

FLAVIAN MEDEA: THE FURTHER VOICE IN VALERIUS' ARGONAUTICA

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Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* tackles an archetypal exploration myth: man's first daring plunge into the unknown; his technological mastery; his quest to overcome tyranny, acquire foreign wealth, and open up shipping lanes for future maritime traffic. This, at least, is the standard reading. Roman epic is a masculine genre that speaks the conqueror's language. This *Argonautica*, however, has two protagonists, and two distinct perspectives on the imperialist project. Jason might successfully navigate his vessel as far as the Black Sea, but once he reaches Colchis, the narrative slips out of his control. During the last three books of Valerius' extant epic, it is Medea who assumes dominance. This paper explores what such an unorthodox transferral of focus might imply. After briefly surveying the background of the *Argonautica*'s composition, I will present the evidence for regarding Valerius' Medea as a powerful narrative agent, and examine her embodiment of two common themes in Roman self-definition: internal conflict and external assimilation. In adapting the voice of the colonised woman to epic discourse, Valerius appropriates a marginalised subjectivity; but the same time, he traces faultlines in the foundations of his genre.

1. An *Argonautica* after 69

It is possible that Juvenal had Valerius' work (or something very like it) in mind when he balked at sitting through yet another interminable evening of spear-hurling and fleecing, safe topics with no possible political bite.¹ But as more recent analysis has shown, Roman epic displays intense political sensitivity.² As a genre, it is deeply and critically engaged with the sources and consequences of imperial power. Valerius' *Argonautica* is no exception. Whether through allegory, implication, metaphor or simply its material presence, mythological epic constitutes a topical speech act. Donald McGuire points out that epic was

recognised by both the public and the *princeps* as an appropriate medium for political commentary and critique... [It was] expected to engage itself in open dialogue with the principate regarding imperial policy and achievements, and could couch its more critical commentary in the literary and rhetorical figures familiar to its Roman audience.³

Valerius' *Argonautica*, then, assumed a generically charged position in relation to the Roman state before it even left port. Epic interventions need not address specific policies, however, nor individuals. They can just as provocatively provide a testing ground for ideological posi-

1 Juv. *Sat.* 1.1.7-13, 162-64. This is also a point of view expressed by Hardie (1983), 382, Henderson (1998), 5, and Hutchinson (1993), 69.

2 See for example, Dominik (1994) and McNelis (2007) on Statius; Henderson (1998) and Bartsch (1997) on Lucan; Boyle (1986) and Lyne (1987) on Virgil; Hardie (1993) on post-Virgilian epic generally, McGuire (1997) on Flavian texts and Quint (1993) on epic's generic affiliations.

3 McGuire (1997), 36-38. See also Dominik (1993), 135, on how 'mythological poetry operated close to the corridors of power as an instrument of political dialogue': in relation to Statius' *Thebaid*, 130-37, 178f.

tions or broader explorations of social crisis. For Valerius, this involved the twin pressures—already inseparable in the Roman literary imagination—of imperial expansion and civil war.

The *Argonautica* is essentially Flavian. Conceived in the mid-70s CE, it was developed under Vespasian's administration and the brief rule of Titus, and Valerius ultimately abandoned the mission somewhere up the Danube during Domitian's infamous autocracy.⁴ Despite ending in obscurity, the epic commences with a confident *prooemion* addressed to the parvenu emperor Vespasian:

tuque o, pelagi cui maior aperti
fama, Caledonius postquam tua carbasa uexit
oceanus Phrygios prius indignatus Iulos,
eripe me populis et habenti nubila terrae,
sancte pater, ueterumque faue ueneranda canenti
facta uirum...

te duce Graecia mittet
et Sidon Nilusque rates. nunc nostra serenus
orsa iuues, haec ut Latias uox impleat urbes

(*Argonautica* 1.7-12, 19-21)⁵

And thou, whose fame for opening the seas
is greater (since the Caledonian ocean bore your fleet
after rejecting the Phrygian Julii),
pluck me from the common throng and cloud-clad earth,
sacred father, and favour me as I sing heroic deeds
of long-ago men...

Guided by you (*te duce*), Greece and Sidon
and the Nile will dispatch their fleets. For now, be content
in supporting our expedition.

Despite the reference to Vespasian's early British campaign, this is not an epic commemorating military victory. With a typical *recusatio*, Valerius declines to compete with Domitian for the rights to 'Judaean dust' (1.12f.), and proposes to eulogise a different aspect of imperial conquest. Greek, Sidonian and Egyptian vessels represent luxury consumer goods, linking the profitable pathways the *Argo* scores across the ocean to the economic networks spanning the sphere of Roman prosperity.⁶ While endorsing the poetic vehicle that is bearing the *Argonauts*, Vespasian's favour simultaneously guarantees the success of commercial shipping.

On the surface, then, this celebrates Roman achievement, parading the material wealth brought home by the acquisition of territory. Probed a little deeper, however, the implications are less savoury. The voyage of the *Argo* has unpleasant connotations of superhuman over-

4 See Taylor (1994) for a discussion of the competing theories. One attractive suggestion is that the epic was begun under Vespasian and was still an ongoing project when Valerius died c.93 (Zissos [2003], 660). Strand (1972), 35-37 proposes conservative dates—75-85 CE—and argues that 'the proem of the A. must be regarded as written under Vespasian'. Feeney (1991), 334, concurs. On the epic as unfinished, see Poortvliet (1991).

5 Text used is the Loeb edition (Mozley, 1936). All translations are my own.

6 See Young (2001) on trade networks; on *exploratio* and profit, Pliny *NH* 2.45.117-18 with comment by Murphy (2004).

reach resulting in collapse,⁷ connotations which Seneca's *Medea* linked explicitly to Roman imperialism. At the same time, civil war pervades the epic.⁸ Addressed to a regime that recently seized imperial power—the fourth in a series of violent military coups, and urgently seeking legitimacy—Valerius' *Argonautica* retains civil war as a secondary theme until the Argo's arrival in Colchis. Here, the Argonauts become embroiled in a dramatic local conflict, which seems to be a Valerian innovation. Sympathies are forcefully re-aligned as issues of internal disorder and foreign contact become acute.

2. Displacing Jason

Traditionally, as postcolonial theorist Sara Mills demonstrates, 'the stereotype of imperial activity has often been epitomised in...the figure of the male adventuring hero.'⁹ This perspective seems to have informed readings of the *Argonautica* until critics almost universally concur that this is exclusively Jason's epic, Jason's quest, Jason's god-given opportunity to exert his exemplary masculinity all over Scythia. Such readings perpetuate an imperialist paradigm that continues to privilege what Mills calls the 'adventuring position' determined by the male colonising subject.¹⁰ The (contestable) primacy of the Argo itself contributes less to the imperialism colouring its mission than does Valerius' overall depiction of contact with the foreign. It may be objected that the *Argonautica* does not depict a mission of imperialist conquest or colonial pretensions at all, merely the recovery of a sacred object, the Fleece. (1.56f.). The expedition, however, is characterised throughout as aggressive invasion. It is assumed from the start that 'dominating Scythia' will involve armed conflict (*bella*: 1.33, 54, 322).¹¹ Land and sea are both to be conquered, the *domitis Symplegados undis* (5.299) and *uictum aequor* (5.511) joining the shores of Colchis in submitting to Jason's authority. Having ordered him to perform a monstrous version of agricultural foundation, Aeetes refers to Jason as *Haemonio colono*, and speculates that his ship may contain enough extra manpower to constitute invasion (7.59-61, 607). Moreover, there are distinct material advantages to attacking Scythia. Jason hopes to return 'having plundered Scythian riches' (*Scythias populatus opes*, 3.304), rejoicing in the abundant *spoliis* that Mars and Absyrtus will later condemn as unlawful plunder (5.632, 646; 8.151, 265-67). Jason plans to commemorate his success with an *effigies* dedicated to the river Phasis (5.208), ostensibly as a religious dedication, but reminiscent of landmarks reduced to the *simulacra* carried in Roman Triumphs, or the statues of conquered peoples adorning the Forum.¹² In addition, the epic's exploratory coverage of landscape takes

7 The most prominent exponents are Catullus 64; Horace *Odes* 1.3; Lucan *BC* 3.193-97 and Seneca *Med.* 359-77. Variations include Ovid *Am.* 2.11; Phaedrus *Fab.* 4.7; Pliny *NH.* 6.1; and Statius *Sily.* 3.2. Davis (1990) provides the most comprehensive discussion.

8 Conflict on Lemnos (2.79-310) and in Cyzicus' kingdom (3.1-361) is also figured as civil war. For a full discussion, see McGuire (1997).

9 Mills (2005), 14. See also Kolodny (1984), Said (1993), Bush (2006).

10 Mills (2005), 160.

11 Further references to invasion: Aeson anticipates seeing his son *Scythici regisque marisque uictorem* (1.346); Hypsipyle begs him to return *domitis a Colchidos oris* (2.423); Boreas protests that his liberty is compromised while this young Greek pioneer *ingenti gaudens domat aequora uelo* (1.600). See also 1.744, 7.45-52 on *spoliis*.

12 Dench (2005), 76-79. Another parallel might be the Danube depicted on Trajan's Column. On Augustus' Forum (or alternatively his Portico of Nations), see Ferris (2000), 30-31, and Edwards (2003), 65-66.

conceptual possession of it, replicating the coloniser's need to accommodate alien territory to an existing epistemological system. The Argo's voyage may not introduce systematic settlement, but it certainly represents the ethos of global conquest.

As soon as they disembark in Colchis, however, Jason and his crew find themselves redirected by Aeetes' malice and, more effectively, by Medea's sympathetic counter-plots. 'In my uncertainty and ignorance of this place,' Jason hails the strange girl on the river-bank, 'some god has sent you to me.' Immediately, he entrusts his security and his mission to the Colchian princess, the very lives (*animos*) of his crew and everything they possess (5.389f.). Medea may not be a 'hero' in the restricted sense which conservative readings of epic allow,¹³ but she is certainly—to apply Mills's phrase—the 'point of intelligibility of the text' during Valerius' last three books.¹⁴ His second authorial invocation (5.217-21) states explicitly that the remainder of the action will focus on 'the madness (*furias*) and unspeakable pacts of [Aeetes'] daughter, and the ship shuddering under the maiden of horror (*horrenda uirgine*)'.

Different Medeas exhibit different degrees of authority and autonomy. Apollonius' Medea remains subordinate to Jason, becoming what Clauss calls his 'helper-maiden from Hell'.¹⁵ Her role is restricted to supplying the drugs that will enhance Jason's performance sufficiently to complete his trials. Similar constraints limit Ovid's Medea at *Metamorphoses* 7.137-40, whose protective spell becomes redundant when Jason uses his own initiative to defeat the *terrigenae*. Valerius' heroine, in contrast, intervenes throughout:

patrios extinxi noxia tauros;
terrigenas in fata dedi; fusum ecce draconis
corpus habes, iamque omne nefas, iam, spero, peregi

(*Argonautica* 8.106-08)

I extinguished the poison in my father's bulls;
I sent the Earthborn to their deaths; look, you have the dragon's
passive corpse; and now, I hope, now I have finished all my evil.

Medea claims responsibility for all the acts that won the Fleece, having used Jason as her proxy. Not content to remain an adoring spectator at the bullfight as at *Met.* 7.100-48, Valerius' Medea engages the beasts directly. The *carmina* which entwine Jason's limbs suppress and emasculate (*languent*) the bulls (*Arg.* 7.463-66). Apollonius' bullfight, at which Medea is not even present,¹⁶ lays on an extravaganza of pure testosterone. Valerius, in contrast, repeatedly invokes Medea's contribution, even addressing her directly:

13 Hershkowitz (1998), 123-236, omits Medea altogether from her discussion of 'new and improved' characters; Hunter (1998) offers a reading of Apollonius' whole epic as ephebic initiation; Garson (1963), 264, calls Medea's presence 'an embarrassing exigency of the story'; Beye (1982), esp. 119, describes the *Argonautica* as Jason's *bildungsroman*, although he does concede that it 'becomes the adventure story of the couple' (143); Taylor (1994) identifies only a Hercules-Augustus, Jason-Vespasian typology. Keith (2000) restricts female characters to providing a periphery, background or motive for epic, and does not discuss Valerius' Medea at all.

14 Mills (2005), 20.

15 Clauss (1997), 149, 175. See also Hunter (1998), 438ff.

16 Observed by Lindheim (2003), 132.

sed non incendia Colchis
adspirare sinit, clipeoque inliditur ignis
frigidus et uiso pallescit flamma ueneno...
ille uirum atque ipsam tunc te, Medea, recusans
concutit...

(*Argonautica* 7.584-86, 589f.)

The Colchian did not allow it
to breathe its flames. Striking Jason's shield, the fire
froze, and paled when it saw her poison...
In resisting the man and then you yourself, Medea,
the bull tottered...

In the end, she intervenes decisively from the sidelines, casting the spell which enables Jason to prevail over a spent and recumbent beast:

alium dehinc turbida Colchis
exarmat lentumque offert timideque minantem,
iamque propinquanti noctem implicat; ille fatiscens
in caput inque umeros ipsa ui molis et irae
proruit...

(*Argonautica* 7.596-600)

Then the Colchian, concerned,
pacified the other bull, and delivered him as a sluggish, timid threat,
approaching already ensnared in darkness; exhausted,
headlong, tumbling under the weight of his own strength and rage,
he fell...

Hershkowitz argues tortuously that 'Medea's interventions do not undermine Jason's heroic stature so much as allow it to be shown to its best advantage', so instead of revealing Medea's own complex complicity, they merely exhibit the captain's 'innate martial prowess and zeal'.¹⁷ This apologetic attitude towards acknowledging Medea's dominant role is a typical product of the critical position that continues to promote the male adventurer at all costs. While Jason's qualities are not irrelevant, they are, for Valerius, subordinate to those of the woman whose self-destructive power in fact supplies the dynamism that begins to drive the action from the moment she is first introduced. A reorientation of focus can dispense with the apparent need for justification still prevailing in readings of this episode that cannot seem to escape the invisible restrictions of gender, genre and imperialist subjectivity.¹⁸

Initially, Medea's mother does condemn him as a *praedo*, a buccaneer responsible for abducting the treasures of the Colchian royal house. This is the Jason described by Hunter as 'the foreign raider who has snatched both the king's daughter and his favourite possession',

17 Hershkowitz (1998), 52-57.

18 See also Feeney's dismissive remarks (1991), 326: 'The poem's great set-piece battle book is *undetermined*, to become *only* an occasion for the girl to fall in love with her future husband.' (Emphasis mine.)

reducing Medea to the equivalent of stolen property.¹⁹ Medea's mother, however, revises her interpretation. 'But why do I attack him with these undeserved complaints?' she asks. 'She was the one who fled, and the one who burned—unspeakable!—with such passionate love' (8.158f.). Jason deserves neither the censure nor the credit for his Colchian exploits. Medea has engineered her own escape, acting according to her own uncontrollable desires. This is of course hardly an innovative suggestion; exercising autonomous agency is integral to becoming the Medea more familiar from tragedy.²⁰

It is ironic that her assertion of independence should ultimately come to serve the interests of the Argo and the colonising force it represents, but this irony is replicated by the poem's own ventriloquism. Valerius, working through the divine machinations of Juno and then Venus, creates a paradox for his heroine: in rebelling against paternal authority, and realising her individual potential—in magic (*carmina*) as well as sexuality—she makes herself indispensable to Jason's predestined success. In a similar way, Medea's dynamism is exploited by the Roman poet to add an extra dimension to his own dialogue with literary precedent and contemporary politics. There is nothing of value about Medea's colonial experience, except in so far as it allows Valerius further to pursue his theme of self-destructive globalisation, and nothing authentic. It unfolds along the well-worn tracks of epic diction. Even as Valerius' Medea finds her voice in Rome's top genre, she must be accommodated to its purposes and principles.

3. Whose civil war is it, anyway?

Tim Stover's recuperative analysis of Jason's similes is based on the flawed assumption that Medea exercises a 'subversive' influence over the narrative. The proper substance of epic, according to this interpretation, is the exclusively masculine domain of *reges et proelia*, and erotic involvement represents a threat to generic coherence.²¹ Defending this position becomes particularly urgent for Roman epic, in which the masculine pursuit of empire converges with a genre where masculine interests and values are paramount.²² But Valerius' Medea ensures that the *Argonautica* progresses. She follows the lead of the strong female characters in prior Latin epic who temporarily take over the narrative, whether—like Dido—they threaten alternative scenarios, or whether—like Erichtho—they make manifest the chaos at the root of all history.²³ Medea both emulates and supersedes their example.²⁴ Rather than functioning as a counterpoint, she comes to replace Jason as Valerius' central figure. Jason withdraws from both the Colchian court and the text itself, skulking unheard in the belly of his ship while Venus misrepresents him as suicidal (7.263-80). Medea's vacillation, meanwhile, her troubled resistance and her eventual acquiescence constitute the substance of the

19 Hunter (1989), 440.

20 Euripides' Jason naturally attributes his success to Venus instead (*Med.* 526-28), but compare Eur. *Med.* 475-90, *Ov. Her.* 12, *Sen. Med.* 447-89.

21 Stover (2003), 123f. Or, as Beye (1982), 89, states bluntly, 'Epic poetry is male poetry.' Johnson (1987), 53, writes that 'epic is about great men doing great things in great wars'—or else (in Lucan's case) cosmic dissolution.

22 It is, according to Keith (2000), 35, 'a literary form centred on the principle of elite male identity'.

23 Johnson (1987), 21, discovers Erichtho 'at the very heart of Lucan's divine machinery'.

24 Hardie (1993), 35, discusses heroic succession, although emulating 'earlier historical and literary models' is not limited to epic heroes (consider Seneca's *Medea nunc sum* (910), *sic fugere soleo* (1022), etc).

Valerian narrative. Jason may, as Stover argues, enjoy ‘as heroic an *aristeia* as he possibly could’ during Colchis’ civil war,²⁵ but it is a cul-de-sac that goes nowhere and resolves nothing. In this particular Roman epic, *proelia* form the dangerous digression, while *amor* and its consequences return it to the preordained route.

Medea’s gaze becomes indispensable to the Colchian civil war. Her extended *teichoscopia* (6.507-760) has been the subject of a recent article by Helen Lovatt which investigates the possibility of a distinctively ‘female gaze’ in Flavian epic.²⁶ Hershkowitz supposes that ‘the reader observes the battle essentially...from the perspective of Jason’.²⁷ On the contrary, Jason only becomes visible to the reader when Medea is watching him. His role in the fighting is not mentioned at all until he appears at line 546 in response to Medea’s obsession. Jason’s apparent prominence in the second half of the Colchian war is the effect of its refraction through her dazzled vision:

conspicit Aesonium longe caput, ac simul acres
 huc oculos sensusque refert animumque fauentem,
 nunc quo se raperet, nunc quo diuersus abiret,
 ante uidens...
 quaque iterum tacito sparsit uaga lumina uultu
 aut fratris quaerens aut pacti coniugis arma,
 saeuus ibi miserae solusque occurrit Iason.

(*Argonautica* 6.579-82, 584-86)

She glimpsed Jason in the distance, and kept
 returning her eager eyes to him, her senses and her favour,
 seeing in her mind’s eye where he would take himself,
 where he would go next...
 Repeatedly, wherever she silently cast her wandering eyes,
 seeking the armour of her brother or her betrothed,
 there alone for the wretched girl ranged fierce Jason.

It is Medea’s sightline that determines what can be described or visualised for the remainder of the battle, which switches between breakneck bloodshed down on the field and the reluctant fascination of the girl watching. Rather than experiencing the fighting from a participant’s point of view, the reader is brought to identify with Medea’s experience.

Skill in combat is no guarantee of empowerment, particularly considering the dynamics of Roman spectatorship evoked by the battle scene.²⁸ Although observing men at war has been an epic heroine’s prerogative since Helen leaned over the walls of Troy (*Iliad* 3.130-242), the mock-battle staged by Valerius is enhanced by contemporary resonance. ‘Through the focalisation of Medea,’ as Andrew Zissos argues, ‘the reader is forced to take a specifically amphitheatrical perspective on the battle.’²⁹ The sheer unprecedented magnitude of arena culture in the Flavian capital cannot be overstated. Completed in 80 CE, the Colosseum became both

25 Stover (2003), 143.

26 Lovatt (2006).

27 Hershkowitz (1998), 227.

28 On arena spectatorship, see Zissos (2003), 668-84; Barton (1993), 11-81; Edwards (1997), *passim*; Newlands (1997), 227-45.

29 Zissos (2003), 669 n.32; see also Summers (1894), 59.

medium and icon of the popular phenomenon.³⁰ Gladiatorial masculinity is a complex issue, but overriding anxieties about improper self-display, and the degradation (*infamia*) legally resulting from amphitheatrical performance, remain difficult to disregard.³¹ Virility showcased in the service of the arena may be regarded as a form of masculinity whose enforced display deprives it of intrinsic authority. While Medea watches avidly from above, 'ipso facto defined as part of the Roman social order' by the arena's scopic economy,³² Jason—exotic foreigner, disposable mercenary—occupies unawares the gladiator's marginal role. Both as star attraction and as focus of Medea's desiring gaze, Jason is deprived of subjectivity. Like the civil war he is fighting, he becomes a decorative adjunct to the *Argonautica*'s core plot, which from this point is the province of Medea. The only conceivable function of Colchis' civil war, according to Hershkowitz, is to provide 'a chance for Jason's skills as an epic warrior to shine'.³³ On the contrary, Valerius has accomplished a complete revision of the *Argonautica*'s centre of poetic gravity.

Juno excuses the Argonauts' pointless involvement in Aetes' war by explaining that she has other plots in mind (*alios dolos*), plots which will convey the vessel that she and the poet have crafted together to its proper destination (5.291-94). Medea's infatuation develops concurrently with the battle-scene, her intimate responses interwoven with the clash of weapons.³⁴ She is engaged in a parallel struggle, gradually surrendering to the jewels that are insinuating erotic flames around her body, to Juno's soft encouragement, and to her own desire. Whenever Jason is surrounded or attacked, it is Medea who feels the deluge of spears and stones (6.683-85). Just as love-elegy uses metaphors of (epic) warfare, so Valerius converts civil war into an external expression of the more significant inner conflict raging in Medea's heart. The battle out on the plain is something of a decoy, thematically crucial but structurally superfluous, a counterpoint to the real plot laid by Juno and Valerius: Medea's seduction.

The civil war which Jason must incite among Aetes' *terrigenae*, the earthborn brothers, is also attributed decisively to Medea's initiative. Once again, whereas Apollonius' 'helper-maiden' merely suggests throwing a stone among the warriors, Valerius' heroine impregnates a helmet with a drug that deludes them into fratricide. As the Earthborn turn on one another, one of Valerius' trademark Roman similes connects the episode to themes pertinent to Flavian self-consciousness. Medea is compared to two goddesses:

qualis ubi attonitos maestae Phrygas annua Matris
 ira uel exectos lacerat Bellona comatos:
 haud secus accensas subito Medea cohortes
 implicat et miseros agit in sua proelia fratres.

(*Argonautica* 7.635-38)

As when the grim Mother strikes the Phrygians with their annual
 frenzy, or Bellona hacks into her eunuch followers,

30 Zissos (2003), 660f.

31 Edwards (1997), 66: 'Actors, gladiators and prostitutes...were symbols of the shameful.' According to Edmondson (1996), 83, 'Those who performed in the arena were socially dead, or at best, *de-classé*.'

32 Edmondson (1996), 83.

33 Hershkowitz (1998), 124; also 231.

34 See Lovatt (2006), 70, for a discussion on how this departs from a 'model reading' of epic war.

even so Medea engages the cohorts, suddenly inflamed,
and drives the wretched brothers into war against themselves.

Colchian civil war mirrors Rome's own eternal return to internal conflict, even occurring on Colchis' very own Campus Martius (*Martius ante urbem longis iacet horridus annis/campus*, 7.62f.).³⁵ Earlier, during the major battle, Colchian warriors were compared to Roman legions opposing one another in criminal (*infelix*) combat (6.402-06). The divinities invoked by Medea's simile add a further dimension to the city's deadly fault-line. Civil war is figured here as castration, self-harm inflicted under the influence of a frenzy that maims its own participants.

Bellona, Rome's home-grown personification of war, was relegated to the Campus Martius. The cult of Cybele, however, centrally located on the Palatine itself, was originally imported from the Near East as a means of defending Rome against Hannibal's invasion (at least according to Roman sources).³⁶ Its practitioners, the eunuch Galli, can therefore be understood as representing foreign energies channelled into protecting Roman interests.³⁷ Self-mutilation is both enshrined and ritually excluded at the centre of urban space. Casting Medea as Magna Mater, then, not only assimilates her to a foreign goddess intrinsic to metropolitan identity, but also suggests that harnessing such energies may not be altogether beneficial. If Rome itself is splitting apart, and the state's conceptual integrity has been compromised from within, 'foreignness' can no longer be defined nor contained. There is no difference, the simile suggests—*haud secus*—between the self-mutilating Galli, embraced as a source of potency, and the battle-lines of brothers inflicting wounds on their own flesh and blood. Centralised otherness generates power, but power unbalanced generates internal dysfunction. It is worth observing that Jason has once again receded from the action at this point. The full force of responsibility for the massacre of the *terrigenae* descends on Medea. Uniting them (*implot*) in their orgy of self-destruction, she stands untouched in the eye of the violence, Bellona and Cybele, presiding over blood-mad men in Rome and Colchis alike.

4. Divided against herself

It is perhaps not surprising that Medea should provide an avatar for civil war. This central character, whose complicity ensures the success of Jason's mission and Valerius' epic project, stands divided by her own desires. Duality has been identified in Medea at every stage of her textual and mythical career.³⁸ As she becomes more and more familiar to the *Argonautica*'s reader, Medea progressively loses touch with herself and her homeland. Valerius' heroine finds herself splitting apart, divided into powerless girl and invincible witch, caught between Colchis and Greece, harbouring the lethal future that is the legacy of her poetic predeces-

35 McGuire (1997), 112f., relates Valerius' Colchis to Rome's 'continual cycle of civil war.'

36 Livy 29.10.4-11.8 and 29.14.5-14.

37 Stehle (1989), 155-56.

38 Newlands (1997), 178 and 191f., analyses Ovid's contrasting portraits in the *Metamorphoses*: 'juxtaposing...the two Medeas of the literary tradition...mirrors the physical and psychic displacement of Medea herself.' Lindheim (2003), 116, describes Medea's 'sharply divided double image' in the *Heroides*. Nussbaum (1997), 249, comments that Seneca's Medea 'displays a serpentine doubleness'.

sors.³⁹ Medea cannot be approached without an awareness of her prior incarnations—Euripidean, Apollonian, Ovidian, and (most recently) Senecan—implicating the reader in her transition from obscure Colchian virgin to her infamous maturity.

Medea is torn between two worlds. Ingrained loyalty to her homeland conflicts with the libertine allure of voyaging, power and mature sexuality. Yearning after Jason as he slams out of the throne-room, Valerius' heroine can no longer fully identify as Colchian, but remains 'isolated (*deserta*) even in the intimate midst of her family' (7.103). Apollonius' Medea, stimulated by a playful Eros, spends the night in well-crafted reasoning, eventually deciding to contribute to the intrigue fomented by other members of her family. Valerius compresses and intensifies her struggle to resist divine imperative until Venus, determined to end all hesitation, finally assaults her physically: the goddess 'seizes her in an embrace (*occupat amplexu*)...plants furious kisses, and inspires her with breath that mingles desire and disgust (*odiis amorem*)' (7.254f.). Even so inflamed, Medea refuses to surrender, writhing and grinding her face into the bed as 'horror invades her slackened (*mollis*) limbs' (7.296). What Hardie calls 'epic's basic dualism...expressed through moral and psychological abstractions, above all *pietas* and *furor*' is channelled into the mental turmoil of an individual.⁴⁰ Just as Medea's *amor* draws the epic back from its dangerous digression into *proelia*, so the classic Virgilian dichotomy is inverted here as well; it is descent into *furor* that the fated plot demands. A Medea who clung to familial *pietas* would wreck the Argonautic mission.

Medea's doomed decision is the fulcrum of the epic.⁴¹ Whereas Apollonius' Medea drives out to negotiate openly with Jason, resplendent in the sunrise, Valerius shifts the scene to midnight. Civil war has been distilled into the conflict raging in Medea's own head as 'the poor girl arms herself (*induitur*) with poisons against her own kingdom (*contra sua regna*), and trembling ventures into the shadowy night' (7.371f.). Her passage transforms the protective enclosure of city walls into something uncannily oppressive (7.380-81). But when silence answers her hesitation at the final gateway, Medea's fear of the dark dissolves:

et iam iam magico per opaca silentia Colchis
 coeperat ire sono, montanaque condere uultus
 numina cumque suis auerti collibus amnes;
 iam stabulis gregibusque pauor strepitusque sepulcris
 inciderat; stupet ipsa graui nox tardior umbra...

(*Argonautica* 7.389-93)

And now through the silent darkness the Colchian began
 to move, with magical incantation. The mountain spirits
 hid their faces, and rivers turned aside from their slopes;
 now fear hit the stabled flocks, and groaning came from the tombs.
 Night herself was stricken, and held back her heavy shade...

39 Three episodes supply fragmentary glimpses of this future: Mopsus' prophecy (1.224-26); Medea's own nightmare vision of murdered children (5.329-40); and the ekphrasis of Apollo's temple doors (5.440-54), discussed below.

40 Hardie (1993), 58; see also 44. Beye (1982), 124, calls this the 'dynamics of indecision' in Apollonius, arguing that 'Jason *seems* to be the hero, the only hero, the true traditional centrepiece of the action, until Medea commences to debate her great moral choice.'

41 On Apollonius, Beye (1982), 135, writes that 'the result is to constitute her as a hero, at least equivalent to Jason in the narrative.'

The dark now covers before Medea. She arrives in Hecate's shadowy grove trailing a landscape responding to her own panic like a topographic echo. Medea and Jason encounter like *umbræ caecæ*, mute blind ghosts in the void (7.401f.).⁴² 'Are you carrying any hope of light?' Jason asks (7.413), an ironic question to put to a bearer of such darkness. Committing irrevocable treason, Medea hands over her *medicamina* to Jason as though it is her 'own country' she surrenders (7.459), a betrayal not only of her state but of her own former self. She has been irrevocably changed, mourning that 'these forests do not now recognise (*agnoscunt*) Aetes' daughter' (7.445). Neither her father nor her Colchian landscape can continue to define her. She is developing an identity apart.

Medea is defined by dread. Already terrified (*territa*, 5.329) by her own visions, she is plunged deeper into fear (*maesto timore*, 5.352) by the appearance of the strangers creeping along the river-banks. Her response to Jason produces more apprehension: *trepidam* (5.358, 391), *uirgineo cunctata metu* (5.392). It exceeds the pragmatic decorum ascribed to Nausicaa, on whose hospitality towards the shipwrecked Odysseus the scene is modelled.⁴³ Medea's entire being is consumed by terror. At last, when locked in her chamber (*in thalamis*) and preparing for departure, the source of her fear is identified as neither the prospect of a voyage nor the inaccessibility of distant lands (8.3f.). A global citizen, as Seneca once asserted, should be impervious to exile in a world where no land is more foreign than any other (*ad Helv.* 8.5). Instead of the sea, the vast unknown, and the unthinkable distances that intimidated the Argonauts, Medea appears 'fearful (*trepidam*) in her chamber, already afraid of what she has done (*sua facta*)' (8.1). She is haunted by her own actions and their consequences, the hidden aspect of herself that she would rather reject or suppress. Such a Medea is well-known to Scythia's magicians and goddesses, not to mention Roman readers, but is experienced by the troubled girl herself only as a nightmare, and in the cold quiet constant presence of her fear.

Valerius develops a discrepancy between Medea's experience of herself and her reputation, the image now available to those who would cultivate her power. Juno, following Seneca's portrayal of Medea as effectively a force of nature, regards her as 'more powerful than any other at the nocturnal altars' (6.440), and

non aliam tauris uidet et nascentibus armis
 quippe parem nec quae medio stet in agmine flammae,
 nullum mente nefas, nullos horrescere uisus.

(*Argonautica* 6.451-53)

sees no other as her equal against the bulls and earthborn
 armies, nor anyone who could stand against flames in the front line,
 nothing too evil for her mind to contemplate. No sight makes her shudder.

This Medea can not only liquefy the moon and walk through fire, but, more pertinently, is afraid of nothing. Juno's opinion is not isolated. Valerius adds that even *maxima Circe* and Phrixus, with all his experience of Thessalian witchcraft, are awestruck by Medea's 'terrifying methods' (6.445-48). This perception of Medea as invincible sorceress is not misplaced, for all it seems incompatible with the fragility and doubt that crack her self-image. Medea is certainly capable of whatever Juno (or Jason) may require, supremely confident in her potions

42 See Hardie (1993), 91, on echoes of *Aeneid* 6.

43 Clauss (1997), 156f.; Hershkowitz (1998), 96.

and incantations and affinity with the monstrous dragon she cherishes. Valerius' discrepancy illustrates a split in Medea's psyche as the witch and the virgin compete for precedence.⁴⁴ Medea is not to be regarded as an essential, interior psychology misinterpreted by those who read her actions. Nor is she simply unaware of the latent power she harbours. The clash between these formulations of self is precisely what makes her the 'point of intelligibility' for Valerius' text.

It has been widely recognised that Valerius' *Argonautica* self-consciously exhibits an awareness of its own 'belatedness', or the weight of epic and other tradition, and the irony of launching a *prima ratis* so late in the literary armada.⁴⁵ Medea's career, particularly as tragic heroine, is no exception. It is worked most prominently into the epic as the epheastic panels decorating Apollo's temple doors in Colchis. Here, Medea's forthcoming tragedy is depicted along with scenes from Colchian history. An abandoned wife mocked by a royal wedding chorus, a poisoned robe whose fire consumes a palace, Furies watching from the roof and a murderess making a getaway by dragon are all memorable images pulled from the archives of Graeco-Roman theatre.⁴⁶ This is the future that Medea must fulfil, the (pre)destined role which makes her betrayal inevitable. Fate—that is, the necessary outcome of her myth as inherited from prior sources—demands its players sacrifice who they are for what they will become.

Medea, the epic's new driving force and affective centre, embodies powerful internal conflicts. Her dual identity becomes apparent as the competing claims of Colchis and Greece—ancestral homeland and brave new world, present incarnation and literary heritage, self-image and reputation—exert intolerable pressure. Gradually, she resembles less and less the self she thinks she knows, becoming more like the ravaged, volatile figure familiar from elsewhere. In both senses of the word, Valerius' Medea is fearful. Inspiring terror, she is deeply afraid, because while her magic is more than sufficient to eliminate external threats it is impotent against her own passions. This is not a position unfamiliar to Roman philosophical and psychological discourse.⁴⁷ Perceived as all-powerful, and indeed afraid not of any external danger but of what she herself is incubating, Medea shares qualities attributed elsewhere, most pertinently by Lucan, to Rome itself.

5. Rome's liquid capital

Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, the suicidal howl of an *enfant terrible* from the last wild years of Nero's reign, supplies an important intertext for Flavian epic. Lucan's influence on Valerius deserves a much more detailed analysis than is feasible here, but it is worth mentioning one or two passages for the rhetorical connection they assert between civil war and Rome's penchant for foreign assimilation. Like Tacitus, who portrays civil war as the inevitable outcome of an

44 Clauss (1997), 169; see also Lindheim (2003), 125.

45 Davis (1990), 47; according to Malamud & McGuire (1993), 196 and 215: 'Valerius' Argonauts sail through seas choked with precedents.... Their unmapped unknown is for the author a well-charted world of familiar texts; for the reader, the *Argonautica* is an endless voyage into the familiar made strange.' See also Hershkowitz (1998), *passim*, but esp. 35-38, 99-106, 206.

46 Compare Sen. *Med.* 56-116 (the wedding chorus) and 1021-25 (the winged serpents); Eur. *Med.* 1185-1202 (effect of the poison); also Ov. *Her.* 12.142-58 (the wedding chorus); and for Furies on the roof compare Eur. *Her.* 815-74 (Iris and Lyssa), Virg. *Aen.* 7.511-18 (Allecto).

47 Henry & Henry (1985), 79-80.

imperial expansion fuelled by *avaritia* (*Hist.* 2.38), Lucan blames its outbreak on spiralling prosperity (*BC* 1.158-82). The accumulation of both monetary wealth and luxury consumer goods is figured as causing imbalance and dysfunction at the imperial centre.⁴⁸ Excessive absorption of foreign substances into Roman bodies can be equated to excessive absorption of foreign bodies into the Roman state. Shadi Bartsch, discussing the *Bellum Civile*'s leitmotif of boundary-dissolution, shows how Lucan conflates the body and the body politic, arguing that 'the issue of integrity, of course, concerned state as well as self.'⁴⁹ Civil war, according to Lucan, not only breeds Caesarism but liquidates Rome into *mundi faece*, the melting pot of global filth (*BC* 7.404f.).⁵⁰ It destroys native Romans and thus enables everybody else (Gauls, Germans, Greeks, Africans, Scythians etc.) to inherit the metropolis, the empire and the earth. Lucan declares apocalyptically that *Pharsalus tanti causa mali* (*BC* 7.407f.), collapsing civil war into globalisation as the co-dependent consequences of an expansionist ideology.

The accuracy of Lucan's assertions may be dubious at best, but they draw on a xenophobic strain in Roman literature which progressively implicates the Argo. The *Bellum Civile* includes a number of direct references to Argonautic myth. Thessaly, where Pharsalus will decide the fate of Lucan's Roman Republic, also produced the first ship, with its new brand of death (*BC* 3.193-97; compare *Arg.* 1.648). Lucan also locates the origin of war itself on this same stretch of coast, where the simultaneous invention of weapons, commerce, and navigation 'compelled the inhabitants into criminal conflict (*scelerata arma*)' (*BC* 6.406). The Argo has a rich Roman history as icon of humanity's primal descent into civilisation, expressed perhaps most vehemently by Horace in *Ode* 1.3, which equates Argonautic transgression to Prometheus' theft of fire.⁵¹ However, a specific link between the decline instigated by the first ship's *audacia* and the corruption entailed by Roman expansion was not forged until the Neronian period. Around the same time as Lucan was unleashing his *Bellum Civile*, Seneca's *Medea* was synchronising the Argo with the anxieties of contemporary Rome.

The fullest expression of the Argo's contribution to Roman decadence is found in *Medea*'s choral indictment of global expansion and its consequences.⁵² After rehearsing some familiar deprecations of the first ship's temerity, and its contribution to the breakdown of Golden Age self-sufficiency, Seneca introduces two concepts crucial to Valerius' treatment. The first is *Medea* as imported cargo:

quod fuit huius pretium cursus?
aurea pellis
maiusque mari Medea malum,
merces prima digna carina.

(*Medea* 361-64)

And what was the price of this voyage?
Golden fleece,

48 See also Petr. *Sat.* 119-20, Caes. *BG* 6.22.3, Sall. *Cat.* 11-13; Juv. *Sat.* 6.286-300.

49 Bartsch (1997), 44. See also Morley (2003), 150: 'Rome consumed bodies as insatiably as it consumed food, wine and other goods.'

50 See discussion in Johnson (1987), 88-94. Also Sall. *Cat.* 37: 'Anyone whose disgrace and offensiveness was outstanding...those whom vice or crime had exiled, all these dregs came flowing together at Rome.'

51 On Prometheus' prominence and significance in Valerius, see Hardie (1993), 85.

52 For discussion of this ode, see Davis (1990), 55-59, and Boyle (1997), 127f.

and Medea, more malicious than the main,
cargo worthy of the first ship.

The Argo does not just represent the first defiant plunge into a forbidden zone. It also brings something back. And as in Valerius' *proem*, Seneca's Argo does not launch naval invasion, but an equally deadly flood of commerce. The seductive commodities that will infiltrate the cultural premises of the colonial power are embodied by Medea, prize and merchandise (*merces*), whose malice is as boundless as the earth itself. The choral ode concludes with a geographical crisis of global proportions:

nunc iam cessit pontus et omnes
patitur leges...
terminus omnis motus, et urbes
muros terra posuere noua.
nil qua fuerat sede reliquit
peruius orbis;
Indus gelidum potat Araxen,
Albin Persae Rhenumque bibunt.

(*Medea* 364f., 369-74)

Now the ocean gives way
and suffers all manner of regulation...
Every boundary has shifted, and city-
walls break new ground.
Nothing remains where it used to be
in a world so accessible;
An Indian gulps the freezing Araxes
and Persians drink Albin and Rhine.

The impact of the Argo's passage is not restricted to some prehistoric cataclysm. It has produced ongoing reverberations in a Roman present where the world has been rendered unlimited and infinitely permeable. Conquest, in overcoming geophysical space, has disrupted ethnic and topographical particularity. The Argo generates a contemporary world where distance has collapsed, a world with Seneca's lethal Medea as its emblem.

Seneca represents Jason and his quest as the '*raptor* coming back with foreign gold' (612f.). Obtaining the Golden Fleece, in this version, satisfies an insatiable thirst for riches. Boundless *auaritia*, lust for possessions, is linked to imperial success and self-destruction so frequently as to have become an embedded trope in the Roman vocabulary of self-flagellation. Seneca therefore combines in this tragedy two distinct strands of Roman thought: the general association of the Argo with a primeval fall from grace, and the particular dislocation generated by economic imperialism. The *prima ratis* was always hubristic, and foreign countries always seductive, but this is the first explicit integration of the two tropes into one powerful image: the Argo now embodies Roman imperialism. Once this line has been crossed, there is no way to go back. And although Valerius allows the connection to develop implicitly—through strategically placed Roman similes, for example, and through the very act

of (re)inscribing the Argonautic myth in this most overtly politicised of poetic genres—his pristine vessel is already tainted by what Seneca made it do.

The voyage of the Valerian Argo, like Vespasian's benign influence, lays the Mediterranean wide open to marine traffic. After the emperor's apotheosis, Valerius predicts, not only will Tyrian vessels plot their course according to Vespasian, but he will also preside over those from 'Greece, Sidon and the Nile' (1.17-20). Neptune, justifying his intervention in rescuing the Argo from Book 1's storm, predicts that 'ships will come from Pharos and Tyre' (1.644) in its wake. It is apparently not military fleets that the Argo will inspire; despite Jupiter's prior claim that open shipping lanes will provide a pathway for Bellona (1.543), Valerius does not stress that the first ship could be held responsible for the Roman navy, nor for aggression directed overseas. The 'revolutionary cause of death' (1.648) it engenders is shipwreck, not invasion. Instead, Valerius' Argo will lure commercial shipping in the opposite direction, from Greece, Alexandria and the Levant, the ports where luxury products from Asia Minor and the Middle East were stockpiled.⁵³ Argonautic precedent, then, is identified as spawning the widespread, largely unregulated trading networks that provided Roman consumers with their symbols of sensory excess. With the *Argonautica* as its emblem-text, Valerius' becomes a Rome of boundless consumer gratification, not defensive *alta moenia*.

Valerius' Cybele similes further support the reading of Medea as embodying foreign assimilation in a way that is meaningful for Flavian Rome. Medea's Roman-style wedding ceremony is infiltrated by Cybele's iconically alien cult. She approaches the altar accompanied by the power of a foreign goddess in conjunction with wilful self-deception and civil war:

sic ubi Mygdonios planctus sacer abluit Almo,
laetaque iam Cybele festaeque per oppida taedae,
quis modo tam saeuos adytis fluxisse cruores
cogitet? aut ipsi qui iam meminere ministri?

(*Argonautica* 8.239-42)

So, when the sacred Almo has washed away Mygdonian pain,
when Cybele rejoices, and torches celebrate throughout the town,
who now would believe such savage blood flowed
in her temples? Or which of her devotees themselves now remember?

Centralised otherness, as mentioned above, is the defining property of Rome's cult of Magna Mater.⁵⁴ Embracing Eastern cults like Cybele's not only represents the incorporation of foreign potency, as Stehle argues. It also destabilises the foundation of Roman power and identity, acting as a reminder that they arise continually from origins elsewhere. Mary Beard has commented that:

53 Young (2001), esp 52f.

54 Stehle (1989).

At the centre of Rome...there lay a puzzle, and a series of conjectures, of wanderings...a sacralised parade of the question of what Rome was, where it came from, how Roman-ness was to be defined as Roman. Rome as foreign...?⁵⁵

Medea represents the diverse experiences of the migrants who comprise Valerius' empire. Emma Dench makes the point that Rome's socio-political development was predicated on an ideology of assimilation. This is expressed in a rich, ongoing mythology of displacement, arrival, departure, the 'incorporation of foreigners', into a foundational pluralism which comprises exiles, refugees, wanderers and conscripts from all over Italy and the Mediterranean.⁵⁶ Behind Romulus, there is Aeneas; behind Aeneas, Evander. As Virgil indicates, and Ovid's *Fasti* reiterates, Rome is a composite of elsewhere. Identifying a homogenous, autochthonous or original presence is impossible, because those remotest and purest of ancestors, the *prisca gens*, the ones who never forged a sword or reefed a sail, are by definition pre-Roman. Rome begins with external contact and the internalisation of difference. 'There's no ethnic group (*hominum genus*) which doesn't gather and mix (*concurrit*) in this city', writes Seneca (*ad Helv.* 6.2), pitching migration as the human condition and reminding his readers that Roman power (*imperium*) itself regards an exile as its founder (*ad Helv.* 7.7). By the 70s, Rome was becoming 'an increasingly virtual community,' located in a network of imagined identities extending far outside the city walls.⁵⁷ Even emperors, as the events of 69 demonstrated, could be made elsewhere (Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.4). But held in tension against multicultural diversity is the corresponding dread of civil war. It should be recalled that Medea's previous association with Cybele (see p.00 above) embroiled her in fratricide. Valerius' Cybele similes therefore combine Rome's propensity for foreign fusion with the city's other primary foundational attribute, internal fission. The blood flowing in Cybele's temple to enhance Medea's marriage flowed previously when the *terrigenae* clashed, performing the self-mutilation that Roman dominance, now secure, would prefer to conceal. Even the festival's mutilated *ministri* have already forgotten what it was they did not want to remember.

6. Conclusions

The voyage of Valerius' Argo is not a one-way trip. Jason's venture into the Black Sea's otherworld (*alium orbem*, 2.628) is counterbalanced by Medea's decision to embark on her own voyage into the unknown. Valerius handles the shift displaying immense sensitivity towards both a multi-layered epic tradition and Medea's cumulative identity on the tragic stage. His heroine possesses a subjectivity not unfamiliar to readers of Euripides or the *Heroides*, but unusually well-developed for a female figure in epic. Her initiative is emphasised, as is her responsibility for Argonautic success. In cleaving to Jason, Medea assumes a new identity as exile and wanderer, a stateless individual, alien even to her own former self. That Medea's radical reorientation of psyche and loyalties could constitute the substance of Roman epic, particularly a Roman epic so overtly concerned with foreign contact and its impact, suggests a

55 Beard (1995), 174. This particular quote refers to the Vestals, following a discussion of the proximity and religious dialectic of the Vestals' temple and that of Magna Mater (170f.). Stehle (1989), 156, argues in addition that 'Cybele *qua* Magna Mater is a politicized, "distorted" version of Vesta.'

56 Dench (2005), 137; see also 63. Compare Morley (2003) on Roman plurality. Rome's multicultural composition is surveyed by Noy (2000).

57 Dench (2005), 134.

willingness to experiment not only with form but with prevailing attitudes towards imperialist power. There are, as Edward Said has consistently demonstrated, multiple ‘discrepant’ or ‘contrapuntal’ voices contributing to the collective experience of empire.⁵⁸ Valerius relates Medea’s Argonautic narrative as much as Jason’s.

Imperialism, in Valerius’ *Argonautica*, is therefore not simply a self-contained act of conquest perpetrated by an adventure-hero and his *nimum audax* (‘far too daring’) ship.⁵⁹ This scheme is disrupted by Medea’s takeover of the narrative. She is not there to function as ornamental *spolia*, nor as an embarrassing detraction from Jason’s personal glory. Instead, she becomes a concentrated personification of precisely those flaws in Roman imperialism which the *Argonautica* traces throughout: the origin of empire in the assimilation of strangers, instantly compromising any pretensions to stable identity, and the corresponding tendency towards internal fragmentation. Neither of these views is at all alien to a Roman perspective on imperialism, but for Valerius to rediscover them at the heart of this epic’s foreign ‘point of intelligibility’ alters her status dramatically. Medea assumes responsibility for the epic’s trajectory even as she assumes the contradictions embedded in the rhetoric of Roman expansion. The superpower who can make Avernus crawl and Prometheus wince and the whole world tremble is unable to recognise herself as she betrays her *patria* for desirable otherness and perpetual circulation.

However, what appears at first to hold out extraordinary subversive potential—the replacement of imperialist Jason by his sometime conquest Medea—is ultimately returned to a mechanism for affirming Roman pre-eminence. The marginal moves to the centre, immigration supplants birthright, the double vision and the heartrending choices of the colonised woman take over from the explorer’s dispassionate gaze. The result ought to challenge the prevailing discourse regarding empire. To some extent, it does: if this is what actually constitutes Rome, antique values such as the fear of cultural permeation, so pronounced in Seneca’s *Medea*, need no longer apply. But Medea’s discrepant voice feeds back, in the end, into Valerius’ master-discourse. Embraced, like Cybele, for the power generated by her violence and her foreignness, Medea is appropriated and refashioned for Roman epic. She enables Valerius to face the twin agonies of civil war and displacement without exceeding generic limits. Valerius exploits Medea’s ambivalence to stir the fearful undercurrents of his own imperial genre and imperialist myth.

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58 Said (1993), esp. 32-61; Mills (2005), 14f., 136, 147; Bush (2006), 125-35. See also Barrett (1997) on Rome in particular.

59 *nimum audax* is Seneca’s phrase (*Med.* 301); Valerius introduces his Argo as the ship ‘which dared to follow the shores of Scythian Phasis’ (*Scythici quae Phasidis oras/ausa sequi*, Arg. 1.2-3). See also Hor. *Odes* 1.3.8-10 for *audax* applied to the Argo in a similar context, and compare Statius’ use of the seafaring-as-*audax* trope at *Silv.* 3.2.61.

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