The Paraphilologist as ’Pataphysician

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This volume is predicated on the notion that ’pataphysics constitutes the avant-garde destiny of a doomed conservative metaphysics. A conservative metaphysics fetishizes “the rule of the rule.” ’Pataphysics relishes in such a phrase only the logic-cleaving of a sideways-splitting pun: “how many inches in a ruler, my liege?” And, as a lover of puns, ’pataphysics is just getting started precisely where one had been asked to end. When wearing his or her outlandish grammatical hat, the ’pataphysicist becomes ’pataphilologist — or is it the other way around, I forget — oversees the emancipation of logos in a parallel revolutionary moment. This revolt upends the dour hegemony of generalities in the name of a mass uprising of laughing particularities.

The consonance of physis and logos was always a key metaphysical gambit in the west. Shifts in the one domain affect the other because the two are different aspects of the same underlying unity. The “natural reasonableness” of the world, its contents, and human conventions alike has long been “axiomatic.” And many have set themselves up as guardians of this obviousness, guardians who will never acknowledge that there might be anything ill-fitted about the world.
I wish to explore the philological word-lover who positions himself to the side of the being-and-meaning pair. Such a process begs any number of questions about wheres and hows. And yet, keeping a zealous watch over his thesaurus, the word-lover would never think himself to be begging for anything. Nevertheless, this figure has in fact arrogated for himself a curious and impossible ou-topia that has been designated as a eu-topia. And he can only live there to the extent that he refuses to acknowledge the pun, a pun that a good ’pataphilologist would explicate by beginning, “Ewww. Well, no…” For myself, I would designate this nowhere-man as the paraphilologist, the grey, double- and stern-faced straight-man to the colorful and comic ’pataphilologist. But even a grey clown is nevertheless a full-fledged clown and duly distinguished matriculant from clown college: it would be wrong not to fête him as well in the course of our celebration of ’pataphilology.

A sketch: The paraphilologist keeps a solicitous watch. The aims are conservative. The results anything but. He cries trebly (in a two-fold sense) as he notes that sheep, apples, and tears are running down his cheeks all at once: “ῶ μῆλα, μῆλα, μῆλα!” The fruits of all labors to shore up the side-and-head-splitting facts of language tumble lamentably to the ground, and thereafter germinate seeds from which grow novelties that are unwanted by the gardener himself.

(Derrida’s) Plato’s Pharmacy seems like the place to begin and, likely, end. One can offer a miniature history by way of supplement to his tale of the philosophy of supplanting. Chapter One: The Attic philosopher as (aberrant) guardian of truth gives way to the aberrancy of philology as a bastard discipline that substitutes itself for legitimate philosophical guardianship. Chapter Two: Then, and worse still, the Romans arrive and imperiously arrogate for themselves the role of guardians of the (ill-gotten) gains of both philosophy and philology. These new parasitical paraphilologists know that they do not even have the words for the words that give the truth to all of the things: “The poverty of the Latin language,” they say whilst lolling amidst the spoils of the world.
Those other chapters of a (para-)history of erudition will need to be “taken as read” even if it is not quite the case that they have all already been written. I wish to linger in the here and now of “late antiquity” as an exemplary moment in the long history of the failure of the philological example to establish authoritative genera. *Pars* fails to hook up to *totum*. Instead one sees the reproduction of aberrancy amidst the narrative of normativity. It’s a farce: all of the parts want to play one and the same role, but the ill-signed forgery that is the sign system itself has given quite different parts to all of these parts. Cabbage-heads have mistaken themselves for the kingly-minded.

The Latin Grammarians write up their artfully artless *Artes* several hundred years into the language game: *noch einmal* a voice rings out defining for us what a *vox* is. Moreover, they know that we know that it’s all been said before. But has it? Amidst the authoritative citations, bald declarations, and general stagecraft of Settled Questions a reader might well note discord instead of concord, texts that do not quite agree with their peers and antecedents, texts, indeed, that do not even agree with themselves.1 Meanwhile the professor drones on and on so as to narcotize the student from noting the exciting possibility of linguistic failure and slippage. But not every student has always been so inattentive. And that’s where we will end, with a gesture to the fecundity of the failure of the stuffy to stuff others with...
all their stuffing: their words do indeed get taken up by their own students, but they are taken up not as truths but instead as amusing truisms, as mobile signifiers that can be whirled in now this direction and now that. The potential for ironic misreception will be the only eternal verity that we will be able to discern in here. The professor’s words are always also mere words that can take one down any number of paths. They can and will be detour(n)ed again and again. Even, of course, as these same stolid nostrums of the magisterial would themselves need (errant) repeating, if only to inspire still further quixotic students in their questing.

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Vox vocis. What did I just say? Did you hear the beginning of a grammatical paradigm: vox vocis voci vocem voce? That is, does one hear the word vox and at once feel the overwhelming urge to “decline” and so to analogize this ox by yoking it with some other that one might thereupon plow the field of language to spread a life-giving layer of dung over it? But if vox vocis is taken as a phrase, it is difficult to translate, and the one who uttered it stands guilty of the vice of amphibolia. For vox means both the voice and that which is uttered by the voice. In fact,

2 See D.S. Colman, “Confessio grammatici,” Greece and Rome 7, no. 1 (1960): 72–81, for a praise of folly: “I am proud to be a modern grammaticus; it does the youth of today good.”

3 See Priscian, Institutiones 7.44 (= GL 2.323–24) to learn how to decline words that end in ox, ox, ux, ux, yx, yx, aex, aux, alx, anx, unx, arx, ac, ec, and ut. Some of the beans were already spilled in 3.32 and 5.38, though [GL 2.106 and GL 2.166]. Priscian was active at the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth centuries CE. He taught at Constantinople. He is also the author of a panegyric to Anastasius. He was one of the leading scholars of his day.

4 Donatus, Ars Grammatica 3.3 (= GL 4.395): “Amphibolia est ambiguitas dictionis, quae fit aut per casum accusativum, ut siquis dicat ‘audio secutorem retiarium superasse’; aut per commune verbum [...] fit et per homonyma, ut siquis aciem dicat et non addat oculorum aut exercitus aut ferri. fit prae-terea pluribus modis, quos percensere omnes, ne nimis longum sit, non oportet.” Donatus was active at Rome in the middle of the fourth century CE. He was one of the leading scholars of his day.
vox also means any sound whatsoever. And as a phrase vox vocis can signify, inter alia, “the sound of one’s voice,” “talk about a word,” or “the word for speech.” Of course, a good stylist would avoid the collocation to begin with. But this artless gaffe allows a phrase to emerge that exposes problems circulating among the grammarians and their artes. At the foundation of the “art” of grammar stands a confusion about the status of language. In fact, this very confusion constitutes the sand upon which the castle of erudition will be built. Where to begin? With the voice? Perhaps, but what do we mean by vox? Thankfully, the grammarians are happy to define their terms for us. Unfortunately, they are all too happy to do so, and one is left with a surfeit of information. The knowledge comes pre-packaged as rationes, but one casts about in vain for reasonable ways to sift it. Priscian and Diomedes begin their discussion of the vox by reporting the philosophers’ definition of it. Which philosophers? Exactly how did they justify their position? Why this definition and not some other? The answers to such questions are less clear: philosophy is hauled onto the stage only long enough to have its authority conjured. We will not explore its methods and insights or, for that matter, even its basic bibliography. Priscian adumbrates a distinction between vox as “stricken air” and vox


6 Reynolds and Wilson may well talk about “decline,” the “dreary” and the “potted” relative to this era (L.D. Reynolds and N.G. Wilson, Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature, 3rd edn. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991], 29), but the uncritical accumulation of rationes is already several scholarly generations old by the time we get to Gellius in the second century CE. There is little reason to think that the worst one sees in late antiquity is somehow peculiar to late antiquity itself. See Anonymous, Nox Philologiae: Aulus Gellius and the Fantasy of the Roman Library, ed. Erik Gunderson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 114–15 on thoroughly encrusted rationes in Gellius. And, as Henderson notes, users of reference works like these are always addressed as if they were already advanced users, never readers who are really and truly themselves beginning at the beginning. See Henderson, The Medieval World of Isidore of Seville, 31.
as “air that strikes the ear.”\(^7\) Diomedes flags the idea as Stoic and gives roughly the same distinction.\(^8\) Neither really does much with this information beyond brandishing it.\(^9\) And one may well wonder how many philosophers either man has read and how closely: many seeming pieces of knowledge in this world are more indices of a kind of know-how that relates to repeating the already-said within the domain of a specific and narrow professional discourse.\(^10\) In short, many other discussions by many other grammatici begin in this fashion.\(^11\) After a brief philosophical flourish we get into the grammatical trenches. Let us try to follow along with Priscian for a while as he attempts to lead us. Priscian encourages us to think of vox as being that aer tenuissimum ictum he spoke of: this definition is taken from the essence of the thing, not some accident that befalls it. But even if vox is substantively aer, this same air has had one of four destinies bestowed upon it by that fateful blowing. Vocis autem differentiae sunt quattuor: articulata, inarticulata, literata, illiterata. Each of these qualifying terms will be defined presently. Articulata est quae coartata, hoc est copulata cum aliquo sensu

\(^7\) Priscian, Institutiones 1.1 (= GL 2.5).

\(^8\) Diomedes, Ars Grammatica 2 (= GL 1.420). Diomedes seems to have composed his work in the late fourth or early fifth centuries CE.

\(^9\) On the doctrine itself, see the index entries for ἀήρ and φωνή in Von Arnim’s Stoicorum Vererum Fragmenta.

\(^10\) Robert A. Kaster, Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 12. The product of the schools had no synthetic appreciation of history, philosophy, or even language, just a familiarity with certain approved individual items from various categories.

\(^11\) Servius, Commentarius in artem Donati (GL 4.405): “plerique artem scribentes a litterarum tractatu inchoaverunt, plerique a voce, plerique a definitione artis grammaticae. sed omnes videntur errasse […].” One might well be intrigued by so many different heteronomously errant majorities: plerique… plerique… plerique… One wonders what Servius would say about Diomedes who starts his second book on grammar by offering to tell us quid sit grammatica and thereupon launching into a discussion of vox. Only at the opening of Book 2 do we learn how to categorize whatever it was that was happening in Book 1. Servius was active at Rome in the last part of the fourth and early part of the fifth centuries CE.
mentis eius qui loquitur profertur. “Articulation” entails “coupling”: mind-and-voice. The air is not “mere” air, it is instead air that has been signed-and-sealed with the thought-and-will of the speaking subject. It travels from the psychic-and-physical interior of the speaker and makes its way into the ear of the auditor. The yoking of words to thoughts is hardly something unique to the grammarians: one of the key senses of the word sensus is “a thought expressed in words, a sentence.” But here we are forging a collection of bonds that will be set down as the foundations for an authoritative technology of language. And, significantly, though indeed forged and fabricated, these as-if rational foundations have been cloaked in the abstract and  

12 GL 2.5.  
13 Articulo in this sense is a wide-spread “technical” metaphor: see Lucretius, Apuleius, Gellius, Cledonius, and Isidore. “To divide distinctly” is obviously what Apuleius has in mind when he talks about the ability of a parrot to mimic human speech (eis lingua latior quam ceteris auibus; eo facilius urcha hominis articulant patentiore plectro et palato. Apuleius, Florida 13). By adding coupling to the notion of quasi-mechanical articulation in a passage like Apuleius’s the grammatici can shift from the merely qualitative to the interior and the intentional.  
15 The philosopher’s version of this can be found in Ammonius, In Aristotelis librum de interpretatione commentarius, 24: “νῦν γὰρ ὁ λόγος ἡμῖν οὐ περὶ τῆς τυχούσης φωνῆς, ἀλλὰ περὶ τῆς σημαινούσης τὰ πράγματα διὰ μέσων τῶν νοημάτων κατὰ τινα συνθήκην καὶ ὁμολογίαν αὐτῆς τε σημαίνεσθαι διὰ γραμμάτων δυναμένης.” Compare Diocles Magnes apud Diogenes Laerti 7.55–56 (= Diogenes Babyloniuss fr. 517ff in Hans Friedrich von Arnim, ed., Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta [Stuttgart: Teubner, 1964], henceforth SVF): ἐστὶ δὲ φωνὴ ἄηρ πεπληγμένος ἢ τὸ ἴδιον αἰσθητὸν ἀκοῆς, ὡς φησὶ Διογένης ὁ Βαβυλώνιος ἐν τῇ περὶ τῆς φωνῆς τέχνῃ. Since Ammonius will shortly discuss Aristophanes’ Frogs and their κοάξ, there is likely some attenuated kinship between Ammonius’s discussion and Priscian’s. But Priscian’s closest relative is something like the Commentaria In Dionysii Thracis Artem Grammaticam, Scholia Marciana, 310, which gives his same material in Greek: “Τῶν φωνῶν αἱ μὲν εἰσὶ εὐγράμματοι καὶ ἑνάρθροι, αἱ δὲ ἀγράμματοι καὶ ἄναρθροι, αἱ δὲ εὐγράμματοι καὶ ἄναρθροι, αἱ δὲ ἀγράμματοι καὶ ἑνάρθροι.” And we will soon hear of the Frogs there as well: “αἱ δὲ εὐγράμμαται καὶ ἄναρθροι, αἱ γραφόμεναι μὲν μηδὲν δὲ σημαινοῦσαι, ὡς τὸ βρεκεκεκέας κοάξ καὶ πάλιν τὸ φλαττόθρατ.”  
16 Lewis and Short’s Latin Dictionary: s.v., sensus B.2.b.
eternal idiom of science. The terms are all defined as being thus, and so there is no argument that leads us up to this position. A matrix of possibilities is being constructed: *articulata, inarticulata, literata, illiterata*. Inarticulata is a word that seems to exist only for a moment such as this: the *not-articulata*. One notes a minor hyperbaton: *mentis* has been held off to end its sentence: “mind” is what we are emphasizing here. *Vox*-without-*mens*: it is not really “speech,” just “sound” that is specifically failing to be speech. There are words for mere sound, and this is not one of them, or, to the extent that this is such a word, it becomes such a word only when seen from a very specific and specifically linguistic angle. “Defective relative to its valorized twin”: this same structure characterizes the relationship between the other two possible qualities of *vox*, the *literata* as against the *illiterata*.

The lettered [*literata*] is the one that can be written down, the unlettered cannot be written. Therefore one finds certain articulated *voces* that can be written and understood as, for example, “*I sing of arms and a man.*” Others cannot be written but are understood nevertheless, as is the case with men’s hisses and groans. These are *voces* and they attest to the thought [*sensum*] of the person who produces them, but writing them is not possible. There are others which even though they can be written are nevertheless called non-articulated since they signify nothing, words like *coax* and *cra*. But there are others that are non-articulated and non-transcribable [*illiteratae*]: they can be neither written nor understood. Examples are clattering, lowing, and the like.

17 Compare foundational mathematical axioms such as “if a = b, then b = a.” Unless you want to do set theory, this is where your discussion of arithmetic, algebra, and calculus will begin.

18 “*inarticulata est contraria, quae a nullo affectu proficiscitur mentis.*” Priscian, *Institutiones* 1.1 (= *GL* 2.5)

19 “*literata est quae scribi potest, illiterata quae scribi non potest. inveniuntur igitur quaedam voces articulatae quae possunt scribi et intellegi ut: Arma virumque cano, quaedam quae non possunt scribi, intelleguntur tamen ut sibili hominum et gemitus: hae enim voces, quamvis sensum aliquem significat proferentis eas, scribi tamen non possunt. aliae autem sunt quae
The “inaarticulate” choice is itself a “literate” one: Aristophanes’ *Frogs* sing Βρεκεκεκὲξ κοὰξ κοὰξ. But even that non-signifying signifier was itself turned into an object of knowledge/power/grammar within the play: τὸ κοὰξ was a meaninglessness given meaning by way of the definitive supplement of the definite article. So too the “empty” quality of the terms chosen by the grammarians is not “fully empty” given that there are high-status and highly literate precedents for these terms. Each is brought on to mean precisely “the meaningless.” And so, there is a meaning here. Κοὰξ is always coaxed into becoming τὸ κοὰξ. Zero is a number, too, and it “counts for something” even as it is itself nothing. Hisses and groans cannot be captured in writing even if one has no trouble writing either the word “hisses” or the word “groans.” These *voces* are perfectly intelligible and perhaps also “scriptable,” provided that one is willing to accept that the inscription is itself somewhat imperfect and ill fits the precise sound to a recognized, legitimate word.

In the middle one finds the exemplary example of an “articulate voice”, an “articulated utterance.” It is a speech-act that is also a writing-act, namely the singing of arms and a man. Priscian does not adduce the simple, neutral case of a “literacy” which need only mean “can-be-put-into-letters.” Instead he evokes the loftiest imaginable example of *litterae*-as-literature: these are the opening words of the most famous Latin poem, the poem that serves as the constant point of reference for the *quamvis scribantur tamen inarticulatae dicuntur, cum nihil significant ut ‘coax’, ‘cra’. Aliae vero sunt inarticulatae et illiteratae quae nec scribì possunt nec intellegi, ut crepitus, mugitus et similia.” Priscian, *Institutiones* 1.1 (= *GL* 2.5–6).

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20 The orthodox Stoic choice would be Chrysippus’s and Diogenes’ βλίτυρι, as can be seen in the notes below.

21 See Aristophanes, *Frogs* 266 and 268: ἕως ἂν ὑμῶν ἐπικρατήσω τῷ κοὰξ (266). Ἐμέλλον ἄρα παύσειν ποθ’ ύμας τοῦ κοὰξ (268). “That κοὰξ of yours: I know what it’s all about. I’ll get it under control and put a stop to it.” See also Sean Gurd, *Dissonance: Auditory Aesthetics in Ancient Greece* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 55–56, for the meaning in/as music that can be found in these “empty” words that are fully a part of a choral song.
teaching of a grammarian. Understanding Vergil is the task par excellence of the grammaticus whose schoolhouse teaches Latin as Vergil's Latin.

Sound is always already tending towards speech. And speech is always “literate” speech in the fullest sense of the word, the speech of the speaker who has gone through training in a specific variety of literary study. The articulate voice is both intelligible and destined-for-writing. Sound in general becomes speech in particular and speech is always also inhabited by a manifold version of The Letter. For it is not just the case that valorized speech can be transcribed with the mechanical service of letters, but the speech that is signed, sealed, and delivered by the soul of the speaker hits the ear of the listener enmeshed in a web of literate literature. One can read-and-hear the (Derridean) trace of literature in every human voice, said the grammarian who parroted the other grammarian who parroted still another, Pretty Diogenes Laertius's report about Diogenes Magnes continues: “Λέξις δέ ἐστι κατὰ τοὺς Στωϊκούς, ὡς φησιν ὁ Διογένης, φωνὴ ἐγγράμματος, οἷον ἡμέρα: λόγος δὲ ἐστὶ φωνὴ σημαντικὴ ἀπὸ διανοίας ἐκπεμπομένη” (7.56). Speech-as-lexis is always be-lettered, and speech-as-reason-as-argument-as-logos always gives a sign-of-interiority. The two differ in that lexis can be bereft of signification, but logos always signifies: “λόγος ἂεὶ σημαντικός ἐστι, λέξις δὲ καὶ ἀσήμαντος, ὡς ἢ ‘βλίτυρι’, λόγος δὲ οὐδαμῶς.” See also Ammonius's list of meaningless words: “τῶν φωνῶν αἱ μέν εἰσιν ἄσημοι οἷον κνὰξ βλίτυρι σκινδαψός” (Ammonius, in Porphyrii isagogen sive quinque voces, 59). Ammonius repeats the list several times. Similarly see Asclepius, In Aristotelis metaphysicorum libros A–Z commentaria, 252.28: “ὁ γὰρ εἰρηκὼς βλίτυρι οὐδὲν εἴρηκεν.” βλίτυρι and σκινδαψός are preserved among the fragments of Chrysippus as well (fragment 149 in SVF 2). Meanwhile, if you wait long enough, someone will declare that these non-words are in fact words and that they in fact do have meanings. See the Corpus paroemiographorum Graecorum 1.56: “Βλίτυρι καὶ σκινδαψός· ταῦτα παραπληρώματα λόγων, εἰσὶ δὲ καὶ παρομοίωδης. Ἰόβας δὲ τὸν σκινδαψόν ὄργανον λέγει μουσικόν, τὸ δὲ βλίτυρι χορδῆς μίμημα.” And the Etymologicum Magnum offers roughly the same account. See also Aelius Herodianus's word list: “Τὰ ἀπὸ τῆς βλι συλλαβῆς ἀρχόμενα διὰ τοῦ 1 γράφεται· οἶον· βλίτον, εἴδος λαχάνου· βλίνος, ἰχθύς· βλίτυρι, ξώον· βλιμάζω, τὸ ἀποστάζω µέλιτος· καὶ τὰ λοιπά” (Partitions 6.6). If it can be written, it really is fated to signify despite even the diavoi a of a man like Chrysippus.
Poly-Pittacus with his *patentiore plectro et palato*. After defining *vox* Priscian transitions to the *litera*.

The letter is the smallest element of composite speech [*vocis*], that is, of the voice that subsists by means of the arrangement of letters.⁴⁵

After noting what he means by *minima*, Priscian writes a second, supplementary definition: “We can define it thus: the letter is an individual *vox* that is capable of being written down.”⁴⁴ Letters are the atoms of speech: all utterances (that can be written) are made up of letters (whose essential function is the writing up of utterances).⁴⁵ The over-defining of the letter in terms of the voice emerges as a function of this circularity: letters are already speech; speech is already a letter. Each inevitably points to the other and defines itself by means of its partner. And this partnership is not just something that joins (external) sign to (internal) presence, a yoking of λέξις and λόγος. This same unconvincing melange also allows for reading-and-writing to be inserted into the destiny of the lettered voice and voice of the letter. Priscian’s argument continues/jumps:

*Litera* is so named as if from *legitera* because it offers a path-for-reading [*iter + legere*] or from erasures [*lituris*], as some would have it, because men of old generally used to write on wax tablets.⁴⁶

The etymological fantasy hurls itself into the discussion: the truth of words is that they bear their own truth within them-

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²³ “Litera est pars minima vocis compositae, hoc est quae constat compositione literarum.” Priscian, *Institutiones* (*GL* 2.6).
²⁴ “possumus et sic definire: litera est vox quae scribi potest individua.” Ibid.
²⁵ The atom of speech: τῆς δὲ λέξεως στοιχεία ἐστι τὰ εἰκοσιτέσσαρα γράμματα (Diogenes Magnes, fr. 20 *SVF*).
²⁶ “dicitur autem litera vel quasi legitera, quod legendi iter praebet vel a lituris, ut quibusdam placet, quod plerumque in ceratis tabulis antiqui scribere solebant.” Priscian, *Institutiones* (*GL* 2.6).

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selves, a truth that is legible — because the road to meaning was meant to be travelled — just around the phonetic bend. Your deaf ear can hear-the-voice inside the voice-of-letters just as clearly as your vacant, staring eye can see that the letter is really an erasure. Provided you are willing to assume your own conclusions this all works out quite nicely. Priscian hands us on a platter sight-and-sound, silence-and-speech, here-and-there, writing-and-present-absence. Thanks! The voice is always inhabited by letters, but letters are not some incidental aspect of the voice, they are all part of the destination/destiny of voice: books that capture arms, men, and songs at the end of an errant itinerary.

There is no such thing as rational/cultured speech “before the letter.” Either it is the true-story/etymology of the word, or, as some would have it, a letter is a sound-sign that points to a thought-sign that is not so much showing the way

27 While much of the discussion here centers around late and less prestigious authors, this truth-of-words thought extends all the way back to the classical Greek philosophers. See David Sedley, “Etymology as techne in Plato’s Cratylus,” in Etymologia: Studies in Ancient Etymology: Proceedings of the Cambridge Conference on Ancient Etymology, 25–27 September 2000, ed. Christos Nifadopoulos, 21–32 (Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 2003) on etymology in Plato’s Cratylus. For a thorough meditation on power/knowledge and etymology “out here” at the edge of late antiquity, see Henderson, The Medieval World of Isidore of Seville.

28 Fellow travelers met along the road: [Sergius], De Arte Grammatica: “Littera dicta est quasi legitera, eo quod legentibus iter praestet. ea est vocis articulata pars minima. vox autem dicitur articulata quae scribi potest, confusa quae scribi non potest” (GL 7.538). Servius, Commentarius in Aram Donati: “Litteras Latinas constat Carmentem invenisse, matrem Euandri. quae ideo dictae sunt litterae, quod legentibus iter praebant, vel quod in legendo iter-entur, quasi legiterae” (GL 4.421). If you trace the path back far enough, you will discover that Roman letters are older than Rome itself. See also Isidore, Etymologiae 1.3.3.

29 Note as well that, for his scholiasts, “Homer writes” and he writes “books”: he is not a bard within an oral culture. See, for example, Eustathius, Commentarii ad Homer Iliadem 1.7: “δόθην ἐκείνο μὲν τὸ βιβλίον ἀπὸ ἕνος προσώπου τοῦ Ὄδυσσεως ἀνόμασεν ὑποδηλόν τὸ ὀλίγον τῆς τοῦ γράφειν ὅλης.” Compare the scholia to the Iliad that explain why Homer starts writing his epic just where he does: the earlier battles were inconsequential, “περὶ ὧν ἀναγκαῖον ἀυτῷ γράφειν οὐκ ἦν, μὴ παρούσῃς ὅλης τῷ λόγῳ” (1.1b.6).
as it is a muddled way of talking about muddling: the letter in this case is an effaced word for effacement, *litura*. The name of the defenders of such an interpretation of the word for means-of-interpretation is fittingly blotted out from this text. Priscian continues to weave his web of intersecting heterogeneities into a single would-be coherent cloth: one can and will correlate the material, psychic, heard, seen, and understood. “They (juridically) designated them as letters by means of the word for ‘atoms’ after their likeness to the fundamental particles of the cosmos.”

Letters are “like” atoms. Their combination forms an as-if body that compounds a literal/letteral voice (*litteralem vocem*). But it is more than mere likeness and this body-of-voice is by no means merely some “as-if” entity: the air really has been struck and that sound is a physical phenomenon. Priscian even attempts to map vocal qualities onto space-time so as to insist upon the materiality of *vox literalis*. A dance of the quasi ensues: comparisons emerge but they arise as images that are not supposed to be mere images. Sometimes the image turns into the thing itself. At others, it is not a metaphorical stand-in but rather a legitimate/leg-iter-mate representative of the underlying substance. “Therefore the *litera* is the mark of the atom and as it were a certain image of the ‘literate’ voice, one which is known from the quality and quantity of the shape of its lines.”

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30 “Literas autem etiam elementorum vocabulo nuncupaverunt ad similitudinem mundi elementorum.” Priscian, *Institutiones* (GL 2.6). The translation is odd. But so is the Latin. *Nuncupare aliquem nomine* should mean “to call someone by a name.” But the “they” comes out of nowhere in this sentence unless “they” = “*the antiqui*” from the previous sentence who did not in fact name letters after atoms, at least they did not in so far as what we read there is concerned: letters were either “roads-to-reading” or (ancient) “erasures.” The point being made in this sentence is that “some scholars say that letters are like ‘atoms of speech,’” but the actual Latin makes it sound like *litera* is itself somehow etymologically connected to “atom” and that there was a formal proclamation to that effect. *Nuncupare* is often legal, and it is certainly not mild or neutral.

age of the lettered voice. This whole presentation fits awkwardly with issues that arise later for anyone in Priscian’s line of business, issues that in fact occupy much of the bulk of an Ars: what about the semi-scandal of a letter like K which need not exist? Indeed, K, Q, and C may well seem to form a redundant triplet. Meanwhile there are sounds that are not always represented by a letter. $H$ has an unusual status: its properties are only letter-like. Further, there is the whole question of accent, a phenomenon which does not have a written component. A letter’s essence: “image of the voice.” The accidents that attach themselves to this oh-so-material essence-as-simulacrum: (mere) name, (incidental) shape, and (real, material) force. The last turns out not to be an accident at all but rather something that governs the other two terms and is itself profoundly connected to vox. Living speech as performed (pronuntiatio) will unveil the truth of the letter/voice/voice-as-lettered/letter-as-voice.

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We have been following along with Priscian as he maps out the space-and-place of living speech and of word/voice as the image of presence. As we traverse our own road-to-reading/legiter, we will begin to take a number of detours and side roads in order to get a more complex appreciation of the territory over which

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32 Priscian 1.14 (= GL 2.12): “k enim et q, quamvis figura et nomine videantur aliquam habere differentiam, cum c tamen eandem tam in sono vocum quam in metro potestatem continerit. et k quidem penitus supervacua est.” Supervacua also appears in Scaurus’s work on orthography: “k quidam supervacuam esse litteram iudicaverunt, quoniam vice illius fungi satis c posset” (GL 7.14). See also Servius’s commentary on Donatus (GL 4.422)

33 Hence, as Priscian reports, Varro sees the Chaldeans as the first authors of letters because, he says, their alphabet has a one-to-one mapping of letters and sounds (1.7 [= GL 2.8]). Any drift away from this happy state is evidence of decay and/or secondariness.

34 Priscian 1.16 (= GL 2.12–14) says that some deny that it should be considered among the letters.

35 Priscian 1.6 (= GL 2.7): “Accidit igitur literae nomen, figura, potestas.”

36 Priscian 1.8 (= GL 2.9): “potestas autem ipsa pronuntiatio, propter quam et figureae et nomina facta sunt.”
grammatical knowledge extends itself. There are a number of different approaches to getting a grammar started, and the very variety is indicative of a somewhat confused intellectual sub-structure that supports the whole enterprise. Nevertheless, the varied efforts all labor in parallel directions even if they start from different particular elements and move through their material at varied rates. Speech is meaning. Meanings are intentions. Deep down words are “true,” and grammar helps us to suture true images to true things. Of course, the number of stand-ins tends to multiply and the quantity of substances to slip away. And so: The word is the image of the thing-thought. The letter is the image of the voice-spoken. The *vox* is word-and-voice. It is substance and spirit(-as-air) and spirit(-as-soul). All of this has to be pinned down and put in its place if the enterprise is to begin and to have legitimacy. And yet what emerges is instead an as-if legitimacy, an image of knowledge rather than knowledge itself.

“Locution” [*loqui*] is derived from “location” [*locus*]. This is because one who speaks initially utters terms and speaks words before he knows how to say things in their proper place [*suo loco*]. Chrysippus denies that this person speaks [*loqui*] but calls this as-if-speaking [*ut loqui*]. And as the image of a man [*imago hominis* (cf. *imago vocis literatae* above)] is not a man, just so the words used by ravens, crows, and children starting to use language are not actually words since they are not speaking [*non loquantur*]. And so that man speaks [*loquitur*] who knowingly places each word in its own

37 Servius’s commentary makes intentions one of the agenda items. And we can wonder if, like the number of books in a work, *intentio* is itself akin to an objective fact for someone like Servius. “In exponendis auctoribus haec consideranda sunt: poetae vita, titulus operis, qualitas carminis, scribentis intentio, numerus librorum, ordo librorum, explanatio” (comm. in *Aen.* I *praef.*) For a practical example, see 1.pr.70: “intentio Vergilii haec est, Homerum imitari et Augustum laudare a parentibus.” Compare the commentary on 1.286: “et omnis poetae intentio, ut in qualitye carminis diximus, ad laudem tendit Augusti.”
proper place [suo loco] and locution [prolocutum] is a case of bringing forth what one has within one’s breast [animus] by means of speaking [loquendo].

The account of language is suffused with a conflated set of ideas about “propriety”: proper places, proper persons, and things properly used. The discussion is almost never about language in general or some sort of neutral account of the empirical. Indeed, the domains of usus and consuetudo are filled with ugly necessities and not valorized terms. Instead this is the good Latin of good people: an elite sociology is mapped onto a quasi-scientific description of language. To the extent that grammar is chiefly invested in the reproduction of the cultural relations of production, one is unsurprised at the tendency of discussions to degenerate into word lists and various catalogs of knowledge as know-how rather than rigorous scientific appraisals. Accordingly, the generic category of usus which was initially scorned as “mere use” returns in the form of reams of citations of “proper (elite) use.” Professors — a collection of sociological also-rans — keep a tally of the bold strokes made on the field of play by their betters and transmit the scorecard on to the next generation as a (crushing) burden of tradition. In short, Latin is already a “dead language” for these men even as they are fetishizing the living voice on the first pages of their works. These are lepidopterists who may praise winged words, but the only

38 “loqui ab loco dictum, quod qui primo dicitur iam fari[t] vocabula et reliqua verba dicit ante quam suo quisque loco ea dicere potest. hunc C<h>rysippus negat loqui, sed ut loqui: quare ut imago hominis non sit homo, sic in corvis, cornicibus, pueris primitus incipientibus fari verba non esse verba, quod non loqu[eb]antur. igitur is loquitur, qui suo loco quadrue verbum sciens ponit, et †istum prolocutum, quom in animo quod habuit extulit loquendo.” Varro, De lingua Latina 6.56.

39 Kaster, Guardians of Language, 14: “Whatever its other shortcomings, the grammarian’s school did one thing superbly, providing the language and mores through which a social and political elite recognized its members.”

40 Ibid., 7: “The grammarian is “the man whose function set him amid many vital spheres of activity most often was without a place at the center of any of them.”
legitimate specimens are the ones firmly affixed in their position by the stylus rammed through them.

It is in this context that I would like to explore a couple of tendentious etymologies and then to move on to barbarism and solecism. Grammarians teach a bounty of falsehoods. Contrived etymologies are thick on the ground. The errancy of their interpretations is less interesting than the poetic spark that motivates it. This particular poesy is generally quite retrograde and might well be seen as exactly the sort of thing designed to preclude the much freer play of the imagination that one associates with the poetry of the poets.

For the etymologist, instead of enjoying untrammeled liberty, language needs to have a necessary relationship to the world. And the professors are quite happy to dig out of words a meaning they knew had to be there all along. Isidore has good news: there is a one-church/Catholic truth to language. But his position — as well as that of the other crypto- and not-so-crypto-Christian grammatici — is less an imposition upon the original material than it is a bringing out of a “truth of the truth of words,” namely that the Word is always ready to be impressed into the service of (some) One that is (rhetorically) positioned as The One. Artes grammaticae can even begin with an etymology of ars itself. What is the truth of ars/an ars? Servius’s commentary on the Ars of Donatus starts with just such a commentary on the word ars itself:

Ars is so named owing to aretē — that is it is derived from (manly) excellence [virtus] — which is the name Greeks give to the knowledge of each individual topic. Or it is most assuredly called ars because it encompasses everything in tight [artīs] precepts, that is in narrow and brief ones.

42 Kaster, *Guardians of Language* flags the many grammatici who were likely Christians. But their texts do not announce such on every page, quite the contrary, in fact.
43 “ars dicta est vel ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρετῆς, id est a virtute, quam Graeci unius cuiusque rei scientiam vocant; vel certe ideo ars dicitur quod artis praecipitis
Either A, which is not especially convincing, or B, which is even less convincing.44 Balking at such loosey-goosey arguments would be a disaster: everything is ship-shape says the man, even as the shapes shift before your very eyes: vel... vel... But not some other vel, of course. Isisore gives Servius’s argument but in a different order:

_Ars_ is so named because it consists of tight _[artis]_ precepts and rules. Others say that the word is drawn from the Greeks, ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρετῆς, that is, from “manly excellence” _[virtus]_, the name they gave to knowledge.45

cuncta concludat, id est angustis et brevibus.” Servius, _Commentarius in artem Donati_ (GL 4.405).

The pedigree for this particular argument perhaps includes a trace of the noble blood of Homeric scholarship wherein a valiant effort is made to etymologize the word “hero”: “ἡρώων· δεῖ γινώσκειν ὅτι ἥρωες ἐκλήθησαν ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρετῆς ἢ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀέρος, ὡς φησὶν Ἡσίοδος ἐν Ὁργοὶ καὶ Ἡμέραις” (Ephimerim Homerici, _Iliad_ 1.5.1; compare _Etymologicum Gudianum_ (ζείδωρος-ὦμαι), Alphabetic entry eta, 249 and Eustathius, _Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem_, 1.29.) Missing from the argument of Donatus, however, is the rather obvious fact that τέχνη is the word that is routinely found in the titles of Greek “technical” works. The Latin translation of Τέχνη ῥητορική is _Ars rhetorica_. More to the point, a Greek would call his _Ars Grammatica_ a _Τέχνη γραμματική_. See, for example, the opening words of Dositheus’s _Ars grammatica_: “ἐστιν γνώσις διωρθωμένης ὁμιλίας ἐν τῷ λέγειν καὶ ἐν τῷ γράφειν ποιημάτων τε καὶ ἀναγνώσεως ἔμπειρος διδασκαλία. “ See Massimo Gioseffi, “A Very Long Engagement: Some Remarks About the Relationship Between Marginalia and Commentaries in the Virgilian Tradition.” _Trends in Classics_ 6, no. 1 (2014): 176–91 for some preliminary notes on how to deal with “as others would have it” within authors like our grammatici: how much comes from the reading of distilled, excerpted and highly derivative works and how much from an engagement with longer, continuous pieces? And what degree of freedom do our authors show relative to antecedents such as these? One can compare the remarks of Robert A. Kaster, “Servius and Idonei Auctores,” _American Journal of Philology_ 99 (1978):181–82.

“ars vero dicta est quod artis praeceptis regulisque consistat. Alii dicunt a Graecis hoc tractum esse vocabulum ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρετῆς, id est a virtute, quam scientiam vocaverunt.” Isidore 1.1.2. Isidore’s text is identical to Servius, _Commentarius in Artem Donati_, 405, l. 2. Isidore was the archbishop of Seville and he died in 636 CE. See also Pompeius’s _Commentum artis Donati_ (GL 5.95) for the same etymology. Pompeius seems to have been an African and to have been active in the fifth or sixth centuries CE. Note also that
There is an “internal consistency” to such arguments that is provided by the “tight” binding of words like *ars* and *artus* to one another within an imaginary plane of signification that is perfectly indifferent to any failure of an actual etymological (in our sense) affiliation: manliness is scientific; science is manly; Latin art is really Greek excellence... All of this “makes sense” and is “sense-making” because it leverages a pre-existing universe of symbolic associations in order to generate a “voice of reason” that then speaks an arbitrary truth of words which has been posited as an essential truth of words. Meanwhile language in general constricts into a domain fully territorialized by elite speech. This elitism is both political and cultural. Nor should there be any real gap between aesthetic domination and socio-economic domination. The exemplary examples are all canonical, for, of course, we are working in the rule/ruler factory. Says Probus:

The *articulata vox* is the one that can be captured by letters: for example/put in your head the following injunctions, “Write, Cicero”; “Read, Vergil”; and other such items.\(^46\)

The structure of the lesson is itself part of the lesson. To say that a *vox* is something that can be transcribed requires only a citation of line one of the *Aeneid* if you are Priscian. Those words can be turned into those letters. But here the exemplary word is a command: “Get to work, Cicero. Go to it, Vergil.” And the Servius will sneak the *ars = virtus* equation into his commentary on the *Aeneid*: “reddidit arte: id est virtute, ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρετῆς.” This is a gloss on *Aeneid* 5.704–5, a place where one feels no special need to translate *ars* with anything that lies very far from the English term “art”: “tum senior Nautes, unum Tritonia Pallas | quem docuit multaque insignem reddidit arte.” Of course, now that one knows that *virtus* is an equivalent for *ars*, why not imagine swapping it in for every instance of *ars*? Something quasi-sensible will always emerge in the wake of the substitution.

\(^{46}\) “(vox) articulata est qua homines locuntur et litteris comprehendi postest, ut puta scirete Cicero, Vergili lege et cetera talia” Probus, *Instituta artium* (GL 4.47). Probus was active in the fourth century ce. He was perhaps an African who (perhaps) migrated to Rome to teach.
work these men are asked to do converges with the work that
the professors and the students engage in as consumers of these
cultural producers: read-and-write. Professor Probus gets after
that shiftless Chickpea and that none-too-chaste Vergil: “Write
that we might read.” And while *ut puta* is more or less dead as
an imperative and means little more than “for example,” one
might as well revitalize it just a bit and think of it more as “Im-
agine a situation like… .” The imperative thing is to get into your
head the imperative to fuse voice, reading, writing and then to
set them into a relationship with the spirit or soul (*animus*) (if
we are allowed to pull a key word from other passages in other
authors into this one).

The hortatory mode of instruction is no mere boosterism.
Instead the injunctions are convergent with legal education if
not just plain old legislation. If laws (*leges*) have legislators (*la-
tores*) in Livy and Quintilian, so does grammar itself in Probus.
“The letter is the atom of *vox*… .” After going through some
familiar arguments about letters, Probus then transitions to the
“problem” of the gender one is to assign to the names of the
letters. The letter is the atom of the word, but even these atoms
seem to be burdened with the as-if metaphysical question of
(grammatical) gender. This question is “assuredly” (*sane*) a set-
tled question, and one settled by legislative fiat:

> Assuredly the legislators of the art of grammar [*artis laiores*]
> and Varro in particular have all decided and commanded
> that the name of each individual letter is neuter in gender
> and to be declined accordingly.”

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47 The collocation is extremely common in Justinian and is used to illustrate
a general legal situation by means of a pertinent specific situation to which
it might be applied. And Probus himself will spread it liberally across this
same page.


49 “*sane nomen unius cuiusque litterae omnes artis laiores, praecipueque Var-
ro, neutro genere appellari iudicaverunt et aptote declinari iusserunt.*” Ibid.
Varro and others passed the Art-law that says that it’s *hoc a* and not *hic a* or *haec a*. The use of *latores* is something of a throwaway moment, but it is nevertheless a revelatory one as it provides one of the proper domains within which to think about “the art,” how it works, and where it comes from. And this genealogy is not especially close to the sort of neutral, empirical work that is demanded by modern linguistic science.

As I have been arguing, an analysis of ancient philology at the atomic level exposes that this same level is governed by what one might call quantum effects: strategic superimpositions and structuring uncertainties govern the account of the foundations of language. And these same effects can be observed once we have fully embarked upon the erudite road to reading. Varioustics can be observed throughout our teachers’ presentations. And one need little more than to ask grammar to offer a grammatical account of itself in order to precipitate a crisis. And this is the sort of thing we will see Lucian and Petronius in fact did.

One of the chief justifications for submitting oneself to a grammatical education is not something like an ability to read Vergil better and to love him all the more. Instead the teachers emphasize that good grammar helps you to avoid linguistic failures. And these same failures are always also class failures. Education teaches the ruling rules, how to recognize and to deploy them, how to submit oneself to them, how to insist that others submit as well. Accordingly, one of the first items to be discussed after the mechanical issue of letters is proper spelling. In fact there is not so much a word for proper spelling as there is a word for improper spelling: barbarism. Avoid it.

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50 Next order of business: what we should do, er, what we should not do… See Servius, *Commentarius in Artem Donati*: “Decurso octo partium tractatu incipit iam transire ad illud, quod docet nos, vel quem ad modum possimus vitare vitia vel habere virtutes” (*GL* 4.443).

51 Quintilian conjures it away early on: “Prima barbarismi ac solecismi foeditas absit” (*Institutio* 1.5.5). But no sooner has he dispelled these specters
Two complications arise at once: first, teacher himself has been barbarizing, and, second, Vergil is chock-full of barbarisms.\(^{52}\) Let us look at the latter issue first. The examples of barbarism and other transgressions will regularly be drawn from the *Aeneid*.\(^{53}\) Diomedes says that we cannot make it two lines into the *Aeneid* without confronting the poem’s coarse barbarity: *Italiam fato pro fugus* has a long initial *i*, even though the vowel should be short.\(^{54}\) Obviously my own argument is itself somewhat tendentious. Nobody is saying that Vergil’s Latin is bad. Quite the contrary, in fact. But bad Latin prose is consistently illustrated by means of appeals to good Latin verse: “If a poet does it, it is *metaplasmus*. If you do it, it is *barbarismus*.”\(^{55}\)

Naturally, one suspects that any old poet is not allowed to make any old change: poetic licenses are not handed out willy-nilly. And yet once you have such a license, it is really more like a blank check: either all irregularities in a good poet are part of his genius and to be explained as such, or they are to be dismissed than they return in the very next words: “sed quia interim excusantur haec uitiae aut consuetudine aut auctoritate aut uetustate aut denique uirtutum […]”.

The word “barbarism” is itself a quasi-barbarism? One can accept it to the extent that neologisms are admissible. See Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 13.6.4: “Itaque id uocabulum, quod dicitur uulgo ‘barbarismus’, qui ante diui Augusti aetatem pure atque integre locuti sunt, an dixerint, nondum equidem inueni.”

For a less tendentious take on the manner in which our teachers have to warn their students that some Vergilian uses are deviations from *proprietas* and not to be understood as “proper Latin” itself, see Robert Maltby, “The Role of Etymologies in Servius and Donatus,” in *Etymologia: Studies in Ancient Etymology: Proceedings of the Cambridge Conference on Ancient Etymology, 25–27 September 2000*, ed. Christos Nifadopoulos, 103–18 (Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 2003), 108–9.

Diomedes, *Ars grammatica* (*GL* 1.452). This is a canonical example: compare Quintilian, *Institutio* 1.5.18 and Servius, *Commentarius in Artem Donati* (*GL* 4.444).

as uninteresting examples of places where “the meter made him do it.” Or maybe the transgression was a harmless bit of pleasure-seeking in the name of beauty (decoris causa). On second viewing, the vice might well be a virtue, provided, of course, that the right sort of sinner has sinned in the right sort of way and is said to have done so by the right sort of reader.

The fetish for the good and the bad leaves these readers relatively numb to any number of hermeneutic possibilities. Nevertheless, even as they are fostering a strong, clear sense of right and wrong uses, the grammarians produce a jarring double acoustic experience. In good verse, we hear an echo of something bad, and every time we say Italiam “the right way,” we hear ourselves also not speaking it “beautifully.” And every time we read Vergil, our ears are inundated by an endless array of transgressions against propriety.

Adding or subtracting letters is one of the prominent species of the class of barbarisms. And, of course, the phenomenon needs to be illustrated. The grammatici are happy to oblige. Quintilian cautions against deriving examples of transgressions from the poets. He says that it is easy enough to invent misspellings and mispronunciations without vaunting a perverse brand of erudition by diggimg up problematic verses. And yet the boastful learnedness of iactatio eruditionis constitutes a key

56 Donatus, Ars grammatica: “metaplasmus est transformatio quaedam recti soluti sermonis in alteram speciem metri ornatusve causa” (GL 4.395). Rectitude (recti) makes way for either meter or adornment. Compare Charisius, Institutio grammatica: “metaplasmus est dictio aliter quam debuit figurata metri aut decoris causa” (GL 1.277). Obligations (debuit) are suspended: meter-or-beauty takes precedence. Charisius was active at Rome in the late fourth century CE.

57 Quintilian, Instruto Oratoria 1.5.10–11: “tertium est illud uitium barbarismi, cuius exempla uulgo sunt plurima, sibi etiam quisque fingere potest, ut uerbo cui libeit adiciat litteram syllabamue uel detrahat aut aliam pro alia aut eandem alio quam rectum est loco ponat. sed quidam fere in iactationem eruditionis sumere illa ex poetis solent, et auctores quos praelegunt crimina- nuntur.” But Quintilian himself will draw from Vergil in just a few sections when he notes the scansion of Italiam at Aeneid 1.2.
element of the knowledge performance of the grammarians. The learned mask projects this self-satisfied voice most eagerly.

If we linger with the idea of masks, and stages, and theatricality, we can describe the *ars grammatica* as an art of staging oneself as a professor. For example, the incoherent description of *vox* on offer need not be read as a failure of argument or reason. That puts things in the wrong register. Instead the specious story of *vox* is part of a performance of the would-be coherence of the professor’s own *vox*. Furthermore, as a would-be coherent performance of authoritative knowledge the various *Artes* perform a mastery of *Artes grammaticae*. They are about mastering this character and performing him on this stage. It is not really clear that an *Ars* is really about Latin in general (as it was really spoken) or even about the Latin of a given era or genre. One notes then that several of the *Grammatici Latini* write commentaries on Donatus’s commentary. Scholarship is more a matter of a mastery of the secondary literature and its idioms than it is something that is predicated on a devotion to the primary texts.58

Again, the argument about barbarism is completely hollow: “If a poet does it, then it is not a barbarism.” The Latin of the poets obeys its own rules, say the people who teach “the rules.” And yet a good many of these same rules seem to be made up on the spot as a means of explaining what one sees in the poets.59 The explanations tend towards the tautological: even though

58 See Roger Wright, “Even Priscian Nods,” in *Latin vulgaire, latin tardif VI: actes du VIe Colloque international sur le latin vulgaire et tardif, Helsinki, 29 août–2 septembre*, ed. Heikki Solin, 577–88 (Hildesheim: Olms, 2003), 577 on the way that *grammatici* tend to read only *grammatici*, even when common sense might give them some pause about certain issues.

59 The closed-off quality of the “barbarism” debate can be seen in the fact that the examples of failures tend to themselves be centuries old and drawn from other authors’ notes on the topic. Pompeius’s use of the actual (mis-)spoken Latin of his day sets him apart. See Luigi Munzi, “Per il testo dei grammatici latini,” *Bollettino dei classici, a cura del Comitato per la preparazione dell’Edizione nazionale dei Classici greci e latini* 21 (2000): 103–14, at 104–5 on *GL* 5.285–49.
this is wrong, it is right because this is poetry.\textsuperscript{60} Indeed, an educated, backwards-looking fantasy of “authorial intention” determines whether or not a variation from the norm is a poeticism or a lapse.\textsuperscript{61}

Meanwhile, as fans of good spelling may well have noticed by this point, the professors’ Latin is itself full of variants, or, as they would put it, barbarisms. Some of our authors have been writing about \textit{literae}, others about \textit{litterae}. There is literally a failure to agree about first principles, and we find disorder at the atomic level.\textsuperscript{62} Even as the \textit{grammatici} obsess over pure Latin and aver that there is such a thing, and that it can and, indeed, must be taught, their concrete practice reveals that they are promulgating a fantasy of Latin. And the clear-eyed will notice any number of superfluities, remainders, and omissions in the course of their account of an immaculate Latinity.\textsuperscript{65} This is a dream of Latin that subsists with the keenest “reality” only as a concrete character trait of the proffessoriat. This Latin inhabits only the brainpans of a certain species of highly influential cul-

\textsuperscript{60} Or maybe it is wrong. Homer nods, say Amphipolites and Chrysippus. See \textit{Scholia in Homeri Iliadem} A 129: “Ζώϊλος δὲ ὁ Ἀμφιπολίτης καὶ Χρύσιππος ὁ Στωϊκὸς σολοικίζειν οἴονται τὸν ποιητήν ἀντὶ ἑνικοῦ πληθυντικῷ χρησάμενον ῥήματι.”

\textsuperscript{61} Pliny says as much. See Servius, \textit{Commentarius in artem Donatum}: “Quaesitum est apud Plinium Secundum quid interesset inter figuras et vitia. nam cum figure ad ornatum adhibeantur, vitia vitentur, eadem autem invendantur exempla tam in figuris quam in vitis, debet aliqua esse discretion. quidquid ergo scientes facimus novitatis cupidi, quod tamen idoneorum auctorum firmatur exemplis, figura dicitur. quidquid autem ignorantes ponimus vitium putatur” (\textit{GL} 4.447).

\textsuperscript{62} Lewis and Short’s \textit{Latin Dictionary}: “\textit{littēra} (less correctly \textit{lītēra}), ae, f. \textit{lino}, q. v.” Why “less correctly” and not “barbarously”? It seems that critics have grown soft over the centuries.

\textsuperscript{63} See Daniel C. Andersson, “Did Diomedes Know Latin? A Problem with His \textit{De optativis},” \textit{Hermes} 139 (2011): 110–11 on how it is that Diomedes comes to utterly botch a description of the use of the subjunctive with \textit{priusquam} and \textit{antequam}: “What appears to have happened is that the authority of Vergil within the teaching environment that Diomedes knew so well has warped the descriptive function of Charisius’ grammar and that he has constructed an ad hoc explanation to deal with an apparent difficulty in Vergil’s text.”
tural gatekeepers. It was never obviously on anyone’s tongue either “back then” or, especially, in the benighted “here and now.”

Latin is conservative speech is “pure speech”: “Latinity is that which preserves pure speech, a speech free from every failing. There are two possible failings in speech that cause it to be less than Latin, the solecism and the barbarism.” Barbarity produces less-than-Latinity. The least linguistic variation is tantamount to an unnatural act. The schoolmasters trot out Pliny on pure Latin and (dangerously) supplement the citation with an asseveration that Pliny’s Latin was itself pure while he was speaking of purity:

Look how Pliny puts it, how well and irreproachably he speaks. What is barbarism? That what is not spoken naturally [per naturam]. What is solecism? That which is ill spoken artfully [per artem].

The proper individual word is as natural as the atoms of the universe. Bad phrases represent bad art in every possible dimension: they break both with nature and with the appreciation of language that artes grammaticae have. And, in all likelihood, these bad phrases make their transgressions in the name of their own perverse, ignorant, and oxymoronic species of artless art. The secondary senses of the vocabulary in such passages

64 “Latinitas est, quae sermonem purum conservat, ab omni vitio remotum. vitia in sermone, quo minus is Latinus sit, duo possunt esse: soloecismus et barbarismus.” See [Cicero], Rhetorica ad Herennium 4.17.

65 “Et vide quem ad modum expressit Plinius, quam bene et integre dicit. quid est barbarismus? quod non dicitur per naturam. quid est soloecismus? quod male per artem dicitur.” Pompeius, Commentum artis Donati (GL 5.283). The passage continues with definitions of solecism and barbarism. Then it concludes: “We will clearly explain how we can avoid such in our Ars Grammatica [haec qua ratione vitare possumus, in arte grammatica dilucide dicemus].” Compare Servius’s Pliny: “Pliny says that a barbarism is a single word whose force is unnatural. The name barbarism comes from the fact that barbarians speak in a warped manner, as if one were to say ‘Rume’ instead of ‘Rome’ [Plinius autem dicit barbarismum esse sermonem unum, in quo vis sua est contra naturam. barbarismus autem dicitur eo quod barbari prave locuntur, ut siqui dicat Rumam pro Roma].” See GL 4.444.
tell a tale of legitimate conservative hegemony fighting valiantly against degenerate outsiders, the alien, and the déclassé. And yet the very people who repeat this lesson century after century are themselves often usurpers. They may well be successful occupants of privileged positions, but theirs is more a rhetoric of legitimacy than some sort of substance thereof. Hermit crabs flail their claws menacingly as they lecture about the making of the shell that they wear on their back, an act of fabrication of which they have only second-hand knowledge, if any.

This calcified, formal posture of philological rigor says: “Every letter matters, no least detail is too small.” Meanwhile variant spellings swirl about us, and they do so less as a simple function of stupidity and error than as an element of a self-blinding knowledge that cannot let language live. Living speech and the dead letter have to be fused together if this sort of by-the-book Latinity is to be promulgated. And so, the Artes get written up century after century, more likely to cite one another and familiar bundles of citations than to read verses with fresh eyes.

It all suits them to a missing-\(t\), this literatus insistence upon the rule-bound nature of Latin. And their erudition runneth over. The bluff and bravado of the institution as a whole is swaddled in the rhetoric of stuffy asseveration. “In poetry this is metaplasmus, but the same thing is a barbarism in everyday speech.”\(^6\) And yet how does one spell the word for “everyday speech”? Is it loquella or loquela? That’s an easy one, just open up Flavius Caper’s De Orthographia: “narro and narratio are spelled with two \(r\)’s, querela and loquela with one \(l\)”\(^7\) One and only one \(l\). If Catullus, Lucretius, and Ovid use two, then that must have been a metaplasmus, right?\(^8\) That’s the rule we have seen before: poetry means wrong-but-right means metaplasmus.

\(^6\) Donatus, Ars grammatica: “in poemate metaplasmus, itemque in nostra loquella barbarismus” (GL 4.392).
\(^7\) Caper, Orthographia: “narro narratio per duo \(r\), querela loquela per unum \(l\)” (GL 7.96).
\(^8\) Catullus, Carmina 55.20: “verbosa gaudet Venus loquella”. Lucretius is kind enough to even be talking about linguistic variation in one of the places where he uses the word. See Lucretius, De rerum natura 5.71: “quove modo
And sure enough it looks like we might be seeing it again. Varro’s *De Lingua Latina* has only one *l*. And Servius’s commentary on *Aeneid* 4.360 specifically says that the doubling is what poets do. It would be easy enough to close the book on this one were it not the case that our very same Servius had used *loquellis* in his own prosy voice when commenting on *Aeneid* 1.595. A proper count should be the work of an instant. A glance could sort the byproducts of coprolallia from the products of a golden tongue. But this is not really about counting in the end. Instead, the field of play circles around a different statement, namely “we all know that there is a right number of consonants.” “Know” and “right” are the important terms, the real words that we really care about. The actual number of consonants can and will vary. As with the heterogeneity of *litera/littera*, one cannot but marvel at a failure of the word masters to agree about the spelling of the word for word. And, further, the failure of agreement within the professional discourse is itself quietly effaced even as one volubly denounces the ignorant masses for their failure to adhere to the norm (whatever that norm might be).

As an illustration of barbarity that is not barbarity because it is really licensed poetic metalepsis we are pointed to an example with which we must certainly be familiar: *relliquias Danaum*. Donatus tells that barbarism can result from the addition of a letter or a syllable: “cf. *relliquias Danaum*.” The phrase in question is used three times in the *Aeneid* and occurs at 1.30, 1.598, and 3.87. Donatus is probably thinking of the first of these given

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70 “sane coram quidam adverbium putant, quia non subsequitur casus, quidam praepositionem loquellis, non casibus servientem.” Servius, *In Vergilii Aeneidos Libros* 1.595.

71 Donatus, *Ars grammatica*: “per adiectionem litterae fiunt barbarismi, sicut *relliquias Danaum*, cum reliquias per unum l dicere debeamus; syllabae, ut *nos abiisse rati* pro abiisse; temporis, ut *Italiam fato profugus*, cum Italian correpta prima littera dicere debeamus […]” (*GL* 4.392).
that there is a bias towards early lines in his examples. Nevertheless, one will be hard pressed to find any remainder of the phrase *relliquias Danaum* in a printed text of Vergil. And that is because, outside of a passage like this, one does not spell the word that way. Indeed, the spelling is tough to find in Servius’s commentary on Vergil. When he glosses these lines, Servius tells us about items like *Danaum* and is silent about the spelling of *reliquiae*. And yet Servius’s commentary on Donatus faithfully transcribes an example that he himself does not follow. It looks like we are seeing in Donatus some sort of retrojection into the text of Vergil of a later way of saying/syllabifying a word. And then this non-Vergilian Latin is made into an element of an erudite gloss on something that “seems off but is really spot on because, see, it’s in Vergil.”

When we step back and take stock of this soundscape, it’s all starting to feel like we are overhearing some sort of bizarre inside joke: won’t spell letter right; slurring the word for words; leftover letters in the word for leftovers. And, to cap it all off, many of them are unable to spell the name of their favorite poet properly: it’s Vergil, not Virgil, you idiots. His friend Horace called him that, and so should we. And yet this misspelling has a canonical status. It starts early and persists well beyond the classical era. In fact, Virgil becomes the standard way of writing the name. If one cares about spelling and abhors barbarity as per the eight thick volumes of the *Grammatici Latini*, then one

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72 Vat.lat.3225 is a fourth-century manuscript of Vergil. At XVIv (i.e. at 1.598) one reads *relliquias*. But a small extra l has been written in above the word. But which version is the “mistake,” the first or the second? It depends on where you went to school and when and with whom, I suppose. In the next line *exaustis* was written and then double corrected to read instead *exhaustos*. And the latter is what one prints today: change the case; add an *h*.

73 Servius, *Commentarius in Artem Donati*: “[barbarismus] fit quinque rebus, littera syllaba tempore adspiratione. haec omnia aut adicuntur aut detrahuntur. adicitur littera, ut ‘relliquias Danaum’, syllaba, ut induperator pro eo quod est imperator: tempore, ut ‘Italiam fato profugus’, cum Italian priore correpta syllaba dicere debamus” (*GL* 4.444). And the latter is what one prints today: change the case; add an *h*.

74 See, for example, Horace, *Sermones* 1.10.44–45: “molle atque facetum | Vergilio adnuerunt gaudentes rure Camenae.”
can only shudder to heft the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* whose second edition has an entry only under “Virgil.” Seek for something that starts “Ver…” and you will find only “Vergiliomastix.” A poet is being beaten. But who? And why? Presumably he barbarized when he thought he was being metaplastic.

The entry to “Virgil” — whoever he might be — begins: “The spelling with an ‘i’ is traditional; contemporary inscriptions give the name Vergilius. It was corrupted by the fourth or fifth centuries, and so passed into all vernaculars.”

Virgil is what highly exquisite barbarians of all centuries call the poet they fetishize and most adore. The very ages that are starting to have trouble spelling his name are the same ones in which *artes grammaticae* are exploding, these books full of voice-and-letter stuff. Amidst all that talk about writing and writing about talk there ensues a becoming-right of the wrong, an institutionalized acculturation of barbarism that is so powerful and so well-placed that the noble savages of Oxford cannot bring themselves to call Vergil by his own name: the post-classical vernacular takes precedence over the classicism of the *Classical Dictionary*.

I have been bringing out the most dire potentialities folded within the discourse of the *grammatici*, and I will continue to do so for a bit longer. Obviously, they can and would train sensitive, open-minded readers of literature, but an emphasis on that sort of end is hard to note amid page after page of talk about right vs. wrong and catalogues of approved uses.

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76 Dionysius Thrax begins his *Ars Grammatica* with a much more expansive definition of the project: “γραμματική ἐστιν ἐμπειρία τῶν παρὰ ποιηταῖς τε καὶ συγγραφεῦσιν ὡς ἐπὶ τό πολύ λεγομένων.” And even if many of the chief members of the practice have a certain stiffness to them, he does not phrase things in the most dire possible way. Moreover, he privileges interpretation as the noblest of the elements. See 1.1.5: “Μέρη δὲ αὐτῆς ἐστιν ἐξ πρώτων ἀνάγνωσις ἐντριβὴς κατὰ προσῳδίαν, δεύτερον ἐξήγησις κατὰ τοὺς ἐνυπάρχοντας ποιητικοὺς τρόπους, τρίτον γλωσσῶν τε καὶ ἱστοριῶν πρόχειρος ἀπόδοσις, τέταρτον ἐτυμολογίας εὐρεσις, πέμπτον ἀναλογίας
Education takes on the air of class indoctrination. The “guardians of knowledge” take on a gatekeeper function: their role is to produce a natural-cum-artificial yoke between good language and good people.\textsuperscript{77} Students become heirs to a cultural legacy which they have earned by dint of the fact that they have submitted themselves to their teacher’s lessons. Or, more accurately, by dint of the fact that their already successful fathers have sent them to the school of submission.

Even if \textit{amphibolia} is a vice, double-meanings hover over every term and multiple ends are served simultaneously.\textsuperscript{78} The technical discussion is always also about something more than mere technicalities. A self-referential air wafts over the discussion. Examples are frequently not mere examples. Do you want to know about the comparative and superlative degrees? The words chosen to illustrate the phenomenon are \textit{doctus}, \textit{doctior}, and \textit{doctissimus}.\textsuperscript{79} Do you want to know what an abstract noun is? \textit{Pietas} will do as an example, a word that defines both Aeneas and, \textit{sotto voce}, commentators (on commentators) on the \textit{Aeneid} who piously invent, er, I mean, transmit to their students, the \textit{scribentis intentio}.

\textit{Proprie} is a word often deployed when drawing legitimate scholarly distinctions. But scholarly distinction cannot be segregated from social distinction. Legitimacy is the proper possession of the educated. See, for example Servius:

\begin{quote}
In the case of every part of speech there ought to be definitions that separate them from the others and that indicate
\end{quote}

\textit{ἐκλογισμός, ἕκτον κρίσις ποιημάτων, ὁ δὲ κάλλιστὸν ἔστι πάντων τῶν ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ.” As someone who was active in the second century BCE, Dionysius is a much earlier writer than most of the people we have been talking about.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{77} This is Kaster’s thesis. See the opening chapter of Kaster, \textit{Guardians of Language}.

\textsuperscript{78} Quintilian, \textit{Institutio oratoria} 9.4.32: “Amphiboliam quoque fieri uitiosa locatione uerborum nemo est qui nesciat.”

\textsuperscript{79} Servius, \textit{Commentarius in artem Donati} (GL 4.406).
Definition, boundary setting, propriety. That sounds good. But notice that this remark by Servius is offered as a commentary on the following statement by Donatus: “A noun is a part of speech that has a case and indicates a (material) body or an (abstract) thing in a manner that is either particular or general.” Servius’s sequel uses the same terms but differently, and it steers the point towards a different end. Donatus’s self-appointed heir appropriates propie and drops communiter. Servius’s point is more narrow and technical than I let on, but he has nevertheless strategically shifted the terms of the discussion. Donatus wanted to talk about proper nouns as distinguished from “common nouns.” His examples were Tiber and Rome as against river and city. In Servius, it is exclusively an exclusionary Rome that we will inhabit: to hell with other cities and any community of common nouns. Karthago and its accursed K should be deleted. Remember as well that k is not a “proper vox” since it mimics c and qu and is accordingly “common.” Instead let us speak only of purity/propriety, and let us do so in the midst of an incredibly hybrid text composed during an era of radical cultural change.

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80 “in omnibus partibus orationis definitiones ita esse debent, ut et segregent ab alis partibus et ipsius partis quam definiunt aliquam proprietatem dicant.” Servius, Commentarius in artem Donati (GL 4.406).

81 “nomen est pars orationis cum casu corpus aut rem proprie communiter significans.” Servius, Commentarius in artem Donati (GL 4.406).

82 Cledonius uses the same argument in his Ars (GL 5.10). Cledonius seems to have been active in the second half of the fifth century CE. He was a grammarian and a senator who lived in Constantinople.

83 In this period, we are undergoing the decisive shift from a pagan culture of Rome to a Christian one: the number of reasons there is not going to be a next Cicero compounds itself century by century, starting with the 1st century CE. Nevertheless, the syllabus still consists of “the classics.” See L. D. Reynolds and N.G. Wilson, Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature, 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 34–35. And yet, unlike Quintilian who will cite both Vergil and Cicero on every single page, the grammatici are in fact much more interested in Vergil than in Cicero, and, accordingly, “Augustan verse” and not...
The contrived, baroque rhetoric of the letter that serves as the preface to Diomedes’ *Ars* is just the sort of thing that some rhetoric teachers could pick to pieces for its swollen style. And yet we are not allowed to laugh, at least not yet. Please see below for who chuckles, when, where, and how. Instead this tumescent rhetoric that opens up the volume is a vindication of education in general and it hammers us with a Latin no uneducated man would ever produce as it describes the Latin only education can yield. Overwrought metaphors about metalworking are indicative of a neurotic and hyperbolic effort to show-and-do-and-tell, a rhetoric where these modes have all become fused as we listen to this *vox* about *vox* about *vox* echo in our ears ideas parroted from others.

Diomedes begins thus: “The Art of undiluted Latin, the teacher of pure eloquence: the grandeur of human cleverness has polished it, a thing forged by learned blows of a scholarly hammer making educated strikes.” The overstuffed prose is hard to parse at first glance, and this is exactly the sort of failing that teachers teach one to avoid. And yet Diomedes doubtless “intends” for us to take this sentence about shine and polish as


84 As Kaster, *Guardians of Language*, 38, insists, illiteracy is far and away the norm. Any attainment sets one apart. Being an imperfect student of Cicero’s Latin is assuredly not the most salient issue in a world where virtually nobody can claim to be an accomplished one.

something that is itself shiny and polished. *Claritas* is abstract and empty but it radiates a warm sociological glow: *clarus* is a word that is used to designate a very specific sort of man, after all. For an up-and-comer schoolmaster clever clarity and cleverness as *claritudo* will do just fine as a surface sense with some not-so-hidden depths to it.\(^8\)

This sentence beats us over the head with its ideas about education and hammers home its thought about hammers. Literary study teaches the teachable its learned learnings learnedly. *Dociliter* is doing a lot of work. The fact that Diomedes seems unaware of or indifferent to the sorts of things that Cicero, Seneca, and Quintilian say about style shows us that this is a book about “today” and “today’s Latin” even as it is stuffed full of backwards-looking passages and precepts.\(^8\) The Book of Good Latin™ is replacing books that are filled with good Latin. The textbook has an immanent force that is only incidentally connected with the sort of projects embedded in the Latin that it quotes.

For example, when Diomedes used the phrase *meatus aurium* our own erudite ears shudder at the sort of collocation that would be a problem for older writers. *Aures* should not be a genitive modifier of a concrete noun unless there is a good reason to do such a thing. An abstract noun is what one will see governing *aurium*: *voluptas aurium, sensus aurium, mensura aurium, causa aurium*. *Meatus* takes something like “moon,” “sky,” or “stars” as its typical object: very few passages will not fall into that pattern. At a minimum, a Vergil—or is it Virgil?—professor will have Vergil, *Aeneid* 6.849 to hand, a verse which contains the phrase *caelique meatus*. *Meatus pectoris* is a late and bold extension. See [Quintilian], *Declamationes Maiores* 8.18. Accordingly, *meatus aurium* reads like the pushing of an already forced us-

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86 See Kaster, *Guardians of Language*, 57–62, on the precarious claims to membership in high society of the *grammatici*.

87 See Kaster, “Servius and Idonei Auctores,” on the conjuring of approved classes of author who are ranked by time-as-merit: *antiqui, neoterici, idonei*. More recent writers are admitted to discussions only provisionally and when they support an “older” consensus and can be slotted into some sort of “establishment” position.
age. Well, that’s how it reads if the Latin one is familiar with is the “pure Latin” of Cicero and not the “pure Latin” of Diomedes the Latin teacher whose life and Latin are to be placed centuries later despite the rhetoric of “timelessness” in which his work is couched. Of course, it should be remembered that Quintilian’s Ciceronean Latin is a retrograde-but-contemporary construct that can and should be distinguished from Cicero’s Latin. And, similarly, Cicero’s Latin was itself an invention that was decried as a modernist, hybrid monstrosity back in the day. “Good Latin” names/has named/will name a gambit wherein one pretends that there is such a thing as Good Latin, even as it is never a thing in its own right.88

Diomedes’ prologue closes with an injunction to remember. Memory and nostalgia save us from horror. Those who remember what their teachers taught them will be OK in the end. What remains is the task of cultivating-and-recultivating an atomized Field of Latinity, of committing remainders like relliquiae-two-l’s to our memory and therewith triumphing:

For the rest, one should rehearse one’s individual lessons and so fix them fast in the memory. Otherwise one’s efforts would fade over time, and effort is the thing that principally allows us to be recognized as being superior to the ignorant. With the monstrosity/non-normativity of their rustic and uncultivated speech the ignorant wound, no, they utterly warp, the well-regulated/normative integrity of speech. They bring darkness upon its polished light, a light brought forth by means of art in the same measure as they themselves differ from beasts.89


89 “superest ut singula recolendo memoriae tenaci mandentur, ne frustra cum tempore evanescat labor, quo tanto maxime rudibus praestare cognoscimur, qui rusticitatis enormitate incultique sermonis ordine sauciant, immo de-
This learned praise of learning is written in a terrible-but-educated Latin that poses as terribly educated Latin. Diomedes does a fine job, though, of hitting his key terms: book-labor distinguishes us from rustic labor. But there is an overlap despite the fundamental divide that sets the abstract over and against the concrete: both parties cultivate. It is just that one cultivation is sublime and the other gross. Rules are emphasized. We see both enormitas and normata. Mangled Latin reminds us of mangled bodies. “Abnormal” Latin is bad Latin, is rustic Latin, is “unenlightened” Latin. Indeed, bad Latin darkens, and, conversely, the Latin imparted by artes brings light.

One might feel a bit anxious even before the catastrophic ending: throughout this sentence the praise of purity is suffused with mixed metaphors. But then, in the place of a crescendo, risible bluster. After complaining about the bad order of bad Latin, Diomedes tacks on a lame extra limb whose lack of coordination is glaring. The tanto... quanto... that bridges the two members of the sentence is forced and unbalanced: tanto cognosimur... quanto ipsi videantur. Huh? Oh, right: the uneducated are halfway between beasts and the educated. Weak verbs and a pile of intervening material means that the pointed finale falls short. The sympathetic reader has to do the work that Diomedes’ own Latin fails to do. And the work that Diomedes has failed to do well is, scandalously, the work of praising reading-as-work.

If we are going to get ourselves in a high Sallustian dudgeon, then a sensible idea is that “by so much as” education brings light, “by that much” does want of education consign one to darkness. But the sentiment we read here is unmeasured and monstrous (enormis). Diomedes instead mixes two ideas together and then leaves one branch out. He wants to say both something about “educated is to uneducated” as “rustic is to animal” and to correlate illumination from the ars grammatica with the darkness of boorish speech. Diomedes’ sentiment is clear enough, but the

formant examussim, normatam orationis integritatem politumque lumen eiu infuscant ex arte prolatum, quanto ipsi a pecudibus differe videantur.” Diomedes, Ars grammatica (GL 1.299).
Latin itself is flailing and utterly deformed (examussim) exactly at the moment when it has invested its all in the idea of the well-tempered linguistic distinction that education imparts.\(^90\)

Though grammatically viable, Diomedes has very nearly solcized in his abuse of the ignorant. Consider his definition of a solecism (as well as its forced Latin):

A solecism is [something which] disorders speech in contravention of the logic of Roman tongue and it is a failure in the weaving together of the parts of speech made in contravention of the rule of the grammatical art. That is, it is a joining together of words that does not converge with the logic of the language.\(^91\)

While solecism is typically discussed as a matter of syntactical failures like “I are stupid,” there is nevertheless a connection between badly woven parts of speech and badly woven clauses. And I would like to push that connection for at least a moment.\(^92\)

One can also see here yet another brush with failure. Though he will teach us to eschew tautology, there is a quasi-tautological idea in Diomedes’ argument. Specifically, the ratio sermonis and the regula artis grammaticae are virtually one and the same: the logic of speech itself blurs with the rules of the art of analyzing speech. In fact, Diomedes’ prose stutters here as he decides whether or not to make them identical: id est… To paraphrase his sentiment: “The ratio is the regula, that is, the regula is the ratio.” The ratio of Diomedes’ own sermo hinges on this ability to allow for a free movement between academic description and

\(^90\) Many of Diomedes’ key terms recur in the discussion of Latinitas, that is “good Latin.” See GL 1.449.

\(^91\) “solecismus est contra rationem Romani sermonis disturbans orationem et vitium in contextu partium orationis contra regulam artis grammaticae factum, id est non conveniens rationi sermonis iunctura verborum.” Diomedes, Ars grammatica (GL 1.453).

\(^92\) See Julia Burghini and Beatriz Carina Meynet, “Casos equivocos entre barbarismos y solecismos: scala, scopa, quadriga en Quintiliano, Donato, Diomedes, Pompeyo y Consencio,” Argos 35 (2012): 40–59, at 47–49: Diomedes’ discussion is itself more expansive than that of his predecessors.
academic prescription. “That is,” grammar teaching “is” organically connected to language’s internal logic. At least that is what Diomedes needs us to understand.

Fine, we all flatter ourselves with such notions about the metaphysics of our epistemology. And yet, symptomatically, Diomedes’ very next item is a (familiar) pair of utterly unconvincing etymologies for the word solecism itself. Either it comes from λόγου σώου αίκισμός or it is coined off of the bad linguistic habits of some people named the Soloi whose gaffes were so numerous as to give a name to the thing. And then Diomedes tells us that there are 14 ways one can solectize. Well, some say there are 15…. The argument/λόγος makes sense only from moment to moment. Anyone who wants the sort of ratio or λόγος that a philosopher attempts to provide will be pained at the αίκισμός inflicted upon the rules of reasoning. Of course, the “rules of reasoning” are not quite the same thing as the “rules of speech”: the latter obey a secret logic that allows the iunctura of ill-yoked arguments and heterogeneous species of argumentation. But there’s nothing to worry about because the rules of speech and the rules of grammar teachers are somehow — but don’t ask just how… — connected to one another.

The grammaticus is a paraphilologist who attaches himself to language as its guardian. But the attachment has a parasitical and moribund structure. The doctor may well be the disease rather than the cure. Nevertheless he, like any good parasite, feasts away while language itself is left in a somewhat precarious state. Even if the fruits of the grammarian’s labors are not necessarily useless, one has to note that the grammatici are seldom setting out to do productive new research. Most of their time is spent repeating the old bibliography and disputing narrow questions like whether there are 14 or 15 species of a certain class of error and what names to give to them. Interesting things happen, but these moments arise more in the gaps and cracks than they do within the terms of the surface of the text. These
textbooks are supposed to be dry as dust. A pursuit of technical mastery within a static field squeezes out a self-critical analysis of just what it is they are doing and how it might be refined or improved more generally.

See, for example, Diomedes’ pointedly toothless definition of comedy: “Comedy is a compassing of private, civic station that entails no risk to life. The Greeks define it thus: κώμῳδιά ἐστιν ἰδιωτικῶν πραγμάτων ἀκίνδυνος περιοχή.” Despite any curiosity that this statement might arouse in certain directions, we are not going to learn more about the terms “private” or “harmless.” Instead we are told that this bit of Latin is really just Greek (even if that is not quite true). And within that Greek which is not quite the same as the Latin, the item of interest is κωμ-, a stem that is explained via an appeal to the word κῶμαι.

Learning to read the grammatici critically entails figuring out how to excavate something from a translation of a commentary on a commentary despite several textual generations’ worth of insistence that there is nothing more to see here than that which the professor says there is to see. Just listen to the master’s vox and don’t think too hard. And yet the professor is churning up a host of issues that seem to emerge “unintentionally” despite the insistence upon the importance of intentionality. However, no sooner does the desire to ask a follow-up question burble forth

93 Diomedes, Ars grammatica (GL 1.488).
94 For example, one might wonder as to why the Greek ἀκίνδυνος has been over-translated in the Latin. The source material is using a potentially strong word in a mild sense: ἀκίνδυνος literally means “free from danger,” but in a context like this it has the force of “harmless.” Meanwhile the Latin translation lurches towards “without risk to life” when one instead expects to read, at the furthest limits of a strong Roman-minded version of ἀκίνδυνος, something that means “without bringing risk to another’s civil or legal standing.” And to indicate “standing” one should either write status or vitae status and not just vita. Such philological exercises ought to be discouraged: they might lead us to doubt the professor’s grasp of his material.
95 At best only the faintest echoes of Aristotle’s definition in Poetics 1449a32 can be found. Instead Diomedes’ argument is engaged with something like the Commentaria In Dionysii Thracis Artem Grammaticam: “Κωμῳδία ἐστιν ἡ ἐν μέσῳ λαοῦ κατηγορία ἡγουν δημοσίευσις; εἰρηται δὲ παρὰ τὸ κώμη καὶ τὸ φθή, […]” (172).
than the discussion has flowed off in a different direction with a completely different emphasis.

But not everyone was quite so unwilling to do something more and something new in the wake of sitting though their lessons. The grammarians’ paradigms may well constrain, but they also enable. Lucian’s *Lis Consonantium* arises as a free play of the imagination from the barren soil prepared by the grammarians. If the *grammaticus* trains you for the *rhetor* who trains you for the courts, then Lucian short-circuits the institutional hierarchy. The least elements perform the most exalted role: the *voces*-as-letters are literally given voices. Though a light piece, Lucian’s oration delivered by Sigma against Tau before a court of Vowels makes literal the sociology that subtends the technical discourse of proper spelling. Change over time turns into howls of outrage: “Time for changes.” Sigma establishes his good character. He emphasizes his reluctance to use and abuse the court system. In so doing, Sigma inevitably generates a witticism surrounding the multiple possible senses of an idiom like ἡσυχίαν ἀγαγόντα, “keeping quiet.”96 Meanwhile σύνταξις will mean both social order and grammatical order.97 This comic conflation forms the core of the piece. And Sigma is keen to point out that verbal-cum-social chaos is running rampant: Lambda and Rho have been quarreling for some time. The same is true of Gamma and Kappa. Sigma’s own narratio tells the story of Tau’s constant and shameless encroachments upon Sigma’s property: a host of objects that should be spelled with σ now have a τ in them instead. And the crowning outrage is that the word for speech itself has been depraved: “Will we allow γλώττα to supplant γλώσσα?!?”98

96 We can tell there is a joke afoot because the two times words formed on ἡσυχ- are used in this speech both occur in the same paragraph. See Lucian, *Lis consonantium* 2.

97 See ibid. 3: “οὐχ ὥστε τίνα τρόπον αἰ συντάξεις τὰ νόμιμα, ἐφ’ οἷς ἐτάχθη τὰ κατ’ ἀρχάς, ἐξουσίω.”

98 Ibid. 11: “οὐ γὰρ ἐπιτρέπει γε αὕτως κατ’ εὐθὺ φέρεσθαι ταῖς γλώσσαις μᾶλλον δὲ, ὃ δικασταὶ, μεταξὺ γὰρ μὲ πάλιν τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πράγματα ἀνέμνησε περὶ τῆς γλώσσης, καὶ ταύτης με τὸ μέρος ἀπῆλασε καὶ γλώτταν ποιεῖ τὴν γλώσσαν. ὃ γλώσσης ἄληθῶς νόσημα Ταῦ.”
Sigma evokes the trope of the lawgiver so commonly found in forensic oratory. If we go back to the invention of letters we will see that there is a fundamental order and hierarchy that must be preserved. The story of who invented and organized the alphabet is given with multiple variants: either Cadmus or Palamedes or Simonides.\(^99\) This argument faithfully captures the constant over-determination of origins within the *Artes grammaticae*. Similarly, Sigma demands that Tau be crucified by Tau-ing him since that would suit him to a T: the cross for the cross-shaped letter.

Lucian’s games only work if everyone has been to school. The audience for the piece can only be schoolboys past and present who find themselves all too ready to smirk at what really goes on in the lecture hall. Moreover, the things one learns in more advanced classes or hears in actual speeches become fodder for another set of laughs. It’s all rather trite, isn’t it? Nevertheless, Lucian himself is hardly a linguistic relativist. His Greek is an erudite Attic, an idiom which can only be acquired after great efforts, if one happens to be born at a distance of hundreds of kilometers and hundreds of years from the Athenian Miracle. For example, the *Adversus indoctum* argues in favor of exactly the sort of technical linguistic skill that is imparted by the *grammatici*: a man who buys many books is not the same thing as a man who knows how to read them, and the piece unfolds at the expense of the former and to the credit of the latter. Lucian shows that there is no need to either passively absorb philological knowledge or to repudiate it outright. Instead literary ’pataphilology offers the most erudite commentary of all.

And this ’pataphilology opens up new passages for the signifier by composing dramatic dialogues of the bookish.\(^100\) Lucian’s *True History* is able to fly off into outer space precisely because

\(^{99}\) See ibid. 5.  
\(^{100}\) Consider as well Terentianus Maurus’s versification of grammar lessons. Rather than use erudition to read Vergil one can make erudition itself into a sort of (humble-but-not Entirely-humble) epic. His verse prologue is full of elaborate self-positioning when it comes to the sort of labor and ingenium that is capable of producing what will come in the body of the work.
it plays with the absurdity of a certain species of erudition. Meanwhile our own philology becomes anxious in the face of *The Solecist*. Is it by Lucian, or isn’t it? Are the errors part of the joke? Intentions and authorship, authenticity and merit: the endless academic game transmits itself across the ages.

But it is easy to oversell the uses to which this sort of ‘pataphilological response to grammatical paraphilology has been put. The humor is often principally concerned with maintaining social control and privilege even more effectively. There is a smirking return to terms like barbarism and solecism that can and should give us pause. The joke is often that, despite an ostensible preoccupation with rightness, the representative of learning is either a fake representative or a failed representative. Meanwhile, by not so subtle implication, the author and reader are positioned as genuine representatives.

Mocking bad Greek or bad Latin is frequently a sociopolitically reductive move. Catullus’s abuse of Arrius’s *chommoda* and *hinsidiae* instead of *commoda* and *insidiae* scolds a linguistic outsider who has become a bit too much of a political insider. When in Rome you absolutely must speak as the smart-set Romans do. Suetonius’s account of the works of Claudius is hardly glowing. “Not bad” is the best he will say of some of it. But the story of Claudius’s addition to the alphabet is framed so as to make the emperor look like a self-important, second-rate scholar. Martial plays the spelling game to make fun of a Cinnamus and to put him in his non-place. If a Cinnamus is

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101 Compare the *Battle of Frogs and Mice*, a Homeric epic in mousy miniature that emerges around the time that scholars are first really digging into Homer. It is both a derivative work and a novel one, as the poem itself notes in its third line: “ἣν νέον ἐν δέλτοισιν.” These are new verses for modern book technology, not old sung lays.

102 See Catullus, *Carmina* 84. Rough words are allowed into the smooth and polished book only to be singled out as an affront to those whose ears like things *lenis* and *levis*.

103 Suetonius, *Claudius* 41.3: “nouas etiam commentus est litteras tres ac numero ueterum quasi maxime necessarias addidit; de quarum ratione cum priuatus adhuc volumen edidisset, mox princeps non difficulter optimuit ut in usu quoque promiscuo essent.”
allowed to appropriate a grand name like Cinna, then let us go all in with our barbarisms and call a (noble) Furius a thief (fur) instead.\textsuperscript{104} The extra twist of the joke here is that this madman (furiosus) has indeed been thieving, and he was mad enough to think that he could get away with it. But Martial the \textit{grammaticus} caught the barbarism and so saved the sociolinguistic day. Everyone knows that proper nouns, especially aristocratic ones, should never be expected to suffer the vicissitudes of barbarous assaults of either the semiotic or the phonetic stamp.

Against the largely reductive and conservative deployment of “the right” as against “the wrong,” more productive paths are traced out by the Latin novelists. Petronius’s book of scoundrels shows the worldliness of learning. The antihero pretends to be a scholar. The actual scholars are spongers. The \textit{nouveaux riches} despise learning but also acknowledge the sort of cultural capital it represents. Names are constantly changing. False labels are affixed to everything. Poetry is endlessly mis-cited. The embedded epic in hexameters is thoroughly discredited by an internal audience of even worse (prose) offenders. Conte’s thesis that this book is really some sort of praise of conservative literary tastes is hard to sustain in the face of a Bakhtinian riot.\textsuperscript{105}

Meanwhile in \textit{Metamorphoses}, Apuleius’s Lucius is teased for being a \textit{scholasticus} by Photis. And the set-up to the narrator’s asinine transformation circulates around a clever, educated youth who is not nearly so clever as he thinks he is. The self-staging of the narrator prior to his transformation presupposes a gentlemanly world of erudition and the station that goes with it, and yet Lucius is not taken seriously by others even before he becomes the unwitting star of the Festival of Laughter. The fact that the book has a quasi-hieroglyphic structure, complete, of course, with Isis and Egyptian priests, shows a sort of internal limit to voice-as-letter-as-book and the confidence of the savvy

\textsuperscript{104} \textit{Epigrammata}, 6.17: “Cinnam, Cinnamon, te iubes vocari. | Non est hic, rogo, Cinna, barbarismus? | Tu si Furius ante dictus esses, | Fur ista ratione dicerris.”

\textsuperscript{105} See Gian Biagio Conte, \textit{The Hidden Author: An Interpretation of Petronius’ Satyricon} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).
schoolboy who is sure that he knows how to read and to understand what is written.\footnote{106}

A whistle-stop tour of Greek and Roman literature will only do these texts a variety of injustices. The main point is to appreciate the manner in which both the spirit and the letter of grammatical education suffuses the literary and cultural landscape. An education in spirits (in multiple senses) and letters (in multiple senses) plants a variety of seeds from which many other texts can germinate. And this efflorescence has an ironic quality given that so much time is spent by the schoolmen scorning the idea of change and insisting upon a rigid normativity.

It is easy enough to dismiss the *grammatici* as marginal figures. They are not politically or culturally central. Their material constitutes the stuff of early education. The texts we have are “late” even if the practice itself is centuries old.\footnote{107} Their texts are multiply derivative, usually of one another. Even the intellectual core of the enterprise is on loan from the linguistic theories of the philosophers. And many of our “native informants” insist upon several of these same critiques. For example, Quintilian certainly does not aspire to train the next generation of *grammatici*. Quintilian is training the next Cicero (in an age when there cannot be a next Cicero).

But it is precisely this marginality and derivativeness that enables one to see something important about the underpinnings of literate society more generally. If we take the *faux*-high road we can try to out-*grammaticus* the *grammatici* and note the uneven, shoddy workmanship executed by second-rate thinkers. There are risks along this alternate reading itinerary (*legitera*...
the paraphilologist as ‘pataphysician altera). For example, if we assume that Chrysippus succeeded in establishing a philosophy of language (because he was a Greek philosopher, and philosophers are wise and therefore right) where Priscian failed (because he was a Latin grammaticus and grammatici are shallow and therefore wrong), we merely reveal our own passion for the syllogisms of authority.

Instead we should note the desire in many quarters to establish a “metaphysics of presence” by means of a metaphysics of phonetic writing. In short, much of what Derrida says in Of Grammatology can be quickly adopted to a reading of these stories of the phonetic alphabet. The grammatici present incomplete, cursory, contradictory accounts of the relationship between writing and speech and soul.108 In fact, these accounts are not just incomplete, they are also at the same time over-complete as well. One is offered multiple incompatible explanations without comment or cues for adjudication. If the more rigorous and scrupulous realm of philosophy will do a tidier job of positing unity within the heterogeneity of the sign, that does not mean that the philosophers got it right, only that they are craftier craftsmen of logoi about logoi. And we should not let our own longing for a unity of speech and reason — that is, our own desire that we ourselves say and mean always and only what the ego of our ego-speech says it says and means to mean — seduce us into a belief that that sort of present-to-itself voice-of-reason that can and should be written-and-read is an established fact instead of a metaphysical fantasy.109

The grammatici offer the perfect site to watch différance at work. They not only show that a deconstruction of logos is possible, but they further reveal the potential fecundity of a deconstructive relationship to the sign even as, of course, the gram-

109 See ibid., 20, on conscience as the hearing of the voice of the transcendental signified.
matics are doing their best to prevent any such radical projects.\textsuperscript{10} The failure to offer a satisfying account of the sign at the opening of the \textit{Artes} is a repeated, ritualistic gesture that pays obeisance to a desire for a closure that will ground the practice of grammar as a would-be science. What these \textit{faux}-satisfactory accounts reveal instead is that the being of speech is indeed “derivative with regard to difference.”\textsuperscript{11}

Each of the grammatical projects above ends up telling a double story as it attempts to shore up precious singularity. Each positions itself as a legitimate heir to earlier efforts while also resembling a parodic distortion of them. Nevertheless, this “degeneration” can also be a liberation. And various adventurous then-contemporary literary projects can be seen tapping into the conjoined wisdom and folly of the erudition of the hour. Learning and literature were long associated in antiquity as a noble, stable pair. But this scandalous slide in the form and contents of learning opens up productive gaps. And therein one can find the wherewithal for various free-spirited exercises that launch language into the “beyond of the beyond” and give rise to a generative ’pata-discourse inspired by the stagnant academic para-discourse.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} Jacques Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in \textit{Writing and Difference}, trans. Alan Bass, 278–93 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 279: “Nevertheless, the center also closes off the play which it opens up and makes possible. As center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, element, or terms is no longer possible.”

\textsuperscript{11} See Derrida, \textit{Of Grammatology}, 23.

\textsuperscript{12} My overall conclusion converges with the position of Raymond Starr, “The Flexibility of Literary Meaning and the Role of the Reader in Roman Antiquity,” \textit{Latomus} 60 (2001): 433–45, but with a key difference. Starr sees the internal diversity of the tradition (“some say… others say…”) as something that liberates readers and gives them a role. I believe that \textit{ultimately} this is true, but that scholarly mastery often baldly declares “the right” version outright. Meanwhile major avenues of exploration are never opened up, and only narrow, technical questions are allowed. \textit{Auctoritas} plays a key role here, and none of these modes is especially liberating in and of itself: one is free only to follow one’s master and so to become him. Compare ibid., 441: “The commentator often models the reader’s task.” I am most interested in
The Artes’ “authoritative contents” arise in the wake of and by means of an endless negotiation of the “problem” of differing/deferring folded into the would-be objective object of study, namely the ephemeral voice, and the way that both spirit and letter mediate it simultaneously. A contemporary deconstruction of the Artes might seek to inhabit them and subvert them from within. That is all well and good, but one needs to note as well the productive quality of their internal incoherence within the ancient context.

In the schoolhouse, the non-simplicity of the problem of the sign and the need to appeal to not just ratio but also auctoritas and usus enables this branch of knowledge to swiftly become an instrument of social power. A specific contemporary configuration of proper authority, good use, and right reason swoops in to save the day by reaffirming the order of the day. Similarly, it is entirely possible within the ancient world to smirk condescendingly at the insipid grammatici and then to follow up by engaging in their same game of cultural hegemony, only “better” this time.

Nevertheless, various ancient appraisals of grammar break it free from its own internal debates which are wont to ask questions like “How many cases are there, really: 6? 7? 8?!” In fact, those readers who broke with the tradition of taking scholarly reading too seriously.

113 See F. Murru, “Alcune questioni filologico-linguistiche a proposito dell’octavus casus,” Glotta 56 (1978): 144–55, and F. Murru, “Due ulteriori definizioni dell’octavus casus nei grammatici latini,” Glotta 57 (1979): 155–57, on the eighth case in the Grammatici Latini. Unusual and/or bold poetic uses can turn into “core features of Latin syntax.” Vergil-as-normal means that all rulers should be calibrated to measure (a highly imperfect understanding of) his poetry as if it gave the index of Latin itself. Servius mentions several times Vergil’s it clamor caelo at Aeneid 5.451: it is a problem passage that helps to work through other passages. But if you are unable to decide the case of caelo here, you can always invent an eighth one to handle more or less exactly this passage: caelo is a dative—that’s-an-accusative, i.e., “the eighth case.” Servius’s position is merely that this sort of thing is figurative: “figuratum est; nam de nominativo transit ad dativum” (Servius, In Vergilii Aeneidos Libros 10.322). Why one elects to be “figurative” in one place and not in another is of less interest to him. That is, why, exactly, does...
it is perhaps too kind to use the word debate of what one sees. The details are regularly elided, and one is more likely to know that “some say that” something is such or so than one is to hear their reasoning. In contradistinction to the grammatici and their adumbrations that give everything a very specifically normative pattern of light-and-shadow, wayward, literary students of the letter generate novelties. They appreciate that dramatizing knowledge at work in the world can generate new configurations that are not necessarily just the same game but are played, this time, at a higher level of social mastery. That last option is always on offer and enticing. But we can see as well the possibilities that emerge for the so-good-he’s-bad student.

These new efforts and ectopic texts can expose the game for what it is: a place where jeux de mots and jeux d’esprit can frolic productively. And, significantly, these paraphilological efforts can open up vistas within which the grammatical apparatus can be deployed as a set of productive possible relationships to words. And then learning can be leveraged to sail through a universe of speech-and-writing that is “novel” in both the empirical and literary senses of the word. These innovations in the name of heteroglossia and against monoglossia unsurprisingly tend to have a comic cast to them. For comedy remains the place where the familiar can be most readily challenged. Comedy revels in short-circuits, overlaps, homophonies, and other paralogisms that in fact reveal something scandalous about logos himself, namely that a word like vox means too many things for us to take it at its word. Plautus’s Sosia decides he might not be Sosia after losing a violent grammatical debate-cum-altercation

Vergil write it “clamor ad alta | altaria” at 4.665–66 and “it clamor caelo” at 5.451? What is the force of the figure?


115 See Slavoj Žižek’s forward to Alenka Zupančič, The Odd One In: On Comedy (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008) for a manifesto in the name of the short circuit. And then keep reading Zupančič herself for an account of the radical qualities of comedy relative to the order of the sign.
with someone who says that, no, he is Sosia. In Apuleius, Lucius the asinine schoolboy discovers (and also fails to discover) just how much of a metaphorical ass he was when he got himself transformed into a literal ass. This is the sort of foolishly funny thing that breaks lose when one realizes that wordplay is the thing to prick the conscience of the logocentric king.

Ubu-se-trouve: Ah! messieurs! si beau qu’il soit il ne vaut pas la Grammaire. S’il n’y avait pas de Grammaire il n’y aurait pas de Grammatistes!