Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 4.6-46: A Critical Commentary

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I. Introduction

In 4.6–46 of the Argonautica, Apollonius Rhodius interrupts the expected forward movement of the narrative, diverting attention from Jason's completed labours to Medea's internal turmoil. Instead of advancing directly to the seizure of the Golden Fleece, the poem lingers on a moment of hesitation, foregrounding fear, and the tension between divine influence and human response.

The passage centres on Medea whose emotional state contrasts sharply with her earlier presentation in Book 3. There, under the influence of Eros, she appears as a reluctant and largely passive figure, struggling to conceal her desire for Jason. Here however, erotic longing is replaced by fear, which becomes the dominant force. Medea anticipates her father's anger and recognises the danger posed by her complicity, especially given that her secret has not remained entirely hidden. This fear is expressed through intense simile and physical imagery, notably the comparison to a hunted fawn, which recalls but also transforms Homeric models such as the vulnerable figures of the Iliad.

Alongside this, Apollonius brings divine intervention to the forefront. Hera's role in instilling fear and ultimately preventing Medea's contemplated suicide reprises her intervention in Book 3, yet does not fully determine Medea's actions. The question of agency remains deliberately ambiguous as Medea is both driven by external forces and actively choosing her course. Her gestures, collecting her drugs, taking leave of her chamber, and symbolically parting from her maidenhood, all suggest not only flight from Aeetes but also movement towards a new identity defined by her relationship with Jason. In this respect, the passage resonates with the broader themes of transition and dislocation, characteristics of Hellenistic poetry.

This commentary argues that lines 4.6–46 constitute a programmatic treatment of Medea's

divided motivation. By staging a moment of narrative suspension, Apollonius not only delays the action but also reconfigures epic momentum through psychological depth. The lemmatic analysis that follows traces how this tension is developed at the level of language and intertextual engagement with earlier epic, based on the Greek text of the passage and its accompanying translation.[1]

[1] See Appendix

II. Commentary on Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 4.6-46

6–9 ἤτοι ὁ μὲν δήμοιο μετ᾽ ἀνδράσιν, ὅσσοι ἄριστοι / παννύχιος δόλον αἰπὺν ἐπὶ σφίσι μητιάασκεν / οἷσιν ἐνὶ μεγάροις, στυγερῷ ἐπὶ θυμὸν ἀέθλῳ / Αἰήτης ἄμοτον κεχολωμένος. The passage constructs a heightened atmosphere of menace through delay and narrative indirection, drawing the reader into a more uncertain and mediated perspective. The postponement of Αἰήτης sharpens suspense[2] while the indirect discourse makes events feel filtered and unstable.[3] Night (παννύχιος) provides a familiar setting for plotting and betrayal[4] reinforcing the importance of δόλος, already signalled by δόλον αἰπύν.[5] The prominence of δόλος throughout the Jason–Medea narrative, especially in their later plot against Apsyrtus,[6] confirms how central deception is to the poem's structure.[7] At the same time, these techniques align the reader with Medea's own uncertainty. This indirectness and delay mirror her anxious, partial grasp of events, aligning narrative form closely with characterisation.

Aeetes' portrayal remains consistent yet subtly undermined. His violent temper[8] and reliance on elite counsel (μετ᾽ ἀνδράσιν…ὅσσοι ἄριστοι) recall both Homeric assemblies[9] and tragic rulers such as Creon and Thoas.[10] Yet, unlike contexts where ἀνήρ δήμου is contrasted with βασιλεύς, ἔξοχος ἀνήρ, and οἱ ἄριστοι,[11] authority here feels unstable. Aeetes' earlier hostile

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[2] cf. 4.127–8; Hor. *C*. 3.7.5
[3] Hunter, 1993b, pp. 143–51; Lightfoot, 1999, pp. 270–2
[4] cf. Hom. *Od*. 19.1–2; Hom. *Il*. 7.478–9
[5] cf. Hom. *Od*. 4.843; Hes. *Th*. 589
[6] cf. 4.421
[7] Hulse, 2015, pp.28-9
[8] cf. 2.1202; 3.367–400; Hom. *Od*. 10.137
[9] Hom. *Il*. 10.197–208
[10] Hunter, 2008, pp.95-114
[11] cf. Hom. *Il*. 2.188,198; Hdt.3.81, 5.66

plans,[12] and his βαρεῖαι ἀνῖαι (grave pains)[13] all point to strain rather than control. Linguistic echoes such as μητιάασκεν and οἶσιν ἐνὶ μεγάροις[14] suggest anxious deliberation rather than decisiveness. In this light, δόλος may be seen not simply as moral failure but as a necessary resource. Both Medea and Jason depend on cunning where direct action is impossible, complicating any clear ethical judgement. By contrast, Aeetes' reliance on authority and direct power exposes the limits of such an approach.

9–10 οὐδ᾽ ὅγε πάμπαν / θυγατέρων τάδε νόσφιν ἑῶν τελέεσθαι ἐώλπει.

A sharp revision in Aeetes' thinking is marked here. Earlier in Book 3, in his anger,[15] he interpreted the Argonauts' arrival as a scheme of the sons of Phrixos and had little fear that his own daughters might μῆτιν φράσσωνται στυγερήν (contrive some hateful plan)[16] whereas here, that confidence is shown to be misplaced.[17] The syntax itself draws the daughters into suspicion: τάδε, with its deliberately vague and therefore threatening force, is enclosed within θυγατέρων…νόσφιν ἑῶν, subtly implicating them in Medea's escape. The effect is to suggest that treachery has emerged from within the household, not from outside.

The verb ἐώλπει, taken by Alexandrian scholars as an imperfect,[18] balances μητιάασκεν[19] and reinforces the sense of ongoing, unsettled thought. τελέεσθαι fits τάδε more naturally than τετελέσθαι,[20] which would imply completed plots, as Aeetes seems to fear schemes still in motion.

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[12] cf. 3.576–83
[13] cf. 3.1404
[14] cf. Hom. *Od*. 16.93–4
[15] cf. 3.606-8
[16] cf. 3.602–5
[17] Hunter, 2015, p.85
[18] cf. LSJ, 1996, s.v. ἔλπω
[19] cf. 4.7
[20] Hunter, 2015, pp.85-6

Read this way, the line captures a moment where authority turns inward and becomes self-doubting. Aeetes no longer controls events but anxiously reinterprets them revealing how easily power is destabilised when trust within the *oikos* breaks down.

11–13 τῇ δ᾽ ἀλεγεινότατον κραδίῃ φόβον ἔμβαλεν Ἥρη· / τρέσσεν δ᾽ ἠύτε τις κούφη κεμάς, ἥν τε βαθείης / τάρφεσιν ἐν ξυλόχοιο κυνῶν ἐφόβησεν ὁμοκλή.

The fawn simile sharply crystallises Medea's divinely induced panic. Hera's implantation of φόβος in her heart renders fear not a response but an imposed condition, and the comparison to a startled deer translates this interior disturbance into vivid sensory terms. The detail κυνῶν ὁμοκλή evokes the soundscape of pursuit, projecting an imagined threat that anticipates Aeetes' potential vengeance and thus makes Medea's fear experientially real before any action unfolds. The verb τρέσσεν captures a moment of instinctive recoil rather than sustained flight,[21] a nuance paralleled in lyric usage[22] and suited to the narrative's suspension.[23]

Although no single Homeric model dominates, the Iliadic colouring of the simile[24] reframes Medea's crisis in martial terms. Her fear resembles the rout of a soldier under pressure, and later verbal echoes such as βρυχήσατο[25] align her suffering with that of the dying in battle.[26] Yet the image of the fawn also activates an erotic-poetic tradition,[27] where such animals conventionally encode feminine vulnerability and erotic susceptibility. The fusion of these registers generates a

[21] Hunter, 2015, p.86
[22] Acosta-Hughes 2010, p.45
[23] Hulse 2015, p.31
[24] cf. Hom. *Il.* 11.546–51
[25] cf. 4.19
[26] Hunter, 1987, p.136
[27] Sappho (fr. 58.16 LP-V)

layered emotional effect. Medea appears both as a threatened daughter and as a figure on the verge of desire, her hesitation suspended between fear and attraction.

14-15 αὐτίκα γὰρ νημερτὲς ὀίσσατο, μή μιν ἀρωγὴν / ληθέμεν, αἶψα δὲ πᾶσαν ἀναπλήσειν κακότητα.

The use of indirect discourse maintains and internalises tension as Medea's fear is filtered through ὀίσσατο, presenting it as uncertain yet urgent.[28] The opposition between ἀρωγήν and κακότητα spans a wide range of possible outcomes, while the abstract κακότητα (rather than κακά) sharpens the sense of an undefined but overwhelming disaster. Within this frame, μιν refers to Aeetes, whose reaction Medea anxiously anticipates. By reworking an earlier epic model,[29] Apollonius turns a moment of recognition into one of foreboding, and the μή followed by infinitive construction[30] reinforces this effect: instead of clarifying events, it opens up several possible consequences. Medea is thus isolated within her own fears as her mind produces multiple, inescapable outcomes.

16-17 τάρβει δ᾽ ἀμφιπόλους ἐπιίστορας· ἐν δέ οἱ ὄσσε / πλῆτο πυρός, δεινὸν δὲ περιβρομέεσκον ἀκουαί·

Apollonius compresses expression through dense alliteration in plosive π sounds (ἀμφιπόλους ἐπιίστορας… πλῆτο πυρός… περιβρομέεσκον) sharpening the sense of Medea's agitation. Her symptoms (her eyes blaze with fire and her ears roar terribly) are strikingly physical and overwhelming, foregrounding the intensity of her emotional disturbance. The phrase ἐν δέ οἱ

[28] Hunter, 2015, pp.86–7
[29] cf. Hom. *Od*. 19.390–1
[30] Smyth §2238

ὄσσε… πλῆτο πυρός combines the dual ὄσσε with the reflexive pronoun οἱ and a singular verb,[31] echoing Homeric idiom[32] while intensifying inward experience. The following περιβρομέεσκον ἀκουαί draws on lyric,[33] creating a fusion of epic and erotic discourse.[34] Medea is thus figured simultaneously as warrior and lover, her symptoms recalling both battlefield fury and the physiology of overwhelming desire.

18-19 πυκνὰ δὲ λαυκανίης ἐπεμάσσετο, πυκνὰ δὲ κουρὶξ /ἑλκομένη πλοκάμους γοερῇ βρυχήσατ᾽ ἀνίῃ.

In πυκνὰ δὲ λαυκανίης ἐπεμάσσετο, the aorist ἐπεμάσσετο suggests a repeated, almost compulsive gesture. This physical action, intensified by the anaphora of πυκνά, conveys not just grief but its persistence as if the body is trapped in a cycle of suffering, an effect that recalls the iterative emotional pattern noted in Sappho, fr. 31.[35] The movement then shifts into ἑλκομένη πλοκάμους, in which the chiastic structure emphasises the violence of traditional lament,[36] making the grief increasingly external and visible. This escalation culminates in βρυχήσατ': the use of a verb associated with animal sounds gives Medea's anguish a raw, unsettling force, pushing beyond human restraint into something almost bestial.[37]

20-23 καί νύ κεν αὐτοῦ τῆμος ὑπὲρ μόρον ὤλετο κούρη/φάρμακα πασσαμένη, Ἥρης δ᾽ ἁλίωσε μενοινάς,/εἰ μή μιν Φρίξοιο θεὰ σὺν παισὶ φέβεσθαι/ὦρσεν ἀτυζομένην.

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[31] Smyth §959; 1195
[32] cf. Hom. *Od*. 10.246-8
[33] cf. Sappho, fr. 31.11–2 Voigt
[34] Rissman, 1983, p.72
[35] Acosta-Hughes, 2010, p.45
[36] cf. Hom. *Il.* 22.405–6
[37] cf. Soph. *Tr*. 904

Medea stands on the verge of self-destruction, only to be redirected by divine will. The phrase φάρμακα πασσαμένη highlights her identity as a sorceress. Poison is an unusual but character-appropriate suicidal method, contrasting with the more typical feminine deaths by hanging or the heroic sword[38] thus this choice internalises her crisis with her *technē* becoming a source of her own ruin.

Yet Medea's agency is limited. Hera seizes her (ἁλίωσε μενοινάς) and forces her to flee, the intervention reflecting a larger teleology since Medea must live to become Pelias' destroyer.[39] At the same time, the goddess preserves a degree of Medea's shame, as she departs not with a lover but with the sons of Phrixus, whose placement in the sentence (Φρίξοιο θεὰ σὺν παισί) subtly implicates them in the divine plan.[40] This raises a key issue: Medea's will is real but overridden. The verbs φέβεσθαι and ἀτυζομένην echo Iliadic battle scenes[41] where warriors flee in terror. Applied to Medea, this language gives her fear an epic intensity while also emphasising her vulnerability in this more modest and dependent departure with her nephews in contrast to her later escape with Jason.

24-25 πτερόεις δέ οἱ ἐν φρεσὶ θυμὸς / ἰάνθη, μετὰ δ᾽ ἥ γε παλίσσυτος ἀθρόα κόλπῳ / φάρμακα πάντ᾽ ἄμυδις κατεχεύατο φωριαμοῖο.

The line marks a sudden shift in Medea's emotional state, and πτερόεις…θυμός is a striking phrase that presents her inner impulse as not just quick but suddenly stirred up,[42] suggesting the sense of

[38] cf. Eur. *Tro.* 1012–14
[39] cf. 3.1133–6
[40] Hunter 1987, p.136
[41] cf. Hom. *Il*. 6.41; 21.4
[42] Hulse, 2015, p.38

ἀναπτερόω, 'to excite' or 'to agitate'.[43] In this state, her actions follow immediately, and the pouring out of the φάρμακα from the φωριαμός gains symbolic force. Hera's influence has consistently linked Medea with her drugs and here, that divine pressure crystallises into action.[44] The chest, which earlier suggested both death and survival,[45] now points clearly towards life while its abandonment marks Medea's separation from her home, and completes the sense of withdrawal from her former identity. The spatial and gestural dimension of this action becomes clearer in the following lines.

26-27 κύσσε δ᾽ ἑόν τε λέχος καὶ δικλίδας ἀμφοτέρωθεν / σταθμοὺς καὶ τοίχων ἐπαφήσατο· χερσί τε μακρὸν

The scene presents Medea in a final act of farewell, showing her kissing her bed and the familiar structures of her room before departure. The gesture extends to the doorposts and walls, turning the bedroom into a charged boundary of memory and loss,[46] and marking her separation from the life of an unmarried girl.[47] The sequence of actions, moving from bed to thresholds and to enclosing walls, suggests a gradual withdrawal from interior space, almost a ritualised departure from Medea's former identity. The phrase δικλίδας ἀμφοτέρωθεν σταθμούς is textually difficult; a conjecture[48] reads σταθμῶν with ἀμφοτέρων τε to balance τοίχων and regularise the syntax, indicating some strain in Apollonius' variation on Homeric diction perhaps revealing the limits of his attempt to adapt Homeric formulae to a more complex, Hellenistic syntax.

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[43] cf. Eur. *Supp.* 89; *Or.* 87
[44] Acosta-Hughes 2010, p.45
[45] cf. 3.802–9; 3.804 and its echo in 3.817
[46] Hawley, 2007, p.12
[47] cf. 3.635–64; Virg. *Aen*. 2.490; Val. Flacc. *Arg.* 2.168–9
[48] Hulse, 2022, pp.115-22

27-29 χερσί τε μακρὸν / ῥηξαμένη πλόκαμον, θαλάμῳ μνημήια μητρὶ / κάλλιπε παρθενίης, ἀδινῇ δ᾽ ὀλοφύρατο φωνῇ·

Medea's action intensifies the farewell into something more violent and irreversible. χερσί τε μακρὸν ῥηξαμένη πλόκαμον marks a forceful tearing of her lock, not a calm ritual offering but a gesture anticipating separation from her family and former identity, in pointed contrast to the earlier, more uncontrolled hair-tearing.[49] While the dedication of hair belongs to a traditional pattern,[50] here it is redirected towards her mother rather than a deity, giving the act a deeply personal and unsettling focus. As a pre-nuptial and funerary gesture,[51] the lock becomes a μνημήιον, suggestive of death, so that Medea treats her departure as a symbolic death within the household. Unlike the playful *Coma Berenices,*[52] Apollonius uses the motif to heighten emotional rupture and finality.

30-32 "τόνδε τοι ἀντ᾽ ἐμέθεν ταναὸν πλόκον εἶμι λιποῦσα, / μῆτερ ἐμή· χαίροις δὲ καὶ ἄνδιχα πολλὸν ἰούσῃ· / χαίροις Χαλκιόπη καὶ πᾶς δόμος.

Medea's shift to direct speech heightens tragic immediacy, as the earlier quasi-messenger narrative in 6–29 gives way to the heroine's own voice.[53] This transition intensifies the emotional focus, and the emphatic τόνδε, with its interlaced syntax, draws attention to the ταναὸς πλόκος as both object and symbol. While such "long" hair conventionally marks femininity, its prominence

[49] cf. 18–9
[50] cf. Hom. *Il*. 23.140–1
[51] cf. Call. *Hymn*. 4.296–9; Eur. *IT*. 820–1
[52] cf. fr. *Aet*. 110.39–40
[53] cf. Eur. *Alc*. 175–7

here also gestures towards Dionysiac excess, suggesting a mind on the edge of loss of control.[54] In this light, Medea's offering of the lock becomes more than a farewell token.

Paired with λιποῦσα, it suggests reluctant departure but alters it, giving the scene a fragmented, almost ritualized tone.[55] The repeated optative χαίροις further unsettles the leave-taking, replacing certainty with anxious projection. Finally by extending her address to πᾶς δόμος, and singling out Chalciope, Medea signals not merely departure but a deliberate severing of familial bonds, recalling their earlier manipulative intimacy[56] and foreshadowing her eventual mythic isolation.

33-34 αἴθε σε πόντος, / ξεῖνε, διέρραισεν, πρὶν Κολχίδα γαῖαν ἱκέσθαι."/ ὣς ἄρ᾽ ἔφη· βλεφάρων δὲ κατ᾽ ἀθρόα δάκρυα / χεῦεν.

The passage opens with αἴθε introducing an unreal wish about the past and immediately situating Medea's speech within a register of intense yet futile longing. This emotional force is sharpened by the aorist of the compound διέρραισεν, which suggests not a simple shipwreck but total destruction,[57] and amplifies the violence of her curse. The infinitive ἱκέσθαι with πρίν reinforces the irrevocability of Jason's arrival, so that the syntax itself mirrors her inability to undo events. In this way, Medea's words participate in a broader tragic pattern of a psychologically revealing reworking of the past, as she implicitly seeks an ἀρχὴ κακῶν.[58] Her address to Jason as ξεῖνε then maintains a pointed distance, resisting intimacy and hinting at her conflicted stance towards him.

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[54] Hunter, 2015, p.89
[55] Tsagalis, 2008, p.269
[56] cf. 3.688-92 ; De Forest, 1994, pp.114–17
[57] cf. Hom. *Od*. 8.569, 13.151, 23.235
[58] cf. Eur. *Med*. 1-8; Mastronarde, 2010, pp.123–4, 134, 140

This emotional intensity is sustained in the narration with κατ'…χεῦεν employing tmesis, and κατά in anastrophe which governs βλεφάρων,[59] creating a fluid, downward movement of tears. The phrase δάκρυα χεῦεν, though non-Homeric, draws on Euripidean colouring to stress abundance, and thus helps individualise Medea's grief as psychologically complex rather than formulaic.

35-40 οἵη δ᾽ ἀφνειοῖο διειλυσθεῖσα δόμοιο / ληιάς, ἥν τε νέον πάτρης ἀπενόσφισεν αἶσα, / οὐδέ νύ πω μογεροῖο πεπείρηται καμάτοιο, / ἀλλ᾽ ἔτ᾽ ἀηθέσσουσα δύην καὶ δούλια ἔργα εἶσιν ἀτυζομένη χαλεπὰς ὑπὸ χεῖρας ἀνάσσης· / τοίη ἄρ᾽ ἱμερόεσσα δόμων ἐξέσσυτο κούρη.

The simile frames Medea's flight as that of a war-captive girl forced into slavery, exposing the emotional violence of exile and the coercive structures awaiting her in Greece. The dissonance between reluctant suffering and sudden motion underscores her anomalous status and foreshadows the marginal position she will occupy in Greece.[60] Euripidean echoes deepen the intertextual texture and complicate readings that construe the scene as one of escape rather than subjection, thereby reframing its significance within familiar tragic paradigms.[61]

The transmitted †διειλυσθεῖσα resists secure interpretation. Σ's sense of stealthy flight conflicts with the sluggish nuance of εἰλύομαι, while conjectures like διελκυσθεῖσα import violent compulsion but awkwardly shift the setting to the slave-girl's new οἶκος.[62] This lexical instability is not merely technical but reflects the interpretive tension within the simile between agency and coercion in Medea's movement. The enslaved-woman comparison notably inverts Medea's recent

[59] Hulse, 2015, pp.47-8
[60] Asper, 2008, p.183
[61] cf. Eur. *Tr.* 197–213, 1081–99, 1311; Eur. *Med*. 256
[62] Hunter, 1987, pp.136-7

status: once attended by ἀμφίπολοι,[63] she is now assimilated to a ληιάς exposing the precarity of her identity as she leaves Colchis. Yet the likeness operates at a deeper psychological level as, like the captive untried in κάματος (πεπείρηται), Medea has not yet experienced the suffering entailed by her choice, aligning erotic initiation with forced labour.[64] The simile thus calls into question readings of Medea as a fully empowered helper-maiden. Her approach to Jason is driven as much by divine and emotional compulsion as by volition, casting her as both agent and victim. Unlike the captive, however, her subjection remains internalised and does not remove her ability to act decisively.

This dynamic is intensified by the phrase χαλεπὰς ὑπὸ χεῖρας ἀνάσσης, with χεῖρας evoking imminent physical threat. If the ἄνασσα is Aphrodite and her desire is figured as enslavement, Medea's subjection becomes explicitly erotic. Hera's prior role,[65] however, complicates this hierarchy of divine control.[66] Finally, ἱμερόεσσα … κούρη sharply contrasts with ληιάς, reasserting Medea's desirability even as the simile degrades her status. This disjunction sharpens the poem's exploration of eros as a destabilising force: Medea's beauty propels the narrative forward while it marks her as an object to be appropriated, so that desire itself becomes the means by which heroic progress is achieved, at the cost of her autonomy.

41-42 τῇ δὲ καὶ αὐτόματοι θυρέων ὑπόειξαν ὀχῆες / ὠκείαις ἄψορροι ἀναθρώσκοντες ἀοιδαῖς. The doors 'yielding of their own accord' (αὐτόματοι) signals Medea's emerging identity as a sorceress whose power overrides normal human agency. The house itself behaves as if in the

[63] cf. 3.838
[64] Clark, 1973, p.314
[65] cf. 4.21
[66] Hunter, 2015, p.51

presence of a divinity, recalling epic and hymn-like motifs of automatic movement at divine arrival.[67] Yet here the effect is not divine epiphany but learned magical manipulation, aligning Medea with expert practitioners whose incantations can compel thresholds to open. The ambiguity of 'from the doors' versus 'of the doors' further unsettles agency, suggesting either internal dissolution or external unlocking[68] and thus blurs the boundary between enchantment and physical action.

The phrase ὠκείαις ἀοιδαῖς sharpens this uncertainty. If ὠκείαις is taken adverbially,[69] it may indicate either rapid utterance or effective immediacy, though its attachment to the instrumental dative is unusual.[70] This speed may reflect Medea's urgency and fear of capture, or alternatively the practised efficiency of ritual speech,[71] which will be marking the first explicit staging of her incantatory expertise within the epic narrative.

43 γυμνοῖσιν δὲ πόδεσσιν ἀνὰ στεινὰς θέεν οἴμους,

Medea's secretive, solitary escape here contrasts with her earlier conspicuous, princess-like journey in Book 3 to meet Jason at the temple.[72] γυμνοῖσιν δὲ πόδεσσιν emphasises silence and haste,[73] while also evoking ritual barefoot practice attested later,[74] thereby aligning the flight with her nocturnal herb-gathering.[75] The στειναὶ οἶμοι invert the earlier broad δρόμος,[76] reflecting not only physical movement but also her psychological and moral constriction.

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[67] Hom. *Il.* 5.749; Callim. *Hymn.* 2.6–7; also Hom. *Od*. 21.47 (for the effortless ease with which Penelope opened the doors)
[68] Hunter, 2015, p.90
[69] cf. Hom. *Il.* 23.880; Hom. *Od.* 8.38; A.R. *Arg.* 4.907
[70] Campbell, 1969, p.282
[71] Pavlou, 2009, 191ff
[72] Rose, 1985, p.37
[73] cf. 3.646
[74] cf. Virg. *Aen*. 4.518; Plin. *HN* 23.110
[75] Ovid *Met*. 7.183
[76] cf. 3.874

44-46 λαιῇ μὲν χερὶ πέπλον ἐπ᾽ ὀφρύσιν ἀμφὶ μέτωπα / στειλαμένη καὶ καλὰ παρήια, δεξιτερῇ δὲ / ἄκρην ὑψόθι πέζαν ἀερτάζουσα χιτῶνος.

Medea's self-concealment continues the logic of her furtive flight as she deliberately obscures her identity in ways that invert her earlier public visibility. In λαιῇ μὲν χερὶ…στειλαμένη, Medea draws the πέπλος over her face and cheeks, a gesture of secrecy but also one resonant with bridal veiling, marking transition and separation from a former status,[77]a latent nuptial imagery which is ironic given her unresolved relationship with Jason.

At the same time, her raised χιτών (δεξιτερῇ…ἀερτάζουσα) emphasises haste and physical urgency, recalling attendants in 3.874–5 but now transferred to Medea herself, isolated rather than accompanied. The chiastic λαιῇ…δεξιτερῇ frames her body as textually wrapped,[78] reinforcing concealment. Visual parallels from archaic art[79] suggest a culturally legible image of veiled female movement, here redirected towards anxious escape rather than ritual display. In this way, Medea's veiling of herself reflects not only practical urgency but a deeper instability of identity.

III. Conclusion

The analysis of 4.6–46 has shown that the passage is not simply a pause in the action, but a deliberate shift in what the epic makes central. At the point where Jason's success might be expected to dominate, Apollonius turns instead to Medea, whose fear and hesitation begin to shape the course of events. This raises the question whether heroic progress in the *Argonautica* still depends on achievement in the traditional sense, or is increasingly driven by emotion and

[77] Tsakiris, 2022, p.184
[78] Hulse, 2015, p.54
[79] cf. Havelock, 1971, pp.134-5, plates 118,119; p.140, plate 130; Llewellyn-Jones, 2003, pp.73-94

psychological disturbance. Medea's feelings do not merely accompany events but begin to generate them, so that emotion itself becomes a determining force in the poem. She is therefore not just Jason's partner in the action, but a figure through whom events are increasingly filtered.

Apollonius' use of earlier epic, especially Homeric scenes of vulnerable figures, helps frame this shift. The image of the frightened fawn and the repeated focus on concealment and movement in space present Medea as isolated and exposed while redirecting attention towards her inner experience rather than heroic action. Hera's role remains significant, yet it does not fully determine events. Instead, it sustains a tension between external compulsion and Medea's emerging agency. Medea's flight thus marks a turning point in the poem, where progress is no longer secured by heroic achievement alone but becomes dependent on fear, hesitation, and decision.

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APPENDIX

6 ἤτοι ὁ μὲν δήμοιο μετ᾽ ἀνδράσιν, ὅσσοι ἄριστοι,
παννύχιος δόλον αἰπὺν ἐπὶ σφίσι μητιάασκεν
οἷσιν ἐνὶ μεγάροις, στυγερῷ ἐπὶ θυμὸν ἀέθλῳ
Αἰήτης ἄμοτον κεχολωμένος, οὐδ᾽ ὅ γε πάμπαν
10 θυγατέρων τάδε νόσφιν ἑῶν τελέεσθαι ἐώλπει.
τῇ δ᾽ ἀλεγεινότατον κραδίῃ φόβον ἔμβαλεν Ἥρη·
τρέσσεν δ᾽ ἠύτε τις κούφη κεμάς, ἥν τε βαθείης
τάρφεσιν ἐν ξυλόχοιο κυνῶν ἐφόβησεν ὁμοκλή·
αὐτίκα γὰρ νημερτὲς ὀίσσατο, μή μιν ἀρωγὴν
15 ληθέμεν, αἶψα δὲ πᾶσαν ἀναπλήσειν κακότητα.
τάρβει δ᾽ ἀμφιπόλους ἐπιίστορας· ἐν δέ οἱ ὅσσε
πλῆτο πυρός, δεινὸν δὲ περιβρομέεσκον ἀκουαί·
πυκνὰ δὲ λαυκανίης ἐπεμάσσετο, πυκνὰ δὲ κουρὶξ
ἑλκομένη πλοκάμους γοερῇ βρυχήσατ᾽ ἀνίῃ.
20 καί νύ κεν αὐτοῦ τῆμος ὑπὲρ μόρον ὤλετο κούρη
φάρμακα πασσαμένη, Ἥρης δ᾽ ἁλίωσε μενοινάς,
εἰ μή μιν Φρίξοιο θεὰ σὺν παισὶ φέβεσθαι
ὦρσεν ἀτυζομένην. πτερόεις δέ οἱ ἐν φρεσὶ θυμὸς
ἰάνθη, μετὰ δ᾽ ἥ γε παλίσσυτος ἀθρόα κόλπῳ
25 φάρμακα πάντ᾽ ἄμυδις κατεχεύατο φωριαμοῖο,
κύσσε δ᾽ ἑόν τε λέχος καὶ δικλίδας ἀμφοτέρωθεν
σταθμοὺς καὶ τοίχων ἐπαφήσατο· χερσί τε μακρὸν

ῥηξαμένη πλόκαμον, θαλάμῳ μνημήια μητρὶ
κάλλιπε παρθενίης, ἀδινῇ δ᾽ ὀλοφύρατο φωνῇ·
30 "τόνδε τοι ἀντ᾽ ἐμέθεν ταναὸν πλόκον εἶμι
λιποῦσα,
μῆτερ ἐμή· χαίροις δὲ καὶ ἄνδιχα πολλὸν ἰούσῃ·
χαίροις Χαλκιόπη καὶ πᾶς δόμος. αἴθε σε πόντος,
ξεῖνε, διέρραισεν, πρὶν Κολχίδα γαῖαν ἱκέσθαι."
ὣς ἄρ᾽ ἔφη· βλεφάρων δὲ κατ᾽ ἀθρόα δάκρυα
χεῦεν.
35 οἴη δ᾽ ἀφνειοῖο †διειλυσθεῖσα δόμοιο
ληιάς, ἥν τε νέον πάτρης ἀπενόσφισεν αἶσα,
οὐδέ νύ πω μογεροῖο πεπείρηται καμάτοιο,
ἀλλ᾽ ἔτ᾽ ἀηθέσσουσα δύην καὶ δούλια ἔργα
εἶσιν ἀτυζομένη χαλεπὰς ὑπὸ χεῖρας ἀνάσσης·
40 τοίη ἄρ᾽ ἱμερόεσσα δόμων ἐξέσσυτο κούρη.
τῇ δὲ καὶ αὐτόματοι θυρέων ὑπόειξαν ὀχῆες
ὠκείαις ἄψορροι ἀναθρώσκοντες ἀοιδαῖς.
λαιῇ μὲν χερὶ πέπλον ἐπ᾽ ὀφρύσιν ἀμφὶ μέτωπα
45 στειλαμένη καὶ καλὰ παρήια, δεξιτερῇ δὲ
ἄκρην ὑψόθι πέζαν ἀερτάζουσα χιτῶνος.[80]

[80] Apollonius Rhodius. *Argonautica.* W. H. Race (ed. and trans.). 2009 Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

6 Aeetes, together with the bravest men of his people,

spent all night in his palace devising an impossible to escape

trap for the heroes, fiercely angry in his heart

at the hateful contest; for he did not deem at all

10 that these things were accomplished without the knowledge of his daughters.

But into Medea's heart Hera cast most grievous fear;

and she bolted like a nimble fawn whom the baying of hounds

terrifies amid the thicket of a deep copse.

For at once she truly suspected that her aid was not hidden from her father,

15 and that she would soon suffer the full measure of wretchedness.

She dreaded her maids who had knowledge of what had happened;

her eyes were filled with fire and her ears rung with a terrible cry.

Again and again she clutched at her throat; again and again she dragged out

the locks of her hair and groaned in wretched despair.

20 There at that very time the girl would have perished contrary to what was fated

by drinking poison and have made void the purposes of Hera,

had not the goddess driven her to flee in fear

with the sons of Phrixos. Her fluttering heart within her

was comforted and then, changing her mind, she poured from her chest

25 all the drugs together back again into her lap.

She kissed both her bed and the doorjambs on the double door-posts,

and stroked the walls. Tearing off

a long tress of hair with her hands, she left it in the chamber for her mother,

as a memorial of her maidenhood, and lamented in a mournful voice:

30 "I go leaving this long flock for you in my stead,

O my mother. Take this farewell from me as I am going far away.

May you fare well Chalciope, and all my home. If only the sea,

stranger, had dashed you to pieces, before you had come to the Colchian land!"

So she spoke, and abundant tears poured down

from her eyelids.

35 And like a captive woman, having been dragged through her rich house,

one whom fate has newly separated from her homeland,

and who has not yet been tested by grievous toil,

but still, being unaccustomed, dreads misery and the works of slavery,

she passes, terrorised, beneath the harsh hands of a mistress;

40 in such a state of mind the lovely maiden rushed from her home.

The door bolts gave way by themselves to her,

rapidly springing back at the sound of her spells.

On bare feet she ran along the narrow paths,

with her left hand holding her robe over her eyebrows

45 to veil her face and fair cheeks, and with her right

lifting up the hem of her chiton high off the ground.