

Errors in Manuscripts¹

Anyone who writes a text that is above a few lines in extent makes mistakes, whether he is the author (1) or a scribe reproducing the material of another: such corruption is fundamentally psychological, a function of the human incapacity for sustained attention and coordination of mind and hand (on corruptions in inscriptions see 2).

Discussions of corruption regularly begin with the confusion of one letter with another (e.g. 3, pp.223ff; 4, pp.57-62); this is convenient, but may mislead students into thinking that this 'palaeographical' category is the most important. Since scribes usually know well the language of the text they are writing, they are more likely to replace one word with another than to make a mistake over a single letter and thus produce a nonsense-word. This is nicely illustrated by 5 (cf. also 6): of 102 corruptions listed for the letters **A** and **B**, with the exception of those involving proper names, only a handful have led to improper forms. Typical is what has happened at Seneca, *Phaedra* 919: *turpibus* has become *turbidus* in the A mss; far rarer is the confusion of a single letter at *Hercules* 1325, where E has *turbibus* for *turbidus*, and even that produces a recognisably Latin ending. (See also 7, pp.155-7; 8, 15-29.) The corruption of inflected endings is an endemic feature in both languages: thus in *Aeneid* 3.484-504 the five items cited in Mynors' apparatus all fall into this category (484 *honore*] *honori*; 492 *adfabar*] *adfabor*; 499 *fuerit*] *fuerint*; 503 *Hesperiam*] *Hesperia*; 504 *faciemus*] *faciamus*).

These observations are important not only for textual criticism, but also for the history of traditions: it is a commonplace that the interchange of **P** and **C** is caused by their similarity in capital hands, yet when, at Propertius 4.11.70, the scribe of Flor. Laur. plut. 36,49 (c. 1380) writes *nupturis* (for the *uncturis* of the other MSS), this is hardly evidence that the exemplar (itself a copy of a minuscule MS, Leiden Voss lat.38: see 9) was written in capitals. In such cases the context has influenced the scribe's mind, whether in a general way (Propertius 4.11 is largely concerned with the institution of marriage, and *nupta* appears in verse 36), or through assimilation to words in the immediate vicinity, whether formal (the codex Thuaneus has *facilis nobilis* for *facilis nobis* at Cat. 62.11) or semantic (some Horatian MSS have *urit* for *uisit* at *carm.* 1.4.8 immediately after *ardens*). Such assimilations are extremely frequent. Scribes are also affected by their general knowledge of Greek or Latin; and this is most obvious when they introduce Christian terms into pagan texts (the scholia on *Iliad* 7.135 convert the ἱερδάνος into ἱερδάνης; *amem* becomes *amen* at Prop. 3.15.46).

One word is substituted for another not only where they are similar in appearance: we often find replacement by a word of identical metrical pattern (e.g. dactylic words such as *corpora*, *praemia*, *numine*, *tempore*, especially in the fifth foot of hexameters, and iambic words at the end of pentameters, where the scribe's memory is most likely to be at fault). Housman's textual papers (10) rightly emphasise the frequency of anagrams and near anagrams: a good example comes at Propertius 3.5.24, where the tradition has turned *et nigras* into *integras*. Synonyms interchange (*species* for *facies* at Vergil, *georg.* 4.361; *agricola* for *rusticus* at 2.406), and so do vaguer equivalents (*consul* for *praetor* at Ovid, *Fasti* 1.207), and even antonyms (11: cf. σῶφρον printed for μῶρον at Euripides, *Hippolytus* 966 in the first printing of Diggle's edition, and Lachmann's θεῶν for θνητῶν at Soph. *Phil.* 176). In verse of course only substitutes that fit metrically will cause uncertainty to the editor in full possession of the facts, but earlier readers may have been led on to erroneous corrections by a plausible substitution.

As we have seen, corruption often arises from the context: this may involve not alteration of one word, but exchange between two of stems (for Greek examples see 12; in Latin, R of Vergil has *nulla ... primo* for *prima ... nullo* at *ecl.* 4.18), or endings, or position. In both prose and verse word order gets changed to bring it into line with later norms of cadence or stress (on the so-called *uitium Byzantinum*, see 13). Transposition of lines, couplets and stanzas is slightly different in that it normally results from an attempt to correct a mistake that has been noticed; because the change in such circumstances is intentional we should perhaps classify this phenomenon under interpolation. However, the origin is an error of omission, often caused by similarity of phrasing or appearance

¹ English original of the *Neue Pauly* article 'Textverderbnis' by SJH and N.G.Wilson.

between one passage and another in the vicinity. Though the erring scribe (or his reader) has corrected in some cases, and different manuscripts make good the loss in others, in many places material has been lost completely: the lacunae in Catullus 62 are notable examples where we can be sure of the cause of omission. Depending on whether the similarity has been at the beginning, at the end or in the middle of the verse, scholars speak of homoearchon, homoeoteleuton, or homoeomeson (Housman's term: there are good examples of omissions caused thus at Ovid, *met.* 1.8 and *fast.* 2.61-4). Alternatively the scribe's eye may skip from one sequence of words or letters to a similar sequence, omitting all between them rather than a metrical unit. And on some occasions omissions occur for which there is no explanation beyond the scribe's eagerness to progress with his work (e.g. Ovid, *ep.* 9.63-4, omitted by P). In prose such omissions can be helpful to the student of the tradition if we can identify the length of the omission and match it with the length of line in an extant manuscript (14).

Besides the misreading of individual letters, certain sequences were regularly found difficult by scribes (thus IC in Greek uncials is often misread as K). Groups of letters made up of minims (i.e. the basic vertical stroke common to many letters) are always liable to confusion, and especially so in gothic hands. We may note *timui* corrupted to *nimum* at Ovid, *tristia* 4.3.11; *mane* to *in acie* at Propertius 3.10.1. The problem is exacerbated by the frequency with which *m* and *n* are reduced to a supralineal bar or mark of suspension; and abbreviations in general contribute to corruption (for accounts of abbreviations see 15 and 16; 17 deals with a special group, the so-called *nomina sacra*). Numerals form a special case: though in literary manuscripts they are most often written in full, any instance where the letter equivalents are used is liable to lead to error. As context rarely binds the sense of a numeral, confusion is possible even when the forms are not similar: the MSS at Longus, *Daphnis & Chloe* 1.1.2 diverge between εἴκοσιν [κ'] and διακοσίων [σ'].

Developments in pronunciation often had an effect on spelling, and this led to confusions between ω and ο, ε and αι, and especially the numerous vowels and diphthongs that came to be pronounced like *iota* in medieval Greek. Less commonly used letters, such as *h* and *y*, also caused difficulties, and we find these misplaced and multiplied in words in which they occur. Such details can often be regarded as orthographical variants rather than real errors, and many editors are insufficiently critical about what they place in the apparatus criticus. For example, the gemination of consonants is persistently uncertain in the writing of both languages, and word division is often haphazard until a late stage. Awareness of these features is important because they can lead on to substantive error when a scribe tries in vain to make sense of his exemplar.

Failed attempts to correct are indeed a further cause of error; but no brief survey can hope to be exhaustive.

Bibliographical notes

1. M.D.Reeve, 'Errori in autografi', in P.Chiesa & L.Pinelli (edd.), *Gli autografi medievali: problemi paleografici e filologici* (Spoleto, 1994), 37-60
2. E.Courtney, *Musa lapidaria: a selection of Latin verse inscriptions* (Atlanta, GA, 1995), pp.11-16
3. L.D.Reynolds & N.G.Wilson, *Scribes and scholars* (3rd ed., Oxford, 1991)
4. J.Willis, *Latin textual criticism* (Urbana, 1972)
5. O.Zwierlein, *Kritischer Kommentar zu den Tragödien Senecas* (Mainz, 1986), 'Anhang: Buchstabenvertauschungen', pp.481-500
6. O.Zwierlein, *Prolegomena zu einer kritischen Ausgabe der Tragödien Senecas* (Mainz, 1983), pp.44-6
7. L.Havet, *Manuel de critique verbale appliquée aux textes latins* (Paris, 1911)
8. M.L.West, *Textual criticism and editorial technique* (Stuttgart, 1973)
9. B.L.Ullman, 'The manuscripts of Propertius', *CPh* 6 (1911), 282-301
10. A.E.Housman, *Classical papers* (Cambridge, 1972), 3 vols.
11. W.W.Briggs, Jr., 'Housman and Polar Errors', *AJPh* 104 (1983), 268-77

12. W.G.Arnott, *AJPh* 106 (1985), 240-1
13. W.S.Barrett, on Euripides, *Hippolytus* 1315 and 1322 (Oxford, 1964)
14. A.C.Clark, *The descent of manuscripts* (Oxford, 1918), 266-80
15. T.W.Allen, *Notes on abbreviations in Greek manuscripts* (Oxford, 1889)
16. A. Cappelli, *Dizionario di abbreviature latine ed italiane* (Milan, 1961); W.M.Lindsay, *Notae Latinae* (Cambridge, 1916)
17. L.Traube, *Nomina sacra* (München, 1907)

Errors in Manuscripts: typology

words confused as much as or more than letters

adjacent forms repeatedly confused

e.g. moods and tenses of verbs

cases of nouns

anagrams

dactylic substitution

synonym substitution

antonym substitution ('polar error')

influence of context

semantic assimilation

formal assimilation

external assimilation

exchanges

of words

of stems and endings ('spoonerism')

dittography

haplography

interpolation

insertion of glosses, comments or other extraneous material

attempted improvements

attempted corrections

omission

often due to homoearchon, homoeomeson, or homoeoteleuton

or to 'saut du même au même'

but not always

transposition

of words

of phrases

of lines, couplets, paragraphs

confusion of similar letters

esp. sequences of minims

unfamiliar forms

confusion due to abbreviations

problems caused by changes in pronunciation

orthography, and the confusions it causes

See also the following list, taken from Willis, J. (*Latin Textual Criticism*, Illinois Studies in Language and Literature 1972, vol. 61: 49) for an idea of the different types of mistakes in mss:

SIMPLE CORRUPTIONS

- Mistakes in recognition
 - In single letters
 - In groups of letters
 - In abbreviations
 - In whole words: by substitution of a word roughly similar in appearance; by substitution of a word roughly similar in meaning; by rearrangement of the component letters (anagrams)
- Mistakes in remembering
 - By preservation and anticipation
 - By preoccupation with other matters
- Mistakes in relocation
 - By omission
 - By repetition
- Deliberate falsification of a sound text

COMPLEX CORRUPTIONS (those which have occurred in two or more stages)

- From corrections misunderstood
- From attempts to correct metre
- From transposition
 - Of words
 - Of manuscript leaves
 - Of verses and couplets

Errors in Manuscripts: some examples

Propertius II iii 18 *euhanter*] *cubantes* M
 II xxv 27 *flatus*] *saltus* D
Tibullus I x 49 *bidens*] *uidens* A
Verg. *geo.* 1.288 *aut*] *uel* R

Haplography:

Hor. *car.* 3.5.1 *credidimus*] *credimus* β
Ovid, *her.* 9.32 *nubere nube*] *nubere* PG_u

Dittography:

Catullus 63.18 *animum*] *an animum* V
Propertius II xxix 9 *hunc* bis S
 II xxx 17 *iacta*] *iactata* S

Problems perhaps caused by abbreviations:

Tibullus I x 68 *profluat* G: *perfluat* H: *praefluat* AVX
Ovid, *her.* 3.16 *iterum* PGω: *iam tum* E

False reminiscence and substitution:

Ovid, *her.* 3.82 *metus* PEGω: *timor* ζ: *tremor* ζ
Ovid, *her.* 3.51 *tamen* PEGω: *simul* ζ
Ovid, *her.* 3.28 *ille gradu* PEω: *iste gradu* G
Ovid, *her.* 3.34 *sex* (P)Gω: *septem* Eζ

Omission or transposition owing to homoearchon, homoeomeson, homeoeoteleuton:

Ovid, *trist.* 2.250-5 om. M (249 *nil nisi ...*, 255 *nil igitur ...*)

Propertius I xv 8-11 om. C (7 ... *lapillis*, 11 ... *capillis*)

Ovid, *her.* 2.140-2: uide E

Saut du même au même:

Propertius III xv 19-22 *Iuppiter <Antiopae .../ .../ .../ inuocet> Antiope* om. K

Ovid, *trist.* 1.10.17-18 *flexi<mus in laeuum .../ ueni>mus ad portus* om. L₄

Catullus 64.139 *quondam blanda* O recte: *quondam nobis* X

Attempt to correct:

Ovid, *her.* 3.57 *eos* [i.e. *Eos*] P teste Heinsio: *hora p* (u.l.) EGw: *aura* ζ

Glosses:

Ovid, *fast.* 1.461 *proxima prospiciet Tithono nupta relicto*
nupta] *ut nupta* A: *aurora* ω

Ovid, *fast.* 4.37-8 (in a list giving the line of descent from Jupiter and Venus to Romulus)
hinc satus Aeneas; pietas spectata per ignes
sacra patremque umeris, altera sacra, tulit.