Transactions of the American Philological Association 135 (2005) 1–13

Critical Divergences: New Directions in the Study and Teaching of Roman Literature

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SUMMARY: Introduction to seven papers from the conference Critical Divergences: New Directions in the Study and Teaching of Roman Literature, held 24–25 October 2003 at Rutgers University.

INTRODUCTION

THE SEVEN PAPERS IN THIS VOLUME COME FROM A CONFERENCE entitled Critical Divergences: New Directions in the Study and Teaching of Roman Literature (Rutgers University, 24–25 October 2003). The thematic question to which the conference was devoted was the direction or directions in which the study of Roman literature is now moving.

The participants were asked to respond to one or more of a set of particular questions:

- What are you working on?
- What questions are you asking?
- What is your approach?
- How does your approach differ from what it was ten years ago?
- What authors outside the field of Classics have most affected your way of thinking about the authors and subjects about which you write?
- In what ways has the field (interpretation of Roman literature) changed in the past ten years?
- What is your theoretical orientation, if any?
- Does the notion of empirical research mean anything to you?
- Do you see yourself as a philologist? If so, in what sense?
- Do you see the recovery of a historical meaning as your primary goal?
- Do you see your work as contributing to some future history of Latin literature?

- In teaching Latin literature to undergraduates, what is most important to communicate?
- Give an example, which should be subordinate to your answers to the questions above.

Readers of the papers printed here will make up their own minds about which questions are answered and whether or not the larger question of the conference receives an answer from the papers as a collection. This introduction offers the conference organizer's take on the papers and their implications for the larger question.

HISTORICISM AND FORMALISM

Four of the papers deal with what Michèle Lowrie calls "the articulation of the relationship between a text and its world or worlds," which she "would identify as the overriding critical problem facing us today." Joseph Farrell calls the "relation between texts and contexts" "a perennial methodological problem." Alessandro Barchiesi asks "After so many historicisms and formalisms, how are we going to interface literature and cultural/historical approaches?" Though Joy Connolly's main concern is something else, she devotes a few pages to "the methodologies of formalism and historicism."

Historicism is the right word for the trend that these papers are discussing, but it is a notoriously difficult word. With reference to the study of literature, it once meant the objective understanding of literary works as products of their historical period. Within this kind of literary historicism, some scholars regarded the relation of work to historical period "idealistically," as one to be explained by ideas, tastes, or "the spirit of the times." Other scholars regarded it "materialistically," as, to put it in the crudest Marxist terms, the relation of superstructure to economic base.[1]

The contributors to this volume are in a new phase, however. As a benchmark for their reflections, the foundational essay of New Historicism serves well. In 1981, in "Invisible Bullets," Stephen Greenblatt fastened on a forgotten tract from colonial Virginia and showed how it could illuminate two of Shakespeare's historical plays. The tract was Thomas Harriot's "A Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia" (1588). Isolating in Harriot an ambiguous relation of religious orthodoxy and subversion, Greenblatt proceeded to show the same dynamic in Shakespeare. Prince Hal will grow into the ideal king, but "such an ideal image involves as its positive condition the constant production of its own radical subversion and the powerful con-

[1] Cf. Patterson 258–60.

tainment of that subversion."[2] This dynamic, further, does not simply represent the workings of power in Elizabethan England but appropriates power's own ambiguous modalities for the theater.

Greenblatt was to use the expression "circulation of energy" to describe the elided difference between society and theater, or between world and text, precisely the difference with which classicists are now struggling, as the relevant papers in this collection show. In 1987, in "Towards a Poetics of Culture," he took on other historicisms, most notably those of Jean-François Lyotard and Fredrick Jameson, in order to carve out the territory to which the title of the article gives a name.[3] Classicists are at a practical disadvantage in comparison with "those around Greenblatt." They do not have the vast multifarious database of the Renaissance scholar and cannot produce the unexpected, "outlandish" text that becomes the algorithm for the new understanding of great works of literature.

Farrell illustrates the trend toward historicism in the study of Roman literature with the example of Horace, *Carmen saeculare*. He surveys three distinguished Latinists' discussions of this poem and its performance in 17 B.C.E. and shows how, over the past twenty years, "their interests have moved in varying degrees from the formalist end of the spectrum in the direction of the historical." Lowrie offers three examples from her own work on the interaction of form and history. She shows that, even when one starts at what seems to be the maximum distance from any literary text, e.g., at the level of sovereignty and law, one has not escaped representation and so one has not escaped form. Those studying Rome with non-literary materials "should remember that the materials they are handling, whether histories, inscriptions, or physical remains, all participate in a system of representations that informs them, by which I mean that it gives them form." Or, as Barchiesi says, "we know that culture has *forms*, and forms can incorporate a rhetoric and a poetics." From his work in progress he gives six examples of connections between literary texts and non-literary evidence.

These papers are talking, then, about something like a poetics of culture for ancient Rome. Farrell asks: "How far will it go?" One might also ask: how far *can* it go? This is the moment to re-read Duncan Kennedy's chapter "Representation and the Rhetoric of Reality."[4] He sketches a *pas de deux* in which the sylph he calls "textualism" and the muscular male he calls "historicism," whatever their reciprocal displacements, are forever joined. Just when

[2] Greenblatt [1981]1985: 30.

[3] Greenblatt 1987.

[4] The first chapter of Kennedy 1993.

textualism pauses, on point, and looks demurely aside and historicism (it could be New Historicism) executes a series of *grands jetés*, apparently about to burst into some new sphere, perhaps ancient Roman reality, something stops him. "If historicism achieved its aim of understanding a culture of the past 'in its own terms', the result would be totally unintelligible except to . . . that culture and moment. . . . Far from past being made 'present', it would be rendered totally foreign and impenetrably alien. History cannot present the past in its own terms; it must act to some extent as a translator, an interpreter" (8). One could amuse oneself, inspired by Kennedy's remarks, with thinking about the implications of the historicist principle for textual criticism. Clearly the material form of the ancient text—the papyrus, the ink, the spacing of lines, the shape of letters—communicated as much as the mere words, not to mention the communicative pragmatics of the text's distribution. The modern critical edition does not simply fail to reproduce these historical forms of the ancient text's communication, its unfaithfulness to the past systematically obliterates them. The consequence for the field of Classics seems obvious: fidelity to the historicist principle requires that *there be no critical editions of ancient texts*.

With these thoughts in mind, I turn to Thomas Habinek's approach to historicism. He distinguishes not between context and text but between the "embodied" and the "semiotic," between "embodied experience" and "symbolization," between (non-verbal) "mimesis" and "semiosis." This binarism is not specific to ancient Rome but universal and transhistorical. Rome provides a case study: "the student of Roman literature is uniquely positioned to contribute to the history of mimesis, in particular in its fraught relationship with semiosis."

Unlike the historicist contributors already discussed, Habinek would not, and on his understanding of the matter could not, break down the binarism indicated by his terminology. There is, on his view, some already human capacity for self-representation prior to speech, *a fortiori* to texts, and, even in societies like ancient Rome, this capacity (with its specific reflexes) continues independent of language. The difficulty for Habinek's approach is, of course, that Roman "embodied experience" is known to the scholar only in highly mediated forms. It is already textualized or otherwise *represented*; it is not available as such. Habinek might seem, then, to be offering a "rhetoric of reality," more sophisticated perhaps than that of the scholars criticized by Kennedy, but still a rhetoric. Can one see through the process by which an apparently (but only apparently) independent realm of the semiotic is created in ancient Rome? Habinek's paper offers suggestions to the effect that this realm becomes transparent once one is aware of socio-economic class and

power relations. But the answers will have to be looked for in his forthcoming book.

RECEPTION (1)

No matter what anyone decides about the relation of texts to the historical contexts in which they originated, the fact remains that texts, some texts anyway, have the capacity for reiteration in new contexts, in later times, in different media, and, if it is a matter of translation, in languages that had not yet come into existence at the time of the texts' origin.[5] Three papers in this collection deal, entirely or in part, with the reception of Latin literature.

Barchiesi's third example of his work in progress begins with Baudelaire's *Le cygne*, a poem in which the disappointments of modern metropolitan existence are figured by the experience of Andromache in Buthrotum (V. *Aen.* 3.294–355, 463–505). From this beginning, Barchiesi moves back in time to an exploration of the various ways in which a colonial city like Buthrotum might have been experienced by its inhabitants in ancient times. At the end of his discussion, however, he returns to Baudelaire and reflects that his historicizing interpretation is not incompatible with (read: is saying more or less the same thing as) Baudelaire's reception of this passage of the *Aeneid*. In this way, Barchiesi's scholarly work seems to have drawn breath from the creative work of the French poet.

Stephen Hinds offers four studies of reception, two of which are discussed in the next section in connection with Connolly's paper. His discussion of Alex Shakar's adaptation of a story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has the same tendency as Barchiesi on Baudelaire. Shakar's *City in Love: The New York Metamorphoses* (1996) re-sets Ovid in New York (as Baudelaire re-set Vergil's Buthrotum in Paris). Concluding his discussion of Shakar's re-telling of *Met.* 12.146–535 (Caeneus), Hinds reflects: "Shakar's refocalization is so compelling here that it becomes impossible not to read his psychoanalytic slant back into the Ovidian original itself: in other words, the Shakar story reads, not as a grafting of psychoanalytic terms on to Ovid's version of the battle narrative, but as an eliciting of psychoanalytic terms that now seem *already immanent* in Ovid's battle narrative." Here creative work on myth is radically affecting scholarly work. Shakar has effectively changed the text that the scholar is reading even if, from a philological point of view, the words on the page remain the same.

To leap from these two examples to a generalization about Classics as a whole, it seems as if one could think of this field as engaged in a continual

[5] Cf. Lowrie in this volume, n. 3.

renegotiation of the distance between ever-changing present points of engagement and the apparently fixed points of past texts and contexts.[6] Mary Beard and John Henderson in their *Classics: A Very Short Introduction* (1995) propose to see the field in exactly these terms: "*Classics* is a subject that exists in the gap between us and the Greeks and Romans. The questions raised by *Classics* are the questions raised by our distance from 'their' world, and at the same time by our closeness to it, and by its familiarity to us. . . . The aim of *Classics* is not only to *discover* or *uncover* the ancient world. . . . Its aim is also to define and debate our relationship to that world."[7]

One could argue, that, if Beard and Henderson are right, what Classics is doing is not different, except procedurally and formally, from creative work on ancient texts (e.g., Baudelaire's on Vergil) or conceptual work on ancient texts (e.g., T. S. Eliot's on Vergil).[8] In the case of certain monumental works of Greek and Latin literature, such as the *Aeneid*, these three kinds of work—philological, creative, and conceptual—go on simultaneously. With or without mutual awareness, with or without reciprocal influence, all three are engaged in a somehow salutary renegotiation of the present with ancient Rome.

This rosy picture of reception is somewhat inaccurate. Philological work does not usually see itself as a kind of reception. On the contrary, it assumes a neutral, atemporal stance toward someone else's earlier reception of an ancient work, and, for that matter, toward the ancient work itself. Or, if Classics disavows this scientific neutrality, it now goes to the opposite extreme of indeterminacy. This alternate path, though probably the one less traveled on, has a history worth telling.

At a time of a renewed interest in reception (of Vergil in particular), in the early 1990s, the one theory of reception that sought to integrate the present perspective of the interpreter into the interpretation of works of the past was the hermeneutics of the School of Constance.[9] This theory was rejected by Classics, i.e., by those classicists who felt obliged to deal with the issues, almost before it was considered.[10] The deconstructive analysis applied by them to reception resulted in one of the kinds of indeterminacy that form the alternate path. A softer kind, which has since come into vogue in some quar-

[6] Cf. the first sentence of Fowler 1995 for the negotiation metaphor, which was probably already a dead metaphor when he used it and which I am using as such.

[7] Beard and Henderson 6–7.

[8] Eliot [1944]1957; Eliot [1951]1957.

[9] Renewed interest: Ziolkowski. For an overview of the School of Constance see Holub.

[10] See Martindale 1993 (especially 6–7, 9–10, 17–18) and my review thereof, Edmunds 1994; also Nauta. Other articulations of the deconstructive position on reception: Martindale 1997b; Kennedy 1997.

ters, was articulated by Don Fowler in 1993: "there is only ever one type of reading, based on our own (hopefully reflective) historically situated consciousness." "There is no escape from our historical situatedness."[11] Fowler held that it was impossible to recreate an ancient reader's horizon of expectation, i.e., the set of assumptions that he or she brought to a text.[12] Without this possibility, one could never make a comparison between one's own reading and an ancient one, and, once again, the hermeneutics of the School of Constance was doomed.

Fowler's view of reception, like the deconstructive one, would go directly counter to the trend toward historicism discussed above, a trend seeming to promise new descriptions of ancient Rome and Roman literature that would not be simply a matter of the scholar's perspective. What Classics awaits, then, is a theory that would bring together historicism and reception. In the meantime, something else is going on.

RECEPTION (2)

Beard's and Henderson's definition of Classics leaves open, perhaps even invites, the possibility of what could be called formative reception. This kind of reception one sees in Hinds' example of Petrarch's relation to Cicero. Inspired by his discovery of Cicero's letters to Atticus, Petrarch writes letters to Cicero, fashioning himself as a *familiaris* and a Ciceronian man. "This moment," Hinds observes, "looks very like the beginning of our own field of Classics—at least as our teachers, and our teachers' teachers, knew it." Hinds offers a second example of "becoming Cicero," William Armistead Falconer, translator of Cicero's *On Old Age*, *On Friendship* and *On Divination* for the Loeb Classical Library (1923). It is Falconer's preface to his translation that offers the testimony of another Ciceronian man, one who is carrying on the tradition of Petrarch six hundred years later. But, Hinds reflects, "a text like

[11] Fowler 1993: 88. For the vogue see Edmunds 2004.

[12] Fowler 2002 contradicts his principle of "only ever one type of reading." In his commentary on Lucr. 2.1–332 he assembles all the ancient evidence for the rival views of the universe to which the motion of the atoms is an answer. He thus fully describes the horizon of expectation of a sophisticated ancient reader of Lucretius (as distinguished from a catechumen like Memmius). The modern reader, who is aware, if not of string theory, certainly of gravity as a field curved by space-time and of quantum mechanics' randomly moving particles, has a different horizon of expectation. Fowler's occasional irony toward Lucretius (e.g., 228 on 2.161) is an index of the difference between the two horizons, between his reading and an ancient one. Despite his occasional use of the transhistorical first person plural ("the poet prods us with his finger," 346 on 2.257), Fowler consistently remains aloof from the ancient perspective.

Falconer's preface now looks a bit strange: we have almost lost our own living connection to the time when Cicero was at the center of the curriculum for 'making men' in the real world."

Enter Connolly. In the first section of her paper, she raises the question "What would a publicly responsible—and publicly convincing—practice of Latin literary studies look like?" She prefaces her answer with reference to the crisis of theory, for which she cites the position papers of the editorial board of *Critical Inquiry* (2004), and with an overview of the history of the university in the United States since the culture wars.[13] She sees an opening for a new kind of study of Latin literature "in its capacity to illuminate the hidden scripts of social practice, and most importantly, the concept of the social itself—not only with regard to the field of cultural production in ancient Rome, but to the history of our self-understanding up to and including modernity." Which Roman writer is going to be most useful to this project? Well, it is Cicero. Hinds may have spoken too soon about the loss of connection. To my mind, Connolly's version of Cicero, which one will find more fully developed in her forthcoming book, makes him more interesting than the Cicero whom I remember and now rarely read. It is probably too late for me to become a Ciceronian man, but perhaps I will be reading more Cicero in the coming years.

PHILOLOGY

Of the questions sent to the speakers, the only one that I now consider *mal posée* is: *Do you see yourself as a philologist? If so, in what sense?* According to the conventions of the field, none of those who were invited is a philologist. Classics makes a distinction between interpretation or literary criticism, on the one hand, and philology, on the other, of which textual editions and commentaries are the *chefs d'oeuvre*. (Research on metrics and stylistics, and, in general, on aspects of language that can be described in quantitative terms or positively, and also ancillary disciplines like paleography and papyrology, go on the side of philology.) All of those who were invited do interpretation. They do not, at least not regularly, do any of the tasks conventionally placed under the heading "philology."

But they all received philological training, and none of them now disowns philology. On the contrary, six of the seven papers refer to philology, always

[13] I would call attention in particular to Mitchell. Comparison of the Rutgers conference with the conference of editors on which Mitchell reflects (Chicago, April 2003, six months before the conference at Rutgers), *si parva licet componere magnis*, is most instructive.

respectfully. One of the speakers, James O'Hara, says that he uses "rigorous and cautious philology to do 'empirical' testing of ideas against the evidence," though he quickly adds: "For me, both philology and theory . . . are what I use to help me read better. . . ." O'Hara was the first speaker at the conference, and two of the terms in the phrases just quoted, "philology" and "theory," proved to have framed a response to all of the papers. At the concluding roundtable discussion, much comment came from graduate students, and it had to do with the balance between theory and philology in graduate training. After the conference, on 4 November 2003, Meredith Safran, then a third-year graduate student at Princeton, sent an e-mail message to the speakers in which she cogently articulated the dilemma faced by today's graduate students, and most of the speakers replied. The e-mail discussion continued into mid-December.

So an issue that began, explicitly or implicitly, in the papers as a disciplinary one (theory vs. philology in Classics as a field of research) in the end turned into a professional one (theory vs. philology as a choice to be made in a career in Classics). The dilemma for the graduate student is that, while it looks as if the new Ph.D. who presents herself as (nothing but) a specialist in some branch of philology has poor prospects in the job market, in her graduate program she does not have the time to learn theory, and, even if she did have time, she would not know where to begin.

The picture of the graduate student is never quite as simple as the one I have just sketched (see, for instance, the concluding remarks in Barchiesi), nor are the pictures of theory and philology I shall now sketch. First of all, those standing behind philology in the U.S. are usually unclear about their syllabus. Exactly what are the elements of "philological training"? It is difficult for most graduate programs to give the answer they would like to give, even when they have thought about the problem, because they lack the staff to teach every subject they would like to include. In the case, for example, of the graduate program of which I am a part, while we would like to say that textual criticism is obligatory, at the moment we have no one teaching this subject. But philology is at its worst when it tries, as it often feels forced to do by theory, to explain its premises. It can only insist on "the text itself," "problems generated by the text," and "objective meaning," while large elements of the field have ceased to adhere to these beliefs (I use "belief" advisedly).[14] When it comes to debate, philology, opposed in principle to theory and thus to a

[14] "The text itself": Edmunds 2001: xii and ch. 1 ("Text"). "Problems generated by the text": "But problems are not an inherent aspect of a text: they are created by a reading

theory of itself, resorts unpleasantly to the deontic and the dogmatic.[15] Especially unhelpful is the philologist's rhetoric of *après nous le déluge*: if philology is defeated by "deconstruction" (the term they always use, with scant philological regard for its origin and meaning), there will be chaos, the loss of all certainty, the death of the field.

Theory as currently on offer in the Classics graduate program is not much better. It presents graduate students with one or another of Francis Bacon's idols. The idol of the cave is the theory that has somehow reached someone's mind from the idiosyncrasies of his or her own intellectual experience and is maintained in ignorance of all other theories. The idol of the marketplace is the second-hand, poorly grasped theory that someone has picked up from cursory reading of books about theory. This "theoretically aware" person is just as square as the blinkered old philologist. Worst of all is the idol of the theater, the totalizing theory that someone believes will save the world. Here I refer to the essay by W. J. T. Mitchell in the volume of *Critical Inquiry* cited above, a moderate reflection on the disappointing practical results of three decades of theory in the academy.[16] "After theory" is now, of course, the theme of much discussion outside the field of Classics.

Restrictions of space have forced me to caricaturize. The situation is not as risible or desperate as I make it seem. As I said in the e-mail correspondence referred to earlier, Classics will sort things out and will reach a consensus, though it will probably never be stated as such. How long it will take is uncertain. What would speed the plow would be more communication between classicists and colleagues in other fields (on this matter cf. Lowrie's paper) and more communication about theory amongst classicists. At "Elegy and Narrativity," an excellent conference organized by Patricia Salzman and held at Princeton University 30 April–1 May 2004, I was struck by a cer-

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which asks questions of the text to which the text only partially responds" (Most xiii). "Objective meaning": "The reader is figured as operating on the text to produce meaning, rather than attempting to recover authorial intention" (Fowler 1995; cf. Fowler 1997: 24).

[15] E.g., West (David West in his Presidential Address to the British Classical Association in 1995, but the attitude is hardly confined to England). An especially obnoxious example: Kugelmeier.

[16] Cf. n. 13 above. Connolly cites Latour on the same theme. On the claim that one is having some effect outside the academy see Fish. Fish argues that, while academics are in a way right believe "that all activities are inherently political," the academic and the partisan can and should be kept separate. Further, professors should not attempt to teach civic responsibility, because they could do so "only by deciding in advance which of the competing views of morality and citizenship is the right one."

tain theoretical incoherence, as regards narratology, in the conference as a whole. It could be argued, as Genevieve Liveley, one of the speakers at that conference, is arguing in correspondence with me, that theoretical differences are productive. At the level of theory, yes, but my view is that the results of her large project (with Duncan Kennedy and Jo Paul), whenever they are tied to a particular theoretical model, e.g., to Paul Ricoeur (her main point of reference in the paper she gave at the Princeton conference), will be difficult to compare with the results of someone else's work on the same ancient texts if that other person's results are tied, for example, to Gérard Genette. In the first place, one will be dealing with two different, unconvertible critical and theoretical vocabularies.

CONCLUSIONS

The two main trends that these papers identify are (1) work on the interface of formalism and historicism and (2) reception studies (cf. above on the early 1990s as a *terminus a quo* for this one). These papers indicate some of the theoretical issues surrounding these trends. The professional context of these issues received too little attention at the conference. (The formalism-historicism problem was somehow inscribed in the proceedings.) The graduate students present brought us to our senses. The original plan for the conference in fact included graduate students, who would have given papers and participated fully. Sufficient funding was not forthcoming. Triage became necessary, and the professors went to the head of the line. (Graduate students can reflect that, by the principle of triage, the strong have to wait.)

Those to whom the trends here identified come as no surprise will find new examples in the papers and new approaches. All, including the unsurprised, are still left with questions of theory and method. As for historicism, Beard and Henderson, in the book already cited, say that sifting through an ancient dung heap and sifting through Pausanias are "integral parts of the same enterprise."[17] But what integrates these activities (the theoretical question) and how does one do it (the methodological question)? As for reception, if, *pace* Fowler and others, one grants historicism the possibility of reconstructing the past, how does one define one's present position toward that past (once the dogmatism of objectivity is abandoned), and how (the theoretical question) does one conceive of the "closeness" and "familiarity" (cf. Beard and Henderson above) that connects present and past?

Some may want to compare the results of the conference at Rutgers with the "New Latin" proclaimed by Don Fowler almost a decade ago in the on-

[17] Beard and Henderson 59.

line journal *Arachnion*.[18] His diagnosis of changes in this field has proven, I think, to be fundamentally correct, though now, *ex eventu*, one can see a little more clearly which changes in particular were going to take hold. As for the cadre of scholars he named and the notion of a "movement" (I repeat his quotation marks), doubts will be felt (the quotation marks have acquired a stronger meaning), and one would not today, I think, want to name a cadre. Each of those invited to speak at Rutgers could have been replaced by someone else from the same age cohort and equally useful, though perhaps not always the same, answers would have been forthcoming. Of the thinkers Fowler named as informing the "New Latin"—in addition to Greenblatt, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan—I am not sure how much of any of them had been digested by his cadre, nor am I sure that any of them except Greenblatt is having much effect on studies of Roman literature today.[19] What remains most urgent in Fowler's manifesto, was the question: "[H]ow do we continue to speak to our contemporaries and continue to play a role in the intellectual life of our cultures?"

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[18] Fowler 1995.

[19] Notable exceptions: Micaela Janan's use of Lacan; Most's Foucauldian framing of the conference on the commentary he organized: Most vii–xv. There will be other exceptions of which I am unaware.

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