The Idea of Poetic Language: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Frege

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The preromantic and romantic period laid the foundations of modern poetics by declaring the autonomy of poetic artworks vis-à-vis nature (the world). Both the possible-worlds semantics of fictionality and the morphological theory of the imaginary object are historical landmarks on the road toward an alternative to mimetic theory. Further arguments for the autonomy of poetic art can be discovered if we examine the nineteenth-century engagement with another fundamental thema of poetics, the idea of poetic language.

The thema unfolds from the claim that the language of poetry is in some essential ways different from other varieties of language use. Therefore, the definition of poetic language and of its properties requires a *contrastive framework*. Traditionally, this framework was established by contrasting poetic language with that of "ordinary prose". Since the same opposition applied to the language of oratory, a *rhetorical conception* of poetic language dominated poetics for many centuries. Poetic language was characterized by well-defined, identifiable, and enumerable tropes and figures, by the presence of more or less frequent "verbal ornaments" or "beautiful spots" (Posner 1982: 164). Despite Aristotle's differentiation of poetic language from the style (or styles) of oratory (Rhet 3, 1: 1404a; 3, 12: 1413b) it was, ultimately, his *Rhetoric* which defined the properties and criteria of poetic language (see Solmsen 1954: xiii; Wimsatt and Brooks 1966: 58; Morpurgo-Tagliabue 1967: 358; Barthes 1970: 179; Dupont-Roc and Lallot 1980: 194). The rhetorical conception of poetic language was so entrenched that it could be seriously challenged only upon the demise of rhetoric, which occurred toward the end of the eighteenth century (see Todorov 1977: 85)[1]. The *historical* fact that nineteenth-century conceptions of poetic language

were formulated in explicit or implicit rejection of rhetoric explains their *theore-tical* assumptions.

The first conception of poetic language to arise from the ashes of rhetoric was formulated during the Enlightenment. The first postrhetorical conception is purely negative; poetic language loses its status of "the acme of eloquence" and becomes "diaphanous". *"Poetry is no longer art in language, but language that transcends art in order to reapproach nature"* (Wellbery 1984: 71-72). This conception, which reflects the general period view of language as a "transparent" medium providing unmediated access to the world, made it impossible to isolate poetic language as a theoretical entity. A theory of poetic language could be initiated only when language was assigned a relative independence from the referred-to world. Such independence was perceived by the romantics; not surprisingly, modern theory of poetic language has its origins in romantic poetics.

1. The Wordsworth-Coleridge aesthetic conception

My presentation of the romantic conceptions of poetic language will be based on the highly instructive discord between Wordsworth and Coleridge[2]. The views of the two friends-antagonists have been discussed many times, but the controversy is worth revisiting because it has not been examined as an event in the history of poetics. In isolation, the Wordsworth-Coleridge incident appears as an ideological disagreement over topical issues of contemporary poetry; in a broader theoretical perspective, their respective positions prove to be complementary approaches to the thema of poetic language.

Both Wordsworth and Coleridge felt un urgent need for a new theory and practice of poetic language radically opposed to the traditional idea and practice of "poetic diction" (see Wellek 1932: 130-32; Abrams 1953: 102)[3]. Wordsworth urged abstention from the use of worn-out poetic clichés (1802: 45); Coleridge was quite definite when he characterized the traditional poetic diction: "The imagery is almost always general; sun, moon, flowers, breezes, murmuring streams, warbling songsters, delicious shades, lovely dames cruel as fair, nymphs, naiads, and goddesses are the materials which are common to all" (1817: 160). The enumeration leaves no doubt that the target of the Wordsworth-Coleridge critique was the language of neoclassicist poetry, a stereotyped repetition of the rhetorical stock. The romantic conceptions of poetic language will be based on the recognition that innovation, constant renewal, is a necessary condition for the very existence of poetic language.

In opposition to the language of poetic clichés, Wordsworth formulated his famous requirement that poetic language should be "a selection of language really used by men" (1802: 40). This postulate seems to push poetic language so near to ordinary language that its specificity is lost, but the ordinariness of poetic language is constrained on two sides. First, Wordsworth leaves no doubt that his "ordinary" man is a highly idealized creature and so is his language. It is a language arising "out of repeated experience and regular feelings", and, as such, "a more permanent, and far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets" (1802: 41; see Owen 1969: 7). On the other side, the specific character of poetic language is protected by Wordsworth's requirement that the poet's selection of verbal means be guided by "true taste and feeling". Under this guidance, the selection will "entirely separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life; and, if metre be superadded thereto, I believe that a *dissimilitude* will be produced altogether sufficient for the gratification of a rational mind" (1802: 47; emphasis added).

This statement clarifies Wordsworth's position: having established a vital link between poetic language and the language of ordinary men, Wordsworth ultimately reasserts its dissimilitude from ordinary language use. A similar strategy is employed in Wordsworth's consideration of the relationship between poetic and scientific language. First, Wordsworth asserts that both poetry and science impart knowledge and truth (1802: 52). This traditional formula is offset by the unequivocal statement that a fundamental "contradistinction" exists between "Poetry and Matter of Fact or Science" (1802: 47n.; see Wellek 1932: 131). The contrast is expressed in a curious conjunction of secondhand Aristotelian and romantic phraseology: truth of poetry is "not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive in the heart by passion" (1802: 50). Although this formulation is almost "mystical" (Richards 1925: 257), it supports the conclusion that Wordsworth's poetics includes a postulate of the specificity of poetic vis-à-vis scientific language.

In which direction, then, is poetic language pulled when it is made distinct from both ordinary and scientific language? Wordsworth's second, modified statement of his basic requirement gives us a clue for answering the question: poetic language should be based on "the real language of men *in a state of vivid sensation*" (1802: 42; emphasis added). Clearly, the emphasis is shifted from ordinariness to expressivity. A poet who defined poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" is proposing an *expressive conception* of poetic language: poetic language gives voice to "the fluxes and refluxes of the mind when agitated by the great and simple affections of our nature" (1802: 42). We should

not overlook the humanistic mission of the expressive conception: by cultivation "affections" poetry will "ameliorate" the sensibilities of its readers at a time when modern civilization has reduced the human mind to "a state of almost savage torpor" (1802: 44)[4].

The expressive conception of poetic language, being in full accord with the romantic view of poetry (see Abrams 1953: 88-99), is most appropriate for the poetics of this time. Wordsworth, however, circumscribes the expressiveness of poetic language no less than its ordinariness. The first, rather traditional restriction results again from the poet's selectivity: the poet who is guided by "true taste and feeling" removes from the expressed passion everything that "would otherwise be painful or disgusting" (1802: 42). More significant is Wordsworth's modification of the expressive conception by his reclaiming the aesthetic function of poetry: "The end of Poetry is to produce excitement *in coexistence with an overbalance of pleasure"* (1802: 56; emphasis added). Poetic language and especially its rhythmic variety mitigates expressiveness by imposing aesthetic patterns on the expression of passions: "From the tendency of metre to divest language in a certain degree of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition, there can be little doubt but that more pathetic situations and sentiments... may be endured in metrical composition, especially in rhyme, than in prose." Ultimately, the passions that the Poet communicates to his reader "should always be accompanied with an overbalance of pleasure" (1802: 42, 58). Superimposing "pleasure" on "passion", Wordsworth moves almost imperceptibly from the expressive to the *aesthetic conception* of poetic language[5].

At this point, it is necessary to reconstruct the contrastive framework behind Wordsworth's reflection on poetic language. The romantic and postromantic conceptions of poetic language cannot be accommodated within the traditional one-dimensional contrast (poetic language – prosaic language); we need a two-dimensional matrix with one axis marked by the poles 'ordinary'–'scientific' language, the other one by the opposition 'expressive' ('emotive') – 'nonexpressive' ('nonemotive') language (see Schema 1). Wordsworth establishes the characteristics of poetic language by confronting it successively with the poles of this matrix. Having refused to identify poetic language with either 'ordinary', or 'scientific', or 'expressive' languages, he suggests the aesthetic conception. In such a way, poetic language is placed both within and outside the contrastive matrix. Defined in contrast to the poles of the matrix, it is assigned a place of its own.

SCHEMA 1
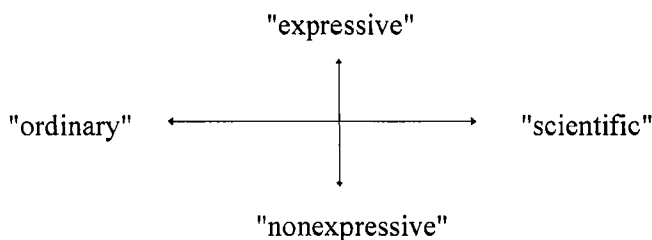
This reconstruction reveals the significance of the Wordsworthian impetus: it is a decisive step in the development of the modern, aesthetic theory of poetic language foreshadowed occasionally in the eighteenth century. Wordsworth perceived that this theory has to be based on *functional* assumptions, on the view that poetic language pursues aesthetic aims. At the same time, he intimated that the aesthetic effect is conditioned by *structural* properties of poetic language, by "the perception of similitude in dissimilitude" and "dissimilitude in similitude" (1802: 57). In this observation Wordsworth came close to discovering one of the fundamental structural principles of poetic language, the principle of equivalence; however, because of what he modestly called "my limits" (1802: 57), he left this discovery to others[6].

For Wordsworth, no doubt, metrical language is the core of poetic language; it is the meter and the sound organization in general which produce the highest aesthetic effect, the "overbalance of pleasure". But Wordsworth also makes it clear that he is opposed to the traditional rhetorical conception that restricted poetic language to metrical poetry; the domain of poetic language extends over both "good poems" and "good prose". In statements that were both perceptive and controversial, he united prose with poetry in one variety of language: "There neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition" (1802: 47); in fact, "some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly in the language of prose, when prose is well written" (1802: 46). These formulations could be interpreted as bringing Wordsworth back to where he started – to the ordinariness of poetic language. His qualifier in the second quote indicates, however, that he had a special kind of prose in mind, prose that is "Sister" to "Poetry", no less than is "Painting" (1802:

47); in other words, he refers to prose that is a form of art. Becoming explicit about his generic categories, Wordsworth makes a memorable suggestion: if he could reform the conventional vocabulary, he would not hesitate to subsume both metrical and prosaic verbal art under the term "Poetry", thus avoiding much of the "confusion" that exists in criticism because of "contradistinction of Poetry and Prose" (1802: 47n.).

Wordsworth's desire to change the established critical terminology has not been fulfilled. Indeed, even today much confusion in literary criticism arises from the lack of a commonly accepted term in English for 'verbal art'. Wordsworth's suggestion indicates that the aesthetic conception makes sense only if poetic language encompasses both metrical poetry and artistic prose.

Coleridge's views on poetic language were formulated in the context of his polemical assessment of Wordsworth's Preface. Coleridge's criticism is not quite fair, being directed against Wordsworth's "unhedged" theses[7]. This unilateral reaction stimulated Coleridge to develop the most advanced version of the romantic theory of poetic language, a version that rightly assumes a significant place in the history of modern poetics[8]. The prime stimulus was Wordsworth's postulate, which, in Coleridge's loose paraphrase, had it "that the proper diction for poetry in general consists altogether in a language taken, with due exceptions, from the mouths of men in real life, a language which actually constitutes the natural conversation of men under the influence of natural feelings" (1817: 164-165). I have mentioned that Wordsworth's postulate was coupled with an idealization of the "rustic" and his language. Coleridge's disagreement is motivated by a more realistic assessment of village life in contemporary England (1817: 166-67); he insists on differentiating between the dialects of the uneducated peasantry and 'ordinary language', a language free from local and social speech peculiarities and "common to all" (1817: 173)[9]. This definition of 'ordinary language' is a notable refinement of the contrastive matrix of language varieties. Of greater theoretical significance is Coleridge's relativization of Wordsworth's postulate: he finds it applicable "only to certain classes of poetry" (1817: 165). In other words, the relations of poetic language to ordinary language is a *stylistic variable* rather than a linguistic constant. The same holds true for the postulate of expressivity. For Coleridge, Wordsworth's conception of poetic language is nothing more than a theoretical vindication of his poetic practice, of his "predilection for a style the most remote possible from the false and showy splendour which he wished to explode" (1817: 194)[10].

Coleridge's transformation of Wordsworth's theory of poetic language into a theory of poetic styles leads us to reconsider the contrastive matrix of Schema 1;

it becomes a framework for defining poetic styles that can be represented as points moving along the axes of ordinariness and expressiveness. Poetic language cannot be understood in contrast to any *particular* language variety; its specificity can be formulated only in contrast to abstract properties and norms of a *universal* system, *nonpoetic language*. Coleridge's theory is the first systematic attempt to capture both the *structural* and the *functional* specificity of poetic language within this new contrastive framework.

To reveal the specific structural properties of poetic language, Coleridge had to narrow its scope. Contrary to Wordsworth, Coleridge insists on a strict separation of the language of metrical and prosaic compositions (1817: 179)[11]; the concept of poetic language then applies solely to the domain of metrical poetry. In a crucial theoretical move that represents the core of Coleridge's poetics, metrical patterning is not only incorporated into the organic whole of the poetic structure but becomes its dominant constituent: "A *legitimate* poem ... must be one, the parts of which mutually support and explain each other; all in their proportion harmonizing with, and supporting the purpose and known influences of metrical arrangement" (1827: 150). In this way, the aesthetic conception of poetic language is integrated into morphological poetics, making its mereological model more definite and comprehensive. All parts of the organic poetic whole, such as "images" and "thought", are subordinated to the prime source of "delight", to metrically organized language. Although tensions and contradictions between the parts are recognized in Coleridge's mereology, they are "reconciled" by the harmonizing power of meter[12]. Not surprisingly, when Coleridge applies his aesthetic conception of poetic language to "practical criticism" of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, he perceives as the poem's "first and most obvious excellence ... the perfect sweetness of the versification" (1817: 153)[13].

Although Coleridge's structural version of the aesthetic conception grew out of his criticism of Wordsworth, he in fact arrived at a position which is compatible with that of his friend: meter is the necessary specific property of poetic language. Coleridge's formulation is certainly more advanced because it is spelled out within the morphological theory of poetry. In addition, Coleridge is logically consistent when he restricts poetic language to metrical compositions. In principle, however, both Wordsworth's and Coleridge's formulations reveal a fundamental, as yet unresolved dilemma of all attempts to describe the specificity of poetic language purely in terms of structural properties. Nobody will deny that meter, and sound patterning generally, is a feature that distinguishes poetic from nonpoetic language. Yet *metrically organized language is not extensionally equivalent to poetry*. This disparity was recognized by Coleridge. He pointed out

that there exist numerous metrical compositions (such as a rhymester's distich given in 1817: 181), which clearly are not poetry; on the other hand, the realm of poetry includes many and varied nonmetrical compositions: "The writings of Plato, and Jeremy Taylor, and Burnet's *Theory of the Earth*, furnish undeniable proofs that poetry of the highest kind may exist without meter. ... The first chapter of Isaiah (indeed a very large portion of the whole book) is poetry in the most emphatic sense" (1817: 151; see Marks 1981: 77-78). It is precisely this lack of extensional equivalence of 'poetry' and 'poetic language' which makes the structural version of the aesthetic conception fragile and vulnerable. The very existence of structural features specific to poetic language is open to challenge[14].

Coleridge's writings not only reveal the dilemma of the structural version of the aesthetic conception, they suggest a possible way out. This suggestion does not resolve the dilemma, but rather bypasses it: the domain of poetic language is defined by a functional criterion, by its specific aim, goal, or effect. Coleridge agrees with Wordsworth when he proposes, in a traditional way, that the aim of poetry is to give "pleasure", "delight"; however, he takes a further step in the development of the functional version of the aesthetic conception when he makes more definite the functional contrast between poetry and science: "A poem is that species of composition which is opposed to works of science by proposing for its *immediate* object[15] pleasure, not truth" (1817: 150)[16]. Putting the opposition between "pleasure" and "truth" into a broader perspective, Coleridge arrived at the formulation of an essential feature of the functional theory, the idea of the hierarchy of functions: "The immediate purpose [of a composition] may be communication of truths; either of truths absolute and demonstrable, as in works of science; or of facts experienced and recorded, as in history. Pleasure, and that of the highest and permanent kind, may result from the attainment of the end; but it is not itself the immediate end. In other works the communication of pleasure may be the immediate purpose; and though truth, either moral or intellectual, ought to be the ultimate end, yet this will distinguish the character of the author, not the class to which the work belongs" (1817: 150). Although the aesthetic and cognitive functions of language are in opposition, they do not necessarily exclude each other, if a clear hierarchy of the primary ("immediate") and secondary ("ultimate") functions is respected. The specificity of poetic language vis-à-vis the language of science rests on the *primacy* of the aesthetic function; it does not mean that poetry cannot pursue as its secondary functions cognitive, moral, or other ends[17].

The functional version of the aesthetic conception offers a theory of poetic language which accounts for the entire domain of verbal art. Indeed, Coleridge

notes that language in the aesthetic function is not restricted to metrical compositions: "The communication of pleasure may be the immediate object of a work not metrically composed; and that object may have been in a high degree attained, as in novels and romances" (1817: 149; cf. 1811: 2: 163). In the final account, Coleridge's theory of poetic language rests on a two-level differentiation: the domain of poetic language is defined by its specific, aesthetic function; its structure is represented by patterns, devices, and principles of organization which characterize the core of this domain, that is, verse poetry[18]. Poetic language enters into a system of functional and structural oppositions with nonpoetic language: the presence or absence of the aesthetic function; metrical organization or the lack of it; and the absence or presence of communication of truth.

We have noted that Coleridge's reinterpretation of Wordsworth's conception of poetic language converted the two-dimensional contrastive matrix of Schema 1 into a framework for a theory of poetic styles. Now, having examined Coleridge's views we are ready to reconstruct the contrastive matrix underlying the definitive romantic conception of poetic language. The new model (see Schema 2) expands the original contrastive matrix by introducing a third, aesthetic axis. On this axis one pole is reserved solely and exclusively for poetic language; all other nonpoetic language varieties are located at the opposite pole. The contrast defined on the aesthetic axis is the constant of poetic language; its changing relationships with the particular nonpoetic language varieties define the space of its stylistic variability. Such a synthetic representation of the romantic theory of poetic language both respects and transcends its historicity.

SCHEMA 2
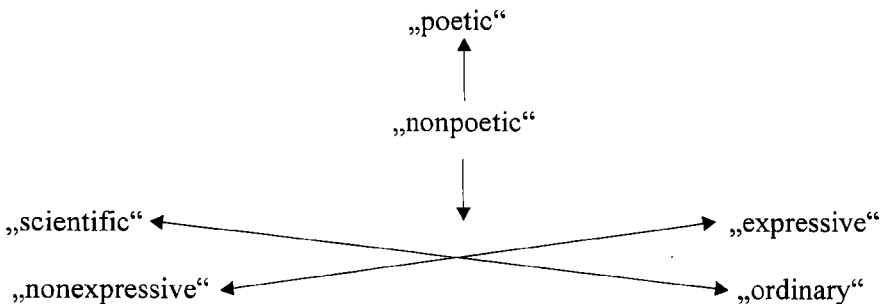
2. Frege's semantic conception

We have observed that the aesthetic conception of poetic language developed in romantic poetics assumes that specific structural patterns and a specific aesthetic function are characteristic of poetic language. We have also noted that Coleridge recognized the serious implications of the aesthetic function of poetic language for its semantic status. In contrasting poetic language with cognitive language on truth-functional grounds, he undermined the traditional popular concept 'truth of/in poetry'[19]. He recognized that the aesthetic functioning of poetic language has to have serious implications for its semantic status. Coleridge's idea was formulated in a purely negative manner since in his time it could not be grounded in a general semantic theory, and so it remained an original but rarely remembered suggestion.

The *semantic conception* of poetic language could make its appearance only when a general semantics of natural language had been formulated. For this reason, the semantic theory of Gottlob Frege has to be accorded a prominent place in the history of poetics. It took a long time for Frege to be recognized as the founder of modern logical semantics and philosophy of language; much later still, the importance of his ideas for literary theory was noted (Aschenbrenner 1968; Gabriel 1970; Doleżel 1979). Here we are concerned with Frege's semantics only insofar as it bears on the theory of poetic language. Let me state at the outset that Frege's stimulus is remarkable in that a semantic conception of poetic language is put forth not only as a complement to but also as a corroboration of the aesthetic conception.

Two preliminary comments should help us integrate Frege's idea of poetic language into the history of poetics: (a) Frege's formulation of the semantic specificity of poetic language is phrased in the terminology of his general semantics of natural language. Therefore, Frege's contribution to poetics cannot be grasped without some understanding of his general semantic concepts. It is equally true that interpretations of Frege's general semantics are seriously defective if his theory of poetic language is ignored[20]. (b) Frege's conception of poetic language can be formulated in terms of the contrastive framework represented in Schema 2, but his general semantics makes it possible to name the abstract system of nonpoetic language which we need to set up the aesthetic axis: the opposite pole of poetic language is *referential language*.

Frege's general semantics is based on the well-known differentiation of two constituents of meaning in language, reference (*Bedeutung*) and sense (*Sinn*). Reference is the designation of an entity in the world which the verbal expres-

sion stands for; sense is "the mode of presentation [*die Art des Gegebenseins*]" of the reference (1892: 41; 57). The distinction may be illustrated by using Frege's much discussed example. The expression *morning star* and *evening star* have the same reference, both designating "the second planet from the sun", but they present the reference in two different "modes" and, therefore, carry different senses; the first expression evokes by its form the semantic constituent "morning", the second, that of "evening". If we add the name *Venus* to the designations of the planet, we obtain yet another sense for the same reference. Developing his concept of reference further, Frege suggested that the domain of reference for 'names' is constituted by objects, sets, and relations; the reference of a sentence is its truth value, or, as Frege put it, "we are driven into accepting the *truth value* of a sentence as constituting its reference" (1892: 48; 63). What, then, is the sense of a sentence? It is the 'thought' (*Gedanke*) expressed by the sentence. The thought of the sentence *The morning star is a body illuminated by the sun* differs from that of the sentence *The evening star is a body illuminated by the sun*, so that the two sentences have different senses but the same reference (1892: 47; 62)[21].

The semantic theory applies to, and, indeed, defines referential language, that is, a language whose sentences are truth-functional. Sentences of poetic language cannot be interpreted by this two-tier semantics; they lack reference and truth value. I must quote Frege's principle of poetic semantics *in extenso*, because all of its presuppositions and implications need to be taken into account: "On hearing an epic poem (representing poetry in general) ... apart from the euphony of language, we are seized only by the sense of the sentences and by the ideas and feelings which are evoked. The question of truth would cause us to abandon the aesthetic delight (*Kunstgenuss*) and turn to a scientific attitude. Therefore, it is immaterial for us whether the name *Odysseus*, for instance, has reference, as long as we accept the poem as a work of art" (1892: 48; 63). A rarely quoted, but theoretically very significant footnote is appended: "It would be desirable to have a special term for signs which have to have sense only. If we call them, say, images (Bilder), then the words of an actor on the stage would be images; indeed, the actor himself would be an image" (1892: 48; 63).

The contrast between referential and poetic language became a central problem of Frege's philosophy of language. He was repeatedly concerned with it, as the papers and notes published in his *Nachlass* demonstrate (1969: 128, 133, 208, 209, 211, 243, 250; 118, 122, 191, 192, 194, 225, 232). Two passages from these documents will elaborate the principle of Frege's poetic semantics, the first concerns the meaning of words, the second, that of sentences: "Of course, in

poetry words only have sense, but in science and wherever we are concerned with the question of truth we do not content ourselves with the sense, we also attach a reference to proper names and concept-words" (1969: 128; 118). "A sentence has a sense and we call the sense of an assertoric sentence a thought. ... For science, it is not enough that a sentence should have only sense; it must have a truth value as well, and this value is called the reference of the sentence. If a sentence has only sense, but no reference, it belongs to poetry and not to science" (1969: 262; 243)[22]. In all these pronouncements scientific language is taken as the quintessential representative of referential language, without necessarily being its sole manifestation.

Let us now reconstruct the Fregean conception of poetic language within the general semantics of reference and sense:

1. Sentences of poetic language lack truth value; they are neither true nor false[23]. This Fregean principle has often been interpreted as requiring a nonstandard, three-value logic in which sentences can be assigned the values *true* or *false* or *gap* (see Herzberger 1980). Such a logic, however, is explicitly denied by Frege: "By the truth value of a sentence I understand the circumstance that it is true or false. *There are no further truth values*" (1892: 48; 63; emphasis added). Evidently Frege did not introduce a third truth value but proposed to exempt a domain of language use – poetic language – from truth valuation. Although in referential language truth valuation is required, in poetic language the question of truth or falsity does not arise. In this sense and in this sense only, verbal art can be characterized as a giant truth-value gap[24].

2. Frege's identification of the sentence reference with its truth value implies that sentences that are neither true nor false lack reference. If there exists a variety of language whose sentences are exempt from truth valuation, then this variety will be necessarily a nonreferential language. This reasoning is consonant with Frege's semantic interpretation of fictional names: there are no objects (individuals) in the 'world' for which fictional names stand. If *Odysseus* is a fictional name, then it lacks reference (1892: 47; 62). Obviously, the semantic conception of poetic language embraces the concept of *fictionality*. In a Fregean semantics, however, fictionality is defined in a purely negative manner: fictions are nothing but words; there are no 'worlds' behind poetic texts[25].

3. The absence of reference and the nullification of truth valuation restrict the meaning of the sentences in poetic language to sense only. Whereas meaning in scientific language hinges on reference and truth value, poetic meaning is concentrated in, and exhausted by, sense. Poetic language is pure-sense language[26]. Consequently, Fregean theory postulates two distinct semantics: (a) the seman-

tics of referential languages, which studies the truth conditions and reference re-
lations of verbal signs; (b) the semantics of sense languages ("images"), which is
concerned with the rules and patterns of sense organization. Poetic semantics is
sense-language semantics; its task is to study how poetic texts constitute and or-
ganize sense to express "ideas" and "feelings".

4. The semantic particularity of poetic language is a necessary consequence of
its aesthetic function. If scientific language is to fulfill its cognitive function, it
has to be a referential language subject to truth valuation. If poetic language is to
serve its aesthetic function, it must be liberated from referentiality and truth va-
luation. Poetic language has to be pure-sense language, because it is precisely
the structures of sense (in conjunction with sound organization) which generate
aesthetic effects. When the requirement of truth is imposed on poetic texts, or
when these texts are interpreted in truth-functional terms, the specificity of po-
etry as an aesthetic phenomenon is denied or, at least, neglected.

The necessary correlation between the aesthetic function and the semantic
principles of poetic language is the cornerstone of Frege's poetic semantics. If
we understand language functions as pragmatic concepts – in that they link lan-
guage with its users – then we are entitled to designate the Fregean theory of po-
etic language as a *semantic conception based on pragmatics*. Some of Frege's
later formulations, however, lead us to believe that he was moving toward a *pu-
rely pragmatic conception*. This move was connected with, indeed motivated by,
a significant shift in Frege's general semantics. In late Frege the form of a sen-
tence is no longer sufficient for establishing its assertoric character. The que-
stion "whether it [the sentence] really contains an assertion... must be answered
in the negative if the requisite seriousness is lacking" (1918-19: 36; 356). The
"recognition of the truth of a thought", that is, the act of "judgment" (*Urteilen*)
has to be supplemented by the "declaration (*Kundgebung*) of this judgment",
that is, by the act of "assertion" (*Behaupten*) (1918-19: 35; 355-56). Truth-con-
ditional semantics is annexed by speech-act theory. Frege's original rejection of
"psychologism" is revised, and the speaker's intention (his "seriousness") beco-
mes a decisive factor in the semantic status of his utterances.

The result, as well as the test of the pragmatic semantics, is a new conception
of poetic language. The contrast between referential and poetic language is now
purely pragmatic: the presence or absence of the "assertoric force", that is, of the
speaker's commitment to, or rejection of, truth valuation. Accepting play as a
model of poetry, Frege comes to the conclusion that sentences of poetic langua-
ge are "apparent assertions" (*Scheinbehauptungen*). "As stage thunder is only
apparent thunder and a stage fight only an apparent fight, so stage assertion is

only apparent assertion. It is only play, only poetry. In his part, the actor asserts nothing, nor does he lie, even if he says something of whose falsehood he is convinced. *In poetry we have the case of thoughts being expressed without being actually presented as true in spite of their indicative sentence form*" (1918-19: 36; 356, emphasis added; cf. 1969: 211; 194)[27]. It is no coincidence that in the pragmatic conception of poetic language the aesthetic function was dispensed with. When poetry is play it does not require any functional motivation.

Our perusal of the writings of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Frege has enabled us to reconstruct a gamut of conceptions of poetic language formulated in the romantic and postromantic period. If we arrange them according to their theoretical foundation, we notice that the extreme and contradictory positions – the *purely structural* and the *purely pragmatic conceptions* – are each based on a single distinctive feature: the former on the presence of structural patterning, the latter on the ludic intention of the speaker (poet). In contrast, for the *aesthetic conception* – formulated by Coleridge – a double distinctive feature is essential: the specificity of poetic language rests on the conjunction of the aesthetic function with structural patterning. A double distinctive feature also underlies the *semantic conception* suggested by early Frege: poetic language acquires specific semantic properties in order to fulfill its aesthetic function.

A grasp of the common functional base of the aesthetic and semantic conceptions makes it possible to merge them into an *integrated theory* of poetic language. Such a theory will recognize that the specificity of poetic language given by its aesthetic function is not exhausted by phonic and formal patterns; it is primarily a semantic specificity consisting in distinctive truth-conditions and characteristic ways of sense production. What emerges from the study of the nineteenth-century conceptions of poetic language is the realization that we are not restricted to exclusively formalist or pragmatist perspectives when contemplating the idea of poetic language.

Remarks

[1] It is almost ironic that only certain *rhetoricians* resisted identifying poetic language with figurative language (Todorov 1977: 85). The rhetorical conception of poetic language survives in the popular view of poetry as a discourse of verbal "ornaments" and in the recurring attempts to apply rhetorical categories in the study of poetic language.

[2] My focus on the controversy around 'poetic language' should not obscure the fact that other differences in aesthetic opinions existed between Wordsworth and Coleridge (see Parrish 1958).

[3] My interest in Wordsworth's views on poetic language has nothing in common with the dubious search for his quasi-philosophy of language. It might be true that for Wordsworth language (or is it discourse?) is "indissolubly related" to death, especially when he reflects on the poetry of epitaphs (Ferguson 1977: 30); but it could likewise be argued that language for him is related to life and everything else.

[4] Wordsworth urges poetry to resist the spirit of its time, especially since "the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves" to the dominant tendency of "life and manners" (1802: 44).

[5] The shift is strengthened by the textual changes that appear in the final (1802) version of the Preface. I see no reason to claim that these modifications mean a „change from mimetic to expressive poetics" (Owen 1969: 114). The expressive conception of poetry and poetic language is already firmly established in the 1800 text.

[6] Wordsworth suggested, but left undeveloped, another basic idea of the modern aesthetic conception of poetic language, the idea of its autotelic character, manifested in its „reification". When dealing with the figure of repetition in poetic language, he took note of its emotional power; however, he also suggested a purely aesthetic motivation for poetic repetitions and tautologies: they express „the interest which the mind attaches to words, not only as symbols of the passion, but as *things*, active and efficient, which are of themselves part of the passion" (1800: 13-14; emphasis added).

[7] There is something exasperating and even misleading in the attitude that he [Coleridge] chose to assume to the theory of diction which lies at the basis of the *Lyrical Ballads* (Barstow Greenbie 1917: x). A partial explanation of this attitude might be that Coleridge criticizes the first version of the Preface (1800) rather than the expanded version of 1802 (see Owen 1969: 114, n. 5).

[8] Scholes maintains that Coleridge "is, indeed, if not the father then a genial and benevolent uncle" of modern structural poetics (1974: 179). For a more detailed discussion of this link, see Marks 1981.

[9] Coleridge does not restrict common ordinary language to the style of oral conversation but is also aware of its written variety.

[10] In view of this assessment, Coleridge's charge that Wordsworth does not follow his theoretical postulates in his poetic practice would seem to be especially damaging: „Were there excluded from Mr. Wordsworth's poetic compositions all, that a literal adherence to the theory of his preface *would* exclude two-thirds at least of the marked beauties of his poetry must be erased" (1817: 205). Barstow Greenbie tried to defend Wordsworth against this charge by suggesting that the Preface's theory of poetic language was

meant to apply only to the group of „true Lyrical Ballads", to compositions that represent Wordsworth's „real experiment" (1917: 142-43).

[11] Coleridge mentioned the existence of a "neutral" style between poetry and prose; he found it in texts „passing" from prose to poetry and vice versa. In a quite unromantic gesture, Coleridge dismissed such a style as "awkward" because it „does not satisfy a cultivated taste" (1817: 215).

[12] An often quoted, but little understood, definition of a poem becomes comprehensible if it is taken as a statement of morphological mereology. A poem, Coleridge asserts, is „discriminated" from all other species of composition „by proposing to itself such delight from the *whole*, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component *part* (1817: 150). In this context, we can understand Coleridge's „mean" comparison of meter to yeast, „worthless and disagreeable by itself, but giving vivacity and spirit to the liquor with which it is proportionally combined" (1817: 181). All aspects of Coleridge's organistic view of poetry are presented in Abrams 1953: 218-28; see also Shaffer 1974.

[13] Since there are contradictory opinions about the relationship between Coleridge's theory and his analytical criticism, let me mention that, in my view, his is the *zigzag method* which was found to be characteristic for poetics: abstract concepts formulated on the theoretical level are applied in analytical descriptions of particular works and, inversely, from observations of poetic works abstract theoretical concepts and statements are derived. The link between theory and analysis in Coleridge's poetics is established by the procedure of „desynonymy", his substantial contribution to the metatheory of literary study (see Hamilton 1983: 65-67, 73-81). In this procedure Coleridge's struggle against poetic criticism (Coburn 1974) and his effort at employing „scientific language" in discussing literature (Corrigan 1982: 123-156) is most evident. In view of this effort, labeling Coleridge's critical method „poetical" (Wheeler 1980: 96) is unjustified. It might be true that Coleridge's discussion of the problem of poetic language implies „a certain distrust of analytic techniques that focus on purely linguistic or grammatical relationships in literary works" (Uitti 1969: 102); however, it is unfair to Coleridge to forget that no linguistic poetics existed in his time.

[14] For this reason, the very idea of poetic language has often been rejected. The argument is summed up by Fowler: „Nobody has ever managed to devise any workable criterion for distinguishing 'poetic language' from 'ordinary language'"; therefore, „it seems foolish to retain a spurious terminological distinction" (Fowler 1971: 89; Fowler 1981: 184-86; cf. Posner 1982: 125-26). Such criticism is based on a confusion of ontological and epistemological issues; moreover, it forecloses discussion of a problem that has puzzled many prominent poeticians and poets from Aristotle to the present

[15] The terms 'object', 'purpose', and 'end' are used as synonyms by Coleridge (Abrams 1953: 117).

[16] The idea was restated almost verbatim in a lecture: „Poetry is not the proper antithesis to prose, but to science. Poetry is opposed to science, and prose to metre. The proper

and immediate object of science is the acquirement, or communication, of truth; the proper and immediate object of poetry is the communication of immediate pleasure" (Coleridge 1818, 1: 163).

[17] The hierarchy becomes a functional norm for critical judgment. Coleridge expresses a negative opinion about Wordsworth's poetry that „moralizes" the reader; such poetry „proposes *truth* for its immediate object instead of *pleasure*," thus reversing the proper hierarchy of functions. The resulting didacticism and tendentiousness are alien to poetry and belong „more appropriately" to „sermons or moral essays" (1817: 220, 221).

[18] It should not escape our attention that Coleridge, in conformity with his organicist aesthetics, perceived the specificity of poetic language not only in structural and functional terms but also in the pragmatic aspect of the poietic act: „The very *act* of poetic composition *itself* is, and is allowed to imply and to produce, an unusual state of excitement, which of course justifies and demands a correspondent difference of language" (1817: 184).

[19] For a survey of many, mostly indefinite, meanings of the term 'poetic/artistic truth', see Hospers 1946; Abrams 1953: 312-20; Kayser 1959; Ingarden 1966, 1: 395-412; Hamburger 1979: 47-93.

[20] To my knowledge, this is a common defect of the vast literature on Frege's semantics and philosophy of language, including the most significant monographs (Dummett 1973; Sluga 1980) and collections of papers (Klemke, ed. 1968; Schirn, ed. 1976). Instead of a systematic discussion of Frege's semantics of poetic language we find only reflections on the favorite topic of philosophers of language, the problem of 'empty' (fictional) names. Even Evans, who recognized the role of the theory of poetic (fictional) language in Frege's general semantics, considers it just a „cover-up" for a faulty interpretation of empty singular terms (Evans 1982: 28).

[21] In Frege 1918-19 the notion of thought (*Gedanke*) is reinterpreted in accordance with the general shift in Frege's semantics, which will be touched upon later. For our topic it is important to recognize that in Frege's onthology 'thought' is „the third realm", distinct both from the objective world of things and from the subjective world of mental images (*Vorstellungen*) (43: 363).

[22] The necessary relationship between Frege's general semantics and his theory of poetic language is revealed also in his treatment of sentences with „empty designations" (fictional names); they are called „poetry [*Dichtung*]", even when they occur in referential texts (see 1918-19: 42; 362).

[23] Frege's denial of truth value claims for poetry has completely different philosophical foundations and axiological consequences than the position held by early positivists. Because poetry lacks truth value, and science is the only source of truth, the positivists concluded that poetry is inferior to science (for a résumé of this view, see Abrams 1953:

301-2). The positivists' virtual denial of the aesthetic value of poetry is contrary to Frege's emphasis on its aesthetic function.

[24] The idea that there exist domains of language use or sentence types which lie outside the scope of truth valuation originates with Aristotle. Aristotle split the set of all sentences into 'enunciative' (expressing propositions) and 'others' (such as prayers). The 'other' sentences are taken away from the authority of logic and relegated to rhetoric or poetics (*De interpretatione* 17a; see Gulley 1979: 171-75). In post-Fregean logical semantics, the most explicit formulation of the „exemption" was given by Austin: „The principle of Logic, that 'Every proposition must be true or false' has too long operated as the simplest, most persuasive and most pervasive form of the descriptive fallacy. ... Recently, it has come to be realized that many utterances which have been taken to be statements... are not in fact descriptive, nor susceptible of being true or false. When is a statement not a statement? When it is a formula in a calculus: when it is a performatory utterance: when it is a value-judgment: when it is a definition: when it is part of a work of fiction" (1961: 99). It should be noticed that both Aristotle (implicitly) and Austin (explicitly) mention poetry/fiction as belonging to the class of sentences which are neither true nor false.

[25] Frege's semantics of fictionality cannot offer truth-value conditions for sentences *about* fictional events, characters, and the like. This might be the reason why such „meta-sentences" are often mistakenly identified with the original sentences of the poetic text (see, for example, Charpa 1981: 341-42).

[26] Aschenbrenner misrepresented Frege's position by reducing the entire poetic work to sense (1968: 327-28). This reduction ignores the aesthetic qualities of poetry explicitly asserted by Frege.

[27] Gabriel presents Frege's view of poetic language in the following summary: „The texts of poetry in contradistinction to those of science are nonasserting (are apparent assertions)" (1975: 119-20; cf. 1971: xix-xx). He thus accepts the purely pragmatic conception as the sole expression of Frege's thinking about poetic language.

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LUBOMÍR DOLEŽEL

Koncepce básnického jazyka: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Frege

Autor podrobně analyzuje historický vývoj názorů na básnický jazyk a specifiku uměleckého stylu. Jako nejstarší uvádí koncepci rétorickou. Ta byla překonána až v romantismu, kdy vznikly zárodky moderní teorie básnického jazyka; koncepci estetickou (resp. její funkčně-strukturní verzi) vytvořili především W. Wordsworth a S. T. Coleridge. Coleridge přichází i s představou různých básnických stylů, které mají různý vztah k "nebásnickým" jazykovým varietám. Představitelem sémantické koncepce básnického jazyka je pro autora hlavně G. Frege (opozice jazyka referenčního a jazyka básnického, kde se neklade otázka pravdivostních hodnot). S teorií Fregeho se pak dostáváme do blízkosti teorie řečových aktů a pragmatické koncepce básnického jazyka (poezie jako hra). V závěru autor doporučuje nezůstávat na extrémních pozicích (perspektiva formalistická, čistě strukturní na jedné straně a pragmatická na straně druhé) a směřovat spíše k integraci koncepce estetické a sémantické.