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Review of James J. Clauss, *The Best of the Argonauts: The Redefinition of the Epic Hero in Book One of Apollonius' Argonautica*

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James J. Clauss, *The Best of the Argonauts: The Redefinition of the Epic Hero in Book One of Apollonius' Argonautica*. Hellenistic Culture and Society 10. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. Pp. xviii + 238. \$35.00. ISBN 0-520-07925-6.

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This monograph, "a thoroughly reconceived and rewritten version" of the author's doctoral dissertation, addresses a question first posed by Homer and then taken up by Apollonius: "Who is the best among the heroes?" (xi). It argues that Apollonius worked through the problem by reworking texts from Homer on that in their various ways parse the heroic code and the epic genre and suggest what meaning each may still have had in Hellenistic culture.

The study's formal parameters -- it is a sequential analysis of the first book of the *Argonautica* -- were chosen on the grounds that "it is at the conclusion of Book 1 that Apollonius identifies Jason as the hero of the epic in contradistinction to the quintessential archaic hero, Heracles" (13). Clauss thus follows a straightforward plan, working his way through the book episode by episode and, where necessary, line by line and word by word. His method involves a determined collection of verbal parallels mainly with the texts of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which parallels then become the chief material from which an interpretation is built.

The author is fully aware of the limits within which he must work, both technical and critical. In the former category, Clauss has to reckon with the fact that the text of Apollonius' Homer was an unstable thing, available to us (as to Apollonius himself) only through philological reconstruction; and, of course, we must reconstruct the text of Apollonius as well before we can compare it to the version(s) of Homer that we suppose were available to him. In the latter category, Clauss focuses on a single theme in a single book of the poem as it develops through the medium of literary allusion. This does not add up to a holistic reading of Apollonius' epic, but Clauss does not make this claim; and by forgoing such a project, he registers a number of gains that are just as valuable, while establishing certain interpretive parameters that future critics would be wise to respect.

The eight main chapters all take the same basic shape: a brief introduction followed by a structural analysis of the episode with which the chapter is concerned, followed in turn by separate discussions of the episode's component parts. Only in Chapter 3 on the departure from Iolcus (lines 234-316) does Clauss' argument depart significantly from the order of Apollonius' narrative, the better to bring out (what Clauss convincingly argues is) the episode's chiasmic structure. Then Clauss investigates the Homeric background onto which Apollonius' allusive language projects itself. In some cases, this background is brightly illuminated by a ringing quotation that points unmistakably to a particular Homeric model. For instance, Aeson's reaction to the departure of Jason, as all commentators note, repeats that of Priam to the death of Hector (PATH\R O)LOW=| U(PO\ GH/RAI / E)NTUPA\S E)N LEXE/ESSI KALUYA/MENOS GOA/ASKEN *Arg.* 1.263-64; O(\ D' E)N ME/SSOISI GERAIO\S / E)NTUPA\S E)N

XLAI/NH| KEKALUMME/NOS II. 24.162-63; see pp. 40-42). In other cases the poet directs the reader to his model by means of the subtlest of gestures, chiefly by using unusual Homeric diction (see e.g. pp. 41, 67, 70, 118, 145, 188, to cite but a few examples). Clauss' survey of this material appears to be comprehensive, but he has not overloaded his argument with excessive detail or his notes with superfluous citations. As a result, the book would be valuable simply as a judicious guide to previous work on Apollonius' Homeric imitations.

It is inevitable when dealing with imitation of Homer, whose formulaic language necessarily produces a wealth of similarities and possible cross-references within his own text, and who was widely imitated by many poets before Apollonius joined the fray, that the language of the *Argonautica* will on occasion resemble that of more than one Homeric passage, and may even seem to indicate other sources as well. Clauss is well aware of such occurrences and is scrupulous about calling the reader's attention to them, but as a critic he regards them warily. His general procedure is not to complicate matters, which means in practice normally arguing that "Apollonius seems to have his eye chiefly on" only one passage at a time (43 n. 13; cf. 192 n. 26, et passim). This is not to say that Clauss avoids the issues of allusive contaminatio (simultaneous reference to different source-passages, e.g. 7-8, 183-88) or allusive cross-referencing (imitation of a single source-passage at different points within an allusive work, e.g. 163 n. 32, 192 n. 26 193 n. 28 205 n. 55); nor is he unaware of other Apollonian models (Hesiod, Pindar, Herodotus, tragedy, and, among contemporaries and, with due attention to the *Prioritaetsfragen*, Callimachus, Aratus, and Theocritus). But Clauss's main concern is certainly with Apollonius' individual references to Homer, which he defines quite specifically. In the first place, he regards them as textual phenomena with thematic import. In the second, they are local phenomena, by which I mean that they involve specific Homeric and Apollonian loci rather than intertextual systems that pervade the poems as a whole. And yet, in making this case Clauss shows that the totality of Homeric epic is in a sense involved.

The lexical survey of Homeric "citations" is made the basis of a convincing thematic analysis that focuses on the ways in which Apollonius measures his characters against Homeric prototypes and finds them, shall we say, heroically challenged. Their shortcomings include, but are not confined to, those that concern conventional or obviously heroic traits. Jason is no Achilles, nor is he an Odysseus or a Hector. Indeed, Apollonius measures his characters against a heroic ideal that no single Homeric character could meet, either. If Jason is no Achilles, then neither is Hector, and vice versa; but in Jason's case a lack of martial prowess is not made good by extra emphasis on family values. In his above mentioned analysis of the hero's leavetaking, for instance, Clauss compares Jason to Hector, "the quintessential KHDEMONEU/S," and finds "Jason and his family ... to be a weak, shallow, and self-absorbed group, totally unheroic in stature" (p. 56). Apollonius is relentless in exposing his hero's shortcomings, as Clauss' analysis makes crystal clear: it is almost painful to witness the spectacle in which Jason is compared to previous heroes in a succession of allusive contests that he can only lose. Nevertheless, the cumulative effect of this intertextual agon is to establish Jason as the best of the Argonauts, particularly in contrast to the poem's most obvious symbol of conventional heroism, Heracles -- in Clauss' words, "a disquieting but inevitable conclusion" (13).

If the book has a fault, it is perhaps a bit too reserved both in its methods and in its willingness to push the interpretive envelope. Emphasis on verbal imitation enables Clauss to take full advantage of the abundant efforts primarily of continental scholarship to investigate Apollonius' use of Homeric *hapax* and *dis legomena* and other linguistic rarities, work which Clauss has been able to supplement with his own

lexical research using the computerized TLG database and Ibycus search program. Such extensive evidence of an almost material character provides a very secure foundation for his thematic interpretation. At times, however, I believe Clauss is more cautious than he needs to be. At 1284-95, for instance, when Telamon quarrels with Jason over the loss of Heracles, Clauss (following the commentaries of Mooney and Ardizzoni and Campbell's collection of parallel passages) adduces a quotation from *Iliad* 18: Telamon's reaction to the loss of Heracles is thus derived from Achilles' reaction to the news of Patroclus' death. But Telamon's words are spoken in a quarrel with Jason. In a note (201 n. 50) Clauss cites Richard Hunter's excellent suggestion that the argument is modeled in part on the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon in *Iliad* 1, but declines to follow Hunter on the grounds that there are "no discernible textual points of contact" between the two passages. Clauss admits, however, "that the resolution of the Argonautic argument looks to that of the Iliadic" and exploits this awareness in his ensuing analysis. Thus to exclude the quarrel motif itself from consideration strikes me as an excessively strict application of a basically sound method. And in view of the fact that the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon, like that between Telamon and Jason, concerns the same basic question -- "Who is the best of the Achaeans/Argonauts?" i.e., the very theme of Clauss' book -- the decision to exclude the Iliadic passage from consideration goes beyond caution and begins to look like downright self-abnegation. I would have preferred to see what Clauss might have done with this juicy morsel instead of leaving it to others.

The upshot of Clauss' interpretation -- that Apollonius' ringing of the changes on Homer's conception of the epic hero ushers in a new paradigm for a new age, one that is however full of "trenchant irony" in presenting the hero not as "a totally self-sufficient man of godlike strength" but rather "a totally dependent man of limited skills" (211) -- is hardly unprecedented (nor does Clauss claim that it is or fail to acknowledge his forerunners). The *Best of the Argonauts* does, however, offer an exemplary demonstration of the intimate and necessary connection between philological research and literary interpretation. Clauss' enviable command of Apollonius text, his deep understanding of the habits of mind that enabled the Alexandrian scholar/poets to create such "curious and demanding" (1) poetry, have enabled him to produce a study that all students of the *Argonautica* will do well to consult.
