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## Literature in the 'Languaging' Classroom

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This paper contends that the shift from language learning to 'languaging' is a necessary precondition for aligning the aims of language education with the goals of liberal education. It seeks to establish that 'languaging' is the coexistence of two very different ideas: the belief in the meaning-making potential of language, and the awareness of the radical instability of meaning in language. 'Languaging' is the experience of being in a language, an experience with both cognitive and affective dimensions. This paper attempts to redefine the distinction between L1 and L2/FL, as well as some of the pet-notions in the field of language education in the light of the notion "languaging": authentic language, cognitive approach to language instruction, and learner autonomy. It aims to persuade the reader that literature, which is a compact expression of the potential for meaning **and** the problems in language, alone can be a major stimulus for 'languaging'.

Postmodern theory has provided numerous opportunities to the academic community to explore the connection between language and literary pedagogies. One such instance of this is Jonathan Culler's 'literary competence' and the reader training programme founded on this notion. In spite of saying the right thing and at almost the right time,<sup>1</sup> Culler's programme never got the attention it deserved, **The Pursuit of Signs**, where Culler fine-tuned the programme announced in **Structuralist Poetics**, failed to generate the enthusiasm that **Structuralist Poetics** managed. After making yet another feeble attempt to promote his programme in his **On Deconstruction**, Culler seems to have given up his pet project and settled down to writing books that introduced new developments in literary criticism to graduate students.

The academic community's reluctance to give **Structuralist Poetics** and **The Pursuit of Signs** the iconic status that I.A. Richards' **Practical Criticism** or Cleanth Brooks and R.P. Warren's **Understanding Poetry** (Showalter 2003) enjoyed is quite instructive.

The self-image of the 21<sup>st</sup> century literary studies professional is perhaps the reason for the failure to perceive the opportunity to use Culler's 'literary competence' as a stimulus to start a sustained discussion on what reading literature involved. This self-image is a curious overlay of a public intellectual, and a professional involved in domain-specific activities like textual explication, adjudication, and setting up literary standards. The discussion on 'literary competence' could have become focused if it were based on the shared assumption that the experience of all literature, not just the 'writerly' or modernist/postmodernist 'interrogative' texts (Barthes 1970, Belsey 1980), includes entelechic moments during which the architectonics of the self and reality are revealed.

The discussion of "literary competence", viewed as the awareness of the dialectical process that constructs subjects and objects of their knowledge, would have led to a reconsideration of the much-debated notion 'linguistic competence' (Chomsky 1965), the spiritual ancestor of Culler's term. The literary theory-led revaluation could have helped spot the omission of the ability to forget the radical instability of the language-meaning relation from the definition of 'linguistic competence'. The act of forgetting that language is not a coherent, well-ordered system but a chaotic field would have provided a new orientation to the debate on 'linguistic competence', perhaps even a new lease of life. The revisionary view, where the ability to perceive language use as a rule-governed activity emerges as an act of will, would have so radically altered the notion 'linguistic competence' as to warrant a term like 'linguaging'. The hyponyms of 'linguaging' are 'linguistic competence' and 'literary competence'. In the putative new definition, 'literary competence' is the ability to remember the radical aporia at the heart of language in its engagement with reality.

'Linguaging' does not merely denote communicating through language. Nor is it a taffeta-term that masks the failure to understand the complex process of communication through language. On the contrary, 'linguaging' captures the dynamic process involved in language learning and language use better than any other term. This process is rendered dynamic by the dialectical tension between forgetting and remembering – forgetting that language, as a part of the symbolic practice (for want of a better term), is created through the denial of the *aporetic* moments, and the potential for play, and for pluri-signification. This potential is the flip-side of one of the major virtues of language, its capacity to

represent a thing through another that is quite different from the thing. Ironically, the potential to function as a symbol, to represent an absent thing through tokens totally unrelated to the things to be represented, is both the boon and the curse of language. Language, as a set of symbols, enables a speech community to talk about things in their absence. But the self-same attribute also renders controlling the signifying potential of the 'system' nearly impossible.

Context of use, the third part of the tripartite division of language use (form, meaning, context; Larsen-Freeman 2003), is not really the touch-line where the play of meaning stops. Paul de Man's Archie Bunker responds to his wife's question whether he wants his shoes laced over or laced under, with "What is the difference?". Bunker's response highlights the fact that context alone is not enough to arrest the play of meaning. Even though the domain and the other aspects that fall under the umbrella-term 'context' are well-defined for the two participants in the conversation, poor Mrs. Bunker cannot tell if Archie wants her to describe the semantic distinction or expects her to outline the relative advantages and disadvantages of the two types of lacing ( de Man 1973). This play of meanings, which is potentially paralyzing, is suppressed in most of our wakeful hours. It is allowed only after being made to appear ludicrous, rendered insignificant or contained through some other means. Jokes, which highlight the radical instability of meaning, evoke laughter. They are seldom perceived as the metalinguistic moments that they are, moments when language loses its appearance a natural medium of meaning exchange.

It takes an effort to ignore the experience of the failure to arrest the play of meaning. Through an unconscious training process, the individual user learns to 'fix' meaning through a set of rules and conventions of inclusion and exclusion, relying on the notions of correctness and appropriateness. This user 'forgets' or ignores the fact that language use in real world, which includes metaphorical extensions of meaning, dialectical variations, idiolect, creative use of language, etc., often lays bare the arbitrariness of language. Ironically, this arbitrariness is the reason for language's efficacy. In a sense, they acquire 'linguistic competence', which is not just knowledge of the rules of a language but also belief in language as a rule-governed system, with the potential to express full meaning. This metaphysics of presence, the belief in the fullness of meaning and being, which is the prerequisite of membership of a speech community, is challenged by performance, where the unconscious of language, its aporetic potential, continually surfaces. 'Linguistic competence' is thus founded on the ability to forget the moments where language fails to communicate 'meaning'.

Language learning is in fact 'linguaging', the capacity to acknowledge the uncontrollable play of meaning, and the ability to use language in spite of knowing that context is not resting ground for meaning. Belief in language as a rule-governed activity, together with the subliminal acknowledgement of the fluidity of the word-meaning relation, is what constitutes 'linguaging'. Learning a language and functioning effectively in a language involves, more than anything else, avoiding the impasse that ensues when context is recognized as merely another aspect of the process called language use. The individual member of the speech community 'forgets' that language is the zone of free play of meaning and allows themselves to be convinced that it is a rule-governed activity. This strengthens the illusion of successful transmission of determinate meanings that pre-exist users.

The subsumption of 'linguistic competence' under 'linguaging' through the inclusion of the ability to forget the radical instability of meaning is not a trivial attempt to further problematize the already complex process called language learning. An understanding of the complexity of the symbolic system whose chief virtue, the representation of things through tokens that are totally unrelated to them, is also its major source of difficulty, is a prerequisite for any language education programme that is fully geared towards its aims. Such programme will be able to recognize and address issues related to the cognitive and affective dimensions of communication through language.

'Linguaging' has far-reaching implications for second/foreign language pedagogy. It warrants a redefinition of the distinction between the cognitive-affective processes involved in learning a second/foreign language vis-à-vis those connected to learning a first language. In the case of L1, the user is aware of the potential of language for play from their childhood onwards (gibberish, prattle, repeating names, etc.). As adults they are often aware of it in their dream-experience where the boundary between the literal and the metaphorical/symbolic becomes diffuse. The process of subject-formation and negotiation with the protean unstable and ever-changing 'other', an important aspect of this being the symbolic practice, is a complex process. It is so inextricably intertwined with the process of self-formation that it is safe to treat the self and language as a continuum: self/language, the virgule (/) (Chandran 07) being the best notation to represent the porous wall between the self and language. The role of language in identity-formation or subject-construction makes it less difficult for the individual member of a speech community to forget the arbitrariness of relation between language and reality and the resulting fluidity in the relation between words and their meaning/referent. The subjectivity of the individual member of the speech community is the product/effect of the same system through which the world is ordered for this individual. This makes it easier for these individuals to see the relation

between language and reality as natural, since seeing it as an arbitrary relation would involve seeing their own identity as a construct, a perception that requires a major effort of the will.

In the case of the second or foreign language, too, using that language involves remembering and forgetting. In any given moment of languaging use, the individual user assumes that language is a rule-governed system that facilitates accurate and appropriate expression of a single meaning in a given situation. In doing so, they suppress the utterance's potential for play of meaning. Here too, the tension between remembering and forgetting that language is a fluid/unstable process, a crucial part of making sense of the world, manifests itself. However, there is a crucial difference between functioning in a first language and using a second or foreign language. The struggle to see the connection between words and their meanings as natural is more intense in the case of a second and a foreign language. To the second/foreign language learner, the code tends to appear less natural. This language user is aware of the code's materiality, which makes it less transparent. This awareness often resists the illusion of a natural relation between words and the things they stand for. Unlike in the case of the first language, once appropriately described as 'mother tongue', exposure to linguistic performance by others often threatens to undermine the basis of the competence of the individual user. Idiomatic expressions in a second/ foreign language that draw the user's attention to the arbitrariness of the relation between the symbol and the world of objects, rules of pronunciation that often defy the learner's logic, new meanings of familiar words that are quite different from their known meanings, paratactic structures, ellipsis and other omissions that dramatically modify expectations about sentence and discourse, to mention just a few, contribute to learner difficulties. Journalese, textese, and net-lingo furnish glaring instances of ellipsis and omission. For instance, ESL/ EFL learners, whose exposure to the target language is often limited to the textbook variety of English, are quite likely to wonder how "Queen Mary having her bottom scrapped" is deemed a grammatical sentence. They might also be suitably shocked over the indecent exposé of a highly private act.

To take a specific example, Indian learners of English wonder why *roads* are allowed to be *wide* while *shoulders* are not. They fail to understand why the `gue` in *tongue* is silent while the same group of letters/sequence of sounds is uttered and heard loud and clear in *argue*. They are surprised when they overhear people using *hot* and *cool* as positive attributes within the same subdomain, not as opposites like *dark* and *light*. They are puzzled over an expression like *disinterested*, which, they are informed, is not the antonym of *uninterested*. They often struggle to negotiate with sentences like "*haven't the foggiest*" or "*spring in the air*" that make perfect sense to the native speaker in England.

When translated into pedagogic terms, acknowledging 'linguaging' as the authentic experience of language will result in certain significant changes in the aims and objectives of second/foreign language education. Under the new approach, the pedagogic aims would include training learners to internalize the rules and conventions of the code even while suggesting to them the need to be open to the possibility of violation of these rules. This may be a luxury in the case of functional literacy of adults with limited needs in clearly identified domains of communication. But this double-move is a crucial part of language education. This double-focus, when ignored, places the burden of negotiating with the instances of violations of rules that are eventually regularised, extensions of word-meaning, and variety in language use, squarely on the learner.

Learners' exposure to language outside the classroom, which is often different from the textbook variety, frustrates their effort to group the new data neatly under categories they have been introduced to. It makes the learner strain at language outside the classroom, if not erode their confidence in their linguistic competence. This lends credence to the assumption that the present academic practice of brushing the fluidity of the relation between language and meaning under the language curricular carpet by treating it as a linguistic/philosophical nuance is symptomatic of an inauthentic approach, and unsound pedagogic principles.

The interesting and appropriate analogy is sex-education. If the high school merely treats it as taboo, segregates the genders and discourages sex-talk, and punishes overt and covert sex offences, students will be ill-equipped to deal with the world where sex is an integral part of life. But explicit instruction again is not the solution either. Sex-education, where sex is treated as a legitimate human activity with well-defined norms, even as students are warned about deviant behavior, is the genuine solution to this issue.

The second language curriculum in particular will reduce the burden on individual learner if it aims at 'linguaging' rather than native speaker-like competence. This is not suggesting that the second language classroom should discard accuracy and appropriateness of language use. On the contrary, the second language classroom should simulate language use in society. The individual should be allowed to assume that the meaning-making process is simple and effective. But challenges to this assumption should be part of the language learning experience. When this becomes the curricular aim, second language education will truly become a cognitive process in which generalisations about language use are made, and rules acquired, even as their provisionality is recognised. Such a curriculum will lay the foundation for

continuous language education by preparing learners to handle the variety in language use, and for the periodic changes in the conventions, without undermining their belief that language is a rule-governed activity.

This is the 'new' rationale for literature-based language instruction. Literature-based language instruction is better equipped to simulate the language of everyday use. Literature brings the world into the classroom in more than one way. It introduces learners to people and situations that are within the pale of human experience, and presents a wide range of communication strategies and corresponding verbal/non-verbal expressions. More importantly, it gives its audience hands on experience of authentic language, authenticity being the recognition of the overwhelming indeterminacy that lurks beneath every act of successful communication. From the nonsense verses and rhymes where the word choice is often determined by rhyme and not for reason, to tales and plays that make the working of language transparent, literature reminds the learner, overtly and subliminally, of the communication possibilities language offers. It also highlights the problems it poses. Language education that is based on literature helps present effective communication strategies, and the lexical-grammatical-discoursal choices that operationalize these strategies. Literature also demonstrates the possibility of inventing-innovating communication strategies and expressions, which is covert admission of the fluidity of the meaning-making process. The experience of literature invariably expands the audience's horizon of language experience.

Even a cursory survey of Anglo-American literature, one of the more familiar bodies of literary works, bears this out. Works as diverse as Lawrence Sterne's **Tristram Shandy**, Lewis Carroll's **Alice Books**, Ogden Nash and Edward Lear's Nonsense verse, Joyce's **Finnegan's Wake**, Samuel Becket's **Waiting for Godot**, the modernist poems of e. e. Cummings and William Carlos Williams, Joseph Heller's **Catch 22**, the metafiction of twenty-first century..., readily suggest the fact that literature is sited at the fault lines of language, culture, society, nation and identity. A closer look will convince the observer that literature often makes the sign transparent. It puts the commonsense notion that words are organically connected to their meaning under erasure. Literary texts surprise the reader in a variety of ways. Lewis Carroll both imitates and taunts the meaning-making process in his immortal verse "Jabberwocky". "'t was brillig" is both like and unlike English; the syntactic axis suggests Carroll's desire to abide by the rules of English to communicate with the audience, while the neologism "brillig" is a gesture of defiance. Dylan Thomas poem "A Grief Ago" forcefully inserts "grief" into the list of items in Jakobson's 'axis of selection' (Jakobson 1960), the 'paradigmatic axis' containing a list of items like "second", "minute", "day", "week", "month", "year", "decade", "century", etc. Hopkin's "Wreck of Deutschland", where god is at once "father and fondler of heart", strains reader expectation as it brings together terms

from two different semantic fields, eroticism and parental affection, which are strange bedfellows in everyday colloquy.

The usually sedate Milton astonishes his readers when he attempts to express the sublime, and in the process, exposes the ontological emptiness of words:

There lands the Fiend, a spot like which perhaps  
Astronomer in the Sun's lucent orb  
Through his glazed optic tube yet never saw. (**Paradise Lost**, Book III, 588-90)

To paraphrase Stanley Fish's lucid exposition of these lines, Milton conjures up a vision of the arch-fiend landing on the Earth by suggesting a point of comparison and quickly withdrawing it, thereby giving the reader a sense of a thing that mere words or phrases can never hope to suggest (Fish 1989). Shakespeare sums up the debilitating aporia that is an integral part of the meaning-making process when makes his philosopher-prince, Hamlet, who is a master of equivocation, get frustrated during his interaction with the grave-digger:

#### **Hamlet**

They are sheep and calves which seek out assurance  
In that. I will speak to this fellow. Whose  
Grave's this, sirrah?

#### **First Clown**

Mine, sir.

#### *Sings*

O, a pit of clay for to be made  
For such a guest is meet.

#### **Hamlet**

I think it be thine, indeed; for thou liest in't.

#### **First Clown**

You lie out on't, sir, and therefore it is not  
Yours: for my part, I do not lie in't, and yet it is mine.

#### **Hamlet**

'Thou dost lie in't, to be in't and say it is thine:  
'tis for the dead, not for the quick; therefore thou liest.

#### **First Clown**

'Tis a quick lie, sir; 'twill away gain, from me to  
You.

#### **Hamlet**

What man dost thou dig it for?

#### **First Clown**

For no man, sir.

#### **Hamlet**

What woman, then?

#### **First Clown**

For none, neither.

#### **Hamlet**

Who is to be buried in't?

#### **First Clown**

One that was a woman, sir; but, rest her soul, she's dead.

#### **Hamlet**

How absolute the knave is! We must speak by the  
Card, or equivocation will undo us.... (Act V, Sc I, 116-135)



It is not poetry alone that brackets the signifying practice in the very act of using language. Prose too demonstrates the aporetic moments in language. Even if a student of literature does not subscribe to Stanley Fish's view that certain 17<sup>th</sup> century prose texts are "self-consuming", this student will not hesitate to agree that the novel as an art form challenges the commonsense notions of stable meaning and being. In the act of composing prose, a writer cannot help being acutely aware of the instability of meaning and communicate this through their writing. O Henry's Mr. Penne in "Sound and Fury", who is not exactly a Caucasian Borges, drives home this point:

**MR. Penne** (dictates)

"Cortland, in Kate's presence heard faintly the voice of caution. Thirty years had not cooled his ardor. It was in his power to bestow great gifts upon this girl. He still retained the beliefs that he had at twenty." (To Miss Lore, wearily) I think that will be enough for the present.

**Miss Lore** (wisely)

Well, if he had the twenty that he believed he had, it might buy her a rather nice one.

**Mr. Penne** (faintly)

The last sentence was my own. We will discontinue for the day, Miss Lore.

**Miss Lore**

Shall I come again to-morrow?

**Mr. Penne** (helpless under the spell)

If you will be so good.

Even while demonstrating the immense communication potential of language, literature continuously challenges the belief in the possibility communication, and the perception that language is a rule-governed activity. It performs the latter function by continually challenging signifying conventions, and by presenting the ineffable and the nonsensical as legitimate aspects of experience, not the 'other' of communication and rationality. A central part of the experience of literature is thus training the mind to appreciate the possibilities **and** problems language brings with it.

When literary texts are introduced in the classroom with the twin curricular aims, introducing learners to the rules of language, and preparing them for the violation of these rules, firmly in mind, the method of teaching these literary texts will also become self-evident. The method consists of a) facilitating the perception of patterns of language use in these texts to strengthen the impressions of fixity and one to one correspondence between words and their referents, and b) helping them experience the surprise contained in the literary text. The latter leads to the momentary suspension of belief in the fixity of meaning and the efficacy of language.

The plea for literature in the language curriculum might sound like the proverbial old wine in a new bottle. A few important questions about the relevance of the proposal to language education need to be addressed if it is to be taken seriously. The more important questions among these are: "What is the need for justification of a curriculum that is

already in use?” “After all, hasn’t literature survived in some form in most curricula at the secondary and tertiary levels in SL/FL contexts?” “Despite the increased pressure on the academy for vocational education, sustained by the demands of the service industry in countries whose major export is its human resource, isn’t it true that the academy has been slow to respond to the call for the vocationalization of secondary education, and for functional literacy?” If these questions are not satisfactorily answered, the plea for the inclusion of literature in the language curriculum might sound suspiciously like an attempt to carve a niche for oneself by recasting traditional wisdom in modish terms.

The newness of the programme, it must be stated, lies solely in its re-appropriation of the nearly- forgotten insights on language education. Interestingly, this re-appropriation provides a new perspective on some of the commonplace notions in language education: authentic materials, cognitive approach, and learner autonomy. To look at the last of these notions first, the approach called ‘*linguaging*’ envisaged in this paper necessarily involves a more comprehensive conception of learner autonomy than the one currently in circulation. Insofar as ‘*linguaging*’ is negotiating with the uncertainties of communication through language, learner autonomy in the ‘*linguaging*’ classroom is more than teaching oneself to make appropriate choices in a variety of communicative situations. Autonomy in the context of ‘*linguaging*’ is nothing less than hands-on experience of a process, one where meaning is often suspended, and where the user is forced to constantly modify and qualify generalizations. The cognitive approach this paper advocates is one that, in addition to facilitating rule-generation through the processing of language chunks, helps the learner to be open to the idea of major modifications to these rules. An important aspect of this process of initiation into ‘*linguaging*’ is the subliminal recognition of language as a dynamic process, made up of unstable positions and relations. Within “*linguaging*”, authentic materials are those that provide scope for the learner to experience the cognitive and affective, the conscious and the not so conscious, processes language sets in motion.

The other important issue that needs to be addressed by the present proposal is the one pertaining to the overall effect of such a programme on the learner. Is the acknowledgment of the arbitrariness of the sign-referent relation and the instability of meaning likely to hamper language learning? This concern is the main reason for the uneasy relation between language and literature in the language curriculum. The unexamined belief that the play of meaning in the signification process should be hidden from the learner to increase their confidence, and the fallacy that the goal of language education is cultivating the habit of seeing language as a medium that communicates a message without a remainder, have led to the growing insignificance of literary texts in the language curriculum.

This concern can be addressed if it is understood that ‘linguaging’ does not have a debilitating effect on the learner. Remembering the radical instability of meaning, and forgetting that the natural connection between a sign and its meaning is an illusion cannot coexist at the same communicative moment. The experience of language consists in switching between memory and forgetfulness during the different moments of wakeful hours. In fact, memory of the ‘play’ of meaning and forgetfulness are in a productive tension, which alone can explain why our communication through language goes on even after we realize that our belief in the communicative efficacy of language is grossly misplaced. Translated into pedagogic terms, this productive tension has the potential to help learners constantly synthesize simple generalizations to make more complex ones. It can also equip them to operate across the different levels of language (Fleischman 1990) with consummate ease.

A language curriculum that hesitates to introduce its learners to authentic language, and to initiate them into ‘linguaging’, places the onus of coping with authentic language outside the classroom on the learner. Imposing the questionable view that language is a static system, and a totally rule-governed activity on the learner amounts to forcing on the learner the necessity to unlearn what they learn at school. This is a necessity since effective communication outside the classroom is characterised as much by the deviation from the linguistic norms as adherence to them. An effective second language education programme cannot stop with training learners to internalize the rules of the target language. It should also aim to prepare learners to handle the complexity of the phenomenon called language, and orient them to the communication possibilities and the problems the target language brings with it.

The knockdown argument in favour of ‘linguaging’ is that it treats literature as an inextricable part of the language education programme, and so it should give birth to methods that treat what is now treated as separate entities, ‘linguistic competence’ and ‘literary competence’, as two names for the same attitude-knowledge-skills complex. Any method that views ‘linguistic’ and ‘literary competence’ as two interrelated aspects of the same process, based on a comprehensive view of the complex processes of language and learning, holds the promise of holistic, learner-centred and value-based language education. The approach to language teaching outlined in this paper can only rule in teaching methods that alert learners to constantly monitor their day-to-day communication by making them realize a crucial feature of communication through language: in communication through language, more often than not, if anything can go wrong, it will. The legitimate objective of this method is exploiting the experience of literary texts to make learners

realize the importance of sympathy. Sympathy here denotes appreciation of the communicative constraints the interlocutor/receiver is under. This quality is thus a strategy to deal with the barriers to communication effectively.

The methods consistent with 'languaging', however, do not stop with it. Cultivating sympathy, the capacity for understanding the pain, and sorrow of a fellow human-being, is their other major objective. Preparing learners to be receptive to the others' experiences is a feasible objective since it is just a step away from helping them use an authentic communicative strategy called sympathy.

Like the methods of language teaching inspired by the diverse approaches, the methods under 'languaging' will work towards ensuring that learners become efficient communicators. What distinguishes them from the other methods is the fact that they treat this objective as indistinguishable from the other major objective, which is helping them come to terms with their humanity through an understanding of the significance of being human. The significance of this becomes evident when it is realised that the task of cultivating the capacity for sympathy in learners, which can promote responsible, civilized behaviour, is traditionally assigned to literary studies<sup>2</sup>. Value education is often considered the icing on the language curricular cake, one of the secondary concerns of the language curriculum. The methods compatible with 'languaging', which place value education at the heart of language education, have the potential to perform two important social functions.

The success of these methods is ensured by the right, if tentative, assumptions about language and learning on the one hand, and reality and the way human beings negotiate with it on the other, that underpin these methods. Since these methods are shaped by the notion that language is a dynamic network of positions and relations, and its corollary, the assumption that an awareness of this will evoke sympathy and thereby facilitate communicative efficacy, they should succeed in building the capacity for communication in learners. Methods founded on the belief that the capacity for sympathy is crucial to effective communication should contribute to the project of enlarging sympathies as part of the effort to help learners see themselves as members of a species with a shared history and destiny, rather than as individuals.

As an approach to language education, 'languaging' has the potential to train the mind and temper the spirit, besides building communicative capacity through exposure to the way language works.

## Notes and References

1. One of the important sources of appeal of Culler's "literary competence" is the fact that it makes structuralism, and Reader-response theory appear more sophisticated versions of New Criticism and the intuitive criticism the Anglo-American academy was familiar with. Culler achieves this by presenting Structuralism as an approach to literary texts that affirms literary meaning without having to subscribe to Cartesian metaphysics. In Culler's interpretation, Structuralism and Reader-response theory are the logical progression from New Criticism. By presenting form and meaning as products of interpretation, and in the same breath affirming that interpretation is a conventional act, Culler endorses the positivist notion of objective meaning without undermining the importance of the act of reading. But the reader's subjectivity too is put under erasure when Culler claims that only a reader schooled in literary conventions can see the patterns in a text, and attribute significance to them. But the form-meaning of a text is not imputed by the reader. Insofar as the writer is aware of the way the system works, the writer "allows" the reader to perceive structure and "discover" meaning. Culler thus makes the two post-positivist theories resemble New Criticism and intuitive school of criticism, the former as a version of the latter, a version that has discarded the assumption that reading is an affair between a solid text and an autonomous reader.

Culler makes the post-positivist theories look familiar to the Anglo-American academy of the 1970s by positing the notion of a 'competent' reader, which suggests the need for training in the art and skill of interpretation. The Anglo-American academy was familiar with this notion, well-versed as it was with Richard's Practical Criticism, Leavis's views on the role of the English departments and training manuals like Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren's Understanding Poetry. Culler's programme successfully domesticates the new theories of reading by offering the English literature department its traditional role of training students in the art and skill of reading literature.

Culler seeks to reduce resistance to his programme, resistance that could be triggered by the pedigree of structuralism, its original domain and geographical location, by making literature the original source of the insights of structuralism. Culler's introduction to Structuralism did not seek placate the traditionalist alone. His semiotics of literary interpretation was not rendered irrelevant by the subsequent developments in humanities. The antifoundationalist thesis that the reader and the text are the products/effects of textuality could easily be accommodated by merely emphasizing that the reader, the text and its meaning are convenient labels, not ontological categories.

Culler's programme of helping students acquire literary competence addressed a need that was felt by the literary studies community even during the culture wars – to tempt students to read literature by convincing them that it is readable. His programme had noble predecessors like I.A. Richards, William Wimsatt, and Cleanth Brooks. This need was acknowledged by some of his contemporaries like Stanley Fish and Gerald Graff, William Cain and Patrick Colm Hogan who were concerned about the erosion of disciplinary boundaries in the new Humanities.

2. From the post-humanist point of view, Justifying of literature in the language curriculum by attributing it the capacity for cultivating sympathy and fellow-feeling in the mind of the reader through exposure to the instability at the core of language might sound suspiciously like a proxy justification for the study of literature. The traditionalist scholar,

on the hand, might deem as the mummification of literature, with the category 'literature' becoming an empty category. However, this definition of the nature and function (for want of a better term) of literature has the merit of being one that is least likely to be contested in the postmodern academy.

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