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Roots, Races, and the Return to Philology

Consequences of philology: arrogant expectations; philistinism; superficiality; overrating of reading and writing; Alienation from the people and the needs of the people. . . . Task of philology: to disappear.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, "We Philologists"[1]

Returning to Philologies

So little did Edward Said and Paul de Man have in common, so different and even opposed were their understandings of the methods and aims of scholarship, that it was easy to overlook points of contact or continuity between them. These came into sharp focus, however, with the posthumous publication of Said's *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, whose central chapter was titled "The Return to Philology," the very same title that de Man had used more than twenty years earlier for one of his most programmatic and polemical essays. The currents of agreement between these essays ran deep, beginning with their diagnoses of the state of criticism. Literary studies, they said, seem to have lost sight of the object, so that the discourse of criticism was filled with windy pronouncements about what Said called "vast structures of power or . . . vaguely therapeutic structures of salutary redemption," statements referring not to texts, but, as de Man put it, to "the general context of human experience or history."[2] They agreed, too, on the reason for this loss of focus: the decline of philology in professional training. Criticism without philology, they said, was nothing more than the professional form of the pleasure principle. Only a penitential return to philology, which Said described as the "detailed, patient scrutiny of and a lifelong attentiveness to" the text, would restore the integrity of scholarship (*HDC*, 61).

Although neither gave evidence of actual philological expertise, both de Man and Said suggested that the origins of their own advanced practices

ABSTRACT Noting recent indications of a renewed interest in philology, this essay provides accounts of both the flourishing of philology in the nineteenth century and the abandonment by scholars of philology on methodological and moral grounds in the twentieth century. It contends that while traditional philology cannot be considered a worthy model for contemporary scholarship, neither can it be simply repudiated or ignored, for it continues to exert a powerful if largely unacknowledged influence on scholarly practice. / Representations 106. Spring 2009 © The Regents of the University of California. ISSN 0734–6018, electronic ISSN 1533–855X, pages 34–62. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content to the University of California Press at http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp. DOI:10.1525/rep.2009.106.1.34.

were to be found in this most traditional, indeed, regressive of all scholarly practices. As de Man said in a typically ironic and defiant passage, "technically correct rhetorical readings may be boring, monotonous, predictable, and unpleasant, but they are irrefutable" (19). For his part, Said did not aspire to either monotony or irrefutability, but he took as his heroes the great philologists such as Erich Auerbach, E. R. Curtius, and Leo Spitzer.[3] In a further coincidence, both Said and de Man wrote their essays a year before their deaths: returning to philology seems to be an urge experienced by those confronting their own mortality.

Within this broad spectrum of agreement, however, there were a series of jarring differences. For Said, the object of philological attention, the text, is best conceived as a window onto a particular historical world. In order to grasp that world, one must "put oneself in the position of the author, for whom writing is a series of decisions and choices expressed in words" (*HDC*, 62). These choices constitute the process of aesthetic creation, which, because it constructs a counterworld, represents an "unreconciled opposition to the depredations of daily life" and to the "identities . . . given by the flag or the national war of the moment" (63, 80). For Said, philology leads directly from the text to an empathetic encounter with a masterful author, a deep and direct immersion in the historical world that author inhabited, and privileged access to the author's heroic resistance to the actual, most particularly to the ideology of nationalism. The political indifference of many, if not most, philologists notwithstanding, Said argues that "reading is, fundamentally, an act of perhaps modest human emancipation and enlightenment" (66). De Man, by sharp contrast, regarded language in mechanistic and explicitly nonhuman terms, and scholarship as a technical rather than an interpretive or evaluative exercise. He urged scholars to concentrate on linguistic forms for their own sake, focusing on "the structure of language prior to the meaning it produces" (25).

It seems strange that the leaders of two such divergent critical movements should have ended their careers and indeed their lives with the same diagnosis of criticism's current state, and the same cure; and stranger still that both should have claimed to be the true heir of the philological tradition. Strangest of all, however, is the fact that Said and de Man used the same word to denote such utterly different things: intimacy, resistance, emancipation, and historical knowledge for Said, and, for de Man, a harsh and explicit corrective to precisely such humanistic fantasies, as he regarded them. It is as if each had appropriated the term "philology" for his own purposes, without regard to its meaning.

These curiosities invite us to probe more deeply into philology itself; more importantly, they awaken us to the complex of desires, needs, and longings that have troubled and animated literary study and humanistic scholarship in general.

It is tempting, reading Said and de Man, to think that one of them must simply have gotten it wrong, but philology actually answers to both of their accounts. De Man thinks of philology as a positive science, a technical and systematic investigation of texts, beginning with the establishment of the correct text, by restoration if necessary, and emphasizing accurate description and linguistic analysis. While scholars in the Renaissance devoted themselves to preserving and printing authoritative editions of ancient manuscripts, de Man seems to be referring more specifically to the "new" or "modern" philology invented at the end of the eighteenth century by F. A. Wolf, who applied to the texts of Homer the methods of meticulous textual scholarship recently developed for the study of the Bible.[4] In his major work, *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795), Wolf argued, on the basis of an erudite study of the language of the texts, that the Homeric epics were composed and transmitted orally and existed as a loosely connected sequence of songs for about five hundred years before they were written down. Wolf treated the surviving texts not as transcribed Homeric utterances, but as transcriptions of transcriptions, each one potentially harboring an authentic but encrypted Homeric voice that had to be liberated by painstaking scholarly labor from the impurities that had over time corrupted it. Wolf's professional distrust of the text as given may have compromised the authority of Homer as the historical author of the text, but it marked a significant advance in critical sophistication. Subsequent philologists embraced the presumption that the text was a tissue of appearances whose most elementary features had to be determined by scholarly methods. Scholarship in the wake of Wolf became skeptical and aggressive, even as it confined itself to preliminary matters.

Wolf defined philology as the application of a defined methodology to a limited field of evidence, an empirical practice that prepared the way for the consideration of questions of meaning and value, which would be achieved by other means. After Wolf, philologists devoted themselves to marking the first occurrences of words or usages, determining the geographical range of certain linguistic forms, noting spelling variations, identifying the sound-structure of words and phrases, and tracking shifts in meaning over time. They counted, measured, and compared; they recorded anomalous instances of verb forms, case terminations, inflections, and moods. They developed methods of comparing grammars and classifying languages into families. The work was arduous, a series of microdescriptions with little opportunity for synthesis, judgment, or reflection.[5] Devoting themselves to the study of texts written in ancient languages—Old Norse, Zend, Old Slavic, Sanskrit, and especially ancient Greek—scholars scarcely lived in the world. As the linguist Roy Harris comments dryly, "We are told that such-and-such a scholar paid no attention to the fall of Napoleon, or the Russian revolution, so engrossed was he at the time in the libraries of Paris or St. Petersburg."[6] Those engaged

in such work may have absented themselves from felicity, but they had the consolation that their labors yielded certain knowledge free from abstraction and uncontaminated by interests, desires, or extraneous ends. Moreover, they could, in moments of pride, reflect that their project was reserved for the tiny number of focused intellects capable of years of tedium in pursuit of irreducible fact. They could tell themselves that everything depended on their selfless devotion. As the Byzantinist Ihor Sevcenko puts it, philology even today consists primarily of "constituting and interpreting the texts that have come down to us. It is a narrow thing, but without it nothing else is possible."[7] Associated with a deep erudition accumulated over the course of an ascetic life, philology shaped, as Gerald Graff notes, the pedagogical practices, based on rote learning, recitation, and the examination of linguistic details, of the most prestigious American universities well into the twentieth century.[8] By affiliating deconstruction with this narrow but indispensable thing, de Man was clearly attempting to cast his own practice not only as a traditional pedagogy but also as a kind of first knowledge that subtended and enabled all other kinds of understanding.

Philology was, however, also understood in very different terms, not as an empirical study of a limited field, but as a speculative undertaking oriented toward deep time and distant things. In "We Philologists," written in 1874, Nietzsche registered his contempt for most philologists, whose work impressed him as an absurd combination of inconsequentiality and hubris. But writing just a few years later in *Daybreak* (1881) as the philosopher of "untimeliness," he summoned up the vision of a rare but authentic philological practice:

> philology is that venerable art which exacts from its followers one thing above all—to step to one side, to leave themselves spare moments, to grow silent, to become slow—the leisurely art of the goldsmith applied to language: an art which must carry out slow, fine work, and attains nothing if not *lento.* For this very reason philology is now more desirable than ever before; for this very reason it is the highest attraction and incitement in an age of "work": that is to say, of haste, of unseemly and immoderate hurry-skurry, which is intent upon "getting things done" at once, even every book, whether old or new. Philology itself, perhaps, will not "get things done" so hurriedly: it teaches how to read well: i.e. slowly, profoundly, attentively, prudently, with inner thoughts, with the mental doors ajar, with delicate fingers and eyes.[9]

As a careful reader of Nietzsche, de Man was undoubtedly thinking of this memorable passage when he promoted deconstruction as a way of suspending the rush to interpretive closure by attending to the structure of language prior to the meanings it produces. But de Man most certainly did not intend to affiliate deconstruction, as a practice of "technically correct rhetorical reading," with the kind of unfocused rumination Nietzsche describes here. It appears, in other words, that de Man's call for a return to philology

registered only one of its aspects—its modest but honorable narrowness—but that there is more.

This "more" was present from the beginning, but not in the form of a simple addition or complement. Wolf's work, to take the example nearest to hand, emerged from and supported a larger movement of "philhellenism," an enthusiasm for the culture of ancient Greece. This enthusiasm was associated with his famous predecessor, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, the most influential advocate for a view of classical Greek culture as a singularly rich embodiment of certain values, including an organic unity of man and nature, a vibrant civic culture, a free and harmonious development of human capacities, and a passionate cultivation of beauty. Wolf joined other "neohumanists," including Lessing, Schiller, Hölderlin, the Humboldts, Goethe, and Hegel, in regarding Greece and Rome not merely as admirable in themselves, but as inspiring models for contemporary culture and institutions. The singularly creative essence of Greek culture was, they thought, encoded in the language, whose very grammar represented a kind of elementary philosophy. Wolf's work was important in this context because an accurate text would, it was thought, permit the genius of the Greeks to shine through all the more clearly. The Prussian state supported Wolf and his students because it recognized in philology a tool for promoting a movement of cultural solidarity and renovation that would not be restricted to philosophers and would not be based on reason alone. As Lionel Gossman says, the philhellenistic movement that gave philology its original point and purpose was "one of the more ingenious and deceptive disguises adopted by the Romantic revolt against the Enlightenment."[10] While Wolf and his successors may have seen themselves as disengaged from contemporary political and ideological struggles, they made no effort to distance themselves from the cultural-political project of rendering the vivifying spirit of ancient civilizations in a form that could inspire imitation.

It is ironic, to say the least, that philology, which Said credits with constituting a resistance to the "identities given by the flag or the national war of the moment," emerged in its modern form in the context of a state-sponsored attempt to foster cultural solidarity. Said may have failed to note the irony because, like de Man, he wished to extract and preserve just a portion of philology, which was crystallized in Wolf's statement of his task: to retrieve, from the corrupted extant texts, the "pure, genuine form which first poured from [Homer's] divine lips."[11] Such a project required not just vast knowledge and a long attention span, but—most important to Said—the kind of responsiveness and imagination that would enable the scholar to draw inferences about other minds and cultures from a close study of textual evidence. Imagination was required for such work and, indeed, for everything a philologist did. Only inspired guesswork amounting to divination could identify

vanishing traces of one word in another or derive words in different languages from a common source in a prior language. Accordingly, one of the most striking features of the new philology, and the one that Said wished to retrieve and reactivate, was a speculative boldness that many today would consider unprofessional.

Required of even the most basic philological procedures, this boldness was deployed on an ever-larger scale as the discipline matured. At the very beginning, Wolf declared that his ultimate goal was to articulate "*the philosophy of the history of human nature in Greece*" (emphasis in original).[12] A big job; but over the course of the nineteenth century, philology developed even greater aspirations. Wolf's most accomplished student, Philip August Böckh, saw philology as a master-discipline encompassing a total knowledge of antiquity, including history, geography, mythology, law, religion, art, epigraphy, and what might be called social history. The scope of philology came to include not just Greece but also the civilizations that lay behind Greece, cultures long since vanished, whose migratory movements and even ways of thinking might be reconstructed on the basis of linguistic study. In *On Language* (1836), Wilhelm von Humboldt argued that philology could disclose the origins of myths, religions, and even national characteristics—the elements of a *Volk*. Each language, he said, represented a unique expression of a nation's "mental power," a distinctive way of solving the universally imposed "task of language formation."[13] After studying a number of languages, the philologist might be able to construct a general typology of languages, which could then inform a historical understanding of the principles of cultural development and a philosophical understanding of the phenomenon of human culture as such. At the end of his labors, the philologist might even be privileged with a glimpse of the ur-language, or *Ursprache*, from which all others had evolved, and thus of the thought-forms prevailing at the origin of human civilization itself. A prodigious vista opened up before the scholar, such that a dry stick like Mr. Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* could imagine that as a consequence of decades of dreary toil, the key to all mythologies was within his grasp.

Philology became new or modern when it found a way to conjoin a limited empiricism to a speculative practice with no limits at all, when it discovered the route that led from the close study of the text to the language of the text, and from there to the author, the culture the author inhabited, other cultures, the origins of cultures, and finally to human origins and the mysteries surrounding those origins. In the new philology, the "art of the goldsmith" extended from textual microdetails to questions of profound historical, philosophical, and moral significance, for there was no weak link in this golden chain, no knowledge that could be considered irrelevant.

Given the magnitude of the questions it addressed and the commitment it demanded of the scholar, philology came to be respected, at least in

Germany and France, as the highest form of modern scholarship, the vanguard discipline of modernity itself. Writing as an eager young man of twenty-five, in the wake of the events of 1848, Ernest Renan predicted the dawn of a new day of progress and science, with philology in the lead. The "modern spirit," he wrote, "that is, rationalism, criticism, liberalism, was founded on the same day as philology. *The founders of the modern spirit are the philologists.*" He defined the discipline that eventually came to be known for its antiquarian narrowness as nothing less than "the *exact science of the productions of the human intellect*," a master discourse that epitomized the scientific spirit as such; all advances made by humanity since the fifteenth century, he contended, were attributable to the philological spirit.[14] To its partisans, philology embraced everything, and almost every person, of consequence. Nietzsche, for whom a genealogy of morals lay well within the compass of philology, counted Goethe, Wagner, Schopenhauer, and Leopardi as philologists of the highest rank. Heidegger was placing himself in the great tradition when he attempted to recover the primordiality of Being through a study of words. No task was too great for the philologue. As Said noted, in the nineteenth century, the term itself seemed to include "both a gift for exceptional spiritual insight into language and the ability to produce work whose articulation is of aesthetic and historical power"; "there is," he concluded with a guarded admiration, "an unmistakable aura of power about the philologist" (*Orientalism*, 131, 132).

In short, the fear voiced by Said and de Man—that critics unmoored from philology might indulge in statements about vast structures of power or the general context of human history—was for nearly a century and a half proudly announced as the defining characteristic and entire point of philology itself.

Neither Said nor de Man emphasized the way that the ascetic rigor of philological discipline—the commitment to empiricism, erudition, narrowness, and method—translated into critical power in the form of speculative freedom and the authority to pronounce on issues of immense moment. They merely sought to roll back the tape of the history of scholarship and begin again, with criticism established on the foundation of a safe, limited, honorable practice. It is, however, difficult to imagine that two such charismatic scholars did not also respond to the aura of power that gathered about the philologist, and that, in seeking to return to philology, they were not also looking to recapture that aura. They undoubtedly recognized that the otherworldly authority of philology derived from the fact that it was strictly a preliminary procedure, unimplicated in cultural, political, or ideological agendas. Accordingly, both offered carefully delimited and partial versions of philological practice that stressed such unexceptionable virtues as attention, care, and rigor. De Man simply ignored the historical and speculative dimensions, and while Said criticized scholars such as Renan who could be

accused of Orientalism, he saw their work as a perversion of true philology. The question raised by their work is, then, not just whether scholarship would be well served by a return to philology, but whether an essential or authentic philology could be identified and rescued from its actual historical practice.

Language, Origins, and Race

In fact, philologists in the nineteenth century were already raising this question, and were answering it by insisting that their discipline should be considered a true science, a refined and sophisticated practice that could bear comparison to biology, physics, chemistry, anatomy, electricity, botany, anthropology, and above all geology. “There is no science,” Max Müller wrote, “from which we, the students of language, may learn more from than Geology.”[15] From the philological perspective, ancient languages were like fossils or petrifactions and gave access to past human experience in the same way that rocks displayed in a museum revealed the geological record. “In language, as in pure amber,” one scholar wrote in 1858, “the ideas, hopes, mistakes, experiences, follies, joys and sorrows of preceding generations are preserved, in clear, transparent beauty, for our constant appreciation and enlightenment.”[16] Indeed, words were superior to rocks in that, while the latter could only be observed, analyzed, and described, words could speak their own truth. “And how,” this writer continued, “is the silent past of language made, under the reviving touch of philology, all vocal of itself again.” But as this comment suggests, philology, the discipline of the reviving touch, was also felt to command powers that were not strictly scientific, even approaching the occult. It represented, in fact, a sublime nonconflict of the faculties: as this long essay concludes, “the study of language rises, under the light of true philology, like all high philosophy, into the very charms of poetry” (507).

Staking claims to the status of poetry, philosophy, and science—and to a transcendence of disciplinarity as such—philology represented itself as an “untimely” form of knowledge that was completely independent of political or ideological ends. And yet, the defining feature of philology in the nineteenth century was that, persuaded of the scientific solidity of its means and the sublimity of its ends, it was repeatedly appropriated by, and even affiliated itself with, projects that were neither scientific nor sublime. The most telling instance was the deep investment of philology in the concept of race. The ambitious and high-minded attempt to discover a history as well as a characterological analysis of peoples and nations through a genealogical study of language had, as a corollary, the inquiry into the origins and characteristics of races. The appeal of race, for those interested in language, was that it

provided a strong way of conceiving of linguistic groups as kinds of people whose ways of life could be observed; the appeal of philology, for those interested in race, was that it provided an equally strong—that is, empirical and objective—way of describing the capacities and dispositions of those groups.

The point of origin for this particular strand of the history of philology was the 1786 address by Sir William Jones to the Asiatick Society in Calcutta, in which Jones argued that the resemblances between Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit suggested a common source for all three.[17] This hint provided linguists with a new task that took them far beyond Homer and ancient Greece. The reconstruction of the history of mankind through comparative linguistic study led directly to spectacular and altogether unexpected discoveries about linguistic genealogies, and forced a rethinking of the origins of European culture. The "discovery of a fissure in the European past," as Tomoko Masuzawa has called it, created a stunning new historical and secular genealogy that located the origins of European culture in a part of the world that had hitherto seemed to most Europeans as exceedingly remote, and yet devoid of exoticism or even interest—and, incidentally, radicalized the difference represented by the Jews.[18] As this project advanced, philological distinctions hardened into ethnological or biological distinctions: the term "Indo-Germanic languages," which the German scholar Franz Bopp had proposed in *Comparative Grammar* in 1833, was understood by many to be a "racial" as well as a linguistic category.[19] Linguists found it increasingly difficult to sustain a methodological distinction between language and its speakers, and many failed to see the point of the effort, since the idea of race was so helpful in concretizing the conclusions of linguistic scholarship.

A generation before Bopp, a philhellenic philology was already racialist in that it was explicitly "anti-Judaic." Its enthusiasm for ancient Greece was all the more intense for being pitted against Jewish religion and culture, which were thought to exemplify such qualities as mechanism, abstraction, dualism, and lifelessness.[20] In his later teaching, Wolf himself specifically excluded the Hebrews (along with Egyptians, Persians, and other Oriental nations) from the tiny group of ancient peoples distinguished by a "higher" spiritual culture. The philological inquiry into the historicity of languages, which, after Wolf, rapidly replaced the great curiosity about the origin of language as such—the subject of Herder's 1772 Berlin prize essay—produced the discovery that Sanskrit was an older language than Hebrew, which therefore could not be an "original," much less a "sacred" language. And when scholars compared the expressive capacities of different languages, they almost invariably discovered that the languages from which most modern European languages had derived were superior to Semitic languages.

Friedrich Schlegel, for example, praised the "inflectional" capabilities of Sanskrit and its descendants by comparing them explicitly with the limited

resources of the "agglutinative" Semitic languages. He cautioned against the temptation to rank cultures on this basis, and noted in particular "the lofty power and energy of the Arabic and Hebraic languages," but this point was largely lost even on his most sophisticated readers.[21] Referring to Schlegel's comparative study of grammars, von Humboldt argued that the "Sanscritic family" demonstrated a uniquely generative power, possessing virtually as an organic fact a "stronger and more variously creative *life-principle* than the rest" (*On Language*, 183; emphasis in the original). The people who invented these languages were, he held, naturally more robust and creative than other peoples. After von Humboldt, scholars were increasingly committed not just to articulating cultural differences on the basis of linguistic differences, but also to affirming the supremacy of the groups that settled Christian Europe.

The decisive, if in crucial ways ambivalent intertwining of linguistics and race theory took place in the work of Müller, a German-born comparative philologist and Orientalist who settled in England in the late 1840s to study Sanskrit in the collection of the East India Company. Unlike some of those who followed him, he was not primarily interested in race or even in language, which engaged his attention primarily as sources of information about the origins and growth of religions. He joined others such as August Schleicher, Karl Brugmann, and a young Ferdinand de Saussure in refining the methods by which families of languages such as Bopp's "Indo-Germanic" could be assembled and related to others. The metaphor of the linguistic family—now regarded as incomplete and misleading—seemed to make sense of linguistic development; just as important, it went some way toward compensating for the loss of the biblical narrative of human history by suggesting, on scientific grounds, that the stories of Eden and Babel were true in essence if not in particulars, and that there was once a single language spoken by all people. The most common way of representing linguistic genealogies and relations was the tree-diagram, which showed, in a manner that Darwin and others found deeply suggestive, the bewildering variety of modern languages funneling inexorably back to a fountainhead, the Adam of languages.[22] A language requires speakers, of course, and so the idea of an original race came into focus as an entailment of the philological inquiry into linguistic development.

What was this fabulously fertile first language, and who spoke it? Müller decided to call the common ancestor of Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit "Indo-European"; and in his *Lectures on the Science of Language* (1861–63), he referred to the speakers of this ancient tongue as "Aryans," appropriating the name of a tribal group that had been the object of intense and often wild speculation and mythologizing in German thinking since the late eighteenth century. His authority in this respect was Schlegel, who had proposed

in 1808 a connection based on linguistic evidence between Indians and Nordic peoples. In 1819 Schlegel gave to the ancestors of both peoples the name Aryan, a word he connected to *Ehre,* or honor. Müller included among the descendants of the Aryans not just Germanic peoples, but all Europeans and many others as well. He suggested that the Aryan homeland, the *Urheimat,* was either in the Caucasus Mountains between the Caspian and Black Seas or, more likely, in the Pamir Mountains in Central Asia (now Tajikistan); others put it in Persia, Anatolia, Lithuania, the Ukraine, the Himalayas, southern Germany, the Euphrates Valley, southern Sweden, the Boreal Pole, and even North Africa. Like most who speculated about the Aryans, he posited a restless and mysteriously driven group that eventually inhabited large parts of India and Russia, as well as Persia, Greece, and most of Europe.[23] Müller's growing stature as a philologist and Orientalist supported his identification of the Aryan homeland, his suggestion that they were the common ancestors of all Indo-Europeans, and his advocacy of the thesis, first advanced by Hegel, that the best proof of their existence and their migrations lay in linguistics.

Within eighty years of Jones's suggestion of a common origin of ancient languages, scholars in Europe had shifted their attention from Hebrew and Greek to Sanskrit, and then from these known "daughter" languages to an unknown language, an Indo-European "protolanguage" that had to be reconstructed from the traces it had left in the languages that had succeeded it. Scholars had also attempted to identify on strictly linguistic grounds a number of ancient groups that had left few traces of their existence. And they had identified the original human horde, its cultural characteristics, its wanderings, and its homeland. Given the paucity of material evidence for lost languages and cultures, philology was challenged to maintain the premise that it was an empirical discipline. As Bruce Lincoln writes, the reconstruction of an ur-language "is an exercise that invites one to imagine speakers of that protolanguage, a community of such people, then a place for that community, a time in history, distinguishing characteristics, and a set of contrastive relations with other protocommunities where other protolanguages were spoken. For all this," Lincoln adds, "need it be said, there is no sound evidentiary warrant."[24] But throughout the nineteenth century, a voracious curiosity possessed of considerable cultural prestige and a methodology that gave its speculations the aspect of science flourished in the absence of such a warrant. With support from Müller and others, language became widely accepted as a rich and reliable source of evidence, and philology a kind of master-discipline for theorizing about human origins in general and human races in particular.

This represents one of history's bitter ironies, for Müller came to despise those who, like Comte de Gobineau in the *Essay on the Inequality of Races*

(1853–55), used linguistic evidence to argue for racial differences.[25] Gobineau adopted von Humboldt's claim that language was an index of the "mental power" of a people, substituted "race" for "people," and added the assertion that race was the most powerful explanation for human difference in general, particularly the difference between healthy and degenerate civilizations. He voiced another commonly held view when he wrote that Aryans were not simply an ancient race, but the most masterly and "creative" of races. And he spoke to a smaller but still sizable and committed group when he argued that the corruption or contamination of Aryan stock by Semitic or other blood, wherever it occurred, constituted a species disaster. For those who, like Gobineau, were committed to the principle of human difference rather than human unity, one of the key facts about Aryan migrations was that Aryans had conquered and intermarried with local populations everywhere they went, but had never intermarried with Jews.

Müller rejected all such arguments and the motives that drove them. He believed as a matter of faith in the unity of the human race—indeed, he believed in an "original pair," which seemed to him common sense and sound science—and held that philology was premised on that unity. He argued, in fact, that the Aryan (Indo-European), Semitic, and "Turanian" linguistic families all derived from some even earlier source, a Central Asian tongue spoken at the dawn of human existence.[26] And, in his later statements at least, he insisted on the wickedness of racial theory and its utter irrelevance to linguistic scholarship. On historical and moral grounds, he repudiated the notion of Aryan racial superiority and deplored the fact that linguistic evidence was conscripted in support of such arguments. He singled out for special opprobrium the United States, where "comparative philologists have been encouraged to prove the impossibility of a common origin of languages and races, in order to justify, by scientific arguments, the unhallowed theory of slavery. Never," he asserted, "do I remember to have seen science more degraded than on the title-page of an American publication in which, among the profiles of the different races of man, the profile of the ape was made to look more human than that of the negro."[27] But he was not always careful to make his ideas clear, and some of his ideas, particularly on the genesis of metaphor and myth as "diseases" of language, were themselves unclear—or, worse, clear but wrong, even obtuse.[28] He insisted that philology was a science, but he sought to use this science to disprove the notion that humans had evolved from primates, to demonstrate the presence of the divine scattered throughout nature and, ultimately, to reveal Christianity as the unconscious goal of all human history.[29]

Müller's commitment to the symphonic unity of humankind was unwavering, but his understanding of race was uncertain and inconstant. Race occupied a region in his discourse somewhere between the literal and the

metaphorical, the biological and the linguistic. "Not a single drop of foreign blood has entered into the organic system of the English language," he wrote in his *Lectures*; "the grammar, the blood and soul of the language, is as pure and unmixed in English as spoken in the British Isles as it was when spoken on the shores of the German ocean" (1, 70). The ambiguity was aggravated when he spoke, in terms almost worthy of Gobineau, of the "Aryan race," of which, he asserted, English language speakers were privileged descendants. He translated Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* into English in the conviction that it represented "the perfect manhood of the Aryan mind," and offered it to "the English-speaking race, the race of the future . . . [as] another Aryan heirloom."[30] Gobineau himself could not have put it better.

The reception of Müller provides sobering evidence of the fate of scholarly ambivalence and nuance when it enters the public sphere. On the basis of the uncertain evidence provided by language, Müller attempted to draw inferences about what he called, with some reluctance, race. Others more interested in race than in language simply ignored Müller's scruples even as they cited him as an authority, and proceeded directly to the comparison and ranking of races, cultures, and even religions, claiming scholarly support for their theses.

Under the reviving touch of the right kind of scholar, language yielded up fascinating new insights, particularly into the Jews. Scholarly arguments about the Jewish character resonated well beyond the walls of universities and learned societies. The work of Müller's friend Ernest Renan was particularly influential. Renan's multivolume history of Semitic languages, like his multivolume history of the people of Israel, was undertaken in the rooted conviction of the profound limitations of the Semitic mind. A professor of Hebrew, Renan devoted much of his life to the study of Semitic languages and history, and he was one of the most liberal and learned minds of his age. Yet his detailed historical and linguistic arguments, stripped of complexity and context as in their public reception they were bound to be, did not contradict a common anti-Semitism that included both Jews and Muslims: Renan is, in fact, the occasion for some of the most powerful condemnatory passages in Said's *Orientalism.*

In contrast to Müller, Renan saw, at the origin of human existence, two groups, Semites and Aryans. Each had contributed to human progress, but, according to Renan, the contribution of Semitic peoples was largely negative. The deficiencies of the ancient Semites were striking: they were incapable of science, philosophy, civilization, personal courage, and tolerance; they were selfish, rigid, and righteous; their culture displayed a "want of fertility both of imagination and language," a "startling simplicity of ideas."[31] All this could be seen in their cultural practices and religious beliefs; but the real mechanism, the determining force behind what appear to be racial characteristics, was neither cultural nor religious; it was linguistic.

Renan held an exceptionally hardwired version of the Humboldtian argument, believing that language, once established, became "a mould, a corset so to speak, more binding than even religion, legislation, manners, and customs."[32] A proper scholarly understanding of Semitic culture could therefore, he thought, best be obtained by a philological study of the Bible and other texts. This study would focus not on words but on a linguistic subunit developed by philology, the "root," the irreducible lexical kernel that, he believed, provided the best evidence of the deep character of the people. In the Aryan languages, nearly all roots, according to Renan, "contained an embryo divinity," while the roots of Semitic languages were "dry, inorganic, and quite incapable of giving birth to a mythology."[33] Bound by the ligatures of their language, the ancient Semites were simply incapable of thinking abstractly, much less metaphorically; and their conjugation of verbs displayed a dismaying primitivism.

There is no question of Renan's admiration for the nomadic peoples of the ancient Middle East, who, he said, "were superior to all the peoples of their day," and "occupy the foremost place in the history of humanity." Jerusalem was for Renan "the religious capital of humanity."[34] But he was convinced that he had discovered in the Semitic languages evidence of a principle of incompleteness so definitive and deep-seated that he could only account for the most monumental Semitic contribution to human civilization, the invention of monotheism, by describing it as a "secret tendency," an unconscious and in a sense unwilled expression of racial predispositions.[35] To be sure, he noted, the world owes the Jews in particular an immense debt. The sublime madness of the prophetic voice, decrying injustice in the name of a higher power, is their invention entirely; the multifarious Aryans, dazzled by the world's variety and distracted by divinities everywhere, would never have discovered that voice on their own. But while the kingdom of Israel was "to the highest degree creative," it "did not know how to crown its edifice"; it was incomplete, a "withered trunk" with but one "fertile branch," Christianity, which appropriated the Semitic religion without assuming the mental and linguistic limitations that had framed it.[36] In a sense, Jews owe Christians as much as Christians owe Jews, because the full glorious potential of monotheism was not realized until Aryans converted to it. Having conquered the world by proxy through Christianity, Judaism, Renan declared, was now effectively dead as a world-historical force.

Comparative philology, the science of modernity itself, provided Renan with grounding for arguments about Semitic inferiority that otherwise would have appeared to be mere conventional prejudice. But so inconsistent was Renan in his use of the term race that at times his arguments were indistinguishable from their vulgar counterparts, as tendentious as the popular views they sought to correct.[37] While he argued on occasion that the very

concept of race was useful only as a way of thinking about the distant past, and was becoming less and less useful in the liberal and rational ethos of modern times, he also held that there was "nothing shocking about the conquest of a nation of inferior race by a superior race," and even that Christian Europeans constituted "a race of masters and soldiers."[38] Müller and Renan both equivocated on the question of race, but Renan's pendulum swung even farther than Müller's in the direction of Gobineau, with whom Renan corresponded and whom he cited several times in his treatise on Semitic languages as a fellow philologist. Indeed, his commitment to science (as epitomized by philology) caused his pendulum occasionally to swing even farther than Gobineau's. In *Dialogues Philosophiques* (1876), Renan entertained the thought of a "factory" for the production of Scandinavian heroes located in Central Asia and organized by the Germans, a nation even then celebrated for its efficiency.[39]

The discourse on Aryans proved to be immensely suggestive across a wide range of political sympathies, influencing not only Gobineau and his sympathizers but also many others who relied on scientific studies of linguistic development to support liberal or moderate arguments about culture. Matthew Arnold, for example, had absorbed, without fully endorsing, the racialized discourse on language, which he deployed in the famous opposition of "Hebraism and Hellenism" in the fourth chapter of *Culture and Anarchy* (1882).[40] Unlike some of his neohumanist predecessors, Arnold was neither anti-Judaic nor anti-Semitic; for him, Hebraism and Hellenism represented qualities (such as "strictness of conscience" and "spontaneity of consciousness") that existed in dialectical mixture in any healthy society. Given Arnold's deferential respect for French and German philology, in fact, it is possible that he based his understanding of these terms not on observations of human beings but on linguistic scholarship. Aspects of his account of "Hebraism" seem to have been drawn from Renan's account of Semitic languages as inflexible and limited, while his Hellenism recalls some of the more buoyant formulations of the philhellenistic cultural project, with its emphasis on an enlightened culture that gave form to the sweetness and light inherent in the Greek language. But it is difficult to maintain that actual Jews are altogether outside the referential field when Arnold describes Hebraism in terms of "stiffness, hardness, narrowness, prejudice, want of insight, want of amiability," or when he draws a sharp contrast between Jewish culture and the "higher" spirituality and deeper humanity of the Greeks, Christians, and "Aryans."[41]

These differences played a direct role in his 1891 text *On the Study of Celtic Literature,* where he posited, with linguistic evidence, a distant and long-forgotten commonality between Aryan (more recently, Teutonic and Celtic) and Semitic peoples.[42] The argument borrowed from Müller, who traced the word "Arya" from India to Ireland (*Eire,* rather than Schlegel's *Ehre*),

and more directly from the warm-blooded account of Celtic "nobility" in Renan's "The Poetry of the Celtic Races," which began by praising the Celts for their racial purity.[43] "Never," said Renan (who had been born and raised in Celtic Brittany), "has a human family lived more apart from the world, and been purer from all alien admixture" (4).[44] The horrifying tale of the theory of Aryan supremacy had yet to unfold, of course, and the tolerant and reconciling Arnold would have been appalled at the course the story took after it left the hands of scholars. And yet, the key premises of the Aryan myth—that long ago, an aboriginal group of people emigrated to the West, becoming Christianized without having passed through Palestine, thus avoiding any contact with Jews; that pockets of post-Aryan purity still existed; that the culture of these pockets was superior in many respects to that of other places, and definitely opposed point by point to that of Jews—were all in place in Arnold's time, firmly *in* the hands of scholars, who regarded them as hard-won scientific knowledge about language.

By the turn of the century, when Richard Wagner's son-in-law Houston Stewart Chamberlain was composing *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, a richly confused tradition of scholarship on language, stretching back to Herder, Schlegel, and von Humboldt and including recent eminences such as Müller and Renan, supported in one way or another the concept of race, including notions of racial distinctness, racial comparisons, and racial rankings.[45] Müller had spoken of a "great Aryan brotherhood" based on sameness of blood and encompassing both Europeans and Indians—a concept that, he said, implied a long and peaceable future for the Raj—and Chamberlain agreed, with one exception. Noting that in Sanskrit, "Arya" means noble, free, or skillful person, he simply dropped the then-colonized Indians from the brotherhood. The natural leaders of the human race were the Aryans, and the natural leaders of the Aryan race were the "Nordic" or "Teutonic" peoples, whose refined features and Indo-European language indicated an ancient and noble lineage, a race whose distinctive talent was to rule. Setting aside Chamberlain's inconvenient identification of the insular English as the best contemporary representatives of ancient Aryan stock, a later generation of German intellectuals drew from him, Gobineau, and Nietzsche ideological and quasi-scientific support for the new strain of racist nationalism. After the Great War, the entire discipline of philology in Germany was dominated by monarchist nostalgia and reaction. Indeed, distinguished linguists were among the most committed academic supporters of the anti-Semitism and xenophobia of the Third Reich, contributing to the effort what Christopher M. Hutton has called "mother-tongue fascism," which must be considered the ultimate inversion and profanation of what was, in Müller's work, a mere suggestion about the speakers of Indo-European made in the context of an argument about the unity of the human race.[46]

The history of philology in the nineteenth century was dominated not by people like Gobineau and Chamberlain, whose subject was always race, but by people like Wolf, von Humboldt, Müller, Böckh, Renan, and Arnold, learned and large-souled men who thought they were using scientific methods to extend the range of human connectedness, to provide a secular and rational account of human origins, to articulate ways of understanding and valuing cultural differences, and to hold up for inspection those fascinating instances in which an original purity had somehow been preserved. They looked for the clean and simple forms prevailing at the infancy of the language, the race, the species. But the history of philology is not the whole of history, and the work of these admirable sages lent itself in ways both obvious and subtle to the purposes of others less scrupulous and learned than they, and it was these others who influenced more directly the course of events.

By 1940, philology—that narrow, dull, but indispensable preliminary task, that safely nonideological practice of erudite observation and analysis—had been associated with many of the major movements of the past century and a half, including Romanticism, nationalism, liberalism, Darwinism, and psychoanalysis.[47] Like several other sciences, such as anthropology, archeology, and geology, it had played a key role in breaking the hold on the human imagination of the biblical account of human origins and had made the human past available for systematic inquiry as never before. These were immense accomplishments, and it was not without cause that philology was commonly held up as the highest form of learning. And yet, it had also been responsible for turning scholarship into a practice of pedantry and, far more important, had given warrant to generalizations and profundities that lay well beyond the boundaries of any scholarly discipline. Philologists adduced linguistic evidence in support of racialist theorizing, promulgated learned forms of anti-Semitism, represented as a fact of nature the domination of the weak by the strong, and claimed to deduce from the study of language the superiority of western European culture and its dominant religion, Christianity. Many of the intellectual and subintellectual currents of the time circulated through it, and others had brushed up against it, confirming or being confirmed by it.[48] A tree-diagram of the intellectual and ideological movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would show many of them branching forth from philology. And so, when some recent American critics wished to recall the glories of philology, they had a wide—a chaotically wide—range to choose from.

Task of Philology: To Reappear

These glories had to be recalled because philology had been unable to establish itself as an academic discipline in the American research universities taking shape at the end of the nineteenth century. And we can

see why: its speculative dimension ruled it out of the sciences, and its empirical and technical character disqualified it from the "humanities." It did, however, serve as a kind of chrysalis for two discourses that did establish themselves as professionalized disciplines, linguistics and literary studies, both of which defined themselves in contrast to philology, only to return to it in the course of time.

At one time, linguistics based its claim to be a science on the achievements of philology. Müller had in fact predicted that the new discipline of linguistics, then dominated by comparative philology, would eventually have the highest place among the "physical" sciences. His successors tried to make good on this prediction, but did so in a manner that would have astonished him, by rejecting philology. Ferdinand de Saussure, who had made an early reputation as a historical philologist, argued that philology had strayed from its scientific purpose when it turned from the text itself to "literary history, customs, institutions, etc."[49] Linguistics could only become a science, he contended in an argument that founded modern linguistics, by focusing not on the written language but on the system of signs, the code that made communication possible—not a language, but language itself, language alone. Philology, which directed its attention to "the picturesque side of a language, that which makes it differ from all others as belonging to a certain people having certain origins," remained stubbornly unscientific.[50] For Saussure, philology was to scientific linguistics as Semites were to Aryans for Renan—historically necessary, but preliminary and incomplete. Saussure began the *Course in General Linguistics* by relegating philology to the domain of "criticism," whose primary historical function was to prepare the way for a truly scientific linguistics, that is, semiology. Each of Saussure's innovations—the shifts from languages to language as such, from words to signs, from history to system, and from the description of particulars to theory—was intended to strengthen the scientific credentials of linguistics by distancing it from philology.

Saussure and his successors created this distance by describing philology as a practice whose deficiencies called forth their own corrections in the form of a superior form of linguistics, which they provided. Benjamin Lee Whorf argued, as Saussure had, that a scientific linguistics was superior to philology because the latter failed to focus on the linguistic object but indulged itself by "reading off a sweeping survey of . . . history and culture." But Whorf defined the true object of linguistics in terms very different from Saussure—not the system of signs, but "the text as text, the exact words and grammar, conceiving this as their paramount duty."[51] And while Saussure thought that philology was logically prior to linguistics, Whorf thought the reverse, that philology should be kept at bay until linguistics had secured the text with an adequate factual description. A number of linguists contemporary

with Whorf, including Edward Sapir, Roman Jakobson, Leonard Bloomfield, and Zellig Harris, devoted themselves to forgetting philology. Finally, Noam Chomsky delivered the final blow, defining linguistics, with an authority that could not be questioned, as a subdiscipline within cognitive psychology, a purely scientific discipline with no historical dimension whatsoever. From Müller to Chomsky, the field of linguistics turned itself inside out, or rather outside in, moving from history to the brain. Chomsky realized Müller's dream of making linguistics into a "physical science," but did so by purging philology from linguistics altogether.

And yet. While linguistics was discovering more and more ways to purify itself of any philological residue, it was also tracing a circuitous route back to the origin. Chomsky's linguistics rejected everything about philology except for one thing: its original goal, which F. A. Wolf had defined as that of articulating a philosophy of human nature on the basis of a study of language. In retrospect, it is clear that linguistics since Saussure did not reject philology at all, but simply groped toward ways consistent with evolving understandings of science and scientific methods of fulfilling philology's initial ambitions.

The return by linguistics to its humanistic origins was circuitous and delayed; the return by literary studies to its origins in science has been much more direct and insistent, despite an initial rejection every bit as emphatic as that of linguistics. Indeed, the desire to return to philology has been one of the defining features of literary study from the beginning. In Gerald Graff's well-known account in *Professing Literature*, the university-based discipline of literary study was born of the struggle conducted a century ago between science-oriented philological "scholars" and generalists, or "critics," who thought literature should be studied from an interpretive, humanistic, and even moralistic perspective.[52] By the beginning of the twentieth century, the generalist-critics had won their independence from the scholars, and by 1948, René Wellek and Austin Warren were arguing that the word "philology," lingering on in ghostly form in the titles of journals, no longer described anything concrete in literary studies and should be dropped, a recommendation that was rapidly adopted.[53] Thus liberated, literary scholars and critics were henceforward free to engage in literary history, comparative literature, and the history of ideas. But from the beginning, some critics were haunted by their deed; and, feeling increasingly exposed in the professional ethos of the university, they began to cast longing glances at the discipline they had flung aside and at the receding prospects of a science of language and literature. Attempts at reconciliation or reclamation were made. Virtually all the surging movements that swept over criticism in the twentieth century were grounded in the fear that a practice of literary scholarship that defined itself too aggressively in contrast to close textual study was in danger of losing its footing and collapsing into unwarranted

judgments, impressions, evaluations, projections, generalizations, heresies, and fallacies. Iconoclasts in many ways, Said and de Man were in this respect traditionalists, for the history of literary studies consists of a series of returns to philology.

While linguistics, in the course of becoming scientific, found it useful to construct a philology to be rejected, literary scholars have more often found it useful to construct a philology to be admired. In recent years, the humanistic disciplines most drawn to philology have been those that stress the formal or technical study of texts, beginning with medieval studies. In 1990, Stephen G. Nichols edited a special issue of the journal *Speculum* devoted to a "New Philology" that would, he predicted, rejuvenate medieval studies by returning philology to the manuscript culture of the medieval world, a world of variance unconstrained by the regularities and exactitudes of print culture.[54] As part of this movement, Lee Patterson published, in 1994, an essay with the mortal title of "The Return to Philology," in which he argued that medievalists should embrace this new practice "not despite but because of its intractable penchant for pedantry"—a specialty of medieval studies of which critics in less demanding and rigorous fields could use a strong dose for their own good.[55] Calls for a "feminist philology" have been heard since 1987.[56] And a "radical philology" has emerged from within classics, declaring its intention to tackle questions of textual genetics in a spirit of theoretical audacity.[57] Younger scholars in Mesoamerican ethnohistory are attempting to rejuvenate their field by insisting on a "New Philology" that would recognize the importance of native language sources treated with a linguistic and historical approach.[58] Even biblical scholarship has attempted to renovate itself by returning to philology: a collection of essays titled *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967–1988* includes an essay on "Philology and Power."[59] Jan Ziolkowski's edited volume *On Philology* includes papers given at an unexpectedly exciting 1988 Harvard conference attended by deconstructionists and other theorists, as well as traditional philologists. And there's more. Sunny Stanford has in recent years become the scene of a Great Philological Awakening, marked by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's 2003 book *The Powers of Philology*, which bluntly calls for a return to philology as an antidote to the illicit freedoms of cultural studies, as well as by Seth Lerer's edited volume *Literary History and the Challenge of Philology* (1996) and Lerer's own *Error and the Academic Self* (2002).[60] In 2007 philology acquired a powerful advocate when Michael Holquist, author of "Why We Should Remember Philology," ascended to the presidency of the Modern Language Association.[61]

What most such movements prize above all in philology is its supposed assurance. Whatever its flaws or limitations, many feel, philology knows itself: it is what it is. But a look at recent issues of the scholarly journals whose names

retain the term philology suggests that the discipline is now characterized by the same loose eclecticism that characterizes literary studies in general. The *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* has published articles on "The Werewolf in Medieval Icelandic Literature," and "Revisiting *Gisla Saga*: Sexual Themes and the Heroic Past"; *Modern Philology* has devoted its pages to discourses on "inventing the nation," "William Faulkner's Southern Knights," and "Charismatic Authority in Early Modern English Tragedy"; and *Classical Philology* has provided a venue for essays on "Horsepower and Donkeywork: Equids and the Ancient Greek Imagination" and "Writing (On) Bodies: Lyric Discourse and the Production of Gender in Horace *Odes* 1.13." The absence of a hard core of philology as distinct from criticism and literary history suggests that the term now signifies not so much a discipline—in fact, there are no traditional departments of philology in any major university in the United States—as a kind of dream or myth of origins.[62]

It is tempting to see recent expressions of a renewed interest in philology as symptomatic of a discipline that, momentarily uncertain of its object, methods, and goals, tries to anchor itself in its origins, in a time when things were assured, stable, and honorable, when it addressed serious issues in a serious way, when it commanded respect. But a more comprehensive account would begin with the recognition that while interest in philology may have spiked in recent years, it cannot be considered a temporary fascination or even a recurrent mood, but must instead be seen as a permanent and characteristic feature of humanistic scholarship, a deep chord vibrating beneath literary studies in particular. Philology is to modern scholarship what the voice of Homer was to Wolf and the Aryan *Ursprache* was to Müller and Renan, an endlessly tantalizing mirage, the phantasmatic solution to all problems.

The continuing influence of philology on modern scholarship can be detected in three areas. The first is in the concept of origin. Philology has bequeathed to modern scholarship the conviction that things are explained when their origins have been identified. This assumption commits scholarship to an endless quest, for origins may be construed in any of a number of ways, and every origin has origins of its own. Wolf considered the origin of the Homeric text to be the voice, and therefore the mind, of Homer; but Homer himself sprang from Greek culture, which itself had origins extending all the way back to the origin of humanity. Clearly, returning to philology does not solve the problem of origin, for this problem is part of our inheritance from philology itself.

Second, philology has handed down to contemporary scholarship its characteristic duality, a double commitment to an empirical attention to linguistic fact and a more subjective approach to questions of context, meaning, and value. This duality has led to constant uncertainties about the methodology

and mission of scholarship, uncertainties for which philology seems to many to be the cure. But once again, we do not solve our problems by returning to philology, for it was in philology that these problems first appeared. The difficulties that are, in the view of some, reason to return are in fact the clearest evidence that we have never truly escaped.

Third, modern humanistic scholarship continues to be informed by a key assumption that also guided philology: that a scholarly inquiry into the historical or formal dimensions of the language of the text can illuminate issues of personal and collective identity. Recent claims that the current interest, especially among literary scholars, in culture simply recodes an older interest in race should be seen in this context, as a confirmation that contemporary scholarship has found yet another way to return to philology.[63]

It is difficult to know how to think about philology, because it is difficult to know exactly what philology is. Its proponents, many of whom stake their advocacy on a clear sense of the distinctive difference between philology and other kinds of scholarship, almost invariably also distinguish between worthy and unworthy aspects of philology, identifying what they consider good practices as "radical," "modern," "feminist," or, most often, "new." Nietzsche condemned almost all living philologists even as he extolled the virtues of a rare but authentic philology. Said noted the smothering sense of sterility and pedantry that afflicted most philology, but urged respect for his particular heroes. De Man wanted to return only to rhetorical description, not to the speculative or interpretive side of philology. Advocates of the new philology in medieval studies reject an older philology as fatally compromised by its association with "political nationalism and scientific positivism."[64] Praised for its single-mindedness, philology is irreducibly complex, and repels as strongly as it attracts.

If it is difficult to know exactly what philology is, we can, however, still discriminate between the right and wrong kinds of return. The right kind of return, I submit, would begin with an act of disciplinary soul-searching that holds up the history of philology as a cautionary reminder that the focused professional attention we apply to the object can make us susceptible to ambush by received ideas passing as common sense, or even as empirical observations. Said and de Man, to take just two examples, might have considered this possibility before promoting a practice that had been intimately entangled with racist and anti-Semitic theories and practices.[65] They were, however, promoting the wrong kind of return, one that sought to use philology as a means of restoring a lost sense of groundedness, assurance, and professional self-esteem. To treat philology in this way, as an innocent form of conscientiousness and scrupulosity, or as what Said called "an act of perhaps modest human emancipation and enlightenment," is to invite it to disappear

once again, ushering it out with polite applause. Perhaps disciplines, like nations in Renan's famous formulation, have much to remember and much to forget, and a selective recall is somehow psychically and professionally necessary. But philology cannot be purged of its history any more than contemporary scholarship can get quit of philology. It is our history, a continuous story leading up to the present, and we must own up to it.

The question is what to make of this genealogical connection. One inference might be that scholars should become more careful, cautious, and respectful of limits lest they fall into the same errors as their predecessors. This is undoubtedly good advice, but philology also has more spacious lessons to teach. If we are truly to assume the full burden of the history of philology, we must also allow ourselves to be instructed, inspired, and challenged by the genuine achievements of the greatest scholars of the philological tradition, who were intellectually curious and ambitious to a degree we can scarcely imagine. Their ambition was the germ of much of what today seems their errancy, but we cannot become virtuous simply by becoming small; nor does our abandonment of any pretense to methodology or any attempt to acquire comprehensive knowledge necessarily count in our favor. A revealing mirror, the history of philology combines in a single image scholarship's highest aspirations and darkest fears. The ongoing challenge is not which to choose, but how to tell them apart.

Notes

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, "We Philologists," in William Arrowsmith, trans. and ed., "Nietzsche: Notes for 'We Philologists,'" *Arion,* n.s. 1, no. 2 (1973/74).
2. Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York, 2004), 61, hereafter *HDC*; de Man, "The Return to Philology," in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis, 1986), 3–26, 23.
3. See Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (Baltimore, 1978), 6–8, 68–70, 366–67. On other occasions, Said attacked the discipline, especially as practiced in the nineteenth century, for its orientalizing ideology. See Edward Said, *Orientalism,* 2nd ed. (New York, 1994), 130–48, and "Islam, Philology, and French Culture: Renan and Massignon," in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 268–89. For an informative discussion of Said and philology, see Tim Brennan, "Places of Mind, Occupied Lands: Edward Said and Philology," in *Edward Said: A Critical Reader,* ed. Michael Sprinker (Oxford, 1992), 74–95.
4. For a detailed account of Wolf's debt to J. G. Eichhorn's work on the Old Testament, see Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and James E. G. Zetzel, introduction to F. A. Wolf, *Prolegomena to Homer, 1795,* trans. with introduction and notes by Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and James E. G. Zetzel (Princeton, 1985), 3–36, 18–26.

5. As James Engell and Anthony Dangerfield write, "In Germany . . . it was the humanities and not the sciences that first introduced, in the earlier nineteenth century, rigorous empirical methods"; *Saving Higher Education in the Age of Money* (Charlottesville, VA, 2005), 97.
6. Roy Harris, "History and Comparative Philology," in *Language and History: Integrationist Perspectives*, ed. Nigel Love (London, 2006), 41–59, 57. For a history of academic asceticism stressing the charisma of Wolf and the discipline of philology, see William Clark, *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* (Chicago, 2006).
7. Quoted in Jan Ziolkowski, "'What Is Philology': Introduction," in *On Philology*, ed. Jan Ziolkowski (University Park, PA, 1990), 6.
8. See Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago, 1987), 28–41, 67–69.
9. Friedrich Nietzsche, preface to *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter (Cambridge, 1997). See also Friedrich Nietzsche, "We Philologists," in William Arrowsmith, trans. and ed., "Nietzsche: Notes for 'We Philologists,'" *Arion*, n.s. 1, no. 2 (1973/74): 279–380, 281; and Friedrich Nietzsche, "Homer and Classical Philology," in *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions / Homer and Classical Philology*, trans. J. M. Kennedy (Edinburgh, 1909), 145–70, online at: http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/18188. See also William Arrowsmith, "Nietzsche on Classics and Classicists (Part II)," *Arion* 2 (1963): 5–27.
10. Lionel Gossman, "Philhellenism and Antisemitism: Matthew Arnold and His German Models," *Comparative Literature* 46, no. 1 (1994): 1–39, 13; see also Suzanne L. Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1970* (Princeton, 2003), and Nicholas Rand, "The Political Truth of Heidegger's 'Logos': Hiding in Translation," *PMLA* 105 (1990): 437–47.
11. Wolf, *Prolegomena to Homer*, 45–46.
12. Ibid., 233.
13. Wilhelm von Humboldt, *On Language: On the Diversity of Human Language Construction and Its Influence on the Mental Development of the Human Species*, ed. Michael Losensky, trans. Peter Heath (Cambridge, 1999), 21. For an authoritative account of the "languages and nations project" of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an attempt to discover the deep history of nations through the genealogies of their languages, see Thomas R. Trautman, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley, 1997).
14. Ernest Renan, *The Future of Science* (Boston, 1891), 131, 128; emphasis in the original. Originally published as *L'Avenir de la science: Pensées de 1848*.
15. Max Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 2 vols. (1864; London, 1994), 2:14.
16. "The History of Modern Philology," *New Englander and Yale Review* 16, no. 63 (1858): 465–510, 506; online at http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/ncps:@field(DOCID+@lit(ABQ0722-0016-75)). In addition to scientific exhibits, museums also held the treasures of imperial conquest, a fact that was occasionally noted in the discourse of philology. In one of the most telling moments in his discussion of Renan in *Orientalism*, Said says that philology placed the scholar in the position of the European expert delivering to a European audience the exotic fruits of foreign adventures, surveying, "as if from a peculiarly suited vantage point the passive, seminal, feminine, even silent and

supine East, then going on to *articulate* the East, making the Orient deliver up its secrets" (138; emphasis in the original).

17. Sir William Jones, "Third Anniversary Discourse of the President of the Royal Asiatick Society ('On the Hindus')," in *On Language: Plato to von Humboldt,* ed. E. Peter A. Salus (New York, 1969), 167–72.
18. Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions; Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago, 2005), 147–48.
19. Franz Bopp, *A Comparative Grammar of the Sanskrit, Zend, Greek, Latin, Lithuanian, Gothic, German and Sclavonic Languages,* trans. Lieutenant Edward B. Eastwick, vol. 1 (n.p., 2007); originally published in Berlin, 1833.
20. Gossman, "Philhellenism and Antisemitism," 6–8.
21. Friedrich Schlegel, *On the Language and Wisdom of the Indians,* in *The Aesthetic and Miscellaneous Works of Friedrich von Schlegel,* ed. and trans. E. J. Millington (1808; reprint, London, 1849), 451.
22. The concept of the linguistic "family" assumed its most compelling form in the figure of the "tree," which implicitly supported the underlying contention of the new philology, that languages were natural objects. More intriguingly, it also suggested that linguistic development was governed by the principles of descent with modification and derivation from a common source. For an illuminating account of the roughly simultaneous emergence of evolutionary thinking in linguistics (Schleicher) and in biology (Darwin), see Robert J. Richards, "The Linguistic Creation of Man: Charles Darwin, August Schleicher, Ernst Haeckel, and the Missing Link in 19th-Century Evolutionary Theory," in Matthew Dörries, ed., *Experimenting in Tongues: Studies in Science and Language* (Stanford, 2002), 21–48. The most comprehensive treatment of the complex interactions between philology and biology in the nineteenth century is Stephen G. Alter, *Darwin and the Linguistic Image: Language, Race, and Natural Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore, 1999).
23. See Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: The Indo-European Mythology as Science and Ideology* (Chicago, 2006); Leon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalistic Ideas in Europe* (1974; reprint, New York, 1996); Thomas R. Trautman, ed., *The Aryan Debate* (Delhi, 2005); and Kenneth A. R. Kennedy, *God-Apes and Fossil Men: Paleoanthropology of South Asia* (Ann Arbor, 2000), 80–85. The thesis, articulated by Müller and other philologists, of an "Aryan invasion" of India around 1500 BC has recently been contested on the basis of the discovery of a genetic similarity between the darker inhabitants of southern India and the more light-skinned (presumably "Aryan") inhabitants of northern India. For a review of genetic evidence that the Central Asian "invasion" happened much earlier than philological evidence would suggest, around 9000 BC, see S. Sahoo et al., "A Prehistory of Indian Y Chromosomes: Evaluating Demic Diffusion Scenarios," *PNAS* (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*) 103, no. 4 (2006): 843–48; and T. Kivisild et al., "Deep Common Ancestry of Indian and Western-Eurasian Mitochondrial DNA Lineages," *Current Biology* 9, no. 22 (1999): 1331–34. For an authoritative, indeed perhaps final, demonstration that the Proto-Indo-European language originated on the steppes of Central Asia, see David W. Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton, 2008).
24. Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago, 1999), 95.

25. Joseph Arthur, Comte de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races* (1853–55; reprint, New York, 1999), 182–204.
26. See Müller, *Lectures*, 1:327, 329–78.
27. Müller, *Lectures*, 1:12. An illustration that approximates Müller's description and may have been the original of the image to which he refers, is in Josiah Clark Nott and George R. Gliddon, *Types of Mankind; or, Ethnological Researches, Based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races, Based on the Inedited Papers of Samuel George Morton*, 8th ed. (1854; reprint, Philadelphia, 1857), 459, where the "Hottentot" is placed suggestively next to the "orang-outan" in a series of images of human (and animal) "types." In the text, the authors argue that the Negro stands at the lowest margin of humanity, just above the primates. This book may have come to Müller's attention because, in the course of arguing for ineradicable racial differences at the origin of humankind, the authors complain bitterly about the efforts of philologists to trace existing languages back to a single *Ursprache*, insisting on "that radical diversity of languages which philology has not yet been able to overcome" (285). For them, the decisive evidence of fundamental difference was that while the Negro might learn many languages, he still "preserves that peculiar, unmistakeably-*Negro*, intonation, which no culture can eradicate" (282; emphasis in the original). Among his other accomplishments, Nott translated Gobineau's *Essay* into English.
28. For a detailed account of W. D. Whitney's sustained and largely successful assault on Müller's credentials as a linguist, see Linda Dowling, "Victorian Oxford and the Science of Language," *PMLA* 97, no. 2 (1982): 160–78.
29. See Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 88–92. Müller rejected the theory of the evolution of humankind from primates, declaring that "Language is our Rubicon, and no brute will dare to cross it" (*Lectures* 1:340). Still, he corresponded with Darwin (see *Darwin Correspondence Project*, online at http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/darwinletters/namedefs/namedef-3233.html), and on several occasions in his *Lectures on the Science of Language*, he accounted for linguistic change by referring to Darwinian principles. The fact that ancient languages display a superabundance of synonyms when compared to more modern languages, for example, seemed to him evidence of "natural selection" or a "*struggle for life* . . . which led to the destruction of the less strong, the less happy, the less fertile words, and ended in the triumph of *one*, as the recognised and proper name for every object in every language" (*Lectures* 1:368; emphasis in the original). Müller rejected not natural selection or competition, but rather the idea that these forces might result in a transformed species, an idea that in fact played a large role in the subsequent development of "scientific racism." See Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore, 1996), and Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 137–76.
30. Müller, "Translator's Preface," *Immanuel Kant's* "Critique of Pure Reason" (London, 1881), v–lxii, lxi, lxii.
31. Ernest Renan, *Till the Time of King David*, vol. 1, *History of the People of Israel* (Boston, 1892), 39, 13.
32. Ibid., 2–3. On one occasion at least, Renan conceded that a linguistic "mould" could improve the thoughts of lesser creatures who learned a second language. In his otherwise antidemocratic closet drama *Caliban*, Renan has Ariel say to

Caliban, "Prospero taught thee the Aryan language, and with that divine tongue the channel of reason has become inseparable from thee." Ernest Renan, *Caliban, A Philosophical Drama Continuing "The Tempest" of William Shakespeare*, trans. Eleanor Grant Vickery (New York, 1896), 18.

33. Renan, *History*, 1:40.
34. Ibid., 21; Ernest Renan, *From the Time of Hezekiah Till the Return from Babylon*, vol. 3 of *History of the People of Israel* (Boston, 1891), xiii; Renan, *From the Reign of David up to the Capture of Samaria*, vol. 2 of *History of the People of Israel* (Boston, 1892), 444.
35. Renan, *History*, 1:7.
36. Renan, *History*, 3:xiii; *History*, 2:444; Renan, *Period of Jewish Independence and Judea under Roman Rule*, vol. 5 of *History of the People of Israel* (Boston, 1895), 355.
37. See Olender, *Languages of Paradise*, 57–63.
38. Ernest Renan, *Questions contemporaines*, vol. 1 of *Oeuvres complètes de Ernest Renan*, ed. Henriette Psichari (Paris, 1868), 390. My translation.
39. See Ernest Renan, *Dialogues Philosophiques* (Paris, 1876), 117–20.
40. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. J. Dover Wilson (Cambridge, 1969); online at http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/nonfiction_u/arnoldm_ca/ca_all.html.
41. Matthew Arnold, "A Speech at Eton," in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor, 1961), 9:28–29, 29. See also Gossman, "Philhellenism and Antisemitism," 21.
42. Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* and *On Translating Homer* (New York, 1883); online at http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/celt/scl/index.htm.
43. See Müller, *Lectures*, 1:223–36.
44. Renan links purity with femininity, describing the Celts as "an essentially feminine race. . . . No other has conceived with more delicacy the ideal of woman, or been more fully dominated by it. It is a sort of intoxication, a madness, a vertigo." *The Poetry of the Celtic Races and Other Studies* (Port Washington, NY, 1896), 8; online at http://www.bartleby.com/32/302.html. Celts appeared particularly feminine when compared to the English, whose very language was, to some, the essence of manliness. "There is," the Danish linguist Otto Jesperson said, "one expression that continually comes to my mind whenever I think of the English language," namely, that it is "positively and expressly *masculine*." *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (1905; reprint, New York, 1931), 3.
45. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (London, 1912); originally published as *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (1899).
46. Christopher M. Hutton, *Linguistics and the Third Reich: Mother-Tongue Fascism, Race, and the Science of Language* (London, 1988). Hutton argues that while the 1933–45 period is generally taken as an aberration in the honorable history of philological scholarship, much of what was said and done in the fields of historical Indo-European philology as well as in descriptive "structuralist" linguistics during this period had its seed in earlier, well-respected, and established disciplinary practice (260–61). Philology is not alone among scholarly disciplines in having been susceptible to ideological overdetermination, but it is distinctive in that many of its most distinguished figures can, from another perspective, be seen as mere ideologues who prostituted their discipline by subordinating it to external and, in retrospect, deeply sinister ends. One of the most poignant testimonies in this regard

is that of Bruce Lincoln, who writes of his early training, when he encountered the work of a number of eminent and otherwise admirable scholars who were, as it happened, deeply involved with the Nazi movement.

> To that side of their work, however, I was largely blind. Instead of dangerous ideologues, I saw talented linguists, erudite Orientalists (a word not yet suspect), and trailblazing students of myth. Whatever questions I had—and they were not many—were deftly deflected. The "*Aryan thesis*" was fundamentally sound, I was told, although Hitler and Co. had badly abused it. But no one spoke of "*Aryans*" anymore or located their (presumed) Urheimat in Scandinavia, Germany, or the North Pole. Rather, the postwar discourse dealt with Indo-Europeans, elided questions of race, and placed the origin of this sanitized people off to the east, on the Russian steppes. In the pages that follow, I hope to show that things are not that simple and the problems—moral and intellectual—that attend this discourse or discipline are not so easily resolved. (Emphasis in the original)

Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago, 1999), 48.

47. On the link between philology and psychoanalysis, see John Forrester, *Language and the Origins of Psychoanalysis* (New York, 1980).
48. Among those who took up Müller's work was Madame Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical movement. Dismissing most of Müller's conclusions, Blavatsky still relied on philology to define the relation between Aryans and Semites. In her system, Semites were the fifth root race evolved from an even more ancient people whose secrets were hidden in vast archives in Himalayan monasteries. Aryans and Semites were equally removed from this ancient race, but were related to each other: Semitic languages were the "bastard descendants" of "the eldest children of the early Sanskrit," and Semitic peoples were a branch of the Aryan line that had become "degenerate in spirituality and perfected in materiality." H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy* (1888); Theosophical University Press online edition at http://secretdoctrine.net/, 2:200.
49. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York, 1959), 1.
50. Saussure, "Letter to Antoine Meillet," January 4, 1894, *Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure* 21 (1964): 93–96; quoted by Calvert Watkins, "What Is Philology?" in *On Philology*, ed. Jan Ziolkowski (University Park, PA, 1990), 21–25, 23.
51. Benjamin Lee Whorf, "Decipherment of the Linguistic Portion of the Maya Hieroglyphs," in *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institute, 1941*, ed. C. G. Abbott (Washington, DC, 1942), 479–502, 482.
52. See Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago, 1987), 65–80.
53. René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1956), 38.
54. In addition to editing the special issue of *Speculum* 65 (1990), Nichols co-edited the book version, *The New Medievalism*. See Kevin Brownlee, Marina S. Brownlee, and Stephen Nichols, eds., *The New Medievalism* (Baltimore, 1991). Of particular interest in the *Speculum* issue is Stephen G. Nichols, "Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture," 1–10. Nichols and others have acknowledged the influence of Bernard Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical*

History of Philology, trans. Betsy Wing (Baltimore, 1999); originally published as *Eloge de la variante*, 1989. See also R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols, eds., *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper* (Baltimore, 1996). Contributors to this volume emphasize the historicity of medieval studies, particularly in the context of nineteenth-century nationalist conflicts and twentieth-century institutional ambitions. For an account of the impact of New Philology on medieval studies, see Jan Ziolkowski, "Metaphilology," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 104, no. 2 (2005): 239–72, 243–47.

55. Lee Patterson, "The Return to Philology," in *The Past and Future of Medieval Studies*, ed. John van Engen (Notre Dame, IN, 1994), 231–44, 241.
56. See Mieke Bal, "Virginity: Toward a Feminist Philology," *Dispositio: revista hispánica de semiótica literaria* 12 (1987): 30–82.
57. As one participant in this movement says, the "goal is to assess the realities involved in the multiple productions of a classical text so as to facilitate a literary philology alive to the fact of plurality. I call this a radical philology." Sean Alexander Gurd, *Iphigenias at Aulis: Textual Multiplicity, Radical Philology* (Ithaca, 2005), x.
58. See Matthew Restall, *Music and Literature Against the Grain* (New York, 2006).
59. See David J. A. Clines, "Philology and Power," in *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967–1998* (Sheffield, UK, 1998), 2:613–30.
60. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Powers of Philology: Dynamics of Textual Scholarship* (Champaign, 2003); Seth Lerer, ed., *Literary History and the Challenge of Philology: The Legacy of Erich Auerbach* (Stanford, 1996); Seth Lerer, *Error and the Academic Self: The Scholarly Imagination, Medieval to Modern* (New York, 2003). In "Metaphilology," Ziolkowski reviews Gumbrecht's *Powers of Philology* and Lerer's *Error and the Academic Self*, both of them harshly, if wittily.
61. Michael Holquist, "Why We Should Remember Philology," *Profession* (2002): 72–79; see also Holquist, "Forgetting Our Name, Remembering Our Mother," *PMLA* 115, no. 7 (2000): 1975–77.
62. Columbia's Department of French and Romance Philology might seem an exception, but according to its Web site, the department defines itself as "a thriving point of contact between American and European scholarship," distinguished not by its insistence on traditional methods but by its promotion of a "broad range of specializations" and "dedication to teaching." Many American departments of philology became departments of linguistics in the 1940s; others were converted into departments of comparative literature. Today, American philology is housed primarily in classics departments. Departments of philology remain in some universities in eastern and northern Europe, and in Russia.
63. For the argument that contemporary accounts of cultural difference resurrect older arguments about race, see Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham, 1997).
64. Nichols, "Introduction," 1.
65. Said, at least, is sensitive to the potential for philology-sponsored racism, but he does not display a similar sensitivity to philological anti-Semitism. While he mentions, for example, the racial stereotypes that inform Renan's account of Semitic (Jewish and Moslem) languages and cultures, he lays far greater stress on what he sees as Renan's single-minded antipathy to Muslims than he does on Renan's prejudice against Jews. According to Said, Renan did his work "within the edifice we call Oriental studies"; and within that edifice, his "main project is to shut down Islam" ("Islam, Philology, and French Culture," 282, 288).