

Aphrodite's bribing of Eros with a toy that belonged to the infant Zeus has received a certain amount of attention since the early 1980s. Eros' youth and game-playing features have been characterized as reflecting archaic lyric, and the promised toy, a golden sphere with hidden seams, a dark blue helix and a comet-like tail, has been linked to passages in Aratus' *Phaenomena* and to the spherical cosmos as represented by contemporary solid or armillary spheres (Prendergraft 1991). This paper argues that through his characterization of Eros, his description of the ball and two etymological wordplays (one based on a notorious Homeric crux), Apollonius performs a typical sleight-of-hand that has eluded modern criticism.

Eros' childishness, in both appearance and behaviour, is not characteristic of Eros in archaic lyric, nor is it in evidence prior to his depiction in the *Argonautica*. His bow and arrows are also post-archaic, making their first appearance in Euripides: prior to the fifth century Eros is neither described nor depicted in art as having any such *accoutrements*. Only the ball that he covets as a plaything belongs to the Eros of the archaic period, and it will be argued that *Arg.* 3.137-41 is another instance of Apollonius' sophisticated and tongue-in-cheek aetiological technique, which moreover necessitates a re-evaluation of the toy's semantic reference. Apollonius' designation of Eros as *margos* earlier at 3.120 also echoes earlier lyric, but the manner in which Apollonius employs it should prompt us to revise our interpretation of its epithetic meaning in the lyric poets. It, too, functions as part of Apollonius' aetiological paradigm, relating both to Eros' flight from Olympus to Colchis, and to the helix which swirls about the toy.

While the golden colour of the ball itself has been aptly linked to the golden fleece in a satirical comparison of Jason to Eros, both of whom desire and hoard golden things (Klein 1980-81), the origin of the *kyaneos* colour of the helix which runs over the surface of the sphere has not been investigated, presumably on the grounds that it is appropriately coloured for a celestial object, in keeping with the identification of links to Aratus' *Phaenomena* (Gillies 1924; Prendergraft 1991). Recent discoveries in the field of ancient colour terminology will be adduced to show that the sphere's dark-blue helix and double rings (*diploai hapsides*), have another role to play: the juxtaposition of *helix* and *kyaneos* allude to the well-known problem of their complimentary distribution in Homer - *helikops* occurs only in the *Iliad* and *kyanops* only in the *Odyssey* (Irwin 1974) - and to their apparent synonymy with *melas* (Page 1959). A recent study of *kyaneos* in Greek poetry has shown that both dark-blue colour and notions of threat are implicit in *kyaneos* from the time of Homer (Stewart 2006), and both of these elements can be seen to form a necessary part of Apollonius' aetiological game.