

Ariadne's Lament (Monteverdi *L'Arianna*, 1608)

Let me die! and what do you think can comfort me
in such harsh fate, in such great suffering?
Let me die! Oh Theseus, my Theseus
I still want to call you mine, cruel one,
even though you flee from my eyes.
Turn back, my Theseus, turn back Theseus, oh God!
Turn back to gaze on her who abandoned
her country and kingdom just for you,
and who will leave her bare bones
on these sands as food for fierce and merciless animals.
Oh, Theseus, if you only knew, oh god!
Alas, if you only knew the terrible fear
poor Ariadne is suffering, perhaps you would relent
and point your prow back to the shore.
But, 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.
Where is the faithfulness that you swore to me so much?
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?
To leave me, abandoned for the wild beast to tear and devour?
Ah, my Theseus, will you leave to die,
weeping and calling in vain for help, wretched Ariadne,
who trusted you and gave you glory and saved your very life?
Alas, he doesn't even answer!
Alas, he is deaf than a snake to my cries!
Oh clouds, storms, winds! bury him beneath those waves!
Hurry, you whales and sea monsters,
and fill your deep whirlpools with his filthy limbs!
But what am I saying? Why do I rage so?
Alas, wretch that I am, what am I asking for?
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.