

The Objectification of a Heroine in Catullus 64

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Catullus 64, Catullus's longest work, is a 400 line epyllion which opens and closes with the story of the wedding of Peleus and Thetis. However, the majority of the poem describes the myth of Ariadne and Theseus, which is introduced by an ekphrasis in line 51¹: *Haec uestis priscis hominum uariata figuris / Heroum mira uirtutes indicat arte* (64.52).² Catullus writes, "This bedspread having been adorned with ancient figures / of men shows the virtues of heroes with amazing skill."³ Theseus is a strong Athenian hero who volunteers to be fed to King Minos's son, the Minotaur, to spare the lives of Athenian children. Theseus arrives on the shores of Crete, determined to defeat the Minotaur. As soon as he comes to Minos's palace, the King's daughter, Ariadne is inflamed with love for him and helps him kill the Minotaur, her brother, and escape the labyrinth. Theseus promises to marry Ariadne, but the ekphrasis opens with the image of a helpless Ariadne who has just awoken to find that Theseus is sailing back to Athens

¹ In this ekphrasis, Catullus moves from the poem's focus on the wedding of Peleus and Thetis to the story of Ariadne and Theseus by focusing on an embroidered image of Ariadne on Peleus and Thetis's marriage bed.

² All line quotations from the poem 64 will be taken from Wikisource. Wikisource contributors, "Translation: Catullus 64," *Wikisource*, https://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=Translation:Catullus_64&oldid=5104215 (accessed May 26, 2016).

³ All translations are my own though I consulted Wikisource: Catullus 64.

without her. Most of the ekphrasis then follows the story of Ariadne meeting Theseus, being abandoned, her lament, and finally, her curse. For the narrative of a poem to be steered primarily by a woman's thoughts, words, and actions was rare in earlier forms of Roman poetry.⁴ Catullus, the first real erotic elegist, is one of the earliest Roman poets to give a woman a voice in poetry. Scholars praise elegists like Catullus, Ovid, Propertius, and Sulpicia for fathering this monumental change in poetry, which they see as the beginning of a shift in gender roles in literature.⁵ According to this thinking, the women depicted in elegy are the first to be described and appreciated as people in their own right.⁶ The alleged independence elegy granted to women was especially significant as it emerged during the Augustan period in Rome, when the *mores* of women were strict.

Women in Roman society were relegated to a subservient, confined role. They were praised for "wifely obedience," domesticity, chastity, and fidelity, and literary works portrayed "nice women" as submissive and docile.⁷ They were not allowed to vote or hold office or to influence politics. If women did have any social influence, it

⁴ Maria Wyke, "Mistress and Metaphor in Augustan Elegy," in *Latin Erotic Elegy*, ed. Paul Allen Miller (London: Routledge, 2002), 405.

Ellen, Greene, "Were Roman Elegists Proto-feminists as Described by Judith Hallett?," *History in Dispute: Classical Antiquity and Classical Studies* 20 (2005): 4.

⁵ Hunter H. Gardener "Ariadne's Lament: The Semiotic Impulse of Catullus 64," in *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 153.

⁶ Judith P. Hallett, "The Role of Women in Roman Elegy: Counter Cultural Feminism," in *Latin Erotic Elegy*, ed. Paul Allen Miller (London: Routledge, 2002), 329.

⁷ *Ibid.*

was small and a result of their husbands' wealth. Paul Allen Miller details that the ethical obligation for men to be faithful to their wives was not out of respect for the woman, but out of respect for another man's property.⁸ In comparison to these *mores* - traditional ways - elegy seems progressive, not only in its portrayal of women as something other than property, but with the voice and strength given to women in moments such as Ariadne's lament and curse in Poem 64. Paul Allen Miller and Chuck Platter reference Hallett's diagnosis of elegists as *proto-feminists*⁹ citing her 1979 essay, "The Role of Women in Roman Elegy," in which Hallett likens elegists to the people of the counterculture, forging a new, more meaningful set of values to substitute for conventional social practices.¹⁰ Hallett argues that by not solely venerating women in their poetry, elegists cast their lovers into the "masterful role customarily played by men."¹¹ Hallett believes that by writing about women as companions rather than simply as objects of admiration, elegists were able to abandon the image of a subservient wife.¹²

In the Augustan Era, women gained inklings of independence, but no actual autonomy. For example, there was a movement away from marriages *cum manu*, where a woman was placed under the control of her husband, to marriages *sine manu*, where a

⁸ Paul Allen Miller, "Introduction," in *Latin Erotic Elegy: An Anthology and Reader*. (London: Routledge, 2002), 6.

⁹ Paul Allen Miller and Chuck Platter, "Introduction," *The Classical World* 92, no. 5 (1999): 405.

¹⁰ Hallett., 330.

¹¹ Hallett., 330.

¹² Hallett., 334.

woman remained under the control of her father. In neither case is a woman considered independent or free. In fact, marriages *sine manu* were not meant to grant women more freedom, but to free men of marriage's usual obligations and make divorce easier.¹³ The supposed female liberation of this period came with the caveat that these freedoms had evolved as a way of using women to help advance men's political careers. Divorce was made easier so that men could quickly separate themselves from politically weak families in order to marry into more powerful ones.¹⁴ Just as these small bits of independence had been granted to women in Rome to make "women more serviceable to men and their political ambitions,"¹⁵ women in elegy were serviceable to the elegists' projecting their political opinions. Elegists used the language of politics, law, finance, and warfare to describe their love affairs. Whereas Hallett argues that this language allowed elegists to treat women as their "amicitae" and equals,¹⁶ I argue that women and female characters in poetry function as the vehicles for elegists' political statements. This tactic is present in elegy when men employ female characters as a way of making a statement about a political rival or leader. Women were political assets to their husbands in Roman life, and, by proxy, even in Roman elegy.

¹³ Hallett., 332.

¹⁴ Hallett., 332.

¹⁵ Hallett., 332.

¹⁶ Hallett, 335.

Miller says Catullus's poetry was especially concerned with traditional Roman concepts of friendship, political alliance, faith, duty, and obligations.¹⁷ However, one could still argue that elegists were proto-feminists for portraying a change in typical male-female dynamics, as seen in poems such as Catullus 64 with Ariadne or Catullus 72, where Catullus's love for Lesbia is compared to familial love between men. In Poem 72, Catullus does not simply venerate the beloved¹⁸ as in earlier Roman poetry, but writes about a more substantial sentiment of masculine, familial love to describe a relationship with a woman. This treatment of women not only deviates from earlier Roman poetry but also from the way women were regarded in Roman society, where they were valued as assets and not for meaningful personal qualities.¹⁹ In Poem 64, Ariadne's loud, central voice would seem to indicate Catullus's rejection of the accepted social behaviors of women, as it does not display the conventional subservience expected of Roman women.

In "Ariadne's Lament: The Semiotic Impulses of Catullus 64," Gardener engages with the often debated idea that Catullus reversed, blended, or at least rethought Roman gender roles.²⁰ In Greek mythology, Ariadne is the stereotype of the ruined woman: she leaves the safety of her father's house, disobeys and disappoints her

¹⁷ Miller., 19.

¹⁸ Hallett., 329.

¹⁹ Hallett., 332.

²⁰ Gardener., 153.

mother, and runs off with Theseus who ultimately abandons her, rendering her an object of scorn in the eyes of Roman society. Yet, we hear sympathy in Catullus's vivid and painful descriptions of Ariadne, an unfamiliar respect paid to Ariadne and one unique to elegy. However, a closer examination of the language of Catullus's sympathy for Ariadne in 64 reveals his stereotypical ideas of gender. The language itself unveils what Catullus's poetry says about his attitude toward women. Tracking the use of certain words used to describe Ariadne in 64 throughout the rest of Catullus's poetry provides insight into what Catullus's voice really has to say about Ariadne. Such analysis of his language reveals that Catullus is not a proto-feminist, but rather someone who views women as objects.

Catullus is celebrated for his representation and understanding of women in part because of the vividness of his descriptions of Ariadne in 64. By painting images of a half-naked, sobbing Ariadne, with her hair blowing in the turbulent wind, Catullus makes the reader feel Ariadne's pain and loss. Ariadne is *perdita* - she is helpless.

Saxea ut effigies bacchantis prospicit, eheu,
 Prospicit et magnis curarum fluctuat undis,
 Non flauo retinens subtilem uertice mitram,
 Non contacta leui uelatum pectus amictu, (65)
 Non tereti strophio lactentis uincta papillas,
 Omnia quae toto delapsa e corpore passim
 Ipsius ante pedes fluctus salis adludebant.
 Sed neque tum mitrae neque tum fluitantis amictus
 Illa vicem curans toto ex te pectore, Theseu, (70)
 Toto animo, tota pendebat perdita mente.

She, as stony as a statue of Bacchus, looks forth, alas,

She looks ahead and rages with great waves of concerns,
 not keeping the delicate headdress on her blond head,
 not having been covered with respect to her chest in a light garment,
 not having been bound with respect to the milky breasts with a polished
 garment,
 with all things that having slipped from her whole body here and there
 The waves of salt were playing beneath her feet.
 But neither then of the flowing cloth or of the hat
 she was hanging on you, Theseus, desiring reciprocation from the whole heart,
 with the whole spirit, with the whole mind having been lost.

Catullus uses these painful descriptions to evoke a sympathy for Ariadne. In other tellings of this myth,²¹ Ariadne is portrayed as a ruined woman, but here, Catullus shows us a victim, a woman for whom we can feel pity rather than shame. Dufallo argues that Catullus is able to create such detailed and intense descriptions of Ariadne, and then to express so much pain in her lament, because *he* identifies with her pain in love.²² According to Dufallo, writing about women is not only traversing a new

²¹ Plutarch notes in *Theseus* 19 and 20 that there is conflicting information about Ariadne's fate on Naxos. Most sources describe Ariadne as having been abandoned by Theseus. This side of the debate can be found in Hyginus *Fables* 42 and 43, Ovid *Metamorphoses* Book 8, and Ovid *Heroides* Poem 10. In line 176 of Book 8 of *Metamorphoses*, Ovid calls Ariadne "desertae" and "querenti" (deserted and lamenting). In Ovid's *Heroides* Book 10, Theseus brings Ariadne to Naxos and then chooses to abandon her after being admonished by Bacchus, and he flees with Ariadne's sister, Phaedra. However, according to Homer on line 324 of Book 11 of *The Odyssey*, Ariadne is killed by Artemis on Naxos. Finally, some accounts, such as Diodorus Siculus 4.61; 5.51 and Pausanias 1.20.2; 27.9; 44.5; 9.40.2; 10.29.2, say that Dionysus forced Theseus to abandon Ariadne against his will. My argument focuses on the "abandoned Ariadne" side of this debate.

²²Basil Dufallo, "Reception and Receptivity in Catullus 64," *Cultural Critique* no. 74 (2010): 106.

frontier, but identifying with her seems to signify a transformation in men's understanding of women.

Tum tremuli salis aduersas procurrere in undas
 Mollia nudatae tollentem tegmina surae (130)
 Atque haec extremis maestam dixisse [querellis]
 Frigidulos udo singultus ore cientem:
 'sicine me patriis auectam, perfide, ab aris
 perfide, deserto liquisti in litore, Theseu?

They say that she runs ahead into the facing waves of the trembling salt raising the soft coverings of calf having been made bare. and that this very wretched woman said these things with final lamentations, producing cold sobs with a wet mouth: Treacherous one, so have you left me having been carried away from fatherly altars, treacherous one, have you left me on the deserted shore, Theseus?

Catullus stresses the horrible actions on the part of Theseus, another surprising description given Theseus's status as a famous Greek hero. Catullus refers to Theseus four times²³ using the word *immemor* - forgetful, thoughtless. Catullus insists on showing Ariadne's dependence on Theseus by recognizing that her spirit and mind were lost when he left her (*Toto animo tota pendebat perdita mente* 64.71). Throughout the poem, there is an ever-present suspicion and disapproval surrounding Theseus as Catullus takes Ariadne's side.²⁴

²³ Lines 59, 124, 136, 249.

²⁴ Dufallo., 100.

Ariadne's violent cries, detailed descriptions of her physical and mental state, and Catullus's identification with her, coupled with blaming Theseus, a renowned hero, make it seem that Catullus is taking a radical, pro-woman stance. However, it is essential to remember that a hallmark of Latin elegy is a noncompliance with social norms.²⁵ Elegists like Catullus lean towards social innovation by consciously and deliberately inverting the known world. One way of doing this is to turn expectations of the poet's attitudes towards the sexes on their head.²⁶ Elegists invert gender roles to hold a mirror to society. Distorting the ways of society was meant to arouse discomfort or to encourage people to reconsider the way they think, but not for the sake of elevating women.

Miller explains further that "elegists present themselves as sexual nonconformists and advocates of a lifestyle that threatens the very basis of traditional power between the genders."²⁷ The key here is that this is the way elegists "present themselves." They want to produce a reaction of shock and disbelief by challenging what people know about society. Thus, Catullus "indirectly attempts to question current social assumptions about upper class male conduct and re-tailor them to accommodate *his own* emotional needs."²⁸ In 64, he speaks about Ariadne in a vivid,

²⁵ Hallett., 334.

²⁶ Hallett., 335.

²⁷ Miller., 4.

²⁸ Hallett., 335., emphasis mine.

painful way, which is a perspective on women with which readers would have been unfamiliar. Even Dufallo's suggestion of an identification with Ariadne is not necessarily positive, because it reveals that he can only understand a woman's pain by channeling his own, as opposed to recognizing a woman's independence and personhood.

Catullus might write sympathetically from the perspective of a woman for reasons beyond surprising readers by inverting gender roles or channeling his own pain in love with his mistress. But if readers give Catullus the benefit of the doubt and credit that he was trying to suggest that women were more than property or objects used for political and social status, the words he uses to describe Ariadne reveal something quite different.

When the ekphrasis begins, Ariadne staring out into the sea is compared to a stone statue of Bacchus. Ariadne is disheveled with her hair blowing in the wind, her clothes half off, and waves crashing onto her feet. She is longing for Theseus. In line 55, the word *indomitos* is used to describe the rage in Ariadne's heart: *Indomitos in corde gerens ariadna furores* (Ariadne carrying uncontrollable rage in her heart). *Indomitos* is commonly defined as uncontrollable, however, it can also mean *untamed*, *untamable*, *wild*, *ungovernable*, or *fierce*.²⁹ *Untamable!* Untamable is defined as "(of an animal) not capable of being domesticated." The word's association with efforts to domesticate

²⁹ All definitions are consulted with Whitaker's Words and Lewis and Short, perseus.tufts.edu.

animals may suggest that Ariadne has behaved less like a woman and more like an animal. In Rome, the idea that a woman must be tamed and controlled was certainly not unusual. Women were considered the legal property of their fathers until they were transferred to husbands.³⁰ Ariadne has gone beyond her proper role as a woman by stepping outside of the control of a man. So to call her “untamed” is not quite to call *her* out of control and going crazy, but to call her out of a man’s control. And Ariadne is, in fact, out of both her father and Theseus’s control. In the rest of Catullus’s work, *indomitos* is used to suggest that only ruined women are *unable to be tamed* by men, while objects and men may be *out of control* or *wild* in their own right.

In Catullus 50, Catullus writes: *sed toto indomitus furore lecto* (Wild with inspiration, I tossed myself over the entire bed) (50.11). Here, Catullus describes himself as *indomitus*. He is restless and unable to sleep after a night of composing verse with Licinius. He is not calling himself untamed, because that would put him in the possession and under the control of Licinius - a relationship which is not suggested by the poem. He is tossing and turning with inspiration and cannot wait to be with Licinius in the daytime, suggesting that Licinius is causing this feeling of restlessness and instability in him, as with Ariadne and Theseus or her father. However, this poem does not suggest that Catullus is *indomitus* in the sense that he is out of Licinius’s control, as Ariadne is *indomitus* because she is out of her father’s power. Catullus is

³⁰ Hallett., 331.

indomitus here in the sense that he is simply restless, not “untamed” or “lacking domestication.”

Indomitos has two parts: *in* (not) and *domitare* (to tame). *Domitare* derives from the word *domus*, which means a house. When one is *tamed*, one is *domesticated* and, in fact, confined to a house, so the connection between these two words makes sense. In Latin, to marry a woman is the idiom *domum ducere* - literally *to lead a woman to the house*. The house is where a man aims to “domitare” his (property) woman; “to tame her.” One tames an animal, or in Rome, a woman. To describe any aspect of Ariadne as *indomitos* is not to be sympathetic to her situation; it is to comment on the distance between how she is behaving and how a woman should behave, namely, like a tamed, domestic piece of property. By calling her “untamed,” Catullus suggests that Ariadne is not assuming her rightful place in the home. She is wild because she is so far from her father’s home that no man can exert control over her any longer.

In this same part of the poem, Catullus describes Ariadne as *desertam* (58).

Desertam in sola miseram se cernat harena (She sees herself miserable having been deserted on the lonely sand). *Desertam* is the accusative perfect passive participle of the verb *deserto, deserere, deserui, desertum*, which can mean: to leave/depart/quit/desert; forsake/abandon/give up; withdraw support, let down; cease to be concerned with; fail/fall short.³¹ The word comes from *desertus*, which can mean *to leave, quit, desert,*

³¹ All definitions consulted William Whitaker’s Words

abandon, withdraw support as a verb or *deserted, lonely, forsaken, desert/waste* as an adjective. *Desertus* can describe deserted or abandoned places and people. When describing a place, *desertus* can mean desert or waste/wasteland, as in a neglected, empty, devastated and uninhabitable place.³² Here, Ariadne sees herself as not only abandoned, but also empty, neglected, and left behind as waste. To describe Ariadne as “left as waste” is not the same as calling her “abandoned” or “deserted.” A person can be deserted, but only an actual waste product can be *desertus* by the correct definition and roots of the word. Yet, Catullus uses this word to talk about Ariadne - a living person. Catullus does not see an abandoned woman as a person at all. Ariadne is further rendered worthless by being deemed not only alone and like something left behind, but now as *empty* by this abandonment. If Ariadne is compared to a place *desertam*, she is likened to a place without people. After having been abandoned by a man, her physical presence in space as well as her presence in society is no longer considered valid. Ariadne has lost her status of personhood to the extent that even when she is present, the space she occupies could be considered empty.

Later, on line 43, Catullus uses *desertus* (same perfect passive participle) to describe an object: *Squalida desertis robigo infertur aratris* (a rough rust is inflicted on the deserted plows) (43.63). The plows are being used to sweep up rotten grapevines, which are, in fact, waste products which need to be cleared out before the wedding of

³² Merriam Webster Dictionary, “waste,” “wasteland.”

Thetis and Peleus. Then, on line 134, the shore is *desertam: perfide deserto liquisti in litore Theseus* (Treacherous one, you left me on the deserted shore, Theseus?) (64.134). Here, in Ariadne's own lament, she too uses the word *deserted* to describe a shore. Throughout 64 *desertis* is a word that describes objects, places, and Ariadne.

In the poem Catullus 68 another object is *desertam: Frigida deserto tepefactet membra cubili* (would be wont to warm limbs cold from a lonely bed) (68.29). Here, where a bed is deserted, *deserto* likely means lonely or empty and personifies the bed. The extended definitions of the word do not warrant this kind of personification. The bed is abandoned, and that description is supposed to evoke loneliness. The reader is meant to feel similar feelings of abandonment for Ariadne, but once again, Catullus is talking about an object here. Later in 68, Catullus uses *deserto* to modify *nomine: in deserto Allii nomine opus faciat* (do her work on the abandoned name of Allius) (68.50). Catullus says that a spider will weave her web above Allius's lonely or neglected name once he is dead. Again, *deserto* is not describing a person, but a name. This man's name is only *deserto* once he is actually dead. His name has no use and is abandoned because the living person behind the name is gone. By this connotation of the word, Ariadne is as good as dead. The living person behind the body is gone since Theseus left her. All that remains, in Catullus's eyes, is the neglected physical body of a woman - an object or waste product. Never again in Catullus's entire body of poetry is another person described as *desertam*. Catullus, while trying to defy stereotypes by writing from the

emotional perspective of a woman, is fueling stereotypical gender roles of women as objects and worthless when without men.

Later in the ekphrasis of poem 64, Catullus uses the word *contecta* to modify Ariadne. *Non contecta leui uelatum pectus amictu* (Not having been covered in respect to the chest hidden in a light garment) (64. 65). *Contecta* is the perfect passive participle of *contego, contegere, contexi, contactum*, which most directly means “to conceal” but extends to: cover up, hide; protect; clothe; roof over; bury/entomb; strew thickly. To *hide* or *conceal* a body is a very antiquated, actually religious way of referring to what should be done with a woman’s body. In Latin, the word for conceal, *concelare*, comes from *con* (completely) and *celare* (to hide). This word closely resembles *contegere*, which also contains the prefix *con* (completely) and the verb *tegere*, which also means “to hide.” To cover a body is to hide in this case. Though Ariadne is alone, there is still an aspect of societal shame in her not hiding her body.

Another word that conveys Catullus’s static understanding of gender roles is *perdita*. *Toto animo tota pendebat perdita mente* ([Ariadne] ruined with all her soul, with all her mind hanging [on Theseus]) (64.71). *Perdita* is a perfect passive participle of the verb *perdo* meaning to ruin, destroy, lose, or waste. This passage asserts that Ariadne’s spirit and mind are lost because she has been *desertam* by *immemor* Theseus. Furthermore, the placement of *perdita*, in between *toto animo* (all her soul) and *tota mente* (all her mind) also suggests that she is lost or ruined with respect to her whole heart, soul, and mind.

The participle *perdita* comes from the verb *perdo, perdere, perdidit, perditum* which means “to make away with, destroy, ruin, squander, throw away, waste.”³³ So, saying her mind is “lost” may be an understatement -- her personhood and womanhood may be “lost,” but it is more that they are “destroyed.” She is “wasted,” because she is considered a ruined, soiled woman. It is only by proxy that her mind is also wasted. Her mind is only destroyed, wasted, or ruined because her entire being is destroyed, her entire existence is destroyed. Her being is *perdita* since she has been abandoned by Theseus. *Lost* would be a gentle translation.

The dictionary indicates that the verbal adjective *perdita* can mean ruined; broken/debilitated; bankrupt, financially ruined; lost, done for; degenerate, morally depraved, wild, abandoned; reckless; desperate/hopeless. She is all these things! How differently we’d read this poem if we read: her mind or spirit is *debilitated, broken, and hopeless*. Catullus is suggesting something here about Ariadne and her physical being because it is also her spirit that is *debilitated*. The gentle translation of *perdita* as “lost” is so common not only because of the idiom, a lost mind, but because of the misconception that Catullus and the elegists are advocates for women and their new role in Roman society. Yet, there is a suggestion here that Catullus is advocating for Ariadne. Catullus hints that Ariadne has suffered because of Theseus's behavior. He

³³ Short, Lewis. “Perdo,” Perseus.tufts.edu,
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/resolveform?type=exact&lookup=perdo&lang=la>.

writes that she is *pendebat* - weighing on, hanging on, depending on Theseus and suggests that her mind, spirit, and body have been deprived and starved by Theseus's abandonment. She is lost, hopeless, ruined, and debilitated because he has taken something from her and caused her to suffer a societal punishment by leaving her. Her new reputation as a soiled, ruined woman is the price of his abandonment. Catullus expresses sympathy here for her, understanding that Theseus has treated her badly and has cost her her reputation. His noting that she is *perdita* shows the reader how pathetic and hopeless Theseus has made her and evokes sympathy for the abandoned heroine. Yet, she is only considered ruined because of what a man has done to her. She is only suffering because he has taken something from her. She suffers under his influence, power, dominance, and freedom to abandon her. This suffering comes from the implication and assumption that Ariadne *needs* Theseus.

Readers and translators have the responsibility to look at what these words really mean and that Catullus could be saying indirectly that her spirit, mind, and being are debilitated and broken because she is now *indomitos* and *desertam* - stranded, abandoned, and out of a man's control. As a woman who has been rendered fatherless and ruined, she is *broken* or *lost* to society – she no longer has a place.

Later in 64, the word *perdita* is used again: *nam quo me referam. quali spe perdita nitor* (For where should I bring myself back? On what type of hope do I having been ruined rely?) (64.178). This line is from Ariadne's lament, as she cries about what has

been done to her. Here, many sources translate *perdita* as “ruined” or “doomed” when only a few lines before, in line 71, they used it mean “lost” or “forlorn.”³⁴ Yet, now that he is not talking about a person, translators tend to assume that Catullus’s didn’t mean *ruined*. Here, *perdita* is used in the context of *lost* or *ruined* hope. This suggests a connection with Ariadne’s lost mind and spirit. Hope, mind, and spirit are in fact all connected in Latin because there is a Latin word, *animo*, that has those exact definitions.³⁵

In Poem 98, Catullus writes: *si nos omnino uis omnes perdere Victi* (If you want to destroy us altogether, Victius) (98.5). Here, a man has the power to “destroy,” because the verb is active. However, in poem 64, the same verb is used passively - *perdita*. In 98, a man has control of destroying, but he has not *been* destroyed like Ariadne in 64. Catullus reveals with his passive language towards Ariadne in line 178 that as a woman she can have power exerted over her but that only men can use *perdere* actively and are the ones exerting the power (98.5).

The same happens in Catullus 14a: *Cur me tot male perderes poetis* (Why did you destroy me wickedly with so many poets?) (14a.5). This poem is addressed to the Catullus’s best friend, Calvus. In both these cases, the verb *perderes* is used, which comes from the active, rather than the passive form of the verb. In both these situations,

³⁴ Wikisource: Catullus 64 https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Translation:Catullus_64, Diotima: <http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/cat64.shtml>

³⁵ William Whitaker’s Words

perdere is used to talk about actions that men take - they do the destroying, whereas with the woman Ariadne, *perdita* is passive and is done to her. As a woman, she is not able to destroy, only to be destroyed.

In poem 64, Catullus describes Theseus's interaction with the Minotaur. The narrator speaks about the day Theseus left Piraeus in Athens and arrived at the palace of the Cretan king Minos (64.75). Theseus came to Crete to sacrifice himself for the Athenians, but as soon as the king's daughter, Ariadne, saw him, she burned inside with love for him (64.93). She then prayed to the gods for his safety and laid out a thread for him to follow in the labyrinth to help him escape and kill the Minotaur (64.113). In this section, Catullus uses the word *iactastis*. *Qualibus incensam iactastis mente puellam* (on what waves did you throw the girl, inflamed with respect to the mind) (98). *Iactastis* means to throw away, throw out, throw, jerk about; disturb; boast, discuss. Here, *iactastis* is used to describe Ariadne as being *thrown out, away, or overboard*. The other ways Catullus uses *iactere* show that only objects - and Ariadne - can be *thrown out*. At another point in the lament, Catullus uses the same verb again: *nequiquam uanis iactantem cornua uentis* (in vain throwing the horns to the empty winds) (64.112). Here, the Minotaur is tossing or jerking his horns, *Cornua*, which are the direct object (accusative), just as *puellam*, referring to Ariadne, was in line 98. *Puellam* and *cornua* are both being thrown about or jostled, even though Ariadne is a person, not an object like *cornua*. The way Catullus uses *cornua* compared to the way he uses *puellam* suggests that

Ariadne being thrown out is really her physical body or even personhood being disposed of, like an object. The word is used again in 64: *Pars e diuulso iactabant membra iuuenco* (Some were tossing about the limbs of a bullock which had been torn apart) (64.258). Again, here people are tossing out a waste product. A bull has been torn apart and its limbs - *membra*, accusative like Ariadne! - are being thrown out, as would be expected with a dead animal. What if we look at Ariadne this way? It is obvious you throw out a dead animal's body parts, and to Catullus, throwing out the unwanted Ariadne is just as obvious.

Throughout the poem, poetic devices and poetic language support the theory of stereotypical gender roles embedded in Catullus's mind and prove his ineligibility to be called a *proto-feminist*. Catullus uses anaphora throughout the poem: "*non... non... non*" (64-66.64). This repetition serves to connect female subjectivity with "isolation, repetition, and eternity."³⁶ The reader watches Ariadne become pathetic through her descriptions being confined to certain repeated words. As her clothes unravel, she unravels and becomes subjected to eternity as a ruined woman. Ariadne's entire state of being throughout the poem is haunted by isolation. Although Catullus may have intended the repeated words to further the reader's feeling of Ariadne's hopelessness,

³⁶ Gardener., 149.

they instead remind the reader of the Roman woman's isolation as a political tool or as property.

Gardener discusses the work of scholar Julia Kristeva,³⁷ who writes about a "gendering of time" in which a man's storyline may progress while a woman's moves in circular motion. This occurs almost too perfectly in Catullus 64 as Theseus abandons Ariadne, literally sailing directly forward and leaving her "isolated" on an island with nowhere to go. The anaphora used to talk about Ariadne links her closely with this "women's time" and traps her in repetitive language and a circular storyline. As Gardener notes, Kristeva writes that women's time "fails to progress beyond spatial boundaries in the way that linear time does."³⁸ Even before she is abandoned, Ariadne's storyline doesn't move. The reader only ever sees Ariadne in relation to Theseus's stay and departure in Crete, whereas the narrator gives Theseus a backstory, tells of his exploits with the Minotaur, and then follows up on what happens after he abandons Ariadne. Even though Catullus describes Theseus as despicable and bad, he gets more of a storyline than Ariadne, who is the central character of the poem, because men are afforded a storyline in elegy. Although Catullus is praised for holding women

³⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Le Temps des Femmes* (Cahiers de Recherche de Sciences des es et Documents, 1979), quoted in Hunter H. Gardener, *The Semiotic Impulse of Catullus 64* (John Hopkins University Press, 2002).

³⁸ Gardener., 154.

in a new light in poetry, he continues to subject them to traditional gender roles and does not give them recognition as independent, complete, complex people.

Catullus should not be praised for his depiction of women in elegy. Simply giving attention to women as characters in elegy does not signify progress in portrayal of women. Catullus gives women voices to project his own feelings and comment on society and politics. Elegists like Catullus love to subvert expectations, and thus use women as a means by which to surprise people. Words that describe Ariadne, like *desertam, iactastis, perdita, indomitos, and contecta*, prove that Ariadne is objectified because this language never is used to describe people in the rest of Catullus's poetry. With a close reading of the words used to describe Ariadne, one can see that in Catullus's eyes, she is not a person or an individual, but she is a waste product - a piece of trash, which furthers her objectification and worthlessness as a woman in Catullus's eyes.

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