Introduction

I.

As a pair, dialectic and narrative seem to reflect the respective inclinations of philosophy and literature as disciplines that fix one another in a Sartrean gaze, admixing envy with suspicion. Ever since Plato and Aristotle distinguished scientific knowledge (*episteme*) from opinion (*doxa*) and valuated demonstration through formal and final causes over emplotment (*mythos*), the palm has been awarded to dialectic as the proper instrument of rational discourse, the arbiter of coherence, consistency, and ultimately of truth.

But the matter becomes more complicated when we recognize the various uses of the term *dialectic* in the tradition. In addition to being synonymous with logic in general, it was held by the ancients to be a specific form of reasoning, one that (1) began from received opinion and/or argued to simultaneously contradictory conclusions, a form that (2) constituted a logic of questioning or of testing hypotheses, or a kind of reasoning that (3) established the conditions for inductive discovery of the first principles of a science. With Hegel and the Marxists, "dialectic" becomes the logic of process, where contradiction is not a sign of defeat but the prod for advancing toward higher viewpoints—a temporalizing and totalizing form of reasoning that subsumes the Aristotelian-Kantian logic of understanding as a dynamic whole sublates its static parts. In the following essays, "dialectic" is employed in both its ancient and its modern, Hegelian usages. At one level of the discussion, the very traditions that inform its meanings and its legacies to modernism and postmodernism will be at issue.

Philosophy has traditionally claimed a critical autonomy denied to other disciplines. Its search for "ultimate principles, causes, and reasons," as one voice of the tradition would put it, or its "second-level" position, to quote another voice, affords it the superiority that comes from distinguishing truth from opinion, *episteme* from *doxa* (always "as such"), along with the self-questioning and detachment that accompany this stance. But the form/content distinction, on which this autonomy relies and that warrants the discipline of "formal" logic, is itself questioned and subsumed in modern dialectic and, with it, the adequacy of the contrast drawn between philosophy and what has come to known as "literature."

Moreover, *pace* Aristotle, the philosophical rage for abstract coherence has itself repressed a drive to construct a philosophy of the concrete, one revived in the existential phenomenological movement of the twentieth century. One has only to recall the emotion Sartre expressed at being informed by Raymond Aron of a method (Husserl's) that would enable him to philosophize about the cocktail sitting before them.[1] This urge testifies to a sense felt by certain philosophers of the inadequacy of their own discipline as traditionally conceived. In our day, for example, this malaise may appear as the experienced limit of formalization before the paradox of revisionist denials of the Holocaust. Recent interest in the philosophical use of narrative discourse may be seen as another variation on this theme of the appetite for a philosophy of the concrete. But with this interest, exhibited by the essays in the present volume, the adequacy of the dialectic/narrative dichotomy tends to be undermined and with it, perhaps, the distinction between philosophy and literature as disciplines.

Narrative, after all, is usually processful, temporalizing, and totalizing, as is Hegelian dialectic. In fact, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit,* the paradigm of dialectical thought in modern times, not without reason has been characterized as a *Bildungsroman.* Given that narrative is often multilevel and, when required, can be self-critical as well, the similarity of its argument to that of dialectic may be very strong. This is especially plausible when what Charles Taylor calls the "richer" concept of 'rationality' supplants the notion of rationality as logical consistency propounded by formal logicians.[2] Indeed, the concomitant questioning of the distinction between philosophy and literature has become a characteristic of postmodern thought.

Two philosophers in this collection address this comparative issue directly. Though scarcely wishing to collapse philosophy into literature or vice versa, each points out the rationalistic presupposition operative in traditional attempts to link philosophy exclusively with dialectic and literature (art) with narrative (nonliteral truth). They correctly

underscore the decisive role that philosophy has played in setting the norm for what counts as "knowledge" or "truth," thereby guaranteeing its own legitimacy. The obvious circularity of this move has often been noted by philosophers but politely set aside as one of the unavoidable hazards of epistemology. After all, it is argued, to what else can one appeal in defense of knowledge except knowledge itself?[3] Implicit in what follows is the charge that this ostensible "bad faith" blinds philosophy to its own rich heritage of myth and narrative while impoverishing its dealings with itself and the world.

Thus far we have drawn the contrast between philosophy and literature along the axes of the abstract/concrete. One could also state it in terms of the true/fictive, as some in this volume do. But others, including the poststructuralists and those who are students of the movement, address the contrast in the language of representation/nonrepresentation. This last gives the discussion a totally new focus, while viewing the issue of philosophy and literature from yet another perspective. It circumvents the traditional issue of sense and reference that has captured the attention of analytic and phenomenological philosophers throughout this century. If the representational adequacy of language is in question, then so too is the ability of prosaic philosophy to capture or mirror the real. The Sartrean distinction between "poetry" and "prose" (*What is Literature?*) is likewise in jeopardy and with it the distinction between the imaginary and the real, the fictive and the true. This struggle between representation and language can also be seen as the contemporary heir to the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry, mentioned at the outset.

Placed in the context of Foucault's *The Order of Things,* the representational limits of language do not seem to be shared by praxis or by art. Or even by ethics, as the following discussion of the ethically ambiguous role of metaphor in narrative will propose. In fact, we shall see it suggested that Brecht's theater would sublate the very distinction between praxis and art. Does this snatch the palm from philosophy and confer it on literature in our day? Foucault would scarcely agree. To the extent that awards are expected for ultimacy, primacy, or irrefragability (Descartes), Foucault would simply avoid the contest. But "the so-called crisis of representation," as Fredric Jameson terms it, has become another hallmark of postmodernist thought.

Heidegger's implicit critique of representationalism and its attendant questioning of the normative primacy of philosophy-metaphysics, emerges from his meditations on truth as uncoveredness (*aletheia*). We shall see that he mounts this criticism explicitly in his essay, "The Age of the World Picture," while formulating a related critique in his highly influential "The Origin of the Work of Art." If the distinction

between philosophy and literature is being questioned in these texts by Heidegger as well, it is in terms of a "poetic" way of dwelling in the world that avoids or, better, precedes the distinction rather than denying or covering it over. And this occurs in the midst of a linguistic turn, albeit one, as we have noted, that does not revolve around the sense/reference dichotomy. Rather, his famous *Kehre* calls the very notion of referential adequacy into question. In fact, we shall see it argued that Heidegger's "turn" continues from language to music, the least representational of the arts.

The often gray but sometimes stark presence of Heidegger throughout this collection is apparent from the outset. It is the explicit object of consideration in several essays, most of which set the discussion in a political framework. Indeed, since the appearance of the controversial documentation of Heidegger's continued association with the National Socialist German Workers' Party, one has scarcely been able to separate the philosophical from the political and the moral in his abstract thought. This very concrete difficulty articulates the postmodern challenge to the ideal of a "pure" philosophy. Such a generalization of the "Heidegger problem" exhibits a thesis dear to existentialist thinkers for decades, but one not readily accepted by many parties to either side of this controversy, namely, the claim that abstract, disinterested, uncommitted consciousness (*la conscience de survol*) is in bad faith. In the very least, this "problematizes" the philosophical "as such."[4]

Only a quartet of the following essays deals with the ethico-political dimension of Heidegger's work. But the larger issue of the adequacy of representational thinking, where Heidegger's influence has been pervasive and profound, as well as the concomitant matter of the distinction between philosophical and literary discourse, is not far removed from any of the articles in this volume.

Shifting to yet another perspective, if one reads the dispute between ancients and moderns, between philosophy and poetry, in terms of reason and will, respectively, as Leo Strauss and Stanley Rosen do, then the ascendancy of psychoanalytic discourse can be read as a properly modernist phenomenon and its Lacanian heresy, a postmodernist deviation. Of course, neither Strauss nor Rosen would have much use for either the modern or its deviant offspring. Presumably, both would cite in support of their diagnosis the nominalist and correspondingly voluntarist strains in postmodern thought, an affliction that has always plagued philosophy in the West inasmuch as it has aspired to be a series of footnotes to Plato.

And this reminds us of a second brooding presence in this volume, namely, the so-called French Freud. Psychoanalysis, as a paradigmatically modernist phenomenon, takes the relationship be-

tween dialectic and narrative to be in some respects complementary. Some contributors to this volume acknowledge, at least by implication, their close, if problematic, interrelation. This is expressed, for instance, by relying on a Lacanian account of the origin of the subject, where the contrast is fixed in terms of the imaginary and the symbolic. Whether one claims a Heideggerian "equiprimordiality" for the imaginary and the symbolic or sees a "transmodal" dialectic at work between them, an uneasy, even agonistic, relationship of Lacanian inspiration seems to be acknowledged between the imaginary and the symbolic in diverse cases. Without succumbing to anachronism, one might even extend this Lacanian reading into Adorno's confrontation between literal and artistic truth.

Yet some contributors will underscore the "non-dialectical thinking and non-narrative writing characteristic of postmodernity." To the extent that dialectic and narrative are paradigms of philosophy and "literature" respectively, this claim resonates with the questioning of the end of philosophy that postmodern thinkers have revived, linking it with the corresponding question of the end of literature. What remains? Presumably writing (*l'écriture*) and discourse. Yet even these are chastened by the postmodernist warning to resist "colonization" by various ideologies afoot.

An important issue resting in the wings of these discussions but, unfortunately, not brought to center stage, is that of the contrast between the modern and the postmodern in terms of the valorization of *time* and *space* respectively. To the extent that dialectic and narrative are inextricably bound to temporal sequence, as Sartre, for example, seems to think, their fate appears to rest with that of modernism. On the contrary, inasmuch as one can successfully translate their "arguments" into agonistic relations, diacritical reasoning, and atemporal "plots" (Paul Veyne's *intrigues,* for example),[5] the relative future of dialectic and narrative may be assured, but perhaps at the price of their sharp mutual distinction, if not their very identities. And the consequence of this move for the contrast between philosophy and "literature" is again problematic.

If Heidegger's and Lacan's presences pervade this collection, one glimpses the shadow of Max Weber as well. It hovers over these essays and, indeed, across the entire debate about modernity. His concept of objective possibility, typically intellectualized, seems to lie at the base of Blumenberg's method of reoccupation, for example, and his famous theses about a disenchanted and rationalized society anticipate discussions of instrumental truths, mythic values, and poetic verities that occur in the articles that follow. The secularization thesis, which Blumenberg questions, serves to help characterize modernity.

The tripartite division of value spheres, which Habermas adopts as being characteristically modern, is, of course, explicitly Weberian. And the ultimate inconclusiveness and ambiguity of Weber's own position regarding modernity seems to be shared by several authors in this volume. Of course, the willingness to live with ambiguity is emerging as yet another criterion of the postmodern, one notably anticipated by Merleau-Ponty.[6]

Weber, Heidegger, Foucault, and other harbingers of postmodernity read the by now obviously multifaceted problem of modernity as an issue of *truth and rationality*. The famous debate between Habermas, representing the values of modernity, and Gadamer, upholding a contextualism often associated with the postmodern—though Gadamer would find the link uncongenial—this confrontation is symptomatic of the underlying contrast between a universalizing philosophy and a relativizing literature that has haunted us since the ancient Greeks. Whether one defends a Habermasian position, opts for hermeneutics or finds Blumenberg charting an attractive "middle way" between the two, though scarcely a *via media* between the modern and the postmodern, defenders of each alternative are represented here. There are some, moreover, who, while exhibiting a cautious sympathy for Habermas, would finally side with the (non)position of postmodernism. We place the negative in parentheses to be used *ad libitum,* according as one's negations are "determinate" or free-floating, that is, "Hegelian," if you will, or Freudian.

The uneasy mutual relationship that dialectic and narrative exhibit both in the essays that follow and in the discourse that has come to be known as "postmodern" is symptomatic of that discourse itself. What is being generated is not so much an identity crisis as a *crisis of identity,* Parmenides awash yet again in the Heraclitian stream. More disconcerting still (or is *exhilarating* the word?), is the fact that we seem to be experiencing a *crisis of criteria*. Perhaps the attraction of postmodern "dialectic" (if that is not a *contradictio in adjecto*) is its unwillingness to come to closure or, better, its recognition of closure only in the willing it. The corresponding appeal of narrative might well lie not so much in its retrospective necessities as in its (uncritical?) tolerance. In any case, reflection on dialectic and narrative affords us both a promising perspective from which to view the problem of postmodernity and an especially fruitful instrument for probing the boundaries between philosophy and literature while engaging in both.

II.

It has become almost a truism by now to note the demise of the novel and, by extension, the decline of traditional forms of narration. At

issue is less the disappearance of literature than the fact that the literary forms of the past are being supplanted by experimental genres that challenge the definition and bounds of fictional narrative. Although high modernism (embodied in such figures as Proust, Joyce, and Woolf) may involve the breakdown of traditional narrative modes as well as the identity of consciousness, it still presents us with a familiar image of literature because of its experiential character. Contemporary culture displays an assortment of literary forms, a veritable menu within which one must note the predominance of historical, biographical, and nonfictional works, to the detriment of fictional narrative. This is less a symptom of the decline of fiction than, as this volume will show, a sign that its persistence is translated into narrative modes that are no longer readily classifiable and culturally assimilable.

Before addressing in more detail the status of narrative in a postmodern culture, its apparent illegibility and marginality, it is useful to recall Walter Benjamin's comments on the decline of the art of storytelling in the modern age.[7] At issue is less the nostalgia for an art that appears to have reached its end than the fact that this phenomenon corresponds to a shift in sensibility engendered by the emergence of mechanical modes of reproduction. The decay of the art of storytelling is connected by Benjamin to the demise of an epic conception of truth. Rather than viewing this phenomenon as a symptom of the modern age, Benjamin understands it as an effect of the secularizing forces of history that predate the emergence of modernity. The removal of narrative from the realm of living speech corresponds to the rise of the novel and its dissemination through print. The emergence of mechanical forms of reproduction replaces traditional means of communicating and exchanging experiences. Rather than functioning merely as a "symptom of decay," or specifically, as a symptom of the "modern," the disappearance of the art of storytelling signals shifts in cultural sensibility engendered by the continued intervention of technical modes of production. The debates that fuel the effort to distinguish modernity and postmodernity may, in light of Benjamin's observations, be understood as the effort to come to terms with the radical redefinition of artistic modes of production as artistic modes of reproduction.

According to Benjamin, what differentiates the novel from other forms of prose literature is that "it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it." However, the autonomy of the novel as a medium of representation is menaced today by the proliferation of information in both print and visual media. Information embodies new forms of communication whose mass accessibility and consumption is made possible by means of mechanical reproduction. It seems that the fate of

both oral and written narrative is sealed by the preponderance of information, whose seeming immediacy, verifiability, and plausibility undermine the authority of narrative experience as a subjective and communicative event. The demise of communicable experience is underlined by Benjamin when he cites the experience of the veterans coming home from the First World War: "Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent—not richer, but poorer in communicable experiences? . . . For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power."[8]

This poverty of communicable experience marks the decline of experience, its value and efficacity as narrative account. It seems that experience can no longer function as an adequate reflection of human life, since it is upstaged by events whose massive, disruptive, and overwhelming character contradict it and ultimately undermine its legitimacy. Experienced through the immediacy of newspaper accounts and photographs, the authority of information supplants by its verifiability the legitimacy of personal experience. The spatial and temporal space of narration, which relies on a mediating distance, is upstaged by the illusory objectivity of information, which seems to be, to quote Benjamin "understandable in itself." We now begin to understand how personal experience gives way to information, just as narrative forms may cease to function as an adequate representation of events. Thus the poverty of communicable experience in the modern age reflects not the dearth of information but rather its unremitting immediacy and uncontainable excess.

If the novel no longer provides an adequate or even plausible account of experience, does this limitation extend to narrative as a whole? Given Benjamin's contention that information upstages narration, since it "lays claim to prompt verifiability," how are we to conceptualize its impact on and transformation of narrative modes? The answers to these questions will prove to be indispensable to our discussion of narrative, its paradoxical decline, and also its renewed potential in contemporary culture. The essays in this volume provide us with road marks, which enable us to see that the question of narrative is no less strategic to an understanding of antiquity or the Renaissance than is to an understanding of our own age. As this volume suggests, narrative as a genre has been in dispute since its definitions in antiquity. Its adequacy and persuasive capabilities, as a mode of representation as well as its organization as a structured sequence of events, have been at issue from its very origins in myth.

Starting with Aristotle's critique of myth in *Metaphysics,* the utility of mythic narrative as a cognitive mode has been challenged by the emergence of dialectical modes of thought. Narrative appears to have been supplanted by other discursive forms of expression, such as the Platonic dialogues. However, the Platonic dialogue, as the platform of "dialectical philosophy," is also considered, since Nietzsche, to be the model for a surprising new offspring, the novel. Thus dialectic and narrative are intertwined, even as we attempt to define them exclusive of each other. It is unclear whether the critique of myth in antiquity signals the actual demise of narrative or merely a transformation in the way it is conceived. This latter contention is addressed in this volume by exploring the sophist Gorgias's understanding of mythic narratives as ideological formations. For Gorgias, myth no longer serves as the locus of epic knowledge; rather, its significance lies in its rhetorical function as a series of embedded narratives of persuasion.

Does the fact that mythic narrative appears to lose its hold as a privileged mode of representation imply that narrative structure is threatened as well? A quick glance at Aristotle's *Poetics* reveals that myth returns, albeit under a different guise. For *mythos* now designates the essence of dramatic genre as the representation of action or plot. However, the identification of narrative organization with the structure of *mythos* (a properly dramatic function), conflates narrative and dramatic forms. The critical discussions that surround the emergence of the novel as a genre in the seventeenth century announce the redefinition of narrative concerns according to dramatic principles. In the French context, the formal definition of drama in terms of the *three unities* (of plot, place, and time), impacts on the definition of narrative, its criteria of verisimilitude and plausibility. Novelistic narrative becomes subject to conventions that seek to organize it according to a coherent system that subsumes character, plot, place, and time. Like an axis of coordinates, the coincidence of these terms generates prototypes for modern subjectivity, understood as a network where agency, experience, and identity are inextricably melded together. Staging the confluence of being and existence, novelistic narrative conjures through its dramatic structure the haunting specters of reality, subjectivity, and communicable experience, that is, the constitutive elements of identity and consciousness that define the cultural mythologies of modernism.

But, as M. M. Bakhtin's history of the novel suggests, the capacity of narrative to integrate other discursive modes and genres opens up the possibility of conceiving narrative as a "dialogical" space.[9] Defined by its permeability to modal frontiers, narrative emerges as a process of decoding and recoding, which explains its fundamental instability

as a genre. This is why narrative may also be identified with those moments where it seems to depart most from its own character. For instance, narrative may be most ethical when it is most suspect, since moral referents rely upon narrative and generic conventions that may shift or even be totally undermined in the course of a work. The generic and narrative instability of the modern novel reflects its double origins. For the birth of the novel, in the modern sense, corresponds to the emergence of the anti-novel, that is, with the emergence of parody as an autonomous literary genre.[10] Parody represents an alternative and parallel tradition to the development of the novel as a proper form. Parody is not simply imitation or mimicry of a style or linguistic mannerisms, nor is it merely a satirical copy of another work. Rather, it embodies a dialogic conception of the novelistic genre, based on the transmodalizing features of narrative.

This brief discussion of parody enables us to reassess Fredric Jameson's claim that postmodernity is best defined in terms of pastiche, as opposed to parody.[11] Pastiche is "blank parody," a type of mimicry that has lost its satirical impulse, that appeals to different artistic conventions without recognizing their normative character. While pastiche, like parody, deliberately manipulates artistic conventions, it differs from it insofar as it scrambles these codes without any regard to their historical specificity. By assembling in one work the signatory trademarks of various artistic conventions, pastiche fakes history by reassembling it without regard to its specificity. Its facticity relies on the actual dismissal of history. Pastiche treats convention as information and thereby liquidates the historical content of tradition, whereas parody resists such reduction, since it posits an active dialogue between convention and information. Since parody takes as its subject matter the formal conventions that define narrative, it redefines the narrative process as a function of its dialogical and transmodalizing features. Thus parody provides us with a conceptual insight into the strategies that characterize postmodernism as a medium for information. The conscious manipulation of novelistic codes, which defines the transcriptive and transcoding function of parody, reveals the mechanisms that underline both the production and the reproduction of systems of information. In so doing, parody challenges the order of representation by deliberately staging its "ready-made" character.

This rapid consideration of the issues by a dialogic conception of narrative reveals and by no means exhausts the problematic status of narrative for both philosophy and literature. In the current philosophical debates regarding modernity and postmodernity, narrative has been under siege because of its perceived complicity with philosophical

discourse in the guise of "master narratives of legitimation" (Lyotard). The critique of the hegemony of dialectical reason corresponds to a crisis of logic in philosophy, which poststructuralism, in particular, explores in terms of the limits of formalization. Such an exploration both reveals the difficulty of dissociating dialectic and narrative (Fredric Jameson and Hayden White), and attests to the effort to rethink narrative itself as a strategic site of contestation, of competing forms of discourse and, thus, of logical and rhetorical positions. Hence the style of the essays in this volume attempts to combine philosophical and literary concerns. Whether identified as a critique "internal" to modernity or as a position that exceeds the constraints of modernity, the discussions of postmodernity in this volume suggest a fundamental revaluation of the notion of philosophical critique in the wake of dialectics. Emerging within a field of contesting modernities, could it be that the philosophical articulation of postmodernity might share the transmodalizing features of narrative? If that is the case, the strategic and positional nature of philosophical discourse comes into evidence as a dialogical contestation of its own generic and cognitive limits.

The illegibility of postmodern narrative thus reflects the transformation of the novel as a vehicle for the communication of experience into a medium whose communicative structure is challenged by the advent of information and its consumption as mass-media culture. The effort to classify postmodern narrative must take into account how information as a medium challenges narrative forms and conventions. Works by such authors as William Burroughs, J. G. Ballard, and Don Delillo represent the disruptive and explosive impact of information upon communicable experience. Information, in the guise of systems or networks that substitute their "ready-made" logic for the reality of consciousness, replaces experience. In this context, narrative no longer represents a capacity for fictionalization, a representation of the self in the exterior world, since information implodes this fictional space. Information thus erodes the representational potential of narrative by challenging the ability of fiction to contain and frame it. The space of postmodern narrative is no longer the alternative space of fiction but the space of information where fiction is the only alternative. By exploring the limits of fiction, postmodern narrative restages the facticity of information. In the wake of dialectics, philosophy must face the challenge that narrative assumes as it explores the limits of communicability in the age of information.