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Star-Crossed: Hector, Achilles, Jason, and Medea at *Argonautica* 3.956-961

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This note explores the literary resonances of a previously uncommented on Homeric intertext in the famous Jason-Sirius simile at *Argonautica* 3.956-361. While scholarship on the passage has long recognized that Apollonius primarily draws on the Achilles-Sirius simile from *Il.* 22.25-32, I present evidence that the passage opens with an allusion to another Iliadic simile whose subject is not Achilles, but rather his rival Hector. I argue that Apollonius, in evoking these Homeric rivals, emphasizes both the instability of Jason's heroic character and the tragic blindness of Medea to the pain and disappointment that she is soon to experience. The appreciation of this allusion to Hector also deepens the contrast between the foreboding Jason-Sirius simile in Book 3 and the hopeful star simile which introduces Jason's arrival before Hypsipyle in Book 1.

At *Argonautica* 3.954, Medea, her heart leaping at the mere hint of a footfall or the rustle of the wind, awaits Jason's arrival outside the temple of Hecate. When Jason appears, bringing the journey of these two characters to a climax, Apollonius lingers over this important moment with what a recent critic has described as "the most splendid of his many intriguing similes".¹

αὐτὰρ ὁ γ' οὐ μετὰ δηρὸν ἐελδομένη ἐφάνθη,
ὑψὸς ἄναθρόσκων ἅ τε Σείριος Ὠκεανοῖο,
ὅς δὴ τοι καλὸς μὲν ἀρίζηλος τ' ἐσιδέσθαι
ἀντέλλει, μήλοισι δ' ἐν ἄσπετον ἦκεν ὀζύν·

1 Köhnken 2010, 144.

ὥς ἄρα τῇ καλὸς μὲν ἐπήλυθεν εἰσοράσθαι
 Αἰσονίδης, κάματον δὲ δυσίμερον ὦρσε φανθεῖς.²

But before long he appeared to her longing eyes,
 leaping upon high like Sirius from the Ocean,
 which rises beautiful and bright to look upon,
 but sends unspeakable misery upon the flocks;
 so then did Jason approach her, beautiful to gaze upon,
 but his appearance called forth a tormented yearning.

In Homeric epic, star similes are indicators of heroic prowess and thus equally harbingers of death and destruction. The primary model for this simile is the famous Achilles-Sirius simile from *Iliad* 22.25-32, which portends for Priam the death of Hector.³

τὸν δ' ὁ γέρων Πρίαμος πρῶτος ἴδεν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν,
 παμφαίνονθ' ὥς τ' ἀστέρ' ἐπεσσύμενον πεδίοιο,
 ὅς ῥά τ' ὀπώρης εἶσιν, ἀρίζηλοι δὲ οἱ αὐγαί
 φαίνονται πολλοῖσι μετ' ἀστράσι νυκτὸς ἀμολγῶ,
 ὄν τε κύν' Ὀρίωνος ἐπικλησιν καλέουσιν·
 λαμπρότατος μὲν ὄ γ' ἐστί, κακὸν δέ τε σῆμα τέτυκται,
 καί τε φέρει πολλὸν πυρετὸν δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσιν·
 ὥς τοῦ χαλκὸς ἔλαμπε περὶ στήθεσσι θεόντος.⁴

Elderly Priam spied him first with his eyes
 shining brightly like a star rushing over the plain,
 which rises in the late summer, and its rays appear
 conspicuous among many stars in the dead of the night,
 which men call by the name of the Dog of Orion;
 it is at any rate the brightest, but a sign of evil,

2 A.R. 3.956-961. The text of Apollonius is from Vian's Budé edition; translations are adapted from Race 2009.

3 The scholarship on this simile is extensive; important discussions are Hunter 1989, 202-203; Goldhill 1991, 306-307; Effe 1996, 309-310; Köhnken 2010, 144-145; Beck 2014, 38-42. There is also an obvious parallel with the simile describing the entrance of Diomedes into battle at *Il.* 5.5-6 (cf. Beye 1982, 64). Shumaker 1969, 101-102 argues less convincingly for a reworking of the encounter between Nausicaa and Odysseus in *Od.* 6. This scene is a significant model in the lead up to the encounter, particularly in the description of Medea's travel to the temple and the beautification of Jason (cf. Hunter 1989, 192 on A.R. 3.869-886 and 199 on A.R. 3.919-925; Hunter 1993, 48).

4 *Hom. Il.* 22.25-32. Text is from West's Teubner edition; translation by the author.

and brings much fever on wretched mortals;
so the bronze shone about the chest of Achilles as he ran.

Apollonius' simile is an intertextual masterpiece of tension and irony, and has been rightly singled out as exemplary of Apollonius' erotic repurposing of the martial epic tradition.⁵ Where Priam recognized the blazing physical dominance of Achilles and the impending doom of his favorite son, Medea only sees the gleaming beauty of Jason, whose erotic appeal (rather than any martial skills) seductively eclipses the danger it contains: remain too long in its glow and you are bound to get burnt. The simile injects a menacing foreboding into the encounter. The association of Jason with Achilles underscores the devastation that he will wreak on Medea (and ultimately his own self-destruction), while also stressing the difference between the two heroes. Even more interestingly, Medea is the unwitting victim twice over. As Hector was the focal point of Achilles' *aristeia*, so Medea is Jason's ultimate erotic conquest. At the same time, both the Iliadic and Apollonian similes stress the act of viewing, and in doing so associate Medea with Priam.⁶ The simultaneity of associations with Priam and Medea constructs an ironic tension, as Deborah Beck has observed, that emphasizes Medea's credulousness and thus heightens a reader's empathy for her situation.⁷ On this reading, Medea, unlike Priam, cannot see the difficulties that await her. Love is blind and blinding.

As is often the case in Apollonius (and other Hellenistic poets), the literary meaning of a poetic allusion is enriched as much by what is missing or different from the source text as it is by the parallels that are included. This is true of the passage under discussion. In his insightful treatment of Apollonius' reworking of the Iliadic source material, Adolph Köhnken observes that Apollonius depicts Sirius in the act of rising, whereas in the *Iliad* 22 simile the Dog Star is "set firm in the center of the sky, shining brighter than a multitude of other stars".⁸ Apollonius has highlighted this divergence from the source text in the opening words of the simile, for the phrase ὑψόσ' ἀναθρώσκων (957) functions as the hinge between the narrative and the simile. Without commenting on the language itself, Köhnken understood the Apollonian innovation to emphasize primarily the anticipated appearance of Jason, and, indeed, the presence

5 Cf. Hunter 1989, 202-203; Hunter 1993, 48; Knight 1995, 241-242; Effe 1996, 210.

6 See the discussion in Acosta-Hughes 2010, 56 with a focus on the adaptation of Sappho and Beck 2014, 39-40, who cites the discussion of de Jong 1985, 266-269 on the vivid focalization in the Iliadic model. Medea and Priam are also parallel in regards to the fact that they each will share the grief of losing their offspring, albeit under extremely different circumstances.

7 Beck 2014, 40-41.

8 Köhnken 2010, 145.

of ἀναθρώσκων, which must mean here ‘leaping’ or ‘springing’, complements the jittery emotional and physical state of Medea.⁹ In his commentary on this line, Richard Hunter has explained the innovation as a reworking of the phrase ὑπόσ’ ἀνασχόμενος (*Il.* 22.34), used of a miserable Priam raising his hands at the sight of Achilles, which immediately follows the Sirius simile. In adapting Priam’s anguished reaction as the introduction to his simile, Apollonius “stresses that Jason’s appearance will have disastrous consequences”.¹⁰ This type of inversion is suggestive, particularly given both the placement of the new material at the opening of the simile and shared metrical shape of the two phrases, and Hunter’s interpretation has merit, by highlighting the possibilities of meaning making at sites of disjuncture between source and imitative texts.

However, the *Iliad* offers a closer parallel than that suggested by Hunter, which has until now gone uncommented upon in the literature on the simile. The collocation of the verb ἀναθρώσκω and the adverb ὑψι/ὑπόσσε appears only once elsewhere in surviving Greek literature before Apollonius. At *Il.* 13.140 we have ὑψι δ’ ἀναθρώσκων, essentially identical to the Apollonian phrase and placed in the same metrical position at the head of the line.¹¹ In the context of a passage that is reliant on the reader’s recognition of Apollonius’ adaptation of Iliadic antecedents for a full appreciation of the foreboding atmosphere of the encounter between Jason and Medea, it is quite plausible to consider the reuse of this uncommon phrase as part of the frame of reference.

The context of the Iliadic phrase reinforces this argument. In this section of *Iliad* 13, Poseidon has just roused the Achaeans, suddenly back on their heels, to fight against the onslaught of the Trojans. The Trojans muster another wave of attacks, only to be met with a forceful Achaean resistance. When Hector takes the lead in this assault, the poet likens him (*Il.* 13.137-145) to a boulder (ὄλοοίτροχος), which thrust by a river in flood and leaping aloft (ὑψι ἀναθρώσκων) flies (πέτεται) until it comes to a stop when it reaches level ground. Though Hector is ultimately unsuccessful in breaching the Achaean line, emblemized by his likening to a rock moved by a flood where before he was the flood itself impeding a warrior’s advance (cf. *Il.* 5.598-599),¹² his tireless onslaught

9 Köhnken 2010, 145.

10 Hunter 1989, 203.

11 The parallel is included among Homeric reminiscences by Campbell 1981, 56, but his work is not engaged in the process of literary criticism. Vian 1961 does not cite the parallel. Oppian reuses the Homeric and Apollonian phrase in quick succession, perhaps as *variatio*, at *H.* 3.100 (ὑψι δ’ ἀναθρώσκει) and *H.* 3.129 (ὑπόσ’ ἀναθρώσκων), both times to describe the spirited leaping of captured fish. Could the order of their citation reflect a recognition on the part of Oppian of the Homeric original and Apollonian reworking?

12 Janko 1992, 62.

momentarily inspires his fellow Trojans. Additionally, this simile was reworked or referenced, primarily due to the presence of the rare term *δλοοίτροχος*, by other Hellenistic poets, and so speaks to a familiarity with and interest in the simile as an intertext.¹³ If we accept that Apollonius has borrowed this phrase from the simile in *Iliad* 13, we must consider the poetic purpose of injecting the figure of Hector into a simile seemingly designed to link Jason to Achilles, as Apollonius does elsewhere in the *Argonautica*.

At the most basic level, a reading of *ὕψος' ἀναθρόσκων* as an allusion to *Il.* 13.140 alongside the opening of the reworked Achilles-Sirius simile encapsulates in a single line the conflict between Hector and Achilles, which Apollonius then menacingly maps on to the relationship between Medea and Jason. Indeed, the syntax of the line reproduces the sequence of events in the *Iliad*. When Jason suddenly materializes before Medea, Apollonius also blurs the line between heroic exemplars: Jason's movement is initially associated with the confident attack of Hector only to then inspire the reworking of the Achilles-Sirius simile, which presaged Hector's defeat.¹⁴

The jarring menace produced by the contamination of these two opposed Homeric models in the context of Jason's erotic conquests is reinforced when considered in tandem with the other star simile used for an encounter between Jason and a powerful female character. At 1.774-781 Jason's arrival before the Lemnian queen Hypsipyle is compared to the Evening Star, whose rising delights maidens and thus presages marriage and childbirth, a polar-opposite astrological portent from the sterilizing glare of Sirius.¹⁵ This stark contrast has been well commented upon and contributes to the air of disquiet in the encounter between Medea and Jason.¹⁶

βῆ δ' ἴμεναι προτὶ ἄστυ, φαεινῶ ἀστέρι ἴσος,
ὄν ῥά τε νηγατέησιν ἐεργόμεναι καλύβησιν
νύμφαι θηήσαντο δόμων ὑπερ ἀντέλλοντα,
καὶ σφισι κυανέοιο δι' ἠέρος ὄμματα θέλγει
καλὸν ἐρευθόμενος, γάνυται δέ τε ἠιθέοιο

13 Cf. *δλοοίτροχος* at Posidippus AB 19.9 and Theocritus *Id.* 22.49 with discussion in Petrain 2003. Bing 2005, 125-126 has argued for Posidippus AB 7, another poem in the *Λιθικά* section of the Milan Papyrus, as a "detailed echo" (125) of the entire Homeric simile.

14 We may also consider the impact of contrasting Hector and Achilles through allusions to similes in which the strength of the former is beginning to ebb (Hector as a boulder moved by Zeus' rains; cf. Janko 1992, 62) and that of the latter is reaching its pinnacle.

15 On this simile, see Beye 1969, 43; Garson 1972, 8; Hunter 1993, 48; Reitz 1996, 15-19; Köhnken 2010, 165-166.

16 Cf. Carspecken 1952, 97-98; Garson 1972, 8; Fusillo 1985, 335-336.

παρθένος ἰμείρουσα μετ' ἄλλοδαποῖσιν ἐόντος
 ἀνδράσιν, ᾧ καὶ μιν μνηστῆν κομέουσι τοκήες·
 τῷ ἴκελος προπόλοιο κατὰ στίβον ἦεν ἥρωσ.¹⁷

He went on his way toward the city like a shining star, which
 young brides, confined in newly made quarters, gaze upon as it rises
 above their houses, and enchants their eyes with its beautiful red
 luster through the dark sky, and the maiden rejoices as she yearns
 for the young man who is away among foreign people, for whom
 her parents are keeping her to be his bride; like that star the hero
 followed in the footsteps of the servant.

The introduction of the star simile at A.R. 1.774 (φαεινῶ ἀστέρι ἴσος) echoes the language of the Achilles-Sirius simile at *Il.* 22.26 (παμφαίνονθ' ὡς τ' ἀστέρ'), and so initially prepares the reader for a Homeric association between a hero (notably Achilles), a star, and the withering force of its brightness only to repurpose the gleaming of a star in order to establish the erotic glow of Jason and the optimism for marriage that it casts.¹⁸ Likening Jason to a star that brings hope to a maiden whose fiancé is away at war has echoes of the circumstances faced by Andromache and Hector. Indeed, Apollonius partially models Jason's arrival and reception at Lemnos, as Richard Hunter has convincingly demonstrated, on dutiful Hector's mid-battle visits to Troy in *Iliad* 6.¹⁹ Medea, of course, will not experience the marital harmony hinted at in the Lemnian episode and she will not leave her erotic encounter with Jason unscathed as Hypsipyle did. In view of this, we may detect a whispered echo of the Lemnian queen's name in ὑψόσε, which further reinforces the link between the two women, just as the shared adverb at *Il.* 13.141 and *Il.* 22.34 connects Hector, Achilles, and Jason.²⁰ Altogether, the allusion to Hector (and its echoes of Hypsipyle and Achilles) in

17 A.R. 1.774-781.

18 Given the Homeric association of star similes with destruction an atmosphere of disquiet can still be felt, as Reitz 1996, 19 observes: "[Der Vergleich] spielt auch gleichzeitig auf ihr trauriges Ende an, traurig jedenfalls für diejenige, auf die der Stern und der Held seine Wirkung ausübt".

19 Hunter 1993, 49: Jason is welcomed by the Lemnian women as Hector is by anxious wives and mothers, and both "are alike in the burdens they carry on behalf of others". In typical Apollonian fashion, as Hunter recognizes, Jason's interaction with Hypsipyle also echoes Paris' erotic encounter with Helen in *Iliad* 3.

20 I thank Anatole Mori for drawing my attention to this echo.

Jason's appearance before Medea at 3.957 underscores the matrimonial disappointment that awaits Medea.²¹

In this pair of similes that introduce the major erotic encounters of the first and second halves of the epic, Apollonius subverts, or at least destabilizes, reader expectations through the reworking of Homeric models.²² These contrasts between Homeric intertexts accord with a broader Apollonian penchant for contextual juxtaposition. In particular, the elision of Hector and Achilles at 3.957, vanquished and vanquisher, acknowledges the complicated issue of Jason's heroic identity within the tradition of Greek epic, which is constantly raised by the *Argonautica*.

More significantly, the attention that these two intertexts call to the characterization of Jason underscores Medea's tragic inability to interpret the dangers that lay before her eyes. Given Apollonius' placement of the phrase at the head of 3.957 (ὑψόσ' ἀναθρόσκων), it is thus appealing to interpret the echo of *Il.* 13.140 as a devastatingly ironic deployment of allusion.²³ Medea cannot read how the confident stride of Hector transforms into the brilliant menace of burning Achilles; how the presence of one means destruction at the hands of the other. As noted above, the original Achilles-Sirius simile was focalized through the perspective of Priam, who recognized the destruction that awaits his son on the plains before Troy, and whose grief-stricken response to the sight of brilliant Achilles has been argued as the model for the phrase under discussion. Following Beck, Priam's knowledge contrasts with Medea's ignorance, which is further underscored should it be immediately preceded by an image drawn from a moment of success for Hector. Unlike the reader of the *Argonautica*, Medea does not have knowledge of or access to the Homeric epic or even the rest of the epic into which she is written. Ultimately, Jason is Medea's Hector. Thus, the project of recognizing and interpreting this allusion to *Il.* 13.140 in the context of the Achilles-Sirius simile both points to the

21 A possible inversion may be detected in the contrast between the marked associations of the ecphrasis of Jason's cloak with the shield of Achilles and the feint at the Achilles-Sirius simile in the Jason-Hesperus simile.

22 Cf. Hunter 1993, 50 on the "matrix of Iliadic associations" that serve as the material for and connection between these two scenes.

23 Similar in this regard is the use of another allusion from *Il.* 22 when Medea first sees Jason she interestedly glances at him from behind her λιπαρήν ... καλύπτρην (*A.R.* 3.445) a phrase that echoes the description of Hecuba's veil, which she tears in grief upon seeing Achilles desecrate her son's corpse (*Il.* 22.406: λιπαρήν ἔρριψε καλύπτρην); cf. Pavlou 2009, 186-188.

difficulty in identifying Jason as a hero and further enriches our appreciation of Apollonius' play with Homeric antecedents.²⁴

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