Among the 100 three-line hexameter riddles of Symphosius in the *Anthologia Latina* is one on the snail, No. 18:1

*Coclea*

Porto domum mecum, semper migrare parata,
mutatoque solo non sum miserabilis exul;
seu mihi †concilium† de caelo nascitur ipso.

In line 3 nearly all our MSS have the perplexing *concilium*, the two variants, *consilium* and the *vox eiblii consilium*, each have only slender MS support.2 Castalio’s *conchilium* is unmetrical (in Latin the *y* is long) and senseless (the word means ‘shellfish’).

M. Bergamin,3 who argues that Symphosius was, if not a Christian, at any rate familiar with Christian culture, defends *concilium*, which she takes in the Lucretian sense of ‘aggregation, union’, referring to the bond between the snail’s shell and flesh, but also capable of being interpreted as referring to the union between man’s body and soul made possible by the Divine will. Here, says Bergamin, Symphosius is deliberately trying to distract the reader from the riddle’s right answer, ‘Snail’, by playfully suggesting a wrong but plausible answer, ‘Soul’, while simultaneously hinting at the right answer, inasmuch as *concilium* sounds like *conchilium*, which is a marine snail! But this far-fetched and convoluted exegesis is unlikely to convince many.

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1 The numbering of the individual riddles is identical in the Teubner editions (*AL 1.1*) of A. Riese (Leipzig 1894 2nd ed.), no. 286, and D.R. Shackleton Bailey (Stuttgart 1982), no. 281.


3 ‘Note a Simposio’, *AVM* 62 (1994) 37-68, esp. 61-64.
The variant *consilium* has been defended on the grounds that the snail's travel plans will be affected by the weather and the season. Such a solution must surely be on the right track, but even Ohl (note 4) seems to feel it does not quite carry conviction ('a solution ... probably as good as any'), and two recent attempts at emendation have been made.

Shackleton Bailey conjectured (but did not print) *sed genitale solum* in the sense 'my native land', and evidently took *caelo* in the architectural sense 'vault', referring to the snail's shell: 'The snail is on his native (i.e. home) ground wherever he wanders, for his shell, the “sky” that covers him, makes any ground his patria.' But this seems unduly contrived and abstruse. Moreover, it contradicts line 2: the ground (*solo*) has been changed (*mutato*) and so is no longer truly 'native'. Finally, everywhere else in Symphosius *caelum* simply means 'sky' or 'heaven'.

W.S. Watt suggested *sed mihi corniculae de caelo pascitur ipsa*: "my tentacles feed on dew from the sky"; Symphosius may have imagined that the snail uses its tentacles to feed itself. But anyone can see that snails feed with their mouths, not their horns (= eyestalks/tentacles), and Symphosius is most unlikely to have thought otherwise.

However, Watt's reference to dew was based on a passage from Plautus' *Captivi* (80-81) that is indeed highly relevant to Symphosius:

*Quasi, cum caletur, cocleae in occulto latent,*
*suo sibi suco vivunt, ros si non cadit ...*  

This reminds us that the snail is a moisture-loving creature: in times of heat and drought, to avoid dehydration and death, she will lie low, retreating into her shell and aestivating. But when it rains, she will emerge from her hiding-place, moving around slowly but purposefully, eating and drinking. Anyone can see that a snail glides along on her stomach on a path of her own slime (Plautus' *suo suco*), which on drying is visible as a silvery trail. If there is no rain or dew to drink, there will be no surplus slime and hence no movement.

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6 Riddles 7.2, 9.2, 10.2 (with connotations of 'weather'), 26.1, 32.3, 78.1, 95.1.
8 As W.M. Lindsay (ed.) reminds us in *The Captivi of Plautus* (London 1900) *ad loc*, this passage was well remembered in later centuries: Symmachus and St Jerome allude to it in their letters, and Macrobius quotes line 80.
That Symphosius’ de caelo nascitur ipse has something to do with rain (and dew?) is strongly suggested by the shortly preceding Riddle 9, *Plutia*, line 2: de caelo ocida.

But what, precisely, is it that ‘is born of heaven itself’ so as to benefit Symphosius’ snail? I suggest that it is the power of movement that comes from the rain: it is this power that enables the snail to ‘migrate’. In place of *concilium*, then, I suggest *mobilitas*. This would be Sense 3 of the word in the *OLD*, ‘power of movement, mobility’. The word has an august pedigree in poetry, being used by Lucretius (often), Virgil, Ovid and Ausonius. Here it would appropriately round off the travel theme of lines 1-2. I place a semi-colon after line 2 because in line 3, at any rate with this emendation, *sed* does not mark the reason why the snail is not a *miserabilis exul* (after all, Symphosius does not say *nam*, and anyway the reason has already been given: *porto domum mecum*), but rather introduces a new clue in the form of a contrast between earth (*solo*) and heaven (*caelo*), an antithesis our poet is particularly fond of: cf. 6.2, 7.2, 9.1-3, 32.3, 95.1-2.

But how and why might *mobilitas* have become corrupted into *concilium*? First, the middle letters -iii- are common to both words. Secondly, in uncials the outer strokes of an M are rounded in such a way as to make the letter resemble CO,9 and here the M is also followed by an actual O. Thirdly, while the B of *mobilitas* may seem problematic, it is not unlikely that in an ancestor of our archetype this word was written *MOUIUTAS*. In the late Empire confusion between the B and V sounds and letters was widespread,10 and here apparent etymology compounded the problem (*moveo* ----> *movilzs*, with the presumed intermediate *movibilzs* unknown). No wonder the *TLL* tells us that *mobilis* is quite often written as *movilis* in MSS. Now in Symphosius 80.2 the word *mobilis* actually occurs, and it is in fact written as *MOUIILIS* in an early MS, the uncial A (s. viii). With this spelling (*MOUIILAS*) in our Riddle 18, the ductus litterarum would more closely resemble that of *CONCILIUM* and would thus make the corruption easier to account for, in part because the rounded uncial U is often confused with C and with the sequence CI.11

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9 A similar corruption may have occurred at 22.3, where *multa*, read by nearly all our MSS, yields the better sense and is obviously right but where one MS, the uncial Λ, while also having *multa*, follows it (unmetrically) with *cuneta*, incorporating a marginal or interlinear variant from its exemplar into its text.


11 See L.D. Reynolds & N.G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars* (Oxford 1991 3rd ed.) 223. Within the transmission of Symphosius himself cf. Riddle 5.2, where in place of the undoubtedly correct *multa* a single MS, the Emilianensis 39 in Madrid (s. x), has *cuneta*; see Diaz y Diaz (note 2) 126.

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About the only point in favour of reading *concilium* would be its seemingly Symphosian alliteration: *concilium* ... *caelo*. It is therefore pleasing to observe that what we should lose by jettisoning the paradosis we should regain with the alliteration and assonance of *miserabiles* ... *mihi mobilitas*.

While being well suited to its immediate context, *mobilitas* is also supported by the fact that in 42 of his other riddles Symphosius likewise gives clues – often more than one per riddle – based on the speed, style, source, direction or circumstances of his subjects' movements, or, in a few cases, on the stated absence of such movement. Furthermore, while many different verbs of motion are so used, as well as some motion-related adjectives, adverbs and abstract nouns, the commonest terms are *moveo(r)* and its cognates, including *mobilis*, and to these we now turn. There are six riddles containing such terms, and three of them contain two each.

Straightforward enough are (a) the movement of the fly when brushed away (23.3 *cito submoveor*) and (b) the hanging gourd swaying in the wind (43.2 *pendens commoveor ventis*). (c) Riddle 51, 'Mill', is more elaborate: in line 3 the permanent rest of one millstone is contrasted with the non-stop movement of the other: *hic manet inmotus, non desinit ille moveri*. This explicit contrast between motion and rest would be paralleled by the implicit contrast in Riddle 18 between the *mobilitas* brought to the snail by the rain and her previously dormant state. (d) In 97.2-3, Shadow (*Umbra*) congratulates herself that a divine gift keeps her safe from attack:

> nam deus attribuit nobis haec munera formae,13 <br>quod me nemo movet, nisi qui prius ipse moverit.

While Symphosius does not use the noun *mobilitas* elsewhere, he does use the adjective *mobilis*, and its opposite, *inmobilis*, in our next two examples. (e) In 62 the bridge is said to be made of *inmobile robur*. (f) Riddle 80, 'Bell', is particularly revealing, as it tells us that for Symphosius *mobilis* does not have to mean 'swift' (his snail is hardly that, at any rate by human standards): it can mean merely 'able to move (intransitive) or be moved', 'mobile'. After describing the shape and material of the bell in line 1, Symphosius proceeds to describe its tongue (2) and the circumstances in which the bell rings (3):

> mobilis est intus linguae crepitantis imago.

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12 E.g. *venio* (Riddle 9), *ambulo* (32), *currus* (13); *fluxi* (48), *uccidi* (9, 81); *vehor* (32, 39), *ducor* (79), *iactor* (90); *meat* (95), *volvi contendo meatu* (65); *gradior* (39), *tarda, gradu lento* (20).

13 Or *firma* for *formae*, if we accept the ingenious but perhaps unnecessary emendation of Shackleton Bailey (note 1).
non resono positus; motus quam saepe, resulto.

I should translate this as ‘Inside is a mobile copy of a chattering tongue. I make no sound when at rest, but whenever I am moved I ring out.’ The bell’s ‘mobile’ tongue is not always moving: for long periods it is, like a snail without water, in a state of suspended animation. To operate, the bell must wait for human intervention, the snail for divine. The snail, ever the cheerful optimist, does not complain about this disability but, rather, gratefully acknowledges her intermittent release from its constraints as heaven’s generous gift. That is the meaning of ipso in the riddle’s final words, de caelo nascitur ipso. This gratitude resembles that of Shadow for another divine gift involving motion (see (d) above).

So if Symphosius uses mobilis, and when he does so it means ‘mobile’, and if he uses inmobilis, and when he does so it means ‘immovable’, it would not be surprising if he were to use mobilitas, and use it in the sense ‘mobility’.

m.athorp1@uq.edu.au

14 I here follow the text and interpretation of T.J. Leary, ‘Symphosius 80: a bell of brass’, CQ n.s. 52 (2002) 634-35, with his emendation quam for the nonsensical quoque of our MSS. Unbeknownst to Leary, the same emendation had already been made by Watt (note 7, ibid.), who, however, interpreted it in a very different sense: he saw his quam as ‘exclamatory’. Leary’s interpretation is supported by his Tibullan parallel (1.6.21) and his quamdiu analogy, and is far more apposite to the context.
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