

## WSWG 28

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### *Stylometrics and the Question of Interpolation in Paul*



#### *Concerning Interpolations*

It is commonly said by the manuscript critics that when the manuscript variants have been duly adjudicated, what remains is “the author’s holograph.” It is extremely unlikely that this confidence is warranted.

Suppose we have a received text in which there are three consecutive segments, ABC. Suppose further that all manuscripts have ABC, except that one from Bobbio has AC. This difference brings our judgement into play. It does not by itself solve the problem, but it calls attention to the problem. The problem to which the variant calls attention is this: Is segment B part of the text, or is it intrusive? Judgement now comes into play. That frail and finikin thing, human judgement. Judgement works this way. If B is different in substance from A and C, and if the variant AC reads smoothly and consecutively, then we will judge that B is an interpolation. Contrariwise, if B runs smoothly with A and C, and if when B is removed, AC alone seem choppy and inconsecutive, then we will judge that B belongs to the context, and that the Bobbio scribe (accursed be he) has wrongly omitted it.

Now suppose that due to a fire in the year 1201, the Bobbio manuscript does not exist for the modern critic. Then all witnesses, the received text and all extant manuscripts, agree in the reading ABC. It is nevertheless open to an observant person to find a discontinuity at the juncture of A and B, and another at the juncture of B and C, and propose accordingly that B is an interpolation. The judgement process is the same as before, and the evidence on which the decision is based (the continuity of B in context) is the same as before – *it is the evidence in the text*. The two cases differ only in the way the question has come to our attention. In the one case by manuscript variants; in the other by human observation.

Human observation is probably no more intrinsically fallible than human judgement, on which (in both cases) our final decision rests.

The use of manuscript variations to direct attention to problems in a text is called the lower criticism. The use of observation to identify problems in a text is called the higher criticism. The adjectives are unfortunate, since they imply that one is somehow nobler than the other. But by any names, both belong to the toolkit of the critic, meaning, anyone who proposes to take the source texts seriously.

To conclude, I hope it will now be evident that the frequent cry “You have no evidence” when someone proposes an interpolation on its merits or demerits, is unsound. All such questions, however they come before us, will be decided on the evidence *which is there in the text* – the continuity or discontinuity of a given passage.