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MODERN GREEK STUDIES ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND (MGSAANZ)

ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑ ΝΕΟΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΩΝ ΣΠΟΥΔΩΝ ΑΥΣΤΡΑΛΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΝΕΑΣ ΖΗΛΑΝΔΙΑΣ

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MODERN GREEK STUDIES
(AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND)

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The periodical welcomes papers in both English and Greek on all aspects of Modern Greek Studies (broadly defined). Prospective contributors should preferably submit their papers on disk and hard copy. All published contributions by academics are refereed (standard process of blind peer assessment). This is a DEST recognised publication.

Το περιοδικό φιλοξενεί άρθρα στα Αγγλικά και τα Ελληνικά αναφερόμενα σε όλες τις απόψεις των Νεοελληνικών Σπουδών (στη γενικότητά τους). Υποψήφιοι συνεργάτες θα πρέπει να υποβάλλουν κατά προτίμηση τις μελέτες των σε δισκέτα και σε έντυπη μορφή. Όλες οι συνεργασίες από πανεπιστημιακούς έχουν υποβληθεί στην κριτική των εκδοτών και επιλέκτων πανεπιστημιακών συναδέλφων.

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Anthony Stephens

INTERROGATING MYTH: *ARIADNE*

UNDERSTANDING MYTH IN THE LATE 20TH CENTURY

Three decades ago attempts to define myth were a fashionable pursuit. They represented a series of points of intersection between two main intellectual currents. The one has its origins in Nietzsche's reception of Wagner's operas and is fully articulated in his *Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*. It posits myth as a qualitatively different form of discourse from other narratives or dramas. Mythical discourse is elevated above the superficial status of other fictions, is located closer to the essence of human experience, and becomes, in this perspective, the language of a lost paradise from which humanity has been exiled by too much rationality. Nietzsche at first believed that the qualitative loss of mythical discourse since antiquity had been recouped by Wagner's music-drama. After personal differences with the composer, he repudiated this conviction. But with Nietzsche's disowning of Wagner the concept of myth as a positively charged mode of thinking and narrating did not go away. The later Nietzsche was to attempt, through the language of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and the concept of the Eternal Return, his own re-creation of a mythical discourse in the qualitatively higher sense.

In the early 20th century, this way of thinking still deeply influenced the theory of myth put forward by Ernst Cassirer. It also underlies Heidegger's interpretations of the poetry of Hölderlin and Rilke. The most robust heir of Nietzsche in this respect was – for political reasons – the French author Georges Bataille, whose study *L'Érotisme* (1957) remained influential in both France and Germany until the 80s. Because Nazism had found much in Nietzsche that could be exploited for its own attempts at myth-making in the service of a totalitarian state, Nietzsche was placed under a taboo in both Germanies in the wake of the end of World War II. In 1967, in the afterword to a volume of

selections from Nietzsche, Jürgen Habermas, stressing that what remained fruitful in Nietzsche's thought was his sceptical epistemology, took pains to stress that the less rational side of Nietzsche's work was 'no longer infectious'. French intellectuals, on the other hand, had never felt the need to sanitize this side of Nietzsche. Hence Bataille, who strongly influenced both Foucault and Deleuze, could still, in the second half of the 20th century, espouse what one might call the 'essentialist' view of myth with no second thoughts or hesitations. The influence of the less sceptical side of Nietzsche's thought, including his view of myth, was then re-imported from France into Germany in the Nietzsche-revival which began there in the 70s.

The other intellectual strand that came into conflict with the one I have just traced had its origins in ethnology and was chiefly concerned with how myths functioned in the pre-technological societies that anthropologists had observed. Claude Lévi-Strauss enunciated in the course of many publications the basic doctrine that myths served the social function of mediating contradictions within a given community. Other structuralists emphasized that myths dealt principally with the charged elements in the semantic system of a given society, relating them to one another in meaningful ways by linking them in narratives, which could be songs, tales, dances or rituals. The prime difference between this tradition and that deriving from Nietzsche lay in the values attributed to the elements of mythical discourse. For structuralists in general, myths represented an attempt to come to grips with real social conflicts or concerns using fictional disguises, but without the aura of any transcendent reality. To ethnologists it was all too evident that what one society viewed as myth, another experienced as religion, and their relativistic approach to myth, which the structuralists took over as an axiom, is ultimately irreconcilable with the irrationalism grounded – for modern European thought – in the values posited by Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*.

Lévi-Strauss made a further bold innovation in his brief study of the Oedipus-myth when he went so far as to assert that a myth consisted of the entirety of its variants. Few conservative philologists would have disagreed with him as far as the myths of antiquity were concerned, since these are handed down to us in variants, which frequently contradict one another. But what was revolutionary about Lévi-Strauss' claim was that there existed for him no qualitative difference between, say, Sophocles' version of the myth of Oedipus and that developed by Freud. This was a disguised but effective attack on the 'essentialist' position that was ultimately to destroy any chance of arriving at a definition to which both 'essentialists' and structuralists could subscribe.

Underlying all 'essentialist' views of myth is the vision of a qualitatively *other* community of human experience – be this the time when gods mingled with mortals or a charismatic view of the role of myth in 'primitive' societies. Otherness can be located

readily in the distant past, allowing Nietzsche to pronounce authoritatively, but with no evidence at all, on the 'mythical consciousness' of a participant in an ancient Dionysian festival. Or else, in contemporary times, such otherness can be projected into the consciousness of pre-technological societies, in which a sophisticated modern observer can choose to deduce its presence from observation. Since Western ethnologists or philosophers cannot overcome their own education and social conditioning to *share* such otherness, its existence can only remain conjecture. Hence 'essentialist' thinking today is rife with 'myths of presence'.

Recognising that 'primitives' themselves employed the trope of an inaccessible charismatic otherness – an example might be the concept of the Dreamtime for indigenous Australians – readily lends support to Lévi-Strauss' argument that no chronological stratum of a myth can make a greater claim to closeness to a transcendent mode of experience than any other. Certainly, there were rearguard actions, such as Géza Róheim's book, *The Eternal Ones of the Dream*, a Freudian, 'essentialist' study of indigenous Australian mythology, but, by and large, the levelling effect of Lévi-Strauss' postulate proved more effective. This was aided by Roland Barthes' highly influential study *Mythologies*, which succeeded in demonstrating that the patterns of mythical thinking and discourse identified by anthropologists in pre-technological societies were alive and well in the modern Western world.

If there is no way of proving that a construct so arbitrary in so many ways as Freud's version of Oedipus lacks the supposed integrity and otherness of a 'genuine' myth, then an 'essentialist' position on myth can only be upheld by faith and is fair game for the rational attacks of the functionalists.

In this way, the contest for a dominant definition of myth in the 70s and 80s of the 20th century ended in a nil-all draw. Because 'essentialism' in discussions of myth readily merges with one or other shade of religious or irrationalist conviction, its final recourse is to a dogmatic insistence on the otherness of mythical discourse or experience. Because the structuralist view tended towards extreme complication, as in Lévi-Strauss' later works, but could very well do without the postulate of a qualitative otherness of mythical discourse, it took easily to a pluralism which required no central focus. Thus there was, in effect, no common ground on which the one intellectual persuasion could defeat the other. The axioms on which both were based were ultimately incompatible.

The extent to which the above controversies were carried out in Europe raises the question as to what contribution English-language thinkers made to the debate. Simply put, there was no apostle of the warts-and-all Nietzsche in Britain or the USA comparable to Georges Bataille in France. Rather, there was a considerable reluctance to assimilate Nietzsche at all. E.M. Butler's influential polemic, *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* (1934), did much to discredit the tradition of German Hellenism from which

Nietzsche's 'essentialist' view of myth had sprung. The main continental influence in Britain was that of Bachofen's 'essentialist' conviction that the primal European social form had been matriarchal. As a consequence, the versions of Greek myths recorded and handed down by the patriarchal society which – in pre-literate times – had displaced the original community, needed to be re-interpreted to restore their pristine form. This underlies Robert Graves' understanding of myth, as set forth most boldly in *The White Goddess* (1961). While it influenced a new generation of poets, Graves' book was too much a profession of faith and far too loosely argued to stir up much scholarly or theoretical discussion. An intriguing Marxist variant of the Bachofen line was propounded by George Thomson, but his work was taken more seriously in East Germany than in the English-speaking world. The Bachofen tradition was to celebrate an unlikely renaissance in certain expressions of East German feminism, notably Christa Wolf's lectures on the intellectual roots of her best-selling novel *Cassandra*.

Critiques of and commentaries on the structuralist/'essentialist' controversy were written by many British and American scholars, but these did not bring any fresh impulses into the main area of dispute. A good case in point is the book entitled *Myth* by the Cambridge Hellenist, G.S. Kirk, who both takes a broadly historical perspective and also comes to grips with some of the more esoteric aspects of Lévi-Strauss' thinking, but without doing more than make the debate on the Continent intelligible to English readers.

There is no clear point at which the contest for a pre-eminent definition of myth was abandoned. 'Essentialist' positions continue to be adopted today; structuralism exhausted itself as a school of thought by having promised more in literary criticism and cultural studies than it could deliver, though many of its techniques still survive in non-polemical guises. Myth became less an object of debates that scholars believed they could win, and reverted more to what it had always been: a treasure-house of stories, characters and motifs which could be pillaged for creative purposes.

We may, of course, remove the negative connotations of 'pillaging' and replace them by the positive variant of questioning a myth to see what further dimensions of meaning it may yield. Ancient Greek myths, in particular, are transmitted in variants which may differ widely from one another and which may be extremely schematic, leaving us to wonder why a particular variant became most common or why certain actions are attributed to mythical figures. Two ways are then open, the one to scholarship and the other to creative improvisation.

The scholarly task is usually a deconstructive one: to reveal mythical narratives as something other than they purport to be, such as the explanation of a festival or rite whose real origins had been forgotten or suppressed. The creative alternative is to alter,

embroider or improvise on the account that was at some time written down and passed on so as to construct an additional dimension of meaning.

When I wrote the *Ariadne* that follows, I was very much aware of the scholarly debate about myth I have sketched above, but totally uninterested in realising any program. There is no partisan attitude towards either the 'essentialist' or structuralist persuasions. Rather there is a certain amount of light-hearted playing on both. Most accounts of the myth of Ariadne focus on her elopement with Theseus and its sequel. The tableau of the sleeping Ariadne abandoned by Theseus on Naxos was a popular motif both in the visual arts and in the literature of antiquity, and led to a dominant stereotype among versions of the myth up to the 20th century.

In setting my text before Theseus' arrival, I was trying to ask different questions of the myth than had previously been formulated. I did not excise Theseus from the text altogether, but rather turned his coming into an unfulfilled prophecy, something widely expected, long overdue and thus a burden on Ariadne herself. Also, I set out to question the myth as to Ariadne's relation to the Minotaur, who – all traditions agree – was her half-brother. To unfold this relationship in dialogue a third figure was needed, someone who was emphatically not Theseus, and so the figure of the sailor became necessary. To interrogate the myth using this particular constellation has the result of freeing the plot from the dominance of Theseus and opening an alternative path. There is no suggestion that this set of answers comes closer to any 'core' of the myth than any other version. Rather, it is full of signals that it is not to be taken seriously. It offers itself as an entertaining improvisation.

WHENCE THIS ARIADNE?

If we turn to the most recent version of the standard German lexicon of antiquity, Pauly's *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, we are told that Ariadne originated as a Cretan vegetation goddess, identified with the figure styled in Linear B as *labyrinthio potnia* and honoured in religious dances.¹ I did not know this when I wrote the first draft of the text in 1982 nor when I turned it into a radio drama in 1985. Pauly also asserts that the name Ariadne and its variants were euphemistic ways of avoiding her real name: Aphrodite, and that her original consort was not Theseus but Dionysus.

1 *Der Kleine Pauly. Lexikon der Antike*, eds. Konrat Ziegler and Walther Sontheimer, Munich 1979, vol. 1, col. 543ff.

None of this surprises me greatly either. I knew that she was associated with dancing and that there was an erotic aspect to her nature. My first introduction to the theme came when, at the beginning of the 60s, I read Robert Graves' fine poem *Lament for Pasiphaë*. This sent me to his *Greek Myths* to learn something of the events without which the name made no sense, and so I encountered the story of Minos' family. Graves' poem succeeds in making credible a figure whom the myth simply instrumentalizes. It asks: who might Pasiphaë have been beyond the name necessary to give the Minotaur an origin? So poetry, in answer, makes a living woman emerge from the schematic myth of antiquity. Another early influence was Rilke's poem *Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes*. This narrates the attempted rescue of Eurydice from the underworld, but with the important difference that the perspective of the myth is reversed so as to make the dominant viewpoint that of Eurydice, who has become so attached to the realm of the dead that she lacks all interest in returning to her marriage. When Orpheus looks back, instead of uttering her anguished cry in Vergil's *Georgics IV*, she simply asks the god accompanying her: Who?

Proofs such as this that the myths responded to an interrogation, unhistorical as the questions and answers may be, certainly encouraged me to write the version of Ariadne that follows. It started life in 1982 as twenty-one series of three speeches in verse for Ariadne, the Minotaur and the Sailor. As I was translating German poetry for the Australian Broadcasting Commission at the time, I was encouraged to turn it into a radio drama. Music was commissioned from Tristram Cary, then Reader in Music at the University of Adelaide, and the play was broadcast on ABC FM in December 1985 and repeated a couple of times. It received a Certificate of Merit for 'creative use of the medium'.

I have to confess that, in the beginning, the setting was more important to me than the characters. I had acquired a book by the 18th century architect and artist Piranesi with his series of etchings entitled *Imaginary Prisons*. From that moment I was lost. To understand the world of *Ariadne*, one must know Piranesi's world of gloomy and elaborate architecture – all interiors – at once spacious and oppressive – with balconies, bridges, staircases, tunnels, inexplicable cables strung over voids and often in a state of Gothic dilapidation. The *Imaginary Prisons* became for me the Labyrinth, but with the important difference that, in place of the half-light that clothes Piranesi's structures, I imagined the same structures in total darkness.

In darkness, sound means life, and so I searched for voices. In a poem by Guillaume Apollinaire, there is a fleeting reference to a figure called *la Taupe-Ariane* – Ariadne the Mole – and this may have been the link between Piranesi's *Imaginary Prisons* and the Ancient Greek myth. In any event, I questioned the myth as to the possible relationship between Ariadne and her monstrous half-brother, and the answers that came back are in the text that follows.

Voices in total darkness find relief in story-telling, and so there are some set-piece narratives which the three voices share. One is the myth of Alcestis. Another, the story of the three fishermen and the story of the girl who asks them to restore her drowned lover to her is taken from an old Latvian folk-song which I had first translated into verse in 1970 and now put to use. It is important for the drama that all three characters know the same stories. The Sailor is an Athenian from the ship which brings the latest tribute of youths and maidens to Minos, but he unhesitatingly speaks his part in the narratives. How can he?

In these sequences, the play unfolds its own myth: the shared language in the darkness binds the three voices together in such a way that, in the end, the sailor cannot leave. There is a parallel in this to the effect of the unfulfilled prophecy about Theseus on Ariadne herself. Bound by a foretelling, that may turn out to be nothing but a legend, to await Theseus' arrival, she becomes a victim of this public exposure to the myth and seeks refuge with her half-brother in the darkness of the Labyrinth.

Something else voices in the darkness may do is quote poetry. Both Ariadne and the Minotaur are fond of quoting Sappho. At the time of writing the play, I had the Ancient Greek text of Sappho's poems and fragments in a bilingual German edition. My fascination with Sappho's art found its way into the text, indirectly acknowledged, in the often acerbic dialogues between sister and half-brother. There are various other literary allusions embedded in the dialogues, but they are integrated into the fiction and do not need to be spelled out.

As far as Ariadne herself is concerned, I took the myth of Minos family literally and then asked what sort of a daughter it might produce in modern terms. Certainly, one who is vulnerable, already bitter and sparing with her affections. Visiting the Labyrinth is for her at first a temporary refuge, but the play suggests it might become more. She cannot help but be tempted by the Sailor's offer to take her out of the myth altogether, if she becomes his wife. She could forget Theseus, leave her half-brother to his stench and darkness and opt for the ordinary world. The answer the play gives is that language is compelling and that she can no more leave than can the Sailor. But if Theseus *were* to appear, then that myth might prove still more compelling and take her from the Labyrinth into her prefigured role. The play opts for a binding of the three characters into its own language – I found Theseus boring – but then all interrogations of myth end arbitrarily.

ARIADNE

THE RADIO PLAY
1985

CAST:

Narrator
Ariadne
Sailor (light male voice)
Minotaur (bass voice)

MUSIC AND EFFECTS

1. *Wood-block music.*
2. *Electronic signature:* motif that is distinctive and recurs, as punctuation on numerous occasions.
3. *Ancient Greek music .*
4. *Drums, tambourines and pan-pipes.*
5. The labyrinth is a place of manifold echoes.
6. Background singing (e.g. song of the lobster-fisherman) to be in high, keening notes with no words distinguishable – electronic sounds preferable.

INDICATORS FOR SOUND

Apart from specific indicators, sound is envisaged as follows

(TITLES)

*[Slow wood-block music, solo pan-flute, very slow,
soft hand-drum in background...]*

NARRATOR: Ariadne...

NARRATOR: Ariadne, daughter of Minos
and Pasiphaë...

NARRATOR: Ariadne has her own story
before she ever met Theseus.

[Tavern sounds, ancient Greek dances overlaying them, fading to: wood-block music.]

NARRATOR: Minos, King of Crete,
a poor son of Zeus,
who blackmailed the Greeks
for youths and maidens,
seven of each,
took Pasiphaë, daughter of Perseis
and Helios, to wife. One
of their daughters they named:
Ariadne, The Purest. But Poseidon,
hating Minos, made his wife
Pasiphaë, The All Shining,
fall in love horribly
with a white bull of the pasture.
Daedalus, the craftsman,
helped her to ease her passion, making
her a cow's frame to slip into.
The bull liked it.
From this conjunction
Pasiphaë bore a creature, half-man,
half-bull, Ariadne's half-brother,
the Minotaur. Then Daedalus
built them the Maze to hide it.

[*Electronic signature.*]

Ariadne grew to a brittle girl,
hating her mother, her father, mother,
father again. Liking old women, a few
stray priests, sometimes sailors,
sometimes even her poor half-brother.

[*Sounds of a port-side tavern, drunken shouts, lute and tambourine.*]

NARRATOR: Ariadne had been told
about Theseus, golden-sandalled,
whom she would love at first sight
and who would kill the
Minotaur, her half-brother.
She looked for Theseus in many
faces, loved none, waited,
but still she liked
her half-brother,
and sailors.

[*Sounds fade.*]

Most of a life spent
waiting on a prophecy,
hating the lover she would
lead down to kill her shaggy
sibling. Pasiphaë
was no help and Minos only saw himself
as a tragic father. But
below ground there was
life with poor, misshapen half-brother,
an unwilling monster, a child-
eater, a child-eat-child, a
subterranean. He dug tunnels, built
vaults and galleries,
improved on Daedalus' basic

plan. Above ground, on warm days,
 she liked sailors, unless they knew her;
 below ground she fiddled thread, sang;
 and her poor ogre of a half-
 brother talked about children
 and Theseus, and murder and children...

[*Tavern noises.*]

One day she met a likely lad
 in a tavern, eyes too
 bright to be true, hand
 too smooth to be honest, mind
 too twisty to
 notice the difference.
 And so they went down...

[*Prelude of rhythms on wood-blocks, giving way to electronic signature overlaying
 sound of footsteps.*]

ARIADNE: This way. I know, it
 smells a bit. That's
 my brother, half-brother really,
 Pasiphaë's mistake. He
 eats children; Greek
 for preference, and was never
 house-trained. You'll
 get used to it.

SAILOR: Get talking to the locals,
 the Captain said: find out
 what they really do with
 the cargo. You don't believe
 in minotaurs, he said; the
 seven boys and girls go straight
 into someone's brothel. Get inside!
 get proof! Well, these caves

contain a hundred years
of stench, if that's proof
enough for him.

MINOTAUR: Got another tourist, have you, sister?
I suppose he's had
the half-day's excursion
over you, been in and out a few times,
now he gets: The Labyrinth
by Night. There is
no labyrinth by day. As the
climax of the tour a
glance into the Abyss, the
real one, you've
seen hers already. Step this way!

[Electronic signature, repeated. Then sounds of walking in tunnel, striking rocks.]

SAILOR: The track winds
like a snail shell, doubles back
like a frigate-bird hunting dinner.
Why can't there be some light?

[Sounds of water beneath.]

You might tell me
when we change direction. We've
been climbing for an hour, zig-zagging
up some stinking gallery. I'd have
fallen there but for the cable. It's
a bridge, there's water beneath. Thanks
for letting me know!

MINOTAUR: *[Echoing.]*

If we had lights, you'd
appreciate the vaulting
and the patterns
the spiral stairs make. Daedalus
had them carve the balustrades
in relief: – here! – with practice
you can tell it's a lion's face.
Here six narrow upright arches, each
with its own tunnel. I like high tunnels.

ARIADNE: Daedalus meant all this
to be seen. Minos stopped that.
My brother prefers it. It makes for better
games with the mice they
release here: a panic squeaking,
then a thud. He knows the height
of every gallery and changes
the ropes around. Some of the bridges
can be swung too. But my thread
will guide us through his pranks. Don't worry.

[Electronic signature.]

[Panting of Minotaur, grunt, curse, then:]

MINOTAUR: Stories are a help
against the darkness:
One day I talked to
the wind through the split
rock, asked it to entertain me.
There were three fishermen, it said,
in a silver boat on the sea,
dyed amber by sunrise. They
were asked by a girl about her lover,
his affection for her, his chances
under the sun.

SAILOR: And they told her frankly
 that he was drowned and lying
 with his cheek on sand. Then
 she offered them various gifts
 if they would bring him to her.
 They would not. And so she offered
 herself, seeing their nets were silk,
 their sails silver. Strange fishermen, not
 likely to take up her offer.

ARIADNE: Then the kindest one held her chin, touched
 her forehead, said: Don't ask
 ones like us to bring
 to you what now belongs
 to the currents and fish. He
 would be less use to you than
 we are. He will become
 something else; you can put
 his shore-bound ghost to rest
 with the song of Linos.

*[Music commences an electronic dirge, with plucked sounds in the background and
vague ululations. Return to footsteps, panting, etc., fading to: prelude of wood-block
music.]*

SAILOR: Sister mole, you got us into
 these tunnels, what's
 your next trick? Push
 a little hole in the roof
 for some air and starlight? Your
 walking thread
 is wearing me down, so
 is this darkness.

ARIADNE: If you think it's for you – or you –
 I come here, have another!

It's only following the open lanes and jostling
the walls in my head
that I get here. You are both walls.
Brushing along you I might
go in the direction you want,
but only ever tracing
a map you will not see.

MINOTAUR: Your nightmares are just more tunnels.
I have the god-inflicted
talent to always appear
at the end of them. A looming
hulk in the depth of each sweating
dream, out of reach of lights,
faster than shadows.

[Sounds protracted and eerie, fading to sea-noises. Then: electronic signature.]

ARIADNE: At thirteen I wanted
a place where I could be away
from my virginity
in others' eyes, and deflower
myself slowly
and endlessly in the
rhythm of the sun.

MINOTAUR: *[Echoing.]*

There is no other place.
I gave this one my shape and
my name. Everlastingly, it
gives them back.
In the sound of the waves through
every tunnel
it gives them back.

[Beginning of sea-sounds with electronic overlay.]

SAILOR: Often a pile
of sheep-shit on the deck
was my pillow.
You are both
luxurious. I will get back
to the spaces of
the albatross. I will sleep
on a dew-wet deck

[*Getting drowsy.*]

and never dream
of either of you.

[*Crashing of breakers, creaking of ship's gear, fading to sailor's snores.*]
[*Clear sound.*]

MINOTAUR: Sometimes in my calf-days
they'd bundle me in a closed cart
and take me to the salt-meadows,
specially cleared of peasants:
all daffodils and Helios, quails' eggs
and cow-pats. I'd run
at bushes with my head down and
trample them, hoping
Dad was watching: not Minos,
the other one!

ARIADNE: You hardly knew you were different,
or disowned, you never
dreamed you were so vilely
unique. You were so trusting, they
could have put you in charge
of the nursery. All you wanted
was an hour of Pasiphaë
jawing over her doubtful glory,
and a trough of oats and lots
and lots of straw.

SAILOR: *[Still sleep-bound.]*

A witch said of my life it
would end badly, in strangeness, un-
buried, a puzzle soon forgotten,
unsolved. I think I will never
come out of here.
Or if I did, I'd breathe this stink and carry
this rock-dark inside me till mercy
crumbled my brains.

[Electronic signature.]

ARIADNE: You are a bloated
shaggy hulk, half-brother,
and if I liked, being in with Minos,
I could order you about! Hear! he
swishes his tail, it
gets to him. Shall we make him
give us a ride?

[Tavern music begins.]

SAILOR: There are awful things
in your family's mind and he
is in some ways
the least of them. Oh, give me
back the setting sun on the underbellies
of the sheep of heaven, give me
back a clear night somewhere. This is
the last time I talk
to strange women in pubs.

[Sound of Greek tavern music, somewhat distorted; go over into muted hubbub with flutes, pan-pipes etc. These sounds get louder, with stamp of dancing feet added.]

MINOTAUR: You can order me for all
the good it does you. I can sit, trot, lie,
eat children, shit, piss. Sing a song
or two and reason for hours.
Which of my limited
repertoire will you find
most entertaining?

SAILOR: Here's an embroidered
headband I bought to take back
to my niece for her wedding.
You can feel the stitching:
dancing satyrs with flutes.
It's yours to wear. I doubt
my niece will miss it. It's a relief
to give you something other
than touch and words,
and echoes of words.

[Background rises to climax after these words, then cuts out.]

ARIADNE: They are more alive in here.
Listen:
You, Evening Star,
bring together what dawn
scattered, the sheep home,
the goats home, the children
to their mother.

MINOTAUR: At least she's educated.
She collects poems for me.
One was something like:
The moon has set, the Pleiades
have declined, night
has reached its centre, life
has passed it. I
am alone.

It's not quite right, the words
have shifted. But there's no way
I can keep them still.

[*Wood-block music.*]

ARIADNE: Theope annoyed me. She was
 always like a kitten
 yearning for her mother's tongue.
 I sacked her. She took to selling
 herself on the wharves. I bought
 her child for one of your snacks.

SAILOR: At least seven times I went with her
 between voyages. She was
 hot on the hot nights, still warm
 in winter. She wanted us to come
 to an arrangement – half for me, if I
 brought home the whole crew. I never
 saw her child, it must
 have been sold already.

MINOTAUR: It tasted good. The mother I'd
 often watch sitting with
 knees hunched up
 on the rocks outside. She'd
 sing sometimes and wail others. I
 knew she'd drown one day and
 sure enough. On the beach,
 through my spy-hole, I saw
 the crabs were already at her face.

[*Electronic dirge music from earlier.*]

SAILOR: We do ourselves harm, telling
 such bitterness. Him I can understand.
 But you, with access

to the light, you don't need this.
 Back home on my island
 you would be a sign from
 the gods. I can see you at the
 spring rites in a white shift, golden belt.
 Like a young deer

[Faintly, Greek wedding dance begins and accompanies next two speeches.]

of the forest
 you will lead the dance.

ARIADNE: Yes, I will lead the dance. The flutes
 will be guided by my feet,
 the drums keep my time alone. I will
 show them the maze-dance,
 how the partridges court, hobbling
 fine patterns in the marked sand,
 then the cranes' dance, holding twine,
 last the Titans' dance that moves
 the sun, the moon, and constrains
 the wandering stars.

[Wedding dance becomes louder and remains approximately 1½ minutes. Silence.]

ARIADNE: When I saw love descend the night-sky
 like a staircase, he wore purple.
 How I hated them –
 these royally dressed visions,
 cosmic gigolos – even before
 I started on sailors! My
 mother's fault, she got it in my head I
 would be courted by gods. Like she was.
 On all fours and from behind, while she
 cropped grass!
 I wish I saw love going,
 for a change, vanishing

down a dusty track in daylight,
wearing nothing.

MINOTAUR: My spring is only changes
in the birds' noise. The sea never
flowers and the air here
is always the same. Why don't
you take her off? I can see:
mother, for all she outshines
the early star, was less than
good for her. *You* can certainly
still leave, but I'm no longer sure
about my sister.

SAILOR: Sister mole, I'll take you
from this darkness, out of these
words, off this island.
There's another one, without monsters,
all they worship is sky,
sea and barley.
Sell your jewels, we'll buy
a passage. Smiling,
no one will know you.

MINOTAUR: Why you spend so much time
talking, I don't know. What did
you come into the dark for?

[Return of sea-noises, with atonal, high, male, cracked voice, keening.]

Don't mind me, I
have other interests, there's
plenty of sea-weed for bedding. Shy? I'll go off,
put my ear to a crack, hear
the lobster-fisher sing as
he sets his pots, spy on

the moon rising, like Mother dressed
in white, in silver.

[Sea-noises overlaid by wooden-block music. Electronic signature.]

SAILOR: I'd always thought my dream-countries
would be fresher than
sunrise on a coast,
not a ship's hold full
of rats and ballast. I
would not even mind a nightmare,
but here all terror
goes strictly to the nose.
Can either of you remember
what the world smells like?

ARIADNE: The salt drying on my forehead, the spume
coarsening my hair, eyes
clenched against the beach-grit, hands
teasing a broken shell, the plover's
cry coming from a nursery
of ghosts. There is no Theseus,
never was, there is only
family and tourists.

MINOTAUR: You don't think this
is what they built for me.
I enlarged it, no help
from Daedalus, in fact
the whole design is different.
I added the crabs, the pitfalls,
and the bones, of course; the sea-weed
couches and the acoustics,
the thump and flow and suck
you can hear a mile off –
these are all mine. But I
will share them.

[Electronic signature. Footsteps.]

ARIADNE: He still calls his mother
 All Shining, most others call her
 The Cow, Minos
 doesn't call her anything. She
 never shone for me, the best
 was her hot flank when I'd sometimes
 sneak into her bed, a dull
 fire smouldering me
 back to sleep. But in the morning: she'd be
 hard as gravel round the sea-rocks.

SAILOR: He tunnels his past
 like worms through a cheese, so
 do you. Your only miracles
 are unexpected curvings
 back on the same. Back
 like foxes to their earth with
 a dead mouse for supper.

MINOTAUR: She never told me what it felt like,
 my conception, hunched, splayed
 on the rough wood under
 the stinking cowhide, aching, tensed.
 All this to present
 her bum to a god. But Mother,
 when she gives, she
 gives with determination.

[Noise of copulating bull. Electronic signature.]

SAILOR: Why has she never married?

[Echo.]

ARIADNE: Why have I never married?

SAILOR: In some ways she
embodies the condition, even
here in the darkness she
is full of little duties, foresees
discomforts, turns over
the sea-weed every day. I suppose
no one was good enough –
or is your family
into incest?

MINOTAUR: Excuses mainly. One big excuse
grew greater than what
it was meant to cover. Of course,
she'd like a pirate
to carry her off. Take the decision
away from her and Minos,
and the government, and the priests –
just rape her smartly on the beach
and heave her into his dinghy.
That's what all this
nonsense about Theseus means.
She fills in time with your sort and you
both come invading my privacy.

[Very faint wedding music in background.]

ARIADNE: They kept telling me
when I wouldn't sleep,
that he'd come in the ship from Athens
with seven youths, seven
maidens, to charm my father.
When I was seventeen, waiting
nearly killed me. Nine
years later all my friends
have their fifth
child and all I
do is hide down here. Out in the day,

running the gauntlet of
stares and legends,
my fingers wither slowly to claws
for her eyes and his eyes,
and *her* eyes and *her* eyes.

[*Wedding music increases.*]

MINOTAUR: Their music winds to me
 through my tunnels,
 taking the way my bellowing
 reaches them. Both sounds cross
 on the stone-face,
 etching in darkness over
 one another the scraggles
 of no language.

[*Wedding-music fades.*]

SAILOR: Sea-birds gave us
 comfort or omens, for example:
 a fat gull's waddle
 on the deck: my love's
 way in middle age.
 Voices from the land were
 language too, but forced
 through the wind's sieve.

ARIADNE: Calming waves have very
 little speech, like Eranna s
 skirt stirring air between
 her legs and my face, passing.
 A dead mouth
 is none at all.

[*Long pause. Begins faint beating of drum, joined by tambourines. Something of pan-pipes with electronic accompaniment/distortion. Subdued crowd noise blends in. Faint bray of trumpets.*]

[*Crowd noises and others increase till line below, then music and crowd cut out.*]

SAILOR: [*Proclaiming.*]

So telling tales
keeps you alive! King Pelias
of Iolcus, he of the bruised face, swore
no man would have his daughter unless
he yoked a lion and a boar together, drove
his chariot a full circle. Admetus now,
Apollo being his servant a
year long, had him get
Heracles to do the trick. The fool Admetus –
how he got gods to do him good
escapes me – offended Artemis, and she’s
a vindictive lady.

MINOTAUR: [*Hamming it.*]

And to the chants of Hymen Hymenaon!
he blundered in, reeking of wine
and scent and lust, yes, reeking of lust,
to have Alcestis’ maidenhead.
But imagine!

[*Hissing of serpents.*]

instead of a perfumed, compliant
bride, he found hissing serpents
twined in knots all over
the royal bed. Apollo, witlessly
obliging, stepped in once more
and sweetened Artemis.

ARIADNE: Striking with her a most perverted bargain.
Admetus’ death could be
put off, when his time came, if he

produced a surrogate. When Hermes
 duly flew in to gather him
 for Hell, even his parents looked
 the other way, as he pleaded. Only the bunny, Alcestis.
 said: My life is yours,
 dear husband. And took poison. Now this
 made even Hell convulse. Persephone
 refused the offering, sent her back home.
 How did they live
 ever after? How did she, alone,
 with the changed eyes of the dead,
 greet her resurrection? Did she thank
 Persephone?

*[Electronic signature, fading to a plaintive single voice, soprano or electronic, in a few,
 short and high, cadences. Then:]*

MINOTAUR: Mostly I am
 alone here. I am at
 the world's end, withheld
 from all eyes, here no one
 can reach me, there is no
 creature to come near where I am,
 no limits, hence
 no barriers, I
 am free.

ARIADNE: Your solitude fattens
 on children's bones. All you can do is
 pile them artistically.
 Your world's-end is one great
 orphanage of souls: orphan,
 you eat orphans.

SAILOR: Every nine years
 you get your shipment.
 I fell in love with half of this one,

jet eyes and breath like
wild honey. Why do you need
virgins, if all you do
is eat them?

[Light footsteps running away down echoing tunnel, slower ones in pursuit. Coughing and panting. Cries of children in terror. Tambourines and slow drums underlie the following speeches.]

ARIADNE: Locked in dialogue
with my unrealised self,
a parrot gnawing on its bars, gobbling
my name in my voice s
caricature – what good
to say I was always obedient?
Daedalus made me
a dancing-floor, and the whole island
knows I am clumsy.

SAILOR: But you have magic hands, the way
the thread unwinds like a startled snake,
and lets us follow.
And you can see in the dark.
Inside you, I can believe
I am twenty again, that's magic.
And your nipples
are like plums a few days from ripening.

[Tambourine and drums finish loudly. Then:]

MINOTAUR: By all means use my home
to start a family. We have
so many curses, one more
is nothing. The dark is good
for having compassion. She
devours it, works on it,
like eels on the crew of a wreck. My sister!

Yes! She'll gorge herself
on dead sailors' flesh,
or live ones' pity.
But I repeat: my home is yours,
my tunnels your tunnels.

[Electronic signature.]

SAILOR: My blood tells me years
are gone down here. I'll come out
half-senile, bald. This darkness
eats my time away, these
rocks draw out my juice. For the last
time, let me get out! I don't want
to join your family. I'm more
like a monkey than like Theseus!
Can't you make her
rewind her thread? Surely
you're sick of us. I thought
your hobby was children.

[Sea noises, with atonal voice, high, male, cracked, keening.]

MINOTAUR: You know, last night with my ear
to the cranny, the song
of the fisherman, hauling his nets
out in the bay, made me weep.
His voice sawing against
the music of the stars' dance. When
you have so little to compare, each
single beauty kills you.

ARIADNE: Lying awake in the night, tossing
the this and the that, I have waited
to hear him, when the palace
noises die, singing his fish
to death. All my future

flapped in his nets. I'd watch him
returning in the dawn, silent,
fatigued, saving
his breath for rowing.

*[The sounds above continue, and, after this speech, reach a climax.
Electronic signature. Pause.]*

[Military trumpets.]

MINOTAUR: Some say a troop of cavalry
 in the morning with white
 plumes and all the rest,
 or troops marching;
 some say a fleet rowing off
 to glory is the finest
 sight of all on the dark
 earth, but I
 say: the best is what you love.

ARIADNE: You didn't make that up,
 and what would you know
 about it, seeing the world an
 inch-wide crack
 at a time? And loving? You don't
 keep anything alive long enough
 to love it. Mother
 screamed for a week when
 they showed you to her. Loving!

*[Beginning of rural noises in the background with doves cooing, leaves rustling etc.,
merging to gentle sea-noises.]*

SAILOR: There is nothing to stop him
 loving a past, or a future, if he
 can make a nest in either,
 somewhere, like a place I know,

sheltered, out of the gales,
sunny, I was fifteen then, she
was twelve, the doves
went on and on all morning.

[*Sea-noises increase.*]

MINOTAUR: So what sense, what
 possible sense is there
 in your leaving? Here your doves
 can go on and on
 forever, their talk be
 infinite, your twelve-year-old
 under you always. I won't eat her ghost,
 promise, and sister will, I'm sure
 supply more than adequately
 the tactile dimension.
 Don't leave us.

ARIADNE: So now you re down
 to selling your sister? The poetic
 son of Mother, the secret
 Prince of Crete a pimp?
 And I'm your merchandise?
 Oh yes, you'd do a roaring trade in me
 around the docks. Roaring, that is,
 if your customers would stand
 still long enough
 to hear your pitch!

SAILOR: They'd never give him a licence!
 But I can feel for his wanting
 to keep this weight of darkness
 lighter by one voice more,
 even if it's mine. But I

don't want the same dove, same girl,
same morning for good. I want a day that's
like no one I know: a sunrise flattening
the cold sea, and the gulls all shrieking
like aunts at a wedding.
So goodbye, both of you!

ARIADNE: I like to think of the dawn my way.
Here it can have the
colours I want. I can make a dozen
trading ships set out past the rocks, past
the headland of pines, burnt
brown sails on the blue and white.
This is as close
to your island as I will be coming.

[*Noises diminish.*]

SAILOR: Sailors say goodbye so often,
no one pays them attention.
I have been telling you,
I tell you again: you two
aren't the world. There's one outside of here
I can still smell. My breath is dragging
me up the cold track to the tide caves,
then further into the
warm, tarry stink of nets
in the sun. Goodbye!

[*Sounds of moving away, down the tunnel.*]

I will carry
your image in the outside,
his too. Goodbye.

MINOTAUR: *[Deliberately.]*

[Echoes.]

You have talked too much, sailor,
talked yourself out
of air and sunlight. Every time
you joined our game, your speech
wound you further in, closer to the core.
You have no words
to twist you back
out again. Steal her thread, it will
lie useless in your hand. Only our silk
is live, spinning each of us
a cradle. You will be
with us till death breaks threads.
No other way leads from the pattern. This
is our cradle.

[Wood-block music, merging into sea-noises.]

[ENDS]