

## FULL MOON AND MARRIAGE IN APOLLONIUS' *ARGONAUTICA*

There are two passages in which the poet introduces a full moon to accentuate a particular aspect of a scene in his narrative; 1.1228–33 and 4.166–71. I shall concentrate on the second. Commentators<sup>1</sup> have contributed various suggestions but failed to understand the specific erotic-nuptial connotation of the full moon. The same applies to the more specialized contributions of Drogemüller and Rose.<sup>2</sup> I shall (1) first present the evidence for the nuptial associations of the full moon, then (2) apply this idea to the Apollonian passages, especially 4.166–71, and finally (3) add a remark about the special effect obtained by Apollonius here in relation to an Homeric passage (*Od.* 23.231–9).

### I. THE EVIDENCE

The context of Pindar, *Isthm.* 8.44–5 makes it clear that Themis considers a full moon to be the ideal circumstance for the intended wedding of Peleus and Thetis:

ἐν διχομνηίδεσσιν δὲ ἐσπέρας ἐρατὸν  
λύοι κεν χαλινὸν ὑφ' ἥρωϊ παρθενίας.

An ancient critic, taking ἐν διχομνηίδεσσιν ἐσπ. as his lemma, explains: τοῦτεστιν ἐν ταῖς τῆς πανσελήνου νυξί. κατὰ ταύτας γὰρ ἐποιοῦν τοὺς γάμους.<sup>3</sup> The second instance is found in Euripides' *Iphig. Aul.* Clytaemestra wants to know when Achilles is going to marry Iphigeneia:

Clyt. ἀλλ' εὐτυχοίτην. τίνι δ' ἐν ἡμέρᾳ γαμεῖ;  
Agam. ὅταν σελήνης εὐτυχῆς ἔλθῃ κύκλος. (716–17)

This time there is an interesting comment of a modern scholiast: ἡ πλησιφαῆς σελήνη καὶ νῦν ὑπὸ τοῦ λαοῦ θεωρεῖται αἰσιος οἰωνὸς καὶ εἰς τοὺς γάμους καὶ εἰς ἄλλα.<sup>4</sup> The third instance is of a later period. The narrator of Dion of Prusa's *Euhoicus* describes the admirably primitive goings-on in a family 'far from the madding crowd'. The father tells him that his daughter is betrothed to a poor but decent young hunter, and adds: ποιήσομεν τοὺς γάμους ἡμέραν ἀγαθὴν ἐπιλεξάμενοι. κἀγὼ, Πῶς, ἔφην, κρίνετε τὴν ἀγαθὴν ἡμέραν; καὶ ὁς, "Ὅταν μὴ μικρὸν ᾖ τὸ σελήνιον (7.70).

One authority dissents: Hesiod. At least, that is what one thinks on reading *Erga* 782–4, where the 16th day of the month is explicitly said to be unfit for planting and unfit for marriage. But on closer inspection there is perhaps no complete contrast with the preference expressed by the others for full moon. West observes in his commentary on *Erga*: 'It is noticeable that the good days are mostly concentrated in the first half of the month, when the waxing

<sup>1</sup> H. Fränkel, *Noten zu den Argonautika des Apollonios* (Munich, 1968), E. Livrea, *Argonauticon liber IV* (Florence, 1973) and F. Vian, *Argonautiques* tome III, chant IV (Paris, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> H. P. Drogemüller, *Die Gleichnisse im hellenistischen Epos* (diss. Hamburg, 1956), 179–80; Amy Rose, 'Clothing Imagery in Apollonius' *Argonautica*', *QUCC* 50 (1985), 38–9.

<sup>3</sup> *Scholia vetera in Pindari carmina*, ed. A. B. Drachmann, Teubner (Leipzig, 1927), iii.275. Erasmus Schmid in his 1616 edition of Pindar observed that in his day the same tradition prevailed: 'Sane circa hoc tempus nuptiae auspiciores per experientiam etiam hodie (my italics JMB) censentur', quoted by Boeckh in his *Pind. Epinic.* (Hildesheim, 1963 = Leipzig, 1861), p. 547 ad *Isthm.* viii.44.

<sup>4</sup> G. K. Gardikas, *Εὐρυπίδου Ἰφιγένεια ἡ ἐν Αὐλίδι* (Athens, 1962), 167, ad *I.A.* 718.

of the moon proclaims growth. The 9th is good for planting, the 16th (waning moon) is bad'.

That explains why the 16th, the day just *after* full moon, is unfit for marrying. It is, however, impossible to make Hesiod a witness *ex silentio* for the full moon (15th) as favourable for weddings, because he states in lines 800–1 that one should bring a spouse to one's house on the 4th.

The underlying principle which seems to be at the root of these observances both in Hesiod and in the other testimonies is the sympathy between heaven and earth. In his commentary on Hesiod's *Erga* Plutarch says so in as many words, διὸ καὶ Ἀθηναῖοι τὰς πρὸς σύνοδον ἡμέρας ἐξελέγοντο πρὸς γάμους, καὶ τὰ Θεογάμια ἐτέλουν τότε, φυσικῶς εἶναι πρῶτον οἰόμενοι γάμον τῆς σελήνης οὔσης πρὸς ἥλιον σύνοδον: 'The Athenians chose the days near the conjunction of moon and sun for their weddings, and celebrated the Theogamia then, thinking that in nature the first marriage is the conjunction of the moon with the sun' (transl. Sandbach).<sup>5</sup> It seems to have been a matter of choice whether one preferred the beginning of the contact between sun and moon, or the splendid culmination of it, as the ideal day for a wedding. It is also certain from other sources that women, perhaps because they felt in their body a rhythm which linked them with the moon, were in the habit of addressing the moon when they wanted to apply magical means to implement their erotic desires: see Theocr. 2 *passim*.<sup>6</sup>

## II. THE APOLLONIAN PASSAGE

The first of the Apollonian passages is a fairly simple case. When Hylas approaches the well to get water for his friend Heracles, a nymph is just coming out of the water:

ἡ δὲ νέον κρήνης ἀνεδύετο καλλινάοιο  
 νύμφη ἔφουδατή. τὸν δὲ σχεδὸν εἰσενόησεν  
 κάλλει καὶ γλυκερῆσιν ἔρευθόμενον χαρίτεσσιν,  
 πρὸς γάρ οἱ διχομήνις ἀπ' αἰθέρος ἀνγάζουσα  
 βάλλε σεληναίη. τῆς δὲ φρένας ἐπτοίησεν  
 Κυπρίς.

(I.1228–33)

Youthful male beauty, irradiated by the beams of the full moon, is too much for this nymph: overpowered by Cypri, she pulls the boy into the water, into her element, into her fatal embrace. Full moon accompanies the consummation of her love.

In book 4 the full moon is not part of the narrative itself but of a simile (although the narrator had observed earlier that Moon is shining, 55ff.).

...λείπον δὲ πολύσκιον ἄλσος Ἄρης. 166  
 ὥς δὲ σεληναίης διχομήνιδα παρθένος αἴγλην  
 ὑψόθεν ἀντέλλουσαν ὑπωροφίου θαλάμοιο 168  
 λεπταλέω ἐανῶ υποίσχεται, ἐν δὲ οἱ ἦτορ  
 χαίρει δερκομένης καλὸν σέλας – ὥς τότε Ἰήσων 170  
 γηθόσυνος μέγα κῶας εἰς ἀναείρετο χερσίν...

...and they came out of Ares' dark forest. Just as a maiden tries to catch with a delicate robe the splendour from above, of the full moon which rises above her roofed chamber, and her heart

<sup>5</sup> Plutarch, fr. 105 Loeb ed. tome xv, p. 216 = *Σ Erga* 782–4, ed. Pertusi, p. 244. According to Jacoby, Plutarch depends for this information on Philochorus; see *FGH* III B, Suppl. 1 (Text), 366.

<sup>6</sup> A scholion ad Theocr. 2.10 refers to Pindar who had said in a partheneion (fr. 104 Snell & Mähler) that masculine lovers address their prayers to the sun, women to the moon. About the moon in general see W. H. Roscher, *Über Selene und Verwandtes* (Leipzig, 1890) and C. Præaux, *La Lune dans la pensée grecque*, Acad. Roy. Belgique 2,61 (1973). Neither of the two scholars comments upon the passages in Apollonius' *Argonautica*.

rejoices in her at the sight of this noble radiance, so did Jason hold up the magnificent fleece with his hands, rejoicing...

In view of the crux put by H. Fränkel in his edition in the line 168, and of his remark *ad locum* 'structura verborum obscura', it is not out of the way to start with some remarks on details of text and interpretation. In 166 I follow Platt, Fränkel, Livrea and Vian in reading *λείπον* instead of the unmetrical *λίπεν* of the MSS (*λείπεν* Mooney). In line 168 where *ἀνέχουσιν* (the reading of most MSS) is equally unmetrical I prefer Livrea's *ἀντέλλουσιν*, because of 3.958 and especially 1.776 *δόμων ὑπὲρ ἀντέλλοντα*, to *ἐξανέχουσιν* (a reading found in two MSS of the so-called Cretan family; Fränkel regards it as a conjecture, not tradition; Vian prints it): there seem to be no parallels for *ἐξανέχειν* used for the rising of sun, moon, stars. The scholiast, without giving a lemma and thus not revealing what he actually had in his copy of the text, glosses *εἰσβάλλουσιν*. That would fit *ὑπόθεν* nicely; but it (or any conjecture based on it and starting with *εἰσ-/ἐσ-*) could never go with the genitive *θαλάμοιο*. Still in 168, I follow Vian in accepting Merkel's slight emendation *ὑπωροφίον* for *ὑπόσχεται* in 169 is concerned, compare 4.473 where Apsyrtus tries to catch and to stem the blood gushing out of his wound. The girl's effort to 'catch the moon' has some similarity<sup>7</sup> with Perdicas' way of 'catching the sun' in Hdt. 8.137, 4–5. Is it possible that, just as in the Herodotean scene the boy catches his future kingdom with a symbolic act, the girl in the Apollonian simile tries to capture her future bliss? – Finally, in 170 *δερκομένης* expresses aptly the girl's rapt gaze.

With the two last remarks I have touched upon the interpretation of the simile as a whole, and its relevance to the narrative. I assume that Apollonius' readers were familiar with the nuptial associations which go with the full moon, and that they understood the poet's suggestion that this girl is joyfully looking forward to that other night with full moon in which she will be a bride. She is going to wear this very robe as her bridal attire, and her gesture of catching the moonlight in it is an anticipation of that happy moment; that is why she is filled with intimate joy: *ἐν δέ οἱ ἦτορ χαίρει*. From all this I infer that the simile,<sup>8</sup> by describing the blissful sentiments of a girl looking forward to her wedding, must have had the effect of initially directing the readers' attention to the joy which permeates Medea now that she is walking at Jason's side as his bride-to-be.

### III. THE SPECIAL EFFECT

I have been struck by an interesting similarity between this Apollonian simile and the famous Homeric one in *Odyssey* 23.231–9. In both passages a climax of the narrative is reached, a climax with strong erotic aspects: the *Odyssey* culminating in Odysseus' reunion with his faithful wife, the *Argonautica* in Jason's capture of the Golden Fleece with the help of the princess he has promised to marry. In both epics the poets bring this climactic moment into relief by means of a simile which allows the audience to experience the emotions of *both* protagonists, the male and the female, from within, so to speak.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This similarity has been pointed out to me by M. Reeve.

<sup>8</sup> The nuptial interpretation of 4.167ff. is reinforced by 1.774–81: in that simile, too, nubile girls rapturously watch a splendid star rising in the sky (Hesperus), and one of them in particular is described as longing for the young man who will be her husband.

<sup>9</sup> See I. J. F. de Jong, 'Fokalisation und die homerischen Gleichnisse', *Mnemosyne* 38 (1985), 257–81, esp. 274.

In *Od.* 23.231–9 the audience is initially invited to feel its way through the simile in identification with Odysseus: *κλαῖε δ' ἔχων ἄλοχον... ὥς δ' ὅτε κτλ.* The thematic material of the simile (shipwreck, survivors swimming desperately towards the shore) is fully relevant to Odysseus, indeed it has been taken by the poet from his description of Odysseus' narrow escape at the end of book 5. But when the simile is over, the audience hears with surprise that all this is meant to illustrate what Penelope feels: *ὥς δ' ἄρα τῇ ἀσπαστὸς ἔην πόσις* (239).<sup>10</sup> – In *Argon.* 4 Medea is if not the only subject, certainly the joint subject of the preceding sentence (*λείπον*, 166) and indeed of the whole preceding action: the capturing of the Golden Fleece. So when the simile opens with the description of a girl, the reader will be inclined to think of Medea in the first place. Fränkel had seen this: '... das Mädchen identifiziert er (the reader, JMB) halb mit Medea die zum ersten Mal das Vlies aus der Nähe betrachtet.' (466). The emotions of the *παρθένος* standing with that precious robe in her hands, taking delight in the reflection of the full moon on her bridal attire, seem to be fully comparable to Medea's emotions as she walks beside Jason, with the sheen of the Fleece falling upon her:<sup>11</sup> is this not an anticipation of her bridal night? But no, when the text continues, the poet applies the simile to Jason: *his* joy, and the reflection of the Golden Fleece upon *his* cheeks.

Apollonius has imitated Homer's technique<sup>12</sup> with a change in the direction of the 'switch': Homer switches during the simile from man to woman, Apollonius vice versa. In both cases the poets succeed in making the audience experience the sentiments of the man and the woman very economically: in one and the same simile.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This switch had gone unnoticed by the commentators: Hayman 1882, Monro 1901, Stanford 1948. Fernandez-Galiano 1986 draws attention to it: 'il v.232 indica che il paragone riguarda *Odisseo*...ma la similitudine si conclude in modo diametralmente opposto: è benvenuto per *sua moglie* il ritornato Odisseo. Slittamenti analoghi ricorrono in altre similitudini...'

<sup>11</sup> The epithalamic quality of the Golden Fleece, here only suggested, will become luscious reality when Jason and Medea spend their bridal night on it, 4.1141–3.

<sup>12</sup> It is of course hard to prove that Apollonius modelled his simile on the Odyssean one, and it is not vital for my argument.

<sup>13</sup> I thank P. van Dorp for assisting me in an early stage; M. Reeve for correcting my English and for helping me to clarify my argument in part 2; and the anonymous referee of *CQ* for reminding me of what is now contained in notes 8 and 11.