

Zeitschrift:	Museum Helveticum : schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft = Revue suisse pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique = Rivista svizzera di filologia classica
Herausgeber:	Schweizerische Vereinigung für Altertumswissenschaft
Band:	54 (1997)
Heft:	2
Artikel:	On the departure from Pagasae and the passage of the Planctae in Apollonius' Argonautica
Autor:	Byre, Calvin S.
DOI:	https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-42155

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 21.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

On the Departure from Pagasae and the Passage of the Planctae in Apollonius' *Argonautica*

By Calvin S. Byre, University of Oklahoma

In the first book of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, when the Argonauts have assembled on the shore of Pagasae and Jason has been chosen leader of the expedition, the Argonauts ready the ship, sacrifice to Apollo, and feast. They embark at dawn the next day (1.519–534a). A tearful Jason turns his gaze from his homeland as the ship leaves the shore (534b–535), propelled by the oars of his companions to the tune of the song of Orpheus. The sun glints from their armor, and their wake is white behind them (536–546). All the gods look on from heaven at the ship and the Argonauts; the nymphs of Pelion, too, on its highest peak look with wonder on the ship, the handiwork of Athena, and on the Argonauts, her oarsmen. Chiron descends from the mountain top to the shore and bids them a fair voyage and return, while his wife holds the infant Achilles up for his departing father to see (547–558).

The departure scene has often been admired for its pictorial beauty, its movement from the lofty panorama to the close-up view of the figures on the shore¹. But the scene is more than merely decorative. It is the climax of the preliminary part of the poem, in which the poet introduces us to his fictional world and gives us the background for the central action of the poem, the voyage to Colchis in search of the Golden Fleece and the return with it to Greece. In this introduction to his fictional world, the poet, through his highly selective presentation (and suppression) of narrative information, manipulates our interpretation of what is going on in the story and our expectations of what will happen later. The departure scene reinforces and confirms one important pattern of expectation: that the Argonauts will accomplish their mission through feats of valor, with the supporting favor of the gods.

These expectations are, of course, disappointed as the poem and Argonautic voyage progress; a disappointment that, I believe, is a deliberate rhetorical strategy on the part of the poet, designed to highlight how problematical in his fictional world are “heroic” conduct and the nature of the relationship between gods and mortals².

1 See, e.g., Edward Phinney, Jr., “Hellenistic Painting and the Poetic Style of Apollonius”, *CJ* 62 (1967) 145–146 and Charles Rowan Beye, *Epic and Romance in the “Argonautica” of Apollonius* (Carbondale 1982) 31.

2 Misleading elements in this part of the *Argonautica* have been pointed out by other scholars. For example, Guido Paduano and Massimo Fusillo, eds. (*Apollonio Rodio: “Le Argonautiche”*, Milan 1986, 5) note that the lofty tone of the opening lines have misled generations of readers and colored their judgement of the poem with the disappointment of not having their expecta-

Critics of the *Argonautica* in recent decades tend to agree that the poem as a whole presents a deliberately non- (at least in the Homeric sense), un-, or anti-heroic version of the Argonautic quest, embodied particularly in the character of Jason³; some have found what I have termed the preliminary part of the poem to be strewn with suggestions of inadequacy or deficiency on the part of the Argonauts, and have interpreted the seemingly heroic elements as ironic or even parodic. David Pike, for example, has recently argued that here “Apollonius, at almost every important moment, seems to be pretending to be writing Homeric Epic and then at once telling us that this is really what we might call ‘Anti-Epic’. His ‘heroes’ are not as ‘heroic’ as they might at first appear, and Jason, in particular, is not nearly as ‘warlike’ as we were initially led to believe”⁴. I cannot agree, however, that Apollonius’ anti-epic intentions are revealed “at once”, nor that our initial expectations are brought up so short. It is only after the preliminary part of the poem, through the gradual buildup of narrative information during the (linear) reading process, that we come to see how much this fictional world differs from our initial expectations of it⁵.

tion of heroic grandeur and of an idealized view of the distant past fulfilled. And Richard Hunter remarks that the admiring audience of the gods at the departure is “both unique and (deliberately) misleading” (*The “Argonautica” of Apollonius: Literary Studies*, Cambridge 1993, 78). But they do not seem to see this as part of a large-scale, coherent rhetorical strategy. – The sort of strategy that I am ascribing to Apollonius is quite common in literary narratives. In his study of how such narratives exploit the effect of the order of presentation on the reader’s progressive attempt to make sense of texts, Menakhem Perry notes that “in many cases, the reader constructs, at the beginning of the text, hypotheses that are indeed the best possible inferences from the incomplete material yet available, hypotheses that he would certainly not have constructed, or at least given such prominence, had he been in possession of the information he received later in the reading process” (“Literary Dynamics: How the Order of a Text Creates its Meanings”, *Poetics Today* 1, 1979, 35–64, 311–361; quotation on p. 47). This large-scale strategy may be related to Apollonius’ strategy in particular episodes. Virginia Knight (*The Renewal of Epic: Responses to Homer in the “Argonautica” of Apollonius*, Leiden 1995, 117) notes that his “‘frustrated battles’ are one instance of Apollonius’ tendency to lead the reader to expect an outcome which then does not take place”, highlighting alternatives to battle as a way of dealing with conflicts.

3 For scholarship on the question of the applicability of the concept of “heroic” to the *Argonautica*’s central action and to its characters, particularly Jason, and whether he is a “hero” in the traditional sense of the term or rather an “anti-hero” or “love hero” or something else, and whether or not he is a sympathetic character, see R. L. Hunter, “‘Short on Heroics’: Jason in the *Argonautica*”, *CQ* 38 (1988) 436–437 and bibliographical references; to these should now be added Hunter, “*Argonautica* of Apollonius” (n. 2 above); Steven Jackson, “Apollonius’ Jason: Human Being in an Epic Scenario”, *G & R* 39 (1992) 155–162; James J. Clauss, *The Best of the Argonauts: The Redefinition of the Epic Hero in Book 1 of Apollonius’s “Argonautica”* (Berkeley 1993); and Mary Margolies Deforest, *Apollonius’ “Argonautica”: A Callimachean Epic* (Leiden 1994).

4 David Pike, “Jason’s Departure: Apollonius Rhodius and Heroism”, *AClass* 36 (1993) 27–37 (quotation on p. 32). Cf. Beye (n. 1 above) 101, who finds that “the departure scene, from the catalogue to the actual sailing out, describes more than anything else the nonheroic quality of Jason”; Deforest (n. 3 above) 50–54.

5 As Pike himself (n. 4 above) occasionally concedes; e.g., pp. 29, 31.

Jason's tearfulness as the Argo pulls out from shore is sometimes taken as evidence that he is second-rate and pusillanimous, like his earlier election to leadership of the expedition only after Heracles has rejected it and bidden the Argonauts choose Jason (1.331–362) and his silent brooding on the shore the eve of departure, bitterly reproved by Idas (1.460–471)⁶. I believe, however, that such readings of the preliminary part of the poem involve what Meir Sternberg, apropos of the *Odyssey*, aptly calls “hindsight misreading” – interpreting the characters and events of the early part of the poem in the light of information that is given only later in the narrative⁷ – and fail to recognize the poet's rhetorical exploitation of the (linear) reading process. The preponderance of the evidence afforded by the text *at this stage* of our reading of it suggests a far more charitable interpretation of Jason's character and behavior. If the other Argonauts consider Heracles as τὸν ἄριστον (1.338)⁸ and make him their first choice as leader, no less a man than Heracles himself thinks that Jason, who assembled the group, is the proper one to lead it (1.345–347); sufficient reason, surely, for Jason to accept election as captain with joy and alacrity (1.349–350)⁹. His silent brooding on the shore of Pagasae occurs on the eve of the day on which he has been elected leader, a position whose heavy responsibilities he is well aware of (1.339–340; the leader must concern himself with everything that is involved in the voyage: ὃ κεν τὰ ἔκαστα μέλοιτο) and not long after Idmon has prophesied a successful voyage, but one that will be filled with “innumerable trials” (ἀπειρόσιοι … ἀεθλοι, 441–442) and from which Idmon himself will not return (443–447). In this context, it is understandable that Jason ponders everything that is involved in the voyage (πορφύρεσκεν ἔκαστα) and is like one who is downcast (κατηφιώντι ἐοικώς, 1.461)¹⁰. So, too, it is understandable that he, and he alone, is tearful as the Argo gets under way.

Jason's weeping as he turns his eyes from his homeland reminds us that it is the *nostos* of the Argonauts that is the ultimate goal and purpose of the mission, and that it will be attained only through considerable pain and suffering. But Jason's behavior at the beginning of this scene is balanced at its end by Chiron's

6 See, e.g., Beye (n. 1 above) 82–88; Pike (n. 4 above) 31–32.

7 Meir Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (Bloomington 1978) 70.

As Perry (n. 2 above) 47 remarks, “we may build up at the beginning of the text a sympathetic or a balanced attitude towards a character, because any distinctly disparaging information that might have prevented this was postponed to a later stage in the text-continuum, with the text initially presenting only (or mainly) positive aspects of it”.

8 The text of the poem that is cited throughout this paper is that of Francis Vian, ed., *Apollonios de Rhodes*, “Argonautiques”, 3 vols. (Paris 1976–1981).

9 Cf. Hermann Fränkel, *Noten zu den “Argonautika” des Apollonios* (Munich 1968) 67–69.

10 Cf. Francis Vian, “ΙΗΣΩΝ ΑΜΗΧΑΝΕΩΝ”, in: *Studi in onore di Anthos Ardizzone*, ed. Enrico Livrea and G. Aurelio Privitera, 2 vols. (Rome 1978) 2: 1036–1037; Hunter, “Argonautica” of *Apollonius* (n. 2 above) 19–20.

benediction and by Achilles' being held up for his father Peleus to see¹¹; the latter details look forward brightly and optimistically to the voyage out, and to the presumably heroic deeds that will take place on it. Taken together, the two vignettes suggest that the voyage of the Argonauts is a sort of relay race, in which the generation of heroes before the Trojan War will venture forth to do great deeds and return to pass the baton to the next generation. This theme has already been implicitly sounded in the Catalog (1.23–233), where the roster of Argonauts includes many whose sons fought at Troy¹².

The expectation that the Argonauts are going forth to accomplish their mission through valor and armed conflict is one that the reader shares with the Argonauts themselves, many of whom, the Catalog makes clear, are men distinguished by their prowess in battle and who join the expedition in order to exercise it¹³ (it is Idas' hubristic and vainglorious contempt for the gods that they reject in 1.463–494, not his confidence in the force of arms). The townsmen of Iolcus, too, watching the Argonauts heading toward the ship with their arms (1.241), appear to expect that the Argonauts will have to win the fleece by force of them (1.242–246). Our expectation is reinforced by the narrator's references to Jason's armor as ἀργήτα τεύχε' (1.266)¹⁴, to Jason as ἀργήτος (1.349) and, in the departure scene, by his repeated references to the arms of the Argonauts (1.530, 532, 544–545).

The Argonauts also expect, and by the end of the departure scene the reader has even more reason to expect, that they will carry out their mission with the favor and assistance of the gods. The preliminary portion of the poem is quite chary of expositional details about the events and circumstances leading up to the expedition¹⁵. From what we are told, however, it appears that the impetus for the expedition is Pelias' fear of Jason as the one foretold as his destroyer. Pelias has commanded him to go in search of the Golden Fleece simply in order to get him out of the way forever (1.1–17); and Jason, it seems, must needs obey him (cf. 1.242–243, 278–279; 362).

But what we learn of the antecedents of the expedition strongly suggests that the gods are firmly on the Argonauts' side. Not only does the Catalog em-

11 Cf. André Hurst, *Apollonios de Rhodes, manière et cohérence: Contribution à l'étude de l'esthétique alexandrine* (Rome 1967) 57.

12 John Frederick Carspecken, "Apollonius Rhodius and the Homeric Epic", *YCS* 13 (1952) 44; Donald Norman Levin, *Apollonius' "Argonautica" Re-examined I: The Neglected First and Second Books* (Leiden 1971) 31–32.

13 Cf. Fränkel (n. 9 above) 43.

14 "Mention qui surprend au premier abord dans une épopée où les batailles tiennent si peu de place" (Vian, "Argonautiques", n. 8 above, 1:13); but we must remember that it becomes surprising only in retrospect.

15 On the "gaps" in the exposition, see Fränkel (n. 9 above) 24–37; Levin (n. 12 above) 13–21; and, on the delayed exposition of the divine will(s) at play in the story, D. C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition* (Oxford 1991) 61–64.

phasize the fact that many of the Argonauts are the sons of gods¹⁶, but we have also learned that Athena helped build the Argo, giving advice to Argus (1.19, 111–112) and placing the divine beam of Dodonian oak in her stem (1.526–527), that it was she who impelled Tiphys to join the expedition (1.109–110), and that Jason has close ties with her (συνημοσύνησιν, 1.300). We have learned, furthermore, that Apollo – whose dire prophecy to Pelias precipitated his ordering Jason to make the expedition – has given Jason favorable oracles (1.301–302), promising to guide his journey (1.360–362, 412–414; cf. the prophesy of Idmon, 1.439–447).

Our expectation of active, personal support from the gods seems to be confirmed by what we are told of the observers of the departure, the series of “focalizers” from whose point of view the scene is shown: the gods, the nymphs of Pelion, and Chiron, his wife, and the child Achilles. *All* the gods, the narrator tells us emphatically, watch when the Argo sets out to sea in this, our first direct view of the gods in the poem (Πάντες δ’ οὐρανόθεν λεῦσσον θεοί, 547). They are not individually named or described, and we are told nothing explicit about their feelings or reactions as they watch the scene. But in the context of the verb of perception it is natural to interpret the object of that verb, “the ship and the race of demi-gods” (νῆα καὶ ἡμιθέων ἀνδρῶν γένος, 548) as a case of what de Jong calls “explicit embedded focalization”; that is, the poet may in the word ἡμιθέων (which he uses of the Argonauts only here)¹⁷ be describing the Argonauts in terms that express not, or not only, his own thoughts and feelings about them, but the gods’ own proud consciousness of kinship with them. Similarly, when the poet says that the nymphs of Pelion “looked with wonder at the work of Athena Itonis and the heroes themselves” (ἐθάμβεον εἰσορόωσαι / ἔργον Ἀθηναίης Ἰτωνίδος ἥδε καὶ αὐτοὺς / ἥρωας, 550–552) he may be giving expression to the nymphs’ consciousness that it is Athena’s handiwork that they are wondering at, and their admiration for the Argonauts *qua* heroes. And when he says that the wife of Chiron was showing Achilles “to his dear father” (φίλῳ δειδίσκετο πατοί, 558), the words clearly express the emotional content of Achilles’ experience, the love he feels for his father Peleus as he sees him in the departing ship¹⁸.

What this divine, semidivine, and mortal audience suggests is that this is a seamless fictional world, hierarchically arranged and unified by close, indeed

16 Levin (n. 12 above) 30.

17 Vian, “*Argonautiques*” (n. 8 above) 1:75, n. 4; cf. Clauss (n. 3 above) 97.

18 On explicit embedded focalization in Homer’s *Iliad*, see Irene J. F. de Jong’s *Narrators and Focalizers: The Presentation of the Story in the “Iliad”* (Amsterdam 1987) 102–118 and her “Studies in Homeric Denomination”, *Mnemosyne* 46 (1993) 289–306. I cannot agree with Clauss (n. 3 above) 97–98 that the fact that Chiron and his wife are taking care of Achilles in the departure scene makes us think of the estrangement of Peleus and Thetis and that this allusion to a failed marriage has ominous suggestions about Jason’s future. Thetis is not conspicuous by her absence in the departure from Pagasae, she is simply absent; the focus of interest there lies not on the relationship of husband and wife, but on the relationship of father and son.

intimate, ties of kinship extending from the gods on high to the race of heroes down below. The entire preliminary part of the poem, up to and including the departure from Pagasae, leads us to expect that in this world the Argonauts, favored with the lively and personal interest of the gods, will attain success through valorous feats of arms in accordance with the heroic code represented by (the yet a young child) Achilles; we are given reason to hope that the expedition will be successful, but to fear that that success will have a heavy human cost. The feelings that have been aroused in us by the departure scene are not unlike those expressed by Peleus later, when he replies confidently to Argus' dire description of Aeetes and his power that the Argonauts, too, know how to fight and are for the most part descended from gods (ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡμέας οἵω ἐπισταμένους πολέμοιο / κεῖσε μολεῖν μακάρων σχεδὸν αἴματος ἐκγεγαῶτας, 2.1222–1223).

As the poem progresses, however, we find that our view of the Argonauts and of their relationship to the gods in the preliminary part of the poem was deceptive and that our expectations were misled. The poet drew red herrings across our path, withheld important pieces of information from us, and presented us with “facts” that are incompatible with, if not contradictory to, what we come to know later.

Of the pantheon of Olympian deities constituting the divine audience of the first book, Apollo and Athena had been mentioned as central figures in the preparations for the voyage before the poem opens, and we had been led to expect them to be similarly important during the expedition itself. In the subsequent narrative, however, we find that Apollo's and Athena's direct roles in the action turn out to be quite limited, while it is Hera who plays the principal role as the Argonauts' divine patron in the central action of the poem, engineering the acquisition of the fleece and escape from the Colchians¹⁹. We find, moreover, that in this fictional world it is distance, not closeness, that characterizes the relationship of gods and mortals²⁰. The interventions of the gods in human affairs, furthermore, are based not upon pride of kinship, but rather upon their own private goals and considerations. Far from being the objects of the gods' concern, the Argonauts are little more than the instruments of their concerns, and have little scope for initiative or valor; force of arms and valiant

19 See Vian, “*Argonautiques*” (n. 8 above) 2:11–13.

20 Hunter (“*Argonautica*” of Apollonius, n. 2 above, 78) is not quite right when he says, comparing Apollonius to Homer, “gone are the easy appearances of gods to mortals and the easy conversations between them”. They are not altogether gone, but rather are banished to the exposition of antecedent events, where such close and easy intercourse is sometimes presupposed or implied, as in the references to Athena's role in building the Argo in the preliminary part of the poem. For other examples, see Fränkel (n. 9 above) 539, n. 172; cf. Knight (n. 2 above) 281. Pace Fränkel, this is not simply a matter of Apollonius' narrative restraint, but a matter of how he conceives of the nature of his fictional world; and that world is essentially different from what it was just before his poem opens. On the whole question of the depiction of the gods in the *Argonautica*, see Feeney (n. 15 above) 57–98.

deeds avail little, and, as in the Cyzicus episode, are tragically counter-productive. It is Jason's courtliness, his attractiveness to women, and his capacity for deception that above all stand him (and the expedition) in good stead.

Throughout the poem, we are repeatedly made aware of the clash between our initial expectations for the Argonautic enterprise and the realities of this fictional world. One point at which the confrontation becomes particularly sharp is in the contrast between the departure scene and the episode with which it is linked by correspondences in structure and content, that in which the Argo passes through the Planctae (4.753–963)²¹. The two episodes have two elements uniquely in common: both contain a fully developed divine audience scene, in which Olympian deities gaze down upon the Argo as she sails with her crew, and both introduce elements from the story of Peleus' and Thetis' marriage and of their son, Achilles.

Before the Argonauts approach the Planctae, Hera puts into motion the divine machinery that will effect their safe passage. She first sends Iris to Thetis to summon her to Olympus, and then sends her to Hephaestus and to Aeolus to tell them to be sure that the sea is not roiled when the Argo passes (4.757–779). In her speech to Thetis (783–832), Hera both commands and tries to persuade her to help the Argonauts – in particular Peleus, since he is Thetis' husband, and Medea, since she is to be Thetis' daughter-in-law in the afterlife (810–817)²².

Obedient to Hera's commands, if unconvinced by her rhetoric²³, Thetis dispatches her sister Nereids to the Ausonian Sea and then hastens to Aeaea, the land of Circe; appearing to Peleus alone, she tells him that the Argonauts are to sail thence, and that the Nereids will help their ship past the Planctae on Hera's orders. She adds, however, that he must not then point her out to anyone, or he will make her more angry than he did before.

The narrator's comment apropos of Peleus' sorrowful reaction to this, his first meeting with his wife since she left him, explains Thetis' anger (which Hera

21 A number of episodes in the *Argonautica* are linked by such correspondences, which help give coherence and unity to the poem. The parallelism that has attracted the most attention is that between the Argo's passage through the Symplegades (2.549–606) and her passage through the Planctae: the Argonauts' valorous and emotionally charged activity in the earlier adventure, on their voyage outward to Colchis, is contrasted with their complete passivity in the later one when, on their voyage homeward, their escape from danger is accomplished entirely by divine aid. See Mary Francis Williams, *Landscape in the “Argonautica” of Apollonius Rhodius* (Frankfurt am Main 1991) 275–278; G. O. Hutchinson, *Hellenistic Poetry* (Oxford 1990) 130–139; Beye (n. 1 above) 104–105; and Paul Händel, *Beobachtungen zur epischen Technik des Apollonios Rhodios* (Munich 1954) 88–92.

22 οὐ δ' ἄρηγε νυῶ, ἐκνοή περ ἐοῦσα (815); since ἐκνοή is made tautologous by the preceding νυῶ, Hans Herter (“Hera spricht mit Thetis: Eine Szene des Apollonios von Rhodos”, *SO* 35, 1959, 51) must be right in taking περ as intensive rather than as concessive, *pace* Hutchinson (n. 21 above) 130, n. 75 and Hunter, “*Argonautica* of Apollonius” (n. 2 above) 99, n. 113, who take it to be deliberately ambiguous.

23 On Hera's tactics of persuasion in this speech, see Herter, “Hera spricht” (n. 22 above) 47–54.

also alludes to in her speech to Thetis, 4.812–817) and provides those expositional details about the matrimonial situation of Peleus and Thetis that, significantly, were not given in the scene of departure (nor in the section about Peleus in the Catalog, 1.90–94): ignorant of her designs, Peleus had prevented his wife from making Achilles immortal by fire, and she had abandoned them both (4.867–879). Presented now, these details suggest how fragile and unstable are the bonds linking divinities and mortals, and how terrible and tragic is the distance that separates the world of the divinities that plan and the world of the mortals that figure in those plans²⁴.

It is supremely ironic that one of Hera's arguments to persuade Thetis to aid Peleus and the other Argonauts past the Planctae is the fact that Achilles is destined to receive a blessed afterlife in the Elysian Fields as the husband of Medea (4.810–815): she is to forget her own broken marriage and Achilles' lost immortality because Achilles is to have a kind of immortality and a kind of marriage with Medea! The bonds linking divinities and mortals, it appears, can become undone and retied in unexpected ways. It is ironic, too, that Hera makes no mention of the heroic deeds that Achilles will perform when he grows up²⁵, deeds that seem to be foreshadowed by his appearance in the departure scene and that would seem to be prerequisite for the “reward” in the afterlife that she is describing. The omission suggests how tenuous in this fictional world is the connection between heroism and divine favor.

Medea has become not only a central figure in Thetis' family plans but, as we have learned in the third book of the poem, she is central also to Hera's plan for the expedition. When Hera asks Aphrodite to make Medea fall in love with Jason so that he may be assured of getting the fleece and returning home (3.84–89), she reveals that she intends to keep Jason safe so that Pelias will not escape his doom: she wants revenge on Pelias for not sacrificing to her (3.61–65; it is at this point that the significance of the poet's fleeting reference to Pelias' neglect in 1.14 becomes apparent). Hera adds that Jason has been very dear to her since the time when he helped her, in her disguise as an old woman, across the river Anaurus (3.61–75). But the way in which she adds this further information (*Kai* δ' ἄλλως, “and besides”, 3.66) indicates that her esteem for Jason is a matter of secondary importance; and her explanation of it as based upon her testing of the “good order” (*εὐνομίης*, 3.68) of men is not at all the sort of rationale that the preliminary part of the poem led us to expect. In her speech to Thetis, too, Hera mentions her esteem for Jason and his comrades (4.784–785). But the motive of vengeance is clearly uppermost with her; and Jason and the Argonauts,

24 Cf. Händel (n. 21 above) 78–79, who attributes Apollonius' deferral of these details to the Planctae episode to his tendency to develop scenes independently, for their own interest: the poet does not wish to qualify the happy “Stimmungsbild” of the departure, and he wishes to develop psychological tension in the meeting of Peleus and Thetis.

25 Cf. Knight (n. 2 above) 301.

to say nothing of Medea, are of interest to her primarily as instruments for obtaining it²⁶.

The poet's treatment of the actual passage of the Planctae further suggests that self-interest predominates in the gods' attitude towards mortals. The divine audience of the first book, the Olympian pantheon that collectively seemed to manifest a lively and personal interest in the Argonauts, is here reduced to only three divinities, Hera, Athena, and Hephaestus, who watch the Argo propelled on her fantastic journey past the Planctae by Thetis and her sportive sisters (930–963). It has often been pointed out that the poet is strangely silent about the perceptions and emotions of the Argonauts themselves as they are carried along passively, and quite unheroically, in the ship²⁷. But also noteworthy is the fact that the divine audience that looks on takes little notice or heed of the Argonauts. Whereas in the departure scene both the Argonauts and the ship were the objects of focalization for both the nymphs and the gods, here it is the ship that is the exclusive focus of attention of the Nereids, while the Nereids are the sole object of focalization for the gods (*Tὰς δὲ ... Ἡφαιστος θηεῖτο, καὶ ... Διὸς δάμαρ*, 956–959). Hephaestus, left at leisure through obeying Hera's commands to cease work until the Argonauts have passed, looks on with apparently dispassionate wonder as he leans on his hammer atop a smooth rock; while there is nothing to suggest that the fear that Hera feels (*τοῦτον μὲν ἔχεν δέος εἰσορόωσαν*) as she stands above the bright vault of heaven (*αἰγλήντος ὑπερθεν / οὐρανοῦ*) and throws her arms about Athena (958–960), has anything in it of concern for Jason and his crew. Hers is, rather, merely the emotion of a spectator at a ball game, to which the Nereids' manipulations of the Argo have indeed been compared in 948–955.

The contrast between the rococo playfulness of this scene, in which the ship, with its utterly passive and all but forgotten occupants, has become but a divine toy, and the moving grandeur of the departure scene, with its promise of deeds of derring-do performed under the benign watchfulness of the gods, indicates that in the *Argonautica* Apollonius is employing a rhetorical strategy that depends not merely upon the “shattering of generic expectations”²⁸, but also upon the shattering of expectations aroused by the beginning of the poem itself.

26 Cf. Feeney (n. 15 above) 62–63; Hans Herter, “Bericht über die Literatur zur hellenistischen Dichtung seit dem Jahre 1921, II. Teil: Apollonios von Rhodos”, *Bursian's Jahresbericht* 285 (1955) 277–278.

27 See Vian, “*Argonautiques*” (n. 8 above) 3: 181; Hutchinson (n. 21 above) 131–132.

28 Simon Goldhill, *The Poet's Voice: Essays on Poetics and Greek Literature* (Cambridge 1991) 285.