

## Inter-Species Adultery and Hybridity in Euripides' *Cretans*

Evidence for the close affiliation between human and animals in ancient Greece existed as early as Homeric epic, evidenced by the relationship between Odysseus and his dog, Argus. As a result, the interactions and boundaries between humans and animals are common themes in Classical literature, and the instances in which these barriers are breached help to more acutely define them. Literature explores inter-species associations, often blurring them by equating people to animals or, rather less frequently, by describing sexual contact between humans and animal figures. Perhaps the best known and most fully elaborated story of bestiality in antiquity is that of Pasiphaë and the Cretan bull, a union which resulted in the birth of the famed hybrid creature, later called the Minotaur. Euripides' *Cretans*, a fragmentary play, examines Pasiphaë's guilt in engaging in a sexual union with an animal, as well as the birth and physical form of the Minotaur. Euripides, however, arms Pasiphaë with typically male rhetorical capacity as she claims that Minos' ritual neglect of Poseidon was worse than her eventual union with the bull. In addition, Euripides calls attention to a perhaps less considered aspect of the story: Pasiphaë's status as wife of King Minos, which adds adultery to her transgressions. Also noteworthy is that Pasiphaë goes to great lengths in order to create a situation in which physical consummation is even possible. Enlisting the help of master architect Daedalus, Pasiphaë's betrayal of Minos goes farther than mere adultery; not only does she actively turn her husband into a cuckold, she compounds the act by committing adultery with an animal.

The genesis of the Minotaur introduces another problem; namely, that of hybridity. Pericles' citizenship law of 451/0 B.C.E. indicates that hybridity – and racial/ethnic hybridity in particular – was a problem in Classical Athens. By stipulating that only children with two Athenian parents could be citizens, the legislation effectively outlawed marriage between

Athenians and members of other *poleis*. As Susan Lape contends, “hybridity and/or fusion has no place in either the discourse or practice of Athenian citizenship,” which indicated how essential both racial and, by necessity, human purity were to Athenian ideology (2010: 26). Because ethnic purity was an issue for Athenians at the time the *Cretans* was produced, perhaps as early as 438 B.C.E., I argue that Euripides uses an interspecies hybrid figure, the Minotaur, to emphasize the destructive qualities of the implicit impurity fashioned by the Periclean legislation. This stress on purity, especially of marriage and lineage, is in tune with the Athenian ideological point of view at this time, as shown through legal and social representation. Euripides’ portrayal of the Minotaur symbolically reinforces the inherent problem with hybrid offspring within the Athenian context and shows the dangers – and resulting destruction to the Athenians in particular – that could come from these hybrid unions.

In this paper, I explore this instance of bestial adultery and how it accompanies the neglect or perversion of ritual or sacred domain, along with the themes of hybridity, spectacle, and the manipulation of biological space. Euripides’ depiction of the union between Pasiphaë and the bull and its subsequent consequences for her marriage to Minos is unique in the classical Greek canon. He arms Pasiphaë with male argumentation and enterprise, while still highlighting her female passivity. Out of necessity, Pasiphaë is the passive partner in intercourse, both with her husband and the bull; at the same time, she has seized control over her biological and genealogical space by manipulating an animal into unnatural sexual union and producing an impossible infant. Euripides’ interpretation of the myth, I argue, illuminates the contemporary social importance of marriage and childbearing, while at the same time showing an extreme example of how they can be subverted. Pasiphaë, deviating from this legislated purity through

unsanctioned sexual contact, was furthermore straying from her role as a wife and mother, which in turn had severe social ramifications.

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