Herakles' Emotions in Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*

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In Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*,[1] Herakles belongs to the group of the Argonauts in the beginning, but he leaves the narrative at the end of Book 1 when he is forgotten by his peers while looking for his lover Hylas, who has been abducted by a nymph. On a metadiegetic level, however, Herakles' memory is deliberately kept alive throughout the rest of the narrative by way of various allusions, recollections, and encounters with people who have met him previously. Research on the role of Herakles in the *Argonautica* has traditionally focused on the relation between Herakles and Jason, arguing, essentially, that Herakles acts as a mentor for Jason, but that he simultaneously represents an outdated role model and that he therefore needs to be withdrawn from the narrative as soon as Jason, the modern (anti-?)hero, has acquired sufficient maturity to act as a leader of the Argonauts (his notorious ἀμηχανίη ['helplessness', 'incompetence'] notwithstanding).[2] In two recent publications, I have argued that in addition to this, Herakles in the *Argonautica* should also be interpreted from a metapoetic perspective.[3] After his departure from the narrative, the account of his Twelve Labours (Dodekathlos) is inserted as a narrative palimpsest behind the principal narrative. Consequently, the narratee is encouraged to perceive a parallel *Herakleis* in the background and thus to reflect upon alternative narrative strategies. Furthermore, the primary as well as several secondary narrators present Herakles as a deeply ambiguous, contradictory, and even paradoxical character by drawing on numerous aspects that can be linked to (*inter alia*) the

[1] The textual edition of the *Argonautica* used in this chapter is that by Vian and Delage 1974–81. Translations are mine.

[2] See e.g. Carspecken 1952: 120; Lawall 1966; Clauss 1993: 176–211 and *passim*; Pietsch 1999: 100, nn. 3–4; Papadimitropoulous 2006: 42–43; Glei 2008 [2001]: 6–12. I provide a more detailed research overview at Bär 2018: 79–81 (summarized at Bär 2019: 118). On Jason's ἀμηχανίη, see e.g. Hunter 1988; Jackson 1992; further references at Pietsch 1999: 100, n. 3; Bär 2018: 79, n. 28.

[3] See Bär 2018: 73–99, 143–144; Bär 2019: 116–123. Further, see Heerink 2015: 22–52 on a metapoetic reading of the Hylas episode, and Philbrick 2011 on the references to Herakles in Book 2.

tragic, the comic, and the Stoic tradition of the hero.[4] This adds to Herakles' artificiality (i.e., the idea of Herakles as a *Kunstfigur*), which, in turn, feeds back into the metapoetic significance of the character.

In this chapter, I take my interpretation a step further by looking at Herakles' emotions and the narrative function they perform in the *Argonautica.*[5] Altogether, there are nineteen Herakles passages in this epic,[6] several of which reveal information about the hero's feelings by way of narratorial and/or actorial characterization. Herakles is introduced into the narrative as arriving in the nick of time, panting and sweating, carrying the Erymanthian Boar on his shoulders, and thus interrupting his Dodekathlos for the sake of the Argonautic expedition (1.122–132). This description evokes the stereotype of the athletic, but stupid strongman-hero.[7] Simultaneously, it is stated, by way of a narratorial comment, that he joined the expedition 'by his own choice, against the will of Eurystheus' (αὐτὸς δ᾽ ᾗ ἰότητι παρὲκ νόον Εὐρυσθῆος, 1.130). Thus, the passage as a whole does not only present Herakles as a comical figure, but also as a strong-willed, self-determined person. The latter comes to the fore explicitly soon thereafter when he is elected by the Argonauts as their leader, but declines the election and instead suggests Jason, who is thereupon chosen unanimously (1.343–349):

> […] But he [= Herakles], from where he was sitting,
> raised his right hand, and he spoke:
> 'No one shall allocate this honorary office to me! For I am not
> going to obey, as much as I am going to prevent anyone else from rising.
> He himself who has gathered us here shall also command the throng (ὁμάδοιο).'
> So he spoke haughtily (μέγα φρονέων); and they gave their approval as he had ordered them,
> Herakles. […]

The fact that Jason is elected solely because he is recommended by Herakles demonstrates that Herakles enjoys undisputed authority among the Argonauts – whereas Jason, ironically,

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[4] On the different types of 'Herakleses' and the paradoxes that arise from their juxtaposition, see e.g. Galinsky 1972: 1–39; Feeney 1991: 95–98; Burkert 2011 [1977]: 319–324; Stafford 2012 *passim.* For further references, see Bär 2018: 16–17, nn. 22–26.

[5] There is no comprehensive study on emotions in the *Argonautica.* On enragement, anger, and strife in Apollonius' epic, see Manakidou 1998; Mori 2008: 52–90; Harder (this volume). On μῆνις as a factor triggering the Argonautic expedition, see Dräger 2001.

[6] See the overview at Bär 2018: 73–79; Bär 2019: 116–118.

[7] Herakles the strongman-hero is closely related to the comic Herakles as we find him in Attic comedy; see Pike 1980.

does not.[8] Furthermore, Herakles' hostility is disclosed both by how he expresses himself and through the narratorial presentation of his behaviour and his emotions. For one, he condescendingly calls the Argonauts (who, after all, represent an elite selection of the best heroes of their time) a 'throng' (ὅμαδος, line 347),[9] and he rudely refers to Jason in the third person while the latter is present. For another, the narrator points out that Herakles speaks while he is sitting (which contradicts good epic practice, according to which speakers should be standing),[10] and he qualifies the hero's speech as 'haughty' (μέγα φρονέων). It can thus be noted that Herakles' grumpy attitude, together with his absolute determination, enables the election of Jason as the leader of the Argonauts and also anticipates Herakles' later departure, which is going to take place towards the end of Book 1.

Herakles' grumpiness also sets the tone for his further relation with Jason. During their stay on the isle of Lemnos (1.609–909), Jason and most of the Argonauts are feasting and having sex with the women of Lemnos – whereas Herakles remains abstentious. This has been interpreted differently, either as a sign of his homosexuality – indeed he is accompanied by his lover Hylas and eschews physical contact with women – or as an indicator of his Stoic qualities, that is, his affective self-control.[11] However, after a few days of Stoic acquiescence, Herakles eventually loses his temper and exhorts the Argonauts to set sail. On the same occasion, he insults Jason violently (1.872–878):

> 'Let's go, each one onto his place! But the one over there [= Jason], leave him
> in bed with Hypsipyle all day long, until he has
> populated Lemnos with male children and gets great glory!'
> Such he scolded the crowd (ὣς νείκεσσεν ὅμιλον); and no one dared
> to raise his eyes up to him or to address him –
> but without further ado they set about leaving the assembly,

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[8] See e.g. Beye 1982: 31: 'Heracles' perhaps coy insistence that they choose Jason is of course the perfect ironic revelation of his own authority and Jason's lack of it.' See also, quite aptly, Köhnken 2003: 21: 'Jason wird zum Führer der Argonautenexpedition von Herakles' Gnaden (nicht aufgrund eigener heroischer Vorzüge), und die Argonauten identifizieren sich nicht mehr mit ihm, sondern mit Herakles.'

[9] In archaic Greek epic, the noun ὅμαδος means 'noise', 'din', but also 'tumultuous crowd', 'throng' (see *LfgrE* s.v.). In the *Argonautica*, it is used another four times in the latter meaning (1.1051, 2.1077, 3.270, 4.198).

[10] See e.g. *Il.* 1.57–58, 1.68–69, 2.76–77, 9.52, 19.54–55.

[11] On the former interpretation, see e.g. Beye 1982: 93–96; DeForest 1994: 63–66; Heerink 2015: 23–24. On the latter interpretation, see e.g. Fränkel 1968: 115.

> rapidly moving forward. […]

Again, Herakles expresses his contempt for Jason by referring to him in the third person in the latter's presence, and the narrator reinforces that tone by alluding to Herakles' own word choice from before: by stating that Herakles 'scolded the crowd' (νείκεσσεν ὅμιλον, line 875), the narrator uses a synonym of the noun that Herakles previously used in order to disqualify the entire group of the Argonauts (ὅμαδος ['throng']; see above). An additional form of insult is achieved by way of intertextuality: Herakles' attack against Jason recalls Thersites' invective against Agamemnon at *Iliad* 2.235–242, and by ridiculing Jason's sex addiction, Herakles evokes Hector's rebuke of his brother Paris, the prototypical epic 'sissy', for being γυναιμανής ('mad for women') at *Iliad* 3.39 and 13.769.[12] Typologically, the juxtaposition of a *Hercules Stoicus* and a *Hercules furens* is striking; what is most important, though, is the fact that Herakles' sudden transition from being insentient to being passionately infuriated once again advances and determines the further course of action.

The same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for Herakles' departure from the narrative at the end of Book 1. When the Argonauts arrive at the coast of Mysia, they are welcomed hospitably by the local inhabitants; yet Herakles – 'Stoic' as he is – refuses to eat and rest because he first wants to find a tree from which he can build a new oar as a replacement for the one he has involuntarily broken on the voyage to Mysia (1.1172–1206). This decision, in turn, provokes the further course of action, which marks a turning point for the rest of the narrative. While Herakles is attending to his duty, Hylas is looking for fresh water; on this occasion, a water nymph falls in love with the boy and abducts him (1.1207–1253).[13] When Herakles is informed by Polyphemus (another Argonaut) about what has happened, he undergoes, again, a sudden change from a *Hercules Stoicus* to a *Hercules furens* as he did before in the assembly on Lemnos. He throws a tantrum and runs off in a frenzy to look for Hylas (1.1261–1264):

> Thus he [= Polyphemus] spoke; but when he [= Herakles] heard it, sweat began oozing out
> from his temples, and black blood was boiling in his entrails,
> and in his rage, he threw the fir tree to the ground and ran
> the way where his feet carried him by themselves while he was rushing forward.

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[12] On the former point, see Dräger 2019 [2002]: 451; Harder (this volume); on the latter, see Bär 2018: 82; Bär 2019: 119.

[13] The same story is treated by Theocritus in his *Idyll* 13. The question of priority between Theocritus and Apollonius is a notorious one (but not relevant here) – for a survey, see e.g. Mauerhofer 2004: 103–112; Glei 2008 [2001]: 22–23; Köhnken 2008 [2001]: 83–93.

At the same time, the other Argonauts – completely unaware of what has just happened – leave Mysia without noticing the absence of Herakles and Hylas before next dawn (1.1273–1309). An argument among the crew about whether they should return and retrieve them is settled by the sea god Glaucus who announces that the departure of Herakles was, in fact, destiny's will (1.1310–1325). The Mysian departure scene is in many ways a counterpoint to the Lemnian departure scene. The Argonauts do not wish to leave Lemnos, but they are urged to do so by Herakles, whereas they cannot wait to leave Mysia – so much so that they forget Herakles. In the first case, Herakles' sudden transition from passive silence to active aggression incites the Argonauts to abandon their own passivity (and their jog trot), whereas in the second case, the same change of behaviour leads to the irrevocable separation between the Argonauts and their best hero. In both cases, Herakles and his emotions are responsible for an effective turning point.

As mentioned, Herakles' memory is subsequently kept alive on a metadiegetic level. However, on their way home through the desert of Libya, towards the end of Book 4, the Argonauts almost meet Herakles again (4.1393–1482). Desperately looking for water, they encounter the Hesperides, whom Herakles happens to have passed by on the previous day. Aigle (one of the Hesperides) recounts how Herakles stole their apples, slew their guardian (a snake called Ladon), and destroyed their dwelling (4.1432–1440):

> Truly then, as a very great help for your strains
> he came hither, the very much dog-like, who deprived
> the guardian snake of her life, took away the golden apples of the goddesses
> and went off again – but to us [nothing but] odious pain has been left.
> For, yesterday there came such a man (τις ἀνὴρ), abominable in his outrageousness (ὀλοώτατος ὕβριν)
> and his appearance, and his eyes were sparking below his ferocious forehead –
> the merciless (νηλής)! And around his shoulders he was wearing the skin of a giant lion,
> an untanned one; and he was holding the hefty bough of an olive tree
> and a bow, with which he shot his arrows against this beast here [= Ladon] and killed it.

Astonishingly, the Hesperides appear to have been completely ignorant about who Herakles actually was, as Aigle's phrasing ('such a man', line 1436) clearly reveals. By giving a voice to a figure who has never heard of Herakles, Apollonius establishes an unorthodox, non-mainstream perspective on the story of the most famous mythical hero.[14] Furthermore, in her mixture of embitterment and condescension,[15] Aigle provides us with an implicit actorial

[14] I provide a comprehensive metapoetic analysis of this passage at Bär 2018: 89–92; Bär 2019: 121–122. Here I am solely concerned with its emotive aspect.

[15] On the bitter tone of Aigle's words, see e.g. Fränkel 1968: 601–602; Hunter 2015: 273.

characterization of Herakles. From her point of view, he is a thief and a murderer, 'abominable in his outrageousness' (line 1436) and 'merciless' (1438). This description harks back to Herakles' determination and aggression – character traits that we noted before as relevant to the progress of the narrative development of the *Argonautica.* While this determination and aggression have proven to be highly detrimental to the Hesperides, they are equally beneficial to the Argonauts because Herakles has knocked a source of fresh water out of a rock, which now saves the Argonauts from dying of thirst (1.1441–1456).

In conclusion, it can be noted that Herakles in the *Argonautica* is portrayed as strong-willed and self-determined, but at the same time also as impulsive, irascible, and even overtly aggressive. Due to his determination, he manages to enter into the diegesis, and thanks to his enragement (combined with his undisputed authority), he succeeds in bringing the action forward and in giving it a crucial turn in four instances. This happens for the first time when the leader of the Argonauts is elected, for the second time on the isle of Lemnos when the continuation of the expedition is at risk, and for the third time in Mysia when Herakles facilitates his own removal from the diegetic frame. For the fourth and last time, it happens when the paths of Herakles and the Argonauts almost cross again towards the end of Book 4. There, Herakles' determination and his violent temper have negative consequences for the Hesperides, but the same character traits save the Argonauts' lives. Herakles' emotions thus perform a clearly recognizable narrative function in the *Argonautica* by causing a turning point on four occasions. Herakles may be 'a misfit among the crew'[16] of the Argonauts because he represents an obsolete type of hero, but in contrast to Jason and his ἀμηχανίη ('helplessness', 'incompetence'), his agency is essential for the narrative progress of the *Argonautica.* In other words, Herakles' character is a determinant of his fate, and *vice versa*: his rage and his anger determine the fact that the Argonauts lose him, but paradoxically, his rage and his anger are necessary for him to be able to actually help the Argonauts later. Herakles' anger is thus both destructive and helpful.

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[16] Knight 1995: 131.

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