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Apollonius & the Muses:

the fiction of choral performances in the *Argonautica* (1.1-910)

Recent scholarship on the nature of the narrator in the *Argonautica* has convincingly shown that Apollonius creates the illusion that his literary epic is a song improvised in front of a live audience by a divinely inspired bard. This paper develops this argument further. We argue that (1) this performative illusion is of a mixed gender choral performance; (2) that this choral performance is modeled on the divine performance of Apollo and the Muses on Olympus, which consists of Apollo, the choregos who plays the phorminx and sings while the Muses sing in response and dancing around him with the rest of the gods and goddesses, as depicted in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (186-206); and (3) that the gendered contrasts apparent in the departure from Iolkos (1. 234- 579) and the sojourn on Lemnos (1.601-910) can be interpreted as arising from this fictional re-enactment of the divine ideal.

(1) This paper shows that certain elements in the proem (1.1-23) create a fiction of *ex tempore* composition. These elements include (a) the use of the "fictional future" to announce the song as a whole and project the beginning of the performance to a later moment in the song; (b) the pretense that the bard is deliberating about the content of the song in the present moment (1.18-21); (c) the stress on the present and the use of the first person plural of the hortatory subjunctive in the call to begin the song (*mnêsometha*) imply that the poet is collaborating with the Muses as their choregos.

(2) The conflation of epic with hymn in the Argonautic proem has long been recognized. Here we argue that there is a significant intertextual relationship between the phrase *Dios archômenos*, typical in hymnic preludes and the opening phrase of the *Argonautica*, *archômenos seo Phoibe*. Apollonius' variation of the more usual phrase by replacing Zeus with Apollo, coupled with his general reworking of Pindar's *Fourth Pythian Ode* signifies that one aspect of the fictional performance involves a blending of bardic epic with choral epinician, and even more specifically, choral epinician associated with Pythian Apollo who is often imagined to perform the ideal song himself (e.g. Pi. Py. 1.1-4). We show that projections of this aspect of the fictional performance can be observed in the presentation of the Argonauts as an epinician chorus beginning in the Iolkian episode.

(2) We also demonstrate that there is a resposion between male vs. female voices and perspectives in the departure from Iolkos and the sojourn on Lemnos. We contend that the internal structural symmetry of these episodes is thematically gendered and that a quasi-amoebean relationship obtains between both episodes. This resposion, we argue, reflects another aspect of the fictional performance: the blending is more complex than simply bardic epic and choral epinician. It involves the simultaneous blending of tragic choral performance, in which andro-centric themes of war and victory "sung" by the bard are answered by gyno-centric themes of love and lament "sung" by the Muses.

Finally we will show that in this fictional epic-choral performance the andro-centric blending of epic and epinician of the bard gives way to the Muses' gyno-centric blending

epic and tragic chorus, forecasting the preeminent position of Medea in Book 3. Female speech and perspectives moves from being subtly privileged in the departure episode to being dominant in the Lemnian episode where, we show that through rhetorical strategies and imagery previous pejorative male views of these women in particular (especially vis á vis their guilt in the murder of the male population) and implicitly of women in general are subverted.