We classicists, it could be said, thrive on errors. That is a paradox which contains a good deal of truth. If it had not been for the errors committed by ancient scribes copying our manuscripts, there obviously would not have been any textual criticism; as editors we have every reason to be grateful for these errors which help us to determine the relationships of the manuscripts and which supply materials for our powers of emendation.

Furthermore, much of our work (like that of our colleagues in other disciplines) consists in the correction of errors committed by our predecessors: had they found the whole truth and nothing but the truth, our job would soon have terminated. But as we all know, research is a continual discussion; each good contribution corrects or completes a previous one and brings us a little closer to the final truth which we shall never reach. The Hegelian scheme of thesis: antithesis: synthesis is far too simplistic to account for the devious ways of scholarship toward truth, but somehow or other we are always coming a little closer to our goal. Each new piece of evident truth will be built into our tower of Babel, and future generations of scholars will build upon it; but its discoverer will sooner or later be forgotten.1

Errors and their authors will usually fall into oblivion even sooner. Usually, but not always. The mistakes of a great spirit are often more fruitful to scholarship than the corrections of a small intellect; and generally it must be held that he who corrects an error is not at all necessarily a better scholar than its perpetrator: not infrequently, indeed, the old simile of dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants is apposite. When we come upon errors in works of our predecessors, it is desirable simply to correct them and carry on without more ado.

But even so, we now and again feel an irrational thrill of excitement and pleasure when discovering mistakes, the more so the greater the error and the more famous the culpable party. I shall in this causerie mention a few of these, which it afforded me pleasure to find. Perhaps I shall find somebody to share my Schadenfreude.

Readers versed in Latin morphology cannot withhold a smile if a scholar in his Latin preface thanks someone who *interpretavit* something for him2 and

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1. This is stated with much eloquence by U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Die Ilias und Homer* (1916) p. 376.

2. *Didascalia Apostolorum*, ed. by E. Tidner (Berlin 1963) p. VII. Apart from Mr. Tidner's Latin, active forms of the verb *interpretor* occur in the *Itala* and other Late Latin texts (see *ThLL* 7:1,12258,3 sqq.).
if another is grateful to somebody who adiuavit him. But it is still more diverting to discover in a preface to a volume of our indispensable *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* that quaternio is regarded as feminine rather than masculine; if a contributor to the *Thesaurus* can be guilty of such a slip, we are all excused.

Whereas an error in a preface to the *Thesaurus* may be mentioned in this piece of gaya ciencia, the correction of errors in its articles should be confined to more serious papers. Suffice it to mention here that there are plenty, particularly in the first volumes. Eduard Fraenkel once told me that when he was engaged on the *Thesaurus* (about 1915; his article on fides has remained famous) the collaborators in their leisure time took one each of the older volumes and vied to see who could find the greatest number of serious errors in half an hour: ‘Das war so ein Gesellschaftsspiel, sehen Sie’, said Fraenkel smiling. Some of the most shocking errors have become famous, and each new generation of *Thesaurus* contributors hears about them as warning examples of how not to write an article. One such ‘winged mistake’ is the listing of Valerius Flaccus, *Argon*. 8,178 contenti vellere capto under the heading of contentus with an infinitive; another the misunderstanding of Moretum 78 (in a description of different vegetables in a garden) in *latus demissa cucurbita ventrem* ‘a gourd expanded into a big paunch’; this passage is listed under demitto in the sense of *devoro*.6

When we say ‘I have met him a hundred times’, we mean that we have met him very often. That the Romans in the same way used not only centum and mille but also sescenti, most of us learned in an introductory course in Latin, but some colleagues have never done so. In Fohlen’s edition of Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* in the Budé series (Paris 1931) p. XIV we read: ‘L’accord des manuscrits... est établi par un grand nombre de fautes communes (six cents à peu près)...’, and we ask ourselves why anybody has spent his time counting 600 errors, when a couple would have been enough to establish a stemma. In fact, nobody has been so stupid as to count them: Fohlen is here merely translating the preface of Pohlenz’ edition of the same text in the *Bibliotheca Teubneriana* p. XVIII, and Pohlenz uses ‘sescentos errores’ in the aforementioned classical way.

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3. V. C. Lindström, *Commentarii Plautini* (Uppsala 1907) p. VI.

4. Dittmann in *ThLL* 5:1. In the same preface we read: *secuti sunt temporum...* – Quandique iounus dormitit Homerus: even H. Diels made a similar blunder in his preface to the *Doxographi Graeci*, which was discovered by Usener; see *Bursians Jahresbericht* 215 (1927) p. 163.

5. Gudeman in *ThLL* 4,680,23.

6. Kieckers in *ThLL* 5:1,491,49. – Yet another curious error in our *Thesaurus*: towards the end of his 106th letter Seneca writes non vitae, sed scholae discimus; of course, we usually change the word order to make the quotation more edifying, and in papers on education, on portals of schools, etc. we read non scholae, sed vitae discimus; it is, however, surprising that this variant is ascribed to Seneca in *ThLL* 5:1,133,72. – Hereby I do not want to associate myself with Housman’s harsh criticism of the *Thesaurus*: he is often witty and usually right (e.g. on Lucan 3,188 concerning the name *Athamas*), but in its onesidedness his criticism is unfair; see Helm, *Lustrum* 1 (1956) p. 163 sq.
But why criticize only my own colleagues? Outside the ranks of classicists it is, of course, even easier to find people who cannot handle the Latin language. The best comprehensive work we have on historical French syntax is E. Gamillscheg’s *Historische Französische Syntax* (Tübingen 1957). On p. 582 Gamillscheg quotes the following passage from Cicero: *Tusculanum et Pompefanum valde me delectant; nisi quod me aere alieno obruerunt*, and translates the *nisi*-clause as follows: ‘nur haben sie mich durch eine fremde Luft überfallen’. The use of *aes alienum* in the sense of ‘debt’ is perhaps not as well known as might be expected.7

There are pitfalls in other languages too. We read in G. Leff’s well-known survey *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages* (Manchester 1967) Vol. 2 p. 476: ‘A number (sc. of heretics) were captured at Schieterhaufen, as well as 16 at Krems, 11 at St. Pölten and 2 in Vienna’. I do not know of any town *Schieterhausen* either in Germany or in Austria (nor *Schieterhausen*, as it is emended in the Index), but still it sounds familiar. Sure enough, in the work referred to by Mr. Leff as a source, H. Haupt, *Waldenserthum und Inquisition* (1890) p. 21, we find the place-names *Krems, St. Pölten* and *Vienna*, and it is also mentioned that some heretics were brought to the *Scheiterhaufen*, i.e. the autodafe, stake. The German custom of writing every noun with an initial capital holds pitfalls for an English scholar.

It may be an amusing game (in Fraenkel’s words) to pinpoint errors, but it seems to me still more diverting to be able to follow the devious ways of thought of one’s colleagues, till one comes to the point where the swerve from truth started.

In A. Blaise’s *Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs chrétiens* (1954) s.v. *insequor* No. 2 = *exsequor* ‘accomplir, effectuer’ we find two references: one to Aug. *Civ.* 4,28,6 and another to Oros. *Hist.* 1,14,2. The reference to Orosius is correct, but not the one to St. Augustine; even if we should read all of St. Augustine’s works, we would not find any instance of *insequor* in the sense of *exsequor*. What is hidden behind ‘Aug. *Civ.* 4,28,6’? The main work on the language of Orosius is J. Svennung, *Orosiana* (Uppsala 1922), and here we find our Orosius passage listed at p. 145. But we find more: Svennung compares this passage from Orosius with one from Livy where *exsequor* (not *insequor*) is used in a context similar to the one in which Orosius uses *insequor*. This passage in Livy is 4,28,6! Apparently Mr. Blaise had jotted down in his notes after the reference to Orosius also ‘Livy. 4,28,6’; but when rearranging his notes for publication as a dictionary, he read ‘*Civ.*’ instead of ‘Livy,’ and then added ‘Aug.’ as the author of ‘*Civ.*’, without ever checking the reference.

In C.-G. Undhagen’s edition of *Birgerus Gregorii Officium Sancte Birgitte*

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7. The example is taken from Cic. *Att.* 2,1,11, but it is not correctly quoted; the text runs: *... nisi quod me, illum ipsum vindicem aercs alieni, aere non Corinthio sed hoc circumforaneo obruerunt.*
at p. 177 we read in the critical apparatus to line 9 *suprema cella gloria*: ‘cfr. Nicet. adv. Marc. 3,24 p. 422,11’ and a reference to ThLL 6:2,2083, 51 sqq. Since we do not know of any Nicetas as the author of a work *adversus Marcionem*, we are astonished and go to the source, i.e. the *Thesaurus*. On the quoted page at lines 60 sqq. we find that first a reference to Tertullian is given, then in brackets *Nicet. fid. 7* . . . , then at line 63 other references to Tertullian: *adv. Marc. . . .*. Mr. Undhagen has obviously when perusing the *Thesaurus* for parallels just skipped line 62 and so joined *Nicet.* from the end of line 61 to *adv. Marc.* from the beginning of line 63, without checking the references or stopping to ask if Nicetas ever published a work *adversus Marcionem*.

Of course, ancient scholars and scribes were equally liable to make mistakes, and it is our, the classicists’, task to ferret them out, as was mentioned at the outset of this *chronique scandaleuse*. A treasure house for strange errors are the glosses. W. M. Lindsay has in some of his works drawn our attention to several of them. Here is yet another. In the *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum* vol. 5 p. 574,1 we read: *ocinum: consuetudo*, and in his *Thesaurus Glossarum ementatarum* vol. 2 p. 14 Goetz suggested that a Greek word might have been distorted to *ocinum*. No, *ocinum* is a misspelling for *ocimum*, and the source of the gloss is Charisius’ grammar; here it says at p. 91,19 in Barwick’s edition: *Ocimum consuetudo neutraliter dicit*; of course, *consuetudo* is the subject in the sentence and Charisius deals only with the gender of *ocimum*, but a poor monk thought that *consuetudo* was a translation of *ocimum*, and so this strange gloss has found its way into a standard work like the *Corpus Glossariorum Latinorum*. But with the correction of such errors we may already have arrived at a topic too serious for this causerie.
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