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Unexampled Exemplarity: Medea in the *Argonautica* of Valerius Flaccus*

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SUMMARY: This paper examines how Medea's singularity affects Venus's attempt to offer her models to follow in Valerius's *Argonautica*. While convincing Medea to assist Jason, Venus cites *exempla* designed to diminish Medea's uniqueness. But they have the opposite effect. Since none of these parallels is sufficiently illustrative of the course Medea must take, Venus refashions them so that they resemble previous accounts of Medea's life. Circe, Hippodamia, and Ariadne are exemplary for Medea because Venus reinvents them as pseudo-Medeas. Medea is offered snapshots of her own (future) self: she is thus prompted to become the unparalleled figure prefigured by literary tradition.

INTRODUCTION

AS THE CHORUS OF CORINTHIAN WOMEN IN EURIPIDES' *MEDEA* HEAR THE TITLE character murdering her children, they try to offer a precedent for Medea's awful crimes. They are able to recall only a single *exemplum*: the Chorus likens Medea to Ino, who killed her children in a fit of madness sent by Hera (1279–89). However, Ino's story is not a very apt parallel for this horrific moment in Euripides' tragedy. Not only did Ino murder her offspring as a result of divinely inspired insanity (1284–85), but she also "perished, dying along with her two children" (1289) by jumping from a cliff into the sea when she realized what she had done (1286–87). By contrast Medea, whose calculated madness derives from a conscious desire for revenge, will survive by fleeing to Athens, suffering no sense of guilt for the crimes she has committed.[1] As Rick Newton (1985) has persuasively argued, the Euripidean Chorus's inability to

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[1] See Boedeker 1997: 136–37 and Mastronarde 2002: 370.

discover a suitable model for Medea foregrounds her utter uniqueness. At the moment in Euripides' play when Medea truly becomes Medea, precedents fail because her deeds are unparalleled.

The unprecedented Medea of Euripides' famous play set a powerful and indelible literary precedent, casting a long shadow over subsequent Greek and Latin poetry.[2] Post-Euripidean Medeas are all more or less headed for the unparalleled moment recorded in Euripides' tragic *tour de force*. Any subsequent Medea, regardless of the specific stage in her life treated in any particular poem, is always incipiently *that* Medea for whom there are no apposite precedents: that is, she is always already a figure of unexampled exemplarity.[3]

In this paper I examine how Medea's radical singularity affects Venus's attempt to offer the Colchian maiden models to follow in Book 7 of Valerius's *Argonautica*. In order to convince Medea to take the first steps on the long road that leads to that unique moment in Euripides' play, Venus offers her a series of *exempla*—Circe, Hippodamia, and Ariadne—ostensibly designed to diminish the uniqueness of the path that Venus wants Medea to take. But they have precisely the opposite effect, and they do so in an interesting way. Since none of these parallels is sufficiently illustrative of the course of events that Venus has come to set in motion, she refashions her chosen *exempla* by overwriting them with themes drawn largely from previous accounts of Medea's life. The *exempla* cited by Venus are palimpsests, as it were, "texts" that bear the traces of earlier versions of Medea's highly idiosyncratic story. Circe, Hippodamia, and Ariadne appear to be exemplary for Medea because Venus reinvents them as pseudo-Medeas whose lives, once rewritten, strikingly resemble and anticipate the unique path that Medea must follow.[4] As a result, the Valerian Medea is offered snapshots of her own (future) self: through them, she is prompted not to become a new Circe or Hippodamia or Ariadne, but rather to become the unparalleled figure that has been indelibly prefigured by Euripides' precedent-setting play.[5]

[2] On the remarkable influence of Euripides' *Medea*, see Mastronarde 2002: 64–70.

[3] On the manner in which the Medea of Apollonius's *Argonautica* foreshadows the Medea of Euripides' tragedy, see Hunter 1989: 18–19. Ovid employs a similar technique vis-à-vis Medea in *Heroides* 12, on which see Hinds 1993: 17, 34–43.

[4] There is thus a sense in which, as in Euripides, the Valerian Medea "expands to the point where she obliterates the other characters in her myth" (Boedeker 1997: 148).

[5] Valerius therefore engages in what Alessandro Barchiesi has called "allusion in the future tense," a process whereby an "older tradition enters a new text as a view of the future" (1993: 334).

CIRCE AND MEDEA

Despite the concerted efforts of Juno and Venus to make Medea fall in love with Jason in Book 6, the Colchian maiden wavers (7.153–54).[6] In fact, Medea has decided that she is going to resist her feelings for Jason and that therefore she is *not* going to help him (7.205–9). In order to overcome Medea's remarkable obstinacy, the goddesses now hatch a new plan: Venus herself will visit Medea in order to fan the flames of passion anew (7.156–92). However, Venus comes to Colchis not *in propria persona*, but rather disguised as Medea's aunt Circe (7.210–12). She does this largely in order to use Circe's life as a paradigm for Medea to follow, although she offers other *exempla* as well (Hippodamia and Ariadne). Valerius's narrative at this point thus largely dispenses with overtly mythological means of inducing passion, such as arrows of love (Apollonius 3.275–98) and magic girdles (Valerius 6.455–76).[7] Rather, Venus relies primarily on the rhetorical power of exemplarity and precedent in order to persuade Medea to become like her aunt. Venus's goal is to have Medea follow in Circe's footsteps and thereby to become something of a new Circe (7.290–91).[8] Indeed, following in the elder Circe's footsteps is quite literally what the younger Medea ultimately will do as a result of Venus's persuasive rhetoric (7.347–49):

> testor, cara, tuas, Circe Titania, voces:
> te ducente sequor, tua me, grandaeva, fatigant
> consilia et monitis cedo minor.
>
> Dear Circe, daughter of the Sun, I call your words to witness and I follow where you lead; your counsels, aged one, wear me down and I, being younger, yield to your advice.

To get to this point, Valerius expends a great deal of energy establishing the exemplarity of Circe's career—or a particular version of it—for Medea

[6] Citations of Valerius are taken from the editions of Liberman 1997 and 2002. Translations of the Latin are my own.

[7] However, the powerful effects of Venus's "maddening kisses" should not be overlooked (7.254–55).

[8] That Venus arrives in Colchis ostensibly to transform Medea into a duplicate version of the individual whom she is impersonating recalls her arrival on Lemnos in the form of a Fury (2.101–6, 196–99) in order to transform the Lemnian women into Furies, on which see Hardie 1993: 43–44. In fact, at one point Medea sees through Venus's disguise, but she catches a glimpse not of Venus per se, but rather of Venus-as-Fury (7.248–50). On this passage, see Salemme 1991: 61–63 and Hershkowitz 1998: 262.

at this juncture in her life. As we shall see, the image of Circe offered as an *exemplum* by Venus bears striking resemblances to the image of Medea herself as it emerges from the literary tradition. Following in Circe's footsteps is thus tantamount to following in the footsteps of previous Medeas.

The first thing to note about the Valerian episode is just how unique it is.[9] Venus's arrival in Colchis disguised as Circe is an original and unexpected move, especially since the goddess's personal involvement at this point in the story has no basis in Apollonius's poem. There, although Aphrodite agrees to send her son Eros to strike Medea with an arrow of love (3.100–5), she does not otherwise enter the narrative to assist in Medea's seduction. To have Venus intervene directly in this way thus constitutes a striking departure from Valerius's Hellenistic predecessor. Characteristically, Valerius advertises the novelty of the situation he has created (7.210–12):

> ecce toro Venus inprovisa resedit,
> sicut erat, mutata deam mentitaque pictis
> vestibus et magica Circen Titanida virga.
>
> And look, Venus was unexpectedly sitting on the bed, having exchanged her divine appearance for a new one[10] and pretending to be Circe, daughter of the Sun, complete with her colorful clothes and magic wand.

Although the audience has been alerted that Venus will visit Medea in some form or fashion (7.176–78), her sudden appearance disguised as Circe is as unforeseen (*inprovisa*) for the poem's readers as it is for Medea. Like Medea, we too are caught off guard by the appearance of "Circe" in Colchis, perhaps even more so than Medea herself. For although Medea has not seen her aunt in Colchis in many years (7.217–19), in the context of an *Argonautica* the appearance of Circe (or "Circe") as an actor in her homeland is unprecedented prior to this moment in Valerius's epic. Even beyond the Argonautic legend, it is very unusual to see Circe in Colchis. With the notable exception of Diodorus Siculus (4.45.3–5), I have been able to find no other instance of Circe—in any form, "real" or impersonated—performing as a character in Colchis. Rather, when Circe makes appearances in previous texts, she has already left home, either dwelling in the East, where Homer locates her (*Od.* 12.3–4), or in the

[9] See Bernstein 2008: 55.

[10] Translation here is difficult, but it is clear that Valerius is engaging in a bit of verbal trickery with the phrase *mutata deam*. I have tried to account for this by emphasizing that Venus alters her appearance in order to impersonate not a mortal, but rather another goddess. On the divine status of Valerius's Circe, see Stover 2009: 324–25.

West, where Hesiod (*Theog.* 1011–16), Apollonius (3.311–13), Vergil (*Aen.* 7.10–24), and Ovid (*Met.* 14.8–10) place her new abode.[11] Normally, once Circe has left Colchis, she does not return. In fact, she seems never to roam far from her new home at all, wherever this is located. Consequently, the very idea of bringing Circe to Colchis in any guise is a bold move on Valerius's part, since she is traditionally a homebody whom others visit.[12]

"Circe"'s sudden appearance in Colchis is thus unexpected (*inprovisa*) indeed. Like Venus's outward appearance, the Apollonian version of Medea's seduction is being altered (*mutata*, 211) as Valerius creates something new by reinventing the mythographic material at his disposal. There was no literary precedent for bringing Venus-as-Circe to Colchis to act as a precedent for Medea, no example of this particular process of exemplification.[13] I stress the singularity of the episode in order to emphasize just how un-Circean it is for "Circe" to be in Colchis, which is traditionally Medea's stomping ground. Perhaps this context at least partially helps to account for why the Valerian Circe assumes so many Medea-like aspects. That is, if already in Homer Circe "seems to be borrowed from Medea,"[14] then a Circe in Colchis, brought face to face with Medea, may "automatically" appear more Medea-like than ever. However, Valerius's Circe assumes so many Medea-like aspects that neither the Colchian setting nor the similarities between Circe and Medea in Homer are sufficient to explain what is going on in the Valerian episode.

Medea's puzzling reaction upon seeing her "aunt" establishes the appropriateness of Circe as a paradigm for Medea at this moment in the *Argonautica*, a matter that is initially far from obvious (7.217–19):

> ac prior: "o tandem, vix tandem reddita Circe,
> dura, tuis, quae te biiugis serpentibus egit
> hinc fuga quaeve fuit patriis mora gratior oris?"

[11] Valerius also locates Circe's new home in the West (7.232–34), on which more below.

[12] "[Circe] is essentially a stay-at-home" (Segal 1968: 441).

[13] However, within the context of Valerius's *Argonautica* Venus's strategy is perhaps rendered somewhat less radical by Juno's equally unprecedented approach to Medea disguised as the girl's older sister Chalciope in Book 6 (477–94). The Valerian goddesses thus seem to be working on Medea by adopting the personae of female kin who have an advisory potential vis-à-vis Medea. See Hershkowitz 1998: 261 and Bernstein 2008: 30, 55.

[14] Hinds 1993: 46n83 (quoting a view expressed by J. Porter *per litteras*). For the possibility that "the Homeric Circe is modeled on an Argonautic Medea," see Hunter 1989: 14 (with further bibliography). For a more general comparison between Medea and Circe, see Crane 1988: 141–42.

> And Medea spoke first: "Circe, pitiless one, you have finally, just finally returned to your people; what cause for flight drove you from here on a serpent-drawn chariot or what cause for delay was more pleasing to you than (returning to) your native shores?"

Medea's opening remarks to "Circe" focus not on the reasons for her presence in Colchis, but rather on the reasons for her initial departure and continued absence. Medea does not ask her "aunt" why she has come back to Colchis, but rather why she ever left. This is a bit odd: given how unforeseen "Circe"'s appearance in Colchis is, we might have expected Medea to begin by asking her why she was there, not why she had left.[15] The strangeness of Medea's focus on Circe's departure increases if we hear in her *tandem, vix tandem reddita* (217) an echo of Apollonius 3.53 and the use there of the phrase δηναιὰς αὖτως ("absent for so long"). When Hera and Athena visit Aphrodite to seek her help in making Medea fall in love with Jason, Aphrodite begins, naturally enough, by asking the goddesses why they have come (3.52–54): "Good ladies, what purpose and business brings you here after such a long time (δηναιὰς αὖτως)? Why have you come? In the past I saw very little of you, chief among goddesses as you are."[16] The customary (and logical) nature of Aphrodite's question provides a strong contrast for the Valerian Medea's initial reaction to "Circe"'s arrival in Colchis.[17]

Valerius's Medea is clearly fascinated with Circe's exit from Colchis, an issue she had already raised prior to her encounter with Venus-Circe. Earlier in Book 7, Medea had asked her sister Chalciope to tell her about Circe's withdrawal from home.[18] Although Chalciope's answer is not recorded, it is clear that Medea already knows *how* Circe left, that is, in a chariot drawn by winged serpents (*quaerit ... / ut aligeri Circen rapuere dracones*, 7.119–20). What Medea appears not to know is *why* her aunt left home in this fashion, hence her inquiry at 218–19 (*quae te biiugis serpentibus egit / hinc fuga?*). The

[15] The apparent oddness of Medea's opening address is somewhat lessened by her subsequent suggestion that her aunt has returned home out of a sense of patriotism (*patriae te movit amor*, 222). Nevertheless, Medea's immediate interest in Circe's departure is striking.

[16] Translations of Apollonius are those of Hunter 1993b.

[17] On the traditional nature of Aphrodite's opening inquiry, see Hunter 1989: 103.

[18] Apollonius's Medea, by contrast, never once seeks information concerning Circe's departure from Colchis. However, it should be noted that Medea is present when Aeetes refers to Circe's exit (3.309–13), a passage that may hint at the reason for her withdrawal, as we shall see. So perhaps we are to imagine that Apollonius's Medea knows exactly why and how Circe left Colchis.

reason for Circe's sudden *presence* is simply of no concern to Medea, whereas the reason for her *departure* interests her greatly.

As strange as Medea's reaction is, it makes perfectly good sense in terms of narrative strategy. Valerius deftly uses Medea's interest in the reason for Circe's life outside of Colchis to advance the plot of his epic. Medea's concern for her aunt's exit from Colchis allows "Circe" to concentrate on this particular aspect of her life, since convincing Medea to leave Colchis too is exactly what Venus-as-Circe is there to accomplish. The poem's audience already knows why "Circe" has come to Colchis and Medea's relative indifference about why she is there enables the narrative to focus on the crucial theme of departure. Moreover, Medea's curiosity regarding the cause of Circe's withdrawal from Colchis piques the audience's interest in this issue: her desire to know why Circe ever left Colchis prompts us to seek the answer to this question as well. Indeed, our desire to know the answer is heightened because neither Chalciope nor "Circe" directly addresses Medea's repeated inquiry. By alluding to Circe's exit from Colchis twice (7.120, 217–19), only to deny his audience an explanation of this event on both occasions, Valerius invites us to ponder this incident along with Medea: exactly why *did* Circe leave Colchis? Fortunately, Valerius supplies enough clues for us to piece together the reason for Circe's departure from home, and it has some interesting implications for her exemplarity vis-à-vis Medea. Discovering it, however, requires sensitivity to the subtle allusiveness characteristic of Valerius's poetic technique.[19]

The place to start, as often, is with Apollonius. In fact, the elusiveness with which Valerius treats this matter has an Apollonian precedent. Apollonius does not say explicitly why Circe left Colchis. Rather he allows Aeetes to relate only that she was taken to Italy in the chariot of her father, Helios (3.309–13). Apollonius ostentatiously refuses to permit Aeetes to divulge too much information concerning Circe's departure from home. As he is speaking of the matter, Aeetes cuts himself off, tantalizing the poem's audience by suppressing the details, saying "But what is the point of stories?" (3.314). Richard Hunter (1989: 133–34) has suggested that Apollonius's reference to Circe's exit in Helios's chariot may hint subtly that she was transported to Italy by her father for marriage, although there is no evidence that she is married (or ever was) when Jason and Medea visit her in Book 4. This is a plausible inference and, if admitted, the marriage scenario would make Apollonius's Circe a particularly suitable role model for Valerius's Medea: she too will leave Colchis for marriage to a westerner, although not with her father's blessing, as would appear

[19] On Valerius's subtlety with respect to the art of allusion, see esp. Zissos 1999.

to have been the case for Apollonius's Circe. In fact, Circe's marital status in the West is a prominent theme in Valerius's text, as "Circe" makes a point of mentioning her current marriage to the Italian Picus (7.232): *et nunc Ausonii coniunx ego regia Pici* ("and now I am the royal wife of Ausonian Picus"). At first glance, therefore, Valerius's narrative seems to corroborate Apollonius's implication that Circe left Colchis in order to marry. But on closer examination, it becomes clear that Valerius does not subscribe to the Apollonian account of Circe's departure from home.

Valerius's text points to another reason for Circe's withdrawal from Colchis, one that more closely resembles the version of this event found in Diodorus Siculus (4.45.3–5). Far from leaving home calmly with her father for marriage (or for any other reason), Diodorus relates that Circe *fled* from Colchis to Italy after poisoning her Sarmatian husband, usurping his throne, and generating popular resentment with her harsh rule.[20] Medea's use of the word *fuga* in her opening question to "Circe" (*quae te biiugis serpentibus egit / hinc fuga*, 7.218–19) obliquely points to this version, as nearly all the recent commentators note.[21] However, critics have largely missed another, less subtle allusion to the story of Circe's flight from Colchis a bit later in the episode.[22] As Venus-Circe tries to convince Medea that marriage to a westerner would be far superior to marrying any of the local men, she asks (7.234–35): *at tibi quinam / Sauromatae, miseranda, proci?* ("But, poor girl, tell me: what kind of suitors are the Sarmatians for you?"). Venus's reference to Sarmatian suitors picks up and reinforces Medea's earlier description of Circe's departure from Colchis as *fuga*. Given the Diodoran subtext already activated by Medea's use of the term *fuga*, it is fitting for Venus to suggest that the Sarmatians in particular make lousy mates, since according to Diodorus Circe had poisoned her Sarmatian husband before fleeing from home.[23] The specific attention given

[20] On this passage of Diodorus, which may derive from the *Argonautica* of Dionysius Scytobrachion, see Rusten 1982: 118. On Diodorus/Dionysius Scytobrachion as sources for Valerius in general, see Galli 2005.

[21] See Taliercio 1992: 109, Perutelli 1997: 275, and Spaltenstein 2005: 271. Taliercio, however, implies that Apollonius also has Circe depart from Colchis as a fugitive, which is not the case.

[22] An exception is Stover 2009: 326–27.

[23] It should be noted, however, that Diodorus does not make the murder of Circe's Sarmatian husband the cause of her flight. Rather, he relates that Circe fled only after usurping his throne and inciting the populace with her tyrannical rule. Nevertheless, I submit that Valerius's reference to Sarmatian suitors represents further engagement with the Diodoran account. See Stover 2009: 326–27.

to the Sarmatians by Venus is thus significant as we try to piece together the reason for Circe's departure from Colchis.[24]

Moreover, Medea's reference to a "serpent-drawn chariot" (*biiugis serpentibus*, 7.218; cf. 7.120) also points to the version of Circe's departure found in Diodorus and away from Apollonius's account, although this is not its principal significance. The chariot of Helios (or Sol), which is Circe's mode of transportation out of Colchis according to Apollonius's Aeetes, is never said to be drawn by winged snakes, but rather by four horses.[25] Consequently, Valerius's text does not allow for Circe to have left Colchis in Sol's chariot. She therefore cannot have departed under the circumstances to which Apollonius's Aeetes alludes (3.309–13).[26] Rather, Circe's snake-drawn chariot is more appropriate for a *fuga*, thus recalling the flight from Colchis narrated by Diodorus. Be this as it may, the truly salient feature of Medea's two references to Circe's serpent-drawn chariot (7.120, 218) is that they evoke another, more (in)famous flight, that of Medea herself, whose eventual exit from Corinth on a snake-drawn chariot is a prominent theme in the poem well before we learn of Circe's similar chariot ride out of Colchis (see 1.224–25 and 5.453–54).[27] Indeed, despite the Diodoran version of Circe's flight from Colchis, in which there is significantly no mention of a serpent-drawn chariot, the Colchian female most associated with fleeing in general is not Circe, but Medea. It is one of the things Medea is known for, especially when winged snakes are involved, as she herself acknowledges in Seneca's *Medea* (1022): *sic fugere soleo*.[28]

The notion that Circe is a fugitive, along with the emphasis placed on her serpentine mode of transport out of Colchis, assimilates Medea to her aunt by assimilating Circe's rather obscure past to Medea's very well-known future.

[24] I thus disagree with Spaltenstein 2005: 276, who suggests that the name functions generically, signifying nothing more than "barbarians." Before Jason's arrival Medea was, in fact, betrothed not to a Sarmatian, but rather to an Albanian named Styrus (see, e.g., 3.495–97, 5.459–60, 6.265–69, and 8.298–300).

[25] In Valerius, see 3.400–1, 4.91–92, and esp. 6.517–23. See also Verg. *G*. 2.321–22, *Aen*. 1.568; Ov. *Met*. 2.118–21; and Stat. *Theb*. 1.27–29. Fittingly, therefore, the inhabitants of Rhodes sacrificed to Helios by plunging a chariot drawn by four horses into the sea. On this, see Burkert 1985: 175.

[26] *Pace* Shelton 1971: 441.

[27] On the tradition of Medea's flight from Corinth in a serpent-drawn chariot, see Mastronarde 2002: 377–78.

[28] In addition to fleeing from Colchis and Corinth, Medea also fled from Iolcus after killing Pelias and from Athens after trying to poison Theseus. On these flights, see Gantz 1993: 365–73. Not surprisingly, Valerius repeatedly characterizes Medea's departure from Colchis as a *fuga* (see, e.g., 6.500, 8.144, 159, 167, and 426).

For it turns out that each of them are known for fleeing on a chariot drawn by winged snakes following an act of kin-killing. The Circe that begins to emerge from the Valerian narrative is one whose life seems to offer an apposite paradigm for Medea because this Circe is ascribed such recognizably Medea-like behavior. In convincing Medea to model herself after this particular Circe, Venus prompts Medea to assume the role that marks her as a unique figure in the literary tradition. That is, she is prompting Medea to take the initial steps that will lead to her becoming not a new Circe, but rather a traditional—and traditionally horrifying—Medea. In this regard one thinks of the Senecan Medea's terrifying realization of her full potential for crime, at which point she famously declares *Medea nunc sum* (*Med*. 910). As the Valerian narrative implies with its references to Circe's flight on a serpent-drawn chariot, this is the Euripidean moment to which Medea is headed as a result of her encounter with Venus.

However, I do not wish to suggest that there are *no* ways in which Valerius's Medea is made to resemble previous Circes, even if these are far outnumbered by the ways in which Circe is made to resemble previous Medeas. Although this process is not operative in Book 7, where Circe's exemplarity for Medea receives sustained treatment, it is nevertheless discernible elsewhere. For example, the very first time we see Medea in Valerius's epic she has been startled by a dream on the previous night, the content of which compels her to go to the river in the morning to cleanse her mind of its awful visions (5.329–42). This scenario recalls the moment when Circe first appears in Apollonius's poem (4.662–71).[29] There, Jason and Medea find Circe on the seashore at dawn cleansing her mind of the frightening visions she saw in a dream the night before. Valerius even acknowledges the Apollonian model for Medea's Circe-like entrance into the narrative: he refers to the famed "Circean plain" in Colchis (*Circaei ... campi*, 5.327) just two lines before Medea is brought on stage, thus obliquely raising the specter of Circe immediately prior to our first encounter with Medea.[30] Indeed, introducing Medea in a way that brings Circe to mind is a thoroughly Apollonian gesture: when Medea enters Apollonius's narrative she is dubbed πολυφάρμακος (3.27), an epithet applied to Circe by Homer (*Od*. 10.276).[31]

[29] See Perutelli 1994: 47.

[30] Valerius's reference to the Plain of Circe engages with Apollonius's poem in another way as well: it occupies the exact same moment in the narrative as Apollonius's brief excursus on the πεδίον Κιρκαῖον at 3.200–9 (i.e., the moment when Jason and a chosen group of men leave Argo to seek out Aeetes' palace). On this famous Colchian landmark, see Hunter 1989: 119–20.

[31] See Hunter 1989: 100. In regard to the Valerian Medea's witchcraft, it is worth noting that even Circe was impressed by her niece's proficiency in magic (6.439–46). In Valerius,

But let us return to the manner in which Valerius assimilates Circe to Medea in Book 7. A particularly interesting example of this process occurs at 7.225–26, where Venus speaks words reminiscent of Ovid's Medea. She accosts the Colchian maiden as follows: *cetera parce queri neu me meliora secutam / argue* ("stop your complaining and do not blame me for having chosen to follow a better course"). As Alessandro Perutelli (1997: 277) has observed, the phrase *meliora secutam* recalls Medea's words in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* when she is struggling, as she is at this moment in Valerius's poem, to decide whether to help Jason or to stay loyal to her father (*Met*. 7.20–21): *video meliora proboque, / deteriora sequor*. Venus thus assumes the voice of the Ovidian Medea in order to convince the Valerian Medea to make the same decision she makes in the *Metamorphoses*. Medea is thus trapped in an echo chamber, as it were: "Circe" speaks, but it is Medea's voice that is heard, as Medea's "own" words are used against her. The Circe being impersonated by Venus sounds a lot like (a) Medea.[32]

Of course, the Ovidian intertext also produces troubling irony for Valerius's audience. What Venus claims to be the better plan, that is, to leave Colchis for a new life in the West, is what the audience knows all too well to be the worse plan, as Medea herself acknowledges in the Ovidian passage mobilized by Venus's words. By echoing the language of Ovid's wavering Medea, Valerius's Venus generates an excess of significance that belies her assertion: the allusion subverts the very claim she is making, revealing her advice to be a misrepresentation of the "truth."[33]

As with the references to Circe's flight on a serpent-drawn chariot discussed above, here again Circe's exemplarity for Medea comes full circle: Circe

Medea does not need to be prompted to become a full-fledged Circean witch, since she has already shown a willingness to unleash the power of the black arts.

[32] The echo-chamber effect here is reinforced by the fact that *Met*. 7.20–21 in turn echoes the Euripidean Medea's famous statement at *Med*. 1078–79: "I know what harmful things I am about to do, but angry passion controls my plans" (see Anderson 1972: 245–46). Venus's appropriation of the Ovidian lines thus takes us "back to the future" yet again as we are reminded of the Euripidean character that the Valerian Medea is destined to become. My translation of Eur. *Med*. 1078–79 is based on the discussion of these controversial lines by Mastronarde 2002: 393–97.

[33] This kind of "allusive irony" is a notable feature of Valerius's epic. See the important discussion of Zissos 2004, who defines the technique as follows: "Such instances of 'intertextual' irony employ allusion to create a divergence between the ostensible meaning of a statement and its larger intertextual or metaliterary evocation. Irony then arises from the fact that this secondary signification exceeds and confounds the apparent ... linguistic intention" (23–24).

appears to be an apposite model for Medea because she acts and talks like previous poetic instantiations of Medea. Venus assumes the guise of a Circe who is strikingly Medea-like: Medea is thus being confronted by her own *doppelgänger*, a mirror image sent to prompt her to become the fugitive and criminal required of her by the literary tradition (and the plot of Valerius's epic). When Medea "sees through" Venus's disguise, wrongly thinking that the goddess is a Fury, it is as if she gazes into a mirror and catches a glimpse of the madwoman she must become (7.249–50): *tristes thalamos infestaque cerno / omnia, vipereos ipsi tibi surgere crines* ("I see a mournful marriage and dangers of all kinds; on you yourself I see snaky hair rising up").[34] At this moment, Medea fleetingly discerns the indelible image of her future, "furious" self: φονίαν τ' Ἐρινύν (Eur. *Med*. 1260).

In addition to assuming an identity based on previous versions of Medea, there are ways in which Valerius's Venus does *not* resemble Circe, at least as she is depicted in earlier poetry. Early in her address, Venus-as-Circe cites "her own" departure from Colchis as a precedent for Medea to follow (7.231–35):

> fas mihi non habiles, fas et tibi linquere Colchos.
> et nunc Ausonii coniunx ego regia Pici
> nec mihi flammiferis horrent ibi pascua tauris,
> meque vides Tusci dominam maris. at tibi quinam
> Sauromatae, miseranda, proci?
>
> It was right for me to leave the unsuitable Colchians, and it is right for you too. And now I am the royal wife of Ausonian Picus and there my pastures are not frightful because of fire-breathing bulls and you are looking at the mistress of the Tuscan sea. But, poor girl, tell me: what kind of suitors are the Sarmatians for you?

For readers of Apollonius's *Argonautica* the advice offered here by Venus-Circe does not have an "authentically" Circean ring to it. Apollonius's Circe is utterly opposed to the very course of action that Valerius's "Circe" so eagerly favors, as she tells her niece in no uncertain terms (4.745–48):

[34] Although the term *thalamos* may on the surface mean simply "bedroom," indicating that Medea's immediate surroundings have become lugubrious due to Venus's intervention (so Spaltenstein 2005: 279), we are clearly also meant to think of Medea's ill-fated marriage to Jason (see Taliercio 1992: 113). In fact, Medea's words echo Mopsus's prophetic vision of the tragedy that will eventually take place in Corinth (1.226): *cerno et thalamos ardere iugales*. See Liberman 2002: 303.

> Leave my house; go with this stranger—whoever this unknown man is whom you have carried off behind your father's back. Do not remain at my hearth to supplicate me, for I shall never approve what you have plotted and your shameful flight.

Apollonius's Circe may never approve of Medea's exit from Colchis, but Valerius's "Circe" does more than simply approve of Medea's "shameful flight"—she actively encourages it.[35] Whereas Apollonius's Circe construes Medea's departure with Jason as an insult to her father Aeetes, who presumably deserves better, Valerius's "Circe" gestures toward the uncivilized and savage nature of all the Colchians, Aeetes included (*non habiles ... Colchos*; *flammiferis ... pascua tauris*), as she presents Medea with a choice not between her father and Jason, but between a life in the brutish East and a life in the cultured West. For the Apollonian Circe Medea's exit from Colchis with a foreign suitor is beneath her dignity (4.739); for the Valerian "Circe" Medea's continued presence among the local suitors in Colchis is beneath her dignity. Marriage to a westerner, regardless of her father's wishes, offers Medea the prospect of a better life, one worthy of her noble, Circean lineage: according to "Circe," Medea simply cannot live up to her potential if she remains in Colchis.

The gulf between Apollonius's Circe and Valerius's "Circe" on these vital points allows the reader to see through the disguise of the Valerian imposter. A "real" Circe—that is, the Circe from the most influential earlier epic treatment of the Argonautic legend—would never denigrate Aeetes and encourage Medea to leave Colchis with Jason. Not only does Valerius's Venus masquerade as Circe, but she also misrepresents the views of the most important previous instantiation of the character she is impersonating. In trying to be an *exemplum* for Medea, the Valerian "Circe" dispenses with the example offered by Apollonius's Circe and adopts a position that is wholly un-Circean, at least in Apollonian terms. By redefining what it means to be Circe, Venus greatly expands Circe's exemplarity vis-à-vis Medea. For the Valerian "Circe" claims to have followed the very course of action she is recommending for Medea and to have done so for the same noble reason, that is, lack of suitable husbands in "savage" Colchis. Medea is thus made to think that there is nothing shameful in choosing a Circean life for herself in the West. In fact, she is told that this is the proper thing to do (*fas*, 231).

Venus's reference to Circe's new life in the West (7.232–34) is obviously an important aspect of her exemplarity for Medea. Although Homer places Circe in the East (*Od*. 12.3–4), Valerius follows the more popular tradition

[35] On the irony generated by Venus's un-Circean advice, see Bernstein 2008: 58.

according to which Circe moved from Colchis to Italy. This location for Circe's home is attested as early as Hesiod (*Theog*. 1011–16) and is followed in turn by Valerius's two most important epic predecessors, Apollonius (3.311–13) and Vergil (*Aen*. 7.10–24). Of course, it is rhetorically expedient for Venus to adopt this particular account of Circe's life: it bolsters her viability as an *exemplum* for Medea as she tries to convince the young maiden to leave home and head west too. However, Venus's remarks about Circe's new life in Italy also raise a number of troubling issues that further highlight the manifold tendentiousness of her attempt to offer "her own life" as an example for Medea to follow. Again, the details of "Circe"'s autobiography pointedly resemble events from Medea's ill-fated (future) life, the tragic nature of which is once again telegraphed by Venus's description of Circe's ostensibly blissful existence.

"Circe"'s assertion that she is happily married to an Italian named Picus (7.232) is a significant aspect of her new and better life. It is also problematic. To be sure, this detail is designed to support Venus's contention that life in the West is preferable to life in Colchis by stressing the marital bliss she has found in her new homeland. By juxtaposing her marriage to Picus with her belittling of local suitors (235–36), Venus creates the impression that marriage to a westerner far surpasses Medea's other options. However, the reference to Picus raises questions for Valerius's audience, since previous accounts of Circe's relationship with the Italian king portray their "marriage" as a troubled affair. By having Venus refer to Picus, Valerius foregrounds the tendentiousness of her description of Circe's new life in Italy, once again inviting the audience to ponder the implications of Venus's devious appeal to Circean exemplarity. For if Valerius had wanted Venus *simply* to lie to Medea—and she is ultimately lying—he could have made up any name whatsoever for Circe's new Italian husband or refrained from naming him at all. But he does not do this.[36] Instead Valerius complicates matters by naming as Circe's husband the Italian Picus, a significant name that he clearly did not invent out of whole cloth. Rather, Picus is a well-known figure in the mythology of early Italy: according to Vergil, he was Latinus's grandfather (*Aen*. 7.47–49). The Valerian Venus's reference to the Italian king thus has an air of "truth" about it, insofar as it harmonizes with our experiences as readers of the *Aeneid*. However, the naming of Picus also produces some troubling implications for those familiar with this recognizable figure. For although Picus is normally said to have been an Italian king who did in fact have some involvement with Circe, a blissful marriage to her is not something that emerges as a given from the mythological tradition.

[36] Others take Venus's words to be an uncomplicated deception. See, e.g., Stadler 1993: 95.

Traditionally, Picus and Circe did not have a happy marriage. In fact, it is unclear whether they were ever married at all. Although Vergil does indeed describe Circe as the *coniunx* of Picus (*Aen*. 7.189), readers often take this to be a proleptic usage of the noun (as is the case when Valerius's Jason calls Medea his *coniunx* at 7.497).[37] This interpretation is found as early as Servius, who glosses the term as follows: *"coniunx" vero non quae erat, sed quae esse cupiebat* ("'wife' is indeed not what [Circe] was, but rather what she wanted to be").[38] Modern critics of the *Aeneid* often adopt Servius's reading because Vergil also refers explicitly to a story, well known from Ovid (*Met*. 14.312–96), according to which Circe fell madly in love with Picus, only to be rejected by him because he loved another. Angered by this rejection, Circe turned Picus into a woodpecker (*Aen*. 7.189–91):

> Picus, equum domitor, quem capta cupidine coniunx
> aurea percussum virga versumque venenis
> fecit avem Circe sparsitque coloribus alas.
>
> Picus, the tamer of horses, whom Circe, seized with desire to be his wife, turned into a bird, touched by her golden wand and transformed by her potions and his wings she painted with colors.[39]

Consequently, according to Vergil and Ovid the relationship between Circe and Picus was anything but a happy one. Circe *wanted* to be Picus's *coniunx*, but the two were never married: Ovid even describes Picus as the *coniunx* of Canens, the woman he loved rather than Circe (*Met*. 14.417).

The story of Picus and Circe is thus traditionally a tale of unrequited love in which a male beloved rejects a female lover out of desire for another. The jilted female then exacts vengeance by punishing the unresponsive object of her affection. As a result, this is a very disconcerting myth for Valerius's Venus to evoke in her address to Medea, one that anticipates the tragic fallout of Medea's marriage to Jason: for although Jason and Medea, unlike Circe and Picus, will be indisputably married (8.217–58), their eventual breakup will be far worse than the failed relationship of Circe and Picus.[40] Venus tries to

[37] On the Valerian passage, see Bernstein 2008: 59.

[38] Serv. on *Aen*. 7.190. For this reading, see Horsfall 2000: 158. He offers several parallels for the proleptic force of *coniunx* (others are supplied by Langen 1964: 254). However, Fordyce 1977: 103 is very skeptical of this approach. For a literal interpretation of the word, see Moorton 1988: 253–54. On Vergil's Circe generally, see Stoffelen 1994.

[39] The translation is that of Horsfall 2000: 11.

[40] The horrific breakup in Corinth is foreshadowed long before Jason and Medea ever meet (1.224–26) and references to the future tragedy ominously frame their initial encounter in Book 5 (338–40, 442–54).

persuade Medea that Circe is happily married to Picus, but the intertexts activated by her words point to a very different situation. Here again there is "allusive irony" in Venus's appeal to Medea: her reference to Picus activates the reader's knowledge of mythographic material that problematizes the ostensible intent of her words. The reference to Picus, whose name could have been suppressed, ironically bolsters Circe's exemplarity for Medea by ominously mirroring what is in store for her in Greece: she too will find a life in the West that is not characterized by marital bliss, but rather by rejection and revenge.

The troubling implications of Venus's description of Circe's new life do not end there. As most commentators note, Venus's reference to the absence of fire-breathing bulls in Italy (*nec mihi flammiferis horrent ibi pascua tauris*, 7.233) deftly recalls a passage in the *laudes Italiae* section of Vergil's *Georgics*, where we learn that Italy is a land devoid of "bulls that breathe fire from their nostrils" (*tauri spirantes naribus ignem*, 2.140), that is, that Italy is *not* like Colchis.[41] But critics have failed to notice the interesting complications that arise from this reference. At first glance Venus's claim that Italy lacks monsters such as fire-breathing bulls seems plausible enough, especially since this assertion is corroborated, as it were, by the allusion to Vergil's *Georgics*.[42] However, upon reflection it is incredibly ironic for "Circe" of all people to emphasize the *absence* of fire-breathing creatures in her new homeland, a point that Valerius underscores by means of allusion. When Venus claims that Circe is the "royal wife of Ausonian Picus" (*Ausonii coniunx ego regia Pici*, 7.232), her words recall a phrase in Vergil's description of Latinus's home, which was once the "royal palace of Laurentian Picus" (*Laurentis regia Pici*, *Aen*. 7.171).[43] Although the force of *regia* in each text is clearly different, the phrase *regia Pici* occupies the same metrical position in both poems. This echo further activates Vergil's presentation of Circe in *Aeneid* 7, specifically her association with Latinus, who lives in the *regia Pici* when the Trojans arrive in Laurentum. In the Vergilian narrative, Latinus sends Aeneas a particularly

[41] See Langen 1964: 487, Stadler 1993: 95, Perutelli 1997: 281, Dräger 2003: 523, and Spaltenstein 2005: 275.

[42] Nevertheless, the *laudes Italiae* portion of the *Georgics* has been shown by Ross 1987: 109–19 to be riddled with lies, although the claim that Italy has no fire-breathing bulls is presumably not one of them. It is still a bit unsettling that Valerius's Venus evokes such a deceptive text in her own duplicitous *laus Italiae*.

[43] See Stadler 1993: 94 and Dräger 2003: 523. As Perutelli 1997: 280 notes, Valerius's line also echoes *Aen.* 2.783, where the *simulacrum* of Creusa foretells Aeneas's marriage in Italy to Lavinia, a *regia coniunx*.

memorable gift, two fire-breathing horses (*geminosque iugalis / ... spirantis naribus ignem*, 7.280–81). This magical breed of horses was created by none other than Circe, who mated a mortal mare with divine horses stolen from her father, Sol (7.282–83). Vergil's description of these fire-breathing horses repeats verbatim his own earlier description in the *Georgics* of the Colchian-style fire-breathing bulls that do not exist in Italy (*tauri spirantes naribus ignem*, 2.140).[44]

Valerius's allusion to Vergil's *Georgics* at first glance functions simply to bolster Venus's claim that Italy is not like Colchis because it lacks creatures such as fire-breathing bulls (7.233). However, this apparently straightforward argument is complicated by the intercession of Vergil's depiction of "Circean Italy" in *Aeneid* 7, to which we are drawn by the allusive collocation *regia Pici*, with its reprise of the phrase *spirantis naribus ignem* (*Aen*. 7.281). This latter passage imparts irony to the Valerian Venus's description of Italy, since it reminds the audience that Circe created fire-breathing animals in the West. Valerius's allusive gestures thus problematize Venus's argument by drawing attention to the intertextual connection between *Georgics* 2.140 and *Aeneid* 7.281, texts that have very different things to say about the existence of fire-breathing animals in Italy. Even as Venus claims that Italy has no fire-breathing bulls the reader is prompted to recall that it *does* have fire-breathing horses that Circe herself produced, rendering her new home more like her ancestral Colchis than Venus leads Medea to believe. This subverts her assertion that the West is less monstrous, and therefore more civilized, than the East. For Medea, the grass will not be greener on the other side: in fact, it will be as fire-scorched as the Plain of Circe in Colchis (5.450–51).[45]

HIPPODAMIA AND MEDEA

After offering "her own" life as an *exemplum*, Venus-Circe caps her exhortation to Medea with a pair of other examples for her to follow (7.276–81)[46]:

[44] Vergil's description of the two fire-breathing horses sent by Latinus to Aeneas alludes to the fire-breathing bulls of Colchis in another way as well. Vergil's *spirantes naribus ignem* echoes the words of Apollonius's Aeetes as he challenges Jason to yoke the two fire-breathing bulls at *Argon*. 3.410: στόματι φλόγα φυσιόωντες (a phrase repeated verbatim by Jason at 3.496). See Horsfall 2000: 201–2.

[45] In Valerius, Jason faces the fire-breathing bulls "in the Circean fields of Mars" (*Circaeis Mavortis in agris*, 7.544). On this phrase and its relation to the placement of the contest in Apollonius's poem, see Taliercio 1992: 152–53, Stadler 1993: 207, and Spaltenstein 2005: 352.

[46] On the transposition of these lines to the end of Venus's speech, which is clearly where they belong, see Taliercio 1992: 115–16, Liberman 1997: xxix, Perutelli 1997: 304, Dräger 2003: 525, and Spaltenstein 2005: 286.

si Pelopis duros prior Hippodamia labores
expediit totque ora simul iugulata procorum
respiciens tandem patrios exhorruit axes,
si dedit ipsa neci fratrem Minoia virgo,
cur non hospitibus fas sit succurrere dignis
te quoque et Aeaeos iubeas mitescere campos?

If Hippodamia previously made Pelops's difficult tasks easier and, looking back at the heads of so many suitors whose throats were cut, she finally trembled at her father's chariot, and if the Minoan maiden herself killed her brother, why is it not right for you to help deserving strangers also and why should you not order the Aeaean fields to be tamed?

I shall examine these *exempla* in the order in which Venus cites them, starting with Hippodamia and moving on to Ariadne.

The notion that Hippodamia's life somehow mirrors Medea's current situation is intriguing. I suggest that the example has been chosen by Venus largely due to its thematic similarity to Medea's status in previous versions of the Argonautic legend. In fact, the parallel does not really suit the Medea of Valerius's *Argonautica* very well, but it *is* appropriate for other versions of Medea's interactions with Jason.

At first, it may seem perfectly obvious why Venus-Circe offers the story of Hippodamia and Pelops as a model for Medea's involvement with Jason. The myth concerns a young woman whose love for a stranger prompted her to betray her own father, Oenomaus. Indeed, Venus's words make it clear that she has in mind versions of the Hippodamia-Pelops story in which it was Hippodamia, not Pelops, who bribed her father's charioteer, Myrtilus, convincing him to tamper with Oenomaus's chariot so that he would crash (and die) during his race against Pelops.[47] Valerius's Venus is thus far more explicit about Hippodamia's direct involvement in the contest between Pelops and Oenomaus than the description of this event in Apollonius's *Argonautica* (1.752–58).[48] Surely this is designed to anticipate Medea's surreptitious intervention on Jason's behalf before he faces the daunting *labores* established for him by Aeetes.

Moreover, whereas Apollonius does not ascribe any motives to Hippodamia, Valerius's Venus clearly suggests that she aided Pelops, not necessarily out of

[47] On this tradition, see Gantz 1993: 541–43. See also Spaltenstein 2005: 286.

[48] Although the Hippodamia-Pelops story is not explicitly offered as a paradigm for the subsequent interactions of Jason and Medea in Apollonius's epic, the myth does share several points of contact with Apollonius's elaboration of their love affair. On this, see Hunter 1993a: 57–58.

love for him, but rather out of feelings of resentment and disgust at her father's cruelty: she could no longer tolerate seeing the severed heads of the suitors who had failed to defeat Oenomaus. In fact, such a motive is unparalleled in other extant accounts of the myth. Although the decapitation of Hippodamia's unsuccessful suitors is a standard feature of the story, she is nowhere else said to have bribed Myrtilus because of her father's savagery.[49] Rather, in those versions in which Hippodamia takes the leading role in her father's demise, she is motivated by her love of Pelops.[50]

The Valerian Venus thus implicitly ascribes great cruelty to Aeetes by likening him to Oenomaus, even though Aeetes cannot be accused of anything remotely similar to the crimes committed by the Olympian king. What Aeetes *has* done, however, is renege on his promise to give Jason the Golden Fleece in return for the Argonauts' assistance in the war with his brother Perses (5.538–41). Instead, Aeetes establishes the canonical labors—yoking the fire-breathing bulls, sowing the dragon's teeth, and defeating the earthborn warriors—as a way for Jason still to obtain the fleece (7.35–72). As he ends his description of these tasks, Aeetes obviously relishes the prospect of watching Jason perish (73–77):

> ipse incertus adhuc, tenebris te protinus illis
> involvi flammisque velim, durare parumper
> an magis, everso iacias dum semina campo
> ac tibi Cadmei dum dentibus exeat hydri
> miles et armata florescant pube novales.
>
> I myself do not yet know whether I prefer for you to be immediately engulfed in the darkness and flames, or rather to hold out for a while until you sow the seeds in the upturned field and until the army comes for you from the teeth of the Cadmean serpent and the freshly ploughed earth flowers with armed youth.

Aeetes' cruelty is certainly on display here, and his ruthlessness has an immediate impact on Medea. She now regards her father not as a pious man, as before (5.336), but as a "savage tyrant" (7.78–81):

> filia prima trucis vocem mirata tyranni
> haesit et ad iuvenem pallentia rettulit ora
> contremuitque metu ne nescius audeat hospes
> seque miser ne posse putet.

[49] See Perutelli 1997: 305.

[50] See Gantz 1993: 541–43.

> As she first marveled at the words of the savage tyrant, his daughter was perplexed and turned her pale face to look at the youth, trembling from fear that the unknowing stranger might risk it and, poor man, think that he might succeed.

Thus when Venus cites the unparalleled account of Hippodamia's motivation for helping Pelops, she plays not on Medea's love for Jason, but rather on her sudden and astonished recognition of her father's cruelty and treachery.[51] Now this certainly has the effect of making Hippodamia a more suitable role model for Medea, but it does so by assimilating Hippodamia to the Colchian maiden, not the other way around.[52] The closest parallel for the Hippodamia presented to Medea by Venus is not some earlier instantiation of the Olympian girl, but rather (Valerius's) Medea herself. Hence, Hippodamia is refashioned into an apposite *exemplum* for Medea precisely because she is ascribed a recognizably Medea-like reaction to the savagery of her father vis-à-vis a foreigner.

But beyond the issue of Hippodamia's motivation, her involvement with Pelops does not seem to offer an apt parallel for the current situation of Valerius's Medea. This is so because, in contrast to Hippodamia, Medea has been betrothed to an Albanian named Styrus (3.495–97), a character Valerius seems to have invented.[53] This of course represents a significant departure from Apollonius, in whose epic Medea is not engaged. Valerius's Aeetes has arranged this marriage to the foreigner Styrus in response to a troubling vision he once saw: an image of Phrixus appeared to Aeetes one night and instructed him to marry Medea off to a suitor who would remove her from her father's kingdom (5.238–40, 256–58). Whereas Apollonius's Aeetes pointedly (and ironically) has no fear of treachery from his daughters whatsoever (3.602–4), Valerius's Aeetes has been warned of trouble coming from Medea's continued presence in Colchis, the solution to which is marriage to a foreigner, which has thus been arranged.[54] So Valerius's Aeetes has done exactly what Oenomaus refused to do, that is, he has pledged his daughter's hand in marriage, and

[51] Medea now knows the answer to the question she posed to Juno-as-Chalciope at 6.675: *credisne patrem promissa daturum?* ("Do you think my father will give what he has promised?"). See Shelton 1971: 418.

[52] See Perutelli 1997: 305.

[53] The existence of Styrus is an important aspect of Valerius's engagement with Vergil's *Aeneid*: it allows Jason to play Aeneas to Styrus's Turnus, with Medea as Lavinia. See Wijsman 1996: 221.

[54] The wedding of Styrus and Medea and her departure with him to Albania have been delayed by the war between Aeetes and Perses (5.459–60).

he has certainly not killed and decapitated those who showed an interest in marrying Medea.[55]

So to what extent does Hippodamia's situation mirror Medea's? Not very much, it would seem. Medea's engagement to Styrus appears to undercut the primary thrust of Venus's usage of Hippodamia as an *exemplum* for Medea, which turns not simply on Aeetes' cruelty, but on his supposed cruelty vis-à-vis suitors for Medea's hand. Moreover, Valerius's Jason is not a *procus* ("suitor") for Medea, as Pelops was for Hippodamia. Or is he? Venus certainly implies that he is, and perhaps this is part of her cunning scheme, to convince Medea that Jason has in fact come for *her*, not for the Golden Fleece. Although such a scenario runs counter to the purpose of the Argonauts' journey to Colchis as explicitly formulated in Valerius's narrative, it is worth pausing over this point for a moment. For it turns out that Venus here touches on an admittedly obscure version of the Argonautic legend in which Jason does indeed journey to Colchis primarily as a suitor for Medea.

This tradition may be quite ancient. Hesiod's summary of the Argonautic myth, which makes no mention of the Golden Fleece, seems to suggest that Jason came to Colchis primarily, if not solely, for Medea, whom Jason "led away" from Aeetes (*Theog.* 992–99):

> By the will of the immortal gods the son of Aison led away from Aietes the daughter of Aietes, the divinely nurtured king, when he had completed the many grievous labours which the great king, the overbearing, violent and outrageous Pelias, doer of savage deeds, had imposed on him. When he had finished them, the son of Aison came to Iolcus after many labours, bringing the lovely-eyed girl with him on the swift ship, and he made her his wedded wife.[56]

Jason's involvement with Medea, references to which open and close the passage, dominates this Hesiodic précis, implying that their union was the most significant outcome of Jason's trip to Colchis. Moreover, Richard Hunter (1989: 208) has observed that Hesiod's phraseology in lines 992–94 (κούρην δ' Αἰήταο ... Αἰσονίδης ... ἦγε παρ' Αἰήτεω) "suggests that Aietes gave Medea to Jason," presumably for the marriage referred to in line 999. However, Hesiod does not say explicitly that Jason made the voyage to Colchis for the purpose of marrying Medea.

Although Hesiod's description of Jason's involvement with Medea and Aeetes does not yield anything definitive and thus should not be pressed

[55] We hear of only one other suitor for Medea's hand, a man named Anausis, who is in fact killed by his rival Styrus during the fighting in Book 6 (265–78).

[56] The translation is that of Hunter 1989: 15.

too far, Apollonius's *Argonautica* offers clearer evidence for the existence of a tradition according to which Jason came to Colchis primarily for Medea. The content of the Apollonian Medea's dream alludes to just such a version (3.619–23)[57]:

> She imagined that the stranger undertook the challenge, not at all because he wanted to recover the fleece—it was not for that that he had come to Aietes' city—but to take her back to his own home as his properly wedded wife.

This passage implies not only that Jason "was an open suitor for Medea's hand,"[58] but also that the canonical labors set by Aeetes were designed either to test the worthiness of potential husbands, or indeed to kill them, perhaps out of fear of an oracle such as the one Oenomaus heard regarding death at the hands of a son-in-law.[59]

Consequently, the Valerian Venus's reference to the story of Hippodamia, Pelops, and Oenomaus may possess more significance for the interactions of Medea, Jason, and Aeetes than appears at first glance: although it does not offer a close parallel for the situation explicitly formulated in Valerius's *Argonautica*, it does indeed reflect the interpersonal dynamics of other versions of the Argonautic legend. In this way, Venus is prompting Medea to revise a role she has played in previous accounts of her life, despite its apparent incongruity with the narrative in which she is currently acting.

My reading of Venus's allusion to the story of Hippodamia and Pelops can be bolstered by other passages in Valerius's poem that seem to engage with the version of the Argonautic legend in which Jason comes to Colchis for Medea rather than, or in addition to, the Golden Fleece. For example, as Aeetes is preparing to announce the canonical labors by which Jason can obtain the Golden Fleece, he asks him the following question (7.48–50): *cur age non templis sacrata avellere dona / omnibus atque ipsas gremiis abducere natas, / praedo, libet?* ("Tell me, pirate, why does it not please you to snatch away the holy gifts from all our temples and to remove our daughters themselves from their mothers' laps?"). This implies that Jason is in Colchis not simply to take away the Golden Fleece, but also to "abduct" Medea, thefts that Aeetes will prevent by challenging Jason to yoke the bulls, etc. (58–77). Aeetes' ironic reference to Jason's possible desire to abduct Medea (*gremiis abducere*

[57] Dreams are a particularly good place to look for allusions to previous and/or rival treatments of a given myth. As Alessandro Barchiesi has noted, a dream has the capacity to open "an intertextual window" (1995: 56).

[58] Hunter 1989: 165.

[59] For the latter view, see Rusten 1982: 62–63. For the notion that the tasks arranged by Aeetes were designed to test Jason's worthiness for Medea, see Crane 1988: 140.

natas) is reinforced by an echo of Juno's tendentious assertion that Aeneas has come to Italy to abduct Lavinia (*gremiis abducere pactas*, *Aen*. 10.79).[60] As Stephen Harrison (1991: 79–80) notes, Vergil's Juno here construes Aeneas as a "new Paris." The Vergilian text evoked by the Valerian Aeetes' allusive phraseology has the effect of characterizing Jason too as a Paris-like figure. In fact, elsewhere in Valerius's epic Jason is explicitly likened to Paris, the most famous woman-stealer and/or seducer in Greco-Roman mythology (see, e.g., 1.546–51 and 8.397–99). Comparison with Apollonius's poem is also instructive: although the Apollonian Aeetes also calls Jason and the Argonauts "pirates" (λῃστῆρας, 3.589),[61] he does not insinuate that they have come to steal anything but the fleece.

Moreover, Medea's fiancé Styrus does in fact interpret Jason's successful completion of the *labores* set for him by Aeetes as the ostensible means by which he proved his worth for Medea's hand (8.338–43):

> Haemonius nobis succedet adulter,
> nec mihi tot magnos inter regesque procosque
> profuerit prona haud dubii sententia patris?
> an virtus praelata viri est et fortior ille
> quem sequitur? iungam igniferos sine carmine tauros
> saevaque Echionii ferro sata persequar hydri.
>
> Will a Haemonian adulterer take my place, and from among so many kings and suitors will her unhesitating father's favorable opinion of me have done me no good? Or is the man's courage preferred to mine and is the one she follows braver than I am? I will yoke the fire-breathing bulls without an incantation and I will attack the cruel offspring of the Echionian serpent with my sword.

Styrus portrays Jason as a rival suitor for Medea, claiming that he could prove his superiority over Jason by completing the same difficult tasks, and do so without Medea's assistance. To Styrus at least, Jason is seen primarily as a competitor for Medea's hand.

Finally, at 8.392–93, as the Argonauts ponder how to evade the pursuing Colchians, they begin to have doubts about the real purpose of the voyage. They wonder if they have undertaken the journey so that Jason may enjoy his "stolen bride": *an vero ut thalamis raptisque indulgeat unus / coniugiis* ("[or indeed have they come] so that one alone may indulge in marriage and stolen wedlock").[62]

[60] See Langen 1964: 473, Stadler 1993: 36, and Spaltenstein 2005: 228.

[61] See Spaltenstein 2005: 228.

[62] The question of the ultimate purpose of the voyage here is enriched by an internal echo: the phrase *thalamis ... indulgeat* recalls the behavior of the Argonauts on Lemnos,

ARIADNE AND MEDEA

The story of Theseus and Ariadne features prominently in Apollonius's epic, where it appears in a context that is nearly identical to its appearance in Valerius. As Jason tries to convince Medea to join his cause, he uses the story as a paradigm for her to follow (3.997–1007). In promoting Ariadne as an *exemplum* for Medea, Valerius's Venus thus adopts the rhetorical strategy of Apollonius's smooth-talking Jason. In fact, Valerius gestures explicitly to his Apollonian model: Venus's periphrastic reference to Ariadne (*Minoia virgo*, 7.279) echoes Jason's circumlocutory παρθενικὴ Μινωίς (3.998).[63] Valerius also follows Apollonius by having Venus present Ariadne's exemplarity for Medea in a very tendentious and duplicitous fashion: emphasis is placed squarely on the assistance given by Ariadne while no mention is made of Theseus's subsequent abandonment of the "Minoan maiden."[64] Nevertheless, Valerius's audience is fully aware of this omitted material. Indeed, we are prompted to recall it: the phrase *Minoia virgo*, in addition to signaling engagement with Apollonius's epic, also alludes to *Heroides* 17.193, where the exemplarity of Ariadne is also at issue.[65] However, in her letter to Paris Ovid's Helen cites the story of Ariadne as a *negative exemplum*, using it to illustrate the point that "when it comes to foreigners love is uncertain" (*certus in hospitibus non est amor*, 191). Ariadne's ill-fated love for Theseus thus bolsters Helen's contention that falling in love with a foreigner is a bad idea, since for Ariadne this had such disastrous consequences.[66] Of course, Medea's love for the foreigner Jason will also lead to disaster following his abandonment of her in Corinth.

where they "enjoyed the beds" of the Lemnian women (*indulgent thalamis*, 2.371). On Lemnos, Hercules had to remind Jason that "marriage" was not the reason they undertook the voyage (378–84). In Book 8, it seems that the Argonauts as a whole assume this Herculean stance, as they grow increasingly suspicious of the implications of Jason's singularly self-indulgent behavior. On the clash between Jason's apparently separate goals of obtaining the Golden Fleece and obtaining a wife, see Bernstein 2008: 60. The dual result, if not the dual purpose, of the voyage is in fact advertised from the very beginning of the poem: see, e.g., 1.745 where Cretheus predicts that Jason will return to Greece *Scythiae spoliis nuribusque superbus* ("proud with the spoils and brides of Scythia").

[63] See Taliercio 1992: 117, Perutelli 1997: 306, and Dräger 2003: 525.

[64] On the remarkably underhanded nature of Jason's account of Ariadne's story in Apollonius, see Goldhill 1991: 301–5.

[65] See Stadler 1993: 110 and Perutelli 1997: 306.

[66] Ovid's Helen is of course unaware that her affair with Paris will also have disastrous consequences, since at the time she "writes" the letter she has not yet left with him for Troy. Thus the Ovidian passage is marked by dramatic irony.

Despite Venus's attempt to put a positive spin on the Theseus-Ariadne story by leaving out the tragic sequel, the *exemplum* is ominously and ironically apposite largely because it anticipates the (in)famous outcome of Medea's all-too-brief marriage to Jason.[67]

However, the similarity to Jason's eventual Theseus-like abandonment of Medea is not the most interesting aspect of the Ariadne-*exemplum*.[68] Rather, that distinction goes to the unparalleled version of Ariadne's story cited by Venus, according to which Ariadne took the leading role in her brother's death.[69] Venus's words clearly indicate that Ariadne *herself* killed the Minotaur: *dedit ipsa neci fratrem Minoia virgo* (7.279).[70] Although Ariadne's assistance in the demise of her brother is a standard feature of the myth, no other extant account portrays her, rather than Theseus, as the actual killer.[71] According to tradition, Ariadne was not her brother's killer; but Medea certainly was. Once again, Venus has presented an *exemplum* for Medea in which the ostensibly exemplary figure has been (re)fashioned to resemble Medea herself. The Ariadne on offer from Venus is an apt parallel for Medea, not because she recalls previous Ariadnes, but because she recalls previous Medeas. On the one hand, Valerius's phraseology (*dedit ipsa neci fratrem*) clearly anticipates

[67] The brevity of their relationship is explicitly foreshadowed in Book 8, during their wedding ceremony no less. As Mopsus observes the fire and frankincense, he sees clearly that this love will not last (*breve tempus amorum*, 8.249). This pessimism in the midst of the otherwise joyous occasion seems to take its cue from the *sententia* Apollonius offers as Jason and Medea consummate their relationship on Drepane (4.1165–67): "It is a fact that we tribes of suffering men never plant our feet firmly upon the path of joy, but there is ever some bitter pain to keep company with our delight." On this passage, see Goldhill 1991: 320–21 and Hunter 1993a: 106.

[68] As for the issue of Jason's abandonment of Medea, it is worth noting that later in the poem the parallel with Theseus and Ariadne momentarily threatens to become even closer. Shortly before Valerius's narrative breaks off, the Argonauts have convinced Jason to desert Medea *during the return trip* (8.393–407), a treacherous scheme that recalls the fate of Ariadne. Valerius has here reprised a passage of Apollonius (4.338–49). Presumably Valerius also would have followed Apollonius in having Medea convince Jason to change his mind and allow her to continue on to Greece. This is what seems to be happening when the Valerian text breaks off (8.408–67; compare Apollonius 4.350–420), a scene that in Apollonius's poem leads directly to the murder of Absyrtus (4.421–81).

[69] Apollonius's Jason, by contrast, says nothing about the death of Ariadne's brother. See Spaltenstein 2005: 287.

[70] See Perutelli 1997: 306. Perutelli demonstrates that the phrase *neci dare* can mean only one thing, i.e., "to kill."

[71] On the varying degree of assistance given by Ariadne to Theseus in extant sources, see Gantz 1993: 264–70.

some level of participation by Medea in the death of Absyrtus.[72] On the other hand, these words strongly imply that Medea will do the actual killing rather than Jason, who slaughters Absyrtus like a bull in Apollonius's memorable account (4.452–81). Unfortunately, Valerius's text breaks off prior to the killing of Absyrtus, so we can only speculate about how this would have played out in his *Argonautica* (assuming it would have been narrated at all).[73] Be this as it may, the killing of Absyrtus by Medea rather than Jason is very well attested in the literary tradition: perhaps the most notable example is to be found in Euripides' *Medea*, where Jason unambiguously ascribes Absyrtus's murder to his ex-wife (1334–35).[74] The Medea-like Ariadne offered as a paradigm by Venus once again reveals that Medea is being prompted to become the infamous character handed down by tradition. The relatively passive and plaintive Ariadne known from extant sources is an inadequate parallel for the aggressive and vindictive Medea.[75] Consequently, Venus reinvents Ariadne by modeling her on previous versions of Medea.

In fact, when it comes to Ariadne, Valerius's Medea cannot possibly follow her example because Ariadne's story, strictly speaking, cannot possibly function as a precedent for Medea's current situation. One of the hallmarks of Valerius's *Argonautica* is that Argo is the first ship of all time, a theme of great prominence right from the poem's opening line: *prima deum magnis canimus freta pervia natis* ("I sing of seas first navigated by the mighty sons of the gods").[76] Ariadne, therefore, cannot already have had her affair with Theseus, as Venus claims, since Theseus could not have reached Crete except by ship. Venus's appeal to the story of Theseus and Ariadne thus confounds the poem's internal logic.[77] In contrast, although the relative chronology of the careers of

[72] See Stadler 1993: 109, Perutelli 1997: 306, and Spaltenstein 2005: 287.

[73] On this issue, see Hershkowitz 1998: 15–16.

[74] On this and other accounts in which Medea is the killer, see Bremmer 1997: 85–86.

[75] "Medea is no Ariadne" (Clauss 1997: 171).

[76] See Feeney 1991: 331: "From the poem's first word and first line, the emphasis on Argo as the world's first ship is something of overpowering importance for the work as a whole, crowding out even mention of the Golden Fleece from the proem."

[77] A similar problem arises from Venus-Circe's earlier assertion that she makes a practice of detaining sailors on her island (7.259–62). Within the context of Valerius's *Argonautica*, this claim is totally anachronistic: "Circe" describes herself in terms appropriate for the Circe of Homer's *Odyssey*, who does in fact make a practice of detaining mariners, not a Circe contemporaneous with the very first voyage of all time. On this, see Zissos 2002: 84. The Valerian Venus's allusion to the eventual practices of Circe in Homer's *Odyssey* thus clashes strongly with the logic of the narrative in which she is acting. Of course,

Theseus and Jason in Apollonius is not entirely clear,[78] Jason's reference to the story of Theseus and Ariadne does not involve a rupture in narrative logic, since Apollonius does not present Argo as the world's first ship.[79] The Valerian Venus thus imitates the Apollonian Jason's deceptive rhetoric, but her imitative use of the Ariadne-*exemplum* is even more devious, since it results in a chronological impossibility.[80] In Valerius, the Ariadne-*exemplum* is remarkably duplicitous. On the one hand, Venus presents the story in a very underhanded and tendentious fashion, like Apollonius's Jason. On the other hand, *no* version of the story is able to function as a precedent for Medea in its new Valerian context. As a result, Venus's appeal to the story of Ariadne and Theseus is at once familiar and de-familiarizing, true to the spirit of *an Argonautica*, but inconsistent with the logic of *this Argonautica*'s narrative frame.[81]

CONCLUSION

Ariadne's impossible exemplarity forms a fitting climax to the narrative sequence as a whole, which turns on the impossibility of discovering apposite

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the problems raised by Venus's words here simply vanish if, with Liberman, we excise lines 261–62 as an interpolation (2002: 303–4). For a defense of the transmitted text, see Spaltenstein 2005: 282.

[78] See Hunter 1989: 207.

[79] On this, see Jackson 1997.

[80] Although it is un-Apollonian, there was of course a famous literary precedent for the chronological problem generated by Venus's evocation of Theseus and Ariadne despite Argo's "firstness," i.e., Catullus 64. In Catullus's celebrated poem Argo is initially described as the first ship of all time, a "fact" that is later contradicted when we learn that Theseus had already sailed to Crete before the Argonautic voyage. On Catullus's chronological inconsistency, see Weber 1983, Feeney 2007: 123–27, and O'Hara 2007: 33–44. On its importance as a model for Valerius's deliberately confused presentation of Argo's priority throughout the epic, see Spaltenstein 2002: 23–24. For a stimulating discussion of exemplarity in Catullus 64, esp. with regard to the problems posed by Catullus's assimilation of Medea and Ariadne/Jason and Theseus, see Clare 1996.

[81] Nevertheless, to a certain extent Venus's chronological "error" is in perfect harmony with Valerius's treatment of Argo as the first ship elsewhere, precisely because of its contradictory effect. Venus's implication that there were ships prior to Argo participates in one of the poem's most striking features, namely its refusal to maintain any consistency whatsoever in regard to the issue of Argo's primacy, despite the importance of this theme to the overall design of the epic. Venus's muddling of this matter thus mirrors the narrator's own penchant for deliberately problematizing the issue of Argo's priority. Valerius, on numerous occasions, refers to ships and seafaring prior to the Argonautic voyage: see, e.g., 2.108, 232, 285, 520 (for the reading *rates* here, see Poortvliet 1991: 274), 658, 3.110, 132, and 8.427–29. For further examples, see the list assembled by Spaltenstein 2002: 23.

parallels for Medea. Venus's reference to Ariadne thus highlights the process operative throughout the episode, whereby the requirements of Medea's unexampled career compel Venus to refashion the lives of several inadequately exemplary females by appropriating for them characteristics drawn from previous treatments of Medea herself. The chronological impossibility of Ariadne's precedence focuses our attention on exactly who is the imitator and who the imitated, prompting us to realize that Ariadne has been attracted into Medea's magnetic field, as it were. The gravitational pull inexorably drawing Medea onward to become the unparalleled persona known from and demanded by the literary tradition renders any attempts to prefigure her inimitable career deficient and imperfect. As a consequence, Valerius's Venus presents to Medea a series of *exempla* that turn out to be palimpsests, "texts" that bear the traces of previous representations of Medea's story. Medea's unexampled exemplarity makes Medea herself the only apt paradigm for the individual she must become. There is simply no one else like Medea. The train of events that Venus has come to set in motion renders Medea a peerless and unique figure, one who is constantly prefigured in the *exempla* offered to her. As Medea gazes into the veritable mirror held up for her by Venus, she has no choice but to see the reflection of her own image: she cannot become Circe, Hippodamia, or Ariadne. Rather, she must become Medea.[82]

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[82] It is therefore fitting that as Medea ponders Venus's words she foresees the infamy that awaits (7.308–11): *auditae crescunt in pectore voces / ... famam scelerum iamque ipsa suorum / prospicit* ("the words she has heard gain strength within her heart ... now she herself foresees the fame of her own crimes"). On the metaliterary nature of this passage, see Dräger 2003: 526 and Spaltenstein 2005: 292–93.

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