

MEDEA AS INTERNAL POET IN *ARGONAUTICA* 3-4

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Paper Abstract: [Medea as Internal Poet in Apollonius' *Argonautica* 3 & 4](#)

1: The Preparation of the Promethean Drug

ἡ δὲ τέως γλαφυρῆς ἐξείλετο φωριαμοῖο
φάρμακον, ὃ ῥά τέ φασι Προμήθειον καλέεσθαι.

...

τῆς οἶν τ' ἐν ὄρεσσι κελαινήν ἱκμάδα φηγοῦ
Κασπίη ἐν κόχλω ἀμήσατο φαρμάσσεσθαι,
ἑπτὰ μὲν ἀενάοισι λοεσσαμένη ὑδάτεσσιν,
ἑπτὰκι δὲ Βριμῶ κουροτρόφον ἀγκαλέσασα,
Βριμῶ νυκτιπόλον, χθονίην, ἐνέροισιν ἄνασσαν,
λυγαίη ἐνὶ νυκτὶ σὺν ὄρφναίοις φαρῆεσσιν.
μυκηθμῶ δ' ὑπένερθεν ἐρεμνὴ σείετο γαῖα,
ρίζης τεμνομένης Τιτηνίδος· ἔστενε δ' αὐτὸς
Ἴαπετοῖο πάις ὀδύνη πέρι θυμὸν ἀλύων.

She, meanwhile, took from the hollow chest a drug which they say is called Promethean... Its sap, like the black juice of a mountain oak, she had collected in a Caspian shell to prepare the drug, after bathing herself seven times in ever-flowing streams, and calling seven times on Brimo¹ the youth-nourisher, Brimo the night-wanderer, the infernal goddess, queen of the nether dead—all in the gloom of night, clad in dark garments. And with a bellow the black earth beneath shook when the Titanian root was cut, and the son of Iapetus himself groaned, distressed at heart with pain.²
(Ap. *Arg.* 3.844-5, 3.858-66)

2: Swiftly Working Incantations

τῇ δὲ καὶ αὐτόματοι θυρέων ὑπόειξαν ὀχῆες
ὠκείαις ἄψορροι ἀναθρώσκοντες ἀοιδαῖς.

And all on their own the bolts of the doors yielded for her,
springing back at her swiftly working incantations. (*Arg.* 4.41-42)

1 Hecate: Hunter (1989, *ad loc.*)

2 Translations are drawn from Race (2008).

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3: Medea Faces Down the Dragon

τοῖο δ' ἔλισσομένοιο κατόμματος εἶσατο κούρη,
 ὕπνον ἀοσητηῆρα, θεῶν ὕπατον, καλέουσα
 ἠδεῖη ἐνοπηῆ θέλξαι τέρας· ...
 ἢ δέ μιν ἀρκεύθοιο νέον τετμηότι θαλλῶ
 βάπτουσ' ἐκ κυκεῶνος ἀκήρατα φάρμακ' ἀοιδαῖς
 ῥαῖνε κατ' ὀφθαλμῶν, περί τ' ἀμφί τε νήριτος ὀδμή
 φαρμάκου ὕπνον ἔβαλλε·

But as it (sc. the dragon) was coiling, the girl rushed to look it in the eye, and in a sweet voice called to her aid Sleep, highest of the gods, to enchant the monster... But she dipped a freshly cut sprig of juniper into a potion and sprinkled powerful drugs in its eyes as she sang incantations, and all around the pervasive scent of the drug was casting sleep. (Ap. *Arg.* 4.145-7, 155-9)

4: Talos is Outmatched

ἐνθα δ' ἀοιδῆσιν μελίσσετο, μέλπε δὲ Κῆρας
 θυμοβόρους, Αἴδαο θοὰς κύνας, αἱ περὶ πᾶσαν
 ἠέρα διενύουσαι ἐπὶ ζωοῖσιν ἄγονται.
 τὰς γουναζομένη τρις μὲν παρακέκλετ' ἀοιδαῖς,
 τρις δὲ λιταῖς· θεμένη δὲ κακὸν νόον ἐχθοδοποῖσιν
 ὄμμασι χαλκείοιο Τάλω ἐμέγηρεν ὀπωπᾶς·
 λευγαλέον δ' ἐπὶ οἷ πρῖεν χόλον, ἐκ δ' αἰδηλα
 δείκηλα προῖαλλεν ἐπιζάφελον κοτεύουσα.

Once there, she propitiated with songs and chanted the praises of the heart-devouring Fates of Death, the swift hounds of Hades, who roam throughout the air and hunt down the living. In her supplications she summoned them three times with songs, three times with prayers. And adopting a mind bent on harm, she bewitched bronze Talos' eyes with her hate-filled stares. She gnashed her teeth in bitter anger against him and sent forth destructive phantoms with vehement hatred. (*Arg.* 4.1665-72)

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5: The Apolline Element

5a: Beginning with you, Phoebus

Ἀρχόμενος σέο, Φοῖβε, παλαιγενέων κλέα φωτῶν
μνήσομαι...

Beginning with you, Phoebus, I shall recall the famous deeds of men born
long ago... (*Arg.* 1.1-2)

5b: Whatever Trickle Flows Clean and Pure

ὁ Φθόνος Ἀπόλλωνος ἐπ' οὐατα λάθριος εἶπεν
'οὐκ ἄγαμαι τὸν ἀοιδὸν ὃς οὐδ' ὅσα πόντος ἀεΐδει.'
τὸν Φθόνον ὠπόλλων ποδί τ' ἤλασεν ὧδέ τ' ἔειπεν:
'Ἀσσυρίου ποταμοῖο μέγας ῥόος, ἀλλὰ τὰ πολλὰ
λύματα γῆς καὶ πολλὸν ἐφ' ὕδατι συρφετὸν ἔλκει.
Δηοῖ δ' οὐκ ἀπὸ παντὸς ὕδωρ φορέουσι Μέλισσαι,
'λλ' ἥτις καθαρὴ τε καὶ ἀχράαντος ἀνέρπει
πίδακος ἐξ ἱερῆς ὀλίγη λιβάς ἄκρον ἄωτον.'

Envy spoke secretly into Apollo's ears:

"I don't delight in the song which doesn't sing as much as the sea."

Apollo gave Envy a kick with his foot and spoke as follows:

"The flow of the river of Assyria is great, but it
drags with it a great deal of soil and much refuse in its water.
Not from everywhere do the Melissae carry water to Demeter,
but whatever little trickle flows clean and pure from a sacred spring,
the very crown of waters.

(*Call. Ap.* 106-112)

6: Stand by me, Erato

Εἰ δ' ἄγε νῦν, Ἐρατώ, παρὰ θ' ἴστασο καί μοι ἔνισπε,...

Come now, Erato, stand by my side and tell me... (*Arg.* 3.1)

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7: Spiralling out of Control

7a: Now, Goddess, You Yourself Tell

Αὐτὴ νῦν κάματόν γε, θεά, καὶ δήνεα κούρης
Κολχίδος ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, Διὸς τέκος· ἦ γὰρ ἐμοί γε
ἀμφασίη νόος ἔνδον ἐλίσσεται ὀρμαίνοντι...

Now, goddess, you yourself tell of the distress and thoughts of the Colchian girl, O Muse, daughter of Zeus, for truly the mind within me whirls in speechless stupor,... (Arg. 4.1-3)

7b: Tell to me, Muse...

ἄνδρά μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον...

Tell to me, Muse, the man of twists and turns... (Od. 1.1)

7c: Not Willingly do I tell

ἴλατε Μοῦσαι,
οὐκ ἐθέλων ἐνέπω προτέρων ἔπος

forgive me, Muses,
not willingly do I repeat my predecessors' words (Arg. 4.984-5)

7d: Great Astonishment Confounds my Mind

Ζεῦ πάτερ, ἦ μέγα δὴ μοι ἐνὶ φρεσὶ θάμβος ἄηται,
εἰ δὴ μὴ νόσοισι τυπῆσί τε μῶνον ὄλεθρος
ἀντιάει, καὶ δὴ τις ἀπόπροθεν ἄμμε χαλέπτει,
ὡς ὅ γε χάλκειός περ ἐὼν ὑπόειξε δαμῆναι
Μηδείης βρῖμη πολυφαρμάκου.

Truly, Father Zeus, great astonishment confounds my mind, if in fact death comes not only through disease and wounds, but even from afar someone can harm us, just as he, though made of bronze, yielded in defeat to the power of Medea the sorceress. (Arg. 4.1673-7)

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8: The Telchines want a Continuous Song

Πολλάκ]]ι μοι Τελχίνες ἐπιτρύζουσιν ἀ[[οιδῆι
 νήιδε]]ς, οἱ Μούσης οὐκ ἐγένοντο φίλοι,
 εἴνεκε]ν οὐχ ἐν ἄεισμα διηνεκὲς ἢ βασιλ[ή
]ας ἐν πολλαῖς ἦνυσα χιλιάσιν
 ἢ.....].ους ἦρωας, ἔπος δ' ἐπὶ τυτθὸν ἐλ[ίσσω
 παῖς ἄτ]]ε, τῶν δ' ἐτέων ἢ δεκά[[ς]] οὐκ ὀλίγη.

Often the Telchines mutter against me, against my poetry,
 who, ignorant of the Muse, were not born as her friend,
 because I did not complete one single continuous song
 (on the glory of?) kings... in many thousands of lines
 or on... heroes, but turn around words a little in my mind
 like a child, although the decades of my years are not few.
 (Call. *Ait.* 1.1-5)³

Thank you for your attention!

³ The text of the *Aetia* used is from Harder (2012a). Translations of Apollonius are taken from Race (2008), and of the *Aetia* from Harder (2012a); other translations are my own.

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