

## BOOK REVIEW

*Cretan Woman: Pasiphae, Ariadne, and Phaedra in Latin Poetry.* By REBECCA ARMSTRONG. Oxford Classical Monographs. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Pp. ix + 351. Cloth, \$90.00. ISBN 0-19-928403-2.

In this book, Rebecca Armstrong (A.) explores the connections between the myths of Cretan women in Roman literature of the late Republic and early Empire. Crete is a location defined by contradictions and paradoxes: associated with the establishment of law and justice, it is also associated with lying and deception, depravity, and lack of civilization. These competing tendencies shape the appearances of Pasiphae, Ariadne and Phaedra, whose stories of sexual perversion and betrayal excite both revulsion and sympathy. A. argues that the Roman fascination with these paradoxes makes the stories of these three transgressive women particularly attractive, as they provide a rich context to explore the dynamics of personal, cultural and literary memory, and the overlap and boundaries between the wild and the tame, and between vice and virtue.

The book has a two-part structure. The first three chapters are thematic in nature; each is devoted to how a particular theme (memory, wildness, morality) shapes the stories of all three Cretan women in various works. Chapters 4-7 focus on individual characters in a series of texts. This structural approach has the advantage of flexibility, allowing for a variety of critical approaches. The thematic chapters demonstrate the way layers of texts work together to form composite pictures of the characters, while the sustained readings of the second half provide a fuller view of individual incarnations, situating them within literary history. A. describes her critical approach as labyrinthine—an apt metaphor running throughout a book characterized by twists and turns, even repetitions, as she follows different paths of inquiry. A.'s detailed account of her methodology in the introduction includes poetic memory, ethical values, psychological realism and feminism among the concerns that inform her work. This variety of approaches yields a richly layered and complex analysis; A. consciously resists easy answers and overly-simplifying or schematic assessments, producing a kaleidoscopic view of the texts at hand. One of the most intriguing premises of her book is that the mythological and literary concerns at the center of these stories resonate with broader Roman cultural concerns. This is a suggestive line of inquiry, which has the potential to energize her excellent literary readings, but is left disappointingly under-developed. The entire book displays an impressive command of literary history, bringing to bear a wide array of evidence, both Greek and Roman. A. is at her best in close readings of texts, and offers many sensitive observations and nuanced analyses. The book would have benefited,

## BOOK REVIEW

however, from a clearer articulation of the extent to which these women form a distinct group, unified by shared characteristics that set them apart from other literary women or, through the outlines of their myths, prompt a sharper exploration of the literary implications of more broadly shared characteristics.

Chapter 1 addresses the relationship between personal and poetic memory. Ariadne is haunted by thoughts of Theseus' forgetfulness of her, and Phaedra dwells on the sexual perversion in her family tree and its implications for her own actions. References to memory, immediately motivated by developments within the characters' stories, open up to engage with the dynamics of literary influence and inheritance. This is the most successful example of A.'s multivalent view of these texts; the psychological realism of the women's concern with their own and their ancestors' pasts and the intertextual dynamics that bring in the literary past are mutually reinforcing.

Chapter 2 addresses the theme of wildness in the Cretan women's stories. Beginning with the idea that Crete is a place defined by the contradictory forces of uncivilized wildness and a renowned legal system, A. argues that the stories of Cretan women, characterized by unbridled female lust, remote natural locations, the cruelty of heroes and the divine madness of Bacchus, offer opportunities to explore the hazy boundaries between human and animal, wild and tame, civilized and uncivilized.

Chapter 3 addresses the moral complexities of the sexual intemperance and betrayal that define the Cretan women's stories. Pasiphae's betrayal of her husband for the bull, Ariadne's betrayal of her father for Theseus and Phaedra's betrayal of Theseus for Hippolytus offer opportunities to explore the definitions, categories and even overlaps between vice and virtue. The characters' attempts to fight against their passions or to preserve their virtue through silence complicate their status as irredeemably "bad" women.

The treatments in the second half of the book focus on situating these texts within literary history. The echoes of and departures from familiar details bring into sharper focus the outlines of the individual character in a particular text, but the distinctiveness of these three as specifically Cretan women falls to the wayside as the focus moves away from their thematic unity. Chapter 4 focuses on Pasiphae in Vergil's *Eclogue* 6 and Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* 1. Vergil's sympathetic treatment of her brings together neoteric and pastoral influences, while Ovid treats her with amused mockery, presenting her as a prime elegiac example of women's lustfulness. Chapter 5, on Ariadne in Catullus 64, emphasizes Catullus' poetic self-consciousness and the poem's relationship to literary history. Chapter 6 effectively takes stock of the three different Ovidian Ariadnes, giving a compelling account of the repetitions and variations between them: a pas-

## BOOK REVIEW

sionate and desperate Ariadne, recently abandoned by Theseus, takes control of her own narrative in *Heroides* 10; a vulnerable and weak Ariadne awaits Bacchus' arrival in *Ars Amatoria* 1.527–64; and Ariadne plays the part of jealous wife of Bacchus in the account of the creation of the constellation and her identification with Libera in *Fasti* 3.459–516. Chapter 7 examines two portraits of Phaedra. The Phaedra of *Heroides* 4, drawing from the generic influences of elegy, hymeneal and tragedy, is a weak, lovesick woman attempting to persuade both herself and Hippolytus. Seneca's Phaedra, motivated simultaneously by Theseus' infidelity, the inevitability of inherited sin and the questionable divine origin of passion, is a heroine who bears the weight of her own literary history in a Stoic context.

It remains unclear whether these problematic Cretan women should be regarded as forming a special group or exemplifying wider trends in Latin literature. But A.'s sensitive and sympathetic treatment brings valuable new dimensions to them and the texts they inhabit.

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