

VIRGIL, *ECLOGUES* 4.28

at simul heroum laudes et facta parentis  
 iam legere et quae sit poteris cognoscere uirtus,  
*molli paulatim flavescet campus arista*  
 incultisque rubens pendebit sentibus uua  
 et durae quercus sudabunt roscida mella.

28

Two recent articles have drawn attention to the problem of *Eclogues* 4.28, namely, that although the next two lines describe miraculous occurrences (in the natural order grapes do not hang reddening on brambles or oaks exude honey), nevertheless in 28 we are told that ‘the field (or ‘plain’) will gradually grow yellow with pliant ears of grain’, scarcely a story at all (‘Waves of grain grow amber. Details at eleven.’). Both the articles make interesting suggestions, one of which has a chance of being right, but neither, in our view, carries irrefragable conviction, which leads us to suggest a different approach.

Jenny Strauss Clay suggests that we interpret *campus* as the Campus Martius and that editors spell it with a capital C.<sup>1</sup> She finds the required miracle in the reversion of this urban exercise ground to agricultural use, and she cites the tradition (Livy 2.5, Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 5.13.2, Plut. *Publ.* 8.1) that the place had been under cultivation in the regal period but that because the wheat grown there was sacred to Mars it could not be consumed. Virgil, she says, may be suggesting that this ban has been revoked.

The difficulty with this idea is that in the absence of a writing system that distinguishes between upper- and lower-case letters, Virgil’s readers would get no help from the word itself to send their thoughts toward a location in Rome, and context would have to do the work. That context seems not to encourage, but rather to discourage, thoughts of Rome. It is true that Pollio’s consulship is important (3, 11–12) and so is Rome’s criminal past (13). But the rest of the poem describes phenomena that are not peculiar to Rome or even to Italy: earth’s miraculous fecundity (18–20); the disappearance of lions, snakes and poisonous plants and the ubiquitous springing up of the rare Assyrian *amomum* (22–5); the stubborn lingering on of seafaring, walled cities and agriculture and the final disappearance of these; the arrival of wool dyed by the sheep themselves (31–45); the celestial and terrestrial welcome extended to the young man (50–2): these, like the grapes and honey of 29 and 30, are all universal, not local. If Virgil meant his readers to understand *campus* as the Campus Martius, he has given them no help and quite a bit of hindrance. One of the regular meanings of *campus*, after all, is ‘agricultural land’.<sup>2</sup> When the word means Campus Martius (see *OLD* s.v. 2), the context includes a reference to elections (e.g. Hor. *Carm.* 3.1.11), military drill or recreation (e.g. Hor. *Carm.* 1.8.4, 1.9.17) or is plainly urban in its setting (e.g. Livy 3.69.8). We conclude that upper-case C is unlikely to be the solution to our difficulty.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J.S. Clay, ‘Vergil *Eclogue* 4.28: where’s the miracle?’, *Vergilius* 55 (2009), 13–16. The suggestion was anticipated by L. Herrmann, ‘Paulatim flavescet campus’, *LEC* 14 (1946), 64.

<sup>2</sup> See *TLL* 3.213.28 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Clay further objects to the usual construal that the description in 28 of a spontaneous production of grain does away with the need for cultivation pointlessly and inconsistently anticipates the cessation of agriculture described 39–41. That is quite true, but 29 and 30, where viticulture

A.J. Woodman begins by citing Clausen, whose defence of the transmitted text recommends supplying in 28 ‘uncultivated’ from 29.<sup>4</sup> Woodman rightly regards this as ‘awkward’. He also finds *incultis* redundant in 29 (since no one cultivates brambles). Not being afraid of the sight of a little blood he proposes reassigning words from 28 to 29 and vice versa to produce the following:

*incultus molli flauescet campus arista  
paulatimque rubens pendebit sentibus uua.*

This means that lack of cultivation is explicitly mentioned in the text where it is needed and left unmentioned where it is not. The corruption is certainly not too great to be postulated.<sup>5</sup> A small problem here is that on Woodman’s view *paulatim* apparently goes with *pendebit*, yet the idea of grapes hanging from brambles *gradually* seems difficult, and we do not find it plausible to say that this means the *gradual achievement* of this state of affairs. Sense is improved if the adverb is taken exclusively with *rubens*: ‘the gradually reddening grape will hang from brambles’. So this could be right. Yet since the dislocation is after all rather hard to explain, a different approach might be welcome.

Of 28 as transmitted we might ask ourselves which words seem guaranteed by the general sense. Any word not thus guaranteed may be the locus of our difficulty. We have no grounds for attacking *molli ... arista* or *paulatim* or *flauescet* since they are exactly what the sense requires: *ears of grain* are *pliant*, and when they *grow yellow*, as they do, they do so *gradually*.<sup>6</sup> What is needed is for this usual phenomenon to occur in an unusual spot. That, after all, is what happens in the next two lines: grapes hang from brambles, and honey is exuded from oak trees. The word to be queried is *campus*. We need a word indicating a place unsuitable for farming,<sup>7</sup> ‘marsh’, ‘stony ground’, ‘rocky upland’ or the like. We might consider *saltus*, ‘forest pasture, woodland pasture’. The word occurs several times in Virgil (*Ecl.* 6.56, 10.9, *G.* 1.140, 2.471, 3.40, 3.143, 4.53, *Aen.* 4.72, 7.797<sup>8</sup>), Catullus

and bee-keeping are made unnecessary, do the same thing. Virgil, it seems, is unconcerned about anticipating his own climax.

<sup>4</sup> A.J. Woodman, ‘Virgil, *Eclogues* 4.28–9’, *CQ* 60 (2010), 257–8, citing W. Clausen, *Virgil: Eclogues* (Oxford, 1994), 136.

<sup>5</sup> Woodman (n. 4), 258 n. 3 cites E. Courtney, *BICS* 28 (1981), 22 for a similar proposal by Peerlkamp at *Aen.* 7.178. Courtney also cites a parallel mistake by P in Verg. *G.* 2.145–6 (misprinted as 245–6).

<sup>6</sup> That is, we take *paulatim* to mean ‘gradually over the weeks of the growing season’, not ‘gradually over the course of years’.

<sup>7</sup> Virgil uses *campus* to mean several different things, but once we set to one side such clearly marked uses as the plain of the sea (*camposque liquentis*, *Aen.* 6.724, *campos salis*, *Aen.* 10.214), the broad surface of a sea-washed rock (*Aen.* 5.128) and the Campus Martius (*Aen.* 6.873), the remaining examples denote land that is suitable for growing crops (e.g. *G.* 1.72, 77, 126, 134) or vines (e.g. *G.* 2.274), for pasturing animals (e.g. *G.* 1.482), or as the place where bees gather the makings of honey (e.g. *G.* 4.11). Even where the context is military, *campus* with an adjective (e.g. *Iliacis ... campis*, *Aen.* 1.97) denotes a city’s surrounding *χώρα*, the land on which it depends for its food. Explicit on this point is *Aen.* 12.896–8, where from the plain (*campus*) Turnus picks up a boundary stone that had divided one *ager* or *aruum* from another. Virgil comments expressly when a *campus* has nothing growing on it (*G.* 3.353). We note also that at Columella 2.9.1 *campus*, not *ager* or *aruum*, is used as the object of *obserere*. So a *campus* is a place where one *expects* things to grow.

<sup>8</sup> Since this passage represents the Rutulians as farming *saltus* among other places, it might be regarded as evidence against our suggestion. In fact it is evidence in its favour. The places these

(34.11), Horace (*Carm.* 2.3.17, 3.4.15) and Ovid (*Her.* 5.17, *Met.* 2.498), often of uplands that are the haunts of wild animals (e.g. *G.* 1.140, 2.471) or of narrow passes or ravines (e.g. *Ecl.* 6.56). A particularly pertinent instance is *G.* 3.40–1, *interea Dryadum siluas saltusque sequamur intactos*. Here *saltus* are clearly not under cultivation, and *intactos* (generic, not particularizing) suggests that one would not expect them to be. If we adopt *saltus* for *campus* in our passage, it would indeed suggest the miraculous.

*Saltus* and *campus* have three of their six letters in common, but more important than visual similarity is the tendency of scribes to banalize, to replace what is surprising with what is not. A *campus*, not a *saltus*, is where we expect to find grain, and a scribe may have unconsciously replaced the one with the other.<sup>9</sup> The text of Virgil is attested by good manuscripts of the fourth and fifth century, and their witness rarely needs to be corrected from other sources or by conjecture. But, to go no further than the *Eclogues*, the true reading has vanished from all the manuscripts at 4.62, where Quintilian implies the correct reading *qui non risere parenti* (though his manuscripts likewise corrupt the line to *cui non risere parentes*). Quintilian, Servius and Macrobius also know true readings, lost to the tradition, at *Ecl.* 1.12, 2.12, 3.38 and 3.77, and at 8.107 the true reading was recovered by a Renaissance conjecture. Lastly, one of us has recently given reasons for thinking that all is not well at 4.53–4.<sup>10</sup> Editors are rightly cautious about admitting conjectures to the text of Virgil. But in this case a pair of daggers around *campus* – and our *saltus* below the Plimsoll line – would seem to be the path of editorial prudence.<sup>11</sup>

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hardy rustics farm include *Rutuli colles* and the *Circaeum iugum*, and according to 11.318–19 *uomere duros | exercent collis atque horum asperrima pascunt*. Their raising crops in such places is precisely a remarkable feat.

<sup>9</sup> A similar kind of mistake, likewise owing more to tricks of the mind than of the eye, is the common phenomenon of ‘polar error’, in which the scribe sees ‘big’ but writes ‘small’ or sees *minus* but writes *magis*. On this see M. Davies, *Sophocles, Trachiniae* (Oxford, 1991) on line 677, and the literature cited there.

<sup>10</sup> See D. Kovacs, ‘Virgil, *Eclogue* 4.53–4: enough of what?’ *CQ* 61 (2011), 314–15.

<sup>11</sup> We would like to thank Nick Lane, Tony Woodman, *CQ*’s anonymous referee and its editor Bruce Gibson for helpful suggestions.