

CLCS5001: The Muses' Playground: Epic in Antiquity

Catullus 64 Workshop

Catullus 64 is the only complete surviving example of an epyllion in Roman literature and allows us the opportunity to study the influence of both epic and Hellenistic poetry on Roman. We can see in Catullus 64 both an emulation and renewing of the epic and epyllion genre and a recasting and condensing of many myths in a mere 408 lines.

This seminar will consist of class discussions on Catullus' use of epic conventions, traditions and myths in his 64th poem. For this seminar you should, naturally, read Catullus 64. Guy Lee's 1990 Oxford World Classics translation is a good one to use (there are four copies of this in the library). However, Thomas Banks' 1997 translation is also okay [<http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/cat64.shtml>].

Whilst reading, use the following questions to focus your analysis of the poem:

- i) What idea(s) of 'heroism' does Catullus give through this poem?
- ii) What aspects of Achilles' myths does Catullus choose to highlight? How and why? How epic is the treatment of Achilles?
- iii) How does Catullus connect the outer narrative (Peleus and Thetis) with that of the inner (Ariadne and Theseus)? What are the underlying themes which we derive from these retellings? Does the retelling of the Ariadne/Theseus myth affect our interpretation of the framing myth of Peleus and Thetis?
- iv) How does the Bacchus-Ariadne relationship reflect upon the other relationships in the poem?
- v) Remind yourself of the action of Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*. Catullus utilises the *Argonautica* throughout his poem. How? Why? Read Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* 3.973-1007. How does Catullus, without ever referring to them specifically, evoke the myth of Jason and Medea in his poem? Why?

To help in your preparation for this seminar, please read around, especially:

Gaiser, J. H. 'Threads in the Labyrinth: Competing Views and Voices in Catullus 64', in J. H. Gaiser (ed.) *Catullus: Oxford Readings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 217-58. (previously *AJPh* 116 (1995), 579-616)

Konstan, D. 'Neoteric Epic: Catullus 64', in A. J. Boyle (ed.) *Roman Epic*. London and New York: Routledge, 59-78.

Warden, J. 'Catullus 64: structure and meaning', *CJ* 93 (1998), 397-415