

GRAMMAR AND ÆSTHETICS*

Minute specialization is one of the prominent features of modern science. It is not peculiar to modern culture, for subdivision of the professions is as old as the Pyramids. In the Athens of the best times there were those who made their living by the manufacture of hair-nets. An epigram of Martial informs us that there were surgeons in Rome who limited their practice to the effacement of the scars that disfigured the persons of branded slaves. But the narrowness of a handicraft is different from the narrowness of an intellectual pursuit, or rather an intellectual pursuit is reduced by this narrowness to a handicraft; and in this second half of the nineteenth century the joyous and adventurous swing of the human mind through the range of knowledge and science which marked the first half has been quieted down to a sober pace, not to say a treadmill gait. The line along which the earlier investigators flamed is now traversed by the solitary track-walker, who turns his lantern on every inch of the ground, and travel is often interdicted on account of the insecurity of the road. So much the better for those who are to come after us, but meanwhile life is lonely for the explorer. For times come to every such man when he feels an imperious necessity of justifying himself to them that are without, of seeking a larger audience than the narrow circle of his [128] disciples and associates. True, the utter failure to come to an understanding with the rest of the world often sends the student back to his special work with a determination never again to tempt any communication with his fellows except on the most ordinary topics of social converse, and to lead his intellectual life alone.¹ The old jarring contrast between the man of practice and the man of theory makes itself felt in every fibre of a nature that, by its daily and hourly occupation, is made sensitive to the slight vibrations that are unheeded by the so-called men of the world, the men of affairs. One of the most famous pictures of this contrast has been drawn by Plato in his *Theætetus*, in which Thales appears as the type of the philosopher, the thinker, who falls into a well while star-gazing, and is laughed at by his merry Thracian maid-servant for not seeing that which is before his feet. Your antique scholar, like your modern, goes mooning about the city. He does not know the way to 'change; [*sic*] he cannot tell you where the court-house is or the city hall. He is a stranger to clubs and parties and dinners and banquets. He is profoundly ignorant of family history and family gossip. He is such a university man as the *London Times* described a few years ago: 'at sea he is a landlubber, in the country a cockney, in town a greenhorn, in business a simpleton, in pleasure a milksop.' We all know the man, although in the

* Source: Basil L. Gildersleeve, *Essays and Studies, Educational and Literary* (Baltimore: Murray, 1890): 127-157. Digitally scanned and slightly emended (with original pagination indicated) for presentation on The Geneva School website.

1 This 'Susprium Grammatici' was published in the *Princeton Review* for May, 1883.

movement of modern life the type is becoming less common even in Germany, once the *habitat* of intellectual oddities and unpractical [129] dreamers. For this change the Empire may possibly be responsible, but certain it is that such a figure as Freytag's Professor Raschke, in the 'Lost Manuscript', will soon be as extinct as the dodo.

Still, while the external differences are more and more effaced, and the professor is not singled out by his manners and his conversation, the inner dissidence will remain, and may perhaps increase with the advance of specialization. The professor, the student may become more like the rest of the world, but the heart of his life will be more remote from the bulk of mankind than was the case with the ancient scholar, whose range of sympathies was necessarily wide. Then, to come back to Plato's philosopher, his ideal sage is utterly indifferent to the praise or blame of the world, whereas in the modern specialist we often find a sensitiveness which is bred by the special studies themselves. Every one cannot attain to the philosophic calm which is, in the last analysis, philosophic selfishness, and which makes us resentful when we think of Plato and of Goethe, though not when we think of Shakespeare, for with Shakespeare we do not quarrel any more than we do with the nature of things. And so it is hard for one who is always seeking to find or to frame the key to the beautiful, when the conviction is borne in upon him that the more successful he is in his quest, the more certain he is to be set down among the mere locksmiths who are not suffered to enjoy the treasures which their patience and ingenuity have disclosed. The fewest have the divine faculty of imagination which is necessary to intellectual sympathy, and a vivid representation of [130] the conditions of another's life is possible only for chosen souls. Hence much blundering in all manner of missionary effort. To popularize without vulgarizing is one of the most difficult of arts, and the specialist, afraid of vulgarizing or unwilling to vulgarize, is apt to lose himself in technicalities which the outsider cannot follow. Nor is the unlucky specialist much comforted by those who, recognizing in him the specialist, patronize him by a real or simulated interest in his line of work. The Grecian does not like to be told that his interlocutor used to be fond of Greek when he was at college and still keeps it up after a fashion. This is in its way almost as bad as the threadbare and, because threadbare, uniformly successful jest about Greek roots. And so, between the condescension of those who wish to make some acknowledgment of the value of the special work, and the rudeness of those who repeat the trite jokes of the outside world, the scholar, the student, the investigator withdraws into himself, himself disheartened despite philosophy, and the world possibly the poorer.

Now, of all the special lines of work, among the most arid to the average mind is that of grammar. By grammar is not meant the 'science of language', so called. The success of various popular exhibitions of this department shows that it is possible to interest a very wide circle in the curious facts and glittering theories that lie on the track and encompass the circuit of these studies. What I mean is grammar proper, that very grammar, carried to a higher power, which is the detestation of most youthful minds. No study more fascinating to [131] those who are addicted to it; none more repulsive to the natural man. The average child hates parsing worse than he does arithmetic. Of course, the attitude of the modern mind toward grammar is different from that of the ancient nations, for grammar is an inheritance with us, to them it was a slow growth; it has passed into our mental processes, to them it was a process apart. Still, scientific grammar in its strictest sense is a horror even to a large class of people of cultivation. The average literary man cordially dislikes the grammarian— or heartily despises him; and as grammar becomes more and more detailed, as phonetics develop more and more, and syntax assumes more and more the alluring shape of a census-table, there is increasing danger lest philology shrivel up into mere statistics, and æsthetics be relegated to the mere *dilettanti*.

Phonology, to begin with that, has grown into a science which threatens to overshadow the rest of philology; and though no one would wish to withhold from the school of the *Junggrammatiker* the tribute of admiration for the thoroughness of their method, which brings phonetic phenomena under rules of sharp physical consistency, one wishes a second life for this new line of work, as Lobeck did when he declined to go into Sanskrit. The theory of formation, instead of being simplified by the advance of science, has become greatly complicated, and the frank, objective way in which facts are put remind one very much of the early machinery of grammar. For instance, the ancient grammarians divided the Greek declensions into 'parisyllabic' and 'imparisyllabic'— one of those inorganic arrangements that contain a [132] germ of organic truth. Needless to say, such a division was practically of no moment. The cases went their own sweet way, and well-meaning attempts to reduce the inflections to order resulted in a formidable list of declensions. In like manner the reduction of the Greek declensions to three, and ultimately to two, was considered a great advance in the early part of this century. Now that has proved to be a failure so far as simplification goes, and advanced grammar follows mechanically the endings of the stems. Thus we oscillate from diversity to unity, from unity to diversity again. Syntax has divorced itself from logic. All the grand generalizations in which the first scientific grammarians

indulged have been abandoned, and it is no disgrace to decline giving a definition of case or tense or mood; it is only a wise reserve. No longer logic-mad, your modern grammarian is statistic-mad. It is useless to tell him that statistic is nothing unless it embody some idea. The plan is to get all the empty shells ready in case a soul should be found to occupy them. Arrange your facts in some orderly manner, no matter how mechanical, and the seeing eye will discern vital principles. To an outsider this study—some might hesitate to call it a study—seems incredibly dull, seems to be work that ought to be assigned to a *servus litterarius* as brainless as Caravella, the author of the ‘Index Aristophanicus’, that marvel of patience and stupidity; or as Cruden, the author of the Concordance, who was another semi-idiot. And yet questions of a higher nature are constantly arising in the midst of such work, questions that cannot be delegated to inexperienced and thoughtless compilers; [133] and there comes to the writer the grim consolation that whatever befalls the theory, the facts will stand. Veitch’s ‘Greek Verbs, Irregular and Defective’, will always be of more real value than most of Gottfried Hermann’s grammatical theories; and there is much more in Veitch than a mere collector. But at times even the most determined statistician grows weary. He repeats to himself the warning that he must not theorize before he gets all the facts together, and yet, while the hod may be a model hod and the bricks without flaw, the question will come up, Are we never to use mortar, even if it be untempered mortar?

Such is the present condition of grammar. It shows a strong tendency to assume the mathematical formula, and outsiders ask, What is the use of this array of figures? The answer is mainly negative, at least in the present stage of inquiry, and insiders themselves show here and there impatience. Grammar is becoming a dry and thirsty land, and the grammatical Achsah may well say, ‘Thou hast given me a south land; give me also springs of water.’

Meanwhile æsthetic criticism is going its own way, a ‘primrose path of dalliance’ with fine substantives, superfine adjectives—a path which is apt to lose itself in mere finical fault-finding or sympathetic phrase-mongery. True, the critics of our day are not the failures that Lord Beaconsfield’s epigram would make them out to be. Like many other strictures of that cynical statesman, does does not apply to the present time; it is purely retrospective. Our foremost critics are our foremost [134] producers, and the man whom many would consider the first critic of our time is acknowledged to be one of the best writers of our time. No man’s style is more envied than Matthew Arnold’s, and that by those whose envy is a compliment. Still there is a widespread distrust as to the ultimate value of all the æsthetic criticism of the day, sympathetic or other. The

antique critic, as we shall see, went into tangible details. He left a margin for unreasoned perception, for direct intuition, but his grounds are for the most part susceptible of test. Even the robust critic of the Johnsonese school is comprehensible, is refutable, if need be. Not so the supersubtle genius of the present day. He poses a line of poetry and then poses himself before the line, and if you do not see all poetry in that line, or do not hear all poetry in that line, you are blind and deaf. So Mr. Arnold in his introductory essay to Ward's 'English Poets' gives a series of test verses for the appreciation of higher poetry. His Dante line is

'In la sua volontade è nostra pace.'

His Chaucer line is

'O martyr soulded in virginitee.'

He strikes these chords very deftly; he repeats these verses as a supernal melody. Who knows what mood is associated in his poetic brain with that melody? The overtone is perhaps what he hears. If any ordinary mortal like the present writer should set up another verse, say

'La creatura ch' ebbe il bel sembiante',[135]

Mr. Arnold and Mr. Arnold's admirers might see, might hear nothing special in that; and yet perhaps something could be said for a verse which concentrates all the doom of Lucifer, as well as for

'In la sua volontade è nostra pace',

and many a Chaucerian scholar may have his favorite instead of

'O martyr soulded in virginitee'.

But any one who attempts to mediate between two extremes is in danger of being torn to pieces by the wild horses that he is attempting to yoke together; more furious and unbecoming controversy than has of late raged between poets and philologists would be hard to find in the unpleasant annals of the quarrels of authors, and one would not like to have his family name maltreated, or to be shown up as a dullard and pedant.² Still, with the full consciousness of the risk, he who is a lover of grammatical as well as of literary study can hardly refrain from making at least some effort to show how stronger hands than his may yet succeed in the work of reconciliation. There are men, and those not a few, who have at once the liveliest delight in the observation of grammatical phenomena and the keenest appreciation of literary beauties. Do these

² Swinburne's name has been turned by one of his assailants into Pigsbrook; and the poet in one of his mildest passages speaks with characteristic alliteration of 'the blackguard's loaded bludgeon of personalities', 'the dastard's sheathed dagger of disguise'.

faculties work side by side without any correlation? It was said of Faraday [136] that he had two lives which he kept apart; that he shut his laboratory when he went into his oratory. Is a similar statement true of the scholar? Is his enjoyment of the literary side of his work entirely independent of the scientific side? Are contemplation and analysis completely divorced? Every one who has attempted the close grammatical study of a supreme work of art knows how hard it is to keep steadily at the task when the passion of the piece grows strong. The note-book ought to drop from the hand when Odysseus stands forth revealed. Then, like the hero, the reader strips off the rags of grammar and goes into the fight.³ But for all that the note-book should be picked up again and the patient assemblage of facts resumed. In art nothing is small; and how fully this was appreciated in antiquity is shown by the study of the literary judgments of the great critics of antiquity. Antique criticism took into account much that we relegate to the grammar, even now that grammar is becoming more and more unæsthetic. Shall we not avail ourselves of the more exact methods of these days to secure a more objective standard of criticism? The attempt, as has been said, is dangerous in the extreme. The moral inferences, so to speak, which have been drawn from grammatical peculiarities in languages, dialects, periods, departments, individuals, are partly shadowy, partly hazardous, and yet not only is the problem fascinating in itself, but after all it is a fair problem. It may never receive a complete answer. This in the nature of things is impossible, for the elements are too varied, too [137] subtle. But it is susceptible of an approximate answer, and in time the outline of a system will be laid down. Between the salient points there will be room enough for the play of æsthetic fancy, and fine writers can add arabesque to arabesque, but the structure itself will be essentially fixed.

If a better, a more objective æsthetic should be the outcome of grammatical study, this would only be a completion of the cycle, for grammar began with æsthetic, as can be shown historically. But to prove this point it is not necessary to go back to written records; for, if we wish to reproduce the past, it is only necessary to go down to a lower stratum, and the attitude of the uncultured mind toward language would give ample confirmation of this position. The artistic sense survives in the people, to whom, and not to the makers of books, language ultimately belongs. Doubtless the artificial language finds its way among the people, and what is artificial, nay, what is individual in one generation becomes popular, becomes national in another. Yet it must be remembered that in the main, indeed in almost every fibre, the people owns the language,

3 *αὐτὰρ ὁ γυμνώθη ῥακέων πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς.*

not king or queen, and in any natural scheme of grammar the unsophisticated classes are to be consulted. This widens the sphere of observation from the imperfect registry of manuscripts and the seclusion of the study to the living utterance and the open air of popular life; and in this larger field we learn the immense importance of phonetics. What we analyse with so much care, the body of sound, is to the people as pronunciation, the main thing; and on this score every one who has lived in foreign parts has had [138] mortifying experiences to record. If one's intercourse is limited to the cultured classes, to those who have much to do with strangers, there is no great difficulty about making one's wants known. But it is otherwise with the masses. With the masses the pronunciation is the great thing. Inflection may be twisted and syntax rent in sunder so long as the color of the sound is preserved. The lack of a familiar gasp or a special click, the failure to reproduce the intonation of a sentence, will make the foreigner unintelligible to the people. Departure from the standard is visited with mockery. It is considered unbeautiful, it is the violation of a norm. Not that the people is [*sic*] unobservant of other defects, but of none is it more keenly observant than of this. In this direction the study of dialect is destined to lead to important results, and if philologists lived more in the world they might make valuable additions to the study of language by cultivating the fields that lie untilled about us, by noting the criticisms of the people, and by finding out the sensitive points of the popular tongue. Perhaps there is less opportunity in this country for such observation, because language has been more levelled here than elsewhere, and the process is still going on; and yet there is opportunity enough. The advance of phonetics will enable us to register pronunciation more exactly, and we shall not be satisfied with such rude representations of sound as we find in the current spelling of Yankee, Southern, Western, or negro dialect. To him who has ears to hear and mind to reason there is a vast field open in the domain of every-day speech. Omnibus, streetcar, railway, not a journey that takes us out into a [139] new stream of collinguals but may furnish new specimens for our exhibit, and the student of linguistic may go on an expedition for such a purpose with as clear a conscience as a mineralogist or a botanist

It has just been said that the phonetic or, if you choose, the orthoepic side is that which strikes the popular mind most, and it might be worth while to examine early and unsophisticated representations of barbarous speech with a view to ascertaining the truth of this position. By 'sophisticated' here is meant grammatical; and as one who has learned his own language under the pressure of grammar is not a fair judge, the material must be sought in pre-grammatical or extra-

grammatical, not to say, supra-grammatical spheres. So, for instance, Aristophanes' representations of dialectic and barbaric Greek have a philological, a grammatical interest. Passing by Aristophanes' specimens of dialectic Greek as involving too many difficult questions, we turn to the barbaric Greek, not to the couple of lines of mock-Persian and mock-Persian-Greek of the coarse impostor, Pseudartabas, in the *Acharnians*, but to the representation of the lingo of the Scythian archer in the *Thesmophoriazusæ*, in which the work seems to be very well done, and, so far as we can judge, quite on a level with any modern reproduction of the speech of foreigners, aided, as our reproduction is, in a measure, by the familiar categories of grammar. And it must be remembered that there was no such thing as grammar proper in the time of Aristophanes, for he himself made merry over the categories, now most [140] familiar to us, that were suggested by the thinkers of the time; and false genders, false cases, to the ear of Aristophanes must have been little more than mistakes in pronunciation; for all the grammar known to the most cultivated Athenians of that time pertained to the phonetic side of the language; and Aristophanes felt the barbarian's blunders in syntax not otherwise than he represents Socrates to have felt the uncultured pronunciation of Pheidippides when he is brought to him for training. The differentiation belongs to a later period. Viewed in this light, Aristophanes' representation of barbaric Greek gains a new interest. The wonderful reproduction of musculature in Greek statues has led some to suppose that Greek anatomical studies were further advanced in the time, say, of Pheidias than tradition would have led us to suppose, so admirably did the Greek divine the muscle under the skin. In like manner, Aristophanes, in his representation of the Greek of the Scythian archer or policeman of Athens, goes through every grammatical category, as if he were a trained observer. The barbarian drops his final consonants, simplifies his diphthongs, puts *tenues* for *aspiratae*, evaporates his *h*'s, substitutes dative for accusative, and gets his genders wofully [*sic*] mixed. And with more art than many modern imitators of foreign speech, who attribute to all Germans mistakes in English that no German makes, Aristophanes preserves here and there a group of correct Greek. But the attitude of the ungrammatical mind toward grammar is too difficult a study to be attacked in passing, and it will be more profitable to show by [141] some statements and illustrations the antique connection between grammar and æsthetic, and to give some hints as to a scientific restoration of their joint action.

The great difficulty, as has already been hinted, consists in drawing the line between grammar and rhetoric. The *syntaxis ornata* of the older grammars is pure rhetoric. Grammar as a regulative

art, and as such it was considered until of late years, really takes up one side of rhetoric—correctness; and if there is any overlapping in the following exhibit, let it be forgiven.

Grammar rises after the decline of literature. It is originally retrospective, except when it has been passed on from nationality to nationality as the grammar of the Romans from the Greek, and modern grammar from Latin, and it is therefore associated in this first stage with interpretations either of an earlier monument of literature or of foreign speech, including dialectic variation. Grammatical study is in point of fact literary study, and arises from the necessity of expounding to later generations some great work that has made its language the norm for the period or for the department, whereas for a long time the language of every-day life resists the analysis, and one is astonished to see how many centuries of thought and controversy were needed to settle the categories that every school-child knows after a fashion. This long process of philosophical fermentation is shown by the nomenclature of our grammar, some of which was not settled until a period long subsequent to the death of the antique world, so that the consciously grammatical [142] speech of the cultivated is a strange resultant of tradition and study.

There may have been, let us grant that there must have been, a time when every element in such a language as the Greek had its felt force; but there is no written record of that period, and ages before our first *data* the sharp lines had been rounded and the simple functions complicated. To maintain, as has been done, that every people thinks something not only at every utterance, but at every element of that utterance, is going too far—certainly too far for the resonance or ‘dingdong’ theory of language. Out of conscious composition, according to the dominant view, we pass into a feeling of total effect and general relation. At any rate, this is the condition in which we find language before the grammatical period, and the dawning of what we should call grammar lights up first the æsthetic side, the musical side; for the music to which the language is set, otherwise called the accent, attracted the attention of the Greek before anything else. ‘Acute’ and ‘grave’ were old in the time of Plato, and it is significant that the first element that the artistic Greek noted was the last to receive scientific treatment at the hands of modern grammarians, who had been content to repeat the pretty saying of the ancients that ‘accent is the life-breath of the word’, and were very far from recognizing the wide reach of its influence. To the same artistic side belongs the recognition of the power of the different letters—letters—for the ancients did not emancipate themselves from the external symbols, and even modern philologists have not all succeeded in keeping symbol and power apart. Every [143] cultivated Greek, as early as the end of

the fifth century B. C., knew of some the divisions which are still popularly made in the ‘letters’, and Plato draws his illustrations freely from this sphere as something familiar to all the personages of his dialogues.

But if we look further, we shall find in the heyday of Attic literature no genuine grammatical development. ‘Noun’ and ‘verb’ were used, it is true, but not in their strict grammatical sense. The moods were appreciated but not defined; the first crude attempt was purely rhetorical. Cases were unknown; if the Scythian archer used dative for accusative, the Greek of that time could only feel that he was wrong. Plato makes sharp distinctions between the tenses—distinctions which modern grammarians, at least until of late years, did not take in; ‘ he virtually draws a fine line in the Euthyphron⁴ between the participle as participle and the participle as adjective; but subtle as Plato was, he could not have formulated his propositions [144] grammatically. But it is not necessary to sketch the development of technical grammar, to point out what Aristotle contributed, what the Stoics, what the Alexandrians. It is sufficient for the present purpose to note that it was soon divorced from science and became a purely regulative art. The early observers who marked the difference between vowel and consonant were truly scientific. Not so those who collected glosses and barbarisms and solecisms for the interpretation of the earlier poets, for the training of youthful Hellenists. The diligence and acumen of the long line of grammarians are not to be underrated, and yet we find only here and there a mind that thinks a truly scientific thought as to the functions of grammatical forms. And so it continued down to times that are very near our own. Grammar was and is still to many the art of reading, writing, and speaking correctly, not the exhibition of the structure and growth of language.

As an art, grammar entered largely into antique æsthetic criticism. The ancient models were studied with a view to imitation, and the analysis extended to every element of discourse. Nothing that had been recognized as characteristic was overlooked, and no modern criticism can compare with this microscopic dissection. Unfortunately, few but professional philologists push their studies into the domain of the Greek and Roman rhetoricians, and even these are apt to become

4 This is not the place to interpret a Platonic passage. Suffice it to note that Plato is equal to grammatical distinctions that sorely puzzle his commentators if they are not of a grammatical turn. Grote says on the passage referred to (Euthyphron, 10 A-D): ‘The manner in which Socrates conducts this argument is over-subtle. The difference between the meaning of *φέρεται* and *φερόμενόν ἐστι* is not easy to see’— nor does Grote see it, and, not seeing it, naturally considers it over-subtle. Jowett, being a professed Grecian, which Grote was not, explains the passage thus: ‘The next objection . . . is shipwrecked on a refined distinction between the state and the act, corresponding respectively to the adjective (*φιλον*) and the participle (*φιλούμενον*), or rather perhaps to the participle and the verb (*φιλούμενον* and *φιλείται*).’ The Master of Balliol can hardly be considered happy in his alternative. ‘

impatient with what must seem at first to be fanciful detail, or at best only applicable to the forms of the classic languages. But while we may consider this study tedious in itself [145] and futile in its aim as a regulative art, there is much to be learned from the old rhetorical use of grammar as an *organon* of æsthetic appreciation. The ancient rhetorician took into account phonetics, word-formation, syntax, periodology, all from a purely subjective point of view. Now all these matters fall under the observation of the scientific grammarian, all are subjected to rigid measurement and computation. We know the proportions in which the different vowel-sounds appear in given monuments of literature; we know what sequences, what combinations of sounds certain languages will tolerate, the emergence and the disappearance of such and such terminations, the growth and limit of case-use, tense-use, the extent of section, member, and period; and while it is not proposed to make a mathematical æsthetic on the basis of grammar, it may be possible to remove some part of criticism out of the range of mere sensibility and opulent phraseology. A type of the system to which we may look forward in the remote future is presented by the recent advances in the study of antique metres. Before the development of the new system of antique metres, or rather the rediscovery of the old system, the construction and recitation of lyric measures in Greek and Latin were left very much to individual taste and feeling. Whether a man read an ode of Horace or a chorus of Sophocles or an [epinician](#) of Pindar well or ill was a matter between the reader and his audience, if not between the reader and himself. There was no standard. The result was not absolutely satisfactory; appreciation of the rhythm was confined to a few; and [146] the admiration was conventional, and nothing is more deadening to the sense of the beautiful than conventional admiration, from which, it may be said by way of parenthesis, the study of the classics has suffered more than from all other troubles put together. Now that the great principles which regulate the movement of antique rhythm are brought within the comprehension of every student, now that we can trust to the correcting finger as well as to the less certain ear, now that we can say *digitis callemus et aure*, the enjoyment is surely not less real, not less deep, because it is both so much more exact and so much more explicable. Of course it is not maintained that any such system can be perfected for the relations of grammar and literary art. Much detail is yet unsettled even in metrical study, and the problem before us is, one might almost say, infinitely more complicated. Still the task is not hopeless, and although it has never been approached in a systematic way, partial results and undesigned successes show what may yet be accomplished.

It has just been said that the ancient rhetoricians, who were the æsthetic critics of antiquity, went into a much more minute analysis of their authors than would be tolerable now; and as the object of this paper is to vindicate minute grammatical study with a view to æsthetic result, it may not be considered irrelevant to call up the grammatical points which are to be found in one of the various critical writings of the famous rhetorical theorist Dionysius of Halicarnassus. This great critic was in some respects an unfair and pedantic judge, yet his writings deserve all the close study that they have received of late [147] years.⁵ Minute he is, but not arid, and there are passages in his rhetorical works that would not be unworthy of Mr. Pater or Mr. Symonds.

In his admiration of Demosthenes, Dionysius seems to have gone to the extent of underrating all other Greek writers in order to heighten the stature of his idol, who in his judgment overtopped them all, avoided all their defects, and combined in culmination all their merits. Yet he has keen insight, just tact, and in the merely sensuous side of his criticism, that which pertains to rhythm and color, we must still be content to learn of him. Now Dionysius' judgment of Thucydides is thought to be singularly harsh, and it is adduced here only to show first what the categories are that antique criticism thought it right to bring in, and then to ask whether some of these categories are not such as may be satisfactorily filled by the processes of modern grammar. Not that it will be thought necessary to give an analysis of the long essay which Dionysius has devoted to Thucydides. He himself has gathered up in a shorter tract what he considers the peculiarities of the style of the great historian, and from a summary of this we may cull the grammatical elements. [148]

According to Dionysius, Thucydides went deliberately to work at a new style of his own, one that was neither pure prose nor absolute poetry, yet blended out of the two. It must be noticed that the ancient critic writes of Thucydides as many modern critics have written of Carlyle—not as though his style were the man, the expression of his individuality, but a mechanical contrivance, with a deliberate view to novelty of effect. How far the ancient critic and the modern are right this is not the place to inquire, although Carlyle almost makes confession of conscious mannerism in his Reminiscences, one of his best or at all events one of his most characteristic productions. By the way, some one with a turn for computation has counted the parentheses in the Reminiscences,

⁵ Professor Usener has recently shown in his edition of the *περὶ μιμήσεως* that the literary judgments of the famous critic, for whom, by the way, he has no better name than *magistellus*, go back to an earlier and better time. See also Professor Nettleship in the *Journal of Philology*, Vol. XVIII (1890), No. 36, p. 263 foll. This enhances the value of the specimens that have been given in the text, because it is an indication that the importance of what we call grammar for style was recognized before the age of pedantry.—B. L. G.

and it is much to be wished that the same observer had watched the rise and growth and general norm of parentheses in Carlyle, so that this paper might have received an additional illustration from a familiar region. Was parenthesis a designed peculiarity of Carlyle, which afterwards passed over into blood and bone? Were the characteristics of Thucydides just so many evidences of his artistic purpose? Here Dionysius is wrong. To attribute full consciousness to the greatest writers would be a capital mistake, and the value of the study discussed in this paper would be much diminished by such an assumption. But Dionysius, it must be remembered, looked upon his author with the eyes of a rhetorician who is in search of a norm for practice. This study has to do only with the appreciation, not with the creation, of works of literary art. [149]

Dionysius, then, treats Thucydides as an innovator, not by virtue of a native necessity, but in the interest of striking effects. As to his phraseology, his selection of words, Thucydides uses tropical expressions instead of literal, glossary vocables instead of current words, archaisms instead of the common and familiar language of his contemporaries—another charge, by the way, that is freely made against innovators of our day, both in prose and poetry. True, it is one that does not come fully within the scope of grammar, but the next set of peculiarities is strictly grammatical. As some scholars have gone so far as to call English a grammarless language, so some have claimed a similar character for Thucydides, or at any rate have said that Thucydides is not to be judged by the rules of ordinary grammar, and so can never be called ungrammatical because he is not holden of grammar. Dionysius goes further and makes him antigrammatical, as one who deliberately sets himself to disappoint the grammatical sense of his reader. As there was no technical grammar in Thucydides' time, this designed discord must have been brought about by feeling rather than by reasoning; and while Thucydides might have understood his critic when he says that the historian loves to expand a word into a sentence, and again to contract a sentence into a word, he would not have understood so well, if at all, when the critic says that he makes verbs out of nouns and nouns out of verbs; shifts actives and passives; exchanges singulars and plurals; blends feminines with masculines, masculines with feminines, both with neuters, to the utter confusion of [150] natural sequence; deals in daring constructions according to the sense; is no respecter of grammatical persons; is lavish in the exchange of tenses, and behaves generally in a manner that in a lesser author would be called solecistic. He indulges in abstracts for concretes, concretes for abstracts, and, like Carlyle, lets parenthesis in as a flood, so that his sentences become twisted and hard to disentangle. The other strictures on Thucydidean style we pass by—on

the build of the sentence, the equalization of the members, the jingle of the clauses, the play on words, the balanced antitheses; but what is important for us to notice has been verified—the large part that grammar, pure and simple, plays in this characteristic. Now Thucydides is confessedly an extreme, as much an extreme as Carlyle, and we must expect to find every peculiarity exaggerated in him; but it is by these extremes that we learn the outline. The insight into finer distinctions comes only after multiplied observations. Hence a notorious case has been selected. Of course, it is not supposed for a moment that even in modern literary criticism grammatical peculiarities have not been noted, but they have not been systematically studied, and there has been little serious attempt to get at the moral, the æsthetic value. This value, recognized by the ancient critics in a general way, is susceptible of more exact ascertainment,—thanks to the exhaustive methods in vogue,—and such an ascertainment is the highest as it is the most refined result of grammatical study. Dionysius has elsewhere, as, for instance, in a remarkable and valuable [151] treatise on ‘Composition’,—that is, the arrangement of words in the sentence,—gone largely into the euphonic side of literary art, the sequence of sounds and the artistic effect of the combination of the phonetic elements. This, too, is grammatical, or at all events borders on the sphere of grammar, and with the advance of phonetics we may expect here also sharper formulæ and clearer results. The symbolism of sound is, it is true, a most treacherous subject of investigation, and, looking at the fantastic tricks that have been played with the correspondence of sense and sound in ancient as well as in modern times, it is well to be cautious. The permeation of the ‘lightning letter’ *i* (pron. *ee*), the hissing hate of the repeated *s*, the dull obstinacy of the dental, and the loving lapse of the liquid,—all this symbolism has had a fascination for minds of a certain order from the beginning; and those who are intolerant of such fancies in others fall into similar fancies themselves. A man who will sneer at the symbolism of Homeric verses as expounded by the old interpreters will not hesitate to recognize moral and æsthetic elements in the vowel-register and consonant-range in various dialects of the same language. How far fancy can be excluded and science be introduced is a problem which the advance of phonetics must solve. It may be the dream of a pedant to suppose that the æsthetic appreciation of an author as an artist can be furthered by the tabulation of his vowels and his consonants; and yet, inasmuch as quite as subtle an element, the sufferance of the *hiatus*, has done good service as a criterion of genuineness, and to a [152] certain extent as a criterion of style, it is not well to reject with scorn the possibility of a successful application of these delicate tests. Physical science has of late years in all its departments made marvellous

advances in the invention of instruments of precision. Everything is weighed, counted, registered, to the nicest exactitude; but weighing, counting, registering, all signify something. Shall grammatical weighing, counting, registering signify nothing? Leave the largest possible area for convention. If there is but one word to express an idea, the individual taste must accept that word, whatever its phonetics; but is there not a margin of choice which is sufficiently susceptible of mensuration to be characteristic? May not phonetics come in here, even in a language apparently so careless in this respect as the English? The love of variation is a marked natural peculiarity of English style; it was loudly proclaimed by the translators of the Authorized Version. Do we not find the same principle at work in the phonetics of our literature, our written art? Poets have occasionally noticed some points. So Coleridge somewhere remarks on the disagreeable effect of blended assonance and consonance—such a sequence of rhymes, for instance, as *rose, grown, blows, cone*, being offensive to the ear by the want of contrast.⁶ But [153] poets do not often make their combinations scientifically; they group sounds as florists group flowers, by the complementary sense, and leave the scientific appreciation to others. Professor Sylvester's essay on the 'Laws of Verse' shows the fruitfulness of this method as applied to poetry. For artistic prose little has been done either on the appreciative or on the regulative side.

Periodology belongs to the music of style as well as the sequence and combination of sounds. This also falls within the domain of grammar, at least in its elements. The importance of periodology in the estimate of antique composition has of late years been fully recognized, thanks to a renewed study of the ancient authorities. The symmetrical structure of the oratorical period, the proportion of its members, the distribution of its feet, all these matters now enter into characteristics of style, and become important for questions of individual development as well as of genuineness; and it is not necessary to insist on the self-evident fact that in this region of aesthetics minute statistics and careful measurement are not only possible but are susceptible of valuable application.

The term syntax in its modern use is so vague that it runs over freely from the grammatical to the rhetorical side of the study of language, and yet even in the narrowest sense in which it can be taken, the theory of construction, it may have an aesthetic value. It is not a matter of indifference

⁶ 'In his 'Science of English Verse', which is a contribution to the phonetic and musical side of style, the late Mr. Sidney Lanier has laid down as one of the laws of rhyme: 'Avoid neighboring rhymes which are very nearly alike in tone-color. For example, if two lines rhyme with 'name' and 'fame', do not have the two next lines rhyming in 'vain' and 'stain', or similar near shades of vowel-color. The result is like two contiguous shades of pink in a dress: one of the rhymes will seem faded.' Elementary and obvious as such a rule may seem, it must have been new in Coleridge's time.

as to the æsthetic [154] effect of composition what the dominant constructions are⁷—and there is yet open a wide field of observation in this direction. Sporadic remarks are found in grammars and commentaries, but much more remains to be found out and brought into tangible shape. For great departments and great periods of literature some of these observations are of more importance than pages of exclamatory admiration. We contrast the epos of Greece with the epos of Rome. One grammatical difference sums the whole matter up. No historical present in the one, while the historical present abounds in the other, and nothing more is needed for him who appreciates the range of grammatical phenomena. The wide sphere of the dative in Latin poetry is another such significant fact. Now as the examination of the usages of different periods and different authors becomes more exact, more detailed, we shall find a potent meaning in much that seems to us indifferent now.⁸ ‘The writer’s consciousness [155] would make the study of less interest, of less value to us who follow the appreciative rather than the regulative side. But in this unreasoned choice, if the expression be not an absurdity, the characteristic often lies. When we compare two authors, we are apt to look chiefly at the range of thought and the vocabulary. Periodology is considered only in its extremes; euphony is not brought to any scientific test; and syntax is not studied except in its monstrosities. Ask an ordinary student, ‘What is the difference between the style of Addison and that of Johnson?’ Would the answer be anything like the one given by the shrewd observer who says: ‘One of the chief points of contrast in their style lies, I apprehend, in the easy and natural recurrence in the former of the verb, and the artificial preponderance given in the latter to the noun. Since Dr. Johnson’s time the substantive has been gaining ground; the infinitive mood, the gerund, and the compound participle have been in the same proportion suppressed in many works of which the composition is highly elaborate. As far as unstudied writings may be expressed in set phrase, the usurpation has extended even to these?’ This is a grammatical observation of wide reach and capable of ample illustration; yet those who are outside of grammatical study would see in the collection and registration of such facts nothing but

⁷ I venture to refer to a recent study of mine in the *American Journal of Philology* for 1888, IX 137 foll., on the Stylistic Effect of the Greek Participle.—B. L. G.

⁸ ‘La plus belle tâche que puisse se proposer la critique, c’est de repenser avec clarté ce que la génie a conçu plus ou moins confusément, et, semblable à Mercure, de se faire près des hommes l’interprète des dieux. Voilà pourquoi je ne me laisse point arrêter ou troubler par l’objection commune: “Vous prêtez aux poètes des intentions qu’ils n’ont pas eues.” Qu’importe qu’ils ne les aient pas eues, si elles sont dans leurs oeuvres? Tout ce que l’étude peut y découvrir, la critique a le droit de le développer avec une abondance, une largeur d’analyse vraiment illimitée; elle ne risquera guère de s’égarer si elle est sympathique et respectueuse et elle ne doit craindre en aucun cas d’épuiser le sujet’, etc. (Paul Stapfer, *Shakespeare et l’antiquité*, i. 316.) The same line of defence applies to grammatical analysis. Sophocles could not have given a reason for his use of the negatives; and Mr. Bryant’s grammatical explanation of *shall* and *will* in his *Thanatopsis* seemed to me as faulty, when I read it, as the word *Thanatopsis* itself.

the [156] senseless toil of the pedant. Of course much depends on the texture of the language; statistics that would be valuable in Greek would be worthless in English, and it requires a certain clearness of vision to see what are true analogies. Yet with just limitations it is true that the statistics of construction do serve to fix the characteristics of style not only in periods and departments, but also in individuals. Given, for instance, a certain conditional combination in Greek; determine the frequency of its occurrence in comparison with another conditional in various departments and in a series of authors, and it will be found that in that one category we have a sharp index of character. The tragic poets will employ the severer conditional in larger proportion than prose writers, and as compared with one another the nearer they approach the standard of every-day life the smaller the proportion becomes.⁹ Comic poetry stands in this respect on the same level with prose, and prose in emergency rises to the level of tragedy. It is true that there is more exciting reading than a table of decimals, but those decimals have after all a meaning; and if a lodgment has been gained for the thought that all the minute grammatical research of the present day may be made available, and is to be made available, for literary criticism, for æsthetic appreciation, something has been done in vindication of the much-abused fellowship of grammarians—the ‘corner-[157]hummers’, as the Greek epigrammatist¹⁰ contemptuously calls them. That it is possible to forget the end in the means, that there are those who never go beyond the collection of facts, is most true; but there are others, and those not a few, who while they put aside the mere dilettantism of æsthetic phrase-making are not insensible of the total effect, and while they use the measuring-rod are not blind to the chambers of imagery—to cherubim and palm-trees and lions.¹¹ Music and architecture rest on mathematics; and no one denies to the votaries of music and architecture the due appreciation of their arts because of counterpoint, because of studies as to the strength of material. The very love of art forbids the neglect of any detail, and the quest of some principle, the effort to get exact expression for every manifestation of spiritual life, is not unworthy of the highest intellectual faculties. Wherever there is true art there is law, however it may hide itself under the facts, and this recognition of law lifts the study of literary art out of the domain of elegant trifling and carries it into a region where art and science meet.

⁹ An allusion to a laborious investigation, the results of which were published in the Transactions of the American Philological Association for 1876—B. L. G.

¹⁰ γωνιοβόμβυκες, μονοσύλλαβοι, οἷσι μέμηλεν
τὸ σφιν καὶ τὸ σφῶν καὶ τὸ μὴν ἤδὲ τὸ νίν.

¹¹ Ezek. ch. xli.