CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSIONS

We started our study of Edith Sitwell's poetry with the assumption that Stylistics was the central mode of critical investigation and that it was a more scientific and objective study of a literary text than traditional literary criticism. My experience of stylistic analysis of Edith Sitwell's poetry has certain lessons to offer.

(a) Though poetry is primarily language and consequently the linguistic analysis of a poem is apparently the basic critical tool, what is important to bear in mind is that language is not a thing but a process, that the language of literature is a kind of speech act, and, therefore, stylistic analysis presupposes the reader's response which is not a mechanical affair, that the reader's response, however strongly it is tied down to the mere facts of language, is constantly subjected to the pressure of interpretation, and that mere stylistic analysis tends to degenerate into mechanical and statistical trivialities.

(b) The difference between the stylistician and the literary critic, it appears to me, is that the literary critic yields to the pressure of interpretation, whereas the stylistician senses the pressure but does not yield to it. Only when he is intensely aware of the pressure of interpretation, his linguistic analysis tends to become meaningful and productive. I must admit that in my analysis of individual
poems though I have generally withheld myself from interpretation, I found myself sometimes yielding to it. Particularly towards the concluding part of the analysis of the individual texts, I found the urge to seek meaning and the coherence of meaning too strong to resist.

(c) I think stylistic analysis is easy and extremely fruitful if the propositional sense of a text is readily available, in which case, stylistic analysis adds to, modifies, and subtilizes the initial propositional sense (as, say, in Halliday's analysis of Yeats's poem 'Leda and the Swan' or Widdowson's analysis of Ted Hughes' 'September'). But in the case of a Sitwellian poem, where the propositional sense is not easily available, stylistic analysis is always subjected to an abnormally strong pressure of interpretation. Sometimes, I found it necessary to make use of a literary critic's intuitive interpretation in order to get the initial entry into an otherwise opaque and difficult text.

(d) The poems of the first two phases are, to use Barthes's terminology, 'writerly texts', in which Edith Sitwell self-consciously disregards the readers, with the result that there is extreme foregrounding on all the levels which makes it difficult to work out structures of meaning. We have to use almost all the available strategies to work out various patterns of meaning and build up some kind of viable structure out of some common components of the patterns.
Ambiguities and uncertainties in semantic structures render detailed stylistic analysis unproductive. On the other hand, in the third phase, Sitwell, the Christian prophet, turns towards the readers and attempts to work within the framework of accepted semantic world of discourse. But sometimes, she does not, as in 'Bagatelle', resist the temptation to return to her central strategy of extreme foregrounding at all linguistic levels, in which case the attempt to work out the relationships between various components of the poem takes on the nature of a highly speculative linguistic adventure. Unless there is a properly balanced proportion between the propositional sense and the area of 'dhwani', stylistic analysis tends to become futile and unprofitable. Only when there is a dynamic interaction between the two areas - the area of propositional sense and that of 'dhwani', stylistic analysis operates both effectively and productively.

(e) While studying Sitwell's poetry from the point of view of linguistic stylistics we become intensely aware that language in a poem is not merely a linear phenomenon and that a poem is a linguistic construct, having a kind of architectural structure bound together by a complex system of relationships - parallelisms of sound, diction and images, equivalences of syntactic structures and contrasts of all kinds - all held together in a sort of interactive tension. Hence the development of Cluysenaar's strategy of working out
the internal relationships of linguistic features in a poem is imperative for any productive stylistic analysis of poetry.

(f) Stylistics as a tool of literary analysis is viable with comparatively short poems, the components of which can be held together in one manageable span of consciousness. A longer poem can be studied stylistically only in terms of chunks culled from it and in terms of critical intuitions to bridge the gaps in our total comprehension of a poem. Similarly it is difficult to work out the continuous development of a poet in terms of stylistics. Here again what is possible is only a division of phases, based on objective-cum-subjective, linguistic-cum-literary perceptions and arriving at certain conclusions about broad principles and possible directions of development.

A Sitwellian poem does not lend itself to a linear, logical and propositional analysis. We are forced, therefore, to look at the poem as a picture, giving attention to the totality of the poem at one glance and holding together in the consciousness all the connections that go to make the construct.

The diachronic as well as the synchronic study of Edith Sitwell's poetry helps us to define the salient features of what we might call her 'development'. Broadly speaking, the poetry of the first phase belongs primarily to the category of 'intransitive' writing. It is essentially 'non-representational', with the meaning structures built entirely through the intra-textual patterning primarily on the phonetic and semantic levels.
and the language answers to the extreme formalistic position of Mukarovsky: "In poetic language foregrounding achieves maximum intensity to the extent of pushing communication into the background as the objective of expression and of being used for its own sake; it is not used in the services of communication, but in order to place in the foreground the act of expression, the act of speech itself" (Cluysenaar: 1976, Sitwell's 61). We have seen that behind extreme foregrounding in terms of sound, diction and semantics, which is the device of extreme defamiliarization, there is some kind of attempt at a philosophical coming to terms with the universe. The central strategy of defamiliarization consists of various devices such as synaesthesia, syllabic autonomy, experimentation with various relationships between tenor and vehicle.

We have come to the conclusion that, in the poetry of the first phase, Sitwell is primarily interested in breaking down the older modes of perception and in exploring newer modes of sensual-cum-linguistic perceptions. In the poetry of the first phase, the basic structure of meaning is related to the orchestration of phonological units. Within the first phase itself we notice a gradual movement from perception to conception, with her sensibility trying to grapple with the most fundamental elements in the existential process of life.

Edith Sitwell's theory of stylistics, as the discussion of it in Chapter 2 indicates, is the outcome of her
preoccupations in the first phase, that is, it is primarily devoted to phonetics. The value of her 'intuitive theory', as it has been pointed out earlier (see p.39), lies in the fact that it shows the possible development of 'Phono-stylistics'.

In the second phase, the phonetic motivation becomes less strong than in the first phase. Words become more important than sounds, and the semantic dimensions of words become increasingly operative. The device of sound linkage in terms of parallelisms, equivalences and contrasts become increasingly meaning-oriented, with the result, certain concepts gradually crystalize into operating symbols in her poetry. If the first phase is dominated by the orchestration of sounds, the second phase is dominated by the orchestration of semantic units in terms of significant words, phrases and images. It is interesting to notice that syntactic deviations are kept to the minimum in both the phases. This confirms one of the principles that Mukarovsky enunciates: "...the simultaneous foregrounding of all components of a work of poetry is unthinkable". (Cluysenaar: 1976, 60). The second phase has in it all the characteristics of the period of transition. Towards the end of the second phase, the poet moves to a positive philosophical stance - that of Christianity. From a critical point of view we might say that Sitwell's passage from the beginning of the first phase to the end of the
second phase is a journey from an amoral, ahistorical perception of things to a conceptual vision of Christianity.

The third phase is dominated by the principles of simplification and universalization. If in the first phase Sitwell revels in the multiplicity of sensations and complexity of perceptions, involving unexpected linguistic connections, in the third phase, she works within the world of accepted symbols and simple linguistic strategies. If the poems of the first phase are predominantly 'writerly texts', the linguistic constructs being complete self-contained entities, the poems of the third phase are predominantly 'readerly' texts, with the linguistic constructs easily extending into the consciousness of the readers. By 'readerly' I do not mean 'capable of being easily available to any reader', but 'capable of being available to the reader of Sitwell's works' who is familiar with her poetic code. In other words, if the reader is acquainted with the poetic code of the first two phases, he gets an easy entry into the poetry of the third phase.

The level-wise characteristics of the three phases in Sitwell's poetry may be summarised as follows:

**Phonetic level**

**Phase I**

1. Extreme phonetic foregrounding.
2. Abnormal concern with the texture of sounds.
3. Little foregrounding of rhythm.
4. Syllabic autonomy.

5. Frequent phonological repetitions and parallelisms.

6. Sound as a centrally operating factor.

7. Orchestration of phonological units (meaning structure built round this orchestration).

**Phase II**

1. Phonetic preoccupation continues: more striking organization in terms of rhyme, alliteration, internal rhyme and assonance. But the phonetic motivation becomes less strong than in the first phase.

2. Experimentation with rhyme continues: internal rhythms and rhymes.

3. Use of various devices of sound linkage and rhyme linkage, some of which transcend word-boundaries.

4. Increase in the number of sibilants.

5. Frequent use of long vowels - giving a sense of amplitude.

6. The principle of amplification central to the structuring of sound texture.

**Phase III**

1. Phonological motivation becomes secondary.

2. Phonological connections used for establishing semantic links: lexico-phonological repetition.

3. Disappearance of the rhyme: general disappearance of rhymes transforms the line into a kind of Biblical prose.
4. Simplification of rhythms.
5. Vowel quantity significantly foregrounded - a mark of prophetic poetry.
6. The predominance of nasals over plosives and fricatives lending sonority to the prophetic tone.

**Syntactic level**

**Phase I**
1. Very little foregrounding with regard to syntax: very few elliptical phrases and clauses; very few dislocations and fewer fragmentations.
2. Right-branching constructions predominate.

**Phase II**
1. Syntactic deviations are still kept to the minimum, though they are more in number than in the first phase; elliptical clauses outnumber elliptical phrases; occasional use of disjointed syntax; quite a number of verb-less sentences; mixing of questions and statements.
2. Frequent use of interjections, especially in 'Metamorphosis'.
3. Various strategies of elaboration: paratactic constructions; a plethora of co-ordinating constructions, with 'and' constructions predominating.
4. More left-branching constructions than right-branching ones.

**Phase III**
1. Syntactic deviations less than in the second phase.
2. Right-branching (post-modifying) constructions dominate; multiple modification within the pre-modifying
constructions: participial constructions, single words etc.)

3. Elliptical clauses continue to be used.

4. Frequent use of the syntax of compression and subordination.

5. Sudden changes of sentence type (statement, question, command, and exclamation).

Semantic level

Phase I

1. Striking semantic foregrounding.

2. Frequent lexical repetitions.

3. Frequent use of the device of establishing slant semantic relationships between lexical items.

4. A complex intra-textual patterning of lexical items: fusion of light, colour, sound and touch sensations resulting in collocative clashes.

5. Highly striking images and metaphors: extremely original set of similitudes between tenor and vehicle.

6. The semantic structures governed primarily by phonetic motivation.

7. The poems of the first phase: more or less autonomous semantic structures.

Phase II

1. Extreme semantic foregrounding: collocative clashes, ellipsis, ambiguity, obscurity.

2. Exploitation of phonoesthetic suggestiveness ('vyanjana') of words. Concepts gradually crystallizing into operating symbols.
3. Orchestration of semantic units in terms of significant words, phrases and images.

4. A clearly discernible movement towards conceptualization: a positive philosophical leaning towards Christianity: the increasing frequency of occurrence of Christian symbols.

5. Frequency of lexical repetitions continues - often resulting in chains of lexical repetitions; blending of cognitive and connotative links in lexical repetition.

6. Word-formation: compounding used extensively; functional conversion of the elements in compoundings; variety of experiments in compounding.(see Appendix A)

7. Frequent use of semantic linkages: use of paradigmatic relations of words.

Phase III

1. Semantic foregrounding continues - but the movement is towards the direction of simplification and universalization;

2. Words of greater semantic dimensions are frequently used.

3. The use of capitalization to highlight the semantically significant words.

4. No strained compound formation.

5. The vehicle more important than the tenor in metaphors and similes.

6. Ideational level more important than sensation level.

7. World of a few large generally accepted symbols: the dominance of the images and symbols of Christianity.
The general movement and direction of her development may be shown as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Linguistic preoccupation.</td>
<td>Meta-linguistic pre-occupation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Form</td>
<td>Meaning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Formalism</td>
<td>Symbolism.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Perception</td>
<td>Conception.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Centripetal movement of the poem</td>
<td>Centrifugal movement of it.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Writerly texts</td>
<td>readerly texts (cf. Barthes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Synchronic pre-occupation(with the present existential moment)</td>
<td>Diachronic pre-occupation(with the past, present and future, with the historical and the prophetic).</td>
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Sitwell's poetry, on the whole, represents almost all the
possible forms of foregrounding in the semantic/phonetic areas, and offers, therefore, a very fertile area of study to any stylistician who is interested in working out the limits of the possibilities in these areas. The stylistic study of Sitwell's poetry clearly indicates that one of the significant directions of poetic development is towards increasing simplicity and universalization. However experimental the poet is in the beginning, his maturity expresses itself in terms of a positive philosophical stance and a corresponding centrifugal movement encompassing comparatively more basic human concerns. There is, therefore, a general movement from linguistic preoccupation to metalinguistic pre-occupation, from form to meaning, from surface structures to deep structures, from, to use Barthes's terms, 'intransitive' writing to 'transitive' writing.