PHILOLOGY, LITERATURE, STYLE

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PHILOLOGY, LITERATURE, STYLE

BY FRANCES FERGUSON

I. THE CALL FOR A RETURN TO PHILOLOGY

This paper grew, in the first place, from my having noticed a steady drumbeat in literary studies: a call for a return to philology. Geoffrey Harpham usefully catalogs various instances of this trend, citing the work of medievalists like Stephen J. Nichols and Lee Patterson from the 1990s and the injunctions to remember philology by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Michael Holquist in the first decade of the twenty-first century.[1] Yet even as he mentions a large number of examples, Harpham focuses on Paul de Man's and Edward Said's ways of making the case for philology, and in the process makes the interesting claim that "neither gave evidence of actual philological expertise."[2] Harpham's view would seem to draw support from Sheldon Pollock's having observed how far de Man's notion of philology is from anything that a classically trained philologist would recognize.[3] To understand their views is to understand that Harpham and Pollock are not being dismissive (or not simply dismissive). Said seems not so much to practice philological criticism as to recognize what's involved in it when he talks about the importance of knowing how texts are made, and de Man's critical views stress the importance of readings in a way that could be seen as an occasion and motive for philological work rather than anything that resembles philology as it has regularly been practiced.[4]

Even as de Man and Said were calling for a return to philology, that is, they were themselves practicing a form of philology that was itself novel in that it did not particularly concern itself with the notion that one of philology's chief tasks was to establish the very texts that it interpreted, and to construct them from fragments. The tension and mutual inspiration between the old philology and the new appeared in Jan Ziolkowski's edited collection *On Philology*, which brought together papers from a 1988 conference that included traditional philologists and deconstructive critics—and in a fashion that loosely connected classical philology with the ideal scholarly program that Said advocated and the theoretical critical practice that de Man championed.[5] In that

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collection of essays we can most clearly discern a problem created by and for literary history.

The problem is that of the editor or critic who helps a text to speak. Western European philology developed in the eighteenth century at much the same time that the notion of literature did. It was particularly designed and increasingly well equipped to deal with fragments. It deployed historical knowledge of grammar, syntax, and idiom to establish and interpret texts that had not originated in written form, much less in the consciousness of being part of what Pascale Casanova would term a system of literature.[6] The historical contribution of philology was to represent this literature that had been produced *avant la lettre*. Developing and drawing on historical linguistics, it rounded out various fragments, so that they were in a position to speak to the modern era that had separated out its literature from other instances of writing.

A number of different commentators have described the link between the European philological tradition and nations and nationalisms, schools, and even racialisms. Casanova has compellingly described the ways in which nations used literary traditions—particularly as those traditions could be seen to have issued in ancient epics, ballads, and tales—to underwrite their claims for national identities.[7] University curricula, as many have observed, underwrote such a long and genealogically shaped view of literature when they described the canon as stretching from *Beowulf* to Virginia Woolf. Even as scholars were lobbying for Woolf's admission to that canon in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they were also frequently calling for an end to requirements that Old English be studied in PhD programs, arguing that this genealogy legitimated literary study on illegitimate grounds. Finally, a critic like Harpham has seen the specter of racism in the work of some of the philologists from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the linguistic nationalism of philological work took on racialist overtones.

Those analyses help us to identify how philology helped to amass and increase literary capital that was both literary and linguistic and to direct it to non-literary ends. Yet another, more immediate question that the call for a return to philology raises is this: What can philology do for the study of texts written in the full light of literary day—that have their existence in writing (rather than oral tradition) and that emerge in consciousness of the existence of a literary tradition that precedes them? What does a philological approach contribute to our study of texts that are so far from being fragments that they exist in multiple forms? And what form does philology take at present?

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In the discussion that follows, I'll briefly sketch in some of the contours of the philological approach as it emerged in Western Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I'll then draw on Jacques Rancière's discussion of the rise of style in modernity as an example of a literary-historical approach with two important methodological claims—namely, that literature and the criticism contemporary with it should be seen to be speaking with one voice, and that the formal device of representing eras in contrast with one another makes it possible to see each of them more clearly.[8] I'll proceed from there to observe how style as Rancière conceives it made literature look like a kind of fossil that needed both acknowledgment of its silence and interpretation of it. Finally, I'll describe how the novel has more recently absorbed the philological and hermeneutic project into itself even as criticism has, in the name of philology, seen itself as countering a hermeneutic approach.

II. THE TASK OF PHILOLOGY, CLASSICALLY CONCEIVED

In the late eighteenth century, European philological analysis essentially began with the Higher Criticism of the Bible and with Friedrich August Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795), as scholars pursued lines of thought that Erasmus and Spinoza had opened. Philology has repeatedly been credited with introducing history into the reception of religious and literary texts, but we should accept that account only if we distinguish between philology and most of what we think of as historicist scholarship. For philology did not subscribe to the eras-and-modes approach of much historicism; it did not proceed from the assumption that one could begin with a date and consult texts roughly contemporary to one another. Rather, its central self-assigned task was to pry apart the various strands of a text and to sort out the sequence in which these strands had initially appeared and the time periods in which they could have been written.

This is to say that philology as a discipline demanded that texts carry their identity papers on them. It audited texts to see if they were who they said they were. In that sense its approach was not all that remote from that of Bethany McLean, the contemporary financial journalist who reviewed the accounts of Enron. As soon as she realized that those books spoke different languages, she produced an analysis that verged on philological work. As with accounting, philology insisted that interpretation could only proceed on the basis of reliable texts. It sought to square up textual columns.

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The drive to establish the provenance of texts and to say when and where they had been committed to writing—the project of verifying texts and authenticating them—was complicated by the fact that philology in its credentializing aspect created a market for both real and fake relics of the past. As Susan Stewart, Margaret Russett, Andrew Piper, and Maureen McLane have pointed out, the literary world of the eighteenth century saw an explosion of trumped-up antiques—what Stewart wonderfully terms the "distressed genres" of ballads, epics, and the like because of their resemblance to the distressed furniture that a modern Florentine cabinet-maker might produce in applying chains to age a newly made piece in an instant.[9]

Philological work did not, however, simply make it possible to sort the authentic texts of the past from the texts written in a mocked-up language that no one had ever spoken or written. It was easy enough for Samuel Johnson to discern the fakery in Ossian, and to claim that "many men, women, and children" could have written language like that.[10] The discovery of forgery was tantamount to dismissal. Yet philology, in the form of the Higher Criticism of the Bible and Wolf's scholarship on Homer, made it possible to dispute the supposed provenance of culturally central texts without ever dismissing the texts that came with false papers. Philology might have demonstrated how much earlier thinking about the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels and the Homeric epics needed to be revised, how much earlier thinking relied on a sense of the past akin to what usually goes into costuming for movies based on nineteenth-century novels: the past of whatever. Yet even as it laid out the various phases of development that texts had gone through, philology accepted these texts without discrediting them.

Wolf's philological argument was straightforward. As Anthony Grafton puts it, Wolf maintained that

> Homer must have been an oral poet, illiterate. Despite his powers of memory, moreover, he could not have produced works on the scale of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Later Greeks [must have] added to and compiled the early texts after they were written down. Still later . . . Aristarchus and Zenodotus redacted these and, in the process, gave them the appearance of large-scale coherence and order that they still undeniably possessed—just as the Masoretes had edited, and imposed a new coherence on, the varied texts that went into the Five Books of Moses and the rest of the Hebrew Bible.[11]

While esteem for modern antiques like James Macpherson's Ossian poems and Thomas Chatterton's Rowley poems declined as their

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authenticity was challenged, both the Bible and the Homeric epics could be said only to have gained from the intervention of philologists who assembled evidence that their composition had taken place over centuries. These texts, now seen as the work of multiple authors, accrued the authority of having been ratified by something like deep time.

Indeed, the idea of a blind bard named Homer survived even for Wolf. As Grafton points out, Wolf arranged for an illustration representing a neoclassical bust of Homer to appear on the title page of his *Prolegomena*.[12] Moreover, Wolf's handling of Homer's image was not simply contradictory. Although we might well wonder why anyone would both deny that the Homeric poems were the work of a single inspired individual and also print an image of what looked like a single inspired individual who incarnated all the features of the traditional conception of Homer, Wolf's perspective was paradoxical in a way that has marked literary criticism almost ever since. With Wolf's pictured bust of Homer, as with serious philological work on the Bible, there was no mere exercise in unwitting self-contradiction. There was, rather, the establishment of a regular relay between a single emblem and its multiple aspects.

Two substantial changes in the understanding of ancient texts and of texts in general came so strongly into play as to become thereafter virtually inescapable. First, the notion of the culture (and of a culture and cultures) developed substance. It bore with it the corollary sense that there were national geniuses—highly populous fields of culture that might sometimes be represented by individuals (such as Shakespeare or Goethe). And this made the texts something more than the product of their time. The Biblical and Homeric texts were said not only to have been inspired at some early moment in the productive process. Instead, the very process of transmission came to be seen as an exercise in reinspiration. Second, this account of the expansiveness of culture came to seem the province of a scholarly elite, who were said to be able to cope with the tensions between local, historical, particularizing evidence and an ideal construct of the kind that James I. Porter has wonderfully described in his essay "Homer: The Very Idea."[13] This tension is remarkably great in relation to texts of the New Testament. Think here of the fact that the Higher Criticism of the Bible prompted lasting debates about whether historical evidence was necessary for faith, and think, even more importantly, about the fact that seminarians in virtually all non-fundamentalist sects study the textual tradition of Biblical scholarship while almost never referring to it in their sermons.

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On the one hand, the discovery of the cultural sources of texts that were taken to have major cultural significance seemed an argument on behalf of a democratic origin for these texts. On the other, such collective thinking only seemed appropriate in the mouths of a scholarly elite. Philological history, in other words, enables us to identify a moment in which the study of language defines itself in a specifically historical dimension. It attends to the histories of words so as to establish not just the variety of things one might say with a particular word, but also to mark the changes in what one might say with that word at various different historical moments. It also observes the historical circumstances to which texts refer and to which they silently attest. Thus, for example, Said describes Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* as a novel in which the external world exerts pressure on the relatively self-involved doings of young people seeking to match themselves up with other young people; the remote sugar plantations of Fanny Price's uncle Bertram, with their constant demand for slave labor, tinge the courtship story with a sense of the connectedness of private and public worlds.[14] Thus, for example, Fredric Jameson speaks of George Eliot's paeans to the importance of community as an expression of a conscious lack; he argues that, just as laws never address crimes that never occur, recommendations never need to be made about situations that exist so firmly that they can be taken for granted.[15] For these critics, texts come to include both the things that they explicitly refer to and the things on which they are silent.

These elements of a philological approach put us on the track of ways we might think about texts, things we might do with them. For they make it clear that the greatest contribution of late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century philology was not to have replaced the notion of a single witness or poet behind a gospel or an epic with the notion of composite authorship. Rather, philology, in putting the two conceptions into permanent relationship, inaugurated the tendencies that frequently have been bundled under the rubric of a hermeneutics of suspicion. When a text was said to be individually *and* culturally produced, it contained a principle for its own self-expansion and self-transcendence. It said what it said, and it said what it remained silent about. It uttered its words out loud, and it whispered another message in a subtext. Other philologists may have faulted Nietzsche for having been less interested than they in establishing the exact words that were there to be read in a text; Nietzsche, however, captured the new tendency of philology in his ability to read words that were urgent on account of their absence.[16]

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Reading texts became a speculative enterprise, and continually pitted the notion of historical reference against the idealizing impulses that had lead Wolf to illustrate his title page with an image of a stereotypically neoclassical Homer and that continue to prompt readers to talk about Homer even after they've heard all the accounts of composite authorship.

The persistence of the two impulses—one, the search for historical references that might fragment a text, and the other, the idealizing and unifying reading—appears in many places. It finds one particularly vivid example in William Godwin's *Essay on Sepulchres* of 1809.[17] There, more than a decade after Wolf published his famous thesis, Godwin, a self-confirmed atheist, lays out a scheme for marking the graves of persons who had made extraordinary contributions to mankind. One might think, reading this proposal for mortuary tourism, that Godwin hasn't yet heard about Wolf's work or hasn't accepted it, because he speaks of wanting to mark the exact spot where Homer had died. But when he proposes memorials marking the spots where Don Quixote and Clarissa Harlowe died, one realizes that he might well have been making plans to mark a fabulous grave for Homer. The idealizing movement that counters philology's auditing gives Godwin access to a world that cannot be staked out with ordinary surveyors' instruments and markers. Don Quixote is no longer just a figure who wanders back and forth across the border separating a real world from a fictional world. He is also a compatriot of the sober-sided textual scholar and the projector.

III. THE RISE OF LITERATURE

Literature came into its own as literature, as distinct from everything that appeared in writing, in conjunction with the rise of philology. The scholars who were able to validate and accredit texts lent considerable intellectual capital to the literary enterprise, in ways that correspond to the roles of middlemen like translators and reviewers in Casanova's account of the literary system.

In *Mute Speech* (published in France in 1998 as *La parole muette*), Rancière provides a literary history that draws its force from understanding how much the processes of literature depend on a symbiotic or collaborative relationship between poetry and prose fiction, on the one hand, and criticism, on the other.[18] His account suggests how the modern era in literature did not merely replace the spoken word of ballads and stories with the printed word of the novel. One can see

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the full dimension of the changes that took place within the literature of the age of writing, he suggests, by consulting both the literature and its criticism together.

In the era of literature that exists only in the mode of writing, the project of hailing new entries into the literary system divides into two phases. The earlier regime of writing had seen the coin of the literary realm to consist in genres—epics, dramas, lyrics—and criticism had assigned itself the task of judging how effectively a particular work exemplified its generic type. This earlier criticism took its task as assessment: How well did a particular work exemplify the conventions of epic? Was it a well-made drama? The issue, as Rancière stresses, was not "obedience to rules" but rather a sense of suitability, of a work's projection of its understanding of what was appropriate to it.[19] A critic attested to a work's success at achieving recognition in the terms in which it asked to be recognized.

Thus, a critic like Samuel Johnson (to substitute an English example for Rancière's Voltaire and La Harpe) could judge *Paradise Lost* in relation to other epics. He could pronounce on the appropriateness of its depiction of the allegories of Sin and Death just as he could complain of the poor Latin of some of his subjects in his *Lives of the Poets*. Voltaire would have identified such working judgment as the expression of grammar, which he defined as knowledge of the works of taste, the nuances of history, of poetry, of eloquence, and of criticism that a cultivated person was expected to know. A critic deployed grammar in this extended sense in assessing particular written performances, just as he or she called on grammar in the narrow sense to complain of the poor Latin that appeared in a writer's work at a time when writers frequently larded their English or French prose with Latin. Philologists were beginning to attend to texts that claimed such ancient date as to seem to have anticipated events and linguistic developments of a later time. But critics like Johnson and Voltaire largely attended to writers' inabilities to continue to speak the language of the literary past.

All that changed with the advent of the novel, Rancière observes. And he identifies the novel's importance in a distinctive way. One familiar and significant account of literature's movement into modernity calls attention to the importance of the rise of the novel and its increased attention to domestic life, the life of the bourgeoisie, and even the life of laborers. Yet Rancière does not treat the novel as an exercise in social representation or the depiction of particular actors. In this he differs from both a Bakhtin and a Jameson. When Bakhtin distinguishes between the epic and the novel, he emphasizes how the

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novel allows for dialogism, the multivoicedness of society in which persons from a variety of different social situations can speak.[20] Similarly Jameson, even in the course of talking about how the English novel of the nineteenth century occupies the English drawing room and its social perspective, calls attention to its conversation.[21] Yet Rancière, while well aware of how the novel as the genre of no genre has been characterized as more socially capacious than other literary forms preserved in writing, is not persuaded that the social miscellany that populates it necessarily opens onto social representation.

What has been called the social realism of the novel loses its force for Rancière in the face of the issue of style. And though we might think of style as tightly bound up with an individual's way of doing things—as Seamus Perry did talking about a passage as "incorrigibly Wordsworthian"—Rancière describes it in exactly opposed terms.[22] Style is for him an expression of impersonality. It seems to come from no one, or from anyone. And this equation between style and impersonality holds even when we can identify the author of a passage without being supplied her name. For the crucial feature of style is its refusal of the very discriminations and terms of distinction that underwrote the genre system. Style levels its subject matter just as it levels its relation to its audience. Baudelaire's garlic and rubies and mud would make the point very explicitly, but it had already begun in texts like Richardson's novels that focused less on the social climbing that a character like Pamela might do than on the way the new literature challenged both social divisions and the literary divisions of the genres.

The task of sorting that classical rhetoric had performed no longer persisted in the world of literature that the novel and its style represented. The project of distinguishing literary audiences from one another begins at this point to fall to the sociologist, who can demonstrate how class stratification and taste can be mutually correlated. Literary texts no longer speak to a fairly homogeneous audience that has its standards. And with the audience no longer demanding the standards exemplified by the generic system, writers actively become louche. Unconcerned to represent aristocracies of valor, power, or virtue, they tumble their characters into a world that is as likely to use their words against them as for them.

Style as Rancière presents it, then, bespeaks the Flaubertian doctrine of art for art's sake and the Mallarmean eulogy of the pure poem. Where the earlier regime of literature retained a connection to action, the modern era is one that presents itself in works with all future labor removed from them. Think here of Flaubert's famous

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epistolary rants about his own slavish labors to accomplish a prose that will leave his reader "*demoralizé*" and in a state of "*désoeuvrement*."[23] Flaubert and Mallarmé, Rancière's chief exhibits of the literature of modernity, inspire a criticism that cannot say whether style and its blank page are good or bad examples of anything. For style involves a distillation or solidification of language so intense that literature seems to aspire to be language in another state—not the water of free-flowing speech but of water vapor or ice. Literature is no longer the regime of genres that create norms and points of comparison. Literature is instead language preserved in a markedly different state from that in which it ordinarily appears. Neither water vapor nor ice is a good or a bad version of water, nor is literature a good or bad version of language. The task of the critic is less to pronounce it good or bad than continually to mark its altered state.

Thus it is that criticism becomes interpretative. In losing contact with the system of genres, it can no longer take itself to assess a work's quality and salience relative to other works of its kind. Instead, criticism increasingly sees itself as dealing with individual works that it treats almost as if they were children of the family who could not be understood by outsiders. Criticism imagines a need to speak *for* the literature, to be protective of the work, to say that it can't talk now, that its silence needs to be respected—and that it would, even if absolutely required, refuse to give up that silence.

Criticism's very move into hermeneutics is part and parcel of a new understanding of literary works—that they need interpretation, need to have their meanings unpacked, laid out, and explained. And this way of treating texts is, as Rancière suggests, a way of treating them as if they were mute. Literary works may speak, but their language does not communicate itself without the critic's mediation. They speak—but silently or cryptically. The task of the critic is to be what is sometimes called "next friend" to the mute oracles that literary works had become in this later regime of literature.

In order to be true to the muteness of the literary work, criticism sometimes ventures to say what the work would say if it were transcoded into the language of a system of thought like the psychology of Freud or Lacan, the sociology of Weber or Bourdieu, the literary history of a Bloom and his way of marking the various Romantic poets as variants of Milton. This is interpretation that draws its strength from the target language, and hesitancy to say what this poem or novel means becomes garrulity in its new tongue. Even as critics make no explicit

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foundational claims for these codes, the codes develop a kind of stability in standing in as explicators. They firm up in propping.

Now Rancière instances quotations from a series of twentieth-century critics to support his claim that criticism has over time increasingly become an insistence upon the silence of the literary work—otherwise known as its absoluteness or opacity—and of expatiating on this silence at some length. He makes his case by pointing to such things as a resonant quotation from Maurice Blanchot: "A literary work is, for anyone who knows how to penetrate it, a rich intermission of silence, a strong defense and a high wall against that speaking enormity that addresses itself to us in turning us away from ourselves. . . . And it is the defeat of silence that would indicate perhaps the disappearance of the literary word."[24] In the history that Rancière traces, the futility of Sartre's spirited objections to the stonily statuesque literary language of Flaubert and Mallarmé only serves to indicate how pervasive the mode of petrifaction has become.

Indeed, the breakdown of the genre system and the concomitant rise of the novel as the genre that repudiates genre signals the expansion of style in the new silent mode. This is not a matter of the rise of prose in relation to poetry, and the waning of generic norms is not an isolated phenomenon. Literary language, in the new regime, distributes stoniness in all directions. In loosening its grip on generic conventionality, it generates style and its self-obsession. What had once operated in the classical era as different strata of speech and writing—the high, the middle, and the low—for different subject matters and different audiences are consolidated and collapsed into style. In giving up the notion that literature might include an instructive component, that one might do botany in verse as Erasmus Darwin did, literature comes increasingly to insist, with Flaubert, that it's about nothing other than style. Literature and criticism agree to see the former as self-referential. It privatizes its language, and allows critics to hover protectively to defend it against paraphrase or glosses.

If we were to take Rancière's account simply as literary history, we might well think it simply marked changes of the kind that we retail in chronologically organized courses. We might well imagine him to be saying the literary values and attitudes change over time, that critics inevitably start thinking along the lines of the writers whose work they're attending, and that the best we can do as scholars is to list the various periods in their order and characterize them in broad strokes. But Rancière's discussion suggests why there has been growing

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uneasiness about this approach and why scholars have worried about how one gets from, say, the eighteenth century to Romanticism.

One response to this concern has been to expand the canon and stress the importance of more writers than we used to consult (Joseph Priestley, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Mary Shelley) and to call in various sub-periods to smooth the transition (pre-Romanticism). But expanding the canon and multiplying the number of historical periods only takes us so far. And this is the point at which Rancière's account of the history becomes particularly valuable. On the one hand, he produces, by characterization and confirming quotation, a description that aspires to accuracy, and he honors the accuracy with which the criticism he cites saw the literature it was describing. In this aspect, he is a historical empiricist. He calls things as he sees them. On the other, he recognizes that such empirical observations always give way to the critical "Yes, but . . ."—the phrase that always precedes the mention of something left out as if the omission were devastating to the larger argument. He understands that one's efforts at description will always vary with the composition of the group of things under description. Adding another text or removing an author will make a difference.

Yet the critical feature of Rancière's approach is that he does not imagine that the solution to the deficiencies of empirical observation is more observation *tout court*.[25] Rather, he juxtaposes Voltaire and Blanchot—the view that captures a literature of recognition and the view that speaks of literature in terms of silence and the desert—in order to create a sense of the pressure of a notion of literature as a discursive formation. The importance of the juxtaposition goes well beyond any effort to endorse one position or the other. Rancière is not expressing nostalgia for Voltaire's literary era; he is not dismissing the desert places of Blanchot's description of literature to propose another, better view. The pairing is especially important in ways that we are perhaps more accustomed to recognize in something like Michel Foucault's setting a description of the execution of the regicide Damiens in 1757 next to the timetable for the "House of young prisoners in Paris" some eighty years later in *Discipline and Punish*.[26] For both Rancière and Foucault the use of juxtaposition suggests how very difficult it is to proceed from one moment and one approach to the other if one takes one step at a time. Even the most detailed and exacting accounts of what Voltaire thought about literature and the executioners of Damiens thought about crimes and punishments scarcely move in an orderly sequential fashion toward Blanchot's description of literature and the bureaucracy of humane punishment, respectively.

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The juxtapositions help us to see exactly how far the kind of philological operations that we earlier saw in the work of Wolf and Godwin have moved into the realm of history. Different discursive fields are identified and opposed, only to be telescoped into a unified image, which operates with all the ideality that prompted Wolf to picture Homer in a unified neoclassical image even as he was separating the various strands of Homeric epic to reveal multiple authorship and that moved Godwin to speak of locating actual tombs of fictitious characters. Rancière's opposition between his two eras of literature may never exactly resolve itself into the data, but it represents a methodological credulity that turns out to serve a critical function of the most serious kind, to introduce a suspicion that the ostensible speakers of an era are saying more than they know themselves to say. It produces the kind of paradox that has repeatedly marked a genuinely critical tradition.

IV. THE RETURN TO PHILOLOGY—IN THE NOVEL

Perhaps the most important contribution of philology is to emphasize the importance of the moment at which words were used and statements were made, as if to suggest that timing is as significant to literary statements as it is in ordinary conversation. Philology locates words in time, and gauges their effects in relation to other words of its time. In that, philology analogizes literature to Bourdieu's gift, its effectiveness compromised or even vitiated by being given too soon or too late. Literature may be timeless from some perspective, but it is not so for philology, which directs our attention always to its timeliness.

The call for a return to philology can be seen, that is, particularly as a response and a retort to the criticism that immediately preceded it. The quotation from Blanchot that Rancière foregrounds may be more eloquent than blunt-sounding statements by American New Critics like W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley to the effect that there is no point in consulting the oracle (that is, the poet) when one wants to know what a poem means.[27] For them the poem is, as Rancière would say, mute until spoken for by the critic. Moreover, Blanchot's evocation of the importance of literary silence, which makes literature distinct from other uses of language and from the noise of the world, can be seen as a restatement of doctrines familiar to us from American New Criticism. Thus, even as one might have thought that philosophers like Bertrand Russell had been giving paradox its due, Cleanth Brooks pronounced paradox to be the distinctive language of poetry and treated it simply as a version of language at its greatest

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possible distance from functionality.[28] As the point at which language seemed to become poetic or literary, it tied its users' hands—or left them with the purpose of being purposeless. Thus, paradox, now seen as the epitome of literary language itself, called for a doctrine like "the heresy of paraphrase," which enabled Brooks to unpack relatively short poems at great length while declaring that his close reading was not a paraphrase.[29]

One historicizing impulse might involve simply noting that we could produce a kind of time stamp for criticism in the fifties and sixties in France and America—for all the differences between the two—by focusing on the insistence that literature speak silently, that it present itself as an alternative to what Blanchot, in the quotation I cited earlier, called "a strong defense and a high wall against that speaking enormity that addresses itself to us in turning us away from ourselves," a speaking enormity that John Guillory has trenchantly described as a notion of communication increasingly set at odds with literature.[30]

As Guillory helps us to see, the business memo of modern English itself nearly approaches the whiteness of Mallarmé's blank page. It incorporates a great deal of unwritten space in the effort to condense its message into the smallest possible number of words. Yet the bureaucratic memo and the literary work have come to seem such polar opposites that we take any literature that incorporates the look of the memo as irony or a metaliterary instance of literature. We feel obliged to talk about it in ways similar to those in which we talk about William Carlos Williams's poem "This Is Just to Say," in which the title apes a bureaucratic announcement that puts its recipient on notice, and applies it to a domestic situation in which the communication concerns all that his wife will surely not find in the icebox when she opens it. The bureaucratic inventory, with its insistence on its being received, speaks the language of the memo. It defines itself as a public document available for general review and analysis, as Weber observed in his account of the modern office. It becomes poetic not just through its line arrangement but by its suggestion that it is a poem because it is an inventory of absence. It does not use its white space as a ground on which to figure its points and embolden them, as the memo does. Instead, it uses its white space to say that it's not saying.

In 1988 the conferees who asked themselves "What Is Philology?" spent most of their time, Ziolkowski says, "assessing the utility of philology in determining what *Webster's* so amusingly and evasively designated the 'authenticity, meaning, etc.' of written records."[31] And he adds, "if philology can be seen most broadly (and perhaps *too*

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broadly as 'the art of reading slowly,' it is more narrowly a slow reading that aims at establishing and commenting upon documents."[32] For philologists in the classical tradition, the project of establishing texts is central, and an abundant knowledge of the history of a language and languages is necessary. For literary scholars of written modernity, however, the texts appear as if already established. For them, the project of reading involves an acknowledgement of the philological work that texts incorporate into themselves.

One of the most striking of these modern accounts of reading is Barbara Johnson's "Philology: What Is at Stake?" in which she cites de Man's description of Reuben Brower's Hum 6 course as an example of a turn to reading that was analogous to the turn to theory some decades later. Foregrounding de Man's claim that "the turn to theory occurred as a return to philology, to an examination of the structure of language prior to the meaning it produces," she looks to two texts, one of them Richard Wright's *Native Son*.[33] Her example of the "utility of philology" in reading is "the ransom note Bigger Thomas sends to his employer Mr. Dalton."[34] Bigger has, Johnson recounts, "accidentally killed Dalton's daughter and wants to throw the blame on communists. He therefore signs the letter 'Red.'" And the police are thrown off by this, "blinded," as Johnson says, by a "preconception" that prevents them from seeing that the final instruction in the ransom note, "Do what this letter say," "is a sign that the author is black, not red."[35] The injunction "Do what this letter say" calls for philological attention in either case. For someone reading it without any knowledge of the identity of the author, it is the note of a communist who committed a lapse and left the final *s* off "says," or the message of a man who doesn't realize that "say" isn't standard English here, and whose very use of words announces that he's black.

Johnson here treats the tendency of the police to accept the signature as a valid statement of its author's identity as a familiar way of falling for meaning. It is indicative of their succumbing to "the screen of received ideas" and of their failure to "encounter unexpected otherness . . . to encounter the other."[36] Yet the episode is also something of a parable about the kind of philology that would immediately have recognized Bigger Thomas's voice in the ransom note. It says something about the development of literature that a novelist like Wright claims philological privilege for the novel, which can now assign dialect, malapropisms, and grammatical errors to its characters without itself taking on the mistakes in the process. The novelist has turned the philological tables on characters, thus effectively outflanking the critics who might brand him a writer of a particular time, place, and identity.

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This appropriation of a philological high ground persists through novels of the present that know how to depict their own historical moment effortlessly. Think of how David Foster Wallace, for instance, comments extensively on the ways in which American novelists insist upon naming brands and products.[37] Advertisers may well have paid television and movies to include their products in domestic and office scenes, but novelists reverse the thrust of product placement and use products to place their work in time. Eliot might have created a novelistic world in *Middlemarch* that organized a fictional present and a recent past just before the Reform Bill of 1832. Contemporary novelists create a fictional present and a recent past by mentioning Kate Spade handbags, Oliver Peoples glasses, and Holly Hobby ovens, or by using names of products and corporations that no longer exist. (Lewis Carroll and Gilles Deleuze would be amused by a world in which an advertisement can say, "Cingular's name is now AT&T.") Naming and name-dropping have come to be historicizing operations rather than ontological or aspirational ones. This self-philologizing impulse creates the opening for Wallace's send-up of the world of datable products in having consumer brands sponsor entire years in his novel *Infinite Jest*: the Year of the Trial-size Dove Bar, the Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment, the Year of the Perdue Wonderchicken.[38]

Johnson is certainly right to point to the example in *Native Son* as an instance of what de Man called "the structure of language prior to the meaning it produces."[39] She tracks Wright's presentation wonderfully in showing how different ways of accounting for the missing *s* chime or clash with the signature "Red." This is the reading of a minimal element, one *s* in a ransom note of many sentences, with maximal consequences. It is, as de Man claims of the kind of philological reading he's describing and advocating, "irrefutable," in that its logic can be tracked perfectly. It refuses to teach literature as what de Man calls "a substitute for the teaching of theology, ethics, psychology, or intellectual history."[40] And it bears upon the philology of daily life, the world that we don't even need sociologists to comment on for us, the world in which we recognize the hierarchies of literacy that give us a myriad of different kinds of comparative evaluation and correctness.

Johnson is right to present her reading in support of de Man's account of the startling effect that can be achieved by attention to the very words of the text and thus to correlate close reading with philology as what Edward Said calls "attention paid to language as bearing within it a knowledge of a kind entirely limited to what language does and does not do" and what Sheldon Pollock calls "the discipline of making sense of texts."[41]

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Rancière's technique of creating philological epochs that can be contrasted with one another, however, sets the results of that close reading in a somewhat different light. While Johnson compellingly talks about the need to "break through preconceived notions of meaning in order to encounter unexpected otherness, her injunction is directed at the reader, and leaves the writer and his epochal expectations unaddressed.[42] Rancière's account of style—particularly in his discussion of "Why Emma Bovary Had to Be Killed"—bears out a philology that regards style as "a structure of language prior to the meaning it produces."[43] But the emphasis on style in *Madame Bovary* that makes it simultaneously a novel about the wife of a provincial doctor and also a novel about the novel and its style sets up a kind of competition between the novelist and his character. In the philological work of the novel, Gustave has style, Emma has kitsch. While an earlier literature was to be judged on its consonance with epic or dramatic conventions, the diffusion and celebration of style functions to cast Emma as if she were herself an example of all that Blanchot meant when he talked about "the speaking enormity that addresses us in turning us away from ourselves," and all that Said meant when he invoked Adorno to say that art exists "intensely in a state of unreconciled opposition to the depredations of daily life, the uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor."[44]

Even, that is, as scholars call on us to attend unexpected voices and to extend our sense of philology to escape what can be merely stated and paraphrased, novelists have been setting themselves up as the monitors of style and usage. Flaubert can hang a great deal of his novel on the way the novelist and his ideal readers have a more capacious, Voltairean sense of grammar than does Emma Bovary, and Wright can structure his plot around Bigger Thomas's inability to recognize that he should have checked his spelling. Even as de Man and Johnson want to emphasize the importance of a reading that goes beyond hermeneutics and paraphrase, Rancière enables us to see how far novelists have taken over the project of authentication and accreditation, what feels like the factuality of the assessment of taste and grammar.

The triumphant accomplishment of the novel in the nineteenth century was not simply to have replaced the oral story with a fiction that could only subsist in written form. It also disabled the story that could be attended and recounted and paraphrased and recounted again. In its place it left novelistic style and the notion that paraphrase was impossible or heretical, and the motto "Accept no substitutes." In the twentieth century, with the rise of standard brands and their names,

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writers came to be their own best philologists. In being self-situating, they aimed to locate themselves both particularly and ideally, all without the aid of literary criticism—or so confident of its assistance that they have absorbed it into themselves.

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NOTES

[1] See Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "Roots, Races, and the Return to Philology," *Representations* 106 (Spring 2009): 34–62.

[2] Harpham, 34.

[3] See Sheldon Pollock, "Future Philology?" *Critical Inquiry* 35.4 (2009): 931–961, esp. 934.

[4] See Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2004), 58.

[5] See Jan Ziolkowski, ed., *On Philology* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1990).

[6] See Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007).

[7] See Casanova, 103–4, 255.

[8] See Jacques Rancière, *La parole muette: Essai sur les contradictions de la littérature* (Paris: Hachette, 1998); *Mute Speech*, trans. James Swenson (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2011).

[9] Susan Stewart, *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), 66–101. See Margaret Russett, *Fictions and Fakes: Forging Romantic Authenticity, 1760–1845* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009); Andrew Piper, *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2009); and Maureen N. McLane, *Balladeering, Minstrelsy, and the Making of British Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011).

[10] James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*, ed. R.W. Chapman, corr. J. D. Fleeman (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), 280.

[11] Anthony Grafton, "Wolf, Friedrich August," in *The Classical Tradition*, ed. Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2011), 987–89.

[12] See Grafton, 988–89.

[13] See James I. Porter, "Homer: The Very Idea," *Arion* 10.2 (2002): 57–86.

[14] See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 59–97.

[15] See Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory* (New York: Verso, 2008), 128.

[16] See Wiliam Arrowsmith, "Nietzsche on Classics and Classicists: Part I," *Arion* 2.1 (Spring 1963): 5–18; "Nietzsche on Classics and Classicists: Part II," *Arion* 2.2 (Summer 1963): 5–27; and "Nietzsche: Notes for 'We Philologists,'" *Arion*, n.s. 1.2 (1973/74): 279–80.

[17] See William Godwin, *On Sepulchres, or A Proposal for Erecting Some Memorial of the Illustrious Dead in All Ages on the Spot Where Their Remains Have Been Interred* (1809), http://departmentofurbanarchaeology.webs.com/essayonsepulchres.htm.

[18] See Rancière, *Mute Speech*, esp. 43–53.

[19] Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 47.

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[20] See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, Vadim Liapunov, and Kenneth Brostron (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1982).

[21] See Jameson, 131–32.

[22] Seamus Perry uses the happy phrase "incorrigibly Wordsworthian" to suggest that particular lines are so representative of Wordsworth's style as to be immediately recognizable. See his "Joy Perplexed," *Times Literary Supplement*, July 14, 2006, 15.

[23] Gustave Flaubert, Correspondance, ed. Jean Brumeau, 4 vol. (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 2:732.

[24] Maurice Blanchot, *Le livre a venir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), 267, quoted in Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 34 [*La parole muette*, 9].

[25] Rancière is, in other words, arriving from a different angle at a point that Jacques Derrida makes in his critique of Claude Lévi-Strauss—namely, that what is needed is not more data. See Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1997), 117–18.

[26] See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977), 3–7.

[27] See W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1954), 3–18, esp. 18.

[28] See Cleanth Brooks, "The Language of Paradox," in *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1956), 3–21, esp. 3.

[29] See Brooks, "The Heresy of Paraphrase," in *The Well Wrought Urn*, 192–214.

[30] See John Guillory, "The Memo and Modernity," *Critical Inquiry* 31.1 (2004): 108–32. See also his "Genesis of the Media Concept," *Critical Inquiry* 36.2 (2010): 321–62.

[31] Ziolkowski, 6.

[32] Ziołkowski, 9.

[33] Paul de Man, "The Return to Philology," in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1986), 23.

[34] Barbara Johnson, "Philology: What Is at Stake?" in *What Is Philology?* in *Comparative Literature Studies*, 27.1 (1990): 29.

[35] Johnson, 29.

[36] Johnson, 29.

[37] See David Foster Wallace, "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction," *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 13.2 (1993): 151–94.

[38] David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest* (New York: Little, Brown, 1996).

[39] de Man, 24.

[40] de Man, 24.

[41] Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, 58; Pollock, 931.

[42] Johnson, 29.

[43] Rancière, "Why Emma Bovary Had to Be Killed," *Critical Inquiry* 34.2 (Winter 2008): 233–48.

[44] Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism,* 63.

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