

Anaphe (4. 1701–30) as the most realistically portrayed fantastic origins of all.

It may now be seen what an appropriate emblem Phineus is for the narrator of the *Argonautica*, with his fragmentary imparting of knowledge, his refusal to narrate methodically, blow-by-blow, right up to the end, and his effectively misleading hints about the role of the gods: he will not tell the mind of Zeus, he misleads concerning Athene at the Symplegades, and Aphrodite at Colchis.¹²⁷ Altogether, Apollonius' technique may be thought to approximate to what modern criticism refers to as 'metafiction', 'a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fictions and reality'.¹²⁸ But then, such concerns had always been at the core of Greek poetics, while Apollonius' contemporaries were every bit as preoccupied with the dilemmas of poetic truth and fiction as he was.¹²⁹

If the complex treatment of the gods has a cardinal role in the poetics of the *Argonautica*, it is also very important in establishing the currents of unease and pessimism which have long been acknowledged in the poem,¹³⁰ and which we have already encountered at more than one point. Many of the distinguishing features of the *Argonautica*'s created world owe their nature to the force of the divine action: the clouded, imperfect knowledge of motive, purpose, and even fact; the oppressive sensation of inextricable consequence, by which few actions have clean issue; and the failure of codes of practice, with norms of morality made difficult and obscure. Jason's dutiful rote acknowledgement of Zeus' role in the conventional pieties is only the most spectacular example of the failure of the religious norms to keep making sense.¹³¹ It is a world where even the narrator finds it hard to discern a pattern.

One of the most striking features of the gods in the *Argonautica* is

¹²⁷ See, again, Margolies (1981), 46–7, 134–5, 141–3, 188.

¹²⁸ Waugh (1984), 2.

¹²⁹ Goldhill (1986).

¹³⁰ Visser (1938), 60–2 (an account handicapped by an inability to accept that a pessimistic picture of the world can be presented ironically); Herter (1944–55), 282; Bulloch (1985b), 596–7.

¹³¹ Apollonius' showing up of the fissures in the inherited religious solutions is not as relentless and intense as in Callimachus, whose techniques have been splendidly analysed by Bulloch (1984); but Bulloch's discussion is indispensable reading for students of the *Argonautica*.

their otherness, their difference and distance from humans—the very qualities which make them so problematic as characters. Yet there is in the poem a character who crosses that extraordinary boundary, a man who becomes a god. We may finish our discussion of Apollonius' gods with this coda, a brief account of Heracles, whose transformations reveal so much about the nature of the divine and the mortal.¹³²

Apollonius' treatment of Heracles was by no means preordained for him by tradition, for Heracles was the most protean and ambivalent creature in Greek myth. He was ambivalence itself: hero and god, receiving divine and heroic sacrifice in cult, lying, as Silk well puts it, 'on the margins between human and divine, [occupying] the no-man's-land that is also no-god's-land, . . . a marginal, transitional, or, better, *interstitial* figure'.¹³³ That is, he occupies the interstices, the zones of transition, potentially always one thing or the other. He may be the hero in epic, tragedy, or comedy. He is at home in the shared feast, sometimes as a glutton, and he is also famous for violating the holy laws of hospitality. He is the ultimate expression of Greek virility, and spends a year as the slave of a woman, the Asiatic Omphale. He is physical strength incarnate, and also a philosopher's paradigm of intellectual resource and self-control. He is the great civilizer, clearing the world of monsters to make it safe for humans, who wears the untanned skin of an animal. One of his stock weapons, the club, is the very emblem of pre-technological aggressive brutishness, while the other, the bow, is the embodiment of craft in war. His very name is a paradox: the glory of Hera, the glory of the goddess who persecuted him all his life.¹³⁴

Apollonius maintains many of these ambiguities in the first part of the poem, when Heracles is still a character, playing especially on the antitheses involved in seeing Heracles as the archetype either of restrained wisdom or of physical violence. In particular, the issue of Heracles' immortality is made prominent, as Apollonius keeps open the question of whether he will follow Homer in having Heracles as a mortal, or else the later tradition,

¹³² For a fuller discussion of Heracles in the poem, with bibliography of earlier studies, see Feeney (1986a).

¹³³ Silk (1985), 6.

¹³⁴ On these Heracleian paradoxes, see Galinsky (1972), 1–39; Burkert (1985), 208–11.

which had the hero elevated amongst the Olympians.¹³⁵ Only when Glaucus speaks to the Argonauts at the end of Book 1 do we learn that Heracles will become a god, *if* he accomplishes the full quota of labours assigned to him (1317–20). After his disappearance and Glaucus' pronouncement, it is natural for the Argonauts and the reader to assume that Heracles will not cross their paths again. Yet, in the last book, in Libya, when they are desperate with thirst, at the other end of the Mediterranean from where they had last seen Heracles, the Argonauts, to their great surprise and ours, only just miss Heracles, to find themselves literally in his footsteps—and in no other sense than literally.

They come tantalizingly close to meeting with him again, for only on the previous day he had passed through this very stretch of desert (1436). The Argonauts are in the Garden of the Hesperides: there is the dragon, killed only the day before by Heracles (1400); there is the tree, despoiled of its golden apples (1397); there are the Hesperides, bemoaning their loss (1406–7). One of the Hesperides tells them the story, bitter with anger against the bestial Heracles, whom she calls 'dog-like' (1433), and compares to a beast of the field, as he fills his great belly from the spring he has caused to flow by kicking a rock (1449). This spring is the salvation of the Argonauts, as one of them observes: 'Friends, even in his absence Heracles has saved his companions, afflicted with thirst' (ὦ πόποι, ἧ καὶ νόσφιν ἔων ἐσάωσεν ἑταίρους / Ἡρακλῆς δίψῃ κεκμηότας, 1458–9). The best-qualified of the Argonauts dash off to find him (1464–7): the sons of Boreas, who can fly;¹³⁶ Euphemus, the fastest runner; Lynceus, with the wondrous eyesight, who, as the story went, could see even under the earth (1. 153–5). One unmarvellous Argonaut also goes—Canthus, of whom more in a moment. All fail. 'Only Lynceus thought he could see Heracles, far off, on the limitless land, seeing him as you see the moon, or think you see the moon, on the first day of the month, all obscured' (ἀτὰρ τότε γ' Ἡρακλῆα / μόνος ἀπειρεσίης τηλοῦ χθονὸς εἶσατο Λυγκεύς / τὼς ἰδέειν, ὥς τις τε νέω ἐνὶ ἡματι μήνην / ἧ ἶδεν ἧ ἐδόκησεν ἐπαχλύουσαν ἰδέσθαι, 4. 1477–80).¹³⁷ Lynceus rejoins his com-

¹³⁵ Feeney (1986a), 52–8.

¹³⁶ Little knowing, of course, that, according to Apollonius' new version (1. 1302–8), Heracles would have killed them if they had found him.

¹³⁷ Following the text and interpretation of Vian-Delage (1976–81), vol. 3 ad loc.

panions, swearing to them that none of the searchers would be able to catch up with Heracles on his route (1481–2).

What does all this mean? Above all, it means that Heracles has managed to fulfil the conditions stated by the sea-god Glaucus at the end of Book 1. He has completed his labours, he has taken the golden apples of eternal life, which represent his final labour, and won his prize of immortality.¹³⁸ He has gone virtually all the way down the path towards becoming a god, and that is the extraordinary interstitial point which Apollonius captures in that beautiful moment when Lynceus sees him in the far distance, or thinks he sees him. In this last mention of him in the poem, he is passing out of the world of men, and into the world of gods. In saving his companions, even in his absence, he has already begun to fulfil the functions of a god.¹³⁹

Apollonius luxuriates here in the paradoxes at his command. Just when Heracles lays his hands on his guarantee of apotheosis, Apollonius casts him at his most brutish, a creature of violence, wearing the raw untanned hide of a beast (4. 1438–9). Heracles causes misery to the Hesperides, but as the 'avertor of evil' (ἀλεξίκακος) he saves the Argonauts. Brutish and thirsty, he can still use his wit, or be thought capable of it (1445). If his paradoxical nature here corresponds to the bizarre nature of his particular divinity, he approximates also to more general notions of the divine, in his power, his invulnerability, his self-sufficiency, his otherness.¹⁴⁰ He may be beneficent, but he is so much 'himself' that he moves eventually into total isolation. In the course of the poem, he is separated from the Argonauts, from Hylas, from Polyphemus. In the second book, we see four of his companions from the Amazonian expedition, who were cut off from him in Asia Minor (957). As Heracles moves out of the poem for good, Canthus tries to follow him, but is prevented from doing so, for he is killed by a local shepherd (4. 1487–9). His death, by a ring-pattern, takes us back to the moment when Heracles first disappeared, at the end

¹³⁸ On the significance of the apples, see Bond (1981), 166.

¹³⁹ Cf. *Od.* 4. 444; and compare *Arg.* 4. 1436 with *Od.* 2. 262. The contemporary interest in deification of great men is clearly behind this talk of Heracles as a 'saviour': on such language, see Nock (1972), 78, 720–35. There is a very extended and striking reference to contemporary ruler cult in the cult offered to the Dioscuri by the Mariandyni, out of gratitude for Polydeuces' killing of their oppressor, Amycus (2. 756–8, 796–810).

¹⁴⁰ His apartness already stressed in the Homeric *nekyia*, *Od.* 11. 601–27; see the acute comments of Galinsky (1972), 12–13.

of the first book, for Canthus is trying to find out where Heracles left Polyphemus, after the two had been stranded together. Heracles did not protect Polyphemus either; Polyphemus followed along the coast of Asia Minor looking for Argo, and died there (4. 1473–5).

A god, says Aristotle, is self-sufficient, and does not need friends; it is, indeed, not possible to be friends with a god.¹⁴¹ Aristotle also sheds light on what lies behind Apollonius' dramatic polarities of Heracles as god and beast. 'Man is by nature', says Aristotle, 'an animal intended to live in a polis. He who is without a polis, by reason of his own nature and not of some accident, is either a poor sort of being, or a being higher than man.'¹⁴² Heracles does not belong with the Argonauts, or with any human company: he has no fixed polis—does he belong to Tiryns, Argos, or Thebes?—; he cannot tie in successfully with a family, for he kills his children and is killed by his wife. Aristotle further says, 'The man who is isolated—who is unable to share in the benefits of political association, or has no need to share because he is already self-sufficient—is no part of the polis, and must therefore be either a beast or a god' (*Pol.* 1253 a 27–9). The *Argonautica* is not a commentary on Aristotle, but some such preconceptions lie behind Apollonius' paradoxes here, as he tells us of the bestial and god-like Heracles striding off alone across the desert, towards divinity, out of the poem.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ *Eth. Eud.* 1244 b 8–10; *Eth. Nic.* 1158 b 35–1159 a 6.

¹⁴² *Pol.* 1253 a 2–4; I give the translation of Barker (1946).

¹⁴³ We return to the boundaries around humans formed by gods and beasts in the discussion of Vergil and Ovid.

3

From Greece to Rome: Naevius and Ennius

Μεγίστην δέ μοι δοκεῖ διαφορὰν ἔχειν τὸ Ῥωμαίων
πολίτευμα πρὸς βέλτιον ἐν τῇ περὶ θεῶν διαλήψει.

The greatest point of difference which counts in favour of the Roman political system's superiority strikes me as being their attitude concerning the gods.

Polybius 6. 56. 6

The Romans' creation of a national literary culture in response to the literary culture of the Greeks is a phenomenon which fascinates and baffles us as it fascinated and baffled them, a phenomenon which invites enquiry from many directions.¹ Here we have no more than three aims: first (and most modestly), to give a sketch of how the Romans took over Greek literature, together with the apparatus of scholarship which had become an inextricable element of that literature; second, to mark out those key differences between Greek and Roman attitudes to religion which will be most important for an understanding of how Roman epic treated the divine; finally, to investigate the role of the divine in the epics of Naevius and Ennius, so as to set the scene for our enquiries into the *Aeneid*, and the subsequent tradition.

For the Greeks, Homer's inimitable pre-eminence was the primary fact of their literature, and their evolution of systematized ways of reading the epics was, as we have seen, a long process. Roman literary history runs the reverse course. Whereas the Romans had to wait long for their poetry to attain anything like the achieved quality of the Greeks', writers in Latin experienced literature from the start (literature being to them, of course, nothing but *Greek*

¹ Toynbee (1965), 2. 416–34; Petrochilos (1974); Momigliano (1975), 12–49; Wardman (1976); Balsdon (1979), 30–58; Kaimio (1979); Rawson (1985). One awaits with eagerness Andrew Wallace-Hadrill's work on the Hellenization of Roman culture; in the meantime, note the power of the aphorism of Cornell (1978), 110: 'an independent or autonomous Latin culture never had a chance to emerge'.