

Corydon's *Incondita Carmina* in *Eclogue 2*

Eclogue 2 presents the shepherd Corydon's futile attempt to win the love of the urban Alexis. The opening frame labels Corydon's verses as *incondita* (*Ecl.* 2.4). But what does Vergil mean by this adjective? I argue that *inconditus* marks Corydon and his song as generically out of place within bucolic poetry.

Commentators and translators often render *incondita* along the lines of "artless," and scholars usually interpret this "artlessness" in one of two ways: either Corydon's *rusticitas* yields a song that is *rusticus* and, thus, lacking urbane refinement (e.g., Cucciarelli 2017; Clausen 1994; Putnam 1970) or Corydon sings an extemporaneous and, thus, poorly organized song (e.g., Du Quesnay 1979; Otis 1964). Yet, I argue, within the larger context of the *Eclogues*, neither *rusticitas* nor extemporaneity yields unrefined poetry. There must be another explanation for Corydon's *incondita carmina*. It is my contention that Vergil presents reason to doubt whether Corydon is as *rusticus* as he claims: his desire for the urbane Alexis exemplifies a preference for the city. Viewed in this way, Vergil's use of *inconditus* corresponds more closely to its etymology as a negated form of *condo*: Corydon and his song are "out of place."

Apostol (2015) argues for Corydon's disparaging view of the countryside. My argument takes this one step further: within Corydon's ostensible praise of the countryside lies an implicit bias for the city. Corydon compares the fair-skinned Alexis to the traditional, tan-skinned bucolic beloved, using the analogy of pale flowers (*alba ligustra*) and dark flowers (*vaccinia nigra*, 18). The shepherd's point is that fair-colored, urbane beauty and dark-colored, rustic beauty are equal. But this color comparison reappears in a garland woven for Alexis as a gift. In this garland, fair-colored flowers are used to mask and ameliorate dark-colored flowers: the lighter,

“yellow marigold” (*luteola caltha*, 50) colors the dark *vaccinium* used earlier to represent rustic beauty. Following Corydon’s earlier analogy, his garland reveals his preference for fair-colored, urbane beauty, epitomizing his desire for the urban Alexis and highlighting his own bias for the city.

Corydon also appeals to myth to entice Alexis to stay in the countryside. Boasting of his musical prowess, he compares his poetry to Amphion’s and later states that, if the countryside was suitable to Paris, it should be suitable to Alexis. As figures who were raised as shepherds, Amphion and Paris ostensibly support the claim that Corydon appreciates the countryside and Alexis should too. But, as the founder of Thebes and prince of Troy, respectively, Amphion and Paris are also two figures who abandon the countryside for the city. Corydon’s appeal to these mythical figures underscores his bias for the city: just as Amphion and Paris once did, Corydon is transitioning away from the country.

We can also view this evidence for Corydon’s urban bias as a metaphor for his poetry. Corydon identifies himself and his poetry with Amphion—a mythical singer who transitioned from country to city. Viewed metapoetically, Corydon’s association with Amphion demonstrates that his own poetic output is transitioning away from bucolic. Likewise, a woven garland is a metaphor for poetic composition (e.g., Meleager 1 G-P). Paraskeviotis (2018) argues for the influence of Meleager and other non-bucolic sources within Corydon’s garland, and scholars also note that Vergil perhaps took the name Alexis from Meleager’s epigrams (Cucciarelli 2017; Coleman 1977). And so, Corydon is infatuated with a love interest who originates not only from the city but also from a different genre. Corydon’s garland and his association with Amphion are, therefore, reflections of his own generic displacement. His preference for Alexis, an urban outsider, reflects a change both in his perception of the countryside around him and in his song.

His song is *inconditus* not because it is artless or impromptu but because it is generically out of place.

Works Cited

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