

Audience Engagement and Apollonius' *Argonautica*

This paper argues that the first two extended similes in Apollonius' *Argonautica* work together with adjacent direct speeches in order to depict the emotions of the characters with remarkably engaging vividness. As Jason prepares to leave Iolcus, the first simile in the poem compares his grieving mother Alcimedea to a young girl being maltreated by her stepmother (269-75); after she bewails her lot (278-91) and Jason comforts her (295-305), a second simile likens him as he departs to Apollo (307-309). This paper will examine these similes in the *Argonautica* from a fresh angle in order to broaden our view of the expressive dimensions of Apollonius' narrative.

Existing scholarship on Apollonius' similes has focused predominantly on what they tell us about his attitude toward Homeric poetry and Homeric poetics (e.g. Effe 1996 and 2001, Kouremenos 1996, Reitz 1996). In general, Apollonius is not considered an "emotional" or "expressive" narrator, outside of the Jason and Medea love story in Book 3 (Fusillo 1985: 16-18 provides an overview). While the emotional possibilities of similes have been noted (Hunter 1993: 135), they have not been explored in any detail. Indeed, the thorough study of these two similes in Clauss 1993: 38-56 subordinates their emotional power to the central claim that the primary purpose of the departure scene from Iolcus is to draw an unfavorable contrast between Jason as a hero and Hector in the *Iliad*. In fact, similes and direct speeches are examples of storytelling devices that heighten an audience's engagement with narrative by requiring them to make sense of it themselves, rather than being told by the narrator what it means (Iser 1974, Tannen 1989). Accordingly, crowds are massing in the streets, eagerly awaiting a study that shows how similes depict emotions of the characters in the *Argonautica* so as to involve the audience in those emotions.

Because the simile for Alcimedede is the first extended comparison in the *Argonautica*, it sets the audience's expectations for similes in several ways. At the level of its specific language, this simile models the general tendencies of similes – and of the *Argonautica* overall – by evoking Homeric parallels from both the *Iliad* (Ardizzoni 1967: 135) and the *Odyssey* (Clauss 1993: 8) as well as various Greek tragedies (Vian 1974: 63). These allusions all depict grief felt by parents and children who are separated, but they leave the audience uncertain which family role(s) should be assigned to Jason and which to his mother. The nature of the emotions that such allusions depict for the characters in the poem has been pointed out; what has not been previously considered is the emotional engagement that the *audience* feels as a result of spotting the parallels and trying to figure out their dense and sometimes conflicting implications for understanding the characters. The complexity of the allusions in the first simile in the *Argonautica* introduces the audience to the intellectual and emotional stimulation that the intertextuality of the similes will consistently arouse.

The narrative sequence beginning with the first simile models another aspect of similes in Apollonius' storytelling. They may combine with neighboring expressive techniques, such as direct speeches, to give especially vivid detail to emotional parts of the *Argonautica* and to reel in the reader by asking him to take an active part in understanding and experiencing those feelings. The first simile comparing Alcimedede to the sorrowing girl (269-75) and the comparison of Jason to Apollo (307-309) bracket a directly quoted speech by each character, creating a chiasmic sequence of expressive narrative techniques in which each amplifies the others.

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