

## Philology and Music in the Work of Pascal Quignard

John T. Hamilton  
*Harvard University*

Chaque livre est un morceau de silence et  
pourtant chaque livre a une intonation  
propre.

Every book is a scrap of silence and yet  
every book has its own intonation.  
Pascal Quignard

The writings of Pascal Quignard (b. 1948, Verneuil-sur-Avre) tend to return insistently toward two distinct areas, toward two well-defined and recognizable zones: music and classical philology. Although these two domains by no means exhaustively account for the rich variety and stunning complexity of Quignard's work, it is fair to say that an intense concern for music and a scientific (or quasi-scientific) attention to the texts of classical antiquity together comprise a thematic nexus that, despite its dual orientation, may help to unify an oeuvre that is, at least in terms of genre, rather heterogeneous, covering everything from essay to novel, fable to treatise. One might with justification go so far as to speak of a compulsion, either decreed by an imagined fate or decided by the accidents of birth. Accordingly, to account for this bifocal trajectory, this twinned passion, the writer has repeatedly alluded to his upbringing in a family that boasted both philologists and musicians. In a brief autobiographical note, he claims: "My parents taught classical languages and literature ... My father belonged to a family of organists who worked for three centuries in Bavaria, Wurttemberg, Alsace, Anjou, Versailles and the United States" (Marchietti 191).<sup>1</sup>

Apparently, at least in the author's own self-representation, music and philology are the writer's patrimony, a double heritage, forming a creative identity that oscillates between the attractions of word and sound, tonalities and lexica, between a fascination with the silence of the page and an enthrallment to the sonorities of performance. The centrality of music and Greco-Latin literature, with a decided emphasis on Roman antiquity, is evident even in the most cursory look at Quignard's publications. It constitutes a nearly obsessive focus for the writer and, for the reader, a provocative collocation that beckons examination.

To be sure, music and philology are treated in ways that are more emotional than intellectual, less academic than personal. Nonetheless, Quignard does not relate to music or to institutional philology entirely as an outsider. In addition to his proficiency on the cello, piano and organ, he has worked since 1988 as advisor for the Centre de Musique Baroque and, from 1992 to 1994, as chairman of the Festival d'Opéra Baroque at Versailles, which he founded with François Mitterrand. As for philology, 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*.

In 1976, with the appearance of *Le Lecteur* 'The Reader,' a work clearly stemming from his position as reader for Gallimard, he embarked on a writing career devoted to more original and creative reflections, including a number of novels and the digressive essays collected in two volumes of *Petits Traités* 'Short Treatises,' first published in 1984. His engagement with philological matters was transposed into a piece of historical fiction, *Les Tablettes de buis d'Apronemia Avitia* 'The boxwood tablets of Apronemia Avitia' (1984), which purports to be based on notes inscribed by a woman of late Roman nobility on the eve of Christianity's rise and the Empire's decline. In *Albucius* (1990), Quignard turned to 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* 'Disputes' 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* 'friend' and *satura* 'satire, a dish of various ingredients'—or on Albucius's concept of the "fifth season," which altogether result again in a kind of novelistic essay or an essayistic novel. It is also at this time that musical themes and topics began to seep into his work with greater explicitness. Laconic aphorisms on the phenomenology of audition might accompany translations from Latin oratory; discussions on the significance of rhetoric could readily segue into confessions of his passion for seventeenth-century music. Extended reflections on musical experience were finally gathered in two collections of treatises, *La Leçon de musique* 'The music lesson,' (1987) and *La Haine de la musique* 'Loathing music,' (1996), whose theoretical premises underlie some of the novels of the same period, for example *Le Salon de Wurtemberg* 'The Salon in Württemberg' (1986) and *Tous les matins du monde* 'All the World's Mornings' (1991). Throughout, as we shall see, meditations on musical composition, performance, and listening do not simply run parallel to or commingle with philological issues. On the contrary, the latter fundamentally motivate such reflections, corroborating or even instigating them.

The question, then, that Quignard's oeuvre persistently poses is whether it is possible to discover something essentially philological in the art of music and, conversely, something musical in philology. A valid response cannot neglect a definition of terms. On the one hand, is there justification for calling what Quignard does "philology"? Does his work participate in any meaningful or rigorous way with this established academic discipline? Does it stand to make an original contribution to scholarship? Or does it simply exploit scientific material for its own creative purposes? On the other hand, is this work "musical" in any proper sense? That is to say, does his prose strive to translate essentially musical elements or effects—for example, rhythm, harmony, or timbre—into discursive form? Or is this musicality to be understood metaphorically, more or less derived from the European Romantic tradition, where music was

verbally represented as a language of the passions, an expression of the emotions, a trope of immediacy, an authentic communication of singular feeling, or even a mystical revelation of the ineffable? In addressing these questions, we move directly to the heart of Quignard's aesthetic and theoretical concerns.

The two strands of music and philology, which may on the surface appear to be antithetical (an art of tones, on the one hand, and a science of words on the other), are consistently negotiated by Quignard, who reveals them as sharing common properties. To begin, his philological ruminations, the aphoristic manner in which meaning is produced, unfold by means of phrasing, reprises and refrains that readily suggest the art of musical composition. Many scholars have commented on this aspect of Quignard's work. Claude Coste, for example, refers to "the obsessive presence of music" in the essays, describing the writer's thematic consistency as a "continuous bass" heard beneath the author's multifarious digressions (126); Jean-Louis Pautrot points to the "repetitions, echoes, and analogies" that for him, too, directly "evoke music" ("Dix Questions" 89). Gilles Dupuis likens Quignard's technique specifically to the employment of leitmotifs that constitute "the harmonic secrets of [his] style, the small notes that sound out in the void" (121-22). Others cite the writer's fondness for etymology, his tendency to track the career of words, to investigate what lies beneath the lexicon, to alert us to latent undertones.

To locate the basis of these kinds of textual musicality, I would stress above all Quignard's role as a reader. For Quignard, reading is practically indistinguishable from writing. As he admits in an interview with Chantal Lapeyre-Desmason, writing and reading are but modalities of a single act—"J'écris en lisant" 'I write while reading' (2001a: 76). Similarly, in response to Pautrot, Quignard explains: "C'est la lecture qui est pour moi vitale ... La lecture (l'étrange passivité, le *regressus*, la mise au silence) plutôt que l'activité conquérante ou volontaire d'écrire" 'It is reading that is vital to me ... Reading (that strange passivity, that *regressus*, that casting into silence) rather than the conquering or deliberate activity of writing' (Pautrot "Dix questions" 87). In other words, the act of creating or formulating a text has its explicit origin in a passive or receptive mode: the *auctor* is always a *lector*. I regard the function of reading as the source of

the text's musical qualities because Quignard reads and writes by *listening*, albeit in a particularly idiosyncratic fashion—"Celui qui écrit est ce mystère: un locuteur qui écoute" "The one who writes is this mystery: a speaker who listens" (HM 132). At stake is a certain resonance, or more precisely, a *re-sounding*, which overwhelms the strict separation of a reading subject and a read object. Reminiscent of the German term *Stimmung* 'mood; ambient feeling,' this resonance names an *Übereinstimmung* 'accord' between subjective interiority and objective exteriority.<sup>2</sup> In listening, Quignard approaches a text by having the text approach him. It would seem that, like the sound emitted from the body of a violin, writing could detach from its source on the printed page and enter the ear from the outside, lodging itself within the internal space of the reader's consciousness. This kind of phenomenological process, however, is never quite so clear, for unlike music, the tones that emerge from the text explicitly come across as imagined sonority or even silence. As we shall see, Quignard is, on this point, richly provocative: writing being the silent re-sounding of what has been silently read. In one sense we are dealing with a notion of "interpretation" that is close to its musical, performative connotation, a notion that may remind us of Theodor W. Adorno's point: "To interpret language means to understand language; to interpret music means to make music" (115). Yet, in Quignard's case, this idea would have to be qualified: to interpret language as music is to make silent music. How, then, does this silent music sound?

The first treatise of *La Haine de la musique*, entitled "Les larmes de saint Pierre" 'The tears of Saint Peter,' blatantly uses philology to support claims about music's essence and musical experience to generate an examination of key Latin terms. Before turning to these modes of operation, it is best to review the basic claims of the essay. The stated intention is to interrogate the links between music and what he refers to as "sonorous suffering" (HM 16). In a way highly reminiscent of Freudian and Lacanian theories of fetishism, Quignard regards "cantatas, sonatas, and poems" as surrogates for loss, as compensations that strive to overcome a castration anxiety, as modes of protection from an unspeakable, unrepresentable fear. Together these acts of song, sound, and word provide a refuge from pain, a "partition" or "cloison" that is frighteningly fragile, forever

vulnerable to the sounds that hum beneath the forms, forever liable to be *déchirée*, ‘torn’ by the noise that is anterior to sense. Since music is first and foremost sonorous, it is distinguished from the other arts in its capacity to rend the heart—“Seule la musique est déchirante” ‘Music alone is heart-rending’ (HM 27).

Quignard borrows liberally from psychoanalysis when he defines these resonant *cloisons*—cantatas, sonatas, and poems—as productions that cover over an anterior sonority: “Nous entourons de linges une nudité sonore, extrêmement blessée, infantile, qui reste sans expression au fond de nous” ‘We wrap in cloth an extremely wounded, infantile, sonorous nudity that remains without expression at our very core’ (HM 13). As in Lacan, the entrance into the symbolic is purchased with an irretrievable loss of plenitude; the *linges*, ‘linen’ constitutes a closed system of signification that closes the subject off (218). It would be a mistake, however, to label Quignard exclusively as a Lacanian. In his earlier *Leçon de musique*, he implicitly disdained psychoanalytic theory when he referred to the historical practice of castrating singers, which he regarded neither as a loss nor as a source of anxiety, but rather as a means of maintaining one’s childhood voice, of preventing the pubescent break—*la mue*—that makes the voice more somber, sexualizes it, and thereby severs the male singer’s connection to the past. Castration, in other words, negates the negation: “Elle permet de renverser l’échelle naturelle des voix. Elle libère la voix humaine et de la dépendance du sexe et de la dépendance de l’âge” ‘It allows one to subvert the natural progression of voices. It liberates the human voice both from its dependence on the sexual organ and from its dependence on age’ (*La Leçon de musique* 31).

In *La Haine de la musique*, the optimistic tones of liberation and independence are weakened significantly. The recognition of music’s relation to something terrible leads to a crucial reassessment—indeed, to a “hatred for music.” To elaborate his position, Quignard resorts to a series of words, Latin *Machtwörter* that will inspire and guide his discourse. *Pavor*, for example: early in “Les larmes de saint Pierre,” Quignard announces this Roman expression of dread, again in language that recalls, in an admittedly non-conventional way, the Freudian discourse about the fetish: “*Mousikè* et *pavor*. Ces mots me paraissent indéfectiblement liés—quelque

allogènes et anachroniques qu'ils soient entre eux. Comme le sexe et le linge qui le revêt" *Mousikè* and *pavor*. These words appear to me indestructibly linked—however foreign and anachronistic they may be to each other. Like the loins and the cloth that covers them' (HM 16). Throughout the text, *mousikè*—the Greek term for the "art of the Muses," which includes the arts of word, pitch and movement (*logos*, *harmonia*, and *rhythmos*)—is brought into relation with the Latin word *pavor*, 'quaking fear, dread.' Here, *pavor* re-emerges, sometimes explicitly—for example in discussions about the audible hallucinations of the *pavor nocturnus* 'night terror' and the analogous *pavor diurnis* 'day terror' (HM 28-29)—or implicitly, as in *Pavie* 'Pavia,' the modern name for the Roman municipality of Ticinum where Boethius, locked away in a tower, betook himself to *gémissement* 'whimpering' as he awaited his death sentence (HM 17-18). Quignard cites the terms *expavescentia* and *expavantatio*, forms derived from the verb *expavesco* 'being terrified, fearing greatly' and cognate with the French word for fright *épouvante*, which he defines as "le son des hommes qui ne cessent de piétiner la terre, fuyant, terrifiés, le proximité au lieu" 'the sound of mankind that does not cease to trample down the earth, fleeing, terrified, the proximity to the place' (HM 31); and later as "un expavanté au sein de l'expérience sonore du langage" 'an *expavanté* at the heart of the sonorous experience of language' (HM 89). Eventually, he reflects on the uneven *pavé* 'cobblestone pavement' that makes men stumble, men like Saint Peter, the eponymous hero of the treatise, whose rock-solid loyalty is shaken by the cock's crow, a sound that reminds him of his past identity as Simon (from the Hebrew verb of "hearing"). Petrified, this auditor breaks down in tears.

Thus, Quignard proceeds to weave together a text on music and suffering by following specific etymological paths: *tremor* and *tremolo*, *terror* and the *épouvantail* 'scarecrow.' Yet, his method is not restricted to stirring up the audible residue that rests at the bottom of this lexicon of fear. Often his demonstrations are far more subtle and complex, for example his treatment of the notion of *persuasion*, which is exemplary in this regard. The density of the passage warrants close analysis. The articulate language of persuasion or "*suasio*" is first distinguished from natural-animal sounds ("buzzing," "humming," and "barking"). The tonic is established by placing the

etymon “*suavitas*,” ‘sweetness’ in isolation at the head of the section. What follows is a series in threefold anaphora, which describes the person who possesses *suavitas*: “Qui ne fâche pas ... Qui caresse ... Qui n’offense pas” ‘Whoever does not annoy ... Whoever caresses ... Whoever does not give offense’ (HM 77). Quignard does not rest with this characterization of the one who is “*suavis*” ‘sweet.’ Instead, he proceeds with a restatement of the theme, which is now given as “*Suasio*. La persuasion.” Once again, it is etymology that motivates this transition from “sweetness” to “persuasion.”

For an elaboration of what precisely persuasion entails, Quignard turns to authoritative citation. We are invited to read the opening lines of what is presented as “the quite extraordinary overture” of the second book of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*, which is said to *répond* ‘respond’ to the preceding threefold definition of *suavitas* (HM 78). Quignard supplies a prose paraphrase of the following verses, without translating the key terms (marked in boldface in the Latin). For the sake of analysis, I give the original verses, with my literal English translation below, followed by Quignard’s version.

**Suave**, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis,  
 e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem ;  
 non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas,  
 sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere **suave** est.  
**suave** etiam belli certamina magna tueri  
 per campos instructa tua sine parte pericli.  
 sed nihil dulcius est, bene quam munita tenere  
 edita doctrina sapientum templa serena. (Bailey II.1-8)

[It is] *suave*, when on the great sea the water is stirred by the winds,  
 to watch from the shore another man’s struggle;  
 not because someone else being shaken is a delightful pleasure,  
 but rather because perceiving from what evils you are spared is *suave*.

It is also *suave* to behold great battles of war  
 arrayed over the fields without your part in the peril.  
 But nothing is sweeter than to occupy  
 high sanctuaries serene, well fortified by the teachings of the

wise.

Il est *suave*, quand la mer immense est soulevée par les vents, d'observer du rivage la détresse d'autrui. Non qu'on éprouve une agréable *voluptas* à voir souffrir le congénère : simplement il est *suave* de contempler les maux qui nous sont épargnés. Il est *suave* encore d'assister sans risque aux grands combats de la guerre, de contempler de haut les batailles rangées dans les plaines. Mais de tout ce qui est suave, le plus doux (*dulcius*) est d'habiter les acro- poles fortifiées par la doctrine des sages ... (HM 78)

Quignard's translation is fairly loyal to the Latin, allowing only minor infractions perfectly legitimized by the long established principle, in France, of "beautiful infidelity." What is immediately striking, of course, is the choice, as usual, to leave the key foreign words untranslated and italicized, and thereby non-appropriated. The words *suave* and *voluptas* that gleam out from the page carry meaning precisely by remaining outside the French narration, creating, as Bénédicte Gorrillot has noted, a linguistic multiplicity within the discourse, a divisive struggle within the text (203).

As for interpreting the passage, Quignard departs significantly from standard philological practice. He reductively dismisses centuries of commentators who, in his view, have read these verses "de la façon la plus sèche, la plus moralisante" 'in the driest, most moralizing fashion' (HM 78). Traditionally, this text furnishes one of the most exemplary depictions of *ataraxia*, an ideal condition that places the philosopher on secure and peaceful ground, from whose vantage point he may observe the anguish of the world. The desiccated morality, to which Quignard refers, no doubt has to do with the specific kind of pleasure or *hêdonê* generally associated with the Epicurean school. According to most classical scholars, what is at stake in Lucretius's proem is the "catastematic" pleasure of being free from pain and anxiety, as opposed to the so-called "kinetic" pleasures of the body and imagination (Bailey 2: 796). In the lines that follow, not cited by Quignard, this state of tranquility, this liberation from physical and mental excitation, is further developed in line with the notion of observation that was already posited in the second line (*spectare*): "(But nothing is sweeter than to occupy high

sanctuaries serene, well fortified by the teachings of the wise), from where you can *look down* on others and *see* them wandering here and there, going astray as they seek a way of life” (“*despicere* unde queas alios passimque *videre* / errare atque viam palantis quaerere vitae,” 9–10; my emphasis). Quignard, however, is not interested in pursuing this track; he neglects the metaphors of vision, which he judges “insufficient” (79). Rather than discuss the visual aspects of this philosophical stance, he turns instead to the audible. To this end, he leaps directly to the poem’s seventeenth line (musically referred to as “le finale”), which mentions *naturam latrare*, ‘nature’s barking.’ The Latin text again stresses the act of vision and presents this barking as an urgent appeal from nature herself—“*nonne videre / nil aliud sibi naturam latrare, nisi utqui / corpore seiunctus dolor absit*” ‘do you not *see* that nature barks for nothing other than this: that pain may be absent, sundered from the body,’ (16–18; my emphasis). Quignard, however, elides the *videre* altogether and instead concentrates exclusively on the *latrare*. We thereby return to the sphere of natural-animal sounds that directly preceded this section on *suavitas* and *suasio*. For Quignard, the phrase *naturam latrare* constitutes the “secret” of the Lucretius proem, not because it reinforces the general idea of distance but rather because it hints at the distinction between non- or pre-verbal communication on the one hand and verbalization on the other. He comments: “Nature barks (*latrare*), it does not ‘speak’ (*dicere*)” (79). This clue leads him to the conclusion that the term *suavis* has to do primarily with auditory experience: *suave* is not simply being removed from danger, it is not merely the condition of being out of harm’s way, more specifically and emphatically it is “being too far away to hear” (79).

This state of remaining out of earshot, furthermore, comes to define the realm of language, within which one no longer hears (“entend”) the dog’s bark or the “panting” that accompanies work (“le alanement du travail,” 80). Quignard exploits the ambiguity of the verb *entendre* (“to hear” or “to understand”), in order to differentiate the hearing of nature and the understanding afforded by language:

On n’entend même plus l’aboi lui-même des chiens ... mais le silence des atomes qui pleuvent dans l’espace nocturne et les lettres

muettes de l'alphabet ... L'*auctor* comme le *lector* n'entendent pas crier ou aboyer les *litterae*. La *litteratura* est le langage qui se sépare de l'aboi. Telle est la *suavitas*.

One no longer even the barking of dogs ... but rather the silence of the atoms that rain down through the vastness of night and the mute letters of the alphabet ... The *auctor*, like the *lector*, does not hear the letters crying or barking. *Litteratura* is language that detaches itself from barking. Such is its *suavitas*. (HM 80-81)

The *sweetness* of literature, then, consists in the silence of the page, in the silence of the reader and the writer, whose participation in language protects them from the natural and the bestial. Literature's persuasiveness, its capacity to *caress*, stems precisely from the "*suavitas* du silence ... la *suavitas* de l'*aboi perdu au loin dans l'horreur*" '*suavitas* of silence ... the *suavitas* of the *barking receding into the distance* in horror' (HM 81; emphasis in text). To listen to a text therefore means to attend to what the text has silenced, to hear what has disappeared into sweet literature.

Although far from the methods of and criteria of conventional philology, Quignard assumes a philological position, not without irony, by focusing on a series of single terms. One might say his method is antiphilological, insofar as it turns philology insidiously against itself. Yet, perhaps it would be better to regard Quignard's practice as philology for its own sake, a philology that is intransitive, refusing to play the traditional role that has always been assigned to it, namely as the handmaiden of an interpretation that would dissolve the material specificity of words for the sake of immaterial sense. To use the terms of the medieval *ars interpretandi*, we could say that Quignard obstinately remains on the level of the grammatical, of the *sensus literalis*, protecting his key words from being subsumed into any *sensus spiritualis*. As Bruno Blanckeman demonstrates, in reference to Quignard's *Rhétorique spéculative*, individual words lose their mediating function and instead serve to generate the writer's own analogical reflections (112). In the passage under investigation, the line that reaches from *suavis* to *suasio*, further motivated by underscoring *latrare*, allows Quignard the *lecteur*, the collector of silences, to step away from Lucretius's narration.

By entering upon etymological paths, Quignard's text abandons the discursive direction of the text being read.

What, however, does Lucretius tell his reader when meaningful communication has been abandoned? As we have seen, for Quignard, behind or beneath Lucretius's exposition is a "sonorous suffering" that evanesces into the *suavitas* of the philosopher's language. Quignard's attention to the barely discernible bark embedded in the Latin text strives to retrieve what has passed from the ear to the eye. In this way, the verses of *De rerum natura* have been deformed, so to speak, in order to serve Quignard's broader interests in nature and language, silence and loss. For the reader familiar with Quignard's work, these concerns should be recognized as highly personal. It comes as no surprise, then, that Quignard concludes his reading of the Lucretius passage by labeling it: "A childhood memory of Titus Lucretius Carus" (81). This final gesture, this resonant fermata, thus completes the reading by locating the entire passage within the sphere of autobiography. *Carus* is a significant word for Quignard. For example, it is the title of his novel of 1979, about a melancholic aphasiac, whose friends—including a grammarian, a philology professor, a musicologist, and an antique dealer—pay regular visits in the hope of convincing him to resume their chamber music group, which they feel would rouse him from his mental darkness. In the opening paragraph of the preface to the novel's second edition, Quignard alludes to Horace, who in his final days, considered himself free of all reproach because he had been "dear to his friends"—"carus amicis." He goes on to remind the reader that Carus is the surname of Lucretius, who, he proclaims, is the "secret patron saint of this book" (*Carus* 11). The plight of *Carus's* protagonist is relevant to the passage under discussion, insofar as his depression prevents him from rising to the *templa serena* erected by the doctrines of Lucretius Carus. In "Les Larmes de Saint Pierre," Quignard has already called attention to this powerful word by alluding to Horace, whose stylus is said to have been "tremblotant" 'trembling' as he inscribed the phrase "carus amicis" (*HM* 51).

The adjective *carus* ("dear," "precious," "beloved") at least implies a certain *suavitas*, an implication that Quignard underscores by defining the one who is *suavis* as he "who caresses" ("qui caresse"). Furthermore, this definition—the second of a series of

three—corresponds precisely (by paronomasia and false etymology) with the second of Lucretius's series: *quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suave est* 'because perceiving from what evils **you are spared** is *suave*.' Alfred Ernout and Antoine Meillet in their *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine* (1959–1960)—an avowed favorite of Quignard's—note that since antiquity, despite the difference in the vowel's quantity, authors conflated the adjective *cārus* with the verb *careo*, 'spare' (s.v. *cārus*, 1.102). This confusion opens the door to Quignard's analysis of the passage, which might thereby read: The caress of language, its dearness, allows you to perceive from what evils you are spared; herein lies its sweetness.

The associative patterning, thematic development, and etymological motifs do suggest a musical interpretation, which purports to attend to Lucretius's verses as one might attend a score, that is, as the basis for one's own performance. Thus, the Latin text informs Quignard's own writing. However, although the analogy between listening to music and reading a text with one's ear may be conventional enough—issues of "musicality," of rhythm and meter, intonation and accent, are certainly concerns well established in literary criticism—Quignard complicates the similarity by insisting, as mentioned, on notions of silence. To be sure, silence is the subjective pre-condition for hearing: "Dans lire, le plaisir qu'il y a à lire, c'est écouter jusqu'à la fin" 'In the act of reading, the pleasure derives from listening to the very end' (*Petits Traités* 2: 376). In a strictly empirical sense, only by quieting oneself can one properly become a reader. To stress this fact, Quignard often uses the verb *obéir* as a synonym for the reader's listening. This usage relies on another of the author's favorite *figurae etymologicae*, which emphasizes the auditory nature of obeisance (*obéir* < *oboedire*, i.e., *ob-audire*) and the suspension of subjective activity it implies (*HM* 108). As *obaudire*, the act of reading comes across as particularly passive. Yet, as his commentary on Lucretius shows, this listening demands not only a silence on the part of the reader, but also on the part of the text itself. Elsewhere he writes: "Obéir à la voix jusqu'à la mort. Écouter jusqu'à l'extrémité de son destin. Écouter la voix jusqu'au silence de la voix" 'To obey the voice unto death. To listen all the way to the destination of its fate. To listen to the voice until the voice goes silent' (*Petits Traités* 2: 376). With this concatenation of definitions,

Quignard moves the experience of reading beyond the intention of receiving information, beyond a verbal exchange upheld by presence, and instead directs it toward a loss, toward an absence that is always anterior, the “barking lost at a distance.” The same is true for writing. “Écrire, c’est entendre la voix perdue ... C’est rechercher le langage dans le langage perdu” ‘To write is to hear (*entendre*) the lost voice ... It is to search for language in the language lost’ (*Le Nom sur le bout de la langue* ‘The name at the tip of the tongue’ 94). Even more provocatively, in an interview with Catherine Armand, Quignard describes musical experience in these terms: “Il n’y a aucune différence entre écrire un livre silencieux et faire de la musique” ‘There is no difference whatsoever between writing a silent book and making music’ (cited in Pautrot 2004b: 55). The paradox is worthy of a Gorgias. How could one efface the difference between the resounding, non-verbal phenomenon of musical performance and the silent practice of writing? In what way can one relate musical composition to the act of creating the mute pages of a book?

In order to appreciate better Quignard’s association of philology and music, it is necessary to understand more precisely how he construes music’s own relation to silence. As Coste points out, the art of music for Quignard is essentially an “art of reparation,” an attempt to remedy or respond to a series of losses or changes that take place in human life (125-46). To designate these losses Quignard employs the term *mue* (< L. *mutare*), which may denote the sloughing of a snake’s outer skin, the molting of a bird’s feathers, the shedding of hair, or also the breaking of a pubescent male’s voice. The word further evokes “silent,” related to *muet*, used in the common phrase “une rage mue” ‘a silent rage’ which, incidentally, Littré defines as “une rage sans aboiement”—‘a rage or rabies without barking’ (Littré s.v. “MUET”). Derived from the Latin *mutus*, the word originally described animals who could only pronounce *mū*—an exemplary adjective for a wordlessness that is not soundless.

One of the most insightful and sensitive of Quignard’s commentators, Pautrot, has generously located the series of deprivations that inform Quignard’s reflections on music and language (2004b). The first loss in need of reparation, the first *mue*, is birth itself, which removes the infant from the auditory realm of fetal existence. Quignard repeatedly refers to embryology, which teaches that the ears

are the first organs to fully develop in the womb: “L’oreille humaine est préterrestre et elle est préatmosphérique. Avant le souffle même, avant le cri qui le déclenche, deux oreilles baignent durant deux à trois saisons, dans le sac de l’amnios, dans le résonateur d’un ventre” ‘The human ear is pre-terrestrial and pre-atmospheric. Even before breath, before the scream that triggers it, two ears bathe for two or three seasons in the amniotic sac, in the echo-chamber of the womb’ (*La Leçon de musique* 52). As Quignard elsewhere states, what takes place in this archaic space—a pre-natal site, before the beginning—is “the maternal sonata” (*HM* 109); and it is birth that marks the concert’s end. The second loss arrives with the acquisition of language, whereby the child takes on a system of signs that replaces immediacy with mediation. The entrance into discourse requires that pure pleasure in sound should be neglected, that the voice should proceed more in accordance with the dictates of meaning. As we have seen, the third loss is exclusively the lot of male adolescents, the *mue* or breaking of the voice which marks the end of childhood and the onslaught of puberty:

Un enfant perd sa voix: c’est une scène masculine. Cette voix – son identité, la matière même de l’expression de son identité, voix qui liait ce corps à la langue maternelle, voix qui liait cette bouche, ces oreilles, ces souvenirs sonores à la voix de la mère qui ne paraît connaître de mue—est à jamais cassée. Elle est à jamais perdue.

A child loses his voice, this is a male event. This voice—its identity, the very expression of his identity, the voice which linked this body to the mother tongue, the voice which linked this mouth, these ears, these sonorous memories to the mother’s voice, which does not appear to suffer a *mue*—this voice is forever broken. It is lost forever. (*La Leçon de musique* 33)

All three losses entail the eradication of an auditory experience—the uterine, the infantile, and the prepubescent. The link to the past is forever silenced, consigned to the stillness of the no longer or the never again. According to Quignard, the last bereavement, the male breaking of the voice, historically summoned two possible solutions: castration, which preserved the voice of the child; and

musical composition, which sought to regain realms long gone, including the uterine and the infantile—“Une œuvre de musique hélant une voix perdue, ou organisant une voix devenue impossible” ‘A work of music hailing a lost voice, or devising a voice that has become impossible’ (*La Leçon de musique* 74). This latter alternative applies to the art of literature, whose sweet silence may relate to the natural, non-verbal, pre-adult experience of our collective past. This is precisely why Quignard refers to the “overture” to Book II of *De rerum natura* as nothing less than Lucretius’s “souvenir d’enfance.”

As Pautrot (1997) demonstrates, Quignard’s notion of the lost voice is highly indebted to twentieth-century French theory, from Phenomenology to Structuralism and Psychoanalysis. Husserl’s fundamental distinction between “expression” (*Ausdruck*) and “indication” (*Anzeichen*) blends into Saussure’s division of the sign into the signifier, insofar as both conceptualizations clarify the noetic process by which the material medium of meaning (the voice) evaporates into the immaterial meaning it communicates. Here, linguistic signification works as a mechanism of dematerialization or devocalization, which Quignard invariably interprets as a sacrifice. The motivated uniqueness of the vocal instant is incorporated into a discursive system of arbitrary signs; its evanescence is gathered into a verbal chain or sublimated into a lasting concept. It can be said to contribute to the production of meaning only insofar as it passes away. Along these lines, for Quignard, verbal communication is but a silencing machine: “L’écoute linguistique est un silence où se détruit la parole, laquelle se consume sous forme de pensée” ‘Linguistic listening is a silence wherein the word is destroyed, wherein it is consumed in the form of thought’ (*HM* 127).

What one listens for—be it in literature or in music—is the loss itself, the irretrievable (unheard) origin of what is heard. The nostalgia that associates music with philology is grounded in the radical anteriority of what Quignard designates as the “Premier Royaume” ‘The First Realm,’ that is, the period before birth, the origin before the beginning. In an interview with Nadine Sautel in *Magazine littéraire*, Quignard is especially explicit:

Je pense que le musicien qui se récite à l’intérieur le morceau qu’il va interpréter est très proche du ‘Premier Royaume’ du fœtus (le

‘Dernier Royaume’ étant celui qui suit), qui n’est que pure audition. Lorsqu’on récapitule sensoriellement tout ce qui peut être ressenti, que ce soit en musique ou en littérature, c’est une sorte de régurgitation silencieuse, extatique.

I think that the musician who inwardly rehearses the piece he is about to perform is very close to the “First Realm” of the fetus (the “Last Realm” being the one which follows). This is a realm of sheer listening. When one does the sensorial summing-up of everything one can possibly feel, be it in music or in literature, it is a kind of silent, ecstatic regurgitation. (Sautel 100)

That is to say, Quignard’s philology comprises a mode of reading (and writing) that listens for the silence of language, for the voice that disappears into the *logos*. For this reason, it is eminently musical, at least in his idiosyncratic understanding of the art.<sup>3</sup> For Quignard’s philological practice a silence is required on the part of the reader, a need to dispel the loudness of oral communication: “Le livre est un morceau de silence dans les mains du lecteur. Celui qui écrit se tait. Celui qui lit ne rompt pas le silence” “The book is a scrap of silence in the hands of the reader. The one who writes is silent. The one who reads does not break the silence’ (*Petits Traités* 1: 87). If *logos* is the site of the “voice that has disappeared,” then Quignard—*le lecteur*—is the *col-lector* who gathers these silences. Moreover, in gathering them, he forges a new link, “a silent book” that attends to what has been lost. “Cueillir, rassembler, lier se dit en grec *legein*. Le lien, tel est le *logos*, le langage” “To collect, to gather, to bind is called in Greek *legein*. The bond, such is *logos*, language’ (*Rhétorique speculative* 12). Philology and musical sensibility construct this *cloison*, which for Quignard must be a resonant membrane, capable of transmitting in the *logos* that which is anterior to it. But is a discourse that admits the pre- or non-verbal still a discourse? Is a *logos* that communicates the alogical still a *logos* in the proper sense?

“Les philologues ne sont jamais raisonnables”—‘Philologists are never reasonable’ (*Petits Traités* 2: 361). The force of Quignard’s statement is one of provocation, evident in the hyperbole. Are we being asked to believe that all philologists—regardless of epoch or culture, historical circumstances or ideological orientation, method

or theoretical premises—are *never* reasonable? How could we not dismiss Quignard’s pronouncement as reductive or glib, as a carelessly audacious remark? What are we to make of the barely concealed oxymoron, namely that philologists—“lovers of *logos*”—are incapable of reason, *ratio*, *logos*? Is such a proposition even worth considering? Is it not grounded more in a novelist’s fancy or irony than in a serious appraisal of a scientific tradition?

Quignard, however, as already mentioned does not relate to institutional philology entirely as an outsider. The remark on the irrationality of philologists is at least partially directed against himself. Hardly a slight against the profession, it constitutes one of the writer’s most pressing concerns. In addition to mentioning that his mother and father both worked as teachers in Latin and Greek, Quignard is also fond of conjuring the image of his maternal grandfather, Charles Bruneau, who co-authored the magisterial *Histoire de la langue française*, published in 1905. In an interview with Lapeyre-Desmaison, Quignard recollects the evenings spent with this formidable historical linguist:

Chez mon grand-père, pas un repas ne se déroulait qu’il ne se levât et qu’il n’allât fouiller dans le Bloch et Wartburg, dans le Godefroy, dans le Littré, dans le Chantaine, dans le Ernout-Meillet, afin de s’assurer de l’étymologie de tel ou tel mot qu’on venait d’employer ... Ma mère, qui était sa fille aînée, est faite exactement du même bois étrange, ardennais, précis jusqu’à l’obsession, têtu.

At my grandfather’s house, not a meal went by without him getting up to leaf through the Bloch and Wartburg, the Godefroy, the Littré, the Chantaine, the Ernout-Meillet, in order to verify the etymology of such or such a word that he just employed ... My mother, his eldest daughter, was cut from exactly the same strange wood of the Ardennes, precise to the point of obsession, stubborn. (Lapeyre-Desmaison 2001a: 77)

In his adherence to the history of language, Quignard betrays his distance from the decided emphasis on synchronic issues prevalent in Saussurean linguistics. Moreover, this childhood scene provides a definition of philology that in fact runs counter to a mere love of

words. This judgment becomes clear when we turn to the question that prompted the reminiscence. The interviewer had invited the writer to confess what he “detests,” to which Quignard replied:

Les phraseurs. Tous ceux qui aiment les mots, tous ceux pour qui les mots sont sans problème, sont creux. Creux, c'est-à-dire sonores. Tous ceux pour qui le langage est disponible plutôt que problématique.

The speechifiers. All those who love words, all those for whom words are not a problem, are hollow. Hollow, that is to say sonorous. All those for whom language is readily available, posing no problem. (Lepeyre-Desmaison 2001a: 77)

What is despised is a trust in the viability of language, a faith that words can operate as an audible, but more importantly, transparent medium of sense. Consulting the lexica, disputing subtleties of meaning, arguing over points of derivation—all this turns communicative language into a problem. One could say that Quignard's family loves words only insofar as they mistrust them, or—and this amounts to the same—that they love to turn language into a problem, into an object to worry about. They are therefore opposed to the “phraseurs,” for they are the ones who deploy words into rational discourse, into a *logos*. Confident in the oral exchange of information, these speechifiers become too loud—too sonorous—to listen to a word's recalcitrance; and it is this volubility that betrays their hollowness. Pausing to refer to the etymological dictionaries of Littré or Chantraine imposes a silence that interrupts the all-too-easy flow of conversation. Communication comes to a halt. Words are wrested free from their discursive context. It is in this sense, I would argue, that Quignard speaks of an essentially philological incapacity to maintain or conduct *logos*. “Les philologues ne sont jamais raisonnables” ‘Philologist are never reasonable’ (361).

In Quignard's case, then, philology might be better designated as misology. In the third of his *Petits Traités*, entitled “Le Misologue” ‘The Misologist,’ Quignard cites Socrates's warning to Phaedo, who sits beside his master on the day of execution. The passage (89c–d) powerfully anticipates the issues of pain, suffering, and protection

that reverberate throughout *La Haine de la musique*. Quignard provides the following translation.

Protégeons-nous d'une souffrance dont nous pourrions souffrir. Prenons garde de devenir des misologues, comme d'autres deviennent des misanthropes. Car, ajoute-t-il, il ne peut arriver à personne pire malheur de prendre en haine les *logoi*. *ōs ouk estin, ephē, oti an tis meizon toutou kakon pathoi ē logous misēsas.*

Let us protect ourselves from a pain that we could suffer. Let's beware of becoming misologists, as others have become misanthropes. For, he added, one can not suffer a worse misfortune than to acquire a hatred for words, for *logoi*. (*Petits Traités* 1: 52)

In the *Phaedo*, in the paragraph that immediately follows, not cited by Quignard, Socrates goes on to clarify his meaning:

Misology and misanthropy arise in the same way. Misanthropy comes when a man without knowledge or skill [*aneu technēs*] has placed great trust in someone and believes him to be altogether truthful, sound and trustworthy; then, a short time afterwards he finds him to be wicked and unreliable, and then this happens in another case: when one has frequently had that experience, especially with those whom one believed to be one's closest friends, then, in the end, after many such blows, one comes to hate all men and to believe that no one is sound in any way at all. (89d-e)

The one who hates words, then, is the one who loves them too dearly, the one who too fondly caresses them. The excessive trust initially placed in language becomes, upon many betrayals, excessive detestation. The misologist comes across as a hyperbolic philologist, one who is perhaps too intimate with words and counts them among his "closest friends." Quignard's "hatred for music" is, of course, nothing less—"L'expression *Haine de la musique* veut exprimer à quel point la musique peut devenir haïssable pour celui qui l'a le plus aimée" "The expression *Loathing Music* means to convey at what point music can become detestable for one who

has loved it the most' (*HM* 199). Quignard associates Socrates's fear of misology with the philosopher's well-known insistence on unprepared, oral discourse and his concomitant suspicion about writing, which is arranged beforehand and may be distributed in the author's absence. Quignard notes that the Sophists, who indeed destroy all faith in language, nonetheless continue to be attached to writing. Herein lies one of Quignard's fundamental conceptions of what literature has always entailed:

Écrire d'une part attestait une détestation plus acharnée, plus insistante, et plus profonde; de l'autre permettait de mettre en œuvre une action plus délétère, un sacrifice plus saisissant et associant à sa suite une communauté plus nombreuse. Gorgias, Jean de La Fontaine ...

The act of writing demonstrated, on the one hand, a hatred more fierce, more insistent and more profound; on the other hand, it permitted one to carry out an act more destructive, a sacrifice more spectacular and associating, as a result, with a larger community. Gorgias, Jean de La Fontaine ... (*Petits Traités* 1: 54; ellipsis in text).

Quignard consistently focuses on those whose writing constitutes a withdrawal from oral communication. Gorgias—the great rhetorician and paradoxologist, whose attention to the form of language is concomitant with his insistence on words' incommunicability—together with La Fontaine, the beloved seventeenth-century fabulist, belongs to an "antiphilosophical" tradition that Quignard would come to designate as "rhétorique spéculative" (*Rhétorique spéculative* 11). Their deep engagement with writing ultimately effectuates a silencing of language, an interruption that undoes or unworks both communication and the personal subjectivity that would ground it ("Je n'écris pas pour 'maîtriser' la peur. ... Je ne suis pas sujet d'une expérience" 'I do not write to 'master' fear ... I am not a subject of experience.' Lapeyre-Desmaison, *Mémoires* 46). Bruneau, Quignard's maternal grandfather, clearly participates in this tradition: "Grammairien respecté et sarcastique, dans un pyjama pourpre, mon grand-père n'écoutait que la forme de ce qui était dit. Le

langage humain n'avait jamais eu de sens" 'A grammarian, who was respected and sarcastic, clad in his purple pajamas, my grandfather only listened to the form of what was being said. Human language never had any sense' (*Albucius* 41).

It is noteworthy that Socrates broaches the topic of misology halfway through the *Phaedo*—a brief digression or caesura that follows the famous arguments for securing belief in the immortality of the soul. His account of the misologist is a direct response to the critiques lodged against his philosophical speech. Simmias and Cebes have their problems with Socrates's demonstration of the soul's eternal life after death. The elderly thinker and provocateur, slated to drink the hemlock by sundown, brushes back the beautiful hair of his devoted *Phaedo*. He instructs his passive disciple not to cut his hair tomorrow to mourn the loss of his teacher, but rather to cut it off right now to mourn the death of *logos*. According to Socrates, the misologist is the one who lacks *technê*. But Quignard's own technique trumps philosophy. In examining his translation of the key passage, we can see that he includes the Greek, not for reasons of pedantry, but rather in order to exploit the ambivalence of the word *meizōn*, which is simply the comparative form of *meγas*, denoting greatness either in quality or in degree. At first, quoting Socrates, Quignard renders the phrase *meizon kakon* with strongly evaluative force: "pire malheur" '[there is no] worse misfortune.' Yet, further in the treatise, upon discussing the counter-philosophical tradition of sophistry and then associating it with writing, he retranslates the same sentence as "there is no better misfortune [*meilleur malheur*] than to acquire a hatred of *logoi*" (56). The writer's silence, which prefigures the reader's silence, demonstrates a misology that no longer places trust in spoken discourse, in *logoi*. As Quignard describes it elsewhere, the true writer is a "phonoclast," the one who "breaks the oral circle" (*Une gène technique à l'égard des fragments* 'A technical discomfiture regarding fragments' 34)—like Papi Bruneau, who disrupts the dinner conversation to fetch Godefroy's *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française* or Ernout and Meillet's *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine*.

For Quignard, writing is always the silencing of language—"L'invention de l'écriture est la mise au silence du langage"—a silencing that wanders in exile from the source. This silencing eludes the

rational control of the writer and, precisely by doing so, is capable of relating what oral communication cannot: “C’est une seule et même aventure dont on ignore l’issue. Ce que le langage oral ne peut dire, tel est le sujet de la littérature” ‘It is one and the same adventure, one whose outcome remains unknown. What oral language cannot say, this is the subject of literature’ (*Vie secrète* ‘Secret life’ 222). Philology, in its search for origins, in its attachment to dead languages, in its fundamental distrust of words, is in fact misology, a science of the unique (and therefore no science at all). It transforms texts into a problem by listening for the sonorities paved over by verbal expression. In the end, for Quignard, philology, like music, is a privileged mode for imposing silence, a call for attentiveness, a command to pause, to interrupt, so that one may hear what is here no longer.

#### Notes

1 See also Pascal Quignard, *La Haine de la musique* 55-56. Subsequent citations from this edition will be marked *HM* in the text. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

2 On the term *Stimmung* and its long career across the Western European tradition, see Leo Spitzer’s seminal study (1963).

3 Both the dual orientation—philology and music—and the manner of defining it rehearse, to a large extent, the work of that other philologist-musician, Friedrich Nietzsche; his entrance into academic philology, partly compelled by his failings as a composer, ultimately yielded the *Birth of Tragedy*, which also speaks of listening to Wagner’s “weiten Raum der Weltennacht” ‘wide space of the world’s night’—from the Third Act of *Tristan und Isolde*—and thereby fleeing towards the “Urheimat” ‘first and original home.’ *Geburt der Tragödie* 21 (135-36).

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