

Female Space, *Eros* and Intertextuality in Theocritus and Apollonius

In *Idyll 2* Delphis remarks that Love "*routes with wretched madness even a maiden out of her chambers and a bride to abandon her husband's still warm bed*" (135-8). The chambers and the bed are key concepts in the representation of female *eros* in the stories of Simaetha and Medea, as told in *Idyll 2* of Theocritus (Segal 1985: 108) and the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes. In this paper I use intertextuality as a constructive literary device that enables my discussion of the dialectics between bounded spaces, particularly female space as symbolic representation of women's social standing, and the destabilization of those spaces by the threatening force of *Eros* in the narrative of these two texts. I first examine Theocritus' treatment of Simaetha by looking at parallel passages from *Idylls 3* and *11*, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the *Cologne Epode* of Archilochus and the *Medea* of Euripides. I then turn my attention to the story of Medea in Book 3 and the beginning of Book 4 of the *Argonautica*, taking into consideration literary parallels found in the Homeric epic poems, Sophocles' *Trachiniai*, Euripides' *Hippolytus* and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.

What happens when there is movement between clearly demarcated, bounded spaces? Doors and thresholds serve as physical boundaries and markers of certain social distinctions, and their transgression causes a 'cognitive muddle' with respect to social strictures that define gender behavior, ultimately challenging and subverting these distinctions. Dover observes that "upholders of the proprieties pronounced the door to be the boundary of a good woman's territory" (1984: 145). *Idyll 2* is the story of the violation of that territory as a result of the openness and exposure of female private space that occurs through the evocation of literary subtexts. These subtexts not only stress Simaetha's unusual usurpation of the leading role from the male but also capture the ambiguity of her status (the contradictory literary models of the

faithful and unfaithful married woman). Simaetha's bed becomes the site of the consummation of her love with Delphis; his eventual abandonment of it strips it of its virginal and potential marital status. To restore her integrity Simaetha resorts to witchcraft, in an effort to draw Delphis back into her house. She thus aligns with literary figures like Circe and Medea (Burton 1995: 65), but she finally collapses under the burden of her literary predecessors whose complexity she conspicuously lacks.

Medea's character, on the other hand, is an amalgam of virginal chastity, audacity, deception and manipulation. Her story in the *Argonautica* is that of a young maiden who abandons her virginal bed under the *θέλξις* of Eros (Clare 2002: 241), a decision that undermines and subverts the authority of the paternal *οἶκος*. The figures of the *παρθένο*ς and the *πολυφάρμακος γυνή* are intrinsic to her character with the resulting internal tensions and conflicts materializing in spatial terms, as can be seen in her movement between her chambers and the temple of Hecate (Thalman 2011: 133). Various literary subtexts attest to the interplay between the woman and the innocent maiden, one who experiences at once Nausicaa's and Phaedra's *αἰδώς*, whose gestures of bidding farewell to her virginal bed are reminiscent of Dianeira's bidding farewell to her marriage bed and whose "shameful" flight (*Argon.4,5*) recalls the Aeschylean Helen, who crosses the gates of her house to elope with Paris. The outstanding differences in these literary parallels confront the reader/ audience with the subtle ironies of Apollonius' narrative. What we ultimately see in the stories of Medea and Simaetha is the collapse of physical, social and moral boundaries, which both authors emphasize by breaking down the boundaries of literary genres, integrating motley literary subtexts and assimilating previous literary exempla into new contexts.

LIST OF WORKS CITED

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