COLLECTIVE SPEECH AND SILENCE IN THE
ARGONAUTICA OF APOLLONIUS AND VALERIUS’

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1. Introduction

The scope of Apollonius Rhodius’ influence on Valerius Flaccus’ Argonautica regarding its subject matter, character portrayal, and narrative technique has been scrutinized in many recent studies. The use of direct speech, however, a key feature of Greco-Roman epic poetry, has not been comprehensively examined yet. While Rolf Ibscher’s Gestalt der Szene und Form der Rede in den Argonautika des Apollonios Rhodios (1939) provides a detailed survey of the speech scenes and the individual direct speeches of the Hellenistic Argonautica, the most extensive discussion of the speeches in Valerius’ poem remains Ulrich Eigler’s Monologische Redeformen bei Valerius Flaccus (1988).

This paper analyzes the key similarities and differences in the use of collective and representative speeches and collective “conversational silence” in both Argonautic poems. The collective speeches will be divided into primary (the protagonists) and secondary (other collectives) speeches to facilitate the discussion and avoid unnecessary repetition. For the purposes of our study, a collective speech act is defined as “the coordinated effort of more than one individual in forming utterances in the same rule-governed form of behavior as the speech acts of individuals. The group speech act differs from the individual’s monologic utterance only (or at least characteristically) in that its meaning and intention originate in multiple persons.”

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According to this definition, Apollonius employs three primary (A. R. 2.145–153, 4.1251–1258, 4.1458–1460) and three secondary collective speeches (1.242–246, 1.251–259, 4.1318–1329), while Valerius’ *Argonautica* includes three secondary (V. Fl. 2.113–114, 3.45, 6.29), and four primary collective speeches (1.627–632, 4.327–329, 5.17–20, 5.550–552). As none of the secondary collective speeches have equivalents in the other epic, they will be discussed separately first before the corresponding primary collective speeches of both epics are analyzed together.

2. Secondary Collective Speeches in Apollonius

a. Male and Female Collectives (A. R. 1.242–246 and 1.251–259)

When the Argonauts prepare for their departure from Iolcus (A. R. 1.234–258), a crowd of common people (λαῶν / πληθύς, 1.238–239) gathers to see them off. Apollonius first gives a rational evaluation of the Argonauts’ mission from the collective male perspective (1.241, 247) before presenting the more emotional female view (1.247).

The men question Pelias’ motive for sending their best men on a highly dangerous quest. They are confident that the Argonauts can defeat Aeetes, but are pessimistic about the feasibility of the sea voyage (1.242–246). In contrast to the men, who analyze the reason for the Argonauts’ journey and their chances of survival, the women lament the emotional strain the expedition causes for Jason’s weak elderly father Aeson (1.251–259) and especially his esteemed mother Alcimede (1.251, 259). While the men accept the mission as a necessity and focus on its future implications, the women dwell on the past and retrospectively curse Phrixus (1.256–259). Their pathos sets the tone for a private farewell between Jason and his parents that takes

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5 On the structure of the scene and the speeches, see Ibscher (1939) 1–6 and Dräger (1995) 472–476.

6 Cf. Beye (1982) 81: “the agora mentality of the men” and “the thalamus mentality of the women.”

7 Cf. Hurst (1967) 51: “futur, assurance” and “passé-causalité, malheur.” These categories apply to both the collective and the individual pair (men-women, Jason-Alcimede).