



Medea's Flight: The Fourth Book of the Argonautica

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MEDEA'S FLIGHT: THE FOURTH BOOK OF THE *ARGONAUTICA**

If Medea has attracted more readers to the *Argonautica* than any other character – thereby also determining which parts of the poem have become generally familiar – she has also provided critics of the poem with their major (sometimes their sole) topic for discussion.¹ The main charge, particularly among critics writing in English,² is that the various aspects of Medea – awakening love, deadly magic, fratricide – form neither a consistent nor a credible whole. One quotation, from an article which explicitly aims to summarise recent criticism, may stand as representative: '[Medea's passion] produced an inconsistency [Apollonius] either ignored deliberately in the confidence of his Medea in love, or, just possibly, may not have noticed. The same emotionally immature and helpless Medea is the competent, unfrightened servant of Hecate, the cool instructress of Jason in taming the bulls, the calm soother of the dragon... the behaviour of Medea later in the [fourth] Book is, against all reason, quite untouched by what we would think of as a shattering experience, at the very least destructive of any real trust between her and Jason... It is as if Apollonius has thrown in [Apsyrtus' murder] without care or realisation of its consequence for the consistency of her character'.³ Behind criticism of this kind lies both an understandable desire to relate the characters of ancient literature, if not to our own experience, at least to what instinct tells us is possible, and the whole tradition of criticism which descends from the *Poetics* of Aristotle. In recent years other approaches have gained currency,⁴ but in this paper I shall explore the presentation of Medea as a whole (Part I) and particularly of her flight from Colchis (Part II) within a traditional framework in an attempt to clarify what seem to me to be critical misunderstandings.

I

Two related observations are in order at once. First, Medea's 'credibility' can hardly be the object of serious debate. Whether or not homicidal sorceresses can also be

* Earlier versions of this paper were read to seminars in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Oxford, Sydney and Zurich; I am grateful to those audiences for much advice and criticism. I am also indebted to Dr D. C. Feeney who kindly commented upon the penultimate draft. The following works are cited by author name only: C. R. Beye, *Epic and Romance in the Argonautica of Apollonius* (Carbondale, 1982); M. Campbell, *Studies in the Third Book of Apollonius Rhodius' Argonautica* (Hildesheim, 1983); H. Fränkel, *Noten zu den Argonautika des Apollonios* (Munich, 1968); M. Fusillo, *Il tempo delle argonautiche* (Rome, 1985); P. Hübscher, *Die Charakteristik der personen in Apollonios' Argonautika* (diss. Freiburg i.d. Schweiz, 1940); G. Paduano, *Studi su Apollonio Rodio* (Rome, 1972); U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Hellenistische Dichtung* (Berlin, 1924).

¹ Particularly helpful are Hübscher 10–38, Paduano and the survey by H. Herter, *Bursian's Jahresbericht* 285 (1944/55), 291–4. Of criticism in English most can be learned from E. Phinney, 'Narrative Unity in the *Argonautica*, the Medea–Jason Romance', *TAPA* 98 (1967), 327–41 and Campbell 37–77.

² Cf. Fusillo's strictures (p. 287 n. 54) 'Il problema della "doppia Medea" è forse il più ozioso e il più falsato nell'impostazione di quelli su cui si è soffermata la bibliografia apolloniana'.

³ C. Collard, 'Medea and Dido', *Prometheus* 1 (1975), 131–51 at 138–9.

⁴ Cf., e.g., S. Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 169–98; for a 'revised Aristotelianism' cf. J. M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad* (Chicago, 1975), pp. 20–3.

impressionable virgins (and vice versa) is a subject about which people may reasonably disagree. Moreover, we are here concerned not with any young Colchian girl, but with the hypothesised adolescence of a familiar figure of myth and literature. The murder of Apsyrtus foreshadows the later murder of Medea's own children, just as, *mutatis mutandis*, Heracles' strangling of the snakes foreshadows his later elimination of some of Greece's most hideous monsters.⁵ Such neat patterns may indeed be more common in myth and literature than in real life, but at any event simplistic notions of 'credibility' have no place here.

The apparent paradoxes in the presentation of Medea occur in both Book 3 and Book 4. Well known is 3.858–68:

τῆς οἴην τ' ἐν ὄρεσσι κελαινὴν ἱκμάδα φηγοῦ
 Κασπίη ἐν κόχλωι ἀμήσατο φαρμάσσεσθαι,
 ἐπτάκι μὲν ἀεναίοισι λοεσσαμένη ὑδάτεσσιν,
 ἐπτάκι δὲ Βριμῷ κουροτρόφον ἀγκαλέσασα,
 Βριμῷ νυκτιπόλον, χθονίην, ἐνέροισιν ἄνασσαν,
 λυγαίη ἐνὶ νυκτὶ σὺν ὄρφναίοις φάρεεσσι.
 μυκηθμῶι δ' ὑπένερθεν ἔρεμνῇ σείετο γαῖα,
 ῥίζης τεμνομένης Τιτηνίδος· ἔστενε δ' αὐτὸς
 Ἰαπετοῖο πάϊς ὀδύνηι πέρι θυμὸν ἀλύων.
 τό ῥ' ἢ γ' ἐξανελοῦσα θυώδει κάτθετο μίτρηι
 ἧ τε οἱ ἀμβροσίοισι περὶ στήθεσσιν ἔεργο.

Medea is here an aroused and arousing virgin who holds converse with chthonic powers and who stores the physical torment of others between her beautiful breasts. A less bizarre example of these contrasts, but one very relevant to the argument of Part II of this paper, occurs in the description of her flight to the Argo:

οὐ γὰρ αἰδρις
 ἦεν ὀδῶν, θαμὰ καὶ πρὶν ἀλωμένη ἀμφὶ τε νεκροῦς
 ἀμφὶ τε δυσपालέας ῥίζας χθονός, οἷα γυναικῶν
 φαρμακίδες· τρομερῶι δ' ὑπὸ δείματι πάλλατο θυμός. (4.50–3)

So too, Medea's last two appearances in the poem form a tellingly contrasted pair. At 4.1521–2 she and her maids flee when Mopsus is bitten by a snake: they behave like ordinary young girls.⁶ In her final appearance, however, the magic powers of her eyes save the Argonauts by causing the destruction of the bronze giant Talos (4.1651–88). Thus, the picture we have of her does not change; rather, different aspects are emphasised as the narrative moves through a wide range of action and emotion. We may compare the Medea of Euripides. She too is clever and dangerous, even if her magical powers are, until the end of the play, given less prominence than in Apollonius,⁷ but she is also a woman who expresses concerns which Euripides represents as common to all women⁸ and whose situation, that of being discarded in favour of another, is not peculiar to clever and dangerous women.

The murder of Apsyrtus is the hinge around which most discussion of Medea's character has swung. Interpretation is hindered by the very elliptical narrative of the events surrounding the deed.⁹ Critics differ as to whether at 4.404–5 Jason reveals a

⁵ Apsyrtus goes to his death like an ἀταλὸς πάϊς (4.460); cf. also 3.747–8, Fusillo 338.

⁶ Vian's note on 1521, 'Médée a aussitôt compris le danger et le caractère irrémédiable de la blessure', is hard to believe; contrast, e.g., Paduano 232.

⁷ Cf. B. M. W. Knox, 'The Medea of Euripides', *YCS* 25 (1977), 193–225 at 211–16 (= *Word and Action*, pp. 307–11).

⁸ This, of course, simplifies a highly complex subject, cf., e.g., S. C. Humphreys, *The Family, Women and Death* (London, 1983), pp. 72–3, Goldhill, op. cit., pp. 115–17.

⁹ Cf. P. Händel, *Beobachtungen zur epischen Technik des Apollonios Rhodios* (Munich, 1954), pp. 75–7, Vian's edition of Book 4, pp. 20–1, Fusillo 283 n. 37.

plan to kill Apsyrtus which had been part of the Argonauts' strategy all along,¹⁰ or whether the idea suddenly occurs to him as an *ad hoc* way of soothing Medea's rage.¹¹ What is crucial, however, is that the uncertainty the modern reader feels is precisely the situation in which the poet has placed Medea herself, and it is this uncertainty about her position that marks and determines her behaviour throughout the fourth book. She is no more clear than we are what game Jason is playing. The actual manner of Apsyrtus' death – lured by Medea's false words and struck from behind by Jason – should surprise nobody. Medea's guile was apparent already in the third book in her handling of Chalciope (3.681–739) and her maids (3.891–912). It has, moreover, long been recognised that the *δόλος* which lures Apsyrtus to his death recalls the *δόλος* which killed Creon and his daughter in Euripides' *Medea*, just as Medea's speech of reproof to Jason is clearly a reworking of the parallel speech in the tragedy (*Med.* 465–519). The tragic Medea makes no bones about what is likely to happen when a woman is wronged *ἐς εὐνήν* (cf. 265–6, 1367–8), and the chorus of the play sing of the dangerous excesses to which love can lead (627–43); the comparison of Apollonius' curse on *σκέτλι* 'Ερωος (4.445–9) to a choral song has often been made. So too, the Apollonian Medea's frightening potential has always been clear. In Book 3 she threatened to materialise on the other side of the world if Jason forgot her (3.1111–17),¹² and here in Book 4 there is no doubting the seriousness of her situation. She will not merely be abandoned like Ariadne,¹³ but handed over to her father whose taste for cruelty she well knows (cf. 3.378–9). Her desire to burn the Argo (4.392) in fact echoes an intention of Aietes himself (3.582, cf. 4.223); in her anger, she is her father's daughter,¹⁴ and Jason must resort to the same tactics with her which he used to calm Aietes.¹⁵ The horror of the murder of Apsyrtus, even if epic legend knew much more horrible versions,¹⁶ is real enough – echoes of the murder of Agamemnon¹⁷ as well as the poet's *ἀποπομπή* of Eros (4.445–9) bear witness to that – but it comes as a climax in a pattern of events and not as an isolated and inexplicable catastrophe.

Intimately connected with the question of Medea's behaviour in Book 4 is, of course, her relationship with Jason. Much discussion, taking its cue from Wilamowitz,¹⁸ has been concerned to establish whether or not love still exists between the pair on the return journey. This discussion has, of course, been bedevilled by the fact that love is not always easy to identify and different observers may apply this label to different

¹⁰ Cf., e.g., Vian's edition, p. 22. I do not find Vian's reconstruction of Apsyrtus' strategy credible.

¹¹ Cf., e.g., Wilamowitz ii.202. Beye 162 hedges his bets, perhaps wisely.

¹² I do not agree with Vian (*Note complémentaire* to 1116) that Medea is saying that she will torment Jason 'comme un revenant'. Magical transport seems to suit her magical powers.

¹³ Catullus used Medea's speech for Ariadne's lament in Poem 64; note 4.385–7/Cat. 64.192–7. There are other more general similarities, which might arise merely from the similarity of situation or from the common debt to Euripides. It is noteworthy that a cloak decorated with the story of Ariadne (4.423–34) is part of Medea's way of avoiding Ariadne's fate; this cloak was a gift from Hypsipyle, the first 'Ariadne' in the poem.

¹⁴ Note 3.368/4.391, 740.

¹⁵ Note 3.386–8/4.395–8; 3.396/4.410 (*ὑποσαίνων*).

¹⁶ Apollonius avoids any gruesome butchery by Medea herself, cf. Hübscher 34–5.

¹⁷ 4.468, cf. *Od.* 4.535, 11.411. It is interesting to compare the episode with Circe to the *Iphigeneia in Tauris* of Euripides: a couple, stained (in Medea's case literally, cf. 4.473–4) with the blood of a relative of one of them, come at the command of a divine voice to receive purification. The purifier, who is related to murderer and victim, is forewarned of the arrival in a dream. The crucial difference between the two works is the moral status of Orestes and Medea.

¹⁸ ii.196–7, 203, 213.

phenomena. A glance at what the poet tells us about the characters rather than what he gives them to say may, however, establish certain 'facts'.

During the meeting at the temple of Hecate love works on Jason as it had already worked on Medea (3.1022–4, 1078). Under its power, Jason tells Medea of his home (thus watering the seed of flight which had been planted earlier)¹⁹ and promises to marry her if ever she were to come to Greece.²⁰ Nevertheless, the gulf between them is not hidden.²¹ When they part, Jason goes back 'rejoicing' to his companions (3.1148) and tells them of Medea's help, which causes them in turn to rejoice (3.1171). The group-solidarity of the Argonauts, which has always been an important feature of the expedition (cf. 1.336–7, 3.171–5) and which strongly distinguishes it from Homer's account of Odysseus' adventures, is here emphasised to mark the support which Jason enjoys: *ἑτάροις* (1163), *σὺν τοῖσι* (1165), *ἡρώων ἐς ὄμιλον* (1166), *ὄμοῦ* (1166). On the other hand, Medea, 'stunned' (1157), goes home silent and aloof to fall into a gesture of lonely mourning and despair (1159–62).²² This is the last we see of her until the opening of the fourth book. There, in her terror, she finds the heroes celebrating with an all-night party (4.69); the contrast between her emotions and theirs could not be greater. When she begs them to rescue her, offers to secure the Golden Fleece for them and reminds Jason of his promises, he 'rejoiced greatly' (92–3) and repeated his pledge to marry her in Greece. Vian²³ comments, 'Jason does not merely rejoice selfishly at the thought of getting the fleece; it is Medea's presence which makes him happy.' Such matters are, of course, hard to judge and there is certainly room for disagreement. Nevertheless, this passage should be set beside 3.1014 where Jason receives the magic drug from Medea 'rejoicing', and 4.171 where he lifts up the fleece again 'rejoicing'. Joy is not otherwise an emotion which comes readily to Apollonius' Jason. He rejoices when Heracles imposes his election as leader (1.350) – a scene rich in nuance and irony – and he tells Phineus that if the gods should restore the old man's sight as well as his fortunes he (Jason) would rejoice as much as if he had reached home (2.441–2). This is indeed Jason's motivating impulse: the *need* to complete the tasks imposed by Pelias and the *desire* to get home. To these ends he exploits Medea who alone holds the key to success.²⁴ His complete dependence upon her, emphasised by *εἶπετο δ' Αἰσονίδης πεφοβημένος* (4.149) and *κούρης κεκλομένης* (4.163), is suggested also in the description of the dragon's roar:

δέιματι δ' ἐξέγγροντο λεχῶιδες, ἀμφὶ δὲ παισὶ
νηπιάχοις, οἳ τέ σφιν ὑπ' ἀγκαλίδεσσιν ἴανον,
ρόϊζωι παλλομένοις χεῖρας βάλον ἀσχαλόωσαι. (4.136–8)

That Medea protects Jason as a mother cares for her child²⁵ is an idea which has already been suggested in the description of gathering night in the third book

¹⁹ Cf. 3.680 (Chalciopé's expressed wish to live *ἵνα μηδέ περ οὔνομα Κόλχων*).

²⁰ Hübscher 12–13 well observes that Jason's conditional undertaking is very typical of him. His partial revelation of the story of Theseus and Ariadne would, of course, have to be considered in any full account of his behaviour in this scene.

²¹ Cf., esp., Paduano 199–200, Fusillo 259.

²² The curious phrasing of 1162, *ἔη· κακὸν ἔργον ἐπιξυνώσατο βουλῆι*, points to the fact that Medea's only partner is herself.

²³ *Note complémentaire* to 4.93.

²⁴ Cf. Hübscher 18.

²⁵ For a different interpretation of 4.136–8 cf. A. Hurst, *Apollonios de Rhodes: manière et cohérence* (Rome, 1967), pp. 105–6. On the transference of the language of family relationships to amatory contexts in general cf. C. W. Macleod, *ZPE* 15 (1974), 218 (= *Collected Essays*, p. 17).

(3.747–8). This idea gives bitter point to Medea's exploitation of Andromache's famous plea to Hector (Hom. *Il.* 6.429–30) at 4.368–9:

τῷ φημί τεῆ κούρη τε δάμαρ τε
αὐτοκασιγνήτη τε μεθ' Ἑλλάδα γαίαν ἔπεσθαι.

In Colchis, Jason had been thus dependent upon Medea; now the tables are turned and Medea is equally helpless.²⁶

Medea's isolation, the tragic ironies of her position, have thus been carefully laid out long before the poet's rueful intervention at the moment of her defloration (4.1165–7):

ἀλλὰ γὰρ οὗ ποτε φύλα δυηπαθέων ἀνθρώπων
τερπωλῆς ἐπέβημεν ὄλωι ποδί· σὺν δέ τις αἰεὶ
πικρὴ παρμέμβλωκεν εὐφροσύνησιον ἀνίη.

Between the visit to Circe and the marriage on Drepane we learn that Achilles is destined to marry Medea in the Elysian fields (4.811–15); this is not an idle utilisation of a variant myth, but a strategically placed warning that Medea and Jason will not 'live happily ever after'. While the sleepless Medea waits to hear of Alcinous' decision, her swirling emotions are compared to the spindle turned by a grieving widow as her children cry round about her (4.1060–7). Just at the point where Medea is formally to be given to Jason, the meaninglessness of the match is marked by the figure of the woman who has lost a husband.²⁷ This simile acts as counterpoint to the comparison of the onset of Medea's passion to a fire lit in kindling by a working woman at 3.291–7. The two similes mark the progress of Medea's suffering; neither gives any cause for optimism. Finally, Medea's isolation is marked by echoes of Homer. The contribution of the Homeric Nausicaa to the Medea of Book 3 is widely recognised, and we seem to catch a bitter echo of this in the account of Medea's tale to Circe (4.736–7):

φόνον δ' ἀλέεινεν ἐνισπεῖν
Ἀψύρτου, τὴν δ' οὐ τι νόωι λάθην.

When Nausicaa asked her father for a cart,

αἶδετο γὰρ θαλερὸν γάμον ἐξονομήναι
πατρὶ φίλωι· ὁ δὲ πάντα νόει... (Od. 6.66–7)

The substitution of *φόνος* for *γάμος* marks how far Medea has come from the innocence of a Nausicaa. Later, when she must plead with Arete, she is placed in the position of Odysseus in *Odyssey* 7 who begs Arete to intercede to secure safe passage home for him.²⁸ That, of course, is the last thing Medea wants. Her actual words to Arete seem to rework not so much those of Odysseus' plea to the queen as the hero's first words to the queen's daughter in *Odyssey* 6.²⁹ In a ship full of heroes³⁰ Medea

²⁶ *αὐτοκασιγνήτη* in 369 clearly foreshadows Medea's betrayal of Apsyrtus, cf. Fränkel 481, Paduano 219. There is a similar effect at Eur. *Med.* 257 (cf. Page on 231). Medea exploits the same Homeric verses in her pledge to Chalciope at 3.730–2; that is not simple hypocrisy, as Medea's motives are complex and apparently contradictory impulses exist side by side.

²⁷ For other possible resonances in this simile cf. Hurst, op. cit., pp. 122–3, Beye 154, Fusillo 338.

²⁸ Note *Od.* 7.142/*Arg.* 4.1012–13.

²⁹ *Od.* 6.149/*Arg.* 4.1014; the doubt about whether the addressee is human or divine (cf. Livrea on *Ἰλαθι* in 1014); *Od.* 6.175/*Arg.* 4.1025; *Od.* 6.180–2/*Arg.* 4.1026–8. For other Homeric passages cf. M. Campbell, *Echoes and Imitations of Early Epic in Apollonius Rhodius* (Leiden, 1981), p. 80.

³⁰ Note the stress on the plurality of potential protectors at 4.1030. The lack of any specific reference to Jason marks the increased seriousness of Medea's position since the murder of Apsyrtus and the visit of Circe. For Wilamowitz (ii.203) Jason's silence here was 'das Allerbezeichnendste für die erloschene Liebe', and subsequent critics have elaborated this view.

is as alone as the shipwrecked Odysseus. When threatened earlier in the book, Medea was saved by the gruesome murder of her brother. Now she is saved by a hastily arranged marriage; the parallelism may be thought to point forward to the subsequent history of Jason and Medea.

II

Whereas the proem to Book 1 had asserted the poet's independence from previous poets and reduced the prominence of the Muses (1.18–22),³¹ the invocation to Erato at the head of Book 3 assigns this Muse a leading role (*μοι ἔνισπε*) beside the poet. At the head of the last book, the poet abandons the field entirely to the Muse, whom I take to be Erato, who is to take over the narrative herself: *αὐτή... θεά* is thus a splendid example of Apollonius' skill at breathing new life into familiar epic tags.³² Whereas Homer had pleaded human ignorance and physical weakness in his request to the Muses before the Catalogue of Ships (*Il.* 2.484–93), Apollonius professes an inability to choose between two apparently exclusive alternative labels to attach to Medea's flight from Colchis. Like Homer, Apollonius pleads lack of certain knowledge, but the ignorance is now not of action but of interpretation. Before considering why Apollonius has chosen this poetic strategy, we should note that it has a precedent even in our limited remains of Greek literature. In the eleventh *Pythian* Pindar considers two explanations of why Clytemnestra killed Agamemnon and Cassandra:

πότερόν νιν ἄρ' Ἰφιγένει' ἐπ' Εὐρίπῳι
σφαχθείσα τῆλε πάτρας
ἔκνισεν βαρυνάλαμον ὄρσαι χόλον;
ἢ ἑτέρῳι λέχει δαμαζομέναν
ἔννυχοι πάραγον κοίται;
(*Pyth.* 11.22–5)

In Pindar also the action in question is the shameful deed of a female. It may be true that men frequently find the actions of women inexplicable, and it may be thought revealing that both Pindar and Apollonius consider love or sex as possibly major motive forces in the action of their female characters – revealing of Pindar and Apollonius, that is – but we may also see here an illustration of the adoption by Hellenistic hexameter poets of a voice that was more suited to their ambivalent stance with respect to the narrative of mythical material than was the authoritative, but impersonal, Homeric voice.

What then is the import of the invocation at the head of the fourth book? It is important that the five verses are replete with echoes of Medea's suffering in the previous book: *κάματον*,³³ *δήνεα*³⁴ and *ἄτης πῆμα δυσίμερον*³⁵ all take us back to crucial stages in the earlier book. The new element, *φύζα ἀεικελίη*, is thus given prominence: to the picture of Medea in Book 3 a new detail is to be added. The grouping of 'fragments' of the earlier book at the head of Book 4 suggests that the new book is going to rework, and therefore revalue, scenes and language from Book 3. This is indeed precisely what happens.

³¹ On the much disputed *ὑποφήτορες* of 1.22 cf. most recently Fusillo 365–6.

³² The desire to be read against Homer may also be marked out by echoes of *Il.* 1.1 in 4.1 and *Od.* 1.1 in 4.2, cf. L. E. Rossi, *RFIC* 96 (1968), 159–60. That 4.1–2 is 'a concentration of tags' (M. Campbell, *Mnem.*⁴ 36 [1983], 155) does not disprove specific echoes, as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* have privileged status for later poets.

³³ Cf. 3.288–9 (the onset of love) *ἄηνητο | στηθέων ἐκ πυκινὰ καμάτω φρένες*, 961 (the first sight of Jason).

³⁴ Cf. 3.661 (the simile of the *νύμφη*).

³⁵ Cf. 3.773, 798 (Medea's suicide speech), 961, 973 (first encounter with Jason).

Those who are not content merely to dismiss these verses as a jokey 'Callimachean conceit' have offered two explanations for them, both of which contain some truth. First, the poet is calling attention to the fact that his version runs counter to the common tradition, in which Medea fled solely out of love for Jason.³⁶ The key witnesses to that tradition are Pindar's *Pythian* 4 and Euripides' *Medea*. In Pindar, love makes Medea give Jason the necessary magic drugs and marriage is promised before the contest of the bulls (vv. 213–33); Jason 'stole' Medea (v. 250), and nothing is said of fear of her father. In Euripides' tragedy, the nurse asserts in the prologue that Medea came to Iolcus because of her passion for Jason (v. 8); the chorus says that she left her homeland *μαιομέναι κραδίαι* (v. 434), and Medea herself ruefully admits that she came *πρόθυμος μάλλον ἢ σοφωτέρα* (v. 485) and she links the evil which love works with separation from her country (vv. 328–30). The second stasimon deprecates *ἔρωτες ὑπὲρ ἄγαν ἐλθόντες* (v. 627) and places death before exile in verses which might serve as a motto for the opening of *Argonautica* 4:

ὦ πατρίς, ὦ δώματα, μὴ
 δῆτ' ἄπολις γειοίμαν
 τὸν ἀμηχανίας ἔχουσα δυσπέρατον αἰῶν',
 οἰκτρότατον ἀχέων.
 θανάτῳ θανάτῳ πάρος δαμείην
 ἀμέραν τάνδ' ἔξανύσα-
 σα· μόχθων δ' οὐκ ἄλλος ὕπερ-
 θεν ἢ γᾶς πατρίδας στέρεσθαι. (Med. 645–53)

A second interpretation of the proem to Book 4 sees the poet concerned with the causation of human action: are we responsible for what we do, or are the gods?³⁷ Later in Book 4, Medea herself has no doubts that the gods have been at work on her (4.413, 1040), and Jason recognised this before he had exchanged a single word with her (3.973–4). As, however, Hera and Eros are responsible for the *ἄτης πῆμα δυσίμερον* and Hera for the *φύζα* (4.11, 22–3), the alleged dichotomy seems illusory.³⁸ What remains, however, is the difficulty which the poet claims to have in assessing Medea's flight. Perhaps we too should not assume that the answer is an obvious one.

Against the apparently authoritative statements of v. 11 and vv. 22–3³⁹ may be set the mocking remarks of the moon as she sees Medea fleeing to the ship (4.57–65). The moon picks up the language of the invocation's first alternative (*ἄτης, ἀνηρόν . . . πῆμα*) to mock Medea's passion. Of itself, this does not, of course, contradict the assertion of Hera's responsibility for Medea's flight as the fact of Medea's passion is not in doubt. Nor is it a necessary, or even attractive, conclusion from these verses that the moon has misunderstood the immediate reason for the flight.⁴⁰ Rather, the moon's speech reinforces the illusoriness of the opening poetic dilemma, just as the verses which describe Medea's decision to flee sustain a delicate interplay between the language of fear and the language of love.

Hera's responsibility for Medea's abandonment of Colchis was announced in 3.1133–6 where Hera's purpose, her vendetta against Pelias, was also stated. As in the third book (3.250, 818), Hera intervenes crucially at the opening of the fourth book to determine Medea's action.⁴¹ In both books the temptation of suicide is rejected in

³⁶ Cf. p. 4 of Vian's edition.

³⁷ Cf., e.g., H. Faerber, *Zur dichterischen Kunst in Apollonios Rhodios' Argonautica (die Gleichnisse)* (diss. Berlin, 1932), p. 88.

³⁸ Cf. (from a different perspective) Paduano 206.

³⁹ Cf. also Livrea on v. 4, citing Kühner–Gerth ii. p. 173 for γε attached to the apparently preferable of two alternatives.

⁴⁰ As asserted by Fränkel 458–9 and Beye 146, 164; a better view in Livrea's note on v. 55.

⁴¹ Cf. Campbell 52.

favour of a movement towards Jason and the offering of her help in the two great tasks which he must confront.⁴² In both books the movement takes the form of a journey. In Book 3, however, the journey is conducted in the light of day (3.823–4), whereas Medea's flight needs the cover of night; in Book 3 Medea drives a waggon and is accompanied by attendants through the broad road (3.872–4), in Book 4 she flees alone, on bare feet, by the narrow back-streets (4.43); in Book 3 the people look away for fear of catching her eye, but in Book 4 she must cover her face for fear of being seen;⁴³ in Book 3 she is compared to Artemis driving her deer-drawn chariot as the wild animals fawn around her in fear, whereas in Book 4 she is herself terrified and is successively compared to a deer, startled by the baying of hunting-dogs, and to a wretched slave-girl. Here too, then, Book 4 exploits the situations of Book 3 with powerful poetic effect.

A direct Homeric model for the simile of the deer (4.12–13) is not easy to find, although a number of passages may have contributed something.⁴⁴ The Iliadic flavour of the simile is, however, crucial to its interpretation: Medea's fearful flight is like the rout of a soldier or an army in battle.⁴⁵ If caught, she will suffer a terrible fate at the hands of her vengeful father. Her groans (v. 19) are expressed by the verb *βρυχᾶσθαι*, used by Homer of the groans of dying soldiers;⁴⁶ the Iliadic reminiscences mark the seriousness of her struggle. Young deer, however, suggest other areas of meaning as well. The comparison of girls to deer is well-established in poetry before the Hellenistic period,⁴⁷ and we might have guessed that it had found a place in amatory poetry even without tantalising fragments of Anacreon (*PMG* 408), Sappho (fr. 58.16 LP-V) and Archilochus (the 'Cologne Epode', *SLG* 478, v. 31) and Horace's later exploitation in *Odes* 1.23. In Anacreon and Horace the fawn has become separated from its mother; Medea is about to abandon her parents in favour of a man. It can be no more than a guess that a reader must see an erotic as well as an epic tradition behind Apollonius' simile; if the guess were correct, however, the image would serve perfectly Medea's ambivalent emotions.

Interpretation of the simile of the slave-girl at vv. 35–40 is made difficult by the uncertainty of the text of v. 35. Broadly speaking, the critics may be divided into those who see the *ληϊάς* of the simile escaping from servitude⁴⁸ and those who have her being taken into it.⁴⁹ The former view, which might seem superficially attractive, founders for want of an adequate interpretation of v. 39, *εἶσιν ἀτυζομένη χαλεπὰς ὑπὸ χεῖρας ἀνάσσης*.⁵⁰ Medea is, therefore, probably compared to a girl from a rich family who

⁴² Note the parallelism of 3.817 and 4.24–5, perhaps (as Dr Feeney suggested to me) emphasising Medea's reduction to the status of a servant. *νηόνδε* in 4.50 would suit the matching of the two scenes, but I do not believe that it can stand. Some of the parallels between Books 3 and 4 have now been noted by A. Rose, 'Clothing Imagery in Apollonius' *Argonautika*', *QUCC* 21 (1985), 29–44 at 36–7.

⁴³ Note also 3.874–5/4.45–6. Medea's isolation from her people is emphasised by the description of Aietes' procession, accompanied by *ἀπειρίτος λαός*, at 3.1237–45.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Il.* 10.360–2, 11.473–81, 544–7, 22.189–93.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Il.* 22.1 *πεφυζότες ἤντε νεβροί* (of the Trojans); Homer calls *φύζα* the *φόβου κρυόντος ἐταίρη* (*Il.* 9.2). Cf. Beye 144–5.

⁴⁶ Nowhere else in Apollonius of a person, but note 2.831 of the dying sounds of the boar which killed Idmon. *Soph. Tr.* 1071–2, *ὅστις ὡστε παρθένος | βέβρυχα κλαίων*, is (despite v. 904) a pointedly oxymoronic description of Heracles.

⁴⁷ Cf. *h. Dem.* 174, Bacchyl. 13.84–90, Eur. *Ba.* 866–76. For some of the associations of the fawn in these contexts cf. A. P. Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets* (London, 1983), pp. 93–4.

⁴⁸ Cf. G. Pompella, 'Su Apollonio Rodio IV 35–40', *Annali... Napoli* 19 (1976/7), 53–61, Beye 150.

⁴⁹ Cf. Wilamowitz ii.212 n. 2, Fränkel 456, and the notes of Livrea and Vian.

⁵⁰ Pompella's 'teme di andare, è terrorizzata all' idea di finire sotto la padrona' (op. cit. 57)

has recently been captured in war and has entered slavery far from her homeland and who has not yet become accustomed to hardship and the demands of a cruel mistress. I would prefer to believe that Medea's *δύη*, *δούλια ἔργα* and *κάματος* are not the perils and hardships she is to face on board the Argo (as Fränkel and Vian argue), but rather emotional perils (cf. the echo of *κάματος* from v. 1). The Medea of Euripides too can claim, in an extravagantly rhetorical passage (vv. 253–8), that she was *ἐκ γῆς βαρβάρου λεληισμένη*. This is not simply the distorting effect of bitterness, but has links with a recognised aspect of the Greek view of marriage. In a famous fragment of Sophocles' *Tereus*, for example, a woman contrasts the pleasant life young girls lead in their father's house (cf. *Arg.* 3.811–14) with the exile of marriage, which is merely a matter of trade:

αἱ νέαι μὲν ἐν πατρὸς
ἡδιστον, οἶμαι, ζῶμεν ἀνθρώπων βίον·
τερπνῶς γὰρ αἰεὶ παῖδας ἀνοία τρέφει.
ὅταν δ' ἐς ἡβην ἐξικώμεθ' ἔμφρονες,
ὠθούμεθ' ἔξω καὶ διεμπολώμεθα
θεῶν πατρίων τῶν τε φυσάντων ἄπο,
αἱ μὲν ξένους πρὸς ἄνδρας, αἱ δὲ βαρβάρους,
ταῖ δ' εἰς ἀληθῆ δώματ', αἱ δ' ἐπίρροθα.†
καὶ ταῦτ', ἐπειδὴν εὐφρόνη ζεύξιμι μία,
χρῶν ἐπαινεῖν καὶ δοκεῖν καλῶς ἔχειν.

(Soph. fr. 583 R)

As Medea leaves for a life in exile, an exile that means marriage (vv. 29–30), Apollonius exploits, as many poets had before him, the similarities between Greek marriage and funerary ritual (vv. 27–9).⁵¹ With gestures familiar from the prelude to the death of women in tragedy, Medea finally abandons the virginal chamber which had played such a crucial role in the third book (3.645–64)⁵² and opts, not for death, but for life and marriage. This tension is reflected in the otherwise surprising dissonance of *εἶσιν* (v. 39) and *ἐξέσσυτο* (v. 40), and in the echoes of Sappho, fr. 31 LP-V in the description of the physical symptoms of Medea's terror. This most influential of amatory poems had naturally been used in the earlier descriptions of Medea's passion;⁵³ here the same poem is invoked to describe the consequences of that passion. What distinguishes vv. 15–19 from the Sapphic poem is the violence of Medea's terror;⁵⁴ in both love and fear she knew no half measures.

I have been exploring some of the implications of the poet's declared uncertainty which introduces the description of Medea's flight. Beyond these verses, there are three passages in which the status of Medea's flight is explicitly at issue. At 355ff. she reproaches Jason bitterly: she has brought disgrace upon women through her *μαργοσύνη*, and left Colchis *οὐ κατὰ κόσμον ἀναιδήτῳ ἰότητι* (360), trusting in Jason's promises of marriage. Secondly, Circe's speech of dismissal to Medea at 739–48 is framed by echoes of the *φύζα ἀεικελίη* of the proem, and Jason becomes simply a nameless stranger to be contemptuously ignored. Finally, in her plea to Arete at 1014–28 Medea blames the *ἄτη* to which all mortals are prone, denies that she left Colchis willingly – contrast Jason's proud assertion at 194, *τὴν μὲν ἐγὼν ἐθέλουσαν ἀνάξομαι οἴκαδ' ἄκοιτιν* – but through the persuasion of hateful fear, and denies

simply cannot be got out of the Greek. For *ὑπό* with the accusative 'in the power of' cf. N. Hopkinson on Call. h. 6.62.

⁵¹ Cf., e.g., J. M. Redfield, *Arethusa* 15 (1982), 188–91, R. Seaford, *CQ* 35 (1985), 318–19.

⁵² Cf. *JHS* 105 (1985), 192.

⁵³ Cf. 3.284–90.

⁵⁴ For the very strong emotions indicated by 'fire in the eyes', cf. L. Graz, *Le Feu dans l'Illiade et l'Odyssee* (Paris, 1965), pp. 240–7.

μαργουσίνη. Any apparent contradictions may, of course, be explained by the demands of each rhetorical situation,⁵⁵ but there is perhaps more to it than just that. Circe's view is plainly the Colchian view of Medea's behaviour – when the poet tells us that Medea and her aunt speak in Colchian (731), this is not merely a playful recognition of the unreal linguistic assumptions of the plot – but there are other views also. The one action, Medea's flight, is variously interpreted by Jason, Circe and Medea herself according to the partial knowledge which each has, as well as to the changing course of events. The poet thus exposes the frailty and relativity of explanation for human action, particularly when that action occurs within epic narrative. This is the problem to which the opening quandary has directed our attention.

Behind Apollonius' Medea lies not only the Euripidean character but also the figure of Helen, whose flight from Sparta with a *ξένος* provoked a war and whose motives had been variously analysed by poets, philosophers and historians.⁵⁶ Helen's power was an almost more-than-human beauty, whose dangerous force could be not unlike that of Medea's magic:

*αἶρεϊ γὰρ ἀνδρῶν ὄμματ', ἐξαιρεῖ πόλεις,
πίπρησιν οἴκους· ὧδ' ἔχει κηλήματα.* (Eur. *Tr.* 892–3)

The Helen of the *Odyssey* in fact is, like Medea, a worker in drugs (4.219–34),⁵⁷ who claims to have been the victim of *ἄτη* from Aphrodite which caused her to commit an *ἔργον ἀεικές*, the abandonment of her home and family (4.259–64, 23.218–24). The regrets of the Iliadic Helen (3.171–80, 6.343–58, 24.761–75), moreover, clearly look forward to Medea's bitter reproaches in Euripides and Apollonius. Apollonius indeed structures Medea's dilemma in Book 3 as a choice between following the example of Penelope and becoming a Helen.⁵⁸ So too, the question of how her flight should be judged, so crucial to Book 4, draws upon a rich tradition. Of particular importance is Euripides' *Trojan Women* in which Helen lays the blame for her behaviour on Aphrodite (vv. 940–50) and Hecuba blames Helen's *μαργουσίνη* (987–97); Gorgias' alternatives,⁵⁹ love as a god or love as *ἀνθρώπινον νόσημα καὶ ψυχῆς ἀγνόημα* (cf. *Arg.* 4.1015–17), offer a rather different choice, but point broadly in the same direction. Finally, it is important that the story of Helen embodies the clash between Europe and Asia,⁶⁰ a conflict which has an important structural role in *Argonautica* 4. The Colchian maiden (cf. 4.2–5) rescues the Greek expedition and in return receives Greek protection (4.195–7, 202–5, 1074–7); knowledge of the disastrous consequences of this assimilation of a foreign body is something which every reader must bring to the *Argonautica*.⁶¹

It is finally worth remarking that Vergil used Medea's oath to Arete (4.1019–22) in composing Aeneas' defence to Dido in the Underworld:

*ἴστω ἱερὸν φάος Ἥελίοιο,
ἴστω νυκτιπόλου Περσηίδος ὄργια κούρης,
μὴ μὲν ἔγων ἐθέλουσα σὺν ἀνδράσιν ἀλλοδαποῖσι
κεῖθεν ἀφωρμήθην·*

⁵⁵ Cf. Vian on 375, Beye 154.

⁵⁶ There is a useful survey by N. Zagagi, 'Helen of Troy: Encomium and Apology', *WS* 98 (1985), 63–88.

⁵⁷ This passage is echoed at 3.803 (Medea's drugs).

⁵⁸ Cf. 3.641 (corresponding to *Il.* 3.180, 6.344, 356), following a dream description based on Penelope at *Od.* 18.187–9, 19.516–17, and 3.793–4 (corresponding to *Il.* 3.411–12).

⁵⁹ *Helen* 19.

⁶⁰ Cf., e.g., Isocrates, *Helen* 67, Zagagi, *op. cit.*, pp. 72–4.

⁶¹ Herodotus makes the abduction of Medea the last in the series of actions which inspired Paris to abduct Helen (1.2–3). His report of Greek opinion, 'the women obviously would not have

per sidera iuro,
per superos et si qua fides tellure sub ima est,
inuitus, regina, tuo de litore cessi. (Aen. 6.458–60)

The Apollonian model is curiously overlooked by Vergilian critics, concerned as they are with Vergil's use in this passage of Callimachus and Catullus.⁶² The neglect is curious if only because Aeneas' speech is introduced by a simile (6.450–5) taken from the fourth book of the *Argonautica* (4.1477–80). Both Medea and Aeneas plead that they left unwillingly, under the compulsion of, in Medea's case, fear and, in Aeneas', divine instructions. Aeneas wants to say that love would have made him stay; in her panic, Medea tries to conceal her passion as one of those common human misdemeanours.⁶³ The difference is eloquent.

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been abducted unless they had wanted it' (1.4.2), shows that the question of female attitude was already inherent in the story. For the later linking of Medea and Helen cf. Propertius 2.34.5–8 (behind which may lie *Arg.* 4.445–9).

⁶² Cf. most recently J. Tatum, *AJP* 105 (1984), 440–4, S. Skulsky, *AJP* 106 (1985), 447–55, J. Griffin, *Latin Poets and Roman Life* (London, 1985), p. 159. With 4.1021 F. Rütten, *De Vergilii studiis Apollonianis* (diss. Münster, 1912), p. 71 connected *Aen.* 4.361, *Italiam non sponte sequor*.

⁶³ Vian's attempt to deny this sense to *κούφησι . . . ἀμπλακίησι* in 4.1017 is unconvincing.