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On the Concept of ‘Slow Reading’ in Latin Language and Literature

Abstract: The techniques of so-called ‘slow reading’ or ‘deep reading’ are taught in Classical Philology as an academic discipline in an exemplary manner. This is necessary not only because we lack a pragmatic approach when dealing with so-called ‘dead’ languages, but also because the surviving texts are for the most part of an extremely high aesthetic and intellectual standard. The deliberate reduction of reading speed was declared by Nietzsche to be an indispensable prerequisite of a good philologist, and recently there has been an increased interest in this concept, often with reference to Nietzsche. In what follows, I argue that teaching and research in the field of Latin language and literature are neither conceivable nor justifiable without traditional training in the technique of close and thus slow reading.

Keywords: science of reading, ‘dead languages’, Friedrich Nietzsche, grammar, rhetoric, hermeneutics

1 Preliminary remarks

The process of slow reading has always been familiar to classical philologists, as reading Greek and Latin literature requires precise and thus time-consuming linguistic and literary analysis. This is necessary not only because we do not have pragmatic access, since Greek and Latin are so-called ‘dead’ languages, but also because in most cases the preserved texts have pronounced aesthetic, artistic and intellectual ambitions. Two fundamental complications usually arise when we want to read, understand and interpret texts of classical Greek and Latin authors: (1) We have to cope with the difficulty of highly complex languages, with texts that we usually cannot read fluently but which we effectively have to translate into our own language first — apart from the fact that the transmission of the texts often makes basic understanding difficult. (2) The mode of expression and the subject matter are pre-modern; the interpretation of the content of our texts is therefore far more difficult and controversial than in modern literatures.

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The question of whether classical ancient languages and literatures should continue to be the subject of teaching and research at schools and universities will certainly be answered positively by all or most classicists. Current educational policies that limit the importance and scope of the Classics are countered by representatives of the discipline with a wide range of arguments, which I will only briefly outline here: (1) We deal with a corpus of highly reflective, aesthetically excellent literature, which remains fundamental and indispensable for the (self-)understanding of Western culture. However, this is true regardless of whether we read the texts in the original — which is still our professional goal. (2) Dealing with language, especially syntax, and translating texts into one's own language develops linguistic competence and analytical and logical thinking. (3) Learning ancient languages and their grammar facilitates access to many modern languages. Arguments (2) and (3) are controversial and empirically falsifiable.[1]

The question remains of whether or why it is worth the great effort involved in learning the ancient languages in order to be able to read the texts in the original and to understand them adequately. To answer the question, I would like to refer to the techniques and skills of slow reading that we constantly reflect upon and practice professionally in Greek and Latin studies. While reading comprehension in modern spoken languages is based on the fact that the grammatical dissection of sentences is automatic and supported by pragmatic and nonverbal communication, the mental processes of syntactic analysis operate differently when we read texts written in 'dead' languages. These are no longer exposed to the processes of grammaticalization of idioms newly formed in the active use of language;[2] they are languages that are read (spoken only for practice or fun). I thus prefer the term 'reflective' instead of 'dead' languages.

This specific feature of ancient languages requires cultural techniques of reading, understanding and translating texts, which our disciplines have developed and refined in a long tradition of research and teaching to a greater extent than other (pre-)modern philologies. So, I am not primarily concerned here with the high quality of the texts (which other literatures also claim for themselves), but with the reading culture of linguistically and aesthetically sophisticated literature:[3] the method

1 For the discussion, see Bracke/Bradshaw 2020; Beyer/Liebsch/Kipf 2019.

2 On the phenomenon, cf. Fruyt 2011, 661f., who also discusses the processes of forming new lexemes through 'agglutination', lexicalization and 'reanalysis', which are also to be considered in ancient Latin — albeit not as diachronic phenomena.

3 See Graf 2015, 190: "Complex texts usually require a high degree of attention to their linguistic and formal form, the coherence of the text as well as an interested openness to the thematized contents, i.e. a slow, thorough, analyzing or interpreting reading, in some cases a philologically precise text-critical procedure" (my translation).

of slow, thorough, analytical or interpretative reading and the precise textual and literary criticism that has a long tradition in classical philology.

I will first define the concept of 'slow reading' with reference to current trends and discussions about the phenomenon (section 2), then situate it in the tradition of (pre-)modern literary criticism, focusing on Friedrich Nietzsche's reflections on the role of reading in philology (section 3). Finally, using selected phenomena of the Latin language and their relevance in literary texts, I will try to show that the importance of slow reading can also be justified with arguments from research on Latin grammar and syntax (section 4).

2 Definitions of slow reading

'Slow reading' can be defined as conscious and intensive reading, especially of literary works.[4] In contrast to the — probably more familiar — concept of 'close reading' established in literary criticism since the advent of New Criticism, which can mean the intensive reading of a specific text or text section or merely text-immanent interpretation, the concept of 'slow reading' focuses on the reading tempo and thus sets itself apart from the techniques of 'speed reading'. The concept of slow reading should be understood without the concentration or limitation to text-immanent analysis implied by the term 'close'.[5]

The term 'slow reading' is the subject of popular science discussion and research on several levels. In addition to arguments from cognitive science, approaches from the psychology of learning or speech therapy, where it has proved useful as a way of treating dyslexia,[6] there are the interests of philologists and readers of literature of all genres.[7] Slow reading is contrasted with 'skimming' techniques and praised

4 For the current discussion in research on slow reading, see Newkirk 2011; Mikics 2013; Lönnroth 2017; Mohrhard 2018.

5 On the difference between 'close' and 'slow reading', see Culler 2010; Mohrhard 2018, 59–68. See also Hallet 2010 on the contrast between 'close' and 'wide reading'.

6 See Newkirk 2011 and the book review by Kelly Gallagher (author of *Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It*): Newkirk's research is welcome "at a time when skimming and click-and-go reading have become the norm for our students" (https://www.heinemann.com/products/e03731.aspx, last visit June 13th, 2024).

7 A vehement advocate of the "slow tempo of literature" is Lindsay Waters, Executive Editor for the Humanities, Emeritus, at Harvard University Press. See also Johan Schloemann, "Lernt gut lesen, das heißt langsam", in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung* no. 236, Oktober 14, 2015; Watkins 1990: "What, then, is philology? Let me conclude with the definition of philology that my teacher Roman Jakobson gave (who got it from his teacher, who got it from his): 'Philology is the art of reading slowly'."

because it helps the reader to "understand the text better, to feel greater enthusiasm in the reception of the reading and to build up a long-lasting and intensive relationship with the text and the author".[8] Even without scientific legitimacy, the concept of slow reading is often promoted in the overall context of the 'slow movement' as a therapeutic tool in stressful everyday and environmental situations.[9]

3 On the history of the concept of slow reading: Friedrich Nietzsche's appeal to learn to read

The method and reading practices of close and thorough analysis and the hermeneutical reflections on it also have a historical dimension. They are documented for the exegesis of religious or secularly defined canonical texts in various pre-modern (Persian-Zoroastrian, Jewish-Rabbinic, early Christian, pagan-classical) and modern cultures — one may think of the upswing and boom of hermeneutics in Europe since the 17th century —, primarily with the aim of opening texts to ever new 'readings' in the sense of 'interpretations'.[10] The 'time' and 'speed' factors in the process of reading and interpretation play a subordinate role in ancient or (pre-)modern hermeneutics. It is a commonplace of the *praefationes* of classical Greek and Latin literature that the author, having invested considerable time and energy in writing and being therefore able to promise quality, is entitled to demand similar time and effort from the reading or listening audience.[11] However, I am not concerned here with the forms and performances of (slow) reading described in ancient literature[12] but rather with the demands that the texts themselves make on their readers through the complexity of their linguistic structure and aesthetics, assuming that these texts require us modern readers to read slowly to satisfy those demands.

Before giving an illustrative example of this in the next section (4), I would like to offer some further reflections on the concept of slow reading, in line with the

8 The quotes are from Mohrhard 2018, 7 (my translation).

9 "With slow reading, we take our time" (https://slowreadingjoyce.wordpress.com/, last visit May 20th, 2024); "The power of slow reading in fast times: I am a slow reader, and that's a good thing" (https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2015/the-power-of-slow-reading-in-fast-times/, last visit May 20th, 2024).

10 See Hartmann 2015; Zetzel 2018, 121–157; Mohrhard 2018, 53–58.

11 Thus, for example, Lucr. 1.50–3; Phaedr. 3 prol. 1–16; Mart. 5.80; cf. also Plat. *Phdr*. 227b8. For the slowness in reading as a concept in teaching grammar, cf. Dion. Thrax, *Gramm.* 2 ("On reading").

12 On this topic, see the contributions in Johnson/Parker [2]2011; Gurd 2012.

appeals of Friedrich Nietzsche, himself a trained classical philologist and professionally engaged with the texts of Greek and Latin literature.

The German term *langsames Lesen*, translated as 'slow reading' in English editions, apparently goes back to Friedrich Nietzsche, sometimes paired with the (musical) term *lento*. The locus classicus is the "preface" to *Morgenröthe* (1886), where Nietzsche 'proclaims' in the last paragraph (§ 5):[13]

> Let us proclaim it, as if among ourselves, in so low a tone that all the world fails to hear it and us! Above all, however, let us say it slowly … This preface is late, but not too late — what, after all, do five or six years matter? A book like this, a problem like this, is in no hurry; we both, I just as much as my book, we are friends of the *lento*. It is not for nothing that I have been a philologist, perhaps I am a philologist still, that is to say, a teacher of slow reading. I even come to write slowly. At present it is not only my habit, but even my taste — a perverted taste, maybe — to write nothing but what will drive to despair every one who is 'in a hurry'.[14]

> … sagen wir es, wie es unter uns gesagt werden darf, so heimlich, daß alle Welt es überhört, daß alle Welt u n s überhört! Vor allem sagen wir es l a n g s a m … Diese Vorrede kommt spät, aber nicht zu spät, was liegt im Grunde an fünf, sechs Jahren? Ein solches Buch, ein solches Problem hat keine Eile; überdies sind wir beide Freunde des lento, ich ebensowohl als mein Buch. Man ist nicht umsonst Philologe gewesen, man ist es vielleicht noch, das will sagen, ein Lehrer des langsamen Lesens: — endlich schreibt man auch langsam. Jetzt gehört es nicht nur zu meinen Gewohnheiten, sondern auch zu meinem Geschmacke — einem boshaften Geschmacke vielleicht? — Nichts mehr zu schreiben, womit nicht jede Art Mensch, die „Eile hat", zur Verzweiflung gebracht wird.[15]

Nietzsche wrote these lines seven years after he had given up his professorship of classical philology in Basel (1869–1879), when he was travelling through Italy and other countries, two years before mental disorders interfered with his work.[16] The theme of *Morgenröthe,* written in the form of aphorisms in the early 1880s, is the analysis of human life and culture on the basis of a symptomatology which he describes in the preface as "work in the depths" (§ 1: "Arbeit der Tiefe"), himself being "a 'subterranean man' at work, one who tunnels and mines and undermines":[17] The aim is to question — to "undermine" — and reassess the commonly

13 Nietzsche added the preface in 1886 on the occasion of the new edition of *Morgenröthe*, which he wrote in 1880/81 and which had received little attention until then. See Schmidt 2015, 9.

14 Transl. Hollingdale 1997/[10]2007, 5 (Daybreak. Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality).

15 *KSA* 3, 17 (with Nietzsche's blockings).

16 See Schmidt 2015, 7–9. On the parallels between reading and travelling that Nietzsche often draws by using travel metaphors to describe the reading process, see Benne 2005, 158f.

17 *KSA* 3, 11: "In diesem Buche findet man einen 'Unterirdischen' an der Arbeit, einen Bohrenden, Grabenden, Untergrabenden. Man sieht ihn, vorausgesetzt, daß man Augen für solche Arbeit der Tiefe hat —, wie er langsam, besonnen, mit sanfter Unerbittlichkeit vorwärts kommt …". See Schmidt 2015,

held trust in morality and religious ideas and, above all, to dismantle the "philology of Christianity".[18]

Slow reading is thus supposed to be an analytical, critical, even subversive form of reading. Nietzsche claims this ability for himself and his readings, and he sets out the result in his *Morgenröthe*. He sees himself also as the slow writer (§ 5: "I even come to write slowly"), placing himself on a par with the authors he has read and interpreted as a classical philologist. He is a 'teacher' in the sense that he wants to impart to his pupils the ability of slow reading, which he possesses as a reader of classical Greek and Latin texts.

When he asks his addressees to read carefully at the end of the preface, he is calling — with his sometimes almost unbearable self-confidence — for an engagement with *his own* text: "learn to read me well", the understanding of which depends on the reader being a "perfect reader and philologist" (§ 5).[19] Moreover, Nietzsche's ideas about what "slow reading" and "lento" can and should achieve are not reading instructions specifically for *Morgenröthe*, but generally for his books.[20] He demands an attitude and reading competence that he learned as a student in Bonn and Leipzig when studying ancient authors and texts, and which — at least in his first years as a professor of Classics — he will have taught his pupils at the Basel Gymnasium and his students at the university in the Classics.[21] His ideal reader should be a philologist who, in the tradition of Friedrich Ritschl, whose model student he was in Leipzig, thoroughly practices the 'statarian', cyclical (re-)reading of all his writings.[22] In

67f.: When Nietzsche speaks of "slow" progress, he does not mean the time it took him to write *Morgenröthe*, which took only 18 months; he then urged the publisher to publish it quickly.

18 *KSA* 3, 79 (§ 84): "Die Philologie des Christentums". On Nietzsche's confrontation with (Christian) morality and exegesis, see Schmidt 2015, 17–20 and 32–37; Bishop 2022, 253–258.

19 *KSA* 3, 17: "Meine geduldigen Freunde, dies Buch wünscht sich nur vollkommene Leser und Philologen: l e r n t mich gut lesen!"

20 See also *Ueber die Zukunft unserer Bildungsanstalten* (*KSA* l, 648f.): "Der Leser, von dem ich etwas erwarte, muß drei Eigenschaften haben: er muß ruhig sein und ohne Hast lesen, er muß nicht immer sich selbst und seine 'Bildung' dazwischen bringen … Wenn der Leser dagegen, heftig erregt, sofort zur That emporspringt, wenn er vom Augenblick die Früchte pflücken will, die sich ganze Geschlechter kaum erkämpfen möchten, so müssen wir fürchten, daß er den Autor nicht verstanden hat." Cf. *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches. Ein Buch für freie Geister*, *KSA* 2,1, 436 (§ 137): "Die schlechtesten Leser sind die, welche wie plündernde Soldaten verfahren: Sie nehmen sich Einiges, was sie brauchen können, heraus, beschmutzen und verwirren das Uebrige und lästern auf das Ganze." See Benne 2005, 153 and 203.

21 On Nietzsche's career as a student and professor of classical (Greek *and* Latin) philology, see Benne 2005, 20–26 and 46–68; Bishop 2022, 241–244.

22 Ritschl calls reading the most important activity of the philologist; see Benne 2005, 46–48; Bishop 2022, 239–243. Cf. Benne 2005, 157: "Sein idealer Leser soll ein guter Philologe sein, der

Nietzsche's words from *Ecce Homo*, his ideal is "a reader such as I deserve, one who reads me as the good old philologists read their Horace".[23]

With his image of the perfect reader, Nietzsche does not have the parochial, pernickety scholar in mind nor the concentration on words, the *Wortphilologie*, which he himself later satirically pilloried as a philology of "micrologists".[24] He constantly criticized the pedantry of the historical-critical method of classical philology and felt a growing unease about his discipline.[25] Nevertheless, in a certain sense he always remained a disciple of Ritschl's.[26] In his Basel lectures published as *Encyclopaedie der klass. Philologie* (1870/71), he muses on "the methods of reading", that we have to "read the same texts over and over again", and on "the method of understanding and assessing something that has been handed down to us", namely that one must "learn to read again".[27] He considers the "task of philology as a means of transfiguring one's existence and that of the rising generation".[28]

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unermüdlich die philologische, d.h. die statarische, zyklische Lektüre aller seiner Schriften praktiziert." On Ritschl's distinction between statarian and cursory reading, see ibid. 63f.

23 *Ecce Homo* (1888/9), ch. 5 (*KSA* 6, 305): "… ein Leser, wie ich ihn verdiene, der mich liest, wie gute alte Philologen ihren Horaz lasen." The chapter opens with the statement that his writings had not yet been understood by anyone, if anyone had noticed them at all. See Benne 2005, 157f.

24 See the quote from "Autobiographisches aus den Jahren 1868/69" at Güthenke 2022, 189 with n. 89: "narrow-hearted, frog-blooded micrologists" ("engherzige, froschblütige Mikrologen").

25 See Bishop 2022, 242–248. In a letter to Erwin Rohde in November 1868 (*KSB* 2, 344), he calls his professional colleagues "the swarming breed of philologists" and mocks "all the mole-like efforts, the full cheek-pouches and the blind eyes, the joy over the captured worm" ("das wimmelnde Philologengezücht … das ganze Maulwurfstreiben, die vollen Backentaschen und die blinden Augen, die Freude ob des erbeuteten Wurms"). The translation is from Bishop 2022, 243.

26 On Ritschl's lasting influence on Nietzsche, see also Benne 2005, *passim*, esp. 22: "Der Irrtum, dem die Forschung bis heute unterliegt, besteht darin, der historisch-kritischen Kärrnerarbeit überhaupt jede Bedeutung für Nietzsche abzusprechen. Kaum jemand scheint erkannt zu haben, dass sich seine philologiekritischen Äußerungen in erster Linie gegen die Existenzform des Philologen, gegen den Berufsstand richten und nicht gegen die Wissenschaft als solche." Cf. Güthenke 2022, 126 who juxtaposes the "overspecialized, dust-blind 'micrologist' satirized by Nietzsche and the antlike but somehow still spiritually beneficial condition of Ritschl's scholar."

27 *Encyclopaedie der klass. Philologie*, in: *KGW* 2,3, 373: "Die Methode, etwas Überliefertes zu verstehen und zu beurtheilen. … Da die Überlieferung gewöhnlich die Schrift ist, so müssen wir wieder lesen lernen. Wir müssen wieder lesen lernen: was wir, bei der Übermacht des Gedruckten, verlernt haben"; ibid. 404: "Über die Methode zu lesen. … Oft Lesen ders. Schrift ist viel wichtiger als zerstreuende Vielleserei." See Benne 2005, 152–154, with reference to Ritschl (cf. above n. 22) and Theodor Birt and August Boeckh who made similar demands.

28 *Encyclopaedie*, ibid. 437 (in the last paragraph): "In diesem Sinne wünsche ich Ihnen die Aufgabe der Philologie gezeigt zu haben: als ein Mittel, sich und der heranwachsenden Jugend das Dasein zu verklären". The English translation is from Bishop 2022, 237.

Even when Nietzsche's own scholarly abilities were questioned by the philological guild after the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872)[29] and after he had withdrawn from academics, he continued to consistently promote the philological practice of slow reading, not only in the preface to *Daybreak*: the appeal to careful, accurate, reflective and critical reading runs through almost all of Nietzsche's works.[30]

4 Reflections on slow reading in classical philology — and on (Tacitean) Latin

Following on from Nietzsche's words, I would like to briefly explain how the concept of slow reading defined at the beginning can be substantiated as a method as well as a specific feature of reading in classical studies. Let us return to the question of the significance of slow reading in literary studies, and in classical philology in particular, and how it can be justified methodologically — and perhaps also theoretically. I cannot present results based on the findings of science of reading, cognitive psychology, neurosciences, philosophy of language or empirical research.[31] However, I think that a concept of slow reading can be outlined, based on arguments from literary and linguistic studies and not least on experience with classical authors and texts.

As textual and literary scholars, we are interested in the language and the literary procedures and strategies with which an object is represented in the text. Our core competence focuses not only on the question of 'what', but also particularly on 'how', i.e. the form of description and modelling of what is said in the text. Most of ancient Greek and Latin literature is rhetorically shaped, in the sense that it looks beyond mere communication of thought and aims to produce a calculated rhetorical

29 Not least by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff who accused Nietzsche of unclean scientific work in his pamphlet *Zukunftsphilologie!*. On the dispute between Nietzsche and Wilamowitz, see Güthenke 2022, 188–193; Benne 2005, 155 and 275f.; Bishop 2022, 244f. See also the contribution by Bernhard Zimmermann in this volume.

30 See the comprehensive reflections on this topic by Benne 2005, 151–237.

31 See the collection of essays in Rautenberg/Schneider 2015; Seidenberg 2013. Rautenberg/Schneider 2015, 97 speak of "reading mode" (*Leseweise*), i.e. "the techniques by which readers … acquire all habitual forms of enactment of the vocal or non-vocal representation of texts and their historical manifestations … Furthermore, the parameters of intensity and speed of reading, which partly correlate with reading aloud or quietly, slow or fleeting reading, reading once or repeatedly, and selective reading are included" (my translation).

effect upon the reader. Its aesthetic structure aims at a formulation appropriate to the subject matter and, like modern rhetoric, at the persuasive presentation of facts and arguments. Its language is artfully structured by wording, word order, figures of style, syntax, and in poetry it is also 'bound' by meter.

Let us consider some phenomena of Latin literary language for further illustration. The Latin syntax often does not reveal clear discourse relations between the information given in detail; rather, the texts try to avoid or even prevent certainty in the interpretation. The Latin language offers special possibilities for the suggestive or insinuating conveyance of information through syntactic abbreviations, for instance the asyndeton or mere juxtaposition.[32] Participial clauses and *ablativus absolutus* constructions, can, as is well known, contain information whose connection with the content of the overall statement does not necessarily have to be made clear by an adverbial clause: it can be understood as temporal, causal, modal, concessive or conditional. We have to fill in these semantic gaps, i.e. analyze the word order and sentence structure in detail, before we understand or at least can try to interpret the statement.[33] The ancient Latin 'native speaker' obviously did not need this explicitness.[34] As non-native speakers, we must therefore first move "from syntax to information structure",[35] and this can only be done by slow reading.

I take Tacitus as an example, as a prominent representative of the so-called *Kunstprosa*.[36] The historian Hayden White argues that there is also a "content of the form", and so the question arises as to how a piece of information is charged with meaning by being reproduced at a certain point in the text or paired with certain other statements, without defining the exact discourse relations.[37] With reference to Tacitus' historiographical writing, the question arises as to how the presentation of historical 'facts' can acquire a certain meaning by means of lexical or syntactical

32 See the recent study by (the late) Adams 2021.

33 On the "semantics of information structure", see Devine/Stephens 2019; on "placement constraints and liberties in Latin constituent order", see Spevak 2010, esp. 13–26; on word order as a means to structure meaning and information, see Devine/Stephens 2006; Danckaert 2012, 10–14; and the exhaustive chapter in Pinkster 2021, 948–1137.

34 On the supplementary work that an ancient reader must perform in order to decode the "elliptical sentence-valued construction" of an abl. abs. on the basis of his (prior) knowledge of the respective context of utterance, see Glei/Philipps 2018 (p. 188: "elliptische satzwertige Konstruktion").

35 This is the subtitle of the monograph by Devine/Stephens 2019.

36 On the difference between artistic or belletristic prose (*Kunstprosa*) and scientific or technical language, see Clackson/Horrocks 2011, 215–222. For the analysis of a poetic text, see Worstbrock 1963, 122–167, on Virgil's *Aeneid*.

37 White 1987/^{2}1990. On the topic of discourse relations, see Asher/Lascarides 2003, especially xvi–xvii and 28f. On Tacitus see Fuhrer 2021 and 2022.

features used in the text to connect parts of the discourse, i.e. by the relations that logically connect two or more discourse segments.

Tacitus' style is predominantly paratactic, a phenomenon referred to as *brevitas*, 'pointed style' or 'epigrammatic style'.[38] The paratactic style allows an open offer of a plurality of information. On the other hand, it is precisely the asyndetic juxtaposition of words that makes it possible to connote the content in a certain way. Through the arrangement, structuring or the omission of information, an interpretation can be insinuated, suggested or provoked. The reader is thus prompted, allowed or required to make causal or antithetical connections that are not made explicit in the text or to fill gaps left open by the sentence structure.[39]

It should therefore be clear that rapid reading is counterproductive to any convincing and meaningful interpretation of a Tacitean text. Slow reading prevents or at least limits misunderstandings and hasty conclusions and always opens up new insights into the complexity and deliberate openness that the Tacitean text quite obviously aims to establish.

5 Conclusions – Nietzsche's *lento*

I would like to return to Nietzsche, to a metaphor that he uses to describe the analytical process of reading. I quote once again from the "preface" to *Morgenröthe* (§ 5):

> For philology is that venerable art which demands of its votaries one thing above all: to go aside, to take time, to become still, to become slow — it is a goldsmith's art and connoisseurship of the word which has nothing but delicate, cautious work to do and achieves nothing if it does not achieve it *lento*.
>
> Philologie nämlich ist jene ehrwürdige Kunst, welche von ihrem Verehrer vor Allem Eins heischt, bei Seite gehn, sich Zeit lassen, still werden, langsam werden —, als eine Goldschmiedekunst und -kennerschaft des W o r t e s, die lauter feine vorsichtige Arbeit abzuthun hat und Nichts erreicht, wenn sie es nicht lento erreicht.[40]

Nietzsche considers philology an "art which demands … to go aside, to take time, to become still, to become slow"; he calls it "a goldsmith's art", a "connoisseurship of the word" to do "delicate, cautious work" by doing it "*lento*". What he calls the "art"

38 For references see Fuhrer 2021, 317f.

39 On juxtaposition in Tacitus, see Pelling 1993/2012, 64/287; on insinuation see Dench 2009, 394–399, on the suggestive style, see Develin 1983; on Tacitus' appendix style, see Oakley 2009, 205.

40 *KSA* 3, 17. The translations are from Hollingdale 1997/[10]2007, 5.

of the "goldsmith" describes the active and constructive process in which a text is repeatedly read anew and differently, evaluated, provided with further arguments for understanding and so made readable for others.[41] For Nietzsche, reading itself was a metaphor for keeping a text's meaning fluid.[42]

He concludes the preface as follows (§ 5):

> — this art does not so easily get anything done, it teaches to read well, that is to say, to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and after, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers.
>
> — sie selbst wird nicht so leicht irgend womit fertig, sie lehrt gut lesen, das heisst langsam, tief, rück- und vorsichtig, mit Hintergedanken, mit offen gelassenen Thüren, mit zarten Fingern und Augen lesen.[43]

The image of the mental "doors" ajar ("doors left open") refers to the idea of reading as movement and as an exploratory walk through open doors into and out of the mental spaces opened up by reading. The metaphor of openness relates to the idea from the beginning of the preface that a text is like a deep mine that can be opened up by the philologist, "a 'subterranean man' … who tunnels and mines and undermines" (§ 1).

Finally, I would like to cite another sentence by Nietzsche that precedes the one quoted above:

> But for precisely this reason it [i.e. the "goldsmith's art"] is more necessary than ever today, by precisely this means does it entice and enchant us the most, in the midst of an age of 'work', that is to say, of hurry, of indecent and perspiring haste, which wants to 'get everything done' at once, including every old or new book.
>
> Gerade damit aber ist sie heute nöthiger als je, gerade dadurch zieht sie und bezaubert sie uns am stärksten, mitten in einem Zeitalter der 'Arbeit', will sagen: der Hast, der unanständigen und schwitzenden Eilfertigkeit, das mit Allem gleich 'fertig werden' will, auch mit jedem alten und neuen Buche.[44]

41 See Benne 2005, 157f.; cf. ibid. 105: "Der Text, dessen Eigenschaften und Bedeutungsumfang noch näher zu bestimmen ist, stellt keinen Fakt, sondern ein Artefakt dar, zu dessen Herstellung viel Geduld und Könnerschaft nötig sind" (cf. ibid. 257 on the difference to the deconstructivist readings).

42 See Benne 2005, 203 and 211: "Flüssighaltung des Sinns" as against "Sinnerschließung" which is not Nietzsche's aim.

43 *KSA* 3, 17.

44 Ibid.

This sounds like an advertising slogan for classical philology and its tradition of inculcating skills that are "more necessary than ever today", namely, as Nietzsche says in the concluding sentence quoted above, in reading texts "slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and after, with reservations".

My plea for slow reading is not a critique of rapid thought and action — the skills currently most in demand — but a contrastive insistence on the values that classical philology pursues and promotes in universities and schools: the ability to read simple and complex texts slowly and thoroughly, accurately and critically, to dissect sentences grammatically, to develop syntactical awareness; the ability to recognize constructions of meaning that may be straightforward or multi-layered, to understand hidden allusions and to identify signs of manipulation.

I conclude with what I believe is a strong thesis: Greek and Latin studies are neither conceivable in research and teaching without the practice of slow reading, nor can they be justified in their position at school and university unless they develop the capacity to preserve, practice and develop the cultural techniques of critical or even subversive reading, not only — and perhaps not necessarily — of Nietzsche's texts, but of more famous, more difficult and more subtle texts, such as the Greek and Latin classical writings that are more relevant — at least to our European tradition.

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