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# Before discipline: philology and the horizon of sense in Quignard's *Sur le jadis*

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## BEFORE DISCIPLINE

### PHILOLOGY AND THE HORIZON OF SENSE IN QUIGNARD'S *SUR LE JADIS*

JOHN T. HAMILTON

Were a philologist to consider the word *philology* itself, he or she might point out the peculiarity of its morphemic construction. At first sight, the term may be presumed to name a scholarly field or a scientific discipline, given the fact that the word's latter half (*-logy*) is generally taken to be a suffix denoting "the study of" the object indicated by the root—thus, for example, *anthropology*, *biology*, and *cosmology* signify the study of "mankind," "life," and the "cosmos." Yet, common usage already informs us that *philology* hardly deals with the study of "familiar love" or "friendship" (φιλία); the implicit verb of loving inclination and affectionate regard (φιλεῖν) does not constitute an object of research or analysis. Certainly, it would be absurd to suggest that the philologist is an expert or an authority on the meaning, structure or essence of personal attachments or relationships. Rather, the designated role of the philologist bears only a nominal resemblance to that of the zoologist, oncologist or physiologist. The development of institutional histories notwithstanding, philology cannot be reduced to logology.

As every philologist should know, his or her discipline—if it is in fact one—is not modeled on the sciences but rather on the term *philosophy*. Just as *philosophia* expresses the "love" (φιλία) of "wisdom" (σοφία), so *philologia* denotes the "love" of "discourse, argument, or the word" (λόγος). The disciplinarity of both, therefore, is put into question, precisely because the *sophia* and the *logos* do not occupy the position of an object known or possessed but rather one that is *desired*. Within the familiar horizon of Platonic discourse, philology's link to philosophy reveals this decidedly "erotic" character:

τίνες οὖν, ἔφην ἐγώ, ὧ Διοτίμα, οἱ φιλοσοφοῦντες, εἰ μήτε οἱ σοφοὶ μήτε οἱ ἀμαθεῖς;

δῆλον δὴ, ἔφη, τοῦτό γε ἤδη καὶ παιδί, ὅτι οἱ μεταξὺ τούτων ἀμφοτέρων, ὧν ἂν εἴη καὶ ὁ Ἔρως. ἔστιν γὰρ δὴ τῶν καλλίστων ἡ σοφία, Ἔρως δ' ἔστιν ἔρως περὶ τὸ καλόν, ὥστε ἀναγκαῖον ἔρωτα φιλόσοφον εἶναι, φιλόσοφον δὲ ὄντα μεταξὺ εἶναι σοφοῦ καὶ ἀμαθοῦς.

(Plato, *Symp.* 204a–b)

“Who then, Diotima” I said, “are the philosophers, if they are neither the wise nor the ignorant?”

“Well, that is already clear enough,” she said, “even to a child, that they are between both of them, and Eros would be one. For one of the most beautiful things is wisdom, and Eros is love for the beautiful; thus, necessarily, Eros is a philosopher, and being a philosopher, he is between the wise and the ignorant.”<sup>1</sup>

What is “already clear” is that the philosopher—and by extension, the philologist—are caught between the same resourcefulness and penury that motivates and frustrates erotic behavior: precariously poised between ignorance and knowledge, lacking understanding (ἀμαθής) but at least wise (σόφος) to the lack. Although they do not possess what they desire—*wisdom* or the *logos*—they still realize the fact of their poverty. We could imagine that Socrates, the self-styled “philological man” (ἀνὴρ φιλόλογος, *Phaed.* 236e), listened well, knowing, ironically or not, that he did not know.

Like the philosopher, what every philologist should know is that his or her knowledge encompasses a kernel of non-knowledge that inflames desire and motivates persistent inquiry. Correspondingly, in the *Theaetetus*, *philologia* simply refers to a willing disposition or an affective inclination for engaging in conversation, discussion or debate, without presuming cognitive proprietorship of the topics broached, yet all the while aware of what is or is not topical (*Theaet.* 146a). If a discipline entails a body of knowledge to be learned, understood and mastered, if it marks out some intellectual territory that has been acquired, some space that has been delineated by a particular horizon, then philology—and by extension, philosophy—are perhaps better regarded as pre-disciplines, as modes of free but rational questioning that, analogous to the university’s “lower faculty” described later by Kant, comprise the conditions of possibility for authorized, regulated, disciplinary work.<sup>2</sup> For Kant, the pre-disciplinary quality of philology and philosophy underscores not only their traditionally ancillary role in relation to the sciences but also their moral freedom from every determined horizon of sense.

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<sup>1</sup> All translations, unless noted otherwise, are my own.

<sup>2</sup> See Immanuel Kant’s last published essay, *Der Streit der Fakultäten* (1798), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 23 vols. *Akademie-Ausgabe* (Berlin: Reimer/de Gruyter), 7: 17–21. The question of philology and philosophy’s relation to other scholarly fields—that is, the relationship between “Erkenntnis” and “Wissenschaft,” is explored by Peter Szondi, “Über philologische Erkenntnis,” in *Schriften*, 2 vols., J. Bollack et al., ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), 1: 263. For an engaging analysis of Szondi’s essay, see Thomas Schestag, “Philology, Knowledge,” *Telos* 140 (2007), 28–44.

Despite their close relationship, often stressed throughout antiquity, philology is not philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Although both are grounded in the loving motivation of *philia*, philosophy clearly differs from philology, insofar as the former reaches out toward wisdom, while the latter inclines toward the word. Whereas philosophy finds its end in knowledge, philology finds its end in *logos*. In addressing the employment of multiple languages, in pursuing their grammatical, morphological and lexical components, in tracing how these verbal and syntactic elements developed historically and cross-culturally, philology ceaselessly poses questions concerning human words, including of course the word *philology* itself. Indeed, philological research inevitably arrives at self-questioning, raising and formulating questions about its own functions and operations, about its relation to other disciplines as well as its own status as a discipline. As Werner Hamacher points out, philology is always also a *philo-philology*.

Consequently, already beneath the aspect of its questionability, philology is neither a science nor is it a theoretical discipline with well-defined procedures that lead to the acquisition of knowledge. The question concerning itself can thus at best make use of the right of a propaedeutic and therefore proto-philological enquiry. It is not a question of philology as science, but rather—*sit venia verbo*—of philo-philology, which stays at the edge, in the fore-court or at the gate of philology, but whose interior it does not enter and whose law it does not know.<sup>4</sup>

Because philology approaches every aspect of language or *logos* as a loving question, it comes to question itself, to such an extent, at least according to Hamacher, that it undermines its own disciplinary stability. Philo-philology, provided we allow Hamacher the use of this term (*sit venia verbo*), underscores the non-disciplinarity of every philological enterprise. Indulgence (*venia*) is called for and readily granted, insofar as every word, once the questionability of philology is broached, emerges as something provisional. Philology has the right (*das Recht*), but is unfamiliar with the instituted law (*das Gesetz*). Philology, so to speak, particularly as philo-philology, stands “before the law”—*vor dem Gesetz*. The light

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<sup>3</sup> For a general overview of usage, see A. Horstmann’s article on “Philologie” in the *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, 13 vols., J. Ritter, ed. (Basel: Schwabe, 1971–2007), 7: 552–72.

<sup>4</sup> “Philologie ist mithin schon unter dem Aspekt ihrer Fraglichkeit weder eine Wissenschaft, noch ist sie eine theoretische Disziplin mit wohldefinierten Verfahren, die zum Erwerb von Wissen führen. die Frage nach ihr kann deshalb allenfalls das Recht einer propädeutischen und darum einer proto-philologischen Erkundung in Anspruch nehmen. Sie ist keine Frage der Philologie als Wissenschaft, sondern—*sit venia verbo*—der Philo-Philologie, die sich am Saum, im Vorhof oder am Tor der Philologie aufhält, aber deren Inneres nicht betritt und ihr Gesetz nicht kennt.“ Werner Hamacher, “Für—die Philologie,” in *Was ist eine philologische Frage?* J. P. Schwindt, ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009), 21–60, here 28.

allusion to Kafka is not unimportant: Philology falls outside every disciplinary *Gesetz*, but also stands by, before the law closes the gates, before meaning is locked within its institutional limits. In reaching toward words, toward language itself, philology remains at the margins of every discipline, before every meaningful horizon. Its fundamental priority subsists in this reaching out—in this *orexis*—which can be either negatively or positively charged. On the one hand, it consigns philology to the outside, removed from disciplinary authority; while on the other hand, it diagnoses every discipline with terminal anorexia.

In one Friedrich Schlegel's aphorisms, cited by Hamacher, we read: "Es bleibt ewig wahr; als Affect und als Kunst ist die φλ [Philologie] Fundament und Propädeutik und Alles für die Historie"—"It remains eternally true; as affect and as art, φλ [philology] is the foundation and propaedeutic and everything for historical science."<sup>5</sup> Here, the eternal or timeless truth—*das Ewig-Wahre*—pronounces a philological *pre-disposition* informed by affect-laden distance and removal. If the objects of intuition appear through the categories of understanding, within the temporal and spatial horizons of sense, then philology is again situated before every horizon, before every beginning, and therefore at the foundation. Paradoxically, its horizon is without horizon. Radically outside or before every discipline, philology nourishes its desire, indulges in affect, and motivates its art, *infinitely*. Thus, Hamacher insists on philology's pre-semantic position, on its status as a preliminary mode, as a propaedeutic to study, as the non-disciplinary ground for every discipline. Philology is the *ancilla theologiae et iurisprudentiae* that serves the other disciplines by directing attention to language itself, by alerting us to language's formal conditions, by indicating how meaning is produced without bearing any meaning itself. Whereas scientific disciplines organize themselves within a meaningful horizon, philology suspends the moment of every stabilizing definition and thereby keeps the question of language open. As Hamacher concludes: "Invading horizons and fusions of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzungen*) are the death of language, not its beginning."<sup>6</sup>

Rather than construe philology as an epistemic discipline that fixes definitions or halts the flux of polysemy, Paul de Man appreciated its capacity to reinvigorate reading. He deeply appreciated its erotic energy, "the bafflement that such singular turns of tone, phrase and figure [are] bound to produce in readers attentive enough to notice them and honest

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<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophische Lehrjahre*, Nr. 929, *Kritische Ausgabe*, H. Eichner, ed., (Paderborn, 1967), 18: 106; cited in Werner Hamacher, "Für—die Philologie," 33.

<sup>6</sup> Hamacher, "Für—die Philologie," 27.

enough not to hide their non-understanding behind the screen of received ideas.”<sup>7</sup> This philosophical wonder before the word itself, this astonishment that keeps definitive understanding in abeyance, should herald a “return to philology,” namely, a return “to an examination of the structure of language prior to the meaning it produces”<sup>8</sup> The investigator of words thus grapples with “the structure of language” and essentially removes texts from the horizons of authorial intention and hermeneutic engagement. For De Man, the return to philology reminds us that language is a rhetorical machine, one that operates beyond subjective control, and thus withdraws from the horizons that establish signification.



If we accept that philology is not a discipline but rather a mode of work that attends to the pre- or proto-semantic production of meaning, then the writings of Pascal Quignard (b. 1948, Verneuil-sur-Avre) are philological in an exemplary way. Over nearly four decades, he has turned insistently toward themes and topics that conventionally belong to the sphere of classical philology, yet by means of an approach that would be barely recognizable to the profession of academic philology. His prolific output instead occupies the margins of classical studies, taking on forms that resemble the experimental novel, the fable, the treatise and the essay. All the same, this marginality has always been contiguous with more standard or central understanding of academic discourse. Having studied philosophy at Nanterre with Paul Ricoeur and Emmanuel Levinas, he went on to teach medieval literature at the Université de Vincennes and later a seminar on the ancient Roman novel at the École Pratique des Hautes Études. At the Bibliothèque nationale he applied textual criticism to establish texts by Maurice Scève, Dom Deschamps and the sixteenth-century scholar of Syriac and Aramaic, Guy Le Fèvre de La Boderie. He regularly published articles on classical philological topics—on Heraclitus, Aeschylus, Aristotle, and others—including a critical edition and translation of Lycophon’s *Alexandra*.

Quignard’s ostensibly more creative work began in 1976 with the appearance of *Le lecteur*, a sustained meditation that stems directly from his position as reader for the renowned publisher Gallimard. From that point, he embarked on a writing career devoted to increasingly original and idiosyncratic reflections, including two volumes of *Petits*

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<sup>7</sup> Paul de Man, “The Return to Philology,” in *The Resistance to Theory*, 23.

<sup>8</sup> De Man, “The Return to Philology,” 24.

*Traités*, first published in 1984. His engagement with philological matters was subsequently transposed into a piece of historical fiction, *Les tablettes de buis d'Apronemia Avitia* (1984), which purports to be based on notes inscribed upon wooden tablets by a woman of late Roman nobility on the eve of Christianity's rise and the Empire's decline. In *Albucius* (1990), Quignard focused on an earlier but no less crucial moment of Roman history in presenting the rather lascivious work of Caius Albucius Silus (b. 69 BC), whose collection of *Controversiae* were produced during the last days of the Republic. Here, Quignard's translations provide a springboard for a series of literary musings, generally on individual words—for example, *amicus* and *satura*—or on Albucius' concept of the “fifth season,” which altogether result again in a kind of novelistic essay or an essayistic novel.

The recent five volumes that make up Quignard's *Dernier Royaume*, published 2002-2005, continue this trend. They rehearse, elaborate, and modify themes and motifs long familiar from the author's considerable œuvre. Irretrievable loss and transience; silence and the human voice; uterine existence and birth; rhetoric, reading, and musical resonance; horror, nakedness and the constitutive secret—all surge forth over the course of these books, formulated in Quignard's usual kaleidoscopic and aphoristic style. As expected, deeply personal reflections and autobiographical details commingle with obscure allusions, provocative etymologies, and peculiar anecdotes drawn from the full range of the world's nearly forgotten cultural legacies. The accumulated material is presented in verbal mosaics that closely reflect Quignard's creative, wandering abandonment, his renunciation of mastery, his attentive submission to texts, history, and memory.

In other words, at least for Quignard's devoted readers, both the form and content of *Dernier Royaume* amount to a return to the same, a restitution of the similar, something at once new yet not without a haunting sense of *déjà lu*. That is not to say, however, that this pentalogy has simply succumbed to a flat, stylistic homogeneity or that the work has fallen into self-scripted routine. Although the terrain may be familiar, it is in no way comforting or reassuring. On the contrary, it affords the recognition of the disruptive power of the same. As Quignard has persistently demonstrated, the return to the same hardly offers respite, for the familiar is often the harbor for that which at any moment may surge forth with frightening force. Like Freud's *Heimliche*, the familiar may be the secret (*heimliche, geheime*) container of *das Unheimliche*, the uncanny, *l'inquiétante étrangeté*. With Quignard, as in the Freudian model, the return to the same may always be but a cover for the return of the repressed. Indeed, Freud's well-known “repetition compulsion,” which unconsciously drives

him again and again to the same sordid neighborhood of Rome, shares many analogous traits with Quignard's *sordidissimes*, those pieces rejected or abjected from the literary-philosophical canon which ceaselessly attract the author's concern.<sup>9</sup> Yet, where Freud sees a symptom, Quignard discovers a method; where psychoanalysis works toward a cure, Quignard works on registering the incurable. While Freud approaches the unconscious in order to master it and thereby put life back into working order, Quignard attends to what has almost been obliterated in order to rescue it and thereby bring his writing back to life.<sup>10</sup>

This salvific program is explicitly expressed in the note Quignard appended to the back cover of his *Petits traités*:

[Les *Petits Traités*] étaient de courts arguments déchirés, des contradictions laissées ouvertes, des mains négatives, des apories, des fragments de contes, des vestiges. Je ne retenais que ce qui du temps était rejeté par l'Histoire tandis qu'elle prétendait écrire sa grande narration mensongère. Je ne retenais des livres des Anciens que ce que la Norme expulsait des littératures du passé pour asseoir son autorité collective et académique.<sup>11</sup>

Referring to this text, Jean-Louis Pautrot comments: "Ce geste annoncé pour les *Petits Traités* informe l'œuvre. Les exclus de l'Histoire, dont les travaux ne firent 'pas une ride sur la surface du temps,' coupables de singularité pour leur époque, sont innocents de la *doxa*."<sup>12</sup> Needless to say, in order for these rejected, *paradoxical* pieces to have an effect, it is necessary to present and maintain the frame of *doxa*, which serves as the horizon for the resurgence of the expelled.<sup>13</sup> The abnormal can be defined as such only in relation to the norm. Counter-currents require something to counter. Could one then argue that the typical form and content of Quignard's later work, particularly in *Dernier Royaume*, constitutes a familiar, more or less expected setting for staging the reappearance of the unexpected? Or is it not rather the case that the return to the same, the realm of the similar, is coincident with the return of the suppressed? That the unexpected is nothing but the expected viewed from

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<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Das Unheimliche" (1919), *Gesammelte Werke*, 18 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1999), 225-68.

<sup>10</sup> On Quignard's indebtedness and reconfiguration of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, see Chantal Lapeyre-Desmaison, "Pascal Quignard: une poétique de l'*agalma*," *Études françaises* 40:2 (2004): 39-53.

<sup>11</sup> Pascal Quignard, *Petits Traités II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), back cover.

<sup>12</sup> Jean-Louis Pautrot, *Pascal Quignard ou le fonds du monde* (New York: Rodopi, 2007), 9. Pautrot is quoting from Quignard's "Traité sur Esprit," in Jacques Esprit, *De la fausseté des vertus humaines* (1678) (Paris: Aubier, 1996), 26.

<sup>13</sup> "Cette œuvre se bâtit à contre-courant de ce que son auteur perçoit comme la *doxa* de notre époque: paradoxale, donc, au sens que lui conférait Barthes." (Pautrot 8).



a new perspective? Does Quignard's stated distinction from collective and authoritative authorities not already suggest that he *simply* sees or strives to see 'the same' in a truly different way? An adequate response to these questions would have to rest on how we read this simplicity.

A particularly rich example, which might address the problem, comes straightaway on the very first page of *Sur le jadis*, the second volume of the *Dernier Royaume* series. With the opening sentence, Quignard describes a very recent walk through the mountainous regions of Périgord: "Hier je suis descendu au fond du vallon sous le causse qui prolonge le lac de Garet."

Cela faisait vingt-deux ans que j'évitais cet amas de pierres en ruine qui étaient entourées d'herbes folles et de mousses. De ronciers. [...]  
Je ne pus m'empêcher de me dérouter de mon chemin. J'avais encore envie de voir. Je voulus y jeter les yeux un instant. J'entraï sans le pouvoir tout à fait.  
Ma gorge se serre. J'ai un léger vertige. Je ressors presque aussitôt.<sup>14</sup>

As my epigraph reminds us, where Rimbaud opens his descent by turning to the *Jadis*, Quignard begins his reflections "on the *Jadis*" with a descent.<sup>15</sup> Analogous to Rimbaud's hesitant – hellish, damning – qualification ("si je me souviens bien"), Quignard's experience is fraught with ambivalence: the return to the same, to a place visited over twenty years before, is in fact a return to an old evasion, to something once suppressed; the will to self-prevention or self-preservation is weakened, yet the desire to carry on is checked by some fundamental incapacity. The repeated confrontation suddenly causes dizziness, which goads him to leave almost immediately.

The fact that this scene confronts an old avoidance and presents a vague but powerful resurgence only partially explains the force of this brief, opening narration. A far greater nuance rests in the shifting verb morphology, which will allow this incipit or re-commencement to be taken as programmatic for the present reading of *Sur le jadis*. The text quickly runs through an entire range of tenses – the *passé composé* ("Je suis descendu"), the

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<sup>14</sup> Pascal Quignard, *Sur le jadis: Dernier Royaume II* (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 7. {S}

<sup>15</sup> Across the *Dernier Royaume* series, Quignard suggests his artistic kinship with Rimbaud, for example in *Sordidissimes*, where he cites directly from *Une saison en enfer (Délires II: alchimie du verbe)*: "Liste d'Arthur Rimbaud: La littérature démodée, latin d'église, livres érotiques sans orthographe, romans de nos aïeules, contes de fées, petits livres de l'enfance." Pascal Quignard *Sordidissimes: Dernier Royaume V* (Paris: Grasset, 2004), 257. On Quignard's indebtedness to Rimbaud's style, see Gaspard Turin, "'Entre centre et absence': fragmentation et style chez Pascal Quignard," *Littérature*, 153 (2009): 86-101; especially 92-93.

*imparfait* (“Cela faisait,” “j’évitais”), the *passé simple* (“Je ne pus,” “Je voulus,” “J’entrai”) – before moving directly into the *présent* (“Ma gorge se serre. J’ai un léger vertige. Je ressors presque aussitôt”). How should we account for this *confusion des temps*?

Tense-shifting, especially from the past to the present, is generally understood as a deictic gesture, one that achieves an effect of vividness, referred to in Greek poetics as *enargeia* and in Latin variously as *illustratio*, *evidentia* or *demonstratio*.<sup>16</sup> With the sudden intrusion of the present tense, the story is no longer felt to be a story but rather an event unfolding in the here and now. Distance is overwhelmed. The scene demands alertness. What this vividness entails, it should be specified, is nothing less than language’s readiness to disappear, to allow its words and voice to yield its place to the vision it evokes. The medium hides its mediating role. The listener or reader becomes a spectator, a participant in the scene, an engaged witness; and the statement thereby acquires greater force, more urgency. To employ the terms famously defined by Émile Benveniste, the *histoire* – the story given without indication to the context of its telling – abruptly turns into a *discours*, marked by personal pronouns and verbal tenses that allude to the narrating act.<sup>17</sup>

The technique is discernible throughout classical literature, for example in the following passage from Vergil’s *Aeneid*:

vix prima *inceperat* aestas  
et pater Anchises dare fatis vela *iubebat*.  
litora cum patriae lacrimans portusque *relinquo*  
(*Aen.* 3:8-10)

The onset of summer hardly *had begun*  
and father Anchises *ordered* to set sails to the fates,  
when I *leave* my country’s shores and harbors, crying

My literal translation of the verb tenses should emphasize the effect. From a purely grammatical point of view, we would expect the coordination of the pluperfect (*inceperat*) and the imperfect (*iubebat*), where the former supplies information that situates the narration in the past. The pluperfect and the imperfect work together to maintain that this is an *histoire* that has taken place sometime beforehand. The subsequent intrusion of the present tense (*relinquo*) appears to pull the narration out of the past, effacing the distance that separates the *temps de l’énoncé* and the *temps de l’énonciation*. Traditionally,

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<sup>16</sup> The term *enargeia* is first found in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Commentaries on the Attic Orators: Lysias*, 7. See also Longinus, *On the Sublime*, 15, and Quintilian’s remarks, *Institutio oratoria* 6.2.29-32.

<sup>17</sup> Émile Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 238-42.

philologists would classify this use as the “historical present” (*praesens historicum*), which appears to heighten dramatic tension.<sup>18</sup> In considering modern usage, some linguists explain that the contrast distinguishes background from foreground material.<sup>19</sup> In this brief example from the *Aeneid*, the shift from past to present tenses would simply mark the summer’s onset and Anchises’ command as *non-events* that provide background to the *event* of Aeneas’s lachrymose departure. Other language scholars would regard Vergil’s tense shifting as a progression from a more static, depictive narration toward an increased dynamism.<sup>20</sup>

All of these interpretations of the role of the present in past narration are compelling and have at least some bearing on the opening sequence in *Sur le jadis*. The non-event of a hike through Périgord, the background experience of returning to the same, could indeed be read as preparation for the impingement of a powerful event. Yet, as we continue to read, we see that Quignard complicates any straightforward account by imposing even further shifts in tense: “Ma gorge se serre. J’ai un léger vertige. Je ressors presque aussitôt. Mes yeux se portèrent d’eux-mêmes près de l’autel des Romains. Je ne vis rien. Rien ne se leva, venant d’autrefois” (*Jadis* 7). The reintroduction of the *passé simple* (“se portèrent,” “vis,” “se leva”) would appear to expel the scene back into a prior time, reducing the vertiginous *discours* back into a mere *histoire*. The foreground seems to dissolve into the background. As the passage continues, however, it becomes quite clear that the move back to the past tense hardly diminishes the effect of vividness or dramatic tension: “Dans l’ombre de la branche je vis surgir soudain le visage d’une femme” (*Jadis* 8). The suddenness that accompanies the *passé simple* disproves the claim that the present tense alone can communicate intensity. In fact, restricting vivid effects exclusively to the present tense and denying the past tense this power would be valid only if we read the verbs as expressing time alone and thus ignore their qualities of *aspect*. Like all Indo-European languages, modern French verbs exhibit aspect (continuous, completed or aorist), even if these

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Heinze writes, “The more vividly [Vergil] produces the illusion in us that we are facing *immediately* [*unmittelbar*] the events themselves, the more perfectly he believes that he has reached his goal. An external feature of his narrative, but a very characteristic one, is the overwhelming use of the historical present [...] intended to paint the events for us as truly present.” *Virgils epische Technik* (1915) (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1982), 374 (my translation and emphasis). For a comparative account of the narrative implications of the historical present in Caesar’s *Gallic Wars* and Charles de Gaulle’s *Mémoires de guerre*, see Sylvie Mellet, “Le Présent ‘historique’ ou ‘de narration,’” *L’Information grammaticale*, 4 (1980): 6-11.

<sup>19</sup> See Paul Hopper, “Some Observations on the Typology of Focus and Aspect in Narrative Language,” *Studies in Language*, 3 (1979): 37-64.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Longacre, “A Spectrum and Profile Approach to Discourse Analysis,” *Text*, 1 (1981): 337-59.

assignments are no longer assigned unequivocally. Rather than take the shift from the present to the past as conversion of *discours* to *histoire*, it would be better to understand it as a modulation from continuous to simple or aorist aspect, from an on-going situation to one that occurs forcefully “at once.”

A reading of *Sur le jadis* should reveal that aspectual difference plays a central role not only in the book’s stylistic presentation but also in its thematic organization. As the title already suggests, the volume is not only a study of time but more precisely a study of temporal *aspects*. In brief, to approach *Sur le jadis* critically is to witness and assess what happens when a particular species of time, the ongoing *now* of writing and reading, intersects or collides with another kind of time, the *completeness* of a past conceived as space. To employ Latin terms, *Sur le jadis* performs the dynamic encounter between the *infectum* of the now and *perfectum* of the historical past. Moreover, and even more crucially, the book grapples to express the ground or foundation of this temporal confrontation. It attempts to evoke that which makes this concurrence possible. In reaching for this potentiating origin, this potent source of temporal experience, we need to have recourse to the third verbal aspect – the one that attracts Quignard’s attention above all – namely the *already* or *iam* that characterizes the simple aspect discernible in the Greek *aorist*.

Early on in *Sur le jadis*, Quignard confirms the completed, spatial quality of History (“Histoire”) by reconnecting the word *page* (or *pagina*) with *pagus* (“country, *pays*”), “la demeure la plus vaste où l’âme puisse se mouvoir, voyager, comparer, revenir” (*Jadis* 14). By means of the written word, temporal experience is transformed into a landscape open to repeated visits and return engagements. The page, and this would of course include Quignard’s pages, invites exploration, or better, *in-vestigation*; it is the past as a “nouvel espace” where vestiges of absent presence are accessible to the present eye: “Le passé est un immense corps dont le présent est l’œil” (*Jadis* 17).<sup>21</sup> A broad *horizon* stretches out before the journeying spectator. History is there as that which has taken place. It is complete. The present – the present time of writing, the present now of reading – penetrates the surrounding space of complete, perfected history; it springs forth and takes “from this horizon,” hence the eminently Quignardian *aphoristic* style, which literally arrives at its observations by marking itself off, by creating a boundary (*horos*), *aphorizein*.

One could readily claim, then, that the horizon or boundary is there only because there is an eye to regard it. That is to say, the present does not merely encounter this

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<sup>21</sup> For Quignard’s reflections on the relation between *vestigium* and *investigatio*, see *Sur le jadis* 62.

horizon, but also decisively creates it. The present itself has constituted the *horos*, which suggests that the past is already contained or lodged in the now. Conversely, the spectacle of the past could be understood as giving birth to the now that arrives to greet it. Quignard's zoomorphic metaphor – the present as the eye of the body that is the past – proposes that the two aspects, the *infectum* and the *perfectum*, are organically conjoined, distinct but inseparable, held together by the horizon that gives both sides their definition, their contour. If it is true that the past is *already* in the present, then it also holds that the present is *already* in the past. Within the vast frame of the horizon, the two aspects of time are bound together.

What permits this boundary, this horizon, to be recognized as such? What is the constitutive exterior that allows the bounded area to be thus identified? What is the ground or the foundation of both the present and the perfected past? It can only be that which is *already* there, the *iam* that is beyond the bounded scene, or beyond boundedness itself. The term for the boundlessness that allows the horizon to take shape is the *aorist*, literally that which negates the *horos*: *a-oriston*, “without horizon, without boundary, without limit.” Quignard offers a very concise series of definitions:

*To horizon* définit ce qui limite ou délimite le site au sein de l'espace. *To aoriston*, ce qui est sans limites. Ce mot définit ce qui ne connaît pas de frontière et qui ne connaît plus d'horizon. *To ek-statikon* définit ce qui se tient en dehors de sa place. Ce qui est hors de soi. Le site en extension de toute situation. Le mot ek-statique définit le temps même. (*Jadis* 129)

The aorist is the *already* that defines both the progressive present, which already contains the past, and the completed past, which already contains the present. It is “ecstatic”; it is “time itself.”

The force of the aorist is therefore consolidated in the key term *Jadis*: “La forme française *jadis* se décompose comme Ja-a-dis qui peut elle-même se traduire comme Déjà/il y a/des jours. Source qui renvoie à une source qui antécède. C'est ainsi que le *Jadis* structure le temps comme avant.” (*Jadis* 139) As the “fount of time” (“fons temporis,” *Jadis* 138), *le Jadis* can neither be located nor dated. All the same, *le Jadis* is everywhere, coursing through the *paginae* of *Dernier Royaume*, living on or surviving precisely as the non-localizable, as the interminable – “Le *Jadis* erre sur tout l'espace de la terre.”<sup>22</sup> For Jean-Luc Nancy, this errancy specifies the meaning of Quignard's provocative neologism, the verb *jadir*: “Le *jadis*

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<sup>22</sup> Pascal Quignard, *Les Paradisiaques: dernier royaume IV* (Paris: Grasset, 2004), 18.

*jadit* – c’est-à-dire qu’il survient dans sa perte, en tant que perdu, un paradis perdu [...], ainsi toutefois survenant, faisant rencontre et rencontre dont au moins il peut trouver, lui, attestation elle-même archaïque.”<sup>23</sup> Nancy’s allusion to “a paradise lost” is relevant, insofar as Quignard eventually turns to theological language, albeit in a thoroughly non-Deist fashion. Specifically, he borrows terms from negative theology and the Plotinian method of *apophasis*, an utterance that reverently refuses to utter anything in positive and therefore reductive terms. In an analogous way, affirming only by means of negating, Quignard elaborates the force of *jadis*, which is distinguished from the past: “Le *jadis* par rapport au passé a pour premier trait de ne pas avoir nécessairement été. Le *jadis* ne figure ni au nombre des étants ni au nombre des ayant été car il n’a pas encore fini de surgir. Le *jadis* est un puits plus vaste que tout le passé” (*Jadis* 140). *Le Jadis* participates in the origin that antedates all that is originated. It is prior, already there before the beginning (“Ce qui précède le début, tel est le *jadis*,” [*Jadis* 55]). That is to say, *le Jadis* precedes the language and the borders and the limits that *define* experience through polarization and discrimination. Accordingly, it is linked to the apohatic, alpha-privative terms that Plotinus employs to point (negatively) to the origin: “*Alogos, aoristos, apeiros*, tels sont les mots de Plotin” (*Jadis* 129). In contrast, the *passé* is riveted to the boundaries imposed by language.

The key distinction between *le Jadis* and the *passé* is therefore best understood in light of aspectual rather than temporal difference. The *passé* is replete with that which *has been*, with actions completed or perfected from the perspective of the present. For this reason, it is grammatically represented by the “present perfect” or *passé composé*, whose aspect explicitly diverges from the aorist force of the *passé simple*. The acts that comprise the perfected past do so by being taken from the horizon of lived experience. They are *aphoristic*. The contents of *le Jadis*, however, are *aoristic, simple*. They are associated with a prior, liquid source that does not suffer the cuts, divisions or contours featured in language’s sculpted accomplishments (“Il y a un pressentiment de la préexistence, substantielle, liquide, obscure, ontologique, inconnaissable à la vision, au langage, à la conscience,” [*Jadis* 236]). The aorist surge of *le Jadis* is without the temporal or spatial boundaries that compose the verbal sense of “present perfect”:

L’aoriste est lié à l’achronie. On dit aussi: le passé simple. [...] Les simples n’opposent pas comme les mots du langage se discriminent et se polarisent.

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<sup>23</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, “*Jadis, jamais, bientôt (l’amour)*,” in *Pascal Quignard, figures d’un lettré*, Philippe Bonnefis et Dolorès Lyotard, eds. (Paris: Galilée, 2005), 384.

Face à la *simplicitas* du passé simple, si simple, presque aoristique, il y a un passé composé, si complexe, si composé qu'on peut presque le dire décomposé. C'est le passé du langage. (*Jadis* 120)

Therefore, guided by aspectual difference, we discover that two contrasting types of the past have been operative throughout ("il y a deux sources du temps" [*Jadis* 28]): there is the past as "irréversibilité" ("le passé-à-jamais"), which Quignard identifies as "deuil," and the past as "réversibilité," which is characterized as "théophanie," as the limitless ever resurgent past – "Le passé de ce monde comme printemps à faire sans cesse revenir" (*Jadis* 29). This latter past "n'a pas encore fini de surgir." Quite explicitly, Quignard grounds the simple aspect of the aorist in the *déjà* that resounds in *le Jadis* and promises an encore: "Il n'y a aucun Jamais-plus dans le Jadis. Il y a un jour. Un jour déjà. Un jour encore" (*Jadis* 141).

Whereas the *simple* ontology of *le Jadis* must be differentiated from the *completed*, ontic phenomena of the *passé*, it is important to see some deeper relation between *le Jadis* and the *présent*, whose radical transience should also be defined or affirmed negatively, that is, as passing constantly between the *no longer* and the *not yet*. As Laurence David notes, "Dans le cycle du *Dernier Royaume*, Pascal Quignard dit que le présent n'existe pas. On ne peut penser à la seconde même. Le présent serait tout au plus un passage entre deux intervalles."<sup>24</sup> In order to distinguish, then, the constitutive negativity of *le Jadis* from that of *le présent*, it again appears necessary to stress a difference in verbal aspect. The negative force of *le présent* is through and through *durative* or continuous, fluctuating ceaselessly between what has been and what is to come, between mourning and theophany. As cited above, "Le passé est un immense corps dont le présent est l'œil" (*Jadis* 17); but this past should now be understood in its two, distinct aspects: the irreversible past of the perfect; and the reversible past of the aorist. By means of its continuous movement, *le présent*, consistently associated with the eyes, can train its gaze either on the limited, visible past or the unlimited, invisible past. In a much earlier text, his "Préface" to Colette Lazam's translation of Apuleius's *De Deo Socratis*, Quignard privileges the latter option: "Aimer, dormir, lire c'est ce 'voir l'aphantos'. Lire, c'est suivre des yeux la présence invisible."<sup>25</sup> It would appear that the negative constitution of present's durative aspect (no longer, not yet) is precisely what attracts it to the privative substance (*alogos, aoristos, apeiros*) of *le Jadis*.

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<sup>24</sup> Laurence Werner David, "La Mémoire la plus lointaine," *Critique* 63 : 721-722 (2007): 508.

<sup>25</sup> Pascal Quignard, "Petit traité sur les anges," preface to Apuleius, *Le Démon de Socrate*, Colette Lazam, trans. (Paris: Payot, 1993), 28.

To illustrate, Quignard alludes to the story of Gyges. In the first book of his *History*, Herodotus relates how the Lydian king Candaules, eager to confirm that his wife was the most beautiful of women, turned to his trusty bodyguard, Gyges. With some difficulty, Candaules tried to persuade Gyges to spy on her as she undressed for bed, so that in beholding her nakedness he would agree that there was indeed no one fairer. Yet, Gyges wisely protested: ἄμα δὲ κίθωνι ἐκδυομένῳ συνεκδύεται καὶ τὴν αἰδῶ γυνή (*Hist.* 1.8) – in Quignard’s translation: “En même temps qu’elle se dépouille de sa chemise, reine ou non, la femme quitte sa gêne” (*Jadis* 57). Apart from the interpolation (“reine ou non”), which does not appear in Herodotus’s Greek, the translation is perfectly accurate and literal. For Quignard, the crucial term of the passage is *aidōs*, “gene,” which he takes to be an alpha-privative noun: shame is that which should not be seen (*a-idēs*). Herodotus appears to support this etymology further in the episode, not cited by Quignard, when the queen rebukes Gyges for “seeing what he should not” (ἴδης τὰ μὴ σε δεῖ, 1.11). In Quignard’s text, this brief story yields a series of observations that pursue the path of key negative conceptions, beginning with the word for truth *alētheia*, which eradicates forgetfulness (*lēthē*): “La vérité se disait en grec *alētheia*. Est vrai ce qui ne parvient pas à s’oublier. [...] *A-lētheia* est le Non-oublié comme *A-oriston* est le Non-fini et comme *A-idēs* est le Non-visible” (*Jadis* 57). Continuing along this line, *alētheia* is connected with the Latin *revelatio*, literally a lifting of the veil, which corresponds to the undressing scene in Herodotus. For Quignard, it is within the logic of *revelation* that we recognize how the eye of the present relates to the body of the past: “Non-oubli qui arrache le voile (le *velum*) sur le passé. La souche du vrai est le nu. C’est encore le mot de Gygès : quand elle se dénude, reine ou non, la femme arrache la vélation sur la zoomorphie” (*Jadis* 58).

In respecting no boundaries, like the line that divides what should and should not be seen, like the border that separates humans from beasts or predators from prey, the aorist aspect is revealed in the present’s encounter with the past; not with the past of what has been but rather with the past of what is *already* there, “le jour déjà”: *le Jadis*. The continuous aspect of the present is interrupted and disrupted by the simplicity of this past that invisibly surges into view. As Simon Saint-Onge expresses it, *le Jadis* is “un processus de figuration qui fait éclater le continuum de la temporalité.”<sup>26</sup> To follow with one’s eyes this invisible presence is to read the page, the *pagina*, which becomes the scene of the past as

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<sup>26</sup> Simon Saint-Onge, “Le Temps contemporain ou le Jadis chez Pascal Quignard,” *Études françaises*, 44:3 (2008): 160.



*simultaneity*, as something all at once, “en même temps,” and decidedly not as the repository of that which has been completed in the past and will never come again. To refer again to “le mot de Gygès,” although Quignard does not call attention to it, Herodotus’s adverb, *hama*, “en même temps,” is in fact cognate with the Latin *iam* that yields the French *déjà—dès et jà, de jam*. And “at the *same* time” concisely recalls the effect of returning to the same. It broaches the profound relation between simultaneity and similarity, *simul* and *similis*; as well as the simultaneity and similarity evoked in the *simple* (*semel plex*) aspect of the aorist (*Jadis* 120).

To return to the same is to wrest the past free from its stable location in History. It is to dissolve its delimitations and thereby return it to time itself. “Les formes sont des limites. Dans la métamorphose les formes ne connaissent plus de limites. Elles sont devenues *aorista*. Leur horizon est sans forme: c’est le temps” (*Jadis* 131). To return to the same is to remove the veil that consigns the past to a chain of accomplishments, of perfected acts that will never return, acts that have been expelled from living time. Hence, to return to the same is to enjoy the simultaneity and simplicity of the past, the past in its aorist aspect, which overwhelms every limit, unveils itself as the all-at-once, and radiates in its invisibility. In a word, it is to throw an eye onto that which is already there before the beginning, to witness the vivid splendor of the now, to place the present “sur le jadis”—before discipline and before meaning, upon the ever-retreating margins of philology.