

NOTE ON *CULEX* 292

Those scholars who deny that the poems of the *Appendix Vergiliana* belong to the early career of Vergil have often sought to strengthen their case by claiming that certain passages of these works appear to have been inspired by Vergil's undisputed compositions.¹ Such a passage is *Culex* 289–93; in these lines the poet concludes the episode of Orpheus and Eurydice by contrasting the conduct of the two lovers:

illa quidem nimium manes experta severos
praeceptum signabat iter nec rettulit intus
lumina nec divae corruptit munera lingua;
sed tu crudelis, crudelis tu magis, Orpheu,
oscula cara petens rupisti iussa deorum.

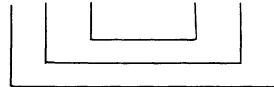
F. Leo was the first to note the difficulty of making any sense of the phrase *crudelis tu magis*, since no appropriate object of comparison presents itself: “negari non potest *magis* ineptum esse, nam comparari actio Orphei non potuit nisi cum Eurydica.”² His conclusion was that the words can only be an unconscious reminiscence of *Eclogue* 8.47–50:

saevus Amor docuit natorum sanguine matrem
commaculare manus; crudelis tu quoque, mater:
crudelis mater magis, an puer improbus ille?
improbus ille puer; crudelis tu quoque mater,

where the comparison is clearly between cruel Medea and savage *Amor* who drove her to commit her crime. This apparent proof of the priority of the *Eclogues* to the *Culex* has won widespread approval and has frequently reappeared in studies of the question of authenticity made subsequent to Leo's edition.³

Whatever the truth of the vexed question of authenticity, the argument presented above has no bearing on the matter since, in fact, *Culex* 292 makes excellent sense in its own right. Scholars have, in the past, made two assumptions: that *magis* (a) has a comparative force and (b) must be attached to *crudelis*.⁴ However, there are instances in Latin literature where *magis* has an *adversative* force (=rather), when it modifies a preceding negative statement, as *Eclogue* 1. 11: “non equidem invideo; miror magis.”⁵ Moreover, the chiasmic structure of *Culex* 293 would suggest that *magis* is to be attached not to *crudelis* but to *sed*:

sed tu crudelis crudelis tu magis Orpheu



Thus its function is to strengthen *sed* and, in turn, to lay greater emphasis on the notion that it was the conduct of Orpheus, and not of Eurydice, which caused the latter's misfortune: “*She, indeed*, having found by experience that the shades were exceedingly severe, was marking out the prescribed path and did not draw back her gaze within nor bring to nought by speech the gifts of the goddess; *but rather you*, cruel one, cruel you, Orpheus, seeking her dear kisses, did break the commands of the gods.” The author of the *Culex* admittedly lacked many of the refinements of artistic expression, but he did at any rate know enough of his own language to avoid writing nonsense.

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1. For a general criticism of this method of tackling the problem of priority, see K. Mras, “De *Culicis* auctore,” *Studi in onore di Luigi Castiglioni* (Florence, 1960), pp. 623–26.

2. “*Culex*”: *Carmen Vergilio ascriptum* (Berlin, 1891), *ad loc.* The solution of F. Skutsch, *Aus Vergils Frühzeit* (Leipzig, 1901), p. 128, is that the comparison is between Orpheus and the *manes*. Eurydice found them *severos*, but Orpheus proves to be *magis crudelis*. This is technically possible but extremely awkward.

3. More recent instances include E. Löfstedt, “Reminiscence and Imitation,” *Eranos*, XLVII (1949), 148–64; E.

Fraenkel, “The *Culex*,” *JRS*, XLII (1952), 1–9; and E. Holzer, *Vergleichende Interpretationen zum “Culex”* (Diss., Munich, 1952), pp. 3–4.

4. There have been exceptions. For instance, C. Plésent, *Le “Culex”: Poème pseudo-Virgilien. Edition critique* (Paris, 1910), *ad loc.*, recognizes that the force of *magis* is adversative, but in insisting that it be attached to *crudelis* fails to make adequate sense of the line.

5. See A. Ernout and F. Thomas, *Syntaxe latine* (Paris, 1953), p. 450, and C. J. Fordyce, *Catullus* (Oxford, 1961), on 73.4.