Language, Poetry and Enactment

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In the first great work of Western literary theory, the *Poetics*, Aristotle presents a case for the proposition that a philosopher like himself should be taking poetry seriously. Poetry (especially in the form of drama) presents causal sequences of fictional events. It thus *tells* us something. It adds exemplary possibilities to our experience. It has, accordingly, something *philosophical* about it – even if it is evidently distinguishable from, and subordinate to, philosophy proper such as Aristotle himself is engaged in.[1]

In pursuance of his task, Aristotle presents poetry as a hierarchy of its several kinds (tragedy, epic, comedy, and so on), pronounces tragedy the highest kind[2] and discusses tragedy both as the special, but also as the representative, kind of poetry. Within tragedy he isolates six elements and presents these too as a hierarchy. In descending order of importance the six elements are: plot-structure (μῦθος), character (ἤθη), reasoning (διάνοια), verbalization (λέξις), song-composition (μελοποιΐα), and (last and very much least) visual presentation (ὄψις) – under which is subsumed the whole visual dimension whereby a play is staged in our presence and before our eyes.[3] Many commentators have discussed this bottom place given to the visual aspect of the theatrical art of tragedy: Aristotle even goes so far as to suggest that the tragic effect is independent of performance and should be operative if a play is only read, not seen.[4] Less discussed, but no less significant, is the relatively low place given to verbalization and the implication that the conceptual organizing of tragedy comes first (logically and, no doubt, chronologically too), with words – the 'symbols of mental experience' – added afterwards.[5]

Aristotle's argument, like all arguments, has a historical context. The *Poetics* is to be dated (probably) to around 330 B.C.[6] It thus began its influential career four centuries or so after the age of Homeric epic, a century or so after the high point of Attic tragedy, and a century or so (likewise) after the free thinker, or 'sophist', Gorgias came to Athens and took the city by storm with a demonstration of how to argue and how to speak to an audience: a demonstration that borrowed freely

from the traditional techniques of poetry, but detached them from poetry.[7] More widely, Aristotle's treatise sees the light of day a generation or two after the momentous work of his former master Plato, and about three hundred and fifty years before the Roman poet Horace produced his own poem about poetry, the *Ars Poetica*; about sixteen hundred years before the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas; about two thousand years before Isaac Newton's *Principia*; about two thousand, one hundred and fifty years before Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*; about two thousand, two hundred and fifty years before the publication of Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics;* and about two thousand, three hundred years before the appearance of *Grammatology* by Jacques Derrida.

As far as its immediate context is concerned, the *Poetics* presupposes a great debate and, behind the debate, a power struggle, plausibly described by Plato as 'the old quarrel between poetry and philosophy'.[8] One aspect of the debate is inaugurated by Gorgias and his fellow sophists in the fifth century and concerns the nature and capacities of language. The sheer power of language, everywhere from poetry to forensic debate, is what Gorgias himself insists on: an irresistible emotional affect is exercised on the hearer by the 'inspired incantations' of language, and, when 'persuasion' is added, language can 'mould the psyche any way it likes'.[9] Such manifestoes help to stimulate an intense awareness of language in all its forms. In particular, the enthusiasm for persuasive language is rapidly translated into the awesome apparatus of rhetorical theory: a system of principles and categories encapsulated in many treatises for the benefit, primarily, of the public speaker, but nowhere with more sophistication than in Aristotle's own *Rhetoric*. At the same time, linguistic consciousness is rarified into a purer philosophical air, as in Plato's *Cratylus*, a dialogue whose participants consider the relation of language to reality: in this relation, are words conventional, therefore arbitrary? or is there some natural connection from which it might follow that language gives us direct access to the truth about things?[10] Whatever else may be said, Plato is less than persuaded that this optimistic view of language is acceptable.[11]

More directly, Aristotle's *Poetics* presupposes Plato's damaging critique of poetry itself; and Plato's critique, in turn, presupposes the remarkable place of poetry within earlier Greek culture and the remarkable history of Greek literature up to his own time. For Plato as for us, Greek literature begins with the poetry of Homer and Hesiod; there is no prose literature for two hundred years; and prose (from philosophers, scientists, historians, orators) only begins to develop fully as

literature and, by developing, to compete seriously with poetry, towards the end of Attic drama's greatest creative age.[12] The place of poetry, even at this time of challenge, is summed up by an exchange of views about the poet's function in Aristophanes' comedy, *Frogs*, produced in 405 B.C. In this play, the rival Athenian tragedians, Aeschylus and Euripides (both now dead), compete for the chance to come back to life to save Athens in her hour of need;[13] and much as the two playwrights disagree, one thing which they agree on, and which in effect the play endorses, is the importance of the poet and the poet's place in Greek life. Aeschylus says: 'children have teachers, grown-ups have poets.' Euripides says: 'we poets make our fellow-citizens better people.'[14]

The poets are accepted as artistic, moral, spiritual and intellectual leaders of society, and as entertainers too; and (more important still) these functions, though separable, are not always separated and are, at least, always compatible. They are not fully dissociated, or only now, in the new age of free thinking, beginning to be dissociated. Art, education, religion, thought, entertainment, are not, or not fully, specialized; and poetry is their common, unspecialized medium.[15] Correlatively, poetry invites what can only strike us as an uncompartmentalized response and appeals to what we are bound to see as an uncompartmentalized sensibility. This, in fact, is the fabled *wholeness* which from the later eighteenth century provoked a hundred years of Romantic and post-Romantic admiration: the wholeness which first the sophists and their generation, and then, and above all, Plato and his generation, sought to unravel. The dissociation of sensibility that Eliot detected in the seventeenth century pales into insignificance beside this one.[16]

At the heart of Plato's critique of poetry is its failure to be specialized and, in particular, its failure to be specialized philosophy: it may encompass, but is not encompassed by, thought. Tragedy may (in its way) probe the limitations of human existence, explore the dilemmas and question the solutions of human order, but even if it does (and Plato does not seem to see that it does), even tragedy is – like language – ineffectual. For Plato, poetry in even its most powerful forms does not think its way towards truth. It may project striking images of men and even of the gods themselves, but they are arbitrary, human images. It does not and cannot encounter reality, which Plato identifies with an ideal realm beyond the world of ordinary human experience. Compared with that true reality, our ordinary experience is a mere facsimile, a *mimêsis*; and poetry offers merely a facsimile of the ordinary facsimile: a *mimêsis* of a *mimêsis*.[17]

This mimetic terminology is retained by Aristotle, but with a different valuation.

In the *Poetics* poetry remains a *mimêsis* of life, but is no longer damned for that: it has a clear, if limited, validity. The limitation, however, stands. Unlike Plato, Aristotle accepts that poetry does have some purchase on reality, but only on strictly Aristotelian terms. Poetry may be (as Aristotle puts it) 'more philosophical' than, for instance, history, which merely reports events from the experiential world, but it remains less philosophical than the philosophy which partially reclaims it; and even the creative questionings of men and gods articulated by the tragedians are politely ignored by Aristotle as if they were not there.[18] Tragedy is reduced to plot structures and characters, reasonings and verbalizations, with the musical and visual elements tacked on at the end.

Plato attacks poetry because poetry, with its accepted status, is an enemy worth attacking. For Aristotle, apparently, the battle is already won. Poetry has been taught its place, and philosophy is the accepted teacher: which means that the unity has been unpicked and (in particular) thought has been detached from art. And in the persons of Aristotle and his successors, thought now reigns supreme. For Aristotle, for his successors, and for the whole subsequent Western world (with few exceptions), it is dissociated thought that presumes to provide our ultimate edification and our ultimate engagements with reality – whether 'thought' goes under the name of philosophy, or theology, or (latterly) science. And poetry is now subsidiary and knows it, so that it causes no surprise when the poet Horace says that if a poet wants wisdom, of course he must get *that* from Plato, no more than it seems surprising that the theologian Aquinas should rank poetry 'lowest' among all the 'disciplines', or that the scientist Newton should see poetry as 'a kind of ingenious nonsense'.[19] It is not until the age of Romanticism that we meet with much in the way of counter-statements. 'A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth': that formula (from the poet Shelley)[20] is as obviously Platonic in terminology as it is anti-Platonic in evaluative implication; and, along with a hundred other such formulae, it serves to mark a new age in which spokesmen for poetry (or soon, in the age of the prose novel, for literature) at least restate the claim for poetry[21] – albeit largely as individuals in response to a largely indifferent collective world.

For Aristotle ' a poem' is something less than 'the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth'. Nevertheless, from his various discussions of poetry and of prose that uses the techniques of poetry it is apparent that the prose philosopher is aware of ways in which it might be said that poetic language does, after all, offer some sort of special engagement with life and its realities. Above all, he is aware

that such language has the capacity to create evocations of this life or these realities with a peculiar immediacy. In the *Rhetoric* he explains the popularity of Homer as due partly to the poet's capacity for creating 'actuality' (ἐνέργεια), especially through metaphor, and on various occasions he commends the use of language that sets things 'before the eyes' (πρὸ ὀμμάτων).[22] Among its other implications, this last phrase presumably implies that things are set in a cognitive light, because for Aristotle vision is 'the paradigm of mental process'[23] – odd as that may seem for one who is so uninterested in literally seeing anything on the tragic stage.

The sense that literature, especially poetry, has such a capacity for vividness, actuality, immediacy, is familiar to anyone acquainted with literature or with theorizing about literature. Among the theorists who have considered this aspect of literature recently is Derek Attridge. Like Aristotle, Attridge notes the popularity of such effects in verse. More particularly, Attridge notes the case for saying that these effects, though special and specially characteristic of verse, are representative of literature as a whole. *En route* he cites the name that I wish to give to the effects in question, *enactment*:

> The common feeling that the words of a favourite literary passage have an unusually strong purchase on reality, a peculiarly intimate bond with the non-linguistic phenomena to which they refer, is often accounted for ... by finding ways in which it can be said that the properties of the objects or events in question are represented ... by the physical properties of the language, its sounds and their sequential arrangement. This direct evocation of the meaning ... is seen as the explanation of the 'vividness' ... of the successful passage; language is felt to be working here with superefficiency, every aspect pointing beyond itself to what it means. And it is frequently assumed that the relationship between the signifier and its referent in such language is one of *resemblance* – literary criticism abounds in phrases such as 'mimetic syntax', 'appropriate sound-patterns', 'rhythmic enactment', 'aural embodiment' ...[24]

At which point Attridge quotes from 'a recent handbook on style in the novel' to demonstrate that 'the scope of this assumption stretches well beyond verse':

> The iconic force in language produces an enactment of the fictional reality through the form of the text ... as readers we do not merely receive a report

of the fictional world; we enter in it *iconically*, as a dramatic performance, through the experience of reading.[25]

Attridge's presentation of enactment is, so to speak, in inverted commas. He writes from a Derridean post-structuralist perspective, viewed from which this phenomenon is a problem. Despite this, and despite the fact that his version of enactment is a touch less visual than Aristotle's, it is recognizably a version of the same phenomenon as Aristotle discussed. So too is the rather more visual version presented by Joseph Graham from the quite different standpoint of Chomskyan linguistics. Literature (Graham argues) has meaning through what he calls 'exemplification', which he relates to the 'immediacy' of literary representation, whereby

> literary texts show or exhibit rather just say or tell ... they dramatize, enact or mime ... Reading gives the impression, and carries a conviction, of being present ...[26]

Such theoretical discussions have been conducted by many recent theorists from a variety of perspectives. It is not common for such theoretical discussions to be conducted by specialists in ancient literature, not any longer – though of course Aristotle was a specialist in ancient literature, and specialists in ancient literature continued to theorize about literature as a whole well into (and occasionally beyond) the eighteenth century.[27] In our time, classical *littérateurs* seldom enter the lists of theoretical debate, though some apply pre-existing theories (which is different) and all, necessarily, occupy some theoretical position, consciously or unconsciously. The lack of such enlistings seems to me a loss. It is a loss to classical studies itself. It is equally a loss to literary theory – that is, a loss for the wider understanding of literature – because classical studies in its modern form can claim to have several distinctive features by which this wider understanding can only be enhanced: a range which reaches back to the beginnings of Western literature; a direct access to most of the archetypes, as well as some of the acknowledged masterpieces, of Western literature; old habits of linguistic precision, patience and thoroughness; and a newer outlook within which linguistic precision and large cultural reference are seen as compatible and even complementary. The chair which I am privileged to hold is a chair of Greek language and literature, and Greek language and literature belong to language and literature as

a whole. Literary-theoretical debates are debates that concern language and literature as a whole; as such, they are debates to which a specialist in Greek language and literature should feel able to attempt a contribution. That such a contribution must involve discussion of the continuum of experience beyond the specifics of the ancient world goes without saying – just as it goes without saying (and usually without comment) that specialists in other languages and literatures feel entitled to invoke the experience of antiquity in such debates.

The specifics that Attridge and Graham – and Aristotle – are pointing to are evidently not restricted to any one phase of Western experience. In particular, it would seem that *recognition* of enactment is attested virtually everywhere one looks. A representative short list of instances might include (to begin with) the Hellenistic critic Demetrius' response to a line of Homer whose sound-effect is said to have 'reproduced' or 'copied' the matter it describes, a response endorsed by the Byzantine bishop Eustathius in the twelfth century and canonized in the eighteenth by Alexander Pope in the recommendation that ' the sound must seem an echo to the sense'. Then one might point to the account in the Roman rhetorical treatise *ad Herennium* of the so-called 'demonstratio' through which 'an event seems to take place before our eyes', or the similar formula (under the heading of 'energia') from the seventh-century encyclopaedia of Isidore, a central work of reference for the Western Middle Ages. More broadly, Montaigne in the sixteenth century urges that ' style should not obscure subject-matter, but should allow it to be presented directly to the mind of the hearer'; and more broadly still, Hegel in the early nineteenth declares that 'the work of art should put before our eyes a content ... whose universality has been absolutely individualized and sensuously particularized'.[28]

In the later nineteenth and then the twentieth centuries, interest in, and enthusiasm for, enactment reaches a peak in the Symbolist and Imagist movements and in the Anglo-American New Criticism. So the poet Valéry finds in the poetic use of language 'an *indefinable* harmony between what it *says* and what it *is*', a harmony 'between form and content, between sound and meaning'. So the poet Ezra Pound, identifying successful poetry with 'the image', calls for a kind of writing that will 'reveal something', that will concentrate on 'direct treatment of *the thing*', that will 'present'. So the critic Wimsatt identifies poetry with 'the concrete universal' and calls the poem a 'verbal icon'.[29]

There is no shortage of responses, then – *but* (one would do well to take stock and ask) responses to *what*? Enactment is elusive to define: let us not rush. We may

agree, for a start, to associate it especially with special – intensified – usage of language. We may also endorse the analogy with drama. Everyone knows the difference between the bare text of a play and the acting out of that text before our eyes, in our presence, *as* a presence: the contrast between enactment and no enactment is like that contrast. An example would help, of course: a single, pure, uncomplicated example as a paradigm. For reasons that will become clear, I suggest that the purest paradigms are to be found in miniatures and in the domain of verse rhythm. We need, therefore, a suitable example of rhythmic enactment, such as occurs, for instance, in a well-known passage in Homer's *Iliad* where, for the edification and entertainment of his fellow gods on Olympus, the god Hephaestus recounts how the greater god Zeus once punished him for an act of insubordination and (literally) threw him out of heaven ...[30]

> πᾶν δ᾽ ἦμαρ φερόμην, ἅμα δ᾽ ἠελίῳ καταδύντι
> κάππεσον ἐν Λήμνῳ ...

Heinrich Schliemann, first excavator of Troy, associated his youthful interest in the Homeric world with an occasion in the grocer's shop where he worked as an apprentice, and where, one evening, he heard a clergyman's son recite Homer: 'and though I did not understand a syllable, the ... sound of the words made a deep impression on me'.[31] Schliemann notwithstanding, it is (perhaps) a little optimistic to expect the rhythmic enactment in the Homeric sequence I quoted to convey its 'indefinable harmony' to an audience not all of whom will understand a syllable. Fortunately, though, a classic English translation is to hand in the shape of *Paradise Lost,* where Milton offers what is (in effect) a version of the passage, and one which reproduces Homer's enactment with some fidelity. As if by way of assuring us that the seventeenth century, like all the others, recognizes and cherishes enactmental effects, Milton recalls how the humiliated god was

> thrown by angry Jove
> Sheer o'er the crystal battlements: from morn
> To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,
> A summer's day; and with the setting sun
> *Dropped* from the zenith, like a falling star,
> On Lemnos –

πᾶν δ᾿ ἦμαρ φερόμην, ἅμα δ᾿ ἠελίῳ καταδύντι
κάππεσον ἐν Λήμνῳ –

and 'dropped' is κάππεσον, similarly pointed by the shape and movement of the
verse in a way that gives us the requisite effect of presence.[32]

A fuller discussion would naturally consider many other such instances.
Nevertheless, one of the virtues of such a paradigm is that it suggests that the
representative formulations of Attridge and Graham are too loose or too inclusive.
Attridge, for instance, is content to associate enactment with resemblance. But
resemblance need have nothing to do with enactment: identical twins resemble
each other – they don't enact each other. And enactment need have nothing to do
with resemblance. There is no resemblance between the κάππεσον effect and the
(or any) actual dropping. If there had been, those here today who have no Greek
should have been stimulated into some kind of awareness of the sense of the words;
and I expect we may assume that this was not the case. Indeed, if there *were* a
significant ingredient of detectable resemblance in enactment, the significance of
enactment would be greatly reduced. To detect resemblance, we must know the
original, and enactment cannot be worth so much if it only offers a semblance of
an original we know already: the point was made, in effect, by Plato.[33] All of which
means we should distinguish enactment from *mimêsis*, 'copying', the label that
Plato (disparagingly) and Aristotle (more neutrally) gave to art.[34] Not that
enactment and *mimêsis* cannot coincide: of course they can. But different things
often do coincide.

Enactment is widely ascribed to metaphor, and with reason, and some of
Aristotle's examples involve metaphor; but metaphor tends to involve resem-
blance.

Peace, peace.
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast...[35]

Cleopatra's 'baby' is the asp around her neck. We see the asp, literally. We 'see'
the baby in a different, enactmental, sense of 'see'. There is a degree of
resemblance between the asp and a baby sucking at Cleopatra's breast, and this
metaphor (like most metaphor) is such a close complex that it is hard to dissociate
the enactment from the resemblance. But we need paradigms of enactment pure
and simple, which metaphors are not: it follows that we should leave metaphor

aside. Enactment, again, is widely ascribed to onomatopoeia, but there unquestionably we find resemblance. The 'murmuring of innumerable bees' *sounds* a bit *like* bees.[36] But as we do not want resemblance, let us put onomatopoeia, too, aside.

In Graham's formulation, on the other hand, there is a less than helpful distinction between ordinary 'saying' and literary 'showing': 'literary texts *show or exhibit* rather than just *say or tell*'.[37] In the same vein the New Critic Wimsatt suggests that 'the poetic character of details consists not in what they *say* directly and explicitly (as if roses and moonlight were poetic), but in what by their arrangement they *show* implicitly'.[38] There is certainly an important issue here, but that is not to say that the issue is relevantly, or rightly, formulated. Does the enactment in κάππεσον/'dropped' *show* us anything *implicitly*? Enactment is, no doubt, closer to showing than to saying (as putting before the eyes and creating a presence are closer to showing than to saying) – but the presence is arguably as explicit as it is implicit.

More fundamentally, it should be noted that the thrust of Wimsatt's words, and of Graham's too, is to dissociate poetry (and literature in general) from discursive statement, from propositions, from *saying* anything in the sense that the saying could be adjudged significant or insignificant, false or true. 'Literature as such has nothing to say, and quite literally nothing to say, because nothing to say literally.'[39] This reading of literature (which is common in our century) would have puzzled, among others, the Greek poet Hesiod at the end of the eighth century B.C., who *tells* us of an encounter with the Muses who *told* him: 'we know how to *tell many lies* that are like the truth, but we know how to *speak truth* when we want to.'[40] It would equally have puzzled, among others, the Greek tragedians: Aeschylus, for instance, whose chorus, early in the *Agamemnon*, announces the theme of the 'law' with which 'Zeus has set mankind on the path to understanding'. The 'law' is 'suffer and learn': it is a law which the whole play and the whole trilogy then duly acts out – but, notwithstanding that, it is a law which is stated, *told,* directly, here within the play.[41] Enactment may indeed be closer to 'showing' than to 'saying', but the antithesis has, at the very least, a subtext that is open to question. Let us put 'showing and saying', too, to one side.

Having said which, we should applaud all these theorists – Wimsatt, Graham, Attridge – for helping to make clear that the stylistic miniature is a miniature of a larger whole. The whole work of literature aspires to enact, but does so in a way much more complex and difficult to describe than the miniature: which is precisely why the miniature is so suitable to argue from.

But we are still taking stock. Enactment is esteemed down the ages, as few other aspects of literature have been, or not with such consistency and such specificity. *Why?* What do we value it for? Attempts at answers to this question are remarkably thin on the ground, even down the ages – or especially down the ages, because most of the answers turn out to be recent ones. One answer (which conveniently provides an *entrée* to the others) is implicit in the concept of defamiliarization, developed in the early decades of this century by the Russian formalist theoreticians, notably Shklovsky. Where poetry is concerned, the formalist argument centres on the power of unexpected language – such as poetry thrives on, and such as we find in κάππεσον/'dropped' – to shock us into a new response. At its widest, however, the principle is claimed as the rationale of all art. Shklovsky writes:

> Habitualization consumes works, clothes, furniture, one's wife and the fear of war ... And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar'.[42]

This is appealing, but as an answer to our question, it can't stand. Consider the paradigm, κάππεσον/'dropped'. Do we have *sensation* here? If so, sensation of what? The sensation of Hephaestus dropping? One essential element in Shklovsky's principle is the specificity of the sensation: 'things as they are perceived' (i.e. in their particular manifestations), 'not as they are known (i.e. in general conceptual categories). Do we have such a specific sensation here? Does it – could it – feel like Hephaestus dropping, as against someone else dropping? 'Art exists to make the stone stony.' Does the drop, duly enacted, feel *droppy*? And if it does, is it somehow with a non-specific droppiness? But if non-specific, therefore general, which is no longer in accordance with formalist theory, and which (furthermore) brings the notion of *sensation* into question too. What kind of sensation can this be that takes us away from specifics and towards the kind of general categories we associate with concepts? The formalist emphasis on sensation is evidently designed to eliminate the conceptual. κάππεσον/'dropped': we will doubtless agree that sensation is involved in the effect created by these words, but we should acknowledge that the formalist attempt to eliminate the conceptual can't stand.

For Shklovsky, words are destined to do more than Aristotle supposed they

could do when he presented words as the verbalization of thought and language as the expression of thought. Within linguistic and literary theory, Aristotle's supposition has had a long run. Within literary theory, its apogee, perhaps, was the eighteenth century, which made good writing dependent on it: 'What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed'.[43] However: it is common ground among many recent and contemporary thinkers that this cannot strictly be so, or possibly cannot be so at all. Shklovsky's implicit challenge to Aristotle is only one among many and not one that we need to consider further. There is, I think, more profit in considering one of the more vocal – not to say more noisy – versions of the challenge: the post-structuralist, and in particular the Derridean.[44] At which point (it will be noted), we are moving into a battleground of contemporary debate and a territory contested fiercely by rival factions of philosophers, semanticians and literary theorists, into which one ventures at one's peril. I propose – at least in part – to contemplate the formulations of the issues from a safe distance.

What is at issue, in one sense, is the potential of language: the potential discussed and admired by Valéry and Pound; the potential first trumpeted by sophists like Gorgias. Against that reverential attitude one can set a long tradition of scepticism about the capacity of language: a tradition with distinguished spokesmen like Plato, who said that the search for ultimate truth can never be verbalized (ῥητὸν οὐδαμῶς); and Nietzsche, who said, 'whatever we have words for, we have already got beyond'; and Eliot, who (in the very act of using words to 'get beyond') said:

> .   Words strain,
> Crack, and sometimes break, under the burden,
> Under the tension ...[45]

Gorgias might indeed be said to have inaugurated both traditions, by combining his enthusiasm for the persuasive power of language's 'inspired incantations' with a willingness to argue the radically sceptical position that nothing exists; that if anything exists, it is incomprehensible; and that, even if it is comprehensible, it is *still* incommunicable.[46]

Derridean theory too seems to face both ways. It assures us that language is our most precious possession, but also that language gets – and gets us – nowhere, except to the point of revealing this fact: which is not the only affinity, perhaps, between Gorgias and Derrida. Derrida's active relationships (needless to say) are

with more modern thinkers: specifically, with German philosophy – with Husserl and Heidegger and (before them) with Hegel and Nietzsche. Notwithstanding which, it has become conventional for literary theorists to place him in the perspective of twentieth-century linguistics and especially the linguistic theories of Saussure. This has, if nothing else, a schematic convenience of which I too shall take advantage.

Saussure is often regarded as the father of modern linguistics. In the present context, one aspect of his paternity counts for most: his argument that language is a sign system whose process of signification does not centre on reference to a real world outside the system, but rather on differential relations between terms within the system: we understand the word 'big' through its relationship with the word 'little'; we understand the word 'orange' through its relationships with the word 'red' and the word 'yellow'. The tradition with which Saussure takes issue is the tradition that broadly goes back to Aristotle, within which words express thoughts about things, because 'words are the symbols of mental experience'.[47] At its most formulaic, the position which Saussure challenges is summed up in the medieval maxim, 'the word signifies the thing by means of concepts',[48] with meaning guaranteed by this triangular relationship of word, concept and referent (or 'thing'). In Saussure's new formula there are two, rather than three, items, *signifier* and *signified*, though it is not to their relationship that *meaning* is taken to attach. In challenging the 'semiotic triangle', however, Saussure's immediate point of engagement is with the relationship of word and thought:

> Without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula. There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language.[49]

The traditional position that we have thoughts (about things) which we put into words is therefore, for Saussure, unacceptable.

From this influential discussion two conclusions have been drawn by post-structuralists in general. First: that language does not express thought, but rather constitutes or constructs thought. Secondly: that language cannot *refer* to any reality outside itself, but is (so to speak) disembodied, like the symbols of logic.[50] Unlike the first conclusion, whose prospective importance is obvious, the importance of the second no doubt depends largely on what 'refer' is taken to mean. For instance, no-one seems to deny that all the innumerable instrumental uses of language (like phoning for a taxi) cling in a straightforward kind of way to a world

outside. How far Saussure can, in any event, be held responsible for this second conclusion is as disputable and as disputed as the conclusion itself.[51] It is, nevertheless, clear that Saussure's arguments have helped to motivate and to shape Derrida's particular version of the post-structuralist case, which for my purposes comes down to this: that language constructs thought; that our apprehension of reality is effectively mediated through language and is therefore itself a construct; that our common belief in realities like 'reality' is a metaphysical belief which is dependent on the language that we (at least we in the West) use and, since the Greeks, have used, to reiterate it; and that, thanks to the metaphysical implicature of language, metaphysics is all we achieve even when we enlist language to unpick metaphysics itself. Language may seem forever on the point of breaking through to some less elusive reality, but at the Derridean table it is always jam tomorrow. Given the relationality of language, any breakthrough is always indefinitely postponed, subject as it is to an endless 'deferral of meaning' along a chain of inter-related signifiers – from 'red' to 'orange', from 'orange' to 'yellow', and eventually back to 'red' again.[52]

Derrida rarely casts his light on poetry or kindred literature as such, but a series of further claims that bear on literature are read into his arguments, or inferred from them, by those of his circle for whom literature is of closer concern. Among these, two call for some comment. The first is that literature is not just made up of language, but constitutes a system analogous to language. This claim ('inferred' from Saussure before Derrida) is dubious, if only (though not only) because language is the property of, and exists as a system by virtue of, an actual community located in time and place, whereas literature is (in that sense) no-one's property, but exists erratically and unpredictably across time and across place as well.[53] The second claim is that, if literature is both made up of language and like language, and if language is exclusively relational and therefore disjunct from reference, it follows that literature can only be either non-referential or self-referential: either words about words or not words 'about' at all. The notion that literature is non-referential is at least a seeming inference from the given premises, however questionable those premises may be: it is, of course, the *reductio* of the general twentieth-century tendency to deny literature its right to *say*. On the other hand, the claim that literature is self-referential (inherently and irrevocably) should be summarily dismissed. Eliot's words that assure us that 'words strain ... under the burden' may reasonably be called self-referential. So possibly might Hesiod's words about the Muses. But the words of Aeschylus' chorus about the law of Zeus,

or the words of Homer's Hephaestus about his drop from heaven, are not words about words, but words about the law of Zeus and Hephaestus' drop from heaven; and any neo-Saussurian attempt to collapse the distinction between these sets of words and Eliot's (and Hesiod's) sets of words is as intellectually reactionary as it is self-contradictory, given that it defies the Saussurian logic of differential relationality as much as any other.[54]

Amidst all this claiming and reclaiming, however, Derrida's own focus of interest is (like Plato's) reality, or language and reality. It is as if he agreed with Plato that language and art and the art of language aspire to engage with reality, but fail − except that Plato's point is, they fail because they aren't philosophical enough; whereas Derrida's is, they fail because there *is* no reality that, as constructive media, they *could* (or *they* could) engage with. We have, instead, the illusion of engagement, or (as Derrida puts it) the illusion of *presence*. For Derrida, presence is a term of central importance. Presence is meaning, but meaning in a pre-Saussurian referential sense, or rather in a hyper-referential sense. Presence is what the signifier promises to call up, but cannot. Presence is the presence of the signified: as if using the word, 'taxi', ensured the presence of a taxi; as if using the word, 'reality', ensured that there it was, reality with a capital R, before our very eyes. For Derrida, then, 'presence' has a metaphysical rationale, and he detects its metaphysical traces in some, most, even all, of the conceptual and interpretive manoeuvres that underlie Western linguistic usage. In particular, he tells us that

> it would be possible to show that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the centre, have always designated the constant of a presence,[55]

and duly offers us a list of such names, which includes

> consciousness or conscience, God, man ...

and a series of items from Greek philosophy,

> *eidos, archê, telos, energeia, ousia,*

all of them 'ultimate reality' words, and one of them (*energeia*) the word that Aristotle used for the 'actuality' produced by metaphor. This list of Greek items,

meanwhile, Derrida paraphrases and expands with another set:

essence, existence, substance, subject.[56]

He is not arguing (we should be clear) that, for instance, 'nothing exists': here he differs from Gorgias. He is arguing, rather, that 'existence' is metaphysical terminology and thus implies the same kind of presence as does, more obviously, terminology like 'God'. And, as the presence of 'God' in his list helps to explain, he sees our 'nostalgia for presence' as a desire for a 'transcendental signified' which will 'put a reassuring end' to the otherwise endless 'deferral of meaning', the otherwise interminable 'reference from sign to sign'.[57]

For us the upshot of these arguments is that literature (supposedly like language) is seen not just as a system, but as a closed system, out of which one yearns to escape, but never can. Language (in the influential phrase of one of the earlier members of the Derridean circle) is a prison-house: *therefore,* literature too is held in the prison. It too (so runs the argument) cannot get outside itself to any 'real' world, not even in the case of overtly realist literature. From Menander to Henry James, all that realist writing can achieve is (as the critic Barthes put it) 'the *effect* of the real'.[58]

And how does enactment fit into this argument? – or, perhaps, how does it *not* fit in? We need (let me stress) an understanding of enactment that makes sense of miniature paradigms like κάππεσον/'dropped', but one that also makes sense of *our* sense that a successful work of literature achieves a vastly larger and more complex enactment. My unanswered question was: why do we so value enactment? Several of those who have, to their credit, posed the question are in and of the post-structuralist movement. There is (for instance) a discussion by Genette of the 'harmony' between 'what it is' and 'what it says' that Valéry identified as a characteristic of the language of poetry.[59] Genette translates what Valéry called 'harmony' into 'mimetic virtue' (not, admittedly, a clever bit of translation) and explains it as 'poetic language's real or illusory privilege of defying the arbitrariness of the sign',[60] where 'arbitrariness of the sign' is shorthand for the Saussurian principle that words lack a referential signification. Ordinary language (we gather) is certainly subject to the non-engagement with reality-outside-language which is assumed to follow from this 'arbitrariness'. Poetic language *possibly* promises more – but here Genette equivocates: poetic language has its 'real or illusory' privilege. So why do we value enactment? An answer is inferential: because it

does, or seems to, defy the presumed limitations of language. But the emphasis is not on the *does*, and Genette cites Pope's injunction that 'the sound must seem an echo to the sense' and triumphantly italicizes the 'seem'.[61]

Another post-structuralist discussion of the 'convergence of sound and meaning' is offered by Paul De Man. De Man plays with the same counters, but is more direct in his counter-play:

> The convergence ... operates on the level of the signifier and contains no responsible pronouncement on the nature of the world – despite its powerful potential to create the opposite illusion.[62]

We value such a 'convergence', then, because we are taken in by the illusion. In contrast, Attridge, discussing onomatopoeia, takes the alternative post-structuralist view, assuring us that

> what is important – and pleasurable – in a successful example ... is the momentary and surprising reciprocal relationship established between phonetic and semantic properties ...

which (he suggests) produces

> a heightened experience of language *as language*.[63]

In other words, we enjoy and (presumably) value enactment because it shows us language at its most creatively self-referential. Bizarrely, Attridge seems to suppose he is articulating a reader's response. Yet his answer, like all of these post-structuralist answers, is clearly extrapolated from neo-Saussurian theory without decisive reference to any reader's response or indeed to any human experience outside the theory itself. None of these answers, therefore, has any claim to independent validation: which is not good enough.

Our paradigm again:

>   ... and with the setting sun
> *Dropped* from the zenith ...
>   ... ἅμα δ' ἠελίῳ καταδύντι
> κάππεσον ...

Why *do* we value such enactmental effects? The question might be restated: what is enactment enactment *of*? Attridge's party-line answer is: language at work. De Man's (and, in effect, Genette's) is: news from nowhere that seems like news from somewhere. Shklovsky's would have been: the sensation of things. But none of these can be adequate for κάππεσον/'dropped', let alone for the fuller complexes of enactment that we call 'works of literature'. If *we* value enactment so highly and so universally, it must involve something less purely cerebral than the post-structuralists suppose or (in the case of 'the sensation of things') less purely external: something, surely, that relates to *us*; something (I suggest) that connects us *to* the external. κάππεσον/'dropped': even in the miniature we feel (do we not?) that we are involved – that we are connected. But any such connection, any such sense of connection, involves experience: but experience past as well as present; experience *in situ*, but also in remembrance; indeed, experience future and experience hypothetical. Poetry (said the poet Rilke) offers us 'the sensuous possibility' of new worlds and new times;[64] but we will only know them as such, and only appreciate them as such, if we have experience to bring to bear on their apprehension and their interpretation: experience, in the light of which, and the sense of which, we make connections, contacts, find ourselves, construct ourselves, interpret ourselves in existence, and thereby attach our existence to a kind of meaning and even absoluteness, whatever the attendant relativities.

All of which is a paraphrase – not too tendentious – of Derrida's concept of 'presence'; and what I wish to suggest is that 'presence', in Derrida's sense, is what enactment enacts. Enactment is an evocation of presence which connects us to reality outside us,[65] or (as Derrida, or his followers, would wish to say) gives the illusion of doing that. And yet there seem to be no grounds, certainly no grounds in Derrida's philosophy, for supposing that his argumentation either shows that it *is* an illusion or suggests what would be a preferable alternative to accepting the 'illusion' as reality.

What is enacted, even in a miniature like κάππεσον/'dropped', is the evocation of presence: presence as if literally (as if *we* were present at the drop), but also presence with the existential accent which that 'we' (as Derrida rightly insists) ultimately implies. Enactment does not evoke existence outside language, so much as our belonging to that existence. It gives us the sense that we are implicated in existence, with or without (in more substantial cases of enactment, clearly *with*) some sense of what that implicature entails. And it does so (does it not?) irrespective of whether, or how, language might be said to be, or not to be,

referential. The conclusion does not (I suggest) depend on that issue; and the discussion of that issue should therefore be seen as merely the ladder by which one got to this point.

Enactment is a complex phenomenon, and requires in us a complex response. The response is one in which sensation does play a part, and experience is brought to bear, and the interpretation of experience, and therefore (as only becomes fully apparent in less miniature examples) thought, emotion and value are involved as well, even (as Derrida's formula for presence suggests) ultimate value: the whole complexity of response called for, then, if we are to confront a complex work of the stature of the *Iliad* or the *Oresteia*. In fact, thinking of literature in general, especially poetic literature, as an enactmental medium, we may say that enactment calls for a unified apprehension in which all our faculties are called into play. However: we in the modern world generally cultivate a specialized apprehension. Our highest achievements are compartmental. We do not expect value or emotion to play a significant part in our science, any more than we expect spirituality to play a part in our sport (but the Greeks could: witness the odes of Pindar); and most of the spokesmen for our poetry have been doing their best to convince themselves for the best part of the century that poetry does not involve *thought* as such – that, as Eliot (of all people) insisted, poetry does not involve 'thought', but only 'the emotional equivalent of thought' – that poetry (for all the world like Shakespeare's 'tale told by an idiot') signifies, *says*, nothing.[66]

Post-structuralists faced with enactment allow its appeal to the senses, but seek to explain that away short of any larger or wider apprehension, or else (like Attridge) detach enactment even from the senses and convert it, paradoxically, into an intellectual comment, albeit only a solipsistic comment on itself. In either case they assume and replicate the compartmental, dissociated state of modern sensibility and modern life: where intellect is paid to be disembodied; where thought is categorized separately from art – saying from showing; where our civilization tends to marginalize art in general, literature certainly, poetry in particular; and where for two hundred years, since the Romantics set themselves against the challenge of the new industrial-scientific age, the artist has been a problematic figure, isolated and all-too-conscious of his isolation. Post-structuralism represents enactmental literature as reaching hopelessly for a reality it can never attain. In that representation it assumes the marginal condition of literature in its modern state. More than that: what Derrida does, in presenting his vision of disconnected language, and what post-structuralism in general does, in dissociating literature

from reality, is to present an authentically Romantic self-image, a Romantic vision of alienation, inside out. The familiar condition of the isolated Romantic poet – symbolized by the boy Chatterton, helpless in his lonely garret – is reconstituted as the condition of the poet's medium itself: language forlornly languishing in its prison-cell. And 'presence' for Derrida is like Keats's 'forlorn':

> the very word is like a bell
> To toll me back from thee to my sole self.[67]

Romantic selves *are* sole: like language (in Derrida's scheme of things) they cannot hope to make any connection with any 'thee' outside them. And that poignant Derridean motif of the endless deferral of meaning: you can almost see it as a detail on Keats's Grecian Urn –

Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss –

as the frustrated signifier forever falls short of the consummation it pines for.

Contrast the world of early Greece, where the artist *belongs*, and the poet is accepted as intellectual and spiritual leader of the community: the world before the sophists began, and Plato completed, the first phase of dissociation. For Plato, poetry is detached from thought and equally from any connection with any reality that matters, and the well-known paradox that Plato is himself an artist in words does not affect the point: it is Plato the thinker in search of reality, and Plato the opponent of poetry, who authorizes the detachment. Yet enactment, both in its vivid momentary form and in its fuller complex form, predates this phase of Greek civilization and survives beyond it, as an incitement to, and a reminder of, connection, and as a conundrum for the literary theorist into our own age. In the twentieth century, post-structuralist insistence on the limited scope of language and literature is an equivalent reminder of *dis*connection, as also was the formalist fetishization of sensation, and as was, and is, the common reluctance to take literature sufficiently seriously to allow that it has anything to say.

And Aristotle, who (unlike most of our modern theorists) rightly sees that tragedy does 'say' something, and whose notion of enactment 'before the eyes' rightly carries a cognitive implication – he disconnects, already, too. In tragedy, as elsewhere (he indicates), words merely verbalize thoughts; *and yet* they can also create a presence in a visual kind of way, *and* (after all) vision is *the* cognitive sense;

and yet vision is also of no account in tragedy. In these less than tidy corners of Aristotle's literary theory we may detect clear signs of, and concessions to, dissociation in its first phase.[68]

In this lecture I have sought to bring the experience of Greek literature to bear on wider issues and *vice versa*. This seems to me a responsible and a desirable enterprise, and I hope that my discussion has done something to explain why.

NOTES

This paper was delivered as an inaugural lecture at King's College London on 9 February 1994. The text is essentially as delivered; the notes are additional.

1 *Poetics* IX. 'Tells us something': λέγειν ... οἷα ἂν γένοιτο (1451a 37).
2 *Poetics* IV, XXVI.
3 The six 'elements' (μέρη) and their ranking order are set out in *Poetics* VI. Several of them are traditionally misinterpreted: [i] διάνοια as 'thought', though Aristotle himself defines it otherwise as τὸ λέγειν δύνασθαι τὰ ἔνοντα καὶ τὰ ἁρμόττοντα (VI: 1450b 5), and associates it ἐν ὅσοις λέγοντες ἀποδεικνύασίν τι ἢ καὶ ἀποφαίνονται γνώμην (VI: 1450a 6-7, cf. also XIX: 1456a 34-56b 2). 'Reasoning' is the translation offered by R. Janko, *Aristotle, Poetics* (Indianapolis 1987). [ii] λέξις as 'diction', μελοποιία as 'song', ὄψις as 'spectacle', though the indications are that all three are partly, even primarily, compositional: see M.S. Silk, 'The "six parts of tragedy" in Aristotle's *Poetics*: compositional process and processive chronology', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 40 (1994) 108-15.
4 *Poetics* XIV (cf. XXVI and VI).
5 'Logically and chronologically': see Silk, 'The "six parts of tragedy" in Aristotle's *Poetics*'. 'Symbols': Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* I (16a 3-7).
6 I.e. in its given form, which (again, probably) presupposes successive authorial revisions: see S. Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London 1986) 324-30.
7 'Took the city by storm': see the references in D.M. MacDowell, *Gorgias: Encomium of Helen* (Bristol 1982) 9. 'Techniques of poetry': the point was taken as early as Aristotle (ποιητικὴ ... λέξις, οἷον ἡ Γοργίου: *Rhetoric* III. 1.9).
8 Plato, *Republic* X, 607b.
9 *Encomium of Helen* 10, 13.
10 'Conventional': *Cratylus* 384c-d (Hermogenes). 'Natural connection': *Crat.* 383a-b (Cratylus).
11 *Crat.* 439a-b.
12 With this sketch of Greek literary history, cf. M.S. Silk and J.P. Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy* (Cambridge, rev. ed. 1983) 156-8.
13 As eventually becomes clear (whether or not implicit before: cf. K.J. Dover, *Aristophanes, Frogs* [Oxford 1993] 11) at *Frogs* 1414-9 and fully explicit at 1501-3 (σῶζε πόλιν ...).
14 *Frogs* 1054-5 and 1009-10; for the translations offered here, cf. Dover (*Aristophanes, Frogs*) on 1054-5 and p. 16.
15 The alienness of which to the modern sensibility often induces misinterpretation of words and works

of the archaic and earlier classical periods. Consider e.g. the word σοφός (and cognates), whose active denotations range from 'skilled' to 'wise'. The word is often used by poets of themselves and of poetry in general, with both meanings operative in varying degrees at the same time – as is inevitable, unless the context precludes one meaning or the other, which it seldom does. So e.g. H. Maehler (*Die Auffassung des Dichterberufs im frühen Griechentum bis zur Zeit Pindars* [Göttingen 1963] 94) rightly argues that in Pindar the two meanings co-exist: 'technische Beherrschung' *and* 'geistige Fähigkeit'. Other commentators are more comfortable with a more familiar kind of dissociation: 'not "wise" but "skilled"' (W.J. Verdenius on Pindar, *Olympian* XIV.7: *Commentaries on Pindar*, I [Leiden 1987] 111).

16 Cf. Silk and Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*, 4-8, 156-7. Given that 'uncompartmentalized response' is as alien to most moderns as undissociated function (n.15 above), its alienness induces misinterpretations of its own. Consider e.g. the anxiety of M. Heath (*The Poetics of Greek Tragedy* [London 1987] 1-89) to play up the emotional effect of Greek tragedy *as against* its intellectual significance. As various reviewers have wearily pointed out, the one does not exclude the other. Compare and contrast the subtler case of Eliot (p. 127 above, with n. 66).

17 See in particular *Republic* X 595a-605c. '*Mimêsis* of a *mimêsis*' is implicit in this, as in other, Platonic discussions, though never spelled out. (E.g. the carpenter of the bed in Plato's famous analogy is μιμητής [sc. 'imitator' of the *ideal* bed] at 597b, while the artist who produces a painting of the carpenter's bed is *its* μιμητής [597d-e and *passim*]. Painting is φαντάσματος μίμησις at 598b and poetry is 'at two removes from reality' at e.g. 599a [τριττὰ ἀπέχοντα τοῦ ὄντος]. The '*mimêsis* of a *mimêsis*' formula underlies Plotinus, *Ennead* 5.8.1 [εἰ δέ τις τὰς τέχνας ἀτιμάζει, ὅτι μιμούμεναι τὴν φύσιν ποιοῦσι, πρῶτον μὲν φατέον καὶ τὰς φύσεις μιμεῖσθαι ἄλλα].) At 605a Plato goes on to name poetry's supposed power to corrupt as its greatest crime (τὸ μέγιστον), but the ethical argument rests on deeper foundations.

18 'More philosophical': *Poetics* IX. 'Politely ignored': cf. Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 227-37.

19 Horace, *Ars Poetica* 309-10; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia, 1, 9 ('infima inter omnes doctrinas'); Newton, quoted by D. Bush, *Science and English Poetry* (New York 1950) 40.

20 Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry* (in *Shelley's Literary and Philosophical Criticism*, ed. J. Shawcross [London 1909] 128).

21 'Obviously Platonic': M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford 1953) 126-32. 'A hundred other such formulae': Abrams, *passim*, offers a still unsurpassed discussion.

22 'Actuality (ἐνέργεια)': *Rhetoric* III.11.1-4. 'Before the eyes': *Rhet.* II.8.14, III.2.13, III.10.6, III.11.1-2; cf. *Poetics* XVII (1455a 24) and *De Anima* III.3 (427b 18).

23 'Paradigm of mental process': R. Norman, in *Articles on Aristotle IV: Psychology and Aesthetics,* ed. J. Barnes, M. Schofield and R. Sorabji (London 1979) 95; cf. C.H. Kahn, *ibid.* p. 15.

24 D. Attridge, *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (London 1988) 127-57; the words quoted occur on p. 133.

25 Attridge, *ibid.*

26 J.F. Graham, *Onomatopoetics: theory of language and literature* (Cambridge 1992) 225.

27 Thomas Twining's 'On poetry considered as an imitative art' (part of his *Aristotle's Treatise on Poetry* of 1789) is a good example of literary theory from a classical scholar. The last *great* work of literary theory to have been produced by a professional in the field is certainly Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* (published in 1872, at which time its youthful author occupied the Chair of Classical Philology at Basel).

28 Demetrius, *De Elocutione* 72 on *Odyssey* XI. 596; Eustathius *ad loc.*; Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* 365; *Ad Herennium* IV. 68; Isidore Hisp., *Origines* II.21.33; Montaigne, in the paraphrase of G. Castor, *Pléiade Poetics: A Study in Sixteenth-Century Thought and Terminology* (Cambridge 1964) 170; Hegel, *Ästhetik*, ed. F. Bassenge (Berlin 1955) 92.

29 Valéry, as cited by Gérard Genette, 'Valéry and the poetics of language', in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. J.V. Harari (Cornell 1979) 366, 369; Pound, in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T.S. Eliot (London 1954) 3-5 (the quotations date from the period between 1913 and 1918): W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Kentucky 1954) 69-83 ('The concrete universal').

30 *Iliad* I. 592-3.

31 E. Meyer, *Heinrich Schliemann: Kaufmann und Forscher* (Göttingen 1969) 14. The '...' conceals 'melodious' ('melodische'), which points to Schliemann's sense of euphony rather than enactment, but the point can stand.

32 *Paradise Lost* I. 741-6. There is a similar, but lesser, effect in Milton's 'sheer', corresponding to Homer's ῥίψε: see my discussion in *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 110 (1990) 204.

33 E.g. at *Republic* X 599b and *Cratylus* 439a-b.

34 And incidentally the label which Demetrius used of the enactmental effect in Homer cited above, n.28 (ὁ στίχος ... μεμίμηται ...).

35 Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* V, 2.

36 Tennyson, *The Princess* VII, 207.

37 Above, p.114 (my italics).

38 Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon* 77 (his italics).

39 Graham, *Onomatopoetics* 289.

40 Hesiod, *Theogony* 27-8.

41 πάθει μάθος: Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 176-8. The reluctance to allow that poetry 'says' anything (it should be stressed) is especially characteristic of some of the best twentieth-century critics at their most twentieth-century. E.g. Leavis: 'for Hopkins his use of words is not a matter of *saying* things with them; he is preoccupied with what seems to him the poetic use of them, and that is a matter of making them do and be' (*The Common Pursuit* [London 1958] 51) – where the antithesis between 'saying' (italicized by Leavis) and 'poetic' speaks volumes. Cf. Eliot on 'thought' (n. 16 above). Renaissance authority might be claimed for the 'non-saying' tradition on the strength of Philip Sidney's 'the Poet, he nothing affirmes, and therefore never lyeth' (*An Apology for Poetry* [1595] in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. G. Smith [Oxford 1904] I, 184), but Sidney's point is essentially the Aristotelian one that associates poetry and *fiction*.

42 Viktor Shklovsky, 'Art as technique' (1917), in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. L.T. Lemon and M.J. Reis (Lincoln, Nebraska 1965) 12.

43 Pope, *An Essay in Criticism* 298.

44 Contrary to vulgar opinion, such challenges began before the present century. Consider e.g.: Wordsworth's insistence on words as 'an incarnation of the thought' ('Upon Epitaphs' [1810], in *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, ed. N.C. Smith [Oxford 1905] 129); von Humboldt's account of 'language [as] the formative organ of thought' (*Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts* [1836] §9); and R. Waswo's discussion of Renaissance theorists like Valla and Vives in his *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance* (Princeton 1987).

45 Plato, *Epist.* VII 341b-d; Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, §26; Eliot, *Four Quartets* ('Burnt Norton', V).

46 Gorgias, fr. 3 D.-K.

47 See n.5 above.

48 'Vox significat [rem] mediantibus conceptibus': see e.g. Otto Funke, 'On the function of naming', *English Studies* 18 (1936) 57.

49 F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* [ed. Bally, Sechehaye and Riedlinger: 1916], tr. W. Baskin (New York 1959) 112.

50 Cf. C. Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature: towards a true post-modernism* (Cambridge 1989) 10.

51 See, for instance: Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature*; L. Jackson, *The Poverty of Structuralism: literature and structuralist theory* (London 1991); J.M. Ellis, *Against Deconstruction* (Princeton 1989); R. Freadman and S. Miller, *Re-Thinking Theory: a critique of contemporary literary theory and an alternative account* (Cambridge 1992), especially 115-65. One of the most admirable (and neglected) discussions of the 'reference' issue is G.D. Martin, *Language, Truth and Poetry: notes towards a philosophy of literature* (Edinburgh 1975).

52 See, for instance, the quotations assembled by Ellis, *Against Deconstruction* 50-52. As is well known, Derrida combines this 'deferral' and the relational (Saussurian) 'difference' (*sc.* the 'difference' between words that gives them their meaning) into a portmanteau 'différance' (see especially *La Voix et le phénomène: introduction au problème du signe dans la phénoménologie de Husserl* [Paris 1967]). 'Deferral' (which in this context carries the Saussurian implication with it) is simple and sufficient.

53 A language, as Saussure insisted, is both *langue* (a system) and *parole* (individual utterances). Literature is equivalent to 'parole' by virtue of its individual works. In no meaningful sense can it be said to offer an equivalent to 'langue'. Hence there is no true equivalent to a dictionary or a grammar on the literary side of the supposed equation.

54 Strictly speaking, in any case, no Saussurian post-structuralist should be talking of *reference* at all: cf. Waswo, *Language and Meaning in the Renaissance*, 304. A literary critic may, of course, need to discriminate between literature that is 'about life' and literature that is merely 'about other literature' – but it is precisely this kind of discrimination which the theory of omnipresent 'self-reference' precludes.

55 *L'Ecriture et la différence* (Paris 1967) 410-11.

56 *Ibid.*

57 *Of Grammatology* [*De la grammatologie* (Paris 1967)], tr. G.C. Spivak (Baltimore 1976) 49.

58 'Prison-house': F. Jameson, *The Prison House of Language: a critical account of structuralism and Russian formalism* (Princeton 1972) 173. 'Effect of the real': Roland Barthes, 'L'Effet du réel', *Communications* 11 (1968) 84 ff. The later Barthes was as clearly a post-structuralist as the earlier Barthes was a structuralist: cf. the succinct remarks in J.V. Harari's introduction to *Textual Strategies*, 22-31.

59 'Valéry and the poetics of language', in Harari, *Textual Strategies*, 359-73.

60 *Textual Strategies*, 373 (slightly rephrased in the interests of English usage).

61 *Textual Strategies*, 372.

62 P. De Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis 1986) 10.

63 Attridge, *Peculiar Language*, 151-2. The fashionable phrase, 'language *as language*', prompts the thought that in the history of Western dissociation a place should be found for what Roy Harris calls 'the idea that language is somehow separable from the rest of man's bodily activities and physical behaviour' (*The Language-Makers* [London 1980], pref. note) – not that Harris succeeds in making this idea seem as altogether disreputable as he evidently supposes, nor that he does much to suggest a satisfactory alternative.

64 Cited by Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature*, 113.

65 On this reclamation of 'presence', cf. George Steiner, *Real Presences: is there anything in what we say?* (London 1989) 137-232, and Falck, *Myth, Truth and Literature*, 4-33, 86-114; but my own usage is more specific to the present argument.

66 Eliot: in *Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca* (1927) (*Selected Essays* [2nd edn: London 1951] 135). Shakespeare: *Macbeth* V, 5.

67 Keats, 'Ode to a Nightingale' (stanza 8).

68 Whether or not Aristotle ever made the connection between theatrical and enactmental 'seeing', it is implicit in at least one later Greek formula for enactment: Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* III.1 ἐμὲ ... θεατὴν ὁ σὸς ἐπέστησε λόγος.