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Cobet Revisited

New Light on a Brilliant and Eccentric Scholar

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Abstract

This article argues that Cobet's philological and text-critical work deserves to be understood on its own terms, rather than being dismissed for its inconsistency with prevailing conceptions of classical scholarship. As shown by his Latin programmatic writings, Cobet was a typical nineteenth-century humanist, who aimed to integrate contemporary scholarly values into a traditional educational framework. Both Cobet's method of textual criticism and his determination to remain aloof from what are nowadays considered progressive developments in nineteenth-century classical scholarship make sense on the basis of his humanistic conviction that classical scholarship's ultimate aim is to serve humane educational ends. The fact that Cobet's humanistic educational writings have fallen into oblivion is the result of a tendency among modern classicists to measure the past by standards drawn from the present, a tendency that can be called the 'Whig history of classical scholarship'.

Keywords

History of classical scholarship – textual criticism – classical education – humanism – Cobet

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With the example of a Cobet before us, we are constantly reminded that learning must be coupled with character, good taste and freedom of spirit, and that these last three virtues are, in the end, worth more than the first.

J.J. HARTMAN, *Rede ter herinnering aan Cobet*, 1909.

1 Revisiting Cobet

The year 1857 marked the beginning of the collaboration between *Mnemosyne* and the scholar who more than any other helped the journal achieve the venerable reputation it still has today: Carel Gabriël Cobet (1813-1889). It is worth remembering that at its inception in 1852, *Mnemosyne* not only served the scholarly study of classical antiquity; it also aimed to become a "*popular* journal, accessible to all *literati* in The Netherlands, as well as to some civilised *non-literati*". For this reason, Dutch, not Latin, was chosen as its official language. Only when Cobet joined the editorial board did *Mnemosyne* develop into the exclusively scholarly, internationally reputed journal that it has remained ever since. Changing its language from Dutch to Latin in 1857, Cobet authored the large majority of contributions for almost three decades (1857-1886), thus making *Mnemosyne* nearly synonymous with his name.

Today Cobet is best remembered as the primary representative of the once respectable but now wholly outdated 'Leiden school' of textual criticism.[1] Being widely revered in his own day as towering "head and shoulders above all the Greek scholars of [his] century" and even as "difficult to compare with any other scholar than Scaliger or Bentley",[2] Cobet is nowadays usually seen as an exponent of a largely aberrant phase in the history of classical scholarship, happily consigned to the past. The main reason for this lies in Cobet's

1 This movement in textual criticism was continued after Cobet's death by a number of his students, who held important positions at Dutch universities for many decades. Amsterdam: Samuel Naber (1871-1898); Utrecht: Henricus van Herwerden (1864-1902) and Johannes van der Vliet (1891-1902); Groningen: Tjalling Halbertsma (1877-1894) and Herman Josef Polak (1894-1908); Leiden: Jan van Leeuwen (1884-1915), Jacob Hartman (1891-1921) and Dirk Christiaan Hesseling (1907-1929).

2 From the obituary by Rutherford 1889, 472f., cf. Sandys 1908, 287. In his day, Cobet was often praised in extravagant tones, e.g. as the "the grand master of criticism" (from Cobet's obituary in *AΘHNA* II, 1890, unpaginated), or the "God of Dutch philologists" (ironic, Moritz Schmidt, see Polak 1889, 416); Cobet's knowledge and mastery of ancient Greek and Latin (both of which he spoke and wrote fluently) were widely acknowledged to be nearly unparalleled, see e.g. Wilamowitz 1921, 41; Rutherford 1889, 471; Mayor 1887, 124. Cf. Müller 1869, 119.

unusually stringent and idiosyncratic method of textual criticism. Through his intimate and enduring familiarity with Greek authors Cobet believed he had gained a deep, inner understanding of the ancient Greek language, particularly of the difference between stylistic 'purity' and 'impurity'. The genius of Greek civilisation, in Cobet's view, was perfectly expressed in a small number of stylistic masterpieces, mostly from the fifth and fourth centuries BC. All other works whose style did not conform to his narrowly defined stylistic ideal, Cobet regarded as 'degenerate' and unsuitable for educational purposes. As a textual critic, he therefore set himself the task not of objectively reconstructing originals, but of restoring allegedly deficient texts to the stylistic purity of which they had unhappily fallen short. As a consequence, Cobet not only detected 'errors' of textual transmission where no modern editor sees a reason to emendate, but even laboured to 'purify' original Greek authors from the linguistic 'mistakes' by which they had unwittingly defiled their beautiful language. It is due to both his presumptuous claim to know better Greek than the majority of original authors and his extremely dogmatic application of normative standards that modern scholars have dismissed Cobet's philological work as "unscientific", "limited", "narrow-minded", "anachronistic", and "outdated".[3]

The striking unanimity among modern scholars about the shortcomings of Cobet's philological method is paralleled by an equally striking failure to consider the reasons *why* Cobet chose to steer a course that was so different from that taken by many of his colleagues and nearly all of his modern successors. Throughout his employment at the University of Leiden—which lasted for almost forty years (1846-1883)—Cobet regularly justified his philological viewpoints in lectures delivered in Latin on solemn occasions during the academic year. These lectures, which have been almost completely ignored by modern scholarship, show that Cobet understood his philological work from a humanistic view of the educational value of classical studies.[4] While being inspired on the one hand by novel principles and ideals drawn from contemporary scholarship, Cobet attempted on the other hand to make these principles and ideals subservient to educational ends that had been integral to humanistic education for centuries. Both his method of textual criticism and

3 Unscientific: Kenney 1974, 119; limited: *ibid.*, 118; de Vries 1973, 501; narrow-minded: Janssen 1990, 20; Sicking 1998, 252; anachronistic: Kenney 1974, 121; outdated: Sicking 1998, 258.

4 During my library research for this article, several copies of Cobet's programmatic works appeared to be still uncut: a sure sign that they had not been read *once* since their publication about a century and a half ago. For a survey of Cobet's programmatic works, see the bibliography. Programmatic statements are also found in some prefaces of Cobet's philological works, for example those to the *Novae lectiones* (1858) and *Variae lectiones* (1854, 1873).

his determination to remain aloof from what are nowadays considered notable advances in nineteenth-century classical scholarship—most notably the rise of *Altertumswissenschaft*—make sense on the basis of his typically humanistic conviction that it is classical scholarship's ultimate aim to serve humane educational ends. It is only by studying Cobet's hitherto unknown programmatic writings that we can learn how to appreciate Cobet's philological work on its own terms, rather than dismissing it for not being consistent with conceptions of classical scholarship that have come to prevail today. My aim in this article is to explore this untrodden ground and to interpret Cobet's philological standpoints and method in the context of his educational viewpoints. My argument begins with a discussion of Cobet's conception of classical education. Thereafter I will interpret his work as a philologist and textual critic in light of his educational objectives. Finally, I will consider what characterised Cobet as a typically nineteenth-century scholar and how his efforts to integrate principles and ideals derived from contemporary scholarship into a traditional educational framework over time risked thwarting the very purposes they were intended to serve.

2 Cobet's Ideal of Classical Education

Like most humanists from the Renaissance, Cobet believed that the prime and ultimate purpose of classical studies was to elevate and perfect oneself as a human being.[5] Since the cultural monuments of classical civilisation revealed an unsurpassed intellectual and spiritual refinement, they were preeminently suited to "uplift the spirit" to "true nobility"[6] and to reach a state which—following a long tradition—Cobet called *humanitas*.[7] Acquiring *humanitas* was the legitimating purpose not only of classical school studies, but also of academic philology. Finding little use in an academic scholar who was not at the same time a "brave and constant man", as well as a "good citizen", Cobet considered it futile to know "literature and history by heart" if "erudition does not make you better, more prudent, healthier, more human".[8] In view of these

5 From this point onwards, I will extensively quote from Cobet's educational writings. I refer to them by their year of publication alone.

6 1852, 15. Cf. 1856, 6; 1860, 5.

7 See e.g. 1847, 4, 11; 1852, 4f., 7; 1853a, 4f., 6. Cobet used to mention classical studies by their traditional name of *studia humanitatis*, see e.g. 1856, 7, 14; 1860, 5, 11.

8 1853b, 9f.: "Quid expedit aut iuvat Litterarum partes omnes tenaci memoria complecti et historias … scire omnes, si non melior, non prudentior, non sanior aut humanior denique ex illa diffusa eruditione evasisti. Quam turpe ac foedum, quam ioculare etiam et ridiculum

educational objectives, Cobet saw little point in studying remains of the ancient world that were not truly "worthy of admiration".[9] Only "great and memorable subjects", "the noblest historical deeds" and "the greatest men" were suitable to "strengthen our character".[10] Unlike advocates of the emerging ideal of *Altertumswissenschaft*, Cobet did not see value in extending scholarly attention to anything that was not morally, aesthetically or intellectually exemplary. It was one's duty not only to ignore, but to 'despise' the lowly remains of ancient civilisation, being "of the least or of no importance".[11]

In Cobet's view, the exemplary quality of classical civilisation was above all reflected in its literary monuments. Like many of his contemporaries, Cobet boundlessly admired the formal variety of the language the ancient Greeks used in their classical age, a variety expressed in the extended case and verb system, the dual forms, the coexistence of the subjunctive and optative modes, etc. Due to its "incredible richness, variety and inexhaustible treasures", classical Greek was "transparent and accurate" and wholly "tailored to the truth".[12] This formal perfection was important to Cobet as he adhered to the typically humanistic view of words as the "effigy and image of thoughts".[13] He regarded language as the expression of a people's inmost character, of both its "virtues and vices", and thus an "index and testimony of *humanitas*".[14] In accordance with this view, Cobet interpreted the extraordinary variety of forms and expression typical of classical Greek as pointing to an array of eminent intellectual and moral virtues. The fact that the classical Athenians "denoted everything by its proper name" and "never confuse[d] and mix[ed] up things that are by nature distinct" proved both their refined judgment and the "gravity and constancy" of their character.[15] The harmonious beauty of their style reflected their innate

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est Romanos et Graecos sedulo trivisse omnes et in ea re aetatem contrivisse ac nihil tamen Romanae constantiae, nihil elegantiae Graecae in vitam et mores traxisse."

9 1864, 7.

10 1853b, 3; 1852, 17 and 1853c II, 7.

11 1864, 10, 13.

12 1854, 15f.: "… Graecorum lingua, quae tota est ad veritatem rerum exacta et composita".

13 1847, 7f.

14 1853c III, 4; 1854, 11: "In Litterarum monumentis tamquam in speculo cernitur populi totius ingenium. In lingua et scriptis indoles virtutum et vitiorum tota conspicitur, ut in singulis hominibus ex oratione pellucent mores. Lingua humanitatis est index ac testis."

15 1854, 14: "Incredibile dictu est quam egregia res sit in dicendo scribendove in nulla re ineptire, et linguam habere sanam, naturae convenientem, quae suo quodque nomine veluti certa nota signat, certoque discrimine diversa dirimit, propria et figurata ex ipsa veritate naturae sumit, neque umquam dormitans aut alias res agens quae in ipsa rerum veritate distincta sunt confundit miscetque." Cf. 1860, 9.

"elegance and grace".[16] Moreover, the fact that the Athenians "never committed ineptitudes in speaking or writing" was indicative of their love of freedom: for the same critical spirit that underlay their accuracy of expression prevented them from being misled by the deceptive reasoning of malicious political rulers and usurpers and thus enabled them to preserve their political liberty for a very long time.[17] Through close analysis of the classical Greek language, Cobet expected his students to take on the very discriminatory qualities, the same moral gravity, the same sense of beauty and elegance and the same love of political and mental freedom of which this style was the formal expression. Through "making their thoughts and speech conform to that [sc. classical Greek] language that does not endure follies", they would achieve the moral and spiritual refinement that was the legitimating purpose of classical studies.[18]

We can see from the above that Cobet's ideal of classical education was a far cry from the kind of superficial, leisurely humanism that conceives of classical literature as a repository of rhetorical flourishes and moral platitudes. Cobet tended to ridicule people who concealed their lack of solid knowledge of the ancient world by making a great song and dance about "Homer's divine vein", "Plato's celestial nature" and "the majesty of the Tragedians".[19] By *humanitas*, he stated, "I don't mean that [*humanitas*] that is only found in [leading] an elegant life", in "grace and gentleness of behaviour", nor in the kind that breeds "the ability to speak ornately and eloquently".[20] In Cobet's view, the virtue that was the ultimate reward of classical studies could only be realised by the intensive and serious study of classical form. 'Imitating' the classics did not come down to rattling off rhetorical formulas or inculcating moral lessons, but to the sustained process of internalising intellectual and moral virtues by the serious study of the literature in which these virtues had found their most perfect expression. For this reason, Cobet often commended classical studies as "*severa* litterarum studia" (italics added),[21] whose coveted reward was "true and

16 1856, 13.

17 1860, 9: "[S]everissima Litterarum studia … et amorem libertatis et superstitionis odium augent et inflammant, et hinc humanae felicitatis fundamenta iaciuntur." Cf. 1864, 7.

18 1854, 14: "Nihil est rationi salubrius et propterea verae humanitati fructuosius quam cogitationes suas et orationem exigere ad illam linguam, quae ineptias ferre non potest …"

19 1864, 4: "Multum abest ut mihi isti placeant qui … mediocriter … in illo difficillimo studiorum genere versati … ambitiose et sine fine creparent divini Homeri venam, coeleste Platonis ingenium, maiestatem Tragicorum …"

20 1860, 8: "[S]citote me non illam humanitatem dicere, quae in vitae tantum et victus elegantia cernitur et venustate morum et ingeniorum lenitate … [n]eque illam … humanitatem unde … ornate copioseque dicendi facultas aut paritur aut alitur."

21 See e.g. 1852, 17; 1853 all., 13; 1854, 17; 1856, 10.

solid erudition".[22] To Cobet, true *humanitas* was intrinsically bound up with *studiousness*.[23]

3 Cobet's Philological Mission

Let us now review Cobet's philological work from the perspective of his educational objectives. As a philologist, Cobet was deeply worried that the knowledge of the Greek classical style—on which the educational value of classical studies depended—had been critically blurred in the course of history. Whereas most scholars of his day had a sufficient understanding of the "proper and idiomatic use of the Latin language", they often groped in the dark when it came to distinguishing "what was Greek and what was not".[24] The deficient knowledge of "true Graecitas" (*genuina Graecitas*), as Cobet called it, was the result of the structural neglect that befell the Greek language from late antiquity onwards.[25] In the classical age, as the Greeks were still free from foreign domination, their "nature and personality" could still articulate itself unimpededly in their language, which for that reason showed a wonderful spontaneous freedom and naturalness.[26] At this time, the written language employed by educated men such as poets and writers still coincided with the vernacular: classical authors still drew from the "language of the people" (*oratio populi*) as from an "eternal source".[27] This situation came to an abrupt end in the Alexandrian age,

22 1860, 8.

23 This belief, which was shared by many of Cobet's renowned colleagues from abroad, such as Ulrich von Wilamowitz (1848-1931), Friedrich Leo (1851-1914) and Eduard Fränkel (1888-1970), was itself a legacy of the classical-humanistic tradition: in classical Latin, *humanus* often meant 'learned'. See e.g. Cic. *Part.* 90; *Fam.* 13.22.2; Aulus Gellius described *humanitas* as *eruditio et institutio in bonas artes*. (13.15). *Humanissimus vir* was the usual Latin way to refer to a scholar (see e.g. Cic. *de Orat.* 2.3). This specific shade of meaning was also of vital importance to Renaissance humanism. See Giustiniani 1985, 168.

24 1853c I, 3f. Like many classical humanists, Cobet nearly always used the term 'Greek' (and 'Roman') in an evaluative sense. Since he believed that the ancient Greeks had expressed their true character only in their most accomplished literary works, he considered inferior works not even worthy of the name Greek.

25 1853c II, 16.

26 1853c I, 5: Cobet described the classical age as a time "cum variae [Graecae] stirpes in Graecia libera ab alieno, id est barbaro, imperio florerent et eloquio uterentur nativo, nondum depravato alienis additamentis, sed quale ipsa natura et ingenium gentis veluti insitum sibi et innatum edebat."

27 1853c II, 9.

when the Greeks lost their political freedom along with the moral virtues and spiritual autonomy that belong to life as a free citizen. As a result, the Greeks also lost the richness, scope and accuracy of linguistic expression that belong to people whose spiritual life is not curtailed by intellectual censorship or political repression. In Cobet's view, then, the simplified grammar and syntax of *koine* Greek was the formal expression of a depraved moral and political condition.[28] In response to this situation, Hellenistic scholar-poets attempted to artificially keep the cultivated language used by their great classical ancestors alive. In order to do so, however, they had to rely on 'erudition' instead of 'nature',[29] a circumstance reinforced by the fact that most writers were not native Greeks but foreigners from distant regions of the ancient world.[30] Consequently, "erudition, effort, industry and the skill of ornate speech" gradually came to replace "character, the spiritually sublime and great speech".[31] In other words, the desired reconstruction and conservation of civilised Attic was only poorly realised. Due to their insufficient knowledge of the rules and regularities of classical Greek, as well as their limited understanding of obsolete expressions, Hellenistic authors could do little but randomly patch together remnants from classical Greek, obsolete words and strange neologisms.[32] The result was a classically 'coloured', but essentially artificial language that was a far cry from true classical Greek.[33] It was the peculiar dichotomy between a vulgarised vernacular on the one hand and an artificial 'scholarly' language on the other that Cobet considered characteristic of a culture that, having succumbed to foreign domination and moral decline, was no longer able to freely express its inmost character.[34]

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28 1864, 7; 1847, 10f. Cf. 1853c II, 5: in the Alexandrian age "sermo Graecus ex pulcherrimo et praestantissimo factus est turpissimus ac sordidissimus".

29 1847, 10.

30 1864, 13: "Nemo umquam extra Graeciam natus Graece scripsit quod esset lectu dignum."

31 1864, 10: "Non est in poëtis [qui post Alexandri mortem scripserunt] ingenium illud et mens sublimior et os magna sonans; non est in historicis, in philosophis, in oratoribus illa vis dicendi quae animos quo velit rapiat et inflammet, neque illa inveniendi et eloquendi facultas, quae facit ut omnia non narrari aut describi, sed agi et vivere videantur."

32 1847, 11: "[Q]ui docte scribere volebant obsoletorum verborum cadavera, ut ita dicam, effodiebant, aut procudebant nova ad omnem analogiae formam deficiente pulchri sensu elegantiaeque temere efficta: hinc paulatim quid bene Graecum esset quid non esset vulgo dubitari et ignorari coeptum est …".

33 1847, 10f.

34 1853c II, 9: *sermo vulgaris*/ἡ τῶν ἰδιωτῶν διάλεκτος versus *sermo eruditus*/ἡ τῶν πεπαιδευμένων γλῶσσα. Cf. *ibid.*: "Incredibile dictu est quam late ea ratio patuerit, quotus enim quisque est Graecorum, qui post amissam libertatem aliquid conscripserunt, qui se

The next step in the decline of the Greek language was brought about by the poor transmission of original Greek texts from late Greek antiquity up to the Middle Ages. After Hellenistic librarians and copyists, caused by their poor knowledge of the classical style, had overlooked many pernicious errors,[35] the defective textual transmission was continued by medieval clerks and copyists, whose innumerable mistakes were due, among other things, to 1) their incorrect pronunciation of Greek, 2) their lack of knowledge of signs and abbreviations, 3) their tendency to adopt annotations made in the margins of manuscripts into the text themselves, and above all 4) their often arbitrary and rash conjectures.[36] As a result of this gravely disordered textual transmission, Cobet believed, no medieval codex could possibly be understood "without multiple improvements".[37] In the Renaissance, the situation worsened. Renaissance humanist-editors, although undeniably learned and among the first people for many centuries to maintain a serious interest in classical Greek literature, showed an alarming lack of "judgment and discernment".[38] Due to a "blind and half-crazy veneration of antiquity", they deemed "beautiful and elegant whatever was ancient", making no distinction between historical periods or literary genres.[39] Heedlessly explaining Homer from Apollonius Rhodius, the tragedians from Themistius, Plato from Philostratus, they buried the "good authors" beneath masses of annotations that were often hardly relevant.[40] As a consequence, Renaissance commentaries were a hopeless "mishmash" of annotations, a set of "useless paraphernalia" that formed an inextricable jumble

non ad antiquiorum imitationem totum dederit et ausus sit scribere, ut ipsi loquuntur, vulgari sermone." In Cobet's analysis, this same diagnosis held true for Greek writers from late Roman antiquity, such as the 'Atticists' and many late antique grammarians: it was by a comparable lack of political freedom that they had only proved capable of artificially and deficiently mimicking the classical Attic tongue, rather than bringing it to true life. See 1853c II, 15.

35 1853c II, 8.

36 1847, 23f.

37 1847, 22.

38 1847, 12: In the Renaissance "ardentissimo studio omnes in omnis generis scriptoribus … cuiuscumque aetatis et pretii promiscue helluabantur, ex indigesta diffusae lectionis farragine omnem humanae cognitionis modum se complexuros sperantes: cuius doctrinae ut documenta exstarent multi collectam undique explicationis et annotationis materiem sine iudicio nec delectu effundebant."

39 1864, 13; 1847, 12.

40 1853c II, 7f. Cobet mentions the Frisian headmaster and poet Johannes Pierson (1731-1759) who, in his commentary on Aelius Moeris—a Greek grammarian from the second century AD—"gave equal value to the errors made by *Atticistae* and *Graeculi* and to the documents of true and genuine *Graecitas*."

of "notions, forms and meanings".[41] Even the greatest Dutch classicists from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, such as Tiberius Hemsterhuis (1685-1766), Caspar Valckenaer (1715-1785) and Daniël Wyttenbach (1746-1820), had not been able to bring order out of the alarming chaos.[42]

It is easy to imagine the consequences that Cobet expected the seriously disordered knowledge of classical Greek to have: it disabled readers from cultivating their minds by studying the unique Greek character that found its truest expression in the classical style. The poor textual transmission had the double effect of "clouding the elegance of the Greek character", and of "corrupting one's faculty of judgment, that it was one of ingenious writers' tasks to sharpen."[43] Being unable to achieve the intended educational effect, the study of Greek literature was deprived of its central legitimating purpose. Therefore, the ambitious philological mission that Cobet set himself was to "bring order to what is said and taught about the common usage and propriety of the Greek tongue",[44] that is, of the Greek language that predated the linguistic decline that began with the Alexandrian era. Cobet's aim was to achieve definitive and "certain knowledge" of the "fixed, irrefutable rules" governing the language that the Greeks had used in their classical age.[45] For such knowledge would provide him with a solid measure by which he could critically assess the development of the Greek language over time: a fixed, unwavering standard which he could use to distinguish 'good' Greek—which was of educational value—from 'bad' Greek—which was educationally worthless.[46]

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41 1853c II, 8: "[N]ihil est facilius quam annotandi talem farraginem et inutilem supellectilem undique corrasam veterum monumentis adiicere, quid attinet dicere nihil esse inutilius." Cf. *ibid*. I, 4.

42 1853c II, 6. It should be noted that Cobet scholarly horizon was largely Dutch. Both for praise and criticism he mostly turned to scholars of his own nation.

43 1853c I, 4: "… non tantum elegantia Graeci ingenii tamquam nube obfuscatur, sed corrumpitur iudicium, quod ingeniosi scriptores acuere debuissent."

44 1853c I, 15: "… ut tandem ad … rationem exigantur, quae de usu et proprietate Graeci sermonis … doceri … assolent."

45 Letter to J. Geel (1789-1862), March 20th 1844, see Fruin, van der Mey 1891, 504.

46 Cobet's attachment to "solidity and unwavering certainty" (see a letter to J. Bake (1787-1864), cf. Polak 1889, 431) was well known among his students. Johannes van Leeuwen recorded that his teacher anxiously avoided using phrases expressing uncertainty, such as 'as it were' ('als het ware'), 'perhaps' ('misschien'), 'usually' ('gewoonlijk'), 'now and then' ('nu en dan'). See van Leeuwen 1889, 365. Interestingly, the same quest for solidity and certainty underlay Cobet's rejection of the ideal of *Altertumswissenschaft* that in recent decades had quickly gained popularity in Germany. Cobet's scepticism about it was grounded in his belief that all knowledge of antiquity that was not based on actually surviving texts, and thus on solid, human testimony, was doomed to remain fuzzy and

Cobet went about his task by selecting a group of authors whose works in his view reflected the stylistic purity and regularity the revival of Greek studies required. Unsurprisingly, he only selected authors from what is nowadays called the 'classical' age. Within the classical age, he focused on Attic literature alone, firstly because the large number of available sources made Attic a "stable dialect" against which the other Greek dialects could be safely measured,[47] secondly, because Cobet believed that the Attic language that has come down to us in literary sources was *identical* with the "popular speech" of common Athenians. Due to the unique, harmonious coincidence of the *sermo eruditus* and the *sermo vulgaris*, classical Attic was not only a model of perfection, but also of purity and naturalness.[48] The pursuit of these same ideals also induced Cobet to give precedence to prose writers over poets. Such was Cobet's attachment to the 'pure' and 'natural' Attic style that he accused poets no less than Pindar and Aeschylus of sometimes sinning against the nature of their own language by indulging in "poetical frenzy and ardour".[49] As a result, the pool of writers who met Cobet's demands of stylistic purity was exceptionally small:

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indistinct. See e.g. 1853b, 11f.: "Sequitur … eas tantum partes Historiae Veteris nobis patere, in quibus Historiam cum Litteris coniungere possimus"; cf. 1847, 18. For other instances of this typically humanistic belief in the superiority of literary testimony, see 1856, 10f.; 1860, 10f.

47 1852, 11f.: "Ea … varietas [dialectorum] nullo negotio teneri et addisci potest, si omnia ad unam stabilemque dialectum referas quam diligenter noris. Est ea dialectus Attica, lingua Atheniensium."

48 1853c I, 12: "Lingua populi est communi semper iudicio, in optima quaeque conspirantis quae sana sint, quae simplicia et consentanea naturae, simul lepide et acute reperta usu probantis, vana, affectata, aegra omnia negligentis et contemtu opprimentis ac delentis." Cf. 1847, 9: "Apud Atticos laetus summorum ingeniorum proventus patrium sermonem ad illud evexit fastigium, ut nihil umquam viderit humanum genus, quod ad illam copiam, nitorem, magnificentiam cum eleganti simplicitate et sobrietate coniunctum possit comparari." For other admiring comments on the ancient Greek language, and on classical Attic in particular, see 1854, 11-16; 1856, 13; 1864, 8. Cobet's view of Attic as a wholly 'natural' dialect was already criticised in his own time, see e.g. Polak 1889, 428.

49 1847, 19. The "drunken loftiness of Aeschylus and Pindar", for example, in Cobet's view could not provide students of ancient Greek with any "solid ground". (Letter to C.G. Menzel, Nov. 27th-Dec. 1st 1844, see Fruin, van der Mey 1891, 546.) For similar reasons, Cobet was sceptical towards philosophy as such. In a letter to Jacob Geel from Jan. 25th 1844 (*ibid*., 491), he described contemporary German philosophy as "idle nonsense" (λῆροι λεπτότατοι) spreading "a foggy mist which takes away my freedom of view and intoxicates me and makes me seasick". For other anti-philosophical statements, see Schouten 1964, 188f. Being a typical "noble-minded, enlightened, modern-tinged Protestant" (*De Gids* 1891, II, 556), Cobet was also aversive to everything reeking of mysticism and romanticism.

only Xenophon, Plato, Demosthenes, Thucydides and Aristophanes—a poet whose comical style Cobet considered much closer to the *sermo vulgaris* than the elevated diction of the tragedians—qualified as "classical and reliable witnesses" (*testes classici et locupletes*) to "true and genuine *Graecitas*".[50]

Cobet's admiration for the 'pure' Attic style was paralleled by an unconcealed contempt for authors who did not meet this ideal. While he was willing to "forgive" the classical Attic poets their mistakes—because their enthused, though erroneous diction was at least capable of "moving the heart"—the graver stylistic errors made by poets living after the loss of Greek freedom could only be "despised".[51] While he acknowledged Polybius' remarkable erudition, for example, Cobet nevertheless discouraged his students from studying him because of his "lack of eloquence" and his "boorish and plebeian style".[52] Likewise, for all Dionysius' qualities as a literary critic, the "sophistry" and "verbosity" of his style disqualified his prose as a suitable object of study.[53] Even worse was Flavius Josephus, whose abominable Greek was "patched together without artistry and discrimination from the rubbish of his contemporaries and Roman authors".[54] For comparable reasons, Cobet commented in overtly disapproving terms on modern scholars who had taken little heed of the distinction between classical and non-classical Greek. He could only blame Tiberius Hemsterhuis for paying more attention to Xenophon of Ephesus than to Xenophon of Athens. He criticised Caspar Valckenaer for "equating good with bad authors" and for preferring the "sophists and rhetoricians" to the "old Athenians", and Daniël Wyttenbach for paying as much attention to Julian and Eunapius as to Plato.[55]

For his unfavourable experiences with what he considered "catholic superstition" during his research years in Italy, see Sicking 1998, 250.

50 1853c II, 15f.

51 1847, 20: "[Q]uemadmodum hoc magnis poëtis condonamus lubenter, qui vel in hoc ipso dithyrambicae dictionis ornatu verbisque sonoris ita afficiunt animos, ut eodem impetu rapiamur audientes, sic cum contemtu abiiciendi isti sunt, qui inani verborum strepitu incautos et imperitos fallere possunt, prudentes et antiquorum gnaros non possunt."

52 1864, 11.

53 1864, 11f.

54 1864, 13: "Non est haec Graeca oratio ex laciniis veterum sine arte, sine delectu, contexta intertextis veluti pannis decoloribus ex aequalium et Romanorum sordibus." For similar stylistic reasons, Cobet criticised many other late antique authors: e.g. Maximus Tyrius, Themistius and Himerius ("verbose"), Philostratus ("dull"), Iulianus ("mannered"), Eunapius ("insipid") and Xenophon Ephesius ("puerile"), see *ibid*.

55 1853c II, 6.

Cobet's rigid stylistic normativity has been a source of puzzlement and consternation for modern scholars. His exclusive appreciation for an extremely select group of writers of 'pure' Attic lineage, combined with his derogatory attitude towards colleagues who chose to demean themselves by studying 'inferior' authors, have been invoked as unmistakable signs of his narrow-minded, pedantic character.[56] It is undoubtedly true that Cobet pursued his stylistic ideals with a rigidity and obsessiveness that bordered on the absurd. The ideal of stylistic 'purity' was so important to him, that he could hardly find *any* classical author whose works fully conformed to it, and was forced to cast aside as 'degenerate' the bulk of the Greek literary heritage. Yet we can only do justice to Cobet by realising that the choices he made sprang from educational motivations. As we have seen, underlying Cobet's conception of classical scholarship was a typically humanistic belief in the close relationship between style and the formation of character. Cobet's efforts to elaborate a strictly defined canon of 'pure' Attic were inspired by his desire to provide readers with a standard of stylistic excellence by the study of which they could elevate themselves as human beings. Conversely, his often relentless judgments on post-classical authors were essentially judgments about their deficient educational value. Just as Polybius prevented the reader from ever being "warmed or touched", Dionysius from "strengthening [his] character".[57] Cobet's critique of his colleagues' interest in 'inferior' authors was likewise rooted in the primacy of educational values. As a true humanist, Cobet was never quite able to grasp the point of studying literature that failed to do what, in his view, all great literature should do: speak to the heart.

Cobet's belief in the potential of style to educate the character was part of a long humanistic tradition. Indeed, educational fascination with stylistic perfection had been endemic to classical humanism from its very beginning. Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) was hardly different from Cobet in believing that one could only access the heights of ancient culture through imitating and internalising the classical (Latin) style. Renaissance editors and commentators were much like Cobet in their educationally-inspired attempts to present students and readers with examples of stylistic perfection.[58] Furthermore, excessive linguistic purism had been a well-known phenomenon for many centuries. An overriding focus on the classical style, as well as vehement critique of the excesses of linguistic purism were standard ingredients of the Renaissance

56 See e.g. Janssen 1990, 20; Sicking 1998, 252; Slings 2003, 32.

57 1864, 11f.

58 For the educational purpose of Renaissance commentaries, see Enenkel and Nellen 2013, esp. 17-23.

debates concerning 'Ciceronianism'. Cobet's narrow focus on a small number of 'pure' Attic prose writers was not that different from, for instance, Christophorus Longolius' decision to once and for all rid his Latin from impurities through a five-year-long, exclusive immersion in the works of Cicero.[59] Ever since the Renaissance, exalted enthusiasm for stylistic perfection had gone hand in hand with excesses of inflexible normativity and fanatical classicism. Although the stringency with which Cobet pursued his stylistic ideals sets him apart from even the most uncompromising Renaissance Ciceronians, we must acknowledge that in his fascination with perfection of form, Cobet was carrying on a long humanistic tradition. To Cobet, just as to Renaissance humanists, the ultimate legitimating purpose of classical scholarship was its potential to educate the character through the dedicated and unceasing cultivation of the classical style.

4 Cobet's Method of Textual Criticism

In view of the gravely disordered manuscript tradition of ancient Greek literature, the survival of "true *Graecitas*" was almost entirely dependent on the philological discipline to which Cobet devoted nearly his entire life as an academic scholar: textual criticism. In Cobet's view, it was the textual critic's exalted task to restore the "sanity of thought, the elegant brightness of diction and the integrity and purity" that gave classical Attic literature its status and on which its educational value depended.[60] In other words, Cobet's objectives as a textual critic *coincided* with his objectives as a humanistic educator. His endeavour to rid "the monuments of Greek *humanitas* from corruptions and restore them to their original integrity"[61] was ultimately inspired by his intention to provide readers with examples of stylistic perfection, through the study of which they could elevate their spirit and perfect themselves as human beings.

We can only understand Cobet's method of textual criticism by taking into account this close interconnection between his text-critical and his

59 For the 'Ciceronianism' of Christopher Longolius (1488-1522), see Tunberg 1997. The question of how strictly the stylistic standards of classical Latin should be applied was also hotly debated in the late eighteenth century. See van Bommel 2015a, 134-146, and 2015b.

60 1858, iii: "sententiarum sanitas et elegans dicendi nitor et linguae veteris sinceritas et puritas".

61 1853 comm. I, 4: "[Criticorum] est monumenta graecae humanitatis emendata et in pristinam sinceritatem restituta caeteris legenda proponere."

educational ideals. In his inaugural address of 1846, which can be seen as the manifesto and founding document of the 'Leiden school' of philology, he portrayed the textual critic as the man who by virtue of his profession is best capable of achieving the ideal that classical humanists pursued ever since the Renaissance: to converse with ancient authors as with personal friends. The textual critic, being thoroughly versed in the ins and outs of an author's style, was capable as no other to "live together and converse with individual [classical authors]" in "personal proximity". To him, reading a classical author was to "hear and behold [him] speak in person".[62] Therefore, Cobet insisted that people be initiated into the art of textual criticism at an early age, for only then would they learn to understand that "books are not books but people … who talk to you, with whose opinions you are imbued, whose nature you take on, by whose example you compose yourself, no different than as with friends".[63]

Cobet's belief in the humane educational value of textual criticism is essential to understanding why he practised this discipline with such exclusive devotion, an exclusiveness that has repeatedly been criticised as proving his 'limited' and 'formalistic' approach to classical studies.[64] In Cobet's own view, the advanced study of style, which itself found its highest expression in the art of textual criticism, was in no way 'formalistic', 'dry' or 'limited', but an endlessly rich, ideally suited way to build a personal relationship with the great authors of Greek civilisation. These humane educational concerns also explain another aspect of Cobet that has often been unfavourably assessed: his lack of interest in the work of his colleagues.[65] Cobet often derided the vast amount of learning that had been amassed by academic philologists in the course of

62 1847, 28f.: "… homines semper et ubique sunt homines. Non coeli temperies, non reipublicae forma, leges, instituta, mores, religiones tantum umquam efficient discrimen, ut homo hominem penitus cognoscere non possit. Animo et cogitatione una vivendum colloquendumque cum iis est, quos intelligere et imitari studeas. Contrahenda cum singulis assidua lectione notitia est et familiaritas, ut veluti loquentes audias, et praesens praesentes intuearis." Cf. 1856, 14. Cobet's pupil J.J. Hartman described his teacher as a man "qui cum codicibus tam intimam contraxerit familiaritatem ut cum iis tamquam cum vivis hominibus vivere videatur". Hartman 1889, 60.

63 1847, 28: "ad hanc [facultatem criticam] mature ita informandi sunt iuvenes, ut in cognoscenda antiquitate non cum libris sibi agendum sed cum hominibus intelligant." 1856, 11: "non libri … sunt sed homines, qui tecum una sunt, qui colloquuntur tecum, quorum opinionibus imbueris, quorum naturam induis, ad quorum exempla te componis, haud secus atque ad amicorum." Cf. *Variae lectiones* 1854, viii-ix.

64 E.g. Kenney 1974, 118; Krul 1989, 75.

65 See e.g. Sicking 1998, 257. Also Bursian 1883, 928f.; Holwerda 1890, 439; Polak 1889, 434; cf. Schouten 1964, 203f.

centuries. The "inane burden" of erudition had created the false suggestion that understanding classical authors was the prerogative of a small group of accomplished scholars.[66] In Cobet's view, the "burdensome and senseless [critical] apparatus"[67] typical of modern text editions often had little effect other than to spread "darkness and inextricable difficult[ies]"[68] and thus to obstruct readers from getting to know classical authors as their personal friends. For similar reasons, Cobet rarely took time to read secondary literature and repeatedly—and notoriously—called upon his students to "throw away lexicons"[69] and get to know ancient authors "out of themselves".[70] The same humanistic attitude explains, finally, why Cobet hardly ever took time to elaborate his text-critical work into broadly conceived articles or monographs. The large majority of his *Mnemosyne* contributions consisted of stray notes containing textual emendations and conjectures, which he only a few times bothered to bundle into voluminous books, usually with few additions, or none at all.[71] Cobet never published work in which he drew general conclusions from his emendations or interpreted textual content in an historical context. A number of proposed text editions never saw the light of day.[72] To Cobet, publishing

66 1852, 11; 7: it was widely believed that "quae … exstent monumenta ingenii veterum miro quodam artificio et magno apparatu diffusae doctrinae difficulter et vix intellig[untur] a paucis".

67 1847, 26: "Illi nil nisi variantium lectionum acervos undique sedulo corradunt, onerantes cuiusque generis scriptores molesto inutilique apparatu, quo saepe nihil est ad exstinguendum ingenium magis idoneum."

68 1852, 8.

69 1847, 16; 1852, 15; 1853a, 11; 1856, 17. According to one of his students, "throw away your lexica" was even one of Cobet's "favourite sayings", see Polak 1889, 427.

70 1847, 15; cf. *ibid.* 7 and 1856, 15: "Nempe Graeca nobis ab ipsis Graecis discenda sunt, Romana ab ipsis Romanis."

71 Sc. *Variae lectiones quibus continentur observationes criticae in scriptores Graecos* (1854, 1873); *Novae lectiones quibus continentur observationes criticae in scriptores Graecos* (1858); *Miscellanea critica quibus continentur observationes criticae in scriptores Graecos* (1878); *Collectanea critica quibus continentur observationes criticae in scriptores Graecos* (1878). The only proper monographs Cobet ever published were an early work on Xenophon, the winning entry of a contest issued by the Leiden Faculty of Letters: *Prosopographia Xenophontea, illustrandis nominibus eorum, qui memorantur in Memorabilibus Socratis, Symposio et Oeconomico* (1836), and his dissertation on the fragments of Plato comicus: *Observationes criticae in Platonis comici reliquias* (1840).

72 Cobet never met his editor Firmin-Didot's request to write a preface for his 1850 edition of Diogenes Laertius. Nor did he ever finish the proposed edition of Simplicius, on which he spent much time during his five-year study trip abroad (1840-1845). (The edition by Herman Karsten, who had encouraged Cobet to work on Simplicius, appeared in 1865

and editing were, at best, of secondary importance.[73] As a true humanist, his primary focus was always on his and his students' ongoing personal dialogue with his beloved classical authors, rather than on enriching scholarship with original and constructive contributions.

Let us now turn to Cobet's method of textual criticism. This was based on two principles, which Cobet explicitly distinguished from each other: *ratio* (method) and *usus* (common usage).[74] On the one hand, the textual critic should focus on the intensive study and critical comparison of Greek texts and manuscripts, in order to see which manuscripts and readings deserve more authority than others. It was the textual critic's additional obligation, however, to personally familiarise himself with the "constant form of speech" (*constans orationis forma*) characteristic of individual authors.[75] Once a "long familiarity and experience" with the author in question had engendered a solid knowledge of his idiom and manners of expression, obscure passages could be reconstructed on the basis of a "certain analogy".[76] This experience- and analogy-based method of textual criticism has been often criticised by modern scholars for being essentially circular: for relying on "common usage" and "analogy" is only possible by assuming the reliability of the very manuscripts that are subjected to emendation.[77] However, apart from the fact that circular reasoning is something from which no textual critic can entirely free himself,[78] this critique fails to recognise the humanistic nature of Cobet's view of textual criticism. To Cobet, personal familiarity, indeed, personal friendship with classical authors was not only not contradictory to, but a *prerequisite* for achieving

without Cobet's name on the title page.) Also a proposed integral edition of the Attic orators never appeared.

73 In the early 1840s, when he did not yet have a position at the University of Leiden, Cobet expressed his joy about not yet being under the pressure of publication. See Fruin, van der Mey 1891, xxxiii-xxxiv; Naber 1894, 216.

74 1847, 13.

75 1847, 15. Cobet believed that as a rule, words have clear, well defined meanings that tolerate no ambiguous explanation, a phenomenon known in linguistics as 'monosemy'. See 1847, 14: "Quidquid homines loquimur … *unum* habet sensum, ut prorsus eadem cogitatio ab loquente transeat ad audientem: atque hoc est *intelligere* ut quod cogitavit aliquis, idem nos audientes vel legentes cogitemus." Cf. Slings 2003, 8.

76 1847, 6: "certa … analogia".

77 See e.g. Kenney 1974, 117 and Slings 2003, 19. Cf. Sicking 1998, 255.

78 Although the Lachmannian separation of the *recensio* and the *constitutio* enables modern scholars to draw more information from manuscripts than could Cobet, they cannot avoid treating manuscripts *both* as a source of stylistic knowledge *and* as potential objects of emendation. See also Sicking 1998, 255f.

certain knowledge. As linguistic expression was inextricably bound up with the author's personality, the highest authority in questions of textual criticism was only within reach of people who had learnt to converse with classical authors as with personal friends. "Only from prolonged intercourse and familiarity with ancient authors", Cobet stated, "there gradually grows that *most accurate* understanding of things and words that we are looking for."[79] (ital. added) Precisely for this reason, the textual critic that Cobet most admired was not one of his contemporaries, but a Renaissance humanist: Joseph Scaliger (1540-1609), who detected textual corruptions by first "familiarising himself with the author's … personality" and by then restoring the proper form "either from manuscripts or *from* [*the author's*] *character*."[80] (ital. added)

Cobet's humanistic conception of textual criticism also fundamentally influenced the way he conceived of the Greek manuscript tradition and of the role it should play in the reconstruction of ancient texts. Since restoring classical clarity and simplicity was Cobet's prime concern, he insisted that textual emendations be based on a small number of codices that could be shown to be at the root of all the others.[81] Establishing a small number of usable codices that by virtue of their age had been exposed to relatively little corruption would be the best way to dissolve the "mishmash of variant readings" that had cast its shadow over the art of textual criticism for many centuries.[82] Cobet found it reasonable to assume that such "archetypical codices" (*codices archetypi*), as he called them, would one day be found for each individual author.[83] We should note, however, that Cobet did not use the word 'archetype' in the sense that would soon be standardised by Karl Lachmann (1793-1851). Instead of establishing (or reconstructing) the 'archetype' through the collation of all available manuscripts and systematically eliminating derivatives, Cobet based his choice of 'archetypical' codices on his own judgment about what was good Greek. At a time that Lachmann was about to decisively transform the art of textual criticism by distinguishing the phase of manuscript evaluation (the *recensio*) from the phase of textual reconstruction (the *constitutio*)—a

79 1856, 15: "Ex longo usu et familiaritate scriptorum paulatim subnascitur illa accuratissima rerum et verborum intelligentia, quam quaerimus." Already in his inaugural address (1847, 6f.), Cobet distanced himself explicitly from philologists who attempted to figure out the meaning of a text by what he called *divinari* or *hariolari*.

80 1847, 25. "… perspecto … penitus cuiusque scriptoris ingenio et consuetudine, … aegris ac depravatis sive ex antiquis membranis sive ex ingenio pristinam formam restituebant." (sc. Scaliger cum suis).

81 1847, 27.

82 1847, 26; cf. 1853c II, 7f.

83 1847, 27.

distinction aiming at the greatest possible objectivity by deferring interpretation to the final stage of textual reconstruction (the *constitutio*)—Cobet allowed a pre-established stylistic ideal—which he had constructed himself from closely hearing his "classical and reliable witnesses"—to play a central role in the establishment of manuscript hierarchies.[84] This typical disregard of the Lachmann method—a disregard that has earned him harsh criticism from modern scholars (see section 6)—sprang from his humanistic conception of the art of textual criticism.[85] Cobet's understanding of textual criticism as a means of establishing an intimate, personal familiarity with classical authors was so deeply ingrained in his mind that he did not see the point of a purely 'objective' or 'value-free' ideal of manuscript evaluation. To Cobet, to rid the study of manuscripts from its reliance on judgment and interpretation was to defeat the purpose of studying manuscripts in the first place. Cobet's much-criticised refusal to accept Lachmann's separation of the *recensio* and the *constitutio* did not so much spring from an obstinate, 'conservative' bias against reform and innovation, but rather from a typically humanistic insistence that ancient texts and manuscripts be treated as living expressions of a universal mankind, rather than as historical objects from a distant past.

Cobet's humanistic objectives are equally valuable in explaining another characteristic of his philological practice: his hypercriticism. The fact that Cobet proposed many more emendations than seem necessary to modern scholars is in part explained by his belief in the humane educational value of the classical style. His heartfelt admiration for Attic 'purity' allowed him to brush away many alleged 'irregularities' that are now commonly acknowledged as being authentic.[86] An equally important motive for Cobet's energetic emendations, however, was the intense *pleasure* he enjoyed when through his deep inner familiarity with the author, he could come to a visionary conjecture

84 Cobet was explicitly opposed to Lachmann's ideal of reconstructing the archetype when it was not available. In this case, it was best "to content oneself with an approximation, instead of calling upon the imagination, as some of our neighbours do, and creating an archetype in which all differences and deviations should be melted into an arbitrary and enforced unity." See Fruin, van der Mey 1891, 604f.

85 There seems to be no reason to believe that Cobet ever (seriously) read Lachmann's work. See Naber 1894, 241 and Schouten 1964, 182. In his preface for the 1873 edition of his *Variae lectiones*—published nearly a quarter of a century after Lachmann's 1850 groundbreaking edition of Lucretius—Cobet still did not mention Lachmann's name or method.

86 Frequent regularisations were, amongst others: replacing present or imperfect tenses by aorists, replacing indicatives by oblique optatives, adding ἄν to aorist infinitives, changing plurals in -εῖς (from substantives on -εύς) into forms on -ῆς. For more examples, see Janssen 1990, 19 and Schouten 1964, 203.

of what he had meant to say. Producing brilliant, imaginative conjectures was a way of putting one's personal, 'inner' knowledge into practice and thus to enjoy and at the same time deepen the intimate bond with the author from which this knowledge arose. As a result, there is something undeniably *playful* about many of Cobet's conjectures. As has been keenly observed by Henk Jan de Jonge, conjectures in Cobet's day served above all to identify a textual problem, but "without being accorded the heavy weight that is nowadays usually attributed to [them]".[87] Although Cobet obviously believed in the validity of his own conjectures, the *joy* he took from the process leading up to them, *i.e.*, the joy of empathetic searching and creative finding, was of paramount importance to him. Precisely because of their playful character, Cobet's conjectures deserve to be assessed on more than their scientific merit alone. Even if they are not always objectively tolerable, many of Cobet's conjectures were so brilliant and ingenious that they deserve to be appreciated for their artistic value.[88]

The intense, humanistically inflected pleasure in proposing brilliant conjectures is essential for a sound understanding of the Leiden school of philology at large. To Cobet, the high art of textual criticism was a source of such passionate joy that he once exclaimed that "without codices", the "monotony" of his life would be "unbearable".[89] In a letter to Bakhuizen van den Brink (1810-1865) written at the time of his wedding, Cobet could still not resist mentioning a recent emendation of Lysias.[90] This enthusiasm also infected many of his students. In his biography on his famous teacher, Samuel Naber devoted over a hundred pages to admiring discussions of Cobet's most ingenious emendations and conjectures: a decision that hardly any modern biographer would

87 de Jonge 1981, 23.

88 Cobet's successors, who themselves appreciated textual criticism as a creative discipline, often pointed to Cobet's 'artistic' nature. See e.g. Holwerda 1890, 437: "Gelijk het antieke kunstschoon aan den geest van mannen als Leonard (sic) en Rafael zich als het ware oplegde en zij zich niet verzadigen konden met oude kunstwerken te aanschouwen en weder te aanschouwen, na te teekenen en weder na te teekenen, zoo dat al die vormen en lijnen het onbewust eigendom hunner ziel werden—op gelijksoortige wijze vervulde zich de geest van Cobet met het Helleensche taaleigen en de Helleensche letterkunde; ja zelfs had Cobets verbeteren van oude teksten met hun restaureeren van geschonden kunstwerken naar eigen kunstenaarsingeving, zóó dat zij ten slotte niet meer wisten wat hun werk was, wat dat van den ouden meester, een niet te miskennen familietrek." Cf. Polak 1889, 420; Vürtheim 1925, 128; van IJzeren 1947, 3.

89 See 1891, xxxi. Cobet's teacher Jacob Geel once remarked about his former student: "Het is bij hem: zooveel Grieksche auteurs, zooveel bijwijven", quoted from Schouten 1964, 159.

90 See Schouten 1964, 158f.

make.[91] Far into the twentieth century, classical philologists could still lyrically express the "exquisite delight" or "deep emotion" they felt when reading Cobet's text-critical works.[92] This broadly shared, almost juvenile enthusiasm about the glorious art of conjecturing is worth keeping in mind whenever one feels tempted to interpret the heyday of Dutch textual criticism as a 'formalisation' of classical scholarship, or to simply write off emendations from the Leiden school as "futile" or "scientifically deficient".[93] For almost three quarters of a century, it was mainly through this very search for brilliant conjectures that Holland's most prominent classicists sought to strengthen the intimate bond with classical authors that, following a long humanistic tradition, they considered the legitimating purpose of classical scholarship.

Cobet's humanistic joy in emending is most powerfully expressed in what is rightly considered the most problematic aspect of his philological practice: the fact that he not only tasked himself with the correction of errors of textual transmission but also of passages "that due to a mistake of the author himself cannot be rightly understood and explained."[94] As knowledge of the ancient Greek language had not only suffered from the ignorance of copyists and editors, but also from the linguistic degeneration of the ancient Greek language after its classical heyday, Cobet deemed it urgently necessary to "force [Greek] authors themselves into order" and to "call them to account for violating or ignoring grammatical rules". He aimed at nothing less than to found an "Aristarchean tribunal", where Greek authors themselves had to justify their manner of speaking and "where it is of no use to speak unless correctly."[95] This ambitious mission to not only correct errors of textual transmission but to summon original Greek authors to the court of stylistic purity explains why Cobet spent so much time studying non-classical authors, predominantly the so-called 'Atticists' and a multitude of late antique grammarians and rhetoricians whose deficient knowledge of the classical Attic tongue was a reason for

91 See Naber 1894.

92 See Vürtheim, 1925, 126; van IJzeren 1947, 3. Cf. Polak 1889, 432; Hartman 1909, 18.

93 "futile": Jan Woltjer on Cobet (see Slings 2003, 15); "scientifically deficient": Kenney 1974, 119.

94 1847, 19: "… locos …, qui ipsius scriptoris vitio recte intelligi et explicari non possunt."

95 1853c II, 8: "Videbatur, opinor, temerarium ipsos scriptores in ordinem cogere velle et violatae vel adeo ignoratae Grammaticae rationem reos agere illos ipsos, unde omnis illa cognitio pendere credebatur. Neque tamen aliter lux affulgebit nisi quis ipsos Graecos ad severum et … Aristarcheum tribunal adduxerit sermonis quo utantur rationem reddituros, ubi nil proderit sic dixisse, nisi constet sic recte dici potuisse." Aristarchus' severity in rejecting doubtful lines was already proverbial in antiquity, see e.g. Hor. *Ars* 450.

Cobet to call them by the derogatory name of *Graeculi*.[96] Unlike his colleagues, whom he blamed for doing so, Cobet felt justified in engaging with authors of inferior quality, since by virtue of his intimate knowledge of the Greek language and individual authors, he felt capable of restoring "by a certain correction what [a Greek author] had not been able to say or think, but which (…) he *should have* [said and thought] by his custom and his nature."[97] (ital. added)

Few things have been more alien, even repugnant, to modern scholars than Cobet's claim that he could intuitively feel what a native Greek author had not been capable of saying, but what he should have said or had wanted to say. More than anything else, it was this boundless hypercriticism that has struck modern scholars not only as unscholarly, but as impious and megalomaniacal.[98] Without a doubt, the idiosyncrasy of Cobet's method emerges most powerfully from his shameless confidence that he was entitled to rewrite original Greek literature at his own discretion. In imposing stylistic standards drawn from the classical age to authors who lived many centuries later, Cobet succumbed to a method that can only be described as oppressive and pedantic. Yet even here, we would do well to keep an eye on his humanistic objectives. To Cobet, by far the most relevant and evident fact about post-classical Greek literature was that its style did not show the radiating classicality of which the Greek language was capable and on which its educational value depended. Since achieving this classicality had been the express purpose of most Atticists and late antique grammarians, one could do them no greater favour than helping them achieve the goal of which they themselves had fallen short. Conversely, Cobet considered it pointless and even absurd to leave their depraved readings untouched and forcefully try to distil a sound meaning from them. Scholars attempting to do this he compared to people who "in the noisy laughter of a drinking bout were alone in not getting excited, and tried to angle an abstruse and hidden sense from their witticisms and jokes."[99] The stylistic quality of most post-classical Greek literature was so evidently deficient, that Cobet saw little point in subjecting it to serious study, let alone in including it in academic

96 See e.g. 1853c II, 6, 7, 15. Among them were Himerius, Philostratus, Choricius, Julianus, Eunapius, Harpocration, Claudius Aelianus, Aelius Moeris, Maximus Tyrus, Hesychius and many others. In his *Variae Lectiones*, Cobet dealt with no less than 124 authors.

97 1847, 29: "Ita demum quid dicere vel cogitare aliquis non potuerit, quid contra e more suo ac natura debuerit e vestigiis depravatorum librorum certa correctione potest restitui."

98 See e.g. Kenney 1974, 119.

99 1847, 19: "Haec qui magno nisu et eruditionis copia [corr. ex copias] explicando severi ac tristes enarrant videant ne similes sint iis, qui in strepitosa compotationis hilaritate soli non incalescunt et ex facetiis ac iocis nescio quem abstrusum et reconditum sensum expiscantur." Cf. 1873, ix.

curricula. It was for this reason that when Cobet boldly presented his philological objectives in his inaugural address of 1846, he did not shrink from berating his potential critics for entertaining such a low opinion of "true *Graecitas*" that they would rather accept a plain, "tolerable" reading than to live up to their exalted task as textual critics of restoring the *elegans dicendi nitor*, in the study of which classical philology has always found, and would always find, its truest fulfilment.[100]

5 Between Classical Humanism and Rigorous Scholarship

We have come to see that as an academic philologist, Cobet was committed to distinctly traditional values and objectives. His strictly normative conception of the classical style, his neglect of Lachmann's stemmatic method and his 'hypercriticism' were all rooted in his typically humanistic belief that establishing an edifying, personal relationship with ancient authors was the legitimating purpose of classical scholarship. At the same time, however, Cobet was undeniably a child of his time. Underlying his ambition to elaborate an unalterable canon of 'pure' Attic, for example, was a typically late-nineteenth-century conception of scholarship as an unbiased and morally uplifting search for truth.[101] His quest for philological knowledge that was 'certain', 'fixed' and expressible in 'irrefutable laws' clearly betrayed the influence of the rapidly rising natural sciences, whose ideals Cobet expressly aimed to emulate.[102] Furthermore, Cobet's nearly exclusive devotion to textual criticism—a discipline that he considered more likely than any other to yield precise and tangible knowledge—reflects the increasing importance of the ideals of exact science, particularly that of positivism, which exerted a strong influence on Dutch science in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Finally, Cobet was convinced that the modern scholarly ideals of "solidity and unwavering certainty" were of profound social and political importance. Post-1848 Europe, he argued, was a deeply uncertain time, leading many to want "to reform the state with no or

100 1847, 29: "Nihil est adeo absurdum quin expromant alicunde unum et alterum locum similem, unde vulgatam scripturam *ferri posse* et *tolerabilem*, ut aiunt, sententiam continere demonstrant scilicet." (ital. original)

101 See Schouten 1964, 197. Cf. Cobet 1854, 7: "… verum videre, hoc demum est humano ingenio ac ratione dignum, hoc pabulum est animi, hoc demum est vivere et frui anima denique!"

102 Cobet loved to repeat Valckenaer's words that philologists "compete with the mathematicians", see Polak 1889, 430. See also Schouten 1964, 197f.

little [mental] effort", in turn creating a dire need for the "secure and stable light" of science.[103] These novel, typically nineteenth-century conceptions of scholarship met with Cobet's enthusiastic approval because they instilled in him the inspiration to capture and codify classical stylistic norms with a precision and accuracy unheard of in the past, and therefore bound to render the study of classical Greek all the more imperative. Contrary to what has often been assumed, Cobet's glorification of a handful of 'pure', canonical Attic authors at the expense of nearly all other Greek literature does not point to a rejection of contemporary scholarly values, but rather to a genuine effort to make these values subservient to humane educational ends.

In the course of time, however, it was precisely this attempt to reconcile contemporary scholarly ideals with traditional humanistic values that risked thwarting the very objectives that it was intended to serve. It is ironic, for instance, that the same scholar who claimed to be so intimately acquainted with classical authors as to converse with them as with personal friends, hardly ever showed any interest in the thoughts and views they expressed in their works. Notwithstanding Cobet's lofty conception of textual criticism and its potential for establishing an inner familiarity with classical authors, one doubts whether these authors would have felt personally flattered by a tribute consisting solely of amassed textual emendations. Likewise, Cobet's intention to rid classical studies of the 'burden of inane erudition' and to provide students with 'an easy road' to the treasures of ancient literature seems strangely at odds with his conception of advanced philology and textual criticism as *prerequisites* for a personal understanding of classical authors. While urging his students on the one hand to "throw away their lexicons" and learn to know ancient authors "out of themselves", Cobet on the other hand helped establish, as few other scholars did, classical philology's reputation as a highly advanced, technical discipline that was fully accessible to consummate scholars alone.[104] Most ironically, perhaps, the conception of 'true *Graecitas*' did not so much inspire

103 1853a, 5: "Haud scio an umquam hac luce certa ac stabili ad regendum vitae cursum magis fuerit opus, quam his ipsis, quibus vivimus, temporibus, quum labi et fluere multa videas, quae olim certissima et firmissima omnibus esse videbantur, quum passim quilibet de republica bene aut melius etiam constituenda consilia expromit nova … ac sibi videtur aut nullo labore aut perexiguo omnia in melius posse convertere."

104 It is precisely because Cobet put the stakes so high and laid such exclusive emphasis on textual criticism, that he and his disciples played a role in generating the *odium philologicum* that from the 1880s onwards made many young Dutch scholars and men of letters turn their backs on classical studies and look for new, non-classical paths. A good example is the group of young writers known as the 'Tachtigers', who voiced their anti-classical sentiment in the programmatic journal *De Nieuwe Gids*, which appeared from

Cobet to a sustained and reverent study of the select authors that embodied his ideal, but rather to an obsessive and often disrespectful propensity to correct those who did not.

It is only possible to make sense of these notable paradoxes if we understand that they originated from Cobet's time-bound attempt to square his traditional humanistic objectives with principles and ideals drawn from contemporary scholarship. Although Cobet was profoundly indebted to the classical-humanistic tradition, he also stood apart from it in substantial respects. During the Renaissance, most humanists were driven by the desire to imitate the classics in markedly concrete and practical ways. Just as reading Cicero and Vergil was widely seen as an incentive to virtuous behaviour, studying the Ciceronian and Vergilian style paid off in the production of new Latin verse and prose works. In other words, both the educational and artistic interest that traditional humanists took in ancient literature mostly led to the practical imitation of the classics in word and deed. Cobet, however, was deeply sceptical of this ideal of practical imitation. As we have seen, treating classical works as collections of moral sayings and aphorisms was something he considered barely worthy of a serious scholar. Nor did his interest in perfection of form ever incite him to invest serious energy in composing his own Greek or Latin verse or prose works. As a typically nineteenth-century humanist, Cobet turned his humanistic urges almost exclusively to the most *rigorous* aspects of classical scholarship, such as philology and textual criticism, as well as to rigorous scholarly ideals, such as 'objectivity' and 'certainty'. Inspired by such contemporary ideals, Cobet aimed to *translate* his normative conception of the classical Greek language and literature in a set of objective and immutable rules. Thus, Cobet expressed his admiration for ancient Greek authors not by listening to what they had to say and by trying to implement their wisdom, but by 'purifying' their works of defects or even 'errors' that he believed obscured their ideal character. Similarly, instead of using the classical Attic style as a practical guide for producing his own Greek verse or prose compositions, he transformed it into an unshakable ideal of stylistic perfection by which the quality of Greek literature could be measured for all time. It was this typically nineteenth-century endeavour to bring humanistic idealism into harmony with modern ideals of certain knowledge and objectivity that gave rise to the most problematic aspects of Cobet's philological work, above all his uncompromising rigour. Not his idealist conception of the ancient world or the classical style *per se*, but the underlying claim that he had managed to express this

1885. For students' complaints about Cobet's predominant emphasis on textual criticism, see Naber 1894, 204f., cf. Schouten 1964, 165, 210.

ideal in concrete and objective terms, allowed him to write off as 'decadent' the enormous amount of Greek literature that did not meet his one and only standard. It was due to his attempt to square traditional humanistic values with ideals and principles drawn from contemporary scholarship, then, that Cobet moved in the questionable direction in which, as Wilamowitz observed, after him "no further progress was possible".[105]

With this conclusion we are in a position to consider Cobet's place in the history of classical scholarship in more detail. Cobet's work as a philologist poignantly illustrates how in the late nineteenth century, the traditional, humanistic approach to the ancient classics came into confrontation with a new paradigm of rigorous scholarship. Cobet's case shows us that this confrontation did not result in an immediate collision, but began with a phase in which both traditions were seen to be reconcilable and mutually fruitful. Although we might feel tempted to interpret Cobet as a scholar committed to unattainable and outdated ideals and reprehensibly slowing down the advance of modern scholarship, such an interpretation would do little justice to historical reality. We should not forget that the inner tension characteristic of Cobet's philological work was characteristic of nineteenth-century classical scholarship at large. Many notable innovations, such as the concept of *Altertumswissenschaft*, disciplinary differentiation and the concept of research as an autonomous category, were initially welcomed by classicists not as challenges to the humanistic tradition, but as new and promising ways to achieve long-standing educational goals.[106] Cobet's case, after all, is not that different from, for instance, that of Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824), whose aim of establishing classical philology as a self-contained discipline called *Altertumswissenschaft* was grounded in his belief in antiquity's exemplary educational value;[107] nor from that of Ulrich von Wilamowitz (1848-1931), who, known for his conception of classical scholarship as an end in itself, defined the aim of rigorous philology as the "pure, exhilarating contemplation of what has been understood in its truth and beauty".[108] If anything, Cobet's work showcases the remarkable dynamism characterising the classical-humanistic tradition until far into the nineteenth century. Cobet's philological school is an eloquent testimony that for a long time, emergent ideals of rigorous scholarship did not marginalise the humanistic tradition, but rather challenged it to renew itself by incorporating contemporary values and ideals.

105 Wilamowitz, 1921, 40.

106 See van Bommel 2015a, 64-93 and 2015b.

107 Wolf 1807, v.

108 Wilamowitz 1921, 1.

6 The Whig History of Classical Scholarship

Let us finally return to the severe criticism Cobet has earned from modern scholars. Nearly all studies on Cobet published after the Second World War are devoted to exposing those aspects of his philological work that are not in accordance with present-day conceptions of philology, and to using this discordance to portray Cobet's philological school as a justly outmoded stage in the history of classical scholarship. Traditional features of Cobet's philological activities are usually eagerly seized upon to illustrate his reprehensible "conservatism". Cobet's old-fashioned use of the term 'archetype', for example, has met with indignant disapproval, as this term "after 1839 *ought* to have been confined to its strict Madvigian sense".[109] Cobet's conception of philology has been called "clearly inadequate, *because* he *still* viewed the operations of the critic in terms of the old aims and the old vocabulary".[110] (ital. added) Conversely, Cobet's humanistic values, if noticed at all, are almost invariably dismissed as a "collection of venerable commonplaces", a set of perfunctory "generalities" that cannot have been of essential importance to the true business of philology and textual criticism.[111] The mere fact that Cobet did not go along with what most modern scholars consider progressive developments in nineteenth-century scholarship, is often seen as reason enough to treat him condescendingly.[112]

This highly selective, anachronistic understanding of Cobet is a typical example of what can be called the 'Whig history of classical scholarship'. The concept of 'Whig history'—famously established by Herbert Butterfield (1900-1979) in 1931—describes a trend in historiography that examines the past exclusively in order to be able to explain the present. 'Whig historians' tend to attribute disproportionate value to those aspects of the past that point forward to the present, while downplaying, or ignoring, the extent to which the

109 Kenney 1974, 119 (italics added). Kenney meant that Cobet ought to have followed in the footsteps of J. Madvig (1804-1886), who was one of the first scholars to consistently apply a Lachmannian concept of 'archetype' in his famous 1839 edition of Cicero's *De finibus bonorum et malorum*. See Kenney 1974, 118.

110 Kenney 1974, 120.

111 Kenney, 1974, 117. Cf. the perfunctory mentioning of Cobet's educational objectives in Sicking 1998, 248.

112 Cf. de Jonge 1981, 23: "Vele [van Cobets conjecturen] zijn … zulke notoire en briljante verbeteringen, dat men over zijn vergissingen een toontje lager behoort te zingen dan thans de mode is onder mensen die nog niet waard waren geweest zijn schoenriem los te maken."

past was shaped by traditions and other forces of historical continuity.[113] The concept of 'Whig history' can be conveniently applied to the historiography of classical scholarship: to most modern classicists, the nineteenth century is primarily important for having laid the foundation for the conception of classical studies and the underlying ideals of scholarship that predominated after the Second World War. Seen from this perspective, the nineteenth century emerges as the time when a post-Kantian concept of 'value-free' science, strongly influenced by the emergent natural sciences, was successfully imported into classical studies. As a result, a new ideal of historical reconstruction gradually replaced old humanistic ideals of imitation and moral edification. This common progressivist view of nineteenth-century scholarship risks ignoring or trivialising the striking persistence of humanistic beliefs and ideals. Cobet's unwavering allegiance to age-old humanistic values and his lifelong effort to reconcile these values with principles drawn from contemporary scholarship testify to the fact that the classical-humanistic tradition lasted much longer than is commonly assumed. Although this is true for most European countries, it is particularly true for the Netherlands, where Cobet's students, and even his students' students, continued to propagate a holistic, humanistic concept of classical education and scholarship well into the twentieth century.[114] The fact that Cobet's towering reputation only dwindled in the decades following the Second World War is itself an indication that his humanistic values were broadly shared for a very long time indeed.[115]

The 'Whig history of classical scholarship' is something to guard against for two main reasons: firstly, it suffers from a notable paradox, in that the very scholars who blame Cobet for endorsing an outdated, normative concept of

113 See Butterfield 1931.

114 In 1919, Cobet's student Jacob Hartman pleaded in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* to preserve Latin as the universal language of scholarship. As late as 1955, Hartman's student Pieter Jan Enk, professor of Greek at the University of Groningen, made a similar plea in his farewell address at the University of Groningen. Cf. also Waszink 1951, 56. Due to the common 'Whig' distortion, the notable continuity of the classical-humanistic tradition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has attracted little scholarly attention. For continuities in nineteenth-century Germany, see van Bommel 2015a.

115 As late as 1964, Dirk Schouten 1964, 196 observed that nearly all sources on Cobet were full of admiration. Cobet's contemporaries, students and immediate successors were still keenly aware and appreciative of his humanistic ideals. Van Leeuwen and Naber pointed out that he was above all a pedagogue (Leeuwen 1889, 365; Naber 1894, 337). Rutherford 1889, 472 remarked that it was his "strong personality" that put Cobet "head and shoulders above all the Greek scholars" of his time. Hartman 1889, 53 pointed to the fundamental importance of Cobet's educational writings.

scholarship and "deny[ing] the historical distance that separate[d] him from his authors"[116] have not refrained from ignoring historical distance and applying *overtly* normative standards themselves in judging Cobet. Rather than interpreting his old-fashioned approach to classical studies as proving the notable persistence of classical-humanistic ideals and values, most scholars have understood it as poignantly illustrating Cobet's "narrow-minded" and "conservative" character. In other words, Cobet is blamed for refusing to conform to a conception of scholarship that the balance of the historical evidence suggests was in his time only just emerging and far from hegemonic.

Secondly, and most importantly, the current anachronistic evaluation of Cobet tends to obscure what is arguably most interesting about him: that he reminds us of the humanistic roots of our profession. Cobet's legacy shows us that far into the nineteenth and even the twentieth century, classical scholarship was still broadly seen to draw its ultimate justification from humanistic educational values and objectives. Even modern scholarly ideals that are embraced by classicists up to the present day were initially welcomed as being wholesomely conducive to the realisation of age-old humanistic goals. Thus, it is above all as a humanist that Cobet continues to speak to us. Through his work as a humanistic philologist, he reminds us that the overwhelming significance that is nowadays attributed to ideals of objectivity, 'value-free' scholarship and historical reconstruction—for all their evident value—risks side-lining vital and fundamental issues as to what classical studies and scholarship are ultimately *for*. Cobet urges us to take serious heed of the fundamental tension that exists between the ideals of modern scholarship and those of humane education. As a humanist, then, Cobet confronts us with momentous and arresting questions, which perhaps we are not always sure how to answer, but which we undoubtedly do well to ask.

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