

Emasculating Jason: Narratology and Gender in Apollonius' *Argonautica* 3-4

That Apollonius constantly reworks details, scenes, vocabulary, and more from the Homeric poems has long been established. The specific Homeric echoes of the confrontation between Jason and Medea in Book 3 of Apollonius' *Argonautica* have not gone unnoticed, either. In particular, Richard Hunter's notes reworkings of the confrontation between Hector and Achilles of *Iliad* 22 in *Argonautica* 3 (Hunter, 1989). The focus on Apollonian connections to the Homeric tradition, however, has largely been based on linguistic similarities, whereas other points of connection, especially thematic relationships, between Apollonius and the Homeric epics have gone unremarked (Lennox, 1980).

A detailed analysis of Apollonius' reworking of Homeric type-scenes in general, and of how Apollonius does this in the confrontation between Jason and Medea, has yet to be accomplished. Campbell's commentary, while noting the similarities between this section and the meeting of Odysseus and Nausicaa in *Odyssey* 6—certainly an important connection—does not note the connections to Homeric *aristeiai* (Campbell 1983). Beye has noted that “Jason's meeting with Medea has the climactic tension of an *aristeia*,” but delves no deeper and moves on to discussing Jason's contest as the *aristeia* “truer to the epic tradition,” (Beye 1982). Apollonius tends to portray Homeric elements in quite unusual ways, and so he does here: Jason begins an *aristeia*, entering not a battle of swords and spears, but a contest of wits and words with Medea. The scene contains the tropes commonly found in such type-scenes in the Homeric epics, and certain elements draw specific comparisons to *aristeiai* in the *Iliad*. But Jason is not the only one described as a hero entering his *aristeia*: similar attention is given to Medea, but it is unclear which of the two comes off victor in Book 3. The culmination of the “battle” is put off until

Book 4, when Medea emerges victorious in mental and verbal contest. Though Apollonius includes type-scenes more typical of those in the Homeric poems, here he subsumes the Homeric *aristeia* in a dialogic battle of wits, subverting the reader's expectations. Doing this, Apollonius reverses the roles expected of the participants of the conflict.

The choice to center the narrative of Book 3 of the *Argonautica* on an *aristeia* between Jason and Medea sheds light on Apollonius' characterization of the major players of his narrative. The weakness of Jason as an epic hero has been one of the main discussions in Apollonian scholarship. Scholars have tended to point out Jason's flaws and criticize him as a subpar character (Beye 1969). More recently, it has been argued that Jason represents not a traditional epic hero, but a normal human thrown into epic situations, (Jackson, 1988; Hunter, 1988). In this "battle" it is not Jason, but Medea, who triumphs. The two enter a contest of words to decide their fate: Jason seeking to use Medea to accomplish his task of acquiring the Golden Fleece and go on his way, Medea seeking to win Jason as her husband and convince him to take her with her to Greece. Though Jason does accomplish his goal, it is only by submitting to Medea. Through the process of this battle, Medea gradually gains the dominant role, while Jason is shunted to the side at the cost of his masculinity. This *aristeia* of wits helps us see that Jason, though we would assume him to be the central character of this conflict, is in fact only secondary: Medea is the true central figure.

There are several elements which feature prominently among *aristeia* type-scenes, though different scholars identify different key features (Krischer, 1971, Edwards, 1992) this paper will focus first on clues that indicate that the narrative of book 3 enters a non-traditional *aristeia* sequence, and then focus on the epic similes, arming sequences, and the sort of epic feats

comparable to those in a Homeric *aristeia*. It will then examine how Apollonius' narratology affects his constructions of the genders of Jason and Medea.

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