

Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*: sample passages

Herakles and Hylas episode (1.1207-1343)

In the meantime, Hylas went off from the crew with a bronze pitcher in search of a spring's sacred flow, so that he might collect water for the evening meal before Heracles returned and get everything else promptly prepared and in due order for his arrival. For in such habits had Heracles himself raised him, ever since he took him as an infant from the palace of his father, noble Theiodamas, whom he ruthlessly killed among the Dryopians for opposing him over a plowing ox. Now Theiodamas, stricken with pain, was cleaving his fallow fields with a plow, when Heracles ordered him to hand over the plowing ox against his will. For he was eager to create a dire pretext for war against the Dryopians, because they lived there with no concern for justice. But these things would divert me far from my song.

Soon Hylas came to a spring, which the neighboring inhabitants call Pegae. Just about then choruses of nymphs were being formed, for all the nymphs who lived there on the lovely peak made it their concern to hymn Artemis every night with songs. And so all the nymphs who haunted the mountain peaks or rushing streams, and those who were wardens of the woods, were coming in lines from afar; but the water nymph was just rising from the fair-flowing spring. She noticed the boy nearby, glowing with rosy beauty and sweet charms, for the full moon was casting its rays on him as it gleamed from the sky. Cypris confounded her thoughts, and in her helpless state she could barely collect her spirit. But as soon as he leaned on one side and dipped the pitcher into the stream, and the abundant water gurgled as it poured into the echoing bronze, at once she raised her left arm over his neck in her longing to kiss his tender mouth, while with her right hand she pulled on his elbow and plunged him into the midst of the swirling water.

The only one of the comrades to hear the boy shout was Eilatus' son, the hero Polyphemos, who was heading down the path, for he was expecting massive Heracles to return. He rushed toward the cry and drew near to Pegae, like a wild beast to which comes the bleating of sheep from afar, and, burning with hunger, it goes in pursuit but does not reach the flocks, for beforehand their own shepherds have shut them in their pens, and so he groans and roars vehemently until he tires—so at that time did Eilatus' son groan mightily and wander about the spot calling out, but his shouting was in vain. Immediately he drew his great sword and went off in pursuit, fearing that the boy might be prey to wild animals, or that, all alone as he was, men had ambushed him and were taking away their easy capture. Thereupon, as he was brandishing his bare sword in his hand, he came upon Heracles himself on the path, and easily recognized him as he hastened through the darkness to the ship. Immediately he told of the terrible calamity, with a heavy heart and out of breath:

"My poor friend, I shall be the first to tell you of a horrible grief: Hylas went to the spring and has not returned safely, but bandits have attacked him and are taking him away, or beasts are tearing him apart. I heard him shouting."

Thus he spoke. When Heracles heard this, sweat poured forth in abundance down from his temples and the dark blood seethed deep in his gut. In anger he threw the pine tree to the ground, and ran down any path on which his feet carried him headlong. As when, stung by a gadfly, a bull charges forth, leaving the meadows and marshlands, and pays no attention to the herdsmen or the herd, but at times makes his way without stopping, while at other times he stands still and raises his broad neck and lets out a bellow, having been stung by a vicious fly—thus in his frenzy he sometimes moved his swift knees without a break, then sometimes ceased from his labor and shouted piercingly into the distance with a mighty cry.

Soon the morning star rose above the highest peaks, and the breezes swept down. And at once Tiphys urged them to board and take advantage of the wind. In their eagerness they boarded right away, drew the ship's anchors up on deck, and pulled back on the halyards. The sail bulged in the middle from the wind, and far out from the shore they joyfully were being borne past the Posideian headland.

But at the time when bright dawn shines down from the sky, as it rises from the horizon, and the pathways are clearly visible, and the dewy plains sparkle in the bright gleam, they realized that they

had unwittingly left those men behind. And fierce strife came upon them and a great uproar, to think that they had gone off and abandoned the best man of their comrades. Stunned with helplessness, Jason spoke not a word on one side or the other, but sat there, eating his heart out from deep within at this grievous calamity. And anger took hold of Telamon, and he spoke thus:

“Sit there calmly like that, since it was to your advantage to leave Heracles. It was from you that this plan originated, so that his glory throughout Hellas would not put you in the shade, if the gods grant our return trip home. But what pleasure is there in words? For I will go back, even without the aid of those comrades of yours who helped contrive this treachery.”

He spoke and rushed up to Tiphys, Hagnias’ son; and his eyes sparkled like flashes of blazing fire. And so they would have gone back again to the land of the Mysians after struggling against the surge and constant blast of the wind, had not the two sons of Thracian Boreas restrained Aeacus’ son with harsh words—unfortunate men, for in fact horrible vengeance came upon them later at the hands of Heracles because they had prevented the search for him. For as they were returning from the games held when Pelias died, he killed them in sea-girt Tenos, and heaped earth over them and set two pillars on top, one of which—an extraordinary marvel for men to behold—moves at the gusts of the whistling north wind. And thus were those things to be accomplished in the course of time.

But to them out of the salty depths appeared Glaucus, the wise interpreter of divine Nereus. Raising up his shaggy head and chest down to his waist, he seized the ship’s keel in his mighty hand and shouted to the men in their haste:

“Why, in opposition to the plan of great Zeus, are you determined to take bold Heracles to Aeetes’ city? At Argos it is his destiny to toil for arrogant Eurystheus and accomplish twelve labors in all, and to dwell in the home of the immortals if he completes a few more. Therefore, let there be no remorse at all for him. Likewise, it is fated that Polyphemus build a glorious city among the Mysians at the mouth of the Cius and fulfill his destiny in the vast land of the Chalybes. But as for Hylas, a divine nymph has made him her husband out of love; it was for his sake that they wandered off and were left behind.”

He spoke and cloaked himself in the restless wave as he plunged below. Around him the dark water foamed as it was stirred in whirlpools and washed the hollow ship on through the sea. The heroes rejoiced, and Aeacus’ son Telamon rushed up to Jason, took his hand in his own, embraced him, and said:

“Jason, do not be angry with me, if I foolishly blundered, for excessive grief impelled me to make that arrogant and insufferable rebuke. Let us cast that mistake to the winds and be friends as before.”

In turn, Jason answered him with due consideration:

“My good friend, you certainly did revile me with a harsh rebuke, claiming in front of them all that I betrayed a man who was kind to me. But I can assure you that I harbor no bitter wrath against you, although before this I was pained, because it was not over flocks of sheep or over possessions that you flared up in anger, but for a man who was your comrade. Indeed, I hope that you would oppose another man as well on my behalf, if a similar situation ever arose.”

Medea and Jason get the Golden Fleece 4.139-205

And as when countless swirls of sooty smoke spiral above a smoldering forest, and one follows another in quick succession, ever lifted on the swirls from below, so did that huge beast then roll his countless coils covered with dry scales. But as it was coiling, the girl rushed to look it in the eye, and in a sweet voice called to her aid Sleep, highest of the gods, to enchant the monster, and invoked the queen of the underworld, the night-wanderer, to grant a favorable venture. Jason followed in fear, but the snake, already enchanted by her song, was relaxing the long spine of its earthborn coils and stretching out its myriad spirals, like a dark wave when it rolls mute and soundless on a sluggish sea. But all the same, it raised up its horrific head, eager to clasp them both in its deadly jaws. But she dipped a freshly cut sprig of juniper into a potion and sprinkled powerful drugs in its eyes as she sang incantations, and all around the pervasive scent of the drug was casting

sleep. It laid its jaw to rest on that very spot, and those countless spirals lay stretched out far behind through the dense woods.

Then, at the girl's command, he took the golden fleece from the oak tree, while she stood fast and kept rubbing the head of the beast with the drug, until Jason himself told her to turn back toward their ship, and she left the shade-filled grove of Ares. And as a young girl catches on her delicate gown the beam of a full moon as it shines forth high above her upper room, and her heart within her rejoices as she beholds the beautiful gleam, so joyfully then did Jason lift up the great fleece in his hands, and upon his golden cheeks and forehead there settled a red glow like a flame from the shimmering of the wool. As large as the hide of a yearling ox or of the deer which hunters call the achaiines, so great it was, all golden, and its fleecy covering was heavy with wool. The ground at his feet sparkled brightly with every step he took. Sometimes he went draping it over his left shoulder from the top of his neck to his foot, but at other times he rolled it up and stroked it, for he greatly feared that some man or god would come and take it from him.

Dawn was spreading over the earth when they joined the crew. The young men marveled when they saw the great fleece shining like a thunderbolt of Zeus, and each one leapt up, eager to touch it and take it in his hands, but Jason restrained them all and covered it with a newly woven robe. He lifted the girl and seated her in the stern, and spoke the following to them all:

"My friends, no longer now refrain from returning to your homeland, because now the purpose for which we toiled in misery and endured this arduous journey has been easily accomplished through the girl's counsels. With her consent I shall take her home to be my lawfully wedded wife, and for your part, inasmuch as she is the noble savior of all Achaea and of yourselves, you must protect her, for I reckon that Aeetes will doubtless come with his host to prevent us from going from the river into the sea. So let every second one of you throughout the ship sit and ply the oars, and let the other half secure our return by holding their oxhide shields in front of them as a ready defense against enemy missiles. And now in our hands we hold our children, our dear homeland, and our aged parents; and on our venture depends whether Hellas wins dejection or else great fame."