

Suspense in the Phaeacian Episode of Apollonius' *Argonautica*

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The suspenseful Phaeacian episode of Apollonius' *Argonautica* (4. 982–1222) is one of the most important and dramatic in the action of the second half of the poem, tying into a tight knot its central conflicts and finally (apparently) resolving them.¹ The love affair between Jason and Medea, which made possible the former's acquisition of the Golden Fleece but which has seemed precarious and dubious, is consummated. Their marriage, which is celebrated with glorious festivity, means that King Alcinous recognizes that Medea has thereby passed from the power of her father into the power and protection of Jason and declares that Medea shall not be given up to the Colchian force which is demanding her back. The latter give up further pursuit of the Argonauts.

And yet this ending to the Colchian portion of the Argonautic story is curiously ambiguous, ambivalent, and inconclusive. Scholars and critics have read the episode in quite different ways. Many follow Wilamowitz² in seeing the episode as the unhappy beginning of the end of the story of Jason and Medea: They are alienated and estranged from one another, and they marry perforce in order to keep Medea from falling into the hands of the Colchians. Others, however, see it rather as the happy end of the romantic story that is the subject of the second half of the poem.³

This ambiguity and inconclusiveness, I will argue here, is part of a deliberate rhetorical strategy on the part of the poet. In this episode, Apollonius creates a complex interplay and tension between the "suspense of uncertainty" that we are made to feel about the outcome of the action *within* the episode (the development of the relationship between Jason and Medea and the handling of the threat posed by the Colchians) and the

¹ On the Phaeacian episode as a "substitute" for the Argonauts' return to Pagasae, which the poet handles summarily at the end of the poem, see V. Knight, *The Renewal of Epic: Responses to Homer in the "Argonautica" of Apollonius* (Leiden 1995) 248–49.

² U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Hellenistische Dichtung in der Zeit des Kallimachos II* (Berlin 1924) 199–203.

³ See especially Edward Phinney, Jr., "Narrative Unity in the *Argonautica*, the Medea–Jason Romance," *TAPA* 98 (1967) 336–38; cf. G. O. Hutchinson, *Hellenistic Poetry* (Oxford 1988) 132–34.

"suspense of anticipation" that we feel about the ultimate outcome of the Argonautic expedition and of Jason and Medea's marriage.⁴ From our knowledge of the mythological tradition and from foreshadowings within the poem itself (e.g., 1. 440–41, 3. 85–89, 3. 241–43), we know that the Argonautic enterprise will be successful, and that both Jason and Medea will reach Greece safely; however, we also know that the trip will involve "innumerable trials" (1. 441–42). We know, too, that the relationship of Jason and Medea is doomed to fatal estrangement that will have tragic consequences; through vague but ominous hints and allusions to Euripides' *Medea*, Apollonius reinforces this knowledge and keeps the ultimate fate of Jason and Medea continually in view.⁵

The poet intensifies and complicates the suspense by exploiting the dynamics of the reading process described by Menakhem Perry, whereby the audience continuously constructs hypotheses about what is going on in the fictional world on the basis of the information and knowledge available during the reading of the linear text, and confirms, modifies, or rejects these hypotheses as further information becomes available.⁶ By withholding crucial information about events and about his characters' thoughts and feelings, and by emphasizing the bellicose implacability of the Colchians and recalling words or events in Euripides' play, Apollonius leads us to believe that the Colchians will resort to anything in order to get possession of Medea and that the tragic estrangement of Jason and Medea may already be in progress.⁷ Finally, when the suspense of uncertainty dissipates as narrative gaps are filled in and ambiguities are resolved, we are left with a "happy" ending whose happiness is tempered by our knowledge that it is

⁴ On the distinction between "suspense of uncertainty" and "suspense of anticipation" and between suspense concerning individual episodes and suspense concerning the "main events of the story" whose outcome is known to the audience, see G. E. Duckworth, *Foreshadowing and Suspense in the Epics of Homer, Apollonius, and Vergil* (Princeton 1933) 37.

⁵ On the foreshadowing of events that await Jason and Medea in Greece, see Duckworth (previous note) 33–34; M. Fusillo, *Il tempo delle "Argonautiche": Un'analisi del racconto in Apollonio Rodio* (Rome 1985) 307–11, 338. On audience expectations based on knowledge of the tradition and on internal foreshadowings in the *Iliad*, see J. V. Morrison, *Homeric Misdirection: False Predictions in the "Iliad"* (Ann Arbor 1992) 13. On "aftermaths," or "endings beyond the ending" in literature, see D. H. Roberts, "Afterword: Ending and Aftermath, Ancient and Modern," in *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature*, ed. by D. H. Roberts, F. M. Dunn, and D. Fowler (Princeton 1997) 251–73.

⁶ M. Perry, "Literary Dynamics: How the Order of a Text Creates Its Meanings," *Poetics Today* 1 (1979) 35–64, 311–61. Cf. S. Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London 1983) 117–29.

⁷ R. L. Hunter (ed.), *Apollonius of Rhodes. "Argonautica" Book III* (Cambridge 1989) 19, says that Apollonius "models his Jason and his Medea with an eye to their 'subsequent' history in Euripides' tragedy. The two texts become mutually explicative: *Arg.* shows us how the origins of the tragedy lay far back, and the tragedy lends deep resonance and 'tragic' irony to the events of the epic." I would argue, however, that Apollonius does not really "show" us that the tragedy originated in the initial stages of Jason and Medea's love affair; rather, he encourages our hypothesis that it did so. In his now giving support to this hypothesis, now taking it away, lies much of the power and interest of the fourth book of the poem.

not the end at all, and that the disaster that we were led to fear has only been deferred.

Apollonius has already employed similar techniques in the earlier Apsyrtus episode (4. 338–521), which closely parallels the Phaeacian episode in situation and in structure.⁸ In that episode, the Colchian contingent led by Medea's brother Apsyrtus caught up with the Argonauts and demanded that Medea be given up to them; but Jason made an agreement with them to submit her fate to third-party arbitration. After accusations of betrayal on her part, and self-defensiveness on his, Jason and Medea concerted the killing of Apsyrtus in order to escape. Medea's towering rage and bitter recriminations and Jason's smooth reassurances vividly recall their portrayal in the *Medea*, and indeed many scholars have seen here the germination of the seeds of their ultimate tragedy, as told by Euripides. But Apollonius is in fact deliberately ambiguous about whether their relationship has already become the "Euripidean" one: Though Medea shows herself capable of implacable wrath against Jason, she nevertheless seems to be placated by his arguments; and though Jason shows that he is capable of deceit and treachery, it is not clear that it is Medea whom he wishes to deceive and betray.⁹ The "Euripidean hypothesis," therefore, remains in abeyance, to be reactivated in the Phaeacian episode.

The excursus with which the Phaeacian episode begins, giving alternative derivations of the name of the Phaeacians' island, on which the Argonauts land, suggests a thematic opposition between violence and betrayal, on the one hand, and peace and civilization, on the other: Drepane gets its name either from the sickle with which Kronos castrated his father or from the sickle of Demeter, who out of love for Macris taught the Titans to reap grain there (984–91).¹⁰ This thematic opposition is carried over onto the level of the plot when the narrative proper begins: The Argonauts are welcomed with joy and homecoming-like festivity by the friendly Phaeacians (994b–1000a), but immediately have to face the prospect of battle (1000b). That part of the Colchian fleet that is still pursuing the Argonauts has arrived.¹¹

Events immediately following the arrival of the Colchians are narrated rapidly in a dense and elliptical summary (1004–10) similar to that reporting the forging of the compact between the Colchians and the Argonauts in the

⁸ On the parallelism, see F. Vian (ed.), *Apollonios de Rhodes. "Argonautiques" III* (Paris 1981) 14–15; cf. A. R. Dyck, "On the Way from Colchis to Corinth: Medea in Book 4 of the *Argonautica*," *Hermes* 117 (1989) 466.

⁹ On this episode, see C. S. Byre, "The Killing of Apsyrtus in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*," *Phoenix* 50 (1996) 3–16 and the bibliographic references there.

¹⁰ Cf. Dyck (above, note 8) 465; A. Hurst, *Apollonios de Rhodes, manière et cohérence: Contribution à l'étude de l'esthétique alexandrine* (Rome 1967) 121.

¹¹ They have arrived, the poet adds (1002b–03), by a different route than the Argonauts. This fact tells us that the Colchians are unaware of Apsyrtus' murder, and introduces a further source of suspense into the episode: Will they find out about it? (They do not, and in fact no allusion is made to it in the episode by either the poet or his characters.)

Apsyrtus episode (4. 340–49). We learn only that the Colchians are implacably set upon (ἔεντ' ἀπροφάτως, 1005¹²) bringing Medea back to her father, threatening great violence if they do not get her; but that Alcinous restrains them, for he is eager to resolve the dispute for both sides without warfare (λελιήτο γὰρ ἀμφοτέροισι / δημοτήτος ἀνευθεν ὑπέρβια νείκεα λῦσαι, 1009–10). The poet withholds from us the details of Alcinous' intervention, and tells us nothing about how he intends to resolve the issue. We are thus left with the impression that the Colchians are a powerful force who will not be deflected from their object and will stop at nothing to obtain it.¹³

Nor does the poet tell us anything about Jason's own actions and reactions. This narrative gap seems to become ominously significant when we are told that Medea's appeals to the Argonauts for support are addressed to Jason's *companions* (πολλὰ μὲν αὐτοὺς / Αἰσονίδεω ἑτάρους μειλίσσετο, 1011b–12a), each in turn (τοῖα δ' ἀριστήων ἐναμοιβαδὶς ἄνδρα ἕκαστον, 1030). Nothing is said about where Jason is or what he is doing in the meantime. This, together with the fact that Medea's scornful appeals to the Argonauts echo many of her arguments to Jason in the Apsyrtus episode¹⁴ (which in turn echo Medea's speech to Jason, *Med.* 465–519), including her adjuration to respect the compact made with her, the oaths sworn, and her rights as a suppliant (δεῖσατε συνθεσίας τε καὶ ὄρκια, δεῖσατ' Ἐρινὺν / Ἴκεσίην νέμεσίν τε θεῶν, 1042–43a), suggests that, once again, she suspects that treachery may be afoot. Moreover, neither her appeals to Queen Arete (1014–28) nor her appeals to the Argonauts (1031–52) make any mention of Jason; she even treats the trials in Colchis and the acquisition of the fleece—which, as she notes, are due entirely to her own agency—as exploits of the entire group (1031–35). All of this encourages us to assimilate the information that is given in the narrative to the tragic pattern of the *Medea*; in other words, to reactivate the hypothesis, first suggested by the Apsyrtus episode, that the relationship between Jason and Medea has become the “Euripidean” one, that Jason has gotten what he wants from Medea and is ready to throw her over if she

¹² On the meaning of ἀπροφάτως here, see E. Livrea (ed.), *Apollonii Rhodii Argonauticon liber quartus* (Florence 1973) ad loc. R. Hunter translates, “their unconditional demand was the handing over of Medea to be returned to her father” (*Apollonius of Rhodes: Jason and the Golden Fleece [The “Argonautica”]* [Oxford 1993] 122). The text of the poem that is cited in this paper is that of Vian (above, note 8).

¹³ Fusillo (above, note 5) 272, 274, argues that the poet uses narrative compression here in order to downplay what is least important in the episode, the development of the action itself, and to highlight what is most important, the psychology of Medea. And H. Fränkel (*Noten zu den “Argonautika” des Apollonios* [Munich 1968] 553–55), pointing out that the reader can fill in the details of what is going on at this point in the story only on the basis of what he or she learns later in the episode, attributes the gaps to the author's lack of consideration for the reader. Both scholars fail to recognize the function of these narrative gaps in creating ambiguity and suspense. On the function of similar gaps in the Apsyrtus episode, see Byre (above, note 9) 5–6.

¹⁴ See Vian (above, note 8) 114 n. 3.

jeopardizes the success of the expedition and that Medea, with good reason, no longer loves or trusts him.¹⁵

The fact that the Argonauts answer her pleas with a show of arms and promises of aid in the case of an unjust verdict (δίκης ἀλιτήμονος, 1057) suggests that Medea need fear no treachery from them, at any rate.¹⁶ But their saber-rattling only reinforces our fear that the situation may erupt into warfare—the Colchians have threatened violence if they do not get Medea, now the Argonauts promise it if they do. Meanwhile, our suspicions about Jason's motives remain.

Night finds Medea sleepless and tortured by apprehension. Our own suspense about what is going to happen on Drepane seems to mirror hers, and we are made to feel deep sympathy with her in what we take to be her desolate situation. The poet tells us that her anguish is like that of a poor spinstress who works by night while her orphan children (ὀρφανὰ τέκνα, 1063) whimper; the woman, desolate through the loss of her husband (χηροσύνη πόσιος, 1064), weeps at her sad lot. The details of the simile, besides reminding us of the terrible events to come in Corinth, her abandonment by Jason and perhaps even her killing of her children,¹⁷ reinforce the hypothesis that something is seriously amiss between her and Jason, suggesting that Medea has already "lost" her lover.

Meanwhile, in the palace, the bedtime conversation between Arete and Alcinous (1068–1109), whose marital harmony poignantly contrasts with Medea's situation,¹⁸ only deepens the suspense. Arete pleads that her husband save Medea from the Colchians (1073–74); but her request that he not make Jason false in the great oaths that he has sworn to Medea¹⁹ ironically reminds us both of the possibility of Jason's faithlessness now, and of the perfidy that he will certainly be guilty of some years hence. And Alcinous' decision, made (or revealed) only now, to give Medea back to her father if she is a virgin, makes it seem inevitable that the episode must have an unhappy issue; for both Medea in her pleas to Arete, and Arete in her pleas to Alcinous, have emphasized that her virginity is intact (1024–25 and

¹⁵ Cf. Wilamowitz (above, note 2) 202–03; P. A. Hübscher, *Die Charakteristik der Personen in Apollonios' "Argonautika"* (diss. Freiburg 1940) 16; S. A. Natzel, *Κλέα γυναικῶν: Frauen in den "Argonautika" des Apollonios Rhodios* (Trier 1992) 115–16.

¹⁶ Fränkel compares Medea's appeals to the Argonauts to Agamemnon's *epipoleis* in the *Iliad*, designed to spur to action men whose loyalty was never in doubt ([above, note 13] 559–60).

¹⁷ Cf. Hurst (above, note 10) 122–23; C. R. Beye, *Epic and Romance in the "Argonautica" of Apollonius* (Carbondale, IL 1982) 154; Fusillo (above, note 5) 338; Natzel (above, note 15) 117.

¹⁸ Cf. Knight (above, note 1) 251.

¹⁹ How she has heard of this (ὡς αἶώ, 1084), is unclear, since no mention is made of it in Medea's speech to Arete. According to R. Ibscher (*Gestalt der Szene und Form der Rede in den "Argonautika" des Apollonios Rhodios* [diss. Berlin 1939] 91), ὡς αἶώ "nimmt Bezug auf das, was sie durch Medea erfuhr"; but this inference is not justified by the text. See R. Hunter, *The "Argonautica" of Apollonius: Literary Studies* (Cambridge 1993) 72.

1074, respectively).²⁰ Alcinoos emphasizes his resolve to render a verdict that all mankind will regard as the best one (1104–05). But will the Argonauts see it that way if he awards Medea to the Colchians? Or will they see it as the “unjust verdict” in the case of which they have promised their aid to Medea? And what, in any case, will Jason do?

As the narrative continues, what the poet tells us gradually lessens the strength of the “Euripidean hypothesis” while suspense about the Colchian threat continues to build. Arete secretly sends a herald to the Argonauts to tell them what Alcinoos’ decree will be and to urge Jason to consummate his marriage with Medea. From this it is evident that Arete, at any rate, trusts Jason with Medea’s welfare. The herald finds the Argonauts in armed watch by the ship (1124–25). Although his reception by them is presented in another swift and elliptical summary, and Jason’s individual reaction is not shown, the fact that the herald has come to give his message to Jason (ὥς κεν Ἴησони μῦθον ἐναίσιμον ἀγγείλειεν, 1122) makes it clear that Jason shares in the general joy of the Argonauts when they hear the welcome news (γῆθησε δὲ θυμὸς ἐκάστου / ἥρώων, μάλα γάρ σφιν ἐαδὸτα μῦθον ἔειπεν, 1126b–27).

Our fears that the couple are estranged, however, are not allayed until the narrative of the wedding itself. In a rare “inside view” of the couple in this episode, we are finally given direct insight into the motivations of Jason and into the attitudes of Medea. The poet notes (1161–64) that this wedding on Drepane is not as either of them desires (they had wanted to wed in his father’s house in Iolcus), but that they are led to make love by necessity (τότ’ αὖ χρεὼ ἦγε μιγῆναι, 1164). And he adds the deeply pessimistic gnomic generalization that we much-suffering humans never get a firm footing on the path of Delight, that bitter care always attends human joy (1165–67):

ἀλλὰ γὰρ οὐ ποτε φῦλα δυηπαθέων ἀνθρώπων
 τερπωλῆς ἐπέβημεν ὄλω ποδί· σὺν δὲ τις αἰεὶ
 πικρὴ παρμέμβλωκεν ἐυφροσύνησιν ἀνίη.

In the universalizing generality of the comment we have once again, of course, a foreshadowing of the ultimate unhappy outcome of the marriage.²¹ But there is nothing in the text to suggest, as some scholars seem to think, that Jason and Medea are unwilling to marry each other, or that they have mixed feelings about their marriage itself.²² The comment is syntactically and semantically closely tied to its context, to the poet’s attempt to explain

²⁰ Cf. Duckworth (above, note 4) 110, who sees in this “an element of false foreshadowing.”

²¹ I believe that G. Zanker, however (“The Love Theme in Apollonius Rhodius’ *Argonautica*,” *WS* n.s. 13 [1979] 67–68), goes too far when he says that here the poet “clearly states his view of love in the *Argonautica*: the passion may be all-powerful and grand, but it can provoke men and women to action which can have the direst consequences” (i.e. the events of Euripides’ *Medea*). The statement, rather, is about life in general.

²² See Natzel (above, note 15) 119; cf. Dyck (above, note 8) 467.

the state of mind of the couple at this moment of the story:²³ their feelings of joy in their love-making mixed with disappointment at the hasty irregularity of the marriage and with awareness that they are not yet home and mixed above all, as the poet indicates in his resumption of the narrative, with anxiety about Alcinous' future verdict and its consequences (τῶ καὶ τοῦς, γλυκερῆ περ ἰαινομένουσ φιλότητι, / δεῖμ' ἔχεν, εἰ τελέοιτο διάκρισις Ἄλκινόοιο, 1168–69). It is the *circumstances* of the marriage that occasion their mixed feelings. They do want to marry; and the fact that they "take delight in sweet love-making" (1168b) at the consummation of their marriage means that, by this point in the narrative, textual support for the "Euripidean hypothesis" is severely eroded, if not swept away altogether.²⁴

As the imminence of tragedy diminishes, intimations of tragedy deferred continue. In the poet's excursus on the sacred cave in which the marriage is consummated (1131–40), we are told how, on Euboea, Macris fed the infant Dionysus with honey after Hermes had taken him from the flames; Hera in anger drove her from the island, and she went to dwell in the sacred cave of the Phaeacians, where she gave the inhabitants unlimited prosperity (ὄλβον ἀθέσφατον, 1140). The content and tone of the digression suggests salvation and safe refuge; but Natzel hears sinister overtones in the story, reminders that Medea is, like Macris, an exile who is a victim of the designs of Hera.²⁵

In keeping with Apollonius' technique of spinning out the threads of the suspense of uncertainty as long as possible, Hera's role in this episode is revealed in a tardy and piecemeal fashion. It is only after describing the nymphs who have come with flowers for the bridal chamber that he mentions that they were moved to come by Hera, who was doing honor to Jason (Ἰήσονα κυδαίνουσα, 1152); only after describing the arrival the next morning of men and women bringing gifts for the couple that he mentions that Hera had sent out word about the wedding (1184b–85a). And only at the end of his description of these festivities does he reveal that it

²³ As Vian (above, note 8) 120 n. 3 points out, "Ἄλλὰ γὰρ implique comme d'habitude une ellipse: 'Mais (ils ne jouirent pas pleinement de leur union: cf. 1164 μιγῆναι, et 1168), car . . .'"

²⁴ Cf. Phinney (above, note 3) 336–38. There still remains the disturbing fact that Medea addressed her appeals for support to the other Argonauts and not to Jason. H. Herter ("Bericht über die Literatur zur hellenistischen Dichtung seit dem Jahre 1921, II. Teil: Apollonios von Rhodos," *Bursian's Jahreshb.* 285 [1955] 396) attributes it to the poet's wish for *variatio*: She had addressed Jason, and not the other Argonauts, in the Apsyrtus episode. But the poet's making Jason so conspicuous by his absence seems to demand motivation on the level of the story as well. Did Medea in fact have no confidence in Jason? Or are we to understand in the light of what we have now learned that Medea, convinced perhaps of his fealty by his complicity in the murder of Apsyrtus, did not find it necessary to test his loyalty or spur his courage (cf. Phinney [above, note 3] 336)? Apollonius does not give us enough information finally to decide between the two possibilities, and thus leaves the door slightly ajar on the "Euripidean hypothesis."

²⁵ Natzel (above, note 15) 118.

was Hera who gave Arete the idea of disclosing Alcinous' intended decree (1199–1200).²⁶ Had the latter incident been revealed to us at the time when it occurred in the story, much of the suspense of the episode would have been lost, for we would have known from almost the beginning that Hera was safeguarding Jason and Medea here,²⁷ just as she ensured their safe passage of the Planctae not long before (4. 753–963).

This information about Hera's support of the couple further reduces our suspense of uncertainty; it increases our suspense of anticipation, however, for it brings with it recollection of the self-interested designs that lie behind her support. We learned earlier in the poem, when Hera secured Aphrodite's aid in making Medea fall in love with Jason and later when she secured Thetis' aid in assisting the Argonauts past the Planctae, that Hera intends that the Argonauts return safely to Greece, partly because she feels affection for Jason (3. 61–75, 4. 784–85) but partly, and indeed chiefly, because Jason and Medea are the instruments of her revenge upon Pelias (3. 61–65). And we have heard her reveal the curious and disturbing fact that it is Achilles to whom Medea will be married in the afterlife (4. 810–15).²⁸ Clearly, then, this is not a "happily ever after" marriage.

Despite the marriage and the splendor with which it is celebrated, the Colchians still remain a threat (the Argonauts sing the wedding song with weapons in hand, against a possible surprise attack, 1155b–60). Suspense about them and their seemingly non-negotiable demands is not fully and finally dissipated until the very end of the episode. Once again, Apollonius has heightened the suspense of uncertainty by withholding until later information that "naturally" belongs earlier in the narrative. When Alcinous sets out for the meeting-place to deliver his verdict about Medea, we are told that he does so "in accordance with the agreement" (συνθεσίησιν, 1176). This is the first clear indication that what occurred in the confrontation of the Argonauts with the Colchians at the beginning of the episode was the agreement by both parties to have Alcinous arbitrate the dispute.²⁹ Now, in the similarly dense and elliptical narrative of how Alcinous delivers his verdict in favor of the Argonauts, we are told that he is not influenced by fear of the wrath of Aetes (1203b–05a), which the

²⁶ Knight (above, note 1) 287 says that "it is characteristic of Apollonius casually to mention a divine intervention after describing its effect"; but three of her six examples are these references to Hera's role in the wedding.

²⁷ Cf. L. Klein, "Die Göttertechnik in den *Argonautika* des Apollonios Rhodios," *Philologus* 86 (1931) 237–39.

²⁸ See C. S. Byre, "On the Departure from Pagasae and the Passage of the Planctae in Apollonius' *Argonautica*," *MH* 54 (1997) 112–14. See also D. C. Feeney, *The Gods in Epic: Poets and Critics of the Classical Tradition* (Oxford 1991) 62–63, who notes that "once her instrument of vengeance is safely married to the transport [Hera] disappears from the story, now fully assimilated to her standard pattern of malevolence, with the anomaly of her initial beneficence removed."

²⁹ Cf. Fränkel (above, note 13) 554.

Colchians had threatened him with in 1006,³⁰ because “he had bound them with unbreakable oaths” (ἀρρήκτοισι δ’ ἐνιζεύξας ἔχεν ὄρκους, 1205). As Fränkel points out, this must mean that Alcinous has, in this part of the story or earlier, made both parties swear to abide by his decision and that he now holds them to their oaths.³¹ Vian takes the phrase to mean that they took the oaths just before Alcinous gives his verdict.³² It makes more sense, however, to take it as referring to the time when Alcinous was chosen (or imposed himself) as the arbitrator of the dispute at the beginning of the episode.³³ So we can now see that the Colchian threat has been something of a red herring: The Colchians are not as truculent and intransigent and lawless as the poet initially led us to believe. Indeed, when they see that their suit is in vain, their fear of Aeetes’ anger, far from impelling them to renege on their agreement, prompts them to ask to become allies of Alcinous (1206–10).³⁴

By the end of the episode, then, the issues involved in the intra-episodic suspense are resolved and a happy closure is made to the Colchian portion of the Argonautic adventure. The to-and-fro swing from tragedy-in-progress to tragedy deferred, which began in the Apsyrtus episode, has now halted at the latter. But this very deferral means that the episode does not bring closure to the story of Jason and Medea.

As we read through the narrative of the Phaeacian episode to its end, our suspense of uncertainty gradually gives place to suspense of anticipation, anticipation of what is in sight beyond the borders of the poem. And at the end of the episode, in retrospect, we are able to see the poignant, double-edged ironies of the situation on Drepane. Medea was not in fact like the woman in the simile, for she would gain a husband, not lose one.³⁵ And yet she will be like the woman in the simile, for she will lose the husband that she has gained. She suffered agonies of uncertainty, expecting the worst, not knowing that the adventure would end happily for her; and she has reached that happy end not knowing what horrors lie in store.

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³⁰ On the interpretation of 1203b–05a, see Fränkel (above, note 13) 576; Vian, on the other hand, interprets the lines as referring to threats made by the Colchians at the present moment of the story ([above, note 8] 53).

³¹ Fränkel (above, note 13) 577; cf. Livrea (above, note 12) 340, on line 1205.

³² Vian (above, note 8) 53.

³³ Cf. the terms of the compact (ἐτάμοντο) agreed upon (συνθεσίη) by the Argonauts and the other contingent of Colchians at the beginning of the Apsyrtus episode, whereby Medea’s case would be settled by arbitration (4. 340–49). On agreements to arbitration in ancient Greece, see M. N. Tod, *International Arbitration amongst the Greeks* (Oxford 1913) 70–77.

³⁴ As Knight points out, this is one of several instances in the *Argonautica* where armed conflict seems imminent but does not take place; such “frustrated battles” “tease the reader” and highlight alternatives to warfare in dealing with conflicts ([above, note 1] 114–17).

³⁵ Hutchinson (above, note 3) 133.