

CHAPTER : VIAMBIGUITY OF THE SIXTH TYPE

Empson's types indicate 'advancing logical disorder', as the sixth type is concerned one can mark this fact sharply. The 'fifth type' indicates the muddle state of the mind of the author', where idea is not adequately expressed, and it lies half-way between two things. In the 'sixth type' more confused state of the mind of the reader is suggested. Tautology and contradictions force the reader to invent the statements of his own. Empson defines this type : "An ambiguity of the sixth type occurs when a statement says nothing, by tautology, by contradiction, or by irrelevant statements; so that the reader is forced to invent statements of his own and they are liable to conflict with one another".¹

Empson usually illustrates 'his types' by giving examples from poetry. But in the sixth chapter of Seven Types of Ambiguity he begins his discussion by giving a prose passage, that describes appearance of Zuleka Dobson. Here are two sentences describing her beauty.

1. Zuleka was not strictly beautiful.
2. Her eyes were trifle large, and lashes longer than they need have been.

After reading these two lines the first impression of a reader is that whether it is compliment to Zebeka's beauty or a comment on her beauty ? Because contradiction is consciously apprehended by the reader. Empson interpretes the first sentence " Do not suppose that she was anything so commonplace; do not suppose that you can easily imagine what she was like, or that she was not, probably, the rather out-of-way type that you particularly admire".² Thus the first sentence gives us all these meanings because statement says nothing by contradiction and we are forced to invent the statements of our own as Empson does in his analysis. The first sentence describes her beauty it is ambiguous because it is very difficult to guess what is meant by 'strictly beautiful'. The second sentence that describes her eyes, does not give clear idea. Here description of her eyes is 'trifle large'. But we do not understand here how 'large' the 'trifle' may be; and a reader is doubtful whether such eyes appear charming or make any other impression.

The description of Miss Dobson in the following paragraph is 'warm but ambiguous praise'.³

No apple-tree, no wall of peaches, had not been robbed, nor any Tyrian rose garden, for the glory of Miss. Dobson's cheeks. Her neck was imitation marble. Her hands and feet were of very mean proportions. She had no waist to speak of.

- Mr. Beerbohm.

According to Empson the negatives in the first sentence give us opposite meaning. In the second line her neck is described as 'imitation marble'; it gives another impression that whether her neck was imitating imitation marble or it was imitation of genuine marble. The adjective 'mean' that describes her hands and feet create doubt in the mind of a reader. Empson explains these lines and points out various possible meanings of those statements. Here 'mean' may suggest 'medium', 'small' or 'without quality'. In the same way author describes Zuleka's waist as 'She had no waist to speak of', it suggests that her waist may be 'at once flesh and without flesh' and readers are left in doubt whether her beauty was unique and did not depend on the conventional details, or parts of her body were, in fact good enough to be worth mentioning, or that they were intensely and fashionably small.⁴ The passage displays poetic beauty and hence Empson includes the author of this passage among the poets without making any apology.⁵ And this may be the reason, that Empson begins his

discussion of this type by quoting this passage of Mr. Beerbohm to express his concept of the 'sixth type'.

But who hath seen her wave her hand?
Or at the casement seen her stand?
Or is she known in all the land,
The Lady of Shalott?

- Tennyson.

These lines are quoted from Tennyson's poem 'The Lady of Shalott', the poem is regarded as one of the master pieces of Tennyson. The contradiction in the poem is expressed through the questions. Empson explains this, " She is not 'known' personally to anybody in all the land but everybody knows of her as a legend".⁶ This heightens the dramatic effect of the poem. Here the questions can be answered either 'yes' or 'no'. Because contradiction expressed here brings ambiguity in the lines.

It is the Cause, it is the Cause (My Soul),
Let me not name it to you, you chaste Starres,
It is the cause. Yet Ile not shed her blood,
Nor scarre that whiter skin of hers, then Snow.
And smooth as Monumental Alabaster.

- Shakespeare

These are the opening lines of the smothering scene in Othello, Act V, Sc ii. When Othello enters in the bed chamber of Desdemona and addresses her before smothering her, his mind is storming with jealousy, feeling of suspicion has filled his heart. The speech expresses his determination to kill Desdemona he begins his speech with 'O, it is the cause of vindicating love and honour. You chaste stars I cannot mention to you the sin. Yet I will not shed her blood, nor disfigure that skin of hers, which is whiter than snow; and who is smooth as a figure cut in alabaster. This may be plain paraphrase of the lines mentioned above.

Empson begins his analysis by giving Dr. Johnson's interpretation of the first line : 'It is not the act of murder that horrifies me here; it is the cause of it'. Empson further explains this as " we are made to wonder what it was that was causing the tempest in his mind".⁷ According to Empson it is then necessary to find out one word for what was in his (Othello's) mind. The statement fails to give primary meaning because there is lack of information; and secondary meaning of the statement suggests the agonies of his mind. Empson further points out meaning of 'it' which makes various assumptions possible such as 'his blackness, as her causing defection; the universality of human lust in both of them'.⁸

Empson's interpretation of the next line throws light upon the entire scene. Othello is not ready to shed Desdemona's blood, because to him it would be to display his animal instinct. The reason is then quite clear Desdemona who is chaste but Othello., charges her of adultery he is in divided mind, so eventhough he is suspicious of her character he thinks that if she is chaste, it would be like to stain her with the blood hidden even in her; and if she is guilty, it would be to stain Othello himself with the blood of Desdemona.⁹ Empson observes that the scene is designed in such a manner that horror of Othello's violence is made to seem inevitable. The symbols used in the speech and the comparisons may suggest different meaning to different people. However, a meaning of a particular line depends upon the Elizabethan associations with 'blood'.⁹

In this type tautology, irrelevance and contradiction force the reader to findout the statements of his own. This type is a link between 'first' and 'seventh' type. As we find there is a link between 'third' and 'fourth' type. Empson mentions, "Ambiguity of the sixth type by irrelevant statements maintains precarious existance between the first and the seventh".¹⁰

In this type we have various statements of various implications, because by tautology contradiction and irrelevant statement nothing is said and ultimately reader has to make the statements of his own. Where as in the 'first type', 'a word' or 'a grammatical structure' is 'effective in a several ways'. So thus we can establish a link between these two types.

Simile is considered in this type by Empson ; he interpretes a single simile : " To say a thing is like 'gold' " may suggest different meanings. Empson lists them as - glittering, strong, lifegiving like the sun, young, like the Golden Age, expensive and hence aristocratic, capable of being drawn and beaten into delicate ornament or simply means 'mercenary' and a heavy symbol of wealth.¹¹ etc. Thus a single simile expresses such different meanings. Empson includes this in the sixth type because with a single simile the reader is forced to invent his own statements with various implications and associations.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. William Empson : Seven Types of Ambiguity.
P.176.
2. Ibid. P.176.
3. Ibid. P.177.
4. Ibid. P.177.
5. Ibid. P.177.
6. Ibid. P.177.
7. Ibid. P.185.
8. Ibid. PP.185-86.
9. Ibid. P.186.
10. Ibid. P.184.
11. Ibid. P.185.

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