

Making Genres Meet: An Examination of Character Movement in *Argonautica* 3

While scholars have long noted the influence of Greek drama on the *Argonautica*, particularly on *Book 3*, they have neglected to sufficiently explore how Apollonius accomplishes his blending of literary genres via character movement and space (Levin 1971; Clauss 1993; Hunter 1993). This paper will largely focus on how Apollonius' use of movement and space in *Argonautica 3* diminishes generic boundaries between epic and tragedy in order to produce a novel sort of episode. Unlike the rest of the *Argonautica*, in which the sailors are transported to interesting locations in accordance with generic expectations, the entirety of *Book 3* takes place in Colchis. Apollonius, therefore, relies on the movement of various characters to 1) create the illusion that the epic has not come to an uncharacteristic pause, 2) establish Colchis as a world unto itself capable of containing its own travel narrative, and 3) create a network of stage-like locations throughout Colchis.

Apollonius' divine characters transcend the boundaries of Colchis, thereby substituting for the typical travel of the Argo. The movements of the gods transport the narrative to far-flung locations, but they always result in a physical or narratological return to Colchis, continuously reestablishing it as a significant destination in a travel epic. Furthermore, the movement of the gods also parallels the voyage of the Argonauts. Eros, dispatched by his mother to force Medea to love Jason, departs from Olympus and soars through the sky to the palace of Aetes (*Arg.* 3.158-66). His journey, like the Argonauts' in *Books 1* and *2*, delivers him from Greece to Colchis. Just as this depiction of Eros' movement reinstatiates the earlier travel narrative of the Argonauts, Aetes' recollection of his trip with Circe to the western lands foreshadows the Argo's voyage in *Book 4* (3. 304-13).

But while the gods expand the geography of *Book 3* outside of Colchis, the mortal characters expand Colchis' space from within by traveling to discrete, significant locations on the island. Each location on the island, such as the Argo (a place of democratic deliberation), the palace of Aeetes (a location of utter despotism), and the temple of Hecate (the numinous site of dramatic climax), like the loci of the *Odyssey*, possesses unique thematic significance and characteristics. Book 3, in this way, arguably becomes a self-contained miniature epic.

Many scholars had been accustomed to classifying the *Argonautica* as an “episodic” epic consisting of loosely related scenes, but this perspective has been challenged more recently as efforts have been made to link seemingly disparate scenes to each other, thereby demonstrating the narratological cohesion of the poem (Köhnken 2010). It might be useful, then, to think of *Book 3* as consisting of acts punctuated by the arrivals and departures of characters. This conceptualization is bolstered by Apollonius' interest in conveying the path of characters between locations. For Apollonius, the paths that link the significant sites of Colchis function much like *eisodoi* in tragedy; they link his spatially limited “stages” to the outside world and are the pathways along which character movements occur that coincide with significant shifts in action, tone, and theme. In a sense, Apollonius gets to focus on a single location like a tragedian on a stage, but he gets to have multiple stages. His characters come together, separate, and assemble in different groupings and locations as befitting the action of a scene. In this way, movement within *Argonautica 3*, allows the work to behave like a tragedy while maintaining the freedom of movement afforded to an epic.

Bibliography:

Clauss, J. J., et al. *A Companion to Hellenistic Literature*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Levin, D. N. *Apollonius' Argonautica re-examined*. Brill Archive, 1971.

Köhnken, A. "Apollonius' Argonautica." *A Companion to Hellenistic Literature*, 2010: 136-150.

Hunter, R. L. *The Argonautica of Apollonius: Literary Studies*. Cambridge. 1993.

Thalmann, W. G. *Apollonius of Rhodes and the Spaces of Hellenism*. Oxford University Press,
2011.