

CONFRONTING MEDEA: GENRE, GENDER, AND ALLUSION IN THE *ARGONAUTICA* OF VALERIUS FLACCUS

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THE TENDENCY FOR ROMAN POETS to reconstruct traditional generic boundaries by testing the confines of a given literary genre is by now widely recognized as a fundamental feature of Latin poetry.¹ In this regard, it has proven particularly fruitful to examine the tension produced in Latin poetry when themes most appropriate to heroic epic, defined tentatively as *reges et proelia*, are juxtaposed with *amor*, the subject matter most characteristic of elegiac poetry at Rome.² Such studies—and especially the work of Stephen Hinds—have revealed that in Latin poetry, generic theory and generic practice are often self-consciously opposed to one another. While the former functions to restrict the mass of material “appropriate” to a given poetic form, the latter constantly devises ways to sneak “illicit” content across the borders thus drawn. Consequently, subjects (such as *amor*) that fall outside the narrowly defined, tentatively prescribed boundaries of “proper” heroic epic are frequently introduced into epic narratives precisely as “unepic” incursions. And this despite the fact that heroic epic already with Homer had clearly been willing and able to accommodate a vast array of subject matter, amatory themes included.³

In light of these considerations, it is not surprising to discover in the *Argonautica* of Valerius Flaccus a particularly intense interaction between the poem’s erotic and martial themes, given the unavoidable importance for the epic’s plot of Jason’s love affair with Medea. In fact, Denis Feeney has demonstrated the importance of this aspect of the Roman *Argonautica* and has identified some of the ways in which Valerius handles the arrival of Medea

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1. Conte 1986, 69–129, 141–50; Hinds 1987, 99–134; Hinds 1989, 269–71; Conte 1994, 35–65, 105–28.

2. For example: Nicoll 1980; Feeney 1991, 320–28; Conte 1992; Hinds 1992; Boyle 1993a, 1–6; Sullivan 1993; Hinds 2000.

3. Hinds has recently reiterated the essential features of this dynamic model of Latin poetry’s engagement with aspects of literary genre. As he puts it: “‘Unepic’ elements, no matter how frequently they feature in actual epics, continue to be regarded as unepic; as if oblivious to elements of vitality and change within the genre (for which he himself may be in part responsible), each new Roman writer reasserts a stereotype of epic whose endurance is as remarkable as its ultimate incompatibility with the actual plot of any actual epic in the Greek or Latin canon” (Hinds 2000, 223).

in his heroic epic narrative. In general, Feeney finds that “the poem’s generic self-consciousness is expressed not just in the observance but also in the creative transgression of the expected bounds of epic.”⁴ Taking this observation as a starting point, I will explore further the generic and thematic tension created by Medea’s entrance into Valerius’ narrative. For the critical moment when Jason and Medea meet for the first time (5.329–98) is characterized by a great deal of tension and ambiguity, largely due to a fundamental uncertainty concerning the trajectory of the narrative itself and its hero’s role in it now that Medea is in the picture. This uncertainty is reinforced by a dense network of allusion and imagery that presents Medea’s entry as an erotic transgression that threatens to undermine Jason’s heroic status by calling into question his manliness. The initial confrontation between Jason and Medea highlights the potential enervation of the epic’s hero and, in short, the potential for Medea, as elegiac-style *domina*, to reduce Jason to an elegiac *servitium amoris*.⁵

My analysis thus seeks to elucidate how the generic destabilization produced by Medea’s entrance is formulated in terms of an instability in Jason’s masculinity. In so doing, I hope to reiterate the extent to which questions of genre are very closely tied to questions of gender, an ideological conjunction that is, of course, not unique to Valerius. Rather, Valerius here engages in a dynamic and enduring epic practice. Women, excluded from the definition of epic as a poetic form concerned with arms and *men*, are often treated in Latin epic as outsiders who threaten its purity by threatening to undermine the (ideally) bellicose virility of the genre’s heroes.⁶ However, as an examination of Jason’s *aristeia* at 6.575–760 will demonstrate, Jason’s potential emasculation, hinted at in Book 5, is not realized in the subsequent narrative. Moreover, because the poem moves from a questioning of Jason’s manliness (Book 5) to an emphatic display of his virility (Book 6), the two episodes examined here allow us to observe the nature of Valerius’ attempt to recuperate Jason as an epic hero from his Hellenistic predecessor’s (mis)treatment of him, an important aspect of the poem well treated by Debra Hershkowitz.⁷ In this regard, I will focus on the imagery of the Dog Star in each episode and its important role in underscoring Valerius’ recuperative efforts. For it is this imagery that most explicitly reveals the dialectical relationship between Valerius’ generic technique and his program of rehabilitating Jason. The arrival of Medea functions to destabilize

4. Feeney 1991, 321. For the great importance of Feeney’s reading of Valerius’ generic preoccupations, which has greatly influenced my understanding of the poem, see Zissos 1996.

5. On this topos in Latin elegy, see Lyne 1979.

6. Cf. Hinds 2000, 227: “[R]eferences to epic’s *actual* female and erotic forces, where they do occur, tend to present those female and erotic forces as subversive of, rather than constitutive of, the epic plot” (Hinds’ italics). See also Keith (1999, 214–16), who, appropriating the findings of Teresa de Lauretis’ work on the subjectivity of women in film, describes the presentation of the female in classical epic as an “element of resistance.” Though beyond the scope of the present paper, this aspect of epic poetry needs to be subjected to radical historicizing, in order to reveal the full extent of its ideological ramifications. On some of the social and political dimensions of the genre’s androcentrism, see Keith 2000.

7. Hershkowitz 1998, 105–98. Those familiar with her important examination of this theme will recognize my debt to her work.

the foundations of the tendentiously defined Roman epic in order to assert the possibility (and superiority) of a more balanced approach, which is reflected in the figure of the Dog Star. The rigid definition of proper epic, with its preconceived incommensurability between *amor* and *arma*, is mobilized precisely so that its limits can be transgressed, tested, and ultimately made to yield to a more totalizing and inclusive epic vision.⁸

THE STAGING OF THE ENCOUNTER

Early in Book 5, the Minyae finally reach their much anticipated destination, as they land at the mouth of the Phasis and disembark from the Argo to spend a somber and fearful first night (5.176–328). The mood at this critical turning point in the story, marked by the poet as beginning “other songs” (*cantus alios*, 5.217), is dark and ominous, the future fate of the heroes and the trajectory of the plot most uncertain (5.300–303):⁹

cunctaque adhuc, magni veniant dum regis ad urbem,
ambigua et dubia rerum pendentia summa.
praecipue Aesoniden varios incerta per aestus
mens rapit undantem curis ac multa novantem.

Everything as yet, until they come to the great king's city,
is uncertain and the outcome of events hangs suspended in
doubt. The sense of uncertainty especially seizes Jason, as
he rolls on the inconstant tides of anxiety, changing his mind
many times.

Nor are the fearful uncertainties that afflict the Minyae on their first night in Colchis restricted to the human realm and its actors. The conversation on Olympus between Juno and Minerva adds to the feeling of confusion concerning how events in Colchis, and in the second half of the epic in general, will develop (5.278–95). In particular, it is most unclear whether Valerius will be granted the opportunity to sing “the wars of the Thessalian leader,” which he had asked the Muse to inspire in him when he defined the subject matter of the second half of the poem (5.217–18): *Incipe nunc cantus alios, dea, . . . Thessalici da bella ducis*. For when Minerva asks Juno which side they (and Jason) should support in the civil war between Perses and Aeetes, the queen of heaven, annoyed at the question, threatens to revoke and disallow the (potential) martial aspects of this political confusion (5.286–87): *dimitte metus, ne proelia forte / hinc tibi grata negem* (“Cast out your fears, or else I may from this point on deny the battles you enjoy”).¹⁰ This uncertainty within the minds of the characters over how the narrative will unfold

8. This is a restatement of Feeney's elegant formulation: “Valerius [engineers] the wreckage of his grandiose epic gestures in order to show that the collapse reveals a more humane and comprehensive epic tradition still standing behind the rubble” (Feeney 1991, 328).

9. Citations of Valerius are made in accordance with E. Courtney's 1970 Teubner edition. All translations are my own.

10. A note on my translation here is in order. One of the reviewers for *CP* suggests that the clause *ne . . . negem* should be construed as a fear clause, not a purpose clause. Grammatically, of course, it could go either way, but in the context of this passage, it seems best to render it as I have. For Minerva has nowhere

threatens to spill over into a metatextual confusion. That is, Juno's threat and the political situation in Colchis that ultimately causes it make it unclear whether or not Valerius will be able to produce the martial song he desires to sing. Will these wars and battles and Jason's participation in them be (allowed to be) recounted by our poet? If not "the wars of the Thessalian leader," what then? What kind of story *will* be told and what will Jason's role in it be? It is in this atmosphere of narrative uncertainty that Jason and Medea first meet, a moment that is itself marked by an abundance of confusion, tension, and ambiguity. In fact, I suggest that it is precisely because this encounter is about to take place that a mood of uncertainty has come to dominate the beginning of the second half of the epic, these "other songs."

To begin with, the context in which Jason and Medea first meet generates its own type of tension, further setting the tone for the confrontation proper. The setting is highly eroticized, being greatly indebted in the first instance to the context in which Odysseus encounters Nausicaa on Scheria in *Odyssey* 6.¹¹ In fact, Valerius seems to have gone out of his way to invite comparison with this Homeric episode. Nausicaa had been urged by a vision of Athena in the night to go down to the river to wash clothes in preparation for marriage (*Od.* 6.25–40). Similarly Medea, frightened by her dreams (*varis per noctem territa monstris*, 5.329), has gone to the banks of the Phasis in the early morning to "cleanse her soul," as it were, of these terrible visions (*ibat et horrendas lustrantia flumina noctes*, 5.332). Though unaware of it, Medea too (like Nausicaa) is making her trip in preparation for marriage. Also at play in Valerius' narrative is the episode at *Aeneid* 1.494–504 in which Aeneas sees Dido for the first time, a passage that, of course, owes not a little to the Homeric scene. In fact, Valerius alludes quite explicitly to this Vergilian episode. Jason, as he gazes upon Medea for the first time, *haeret in una / defixus* (5.376–77). These words recall a phrase employed by Vergil in the *Aeneid* when Aeneas first encounters Dido (*obutuque haeret defixus in uno*, 1.495).¹² Valerius thus sets the stage for the important meeting between Jason and Medea by alluding to the moment when Vergil's epic and its hero are confronted and threatened by amatory themes.¹³ As it is, this setting for the first encounter between Jason and

prior to this moment expressed a fear that Juno will disallow the *proelia*, nor does she do so here. Rather, the discussion between the goddesses *before* Juno makes this statement has centered not on whether or not there will be any battles at all, but which side they (and Jason) should support in the war (so at 5.285 Minerva asks: *quibus addimur armis?*). As such, the *metus* of line 286 can really only refer to Minerva's anxiety about which side to take, with the clause *ne . . . negem* functioning as a threat, suggesting for the first time the possibility that this war may be called off by Juno. Nor am I alone in reading the passage this way. J. H. Mozley, in his Loeb edition (1934), also takes the phrase as a purpose clause with the force of a threat.

11. For specific similarities (both verbal and thematic) beyond those added here, see Hershkovitz 1998, 95–97.

12. Of course, Aeneas is here gazing not upon Dido, but rather on the images that depict episodes from the Trojan War.

13. On the tension (generic and otherwise) caused by Dido in the *Aeneid*, see Hinds 1987, 133–34. For a discussion of some of the ways in which Aeneas is effeminized in Dido's presence at Carthage see Starks 1999, 273–74 and Hinds 2000, 230–31.

Medea is quite different from the analogous moment in Apollonius' version (3.248–98).¹⁴ There, the future lovers initially see each other inside Aeetes' palace. Apollonius in fact emphasizes the domestic locale by explaining Medea's presence in the house as anomalous, since she was detained inside on that day by Hera (3.250).¹⁵ At any rate, the connections between Valerius, Homer, and Vergil are further strengthened by Jason's reaction to the sight of Medea (5.378–90). Jason entertains the notion that Medea is Diana, at rest after the hunt. This of course evokes the simile at *Odyssey* 6.102–9 that likens Nausicaa to Artemis as she towers above her band of maidens, and its reappearance in Vergil (*Aen.* 1.498–504), where this simile is employed to describe Dido's physique as Aeneas catches first sight of her. Consequently, the setting for the initial encounter between Jason and Medea in Valerius partakes of the sexual and thematic tensions inherent in the confrontations that these earlier epic contexts depict. Yet upon closer inspection, one realizes that in Valerius the tensions evoked by these earlier contexts are brought into even sharper relief, largely because the setting and the episode that is dramatized there are tinged with some interesting and important echoes (both thematic and verbal) of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

THE CONFRONTATION, PART 1: THE OVIDIAN ELEMENT

Although the setting for the encounter between Jason and Medea is in the first instance modeled on the meeting between Odysseus and Nausicaa in *Odyssey* 6, for the post-Ovidian reader the landscape also recalls the motif of the peaceful pastoral retreat, the context in which acts of sexual violence often occur in the *Metamorphoses*.¹⁶ Moreover, the audience need not worry if it missed the potential for sexual violence signified implicitly by the Ovidian *locus amoenus*. For this potential is further underscored by a simile at 5.343–49 that likens Medea to Proserpina as she leads a band of maidens in a dance just before being raped by Pluto.¹⁷ As it is, then, the setting in which Jason and Medea first meet is a poetic space fraught with uncertainty and erotic tension. Violence threatens to confuse and confound the serenity and peace of the locale. The beauty of this romantic *locus amoenus* threatens to yield to the ugly disorder of sexual assault. Transgression seems imminent.

In addition to evoking the type of setting in which sexual transgressions commonly take place in the *Metamorphoses* in general, I suggest that Valerius

14. This is not to say that there are no Apollonian elements in Valerius' passage. For as we shall see, Valerius does appropriate some features of the early morning rendezvous between Jason and Medea that we find in the Hellenistic version (3.919–1145). My point is simply that in Apollonius the early morning rendezvous is not the setting for the *first* meeting between Jason and Medea.

15. Similarly, Aeetes' palace is the setting for the first meeting between Jason and Medea in Ovid's *Heroides* (12.29–32).

16. On the importance of this motif in the *Metamorphoses*, especially with respect to the tension between the peaceful settings and the sexual violence committed there, see Parry 1964 and Richlin 1992.

17. The potential for sexual assault to feature in the relationship between Jason and Medea had been set up earlier, since Medea's (eventual) departure from Colchis is identified as rape by Jupiter (*ex virgine rapta / ille dolor*, 1.547–48), who equates this episode with the rape of Helen. And later (8.264–69), while pursuing the Argonauts, Absyrtus compares the "abduction" of Medea (and the fleece) to Jupiter's rape of Europa.

has in mind here a specific example of such an episode: the rape of Hermaphroditus by Salmacis.¹⁸ The correspondences between Valerius and Ovid are verbal, structural, and thematic. As Jason approaches the Colchian maiden and begins to address her, his words echo the words of Salmacis when she approaches and speaks to Hermaphroditus at *Metamorphoses* 4.317–28, an exchange that, like our passage, plays off (and with) the conversation between Odysseus and Nausicaa in *Odyssey* 6, as is widely recognized.¹⁹ As Salmacis addresses the young boy, she begins by flattering him, saying that he could be Cupid. She then goes on to praise the happiness of various members of his family, if he is in fact a mortal, reaching a climax with the mention of a possible wife (*Met.* 4.320–26):

. . . puer o dignissime credi
esse deus, seu tu deus es, potes esse Cupido,
sive es mortalis, qui te genuere, beati,
et frater felix, et fortunata profecto,
si qua tibi soror est, et quae dedit ubera nutrix;
sed longe cunctis longeque beatior illa,
si qua tibi sponsa est, si quam dignabere taeda.

Boy, you who are most worthy to be considered a god,
if you are a god, you can be Cupid, or if you are a mortal,
happy are they who gave birth to you, and blessed is your
brother, and fortunate indeed is your sister, if you have one,
and so too the nurse who breast-fed you; but happier than
all of them is she, whoever has been betrothed to you, if you
will deem any woman worthy of marriage.

In Valerius, Jason's first words to Medea are strikingly similar to those of Ovid's Salmacis. Jason begins by suggesting that she may be Diana before moving on to praise her parents and the happiness of her future husband, if she is a mortal. Again, the echoes of the Ovidian passage are thematic, structural, and verbal. I have underlined the verbal correspondences in each passage. Valerius' treatment follows (*Arg.* 5.378–84):

si dea, si magni decus huc ades, inquit, Olympi,
has ego credo faces, haec virginis ora Dianae,
teque renodatam pharetris ac pace fruentem
ad sua Caucaseae producunt flumina Nymphae.
si domus in terris atque hinc tibi gentis origo,
felix prole parens, olimque beatior ille,
qui tulerit longis et te sibi iunxerit annis.

18. Valerius seems to have been particularly fond of this Ovidian tale. For a discussion of the importance of Ovid's Salmacis-Hermaphroditus episode for Valerius' presentation of Hylas in book three, see Malamud and McGuire 1993, 201–8.

19. Ovid's reformulation of this Homeric episode suggests that he (like Vergil) read the encounter between Odysseus and Nausicaa as a (potentially and/or temporarily) enervating experience for the hero. However, Ovid has, characteristically, taken the theme of emasculation to its most extreme limit in his revision of the Homeric episode.

If you are a goddess, he said, if you come to this place as a beauty from great Olympus, I believe that these are the torches, this the face of the virgin Diana; the nymphs of Caucasus are bringing you, your quiver taken off in enjoyment of peace, to the waters of their river. But if your home is on earth and your family has its origins here, blessed is your father in his offspring, and some day that man will be happier who will take you away and join you to himself for many years to come.

One result of this reference is a great increase in the irony of Jason's words, which are already ironic since the audience knows that it is Jason to whom Medea will be joined (*iunxerit*), but neither happily (*beatior*) nor for many years to come (*longis . . . annis*). The allusion to the episode in Ovid, however, gives a remarkable irony to Jason's *te sibi iunxerit*. For the ultimate result of Salmacis' love for Hermaphroditus is that the two become physically inseparable, dramatizing the grotesque realization of the elegiac ideal of absolute union with the object of one's affection.²⁰ But in Valerius, it is precisely because Jason and Medea will eventually go their separate ways that their love will lead to the grotesque and unnatural. And it is because their relationship ends in tragedy as a result of their violent separation that their names are forever bound to each other.²¹ We shall return to the theme of "conjugal enervation" that this Ovidian echo imports to Valerius' passage in a moment. It is enough to recall for now that Ovid's tale is told as an *aetion* for the emasculating powers of a particular spring.

Before returning to Ovid, I want to consider how the beautification of Jason by Juno contributes to the themes under discussion. Moments before Jason approaches Medea, Juno, in order to make him as attractive as possible, beautifies the hero, who has been worn down by the long and difficult journey to Colchis (5.363–65). The result of this divine makeover is that Jason is now said to tower over his companions with his radiant countenance (5.366–67): *iam Talaum iamque Ampyciden astroque comantes / Tyndaridas ipse egregio supereminet ore* ("With his outstanding visage does Jason now surpass Talaus and now too Ampycides and the Tyndaridae with their starry locks"). This beautification scene recalls the moment in Apollonius' narrative that witnesses what is in essence Jason's submission of the epic action to the Colchian maiden. In Apollonius, just prior to Jason's early morning rendezvous with Medea in Hecate's grove, Hera beautifies Jason so that Medea will fall even more madly in love with him (3.919–26). Consequently, the beautification of the hero just before his meeting with Medea in the Roman *Argonautica*, with its Apollonian undertones, sets up the (false)

20. Robinson 1999, 221–22.

21. In fact, the audience is made to ponder the horror that will eventually result from the (dis)union of Jason and Medea just before they meet, as the details of Medea's nightmare "remind" us of their future woes (5.338–40): *. . . mox stare paventes / viderat intenta pueros nece seque trementum / spargere caede manus et lumina rumpere fletu* (" . . . then she had seen children standing there shivering in fear, trembling at her murderous designs, and blood spattered on her hands and her eyes gushing with tears").

expectation that Jason is here too, as in the Hellenistic version, about to hand the direction of the narrative over to Medea.²² And lines such as 5.390 do little to diminish this impression, as Jason tells Medea: “it is to you that I am entrusting our purpose and our all” (*in te animos atque omnia nostra repono*).

One of the more striking features of this beautification scene is the verb used to describe the appearance of Jason as he now surpasses his comrades with his heavenly brilliance: *supereminet*. It is a relatively rare word.²³ Vergil uses this verb only three times, all in the *Aeneid*. His usage is instructive. At *Aeneid* 10.765 it is employed to signify the awesome size of Mezentius, who is said to be as large as Orion as he strides through the water (*umero supereminet undas*). At *Aeneid* 6.856 the verb describes Marcellus’ extraordinary size as he towers over those around him (*viros supereminet omnis*). And finally, *supereminet* is found at *Aeneid* 1.501, where it describes the appearance of Dido, who is said to be like Diana amid her troupe of maidens (*deas supereminet omnis*). It is clear then that in Vergil the verb *supereminet* is used to signify the conspicuous size of its subject, who is in each case a person occupying an important position of leadership over a group. The subjects of this verb in Vergil stand out as exceptional, even in a crowd. These distinctions accord well with the verb’s appearance in our passage, and I shall have more to say in a moment about the importance of the language and imagery used by Valerius to underscore Jason’s role as the leader of his men just before his confrontation with Medea. Now, given the thematic similarities between our passage and the scene in the *Aeneid* when Aeneas first meets Dido, as well as the verbal echoes of this Vergilian encounter that I mentioned earlier, it is perhaps natural that this is the episode that most immediately comes to mind when we meet *supereminet* in Valerius. Be this as it may, for the usage in Valerius we should also allow for the intervention of Ovid, who employs *supereminet* only one time in the *Metamorphoses*. It occurs during the encounter between Diana and Actaeon (3.182), a passage that itself can be seen, not least because of the rare verb, to echo the Vergilian usage at *Aeneid* 1.501.²⁴ As Actaeon unwittingly gazes upon the naked body of Diana, Ovid notes the inability of her nymphs to act as “bodyguards,” since the goddess towers head and shoulders over them (*colloque tenus supereminet omnis*, *Met.* 3.182). Valerius, however, uses this rare word not in reference to Medea’s height, although he certainly could have, since he does emphasize the fact that her height made her the most physically conspicuous member of the group of girls

22. And Valerius includes other details beyond the divine beautification to reinforce the closeness between his scene and the secret meeting between Jason and Medea in Apollonius. For example, Valerius too has the future lovers meet at dawn (5.330–31). He also mentions that poplar trees stand in the area where they meet (5.185), a detail that recalls the poplar in Hecate’s grove mentioned by Apollonius (3.927–29).

23. For example, it is not found in Lucretius, Propertius, Tibullus, Horace, Lucan, Statius, or Silius. Valerius uses the word twice, in the passage under discussion and at 1.317, where it describes the sound of Alcimedides’ lamentation.

24. On the relationship between the Ovidian and Vergilian scenes, see Anderson 1997, 356. Ovid employs *supereminet* only one other time in his extant corpus, at *Tristia* 1.2.49, where it describes the height of a particularly large wave.

around her (*altior ac nulla comitum certante*, 5.346). Rather, Valerius employs *supereminet* to describe Jason's height. Valerius has made Jason the subject of a verb that hitherto, at least in erotic encounter scenes such as this, had been employed in Latin epic to describe female subjects (Dido and Diana) caught in the erotic gazes of men (Aeneas and Actaeon).²⁵ In Valerius, however, Medea's gaze no less than Jason's is eroticized, as the two strangers stand in mutual awe of each other's physical beauty, each one simultaneously viewing subject and imaged object of the other's examining eyes (5.373–77). And if our interpretation of Valerius allows for the presence of and interaction with the Ovidian episode, it is Medea who, in gazing upon Jason, will be tormented because of what she has seen, like Actaeon before her.²⁶ Moreover, it is Medea who, like Ovid's Actaeon, assumes the role of the transgressive intruder and outsider, although it is Jason who, like Vergil's Aeneas, has just arrived on foreign soil. Of course, Medea is no stranger to such a role.²⁷ Yet the subtlety with which Valerius presents her as a transgressive outsider, somehow out of place even at home in Colchis, is nevertheless quite remarkable.

The details of Medea's dream, which "snatch her from her bed" (*rapta toris*, 5.331), emphasize the extent to which her involvement with Jason renders her an alienated figure. Woven among references to the acts of violence and betrayal that Medea will commit against her father, brother, children, and husband are some powerful images of this estrangement. Medea dreams that she "leaves behind Hecate's chaste grove" (*castis Hecates excedere lucis*, 5.335), which symbolizes both her loss of virginity and the departure from her father's home that this implies. These themes are picked up and carried forward by the image of Medea unable to approach her father, since she is isolated, seemingly alone, cut off from her natal family by a vast expanse of sea on all sides (5.336–38): *dumque pii petit ora patris, stetit arduus inter / pontus et ingenti circum stupefacta profundo, / fratre tamen conante sequi* ("And when she looked for the face of her pious father, a difficult sea stood between them and she was dazed by the vast deep all around, although her brother was trying to follow her"). Caught in this liminal moment, between being her father's daughter and her husband's wife, Medea is alienated, symbolically homeless. In a striking contrast, Jason, the foreigner in Colchis, seems quite at home there. His arrival in Colchis is described as a sort of homecoming (5.190–91): *sistere tum socios iubet atque hinc prima ligari / vincula, ceu Pagasas patriumque intraverit amnem* ("Then Jason orders his companions to stop the boat and here first to tie the cables, as if he has entered Pagasae and his ancestral river").

25. That is, a male can be the subject of *supereminet*, but based on Vergil's usage this would be more appropriate to a martial/heroic context.

26. Medea's mental anguish as she gradually succumbs to her passion for Jason is a key element of Valerius' presentation of the maiden (e.g., 7.1–25, 101–52, 193–253, 300–322). Of course, the torment of Medea's psychological fluctuations is Ovid's primary concern at *Met.* 7.7–99. We can only imagine how this theme may have been handled by Ovid in his *Medea*, and can only speculate about the extent of this tragic version's influence on Valerius' presentation.

27. "Euripides' Colchian Medea is the paradigmatic 'transgressive' woman" (Hall 1989, 203).

Based on the preceding discussion, I suggest that the Ovidian echoes found in Valerius' version of the confrontation between Jason and Medea mark her appearance in the epic as an intrusion that problematizes Jason's status and threatens to subvert the heroic epic narrative by enervating its hero. Valerius' allusion to and reformulation of the rape of Hermaphroditus casts Jason, who speaks the words of Ovid's Salmacis, in an active, though female role. At the same time, Valerius' reference to and inversion of the relative subject positions of Ovid's Diana and Actaeon (and for that matter of Vergil's Dido and Aeneas) place Jason, as subject of *supereminet*, in an (also female) passive role, as object of Medea's erotic gaze. Valerius' allusion to the story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus in and of itself imports to his poem a thematics of emasculation and the confusion of normative subject positions and gender hierarchies, all of which are essential aspects of this Ovidian episode. For in this story Ovid presents the reader with an active female rapist, a passive male victim, a nymph in Diana's troupe who is sexually active and doesn't like to hunt (animals, at least), and a male who is objectified by the erotic gaze of a female. The reversals and complications reach a crescendo with the physical union of the two bodies, whereby the distinctions between the sexes (and genders) completely collapse, though the transsexual Hermaphroditus is clearly more "womanly" than "manly" after the metamorphosis (e.g., he speaks *non voce virili*, *Met.* 4.382). This union leaves the boy less virile because the *aetion* concerns the enervating powers of the spring on *men*, as Hermaphroditus' prayer makes clear (*Met.* 4.385–86): *quisquis in hos fontes vir venerit, exeat inde / semivir* ("May whoever enters this spring as a man depart from it as a half-man"). As transgressive of normative gender roles as Salmacis' actions undoubtedly are, it is the status of the *vir* as a gendered subject that is really at issue here.²⁸ That is, a male can be either a true *vir* or something not quite a *vir*, a *semivir*, and thus a half-woman (quite literally for Hermaphroditus). The status of the category "woman" is thus underlyingly assumed to be constant, and constantly associated with "weakness," "softness," and "passivity" (despite what we've just seen Salmacis do!). Presumably Salmacis' spring would have no effect on women, since they have always already been anointed by its waters. It is the power of the spring, of the female principal in the union, to problematize the gendered subjectivity of the male that is dramatized in this Ovidian episode. In this regard, it is helpful to remember that Salmacis is both a nymph and the emasculating spring itself. The woman is the water, the agent of enervation.²⁹ Will Jason's confrontation with Medea be as unmanning for him as a dip in the emasculating waters of Salmacis' spring? Valerius' allusive gestures suggest that the confrontation between Jason and Medea has (at least momentarily) destabilized Jason's status by calling into question his *virtus*, his manliness, marking this encounter as potentially sub-

28. On the difficulty of locating a female subjectivity in Ovid's rapes more generally, see Richlin 1992.

29. Richlin 1992, 166, summarizes the "moral" of this Ovidian episode nicely: "when a female acts male, the result is the unmanning of all men." For more on the remarkable play with role reversal and gender bending in the Salmacis-Hermaphroditus episode, see Robinson 1999 and Keith 1999, 216–21.

versive of his role as epic hero. Nor does it stop there, as further analysis of Jason's divine makeover reveals. For Valerius employs the imagery of the Dog Star to intensify further the sense of ambiguity and uncertainty produced by Medea's entry into the narrative.

THE CONFRONTATION, PART 2: THE ASTRAL ELEMENT

Surely He Can't Be Sirius?

As soon as Juno has beautified Jason in order to make him appear as appealing as possible to Medea, the splendor of his visage is likened to the brilliance of the Dog Star (5.368–72):

non secus autumnno quam cum magis asperat ignes
Sirius et saevo cum nox accenditur auro
luciferas crinita faces, hebet Arcas et ingens
Iuppiter; ast illum tanto non gliscere caelo
vellet ager, vellent calidis iam fontibus amnes.

Just as when Sirius in autumn sharpens even more
his fires and the night, with its tresses of shining flame,
is set ablaze by the star's cruel gold, while Arcas and
great Jupiter grow dim; but the fields would prefer that
he not shine so brightly in heaven, so too the rivers
with their now heated springs.

As I mentioned earlier, this scene of beautification is modeled largely on the scene in Apollonius' narrative in which Hera makes Jason more physically attractive just before his secret meeting with Medea (3.919–26). The simile that likens Jason's physical splendor to the awesome glow of Sirius is a further reminiscence of the Hellenistic version. At 3.956–59 Apollonius famously appropriates this simile, employed by Homer to refer to a hero's martial ardor, and repositions it in an erotic context. This Apollonian revision of Homer creates, in the Hellenistic version, a great deal of generic and typological tension, a fact not lost on Valerius.³⁰ I suggest that a similar tension is felt in Valerius' usage of the Dog Star simile in this amatory context, especially since the simile's martial application in heroic epic had been reasserted by Vergil (*Aeneid* 10.270–75), a reassertion that, as we shall see, Valerius himself follows in Book 6. Again, these echoes of Apollonius have the effect of setting up the expectation that Valerius' Jason, as Apollonius' before him, is about to be subordinated to Medea, about to hand over to her the direction of the epic narrative. And the stakes for Valerius' Jason are higher than they had been for Apollonius'. For it is clear that Valerius has, up to this point in the story, taken great care to recuperate Jason as an epic hero, which in many ways entails "correcting" various aspects of Apollonius' playful and frivolous presentation of him.³¹ But I contend that Valerius' Jason, through such correction and recuperation, stands out as all the

30. On Apollonius' use of this simile, see Hunter 1993, 48; 1989, 202–3; and Hutchinson 1988, 112.

31. Hershkovitz 1998, 105–89; and Adamietz 1967.

more heroic and lofty (and even original) precisely because our poet hints at the depths to which his confrontation with Medea might take him, emphasizing the hero's brilliance by gesturing toward the darkness visible around the edges. The symbolism and semantic richness of the Dog Star simile should be read with these considerations in mind.

The simile that likens Jason to the Dog Star in our passage not only refers to his surpassing good looks, it also enhances the grandeur of his status as the unquestioned leader of his men. For one thing, Valerius' simile emphasizes the astronomical and cosmic significance of the Dog Star, certainly more than Apollonius' had before him. Valerius mentions that Sirius' brilliance outshines the splendor of other heavenly bodies, such as Arcas and Jupiter (5.370–71). There is no mention of Sirius' effects on other stars in Apollonius, who notes instead the harm its heat brings to flocks on earth (3.958–59). Valerius, however, says that Jason's physical appearance, like the splendor of Sirius, makes those around him seem less appealing and less powerful by comparison. In fact, just three lines before Jason is likened to Sirius, Valerius tells us that Jason's visage surpassed even the splendor of the Tyndaridae, who are described as having "starry locks" (*astro . . . comantes*, 5.366). The Dog Star simile in Valerius, therefore, reinforces a primary significance of the verb *supereminet* (5.367), which, as I noted earlier, often refers to the leader of a group and/or an individual who stands out as conspicuous even in a crowd. And Valerius' emphasis on the astronomical significance of the Dog Star invites us to take this line of analysis further, into heaven itself.

The close connection between Sirius, as the leading star of the constellation Canis Major on the one hand, and the connection between Canis Major as a whole and the constellation known as the Argo on the other, and the significance of these considerations for reading the imagery of the Dog Star in Valerius have apparently gone unnoticed by critics. Aratus tells us that Sirius not only occupies a leading position within the constellation of Canis Major (i.e., the tip of the dog's jaw), but that its brightness dominates the constellation, making it difficult for the viewer to discern the other stars that make up the group (*Phaen.* 326–37). The power of Sirius to outshine the other stars in its constellation is very similar to one of the primary ideas behind the star's imagery in Valerius, as the splendor of Jason's visage obscures the brilliance of those around him. But what is more, Aratus later informs his audience that Canis Major draws forth, as if guiding it, the constellation of the Argo, placed in heaven by the gods as a reward for its great services (*Phaen.* 603–4).³² Cicero's translation of these lines clearly reveals that Canis Major was construed as the Argo's heavenly guide (*Aratea* 388–

32. On the theme of the catasterism of Argo (and some of its heroes) in Valerius, see Hardie 1993, 83–84. In fact, it would be an interesting study, outside the scope of this paper, to examine how the Dog Star imagery interacts with the broader themes of deification and catasterism, which are prevalent throughout the narrative. For example, just before we encounter the Dog Star imagery in Book 5 Juno reminds the audience of the Argo's eventual celestial destination (*puppem . . . nostro componere caelo*, 5.294–95). Cf. also Jupiter's instruction to Hercules and the Dioscuri (whom Jason is now said to outshine) at 1.563: *tendite in astra, viri*.

89): *inde pedes Canis ostendit iam posteriores, / et post ipse trahit clarum lumine Puppim* ("Next, the Dog Star shows his hind feet and drags behind himself the Argo with its brilliant light"). In fact, a glance at a visual representation of the heavens based on Aratus' text immediately makes clear the leading position occupied by Sirius within Canis Major on the one hand and the spatial proximity between Canis Major and Argo on the other [see fig. 1].³³ The constellations of Canis Major (with Sirius in its jaw) and Argo appear below the center of the map (it may be helpful to view the chart upside down to get the full effect). Seeing the spatial relations between the two constellations makes it immediately clear how one could describe the Dog Star as drawing Argo behind it through the heavens. Consequently, the simile that likens Jason to Sirius functions to highlight further his position as the leader of his men. While emphasizing the surpassing beauty of Jason's (heavenly) body, as he outshines the lesser lights of his comrades, the simile gestures toward the cosmic position of importance occupied by Sirius relative to the other stars of Canis Major, as well as that constellation's guidance of Argo through the seas of heaven. At the very moment that Jason is to meet Medea, Valerius employs the imagery of the Dog Star to underscore his role as leader of the Argonauts, to stress the lofty heights he has attained in achieving this position. The astral imagery implicitly highlights what is at stake for Jason, should he fail to remain (heroically) in control, for lurking beneath the surface of this episode and its bold imagery, as I have shown, is a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity concerning the effect that Medea's arrival in the narrative will have on Jason. And the question still remains: Will Jason retain his starring role in this heroic drama, or relinquish his position of leadership to Medea? As we shall see, the imagery of the Dog Star is not only instrumental in raising this question, thereby reinforcing the uncertainty produced by Medea's arrival in the story, but is also instrumental in ultimately answering it.

Sirius' Ambivalent Poetic Effects

The Dog Star simile that signifies Jason's physical beauty and the erotic heat that this generates, while highlighting his role as leader of the Argonauts, also produces its own type of ambiguity concerning the trajectory of the narrative and Jason's role in it.³⁴ By Valerius' day the figure of Sirius,

33. This star chart was taken from the end of the Loeb volume containing Callimachus' *Hymns* and *Epigrams*, Lycophron (both by A. W. Mair), and Aratus (by G. R. Mair). It is a simplified version of a map taken from Buhle's edition (Leipzig, 1801) of various Latin renditions of Aratus' *Phaenomena* (i.e., those of Cicero, Germanicus, and Avienus).

34. In regard to the erotic heat generated by Jason's appearance as Sirius, it is interesting to note how immediately the scene begins to warm up. For at 5.350, we are told that the waters of the river where Medea has gone to "cleanses her mind" were cool (*gelidis a fluminis undis*). Then, during the simile that likens Jason to Sirius, Valerius mentions that the rivers would prefer that the star not glisten in the sky, rivers that are characterized as *calidis iam fontibus amnes* (5.372). The *iam* here emphasizes the sudden change in temperature: "with their springs now heated." These now heated waters reinforce the unstable nature of this moment in Valerius, as they produce a sharp contrast with the coolness of the Phasis mentioned some twenty lines before. And a hellish heat it is. On the theme of the "Furies of love" in Valerius, see Hardie 1989, 5–9. And on the importance of the theme of the hellish energy of the Furies (and Juno) both in the *Argonautica* and Flavian epic more generally, see Hardie 1993, 57–87.

HEMISPHERIUM AUSTRALE.



Fig. 1.—Star chart based on Aratus' *Phaenomena*, from A. W. Mair and G. R. Mair, trans., *Callimachus' Hymns and Epigrams, Lycophron, and Aratus*, Loeb Classical Library, 129 (1921; rev. ed. 1955; reprint, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1989).

at once beautiful and baleful, had become an ambiguous poetic symbol characterized by a fundamental tension, which can be described in essence as a tension between martial and amatory themes, and in generic terms, between (heroic) epic and elegiac poetic modes. In what follows, I shall analyze the imagery connected with the appearance of the Dog Star in earlier Latin poetry not in terms of any direct influence by this or that text on the *Argonautica*;³⁵ rather, I want to examine the importance of this imagery for our text by reading the figure of Sirius as the central term in a semantic complex whose allusive richness and metaphorical potential are deeply reflective of the tension and uncertainty generated by Jason's confrontation with Medea. Valerius could hardly have chosen a more evocative symbol than Sirius to illustrate the tension of this crucial moment in his epic.³⁶

Leaving aside for the moment its application in battle narratives, an analysis of the symbolism surrounding the appearance of Sirius in earlier Latin poetry, and particularly in elegy, reveals that it is often found in contexts that explicitly contrast martial and amatory themes. The Dog Star is employed as an important signifier whose appearance occasions two related yet distinct poetic reactions that are fundamentally rooted in a contrast between heroic epic and elegiac poetic modes, for the appearance of Sirius is connected with a basic choice: either to avoid its heat and to indulge in peaceful inactivity and *amor*, or to endure its heat and to engage in difficult (martial) labors despite its debilitating effects. A *locus classicus* for choosing inactivity when the Dog Star appears is Tibullus 1.1, a poem in which the elegist programmatically defines the essential nature of his lifestyle and literary pursuits. As Tibullus is setting out the fundamental aspects of the *vita iners* (5), describing the lifestyle of the elegiac poet-lover, he uses the imagery of the Dog Star in order to valorize a retreat from martial exploits (and heroic epic verse) in favor of the peace and quiet of country life, *amor*, and the composition of love poetry. He says (1.1.25–28):

iam modo, iam possim contentus vivere parvo
nec semper longae deditus esse viae,
sed Canis aestivos ortus vitare sub umbra
arboris ad rivos praetereuntis aquae.

Now may I be able to live content with a little
and not always be given to the long march, but
avoid the summer rising of the Dog Star beneath
the shade of a tree near the streams of a passing
river.

35. While I posit no direct influence in regard to Valerius' use of the Dog Star imagery proper, I do suggest that a specific phrase from the end of Tibullus 1.1, a poem in which Sirius figures prominently, is specifically echoed by our poet (for which see below).

36. My reading of the Dog Star imagery also assumes something like David West's notion of the "irrational correspondence simile" at work in Valerius. In this way, I allow for the possibility that Jason is not only the subject of the simile, the possessor of a heavenly, Sirius-like brilliance, but is also potentially an object (like Medea) affected by his own good looks, by the erotic heat that his appearance generates. For the concept of the "irrational correspondence simile," see West 1969.

Here, avoiding the heat of the Dog Star is connected with avoiding martial exploits in favor of the cool seclusion of the inactive life of the elegiac poet-lover.³⁷ As such, the image of the poet reposing in the coolness of a tree's shade functions to reiterate the superiority of the sedentary life of the elegiac lover over the troubled motion of the soldier's life, the theme with which the poem opens (1.1.1–6). This theme is picked up again later in a passage that links this valorized inactivity directly to the poet's desire for *amor* (1.1.53–56): *te bellare decet terra, Messalla, marique, / ut domus hostiles praeferat exuvias: / me retinent vinctum formosae vincla puellae, / et sedeo duras ianitor ante foras* ("It is fine for you, Messalla, to wage war on land and sea so that the front of your house may sport the enemies' spoils: I am detained, shackled by the chains of my beautiful girl, and I sit as a doorkeeper before her unyielding doors").

Likewise, at *Fasti* 4.901–42, Ovid suggests a similar withdrawal from military exploits and indulgence in peacetime activities when Sirius appears. During his discussion of the festivities connected with the Robigalia, which are celebrated when "the Dog Star rises" (*exoritur Canis*, 4.904), Ovid addresses the debilitating rust itself, saying (4.925–28): *utilius gladios et tela nocentia carpes: / nil opus est illis, otia mundus agit / . . . inquinet arma situs* ("It will be more useful for you to gnaw on the swords and harmful spears: there is no need for them, the world is at rest . . . let rust defile the weapons").³⁸ And this passage can be read in terms of Ovid's remarkable preoccupation with the dynamic interplay between *amor* and *arma*, elegy and epic, in the *Fasti* more generally.³⁹ As a final example of the topos of valorizing the inactive life of peace and love by avoiding the heat of Sirius, consider Horace *Carmen* 1.17. Here again, the theme of avoiding the heat

37. For the *via longa* as a tag for military (and commercial) undertakings in Tibullus, see Putnam 1973, 54. Cf. Ov. Am. 1.9.9: *militis officium longa est via*. I have tried to stress the military nuances of the phrase with my "long march."

38. Interestingly, Ovid here also connects the rise of Sirius with the inability to discover the "ram of Helle" (4.903): *et frustra pecudem quaeres Athamantidos Helles* ("And in vain will you seek the ram of Helle, daughter of Athamas"). Now Valerius does refer to the golden fleece as the "pelt of Helle" (*vellere . . . Helles*, 1.167), and only some one hundred lines prior to Jason's appearance as Sirius in Book 5 he mentions that the constellation of the Ram appeared in heaven on the day of Phrixus' death (5.226–28). In fact, the close connection between this star group and the golden fleece is made explicit by the lines that follow (5.228–30). As such, in (Ovid's) astronomical terms, the appearance of the Dog Star and the discovery of the pelt of Helle (understood simultaneously as the constellation of the Ram and the golden fleece) are mutually exclusive. And while Jason will, of course, ultimately discover the pelt of Helle, these considerations add yet another (cosmic) layer to the sense of tension and uncertainty that attend Jason's initial encounter with Medea.

39. Hinds 1992. After all, Ovid has it that the Dog Star rises (*exoritur*) in April, Venus' month. This is a serious distortion of the facts. In Ovid's day, the Dog Star most certainly did not rise in April, nor did it set then either. Rather, it rose in August and set in May. Now we might try to save Ovid by suggesting that he must have been thinking of the setting of Sirius in May and miscalculated by only a few weeks (placing the setting in April) rather than erring by several months (by placing its rising in April, which is nowhere near August). But it is quite difficult to see how *exoritur* could mean "sets." On the poet's "confusion" here, see Frazer 1929, 404. Better to assume that Ovid knew what he was doing. If we do, we can see him going out of his way here to create a poetic environment in which to produce a confrontation between epic and elegiac modes. That is, Ovid might have placed the rising of Sirius in April precisely in order to take full advantage of the topos of avoiding its heat and indulging in (elegiac, amatory) *otium*, which would be most appropriate and symbolically charged in Venus' month. Read in this way, the passage produces ring composition, tying the end of *Fasti* 4 closely to the book's opening (1–16) and the generic tension between epic and elegy that is explicitly evoked there (on which, see Hinds 1992, 85–87).

of the Dog Star (17–18) goes hand in hand with the choice to remain at peace, sing of love, and avoid martial themes (19–28).⁴⁰ So what will the appearance of the Dog Star in Valerius, triggered as it is by Medea's arrival in the narrative, do to the hero and his story? Will it occasion a withdrawal by Jason, an indulgence in the amatory and avoidance of the martial? What type of *dux* will Jason become now that he is faced with Medea, who at the very moment the two first meet is described as both *dux* and *domina* (5.377)? Will he be compelled to become a kind of elegiac general and soldier, like Tibullus in 1.1, eschewing actual battles *in campo* in order to exert himself in metaphorical battles *in lecto*? In fact, Jason's plea for help strikes the notes of Tibullus the erotic general and begins to suggest a partial answer to some of our questions. As Jason implores Medea to help him and his men, he says: *sed fer opem, regina, viris* (5.385). This phrase echoes the words of Tibullus the elegiac soldier as he addresses the military standards and horns that call men to arms (1.1.75–77): *hic ego dux milesque bonus: vos, signa tubaeque / ite procul, cupidus vulnera ferte viris, / ferte et opes* ("It is here that I am a good soldier and general: you, standards and trumpets, get out of here, bring wounds and wealth to men who desire them"). This verbal echo is suggestive for an appreciation of Valerius' Jason and his interaction with Medea. At first glance, the reference to the Tibullan passage increases our uneasiness concerning the impact that Medea may have on the narrative, specifically in regard to Jason's (potential) martial exploits announced at 5.218, which Juno threatens to revoke from the story at 5.286–87. The words Jason speaks here echo those of the elegiac soldier precisely at the moment he orders the instruments of war to depart from his sight. But upon closer inspection, some important differences between the two passages become discernible. For example, the instruments that call men to arms in Tibullus' poem (the *signa* and *tubae*), are replaced by Medea in Valerius' text. And as we shall see, there is a very real sense in which Valerius' Medea inspires Jason to his greatest acts of martial excellence. Further, the words of the Tibullan elegiac general, when spoken by Valerius' Jason, do not distinguish him from the (truly) military men, as in Tibullus. Rather, Jason is at once the elegiac soldier and a member of the group of fighting men (*viris*) for whom he seeks assistance. That is, Jason is simultaneously an (elegiac) lover and an (epic) warrior. And just as the soldiers in Tibullus must fight for the wealth they desire, Jason too will have to fight for the aid he wants.

This last consideration leads us to an examination of the second of the two basic choices occasioned by the appearance of Sirius in earlier poetic contexts. For there are passages that indicate a different reaction to the arrival of the Dog Star, one in which an individual braves difficult labors,

40. For a discussion of this imagery in *Carm.* 1.17, as well as parallels from elsewhere in Horace, see Nisbet and Hubbard (1970, 215–17 and 223), who rightly stress its relations to idyllic pastoral. To generalize the generic significance of avoiding the Dog Star's heat, we might say that the topos was used to contrast the more "humble" and "subjective" poetic modes (e.g., elegy, bucolic, and lyric) with epic's grand and national pretensions. But again, what makes this a useful trope for such genres is a shared valorization of *otium*, *pax*, and *amor*.

symbolized again by the heat of Sirius, in order to strengthen *amor*. Tibullus supplies an important example of this topos (1.4.40–42):

cedas: obsequio plurima vincet amor.
 neu comes ire neges, quamvis via longa paretur
 et Canis arenti torreat arva siti.

You should yield: love will conquer very many things
 by compliance. Nor should you refuse to go along as
 a companion, although the march is long and the Dog
 Star scorches the fields with its parching dryness.

Here Tibullus, in the guise of *praeceptor amoris*, advises the reader to endure hardships in order to strengthen *amor* and win over his beloved. This theme is put succinctly a few lines later (47): *nec te paeniteat duros subiisse labores* (“nor let it be offensive to you to submit to harsh tasks”). And in order to signify the endurance of such difficult labors (including military exploits),⁴¹ Tibullus employs the image of braving the heat that emanates from the Dog Star in terms that recall his desire to avoid the star’s heat in 1.1. This image implies that the programmatic ideal of the elegiac poet’s *vita iners* cannot always be strictly adhered to, if *amor* is to succeed. Likewise, part of Ovid’s course in the arts of love teaches the student to go to his lover whenever he is called and to endure hardships in order to win the heart of his beloved. He too uses the heat of Sirius in order to suggest that this precept should be followed despite extreme conditions (*Ars am.* 2.229–32):

rure erit et dicet venias; amor odit inertes:
 si rota defuerit, tu pede carpe viam.
 nec grave te tempus sitiensque Canicula tardet
 nec via per iactas candida facta nives.

She will be in the country and will tell you to
 come; love hates the lazy: if the wheels fail,
 take to the road on foot. Don’t let a difficult
 season and the parching Dog Star slow you
 down, nor a whitened route through the fallen
 snow.

As it is then, the imagery of the Dog Star receives much of its semantic richness because it is a figure intimately connected to questions concerning withdrawal from and/or endurance of difficult labors. In generic terms, the Dog Star is a symbol tied directly to the contrast and interaction of elegiac and heroic epic modes, amatory and martial themes. Since the appearance of Sirius forces a choice between withdrawal from physical exertion and martial undertakings on the one hand and engagement in them on the other, its symbolism produces an ambivalence perfectly suited to the narrative uncertainty of the moment in the *Argonautica* that dramatizes the initial confrontation between Jason and Medea. Perhaps the fundamental ambiguities inherent in the symbolism of the Dog Star that I have been examining are

41. On the *via longa* and its connections to military undertakings, see n. 37 above.

nowhere more succinctly put than by Manilius, who in discussing the star's power ascribes to it the symbolic value of a unifier of opposites, as it is connected to motion and rest, hot and cold, disease and health, high and low (*Astronomica* 1.398–404). He then sums up the essential ambiguities and tensions connected to Sirius' symbolic richness by saying: *bella facit pacemque refert* (*Astronomica* 1.405).⁴² The basic question for us, then, as we read the initial encounter between Jason and Medea is which of these, war or peace, the Dog Star will bring to Valerius' epic narrative.⁴³

THE *TEICHOSCOPIA* AND JASON'S *ARISTEIA*

By Book 6 the questions concerning the Dog Star's effect on Valerius' narrative are answered. Moreover, it is the imagery of the Dog Star itself that emphasizes and highlights the extent to which Valerius' Jason differs from Apollonius'. In Book 6 (575–760) Jason is given a grand epic *aristeia*, an episode that has no parallel in the Hellenistic version. Medea has been taken by Juno, disguised as Medea's sister Chalciope, to the city walls so that she can watch the battle taking place between the armies of her uncle Perses and her father Aeetes, who has contracted an alliance with Jason and his companions. This episode is a most important moment in Valerius' attempt to present Jason, even in the face of Medea's presence, as a truly heroic epic warrior—to present an un-Apollonian Jason. Consequently, it is not surprising that Valerius goes out of his way here to recall similar moments in earlier epic poetry, particularly the *teichosopia* in *Iliad* 3.⁴⁴ For in the Homeric passage, Iris, disguised as Helen's sister-in-law Laodice, takes Helen to the city walls to watch Menelaus and Paris fight in single combat. Just as Helen's position at this moment in the *Iliad* is ambiguous, as she is at once friend and foe to the combatants, so too is Medea's at the analogous moment in the *Argonautica*: Medea is compelled by Juno to feel for the foreigner Jason as he joins her father in battle against her uncle. More importantly, the Iliadic episode that is here recalled by Valerius presents, like his own *teichosopia*, a martial confrontation that has been arranged ultimately for amatory purposes. After all, Menelaus and Paris are fighting for Helen's love.⁴⁵ In fact, Valerius emphasizes the (ultimately) amatory purpose of his *teichosopia* and Jason's *aristeia*. He has Juno use Venus' magic girdle on Medea before taking her to the city walls to watch the fighting (6.460–79),

42. This phrase also foregrounds the impact of Sirius on human actions, and specifically the actions of *men*, the normal agents of war and peace. This is reinforced by Manilius with an intriguing reference to Vergil's Turnus, who tells Allecto, disguised as an old priestess (*Aen.* 7.444): *bella viri pacemque gerent quis bella gerenda* ("men will wage wars and make peace, for it is men who should wage wars").

43. A question reinforced (more superficially) by the fact that Jason and his men, as they approach Medea, are described first as an armed gang, as if in battle array (5.353–54), and then seven lines later as a peaceful group of foreigners wearing *imbellis oliva* (5.361).

44. Pace Herschkowitz (1998, 97), who sees the connections between Valerius and the *Iliad* here as "loose." The thematic similarities are in fact quite strong, as we shall see. My discussion therefore should be taken as a supplement to the fine study of Fucecchi (1996, 127–65), who identifies many of the Iliadic elements (among others) at play in Valerius' *teichosopia*. For a catalog of other influences, especially Vergil, on Valerius' narrative in Book 6, see Wijsman 2000, 5–13.

45. Iris says to Helen: "But Alexander and Menelaus, dear to Ares, will do battle with their long spears for you; and you will be called the dear wife of the one who wins" (*Il.* 3.136–38).

so that the seduction of the maiden will be that much easier to accomplish. This recalls the amorous scene in the *Iliad* in which Hera uses this same magic girdle to seduce Zeus (*Il.* 14.197–351). And although Jason, unlike his Iliadic counterparts, does not simply engage a single enemy, the epic warfare witnessed by Medea in the *Argonautica* is used by Juno to arouse in the maiden a love for Jason.⁴⁶ In this sense then, Jason is fighting for Medea's love, as Paris and Menelaus fought for Helen's, though Jason is unaware that he is doing so. Consequently, Valerius legitimizes the fact that he has constructed a scene in which (heroic) epic conventions are put to the service of amatory ends by basing his episode on a scene from Homer that can be interpreted in a similar way (albeit by a rather "elegiac" revisionism that emphasizes the amatory nature of the primary cause and essential purpose of the warfare waged at Troy).⁴⁷

There are other thematic links with the *Iliad*'s *teichoscopia* here as well. As Medea watches the fighting from the walls, she asks Juno to tell her who Jason is (*Argon.* 6.587–99). This interchange recalls the conversation between Helen and Priam at *Iliad* 3.161–242 in which the king asks the Spartan queen about the identities of various Achaean heroes. However, in Valerius Medea seeks information only about Jason. Indeed, Priam's general inquisitiveness in *Iliad* 3 contrasts sharply with Medea's sole focus on Jason in our poem (*ibi miserae solusque occurit Iason*, 6.586). And the contrast can be pressed further. In the Homeric passage, there is single combat for a single prize, and yet Priam is concerned with the identities of men who are not taking part in the fight. Medea, on the other hand, tries to watch the combat in its entirety as it rages in many areas of the plain, but is able to focus on Jason alone (6.584–86, 657–58, 718–20).⁴⁸ The reader, viewing the

46. See 6.602–3: *ac simul hanc dictis, illum dea Marte secundo / impulit atque novas egit sub pectora vires* ("And at one and the same time the goddess excites Medea with words, Jason with martial success, and she drives new strength into his heart").

47. That is, Valerius' *teichoscopia* seeks to remind his audience that Homer's epic warfare too can, on some readings, be viewed as so much squabbling over a girl, and that the martial undertakings that form the subject of his song are put in the service of ultimately amatory ends. An example of this revisionist emphasis on the *Iliad*'s amatory themes is found at *Tristia* 2.371–74, where Ovid tendentiously argues: *Ilias ipsa quid est aliud nisi adultera, de qua / inter amatorem pugna virumque fuit? / quid prius est illic flamma Briseidos utque / fecerit iratos rapta puella duces?* ("What is the *Iliad* itself other than an adulteress over whom there was a fight between her lover and her husband? In that poem, what comes before the passion for Briseis and the rape of the girl that angered the generals?"). For a fuller discussion of this and similar Ovidian (and Vergilian) (mis)readings of the essential subject matter of epic, see Hinds 2000, 227–33. For a similar revisionism in Propertius, see Sullivan 1993, 147–49. Hence, Valerius recognizes the erotic aspects of Jason's *aristeia* as a potential problem within the terms of the strictly defined Roman epic, and seeks to palliate this by going to the fountainhead of all heroic epic, the *Iliad*, as his inspiration and model. Valerius' *teichoscopia*, then, reveals most explicitly the validity of Feeney's suggestion that the "more comprehensive epic tradition" revealed by the collapse of the narrowly defined Roman epic, a collapse precipitated by Medea's presence in the narrative, is a fundamentally Homeric tradition (Feeney 1991, 328). In this way, Valerius' *teichoscopia* demonstrates that *arma* and *amor* can both be accommodated within epic, as the example of Homer shows. Moreover, like the elegists, Valerius here implicitly reminds his audience that in fact *amor* is the prime mover of *arma*, that the latter serve the former. This feature of Valerius' narrative lends further support to the recuperation of Jason by associating him with the tradition of Homeric heroism. On Valerius' use of Homer to move beyond the limitations imposed on him by his primary models (i.e., Apollonius and Vergil), see Zissos 2002.

48. In passing it should be noted that the episode that pits Jason against Colaxes (6.621–56) adds still further to the Iliadic flavor of Valerius' *teichoscopia*, since it is a revision of the death of Sarpedon at *Il.* 16.426–507. On the intricate allusive gesture made by Valerius here, see Zissos 1998.

action through the eyes of the maiden, is also blinded to the actions of the many other combatants, a narrative feature that turns the scene into something more like a series of single combat episodes featuring Jason. Moreover, Jason's martial lack of discrimination contrasts sharply with Medea's erotic myopia. Whereas Medea "scatters her roving gaze" (*sparsit vaga lumina*, 6.584) trying to watch the action in general, only to find that she cannot take her eyes off Jason, the hero, like a lion delighting in the kill, "scatters his hunger" (*spargitque famem*, 6.614) all over the plain. This verbal echo and the contrast it creates underscores the fact that Jason's martial brilliance is required as a means of arousing Medea's erotic passion and that in fact Valerius is employing heroic epic modes (*aristeia*) in the service of erotic and elegiac ends (*amor*).⁴⁹ Consequently, while Jason performs his *aristeia* he is once again, as when the two first met, eroticized by the gaze of Medea, who watches intently from the walls.⁵⁰ Yet this contrast also underscores the extent to which it is Medea, not Jason, who is caught in the throes of something approaching an elegiac *servitium amoris*. Jason does not even know Medea is watching, and at this point in the narrative, it is not at all clear that, if he had known she was there, he would have cared much. As it is, the *teichoscopia* is revealed as the perfect narrative vehicle for deconstructing the tendentious definition of the Roman epic, as it creates a poetic space in which *amor* and *arma* are not seen as incommensurable, but rather as mutually reinforcing categories. The one does not negate the other, and it is the symbolism used by Valerius to signify Jason's martial brilliance that I will now examine.

There are a number of indications that Valerius took great care to give Jason as heroic an *aristeia* as he possibly could. One important means of achieving this is the employment of imagery recalling earlier epic moments that record the martial excellence of the more glorious heroes. An example of this occurs at 6.613–14. As Jason is raging on the battlefield and delighting in the slaughter of his enemies, he is likened to a lion raging in a stable, delighting in the easy kill: *tunc vero, stabulis qualis leo saevit opimis / luxurians spargitque famem mutatque cruores* ("Then indeed, like a lion that rages in the rich stables, reveling in the slaughter as he scatters his hunger and roams about amid the bloodshed . . ."). This simile has an interesting epic history that offers Valerius an opportunity to describe his hero in grand epic fashion and to highlight the coexistence of the erotic and martial elements in this episode. On the one hand, the simile is Iliadic, with a classic martial pedigree. Homer uses it, for example, to describe the martial prowess of Sarpedon on the battlefield before Troy at *Iliad* 12.298–301.⁵¹ However, the lion-in-the-stable simile had been (re)appropriated by Homer himself

49. Feeney 1991, 328.

50. On which see Hershkovitz 1998, 124.

51. Incidentally, it is worth noting that Valerius employs the lion-in-the-stable simile to describe Jason just before he kills Colaxes, who as we have seen (n. 48 above) is a reincarnation of Homer's Sarpedon. Thus, by transferring this simile from Colaxes/Sarpedon to Jason as Jason moves to kill Colaxes/Sarpedon, Valerius achieves a kind of "poetic justice." For now the Greek hero gives a taste of his own medicine to a character derived from an individual who did the Greeks such harm in the earlier epic.

and (re)written into an amatory context. Thus at *Odyssey* 6.130–34, Homer compares Odysseus as he approaches Nausicaa to a lion that desires to get inside a pen full of sheep, a gesture that generates a great deal of generic and typological tension in this episode.⁵² So Valerius has appropriated a simile that stood as a classic example of the poetic practice of creating generic tension within heroic epic by employing martial imagery in an erotic context, even as he is constructing an episode that witnesses epic conventions put to the service of amatory ends. That is, Valerius has not simply reformulated the *Odyssey*'s revision of the *Iliad* by repositioning this simile in a martial context, though he does do this. Rather it is the simile's potential for generic ambiguity already in Homeric contexts that makes it so suitable for this moment in the *Argonautica*. The tension and ambiguity that this simile produces, however, do not detract from the greatness of Jason's *aristeia*. Quite the contrary, the lion simile emphasizes the fact that Jason's martial excellence is consonant with the military prowess of an Iliadic hero, even under the erotic gaze of Medea. Again, Homer has been mobilized to effect this "reconciliation" between the poem's erotic and martial themes. The appearance of this simile during Jason's *aristeia* thus signifies the extent to which Medea's arrival in the narrative has *not* emasculated the hero by subverting the heroic action of the epic, and how *unlike* Apollonius' Jason Valerius' hero is. In fact, Medea's presence offers Juno the opportunity to give Jason the great strength he needs in order to carry out the valorous deeds of his epic *aristeia* (6.602–3). Medea, who in Book 5 was presented as a serious threat to the progress of the epic narrative and Jason's role in it, has become the stimulus for the most heroic deeds performed by anyone in the whole poem. It has become clear by this point in the narrative that *amor* has not impeded *arma*. Rather, as noted above, the one depends on the other. For the logic of Valerius' story is such that *amor* requires *arma*, since the success of the *amor* theme (and by extension the success of the mission in general) depends in no small measure on the success of Jason's martial exploits. As it is, Valerius emerges as a proponent of the elegiac precept *amor odit inertes* (Ov. *Ars am.* 2.229), since Jason's *aristeia* dramatizes the laborious, physically demanding, martial-epic type of *obsequium* discussed earlier in connection with the Dog Star imagery. And it is the imagery of the Dog Star that highlights most emphatically Valerius' presentation of Jason as a bona fide epic hero.

He Is Sirius, So Stop Calling Him Shirley

As Medea watches Jason on the battlefield, Juno gives him a boost in strength so that his military skill, now enhanced by the goddess, may impress the maiden all the more and increase her desire for him (6.602–3). At this point the splendor (and destructive power) of Jason's martial brilliance is so great

52. On which see Cook (1999, 158), who notes: "[The lion simile] simultaneously locates Odysseus in multiple narrative environments, including those of epic warrior and erotic seducer." See also Watrous 1999.

that he is likened to Sirius (6.607–8): *acer ut autumno Canis iratoque locati / ab Iove fatales ad regna iniusta cometae* (“Like the fierce Dog Star in autumn or death-bringing comets sent by angry Jupiter to unjust kingdoms . . .”). Likening a hero’s martial brilliance and destructive power to the heat and might of the Dog Star was nothing new: Homer uses this imagery to describe the martial sheen of Diomedes (*Il.* 5.4–8) as well as the awesome power of Achilles as he is about to wreak vengeance on Hector (*Il.* 22.25–32), and Aeneas’ military splendor is likened to Sirius by Vergil (*Aen.* 10.270–75).⁵³ So, on the one hand, this simile represents, like the lion-in-the-stable simile, yet another means by which Valerius increases the greatness of Jason’s martial prowess at this moment by describing him in terms that recall the most glorious warriors of the epic tradition. But the Dog Star imagery also takes us back to the moment in Book 5 when Jason and Medea first meet, an episode that, as I have shown, is fraught with uncertainty concerning Medea’s potential impact on Jason and the trajectory of the epic narrative.⁵⁴ Whereas the Dog Star imagery in Book 5 was used primarily to signify Jason’s physical appearance during his erotic encounter with Medea, in Book 6 it signifies Jason’s physical strength during his martial *aristeia* on the battlefield.⁵⁵ The symbolism of Sirius in Book 6 highlights how far Jason has come from Apollonius’ presentation of him, and underscores Valerius’ recuperative effort to present him as a more balanced hero than we get in the Hellenistic version.⁵⁶ His good looks do not outshine his martial prowess, the (unavoidable) erotic elements of the story do not subvert the martial, Medea’s presence does not enervate Jason. The Dog Star imagery reveals that Jason, in Valerius’ presentation, is both a lover and a fighter, and that Valerius is indeed a proponent of Feeney’s more comprehensive epic vision.

So while Jason’s first appearance as Sirius helps to highlight the potential threat posed by Medea’s arrival in the narrative by underscoring the possibility for the heroic action to be derailed by amatory themes, the second appearance of Jason as the Dog Star indicates emphatically that this has not happened. Valerius, unlike Apollonius, gives Jason an opportunity to display his martial prowess, and has made his physical strength as important for the seduction of Medea as his physical beauty. The potential for the amatory subject matter of the story to predominate over more (tendentiously) “appropriate” epic themes is highlighted in Book 5 only to be rejected in favor of a more balanced approach, a balance that is reflected in Valerius’ employment of the Dog Star similes. Consequently, the similes function as important markers in Valerius’ general attempt to recuperate Jason as an epic hero. As it is, Valerius’ Jason may ultimately be compelled

53. In fact, Valerius alludes to this Vergilian episode by mentioning, along with Sirius, baneful comets. His *cometae* (*Argon.* 5.608) stand in the same metrical position as the *cometae* in Vergil’s text (*Aen.* 10.272).

54. For a discussion (with further bibliography) of the connection between the Dog Star similes in Books 5 and 6, see Wijsman 2000, 232–33.

55. Hershkovitz 1998, 124.

56. Fucecchi 1996, 150–51.

to yield to Medea (as she to him), but he (like Medea) does not give in without a fight.⁵⁷

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57. As an example of Jason's eventual "submission" to Medea, one thinks of 8.54–133, where Medea asks Jason how he would like to proceed against the dragon that guards the fleece, a question that meets with deafening silence from our hero. As Zissos (1999, 290–91) has shown, Valerius here highlights various earlier versions of this episode, ultimately opting for the Apollonian version in which Medea drugs the serpent as Jason easily takes the fleece. It could have gone differently: Jason could have engaged in a truly heroic struggle with the beast, as Pindar's Jason had done (*Pyth.* 4.247–49), a version alluded to by Valerius at 8.64–66. And yet, Valerius (or, actually, Medea) chooses the far less heroic version (from Jason's perspective anyway). To be sure, Valerius even here has made a partial recovery of Jason's epic status. For whereas Apollonius compares Jason to a young girl once he gets the fleece (4.167–71), Valerius compares his hero to Hercules (8.121–26). And yet, the comparison to Hercules itself leaves the reader feeling a bit uneasy, as it implicitly reminds us of how truly heroic fighting against a dragon can be; Valerius had earlier told in florid epic fashion the story of Hercules' rescue of Hesione from a sea serpent (2.478–549). While Valerius has recuperated Jason, there is not a complete recovery.

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