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Most modern editors of the *Culex* print vv. 107–108 in the following way:

*iam medias operum partes euectus erat sol,  
cum densas pastor pecudes cobeat in umbras.*<sup>1</sup>

The reader of v. 108 is checked by a momentary doubt: should *densas* go with *pecudes* in the sense “crowded together” (*OLD* s.v. 2b) or with *umbras* in the sense “thick, dense” (*OLD* s.v. 1b)?<sup>2</sup> Both ideas are paralleled: contrast Stat. *Theb.* 5.349 *densarum pecudum ... more* “like thronging livestock” with Catul. 65.13 *sub densis ramorum ... umbris* “under the thick shade of branches”. The recurrence of the phrase *densa ... umbra* at v. 157 in connection with the goatherd’s own place of rest inclines one to think that *densas* in v. 108 ought to go with *umbras*, and so indeed do all translators render this line.<sup>3</sup> But

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<sup>1</sup> Plésant, 1910, p. 69; Vollmer, 1910, p. 51; Salvatore, 1957, p. 80; Clausen et al., 1966, p. 23; Salvatore et al., 1997, p. 47; St. Louis, 2001, p. 136; Gärtner, 2010, p. 234.

<sup>2</sup> For illustration of these two senses, see Jachmann, *TLL* 5.1.545.39–547.2 (“i. q. spissus, de unius rei partibus arte conglomeratis”) and 547.3–547.57 (“i. q. constipatus”).

<sup>3</sup> “[W]ithin the thick shade” Fairclough, 1918, p. 379; “sotto gli ombrosi alberi” Giomini, 1962, p. 204; “verso le fitte ombre” Salvatore, 1964, p. 19; “hacia espesas sombras” Soler, 1972, p. 18; “into the dense shadows” Bailey, 1996, p. 77; “in dichtem Schatten” Seelentag, 2012, p. 51 (on p. 124 comparing 157 *densa ... umbra*); “in dichtem Schatten” Zogg, 2020, p. 111. Schmidt, 1959, p. 24, offers “Als seine Ziege der Hirte zusammentrieb tief in den Schatten”, Slavitt, 2011, p. 9 “Then does the herdsman gather | his flock together as

if this is the poet’s meaning, it has been rather misleadingly expressed: *pecudes* stands before *umbras* in proximity to *densas*, and the natural instinct of a reader coming fresh to this line is to take the adjective with the first viable noun that he sees, not the second.

Metrically interchangeable words are so frequently displaced by copyists of Latin poetry that I cannot forbear offering the less ambiguous arrangement *cum pecudes pastor densas cogebat in umbras* “when the goatherd was gathering his flock into the thick shade”.<sup>4</sup> It is usual for the epithet of a verse-final noun to stand immediately before an intervening verb:

<i>insignis longe Phrygiis fulgebat in armis</i>	(Virg. <i>Aen.</i> 11.769)
<i>nec moriens Dido summa uidisset ab arce</i>	(Ov. <i>Rem.</i> 57)
<i>quid querimur flammis totum saevisse per orbem</i>	(Manil. <i>Astr.</i> 1.744)

This word-order, if right, would confer on v. 108 the additional benefit of beginning with that initial dactyl which was so favoured by Latin hexameter poets, including, I may add, the author of the *Culex* himself.<sup>5</sup>

But it is uncommon for two words separated by another to exchange places spontaneously, and, as Stat. *Theb.* 5.349 serves to show, the locution *densas ... pecudes* is good Latin. What if *densas* really should go with *pecudes*? There are further reasons to think that it does. In v. 48–50 the goats appear to graze in scattered multitude:

<i>iam siluis dumisque uagas, iam uallibus abdunt</i> <i>corpora, iamque omni celeres e parte uagantes</i> <i>tondebant tenero uiridantia gramina morsu.</i> <sup>6</sup>	(48–50)
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shadows lower upon the hillside.” Murgia, 1971, p. 211, n. 15, also seems to take *densas* with *umbras*. I have not found a scholar who prefers to construe it with *pecudes*.

<sup>4</sup> While it is true that in this version of the line *densas* would remain in an equivocal position between *pecudes* and *umbras* (and hence could hypothetically go with either), there would no longer be the strong presumption that it ought to go with *pecudes*.

<sup>5</sup> The advanced search tool of the website Pedecerto (Colombi et al., 2007; accessed 15/05/23) reveals that of the 413 transmitted verses of the *Culex* (excepting 318, 330, 371, which are obelized), 278 (67.8%) begin with a dactyl, 132 (32.2%) with a spondee. In lines consisting of three spondees and one dactyl, the dactyl tends accordingly to be placed in first position: 52× DSSS (12.6%), 32× SDSS (7%), 13× SSDS (3.1%), 8× SSSD (1.95%).

<sup>6</sup> In v. 49I am disposed to accept Ellis’ *meantes* for *uagantes*, which is otiose after *uagae* in v. 48; cf. Brandt, *TLL* 8.785.44–46 s.v. *meo* (“de quadrupedibus”).

Later they are gathered by the waters of a pool:

*et iam compellente uagae pastore capellae  
ima susurrantis repetebant ad uada lymphae  
quae subter residebant caerula muscum.*<sup>7</sup> (104–106)

From the juxtaposition of *compellente* with *uagae* it appears the goats have been forcibly assembled into a group (cf. 204 *grege compulso*), being no longer vagrantly scattered, and thus pass into the shade as one mass. It would therefore be quite natural for the poet to describe the goats at this point as “thronging”,<sup>8</sup> and given the greater proximity to *densas* of *pecudes* as compared with *umbras*, this is probably the analysis of v. 108 which critics who prefer to keep the MS reading should favour henceforth.<sup>9</sup>

But the facility with which previous translators have wrongly assigned *densas* to *umbras* shows that the syntax of v. 108, as transmitted, is difficult for some readers to interpret correctly, and the text therefore remains under some suspicion. The author of the *Culex*, it is said, was not a poet of the first rank, but to avoid this particular ambiguity was surely within his power. I therefore venture to suggest that *umbras* is a corruption of *umbram*, and that the MS reading has sprung accidentally from a scribe’s concentrating overmuch on the ending of *densas*.<sup>10</sup> This conjecture is in keeping with the author’s usage, for

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<sup>7</sup> For *repetebant* I would prefer Heinsius’ *reptabant*: cf. Lucr. 2.317–319 *nam saepe in colli tondentes pabula laeta | lanigerae reptant pecudes, quo quamque uocantes | inuitant herbae gemmantis rore recenti*. The corruption is probably due to a scribe’s anticipating *residebant* (if that word is right) in the line below.

<sup>8</sup> Further parallels for *densas* ... *pecudes* include [Tib.] 3.7.186 *cuique pecus denso pascebant agmine colles* and Sidon. Apoll. *Epist.* 1.6.4 *densum pecus grauidis uberibus in mulctram per antra olida caularum pinguis tibi pastor includet*. Virgil’s *densior hinc suboles* (*G.* 3.308) probably refers to the peculiar fecundity of goats, rather than their habit of forming dense flocks (cf. Thomas, 1988, p. 100, who compares Columella 7.67).

<sup>9</sup> There may be, it must be admitted, an apparent inconsistency between the “crowding” of the goats into the shade at v. 108 and their later sleeping “in a scattered or dispersed manner” at v. 154 (*at circa passim fessae cubuere capellae*). It has been suggested that vv. 107–108 are a doublet of vv. 104–106, and indeed the possible incompatibility of *densas* (*pecudes*) with *passim* may support this view. On the other hand, one could plausibly imagine the goats as “thronging” when they are driven into the shade, but “scattered” once each is left to seek out a spot for his own repose. This is the interpretation which I favour.

<sup>10</sup> Heyne, 1795, p. 36 n. 107, if I have understood his note aright, offers to read *densis* ... *in umbris*, and reports Heinsius as having suggested *densa* ... *umbra* (“107. *densas—in in*

the *Culex*-poet seems to prefer the singular of *umbra* when speaking generally of “shade”, especially that produced by trees, and the plural when speaking of many individual “shadows” or of the “underworld” below:

<i>quis dabat et dulci fessas refouebat in umbra</i>	(122)
<i>pastor ut ad fontem densa requieuit in umbra</i>	(157)
<i>cum grege compulso pastor duplicantibus umbris</i>	(204)
<i>terreor a tantis insistere terreor umbris</i>	(239)

For a parallel to *cogebat in umbram*, consider Nemesianus, *Bucolica* 4.38:

<i>huc, Meroe formosa, ueni: uocat aestus in umbram.</i>	
<i>iam pecudes subiere nemus, iam nulla canoro</i>	
<i>gutture cantat auis, torto non squamea tractu</i>	
<i>signat humum serpens: solus cano. me sonat omnis</i>	
<i>silua, nec aestiuus cantu concedo cicadis.</i>	(4.38–42)

The pointed absence of a snake from Nemesianus’ idyllic picture could be interpreted as an allusive reversal of the plot of the *Culex*, in which a serpent later disturbs the shepherd’s repose (cf. 167 *squamosos late torquebat motibus orbes*).<sup>11</sup>

To sum up, future editors of the *Culex* can edit v. 108 in one of three ways. (a) If they desire to keep *densas* with *umbras*, then the former will have to be transposed with *pecudes*, so as to avoid the ‘garden-path sentence’ effect of having another viable noun between the adjective and its intended head. (b) If they prefer to keep the transmitted text, they must assume that the poet wished *densas* to be taken with *pecudes*, not *umbras*, there being no other reason for him to have ordered the verse as he did, when, if he intended *densas* to go unambiguously with *umbras*, he would surely have written *pecudes pastor densas cogebat in umbras*. (c) Since, however, *densa(s)* and *umbra(s)* are so

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*umbras*: f. *densis in umbris*. Heins. *densa in umbra*”). But with *cogebat* the accusative is surely required, as in Plin. *HN* 18.330 *pecudes a sole in opaca cogito*. A third alternative, and one that escapes the possible incompatibility of *densas ... pecudes* in v. 108 with *circa passim fessae cubuere capellae* in v. 154 (though see the previous note), would be to write *densam ... umbram* instead, and thus to regard the two endings in *-as* as perseverative errors caused by *mediās* in v. 107. For the position of the epithet before the trihemimeral caesura, cf. e.g. Lucr. 4.548 *cum liquidam tollunt lugubri uoce querelam*, 5.1122 *cui placidam possent opulenti degere uitam*.

<sup>11</sup> Note also Virg. *Ecl.* 3.93 *frigidus [...] latet anguis in herba*.

often collocated that many perceptive readers are apt to take them together here, the best and least ambiguous solution, all told, is to emend *umbras* to *umbram*, taking *densas* with *pecudes* and translating vv. 107–108 thus: “Already the sun had ascended the middle part of his course, when the goatherd began to drive his thronging beasts into the shade.”

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