

Scylla: Myth, Metaphor, Paradox. By MARIANNE GOVERS HOPMAN. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. xix + 300. \$99.00 ISBN 978-110702-676-6.

Hopman's provocative study, exemplary as both reception project and mythography, reads Scylla semiotically in order to map the name's semantics from the archaic age through late antiquity. In considering Scylla as sign, the author explores her meanings in historically distinct visual and verbal contexts instead of treating her as a biographically consistent character or charting her narrative functions in "at least three conceptual domains: sea, dog, and woman" (12). Hopman's analysis of Scylla as a complex symbol not only offers an alternative to pervasive narratological methods of interpreting mythical 'figures', but challenges their applicability to Scylla and, by extension, other mythical names that occur in varied positions throughout diverse narratives. Further, the argument traces to late antiquity mythographic methods that treat mythical names as 'figures' and casts doubt upon the conclusions they produce.

The chapters follow a tripartite chronological organization prefaced by an introduction that establishes the semiotic grounding of the project, mentions the philosophical lineage it implicates (3–4), and outlines the book's broader significance. After an explication and inter-textual reading of the *Odyssey's* Scylla episode, Hopman considers Scylla representations of the classical era; the Hellenistic origins of her mythography; and her reception in Roman poetry. The epilogue concludes that *Mischwesen* (hybrids) like Scylla differ from anthropomorphic immortals in that *Mischwesen* lack agency to initiate narrative sequences.

Scylla's introduction thoroughly justifies the sophisticated bricolage of Hopman's methods, drawn from Saussurean linguistics, the works of Jakobson, Barthes, Jauss, Vernant, Geertz, and, to a lesser extent, Freud via Horney and other epigones. The first section interprets the Homeric Scylla episode as heroic failure: Odysseus falls short of Jason when his inability to best Scylla, portrayed as a "failed cosmogonic battle" (33), contrasts structurally with his triumph over Polyphemus (34–39).

Hopman stresses the language of forgetting in Odysseus's narration of Scylla's attack as meta-poetic threats to the song additionally emphasize Odysseus's failure. There is danger that Odysseus will forget his *nostos*, and this danger

reflects analogous meta-poetic hazards to the performance. Scylla remains such an unconquerable monster in later receptions, in Hopman's view, in that only one "eccentric", Hellenistic story recounts a hero's victory over the beast (51). Hopman highlights Scylla's canine voracity in the *Odyssey* and details its relation to descriptions of the sea in archaic contexts. She then considers the monster's enigmatic nature and argues that Scylla fuses elements of mystery, which the epic consistently codes as feminine, with anthropophagous voracity typically gendered as masculine. The section left me pondering the implications of this fusion and possible reasons behind it.

Part II argues that while the *Odyssey* "keeps Scylla's gender relatively subdued" (88), classical representations use Scylla to signify anxieties about female sexuality. Hopman voices due skepticism that a lost Stesichorus poem determined visual representations of Scylla (93–94). Instead, she contends that the visual type derives from merman images (99). Hopman shows that visual elements comprising Scylla (woman's torso, dog protomes, fishlike tail) correspond semantically with verbal descriptions (107).

Textual sources (notably Aeschylus's *Oresteia* and Euripides's *Medea*) use Scylla to represent the danger of female sexuality, while Scylla comes to designate sexual voracity in Xenophon and predatory sexuality in Anaxilas. Hopman, citing the *vagina dentata* as parallel (138–39), establishes textual and iconographic equivalents between Scylla's mouth, the straits in which she resides, and the female genitals. She also shows that Scylla often symbolizes a danger to *parthenoi* in their transition to marriage. She gives particular attention to Thetis, a foil, in Hopman's view, often juxtaposed to Scylla. While Thetis protects the metaphorical "passage" of the *parthenos* to marriage, Scylla, as canine embodiment of undomesticated erotic passion, threatens its successful navigation.

The book's third section elucidates how allegorizing and rationalizing interpretations of Scylla by philosophers, historians, and geographers influenced later poetic representations. Scylla becomes moral abstraction (Plato), misunderstood historical courtesan (Heraclitus the Paradoxographer), and toponym (Tzetzes) (184–88). Empirical rationality and the logical criterion of non-contradiction result in a homogenization of Scylla's diverse tradition (195–200), while biographical models attempt to reconcile 'discrepancies' in her genealogy by distinguishing Megarian Scylla from the sea monster.

Hopman convincingly traces the implications of mythic rationalizing. She details in nuanced terms, how, why, and with what consequence Virgil, Ovid, and Propertius self-consciously conflate the two Scyllae. Scylla becomes oxymoron—

maiden as monster—the psychological epitome of female ferocity. While Scylla's *exemplum* in Roman poetry becomes formulaic, Ovid, Hopman shows, psychologizes Scylla, whose novel semantics in *Metamorphoses* depend upon inter- and intra-textual effects.

This outstanding work of scholarship is valuable for the specific case it presents and for its challenge to established methods of reading mythic 'figures'. Hopman elucidates both the homogenizing impetus of late antiquity and the flexibility of tradition. There is stimulating tension between Hopman's own bid to unify under the sea/dog/woman synthesis, which tends toward abstraction, and her appreciation of the fluidity of myth.

Thus, while I agree about the eccentricity of a late source in which Heracles defeats Scylla (51), Hopman's limited treatment of the only extant archaic depiction of Scylla in visual art (35) leaves unaddressed the "octopus-like" (35) monster's lack of the supposedly ubiquitous "woman" semantic marker, as well as the questionable dogginess of its heads. Perhaps archaic depictions are even more flexible than Hopman allows? The book's central claims, whether they meet with agreement or disagreement, will continue to inspire questions and debate among specialists. *Scylla* deserves praise for originality, versatility, and intellectual depth.

ERIC DODSON-ROBINSON

West Chester University, EDodson-Robinson@wcupa.edu.