

THE USE OF WOMEN AS HELPERS IN HOMER'S *ODYSSEY* AND APOLLONIUS OF
RHODES' *ARGONAUTICA*

by

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(Under the Direction of Christine Albright)

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the role of women as helpers in Homer's *Odyssey* and Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*. In writing this thesis, I had two goals: to better understand the complex roles of the women in the *Odyssey* and to learn the complex ways in which Apollonius incorporates and references these earlier women within his *Medea*. My first chapter examines the actions of Odysseus' main female helpers and how these women interact with Odysseus and allow him to move closer to obtaining his goal of returning to Ithaca and retaking his house and wife. My second chapter explores how Apollonius of Rhodes creates his *Medea* with numerous similarities to the Odyssean women but also alters these models to separate her from her predecessors. This thesis ultimately seeks to display *Medea*'s unusual prominence within the narrative of the *Argonautica* through her similarities to Odysseus' helper women.

INDEX WORDS: Epic, Homer, *Odyssey*, Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*, Greek poetry

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DEDICATION

αἶδε δ' αἰδαὶ
εἰς ἔτος ἐξ ἔτεος γλυκερώτεραι εἶεν ἀείδειν
ἄνθρώποις.

(*Arg.* 4.1773-5)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The *Odyssey*, as it announces in its first several lines, is a poem about a man, his *nostos*, the destruction of his companions, and the trials he faced on his way home. Odysseus is a tricky hero, whose cunning and ability to “[speak] many false things like true ones” (ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγων ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, 19.203) often save him in difficult situations. The *Odyssey* is also, however, a story about women and their role and abilities within Homeric society. The women whom Odysseus meets contribute significantly to his *nostos*, as they provide crucial help to the hero. They feed and clothe him, give him instructions, and manipulate those around them in order to help him. In doing so, these women display a great deal of power in the narrative. Indeed, a theme of the *Odyssey* is the overwhelming power of women,¹ and the poet shows this idea through the way that Odysseus is helped most often by women and nearly destroyed by the men he comes in contact with.² Women are Odysseus’ most significant helpers in his *nostos*; without them, Odysseus would be unable to accomplish many of his deeds. The *Odyssey*’s female characters serve dual roles within the epic; much of the time, they serve as hindrances to Odysseus’ journey. As women, they serve as seduction figures³ for the hero and threaten to hold him back from completing his *nostos*. Upon meeting them, Odysseus must deflect and manipulate their advances, and when he succeeds, these women become helpers of his cause.⁴

¹ Beyé 1993, 162-163; also with the theme of the power of women comes the attempt to control it, which also features heavily in the epic.

² Ibid. 165.

³ With the exception of Athena, because of her virginity.

⁴ Doherty 1995a, 85; again, with the exception of Athena and perhaps Arete.

After this, Odysseus' women are fully invested in him accomplishing his *nostos*. Thus, their characters are defined by their helping or hindering capacities.⁵ While Odysseus may very well manipulate his female characters into helping him, they do not do it solely for his benefit. Often, the women have their own motivations for helping the hero, and they might receive benefits like *kleos* in return for doing so. In this way, the *Odyssey* tells much about its women and their thoughts.

As an epic poet in the Hellenistic age, Apollonius of Rhodes employs many of the same epic traditions as the Homeric poet. He writes in dactylic hexameter, uses Homeric vocabulary, and creates a story of the heroic past, among other similarities. The story of the Argonauts is much older than Apollonius; Pindar composes a shorter version in *Pythian* 4, and parts of the lost *Naupactica* seem to be devoted to the tale.⁶ Thus, many of the events told by Apollonius are part of a greater tradition. So as is fitting for the stories of old heroes, Apollonius writes an epic in which he incorporates similar scenes and language into his poetic program. The *Argonautica* itself, as an epic, begs to be read in view of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and Apollonius' incorporation of specific scenes and language demands that we view his characters and their actions in view of the Homeric models. One way to examine Apollonius' use of Homeric models is through the creation of his Medea. She is a complicated character, and in her psychological characterization, Apollonius creates a female character that goes far beyond her Homeric predecessors in her power. She is more emotional, and the depth of her character, in terms of strength and emotion, provides her the opportunity to nearly overtake Jason as the hero of the epic. Aspects of her character come from many works; most obviously, Apollonius draws Euripides' *Medea*, especially in book four when Medea rages against Jason's treatment of her.

⁵ Doherty 1991, 43.

⁶ Beyé 1982, 46-47 gives summaries of several fragments.

But many of Medea's scenes, such as her wagon ride to the shrine of Hecate, also suggest direct comparisons to the *Odyssey*. In examining Medea's character, we can find many similarities between Medea and the women who help Odysseus. Apollonius creates Medea in a way that consistently draws back on Homeric models while also adapting these models in order to better fit his Hellenistic epic.

In writing this thesis, I had two goals: to better understand the complex roles of the women in the *Odyssey* and to learn the complex ways in which Apollonius of Rhodes incorporates and references these earlier helper-women within his Medea. To accomplish this, I examined the actions of these women through a framework like that of Vladimir Propp. In his *Morphology of the Folktale*, Propp set out to discover the parts of a Russian wondertale whose substitution might change the tale substantially.⁷ Propp creates thirty-one "functions," acts of a character which have significance for the course of the tale, that are common within these Russian wondertales.⁸ In his work, Propp makes a distinction between *function* and *action*; different actions can perform the same function within Propp's framework. Although Propp focused on Russian wondertales, these functions can also apply more broadly to the story of the *Odyssey* and that of the Argonauts. Propp himself found that the Argonauts follow the same morphological pattern as the Russian wondertales.⁹ However, I do not fully embrace Propp's framework within this thesis. Propp puts his focus primarily on the functions, not the characters who perform them. In this thesis, the fact that women help Odysseus and Jason in these ways is quite significant. The women could not be exchanged for men and the story remain the same.

⁷ Csapo 2005, 192.

⁸ Ibid. for the definition of a function.

⁹ Propp 1984, 79.

Thus, I examine the actions of these women through a Propp-like framework but cannot commit to Propp's ideas fully.

The first chapter of this thesis discusses Odysseus' main female helpers in the *Odyssey*: Calypso, Nausicaa, Arete, Circe, Athena, Eurycleia, and Penelope. Through an examination of their acts of help for the hero, I explore how these women interact with Odysseus and each allow him to move closer to obtaining his goal of returning to Ithaca and retaking his house and wife. As discussed above, many of these women begin their character as hindrances to the hero. Often, Odysseus is also restrained at the homes of these women, and they hold the means for him to continue on his *nostos*.¹⁰ Within this chapter, I also examine why these women might choose to help Odysseus and what benefits they might receive in doing so. Many of Odysseus' helpers have a fondness for him, and I examine the reasons why they might have this connection. I conclude with a discussion on how each of these women foreshadow Odysseus' reunion with his wife Penelope through their courtship and Penelope's role as Odysseus' ultimate helper within the epic. In my second chapter, I examine the character and role of Medea in Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*. By examining her actions throughout books three and four, I discuss Medea's similarities and differences to the Odyssean women of chapter one. Medea contains a multitude of similarities to Odysseus' helper women; at the surface, she is a young princess like Nausicaa and a sorceress like Circe and Calypso. She displays much of the same μῆτις as Athena and experiences similar emotional turmoil to Penelope. She shows these similarities in a multitude of ways, such as through similar scenes and specific language. Apollonius draws on models provided by the poet of the *Odyssey* to craft scenes and emotions for Medea, but he regularly alters these models to support his own story. Medea holds many of the same traits of

¹⁰ Examples of the means needed for Odysseus' *nostos* are Circe's instructions on where the hero must sail next and the ship of the Phaeacians which carries him back to Ithaca.

these women, but she also has many traits that separate her from her *Odyssey* predecessors. Medea is much more psychological than the women of the *Odyssey*; Apollonius gives her emotional turmoil and an internal narrative, which most of Odysseus' helpers lack. In giving Medea, her actions, and her emotions more prominence, Apollonius creates his heroine in a way that allows her more control of the narrative, and the story becomes just as much about her as the Argonauts. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to highlight Medea's role as a helper to Jason through her similarities to Odysseus' female helpers and to detail the ways in which Apollonius adapts the roles of Odyssean women to better fit Medea in the *Argonautica*.

CHAPTER TWO

WOMEN AS HELPERS IN THE *ODYSSEY*

Within the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' trials and adventures are numerous. To return to his home and rightful place in his kingdom, he must conquer monsters, win the good opinion of the Phaeacians, and defeat the suitors ravaging his household and attempting to marry his wife. Odysseus does not accomplish these trials on his own; rather, he employs a significant number of helpers in order to succeed in his *nostos*. Male figures do play some role in his story: Zeus sends Hermes to free Odysseus from Calypso's island, Aeolus manipulates the winds for him, and Eumaeus and Telemachus play significant roles in the killing of the suitors. But throughout his journey, the hero receives the most help from the women he encounters. Calypso, Nausicaa, Arete, Circe, Eurycleia, Athena, and Penelope each provide Odysseus with crucial instruction and aid to accomplish his *nostos*. Away from Ithaca, the women house Odysseus while he recovers from his time at sea and instruct him on where he must go and what he must do next. In Ithaca, his wife Penelope works within the house, setting up her weaving-trick and the bow contest. And throughout the entire poem, Athena stands at Odysseus' side, helping him through many of his trials.¹¹

The roles of women in the *Odyssey* differ slightly from those of the typical woman in archaic Greece.¹² The real and fictional women share one main commonality in epic: their weaving. Although women are often absent in extant sources, the women of the *Odyssey* are

¹¹ There is some debate on if Athena is truly unwavering in her support of Odysseus, particularly during the events of books 9-12. See Clay 1983.

¹² Wilson 2018, 39.

present and active in the story, both through their weaving and other deeds. At the surface, their help seems freely given, with every action intended to help the hero on his way. With Odysseus as the main character of his epic poem, all other characters are cast as either helpers or opponents of the hero.¹³ The women who help Odysseus alternate between these two roles. Initially, despite their eventual aid, the narrator of the *Odyssey* characterizes most of these women as threats to Odysseus' homecoming. Yet, in the resolution of the plot, these women are not barriers to the homecoming of the main character but instead become helpers. Although they may seem to provide aid only for the sake of Odysseus' homecoming, each of these women has her own motivation and reasoning. She decides why she must help Odysseus and how this action may benefit her. With the male hero at its center, the *Odyssey* forces its subordinate female characters to choose between helper or opponent to maintain the hero's narrative dominance. However, these women are still characters outside of Odysseus' journey, and they hold their own thoughts and feelings, which are clear in the ways they choose to help the hero. This chapter will explore the various ways in which the epic poet employs women to help Odysseus reach his goal and how these women use the opportunity to help to reveal their own motivations. This chapter will conclude with a discussion on the range of women in the poem overall and the interconnection among them as they anticipate Odysseus' ultimate helper, his wife Penelope.

CALYPSO

The first female helper to appear in the *Odyssey* is Calypso. At the beginning of the epic, we find Odysseus grieving on the shores of Calypso's island, wishing to return home:

τοῦ θυγάτηρ δύστηνον ὀδυρόμενον κατερύκει,
αἰεὶ δὲ μαλακοῖσι καὶ αἰμυλίοισι λόγοισιν
θέλγει, ὅπως Ἰθάκης ἐπιλήσεται· αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεύς,
ἰέμενος καὶ καπνὸν ἀποθρώσκοντα νοῆσαι
ἧς γαίης, θανέειν ἰμείρεται...

¹³ Doherty 1995b, 21.

“His [Atlas’] daughter detains the wretched, lamenting man, and always with soft and wheedling words she bewitches him, in order that he will forget Ithaca; but Odysseus, wanting to see even the smoke leaping from his land, yearns to die...” (1.55-59).

She has kept him there for years and does not want to release him. When she bids Zeus to free Odysseus from the island, Athena says that Calypso ἵσχει, restrains, Odysseus, with a decidedly negative connotation (5.15). Here, Athena clearly means that Calypso is preventing him from his freedom, as opposed to other possibilities of ἵσχω.¹⁴ This word also characterizes Odysseus’ stay with Calypso twice more, at 4.558 and 17.144, emphasizing the harm she can cause. Her speech to Hermes reveals her aid to Odysseus before the epic begins: she saved the hero from his shipwreck and cared for him throughout the time that he has been with her (5.129-136). By the end of book five, Calypso gives Odysseus the tools, materials, and information he needs to make a raft and get home successfully, and she releases him, giving him a breeze to send him on his way (5.228-281). Thus, although the poet only mentions her a few times, Calypso’s effect on the poem is great.

As the poet portrays, Calypso is an unwilling helper. She does save Odysseus from his shipwreck and care for him for an extended period of time, and she meets all of his needs during his seven-year stay. However, her helpfulness does not extend to assisting Odysseus’ departure from her island back to Ithaca. When the gods force her hand, Calypso still attempts to persuade Odysseus to stay with her: she speaks of his evil fate, the advantages of staying with her, and appeals to her own sexual charms, her δέμας καὶ εἶδος, before finally assenting to his leaving (5.206-213).¹⁵ As she shows by her reaction to Hermes’ demand for Odysseus’ *nostos*, Calypso is one of Odysseus’ more emotional helpers. McClymont describes her actions as selfish; in

¹⁴ Cunliffe 2012 provides more neutral definitions, like “hold in specified position” and “hold in hand” but cites this usage as decidedly negative.

¹⁵ McClymont 2008, 26.

contrast to other helpers, Calypso has only her own interests at heart.¹⁶ This fact is clear in her desire for Odysseus to stay, despite his unhappiness and tears. Odysseus may have been happy with the nymph for a time, but at this point of his sentence, he is clearly not:

ἀλλ' ἣ τοι νύκτας μὲν ἰαύεσκεν καὶ ἀνάγκη
ἐν σπέσσι γλαφυροῖσι παρ' οὐκ ἐθέλων ἐθελούσῃ·
ἦματα δ' ἄμ πέτρῃσι καὶ ἡιόνεσσι καθίζων
δάκρυσι καὶ στοναχῇσι καὶ ἄλγεσι θυμὸν ἐρέχθων
πόντον ἐπ' ἀτρύγετον δερκέσκετο δάκρυα λείβων.

“But indeed he even sleeps nights by necessity in her hollow cave, not willing, beside her willing; and during the days, sitting on rocks and on the shore, breaking his heart in tears and groaning and pain, he looks at the barren sea, pouring forth tears.” (5.154-158).

Yet, Calypso still does not release him before the intervention of the gods. In fact, the verb ἐρύκω, used to describe Calypso’s detention of Odysseus at 1.14, is decidedly negative in its meaning in this situation; Odysseus is clearly being held against his will, and this act ultimately impedes his ability to return home. Though some scholars call Calypso’s effect of Odysseus’ *nostos* benign,¹⁷ her entrapment of the hero seems to be a great hindrance to his journey. Additionally, her name highlights one of her roles within the story;¹⁸ Calypso means “concealer,” and she succeeds in this role by hiding Odysseus from the world on her island.¹⁹ By hiding him away, Calypso also attempts to take away any *kleos* Odysseus might gain by sharing his deeds with others.²⁰ Thus, Odysseus’ extended stay with Calypso ultimately has a negative effect on his *nostos*, and Calypso serves, in one part, as a barrier.

When she is first introduced in the *Odyssey*, we find Calypso at her loom weaving, as is proper for Homeric women (... ἣ δ' ἔνδον ἀοιδιάουσ' ὅπῃ καλῇ/ἴστον ἐποιχομένη χρυσεῖη κερκίδ' ὕφαινεν. “And she weaves, singing inside with a beautiful voice [and] approaching the

¹⁶ McClymont 2008, 26.

¹⁷ Doherty 1991, 42.

¹⁸ Heubeck et al. 1988, 73, 14n.

¹⁹ Schien 1995, 20.

²⁰ Although this is likely not her intention, this is the result.

loom with a golden shuttle” 5.61-62). The acts of weaving and epic poetry are closely linked.

Just as an epic poet weaves together his story, an epic woman weaves together her work. Helen in *Iliad* book three proves a clear example of this fact. Here, as Iris comes to Helen so that she might witness the duel between Menelaus and Paris, the goddess finds her weaving:

τὴν δ' εὔρ' ἐν μεγάρῳ. ἥ δὲ μέγαν ἱστὸν ὕφαινε,
δίπλακα πορφυρέην, πολέας δ' ἐνέπασσεν ἀέθλους
Τρώων θ' ἵπποδάμων καὶ Ἀχαιῶν χαλκοχιτώνων,
οὓς ἔθεν εἵνεκ' ἔπασχον ὑπ' Ἄρηος παλαμάων.

“And she [Iris] found her in the hall. She [Helen] was weaving a great web, doubled-folded purple, and she was weaving the many competitions of the Trojans, tamers of horses and the bronze-chitoned Achaeans, which for her sake the Achaeans were suffering by the hands of Ares.” (*Il.* 3.125-128)

Helen’s weaving clearly connects her to the art of epic poetry. Like an epic poet designs his stories to preserve the *kleos* of heroes, Helen uses what is available to her as a woman, weaving, to display how she experiences the war.²¹ She preserves the *kleos* of heroes on her web by freezing the heroes’ actions in time, much in the same way the epic poet does in his songs. The women of the *Odyssey* act similarly. Every woman whom Odysseus meets, apart from Nausicaa and Eurycleia, is a weaver in some way. Calypso, Circe, and Penelope all weave explicitly, with the poet or other individuals acknowledging the work. The poet describes the Phaeacian women as skilled in weaving (6.110), and Nausicaa predicts that Arete will be spinning wool when Odysseus finds her (6.306). Athena’s main example of weaving in the *Odyssey* is her weaving of plots. The poet uses the verb ὑφαίνω both for the physical act of weaving, as with Calypso at 5.62, and the weaving of plots, as with Athena at 13.386, connecting them to the epic poet in that they are weaving Odysseus’ fate. Early Greek culture inherits a metaphor from Indo-European in which poets describe themselves as “weaving” words.²² Bergren 1983 highlights this connection

²¹ Pantelia 1993, 495; in this scene, Helen is weaving scenes showing the Argives and Trojans fighting for her sake. Her weaving gives her the voice to depict the war as she has seen it up until this point.

²² Bergren 1983, 72.

using the story of Tereus, Procne, and Philomena. Although Tereus cuts out her tongue in order to keep her silent about her rape, Philomena still tells her sister Procne about her husband's crime through the weaving of a *peplos*.²³ This story shows the clear connection between storytelling and weaving, which plays a great part in the *Odyssey*. As Odysseus' women spin and weave throughout the story, they display their ability to help Odysseus *create* his story, and their weaving mirrors the effects they have on the hero's *nostos*. By crafting actions that help Odysseus return back to Ithaca, these women help him gain the *kleos* that a Homeric hero needs and desires, to ensure that bards, like our Homeric poet, will sing his story and secure his fame.

On the surface, weaving shows Calypso sitting comfortably within the traditional role of woman. Though a goddess, she is doing precisely what one might expect a woman to do. Her weaving also serves a second purpose: to show her danger and power.²⁴ Weaving can be a sign of a woman's trickiness, as seen in Penelope's trick with the shroud of Laertes (2.94-110).²⁵ Thus, through her name and her weaving, Calypso shows her complexity and trickiness. However, her weaving also serves a third purpose. As Calypso sits at her loom before releasing Odysseus, her weaving represents her part in crafting of the hero's story. Prior to the beginning of the epic, she has already altered a great part of Odysseus' story by entrapping him on her island. As Penelope's weaving represents her way of preserving Odysseus' home, Calypso's weaving foreshadows how she is acting in the hero's story. It shows that she is an active worker in his story. Now, her weaving represents the next great change she will enact in his story: releasing him.

²³ This summary is a shortened version of that provided in Bergren 1983, 72.

²⁴ Schien 1995, 19.

²⁵ The suitor Antinoos clearly presents Penelope's weaving as a trick (2.90-95).

Ultimately, Calypso's role as a helper in the *Odyssey* is complex. She undoubtedly helps the hero, but her actions are not entirely altruistic. In fact, the poet, rather than declaring her a true helper, presents her as holding him back from his goals, rather than pushing him forward.²⁶ In this way, Calypso seems to be as great a hindrance to Odysseus' *nostos* as she is a helper. With her feminine tricks, she detains Odysseus from his journey and prevents his homecoming,²⁷ but she also is the only one who can release him and push him to continue to the Phaeacians, where he will secure his passage to Ithaca. Calypso has a certain fondness for Odysseus; she seems to enjoy the way he speaks plainly to her and persuades her to bend to his will (5.180-181), and she notes her compassionate heart before she swears her oath to him. This admiration creates her desire to have the hero as her husband, leading to her both helping him and attempting to delay or prevent his departure. Neither the poet nor Odysseus tells the audience Calypso's precise feelings toward the hero; we hear only that she restrained him because "[she] desire[s] him to be her husband" (λιλαιομένη πόσιν εἶναι 1.15). Calypso helps him because the gods command it and because, in the end, she recognizes that he must move on. Despite her own desires, Calypso must turn from opponent to helper in order for Odysseus to succeed in his *nostos*. She remains unwilling, so much so that Odysseus makes her swear an oath that she will send him safely on his way, rather than try to foil him:

ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν νοέω καὶ φράσσομαι, ἅσθ' ἂν ἐμοί περ
 αὐτῇ μηδοίμην, ὅτε με χρεῖω τόσον ἴκοι·
 καὶ γὰρ ἐμοὶ νόος ἐστὶν ἐναΐσιμος, οὐδέ μοι αὐτῇ
 θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι σιδήρεος, ἀλλ' ἐλέημων.

"But I am thinking and planning these things, as much as I would be minded for myself, when so much need should come to me; for my mind is decent, and the spirit in my chest is not iron, but it is compassionate." (5.188-191).

²⁶ McClymont 2008, 28.

²⁷ van Nortwick 1979, 271.

Only at the intervention of Zeus does Calypso finally yield in her own wishes and concede that Odysseus must leave. Thus, although the plot does force Calypso's help to ensure the hero reaches home, she remains an unwilling participant, only wishing for a husband to keep her company on her island.

NAUSICAA

In contrast to Calypso, Nausicaa's help is much more willingly given. After Odysseus leaves Calypso's island, he next lands at the island of the Phaeacians. He has just faced Poseidon's wrath in the form of a storm, and Odysseus is completely alone as he arrives shipwrecked and sea-weary on the island of the Phaeacians. This is the first of Nausicaa's two interactions with Odysseus. Nausicaa finds him on the shore; at Athena's bidding, she leaves her home to wash her clothes in the river, and this action leads to Odysseus' eventual arrival to the palace. Nausicaa's help is straightforward. She sees a stranger in need, and, understanding her duty to provide strangers with *xenia*, Nausicaa orders her handmaidens to wash Odysseus and instructs him about the place in which he has arrived (6.186-210). At his request, she tells him how he will find the palace of Alcinous and whom he must entreat to succeed in securing his *nostos* (6.255-315). She then leads Odysseus, at a distance, to her parents. The second interaction of the pair occurs during a bathing scene, as Odysseus prepares to leave the island. Here, Nausicaa reminds the hero of her help and bids him to remember her when he returns home: χαῖρε, ξεῖν', ἵνα καί ποτ' ἐὼν ἐν πατρίδι γαίῃ/μνήσῃ ἐμεῦ, ὅτι μοι πρώτη ζῳάγρι' ὀφέλλεις. ("Be glad, stranger, in order that you, being in your fatherland, remember me, because you owe your life-price to me first." 8.461-462). These two instances are the extent of Nausicaa's interactions with Odysseus, but her help to the hero is indispensable.

Nausicaa lacks much of Calypso's duplicity. Unlike the goddess, her help is freely given, not forced by the gods. Athena motivates Nausicaa with thoughts of a husband, but she does not compel her. When Odysseus plans to leave, Nausicaa does not try to trick or beg him. She only cleans Odysseus and tells him how to get to the palace; she does not go as far as securing his passage home. He must persuade her parents to help him from there. The interactions between the pair are simple and innocent, yet they are still tinged with romantic undertones, based on the context of the scenes. Nausicaa herself is nearly the age for a husband; this fact is how Athena motivates her to go to the shore, and this is Nausicaa's own motivation for helping Odysseus. When she sees Odysseus, she hopes that a man like him might be her husband and that, after seeing her home and her people, he might wish to stay there: αἶ γὰρ ἐμοὶ τοιόσδε πόσις κεκλημένος εἴη/ἐνθάδε ναιετάων, καὶ οἱ ἄδοι ἀντόθι μίμνειν ("Would that such a man might be called my husband, dwelling here, and that it would be pleasing to him to stay here." 6.244-245).²⁸ Their conversation is undoubtedly romantic; as Odysseus appears from the brush, all of Nausicaa's handmaidens flee in fear, and she remains alone, without a veil, with this strange man. The poet highlights the danger of Odysseus' presence by comparing the hero to a wild lion:

βῆ δ' ἵμεν ὥς τε λέων ὀρεσίτροφος ἀλκὶ πεποιθώς,
 ὅς τ' εἶς ὕόμενος καὶ ἀήμενος, ἐν δέ οἱ ὄσσε
 δαίεται· αὐτὰρ ὁ βουσὶ μετέρχεται ἢ οἴεσσιν
 ἢ μετ' ἀγροτέρας ἐλάφους· κέλεται δέ ἐ γαστήρ
 μῆλων πειρήσοντα καὶ ἐς πυκινὸν δόμον ἐλθεῖν·

"And he went, having been emboldened in strength just as a mountain-bred lion, who was rained and blown upon, and his eyes kindled; he attacks an ox or sheep or after wild deer; and his stomach urges him to try also to go to the crowded home of sheep." (6.130-134)

His comparison to a lion evokes Odysseus' power to victimize Nausicaa and her handmaidens, but the hero quickly subverts this characterization; Odysseus makes no move to harm the girls.

²⁸ Thornton 1970, 18-19.

Instead, he begins his pleading by remarking on Nausicaa's beauty, though he does compare her to Artemis to assuage any threat that his presence might cause: Ἀρτέμιδί σε ἐγὼ γε, Διὸς κούρη μέγαλοιο/εἰδός τε μέγεθός τε φυὴν τ' ἄγχιστα εἶσκω ("I compare you most closely to Artemis, the daughter of great Zeus, in respect to beauty and height and voice." 6.151-152). Her speech that follows eloquently mimics the syntax of Odysseus' own, indicating her desire to impress this handsome stranger.²⁹ Once she agrees to his plea, Nausicaa urges Odysseus to follow at a distance to prevent rumors about her search for a husband, but, regardless, she invites him to the city both to help him and to entice him to stay. Though her presence is innocent, Nausicaa's interactions with Odysseus are colored with a romantic intensity that proves that she is not much different from Calypso in her threat to the hero. Because she is a woman, she still has the ability to prevent Odysseus from his ultimate goal: going home.³⁰ Even though she is not as serious a threat as Calypso or Circe, Nausicaa is a young woman and a seduction figure for the hero, and thus she threatens his *nostos*.³¹ Her danger to the hero is clear within their final interaction, in which Nausicaa finds Odysseus after bathing. Here, the poet uses the same phrase στή ῥα παρὰ σταθμὸν τέγεος πύκα ποιητοῖο ("She stood near a column of the well-made roof" 8.458) that is often associated with Penelope's appearances in Odysseus' palace.³² By employing this same phrase for both women, the poet draws a distinct connection between Nausicaa, who desires Odysseus for a husband, and Penelope. Nausicaa is a young maiden, ready to search for a husband, and part of her role in the *Odyssey* is to prepare the hero to reenter courtship with his

²⁹ Gross 1976, 314.

³⁰ Doherty 1991, 42.

³¹ Doherty 1995a, 85. Here, Doherty discusses seduction figures as a threat that must be deflected by Odysseus, and once he deflects them, these women become helpers. Doherty lists Calypso, Circe, Nausicaa, and Penelope among such women.

³² Heubeck et al. 1988, 376, 458n. This phrase is used at least once for referring to Penelope (1.333) prior to this scene.

wife, Penelope.³³ Similarly, Penelope has been without her husband for a long time and throughout the epic seems to be preparing herself for courtship and marriage. The poet draws connections between the two women and their situations through this phrase. However, Nausicaa does not become his wife. Despite her father Alcinous' quasi-offer, Odysseus declines the opportunity to stay as Nausicaa's husband, instead insisting on his desire to return to Ithaca. The text does not suggest that the princess or her parents might detain Odysseus because of their desire to matchmake, and so Odysseus is able to leave.³⁴ Despite any potential threat she could have posed, Nausicaa instead shows herself to be a true helper, despite any infatuation she might hold for the hero. Additionally, Nausicaa's interference allows Odysseus the ability to entreat another, more powerful helper: her mother, Arete.

ARETE

Along with her daughter Nausicaa, the queen Arete provides Odysseus significant help. When Odysseus arrives on the island, Athena (7.75-77) and Nausicaa (5.303-314) both tell him that she is the one whose favor he must earn based on the power she holds on the island. Arete ensures that Odysseus is washed and obtains the customary guest gifts from the Phaeacians. As he recounts his quest, she admires his story, and at the end of Odysseus' catalogue of heroines in the *Nekyia* of book eleven, Arete urges the Phaeacians listening to honor him and give him gifts due to the success of his storytelling:

Φαίηκες, πῶς ὕμιν ἀνὴρ ὅδε φαίνεται εἶναι
 εἶδός τε μέγεθός τε ἰδὲ φρένας ἔνδον εἴσας;
 ξεῖνος δ' αὐτ' ἐμός ἐστιν, ἕκαστος δ' ἔμμορε τιμῆς·
 τῷ μὴ ἐπειγόμενοι ἀποπέμπετε, μηδὲ τὰ δῶρα
 οὕτω χρηρίζοντι κολούετε· πολλὰ γὰρ ὑμῖν
 κτήματ' ἐνὶ μεγάροισι θεῶν ἰότητι κέονται.

“Phaeacians, how does this man appear to you to be in respect to his beauty and height and his sound mind within? He is my guest, and each man gave him honor; do not send him away, being

³³ For a more extensive discussion of this, see the conclusion of this chapter.

³⁴ Heubeck et al. 1988, 295, 27n.

eager, nor give gifts in small measure to him being in need in this way; for many possessions lie to you in your houses by the will of the gods.” (11.336-341).

This is the extent of her help to the hero.

Arete, in contrast to many other women of the *Odyssey*, is invariably helpful.³⁵ The plot of the epic presents no other serious way for her to function. She could hold him back, because she is a woman, a powerful queen, and thus a sexual distraction. Her daughter Nausicaa is also reaching the age for a husband, and the queen could attempt to persuade Odysseus to take that role. However, Arete proves herself as no real danger for the hero. She functions simply as the queen he must win over to get his passage home.³⁶ The true danger exists in Odysseus’ potential inability to return home from Scheria. As a relatively neutral figure, her exact motivation for helping Odysseus is difficult to discern. Initially, she seems to help Odysseus simply for the sake of being helpful. Though he must prove himself worthy of their help, the Phaeacians exist within the poem to help Odysseus. Alcinous promises when he first meets Odysseus that he and the Phaeacians will help him (7.189-196). Arete, like the other women who help Odysseus, is not a character without her own thoughts and motivations; her aid is not entirely selfless. The Phaeacians are an isolated people; their island is distant, and they receive few visitors. Thus, they lack the *kleos* that is so important in Homeric society. Like the heroes of the *Iliad*, they need their deeds to be seen and known by people outside their island in order to achieve any glory. The king Alcinous admits his desire for Odysseus to tell his peers about the excellence of the Phaeacians once he returns home:

ἀλλ’ ἄγε νῦν ἐμέθεν ξυνίει ἔπος, ὄφρα καὶ ἄλλω
εἵπης ἡρώων, ὅτε κεν σοῖς ἐν μεγάροισι
δαινύη παρὰ σῇ τ’ ἀλόχῳ καὶ σοῖσι τέκεσσιν,
ἡμετέρης ἀρετῆς μεμνημένος, οἷα καὶ ἡμῖν
Ζεὺς ἐπὶ ἔργα τίθησι διαμπερὲς ἐξ ἔτι πατρῶν.

³⁵ Schien 1995, 21.

³⁶ van Nortwick 1979 274-275.

“But come now, hear my word in order that you tell also to another hero, when you dine in your halls beside your wife and children, remembering our virtue, such things as Zeus put continuously to us from our fathers still for our works.” (8.241-245).

Arete, as the queen of the Phaeacians, wants the same thing as her husband: *kleos* for herself and her people. This is her true motivation. Once Odysseus proves himself worthy of aid through his storytelling, Arete will help him in order to obtain this much desired *kleos*. Notably, Arete is also one of the few women in the *Odyssey* whose personal reasons for helping Odysseus are realized, as the hero does return home and tells Penelope about the help and honor of the Phaeacians: ἡδ’ ὥς ἐς Φαίηκας ἀφίκετο πολλὰ μογήσας, οἳ δὲ μιν περὶ κῆρι θεὸν ὧς τιμήσαντο/καὶ πέμψαν σὺν νηὶ φίλην ἐς πατρίδα γαῖαν (“And how, having suffered many things, he arrived to the Phaeacians, who honored him in their heart as a god and sent him to his dear fatherland with a ship.” 23.338-341).

CIRCE

As Odysseus delivers his story to the Phaeacians, he explains his stay with the witch Circe. He and his men sail to her island after a conflict with the Laestrygonians. They stay on the island for two days without any interaction with Circe; on the third, Odysseus sends out men to find the house on the island (10.207-210). Odysseus’ men encounter Circe in the same way the audience finds Calypso at the beginning of the epic: at her loom, singing and weaving: Κίρκης δ’ ἔνδον ἄκουον ἀειδούσης ὅπῃ καλῇ, ἱστὸν ἐποιχομένης μέγαν ἄμβροτον... (“They heard Circe singing inside with a beautiful voice, walking along the great divine loom...” 10.221-222). Quickly, Circe proves herself to be a danger to these men, as she feeds them each a φάρμακον and transforms them into pigs:

ἐν δέ σφιν τυρόν τε καὶ ἄλφιστα καὶ μέλι χλωρόν
οἶνω Πραμνεῖω ἐκύκα· ἀνέμισγε δὲ σίτω
φάρμακα λύγρ’, ἵνα πάγχυ λαθοῖατο πατρίδος αἴης.
αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δῶκεν τε καὶ ἔκπιον, αὐτίκ’ ἔπειτα

ῥάβδῳ πεπληγυῖα κατὰ συφροῖσιν ἔεργνυ.

“For them she stirred cheese and barley and yellow honey with Pramneian wine; and she mixed an evil drug with the food, in order that they would forget their fatherland entirely. But when she gave it and they drank it, having struck them with her staff, she confined them in the hog-sty.” (10.234-238).

This transformation seems to be typical of Circe, as she readily completes this act as soon as she interacts with the men. She attempts the same trick with Odysseus as he arrives in search of his men, but because of Hermes’ interference, he subverts Circe’s powers. Odysseus makes Circe swear an oath that she will not harm him before he joins her in her bed, as she requested. From here, Circe is transformed from a hostile, potentially harmful goddess into yet another helper-figure of the hero Odysseus.

Once Circe swears her oath and shares a bed with Odysseus, his men are no longer a potential threat to her safety, and Circe is no longer a potential threat to theirs. She welcomes them to her island; she orders her maidservants to wash Odysseus and prepare a feast for the two, and she transforms his men back into humans at his request (10.348-396). Odysseus and his men reside with her for about a year, profiting from Circe’s hospitality and care: ἔνθα μὲν ἡματα πάντα τελεσφόρον εἰς ἐνιαυτὸν/ἥμεθα δαινύμενοι κρέα τ’ ἄσπετα καὶ μέθυ ἡδύ (“For all our days to a year’s fulfillment we sat, feasting on boundless meat and sweet wine” 10.467-468). This is one part of her help, as she allows the hero and his men to rest from their journey until “you take up the spirit in [your] chests” (θυμὸν ἔνι στηθεσσι λάβητε, 10.461) to continue their *nostos*. When Odysseus and his men decide to leave, Circe does not try to prohibit their journey, as Calypso does earlier in the narrative.³⁷ Instead, she tells Odysseus that he must first journey to the Underworld to speak with the prophet Tiresias before he can return home, and she gives him precise directions about how to accomplish this task (10.488-540). When Odysseus returns from

³⁷ Though later, chronologically.

his *katabasis*, Circe continues her aid by giving him more specific directions to Thrinacia, his next stop. Her narration fills in some of the gaps of Tiresias' instructions; she tells him what challenges he will face and how to make it through them as safely as possible. Circe feels no need to hide anything from Odysseus, in contrast to another divine helper, Calypso. Rather, she seems, through Odysseus' narration of the tale, to tell him everything that she knows in order to help him on his way. Though this seems unusual, considering Circe's earlier threat to Odysseus and his men, this indicates the progression of her character within the epic.

Circe's character within the *Odyssey* is two-sided. She is both the evil witch who harms Odysseus and a proper woman who helps his *nostos*. During their first meeting, she harms Odysseus' chances of returning home by turning his men into pigs and attempting the same trick on him. Circe, as a sorceress, serves as a barrier meant to prevent Odysseus from his greater goals and presents a very clear threat of keeping him with her forever. But, unusually for the evil witch character, once she has sworn her oath and ensures her own safety, Circe transforms into another of Odysseus' helpers, and her actions aid him in achieving his *nostos*. Her willingness to help, in contrast to the divine Calypso's reluctance, indicates her transition from evil witch to helper. Circe, like Calypso and Penelope, also weaves and thus connects herself more closely to the work of a mortal Homeric woman. However, her work is divine (ἄμβροτον, 10.222), and thus above the level of a mortal woman; thus, Circe does not only succeed in the proper work of women, but she excels in it because she is a goddess.³⁸ However, Circe does not only weave garments; her divine weaving represents also her crafting of Odysseus' story, as Calypso's does. Circe weaves the next part of Odysseus' *nostos*, his trip to the Underworld and arrival on Calypso's island, by giving him the instructions he needs to complete this journey. By holding

³⁸ McClymont 2008, 22.

Odysseus on her island for a year, Circe shapes the timing of his journey and his preparation for returning to Penelope. Without her weaving, Odysseus likely could not succeed. To further transform her into his helper, Odysseus forces Circe to swear an oath not to harm him. From here, she must now interact with the hero on a more personal, less dominating level,³⁹ transforming herself from a divine hindrance into a true helper. She questions him as mortals do when he arrives at their homes: τίς πόθεν εἰς ἀνδρῶν; πόθι τοι πόλις ἡδὲ τοκῆες; (“Who are you of men and from where? Where is your city and parents?” 10.325). Her sworn oath and Odysseus’ prior avoidance of Circe’s trick function as ways of thwarting Circe’s control, bringing her under his control and enlisting her to help his goals.⁴⁰ Thus, Circe the witch becomes Circe the helper, more like the mortal women who give their aid to Odysseus in her immediate willingness to help him succeed. Her help and direction are imperative for the hero’s successful *nostos*. Odysseus needs her knowledge of magic rituals and information on the Underworld,⁴¹ and Circe gives it readily because she seems to have a certain fondness for Odysseus. Circe understands the hero’s capacity for deceit and scheming, because she too, like Calypso and Penelope, holds similar qualities.⁴² She shows some familiarity with the hero upon their first meeting, and she seems impressed that he defeated her φάρμακον:

θαῦμά μ’ ἔχει ὥς οὔ τι πῶν τάδε φάρμακ’ ἐθέλχθης:
οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδέ τις ἄλλος ἀνὴρ τάδε φάρμακ’ ἀνέτλη,
ὅς κε πῖη καὶ πρῶτον ἀμείψεται ἔρκος ὀδόντων.

“Wonder holds me that you were not bewitched when you drank these drugs; for no other man endured these drugs, whoever drank them and first entered the barrier of his teeth.” (10.326-328)

³⁹ McClymont 2008, 23.

⁴⁰ Doherty 1995a, 85.

⁴¹ McClymont 2008, 24.

⁴² Wilson 2018, 59.

Circe shows her capacity to deceive as she invites men into her home and bewitches them, and her reaction to Odysseus' trick shows that she appreciates that he can do the same. Additionally, Circe seems to be impressed by Odysseus and the *kleos* he has obtained. When he avoids her trick with the φάρμακον, Circe knows that he must be Odysseus because he is one of the few mortals who could subvert this trick. She identifies him immediately, indicating that his name and deeds have traveled as far as her island, as told by Hermes: ἦ σύ γ' Ὀδυσσεύς ἐσσι πολύτροπος, ὃν τέ μοι αἰεὶ/φάσκεν ἐλεύσεσθαι χρυσόρραπις ἀργεῖφόντης ("You are resourceful Odysseus, whom Argeiphontes of the golden staff was always telling me would come" 10.330-331).

Circe's motivation for helping is difficult to identify. Her fondness for him must play a certain part. Additionally, while he is on her island, Odysseus is her responsibility. He is her guest, and *xenia* demands that she care for him while he resides at her home. Circe may feel some obligation to ensure that he can return home safely. Based on her willingness to provide Odysseus with instructions on his next tasks, Circe shows that she cares about Odysseus' journey and wishes for him to accomplish his goal. Calypso, in contrast, does not feel the same responsibility. In fact, where Calypso tries to hold Odysseus back from returning home for her own benefit, Circe allows the hero to leave as soon as he pleases. For this reason, Odysseus, as he narrates the story, seems to have a clear preference for Circe's character; his experience with Calypso is defined by the verb ἐρύκω, describing her actions as "trapping."⁴³ From his own narration of his time with Circe, Odysseus makes his stay sound significantly more pleasant, with much less weeping. Circe thus presents herself as having Odysseus' best interest at heart over her own desires. But, despite her helpfulness and fondness for the hero, Circe still presents a clear

⁴³ The poet uses this verb in reference to Calypso in multiple places, namely 1.14 and 9.29. The same phrasing at these two lines is repeated to describe Calypso's detainment of the hero and emphasizes Odysseus' unwillingness.

threat to Odysseus' *nostos*. Once he arrives on her island, she detains him there with her, desiring for him to be her husband: ὥς δ' αὐτως Κίρκη κατερήτυεν ἐν μεγάροισιν/Αἰαίη δολόεσσα, λιλαιομένη πόσιν εἶναι (9.31-32). Interestingly in book nine, as Odysseus begins to speak to the Phaeacians, he describes his time with Calypso and Circe both as unwilling, though later he does not recount his time with the latter in the same negative tone. In any case, Circe is a threat. As a both an evil witch and a "proper" woman, she represents yet another sexual temptation for Odysseus, attempting to persuade him from his *nostos* and keep him with her forever.⁴⁴ Once again, though, Odysseus subverts the charms of Circe and thus forces her to transform from hindrance to helper in order to help him on his way back to Ithaca.

EURYCLEIA

As Odysseus' nurse, Eurycleia plays a significant role in helping Odysseus reestablish his power on Ithaca. She first appears in book two, as Telemachus prepares for his journey to Pylos. After he orders her to collect supplies for his journey, Eurycleia urges Telemachus not to leave his home:

...πῇ δ' ἐθέλεις ἰέναι πολλὴν ἐπὶ γαῖαν
μοῦνος ἐὼν ἀγαπητός; ὃ δ' ὤλετο τηλόθι πάτρης
διογενὴς Ὀδυσσεὺς ἀλλογνώτῳ ἐνὶ δῆμῳ.
οἱ δέ τοι αὐτίκ' ἰόντι κακὰ φράσσονται ὀπίσσω,
ὥς κε δόλῳ φθίῃς, τάδε δ' αὐτοὶ πάντα δάσσονται.

"In what way do you want to go to many lands, alone being beloved? Odysseus born from Zeus was destroyed far from his fatherland in an unknown house. But the suitors will plan wicked things for you at once when you return, so that you may die by trick, and they will divide all these things." (2.364-368)

In her speech, Eurycleia pleads with Telemachus not to leave because of the harms that might befall him, just as a family member might attempt to persuade him. Nevertheless, Telemachus insists on going, and she promises not to tell his mother Penelope and helps him as he asked.

⁴⁴ McClymont 2008, 22.

Eurycleia reappears again in book four as Penelope learns about her son's departure. Penelope condemns those who knew about the trip for not waking her, and Eurycleia informs her mistress that she knew and was involved in Telemachus' trip. She then tells Penelope to go upstairs and pray for Athena to save her son. In the first half of the epic, Eurycleia plays a relatively small role; she helps Odysseus indirectly, by helping Telemachus along his maturation journey, and she calms Penelope in her frustration. In the second half of the *Odyssey*, Eurycleia holds a more significant role in Odysseus' plan against the suitors. Her most important act of help occurs during her recognition of Odysseus. In book nineteen, after Penelope becomes acquainted with the stranger-Odysseus and believes that he once met her husband, she summons Eurycleia to wash his feet. Eurycleia does so, first lamenting the stranger before her who is so like Odysseus in age and in story. She mourns that he, too, has lost his *nostos* (νῦν δέ τοι οἴῳ πάμπαν ἀφείλετο νόστιμον ἡμᾶρ, 19.369). As Eurycleia begins to wash him, she notices the scar:

νίξε δ' ἄρ' ἄσπον ἰοῦσα ἄναχθ' ἐόν· αὐτίκα δ' ἔγνων
οὐλήν, τήν ποτέ μιν σῶς ἦλασε λευκῷ ὀδόντι
Παρνησόνδ' ἐλθόντα μετ' Αὐτόλυκόν τε καὶ υἱας...

“Coming very near, she washed her lord; and immediately she knew the scar, which once a wild boar drove on him with a white tooth, when he was going to Parnassus with Autolykos and his sons...” (19.392-394)

As she recognizes this mark, Eurycleia rejoices that Odysseus has finally returned home, and she attempts to tell Penelope. Athena and Odysseus both intervene. As Athena ensures that Penelope cannot look in Eurycleia's direction, Odysseus seizes her. He accuses her of trying to kill him and says that, despite any fondness he might hold for her for being his old nurse, he will kill her if she betrays his confidence (19.479-490). Eurycleia immediately promises her allegiance to Odysseus, and she tells him that she will give him the names of the women who have been unfaithful to him in his absence, if he kills the suitors. Later, she does just so (22.419-434).

Eurycleia has several other acts of help for Odysseus; she bars the doors shut during the slaughter of the suitors (21.387), and she is the one who urges Odysseus to wake Penelope and tell her what he has done (22.490-501), then, later, does it herself (23.1-84). But it is her recognition scene, and her promise to keep safe Odysseus' identity, that has the most impact on Odysseus' accomplishment of retaking his house.

By keeping Odysseus' secret, Eurycleia helps the hero immensely. As Odysseus tells her, anyone knowing that he has arrived back on Ithaca would ruin his plans and likely see him killed. If Penelope learned of his arrival, she would have no need to stage the contest of the bow, which sets the scene for the suitors' slaughter. If the suitors found out, they would kill Odysseus before he could enact revenge against them. Eurycleia, then, is the piece that prevents either of these events from happening. In comparison to the other women who help Odysseus, her role in hindering the hero's ultimate goal is rather small. She does not serve as a sexual threat to him, in the way that Nausicaa or Circe do,⁴⁵ and since Odysseus has already arrived home, she can do little to prevent his actual homecoming. Instead, the simple idea of her spreading Odysseus' presence is the threat. Still, Eurycleia's knowledge presents a great safety threat to the hero, in a way that few other women he meets do. But, she maintains, she will not betray her master. Eurycleia, as Odysseus' old nurse, has a great deal of fondness for him, and she wants to see him retake his place in Ithaca. In his absence, she mourned him, as evidenced by her reaction when she recognizes him: τὴν δ' ἅμα χάρμα καὶ ἄλγος ἔλε φρένα, τὼ δέ οἱ ὄσσε/δακρυόφι πλησθεν, θαλερὴ δέ οἱ ἔσχετο φωνή ("Joy and pain took her in her heart, and her eyes were filled with tears, and her rich voice held her." 19.471-472). By helping him, Eurycleia sees his house, and her position in it, restored. Her potential for danger does not last long, and she quickly becomes a

⁴⁵ Doherty 1995b, 123.

loyal helper as the rest of Odysseus' women do. In contrast, many of the other female servants do not stay loyal to Odysseus and instead choose to sleep with the suitors in his absence. Eurycleia again proves her loyalty to the hero by ensuring that he knows of their deeds, so that he might punish them for their disloyalty and further reclaim his home. Without her intervention, the servant women would continue to pose a threat to him. Thus, her help in keeping his secret is crucial, and Eurycleia plays a significant role as helper on Ithaca.

ATHENA

Athena is one of Odysseus' greatest helpers in the *Odyssey*. The instances in which she helps him are nearly innumerable. At the beginning of the poem, Athena persuades Zeus that it is time for Odysseus to leave Calypso's island:

Ἑρμείαν μὲν ἔπειτα διάκτορον ἀργεῖφόντην
νῆσον ἐς Ὀγυγίην ὀτρύνομεν, ὅφρα τάχιστα
νύμφη ἐυπλοκάμῳ εἴτῃ νημερτέα βουλήν,
νόστον Ὀδυσσεύος ταλασίφρονος, ὥς κε νέηται·

"Let us send the messenger Hermes Argeiphones to the island Ogygia, in order that he tell the fair-haired nymph the plan clearly, the homecoming of stout-hearted Odysseus, that he might return." (1.84-87).

She urges Telemachus to leave Ithaca in search of news of his father Odysseus, setting in motion the maturation arc of Telemachus. Though perhaps seeming more for Telemachus' benefit than Odysseus', this journey for maturation gives Telemachus the ability to help his father with the killing of the suitors. When Odysseus arrives on the island on the Phaeacians, Athena prods Nausicaa to go to the beach to wash her clothes and ensures that she will find the hero (6.20-40). Although Nausicaa tells him that he must entreat her mother Arete first (6.303-315), Athena, in the form of a young girl, reiterates this fact as she guides Odysseus through the city by describing Arete's powers in dissolving quarrels (7.74-77). Under a cloud of mist, she makes sure that his presence will not be known before he reaches the palace so that he will not face any

unwanted attention or abuse. On the island of the Phaeacians, Athena works behind the scenes for the benefit of Odysseus, changing his appearance from that of a beggar to a young, healthy man as the situation calls. She also disguises herself to bolster his reputation in the athletic competition of the Phaeacians; Athena appears as a man to assert Odysseus' success. Though she plays a significant role in the first twelve books, the second half of the epic is entirely under Athena's control.⁴⁶ After the hero's return to Ithaca, she hides his surroundings until she herself can intervene. In this way, Athena ensures that it is her own plan of ridding his home of the suitors that is used and may succeed, rather than anything Odysseus may create on his own.⁴⁷ She reveals Ithaca to him and sends him to the swineherd Eumaeus, whom she has chosen as his next helper.⁴⁸ Again, Athena changes Odysseus' appearance to prevent his discovery. And when the time arrives for him to kill the suitors, Athena is present with him, though she does not intervene physically.⁴⁹ Though she is not absent from the first twelve books of the epic, the second twelve are Athena's tapestry to weave, as she plots and persuades people as she needs in order to resolve the plot of the epic in the way she, not Odysseus, thinks it should. As a goddess associated with weaving, she holds the ability to weave the hero's future. Odysseus tells her to do just that: ἀλλ' ἄγε μῆτιν ὕφηνον⁵⁰, ὅπως ἀποτίσομαι αὐτούς ("But come, weave your plot, in order that I will punish them." 13.386). Athena follows his command by creating the plan to kill the suitors.

⁴⁶ Although her role in the second half of the epic is much larger, she is mentioned by name 87 times in books 1-12 and 75 in 13-24.

⁴⁷ Murnaghan 1995 suggests that Athena is in charge of the entire plot of the *Odyssey* and describes numerous ways in which she intervenes on the hero's behalf, including how she manipulates other women such as Nausicaa and Penelope.

⁴⁸ Athena orders Odysseus to first go to the swineherd, Eumaeus, and wait with him at 13.404-412.

⁴⁹ Her interventions include making the suitors' weapons miss their marks (22.273) and confusing them in the hallway (22.297-298) but no physical fighting.

⁵⁰ It is notable that Athena uses this phrase first to describe her reasons for coming at 13.304, and here Odysseus reuses it. Clay 1983, 199 notes Athena's use of μῆτις as it separates her and Odysseus in this moment. He can never truly be her equal because he lacks divine μῆτις.

While the plot of the epic does, undeniably, center around Odysseus and his plight, Athena's decisions are wide-reaching throughout the entire story, as she crafts both the characters and their actions to match how she thinks things should play out. As the epic poet himself weaves the *Odyssey*, so Athena weaves her *mētis* to manipulate characters and situations to benefit Odysseus. Athena shows herself and influences the action numerous times within the epic. However, Odysseus does not mention the goddess when he recounts his trials since leaving Troy to the Phaeacians. Odysseus presents himself as without divine help as he battles against monsters and other figures on his *nostos*; in fact, he portrays the gods as being actively against him as he tries to make his way home.⁵¹ It is worth noting, however, that Odysseus is an unreliable narrator; his goal is to tell a fantastical story to the Phaeacians so that he might win his passage home. For this reason, he has no need to tell an entirely true story. Instead, he must relate his trials in a way that presents him both as a hero worthy of his *kleos* and a good poet with the ability to spread the *kleos* of the Phaeacians. Thus, Athena's absence could be a product of Odysseus' storytelling. Regardless, we as audience members must assume that Odysseus' tale is true and Athena was absent from the bulk of his travels. The epic only presents the events as Odysseus tells them, and this is the story we must accept. The hero also notes the goddess' absence directly in their conversation in book 13:

τοῦτο δ' ἐγὼν εὖ οἶδ', ὅτι μοι πάρος ἠπήν ἦσθα,
 ἦρος ἐνὶ Τροίῃ πολεμίζομεν υἱες Ἀχαιῶν.
 αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ Πριάμοιο πόλιν διεπέρσαμεν αἰπὴν,
 βῆμεν δ' ἐν νήεσσι, θεὸς δ' ἐκέδασσεν Ἀχαιοὺς,
 οὐ σέ γ' ἔπειτα ἴδον, κόυρη Διός, οὐδ' ἐνόησα
 νηὸς ἐμῆς ἐπιβᾶσαν, ὅπως τί μοι ἄλγος ἀλάλκοις.

“I know this thing well, that you were once kind to me, while we sons of the Achaians were fighting in Troy. But when we destroyed the high city of Priam, and we boarded the ships, and a god scattered the Achaians, I did not see you then, daughter of Zeus, nor did I know you going aboard my ship, in order to ward off some pain from me.” (13.314-319).

⁵¹ At 9.38-39, Odysseus calls his homecoming πολυκηδής and says that Zeus sent it to him. At 9.52, his evil luck is from Zeus.

Odysseus confronts the goddess about her absence, and so it must, on some level, be true. Thus, Athena is not nearly as steadfast a companion as she would like Odysseus to believe. Her help is not freely given but conditional, as she chooses to help at some times and ignores the hero's woes at another. The Greek gods are anthropomorphic and mimic humans not only physically but also socially; in this way, the goddess Athena favors some heroes and holds grudges against others, and her esteem can waver quite easily.⁵² Though her help is integral to the plot of the *Odyssey*, Athena's patronage of Odysseus is not so steadfast and seems to be something the hero must earn.

The interaction between the hero and goddess in book thirteen gives the clearest indication of why Athena might choose to patron Odysseus over other heroes. When Odysseus arrives on Ithaca, Athena immediately disguises both herself and his surroundings so that she "makes him unknown and tells him everything," (ἄγνωστον τεύξειεν ἕκαστα τε μυθήσαιτο, 13.191). The two meet, and Odysseus quickly chooses to lie to her about his identity, as he has with most other mortals he has come across thus far. The poet here describes Odysseus' mind as πολυκερδέα, thus highlighting his craftiness (13.255). After Odysseus gives his false introduction to Ithaca, Athena praises him for his cleverness and admonishes him for attempting to lie to her. Her attitude toward him is fond, evident in the way she raises her hand to stroke his face. She praises him by noting that even a god would have to be particularly tricky to fool him and by using his epithet ποικιλομήτης, which emphasizes his ability to plan tricks (13.293). This praise seems to be part admonishment as well, as she warns him against trying to use his

⁵² Nestor at 3.135 notes that many of the Achaeans faced difficulties on their journey home because of Athena's anger. Clay 1983, 187 gives several reasons why Athena might be angry at Odysseus when he leaves Troy, indicating that her favor may not be entirely steadfast.

trickiness against her, his patron. Athena then equates the two of them, to a certain level: ...ἐπεὶ σὺ μὲν ἔσσι βροτῶν ὅχ' ἄριστος ἀπάντων/βουλῇ καὶ μύθοισιν, ἐγὼ δ' ἐν πᾶσιν θεοῖσι/μήτι τε κλέομαι καὶ κέρδεσιν... (“Since you are by far the best of all mortals in counsel and stories, and I among all the gods am made famous by cunning and intelligence...” 13.297-299). Together, the two of them excel in their respective brands of intelligence and thus nearly match each other in intelligence and trickery. Athena goes on to emphasize her help with the Phaeacians and promise her help with the suitors. As Odysseus accuses Athena of absence, the goddess denies that she could abandon him when he is δύστηνος and that she had confidence that he would return to Ithaca (13.331-340). Athena blames her absence on Poseidon’s wrath toward Odysseus, though this excuse seems weak. Their conversation continues, as Athena tells Odysseus what he must do next to regain his place in his home, but the beginning of this conversation seems to display her reasoning for preferring Odysseus. He is clever and cunning, and he shares these traits with her. His epithet is πολύμητις Odysseus, and the goddess Athena holds *mētis* in abundance, though she makes clear that hers is a divine sort. Odysseus possesses the cleverness needed to disguise himself and to hide behind false stories of his identity to maintain his safety. Athena values his quick-thinking and tricks, as his other helpers Circe and Penelope do. This, then, is the basis for her favor: the two of them share a kind of cunning that few, if any, others can match. But, as her admonishment of him and her absence from his post-Troy wanderings shows, this craftiness of Odysseus’ can also bring her ire. Because his cleverness is too close to hers, Odysseus is the only hero who threatens her position as a holder of divine *mētis*.

Athena’s esteem for Odysseus’ cunning is not the only possible reason for her help, however. Athena, in addition to being a cunning, crafty goddess who weaves plans, is also a law and order goddess. Her role in the *Iliad* makes this clear. Paris violates *xenia* and kidnaps Helen,

and thus Athena seeks retribution and the return of Menelaus' wife because she demands order. Athena acts similarly in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*. In this play, Athena states, in defense of Orestes, that she will always champion the man (Aes. *Eu.* 738). Athena will side with her father Zeus, whose role as king of the gods is to uphold the structure of this patriarchal society. Thus, Athena upholds these same values, even going so far as to threaten the Furies with Zeus' thunderbolts if they go against her ruling (Aes. *Eu.* 827-828). In the *Odyssey*, the disarray of Odysseus' house provides a reason for her to step in. By virtue of her role as a goddess of the *oikos*, Athena is associated with patrilineal values, especially upholding them, and Odysseus' power needs to be restored in Ithaca.⁵³ She establishes and reestablishes male order to spaces in both the *Iliad* and the *Eumenides*, and her role in upholding patrilineal values may be a reason for her intervention in the *Odyssey*.⁵⁴ A third option for Athena's aid stems from her conflict with Poseidon and Poseidon's issues with Odysseus. Athena and Poseidon have a long-established rivalry; their conflicts begin with their competition over naming rights in Athens and follow through numerous myths.⁵⁵ Odysseus angers Poseidon with his blinding of Polyphemus, and the god's wrath toward the hero is a great barrier to his homecoming. Murnaghan 1995⁵⁶ alludes to the idea that Athena's intervention on behalf of Odysseus could be a way of her attempting to subvert Poseidon's power. By bringing Odysseus safely home, Athena can once again assert her

⁵³ Felson-Rubin 1994, 96.

⁵⁴ Ibid. describes Athena's role as goddess of the *oikos* and her commendation of Orestes' vengeance in the *Eumenides*. This act restored the patriline in Argos. Burkert 1985, 140 mentions Athena's role as goddess of the citadel and city. Her intervention in Odysseus' house, then, can be seen as her reinstating the rule of her favorite hero Odysseus in his house because of her demanding of a stable *oikos*.

⁵⁵ Athena and Poseidon's competition over Athens is memorialized in the west pediment of the Parthenon. Another notable conflict between the two is their competition over Troezen, as told by Pausanias 2.30.6, although Pausanias says this land was held in common.

⁵⁶ Murnaghan 1995 suggests that Athena rules over the entire plot of the *Odyssey* and describes many ways in which the goddess manipulates those around Odysseus for his benefit. She must cede control of Odysseus' journey to Poseidon because of his anger, and the *Odyssey* is divided into two phases: one part controlled by Poseidon and another by Athena. By bringing Odysseus home despite his wishes, Athena has a way of asserting her power over Poseidon.

power over Poseidon and prove herself the stronger divine figure. Poseidon's hatred of Odysseus makes Athena's glory that much more pleasing. Regardless of the reason for her aid, Athena provides it with incredible success. She is determined that Odysseus be reestablished in his role as king of Ithaca, and she helps him as she sees fit. Her help is absolutely necessary to Odysseus' completion of his *nostos*; without it, he could not achieve the transformation to make himself unrecognizable that allows him to sneak into his own house.⁵⁷ Because her help is so instrumental, Athena, similar to other women who help the hero, still poses a threat to Odysseus in this way.⁵⁸ Without her, Odysseus has no other divine helper who can provide this imperative aid. Though she is a threat because her favor is fickle and she has the power to withhold help, it is not for long, and once Odysseus holds Athena's esteem, she is a steadfast companion. As a virgin goddess, she has no motivations for betraying him. She does not have any sexual designs on him and has no true reason to keep him from his wife. Thus, Athena can serve as a true, willing helper to Odysseus and presents only a small threat to the hero's homecoming.

PENELOPE

Penelope, as Odysseus' wife, provides the most significant help to the hero, aside from perhaps the goddess Athena. Her acts are extensive and allow for the preservation of Odysseus' home and rule in Ithaca throughout his absence. Throughout the *Odyssey*, Penelope's help occurs primarily in two ways: her weaving of the funeral shroud for Laertes and her contest of the bow. In book two, the suitor Antinoos recounts Penelope's first trick. Several years before the beginning of the poem, Penelope begged the suitors to wait for her to finish her web, a funeral shroud for Laertes, the father of Odysseus, before she would marry one of them (2.96-98). During the day, Penelope spent her time weaving, as is proper for a Homeric woman; at night,

⁵⁷ Clay 1983, 208.

⁵⁸ Doherty 1995a, 85.

however, she unwove the funeral shroud in an effort to keep the suitors at bay: ἔνθα καὶ ἡματίη μὲν ὑφαίνεσκεν μέγαν ἱστόν,/νύκτας δ' ἀλλύεσκεν, ἐπεὶ δαΐδας παραθεῖτο. ("There also during the day she weaved her great loom, but at night she undid it, after she set torches beside." 2.104-105). Her plan works for a time. Antinoos states that she did this for nearly four years before one of her serving women caught her and revealed her trick to the suitors, who then forced her to finish it (2.106-110). He continues to detail the characteristics that allow Penelope to accomplish this trick, including her wisdom, good character, and craftiness, traits that she also happens to share with her husband. In epic, weaving is a tool that allows women to express themselves visually. Here, Penelope uses her weaving as a tool for expressing her cunning and her dominance over the suitors, as well as displaying her goodness as a woman. She is able to employ weaving, the marker of a good Homeric woman, to her own advantage by stalling her marriage to the suitors with the promise of finishing the funeral shroud. She also uses weaving to the benefit of her husband. Like her husband's other helpers, Penelope's weaving can also represent her ability to affect Odysseus' story. By holding off the suitors for three years with her weaving, Penelope prolongs the courtship period and provides Odysseus with a much greater window within which to arrive home. Penelope's language regarding her weaving is also significant. She asks the suitors to wait until she finishes the shroud to continue their bid for her hand, implying that she will finish it. Instead, she uses the weaving as an act to buy time for Odysseus to return.⁵⁹ Additionally, the poet, through Antinoos, presents her weaving as a δόλος, a trick (2.93). Penelope herself does not refer to it explicitly as such, but she does claim to carry out her own trick, using the same word (δόλους, 19.137). Though she does attribute the idea to some god (φᾶρος μὲν μοι πρῶτον ἐνέπνευσε φρεσὶ δαίμων, 19.138), Penelope's own cunning

⁵⁹ Felson-Rubin 1994, 27.

seems to have maintained her place in Odysseus' absence. Penelope shows her superior intelligence and cunning through the trick of the shroud as she keeps over a hundred suitors at bay for over three years, entirely on her own.⁶⁰

Penelope proposed the contest of the bow (19.572-581) as her second and final act of assistance. Her reasoning for enacting this contest is unclear; nearly as soon as she receives another indication (from Odysseus himself, no less) that her husband will soon arrive home, Penelope decides that she must set up this contest. Telemachus' maturation must play some part, since she promised Odysseus that she would remarry if he had not returned upon Telemachus' adulthood (18.269-270). But Penelope has a great deal of devotion for her husband, and it seems unlikely that she would relent when she has another indication that Odysseus will soon return. Regardless of her reasoning, she sets up the competition, and this contest gives Odysseus the perfect opportunity to kill the suitors and finally retake his position in the house. The act itself is straightforward; the contest benefits Odysseus by giving him the platform on which to defeat the suitors and gives Penelope the ability to take control of her own future. The conflict of her decision, then, exists in why Penelope chooses to set up the contest at this moment. At the point of the contest's inception, Penelope has had both dreams and people inform her that Odysseus' arrival is imminent.

In addition to the conflict created by her choice to set up the contest, Penelope's conversation with the stranger in book nineteen shows a great deal of internal conflict. Her opening speech emphasizes her grief in her husband's absence. She tells the stranger that her beauty was ruined when Odysseus left and she has spent her years grieving the evils of the gods: 'ξεῖν', ἧ τοι μὲν ἐμὴν ἀρετὴν εἰδός τε δέμας τε/ῶλεσαν ἀθάνατοι, ὅτε Ἴλιον

⁶⁰ Thornton 1970, 95-96.

εἰσανέβαινον/Ἀργεῖοι, μετὰ τοῖσι δ' ἐμὸς πόσις ἦεν Ὀδυσσεύς (“Stranger, indeed the immortals destroyed my excellence and beauty and form, when the Argives went up to Ilion, and my husband Odysseus went among them.” 19.124-126).⁶¹ Penelope also speaks of the suitors’ pressure for her to choose one of them to marry, leading to her trick with the funeral shroud (19.136-140). After the stranger claims that he once hosted Odysseus, Penelope decides to test him to determine his truthfulness, indicating her desperation for any true news about her husband. Later, Penelope tells the stranger that her mind is divided on what she should do, if she should continue to wait and stay in her home or marry “the best of the Achaeans,” of those suitors who court her. She then asks the stranger to interpret her dream about the geese, and the stranger-Odysseus informs her that the dream means her husband will soon return and will rid the house of the suitors. Penelope dismisses this idea and determines that she will set up the contest of the bow. Her motivation to set up this contest seems to be based in Odysseus’ parting words, telling her that she may remarry once Telemachus comes of age. Though omens and signs have come that point to Odysseus’ return, Penelope has no clear signs and thus she must act in her own self-interest.⁶² Her loyalty to her husband, though, is what leads Penelope to decide that a bow contest is the appropriate measure to take, because only a man most similar to her husband would be able to accomplish this deed.⁶³

Penelope’s motivation for accomplishing these acts is double. On the first, most obvious level, she sets in motion the weaving of the funeral shroud and the contest of the bow in order to

⁶¹ It is notable that Calypso uses the same phrasing (εἰδός τε δέμας τε) at 5.206-213 in attempt to persuade Odysseus to stay with her, while Penelope speaks of the gods ruining her beauty during her husband’s absence.

⁶² The return foretold by Odysseus himself seems to be another in a long line of omens. Penelope likely hears this regularly; at 17.151-161, Theoklymenos prophesies that Odysseus is already on Ithaca, and she dismisses it. At 19.309-316, Penelope dismisses Odysseus’ statement that he is near. She seems like a woman who has lost hope at all these omens. Although the story is correct this time, Penelope has no real reason to believe it, due to its frequency.

⁶³ Thornton 1970, 105 and 113.

help her husband. The weaving of the shroud puts off Penelope's impending problem of the suitors and allows Odysseus more time to return home, and the contest of the bow sets the scene for the killing of the suitors. On another level, though, Penelope seems not just to be acting in the best interest of Odysseus; she is also acting in her own best interest. Her trick with her weaving has the benefit of extending the courtship of the suitors, allowing her to thrive in the attention and gifts of the suitors. Although Telemachus resents the suitors eating and destroying his house, Penelope seems ambivalent to their presence. Her opinions regarding the suitors at the beginning of the epic are not entirely positive; Telemachus says that the suitors ἐπέχραον οὐκ ἐθελούσῃ ("attack her, being unwilling" 2.50), and, after learning about the suitors' plan to kill Telemachus, Penelope herself calls them κακῶς ὑπερηγορέοντας ("evilily displaying arrogance" 4.766). Her dream with the geese in book nineteen, as well as her occasional "showing herself" to the suitors, though, indicates her fondness for the suitors. In her dream (19.535-553), she weeps for geese, her suitors, after the eagle kills them, as throughout the years she has developed an enjoyment for their presence and even a rapport with several of them. Any fondness she might have for them, though, does not change her desire for her husband to return and her need to do something about their presence. From this trick to extend the courtship, Penelope also displays her intelligence and cunning over the suitors. The formulaic phrase often associated with Penelope "though her mind had other intentions" assigns her the same duplicity as Odysseus,⁶⁴ and she uses this duplicity to outsmart her suitors. Her weaving also shows her resentment toward the suitors in her house. If she truly wanted their presence and desired to marry one of the suitors, Penelope would not have held off for so long. When this weaving-trick does not work,

⁶⁴ Felson-Rubin 1994, 29.

Penelope grows desperate, and she must consider some other way to either secure her own future or further hold off the suitors.⁶⁵

The contest of the bow provides Penelope a similar opportunity to act in her own self-interest. Penelope pictures several different outcomes for the contest. Felson-Rubin 1994 presents four potential reasons for why Penelope sets up this contest: she believes that the stranger is Odysseus and thus gives him a chance to win her hand, she believes that Odysseus will come home soon and hopes that this contest will buy her the necessary time, she believes that no suitor will be able to string the bow, allowing her to maintain her freedom, and she believes that the stranger before her will be able to string the bow and win her hand.⁶⁶ In each outcome, she receives a benefit from the resolution of the contest. If she knows the stranger before her is her husband, the contest gives him opportunity to reinsert himself into the household, preventing Penelope from having to make a choice in addition to the general happiness of her husband's arrival. If she believes that Odysseus is returning home soon, setting the contest gives him more time to return, resulting in the same satisfaction. Penelope may also believe none of the suitors will be able to string the bow, and this alternative would allow her to stay in her home and continue her life as she pleases. Finally, if the stranger is able to string the bow, Penelope has the opportunity to marry someone who is intriguing to her, with a mind and physical strength that could match her husband's. In these thoughts, it is simple to see a motivation past that of helping Odysseus.⁶⁷ This is a way for her to help herself; by setting a contest that only Odysseus has completed successfully, Penelope will ensure that anyone who

⁶⁵ Although she has held the suitors off for roughly three years since her plan with the funeral shroud was discovered, Penelope displays fresh frustration with her situation at 19.157-161. She says that she can no longer think of a new plan to hold them off and describes Telemachus' maturation and his new awareness of the threat of the suitors perhaps as a catalyst for her decision.

⁶⁶ Felson-Rubin 1994, 33.

⁶⁷ Schein 1995, 24.

might accomplish this trial will be the most like her husband. Additionally, this contest again allows Penelope the opportunity to display her own cunning and authority. By setting this trial in motion, she is establishing her own bridal contest, taking an authority and autonomy virtually unheard of in the Homeric world. Instead of her father or son instigating the contest, Penelope uses her own cleverness to ensure that, if she must choose a suitor, he will be the best and most like her husband of all men. Thus, she indeed does these acts in order to help Odysseus, but Penelope also does them for her own benefit.

CONCLUSION: ALL ROADS LEAD TO PENELOPE

The hero Odysseus' *nostos* would be virtually impossible without the aid of numerous women across his journey. Calypso saves him from the sea and gives him a place to recover from his travels; she then releases him, though reluctantly, when he must leave. Nausicaa gives him directions to the palace of the Phaeacians and provides him insight to entreat her mother first. Arete provides Odysseus with clothes and gifts, and she helps persuade her husband when needed to send Odysseus home. Circe's role is large; like Calypso, she provides Odysseus with a safe haven to recover from his travels. When Odysseus is ready to leave, Circe gives him precise directions on what he must do next and releases him. Athena works to ensure the hero's safe arrival home throughout the entire epic, disguising herself and persuading others to work for his benefit. She also controls the plot of the second half of the epic, for it is her plan that Odysseus follows once he returns. And finally, Penelope spends the epic maintaining her husband's home and creates two tricks that ultimately work to his benefit. Each of these women plays a large role in Odysseus' *nostos*, and they all also help for their own motivations, outside of helping Odysseus. Additionally, each woman ultimately foreshadows Odysseus' reunion with his wife. Odysseus has the opportunity to reacquaint himself with the acts of courtship in his interactions

with each woman he meets. He relearns how to flirt and other, more intimate acts after ten years at Troy until he is finally ready to meet his wife again. Odysseus willingly embraces his relationships with Calypso and Circe, using the women not only as helpers on his *nostos* but also as maidens to relearn the acts of courtship. When he reaches Scheria, the maiden Nausicaa offers Odysseus a final opportunity to practice his courtship-skills; their two private meetings are laced with romantic undertones, as the hero re-learns how to interact with an eligible, mortal woman. After leaving the Phaeacians, Odysseus has satisfied his need to roam and is ready to return to his wife and engage in a new courtship with her.⁶⁸ The description of the pin given to him before he leaves for Troy by Penelope can be read as a metaphor for courtship:

...πάροιθε δὲ δαίδαλον ἦεν·
 ἐν προτέροισι πόδεσσι κύων ἔχε ποικίλον ἑλλόν,
 ἀσπαίροντα λάων· τὸ δὲ θαυμάζεσκον ἅπαντες,
 ὥς οἱ χρύσειοι ἔόντες ὁ μὲν λάε νεβρὸν ἀπάγχων,
 αὐτὰρ ὁ ἐκφυγέειν μεμαῶς ἥσπαιρε πόδεσσι.

“...And [the pin] was cunningly wrought on the front: in its front paws a dog, seizing, held a spotted fawn while it struggled; and all were amazed, how, being golden, the dog seizes the fawn, strangling it, but it was struggling with its feet, wishing to flee.” (19.227-231)

Here, the pin’s meaning is twofold: on the surface, it celebrates Odysseus’ hunting prowess, as he is the dog hunting down the fawn. On a deeper level, though, the pin represents Odysseus’ erotic conquest of Penelope.⁶⁹ The fawn is a typical animal used by archaic poets to describe a young, marriageable woman.⁷⁰ Odysseus and Penelope seem to recreate this same act as they reacquaint themselves with one another after twenty years and begin their courtship anew. In this interpretation, the fawn’s struggling symbolizes Penelope’s hesitance in believing that the man in

⁶⁸ Felson-Rubin 1994, 49.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 30.

⁷⁰ As in Archilochus’ “Cologne Epode,” line 31 (Archilochus 169A West).

front of her is her husband until she is faced with indisputable proof.⁷¹ From there, they can continue their new courtship.

There is also a strong sense that these women together are weaving the journey of Odysseus. Calypso, Circe, Athena, and Penelope each greatly alter the journey of Odysseus as they weave plans for him, ultimately leading to his successful reinstatement in his home. Together, all the women helping the hero seem to flow into Penelope, as they not only provide help for him to return to his wife but give him the social reintegration he needs to retake his place back in Ithaca. As Odysseus frequently denies the advances of other women, Penelope's role as ultimate helper is emphasized. She stays faithful to him during his entire absence and provides her husband with the help that maintains his house and reestablishes his rule in Ithaca. Thus, each woman in the *Odyssey* and her role as helper simply functions as a stand-in for Penelope herself, ultimately helping Odysseus return to his role not only as king of Ithaca and head of his house but also to the role of husband.

⁷¹ Felson-Rubin 1994, 30.

CHAPTER THREE

MEDEA AS HELPER IN THE *ARGONAUTICA*

This chapter seeks to show the connections between Medea and the helper-women of the *Odyssey*, both thematically and verbally, and to show how Apollonius of Rhodes draws from these various Homeric women to create a helper-figure in Medea that fits his poetic program. Written in the Hellenistic period, the *Argonautica* features Medea as a main character, and she serves as the primary helper of the poem. Generally, she has two sides; Medea is at once a young, innocent maiden and a resourceful sorceress.⁷² Since Apollonius demands that we read his epic against the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the roots for Medea's character become clear when we look at the *Odyssey*. Medea fuses into a single character what the Homeric poet spreads out across Nausicaa, Calypso, and Circe.⁷³ In book three, Medea seems most like Nausicaa in how she interacts with Jason, and her devotion to Hecate and power in sorcery immediately connect her to the witches of the *Odyssey*, Circe, Calypso, and Helen.⁷⁴ She also takes up their roles as helper-figures, as she helps Jason in ways without which he would not be able to accomplish his quest. Apollonius also draws on Athena and Penelope in order to make his Medea the ultimate helper-figure for Jason. However, Medea is never just one of these models. She holds aspects of the Odyssean women all at once, and this complicates her character. Because of the layers of her character, Medea's true nature is difficult to pin down. This difficulty also affects her role as a

⁷² Crane 1987, 19-20.

⁷³ Ibid. 21. Crane only remarks on Medea's similarities to these three women.

⁷⁴ It is worth noting here that Apollonius' characterization of Medea does not only come from the *Odyssey*. He also draws heavily from Euripides' Phaedra in *Hippolytus* and Sophocles' *Colchian Women* (Hunter 2008, 143). The knowledge of the events of Euripides' *Medea* also hangs heavily throughout the entire poem.

helper. Medea does help Jason with his goal in obtaining the Golden Fleece by giving him a *pharmakon* to protect him as he yokes the bulls, but she also takes over the task herself to bewitch the Colchian dragon. In this way, Medea goes beyond the model of helper provided in the *Odyssey*. The same powers that make Medea an incredible helper to Jason also make her a danger to the hero. Medea has her father's temper, the magical powers of her aunt Circe, and a great deal of μῆτις. Like she is a combination of all the women of the *Odyssey* at once, these aspects of Medea make her both a helper and a threat to Jason and the Argonauts.

In describing Medea's connections as a helper to the women of the *Odyssey* who act similarly with Odysseus, one finds a link between the two heroes of the epics, Odysseus and Jason. These men can immediately be connected in their sea journeys, primarily through the destinations they visit. They are, however, very different characters. Most of Odysseus' journey home is a search for *kleos*; as he attempts to complete his *nostos*, the hero gathers gifts and spreads his name across the Mediterranean, thus ensuring he returns home with the appropriate amount of glory. In fact, he tells his story to the Phaeacians partly for the sake of *kleos*.⁷⁵ Jason, however, does not undertake the quest for the Golden Fleece for fame and glory; Pelias forces his hand (1.15-17). Initially, the Argonauts did not even choose him to be their leader. Heracles was chosen but deferred to Jason (1.345-347). Additionally, the two heroes are separated by their intelligence. Repeatedly throughout the *Odyssey*, the poet distinguishes Odysseus by his intelligence and cunning. He creates elaborate lies quickly to cover his identity, and he is able to trick everyone except Athena and Eurycleia.⁷⁶ Apollonius' Jason is ἀμήχανος; he lacks the

⁷⁵ Alcinoos asks Odysseus to share his story at *Od.* 8.536ff. Because a hero's *kleos* is spread in the stories about them, Odysseus shares his trials with the Phaeacians both to spread his fame and also to gain passage home. Odysseus narrates his adventures starting in book 9 in a similar way to the bard Demodocus' singing in book 8, which is a way of spreading *kleos*.

⁷⁶ Though Eurycleia is markedly different from the other women because she sees a physical indication of his identity in his scar.

extraordinary intelligence and supernatural skills of Odysseus.⁷⁷ He is not the cunning hero who is always one step ahead, but he often relies on those around him to help him accomplish his feats.⁷⁸ A final distinction in the two heroes is their prominence within their respective epics. Odysseus' centrality in the *Odyssey* is indisputable. Although he plays no part in the first four books, the very first line of the epic names Odysseus as its subject: ἄνδρα πολύτροπον. Jason is not the sole dominant figure of the *Argonautica*. He does not appear in the proem of book one, as Odysseus, Achilles, and Aeneas do in their epics,⁷⁹ and he remains largely absent from the action of book four. While Jason is the leader and famed hero of the Argonautica myth, Apollonius tells us that the poem is about ancient men (παλαιγενέων φωτῶν, 1.1). While Odysseus' actions in his epic are nearer to the typical Iliadic heroism an audience might expect, that does not discount Jason's own fame. Just as Apollonius takes care to craft aspects of Odyssean women into his Medea, he also constructs Jason differently from Odysseus to be a fitting hero for his Alexandrian epic. Although Jason is not dominant in controlling his story, he shares the role well with Medea, whose help leads to the success of the Argonauts.⁸⁰

MEDEA AS A YOUNG MAIDEN

Medea's first appearance in the *Argonautica* occurs at the beginning of book three. The poet first mentions her in his invocation to Erato:

εἰ δ' ἄγε νῦν, Ἑρατώ, παρά θ' ἵστασο, καί μοι ἔνισπε,
 ἔνθεν ὅπως ἐς Ἴωλκὸν ἀνήγαγε κῶας Ἰήσων
 Μηδείης ὑπ' ἔρωτι...

⁷⁷ Hunter 1993, 24. The first instance of this descriptor occurs at 1.460.

⁷⁸ Some scholars, such as Beye 1982, remark on Jason's diplomatic abilities; he has "politeness and patience" (Beye 1982, 83), and he attempts to speak to Aietes as if he is a reasonable king, although he has been warned to act differently. Although this scene and similar ones do portray Jason as having some diplomatic skills, he is, on the whole, entirely unsuccessful. Beye 1982 does note, however, that Jason is most successful in the realm of love and appropriately refers to him as a "love hero" (93).

⁷⁹ Hunter 2008, 143.

⁸⁰ Kenney 2008, 365.

“Come now, Erato, stand beside me, and tell me how from then Jason led the Fleece to Iolchos by means of Medea’s love...” (3.1-3)

Here, Apollonius begins this book in the same way the *Odyssey* begins, by calling upon a Muse for aid in telling the story and indicating the topic at hand, even using the same verb, ἐννέπω.⁸¹ Although Medea does not actually appear until 3.247, the poet announces that her presence, actions, and choices will loom large on the second half of the epic.

Throughout this third book, Medea’s character most nearly mirrors that of Nausicaa in the *Odyssey*. They are both young, foreign princesses at a marriageable age.⁸² Divine intervention leads both girls to meet their heroes; just as Athena sends Nausicaa a dream persuading her to leave her home to wash her clothes, Hera intervenes in Medea’s day by keeping her at home, away from the shrine of Hecate, so that she may see Jason and so that Eros can strike.⁸³ Medea and Nausicaa also both have dreams that drive their actions. Medea’s dream is much less pleasant than Nausicaa’s (ὀλοοὶ ὄνειροι, 3.618), but it does eventually lead her to choose to help Jason, although this occurs after much mental anguish. In addition to these general similarities, Apollonius makes a more obvious comparison to Nausicaa during Medea’s wagon ride to the shrine of Hecate:

ἐκ δὲ θύραζε κιοῦσα τοῆς ἐπεβήσατ’ ἀπήνης·
σὺν δὲ οἱ ἀμφίπολοι δοιαὶ ἐκάτερθεν ἔβησαν.
αὐτὴ δ’ ἡνί’ ἔδεκτο καὶ εὐποίητον ἱμάσθλην
δεξιτερῇ, ἔλαεν δὲ δι’ ἄστεος...

“And going out the door she got on the swift wagon; two handmaidens went on either side with her. She received the reins and the well-made whip in her right hand, and she drove through the city. ...” (3.869-872)

⁸¹ *Od.* 1.1 ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα...; ἔνισπε, used above, is listed by Cunliffe 2012 as the aorist form.

⁸² Crane 1987, 19.

⁸³ Interestingly, the poet uses the verb ἔρυκε for Hera’s restraint of Medea, the same verb used of Circe and Calypso’s trapping of Odysseus on their islands.

This scene evokes Nausicaa's own ride to the stream at *Od.* 6.71-84. Apollonius connects the two maidens through several verbal similarities. He employs the Homeric ἐπεβήσατ' ἀπήνης (*Od.* 6.78) to describe Medea at 869. Handmaidens surround both Nausicaa and Medea, as is proper. The verb κίον describes both of their movements (*Od.* 6.84).

From these obvious verbal similarities, Apollonius continues to model the Homeric scene, but he clearly alters it. The Homeric poet makes no mention of the Phaeacians' opinions of Nausicaa as she drives through the city, but Apollonius emphasizes the Colchians' reactions to seeing Medea: ...ἀμφὶ δὲ λαοὶ/εἴκον, ἀλευάμενοι βασιλίδος ὄμματα κούρης ("And around her the people withdrew, having avoided the eyes of the royal maiden," 3.885-886). The Colchians clearly feel some unease at Medea's presence and even fear looking in her eyes. Additionally, Nausicaa sets a leisurely pace for her journey to the stream, but Medea goes quickly because she is hopeful to see Jason. Apollonius and the Homeric poet both describe their maidens by similes relating to Artemis, although these similes produce different results for their subject. As Nausicaa and her handmaidens play with a ball, they are likened to Artemis and her nymphs playing (*Od.* 6.102-109). The poet's emphasis in this simile is on Nausicaa's physical similarities to the goddess, in stature and in beauty (*Od.* 6.107-109). Apollonius significantly alters this simile to fit Medea. He first shifts the simile earlier by comparing Medea in her wagon to Artemis as she rides her chariot through the hills and beasts cower at her feet: ...ἀμφὶ δὲ θῆρες/κνυζηθμῷ σαίνουσιν ὑποτρομέοντες ἰοῦσαν ("And around her while she goes, trembling feasts fawn with a whine" 3.883-4). Within the simile, Artemis displays her power over the beasts, so Medea's comparison to Artemis in this moment must mean that she also holds a similar power in her environment. The Colchian crowd that she drives through, then, are like the beasts. The Colchians likely do not avoid her gaze simply because she is royalty; descendants of

the Sun are characterized by formidable and eventually dreadful eyes.⁸⁴ The power of Medea's eyes becomes more significant later, as she defeats the bronze giant Talos. In a more physical way, Medea fits the age and stature of the maidens who follow Artemis. Because she is of the type of maiden who could be familiar with Artemis, she is well-acquainted with Artemis' more dangerous and hostile side, the goddess who holds destructive powers.⁸⁵ With this comparison to Artemis within a direct modeling of Nausicaa, Apollonius makes a statement. Medea contains the gentle and hostile sides of Artemis, and this helps represent the dual sides of Medea's character. Artemis herself is often associated with Medea's patron goddess Hecate,⁸⁶ and Medea's explicit comparison to the danger and power of Artemis connects her that much more closely to the power of Hecate. In this way, Apollonius begins to tell his audience that Medea holds a potential for true danger, even this early in her character.

Nausicaa and her handmaidens play with a ball while they wait for their clothes to dry. In playing her game, Nausicaa acts, presumably, as an epic maiden should. Medea too urges her handmaidens to play:

ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ οὖν ἰκόμεσθα, καὶ οὐ νύ τις ἄλλος ἔπεισιν,
εἰ δ' ἄγε μολπῇ θυμὸν ἀφειδείως κορέσωμεν
μειλιχίῃ, τὰ δὲ καλὰ τερείνης ἄνθεα ποίης
λεξάμεναι τότε ἔπειτ' αὐτὴν ἀπονισσόμεθ' ὥρην.

“But since we have arrived, and no one else will approach, but come, let us satisfy our hearts unsparingly with a sweet game, and after we pick beautiful flowers from the smooth grass, let us then go away at the same hour as usual.” (3.896-899)

Medea tricks her handmaidens by urging them to play. Then, she informs them of Jason's arrival and swears that she intends to trick him by taking his presents and giving him a more terrible

⁸⁴ Vian 1980, 138.

⁸⁵ Hunter 1989, 29; Hunter describes Medea as “reflect[ing] many aspects of Greek views of the female” because she is a young, freeborn virgin. She also knows the dangerous side of Artemis because she serves as a priestess of Hecate.

⁸⁶ “Hecate” Henrichs 2015; in Athens, Artemis was sometimes worshipped as Artemis Hecate.

drug (κακώτερον φάρμακον, 3.910-911) than the one he expects. In this way, Medea begins her deceit that follows throughout the remainder of the epic.⁸⁷ The play, then, is a trick designed to deceive everyone around her: on one hand, it is meant to settle her attendants into an action that is presumably typical for them so that they do not suspect that she might have intentions which go against her father. On the other, the play is designed to trick Jason into believing that Medea is no harm to him. However, Medea is not a typical maiden like Nausicaa, who plays with balls with her friends while she waits for her clothes to dry. She is a priestess who devotes her time to tending to Hecate's shrine. Priestesses do not play with balls, pick flowers, nor enjoy a normal relationship with girls of their own age.⁸⁸ In the chariot ride and the playing scenes, Apollonius sets up an explicit comparison between the two young maidens and subsequently destroys it by emphasizing Medea's power and trickery.⁸⁹ These scenes begin to show the cracks in her Nausicaa-like façade, and Apollonius gives his audience a glimpse at what lurks beneath Medea's initial character. This is one way Apollonius sets his Medea apart from her Homeric models. Other scholars⁹⁰ see Medea's shift from maiden to sorceress at the beginning of book four, when her magical powers become more relevant, but I believe that the seeds of this transition are planted here, as Medea makes known her ability and eagerness for deceit.

In another distinct contrast to Nausicaa, as the girls play, Medea is unable to find any joy in the game:

οὐδ' ἄρα Μηδείης θυμὸς τράπετ' ἄλλα νοῆσαι,
 μελπομένης περ ὅμως· πᾶσαι δέ οἱ, ἦντιν' ἀθύροι
 μολπήν, οὐκ ἐπὶ δηρὸν ἐφῆνδανεν ἐψιάσθαι.

“But the heart of Medea did not at all turn to think other things, although she played all the same; whatever game she played, none pleased her to play for a long time.” (3.948-950)

⁸⁷ Hunter 1993, 63.

⁸⁸ Campbell 1983, 60.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Like Kenney 2008.

Her reaction upon meeting Jason is also very different from Nausicaa's. The Homeric poet goes into no detail about Nausicaa's thoughts and feelings upon seeing Odysseus for the first time, only that Athena "put courage in her heart and seized the fear from her limbs" (θάρσος ἐνὶ φρεσὶ θῆκε καὶ ἐκ δέος ἔλκετο γυίων, *Od.* 6.140).⁹¹ However, Apollonius goes into great detail about the physicality of Medea's symptoms upon seeing Jason, drawing not from the Homeric epics but from the descriptions of lovesickness often found in lyric poets like Sappho.⁹² Jason's attractiveness triggers the uncontrollable, unhealthy symptoms of love that are found in lyric poetry, which culminate in immobility and speechlessness. This culmination is indicated by the simile at 967 in which the pair stare at each other like firmly rooted trees.⁹³ It is Jason's comparison to Sirius, however, which holds the most implications for the future of Medea:

ὕψος' ἀναθρόσκων ἅ τε Σείριος Ὠκεανοῖο,
ὃς δὴ τοι καλὸς μὲν ἀρίζηλός τ' ἐσιδέσθαι
ἀντέλλει, μήλοισι δ' ἐν ἄσπετον ἦκεν οἰζύν·

"rising up on high as Sirius from Oceanus, who rises beautiful and distinct to see and brings unspeakable misery for flocks;..." (3.957-959)

Jason appears like Sirius, bright and clear but also ruinous. Apollonius employs the idea of love as burning fire, also popularized by the lyric poets.⁹⁴ The hero is like a burning star, which leads to Medea's suffering through the burn of love. The last line of the simile describes Sirius' ruinous effects on flocks, and Medea's physical ailments upon seeing Jason serve to foreshadow her later ruin. Earlier in the book, the appearance of dawn brought Medea gladness and security in her decisions (3.823-824); now, the light that Jason brings will only cause her suffering, in this moment and in the future.⁹⁵

⁹¹ She does later at 6.237 admire him after Athena improves his looks.

⁹² Sappho 31 in particular.

⁹³ Campbell 1983, 62.

⁹⁴ This is not the first time Apollonius has employed this metaphor. Earlier at 3.446, Apollonius describes Medea as σμύχουσα, smouldering, in her heart.

⁹⁵ Campbell 1983, 60.

When Medea meets the hero, Jason mirrors Odysseus as he promises that he comes to Medea as a suppliant (ικέτης ξεινός τέ τοι ἐνθάδ' ἰκάνω, 3.987), though he does not flatter Medea as Odysseus does Nausicaa. Aware of her magical abilities, Jason instead bids her not to deceive him with pleasant words (τερπνοῖς ἐπέεσσιν, 3.982-83). Odysseus wishes that the gods reward Nausicaa for her help, but Jason promises that he himself will spread Medea's fame across Greece, as though she is a Homeric hero in need of *kleos*. His promise of *kleos* serves to emphasize the significance of Medea's help; with her name spread across Greece for this deed, Medea becomes just as heroic as the Argonauts themselves. In one final similarity, Medea makes Jason promise to remember her, just as Nausicaa does Odysseus, though Medea does not invoke her help to the hero: μνώεο δ', ἦν ἄρα δὴ ποθ' ὑπότροπος οἴκαδ' ἵκηαι, οὔνομα Μηδείης ("Remember the name of Medea, if you, returning, ever come home." 3.1069-70).

In the *Odyssey*, Nausicaa's help to Odysseus is great. On the surface, the maiden merely helps Odysseus to the city, but Nausicaa also provides Odysseus with an opportunity to reacquire himself with the practice of courtship so that he may later reenter his relationship with Penelope. In book three, Medea's help does not look the same. She does not guide Jason to the city, nor does she prepare him for any sort of courtship or sexual encounter; Jason's preparation for this moment occurred earlier in the epic on Lemnos (1.609-909). Rather, the promise of Medea's powerful help hangs over most of the third book of the *Argonautica*, and her magical abilities distinguish her from Nausicaa of the *Odyssey*. In this way, Apollonius anticipates the extensive help that Medea will give the Argonauts and the fact that their task will be nearly impossible without her. Additionally, while her help is essential for the completion of the Argonauts' *nostos*, Medea also serves as a threat, just as Nausicaa does to Odysseus. She does not threaten to restrain him from his journey as Nausicaa could, but the denial of Medea's help

would likely mean the failure to obtain the Fleece. Her refusal to help at this point is only a marginal risk, though, due to divine intervention and *eros*. Instead, in Medea's comparison to Nausicaa, the promise of what the maiden could do has the biggest effect on the hero, and this tension follows into the next stage of her character.

MEDEA AS A SORCERESS

As her magical powers begin to have more prominence in the plot, Apollonius starts to shift the model of Medea's character from Nausicaa to the sorceress figures of the *Odyssey*, Calypso, Helen, and Circe. The first marker of Medea's character shift is the moment when she gives Jason her *pharmakon* and explains how he must use it (3.1026-1062). Apollonius' model for this scene is likely Circe giving Odysseus instructions on how to reach the Underworld and what he must do when he arrives to speak to Tiresias (*Od.* 10.516-540). Medea and Circe both give their heroes very explicit directions on what they must do and leave no room for questions. Both journeys are figured as chthonic rituals; while Odysseus quite literally travels to the Underworld, the description of Jason's sacrifice recalls Odysseus', and his calling upon Hecate as a chthonic deity⁹⁶ cements this as a kind of journey to the Underworld. The poet also distinguishes Medea's role from Circe's in this scene. In contrast to Circe, who presents Odysseus' route and the tasks he must complete as the will of fate, Medea gives her instructions as her own plan for Jason to follow: φράζω νῦν, ὥς κέν τοι ἐγὼ μητίσομ' ἀρωγήν ("Consider now, how I will devise help for you." 3.1026). The use of μητίομαι is striking, as it emphasizes Medea's role in crafting the plan and the cunning μῆτις that she employed in doing it. From this point until Jason yokes the bulls, it is Medea's plan to gain the Fleece that succeeds, and her

⁹⁶ Beye 1982, 132. Hecate's worshippers associate her with reproduction and fertility, making her important to the earth and linking her to the dead.

μητις is responsible. Circe merely tells Odysseus the facts, but Medea inserts herself readily into the quest and accomplishes it through Jason's actions.

After Jason yokes the bulls, he and the Argonauts set out to take the Fleece. To do so, they need Medea to bewitch the serpent who guards it. There is no exact parallel in Circe, Helen, or Calypso, but the magic of the scene immediately recalls the sorceresses of the *Odyssey*. As Jason and Medea leave to seize the Fleece, Apollonius states that they go at the time when hunters leave (4.109-117) and compares the pair to the hunters themselves and their prey to the Fleece. This emphasizes the deceit and concealment of the two, Medea especially, and connects her to the deceit of Circe.⁹⁷ Medea enchants the serpent first by calling out to Sleep and Hecate, then by rubbing a potion, κυκεών (4.157), on its head and singing:

ἡ δέ μιν ἀρκεύθοιο νέον τετμηότι θαλλῷ
βάπτουσ' ἐκ κυκεῶνος ἀκήρατα φάρμακ' αἰδαῖς
ῥαῖνε κατ' ὀφθαλμῶν· περί τ' ἀμφί τε νήριτος ὀδυμή
φαρμάκου ὕπνον ἔβαλλε·

“And she, with a newly cut branch of juniper which was dipped into the potion, sprinkled the pure *pharmakon* over its eyes with song; and all around the immense smell of the *pharmakon* was casting sleep.” (4.156-159)

The Homeric poet also uses this word several times in reference to the magic of Circe, as she mixes a drug to transform Odysseus' men and later the hero himself (*Od.* 10.234-236, 290, 316-317). Although Medea does not transform the serpent, the κυκεών recalls Circe's power and connects Medea's powers to those of her aunt, altering the audience's ideas about Medea's danger. In describing the serpent itself, Apollonius emphasizes the fear that it brings to those who hear it:

δείματι δ' ἐξέγροντο λεχωίδες, ἀμφὶ δὲ παισὶν
νηπιάχοις, οἳ τέ σφιν ὑπ' ἀγκαλίδεσσιν ἴαον,
ροῖζ' παλλομένοις χεῖρας βάλλον ἀσχαλόωσαι.

⁹⁷ Hunter 1993, 17.

“Women who had just given birth awoke in fear, and being distressed they threw their hands around their young children, who were sleeping in their arms, shaking at the whistling.” (4.136-138)

By including this detail, Apollonius emphasizes Medea’s bravery in the way she does not hesitate to approach the serpent. This bravery reflects a confidence in her magical abilities, and it is a similar confidence to Circe’s own when she faces Odysseus’ crew.⁹⁸ Jason, however, is terrified. By speaking about the women’s fear of the serpent and Jason’s, Apollonius compares his hero to the powerless children of the simile. In securing the Fleece, Jason must be completely dependent on Medea, as these children are on their mothers. In this way, Medea seeks to protect Jason just as a mother seeks to protect her child.⁹⁹ Because this part of the quest takes magical prowess to complete, Jason has given control to Medea, and now the *kleos* for it has become hers. This surpasses the help that Circe or Calypso provides in the *Odyssey* and emphasizes Medea’s power as a helper with distinct differences from those before her. Rather than strictly help the hero achieve his goals, she now accomplishes them herself. Although Medea lets Jason take the Fleece from the branch himself, the victory is hers, as Jason announces:

ἤδη γὰρ χρειώ, τῆς εἵνεκα τήνδ’ ἀλεγεινὴν
ναυτιλίην ἔτλημεν οἷζύι μοχθίζοντες,
εὐπαλέως κούρης ὑπὸ δήνεσι κεκράανται.

“For the need, on account of which we bore this hard voyage while suffering in misery, has been accomplished easily by the plans of the maiden.” (4.191-193)

At this point, Apollonius brings the action of the epic to center solely on Medea, rather than Jason.¹⁰⁰ This theme continues as the Argonauts abandon Colchis and begin their journey home. Medea seems to command the crew as she orders them to sail and stop so that she may propitiate

⁹⁸ As a lone woman, Circe has every reason to fear a group of men approaching her home. Her lack of fear then can serve as a reflection of her belief in her abilities.

⁹⁹ Hunter 1993, 61; this scene of Medea protecting Jason as a mother does her children also holds a great deal of irony, as Apollonius’ audience would be aware of the fate of Medea’s own children.

¹⁰⁰ Beyé 1982, 143-166 speak broadly about Apollonius’ shift from Jason as a central character to Medea.

her goddess Hecate (4.241-52). By this time in the book, she is no longer the Nausicaa-like Medea, but Αἰαΐη Μήδεια (4.243), connecting her even closer to Circe.

Medea's reaction to the deal made between the Argonauts and the Colchians for her return is fierce (4.355-94). She rails against Jason, saying that he has abandoned the oath that he made to her and beguiled her with sweet promises to leave her homeland.¹⁰¹ Medea reminds him of the shame that she has brought upon herself by helping him. She is now completely dependent on him because she has abandoned her family. Medea knows and fears her father, and she is aware that her return will mean a severe punishment. At the end of her speech, Medea invokes the Furies against Jason if he abandons her, and Apollonius tells us the true depth of her anger:

ὥς φάτ' ἀναζείουσα βαρὺν χόλον· ἵετο δ' ἥγε
νῆα καταφλέξει, διὰ τ' ἔμπεδα πάντα κεάσσαι,
ἐν δὲ πεσεῖν αὐτὴ μαλερῷ πυρί.

“Thus she spoke, seething deep anger; she desired to burn the ship completely, to split everything completely, and to throw herself in the devouring fire.” (4.391-393)

This moment shows Medea's potential destructive nature in a way that is different from the destruction suggested by her magical powers. She holds the power to prevent the hero from his course with romance as Circe and Calypso do, but she can also cause real harm, even death, to Jason with both her powers and her anger. Her anger at the potential betrayal echoes Aietes' own anger at learning that Jason had come take the Fleece (3.372-81). In that moment, Aietes threatens that if the men had not already eaten from his table, he would have cut out their tongues. Medea's threat to burn the Argo also recalls her earlier symptoms of love. Just as Medea was earlier consumed by the flames of love, now she wishes to be consumed by the flames of destruction for her betrayal. In her anger and emotion, Medea distinguishes herself

¹⁰¹ Medea's accusation that Jason tricked her with sweet promises (μελιχρὰ ὑποσχέσθαι, 4.359) recalls Jason's earlier bid that she not deceive him with *τερπνοῖς ἐπέεσσιν* (3.982-83). Although these are not repeated phrases, both characters seem to emphasize the deception and untrustworthiness of the other.

again from the Odyssean helper women. The idea of remembering included at 4.383-84 (μνήσαιο δέ καί ποτ' ἐμεῖο,/στρευγόμενος καμάτοισι) does recall the final exchange between Odysseus and Nausicaa (*Od.* 8.461-68) and Jason's tender exchanges with Medea in book three, as she asked him to remember her when he left (3.1069-1071), but here the tone is much different.¹⁰² There is no love in Medea's speech, only bitterness and anger. No woman in the *Odyssey* acts in this way to help the hero; although they may take risks to help Odysseus, those women do not go to the destructive lengths that Medea does, as she betrays her family to help Jason.

In her attack against Jason, Medea acts outside of her Homeric models and instead seems more like the characters of tragedy in the self-destructive potential of her actions. In her anger and her description of her folly (ματίη, 4.367), Apollonius casts Medea as Clytemnestra, as she κατὰ δ' οὐλοὸν αἴσχος ἔχευα/θηλυτέραις (“pour[s] down destructive shame on women” 4.367-68).¹⁰³ The Homeric poet uses these same words to describe Clytemnestra's part in the murder of Agamemnon (οἳ τε κατ' αἴσχος ἔχευε καὶ ἐσσομένησιν ὀπίσσω/θηλυτέρησι γυναῖξί..., *Od.* 11.433-434); thus, Apollonius seems to indicate that Medea has Clytemnestra's capacity for destruction. Additionally, in calling on the Furies, Medea evokes the situation of Orestes. If Jason forsakes her, he will be guilty of causing Medea's death just as Orestes is guilty of causing his mother's.¹⁰⁴ Finally, and perhaps most obviously, the entire scene of betrayal and anger mirrors the *agon* between Jason and Medea in Euripides' *Medea*.¹⁰⁵ The conclusion of the *Medea* hangs over the emotions of this scene, as it does much of the play because the audience knows that this rampage is only the beginning of Medea's rage.

¹⁰² Hunter 2015, 135, 383-4n.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 133, 367-8n.; casting Medea as Clytemnestra also implicitly casts Jason as Agamemnon. This is a fitting connection as well, as it is Agamemnon's betrayal of Clytemnestra through the sacrifice of their daughter that brings about his fate, as Jason's later betrayal of Medea brings about his own punishment.

¹⁰⁴ Hunter 2015, 136, 386n.

¹⁰⁵ Hunter 2008, 142.

Her final act of anger includes the murder of her brother, Apsyrtos. This is another moment without an Odyssean parallel of Medea taking complete control of the story. Medea herself is at the center of her plans:

αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ κείνόν γε τεὰς ἐς χεῖρας ἰκέσθαι
μειλίζω· σὺ δέ μιν φαιδροῖς ἀγαπάζεο δώροις.
εἴ κέν πως κήρυκας ἀπερχομένους πεπíθοιμι
οἰόθεν οἶον ἐμοῖσι συναρθμῆσαι ἐπέεσσιν...

“But I will implore that he come to your hands; show him affection with shining gifts. If only somehow I would persuade the heralds leaving with my words to agree that he is alone... (4.415-418)

Although it is a terrible action, this is another way she helps the hero. Because Apsyrtos follows the Argonauts seeking the return of Medea, their *nostos* becomes unlikely, or at least considerably more difficult. By killing her brother, Medea both frees herself from her family’s reign and brings Jason that much closer to returning home. Although there is no exact parallel in Circe’s actions, through this act Medea exhibits a similar trait to her aunt: a lack of concern in harming others to meet her goals.¹⁰⁶ With this act, Medea seals her transition from young maiden to formidable sorceress, as her veil becomes marked with her brother’s blood.¹⁰⁷

In the final lines of the *Argonautica*, Medea defeats Talos. The bronze giant Talos threatens their homecoming as he breaks rocks from a cliff and throws them to keep the Argonauts far offshore. Medea does not hesitate to offer her help and is eager to show off her magical abilities once more when she reappears after a significant absence from the events of book four. Her destruction of Talos recalls her prayer over the Colchian serpent:¹⁰⁸

ἔνθα δ’ αἰοιδῆσιν μελίσσετο, μέλπε δὲ Κῆρας
θυμοβόρους, Αἶδαο θαῶς κύνας, αἷ περὶ πᾶσαν
ἡέρα δινεύουσαι ἐπὶ ζωοῖσιν ἄγονται.

¹⁰⁶ Knight 1995, 184.

¹⁰⁷ Kenney 2008, 370.

¹⁰⁸ Hunter 2015, 302, 1665-72n.

“Then she appeased him with songs, and she celebrated the heart-eating Keres, the swift dogs of Hades, who as they roam around the whole air are led against men.” (4.1665-1667)

Medea calls upon a chthonic goddess just as she did before, and she utters similar incantations and prayers. Apollonius adds something more sinister to this scene that was not included in her magical act against the dragon: Medea sets her mind on evil (θεμένη κακὸν νόον, 4.1669). In this way, she settles more firmly into her role in the epic as a sorceress, which Apollonius marks with the use of the epithet πολυφάρμακον (4.1677), which the Homeric poet uses to describe Circe in the *Odyssey* (*Od.* 10.276). Medea defeats Talos not simply to show off her magical power; she also does so to increase her *kleos*. The poet chooses to craft this scene as an unusual version of Iliadic single combat.¹⁰⁹ Medea’s combat takes place far offshore, and she kills the bronze Talos with only her eyes. Her gaze itself does not strike Talos dead, but she uses her eyes to bewitch the giant to strike his ankle against a sharp rock. Apollonius compares Talos’ collapse with a tree chopped by woodcutters (4.1682-1688), and this comparison cements the scene with Medea as an Iliadic hero because the Homeric poet uses these same types of similes to describe fallen soldiers in the *Iliad* (*Il.* 4.482-7).¹¹⁰ By employing this simile, Apollonius emphasizes Medea’s search for *kleos* through the ways that she helps the Argonauts. This scene is Medea’s final triumph and the final act of help that occurs in the epic. Before this moment, she has nearly disappeared from the book and only reappears significantly to defeat Talos. If the final book presents a shift in centrality from Jason to Medea, then Medea’s disappearance only to reappear to close out the book secures the focus of the final book to be her, as it is her action that closes out the *nostos*.

¹⁰⁹ Hunter 2015, 301, 1654n.; the “usual” version of Iliadic single combat can be seen in *Il.* 3.1-120. Menelaus and Paris are chosen and plan to fight against each other on a plain with their armies watching on.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 305, 1682-8n.

The end of book three and start of book four present Medea's transition from maiden to sorceress, and naturally the audience begins to see a shift from the Odyssean models of Nausicaa to the witches of the *Odyssey* as Apollonius makes this transition. Explicit references to Calypso are minimal. One could potentially see some similarities in Medea's fury at Jason's betrayal and Calypso's indignation at being forced to release Odysseus. Additionally, Medea does show some similarities to Helen of the *Odyssey*. Most significantly, both women employ the use of *pharmaka*. Helen uses her *pharmakon* to affect the minds of those around her and ease their burdens as they tell stories about Odysseus (*Od.* 4.220-226). Medea's drugs as described in the *Argonautica* seem to affect the body and literally protect or destroy a person, in contrast to the psychological focus of Helen's drugs. The *pharmaka* of these women are extremely powerful and destructive in different ways and provide the women with a significant amount of power over those around them. Apollonius also makes Medea like Helen in her actions. Medea faces a similar choice to that of Helen, as she must decide whether to abandon her family for the sake of a man. Like Helen, she does so. In this way, Apollonius employs several aspects of Helen's danger in Medea, and this in connection with Medea's similarities to Circe enhances the danger she can potentially pose to the hero.

However, despite her similarities to Helen, Medea seems to most clearly mirror the ultimate sorceress of the *Odyssey*, Circe. Her magical ability connects her most closely to Circe; verbal similarities occur much less frequently. In book three, as Medea is tricking her handmaidens, she tells them κακώτερον ἄλλο πόρωμεν φάρμακον (3.910-11). This phrase describing her magic is a combination of phrases from *Odyssey* 10 which detail Circe's own (*Od.* 10.213, 302, 392). Apollonius calls Medea Αἰαίη (3.1136, 4.243) and πολυφάρμακον (3.27, 4.1677) several times, both of which function also as epithets for Circe in the *Odyssey* (Αἰαίη

Od. 9.32, 12.268, 12.273, πολυφάρμακον *Od.* 10.276). As the fourth and final book of the epic progresses, Medea's verbal similarities to Circe lessen. Knight 1995 notes only one similarity between the two women at 4.731.¹¹¹ The reason for this is clear in the transition Medea's character makes within book four. As Medea transforms from innocent maiden to powerful sorceress, Apollonius needs to stress her similarities to Circe less and less.¹¹² Her magical powers make it evident the kind of character she now is. Although Medea uses her magical abilities primarily to help Jason, her resemblance to Circe constantly reminds the reader that she has the potential for true danger, which she hints at in her fury at the beginning of book four.¹¹³ Medea uses her powers to intervene in Jason's quest far more than Circe does in that of Odysseus. Both women provide their heroes with help without which their quests would never be completed, but while Circe has little to risk from helping Odysseus, Medea risks everything in helping Jason. She invokes the rage of her father and is forced by her actions and propriety to flee Colchis. Medea also differs significantly from Circe in the emotions she feels and the risks she takes for the hero. In the fourth book, Medea's actions also begin to surpass those taken simply to help Jason. Rather, the sorceress' actions become acts of heroism on her own part, as she completes feats of bravery, like charming the Colchian dragon, that are fit to spread her *kleos* across Greece, just as Jason promised.

MEDEA AS DIVINE HELPER

Although Medea most clearly resembles Nausicaa and Circe throughout her appearances in the *Argonautica*, Medea's skills at creating plans and her capacity to deceive also connect her closely to Athena. In the *Odyssey*, Athena is one of Odysseus' most important helpers. The hero

¹¹¹ Knight 1995, 183; this verbal similarity occurs at 4.731, where Circe's relationship to Aietes in the *Odyssey* (*Od.* 10.137) is recalled in a phrase describing Medea (βαρύφρονος Αιήταο).

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid. 182.

employs her plan to reclaim his house in the second half of the *Odyssey*. Athena crafts this plan with her μῆτις. As Odysseus asks Athena to help him in this planning, he tells her ἄγε μῆτιν ὕφηνον... (“come, weave your plan...” 13.386), and her divine μῆτις ultimately accomplishes his goals. Medea shares this μῆτις with her. Although she is not divine in the same sense,¹¹⁴ her μῆτις is still beyond that of those who surround her. Medea also contains some of the same capacity for deceit that Athena does. In the same way that Athena manipulates herself and Odysseus’ surroundings so that he does not have all the information until she is prepared for him to, Medea crafts her image and story to best suit her audience, so that she gets the response she needs for the Argonauts to continue their *nostos*.

Argos’ own μῆτις begins the events of book three: Αἰσονίδη, μῆτιν μὲν ὀνόσσει, ἦντιν’ ἐνίγω (“Son of Aeson, you will blame this plan, whatever I will say” (3.475). He declares that the men need Medea’s help. Argos’ μῆτις proves itself to be a lesser kind than Medea’s because he is a man;¹¹⁵ he can create the idea to get Medea’s help, but he cannot develop the plan to achieve their goals.¹¹⁶ Medea invokes her own μῆτις as she designs the plan for Jason to defeat the bulls: φράζεο νῦν, ὥς κέν τοι ἐγὼ μητίσομ’ ἀρωγὴν (“Consider now, how I will devise help for you.” 3.1026). Without Medea’s help, the Argonauts have little hope for yoking these otherworldly bulls, in a similar way to Odysseus’ inability to conquer the suitors without Athena’s intervention. The men’s inability to create a plan shows that they need a greater μῆτις than their own to succeed in their feat. Argos’ description of Medea’s powers over nature is

¹¹⁴ Medea is still divine in some sense because she is a descendent of Helios.

¹¹⁵ Holmberg 1998, 136; Holmberg notes that the feminine in Greek literature is often associated with concealment, secrecy, and deceit, and μῆτις comes to be associated with females. μῆτις in the *Argonautica* is also gendered, and the most successful kind belongs to Medea.

¹¹⁶ At this point, Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite have also decided that Medea’s help is necessary to obtain the Fleece and defeat Pelias; however, these goddesses only explicitly intervene and compel Medea. Argos’ plan seems to be independent from their decision.

fairly typical when talking about women who work with magic in the fifth century,¹¹⁷ and this situates Medea securely within the tradition of powerful sorceresses. Her power and influence are heightened additionally by the degree to which the Argonauts allow her to lead once she has given Jason the drug. Despite her powers, the men seem to trust her wholeheartedly, because her μῆτις benefits them exclusively. Only Idas has reservations about accepting aid from Medea, but it has little to do with a possible deception. The heroes continue to let her guide them into the fourth book, as she directs them on how to conquer the Colchian dragon and gain the Fleece. Once Medea has secured the favor of the Argonauts and they agree to take her to Greece, she takes control of the journey, instructing them how to get to the sacred grove of the Fleece. And Medea continues controlling the journey, as she directs them to sail and stop so that they may offer sacrifices. In this way, Medea plots out the Argonauts' journey and actions up to this point in a similar way to Athena's crafting of Odysseus' plan. They have faith in Medea's μῆτις, her ability to help them, in the same way that Odysseus believes in Athena's divine help.

After Aietes sends Medea's brother Apsyrtos to bring her home, Medea decides that she and Jason must kill him to secure their passage home. She displays no sorrow that this deed must be done and again invokes her clever μῆτις:

φράζεο νῦν. χρειῶ γὰρ ἀεικελίοισιν ἐπ' ἔργοις
καὶ τόδε μητίσασθαι, ἐπεὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἀάσθη
ἀμπλακίη, θεόθεν δὲ κακὰς ἦνυσσα μενοινάς.

"Think, now. For there is a need to also plan this thing with disgraceful works, since I first was misled by a fault and I completed the terrible desires from the gods." (4.411-13)

This plan displays the more harmful, evil side of Medea's cleverness. At this point, Medea has only helped the Argonauts. Only lines before, in her rage against Jason, she has shown them that

¹¹⁷ Hunter 1989, 154, 531-3n.; at 532-33, Argos describes some of Medea's supposed powers over nature, such as stilling rushing waters and binding the moon and stars.

she has the ability to turn cruel and harmful towards them. In crafting a plan to kill her own brother, Medea casts herself outside the role of the innocent maiden she began as and instead becomes the cruel sorceress, and her *μητις* transforms with her. She can and will help the Argonauts, but now she makes it clear that she also has the capacity to harm them, should they truly betray her. In this way, Medea is also similar to Athena. Together, their *μητις* has the ability to help heroes accomplish their goals, but they also have the ability to harm the heroes if they are wronged. Even Medea's most terrible acts, betraying her family and killing her brother, can be seen by the Argonauts as helpful because they benefit them. But these acts are equally harmful to the objects of her *μητις*, like the bulls and Talos, as she uses her cleverness to destroy them.¹¹⁸ As book four progresses, it becomes more difficult for the Argonauts, and the audience, to see Medea's *μητις* as entirely noble.¹¹⁹ Athena's *μητις* displays a similar danger, as she uses it to help her hero Odysseus and kill the suitors. The goddess' help can be as fickle as a mortal woman's, as is clear in Athena's apparent abandonment of Odysseus during much of his wandering (*Od.* 13.318-323). Odysseus fears losing his divine helper, her *μητις*, and her ability to conquer his problems. The Argonauts face the same issue. In her plan to kill the suitors, Athena displays a similar brutality to Medea's plan to kill her brother, as both prove that they will employ their *μητις* in any way necessary to help their hero.

Another aspect of Medea and Athena's shared *μητις* is their ability to deceive. Medea displays this ability clearly throughout books three and four; many of her actions are designed to deceive someone in some way. After the murder of Apsyrtos, Medea and the Argonauts are driven to Circe so that she may purify them of the murder. Circe performs this task as she is required by Zeus, and after this Medea begins to tell her aunt the story of the Argonauts.

¹¹⁸ Holmberg 1998, 147.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 152.

Apollonius does not present her account in direct speech, as one might expect in the Homeric epics; instead, Medea details the expedition of the Argonauts in Colchian:

ἡ δ' ἄρα τῇ τὰ ἕκαστα διειρομένη κατελεξεν,
Κολχίδα γῆρυν ἰεῖσα, βαρύφρονος Αἰήταο
κούρη μειλιχίως, ἡμὲν στόλον ἡδὲ κελεύθους
ἡρώων, ὅσα τ' ἀμφὶ θοοῖς ἐμόγησαν ἀέθλοις...

“The daughter of grave-minded Aietes, speaking the Colchian language, recounted sweetly each thing to her asking, both the expedition and the paths of the heroes, as much as they toiled in sharp contests...” (4.730-733)

Apollonius gives a small summary of Medea’s speech in indirect statement, but he removes Jason and the audience from the majority of her words. By excluding Jason from the narrative of his own exploits, Medea can tell the story in any way she pleases. She can use this as an opportunity to share her own *kleos*, rather than tell the true deeds of the Argonauts. Additionally, since she does not welcome Jason’s input on the story, Medea can craft a new image of herself to Circe, one who did not betray her family for the sake of a man. In fact, Medea changes her reason for helping Jason entirely and blames her sister Chalkiope’s influence: ὥς τε κασιγνήτης πολυκηδέος ἦλιντε βουλαῖς (“and how she sinned because of the will of her grievous sister,” 4.734). Here, Apollonius adds to the mystery of why exactly Medea chose to help Jason and abandon Colchis. In this passage, the poet uses a repeated ὥς τε that imitates the way in which the Homer poet gives indirect speeches, such as at *Od.* 23.312, as Odysseus tells Penelope his journey.¹²⁰ In the *Odyssey*, the audience is also left to question if Odysseus tells a true account of his wanderings because the poet reports Odysseus’ words indirectly. Medea’s story has the same effect. The audience, and Jason, is left to wonder what Medea might be saying in her account to Circe. In this way, Medea shows herself to be like Athena in μῆτις by her willingness to alter a story so that it will benefit herself and her hero.

¹²⁰ Hunter 2015, 187, 734-5n.

Later in book four, Medea proves her ability to trick again, as she begs Arete to pity her and not give her back to the Colchians. In her pleading, Medea says ὥς ἐμοὶ ἐκ πυκινὰ ἔπεσον φρένες, οὐ μὲν ἔκητι/μαργουσύνῃς (“Thus my shrewd mind fell from me, not for the sake of lust,” 4.1018-1019). As before with Circe, Medea changes her story to fit her audience and what they might find appealing.¹²¹ This ability and willingness to change a narrative to fit the expectations of the audience is something also seen many times in Athena, such as when she manipulates Odysseus’ environment in book thirteen until she believes that he is ready to see Ithaca again. Also in this book, Odysseus accuses Athena of abandoning him to his wanderings. Athena’s defense of herself is interesting; she promises Odysseus that she would not abandon him while he is unhappy and states that Poseidon’s wrath against the hero is her reason for not involving herself (*Od.* 13.330-343). Athena’s truthfulness cannot be known, but her speech here shows her willingness to change a story for her own benefit. Athena does not want Odysseus’ anger or resentment, so she ensures that her defense does not allow for it. When Medea tells Arete her reasons for leaving, she offers an alternate explanation of her actions to the one that she offered Circe. Here, Apollonius examines not only Medea’s ability to understand changing rhetorical needs but also her frailty of personal knowledge.¹²² This is how Medea differs from Athena in her deception; it is not only trickery for the sake of it but also the effect of Medea’s emotions. At this point in the epic, Medea is in such a state of upheaval that she cannot recognize why she is acting in the way that she is. At one moment she blames love for her actions, then her sister, then ruin. In her final words to Arete, Medea bids that the gods bless Arete with children, reminding the audience of Nausicaa’s future role. The reference to Nausicaa also reminds the audience that

¹²¹ Hunter 2015, 223, 1019n.

¹²² Hunter 1993, 67; Gross 1976 notes Nausicaa’s rhetorical adeptness in the ways that she carefully imitates the structure of Odysseus’ speech. Thus, Medea may also be sharing in Nausicaa’s rhetorical abilities here.

Medea earlier cast herself into the role of this young princess¹²³ and now does so again as she paints herself as innocent of any wrongdoing. Medea's comparison to Nausicaa in this scene when she mostly seems to reflect Athena and Circe only emphasizes the confusion of her actions and her character.

Throughout her scenes of the *Argonautica*, Medea displays a *μητις* remarkably similar to Athena's in the *Odyssey*. She employs it in two main ways, the creation of successful plans and a capacity for deception. As Athena does, Medea uses her *μητις* primarily to help her hero. This cleverness, however, also has a more dangerous side. Although Medea never truly turns her *μητις* against Jason and the Argonauts, the potential for harm and hindering them from their goal always lurks. Medea, like the women who help Odysseus, holds a great potential for holding the hero back from his goals. Her use of *pharmakon* enhances her possible detrimental effects. This danger presented by Medea's *μητις* ultimately also connects her closely to Athena. The *μητις* of both women holds the ability to help their heroes immensely; Medea and Athena both craft the plans that lead to the success of their hero's quest. Thus, by invoking Athena in Medea's character, Apollonius enhances Medea's role as a helper figure to Jason.

MEDEA AS WIFE

Throughout her appearances in book three of the *Argonautica*, Medea faces a constant choice: to act as a Penelope-figure and stay loyal to her house or to act as a Helen and betray her family for love.¹²⁴ Although she makes this choice quickly based on her actions, Apollonius emphasizes Medea's potential for both roles with the mental turmoil that she faces through much of the third book. As she decides whether to help Jason obtain the Fleece, Medea faces a great amount of internal conflict, culminating in Hera's intervention as she ponders suicide. Although

¹²³ Ibid. 70.

¹²⁴ Hunter 2015, 132, 361-2n.

these moments of turmoil go beyond any interior monologue included in the *Odyssey*,¹²⁵ Medea's conflict over her decision mirrors the internal struggle that Penelope faces throughout the *Odyssey*. Penelope's conflict in the epic stems from the instability of her house and the absence of her husband; as the suitors continue to push her to make a decision, Penelope faces a great deal of turmoil about what she must do. In the end, she remains faithful to her husband and house for as long as she can, and Odysseus' timely arrival and Athena's plan prevent her from going any further. Medea's connections to Penelope occur within this mental turmoil. Ultimately, despite their similarities, the paths of the two women diverge, as Penelope remains loyal and Medea forsakes her house.

The first description of Medea's mental distress occurs after the Argonauts have resolved to persuade her to help them. She first has destructive dreams (ὄλοοι ὄνειροι, 3.618), that hinder her sleep. Medea dreams that Jason came to Colchis for her and that she is the one who conquers the bulls and gains the Fleece. Fear of her angry parents awakens her. With this dream, Apollonius displays Medea's desire for love and *kleos*, two aspects of her character which drive many of her actions in the *Argonautica*. Her dream is unusual within epic because it stands outside the Odyssean models for dreams. There, dream figures give their audience information like predications and warnings; the dreamer's emotional state is not significant for the dream itself.¹²⁶ Medea's dream, in contrast, seems to stem from her emotional state, and she wakes more confused and unsure than she was when she slept. At one moment, she tries to banish her love for Jason, and at another she wants to see if her sister will beg her for help:

μνάσθω ἐὼν κατὰ δῆμον Ἀχαιίδα τηλόθι κούρην
 ἄμμι δὲ παρθενίη τε μέλοι καὶ δῶμα τοκήων.
 ἔμπα γε μὴν θεμένη κύνεον κέαρ, οὐκέτ' ἄνευθεν

¹²⁵ Fusillo 2008 points out that Homeric poems do use monologues to describe the inner life of characters, but those of the *Odyssey* often lack true decision making.

¹²⁶ Reddoch 2010, 54.

αὐτοκασιγνήτης πειρήσομαι, εἴ κέ μ' ἄέθλω
χραιομεῖν ἀντιάσῃσιν, ἐπὶ σφετέροις ἀχέουσα
παισί· τό κέν μοι λυγρὸν ἐνὶ κραδίῃ σβέσαι ἄλγος.

“Let him woo some Achaean girl far off around his own home and would that my maidenhood and the house of my parents be a care for me. In any case, putting aside my shameless heart, no longer apart I will try my sister, if she would entreat me to defend her sons in the contest, since she is grieving them; this thing may quench the mournful pain in my heart.” (3.639-44)

Apollonius narrates the beginning of Medea’s turmoil in her own voice. Medea’s body and mind even conflict with each other as she attempts to leave her room:

...μετὰ δ' ἐτράπετ' αὖτις ὀπίσσω
στρεφθεῖσ'· ἐκ δὲ πάλιν κίεν ἔνδοθεν, ἅψ τ' ἀλέεινεν
εἴσω· τηῦσιν δὲ πόδες φέρον ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα·
ἦτοι ὅτ' ἰθύσειεν, ἔρυκέ μιν ἔνδοθεν αἰδώς·
αἰδοῖ δ' ἐργομένην θρασὺς ἥμερος ὀτρύνεσκεν.
τρίς μὲν ἐπειρήθη, τρίς δ' ἔσχετο, τέτρατον αὖτις
λέκτροισιν πρηνῆς ἐνικάπεσεν εἰλιχθεῖσα.

“Having been turned about, she turned herself back around again; she went back out from the house, and she shrunk back inside; her idle feet carried her this way and that; now surely when she was eager, shame restrained her inside; bold desire stirred her when she was barred by shame. Three times it was attempted, and three times she was held back, [and] the fourth time she, having been turned around again, fell face down onto the bed.” (3.649-55)

Thus, Medea’s distress manifests itself both mentally and physically.

No true model exists for Medea’s feelings in the *Odyssey*; Apollonius creates this psychological description without much help from his Homeric predecessor. It is widely held that Nausicaa’s dream in book 6 of the *Odyssey* has some role as a model for Medea’s dream,¹²⁷ but this model only covers half of the dream. Nausicaa’s dream serves as a narrative model for Medea’s because both dreams prompt the maiden to meet her hero.¹²⁸ However, Nausicaa’s dream has no comparison to the emotional distress that Medea faces. Instead, Penelope’s distress in book 19 of the *Odyssey* presents a better model for Medea’s feelings. Thematically, the beginnings of these speeches are similar; Medea falls asleep in order to find rest from her grief

¹²⁷ Hunter 1989, 164, 616-32n.

¹²⁸ Reddoch 2010, 54.

but is quickly assaulted by unpleasant dreams (3.618), and Penelope also speaks of sleep as a way to assuage one's mourning, although it does not work for her (*Od.* 19.510-516). In both passages, the author uses ἀδινός to describe various aspects of the women. For Penelope, her heart is ἀδινός, translated well here as “beating” or even “throbbing,” as she lies in her bed and mourns her husband (*Od.* 19.516). Apollonius uses the same word twice in reference to Medea: once when describing the kind of sleep that she is about to have (3.616) and again when Medea wakes to describe her voice before she gives her speech (3.635). This serves to connect Medea's dream and the feelings that come after it to Penelope's own turmoil without her husband. The use of this word is significant because within the Homeric epics this is the only passage that uses ἀδινός in a context similar to Apollonius' passage. More often, ἀδινός describes weeping or wailing.¹²⁹ As he often does with Homeric vocabulary, Apollonius chooses to employ one specific usage of a Homeric word in order to call back to the Homeric passage. In this passage, rather than describe Medea's heart as she tries to sleep, as the Homeric poet does Penelope, he uses the word to refer to her sleep more generally. This usage can be seen as similar to the Hellenistic practice of employing Homeric *hapaxes*.¹³⁰ Apollonius takes this connection between the two women further. Both are tormented by their situations; Medea is tormented by her “destructive dreams” (ὀλοοὶ ὄνειροι, 3.618) and Penelope by her own “sufferings” (μελεδῶνες, *Od.* 19.517). Here, Apollonius uses the same word Homer does, ἐρέθω, to ensure that his audience sees the connection between the two scenes. Additionally, at *Od.* 19.524, Penelope claims that θυμὸς ὀρώρεται ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα... (“[her] mind is stirred this way and that”), and Apollonius provides the same ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα when later describing how Medea paces in her

¹²⁹ Reddoch 2010, 56, on Apollonius' use of ἀδινός.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

shame as she tries to leave her room after her dream (3.652). In this way, Apollonius links both women's indecision.

Medea's turmoil continues after her dream, into the night. After her conversation with her sister, Medea is unable to sleep due to her worry for Jason. Her anxiety overwhelms her body physically, similar to her earlier love:

δάκρυ δ' ἀπ' ὀφθαλμῶν ἐλέφ' ῥέεν· ἔνδοθι δ' αἰεὶ
τεῖρ' ὀδύνη σμύχουσα διὰ χροός, ἀμφί τ' ἀραιὰς
ἵνας καὶ κεφαλῆς ὑπὸ νείατον ἰνίον ἄχρις,
ἔνθ' ἀλεγεινότατον δύνει ἄχος, ὅππότε' ἀνίας
ἀκάματοι πραπίδεςσιν ἐνισκίμψωσιν Ἔρωτες.

“A tear flowed from her eye from pity; within her bodily pain always oppressed her, burning through her skin, around her thin tendons and head down under the innermost nape of her neck, there the most terrible pain sunk, whenever the unresting Loves let grief sink into her heart.” (3.761-65)

Medea's physical suffering goes beyond the emotions of Penelope; her symptoms more closely parallel the emotions of love in the lyric poets, as in Sappho fr. 31. She then faces another bout of indecision over her actions. This time, though, Medea debates between letting Jason die, helping him and dying herself, or simply dying. She imagines the words of her detractors, shaming her for choosing a man over her family:

ἥτις κηδομένη τόσον ἀνέρος ἀλλοδαποῖο
κάτθανεν, ἥτις δῶμα καὶ οὖς ἥσχυνε τοκῆας,
μαργοσύνη εἴξασα. τί δ' οὐκ ἐμὸν ἔσσεται αἴσχος;

“She, caring for a foreign man in such a way, died, she shamed her home and her parents, having given herself away in lust. What shame will not be mine?” (3.795-97)

Penelope faces no such derision for entertaining the suitors, real or imagined, but Nausicaa imagines this same scene of her people shaming her if she walks to the palace with Odysseus. Because of her shame, Medea decides that she must die without helping Jason, and she retrieves her drugs for the task. As she sits with the drugs in her lap, Medea mourns: ἐνθεμένη δ' ἐπὶ γούνατ' ὀδύρετο. δεῦε δὲ κόλπους/ἄλληκτον δακρύοισι, τὰ δ' ἔρρεεν ἀσταγὲς αὐτῶς... (“Having

placed [it] on her knees, she cried. She wet her lap unceasingly with tears, which flowed, gushing, in this manner,” 3.804-5). In this way, Apollonius mirrors the state of Penelope at *Od.* 21.55-56, as she cries over her husband’s bow: ἐξομένη δὲ κατ’ αὔθι, φίλοις ἐπὶ γούνασι θεῖσα,/κλαῖε μάλα λιγέως, ἐκ δ’ ἤρεε τόξον ἄνακτος (“Sitting down there, having placed it on her dear knees, she cried very shrilly, and she took the bow of the lord.” *Od.* 21.55-56). Thus, Medea is once again pictured as mourning Penelope. Thematically, Medea’s indecision here recalls the turmoil that Penelope faces concerning the suitors. More specifically, she mirrors the indecision, and the quick, difficult to understand decision to set up a contest, surrounding Penelope’s dream of the geese in book 19. Prior to asking Odysseus about her dream, Penelope describes how the gods destroyed her beauty by her husband’s absence (*Od.* 19.124-129). By detailing her dream, Penelope displays her indecision concerning her suitors; although at other points in the epic she seems not to appreciate their presence, in her dream Penelope enjoys watching the geese, and she is sad when they are killed. After Odysseus interprets this dream, saying that it means that her husband will soon return home, Penelope abruptly decides to institute the contest of the bow, rather than continue to wait for her husband to return. This scene is a clear example of the indecision that follows Penelope throughout the *Odyssey*. She is unsure that Odysseus will ever arrive home, and so she moves to secure her own future with the contest of the bow, just as Medea acts by helping Jason. Although Penelope’s marriage to Odysseus presents a small contrast, both women face a choice. Penelope must choose between staying faithful to Odysseus or marrying one of her suitors, and Medea must choose between her family and Jason.¹³¹ In the end, Odysseus’ arrival and his victory in the contest ensure that Penelope stays faithful to him. Medea, however, chooses the other path and leaves her home for Jason.

¹³¹ Although, because of divine intervention, it could be argued that Medea does not have much of a choice; the gods have decided that she must choose Jason.

After Medea gives Jason the *pharmakon* and her instructions for using it, Jason leaves happy, but she is once again in turmoil. At the beginning of book four, Hera strikes fear into Medea's heart and causes her to fear the consequences of her actions once more. Apollonius compares Medea in her fear to a frightened deer: τρέσσει δ', ἥν τε τις κούφη κεμάς, ἣν τε βαθείης/τάρφεσιν ἐν ξυλόχοιο κυνῶν ἐφόβησεν ὁμοκλή ("She fled, like some quick fawn, which the barking of dogs frightened in the thicket of a deep forest" 4.12-13). This simile seems to suggest the opposite of 3.883-884, in which the Colchians cower from Medea as beasts cower from Artemis; now, Medea is the one fleeing in fear. Here, Apollonius uses a deer to represent Medea's vulnerability, a fairly common motif in Greek literature.¹³² Medea's panicked thoughts recall her long night of torment in book 3, but here, her rejection of suicide belongs to Hera's intervention alone.¹³³ She has no happy thoughts that encourage her; divine intervention pushes Medea to flee to the Argonauts. As she flees, Medea bids farewell to her former life by cutting a lock of her hair and leaving it on her bed, evoking the actions of tragic heroines before their suicide or death and indicating that this departure of Medea's is a kind of death.¹³⁴ This act reaffirms her connections to tragic figures, such as Orestes and Euripides' Medea. As she flees her home, Apollonius contrasts the earlier image of Medea as she rode to the stream. When she first left to meet Jason, she was confident and powerful, like Artemis riding her chariot. Now as she flees in the cover of darkness, Medea hides her face as she runs through the streets:

γυμνοῖσιν δὲ πόδεσσιν ἀνὰ στεῖνὰς θέεν οἴμους,
 λαιῇ μὲν χερὶ πέπλον ἐπ' ὀφρύσιν ἀμφὶ μέτωπα
 στεῖλαμένη καὶ καλὰ παρήια, δεξιτερῇ δὲ
 ἄκρην ὑψόθι πέζαν ἀεργάζουσα χιτῶνος.

¹³² Such as in Archilochus "Cologne Epode" (Archilochus 169A West). The image of the deer on Odysseus' pin (*Od.* 19.227-231) may also be a representation of female vulnerability.

¹³³ Hunter 2015, 86, 11-25n.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* 88, 26-33n.; this is yet another way that Apollonius moves Medea out of the realm of epic maidens and into that of tragic women.

“With bare feet she ran upon the narrow paths, in her left hand having gathered her *peplos* at her brow around her forehead and beautiful cheeks, and in her right hand lifting up the bottom of her chiton high.” (4.43-46)

Apollonius again shows the complications of Medea’s character through her fear.

Medea approaches the Argonauts and begs them to take her with them now that she has betrayed her family. She offers herself in marriage to Jason with the Fleece as her dowry and pleads with him not to forsake her since she now has no guardians:

δώσω δὲ χρύσειον ἐγὼ δέρος, εὐνήσασσα
φρουρὸν ὄφιν· τὴν δὲ θεοὺς ἐνὶ σοῖσιν εἰταίροις,
ξεῖνε, τεῶν μύθων ἐπίστορας, οὓς μοι ὑπέστης,
ποίησαι· μηδ’ ἐνθεν ἐκαστέρω ὀρμηθεῖσαν
χῆται κηδεμόνων ὀνοτὴν καὶ ἀεικέα θείης.

“I will give you the Golden Fleece, having put the snake acting as a guard to sleep; but you, stranger, surrounded by your companions, make the gods witnesses of the stories which you promised me; do not make me blameworthy and shameful because I have been driven very far off in need of guardians.” (4.87-91)

Although Medea’s act of settling her own marriage and dowry may seem unusual, it was common practice even among noble families in the Hellenistic world.¹³⁵ Penelope established her own bridal contest in the *Odyssey*. Although she has just received a hint that her husband might soon be returning, Penelope chooses to institute the contest of the bow as a bridal contest for herself, so that, if she must marry, her new husband will be as similar to Odysseus as possible. In a similar way, Medea secures her future by promising the Fleece to the Argonauts as her dowry. She helps herself by fleeing before she experiences her father’s anger and the Argonauts by fulfilling the final step of their quest. Medea acts in her own self-interest, just as Penelope does, and each of their actions ultimately benefits their hero.

Unlike the figures of Nausicaa and Circe, Medea’s connections to Penelope are less obvious and clear-cut in her character. Their connections appear in the descriptions of Medea’s

¹³⁵ Hunter 2015, 95, 87-91n.

mental turmoil and her conflict over if and how she must help Jason in books three and four. Medea faces great amounts of mourning and indecision, and these are the same feelings that plague Penelope's character throughout the entire *Odyssey*. This is the indecision that drives Penelope ultimately to establish the contest of the bow. Audience members may wonder about why she makes this choice, as it seems that Penelope and Odysseus will finally be reunited; why would she not hold out just a little longer? Medea and Penelope experience the same uncertainty, and even they are not always certain on the motivations behind their actions. Penelope first says that she has decided to institute a contest (*Od.* 19.572-581); then, the poet pictures Athena as giving her the idea (*Od.* 21.1-4). Likewise, Medea gives multiple explanations for why she helped Jason and betrayed her family. Medea and Penelope suffer mentally and emotionally in their epics in very similar ways, as they are plagued by turmoil and confusion. And together, as soon as these women secure their futures, both disappear from the narrative almost entirely. Penelope does not appear after her reunion with Odysseus. After her marriage with Jason, Medea very nearly disappears from the fourth book; she appears in fear while they are in Libya, and she closes out the *Argonautica* with the defeat of Talos.¹³⁶ Additionally, Penelope serves as Odysseus' ultimate helper in the *Odyssey*. Every one of her actions works to preserve Odysseus' house, and they also work to benefit herself. Medea functions similarly as Jason's helper. Without her intervention and help, the Argonauts' quest would be impossible. Only Medea's magical abilities can defeat the bulls and obtain the Fleece. One of the final scenes of the epic is Medea's defeat of Talos, which officially secures the Argonauts' *nostos*. Just as all of Odysseus' helpers flow into one main helper, Penelope, the other helpers of Jason culminate into Medea and her invaluable help. A clear difference exists in the endings of their stories, however. The

¹³⁶ Beye 1982, 159.

Odyssey ends as Odysseus reclaims his house and reestablishes his relationship with his wife; Athena assures that the suitors are dead, their families mollified, and Odysseus will continue to rule. The *Argonautica* ends similarly, as the heroes return to their home shores. But the audience is aware that this is not the end of Jason and Medea's story. The events of Euripides' *Medea* hang over the end of the *Argonautica*, leading to an unsettling ending. Medea may help Jason here and secure the *nostos* of all the Argonauts, but she will soon ruin this peace.

CONCLUSION: MEDEA AS ULTIMATE HELPER

Apollonius' Medea is a highly complex character whose personality he highlights with numerous different literary models. She is not just a collection of traits from the Odyssean women; Medea also contains echoes of a multitude of other epic and tragic women. But as Apollonius writes an epic, he demands that we read his work up against the Homeric epics, and thus connections between Medea and Odysseus' female helpers can clearly be found. Medea is similar to the young maiden Nausicaa in age and social standing, and Apollonius uses similes and related scenes to connect the two even further. Medea's role as a sorceress associates her with primarily the *Odyssey*'s Circe, Calypso, and Helen, the witches of the *Odyssey*, and the method in which she gives instructions to Jason and her epithets secure Circe as her model. She displays her similarity to Athena through her μητις and willingness to deceive those around her to accomplish her goals. Finally, Medea's mental turmoil completes her comparison to Penelope, and the two women serve similar roles in how they help their hero. Apollonius creates his Medea as a mixture of various aspects of these women, but her character is also distinct from those of Odysseus' helper-women. Apollonius takes aspects and actions of Odysseus' women and expands upon them greatly, giving each *Odyssey*-coded action Medea takes a double meaning or undertone. This creates a Medea that is rich and complex and difficult to pin down. Because

Medea's character contains aspects of all of these helper women, she has the ultimate power to help Jason and the Argonauts. She is the only one who can conquer the bulls and obtain the Fleece; the Argonauts themselves simply do not have the power. Medea also holds the same power to destroy that these other women do. Her *pharmaka*, both noble and destructive, demonstrate both of these same abilities in Medea.¹³⁷ The danger she poses to Jason is extreme, and Apollonius' foreshadowing of the events of Euripides' *Medea* only add to her threatening nature. Her danger is unavoidable for Jason; not only does Medea mask this part of her nature during her first interventions, but Hera also decides that Medea must help Jason so that the goddess may seek revenge against Pelias. But Medea's unique character and outstanding abilities also provide her with an ability to take control of the narrative in a way that no Odyssean woman does. She rules most of the fourth book, as she completes the quest and guides the Argonauts to begin their *nostos*. Jason's small role in this book makes it easier for Medea to take the reins, and her conquest of Talos as the final act of aid in the epic secures the book as hers. Medea contains aspects of the Odyssean women, but Apollonius amplifies them until she is able to become Jason's equal in the story. The poet incorporates the roots of Odysseus' helper-women into his Medea and expands upon them until he has created a heroine who fits within his new Alexandrian epic. This expansion calls into question Medea's true role as a helper in the poem. In some ways, she seems to be a helper on the level of the women of the *Odyssey*, but Medea also seems to do a great deal of the work herself. In this way, Medea's role as a helper is as difficult to pin down as her character.

¹³⁷ Holmberg 1998, 147.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION: FINAL THOUGHTS ON MEDEA

So far removed from the original context of the *Argonautica*, it is nearly impossible to gauge what Apollonius' poetic goal for writing the epic may have been. Instead, we must turn toward Alexandrian literature as a whole, to the things they favored, in order to see the differences between the *Argonautica* and *Odyssey* and what these differences might mean. Apollonius created his *Argonautica* within the academic environment of the famed Library of Alexandria, which promoted the study of older Greek literature and other notable scholarly pursuits. This epic, as noted before, is a testament to his knowledge of not only the Homeric epics but also countless other works of literature. In understanding Alexandrian aesthetics, though, one must turn to the works of Callimachus, rather than Apollonius. Callimachus' critical theories set the standard for the poetry of the Hellenistic Age.¹³⁸ He seems to have favored short poems,¹³⁹ and Beye 1993 notes that economy, refinement, and novelty are the operative terms of the Callimachean aesthetic.¹⁴⁰ These ideas, then, set the tone for much of the Alexandrian poetry. In many of these Callimachean poetic ideals, Apollonius seems to be the exception; he writes a long epic, rather than short poems or epigrams, and he focuses on the heroic past rather than the mundane, as other Alexandrian poets tend to do. He does, however, exemplify one marker of Callimachean aesthetic: novelty. The poet breaks from many epic traditions, including the use of repetition, most often seen in epithets, and type-scenes, like feasts,¹⁴¹ and the *Argonautica* does

¹³⁸ Beye 1993, 190.

¹³⁹ Based on *Aetia* 1.1, line 24.

¹⁴⁰ Beye 1993, 191.

¹⁴¹ For greater discussion on Apollonius' use of Homeric type-scenes, see Knight 1995.

not tell a story in the same way that the *Odyssey* does; where the Homeric poet has created a true narrative story, scholars like Beye have commented on the disjointed nature of the *Argonautica*, which reads more than a collection of scenes than any continuous narrative. Indeed, Apollonius' novelty can be seen in numerous places throughout the *Argonautica*, but the most relevant to this thesis is the creation of Medea.

The *Argonautica* is a scholarly work, designed, among other things, to display its author's familiarity with numerous Greek works coming before it. Through its creation, Apollonius presents a way of reading the Homeric epics through scholarly pursuit and preoccupation with literary forms and stylistic authenticity.¹⁴² Alexandrian poets, in an attempt to recreate a literary past, closely imitated the works that came before them, and this imitation showed their scholarly knowledge of the literature with which they worked. Their works are not true imitations, however; Alexandrian poets like Apollonius create similarities and demand their readers to notice the differences between their models and their creations.¹⁴³ This is how Apollonius treats his Medea.

While Medea has many notable literary models,¹⁴⁴ the women of the *Odyssey* contribute a great deal to her character. She is not, however, just a collection of Homeric scenes and similarities. Instead, Apollonius often references her Homeric predecessors with specific similarities and twists them in some way. Medea is like the female helpers who work in the *Odyssey*, but she also goes far beyond them in her actions and emotions. Apollonius fashions his Medea as a strong woman and character within the *Argonautica*. Her actions to help Jason take control of the story in a way that no woman of the *Odyssey* really does. There, the women help

¹⁴² Beye 1993, 194.

¹⁴³ Ibid. 195.

¹⁴⁴ Outside of the women of the *Odyssey*, Ariadne, Aeschylus' Clytemnestra, and Euripides' Medea are some of the most prominent, as noted by Beye 1993, 204.

Odysseus, but ultimately it is the hero who accomplishes his deeds, even if he could not do it without their help. Indeed, Athena creates the plot of the second half of the epic with her actions, and Penelope plays a strong part in maintaining the domestic tasks in her husband's absence, but Odysseus is still the main character of the poem. Jason does not hold the same strength as a hero as Odysseus does; he cannot accomplish much, if anything at all, without Medea's help. Thus, Apollonius gives Medea such narrative prominence that she threatens to overtake Jason as the hero of the final two books. A combination of her monologues and actions solidify this place for Medea. Through her sorcery and creation of plans, Medea displays her physical power to succeed, which has the potential to rival that of the Argonauts themselves. But her monologues in book three play a particular role in increasing her importance in the narrative. By giving her an internal narrative that shows the complex reasoning of her actions, Apollonius shows Medea to be more decisive in her actions than Jason is, and this helps make her a major figure in the epic.¹⁴⁵ Medea's monologues also set her apart from the women of the *Odyssey*. The Homeric poet does not describe the interior thoughts of Homeric heroes; they speak what they are thinking, and they can hide nothing from the narrator and audience. Thus, knowing Medea's thoughts and emotions in the rather intimate way provided by internal monologues makes her powerful in a way that Odyssean women are not. Her actions make her impressive, and her sorcery gives her a reputation. But knowing her mind and emotions gives her a power beyond her magic, which has the potential to make her intriguing to audience members and make her more important than the central heroic figure of the *Argonautica*.

The greatest display of Medea's power occurs in the fourth book of the *Argonautica*. Her decisions and actions are crucial to the success of the Argonauts, and at this point, Apollonius

¹⁴⁵ Beye 1993, 205.

seems to be placing a greater value on Medea's actions than Jason's, as evidenced in her prominence throughout the book. In this way, Medea develops a kind of centrality to the narrative that the Odyssean women do not have. And it is in this difference, then, that we can begin to examine Medea as an example of Apollonius' poetic intentions for his *Argonautica*. On the surface, Medea's character contains numerous references to the women of the *Odyssey*; thus, Apollonius may have wanted his work to be in dialogue with the Homeric epic, or at least he aimed to show his familiarity with older epic. The poet clearly did not try to recreate the *Odyssey*, but rather he seems to want to create a work meant for Alexandria, which straddled the border between performed and written poetry.¹⁴⁶ The city lacked a mythic past, as Athens had, and the poets of Alexandria were tasked in creating it.¹⁴⁷ These poets were learned individuals, and they set out to create learned works, which draw on the authors who came before them. Apollonius, for his exceptions in Alexandrian style, acts similarly. Through Medea, he shows that he employs the models provided for female helpers in the *Odyssey* and changes them, until he has a powerful female figure who in many ways outshines her models. Thus, Medea herself represents a shift in aesthetic from the old Homeric forms to a new style, which takes into account an audience who might be more literate than previous audiences. She is no longer like the flat, "predictable"¹⁴⁸ Homeric woman whose every action works to increase the *kleos* of her hero, but she takes control of the narrative herself and proves to have some of the qualities of the protagonist that Jason lacks.

¹⁴⁶ Stephens 2018, 3 emphasizes the unique moment in history of the creation of poetry at Alexandria, and how this poetry "self-consciously situated itself as both performed and read."

¹⁴⁷ Stephens 2008 notes that Apollonius takes up this particular task in his story of the clod in book 4, which she suggests helps make clear a Greek place in North Africa.

¹⁴⁸ Quoting Beye 1993, 203.

The exact statement which Apollonius seeks to make about his new kind of epic is difficult to discern. Through examining Medea's new role as a helper in comparison to the women of the *Odyssey*, one can see that the poet pivots from the older Homeric epic models to a newer style that allows a female character to be the hero. Holmberg 1998 also suggests that Medea is the character most associated with the *Argonautica*'s difference from traditional epic. Along with this, Holmberg describes Medea's destruction of Talos as a potential metaphor for Apollonius' betrayal of traditional epic values.¹⁴⁹ The poet notes that Talos is the last of the Hesiodic bronze age of men (4.1641-1644), and he is the final obstacle they must conquer before they return to Greece. Medea does this entirely on her own. I find myself persuaded by this argument to a degree in my search to understand the choices Apollonius makes to distinguish himself from earlier epic in the latter two books of the *Argonautica*, but it is difficult to truly determine the poet's goals. In any case, Apollonius uses his Medea to make a firm statement about the new Alexandrian epic, even if it is difficult to determine what that statement is.

¹⁴⁹ Holmberg 1998, 155; this argument is based on an earlier one by DeForest, who suggests that this scene represents Apollonius' destruction of epic entirely.

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