Philology and Its Histories
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In 1982 Paul de Man wrote “The Return to Philology,” bringing to the stage, at least within much modern literary scholarship, a term that many would have found difficult to define with any measure of confidence. In Paul de Man’s wake, Harvard organized a conference in 1988 on the topic “What is Philology?” It was published in 1990 as both a special issue of the journal *Comparative Literature Studies,* and as the book *On Philology.* Around 1990 discussions about philology and medieval studies had also started to flourish, particularly through a special issue of *Speculum* on *The New Philology* edited by Stephen Nichols. The aftereffects of this publication galvanized medieval studies, producing further self-questioning on the past and future of medieval studies as well as on the significance of philology for medievalists and literary scholars in general. Among these engagements are Seth Lerer’s *Literary History and the Challenge of Philology,* William Paden’s *The Future of the Middle Ages,* and John van Engen’s *The Past and Future of Medieval Studies.*

The place of philology in literary and medieval studies henceforth became a very active field of inquiry, and many of its engagements explicitly echoed the title of De Man’s by now famous essay. Lee Patterson, for instance, added his own “The Return to Philology” in 1994, and in 1997 David Greetham published “The Resistance to Philology” as a conflation of de Man’s “The

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1. This essay is a revised version of Nadia Altschul, “Terminología y crítica textual,” which appeared originally in Altschul 2005. By permission of Editorial Pliegos.
Resistance to Theory” and “The Return to Philology.”

That there are returns in philology might seem a commonplace, yet it should not be taken for granted that what returns is “the same.” A 2004 essay by Marie-Rose Logan on the meaning of the term philology as used by Guillaume Budé (1468–1540), for instance, ratifies that for Budé philologia, litterae and philosophia were not disciplines or genres but broad semantic fields. Indeed, philologia underwent a momentous shift in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, leading it to become an institutionalized discipline. Thanks to this new disciplinary garb, it changed meaning so much that Friedrich Nietzsche’s Wir Philologen—literally “we philologists”—is more appropriately translated as We Classicists. Tellingly, however, Logan also points out that “the range of inquiry in philology was never, it appears, to be defined with any precision.”

Fraught by constant returns, never defined with any precision—how may we approach what is philology?

The present essay dwells on the question concerning philology by concentrating on vernacular medieval studies, particularly after the “return” of Paul de Man and the 1990 Speculum issue on The New Philology. Focusing specifically on the study of medieval vernaculars, I will examine philology as an interplay between its potential range and the specific disciplinary uses in which it is concretized. In order to negotiate this interplay I will compare the Castilian tradition and the Anglo-American tradition in the United States, two very different language traditions whose confrontation will force us to broaden our sense of philology’s meaning and range of application.

“Philology” in the Castilian and Anglo-American Traditions

Differences between the Spanish and Anglo-American academic traditions have been observed in the past. Karl Uitti traces the distinction to Yakov Malkiel, and ratifies his opinion that while “philology” in the Anglo-American tradition tends to be understood as the critical study of texts, “the conservatism inherent in the Hispanic tradition” has tended to associate the Spanish “filología” and “filólogo” with “humanities” and “humanist.” Differences may also be revealed in the respective dictionary definitions, which also make apparent the difficulty of giving “philology” a unified sense. The dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy (DRAE) defines filología under three headings:

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1. Science that studies a culture as it is manifested in its language and its literature, primarily through written texts.
2. Technique that is applied to texts in order to reconstruct, fix and interpret them.
3. Linguistics.\(^8\)

The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* organizes these meanings differently and in the pertinent entries defines philology as:

1. Love of learning and literature; the study of literature, in a wide sense, including grammar, literary criticism and interpretation, the relation of literature and written records to history, etc.; literary or classical scholarship; polite learning. Now rare in general sense except in the U.S. [. . . ]
2. \textit{spec.} (in mod. use) The study of the structure and development of language; the science of language; linguistics (Really one branch of sense 1.).\(^9\)

The *OED* does not explicitly mention a sense equivalent to *Textkritik* or the “technique that is applied to texts in order to reconstruct, fix and interpret them,” as we find in the second entry of the Spanish dictionary. Thus in order to better approach the meanings in the Anglo-American tradition, and following on the footsteps of Ziolkowski’s published recap of the Harvard conference, we shall turn to the entries of the *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language*. Despite its relative vagueness, especially when compared to the *DRAE*, *Webster’s* presents a rough equivalent to the Spanish dictionary by way of a tripartite definition that includes the reconstruction and interpretation of written texts. Its three headings for “philology” are:

1. Originally, the love of learning and literature; study; scholarship.
2. The study of written records, especially literary texts, in order to determine their authenticity, meaning, etc.
3. Linguistics: the current use.\(^10\)

The association between philology and linguistics is particularly intriguing.

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8. Real Academia Española 2001. Translations from Castilian to English are my own.
9. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. s.v. “philology.” The second entry is deemed obsolete, rendering from Greek the meaning “love of talk, speech, or argument” as opposed to “love of wisdom, philosophy.”
While the Royal Spanish Academy sends the reader to a new entry (by printing “Linguistics” in bold face), the *OED* and *Webster’s* emphasize that in its modern and current meaning philology is a branch of linguistics. One reason for this is that when the term linguistics was starting to make an impact in the first quarter of the twentieth century, the British academy did not accept the neologism and continued to use “philology” for what became established in other traditions as “linguistics.”

But Ziolkowski reports that the equation between linguistics and philology was soundly rejected at the Harvard conference and, more significantly, that most of the encounter “was spent in assessing the utility of philology in determining what *Webster’s* so amusingly and evasively designated the ‘authenticity, meaning, etc.’ of written records.” Thus in the oral discussion of the Harvard conference “philology” was closely associated with the *DRAE’s* second entry: the “Technique that is applied to texts in order to reconstruct, fix and interpret them”; or, in different words, to *Textkritik*.

For those present at Harvard in 1988, then, *Textkritik* was the primary meaning of philology. This meaning has been traced by Suzanne Fleischman to one of the works of Erich Auerbach: the *Introduction aux études de philologie romane*, where Auerbach maintained that many scholars consider that the most noble and most authentic facet of the philological enterprise is the making of critical editions. Fleischman concluded that “history seems to have upheld Auerbach’s assertion about the centrality of textual criticism to the philological enterprise; so much so, in fact, that for many in the humanities today, philology is textual criticism.” Fleischman’s equation of philology with textual criticism is not laudatory, but we may point out that the relationship with *Textkritik* has stood its ground well enough to be the structuring definition of, for instance, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s 2003 *The Powers of Philology*.

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11. Bolling 1929: 30. I want to thank Boncho Dragiyski for bringing this essay to my attention.
14. Fleischman 1996: 93. As pointed out to me by Sean Gurd, dismissive gestures associating *Textkritik* with philology are also found at the beginning of Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale* (Saussure 1916; translated in Saussure 1986). In a maneuver to legitimize linguistics as an independent discipline Saussure states that “early philologists sought especially to correct, interpret and comment upon written texts” (Saussure 1986: 13). Interestingly, considering the observations below, he notes that philological studies “also led to an interest in literary history, customs, institutions, etc.” (Saussure 1986: 13–14).
15. “In the title of my book and throughout its chapters, the word *philology* will always be used according to its second meaning, that is, referring to a configuration of scholarly skills that are geared toward historical text curatorship and whose other side is the ‘study of language or, even more generally . . . almost any study of any product of the human spirit’” (Gumbrecht 2003: 2).
While this might seem to answer the question “what is philology” in an apparently simple manner, a clearer consideration of non-English language traditions complicates matters. While in US English “philology” elicits connections with punctiliousness and textual reconstruction, in Spanish the term continues to be fruitfully used in a much broader sense. This may be observed in the names of many academic departments. While in the US a typical nomenclature will be Department of Portuguese or Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, the equivalent in Spain will commonly be known as Filología francesa or Filología italiana. Moreover, many departments of Filología in Spain contain graduate students who see themselves as linguists, while graduates of US Departments of Language and Literature are in most cases still predominantly trained in literary criticism or literary theory. This state of affairs does not equate filología with linguistics in Spain, nor does it disqualify an equation of filología with textual criticism, but it does point to a different semantic range. Indeed, despite its close connection with linguistics, we can glimpse the broader meaning of filología in many Spanish scholarly publications. To provide one significant example, a book by José Portolés on Half a Century of Spanish Philology does not mention the field of textual criticism, and is concerned primarily with the history of Spanish literary scholarship.\(^{16}\) At first sight, a simple explanation would be to accept Uitti’s and Malkiel’s statements and place Spanish filología as part of a more “conservative” scholarly tradition that uses the term in the broad sense of humanistic studies. But the Spanish, British, and US English dictionaries all show that the different facets of “philology” cannot be explained with reference simply to conservative or innovative intellectual traditions. While it might be comforting to set aside the Spanish case as “conservative” while enhancing a more “innovative” English usage, the duality of philology can also be approached as integral to the term itself. In his contribution to Speculum, Lee Patterson observes a distinction between “philology as Textkritik and philology as Geistesgeschichte.”\(^{17}\) A few years later, in his 1994 essay on “The Return to Philology,” Patterson advanced that philology has always been in a constant struggle between these two aspects, and separates a “history of culture” or Kulturgeschichte from the erudite and punctilious practices that he had earlier aligned with Textkritik.\(^{18}\)

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17. Patterson 1990: 91.

In the Castilian tradition, where common usage has maintained the conceptual validity of philology’s broader sense, medieval studies handles the ambiguities by making explicit the way the word is used. As examples, we may observe two articles on Hispanic textual editing first published in the journal Romance Philology, forming part of the 1991 issue that has been perceived as a response to the 1990 New Philology issue of Speculum. Due to unexpected circumstances these two essays had the unusual privilege of being translated into English and published in 1995 in a volume on Scholarly Editing edited by David Greetham for the Modern Language Association of America. In these essays the Spaniard Alberto Blecua explains that the book by José Portolés mentioned above traces the trajectory of the masters of Spanish Philology “in the broad sense of the term,” while the Argentinian Germán Orduna refers to the “philological labors of Ramón Menéndez Pidal . . . at the editorial level.” A second striking example of the duality and the difficulties of negotiating it—even in the more literal Castilian tradition—is in Pedro Sánchez-Prieto Borja’s discussion of “[t]he place of textual criticism in ‘philological’ studies.” Paired with textual criticism, the quotation marks around the word “philological” are used to indicate the broad “humanistic” sense of the term; we are to understand that the use of the word without quotation marks would indicate textual criticism. However, a few pages later, showing indeed how difficult it is to keep a lid on the term, he will write that the lack of rigorous editions in Castilian “is the consequence of a way of conceiving humanistic studies, of understanding philology.” In this case, the word denotes a direct equivalent of humanistic studies.

What is important for us here is the dislocation produced by the Castilian tradition in the established equation of philology with Textkritik within the Anglo-American sphere. Indeed, the very literal level of engagement found in the Castilian tradition not only clarifies that philology cannot be unequivocally equated with Textkritik, but also confronts the reader with a different—and larger—set of terminological alternatives for their intersection. In the following section I will examine one of these terms—Ecdotics—and propose it as an option for conceptual change within the field of editorial philology.

“Philology” as Ecdotics

In a handbook on Castilian textual criticism published in 1983, Alberto Blecua argued that “the goal of the art of textual criticism is to present a text purified as much as possible of all the elements that are extraneous to the author.” To Blecua, however, the terminological disparities within the field were noticeable enough to deserve mention, and he thus provided an extensive footnote on available terms that refer in one way or another to his main topic:

Dom Quentin coined in 1926 a new term, Ecdotique (“Ecdotics”), which some critics use as a synonym for textual criticism . . . [O]thers . . . give to this term a broader meaning, since it would include besides its purely philological nucleus—textual criticism—all aspects of editorial technique. . . . On occasion the term stemmatics is also used as a synonym of textual criticism, since the so-called Lachmannian method, based on the construction of the stemma, is the most widely used. In relatively recent times a new art has emerged under the name Textology. The term . . . is common in Slavic philology.

English language readers of medieval vernacular topics commonly encounter “stemmatics” and “textual criticism,” but “textology” and “ecdotics” are a lot rarer if they surface at all. In the Castilian case, among the different options presented by Blecua—and despite the use of “textual criticism” in his title—the medieval Castilian field has in great measure chosen “ecdotics.” In other words, if in English philology is textual criticism, in Castilian textual criticism is ecdotics.

Ecdotics however is not an “autochthonous” term but one that was incorporated from the Italian editorial school. Dom Henri Quentin coined it to characterize his work in editing the Vulgate, and in time it came to be widely used by the Italian Nuova Filologia or neo-Lachmannian school of editing. When the Castilian editorial tradition adopted this tradition in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the term “ecdotics” was also made available within medieval Hispanicism. Because of its connection to

24. Quentin 1926.
25. The close connections between the Italian and the Castilian fields have been expressed by neo-Lachmannian critics like Germán Orduna, who traced the disciplinary history of Castilian rigorous editing as an Italian affair: the rigorous neo-Lachmannian method was introduced in Hispanic scholarship through the works of mid-twentieth-century Italian critics such as Giorgio Chiarini, Se-
the *Nuova Filologia*, ecdotics is closely linked with the methodological crisis created by Joseph Bédier when he challenged the appropriateness of the traditional Lachmannian method for the study of medieval vernaculars. After the shock of Bédierist skepticism, Quentin proposed a more “objective” use for common-error analysis in the accurate filiation of witnesses. Quentin’s propositions did not succeed in renewing criticism in Lachmannian stemmatics, and it was left to one of his students, Gianfranco Contini, to revitalize ecdotics by positing that editors do not provide a true authorial text but a working hypothesis on the common ancestor of the extant tradition.26

The term ecdotics as well as the Italian neo-Lachmannian school are therefore both closely related to the crisis provoked by Bédier’s rejection of the stemmatic “Lachmannian” method for the editing of medieval vernaculars.27

It should be noted in this case that just as the *Nuova Filologia* was less than acknowledged in the apparent homonym of the Anglo-American New

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27. Although Bédier associated the stemmatic method of the common error with Lachmann, creating the dichotomy known as Bédierism and Lachmannism, Karl Lachmann did not strictly use this method in his editions of medieval vernacular texts. Bédier challenged what he called the Lachmannian method—introduced in France by his teacher Gaston Paris—in two main venues (Bédier 1913, 1928). The problem centered on the impossibility of objectively recognizing an erroneous scribal reading. Bédier noticed that editors working with the common-error method tended to divide the tradition into only two branches. This implied that there was no objective way to separate between original and erroneous readings and that editors separated until only two irreconcilable options were left. Bédier also noticed that using the common-error method he was able to form four plausible stemmata of the *Lai de l’Ombre*, which would lead to four different critical texts. If the identification of error was not secure, and different stemmata were equally plausible, then no critical text could be deemed closer to the original. Quentin responded by trying to provide scientific ways of counteracting editorial subjectivity in the recognition of errors, noting that the logic underlying the practice criticized by Bédier was based on circularity and depended on editors’ prejudices. He proposed changing the terminology to the neutral concept of “variant”—leaving “error” only for cases when a reading was confronted by an established original—and developed a statistical method that would bypass editorial subjectivity in identifying error (Quentin 1926). L. P. Schmidt, however, argues that there could have been no crisis of the common-error method at the time of Bédier and Quentin because the true formulation of this method only occurred in the aftermath of Bédier’s and Quentin’s interventions, in Paul Maas’s 1927 reply to Bédier’s methodological doubts in *Textkritik*, and Giorgio Pasquali’s review of Maas’s book in 1929 and his fuller reply in *Storia della tradizione e critica del testo* in 1934 (Schmidt 1988: 234). The beginnings of the Italian *Nuova Filologia* would then be placed in Pasquali’s rehabilitation of the so-called Lachmannian method in the *Storia*, together with Michele Barbi’s 1938 *La Nuova Filologia e l’edizione dei nostri scrittori da Dante al Manzoni*. For further discussion of this history of editorial philology see Altschul 2005: 73–97. For specific discussions of Lachmann’s editorial practice, see Ganz 1968 and Schmidt 1988. Mary Blakely Speer’s “In Defense of Philology” (1979) and Paola Pugliatti’s “Textual Perspectives in Italy” (1998) are especially useful presentations and discussions of the Italian *Nuova Filologia*. 
Philology, the term ecdotics is also generally unknown within the US.  
For instance, when the translation of Orduna’s “Ecdótica hispánica” was produced for Greetham’s MLA volume on Scholarly Editing, his title was renamed “Hispanic Textual Criticism.”  
This situation is related to the history of the “Lachmannian” method in the United States, a revised form of which entered American English studies with the highly influential work of Walter W. Greg on the selection and manipulation of a copy-text for Renaissance compositions. It coalesced as an “eclectic” editorial school after World War II with the aid of Greg’s continuators, forming a theoretical triumvirate with Walter Greg, Fredson Bowers, and Thomas Tanselle, and leading an existence somewhat independent from other language traditions. The Italian revisions introduced into the stemmatic methodology starting in the 1930s were not a strong presence in the United States. Instead of presenting a common ancestor as a working hypothesis of the authorial text, the US school produces “eclectic” editions that incorporate textual elements from different available witnesses into a copy-text. The eclectic school can also go as far as to propose that holographic copies in the author’s hand also need editorial correction. In the case of modern authors, when the existing holograph does not match the editorial ideal, it may be posited that the editor should reconstitute the composition that the author must have had in his or her mind before writing it down erroneously on paper. Eclectic editors could thus reconstitute not an actual composition—an ancestor or archetype—but the ideal composition that the author would have wanted to write.

In contrast, the term ecdotics and the neo-Lachmannian editorial branch adopted today in the Castilian tradition were both formed in reaction to the critiques of Joseph Bédier. Because of its intellectual descent, “Ecdotics” is therefore the editorial equivalent of the reformed stemmatics of the Italian Nuova Filologia. There is, however, despite this association of “ecdotics” with the reformed Lachmannian branch of Textkritik, a more suggestive range to be reclaimed for this term. I would thus like to rescue a proposal of the Spaniard Elisa Ruiz. Ruiz mentions the Greek etymology of ecdotics as the background for an expansion of this term. The etymological connection with ἐκδίδωμι and ἔκδοσις connects the word with the idea of “issuing forth,” “sharing with friends,” “bringing to light,” and thus with the realm of edit-

28. In the 1990 Speculum issue Howard Bloch mentions the previous existence of the Italian Nuova Filologia and disparages the choice “New Philology” (Bloch 1990: 38).
31. For the eclectic school see, for instance, Bowers 1978; Greg 1950–51; and Tanselle 1996.
32. See in particular Tanselle 1996.
ing and publishing. Based on these connotations, Ruiz proposed that even if many scholars use the term as a synonym for textual criticism, and even though this was the meaning Quentin conferred on it when he coined it, ecdotics can nevertheless be broadened according to its etymological value to “designate in genere the art of editing books.” We should consider Ruiz’s expansion of the range of ecdotics as a valuable addition to the available critical vocabulary in English because of the restricted definition of Textkritik. “Textual criticism,” despite its ample potential as a semantic field, has a precise meaning in medieval vernacular editing that associates it with the search for authorial texts. Although Lachmannism and Italian neo-Lachmannism contend that the common-error method introduced from biblical and classical studies is trustworthy and applicable to medieval vernacular texts, and Bédierism holds that it is faulty, both posit a reconstructed common ancestor or a best-manuscript to stand for the lost authorial composition, avatars, we might say, of the lost authorial text.

Ecdotics introduces the possibility of breaking away from this emphasis on an authorial text. For instance, it was in confrontation with these two branches of Textkritik that the Anglo-American New Philology, consciously basing itself on Paul Zumthor’s mouvance and Bernard Cerquiglini’s variance, proposed to account for the constant non-authorial modifications of the linguistic code in vernacular manuscripts of the Christian Middle Ages. Elsewhere I have called this third editorial position “scribal versionism” and I have argued for a distinction between it and the Bédierist field. But the existence of scribal versionism as a third editorial option opens a particular terminological question. How are we to relate this discordant editorial position to textual criticism? What is the place of a non-authorial stance in a Textkritik defined by its interest in authorial originals? The editorial position of the New Philology cannot be subsumed under any of the rubrics available today: it is not a form of Lachmannism, and it is not a form of Bédierism.

33. It is worth pointing out that although related to the idea of “publishing,” the meaning in Greek was indeed closer to the idea of sharing with friends a work that might not be finished, than to the current notion of releasing a finished work to a broad and unknown reading public. I want to thank Georg Luck for his assistance with this etymology, as well as Sean Gurd.


35. “To present a text purified as much as possible of all the elements that are extraneous to the author” (Blecua 1983: 18–19).

36. I am referring to an avatar as an icon or representation. The word derives from the Sanskrit Avatāra and, tellingly, means the deliberate “descent” or incarnation of a Hindu god-like figure into the earthly mortal realm.


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When Bédierism stops positing that the best-manuscript is an authorial avatar and begins to consider that each manuscript is an individually valuable composition, it becomes something else. And this “something else” is not “neo-Bédierism” but a different philosophical take on medieval textuality. The same may be said of the relationship between Lachmannism and neo-Lachmannism. The Italian Nuova Filologia viewed itself as a continuation of the Lachmannian methodology and thus continued its attachment to authorial texts. It reformed some aspects of the common error methodology and became, in its own estimation, neo-Lachmannism. But if this reformed neo-Lachmannian methodology eventually separates itself from the search for an authorial Urtext, then it will also sever its connection with textual criticism and become something else. The rubric of ecdotics as “in genere the art of editing” provides ample room for editorial endeavors that do not hinge on the recuperation of authorial texts. “Ecdotics” can include editorial methodologies such as neo-Lachmannism, the Eclectic school, and Bédierism, but it can also include philosophically contrary endeavors such as the mouvance-inspired editorial perspective of the New Philology. “Ecdotics” is also broad enough to include not just specific editorial methodologies but also the study of these methodologies, histories and historiographies, that is, the study and critique of their intellectual genealogies.

At this point, however, it becomes clear that philology is not, or at least not merely, textual criticism for the simple reason that Textkritik is only an authorial branch within an editorial world that must accommodate the propositions of the New Philology and the study of mouvance. Equating philology with textual criticism also represents a simplification of the editorial terminology, which includes at a minimum stemmatics and Slavic textology. But more importantly, this equation is an unfortunate reduction of the range of philology itself. Earlier we noted that philology includes the study of culture as well as text, a focus reflective of “older” terms such as Kulturgeschichte. At first sight, then, the cultural facet of philology may give it the same comprehensive extension it had in the nineteenth century. But it is here that we may find a philology for the present. In the section that follows, we will thus move away from the topics opened by philology-as-Textkritik and discuss philology as the study of culture.

39. I discuss these positions more fully in “The Genealogy of Scribal Versions” (Altschul 2006), where I also provide an example of an ecdotal non-authorial “neo-Lachmannian” enterprise. In an earlier article I had identified a fissure within the neo-Lachmannian authorial edifice in the theory of diasystems of Cesare Segre (Altschul 2003), and “The Genealogy of Scribal Versions” more openly proposes the 2004 edition of the medieval Castilian epic Mocedades de Rodrigo by Leonardo Funes—a former student of the neo-Lachmannian critic and theorist Germán Orduna—as an actualization of the editorial possibilities opened up by Segre’s diasystems (Funes and Tenebaum 2004).
Philology and Culture

For Fleischman, Anglo-American scholarship has largely followed Erich Auerbach in understanding Textkritik as the highest rank of philological activity. Similarly, Stephen Nichols suggests that the Anglo-American literary field followed René Wellek and Austin Warren in their rejection of the cultural aspiration of philology. In the highly influential Theory of Literature first published in 1942, Wellek and Warren maintained that philology’s ambition to study “all products of the human mind” was excessive and, finally, that it would be better to exclude the term from the literary lexicon. Considering that De Man’s essay of 1982 was the first to reclaim philology in a noticeable measure for literary studies, and considering that he only recovered those punctilious aspects that closely echoed his own methodology of close reading, it could be argued that Wellek and Warren’s injunction to “forget” philology was indeed successful.

Within medieval studies, two aspects seem particularly problematic in the apparent “forgetfulness” of philology’s cultural interests. The first is that philology runs the risk of being constrained to meticulous erudition and characterized as a relic from the past, while its cultural facet becomes the property of “new” fields and disciplines. Despite Wellek and Warren’s disavowal, it seems apparent that there is need for an analogous term that focuses on a cultural study of the past. Indeed, there are terminological alternatives available for philology as the study of culture, just as there are alternatives for the more reduced meaning of philology as textual criticism. One of the most successful terminological alternatives in the US has been in use since 1979. In this year a group of English-language bibliographers and textual critics founded The Society for Textual Scholarship (STS) based in New York City. The STS decided on an innovative term because they intended to bring together all scholars concerned with textual matters of all kinds and because, as Tanselle explained in 1981, “textual criticism” was too closely linked to the study of pre-modern textualities.

A long tradition of what is usually called “textual criticism” exists, concerned primarily with the texts of classical and biblical writings, and more recently, with medieval manuscripts. This Society has chosen the term “textual scholarship” rather than “textual criticism” not in any sense as a rejection of the latter term but only because the former is the more encompassing term.

The great tradition of classical and biblical criticism forms but one branch of textual scholarship as a whole.\footnote{Tanselle 1981: 2. This quotation continues by positing that another branch is the “English-language tradition in the editing of Renaissance and post-Renaissance literature” that we associated with Greg, Bowers, and Tanselle and which figures prominently in the United States and in the STS. It is plausible that a terminological alternative was related to the need to place the US school on equal footing with the older tradition of “textual criticism.” We may also point out that the STS posited an additional innovative term and called the editorial facet of philology by the name “scholarly editing.”}

The terminological innovation is not only more inclusive in its incorporation of post-medieval textualities but is also clearly a replacement for the disciplines that were once “philology.” “Textual scholarship” is “cumulatively and collectively perhaps a field somewhat like the old ‘philology’ of an earlier dispensation, the technical and conceptual recreation of the past through its texts, and specifically the language of those texts.”\footnote{Greetham 1994: ix.}

Note that “textual scholarship” seems to rely for its legitimacy on the disappearance of philology’s ambition to study culture. So much is this the case that Greetham defines the range of textual scholarship in terms uncannily similar to one of the entries in the dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy. (Recall that the DRAE defined philology as the field “that studies a culture as it is manifested in its language and its literature, primarily through written texts.”) One thus wonders whether “textual scholarship” would have been needed at all if the “old” philology had retained its meaning as a “technical and conceptual recreation of the past through its texts, and specifically the language of those texts.”\footnote{In practice, nonetheless, the term textual scholarship has found acceptance as an accessible name that is not restricted by the temporal connotations assumed for textual criticism. This might therefore be a good time to mention that the full title of Gumbrecht’s 2003 book is The Powers of Philology: Dynamics of Textual Scholarship.}

The return to an “old” style of studying culture, however, is not textual scholarship’s aim. What alerts us to a more significant broadening is not its interest in including both pre-modern and post-medieval texts but more particularly a change of object of inquiry. Elsewhere Greetham argues that the difference between textual scholarship and “old philology” does not concern timeframes or even styles of scholarly editing, but the definition of text and the separation of textual scholarship from the realm of literature and letters. In Greetham’s words: “While literary texts (or, at least, texts composed of words) are the most familiar objects of textual scholarship, the textual scholar may study any means of textual communication—a painting, a sculpture, a novel, a poem, a film, a symphony, a gesture.”\footnote{Greetham 1992: 103.}
Here, with Greetham’s inclusion of the written, the aural and the visual as philological objects of inquiry, there arises a second problematic aspect of the “forgetting” of the broader cultural facet of philology: the status of literature as a privileged area of inquiry. We can observe philology’s reliance on literature in the dictionary definitions cited above, but it serves us better to point to a more detailed discussion. So, for instance, when Patterson outlines a division within philology between Textkritik and Kulturgeschichte, the struggle between them is presented as a war between “philological pedantry and literary philosophy.” A similar example may be found in Nichols, who identifies a conflict within philology between “language study narrowly focused on textual study [and] literary language as a manifestation of culture.” Nichols links this division to the new comparative linguistics, which searched for models of language outside literature and thus “struck at the heart of philology’s initial raison d’être.” He argues that Kulturgeschichte emerges from a textual realm limited to literary compositions; it is thus in “literary language” that philology would be able to observe a manifestation of culture. Let us underline that literature may be exceptionally important as a manifestation of culture. It is well posed to produce a living image of the past; it fictionalizes and makes available human interactions within a cultural realm; it is in itself part of the culture of a time and a place. But culture need not be “high culture,” and written compositions need not be privileged over nonverbal artifacts, nor need literature occupy for the study of culture a position hierarchically superior to religious, philosophical, technical or other sorts of writing.

We have seen the weight that literary critical figures such as Auerbach, De Man or Wellek and Warren have had at different times on contemporary notions of philology. But a notion of philology as exceeding the realm of the properly literary can also be found in Edward Said’s short introduction to Auerbach’s “Philology and Weltliteratur.” For Auerbach himself philology was significantly more than textual criticism, even in the handbook used by Fleischman to posit and critique a restricted meaning for the field.

47. Nichols 1994: 123.
49. Auerbach devotes a full chapter to “La philologie et ses différentes formes.” He does specify that one of the oldest forms of philology—the “classical” form—is the critical edition of texts, and that it is considered by many as the most noble and most authentic form of philology (Auerbach 1949: 9). But together with Textkritik he provides other branches for philology: linguistics; literary study, including bibliography and biography, esthetic criticism and literary history; and “l’explication des textes.” In “Philology and Weltliteratur” he further posits that philology is “a historicist discipline,” and that its object of inquiry is the “inner history of the last thousand years,” “the history of mankind achieving self-expression” (Auerbach 1969: 5).
Maire and Edward Said note that Auerbach’s practice is concerned “with strictly literary philology”\(^{50}\) and seek to counter this circumscription by re-opening inquiry into texts that are not “literary.” “One is always to keep in mind,” they write, “that philology’s ‘material’ need not only be literature but can also be social, legal or philosophical writing.”\(^{51}\) Tellingly the Saids still circumscribe philology to the study “of all, or most, of human verbal activity,”\(^{52}\) that is, to texts whose material is not literary but is still composed of words. Today it seems patent that philology can move further away from the realm of letters. As Greetham points out, it need not be circumscribed either to literature or to texts composed of words. Indeed, the field with which philology may have the strongest affinity is not “languages and literatures” but cultural studies. And this affinity, in turn, seems to resonate with earlier disciplinary spans, even with the older *Kulturgeschichte* which included written and visual artifacts as objects of inquiry.

Cultural studies is presently one of the liveliest areas of scholarly research, to the point that some contemporary scholars have identified this shift of interests in the humanities as a cultural turn.\(^{53}\) The specific caveat presented by cultural studies is that the field is not particularly concerned with the medieval or classical past. In the straightforward words of Simon During, cultural studies can be defined “as the engaged analysis of contemporary cultures.”\(^{54}\) But why not have a cultural studies of the past? Or more properly, in what ways might the “cultural studies” of the medieval past cross-pollinate with the project of cultural studies? Unfortunately *Kulturgeschichte* suffers from the perception that it is extremely technical and absorbed by the nitty-gritty of sound changes, obscure etymologies, reconstructed fragments, and a long line of *etceteras*.\(^{55}\) But a more yielding point of entrance might be to question what is the final *goal* of philology; and that might just be described as a cultural study of the past.\(^{56}\)

It would be a mistake to assume that there are no differences between cultural studies and *Kulturgeschichte*. The nineteenth-century view of Kul-

\(^{50}\) Said and Said 1969: 2.

\(^{51}\) Said and Said 1969: 2.

\(^{52}\) Said and Said 1969: 1; my emphasis.


\(^{54}\) During 2005: 1.

\(^{55}\) During’s definition of “engaged analysis” also takes us to a direction that I will not be able to discuss here. “Engaged” is used in three senses, as political or critical engagement, as celebration of different cultural experiences, and as aspiring to join everyday life instead of studying culture as an object (During 2005: 1).

\(^{56}\) The interested reader may peruse recent bibliography focusing on this confluence, such as two special issues of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*: Hahn 2001 and Lees and Overing 2004.
turgeschichte tended towards understanding it as a search for the “spirit” or essence of a collective. As explained by Patterson, Kulturgeschichte embodied a commitment to unity or wholeness characteristic of the Romantic beginnings of historicism, in which the aim was to understand “the spiritual radix of the historical period, the diapason . . . of which each individuality was but a partial and symbolic expression.” Cultural studies does not correspond with this search for a spiritualized and unified notion of culture, nor does it understand culture as a homogeneous whole. On the contrary, one of its main interests is a conscious separation from hegemonic cultural discourses and an attention to hitherto undervalued and underexamined groups and practices.

Interest in a cultural studies of the past is therefore not a reintroduction of the search for the “single radix” of nineteenth-century Kulturgeschichte; nor should it imply “doing” Kulturgeschichte under fashionable new keywords. One of the keys to the newness of a philology “for the present” is that it does imply a change in our materials as well as a change in the questions we ask of our materials. A philology for the present requires an acceptance of its worldliness, of its functions and effects in the world today, and this means accepting that the questions we have inherited from the nineteenth century need not have the same value that they had at their inception. Yet this should not be understood as meaning that interest in a cultural studies of the past, or in a philology for the present, is merely a retrospective application of questions and interests formulated in Kulturgeschichte’s twentieth-century “namesake.” Philology as a cultural studies of the past must insist on a mutually engaged approach, where philology is not merely applying and echoing the interests and vocabulary of cultural studies, but carves out a space in which both fields may be pollinated and even redefined in the contact. In other words, while philology should be ready to change its materials and questions and expand its theoretical underpinnings, it is also in a position to modify core issues of cultural studies and thus to demand to be recognized as an active partner in disciplinary dialogues and a contributing member in the paradigm-setting realm of theory.

I hope to have clarified that the study of culture is not foreign but integral to the philological realm; and thus I hope that philology, conceived as a cultural study of the past, could dispel residual doubts that medieval studies “dwells in the past” or is merely a foreign guest at the table of the cultural turn.