



Eduqas GCSE Latin
Component 3A

Latin Literature (Narratives) Ovid, *Ceyx and
Alcyone*

Section G

For examination in 2022 and 2023



Section G

The final moments of Ceyx

In this passage, Ceyx begs for divine assistance, but in vain. As he slips under the waves

Notes

Teachers should not feel that they need to pass on to their students all the information from these notes; they should choose whatever they think is appropriate. The examination requires knowledge outside the text only when it is needed in order to understand the text.

- 1-2** These lines are an excellent opportunity to show students how word order can help us to imagine the scene more vividly. We focus first on a hand (**manu**), the desperation of its grasp emphasised by the placing of **tenet** at the start of the sentence. We are reminded immediately of what his hand usually holds (**sceptra solebat**) before this stately image is brutally contrasted with what it is now grasping (**fragmina navigali**). The name of the poor soul has been delayed, but now we learn it is Ceyx and we move our focus from his hand to his face, hearing the words he is repeatedly calling out (**soceremque patremque**), the sentence running on to a third line before abruptly being cut off (**frustra**).

Ovid has chosen to put the audience close to Ceyx in the following lines. We hear his thoughts and words, and we are with him to the last moment. Ovid is relentless in pushing us for an emotional reaction!

- 2-3** **socerumque patremque / invocat**: Ceyx's father is the god Lucifer (the morning star), and his father-in-law is Aeolus, the god of the winds. Neither seem inclined to intervene, but no clear explanation for this is given. Neither Ceyx nor Alcyone have wronged the gods in any way, and neither have brought this punishment upon themselves. It is implied in another part of the text that Lucifer may be buried in the stormy night and therefore unable to help. The repetition of **-que** (*polysyndeton*) suggests that Ceyx is also repeatedly calling upon them.
- 3** The author is moved by his own work to interject **heu**, directing our own emotional response to Ceyx's plight. The author, and now the audience, are informed that Ceyx' actions are **frustra** ('in vain'), adding a tragic touch of *dramatic irony*.
- 3-4** As always, it is Alcyone who is in Ceyx' thoughts. He calls upon her 'most often' (**plurima**), Ovid delaying the words **Alcyone coniunx** to the next line (*enjambment*) for emphasis. The repetition of **-que** (*polysyndeton*) in **meminitque refertque** shows us his constant, repetitive thoughts of Alcyone.

- 5-6 The translation is **optat (he wishes) ut (that) fluctus (the sea) agant (might wash ashore) sua corpora (his body) ante (before) illius (her) oculos (eyes) et (and) exanimis (lifeless) tumuletur (he might be buried) amicis (by her kindly) manibus (hands)**

These lines recall Alcyone's fears in Section A as she considered 'names on tombs that contain no body' (**in tumulis sine corpore nomina**).

- 7-8 The translation is **dum natat (while he is swimming) quotiens (as often as) fluctus (the sea) sinit hiscere (allows him to open his mouth) nominat (he calls out the name) absentem (of the absent) Alcyonen (Alcyone) que (and) inmurmurat (he whispers it) undis (within the waves) ipsis (themselves)**

Again the word order makes the scene more dramatic: the word **absentem** moved far from Alcyonen, emphasising the couple's own separation. This also recalls Alcyone's fears in Sections A and B, and in particular the question in Section A, line 10 **iam sum tibi carior absens** ('Am I now dearer to you when I am not here?'). The verb **inmurmurat** is then sandwiched between **ipsis** and **undis**, mimicking the meaning as his words are whispered amongst the waves themselves.

inmurmurat: the repetition of the **m** sound brings the meaning of the word to life (*onomatopoeia*). Usually this would suggest a murmuring noise, but here it has the added chilling effect of the sound of his gulping in the water. Notice too how Ceyx was able to **invocat** (call out) in line 3, now he is only able to **inmurmurat** (whisper) as he begins to slip below the water.

- 9 **ecce**: the shout of 'look' from Ovid again puts the audience and author into the scene. Our gaze is suddenly directed away from Ceyx to high above (**super**).

niger arcus aquarum: the water's blackness reflects the depth of water looming above Ceyx. As Ovid dwells on the description, the audience experiences a moment of tension as we look at the wave, waiting for it to crash down.

- 10 Ovid pulls us back to where we were, focusing on Ceyx' head as it goes under one last time, the piling-up of verbs (**frangitur...rupta mersum...obruit**) contrasting with the 'pause' created by the description in line 9. This final phrase is carefully constructed, the **rupta...unda** ('broken wave') enclosing the **mersum caput** ('submerged head').

Discussion

Although the scene itself may not have been particularly original in Roman literature, Ovid's description of the drowning Ceyx is particularly heart-breaking and harrowing: he refuses to let us look away, his description is written from up close, and we are alongside Ceyx in the water.

Alcyone, although physically absent, is very present in these lines: Ceyx specifically recalls and calls her, her words and fears are echoed in Ovid's vocabulary and themes.

Suggested Questions for Comprehension

Read the entire text aloud, emphasising phrasing and word groups. Then reread each section, asking leading questions so that the class comprehend the meaning of the Latin text. It may be desirable to produce a written translation once the students have understood the Latin.

lines 1-3:

- What is Ceyx holding on with? What was hand accustomed to hold? What is he holding on to?
- Who is he calling to? Is it effective?

lines 3-6:

- What name was most often on his lips? What was he doing?
- What exactly is he doing? What does he wish the sea would do? Where does he wish the sea would wash his body? What does he wish might happen to him, lifeless?

lines 7-8:

- While he is swimming, what is he calling out? How often is he doing this?
- Where is he murmuring it?

lines 9-10:

- What does 'ecce' mean? Where are we to look? What is over the middle of the waves? What happens to this black arch of water? What bursts? What does it submerge? What has happened to his head, and to him?
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Questions on Content and Style

1. (lines 1-3 'frustra'):

- a. Where is Ceyx at this point in the poem?
- b. What two things is Ceyx doing?
- c. How does Ovid's description make this scene particularly tragic?

2. (lines 3-6):

- a. What is Ceyx remembering?
- b. What does Ceyx wish and why?

- c. How does Ovid show us how much Ceyx loves Alcyone through his choice of words and style of writing here?
3. (lines 7-8):
- Describe the two different ways Ceyx is saying Alcyone's name.
 - How does Ovid make these lines vivid through the order and sound of the words?
4. (lines 9-10):
- Why do you think that Ovid uses the word **ecce** here?
 - What happens to Ceyx in these lines?
5. (whole section):
- How does this section show us the depth of love between Ceyx and Alcyone?
 - How effective is Ovid in creating sadness around the death of Ceyx?