

One More Letter to Change: Martial 4.52.2

The couplet is transmitted without variants in all the manuscripts that contain it ($\beta\gamma$):

Gestari iunctis nisi desinis, Hedyle, capris,
qui modo ficus eras, iam caprificus eris.

Previous editors had assumed that *ficus* can mean *ficosus*, but Shackleton Bailey calls this “manifestly inadmissible” and emends the person of the verbs in line 2:¹

Gestari iunctis nisi desinis, Hedyle, capris,
qui modo ficus *erat*, iam caprificus *erit*.

In his Loeb (1993), he translates:

Unless you stop riding behind a pair of goats (*capri*), Hedylus, what
used to be a fig will soon be a goat fig (*caprificus*).

The word ‘behind’ is not in the Latin, and I think there’s a hint that Hedylus may be getting his new ‘figs’ (=hemorrhoids) from (how to put this?) being a little too fond of goats. I also think we should probably change one more word – in fact just one more letter:

Gestari iunctis nisi desinis, Hedyle, capris,
cui modo ficus erat, iam caprificus erit.

Now it means ‘the one who used to have figs will have goat-figs’ – *ficus* and *caprificus* are of course collective singulars, and ‘the one’ is you, Hedylus. This seems a bit clearer: the substitution of one related affliction for another, not the transformation of one into the other.

¹ “Corrections and Explanations of Martial”, *CPh* 73 (1978) 273-96 = *Selected Classical Papers* (Ann Arbor, 1997) 65-94, at 70.