LUCIDA INTERVALLA

PRILOZI ODELJENJA ZA KLASIČNE NAUKE

35
(1/2007)

FILOZOFSKI FAKULTET
U BEOGRADU
2008

UDK 821.124'02.09 ; 821.09
ID 153712396

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Looking (at) Ariadne: Vision and Meaning in Catullus, Ovid and Hofmannsthal

Abstract. Ariadne's story in Catullus' *Wedding of Peleus and Thetis* is a drama of looking, seeing, and not seeing. It depicts interpersonal relations and distinguishes presence and absence, life and death, by thematizing the visual contact between the characters, between gods and humans, and between the internal audience and the image described in the ecphrasis. In Catullus the gaze sometimes expresses the objectifying force of power or its failure, but it may also denote the possibility of communication, interpersonal contact, or mutual attachment. The preoccupation with visual perception represents the complexity of the encounter with the Other in the face of those we might or might not love or need: a lover, a close relative, a divine power, a work of art, a fictional reality. Ovid's *Letter of Ariadne to Theseus* echoes its predecessor. While Catullus' Ariadne comes into contact with reality through intense and desperate looking, Ovid's heroine relies on actual interpersonal contact: she tries to send visual signs, stay visible and thus make Theseus reconsider. Hofmannsthal's libretto for *Ariadne auf Naxos* is amazingly comparable to Catullus' poem. The text is again complex and sophisticated, exploring concepts like memory, fidelity, loss, transformation, surviving and living on. The paradox of the human condition, the dialectic of sameness and transformation, of rigidness and vitality, is expressed through Ariadne's refusal to look or even stay visible. All three Ariadnes experience a gap between themselves and reality, marked through a visual vacuum, by looking in vain, being unable to see or be seen, or refusing to look and see.

Key Words: Roman literature, Catullus, Ovid, Hofmannsthal, visual perception, gaze, visual contact

Introduction[1]

Ariadne's story fascinated hundreds of poets, painters, playwrights and composers in modern times. They were inspired mainly by Ovid's account, which in turn was based on Catullus. While in literature and music the story takes various and often unrecognizable shapes, the

[1] I am grateful to the Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften, Vienna, for the possibility to work on this study during my fellowship in the spring of 2007.

paintings are more conventional in their iconographic patterns which were in fact set already in the ancient art. Greek vase paintings and Roman mosaics and frescoes show Ariadne in a limited number of typical poses: sleeping beauty, archetypal abandoned woman gazing at the sea, celebrated goddess together with Dionysos and other divinities. Most paintings tend to emphasize the gaze of Ariadne, and almost all of them except for Titian's one,[2] treat the two main parts of the story separately, as is perhaps natural for a single image. Moreover, in most pictorial interpretations we can easily recognize the visual economy employed by the artist. The intense exchange of gazes between the lovers not only expresses erotic desire, but signifies also a physical interaction through vision and, presumably, partnership and emotional attachment.

The opposite is also true and numerous parallels to this artistic pattern can be found in literary texts. Here is just one example out of many: in Virgil's *Aeneid* 1.482 we see the depiction of an episode from the Trojan war, where the women make supplication to the statue of Athena, but the goddess is not responsive: *illa solo fixas oculos aversa tenebat*, "she had her eyes turned away and fixed to the ground". The meaning of her averted gaze is unmistakably clear.

1. Catullus' Ariadne

Poem 64 is a particularly elaborate example of an epyllion or 'mini-epic'. Characteristic for this kind of compressed epic form is the choice of rarely treated subject matter, sometimes concerning not quite heroic events or heroines instead of heroes.

Catullus' longest poem was maybe his most ambitious attempt to realize a new literary project. It is remarkable for its complex and much debated structure and for its ambiguous and still more debated meaning. The poem has been traditionally entitled *The Wedding of Peleus and Thetis*. The narrative focuses on the distant mythical past. It begins with the first ship constructed by the mortals which evokes the amazement of the sea goddesses. Peleus and Thetis fall in love, and Jupiter grants his assent to their marriage. On the wedding day, people from the country come to the

[2] Titian's interpretation (1525, National Gallery, London) was probably based on literary sources only and is famous for including all the crucial elements of the story.

palace to celebrate the event. They look at the magnificent palace, then step into the room and see the marriage bed covered with a beautiful tapestry on which the story of Ariadne is embroidered. Here the poet stops to narrate this story and thus the poem contains an instance of ecphrasis, a typical epic device, which is as old as the shield of Achilles. After some 200 lines of ecphrasis, the narrative goes back to the wedding, the mortal guests depart and the gods arrive on the scene instead. What follows is mainly a song performed by the Fates, who sing about the happy marriage and the son that will be born to it – the mighty Achilles. The poem closes with a dark picture of the moral decay following those times of great heroes and the ultimate separation of humans and gods. Thus the poem consists of two sections: one of them tells a sad story about betrayal and abandonment, which then turns to a happy ending through the arrival of Bacchus; the other tells a story of a happy union blessed by the gods, which is nonetheless undermined by the gloomy closure.

For decades scholars have been trying to find a coherent overall interpretation of the text. The complexities of its narrative technique and the ambivalence in its treatment of the heroic world have been at the heart of ongoing debates.

The relationship of the Ariadne episode to the rest of the poem is problematic with regard to its lengthy treatment and its larger implications. The problems of structure and imagery inevitably evoke the puzzling question of meaning: what attitude to the heroic age is the text implying? Is Theseus to blame for what he did to Ariadne? Is a moral interpretation of the poem defensible?

My concern with the poem is about the theme of visual perception, and more precisely of visual contact between the characters. The questions surrounding visual perception are of course vast and therefore this narrowing down the topic is inevitable. The ancient civilization in general has always been described in terms of ocularcentrism. Seeing and knowing are linguistically and symbolically connected in Indo-European languages and cultures. Most major texts in the Western tradition involve metaphoric conceptions of seeing as knowing and understanding. We could also go another way and trace the so called visual obsession of the Roman society with its spectacles or its impressive artistic display of power and grandeur.

Visual perception represented in a fictional text is a complex problem, concerning the perspective of the characters, the so called intra-perspective, where one person depicted in the text is looking at another person or an object, and the perspective of the internal and external audiences. Catullus' epic presents the reader with all sorts of perspectives and could be described as a drama of looking, seeing and not seeing.

At the very beginning the ship is sailing away, the sea goddesses emerge from the water gazing at this amazing view, and the men on the deck gaze at their amazing beauty:

> Emersere freti candenti e gurgite vultus
> aequoreae monstrum Nereides admirantes.
> Illa, atque haud alia, viderunt luce marinas
> mortales oculis nudato corpore Nymphas
> nutricum tenus exstantes e gurgite cano.
> Tum Thetidis Peleus incensus fertur amore,
> tum Thetis humanos non despexit hymenaeos… (14–20)

This is a scene of a direct and reciprocal visual contact between two worlds: the sea and the earth, the mortals and the immortals. The scene is also erotically charged and followed immediately by the account of a love from the first sight from the part of both Peleus and Thetis.[3]

At the beginning of the ecphrasis the abandoned Ariadne is gazing at the ship in the distance, not believing her own eyes, then she sees herself on the desert shore, then she gazes again and again at the see:

> Namque fluentisono *prospectans* litore Diae,
> Thesea cedentem celeri cum classe *tuetur*
> indomitos in corde gerens Ariadna furores,
> necdum etiam sese quae *visit visere* credit,
> utpote fallaci quae tum primum excita somno
> desertam in sola miseram se *cernat* harena.
> Immemor at iuvenis fugiens pellit vada remis,
> irrita ventosae linquens promissa procellae.
> Quem procul ex alga *maestis* Minois *ocellis*,

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[3] This is a story invented, or rather manipulated by Catullus: in other versions of the myth Peleus is already the husband of Thetis and the father of Achilles, when he sails away with the ship, to say nothing of the fact that, according to Greek tradition, Thetis was not so in love with him, she was forced by Jupiter to marry him only to leave him after their first night spent together.

saxea ut effigies bacchantis, *prospicit*, eheu,
prospicit et magnis curarum fluctuat undis,
non flavo retinens subtilem vertice mitram,
non contecta levi velatum pectus amictu,
non tereti strophio lactentis vincta papillas,
omnia quae toto delapsa e corpore passim
ipsius ante pedes fluctus salis alludebant. (52–67)

Here, the intense feeling of loss and despair is conveyed primarily through the visual experience of the heroine. This predominant motive expresses various aspects of her situation: desire, loss, pain, isolation, helplessness. The gazing is one-sided: Ariadne is looking at Theseus, but Theseus is not looking at Ariadne. His perspective is fully absent from the narrative and he remains invisible for both the heroine and the audiences. We will see further on that his visual absence and indifference is one of the main devises employed by the author in constructing his figure. But Ariadne is still being looked at: she is the object of voyeuristic gazing by the internal and the external audience, and thus not invisible, despite her loneliness and isolation.

In the following flashback the situation is quite different, but the narrative strategy is strikingly similar. On his arrival to Crete Theseus is depicted as the object of Ariadne's gazing and desire:

Hunc simul ac *cupido conspexit lumine* virgo
[…]
non prius ex illo flagrantia *declinavit*
lumina, quam cuncto concepit corpore flammam. (86–91)

The passage delivers a second instance of love at first sight. But in this case Ariadne seems to be alone in her passion. The text does not reveal any reaction on the part of Theseus. It does not inform us whether he noticed Ariadne, whether he saw her; neither does it provide any description of the hero himself. What we actually see is again Ariadne, through the description of her innocence and beauty. Theseus is briefly depicted later on as the hero that succeeded in killing the monster, but his going back was not so heroic. His only source of orientation on his way out of the labyrinth was Ariadne's thread.

In her despair and anger the heroine of the ecphrasis pronounces a long speech of indignation and curses Theseus, so that he might forget also his own father and bring misery to his own home. As it has been

often pointed out, the text implies in many ways a parallel between Ariadne and Aegeus. In another flashback Aegeus' love, anxiety and hopes for the future are described through the imaginative picture of seeing his son's successful return:

> …cui languida nondum
> *lumina* sunt gnati cara saturata figura… (219– 220)
>
> quam primum *cernens* ut laeta gaudia mente
> *agnoscam*, cum te reducem aetas prospera sistet. (236–237)

Thus the text insists on depicting interpersonal relations, and, by extension, distinguishing presence and absence, life and death, by thematizing the visual contact. The image of Aegeus on the top of the fortress gazing at the sea mirrors the gazing Ariadne. In both cases it is Theseus who is the elusive object of the gaze and thus of desire, love, hope and despair. He himself, by contrast, is neither gazing nor described, neither seeing nor seen. He forgets to change the sails and the father becomes ironically the victim of his own sight.

The narrative now turns to the other picture on the coverlet. Dionysus is coming with his noisy attendants. He apparently has seen the heroine, as he states that he is in love with her, but his gaze is not mentioned. And she does not even see him at the moment where the ecphrasis ends, as he is coming from her back. The two characters are not looking at each other and their actual encounter is expected but not described.

The ecphrasis closes with the picture of the internal audience having satisfied its eagerness to watch. Here again the gaze is the place of desire, this time for the story itself:

> Quae postquam *cupide spectando* Thessala pubes
> expleta est, sanctis coepit decedere divis. (267–268)

The poem itself closes with a dark and pessimistic account of the moral decay of the later generations. The gods, in disgust, have averted their eyes from the humans and are unwilling either to see their actions, or to be seen by them.

So both the beginning and the end of the narrative deals with the contact between gods and humans by means of two opposing pictures: the mutual and the averted look.

Having sketched the prominence of the theme of visual perception in its various realizations, I would suggest that it has something to do with

the major theme of the heroic past and thus with the poet's view towards his own political and social reality in a society preoccupied with the idea of power, heroism and glory. Yet it touches on this theme through the subtle depiction of personal reactions and relations between the characters.

A great deal of recent critical thought has been engaged with the problem of vision and looking as an act of objectifying, controlling and colonizing the other. It has been argued that the gazer takes a superior position to the object of looking, so the gaze can reflect power structures. This idea forms a basis of feminist analyses of texts. Many critics adopt and develop the approach of Laura Mulvey, who, in a seminal article published in 1975,[4] drew on psychoanalytical theory to analyze the erotic pleasure of viewing in film. She identifies the possession of a gaze as male and the state of being gazed upon as female. This analysis has been also understandably criticized as rigid and giving no answer to the question of whether a female gaze exists. Mulvey herself argues that the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Numerous classical scholars have adopted this approach and have analyzed ancient texts with much intellectual energy.

If we assume this logic of argument, the eroticized descriptions in Catullus' poem would perfectly suit the expectations of his presumably male audience, and Theseus is right in not letting Ariadne reach him with her gaze. The male character successfully avoids being viewed as an object of desire, he escapes the fixing power of gaze, while the female fails to establish the power of the gazer and at the same time the female body is displayed by the narrator as an object of the erotic gaze and is being watched by the textual audiences assuming the role of spectators. Many other questions remain, though. Why Theseus is never depicted as the bearer of a dominant gaze? He remains practically invisible: can we describe his presence in the text in terms of being the subject or the object of a gaze? Why the narrator presents us with three different versions of an erotic encounter: one of mutual gazing, one of one-sided gazing, and the third where neither of the two parties is explicitly showed as looking or being looked at? And how does poor Aegeus fit in the picture? Most

[4] L. Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, *Screen* 16, 1975, 6–18.

of the theoretical studies do not seem to be much helpful. Instead of the penetrating male gaze we have observed the gaze of longing, the problem of the refused gaze and of the unreciprocated gaze.

However, a more flexible definition is to be found in an article entitled "The Photograph as an Intersection of Gazes: The Example of National Geographic" by Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins.[5] The authors note that "the mutuality or non-mutuality of the gaze of the two parties can… tell us who has the right and/or need to look at whom". They also present, among other arguments, an interesting observation on the issue who is actually looking at the camera:

> To a statistically significant degree, women look into the camera more than men, children and older people look into the camera more often than other adults, those who appear poor more than those who appear wealthy […] those without any tools more than those using machinery. Those who are culturally defined by the West as weak – women, children, people of colour, the poor, the tribal rather than the modern, those without technology – are more likely to face the camera, the more powerful to be represented looking elsewhere.

I would suggest that in Catullus' poems looking may sometimes express the objectifying force of power (or its failure), but it may also denote other concerns, such as the possibility of communication, interpersonal contact, mutual relationship of attachment. In short, I would rather speak of the meaning of visual perception not in terms of active vs. passive, but of detached vs. involved. Theseus is the character who does not feel the *need* to look or to be looked at, and so he is the most monolithic character, possessing a stable and self-sufficient heroic identity. Ariadne, who has betrayed her family, left her home and become socially nobody, without the perspective of a marriage, states in her speech that she would rather become his slave than stay alone in the wilderness. Both she and Aegeus rely on Theseus' presence and involvement for their very existence and this dependence is represented as much in terms of social status as in terms of personal and emotional investment. The poem, then, as so many of Catullus' other poems, questions the ambiguous nature of human relationships and the very possibility of establishing a mutual bond

[5] C. A. Lutz, J. L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic*, Chicago, 1993.

bringing the sense of commitment and fulfillment, even at the expense of a strong sense of one's socially prescribed identity.

It is also important to keep in mind the significance of the ecphrasis: at the end of it the narrator returns to the internal audience only to state that it has satisfied its hungry eyes, without any comment on its emotional or interpretative reaction. This might be a hint towards self-reflection of art and on textual and pictorial media. Yet, we should not forget that what the internal spectators actually saw were two parallel pictures which were likely do keep the balance between the unhappy scene and the happy one. What we have seen as external audience was a much more expanded story based on the first picture.[6] That is why, in the course of the narrative, our perspective shifts and we happen to be much more involved in looking at poor Ariadne, as the textual structure undermines the balance of the two images.

The poem's preoccupation with visual perception in its various modes is about power and desire and at the same time it goes beyond power and desire, it is about the complexity of the encounter with the Other in the face of those we might or might not love and need: a lover, a close relative, a divine power, a work of art, a fictional reality.[7]

2. Ovid, Letter of Ariadne to Theseus

This is the tenth poem in the *Heroides*, a collection of fictional letters written by mythological heroines to their absent husbands or lovers.[8] The exaggerated fictionality of these poems is eminent particularly in the

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[6] For a clear account of the complexities of the narrative progression and the actual chronological order of the events see the recent monograph of Michaela Schmale, *Bilderreigen und Erzähllabyrinth: Catulls Carmen 64*, München, 2004.

[7] The gazing of the Roman audience through the medium of art at the represented world of the myth has been pointed out by William Fitzgerald, who has recognized that "the gaze – satisfied, frustrated or interrupted – is the main thematic thread of the poem". See p. 140 and the whole chapter "Gazing at the Golden Age: Belatedness and Mastery in Poem 64" in W. Fitzgerald, *Catullan Provocations: Lyric Poetry and the Drama of Position*, Berkeley, 1996, 140–168.

[8] I leave aside the other three accounts of the story to be found in Ovid's works (*Metam*. 8, 172–182; *Fast*. 3, 459–516; *Ars am*. 1, 572–564) as they are either concise or rooted in a fairly dissimilar context.

case of Ariadne's letter, because there could not be any postal service on a desert island, as W. Furley comments.[9] The same scholar also points out the bizarre appearance of a comfortable double bed placed right on the beach and not inside any domestic structure. The bed plays a prominent role in the text as a traditional motive associated with women and marriage and as a symbolic object of love and union/disintegration. Indeed, Ovid's Ariadne recognizes Theseus' absence by touching the empty bed in the first place, and some ten lines later she uses her eyes to realize the distressing reality:

> Luna fuit; specto siquid nisi litora cernam;
> quod videant oculi, nil nisi litus habent. (17–18)

Catullus' Ariadne, as we remember, is depicted on the coverlet, and she is looking at the very first moment we see her. As we might expect Ovid's text echoes in many ways its literary predecessor. Ovid had been a keen reader of Catullus and he shows a sense for variation by introducing the touching first and then paraphrasing his line:

> necdum etiam sese quae visit visere credit (Cat. 64.55)
>
> ut vidi indignam quae me vidisse putarem (Ov. *Her*. 10.31)

Ovid's Ariadne is more engaged with vision in the literal sense: she explicitly tries to make Theseus see her (taking too literally the motive of his fatal forgetfulness elaborated by Catullus in a more complex way):

> Si non audires, ut saltem cernere posses:
> iactatae late signa dedere manus.
> candidaque imposui longae velamina virgae
> scilicet oblitos admonitura mei. (39–42)

As the ship disappears over the horizon, Ariadne is utterly devastated:

> Iamque oculis ereptus eras. tum denique flevi;
> torpuerant molles ante dolore genae.
> Quid potius facerent, quam me mea lumina flerent,
> postquam desieram vela videre tua? (43–46)

[9] "Die Fiktion einer Korrespondenz im 10. Heroidenbrief erfordert eine Art Telekommunikation zwischen Ariadne und dem mobilen Theseus, die man gerade heutzutage mit e-mail oder einem „Handy" telefon erreicht hat!" See W. Furley, *Eingebettet im Nichts: zum Ariadne-Brief in Ovids Heroides*, in: *Ovid. Werk und Wirkung. Festgabe für Michael von Albrecht zum 65. Geburtstag*, Frankfurt etc., 1999, 159–168.

Here we witness how Ovid plays on and reshapes the Catullan emphasis on vision. Theseus' unresponsiveness is highlighted to a comic degree, by Ariadne's vain gestures and signs and the theme of the unanswered and futile gaze is reinforced by declaring the looking superfluous and pointless. While Catullan Ariadne comes into contact with her reality through her intense and desperate looking, this one relies on actual interpersonal contact through it and then turns to the written word as a medium of communication. At the end of her letter (vv. 133–150) she tries again to send visual signs, to be seen, to become visible and present: she portrays herself and this verbal painting is supposed to call to Theseus' mind an image that would make him reconsider and come back.

Some critics have pointed out that Ariadne is too concerned with her appearance, or that she tries to offer Theseus an image which would please him. Yet, I think that the image Ariadne is depicting here is not an image of a desirable woman. With her body bearing the marks of external forces and internal suffering, and with few hairs left on her head, she looks rather pathetic. It is as this Ariadne is trying to send a picture of herself together with the letter, and she is looking straight at the camera, assuming the weak position and willing not to seduce, but to evoke pity, not to attract the desiring gaze, but the gaze of a sympathetic human. This attitude is emphasized through her last request: Theseus should return if only to find her dead body and to give it the last tribute which every human being needs and deserves. It is difficult to say whether Ovid creates a touching figure of an abandoned woman, or skillfully and comically subverts the creation of Catullus. His absorption with erotic affairs and the very playfulness of his text could more easily respond to a more strictly "gendered" kind of reading. Some critics have tried to see in the *Heroides* the realization of the female voice, still others insist that he has authored a blunt, melodramatic and somewhat distasteful literary cliche.

3. Hugo von Hofmannsthal

The poems of Catullus and Ovid have been hugely influential ever after. Among the various interpretations of Ariadne's story in Modern times, the one created by Hofmannsthal is amazingly comparable to Catullus' poem, being also a story within a story. Moreover, we see again

stories contrasted as the sad and the merry face of human experience, and art is also made alongside to a subject of reflection.

Ariadne auf Naxos is the third of six operas of Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, first performed in 1912 in Stuttgart and revised in 1916 for the stage in Vienna.[10] It presents the audience with an unusual situation: a play within a play, or rather two plays within a play. The frame story begins backstage, in the house of "the richest man in Vienna" who wants to entertain and impress his guests giving two performances: an opera seria and a hilarious commedia dell´arte. While the two groups of musicians are arriving the composer is perplexed by the announcement that both performances are to take place simultaneously. So the tragic figure of Ariadne lamenting her bitter fate is confronted with the mischievous Zerbinetta and the other burlesque characters who attempt to cheer her up. Zerbinetta confirms that men are often unfaithful, but a broken heart could easily find relief in a new love and every new lover appears like a god to her. She fails either to console or to convince Ariadne who prefers and expects to die. The arrival of Bacchus puts an end to her suffering and Zerbinetta is pleased to observe that the new god has indeed appeared.

Throughout the centuries, Ariadne seems to have appealed to the artists primarily as a symbolic figure of solitude and despair and as an embodiment of pure pathos. Yet Hofmannsthal's interpretation is much more complex. He explores concepts like memory, fidelity, loss, transformation, surviving and living on. His libretto is highly sophisticated and programmatic and for the most part critics have studied it tracing the author's own argument. In his famous Ariadne-Brief of July 1911 he explains his ideas to a somewhat puzzled and unenthusiastic Strauss: "Verwandlung ist Leben des Lebens, ist das eigentliche Mysterium der schöpfenden Natur; Beharren ist Erstarren und Tod. Wer leben will, der muß über sich selber hinwegkommen, muß sich verwandeln: er muß vergessen. Und dennoch ist ans Beharren, ans Nichtvergessen, an die Treue alle menschliche Würde geknüpft."

In Hofmannsthal's sense, then, Ariadne is not only "das Sinnbild der menschlichen Einsamkeit", but also a personification of loyalty to her

[10] I am referring to the later version.

absent lover, to her past and to herself in the first place. The rapid change of fate in her story represented to the poet a deep paradox of the human condition: the dialectic of sameness and transformation, of rigidness and vitality.

Moreover, in the course of Ariadne's transformation, Bacchus, a god associated with death and revival, is also transformed: the Composer states in the *Vorspiel* "Daran wird er zum Gott". Both characters are bearers of Hofmannsthal's concept of mutual love and transformation, which restores not only their personal harmony, but also their contact to the world.

It appears that what the poet had in mind was to highlight the role of Bacchus which Catullus had underplayed and Ovid omitted, and to get the two Ariadnes together. So his Ariadne was to stand for both Treue and Wandel. She should be looking somehow both at Theseus and Bacchus. But is she?

Ariadne has been abandoned for quite some time, and she is now looking neither at the sea nor at anything else around her. She is supplied this time not with a miraculous bed, but with a cave, a symbol of her detachment. And she is placed on the same stage together with the comic characters so that she can hear their comments on her lamentation, but does not come into verbal or visual contact with them, as both their and the author's remarks suggest:

> (ohne ihrer irgendwie zu achten; vor sich, monologisch);
>
> (ohne den Kopf zu wenden, vor sich);
>
> Zerbinetta: Sie hebt auch nicht einmal den Kopf.

Ariadne then sings a famous aria expressing her disillusionment and misery: she welcomes death as the only alternative and is ready to meet Hermes, the god leading the souls to the realm of death. Meanwhile the comedians are trying to distract her by singing and dancing. While she can hear their songs, although ignoring what she is hearing, she definitely refuses to look at them. As Zerbinetta observes:

> Doch die Prinzessin
> Verschließt ihre Augen,
> Sie mag nicht die Weise,
> Sie liebt nicht den Ton.

When Zerbinetta in turn attempts to comfort Ariadne, this time with a long speech (aria) displaying her philosophy of love and life, the tragic heroine becomes even more unreceptive until she practically disappears in her cave:

> (doch Ariadne achtet in keiner Weise auf sie);
>
> (Ariadne, ihrer nicht zu achten, verhüllt ihr Gesicht);
>
> (Ariadne tritt an den Eingang ihrer Höhle zurück);
>
> (Ariadne tritt vollends in die Höhle zurück, Zerbinetta richtet ihre weiteren Tröstungen an die unsichtbar Gewordene).

Zerbinetta, in fact, sings her aria including the suggestive words "Als ein Gott kam jeder gegangen, Jeder wandelte mich um" for the most part to an absent Ariadne. The contrast between the values of Ariadne and Zerbinetta is represented not only as lack of spoken communication, but also through Ariadne's refusal to look and even to stay visible. Both heroines speak their own truth, but there is no chance for bridging the gap. Moreover, Ariadne is fully absorbed in her wish to distance herself from the world outside, to maintain her essence. In her denial to see and to be seen she preserves her fundamental nature of a tragic heroine.

Later on, Bacchus enters the stage and he soon evokes Ariadne's attention. Surprisingly, she is not longer hiding and withdrawing. She believes, though, to have heard the voice of Hermes and restates her willingness to die. Ironically, this is not the messenger of death, but, quite the contrary, the young god of joy, pleasure and fertility. It seems however, that throughout the following dialog, up to the end, Ariadne is not able to realize her mistake. The acceptance of death will turn out to be acceptance of life, but this tragic or perhaps comic irony goes beyond the heroine's perception. The irony of Catullus who does not let his heroine see Bacchus coming to the rescue, thus suggesting that there is no real replacement to her loss, is developed to a further and nearly incredible degree: she sees him and she sees him not.

Conclusion

Hofmannsthal's version encapsulates the earlier treatments of the story, but at the same time it is concerned with integrating both stages of Ariadne's fate which neither Catullus nor Ovid did, for their different reasons. Nevertheless, Hofmannsthal's heroine was reluctant to embrace

his idea of *Verwandlung* and did her best to resist it. The paradox of this idea, as expressed in the *Ariadne-Brief*, is reflected in the paradox of Ariadne's behaviour, in the very structure of the play with its bizarre blending of tragedy and comedy, and perhaps in the not quite convincing climax.

All three Ariadnes experience a gap between themselves and the reality of existence, marked through visual vacuum: by looking in vain, by not being able to see or to be seen, or by refusing to look and to see.

This last Ariadne is very different from the Catullan one, and yet, in a sense, she is her sole descendant. She has had the chance to reappear in a modern society not so restrictive towards women, and under the pen of a poet who was not interested in skilled imitation or in mere psychological portrayal of distress. Ariadne has finally attained the elusive reality of shared and harmonious contact, which was probably a point of deep concern for Catullus and never really for Ovid.

However, this final accomplishment at the end of Hofmannsthal's libretto does not seem to be truly illuminating, neither on the conceptual, nor on the artistic level. The mutual transformation takes place as mutual misunderstanding, as an enigmatic and mystical act, not as conscious mutual commitment and revelation. It seems that the heroine is still lingering in the visual vacuum, distanced from her reality, and the longed harmony remains perceptively and notionally obscured, either because a happyend with its lack of events goes beyond narration and description, or because there could be no real happyend at all.

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