

NOLA, VERGIL, AND PAULINUS

Vergil, G. 2. 224

talem diues arat Capua et uicina Vesaeuo
ora iugo et uacuis Clanius non aequus Acerris.

Gellius, in *N. A.* 6. 20, claims to have read 'in quodam commentario' that the original text had been not *ora* but *Nola*; 'postea Vergilium petisse a Nolanis, aquam uti duceret in propincum rus, Nolanos beneficium petittum non fecisse, poetam offensum nomen urbis eorum, quasi ex hominum memoria, sic ex carmine suo derasisse oramque pro Nola mutasse'.¹ It may be from this passage that by way of Donatus this story reached the expanded Servius: 'et hoc emendauit ipse, quia Nola posuerat; nam postea offensus a Nolanis, qui eidem aquam negauerant, "ora" pro "Nola" posuit'.²

Whether Gellius' source was Hyginus or Probus or *quiuus ex populo* I leave for others to determine;³ my concern is with the story's *raison d'être*. That it is true no one who is acquainted with the rubbish that ancient scholars wrote about the life and work of Vergil will suppose;⁴ but it is not difficult to see why someone wanted to read *Nola* here. If the two lines

talem diues arat Capua et uicina Vesaeuo
— ∪ iugo et uacuis Clanius non aequus Acerris

were thus preserved with a lacuna before *iugo*, scholars would confidently declare that the missing word was a proper name, counterbalancing *Vesaeuo* and standing in sequence with *Capua* and *Clanius*; a glance at the classical atlas would then show that the obvious supplement was *Nola*. We know that Vergil does not compose by rule of thumb; but it is not hard to imagine that an ancient scholar, slave to a *Systemzwang*, missed the proper name and devised a story of a well-known type⁵ to show that it was really there. But why this particular story?

Before answering this question, we may note that there is a doublet. At *Aen.* 7. 740

et quos maliferae despectant moenia Abellae

¹ Gellius is not concerned with the story's truth or falsity, but declares that the juxtaposed *ō*-sounds make *ora* 'melius suauiusque ad aures'. This reflects the doctrine found in Demetr. *eloc.* 72–4, the Towneley scholia on X 152, and Eustathius 1702. 19 on λ 596 (cf. D. H. *comp.* 20); one may argue that in Vergil the sequence suggests the richness of Campanian soil. Gellius cites the two Homeric passages, but then attempts to import this feature of the *μεγαλοπρεπής χαρακτήρ* (Demetr. loc. cit.) into Catullan lyric, arguing for *ebria acina* at 27.4; to Fordyce's refutation I add that the repeated elision of a long vowel in *ebrioso acino ebriosioris* admirably hits off the slur of a drunkard's speech.

² DS on G. 2.224; Hosius's reference in his Teubner Gellius to Philargyrius is illusory.

³ Cf. the literature quoted by Hosius, vol. i, p. xxxvi.

⁴ See in general G. P. Goold, *HSCP* 74 (1970), 101–68.

⁵ Goold, pp. 125–6; the grossest example is the alleged rewriting of Georgic 4 when Gallus fell, cf. W. B. Anderson, *CQ* 27 (1933), 36–45, 73, Goold, p. 137. So too in Euripides: G. Zuntz, *An Inquiry into the Transmission of the Plays of Euripides*, pp. 253–4, cited by Goold. The story at *Vita Persi* 57 that *sat.* 1. 121 originally read 'auriculas asini Mida rex habet' is plausible till one notices that *quis non* resumes verse 8.

all the manuscripts, plus those of Ti. Donatus, read *Bellae*, which also stands in Servius' lemma, with the comment: 'multi Nola uolunt intellegi, et dicunt iratum Vergilium nomen eius mutasse propter sibi negatum hospitium, et id aperte noluisse dicere, sed ostendere per periphrasin, nam illic Punica mala nascuntur: ut nunc "Bella" pro "Nola" posuerit. alii ita uolunt accipi ut sit synalipha et legatur "moenia Abellae"'; DS adds some matter concerning that town. We prefer *Abellae*, less because we have never heard of Bella or even because the corruption is so easy, than because *Abellae* gives point both to *maliferae*, for the Oscan name * Abellú seems to be cognate with 'apple',⁶ and to *despectant*, for Avella Vecchia stands 333 m above sea-level looking down on Nola in the plain below.⁷ The haplography MOENIABELLAE deceived a reader who did not know Campania but did know there was some story of Vergil's being at feud with Nola.

Arrogant refusal to share resources would be expected of the Nolans by any Roman who knew of their taste for a certain practice 'quod Nolanis capitalis luxus inussit'⁸ and which he invoked both as an insult and as a metaphor for contumelious or niggardly behaviour.⁹ But we have one unimpeachable account of their withholding water, in a poem of the year 407 by their future bishop Paulinus.¹⁰ In *carm.* 21, having described the building of his new church in honour of St. Felix, Paulinus relates at length (lines 643–821) how the *ordo populusque Abellanus*, by repairing a disused aqueduct, had provided sufficient water for the church with plenty to spare for the Nolans. The latter, by contrast, had refused Paulinus' request for water from their own supply on the grounds that there was not enough:

nam mihi, Nola, tui consortia iusta petenti
fontis, quo turbata metu quasi dura negabas
hospitium communis aquae? diuinaque iura
respicere oblita, humanis mea uota putabas
usibus, et mihi te, Felicem oblita, daturam
credebas, ac si tribuisses, mox tibi siccam
subducto patriam potu fore maesta gemebas,
idque etiam moto clamabas saepe tumultu,
nescia diuinis opibus promptos fore fontes,
sicut et experta es.

(758–67)

⁶ J. Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* i. 1, cf. Fordyce ad loc. and on verse 684 for such etymological epithets in Vergil. *Hernica saxa* (7. 684) shows knowledge of a word in Sabine or Marsic, closely related to Oscan; a poet learned enough to know (even if at second hand) the Punic etymology of *Karthago* (*Aen.* 1. 298), who loved Italy as his poetry shows he did, will surely have known at least a word or two of the once great language not yet dead that had made the second of his predecessor Ennius' three hearts (Gell. 17.17.1). Lucilius, writing perhaps no longer a time before Vergil's birth than the *Aeneid* was written after it, used an Oscan word, correctly

declined, in place of a Latin one with identical scansion (1318 M ap. Fest. 384. 30–2 L.).

⁷ H. Nissen, *Italische Landeskunde* II. ii. 755; Abella 'nostrae hinc sex milibus absita Nola/altiugos montes inter iacet' (Paulin. *carm.* 21. 712–13); by contrast 'campo Nola sedet' (Sil. 12. 162) at only 40 m (Nissen, p. 756).

⁸ Ausonius, *epigr.* 79. 5 Peiper; an old Oscan custom (Festus 204. 31–2 L.).

⁹ Housman, *Classical Papers*, pp. 733 and 1180.

¹⁰ For the date see P. Fabre, *Essai sur la chronologie de l'œuvre de saint Paulin de Nole*, p. 37. The parallel was noticed by Fordyce on *Aen.* 7. 740.

Although the similarity in language between Paulinus (*negabas hospitium*) and Servius (*negatum hospitium*) may suggest that Paulinus still possessed or remembered Donatus' or some other commentary,¹¹ no one will suppose that the incident itself is a mere literary figment like Horace's dove-protected slumbers on Monte Voltore.¹² Paulinus did ask the Nolans for water, and they did refuse.

Nor is it easy to blame them: Paulinus himself admits that their supply, before the Abellans repaired the aqueduct, was inadequate to their needs—

et tempore in ipso
quo totiens aquae¹³ possessor egere solebas
in multum referente deo quod sumpserat a te
fluxit abunda tuis aqua potibus atque lauacris.

(784–7)

—and if he had no better argument than 'Dominus providebit' he had no chance of convincing them. But was Paulinus the only person ever to ask for water and be turned down?

If the needs of the luxurious city and its fertile farms really did, in the summer months, exceed the supply from the Acqua di Serino,¹⁴ we may well believe that the Nolans had been reluctant to allot any water to newcomers who bought land in their territory.¹⁵ Their disappointed petitioners called meanness what to them was common prudence, and bestowed on them a reputation remembered by the reader whose schematic mind took offence at *ora* in the second *Georgic*: knowing the poet had a *secessus* in Campania,¹⁶ he invented a story to explain the absence of the name that he himself would have written. Someone else, faced with a *Bellae* that no one could interpret, and recalling that Vergil was supposed to have had a feud with Nola, concocted a similar explanation for what he lacked the wit to emend. Who these two readers were I cannot tell; but their existence will remind us that Romans were no less capable of writing stupidly on Vergil than Englishmen on Shakespeare.

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¹¹ It is not particularly probable that Servius' commentary had appeared by 407 (cf. A. D. E. Cameron, *JRS* 56 (1966), 30), still less that Paulinus had a copy; but it is more than likely that Servius took over *negatum hospitium* (cf. *negauerant* in DS on G. 2. 224) from Donatus, who need not be its coiner. Paulinus speaks of 'hospitium communis aquae' because both by law (J. 2.1.1) and by common consent (Cic. *off.* 1.52) water flowed for all, and was not to be denied save to the outlaw; see in general

W. Schulze, *Kl. Schr.*, pp. 189–210.

¹² See Fraenkel, *Horace*, p. 275 and n. 1.

¹³ Whether like Lucretius (6. 552, 1072; cf. Italian *acqua*) Paulinus permitted *aqu-* to fill a biceps or wrote the *tuae aquae* that Hartel gives him, with its hideous elision and its inappropriate suggestion of *dominium*, there are others more qualified to judge.

¹⁴ Nissen, pp. 751, 758.

¹⁵ Cf. Cic. *Att.* 13. 8 for outsiders' seeking properties in the *Nolanum*.

¹⁶ *Vit. Donat.* 45 Hardie.