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Article

The Graveyard of Words: Nietzsche and the Death of Philology

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ABSTRACT
Friedrich Nietzsche is usually introduced as a classical philologist who outgrew his discipline. This paper restructures that narrative around a single image, especially his 1873 essay on truth and lying. Nietzsche uses a concept of *columbarium* (a structure with niches for funeral urns) as a powerful metaphor for human concepts, language, and science, describing them as the "graveyard of perceptions". Working outward from that figure, the paper follows his training under Friedrich Ritschl, the damage *The Birth of Tragedy* did to his standing in 1872, the abandoned notebooks that survive as *We Philologists*, the account of monumental, antiquarian and critical history in the second *Untimely Meditation*, and the etymological arguments of the Genealogy. What emerges is not a story of departure but of transposition. Genealogy, on this reading, is source-criticism practised on morality (the same patience with descent and corruption), redirected from manuscripts to values. The argument is then set within a longer reception history, running from Wilamowitz-Moellendorff's furious rebuttal through Foucault and Derrida on textuality to the recent return to philology in Pollock, Said and Hamacher. A closing section turns to the fate of Nietzsche's own manuscripts: corrupted by his sister, reconstructed by Colli and Montinari. There his claim that philology teaches slow and honest reading receives its most literal vindication.

Keywords
Nietzsche, philology, genealogy, classical philology.

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Introduction

For most of the nineteenth century, philology held a position of almost unrivalled prestige in the European academy. It was the model discipline of the humanities, the rigorous practice from which linguistics, literary study, and modern historical method would each eventually branch. And its ambitions were centred on textual accuracy, the recovery of linguistic origins, and the faithful reconstruction of the classical past (Turner, 2014). To edit a corrupt manuscript correctly, to trace a word to its earliest attested form, to establish what an ancient author had actually written. These were the tasks that defined scholarly virtue in the German university. They did so above all within *Altertumswissenschaft*, the integrated "science of antiquity" that Wilhelm von Humboldt's reforms had installed at the centre of German higher education (Benne, 2005; Whitman, 1986).

Friedrich Nietzsche was among the most gifted products of that tradition. The University of Basel appointed him to teach classical philology in 1869, at the age of twenty-four, on a Leipzig doctorate granted without examination or dissertation. A case, as one historian of the field observes, without real precedent in the German university system (Whitman, 1986). And it was this same prodigy who, in an essay drafted in 1873 and left unpublished in his lifetime, produced one of the most damning images of his own discipline any philologist has managed. Nietzsche describes what happens when a living perception hardens into a concept. Metaphors wear down like coins whose faces have been rubbed smooth, until what circulates is currency without an image. It worth something only because everyone has quietly

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agreed to stop looking at it. He then supplies the architectural figure that gives this paper its title. The great edifice of concepts, he writes, is a *columbarium* (the Roman burial vault whose walls are honeycombed with niches for the urns of the dead) and it is a powerful metaphor for human concepts, language, and science, describing them as the "graveyard of perceptions" (Nietzsche, 2006).

The choice of image repays attention. A *columbarium* is not a metaphor or figure that occurs to a philosopher in passing. It is one that occurs to a classicist, to someone trained to read the sigla (initials) on Roman funerary inscriptions, and it encodes the thesis this paper pursue. For Nietzsche, language is not a transparent medium but a necropolis, an orderly and well-tended arrangement of dead things whose deadness is the very precondition of its order. Philology, the discipline charged with the care of that necropolis ("city of the dead"), is a kind of grave-keeping (a church officer/sexton, who take care of the cleanliness of the building, maintenance of the church yard, and digging graves). Whether the philologist understand this about his own vocation is, for Nietzsche, the decisive question, and it is one he pursued for the rest of his intellectual life (Porter, 2000a).

This paper argues against the conventional periodization of Nietzsche's career, in which an early "philological" phase gives way to a mature "philosophical" one (Whitman, 1986; Porter, 2000a). It contends instead that Nietzsche's engagement with philology runs continuously across his entire authorship, and that his most distinctive later method called, "*genealogy*". Genealogy is a philological technique transposed from manuscripts onto morality.

The argument of this paper develops in three movements. The first section reconstructs Nietzsche's formation as a philologist and offers a working definition of the discipline. Then turns to the *The Birth of Tragedy* and its account of the Apollonian and Dionysian origins of Greek drama, the professional catastrophe that publication brought in 1872. Which is the unpublished indictment *We Philologists*, and the theory of monumental, antiquarian, and critical history. The second section follows the migration of philological method into genealogy, taking in Nietzsche's rehabilitation of philology as an ethic of slow reading in 1886 and its consummation in the *Genealogy* of 1887. Before tracing the line of transmission from that position into Derrida's and Foucault's theories of text and discourse and into the more recent return to philology associated with Sheldon Pollock, Edward Said, and Werner Hamacher. The third section weighs the risks and payoffs of the reading and closes with the posthumous fate of Nietzsche's own corpus. It is corrupted by his sister Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche and restored by the philologists Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari as an ironic and, in some ways, definitive, confirmation of this paper's thesis.

Reframing Nietzsche's philological critique this way accomplishes two things. Firstly, it corrects a persistent misreading in which the 1872 controversy over *The Birth of Tragedy* is treated as biographical trivia rather than as the founding scene of Nietzsche's mature epistemology (Porter, 2000b; Han-Pile, 2006). Secondly, it connects a nineteenth-century argument to present anxieties about the humanities, positioning Nietzsche as an early architect of the hermeneutics of suspicion that shape twentieth-century textual theory (Foucault, 1977; Derrida, 1976, 1979). And that still animates debates about what, if anything, close or slow reading can offer an

academic culture reorganized around quantification, distant reading, and algorithmically generated text (Pollock, 2009; Gumbrecht, 2003).

Method

This paper adopts a hermeneutic and text-critical approach built around three procedures. Firstly, it offers close readings of the primary texts. Most directly concerned with Nietzsche's relation to philology i.e. the inaugural lecture *Homer and Classical Philology* (1869), *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), the unpublished essay conventionally known as *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (1873), the notebooks gathered posthumously as *We Philologists* (1874–1875), the second *Untimely Meditation*, *On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life* (1874), the 1886 preface to *Daybreak*, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887), and *The Antichrist* (1888). Primary texts are cited from standard English critical editions (Nietzsche, 1990, 1994, 1997a, 1997b, 1999, 2005, 2006), with the German text consulted in the Colli–Montinari's *Kritische Studienausgabe* where the wording of a key term is at issue (Nietzsche, 1980).

Secondly, it provides historical contextualization. This reconstructs the methodological commitments of nineteenth-century classical philology, the Bonn's *Philologenstreit* between Friedrich Ritschl and Jahn that shaped Nietzsche training. And the ideal of *Altertumswissenschaft* against which his revolt acquired its charge (Benne, 2005; Whitman, 1986; Jensen & Heit, 2014). Judgements of Nietzsche's standing as a classicist by practicing classical scholars offers a necessary corrective to reading that treat the same material philosophically alone (Lloyd-Jones, 1976; Bishop, 2004).

Thirdly, it undertakes a comparative analysis. Reading Nietzsche alongside later theorists of language and interpretation i.e. Foucault, Derrida, de Man, Said, Pollock, and Hamacher, allows the paper to trace how Nietzsche's insight into the historicity of concepts was transmitted and transformed across the twentieth century and into the present debate on the future of philology (Foucault, 1970, 1972, 1977; Derrida, 1976, 1979; de Man, 1979, 1986; Said, 2004; Pollock, 2009; Hamacher, 2009).

These three Nietzschean concepts serve throughout as interpretive instruments. *Genealogy* exposes the contingent historical descent of values that present themselves as timeless. While *perspectivism* holds that all cognition is interpretation from a particular standpoint, which complicates any philology promising a single recoverable original meaning (Nehamas, 1985; Anderson, 1998; Clark, 1990). And the distinction among monumental, antiquarian and critical relations to the past supplies the paper's governing metaphor of "the graveyard" or necropolis (Jensen, 2013). Porter, Paul de Man, and Kofman furnish the principal critical lenses (Porter, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; de Man, 1979; Kofman, 1993).

Result and Discussion

Classical Philology: Definition, Methods, and the Ideal

Classical philology is the scholarly study of the languages, literatures, and cultures of ancient Greece and Rome. It is interdisciplinary by design, combining

linguistic analysis, textual criticism, and historical and cultural inquiry with the shared aim of understanding the classical world through its surviving texts (Turner, 2014). That breadth explains why philology has often been treated as one of the foundational disciplines of the modern humanities, and as an ancestor of modern linguistics, given its sustained attention to language as embedded in literary and historical works (Gumbrecht, 2003). Two emphases follow from any working definition of the discipline: first, philology concerns itself primarily with the written legacy of antiquity rather than with material remains; second, addresses the classical world only to the extent that world can be recovered through language (Reynolds & Wilson, 2013).

Classical philology comprises a set of interlocking scholarly procedures. Working from fragile papyrus fragments and medieval parchment alike, philologists apply the auxiliary sciences of palaeography (the study and academic discipline of historical writing systems), and the reading of ancient scripts, and codicology, the physical study of manuscripts, to establish a text's provenance (Thompson, 2013). They then deploy textual criticism proper, comparing variant readings across surviving manuscript copies in order to reconstruct a version as close as possible to a lost original and to produce a critical edition accompanied by an apparatus recording the variants (Reynolds & Wilson, 2013). Historical linguistics analyses the changing forms and meanings of Greek and Latin words over time; contextual explanation situates a text within the historical, social, and cultural conditions of its production; and philological commentary provides detailed clarification of individual words, phrases, and allusions (Reynolds & Wilson, 2013; Turner, 2014). Together these methods demand mastery not merely a language but of the entire world in which a text was produced.

In nineteenth-century Germany, this cluster of methods was organized under the broader intellectual program known *as Altertumswissenschaft*, the "science of antiquity", which sought to integrate *philology, history, archaeology, philosophy,* and *the visual arts* into a comprehensive reconstruction of the classical world as a total cultural, social, and material reality, rather than merely a collection of texts (Benne, 2005; Whitman, 1986). It was precisely within, and against, this scientific ideal that Nietzsche's revolt acquired its particular charge, since his target was never classical antiquity itself but the institutional apparatus that had arisen to guarantee scholarly access to it (Porter, 2000a).

The Making of a Philologist

Nietzsche's critique of philology carries unusual authority because it is an inside job of rare technical competence. At Schulpforta, the Saxon school that had educated Klopstock, Fichte, and Ranke, he received an exceptionally rigorous grounding in Greek and Latin (Kaufmann, 1974). He went to the University of Bonn to study theology and philology, arriving in time for the *Philologenstreit*, the quarrel between Friedrich Ritschl and Otto Jahn that split the faculty and drove Ritschl to Leipzig in 1865, thus, Nietzsche followed him (Whitman, 1986). The quarrel is ordinarily filed as academic gossip, but its intellectual content anticipates the fault line along which Nietzsche's own career would later fracture. The tension between *Wortphilologie*, the disciplined science of the word (grammar, meter, textual recension) and

Sachphilologie, the science of the thing, which uses texts to reconstruct an ancient world's art, religion, and forms of life (Whitman, 1986; Benne, 2005). Ritschl was a master of the first mode who understood the value of the second. Nietzsche would eventually attempt to leap from the first to the second in a single move, and would be professionally destroyed for it.

Under Ritschl's direction, Nietzsche's promise was extraordinary. His work on Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers*, the argument that the text depends on a lost intermediary compilation, plausibly by Diocles of Magnesia which was published in the *Rheinisches* Museum while he was still a student (Jensen & Heit, 2014). This is *Quellenforschung*, source-criticism, in its purest form. The reconstruction of a vanished original from the distortions visible in a surviving derivative text, the identification of a document's hidden ancestry. The technique matters for everything that follows, one does not recover the lost source by finding it, but by reading the seams in what survives.

On Ritschl's recommendation, The University of Basel appointed Nietzsche to teach classical philology in 1869, at twenty-four, an appointment made without the customary doctoral examination, an appointment without real precedent in the German higher education system (Whitman, 1986). His inaugural lecture, *Homer and Classical Philology*, delivered that May, already contains the seed of everything after. Its subject is the Homeric question inaugurated by Friedrich August Wolf's 1795 demonstration that the epics are products of oral tradition and a long redactional history rather than the work of one single author. Nietzsche's argument is that philology, believing itself to be settling a narrow factual question about authorship, had in fact performed an operation on a concept, recasting "Homer" as an aesthetic value into a historical cause without possessing the philosophical tool to recognize what it had done (Whitman, 1986; Porter, 2000a). Nietzsche closes the lecture by inverting Seneca, who had lamented that what was once philosophy had become philology, "*quae philosophia fuit, facta philologia est*". For Nietzsche, the task ahead was for the reverse.

The Scandal of 1872: *The Birth of Tragedy* and the *Zukunftsphilologie* Affair

The Birth of Tragedy appeared in January 1872. It carries no conventional critical apparatus, cites almost nothing, assigns to Greek culture a dual metaphysical principle it names Apollonian and Dionysian, and concludes with an extended appeal for the rebirth of tragedy out of the spirit of Wagnerian music drama (Nietzsche, 1999; Geuss, 1999). Judged by the standards of *Sachphilologie*, it is an audacious and generative book. Judged by the standards of *Wortphilologie*, it barely counts as scholarship (Whitman, 1986).

The public rebuttal came from Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, then twenty-three and destined to become the most powerful classicist in Europe. His pamphlet *Zukunftsphilologie!* or "Philology of the Future!," mocking Wagner's own *Zukunftsmusik* (Music of the Future). In which worked methodically through Nietzsche's errors of fact, metre, chronology, and citation and concluded that its author had abandoned scholarly method altogether (Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, 2000). Erwin Rohde, Nietzsche's closest friend and a serious philologist, answered with a

countervailing pamphlet; Wagner intervened with an open letter in a Berlin newspaper; Wilamowitz replied again (Gründer, 1969).

The controversy is often narrated as a matter of injured collegial pride, but a more precise diagnosis is available. Wilamowitz was defending a method against a book that had declined to use it. While Nietzsche was proposing that the method itself possessed a history, an interest, and a psychology of its own. And that was a symptom before it was an instrument (Porter, 2000b). The two positions do not meet on the same argumentative plane, and the fact that they were fought as though they did is why the episode still reads, a century and a half later, as a case study in two disciplines discovering, in public that they could no longer address each other (Whitman, 1986; Porter, 2000c).

The material consequence was severe. Enrolment in Nietzsche's philology lectures collapsed the following semester, and although he continued to teach (largely in the attached secondary school) for another seven years. He did so in declining health and resigning with a pension in 1879 (Whitman, 1986; Kaufmann, 1974). The affair damaged Nietzsche's academic standing and confirmed his developing diagnosis which is the guardians of philology could not easily tolerate an approach that treated ancient texts as living provocations rather than objects to be catalogued (Porter, 2000b).

The Tragic Vision: Apollo, Dionysus, and the Death of Tragedy

At the centre of *The Birth of Tragedy* lies a fundamental duality. The Apollonian names the principle of form, boundary, individuation, and luminous appearance (the dream-image) that renders the world orderly, intelligible, and bearable. Apollo is the god of measure and beautiful illusion, and his art are the sculptor and the epic poet (Nietzsche, 1999; Young, 1992). The Dionysian, by contrast, names the dissolution of form i.e. *intoxication*, *ecstasy*, *the collapse of individual identity* into a primal unity with nature and with other human beings. Its paradigmatic art is music, which requires no representation and speaks directly to the ground of existence (Silk & Stern, 1981). These forces are not simply opposed, great art arises from their productive tension, and tragedy is the supreme instance of that union, Apollonian form giving shape to Dionysian depth without extinguishing it (Porter, 2000b).

Nietzsche rejects the Aristotelian account of tragedy as moral instruction or as the purification of pity and fear through catharsis. On his reading, tragedy neither moralizes nor merely consoles but it enables the spectator to confront the violence and apparent absurdity of existence and nonetheless affirm it (Nietzsche, 1999; Ridley, 2007). Oedipus and Prometheus are not individuals who meet misfortune but embodiments of a universal predicament, and in their suffering the audience encounters a form of affirmation deeper than optimism. Tragedy justifies existence as an *aesthetic phenomenon* only as art, he insists, can the world and human life be vindicated (Han-Pile, 2006).

Nietzsche locates the death of tragedy in the dominance of what he calls Socratism, the conviction that existence can be fully understood, and even corrected, through reason. He accuses Euripides of dragging the ordinary spectator onto the stage and subordinating the Dionysian chorus to rationalize dialogue, dissolving the mysterious core of tragic art. Behind Euripides stands Socrates, the "theoretical man"

who trusts that thought can plumb and repair the deepest abysses of being (Nietzsche, 1999; Nehamas, 1998). For Nietzsche, this optimism inaugurates a long decline in which modernity grows steadily more Apollonian in its pursuit of scientific mastery and loses contact with its Dionysian sources.

In 1872, Nietzsche placed Richard Wagner at the centre of his hopes for a cultural renewal, seeing in Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* a modern vehicle capable of reviving the tragic spirit of the Greeks (Nietzsche, 1999). But, the admiration proved temporary. As Nietzsche's thought matured and grew more critical of metaphysics generally, he came to read Wagner's turn toward Christian religiosity, epitomized by *Parsifal*, as a symptom of the very decadence Wagner would cure, a rupture that culminated in *The Case of Wagner* (Nietzsche, 1967). The arc of the friendship mirrors the arc of the thought: from the search for a redemptive tragic art suspicion of every form of aesthetic and metaphysical absolute, including an artist he had once loved (Young, 1992).

Language as a Graveyard of Metaphors

On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense (1873) supplies the philosophical basis for the image that organizes this paper. Nietzsche argues there that concepts do not correspond to essences in the world; rather, they arise through a chain of transferences, in which a unique nervous stimulus is translated first into an image, then into a sound, and then into a word that is subsequently applied to countless non-identical cases (Nietzsche, 2006). Truths, in his famous formulation, are "a mobile army of metaphors" whose metaphorical character has been forgotten, coins whose faces have been rubbed smooth through circulation until they function as mere metal (Kofman, 1993; de Man, 1979). Concepts are the fossilized residue of once-living perceptions, and the edifice built from them is the *columbarium*.

Philology, on this reading, participates directly in the process of ossification it claims merely to describe. In striving to fix, classify, and preserve the linguistic remains of antiquity, the discipline privileges the conservation of forms over the reactivation of the meanings that first produced them. It treats the sedimented metaphor as a stable object of knowledge rather than recovering the creative act behind it (Babich, 2006). The charge is therefore not that philology studies the wrong things, but that its characteristic procedures reinforce language's own tendency to forget its origins. The discipline of remembering is, thus, in its institutional form, an engine of a subtler forgetting.

The Indictment of a Discipline, Antiquarian History and the Care of Graves

In 1874 and 1875 Nietzsche filled notebooks for a projected *Untimely Meditation* to be titled *Wir Philologen* or "We Philologists." He abandoned the project, Rohde discouraged it, and the material was in any case probably unpublishable given Nietzsche's professional position (Nietzsche, 1990). The surviving notes constitute the most concentrated attack on academic classicism written in the nineteenth century. And its force is sharpened by the fact that its author was a sitting professor of the subject who wrote consistently in the first-person plural (Jensen & Heit, 2014).

The indictment separates into several distinct counts. The first is *temperamental unfitness*. Philology recruits and rewards precisely the personality least capable of understanding the culture it studies. The Greeks, on Nietzsche's account, were violent, agonistic, aristocratic, and shameless. While the modern scholars who study them professionally are diligent, cautious, and moralizing — a relation, Nietzsche suggests, resembling that of a mole to a mountain range (Nietzsche, 1990). The second is *institutional self-interest*. The nineteenth-century German cult of Greece, running from Winckelmann's neoclassicism through the Gymnasium curriculum, depends on a serene, marble-white Hellas that never existed, and a genuinely disenchanting encounter with the ancient world would function as a corrective the discipline has structural reasons to avoid (Williamson, 2004). The third, and most durable is, *self-ignorance*. The philologist inherited the prestige of classical study from the Renaissance and the Reformation without ever asking what that inheritance is now for. And imagines himself in a relation of pure receptivity to his object while remaining blind to the unexamined values governing his own editorial choices (Jensen & Heit, 2014). This count survives independently of the polemical excesses of the first two. It is the founding move of a hermeneutics of suspicion applied to scholarship itself, and it is the reason *We Philologists* continues to read less like a period quarrel than like a memorandum to the future of the humanities.

The second *Untimely Meditation*, *On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life* (1874), generalizes the argument. Nietzsche distinguishes three ways of relating to the past: monumental history, which seeks great precedents to authorize present action; critical history, which preserves the past and condemns what deserves condemnation; and antiquarian history, which preserves, venerates, catalogues, and tends (Nietzsche, 1997b; Jensen, 2013). Antiquarian history is philology's own characteristic mode, and Nietzsche's treatment of it is unusually nuanced because he is in effect describing himself. Antiquarian piety has genuine value: it gives a culture rootedness, rescues what would be lost, and resists the shallowness of the present. But it carries a specific pathology. Because it cannot discriminate, because everything old is, in its own logic, equally worthy of preservation, it eventually loses the capacity to distinguish the living from the dead. It preserves indiscriminately, and what it preserves it also suffocates (Nietzsche, 1997b). The past ceases to function as a resource for life and becomes instead an object of maintenance.

This is the graveyard proper, and it is where the columbarium comes home. The philological seminar and the conceptual necropolis of *On Truth and Lies* are the same structure seen from two angles. In both, an original act, *the metaphor, the deed, the living word* has been decorously interred and a scholarly caste has arisen whose function is to keep the niches tidy.

From Philology to Genealogy: *Quellenforschung* turned upon Morality

If Nietzsche had simply left the discipline behind in 1879, the story would be a conventional one about an academic career cut short. What happened instead is stranger and more consequential. Philological method went underground for over a decade and resurfaced, transposed, in a different field entirely. *On the Genealogy of Morality (*1887) opens its first essay with etymology. Nietzsche derives the

aristocratic mode of valuation from the words themselves: German *gut* against *schlecht*, the latter originally meaning nothing worse than "plain" or "simple," cognate with *schlicht*, and only later hardening into "bad"; *Latin malus*, which he associates with *Greek melas*, "dark," denoting the darker-haired pre-Aryan population of Italy; and Latin "*bonus"*, which he proposes to derive from an older form *duonus* and thereby to link to *duellum*, the ancestor of *bellum* "war", so that "the good man" would originally have meant "the warrior" (Nietzsche, 1994). It should be noted that most of these specific derivations are not accepted by modern historical linguistics. The *bonus-bellum* connection is unsupported, and the *malus-melas* derivation is likewise rejected, while the *schlecht-schlicht* case is essentially sound and matches the account a historical lexicographer would give (Whitman, 1986). The philological execution, in other words, is uneven, a symptom of what happens when evidentiary discipline is subordinated to an overriding thesis.

What survives this uneven execution is the method itself, which is philology's own, transposed onto a new object. Recall Nietzsche's earlier work on Diogenes Laertius: a late, composite, internally inconsistent text is read for the seams left by an earlier, lost source, which can then be reconstructed by careful attention to exactly those seams (Jensen & Heit, 2014). The *Genealogy* performs the identical operation on the moral vocabulary of Europe. Morality is treated as a received text — corrupt, stratified, the product of a redactional history that has effaced its own traces. Its internal contradictions, such as why the same evaluative vocabulary should carry both "noble" and "generous," both "common" and "wicked," are read as seams. Beneath the received text lies an earlier stratum, the aristocratic mode of valuation, overwritten by a later hand in what Nietzsche calls the slave revolt in morality, in strictly technical terms, *an interpolation* (Deleuze, 1983; Foucault, 1977). The proposed *Umwertung aller Werte*, the revaluation of all values, is then the editorial act of marking the interpolation as such and attempting to restore the reading of the archetype.

This is why the note Nietzsche appends to the end of the Genealogy's first essay is not a curiosity but something closer to a confession. There Nietzsche proposes that a university faculty establish a prize essay on the history of moral concepts and explicitly solicits the collaboration of philologists, historians, linguists, physiologists, and physicians (Nietzsche, 1994). In the precise institutional idiom of the *Preisaufgabe*, Nietzsche had himself had won as a student at Leipzig, advertising for a research program and attempting to found a discipline. Foucault's influential essay on genealogy makes essentially the same point from the other direction. Genealogy, Foucault insists, is documentary, patient, and gray; it is work performed on parchments (Foucault, 1977). Genealogy, on this account, is what philology becomes when it accepts Nietzsche's early inversion of Seneca and consents to become philosophy.

Lento: The Late Rehabilitation of Philology

What makes this story more than a simple tale of abandonment is that Nietzsche, late in his career, returned to philology and rehabilitated it, not as an institution, but as an ethic. In the autumn of 1886, preparing a new edition of *Daybreak*, Nietzsche wrote a preface containing the warmest paragraph about

philology anywhere in his corpus. Philology, he writes, is a venerable art that asks its practitioners to step aside, to take time, to become still and slow. It is goldsmith's work performed on the word, and it achieves nothing unless it achieves it *Lento*. In an age of haste that wants everything finished at once, philology is for that very reason more necessary than ever. It is the art that teaches one to read well, which is to say, slowly, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate fingers and eyes (Nietzsche, 1997a). This ought to sound like capitulation but it does not, because the object of Nietzsche's praise has changed. He is not rehabilitating the seminar, the critical apparatus, or the professional culture that had driven him from his chair. He is extracting from the discipline a single transferable capacity, the refusal to be hurried past a text, and installing it as a form of counter-conduct against modernity (Gumbrecht, 2003).

The Antichrist, written two years later, makes the polemical use of this rehabilitated concept explicit. Nietzsche defines philology as *ephexi*s in interpretation, borrowing the *skeptic* term for the suspension of assent: the capacity to read a state of affairs off a text without falsifying it through interpretation, without losing caution, patience, and delicacy in the desire to understand (Nietzsche, 2005). His indictment of institutional Christianity in that text is, at bottom, a charge of bad reading —that the Church took the sacred texts of another people, read them as a system of prophecies pointing at itself, and wrenched every passage from its original setting. The priest is defined by an incapacity for philology, and that incapacity is constitutive of priestly authority rather than incidental to it (Nietzsche, 2005). The late position is therefore stable and not a retraction: philology as a nineteenth-century institutional science, with its unexamined values and its temperamental mismatch to its object, remains condemned; philology as the discipline of not falsifying becomes the one intellectual virtue Nietzsche is prepared to endorse without irony.

Nietzsche's Postmodern Legacy and the Return to Philology

The later twentieth century inherited and radicalized Nietzsche's understanding of language as historically contingent and inseparable from relations of power. Derrida's account of *deconstruction* elaborates the idea that meaning is perpetually deferred and never fully present, extending Nietzsche's suspicion of any final, authoritative reading (Derrida, 1976, 1979). Foucault's *genealogies* and his *archaeology of discourse* extend Nietzsche's insight that discourses are structured by historically specific configurations of power and knowledge. And that the search for pure origins is itself an interpretive fiction rather than a neutral discovery (Foucault, 1970, 1972, 1977). For both thinkers, Nietzsche's columbarium of dead metaphors anticipates a textual world in which interpretation is effectively endless and the dream of a single, definitive meaning is quietly abandoned (Behler, 1991).

The term "philology" has since kept returning, generally in a recognizably Nietzschean register, as a demand for slowness against some contemporary form of hurry. Paul de Man's *The Return to Philology* argued that literary theory's apparent threat to literary study was, properly understood, itself a return to close attention to the letter of the text, against its ideological consumption (de Man, 1986). Edward Said, from an almost opposite political position and near the end of his own life,

called for a *philological humanism* grounded in close, patient, resistant reading as the basis of democratic criticism (Said, 2004). Sheldon Pollock's *Future Philology?* deliberately revived Wilamowitz's sneering 1872 title, minus the sneer, proposing philology understood broadly as the discipline of making sense of texts, as one of the few genuinely global human sciences, with implications for how digitized and algorithmically processed corpora ought to be read (Pollock, 2009). Werner Hamacher's *95 Theses on Philology*, posted in the deliberately Lutheran manner its title suggests, redefines philology as an infinite and unfinishable relation to language (Hamacher, 2009). Each of these positions is, in a meaningful sense, treats reading slowly as a form of intellectual and political resistance, and none would have been fully thinkable from within the philology Wilamowitz defended in 1872.

The Paradox of Nietzsche's Philology

Nietzsche's relationship to philology is genuinely paradoxical. He rejected the discipline's guiding assumptions while continuing to rely on its tools to dismantle Western metaphysics. His *genealogy of morality* depends on philological rigor i.e. *etymology, semantic history, comparative attention to sources* in order to expose the historical contingency of values that present themselves as absolute (Nietzsche, 1994; Foucault, 1977). Far from simply rejecting philological competence, Nietzsche radicalized it, redirecting the instruments of close reading from dead manuscripts toward the living concepts that govern moral and intellectual life (Porter, 2000a). “The graveyard of words” is therefore not, finally, a call to abandon philology, but a demand to practice it differently.

Nietzsche's *perspectivism*, the thesis that there are no facts, only interpretations, and that every interpretation issues from a particular standpoint — poses a direct challenge to philology's traditional aspiration to recover a single, authoritative original meaning (Nehamas, 1985; Anderson, 1998). If all reading is interpretation all the way down, then the critical edition is not a neutral window onto the past but is itself an interpretive construction, shaped by the values and assumptions of its creators. This does not render textual scholarship worthless but it reframes it as a creative and responsible act whose criteria become life-enhancement, fruitfulness, and honesty about its own perspectival character rather than pure objectivity (Clark, 1990).

A philology that embraces ambiguity and the will to power in interpretation is not without danger. If interpretation is treated as wholly unconstrained by textual evidence, it risks collapsing into a relativism in which any reading is judged as good as any other. More troublingly, the historical record shows that a rhetoric of vitality, myth, and intensity has proved vulnerable to appropriation by authoritarian and nationalist movements, as the notorious posthumous misuse of Nietzsche's own texts by his sister and by later ideologues demonstrates (Kaufmann, 1974; Aschheim, 1992). A responsible successor to Nietzsche's project must therefore hold interpretive creativity and scholarly discipline in tension, affirming the freedom of interpretation without abandoning the conscience that tests interpretations against evidence.

Nietzsche's question acquires renewed force in the age of large-scale digitization, searchable corpora, and machine learning applied to historical texts.

Such projects promise unprecedented access to the past. Such projects also risk reproducing the tendency Nietzsche criticized in his own discipline (the reduction of living works to data to be stored, indexed, and managed) rather than read (Pollock, 2009). On a Nietzschean framing the relevant question is not how much a digital archive preserves but whether it intensifies a reader's encounter with the texts it makes available or merely multiplies the niches in the columbarium (Gumbrecht, 2003).

Afterlives: Who Buried Whom

Nietzsche's verdict on his own discipline turned out to be premature in one sense and prophetic in another. It was premature because philology, narrowly understood, did not die; it professionalized with extraordinary success. Wilamowitz dominated European classical scholarship for four decades. And the tools Nietzsche judged spiritually inadequate went on to produce, over the following century, discoveries — *the papyri of Oxyrhynchus*, the decipherment of Linear B, a transformed understanding of Greek religion and society, that would have startled every participant in the 1872 controversy (Whitman, 1986). It was prophetic because the name itself did die. Philology as the designation of a single unified project encompassing language, literature, and history (the master discipline of the nineteenth-century humanities). And in important respects, the organizing model for the modern research university dissolved over the following century into linguistics, literary criticism, history, anthropology, and religious studies. The word survived largely as either an antiquarian curiosity or a mild insult meaning pedantry (Turner, 2014). Foucault's later account of the emergence of philology alongside biology and political economy treats it as one of the epistemic ruptures that made the modern human sciences possible, and treats its self-consumption. Language becoming an object with an autonomous density of its own, rather than a transparent medium, as one of the conditions for the disappearance of the classical, unified conception of "man" as an object of knowledge (Foucault, 1970). On that reading, Nietzsche is not philology's assassin so much as the point at which the discipline became conscious of what it had already done to itself.

And then the final turn, which is almost too neat to be credible and is nevertheless documented fact. Nietzsche collapsed in Turin in January 1889 and wrote nothing further. His literary estate passed to his sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, who had earlier attempted to found a racially exclusive colony in Paraguay and who returned to Germany to found and control the Nietzsche Archive. Over the following three decades she edited, rearranged, suppressed material, and in some cases forged correspondence, assembling from discarded notebook material a book titled *The Will to Power*. A work her brother never composed as such, whose architecture was substantially hers, and which was read for half a century as his systematic philosophical masterwork (Aschheim, 1992). A philologist's own corpus had become a corrupt text: interpolated, mis-ordered, edited by a hostile redactor with an identifiable ideological agenda. And transmitted to posterity in a condition requiring exactly the kind of restoration Nietzsche himself had once performed on Diogenes Laertius.

That restoration was carried out beginning in the 1960s by the philosopher Giorgio Colli and the philologist Mazzino Montinari, who spent years in the Weimar archives collating manuscripts against printed editions, establishing the correct chronology of the notebooks, and demonstrating, with the ordinary instruments of textual criticism that *The Will to Power* did not exist as a coherent authorial work at all (Colli & Montinari, 1967; Montinari, 2003). Their critical edition the *Kritische Studienausgabe* prepared under the same editorship is the basis of essentially all serious Nietzsche scholarship conducted since (Colli & Montinari, 1967). Everything that contemporary readers say about Nietzsche's thought rests, at bottom, on two men doing precisely what Friedrich Ritschl had trained his most gifted student to do a century earlier. Nietzsche called the concept a *columbarium* and *philology* the tending of graves. On the evidence of his own posthumous reception, he was right, and the last word belongs to the sextons. Without their patience with the urns, the *Genealogy* now read in university seminars would still be, in substantial part, the text his sister arranged.

Conclusion

Nietzsche's metaphor of the *graveyard of words* (columbarium) condemns a philology that entombs living thought in the name of rigor, mistaking the preservation of dead forms for understanding. Yet the same body of work gestures toward a rebirth: a philology that admits ambiguity and interpretive creativity without discarding the discipline that distinguishes a defensible reading from an arbitrary one. Nietzsche did not, in the end, abandon the philological tools Bonn and Leipzig given him and Basel had cost him. He turned them into instruments of genealogical and cultural critique, and in doing so helped inaugurate a line of interpretive theory running through Foucault and Derrida into the still-unresolved debate over the future of the humanities (Porter, 2000a; Pollock, 2009). In an era shaped by algorithmic analysis, machine-generated text, and searchable digital corpora, his summons to read lento — slowly, with reservations, with doors left open — is more pressing than when he issued it. To recover philology from its own grave, scholars must first accept the fact that concepts are worn-down metaphors and that reading is never innocent. Having accepted it, they must nonetheless dare to interpret rather than retreat into naive positivism on one side or unconstrained relativism on the other side. The final irony belongs to Nietzsche's own biography. The discipline he had twice pronounced spiritually bankrupt outlived him, watched his own corpus become precisely the kind of corrupted text he had once trained to restore, and then slowly, with the delicate fingers he demanded of every honest reader — dug him back up (Colli & Montinari, 1967; Montinari, 2003).

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