

Catullus 64: Grand Myth on a Small Scale [Unit 6]

Primary Reading: Catullus 64.

Secondary Reading:

- Armstrong, R. *Cretan Women. Pasiphae, Ariadne and Phaedra in Latin Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006: 187-220 [Moodle].
- Debrohun, J. B. 'Catullan Intertextuality: Apollonius and the Allusive Plot of Catullus 64', in M. B. Skinner (ed.) *A Companion to Catullus*. Malden MA and Oxford: Blackwells, 2007: 293-313 [Moodle].
- Gaisser, J. H. 'Threads in the Labyrinth: Competing Views and Voices in Catullus 64', in J. H. Gaisser (ed.), *Catullus: Oxford Readings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007: 217-58 [Moodle].
- Godwin, J. *Catullus: Poems 61-68*. Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1995, 1-16; 132-75 [Library].
- Hutchinson, G. O. *Hellenistic Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, 301-310 [Moodle].
- Konstan, D. 'Neoteric Epic: Catullus 64', in A. J. Boyle (ed.), *Roman Epic*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993: 59-78 [Moodle].
- Merriam, C. U. (2001), *The Development of the Epyllion Genre through the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001, 75-125 [Library].
- Webster, T. B. L. 'The myth of Ariadne from Homer to Catullus', *G&R* 13, 1966, 22-31 [Moodle].

SECTION A: EPYLLIA

Discussion Points

1. What is Neoteric poetry? Why can we call Catullus 64 neoteric?
2. To what extent can we call this poem an *epyllion*? What parallels are there with the Greek *epyllia* studied last week?
3. To what extent are the themes, structure and foci of the poem typical of *epyllia*?

SECTION B: THE POEM

Discussion Points

1. What is the structure of the *epyllion*? How does the poet move between his stories? This structure has been called a 'jewelled style', do you agree?
2. How and why does Catullus treat time in this poem? Why has he made the movement of time so complex?
3. How does Catullus use the literary device of *ecphrasis*? How innovative is he in his application of this device?
4. What is the role of the poet in this poem? How does he combine both distance and emotion?
5. What are the internal/external audiences of this poem? Do the two have different readings of the piece? Can the application of readership theory help us in an analysis of this poem?
6. To what extent should we consider this poem a piece of meta-fiction (think of readership, narration and focalisation, the combination of literary and artistic genres, allusion and intertextuality)?

Myth in Greek and Roman Epic

SECTION C: THE MYTHS

Discussion Points

There are four interlaid myths in this poem: Peleus and Thetis, Ariadne and Theseus, Jason and Medea and Achilles. For each of these myths consider:

1. How are the mythological figures characterised and presented? Why?
2. How are these characterisations and depictions of myths different and/or similar to previous instantiations? What aspects of the myths has Catullus chosen to highlight? Why has Catullus chosen to present them in this way?
3. What types of heroism are highlighted in these retellings? Who is the hero? Why?

Consider too:

1. Are we supposed to take the happiness of Peleus and Thetis' marriage at face value?
2. How are we supposed to view/judge Theseus' abandonment of Ariadne?
3. Does the retelling of the Theseus/Ariadne myth affect our interpretation of the framing myth of Peleus and Thetis?
4. How does Catullus, without ever referring to them specifically, evoke the myth of Jason and Medea? Why?
5. Why does Catullus include the prophecy of Achilles? How does it affect our reading of the poem?