terms of a pragmatic approach.
4. Bold paradoxes used by Donne encourage the pursuit of perfection in the hope of salvation, thus serving as a dramatic embodiment of highest spiritual aspirations. Each paradox reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite discordant qualities.
5. Most of Grice's maxims are flouted in Donne's paradoxes.

1.4. Procedures of the Study

Analyzing paradoxes in the sonnets of Donne requires the adoption of the following procedures:

1. Surveying a theoretical overview of pragmatic perspective that accords with paradoxical statements in Donne's sonnets.
2. Adopting an eclectic model of Searle's model of speech acts(1979), Grice's model of cooperative principle and implicature, meanwhile, exploiting the context of situation in which paradox is uttered because it gives further information that might be helpful in the analysis of the sonnets.
3. Analyzing paradoxical utterances in the selected sonnets according to the adopted pragmatic models.
4. Drawing conclusions and evaluating them, then offering recommendations and suggesting topics for further research.

1.5. Limits of the Study

The present study is concerned with the analysis of the paradoxes employed by Donne in eleven selected sonnets, namely sonnets II, IV, V, VII, X, XI, XIV, XV, XVII, XVIII, XIX where he uses paradox amply in these sonnets which depicts certain life experiences that all compromise intended meanings.

1.6. Significance of the Study

The present study is concerned with, on the basis of the pragmatic analysis of Donnean paradoxes, the pragmatic features of paradox and displays the intentions envisaged in terms of images. It is expected to be of value to all those who are concerned with linguistics – especially pragmatics. On the other hand, it will be significant to the specialists in the field of rhetoric and figurative language. Not to forget to mention that this work is important to the students of the Dept. of English: linguistics and literature for it provides them with an approach to the analysis of literary discourse.

3.11. The Pragmatics of Paradox

Paradox is one of the figures of speech or tropes that deviates from the ordinary use of language, therefore what is applied to other figures of speech such as metaphor can be pertinent to paradox. Paradox can be interpreted pragmatically in specific contexts with respect to the intentions of the speaker. Within the speech act theory, it could be treated as (Mack 1975) has treated metaphor. Hence, the use of paradox in conversation requires an examination of the speech acts of these paradoxical utterances.

In Grice's view of the principles of conversational interaction, paradoxical utterances violate the cooperative maxims of truth, relevance and manner, i.e. the non-literal interpretation of paradox can make the utterance false or nonsensical and irrelevant in specific context or discourse. Grice (cited in Ching, et al, 1980:117) nonetheless, observes that there is a reason behind these deviations from the pragmatic principles. They remain within the scope of the cooperative principle for a rational interaction, in paradox for instance, the deviation is only apparent and the hearer recognizes that the speaker intends something different from the literal meaning of the utterance or implies an additional meaning besides the literal meaning. Likewise, Levisohn, (1983:126) affirms that when Grice differentiates between generalized and particularized conversational implicatures, regards those figures of speech as exploitations of more straightforward ways of talking. He believes that these floutings or exploitations are particularized conversational implicatures because they require particular background assumptions to rule out the literal interpretation. On this account, then, all instances of non literal language use are cases of indirect communication, with the speaker-meant content (the figurative meaning) arising entirely at the level of conversational implicature.

4.2. Data Analysis

Since there is no adequate model for analysing paradox, it is necessary to adopt an eclectic model taking into account Grice's maxims and cooperative principle and implicature, and the context of situation in which these statements of paradox are uttered. The researcher will also make use of Searle's model of speech acts (1979) in order to analyse these literary texts.

1. *That thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt, not chuse me.*
2. *And Satan hates mee, yet is loth to lose mee.*

(13-14, Sonnet II)

Donne claims full identity with God. He is, therefore, much pained to find that now his spirit is possessed by the Devil. The poet's soul belongs to God by right, but God permitted the Devil to take possession of his soul. The poet himself is helpless to fight the Devil and drive him out, unless God fights him for what rightfully belongs to Him. Thus, we have two paradoxes here: God loves all mankind, but still He does not save the poet's soul from the devil; with anguish Donne says that the devil hates him, but still he possesses his soul and does not want to leave it.

There is a clear flouting of the maxim of quality because Donne depicts God as loving mankind, but He does not help or save them and this is unbelievable. Then, Donne's depicting the Devil in a form of hating, but unwilling to lose his soul is also untrue because if someone hates anybody else, he is supposed to leave him and abandon him as much as he can. The ordinary reader when he reads these lines literally will find a sort of ambiguity and that there is no such relationship between God and evilness and that God always loves and protects mankind from evil powers. Thus, the maxims of relevance and manner are flouted.

The speaker is perfectly aware of his need for salvation, but is also entirely incapable of moving toward it himself. Instead he is entirely dependent on the grace of God and is desperate in his pleas. This is an example of the tension in Donne's life coming through in his writing. Donne was overwhelmingly aware of his sin and his inability to do anything about it, which perhaps explains his hesitancy in taking orders and becoming a preacher. Donne felt helplessly bound by his sin, held tight by Satan, but desiring only God. Obviously then, the implied meaning is that there is a struggle between Good and Evil within the soul of the poet, and his helplessness and deep anguish. Thus, Donne needs God's help for after all he belongs to Him.

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3. *Thou art like a pilgrim, which abroad hath done
Treason, and durst not turn to whence hee is fled,*
 4. *or like a thief, which till deaths doom be read,
Wisheth himself dilevered from prison;
But damn'd and hal'd to execution,
Wisheth that still he might be imprisoned;*

(3-8, Sonnet IV)

According to Grice's theory of cooperative principle, the maxim of quality is flouted because it is unbelievable that a traveller who yearns to see his country chooses to stay away from it and does not return to it. Also, the thief always seeks for his freedom and to flee from prison, but here he prefers to stay in prison forever. The other maxim which is flouted is the maxim of relevance because there is no relationship between the soul and the traveller on one hand and the soul and the thief on the other. But the poet uses these indirect relationships in order to tell us or make us understand the greatness of the situation and the dilemma of committing sins.

Here the poet or the speaker of the sonnet commits a sin and his soul is black with sin. He is now sick, and his sickness is the call of death. In these lines, there are two statements of paradox: the first is when the speaker is compared to a traveller who goes to some foreign country and there he commits an act of treachery against his own country, so he is afraid to return to his country, though he still loves it and yearns to

see it. The implied meaning here is that the soul of the poet is similar to a traveller to this world from the other world. The soul commits sins against God and therefore, it is afraid to return to Him, though it loves God and longs to see Him.

The second paradox is that the soul is compared to a thief who wants to escape from the prison as long as he is waiting trial, but when the sentence of death is passed against him, he wants to remain in prison forever. This statement has the implicature that the body is like a prison for the soul. The soul wants to leave this prison and return to God, but when it is confronted with death, it no longer wants to leave the prison because it is afraid to face God, against whom it has sinned. In other words, the soul is afraid of divine punishment.

*5. Oh make thy selfe with holy mourning blacke,
And red with blushing, as thou art with sinne;
Or wash thee in Christs blood, which hath this might,
That being red, it dyes red soules to white.*

(11-14, Sonnet IV)

In these lines, the poet says that the soul should grieve and mourn for its sin and thus turn the blackness of sin into the blackness of mourning. It is now red with sin, but it should change this redness into the redness of sincere shame and repentance. Paradoxically, the poet states that Christ's blood which is red dyes those red souls to white implying that the soul should bathe or wash itself with Christ's blood. The blood of Christ has the miraculous power of changing the redness of sin into white which is a symbol of purity.

The maxim of quality is flouted because Christ's blood which is supposed to be red cannot wash or turn the red colour into white or cannot wash one's soul with his blood. Moreover, the maxim of relevance is flouted since there is no relationship between the red colour and the soul and that the soul cannot grieve and mourn. The utterance is absurd if it is read literally and out of context and hence the maxim of manner is flouted. The impicture is, then, through sincere repentance, suffering and self-sacrifice that the soul can be purified and the grace of God is obtained.

*6. And burne me Ô hord, with a fiery zeale,
Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heale.*

(13-14, Sonnet V)

The sonnet refers to the day of judgment that awaits everyone. If it is too late to repent, there is no way to save oneself from an eternity in the fires of hell. The poet tells us that lust and envy have consumed his soul and according to many religions, lust and envy are two of the seven deadly sins and dying with these in your soul will result in damnation. There is a paradox in these lines because the poet addresses God with an imperative that commands more than asks God to burn him with the fire of hell in order to be healed, connotes purification as well as lust.

The maxim of quality is flouted because it is untrue that through burning the soul it will be healed. Concerning relevance maxim, it is also flouted because fire is always regarded as a source of burning and cannot be used to heal human being. Thus, the poet flouts these maxims intentionally implying that he begs the Lord to burn him with a fire for that only the fires of the Lord have the power to overcome the lust and envy of the poet as a result of his sins. Additionally, this is a representation of repentance, although it seems to be a little too late. The poet weeps over his own fate, and begs for the chance to clean his soul of the sins which he has committed. The

Sonnet uses such images and figures of speech to create a natural world functioning as ways to show contrition.

7. *'Tis late to aske abundance of thy grace,
When wee are there; here on this lowly ground,
Teach mee how to repent; for that's as good
As if thou hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood*

(12-14, sonnet VII)

Another aspect of this desire for salvation comes in Sonnet VII, when the speaker voices his need to repent, but does not know how. Thus, the maxim of quality is flouted intentionally here by the poet. Donne simply implies that he wants the smallest hint at how to approach God and give some sort of penitence for his sins. If he could only have that, the speaker implies, it would be just as good as a full pardon. Donne desires to make an effort at seeking God, but has no idea how to go about it. He is just desperate to pull out of his own sin and move closer to God, but still realizes that he has no ability to do so. He is afraid to face God with his many sins. Therefore he prays to God that the day of judgment be delayed and the dead be allowed to sleep for some more time. Consequently, he must be taught by God what to do in order to make any progress.

As is so often the case in Donne's devotional works, the effect of this final stage of the meditation is to awaken fear, and specifically the dreadful thought that the speaker's sins will be too great to be forgiven. Consequently, this final image creates a sense of ambiguity and disturbance when read literally; therefore, the maxim of manner is also flouted.

The paradoxical confidence of this self-doubt is fascinating. The speaker commands God to leave the dead sleeping to postpone the Last Judgment and to concentrate instead on him. There is also a startling assumption in the last lines that the very idea of redemption by the blood of Christ shed on the cross is an optional alternative ("that's as good / As if . . .") to the personal attention demanded by the speaker from God.

Thus the poem does not end as it began, looking to the future in those remote "imagin'd corners" of the earth, but in present and local circumstances, "here on this lowly ground," in the corners of a fearful heart. What the speaker of this sonnet seeks is the assurance of an "abundance" of grace, but how can that be achieved without the initial inspiration to repent?

Thus, the entire sonnet is like a sermon on the need and significance of divine judgment.

8. *Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mightily and dreadful, for; thou art not soe,*

(1-2, Sonnet X)

Donne begins his apostrophe challenging death, and at the same time while personifying death, he humiliates it. Here Donne is anthropomorphizing Death, and addressing him as an equal, or indeed, as it becomes apparent later, as an inferior. Donne is saying that Death likes to think of himself as powerful and terrifying, and indeed some people have called him that, but he is not so in truth.

The paradox here is that Death should not be proud of himself and that Death who is supposed to be mighty and dreadful, is in reality neither mighty nor dreadful. Therefore, it should not be proud. Donne favors apostrophes and dramatic monologues, which give an immediacy and urgency to his rhetoric - in his career as a churchman, Donne was a famous preacher, so it is no surprise that many of his poems sound like dramatic speeches.

The maxims of quality is flouted in the above lines since death is personified and is treated as a human being which is something unbelievable in reality. Secondly, the maxim of relevance is also flouted because death is thinking himself mighty and boastful and that he has the power over human beings which is also untrue. This image of personifying death and considering him as proud man is unacceptable and irrelevant if it is read literally.

*9. Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee.
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee,
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,*
(4-6, Sonnet X)

Donne proceeds to give argument after argument to prove his point of view. Those who are supposed to be killed by death do not die in reality. Paradoxically, they only sleep a long and peaceful sleep. Donne implies that rest and sleep are considered as pictures of death and people get pleasure when they sleep. Thus, the other paradox here is that death provides pleasure and comfort to people as the pleasure results from sleep. So, death is merely frees men's souls from the prison of their bodies and provides rest to them.

The maxim of quality is flouted because it is a well-known fact that death kills people in reality, but here it is said that it just gives rest and sleep to people. Moreover, death does not provide people with pleasure and happiness, therefore the statement is also untrue and makes the maxim of quality flouted. The maxim of relevance, on the other hand is flouted since comparing death to sleep and engaging it with pleasure is not relevant because there is no such relation between death, sleep and pleasure.

*10. Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and department,
And dost with poison, warre, and sickness dwell,
And poppie, or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stroake; why swell'st thou then?*
(9-12, sonnet X)

Again here, personifying death and comparing it to slaves is unbelievable. The poet intentionally flouts the maxim of quality because slavery is a feature of human being and needs animate things, but here it is attached to death which is inanimate thing. Also, humiliating death and considering it as a slave person has no relationship with each other and not relevant to our literal use of the language so the maxim of relevance is flouted.

Death is not mighty; it is not like a mighty king. It is only a slave of fate, chance, wicked and malicious persons, poison, wars and sickness. So, the conversational implicature here is that death is not the cause but the instrument. It obeys the call of accidents, kings, wicked murderers, poison, old age and sickness. It cannot be regarded as glorious because opium preparations or other intoxicants, drugs have magical properties and can produce better sleep and with far gentler and painless operation.

Conclusions

5.1. Findings

By examining Donne's *Holy Sonnets* pragmatically, it has been observed that the maxims of quality, relevance, and manner are all flouted. Throughout the analysis of them, it is found that the occurrence of the maxim of quality is more than other maxims followed by the maxim of relevance and then the maxim of manner but in mild discrepancy which means that the poet deliberately flouts these maxims in order to achieve his purposes of tension and absurdity. Searle's model of speech acts shows the following results:

Table(2)
Frequency of Occurrence of Speech Acts in Donne's Selected Sonnets

Item Number	Type of Speech Acts	Frequency of Occurrence
1	Directive	11
2	Representative	9
3	Expressive	4
4	Commissive	-
5	Declarative	-
	Total	24

The above table has proved that directive speech acts occur more than other acts rated 45.83%, followed by the representative speech acts rated 37.5%, then comes the expressive speech acts rated 16.66 %. The table also shows that commissive and declarative speech acts have no occurrence in these paradoxical utterances.

5.2. General Conclusions

The analysis of paradox in Donne's sonnets shows the following observations:

1. Paradox is an apparently self-contradictory and even absurd statement, but on closer inspection it seems to make sense or assert truth. It is an important literary device in English literature since it functions as a method of literary analysis which involves examining apparently contradictory statements, which might seem somehow inconceivable by the simple readers, and drawing conclusions either to reconcile them or to explain their presence. Donne makes use of paradox in his sonnets to explore the dominating contradictions and to help readers have a better grasp of the meaning of the sonnets and extracts pleasure from them.
2. After applying Grice's model (1975) to the analysis of the sonnets, it is approved that paradox is that phenomenon which makes clear flouting of the cooperative principle. This indication results from the fact that paradox is a statement that contradicts reality and absurd in meaning. Therefore it is observed that most of Grice's maxims are flouted.
3. Concerning Searle's speech acts, it is found that directive speech acts are highly adopted by Donne than other speech acts, then comes representative, and expressive speech acts respectively. Even though each of the speakers in the Holy Sonnets is "but a voice," they combine to command, inquire, threaten, rationalize, visualize, and expostulate their way into God's attention, whether by groans or trumpet blasts. As Patrides (cited in Guibbory, 2006:152) writes, "the Holy Sonnets represent the summit of Donne's art. The brevity and containment of the individual holy sonnets are important aspects of their cumulative impact."
4. Paradox is a context dependent phenomenon and cannot be understood without relying to its proper context.

5. This study demonstrates that paradox expresses pragmatic meanings in a way that reflects the speaker's communicative goals, either to strengthen an existing assumption, add new information, or contradict an existing discourse assumption.
6. Paradox which is regarded as non-literal use of language, with its communicated (speaker-meant) content is analysed as a matter of particularized implicature by Grice; therefore it contributes elements of content to the proposition most directly communicated by the speaker.
7. Many paradoxes are full of a range of meanings and are capable of evoking a rich set of propositional and non-propositional meanings, depending on the amount of effort a reader or listener puts into interpreting any paradox in some specific situations. So the task of understanding these paradoxes involves trying to maximize the cognitive effects associated with an utterance in context while minimizing the cognitive effort put into deriving these effects. Otherwise, any failure to understand paradoxical utterances would lead to an immense misunderstanding of the whole work.
8. It is observed that paradox interpretation involves the same inferential process as that of daily language, which is immediate and dynamic as it is viewed in pragmatic perspective. Paradox is not only a rhetorical device, but it also plays a critical role in pragmatic inference in the course of utterance interpretation by helping the listener or reader to get what is behind the literal words.
9. Figures of speech, including paradox, are imaginative tools in both literature and ordinary communications used for explaining speech beyond its usual usage. The acquired result shows that Donne wants to convey his message of these sonnets in an implicit and indirect way, so he has used paradox which has figurative meaning beyond its literal meaning. Also, the result of using this kind of figures of speech shows that the addressee cannot explicitly understand the meaning of the sonnet and he must refer to the allegorical dimension of it to discover its implicit meaning.
10. When writing these sonnets, Donne was still struggling to assume a position within his society. Thus, the speakers share part of Donne's frustration between his self-conception compared to the way society perceived him. Unfortunately for Donne, being defined by his association with the Catholics and Jesuits made him nothing in his society. So his speakers serve Donne's need to contain and forget that part of his identity. In doing so, they express the isolation of having no social selfhood.
11. The poems both serve and deny the poet's purpose of establishing an autonomous spiritual self, free of the constraints of his heritage. The only way to recognize this tension is to approach Donne as a poet who infused his biographical and social self into his poetic personae.
12. Poetic language allows Donne to express the paradoxical challenges of eliminating one's past without destroying one's selfhood, of acknowledging one's heritage without limiting self expression. Donne's speakers attempt self-assertion but fail to fully stem the constraining elements of a past that still held sway over the poet. By examining these poems in light of Donne's Jesuit influence we come to understand the spiritual indolence of speakers trying to repress inherited traditions that were central to Donne's sense of identity.

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