

“To the Superlative”: Intertextual Parallels Between Alexander’s Last Words and the Golden Apple of *Eris*

The myth of *Eris* throwing a golden apple among the Wedding of Peleus and Thetis with the inscription “to the most beautiful woman (*kallistei*)” appears, by our surviving textual evidence, to be a post-Euripidean addition to the Wedding and Judgement of Paris stories. Likewise, Alexander the Great expresses his last words to his successors with the phrase “to the strongest/greatest man” (*kratistoi/aristoi*). This version of Alexander’s death is, according to Arrian (7.26.3), something not found in his original sources Ptolemy and Aristoboulos. The intertextual parallel between these two passages is already prevalent but is further strengthened by the remark of Justin/Trogus that Alexander’s last words were as if he tossed the golden apple of Discord among them (12.15.11).

This paper will explore the intertextual parallel between this myth and the accounts of Alexander’s last words in the histories of Alexander. Since it is nearly impossible to determine which revised story appeared first, this intertext presents a unique opportunity to determine historiography’s effect upon poetry and/or vice versa. This paper will examine the intertextual meaning when considering both possible directions of influence.

No matter the direction of influence, both of these stories became the predominant versions by around the 2nd century CE. Justin/Trogus’s notice of the parallel illustrates the ancient connection between the two wars started by these superlative phrases, namely, the Trojan War and the Successor Wars. These battles to be the superlative build upon the tradition started in the *Iliad*, which was later continued by Vergil and his epic successors (Hardie 1993).

Greeks during the Hellenistic period are changing their conceptions of what it means to be “a superlative” along with how the “love token” symbol of the apple is represented in art (e.g.,

Acontius and Cydippe). Through this examination of the textual and material representations of both “superlative” stories, we will gain a better understanding of how art (textual and visual) and history are in constant conversation, and how this intertextual dialogue influences the ancients’ comprehension of these two crucial stories.

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