

## Goodbye, Cruel (Elegiac) World: Gallus' "Conversion" in Vergil's Tenth *Eclogue*

In the Tenth *Eclogue*, Vergil has Gallus utter the following lines: *Ibo et Chalcidico quae sunt mihi condita versu / carmina pastoris Siculi modulabor avena* (*Ecl.* 10.50-51: "I shall go and adapt to the reed of the Sicilian shepherd the songs I have written in the verse of Chalcis").

Vergil's use of Cornelius Gallus, a contemporary poet whom he almost certainly knew personally, as a character in two of his *Eclogues* (10 and 6) has naturally fuelled significant speculation about the meaning of these two lines. The most common approach has been a literary historical one, and indeed it makes sense that two contemporary poets, linked in various ways, would converse and interact over and about their poetry in the way that Catullus and Licinius did (*Cat.* 50). And so the norm has been to treat Vergil's lines as relating to Cornelius Gallus' actual poetry: either Vergil is describing an actual change of genre which Gallus has already made, from elegy to pastoral, or he is recommending that his friend make such a change in genre.

The problem with this approach is that there is no concrete evidence that Cornelius Gallus made such a change in genre in his poetry, and so I would suggest a different approach to the lines and their significance, an approach that maintains the premise of interaction between the two poets about their poetry, but relieves us of the necessity of trying to demonstrate that Cornelius Gallus made a drastic change in genre.

Rather than treating Vergil's use of Gallus as a portrait of Cornelius Gallus, and thus useful in literary history, I propose treating it as a use of Gallus' own poetic *persona*. Vergil is responding to Gallus' poetry by taking the elegiac character that Gallus created for his own poetry and using that *persona* as a character in the *Eclogue*. Then the lines need not reflect any action previously taken by, or prescribed for, Cornelius Gallus the poet, but they certainly show a Gallus who is deeply immersed in the world and ethos of elegy. Vergil is contrasting elegy and pastoral

as genres, Gallus' work and his own, by showing us an elegist, and an elegiac persona, in the pastoral setting.

Through this character Gallus, Vergil shows several elegiac themes and pursuits: Gallus is wandering in the mountains, he is hunting, he is lamenting his mistress' infidelity; and he is regarding his passion as a madness (*furor*) for which a cure must be sought. It is unremarkable, then, that this elegiac character would indulge in another elegiac trope, the cry of a frustrated lover who has had enough of love and all that it involves and is going to change his life permanently. Like Propertius in Elegy 3.21, who determines to escape to the East and devote himself to learning, Vergil's Gallus throws up his hands in despair and threatens to abandon his painful, frustrating life of love and love poetry for something more worthy. In essence, the lines are this fictionalized Gallus bidding "Goodbye, cruel world" to elegy and the elegiac world of love and suffering.

As a clue to literary history, the lines *Ibo et Chalcidico quae sunt mihi condita versu / carmina pastoris Siculi modulabor avena* are frustrating and unreliable. As the utterance of an elegiac character in a pastoral landscape, the lines can indeed show us something of the creative relationships between Vergil and Gallus and their specific literary endeavours.