

CHAPTER - VIII

CONCLUSIONS

Making the survey of the early twentieth century criticism George Watson points out that according to I. A. Richards A Survey of Modernist Poetry, by Robert Graves and Laura Ridings is William Empson's model for his Seven Types of Ambiguity.¹ Empson was Richards' student when he was at Magdalene. He was deeply influenced by the book and the method of verbal analysis used by Graves and Ridings to analyse Shakespeare's sonnet. Taking the same view of analysis he wrote Seven Types of Ambiguity. Taking into consideration the relationship between Richards and Empson James Jensen assumes that there must have been some serious discussion between Richards and Empson about Graves and Ridings technique of verbal analysis. Richards who attempted to place it in his own theoretical perspective. In doing so, he could have easily suggested the term "ambiguity"; or Empson himself could have come across it in Richards' Principles of Literary Criticism.² S.E. Hyman points out that the concept is not quite new. Quoting Demetrius he states that there is not much difference between Demetrius' "coiled language" and Empson's definition of ambiguity : " any consequence of language, however, slight, that adds some nuance to the direct statement".³

Watson states that in Seven Types of Ambiguity Empson rechristened 'ambiguity' as far as the technique of verbal analysis is concerned.⁴ Watson further writes, "Empson did not invent the technique of verbal analysis, which dominated critical fashion in the Forties and Fifties, but he was first to systematize it."⁵

Elder Olson states that "ambiguity" is one of the forms of the tropes. He places Empson besides ancient theorists who sought to discuss elevated style; and calls Empson as a 'tropist manque'.⁶ But here it should be considered that though poetic devices such as pun, simile, conceit, and allegory are included by Empson in his 'types'. Empson's approach is quite different, because tropes are used to embellish language but they never create puzzle in the mind of the reader, or never give devices arise alternative reactions. When writer uses trope he has clear idea in his mind. Tropes never indicate 'muddle state of the mind of the author', on the other hand 'ambiguity' as Empson conceives is quite different from tropes. It is the strength of the poetry. It is the natural characteristic of language.

Philip Wheelwright who is not satisfied with the term : 'ambiguity' because it suggests connotative meaning. He suggests the another term for ambiguity that is : 'plurisignation'.⁷ But Empson's concept of ambiguity can be only suggested with word ambiguity than any other because the term is all-enveloping and covers wide range. It gives idea of what linguists say 'surface structure' that conceals 'one or more deep structures'.

F. C. Prescott's approach of analysis should be taken into consideration, who states that language like imaginative mental picture, like the vision or dream of the poet shows condensation hence each word is apt to have many meanings.⁸ Empson's approach is logical and he tries to make linguistic analysis of the poems in his book. There are many instances in the book those show that he often seeks help of psychology to point out complexities in the poem and to relate it with the mind of the poet. Freudian analysis of the poems in the Chapter VII of Seven Types of Ambiguity is illustrative of this point.

Most of the objections raised by James Smith are answered in the Preface to the Second edition of Seven

Types of Ambiguity, and some of the charges answered in his second edition while discussing his 'types'. Objection raised by James Smith is that we never consider pun or conceit as ambiguous; to this Empson answers, "We call it ambiguous I think, when we recognise that there could be puzzle as to what the author meant, in that alternative views might be taken without sheer misreading. If a pun is quite obvious it would not ordinarily be called ambiguous, because there is no room for puzzling."⁹

Another objection raised by Smith regarding dramatic situation and judgement of the poet, is explained by Empson as,

Good poetry is usually written from a background of conflict, though no doubt more so in some periods than in others. The poet of course has to judge what he has written and get it right, and his readers, and critics have to make what they can of it too.... If critics are not to put up some pretence of understanding the feelings of the author in hand they must condemn themselves to contempt. And besides, the judgement of the author may be wrong..... Critics have long been allowed to say that a poem may be something inspired which meant more than the poet knew.¹⁰

Elder Olson calls Empson's method "Permutation and combination", and comments that it, "is mechanical method, and it is capable of all the mindless brutality of machine".¹¹ Olson quotes Empson's analysis of Macbeth's

speech from Chapter I and comments "this is the wrenching of the text."¹² But one hardly concur with this view after reading Empson's analysis because, it is careful study and close reading that makes Empson possible to interpret the poems, and state alternative meanings. It is not merely the listing of the meaning from Dictionary as Olson criticises, but to explain in detail subtleties of grammar and to unveil beauties of poem in the best possible way.

The book is praised for its educating purpose by M. C. Bradbrook, because it has unusual fertilizing power.¹³ A. R. Jones writes that the success of Empson's book lies in the fact that he proved that vagueness and imprecision are poetry's chief strength, and it is the honest way to record the complexities of experience.¹⁴ The book produces series of 'protocols' of the quality and perspectiveness.

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NOTES & REFERENCES

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11. Elder Olson, Critics and Criticism, PP 27-28.
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