Counterphilologies

Graduate Student Conference at the Johns Hopkins University
Department of German & Romance Languages and Literatures

September 21-22, 2012

Keynote Speaker: James I. Porter

In his inaugural lecture at Basel in 1869, Nietzsche famously reversed Seneca’s dictum, quae philosophia fuit facta philologia est, proclaiming instead, “What was once philology has now been made into philosophy.” This paradoxical reversal may be said to have initiated a radical critique of classical philology and its desire to objectively reconstruct and represent a pure, authentic past. No longer conceived of as an antiquarian excavation of an ideal world buried underneath our own, philology-turned-philosophy must now critically reflect upon its own historical, scientific, and aesthetic conditions of possibility, not as the privileging of philosophy against philology, but rather as philology turned against itself—as “counterphilology.”

In the spirit of critical or counterphilologies—that is, the critique of language, culture, thought, and philology itself through philology—we are looking for research which deals explicitly with the assumptions deriving from classical philology and the hermeneutic tradition. For instance, how might a return to the texts themselves at the same time be able to call into question the interpretative presuppositions and foundational claims implicit in this return? Would it be possible for the philological act to demonstrate a critical awareness of the methodological limits of historicism and the retroactive construction of the work? And what is at stake in a critical reassessment of the discourse of philology as a whole?

We invite speakers to present on either a direct engagement with the history of philology and philology as a discipline and praxis, or an original work of scholarship in which close textual analysis is mediated by a methodological reflection on issues pertaining to philology. Possible topics include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Conceptions and practices of philology across the centuries and languages (especially the intersection of German & Romance Languages traditions) and their influence on current criticism and historiography
- Philology and theology, especially the origins of modern philology and the theological influences on philological discourse and the hermeneutic tradition
- Humanism and the recovery of Antiquity in the early modern period
- Radical philologies (critical theory, deconstruction, and hermeneutics of suspicion)
- “Intrusion” of the editorial voice in text editing; reconstructing "the making of a work": from philology to genetic criticism; philology and the construction of authorial unity
- Technology, the history of printing, and media
- Intellectual history, literary culture, and criticism
- Philology and the invention of a European identity; philology and non-European literatures
- The return to philology and its potential for comparative or world literatures

We wish to bring together disparate views of philology across national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. In order to foster a more productive dialogue, we ask that all presentations be in English, with translations of foreign language sources encouraged. If desired, we can arrange for translations during question-and-answer sessions.

All abstracts should be 300 words or less and submitted by June 15, 2012 to jhu.counterphilologies@gmail.com. We ask that all abstracts be in .doc or .pdf format.