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**Gazing in the Mist: Vision and Narrative in Apollonius' *Argonautica***

In the *Argonautica*, Apollonius draws attention to the limitations of vision. One feature of this is that he diverts his characters' vision away from significant events in the story and toward signs, such as portents, wonders, and divine beings. This treatment of vision and narrative is consistent with the bleak condition of the poem's heroes, who are prevented from taking an active role in the narrative.

Often characters' attempts to see are thwarted by either obstacles or distance. When the Argonauts make their second arrival on the island of the Doliones, Jason mistakenly kills his friend Cyzicus during a battle in which neither is able to recognize the other on account of the stormy darkness surrounding them. (1.1012–1077). During their return trip home, the Argonauts think they see Heracles, but their attempts at finding him are hindered by their inability to follow his footsteps, which the dust has covered; eventually one of those searching for Heracles sees him, but the image is just at the edge of the horizon and therefore uncertain (4.1432–1484). The sense of despair surrounding the search for Heracles (as the hero sees and then loses sight of his heroic comrade in the expansive desert) echoes the earlier description of the Argonauts arrival on the desert of Syrtis, where their sense of despair is associated with their inability to see anything but sea in one direction and sand in the other.

Apollonius has a tendency to downplay the positions his characters occupy as an audience to events. There are a number of scenes of arrival and departure where the narrator passes over the opportunity to hand over focalization of the action to the local inhabitants. Similar are scenes where he deliberately places action outside the field of vision of other characters, such as when Medea turns her eyes so as not to see Jason kill Apsyrtus (4.465–79), and when Mopsus and Argus are instructed by Hera not to observe the meeting between Jason and Medea prior to the contest with the bulls (3. 927–46).

It is possible, however, for the heroes to observe portents and other marvelous signs. In one scene, a horse emerges from the sea and runs across the desert, leading the Argonauts across the desert. Here the Argonauts are clearly placed in the position of audience to the event, which is a sign from the gods intended to assist them in their return home. The fact that what is described is extended action suggests that Apollonius has the compositional tools for presenting events through the eyes of his characters. It is significant, however, that in this and other similar scenes, what is described is not so much an episode in the main action of the poem as an event that exists in the shadows of the main action, the importance of which lies in the degree to which it anticipates the main action.

Apollonius prefers to present the main action without mediation by other characters. Given the link between seeing, narrating, and authoring, it is not surprising that he presents his characters not as viewers of action, but rather as actors in events beyond their control, and often in a state of wonderment at marvelous and fantastic happenings, out of which they seek to understand what the larger narrative has in store for them.