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LITERATURE ^{AND} THE
QUESTION
OF PHILOSOPHY

EDITED AND INTRODUCED BY
ANTHONY J. CASCARDI

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Introduction

Collections of critical essays commonly begin with an introduction of some thirty or forty pages in which the editor of the volume sets forth the premises tacitly understood by the various contributors, thereby exposing, without arguing for, the program or ideology they all share. The present volume dispenses with the conventional omnibus introduction in favor of a series of interstitial notes designed to mediate among thirteen disparate voices in the larger interdisciplinary conversation of literature and philosophy. Beginning with Arthur Danto's general essay on the interrelationships between these two fields, and proceeding in a roughly historical fashion from Harry Berger, Jr.'s, essay on Plato to Berel Lang's essay on postmodernism, this volume purports to give a fair sampling of some of the liveliest of the most recent work of North American scholars in this area.

The very nature of this project precludes ideological summary, for it is first and foremost characterized by the diversity of voices and positions competing within it. My contention in assembling this collection has been that such diversity does not preclude the possibility of dialogue and, moreover, that such dialogue represents the necessary mediation of otherwise disparate views. Thus, one will not find in these essays any secret campaign in favor of one or the other of the many critical terms currently in vogue. There is no collective apologia for historicism, for idealism, for *différance*, or for the aesthetics of reader-response. What there is, by contrast, are thirteen individual voices, each of which speaks to the problematic interrelations of literature and philosophy at some point near the forefront of their mutual concerns. The appropriate image for the present volume is thus less that of the "book" than that of the roundtable discussion. In such a conversation, all the speakers are unlikely to agree on conclusions; indeed, they are

likely to disagree on premises as well. Nonetheless, they share an understanding that the interrelationship of literature and philosophy throughout their history has been problematical, and they recognize where the most fruitful areas of investigation are apt to lie.

The effort to establish a dialogue between literature and philosophy will depend for its specific character on the exact nature and range of the issues that are thought to stand between them. Thus, while the conversation initiated here may preclude any initial (or terminal) summary, the essays may be situated with respect to one another and to the problem they collectively address. If there is no single "metanarrative" that unifies them, the compass of their shared concerns is limited only by the angle of one's historical view. For the problem of literature and philosophy in their relationship to one another may be seen as continuous with the entire "history of Western metaphysics" from Plato to the present age, and as coextensive with those institutions (e.g., "literature," "philosophy") which that metaphysics founds. In book 10 of the *Republic*, Plato refers to an "ancient quarrel" between literature and philosophy, but it is to his treatment of that quarrel that most discussions in the West in fact look back. Plato moves to exclude the poets from his Republic, but as Dalia Judovitz shows in her essay on Plato and Descartes, the marginalization of poetry within the Republic marks something deeper than a thematics of rivalry might suggest. The founding of the institution named "philosophy," which is imaged in the founding of the new state, is here accomplished by the exclusion of the "literary" from its bounds. The "mark of absolute difference" which Plato seeks to establish between philosophy and literature (indeed, between philosophy and all the other arts) is itself, as Judovitz says, "the trace of a series of differential operations that reinscribe and retrace the figure of philosophical discourse."

The differentiation of "literature" and "philosophy" would indeed be absolute were it not for the fact that philosophy is itself unable to produce a coherent theory of the differences that separate it from literature. As Peter McCormick demonstrates in his essay, "Philosophical Discourses and Fictional Texts," neither a theory of speech-acts based on such notions as "semantic markers" or "illocutionary force" nor a theory of genre is able to distinguish categorically between fictional and philosophical texts. Indeed, there are good reasons for construing at least some of the texts we customarily call "philosophical" as fictions of a peculiar sort. Within philosophy we witness the return of the literary, as of the repressed, in the guise of dialogue, fable, and myth. The

presence of these “literary” qualities has in fact been acknowledged by Plato scholarship since at least the work of Paul Friedländer and Leo Strauss, even if it has been systematically ignored by those analytical philosophers who attempt to draw on Plato.

In the essay entitled “Levels of Discourse in Plato’s Dialogues,” Harry Berger, Jr., confronts this conventional view with the charge that the notion of the “literary” nature of the Platonic dialogues thereby invoked cannot be coherently maintained. Either the dialogues are regarded as literary (more accurately, “dramatic”) and aspire to the condition of closure, but laudably fail to produce closed solutions to the problems they broach, or the ironic nature of the individual dialogue as a literary form is maintained, and the will to closure is displaced onto some conception of the coherence of the dialogues as a group. In either case, claims for the “literary” nature of the dialogues are severely undercut by the search for a systematic Platonic *doxa*. As Berger says, to presuppose that there exists a recoverable “teaching” or Platonic system in the dialogues is to succumb to that desire which Heidegger and Derrida have analyzed under the rubric of the “metaphysics of presence.” Of equal interest here is the break that Berger makes with Heidegger and Derrida: whereas they seek to locate the origin of the metaphysics of presence in Plato, Berger produces a reading of the dialogues in which they are seen to anticipate Heidegger and Derrida in a critique of that same metaphysics. I would perhaps add that, as a result of such a reading, deconstruction turns against itself; the very notions of “Western metaphysics” and the “metaphysics of presence” are revealed to be strategic concepts, the effect of which is to configure the relationship between philosophy and literature as a function of the crucial deconstructive term, “difference” (*différance*).

To say this much is, if not exactly to produce a critique of “difference” from within, then at least to indicate that the program for the deconstruction of philosophy corresponds to a determinate conception of “literature” and its affiliates (“writing,” “text”) and of the ideology they share. Where philosophy is seen as aspiring to “closure,” to “system,” or to knowledge as possession or full presence, literature will be defined as that which is disruptive of closure and productive of (sexual, racial, historical, etc.) difference, as the province of desire, displacement, delay, deferral, or lack. In an analogy that is apposite here, Mary Bittner Wiseman takes Roland Barthes’s partly autobiographical essay on photography (*La chambre claire*) as a long excursus on that kind of writing which subverts philosophical discourse. What Barthes

calls the “scandal” of photography lies in its transgression of the customary association of the real with the present by virtue of the fact that this apparently realistic art can testify only to the past existence of objects. Photography thus also undermines the Cartesian notions of the self as subject and of the world as its representation, which the notion of presence underwrites. It is more closely related to the Diderotian aesthetics of the gesture, the performance, and the *tableau vivant* than to classical (Cartesian) representation. As Barthes says, representation suppresses performance, just as it also suppresses the gesture and the mask: “representation is when nothing emerges, when nothing leaps out of the frame: of the picture, the book, the screen.”

Photography is thus the radicalization of writing (and, in particular, of modern writing) because in it signs are removed from the assertive field of force on which philosophical discourse depends and in which they are used to enjoin belief. Like theatricalized writing, its signs are acted, or perhaps more accurately, they are performed. And yet the camera lens is not an extension of the human eye; its role is neither to humanize the world nor (what amounts to the same thing) to reproduce through light the point of the subject’s gaze. Rather, the mode of photography is that of an automatism; it is a mode of automatic writing with light in which it has proved possible to achieve something that literature itself could not: the decentering of the physical world and of the material presence of objects before the lens.

This extreme form of writing is valuable as an image of what literature might be were it fully to clear free of those constraints that “philosophy” imposes on it. In the absence of such a limit-case, however, the history of literature has been intricately bound up with those concepts (e.g., “author,” “representation,” “intention”) which the Platonic and Cartesian notions of “presence” and “subjectivity” found. Accordingly, the majority of the contributors to this volume are more circumspect in their projects. Rather than concentrate on that moment in which the human is eclipsed, in which both “literature” and “philosophy” are transformed into (automatic) writing, and in which the modern is overtaken by postmodernism, they devote themselves to the intermediate-range tasks of revising, clarifying, and purifying the central range of concepts in terms of which the relationship of literature to philosophy has historically been viewed. In the concluding essay of this collection, Berel Lang describes postmodernism as that age in which nothing is above suspicion; in another description, it is the age in which nothing is beyond belief. The essays that precede his are themselves the products of postmodernism insofar as they take up with

healthy suspicion the questions of hermeneutics (Dutton, Nehamas, Rosen), ethics (Altieri, Cascardi, Nussbaum), and aesthetics (Cascardi, Halliburton, Nussbaum); but none of these places literature in a position that inherently contravenes the demands of philosophical belief.

Alexander Nehamas, for instance, breaks with the Foucauldian will to dispense altogether with such concepts as "work" and "author" by arguing that these may coherently be understood as the constructs of interpretation, rather than as absolute points of departure for it. Authorship may not follow the model of "knowledge as possession," and the author may not be the sole proprietor of the meaning of his words; he may be considered as an "artificial person," which is to say as a character who acts in the production and reception of texts. But he may also be reconstructed as a plausible variant of who the writer may historically have been. In a related essay, Denis Dutton demonstrates the uncanny resilience of the concept of "intention" and its importance for the construction of almost any reasonable account of the meaning of a work. Yet at the same time he seeks to specify the legitimate field over which such a concept may be applied, in this case by broadening it beyond the province claimed for it by romanticism. If "romantic intentionalism" conceives the artist first and foremost as one who speaks, and as one whose words thereby have the meaning with which he alone invests them, then Dutton follows Wittgenstein far enough to say that the picture of meaning as a function of intention, and of intention as an inner, subjective state, must be replaced by the notion that meaning is accessible through public and historical conventions and rules. Dutton breaks with standard conventionalism at roughly the point where Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations* speaks about the folly of seeking rules for following conventions and rules. At this point, the knowledge accessible through a familiarity with the rules reaches its limit: contravention of the rules can no longer be described as an instance of error within the framework of the rules, but only as choosing the inappropriate set of rules, as stepping into the wrong (hermeneutic) circle. Consider Peter McCormick's essay once again in this regard. In the effort to distinguish fictional from philosophical texts, one proceeds from a search for an exhaustive list of the markers characteristic of each class of texts to a search for a single rule (a "law of genre") for the interpretation of the significance of these differences. But since neither such a list of differences nor such a law for their interpretation can be formulated theoretically, it is more profitable to think of "genre" as a function of the natural sense of types and kinds, a product of the intuitive rather than the theoretical mind.

The example of Wittgenstein has often been invoked in support of the “antitheoretical” program of contemporary literary criticism, but as several of the essays in this volume suggest, theory can never entirely be repressed. Consider in this regard Stanley Rosen’s essay, “The Limits of Interpretation.” Rosen conducts a strenuous argument not so much against the notion of “theory” as in favor of the proposition that theory necessarily has limits. He suggests that a theory of interpretation, qua theory, with the features of coherence and closure, is impossible to achieve and must be supplemented by something akin to the “natural sense” mentioned above (e.g., intuition or insight). If one thinks along Wittgensteinian lines, the question that theory proves unable to answer is *what to do* once we have reached the heights (or the depths) marked out by silence and the theoretical “ladder” has been thrown away. Or, if one thinks along more strictly metaphysical lines and chooses Hegelian terms, the question remains that of how to gain an absolute entrance into the Absolute; yet, despite its will to closure and its remarkable powers of totalization, this is the question that Hegelianism does not address. As Rosen says, the problem is not with theory (or “method”) as such but with our attitude toward it: the metaphysics of method, which receives its canonical formulation in Descartes, is, in Rosen’s words, “the attempt to replace the judicious selection of methods by a comprehensive method of selection. In the case of hermeneutics, it is the attempt to replace or to fortify the judgment of the reader with a methodology for the selection of methods of reading.” The search for method, and the reliance on the (scientific) conception of knowledge as the possession of the foundations of truth, manifest themselves as a loss of faith in what Husserl in *Ideas* and Northrop Frye in connection with Shakespearean comedy and romance have each called the “natural” perspective. My own essay on “romantic” responses to Kant works toward a recovery of the natural along related lines. This requires surpassing the appeal to a “pre-theoretical” attitude, just as it also requires transcending the Wittgensteinian conception of knowledge as the “post-theoretical” familiarity with tacit rules, which ultimately issues in silence. Rather, I regard the natural as at once an epistemological, a moral, and an aesthetic project, and I propose that for romanticism, at least, it may be understood as an articulation of the self in its relations with the world and with others which goes beyond the sublime.

The notion of a sublime rooted in idealism which at some point gives way to the natural is imaged in those “forms of life” in which we are able to know everything about others that we can and in which we

are free to pursue whatever forms of passionate attachment to others such knowledge would allow. It corresponds on the aesthetic and moral planes to that point at which theory must be supplemented by practical wisdom or prudence. These latter terms are central to Martha Nussbaum's essay on literature as a form of moral imagination. Based largely on a reading of Henry James's *Golden Bowl*, Nussbaum's analysis of the relationship between literature and moral philosophy relies on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and on the contrast between scientific knowledge and prudential wisdom presented there. If scientific knowledge consists, in Aristotle's words, in "judgment about things that are universal and necessary" and follows from "first principles" (1140B), then practical wisdom offers proof of the fact that antifoundationalism does not necessarily issue in skepticism, nihilism, or the anxieties of indeterminacy. Practical wisdom is a reasoned state (although not only a reasoned state); it is a virtue, and if it does not admit of demonstration this is because the very objects of its knowledge—human goods—are things whose first principles are variable. With this basis in Aristotle more or less understood, Nussbaum succeeds in showing that literature in general, and the novel in particular, may be considered as a form of moral philosophy. Insofar as the tasks of morality call for *phronēsis*, or practical wisdom, and rely on a range of activities customarily associated with the "aesthetic" (e.g., vision, imagination, attention, and insight), they are exemplarily fulfilled by the novelist.

The range of moral action which Nussbaum discusses in terms of practical wisdom is taken up toward rather different ends in Charles Altieri's essay on the relationship between literary theory and "expressivist ethics." With reference to the contemporary projects of such thinkers as Stanley Cavell, Alasdair MacIntyre, Robert Nozick, Angel Medina, and Charles Taylor, Altieri begins by distinguishing the claims of the ethical from those of the moral. If the moral in Kantian philosophy is marked as that region in which all subjects are treated under a rubric of equivalence, and if the moral agent is correspondingly recognized by the capacity to generalize the "I," then the ethical addresses the question of how the empirical subject chooses his or her own good. In its appeal to Wittgenstein's delimitation of the ethical by the "aesthetic," i.e. by the peculiar modalities in which personal (ethical) identity is modeled and engaged, this outline of an "expressivist" ethic crosses the boundary between pure and practical reason which troubled Kant. By confronting the question of how the "I" disposes the will, which defines its particular hold on the world, the notion of an

expressivist ethic is powerful enough to embrace the Wittgensteinian critique of subjectivity without at the same time being drawn into pure anticognitivism or into an "antitheoretical" stance.

At several points in the essays that follow, the interests of literature and philosophy cross over into the realm of aesthetics. Signal instances occur in the studies of Nussbaum and Altieri and in my own essay, "Romantic Responses to Kant." Yet the aesthetic as such is given special foregrounding in David Halliburton's theory of "constitution": "Endowment, Enablement, Entitlement." Written in a spirit that owes something to Kenneth Burke, Halliburton begins from the pragmatism of C. S. Peirce and proceeds to demonstrate what it might mean to substitute a metaphysics that puts aesthetics in first place for one that takes epistemology as "first philosophy." Epistemology is conveniently described as the theory of knowledge, and as Heidegger has said, since Descartes and Kant a theory of knowledge has preceded a theory of the world. What Halliburton intends by "constitution," then, is a response to Cartesian and Kantian metaphysics and to their Platonic underpinnings, for it is not a "theory of knowledge" but a "theory of the world." When Plato described the relationship between the realm of appearances and that of ideas, he described a "founding" relationship in which the visible world is subordinated to the realm that transcends it and that it reflects. Following Heidegger in "The Question Concerning Technology" (and, implicitly, the Nietzschean revolt against Platonism, which Heidegger takes up), Halliburton recalls that the Platonic notion of *eidōs* on which this understanding of "foundations" is based was itself the product of a reversal in that thinking according to which the *eidōs* was regarded as the outward aspect that a visible thing presents to the eye. Insofar as Halliburton follows Heidegger and Nietzsche in their "aesthetic" critique of Platonism, the position that he outlines is "antifoundational," while it is "foundational" as well. More accurately, it seeks to replace a theory of "foundation by ideas" with a theory of "foundation by functions," or, as Kenneth Burke might have said, with a theory of "ratios," of which that of "endowing" (founding) is itself one.

Halliburton's recollection of the importance of the aesthetic at an early juncture in his essay leads to a reconsideration of "foundational" thought and thus complements the revision of foundationalism carried out by a number of the authors represented in this book. Taken together, their work may be regarded as a large-scale response to the proposition that the rejection of foundationalism must lead to an anti-theoretical posture. Collectively, this work shows that the theoretical

impulse of contemporary literary theory has been transformed into an inquest of literature by philosophy, and that literature, rather than theory, itself constitutes a philosophical inquest. Philosophy has shown that at some point theory reaches its limit and is eclipsed by (literary) practice. For its part, literature has taught that “philosophy” can no longer be conceived as the enterprise that Descartes, Kant, and Hegel described as the search for totalizing theories of knowledge or of the Absolute. If the essays gathered here may be taken as proof, literature and philosophy are not separable enterprises, and the dialogue that they constitute is not about to end.

Contents

	Acknowledgments	vii
	Introduction	ix
	<i>Anthony J. Cascardi</i>	
1	Philosophy as/and/of Literature	1
	<i>Arthur C. Danto</i>	
2	Philosophy and Poetry: The Difference between Them in Plato and Descartes	24
	<i>Dalia Judovitz</i>	
3	Philosophical Discourses and Fictional Texts	52
	<i>Peter McCormick</i>	
4	Levels of Discourse in Plato's Dialogues	75
	<i>Harry Berger, Jr.</i>	
5	From the Sublime to the Natural: Romantic Responses to Kant	101
	<i>Anthony J. Cascardi</i>	
6	From Expressivist Aesthetics to Expressivist Ethics	132
	<i>Charles Altieri</i>	
7	"Finely Aware and Richly Responsible": Literature and the Moral Imagination	167
	<i>Martha Craven Nussbaum</i>	
8	Why Intentionalism Won't Go Away	192
	<i>Denis Dutton</i>	
9	The Limits of Interpretation	210
	<i>Stanley Rosen</i>	
10	Endowment, Enablement, Entitlement: Toward a Theory of Constitution	242
	<i>David Halliburton</i>	
11	Writer, Text, Work, Author	265
	<i>Alexander Nehamas</i>	

12	Rewriting the Self: Barthes and the Utopias of Language	292
	<i>Mary Bittner Wiseman</i>	
13	Postmodernism in Philosophy: Nostalgia for the Future, Waiting for the Past	314
	<i>Berel Lang</i>	
	Notes on Contributors	333

I Philosophy as/and/of Literature

What are the boundaries between philosophy and literature? What would it mean to see the philosophical corpus as composed of (literary) texts or, conversely, to take a philosophical interest in literature? At a time when literary theory has widened the notion of "text" to include virtually any cultural artifact, it comes as little surprise to regard philosophy too as a form of writing. And yet such a move stands at a sharp angle to the prevailing thrust of analytical philosophy, which, as Arthur Danto characterizes it, has sought to align itself with the sciences and to dissociate itself from the arts. Philosophers are taught to direct their interest to the arguments of Plato's dialogues or Descartes's *Meditations* (arguments that may, it is suggested, be reduced to logical formulae), which means that the dialogic, meditational, and other "literary" features of these works of philosophy are bound to be dismissed. But would the reinterpretation of philosophy as a form of literature have any significant philosophical impact? This is a question that must necessarily be left suspended until something further can be said about what it might mean to take a text *literarily*, which, as Danto discusses in the final portion of his essay, involves answering questions about the nature of reading. (Cf. Harry Berger, Jr.'s, essay on levels of discourse in Plato's dialogues, which may be taken as a further investigation into what it might mean to view works of philosophy as texts, and also Dalia Judovitz's essay on Plato and Descartes, which takes up the problem of the distinction of philosophy and literature as seen from within two seminal philosophical texts.)

When analytical philosophy has seriously addressed the question of literature, the problem of fictional reference has been its principal concern. In discussing fictional reference here, Danto does not aim at new solutions. His purpose is rather to suggest that philosophical interest in literature is not exhausted in the semantic relationship between litera-

ture and the world. Semantic theories of reference succeed, Danto says, at the expense of distorting the world; its candidate referenda are “as bizarre a menagerie of imaginabilia as the fancy of man has framed.” They limit literature’s possible connections to the world to such (semantic) matters as reference, truth, instantiation, exemplification, and satisfaction, whereas the place of literature could only adequately be measured by some account of its persistent importance to cultures across time. Semantic explanations of literary reference are, moreover, versions of what contemporary literary theory has roundly condemned as the Referential Fallacy. From this view, which Danto wishes to show is both incomplete and extreme, literature does not refer to reality at all, but at best refers only to other literature. Thus, a concept of intertextuality is advanced “according to which a literary work is to be understood, so far as referentiality facilitates understanding, only in terms of other works a given work refers to, so that no one equipped with less than the literary culture of the writer up for interpretation can be certain of having understood the work at all.” If analytical philosophy, which centers on the problem of reference, can be said to view the text “vertically,” then the intertextualist may correspondingly be said to view the text “horizontally.” Danto urges that these axes be supplemented by a third, the axis of the reader, if we are to produce an account that might do justice to the importance of literature in our lives.

Danto’s essay is marked throughout by a concern for the relevance of literature, which goes unaccounted in both the analytical-semantic and the intertextual accounts. As he says at one point, “Literature seems to have something important to do with our lives, important enough that the study of it should form an essential part of our educational program.” It is the problem of the relevance of literature, over and above the problem of literary reference (seen either semantically or intertextually), which Danto tackles in the final section of his essay. He does so by appealing to the fact that texts may be said in some significant way to be meant for the reader: each reader of a text, each “I” who reads, is activated (some might want to say “engaged”) by the text as a *particular* “I,” so that each text may be said to be about the reader. Here, the thrust of Danto’s argument overlaps with Sartre’s in *What Is Literature?* and with the theories of *Rezeptionsaesthetik* and reader-response produced more recently by Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss. The novel suggestion of Danto’s essay in relation to their work lies in its final appeal to the philosophical text, as modeled on Descartes’s *Meditations*, “where the reader is forced to co-meditate