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Over her live body? Marriage in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*

Introduction

As the text of the Flavian *Argonautica* breaks off, Jason and Medea are in a precarious position. A threatening Colchian fleet under the leadership of Absyrtus has met the Argonauts on the island of Peuce, and Jason's comrades are keen to abandon Medea, pointing out that their leader is exposing them to danger for the sake of a mere foreign girl (*externa pro virgine*, *Arg.* 8.386). This passage closely recalls the events of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, where the Hellenistic Argonauts – there deeming Medea 'the cause of strife' (τὸ γὰρ πέλεν ἀμφήριστον, *AR Arg.* 4.345; cf. *Arg.* 3.627) – suggest that her ultimate fate (to be returned to her father, or to continue on to Greece in the *Argo*) be subject to the arbitration of a king (*AR Arg.* 4.338-49). Both Medeas respond with a passionate speech directed at Jason alone, reminding him of the service she has done him, the promises he has made (*Arg.* 8.415-44; *AR Arg.* 4.350-90). Yet the characterization of the two is very different. The Apollonian Medea – already a terrifyingly destructive figure barely able to control her anger – rails against the perfidy of her lover and concludes with a menacing threat:

“ἐκ δέ σε πάτρης
αὐτίκ' ἐμαί σ' ἐλάσειαν Ἐρινύες: οἷα καὶ αὐτὴ
σῆ πάθον ἀτροπιή. τὰ μὲν οὐ θέμις ἀκράαντα
ἐν γαίῃ πεσέειν. μάλα γὰρ μέγαν ἤλιτες ὄρκον,
νηλεές: ἀλλ' οὐ θῆν μοι ἐπιλλίζοντες ὀπίσσω
δὴν ἔσσεσθ' εὐκῆλοι ἔκητί γε συνθεσιάων.” *Arg.* 4.385-90
'May my Furies drive you straight from your homeland, because of what I have
suffered through your heartlessness. What I say the gods will not leave
unaccomplished – it cannot fall idly to the ground – for you have broken a very
solemn oath, pitiless one! But not for much longer will you sit here happily and laugh
at me – for all your agreements!'¹

¹ All translations of Apollonius' *Argonautica* are from Hunter (1993a).

The Flavian Medea takes a rather different tack. Appealing at the outset instead on the Roman grounds of *pietas* and what is *fas*, Medea's speech does not just remind Jason of the oaths he has made, traditional to perfidious lovers: she also appeals to her status in Roman law as Jason's wife; invites him sarcastically to divorce her only in Thessaly (*sperne* = *repudia*); and even draws the distinction between the legal obligations a husband has to his wife *in manu mariti*, and the *potestas* a conqueror has over a war-slave:²

‘me quoque, **vir**, tecum Minyae, fortissima pubes,
nocte dieque movent? liceat cognoscere tandem,
si modo Peliacae non sum captiva carinae
nec dominos decepta sequor consultaque vestra
fas audire mihi. vereor,³ **fidissime coniunx**,
nil equidem, miserere tamen promissaque serva
usque ad Thessalicos saltem conubia portus
inque tua me **sperne** domo. scis te mihi certe,
non socios **iurasse** tuos. hi reddere forsan
fas habeant, tibi non eadem **permissa potestas**
teque simul mecum ipsa traham: non sola reposcor
virgo nocens atque hac pariter rate fugimus omnes.’

Arg.8.415-426

Do the heroic Minyae discuss me too by day and by night with you, my husband? Then let me know at last, if indeed I am not the captive of your Pelian ship, nor, deceived, I obey masters, and it is right for me to hear your thoughts. I **deserve fear** nothing at all, most faithful spouse: yet have some pity for me and keep your marriage-vows at least until Thessalian harbours; divorce me in your own home. You know that you at least have made a vow to me, though your comrades have not. Perhaps they could lawfully hand me back, but the same power has not been granted to you. I will drag you with me: I, a guilty girl, am not demanded back alone: on this ship we have all fled together.⁴

The text breaks off while Jason is still embarking on a stuttering reply **to these charges**— ‘Do you think I deserved something? Do you think I wanted such things to happen? (*‘mene aliquid meruisse putas, me talia velle?’* Arg.8.467) – but even as it

² Cf. On *sperne/repudia* cf. Liberman (1997-2002) 393, citing Treggiari (1998) 435-441; on Medea as slave here cf. also Arg.8.443-4, and for the *uitae necisque potestas* of masters over war-captives see Nyquist (2013) 7-8. Of course, for the marriage to be legal Medea should have the consent of her *paterfamilias* Aeetes (cf. Treggiari (1998) 170-1) and indeed in another major divagation from Apollonius, Medea is already engaged to the Albanian tyrant Styru (Arg.8.153).

³ *merear* Ehlers

⁴ Translations of Valerius are my own, adapted from Mozley (1934).

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stands, this broken interchange sharply reflects the Roman reorientation of the Greek mythological epic: this Medea may be painted as ‘foreigner’ by the Argonauts but she speaks and behaves like a Roman *virgo* conditioned by the demands of *pietas*, within a world which is recognizably Roman in its social hierarchy and power-structures.⁵ But Valerius does not just ‘Romanize’ here: he also effects a profound dislocation from the plot of Apollonius’ epic, for while Medea’s speech alludes to the equivalent one her predecessor made under threat of abandonment, in the Hellenistic epic the marriage of Jason and Medea takes place only *after* they have dealt with the threat of Absyrtus. Medea’s angry speech to Jason is followed immediately by her ‘deadly speech’ (οὐλοὸς μῦθος) in which she outlines the plot to destroy her brother (AR *Arg.*4.411-20): only a later confrontation with another set of Colchians provokes the eventual wedding.

Valerius’ decision to re-work Apollonian marriage in this way has been written off as simply another example of the ‘simplification’ of his chief *modello-esemplare*, the Hellenistic epic, while his choice to write a ‘Roman’ Medea conforms more broadly to Valerius’ energetic engagement with his chief *modello-codice*, Virgil’s *Aeneid*.⁶ Yet in this chapter I will argue that the wedding serves as a kind of microcosm for a much deeper reflection on the role of marriage in constituting Roman epic. A policy of ‘dislocating’ allusion to Apollonius’ *Argonautica*, forcing Valerius’ plot to ‘jump the rails’ of the Hellenistic source, together with another [policy-kind](#) of [deliberate](#) dislocation – Valerius’ overt ‘Romanization’ of an originary epic set

⁵ On ‘Roman’ Medea see esp. now Zissos (2012); on the ‘Roman-ness’ of the world of the *Argonautica* through kinship structures, esp. *patria potestas*, see Bernstein (2008) 30-63, (2012). Note, e.g. that Thessaly has not just a tyrant but also *populus* and *patres* (cf. *Arg.* 1.71-3 with Zissos (2008) 123-4), while Colchis also appoints senators (*Arg.*5. 464 *legit ... patres* with Wijsman (1996) 222).

⁶ On Valerius’ reliance on Apollonius for the *quid* (*modello-esemplare*) versus Virgil (*modello-codice*), for the *quale* (*modello-codice*) of his epic, above all in the creation of a traditionally ‘heroic’ Jason and a Romanized Medea, see esp. Hershkowitz (1998); [Davis \(2010\)](#); Stover (2012); [Castelletti \(2014\)](#), and [Davis \(2010\)](#).

chronologically before the events of the *Iliad* – together form a programmatic reflection on the role of marriage in epos: foundation-block of Homeric epic and a striking presence in Flavian epic, but conspicuously omitted or parodied in the previous Roman tradition.⁷ Valerius' marriage responds acutely to the crucial role of Apollonius' wedding in reflecting on marriage's role in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. But it also, while also reacts ing to a Roman tradition which has removed marriage from the picture, building itself not just on dynastic alliances never achieved within the narrative and-but also over the 'dead bodies' of other transgressive females.⁸ Valerius' epic wedding, I shall suggest, serves as a 'tipping point' into tragedy, accelerating the Apollonian epic to make the wedding at Peuce not just the origin story for the *Medea* but also, at least figuratively, its *telos*. But-In so doing, Valerius also – and much more provocatively – writes the wedding of Jason and Medea into a much as a much broader revisionary origin-story for epic itself. The result is not just a deeply disturbing wedding ceremony in *Argonautica* 8, but also a Flavian epic that now attributes empire and epos to the *survival* of the disruptive female.

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Epic and Tragedy: reading for the plot in Apollonius and Virgil

First, though, it is worth sketching the place Valerius' most important exemplary models, Apollonius' *Argonautica* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, have in an history of epic tradition which from its inception makes marriage central to plot. Apollonius' wedding takes place after a second encounter with Colchian pursuers, who catch up with Jason and Medea on the island of Corcyra after Absyrtus' murder and demand

⁷ For the important re-emphasis on marriage in Statius' *Thebaid* see Newlands in this volume: in the *Achilleid*, Bernstein (2008) 130-1; on female discord in Flavian epic Keith (2013). While marriage has a significant role in Lucan's *Bellum Civile* this chapter limits itself to mythological epic: on Silius, less work has been done but cf. Cowan (2009).

⁸ See Keith (2000), esp. 101-131.

the return of Medea to her father (AR *Arg.*4.982-1007). The Phaeacian queen Arete reveals that her husband Alcinous will permit Medea to continue to travel with the Argonauts only if she is married. If she remains a virgin, Alcinous has decreed, Medea must return to her family (AR *Arg.*4.1110-20). Therefore Jason and Medea secretly wed ~~that the same very~~ evening in the sacred cave of Macris, attended by nymphs sent by Hera and the ritual armour-clash of the other Argonauts. The wedding is not entirely happy: both Jason and Medea would have preferred to marry in Iolchos (AR *Arg.*4.1161-3), the narrator remarks, and though their souls melt with love, that love is accompanied by the fear that the next day Alcinous will judge against them (τῷ καὶ τοὺς γλυκερῆ περ ἰαινομένους φιλότιτι / δεῖμ' ἔχεν, εἰ τελέοιτο διάκρισις Ἀλκινόοιο, AR *Arg.*4.1168-9).⁹ Nevertheless, this wedding – rushed and unsatisfactory as it is – clearly has paradigmatic importance for the narrative as a whole, as the narrator connects the *telos* of the epic – the attainment of the Fleece – with the wedding itself:

ἔνθα τότ' ἐστόρεσαν λέκτρον μέγα: **τοῖο δ' ὑπερθεῖν
 χρύσειον αἰγλήεν κῶας βάλλον, ὄφρα πέλοιτο
 τιμήεις τε γάμος καὶ ἀοίδιμος.**

AR *Arg.*4.1141-3

There it was that they prepared a great couch; over it they threw the radiant golden fleece so that the wedding should be honoured and become the subject of song.

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Ἀρχόμενος σέο, Φοῖβε, παλαιγενέων κλέα φωτῶν
 μνήσομαι, οἳ Πόντοιο κατὰ στόμα καὶ διὰ πέτρας
 Κυανέας βασιλῆος ἐφημοσύνη Πελίαο
χρύσειον μετὰ κῶας ἐζύγον ἤλασαν Ἀργώ.

AR *Arg.*1.1-4

Taking my start from you, Phoebus, I shall recall the glorious deeds of men of long ago who propelled the well-benched Argo through the mouth of Pontus and between the Dark Rocks to gain the golden fleece.

In these few words Apollonius frames his own Argonautic ‘marriage’ against the Homeric tradition: the Phaeacian backdrop and the desire for *nostos* clearly cast

⁹ For more on the already very strained relationship between Medea and Jason as background to this wedding, see DeForest (1994) 128-9.

the marriage of Jason and Medea against the potential marriage of Odysseus and Nausicaa in the *Odyssey*, but also the true *telos* of Odysseus' journey, his arrival home and reunion with Penelope, celebrated when they return together to their bridal couch (*Od.* 23.292-6).¹⁰ ~~While the~~ while the fleece's quality as *αοιδίμος* ('a subject for song'), meanwhile, also recalls the *Iliad*, and Helen's meta-poetically aware conversation with Hector which describes her marriage to Paris ~~—ord,—ord~~ —ord,—ord ~~ained~~ by Zeus but pure woe to her ~~— as,—as~~ — as,—as subject of song:

ἄδερ ἐμεῖο κυνὸς κακομηχάνου ὀκρυόεσσης,
ὡς μ' ὄφελ' ἦματι τῷ ὅτε με πρῶτον τέκε μήτηρ
οἴχεσθαι προφέρουσα κακῆ ἀνέμοιο θύελλα
εἰς ὄρος ἢ εἰς κῦμα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης,
ἐνθά με κῦμ' ἀπόερσε πάρος τάδε ἔργα γενέσθαι.

[...]

ἀλλ' ἄγε νῦν εἴσελθε καὶ ἔζο τῶδ' ἐπὶ δίφρῳ
δᾶερ, ἐπεὶ σε μάλιστα πόνος φρένας ἀμφιβέβηκεν
εἶνεκ' ἐμεῖο κυνὸς καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρου ἔνεκ' ἄτης,
οἷσιν ἐπὶ Ζεὺς θῆκε κακὸν μόρον, **ὡς καὶ ὀπίσσω**
ἀνθρώποισι πελώμεθ' αἰοιδίμοι ἔσσομένοισι.

Il. 6.354-8

'O Hector, you're my brother, and me, / I'm a horrible, conniving bitch. / I wish that on that day my mother bore me / some evil wind had come, carried me away, / and swept me off, up into the mountains, / or to the waves of the tumbling, crashing sea. / Then I would've died before this happened. [...] But come in, sit on this chair, my brother, / since this trouble really weighs upon your mind— / all because I was a bitch—because of that / and Paris' folly, Zeus gives us an evil fate, / so we may be subjects for men's songs / in human generations yet to come.'¹¹

The marriage of Medea is not just the end of epic, then, an 'Odyssean' *telos*: it is also an 'Iliadic' origin, a cause for song.

In this combinatorial imitation, Apollonius offers a typically deconstructive response to the foundational role marriage plays in ~~constituting~~ constituting Homeric epos ~~itself~~, that is to say the context in which heroic masculinity and epic exemplarity can be memorialized in song. ~~Indeed, And as Simon Goldhill points out,~~ Indeed, And as Simon Goldhill points out, Apollonius invokes

¹⁰ On Apollonius' relationship with the Phaeacian episode of the *Odyssey*, see Knight (1995) 251-2; on the scholia's belief (ad *Od.* 23.296) that the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope is 'goal' (*telos*) of the epic, see Foley (2010); de Jong (2001) 561-2; on more recent dissatisfaction with this closure see Crotty (1994) 205-7.

¹¹ Tr. Johnston (2007).

these paradigms only to problematize them, for it is far from clear that this moment – a subject for song though it may be – has much to do with a larger ‘plan of Zeus’ (Διὸς βουλή, *Il.* 1.5).¹² The plans of that deity are notoriously inscrutable in the Hellenistic epic, and it is Hera who has conspicuously taken charge of the narrative from *Argonautica* 3 on.¹³ Moreover the *nostos* awaiting Jason and Medea will not constitute the culmination of a happy reunion, but rather the introduction to a tragic future. Though there is no explicit prolepsis of the future in the wedding episode itself, from this point of view Apollonius creates a new paradigm: the wedding is not just *telos* to a Fleece won by erotic guile rather than martial prowess, but also an origin-story for epic’s transformation into tragedy.¹⁴

It is perhaps no wonder, then, that Roman epic deliberately avoids the troubling associations marriage brings to the epic picture. Rather, the celebration of masculinity encoded in the heroic deeds of Roman epic – the stuff of *fama*– builds upon the connection already in Greek epic between the guilty female and war, a guilt specifically vocalized when Helen calls herself the ‘evil-devising dog’ who is ‘cause of war’ (*Il.* 6.344). Virgil, Valerius’ most influential literary precursor, makes Lavinia *casus belli* in Italy (cf. esp. *Aen.* 6.93, where the Sibyl calls Lavinia ‘the cause of such great evil’, *causa mali tanti*): in the *Aeneid* the secure *telos* of a dynastic alliance through marriage is often hinted at but always deferred beyond the scope of the narrative itself.¹⁵ At the same time the *Aeneid* creates, only to dispense with, a series

¹² [As Goldhill \(1991\) 120 points out.](#)

¹³ On the obscurity of Zeus’ purpose in Apollonius’ epic see Feeney (1991) 93-7; Dräger (2001) argues that the narrator gradually reveals that the whole quest has been motivated by the wrath of Zeus; on the importance of female divinities in the Hellenistic *Argonautica*, including Hera’s role in the wedding at Corcyra, see Feeney (1991) 57-65; Hunter (1993b) 75-100; Mori (2012).

¹⁴ Levin (1971) 24-33 charts the Hellenistic epic’s scrupulous avoidance of the future, but tragic foreshadowing through allusion to (above all) Euripides’ *Medea* is also part of Apollonius’ epic: see Goldhill (1991) 320-1; Hunter (1993b) 123.

¹⁵ On the importance of the dynastic marriage alliance, cf. esp. *Aen.* 6.763-6, 7.272 with Keith (2000) 49-50, 74-5. On the important role females play in marriage-contracts in the *Aeneid*, together with the ‘real-world’ application of their networking, see Keith (2006).

of chaos-inducing females at both the human and divine level who wreck the order that has been imposed by men, from Creusa at Troy to the mother of Euryalus in *Aeneid* 9.¹⁶ ~~Most And~~ notoriously of all, the epic's end balances human conflict with a partial 'reconciliation' ~~of between~~ Juno and Jupiter, in a scene in which the most disruptive force of the entire epic, Juno, agrees no longer to create the strife which enables the poem's continuation.¹⁷

Within this scheme, the central '*coniugium*' of Virgil's epic – the union of Dido and Aeneas – becomes the crucial testing-ground for the *Aeneid*'s adaptive response to the role of marriage in Greek *epos*. Opinions differ when it comes to labelling what happened in the cave during the storm; the narrator's overt denial that a wedding occurred is balanced against the undeniable marriage-like elements:¹⁸

prima et Tellus et pronuba Iuno
dant signum; fulsere ignes et conscius aether
conubiis summoque ulularunt uertice Nymphae.
ille dies primus leti primusque malorum
causa fuit; neque enim specie famaue mouetur
nec iam furtiuum Dido meditatur amorem:
coniugium uocat, hoc praetexit nomine culpam. *Aen.* 4. 166-72.

Primeval Earth and Juno *Pronuba* give the signal: Lightning flashed, the air bore witness, and the nymphs on the ridge's height wailed. That was the first day of death, that day was the cause of evil; for she is moved by neither appearance nor rumour, and does not now consider her love a secret thing: she calls it 'marriage', and covers up her crime with that name.

What *is* clear is that even as Virgil writes what is conspicuously a *non*-marriage for Dido and Aeneas here, ~~he is writing~~ this 'union owes a great deal to through the model of Apollonius' marriage, in a way which far exceeds 'local' details.¹⁹ Virgil has drawn from the Hellenistic epic not simply the wedding itself, but also the

¹⁶ On the narratological effects of the incursions of female divinities, esp. Juno, see Feeney (1991) 130-4; Hardie (1993); on the female as agent of disorder more generally in the *Aeneid*, see Nugent (1992); Keith (2000).

¹⁷ Feeney (1984).

¹⁸ See Gutting (2010) 272-3 on the question whether this is *coniugium* or travesty of *coniugium*, with full bibliography on the vexed topic: see esp. Moles (1984); O'Hara (2011) 38.

¹⁹ See Nelis (2001) 148-152.

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directing divine apparatus for this episode, [as-](#) Virgil's Juno intervenes to enforce her own preferred alternative 'plot' to the epic – an ending to the *Aeneid* in which Aeneas never reaches Italy at all – in a manner conspicuously reminiscent not just of Hera's behaviour in *Argonautica* 4, but also of her collusion with Aphrodite in *Argonautica* 3.²⁰ Of course, the marriage which Juno has engineered is doomed to failure, as Dido dies to save not just the epic narrative but also the Roman cultural order itself.²¹ But in her death her status converges not just with her necessary excision from the plot for the success of the epic, but also with a broader pattern of Roman identity politics in which the progress of the nation is built from the very beginning over a series of female deaths.²² The epic tradition that begins with Helen, 'guilty cause' of the Trojan war and *Iliad* alike, then, has diverged strikingly: the narrator's accusation that the day of the union of Dido and Aeneas was *primus leti* and *malorum causa* (*Aen.*4.169-70) allows for Dido's own story to conclude in tragedy, while Aeneas and the epic plot – divorced from any irregular union – can continue on their way.

Valerius' Wedding

It might seem that this [select outline/brief sketch](#) of the role of marriage in epic has taken us some distance from the Flavian *Argonautica* and the wedding celebrated at Peuce in the eighth book of the epic, especially given that at first glance Valerius overtly departs from both the Apollonian and Virgilian models here. In a nod to the Hellenistic source, the Flavian couple also wed in a cave (*Arg.*8.256), but no sooner

²⁰ As Nelis (2001) 150-2 has shown.

²¹ See Keith (2000) 114-5: Dido is 'accomplice to the narrative logic that requires her death [...] [Dido's death] confirms not only that the queen must die for her sexual and social transgressions (of Roman norms), but also that she must die so that the man may live. The death of Dido thus emerges as a requirement for Aeneas' foundation of the Roman cultural order.'

²² On the death of the female as stimulus to the progression of Rome outside of epic see esp. Joshel (1992) on Livy.

have Jason and Medea reclined on the Golden Fleece ([Arg.8.256-7](#)) than they are forced to vacate it as Absyrtus gate-crashes the wedding ([Arg.8.256-7](#); 275-6): no matter where Valerius might have intended his epic to stop, the marriage of Jason and Medea is clearly no satisfactory *telos* to the Flavian epic. Furthermore, Jason's heroic stature is not obviously diminished by this union with Medea: the hero's martial virility, together with his dazzling attractiveness, is evoked in simile by reference to two heroic exemplars, Mars and Hercules ([Arg.8.227-31](#)), the latter a pervasive figure for comparison for Jason throughout the epic, and last evoked in simile when Jason captured the Fleece, just as Hercules had lifted the Nemean lion-skin onto his shoulder ([Arg.8.125-6](#)).²³ This is a far cry from [the Apollonius' epic an 'maiden' at that same point in the epic](#), where Jason's delight is compared to a young girl rejoicing at the moonlight's play on her dress ([Arg.4.167-71](#)).²⁴

Such an approach to writing the wedding fits neatly into a pattern most recently argued for by Timothy Stover, in which Valerius' project is to write Jason as an *alter* Aeneas even as his epic stands as *Aeneid* for Vespasianic Rome.²⁵ But there are significant differences with the Virgilian model too, most remarkably in the fact that this marriage takes place not under compulsion, but at the instigation of Jason himself ([Arg.8.220-3](#)), who acts to fulfil his oath in a marriage ceremony which is clearly Roman, not Greek ([Arg.8.243-6](#)), and presided over by Venus (together with Cupid), who takes charge of Medea in a role that is recalled in the *epithalamium* of

²³ Lazzarini (2012) 217-8 argues that the condensing is part of Valerius' larger strategy of 'banalizazione': cf. Vernini (1971) 582-597.

²⁴ See Bremer (1987) for the nuptial connotations of this simile; on Jason and Herakles in Apollonius' epic, see Hunter (1993b) 25-41; Kouremenos (1996) 238-40. On Jason and Hercules in the Flavian *Argonautica* see Hershkowitz (1998) 72-8 and *passim*.

²⁵ Stover (2012): and on the centrality of the Dido-Aeneas relationship to Valerius' Medea-Jason partnership elsewhere, Stover (2003).

Stattius' *Silvae* 1.2.²⁶ Jason's wedding is clearly 'legitimate' in a way that Aeneas' never was.

It is all the more striking, then that the happiness of the wedding guests and the virility of the groom are not the only features of this wedding. The happy occasion is shot through with a far more disquieting tone that resurrects but goes far beyond the negativity of the Apollonian source:²⁷

adsunt unanimes Venus hortatorque Cupido;
suscitat adfixam maestis Aetida curis,
ipsa suas illi croceo subtegmine vestes
induit, ipsa suam duplicem Cytherea coronam
donat et arsuras alia cum virgine gemmas.
tum novus implevit vultus honor ac sua flavis
reddita cura comis graditurque oblita malorum.
sic ubi Mygdonios planctus sacer abluit Almo
laetaque iam Cybele festaeque per oppida taedae,
quis modo tam saevos adytis fluxisse cruores
cogitet aut ipsi qui iam meminere ministri?
inde ubi sacrificas cum coniuge venit ad aras
Aesonides unaque adeunt pariterque precari
incipiunt, ignem Pollux undamque iugalem
praetulit et dextrum pariter vertuntur in orbem.
sed neque se pingues tum candida flamma per auras
explicuit nec tura videt concordia Mopsus
promissam nec stare fidem, breve tempus amorum.
odit utrumque simul, simul et miseratur utrumque
et tibi tum nullos optavit, barbara, natos.

Arg.8.232-51

Of one mind Venus and Cupid the inspirer are present: Cupid rouses Medea, frozen with sad cares, and Venus dresses her in her own golden robes, bestows her very own double-crown and the jewels destined to blaze on another girl. Then a new bloom transformed her expression, and her golden hair was styled: she steps forward, forgetful of evil. As the sacred river Almo washes away Mygdonian weeping – Cybele is now happy, the festal torches proceed through the city – who now thinks of such savage bloodshed that has flowed at her shrines: do even the devotees of Cybele remember? Then, when Jason has come to the sacrificial altars with his bride and they approach together and begin to pray at the same time, Pollux bears the ritual nuptial fire and water, and together they turn in a clockwise circle. But no clear flame wound its way through the pitchy air, nor did the incense foretell harmonious union: Mopsus sees that the promised vow shall not last, that the time of love will be short. At the same time he hates both, and pities both: and he hoped then that you would have no children, barbarian girl.

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²⁶ On these elements as part of Roman marriage ritual see Lazzarini (2012) ad loc.

²⁷ See most recently Davis (2010) 7-13.

Where Apollonius' wedding serves to meditate on a generality of human life, the fact that joy is never unaccompanied long by sorrow (AR *Arg.*4.1165-7), in Valerius' epic, much more overt and gloomy foreshadowing is in place, above all in the garments Medea is given by Venus to wear – the golden robes, double crown and jewels 'destined to burn on another girl', clearly Creusa at Corinth – and the doom-laden reaction of the sacrificial fire, together with ~~and~~ Mopsus' pessimistic recognition that the marriage will be short, and ~~interpretation~~ hope that the ~~time left for love~~ marriage will be ~~short~~ childless (cf. *Arg.*8.247-51). These images ~~which~~ recall not only the ominous prophecy of Mopsus at the outset of the epic,

‘*quaenam aligeris secat anguibus auras
caede madens? quos ense ferit? miser, eripe parvos,
Aesonide! cerno et thalamos ardere iugales!*’ *Arg.*1.224-6
‘Who carves the air on winged dragons, steeped in gore? Whom does she strike with the sword? Wretched Jason, rescue the little ones! And I see bridal chambers on fire!’

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but also at one remove the ultimate *telos* of the Medea-story, the moment where, as Creusa and Corinth burn together, Medea achieves her final revenge:

‘*haec tum miracula Colchis
struxerat Ignipotens nondum noscentibus, ille
quis labor, aligeris aut quae secet anguibus auras
caede madens. odere tamen visusque reflectunt.*’ *Arg.*5.451-4
Vulcan had built these marvels for the Colchians, who did not yet know what that work was or who carves the air on winged dragons, steeped in gore; yet they hate it and turn away their gaze.

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Valerius' marriage, then, is getting ahead of itself not just because it has outpaced its Apollonian model, but also because it has accelerated the transition to tragedy: it stages a battle between the epic *labor* of the first half of the *Argonautica* and the devolution into not just elegy but also tragedy.²⁸ Indeed, Valerius himself has

²⁸ Such tragic foreshadowing – and Valerius' obsession with gloomy presentiment more generally – has long been noted. See esp. Fuhrer (1998); Hershkowitz (1998) 13-34 examines various internal and external prolepses; Gärtner (1994) argues that the foreshadowing function of Valerian simile is crucial. [It is tempting also to see some influence from Roman republican tragedy: Zissos \(2012\) argues that the](#)

predicted this:- the marriage works precisely as a microcosm of the struggle the epic has had since the Argonauts' arrival in Colchis to avoid ~~devolution~~ diversion into the 'other poetry' (*cantus alios*, *Arg.*5.217) ~~of elegy or tragedy~~, foreshadowed by Valerius in his proem-in-the-middle: *ventum ad furias infandaque natae /foedera et horrenda trepidam sub virgine puppem* ('We have come to insanity, to the unutterable pact with the daughter, to Argo shuddering at the presence of the monstrous girl... *Arg.*5.218-9; cf. 8.202-6).

It could then be argued that Valerius' marriage offers a knowing nod to the 'originary' purpose of Apollonius' wedding, marking the 'tipping point' into tragedy unspoken in the Hellenistic text. After the wedding, Medea is envisaged as Erinys by the Argonauts (*Arg.*8.396), the infuriate creature she will become in Seneca's tragedy.²⁹ When Medea confronts Jason after the wedding, stressing her own guilt even as she implicates him in her crimes at the end of the *Argonautica* – *non sola reposcor / virgo nocens, atque hac pariter rate omnes* ('I a guilty girl, am not demanded back alone: on this ship we have all fled together', *Arg.*8.426) – she recalls two running motifs of the tragic *Medea* which are vocalized in her central confrontation with Jason in that text: her history of both flight and guilt-inducing crime on Jason's behalf.³⁰

pointedly Roman father-daughter relationship in Valerius is modelled on Pacuvius' *Medus*, while Accius' *Medea sive Argonautae*, which draws not just on Sophocles *Scythae* but also on Apollonius *Argonautica* 4, makes the wedding and murder of Absyrtos its subject, and, as Manuwald (2015: 179) argues, the remaining fragments of this play reveal a special interest in family relationships too.

²⁹ Seneca's *Medea* begins by calling first on the *Di coniugales* ('gods of marriage', *Med.*1), then on the Erinys, the goddesses who avenge evil (*sceleris ultrices deae*, *Med.*13) before finally turning to her own *animus* to wreak evil (*Med.* 42). Cf. Gill (1987) 35-6, who notes that Medea is 'agent' or 'collaborator' with the *antiqua Erinys* (*Med.* 965f.) whom she recognizes as she embarks on the revenge itself (and note that Medea is accompanied by the Erinys at *Arg.*7.461-4 when she embarks on *nefas* for the first time): for more on Seneca's *Medea* and the *Argonautica* see Buckley (2014) 90-92.

³⁰ The 'flight' motif comes back with a vengeance at the end of the play: *lumina huc tumida alleua, /ingrate Iason. coniugem agnoscis tuam? /sic fugere soleo* (Raise your swollen eyes to me, ungrateful Jason. Do you recognize your wife? This is how I'm used to fleeing. *Med.*1019-21). In addition to Medea's repeated declarations of guilt (cf. esp. *Med.*246 (*sum nocens*) and 280 (*totiens nocens sum facta, sed numquam mihi.*) cf. Davis (2010) 10, who adduces *Med.*272-4 and 535 on the

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Med. Fugimus, Iason, fugimus. hoc non est nouum,
mutare sedes; causa fugiendi noua est:
pro te solebam fugere.

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Ias. Restat hoc unum insuper,
tuis ut etiam sceleribus fiam nocens.

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Med. Tua illa, tua sunt illa: cui prodest scelus,
is fecit. omnes coniugem infamem arguant,
solus tuere, solus insontem uoca:

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tibi innocens sit quisquis est pro te nocens. *Med.447-8, 498-503*

Medea: We have fled, Jason: we are fleeing. It's not new for me to change my home:
the cause of flight is new. I used to flee for you.

Jason: This one thing alone remains, that even I should become guilty because of your
crimes.

Medea: They are your crimes, yours: the one who benefits from a crime commits it.
All might declare that your wife is infamous: you alone must protect her, alone call
her innocent. Let whoever who is guilty *for* you be innocent *to* you.

Though Valerius may not have intended to finish the *Argonautica* where he did, in
another sense the epic's final moments offer already a peculiarly appropriate end-
point: a recognizably tragic scene, as a vacillating Jason attempts to placate an
enraged Medea (*mota...ira Arg.8.464*).

The wedding does not just serve as 'tipping point' for transformation into
tragedy, however, for the epic narrative has been contaminated with tragedy right
from our first meeting with Medea in the narrative proper, which also obviously casts
the girl as the transgressive *virgo* who will stand in the way of the successful *telos* of
the epic:

Forte deum variis per noctem territa monstris
senserat ut pulsas tandem Medea tenebras,
rapta toris primi iubar ad placabile Phoebi
ibat et horrendas lustrantia flumina noctes.
namque soporatos tacitis in sedibus artus
dum premit alta quies nullaeque in virgine curae,
visa pavens castis Hecates excedere lucis,
dumque pii petit ora patris, stetit arduus inter

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theme of shared guilt with *Arg.8.426*, and points out that *Arg.8.437-40* (a reminder of Medea's help)
anticipates *Med.466-76, 527-8*.

pontus et ingenti circum stupefacta profundo,
fratre tamen conante sequi. mox stare paventes
viderat intenta pueros nece seque trementem
spargere caede manus et lumina rumpere fletu. *Arg.* 5.329-40

By chance when Medea (terrified by various divine portents throughout the night) sensed that at last dawn had come, she threw herself out of bed and made for the friendly gleam of the sunrise and the river to wash away her horrifying nightmares. For while deep slumber weighed down sleepy limbs in her silent house, and the girl was yet carefree, she seemed to be leaving the chaste groves of Hecate, alarmed: and while she sought out her pious father, a deep sea stood between them and she was alarmed by the great deep around her, though her brother, however, attempted pursuit. Next she had seen herself, shaking, spatter her hands with gore and her eyes erupt into tears.

This introduction to Medea obviously activates the Homeric epic ‘marriage’ model ~~and of~~ *Odyssey* 6, where the maiden Nausikaa, prompted in her sleep by the intervention of Athene, sets out in the morning with her handmaidens to wash clothes by the river, only to bump into Odysseus. The close parallels with Medea, who will also make for the river at dawn with her maidens, there meeting Jason – the man who will indeed become her husband – are clear, and are of course also inspired by Apollonius’ own re-working of the Nausikaa episode in *his* version of the meeting of Jason and Medea in *Argonautica* 3.³¹ Apollonius’ Medea, too, following Homeric precedent, is assaulted by ‘deceitful dreams’ that combine prophecy with a realistic, erotically-charged edge (*Arg.* 3.616-633): though she has no direct communication with the divine, as Nausikaa does in the *Odyssey*, the decision she makes in her dream to aid ‘the stranger’, choosing him over her own parents is clearly prophetic.³²

But just as striking as the similarities of Valerius’ introduction to Medea are the differences here: in place of the latent eroticism of the Homeric source, whose

³¹ This meeting, also engineered by Athene, opens up a *leitmotif* of the Phaeacian episode (*Od.* 6.27, 66, 244-5) – Odysseus’ potential suitability as husband for the girl – a source of tension finally resolved when Alcinous offers his daughter to Odysseus in marriage (*Od.* 7.311-5). On Valerius and Homer here cf. Wijsman (1996) ad 5.378-90: on the Dido-parallel, itself of course already modelled on the Nausikaa episode, see Perutelli (1995); Hershkowitz (1998) 95-7; Stover (2003) 126-7.

³² Hunter (1989) 164. On the difference between the content of Apollonian and Homeric dream see Knight (1995) 187; Giangrande (2000) esp. 110-4 on the *theoretikos* (i.e. figurative) function of Medea’s dream. On tragic undercurrents in the Apollonian dream, especially Euripides’ *Medea* and *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, see see Kessels (1982); Walde (1998) 90; Sansone (2000).

heroine is motivated by her semi-conscious recognition of her own readiness for marriage, the dominant tenor of the dreams Medea has is shockingly grim: her night-terrors are nothing less than the programme for her future tragedy.³³ The dream of Valerius' Medea serves, then, as doublet to the erotically-charged and prophetic precedent of the Apollonian epic. ~~B-~~but crucially it once again gets ahead of the Hellenistic source: the final part of Medea's dream, the struggle between duty and desire, culminating with her abandonment of her parents, becomes simply the *first* action in the Flavian Medea's vision, which climaxes with the end-point of the tragic *Medea* and which replaces the erotic undercurrent of the Apollonian (and Homeric) models with one more starkly focussed on the ~~post-elegiac~~later phases of Medea's future relationship.³⁴ Right from the beginning the chronology of the Apollonian source has been over-ridden: the dream of Apollonius' Medea comes *after* her first meeting with Jason; ~~but~~ Valerius' *virgo* dreams a tragedy to come before she has even met Jason for the first time.³⁵ ~~And S~~such chronological disjunction is pressed further in the imposition of another important literary model for Valerius' introduction of Medea from the Hellenistic *Argonautica*, the blood-spattered dream of Circe (*Arg.*4.662-9), which in the Greek epic is introduced after Jason and Medea have fled Colchis with the Fleece, and arrive in Aeaea, only to encounter Circe:

ἔνθα δὲ Κίρκην
 εὖρον ἄλδος νοτίδεσσι κάρη ἐπιφαιδρύνουσιν:
 τοῖον γὰρ νυχίοισιν ὄνειρασιν ἐπτοίητο. *Arg.*4.662-4

There they found Kirke purifying her head in the flowing salt waters because she had been much disturbed by dreams during the night.

³³ Cf. Gärtner (1996) 301; Hershkowitz (1998) 19.

³⁴ This Apollonian model is split and redoubled by Valerius to provide a model for an answering dream at *Arg.* 7.141-7: cf. Gärtner (1996) 302. On the intertextual makeup of Medea's dream, see Perutelli (1995); Walde (1998) 101-4.

³⁵ The central episode of *Argonautica* 5 – the meeting of Jason and Medea – is modelled around the same strategy of allusive disjunction, as the 'chance' meeting of Jason and Medea (*Arg.*5.329-454) is written through the *second* meeting of Apollonius' Jason and Medea, at which Medea gives Jason the magic potion which will enable him to complete the tasks set by Aeetes (*AR Arg.*3.947-1145).

Circe's symbolic vision does not directly predict the arrival of Jason and Medea, but it obviously has some prognostic function, for when Jason and Medea enter her palace, they are polluted with the guilt of the kin-murder of Absyrtus, and in need of ritual cleansing (AR Arg.4.691-9).³⁶ We might be reminded, then, not just of the dream of Medea in *Argonautica* 3, but also of Circe's nightmares in *Argonautica* 4, also prompted by Medea's kin-slaying.³⁷

This radical re-structuring of the ~~elegiac-erotic~~ relationship of Apollonius' *Argonautica* finds its *telos* in the wedding at Peuce. When Medea steps forth *oblita malorum* (Arg.8.238) it is surely these evils – the evils predicted in her own tragic *Orakeltraum* – that she has forgotten, her woe at the outset (*adfixam maestis Aetida curis*, Arg.8.233) recalling her introduction as care-free girl (*nullaeque in virgine curae*, Arg.5.334). But this background also colours our interpretation of the troubling simile accompanying Medea at her wedding. The rational correspondence here is in the emotion of forgetfulness experienced in both simile (the participants in Cybele's cult) and narrative (Medea). But this simile reaches irrationally beyond to suggest a correspondence too between Cybele and Medea herself, both blood-drenched, both in need of lustration (Arg.8.239-42, above). ~~It~~ resonates ~~ing~~ as ~~a~~ ~~the~~ culmination of Medea's story: ~~from~~ ~~recalling~~ its very beginning (a trip to wash away the horrifying *monstra* of ~~her~~ dreams, ~~which becomes~~ cause of ~~her~~ ~~the~~ first meeting with Jason); via window reference, ~~echoing~~ Circe's actions to cleanse herself in response to the dreams she had had of Medea's (future) murder; and via allusion, the *telos* of her own career as child-murderer.³⁸

From Tragedy to Epic

³⁶ Cf. Kessels (1982) 161-3; Giangrande (2000) 114-7.

³⁷ Cf. Wetzel (1957) 58 on Circe as model.

³⁸ On the Cybele ritual see Lazzarini (2012) ad loc.

Valerius includes an ominous coda to his ‘tragic’ prologue, a simile that cements the tragic status of Medea:

his turbata minis fluvios ripamque petebat
Phasidis aequali Scythidum comitante caterva.
floreas per verni qualis iuga duxit Hymetti
aut Sicula sub rupe choros, hinc gressibus haerens
Pallados, hinc carae Proserpina iuncta Dianae,
altior ac nulla comitum certante, priusquam
palluit et viso pulsus decor omnis Averno,
talis et in vittis geminae cum lumine taedae
Colchis erat nondum miseris exosa parentes. *Arg.5.341-9*

In turmoil at these threats she sought water and Phasis’ banks, accompanied by a crowd of Scythian age-mates. Just as Proserpina led her troop of dancers over the flowery ridges of spring-time Hymettus or beneath the Sicilian crag, joined close to Pallas on this side, to dear Diana on that, a tall girl, with none of her companions matching her – before she grew wan, all beauty dispelled at the sight of Avernus – so was the Colchian girl, in her fillets and accompanied by the light of a twin torch, not yet detesting her poor parents.

While this simile reworks very closely famous precedents which compare their respective heroines to Artemis/Diana, (Odyssey’s Nausikaa and Virgil’s Dido especially), there is a startlingly pointed substitution in the point of divine comparison here: Medea is instead a doomed Proserpina carrying the twin torches of Hecate, symbols of death.³⁹ The simile is strikingly negative: this Medea, whose role as priestess of Hecate, leader of virgin dancers, had already been mentioned (*praeterea infernae quae nunc sacrata Dianae / fert castos Medea choros Arg.5.238f.*) has her close connections to the underworld reinforced by means of this simile, in which the positive and negative are never far apart (*floreas per verni iuga ... Hymetti: viso pulsus decor omnis (A)verno (Arg.5.343, 347)*). But this simile once again anticipates her marriage, which will swap the virgin-fillets and sacral torches of Hecate for the crown and marriage torches of Venus. Valerius’ aggressive strategy of proleptic allusion to

³⁹ Valerian-Virgilian allusion occurs with *caterva* (*Arg.5.342; Aen.1.497*), *per ... iuga* (*Arg.5.343; Aen.1.498*), *choros* (*Arg.5.344; Aen.1.499*), *hinc ... hinc* (*Arg.5.344f.; Aen.1.500*), *talis erat Dido* (*Aen.1.503*); *Colchis erat* (*Arg.5.349*); cf. Gärtner (1994) 139–44. Medea is figured as Artemis in Apollonius (*Arg.3.876-886*): cf. Nelis (2001) 82–6.

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Apollonius' narrative results in the framing of a Medea as *coniunx* before she has even met Jason.

There is of course another compelling model for the simile in which Medea is framed as Proserpina: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 5, which recasts Medea's fate as that suffered by that *virgo*, seized by Pluto at the instigation of an 'imperialist' Venus. The Ovidian Proserpina clearly lurks beneath the surface of the Valerian simile, and plays a significant part in the constant pressure to create a doomed atmosphere:

quo dum Proserpina luco
ludit et aut uiolas aut candida lilia carpit,
dumque puellari studio calathosque sinumque
implet et aequales certat superare legendo,
paene simul uisa est dilectaque raptaque Diti;
usque adeo est properatus amor. *Met.5.391-6*

While Proserpina played in this grove, picking either violets or white lilies, and while she was filling her baskets and lap with girlish enthusiasm, and vied with her friends to beat them in the gathering-game, almost as soon as she was seen by Dis she was loved, she was stolen: such was the rapidity of his love.

This Ovidian resonance is not, however, activated until the moment Medea, now in the thrall of Venus (disguised as her aunt Circe), is led to her doom:

ducitur infelix ad moenia summa futuri
nescia virgo mali et falsae commissa sorori,
lilia per vernos lucent velut alba colores
praecipue, quis vita brevis totusque parumper
floreit honor, fuscis et iam Notus imminet alis.
hanc residens altis Hecate Perseia lucis
flebat et has imo referebat pectore voces:
'deseris heu nostrum nemus aequalesque catervas,
a misera, ut Graias haut sponte vageris ad urbes.
non invisam tamen neque te, mea cura, relinquam.
magna fugae monumenta dabis, spernere nec usque
mendaci captiva viro, meque ille magistrum
sentiet e raptu famulae doluisse pudendo.' *Arg.6.490-502*

The unhappy girl, ignorant of the evil to come and trusting to her false sister, is led to the topmost walls: as white lilies gleam among the springtime flowers, for whom life is short and whose whole bloom flourishes briefly, and already the South with threatens with his dusky wings. Persean Hecate, sitting in her lofty grove, wept for her and uttered these words from the depths of her heart: 'You, alas, are abandoning my grove and your girlfriends, wretched one, in order to wander among Greek cities

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against your will: yet you are not hated and I will not abandon you, beloved one. You will give great monuments of your flight, nor though a captive, shall you be spurned by your perfidious husband: he will know that I am your teacher and that I grieved at the stolen virtue of my handmaiden.’

The flower-imagery of *Arg.* 6.492-4, together with the words of Hecate, which respond to Medea’s vision of departure from the *castis lucis* of *Arg.* 5.335, bring to mind the oracular dream of the Proserpina-Medea of *Argonautica* 5; the key motifs of unwillingness and rejection, foregrounded here (*captiva, spernere, Arg.* 6.500-1) anticipate her confrontation with Jason after their wedding (*si modo Peliacae non sum captiva carinae ... inque tua me sperne domo (Arg.* 8.417-422); and the image of the girl, led by Venus and unaware of future evil (*futuri nescia mali*) obviously prefigures her marriage ceremony, where she is now *oblita malorum*. But more strikingly, the *magna fugae monumenta* promised by Hecate re-position Medea’s future career not as tragedy but as *epic*. For when Hecate predicts Medea’s future vengeance, she frames it in precisely the same terms as the epic *telos* of the quest: the Golden Fleece, which is the *monumentum* of another flight, that of Phrixus (*monumenta fugae Phrixea, Arg.* 8.119; cf. *Arg.* 5.229).

From Horace on, *monumentum* is a heavily freighted term for ‘metareflexion’, instantly reaching beyond the lyric genre to speak for poetic fame more generally.⁴⁰ The ‘reminders of savage grief’ (*monimenta saevi doloris, Aen.* 12.945) in the *Aeneid* are not just the baldrick of Pallas, the inspiration for Aeneas’ final act in Virgil’s epic: they are also the epic itself, which bears witness for audiences in ages to come. Of course, the ‘monumentality’ reached for in the *Aeneid* – epic as the commemoration

⁴⁰ *Exegi monumentum aere perennius...* (‘I have built a monument longer lasting than bronze...’ Horace, *Od.* 3.30.1) Of course here Horace is setting his own work in tension with the epicist Ennius. On ‘metareflexion’ here see e.g. Müller-Zetzelman (2005) 125.

of death – is encoded from the *Iliad* on, which twins Achilles' *kleos* with his tomb:⁴¹ and the conceit continues after Virgil in Ovid's own self-consciously realized monument not just to epic but also to himself in the *Metamorphoses*. Valerius continues the tradition, making the Fleece *itself* a monument to the heroic daring of Phrixus (*at vellera Martis in umbra /ipse sui Phrixus monumentum insigne pericli /liquerat ardenti quercum complexa metallo*, *Arg.5.228-30* 'But Phrixus himself had left the famed monument of his peril in the grove of Mars, the Fleece embracing the oak with its blazing gold'). But Hecate's claims for Medea's future *monumenta* also invite the reader to look more closely at the agency of Medea already within the epic itself.

Indeed, when Hecate frames Medea as parallel to the Fleece itself, she is responding not just to the Apollonian conflation of Fleece and girl but also to the another major innovation in the Flavian *Argonautica*: the creation of a fully fledged war-narrative. However, this is battle-narrative with a difference: the *Schlachtenpanorama* cedes when Juno realizes that war – the κλέα φωτῶν – will not help Jason's quest, and decides that she must turn to Medea (*Arg.6.439-40*).⁴² But it is just as important that Valerius writes the subjugation of Medea to *amor* from the beginning as a complementary battle-narrative with Iliadic roots, framing the relationship of Jason and Medea against the divine combination of Mars and Venus, as *itself* a miniaturised conflict within the larger-scale war of *Argonautica* 6. For when Juno decides that Medea must help Jason, she is figured as a worthy ally in pointedly military terms: *Ergo opibus magicis et uirginitate tremendam / Iuno duci*

⁴¹ Cf. Hardie (2002) 178-9; Lovatt (2013) 347-74 traces the theme from *Iliad* to Lucan. Papaioannou (2007) 254-287.

⁴² Cf. Feeney (1991) 326: '[t]he hypertrophy of epic apparatus in the book of warfare (indeed, the hypertrophy of epic apparatus from the beginning of the poem) begins to look like an effect of polarization, a desperate reaction against the collapse that will come when Medea takes over.' See also Fucecchi (1997), esp. 13-16; Zissos (2004).

sociam coniungere quaerit Achiuo ('Juno therefore sought to join an ally to the Greek commander awe-inspiring in her magical powers and her virginity', *Arg.* 6.449-50). The goddess' desire that she should be joined to Jason as his *coniunx* of course alludes to the similar plan of *Juno pronuba* at Carthage;⁴³ but that she should be joined as an ally, *sociam coniungere*, also hints at the power of such an alliance as if it were a joining of military force.⁴⁴

The effects of such alliance become clear when Medea, pre-empting Helen, gazes at Jason from the walls of the city, achieving a level of involvement with the action on the battle-field out of all proportion with her Iliadic model. Once Medea has set eyes on Jason, a seam of allusion evokes an ever-growing sympathetic union of the two, fusing the [elegiac-erotic](#) vocabulary of her slide into love with the military terminology of the battle-narrative proper.⁴⁵ And as Medea sees Jason undergo the risks of battle, she becomes a phantom-fighter herself, feeling the blows of rocks and spears as the hero does (*Arg.* 6.681-5), and even anticipating the fights to come (*ante uidens*, *Arg.* 6.582). Indeed, when Jason meets Medea's gaze in Valerius, we are presented with a contest between heroes as Medea begins to 'hunt' Jason down with her besotted gaze: *At regina virum ... /persequitur lustrans oculisque ardentibus haeret*, ('But the princess pursues the man, tracking him down and clinging to him with blazing eyes *Arg.* 6.658-9; cf. Aeneas' single-minded pursuit of Turnus (*Aen.* 12.647-8; cf. *Arg.* 6.576).

Valerius' choice to write attraction as combat-narrative is pointed. No matter how impressive Jason is on the battle-field, *Argonautica* 6 suggests, the real *gloria*

⁴³ This strategy derives from the debate Hera has with Pallas in Apollonius' *Argonautica* (*Arg.* 5.280-95; *AR Arg.* 3.7-35), in turn traced from the plotting of the allied goddesses in the *Iliad*. Cf. Hunter (1989) 97 ad *Arg.* 3.6-35: and below.

⁴⁴ *coniungo*; *OLD* s.v. 1b 'to unite sexually', s.v. 3 '(mil.) To join (parties of men) into a single force, unite (forces)'. Cf. Jason's alliance with Aetes (*Arg.* 6.483-4) and the (doomed) alliance with Cyzicus (*Arg.* 3.30, 268).

⁴⁵ Fucecchi (1997) 176; see Lovatt (2006) 67-78 for more on Medea's teichoscopia.

rests with Medea. No wonder this book of the epic is framed by love of war (*subiti Mavortis amor*, Arg.6.694) and the *fama* of Medea (*sollicitat nec Martis amor, sed fama Cytaeae / virginis*, Arg.6.156f.). ~~or that~~: the partnership is cemented when

Medea finally takes over from Jason on the field of combat:

Tum vero, amens discrimine tanto,
quam modo Tartareo galeam Medea veneno
in medios torsit; conversae protinus hastae.
Qualis ubi attonitos maestae Phrygas annua Matris
ira uel exectos lacerat Bellona Comanos,
haud secus accensas subito Medea cohortes
implicat et miseros agit in sua proelia fratres. Arg.7.631-8

Then mad with fear at such danger he threw into the midst of the sown men his helmet – the helmet which Medea had previously drugged with the poison of Hell – instantly the spears reversed their direction. Just as when each year the anger of the Mother wounds the crazed Phrygians, or as Bellona wounds the eunuch Comani, not otherwise Medea suddenly entangles the inflamed cohorts and drives the poor brothers into civil war.

Jason throws the drugged helmet, but it is Medea, pointedly compared to the Magna Mater and Bellona, who engages the sown-men, and the metaphor for emasculation surely extends to the epic hero himself.

Once again, then, the symbolic act of *bellum ciuile* that will pave the way for the inward-turning intra-familial violence of their own future is picked up in the ill-starred wedding, reinforcing the comparison of Medea as Cybele, the Magna Mater (Arg.8.225ff.). Valerius' narrative – and the wedding itself – elides the distinction between the virgo's besotted love – the very thing in the Virgilian tradition which steers the epic *off-course* – and the deeds worthy of *fama* which make up the stuff of epos. Perhaps this should not be a surprise, given the characters in charge of the epic at this point. Medea's infatuation has been engineered by Juno and Venus, in a plan which has exploited not just Apollonius (Hera's supplication of Aphrodite (Arg.3.36-110), but also Homer: the Flavian Juno's plan rests on a visit to Venus to obtain the *cingulum*, just as in Hera does in *Iliad* 14. Juno's visit to Venus also recalls a deeper

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backdrop to the divine conflicts in the *Argonautica* itself, for Venus has from already as a war-monger in this *Argonautica*: at Lemnos the pointedly named *Mavortia coniunx* (*Arg.*2.208) had been catalyst for civil war between husbands and wives, in revenge against the islanders who had neglected her worship through their favour for Venus' cuckolded husband, Vulcan.⁴⁶ But more importantly Valerius locates the *origin* of the conflict in the rebellion of the gods and Jupiter's punishment of Juno:

tempore quo primum fremitus insurgere opertos
caelicolum et regni sensit novitate tumentes
Iuppiter et aetheriae nec stare silentia pacis,
Iunonem volucris primam suspendit Olympo
horrendum chaos ostendens poenasque barathri. *Arg.*2.82-86

When Jupiter first realized that hidden grumblings of the gods were surging up and that they were becoming rebellious because his power was new, and he recognized that the tranquility of heaven's peace would not last, he suspended Juno first from swift Olympus, displaying to her frightful chaos and the punishment of the abyss.

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Valerius suggests here in a wholly new aetiology the reason for Vulcan's fall to Lemnos: his attempt to help a rebellious mother wholly at odds with her husband.⁴⁷ In *Argonautica* 6 Valerius returns to this marital discord, as Juno offers Venus the deceptive story that she requires Venus' girdle (*cingulum*) to smoothe things over with Jupiter (*Arg.*6.462-465), since she has offended him by detaching Hercules from the main body of the Argonautic expedition. This moment recalls not just the story of Hera's own punishment in the *Iliad* for her treatment of Herakles, but also reprises Hera's great moment of disobedience at *Iliad* 14, when she obtains the girdle (*kestos*) of Venus in order to further the cause of the Greeks. Moreover, Valerius complements this with another story of divine marital discord: ~~for~~ in *Argonautica* 6 Venus seizes the chance to engineer the destruction of the 'hated' Colchian race, in retaliation, it is hinted, for the Sun's role in revealing her adulterous relationship with Mars

⁴⁶ Cf. Fucecchi (1996) 134: on Lemnos as *bellum civile* fought along the gendered fault-line see further McGuire (1997) 107.

⁴⁷ In the *Iliad*: cf. Poortvliet (1991) 75-7.

(Arg.6.467-8). When, in their wedding at Peuce, Jason is compared to Mars heading from battle to an assignation with Venus (*qualis sanguineo victor Gradivus ab Hebro / Idalium furto subit aut dilecta Cythera*, Arg.8.228-9), while Medea ‘becomes’ Venus as she takes on the accoutrements of the goddess (Arg.8.234-6), the union of Jason and Medea does not just echo how discordant *coniugium* in the divine sphere is: it also makes that discord *responsible* for epic.

When the Flavian Juno has successfully ejected Hercules from the *Argonautica*, and an angry Jupiter demands that the narrative now depend on Furies, Venus, and the wicked *virgo* (Arg.4.13-4), most readers understand that the epic has been re-oriented: Jupiter-sanctioned martial *epos* will be replaced by the tragedy that will eventually be the result of the narratological control of Juno and Venus.⁴⁸ But Valerius’ new ‘origin’ story for epic, which owes so much to a past literary tradition, is genuinely revisionary, for it does not sideline the transgressive female, but puts her centre-stage in the business of not just of epic but also of empire. Jupiter may wash his hands of this epic after Hercules is lost to the quest, but if in the longer term a sequence in the order of empires is what he desires, then it is precisely Juno and Medea who make this happen. As Jason himself points out,

'o decus in nostros magnum ventura penates
solaque tantarum virgo haud indigna viarum
causa reperta mihi, <iam>iam non ulla requiro
vellera teque meae satis est vexisse carinae. Arg.8.37-40

Destined to bring great honour to my family gods, you alone, *virgo*, are the cause I have found for such a great voyage: now I do not seek any Fleece, for it is enough for my ship to have borne you.

Of course Jason’s words here are archetypally manipulative. But in his appeal to Medea’s *decus*, and his claim that Medea herself now is his *causa viarum*, Jason’s words point out just how differently this epic conceptualizes the role of the female.

⁴⁸ Cf. Feeney (1991) 324-327.

Medea's flight *is* the stuff of epic, stimulating a shift in geo-politics that will eventually culminate with Rome. And if Medea is now *causa viarum*, Aeetes the Colchian tyrant knows who to blame now: Jason's *amor*, and Phrixus, *prima malorum* /*causa*:

orbe sato alio, sua litora regnaque habentes,
quis furor has mediis tot fluctibus egit in oras
quisve mei vos tantus amor? tu prima malorum
causa mihi, tu, Phrixus gener! ...

Arg. 7.35-8

Men of another world, who have your own shores and kingdoms, what *furor* has driven you to these lands over so much water? What great *amor* is it that you have for me? *You* are the first cause of my troubles, Phrixus, you my son-in-law!

Working out from a specific Apollonian model that collapses both Medea and the Fleece into one *telos* for the epic, together with a tradition in Roman *epos* which casts the female as 'cause' of conflict, Valerius re-writes an origin story for the role of *coniugium* at Colchis which valorizes the role of the transgressive female. It is Medea's deeds which constitute *labor* (Arg. 5.453), not Jason's, her flight rather than his quest memorialized in song. And while Jupiter may prophesy a world-plan – after the Argonauts have got under way – it is Juno's narrative that will eventually bring about the rise of Rome, by setting in motion the change in empires Medea's conflict-ridden marriage will inspire. Re-purposing Virgil's flirtation with and avoidance of *coniugium* – a 'marriage' to Dido that is a dead end for the narrative but is of crucial importance for the rise of Rome itself via its conflict with Carthage – the 'Roman' Medea who confronts Jason at the end of the *Argonautica*, fighting for her rights as a Roman wife, is a truly appropriate symbol for a tradition of *epos* which, Valerius reveals, is not predicated on the excision of the troublesome female but rather on the constant discord at both the human and divine level crucial to the evolution of power from one set of hands to another.

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