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Title of the Article

Infelcium Avium: Reconsidering Passerat's Conjecture at Met. 3.17.4

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Infeliciam Avium: Reconsidering Passerat's Conjecture at Met. 3.17.4

Abstract

This article aims to corroborate Passerat's emendation *infeliciam [n]avium* to Apul. *Met.* 3.17.4 by means of a twofold enquiry: firstly, attention will be paid to reconstructing the widespread implementation of birds in goetic practices; secondly, a palaeographical explanation of the corruption will be proposed by reviewing analogous dittographies of nasal consonants in contiguous words which occur in the Laurentianus Plut. 68.02 (F), the most authoritative MS. preserving the text of the *Metamorphoses*.

Keywords: Apuleius – *Metamorphoses* 3.17.4 – magic – birds

1. Introduction and scholarship on the reading

At *Met.* 3.17.4-5 Photis describes to the protagonist of the tale Lucius the goetic paraphernalia (*apparatus*) of the eerie laboratory (*feralis officina*) of her mistress, the Thessalian *maga* Pamphile,¹ which is set up with:

omne genus aromatis et ignobiliter lamminis litteratis et infeliciam [n]avium durantibus damnis, defletorum, sepulorum etiam cadaverum expositis multis admodum membris

every type of herb and metal tablets with undecipherable inscriptions, and the lasting remains of *inauspicious birds*, as well as several body parts taken from mourned and even buried corpses²

In this study I shall comment on *infeliciam navium* ('of ill-fated shipwrecks') at *Met.* 3.17.4, which is the reading handed down by the Laurentianus Plut. 68.02 (*siglum*: F) – the most

¹ Pamphile's magical notoriety is already made clear at *Met.* 2.5.3-8.

² Translations, unless otherwise indicated, are mine.

1 authoritative MS. containing the *Apologia*, the *Metamorphoses* and the *Florida* –³ and by the
2 other MSS. alike, and I shall add content-based and palaeographical evidence to defend the
3 emendation *infelicium [n]avium* ('of inauspicious birds'), originally proposed by the French
4 humanist Jean Passerat.⁴ This emendation has witnessed changing fortunes in modern critical
5 editions of the *Metamorphoses*: although Helm accepts it in his first edition,⁵ he prints *navium*
6 in the text of his second and third editions,⁶ as do Giarratano,⁷ Robertson,⁸ Giarratano and
7 Frassinetti⁹ and recently Zimmerman.¹⁰ A strong case for conserving the *lectio traditio* was put
8 forward by Adam Abt,¹¹ who comments on the marine debris mentioned in *Apol.* 35.4 – which
9 Apuleius paradoxically deems as tools for magical practices – and cautiously proposes a
10 comparison between the *resticulae* ('pieces of strands')¹² and *PGM* VII.594-595,¹³ a passage
11 from a prescription for love-magic, where it is said ποιήσον ἑλλύχνιον ἀπὸ πλοίου
12 νεναυαγηκότος ('make a wick of the hawser of a wrecked ship').¹⁴ According to this argument,
13 Abt¹⁵ explains that the emendation *[n]avium* in Helm's first edition would be unnecessary since
14 *navium* would reflect this practice of implementing the remains of shipwrecks in magic. Van
15 der Paardt¹⁶ aptly stresses a parallel with *Apol.* 58.2, a passage in which Apuleius reports that,

3 See especially Robertson 1940, xxxviii-lv; Marshall 1983, 15-16 and recently Magnaldi, Giannotti 2004, 9-22; Carver 2007, 65-67; Zimmerman 2012, x-xxxix; lvii. For a different stemmatic explanation, see Pecere 1987, 99-124 (reprint in Pecere, Stramaglia 2003, 37-60; 180-188 includes the bibliographical update by Luca Graverini).

4 See Passerat 1608, 436 where, commenting on Prop. 3.6.29, he mentions this passage of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and writes: "lego *avium*; & *damna* interpretor, demptas iis plumas" ('I read *avium* and I interpret *damna* as a reference to the feathers taken from the birds).

5 Helm 1907, 65.

6 See Helm 1913, 65 and 1955, 65, respectively.

7 Giarratano 1929, 70.

8 Robertson 1940, 74 who prints <*repletam*> after *damnis*, an integration proposed by Nolte 1864, 674.

9 Giarratano, Frassinetti 1960, 75.

10 Zimmerman 2012, 60.

11 Abt 1908, 147-148.

12 On the comic tone of this and the previous diminutives, see Hunink 1997, 112; May 2006 91; Pasetti 2007, 34. For a stylistic discussion of the whole passage, see Harrison 2000, 67.

13 This is the only passage that Abt uses to support his argument but, from a more accurate analysis, we may add *PGM* V.64-65; 67-68 and VII.466, alluding to material – specifically water and a copper nail – taken from shipwrecked vessels. This evidence notwithstanding, the discussion of the employment of birds in magic below provides a stronger argument for accepting the emendation *[n]avium*.

14 I follow the translation by Aune in Betz 1992, 135.

15 Abt 1908, 222, n. 3.

16 Van der Paardt 1971, 133.

1 according to his prosecutors, the presence of smoke and birds' feathers would evidence that he
2 had performed some impious nocturnal sacrifices (*nocturna sacra*) in the house of Iunius
3 Crassus with his friend Quintianus. Nevertheless, Van der Paardt seems fundamentally to agree
4 with Abt and the aforementioned editors since he prints the reading *navium*.¹⁷ Nicolini,¹⁸
5 however, again stresses the importance of the parallel with *Apol.* 58.2, and points out the
6 infrequent use of parts of shipwrecks in goetic practices. I would add that the reference to birds
7 instead of shipwrecks would be particularly apt in the following passage of the *Metamorphoses*,
8 which concerns the hideous parts of corpses in Pamphile's laboratory.¹⁹ In addition to this
9 internal argument, I shall now present substantial evidence to support of the validity of the
10 emendation by examining the sources hinting at the implementation of birds and their remains
11 in ancient magical rites.

27 **2. The Employment of Birds in Greco-Roman Magic**

28 Although it is true – as we have observed – that the *PGM* contains some allusions to the use of
29 parts recovered from shipwrecks in magical practices, references to the usage of birds in such
30 uncanny rituals is far more significant. The killing of birds for magical purposes was, in fact, a
31 customary practice in the Greco-Roman world and Apuleius was fully aware of it: in *Apol.* 47.7
32 we find that the goetic ritual that he allegedly performed over the epileptic servant Thallus
33 involved the killing of hens (*gallinae*) as sacrificial victims (*hostiae lustrales*).²⁰ Furthermore,
34 the implementation of birds in goetic practices is also attested by two prescriptions of the *Greek*
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53 ¹⁷ Van der Paardt 1971, 17; 133.

54 ¹⁸ Nicolini 2005, 234, n. 16. In her discussion, however, she takes the house of Iunius Crassus, where Apuleius'
55 friend Appius Quintianus lodged (*Apol.* 57.2), for Apuleius' own residence.

56 ¹⁹ See *Apul. Met.* 3.17.5.

57 ²⁰ It is noteworthy that in Porphyry's account of Plotinus' life we find a ritual performed by an Egyptian priest
58 (Αἰγύπτιος γάρ τις ἱερεὺς) which entails the use of living birds for summoning the daemon of Plotinus (*Porph. Plot.*
59 10.15-28). Although Porphyry does not implement any goetic terms, Eitrem 1942, 62-67 and Dodds 1947, 60-61
60 compare this episode with *PGM* VII.505-527 and XIII.368-372. See also the recent discussion by Addey 2014, 16;
61 173-180.

1 *Magical Papyri*: in the first, the complete burning of various birds serves to consecrate a ring;²¹
2 in the second, a bird's tongue is required to compel a woman to confess her lover's name.²²
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4 Not only the birds as wholes or their parts, but especially their feathers played an
5 important function in ancient magical practices: it has already been remarked that, amongst the
6 incriminations in the *Apologia*, Apuleius explains that birds' feathers – which he indicates as
7 *plumae*²³ and *pinnae* –²⁴ had been used by his accusers as evidence of his goetic rites in Crassus'
8 house. Their implementation is also prescribed in the *Greek Magical Papyri* for the achievement
9 of various purposes: in *PGM* III.612-32, it is said that the practitioners can control their own
10 shadow by putting the feather of a falcon behind their right ear²⁵ and that of an ibis behind their
11 left ear.²⁶ In *PGM* IV.45-51, to complete a ritual of initiation, the practitioners need to rub their
12 faces with the bile of an owl and an ibis feather,²⁷ or with the yolk of an ibis' egg and the feather
13 of a falcon.²⁸ Additionally, at *PGM* VII.335-340, one must hold an ibis feather fourteen fingers
14 long in order to obtain a direct vision.
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31 The use of feathers in magical rites is also confirmed by literary evidence. Abt notes²⁹
32 that amongst the eerie ingredients of Canidia's burnt offering³⁰ are the feathers of a *nocturna*
33 *strix* ('nocturnal screech owl'),³¹ a creature deeply associated with the idea of female magic in
34 many literary sources, including Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.³² We could add that in Propertius'
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45 ²¹ *PGM* XII.213-215.

46 ²² *PGM* LXIII.7-12.

47 ²³ Apul. *Apol.* 57.2; 58.9.

48 ²⁴ Apul. *Apol.* 57.3; 58.2; 58.5; 58.10; 60.5. The sceptical approach by Abt 1908, 221 in interpreting *pinna* as
49 'feather' can easily be dispelled; see the occurrences in *ThLL*, vol.X.1, s.v. *penna*, 1085-1086, which includes the
50 aforementioned passages of the *Apologia*.

51 ²⁵ *PGM* III.619-620.

52 ²⁶ *PGM* III.620.

53 ²⁷ *PGM* IV.45-47.

54 ²⁸ *PGM* III.48-51.

55 ²⁹ Abt 1908, 221.

56 ³⁰ Hor. *Ep.* 5.17-24; such feathers have to be well burned on Colchian flames (5.24), a clear reference to uncanny
57 powers of Medea (e.g. Ov. *Met.* 7.296; Sen. *Med.* 225).

58 ³¹ Hor. *Ep.* 5.20.

59 ³² See the *bubones* or *nocturnae aves* at Apul. *Met.* 3.23.3-4, and especially the *fuscae aves* in *Met.* 2.21.3. It is worth
60 noting that the tale of Thelyphron in *Met.* 2.21-30 parallels that of the *strigae* at Petr. 63.2-10, as noted by Pecere
61 1975, 128, n. 249. The theme of the wicked women-owls is very popular in Latin literature: these *strigae* are
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1 *Elegies* the feathers of an owl are mentioned again amongst the ingredients for a love-charm³³

2 and that Medea, as portrayed by Seneca,³⁴ uses the feathers of a Stymphalian bird in her dire

3 ritual. Furthermore, in Lucian's *Gallus*, the Cock is nicknamed γόης ('practitioner of evil magic')

4 by the interlocutor Micyllus³⁵ because of the preternatural powers of his tail's right plume:

5 Τὸ δεξιὸν τοίνυν ὄτω ἂν ἐγὼ ἀποσπάσαι παράσχω καὶ ἔχειν, ἐς ὅσον ἂν βούλωμαι ἀνοίγειν τε

6 ὁ τοιοῦτος πᾶσαν θύραν δύναται καὶ ὄρᾶν ἅπαντα οὐχ ὀρώμενος αὐτός (Lucian *Gal.* 28)

7 To whoever I shall grant to pick up and hold my right feather, he will be able to unlock every

8 door and to see everything while being unseen so long as I want it

9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 **3. Palaeographical Evidence: Dittographies of Nasal Consonants in F**

22 So far we have cast light on the commonplace employment of birds in magical rituals according

23 to literary and papyrological sources, strengthening the plausibility of the emendation. From a

24 palaeographical viewpoint, we can consider *infelicium* [n]avium as a dittography induced by the

25 presence of the previous nasal at the end of *infelicium*. Analogous types of corruption are well

26 attested by F: Rudolf Helm³⁶ mentions some noteworthy examples of dittographies of nasal

27 consonants affecting either the end or the beginning of two consecutive words. I shall review

28 his discussion and add further examples closely mirroring the corruption in *Met.* 3.17.4. Nasals

29 are erroneously inserted at the end of the previous element of the couplet in the case of *Apol.*

30 39.3.11: *purpura[m] mu[r]riculi*;³⁷ *Apol.* 56.4: *gratia[m] manum*; *Met.* 1.13.7: *qua[m] maxime*

31 *Met.* 3.4.4 *publica[m] mihi*; *Met.* 10.31.6: *aspectu[m] minacibus*; *Fl.* 9.35-36: *vigor[em]*

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already known to Horace (*Ep.* 5.20), Propertius (3.6.29; 4.5.17), Ovid (*Fast.* 6.133-368) and even deserved attention of Pliny (*Nat.* 11.95.232).

³³ Prop. 3.6.29: *et strigis inventae per busta iacentia plumae* ('and the feathers of a screech owl found amongst forsaken graves'); this is the passage commented upon by Passerat 1608, 436.

³⁴ Sen. *Med.* 783.

³⁵ See Lucian *Gal.* 28.

³⁶ Helm 1910, xlvi.

³⁷ This example is unacknowledged by Helm.

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neminem;³⁸ *Fl.* 22.3: *poeta[m] memorant*. A nasal consonant is also often inserted at the beginning of the following term of the couplet as in: *Apol.* 95.2: *sum [m]aeque*; *Met.* 8.14.3: *ablutum [m]unita*;³⁹ *Fl.* 9.17: *eorum [m]emerat*. Furthermore, closer scrutiny reveals that dittographies of nasal consonants in F do not only affect the letter *m* but also *n*, as in *Met.* 1.22.3: *inquam [n]ominare*; *Met.* 2.3.1: *socia[m] nam*; *Met.* 8.13.1: *dolore[m] nescio*. These last examples, particularly *inquam [n]ominare* at *Met.* 1.22.3,⁴⁰ make it possible to confirm the hypothesis of a corruption since they display the same features of the corruption *infelicium [n]avium* at *Met.* 3.17.4.

4. Conclusion

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This twofold survey has enabled us to ascertain the validity of Passerat's conjecture *infelicium [n]avium* at *Met.* 3.17.4: having discussed the evidence concerning the employment of birds in goetic practices, and reviewed the dittographies of nasal consonants affecting the most important manuscript testimony of the *Metamorphoses*, we can validate the cogency of an emendation which befits the horrifying tone evoked by Apuleius in *Met.* 3.17.4-5, and ultimately enables us to recover an addition trait of the macabre depiction of Pamphile's workshop.⁴¹

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³⁸ This emendation is printed by Vallette 1924, 140 and followed by Hunink 2001, 35 and Todd Lee 2005, 44. Such mechanical mistake might have also been induced by the termination of *neminem*.

³⁹ Zimmerman 2012, 179 prints *inunita*.

⁴⁰ A further example can be added: in his first edition of the *Metamorphoses*, Helm 1907, 171 prints *venerem [n]ullo* at *Met.* 7.23.2, *nullo* being the reading in F, A (Ambrosianus N. 180 sup.), U (Illinoiensis Urbanensis 7, MCA.2) and the *editio princeps* (De Bussi 1469), whereas φ (Laurentianus Plut. 29.02), E (Etonensis 147) and S (Audomarensis 653) offer the reading *ullo*. Because of the faded and partly erased text in F fol. 158r, col. 1, l. 16, the reading seems to be *venere* followed by rasure, but by post-processing a high-resolution digitisation of the folio, I have verified the presence of the 'm-stroke' or '3-shaped sign' (as it is called by Loew 1980, 171-173 and Newton 1999, 168 respectively). We find, thus, once more the same context of two contiguous nasals occurring in *Met.* 3.17.4. However, *[n]ullo* is rejected in the second and third edition by Helm 1913=1955, 171 and by the other editors (see Giarratano 1929, 189; Robertson 1945, 25; Giarratano, Frassinetti 1960, 203; Zimmerman 2012, 163) on the grounds of Apuleius' intention to imitate colloquial language; for a discussion, see Hijmans *et al.* 1981, 232. In defence of the reading *[n]ullo*, I would observe that the use of *ullus* after a negation is not infrequent in the speeches of Apuleius' characters (e.g. *Met.* 2.7.7; 2.13.2; 2.27.5).

⁴¹ I hereby take the opportunity to thank the staff of the Biblioteca Laurenziana for having granted me a prompt access to a high-resolution digitisation of F, fol. 158r.

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