

John T. Hamilton, *Philology of the Flesh* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018).

As the Christian doctrine of Incarnation asserts, “the Word became Flesh.” Yet, while this metaphor is grounded in the Christian tradition, its varied functions far exceed any purely theological import. It speaks to the nature of God just as much as to the nature of language. In *Philology of the Flesh*, John Hamilton explores writing, reading, and hermeneutic practices that engage this metaphor in a range of poetic enterprises and theoretical reflections. By pressing the notion of philology as “love” (*philia*) for the “word” (*logos*), Hamilton’s readings investigate the breadth, depth, and limits of verbal styles that are irreducible to mere information. While a philologist of the body might understand words as corporeal vessels of core meaning, the philologist of the flesh, by focusing on the carnal qualities of language, resists taking words as mere containers.

By examining a series of intellectual episodes—from the fifteenth-century Humanism of Lorenzo Valla to the poetry of Emily Dickinson, from Immanuel Kant and Johann Georg Hamann to Friedrich Nietzsche, Franz Kafka, and Paul Celan—*Philology of the Flesh* considers the far-reaching ramifications of the incarnational metaphor, insisting on the inseparability of form and content, an insistence that allows us to rethink our relation to the concrete languages in which we think and live.

Since its publication, the book has received noteworthy reviews: “Approached as a series of discrete meditations, *Philology of the Flesh* delivers what are likely to become canonical readings of a wide-ranging corpus of texts and authors; taken as a whole, it is a tour de force—and one that makes a compelling case for philology itself, for a loving struggle with language even and especially when it refuses to grant easy access to fixed meaning” (*German Quarterly*); “*The Philology of the Flesh* is comparative literature at its best: always attuned to word and sound play, sensitive to veiled metaphors and allusions, an incorporation of love of words and love of earthly, contingent, mortal truths” (*Comparative Literature Studies*); “Reading this book is more like practicing meditations among muses, all centered on the difficulties of reading and eventually the impossibility of ‘any secure destination.’ The central theme throughout is the materiality of textuality. ‘Philology’ for Hamilton is reading by pressing against tissue that ‘gives’ a bit, but never completely ‘gives way.’ The flesh of all texts pushes back and never truly surrenders a soul” (Dale B. Martin, Yale University); “With breathtaking historical erudition, exemplary conceptual clarity, and stylistic verve, John Hamilton guides the reader through the carnal career of words in the Western tradition. *The Philology of the Flesh* tracks the incarnational metaphors at work in literary and philosophical texts from late antiquity to the present to model a way of reading that is joyously too close for (academic) comfort, one that libidinally implicates the reader in the life of words. Hamilton’s remarkable sensitivity to the *carnal* dimension of this contact is—perhaps paradoxically—nothing less than *inspiring*” (Eric L. Santner, University of Chicago).