TALKING LIKE THE RAIN TO THE EMPIRICAL DISCIPLINES*

HABLÁNDOLE SIN PAUSA A LAS DISCIPLINAS EMPÍRICAS

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Abstract

Recent developments in computational power have been applied to Shakespearean studies in such a way as to demonstrate that unprecedented collation and insight into authorial work will occur. This will generate a renewed emphasis on authorial intention and reviewing the canon, two traditions which have been reduced to mere concepts by the regnant schools of reader-response criticism and pure aesthetics. A glance at Stanley Fish's new Milton book and the state of G. M. Hopkins' criticism confirms that the academy is still committed to predominantly deconstruction and discipline segregation for English study. The author uses several various issues arising and several poetical meter studies to sketch a possible means of re-uniting pure English studies and empirical sciences like linguistics in fruitful dialogue.

Key words: *canon, computational linguistics, empiricism, Hayes, Hopkins, idiolect, Kiparsky, metrics, Milton, Shakespeare.*

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Resumen

Los recientes desarrollos del poder computacional se han aplicado a estudios de Shakespeare para demostrar que una labor comparativa y un enfoque sin precedentes ocurrirán en el trabajo autorial. Esto generará un renovado énfasis en la intención autorial y el canon crítico, dos tradiciones que las escuelas reinantes de crítica lector-repuesta y estética pura redujeron a meros conceptos. Una mirada al nuevo libro de Stanley Fish sobre Milton y al planteamiento crítico de G. M. Hopkins confirma que la academia aún está comprometida predominantemente con la deconstrucción y la segregación de la disciplina en el estudio del inglés. El autor utiliza temas muy diversos que están surgiendo y numerosos estudios de métrica poética para esbozar un posible medio de re-unir los estudios de inglés puro y las ciencias empíricas como la lingüística en un diálogo fructífero.

Palabras clave: *canon, empirismo, Hayes, Hopkins, idiolecto, Kiparsky, lingüística computacional, métrica, Milton, Shakespeare.*

Introduction

ENGLISH STUDIES HAVE a "new" challenge. The growing mass of online databases, texts, and dictionaries is on trajectory to collide with the fields of critical theory and aesthetics. In this developing scenario, computative power has rendered the study of mega-patterns feasible, patterns formerly intuited or configured primarily through Promethean, discursive intellect. Although the current academe may wish to confine such ballooning research discretely to computational linguistics or linguistic attribution studies (e.g., who was Shakespeare really?), there is also a possibility for renewed attention to authorial intent and the "Canon". By having massive searchable texts available not just across writers but periods, as well as more sophisticated and powerful search engines, branches of linguistics will be able to present compelling snapshots of certain ways poetic minds work, and it will be possible to test aspects of critical interpretive claims about the supposed necessity or non-necessity of the Canon. Intuited criticism will now have sharply focused empirical studies concerning similarities or dissimilarities, and may itself be the subject of such study. The dynamics of Canon formation and even critical response will lie more open to new evaluation. It is no happenstance that Lancashire (1997) invoked the authorial-intention question at the end of his "Empirically Determining Shakespeare's Idiolect":

> Literary criticism over the past two hundred years has increasingly lost faith in an author's presence in the works the author wrote. Most Shakespeareans do not believe that their author is dead, but that he is present, somehow, in the plays and poems he created. The academy tends nonetheless to be skeptical about critical claims to have detected him or his style or his mind objectively in the texts we have, despite the fact that we all routinely award course grades, degrees, and honors on the basis of someone's authorship of a text how ironical that an academy valuing authorship so highly among its own shies away from studying it. (p. 193)

Lancashire has overseen the Text Analysis Computing Tools (TACTweb) and the Early Modern English Dictionary Database (set up in 1993). He was looking for phrasal repetends, chunks of around 6-7 words which are not consciously used by Shakespeare but arise as part of the unconscious use of language which represents the unique way each brain stores the associative memory (drawing on Steven Pinker's research & theory). Obvious suggested implications are that the draconian separation of disciplines that has persisted so long in English studies between pure

aesthetics or pure critical theory and the harder sciences like neurobiology or linguistics has the potential to alter drastically very soon, which is to say that the tools of the Enlightenment are going to render theoretical Enlightenment humanism subject to its own putative/derived cutting edge. Computational power, statistics, and sheer availability could render current prevailing paradigms "redundant" as surely as Higher Criticism forced theology to revisit assumptions about the nature of divine revelation.

Not coincidentally, Craig (2009), Director of the University of Newcastle in South Australia's Center for Literacy and Linguistic Computing, noted as an aside in one of his works on the subject of Shakespeare that Stanley Fish's school of critical theory had a positive hostility towards empirical "stylistics". This is because, among other things, S. Fish and others are committed to a particular critique of tradition which cannot espouse past authority in a struggle with empirical studies. They must keep the aesthetic values inherited from the tradition they have subsumed, but must them selves not fall prey to the empirical encroachment which they may have employed in the process of assuming regnancy. Craig (not unnaturally) wonders out loud why empirical studies could not simply recognize interpretive modes and cultural aspects in texts:

> It is possible, however, to propose an alternative motivation for stylistics, that is, the uncovering of patterns of language use which because of their "background" quality, or their emergence on a superhumanly wide scale, would otherwise not be noticed; and the testing of hypotheses about language use where some empirical validation seems possible and appropriate. An example of the former would be patterns of use of thou and you forms within one dramatist; an example of the latter would be curiosity about whether men and women write differently from one another. This need not be anti-humanist.

Noteworthy is that Craig also addressed authorial intention in his stylistic analysis (Principal Component Analysis) of Shakespeare's works, and here the connection with Stanley Fish (a luminary of English academics and the practical originator of an influential school of reader-response criticism) becomes more explicit. His 1967 work on Milton launched his career at Duke, which was spent creating a department filled with alternative readings on the classics by overtly non-disinterested parties. Oates (2001) noted, in his review of S. Fish's latest work

on Milton that Fish has modified his views in what might seem like a counter-intuitive way:

…not only is there a text in his class but a canonical one to boot, but even more startlingly, any advocacy of ungoverned, free-for-all interpretation using the reader-response criticism now comes with a Satanic pedigree.

However, even in this latest discourse on Milton, for Fish empiricism was still the enemy:

Whenever a character in Milton's poetry seeks to avoid coming to terms with his or her creature-hood in order to claim a measure (however small) of independence, he or we will have recourse to empirical reasoning. Thus Satan says to Eve, "look on me" (ix, 687), inviting her to substitute the observation of physical processes (in this case illusory) for the first principles she is pledged to maintain. Eve, in her turn, makes literal the substitution when she offers its logic (along with the apple) to Adam: "On my experience… freely taste" (988). Mammon performs the first physicalist reduction, designed specifically to exclude any recognition of deity and spirit, when he resolves to build a new heaven from the raw materials of hell, a resolution that makes sense to him because his conception of heaven is so relentlessly material: "what can Heaven show more?" (II, 273) …the entire account of the Fall of the angels points to that conclusion: that the decision for or against God starts with an interpretation of God and then all the evidence of the outside world is marshalled to support that conclusion. (2009)

Fish wanted to defend Milton's empyreal moral vision of the inner choice for God, which paradoxically turns out to be something very difficult to attain to because of our human propensity to read false/other gods out of our inner resources. For Fish, authenticity in the humanities is a matter of vision, however difficult, and not one of more data. It is unlikely that he would have much use for cross-talk across the disciplines; English (or Miltonic for that matter) studies has the inner resources to wrestle with its own inner demons. This current distrust towards other disciplines in this academic branch runs roughly as follows:

Stanley Fish summarizes the current position (for a more rounded, historical account of the marginalization of the aesthetic in literary studies, see Murray Krieger's paper on the subject): "These days being an apologist for poetry means resisting the various historicism —old, new, cultural, material— whose expansive arguments are made at the expense of the aesthetic, a category (and area) that either disappears in

the analysis of 'discursive systems' or is identified (and stigmatized) as the location of a status-quo politics anxious to idealize its own agendas. (In Hurley, 2009)

He specifically fingers linguistics as pushing a "scientism" (at the behest of "publish or perish" demands on teachers) that has endangered the aesthetic appreciation of poetry, an appreciation restored (in Hurley's view) by the recitation of poetry out loud. Supposedly, the top teachers retreated from teaching and competed in scholarship for a difficult and competitive market, leaving the field open for cross discipline take-over bids. Both Northrop Frye and TVF Brogan are cited as authorities agreeing with this line of thought, and at one point Hurley calls the "linguistic turn" the "enemy within".

If linguists have no interest in assaulting the "beauteous form of things", and aver their good intentions and limited objectives, where is the literary angst coming from? Perhaps one can answer this partly, by asking questions of those who are concerned. What would "systematic criticism", in the absence of tradition, ideology, or empirical studies, look like? How is the holding of poetry "slams" or recitals going to help the situation? In the absence of Canonical authority (or something approaching it close enough to make another word choice a semanticism) what lines of possible defense (should a need arise) against empiricism or reductionism in English exist?

This Gordian knot may seem even un-cuttable, but it is hardly "new". The devious nature of language and communication was tentatively explored long ago in Plato's dialogue *Cratylus*, and Socrates himself was prejudiced enough against the tyranny of the text as a means to Truth to leave behind himself no scrap of writing. Later in the West, Constantine's donation was invalidated by the inventor of stylometry, Lorenzo Valla, while the modern debate over the *textus receptus* of the Bible is ample demonstration of the potential warp and woof of the "new" problems. Higher criticism and empirical studies are inseparable in this meta context. The telescoping of centuries and the invalidation of longstanding pieties renders every humane discipline "touchable" by empirical technique. How "touchable" they are, and whether influence flows in the opposite direction, is another matter.

The now regnant principal narratives in the Academy primarily derive from the strongly disciplined drift of a system which has more or less operated one way for a mere hundred years. It is hard not to conceive that just as the library of Alexandria's loss affected the Dark Ages, the printing press altered the Medieval Era, or the exclusion of Latin from Oxford helped configure modern Academe,

so massive computing power will likely shift the intellectual landscape/mental furniture in even "pure" disciplines. Computational power and old age have this in common - they are in command of more data (with less emotion) than young scholars trying to say something completely *nouveau*. Fish's latest book may well be a criticism of his younger self, to a degree.

It is pointless to reassure the humanists that their fears are unfounded. Understandably, the point is not to invalidate critical theory or aesthetics entirely/essentially but to note that it appears that these enormous databases will be searched and collated to reveal meta-patterns which may potentially be "new", and "new" enough to change thinking or generate new fields. The computer won't interpret on its own, but it will allow sorting of data in such a way as to potentially raise vastly different questions on vastly new scales. It will sharpen criticisms which would otherwise not have been generated under the current system of a purely creative confrontation. Embattled texts and opining readers will be somewhat displaced in a climate more likely resembling the early 1900s, in which a great deal of energy was spent doing historical background work on literature. What would before have been white noise/static to the re-interpreting and free ranging single mind could fall out in a more incontrovertible order. It will even be possible to use computational power (including linguistics) to collate bodies of criticism itself. A telescoping of the entire field/criticism will be made possible, as well as a corresponding micro-scoping. The fact that it will be done more quickly and efficiently will not undermine its importance, for it will be readily available. Powerfully programmed super-computers with more or less reasonable parameters will begin to possess and collate the (theorized) invisible margins of the text. In short, computers will begin to do more of the grunt work of the mind. Irreplaceable as the mind on its own terms, it is also limited in certain ways that computers are not. Sheer memory, for one thing.

One now is forced to wonder (in the face of this inter-disciplinary opportunity/impasse): were all clear alternatives placed on the table and duly considered? When Stanley Fish and the poststructuralists rose to dominance in English studies, were they completely in command of the available resources? Although tendentious, Paglia (2009) said this of the current standoff:

> Most seriously, poststructuralism did manifest damage to two generations of students who deserved a generous and expansive introduction to the richness of the humanities and who were instead force-fed with cynicism and cant. I fail to see that American students are emerging today even from elite universities with a broad or dis-

cerning knowledge of arts and letters. Nor has poststructuralism produced any major new critics—certainly none of the towering scholarly stature once typical of prominent professors who had been educated in the first half of the twentieth century. (p. 1)

In her earlier essay on the Classics, she went even further:

The actual mechanics of canon-formation over time were either unknown or ignored: in point of fact, major writers and artists have rarely possessed or were significant beneficiaries of power in the political sense; in most cases (as in that of the embittered Dante) they were eccentrics or social failures... We declare something is important and assign it to the curriculum when we find evidence of its influence on other artists. In other words, the canon is really about artistic or intellectual fertility; it's the dynasty of works that have generated other works. (p. 4)

Paglia may or may not be correct, but it is certain that the issue of the modern understanding of what the Canon was, and why and how it needed to be obviated was at the heart of the modern retreat into aestheticism. She is surely right to raise the issue of Canon formation (as Craig is right to raise the issue of authorial intent), because if English persists in attempting to arbitrarily exclude stylistics and empirical studies from certain complex discussions with multi-disciplinary implications (something it is hard to conceive will not happen), it will tend to raise the very criticism it is seeking to avoid. After all, it was empirical studies which were at the forefront of the historicism which helped unseat antique Traditionalism. Why would one wish to forego it now?

A positive way to put this is that a text inherits some form of materiality whether it or the reader wishes it to or not. Barring the presence of strong authorial intent and corresponding tradition (the talk of the dead), the empirical disciplines are strongly poised to give a more satisfactory account of this latent materiality in English studies, which may be why Stanley Fish is re-thinking Milton now. Materiality is not necessarily the same thing as rank empiricism, but neither is it a prominent feature in pure humanities right now. Abstractions and re-interpretations dominate. Having excluded nostalgic arguments ("we should study Shakespeare because so many of our words we owe to his genius") as not abstract enough (critically refined to treat the subject of study as pure object), abstractions don't want a backdoor materiality coming in through empirical studies. For after all, the above "nostalgia" could be re-formulated and "proven" empirically in a dramatic fashion.

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Rethinking is perennially in order, even about re-thinking. Paglia (2009) was right to suggest that canon formation and its attendant graces (aesthetical and critical theory) more properly go (and once went) hand in hand. Lacking a canon, a concrete image or icon to defend, it is difficult to remain on firm footing against the encroachments of either kindred or alien disciplines, or to even allow them temporary access. It is better to hermetically seal off the ivory tower. As Umberto Eco asks us in one of his essays, is there anything more like a medieval monastery today than a university? Or better yet, a department? Without authors or a canon, both aesthetics and critical theory become ultra-fragile substitutes for the former "whole-person" narrative of "Mediterranean Man". The venerable model was no doubt flawed, but at least it reckoned with materiality in both text and author. The reader was expected to read, and to read a corpus. This corpus was material in a subliminal sense, and therefore not inherently averse to empirical studies or committed to stand-alone aesthetics.

The real irony is that it is the academy, not the canon, that is too rigid, for the academy wishes to preserve classical value and form without classical content or continuity. This un-negotiable and over-rigid position renders them vulnerable (and redundant) to empirical disciplines. Achieving perfectly "unequal" status *vis a vis* empirical studies has actually made them perfectly ideal targets. Linguistics is obviously still interested in canonical poetry, and one study is even using Gerard Manley Hopkins' idiolectical patterns to help us better understand the processes of autism (Chew, 2009). This seems an odd "spiritual" use for his poetry, but it is perhaps consonant with the authors' intentions in ways that portraying him as a herald of universal language-failure is not. In fact the entire linguistic fields of "universal grammar" and idiolects in themselves could be said (in some sense) to be dissonant with the regnant English schools of "community interpretations", post structuralism, and special interest studies. The empirical disciplines will keep "encroaching" because they are empirical and rightly so. They mitigate against too much abstraction. They inherit an abandoned materiality. Paglia (2009) may have an axe to grind, but a studied glance at the state of thinking about a poet like Hopkins (who is excessively preoccupied with materiality in language) shows that he is often interpreted simply in light of modern problems, outlooks, and predilections. If he is seen at all on his own terms, he becomes merely a harbinger of the collapse of older modes of thought.

Both Korg and Sprinker (1980) —who reviewed Korg (1977)— take this line of approach, and both focus on the last of his "Dark Sonnets". They find it easy to

play with the idea that Hopkins had "failed" at his task. Korg and Sprinker both explored, in counterpoint to each other, the strange question of whether Hopkins succeeded at his theological artistic task of drawing out the sacral nature of language. Although Korg went to long lengths to demonstrate that the "Dark Sonnets" show how Hopkins faltered near the end, he didn't go far enough to satisfy Sprinker. Both focus on "Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection" as a key text. Sprinker admitted that Korg had the central insight into the autonomy of language (language as being inherently self referential), but saw Korg's qualification that a certain external "referential" quality of language "is never wholly escaped" as vitiating his argument. Of course, Sprinker couldn't really improve on things.

The language of Hopkins's poem is generated by a process of analogical correspondence in which the poem creates a heterocosm, a world structurally parallel to, but ontologically distinct from, objects of representation... Hopkins poetry is bound in what Nietzsche calls the prison-house of language... it is not at all certain that Hopkins doesn't go as far as Mallarme in establishing a non-representational language for poetry (128).

And just what is the difference between "structurally parallel" and "ontologically distinct"? Where is the concluding philosophical postscript in either of these articles? Or in Fish's book on Milton? It is certainly true that no one can accuse these authors of dogmatism. They are consistently anti-foundationalist, in that they accept aesthetics and critical theory as a sort of replacement for faltering high Art and failing traditional philosophy.

Without tendentious opining, it's possible to simply note that not every poet (let alone human) in the twentieth century was convinced (with Nietzsche) that language is a prison. Two quick supporting points are now in order, concerning the state of *ars poetica*. First, the Renaissance had always emphasized "both sides now". In fact, the essence of a humanist education was centered on classical rhetoric employed in set pieces both for and against, and consequently concerned with discerning (like Solomon) who told the truth. Shakespeare was a product of this, as Martindale and Taylor (2004) and Rhodes (2004) confirmed. Long before the Enlightenment or postmodern critical theory, classical education dealt with the issue at the heart of education. Secondly, since (unlike today) this education placed a good deal of faith in the correspondence of word/text with *realia*, a belief that manifested as an interest in hermetic traditions, the esoteric, and even magic (Covino, 1988), it is not obvious to see why Hopkins is not part of an earlier, rather than

a later, tradition. Though he is admitted to be often preoccupied with "modern" problems, yet if *realia* itself has a self-referential aspect, then the fact that language shares this kind of quantum reflexivity is rather a proof of the word's kinship with the numinous, rather than a disturbing indication that another dead end has been reached. Why should Hopkins' lapse into silence at his discovery of the arbitrary aspect of language mean precisely what it means to us? We often attribute "correspondence naivety" to earlier poets when it comes to *realia* because we frame them as part of our own story of journey into disbelief. But this is precisely the *opposite* view which they themselves took towards writers from the past, foreign or native. For Shakespeare, and even for someone as late as Hopkins, a writer from the past was present, no matter how imperfectly, in the ancient tome or scrap. It seems unwise to solely review their personal developments as mimicking or pre-heralding a modern style.

The fact that some poets/humanists like James Joyce did/do trencher-work in the material canon rather badly means little, just as it does not matter that some empiricist often mingle their own ideology with their legitimate research. The Cold War era linguistic scientist Stuart Chase sensed a target in Joyce. After leaning on Alfred Korzybski to assert that the analytic English language of subject-predicate lead to bad philosophical conclusions using Aristotelian, discrete, either/or logic (1956:129-131), he quoted IA Richards to assert that "the view that meanings belong to words in their own right is a branch of sorcery, a relic of the magical theory of names" (135). Then he dragged James Joyce out to cinch the argument. Joyce had disastrously attempted to flout not only traditional grammar but even the basic phonemic syllabification inherent in our surrounding cultural horizon:

Had he understood the culture concept he would never have attempted it (Finnegan's Wake); he would have realized that he was out of bounds. Here is a sample of his laboratory work: "The fall (bab ba ba da l g h a r a g h t a k a m m i n a r r o n n k o n n b r o n n t o n n e r r o n n ..." This is Joyce trying to symbolize the original Fall of Man (98).

This was the same Stuart Chase who proclaimed his agreement with LM Myers that "linguists and anthropologists have disproved the naive theory of one universal grammar underlying all languages" (97). Unfortunately, this was immediately prior to Chomsky's introduction of universal grammar studies.

Chomsky has reintroduced the idea of virtual and intangible entities in an empirical discipline. Something like this insight must have operated behind the long Western tradition (originating with the Celts) of linking rhyme with epic or

religious hymns, no matter how badly James Joyce may have botched it. So let us take a better and more contemporary example in poetic studies that isn't so easy to dismiss on its own terms. Touching the tradition of rhyme, Isak Dinesen (Out of Africa) related that:

> One evening, out in the maize-field, where we had been harvesting maize, breaking off the cobs and throwing them on to the ox-carts, to amuse myself, I spoke to the field laborers, who were mostly very young, in Swahili verse. There was no sense in the verse, it was made for the sake of the rhyme... it caught the interest of the boys, they formed a ring around me. They (...) waited eagerly for the rhyme, and laughed at it when it came. I tried to make them themselves find the rhyme and finish the poem which I had begun, but they could not, or would not (...) as they had become used to the idea of poetry, they begged: 'Speak again. Speak like rain'. (Kennedy, 1992, p. 1)

Or, from a living neo-formalist poet (talking to an army psychologist he wished to believe him crazy):

> What a firm grip this humble psychiatric tester had on the very private parts of Truth! ...The poet discovers what he thinks when he writes: he is borne (perhaps I mean born) into what he believes by the rhyme, the rhythm, the eloquence of what he is saying... Ezra Pound as I remember said it was impossible to translate Villon because Villon always *rhymed on the meaning*. (Moore)

Properly understood, any subject stands upon its own merits, and yet also depends (for its vindication) on a respectful interest, distance, and interplay from other disciplines. There is no obviously necessary war between poetry, critical theory, and linguistics. There could be a kind of *perichoresis*, in which individual subjects are both illuminated, interpenetrated, and yet set apart by other disciplines. This is illustrated by the many linguistic studies on English poetical meter, which confirm that the great masters' ears were telling them what was really there, differently, but together, for each of them.

For counter-intuitively to the modern bias, the English poetic tradition is remarkable in how much individual poets vary in their correspondence rules - every poet possesses to some degree a 'metrical idiolect' (Hayes, 1983, p.3). Following Kiparsky (1977) Hayes identified several "filters" that are used by strong English poets in their mature verse. Kiparksy and Hayes have identified patterns peculiar

enough to call Milton I and II, Shakespeare I and II, etc. "All filters have the effect of forbidding linguistic s in metrical w position" (p. 359). He has examined Wordsworth, Pope, Poe and Spenser as well. They share commonalities but (for example) Spenser is less picky than Shakespeare who is less picky than Milton. Using Kiparsky's metrical trees, he adds a grid system to explain "arbitrary disjunction" from those trees for better explanatory power in dealing with exceptions to Kiparsky's otherwise admirable system. He demonstrated a remarkable predictable power in discriminating whether a given poet will employ a certain stress in a given situation.

This kind of sturdy empiricism mitigates against the idea that language is either purely material or arbitrarily non-material, that it is a property of interest groups, or that it is capable of infinite manipulation. Properly done, linguistics is capable of revealing both our astonishing abilities (particularly in exemplars like classic poets) and our animal propensities. But of course, expressed more rhetorically, this is simply the old humanist view that man is mid-way betwixt animal and angel.

Linguistics has confirmed what was intuitively sensed all along - that the "Canon" was in fact fluid and also determined, with each poet strongly conforming while simultaneously de-constructing. This is to say that it was alive. Shakespeare was able to do what he did by means of an "inner ear" which both heard his predecessors and yet found an unexplored country of sound all his own. The fact that it has taken years of research and highly complex metrical trees to decipher the intricate patterns executed out of sheer talent only emphasizes the fact. Apparently Canon formation was not arbitrary and rigid in the slightest. One had to have a tin ear to think that it would be to begin with. This is precisely what Paglia was arguing, what Fish is re-thinking, and what Hopkins was stretching for in attempting to unite his *inscape* and *instress*, poetry and faith, mutable language and certainty. The difficulty, paradox, and one-in-manyness of it all strike our modern ways of thought as impossibly jumbled, but this is what "talking like the rain" entails and will always entail. *Perichoresis* is, after all, a theological term. Yet it need not be exclusively so. All this view needs is a return to a dynamic and free (but probably metaphysical) view of man.

Contrariwise to the *ars poetica* and those who practiced it, the institutional West was sick of such endless debate and prattle.

In 1866 the Societe Linguistique declared in its bylaws that it would not accept any communicate dealing with the question of the origin of language thereby officially ending, so it seemed, all inquiry into the thorny problem that had plagued many of the most illustrious (Rousseau, Herder, Vico, and Condillac) and not a

few of the less celebrated (Sussmilch, Maupertuis, and Lord Monboddo) minds of the previous century (Sprinker, 1980, p. 113).

Practice poetry if you like, but do not attempt to formally link it with the divine. Not long before, it was not quite so

> In fact, it occurred to no one in Shakespeare's time that words could be "defined." A "logical definition" existed as a concept (e.g., in the mid-century work of Thomas Wilson) but concerned a thing in the world or something in experience. Elizabethans used definitions to describe objects. It was not then the practice to adopt a logical definition of the thing to which a hard word referred to explain that word. That is, lexicographers did not employ what we now call referential definitions, which describe the meaning of a word by referring to the logical definition of the thing that the word denoted. Words were widely regarded as straightforward signs or pointers to, or names for, things. (Lancashire, 2009)

A bit simplistically, to them the origins of language obviously were divine, while the words themselves were known quantums of magic, although indefinable. To us, it is the other way around: language is obviously not divine, but basically human; it's the magic inherent in the words which make us puzzled, although we can define them. They accepted the word, and puzzled over the Origin. We know the origin, but have trouble believing in words at all. Is it merely because of the flexibility of the language during Elizabethan transition that Shakespeare was able to invoke either/or meanings, "both sides now", as meditations on the tragic and comic fate of man, the difference (for example) between barbarianism and civilization, from *Titus* to *Tempest* (Rhodes, 2004, 200). Or is language sermonic no matter when, or how we live? "Talking like the rain", as much as falling in love, seems to proceed without acknowledgement of the "state of the field".

Where does all this get us? A long way from dealing with the problems clearly, always at hand, in approaching any canonical (or candidate) piece of literature, indeed any work of art itself. Nevertheless, it may become more possible to assert that a genuine suspension of disbelief will require a deep sympathy with the preconceptions and predilections of the author, no matter how foreign to our own, for it will in fact require that we admit the power of the scrap of paper or the smudged syllable to actually speak something across space and time that has a share in something bigger that we, too, are (and must be) interested in. Clearing the ground by examining differences allows for better filters and ultimately, comprehension. The

critical process is a prelude and handmaid to a Grecian "wholeness" in approaching a sub-creation in which we intend to share by also divesting ourselves of all too human tendencies which we tend to operate merely on the level of abstractions. In a larger sense, a failure to sympathize or understand creatively is an admission of guilt, that we do not share that portion of the other which could be expected to endure and to speak out of its worn materiality in order to invoke a similar transmutation in ourselves. It is in this sense that the old concept of the canon, buttressed with empirical studies of greater magnitude, may have something to offer us once again, since one forever retains and the other always helps to master, the power of continuity more fundamental than the distinctions with which we handle it. Empirical studies may awaken a more material and immediate sense of the uniqueness and power distilled in the "dead letter" of the past.

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