

Eumolpus contra Caluos

I offer three notes on Eumolpus' *capillorum elegidarion* and its hendecasyllabic continuation (*Sat.* 109.9-10). Text and apparatus are taken from E. Courtney, *The Poems of Petronius* (Atlanta, 1991, 28-29).

1. To begin at the end, Eumolpus finishes his poetic effusion with a sophomoric pun (12-313):

ut mortem citius uenire credas,
scito iam capitis perisse partem.

As Courtney notes, *capitis* “punningly covers both the literal meaning and the metaphorical ‘existence’ (*TLL* s.v. 416.31)”. I think that there is more to it than that. What we have here is surely not a *double* but a *triple entendre*. Since Encolpius and Giton have had their heads shaved in order to impersonate slaves, *capitis* also refers to the rights of citizenship which they have given up (*OLD* s.v. *caput* 6.b, used by Petronius in 57.6). We might say that the two *calui* have undergone a very literal, though temporary, *deminutio capitis*.

2. This brings us to the interesting variant in the first line:

quod solum formae decus est, cecidere capilli.

1 solum *LO* : summum v

Despite poor manuscript support and editorial neglect, *summum*, taken as a pun, seems to me much preferable to *solum*: the hair is man's ‘highest’ beauty literally as well as figuratively. As we have seen, there is a silly pun in the last line: why not another in the first? If, as seems likely, *summum* is the conjecture of an anonymous florilegist, it is a good one.

3. The third problem is more complex. In lines 9-10, Eumolpus compares his victim to, among other things, a *horti tuber*:

at nunc leuior aere uel rotundo
horti tubere, quod creauit unda, . . .

10 imber *Jahn*, umor uel umbra *Busche*, *Rh. Mus.* 66, 1911, 456

Eumolpus' *tuber* has traditionally been considered a truffle, and that is certainly the usual meaning of the word. However, there are a number of problems with this interpretation. Truffles are not particularly smooth, as *leuior* seems to require, nor are they cultivated, as *horti* might be taken to imply, and *unda* is difficult any way we take it.

Following a suggestion in a footnote of R. Scarcia, (*Latina Siren*, Rome, 1964, 115-17 n 64), G. Sommariva has recently argued ("Rotundum Horti Tuber (Petr. *Satyr.* 109,10)", *A&R* 30, 1985, 45-52) that Eumolpus' *tuber* is a gourd ("zucca"). As Courtney notes, this "suits much about the passage and would allow the retention of *unda* (this on its own could only mean ground-water), but it is hard to refer *tuber* to this". Scarcia lays most emphasis on *horti*, which seems to require some cultivated vegetable, and on Gargilius Martialis' statement, *ueteres medici de cucurbita ita senserunt, ut eam aquam dicerent coagulata* (*Med.* 6), which is certainly the best defense of *unda* yet offered.

A third opinion is also worth mentioning. Sage and Gilleland gloss *tubere* in our passage with "mushroom", and Smith's note on the *terrae tuber* of 58.4 reads: "apparently the literal meaning of this is a toadstool or mushroom". This looks like an attempt to split the difference by staying within the fungi while specifying a fungus which is smoother and rounder than the truffle, presumably the standard pizza-topping *Agaricus campestris*. For some, the mushroom-interpretation also looks like an attempt to save *unda*. For instance, Sullivan, in his Penguin translation (1986 edition), translates "the round cap / Of a mushroom after rain". Arrowsmith's "like mushroom cap in pelting rain" is similar, but less satisfactory. If we agree with Courtney that *unda* "could only mean ground-water", that would rule out Arrowsmith's "pelting rain" and make Sullivan's "after rain" quite problematic.

It seems to me that *tuber* is indeed truffle, that K. Busche's *umbra* for *unda* is a necessary change, and that the *tertium comparationis* has been to some extent misconstrued, in two ways:

The first point to be made is that truffles, though not particularly smooth, are like hairless heads in that they have no leaf, root, or stem attached: the use of *coma* in the sense "foliage" (*OLD* s.v. *coma* 3.a) is pertinent here. If comparing a hairless man to a

truffle rather than a gourd or mushroom is more offensive, as possibly implying a misshapen skull, it still may be appropriate in our passage, since Eumolpus is, after all, mocking his victims. The example of Mr. Potatohead should suffice to show that a bald man may be compared to a lumpy tuber (in the English rather than the Latin sense) when satire is intended. If an English tuber provides a suitable metaphor for baldness, why not a Latin *tuber*? In any case, a head shaved on board a storm-tossed ship, even by a professional, would naturally be a bit rough, and not up to the standards of natural baldness.

The second point in which a truffle makes a more appropriate metaphor in our passage applies only to this dramatic context. One of the most striking things about truffles is that they are entirely subterranean. Encolpius and Giton have had their heads shaved in an attempt to escape notice by pretending to be what they are not. It seems to me then that it is not only their hairlessness but their hypocrisy that makes them resemble truffles. Petronius himself provides the best parallel for this metaphorical sense: *recte, uidebo te in publicum, mus, immo terrae tuber* (58.4). I suggest then that we read *umbra*, with Busche, not so much in the sense ‘shade’ (though truffles do in fact tend to grow beneath trees, since they are parasitic upon the roots), as in the sense ‘darkness’ (*OLD* s.v. *umbra* 5 and 6, roughly). Busche notes that the corruption of *umbra* to *unda* would have been very easy with *rotundo* directly above, and that the two words are variants at 123.200. Given Petronius’ colloquial tendencies, it seems possible that we have in these two passages (58.4 and 109.10) a very early adumbration of the later use of Italian ‘tartufo’ to mean ‘hypocrite’ in the *Commedia dell’Arte*, a use which gave Molière the name of his best-known character.

Finally, it may be worth noting that the literal meaning of ‘tartufo’ in modern Italian is still ‘truffle’ rather than any species of superterranean mushroom or toadstool. The figurative meaning is rather different: “person who always turns up at the right moment, when there is something good to eat or a bottle of wine has been opened” (*Cambridge Italian Dictionary* s.v. ‘tartufo’).