

TRANSACTIONS

OF THE

AMERICAN PHILOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

1958

I. The Cradle of Flowers (*Ecl.* 4.23)

GEORGE E. DUCKWORTH

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

The central core of the famous fourth *Eclogue*, a passage of 28 verses (18–45), describes the gradual coming of the Golden Age as the *puer* advances from babyhood (18–25) to adolescence (26–36) and then to manhood (37–45). The eight verses which describe the first stage appear in our editions as follows:

- 18 at tibi prima, puer, nullo munuscula cultu
errantis hederas passim cum baccare tellus
20 mixtaque ridenti colocasia fundet acantho.
ipsae lacte domum referent distenta capellae
ubera, nec magnos metuent armenta leones;
ipsa tibi blandos fundent cunabula flores.
occidet et serpens, et fallax herba veneni
25 occidet; Assyrium vulgo nascetur amomum.

We have here the gifts of flowers which nature bestows upon the child (18–20), the she-goats returning home and the lions no longer feared by the herds (21–2), the *cunabula* itself producing flowers (23), the disappearance of serpent and poisonous herb (24–25a), and Assyrian *amomum* blooming everywhere (25b). As we analyze the passage in its present form, we have an alternation between plant life and animal life in the form a–b–a–b–a.

Some twenty years ago several scholars—Büchner, Mountford, Snell, Rüstow—suggested independently that verse 23 was

misplaced and belonged after verse 20.¹ The arguments in favor of the transposition are the following: (1) verse 23 with the mention of the cradle is awkwardly placed between the lions and the snake; (2) the new Golden Age is manifested in two ways: the beneficence of nature, and the improvement in nature, and the cradle belongs to the first class of benefits mentioned in 18–20²; (3) the present position of 23 can be explained with ease; the eye of the copyist skipped over the verse beginning *ipsa tibi blandos* to the *ipsae lacte domum* of the next line; realizing his omission, he either wrote the verse in the margin from which it was later transferred to its present place,³ or he copied it in the text after he had already written verses 21–2 (*ipsae lacte domum . . . armenta leones*).

With the transposition the passages read as follows:

- 18 at tibi prima, puer, nullo munuscula cultu
errantis hederas passim cum baccare tellus
- 20 mixtaque ridenti colocasia fundet acantho;
- 23 ipsa tibi blandos fundent cunabula flores.
- 21 ipsae lacte domum referent distenta capellae
- 22 ubera, nec magnos metuent armenta leones;
- 24 occidet et serpens, et fallax herba veneni
- 25 occidet; Assyrium vulgo nascetur amomum.

We have thus two units of four lines each, the first (18–20, 23) on nature's gifts to the child, the second (21–2, 24–5) on the gradual changes of nature for the better. This is more than a mechanical grouping of flowers in the first half and animals in the second (in which case the *amomum* of 25 could be used as a counter-argument). Mountford says:

But the suggested transposition does more than eject an intruder and avoid a very awkward sequence of ideas. It has the positive advantage

¹ K. Büchner, *Ecl.* 4. 23 (privately printed, Weihnachten 1937); J. F. Mountford, "Virgil, *Ecl.* 4. 23," *CR* 52 (1938) 54 f.; B. Snell, "Die 16. Epode von Horaz und Vergils 4. Ekloge," *Hermes* 73 (1938) 239 f.; A. Rüstow, "Die römische Revolution und Kaiser Augustus," *Revue de la faculté des sciences économiques de l'université d'Istanbul* 5 (1943–4) 230, note 4. See also K. Büchner-J. B. Hofmann, *Lateinische Literatur und Sprache in der Forschung seit 1937* (Bern 1951) 131, note 2; K. Büchner, *P. Vergilius Maro, der Dichter der Römer* (Stuttgart 1956) cols. 179 f.

² See Mountford (above, note 1) 54; cf. J. Conington-H. Nettleship, *The Works of Virgil* 1 (5th ed. rev. F. Haverfield, London 1898) on 18: the infancy of the child "is signaled by the production of natural gifts and the removal of natural evils."

³ Cf. Snell (above, note 1) 240.

of bringing together things which are in harmony and ought to be together. It also provides a suitable climax (to which the repetition *fundet, fundent* contributes) for the first half of the passage; not only will the earth be lavish, but the very cradle too.⁴

The transposition is attractive for another reason. Vergil in his famous praise of Italy in *Georgics* 2 (136–76) attributes to his native land the characteristics of the Golden Age; cf. 149 ff.:

- hic ver adsiduum atque alienis mensibus aestas:
 150 bis gravidae pecudes, bis pomis utilis arbos.
 at rabidae tigres absunt et saeva leonum
 semina, nec miseros fallunt aconita legentis,
 nec rapit immensos orbis per humum neque tanto
 154 squameus in spiram tractu se colligit anguis.

With verse 23 of the fourth *Eclogue* placed before 21, as mentioned above, we have in the second half of the passage under discussion the same approximate sequence: flocks and herds, lions, serpent and poison are listed in order. The close association of these same themes in *Georg.* 2.150–4 supports the unity of *Ecl.* 4.21–2 and 24–5.

The transposition of verse 23 actually is not new. It was suggested more than 85 years ago⁵ but was rejected or ignored by most later editors of Vergil.⁶ Now that the transposition has again been brought into favor by Büchner, Mountford, and others, several scholars in recent years have opposed the change,⁷ and others have expressed their approval.⁸

But verse 23 remains difficult; whether we read it in its present position, or after 20, what does it mean? The idea of a cradle blossoming with flowers has been considered a strange and almost

⁴ Mountford (above, note 1) 54 f.

⁵ By H. Klouček, *Jahresbericht der K. K. Gymnasien zu Leitmeritz*, 1873.

⁶ O. Ribbeck, *P. Vergili Maronis Bucolica et Georgica*² (Leipzig 1894) *ad loc.*, notes in his critical apparatus: 23 post 20 poni voluit Klouček progr. Leitmeritano 1873, non inepte.

⁷ Cf. K. Barwick, "Zur Interpretation und Chronologie der 4. Eclogie des Vergil und der 16. und 7. Epode des Horaz," *Philologus* 96 (1944) 28 ff.; F. Dornseiff, *Ver schmähtes zu Vergil, Horaz und Properz* (Berlin 1951 [= *Ber. über die Verhandl. der sächs. Akad. der Wiss. zu Leipzig, Philol.-hist. Kl.* 97, Heft 6]) 55 f.; W. Hartke, *Römische Kinderkaiser: eine Strukturanalyse römischen Denkens und Daseins* (Berlin 1951) 264 ff.; G. Jachmann, "Die vierte Ekloge Vergils," *Ann. Scuola Norm. Pisa* 21 (1952) 16 f.; C. Becker, "Virgils Eklogenbuch," *Hermes* 83 (1955) 332, note 1.

⁸ Cf. L. Herrmann, *Virgile, Bucoliques* (Bruxelles 1952) 33; W. Wimmel, "Über das Verhältnis der 4. Eclogie zur 16. Epode," *Hermes* 81 (1953) 317 f.

grotesque conception, and many commentators and translators fail to clarify the precise relation between the *cunabula* and the *flores*. When Fairclough translates: "unasked, thy cradle shall pour forth flowers for thy delight,"⁹ the cradle itself is clearly thought of as blooming with flowers; this is true also of Rieu's version: "Your very cradle will adorn itself with blossoms to caress you."¹⁰ Conington's interpretation, however, is rather different: "the ground on which thou liest will of its own accord bring forth flowers to show its love."¹¹ This implies that *ipsa cunabula* means "ground," but, according to Rand, the cradle neither puts forth flowers nor is it to be identified with the ground; he says that flowers "spring up about the cradle of the child."¹²

The difficulties in the interpretation of the *cunabula* of 23 were pointed out by Campbell in a paper supporting Mountford's transposition of the verse,¹³ but all recent writers in their treatment of the passage have failed to mention Campbell's important contribution to the discussion. Campbell suggests reading *fundet*, not *fundent*; the first four lines of the passage are thus as follows:

- 18 at tibi prima, puer, nullo munuscula cultu
errantis hederas passim cum baccare tellus
- 20 mixtaque ridenti colocasia fundet acantho;
- 23 ipsa tibi blandos fundet cunabula flores.

This emendation changes materially both the construction and the sense of the transposed line; *ipsa* now refers to *tellus* (19) and balances *nullo cultu* (18), and *cunabula* is in apposition to *flores*: "the earth of its own accord will pour forth flowers as a cradle for you." We thus have in the final line of the first quatrain the culminating gift of beneficent Nature—a cradle of flowers—with *tibi* echoing the *tibi* of the first line.

With this reading the repetition *fundet, fundet* in the last two lines of the first quatrain balances *occidet, occidet* in the last two

⁹ H. R. Fairclough, *Virgil* (New York 1922) 1.31.

¹⁰ E. Rieu, *Virgil, The Pastoral Poems* (Harmondsworth 1949) 41.

¹¹ Conington (above, note 2) *ad loc.*

¹² E. K. Rand, *The Magical Art of Virgil* (Cambridge, Mass. 1931) 100 f. Cf. J. B. Mayor, W. W. Fowler, R. S. Conway, *Virgil's Messianic Eclogue* (London 1907) 20 f., where Conway refers to "the magical flowers beside the cradle," but in his translation (5) he writes: "Thy very cradle, blossoming for joy,/ Shall with soft buds caress thy baby face."

¹³ A. Y. Campbell, "Virgil, *Ecl.* 4. 23", *CR* 52 (1938) 55 f.

lines of the second.¹⁴ As for the existence of *fundent* in our MSS. and texts, if we assume that the verse was wrongly moved from its original position after 20, *ipsa* could then go only with *cunabula*; *fundet* had no subject and was changed to *fundent*, *ipsa cunabula* thus becoming the subject. The phrase in its original form, *tellus . . . ipsa . . . fundet*, is paralleled by *Georg.* 1.127 f.:

ipsaque tellus
omnia liberius nullo poscente ferebat,

and by *Georg.* 2.459 f.:

quibus *ipsa* procul discordibus armis
fundit humo facilem victum iustissima *tellus*.

In each passage Vergil is likewise describing a Golden Age, in the first the earlier age before Jupiter, in the second the New Golden Age of justice and peace in Italy.¹⁵ The similarity in the phraseology of these two passages to *Ecl.* 4.18–20, 23, is an added argument in favor of Campbell's emendation.

I am now convinced that the suggested transposition of 23 after 20 should be made and also that *fundet* should be read in 23 instead of *fundent*. The conception of the earth providing flowers as a cradle for the *puer* is far more natural and poetic than the curious idea of the child's cradle sprouting flowers. My main reason, however, for accepting the transposition and Campbell's emendation is the fact that we have ancient evidence for the existence of a text with this reading.

The ancient Lives of Vergil are a blend of fact and fancy. Much in the Donatus–Suetonius *Vita* undoubtedly came from reliable sources, from friends and contemporaries of Vergil, several of whom Suetonius quotes. But Suetonius, like earlier Greek and Roman biographers, wished to make his works interesting, and he introduced certain conventional topics which were expected by readers of biography.¹⁶ These topics included portents connected with the birth or death of famous men, the linking together of a man of one generation with a famous

¹⁴ Jachmann (above, note 7) 17, admits that the transposition improves the sequence of thought but criticizes the repetition *fundet, fundent*; Campbell's emendation removes the basis of his criticism.

¹⁵ See Rand (above, note 12) 264 ff.

¹⁶ Cf. D. R. Stuart, *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography* (Berkeley 1928) 145 ff., 175 ff., for the various topics which the Greek biographers felt should enter into their delineation of their subjects.

predecessor in the same field, aspersions on the moral character of the subject of the biography, and charges of plagiarism or the palming off of literary material wrongly acquired. Not all passages of this type need necessarily be rejected, but such material must be viewed with extreme caution before we accept it as biographical fact.

Thus we find, in the Donatus-Suetonius *Life of Vergil*, several prodigies connected with the poet's birth (3-5)¹⁷: his mother dreamed that she had given birth to a laurel branch; Vergil as an infant did not cry and had a sweet expression which foreshadowed his future destiny; a poplar branch, planted at the place of his birth, grew up rapidly and was honored as the tree of Vergil. Prodigies such as these (with the possible exception of the second, concerning the newborn baby, to be discussed below) are the conventional stuff of ancient biography.¹⁸ The statement that Vergil attained manhood on the very day that Lucretius, his great predecessor in epic poetry, died (6) is typical of the tendency to connect the lives of two great poets.¹⁹

Another fundamental doctrine of ancient biography was the conviction that the writings of an author expressed his individuality and his personal experience; from this belief developed the tendency to draw from a writer's words inferences concerning his life and personal activities. Suetonius derives information, rightly or wrongly, from Vergil's own writings. He quotes the tradition (found also in the *Vita* of Focas) that Vergil's father was a potter (*figulus*) but adds that he was also said to have increased his substance by buying forests and keeping bees (1). This last could well explain the familiarity with bees displayed in *Georgics* 4; but Vergil's dependence for technical knowledge upon Aristotle, Varro, and others is also a matter of record. It seems more likely that Suetonius made Vergil's father a beekeeper because of the content of *Georgics* 4. Suetonius mentions also

¹⁷ See C. Hardie (ed.), *Vitae Vergilianae antiquae* (Oxford 1954). The arabic numbers in the text refer to the sections of the Donatus-Suetonius *Life*.

¹⁸ For other examples similar to the dream of the laurel tree and the rapidly growing poplar branch, see D. R. Stuart, "On Vergil *Eclogue* 4.60-3," *CP* 16 (1921) 224 f. Another favorite prodigy was that of bees swarming about a poet in his infancy and nourishing him with honey; this appears in the *Vita* of Focas (lines 28 ff.).

¹⁹ Even if, with R. M. Geer, "Non-Suetonian Passages in the *Life of Vergil* formerly ascribed to Donatus," *TAPA* 57 (1926) 107-15, we consider Section 6 to be non-Suetonian, it illustrates the same biographical method which Donatus and other later writers, influenced by Suetonius, followed.

Vergil's plan for an early epic (19); did he know of any such plan from earlier sources, or did he derive the statement from *Ecl.* 6.3-5, where Vergil speaks of his desire to sing of "kings and battles"? If Suetonius' reference to *res Romanas* comes from Vergil's *reges et proelia*, as I consider highly probable, his words provide no separate testimony to confirm Vergil's plan for such an early epic; they merely prove that Suetonius interpreted the *recusatio* in *Ecl.* 6.3 ff. just as do many modern scholars.²⁰

Occasionally the material derived from Vergil's own writings falls also into the conventional biographical rubrics. The story of the tearless and serene countenance of the infant Vergil (4), mentioned above as a prodigy, is rather different from those usually associated with the births of famous men; it could have had its source in the famous and problematical conclusion of the fourth *Eclogue*, especially line 62. Suetonius says:

ferunt infantem ut sit editus neque vagisse et adeo miti vultu fuisse, ut haud dubiam spem prosperioris geniturae iam tum daret.

This implies that *Ecl.* 4.62, in the first and second centuries A.D., had the reading *qui non risere parentes*, "those who have not smiled at their parents," instead of *cui non risere parentes*, "those on whom their parents have not smiled"; the passage in the *Vita* thus supports the reading of Quintilian (*Inst. Orat.*, 9.3.8),²¹ and suggests even more strongly that two different texts of the *Eclogues* existed in antiquity.

We turn now to the *Vita* of Focas, which brings us back to the problem of *Ecl.* 4.23. Focas gives the same story about Vergil as an infant (23-7), but points up even more clearly its connection with the fourth *Eclogue*:

infantem vagisse negant. nam fronte serena
conspexit mundum, cui commoda tanta ferebat.
ipsa puerperiis adrisit laetior orbis:
terra ministravit flores et munere verno
herbida supposuit puero fulmenta virescens.

²⁰ E.g., T. Frank, *Vergil. A Biography* (New York 1922) 68 f.

²¹ See Stuart (above, note 18) 222 f. Others favor the reading *qui non risere parenti*, e.g., V. Pöschl, "Forschungsbericht über Vergil," *Anz. Altertumsw.*, Oesterr. Hum. Ges. 3 (1950) 72; for additional references, see G. E. Duckworth, "Recent Work on Vergil (1940-56)," *CW* 51 (1957-8) 125 f. and note 24, to which add P. Maas, *Textual Criticism* (Oxford 1958) 36 f. Büchner, *P. Vergilius Maro*, col. 183, argues for *cui non risere parentes*.

The first two lines reproduce the substance of Suetonius' statement; cf. *infantem vagisse negant* with *ferunt infantem . . . neque vagisse* and *fronte serena* with *miti vultu*, but the phrase of Focas, *conspexit mundum*, is an important addition and comes directly from *Ecl.* 4.50 (*aspice . . . mundum*); so, too, line 25 (cf. *adrisit*) suggests 4.62; and 26 f., in which the teeming earth supplies to the child *flores* and *herbida fulmenta*, are an obvious echo of *Ecl.* 4.18–20 and 23. Here we have an excellent illustration of the manner in which a passage of Vergil's poetry was applied to the poet himself and used, in this instance, as one of the traditional topics of biography.

This passage in the *Vita* of Focas is decisive for the transposition of verse 23. Focas speaks in 26–7 of the earth providing flowers and a grassy support (*herbida fulmenta* = cradle) for the child. This implies an ancient text read by Focas with *tellus* the subject of *fundet* in 23, the very reading suggested by Campbell—but such a reading is impossible unless 23 follows 20. Here we have, I believe, a strong argument from antiquity to support both the transposition of 23 after 20 and Campbell's emendation. We know from Quintilian that two different readings existed in antiquity for verse 62. It is probable that Quintilian's text also had the correct position of 23 (after 20) and that Suetonius and the later writers of the *Vitae* used this text.²² We should, therefore, no longer speak of a "cradle blossoming with flowers" but of the earth providing for the child of the fourth *Eclogue* a "cradle of flowers."

²² The text with 23 in its present position and the reading *fundet* also receives support in later antiquity; cf. Nonius, 312.4m, and the Greek translation of *Eclogue* 4 in A. Bolhuis, *Vergilius' Vierde Ecloga in de Oratio Constantini ad sanctorum coetum* (Ermelo 1950) 21.