

*Myrtia*, n° 21, 2006, pp. 113-121

**MISSING LETTERS IN OVID'S *METAMORPHOSES*?**

GEORG LUCK  
Johns Hopkins University<sup>1</sup>

**Résumé.** L'auteur considère qu'une série de passages des *Métamorphoses* ovidiennes a perdu "une lettre" tout au long de la tradition textuelle, et il propose et justifie sa réincorporation au texte.

**Resumen.** El autor considera que una serie de pasajes de las *Metamorfosis* ovidianas ha perdido "una letra" a lo largo de la tradición textual, y propone y justifica su reincorporación al texto.

In reviewing R. J. Tarrant's *Oxoniensis* (2004) of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for *Exemplaria Classica* (9, 2005, 249-71), I noticed that in a number of passages the textual tradition seems to have lost a letter.

Later, I realized that Nicolaus Heinsius, in his notes on *Her.* 4. 176 and *Ars* 1. 125, has already dealt with one particular aspect of this problem (see below on *Met.* 2. 132).

The loss is never quite obvious, and editors were not always aware of it, because the passages yield a more or less acceptable sense without the letter. At the same time, once you admit the possibility – after all, it is a very common mechanical error - and look systematically for such cases, it will become clear, I think, that adding just one letter sometimes produces a better sense. Let the reader decide.

I am first quoting Tarrant's text.

(1) 2. 132

*nec tibi directos placeat via quinque per arcus.  
sectus in obliquum est lato curvamine limes*

---

<sup>1</sup>**Dirección para correspondencia:** Department of Classics. Johns Hopkins University. Baltimore, MD, 21218-2685. georgluck@comcast.net.

*zonarumque trium contentus fine polumque  
effugit australem iunctamque aquilonibus Arcton.  
hac sit iter...*

This is from the instructions of the Sun god to Phaethon. Reading *effugit* with most MSS. in v. 132, the subject can only be *limes*. This is how Leumann's *TLL* article *effugio* (5.1. 208. 65) construes it: „limes (*zodiacus*) ... polum effugit (i. *evitat*) australem et arcton', placing the citation between Propertius 4. 7. 2 *effugit umbra rogos* and *Met.* 7. 356 *Deucalioneas effugit inobrutus undas*, which is not very enlightening, to say the very least. And this is how M. von Albrecht (Reclam 1994) translates it: "sie [die Bahn] gibt sich mit dem Bereich dreier Zonen zufrieden und meidet den Südpol und den Grossen Bären mit seinen Nordwinden. So sei dein Weg!"

But *hac sit iter* (133) clearly corresponds to *nec tibi... placeat via* (129) and shows that what lies in-between is not merely descriptive but part of the Sun god's set of instructions. Read, therefore, *effugito* (Heinsius ex P p, uno Basileensi et tribus aliis, Bentley ex con., ut vid.). The imperative ending *-o* was lost before the initial diphthong of the following word. If one reads *effugito*, v. 130 is best taken as a parenthesis. The sad story of a good reading can be tentatively told as follows: (1) Heinsius introduced it from six MSS.; (2) Bentley either accepted it or proposed it *ope ingenii*; (3) it is still cited by Magnus (1914), Ehwald (1915) and Anderson (1977) in the apparatus; (4) it has disappeared from Tarrant's edition (2004) altogether. In his commentary, Bömer (1969) says nothing.

Heinsius became interested in this type of remedy and pursued it further in his notes on *Her.* 4. 176 and *Ars* 1. 125. Let me first deal with the latter passage. Here, he suggested

*hos facito Armenios, haec est Danaeia Persis.*

Most MSS. have *facit* (variants are *facis* and *fac*). In his Teubner edition (2003), A. Ramírez de Verger notes that Heinsius' correction is now known from the Hamiltonensis (man. recentior), a valuable witness, and puts it into the text, following Kenney.

Another passage that Heinsius attempted to heal by introducing an imperative ending in *-o* is *Rem.* 333

*exige uti cantet siqua est sine voce puella*

where the vulgate, in Heinsius' time, apparently had *exige quod* which is now also known from the Hamiltonensis (man. recentior). Heinsius' *exigito ut cantet* has not appealed to later editors. Ramírez mentions it but prefers *exige uti*, following the Etonensis, the Excerpta of Iuretus and those of Scaliger and a few recentiores.

Heinsius tried the same approach again in *ex Ponto* 1. 2. 103

*non pete quod bene sit, sed uti male tutius.*

Ovid urges his friend, Fabius Maximus, to plead his case before Augustus. Here, the MSS. vary between *non pete quod, non petis ut* and *non petit ut*. The paradosis is very similar to the one in *Ars* 1. 125. Once more, Heinsius proposed the imperative,

*non petito ut bene sit,*

following Christian Daum, it seems, who had found this reading in a lost Codex Bersmanni (see the apparatus criticus of Ana Pérez Vega). Heinsius also suggested

*non petito bene sit,*

leaving out *ut*. The former reading is adopted by Ana Pérez Vega in her edition (Madrid 2000), the latter by J. A. Richmond in his Teubneriana (1990) and by Helzle (2003) and Gaertner (2005) in their commentaries. Once more, Heinsius' type of remedy has been accepted, in one form or another, by the recent editors.

This is not true in the case of *Her.* 4. 176

*perlegis et lacrimas finge videre meas.*

As we can see from the recent discussion of this passage by A. Ramírez de Verger (*Mnemosyne* 58 [2005] 430, n. 4), Heinsius' *perlegito* has been rejected by all subsequent editors. Among the many attempts to emend the beginning of this line, Ramírez' *exaudi* seems very attractive to me.

(2) 5.378-9

*at tu pro socio, si qua est ea gratia, regno  
iunge deam patruo.*

Venus asks her son, Cupid, to do her a favor: he should use his arrows to make Dis, the god of the underworld, fall in love with Proserpina. *Ea* is in practically all the MSS. (*tibi* N man. 2 al.: *tua* p, acc. to Anderson : *mihi* Strozianus 120, acc. to Slater) and in the modern editions. It is connected, very awkwardly, with *regno* in some translations, e. g. "wenn sie [die Weltherrschaft] dir etwas bedeutet" (von Albrecht) or "sofern sie [die gemeinsame Herrschaft] dir lieb ist" (Breitenbach 1958). Read: *mea* for *ea* (Heinsius ex codd.) and connect it with *gratia*. This is the idiomatic phrase in requests for a specific favor; cf. 2.293 *quod si nec fratris nec te mea gratia tangit*; 4.654 *at quoniam parvi tibi gratia nostri est*; 6.440-1 *si gratia ... / ulla mea est*. Instead of the possessive pronoun a genitive can be used, as in 2.293 (above) or in 5.515 *si nulla est gratia matris*,

though I am doubtful about the dative in 4.536 *aliqua et mihi (mea M man.2 e, Heinsius) gratia ponto est* (but cf. 12. 576 *solida est mihi gratia tecum*).

Again, a letter seems to have disappeared, and no one who depends on Anderson and Tarrant would have the slightest idea.

A similar case is, perhaps, 6. 154, but here I am not sure that any change is required in the text. Niobe is proud of her husband, their noble ancestors, their kingdom, but most of all of their many children:

*multa dabant animos, sed enim nec coniugis artes  
nec genus amborum magnique potentia regni  
sic placuere illi (quamvis ea cuncta placerent)  
quam sua progenies.*

Almost all MSS. seem to have *ea cuncta*, but one of the ‘Codices Moreti’ offers the v. l. *sua cuncta* which appealed to Burman. One could argue that SVA lost the S- by haplography after QVAMVIS and that V was read as E. But since *sua* appears in the next line, I am doubtful.

(3) 6. 393

*illum ruricolae, silvarum numina, Fauni  
et Satyri fratres et tum quoque carus Olympus  
et nymphae flerunt*

Marsyas has lost in his competition with Apollo and suffers a cruel death. One of the mourners is Olympus, the famous flute-player, a student of Marsyas. Read *clarus* with most MSS. and Planudes. Anderson and Tarrant, following mainly

E and M (man. 1), print *carus*. Tarrant explains *carus* (*sc. Marsyae etiam morienti*), and that is how Mary M. Innes (Penguin 1955, repr. 1978) translates: “dear to him even then.” I disagree. Ovid says that Olympus was “even then” (probably because he was still quite young) famous as a musician. A letter was lost in part of the paradosis, probably because of the erroneous belief that ‘muta cum liquida’ would lengthen the preceding syllable in Ovid.

(4) 6. 642

*nec vultum vertit*

Procne kills her little son, Itys, and does not even “turn her face away” (Mary M. Innes). Breitenbach translates “und sie blickt nicht zur Seite”, von

Albrecht “ohne den Blick abzuwenden”. This is what one would expect, and this is why Heinsius and Burman printed ‘ex uno Vossiano’ *nec vultum < a>vertit*; cf. 5. 179 *vultus avertite vestros*; *Tristia* 4. 3. 50 *avertis vultus*; Livy 1. 28. 11 *avertere omnes ab tanta foeditate spectacula oculos*, etc. Could we say that here, as often, the ‘simplex’ takes the place of the ‘compositum’? No, because *vultum vertere* would mean something different. As I see it, in an early phase of the textual tradition, A was lost between M and V, which is not a difficult assumption, considering the shape of the letters. The problem was first recognized by Glareanus: ‘non est dubium quin matris saevitia hic exprimatur. sed si suum vultum dicamus, videtur *vertit* pro *avertit* positum: quod ipsum tamen carmen suspiciebat.’

## (5) 7. 320-1

*nec mora, balatum mirantibus exsilit agnus  
lascivitque fuga*

The variant *fugam* in M and N (a. c.) makes no sense, but it could indicate that a final letter was misread in a common ancestor of M and N. Both Anderson and Tarrant cite *fugax* (Heinsius) in the apparatus but do not put it into the text, although it is almost certainly what Ovid wrote; cf. 1. 442 *in dammis capreisque fugacibus*; 6. 527 *agna pavens*; *Fast.* 2.85; *ex P.* 2. 7. 1; Arator, *Acta* 2. 278 *lacerabitur ore [lupi] a pastore fugax [agnus]*. Planudes’ *pheugon* seems to translate *fugax*.

## (6) 7.649-51

*qualesque in imagine somni  
visus eram vidisse viros, ex ordine tales  
aspicio noscoque*

The variants *nos hi(i)que* and *nos mox* for *noscoque* are recorded by Anderson and Tarrant; the latter also found *hos iamque* in G. They are of no particular value, except to indicate a disturbance in the text. Read probably *agnoscoque* with Heinsius; cf. 11. 658 *agnoscis Ceyca, miserrima coniunx?* and, perhaps, 2. 183 *iam cognosse (iamque agnosse* Heinsius, Burman ex codd.) *genus piget*; 14. 151 *vel non cognoscet (agnoscet* N man.2 B F P k v) *vel dilexisse negabit*. It seems that forms of *agnosco* were read as forms of *cognosco* or (*g*)*nosco* in a part of the textual tradition. As far as our passage is concerned, E. J.

Kenney writes to me: “*Agnosco* should perhaps be mentioned but *nosco* is defensible as an example of the force of the prefix persisting in a following uncompounded verb (Watkins, Renahan, al.). I think I’ve a note on this somewhere but can’t run it to earth.” I think this is possible; at the same time, it may be a case of a missing letter – only one, if Ovid wrote *gnosco*. It occurs to me that the original spelling of our Latin texts was ‘modernized’ or ‘standardized’ by the scribes from time to time – *gnosco* becoming *nosco*, for instance – and whenever such changes were made, new errors could be introduced. Ovid probably also wrote *gnatus*; hence the error in 5. 591 where we may have to read *gratas* (Oxonienis et unus Heinsii = Harleian. 2742 [?], Hellmuth ex con.) ... *umbras* for *natas* ... *umbras*. Tarrant lists (p. 498) traces of this spelling in the tradition.

## (7) 8. 235

*‘Icare’ dicebat: pennas aspexit in undis  
devovitque suas artes corpusque sepulcro  
condidit; est tellus a nomine dicta sepulti.*

Here, Tarrant prints correctly, I think, *est* (U P a) in v. 235, while Anderson prefers *et* (most MSS.). The copula is necessary; in fact, it was added after *sepulti* in B e h p. In this particular textual tradition (but elsewhere, too, of course) *et* often takes the place of *est*; ESTTELLVS could very easily become ETTELLVS. In 1888, evidently without knowing the variant *est*, F. Polle proposed it as an emendation.

## (8) 10. 537-541

*hortaturque canes tutaque animalia praedae  
aut pronos lepores aut celsum in cornua cervum  
aut agitat dammas; a fortibus abstinet apris  
raptoresque lupos armatosque ungibus ursos  
vitat et armenti saturatos caede leones.*

Venus goes hunting with her beloved Adonis but carefully avoids all dangerous animals and urges him to follow her example (541 – 552). In 530 there is a clear contrast between harmless and not so harmless creatures. Read *at fortibus* (Heinsius after Planudes who translates with *mentoi*) for *a fortibus*. Tarrant cites *at* with a question mark from a Guelferbytanus (w); he also notes *ast* from his generic 13<sup>th</sup> century group. Anderson says nothing, but Ehwald notes ‘a *in ras. man.* 2 N’ which could mean that N originally had *at*. Burman reports

'Heinsius malebat *at* [instead of *a, aut, et, sed*] quod probo.' And Heinsius was right. Ovid never uses *abstineo* with *a, ab*: see 532; 8. 751-2 *ferrum ... illa/ abstinuit*; *Rem.* 626 *finitimis abstinuisse locis*; *Fast.* 1. 354 *palmitē debueras abstinuisse, caper*; *Tr.* 1. 9. 60. The material collected in the article 'abstineo' in the *TLL* (1. 196. 73ff) seems to show that *abstineo a, ab* is more frequent in prose, Lucan 4.242 being an exception. A clear case of a missing letter (*at* lost the *-t*), I think. *Ast, aut, et* and *sed* (known from Burman's note) are conjectures.

(9) 10.595

*haud aliter quam cum super atria velum  
candida purpureum simulatas inficit umbras.*

*Simulatas ... umbras*, printed by Anderson, Tarrant and editors before them, makes very little sense. The shadows, as observed by Ovid, are real. He compares the beautiful color of Atalanta's skin to a certain light effect produced on a white marble floor by the sun shining through a purple canopy. The true reading (I think)

*simul et dat et inficit umbras*

was found by Heinsius in the 'Primus Moreti' and seven other MSS. and printed, e. g., by J. C. Jahn (1832). It is hidden in *simul edat* (F L), SIMVLETDAT having become SIMVLEDAT through the loss of a T, but also in *similem dat* (N man. 2 U P), SIMVLETDAT having become SIMILEMDAT, through a different type of corruption. Even if I am wrong in preferring the reading that survives in Heinsius' MSS., it clearly deserves to be cited by editors.

(10) 14, 206

Achaemenides, one of Odysseus' companions, relives his encounter with the Cyclops:

*mentique inhaeret imago  
temporis illius quo vidi bina meorum  
ter quater affligi sociorum corpora terrae.*

*Terrae* (or: *ad terram*) *affligi*, the reading of most MSS., must be right (cf. 12. 139, etc.), but M, the Marcianus Florentinus, one of our best witnesses, has *affigi*, through the loss of L between F and I. Incidentally, *bina* (seemingly supported by Hom., *Od.* 9, 289) should be *viva* (U P); cf. Lucr. 5. 993 *viva videns*

*vivo sepeliri viscera busto*. The number of bodies seems irrelevant in this context, but the fact that the men were still alive adds to the drama. The pronunciation of B as V may have played a role, but also the proximity of *ter quater*.

(11) 15. 475

*nec volucrem viscata fallite virga  
nec formidatis cervos inludite pennis*

Pythagoras prohibits hunting and fishing. One of the techniques employed by hunters consisted in roping off parts of the woods, in order to form a cul-de-sac into which the animals were driven. Dried feathers and pieces of cloth were attached to the ropes. But the desired effect was to “enclose”, not to “deceive” the animals. Read *includite* (B F G T W p v, ‘fort. recte’ Tarrant) for *inludite* (U P h n, Planudes, and printed by Magnus, Ehwald and Breitenbach). Cf. Virg. *Aen.* 12. 750 *inclusum veluti si quando flumine nactus/ cervum aut puniceae saeptum formidine pennae/ venator cursu canis et latratibus instat*, where *inclusum* is confirmed by *saeptum*. In Ovid, INCLUDITE lost a C between N and L.

(12) 15. 592-3

*aggeribus factis a milite forti  
insistit priscoque deos e more precatus  
‘est’ ait hic unus...’*

Read: *de more*. This is the proper idiom, as F. Leo pointed out, and it is preserved in an Ambrosianus and a Berolinensis identified by Magnus (1914) and still cited in Ehwald’s apparatus (1915). Cf. 12. 11 *patrio de more* where *de* is protected by metre (see also Bömer *ad loc.*). On the other hand, in *ex P.* 4, 4, 35 *patresque e more vocati* only *e* is possible. But when the metre allows it, Ovid, following Virgil’s example, always uses *de*.

In our passage, *prisco ... de more* is equivalent to *more maiorum*, and *priscos* [sc. deos] (F man. 2 e man. 2 h p aliique, ‘fort. recte’ Tarrant) cannot be right. See Helzle on *ex P.* 2. 5. 43-4; Gaertner on 1. 5. 49; Dewar (1996) on Claudian, *Panegy. VI Cons. Honorii*, v. 136.

Strangely enough, the vulgate before Heinsius seems to have had *de more* (apparently first introduced in the Editio Juntina 1522), but Heinsius decreed ‘*e more veteres*’, and since then, the letter D seems to have lost its place in the editions for good (no clues in Anderson and Tarrant).

I hope that these examples are sufficient to show how the omission of a single letter – which could easily happen at any level of the textual transmission, but perhaps more often in ‘scriptio continua’, i. e. in antiquity – can affect the context and obliterate, for us, an idiom which an ancient reader would have recognized at once.

Of course it would be simplistic to establish, even as a rule of thumb, the axiom: Whenever we hesitate between two look-alike words offered by the paradosis, the longer one is more likely to be the correct reading, because the scribes are more apt to omit a letter than to add one. The opposite may be true in some cases. But as a first approach to such problems we ought to keep this possibility in mind.

NOTE: I am very grateful to Antonio Ramírez de Verger, University of Huelva (Princeton Institute for Advanced Study) for his helpful suggestions. I am also very grateful to Francisca Moya del Baño for her kind encouragement and advice.