

Catullus 64 is an epyllion in dactylic hexameter which opens with the marriage of Peleus and Thetis (1-46), but contains a lengthy description of a coverlet upon the marriage bed of the couple (47 - 266).

47 -75 denotes the start of the ekphrasis of the coverlet (vestis) which depicts Ariadne, having been abandoned on Dia and watching Theseus's fleet depart without her. The mortal guests at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis have arrived and may look upon the wondrous coverlet (51) Ariadne has awoken to find herself alone and see Theseus departing (52).

Following this passage, the narrative takes us back in time to Theseus' arrival on Crete (81-85), Ariadne sees Theseus (86-93), and he kills the Minotaur (105-111). We then return to Ariadne on the beach, but now she is crying and running along the cliffs and the shore (116-129).

The episode culminates in Ariadne cursing Theseus (132 - 201). We then see the curse result in the death of Aegeus (202 - 250). The arrival of Iacchus (251 - 266) draws a close to the ekphrasis, which is followed by the wedding song of the Parcae (303-381) and the poet's closing comments on the moral descent of his own times and the god's absence from mortal affairs (382 - 408)

Catullus seeks to emulate Hellenistic poetry, particularly the erudite style of Callimachus. His 'Hecale' depicted a female character involved in the Theseus myth cycle. There are strong intertextual links with Apollonius's *Argonautica*, and Euripides' tragedy *Medea*. Cinna's *Zmyrna*, which Catullus praises in poem 95, is

likely to have been in a similar style, and provides clues as to the types of works a neoteric poet in Rome may have been expected to attempt. This sets the poem within the tradition of polished, allusive poetry, with a high degree of artifice, and self awareness. Lyne (2007) provides a thorough introduction to Catullus's literary predecessors for this style/genre and the influences of the neoterici.

The ekphrasis in Hellenistic poetry, an artistic representation of an item, so it is almost one step removed from reality and is in itself a work of art. The tradition is seen in older Epic poetry, such as the Iliad - shield of Achilles.

One of the themes of the poem is the relationship between mortals and gods. Munro (1886) notes several similarities between Catullus's work and *De Rerum Natura* (hereafter referred to as DRN). Lucretius's didactic poem extols the ideas of Epicurean philosophy and looks to persuade mankind not to fear the gods or believe that they intervene in the lives of mortals. We can understand it most likely that Catullus is responsible for echoing Lucretius, not vice versa (Tamás 2016). In DRN 4 1101-2 Lucretius considers that lovers can never be truly fulfilled solely by looking.

Book 2 of DRN opens with the famous metaphor of the sweetness of watching a shipwreck from the safety of the shore. The imagery of Catullus 64 includes both Ariadne and Aegeus watching ships from the shore. Both characters are seen to suffer as a result. Are we the watchers who are pleasantly enjoying watching the misfortune of others?

The mortals leave the wedding after they have seen, but not understood, the images on the coverlet. They are not able to hear the 'truth' of the Parcae's song (322). It can be argued that interactions with humans have also brought suffering to the gods. The unhappiness of Thetis' marriage is implied by the litotes in line 20, she also has to bear the death of the child she conceived with a mortal. The Parcae sing of his funeral in their wedding song (361-363) Prometheus is also named as a wedding guest (294 - 295), and the scars are a reminder of his suffering for assisting mankind. This sense that gods and men have always been flawed has led to postulations that Catullus is commenting on the politics of his day. This work does not examine that strand of thought which has already been examined in detail (Konstan 2011; Ambühl 2016).

The chronology of the poem is deliberately complex and unfeasible. Catullus creates a labyrinthine poem where the imperfect heroes/heroines are echoing and retelling stories of loss, unhappiness and death. Wasdin (2017) offers a creative solution to the chronology problem by suggesting that the coverlet in fact shows events that are yet to happen at the time of the wedding. I am of the opinion that it is a learned allusion to the chronological inconsistencies in the *Argonautica*, as explored by Weber (1983)

47 puluinar ... geniale locatur

There are similarities with the wedding of Medea and Jason (Apollonius *Argonautica* 4.1141). There, the golden fleece covers the bridal couch. The Apollonian Medea is rushed into marrying Jason at an inopportune time, she also participates in the

murder of her brother, and betrays her family to assist Jason. Debrohun (2007) has explored how 'locatur' alludes to Apollonius's work.

In contradiction to the ekphrastic tradition, we are not told who supposedly created the coverlet, and there is the same sense in this line of an unknown third party creating the scene.

Pulvinar is defined in Lewis & Short as '*a couch made of cushions, and spread over with a splendid covering, for the gods and persons who received divine honors*' this does not seem to have been a very common word, with less than 50 usages attested <https://logeion.uchicago.edu/pulvinar> . It was part of the lectisternum, so may well have been closely associated with Roman traditional worship of the gods.

Genialis - has a sense of 'of marriage/creating offspring' but also 'for enjoyment.'

Both of these senses can be seen as ironic, considering that Thetis is said to have been reluctant to marry, and her character in the Argonautica is presented as being indifferent to Peleus, with their marriage having broken down by this time. The child of this union is represented as bringing sadness to mothers, and receiving the sacrifice of Polyxena, so it can be argued that Catullus is undermining heroic values. Dee (1982) questions whether we can actually interpret Catullus's representation as moralising on the heroic code. There are no easy answers provided in the text, but I would argue that there is a sense of irony present throughout the poem that seems to support a reading that presents the heroes as flawed.

Pulvinar is again used at the start of line 165 to signal the end of the ekphrasis by use of balanced repetition. There is a sense of parts of the poem being woven into others, and it is intratextually complex. This helps contribute to the labyrinthine quality, with Catullus providing hints that may be no more than a dead end to confuse the audience.

48-49 indo ...dente politum Catullus describes the couch as being polished with Indian ivory. Ivory is also mentioned in line 45 so does seem to be deliberately included by the poet. There are several other passages where the whiteness of an item is described, particularly, accompanying red/purple items. It has been noted by Harmon (1973) that Iliad 4.140-7 compares an arrow wound with a woman dyeing ivory, giving an epic precedent for this, and an association with death.

tincta ... roseo conchyli purpura fuco Lines 162-3 make reference to these contrasting colours, Theseus's white feet with the purple cloth Ariadne would be happy to spread on his bed. Glenn (1980) sees this as a reference to Ariadne's sexuality, which seems plausible, given the link with the marriage couch again here in line 48.

If the Argo had been the first ship then the import of ivory from India to Greece would have been unlikely.

Ivory and the expensive dyes denote wealth as well as luxury, but also require trade. The decadence and luxury of the house could be interpreted as an ironic commentary on the morality of the heroes of old. Many of Catullus's literary successors draw a comparison between the degeneracy of the rich modern world and the simple life of poverty (Virgil Eclogues, Juvenal 10)

Catullus contrasts this with line 303 where the guests sit for the feast, then the Parcae sing (309).

Fuco Konstan (2011) states that 'fucus' can give a sense of deceit, as in dyeing something to conceal its true form. Together with the legal impetus of 'indicat' in line 51 this gives a sense that there is something hidden that is now being exposed.

Tyrian purple 'is the oldest, most well-known, most expensive, most prestigious and most vivid dye or pigment,' (Cooksey 2013) so again we are aware of indicators of wealth, and perhaps class.

The image of a tapestry and purple cloth is provided at 2.52 of DRN as an example of how riches are not as important as learning, and this metaphor follows that of a luxurious house rich in gold and silver 2.28, just as in 64 lines 43-44. This seems to support the idea that Catullus is deliberately unclear moral message and drawing attention to our position as watchers.

50 haec uestis priscis hominum uariata figuris

Are the figures older than the times of Peleus and Thetis? We have a chronological anomaly, as the coverlet depicts a boat, and the poem begins with an allusion to the Argo as the first ship.

Priscis has a similar meaning to Greek *archaios* - from the origins/antique/from time immemorial and is the opposite of *pristinus*, so it is a significant word denoting ancient times. logeion.uchicago.edu/priscus Weber (1983) suggests that this deliberate chronological obfuscating may be a feature of neoteric poetry, as a way of showing that they were aware of these issues in their Hellenistic models.

Also used by Ariadne in line 159 to describe her father - perhaps reflecting the ancient bonds of family that she breaks and further inculpating her.

Variata - see Laird (1993) & Faber (1998) *variata* as a Latin equivalent to *poikilos* - Homeric

Similar language used in line 265 at the close of the ekphrasis, again to provide a sense of time repeating.

51 heroum mira uirtutes indicat arte.

Virtutes is emphatically placed in the centre of the line and seems ironic considering the clues that the poet provides of their presentation of the heroes in the work. 'A Hellenistic rejection of harsh archaic values' Garrison (1996) p134.

The concise five word line meets the highly balanced ideal for epic poetry. Just as a poem tells deeds with 'mira arte' so too will the fictional item that the poet will now proceed to describe/elaborate upon. The line is heavily spondaic, slow and grand, again in contrast to the scene that follows.

Faber (1998) states that the following lines contain features not normally found in descriptions/ekphrases:

- extended narrative 53-59
- Simile 60-67
- Apostrophe 68-75
- Considerable authorial involvement

This suggests that Catullus is not only trying to emulate his Hellenistic predecessors but also looking to create something original and genre defying.

52 namque fluentisono prospectans...

Namque and present participle give a sense of urgency and add to the visual effect. Fluentisono is onomatopoeic so there is contrast between the stillness of the supposed tapestry and the movement and sound the poet wants us to imagine. The poem is a medium to be read/heard so Catullus is creating something that allows us to hear the effect of rhythm of the waves, so we become more aware of the skill of the poet and artifice of the situation

See also clarisona in line 320 - another compound word - rare in this poem.

Prospectans - she is looking out - we and the guests are looking at the coverlet and the subject is also looking out at another point of focus. I believe this helps to

support a nod to Epicurean philosophy in this poem, as highlighted by Tamás. (2016) who argues that this is similar to Lucretius's simile of the shipwreck in book 2.1 DRN.

Diae Callimachus fragment 601 tell us that Dia is the older name for Naxos - see Goold (1983) p251. This is also the location in Apollonius's Argonautica where Ariadne and Dionysus lay upon a wondrously crafted cloak which in 4. 424-34 is used to lure Medea's brother to her death, again drawing connections between Ariadne and the equivocal Medea.

53 Thesea cedentem celeri cum classe tuetur

Theseus is mentioned directly by name three times in this passage, rather than being described by Patronymic or similar, in the allusive style common to 'Callimachean' poetry (lines 69 & 73). The more exotic Greek ending is also used here. This could be because Catullus would imagine that Ariadne would call Theseus's name while she is standing on the shore so the poem echoes this. The line is heavy with alliteration and this helps develop the rhythm of the line as Theseus is carried away wave by wave. The pattern of dactyl, spondee, dactyl, spondee reinforce the rhythmic quality of the line.

Tuetor - watch/look at, but has the same root as 'keep safe' irony as Theseus has not looked after Ariadne but has placed her in danger.

54-55 indomitos...furores

Ariadne is full of furor in lines 94 & 197 too. This also helps to create a sense of irony as the epilogue states as the reason the gods no longer mingle with humans:

omnia fanda nefanda malo permixta furore (405)

However, here we are also seeing furor as a major motivation for the behaviour of this 'prisca figura.'

Compare this with Minotaur at 173 'indomito tauro' linking Ariadne with her monstrous half brother. This helps to strengthen the Medea comparison, as well as likening Ariadne to her flawed family.

The poet is not just describing a scene but also giving us an insight into Ariadne's state of mind.

Visit visere credit The present tense verbs create a sense of Ariadne as a living being with senses rather than just an image, and the repetition reinforces this, and draws attention to this supposed work of art having senses of its own.

56 Fallaci..somno she hasn't been deceived by a dream but by the fact that Theseus was able to leave without her as she was unaware of what was happening. Her sleep was deceiving, as it allowed her to be abandoned.

Tum primum continues the dramatic sense that the scene is actually unfolding in real time rather than a static image as Ariadne becomes aware of her predicament.

57 Miseram se is placed in between 'in sola harena' so she is encompassed by the lonely shore. The adjectives describing Ariadne accumulate, heightening emotion.

Se cernat - Ariadne is a watcher too - another sense that the action of the poem is occurring on multiple levels. She is both the subject and the object.

58 immemor ... remis,

Immemor is repeated at lines 123 135 248 – reinforcing the negative view of Theseus. The description of Theseus is the subject of the sentence whereas Ariadne in the line before is in the accusative. Implying that Theseus himself has opted to leave Ariadne, rather than acting on the compulsion of the gods. Catullus' understanding of the emotions involved in feeling abandoned by a lover can be considered alongside Catullus's love poems, where he is devoted to Lesbia but she seems to have lost interest in him.

Rhythm of line reflects the striking of the sea by the oars, created by three dactyls in succession.

59 irrita uentosae linquens promissa procellae.

A Golden line - grand, epic style, a stylistic climax, drawing attention to the unheroic aspect of Theseus breaking his promise.

Irrita - void - of a pact – this features in Lesbia poems eg 109 line 6 sanctae foedus amicitiae

Compare with Catullus 70 lines 3 & 4 (this in itself owes much to Callimachus epigram 25 - see Knox p160 for more detail)

‘dicit: sed mulier cupido quod dicit amanti,
in vento et rapida scribere oportet aqua’

Scholars (e.g. Thomson (1961) Kinsey (1965) Glenn (1980)) have debated whether these similarities are a deliberate attempt to bring aspects of Catullus’s personal life into this poem, or coincidental and part of the nature of describing similar emotions.

I would agree that these lines do seem to provide a connection between the presentation of Ariadne and Catullus’ own feelings.

See also line 335 and 373 - again Catullus uses the language of a pact which is common in the Lesbia poems. R.O.A.M Lyne (1980) provides a full treatment of this topic.

60 quem procul ex alga maestis Minois ocellis,

The Patronymic is not only in the epic tradition but also reminds us again of Ariadne’s flawed family.

The diminutive ocellis makes Ariadne seem small and vulnerable, helping create sympathy.

61 saxea ut effigies bacchantis, prospicit, eheu,

Murgatroyd (1997) points out that this is the first simile of the poem' and is 'freezing Ariadne in the moment'.

When compared with the simile in 369, he tells us these are the only similes concerning women and they have both been maltreated by heroes, supporting a reading that points to a flawed heroic age.

Saxea - Ariadne is compared to a statue, although this is already supposed to be a representation of Ariadne constructed from thread, so the poet is playing with the idea of art and artifice.

Anticipates the arrival of Bacchus in 251-263

effigies: Catullus is describing a work of art by likening it to another work of art in a different medium - it's almost as if he is seeing how far he can push the ekphrasis.

Compare 255 'euhoe bacchantes euhoe'

62 prospicit ... undis,

Epanalepsis see also lines 132-33 and 186-87. High drama, but also drawing attention to the theme of watching.

Again the poet uses Pathetic fallacy.

63 non flauo retinens subtilem uertice mitram,

The perspective changes from a focus on Ariadne's inner turmoil, contrasting it with her appearance.

Colours are prominent - the yellow hair is reminiscent of the golden halls where the wedding takes place (44), and that Ariadne is paler than gold (100). This could be to put the audience in mind of the golden age.

Much has been written on the visual aspect and comparisons with Greek and Roman art. Elsner (2007) provides more detail in this respect.

64 non contecta leui uelatum pectus amictu,

Garrison (1996) translates this as 'not covered with respect to her once veiled breast' p134 . The language is quite involved, but the sound of the line with assonantal soft vowels is sensuous.

65 non tereti strophio lactentis uincta papillas,

Non...non...non balances pars..pars...pars in lines 257-259 - the stillness here contrasts the coming noise and sound of the Bacchae.

We are also reminded of the nymphs when Peleus sees Thetis (17-18)

I feel that there is a sense that Ariadne has lost her chance for a marriage and family, supported by the reference to her milky white breasts, and this draws a parallel between her position and the mothers whose sons have been killed by Achilles (349-51). This view seems to be accepted by Daniels (1972), 'to be barren and homeless is the worst fate for a human.' The poet's gaze moves down their bodies in the same way as Ariadne is described, from their grey hair to their withered breasts - Ariadne still presents a picture of fertility whereas there is pathos in the image of the mothers whose breasts can no longer be a source of nourishment. Perhaps there is further irony here, as Ariadne is unaware of her impending rescue, but considers herself lost.

66 omnia quae toto delapsa e corpore passim

Compare to line 187 'omnia sunt deserta, ostentant omnia muta' There, the state of high emotion is reflected by the language of extremes - there is a lack of reason and balance, here, however, there is a voyeuristic quality to the poet highlighting her nudity and the indiscriminate falling of her clothes. It as makes her appear in a state of vulnerability

67 Salis is a metonymy in typical learned style of Hellenistic poetry, and adds to the sensual nature of the description. Catullus has brought his audience's gaze from Ariadne's hair in 163 down her body to her feet.

Alludebant is a cheerful, happy word suggesting play and lightness, so contrasts with Ariadne's state of mind. The episode, combined with the distressed state of the subject seems quite uncomfortable for a modern reader, although there may be a sense that the poet wants us to be able to delight in seeing the picture of misfortune he has created.

68-69 ... ex te pectore, Theseu,

Catullus has also used 'pectus' in line 64, and 'in pectore' in 72. This repetition is highlighting the distinction between the inner turmoil of Ariadne and the frozen image of her on the shore.

Direct address to Theseus in the vocative by the poet - Apostrophe - this has the effect of adding to the emotion, as the addressee is not present but is almost being asked to respond to the situation he is sailing away from.

70 toto animo, tota pendebat perdita mente.

Repetition 'tota' like 'nulla' in 186-187 show the sense of dealing in extremes, Ariadne is perceived to have an all or nothing mentality. This could be the reason why she is consumed by the fire that she feels.

Choice of verb is unusual and suggests a weight or penalty. 'Perdita' relates to how Ariadne would see herself - the audience would be aware that she is soon to be rescued - irony.

71 a misera

The 'a' interjection is a feature of neoteric poetry (Jenkyns 1982). Dramatic and emotional.

externauit Harmon, D.P. (1973) tells us that 'externare' is unusual and also used to describe Ariadne at 165 - outside herself/alienation. An interesting distinction considering the dichotomy between the audience's understanding of the situation and the [presentation of the character's self perception.

Perfect tense, she has already been terrified and in this way, Theseus's fate, and his father's, is already sealed. We are watching the buildup to Ariadne's delivery of the curse, but the moment of fate, as it were, belongs to the past tense. When Theseus left Ariadne and she felt like she had been abandoned and was dying, that is what caused her to curse Theseus.

72 spinosas Erycina

O'Hara (1990) explains the pun on the use of the epithet and its placement next to 'spinosas'

Spinosas is also reminiscent of cupid's arrows which draws parallels with Medea in Apollonius. Venus sends cupid to make her fall in love with Jason in *Argonautica* 3. 275-298.

serens is ironic, as it suggests potential fertility and growth - which the union with Theseus will not provide. Perhaps there is a hint here of the coming of Iacchus and his vegetal powers.

73 Tempestate... quo ex tempore poetic periphrasis. The verbose style introduces the hero, in a position of prominence at the end of the line. Archaic and formal style seems more fitting for the presentation of Theseus in the mould of an epic hero.

Ferox - seems to be a heroic trait, but perhaps not quite appropriate or beneficial in terms of how it has affected Ariadne. The description of Theseus as *Immemor* is more critical of his character, although a comparison with the fierce Achilles would not necessarily be favourable in this poem. The epithet is again applied in line 247

where Ariadne's curse results in Aegeas' suicide. Lee (1990) translates *ferox* as 'haughty' which would support a more negative reading.

74 *curuis... litoribus* Fordyce (1961) advises that this is an epic phrase. Theseus is here representing the epic hero with an air of tradition and noble glory. This contrasts with the allusion to tragedy in Ariadne's speech which follows this.

75 *Iniusti regis* - a play on words for the learned audience as Minos was a judge in the underworld. Also reinforces the presentation of him as a flawed character. Gortyn is mentioned in Iliad and Odyssey, further support for presenting Theseus as an Epic hero. The subversive treatment of Achilles in the song of the Parcae suggests to me that the poet wishes to display Theseus in this way too.

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