

Beware the Enemy! Parthenius' Dedication to Gallus in the *Erotika Pathemata*

Parthenius' intriguing work, the *Erotika Pathemata*, beguiles the reader in many ways: it defies generic definition, eludes identifications of thematic threads, and includes an enigmatic epistolary preface to the Roman elegiac poet Gallus. It is the last puzzle that will be the subject of this paper: why would Parthenius include an epistolary preface to Gallus in a work on the vicissitudes of love? It will be suggested that Parthenius chose to associate this work with Gallus not simply because of his status as an elegiac poet (and perhaps the poet who created love elegy), but rather because he would soon be governing a province (Egypt) recently made famous for a tragic love affair.

Many scholars have discussed the epistolary preface to Gallus and the difficulties it presents. Lightfoot 1999 discusses the literary role of the epistolary preface, suggesting (following Cairns 1979) that Parthenius' preface is misleading and it should not be assumed that the work was intended as a mythological handbook or for Gallus' private use. Crowther 1976, on the other hand, sees the dedication as uncomplicated evidence that a relationship existed between Parthenius and Gallus, and that these two wrote similar works. Francese 2008 discusses the connection between prominent themes in the *Erotika Pathemata* and its dedication to Gallus, suggesting that Parthenius intended the work to be a seductive device. This is achieved through an emphasis on stories that involve persons being successfully seduced by civilized foreigners; through tales of seduction Parthenius has created a work of seduction.

This paper will not engage with the debate over whether or not the dedication to Gallus suggests a relationship between the two authors. Rather, it will pick up on the point made by Francese regarding the emphasis on successful seduction by foreigners, offering a different interpretation of this theme and suggesting that a better explanation for Parthenius' dedication to

Gallus lies in the historical figure of Gallus and the role that he played in the emerging empire of Rome. While Francese is correct to point out the abundance of stories that involve successful seductions by foreigners, it should also be noted that these stories often end in tragedy. Thus, it would seem that these stories in the *Erotika Pathemata* act as a warning against seduction by a foreigner, rather than an encouragement towards it.

Gallus was appointed the first governor of the province of Egypt after its annexation by Octavian in 30 BCE, following the dramatic suicides of Marc Antony and Cleopatra VII. The love affair between Antony and Cleopatra was well documented in the ancient world, particularly by the Augustan poets. Horace refers to the Roman soldier enslaved to a woman (*Ep.* 9) and Propertius tells of Cleopatra's bride price being the walls of Rome (3.11.31). Gallus, embarking on his governorship of this fateful province, would thus be a most fitting dedicatee of a collection of stories which would remind the reader of the pitfalls of love.

Moreover, the suitability of Gallus as a recipient of this work is further underscored by the circumstances of Antony and Cleopatra's love affair: Antony is a good Roman soldier, while Cleopatra is a foreign, albeit exotic queen. Had Antony not been successfully seduced by the foreigner, Cleopatra, he may have lived and become master of Rome. Thus, by dedicating the *Erotika Pathemata*, a work that includes many stories detailing the dangers of loving foreigners, to Gallus, governor of Egypt, Parthenius highlights the practical relevance of his work: beware of falling in love with a foreigner! This is not to suggest that Parthenius intended for his work to be instructional for Gallus, but rather that he chose his dedicatee specifically because of the connection between the stories in the *Erotika Pathemata* and the political situation into which Gallus was entering.

It should be noted that this argument assumes a rather specific date for the *Erotica Pathemata*, an issue about which there is no scholarly consensus. Since there is as yet no evidence to date securely the *Erotika Pathemata* it is certainly possible that it was written towards the end of Gallus' life. The question of dating, therefore, will be used neither to support nor contradict my argument that the *Erotika Pathemata* was dedicated to Gallus around the time of his governorship.

#### Works Cited

- Cairns, Francis. 1979. *Tibullus, a Hellenistic poet at Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crowther, N. B. 1976. "Parthenius and Roman Poetry." *Mnemosyne* 4:29:1: 65-71.
- Francese, Christopher A. 2008. L'érotisme dans les *Erotika Pathemata* de Parthenios. In *Littérature et érotisme dans les Passions d'amour de Parthénios de Nicée. Actes du colloque de Nice, 31 mai 2006* ed. Arnaud Zucker, 163-74. Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon.
- Lightfoot, Jane. 1999. *Parthenius of Nicaea: The Poetical Fragments and the Ἐρωτικά Παθήματα*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.