

Ariadne's Queer Stillness in Catullus 64

The connection between the ekphrastic Ariadne episode in Catullus 64 and the frame narrative of the poem is a perennial point of interest in Catullus scholarship (see Putnam, Kinsey, Schmale, Armstrong, etc.), and this paper proposes a previously unremarked link between the two narratives. Just as Sarah Olsen reads Andromache's embrace of a statue of Thetis as a moment of queer stillness in Euripides' *Andromache* (69), so I see Ariadne adopting a similar "queer stillness" in Catullus 64 as she watches Theseus' ship recede into the distance (52-55). Further, I argue that this queer moment in the ekphrasis ramifies and makes visible other moments of queerness in the frame narrative of Thetis and Peleus' wedding. By queerness, I refer to a mode of being characterized, as Sara Ahmed posits, by disorientation and deviation from expected linear paths (19), particularly ones which emphasize the reproduction of the family line (74). By elucidating Ariadne's queer stillness in the ekphrasis, alongside moments in the frame narrative wherein normative reproductive lines are interrupted or problematized, I demonstrate that Catullus 64 is a poem which foregrounds queerness as a unifying feature, and I suggest that this foregrounding both enhances and is enhanced by Catullus' poetic persona as a 'failed' and thus non-normative (or queer) lover.

The first part of my paper will explore the queer stillness in the ekphrastic Ariadne episode, which I view as arising from Ariadne's failure to complete a normative (and desired) initiation into marriage with Theseus. Although Ariadne is not always physically still, for example, when she erratically wanders the island of Dia at lines 126-130 (cf. Dufallo), we may still understand this wandering as a kind of stillness, one which is defined by the lack of a destination or orientation towards any particular object or goal. Additionally, the poem also emphasizes Ariadne's physical stillness on line 61, when she is described as "stony, like the statue of a Bacchant" (*saxea ut effigies bacchantis*). This stillness is further highlighted by the movement which surrounds her, not only Theseus' notable departure (54), but even the clothes which fall from her body and the waves that

play at her feet (63-67). As Olsen argues, expanding Sara Ahmed's phenomenological account of "sexual orientation", stillness can constitute a queer shift in the patterns of action and behavior which govern the lives of ancient Greek women, who were expected to undergo nuptial mobility as they moved from their natal homes to new, marital homes (76). Because Ariadne's stillness on the island comes from her inability to complete the expected movement from girl to wife (even though this movement will presumably be accomplished with Bacchus, a resolution that is curiously absent from the poem), it therefore reflects the same queer shift that Olsen describes.

Having explored the queer stillness in the ekphrasis, the second part of my paper will argue that this focus makes visible other moments of queerness in the frame narrative, even while this narrative ostensibly deals with the successful and normative marital union of Thetis and Peleus. One such moment occurs early in the poem, when Thetis and Peleus' wedding day is characterized as detrimental to the procreative patterns of nature, as guests abandon their agricultural labor to attend the celebration (35-42). This section introduces a sense of stagnation, anticipating the queer stillness which Ariadne will later reactivate. Moreover, the same deviation from normative reproductive patterns also reverberates throughout the Fates' wedding song, when they describe the destruction that Achilles will bring about (338-365), emphasizing how he will disrupt familial lines through the imagery of mothers mourning their sons (348-351) and foretelling the role he will play in disrupting normative movement in the female life-cycle, when Polyxena is given to him as a prize in death, and her transition from maiden to married woman is consequently brutally interrupted (363-370). With their discussion of Achilles' destructive behavior, the Fates therefore queer Thetis and Peleus' union, even while affirming marriage's normative role in perpetuating a reproductive line.

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