

Inter-Species Adultery and Hybridity in Euripides' *Cretans*

Abstract: In this paper, I explore the instance of bestial adultery that occurs within Euripides' *Cretans*, and how it accompanies the neglect or perversion of ritual or sacred domain, along with the themes of hybridity, spectacle, and the manipulation of biological space. Euripides' depiction of the union between Pasiphaë and the bull and its subsequent consequences for her marriage to Minos is unique in the classical Greek canon. Because ethnic purity was an issue for Athenians at the time the *Cretans* was produced, perhaps as early as 438 B.C.E., I argue that Euripides uses an interspecies hybrid figure, the Minotaur, to emphasize the destructive qualities of the implicit impurity fashioned by the Periclean legislation of 451/0 B.C.E. This stress on purity, especially of marriage and lineage, is in tune with the Athenian ideological point of view at this time, as represented by legal and social codes. Euripides' portrayal of the Minotaur symbolically reinforces the inherent problem with hybrid offspring within the Athenian context and shows the dangers – and resulting destruction to the Athenians in particular – that could come from these unions.

Key events in Euripides' *Cretans*:¹

- The report of Pasiphaë's desire for the bull
- Daedalus' subsequent construction of the wooden bull
- The birth of the Minotaur
- Minos' realization of the Minotaur's paternity
- Minos' imprisonment and intended execution of Pasiphaë (Euripidean invention)

Text Selections²

1. σύμμεικτον εἶδος κάποφώλιον βρέφος
(472a)
(Tr.) ταύρου μέμεικται καὶ βροτοῦ διπλῆι φύσει
(472bc.1)
2. (Tr.) στέρνοις ἔφεδρον **κράτα τ]αύρειον** φέρει
(Mi.) **τετρα]ασκελῆς γὰρ ἢ δίβαμ[ος** ἔρχεται;
(Tr.) δίπους [μ]ελαίνῃ δασκ[
(Mi.) ἢ κ]αί τι πρὸς τοῖσδ' ἄλλο[
(Tr.) μύ]ωπος οἴστρου **κέρκον[**
(472bc.31-5)
3. (Mi.) **μ]αστ[ός] δὲ μ[η]τρός ἢ βοός σ[**
(Tr.) τρ]έφ[ου]σιν οἱ τεκόντες ου [
(472bc.38-9)

Translations

- (??) ...an infant of mixed form, without purpose...
- (Nu.) Two natures are mingled in it, bull and man.
- (Nu.) <It has a **bull's**> **head** resting on its breast.
(Mi.) So <does it go> on **four legs or** walk on **two**?
(Nu.) On *two* feet, dark (?) with black ...
(Mi.) And is there anything further ... ?
(Nu.) <Against> the gadfly's *sting* ?it has a ... **tail**.
- (Mi.) And ?does a **mother's breast or a cow's** ...?
(Nu.) Its parents nurse ?it ...

¹ Collard, Cropp & Lee 1995: 54.

² All texts and translations are from Collard, Cropp & Lee 1995.

4.



An Etruscan *kylix*, dating to the turn of the 4th century B.C.E., depicts Pasiphaë nursing a baby Minotaur.

(Paris Kylix 1066)

5. (Pa.) νῦν δ', ἐκ θεοῦ γὰρ προσβολῆς ἐμηνάμην,
ἀλγῶ μὲν, ἐστὶ δ' οὐχ ἐκο[ύσ]ιον κακόν.
ἔχει γὰρ οὐδὲν εἰκόσ· ἐς τί γὰρ βοδὸς
βλέψασ' ἐδήχθη θυμὸν αἰσχίστηι νόσωι;
ὡς εὐπρεπῆς μὲν ἐν πέπλοισιν ἦν ἰδεῖν,
πυρσῆς δὲ χαίτης καὶ παρ' ὀμμάτων σέλας
οἴνωπὸν ἐξέλαμπε περ[καί]νων γέννυ;
(472e.9-15)

(Pa.) As it is, because a god's onslaught made me mad I suffer, but my sin is not voluntary. Why, it has no likelihood! What was there I saw in a bull to eat at my heart, in such shameful affliction? Was he so **handsome a sight in his clothes**, and did his red hair, and his **eyes**, shine with such brilliance, and was **his chin dark** in contrast, **like a ripening grape**?

6. (Pa.) οὐ μὴν δέμας γ' εὖρ[υθμον ν]υμφίου·
τοιῶνδ' λέκτρων οὐνεκ' εἷς πεδοστιβῆ
ῤινὸν καθισ []ται;
ἀλλ' οὐδὲ παίδων []πόσι
θέσθαι· τί δῆτα τῆι[δ' ἐμαι]νόμην νόσωι;
(472e.16-20)

(Pa.) My **bridegroom's** body <?was> certainly not graceful! <For> **such a marriage** < > into an animal's hide? **Not <?for> children either** < > **to make (him) my husband**. Why indeed was I *mad* with this affliction?

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³ Brendel 1995: 344.