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Chapter 1

Sexual Ethics in the Medieval Grammar Classroom

In trying to contextualize the famously extravagant grammatical metaphors in Alan of Lille's *De planctu Naturae*, Jan Ziolkowski has argued that Alan and his peers were inheritors of an earlier medieval textual and pedagogical tradition that associated linguistic rectitude with moral rectitude, orthography with orthopraxy.¹ This association stemmed, among other things, from the physical dimension of cathedral school grammar instruction where boys would have learned technologies of writing through an assiduous disciplining of body and mind. Indeed, in the iconography of Lady Grammar she is typically represented as a teacher, with whip or scourge in one hand and balm or ointment in the other, emphasizing grammar's disciplinary and redemptive dimensions, respectively.²

However, if we jump roughly sixty years later into the early decades of the thirteenth century, we see that grammar becomes increasingly associated with sexual perversion. In Gautier de Coinci's *Miracles de Notre Dame* (ca. 1218), for example, the corrupt sodomites imagined to have overrun the Roman clergy are described as favoring the laws of grammar over those of Nature ("Il metent *hic* en toutes parz;/ La gramaire *hic* a *hic* acouple,/ Mais nature maudit la couple" [They are putting *hic* all over the place. Grammar might couple *hic* with *hic* but Nature curses that coupling]).³ Nearly a century later, Dante places Priscian into the circle of the sodomites in his *Commedia*, a decision Boccaccio claims was motivated by the widely acknowledged proclivity of grammarians toward sodomy.⁴ This apparent shift in the perceived ethical value of grammar raises a

1 Jan Ziolkowski, *Alan of Lille's Grammar of Sex: The Meaning of Grammar to a Twelfth-Century Intellectual* (Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1985), 1–6 and 95–104.

2 See Gary P. Cestaro, *Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 9–48; and Laura Cleaver, "Grammar and Her Children: Learning to Read in the Art of the Twelfth Century," *Marginalia* 9.1 (2009): n. p., <http://www.marginalia.co.uk/journal/09education/cleaver.php>.

3 Gautier de Coinci, *De Sainte Leocade: Au Tans Que Sainz Hyldefons Estoit Arcevesques De Tholete Cui Notre Dame Donna L'aube De Prelaz: Miracle Versifié / Vilamo-Pentti, Eva*, Suomalaisen Tiedeakatemia Toimituksia. *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1950), 172.

4 Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno* 2. Commentary, trans. Charles S. Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 270.

number of questions relevant to the history of sexuality in medieval Europe. Broadly, we might ask how the early medieval cultural association of grammar with moral rectitude gives way to an association with sexual perversion and moral turpitude in the later Middle Ages. But also, more narrowly, we might ask what specific role medieval grammatical education played in shaping conceptions of erotic desire. To what extent was the grammar classroom perceived as a desirous space, or a space for the disciplining of desire? I will suggest that twelfth-century developments in the theory and practice of *Grammatica*—from the emergence of speculative grammar to innovations in grammatical pedagogy made necessary by increased enrollments and an increasingly autonomous professoriate—are at the root of this dramatic shift in perceptions of grammar’s ethical value in regards to sexuality. By examining this shift, I believe we can gain insight into the role and evolution of sexual ethics in the medieval grammar classroom.

Introduction: Grammar’s Ambivalent Status

Alan of Lille’s use of grammatical terminology in his theological treatment of natural and unnatural desires is attached to a specific moment in the history of the nascent European university. And although *De planctu Naturae* is uniquely systematic in its deployment of grammatical metaphors, Alan was far from alone in his use of metalinguistic terminology from the trivium as a means of encoding questions of sex and gender. In the high Middle Ages, the language of Latin grammar became imbued with a powerful and deeply conflicted erotic aura to a degree unseen in any other period of European history. Poets and theologians of the period found grammar to be an endlessly rich source of concepts, structures, and metaphors with which to encode, reflect on, regulate, and even take pleasure in writing about sex.⁵ Erotic uses of grammar appear in all manner of writings during the period, to a variety of ends, and even, quite often, to opposing ends. On the one hand, grammar was a regulatory art, dedicated in every sense to the straight line (from the Greek γράμμα, “line of writing”), both in the sense

⁵ Examples abound in Latin poetry from the high Middle Ages from Goliardic poetry (especially the *Carmina Burana*) to debate poems such as the *Altercatio Ganymedis et Helene*. See Thomas C. Moser, *A Cosmos of Desire: The Medieval Latin Erotic Lyric in English Manuscripts* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004). Vernacular examples are perhaps more well known and can be seen in troubadour *sirventes*, the *Roman de la Rose*, Henri d’Andeli’s *Bataille des Sept Arts*, and the *Roman de Silence*, among many others.

that grammar students had to develop the manual mastery necessary to write correctly (orthography) and in the sense that linguistic rectitude was thought necessary to the cultivation of moral rectitude (orthopraxy). On the other hand, the discipline of grammar was also always potentially deviant, threatening to lead its practitioners away from the straight path of linguistic and, by extension, moral rectitude. The reasons behind this association of grammar with linguistic excess and deviance were complex and multiple. For one, the medieval grammar classroom was where young boys first encountered pagan literature in all its exuberant and puzzling alterity. Classical attitudes toward sexuality reflected in the *Sex Auctores*⁶ and the works of Ovid and Virgil (somewhat later in the grammar curriculum), combined with the difficulties in using literary, and thus often highly figural, language to teach elementary Latin, we must imagine, would have led *grammatici* to develop a conflicted erotic rapport with the grammar classroom.⁷ Beyond the erotic landscapes of pagan literature, however, even the non-literary aspects of grammar were permeated with a sense of eroticism and sin. Given that Latin was understood to be a post-Babelian language, its grammar was correspondingly imagined to mirror the fallenness of nature;⁸ that the word *casus* (grammatical case) is derived from the perfect passive participle of *cadō* (“I fall”) further cemented the association of grammar with fallen nature, as John Alford observed.⁹ Thus, in the imagination of a writer such as Alan of Lille, fallen grammar cannot help but generate sexual monstrosities such as the two-sexed heteroclite

6 The elementary Latin curriculum that included, in this order, the *Distichs of Cato*, *Eclogue of Theodulus*, fables of Avian, elegies of Maximian, Statius’s *Achilleid*, and Claudian’s *Rape of Proserpina*. These would have been taught in conjunction with the standard grammar textbooks: Donatus’s *Ars minor* and (beginning in the early thirteenth century) Alexandre de Villedieu’s *Doctrinale Puerorum* and/or Evrard de Béthune’s *Graecismus*.

7 Although this ambivalence arguably goes back as far as Augustine (see Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996]) and is certainly informed by Augustine’s thinking, I would argue that it takes on new meaning as soon as the *moderni* begin modifying the grammar curriculum.

8 Cf. John of Salisbury, “While grammar has developed to some extent, and indeed mainly, as an invention of man, still it imitates nature, from which it partly derives its origin. Furthermore, it tends, as far as possible, to conform to nature in all respects” (*Metalogicon*, trans. Daniel D. McGarry, 1.14 [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962], 39).

9 John Alford writes, “Medieval poets, noting the literal meanings of such terms as *casus* and *declinatio* – both signifying ‘fall’ – drew elaborate comparisons between grammar and the story of Adam and Eve: original sin is referred to as ‘the first declension,’ and Adam and Eve are ‘oblique’ nouns that fell away or ‘declined’ from God” (“The Grammatical Metaphor: A Survey of Its Use in the Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 57.4 [1982]: 728–60 at 728).

and the passive-in-appearance-but-active-in-meaning deponent, and harbors the constant threat of metaleptic, or insufficiently teleological, signification.

Grammar had long been harnessed in the service of regulating sexual ethics and in a way that was tied to the intensely homosocial and, in certain ways, homoerotic, atmosphere of the cathedral schools. However, as the discipline of grammar became imbued with dialectical reasoning and thus became more categorical and compartmentalized, its earlier association with the disciplining of desire in a homosocial environment became suspect. Moreover, speculative grammar's tendency to ontologize grammatical categories informed and propelled the creation of new norms just as the Church began to intensify its regulation of sex and marriage.

Since the publication of John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginnings of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* and Mark Jordan's *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology*, a number of scholars interested in premodern sexuality have acknowledged the fact that medieval thinkers tended to view matters of sex and gender through a grammatical lens. However, aside from Ziolkowski's (1985) *Alan of Lille's Grammar of Sex* and, to a lesser extent, Cestaro's (2003) *Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body* and Curry Woods's (2010) *Classroom Commentaries: Teaching the Poetria Nova across Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, existing scholarship on the subject does not contextualize this phenomenon in relationship to pedagogical practice in the medieval grammar classroom, which would have been almost certainly a crucible for the emergence of this peculiar use of grammatical terminology and reasoning to describe and reflect on erotic desire and gender. Moreover, by focusing on the more concrete register of pedagogical practice instead of high grammatical theory, the historical shift in *Grammatica's* status, from a discipline of orthopraxy to one associated with disordered desire and sodomy, comes into view with more clarity.

This essay therefore considers medieval grammar instruction from a few different angles and is organized around a series of pairings. I look first at the presence of the *Altercatio Ganimedis et Helene*, an erotic debate poem, in the context of its manuscript tradition, manuscripts that were likely produced and used in conjunction with grammar instruction. By situating it in its manuscript tradition, we are able to view the *Altercatio* as a product of the homosocial environment of the cathedral school where boys learned a certain disciplining of desire through their grammatical studies. However, by placing it into dialogue with Gilles de Corbeil and Gautier de Coinci, both of whom cite the *Altercatio's* famous grammatical justification of same-sex desire, we also see how quickly the textual legacy of the grammar-as-orthopraxy tradition would become not only indecipherable to readers in the thirteenth century and beyond, but also

suspect and perverse. The next section of the essay pairs John of Salisbury and Alan of Lille with Petrus Helias and Alexandre de Villedieu, respectively. John and Alan are both transitional figures, caught between the early medieval pedagogical grammar model and the emergent fields of speculative and modistic grammar, and both advocate for grammar instruction as a mode of disciplining desire. Petrus and Alexandre, on the other hand, represent innovations in grammar instruction that remove or bracket desire, in various ways, from the grammar classroom.

By placing these medieval intellectuals into dialogue with one another, the presence and concern with desire in the grammar classroom come into relief. For example, John of Salisbury and Petrus Helias are rarely, if ever, studied in relationship to the history of sexuality; nor are they examined for their reflections on desire.¹⁰ However, by considering John of Salisbury's lament about the loss of an earlier generation's pedagogical methods against the emergence of the *summa* as both cause and supplement to the loss John describes, the desirous homosociality of the early medieval grammar classroom comes into view with a degree of clarity that would be impossible looking at either of these thinkers alone. By pairing Alexandre de Villedieu with Alan of Lille, the cosmological stakes of setting *De planctu Naturae* in the grammar classroom become more evident. The endeavor undertaken by Alexandre in his *Doctrinale* to excise pagan eroticism and desire from the classroom is undercut by the intrinsic eroticism of grammatical structures themselves, which Alan imagines as a sort of glue binding Nature and language together. Expansive and infinitely transferable, profoundly ambivalent but also necessary and ineluctable, the grammar classroom is where desires find their attachment to objects, whether good or bad, and thus also where these desires must be disciplined according to Alan's reckoning.

Disciplining Desire in the Medieval Grammar Classroom

In this section of the essay, I will consider the shift in grammar's ethical status described above as it is reflected in one particularly evocative manuscript history.

¹⁰ With the notable exception of Elena Lombardi's fascinating discussion of Petrus Helias in *The Syntax of Desire: Language and Love in Augustine, the Modistae, Dante* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

In *CSTH*, Boswell notes the existence of a manuscript (the MS Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Lat. 2719) that contains Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae* bound together with the anonymously written debate poem, the *Altercatio Ganymedis et Helene*.¹¹ The presence of these two works together in a single manuscript raises important questions about grammatical pedagogy during the high medieval period, including, significantly, whether grammar teachers, in some way, saw the training of desire as one of their pedagogical tasks.

The *Institutiones grammaticae* (ca. 520) together with Donatus's *Ars grammatica* formed the core of the Latin grammar curriculum during the medieval period and into the renaissances. As Sluiter and Copeland note, the *Institutiones* "acquires enormous authority in the Middle Ages," attested by the existence of nearly a thousand manuscripts.¹² It became popular as early as the eighth century, cited by Bede, Alcuin, and, slightly later, Hrabanus Maurus. Then, during the mid-twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the *Institutiones* became particularly important as the common substratum of all speculative and modistic grammatical theories. It is, arguably, the modistic appropriation of the *Institutiones* that influenced Dante's inclusion of Priscian among the sinners against nature.¹³ In either case, a manuscript containing the *Institutiones* would likely have been used to pedagogical ends, whether in a cathedral school or a monastic context.

If the MS Vat. Lat. 2719 was indeed used for pedagogical purposes, the anonymously written *Altercatio Ganymedis et Helene* (composed after 1160 and before 1176) might seem a strange addition; the poem, at least according to John Boswell's reading of it, may have been an apologia for same-sex love. It may also have been a condemnation of same-sex desire, judging by the last three stanzas. Or, if we believe Boswell that the Cambridge, MA Houghton MS Lat. 198 was the autograph copy, it may have been written originally as a veiled apologia but was then modified by copyists in such a way as to be interpreted

¹¹ John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 259.

¹² *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300–1475*, ed. Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 167.

¹³ This might explain why Priscian and not Donatus is included among the sodomites; speculative grammar represents a metaleptic, or tautological, relationship to grammar (as its own end) against the anagogical model of the liberal arts as a bridge articulating God and world through a certain structuring of knowledge. However, the prevailing theory is that Priscian was associated apocryphally with Julian the Apostate (see Eugene Vance, *Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages* [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989], 230–55).

as a condemnation of same-sex desire.¹⁴ Whatever the case, the *Altercatio* is unequivocally concerned with sexual desire, which becomes the primary object of debate between Ganymede and Helen, each of whom defends the virtues of sex with boys and women, respectively. What use would such a debate have in a grammar classroom?

Two further details about the poem might explain its inclusion in MS Vat. Lat. 2719. First, nearly the entirety of the poem derives its metaphors using language from the *trivium*—grammar, dialectic, rhetoric—citing Martianus Capella’s widely known characterization of the language arts.¹⁵ Its use of grammatical language seems to have been precisely what brought it some degree of fame. Ganymede’s grammatical argument that like should be coupled with like according to the rules of *congruitas* was striking enough to have been cited in a dozen or so anti-sodomitic works during the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Ganymede’s argument:

Impar omne dissidet, recte par cum pari
eleganti copula mas aptatur mari.
Si nescis: articulos decet observari,
hic et hic gramatice debent copulari. (ll. 141–44)

Opposites always disagree; the right way is like with like.
Man can be fitted to man by elegant conjunction.
If you don’t know this, look at the gender of their articles¹⁶
Hic and *hic* should be coupled according to the rules of grammar.

Whether the author intended the poem as an apologia or a condemnation, Ganymede’s argument seems to have cemented the association of grammarians with sodomy. Only a decade or so later, Gilles de Corbeil cites Ganymede’s grammatical argument in his virulently phobic anticlerical treatise, *Hierapigra ad purgandos prelatos*, where he worries that “men have made themselves into grammarians” (*volentes grammatici fieri*)¹⁷ so that they might have sex according to the rules of grammar rather than the rules of Nature.

¹⁴ Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, 260.

¹⁵ *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts: The Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, trans. William Harris Stahl, Richard Johnson, and E. L. Burge (New York: University of Columbia Press, 1992).

¹⁶ Thomas Stehling, *Medieval Latin Poems of Male Love and Friendship* (New York: Garland, 1984), 112. The Latin “*Articulos*” best translates as “pronouns” in this context.

¹⁷ Cited in Bruce Holsinger, *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture: Hildegard of Bingen to Chaucer* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2001), 174–75.

The second detail that might explain its inclusion in MS Vat. Lat. 2719 concerns the poem's pagan setting. Although sodomy was a relatively novel concern in Christian theology¹⁸ at the time of the poem's composition, the *Altercatio* contains no references to Christianity, nor does it feature any specifically Christian argument about sexual desire. It is written as though the same classical figures who populated the literature of the medieval grammar classroom were given a retroactive opportunity to debate their sexual mores. In addition to opposing two objects of desire, the *Altercatio* also stages a confrontation with the historical and cultural alterity of the classical past. This speaks directly to the pedagogical concerns of twelfth-century grammar teachers: can students attain literacy in Latin without unmediated exposure to the potentially perverting influence of classical literature? And hasn't the subject of study already been "perverted" by its classical origins? The poem's concern with sexuality is thus difficult, perhaps impossible, to separate from its concern with the value of pagan literature in the medieval grammar classroom. And this was the subject of a highly contentious debate in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.¹⁹

What's more, the MS Vat. Lat. 2719 is not alone. Of the eight known manuscripts that contain the *Altercatio*, one—in all likelihood, the autograph—is freestanding and six of them contain works directly connected to grammar and rhetoric, including works by Matthew of Vendôme, Isidore of Seville, John of Garland, Gautier of Châtillon, Alan of Lille, and others. Given what we know about its manuscript tradition, it is difficult to imagine the *Altercatio* was not used in the grammar classroom.

What is fascinating and puzzling about MS Vat. Lat. 2719 and its sister manuscripts is that authors and defenders of grammar who wrote roughly contemporaneously to the composition of the *Altercatio*, such as Alan of Lille (to whom some have attributed the *Altercatio*'s authorship)²⁰ and John of Salisbury, seemed to believe that the discipline of grammar had some concrete value in the realm of sexual ethics. The author of the *Altercatio* itself most likely believed so as well. But the *Altercatio* elicited such a phobic reception in writers like Gilles de Corbeil and Gautier de Coinci, that less than a century later the *Roman de la Rose* was alone in entertaining the possibility of grammar's ethical value—and even then, Genius's

¹⁸ See chapter 2, "The Discovery of Sodomy," 29–45 in Mark Jordan's *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹⁹ See, for example, Marilyn Desmond's discussion of the *Ovidés moralisées* in Desmond, *Ovid's Art and the Wife of Bath: The Ethics of Erotic Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

²⁰ See Rolf Lenzen's "'*Altercatio Ganymedis et Helene* Kritische Edition mit Kommentar,'" *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 7 (1972): 161–86.

grammatically encoded excommunication of the sodomites (vv. 4313–14) suggests that Jean de Meun did not fully endorse this by-then-outdated understanding of grammar. In either case, Gilles de Corbeil’s claim that men become grammarians just so they can find a way to justify their sexual sins by drawing upon the laws of grammar rather than the laws of nature was so highly influential that it made its way quickly into the vernacular, as was the case with Gautier de Coinci’s wildly popular *Miracles de Nostre-Dame*:

Plus volentiers les font movoir
 A Perrotin qu’a Perronnelle
 . . .
 Terre, terre, por quoi n’awevres,
 Si les transglouz de toutes parz?
 Il metent *hic* en toutes parz;
 La gramaire *hic* a *hic* acouple,
 Mais nature maudit la couple.
 . . .
 Nature rit, si com moi samble,
 Quant *hic* et *hec* joignent ensamble.
 Mais *hic* et *hic* chose est perdue.²¹

They are more turned on by Pierres than by Pierrettes . . . Oh, Earth, why don’t you open up and swallow these men down all the way? They are putting *hic* all over the place. Grammar might couple *hic* with *hic* but Nature curses that coupling.

And roughly a century later, it was this way of thinking about grammar and sex—not Alan of Lille’s—that likely influenced Dante and Boccaccio to ascribe a proclivity for sodomy to grammarians. Alan of Lille’s profoundly nuanced attempt to show what he saw as continuities and discontinuities between natural law and grammatical law, and the anonymous author of the *Altercatio*’s extremely subtle harnessing of grammar’s eroticism to arouse productive anxiety among his students, I believe, were both written to the end of regulating sexual orthodoxy. However, their willingness to walk the student-reader through a gamut of erotic configurations, even if expressed via grammatically euphemistic metaphors, was perhaps too subtle, leading certain readers to reject grammar altogether as dangerous terrain.

²¹ Gautier de Coinci, *De Sainte Leocade*, 172; translations mine.

Nostalgic Homosociality and the *Summa* as Supplement

The early Middle Ages inherited the late antique model of grammar, which had two primary functions: the first, to teach the Latin language (a facet of grammar characterized as the *ars recte loquendi et scribendi* by Isidore of Seville²²) and the second, to teach how to make basic judgments about literature, the facet of grammar known as the *enarratio poetarum*. As Martin Irvine notes in his study of early medieval grammar, “*grammatica* was universally understood to supply the discursive means for constructing language and texts as objects of knowledge.”²³ Grammar was thus concerned with literacy, in the broadest sense possible, the stakes of which heightened in the early Christian era as the primary objective became that of biblical literacy. And it was the most interpretively oriented of the verbal arts, more so even than rhetoric, which was focused more on mastering forms while grammar focused on recognizing and parsing those forms. The practice of textual glossing, for example, which we still practice a version of today in literature classes, was solidly within the purview of grammar. As far as grammar textbooks were concerned, the *Ars minor* and the *Ars maior* of Aelius Donatus, written in the mid-fourth century, were mainstays of curricula from the late antique period all the way through the early print era. The *Ars minor* was an elementary classroom handbook simply delineating parts of speech while the *Ars maior* was a more advanced and complete handbook of rules that outlined stylistic faults and graces, and parsed the difference between figurative language use and incorrect language use, listing such figures as metaphor, synecdoche, allegory, anaphora, sarcasm, and so on. Both are written plainly and enumeratively (e.g., “Pronomen quid est? Pars orationis, quae pro nomine posita tantundem paene significat personamque interdum recipit”²⁴), and the latter drew nearly all of its examples of usage from Virgil’s poetry. As Copeland and Sluiter note, “The Middle Ages erected its curricula on a relatively small group of essential texts from Latin antiquity.”²⁵

22 *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

23 Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: Grammatica and Literary Theory, 350–1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2.

24 Aelius Donatus, *The Ars Minor of Donatus: For One Thousand Years the Leading Textbook of Grammar*, trans. Wayland Johnson Chase (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1926), 28.

25 *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 62.

But one thing that grammar was *not* during the early Middle Ages, with the possible exception of Duns Scotus, was a speculative discipline. In other words, grammar was rarely, if ever, the object of theoretical debate. It was a *tool* used in theological and legal debates—quite frequently, in fact—but, until the early twelfth century, grammar was almost exclusively concerned with Latin literacy, and a fairly stable understanding of literacy at that. The grammar curriculum remained essentially unchanged and unquestioned for six centuries. What’s more, grammar was taught in the institutional context of cathedral schools and monastic schools that served a very small, relatively elite, portion of the population, and generally taught no more than a hundred students at a time.²⁶ Grammatical pedagogy was painstaking, involved lengthy memorization exercises, and was mostly transmitted through tradition. That is to say, techniques for teaching Latin grammar (beyond the minimal question/answer structure of the *Ars minor* and *Ars maior*) were not incorporated into the grammar texts themselves and were more likely handed down through tradition. Grammar was in this sense a kind of boutique discipline.

At the beginning of the twelfth century, however, two major and interrelated factors led to a serious reworking of both the pedagogy and theory of grammar. To begin with, on the heels of the wide dissemination of Boethian logic in the eleventh century, the discipline of dialectic (also referred to as logic) became ascendant and veered to become a master-discipline, to the point that grammar itself became “logicized,” its categories imagined to reflect deeper logical/ontological categories. This fusion of grammar and logic gave birth to speculative grammar, a branch of the discipline interested in finding correspondences between grammatical distinctions in language and ontological distinctions in reality. It was the speculative grammarians who first formulated the notion of a universal grammar. So, whereas early medieval grammarians were for the most part only interested in the preservation of Latin, speculative grammarians examined linguistic categories thought to transcend Latin; in Saussurian terms, it might be said they favored *langue* over *langage*.

This new development, to the extent that it was reflected in new curricula, new pedagogies, and new material practices, was the source of a great deal of conflict and intellectual debate, as might be imagined. Jan Ziolkowski describes this shift in *Alan of Lille’s Grammar of Sex*:

In the twelfth century, the nature of instruction changed fundamentally: *rationes* formerly taught through the *auctores* were now taught autonomously. Partly because of the

²⁶ Stephen C. Ferruolo, *The Origins of the University: The Schools of Paris and Their Critics, 1100–1215* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985).

excitement that dialectic and new translations from Arabic generated, learning became less a matter of philology than of philosophy, especially logic. In the same towns where universities were evolving or soon to evolve, teaching could take any form on a spectrum that ran between two extremes, the one dominated by *rationes* and logic and the other by *auctores* and *grammatica* (in the sense of belles-lettres). Matthew of Vendôme declared succinctly, “Parisius logicam sibi iactitet, Aurelianus / Auctores.” [*Paris is proud of its logic while Orleans is proud of its authors*]. In the thirteenth century *rationes* forced many of the *auctores* from the curriculum.²⁷

The second, and partly related, factor at work was a dramatic increase in demand and enrollments at the cathedral schools. John of Salisbury’s *Metalogicon* is cited perhaps more than any other work for its description of the twelfth-century crisis in education. Like Steven, bishop of Tournai, who complained that beardless youths were stealing the chairs of the old professors right from under them, “neglecting the rules of the arts and discarding the books of good authority,”²⁸ John was preoccupied with what he perceived as the new generation’s lack of respect for the *auctores* and the speed with which they promised to deliver the curriculum to their students. And speed, or more generally, the temporality of teaching and learning, was a major concern in high medieval discussions of grammatical pedagogy. Grammar went from being a sort of art, with a range of unquantifiable payoffs, to being considered rather more like a technical skill, necessary but better done cursorily in order to get to the interesting stuff as quickly as possible.

John of Salisbury writes about this increase in speed, describing the effect it had on his own teachers’ grammatical pedagogy:

But later, when popular opinion veered away from the truth, when men preferred to seem, rather than to be philosophers, and when professors of the arts were promising to impart the whole of philosophy in less than three or even two years, William and Richard [John’s teachers] were overwhelmed by the onslaught of the ignorant mob, and retired. Since then, less time and attention have been given to the study of grammar. As a result, we find men who profess all the arts, liberal and mechanical, but who are ignorant of this very first one [i.e., grammar], without which it is futile to attempt to go on to the others.²⁹

Although John seems to believe that the “onslaught of the ignorant mob” was the result of the newer, dialectic-oriented curricula offered by the youngest generation of professors, it seems more likely that it was the other way around. An

²⁷ Ziolkowski, *Alan of Lille’s Grammar of Sex*, 87.

²⁸ Cited in Louis John Paetow, *The Arts Courses at Medieval Universities with Special Reference to Grammar and Rhetoric* (Champaign: University Studies of the University of Illinois, 1910), 521.

²⁹ *Metalogicon*, 71.

unprecedented upsurge of enrollments in the cathedral schools of John's time made it materially necessary for many teachers to rethink their methods, pedagogical genres, and disciplinary boundaries. These new constraints, which threatened to reduce the amount of classroom time spent on Latin grammar, in concert with the logicization of grammar that had begun in the eleventh century, set grammar up to be a frequent object of disciplinary and pedagogical debates in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. One major debate, according to John, concerned the amount and quality of the time that should be spent learning grammar. John's opponent, Cornificius, asks whether eloquence should be favored over logic and factuality, whether form should matter more than content. John responds that the question creates a false opposition that misses the point about the relationship between language and learning. The latter's impatience with the painstakingly slow process of attaining eloquence through study assumes a specific understanding of the relationship between nature and language. John writes:

In the judgment of Cornificius (if a false opinion may be called a judgment), there is no point in studying the rules of eloquence, which is a gift that is either conceded or denied to each individual by nature. . . .] The device of learning precepts in order to become eloquent fails to accomplish its object. Even the most diligent study of rules cannot possibly make one eloquent. The use of language and speech suffices for intercourse among fellow countrymen, whereas he who most assiduously employs his faculty of speech becomes most fluent. This is evident with the Greeks and Latins; the Gauls and Britons will also bear witness to it; nor is it otherwise among the Scythians and Arabs. . . . Finally, [Cornificius argues,] what can eloquence and philosophy possibly have in common? . . . Philosophy (or wisdom, its object) is concerned not with words, but with facts.³⁰

As John would have it, Cornificius follows the logic that speakers of vernaculars do not need to learn grammatical rules in order to become eloquent in their languages. If eloquence can be acquired naturally, the study of language is perhaps less important than the study of whatever it is that language conveys, what he calls "facts." In the Cornifician model, language is instrumentalized and nature becomes somehow knowable independently of language. Cornificius might represent the new student who, aware of universal categories across the range of individual languages, no longer perceives the discipline of grammar to be the same as the mastery of the Latin language. One can now learn the "facts" of grammar—universal categories such as subject and predicate, noun and verb, and so on—without mastering the language, or as John might say, without

³⁰ *Metalogicon*, 24–25.

learning the art of grammar. But as soon as the mastery of language and the study of linguistic categories become separate, it becomes possible for such a student to imagine that neither the language nor the linguistic categories need to be learned at all, since they are both rooted in natural principles; we can and do learn the vernacular without the artifice of instruction. Grammatical categories are natural and are thus knowable on the same order as trees and animals.

John responds by defending grammar on as many grounds as possible (its practical and ethical utility, its epistemological centrality, etc.) but his response concerning the relationship between nature and grammar undergirds his argument throughout the *Metalogicon*. It also highlights the fact that the stakes of his argument are, at least partly, tied to questions of sexual ethics:

Since grammar is arbitrary and subject to man's discretion, it is evidently not a handiwork of nature. . . . However, we have already seen that nature is the mother of the arts. While grammar has developed to some extent, and indeed mainly, as an invention of man, still it imitates nature, from which it partly derives its origin.³¹

Against the reductive tendencies of the Cornificians, John produces a much more nuanced response to the question, almost too nuanced for a polemic. Grammar is a product of human artifice that imitates nature. It is not a handiwork of nature but it does originate “partly” in nature. These hedged formulations make more sense if you place them in a neo-platonic framework. He compares substance and accident to nouns and adjectives; for example:

and that the devices of reason may cleave even more closely to nature, since the substance of a thing is not susceptible of greater or less intensity, a noun does not admit of degrees of comparison . . . is this not a clear footprint of nature impressed on [the devices of] human reason?³²

The similarity of grammatical categories (such as nouns and adjectives) to physical categories (such as substance and accident) John takes as proof that some prior principle—Nature, as the case may be—determines both. As he formulates it, nature impresses its footprint on the devices of human reason, on both logic and on grammar. But the question of orthopraxy remains unresolved. Does nature provide a model for correct speech and behavior? Are the correct and the natural one and the same? Certainly, the use of the adjective “natural” as an orthodox ideal would suggest so, but John explains that the natural as an

³¹ *Metalogicon*, 39.

³² *Metalogicon*, 40–41.

orthodox ideal is not perfectly consonant with the natural world. Simply put, Nature, like mankind, is in a post-lapsarian state. As John explains:

We will grant that the genitive force originally implanted in things [nature] is powerful and effective. But, certainly, just as it can be canceled or hindered by defects, so it can, on the other hand, be restored or helped by *aids*. *Care* is accordingly not superfluous. Rather, it *assists* nature, and makes easier something that is already possible in one way or another. Socrates, we are told, was naturally wanton and overly susceptible to women (to use history's own word). But he *subdued* and *controlled* his passionate nature, which he *corrected* by philosophy and the exercise of virtue.³³

Following this logic, the study of grammar can bring us closer to understanding nature's originary state but it can also, just as easily, lead us astray. Some other principle—here, it is “care,” that is, the irreducible presence of a pedagogical authority, but elsewhere “reason” and “tradition”—must be invoked to help determine what constitutes a defect and what should be considered correct. John's reference to the sex life of Socrates here to explain the fallenness of nature is not, of course, incidental. Sexual desire is frequently imagined by John's contemporaries in teleological terms as a natural necessity that became deformed or excessive over time. Desire is part of nature but not all of nature is “natural.” One thus needs to employ the artifices of reason and magisterial “care” to recover desire in its original form.

Much like John of Salisbury, Alan of Lille believed that grammar reflected nature darkly, that desire and grammar were shaped by the same underlying laws, and that an intervention via some form of *auctoritas* was necessary to parse “natural” grammar from “fallen” grammar, orthodox from perverse. And, like John of Salisbury, Alan of Lille was wary of many of the new methods being used in the grammar classroom and the speed with which grammar was increasingly being taught. However, unlike John of Salisbury, Alan did appear to appreciate and even delight in the new logic-inflected grammar; that the rules of grammar could reflect “deeper” logical categories certainly fits into Alan's particular brand of neo-platonic cosmology.³⁴

³³ *Metalogicon*, 29–30.

³⁴ As Ziolkowski explains, “Whereas Alan evinced an unambivalent pleasure in the new-found usefulness of each *ars* to the others, he was not completely happy with all the other educational developments that occurred during his lifetime and that had a bearing upon grammar. He manifested special concern about two changes in pedagogical method: the increasing emphasis on methodology at the cost of readings in literature and the displacement of old texts from the syllabus by newer ones. Both changes in education came about partly in response to the predominance of dialectic over the other *artes*” *Alan of Lille's Grammar of Sex*, 86.

Although no single figure has been identified with Cornificius, we can cite pedagogical innovators such as Petrus Helias (who invents the *summa*) and Alexander de Villedieu (whose *Doctrinale* eliminates literature from the grammar curriculum) to understand that pedagogical models for the teaching of Latin grammar were moving away from those of the early medieval period, just as John feared. Traditional disciplinary boundaries began to erode under the ascendancy of Logic while economic pressure to train new professionals for new times (jurists and medical doctors) forced a sudden shift in the temporality of education, in particular the process of becoming lettered (or becoming *grammaticus*).

One telling symptom of the “crisis” in education John of Salisbury describes is the overwhelming success of the *summa* as a pedagogical genre. Petrus Helias’s (1150) *Summa super Priscianum* very likely represented, for John of Salisbury, the new wave of quick and flimsy grammar teaching he complained about so bitterly. It was an instant success in large part because it responded to the new material demands of twelfth-century education. Unlike compendia or traditional commentary, heavily reliant on the primary text, the *summa* is “a commentary complete in itself without recourse to the primary text.”³⁵ This innovation allowed students to work through material on their own without the mediating presence of a teacher. More precisely, the forms of textual mediation that usually took place in the grammar classroom (*lectio, progymnasmata, declinatio*) become the primary text; the importance of the “teacher function” is both amplified, to the extent that the original primary text—the *auctor*, in this case Priscian—is supplanted by its pedagogical mediation, and diminished, to the extent that the teacher’s presence is no longer required in quite the same way as before. In Derridean terms, we might say the *summa* participates in the logic of the supplement, both accretion and substitution, “not a signified more than a signifier, a representer than a presence, a writing than a speech.”³⁶ Just as Derrida saw the logic of the supplement at work in Rousseau’s reflections on autoeroticism versus altereroticism, we can see a certain erotic economy at work in the transfer from magisterial presence to *summa*-as-supplement. John seems to have been concerned specifically with the loss of magisterial presence when he describes Bernard of Chartres’s method, one that, he goes to great lengths to explain, cannot be replicated in writing. This is, incidentally, the same passage in which John describes Bernard’s use of flogging in the classroom:

35 Petrus Helias, *Summa Super Priscianum*, ed. Leo Alexander Reilly (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1993), 12.

36 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 315.

[Bernard] would point out, in reading the authors, what was simple and according to rule. On the other hand, he would explain grammatical figures, rhetorical embellishments, and sophisticated quibbling, as well as the relation of given passages to other studies. He would do so, however, without trying to teach everything at one time. On the contrary, he would dispense his instruction to his hearers gradually, in a manner commensurate with their powers of assimilation. . . . In view of the fact that exercise both strengthens and sharpens our mind, Bernard would bend every effort to bring his students to imitate what they were hearing. In some cases he would rely on exhortation, in others he would resort to punishments, such as flogging. Each student was daily required to recite part of what he had heard on the previous day. Some would recite more, others less. Each succeeding day thus became the disciple of its predecessor.³⁷

John uses heavily qualified, sometimes paradoxical, formulations to insist on the irreducibility of the teacher's presence. Good grammar teaching is about adhering to the rules but also about learning when to suspend the rules; it points to the connectedness of different areas of knowledge without totalizing; it involves an indefinable combination of regularity and spontaneity; it is tailored to the level of the student and yet rigid enough that any student can master Latin grammar within a year's time; it calls on both inspiration and intimidation to elicit good work from the students. He insists moreover on the fragile contingency of a day's lesson. That "[s]ome would recite more, others less" suggests again that the day's lesson depends on the mnemonic capacities of the particular students present or on the ups and downs of their everyday. And by personifying "each succeeding day" as a "disciple of its predecessor," conflating the student with a successive measure of time, John suggests that teaching is bound to a genealogical (metonymic, contingent) notion of time that the bound book, which operates in a more timeless (allegorical, monumental) modality, cannot adequately reproduce. We can look at it as a defense of a guarded tradition defined by a set of pedagogical practices handed down through generations, defined by its long continuities and communitarian practice and characterized by contingency and nuance. We can also look at it as a panicked, and essentially elitist, response to the opening of education to a larger public. In either scenario, John's defense of magisterial presence strangely naturalizes the already-queer quality of medieval grammar education. In other words, the genealogical model implied by the various metaphors to describe both the teacher–student relation and the chain of relations connecting the *auctores* to the *moderni* (most famously Bernard of Chartres's metaphor of dwarves on the shoulders of giants, cited by John in the *Metalogicon*) is itself a supplement, and a very queer one at that, to "natural" genealogy. The chain of relations John describes functions as an alternative

³⁷ *Metalogicon*, 70.

genealogy, one that might even be construed as a queer supplement to the reproduction of familial wealth and power. In rejecting the newer pedagogical modalities, those that eschew magisterial presence and the queer filiation of teacher and student, that is, in rejecting a supplement of a supplement, John paradoxically naturalizes the queer filiation of teachers and students.³⁸

The “old” model of grammar teaching that John advocates is thus deeply coured with a language of homosocial intimacy. And this is because, for John, Latin grammar is also a discipline of orthopraxy, geared to the formation of good ethical subjects. Linguistic rectitude, for John and his grammar teachers, was one and the same as moral rectitude. Through grammar, boys become men. And to this end, the pagan *auctores*, with their many representations of sexual excess and disorder, were in fact useful. A grammar teacher could engage erotic literature as a sort of prophylactic by harnessing his students’ charged response to the literature, arousing productive anxieties but driving ultimately toward orthopraxy. Petrus Helius may not have been motivated by a desire to eliminate erotic content from the grammar classroom, and he doesn’t completely, but the *summa* does interrupt the tradition of grammar as an ethical practice transmitted largely via the homosocial bond between male teachers and students that John of Salisbury so cherished.

Beyond the threat it seemed to pose to the irreducible presence of the *magister*, the *summa* also harked a new sense of disciplinarity connected to the emerging institution of the university. If the *summa*’s purpose was to summarize a particular field of knowledge, it also had to delimit the boundaries of that field. The *auctores* could no longer be simply cited to explain the divisions of knowledge. More fundamental principles had to be found. As Copeland and Sluiter explain, “[t]he twelfth century is the period of the first great systematic commentaries and encyclopedic overviews of the disciplines that go beyond simply describing the doctrine contained in each area and attempt to explain the intellectual and cognitive principles that justify the divisions of knowledge.”³⁹ As subjects became more compartmentalized their value relative to one another became necessarily hierarchized. Whereas the liberal arts curriculum was once imagined in quasi neo-platonic

38 Cf. Canto XV of the *Inferno* where Brunetto Latini addresses Dante as “figliuol mio.” Arnd Bohm notes in his essay, “Increasing Suspicion about Browning’s Grammarian” (*Victorian Poetry* 44.2 –[2006]: 165–82): “Brunetto’s addressing of his pupil as ‘my son’ implies an unnatural procreation, both of the pupil as a person and, ultimately, because they will incorporate traces of the teacher’s instruction, of the pupil’s own works. Giving intellectual birth, particularly in the overwhelmingly male world of medieval learning, could be construed as part of a man-to-man transmission” (168).

39 *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 368.

terms as a seamless whole, in the twelfth century it becomes a power struggle, ideologically volatile, both institutional and counter-institutional, an epistemological battlefield. In this sense, John of Salisbury and Alan of Lille are conservative for their time. They both put forward arguments for the unity of knowledge, a position that requires them to accord significant importance to grammar understood as the *fundamentum*, the material anchoring of language to the world.

Thus, reading Petrus Helias's *Summa super Priscianum* against John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon* allows us to see how this pedagogical shift, which relegated much grammatical learning to a space *outside* of the classroom, might have also threatened an aspect of grammar pedagogy that was proper to the classroom, although not in the curriculum. The slow and intimate mode of teaching grammar that both John of Salisbury and Alan of Lille advocate understands grammar as a fundamentally ethical art in which the erotic and morally dubious pagan content of the literary texts under analysis can in fact be channeled to teach moral continence, to train desire through a highly mediated encounter with pagan sexuality. Of course we can only make educated guesses as to how such mediations might have been undertaken, but first-hand accounts such as John of Salisbury's do suggest that, before the mid-twelfth century when this shift in grammar pedagogy took place, grammar teachers spent a great deal of time mediating the alterity of the classical works studied for their students. Certainly the elimination of certain classical works from grammar curricula (now replaced with literary works of *moderni* such as Gautier de Chatillon's *Alexandreis*) and the increasing popularity of *summae* and versified grammars suggest that less time in the grammar classroom meant less time to grapple with pagan sexuality, thus diminishing or altogether eliminating the training of desire.

In the Grammar Classroom of Life

However, it is also possible to follow a different line of causality here. Alexandre de Villedieu, for example, explains that his versified grammar, the *Doctrinale pu-erorum*, is motivated by a desire to eliminate erotic and morally dubious content from the grammar classroom. Could it be that new, less open attitudes toward sexuality might have motivated some of the pedagogical innovations of this period as well? It may not be possible to answer this question with archival documentation, but we might learn something just by paying attention to Alexandre de Villedieu's comments on the danger of teaching erotic pagan literature to children. His *Prooemium*, which opens the *Doctrinale* (ca. 1200), aligns the inaccessibility of the

auctores with the “nonsense” of Maximianus, referring to the inassimilable erotic content of the works of the *auctores*:

I am getting ready to write a *Doctrinale* [“book of instruction”] for newer students [“Scribere clericulis paro *Doctrinale novellis*”] and will adopt many works of my teachers. Instead of the nonsense of Maximianus boys will read those things which the ancients did not want to make accessible to their dear fellows. [“*Iamque legent pueri pro nugis Maximiani / quae veteres socii nolebant pandere caris*”] May the Grace of the nurturing Spirit be present to this work. May it help me to complete something that may be of use. If the boys should be unable to pay full attention to it at first, let him then at least pay attention, who fulfills the tasks of a teacher, who reads it to the boys, and will disclose it to them in the language of the laity [i.e., the vernacular]; Words [*voces*], which you must give different forms in different cases, I will first of all teach you to decline, in as easy a way I can. . . . Although this doctrine is not really general enough, yet it will be more useful than the nonsense of Maximianus.⁴⁰

Unlike John of Salisbury, Alexandre seems to show a degree of disdain for the *auctores*. As he puts it, his *Doctrinale* will make available that which the *auctores* failed to make accessible to their contemporaries. Just as Marie de France famously made Priscian a *synechdoche* for the *auctores* (who wrote, in her words, “assez oscurement,” quite obscurely) in her prologue, Alexandre cites Maximianus as a *synechdoche*, suggesting a broader concern with the value of pagan classical literature in the grammar classroom. Maximianus was a sixth-century Roman poet whose elegiac lamentations about old age fondly reconstruct the sexual adventures of his youth with a deliciously amoral sensibility. His *Elegies* were part of a set of six elementary Latin texts favored in thirteenth-century grammar curricula that came to be known as the *Sex Auctores*. This bundle of readings included the *Distichs* of Cato, the *Eclogue* of Theodulus, the fables of Avian, Statius’s *Achilleid* and Claudian’s *Rape of Proserpina*. For largely moral reasons, as the name implies, the *Sex Auctores* were soon revamped into what would become the *Octo Auctores morales*, a much more suitably Christian curriculum with the addition of modern works such as Bernard de Cluny’s *De Contemptu Mundi* (On Contempt for the World), and which eliminated all but Cato and Theodulus from the original six. Alexandre’s denigration of Maximianus in his *Prooemium* may have contributed to the elimination of

⁴⁰ *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 576–77.

the latter from the grammar curriculum, especially given the huge and immediate popularity that the *Doctrinale* enjoyed.⁴¹

Perhaps influenced, then, by grammarians like Petrus Helias who had begun to divorce grammar from literature, Alexandre proposes an efficient method of learning Latin grammar that will be more easily memorized, thanks to its versification, and less encumbered by potentially morally dubious citations of the *auctores*. He does cite Cicero frequently but also includes even more examples from Scripture and from the Church Fathers. Indeed, Alexandre seems to believe that grammar can be “cleaned up” and that the eroticism of the grammar classroom is located in literal representations of love, sex, and desire in the *Sex Auctores*. It does not seem to occur to him, however, that there might be something intrinsically erotic about grammatical structures in and of themselves. However, dozens of Latin parodic poems, roughly contemporaneous with the *Doctrinale*, use grammatical terminology in sexually suggestive ways that seem to run counter to Alexandre’s project. One of these, in particular “Scribere clericulis” (which appears in two German manuscripts), is a direct parody of the *Doctrinale*, and suggests a critique of Alexandre’s project to clean up grammar:

Scribere clericulis
 paro novellis omnibus
 per hoc tempus vernale.
 Renunciemus emulis
 nostris sevis doctoribus.
 Ad me, scolares, currite
 et hoc lete suscipite,
 quod scribo, doctrinale.

Non posco manum ferule,
 non exigo sub verbere
 partes orationis.
 Proiciantur tabule,
 queramus, quid sit ludere
 cum virginale specie,
 que primule, non tercie
 sit declinationis.

Jam tempus est cognoscere
 quid feminini generis
 composita figura:
 quid sit casus inflectere

41 *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, 573–76.

cum famulabus Veneris;
 quid copulat, coniunctio;
 quid signat interiectio,
 dum miscet cruri crura.

Sunt silve resonabiles
 philomenosis cantibus,
 iam flores sunt in pratis;
 sunt virgines placabiles
 nostris novis amplexibus.
 Que cuius modi, discite,
 cuius sint forme, querite,
 cuius sint qualitatis.

Et prima coniugatio
 cum sit presentis temporis,
 hec: amo, amas, amat
 sit nobis frequens lectio.
 Scola sit umbra nemoris,
 liber puelle facies,
 quam primitiva species
 legendam esse clamat.

Dum ad choream tenditur
 gradu pluralis numeri;
 dum cantu conclamatur;
 dum sonus sono redditur,
 iungatur latus lateri,
 quod fixum sit vel mobile,
 quod Veneri flexibile,
 dum cantu conclamatur.

Hic instat disputacio,
 vincant promissis precibus,
 non tandem ludo pari
 amoris sit relacio,
 sit fervor in amplexibus,
 dum demum verno tempori
 iam pratis, campis, nemori
 potestis colluctari!⁴²

I am getting ready to write to all new clerics in this springtime. Let us renounce our harsh (and diligent) schoolmasters. Hurry to me, scholars, and receive joyfully the *doctrinale* that I write./ I am not asking for, not demanding, the parts of speech by means of the rod or with blows. The tablets are thrown out. We ask [instead] what,

42 Paul Lehmann, *Die Parodie Im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 1963), 147–55.

of the virginal species, to play with, whether those of the first or those of the third declension./ Now it is time to learn what the composed figure of the feminine gender is, what it is to inflect case endings with the servants of Venus, what a copula, a conjunction, and an interjection signify, while mingling thigh with thigh./ All this is reasonable material for poems of easy friendship now that the flowers are in the fields. These virgins—allowing of our surprising embraces—you must learn: of which sort are they? what are their forms? you must ask: what qualities do they possess?/ And may this first conjugation—*amo, amas, amat*—when it is in the present tense be our regular study. May the shade of the wood be our school, and may the face of a girl be the book, which the primitive instinct of the kind is goaded to read./ While one is directed to a dance by the plural sum of degree [dance step]; while one is summoned by a song; and one sound is echoed by another sound, and while one is connected by conjunction, side by side, let what is firmly established be mobile instead, what is of Venus be flexible, while one is summoned by the song./ This one insists on a debate/ with their prayers (seduction) they will overcome promises/ a match of equals for not much longer/ may the grammar lesson be one of love/ may the passion be (found) in embraces,/ for at least as long as springtime lasts,/ then you all can wrestle in the/ meadows, fields, and groves.⁴³

The opening lines duplicate the first line of the *Doctrinale*, nearly word for word. However, in the lines that follow the students are quickly exhorted to renounce, not Maximianus, but the harsh schoolmasters, perhaps figures for Alexandre de Villedieu himself, described in terms of the physical punishment they inflict on their grammar students. The classroom itself is transformed into a lush outdoor space, the pages of books become the faces of beautiful maidens, a lesson in logic is transformed into dance steps, classroom *disputatio* becomes a lovers' quarrel, and the lesson on verb tense and conjugation becomes that of *amo, amas, amat*, in an eternal and erotic present tense. Grammatical terms such as *flexus*, which denotes inflections in tense, mood, person, number, case, and gender, and *casus*, which denotes grammatical cases, nominative, genitive, dative, and so on, take on multiple erotic meanings. *Flexus*, derived from the verb *flecto*, to bend, bend over, bend to one's will, becomes *inflectere* and *flexibile* in the poem. *Casus*, derived from *cado*, to fall, to fall over, becomes sexually suggestive in the line “quid sit casus inflectere.”

We can read this parody as operating along the logic of a “return of the repressed.” However, the repressed eroticism that “returns” is not in the form of Virgilian or Ovidian, or even Maximianian, perversions. Rather, it is grammar itself in its most elementary structures that turns out to be erotic. As the author of

43 Translation mine.

this parody—and dozens of other similar erotic grammar poems that survive from the period—would suggest, Alexandre’s attempt to “clean up” the grammar classroom backfires, producing an even more erotically charged pedagogical framework that, now stripped of literary content, isolates and foregrounds grammar’s intrinsically erotic focus on connections, disjunctions, and substitutions.

This subversive parody of the *Doctrinale*, although it urges the young students to leave the space of the classroom, finally reminds its readers that the erotic intensities found out in the world nonetheless originate in the grammar classroom. The grammar classroom channels the inherent eroticism of grammatical language and shapes it. Trains it. The erotic grammatical metaphor, whether used playfully or seriously, is a perpetual reminder of this training.

In effect, Alan of Lille allegorizes the notion of the grammar classroom as a space for the training of desire by making Venus (i.e., Desire) a student in Lady Nature’s grammar classroom. What’s more, the making of Venus into a grammar student is itself contained within a larger grammar lesson; the narrator is already positioned as a student in Nature’s grammar classroom. As Mark Jordan notes, the citation of Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* indicates that what is at stake, above all, is the reeducation of the narrator.⁴⁴ Indeed, the entirety of prose sections four through eight is written, as though in a classroom, in the form of a pedagogical dialogue in which Nature speaks as the authoritative *magister* while the dreamer-poet speaks as the eager and obsequious student. This means that the classroom becomes a kind of recursive *mise-en-abyme* for Alan. Nature explains that, just as responsibility over the union of matter and form was delegated to her, she herself delegated responsibility over the continuation of this union, by means of sexual reproduction, to Venus. This delegation—or, in neoplatonic terms, emanation⁴⁵—is described significantly as a grammar lesson. Thus, a second grammar lesson is contained within the narrator’s lesson, suggesting an infinite regress or a spiraling effect that situates the reader in the next circle out as a grammar student. The grammar classroom thus expands infinitely to encompass all things. This expansive quality of the grammar classroom in Alan’s *Plaint* conveys the same idea expressed in the parodist’s calquing of the language of the grammar classroom onto the fields, girls, dances, trees, outside of the classroom. If the grammar classroom is a space in which student desire is trained, it must also by definition be expansive, transferable, infinitely if necessary, so that “all things” can become objects on which to attach one’s desire.

⁴⁴ Jordan, *Invention of Sodomy*, 72.

⁴⁵ On Alan of Lille’s cosmology, see Jeffrey Bardzell, *Speculative Grammar and Stoic Language Theory in Medieval Allegorical Narrative: From Prudentius to Alan of Lille* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

Of course, the expansiveness of the grammar classroom also accounts for the expansive multiplication of perverse desires since expansion implies a kind of degradation in Alan's cosmology. These perverse desires (re)appear in the classroom as monstrous grammatical combinations, an inverse movement that brings what is "outside" of the grammar classroom to the always already inside. Nature does not shy away from enumerating varieties of sexual coupling in her grammar lesson—somehow more vivid, more imaginatively suggestive because expressed via grammatical euphemisms rather than via literal designation. But what purpose could such a florid enumeration of sexual configurations have in Nature's training of the narrator's, and by extension the reader's, desire? Nature's list of perverse desires (what she terms humanity's "grammatical" errors) begins with examples taken from classical literature, from Helen's infidelity and Medea's infanticide to Narcissus's destructive self-love. She then goes on to describe a whole catalogue of sexual perversions entirely through use of grammatical metaphors. As her lesson explains, some men "embrace those of masculine gender only" while others "those of feminine gender," and some prefer "those of common, or epicene gender." Others are described as "belonging to the heteroclite class," reclining (=declining) with "those of female gender in winter and those of masculine gender in summer."⁴⁶ Here, again, a comparison with the *Doctrinale* and its parody is called for: Nature's movement from pagan eroticism to purely grammatical eroticism inversely mirrors Alexandre's quasi-expulsion of the *auctores* set against his parodist's needling insistence that the erotics of grammar cannot be removed from the classroom as long as grammatical categories retain their erotic metaphoricality. Nature allows for both levels of eroticism in her classroom, both erotic classical allusions and erotic grammar metaphors. Although it is not always obvious which sexual practices these metaphors refer to—for example, what is the difference between men who embrace epicene gender and those who are themselves heteroclite?—the underlying assumption Nature makes here is that grammatical categories are transferable to the realm of sexuality.⁴⁷ The classroom becomes transferable to the world, an ever-dilating expanse of potential objects

⁴⁶ Alan of Lille, *The Plaint of Nature*, trans. James Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980), 136.

⁴⁷ The transferability of grammatical categories outside of the once-narrow purview of grammar was, of course, one of the difficult questions in contemporaneous debates about the liberal arts curriculum. Nature does not offer a clear-cut response to these debates. On the one hand, she uses grammatical categories to describe a whole number of perversions, implying that language itself is full of perverse categories and should not be used as a guide in sexual ethics. On the other hand, in the next prose section she grounds her lesson in sexual orthodoxy with "fundamental" grammatical categories.

of desire. In a word, Nature's grammar classroom *grammaticalizes* desire. And although grammaticalized desire might always potentially increase the quality and quantity of sexual couplings, it also simultaneously inscribes desire with a drive to limit its expression, a drive to orthodoxy. And so, although Nature's classroom is expansive, and thus prone to perversion or degradation, it is also a space where desire can be effectively disciplined.

Although Alan and the *Doctrinale* parodist both invoke the grammar classroom as a figurative image, we can still draw some conclusions concerning the place of desire in contemporaneous grammar instruction. For one, the parody suggests that the place of desire in the grammar classroom is in question, an object of polemic. For another, both Alan and the parodist suggest that grammar cannot be conceived of separately from desire. Grammatical structures are desirous and human sexual desire is structured like a grammar. By focusing on these transitional figures and on the question of grammar's ethical value in the mode of debate, we are able to reconstruct obliquely what was imagined to have been lost in the shift from grammar-as-orthopraxy to grammar-as-sodomy and the concurrent shift from early medieval pedagogical grammar to high/late medieval speculative/modistic grammar. Essentially we glimpse a sophisticated, although in some ways contradictory, account of the linguistic nature of desire and the desirous nature of language, a willingness to engage ambiguity in the grammar classroom and a canny awareness of the fact that the same facet of grammar conditions *both* the disorderly nature of desire and the drive to inscribe limits. One can easily understand, therefore, the strong sense of loss expressed in John of Salisbury's writing. A loss, not simply of an old homosocial pedagogical tradition, but also of a sophisticated and artful understanding of desire and language.

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