

A NOTE ON OVID, *HEROIDES* 13.63–4

In her epistle to Protesilaus, Laodamia expresses her fears concerning Hector, the chief Trojan hero:

Hectora nescio quem timeo: Paris Hectora dixit  
 ferrea sanguinea bella mouere manu.  
 Hectora, quisquis is est, si sum tibi cara, cauto;           (65)  
 signatum memori pectore nomen habe!  
 hunc ubi uitaris, alios uitare memento  
 et multos illic Hectoras esse puta.

The text here has been transmitted in this form by all our MSS, including the Greek translation made by Planudes.<sup>1</sup> The first couplet, even though there are no serious objections against its wording, metre or grammar, is considered spurious on the grounds of the poem's internal logic:<sup>2</sup> namely, that Laodamia, who has never met Hector in person, relies on someone else's account of him; but that individual turns out to be Paris, whom she has never met either. Yet the direct speech *Paris dixit*, with no indication of the person to whom Paris was talking, suggests that Laodamia is reporting what she was told by Paris himself. This is incoherent; Palmer therefore deleted the couplet, after he raised the following objection: *unde enim quae dixisset Paris scire Laodamia potuit?*<sup>3</sup>

At first, the appearance of Paris in line 63 may seem consistent with lines 57–62, which describe Paris' arrival. But at that time he has not, of course, come to Laodamia's dwelling place, Iolcus: instead, it is Paris' arrival at Sparta that is depicted there. Laodamia, not having been an eyewitness, had to learn the details from *fama*. Accordingly, Reeson—who nevertheless condemns the couplet just as the majority of present-day editors do—says in its defence that 'Paris' statement need not have been heard by Laodamia at first hand, but rather reported by *fama* (57) along with the details of 57–9'.<sup>4</sup>

It is conceivable that Paris told stories about Troy while on his visit to Menelaus' house, and that Laodamia has learned these, as everything else about Paris, from *fama*. It is hardly conceivable, however, that Ovid failed to tell us clearly that *fama* was involved, if he meant to. Otherwise we would have to declare him guilty of having composed a clumsy distich, because specifying a foreigner, whom you have never seen, as the direct source of information does not make much sense, for at least some such nuance as 'reportedly' would be highly desirable in such a situation. Therefore, the objection raised by Palmer is still valid.

<sup>1</sup> A. Palmer, *P. Ovidi Nasonis Heroides with the Greek Translation of Planudes* (Oxford, 1898), 226: τὸν Ἕκτορα οὐκ οἶδ' ὄντινα δέδοικα: ὁ Πάρις εἶπε τὸν Ἕκτορα αἰμοχαρεῖ χειρὶ δεινοῦς μετέναι πολέμου.

<sup>2</sup> Pace L. Fulkerson, '(Un)Sympathetic magic: a study of *Heroides* 13', *AJPh* 123 (2002), 61–87, at 71 n. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Palmer (n. 1), 81.

<sup>4</sup> J. Reeson, *Ovid Heroides 11, 13 & 14: A Commentary* (Leiden, 2001), 149.

Although I agree that in the present state of affairs the couplet cannot stand as long as the appearance of Paris in it has not been satisfactorily explained, I still think that it is possible to save its skin by emending the text. Assuming that *Paris* is the corrupt word here, the question is who else could have provided Laodamia with an account of Hector and his prowess. That person must certainly have been a well-informed, well-travelled and (unlike Paris) readily accessible man, in addition to being an authority figure for Laodamia. No one meets these criteria better than Acastus (mentioned earlier in the poem at 13.25), as the king of Iolcus, a former Argonaut and, last but not least, Laodamia's own father:<sup>5</sup>

Hectora nescio quem timeo: p a t e r Hectora dixit  
ferrea sanguinea bella mouere manu.

If the source of information is not Paris, this explains very satisfactorily the grandiloquent style of the pentameter: Laodamia, a young and naive bride, having had no opinion of her own on warfare, is simply repeating what she was told by *grandaevus Acastus*, who, being a respectable senior gentleman, apparently formulates his narrative in a solemn, somewhat epic style.

For a parallel usage of this kind of 'dad said' expression without any indication as to whose parent it was and to whom he was speaking, compare, for example, Ovid's *Tristia* 4.10.21 *saepe pater dixit 'studium quid inutile temptas'*, where Ovid's father is talking to Ovid.

The source of the error may have been a transposition of letters, a phenomenon attested elsewhere in the best MS of the *Heroides* (P), and occurring just eight lines later in this poem, at 13.71, where the same manuscript has *limitet* instead of *milite*.<sup>6</sup> In our case the transposition in *pater* must have yielded *paret* first, and this form (blatantly lacking ground in this place) was at a later stage intentionally 'amended' to *Paris* by another scribe.

One might ask why it was *Paris* and not some other word that came to the corrector's mind. The fact that the lines that immediately precede our extract speak about Paris without explicitly naming him (13.55–62) may be an important factor here. It is possible therefore that in the manuscript which the corrector had in front of him the entire section was glossed with the name *Paris*. It is also possible that the word in question could have been read either as *paret* or as *parit*. This could have been due to a script in which there was little difference between an 'e' and an 'i', for example rustic capitals. The corrector therefore would have thought that only one letter—the 't' in the supposed *parit*—needed to change so that the word would make sense in its context.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Hyg. *Fab.* 103–4.

<sup>6</sup> The final 't' in *limitet* may be due to dittography, since *limitet* is followed in the MS by the word *Troiam*. For more examples of transposition in P, see Palmer (n. 1), xxxiv.