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978-1-107-51561-1 - From Philology to English Studies: Language and Culture in the
Nineteenth Century

Haruko Momma

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From Philology to English Studies

The study of English language and literature in Britain changed dramatically between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. *From Philology to English Studies* explores the contribution of philology to this movement. Haruko Momma charts both the rise and fall of philology from antiquity to the late eighteenth century, and the impact of modern philology on the study of modern languages and literatures. Focusing in detail on the work of key philologists in the nineteenth century, Momma considers how they shaped European discourse and especially vernacular studies in Britain: William Jones's discovery of Sanskrit in British India gave rise to Indo-European Studies; Max Müller's study of this same language helped spread the Aryan myth to the English-speaking world; the *OED* achieved its greatness as a post-national lexicon under the editorship of James Murray, a dialectologist originally from Scotland.

HARUKO MOMMA is Professor of English at New York University. Her previous publications include *The Composition of Old English Poetry*.

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HARUKO MOMMA

New York University



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To my father

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Preface

Many lives of philology

Philology caught my attention in my first year of graduate study in Canada, for my favourite course, taught by A. G. Rigg, was called Old English Philology. I already knew what philology was, and I had probably even practised it while working on a Master's thesis about *Beowulf* at a university in Japan. Back then, though, I had not registered, or valued, the fact that my work had a philological orientation, perhaps because I was not too fond of the Japanese rendition of the word, *bunkengaku*, which literally means 'study of written records'. When I began to work on Old English philology, I thought terms specific to the subject, such as 'the *i*-mutation', 'breaking' and 'fronting', were rather quaint. But I soon realized that there was something exhilarating about using these tools of analysis to compare, for instance, a Northumbrian version of Cædmon's *Hymn* with its West Saxon counterpart, or to examine interlinear glosses penned by a Mercian hand against the original Latin gospel, while consulting the dense description of Campbell's *Old English Grammar*. I found joy in poring over every word and every letter in the text and contemplating the linguistic habits of the author, the scribe(s) and all those involved in the making of the manuscript. It may sound rather paradoxical, but the pleasure of philology was none the smaller – in fact often greater – when phenomena in the text did not conform to the expected norm.

Because I belonged to a programme in medieval studies, I soon learned from my peers that there was more than one way to practise philology. The Latinists, who usually had a classical training, considered their work to be philological, and yet they seemed to have an outlook that was different from whatever I was learning as an Old English philologist at the time. The Romance scholars also engaged in philology, but their attitude towards texts seemed distinct from that of the Latinists or of the Old English scholars. After leaving the programme to take a teaching position in an English department in the United States, I encountered more different views on philology, this time held mainly by literary scholars of all historical periods, until I came to see philology as a touchstone – a sorting hat if you will – that could prompt us about our own place in the school of language and

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literature. While I shall consider the semantic range of the word *philology* in the first chapter, I should like in the following to compare two cases of philology as a personified figure. The first portrait was made in 1983 by William F. Wyatt, a classicist at Brown University:

Philology may be imagined as a middle-aged but still handsome woman of stern visage but gentle demeanor who lives in an over-large house with insufficient electricity and plumbing in a decaying section of town. She is known familiarly as ‘Phil’ by neighborhood urchins, and is regarded with amused contempt. She is not ‘with it’. (Wyatt 1983, p. 27, n. 1)

This description of philology occurs in an essay where the author discusses the state of Latin education and recommends a greater emphasis on philology for the benefit of students especially at the beginning level. Although this piece was called ‘Philology *Rediviva*’, there was no open sign of philology being revived at the time. To take the field of linguistics in North America for an example, a survey was taken during the 1980s to ask the questions: ‘How do you understand the word “philology?”’ and ‘What do you see as the relationship between linguistics and philology?’ The returned answers were generally apathetic and occasionally rather uncharitable: ‘mere philology’, wrote one; a ‘boring alternative to linguistics’, commented another; ‘an incredible ability to read poetry and philosophy as an exercise in grammar’, elaborated yet another. In the eyes of modern linguists, philologists were very much like Wyatt’s ‘Phil’: ‘the trivia experts of the linguistic community’ who were ‘more likely to dress formally (tie, coat, vest) than linguists, who, in turn, are more likely to dress informally (denim, tee-shirt, “peasant” dress, etc.)’. This sentiment seems to have been shared by the two scholars responsible for circulating the questionnaire. In publishing the results of their survey, Margaret E. Winters and Geoffrey S. Nathan somewhat humorously called their piece ‘First He Called Her a Philologist and Then She Insulted Him’, because the project had its origin in the argument they had when, to quote their words, ‘the second author claimed that the first author could not call herself a linguist because her degree was entitled Romance Philology’ (Winters and Nathan 1992, pp. 352–3, 355, 359, 364 and 365, n. 1).

The other example of personified philology occurs in Martianus Capella’s treatise *On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury* (*De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*), a treatise written sometime after the year 410 (see Stahl, et al. 1971–7, I: 12). Here philology is depicted as a young woman who gains immortality through her marriage to the deity. The allegory begins when Mercury unsuccessfully courts Wisdom (dedicated to virginity), Prophecy (already in love) and Psyche (held captive by Cupid) and seeks advice from his brother Apollo. The sun god tells him that he will find a fitting match in Philology, ‘a maiden of ancient lineage, highly educated and well acquainted with Parnassus’ (ibid., II: 14). Juno seconds Apollo’s recommendation and helps Mercury win approval from Jupiter by rehearsing Philology’s accomplishments:

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Is there anyone who claims he does not know the wearisome vigils of Philology, the constant pallor that comes from her studies at night? For who is there who discusses the heavens, the seas, seething Tartarus, for whole nights at a time, and traverses in her careful research the homes of all the gods – who considers the constitution of the world, the girding circles, the parallels, the oblique circles and colures, the poles and climates and rotations, and the multitude of the stars themselves – unless it is this slender girl, Philology, who is devoted to these pursuits? (ibid., p. 19)

Martianus uses the marriage plot to organize his treatise on the liberal arts, because it gives an excuse for these seven disciplines, personified as Philology's handmaidens, to explain themselves as a form of entertainment for Jupiter and other celestial guests at the wedding banquet. Despite its dismissal as a frivolous fable by the author/narrator himself, the marriage plot in the *De nuptiis* 'does involve some serious educational and theological doctrine' in that the 'astral setting of the wedding is perhaps the key symbol' for Martianus's pagan cosmology (ibid., pp. 63–4; Leff and Loewe 2008, p. 243). Prior to her ascent to heaven, Philology is made to void her earthly learning in a spasm of violent vomit causing a stream of writings to come out of her mouth. These disgorged pieces of papyrus, linen, parchment and linden bark are promptly collected for the use of arts and disciplines including Poetry, Music and Geometry (Stahl, et al. 1971–7, II: 46–8). In the Middle Ages, Martianus's *De nuptiis* was widely used as a textbook, since the seven liberal arts comprised a foundation for education at least in its ideal. In the Christian framework these disciplines were ancillary to the immortalized Philology, whose marriage to Mercury, according to the twelfth-century author John of Salisbury, allegorized the union of knowledge and eloquence (John of Salisbury 2009, pp. 78–9).

The two portraits just examined are 1,500 years apart, and they seem very different from each other. In the *De nuptiis*, philology is imagined as a young and attractive figure whose mental exertion allowed her to be united with heavenly eloquence. In the case of Wyatt's 'Phil', she is an older woman whose unfashionable style is unappealing to the younger generation. This does not mean, however, that philology passed from youth to midlife in the long stretch covering the whole of the Middle Ages and much of modernity. On the contrary, philology was perceived as old almost a millennium before Martianus and declared to be new in less than a decade after Wyatt's piece. From what we know, philology is as old as the history of the western world, and it has had more lives than we shall ever learn.

About this book

In the following pages, I shall examine issues related to philology. In the first chapter I shall take a bird's-eye view of the rises and falls of philology starting with antiquity and ending in the late eighteenth century. The subsequent chapters will focus on the new philology of the 'long' nineteenth

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century, spanning roughly 1775 to 1925. The language study of this period is sometimes identified as modern philology, not only because its approach was conceived as new at the time, but also because it contributed to developing the study of modern languages and literatures. The middle section of the book will use a biographical model to discuss the work of individual philologists in their own environment: William Jones (1746–94) in the second chapter, John Mitchell Kemble (1807–57) in the third, Richard Chenevix Trench (1807–86) and J. A. H. Murray (1837–1915) in the fourth and Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) and Henry Sweet (1845–1912) in the fifth. I shall also consider the work of scholars who influenced these philologists either directly or indirectly: for instance, Jacob Bryant (1717–1804), Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), Benjamin Thorpe (1781/2–1870), John Josias Conybeare (1779–1824), Rasmus Rask (1787–1832), Jacob Grimm (1785–1863), Herbert Coleridge (1830–61) and Frederick James Furnivall (1825–1910). The final section will offer a brief account of the study of language and literature at the close of the long nineteenth century.

There has been a wealth of studies published on the subject since what may be called the philological turn of the late twentieth century. But even prior to this revival, there was a steady stream of publications on various related topics by philologists, linguists, cultural historians and philosophers of language. Of the publications that belong to this category, I am especially indebted to Hans Aarsleff's informative and insightful *The Study of Language in England, 1780–1860*. Readers will note certain structural similarities between the later portion of Aarsleff's book and the middle section of the current work. I shall however approach nineteenth-century philology not exclusively as scholarship on language but rather as a series of undertakings that centred on language, but which were closely associated with non-linguistic issues. This book will therefore draw material not only from research articles in scholarly journals and main chapters of monographs but also from prefaces and postscripts to such publications, contributions to non-scholarly journals, textbooks, public lectures and private correspondence, along with memoirs, biographies and literary texts.

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