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:***

- 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 Selections**

1. σύμμεικτον εἴδος κάπορωλίνον βρέφος  
   (472a)  
   (Τρ.) ταύρου μέμεικται καὶ βροτοὶ διπλῆι φύσει  
   (472bc.1)  

2. (Τρ.) στέρνοις ἔφεδρον κράται ταύρειον φέρει  
   (Μι.) τετρασκελής γάρ ἡ δίβαμ[ός] ἐρχεται;  
   (Τρ.) δίπους [μ]ελαίνηι δασκ[  
   (Μι.) ἦ κ]αι τι πρός τοῦδε ἄλλο[  
   (Τρ.) μύ]ωπος οἴστρου κέρκον[  
   (472bc.31-5)  

3. (Μι.) μ[αστ[ός] δὲ μ[η]τρός ἢ βοῶς σ[  
   (Τρ.) τρ]έφ[ου]σιν οἱ τεκόντες ου [  
   (472bc.38-9)  

**Translations**

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

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1 Collard, Cropp & Lee 1995: 54.
2 All texts and translations are from Collard, Cropp & Lee 1995.
4. (Πα.) νῦν δ', ἐκ θεοῦ γὰρ προσβολῆς ἐμηνάμην, ἀλγῶ μέν, ἐστὶ δ' οὐχ ἐκόψαμον κακόν. ἐχει γὰρ οὐδὲν εἰκός· ἐς τί γάρ βοδὸς βλέψα' ἐδήχθην θυμόν αἰσχίστην νόσωι; ὡς εὐρεπῆς μὲν ἐν πέπλοισιν ἦν ἱδεῖν, πυρσῆς δὲ χαίτης καὶ παρ' ὀμμάτων σέλας οἰνωπὸν ἐξέλαμπε περ[καϊ]νων γένων; 

(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?

5. (Πα.) οὐ μὴν δέμας γ' εὐρ[θυμον] νυμφιόυ- 

τοιώνδ' λέκτρῳν οὐν'κε είς πεδοστιβῆ 

μίνον καθισ [ ] 

ᾶλλ' οὐδὲ παιδων [ ] 

θέσθαι· τί δήτα τῆδ' ἐμαινόμην νόσωι; 

(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?

6. (Πα.) οὐ μὴν δέμας γ' εὐρ[θυμον] νυμφιόυ- 

τοιώνδ' λέκτρῳν οὐν'κε είς πεδοστιβῆ 

μίνον καθισ [ ] 

ᾶλλ' οὐδὲ παιδων [ ] 

θέσθαι· τί δήτα τῆδ' ἐμαινόμην νόσωι; 

(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?

Select Bibliography
