



Eduqas GCSE Latin
Component 3A

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

Section A

For examination in 2022 and 2023



Section A

Alcyone begs Ceyx to rethink his plans

Following the strange transformation of his brother into a bird, Ceyx decides to visit an oracle of the god Apollo to discover the meaning of these events. Usually he would visit the oracle at Delphi, overland from their home in Greece, but the way is blocked by a hostile king. He decides instead to sail across the Aegean Sea to Asia and the oracle at Claros on the Ionian shore. In this passage he tells his wife his plan, and she reacts with alarm.

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 The translation is **ante** (before [he left]) **tamen** (however) **fidissima Alcyone** (most faithful Alcyone) **certam te facit** (he made you certain) **consilii sui** (of his plan)

The loving relationship between Alcyone and Ceyx is stressed by the superlative vocative **fidissima** ('most faithful'). The delay between the adjective and the noun with which it agrees (**Alcyone**) causes the reader to dwell on the word. The strong bond between the two is one of the main themes of this text.

facit: there are lots of verbs in the historic present tense in this text. These are present tense verbs but used to describe something happening in the past. They make the reader feel as if they are experiencing the events alongside the characters. From this point on, *vivid historic present tense* verbs will be identified in these notes but not analysed individually.

- 2 In line 2 we discover that Ovid (the poet) is here directly talking to Alcyone (**te**). This adds to the emotion of the scene, implying even the author is deeply invested in his own characters.

protinus ('immediately') adds a sudden sense of foreboding about the journey as Alcyone's reaction is so swift and so negative. The sentence describing the change in her begins in the middle of the line, Ovid emphasising the speed of the reaction by refusing to delay these words until the start of the next line.

- 2-3 Ovid frequently describes emotional reactions as physical changes happening to his characters. This engages the audience as we are asked to draw our own conclusions based on the description rather than simply being told how she feels.

intima frigus/ossa: the word order here brings the image to life. The word **frigus** is placed between **intima...ossa**, mirroring how the 'chill' is buried inside her 'deepest bones'.

- 3 **buxo...simillimus ora:** boxwood, commonly used in the UK for hedges, is a pale colour. The simile here highlights her fear draining the colour from her face.
- 2-4 **ossa...ora...genae:** the list of three (*tricolon*) zooms in from the whole of Alcyone to her face. Ovid stays focused on her face in the following lines as well. Foreshadowing what will happen later, here Alcyone's face grows wet with weeping as she talks to her husband: eventually Ceyx's face will be submerged as he murmurs words to her.
- obit** is a *vivid historic present* verb.
- 5 **ter... ter:** in Latin literature, significant actions are often repeated 'three times' to emphasise that they were done over and over. It is also useful to note that the number three was of superstitious importance to the Romans: magic spells and cult rites often required things to be done 'three times'.
- 6 The translation is **singultuque** (and with her sobbing) **interrumpente** (interrupting) **pias querellas** (her loving protests)
- pias** is often translated as 'dutiful', but 'loving' shows Ovid's meaning better: she is showing the concern and affection which is appropriate for a wife to show for her husband. The double -rr- of **interrumpente** and -ll- of **querellas** mimic the sound of sobbing.
- 7-10 **string of questions:** Alcyone interrogates her husband with a series of direct questions which he is not given time to answer, although the reader can imagine his gestures protesting her accusations. It is important to remember that Ovid has told us that these questions are 'loving', rather than angry: she is trying to remind Ceyx of his love for her rather than question it.
- 7 **carissime** ('my dearest one') reminds us again of the couple's love for each other.
- 9 The juxtaposition of **abesse relict**a ('to be away, left behind') emphasises the separation.
- 10 **absens** ('absent') is placed emphatically at the end of the line.
- 11-12 **dolebo ... non metuam ... curaeque timore carebunt:** Alcyone's emotions are arranged as a list of three (*tricolon*) with the first two sentiments opposing each other, and the final sentiment explaining how this reaction will work.
- 11 Alcyone stresses the words in this line with the repeated use of the letter 't'. Of course, Ceyx will not be travelling over the lands (see the introduction to this section), and so the sense should be "supposing your journey was by land..."
- 13 **aequora me terrent:** ancient ships were well-built and their crews skilled, but this fear of the vast and uncontrollable sea appears to have been common, especially amongst those who only occasionally travelled by sea. The fear of a storm as a loved-one leaves on a ship is a common trope in elegy.

- 14 **laceras tabulas:** these are the planks which are all that remain of a wrecked ship. The participle **laceras** ('mangled, shattered') emphasises the violence of the wreckage.
- 15 Alcyone says that she has read names on tombs 'without a body' **sine corpore**. The Roman would set up tombstones to those whose bodies could not be buried, most commonly due to being lost at sea. An example of one of these tombs can be seen in the Grosvenor Museum in Chester (online here: <https://romaninscriptionsofbritain.org/inscriptions/544>). A tombstone would often end with the letters H.S.E, (hic situs est- he is buried here). This tombstone ends with the letters S.E (situs est – he is buried). A space has been left for the H in the hope that one day the body would be found and laid to rest.
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Discussion

This section shows us how much the characters of Alcyone and Ceyx are devoted to one another, but it also begins to foreshadow what will happen to Ceyx. Ovid's use of direct speech brings his characters to life, and also introduces us to the mixing of genres he is exploring in this episode. The journey of a beloved is a theme more common in elegiac poetry rather than epic – as a master of both styles Ovid is able to blend the two together dramatically.

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 1-4:

- What did Ceyx tell Alcyone? When did he do this? How is Alcyone described? Who is Ovid (the poet) talking to here when he says 'te'?
- Which part of Alcyone's body is mentioned? How is it described? What does it receive? When does it receive this?
- What covered her face? What was it exactly like?
- Which part of her is mentioned now? What happened to them? What made them wet?

lines 5-6:

- How many times did she try to speak? What else did she do three times?
- What did her sobs interrupt?

lines 7-10:

- What does she call her husband?
- What is she worried might have changed her husband's mind?
- What question does she ask about his care for her? What did this care used to be?

- What does she ask if he can do? Where would Alcyone be? How does she imagine he would feel?
- What does she think might be pleasing to him now?
- How does she think she might be dearer to him now?

lines 11-15:

- Where does she think his journey might be? What does she say she will do? What does she say she will not do? What does she say about her cares?
- What two things terrify her?
- What has she seen recently? Where?
- What has she read often? What were they on?

Questions on Content and Style

- (lines 1-2) *consilii...Alcyone*:
 - What is the plan which is mentioned in these lines?
 - Who does the word *fidissima* describe?
 - Who is speaking and to whom in these lines?
- (lines 2-4) *cui...profusis*: how does Ovid, through his choice of vocabulary and style of writing, make this a dramatic description of Alcyone?
- (line 5-6) *ter...querellas*: how does Ovid, through his style of writing, show Alcyone's desperation?
- (lines 7-10) *quae...absens*: how does Alcyone attempt to persuade Ceyx to stay through her words and the way in which she says them?
- (lines 11-15) *at puto...legi*:
 - Where is Ceyx going and how will he get there?
 - How does Alcyone say she would feel if the journey was over land?
 - What terrifies her?
 - What has she seen and why would this terrify her?
 - What has she read and why would this terrify her?
 - How does Alcyone emphasise her fears in these lines?
- Think about the whole of Section A. How does Ovid, through his style of writing, show us Alcyone's love for Ceyx?