Introduction

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Perhaps the most useful way to introduce a volume of original essays devoted to the relation of Kant's critical philosophy to critical literary studies is to clarify, first, the bases of Kant's own thoroughly original conception of the necessity to introduce criticism into philosophy. References to "critical thinking" having long descended into empty gestures, the contents of their replacement by the rapidly changing themes of "post-critical thought" have proven no less difficult to pin down. Not knowing what it is one pretends to supersede makes of any such pretense a double regression, the obviation not only of what was already there to begin with but, moreover, why it was. For this historical reason especially, the actual content and motivation, or "what" and "why," of Kant's foundational criticism of all previous philosophical assumptions is well worth laying bare now.

Effectively inaugurating modern thought, the intervention of "critique" into the history of metaphysics transformed the scope and significance of the questions and conceptions that had shaped human inquiry within the Graeco-Roman tradition since antiquity by questioning the very principles at their foundation (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxvii, xxxvii). Rather than subordinate thinking to either its own "idealist" abstraction or projected "materialist" absence, Kant establishes our ability to negate and so reflect upon of each of these as an integral human activity. Both "theoretical" and "practical" in orientation, the tripartite "building" of the *Critique* provides a historically unprecedented framework for understanding how we can and do in fact think, know, experience, understand, imagine, and act within the world: an approach to conceiving all of these based in relations rather than identities, whether of empirical givens or purely intellectual ideas (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxix–xxx, B xliv, B 9). Among the fundamentally relational activities Kant analyzes are "theory" and "practice" themselves. Maintaining the categorical divisions between Ideas (*eidos*), reality (*phusis*), and representation (*mimesis*) first established by Plato, Kant redefines these within a new working model aligning even while

"differentiating" the empirical and intellectual contents of the physical sciences, epistemology, aesthetics, ethics, political action, and, by extension, human history itself (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xix, B xxix). Rather than simply oppose intellect to matter and theory to practice, Kant conceived each in "positive" function of its negation of the other, thereby relating them at once systematically and chiastically. In Kant's upending conception of the two, without the material content of practice, in all its real contingency, no theory; and without the formal lines of analysis first drawn, in all their unconditionality, in theoretical reflection, no practice: Each depends upon the other not only for its own distinctive validity and productivity but, underlying these, its overall relation to reality, whether intellectually *or* materially defined (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxv, B 54).

By the very nature of their object, *literary* studies carry Kant's binding critical chiasmus at their core. The purely verbal nature of literature is as necessarily intellectual as it is material: Every manifestation of language is just that, the perceptible manifestation of a formal intellectual production. Literature, however, underscores that productive duality by *fictively* – imaginatively, rather than deictically – referencing reality with its every word and act of predication. The practical theoretical premises of Kant's *Critique* prove themselves to be precisely those of literature, inasmuch as anyone capable of constructing and understanding a sentence (i.e., of predicating a subject without either perceiving or intending any of the objects, actions, and states that sentence designates) unreflectively puts Kant's power of "synthetic *a priori* judgment" into practice. In this, more than even the most rigorous of experimental sciences, literature may most accurately exemplify the *a priori* combination of formal contours with strictly representational content defining Kant's specifically *critical* epistemology, and literary studies may speak most clearly to the cogency of Kant's radical regrounding of our analytic abilities not in the pure operations of mathematical logic but the impure, "composite," or "heterogeneous" nature of our experience within the world of sensuous phenomena (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B 1, B 177). Like the method of explicitly "negative" delimitation between kinds and modes of experience and action first introduced into philosophy by the *Critique* – the basis not only of the constitutive concerns of cognition, aesthetics, and ethics in all critical theoretical reflection to come, but every modern conception of a dialectic owing, in Hegel's terms, not to "dogmatic" "scholastic" ("schulgerecht") methods for "proving" a predetermined outcome, but rather the active intellectual "movement" of negation itself – Kant's pathbreaking conjunction of an adaptable because *non*contingent structure of analysis with the infinitely

contingent *facta* and data of experience continues to enable every mode and concept of theoretical analysis proposed across the disciplines today (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxiv–xxv, B xxxii–xxxiv, B xxxvii, B 87–88, B 172; Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "Preface").

Any such proposal is, in Kant's terms, a working "hypothesis," a theory *of* practice that no preceding practice or theory can dictate (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxii–xxiii). In this it is directly related to the singular object of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, its attempt to yield not an *a priori* synthetic foundation for both scientific and quotidian cognition but rather to "confirm" the "possibility" of "free," fully "self-legislating" "moral" action (*Critique of Practical Reason*, A 54). Kant recognized that the same rigors of critique that strictly limit the reach of his representational epistemology to phenomena must reject as inherently contradictory the attribution of any delimiting cause or sensory condition to ethical action. Locating no possible basis for ethics – for practice in the only critical sense – in either idealist or materialist determination, Kant reveals the necessary and necessarily latent component of all critical thinking that critical literary studies make most evident. For, as Hegel, describing Kant's pivotal contribution to dialectical thinking, originally acknowledged, it was in introducing the unprecedented "Idea" of "freedom" into metaphysics, explicitly defined as such by Kant himself, that Kant constituted thought's own historical "turning point" ("Wendepunkt"), thereby altering the bases and dynamics of all subsequent reflection on human activity to come, even as, like Hegel himself, he continued to use the elements of the canonical philosophical lexicon, as he would the discursive and structural givens of language itself, so as to repurpose these into the means for reconceiving the full range of our discursive and nondiscursive capacities (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxxvi, B 48; *Logic* A 173, A 394; Hegel, Lectures on Aesthetics, "Historical Deduction of the true Concept of Art: Kantian Philosophy"). Foremost among these – and subsequent modus operandi of the dialectical act of thinking for Hegel – is the uniquely productive ability of human subjects to *form*, experience, and recognize nonmechanical relations with other subjects and objects in the world: The real practical capacity, all subject- or substance-centric, spiritual or ontological assertions to the contrary, both to project and undergo relations that, always intellectual in part, cannot be predetermined by either the demonstrable laws of physics ("Naturgesetz") or "merely speculative" claims of a purely imaginary metaphysics (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxiv, B xxix, B xxxii–xxxiii, B xxviii).

For Kant, that critical reconception redefines the individually unlimited tendency of each of the mutually delimiting operations whose negative

relationships to each other compose the systematic basis for their own self-criticism. Systematicity without positivism: In distinction to every preceding philosophical method of procedure, Kant's "hypothetical" system is ruled neither by "transcendental" nor "empirical" presumptions but a structure defined by the active ability to critique all intellectual claims for the unilateral validity of either. A strictly relational construct "built" upon acts of negation, rather than either quantitative, conventional, or any other positive source of determination, Kant's differentiating structure relates material givens with distinct modes of perceiving, interacting with, and acting both upon and in independence of them. As an explicitly integrated ("theoretical") framework for understanding the ("practical") operation of "applied" (or impure) cognitive "reason," on the one hand, and the "pure reason" of "free" "moral" "praxis" on the other, Kant's intellectually and empirically *combinatory* system defines the only truly "fictional" speculation as that which asserts the absence of any need for critical theory (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xl, B 8). Much as literature and its reading are, by their very constitution, twice removed from any but an imaginary notion of the "presence" or "Being" of the things, actions, and occurrences of every possible genre and description they represent, so Kant's *Critique* reproves the fantastic ascription of existence to ideas or nonexistence to things-in-themselves, replacing positive idealisms and naturalisms alike with the radically new premise of a constitutive relationality distinguishing all human perception, knowledge, and action from the mathematics of natural-mechanical causality (*Critique of Pure Reason* B 27, B 503, B 860–866; *Logic* A 143; *Critique of Practical Reason* A 4).

Remarkably positioned at the center of the "architectonic" "logic" underwriting this explicitly experimental system is Kant's unprecedented conception of an inherently nonlogical "power" as an essential "capacity" – rather than flaw or failure – of mind (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B 9, 27, 503, 860; *Logic* A 143). "The power to judge" ("Urteilskraft") given objects of experience in a specifically "aesthetic" rather than cognitive sense engages the speculative and ethical capacity to act in "freedom" from delimitation that makes of the mind something more than a cognizing machine. In contradiction to his rational-positivist caricature *after* Hegel, Kant not only introduces into the history of reflection a new, nonpositivist conception of "freedom" but describes its unlimited ("noumenal") capacity to negate rationally delimited (phenomenal) "self-interest" as the "keystone" of the entirety of the *Critique* (*Critique of Pure reason*, B 860). Just so, the internal capacity to "feel one's self free" – not from critical but from causal constraints – that subtends any subject's ability to "*feel*" "pleasure"

or "displeasure" in perceiving objects we "judge" "beautiful" or "sublime," performs a singular critical function within the tripartite *Critique*: that of "mediating" between the otherwise mutually exclusive "realms" to which the divided activities and objects of "pure" and "practical reason" pertain (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B 9; *Critique of Judgment*, B xix, B 4, B 18). Like the critically indispensable act of aesthetic judgment in which it takes part, "Imagination" is elevated by Kant to a full-fledged capacity of mind for the first time, just as his epistemology redefines the cognitions in which imagination participates as deriving from neither innate intuitions nor transcendental ideas, but rather the "representations" our minds formally construct of the particular sensuous experiences we undergo (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B vi, B 60).

Kant's systematic inclusions of these and other capacities and forms previously relegated to the merely "subjective" whims of individual and social taste, effectively positions his *Critique* in the permanent avant-garde of aesthetic theory: If imagination is no less instrumental to the logical pursuit of objective science than to our nonlogical ability to experience objects aesthetically – that is, "free" of our cognizing selves – then the possible objects of aesthetic experience, as of cognition, are themselves potentially unlimited. And if, in aesthetic experience, we "feel" in such a "free," impersonal way that, instead of "talking about" "our" "feelings," we feel compelled to use the principal form of logic, predication, to "say" in a thoroughly impersonal way something at once definitive and strictly illogical, because undefined and undefinable, about "it" – that "it is beautiful" (or "sublime") – then the "subjective" basis (in "feeling") of the "power to judge" unknown objects and the "synthetic" basis of object-cognition are, at once, as qualitatively opposed to each other as they are intrinsically linked formally by their "common" dependence upon two, never *wholly* formally delimitable capacities: imagination and, *with imagination*, "communicability," or the ability to construct "communicable" – that is, necessarily inter- and extrapersonal – acts of predication (*Critique of Judgment*, B 28, B 105, B 119, B 133).

But perhaps most significant for the study of literature, Kant qualifies all cognitive representations, along with "thinking" itself, as explicitly and exclusively linguistic in substance – "discursive" in their very nature (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B 170; "On a Newly Elevated Tone in Philosophy," A 309; *Logic*, A 23) – or, as he underscores in a rare appeal to self-consciously figural language in the *Prolegomena*: "concepts of understanding serve only, *so to speak*, to spell out appearances, in order to be able to read them as experience" (*Prolegomena*, A 101). Further distinguishing

"poetry" as the single art form that itself constitutes a "mode of thinking" uniquely capable of "using nature," not as the sensible data of representational cognition but rather as nonrepresentational "schema for the supersensible," Kant's invention of "critique" links philosophy and literature across the central conceptual reversal that its "revolution in mode of thinking" ("Revolution der Denkart") entails (*Critique of Judgment*, B 133, B 158, B 160, B 215; *Critique of Pure Reason*, B vii–xxx; or "transformation in mode of thinking," B vi, B xxiii). In that its object is no object, but rather the "mode" or way in which, acting as subjects, we think about, experience, and interact with objects, including ourselves, as well as all the purely determinate conditions and materialities we are not, such a "revolution" can only be founded on a noncontingent hypothesis that, unconditionally linking a condition to a predicate, systematically relates and, therein, redefines all the entities, actions, and events it comprehends. The individual capacities and modalities first related by Kant's theoretical reversal of all sense-based (including "commonsensical") positivist presuppositions resemble interdependent functions more than independent identities; instead of being simply positively present to sense perception they are first constituted by their reciprocal differentiation and delimitation within the coherent framework that relates them. Such is the nature of the discursivity on whose own forms and structures Kant's revolutionary hypothesis depends; and such is the linguistic "nature" of the only matter on which every literary formation depends.

The relationship of literary theory to literature has always been analogous to that of literature to reality and equally, if somewhat less self-evidently, contentious. Both literary theory and its object employ comprehensive linguistic means to turn the mind from things – what they are believed to be in and of themselves or can be used to do for us – and the longstanding presumption of the intellectual insignificance of both similarly dismiss them as abstract and fictive replacements, respectively, for the "real" objects about which each claims to speak. By focusing instead upon the ability of the mind to move between itself and things, and back again, continually reconceiving each along with the relationship between them, Kant's fundamentally "discursive" turn from "things in themselves" to synthetic principles of representation and formal construction prove identical to those of not only literary theory but literature itself. For, according to the chiasmus of reason laid out by the *Critique*, the "pure" ("theoretical") "reason" of conceptual cognition reveals itself instead to be, *like literature*, "practical" or impure, that is, at once free of logical contradiction and ideational mystification alike because heterogeneously "applied" to

what it itself is not – "phenomena" in the world – and "practical reason" reveals itself to be noncontingent, "pure," that is, also like literature, "free" to act in "real" independence of phenomenal delimitation and causal logic alike, because compelled by its own "freedom" to act without respect to its agent's own worldly existence, or what Kant calls "morally" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxv, B xxviii, B 10, B 177). Each of the several fundamental – sometimes overlapping, sometimes reciprocally negating, but always mutually differentiating – modes of understanding, imagination, and action reframed within Kant's critical system – sensory experience and its "discursive" representation; representational knowledge and noncognitive "feeling"; narrative causality and "spontaneous" action; aesthetic experience and "communicability"; aesthetic judgment and ethics; difference, negation, and identity; comparison, alteration, and temporality; predication, inscription, and revolutions of thought; nature, poetic language, and the schematic art of the sublime – all pertain directly to the constitution of the imaginative discourse we call literature.

Yet with rare while significant exceptions, including important studies of the romantic psychological, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions of the Kantian sublime by Weiskel (1976), Martyn (2003), and McLaughlin (2014), respectively; the analysis of the relation of Kant's epistemology and theory of freedom to the structure and lacunae of representational narrative fiction by Brodsky (1987); the exposition of the essential relationship to otherness in Kant's understanding of the moral subject by Basterra (2015), and Brodsky's recent investigation of the necessarily spoken constitution of acts of aesthetic judgment and unique power of poetic discourse to use the phenomenal world to represent "the supersensible" (2021), the relation of Kant's critical foregrounding of the limits and capacities of discursivity to the discourse of literature has remained largely uninvestigated by contemporary scholars of literary form and history. While the direct influence of the *Critique* upon some of Kant's leading literary contemporaries is well documented (and further explored in this volume), the historical gap in his consideration in relation to our general understanding of literature stands in inverse proportion to his ever-growing recognition as defining a turning point not only in the historical developments of continental and analytic philosophy but of modern ethical, political, aesthetic, and cultural theory as well. Whether echoing the false ascription of unbridled idealism to Kant's critical revolution in the wake of one of its greatest inheritors, Marx, or repeating the popular "post"-Marxist convention of equating all "enlightenment" thought with instrumentality, and reducing all literary and cultural phenomena to

mirrors of the autonomously self-totalizing power of "Power," the stark division in the reception of Kant across the humanities is one the volume aims to redress.

In exploring the pertinence of Kant's thought to our understanding of literature in particular, each of the individual contributions to this volume focuses in a distinctive way on specific aspects of the relations between philosophy and literature that Kant's critical revolution in metaphysics brings to the fore. Kant's proto-romantic conception of "the art of poetry" as an independent "art [or mode] of thinking" in itself; the social dimension inhering in the development of self-knowledge described within romantic poetry and Kant's philosophy; the potential conflict between philosophy and tragedy posed by the *Critique*; the relation between Kant's theory of the sublime and political emancipation; Kant's redefinition of religion within the context of narrative history; the representation in narrative fiction of the role of radical discontinuity in Kant's narrative of intellectual history; the theoretical and literary reception of the *Critique* by its most avid contemporary readers; Kant's conception of cognitive spontaneity and the formal performance of experiential consciousness in literature; the literary genesis of critique within the history of philosophy; the indeterminate subject of modern first-person fiction and the purely formal "I" of the Kantian "I think"; and, finally, the fundamental relation between the necessary "communicability" of judgment and Kant's invention of the ethical category of the possible, all figure among the intersecting literary and philosophical lines of analysis the contributions address. In bringing together original work by a broad range of scholars expert in philosophy and literature alike, *Kant and Literary Studies* is the first volume devoted to examining the particular premises and principles of Kant's *Critique* – their logic, motivation, and real practical effects – as these continue to inform the study of literature in the larger discursive context of the humanities today.

In order to highlight the integration of their avenues of research, the contributions are organized into three interconnected parts. Part I, "Kant on Literature," focuses on the mutually illuminating bases of literature and critical philosophy articulated within Kant's works. Its contributions explore both the philosopher's explicit discussions of literature and the larger theoretical significance of poetic, sublime, and dramatic modes of apprehension and signification explored and employed across the three individual Critiques. Part II, "Kant, Literary Theory, and the Critical Formation of the 'Human' Disciplines," investigates Kant's radical reconception of "the human" ("das Menschliche") as the productively negative

capacity for critique and the fundamental relation of that reconception to all "discursive" (or "communicable") disciplines since Kant, from the reinvigorated investigation of literature and philosophy themselves to the invention of modern literary and aesthetic, moral and political, and social and historical theory, and new "human" histories of science, religion, and secular self-governance. Finally, Part III, "Kant and Literature," presents analyses of groundbreaking manifestations of Kant's critical insights in the ongoing production of literature itself, interpreting the revolutions in literary form, style, and content effected by enlightenment through romantic, modernist, and contemporary works in light of Kant's critical "revolution in thought."

The contributors to *Kant and Literary Studies* approach Kant and individual and comparative literary traditions from different interpretive vantage points and bring differing critical issues to light. In Part I, Paresh Chandra analyzes Kant's conception of poetry as a specific "mode of thinking" ("Denkungsart") with particular reference to its direct relevance to our understanding of the "prosaic" poetics theorized and practiced by Wordsworth; David Martyn analyzes Kant's aesthetic and literary theory of the sublime in relation to the secularization of religion under the "sign" of political emancipation; and Robert Pippin considers the bases of Kant's criticism of the foundational literary form of tragedy so as to better understand the stakes of the general thesis of a necessary incompatibility of tragedy with philosophy that, long before Nietzsche, Kant's view implies.

Part II begins with Rüdiger Campe's investigation of Kant's necessarily discontinuous account of the "history" of science and philosophy from the rigorously coherent point of view of his "transcendental" epistemology, and the relation of both to the grammatically enacted peripeteias marking the discontinuous outcomes of the narratives of Kant's great literary contemporary and avid reader, Heinrich v. Kleist. Next, Richard Eldridge compares Kant's and Wordsworth's accounts of the specifically social, and thus open-ended rather than purely introspective, achievement of self-knowledge by moral subjects. Gabriel Basterra follows Eldridge by investigating the fundamentally interpellative structure of ethical action in the Levinasian social sense of addressing an Other, which she identifies within Kant's conception of "the moral law." Finally, Karen Feldman rounds out Campe's examination of narrative discontinuity in Kant's account of the history of science and Martyn's investigation of the post-Kantian replacement of effective religious narrative with the sublime of political emancipation, by scrutinizing the necessary narrative discontinuity entailed by

Kant's account of the history of Judaism and Christianity, according to which Christianity, if truly "new," must regard its origin, Judaism, as merely "statutory" or no "religion" at all.

In Part III, Tim Mehigan examines the influence of the "Kantian" writings of Schiller upon Kleist, demonstrating the ways in which the dramatic "Kant-crisis" of Kleist's literary career, discussed in Part II by Campe, was in fact a kind of fiction, in that Kleist's knowledge of the *Critique* had already been mediated by its literary reception by Schiller. Next, positioning Kant himself as crucial historical and conceptual mediator between the radically essayistic constitution of subjecthood by Montaigne and emphatically "post"-subject-oriented "reasons" of Spivak, Sloterdijk, and Mbembe, Willi Goetschel's comprehensive contribution examines the rich prehistory and immediate and continuing legacy of Kant's understanding of "critique" as "self-legislating," "discursive" "act." Following Goetschel, Maya Kronfeld finds in modern literature of consciousness the practical realization of Kant's conception of the spontaneity of thought, arguing that Virginia Woolf's dynamic representations of consciousness more closely resemble spontaneous acts of form-production than the mere aggregates of sense impressions described by Hume. John Kim then provides an incisive critical analysis of the problem of knowing the subject of Kant's "I think" as it is directly addressed in Tawada's German-Japanese fiction, *Das Bad* (The Bath)/ うろこもち). Tying first contribution to last, Brodsky's closing essay examines Kant's key distinction between not the noumenal and phenomenal but the phenomenal and *verbal* in relation both to the "use of language" by "poets" and his own specifically speech-based demonstration, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, of the category of the "possible" required to think the "effectivity" of "the moral law" within us.