

Weird Pathos: Stesichorus' *Geryoneis* and the Sympathetic Monsters of Apollonius' *Argonautica*

This paper argues for the pervasive influence of Stesichorus' *Geryoneis* on the representation of monsters in Apollonius' *Argonautica*, with a particular focus on the Hesperides episode in Book 4. Stesichorus' sympathetic, even ennobling depiction of the three-bodied monster Geryon is perhaps the most striking feature of the surviving fragments of his poem, and the subject of much scholarly discussion (e.g., Franzen 2009, Curtis 2011: 43–45, Noussia-Fantuzzi 2013). Equally, scholars have long noted that several of the monsters of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, such as the bronze man Talos or the poem's two sets of earthborn warriors, cut a curiously sympathetic figure, creating a "weird pathos" (Hunter 1993: 42) as they are slain by the poem's protagonists. To date, the influence of the *Geryoneis* on Apollonius' monsters has been tentatively suggested for only one passage (Kouremenos 1996: 237 n. 13, Kauffman 2016: 385–386): Stesichorus' striking poppy simile (S 15 col ii.14–17) has been adduced as a potential model for the Apollonian simile comparing the drooping corpses of Jason's earthborn foes to newly-planted shoots weighed down by heavy rains (*Arg.* 3.1396–1404).

In fact, the suggestion of a link between these similes is borne out by other parallels between these passages, most notably the fact that both Heracles and Jason initiate combat by crouching stealthily and throwing a stone at their unsuspecting monstrous opponents (S 15.7–14; *Arg.* 3.1369; cf. 1057). This evidence shows that it is not only appropriate to read Jason's ruthless slaughter of the sown men in light of Heracles' brutal execution of Geryon, but furthermore, it invites consideration of the influence of the *Geryoneis* on other Apollonian monsters. For example, the earthborn men of Cyzicus, in view of their six arms (1.944–946) and death by Heracles' arrows (992–995), are reminiscent of the anatomy and fate of Stesichorus' monster (S 87, S 15 col. ii.1–13). More subjectively, a Stesichorean ethos may be said to run

throughout the *Argonautica*, as notes of sympathy for monster after monster can be detected—even for such creatures as the Sirens, the Harpies, and the Colchian dragon.

But Apollonius' most sustained engagement with the *Geryoneis*, and the focus of this paper, is in his Libyan episode, in his rendition of the myth of Heracles' quest for the golden apples (4.1395–1449). When the Argonauts arrive at the garden of the Hesperides, the narrator relates how just the day before, Heracles had slain Ladon, the garden's dragon guardian, and made off with the apples, leaving the Hesperides to lament their losses (4.1395–1407). The basic scenario, in which Heracles kills an innocent monster in a far-off land in order to abscond with a prize, is essentially the same as that of the *Geryoneis*. Heracles also slays Ladon in the same way that he shoots the first of Geryon's heads in Stesichorus' poem, with arrows laced with the venom of the Hydra; there are in fact marked verbal parallels (S 15 col. ii.4–6, *Arg.* 4.1404).

What is most Stesichorean about the episode, however, is its re-presentation from the perspective of one of Heracles' victims. When the Argonauts meet the Hesperides, they hear a version of the same events told from the viewpoint of one of the nymphs, who decries Heracles' actions and mourns the loss of their guardian serpent (4.1432–1449). This female perspective on Heracles' violence is reminiscent of the pleas and preemptive lament of Geryon's mother, who urges him not to fight Heracles (S 12, 13). Indeed, the Hesperides' grief is all the more affecting in light of the fact that one of them, Erytheis, is not only the eponym for Geryon's island, but the mother of his herdsman Eurytion, another of Heracles' victims (cf. S 7, 8, 29). Given that the traditional chronology of Heracles' labors places Geryon's cattle immediately before the apples of the Hesperides, Apollonius' Erytheis mourns for Ladon in ignorance of her own son's death at the hands of the same killer (cf. 4.1436). These Stesichorean reminiscences serve to

problematize traditional notions of heroism (cf. Lu 2013: 95–107) by highlighting the victims, even monstrous ones, that heroic achievement presupposes.

Bibliography

Curtis, Paul. 2011. *Stesichoros's Geryoneis*. Leiden: Brill.

Franzen, Christina. 2009. "Sympathizing with the Monster: Making Sense of Colonization in Stesichorus' *Geryoneis*." *QUCC* 92.2: 55–72.

Hunter, Richard. 1993. *The Argonautica of Apollonius: Literary Studies*. Cambridge: CUP.

Kauffman, Nicholas. 2016. "Monstrous Beauty: The Transformation of Some Death Similes in Apollonius' *Argonautica*." *CP* 111: 372–390.

Kouremenos, Theokritos. 1996. "Herakles, Jason and 'Programmatic' Similes in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*." *RhM* 139.3–4: 233–250.

Lu, Katherine Elizabeth. 2013. *Heracles and Heroic Disaster*. Diss. University of Michigan.

Noussia-Fantuzzi, Maria. 2013. "A Scenario for Stesichorus' Portrayal of the Monster Geryon in the *Geryoneis*." *TiC* 5.2: 234–259.