CHAPTER - 5

CONCLUSION
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In chapters 1-4 it has been amply established that the dichotomy between literary criticism and linguistic analysis is detrimental to each other. Poetry uses the verbal medium, which is the domain of consideration by both the aesthetic critic and the linguistic critic. We have discussed an approach to study poetry where analysis of linguistic elements should not merely be a complementary phenomenon but an integral part of the set of tools to be used for understanding the meaning of a particular poem. For the exigencies of discussion we can take up the various criteria and components of aesthetic criticism and linguistic analysis separately. But an ideal approach would be to analyse a poem with the application of both the sets of criteria (literary and linguistic) simultaneously as far as it is feasible with regard to a particular poem. The element of subjectivity, impressionism and intuitive response of an aesthetic critic is not to be rejected as an idiosyncratic aberration but it should be tested with the criteria provided by descriptive linguistics. In the light of the results of the linguistic validation or refutation the response may be
changed or modified. The same is true of the linguistic deviances from, or violence on the established system of the language with reference to the reader's hunch about the total meaning of a poem. Thus the cognitive aspect of language upheld by the descriptive linguist and the affective use of language relied upon by the literary critic can collaborate to determine the viability and the extent of the choice and use of a particular item of language, at the phonological, lexical and grammatical levels. Cleanth Brookes has rightly observed that we read poetry not so much for informational or practical purposes as for such elusive matters as feelings and attitudes\(^1\) about the subject matter. But it is difficult to accept Brooks' concept of "The Heresy of paraphrase" which rejects the referential and cognitive aspects of language function.\(^2\) But when Brooks comes to actually analyzing a poem in his Understanding Poetry he himself finds it difficult to do without extra-textual information which we feel is a part of the cognitive aspect of meaning to be skimmed through paraphrasing.


\(^{2}\) The Well-Wrought Urn, op. cit., Ch. 2.

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We have, in our analysis of the poems, demonstrated the usefulness of paraphrasing – a conventional teaching device followed by teachers. Before paraphrasing we had suggested that the teacher should ponder a bit on the title of the poem by asking various questions to the students. In fact asking questions either about literary devices or linguistic devices used in the poem promotes the heuristic interest of the students in discovering meaning for themselves. It also acts as an impetus to increasing their motivation and involvement in the act of interactive teaching. This fact has been recognized as a viable item of teaching methodology by Brooks also in his preface to the third edition of his Understanding Poetry: “Questions put to the student on individual poems is perhaps the most important part of the teaching process”\(^3\).

In our analysis of the poems we have kept in mind that the poem is not a group of mechanically combined elements - meter, rhyme, figurative language, idea, and so on - but something organic like a plant. A plant exists in a situation - spatial and temporal. Similarly a poem also has its ‘context

\(^3\) Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. XV
of situation\(^1\) where we have three major components, the poet with his background of socio-cultural contexts; the ideational aspect of the poetic artifact, with its intra and extra-textual contexts; and the reader with his own background - social, educational, intellectual, experiential etc. Intra-textual context of situation is provided by the poem itself where we have to analyze the poet's attitude to his subject-matter and his relationship with his reader. Here the linguistic items play a greater role and literary devices such as the use of symbols, myths and images also contribute to the living organism we call the poem. In our analysis of the poems we have been on our guards to introduce the extra-textual information both for the understanding of the referential and the emotive use of the language. For example, in Yeats' two poems we have analyzed, references to the biblical allusion of Christ (The Second Coming) and the classical myth of Leda (Leda and The Swan) become absolutely necessary otherwise the poem will appear baffling. But in a poem like 'The Solitary Reaper'

\(^1\) Papers in Linguistics 1934-1951, op. cit., p. 181.
it is not necessary to mention Wordsworth's sojourn to the Highlands in the Scottish territory.

We have laid, as mentioned above, a significant emphasis on students' heuristic effort to explore referential, affective and stylistic meaning of the title. Here it would be pertinent to add that the students should be made to see whether there is coherence- logical connection-between the title and the opening line/s of the poem. If this element of coherence is not patently discoverable then the title has not been selected artistically. The title in fact quite often conveys the central thematic thrust of the poem or provides a platform for debate of an idea. Like coherence students should also be made aware of the concept of cohesion in the development of argument in a poem. Sudden conclusions and deviations in syntactic patterns are not randomly used by a poet but are carefully selected. We can illustrate our point with an example from *The Wasteland*: In the third movement of the first section "What are the roots that clutch...........?" The use of the interrogative is a cohesive device to connect the dismal picture drawn by the protagonist of the poem in the opening lines and the futility of activities in the modern urban life, and the sense of
uprooted humanity in the lines which follow, where the drab materialistic and despiritualised pursuits in the life of the German princess are described.

We have already talked about the importance of paraphrase where the rational or ideational content of the poem, which is the foundation on which aesthetic experience is grounded, should be clearly grasped and understood by the students. After the paraphrase the most important element of grounding is Ambiguity⁵ William Empson defines it as "more than one cognitive meaning for the same piece of language."⁶ He goes on to say "any verbal nuance however slight, which gives room for alternative reaction to the same piece of language" can be called ambiguous. Ambiguity, in fact can be used 'in two senses; one, operation of an expression in two or more ways at the same time, e.g. use of pun; two, an expression leading to indefinite thought, e.g. unconventional symbolism or imagery such as Yeats' use of 'vague' in collocation with 'trembling fingers' in 'Leda and the Swan'. Of the other devices of Foregrounding which we


have tried to discover for getting at the meaning of the poem in the preceding chapter is the lexical one. There are some frequently used figurative devices, such as metaphor, paradox and hyperbole which are used as linguistico-aesthetic devices of 'Foregrounding'. We have called it linguistico-aesthetic because the use of such a figurative device contains both the emotive response to the subject matter as well as uses linguistic markers to convey both the cognitive and the affective meanings. Take, for example, the use of metaphor in Marlow's Dr. Faustus' Apostrophe to Helen which successfully conceals the protagonists' act of demoniality under the garb of mythical and divine grandeur. Elizabethan and 17th Century poetry is replete with use of metaphor and hyperbole. Shakespeare's of "Multitudinous sea incarnadine," in the context of Lady Macbeth's unfathomable remorse, or Hamlet's declamation of his love for Ophelia in mathematical measures in the funeral scene, to ironically deflate the artificiality of Leartes' ritualistic formality of expression of deep grief in conventional terms, are the two glaring examples quite familiar to students of English literature. Paradox is a figure of speech most favoured by Cleanth Brooks. In fact he calls the language of
poetry as the language of paradox, i.e. the language of 'indirection' as contrasted with the language of 'direction' in scientific discourse. The use of the "cold" sylvan historian narrating the unfulfilled but eternally warm love of the youthful lovers is an example of highly functional paradox in Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn". In fact, the simple fact that the Grecian Urn which is an inanimate object, is the speaking historian narrating events is paradoxical. The controversy about the concluding line of Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium" where the golden bird on the golden bough contrary to the general argument of the poem stultifies the poetic stand. The poet who emphatically rejects the world of nature because of its inherent characteristic of transitoriness and decay decides to go to the world of art, i.e. the world of permanence and fixity. But in the last line of the poem the bird suddenly sings "of what is past, or passing or to come" – the world of flux and mutability which was summarily rejected in the first stanza of the poem. Here a mention can be made of the collaborative linguistic 'Foregrounding' as well. For example, the emphatic demonstrative – "that" - with which the poem opens shows the poet's rejection of and separation from the world of
birth, growth, decay and death. But the use of the parenthesis "those dying generations" is to bridle his creative proclivity to the world he so emphatically rejects but beautifully describes. This syntactic device hints at the early ambivalence in the poet's relationship with the subject matter. The use of the lexical item "monument" to extol permanence contributes to this ambivalence which is accentuated by the use of "artifice of eternity" where artifice may mean both artifact as well as artificial. That the poet has a strong reservation about a clear cut dichotomy between the two worlds as constituting the subject matter of poetry—the world of phenomena and the world of art, where the one world lacks permanence of the other world and the other lacks the warmth and pleasure of its counterpart. The poet rejects the world of nature most emphatically in the last stanza. But the ambivalence which runs through out the poem shows up linguistically in the use of the passive grammatical phrases — "hammered gold and gold enameling ............. set upon a golden bough" — to show his till towards the world of flux because of his disgust with the passivity, (passive grammatical pattern) the fixity (the device of repetition of 'gold') and lack of warmth. Hence the
justification for the unexpected conclusion of the poem in the last line which results from the inner logic of the text and is strongly supported by linguistic manipulation of the language. We lingered somewhat longer on this famous poem of W.B. Yeats because the controversy about the poem can be resolved to perceive the deeper meaning only by focussing on the collaborative use of the linguistic and literary devices. At the aesthetic level, the poem proceeds with a statement which is debated and concluded. Rationale for the point of view is given during the development of the poem. There is a linear movement in the structural pattern of the poem which turns out to be circular because of the concluding line of the poem where the very fact rejected in the beginning of the poem is accepted as the only desirable and acceptable object. But the development of the theme and the progression of the structure hinge heavily upon the consummate artistic use of linguistic items — both lexical and syntactic to sustain the artistic tension created because of the deliberate ambivalence. We can give another example of the masterly use of lexical Foregrounding by Milton in the use of the word “Talent” in line 3 of “On His Blindness”. It refers to both, the poetic talent of the poet at the present
time as well as alludes to the "Talents" in the Biblical parable. The grammatical Foregrounding has been mentioned in the choice of a particular syntactic pattern in a poetic context. The problem to be tackled with the whole issue of Foregrounding is, that the reader has to ask as to why the poet makes a particular choice and not the other one out of the available alternatives, permissible in the system of the language. For example, why should Faustus in his first soliloquy be made to use imperative syntactic patterns, or, why does the lover in Donne's poem uses the same pattern in "Go and catch a falling star" and not the normal declarative syntactic form. In the foregoing paragraphs, with the help of example drawn from poetry of the past and present we have tried to establish that a collaborative endeavour of the literary critic and the linguist-preferably both, in one person-will be helpful in understanding and teaching a poem properly. Leech observes:

It is artificial to draw a clean line between linguistic and critical exegesis: stylistics is indeed the area in which they overlap. Nevertheless, if such a line had to be drawn, I should draw it as follows: the linguist is the
man who identifies what features in a poem need interpretation (i.e. what features are foregrounded) and to some extent (e.g. by specifying rules of transference) what opportunities for interpretation are available; the literary critic is the man who weighs up the different possible interpretations.\(^7\)

We have demonstrated clearly in the analysis of the poems in Chapter 4 that our approach is to discover total significance of a poem in terms of the reader's interpretation where only the linguistic competence is not required. This is because a number of other extra-textual (extra linguistic) kinds of knowledge also enter into the interpretation of poetry. Comprehension of a poem can sometimes lean heavily upon biographical elements-such as in Yeats — and on socio-political elements such as in "The Express" by Spender, which may become necessary to include in the interpretation of the total significance of the poem. This may be going against the claim of the phonetic linguist claiming exclusive authority on the poem because it consists of language, which is his domain. In this context we can close

our discussion by a quote from the most notable craftsman in handling the creative use of language, i.e. Dylan Thomas:

> You can tear a poem apart to see what makes it technically tick and say to yourself, when the works are laid out before you, the vowels, the consonants, the rhymes and rhythms, yes, this is it. This is why the poem moves me so. It is because of craftsmanship. But you're back again where you began. You are back with the mystery of having been moved by words. The best craftsmanship always leaves holes and gaps in the works of the poet, so that something that is not in the poem can creep, crawl, flash or thunder in.⁸

In the teaching of poetry at the undergraduate level, the most important participants are the teacher and the students. It is our assumption that the teacher is well equipped with a thorough knowledge of the descriptive linguistic analysis of the English language. Besides this he

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is expected to have a high degree of sensitivity to the various components of the English language in addition to the cultural fabric in which the language is inextricably interwoven. The student should have a reasonable quantum of sensitivity to language as well as a good grounding in the grammar of English and the cultural background required to fully explore the meaning of a piece of poetry. He should have the perceptivity to identify Foregrounded items literary as well as linguistic – on his own. The sorry state of affair of students' linguistic and literary equipment in majority of the teaching contexts in India is only too well known to need any elaboration. To pass a similar judgement on the situation of faculty in English sections may sound rather presumptuous. But here too, the truth is a matter of common knowledge in the academic circle. How this problem can be tackled will be going out of the preview of the present study. But crash programmes for teachers on how to teach poetry in a meaningful way in the realistic contexts of educational institutions can be a possible solution. In fact the heaviest onus lies on the head of the teacher. In the analysis of the poems an effort has been made to demonstrate how a poem can be put across in an undergraduate classroom, which can
serve the purpose of a model with or without modifications suitable to a specific teaching situation.