

**ANCIENT QUARRELS AND CURRENT PERSPECTIVES IN THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POETRY AND PHILOSOPHY**

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Summary

Beginning with Plato's expulsion of the poets in the *Republic*, this dissertation looks at the often hostile, yet also symbiotic, relationship between poetry and philosophy. Aristotle's 'response' to Plato is regarded as a significant origin of literary theory. Nietzsche's critique of Western philosophy as being an attempt to suppress its own metaphoricity, leads to a reevaluation of truth and consequently of the privileging of philosophy over poetry. Post-structuralism sometimes overemphasizes this constitutive force of metaphoricity, at the expense of conceptual modes. However, Derrida's notion of philosophy as play retains a balance between concept and metaphor: there is no attempt to transcendently ground philosophy, but neither is it reduced to a merely metaphorical discourse. Finally, Wittgenstein's notion of meaning as determined by *use* can help us distinguish pragmatically between poetry and philosophy by looking at the contexts in which they function.

Key Terms: Poetry, Philosophy, Representation, Metaphor, Concept, Post-Structuralism, Reference, Language-Game, Meaning, Use

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Plato's Ancient Quarrel 3

Chapter 1

Poetry and Knowledge 10

Chapter 2

Nietzsche and the Poetry in Philosophy 22

Chapter 3

Metaphor, *Differance*, Post-Structuralism 37

Chapter 4

Reference, Use and Wittgenstein 46

Conclusion

The Use of Philosophy 58

Bibliography 63

INTRODUCTION

PLATO'S ANCIENT QUARREL

Though poetry and philosophy have profoundly shaped Western intellectual culture, they have remained elusively difficult to define. In fact, their reciprocal hostility has often seemed the only factor we *can* take for granted. There is good reason to suppose that this hostility has been exacerbated because, in their disparagement of each other, the poet and the philosopher have seen the surest means to self-definition. What would philosophy be without a self-conscious sense of the 'non-philosophical'? Where would the 'passion' and 'rich particularity' of poetry be without philosophy's abstractions? Of course there have been, and still are, poets who think like philosophers, and philosophers who write like poets, but their achievements along the borders have not eliminated these borders on an institutional level. And yet, any close study reveals that philosophy is permeated by poetic elements, and that poetry cannot be divorced from its claims to truth. The primary aim of a comparative study such as this must be to do justice to the complexity of the historical and analytical issues involved, and so perhaps present a map of possibilities for further investigation.

In the work of Plato, Western philosophy comes increasingly to understand itself as the attempt to supplant or re-articulate uses of language which depend on persuasion rather than dialectic for their effect. Such uses of language would pre-eminently include rhetoric, the very art of persuasion, but in Plato it is at times conceived broadly enough to include poetry¹, which also speaks without securing access to what is worth knowing. Of course, from the outset there is a curious ambivalence in the philosophical attitude. Paul Ricoeur, in *The Rule of Metaphor*, points out that rhetoric is philosophy's enemy because 'it is always possible for

¹ I use the term 'poetry' fairly loosely. The Greeks did not have a term for 'literature', as we understand it, and Aristotle's *Poetics*, which I will make use of, is primarily concerned with Tragedy. There is clearly some terminological vagueness at the origin of these issues. I will use the term 'literature' to refer to a

the art of “saying it well” to lay aside all concern for “speaking the truth” (Ricouer 1986: 10). And yet philosophy, like rhetoric, is a discursive practice. That is to say, it too must convince if it is to succeed. The Platonic distrust of poetry views it, at best, as an incomplete, juvenile form of knowledge, and at worst as a serious threat to the kind of rationality which could legitimate utopian schemes or the perfection of the self. Closely allied to this explicitly distrustful tradition is the philosophical tendency to condescend to poetry. In his essay ‘The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art’, Arthur Danto argues that post-Platonic philosophy has in fact been characterized by either ‘the analytical effort to ephemeralize and hence defuse art, or, to allow a degree of validity to art by treating it as doing what philosophy itself does, only uncouthly’ (Danto 1986: 7).

This quarrel with the poetic arguably inaugurates Western philosophy as a discipline with claims to autonomy. Both Dalia Judovitz, in her essay ‘Philosophy and Poetry: The Difference between them in Plato and Descartes’, and Arthur Danto argue that the origin of philosophy *is* the banishment of poetry. According to Judovitz ‘this conflict...can be shown to function as the constitutive operation in the foundation of philosophy as a metaphysical discourse’ (Judovitz in Cascardi (ed.) 1987: 27). Plato’s quarrel with poetry, described by him in the *Republic* as being already an ‘ancient quarrel’², revolves around the question of what kind of knowledge poets may be said to possess, as well as the *propriety* of this knowledge. In denying the validity of the poetic mode, which is one form of the art of representation, of *mimesis*, in other words, Plato is necessarily forced to develop *his* particular conception of knowledge. As Danto puts it: ‘philosophy itself may just be the disenfranchisement of art’ (Danto 1986: 7).

In the attempt to clarify the Platonic antagonism towards poetry, it is tempting to treat Plato’s remarks on the subject as a sustained, well-developed argument. This can, however, be misleading. Neither Danto nor Judovitz necessarily do

collection of texts, assumptions and commentaries within a complexly organized, predominantly secular culture, and ‘poetry’ as a more generic term for an articulated, usually text-based, representational art.

² This may, of course, be a rhetorical flourish to some extent.

justice to the complexity and downright contradictoriness of Plato's position(s), preferring to simplify matters for polemical purposes by drawing only on the *Ion* and on sections of the *Republic*. Gerald Else, in his *Plato and Aristotle on Poetry*, points out that 'Plato's statements on the subject do not form a coherent logical whole, much less a complete theory of poetry' (Else 1986: 5). Concerning the famous 'expulsion' of the poets in Book III, for example, it is not entirely clear whether Plato means to banish all poets without distinction, or merely the less 'dignified' sort, those who 'will be all the readier to widen their range the worse they are, and will think nothing beneath them' (Plato 1974: 155). The actual banishment passage is clear enough: 'So if we are visited in our state by someone who has skill to transform himself into all sorts of characters and represent all sorts of things, and he wants to show off himself and his poems to us, we shall treat him with all the reverence due to a priest and a giver of rare pleasure, but shall tell him that he and his kind have no place in our city' (Plato 1974: 157). Nevertheless, we can't be sure that Plato would unequivocally classify Homer, for example, with the 'pantomimic gentlemen'. And the whole matter is further complicated by what follows, where Socrates says: 'For ourselves, we shall for our own good employ story-tellers and poets who are severe rather than amusing, who portray the style of the good man and in their works abide by the principles we laid down for them when we started out on this attempt to educate our military class' (Plato 1974: 157). This does seem to imply the sanction of a certain kind of poetry, albeit a more narrowly conceived, pedagogic one, which is simple in form and has as its subject the praise of the gods. What we might call *edifying* works, in other words. In *Aristotle on Tragic and Comic Mimesis*, Leon Golden makes a useful distinction when he argues that Plato 'held in delicate balance a philosophical contempt for *mimesis*³ - due to its essential alienation from ultimate reality - and a sober realization that the

³ Mimesis can mean simply representation or imitation (cf. Book III of *The Republic* where Plato cites the representation, in sound and gesture, of everything from the noises of thunder and wind and hail to the twittering of birds (Plato 1974: 155, 156)), but also carries the more Aristotelian sense of the representation of the particular with the aim of leading us to general insights, especially about the moral aspects of human nature.

skilled use of *mimesis* is an indispensable means for whatever approach we are able to make to that ultimate reality' (Golden 1992: 41).

More significant, though, than the precise nuances of Plato's thought is the fact that he sets a precedent with far-reaching historical consequences, in trying to secure for theory the authority to determine the nature of art, and to limit its scope. There is certainly no love for unregulated poetic freedom in Plato: it is associated with undisciplined desire, with the nascent tendency of democracy to become a 'rule of the mob' and so to deteriorate into tyranny. Only if poetry allows itself to be circumscribed by philosophy, can it still, in principle, retain a didactic function within the republic. In his essay 'Literature and Philosophy: Sense or Nonsense', Morris Weitz emphasizes that: 'Whatever the nuances, subtleties, or deviations may be in Plato's writings (some commentators even regard him as the supreme poet or maker), Plato never wavers on his fundamental and irreducible dichotomy between literature and philosophy' (Strelka (ed.) 1983: 4).

In the Platonic scheme, there are essentially two problems with the mimetic or representational arts, namely their 'ontological separation from true reality' (Golden 1992: 41) and their 'potential for subverting the character of both the individual and the state' (Golden 1992: 41). Regarding the first, for Plato poetry, as a representational art, can never be more than acquaintance with a particular thing. It does not function through that mode of abstraction which, in the Platonic conception, allows us access to universals. Lacking this knowledge, it becomes an imitation of no more than the appearing world, which, for Plato, is *already* removed from the real. Poetry is an imitation of an imitation. If poetry's knowledge is knowledge only of appearances, of the sensible world, then, in terms of the Platonic dualism between essence and appearance, poetry can never know and never speak of that which is truly important, the intelligible world. This is *not* to say that the poet does not possess power over the soul. The poet is a threat to the rational utopia depicted in the *Republic* precisely because 'The

poet's only true craft is the exploitation of a confusion in the soul about essence and appearance' (Judovitz in Cascardi (ed.) 1987: 37). Another name for the exploitation of confusion in the soul for the purpose of winning arguments is, of course, *rhetoric*, for Plato the arch-enemy of philosophy. It is the fact that poets are said to *exploit* this confusion in the soul that gives the *Republic's* anti-poetry stance its political overtones. Poetry as engenderer of confusion is clearly a threat to the kind of utopia established and maintained through the self-present rationality of free citizens.

Plato introduces the dialectic as the pre-eminent model of all true knowledge. His Dialogues are a representation of the attainment of knowledge of the real and the good through an idealized conversational process where questioning weeds out merely sophistic beliefs. The ideal situation is based on reciprocity: a mutually transformative process through engagement with the matter at hand. For Plato the dialectic is in fact a living communion between one soul and another. A further problem with poetry (and its spokespeople, the poets) is that it (supposedly) cannot participate in this manner. The poets are depicted as unreflexive: they are unable to offer reliable commentary on what it is they are doing. The rhapsode whom Socrates interrogates in *Ion*, for example, is unable to move from passionate recitation to analysis of what he is reciting, and thus cannot be said to possess knowledge. The fact that poetry does not seem to be circumscribed by any epistemic constraints that would objectify its domain and delimit its methodology leads Socrates to conclude that 'neither the rhapsode...nor the poet...can be ascertained as possessing an art'⁴ (Judovitz in Cascardi (ed.) 1987:31). Saying the same thing again and again, a poem merely simulates conversation: there is no *exchange*; the dialectic, as the eventual securing of knowledge, cannot get under way: 'Poetry must be expelled because it pretends to speak' (Judovitz in Cascardi (ed.) 1987: 38).

⁴ The use of the word 'art' here would seem to confuse matters, but what Socrates presumably means is either self-conscious skill (*technē*) or a general discipline. *Ion* evidently lacks both.

However, such an argument seems to miss the point that poetry is situated in an ever-changing context of other poems and varying readings which form a significant cultural ensemble. In other words, poetry is a part of 'literature'. The Greeks had no word for literature as we understand it, and this fact does condition Plato's view. For the individual poet as uncritical vessel of inspiration we, at any rate, can easily substitute the notion of the 'interpretive community' which, through criticism and commentary, secures the possibility of meaningful dialogue. The fact that a particular poet may not be able to take up a critical position regarding his work does not exclude poetry in general from the critical orientation: 'Plato's narrow interpretation of dialogue in terms of conversation fails to account for the ongoing polyphonic dialogue in which poetry is already engaged' (Judovitz in Cascardi (ed.) 1987: 39).

In his *Literature against Philosophy, Plato to Derrida*, Edmundson emphasizes that this attack on poetry and the poet is accompanied by a conception of what the *philosopher* ought to be. In fact: 'The two groups define each other reciprocally' (Edmundson 1995: 6). In terms of this account, the poet and the true philosopher are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Poets are often hysterical and whimsical; though they can be fascinating, they rarely leave useful teachings behind. True philosophers, by contrast, are a restrained, stoic elite who gather loving adherents to the truth of their doctrines. According to Edmundson, Plato is uneasy about the poet in his *own* soul: he is, after all, remembered as much for his analogies, images and myth-making, for his *poetry*, as for his abstract arguments. The obvious paradox, that one of the most poetic of all philosophers is so opposed, at least in *The Republic*, to the institutionalization of poetry, is made clearer if we remember that Plato wrote poetry in his youth, and burnt it after his encounter with Socrates. In his *Dialogue and Dialectic*, Gadamer makes the point that it is not that Plato *can't* become a great poet, but that he no longer *wants* to. As the disciple of Socrates, as the lover of *sophia*, Plato believes he must cease to engage with art as art, with poetry as poetry. He must now engage with them as the philosopher. The rejection of *mimesis* is not necessarily total,

but there can be no doubt that it is subordinated to dialectic as a mode for securing knowledge.⁵

Though it is an over-simplification to assert that Plato rejects poetry out of hand, he rarely does justice to it when discussing it theoretically. In the *Ion*, Plato's superficial explication of inspiration as a sort of 'divine possession' removes all critical functions from the poet, who becomes a mere vessel: 'The poet is presented as a creature whose inspiration and method preclude reason and therefore a true knowledge of things' (Judovitz in Cascardi (ed.) 1987: 31). To achieve this, it is firstly necessary for Plato to select an outstandingly dim-witted example of the poetic type in *Ion*, enthusiastic reciter of Homer, who is unable to answer any critical or evaluative questions about what he recites. Plato here wants to show that poetry is *solely* a matter of inspiration, that 'the poet is not able to compose until he has become inspired and out of his mind and his reason is no longer in him' (Else 1986: 7). In other words, 'reason must depart before poetizing can begin' (Else 1986: 7). That this is a strategic move is obvious. Else, using Homer, Hesiod, and Pindar as examples, points out that the 'tradition as a whole is far from sanctioning Plato's dichotomy between inspiration and reason' (Else 1986: 8). One is an artist *and* one is inspired. But Plato must build inspiration up 'to an impossible height of absurdity' (Else 1986: 8) because his argument is that poetry is irrational and lacks self-reflexivity. The strategy is well-expressed by Judovitz: 'By reducing poetry to an oracular genre, one in which the divinely inspired poet is deprived of his own voice, Plato frees philosophy from the challenge of truly considering the problem of knowledge posed by poetry' (Judovitz in Cascardi (ed.) 1987: 32).

⁵ *Mimesis* retains a function as a form of illustration, for example in myth and analogy, which can be 'an imaginative provocation to serious reasoning that, when successful, can open a path for transcending *mimesis*' (Golden 1992: 53). A famous example is the analogy of the soul and the charioteer in the *Phaedrus*.

CHAPTER 1

POETRY AND KNOWLEDGE

!

A hard-line Platonic stance (whether truly attributable to Plato or not) sees Plato as introducing, in Morris Weitz's words, 'the powerful idea that literature is purely emotive' (Strelka (ed.) 1983: 5). This conception of the poetic, as being *nothing* but emotion, severs it from reliable claims to truth, and sets up the historically powerful dichotomy between poetry and philosophy: 'one of the footnotes Plato bequeaths to western thought and literary criticism is that literature can no more be married to philosophy than falsehood can to truth' (Strelka 1983: 5). When, however, we seriously entertain an alternative possibility, we are already closer to Aristotle's 'response' to Plato, and his conception of poetry as 'a repository of truths about the general or shared features of human actions and experiences' (Strelka 1983: 6). We are then assuming that poetry does have access to truth, though in a way which differs from that of philosophy. The Aristotelian revaluation is crucial because it has, in many ways, determined the *kinds* of defences of poetry considered appropriate. This chapter begins by looking in some detail at the *Poetics*, and then proceeds to a discussion of some possibilities it implies.

Though the *Poetics* is primarily concerned with the elements of tragedy, it is, I believe, legitimate to employ it in a discussion of poetry for two related reasons. Firstly, both tragedy and comedy are, according to Aristotle, developments of a more general, pre-existing 'poetry': 'Poetry...soon branched out into two kinds according to the differences of character in the individual poets...as soon as Tragedy and Comedy came upon the scene, those who had a natural tendency to one style of poetry became writers of comedies...and those with a natural bent for the other style became writers of tragedies' (Aristotle 1963: 9). We can

therefore assume that at least some of the conclusions concerning tragedy will be relevant to the less differentiated 'poetry'. Secondly, Aristotle considers tragedy, like poetry, to be a form of *mimesis*, in other words an art which represents by imitation. Clearly, general conclusions concerning *mimesis* will be as applicable to poetry as to tragedy.

We saw in the introduction that Plato subordinated *mimesis* to the dialectic, poetry to philosophy. Early in the *Poetics*, Aristotle presents a discussion of *mimesis* which emphasizes its importance and thus, it would seem, at least tangentially contests Plato's scheme. According to Aristotle, one of the things that makes humanity superior to the animals is the fact that we are imitative animals. A person 'begins to learn by way of imitation; and it is moreover natural for all human beings to delight in works of imitation' (Aristotle 1963: 8). For Aristotle, there is no doubt that *mimesis* engages with our emotions in a meaningful, serious way which can have a pedagogic value. He does not, however, make it explicitly clear what he means by imitation. A medical treatise, for example, even if written in verse, would not qualify, whereas a Socratic dialogue would. In fact, Aristotle indicates his awareness that a term needs to be introduced here: 'There is further an art which imitates by language alone, without harmony, in prose or in verse, and if the latter, either in some one or in a plurality of meters. This form of imitation is to this day without a name' (Aristotle 1963: 4). The gap Aristotle identifies has subsequently been filled with the term 'literature'. If we then ask what these works are intended to represent, Aristotle gives a clear enough answer: 'The objects represented by an imitator are actions performed by men who are necessarily either good or bad' (Aristotle 1963: 5). In *Aristotle on the Purposes of Literature*, Norman Gulley provides the following elaboration: 'Aristotle's point is that the aspects of human behaviour which are fundamental for the artist's purposes are those which are capable of engaging our moral sympathy or antipathy in any way' (Gulley 1971: 7).

Aristotle famously assigns the representational arts a higher place than history. This valuation rests on his distinction between what happens and what *could* happen, between the factual and the probable. In Gulley's words: 'The guideline for the artist...is not what *is*, but what *can be*. And according to the genre he is working in he has to judge what can *plausibly* be represented, that is, he must avoid anything improbable or irrational which is likely to thwart his aim of engaging his readers' sympathies' (Gulley 1971: 11). History is merely descriptive and as such cannot be more than an account of particulars. But poetry 'is more philosophic and of greater significance than history, for its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are particulars' (Aristotle 1963: 17). In the next sentence Aristotle explicitly links probability and universality: 'A universal statement declares what such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do; and that is the aim of poetry' (Aristotle 1963: 17).

Without doubt Aristotle is far more appreciative of the function of representational art than Plato, to the extent of considering it 'philosophical' in some sense. However, we should not assume that the universalizing potential of representational art makes such art true in the sense in which a philosophical statement can be said to be true. Within the parameters of the probable, it is the ability of works to evoke universal *emotions* which constitutes their validity and potency. Gulley expresses it clearly: 'When Aristotle gives his fine analysis of what is the best tragedy he is giving an analysis of the best means of achieving certain emotional effects...the artist's aim is not simply to arouse them but also to regulate them' (Gulley 1971: 18). It would seem as though psychological considerations do feature in Aristotle's account of the value of tragedy and representational art generally.

The aim of tragedy, as a form of *mimesis*, is *katharsis*. Aristotle introduces the term without defining it, and it remains a contentious one. A number of critics have recently cast doubt on the influential identification of *katharsis* with moral

purification or with purgation in a quasi-medical sense⁶. Since the problem is one of interpretation, any English translation will already reflect a bias towards a particular point of view. The Everyman edition, for example, translates as follows: 'A tragedy is the imitation of an action...with incidents arousing pity and fear, whereby to provide an outlet for such emotions' (Aristotle 1963: 12). The debate concerning the possible range of meanings of *katharsis* is significant for us, because the kind of meaning assigned to it will determine the kind of value assigned to representational art. At the beginning of this chapter we cited the Platonic view that art is purely a matter of emotion. The purgation view of *katharsis* implicitly supports this because it seems to see Tragedy's primary function as an emotional / psychological one, rather than an intellectual / cognitive one. Golden, by contrast, in *Aristotle on Tragic and Comic Mimesis*, argues that we should understand *katharsis* as the more cognitive pleasure of learning, of 'intellectual clarification' (Golden 1992: 26), an account of which Aristotle provides when he discusses *mimesis*. The claim that poetry is a mode of securing knowledge becomes more tenable in a context where imitation as a form of learning supercedes imitation as an outlet for the emotions. The tendency to see in representational art little more than a tool for the vicarious experience of various emotions has a long history and has conditioned the reading of Aristotle. Clearly it plays straight into the hands of what appears to be an oversimplified dichotomy between 'rational' philosophy and 'emotive' poetry.

⁶ For example Leon Golden in his *Aristotle on Tragic and Comic Mimesis*.

II

Because Aristotle is an originator of the disciplines we now call literary criticism and literary theory, it is important to ask what his discussion of representational art in the *Poetics* bequeaths to subsequent thinkers. We have looked at his deployment of the crucial terms *mimesis* and *katharsis*, and I would now like to move away from specific Aristotelian arguments and instead investigate what might be called the underlying conceptual and stylistic assumptions which govern his approach. These have probably been as influential as the actual concepts he introduces or refines.

In Aristotle the representational work of art becomes 'philosophical': it becomes something made according to principles of construction, and as such can profitably be *studied*, as opposed to merely experienced. The introduction of formal analysis becomes the mode through which we can be said to gain knowledge of a work. In other words, the process whereby poetry becomes intellectually respectable in Aristotle is precisely the *intellectualization* of poetry, which implies its demystification too. For Plato the poem is still potentially a powerfully disruptive form of communication; as such it *must* be philosophy's rival. Aristotle's poets, however, are craftsmen rather than inspired vessels, and where poetic requirements are laid down these tend to be formal. Aristotle does not seem to share Plato's sense of poetry as a quasi-primordial force. Else writes that, unlike Plato's, 'Aristotle's soul was not haunted by poetry' (Else 1986: 203).

Edmundson claims that the Aristotelian revaluation is a mixed blessing: 'Aristotle, according to many, starts out trying to defend poetry against Plato, but he ends up engendering modes of formalism that undermine poetry's influence in more sophisticated ways than Plato ever conceived' (Edmundson 1995: 9, 10).

According to this argument, the Aristotelian revaluation of art, with its emphasis on the study of 'form' rather than 'content', has lent authority to interpretive tendencies which avoid the powerful potential of art to transform those who

experience it. The application of concepts to poetic texts, so the argument goes, also tends to diminish respect for the *particularity* of works. Since concepts by their nature tend to have a totalizing function, similarity can come to be valued over difference: 'Using formal categories...on a number of works tends to elide the ways they differ from each other.... Summary terms interfere with our ability to perceive what is unique, and uniquely valuable in a given work' (Edmundson 1995: 9).

The fear which Edmundson articulates, shared by Rapp in his essay 'Philosophy and Poetry: The New Rapprochement', is that the autonomy of poetry, and consequently its value, is diminished when we assume it requires another discipline to enable it to 'speak'. In their worst-case scenario, poetry accepts a subordinate role to philosophy because the truths that poetry is able to convey are limited to those 'determined for it in advance by philosophy' (Rapp in Marshall (ed.) 1987: 123). The ever-present risk for poetry is of becoming 'a sort of splendid vehicle for conceptions which originate elsewhere in belief-systems or thought-systems' (Rapp in Marshall (ed.) 1987: 124). Though it would be unfair to accuse Aristotle of desiring such a state of affairs, or of unwittingly working towards it, I believe Rapp and Edmundson are right in wondering whether formally orientated modes of criticism are the only or best mode of bringing poetry within the ambit of knowledge.

In our time the popularity of formalist approaches stems to a large extent from the spectacular, intimidating successes of the natural sciences in shaping post-Renaissance Western culture. Its proponents have argued that only a similarly scientific approach can secure objective knowledge in the humanities. It is this scientific⁷ impulse which underlies literary theory when it sees itself as a discipline which must concentrate on those aspects of literary texts which are 'repeatable' and not dependent on the contingencies of actual readers with their

⁷ The Pan Dictionary of Philosophy defines *scientism* as 'The belief that the human sciences require no methods other than those of the natural'.

values and prejudices. Because they supposedly exclude the domain of values, structural approaches seem to provide a limited but objectively verifiable elucidation of aspects of a poem. The paradigmatic gesture in contemporary theory is Saussure's bracketing of *parole*, or actual language use, in favour of studying the system, *langue*, which makes utterances possible. This methodological move generates a model that can in principle be applied to any signifying practice. For this kind of structuralism, a poem and a recipe will do equally well. Aside from the *langue* – *parole* distinction, Saussure also introduces the distinction between the synchronic and the diachronic modes of investigating a signifying practice. John Sturrock, in *Structuralism and Since*, identifies the contrast between these two modes as that between studying language as 'a system functioning at a given moment in time, [and] as an institution which has evolved through time' (Sturrock 1979: 8). To study something synchronically is to study it as an isolated system that generates combinatory possibilities. A vital Saussurean insight is that meaning is a function of differences at this systemic level. That is to say, when we study *langue* we can't and don't have recourse to referentiality to secure the meaning of a sign, but must see its meaning as solely a function of its difference from other signs. Meaning, in other words, does not reside within a sign as an essence, nor is meaning located in a subject who stands at the center of a system and controls it. Both essential meaning and the subject are de-centered in favour of a widely conceived 'language': 'It [language] is not something we each bring with us into the world at birth, but an institution into which we are gradually initiated in childhood as the most fundamental element of all in our socialization. Language can thus be described as impersonal, it exceeds us as individuals' (Sturrock 1979: 12).

What are the consequences for thinking about poetry if we adopt this theoretical orientation? The first thing to note is that the application of a strict structuralist method generates an approach to literary texts which diverges from the way an assumed reader would engage with such texts. A structuralist such as Roman Jakobson, for example, tends to posit a system of oppositional distributions

which structure a particular poem, yet this distribution cannot be supposed to signify at the surface level of a reading. His oppositions do not, in other words, convincingly account for the overall effect of the poem. In his *Structuralist Poetics*, Jonathan Culler makes the point that 'once one... undertakes a distributional analysis of a text, one enters a realm of extraordinary freedom, where a grammar...no longer provides a determinate method' (Culler 1975: 57). There is little constraint to the kinds of oppositions which can be posited, and consequently the structuralist approach can come across as a somewhat arbitrary exercise. Culler argues that a purely structural analysis has little use in itself: 'To say that there is a great deal of parallelism and repetition in literary texts is of little interest in itself and of less explanatory value. The crucial question is what effects patterning can have, and one cannot approach an answer unless one incorporate within one's theory an account of how readers take up and structure elements of a text' (Culler 1975: 57).

Culler's reading of structuralism is directed by his view that a theory of literary competence is a necessary supplement to structural considerations if literary effects are to be explained. Without getting embroiled in debates about the merits of reader-response criticism generally, of which Culler's is one version, I would agree with his view that the structural method is above all *limited*. Sturrock expresses this as follows: 'Only a fanatical structuralist would argue that to uncover the system of a literary work by means such as these is the whole of literary criticism, and that the structuralist holds the ultimate key to literary understanding. A moderate structuralism is true to its own tenets, and admits that a structuralist interpretation is defined by the differences between it and other interpretations' (Sturrock 1979: 12). The limited nature of structuralist literary studies may be part of its appeal, but an exclusive emphasis on the formal elements of literature separates its study from the realm of values. Such an approach would tend to appeal most to those who see in the, supposedly value-free, orientation of the natural sciences a method which can secure knowledge,

rather than mere opinion, for a discipline such as literary criticism too⁸. In his *Literary Theory: An Introduction* Eagleton praises structuralism for its 'demystification' of literature, but criticizes its ahistoricity: 'There was no question of relating the work to the realities of which it treated, or to the conditions which produced it, or to the actual readers who studied it, since the founding gesture of structuralism had been to bracket off such realities' (Eagleton 1983: 109). Structuralism is thus also unable to account for change, for the diachronic movement which is an essential part of what we understand as literature. All these considerations combine to make it clear that the limited scope of structural analysis relegates it to a marginal role in literary criticism. More generally, it seems something of a dead-end to attempt a consistently rigid articulation of what may be objective in a work. One feels that a more balanced approach, drawing on a wider range of elements introduced by Aristotle in the *Poetics* than its bias towards formal categorization, is possible and necessary in order to defend the knowledge claims of poetry.

Instead of focusing to such an extent on the formal properties of representational art, one can follow an alternative route, also deriving from Aristotle, and argue that *mimesis* is a necessary way of gaining access to the truth. Clearly, this argument is based on a differing, even conflicting, idea of what 'truth' is from that advanced by philosophy. Though poetry does not *assert* truth, it can, in its complex representation, *show* it. This view can even lead to the contention that poetry is suited not only to instruct people in the truth, as argued for example by Philip Sidney in his *Apology for Poetry*, but that it is actually *superior* to philosophy in apprehending the truth. According to this argument, 'reality' is characterized by complexity, opaqueness and indeterminacy. Since these are generally also characteristics of the self-consciously poetic use of language, poetry stands in a privileged relation to the world, in a way that philosophy, as a

⁸ Few serious philosophers of science still deny the value-dependency of scientific investigation, for example the way it is located within a paradigm which cannot be entirely articulated by its practitioners (cf. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*) or the extent to which errors and methodological inconsistencies act as necessary catalysts for scientific progress (cf. Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method*).

more linear, abstract mode of assertion and argument, does not. Plato, of course, thinking in terms of a strict division between the sensible and the intelligible, would find it incomprehensible that truth could be something provisional or vague. For him this is the realm of *doxa*, mere talk, to be distinguished from the realm of knowledge.

In one strain of Romantic thought the richness of the particular makes it more useful than the generalized statements of philosophy in guiding us to an understanding of what it is to be human. In the *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads*, for example, truth is associated with a poeticized ordinary language, which is contrasted with abstract discourse, though Wordsworth's main attack is directed at the 'gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers' (Wordsworth 1992: 59). He makes a case for ordinary language because it does not 'indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites' (Wordsworth 1992: 61). Instead it is the language of those who 'hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived' (Wordsworth 1992: 61). Such a language does not aim at sating the 'degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation' (Wordsworth 1992: 65) which characterizes the ever-expanding cities, but can trace 'the primary laws of our nature - chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement' (Wordsworth 1992: 60). Though Wordsworth's contrast of urban and rural culture may be a bit too neat, he does give an indication of why, for him, poetry is the 'most philosophic of all writing' (Wordsworth 1992: 73). Its truth is not merely a matter of external testimony, but is instead 'carried alive into the heart by passion' (Wordsworth 1992: 73). The passion that is central to poetry gives it a generality more specialized forms of science lack. Thus both the Poet and the Man of Science can lay claim to knowledge, but 'the knowledge of the one cleaves to us as a necessary part of our existence...the other is a personal and individual acquisition...by no habitual and direct sympathy connecting us with our fellow-beings' (Wordsworth 1992: 76). In Wordsworth's scheme of things then, the truly universal is characterized

by the kind of passion which can best be conveyed by a poetry attuned to the language of ordinary people, a language traversed by basic joys and sorrows, embedded in a range of experiences far older than urban sophistications and industrialization. The 'primary laws of our nature' are, according to Wordsworth, to be found and revealed through a mode which is attuned to them because it is as passionate as they are: the colder scrutinies of the specialist are worthwhile but far more limited.

In *The Passion of the Western Mind*, Richard Tarnas usefully contends that Western culture since the Renaissance has produced 'two distinct streams of culture.... One emerged in the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment and stressed rationality, empirical science, and a skeptical secularism. The other was its polar complement...tending to express just those aspects of human experience suppressed by the Enlightenment's...spirit' (Tarnas 1991: 366). Tarnas is quick to point out that this opposition is not a rigid one, nor is it exclusive; in fact 'their complex interplay could be said to constitute the modern sensibility' (Tarnas 1991: 366). Nevertheless, the Enlightenment and the 'reaction' to it, Romanticism, even if they do have elements in common, differ in significant ways that are extremely relevant to the shaping of the historical differences between poetry and philosophy. We have already seen that, when arguing for the superiority of philosophy, Plato tended to assign rationality to philosophers and a non-reflective 'inspiration' to the poets. Tarnas's Enlightenment – Romanticism opposition is structured along similar lines:

'the Romantic vision... exalted the ineffability of inspiration rather than the enlightenment of reason, and affirmed the inexhaustible drama of human life rather than the calm predictability of static abstractions. Whereas the Enlightenment temperament's high valuation of man rested on his unequalled rational intellect and its power to comprehend and exploit the laws of nature, the Romantic valued man rather for his imaginative and

spiritual aspirations, his emotional depths, his artistic creativity and powers of individual self-expression and self-creation'

(Tarnas 1991: 367).

However, instead of defending the kind of knowledge embedded in poetry, we can question the rationality of philosophy, which supposedly guarantees its privileged access to truth. Where Wordsworth still claims that poetry can secure truth because of its association with passion and non-degraded forms of life, Nietzsche inverts the argument and asks whether philosophy is not perhaps a historically influential misrecognition of what thinking and language are capable of.

CHAPTER 2

NIETZSCHE AND THE POETRY IN PHILOSOPHY

I

Historically, the opposition between poetry and philosophy has been maintained within philosophy as a strategic move: the repression of poetry, as an instance of the more generalized banishment of the Other, is arguably the gesture which inaugurates philosophy as a discipline with quasi-autonomous aims and methods. Truth, then, can only inhere in what can be assimilated into the discourses of philosophy. The inassimilable residue, poetry for instance, may possess value, but not that highest value which is accorded the status of 'philosophical truth'. It is characteristic of philosophy that it rates its own status as securer and protector of truth so highly. Philosophers have implicitly, often explicitly, held that philosophical discourse is the final vocabulary for assessing claims and creating a unified field of knowledge. In Hegel, for instance, philosophy assimilates by dialectic and culminates in wholly self-transparent, thus absolute, knowledge. In *Continental Philosophy since 1750*, Robert Solomon points to the conceit of such a view, and the kind of behaviour it has sanctioned historically. In discussing the heightened concept of the self which finds its initial articulation in Descartes' *cogito* and attains its apotheosis in the German Idealists and in the general confidence in reason and rational progress which defines the Enlightenment, Solomon employs the useful phrase 'transcendental pretence', which he describes as 'the unwarranted assumption that there is universality and necessity in the fundamental modes of human experience' (Solomon 1988: 7). Clearly the Kantian project to identify the necessary *a priori* structures of consciousness assumes that the results of such an investigation would be both universal and necessary, that is to say, *transcendental*. And surely most philosophers have posited a connection between the use of reason and the universality of any philosophical conclusions

so arrived at. What is true locally, it would seem, is hardly true at all. The contingency of the empirical, the non-linearity of metaphor, cannot constitute philosophy proper.

Yet we see, as part of the complex reaction to the Enlightenment, an increasing seriousness accorded to the question of whether philosophy *could* perhaps exist if reason were conceived in a more limited way. Kant expresses his intention to 'limit knowledge, in order to make room for faith' (Solomon 1988: 26), though his is still an essentially grandiose conception: a re-conceived reason continues to reign supreme in those realms accorded to it. Shelley contrasts reason and imagination: 'the former may be considered as mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another, however produced; and the latter, as mind acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light' (Shelley 1977: 480). He then goes on to explicitly privilege imagination: 'Reason is to Imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance' (Shelley 1977: 480). And in Nietzsche we find the radical urge to come to terms with reason's 'Other', with the possibility that there exists a necessary abyss within thought. Nietzsche takes more seriously than most philosophers the prevalence of irrationality and the problem of what cannot be wholly understood or assimilated. To take it more seriously than he does would perhaps entail ceasing to be a philosopher at all. He also recognizes the power language has in shaping philosophical prejudices, especially in terms of the role of metaphor as a primary ground for conceptual thinking. In pursuing these questions he has produced a body of writing situated along the boundaries that have historically distinguished philosophy from other practices. I begin this chapter with a general discussion of metaphor, before looking in detail at Nietzsche's position.

The Aristotelian definition of metaphor is well-known: 'Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs properly to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to

species, or on grounds of analogy' (Aristotle 1963: 36). The neatness of this formulation, however, does not mean that it is so easy, in practice, to isolate the linguistic qualities which constitute the 'metaphorical'. In *Knowledge Representation and Metaphor*, EC Way gives a convincing range of examples to demonstrate that metaphors do not necessarily inhere in a particular syntactic form, or always stand in the same specifiable relation to literal utterance. She summarizes as follows: 'metaphor cannot be reliably distinguished from literal language at the level of word, or even at the level of individual sentences. Metaphor does not fit into any particular syntactic pattern and it can take any mood. We have also seen that ideas and objects that are not explicitly mentioned in the actual metaphor are often essential to its understanding' (Way 1991: 16). The range of linguistic features demonstrated by metaphor has tempted many thinkers to attempt to identify it by contrasting it with a supposedly more literal form of language.

Philosophical positivism, in its various strains, sought especially to deny metaphor any claim to truth or knowledge. It sought to distinguish rigidly between a metaphoric statement and a literal statement, with a literal statement typically being the only one accorded cognitive content. In his *Wittgenstein and Metaphor* Jerry H. Gill cites Paul Edwards' representative version of this approach, in terms of which 'unless a statement is 'reducible' to a 'literal equivalent' it is 'devoid of cognitive meaning'' (Gill 1981: 5). Though Aristotle considers the ability to formulate a good metaphor an indication of genius, since it rests on the 'perception of the similarity in dissimilars' (Aristotle 1963: 40, 41) he too frames metaphor as a *deviation* from ordinary language, because it assigns a thing a name that *properly* belongs to something else. Such an account paves the way for seeing poetry itself, a pre-eminently metaphorical mode, as little more than a kind of deviation from more factual ways of language use.

The first problem with this argument is that we clearly use metaphors successfully *without* assigning to them a separate cognitive content, or literalizing

them as part of the process of understanding: 'Not only is it not true that people learn to use and understand metaphors by 'projecting from', and 'reducing to', certain statements about observable features, it is decidedly not the case that people who use and understand metaphors can supply the 'literal equivalent' when called upon to do so' (Gill 1981: 7). Metaphor does not seem to be a mere distortion of language, a deviation from a norm which can be recovered if we retrace our steps. Those who argue that it is tend also to posit the, now somewhat discredited, ideal of a literal language which is connected to an autonomous empirical reality in such a way that language mirrors it, and truth is a matter of accuracy of correspondence. According to Way: 'Literal meaning is supposed to be the 'true' meaning that words have, independently of when and how they are used. Thus, literal meaning is seen to be what is captured in a dictionary; it is supposed to be *context-free*, generally accepted usage' (Way 1991: 16). This view of language leads directly to a second problem, namely that the claims made for a strict literal language, claims needed in order to sustain the literal-metaphorical opposition, do not really stand up to scrutiny. It soon becomes apparent that the entire model is suspect, at least insofar as it purports to be an essential distinction. For 'ordinary' language is itself permeated by metaphors, albeit often so-called 'dead metaphors', metaphors which have been in usage for so long that we conventionally treat them as though they referred directly to a state of affairs. Some examples that Way gives are: ' *running water*', ' *the stem of a glass*', ' *the foot of a mountain*', and ' *the lea of a book*' (Way 1991: 16). Clearly these are metaphors in that they link two fields of meaning which have no essential or previous connection. Equally clearly, almost any language segment will contain such uses of language, taken for granted in the context in which they are used.

Once it is recognized that metaphor is linguistically varied and very pervasive, that it is, in other words, not a specialized technique we occasionally employ, but in some way central to language, only a small further step is needed to assert that 'all is metaphor'. Gill calls this the constitutive notion of metaphor, according

to which our very sense of reality rests upon a metaphorical ground which we can never literalize. Language does seem always already to involve a 'going beyond' the facts of perception, and what we call our 'world' or our 'reality' is not just something out there we talk about using the instrument of language, but comes into being, in other words is constituted, as a function of language. However, Way points out that, in one sense, the assertion that everything is metaphorical is quite trivial. Language is clearly not a *thing* amongst other things in the physical realm. It does not possess materiality in the way a table does, and so using language would necessarily involve the yoking together of qualitatively different realms. When I talk about a table I am using patterns of sound, not wood. Language rests on a tension between presence and absence: what we refer to is usually absent, though rendered precariously present in discourse. But do we clarify anything when we say that this process, which defines all language, is 'metaphorical'? Clearly, if we assert such a pervasiveness for metaphor, we are no longer making a useful linguistic distinction between types of language as they are used, but offering a quasi-metaphysical interpretation of the way language and world are related: one which emphasizes the power of language to *constitute*, rather than to passively mirror. Here the danger is one of reductionism. One can, in fact, point out that we 'make' our world by creating metaphors, and that the possibility of having a world depends on this non-reducible activity, and *nevertheless* hold, without contradiction, that there are good reasons to retain some sort of distinction between 'literal' and 'metaphoric' on a *pragmatic* or linguistic level. I believe we obscure more than we reveal when we level all language to instances of the 'metaphorical', for we then diminish the interest we might have in details, in local *differences* between various language uses.

In this regard Way argues that 'literal' is a genuine concept with a variable meaning which depends on the context. In other words, it serves a purpose in ordinary language. According to Way, we use the word to mean something similar to 'really', 'truly' or 'actually'. Thus, for example, we say 'I scrubbed that

floor literally on my hands and knees' and what we mean is that we are not being ironic or facetious. We really did scrub the floor. Here 'literal' does not refer to a non-negotiable dictionary meaning, but has a pragmatic function as a speaker's indication of a certain relation of seriousness to her utterance. It does this by *excluding* more figurative or fanciful uses and what they imply: 'The function of 'literal' is not to contribute positively to the characterization of anything, but to exclude possible ways of being *non-literal*' (Way 1991: 20). Issues arising from this problematic underlie a great deal of what follows and will hopefully be deepened as well as clarified as I go along. My use of a term such as 'pragmatic', for example, and the assumptions on which my position rests, will themselves have to be scrutinized critically.

We have, provisionally, two related though differentiated senses of the term 'metaphor': as referring to the way language constitutes our world for us and, more modestly, as a kind of language use opposed on a pragmatic level to the non-metaphorical. How does this understanding of metaphor relate to our understanding of what poetry and philosophy are? I believe the main discursive convention of poetry is that it not be taken to refer to the world in the same way as non-literary texts, such as philosophical ones. For Plato, poetry exists in a space characterized by the foregrounding of those elements of language which more instrumentally rational conceptions should attempt to suppress or keep under strict control. Those elements are of course the figurative dimension of language, especially metaphor. The general question of the relationship between poetry and philosophy cannot really be divorced from the consideration of the part explicit and suppressed metaphors play in each.

II

The first problem any would-be interpreter of Nietzsche must grapple with is the extent to which it is justifiable to present his oeuvre (much of which only exists as posthumously published fragments) as though a clear, conceptually cohesive doctrine could be extracted from it. From where are we to approach a thinker who considered the limitations of *one* perspective both inevitable, and inevitably misleading? In Nietzsche's case it would be particularly inappropriate to pretend that such a thing as a neutral, interest-free vantage point exists for interpretation. More than any major thinker he delights as much in iconoclastic hyperbole and the pathos of the mask as in more linear forms of presentation. It has been alleged that even Heidegger's seminal reading of Nietzsche is a specious thematization which, in its drive to interpretive closure, reduces Nietzsche's complexity to a handful of convenient key concepts at the expense of the 'play' in Nietzsche. Two contemporary commentators who do not endorse Heidegger's 'methodological' choice are Alan Schrift and Christopher Norris. In his *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation: Hermeneutics, Deconstruction, Pluralism*, Schrift suggests that 'only a decentered reading of Nietzsche's philosophy can hope to follow the path of his thinking as the Dionysian play of world-construction and world-destruction' (Schrift 1985: 100). Similarly Norris, in *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice*, asserts that 'The unsettling power of Nietzsche's text is such as to place it beyond reach of a philosophy aimed, like Heidegger's, towards truth and the ultimate presence of meaning' (Norris 1982: 70).

I begin then, not with a doctrine, but with a problem, that of Nietzsche's language and his style of writing. A typical first impression of Nietzsche concerns his stylistic diversion from the philosophical norm. For Eric Blondel, in the essay 'Nietzsche: Life as Metaphor', it is 'such a peculiar use of language, one so rare among philosophers' (Blondel in Allison (ed.) 1977: 150). Michael Haar's essay, 'Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language', collected in the same volume, begins in

a similar vein by asking whether Nietzsche might not be 'more inaccessible, more unapproachable, and more inevitably 'betrayed', than any philosopher before or since' (Haar in Allison (ed.) 1977: 5). Why is Nietzsche so uniquely predisposed to being misread? Firstly, according to Haar, there is the deceptive readability of his style, its 'literariness'. Because it does not seem technical, but instead appears as a loose collection of polemic, poetic and aphoristic elements, the illusion is created 'that this philosopher lay within easy reach of everybody' (Haar in Allison (ed.) 1977: 5). But more significant than this, Haar contends, is the fact that Nietzsche's language, 'a strange and ambiguous language' (Haar in Allison (ed.) 1977: 5), is intended as a language of subversion: 'Nietzsche develops, in direct opposition to the tradition and its language, a language of his own, a form particularly insinuating, insidious, complex' (Haar in Allison (ed.) 1977: 6). Subversion of what? Nietzsche's style is intended to invite us to consider that the poetic and/or metaphoric is in some way essentially constitutive, as opposed to merely incidental (as example, illustration and so forth) of the mode of discourse called 'philosophy'. Nietzsche presents us with the possibility of a way of thinking in which metaphor is not incidental to that which is conveyed, but an essential aspect of it. Blondel writes in this regard that Nietzsche's use of metaphor is 'demanded by a specifically philosophical necessity' (Blondel in Allison (ed.) 1977). And Haar implicitly agrees with Schrift's critique of Heidegger when he contrasts concepts in the classical sense with key Nietzschean terms: 'Whereas a concept...comprises and contains, in an identical and total manner, the content that it assumes, most of Nietzsche's key words bring forth...a plurality of meanings undermining any logic based on the principle of identity' (Haar in Allison (ed.) 1977: 6).

In the discussion that follows I will mainly use Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* and the essay 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral sense'. In the latter Nietzsche

explicitly and powerfully thinks through the distinction between concept and metaphor; as such it is one of the texts most referred to by post-structuralists⁹. Nietzsche here claims that conceptual language is inappropriate for grasping the truth, and that the concept is in fact no more than a metaphor which has forgotten its origins. Considering the first claim, Nietzsche asserts that 'Every concept arises from the equation of unequal things' (Breazeale (ed.) 1979: 83). The concept, when measured against the data of the senses, is fundamentally and necessarily imprecise, because when we use a concept we use it in such a way that we bestow identity on what is in fact only similarity: 'Just as it is certain that one leaf is never totally the same as another, so it is certain that the concept 'leaf' is formed by arbitrarily discarding these individual differences and by forgetting the distinguishing aspects' (Breazeale (ed.) 1979: 83). The concept cannot do justice to particularity, to the rich diversity of what simply *is*, because it is required to fit countless similar cases. It has no regard for *difference*. But not only is the concept inaccurate, it is also not primary. It is, in fact, merely the 'residue of a metaphor' (Breazeale (ed.) 1979: 85). Nietzsche argues that the world is *interpretation* all the way through, that it is 'metaphorical' inasmuch as language is not and can never be the adequate expression of reality. In an obscure, but interesting passage, Blondel reminds us that the original sense of meta-phorical is transport or transposition, a going beyond the raw data by interpreting or representing it, and that metaphor, as Nietzsche broadly uses the

⁹Though existing in a comparatively complete and polished form, this essay nevertheless forms part of the assemblage of jottings, fragments and drafts never published by Nietzsche in his lifetime, the so-called *Nachlass*. We do need to face the problem of the status that is to be accorded these texts, texts not explicitly approved for publication by their author. This is especially so given their history of being presented in a falsified manner to portray Nietzsche as a proto-Nazi. In my opinion, Daniel Breazeale's introduction to *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the early 1870's* identifies useful criteria for employing material from the *Nachlass*. According to Breazeale, the *Nachlass* is properly employed if the following criteria are met: '(1) Quotations from and references to Nietzsche's unpublished writings should always be identified as such... (2) When views expressed in the *Nachlass* seem to conflict with views encountered in Nietzsche's published writings, mention must be made of this conflict... (3) Priority should always be given to published over unpublished remarks on the same topic' (Breazeale 1979: xviii).

term, designates 'the separation between body and thought, a kind of displacement that has structured the development of culture since its very inception' (Blondel in Allison (ed.) 1977: 151). I take this to mean that for Nietzsche, as for Freud, self-consciousness is a late arrival, an extension of unconscious and bodily activity, consequently an effect more than a cause or origin. All thought is metaphorical inasmuch as it creates meaning from what can never be wholly present. In 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense', Nietzsche introduces the notion of 'overleaping of spheres', which explains how meaning is eventually derived from the inarticulate processes of the body: 'a nerve stimulus is transferred into an image: first metaphor. The image, in turn, is initiated in a sound: second metaphor. And each time there is a complete overleaping of one sphere, right into the middle of an entirely new and different one' (Breazeale (ed.) 1979 82). This is a linguistically-orientated scepticism resting on the unknowability of the world *an sich*: 'we believe that we know something about the things themselves...yet we possess nothing but metaphors for things - metaphors which correspond in no way to the original entities' (Breazeale (ed.) 1979: 83).

This scepticism, however, is not the end of Nietzsche's thought but its beginning, since it paves the way for a re-assessment of truth, one which is now freed to consider the role of power and desire in thinking and in knowledge claims. The critique of the concept as an inaccurate and forgotten metaphor is seminally expressed in one of the most-quoted passages from Nietzsche, which I include here in its entirety precisely because it has been so influential:

'What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which, after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of

sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins'

(Breazeale (ed.) 1979: 84).

Norris, after quoting part of this passage, comments as follows: 'For Nietzsche this insight led to the conclusion that *all* philosophies, whatever their claim to logic or reason, rested on a shifting texture of figurative language, the signs of which were systematically repressed under the sovereign order of truth' (Norris 1982: 58). Nietzsche's position seems an instance of the view, discussed earlier, that the world is constituted metaphorically in a fundamental way. Proponents of this view tend to start with the insight that words and things are not the same, and conclude that 'all is metaphor'. But it is Nietzsche's explanation of why such a basic insight has been suppressed by philosophy that make his thought so powerful.

Why, in other words, this forgetting of metaphor? Why has truth been conceived as a correspondence between thought and thing, between concept and reality? Why the disavowal of thought's origin in an archaic, creative activity? In *Nietzsche and Metaphor*, Sarah Kofman answers as follows: 'Previously philosophy and science, in the desire to speak 'properly' and demonstrate without using images or similes in order to be convincing, repressed metaphor.... By bestowing highly precise limits on the metaphorical he [the philosopher] was able to hide the fact that the conceptual is itself metaphorical' (Kofman 1993: 17). For Kofman, following Nietzsche, the forgetting of metaphoric origins leads to the devaluation of metaphorical activity. The simultaneous ascendance of the concept, and of the philosopher as the master of the concept, represents the move toward a misguided asceticism that traverses Western culture. She argues that metaphor is an expression of abundance, of a will to life, and that the ascetic ideal can only appeal to a form of life which 'is able to impoverish the world by reducing it to the narrow and ugly measure of the concept' (Kofman 1993: 20). Through the concept the play of becoming is subordinated to philosophical

language, 'the most unsatisfactory there is, for it petrifies the 'music of the world' into concepts' (Kofman 1993: 13). Certainly life organized conceptually is *safer*, as our experiences are located within the stabilizing, familiarizing agency of abstraction. According to Nietzsche: 'Only by forgetting this primitive world of metaphor can one live with any repose, security and consistency: only by means of the petrification and coagulation of a mass of images which originally streamed from the primal faculty of the human imagination[.]...only by forgetting that he himself is an *artistically creating* subject' (Breazeale (ed.) 1979: 86).

Thought that recognizes itself as metaphoric, and celebrates this play of differences and non-identity, is to be praised because it is honest in recognizing its own creativity. For the supposedly *given* it substitutes the *made*. It is a question of the value of differing ways of life: for Nietzsche there is no such thing as value-free thought. There is no truth which is not *my* truth or *your* truth. After Nietzsche it becomes philosophically possible to ask primarily after the *value* of a particular view. We may then ask the very Nietzschean question of what the scheme of values and prejudices is that underlies this account of the relationship between poetry and philosophy.

The Birth of Tragedy is marked by the opposition between Dionysian excess and Apollonian control, much in the way that 'concept' and 'metaphor' structure 'On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense'. 'Apollonian' and 'Dionysian' are archetypes which are analogous to dreaming and drunkenness. They exist 'for the most part openly at variance' (Nietzsche 1995: 1). Nietzsche here depicts philosophy as the effort to 'discipline refractory energies' (Edmundson 1995: 11), as the attempt to univocalize the complex energies of the Dionysian through a confidence in reason which is allied to an overly optimistic view of the world. Concerning Apollo, Nietzsche writes of 'that measured restraint, that freedom from the wilder emotions, that philosophical calm of the sculptor-god' (Nietzsche 1995: 3). But if there is pleasure in the control of the self, there is nevertheless also the ecstasy of the breakdown of the self, the Dionysian state, when one is 'suddenly unable

to account for the cognitive forms of a phenomenon, when the principle of reason, in some one of its manifestations, seems to admit of an exception' (Nietzsche 1995: 3). The Dionysian is the pleasure of being re-united with all that is lost through reason's individuation: 'Under the charm of the Dionysian, not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but Nature which has become estranged, hostile or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her prodigal son, man' (Nietzsche 1995: 4).

Philosophy, represented by Socrates, is unable to comprehend Attic tragedy, as the complex reconciliation of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, because it cannot comprehend the Dionysian as the necessary Other of reason. It celebrates only light, not the patterning of light and darkness. According to Nietzsche, the Socratic optimist believes that if we possess knowledge of the good, we will see it as the only way to secure true happiness, and will act accordingly: 'Socrates is the prototype of the theoretical optimist who with his belief in the explicability of the nature of things, attributes to knowledge and perception the power of universal panacea, and in error sees evil in itself' (Nietzsche 1995: 54). For Socrates, the only reason people don't always do good is because they lack adequate knowledge of how it is to their advantage. Clearly this is an optimistic valuation of the part reason plays in our social and ethical lives. We can contrast it, for example, with the view of the protagonist in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*:

'Who has ever...seen men acting solely for the sake of advantage? What's to be done with the millions of facts that attest to their *knowingly* – that is, with full awareness of their true interests – dismissing these interests as secondary and rushing off in another direction, at risk, at hazard, without anyone or anything compelling them to do so, but as if solely in order to reject the designated road, and stubbornly, willfully carving out another - a difficult, absurd one - seeking it out virtually in the dark?'

(Dostoevsky 1974: 22).

For Nietzsche, rational optimism, historically allied to philosophy, fails to recognize that the exclusive pursuit of Apollonian health, a health of the intellect only, distances a culture from the 'irrational' experiences necessary for its perpetual renewal. As cultural diagnostician, Nietzsche believes modernity is characterized by the lack of meaningful reconciliation between the 'abstract man' of a purely Apollonian culture, and the primary contemporary representative of the Dionysian, the 'artist'. It is worth emphasizing that in the absence of a true reconciliation and a genuine mythological foundation, *both* poles are equally adrift. The destruction of myth gives us a 'culture which has no fixed and sacred primitive seat, but is doomed to exhaust all its possibilities, and to nourish itself wretchedly on all other cultures' (Nietzsche 1995: 85). Within this culture we find the problem of the 'abstract man...the abstract education, the abstract morality, the abstract justice, the abstract state' (Nietzsche 1995: 85), but also the 'lawless roving of the artistic imagination, unchecked by native myth' (Nietzsche 1995: 85).

It is worth emphasizing that Nietzsche is not simply rhapsodizing the Dionysian. *The Birth of Tragedy* is not a philosophical poem in praise of excess, but a depiction of the power of a temporary reconciliation between two archetypal possibilities. Too many commentators have over-emphasized Nietzsche's praise of excess and metaphoricity at the expense of his sense of dialectical tension. For Nietzsche, tragedy is the momentary *equilibrium* of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, and it is only through 'a metaphysical miracle of the Hellenic will' (Nietzsche 1995: 1) that this reconciliation is possible. Commentators who view this text as a conflict between two forces, one 'good', because 'spontaneous', the other 'bad' because 'repressive', fail to do justice to the complexity of Nietzsche's argument. Nietzsche does not collapse the Apollonian into the Dionysian here, or the conceptual into the metaphorical.

Though Nietzsche pushes the critique of philosophy to the point of breakdown, he does not jettison philosophy, leaving us with only poetry or the Dionysian. Though he is one of the few philosophers to value poetry at least as highly as philosophy, I do not believe that his reassessment presents so simple a solution as that all thought is 'poetic' or metaphorical, if this is taken to mean that there are no legitimate reasons for at times wishing to distinguish between a 'concept' and a 'metaphor'. According to Kofman, for Nietzsche philosophy cannot be assimilated into any of the existing categories. It is neither exclusively poetry nor exclusively science. Its aims are those of art, but its means are those of science (Kofman 1993: 1). Though Nietzsche presents one of the most compelling versions of the argument that metaphor is fundamentally constitutive, he also maintains a sense of the diverse possible ways of using language.

CHAPTER 3

METAPHOR, DIFFERENCE, POST-STRUCTURALISM

!

A tendency found in many works associated with post-structuralism is precisely the denial of differences between ways of using language, due to the elevation of the metaphorical, and the accompanying diminishment of the status of the concept. At times this can become an uncritical *reduction* of all understanding to metaphorical understanding, of all language to metaphorical language. According to this view the conceptual is neither 'true' nor 'desirable', but instead is a more or less misguided attempt to ask thought to perform what it, by its very nature, cannot do. One may well ask whether this positing of an 'Ur-metaphoricity' is not in fact a hankering after a kind of metaphysical closure, albeit in the garb of the age. Kofman sounds a similar warning early in *Nietzsche and Metaphor*: 'the tyranny of anyone seeking simply to invert the terms and commend the value of metaphor alone is equally reprehensible: he remains ensnared in the same system of thought as the metaphysician' (Kofman 1993:3). The question which frames this chapter is whether the elevation of the metaphorical is not precisely such an instance of speciously over-deploying an insight which is now recognized as a truism, namely that language is 'metaphorical'.

I begin with a long extract which, in my opinion, is representative, both in its method of arguing and in the conclusions derived from it, of a wide-spread style of post-structuralist discourse:

'Nietzsche denies the fundamental correspondence between the signifier and the signified: the word never expresses an identical meaning, much less an identical object. There is no order of meaning independent of the words or signs used to designate them. Consequently, there is no

transcendent meaning, no ideal signification, no privileged reference, no univocal equation between 'designations' and 'things'. The use of words is entirely conventional, and their signification consists in the manipulation of other words - convenient, agreed-upon fictions, that out of habit pass as representatives or rude equivalents for our own perceptual images. If the strict univocal reference between word and object, word and meaning, is thus denied, it follows that the classical concept of propositional truth becomes an impossibility - and this is due precisely to the primacy of metaphor'

(Allison (ed.) 1977: xv, xvi).

To begin with, Allison is not really talking about Nietzsche here. The salvaging phrase 'and this is due precisely to the primacy of metaphor' sits uneasily with what precedes it. The views Allison is presenting for us are, I would argue, rather based on an influential post-structuralist reading of Ferdinand de Saussure, which sees him as endorsing a non-referential theory of language. Allison begins by perpetuating what has by now become an uncritical distortion of Saussure, in that he demonstrates no awareness of the difference in Saussure's thought between the signifier-signified relation and the sign-referent relation, but seems to want to use them interchangeably. For Saussure the relationship between signifier and signified is marked by negativity: their meaning is not referential but the result of *difference*. However, Saussure makes a methodological choice to study language as synchronic system (*langue*), and explicitly brackets the problem of discourse (*parole*), which can be understood as language in use. According to Raymond Tallis, 'Saussure himself *contrasts* the negativity of the signifier and the signified with the *positivity* that results from their fusion in the realised linguistic sign – the actual verbal token as it appears in discourse' (Tallis 1995: 69). It seems mistaken to take a provisional methodological move such as the bracketing of actual language-use (where the problem of reference is located) and use it as supposed proof that referentiality can no longer be taken seriously. If we choose to study language as a self-contained system then it is

neither surprising nor significant that it appears to us as a self-contained system. Allison, like many post-structuralists, does not take the distinction between system and utterance seriously enough.

We do not have to defend a simplistic understanding of referentiality, where a sign refers univocally to an object, to recognize the referential dimension. I agree with Allison that the conventional element is primary in language use. But the conventionality of words does not mean that they are non-referential: conventions function rather as constraints on how a particular referent and a particular sign link up. Allison's account seems to imply that language in use, discourse in other words, is not about anything save itself. He does not consider referentiality understood as a function of context and use in a communicative situation, but instead sets a specious standard for language to meet and then seems to think that the case for scepticism has been clinched. The following sentence, already quoted above, demonstrates this tendency clearly: 'If the strict univocal reference between word and object, word and meaning, is thus denied, it follows that the classical concept of propositional truth becomes an impossibility'. 'Strict univocal reference' is far from the only meaningful referential option at our disposal, and the 'classical concept of propositional truth' can be denied without language therefore ceasing to be about the world in some way.

Allison attempts to deny any non-metaphorical referential relationship between language and world, using a fairly typical range of arguments and presuppositions to conclude that language cannot secure truth because it cannot correspond to the world except 'metaphorically'. It should be clear that what is at work here is really a metaphorical 'reductionism'. As was said earlier, the mere insight that language does not possess materiality in the way a table does, does not mean that all language necessarily fulfills the same function. In his *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism*, Madan Sarup gives another example of this type of thinking at work:

'literature can no longer be seen as a kind of poor relation to philosophy. There is no clear division between literature and philosophy, nor between 'criticism' and 'creation'. Since metaphors are essentially 'groundless', mere substitutions of one set of signs for another, language tends to betray its own fictive and arbitrary nature at just those points where it is offering to be most intensely persuasive. In short, philosophy, law and political theory work by metaphor just as poems do, and so are just as fictional'

(Sarup 1988: 47).

Here a mild opening claim, 'there is no clear division between literature and philosophy', shifts almost imperceptibly into the far more general and problematic assertion that philosophy, law and political theory are all *equally* fictional, without any support except the notion that they all work by metaphor, just like poems do. One must ask: what do we lose, and what do we gain, by conflating a poem and a law as both being 'metaphorical' constructions? Though a law and a poem both contain the linguistic phenomenon of metaphoricity, are they really equally fictional? Surely the notion of a metaphor is being stretched beyond all usefulness here?

II

It would be foolish to grapple with these issues and not involve one of contemporary theory's most significant post-Nietzscheans: Jacques Derrida. Derrida's work, like Nietzsche's, is too complex and multi-faceted to allow simple encapsulation. I will not pretend that I am giving an exhaustive treatment of it, or that such a treatment is in principle possible or desirable, but will limit myself to those aspects of his texts which bear on the problem of metaphor and the more general topic of the relationship between poetry and philosophy. In this regard a useful place to start is the attempt to determine what Derrida means when he uses the terms *writing* and *differance*. However, Derrida has, in 'Letter to a

Japanese Friend', made it clear that such terms, as well as the overused 'deconstruction', are *not* to be understood as concepts or privileged signifieds which are intended to halt the play of meaning and indeterminacy in Derrida's own discourse. They are strategic terms with a strategic purpose. One must even ask whether they are intended to be portable, whether Derridean terms are not in fact highly specific to a particular *moment* of engagement with a text and a tradition. The commentator, wishing to engage with Derrida, must however provisionally act as though their meaning were stable and accessible. I will consequently attribute a measure of stability to Derridean terms, but hopefully not proceed as though they mapped out once and for all a conceptual ground in its totality. The emphasis will fall on Derrida as a strategic philosopher, in much the same way as the later Wittgenstein conceived of his work as a form of 'therapy'.

A crucial Derridean point, derived from Nietzsche, is that the problem of textuality is as central to philosophy as it is to literature. The difference is not that philosophy has access to a method which exempts it from the problems we associate with texts, but that philosophy is a kind of writing which often does not want to be writing. According to Christopher Norris, in his *Derrida*, the philosopher 'may be *defined* as the one who habitually forgets that s/he is writing' (Norris 1987: 21). Since Plato, philosophy has generally understood itself as the attempt to open up a space where the problem of the figurative has been banished. In this space an appropriately serious group of interlocutors avail themselves of a dialectic which progresses towards truth as its *telos*, without shifting into polysemanticity or the rupture of incommensurable arguments. Richard Rorty's essay on Derrida, 'Philosophy as a kind of writing', suggests that an appropriate way to begin the reading of Derrida is to see his work as attempting to answer the question: 'What must philosophers think writing is that they resent so much the suggestion that this is what they do?' (Rorty 1982: 95). Why is philosophy afraid of writing in the Derridean sense? The Derridean argument engages with the philosophical ideal of a language which is transparent before itself and before the facts. Rorty makes the point that, for

many philosophers, the less language the better: 'what is really wanted is to show, to demonstrate, to point out, to exhibit, to make one's interlocutor stand at gaze before the world' (Rorty 1982: 94). An end to writing is always being posited, when the representation will correspond to the represented, when perception will be immediate and a neutral 'observation-language' will record nothing but what is logically consistent and / or empirically verifiable. For Derrida, on the other hand, 'writing always leads to more writing, and more, and still more' (Rorty 1982: 94).

According to Derrida, the distrust of writing structures the texts of Plato, Saussure, Levi-Strauss, Rousseau and others. In 'Plato's Pharmacy', Derrida looks in detail at the opposition between speech and writing as Plato conceives it in his *Phaedrus*. Derrida makes much of the word *pharmakon* which is used by Plato and which is irreducibly ambiguous in that it denotes both a remedy and a poison. Writing as conceived in this Platonic dialogue is pre-eminently a *pharmakon*. It is conceived as a remedy for forgetfulness, but it is also a poison because it is able to function in the absence of its origin: 'through writing...the genealogical break and the estrangement from the origin are sounded' (Derrida 1993: 74). If writing can function in the absence of its origin, this means it can function in the absence of *intentionality* as a limit to its possible meanings. The control exercised over discourse by a speaker and a listener in a dialogic situation supposedly works to guarantee a degree of semantic and conceptual closure. By contrast, writing leaves home, and can yield all sorts of meanings to all sorts of strangers. In its uncontrollable dissemination there is no telling the effect it may have on the social.

Phonocentrism is the term Derrida uses for the dream of Western philosophy that the sense of self-presence which characterizes the circuit of speaking and hearing oneself speak be the model of philosophical communication. We seem to speak and understand without the bypass of interpretation, without the deferral of meaning, and it is tempting to believe that this transparency, so clearly not

available in our interaction with written texts, is due to the privileged status of speech. In the words of Christopher Norris: 'Voice becomes a metaphor of truth and authenticity, a source of self-present 'living' speech as opposed to the secondary lifeless emanations of writing' (Norris 1982: 28). For Sarup, the contrast is one between the immediacy of speech and the mediation of writing: 'unlike writing, which is hopelessly mediated, speech is linked to the apparent moment and place of presence and for this reason has had priority' (Sarup 1988: 36). Derrida's strategy is to deconstruct this supposed binary privileging by showing that speech is constituted by the same structure as writing, that it also necessarily demonstrates the logic of *differance*. *Differance* is a neologism which can mean both to 'differ' and to 'defer'. In fact, 'its sense remains suspended between the two French verbs' (Norris 1982: 32). Two elements of language, as Derrida understands it, are highlighted by the use of this term. Firstly, that language is a *differential* system. Following Saussure, meaning in language is dependent on a term's place in a system rather than what it refers to. But not only is meaning the result of difference: it is also endlessly deferred. The signifier as word-mark and the signified as 'mental image' or concept which attends that signifier are arbitrarily linked but generate one another in use. The 'concept' cat generated by the signifier 'cat' can only be understood by the use of further signifiers such as 'four-legged' and 'furry', themselves of course understood as signifieds: 'Meaning is continually moving along a chain of signifiers, and we cannot be precise about its exact "location"' (Sarup 1988: 33). In its deferral of a simply present meaning *differance* is similar to metaphoricity: both posit a complex interweaving of presence and absence to produce signification. A crucial argument Derrida advances is that this play of signification is only ever brought to an end for contingent reasons. Though all discourse is constituted by this logic of differentiability and deferral, not all discourse will or can acknowledge this, and historically certain discourses have attempted to halt or obscure the play of signification by employing various distinctive strategies. In Western culture, the invocation of a so-called 'transcendental signified' has tended to be the mode of legitimation favoured by logocentric philosophy. Sarup cites Idea,

Matter, World Spirit, and God as examples of such signifieds. Each of these 'acts as the foundation of a system of thought and forms an axis around which all other signs circulate' (Sarup 1988: 37).

The dissemination of meaning is found in philosophical texts as well as literary ones. Norris writes as follows: 'Derrida has no desire to establish a rigid demarcation of zones between literary language and critical discourse. On the contrary, he sets out to show that certain kinds of paradox are produced across all the varieties of discourse by a motivating impulse which runs so deep in Western thought that it respects none of the conventional boundaries' (Norris 1982: 21). This position is clearly one root of the generalized textual relativism propagated in introductory texts such as Sarup's. The paradox Norris refers to is generated by the tension between statement and structure, between what I would *want* to say and what I am constrained by the communicative structure at my disposal to say. Thus Plato warns against the evils of writing but can do so only by writing himself. This tension is also what gives deconstruction its 'method': 'It seeks to undo both a given order of priorities *and* the very system of conceptual opposition that makes that order possible' (Norris 1982: 31). Its concentration on a 'given order of priorities' makes it undesirable, however, to present deconstruction as a general method separate from its engagement with particular texts: 'Deconstruction is therefore an activity of reading which remains closely tied to the texts it interrogates, and which can never set up independently as a self-enclosed system of operative concepts: (Norris 1982: 31). It is also not synonymous with destruction. Barbara Johnson usefully describes it as being 'the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself' (Johnson 1980: 9).

Clearly such an account implies a re-assessment of the relationship between philosophy and literature. If the *same* logic of deferral of meaning underlies both, then it becomes difficult to think how philosophy can maintain itself, except as the continued deconstruction of its own tradition. Philosophy as anti-philosophy.

Literature becomes especially valued in this account as the mode of textuality which acknowledges and celebrates the fact that it is first and foremost play. In some way, if this argument is pursued, literature comes across as being more honest, at least more sensible, than philosophy, which has pursued a dream of presence and its own transcendental legitimization across centuries, too often misrecognizing the metaphoricity that grounds it. However, it would be a mistake to argue that Derrida elevates the literary above the philosophical. Instead, I believe he presents us with the possibility of what we might call playful philosophy. Such a practice would be legitimately distinguishable from literature, since conceptual thinking would remain its basic activity, but it would cease attempting to centre itself by means of a transcendental presence. It would be playful because it would always be provisional. This does not mean that it would not be 'serious', but rather that oppositions such as that between the serious and the frivolous are eminently deconstructible.

If Derrida does not consider philosophy to be merely a form of metaphoricity which has forgotten itself, this has not prevented the broader reception of his work to assert just this. In fact, Derrida has been exceptionally prone to oversimplification by both hostile and sympathetic commentators. One reason for this is his inclusion in the ranks of a general post-structuralism. While apposite, this has also meant that the truisms of this orientation have been assigned in an uncritical way to his work. In the next chapter I wish to develop my critique of the post-structuralist tendency to assert a *general* ascendancy of the poetic mode, as the mode where the referential dimension is subordinated to the tropic dimension, by looking at a number of perspectives which, without being crudely 'realistic', do grant conceptual language a greater scope in engaging with the world.

CHAPTER 4

REFERENCE, USE AND WITTGENSTEIN

!

In the last two chapters we have looked at the inversion of the opposition between poetry and philosophy due to changing conceptions of truth and language. When it is argued that the project of philosophy is a misrecognition of what is possible within language, there would seem to be an inevitable re-appraisal of modes which frankly use language *creatively* and do not rely on transcendental assumptions for their main effect. Thus we have seen a number of thinkers in recent times who would be sympathetic to Nietzsche when he writes: 'What I had to say then – too bad that I did not dare say it as a poet' (Kofman 1993: p5). Eagleton, in his *Literary Theory: An Introduction* expresses it as follows: 'Literary works...are in a sense less deluded than other forms of discourse, because they implicitly acknowledge their own rhetorical status – the fact that what they say is different from what they do, that all their claims to knowledge work through figurative structures which render them ambiguous and indeterminate' (Eagleton 1983: 145). If language is always metaphorical, always traversed by *difference*, then it makes sense that we would see in poetry a more powerful or more primary activity than philosophy. From this perspective, philosophy seems only a recurrent, empty gesture of turning away from figuration.

However, such a picture is an oversimplification. This chapter, whilst recognizing the validity of the Nietzschean and post-Nietzschean insight into metaphoricity, asserts that there are nevertheless differences between poetry and philosophy worth retaining and defending as clearly as possible. We lose far more than we gain by arguing, as in the simplistic versions of post-structuralism, that the concept is *solely* a metaphor which has forgotten its origins, that language is

solely a differential system which doesn't link up with the world in significant ways. I will firstly discuss some reasons why we cannot abandon the notion of referentiality entirely, and then move on to the notion of *use* as developed by Wittgenstein, which recontextualizes many of the questions we have looked at.

Within the framework established by Saussure, the pivotal question is where and how, if at all, signifier and signified, which together form the sign, refer outside themselves to a 'world'. Can it be asserted that the meaning of a sign is *exclusively* a result of its place in a system? If we assent to this, and many post-structuralists would seem to, then the way is open to understanding literature as an enclosed intertextual system which makes no serious claims concerning the world and which can therefore not engage with the values of the world. A text, according to this reading, refers to nothing but other texts. From this it would follow that philosophy, as a form of textual communication, can only exist as the critique of its own textual tradition, a view which all too easily culminates in the idea that the project of deconstruction inaugurates the end of philosophy by opening a space where 'poetry' and 'philosophy' come to mean the same thing, or, if you will, not much at all. Clearly a great deal depends on this question, and yet it seems as though post-structuralists have rarely attempted to think through the issue of referentiality in an *analytical* way.

For Saussure, it is the role the sign plays in a system that gives it meaning.

In his essay 'Sense, reference and logic' Christopher Norris cites Saussure's example of the 8:25 p.m. Geneva-to-Paris Express: 'There is a sense in which this is the same train every day, despite the fact that engine, coaches and driver may be subject to endless daily substitutions.... . The 8:25 is not so much a referent – an object picked out by straightforward designative naming - as a term within that larger, differential context' (Norris 1985: 62). It would be misleading to insist that the 8:25 train is a particular coach and engine, and in a similar way reference should not be regarded as the primary determinant of meaning. We may say, borrowing our terminology from Gottlob Frege, who is in fact the main

focus of Norris's essay, that *sense* precedes reference. As Norris puts it: 'our use of language to designate objects always depends on our possessing a set of definitional criteria by which to pick those objects out. Language, that is to say, is established as a referential medium only in so far as we can specify *what counts* as an achieved or felicitous act of reference' (Norris 1985: 50). Before I can identify a 'cat' as a 'cat', I need to possess the sense of 'cat', and this happens within a language system. No degree of empirical, 'language-less' acquaintance with the actual animal will bestow on it a meaning which can take its place in a language system. Another way of saying this would be that the world is not conveniently sliced up into inherently meaningful pieces, but that we assign this meaning from within a system. Consequently, if reference is not the primary determinant of meaning, then simple realist accounts of the way language and world connect must be inadequate.

Frege's notion of reference, though similar, is not identical to Saussure's. Saussure does not deny the referentiality of language, but he does want to put linguistics on a new footing by studying what he believes can profitably be studied: language as a system preceding specific articulations. Norris is aware that this orientation can erroneously be assumed to be a denial of referentiality: 'It is in the interests of linguistics as a systematic study that Saussure brackets...the referential dimension and concentrates on the 'arbitrary' relation between signifier and signified. The problem with much post-structuralist thinking is that it takes this methodological convenience for a high point of philosophic principle' (Norris 1985: 62). In seeking a corrective to this post-structuralist tendency, Norris turns to Frege, whose account of language does feature reference. However, Frege is in agreement with Saussure that 'language constitutes a structure of signifying relationships which always interpose between word and object, semantic sense and empirical reference' (Norris 1985: 59, 60). Frege famously employs the example of the 'Morning Star' and the 'Evening Star' (the planet Venus) to show that sense is not governed by reference. In this case the referent is the same in both cases, and yet it gives rise to two different

senses, such that someone could easily assume two separate phenomena were under discussion. There is of course only one, but we require two different ways of talking about it: two senses, in other words. However, though it is clear that meaning can never be a matter of simple referentiality, this example also shows the complexity of the question. Norris cites the one referent / two senses example to indicate the primacy of sense, but one could argue that there would surely be no need to have two senses if it weren't for the fact that the same planet appears at different times depending on the season. And the fact that the planet appears at different times is clearly an *empirical* fact, that is to say, a matter of reference. In other words, doesn't our example demonstrate that sense is *constrained* by what it refers to? After all, we don't habitually go around assigning two different names to every entity in the sky. If we do so here it is ultimately for empirical reasons, reasons which question any simple primacy of sense. Though sense bestows meaning, that meaning is constrained by the empirical reality to which it is held to refer.

Tallis argues that the sense of an object cannot be a matter of its physicality:

'senses are not the physical properties of the objects; nor do they necessarily correlate clearly with those objects; for while physical properties place limits upon plausible senses (for example feasible uses), they do not fix those senses completely. The sense...will...be highly variable...It will depend upon the interests, moods, physiological states and personal history of the individual taking notice of it, as well as, more remotely, upon the history of the society in which he lives'

(Tallis 1995: 111).

However, there is still an extra-linguistic rock bottom which constrains the parameters of sense. The constraints which govern the possible senses of a term may be very loose, and often are, but they do exist. In a given communicative situation, it is more likely that a brick would be accorded the sense of weapon

than a balloon, because of its physical properties and the way those properties are able to interact with the larger physical universe: ' the variability of the application of words to objects...and the freedom we have to reclassify objects under different categories do not license the assumption that there is a total arbitrariness in the relations between words and things:' (Tallis 1995: 109).

To complement Saussure's notion of structure, we need to think of the communicative context, where the possible senses of an object are materialized in the sign. Though an object has an indefinite number of senses, not all of these can or will come into play in a particular context. Rather, the sense that comes to dominate is a function of what the participants are trying to use language for. This is not to say that words conveniently carry their meanings with them. However, if we assume that understanding is possible (if, in other words, we are not total sceptics) then communication must be seen as *negotiation* which produces meaning. The infinitely extended system of language is finitized in a given situation. This does not imply that communication is always smooth, that participants are always wholly *present* to each other. But what is misunderstanding if not a situation where participants have erroneously assumed agreement over the sense of a sign or a series of signs? And what can be done but negotiate a common sense, or at least one with overlapping edges? Eagleton seems to agree that the systemic study of language has to be supplemented with an understanding of *use*, where meaning becomes strategic and negotiated because it is based on the aims of participants: 'Meaning may well be ultimately undecidable if we view language contemplatively, as a chain of signifiers on a page; it becomes 'decidable'...when we think of language rather as something we *do*, as indissociably interwoven with our practical forms of life' (Eagleton 1983: 147).

The above discussion should caution us against assuming too quickly that the recognition of metaphoricity can or should lead to the deconstruction of the poetry – philosophy opposition in favour of a generalized sense of textual effect.

For if a degree of referentiality underlies our use of language, then we need to locate the problematic of metaphoricity and conceptuality within a general framework of *use*. If neither metaphor nor reference is absolute, it becomes necessary to look at their possible functions in discourse. I have pursued this course because I believe a danger resides in arguing for the pervasiveness of metaphor if this argument is pushed too far, in other words pushed towards a textual idealism which recognizes no dialectic between world and text. Since the articulation of such a model is a philosophical undertaking, an 'alternative' also has to begin from philosophical considerations. Clearly we cannot, and would not wish to, return to naive realism, which would be disastrous for literature, as well as philosophically erroneous. However, I believe that turning to a notion of *use* derived from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* is one feasible way of reinstating a working distinction between poetry and philosophy.

II

Wittgenstein introduces the notion of a language game to counter the dominant view that language is a uniform entity capable of being defined univocally. The *Philosophical Investigations* opens with a quotation from the *Confessions* of Augustine which depicts the learning of language as a process of ostensive definition: a thing is matched to its name, and they correspond in such a way that to inquire after the meaning of a word is to ask after the object it refers to. Wittgenstein's criticism of this view is two-fold. Firstly, this account holds true, if at all, only for nouns like 'table' and 'chair': for material 'things' in other words. According to Wittgenstein, Augustine 'does not speak of there being any difference between kinds of word' (Wittgenstein 1958: §1). He is thinking only secondarily of actions and properties, and of the remaining kinds of words as 'something that will take care of itself' (Wittgenstein 1958: §1). Augustine's account of language, a proto-realist one, is not so much wrong as oversimplified: to the extent that it purports to explain language, it does not do justice to the complexity of what is being examined: 'Augustine...does describe a system of

communication; only not everything that we call language is this system' (Wittgenstein 1958: §3). In isolating one way of thinking about language and trying to posit it as the essential way language is learned and used, Augustine demonstrates that drive towards oversimplification which, for Wittgenstein, is characteristic of most philosophy in its quest for generally valid, essential propositions: 'It is interesting to compare the multiplicity of the tools in language and of the ways they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language' (Wittgenstein 1958: §12).

However, Wittgenstein's problematization of philosophy's tendency to oversimplify does not lead him to turn to the elevation of figurative uses of language as a better option. He would see in such a turn an equally problematic manoeuvre, since it too would tend to posit *one* essential aspect of language, its metaphoricity in this case. The notion of language-games is introduced to counter our tendency to think that understanding something must involve intellectually grasping its essence. We are tempted, for example, to ask the question: what is common to all games? We say: 'There *must* be something common, or they would not be called 'games'' (Wittgenstein 1958: §66). To this Wittgenstein replies: 'but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all' (Wittgenstein 1958: §66). Elsewhere he gives the example of looking into the cabin of a locomotive: all the handles will look the same, and this is to be expected, since 'they are all supposed to be handled' (Wittgenstein 1958: §120). But the fact that all words exist to be used, does not mean that all words are used or made to be used in the same way. Where philosophers have tended to see identity, Wittgenstein, instead, tends to see 'a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail' (Wittgenstein 1958: §66). Wittgenstein argues that if we were called on to describe 'games' to someone, we would describe *particular* games, adding, perhaps, that 'This *and similar things* are called 'games'' (Wittgenstein 1958: §69). In other words, we would not move straight to

the plane of abstraction by listing properties supposedly common to all games, but would do no more than hint at possible abstraction, through the description of a variety of actual games. It is precisely the jump to the abstract plane, to 'thinking' instead of 'looking', which we call philosophy, and which Wittgenstein warns us against.

The critique of philosophy that Wittgenstein presents derives, in his later work, from the revaluation of ordinary language and practices grounded in it.

Wittgenstein holds that the level of rationality of ordinary language is sufficient: it is misguided to think that 'our ordinary vague sentences had not yet got a quite unexceptionable sense, and a perfect language awaited construction by us' (Wittgenstein 1958: §98). When we think like this we are blinded by the possibility of the ideal; we are creating pseudo-requirements for language. We do this by removing language from the original language-games which are their home and where we originally learned them. For Wittgenstein, the problems of philosophy as traditionally conceived arise through the spurious redeployment of terms which belong in ordinary language, where their use is circumscribed by practices, into the philosophical sphere: 'When philosophers use a word – 'knowledge', 'being', 'object', 'I', 'proposition', 'name' – and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home?' (Wittgenstein 1958: §116). The positing of a uniquely philosophical discourse 'misunderstand[s] the role of the ideal in our language' (Wittgenstein 1958: §100). Here again, though from a different perspective, we find the argument that philosophy is a kind of language use which has forgotten the origins of what it uses. It is his recognition of the value of practical modes of rationality and knowledge within ordinary language which leads Wittgenstein to describe philosophy as the 'bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language' (Wittgenstein 1958: §109). The fact that Wittgenstein is himself a philosopher, engaged in philosophy, in no way contradicts his argument. For Wittgenstein explicitly conceives of his philosophizing as a *therapy*. Philosophy is both the

disease and the only quarter from which a true cure could be effected. By bringing words 'back from their metaphysical to their everyday use' (Wittgenstein 1958: §116), by uncovering the non-sense at the limits of the way language can be used, we can reconceive our practices in a radical way.

What are the implications for the way we think about poetry and philosophy? I believe this way of conceiving philosophy has interesting consequences for at least three aspects of what I've been discussing thus far. Firstly, Wittgenstein adds his voice to the growing consensus that it is misconceived to regard philosophy's mode of rationality as the appropriate measure for literature. His emphasis on the concrete and on context is an antidote to any nascent scientism we might harbour. Though a nuts-and-bolts pragmatism has, I believe, characterized concrete investigation in all the sciences, not exempting the natural sciences (as Paul Feyerabend, for example, has shown in *Against Method*) this pragmatism often co-exists uneasily with a tendency to retrospectively posit a method based on strict empirical verifiability and methodological consistency. There is a vast, and worrying, difference between the kind of thinking and method a working scientist employs, and the account of that process in the average science textbook, with its assumption of cumulative, linear development. In a related fashion, though on a more modest scale, the human sciences, and literary theory, are periodically beset by insecurity concerning the apparent lack of a sure base to their practices. Wittgenstein, however, would like us to make peace with pragmatism, even when we are attempting to define the foundations of our practices. He asks: 'What does it mean to know what a game is?' (Wittgenstein 1958: §75) and dismisses the notion that this knowledge is equivalent to an unformulated definition which we need to find. In a passage which points to a conception of method particularly relevant to the human sciences, Wittgenstein lists modes of explanation we might avail ourselves of in a concrete situation, such as 'describing examples of various kinds of game; showing how all sorts of other games can be constructed on the analogy of

these; saying that I should scarcely include this or this among games; and so on' (Wittgenstein 1958: §75).

It follows from this that the boundaries we invoke between, for example, 'game' and 'not-game', or 'literature' and 'non-literature', are more fluid than we sometimes allow. Wittgenstein uses the notion of a 'concept with blurred edges' (Wittgenstein 1958: §71) and argues that this is quite often exactly what we need. If literature is an instance of a 'blurred concept', this does not mean that it is a useless concept, but one which is used and learned in a variety of contexts and which will display a variety of uses and thus of meanings, resembling each other in much the same way as members of an extended family do. Wittgenstein would thus agree that there can be no strict, non-contingent way to distinguish poetry from philosophy, no *final* way, in other words, and that in this sense the tradition originating with Plato is ill-conceived. For this tradition thinks that it can posit essences derived from knowledge of formal properties and use this as a basis for discrimination. But the positing of an essence is already a philosophical strategy, dependent on context, and thus not an *a priori* ground. Those who would wish to regulate practices by means of stricter methodological rules forget that such rules would themselves have to be applied in a concrete instance where the ambiguities and indeterminacies of practice, and the primacy of context, would necessarily prevail. Poetry and philosophy, then, would tend to overlap at the edges of use. Historically there have been philosophical poems, as well as poetic philosophers, Plato pre-eminent among them, and of course a whole array of works whose nature is still a source of contention. Wittgenstein is clearly in sympathy with a general current which has sought to defend thinking without recourse to absolute truth: arguing for a language-practice bind which avoids the problem of thinking about the 'essences' of things whilst retaining a conception of 'adequate' rationality. This does not mean that poetry and philosophy are interchangeable terms, or that one is a misguided form of the other, or reducible to the other. Historically, their *uses* have varied. Not only has poetry been used differently from philosophy, but each has shown a varied

internal history too. What philosophy and poetry meant for the Greeks cannot be identical to what industrialized Western culture now uses them for.

Wittgenstein's thought also re-situates the whole notion of referentiality and its significance for philosophical inquiry. In his essay 'Wittgenstein and the Social and Historical Functions of Literature' David Schalkwyk argues that for both Wittgenstein and Saussure '*reference* is not and cannot be the paradigm of all language'. But where Saussure brackets referentiality in favour of the sense-bestowing agency of the system, for Wittgenstein reference is a use of language, neither privileged nor nonsensical. In Schalkwyk's words: 'It is use, within social practices, that determines meaning; meaning does not determine use' (Schalkwyk 1990: 73). It follows from this that 'Reference remains as a particular use of language, but with no particularly privileged status, a way of drawing reality into language, making it a part of 'grammar', rather than an illusion which needs to be unmasked' (Schalkwyk 1990: 70, 71). This is an appeal for a shift in our thinking, where, instead of abstracting further when we try to assign meaning, we instead look at the context wherein a phenomenon ordinarily functions. It is the context which supplies us with adequate rationality, because it supplies us with the parameters of feasible use.

When we concentrate on use, the first thing that must strike us is the irreducible *complexity* of phenomena. In recognizing this, Wittgenstein's work converges with a key post-structuralist notion. Where traditionally philosophy unifies by simplifying, by assigning identity where there is similarity, deriving meaning from use would entail sensitivity to the meaning-bestowing effect of a given context. This also means that to assert that philosophy is a form of metaphorical thinking and therefore does what literature does, without being aware of it, is to be blind to the context of use philosophy opens up for itself, a context different from the context of use in which poetry functions. It is no longer a case of the Platonic question about the securing of the true and the mode most appropriate to that, but instead a recognition that we may wish to distinguish between spheres of use

and that the terms 'poetry' and 'philosophy' are useful in this regard. Though there is no essential way to define either literature or philosophy, this cannot lead to the conclusion that poetry and philosophy are interchangeable terms, or that one is reducible to the other: what we have are complex practices marked as much by discontinuities as continuities. Schalkwyk writes in this regard that 'literature does not carry its own 'literariness' on its face. Such 'literariness' is a product of collective human uses, under the changing pressures of particular forms of life' (Schalkwyk 1990: 75).

CONCLUSION

THE USE OF PHILOSOPHY

We have seen that the status of philosophy can never be secured by an appeal to its being *essentially* different from other forms of discourse, though of course an attempted transcendental grounding has, historically, been the distinctive philosophical move. Many theorists consequently argue that philosophy's attempted claims to autonomy are little more than delusional. In the preceding chapter I gave some indication of how a notion of use could make us sensitive to differences between poetry and philosophy as they function within the changing contexts that legitimate them. So conceived, philosophy is one way of framing language, a way which, moreover, has a historical origin and could presumably disappear given appropriate circumstances. To argue like this is to argue that philosophy is a discourse, or, if you will, a language-game, with an internal set of rules but no particularly privileged status. This does not, however, mean that we cannot ask after the nature of this language-game, or ask whether its insights cannot be useful to the way we understand literature and literary theory.

If a language-game is rooted in practice, then any given language-game is subject to change, since practices clearly do not stay the same: 'new types of language, new language-games, as we may say, come into existence, and others become obsolete and get forgotten' (Wittgenstein 1958: §23). Though this way of thinking yields a useful, *dynamic* model of literary practice, it is also quite vague. In developing these ideas, Schalkwyk argues that Wittgenstein is relevant to literary theory because 'his work alerts us to the social uses of literature as communal practice, it leads us to reconsider the relationship between our habitual critical language-games and the forms of life from which they spring and which they in turn help to maintain, and it provides an important philosophical basis for an historical critical practice' (Schalkwyk 1990: 68). For Schalkwyk the

emphasis on practice necessarily de-centers the subject and shows that all understanding is indissolubly social: 'Although language can be used only within language-games, they are not structures which determine in advance all the possible significations of a word. It is use, within social practices, that determines meaning' (Schalkwyk 1990: 73). Wittgenstein is to be praised, according to Schalkwyk, because he allows us to view 'literariness' not as a fixed category, but as a 'product of collective human uses, under the changing pressures of particular forms of life' (Schalkwyk 1990: 75). Clearly the pressures of particular forms of life would include the pressures of history and sectarian discourses within the social. Schalkwyk further contends that language-games, such as that of literary criticism, change 'when the forms of life upon which they are based are shifted because of different, clashing needs and interests. A corollary to this is that a language-game may be used to perform a variety of social functions. So the language-game that one group may want to promote as the appropriate one for literary criticism may also endorse particular forms of political, cultural or economic life' (Schalkwyk 1990: 76). A language-game is more a site of struggle than a point of view. What we mean by poetry is a function of the language-game in which we ask such a question; and within that language-game there are a multiplicity of available answers. The difference between such an account and the combinatorial possibilities of a system as structuralism understands it, is that in this account it is impossible to isolate the structure from the practice. The structuralist move is a possible one within the language-game of theory, but it accords the notion of structure an independence which involves artificially distinguishing it from its applications.

The main problem with this account is whether Wittgenstein's way of thinking can ever account for the possibility of meaningful *critical* engagement with practices, engagement which changes those practices in a radical way. If we endorse Wittgenstein's account because it allows us to think *socially* about literature, does this automatically mean that he also enables us to think *critically* about it? Wittgenstein tends to avoid dealing with the mechanisms which make language-

games change: what forces would be involved, whether it is meaningful to ask if a language-game has changed for the better, and so on. Though he gives us a way of thinking about language which avoids the problems of referentiality and solipsism, he does not explicate the role of history, least of all the possibility of a critical relation to history. In David Bloor's *Wittgenstein: A Social Theory of Knowledge*, we find the following 'There is no meaning without language-games; and no language-games without forms of life. Wittgenstein's discussion of training made it clear that a culture cannot be sustained unless we have the power to control behaviour while we are transmitting information' (cited in Schalkwyk 1990: 74). The allusion to the 'power to control behaviour' clearly prompts the question of whether language-games are so inextricably interwoven with their own modes of legitimation that to ask after the possibility of radical criticism mistakes causes and effects. Is thinking no more than apologetics when it denies the possibility of a form of conceptual thought (ultimately Hegelian) which could present itself as the dialectic negative of a given language game? How to account, from within this model, for emancipatory orientations such as Feminism and Marxism?

In a chapter of *One-Dimensional Man* called 'The Triumph of Positive Thinking: One-Dimensional Philosophy', Herbert Marcuse contends that ordinary language philosophers enshrine the language that they find, and refuse to deal with the issue of history as the site of struggle, and therefore with the possibility of forces which modify and distort language. According to Marcuse, the language which the 'chap on the street' speaks is a 'purged language, purged not only of its 'unorthodox' vocabulary, but also of the means for expressing any other contents than those furnished to the individuals by their society' (Marcuse 1986: 174). Wittgenstein does indeed at times seem to want to limit the possible function of philosophy: 'Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it. For it cannot give it any foundation either. It leaves everything as it is' (Wittgenstein 1958: §124). For Marcuse, this is a reactionary approach because it assents to whatever *is*; philosophy only

describes a language game, it does not aim to change it by revealing other possibilities or uncovering the distortions of power. This is an invalid understanding of philosophy, which has always been, and been understood as, *intervention* rather than therapy: 'The philosopher is not a physician; his job is not to cure individuals but to comprehend the world in which they live – to understand it in terms of what it has done to man, and what it can do to man' (Marcuse 1986: 183). For Marcuse philosophy is only defensible as the critique of the given. It is because the given is problematic that philosophy remains important, not as epistemology or linguistics, but as the questioning of this given: 'The historical dissolution and even subversion of the given facts is the historical task of philosophy and the philosophic dimension' (Marcuse 1986: 185).

Marcuse articulates a transformational perspective which has become less tenable in recent times, because it purports to explain or ground other language-games, rather than acknowledge that it too is just one more such game. If the relationship between poetry and philosophy has always been complex and dynamic, it is made more so by this questioning of philosophy's right to adjudicate between practices and ways of life and to lay down guidelines for their transformation. Does literature then need philosophy at all? Why not have done with it and simply call it a deluded discourse? To the extent that literature must deal with issues such as those of internal ideological distortion and power, a critical philosophy can provide the necessary conceptual tools and dialectical awareness. Though they are both language-games, philosophy's essential commitment to self-reflexivity rescues it from redundancy in the literary realm. A 'commitment to self-reflexivity', however, also entails a complex re-reading of the literature – philosophy opposition itself, one which could very easily follow Derrida and deconstruct it in favour of a more generalized textuality. Whether such a reconceived configuration would remain sensitive to the problems of power is an instance of the more general philosophical question concerning deconstruction's ethical and political viability. Though it remains difficult to assess the extent to which literature needs philosophy, it may be safer to point out that

philosophy needs literature, because literature, as a representational mode which is both serious and playful, shows that utterances can possess value even if they lack the transcendental legitimization which has traditionally been philosophy's aim.

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