

## Inconsistencies in Characters' Speeches in Apollonius' *Argonautica*

This paper argues that a number of challenging *cruces* in Apollonian scholarship can be solved by applying the ancient literary-critical principle of λύσις ἐκ τοῦ προσώπου, or “solution from the character speaking,” known from the ancient Homeric scholiasts and commentators like Porphyry, who gives us this term (ad *Il.* 3.122, 14.434). This principle holds that inconsistencies arising in a character's speech may owe not to an oversight on the part of the poet but rather to that character's point of view or deceptive motives (Dachs 1913, de Jong 2001: xiv, O'Hara 2007: 11). James O'Hara has put this insight to good use in his study of inconsistencies in Roman epic, arguing, for instance, that certain incongruities in the Lycaon episode of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* put Jupiter's reliability as an internal narrator in doubt (O'Hara 2007: 116–118). It is my contention that this type of analysis may be fruitfully applied to Hellenistic epic as well, whence, indeed, Latin poets may have partly derived the technique of characterization through inconsistency.

Some problems in Apollonius have already benefitted from this approach; one example is the idea that Pelias invents the religious justification of the quest for the fleece as a pretext for Jason's suicide mission (see especially Pietsch 1999: 28–49). Malcolm Campbell has noted the applicability of this explanation to a variety of *cruces* (see Campbell 1971: 416), but has not argued the point at any length, and for other vexed passages, this solution has yet to be proposed. Accordingly, in this paper I present an exemplary passage that has long been criticized as an instance of Apollonian carelessness (Vermaas 1897: 11–13; cf. Fränkel 1968 ad 3.1183, Vian 1980: 8) but which may benefit, I argue, from a fresh appraisal that applies the “solution from the character speaking.”

The passage in question occurs in the scene of Jason's meeting with the Colchian King Aetes early in Book 3. In order to win the golden fleece, Jason must complete an elaborate trial proposed by the king: plowing a field with fire-breathing, brazen oxen, sowing it with dragon's teeth, and slaying the resultant earthborn warriors. Puzzlingly, Aetes boasts of performing this feat regularly himself (3.409–418), an untraditional claim (cf. Pind. *Pyth.* 4.224–231; Ovid *Met.* 7.119, 211) that raises some questions: how does he not run out of dragon's teeth, and why would he elect to undergo this ordeal repeatedly (cf. Campbell 1994 ad 3.413)? Moreover, a later passage (3.1183–1188) implies that Aetes has never actually used the teeth before, as Cornelis Vermaas recognized (1897: 13). In his commentary, Richard Hunter acknowledges the issue and suggests some solutions, but he ultimately concludes, “[P]erhaps, however, [Apollonius] did not bother himself about this” (Hunter 1989 ad 3.1183).

I argue, conversely, that the “solution from the character speaking” offers a more satisfying way out of this problem: Aetes' ridiculous claim is meant to sound like a lie; the deceitful king is trying to put Jason's death beyond a shadow of a doubt by contriving an impossible challenge, much like Pelias before him. This interpretation has meaningful consequences for our understanding of the plot of Books 3 and 4, for Aetes' lie shows that his deal with Jason was made in bad faith, thereby rendering moot the question of Jason's own “cheating” in the challenge by using Medea's magic drugs. More generally, this “solution from the character speaking” saves the poet from charges of carelessness or apathy and, furthermore, promises to enrich Apollonian character studies by opening up new complexities in characters' speeches.

## Bibliography

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