

Medea's Platonic "Soul in the Clouds" (*Arg.* 3.1150-54)

In this paper I argue for an allusion in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* (3.1150-54) to the winged chariot simile of Plato's *Phaedrus* (246a-56e). Following Medea's highly rhetorical meeting with Jason (cf. Paduano, Clare, and Mori), the lovestruck girl "fails to perceive" (οὐ τι... ἐνόησεν, 3.1150) those around her "because her soul had flown high up in the clouds" (ψυχὴ γὰρ νεφέεσσι μεταχρονίη πεπότητο, 3.1151). She then immediately "mounts a swift wagon" (θοῆς ἐπεβήσατ' ἀπήνης, 3.1152) of her own, taking up its reins and whip (3.1153-54). I hope to show that the scene's language and context evoke Socrates' simile not only in a general sense, but recall specifically those souls that fail to reach the "plain of truth" (248a-b). The allusion thus accentuates both Medea's frenzied mind (see esp. Barkhuizen and Fusillo) and ultimate downfall. Secondly, I argue that I am not quite the first to recognize this connection. Though I have yet to see it mentioned in modern scholarship (e.g., Ardizzoni, Vian, Green, Hunter), an ancient scholiast's gloss confirms the allusion.

After a brief disclaimer about describing the soul with precision, the Socrates of Plato's *Phaedrus* attempts to do so with an elaborate simile: "Indeed, let it be like the joined force of a winged chariot and charioteer" (ἐοικέτω δὴ συμφύτῳ δυνάμει ὑποπτέρου ζεύγους τε καὶ ἡνιόχου, 246a). Truth, he then asserts, is "visible only to the steersman of the soul, the mind" (ψυχῆς κυβερνήτη μόνῳ θεατῇ νῶ, 247c). Thus "when full-grown and winged, the soul flies high (μετεωροπορεῖ)" (246c), seeking truth in the "places beyond heaven" (τὰ ἔξω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, 247c). Unfortunately, not all souls complete the journey: "Though all strive to move upward, some lack the strength and are carried around beneath the surface (ὑποβρύχια)" (248a). In the end, "many souls are maimed by the incompetence of the drivers" (248b).

With Socrates' winged chariot as a backdrop, Apollonius' metaphor takes on darker connotations. Rather than expressing elation, as it seems often to be understood, the image connects the flight of Medea's soul directly to the failure of her νοῦς (οὐ τι...ἐνόησεν). It flies upward, as all Platonic souls long to do, but the incompetence of its "charioteer" prevents it from breaking through the heavens. The clouds (νεφέεσσι) thus illustrate not how high her soul has gone, but its continued blindness. Medea fails to perceive things as they truly are because her soul remains enshrouded beneath the surface.

It is with this allusion in mind, I believe, that the scholiast then provides his marginal gloss: *μεταχρονίη* οἶον οὐχ ἡνιοχοῦντος τοῦ νοῦ ("high in the air: as if with the mind not holding the reins"). Rather than defining μεταχρονίη with the usual μετέωρος (cf. interlinear glosses at 2.300 and 2.587), he points directly to the alluded passage that demonstrates its meaning. The soul of Socrates' simile twice "flies high" with the μετέωρ- root (μετεωροπορεῖ, 246c; μετεωρίζουσα, 246d), making the meaning of μεταχρονίη clear in this context. The scholiast is also consistent in marking the mind as the soul's charioteer and, in Medea's case, its failure (οὐχ) to maintain control. In one stroke, the marginal gloss identifies the allusion, defines the term, and interprets their significance.

Overall, I make no claim that the *Phaedrus* is some "interpretive key" to the *Argonautica* but assert that it is a natural association at this point in the text. The meeting between Jason and Medea is just as rhetorical as it is erotic, combining the *Phaedrus*' two most prominent themes. Hence Apollonius' transition from their speeches to the passage at hand: "Thus, with gentle words, they tested one another" (ὥς τὼ γ' ἀλλήλων ἀγανοῖς...ἔπεσσι / πείρηθεν, 3.1146). So, too, just a few lines above that, Medea's "heart delighted in both his beauty and his wily words"

(τέρπετο γάρ οἱ / θυμὸς ὁμῶς μορφῇ τε καὶ αἰμυλίοισι λόγοισιν, 3.1140-1). For Medea's soul, as for those in the *Phaedrus*, desire and rhetoric remain interconnected and powerful forces.

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