"The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism" by A.E. Housman*

Christopher Kelty
Alfred Housman
Scott McGill

This work is produced by The Connexions Project and licensed under the
Creative Commons Attribution License †

Abstract

This article was first published by A.E. Housman (the same poet famed for "A Shropshire Lad") in 1921 at a meeting of the Classical Society in Cambridge England. It elaborates on some definitions of textual criticism and offers both advice and chastening criticism of some common practices.

NOTE: The following text is taken from the *Proceedings of the Classical Association*, August 1921, Vol XVIII. The meetings were held from August 2nd to August 6th. On the Morning of Thursday, August 4th, Alfred Edward (A.E.) Housman presented this paper. The session was chaired by the President of the Association. Numbers in square brackets, [xx], represent the beginning of a page, using the original page numbers. Editors' notes appear in brackets. Greek characters and accents may not display properly in all platforms; transliterations are provided in curly brackets {}.

In beginning to speak about the application of thought to textual criticism, I do not intend to define the term **thought,** because I hope that the sense which I attach to the word will emerge from what I say. But it is necessary at the outset to define **textual criticism,** because many people, and even some people who profess to teach it to others, do not know what it is. One sees books calling themselves introductions to textual criticism which contain nothing about textual criticism from beginning to end; which are all about palaeography and manuscripts and collation, and have no more to do with textual criticism than if they were all about accidence and syntax. Palaeography is one of the things with which a textual critic needs to [68] acquaint himself, but grammar is another, and equally indispensable; and no amount either of grammar or of palaeography will teach a man one scrap of textual criticism.

Textual criticism is a science, and, since it comprises recension and emendation, it is also an art. It is the science of discovering error in texts and the art of removing it. That is its definition, that is what the name **denotes**. But I must also say something about what it does and does not **connote**, what attributes it does and does not imply; because here also there are false impressions abroad.

First, then, it is not a sacred mystery. It is purely a matter of reason and of common sense. We exercise textual criticism whenever we notice and correct a misprint. A man who possesses common sense and the use of reason must not expect to learn from treatises or lectures on textual criticism anything that he could not, with leisure and industry, find out for himself. What the lectures and treatises can do for him is to save

*Version 1.2: Apr 23, 2004 8:54 pm GMT-5
†http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/1.0

him time and trouble by presenting to him immediately considerations which would in any case occur to him sooner or later. And whatever he reads about textual criticism in books, or hears at lectures, he should test by reason and common sense, and reject everything which conflicts with either as mere hocus-pocus.

Secondly, textual criticism is not a branch of mathematics, nor indeed an exact science at all. It deals with a matter not rigid and constant, like lines and numbers, but fluid and variable; namely the frailties and aberrations of the human mind, and of its insubordinate servants, the human fingers. It therefore is not susceptible of hard-and-fast rules. It would be much easier if it were; and that is why people try to pretend that it is, or at least behave as if they thought so. Of course you can have hard-and-fast rules if you like, but then you will have false rules, and they will lead you wrong; because their simplicity will render them inapplicable to problems which are not simple, but complicated by the play of personality. A textual critic [69] engaged upon his business is not at all like Newton investigating the motions of the planets: he is much more like a dog hunting for fleas. If a dog hunted for fleas on mathematical principles, basing his researches on statistics of area and population, he would never catch a flea except by accident. They require to be treated as individuals; and every problem which presents itself to the textual critic must be regarded as possibly unique.

Textual criticism therefore is neither mystery nor mathematics: it cannot be learnt either like the catechism or like the multiplication table. This science and this art require more in the learner than a simply receptive mind; and indeed the truth is that they cannot be taught at all: *criticus nascitur, non fit*. If a dog is to hunt for fleas successfully he must be quick and he must be sensitive. It is no good for a rhinoceros to hunt for fleas: he does not know where they are, and could not catch them if he did. It has sometimes been said that textual criticism is the crown and summit of all scholarship. This is not evidently or necessarily true; but it is true that the qualities which make a critic, whether they are thus transcendent or no, are rare, and that a good critic is a much less common thing than for instance a good grammarian. I have in my mind a paper by a well-known scholar on a certain Latin writer, half of which was concerned with grammar and half with criticism. The grammatical part was excellent; it showed wide reading and accurate observation, and contributed matter which was both new and valuable. In the textual part the author was like nothing so much as an ill-bred child interrupting the conversation of grown men. If it was possible to mistake the question at issue, he mistook it. If an opponent's arguments were contained in some book which was not at hand, he did not try to find the book, but he tried to guess the arguments; and he never succeeded. If the book was at hand, and he had read the arguments, he did not understand them; and represented his opponents as saying the opposite of what they had said. If another scholar had already removed a corrup-[70]tion by slightly altering the text, he proposed to remove it by altering the text violently. So possible is it to be a learned man, and admirable in other departments, and yet to have in you not even the makings of a critic.

But the application of thought to textual criticism is an action which ought to be within the power of anyone who can apply thought to anything. It is not, like the talent for textual criticism, a gift of nature, but it is a habit; and, like other habits, it can be formed. And, when formed, although it cannot fill the place of an absent talent, it can modify and minimise the ill effects of the talent's absence. Because a man is not a born critic, he need not therefore act like a born fool; but when he engages in textual criticism he often does. There are reasons for everything, and there are reasons for this; and I will now set forth the chief of them. The **fact** that thought is not sufficiently applied to the subject I shall show hereafter by examples; but at present I consider the causes which bring that result about.

First, then, not only is a natural aptitude for the study rare, but so also is a genuine interest in it. Most people, and many scholars among them, find it rather dry and rather dull. Now if a subject bores us, we are apt to avoid the trouble of thinking about it; but if we do that, we had better go further and avoid also the trouble of writing about it. And that is what English scholars often did in the middle of the nineteenth century, when nobody in England wanted to hear about textual criticism. This was not an ideal condition of affairs, but it had its compensation. The less one says about a subject which one does not understand, the less one will say about it which is foolish; and on this subject editors were allowed by public opinion to be silent if they chose. But public opinion is now aware that textual criticism, however repulsive, is nevertheless indispensable, and editors find that some presence of dealing with the subject is obligatory; and in these circumstances they apply, not thought, but words, to textual criticism. They get rules by rote

without grasping the realities of which those [71] rules are merely emblems, and recite them on inappropriate occasions instead of seriously thinking out each problem it arises.

Secondly, it is only a minority of those who engage in this study who are sincerely bent upon the discovery of truth. We all know that the discovery of truth is seldom the sole object of political writers; and the world believes, justly or unjustly, that it is not always the sole object of theologians: but the amount of sub-conscious dishonesty which pervades the textual criticism of the Greek and Latin classics is little suspected except by those who have had occasion to analyse it. People come upon this field bringing with them prepossessions and preferences; they are not willing to look all facts in the face, nor to draw the most probable conclusion unless it is also the most agreeable conclusion. Most men are rather stupid, and most of those who are not stupid are, consequently, rather vain; and it hardly possible to step aside from the pursuit of truth without falling a victim either to your stupidity or else to your vanity. Stupidity will then attach you to received opinions, and you will stick in the mud; or vanity will set you hunting for novelty, and you will find mare's-nests. Added to these snares and hindrances there are the various forms of partisanship: sectarianism, which handcuffs you to your own school and teachers and associates, and patriotism, which handcuffs you to your own country. Patriotism has a great name as a virtue, and in civic matters, at the present stage of the world's history, it possibly still does more good than harm; but in the sphere of intellect it is an unmitigated nuisance. I do not know which cuts the worse figure: a German scholar encouraging his countrymen to believe that "wir Deutsche" have nothing to learn from foreigners, or an Englishman demonstrating the unity of Homer by sneers at "Teutonic professors," who are supposed by his audience to have goggle eyes behind large spectacles, and ragged moustaches saturated in lager beer, and consequently to be incapable of forming literary judgments.

[72] Thirdly, these internal causes of error and folly are subject to very little counteraction or correction from outside. The average reader knows hardly anything about textual criticism, and therefore cannot exercise a vigilant control over the writer: the addle-pate is at liberty to maunder and the impostor is at liberty to lie. And, what is worse, the reader often shares the writer's prejudices, and is far too well pleased with his conclusions to examine either his premises or his reasoning. Stand on a barrel in the streets of Bagdad, and say in a loud voice, "Twice two is four, and ginger is hot in the mouth, therefore Mohammed is the prophet of God," and your logic will probably escape criticism; or, if anyone by chance should criticise it, you could easily silence him by calling him a Christian dog.

Fourthly, the things which the textual critic has to talk about are not things which present themselves clearly and sharply to the mind; and it is easy to say, and to fancy that you think, what you really do not think, and even what, if you seriously tried to think it, you would find to be unthinkable. Mistakes are therefore made which could not be made if the matter under discussion were any corporeal object, having qualities perceptible to the senses. The human senses have had a much longer history than the human intellect, and have been brought much nearer to perfection: they are far more acute, far less easy to deceive. The difference between an icicle and a red-hot poker is really much slighter than the difference between truth and falsehood or sense and nonsense; yet it is much more immediately noticeable and much more universally noticed, because the body is more sensitive than the mind. I find therefore that a good way of exposing the falsehood of a statement or the absurdity of an argument in textual criticism is to transpose it into sensuous terms and see what it looks like then. If the nouns which we use are the names of things which can be handled or tasted, differing from one another in being hot or cold, sweet or sour, then we realise what we are saying and take care what we say. But [73] the terms of textual criticism are deplorably intellectual; and probably in no other field do men tell so many falsehoods in the idle hope that they are telling the truth, or talk so much nonsense in the vague belief that they are talking sense.

This is particularly unfortunate and particularly reprehensible, because there is no science in which it is more necessary to take precautions against error arising from internal causes. Those who follow the physical sciences enjoy the great advantage that they can constantly bring their opinions to the test of fact, and verify or falsify their theories by experiment. When a chemist has mixed sulphur and saltpetre and charcoal in certain proportions and wishes to ascertain if the mixture is explosive, he need only apply a match. When a doctor has compounded a new drug and desires to find out what diseases, if any, it is good for, he has only to give it to his patients all round and notice which die and which recover. Our conclusions regarding

the truth or falsehood of a MS. reading can never be confirmed or corrected by an equally decisive test; for the only equally decisive test would be the production of the author's autograph. The discovery merely of better and older MSS. than were previously known to us is **not** equally decisive; and even this inadequate verification is not to be expected often, or on a large scale. It is therefore a matter of common prudence and common decency that we should neglect no safeguard lying within our reach; that we should look sharp after ourselves; that we should narrowly scrutinise our own proceedings and rigorously analyse our springs of action. How far these elementary requirements are satisfied, we will now learn from examples.

At the very beginning, to see what pure irrelevancy, what almost incredible foolishness, finds its way into print, take this instance. It had been supposed for several centuries that Plautus' name was *M. Accius Plautus*, when Ritschl in 1845 pointed out that in the Ambrosian palimpsest discovered by Mai in 1815, written in the [74] fourth or fifth century, and much the oldest of Plautus' MSS., the name appears in the genitive as *T. Macci Plauti*, so that he was really called *Titus Maccius* (or *Maccus*) *Plautus*. An Italian scholar, one Vallauri, objected to this innovation on the ground that in all printed editions from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century the name was *M. Accius*. He went to Milan to look at the palimpsest, and there, to be sure, he found *T. Macci* quite legibly written. But he observed that many other pages of the MS. were quite illegible, and that the whole book was very much tattered and battered; whereupon he said that he could not sufficiently wonder at anyone attaching any weight to a MS. which was in such a condition. Is there any other science, anything calling itself a science, into which such intellects intrude and conduct such operations in public? But you may think that Mr. Vallauri is a unique phenomenon. No: if you engage in textual criticism you may come upon a second Mr. Vallauri any turn. The MSS. of Catullus, none of them older than the fourteenth century, present at 64. 23 the verse:

heroes saluete, deum genus! o bona mater!

The Veronese scholia on Vergil, a palimpsest of the fifth or sixth century, at *Aen.* v. 80, "salue sancte parens," have the note: "Catullus: saluete, deum **gens**, o bona matrum | progenies, saluete iter[um]"—giving *gens* for genus, *matrum* for *mater*, and adding a half-verse absent from Catullus' MSS.; and scholars have naturally preferred an authority so much more ancient. But one editor is found to object: "the weight of the Veronese scholia, imperfect and full of lacunae as they are, is not to be set against our MSS." There is Mr. Vallauri over again: because the palimpsest has large holes elsewhere and because much of it has perished, therefore what remains, though written as early as the sixth century, has less authority than MSS. written in the fourteenth. If however anyone gets hold of these fourteenth-century MSS., destroys pages of them and tears holes in the pages he [75] does not destroy, the authority of those parts which he allows to survive will presumably deteriorate, and may even sink as low as that of the palimpsest.

Again. There are two MSS. of a certain author, which we will call A and B. Of these two it is recognised that A is the more correct but the less sincere, and that B is the more corrupt but the less interpolated. It is desired to know which MS., if either, is better than the other, or whether both are equal. One scholar tries to determine this question by the collection and comparison of examples. But another thinks that he knows a shorter way than that; and it consists in saying "the more sincere MS. is and must be for any critic who understands his business the better MS."

This I cite as a specimen of the things which people may say if they do not think about the meaning of what they are saying, and especially as an example of the danger of dealing in generalisations. The best way to treat such pretentious inanities is to transfer them from the sphere of textual criticism, where the difference between truth and falsehood or between sense and nonsense is little regarded and seldom even perceived, into some sphere where men are obliged to use concrete and sensuous terms, which force them, however reluctantly, to think.

I ask this scholar, this critic who knows his business, and who says that the more sincere of two MSS. is and must be the better—I ask him to tell me which weighs most, a tall man or a fat man. He cannot answer; nobody can; everybody sees in a moment that the question is absurd. **Tall** and **fat** are adjectives which transport even a textual critic from the world of humbug into the world of reality, a world inhabited by comparatively thoughtful people, such as butchers and grocers, who depend on their brains for their bread. There he begins to understand that to such general questions any answer must be false; that judgment can

only be pronounced on individual specimens; that everything depends on the degree of tallness and the degree of fatness. It may well be that an inch of girth [76] adds more weight than an inch of height, or vice versa; but that altitude is incomparably more ponderous than obesity, or obesity than altitude, and that an inch of one depresses the scale more than a yard of the other, has never been maintained. The way to find out whether this tall man weighs more or less than that fat man is to weigh them; and the way to find out whether this corrupt MS. is better or worse than that interpolated MS. is to collect and compare their readings; not to ride easily off on the false and ridiculous generalisation that the more sincere MS. is and must be the better.

When you call a MS. **sincere** you instantly engage on its behalf the moral sympathy of the thoughtless: moral sympathy is a line in which they are very strong. I do not desire to exclude morality from textual criticism; I wish indeed that some moral qualities were commoner in textual criticism than they are; but let us not indulge our moral emotions out of season. It may be that a scribe who interpolates, who makes changes deliberately, is guilty of wickedness, while a scribe who makes changes accidentally, because he is sleepy or illiterate or drunk, is guilty of none; but that is a question which will be determined by a competent authority at the Day of Judgment, and is no concern of ours. Our concern is not with the eternal destiny of the scribe, but with the temporal utility of the MS.; and a MS. is useful or the reverse in proportion to the amount of truth which it discloses or conceals, no matter what may be the causes of the disclosure or concealment. It is a mistake to suppose that deliberate change is always or necessarily more destructive of truth than accidental change; and even if it were, the main question, as I have said already, is one of degree. A MS. in which 1 per cent. of the words have been viciously and intentionally altered and 99 per cent. are right is not so bad as a MS. in which only 1 per cent. are right and 99 per cent. have been altered virtuously and unintentionally; and if you go to a critic with any such vague inquiry as the question whether the "more sincere" or the "more [77] correct" of two MSS. is the better, he will reply, "If I am to answer that question, you must show me the two MSS. first; for aught that I know at present, from the terms of your query, either may be better than the other, or both may be equal." But that is what the incompetent intruders into criticism can never admit. They **must** have a better MS., whether it exists or no; because they could never get along without one. If Providence permitted two MSS. to be equal, the editor would have to choose between their readings by considerations of intrinsic merit, and in order to do that he would need to acquire intelligence and impartiality and willingness to take pains, and all sorts of things which he neither has nor wishes for; and he feels sure that God, who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, can never have meant to lay upon his shoulders such a burden as this.

This is thoughtlessness in the sphere of recension: come now to the sphere of emendation. There is one foolish sort of conjecture which seems to be commoner in the British Isles than anywhere else, though it is also practiced abroad, and of late years especially at Munich. The practice is, if you have persuaded yourself that a text is corrupt, to alter a letter or two and see what happens. If what happens is anything which the warmest good-will can mistake for sense and grammar, you call it an emendation; and you call this silly game the palaeographical method.

The palaeographical method has always been the delight of tiros and the scorn of critics. Haupt, for example, used to warn his pupils against mistaking this sort of thing for emendation. "The prime requisite of a good emendation," said he, "is that it should start from the thought; it is only afterwards that other considerations, such as those of metre or possibilities, such as the interchange of letters, are taken into account." And again: "If the sense requires it, I am prepared to write **Constantinopolitanus** where the MSS. have the monosyllabic interjection **o**." And again: "From the requirement that one should [78] always begin with the thought, there results, as is self-evident, the negative aspect of the case, that one should not, at the outset, consider what exchange of letters may possibly have brought about the corruption of the passage one is dealing with." And further, in his oration on Lachmann as a critic: "Some people, if they see that anything in an ancient text wants correcting, immediately betake themselves to the art of palaeography, investigate the shapes of letters and the forms of abbreviation, and try one dodge after another, as if it were a game, until they hit upon something which they think they can substitute for the corruption; as if forsooth truth were generally discovered by shots of that sort, or as if emendation could take its rise from anything but a careful consideration of the thought."

But even when palaeography is kept in her proper place, as handmaid, and not allowed to give herself the airs of mistress, she is apt to be overworked. There is a preference for conjectures which call in the aid of palaeography, and which assume, as the cause of error, the accidental interchange of similar letters or similar words, although other causes of error are known to exist. One is presented, for instance, with the following maxim: "Interpolation is, speaking generally, comparatively an uncommon source of alteration, and we should therefore be loth to assume it in a given case."

Every case is a given case; so what this maxim really means is that we should always be loth to assume interpolation as a source of alteration. But it is certain, and admitted by this writer when he uses the phrase "comparatively uncommon," that interpolation does occur; so he is telling us that we should be loth to assume interpolation even when that assumption is true. And the reason why we are to behave in this ridiculous manner is that interpolation is, speaking generally, comparatively an uncommon source of alteration.

Now to detect a **non sequitur**, unless it leads to an unwelcome conclusion, is as much beyond the power of [79] the average reader as it is beyond the power of the average writer to attach ideas to his own words when those words are terms of textual criticism. I will therefore substitute other terms, terms to which ideas must be attached; and I invite consideration of this maxim and this ratiocination:

> *"A bullet-wound is, speaking generally, comparatively an uncommon cause of death, and we should therefore be loth to assume it in a given case."*

Should we? Should we be loth to assume a bullet-wound as the cause of death if the given case were death on a battlefield? and should we be loth to do so for the reason alleged, that a bullet-wound is, speaking generally, comparatively an uncommon cause of death? Ought we to assume instead the commonest cause of death, and assign death on a battlefield to tuberculosis? What would be thought of a counsellor who enjoined that method of procedure? Well, it would probably be thought that he was a textual critic strayed from home.

Why is interpolation comparatively uncommon? For the same reason that bullet-wounds are: because the opportunity for it is comparatively uncommon. Interpolation is provoked by real or supposed difficulties, and is not frequently volunteered where all is plain sailing; whereas accidental alteration may happen anywhere. Every letter of every word lies exposed to it, and that is the sole reason why accidental alteration is more common. In a given case where either assumption is possible, the assumption of interpolation is equally probable, nay more probable; because action with a motive is more probable than action without a motive. The truth therefore is that in such a case we should be loth to assume accident and should rather assume interpolation; and the circumstance that such cases are comparatively uncommon is no reason for behaving irrationally when they occur.

There is one special province of textual criticism, a large and important province, which is concerned with [80] the establishment of rules of grammar and of metre. Those rules are in part traditional, and given us by the ancient grammarians; but in part they are formed by our own induction from what we find in the MSS. of Greek and Latin authors; and even the traditional rules must of course be tested by comparison with the witness of the MSS. But every rule, whether traditional or framed from induction, is sometimes broken by the MSS.; it may be by few, it may be by many; it may be seldom, it may be often; and critics may then say that the MSS. are wrong and may correct them in accordance with the rule. The state of affairs is apparently, nay evidently, paradoxical. The MSS. are the material upon which we base our rule, and then, when we have got our rule, we turn round upon the MSS. and say that the rule, based upon them, convicts them of error. We are thus working in a circle, that is a fact which there is no denying; but, as Lachmann says, the task of the critic is just this, to tread that circle deftly and warily; and that is precisely what elevates the critic's business above mere mechanical labour. The difficulty is one which lies in the nature of the case, and is inevitable; and the only way to surmount it is just to be a critic.

The paradox is more formidable in appearance than in reality, and has plenty of analogies in daily life. In a trial or lawsuit the jury's verdict is mainly based upon the evidence of the witnesses; but that does not prevent the jury from making up its mind, from the evidence in general, that one or more witnesses have been guilty of perjury and that their evidence is to be disregarded. It is quite possible to elicit from the

general testimony of MSS. a rule of sufficient certainty to convict of falsehood their exceptional testimony, or of sufficient probability to throw doubt upon it. But that exceptional testimony must in each case be considered. It must be recognised that there are two hypotheses between which we have to decide: the question is whether the exceptions come from the author, and so break down the rule, or whether they come from the scribe, and are to be corrected by it: [81] and in order to decide this we must keep our eyes open for any peculiarity which may happen to characterise them.

One of the forms which lack of thought has assumed in textual criticism is the tendency now prevailing, especially among some Continental scholars, to try to break down accepted rules of grammar or metre by the mere collection and enumeration of exceptions presented by the MSS. Now that can never break down a rule: the mere number of exceptions is nothing; what matters is their weight, and that can only be ascertained by classification and scrutiny. If I had noted down every example which I have met, I should now have a large collection of places in Latin MSS. where the substantive *orbis*, which our grammars and dictionaries declare to be masculine, has a feminine adjective attached to it. But I do not therefore propose to revise that rule of syntax, for examination would show that these examples, though numerous, have no force. Most of them are places where the sense and context show that *orbis*, in whatever case or number it may be, is merely a corruption of the corresponding case and number of *urbs*; and in the remaining places it is natural to suppose that the scribe has been influenced and confused by the great likeness of the one word to the other. Or again, read Madvig, ***Adu. Crit.***, vol. I, book i, chap. iv, where he sifts the evidence for the opinion that the aorist infinitive can be used in Greek after verbs of saying and thinking in the sense of the future infinitive or of the aorist infinitive with ´[U+0315]ν *{an}*. The list of examples in the MSS. is very long indeed; but the moment you begin to sort them and examine them you are less struck by their umber than by the restriction of their extent. Almost all of them are such as δ´ξασθαι *{dexasthai}* used for δ´ξεσθαι *{dexesthai}* where the two forms differ by one letter only; a smaller number are such as ποιησαι *{poiesai}* for ποι´σειν*{poiesein}* where the difference, though greater, is still slight; others are examples like ´[U+0314]κιστα α[U+0313]ναγκαασθηναι *{ekist' anagkasthenai}* for ´[U+0314]κιστΤ' ´[U+0315]ν α[U+0313]ναγκασθηναι *{ekist' an anagkasthenai}*, where again the difference is next to nothing. Now if the MSS. are right in these cases, and the Greek authors did use this [82] construction, how are we to explain this extraordinary limitation of the use? There is no syntactical difference between the first and second aorist: why then did they use the 1st aorist so often for the future and the 2nd aorist so seldom? why did they say δ´ξασθαι *{dexasthai}* for δ´ξεσθαι *{dexesthai}* dozens of times and λαβειν *{labein}* for λ´ψεσθαι *{lepsesthai}* never? The mere asking of that question is enough to show the true state of the case. The bare fact that the aorists thus used in the MSS. are aorists of similar **form** to the future, while aorists of dissimilar form are not thus used, proves that the phenomenon has its cause in the copyist's eye and not in the author's mind, that it is not a variation in grammatical usage but an error in transcription. The number of examples is nothing; all depends upon their character; and a single example of λαβειν *{labein}* in a future sense would have more weight than a hundred of δ´ξασθαι *{dexasthai}*

In particular, scribes will alter a less familiar form to a more familiar, if they see nothing to prevent them. If metre allows, or if they do not know that metre forbids, they will alter ε[U+0313]λειν´ς *{eleinos}* to ε[U+0313]λεειν´ς *{eleeinos}*,οι[U+0313]στ´ς *{oistos}* to ο[U+0313]¨στ´ς *{oiistos}*,*nil* to *nihil*, *deprendo* to *deprehendo*. Since metre convicts them of infidelity in some places, they forfeit the right to be trusted in any place; if we choose to trust them we are credulous, and if we build structures on our trust we are no critics. Even if metre does not convict them, reason sometimes can. Take the statement, repeatedly made in grammars and editions, that the Latins sometimes used the pluperfect for the imperfect and the perfect. They did use it for the imperfect; they used it also for the preterite or past aorist; but for the perfect they did not use it; and that is proved by the very examples of its use as perfect which are found in MSS. All those examples are of the 3rd person plural. Why? We must choose between the two following hypotheses:

- (a) That the Latins used the pluperfect for the perfect in the 3rd person plural only.
- (b) That they did not use the pluperfect for the perfect, and that these examples are corrupt.

[83] If anyone adopted the former, he would have to explain what syntactical property, inviting the author to use pluperfect for perfect, is possessed by the 3rd person plural and not by the two other plural or the

three singular persons: and I should like to see some one set about it.

If we adopt the latter, we must show what **external** feature, inviting the **scribe** to write pluperfect for perfect, is possessed by the 3rd person plural exclusively: and that is quite easy. The 3rd person plural is the only person in which the perfect and the pluperfect differ merely by one letter. Moreover in verse the perfect termination *-ĕrunt*, being comparatively unfamiliar to scribes, is altered by them to the nearest familiar form with the same scansion, sometimes *-erint*, sometimes *-erant*: in Ovid's *Heroides* there are four places where the best MS. gives *praebuĕrunt*, *stetĕrunt*, *excidĕrunt*, *expulĕrunt*, and the other MSS. give *-erant* or *-erint* or both. Accordingly, when the much inferior MSS. of Propertius present pluperfect for perfect in four places, *fuerant* once, *steterant* once, *exciderant* twice, Scaliger corrects to *fuĕrunt*, *stetĕrunt*, *excidĕrunt*. Thereupon an editor of this enlightened age takes up his pen and writes as follows: "It is quite erroneous to remove the pluperfects where it can be done without great expenditure of conjectural sagacity (*steterunt* for *steterant* and the like), and not to trouble oneself about the phenomenon elsewhere." I ask, how is it possible to trouble oneself about the phenomenon elsewhere? It does not exist elsewhere. There is no place where the MSS. give *steteram* in the sense of the perfect *steti*, nor *steteras* in the sense of the perfect *stetisti*. Wherever they give examples of the pluperfect which cannot be removed by the change of one letter—such as *pararat* in i. 8. 36 or *fueram* in i. 12. 11—those are examples where it has sometimes the sense of the imperfect, sometimes the preterite, but never of the perfect. And the inference is plain: the Latins did not use the pluperfect for the perfect.

Scaliger knew that in the sixteenth century: Mr. [84] Rothstein, in the nineteenth and twentieth, does not know it; he has found a form of words to prevent him from knowing it, and he thinks himself in advance of Scaliger. It is supposed that there has been progress in the science of textual criticism, and the most frivolous pretender has learnt to talk superciliously about "the old unscientific days." The old unscientific days are everlasting, they are here and now; they are renewed perennially by the ear which takes formulas in, and the tongue which gives them out again, and the mind which meanwhile is empty of reflexion and stuffed with self-complacency. Progress there has been, but where? In superior intellects: the rabble do not share it. Such a man as Scaliger, living in our time, would be a better critic than Scaliger was; but we shall not be better critics than Scaliger by the simple act of living in our own time. Textual criticism, like most other sciences, is an aristocratic affair, not communicable to all men, nor to most men. Not to be a textual critic is no reproach to anyone, unless he pretends to be what he is not. To **be** a textual critic requires aptitude for thinking and willingness to think; and though it also requires other things, those things are supplements and cannot be substitutes. Knowledge is good, method is good, but one thing beyond all others is necessary; and that is to have a head, not a pumpkin, on your shoulders and brains, not pudding, in your head.