Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 13.471

Polyxena ends her speech to the Greek soldiers with an appeal for unransomed burial (13.469-73):[1]

> '. . . *siquos tamen ultima nostri*
> *uerba mouent oris (Priami uos filia regis,*   470
> *non captiua rogat), genetrici corpus inemptum*
> *reddite, neue auro redimat ius triste sepulcri,*
> *sed lacrimis. tunc, cum poterat, redimebat et auro.'*
>   **471** non *EF₁NU* nunc *F₂MPWhpv*

471 non EF_1NU nunc $F_2MPWhpv$

When he comes to the textual problem in 471, Bömer simply lists the editors and manuscripts on each side — only Breitenbach and Anderson support *non* — and adds «dubium, utrum recte», as if either *non* or *nunc* would provide adequate sense. However, neither is at all satisfactory. The problem with *non captiua* is that it is palpably false: a prisoner is precisely what Polyxena is. On the other hand, the critical principle *utrum in alterum abiturum erat* shows that *nunc captiua*, though acceptable in meaning, is interpolated: if *nunc* had come first, there would be no reason for so many of the early manuscripts to read *non*. Scribes faced with the absurdity of *non captiua* would have been tempted to make the obvious 'correction' to *nunc*, which is literally true, and could be taken as an effective appeal to pity. The two hands of F provide a before and after picture of the process. A further difficulty is that the punctuation is rather awkward: we will return to this point below.

A puzzling pair of variants is often a sign of unsuspected corruption elsewhere in the line. It seems to me that the most economical solution here is to emend to *Priami uos filia regis,* / *non captiua* **roget**.[2] Polyxena is both princess and prisoner. As princess, she has no doubt been accustomed to unquestioning obedience from the lower orders. As

---

[1] Text and select apparatus are taken from W. S. ANDERSON's Teubner edition (Leipzig 1977): variants not pertinent to the point in question are omitted. 'BÖMER' refers to F. BÖMER's commentary on the *Metamorphoses* (Heidelberg, 7 volumes, 1969-86). I only know BREITENBACH through BÖMER.

[2] Whether to put a comma after *captiua* is a nice stylistic question, on which I have no strong opinion one way or the other.

prisoner, she can have no such expectations. Consequently, she may well politely ask the soldiers to treat her as princess rather than prisoner, at least for one last request. In planning the blinding of Polymestor, her mother is less self-effacing, giving orders, as Ovid puts it, *tamquam regina maneret* (545). The use of *non* in such close proximity to a subjunctive would have endangered one or the other, and a scribe who did not realize that it negatives only *captiua* would have adjusted the mood of the verb without hesitation.[3] If we read *roget* in 471, the awkward parentheses can be removed and their contents taken as the apodosis of the *siquos* clause: if the soldiers are moved by her last words, let them show it by treating her as a princess. In default of a conjunction, a colon after *roget* seems appropriate, with the following words spelling out just how the soldiers may grant Polyxena's last request:

> '. . . *siquos tamen ultima nostri*
> *uerba mouent oris, Priami uos filia regis,*   470
> *non captiua, roget: genetrici corpus inemptum*
> *reddite, neue auro redimat ius triste sepulcri,*
> *sed lacrimis. tunc, cum poterat, redimebat et auro.*'

However, details of the punctuation are, in my opinion, less important than the conjecture and its accompanying interpretation.

---

[3] KÜHNER-STEGMANN provides numerous parallels for the use of *non* with jussives (2.1.189-90 § 48.1), of which the most familiar is Ennius' *non cauponantes bello sed belligerantes / ferro, non auro uitam cernamus utrique* (*Ann.* 184 Skutsch).