

Female Characterization in Parthenius' *Erotika Pathemata*

Though Parthenius' *Erotika pathemata* has been recognized as an invaluable source for the study of mythography, the role of women in the various myths has yet to be a subject of extended inquiry. The work, addressed to Cornelius Gallus, contains 36 brief summaries of myths, and the collection was a possible source for other Augustan poets, such as Virgil and Ovid. Despite being summaries, the *Erotika pathemata* provides a wonderful venue in which to examine female characterization and to apply feminist criticism to myth. This paper will center its discussion on issues of gender, reading the collection from a feminist perspective to consider female agency, definitions of sanctioned (and non-sanctioned) behavior and gender stereotyping in select myths.

F. Williams (1999) is one of the few scholars to have examined the collection with gender as a focus, however his article reviewed only a single episode in the collection (#15, the story of Daphne and Apollo). Even the comprehensive edition of Lightfoot (1999) fails to consider the significance of the diversity in female characterization as presented across the text. Parthenius' collection displays great range in how women conform to, or diverge from, traditional stereotypes and in the prominence they play in various myths; trends and patterns in these presentations will be noted. I will concentrate on episodes in which women are protagonists, discussing in detail such myths as number 8, which tells the story of Herippe, captured during the Gallic invasion of Ionia in ~275 B.C, a post-classical myth, but one which still plays on negative stereotypes of female greed and love of material wealth. Number 9, the story of Polycrite, presents the exemplum of a female who places love before civic honor/duty. The use of a letter and the oath to Artemis are reminiscent of Ovid and Callimachus' versions of the Acontius/Cydippe myth, yet in Parthenius a woman's cunning snares her mate. Number 10 (Leucone), which follows stereotypes of female mistrust for males, explores the dangers of female involvement in male affairs and transgression into the male world, yet inverts typical norms in aspects of gender sacrifice, with male sacrificing himself with, and for, the female. I will also discuss the evidence these stories provide concerning gendered spaces, as relates to questions of gender related identity.

One issue of particular importance will be cultural translation in Parthenius' summaries. I ask if a shift in how women are portrayed can be seen in myths now introduced into a society

(Rome) where women held many more rights than that in which the myths were originally composed/transferred from (Greece). The paper will conclude with a comparison to Augustan versions of certain myths, in particular those episodes in which women are treated from a different perspective, such as Ovid's Byblis and Daphne.

Lightfoot, J. (ed.) (1999) Parthenius of Nicaea: *The poetical fragments and the Erotika pathemata*. Oxford.

Williams, F. (1999) "Daphne's hounds: gender and feminism in Parthenius 15," *Eikasmos* 10: 137-142.