

‘SHORT ON HEROICS’: JASON IN THE *ARGONAUTICA**

‘Jason ... chosen leader because his superior declines the honour, subordinate to his comrades, except once, in every trial of strength, skill, or courage, a great warrior only with the help of magical charms, jealous of honour but incapable of asserting it, passive in the face of crisis, timid and confused before trouble, tearful at insult, easily despondent, gracefully treacherous in his dealings with the love-sick Medea but cowering before her later threats and curses, coldly efficient in the time-serving murder of an unsuspecting child (*sic*), reluctant even in marriage.’ So Carspecken put the case against Jason’s heroism.¹ In the face of such an indictment, Lawall’s plea in mitigation, ‘it must be admitted that [Jason] often reveals the qualities of a true gentleman’, seems somehow inadequate.² Criticism since Carspecken has found various overlapping categories for Jason which both take account of the earlier negative judgements and preserve the centrality of his ‘personality’ and character in the poem: Jason is the quiet diplomat who works through consensus rather than force,³ his is a heroism of sex-appeal,⁴ he is an anti-hero,⁵ the embodiment of Sceptic ‘suspension of judgement’,⁶ or, alternatively, he is ‘one of us’, credible and lifelike.⁷

* I am indebted to members of the Cambridge Ancient Literature Seminar for much instructive criticism. The following works are cited by author and date only: C. R. Beye, *Epic and Romance in the Argonautica of Apollonius* (Carbondale, 1982); J. F. Carspecken, ‘Apollonius Rhodius and the Homeric Epic’, *YCS* 13 (1952), 33–143; H. Fränkel, ‘Ein Don Quijote unter den Argonauten des Apollonios’, *MH* 17 (1960), 1–20; id., *Noten zu den Argonautika des Apollonios* (Munich, 1968); M. Fusillo, *Il tempo delle Argonautiche* (Rome, 1985); R. L. Hunter, ‘Apollo and the Argonauts: Two Notes on Ap. Rhod. 2. 669–719’, *MH* 43 (1986), 50–60; id., ‘Medea’s Flight: the Fourth Book of the *Argonautica*’, *CQ* 37 (1987), 129–39; G. Lawall, ‘Apollonius’ *Argonautica*: Jason as Anti-Hero’, *YCS* 19 (1966), 119–69; F. Vian, ‘*ΙΗΣΩΝ* ‘*ΑΜΗΧΑΝΕΩΝ*’, *Studi in onore di Anthos Ardzizoni* (Rome, 1978), Vol. 2, pp. 1025–41. G. O. Hutchinson. *Hellenistic Poetry* (Oxford, 1988) appeared too late to be used in the preparation of this paper.

¹ Carspecken (1952), 101.

² Lawall (1966), 168 n.13.

³ E.g. Herter, *RE* Suppl. 13, 36; Vian (1978); G. Zanker, *Realism in Alexandrian Poetry* (London, 1987), pp. 202–3.

⁴ C. R. Beye, ‘Jason as Love-hero in Apollonios’ *Argonautika*’, *GRBS* 10 (1969), 31–55; this view was closely foreshadowed by A. Hübscher, *Die Charakteristik der Personen in Apollonios’ Argonautika* (diss. Freiburg i.d. Schweiz, 1940), pp. 22–3. Cf. J. K. Newman, *The Classical Epic Tradition* (Wisconsin, 1986), p. 76 ‘[Jason’s] heroism will smell of the boudoir’.

⁵ Lawall (1966); Fusillo (1985). Lawall’s article contains many acute observations, and it would be a pity if the very dated title deterred potential readers.

⁶ T. M. Klein, ‘Apollonius’ Jason: Hero and Scoundrel’, *QUCC* 13 (1983), 115–26 (and cf. already Beye [1982], 60). Klein’s interesting suggestion is, unfortunately, entirely improbable in the form in which he offers it. It is true that 1.1287–8 (on which see below p. 444), οὐδέ τι τοῖον ἔπος μετεφώνειν οὐδέ τι τοῖον | Αἰσωνίδης, may call to mind Sceptic ἐποχή, but Jason’s piety and propensity to despair (1.1286, 1288–9) would be anathema to a Sceptic sage: ἐποχή was supposed to lead to ἀταραξία, which is not Jason’s foremost quality. Jason’s attitude to the tasks imposed upon him (e.g. 3.386–95, 427–31) differs markedly from the unconcern of the Sceptic response, cf. M. Burnyeat in M. Schofield, M. Burnyeat and J. Barnes, *Doubt and Dogmatism* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 40–1. The value of Klein’s article, which despite its polemics, seems to develop an idea found at Lawall (1966), 149, lies in its attempt to tie the *Argonautica* to attested intellectual and social attitudes. However unsuccessful, this represents a considerable advance on vague generalising about ‘Hellenistic values’. There are, however, serious doubts whether a formal philosophy of Scepticism can be identified as early as the third century B.C.

⁷ Cf. Fränkel (1960), 1; Beye (1982), 79; Zanker, op. cit. (n. 3), p. 201.

Carspecken himself tried a different tack: the poem is concerned not with individual heroism but with the heroism of the group (cf. 1.1, 4.1773–81).⁸

Some of these approaches have, in varying degrees, made a real contribution to the understanding of aspects of the *Argonautica*, and most can claim some support from that part of the literary tradition used by Apollonius which survives to us. Thus, for example, already in Pindar Jason deals with Pelias in the ‘diplomatic’ manner which becomes familiar in Apollonius, ‘letting drip the soft words in his gentle voice, he laid a foundation of wise speech’ (*Pyth.* 4.136–8). In Euripides’ *Medea*, Jason’s opening words are a rejection of inflexibility (vv. 446–7, cf. 621–2), and he claims to have tried to soothe the rulers’ anger (vv. 455–6), just as in the *Argonautica* he has to calm Aietes down (*Arg.* 3.385–96). So too, the Euripidean Jason argues that marriage with a princess is the best way out of *συμφοραὶ ἀμήχανοι* (vv. 551–4), and such an attitude, which I for one would not label ‘cynical’, has seemed to many critics the basis of Jason’s dealings with Medea in the *Argonautica*.⁹

It is, nevertheless, difficult not to feel dissatisfied with modern assessments of Apollonius’ Jason. Much of what has been written is little more than a by-product of what now seems a rather old-fashioned kind of Virgilian criticism – the ‘Virgil is unhappy in his hero’ school – and it ignores both Aristotelian and modern warnings¹⁰ against the assumption that an epic must have a single ‘hero’ of extraordinary skills at its centre. Even where due acknowledgement has been given to the fact that Jason plainly shares the limelight with several of his colleagues, there is among modern critics a persistent (and indeed not unnatural) curiosity in Jason’s ‘psychology’. It is, for example, entirely typical when Hermann Fränkel writes of Jason’s behaviour after the loss of Heracles (cf. below p. 444): ‘For Jason, conscious of his responsibilities, the dilemma was insoluble, because the need to complete his great task was as powerful a force driving him forwards as the loyalty to his colleague which pulled him back. *But the reticent poet [der zurückhaltende Dichter] says nothing of this [my italics],* and here, as often, Apollonius’ Jason disappoints as the epic’s central figure.’¹¹ The belief that close study of what Apollonius chose not to say may grant us access to the workings of his characters’ minds, particularly Jason’s, which in turn will lead to an understanding of the narrative, has certainly resulted in a more sophisticated criticism than the simple assertions of Jason’s ‘credibility’, but the great variety of Jasons available in the modern literature ought perhaps to make us pause to consider the value of the method in general. Part II of this paper, therefore, considers the principal passages from the first half of the *Argonautica* around which the debate has centred, and Part III explores one of the patterns into which the story of Apollonius’ Jason certainly does fall; as Apollonian criticism must always begin with Homer, Part I offers a brief survey of the similarities and differences between the heroes of the archaic and the Hellenistic epic.

By way of preliminary, it may be useful to recall the Aristotelian position on dramatic character. Ancient literary criticism is, of course, a very limited guide to the ways in which we should approach ancient texts, but Aristotle’s belief in the very close relationship between epic and tragedy¹² at least makes his views of some interest here.

⁸ Carspecken (1952), 111–25.

⁹ On the links between the Euripidean and Apollonian Jasons cf. K. von Fritz, ‘Die Entwicklung der Iason–Medea–Sage und die Medea des Euripides’, *A&A* 8 (1959), 33–106 at pp. 66–71.

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. D. C. Feeney, ‘Epic Hero and Epic Fable’, *Comparative Literature* 38 (1986), 137–58.

¹¹ Fränkel (1960), 4 (my translation).

¹² Cf. S. Koster, *Antike Epos theorien* (Wiesbaden, 1970), pp. 51–72; J. C. Hogan, ‘Aristotle’s Criticism of Homer in the *Poetics*’, *CP* 68 (1973), 95–108; Halliwell (next note) p. 258.

For the sake of convenience I cite from Stephen Halliwell's recent study of the *Poetics*: 'Psychological inwardness is a major assumption in modern convictions about character, and this in turn leads to typical emphases on the uniqueness of the individual personality and on the potential complexities of access to the character of others. If character is thought of in strongly psychological terms, then the possibility readily arises that it may remain concealed in the inner life of the mind, or be only partially and perhaps deceptively revealed to the outer world; but, equally, that it may be glimpsed or intimated in various unintended or unconscious ways. Such ideas and possibilities, which find their quintessential literary embodiment in the novel... are by their very intricacy and indefiniteness the antithesis of the theory of dramatic character presented in the *Poetics*. ... [For Aristotle] character is most clearly realised in the deliberate framing of ethical intentions which Aristotle calls *prohairesis*... character is a specific moral factor in relation to action, not a vague or pervasive notion equivalent to modern ideas of personality or individuality... dramatic characterisation, to correspond to Aristotle's concept, must involve the *manifestation* of moral choice in word or action... when communicated through language, characterisation will take the form of declarations of decisions, intentions or motives... character [cannot] be obliquely indicated through any kind of speech'.¹³ The possible relevance of this summary to recent Apollonian criticism is immediately clear. Here, for example, is what Charles Beye has to say about Apollonius' main character: 'the emphasis now turns upon the inner life of the characters, that which is left unsaid. Jason now becomes deep, internal, and personal, as we know people to be. He is not public or emblematic. We have reached, in effect, the beginnings of the novel.'¹⁴ That Apollonius foreshadows later narrative genres has, indeed, become a critical commonplace,¹⁵ and one which I have no desire to upset. Nevertheless, it may be worth suggesting that criticism has now moved too far away from Aristotle's emphasis on what actually happens, on events whose pattern gives meaning to a work, rather than on the unifying power of a particular psychological portrait. The patterns which will here be particularly significant are, of course, those which both reflect and diverge from Homeric ones; it is the failure to keep these patterns in the centre of the argument which is largely responsible for much of the critical embarrassment which Apollonius' Jason has aroused.

I

The doubts and even despair to which Jason seems prone have close parallels in the Homeric epics. This obvious fact has been too often forgotten, and it deserved the restatement which it has recently received.¹⁶ Iliadic heroes are affected by fears and anguish just as strong as those which trouble the Argonauts (e.g. *Il.* 7.92-3, 9.9), and

¹³ S. Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (London, 1986), pp. 150-2, 156. Whether or not Apollonius was actually familiar with Aristotelian doctrine is relevant only as a matter of literary history. There may have been a copy of the *Poetics* in the Alexandrian library, cf. Diog. Laert. 5.24, a list which some scholars believe to go back to the library's inventory; I. Düring, *Aristoteles* (Heidelberg, 1966), pp. 36-7; R. Blum, *Kallimachos und die Literaturverzeichnis bei den Griechen* (Frankfurt, 1977), pp. 121-32.

¹⁴ Beye (1982), 24.

¹⁵ For the *Argonautica* as a precursor of later romance cf. R. Scholes and R. Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative* (New York, 1966), p. 67, A. Heiserman, *The Novel Before the Novel* (Chicago, 1977), pp. 11-40.

¹⁶ H. Lloyd-Jones, *SIFC* 77 (1984), 71; A. W. Bulloch in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature I* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 591.

the ἀμνηχανίη which strikes Odysseus and his comrades after the Cyclops' first bloody meal (*Od.* 9.295) matches closely the various shocks which the collective of Argonauts receives (cf. 2.408–10, 3.502–5, 4.1278–9). Odysseus' reaction (*Od.* 10.496–500) to Circe's proposal of a trip to the Underworld – 'my heart broke within me; I sat on the bed and wept, and I no longer wished to live and see the light of the sun. But when I had had my fill of weeping and rolling around, I replied' – is more overtly emotional than the group's reaction to Phineus' dread prophecies (2.408–10) or the reaction of both Jason and the Argonauts to the test which Aietes imposes (3.422–6, 502–4), but otherwise the scenes are closely comparable. These similarities between the two epics are, however, less important than two broad and major differences.

The tension within a warrior between his rôle as a defender of his community's security, for which the community rewards him with privileges, and his desire for personal glory is crucial to an understanding of the *Iliad* and has been particularly well analysed by James Redfield.¹⁷ Apollonius' heroes, however, are not bound to their communities in the same way as are the central heroes of the *Iliad*. The inhabitants of Iolcus do indeed come in large numbers to see them off (1.238–9, cf. 1.310) and take a certain pride in the expedition (1.244–5), but they see it largely as an inescapable πόνος (1.246). At the very most, the outcome of the expedition has real significance only for the family of the Aiolidai (cf. 2.1195, 3.339). In this context it is instructive to contrast the description in Thucydides 6 of the public departure of the Athenian fleet for Sicily, a passage which may have been in Apollonius' mind.¹⁸ The opening catalogue of Argonauts does make clear that the expedition carries representatives from all over Greece, and this 'Panachaeism' resurfaces briefly as Argos and Jason seek to win Aietes over (3.347, 391) and in the 'Greek v. barbarian' theme which runs through the fourth book. Nevertheless, only once does Jason appear to claim that the fortunes of Greece are intimately tied to the success of his enterprise.¹⁹ This passage, 4.195–205, describing Jason's speech to the crew on the point of departure from Colchis, will demand attention in another context (below p. 452), but here its relevance lies in its ambivalence:

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ἀτὰρ ὅμμες, Ἀχαιῖδος οἶά τε πάσης
αὐτῶν θ' ὑμείων ἐσθλὴν ἐπαρωγὸν εἶσαν,
σώετε· δὴ γάρ που μάλ', οἴομαι, εἶσιν ἐρύξων
Αἰήτης ὁμάδῳ πόντονδ' ἵμεν ἐκ ποταμοῖο.
ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν διὰ νηὸς ἀμοιβαδὶς ἀνέρος ἀνὴρ
ἐξόμενος πηδοῖσιν ἐρέσσετε, τοὶ δὲ βοείας
200
ἀσπίδας ἡμίσεες δῆλιων θοὸν ἔχμα βολάων
προσχόμενοι νόστῳ ἐπαμύνετε. νῦν δ' ἐνὶ χερσὶ
παῖδας ἐοὺς πάτρην τε φίλην γεραροῦς τε τοκῆας
ἰσχομεν· ἡμετέρῃ δ' ἐπερείδεται Ἑλλὰς ἐφορμῇ
205
ἢ ἐκατηφείην ἢ καὶ μέγα κύδος ἀρῆσθαι.

But do you protect her [Medea], as being the benefactor of all of Achaia and of you yourselves; for I have no doubt that Aietes will come in full force to prevent you passing from the river to the open sea. But all along the ship divide yourselves in two, and let one half sit and row, while the other half holds their ox-hide shields over them, a secure protection against enemy missiles, to protect our return. Now we have in our hands our children and our beloved native country

¹⁷ *Nature and Culture in the Iliad* (Chicago, 1975), pp. 100–1.

¹⁸ Thucyd. 6.30–2, esp. 30.2. Similarities of language and idea could, of course, simply arise from the similar situations. If, however, we are to think of the Sicilian expedition, then the omens are not good for Jason.

¹⁹ Jason does, however, toy with these ideas as he seeks to win over Medea, cf. 3.990–6, 1122–7.

and our aged parents; upon the success of our raid²⁰ depends whether Hellas will know dejection or win great glory.

Jason, the foreign raider who has snatched both the king's daughter and his favourite possession, adopts the rhetorical pose of the defender of a position against invasion – cf. *Il.* 15.494–9 (Hector), 15.661–6 (Nestor encouraging the Greeks in their defence of the ships), Aesch. *Pers.* 403–5 (the Athenians at Salamis) – as a prelude, not to stalwart defence,²¹ but to hasty flight. So too, Jason's donning of armour (4.206), which follows this speech, is modelled on Odysseus' entirely pointless arming before the meeting with Scylla (*Od.* 12.226–30).²² Both the literary history of the verses and the uniqueness of their tone within the *Argonautica* thus make problematic the status of Jason's assertion that much is riding on their success, as far as Hellas is concerned. These verses do, however, look forward to the rest of Book 4 and to the future history of Jason and Medea. From the opening invocation to the Muse to tell of how 'the Colchian maiden' came to leave 'the land of the Colchians' Book 4 is heavy with Jason's closing theme of Greek v. Barbarian, and Jason's words here are in part a bitterly ironical foreshadowing of the supremacy of Greece which the Euripidean Jason throws in Medea's face (vv. 536–8, 1330–1, 1339); so too, his stress immediately before this passage on Medea's responsibility for the Argonauts' achievements (4.191–3) must be read against *Medea* 526–33, where Jason proclaims Aphrodite to have been primarily responsible for his success. Beyond these resonances, however, these verses, by recalling the tone and manner of archaic and classical poetry, clearly mark the difference between Jason's enterprise and the tasks faced in the Homeric poems and the difference in the social context of the two heroic narratives.²³

Even the personal glory for which a Homeric warrior can hope is offered to the Argonauts only very conditionally. Failure will here lead only to a miserable and unsung death, where there will be no *kleos* to alleviate oblivion (2.889–93, 4.1305–7, cf. 4.401–3); anything less than safe return with the Fleece would be as if they had never set out. The subordination of all else in this extremely rich poem to this single obsessive end is a striking departure from the structural organisation of the Homeric poems. In a particularly desperate moment at the start of their Libyan adventures, the Argonauts wish that they had died 'while attempting some great exploit' (4.1255), like Hector before his final fight with Achilles (*Il.* 22.304–5), but, unlike Hector, they will not be offered the opportunity to do so. This passage in the fourth book is particularly instructive. The deadly calm which traps the Argonauts in the wastes of the Libyan Syrtis is a reworking and reversal of the storm which destroys Odysseus' raft in *Odyssey* 5; the Libyan *ἡρώσσαι* who came to Jason's aid out of pity correspond to Leucothoe in the *Odyssey*.²⁴ As the divinely constructed *Argo* cannot perish in the

²⁰ Vian, *note complémentaire* to 4.205, makes rather too much of *ἐφορμή*; 'military incursion' and 'enterprise' can scarcely be distinguished when the latter consists of the former. If Vian's punctuation is correct at 4.148, we should perhaps there consider *ἀφορμήν* for *ἐφορμήν*.

²¹ In the version of Dionysios Scytobrachion, the Argonauts and the Colchians did fight in Colchis (cf. *Σ Arg.* 4.223–30, Diod. Sic. 4.48.4–5 = fr. 28–9 Rusten).

²² The motif of slashed mooring-ropes is taken from Odysseus' hasty escape from the Laistrygonians (*Od.* 10.126–7). It is noteworthy that Valerius Flaccus chooses to use the motif more 'heroically', at the start of the expedition (1.487–9).

²³ There are some good remarks in the note on 4.190–205 at pp. 553–4 of the edition [Milan, 1986] by G. Paduano and M. Fusillo.

²⁴ 4.1308 *ἐλέηραν* ~ *Od.* 5.336 *ἐλέησεν*. Both divine speeches begin with *κάμμορε τίπτ'* (4.1318, *Od.* 5.339).

waves (cf. 2.611–14), a death of quite another kind is made to threaten the crew.²⁵ Whereas Odysseus in the storm regrets that he did not win *kleos* by dying gloriously in battle, the Argonauts wish for what amounts to death by shipwreck, a wish made particularly ironic by our knowledge that the Symplegades would have posed no threat on the return journey and that their wish would therefore not have been granted (cf. 2.604–6). Here then the gulf between Apollonius' characters and those of Homer is particularly marked.

The second important departure from Homer lies in the relationship between Jason and the other Argonauts, which is obviously and crucially different from that between Odysseus and his crew. The modern *cliché* that Jason is *primus inter pares* is an unsatisfactory half-truth, but the hierarchical organisation of the two voyages is certainly quite different. Odysseus is happy to be less than frank with his men (*Od.* 12.223–5) and, despite his grief at their plight, he is content to make love with Circe while his comrades are still in the pig-pen (*Od.* 10.336–47). An exchange such as *Od.* 9.491ff., where the crew seeks to restrain Odysseus from taunting the Cyclops, is as inconceivable in the *Argonautica* as *Arg.* 2.622–37, in which Jason bitterly reveals the crushing weight of responsibility which he feels for getting the Argonauts home safely (cf. below pp. 445–7), would be in the *Odyssey*. It is striking that in Book 4 no Argonaut explicitly argues that Jason should abandon Medea, although the pact with the Colchians at 4.338ff. – however one interprets it – certainly exploits the motif,²⁶ or criticises the killing of Apsyrtos; this apparently 'natural' possibility was not lost on the author of the later *Orphic Argonautica* where the crew is prevented from throwing Medea to the fishes only by Jason's earnest entreaties (vv. 1170–7). Whereas Odysseus' cunning and capacity for endurance strongly differentiate him from his largely anonymous crew, Jason, often ἀμήχανος rather than πολυμήχανος, is marked by the absence of extraordinary intelligence and the supernatural skills enjoyed by some of the most prominent Argonauts (Heracles, the Boreads, Peleus, Lynceus, Orpheus). Jason does come into powerful conflict with two of his companions, Telamon and Idas, but the communal solidarity and mutual interdependence of the whole crew (cf. the lion simile of 4.1337–44) is a striking and familiar phenomenon, perhaps best expressed by Jason's words as they sit concealed in the Colchian marshes (3.171–5):

ὦ φίλοι, ἥτοι ἐγὼ μὲν ὁ μοι ἐπιανδάνει αὐτῶι
ἐξερέω, τοῦ δ' ὅμμι τέλος κρηῆναι ἔοικε.
ξυνὴ γὰρ χρεῖώ, ξυνοὶ δέ τε μῦθοι ἔασι
πᾶσιν ὁμῶς· ὁ δὲ σῖγα νόον βουλὴν τ' ἀπερύκων
ἴστω καὶ νόστου τόνδε στόλον οἷος ἀπούρας.

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Friends, I shall tell you the plan which I myself favour, but it is for you to give it your assent; for common is our need, and common to all the right to speak. Let him who holds back his view and counsel in silence know that he alone deprives this expedition of its safe return.

The plan which Jason subsequently proposes reworks Odysseus' words to his men at the start of the Cyclops episode (*Od.* 9.172–6) and his praise of the power of μῦθος (3.188–90) associates him with Odyssean virtues, but whereas Odysseus gives orders (ἐκέλευσα) and the reaction of his crew is not described, Jason's proposal is greeted with universal agreement (3.194–5). To find a Homeric parallel to this assembly in *Argonautica* 3 it is better to look to the opening of *Iliad* 14 where the depressed leaders

²⁵ There is a rather similar effect at Lucan 5.424–60 where Caesar's ships are becalmed (cf. 455, *naufragii spes omnis abit*).

²⁶ Medea, of course, has her own fears about the Argonauts' plans; for Jason's speech at 4.395–409 cf. Hunter (1987), 130–1.

of the Greek army hold a council.²⁷ Agamemnon suggests preparations for flight by night as preferable to staying around to be caught up in a disaster. For this he is reproved by Odysseus, and he then (vv. 105–6) says that he will not force the Greeks to carry out his plan against their wishes and he invites suggestions from both young and old for a better plan (ἀμείνονα μῆτιν), whereupon Diomedes offers just such an improvement. Agamemnon's appeal to democracy is a result of a confused and panicky despair; Jason says nothing that has not been said before (cf. 1.336–7), and his statement precedes, rather than follows, his own suggestion for action. For him, it is better to rely on πολέων μῆτις (4.1336) than on one πολύμητις individual.

II

When the Argonauts come to select their leader (1.331–62), Jason, 'wishing what was best for them (ἐυφρονέων)',²⁸ stresses the common task ahead of them and urges them to choose ὁ ἄριστος to lead them, regardless of anything else. Heracles is chosen instantly – who else could be ὁ ἄριστος (cf. 1.1285)? – but he refuses and imposes the election of Jason. 'Warlike' (ἀρήιος) Jason accepts 'joyfully'. Clearly there is more at stake here than merely the acknowledgement and rejection of a version in which Heracles was the leader of the expedition,²⁹ and critics have very variously interpreted his behaviour. Vian's remarks are not untypical: 'Jason is in no way diminished [by the scene]. He knows that, whether he likes it or not, the leadership falls to him, but he is at the same time aware of his inferiority to Heracles ... Heracles' voluntary withdrawal fills him with joy because it re-establishes the natural order without upsetting anyone's sensibilities',³⁰ and '[Jason offers Heracles the leadership] through sincere deference and diplomacy, in the hope that Heracles will refuse it'.³¹ Here again what the poet has chosen not to say is invoked to explain the narrative (cf. above p. 437). Equally unsatisfactory is what may be termed the 'straight-forwardly ironical' reading of the scene – Jason enters as a 'hero' (the Apollo simile of 1.307–11) but is immediately shown up and embarrassed, his weakness revealed by the almost parodic epithet 'warlike'.³² Such a reading appeals to modern sentiment, and does indeed show us one layer of the text's meaning, but it is hard to think of any Greek hero (Homeric or Apollonian) who would not be 'shown up' when matched against Heracles. Rather, it is, as often, Homer who provides the starting-point from which we should read this scene.

Jason's speech, with its stress on the responsibilities of the leader to the group as a whole, suggests why the expedition could not be led by Heracles, a hero of notoriously solitary and idiosyncratic virtue.³³ Jason is indeed ὁ ἄριστος, if *arete* consists in the possession of appropriate qualities for a particular task and involves notions of what is fitting in a particular context. Such a view clearly reflects upon a

²⁷ On this scene cf. M. Schofield, 'Euboulia in the *Iliad*', *CQ* 36 (1986), 6–31, at pp. 23–5.

²⁸ This word has caused considerable bother, cf. Vian (1978), 1028–9, M. Fantuzzi, *Materiali e Discussioni* 13 (1984), 94–5, but its 'surface meaning' seems quite appropriate here.

²⁹ As in Dionysios Scytobrachion, cf. Diod. Sic. 4.41.3, Apollodorus 1.9.19, J. S. Rusten, *Dionysius Scytobrachion* (Papyrologica Coloniensia X, 1982), pp. 96–7. In Antimachus' *Lyde* Heracles did not go because he was too heavy for the *Argo* (fr. 58 Wyss = *Σ Arg.* 1.1289).

³⁰ *Gnomon* 46 (1974), 349.

³¹ Vian (1978), 1028–9.

³² Cf. e.g. Beye (1982), 31, 82–3. Jason is also 'warlike' at 2.122 (the battle with the Bebrycians), and cf. the simile of the ἀρήιος ἵππος at 3.1259–61.

³³ For Heracles in the *Argonautica* cf. D. C. Feeney, 'Following after Hercules, in Virgil and Apollonius', *PVS* 18 (1986), 47–85.

major aspect of the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles in *Iliad* 1, a quarrel which, in one important sense at least, is about who is to 'lead' the Achaean army; the aspect in question is, of course, the problem of who has the right to the title *ἄριστος*.³⁴ In the *Iliad* Nestor seeks to calm tempers by refusing to grant anyone this title – Agamemnon is merely *ἀγαθός* and *φέρτερος* (*Il.* 1.275, 281) – and by appealing to Agamemnon to respect Achilles' prize and to Achilles to give way before the greater *τιμή* due to a king whose power was more extensive. The Apollonian Heracles, more effective and less wordy than Nestor, similarly bases his instruction not on a strict hierarchy of absolute worth but on a recognition of what is fitting and appropriate. Whether Apollonius was influenced by scholarly discussion of the ethical issues raised by the Homeric quarrel we do not know, although this quarrel is important again later in *Arg.* 1, again in connection with Heracles (below p. 444). What is clear, however, is that Apollonius structures his narrative so as to offer a 'reading' of a famous Homeric scene which in turn can help us to understand what is going on in the *Argonautica*. The relationship between Jason and Heracles is not the same as that between Agamemnon and Achilles, but only by calling attention to the similarities can the poet stress the differences.

Before setting out, the Argonauts pass the night in feasting on the shore (1.450–9). Not all is well, however, as Idmon has just prophesied both their successful return after 'countless trials' and his own death.³⁵ During the symposium 'the son of Aison, quite self-absorbed (*ἄμύχανος*), was pondering on everything, looking like one depressed (*κατηφιόωντι ἐοικώς*)'. At this Idas accuses him of plotting in secret or of being afraid and he delivers a proud and blasphemous speech which leads to a nasty quarrel with Idmon. 'Self-absorbed' is Fränkel's interpretation of *ἄμύχανος* here,³⁶ whereas Vian believes that Jason, the *φιλόανθρωπος par excellence*, feels anguish in the face of Idmon's now certain death.³⁷ The structure of the passage, in which the passing of time since Idmon's prophecy is stressed (1.450–2), makes Vian's view improbable, and Fränkel rightly points to the echo of Jason's remarks on the duties of the leader at 1.339–40 (*ὥι κεν τὰ ἕκαστα μέλοιτο*) and to the further use of this motif at 2.631–3 (on which cf. below p. 445). However that may be, Idas himself is unsure how to interpret Jason's demeanour, and Idmon's words at 1.479–80, 'there are other consoling words with which a man might encourage a comrade', would, if anything, seem to confirm, rather than weaken, Idas' suspicions.

Fränkel argues that Jason was not depressed, he just looked like it. Appearances can, of course, deceive, but they need not do so, and this is what is crucial here. Appearances give no access to truth: you cannot tell with certainty what someone is thinking or what his or her mood is from their facial expression. In particular, *ἐοικώς* and related words are frequently used in literary descriptions of representations in works of art;³⁸ just as in life actions do not necessarily reveal motives, so in literature we may need privileged, authorial information to help us to interpret action or, in Jason's case, non-action. If a poet refuses to provide that information, he places us in the position of viewers of a painted scene and forces us to confront the very fragile basis upon which interpretations of mood and motive are made. In the present case a useful comparison may be made with *Aeneid* 1.208–9. After Aeneas' speech of

³⁴ Cf. *Il.* 1.91, 244, 412.

³⁵ Idmon's decision to follow the expedition probably picks up the story of the prophet's son Euchenor at *Iliad* 13.663–72 rather than Achilles' 'death and glory' choice.

³⁶ Fränkel (1968), 75.

³⁷ Vian (1978), 1037.

³⁸ Cf. 1.739, 764, Theocr. 1.41.

encouragement to his shipwrecked comrades, Virgil informs us that the hero's words did not match his real mood:

talìa uoce refert curisque ingentibus aeger
spem uultu simulat, premit altum corde dolorem.

This is precisely the kind of guidance which, time and time again, we look for in vain in the *Argonautica*. I have argued elsewhere that such considerations are important in assessing the relationship in Book 4 between Medea and Jason,³⁹ and I believe that Apollonius' persistent discretion in this matter is in large measure responsible for the critical confusion over Jason which reigns in the modern literature.

When the Argonauts discover that they have left Heracles behind, a fierce argument breaks out on board (1.1280–6). The exact terms of the quarrel are not given to us, and we are probably to imagine confused uproar and recrimination (cf. *κολωϊός*, 1.1284), involving both the reasons for Heracles' abandonment and the course of action which they should now follow. Jason, however, 'helpless and despairing (*ἀμηχανίῃσιν ἀτυχθείς*) said neither one thing nor the other, but he sat deeply crushed by the grim disaster, eating his heart' (1.1286–9). Jason's despair after the loss of the greatest hero requires no special explanation, although even here psychological criticism has been at work.⁴⁰ When Telamon then quarrels with Jason, we know that the former's assertion that Jason was behind the abandonment of Heracles is wrong (cf. 1.1274–5), but Telamon speaks in the irrationality of anger, like Achilles in *Iliad* 1, and his eyes blaze (1.1296–7) like those of Agamemnon in the same scene (*Il.* 1.103–4).⁴¹ The Boreads restrain his impulse to violent action, as Athena restrains Achilles. These comparisons are not idle, as the scene of reconciliation between Telamon and Jason (1.1329–44) exploits motifs from the Iliadic quarrel in a complex intertextual pattern. Like Agamemnon (*Il.* 9.115–20, 19.88–9, 136–7), Telamon confesses to *ἄτη*,⁴² although he does not bring the gods into his defence, relying instead on a confession that he acted under the emotion of grief. Jason's declaration, 'I shall not nurse a bitter wrath (*μῆνιν*) against you, though I was previously pained, since it was not for flocks of sheep nor for possessions (*κτεάτεσσιν*) that you raged in your anger, but for a comrade' (1.1339–43), looks to the theme of the *μῆνις* as a whole,⁴³ to Achilles' renunciation of it in particular, 'but now I have put an end to my anger, nor should I rage ceaselessly forever' (*Il.* 19.67–8), to the pattern of Achilles' relations with Patroclus, to Achilles' taunt to Agamemnon as *φιλοκτεανώτατε πάντων* (*Il.* 1.122), and to his regret that they had 'raged in spirit-devouring strife because of a girl' (*Il.* 19.58). So too, the Iliadic quarrel caused the temporary loss to the Greeks of the 'best of the Achaeans' (*Il.* 1.244 etc., cf. above p. 442), just as Telamon's anger is roused by a similar loss to the Argonauts.

In this scene, therefore, the relationship between Apollonian characters is displayed through a reworking of Iliadic motifs which stresses the Argonautic virtues of loyalty

³⁹ Hunter (1987), 130–1, 138.

⁴⁰ Cf. Vian on 1288, 'il sait qu'Héracles n'a pas été victime d'un complot, mais ne peut expliquer son absence que par quelque obscur dessein des dieux. Son *ἀμηχανίη* est une preuve de lucidité et non un signe d'incapacité'. In as much as such things can be determined, this seems to me incredible; *ἄτη* (1288) need not point to the intervention of the divine.

⁴¹ Cf., in general, L. Graz, *Le feu dans l'Iliade et l'Odyssée* (Paris, 1965), pp. 240–7.

⁴² *ἀφραδίῃσιν* (1332) is the same idea as the second part of Agamemnon's statement, *ἐπεὶ ἀσάμην καὶ μὲν φρένας ἐξείλετο Ζεὺς* (*Il.* 19.137).

⁴³ This much is recognised by Beye (1982), 87. I do not, however, see why Jason's answer to Telamon is 'highly ironical', nor does *Il.* 22.159–61 which Beye adduces seem particularly relevant.

and solidarity rather than the highly personal Iliadic emotions. Our attention is also directed to the Homeric details which Apollonius has omitted: nothing remains of the *Iliad*'s great stress on the gifts of compensation which constitute a visible sign of apology and acknowledgement of wrong, and this too tells us much about the society of Argonauts. In as much as Jason and Telamon behave both like and unlike Agamemnon and Achilles we can, for what it is worth, be said to learn about their 'characters'. What we cannot say is that revelation of 'character' is the dominant motive of the scene: the pattern of action in relation to Homer is what gives the scene its meaning.

Similar considerations apply to the famous scene of the *peira*, 2.610ff. After the Clashing Rocks have been safely passed, the steersman Tiphys delivers a speech full of optimism, reminding the crew both of divine favour for the expedition and of Phineus' prophecy. Jason replies, however, *μειλιχίους ἐπέεσσι παραβλήδην*, that he should have refused to come on the expedition, that he is weighed down by the cares and responsibilities of leadership and that they are surrounded by hostile forces. After this speech the poet tells us that Jason had spoken 'testing the heroes', *ἀριστήων πειρώμενος*. The heroes in fact shout encouragement, and 'Jason's heart within him warmed as they urged him' and he in turn echoes Tiphys' encouragement. Nothing further is said about Jason's attitude. This strange scene has been variously handled by modern critics: perhaps the only point not in dispute is that the scene has some connection with Agamemnon's *peira* in *Iliad* 2, and this is clearly where discussion should start.

Agamemnon's almost disastrous testing of his troops comes at a starting-point, before the *Catalogue of Ships*, at what is the beginning of the poetic war (despite the unsung nine years which have preceded). So too, the passing of the Clashing Rocks marks the end of the major dangers of the outward journey and the beginning of the Colchian section of the poem.⁴⁴ This sense of a new beginning is reinforced by echoes and reversals of two scenes which preceded the departure of the *Argo*. Jason's despairing speech picks up his mother's distressed words at his parting (1.278–82, cf. 2.624–6): where Jason before offered comfort, he now rejects consolation (1.266, 294–305 *μειλιχίους ἐπέεσσι παρηγορέων προσέειπε*, 2.621–2 *μειλιχίους ἐπέεσσι παραβλήδην προσέειπε* · *Τίφυ, τί μοι ταῦτα παρηγορέεις ἀχέοντι*;) and is forced, like his mother, to lament his *ate* (1.290, 2.623). Secondly, the *peira* recalls Jason's election as leader: here, as there, he stresses the responsibilities of power (1.339, 2.631–7), responsibilities which will not allow him to sleep, unlike Agamemnon who was reproved by the dream for sleeping too much (*Il.* 2.23–5); here he laments the loneliness of power, there he declared the solidarity of the group (1.336–7), and the affirmation of loyalty and support which he receives here is a kind of confirmation of the command which was entrusted to him then. It is, moreover, clear that Tiphys' confident words correspond in some degree to the comforting but deceptive dream which Zeus sends to Agamemnon, but Jason's reaction seems more problematic, if no less peculiar, than Agamemnon's. Before considering what explicit guidance Apollonius gives us here, two further aspects of the scene and its Homeric model deserve comment.

The first and last parts of Agamemnon's *peira* speech in *Iliad* 2 are repeated to the Greek leaders at the beginning of *Iliad* 9 (9.17–28): for Agamemnon, the disaster

⁴⁴ Cf. Hunter (1986), 50. Such considerations are ignored by those who find the timing of the *peira* absurd, cf. e.g. P. Händel, *Beobachtungen zur epischen Technik des Apollonios Rhodios* (Munich, 1954), pp. 68–9.

envisaged in the earlier speech of deception has come true. It is interesting that the bT-scholia on 9.17 interpret this second speech as a further *peira*, on the grounds that the reaction of Agamemnon and Nestor to Diomedes' taunts differs so much from the reactions provoked by Achilles in Book 1. That Apollonius has *Iliad* 9 as well as *Iliad* 2 in mind is suggested by the reaction of the Argonauts to Jason's speech (2.638–9, cf. *Il.* 9.50–1 and contrast 9.29–30), and the observation in the scholia both reminds us that Homeric speeches can raise interpretative problems just as acute as Apollonian ones and suggests that if Apollonius is deliberately setting us such a problem, he may not have seen the technique as so radical a departure from Homer as it may appear to us. Secondly, there is the actual substance of Jason's speech. His opening confession of *ate* derives, of course, from the *peira* of Agamemnon (*Il.* 2.111, cf. 9.18), but whereas Agamemnon proposed the abandonment of the expedition and a return to Greece, Jason has nothing at all to offer. His statement that he should have refused to accede to Pelias' command 'even if it meant a pitiless death, my body broken limb from limb' (2.625–6) is remarkably and, for Jason, uniquely physical. Critics have tended to pass over this remark in silence, perhaps because it does not seem to fit with the prevailing picture of the diplomatic Jason. Partly this strange remark may be a pointer to the problematic nature of the whole speech, but partly also, at this turning-point in the narrative, the poet looks forward to an even greater *ate* (cf. 4.449), the dismemberment of the young Apsyrtos – a version of the myth which the *Argonautica* will in fact avoid. The safe return to Greece for which Jason craves (2.637) was in most versions of the myth bought at a price like that for which Jason was prepared to pass up the whole expedition.⁴⁵ These two explanations are, of course, not mutually exclusive, and they do not preclude an attempt to understand what is going on inside Jason's mind. According to Fränkel, for example, Jason is indeed careworn with the worries of leadership, although not quite as worried as the speech suggests. The speech is thus both deceptive and truthful.⁴⁶ If so, however, it is also remarkably inept. The contrast between the personal worries of an individual and the greater worries on behalf of the collective which weigh upon a leader (2.633–7) is familiar enough,⁴⁷ but the helmsman, who is responsible for everybody's safe voyage, seems the very least suitable person to charge with such selfishness. Not long afterwards, in fact, Tiphys' death leads the crew to despair that they will ever return safely (2.862–3, below pp. 447–8). The patent inappropriateness of Jason's words thus points, as does his savage expression of regret which has just preceded, to the problematic nature of the speech.

μειλίχια ἔπεα are usually words of comfort, calming words.⁴⁸ Naturally enough, such words need not convey the whole truth, being rather designed to create a certain effect in the hearer.⁴⁹ *μειλίχια ἔπεα* also occur where 'soothing words' is not really an appropriate meaning,⁵⁰ but there seems to be no context remotely like the present one. What then of *παραβλήδην*? This normally seems to mean no more than 'in reply', but 'deceitfully' is certainly a possible sense (cf. Σ^{bT} *Il.* 4.6) which Apollonius

⁴⁵ That Apollonius in fact uses a different account of Apsyrtos' death does not seriously affect the argument: it is a familiar Apollonian technique to exploit readers' knowledge of rejected versions of the myth, cf. Fusillo (1985), *passim*. ⁴⁶ Fränkel (1968), 217.

⁴⁷ Cf. esp. Soph. *OT* 62–4.

⁴⁸ Cf. 1.294, 3.319, 385, 4.394, 1317, 1431.

⁴⁹ Cf. 3.14–15 where Hera rejects the possibility that the Argonauts could make Aietes give them the Fleece, *ἐπέεσσιν παραιφάμενοι... μειλιχίους*. The participle there may, but need not, imply deceit. Cf. also 4.394, where the exact status of Jason's following speech remains a problem for both Medea and us (Hunter [1987], 131).

⁵⁰ Cf. 2.467, 3.31, 4.732.

may have used at least once elsewhere.⁵¹ Moreover, only once elsewhere do *μειλίχια* and *παραβλήδην* appear together. At 3.1079ff. Jason, affected by 'deadly love', speaks *παραβλήδην* to Medea; at the conclusion of the speech we are told that he had spoken *μειλιχίοισι καταψήχων δάροισι*. That speech begins with a promise that Jason will never forget Medea and concludes with some rather novel mythology about both Minyas and Ariadne; it is, therefore, anything but straightforwardly 'true'. We may conclude that, in the *peira* scene, the poet directs our attention to what is most important about Jason's speech – its relationship to 'truth' – but sets us a puzzle by choosing such an ambivalent introduction for it. Only after the speech do we seem to have a surer hold. Jason spoke 'making trial of the heroes',⁵² which does not necessarily imply that the speech was intended to deceive, but certainly does place us in the context of *Iliad* 2. Jason then responds *ἐπιρρήδην* after the crew's encouragement has warmed his heart. At 2.847 this adverb must mean 'by title, by name', but the scholia on 2.640 have various attempts at it – *φανερώτερον*, *παρρησιαστικώτερον*, *οίονει ἀναφανδόν*, *διαρρήδην*. The comparatives rightly suggest a contrast with *παραβλήδην*, and indeed the later word, apparently meaning 'openly, straightforwardly', must be intended to suggest by contrast a meaning for the earlier. Nevertheless, *ἐπιρρήδην* is itself rare enough to make its use here noteworthy, and it has been chosen, I think, because the 'semantic centre' of this whole episode is not 'the characterisation of Jason',⁵³ but rather the whole problem of how to interpret a speech or how to move from what a character says to the 'meaning' behind it. For this purpose Agamemnon's *peira* provided the classic poetic model. To a large extent, we confront Jason's speech as his hearers do, and we must make of it what we can.

The death of Tiphys, following so soon after the loss of Idmon, causes general despair and loss of belief in a safe return (2.851–63). As at other crucial points, Hera intervenes (like the *ἡρώσσαι* in the Libyan desert), here by giving Ancaios, a son of Poseidon, the courage to speak to Peleus. Ancaios observes that both he and others on board are quite capable of steering the ship, so they should get on with the job; like Jason after the crew's reaction to the *peira* speech, Peleus is greatly cheered by this positive spirit and he addresses the crew openly, basically repeating the substance of Ancaios' speech, but making no actual proposal for a new helmsman. Jason, *ἀμνηχανέων*, replies that the potential helmsmen around him are more depressed than he himself is and he prophesies a miserable fate for them, wasting away where they are, bereft of *kleos*. At this, four Argonauts, including Ancaios, offer themselves as steersmen, and Ancaios is duly chosen. Fränkel⁵⁴ and Vian⁵⁵ have taken a similar view of this scene, which may be summarised as follows: the episode is designed as an illustration of Argonautic *homonoia*; Ancaios approaches Peleus, who is not a possible rival for the job, out of a sense of tact. Jason does not wish to impose a choice among the many possible candidates, so he delivers a speech full of sarcasm and depression in order to prick the *amour-propre* of potential steersmen. The ploy succeeds, and both the expedition and its democratic structures are preserved. The episode would thus be in

⁵¹ 3.107, though the interpretation there is disputed, cf. M. Campbell, *Studies in the Third Book of Apollonius Rhodius' Argonautica* (Hildesheim, 1983), pp. 16–17.

⁵² Fränkel (1968), 214–15 argues strongly for the meaning 'provoking (a certain reaction)' rather than 'testing'; as Fränkel himself admits, however, the distinction is not a sharp one, and the traditional interpretation seems protected by the echo of *Iliad* 2.

⁵³ Paduano–Fusillo on 2.638–40. For *ἐπιρρήδην* cf. Arat. *Phaen.* 261; at *Phaen.* 191 the meaning is doubtful, but Mair's 'expressly' seems close to what is required.

⁵⁴ Fränkel (1968), 240–4; this view is rejected by Paduano–Fusillo on 2.885–93.

⁵⁵ Vian (1978), 1031, cf. *note complémentaire* to 2.885 and *Gnomon* 46 (1974), 349.

some ways comparable – though Fränkel and Vian do not make the comparison – to the scene among the Greeks after Hector has issued his challenge in *Iliad* 7. When no Greek responds to the challenge, Menelaos abuses them as effeminate cowards lacking in *kleos*, and he starts to arm himself for the duel; Agamemnon, however, restrains him and, after a lengthy intervention from Nestor, a number of Greek champions present themselves (*Il.* 7.92–169). The central difference between the two scenes is the crucial ἀμυχανέων in 2.885, quite different from the Homeric δνειδίζων describing Menelaos. Fränkel and Vian deal with this word in different ways. Both agree that Jason is here not ‘resourceless’; for Fränkel ἀμυχανέων is therefore a corruption of, *exempli gratia*, ἀμύχανος ὤς, whereas Vian understands the word to refer to Jason’s embarrassment before the delicate task of choosing between rival candidates.

With many details of this reading I would not disagree, but the emphasis seems misplaced. The loss of Tiphys, who safely negotiated the *Argo* through the Clashing Rocks, is clearly a crushing blow; though he was elected to his position (1.400–1), there was never any real doubt about the choice (cf. 1.105–10, 381–3). The strength of Jason’s despair, like his very positive attitude at 2.641–7, we recognise as similar to the sharp highs and lows of Homeric emotion, notably the fluctuations in Agamemnon’s mood. Whether such despair is consonant with our idea of what a leader should be is of no relevance here. Crucial to the scene is Hera’s intervention, and it is on the indirect nature of divine action – not really all that different from various interventions of Homeric gods – that the poet’s interest is here centred. This mistaken emphasis in the reading of Fränkel and Vian derives again from the modern concern with the behaviour of a central hero, rather than with a pattern of events.

III

It is well known that Jason’s story has strong similarities with myths relating to other young heroes who undergo terrible ordeals before claiming their rightful place in adult society. Three heroes demand particular notice because Apollonius draws explicit attention to them.

Aietes’ fire-breathing bulls are described (3.231) with an echo of the Homeric Chimaira, δεινὸν ἀποπνέουσα πυρὸς μένος αἰθομένοιο (*Il.* 6.182). The myth of the Chimaira, as told in *Iliad* 6, has interesting links with Jason’s story. Proteus sends the handsome Bellerophon to his father-in-law (Iobates), the king of Lycia, with letters which will ensure the young man’s destruction; Proteus, like Pelias, thus hopes to remove a better man from his kingdom, as well as to punish Bellerophon for the alleged outrage against his wife. Iobates receives Bellerophon hospitably (cf. Aietes at 3.299–316), but after reading the treacherous letter he devises a series of trials for the young man which he is not expected to survive. The Chimaira – the ‘equivalent’ of Aietes’ bulls – is one such test; another is the defeat of two hostile tribes, the Solymoi and the Amazons. At 3.352–3 Argos tells Aietes that Jason will subjugate one of his enemies, the Sauromatai (Sarmatians), as a *quid pro quo* for the return of the Fleece. It is noteworthy that this tribe was said to be descended from the Amazons and to retain certain Amazon characteristics.⁵⁶ Argos’ offer may reflect a version of the saga in which the defeat of this tribe by the Argonauts was a condition imposed by Aietes, like the war enjoined on Bellerophon by Iobates. When Bellerophon

⁵⁶ Cf. Hdt. 4.110–17, Hippocr. *Aer.* 17, Pl. *Laws* 7.804e–5a, J. Harmatta, *Studies in the History and Language of the Sarmatians* (Szeged, 1970).

successfully completed his tasks, the king gave him half the kingdom and one of his daughters in marriage; Jason will get both daughter and Fleece, though not with the king's consent.

The murder of Apsyrtos is compared to that of Agamemnon by Clytemnestra and Aigisthos at 4.468, 'like a slaughterer kills a great horned bull', which reworks *Od.* 4.535 (= 11.411) 'as someone kills an ox at its stall'. It is not, however, Aigisthos whom Jason closely recalls, but rather Orestes. Euripides has Orestes kill Aigisthos while the latter is sacrificing to the Nymphs, thus himself becoming the sacrificial victim, in a description (*El.* 839–43) which is very like Apollonius' account of the death of Apsyrtos, struck down like a sacrificial bull⁵⁷ in the shrine of Artemis. Both Orestes and Jason must receive purification for their actions by having the blood 'washed off';⁵⁸ the patterns are certainly very alike, although the killing of the usurper Pelias is more clearly divorced from the death of Apsyrtos than the death of Aigisthos is from that of Clytemnestra. The similarities, moreover, go much further back in time. As a baby Jason was removed from the city of his birth to be brought up in the wild by the centaur Chiron, because of fear that his usurping uncle Pelias might act against the baby who had a rightful claim to the throne. When he had grown to manhood, he returned to Iolcos to reclaim his inheritance (*Pind. Pyth.* 4.101–15). This pattern is obviously very like that of the baby Orestes, saved from the bloodthirsty Aigisthos and deposited with Strophios in Phocis (*Eur. El.* 16–18). To the similarities in their later careers I shall return below (pp. 450–2).

Most striking of all, and most exploited by Apollonius, are the parallels between Jason and Theseus. Like Jason, Theseus returned to the city of his father as a young man in his prime, a *παῖς πρώθηβος* (*Bacchyl.* 18.56–7, cf. *Pind. Pyth.* 4.158 of Jason), like Jason both a stranger and a citizen (cf. *Pind. Pyth.* 4.78). Theseus' birth tokens, by which he is finally recognised by his father the king, are a sword and sandals;⁵⁹ the latter can hardly fail to remind us of 'one-sandalled Jason', although the use of the token in the two stories is quite different.⁶⁰ Like Jason, Theseus was put to the test by a descendant of Helios, Minos; the test of Theseus' divinity imposed by Minos, most familiar to us from *Bacchylides* 17, is recalled at *Arg.* 3.402–3 where Aietes offers to give up the Fleece once he has tested that the Argonauts are 'either of the race of gods or in some other way no worse [than Aietes himself]'. Jason uses the example of Ariadne to encourage Medea (3.997–1007), Medea herself contrasts Minos and Aietes (3.1106–7),⁶¹ and the overcoming of the bulls with Medea's help is plainly on a par with Theseus' success in the labyrinth against the Minotaur. The detailed working out of the parallels between Ariadne and Medea in the *Argonautica* and

⁵⁷ This is also, I think, the image suggested by *γνὺξ ἤριπε* (4.471), cf. 1.427–31, 3.1310 (where I accept *ἐριπόντα*).

⁵⁸ 4.560, cf. Aesch. *Eum.* 281, 452, R. Parker, *Miasma* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 104–43, Hunter (1987), 131 n. 17.

⁵⁹ Cf. Plut. *Thes.* 3.4; Herter, *RE Suppl.* 13, 1057.

⁶⁰ Here the loss of Callimachus' *Hecale* is particularly to be regretted. Frr. 232–3 and 235–6 concern Theseus' arrival in Athens and recognition first by Medea and then by his father. Fr. 274, *ἄρμοι που κάκείναι ἐπέτρεχε λεπτός ἱούλος | ἄνθει ἐλιχρύσωι ἐναλίγκιος*, may suggest that Theseus was portrayed as a young ephebe, like Jason; *Arg.* 1.972 and Call. fr. 274 are obviously connected, and, if Kapp's interpretation of the latter passage is correct, then Apollonius may be drawing a further link between Jason and Theseus by echoing a Callimachean passage about the latter. Relevant too is the suggestion that Callimachus' Theseus owed something to Homer's Telemachus, cf. J. K. Newman, 'Callimachus and the Epic', in *Serta Turyniana* (Urbana, 1974), pp. 342–60 at p. 350.

⁶¹ These verses exploit the familiar fact (cf. Strabo 10.48, Plut. *Thes.* 16.3, *RE* 15.1890–1927) that two very different accounts of Minos' character were current in antiquity. Homer had given both Minos and Aietes the epithet *δλοόφρων* (*Od.* 10.137, 11.322).

later literature is familiar enough to be omitted here. Less obvious perhaps are the shared motifs in the expeditions of the two heroes. The tribute of young men from which Theseus freed Athens was imposed after the death of Minos' son, Androgeos, in mysterious circumstances in Attica. Minos prayed to Zeus for vengeance, and a plague and famine came upon the city. When the Athenians consulted the oracle, they were told to pay Minos whatever penalty he should demand (Apollodorus 3.15.7–8). With the story of the Argonauts and the Golden Fleece this story shares the motifs of Zeus' anger, plague, consultation of an oracle, a long sea-voyage and the death of a tyrant's son. Finally – and it would be possible to pursue the parallels in these two stories at much greater length – it is noteworthy that Theseus' desire to imitate and rival Heracles is a *leitmotif* of Plutarch's *Life of Theseus*,⁶² and this recalls Heracles' rôle in the *Argonautica*, particularly after he has left the expedition.⁶³

Recent scholarship has recognised in these myths and the tragedies based on them a recurrent pattern which reflects the generational passage of a young man into adulthood. The work of Pierre Vidal-Naquet, in particular, has established in new detail the connection of such myths with the institution and ritual of the ephebate.⁶⁴ That the Argonauts as a whole pass through some kind of 'initiation' has long been recognised,⁶⁵ as also of course have the ephebic features of a hero such as Theseus.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the impulse of Vidal-Naquet's work has, for example, allowed the significance of the details of the Pindaric Jason – upbringing in the wild, uncut hair, return at the age of twenty, his ambiguous dress – to be better appreciated.⁶⁷ These patterns will also throw light on aspects of the Apollonian Jason.

Orestes performs his retributive act through guile and cunning; the Sophoclean Orestes, in fact, reports Apollo's oracle to the effect that he should 'with trickery secretly carry out the just slaughter himself, unequipped with shields and an army' (*El.* 36–7). Apollonius presents Jason's acts of ploughing the field and slaying the earthborn men as complementary: the first requires heroic strength, aided by Medea's magic drugs, the second relies on *metis* and on staying out of sight (*λάθρη*, 3.1057, 1369). This complementarity points to Jason's intermediate position on his passage from one stage of his life to another. His preparations for the contest are also interesting in this context. After he has smeared both himself and his weapons with the drug and the strength has entered him, he performs naked a kind of dance, like a prancing warhorse, shaking his shield and spear (3.1258–64). The shield and spear – the weapons of both the Homeric warrior and the hoplite⁶⁸ – are stressed again as Jason goes to the contest *ξὺν δουρὶ καὶ ἀσπίδι* (3.1279). The dancing and shaking movements strongly call to mind the *pyrrhiche*, an armed dance which

⁶² Cf. 6.6–7.2, 29.3 (*ἄλλος οὗτος Ἡρακλῆς*).

⁶³ Cf. Feeney, art. cit. (n. 33).

⁶⁴ Cf. 'The Black Hunter and the Origin of the Athenian *ephebeia*', *PCPS* 14 (1968), 49–64 (reprinted in R. L. Gordon (ed.), *Myth, Religion & Society* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 147–62 and P. Vidal-Naquet, *The Black Hunter* (Baltimore, 1986), pp. 106–28), and 'The Black Hunter Revisited', *PCPS* 32 (1986), 126–44. Already E. S. Phinney, *Apollonius Rhodius* (diss. Berkeley, 1964), p. 110, associated Jason with Parthenopaeus in Aeschylus' *Septem*.

⁶⁵ Cf. F. Graf, in J. Bremmer (ed.), *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (London, 1987), pp. 97–8, and the various speculations of R. Roux, *Le Problème des Argonautes* (Paris, 1949), Chapter 3, and J. Lindsay, *The Clashing Rocks* (London, 1965); for Jason in particular cf. Heiserman, op. cit. (n. 15), pp. 16–20.

⁶⁶ Cf. H. Jeanmaire, *Couroi et Courètes* (Lille, 1939), p. 323.

⁶⁷ Cf. C. Segal, *Pindar's Mythmaking: the Fourth Pythian Ode* (Princeton, 1986), pp. 56–60.

⁶⁸ Ephebes received *ἀσπίδα καὶ δόρυ* after their first year of service and spent the second year on guard duty (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 42.4).

presumably originated in preparations for war and which we know to have been performed at Athenian festivals by all three age-classes of males, *ἄνδρες*, *ἀγένοιοι* and *παῖδες*.⁶⁹ Plato's description of the dance, 'it represents modes of eluding all kinds of blows and shots by swerings, and duckings and side-leaps upward or crouching' (*Laws* 7.815a, trans. R. G. Bury), certainly suits both Jason's movements at 3.1258–64 and also his actual battle with the *γῆγευεῖς*. The Aristophanic personification of Old Education had contrasted those who fought at Marathon – the hoplite battle *par excellence* – with young men of the modern day who could not dance Athena's *pyrrhiche* properly (*Clouds* 986–9), and it has been suggested that we should see in this dance an enactment of the passage of the ephebe towards hoplite status.⁷⁰ Be that as it may, there can be no doubt that Apollonius presents Jason in a crucial transitional stage: halfway between Apollo, the model *kouros*,⁷¹ and the war-god Ares (3.1282–3), he prepares to meet the great test of his 'manhood'. It is worth remarking that the only previous killing to Jason's credit in the poem is that of the equally young prince Cyzicus (1.1026–35), and this was a ghastly mistake committed in the confusion of night, in a scene more reminiscent of the *Doloneia* than of the open duels of Homeric heroes. Finally, one further speculation about Jason's test may be permitted. The trick of distracting the earthborn men by throwing a great stone into their midst not only associates Jason with the cunning of the ephebe, but perhaps also suggests the role of fighters like Tyrtaeus' *γυμνήτες*, who, in contrast to and support of the *πάνοπλοι* (hoplites), throw large stones and javelins at the enemy from the safety of shield cover (fr. 12.35–9 West = 8.35–9 GP, cf. *Arg.* 3.1369).⁷² Here too, then, Jason would be associated with a type of fighting which is marginal to the main military effort of adult males.

The main object of the expedition, the acquisition of the Golden Fleece, is also achieved with the aid of Medea's magical powers. She and Jason leave the *Argo* in the early hours, at the time when hunters who begin while it is still dark get up (4.109–13). By a familiar Apollonian technique,⁷³ this indication of time embraces the functions of a simile, and the possible significance of this night-hunt for Jason's position will be obvious to anyone familiar with Vidal-Naquet's work on 'the Black Hunter'. Once the Fleece has been attained – with Jason playing very much the secondary rôle⁷⁴ – his delight in it is compared to that of a *παρθένος* who sees the full moon caught on her fine dress (4.167–73). The text and interpretation of the simile are both far from clear,⁷⁵ but the comparison of Jason to a young girl is certainly suggestive. It is well

⁶⁹ *IG* ii.2 2311.72–4; for this dance in general cf. K. Latte, *De saltationibus Graecorum capita quinque* (RGVV 13.3, Giessen, 1913), J.-C. Poursat, 'Les représentations de danse armée dans la céramique attique', *BCH* 92 (1968), 550–615, and E. K. Borthwick, 'P.Oxy. 2738: Athena and the Pyrrhic Dance', *Hermes* 98 (1970), 318–31.

⁷⁰ P. Scarpi, 'La pyrrhiche o le armi della persuasione', *Dialoghi di archeologia* 1 (1979), 78–97, accepted by Vidal-Naquet, 'Black Hunter Revisited' (n. 64), p. 136. I do not think that *Laws* 7.796b–c shows that this was Plato's interpretation.

⁷¹ It is tempting to place in this context Orpheus' account of Apollo's slaying of the Pythian dragon, *κοῦρος ἔδν' ἐτι γυμνός, ἐτι πλοκάμοισι γεγηθώς*. I would now be more inclined to such a view of this disputed passage than I was in Hunter (1986), 57.

⁷² The interpretation of this passage is (inevitably) disputed, cf. H. Lorimer, *BSA* 42 (1947), 127; A. M. Snodgrass, *Arms and Armour of the Greeks* (London, 1967), pp. 66–7; W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War IV* (Berkeley, 1985), p. 40. A recently published fragment of Tyrtaeus refers to *γυμνομάχοι* (P.Oxy. 3316).

⁷³ Cf. Hunter (1986), 54–5.

⁷⁴ Cf. 4.149, 163, Hunter (1987), 132–3.

⁷⁵ Cf. now J. M. Bremer, *CQ* 37 (1987), 423–6, who rightly points to the erotic and nuptial associations of the full moon. Marriage for the young girl corresponds, *mutatis mutandis*, to membership of the adult warrior class for Jason.

known that *rites de passage* are often characterised by games or ritual involving sexual reversal; at the moment of Jason's greatest success – the acquisition of both the Fleece and Medea – the simile of the young girl paradoxically marks his readiness to assume his manhood. If this is correct, then his speech to the crew at their departure, which I have already considered in another context (above pp. 439–40), may be seen to mark his emergence from the period of testing. He speaks now as both 'hero' and hoplite,⁷⁶ and he dons 'the armour of war' (4.206) to mark his new status. It may even be that his plan for the protection of the ship (4.199–202), a close pattern of shields to protect the rowers, is designed to suggest the hoplite phalanx as well, presumably, as reflecting a historical reality.⁷⁷

The interpretation of individual details will always be a matter for debate. More broadly, however, it is difficult not to associate Jason's characteristic ἀμυχανίη, the doubts and occasional despair to which he is prone, with the ambivalent insecurity of Orestes in Euripides' *Electra* and, to a lesser extent, Aeschylus' *Choephoroi*.⁷⁸ Both Orestes and Jason require support and encouragement to accomplish difficult but necessary tasks which have been imposed upon them by oracular command.⁷⁹

Two final observations are necessary here. First, as I have already noted, these patterns operate within the poem largely at the level of the individual episode, and we should not expect to find a simple linear progression through a transitional rite from beginning to end. Thus, at a very simple level, the killing of Apsyrtos follows, rather than precedes, the successful acquisition of the Fleece and the assumption of heroic rhetoric. Secondly, I have been assimilating certain patterns in the *Argonautica* to patterns in the mythic thought and literature of archaic and classical Greece, as well as to a military organisation which was for Apollonius quite obsolete. It may be objected that a poet of third-century Alexandria was no longer in touch with these patterns in such a way as to use them meaningfully in his poem. Such an objection can, I think, be met on its own terms by two complementary observations. The broad patterns in question are so widespread in both time and space that the onus of proof is clearly on those who would deny access to them to the inhabitants of third-century Alexandria. More importantly, the *Argonautica* is a creative recreation of a past age, both technologically and in terms of social values and attitudes. Its characteristic flavour derives from the tension between this hypothesised past age and the very Alexandrian concerns of much of the poetic material.⁸⁰ In such a poem, the reprise of this familiar pattern from archaic and classical literature, as only one of a number of structural patterns through the work, is very far from surprising.

The nature of heroism, and its particular instantiation in the 'psychology' of Jason, is not Apollonius' central concern in the *Argonautica*. If Jason sometimes resembles the great heroes of Homer and sometimes wears a quite different aspect, it is because of Apollonius' constant concern with the experimental, with testing the limits and

⁷⁶ Livrea on 4.203 collects the relevant passages. For sex reversal in transitional rites cf. e.g. the remarks of Vidal-Naquet, *Black Hunter* (n. 64), pp. 114–17.

⁷⁷ Cf. Vian on 4.200. In the parallel scene at 2.1069ff. the comparison with a hoplite phalanx is almost explicit (2.1075–8), cf. Paduano–Fusillo *ad loc.*

⁷⁸ Cf. P. Vidal-Naquet in J.-P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece* (Brighton, 1981), pp. 160–1.

⁷⁹ Cf. Pind. *Pyth.* 4.159–67. Apollonius does not explicitly say that the expedition was commanded by divine oracle (contrast 1.8), but the motif of placating Zeus' anger (2.1194–5, 3.336–9) perhaps suggests that we are to infer it. The latter passage raises, and leaves open, the possibility that Pelias has invented the oracle as an excuse to get rid of Jason.

⁸⁰ I hope to discuss this more fully in a future article.

possibilities of the epic form and with exploring what it has seemed to take for granted. This differentiates him both from Homer and, in a different way, from Virgil, who used the results of the experiments to produce a new synthesis.

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