

The difference between Self-Referential Titles like the Bible or *Film*, Self-Reflexive Titles like *The Title of This Book*, and Self-Demonstrating Titles like *Book-Titles Should Be Straightforward* is that the first name the thing they name (at least a copy of that thing), the second name the name of the thing, as the name *name* names itself, and the third exemplify not only what they are but what they say. Inasmuch as the names of things are also members of the class of things, things in the world, a perfectly self-reflexive sentence such as *Adjective adjective subject adverbially verbs adjective adjective object* is as meaningful, though its content is not in itself so moving, as the sentence *Old King Priam tearfully kisses Achilles's bloody hands*.

The late John Gardner was pleased to argue that sentences like the latter make up what he called Primary Literature -- literature about "life" -- whereas the former add up to Secondary Literature: literature about literature, or in this case language about language. One understands what he meant (Homer's powerful scene in Book XXIV of the *Iliad*, of Priam kissing Achilles's hands, still bloody from Hector's slaughter, in vain supplication to return his dead son's body, was one of Gardner's favorite examples of Primary Literature). But since one may write stirring sentences about matters in themselves unstirring or even nonsensical ("And hast thou slain the Jabberwock? Come to my arms, my beamish boy!"), and unstirring sentences about stirring matters ("Homer's powerful scene in Book XXIV of the *Iliad*. . ." above), the issue is far from simple. Such distinctions as Primary and Secondary Literature, particularly when they become value judgments, do more to becloud than to clarify the manifold processes of language and literature, which, like many other processes both "natural" and artificial, from walking upright to welding automobile frames by computerized robot, depend upon more or less subtle and intricate "feedback loops" for their success. Surely we do better to acknowledge that literature, like language, is seldom simply but always also about itself. Titles too, about which this is enough.

Four mornings a week from September through May I have for some years been privileged to make up and set down my stories in a pleasant white house in the city of Baltimore, where in the afternoons I teach at the Johns Hopkins University. On normal Thursday evenings my wife and I drive across the Chesapeake Bay Bridge to a pleasant red house on Langford Creek, off the Chester River, off that same Bay, where on Friday mornings (unless the story in progress asserts the priority reserved to it) I refresh my head with some other sort of sentence-making, preferably nonfiction, while Shelly does schoolwork. Two English teachers. Most of the pieces here edited, revised, and assembled were in fact composed before I was blessed with this tranquil work-rhythm, from which only the later ones proceed. But I find that rhythm so agreeable that in the summer months too, when teaching and weekend-commuting are suspended and we live and work only in our creekside house, hoping the world will not soon end, I still reserve the last weekday morning for whatever "Friday-piece" is in hand, and I hope to do so until the period of my life's sentence.