

Brian BREED

Mimetic Speech and Literary Tradition in Propertius 1.20

The Gallus of Propertius 1, the addressee of four poems (5, 10, 13, 20) and speaker of one (21), causes considerable embarrassment in that the name suggests Cornelius Gallus the purported father of Roman elegy, while the figure addressed seems to have personal characteristics incompatible with the poet (recently Newman, *Augustan Propertius*; Ross is an exception). More troubling for the identity of Propertius' Gallus is the fact that he is entirely naïve about the conventions of elegiac love. This paper will attempt to account for the irony of addressing Gallus in this way by seeing in him a reflection of Propertius' place in literary history. In his naïvete Gallus is like other addressees of the book, to whom the author figure stands as an erotic authority habituated to the elegiac lifestyle. In examining the function of the addressee in Propertius 1.20, this paper locates the speaker's claims to superior awareness of the ways of love within the discursive practice of the whole book. For Veyne "erotic elegy – that 'deceptive work' – is built on a false naïveté," which dissimulates its own textuality (*Roman Erotic Elegy* 93-94). Poem 1.20 exposes this fiction in exploiting it: whereas in other poems of the *Monobiblos* the speaker claims superior knowledge based on lived experience, here the use of the Hylas myth means that it depends upon texts, specifically Theocritus 13. Mimetic speech and allusion in the address to Gallus combine as a way for the poem to dramatize its own coming in a literary tradition as a poetic event.

Abel, Tränkle, and others have studied the devices that give Roman elegy its enunciative qualities, among which the use of the first person is the most obvious. Commonly the elegist's speaking *ego* is complemented by an addressee, usually a friend of the speaker or his mistress. The use of an addressee creates the impression that a poem takes place as speech on a certain occasion, in Propertius 1 often as a response to some notional prior utterance by the addressee. Different addressees give poems in the book a sense of taking place on different occasions and in response to different voices, while the appearance of the same addressee in certain poems joins them in quasi-dramatic continuity. Building upon these observations, I will argue that the *Anrede* to Gallus in 1.20 is anchored to a context in at least two ways: first of all by the suggestion of a historical person—perhaps the author of the *Amores* himself or perhaps not—with whom another individual, the narrator, can converse. At the same time "Gallus" has an internal history within the book as an addressee of other poems, which are related, and even show signs of dramatic development from 5 to 10 and 13.

The speaker characterizes his relationship to Gallus as one of "enduring affection" *pro continuo amore* (1); this not only points to a notional extra-textual relationship between a speaker and an addressee, but is also a reflexive comment on Gallus' presence in the book. The connections between the other Gallus poems and this one give it, the narrator, and the addressee together a prior history that is textual. This reflexive acknowledgement

of textuality corresponds to the speaker's stance as erotic advisor in the poem, which replaces lived experience with reading as the source of elegiac knowledge. Like Cynthia in other poems, Gallus is thus to some degree a device for reflecting on the poet's own literary activity. Given that 1.20 addresses itself to Gallus, locates itself in a tradition of "responding" to prior utterances of Gallus, and advertises reading as its source of authority, one thinks of the role poems by Cornelius Gallus may have played in the formation of Propertius' first elegiac "voice." That Propertius' Gallus has characteristics, including elegiac naivete, that prevent a simple identification with Cornelius Gallus only serves to emphasize that this is a dialogue carried on between texts where all forms of naivete may be equally false.