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## FEAR AND VIOLENCE IN VALERIUS FLACCUS' *ARGONAUTICA*

Considering the Flavian epic, some scholars have criticized it for nostalgia, escapism, meaninglessness, and for its „dinosaurian” form.<sup>1</sup> I prefer personally to take the more positive and broad-minded view of the *Cambridge History of Classical Literature* which writes about Valerius Flaccus as follows:

„Valerius wished to show humanity in a broad historical perspective. He envisaged the whole process of reality as divine, whether manifested in individual, in nation or in the *mundus*.”

The writer of this appraisal does not, however, set Valerius on a pedestal; he goes on to say that Valerius did not succeed in his aims.<sup>2</sup>

To „save one's skin”, according to the scholars through nostalgia, escapism and meaninglessness, was understandable for Roman writers under the Flavian Emperors – in particular under Domitian who for a time violently repressed the freedom of speech of the educated. On the other hand, we also quite understand the satirist Juvenal's puns directed against the Flavian authors of epic who, in his opinion, closed their eyes to the wickedness

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<sup>1</sup> R. M. OGILVIE, *Literature and Society*, Brighton 1980, 223: „The *Punica* and the *Argonautica* are nostalgic works of escapism. To a classical scholar they are of interest for their technique and language, but they have nothing to say. They are the fruits yet again of an educational system that encouraged facility in composition.”; K. QUINN, *Texts and Contexts. The Roman writers and their Audience*, London 1979, 58: „In the hands of Silius, Statius and Valerius epic was what it had been for the poetasters of the Augustan Age: a meaningless, precious exercise for essentially uncreative talent [...] the epic poet devoted to the stylistic perfection of his dinosaur could at least feel he had substituted craftsmanship for social function.” Silver Latin epic has also been criticised for its propensity for excess; for this discussion, see D. HERSHKOWITZ, Patterns of madness in Statius' *Thebaid*, *JRS* 85 (1995) 52.

<sup>2</sup> D.W.T.C. VESSEY, Flavian Epic, in E.J. Kenney and W.V. Clausen (edd.), *Cambridge History of Classical Literature, II Latin Literature*, Cambridge 1982, 590. Also R.W. GARSON 1964 (below n. 6) 277, said, in my opinion, to the point: „...if Valerius' detractors took the trouble of reading it [the poet's account of Pelias' grief, the suicide of Aeson and Alcimedea, and their descent to the Underworld] without bias, they would at least concede that it is a competent piece of epic writing, lacking neither colour nor human interest.”

the political reality of recent history. Putting it explicitly in his first satire, he says that it was best to leave unmentioned the name (of the political reality): ...*cuius non audeo dicere nomen*, and to think before declaration of war: *tecum prius ergo voluit haec animo ante tubas*.<sup>4</sup>

The question of the political and ideological import of the Flavian epic generally, or of the details in individual works,<sup>5</sup> is on the whole a complicated one. Furthermore, we have perhaps come to politicize too much the import of Roman literature. One thing is sure: every ancient text reflects ancient thinking about what humanity is, irrespective of its aesthetic value, originality and primary purpose – political, social or pure literary. I would like to suggest that this might well be true also in the case of Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*.<sup>6</sup>

My chief concern in the present paper<sup>7</sup> is with two phenomena of frequent occurrence in the *Argonautica*, namely fear and violence. What understanding can they provide for a reader about humanity presented in the form of epic? I approach this subject through excerpts<sup>8</sup> which, in my opinion, exemplify the following features of the concepts of fear and violence: the dramatization of text by descriptions of collective fear, woman's (Alcimedea's and Medea's) and man's (Aeson's and Jason's) behaviour in the face of suffering and death, and lastly, the combination of fear and violence presented in the characters of powerful leaders, such as Pelias, Aetes, Perses, Cyzicus and Jason.

### Fear and courage: The Argonauts

There is no doubt that the Argo, *ratis fatidica*<sup>9</sup>, will be a bold ship (1, 1–4):

prima deum magnis canimus freta pervia natis  
fatidicam ratem, Scythici quae Phasidis oras

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<sup>4</sup> *Sat.* 1, 153 and 168–169.

<sup>5</sup> For interesting discussions about possible allusions to the Flavian emperors in Valerius Flaccus: M.A. MALAMUD and D.T. McGUIRE jr, *Flavian Variant: Myth. Valerius' Argonautica*, in: A.J. Boyle (ed.), *Roman Epic*, London 1993, 210–212; P.R. TAYLOR, *Valerius Flavian Argonautica*, *CQ* 44 (1994) 212ff. On Stoicism in Flavian epic: M. BILLERBECK, *Stoizismus in der römischer Epik neronischer und flavischer Zeit*, *ANRW* II, 32.5. (1986) 3116ff.; on suicide reflecting contemporary Stoic debate: D.T. McGUIRE, *Textual strategies and political suicide in Flavian epic (Valerius Flaccus I, 695–850)*, *Ramus* 18 (1989) 21–45.

<sup>6</sup> Most valuable studies for my view in the present work on the *Argonautica* have been R.W. GARSON, *Some critical observations on Valerius Flaccus' Argonautica, I and II*, *CQ* 14, 2 (new series) 1964, 267–279 and *CQ* 15, 1 (new series) 1965, 104–120; ID. *Valerius Flaccus the poet*, *CQ* 20, 1 (new series) 1970, 181–187; M. Korn, H.J. Tschiedel (hrsg.), *Ratis omnia vincet: Untersuchungen zu den Argonautica des Valerius Flaccus* (Spudasmata 48), Hildesheim 1991.

<sup>7</sup> An abridged draft was delivered at the JATE during the conference *Epik durch die Jahrhunderte* on 3rd October 1997. I am grateful, in particular, to Ibolya Tar for her kind invitation. My thanks go to Gianpietro Rosati (Udine), György Karsai (Pécs), Attila Ferenci (Budapest), Veli-Matti Rissanen (Turku) and Riikka Hälikkä (Turku) for their comments, and interest in my project. Michael Pickering, at the Department of English of University of Turku, is acknowledged for revision of the language of the manuscript. Needless to say, any errors in this paper remain mine.

<sup>8</sup> The text version: J.H. Mozley (Loeb).

<sup>9</sup> For this epithet, see VESSEY 1982, 581.

ausa sequi mediosque inter iuga concita cursus  
rumpere, flammifero tandem consedit Olympo.

In scholarly literature, the Argo is interpreted as the first ship to dare to enter the new environment, as well as a prophetic one symbolizing the poet as *vates*.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of their misgivings over the dangers of voyage, the Greek heroes of the *Argonautica* are not lacking in courage and readiness to go to sea. The behaviour of Acastus, King Pelias' young son, exemplifies the vigorous atmosphere at the port of sailing (*Arg.* 1, 173–183):

nec passus rex plura virum „sat multa parato  
in quaecumque vocas; nec nos,” ait, „optume segnes  
credideris patriisve magis confidere regnis  
quam tibi, si primos duce te virtutis honores  
carpere, fraternae si des ad Crescere fama.  
quin ego, nequa metu nimio me cura parentis  
impediat, fallam ignarum subitusque paratis  
tunc adero, primas linquet cum puppis harenas.”  
dixerat; ille animos promissa talia laetus  
accipit et gressus rapidos ad litora vertit.

The Argonauts, full of eagerness and joy,<sup>11</sup> crowd around the ship obeying the admonitions of their leader Jason, the *ductor Aesonius* (1, 184–186). The enthusiasm and the great optimism is, however, temporarily broken off during the sacrifice. Mopsus, the *sacer vates* (one of the Argonauts), speaks in a voice *horrenda viris* (1, 210) and leads the reader with his threatening and daunting prophecies into the world of suspense which continues throughout the whole of Valerius' work: the literary dramatization of human fear and the description of individual strategies of overcoming it.

The first book of the *Argonautica* is one of encouragement and motivation. It is also a book of discussion of principle: the problem of the origin of good and evil in human destinies is raised, as well as the rationality and sense of the given enterprise of the Argo. Mopsus' speech clearly inspires the Argonauts with fear, whereas two of them, Idmon and Jason, try to infuse courage into the crew. Despite a divination of his own misfortune,<sup>12</sup> Idmon, *non pallore virens, non ullo horrore comarum terribilis, plenus fatis Phoeboque quieto*, answers to Mopsus' prophecies (*Arg.* 1, 234–238):

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<sup>10</sup> M. DAVIS, *Ratis audax: Valerius Flaccus' bold ship*, *Ramus* 18 (1989) 46–73, also in A.J. BOYLE (ed.), *The Imperial Muse: Flavian Epicist to Claudian*, Bendigo 1990, esp. p. 47, followed by MALAMUD and McGUIRE jr. 1993, 196.

<sup>11</sup> *Arg.* 1, 188: *tum laeti statuunt aras*; cf. 1, 271–272: *omnibus inde viae calor additus: ire per altum / magna mente volunt*.

<sup>12</sup> *Arg.* 1, 238–239, note also 1, 360–361.

„quantum augur Apollo  
 flammaque prima docet, praeduri plena laboris  
 cerno equidem, patiens sed quae ratis omnia vincet.  
 ingentes durate animae dulcesque parentum  
 tendite ad amplexus.”

Jason encourages his comrades in the same way, but his speech implies also an apology (*Arg.* 1, 244–246):

„non mihi Thessalici pietas culpanda tyranni  
 suspective doli: deus haec, deus omine dextro  
 imperat.”

The words anticipate the problem of Jason: how to reconcile fears and the motivation of his men with the ambitions of the tyrants and, also, with his own.<sup>13</sup> As Mopsus' divination is realized, the *Argo* will face violence, accidents and death. The men are momentarily filled with fear of the stormy sea and the unknown,<sup>14</sup> and even of the ominous silence, as in the second book: *ipsa quies rerum mundique silentia terrent / astraque et effusis stellatus crinibus aether* (*Arg.* 2, 41–42). The first night at sea is the situation „when the Argonauts are at their lowest point psychologically” as one scholar relevantly remarks.<sup>15</sup> The first storm is the touchstone of the crew's mental capacity.<sup>16</sup> To be afraid of the unknown sea – the men believe that the sea is forbidden for them<sup>17</sup> – provides a special setting for the *Argonautica*. The descriptions of the fear of a group accentuate the high courage of men who have to prepare themselves for something of which they have no earlier experience. The Argonauts gain mastery, again and again, over their fears of the *loci horridi*.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For this tension, see later *Arg.* 2, 369ff.; 7, 26 *at sua longarum Minyas iam cura viarum / admonet*, and the discussion concerning Medea in 8, 385ff.: *at Minyae tanti reputantes ultima belli / urgent et precibus cuncti fremituque fatigant / Aesoniden...*; Jason's thirst for glory comes up already in *Arg.* 1, 64–90, noted by GARSON 1964, 279.

<sup>14</sup> *Arg.* 1, 620–621: *qui tum Minyis trepidantibus horror / cum picei fulsere poli pavidamque coruscae / ante ratem cecidere faces*; 1, 633: *haec iterant segni flentes occumbere leto*; 1, 635: *miscent suprema paventes*; cf. *Arg.* 2, 368–369: *longus coeptis et fluctibus arcet / qui metus*, and *Arg.* 4, 188: *et pavor et monstri subiit absentis imago*; 4, 693: *conclamant Minyae...*; 4, 703 (of Jason himself): *nec vero ipse metus curasque resolvere ductor*.

<sup>15</sup> J.E. SHELTON, The Storm scene in Valerius Flaccus, *CJ* 70 (1974–75) 16.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>17</sup> *Arg.* 1, 627–628; SHELTON 1974–75, 15–16.

<sup>18</sup> *Loci horridi* are not, however, the most alarming trial for the crew, see *Arg.* 5, 296ff. for Valerius' description about the atmosphere during the night before meeting Aeetes: ... *tristior at nunquam tantove paventibus ulla / nox Minyis egesta metu...* (On terrible scenes and their influence by the *Aeneid* in the *Argonautica*, see E. POLLINI, *Il locus horridus in Valerio Flacco, Orpheus* 7, 1986, 21–39.).

## Woman's and man's fear: Alcimede and Aeson

The scene at the port of sailing raises the question of the different roles of the women<sup>19</sup> and the men in epic poetry.

Jason's mother Alcimede stands at the head of *trepidae matres*. She falls into a rage at the departure of the Argo (*Arg.* 1, 317–319):

vox tamen Alcimedes planctus super eminet omnes:  
femineis tantum illa furens ululatibus opstat,  
obruit Idaeam quantum tuba Martia buxum.

Alcimede's „furious fear” arises firstly from her opinion that Jason does not deserve the hardships which await him. Secondly, she is uncertain of the mothers' ability to appease the sea by their prayers. Thirdly, Alcimede actually confesses that her own fear will last long, but she is not sure whether she can endure it if Jason should lose his life.<sup>20</sup> In this context, *illa furens*, indicates that Alcimede divines, as it were spontaneously (naturally), the disasters awaiting the voyage.<sup>21</sup> In her speech to her son, Alcimede peeks at the dark side of the future, feeling at the same time a shade of self-pity in her motherly devotion towards her son.

Aeson's behaviour is just the opposite. Being stronger than Alcimede, he encourages his son (*Arg.* 1, 335–336):

talibus Alcimede maeret; sed fortior Aeson  
attollens dictis animos: ...

The grieving Alcimede does not, however, lack courage. The women in the *Argonautica* clearly manifest their fears more open-heartedly than the men, but still they bravely let their sons sail.<sup>22</sup> Their loud submission in the world of heroes indicates, in my opinion, their courage. They dare to accept the adversities and the failures awaiting the enterprise. Therefore they do not oppose the sailing itself – an act which could be considered shameful.

The portrait of Alcimede reflects, on the other hand, what the ancients obviously thought typical of female behaviour: not to keep fear in one's inmost heart, not to control

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<sup>19</sup> For females in the Flavian epic, see A. LA PENNA, *Tipi e modelli femminili nella poesia dell'epoca dei Flavii* (Stazio, Silio Italico, Valerio Flacco), *Atti Congr. Studi Vespasiani*, Rieti 1981, 223–251.

<sup>20</sup> *Arg.* 1, 320–334.

<sup>21</sup> For the connotations of *furor*, *furens* in ancient views, see A. TALDONE's interesting article on Cicero: *Su insaniam e furor in Cicerone*, *BStudLat* 23 (1993), 3–19, esp. 17 „nella divinazione `naturale' invece vi è l'intervento diretto della divinità che si svela attraverso il *furor* dell'indovino” (see *Cic. div.* 1, 34). Cf. F. DUPONT, *Le monstres de Sèneque*, Paris 1995, 74–75 on *furor* rising from *dolor*, in Roman tragedy.

<sup>22</sup> *Arg.* 1, 413: *nec timet Ancaeam genitrix committere ponto.*

oneself but rather to be controlled by one's emotions, to lament.<sup>23</sup> Alcimedede is a prisoner of her nature still at the scene of the suicide of herself and her husband Aeson.<sup>24</sup> She is much more highly-strung than he; Valerius almost draws a deliberate comparison between the wife and the husband (*Arg.* 1, 730–734):

Tartareo tum sacra Iovi Stygiisque ferebat  
manibus Alcimedede tanto super anxia nato,  
siquid ab excitis melius praenosceret umbris.  
ipsum etiam curisque parem talesque prementem  
corde metus ducit, facilem tamen, Aesona coniunx.

The view of man's role in the *Argonautica* is that it was shameful for him to be afraid of future: *sed turpe viro timuisse futura* (*Arg.* 1, 361). Only if he happened to have a bad conscience, a man's fears were not idle, as in the case of Jason. Realizing that he had behaved in a selfish way at the expense of his nearest and overcome by fear, Jason blames severely himself. Jason's self-reproach appears, however, not as an absolute feeling of guilt, because Jason knows that the raging Pelias will accomplish his revenge (*Arg.* 1, 693–699, my underlinings):

at subitus curaque *ducem metus acrior omni  
mensque mali praesaga quatit*, quod regis adortus  
progeniem raptoque dolis crudelis Acasto  
cetera nuda neci medioque in crimine patrem  
liquerit ac nullis inopem vallaverit armis,  
ipse procul nunc tuta tenens; ruat omnis in illos  
quippe furor. *nec vana pavet trepidatque futura.*

But let us return to the suicide scene of Jason's parents. We perceive that Aeson consistently has the situation under his control. Fearless as he is, he is already stepping into the world of the dead; he discusses with his dead father Cretheus – „the direct communication of living and dead seems to reduce the interval between these states which we might expect to find crucial in a scene of suicide”<sup>25</sup>. Aeson, it is true, becomes frightened at the approaching of Pelias' troops – because his communication with his dead father is disturbed (*Arg.* 1, 752–757):

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<sup>23</sup> GARSON 1964, 270 noted the same in Cyzicus' wife Clite's speech (*Arg.* 3, 316–329; not discussed in my paper): „Clite's speech is pure lamentation. Everything is seen from a wifely point of view.”

<sup>24</sup> Studies on the suicide scene: A. PERUTELLI, Pluralità di modelli e discontinuità narrativa: L'episodio della morte di Esona in Valerio Flacco (1, 747 sgg.), *Mat. e Disc.* 7 (1982) 123–140; S. FRANCHET DESPEREY, Une étrange descente aux enfers: le Suicide d'Éson et Alcimédé (Valerius Flaccus, *Arg.* I 730–851), in: D. Porte, J.-P. Néraudau (edd.), *Hommages à Henri Le Bonniec. Res sacrae (Coll. Latomus 201)*, Brussels 1988, 193–227; see also G.O. HUTCHINSON, *Latin Literature from Seneca to Juvenal. A Critical Study.* Oxford 1993, 294–300 and McGUIRE 1989.

<sup>25</sup> HUTCHINSON 1993, 296.

horruit interea famulum clamore supremo  
maesta domus, regemque fragor per moenia differt  
mille ciere manus et iam dare iussa vocatis.  
flagrantes aras vestemque nemusque sacerdos  
praecipitat, subitisque pavens circumspicit Aeson,  
quid moveat.

His fright is partly due to the possibility that he might become involved in a fight against the intruders, a matter he regards as humiliating for himself as an old man. His wife, though *per lacrimas*, encourages him in the suicide preparations (1, 762–767). The way of dying Aeson chooses is a noble one (1, 767–770):

et iam circumspicit Aeson,  
praeveniat quo fine minas, quae fata capessat  
digna satis: magnos obitus natumque domumque  
et genus Aeolium pugnataque poscere bella.

Aeson departs from the world of fear. In his last words, he wishes that the king Pelias will wander in accursed fear (1, 790–799):

„...tu, nuntia sontum  
virgo Iovi, terras oculis quae prospicis aequis,  
ultricesque deae Fasque et grandaeva Furorum  
Poena parens, meriti regis succedite tectis  
et saevas inferte faces. sacer effera raptet  
corda pavor<sup>26</sup>; nec sola mei gravia adfore nati  
arma ratemque putet: classes et Pontica signa  
atque indignatos temerato litore reges  
mente agitet semperque metu decurrat ad undas  
arma ciens;

### Medea's and Jason's struggle against fear

From the 5th book on, Valerius narrates in detail the changes in Medea's mental state.<sup>27</sup> Her person is build up from a mixture of fear, passion and divine influence.

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<sup>26</sup> For the use of alliteration here, see GARSON 1970, 186.

<sup>27</sup> For the episode of Medea and Jason in Valerius, see in particular GARSON 1965, 105–113. A basic study on Medea in Valerius: S. WETZEL, *Die Gestalt der Medea bei Valerius Flaccus*. Diss. Kiel 1957; for Valerius' independency of Apollonius in creating Medea's character, see A. TRAGLIA, Valerio Flacco, Apollonio Rodio e Virgilio. Gli episodi di Hylas e di Giasone e Medea, *Vichiana* 12 (1983) 304ff.

Medea spends a restless night of heavenly portents and nightmares at the approaching of the Argo (*Arg.* 5, 329–340):<sup>28</sup>

forte deum variis per noctem territa monstribus,  
senserat ut pulsas tandem Medea tenebras,  
rapta toris primi iubar ad placabile Phoebi  
ibat et horrendas lustrantia flumina noctes

The first face to face meeting between Medea and Jason kindles their mutual admiration which manifests itself in Medea as an amaze and a speechless stupor, whereas in Jason as self-confident flattery.<sup>29</sup> Jason is self-assertive – Juno had shed over him new strength and handsomeness<sup>30</sup> – Medea, as a young girl, hesitates timorously.<sup>31</sup> Not yet, obviously, her admiration is the main reason for her fears, but her worry about her father Aectes' reactions to the Greek hero.<sup>32</sup> Medea's tentative curiosity towards Jason increases in passion<sup>33</sup> later, when viewing from the walls the battle of the joint troops of Colchians and the Greeks against the Scythians. The *fervens* Jason meets with her great interest, a matter which does not escape the *aspera* Juno's notice.<sup>34</sup> This is Valerius' prelude (*Arg.* 6, 667: *talīs ad extremos agitur Medea furores*) to the story of Medea's frenzy, of her reckless *furor*,<sup>35</sup> composed of her passionate love towards Jason and her fear of her father.

Medea's problem is that she has to make her choice between her father and Jason (*Arg.* 7, 141–145, my underlinings):

dixerat haec stratoque graves proiecerat artus,  
si veniat miserata quies, cum saevior ipse  
turbat agitque sopor: *supplex hinc sternitur hospes*  
*hinc pater*. illa nova rumpit formidine somnos  
erigiturque toro.

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<sup>28</sup> Sleeplessness and nightmares preyed on Medea: *Arg.* 7, 4–7 and 141–145; GARSON 1965, 105–106; on the dreams in the *Argonautica*, see U. GÄRTNER, Träume bei Valerius Flaccus, *Philologus* 140 (1996) 292–305.

<sup>29</sup> *Arg.* 5, 373–390.

<sup>30</sup> *Arg.* 5, 363–365.

<sup>31</sup> *Arg.* 5, 391–392 (my underlinings): *dixit et opperians trepidam stetit. illa parumper / virgineo cunctata metu sic orsa vicissim.*

<sup>32</sup> *Arg.* 5, 393–398.

<sup>33</sup> For this Valerius' innovation, see GARSON 1965, 107ff.; C. SALEMME, Medea e il contagio d'amore, *BStudLat* 22 (1992) 3–21.

<sup>34</sup> *Arg.* 6, 575–601.

<sup>35</sup> „Reckless”, to my mind in the face of danger and death, cf. *Arg.* 6, 681ff.: *imminet e celsis audentius improba muris / virgo nec ablatum sequitur quaeritve sororem.*



Jason, being afraid too, is rather indignant (*ira*) and thinks rationally as compared with the helpless Medea.<sup>36</sup> His anger leads Jason to reasonable thoughts and plans, whereas Medea, tinged with fear more than Jason, fawns in a doglike way on her parents,<sup>37</sup> and blames herself (*Arg.* 7, 128ff.):

„pergis”, ait „demens, teque illius angit imago  
curaque...

Madly in love with Jason – a divine strength is infused into her by the goddesses Juno and Venus, and the *Furiae*,<sup>38</sup> Medea struggles against her other deep emotion, *pudor*.<sup>39</sup> She feels herself sinful.<sup>40</sup> Therefore Venus is from Medea's point of view *saeva* and *iniqua*.<sup>41</sup> Gradually and painfully, the girl becomes a fearful, angry and desperately repentant *infelix* (*Arg.* 7, 292–299, my underlinings).

torserat illa gravi iamdudum lumina vultu  
vix animos dextramque tenens, quin ipsa loquentis  
iret in ora deae; *tanta pudor aestuat ira.*  
iamque toro *trepidus infelix*<sup>42</sup> obruit *aures*  
verba *cavens*; *horror molles invaserat artus.*  
nec quo ferre fugam nec quo se vertere posset  
presa videt; rupta condi tellure premique  
iamdudum *cupit ac diras evadere voces.*

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<sup>36</sup> *Arg.* 7, 78ff. (my underlinings) *filiā prima trucis vocem mirata tyranni / haesit et ad iuvenem pallentia retulit ora / contremuitque metu, ne nescius audeat hospes / seque miser ne posse putet. perstrinxerat horror / ipsum etiam et maesta stabat defixus in ira... tum tamen, infando quae det responsa tyranno.* For Medea's helplessness in Valerius and Apollonius, see GARSON 1965, 106.

<sup>37</sup> Note Valerius' simile of a lapdog, *Arg.* 7, 122–126.

<sup>38</sup> *Arg.* 7, 153ff. *his ubi nequiquam nutantem Colchida curis / Iuno videt necdum extremo parere furori, / non iam mentitae vultum vocemque resumit / Chalciopes...*; 7, 160ff. (in Juno's speech) „...illa nimis sed dura manet conversaque in iram / et furias dolet ac me non decepta reliquit...”; 7, 193–195: *vix primas occulta Venus prospexerat arces, / virginis ecce novus mentem perstringere languor / incipit; ingeminant commotis questibus aestus*; 7, 254–255: *occupat amplexu Venus et furialia figit / oscula permixtumque odiis inspirat amorem*; SALEMME 1992, 13ff.

<sup>39</sup> GARSON 1965, 108: „...but scholars have noticed the emphasis Valerius lays on *pudor*, which they ascribe to a typically Roman predilection for moralizing. This may well be, but the germ of the idea is to be found in Apollonius...the idea is in Apollonius' text for Valerius to seize on.”

<sup>40</sup> For this painful process, see *Arg.* 7, 300–322, esp. 305–308: *haud aliter deserta pavet perque omnia circum / fert oculos tectisque negat procedere virgo. / contra saevus amor, contra periturus Iason / urget et audita crescunt in pectore voces*, and 349–351: *haec ubi fata, / rursus ad Haemonii iuvenis curamque metumque / vertitur.*

<sup>41</sup> I agree with GARSON 1965, 108, that Medea is in Valerius „the helpless victim of Venus' insidious lies”.

<sup>42</sup> For *infelix*, cf. *Arg.* 7, 371: *talibus infelix contra sua regna venenis...*

On the other hand, her consciousness<sup>43</sup> of the sources of her strange, new strength enables Medea finally to act and provide Jason with her magical help.<sup>44</sup> However, neither in her resolution to use magic drugs is she sure,<sup>45</sup> nor can she obtain release from fear of her father's wrath, while she is making her escape plan (*Arg.* 8, 1–3):<sup>46</sup>

at trepidam in thalamis et iam sua facta paventem  
Colchida circa omnes pariter furiaeque minaeque  
patris habent.

Medea's behaviour during the whole process illustrates that she endures her anxiety and fears for Jason and the struggle between *pudor* and *amor* with the help of powers beyond her own – the powers of goddesses and of magic.

In the course of the story, Jason always remains stronger than Medea; not without Medea's help, as we mentioned above and, on the other hand, encouraging Medea in her difficult situation. Medea's problem is in fact far more complicated than Jason's. Jason now<sup>47</sup> regards his struggle as nothing more than a victory to be won, but Medea is distressed about her relatives, her reputation, and her whole life. As an outsider, Jason is quite naturally unhesitating, bold and encouraging.<sup>48</sup> He is ready even to die in his attempt to bring back the golden fleece. Medea, on the other hand, has not yet attained this kind of certainty.

Alcimedea's and Aeson's and correspondingly Jason's and Medea's roles differ remarkably in the scenes discussed above. The women's behaviour reminds us of the disagreeable aspects of suffering, whereas the men's behaviour exemplifies the heroic aspects. Alcimedea's devotion to her son, Medea's love for Jason, and the fear of loss in both women, though fully human, are produced, ultimately, by the gods.

### Power – Fear – Violence

In the *Argonautica*, violence is mainly presented as controlled by the gods. The problem is that humans want to benefit from it. A moral discussion on the limits of power is, in my opinion, one of the principal purposes of the story of the *Argo*: does power justify one's demanding struggle and suffering from his subjects – for the sake of his selfishness and ambition. This question is raised in the characters of Pélías and Aeetes, and in the actions and decisions of Perses and Jason.

The kings of Valerius' narrative, Pelias and Aeetes, are distant characters, „stock tyrants“. They are jointly grouped into the similar types: „*alium hic Pelian, alia aequora*

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<sup>43</sup> For a certain kind of consciousness of her state, see *Arg.* 7, 323–324: *ergo ubi nescio quo penitus se numine vinci / senti et abscisum quidquid pudor ante monebat*, and 337: *stetit et sese mirata furem est*.

<sup>44</sup> *Venena magica*: *Arg.* 7, 325–330, 354–372, 449–460, *Arg.* 8, 16–19, 83.

<sup>45</sup> *Arg.* 7, 338–340: „*occidis, heu primo (potes hoc durare?) sub aevo, / nec tu lucis*“, ait, „*nec videris ulla iuventae / gaudia, non dulces fratris pubescere malas?*“

<sup>46</sup> Medea's anxiety: cf. *Arg.* 7, 349–351; 7, 371–372; 7, 410; 7, 431; 7, 515ff.

<sup>47</sup> He had his own mental struggle earlier, see *Arg.* 1, 693–699, and above in the present article.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Arg.* 7, 410ff.

*cerno*" is said of the Colchian Aetes (*Arg.* 7, 92). The Thessalian king Pelias is *superbus* and *atrox*<sup>49</sup>, his Colchian counterpart *malus, ferus, trux* and *infandus*.<sup>50</sup>

In Pelias' character, violence is produced by his fear of losing power to his nephew Jason who, in contrast, is a reputable and virtuous man (*Arg.* 1, 22–32):

Haemoniam primis Pelias frenabat ab annis,  
iam gravis et longus populis metus: illius amnes  
Ionium quicumque petunt, ille Othryn et Haemum  
atque imum felix versabat vomere Olympum.  
sed non ulla quies animo fratrisque paventi  
progeniem divumque minas; hunc nam fore regi  
exitio vatesque canunt pecudumque per aras  
terrifici monitus iterant: super ipsius ingens  
instat fama viri virtusque haut laeta tyranno.  
ergo anteire metus iuvenemque extinguere pergit  
Aesonium letique vias ac tempora versat.

Pelias wants to get rid of Jason. The task of fetching the golden fleece is a pretext of the tyrant; he sends Jason to sea hoping that he will be killed. Soon realizing his uncle's guile,<sup>51</sup> Jason begins to gamble for high stakes against the king. He induces (not a difficult task)<sup>52</sup> the tyrant's son Acastus to join the voyage, doubtless as a kind of hostage against Pelias' curses.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, Jason is alive to the dangerous position of his aged parents Aeson and Alcimedede. Later, Jason suffers in a state of fear for having made use of his near relatives in his enterprise.<sup>54</sup> Left to the mercy of the tyrant, the parents commit suicide.<sup>55</sup>

The bad conscience which troubles Jason, does not trouble the tyrant. Jason's fear (*Arg.* 1, 699: *nec vana pavet trepidatque futura*) anticipates and emphasizes the tyrant's rising anger. However, Jason conquers his fear and he directs it into power of concentration, and the tyrant seems to lose his control (*Arg.* 1, 700–701):

saevit atrox Pelias inimicaque vertice ab alto  
vela videt nec qua se ardens effundere possit.

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<sup>49</sup> *Arg.* 1, 161–162 *accipit augurium Aesonides laetusque superbi / tecta petit Peliae*; 1, 700 *saevit atrox Pelias*.

<sup>50</sup> *Arg.* 1, 43 *hunc ferus Aetes*; 5, 553: „*nec ferus Aetes, ut fama...*”; 6, 12 „*quos malus hospitio...Aetes*”; 7, 78 *trucis... tyranni*; 7, 87 *infando...tyranno*.

<sup>51</sup> *Arg.* 1, 64–66 *mox taciti patuere doli nec vellera curae / esse viro, sed sese odiis immania cogi / in freta*; 1, 200–201: „*ne Peliae te vota trahant: ille aspera iussa / repperit et Colchos in me luctumque meorum*”.

<sup>52</sup> For Acastus' youthful ambitions, see *Arg.* 1, 173–181.

<sup>53</sup> *Arg.* 1, 153–155, 164ff.

<sup>54</sup> *Arg.* 1, 693–699.

<sup>55</sup> *Arg.* 1, 730ff.

Realizing that Jason persuaded Acastus to go to sea, Pelias is driven to experience angry and violent thoughts; he is described as very fearsome (*Arg.* 1, 722–725; my underlinings):

*dixit et extemplo furiis iraque minaci  
terribilis „sunt hic etiam tua vulnera, praedo  
sunt lacrimae carusque parens.” simul aedibus altis,  
itique reditque fremens rerumque asperrima versat.*

As a portrait of the tyrant, Pelias of the *Argonautica* resembles one familiar in ancient and Roman literature. The tyrant rules by fear, producing fear in his subjects. On the other hand, because he himself is afraid of losing his power, he tries „*anteire metus*” and resorts to what is left to him, namely his ability and proneness to solve the conflict violently.<sup>56</sup>

Aeetes is also a fearsome tyrant from the physiognomy. He obviously wants to frighten Jason who has come to his palace to claim the golden fleece (*Arg.* 5, 519–522; my underlinings):

*talibus orantem vultu gravis ille minaci  
iamdudum fremit et furiis ignescit opertis.  
ceu tumet atque imo sub gurgite concipit austros  
unda silens, trahit ex alto sic barbarus iras.*

Aeetes entangles Jason in his struggle for power with his brother Perses. He rages and does violence to Perses and his supporters (*Arg.* 5, 268–272; my underlining):

*ille furens ira solio se proripit alto,  
praecipitatque patres: ipsum quin talibus ausis  
spem sibi iam rerum vulgi levitatem serentem  
ense petit. rapit inde fugam crudelia Perses  
signa gerens omnemque quatit rumoribus arcton.*

Like Pelias, Aeetes plots against Jason, but finally loses both the golden fleece and, which is most humiliating for him, his daughter Medea. Again, Valerius Flaccus paints before our eyes a tyrant gazing at the sea, frustrated and filled with violent anger (*Arg.* 8, 134–139):

*interea patrias saevus venit horror ad aures  
fata domus luctumque ferens fraudemque fugamque  
virginis. hinc subitis infelix frater in armis,  
urbs etiam mox tota coit, volat ipse senectae*

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<sup>56</sup> On the relationship between a tyrant and his subjects in the *Argonautica*, see M. SCAFFAI, Il tiranno e le sue vittime nel I. I degli *Argonautica* di Valerio Flacco, in: *Munus amicitiae. Scritti in memoria di Alessandro Ronconi, I, Quaderni di filologia latina*. Firenze 1986, 233ff.

immemor Aeetes, complentur litora bello  
nequiquam; fugit immissis nam puppis habenis.

In Juno's words, Aeetes is characterized as *perfidus* (*Arg.* 5, 289–290):

scio perfida regis  
corda quidem; nullos Minyis exsolvet honores.

However, in the goddess' opinion it is, for the present,<sup>57</sup> useful to join with the treacherous' king's army (5, 278–295). Whatever Juno's motives, the humans, included *soligena Aeetes*, are only pawns in the game of the gods (*Arg.* 5, 296: *talia tunc hominum superi pro laude movebant*). Violence is, therefore, sometimes to be found as a vice of divine origin in a tyrant's action, useful for divine purposes, but naturally ruinous for the tyrant himself.

The temptation to uncontrolled violence is crystallized in the efforts of Perses. His action illustrates that in the game of chess between the gods, the humans were not equipped such that they lacked the ability to reflect before indulging in violence. Before his conflict<sup>58</sup> with Aeetes Perses tries to find a peaceful solution which will avoid war. He tells the Scythian legates that Aeetes has deceived the Achaeans and they should tell the Achaeans the truth.<sup>59</sup> Surely Perses is not a hero, he is presented as a usurper (*Arg.* 5, 269–271) whose motives are selfish. He speaks, it is true, for his own benefit. Nevertheless, he (his character) excels himself in this scene.

Perses' efforts vanish into thin air! The situation gets absolutely out of hand. The scene is chaotic and desperate from the point of view of the humans (*Arg.* 6, 26–32):

haec medio Perses dum tempore mandat,  
aureus effulsit campis rubor, armaque et acres  
sponte sua strepuere tubae. Mars saevus ab altis  
„hostis io,” conclamat equis „agite ite, propinquat,”  
ac simul hinc Colchos, hinc fundit in aequora Persen.  
tunc gens quaeque suis commisit proelia telis,  
voxque dei pariter turmas audita per omnes.

As for the tyrants, a violent solution of the threatening conflict is more attractive than a peaceful one. However, there are only losers in this struggle for power between the tyrants. Perses' role in the story is that he stands in the way of a violent solution of the conflict, which, obviously, feeds human vanity: ambition.

Violence is seen as one solution for the problems of the human future – if it has a reason which could be considered rational. Jason, for instance, being greedy for power and

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<sup>57</sup> *Arg.* 5, 291: „... verum alios tunc ipsa dolos, alia orsa movebo.”

<sup>58</sup> For the conflict, see *Arg.* 5, 265ff.

<sup>59</sup> *Arg.* 6, 14ff.

ambitious has to meet resistance of his men who consider the purpose of their voyage.<sup>60</sup> When the leader begins to claim extra tasks from his crew, for his selfish aims, the acceptability of violence is taken up. His eagerness for blind violence is remarkable, and somewhat striking even, in Jason, for it appears in a context, which does not show him as a hero, but rather as a militant.

### *Bellum impium* – Battle between friends

The battle between the Cyzicans and the Argonauts in the third book of the *Argonautica*, is characterized as a *bellum impium* and a *saevus error*. It is caused by the goddess Cybele; she has been injured by the king Cyzicus who slew one of her sacred lions.<sup>61</sup> The battle is fought between friends and thus causes unnecessary bloodshed.

One important character among the crew of Argo, Tiphys the steersman, falls in a sleep *divum imperiis* while steering the ship.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, the ship, doing an about-turn, returns to the friendly harbour of the Cyzicans which it had left earlier.<sup>63</sup> Through the darkness of the night the Cyzicans are misled to believe that the approaching ship belongs to their enemy, the Pelasgians.<sup>64</sup>

For the next, the god Pan, *nemorum bellique potens*, begins to work at the orders of Cybele.<sup>65</sup> Pan makes humans uncertain, hesitating and fearful. *Pavor*, in this context, is a kind of fear in which one is absolutely in the power of the god, and which he cannot overcome by his own initiative. Both the Cyzicans and the Argonauts are hampered by this fear of divine origin to the extent that they are unable to perceive and mend their error. The city of the Cyzicans is paralyzed by the power of Pan.<sup>66</sup> Likewise, the Argonauts are struck by what is called an *anceps pavor*.<sup>67</sup> The king Cyzicus himself<sup>68</sup> falls into the power of this divine fear actually before the alarm, namely in his dream (*Arg.* 3, 58–60):

ilicet ad regem clamor ruit. exilit altis  
somnia dira toris simulacraque pallida linqvens  
Cyzicus.

Certainly, the king may deliberate the possibility of an invasion of the Pelasgians, but in his troubles he also is completely blind. He does not consider any other possibilities than that of the Pelasgians approaching his harbour during the night. What is particularly of

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<sup>60</sup> See above n. 13.

<sup>61</sup> *Arg.* 3, 20–31.

<sup>62</sup> *Arg.* 3, 39–40.

<sup>63</sup> See *Arg.* 3, 40–42; for the friendly reception of the Argo by Cyzicus: *Arg.* 2, 636ff.

<sup>64</sup> *Arg.* 3, 45: „*hostis habet portus, soliti rediere Pelasgi.*”; cf. 3, 126ff. The Cyzicans and the Pelasgians were in war: *Arg.* 2, 656–658.

<sup>65</sup> *Arg.* 3, 47 *iussa ferens saevissima matris.*

<sup>66</sup> *Arg.* 3, 46 *deus ancipitem lymphaverat urbem.*

<sup>67</sup> *Arg.* 3, 74–75 at *Minyas anceps fixit pavor; aegra virorum l corda labant.*

<sup>68</sup> For Cyzicus as the central figure of the episode, see GARSON 1964, 268.

divine origin, is in fact that the king trusts entirely to his senses – his senses are actually lamed by unnatural fear. Fear causes in him a reaction of *furor* which leads to violence. *Furor* as such is state of behaviour which is outside human control. The king then infects others with his fear and with his mad desire to rush into battle (*Arg.* 3, 70–73):

iamque adeo nec porta ducem nec pone moratur  
excubias sortita manus, quae prima furenti  
advolat; hinc alii subeunt, ut proxima quaeque  
intremuit domus et motus accepit inanes.

A similar *furor* to that seen in Cyzicus seizes Jason (*Arg.* 3, 85–86):

non segnius  
ille occupat arva furens

Jason leads his crew into the fatal battle.<sup>69</sup> Two details are important here. Firstly, the hostile behaviour of the adversary does not give the men any time for reasonable thought, and secondly, Jason's fervour to go into action – against the Colchians, as Jason was sure.<sup>70</sup> Consequently, Jason's example as he prepares himself for heroic deeds causes the crew to speculate eagerly about where the battle will take place in place of their thoughts of a moment earlier, when they wondered what land they were approaching.<sup>71</sup> It is Jason only who is sure – his crew is hesitating up to the moment at which the fight begins (*Arg.* 3, 132–133):

trepidant diro sub lumine puppes.  
tollitur hinc tentoque ruit Tirynthius arcu  
pectore certa regens adversa spicula flamma.

Fear thrusts aside clear-headed thinking, e.g. they do not ask Tiphys what happened to him during the night. The time of rational thought comes, it is true, but only with the daylight, after the bloody slaughter, and therefore too late.<sup>72</sup> The Argonauts rush blindly into the battle (*Arg.* 3, 78–80; 110–111):

donec et hasta volans immani turbine transtris  
insonuit monuitque ratem rapere obvia caeca  
arma manu.

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<sup>69</sup> *Arg.* 3, 86 *sequitur vis omnis Achivum.*

<sup>70</sup> *Arg.* 3, 76–82.

<sup>71</sup> *Arg.* 3, 93–94 *pendent mortalia longo l corda metu. quibus illa fretis, quibus incidat arvis; cf. to Arg.* 3, 75.

<sup>72</sup> Daybreak brings forth the truth and the terrible results of the slaughter: *Arg.* 3, 259–261 (Tiphys); seeing all the cruelties they have committed during the night, the Argonauts are stricken with horror, as Agave after the slaying of her son Pentheus (*Arg.* 3, 262–266).

sic agmine caeco  
incurrit strictis manus ensibus.

The fate of the Cyzicans is anticipated, they are a *manus infelix* (3, 95), an „ill-starred band”. Then follows what we may call the slaughter of this *infelix manus*.

Considering violence, and violation of the human body, Valerius Flaccus' epic is detailed and on some occasions realistic. His text is also macabre, because the nasty butchering of the Cyzicans runs side by side with the heroic exclamations of the Argonauts.<sup>73</sup> The Argonauts fight in a kind of ecstasy of strength and bloodshed (*Arg.* 3, 215–216):

                        non signa virum, non funera cernunt,  
                        et rabie magis ora calent.

The adversaries are more than scared.<sup>74</sup> The terrible state of affairs dawns first upon a certain Admon who is killed by Hercules. Valerius Flaccus creates an effective tragic<sup>75</sup> tension: the Argonauts believe that it is the great battle against the Colchians which they are fighting, whereas the truth is disclosed to one of their victims (*Arg.* 3, 171–2):

                        horruit ille cadens nomenque agnovit amicum  
                        primus et ignaris dirum scelus attulit umbris.

After the fall of the king Cyzicus by the hand of Jason (*Arg.* 3, 240–241), *pater omnipotens* decides to break off the fighting, and the Cyzicans flee in terror (*Arg.* 3, 253–256):

                        continuo dant terga metu versique per agros  
                        diffugiunt, quae sola salus: nec terga ruentum  
                        mens Minyis convera sequi.

What does this episode tell us about Valerius' message and style? First of all, the Argonauts do not lose their faces through their serious error. They fight as if in a trance. As the perpetrators of violence they are the best in their world. They settle the matter with a memorial ceremony and then continue their appointed task. The Argonauts know they have committed a terrible mistake, but they soon recover from their depression.

Alongside a kind of wallowing in detailed violence, Valerius brings out the madness of the whole episode. The story portrays the inescapable result of a sin by a subject against his god, namely the king Cyzicus' offence against Cybele – killing his sacred lion. After the misdeed – „involuntary *hybris*” – Cyzicus is doomed to fail. This refines, it is true, the characters of the Argonauts. Now they were doomed to fight, their blindness was caused

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<sup>73</sup> *Arg.* 3, 138ff.

<sup>74</sup> *Arg.* 3, 149.

<sup>75</sup> For Valerius' contribution to the tragic pattern, see GARSON 1964, 269.



actually by the gods, not only by the night. This blindness brings about in particular Jason's readiness for the battle: he was in the power of his ambition to perform his task to the extent that he could not take account of a human error.<sup>76</sup> To my mind, Jason represents a powerful militant personality with ambitions that make him blind. It is these central characters in the story who become maddened with frenzy and infect the others with the divine disease!

Despite heroic fighting by the Argonauts, the episode is ambiguous. As for the battle scene, Valerius made his text conform to the requirements of epic and to the accepted cynical and amoral taste of the Romans, but as regards the reasons for and results of the violence, he is in fact a non-militant pessimist writing tragedy. Dramatizing fear in both parties before the conflict, Valerius produces before our eyes an ancient view of the dependence of human intelligence and action on the whims of the gods. Human leaders – like Cyzicus and Jason – perform their mad acts in a frenzy of divine origin: of divine origin, because the ultimate explanation for violence was thought to be human *hybris* against the gods.

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<sup>76</sup> Jason's heroism does not appear without contradictions in the *Argonautica*; for the theme, see B.E. LEWIS, Valerius Flaccus' portrait of Jason. Evidence from the similes, *Acta Classica* 27 (1984) 91–100.