

Spring 2020

Ariadne's Transformation: Presenting Femininity From Roman Poetry to Modern Opera

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Recommended Citation

Wang, Xinyi, "Ariadne's Transformation: Presenting Femininity From Roman Poetry to Modern Opera" (2020). *Senior Projects Spring 2020*. 165.

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Ariadne's Transformation:
Presenting Femininity From Roman Poetry to Modern Opera

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2020

Acknowledgments

To my advisor Lauren Curtis, for her warm and inspiring presence, for guiding me through this project with constructive suggestions and valuable input, and for spending incredible time on polishing my thoughts and writing.

To my tutor Emily Giangulio, for her warm support, and for carefully helping me with grammar.

To Professor Christopher Gibbs and Karen Raizen, for introducing me to many texts.

To my sister Xinyue Wang, for setting a good example of dealing with constant stress.

To Mike Li, for enlightening my daily life!

To the Bard Community, for staying strong during the pandemic outbreak of coronavirus, and for sheltering me and my friends as another home.

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Introduction: Medium Makes a Difference

Who is Ariadne? We might think we know her well. She is a famous figure from myth, and her story is well known and represented by many authors and artists.¹ Ariadne is the daughter of Minos, who sacrifices her own brother for her lover's glory. She leaves her country with her lover, Theseus, until he abandons her on a desert island. She is eventually married to Bacchus, a god who comes to the island and saves her. These key points in her narrative and character development are all linked by the fact that her story is dominated by her relationships with men: Minos, Theseus, and Bacchus. But who is she? Can her personality be examined independently from men? If yes, does she have her own voice in expressing herself? Do we hear her voice? If no, then, how does her personality help construct her story? My analysis will focus on how the Roman poets Catullus and Ovid, the Baroque composer Monteverdi, and the twentieth-century composer Strauss present Ariadne, and how their Ariadnes' voices are heard.

Among all the parts of Ariadne's story, this project will mainly concentrate on Ariadne's abandonment by Theseus. Although her salvation by Bacchus has also clearly inspired many poets, painters, and artists to create countless works, the tragic period of time when she was forsaken on the island is more appealing to me than her happy ending. Her reaction to being left alone is worth examining, given the fact that she doesn't see a way out for herself; her loneliness seems to be endless for her. This project will carefully look at four versions of Ariadne's

¹ See The Oxford Classical Dictionary (4 ed.) Edited by Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth, and Esther Eidinow. Oxford University Press. 2012: "Ariadne's desertion by Theseus on Naxos/Dia, her rescue by, and marriage to, Dionysus are popular themes in literature (Catull. 64. 50 ff.; Ov. *Her.* 10; see R. Armstrong, *Cretan Women* (2006)), and particularly in vase-painting from the early 5th cent. BC through all periods of Greek and Roman art until the 3rd cent. AD."

abandonment, taken from poetry and music, since each of these Ariadnes' performances distinguish her from the others.

Given the fact that Ariadne is a female who is closely engaged with males, her passivity is perhaps the most obvious characteristic that is placed in front of us. She is born to have a high social status since her father is a king, she is hurt by Theseus for whom she abandoned her country and family, and she is saved by Bacchus after she was miserably abandoned by Theseus. Before we further examine her passivity, I would like to discuss how the medium of the different ancient and modern versions of her story either strengthens or weakens her passivity. In my first chapter, I draw a contrast between the two ways of presenting Ariadne in different mediums that are shown in Catullus 64 and Ovid's *Heroides* 10, which were written in the first century BC (late Republican/ Augustan period). Catullus' Ariadne is embroidered on a coverlet that is looked at by the wedding guests. She is an object to be gazed upon by the audience. Ovid's Ariadne writes her letter to Theseus on the island with the hope that her lover might receive her words. She is an active figure since she does not accept her misfortune passively; she fights for her future.

Although Ovid's Ariadne is described actively and Catullus' Ariadne is portrayed passively due to the different mediums, the contrast between them does not merely come from the medium. Referring back to Ariadne's passivity that we brought up earlier, Theseus abandons her while she is sleeping, the moment of "sleeping" itself is a status that involves passivity. My first chapter demonstrates how the two Ariadnes act differently in the same situation. I compare several major descriptions of Ariadne that Catullus and Ovid share in common: Ariadne freezes herself like a statue when she cannot take the emotional blow that Theseus has caused her,

Ariadne madly runs on the island like a Bacchant when she seeks attention for the sailing ship to come back, and Ariadne reviles Theseus when she is thoroughly sunken in despair and anger. By comparing these points of connection, their differences are more clearly shown. Ovid's Ariadne not only intentionally acts actively in all of these moments, but she also reveals her dignity and cares about things other than simply devoting herself to Theseus, such as her social status.

My project then moves from poetry to opera in the second and third chapters. Having discussed how medium plays an important role in depicting Ariadne in ancient Rome, opera, apparently, serves as a crucial medium for a character to be seen on the modern stage. But why look at opera specifically? As a protagonist who is inevitably being scrutinized on the stage, opera provides more space for Ariadne to express her inner voice not only in her singing but also in her physical movements and staging. Unlike poetry, in which a character's voice can only be "heard" by the reader's interpretation, opera naturally gives the character a voice that is expressed directly between performer and audience. By looking at poetry and opera together, we can better sense how mediums influence how we see Ariadne and how she presents herself. In opera, we hear Ariadne's voice. She's not just a static image to be gazed upon, but more of a power and a presence.

Ariadne is not often treated in opera. Monteverdi's lost opera *L'Arianna* and Richard Strauss' *Ariadne auf Naxos* are two of the most well-known versions. This project will take these two models of Ariadne to show how she presents herself in music and onstage. These two operas are different in many ways: for example their time period, place in the development of opera, musical and dramatic style, and choice of staging. Since most of the music of Monteverdi's *L'Arianna* is lost except for one aria, *Il lamento d'Arianna*, my second chapter is going to focus

very carefully on the musical writing of this surviving aria. In contrast, my third chapter on Strauss' *Ariadne* will examine the general picture of the whole opera in terms of the libretto and staging. The differences between these two operas allow us to see all of the possibilities of what *Ariadne* can be as a character.

The places where these two operas stand in the development of opera determine their ways of presenting *Ariadne*. Monteverdi's opera is a very early piece in the long history of opera writing. From the perspective of a modern audience, the costumes and staging are not elaborate. His opera is mainly a musical retelling of *Ariadne's* traditional story; this is why his music deserves more attention than its dramatic storytelling. In contrast, Strauss' opera is written in the twentieth century, and contains a much more elaborate and surprising plot. Strauss and Hofmannsthal redefine the storytelling of a myth by designing a female character, Zerbinetta, who is completely opposed to *Ariadne*, to help shape *Ariadne's* personality. This is the most avant-garde example of *Ariadne's* presentation in my project, and its complex plots and staging are worth noticing and exploring.

Monteverdi's *Ariadne* is a powerful and self-controlled figure who achieves her glory through her misfortune. She reverses her position from a lonely, abandoned woman on a deserted island to a true protagonist who performs on a stage surrounded by a full audience. Ironically, she achieves glory by the misfortune that she once suffered. Her sadness is not only enjoyed by the audience as a spectacle, but generates sympathy as well. *Ariadne* doesn't exaggerate her sadness on the stage; in contrast, she is self-controlled. She doesn't call for vengeance; she minimizes her anger and yearns for the lost love. Her personality is not shown under the role of a victim as she was in the poetry but rather is revealed when she possesses absolute power.

Strauss and Hofmannsthal present Ariadne's femininity from a unique angle: they create a triangulation of Ariadne, a "male" Ariadne who is similar to her, and a contrasted female figure who is opposed to her. The "male" Ariadne is the character of a composer who draws our attention to the special form of this opera: a play within a play. This opera mixes a comedy with the tragedy of Ariadne, which introduces another female figure, Zerbinetta, who is totally the opposite of Ariadne. The story-within-a-story forms echoes Catullus 64, where Ariadne's story is placed within another love story (that of Peleus and Thetis). The mixture of comedy and tragedy resonates with the concept of ancient Greek drama. Strauss opens up a new perspective of presenting myth based on traditional forms. He redefines the way of presenting a character whom the audience is familiar with. Strauss' opera transforms ancient Greek drama and the story of Greek myth to a modern version, and thereby demonstrates what this project intends to do: to explore the many powerful possibilities for presenting Ariadne via different mediums.

Chapter I:

Ariadne in Roman Poetry: A Contrast Between Passive and Active

Catullus 64 and Ovid *Heroides* 10 are perhaps the most well-known pieces of literature about Ariadne's desertion by Theseus that survive from the Roman world. Ovid's version was produced approximately sixty years later than Catullus', though both were written in the first century BC (late Republican / Augustan period). These two poems serve as a foundation for the later versions of Ariadne; their descriptions of Ariadne inspire and influence many librettists to portray their own Ariadnes: for instance, Ottavio Rinuccini, who writes the libretto for Monteverdi's opera *L'Arianna*, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, the librettist of Richard Strauss' opera *Ariadne auf Naxos*. The value of these two poems, however, are not limited to their historical influence. Their perspectives on this Greek mythological figure are worth studying in their own right. Although they are often listed together as examples of ancient texts that treat Ariadne, they differ from each other substantially and in fact have fundamentally opposite ways of looking at Ariadne.

Catullus depicts his Ariadne as a visual figure. By exposing her body sexually, he invites the audience to gaze at her attractive features. Before she is looked at as a human, she is enjoyed as a female creature. The way Catullus reveals her body already makes her passive, but I also select some paintings to deepen the readers' understanding of Ariadne as a visual object in a Roman context. Ovid's description of Ariadne's body, on the other hand, reduces the impact of her sexual appeal. Ovid's Ariadne uses her body to attract attention. She moves actively to seek a chance to be heard and seen. Although both Roman poets provide many details on Ariadne's appearance, their purpose of portraying Ariadne is clearly different. Catullus' Ariadne never

steps out from her restrictions of being as a passive object; her voice is omitted because of her physical appearance. Ovid gives more attention to Ariadne's awakening. Ovid's Ariadne expresses her emotions and will by her body language, which makes her more active and more aware of the outside world.

Catullus' Ariadne: a Passive Object

Ariadne is often depicted as a passive visual object in Roman poetry and paintings. In Catullus 64, Ariadne is a figure embroidered on a coverlet, by which means Catullus narrates her abandonment by Theseus. Catullus uses his words as brushes that draw the readers a vivid painting about Ariadne's physical beauty. Catullus' painting-like language, I argue in this section, uses techniques drawn from the visual arts to depict Ariadne as a passive and weak female figure who is subordinate to males and other powerful figures such as Cupid and (probably) Bacchus. In making this argument, I compare Catullus' literary style to a series of visual representations of the naked female body. First, Catullus' technique echoes a well-known wall painting discovered at Pompeii from the first century CE (figure 3). This tradition of picturing a female character offering sexual satisfaction for viewers passes down, later in the history of art, to painters William Etty and Camille Corot, each of whom has a painting of a naked female body that is related to Catullus 64 (figures 1 and 2). By considering Catullus' Ariadne in relation to these works of visual art, I draw attention to those aspects of his poem that present her as a vulnerable object of the male gaze.

Laura Mulvey, a film theorist, theorizes how gaze involves the dynamics of gender, in a way that can be applied to Catullus 64. While the male is a spectator, the female is a visual object, and therefore ways of looking at the female body are connected with the power associated

with each gender. David Fredrick, an ancient art historian, summarizes Mulvey's approach in an article that applies her theory to Roman wall painting:

“Cinema, Mulvey claims, has two fundamental “looks” and “gazes,” which provide two avenues of escape from castration. One is fetishistic scopophilia, which suggests, but disavows, sexual difference. The viewer's attention is fixed on the exaggerated beauty of some other body part—hair, face, breasts, buttocks—which substitutes for genital difference. This splits the woman into idealized fragments, the woman as icon. The second avenue is sadistic voyeurism, which begins from the assumption of sexual difference, treating it as a guilty offense. The viewer watches to see the woman either punished or forgiven for her sexual difference, and attention is focused on the movement of the plot toward this end.²

Mulvey's idea of “castration” relates to some males who wish to escape their powerlessness and vulnerability by imposing a gaze upon females who are represented as figures commonly associated with passivity, powerlessness, and vulnerability. The ways these females are pictured always connects with the ideas of female eroticism and helplessness. Fredrick applies this theory specifically to Roman depictions of Ariadne in Pompeiian houses. According to Fredrick, “Theseus' departure and Dionysus' arrival are sadistic in Mulvey's terms in that they emphasize the movement of the narrative around the static figure of Ariadne, whose fate is determined by the males: punishment by exposure on a desolate island, or the “reward” of union with Dionysus” (Fredrick 273). Fredrick and Hérica Valladares, a scholar of Latin poetry, finds Mulvey's theory to be influential in Roman elegy, as well, and so we might consider whether it is useful for understanding the dynamics of gender and the gaze in Catullus' poem.³

Mulvey's gaze theory resonates with Catullus 64 in many places. Before examining how Ariadne herself is an example of fetishistic scopophilia, it is necessary to discuss how she is

² Fredrick, David. “Beyond the Atrium to Ariadne: Erotic Painting and Visual Pleasure in the Roman House.” 1995. p.269-270

³ Valladares applies the erotic gazes to Latin love elegy in her article “Elegy, art and the viewer.” Fredrick also uses Mulvey's theory in his article “The Gaze and the Elegiac Imagery.”

introduced in Catullus' poem. Catullus's Ariadne is depicted on a coverlet that catches guests' attention: "the entire house glittering proudly with royal treasure,/ and there at its heart is set the goddess's own bridal/ couch, all smoothly inlaid with Indian ivory,/ its purple drapery dipped in the mollusc's blushing dye."⁴ She is clearly depicted as a gorgeous object that is being seen. She is displayed passively as the one who is being gazed at instead of the one who looks and judges. This suggests her subordinate status as if she is constrained inside this coverlet. Catullus uses this presentation as a background setting to hint Ariadne's powerlessness as her story with Theseus unfolds.

In the poem, her passive characterisation is further revealed to present her as a subordinate visual object to males. Referring back to Mulvey's theory of the gaze, fetishistic scopophilia can be seen in Catullus 64 since he focuses strongly on Ariadne's sexualized female body. He describes her appearance in lines 63-65: "lost the fine-woven net from her golden tresses,/ lost the light garment veiling her torso, lost the/ rounded breast-band that gathered her milk white bosom." A direct sexual appearance is suggested here: neither the "net," "light garment," "breast-band" can cover someone's body properly as a fabric even though they are not lost from Ariadne's body. Furthermore, her tresses and bosom are shown visually by the colors "golden" and "milk white." This links us back to the coverlet that Catullus exhibits as "all smoothly inlaid with Indian ivory,/ its purple drapery dipped in the mollusc's blushing dye" (lines 48-49). The description of the material as well as the colors "ivory," "purple," and "mollusc's blushing" fully presents Ariadne as an attractive female figure in providing sexual satisfaction to the viewers.

⁴ The Poems of Catullus. A Bilingual Edition. Translated, with Commentary By Peter Green. University of California Press. 1991. Catullus 64.

Catullus also uses visual art techniques in presenting Ariadne's physical gesture. He invites his readers to gaze at Ariadne. Catullus' descriptions of color and tactile sensation of Ariadne's body calls to mind William Etty's oil painting on board *Ariadne* (figure 1), which not only responds to Catullus 64, but also fits into Mulvey's concept of fetishistic scopophilia. It depicts a back view of the sad princess on the shore of Naxos. This painting was done probably around 1820 (the specific year remains unknown), and the technique of the artist is quite mature and expressive. Compositionally, Ariadne is lying on a beach, facing the roaring sea, and her naked body is emphasized as it reaches from the left to the right of the surface. Among the anatomy of her body, the artist puts a lot of attention on her buttocks at the center of the whole piece by depicting it as peach-like, ideal, and sexually attractive, just like Catullus. This artistic choice is meant to show the female beauty of Ariadne. The audience views her more as an object from the rear, as they cannot see her face and eyes, and does not receive messages delivered from her facial expressions or through eye contact with her. This presentation devalues Ariadne's voice. A piece of transparent fabric is on top of her buttocks, but it does not function as covering but rather draws more attention from the viewer. This creates another parallel with Catullus' depiction of Ariadne's slipping clothes. In the painting, her gestures are exhausted and despairing: even though we cannot see her facial expressions, the atmosphere the artist creates makes the audience feel that she is glaring at the shore, hoping that Theseus will come back, even though she knows it is very unlikely. The messages that this painting deliver echo with Catullus' description of Ariadne's sexual exposure. This painting also resonates with Catullus' idea of Ariadne's desperate hope for Theseus' returning, and her reluctance to communicate with others.

Aside from Ariadne, William Etty uses a loose touch while painting the space around her. The brush strokes are chaotic and move in different directions, which puts a sense of anxiety into the painting. The waves and sky merge, as if there is a storm far away, echoing Ariadne's vulnerable status. This loose style of the painting's background and foreground is in strong conflict with Ariadne's fine body as if she is a piece of precious china being discarded in a deserted land, like a beautiful object misplaced. Catullus does a similar thing when he describes Ariadne's fine fabric clothes slipping from her body: "lost the fine-woven net from her golden tresses,/ lost the light garment veiling her torso, lost the/ rounded breast-band that gathered her milk white bosom" as if her dignity as a princess is taken away from her at the same time (lines 63-65). Furthermore, Etty's painting of Ariadne being naked and lying down directly on the rocky ground instead of on a bed or a cushion indicates her loss of social status. Fine clothes and a soft bed can be metaphors that present humans' identities in terms of wealth and social position. Ariadne's passivity is revealed as she has no self-awareness of her identity since she is lying on the ground without a supportive bed or any protective clothes.

Moreover, there are no other creatures shown in the painting, which demonstrates Ariadne's desertion. On the one hand, desertion seems reasonable since she is on an isolated island. On the other hand, the fact that her face is hidden from the viewers suggests she pays no attention to things such as social position, family, or personal pursuits except for Theseus. Ariadne's desertion is also hinted at by Catullus. He states that Ariadne is sleeping while Theseus is sailing away: "roused that moment from treacherous slumber,/ Ariadne finds herself left on the lonely strand" (lines 56-57). Being asleep already states Ariadne's passivity because sleepers cannot interfere with things or have their voice in making decisions. The state of sleep

curtains off the outside world. Sleepers are not aware of the outside world which suggests Ariadne at least is unaware of the viewers. Ariadne, as a sleeper, is in complete isolation.

Having considered Ariadne as the object of the viewer's gaze, let us now examine her own gaze in Catullus' poem. In Catullus 64, the word "eyes" shows up several times. Eyes are important because they can reveal personal feelings and create conversations even without words. Ariadne's eyes are first mentioned when she finds out that she has been abandoned on the island by Theseus: "There, gazing out from Dia's surf-loud shoreline,/ eyes fixed on Theseus as he and his swift vessels/ dwindle away to nothing, with uncontrollable passion/ filling her heart, not yet able to credit the witness of her own eyes" (lines 52-55). Ariadne's eyes see the truth; however, her heart refuses to believe it. The shock is too sudden for her to absorb. Ariadne's eyes staring at Theseus' sailing ship reveals her urgent need to contact Theseus. Catullus shows his pity for her state of lonely beauty in line 57: "Ariadne finds herself left on the lonely strand, poor creature." Just like Etty's painting that we have discussed, Ariadne has no companions in this no man's land.

"Eyes" appear for the second time in lines 60-62: "eyes/agonized, Mino's daughter, a stony bacchant, watches,/ ah, watches." While Ariadne is motionless like a stony statue, her eyes are gazing at Theseus. In other words, her eyes are fixed on one male, while other men gaze at her as a visual object. We can see her shock through Catullus' description of her as "a stony bacchant," which presents her as a statue. On the one hand, freezing can be a self-protective reaction when bad things happen, just as Ariadne becomes motionless when she finds out Theseus left without her. On the other hand, being compared to a statue suggests that she is being watched by others. We have discussed previously how Ariadne is presented as an object that is

seen by others, and the image of the statue here increases the sense that she is a work of art to be gazed upon.

The word “bacchant” is important here, too. It may naturally suggest Ariadne will be Bacchus’ bride. However, Ariadne, at this moment, has not yet fully become an image of the bacchant-like figure. But why does Catullus use the word “bacchant” here if he is not simply suggesting Ariadne’s fate afterwards? Camille Corot’s “Bacchante by the sea” painted in oil on wood in 1865 and now placed in the MET, provides some insight into Catullus’ visual techniques here (figure 2). Corot’s painting allows us to see a contrast between Ariadne’s stillness and a bacchant’s movement. Some may argue Ariadne’s stillness is because she is an object in an artwork. Corot’s “Bacchante” is a still artwork as well, but we can sense the differences between this bacchantic figure and Ariadne as a “stony Bacchant.” This, once again, suggests the passivity of Catullus’ Ariadne. Both the bacchante and Ariadne are oblivious of themselves, but the bacchante is shown as much more confident than Catullus’ Ariadne. Bacchantes disregard their physical appearance because they concentrate on their feelings without being influenced by the outside world. They welcome others to see them. However, Ariadne disregards her physical status because she devotes herself thoroughly to Theseus, a male figure. She hasn’t got any spare room for other things in her mind.

Camille Corot’s painting “Bacchante by the Sea” not only provides the perspective of how a bacchante can be depicted in comparison with Catullus’ “stony Bacchant.” It also affirms itself as not being an example of fetishistic scopophilia as I have argued that Catullus’ Ariadne and Etty’s Ariadne are. It would be very interesting to compare Etty’s “Ariadne” with this painting “Bacchante by the Sea” which was completed only a few decades after Etty’s

“Ariadne.” Compositionally, both figures fill up space generously, with the Bacchante slightly smaller than Ariadne. This artistic choice, along with the vague, smoky back and foreground just like “Ariadne,” emphasizes the female body. The anatomy of the bacchante is also very round and fleshy, further suggesting the sexuality of the figure. Her breasts are depicted vividly with an amount of weight, that they are almost touchable by the viewers. It would be accurate to describe this figure as a sexually attractive object, just like Ariadne under Etty’s paintbrush.

However, these two paintings can be distinguished from each other in the way their female figures are positioned, and the gestures they make. Etty’s “Ariadne” is depicted from the back. She has no interactions with the audience, and she does not know how people gaze at her. On the contrary, Corot’s Bacchante is fully aware, and her gesture can be argued as almost welcoming the viewers to look at her body and enjoy her female beauty. Her left arm stretches backward loosely, making her torso more open to us. She is also not shy to display the beautiful curve of her buttocks. Her hands and feet are smooth, almost boneless, but one of the feet lifts slightly so that it hooks the audience aesthetically and sexually. All of these gestures make “Bacchante” more directly alluring than Ariadne. The audience loses a sense of being a voyeur in “Bacchante,” in exchange for a bolder contact with the figure. This painting shows us that it is not the naked body itself that makes someone passive, it is the figure’s state of mind and attitude towards their body and the viewer.

In addition to these two modern paintings, ancient artworks closer to the time of Catullus can help us better understand his depiction of Ariadne as a visual and sexual object. A fresco from the first century CE by an unknown artist at Pompeii depicts the princess as a half-naked woman (figure 3). She is partially covered by drapery, but her torso is revealed to the audience

directly. The painting skills at this time cannot compare with the maturity of the previous two paintings, and her body is very rigid, even though by her gesture we can tell she is soft and helpless. In this fresco, Ariadne weeps and dabs her eyes with her cloth. The reason for her agony is displayed in the background, which shows a ship sailing away. Her drapery is a golden color, making her look like a precious object that has been carefully wrapped and left behind. Her eyes are closed so they do not have contact with the audience, and it seems that she is dwelling in her pain and hence not bothered by the fact that she is revealing her mostly naked body. It is clear that the painting is meant to display Ariadne's body to the viewer, and at this sad moment in her story, her vulnerability further makes the audience look at her as a fragile object.

The purpose of looking at Ariadne's vulnerability in these different paintings is to help us better understand Catullus' Ariadne passivity in poetry. Catullus' Ariadne doesn't even notice she is almost naked when she gazes at Theseus's sailing ship. At this moment, her lament towards her loss of Theseus seems to be the only thing she cares about. Catullus states that "at this moment neither net nor floating/ garment were noticed by her: she with her whole heart, Theseus,/ whole mind, whole spirit, was concentrated on *you*" (lines 68-70). Catullus emphasizes the word "you" when he addresses Theseus in the second person as if in a conversation. Ariadne devotes herself thoroughly to Theseus. She concentrates on Theseus with her whole heart so that she can not spare any attention to other things. She even hasn't realized the circumstance she has to face after Theseus left her by this time. On the contrary, Theseus is concentrated on all other things except Ariadne. He is sailing to the outside world — a world other than Ariadne and this lonely island, a world Ariadne is unable to notice.

The fact that Ariadne fails to notice her clothes slipping down can also suggest Ariadne cares nothing about her physical state, which makes a thorough contrast with the ones who are gazing at her and fixing their eyes firmly on her physical state. No description in Catullus 64 hints that Ariadne is aware of her beauty. Catullus describes her beautiful presence to readers. Interestingly, Ariadne is not being looked at by any figures within the poem since she is lonely on the island. But outside the poem, just like in the paintings, the reader takes on the role of viewers who gaze at her body. Ironically, though Ariadne hardly knows her beauty in Catullus 64, we read about how she desires Theseus in the poem: “*Him*, the instant that with eyes of desire the royal/ virgin spied him,[...]she did not lower her smoldering gaze from him till/ though the length of her body the flame was kindled/ deep at the core, and blazed up in her inmost marrow” (lines 86-87, 91-93). The word “virgin” is a sexual statement about females. It suggests a female’s fragile and unopened state, which makes her easy to control and easy to hurt by the outside world. This word suggests her vulnerability that foreshadows her passivity in the future. Similarly, references to passion and frenzy occur four times, in lines 54, 94, 124 and 198. All these phrases of “uncontrollable passion,” “wretchedly stirring wild passion,” “wild with passion,” “blinded by mindless frenzy” suggest Ariadne’s irrational and uncontrollable mind, hopes, and behaviors in love. Once again the word “virgin” echoes with Ariadne’s subordinate female figure to males.

The word “gaze” appears again in this erotic description of Ariadne desiring Theseus. It easily leads readers to think their love is more physically engaged rather than spiritually appealed. Ariadne, the naked object to be watched, is herself a watcher with longing and desire. Ariadne may love Theseus spiritually since she sacrifices her life to go with Theseus, and betrays

her own family to save him. However, Theseus never has his voice in Catullus' version. We, as readers, can only see Theseus' and Ariadne's love through Ariadne's eyes. Considering that Theseus left Ariadne on Dia, it is possible to argue that Ariadne may appeal to Theseus only by outward charm. This cruel contrast forms Ariadne's fortune and suggests Ariadne's physical attraction as well.

Moreover, Catullus shows Ariadne's extreme devotion to Theseus, which presents another typical passive female characteristic. When Theseus is going to kill her brother, a savage monster, Ariadne knows that Theseus's fortune is "either death or the rewards of glory" (line 102). She prays to the gods: "Yet the giftlets she offered the gods, the vows she pledged/ with silent lips — these were not in vain, not unpleasing" (lines 103-104). Her offerings and vows to gods save Theseus from dying. In other words, her brother is killed. Helping friends and killing enemies is a strongly-rooted ancient Greek value. In this case, Ariadne clearly put Theseus higher than her family. She sacrifices her brother's life. Another place that reveals her incredible devotion is when she thinks of a way how she could have sailed together with Theseus to his home: "you still could have brought me to your ancestral home,/ to be your slave, to serve you with adoration,/ washing your white-soled feet in crystal water, or/ spreading and dressing your bed with a purple coverlet" (lines 160-163). Comparing these color descriptions to those descriptions that reveal Ariadne's attractive appearance, these descriptions of Theseus reveal his nobility in Ariadne's eyes. It is also striking to see the royal Ariadne present herself as a servant or even a slave. Catullus shows Ariadne's powerless position again.

Even when Ariadne seeks vengeance, she acts as a passive figure as well. She curses Theseus by asking the gods: "don't let my grief all go for nothing:/ rather in just such a mood as

Theseus abandoned me/ to my lonely fate, let him, goddesses, now doom both himself and his!” (lines 199-201) She doesn’t accomplish vengeance by herself — she is left in a lonely island that she has no way to escape. She describes this island as “There’s no way to escape, no hope, and, everywhere, silence:/ everywhere’s emptiness, everything signals death” as if she is trapped in her love with Theseus (lines 186-187). Moreover, her choice also suggests her passive and subordinate personality. The word “death” symbolizes the death of her hopes to Theseus. Her curse does work, which composes her most powerful moment in the poem. She used to bond herself to Theseus. And now, being aware that Theseus has abandoned her, she bonds herself to the gods and goddesses. Even her most powerful moment is depicted in such a passive way.

Catullus states that Cupid and Venus, the gods of love and desire, rule Ariadne’s fate. The unseen powers from Cupid and Venus are involved in Ariadne’s fortune: “Sacred Boy, you who mingle joy with sorrow for mortals/ and you, Lady, ruler of Golgi and leaf-thick Idalium,/ on what rough surges you tossed that girl” (Lines 95-97). Catullus’ description of Ariadne’s “floating garment” is that it becomes “the salty ripples’ playthings,” suggesting the existence of waves and wind as if Ariadne is a plaything of Cupid since his power is often related to the wind; Ariadne’s fortune is controlled by him (lines 67-68). Furthermore, the wind that is depicted in line 142 (“all of which the intangible winds are shredding, making void”) seems to address Ariadne, whose wish for a good marriage is in vain. Moreover, wind is an essential element for sailing; Theseus cannot sail away without the help of wind. This is further evidence that indicates that Ariadne’s fate is somehow ruled by Cupid. Although Ariadne’s misfortune is related to Cupid to some extent, her good fortune is brought by him as well. Catullus depicts the approach

of Bacchus flying as if Cupid himself is bringing good fortune for Ariadne, for “winging” requires help from the wind (line 251).

Ariadne’s passivity cannot be examined independently from other external influences. In Catullus 64, Ariadne is passive due to the choice of medium: a figure who lacks her voice since she is embroidered on a coverlet to be looked at. She is a victim of Theseus’ glory just like her brother is a victim of her love towards Theseus. She offers triumph to her lover, but fails to achieve her own triumph in love. She is abandoned when she is not able to communicate with the outside world; sleeping blocks her out. She is not capable of challenging the outside world even when she is awake. She is passive in terms of her personality; she wishes to be a slave to Theseus merely for a chance to stay near him. More importantly, she is passive since she is willingly and inevitably subordinate to the power of males and gods.

Ovid’s Ariadne As an Active Figure

Catullus 64 and Ovid’s *Heroides* 10 depict Ariadne from two different perspectives. Instead of showing Ariadne from Theseus’ perspective, both poems choose to show Ariadne directly to the reader, but in different ways. The two poems use Ariadne’s desertion as their background. Catullus’ Ariadne, as we discussed in the previous chapter, is presented more as an object to be viewed than as a vivid figure to be communicated with. On the contrary, Ovid’s Ariadne has much more self-awareness. She is active and emotional. She is more lifelike, and the reader is given access to her unstable and exaggerated feelings. Both of these two poems are about viewing, but in different ways: Catullus’ Ariadne is focused on how she is viewed, and Ovid’s Ariadne concentrates on how she views herself.

Ovid's *Heroides* is a series of poetic letters, which differs from Catullus as poetic works. He is writing in relation to Catullus 64 in *Heroides* 10. Ovid's Ariadne presents herself as a writer who writes Theseus a letter, as someone who has a voice. She is presented as more active than Catullus' Ariadne. Catullus' Ariadne comes to people's sight as a visual object on a coverlet, and her voice can only be heard through Catullus. Ovid's Ariadne is made to speak in the first person by Ovid as someone who can completely control the words she wants the audience to know. (She is in charge of what can be exaggerated about her story, for example, and what can be skipped over.) Theseus and the readers can be easily influenced by her own words as recipients. By contrast, as we saw earlier, Catullus' Ariadne is merely an artwork that is described by Catullus. She lacks her own voice since she cannot speak for herself. Her inner voice can hardly be understood precisely since she is presented by another person. For her, it is almost impossible to make any artistic choices in terms of the art of communication. She is provided only one chance to express herself in the poem. Catullus decides to give her a speech on lines 131-201. In this speech, she continuously lists how Theseus did wrong to her as if nonstop waves to the shore. She slowly climbs to a climax which is to curse Theseus. Many readers will feel sorry for Catullus' Ariadne, but her speech doesn't have the specific purpose, like Ovid's Ariadne, of communicating with Theseus directly. Ovid's Ariadne makes her intention very clear that she wants Theseus back, and she speaks of this desire for herself. Catullus' Ariadne is viewed as a still, passive figure while Ovid's Ariadne refuses to be viewed as an artwork who can not express herself or reveal her emotions. I read such a presentation as Ovid's response to Catullus. Ovid's Ariadne tries to picture herself as an active female figure

who wants the audience to view her exactly the way she views herself. She uses her weakness as a weapon in contrast to Catullus' Ariadne, who is gazed upon sexually and passively.

Ovid's Ariadne intentionally reveals her weakness, showing awareness that she is deserted in a big and terrifying natural world where external forces work against her. She realizes that forces of the natural world can disrupt many things and interfere with her fortune, whereas Catullus' Ariadne failed to count them in. For example, Ovid's Ariadne is aware of the part sleep and wind play in her desertion by Theseus. Sleep and wind are two major elements that cause the desertion of Ariadne. Catullus' Ariadne knows that Theseus left when she was sleeping: "...or how there he left her, eyes slumber-weighted,/ to take himself off and vanish, a fickle-hearted husband?" (Catullus 64. 122-3) However, she doesn't realize how sleep cuts her off from the real world. She neglects the significance of sleeping and simply views Theseus as a "fickle-hearted husband." On the contrary, Ovid's Ariadne takes full awareness of how sleeping can block her away from other people's worlds. She blames "sleep" for her misfortune: "Miserable sleep, why did you keep me here?/ It could have been far better for me/ had I been crushed beneath unending darkness"⁵ (Heroides 10.132-4). Ovid's Ariadne reckons sleep keeps her unable to interfere with others' decisions. She does not forget to accuse the wind when she does the same to Theseus: "On this island I was betrayed both/ by you and by the sleep I could not resist;/ in my sleep you plotted my ruin" (Heroides 10. 6-8). She believes that Theseus and the sleep together "plotted her ruin" and that she "could not resist." She puts sleep's responsibility as equal to Theseus' responsibility in deserting her.

⁵ Ovid. *Heroides*. Translated with Introduction and Notes by Harold Isbell. Penguin Books. 1990

Ovid's Ariadne mentions the part the wind plays in her misfortune as well. Catullus' Ariadne herself sees the winds which blew Theseus away from the island: "the marriage I so yearned for —/ all of which the intangible winds are shredding, make void;" however, she fails to further examine whether wind could be one of the reasons that Theseus leaves her alone on an island (Catullus 64, 142-143). Ovid's Ariadne notices this and comments that the wind is cruel: "The winds were also cruel: your sails blowing/ out were stretched tight in a southern gale" (Heroides 10.33–34). Theseus' ship cannot sail without help from the wind. Her awareness comes to a climax when she writes: "My own sleep, the wind and your treacherous oath:/ one innocent girl, three times betrayed" (Heroides 10.140–41). She pictures herself as an innocent girl who is betrayed by Theseus, sleep, and wind. "Innocent" and "girl" are strong words here, for they indicate a thorough denial that Ariadne herself could have been responsible for her abandonment. Ovid's Ariadne chooses to reveal herself as an innocent victim who is unable to fight back against the power of Theseus and her environment. We can feel Ariadne's helplessness through her writing, unlike Catullus' Ariadne, who can only receive sympathy from the sexualized exposure of her body and desperate, weeping moments.

Ovid's Ariadne doesn't merely present herself as a victim of the natural world. Ovid draws attention to Ariadne's state by using the idea of artwork just like Catullus, but with a very different effect. The statue scene in Catullus' 64, when he describes Ariadne as a "stony Bacchant," suddenly cracks the normal time and space, unlike his story-telling style in other parts of his poem (line 61). Catullus focuses on a specific stony figure and invites his viewers to gaze at Ariadne by comparing her to this medium of art. Ovid's Ariadne specifically responds to this. Ovid's Ariadne compares herself to a Bacchant; however, she is not stony but active. She

separates the idea of a stony Bacchant into two components -- moving madly like a Bacchant, and sitting still like a stone: “Alone, with my hair unbound, I wandered like/ a Bacchant roused by the Ogygian/ god, or I sat on a rock like that on which I sat” (Heroides 10.51–54). This seems less expressive than Catullus’ description, as we discussed in the Catullus section. Because a Bacchant is thought to be a less rational figure who wanders around all the time instead of staying quietly in one place, Catullus’ intertwined idea of a moving Bacchant and a stony Ariadne creates a pause for the audience to further examine Ariadne. It freezes the regular time flow in order to give this erotic image of Ariadne a chance to be looked at. Ovid’s explanation, on the other hand, is much simpler. It is more logical to think about Ariadne when she has her hair tangled and moving around everywhere on this isolated island as a Bacchant, and when she steadily sits on a rock as not a Bacchant, which makes her less of a complex and dissonant artwork here.

Ovid provides a transition from Ariadne in a static state to a dynamic one through her own speech:

“At the moment of waking, I,/ still drowsy, turned on my side and reached/ to touch my Theseus but I could not find him./ I withdrew my hands, and reached out a/ second time, moving my arms across the couch./ But he was gone. Fear cut through my sleep./ Terrified, I rose from the abandoned bed, / my hands beat my breasts and tore my hair, dishevelled as it was from my night of sleep./ I strained my eyes to see by moonlight,/ there was nothing to see but the ocean’s shore. Running back and forth without a plan,/ the loose sand slowed my young feet and all that while/ I screamed ‘Theseus’ along the shore/ and only the rocks returned my cry” (Heroides 10.11–25).

Ariadne exhibits her various mood changes by describing her body language. Her physical gestures go through a huge scale from a drowsy movement to a restless running that vividly exposes her inner emotions. She starts by remembering how she tried to “touch” Theseus, even though he’s not by her side. She reaches out for a second time since she is still drowsy. But this

time, her body movement enlarges a little bit: she “moves her arms across the couch.” By increasing her body movement from “touch” to “move across,” we can sense her increased anxiety. Then a trail of verbs “cut,” “rose,” “beat,” and “tore” demonstrate her terrified heart. The word “cut” indicates a rapid motion that urgently interrupts her from drowsiness. When she says “fear cut through my sleep,” we can feel how intensive her fear is by her word “cut.” She then depicts herself as a Bacchant-like figure by mentioning her “disheveled” hair once again. She keeps her eyes open unusually wide: she says she “strained” her eyes as if the bigger her eyes were, the more likely she could find Theseus. Her desperation is thereby shown. Moreover, fear drives her so urgently that she could not bother to wear her shoes (“the loose sand slowed my young feet.”) The image of her wandering without shoes at night creates a typical image of a Bacchant. She is “running back and forth without a plan” “by moonlight,” which also recalls a Bacchant who goes and acts whatever she likes. Nevertheless, Ovid’s Ariadne is not as free as a Bacchant since all her mad actions are triggered by Theseus’ abandonment.

Ovid and Catullus, then, both compare Ariadne to a Bacchant. They both mention Ariadne’s mad running in searching Theseus as well. Catullus’ Ariadne is shown as a watcher, but Ovid’s Ariadne attracts attention. Catullus’ Ariadne climbs the hills and runs along the shore just like Ovid’s Ariadne, but his emphasis is more on her position as a static watcher: “eyes/ agonized, Mino’s daughter, a stony Bacchant, watches,/ ah, watches” (64. 60–70) and “Mino’s daughter --/ who, gazing in sorrow after his vanishing vessel” (64. 248-9). The only time she steps out to be further than a watcher is when she is arranged to be a speaker by Catullus on lines 132–201. On the contrary, Ovid’s Ariadne distinguishes herself from a passive figure: “I screamed ‘Theseus’ along the shore/ and only the rocks returned my cry” (Heroides 10.24-25).

She screams in order to attract others' attention from that sailing ship. When she realizes her shout cannot be heard, she decides to take off her clothes and tie it on a tree to attract attention: "When my voice became weak I/ beat my breast and mixed my words with blows./ I hung my veil in a tree and waved,/ and hoped that those forgetting would remember" (Heroides 10.41-45). Ariadne's furious image as she catches sight of the sails of Theseus' ship, screaming, waving, leaping up to tie her veil all connects to her intention: to attract attention so that Theseus can turn around and fetch her from the shore.

The image of Ovid's Ariadne removing an article of her clothes in order to attract attention forms a significant contrast to the scene in Catullus 64 where she unconsciously drops her clothes into the waves. It is not only a matter of self-awareness, but also a matter of how sexualized each woman is made by stripping their clothes. It is worth noticing here that Ovid's Ariadne writes from her perspective as an author, unlike Catullus as a narrator. She can talk about her own beauty while Catullus' Ariadne can only have male narrator talk about her beauty. The way that she chooses to reveal her beauty is significant. Catullus invites his readers to gaze at Ariadne's female beauty by undressing her. She is not aware of herself being naked since she is too engaged with Theseus' leaving. She is not bothered by how she looks or how others might look at her, for she is meant to be shown as a passive, erotic figure to be gazed upon. Under this circumstance, she is not allowed to have her own voice.

Ovid's Ariadne clearly fights back against Catullus' idea. When she is wandering and shouting to attract others' attention, she has this desire to be looked at. But it is not the same desire as Catullus, who wants his Ariadne to be looked at. Ovid's Ariadne doesn't want to be viewed as a still artwork, which can't speak for herself or have emotions of her own. She refuses

to expose her body simply to reveal her physical attraction. She self-consciously decides to take off her clothes to accomplish her will. This makes her much stronger and more powerful than Catullus' Ariadne, who is stripped for nothing about her benefits but only for the pleasure of males. Being naked doesn't make Ovid's Ariadne weak as a female object. Rather, she frees herself from being simply an artwork by this stripping decision driven by her free will.

Catullus' Ariadne shows little interest in her physical appearance; however, Ovid's Ariadne has a sentimental and self-conscious view of herself and how she must appear to others. Ariadne imagines how appealing she must appear: "I could pray that you had seen me from the stern,/ that my sad figure had moved your heart" (Heroides 10.162-163). She believes that if Theseus were ever to look back to the shore to see her, he would take her with him. She is fully aware of how her "sad figure" can be used as a weapon to achieve her goal. She reverses herself from a weak figure who is abandoned on an island to a strong figure who reveals her vulnerability to move men's hearts and control them. What is more persuasive than an innocent, vulnerable, female figure when it comes to obtaining a man's pity, especially when he considers himself the one who makes her sad?

Ovid's Ariadne changes the gender dynamic that we saw in Catullus. She may seem like a "sad" female figure who is suffering from Theseus' betrayal; however, she takes on a powerful status: she takes advantage of her sadness to evoke Theseus' sympathy. She is an object for her audience for sure, just like Catullus' Ariadne. However, Ovid's Ariadne advertises her appearance and plans to convert her weakness into her advantage. In contrast, Catullus' Ariadne fails to gain benefits from her appearance. Rather, she is thoroughly and irresistibly attracted to Theseus, which leaves her no space to consider herself. Ovid's Ariadne, who cannot accept that

Theseus is not going to come back, or that he cannot somehow be persuaded to want her once more, intentionally transforms her passive status to a potentially profitable one that might eventually lead her back to Theseus.

Ovid's Ariadne reveals her innocence and vulnerability over and over again: for instance, by acting like a Bacchant and by remembering the bed they shared. She is frustrated enough to allow herself to wander around with her hair tangled. She doesn't care to dress herself up as a dignified princess. It could be argued that she aims to attract her lover's pity by this bacchant-like appearance and action. Moreover, she mentions how she wakes up on the bed without Theseus and how she wets the bed with her tears. This memory can also be viewed as acquiring Theseus' sympathy since the bed is an intimate thing that she shared with him. Her letter is written with a hopeful awareness of the possibility that it might reach Theseus. Although she sometimes can't help herself but condemn Theseus, she is self-consciously aware that her beauty and helplessness might be more effective in persuading Theseus back.

Furthermore, Ovid's Ariadne is much more demanding than Catullus' Ariadne. Their reactions to Theseus vanishing away are different both in tone and length. Catullus' Ariadne gives a long speech listing how Theseus wrongs her. She explains Theseus' offenses in a steady but impassioned tone as if she doesn't want to accept her misfortune but still, she has no intention to change her fate. Her long speech in Catullus is replaced by a brief demand in Heroides 10. Ovid's Ariadne doesn't number Theseus' crimes, she merely requests Theseus to come back: "But anguish roused/ me, and made me cry with all my strength:/ 'Where did you go? Wicked Theseus, come back./ Turn your ship, one of your crew remains'" (Heroides 10. 37-40). This imperative sentence "turn your ship" demonstrates her attitude. She tries with all her

strength thoroughly to state her wish that she should be one of his crew. Ovid's Ariadne uses a brief call to command Theseus to come back, in contrast to Catullus' Ariadne's long speech of complaining. Ovid's Ariadne concentrates her attention on her will instead of being distracted by all her concerns. This short sentence makes her wish more clear and urgent.

Ovid in *Heroides* 10 strongly demonstrates his opposite opinion from Catullus' astonishing description of Ariadne's desire to be a slave to Theseus in exchange for staying close to him. Ariadne in Catullus 64 begs for a chance to be with Theseus: "you still could have brought me to your ancestral home,/ to be your slave, to serve you with adoration,/ washing your white-soled feet in crystal water, or/ spreading and dressing your bed with a purple coverlet" (160-164). We can sense her crazy love by her expression of serving Theseus as a slave. Ovid's Ariadne explicitly refuses to be a slave in love though she treasures Theseus' love as well: "But what do I care so long as I am free/ and not held captive in harsh bondage,/ spinning out some task with hands bound by slavery?/ I, the daughter of Minos; I, whose/ mother is descended from Phoebus; I -- there/ is no memory more dear to me --/ who was betrothed to you, promised to be yours" (*Heroides* 10.99-105). She is dignified by her blood. Her sense of social status makes her unable to accept a low status even for her love for Theseus. This highlights a difference between these two Ariadnes on their view of dignity and social position. While both love Theseus equally, Ovid's Ariadne always presents her selfhood and status as being essential for consideration, while Catullus' Ariadne erases her dignity because of her desire for Theseus.

In the concluding section of *Heroides* 10, Ariadne reveals her concern that she should not be forgotten on this isolated island. Catullus' Ariadne seems to lack this concern since she pays no attention to her social position or even herself. Ovid's Ariadne thinks of how she is going to

be remembered: “Dying, must I die without my mother’s tears/ and will no one’s fingers close my eyes? [...] Are my bones to lie unburied, prey/ to the birds that are waiting here by the shore?” (Heroides 10.141-2, 147-8). A proper burial is more than a ritual that leads to a good afterlife; it expresses how much respect the dead is believed to deserve. Certainly, Ariadne, as a princess, should have had a proper burial if she died. But it seems impossible since she is isolated on an island. She deems her proper burial to be important. Like her denial of being a slave, this detail exhibits how much she values her social status, in contrast to Catullus’ Ariadne. Ovid’s Ariadne is described directly as powerful while Catullus clearly does not describe his Ariadne’s strength. It is mentioned in Heroides 10 that it is Ariadne who saves Theseus: “You should have died in the twisting halls without/ the string that I gave to be your guide” (79-80). This is the moment that highlights Ariadne’s strength: she rescued Theseus, the hero. Theseus could have died without her. If he had died, he could not have abandoned her. It is completely understandable that Theseus’ lack of gratitude triggers both Ariadne’s anger. However, Catullus 64 does not contain a description of the help that Ariadne gave him. Ariadne’s strength is exposed vaguely: “Yet the giftlets she offered the gods, the vows she pledged/ with silent lips -- these were not in vain, not unpleasing” (103-4). Her power is shown indirectly by her prayer to the gods. Even her most powerful moment, when she curses Theseus, is done through gods as well. She never has a chance to be interpreted as an active figure who can thoroughly release her power. On the contrary, Ovid’s Ariadne affirms her power by clarifying that she is the one who can and actually did save Theseus.

Catullus’ Ariadne and Ovid’s Ariadne have been examined together in this chapter, in order to show how Catullus 64 and Ovid’s Heroides 10 present Ariadne differently as an object

or a subject. This in turn alters how her voice is heard. Catullus' Ariadne expresses herself by means of speech. Speech is something that doesn't last long, for spoken words can be forgotten easily. The winds can blow them away. Ovid's Ariadne, by contrast, delivers her words by letter. A letter is more permanent than speech. It can be kept safe on paper and it can be spread widely. Ovid's Ariadne is active just like the medium she uses for herself: a letter. She addresses her sadness and anger clearly and comments on her disappointment with Theseus. On the other hand, Catullus' Ariadne seems passive, for her voice is limited, just like how a speech cannot be heard as widely as a letter can be read. A speech is unlikely to be delivered to her audience since it will be gone with the winds gradually. Meanwhile, a letter can be sent not only to its addressee, but can also be read by other audiences. The audience, then, plays an important but different role in these two poems. Catullus' viewers further weaken Ariadne's voice by gazing upon her sexualized body. Their gaze takes away her ability to express how she could have sounded or looked without the viewers. On the contrary, the reactions of Ovid's readers are guided by Ariadne, the writer of this letter. She displays her social status as a princess, her favors to Theseus, and her attempt to earn Theseus back, all of which express her agency and power. This combines with the ways in which she emphasizes her status as a female victim, which together invites Theseus and the readers to sympathize and, she hopes, change the outcome of her cruel fate.

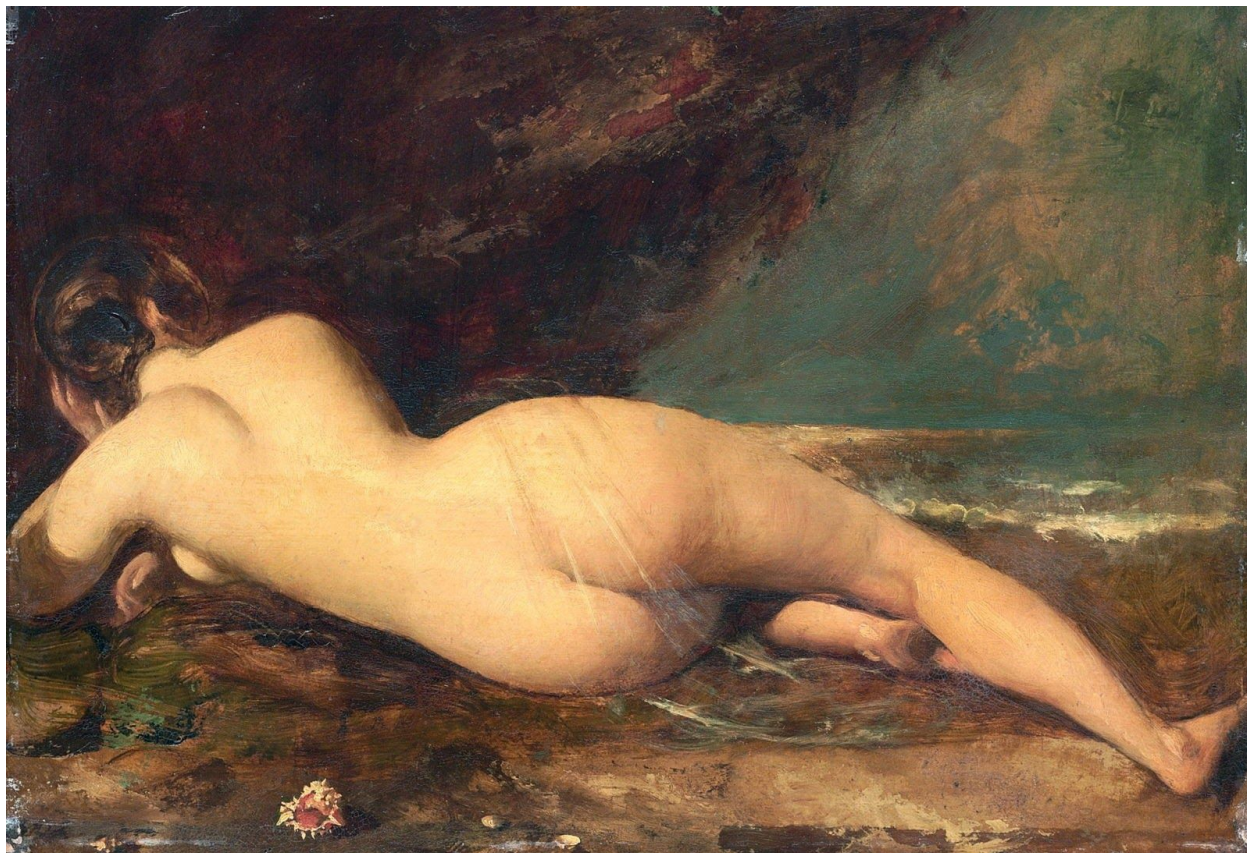


Figure 1: William Etty (1787–1849), *Ariadne* (year not known), oil on board laid down on masonite, 50.1 × 65.5 cm, Private collection.



Figure 2: Camille Corot, Bacchante by the Sea, 1865. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. New York



Figure 3: A 1st Century CE fresco “Ariadne” by an unknown artist at Pompeii

Chapter II:

Ariadne in Baroque Opera: Self-controlled In Her Sadness

Ariadne's story did not disappear during the hundreds of years after Catullus and Ovid. She became particularly popular in the Baroque period (1600-1750 CE), which is characterized by dynamic movement and overt emotion.⁶ Artists tend to picture her in despair. Painters portrayed her sinking in her heartbrokenness when Bacchus finds her. Sebastiano Ricci⁷, Ubaldo Gandolfi⁸, Angelica Kauffmann⁹, and Jacob Jordaens¹⁰ all have paintings named "Bacchus and Ariadne." For instance, Kauffmann's painting captures Ariadne and Bacchus with a minor baby Cupid figure (figure 4). Ariadne's posture clearly expresses her agony by leaning away from the center of the painting with her dress slipping away from her shoulder and almost exposing her bosom. One hand pushes away Bacchus and the other hand covers her face as if rejecting her fate. Bacchus, on the other side of the composition, is leaning towards Ariadne. These paintings share one great similarity, which is that her body is exposed when she is completely sobbing with grief. Because she is depicted as having been betrayed by men, she becomes a model of trials of love. Men enjoy looking at her beauty and pain while women may have viewed her as an emotional outlet who represents their roles in society. Ariadne lived on as a mythological figure for centuries not only as an object that pleased males but also as a subject who expressed the emotions of women who experienced the same misfortune as her. As we saw in the two previous

⁶ Vaughan Higgins, *Il lamento d'Arianna: "Lasciatemi morire" (Ariadne's Complaint: "Let Me Die")*. Recalling Ariadne: a concert project of the Chamber Singers of Haverford and Bryn Mawr Colleges. 2011

⁷ Um 1713, Öl auf Leinwand, 75,9 × 63,2 cm. London, National Gallery.

⁸ Italian. 1728-1781. oil on canvas.

⁹ Oil on canvas. Private collection

¹⁰ Completion Date: 1648. Style: Baroque Genre: mythological painting. Dimensions: 121 x 127.2 cm. Gallery: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA, USA

chapters on Ariadne in ancient art and literature, Catullus portrays his Ariadne more as a viewed object, while Ovid invites his Ariadne to talk as an active subject. As we now turn in the rest of this project to Ariadne's portrayal in opera, I argue in this chapter that Monteverdi, an important figure in the history of opera and its representation of women onstage, both responds to her ancient depictions and differentiates himself from them by portraying his Ariadne as a powerful figure who is self-controlled in her sadness. In contrast to the poetic versions of Ariadne we looked at earlier, Monteverdi's female protagonist has a presence and power that she gains from the differently expressive medium of music.

Claudio Monteverdi is an Italian composer who is well-known for his opera *L'Arianna*. Composed in 1607–1608, it is one of the earliest operas. The libretto was written by Ottavio Rinuccini, who used Ovid's *Heroides* and other classical sources to relate the story of Ariadne's abandonment by Theseus on the island of Naxos and her subsequent elevation as a bride to the god Bacchus.¹¹ Unfortunately, all the music is lost except “*Lamento d’Arianna*” (“Ariadne's Lament”). The music of the *Lamento* survives since it was published by Monteverdi, in several different versions, independently from the opera. This piece was so popular that Severo Bonini could write in the 1640s that “there is hardly a house which has a harpsichord or a theorbo which does not also have the lament of Ariadne.”¹² Two different versions, one for five voices and one for solo soprano, have been frequently recorded. Monteverdi reworked the monodic lament of Ariadne into a cycle of five-voice madrigals -- as we see from a letter to Alessandro Striggio of

¹¹ Carter, Tim, *Monteverdi's Musical Theatre*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 2002

¹² “. . . non e stata casa, la quale, avendo cembali o tiorbe in casa, non avesse il lamento di quella.” From Bonini's MS *Discorsi e Regole sopra la musica*, quoted from Solerti, *Le origini*, p. 139. Nino Pirrotta, “Bonini, Severo,” *Enciclopedia dello spettacolo*, ii (Rome, 1954), col. 776, dates this treatise “not before 1640,” while Nigel Fortune, “Bonini, Severo,” *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5th ed., I (New York, 1955), 803, places it after 1642.

1609, in which he discussed the setting of a text requested by the Duke.¹³ “I have decided to set [these words] first for a solo voice,” wrote Monteverdi, “and then if His Highness commands me to rework this aria for five voices, I will do so.”¹⁴ We know, then, that Monteverdi’s first intention was to set Ariadne alone as a single voice. Although the five voices version shows his virtuoso skills in the Baroque style of composition, the soprano version as the original version sung in this opera amplifies her voice as a single unaccompanied female and emphasizes her loneliness on the island.

I will discuss the surviving aria in detail in later sections. Here I examine how Monteverdi’s opera, so far as we know, treats the story and characters overall and how its representation of Ariadne and Theseus differs from the ancient versions. Ariadne, in Monteverdi’s *Lamento*, summarizes her situation in a rational manner. Her feelings run deeper than mere fury, unlike Catullus’ and Ovid’s Ariadne, who cannot completely put aside her love for her betrayer. This characterization is a complex one compared to other poets’ and musicians’ portrayals of Ariadne. For instance, the setting of the whole opera complicates Ariadne’s depiction. Theseus is characterized in two figures: Theseus and Consigliero. Theseus stands for a lover who feels sorry for his beautiful Ariadne. Consigliero, on the other hand, convinces Theseus not to bring Ariadne back. Consigliero argues that bringing Ariadne back to Athens would diminish the importance of Theseus’ heroic deed of slaying the Minotaur since Athens would find out that this deed was only accomplished with Ariadne’s help. Moreover, he

¹³ Tomlinson, Gary. “Madrigal, Monody, and Monteverdi’s ‘Via Naturale alla Immitatione.’” *JAMS* 34, No. 1. 1981. pp67

¹⁴ “... queste [parole] ho pensato prima di farle ad una voce sola, et se poi S.A.S. comanderà che porti quel aria a cinque tanto farò”; Claudio Monteverdi, *Lettere, dediche e prefazioni*, ed. Domenico de’ Paoli (Rome).

persuades Theseus that Ariadne, as the daughter of their enemy, won't be welcomed in Athens. The decision to separate Theseus into two characters has a unique power in the opera's musical drama. The audience can feel the tension between Theseus' conflicting motivations much more strongly in duet than with one person singing alone. These two characters think in opposition to each other, but together they reveal the struggle in Theseus' heart. Most importantly, Theseus is persuaded by Consigliero eventually, which hints at his internal weakness.

Monteverdi's setting has the result of weakening Theseus into a less prominent character in this opera. He serves as a foil to the more powerful Ariadne. Her perspective will be the subject of most of this chapter's discussion since it is she who sings the *Lamento*. But, so far as we can tell from the surviving evidence about the opera, her own words should also be seen in dialogue with how the other characters see her. Although Ariadne is far from a passive character in her aria, she is depicted by Consigliero as 'femminil bellezza', 'femminili amori', 'femmina impudica' and 'femmina fugitiva.'¹⁵ Consigliero views Ariadne as a fugitive and dishonorable female figure who is related to beauty and love. This opera thus provides two perspectives for the audience to look at Ariadne: Consigliero's view and Ariadne's view for herself. Ariadne reveals herself as a self-controlled and powerful woman who is quite opposite to Consigliero's description. Ovid and Catullus both provide Ariadne with a single angle to either look at herself or to be looked at. Monteverdi's opera, in contrast, uses the power of staged drama to allow the audience to see two thoroughly opposite perspectives on one person. The audience receives messages from both sides: the others' view and her own voice.

¹⁵ Bujic, Bojan. "Rinuccini the Craftsman: A View of his *L'Arianna*" in *Early Music History*: Volume 18: Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Music, ed. Iain Fenlon. 2001

It is in Monteverdi's *Lamento* that we see Ariadne expressively telling the story in her own words. This mode can be compared in interesting ways to the two ancient versions of Ariadne that we have discussed. Catullus uses his own voice to create a third-person narration for Ariadne, while Ovid's Ariadne writes a letter. The viewpoint of Monteverdi's Ariadne, on the other hand, can be expressed most emotionally thanks to the language of music. The medium an artist uses has an important role in telling a story. Catullus' Ariadne is naturally passive since she is introduced by an embroidered artwork and is given her voice by Catullus. Ovid's Ariadne is more aware of her situation and actively communicates with others since she is set as a communicator who writes a letter. Moving from poetry to opera, Monteverdi's Ariadne is multi-dimensional. She speaks in music. She moves on stage. She changes in every scene. She is brought alive by each different performer who plays her. Inevitably, she invites being looked at since she is the protagonist in this opera. But the audience of Monteverdi's opera is not only interested in looking at her but also in paying attention to how she feels and what she sings.

The libretto already conveys emotion in *Lamento*, and its music continues to add emotion to it. Monteverdi's *Lamento* creates an emotional arc, a combination of ascending and descending moments that chart Ariadne's grief, fear, anger, and resistance. It can be divided into eight sections according to the composer's language. There is a major emotional turning point between each section. I will examine each of these eight sections during this chapter. Here, I focus in detail on the opening bars of the whole piece (see figure 5).

Rinuccini's libretto opens with the phrase, "Let me die," and Monteverdi's music makes the words' rhetoric more expressive than it could be merely in words. The aria starts with a

minor second interval, which is a dissonant interval.¹⁶ The second note goes up a half step from the first note. It immediately indicates the internal tension in the music. If Monteverdi had made this interval a major second, the audience would not get the idea of Ariadne's helplessness since a major second is too familiar for the audience's ear. Moreover, Monteverdi could have made this minor second interval go down for a half step instead of going up. This movement of going up can be understood as an indication of Ariadne's begging as if she is calling Theseus to look back for her. The third note moves down a perfect fourth from the second note. The perfect fourth and the perfect fifth is usually used in sacred music to deliver holiness. But there are slight nuances that make the perfect fourth sound more human while the perfect fifth more suitable for God. This interval suggests Ariadne's sacred prayer for Theseus to come back. The fourth note stays the same pitch as the third note. It indicates an emphasis. But instead of combining these two notes together to make them a single note for two beats, Monteverdi chooses to move the rhythm and hold the pitch. Although the pitch stays unmoved, the articulation of this pitch changes. For example, imagine somebody shouting "no, no" evenly and equally in length and imagine him or her crying a long "no." It can be easily sensed that these two expressions of "no" have different moods. So does the language of music: the length and the articulation of the note matters. Then the fifth note goes down for a half step from its last note and provides us another minor second. This minor second has an opposite direction against the first minor second that the first and the second notes create. The first minor second interval that we have talked about reveals Ariadne's imploration by its upward movement while this downward movement minor

¹⁶ A typical major scale is constructed with five whole step intervals and two half step intervals, which is called the major second and the minor second. The minor second appears less frequently than the major second. It is regarded as a dissonant interval since it is not often heard.

second is like a sigh that expresses Ariadne's sadness and grief. The fifth, sixth, and seventh notes are all in the same pitch. The change in pitch creates a direction for the music. Here, the pitch stops moving as if a pause or even a death has occurred, which amplifies the meaning of Ariadne's lyric, "Let me die."

If we look at these seven notes as a phrase, there are more hidden meanings to be discovered. The second note lasts for three beats. This is the longest length among all these seven notes, as if indicating that Ariadne is begging and hoping Theseus to turn his ship back for a long time. Ariadne calls for Theseus, which is indicated by this first minor second interval and it lasts for a long time which is expressed by this three-beat-note. After she notices that her calling doesn't seem to work, she then starts praying for Theseus to come back which is suggested by the perfect fourth. However, praying isn't working either. Her grief comes to a climax. She wishes herself to die. Monteverdi writes through his musical language to deliver the same message that we hear from the lyrics.

Let us proceed now to examine the arc of emotion that Monteverdi creates through the different sections of the *Lamento*. The first section, which starts with the seven-note-phrase that we examined just above, is mainly a section of desolation and pleading. It can be divided into three parts: the first part ends in a cadence in D, and the third part ends in the same cadence and can be viewed as a repeat of the first part. The highest note in these two parts is brought back again at the very end of this piece. It foreshadows the ending of the entire *Lamento*: his highest note serves as a hint as if death is the only cure for her loss. This note is like a little secret kept between the composer and the audience. If they noticed and remembered this note, they would know at the end that this hint is set in the beginning. The beginning and the end echo with the

idea of the same note which symbolizes Ariadne's death. Similarly, this kind of echo and circular patterning is shown at the beginning and the end of the first section. The same cadence also comes back several times afterward in the rest of the piece, which expresses Ariadne's returning feelings of love towards Theseus. The middle part in the first section has a little expansion. One spot worth noticing is where the music is written in a specific rhythm of three equal eighth-notes when Ariadne sings "such harsh fate, such great suffering." This rhythm is well-known because Beethoven uses this in his Symphony No.5 "Fate." The beginning of his Fate symphony is constructed by these three equal eighth-notes like three harsh knocking sounds, even and strong, without humanity. This rhythm appears to both Beethoven and Monteverdi to be an expressive way of presenting "fate." Ariadne sings these three notes, expressing a relentless feeling that she is hurt by her abandonment by Theseus and shows her continuous love for Theseus no matter if he leaves or not. This pattern repeats twice in the middle part of the first section that strikes the audience's heart. Moreover, this pattern of three equal eighth-notes suggests anger as if she is questioning her misfortune and Theseus' betrayal. It foreshadows her rage in the fifth section as well.

Moving to the second section, the longest in the aria, Monteverdi hides further codes in his music. So far the music has stayed in a minor mode that is often used to express sadness, oppression, and a melancholic mood until Theseus' name shows up. Ariadne calls for Theseus and the music turns to a major mode without a transition, as if a ray of the sun suddenly lights up the cloudy weather. Every time she calls Theseus' name, the music turns to major. A major key naturally sounds broad and joyful. Although Theseus has left, she still holds him as a lover with warmth and brightness. Theseus' betrayal doesn't quench her love. He is still her hope and light

even in this misery. Similar to Monteverdi setting a code when Ariadne calls Theseus' name, he inserts another one when Ariadne cries "oh God!" Monteverdi uses a diminished fifth here which is thought to be the most dissonant interval. As we mentioned above, a perfect fifth is normally played to describe the holy gods. However, Monteverdi compresses it into a diminished fifth. It could be argued that Ariadne here expresses her anger towards God: For her, God is no longer just. She questions them, not in lyrics, but in music, as an obvious hint. Furthermore, the music exhibits a feeling of being trapped since there are four sentences that barely move in this long section. A sequence of notes stays in the same pitch with no direction, just like Ariadne is imprisoned on this island and cannot go anywhere else.

Just as the music develops in the second section, so does the libretto. Rinuccini displays Ariadne's situation and personality in his text. Ariadne describes herself as one "who abandoned/ her country and kingdom just for you." This quotation reminds us of Ovid's Ariadne, who is aware of her belongings and maintains a clear sense of who she is, unlike Catullus' Ariadne, who doesn't care where she is from. We can see how much Monteverdi's Ariadne values her social position since this is the first point she makes about herself. She seems to calmly accept the fact that she gave her kingdom up for her great love towards Theseus. This calmness is the most unusual characteristic that Ariadne receives from Monteverdi. Catullus' Ariadne doesn't pay attention to her kingdom. Ovid's Ariadne seems angry when she acknowledges her dignity and status. She complains about Theseus abandoning such a princess who even left her country for him. Monteverdi's Ariadne calmly introduces herself to the audience as if telling someone else's story. Monteverdi's Ariadne thinks about her end as well as Ovid's Ariadne. The next point she makes about herself is that: "who will leave her bare bones/ on these sands as food/ for fierce and

merciless animals.” She weeps for her loss, in the meantime, she looks to how she will die.

Catullus’ Ariadne is too busy mourning to worry about her burial. Ovid’s Ariadne is scared that she won’t get a proper burial. Monteverdi’s Ariadne seems to see her future and prepare to accept this terrible fate: to be eaten by beasts.

Unlike Ariadne’s calm mood in her last two statements, she feels aggrieved in the rest of the second section. Considering her potential death, Ariadne feels that it is unfair to imagine Theseus’ beautiful life: “you leave with joy/ on gentle breezes,/ while I lament here./ Athens is preparing/ joyful proud ceremonies for you,/ and I remain/ food for beasts on these lonely sands. You will joyfully embrace/ Your happy aged parents/ but, oh mother, oh father,/ I will never see you again.” A hint of anger arises from her heart. Theseus enjoys the gentle breezes on the sea while she swallows her sorrow. Athens will hold joyful, proud ceremonies for Theseus; she will be eaten by beasts. Theseus will hug his parents; she will never see hers. There’s a whole world awaiting Theseus: nature embraces him when he is a sailor, people in Athens welcome him as their hero, his parents love him as their son. But Ariadne has no pleasing nature to enjoy but a desert island; no country or people to support her since she is no longer their princess; no family to hug her since she turns against them and kills her brother for Theseus; and no lover to soothe her loss since he betrays her!

The third section immediately reminds me of Catullus 64 when Ariadne is finally given a voice by Catullus and gets a chance to express how much she feels wronged by Theseus. She releases her rage by raising five rhetorical questions to Theseus and questioning his conscience on lines 131-139 of Catullus’ poem. Similarly, Monteverdi’s Ariadne raises five rhetorical questions in section 3. In Catullus 64, Ariadne fears that Theseus not only acts unjustly but also

has a cruel mind. In *Lamento*, she primarily brings up the glory and fame that Theseus promised her: “Is this how you set me on the high throne/ of your ancestors?/ Are these the crowns/ with which you adorn my locks?/ Are these the sceptres,/ the jewels and the gold?” Instead of focusing on how Theseus betrays their love, she cares about how glorious she could have become. She cares about her social status and wants to be treated as someone who deserves the throne. She desires glory, which is stereotypically thought to be a concern of men rather than women. Ironically, Ariadne achieves her glory within this opera from Theseus’ abandonment of her. The music reaches a climax, which is the highest note in the whole piece, when the lyric says: “*lasciarmi in abbandono*” (to leave me, abandoned). Ariadne becomes glorious as a soprano since Theseus abandoned her on a desert island. She gains this glory through Monteverdi. She earns her nobility as a solo soprano. Her glory is on stage, not in the myth.

The sense of unfairness developed in the second and third section begins to create the emotional depth to prepare for the curse that happens in the fifth section. Here, Ariadne explodes with rage: she summons the winds and waves to bury Theseus, to let the whales and sea-monsters swallow him up. It is not merely a moment for Ariadne’s emotional explosion; this moment also speaks back to Ariadne’s potential death. In the previous sections, Ariadne thought she would be eaten by beasts on this island, while in this section she wishes Theseus could be eaten by those sea monsters to pay for his betrayal. Even though Theseus abandoned her, Ariadne still hopes they can share the same destiny. Catullus’ Ariadne also has an explosive moment: “now doom both himself and his!” (Catullus 64, Line 201) But her curse is not as specific as Monteverdi’s Ariadne. Monteverdi’s Ariadne bursts out her curse not only to relieve

her rage but also to reveal her deepest love remains for Theseus through this comparison. This imperceptible love beneath her rage leads to her regret in the next section.

Ariadne quickly regrets her rash words in the sixth section. This is a crucial moment since there is no equivalent plot point in Catullus 64 or Ovid *Heroides* 10. In Catullus, Ariadne's curse is fulfilled when Theseus inadvertently kills his father. Ariadne's curse works and she doesn't seem to regret it. In *Lamento*, Monteverdi projects her change of heart with an abrupt pause. The music suddenly stops as if Ariadne suddenly awakes from her horrible words. The curse is sung in a series of rapid sixteenth-notes. An abrupt silence follows. The music continues with two half notes, which significantly expands the length of sixteenth-notes. These sixteenth-notes are so far the fastest notes in this piece and are shown for the first and the only time when Ariadne curses Theseus. A trail of sixteenth notes can be described as a style of *concitato*. *Concitato* is an agitating style that uses repeated sixteenth notes to increase the active perception of the musical line. The music's rhythmic motion draws a clear line for Ariadne's mood change: the curse is in a quick, angry declamation and the change of heart is expressed by a slower declamation and harmonies turning briefly to the flat side. This rhythmic contrast vividly projects Ariadne's internal change of mood.

Compared to Catullus 64, where Ariadne finally achieves her revenge by asking the gods to punish Theseus, Monteverdi's Ariadne is far gentler and more soft-hearted. She is self-controlled in her complaint: she is aware that she doesn't want her lover to die. Hatred fails to overcome her. She says the curse is not her intention: "Oh, my Theseus,/ it is not I, no, I am not the one/ who uttered those terrible words;/ It was my breathless fear and pain that spoke;/ my tongue may have spoken, but not my heart." Shortly after the pause that creates a space for

Ariadne to re-determine her mind and for the audience to recapture Ariadne's emotion, the motif of *O Teseo* reappears. The tonal center which is related to her feelings towards Theseus is introduced again. Ariadne's mood is back to the beginning section after the climax she reaches in the fifth section. Monteverdi connects motifs in circular modes in the whole piece to portrait Ariadne's changing emotions.

The seventh section evokes death, echoing the first section. Ariadne cries "let me die" at the beginning and once again, she thinks death can be the only solution since her love has nowhere to go: "Is love's fire not quenched/ even amidst mockery?/ It is you, Death; extinguish these unworthy flames." She calls for death to terminate her sufferings. The last section follows: the movement of the voice slows down, the music becomes as fragmented as Ariadne's heart. The rests in the music appear much more frequently; every measure has at least one rest, sometimes three. The phrases are much shorter, imitating the breath of dying people. Ariadne finally accepts the fate of death and peacefully says her goodbye. A dim atmosphere flows in the space when Ariadne's voice gradually fades away in darkness and silence.

Before she says goodbye, she recalls several people: her parents, her servants, her friends, and several rich material items such as mansions and a golden cradle: "Oh mother, oh father, oh splendid mansions/ of the ancient realm where I had a golden cradle,/ oh servants, oh faithful friends." She misses her life before she met Theseus. That is a life when she had high nobility. She was born into a golden cradle, a good that many people cannot earn during their entire lives. However, deceitful fate leads her to death. The whole piece ends at the same theme as where it starts: death. Also, the music resonates with this theme; it cadences in the same d mode. A final cadence in the main tonal center of the piece, d mode, works as a unification throughout the

whole piece. No accidental, which turns a pitch sharp or flat, is made in this cadence. This symbolizes Ariadne's steady mode as if thoroughly embracing her inescapable end.

Looking at Catullus', Ovid's, and Monteverdi's Ariadne together is like examining separate musical notes altogether as a whole sentence: we can discover more messages that cannot be found or understood when we look at them separately. Ariadne is often viewed by artists and writers as a passive figure who is a victim sacrificed to the males' world of ambition and heroism. Monteverdi's Ariadne is presented as a powerful figure who cares about and is even capable of achieving glory. When she sings "who trusted you and/ gave you glory and saved your very life" in the fourth section, she reveals her power to the audience. She is the one who helps Theseus become a hero; otherwise, he might die fighting her brother. This powerful characteristic is usually given to men in artwork: for example, Theseus, who is depicted as a hero of Athens in the myth. His life won't be secure without Ariadne's help. But he cruelly leaves Ariadne behind. Ariadne gives up her brother to save someone who then abandons her on an isolated island. On the other hand, she not only has this power which is often represented by men but also has a soft heart which is usually shown by women. She deserves more appreciation for her power rather than being pitied.

Monteverdi sets his Ariadne as a focus on stage who has her own glorious moment. The audience not merely looks at her for her sexual appearance but concentrates on her experiences and feelings. She is finally seen and heard, not just gazed upon and enjoyed. Although Ovid's Ariadne is more active than Catullus' Ariadne, both of them are trapped. Catullus' Ariadne is trapped by her appearance in a coverlet; Ovid's Ariadne is trapped on the island and it is very unlikely that her letter may be read. Monteverdi's Ariadne is not only a female whose tragedy is

enjoyed by men. She is heard and viewed as a human who has a voice. Monteverdi frees her; thanks to her powerful musical voice, the audience sits down and listens to her telling her own story.



Figure 4. Angelica Kauffmann, "Bacchus and Ariadne" 1794. Oil on canvas. Attingham Park



Figure 5. The opening three bars of Lamento d'Arianna. Claudio Monteverdi, Stampa Del Gardano, Venice.

Chapter III:

Ariadne in Modern Opera: a Triangulation of Femininity

Ariadne and her ancient mythology was not forgotten in the twentieth-century. The opera *Ariadne auf Naxos*, written by German composer Richard Strauss and German librettist Hofmannsthal, is adapted from her story. This opera has two versions: the 1912 version and the 1916 version. The 1912 version that Strauss Hofmannsthal worked on carefully together didn't succeed, with the result that they decided to revise this piece. The opera is a mixture of tragedy and comedy, as demonstrated by its setting of an opera within an opera. Such a story-within-a-story is highly reminiscent of Catullus 64, in which Ariadne and her story are embroidered on a coverlet. The staging of a particular production that I will examine later subtly but intentionally responds to Catullus 64.¹⁷ Strauss' opera contributes to this project's ongoing discussion about how femininity is viewed in Ariadne's story by presenting two contrasting female figures, Ariadne and Zerbinetta, side by side, as well as a third character, the composer, who turns out to have much in common with Ariadne. Compared to Richard Strauss's well-known operas *Elektra*, *Salome*, or *Rosenkavalier*, *Ariadne auf Naxos* may not be considered one of those operas that well represents Strauss's typical music style. While I will focus sometimes on Strauss' musical writing, I will examine more closely Hofmannsthal's libretto and the stage presentation of this opera, since they more strongly display its relation to Catullus and, especially, express the contrast in femininity between Ariadne and Zerbinetta. *Ariadne auf*

¹⁷ *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Op. 60 by Richard Strauss. Recorded live in Baden-Baden in 2012.
 Orchestra: Sächsische Staatskapelle Dresden
 Conductor: Christian Thielemann
 Staged by Philippe Arlaud
 Directed by Brian Large

Naxos is a combination of tragedy and comedy. A tragic opera about Ariadne's abandonment by Theseus and a comic dance that entertains the audience is performed together in Strauss' opera. Zerbinetta, who is a leading lady of the comic dance, flies from one man to another and whom nothing seems to trouble. Although tragedy does play a part in this opera, it is predominantly a comedy that differs from those tragic versions of Ariadne's story that I have discussed in the previous chapters.

In its mixing of tragedy and comedy, the opera recalls the performance context of ancient Greek drama. Ariadne, as a figure of Greek myth, helps us reach back to the world of Greek drama. Bacchus, her divine lover, is the patron god of the Athenian tragic festivals. But Ancient Greek tragic festivals always combined tragedy with a more lighthearted dramatic presentation. A satyr play involving themes related to the tragedies often followed after the performances of the tragedies, but employing a more absurd or downright funny tone. Festivals and theatre performances, especially the comedies, combined visual, aural, and performing arts into one spectacular package. This is what opera does as well. Like Greek drama, opera uses music, song, dance and movement, costume, scenery, and story together to create a comprehensive art form.

Strauss himself reveals his intention and thoughts of writing an opera related to Ancient Greek elements by particularly mentioning his disapproval of Wagner's idea: "I don't want to go back to the Greek Wagnerian ideal. I want to incorporate it into a truer classicism that maintains the sanctity of music and the elevation of myth, that combines it with the vernacular."¹⁸ In his book *Art and Revolution*, Wagner applies the term "Gesamtkunstwerk" in the context of Greek

¹⁸ *Muses of the 20th Century: Greek Myth in Opera, Ballet, and Modern Dance*. Grace Ledbetter. Swarthmore

tragedy. A Gesamtkunstwerk is an artwork that combines many art forms in one piece. In his extensive book *Opera and Drama* (completed in 1851) he takes these ideas further, describing in detail his idea of the union of opera and drama. Wagner's opera cycle *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, and specifically its components *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* represent these ideas. Strauss' ideal musical style for his *Ariadne auf Naxos* is perhaps less magnificent, but more traditional.

In this “sung drama,” poised between tragedy and comedy, Zerbinetta and Ariadne represent two contrasted types of womanhood. Hofmannsthal explains how this setting, which combines two contrasting figures associated with different dramatic forms, borrows the idea from his other work with Strauss: “This is also the basic idea of *Elektra*—the voice of *Elektra* in contrast to that of *Chrysothemis*, the heroic against the human. Here we have the group of heroes, demi-gods, and gods—*Ariadne*, *Bacchus*, *Theseus*—opposed to the merely mortal group consisting of the frivolous *Zerbinetta* and her companions, the common figures in life’s masquerade.”¹⁹ As Hofmannsthal notes, this is not the only piece in which they decided to create a dynamic combination of two seemingly contrasted elements together for the audience: for instance, *Elektra* provides a contrast voice between a hero and a human. In the same way, *Ariadne auf Naxos* creates a voice of opposition and contrast between two women. It is also not the first time we have seen one figure of Graeco-Roman myth split into two characters on the operatic stage. In Monteverdi’s *Ariadne*, as we saw in the previous chapter, the character of *Theseus* is split into two characters as well. Two characters can present two sides of *Theseus* more clearly than a single person. They are in constant tension and disagreement, but they serve

¹⁹ Translated by England, Paul. *Correspondence between Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal 1907-1918*. Alfred A Knopf. New York. 1927. “Hofmannsthal to Strauss. Aussee-Obertressen, 18. VII. 1911” pp127

as a foil to each other and ultimately support each other. This creates a dramatic tension on the stage.

In Strauss' opera, the two women are presented as sharply defined opposites. This operates first on the level of character: Zerbinetta lives chaotically with one man after another, but Ariadne could be the wife or the beloved of one man only. Musically, the role of Ariadne is luxurious and Wagnerian, while Zerbinetta's music is Mozart-like in its clarity and measure. Ariadne's music is more lyrical and the harmony line is broad and steady, for instance, when Ariadne mourns for her loss in *Es gibt ein Reich* (Strauss. pp 152-169). Zerbinetta's music is full of jumping notes and the character of her musical language is much more flighty than Ariadne's especially in *Großmächtige Prinzessin* and *Noch glaub' ich dem einen ganz mich gehorend*,²⁰ when Zerbinetta flirts with several men at the same time. When Ariadne sings, Strauss often uses one particular solo instrument to join her: it can either be a string, a woodwind or a brass. But he chooses another completely different instrument to accompany Zerbinetta. Their differences are indicated by not sharing the same accompanied instrument. Ariadne and Zerbinetta's differences that suggested by these musical details lead to the question: why does Strauss not simply present Ariadne alone? What good does presenting Zerbinetta and Ariadne together bring us? This question is what brings the whole opera together and shows the forms of its dramatic and musical plot. In the first act, Ariadne and Zerbinetta are like two people who seemingly have the least possibility of meeting or getting along with each other. But they gradually narrow their distance from each other in Act II and finally get to interact with each other at the very end of the final act.

²⁰ Ariadne auf Naxos in Full Score. Richard Strauss. Dover Publications. INC. New York. 1993. pp 152-169

On the one hand, then, this opera presents a duality of femininity. But in fact, it also displays a triangulation of Ariadne, Zerbinetta, and a third character, the composer. This third character is also complex in relation to gender: the role of the composer is a man, but is sung by a woman. Strauss writes the composer's part for a soprano, which is marked in the score. Such gender play is not unusual in the history of opera: for example, women characters were often sung by men in the Baroque period. But the situation completely reverses in Strauss' twentieth century opera. Perhaps this could be viewed as a further comment on the status of its female figures, and especially a signal that women in Strauss's work are not passive at all. A brief plot summary will help make clearer this triangulation and conflict. The composer -- a character in Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* -- composes an opera and is also called *Ariadne auf Naxos*. He refuses to adjust his opera to Zerbinetta's dance due to time conflict: the wealthy people decide to mingle these two performances together so they can catch up a firework show. But he eventually is moved by Zerbinetta's kiss. The tragic opera and comic dance are performed together in Act II of Strauss' work. In the play-within-a-play, Zerbinatta tries to change Ariadne's attitude towards love, but fails. Zerbinetta doesn't give up and she finally succeeds in persuading Ariadne not to stick with Theseus in Act III, when Bacchus shows up. At this point the tragedy and comedy merge together. By the end, the two contrasted women are alike each other and both leave with a man, while the composer is disappointed and still alone. The composer is an important character in terms of gender, who triangulates these different perspectives on femininity. I will go into more detail as I analyze each act in turn. The composer and Ariadne herself present a duality of the "male" Ariadne and the "female" Ariadne.

Combined with the duality of Ariadne and Zerbinetta, these two pairings create a triangulation that is dynamic and complex in terms of how the opera presents female agency.

Act 1: Introduction to a Triangulation of Femininity

The different personalities of Ariadne, Zerbinetta and the composer are portrayed in Act I. The composer and Zerbinetta are both invited to perform for a big party held by a wealthy man. However, due to the limitation of time, these two groups have to shorten their performance so that those wealthy people can manage to enjoy a firework show, and therefore they have to perform together. The composer is so angry and won't allow his opera to be cut. How could a Singspiel (a so-called musical) be performed at the same time when his serious opera is to be sung? How could a comedy and a tragedy ever be shown together? This question will keep recurring in this chapter since it is one of the central questions in Strauss's opera.

The composer and Ariadne have pride in their internal world, while Zerbinetta is more flexible in fitting in the real world. The composer refuses to change even a single note in his work. This is where he is similar to Ariadne, who refuses to set herself from her love towards Theseus. They both commit to their own world, and will not step out of it. Although the composer has a crush on the attractive Zerbinetta, he still can't accept the fact that she's dancing after his opera. A crush on a pretty woman cannot shake his pride. His music is untouchable. He leaves no room for any compromise. The composer's music teacher tries to persuade his student by saying that he himself has learned to accept the world as it is. But, obviously the composer hasn't. This is another thing that the composer and Ariadne have in common. They haven't accepted the world as it is yet. Here lies the beauty of Ariadne's story and also a cause for

Ariadne's tragedy. Ariadne can't accept the change of plan either: "Are these people mad? I must speak to the count this instant" (23:05). Zerbinetta's reaction is just the opposite to them: "I have to hurry" (23:58). Zerbinetta rushes to get herself prepared for the performance. Unlike Ariadne and the composer, who stick to their ideal world, Zerbinetta is much more realistic and immediately reacts to the change.

The composer and Ariadne can't adapt to the situation but Zerbinetta can. The dance teacher from Zerbinetta's group continues to persuade the composer to accept the new change after the composer's music teacher failed to do so. The composer is frustrated by the final announcement that his opera has to perform with Zerbinetta's comic dance. The dance teacher points out that the composer's work is not that perfect and that to perform with comedy is actually a salvation to his work: "This opera has tedious moments. It's a question of salvaging your work" (27:51). This is another moment that addresses the question of why comedy should be put together with tragedy: the tragedy is considered a tedious performance that cannot entertain the audience while comedy can easily catch the audience's eyes. The dance teacher then praises Zerbinetta for her flexibility and tries to influence the composer to be like her as well: "She [Zerbinetta] can adapt to every situation" (28:41). At this moment, Ariadne shows up on the stage, as if hinting that she cannot adapt to this situation.

The composer is like a male Ariadne, who doesn't feel like he belongs to the real world either. The composer understands Ariadne, he speaks for Ariadne, and to some extent he fights for Ariadne. He is like Ariadne, who seems quite strange to the group of Zerbinetta. His fight is shown by the fact that he won't allow his opera "Ariadne" to be cut due to the matter of lacking time. On my reading, this moment should be viewed as more than a simple plot point: the opera

Ariadne auf Naxos can symbolize Ariadne herself, who is protected and contended by the composer. The composer feels that no one in this world understands him. But as someone who doesn't receive understanding from others, he chooses to defend Ariadne and tries to make others understand her. The composer complains: "I have nothing in common with this world. Why live in it?" (27:00) The dance teacher replies: "I really don't know why you are both making such exaggerated difficulties" (27:11). This dialogue highlights the major difference between common people and those who "don't belong to this world." Similarly, the composer comments on Ariadne: "She is the epitome of human solitude" (25:24). Ariadne is isolated from the world. Her solitude on the desert island speaks for those idealists who are abandoned by the world. The dance teacher, who speaks for the majority, then replies that this is the reason why she needs company. Otherwise, the audience will be bored. The audience needs to be entertained. In this moment in the opera, the combination of comedy and tragedy are emphasized.

Zerbinetta has affairs with nearly each of the men in her group, in strong contrast to Ariadne who refuses to save herself from a dead relationship. She interprets Ariadne's intention according to how she herself thinks: "She longs for another admirer" (29:45). It seems like she is interpreting Ariadne, but she unconsciously speaks for her own personality instead. The composer rejects Zerbinetta's words: "[Ariadne] is one of those women who belong to only one man in their life. [...] She isn't your kind. She is one in a million" (29:58) (31:58). Zerbinetta doesn't believe what he says and laughs: "What a child you are!" (32:19) Zerbinetta represents those people who cannot understand Ariadne at all since Ariadne is too distant from them. Zerbinetta introduces the plot of *Ariadne Auf Naxos* to her group: "A princess has been jilted by her fiance. And her next admirer hasn't arrived yet" (32:33). "Fiance" and "admirer" seem to be

two keywords in Zerbinetta's view. She simply defines Ariadne's love towards Theseus as a princess being jilted by her fiance. Her words narrow down Ariadne's perspective on love and emotion according to her own view of the world.

Act I ends with the composer's mind finally having been changed by Zerbinetta who intentionally kisses him and makes him fall in love with her. But Ariadne still refuses to perform with a comedy group. It seems as if Ariadne is left alone by the composer. However, he still remains by her side, though he is persuaded by Zerbinetta's kiss. He can't refuse Zerbinetta, but he can't refuse himself either. He cries out why this world dragged him into it after he reluctantly agrees to perform his opera with Zerbinetta's dance. This world left him no choice; he has to adjust to it by giving up his wish. He is unwilling to compromise as if Ariadne refuses to accept her misfortune though she has to face it eventually. In Act I, it is as if the composer and Ariadne stand on one edge of the world, and Zerbinetta stands on the other. These two "Ariadne" are ideal and, to some extent, stubborn; Zerbinetta, on the other hand, is realistic and flexible.

Act 2: "Push-and-pull": Interaction between Ariadne and Zerbinetta

The second act comprises the complete performance for the wealthy people to enjoy, which is the "opera" within the whole opera. We can see a development here from Act I in terms of Ariadne and Zerbinetta's interaction that presents different versions of femininity. The tragedy is brought on stage and satirically undercut by comedy: Ariadne's lament is constantly interrupted by Zerbinetta and her friends, but she ignores them. Zerbinetta and her friends try to

cheer Ariadne up, and never cease to do so even though Ariadne remains unmoving. After this whole act of “push-and-pull,” Zerbinetta fails.

Act II opens with a trio of nymphs: Naiad, Dryad, and Echo. Musically, it contrasts with Act I. A trio is already a typical chamber music form, while the accompanied orchestra is written in a chamber music style as well. Unlike the full orchestral writing in Act I, this chamber music writing style hints at Ariadne’s desertion since only a few instruments are used here. The musical world in Act I is huge since all the instruments have their voice and play a role in the musical world, while the musical world in the beginning of Act II delivers a message of intimacy as if these three nymphs construct a whole world merely by themselves. If we recall Wagner’s idea of combining opera and myth that we discussed earlier in this chapter, clearly we see how Strauss differs from him. For instance, Wagner brings up three Norns in his *Götterdämmerung* as well. In *Vorspiel* and the Norns' scene from the prologue of the opera, Wagner's orchestration and chromaticism sets us in a magical and mysterious world, whereas Strauss’ writing for three nymphs is more classical from its chamber music style.

The staging of the three nymphs also reminds the audience of Catullus 64, where three Fates sing a wedding song. Catullus mentions that three Fates are busy weaving a thread: “The trio of three Fates began their prophetic chanting. [...] while their hands were properly busy with their unending labor.” (Catullus 64, line 306, 310) Strauss’ staging responds to Catullus in the final act, where three nymphs are pulling an invisible line while they are singing. Strauss borrows the idea of fate to serve his vision, which combines his opera, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, with Greek mythology. The staging of three nymphs exaggerates the influence of Greek mythology. As we will see in more detail, when the nymphs reappear in Act III, the staging in Act II and III

both speak to each other and, furthermore, weave an invisible line for the whole story.

A comical contrast in the staging of this scene presents Zerbinetta and Ariadne's different personalities. Ariadne lays slumped over a rock, consumed by grief. Although the three nymphs are bored with Ariadne's ceaseless sadness and complaints, Naiad, a female deity who is associated with water (especially a spring, stream, or other body of freshwater) comments that "[Ariadne's] heart is as pure as any spring" (1:01:30). Once again, Ariadne is a woman who can only love and belong to one man. She laments: "There was a thing of beauty: it was called Theseus-Ariadne" (56:56). She is so obsessed with one man while Zerbinetta is easily moved by many men. Zerbinetta's personality is portrayed by a comic dialogue. Zerbinetta is jealous of Harlequin, her current lover who is infatuated with Ariadne. Harlequin sighs: "I've never been so moved by a human being" (1:05:35). Zerbinetta is a little bit jealous of that: "You are like that with every woman" (1:05:37). Harlequin's jealousy and anger is even greater: "And aren't you like that with every man?" (1:05:39) Unlike Ariadne, Zerbinetta is a woman who is attracted and amazed by multiple men and never belongs to one man.

The opera inserts a description of how Ariadne's view of life differs from other mortals' views. Zerbinetta's group tries to distract Ariadne from grief. Harlequin urges Ariadne to step out from the past: "You must live for dear life" (1:04:49). Zerbinetta's group views life as a combination of joy and torment, love and hatred, as if hinting that the tragic aspect of the opera has to mingle with the comedy. The staging here also plays a big role in indicating the duality of life: the audience (those wealthy people) in the opera is being looked at by the real audience of Strauss' opera. They are performers as well. It is as if the staging emphasizes that everyone is a performer in his or her own life and an audience for others' lives. It hints at the theme of duality

once again, just like the opera, *Ariadne and Zerbinetta*, and the life that Harlequin and the four dancers talk about involves duality. Since happiness and sadness are always intertwined in life, the four dancers of *Zerbinetta*'s group suggest that one should better limit the grief feeling: "We can respect the pangs of love, but we'd rather avoid gloomy languishing" (1:12:00). They represent those people who certainly experience misfortune but will eventually recover from bad feelings. They believe that nothing in life should be perfect. In other words, obstacles and torments are expected in life.

On the contrary, *Ariadne* is one of the other kinds of people who expects and only expects goodness in life. This makes it harder for her to survive the difficult blows of life. *Ariadne* totally loses her faith in living: "There is a realm where all is pure. It has a name: the realm of death. Here nothing is pure. Here all is confused" (1:06:05). She wishes there was pureness in the world. However, life fails her. Her abandonment by *Theseus* destroys her ideal picture for life. *Ariadne* asks for death: "You will set me free, restore me to myself. Take this burdensome life from me" (1:10:04). As we discussed in the previous paragraphs, *Ariadne*'s personality is quite idealistic. Her burden comes from her expectations. *Ariadne*'s disappointment contrasts the liveliness of *Zerbinetta*'s group. What they ask from life makes a huge difference. They fail to cheer her up.

Zerbinetta tries to cheer her up but fails as well. Here, Strauss and Hofmannsthal directly refer back to *Catullus*' *Ariadne*. *Zerbinetta* comments on *Ariadne*, saying that she is "beautiful, proud, and unmoving, like a statue" (1:17:54). Originally, *Catullus* describes *Ariadne* as a statue when she stares at *Theseus*' sailing ship: "eyes/agonized, *Mino*'s daughter, a stony bacchant, watches,/ ah, watches" (*Catullus* 64. Lines 60-62). As we saw in Chapter 2, *Ovid* also responded

to Catullus' original description of Ariadne as a statue. Here, the description of a living human being as a statue hints at Ariadne being isolated from the whole world. She is stuck in her world and rejects any potential possibilities in communicating with the external world. Catullus focuses on Ariadne's physical unmoving status while Zerbinetta describes Ariadne's mental status. But they share the same detail: it is Ariadne's mental status that leads to her physical expression. Catullus' Ariadne refuses to accept her misfortune that she is left by Theseus. Strauss' Ariadne sinks into her grief world and refuses others' suggestions to help her get rid of this pain.

Zerbinetta is quite the opposite to Ariadne who cannot forget Theseus and suffers from their lost love. She talks about her experience of being rejected by men, but this never bothers her: "Ah, there are countless desert islands even among people. I myself have inhabited several of them, and I still have not learned to curse men" (1:19:03). She sees that it is normal for people to not get what they expect from others. The world is not as flawless as Ariadne wishes. Zerbinetta connects the idea of Ariadne being abandoned on the desert island to the idea that the world that people live in is like many desert islands. Sometimes, desertions are not avoidable. However, Ariadne is tortured by her misfortune: "Why do I remember this? I want to forget it. It is shameful to be as distraught as I am" (59:12). She is enmeshed in her bitterness. Ariadne's wish for forgetting Theseus and this unwanted misfortune encloses herself in endless sufferings.

Zerbinetta not only immunizes men's hurt, she injures men. This is perhaps unimaginable for Ariadne. Zerbinetta tells Ariadne that she "ultimately [deceives] him while still loving him" (1:21:50). She cheats on her lover not because she dislikes him, but merely because she doesn't care. Deceiving seems like a normal thing for Zerbinetta. Her tone reveals that she is even proud of her behavior: "Oh, sometimes there even seemed to be two at once!" (1:22:56). Zerbinetta

doesn't believe that love should be exclusive or everlasting. This is why Zerbinetta cannot understand Ariadne's grief at all. Zerbinetta confesses that she is easily charmed by men: "When he kissed my brow and cheeks. I was captivated by the god and ultimately transformed. Each one came as a god, each of them transformed me" (1:24:45). The description of men transforming her by their kisses links back to the moment from Act I when the composer is moved by Zerbinetta's kiss. But what is different between the composer and Zerbinetta is though the composer acquiesces in performing his opera with Zerbinetta's dance, he is not transformed by Zerbinetta. He is still the same kind of person as Ariadne. He is still unwilling to give in to this confusing world as he cries out in despair about his existence at the end of Act I. The description of Zerbinetta feeling herself transformed by men also foretells the plot that Ariadne is being transformed by Bacchus in Act III.

Act 3: The Union of Ariadne and Zerbinetta

The final act displays the process of how Ariadne gets closer to Zerbinetta's reality. Their differences are shown in the previous two acts. Act III focuses on how Ariadne finally has something in common with Zerbinetta. At the beginning of this act, Zerbinetta is frustrated since her efforts lead to no progress at all: "It seems that the lady and I don't speak the same language" (1:29:10). The libretto emphasizes the fact that Ariadne and Zerbinetta are fundamentally opposed to each other. No matter how she and her group persuade Ariadne, Ariadne remains unmoved. Zerbinetta decides to pause her persuasion; she leaves Ariadne and flirts with men as she always has. The opera vaguely foretells that Bacchus might change Ariadne's mind instead, given the fact that Zerbinetta failed.

Before Bacchus shows up, the concept of fate is identified once again by the staging. When three nymphs introduce Bacchus to the audience, Ariadne lies down on a fabric which is pulled by a man masked with a bull-head on stage. Obviously, the bull-head indicates the presence of the Minotaur, Ariadne's brother who was defeated by Theseus. The fabric which Ariadne lies down on is the same golden fabric that the three nymphs wear. It symbolizes the fact that Ariadne's fate is woven by them. More importantly, the presentation of Ariadne being pulled by a bull-headed man hints that Ariadne's decision to let Theseus slaughter her brother is woven into her misfortune. This staging suggests Ariadne is not entirely innocent as a victim.

The staging prepares itself for the introduction of Bacchus: the chairs that were occupied by the wealthy people in Act II are empty now. The audience that Ariadne and Zerbinetta had in Act II is gone; their story was once watched by others. Now, these empty chairs symbolize Ariadne's isolation. Zerbinetta has left her, the audience has left her, and she is alone once again. The external world prepares Ariadne for the salvation that she awaits. Ariadne will be saved by Bacchus, who eventually transforms her into a star. She will no longer be a living human but an eternal, undying star, always bright and never fading.

Strauss and Hofmannsthal spend a whole act exploring Ariadne's salvation, which is hardly seen in the other versions of Ariadne that we discussed in previous chapters. Ovid shows us only the moment of Ariadne's abandonment and terrible suffering, not her salvation. At the end of Ovid's version, Ariadne envisions Theseus' return as bleak: "If I die before you return, it will be you who carries my bones from this place" (*Heroides* 10.184-185). Catullus also narrates Bacchus' approach, but lacks the detail of salvation. Bacchus' arrival in Catullus is like a triumph: "Many were blowing horns, a raucous booming clamor,/ while barbarous pipes skirled

out their ghastly themes” (Catullus 64, lines 263-264). A later artwork, Titian’s “Bacchus and Ariadne,” (figure 6) responds to and elaborates on this arrival scene of Bacchus in Catullus 64. Almost all the space of this painting is occupied by Bacchus and his maenads; a small corner is left for frightened Ariadne who raises her hand as if saying “no” to the crazy group. Bacchus’ robe is widely blown up by the wind and his eyes are fixed on Ariadne while Ariadne holds her clothes by one hand and her face is mostly hidden in the dark. These expressions hint at Ariadne as being submissive to Bacchus. Ariadne’s dismissive body language makes us wonder how she managed to accept Bacchus as a lover. Strauss’s opera provides us a reasonable answer. The opera not only shows Bacchus’ arrival, but it also provides the description of how Bacchus transforms Ariadne. Strauss and Hofmannsthal introduce Bacchus in a darker way; Bacchus presents himself as a messenger of death even though he brings hope. Ariadne thoroughly embraces him since she mistakenly takes him as the “death” that she genuinely longs for.

When we turn to Strauss’ treatment of myth, we can see how he adapts Ovid’s version to express his Ariadne’s pure vision of death. Ovid’s Ariadne languishes in despair and she wonders whether death could be worse than living: she pays attention to her proper burial and how people will remember her. But Strauss’ Ariadne focuses on death, articulates the notion of death, and yearns for death in a way that Ovid’s does not. She believes that death is the only realm where pureness can exist. She even confuses death and Bacchus when Bacchus first shows up: “O messenger of death, your voice is sweet!” (1:44:19). She thinks Bacchus is a messenger of death. Although he is not, he transforms her to a pure status just like what death may have given her. Ariadne’s transformation from a human to a star is a transportation from a confused world to a pure realm.

Hofmannsthal describes Ariadne's savior as a figure who blurs the gap between life and death. He writes to Strauss and explains his intention of portraying Ariadne's salvation: "To him she gives herself, mistaking him for Death—he proves to be at once Death and life for her—unveils for her the immense abysses of Nature herself, whom he represents as the magician, the enchantress who has transformed this poor little Ariadne—conjures up for her in this world the world beyond, keeps her safe for us, and at the same time transforms her."²¹ Bacchus not only saves Ariadne by maintaining her life but also enlightens her. We can sense Ariadne's immortality in the very last lyrics sung by Bacchus in the opera: "Sooner should the eternal stars die than you die in my arms!" Ariadne yearns for death to end her sufferings. Strauss and Hofmannsthal not only keep Ariadne alive but also make her immortal. She no longer suffers and finally enters the pure world where she belongs.

Although the story between Ariadne and Bacchus is expressed seriously, the opera does not forget its setting as a combination of tragedy and comedy. There's a comic moment when Ariadne mistakes Bacchus as a messenger of death and agrees to go with him. This moment also exemplifies how someone as stubborn as Ariadne could easily follow another man. Ariadne seeks confirmation from Bacchus himself on whether or not he is a representative of Death: "You are the master of a dark ship that sails a dark course" (1:52:53). Bacchus misunderstands what Ariadne means by "dark ship." He simply takes it as a regular ship: "I am the master of a ship" (1:53:08). Ariadne doesn't recognize Bacchus either. She asks Death to take her to his realm: "Take me! To the other shore! Away from here with this heart! It is of no more use in this world." Bacchus thinks Ariadne wishes to go with him because of love; however, Ariadne

²¹ England, Paul. 1927. "Hofmannsthal to Strauss. Aussee-Obertressen, 18. VII. 1911" pp127

merely asks to go with Death. They get close to each other because of misinterpretation. It reasonably explains the seemingly impossible deed that Ariadne would fall in love with another man other than Theseus, despite her personality.

At the end of this opera, Zerbinetta shows up again and announces her success in changing Ariadne into someone like her, thanks to the arrival of Bacchus. While Zerbinetta and her group tried so hard but failed, it is eventually Bacchus who succeeds. Ariadne's change of heart can be interpreted as evidence that pure Ariadne can easily surrender in love. Zerbinetta concludes for both herself and Ariadne, since both of them are going to leave with a man: "When the new god comes, we surrender without a word" (2:06:26). Zerbinetta is not only referring to Bacchus, the god, but also connecting her idea in Act II that every man is like a god who can transform her by his kisses. Ariadne and Zerbinetta finally "speak the same language" that directly responds to the beginning of Act III. The unmovable Ariadne is finally moved. It seems like a happy ending since Ariadne has moved on from her grief over Theseus. But it also leaves a trail of disappointment. There's an important detail of staging: when Ariadne walks to the ship with Bacchus, the composer is sad and walks offstage alone. Ariadne and Zerbinetta are supposed to be opposed to each other, but they surprisingly become the same in the end. The duality of male Ariadne and Ariadne herself disappears as well. The composer represents what is left behind by Ariadne. The triangulation no longer exists.

The overall arc of Strauss' opera creates a triangulation of the three figures to present femininity. It explores the possibilities of who Ariadne can become. Unlike Catullus, Ovid, and Monteverdi versions of Ariadne that the project has examined, Strauss draws a larger picture of the myth. He not only shows Ariadne's grief and lament, but pays more attention to the whole

range of female experience that Ariadne can represent. He brings in Zerbinetta, who is conceived as a counterpart of Ariadne, to exhibit a contrasting version of femininity. A woman can be unfaithful to and uncaring of her lover. He also presents the composer, a male version of Ariadne, to explore the question of whether Ariadne's tragedy could be avoided if she were a man. Strauss brings a modern perspective to the ancient myth of Ariadne, showing that she can still be used to explore ideas about female passivity, agency and self-expression.



Figure 6. Titian. Bacchus and Ariadne. 1520. Oil on Canvas. Italian. 176.5 x 191 cm. The National Gallery. London

Conclusion: What Remains of Ariadne

Abandoned by Theseus, Ariadne becomes the model of the woman lamenting male inconstancy and ingratitude. This project examines the external circumstances that lead to her becoming a subordinate female figure to men and nature. Sleep weakens her to an object. Theseus abandons her when she is incapable of communicating with others. The lonely, barren island where Theseus leaves her mirrors her state. She is unable to escape from this miserable situation. However, it is not these unchangeable facts that determine her to be a passive figure who is subject to nature; this project has discussed how her personality, as presented by a range of different artists and media, also defines her identity. Catullus, Ovid, Monteverdi, and Strauss provide us with four versions of Ariadne. What we gain from this project is a figure of the “multi-dimensional” Ariadne, as she travels from the first century BC to the twentieth century in the forms of poetry and opera. These four versions explore Ariadne’s possibilities as a character and ultimately draw our attention to femininity in different ways.

How can a passive figure upgrade herself to a powerful state? We have argued in this project that mediums can help in strengthening one’s voice. Moreover, these four versions choose to look at Ariadne from different angles; they tell the same story from various perspectives. Although her tragedy is clearly shown in all four versions, Catullus focuses mostly on her physical appearance which weakens her personality. Ovid also describes her inability to immediately grasp what has happened, but he gives more attention to her awakening. Monteverdi’s Ariadne has absolute power on the stage, but she is self-controlled in her sadness instead of calling for pity. Strauss concentrates on Ariadne’s salvation by showing another path for her: a woman who can also be like Zerbinetta. Ariadne doesn’t have to be a female who is

closely related to the males' world merely because she is treated badly; she can also be defined by her inner nature from many different perspectives.

These four versions expand Ariadne from a figure who is left depressed by males and misfortune to someone whose voice is heard. We think we know Ariadne: perhaps we are familiar with her misfortune, but her voice needs more attention. This project has followed Ariadne's transformation from a passive female to be viewed and enjoyed in Catullus, to an awakening figure in Ovid, then to a powerful heroine to be heard in Monteverdi, and finally to a multifaceted, avant-garde presentation of femininity in Strauss. The name Ariadne (or Ariagne) means "most holy."²² This inner meaning of her name resonates with her transformation into a star. Perhaps she will always be eternal and undying as long as she remains a figure around which discussions of femininity continue. What remains of Ariadne is what we choose to make of her.

²² McNally, Sheila. "Ariadne and Others: Images of Sleep in Greek and Early Roman Art." University of California Press. *Classical Antiquity*. Vol.4, No.2 (Oct. 1985), pp.152-192

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