

Flavian Poetry and its Greek Past

Edited by
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PART II

VALERIUS FLACCUS

WHEN THE ARGO MET THE ARGO:
POETIC DESTRUCTION IN VALERIUS' *ARGONAUTICA**

Darcy Krasne

Early in the first book of Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, the poet dedicates twenty-eight lines to the construction and decoration of the Argo (V. Fl. 1.121–148). This was a topic that Apollonius Rhodius had eschewed as a hackneyed theme of song, although glimpses of the Argo's construction are subsequently visible throughout the Hellenistic epic.¹ Valerius, however, not only chooses to tread this well-trodden ground but even calls attention to his belated rendition of the construction scene in several ways. Of these, the most pertinent to my argument here is the scene's opening:

feruere cuncta uirum coetu, simul undique cernit
delatum nemus et docta resonare bipenni
litora. iam pinus gracili dissoluere lamna
Thespiaden iungique latus lentoque sequaces
molliri uidet igne trabes remisque paratis
Pallada uelifero quaerentem bracchia malo.
constitit ut longo moles non peruia ponto,
puppis et ut tenuous subiere latentia cerae
lumina, picturae uarios super addit honores. (V. Fl. 1.121–129)

There [Juno] sees all astir with the throng of men, and at the same moment the forest felled on every side and the shores ringing under the deft axe; already Thespian Argus is breaking apart pines with the thin saw, and the side is being joined and the planks are being softened into pliancy over a slow flame; the oars are ready, and Pallas is seeking a yard for the sail-bearing mast. When the ship stood firm in its huge bulk, impervious to long tracts of sea, and

* Thanks are due to Caroline Bishop, Lauren Ginsberg, Liz Gloyn, and Isabel Köster for their helpful comments on an early version of this paper. I would also like to thank Antony Augoustakis for organizing such a fantastic conference, and the other participants for their comments, contributions, and camaraderie.

¹ See, e.g., Murray (2005), who reads the apparent *praeteritio* as an actual polemic against earlier versions. Furthermore, recurring similes of ship-building (e.g., A. R. 1.1003–1010, 2.79–82) and allusions to the moment of construction (e.g., A. R. 1.526–527 and 721–724) suggest that the composition (and reading) of the epic progressively recreates the composition of the ship; this is not entirely dissimilar to the parallel that Valerius draws between the construction of the ship and the construction of the poem.

when fine wax had filled the lurking holes, s/he² adds varied adornments of painting.

As Timothy Stover has recently argued, this passage overtly enacts Valerius' own poetic construction of the *Argonautica*.³ Of course, metaphors of seafaring as poetry are traditional, reaching at least as far back as Hesiod;⁴ what is new in Valerius' realization of the metaphor and in Stover's reading of it is the addition of what might be termed a Lucanean metaphor of destructive poetic deforestation, implying that earlier poetic versions of the Argo become the literal material, not just the literary material, used to build that poetic craft.⁵ The timber that Argus has broken apart to build the Argo becomes the timber of previous instantiations of the Argo,⁶ suggesting that destruction is an intrinsic part of Valerius' creative process,⁷ especially since his work has already been fashioned by other craftsmen so many times in the past.

I find a disquieting echo of this construction later in book 1, when Valerius announces that Argus' task aboard the Argo is to keep her from splitting apart at the seams:

Arge, tuae tibi cura ratis, te moenia doctum
Thespia Palladio dant munere; sors tibi nequa
parte trahat tacitum puppis mare fissaque fluctu
uel pice uel molli conducere uulnera cera. (V. Fl. 1.477–480)

To you, Argus, falls the care of your own vessel, you with the skill that Pallas has bestowed on you are the gift of the city of Thespieae; it is your lot to see that the ship on no side let in the stealthy water, and to seal with pitch or pliant wax the wounds cleft by the waves.

² While Mozley takes Argus as the subject of *addit* (1.129), there is in fact no grammatical reason to be certain of this, and contextually, arguments could be made for Argus, Juno, or Minerva; cf. Zissos (2008) 154.

³ Stover (2010).

⁴ Rosen (1990).

⁵ This idea is strengthened when the personification of the Argo tells Jason that Juno has taken her from *fatidicis siluis* (V. Fl. 1.303). Not only does Valerius hint that the Argo's prophetic prow possibly came from multiple trees, *siluis*, rather than a single oak, but there is also a pun inherent in *siluis*, which can signify literary material (*OLD* s.v. *silua* 5b). This pun is implicit in the actual construction scene, which does not use the word *silua* (although it does use the equally metapoetic *nemus*, 1.122), and explicit here in the Argo's speech.

⁶ As Stover (2010) 645–646 points out, the word *dissoluere* (1.123) is unusual in its present context of breaking apart raw timber; *soluo* and its compounds are usually applied to the breaking apart of whole ships. Thus, Stover says, "it is as if previous instantiations of Argo must first be 'pulled apart' in order to yield the material to (re)build the ship anew" (646).

⁷ The idea in itself is not unique to Valerius (cf. Masters [1992] 25–29); what is unique is his application of this to the Argo, which in turn is a stand-in for the poem as a whole.

In assigning this task to Argus, Valerius suggests the inevitable pressures of disparate material that has been skillfully joined into a single craft, whether sea-going or poetic.⁸ As a result, the Argo's potential for self-destruction and intestine discord is marked, and indeed, it is only a matter of time before she does begin to come apart, primarily under the influence of her own poetic predecessors.⁹ At the same time, those predecessors suffer a similar fate of annihilation. It is this process of mutual poetic destruction and its suggestion of civil war that will concern me in what follows.

At the center of the poem, the Argo is repeatedly destroyed, literally and symbolically. Her literal destruction occurs as she passes through the Clashing Rocks (4.691–693), which crush the tip of her stern, and she is symbolically destroyed twice shortly thereafter. Once, she is visually immolated by the blazing funeral pyre of Tiphys and Idmon (5.33–34),¹⁰ and once, as I shall argue, she is metaphorically slain in the form of the bird that feeds on Prometheus' liver (5.175–176). While all three scenes are highly pertinent for questions of metapoetics, the first and last are especially relevant to the peculiarly destructive aspect of Valerius' engagement with his Greek predecessors.¹¹ Two predecessors in particular are implicated: one of them,

⁸ Valerius had mentioned the pressures of the sea previously (1.127), but there he had claimed that the ship was *non peruia ponto*, whereas here he admits the possibility of fissure. As Stover (2010) 646 observes, "the ship must be able to withstand the rigors of the 'ocean of epic,'" but whether or not it *is* able to do so comes under increasing doubt as the epic progresses. On the sea and seafaring as images suggestive of epic poetry specifically, see recently Harrison (2007).

⁹ The first time she cracks open is during the highly Virgilian storm at 1.609–642.

¹⁰ The Argo herself appears to *be* the funeral pyre, in fact, perishing together with her dead crewmen: *tunc ipsa cremari / uisa ratis medioque uiros deponere ponto* ("then it seemed as though the ship herself were burning and sinking the heroes in mid-sea," V. Fl. 5.33–34).

¹¹ It is Tiphys' death, rather than the metaphorical destruction of the Argo, that is the focal point of the multi-level metapoetic crisis that occupies and extends from the central scene (although see n. 28). On the deaths of Tiphys and Idmon, see Van der Schuur's essay in this volume, pp. 95–112, as well as Krasne (2011) 136–139, where I discuss the metapoetics of the scene with a particular view to Valerius' debt to the *Aeneid*. In addition, I would briefly point out here (and develop in Krasne [forthcoming]) that a unique run of *aetia* drawn directly from Apollonius occurs in this central region, primarily stemming from Tiphys' death, when the loss of the ship's (and poet's) Aratean guide deprives the ship of an ability to follow the astronomical *σήμεατα* (constellations) and instead forces the poet to follow the terrestrial *σήμεατα* laid down by Apollonius' *aetia*. Put another way, Tiphys' presence allows Valerius to innovate on an aetiological level (not one of the twenty *aetia* that occur in the first half of the epic derives from Apollonius), while his absence reduces Valerius to reiterating the frequently-travelled Argonautic itinerary and the signposts left by both Argonauts and Argonautic authors. (This summary is necessarily overly simplified and hence slightly inaccurate, but it gives the correct impression.) See Volk (2012) on Aratean *σήμεατα* and Barnes (2003) on Apollonian *σήμεατα*.

unsurprisingly, is Apollonius' *Argonautica*; the other is the celestial Argo of Aratus' *Phaenomena*.¹²

The Argo is fated to be catasterized. Valerius says as much in the proem (*flammifero tandem consedit Olympo*, "sank at last to rest in the starry firmament," V. Fl. 1.4), and Juno apparently promised catasterism to the Argo's prophetic oak in order to win acquiescence for its inclusion in the ship (*nec fatidicis auellere siluis / me nisi promisso potuit Saturnia caelo*, "the Saturnian goddess could not have torn me from the prophetic woods had not heaven been promised to me," V. Fl. 1.303–304). And it is, or so Valerius tells us, the Argo's passage through the Clashing Rocks that defines her "ultimate celestial form," as Andrew Zissos terms it.¹³ But here we encounter a problem. Valerius is very explicit that, while the Clashing Rocks clip off the Argo's stern-ornaments, it is the *rest* of the ship—namely, her intact portion—that is destined for heaven:

saxa sed extremis tamen increpuere corymbis
parsque (nefas) deprensa iugis, nam cetera caelo
debita. (V. Fl. 4.691–693)

Yet the rocks crashed upon the tip of the stern-ornaments, and part (oh horror!) was caught by the crags: *the rest was owed to heaven*.

Cetera [*pars*] refers to the part that has not already been mentioned, namely, the part that is not crushed by the Rocks.¹⁴ This is unique in discussions of the Argo's catasterism, from Aratus onward. While the constellation of the Argo is most assuredly only a half-ship, traditionally it is her *rear* half that is catasterized, namely the part that is crushed between the Clashing Rocks. The fact that the Argo's stern is the visible half is a point made explicitly by both Aratus and his surviving Latin translators:¹⁵

ἡ δὲ Κυνὸς μέγαλοιο κατ' οὐρῆν ἔλκεται Ἀργῶ
πρυμνόθεν· οὐ γὰρ τῆ γε κατὰ χρέος εἰσι κέλευθοι,

¹² On the broader engagement of Valerius with Aratus, particularly Aratus and acrostics, see Castelletti in this volume, pp. 49–72.

¹³ Zissos (2004b) 327.

¹⁴ *TLL* 3.965.45–65 provides a variety of sources which elucidate various shades of meaning in *ceterus*; in no instance does it seem to mean the same portion which has already been specified. Cf. *OLD* s.v. *ceterus* 1: "the rest of, the remaining part of, the other."

¹⁵ In Aratus' Latin translators, the equivalent passages are Cic. *Arat.* 126–138 and Germ. *Arat.* 344–355. Similarly, Pseudo-Eratosthenes (*Cat.* 1.35) and Hyginus (*Astr.* 2.37) also describe the constellation as only the stern of the ship. Many thanks are due to Joseph Farrell for kindly sending me a copy of his unpublished conference paper on Argonautic constellations in Roman poetry (cited here as Farrell [2010]).

ἀλλ' ὄπιθεν φέρεται τετραμμένη, οἶα καὶ αὐταὶ
 νῆες, ὅτ' ἤδη ναῦται ἐπιστρέψωσι κορώνην
 ὄρμον ἐσερχόμενοι· τὴν δ' αὐτίκα πᾶς ἀνακόπτει
 νῆα, παλιρροθίῃ δὲ καθάπτεται ἠπείροιο·
 ὡς ἢ γε πρύμνηθεν Ἴησονις ἔλκεται Ἄργω.
 καὶ τὰ μὲν ἡερίῃ καὶ ἀνάστερος ἄχρι παρ' αὐτὸν
 ἰστὸν ἀπὸ πρῶρης φέρεται, τὰ δὲ πᾶσα φαιινή·
 καὶ οἱ πηδάλιον κεχλασμένον ἐστήρικται
 ποσσὶν ὑπ' οὐραίοισι Κυνὸς προπάροιθεν ἰόντος. (Arat. *Phaen.* 342–352)

Close to the great Dog's tail is *Argo towed stern first*. Its course is not that of a ship proceeding on its normal business, but its movement is backward-turned, like that of real ships when the sailors have already turned the stern about on entering harbor: all of the crew quickly back water, and the ship surging astern makes fast to the land. So this *Argo* of Jason is towed stern first. *Dark and starless from the prow as far as the actual mast she goes, but the rest is all bright*. The steering-oar is detached and set fast under the Dog's hind legs as it runs ahead.

They all describe how she moves in reverse, unlike a normal ship, and how she only is bright with stars from the tip of her poop-deck up to the mast; beyond that, she is invisible. Germanicus goes so far as to mention the *Argo*'s encounter with the Clashing Rocks as the cause for her celestial half-shape:

sed quae¹⁶ pars uiolata fuit, coeuntia saxa
 numine Iunonis tutus cum fugit Iason,
 haec micat in caelo. (Germ. *Arat.* 350–352)

But the part which was destroyed when Jason, by Juno's divinity, safely fled the Clashing Rocks—this glitters in the sky.

The half that has been physically lost is, according to Germanicus, placed into the heavens as a memorial.¹⁷ Not so, clearly, for Valerius; why the change, and what does it signify?¹⁸

¹⁶ Gain adopts the reading *quia*, found in the O-family of manuscripts, against *quae*, the reading of the Z-family.

¹⁷ Gain (1976) 100 thinks that this is impossible because it would mean that the entire back half of the *Argo* was crushed between the Rocks, rather than just its tip, and therefore he advocates the alternative reading *quia* instead of *quae* (350). This would imply, however, that the whole reason for the *Argo*'s catasterism was the fact that she was damaged by the Clashing Rocks, which seems to me even less reasonable than simply allowing for hyperbole (hyperbole which, I might observe, finds a parallel in Valerius' claim at 4.693 that the *entire* remainder of the ship will be catasterized).

¹⁸ Sens (1994) 70–72 observes a somewhat similar reworking of Apollonius (and, perhaps, Aratus) in Theocritus 22, where (among other "corrections") a μέγα κύμα comes rolling down on the prow rather than the stern. It may also be worth observing that the *Argo* turns, of her

I propose that what we have here is an explicit rejection of the Aratean model.¹⁹ We recall that Valerius had metaphorically woven previous versions of the Argo into the ship's fabric during the scene of her construction in book 1. Here, he begins forcibly to remove these earlier versions, and his first victim is the half-ship of Aratus. On the one hand, it is naturally Valerius' own Argo that is actually damaged here by the Clashing Rocks.²⁰ However, what appears to be eradicated from the text at this point is the Aratean Argo, namely the rear portion of the Argo. This allusion to Aratus' Argo is underscored by Valerius' choice of words. He observes that the ship loses her *extremis ... corymbis* ("the tip of her stern-ornaments," V. Fl. 4.691), which translates a phrase used by Aratus in his second mention of the Argo (*Phaen.* 686): Aratus says that the Argo's ἀκρα κόρυμβα disappear as she begins to descend below the horizon at the rising of Capricorn.

The word *corymbus* is common, in Latin, but Valerius' use of it constitutes a terminological innovation. He is the first and only attested Latin author to use *corymbus* for a ship's stern-ornaments, rather than for clusters of actual vegetation.²¹ Valerius' use of the word in this sense is not limited to this passage, however, and his other uses of *corymbus* strengthen the Aratean reference and rejection. In book 1, Jason and his men vow that *auratis Argo reditura corymbis* ("the Argo will return with gilded stern-ornaments," V. Fl. 1.272–273); while they naturally turn out to be wrong, an Aratean reader, encountering the word in its new Latin usage, might well think of the glittering celestial κόρυμβα of Aratus' Argo that will be enshrined in the sky. In book 8, the Argonaut Erginus closely echoes the earlier phrasing when he points out to Jason that they *cannot*, in fact, survive a second trip through the Clashing Rocks (*non totis Argo redit ecce corymbis*, "the Argo returns not with

own volition, once she has entered the stream of the Phasis, in a self-propelled recollection of the Aratean sailors' turning of the prow (V. Fl. 5.210–212). Finally, it is possible that Valerius has picked up on a phrase in Seneca's *Medea*, where Medea claims that *Argo reuersa* (*Med.* 238) is the only possible source of reproach against her. While *Medea* simply means the return voyage, Farrell (2010) also draws a connection between the phrase and the astronomical tradition of a backwards-sailing Argo; in the topsy-turvy world of Valerius' epic, however, the already-inverted constellation has itself become reversed.

¹⁹ On the most basic level of internal consistency, we could say that the surviving half, i.e., the front half, has to be catasterized in order that Juno can fulfill her promise of catasterism for the speaking prow of the ship. Of course, it was Valerius who set things up this way in the first place, so this is not in fact an answer.

²⁰ Indeed, the Argonauts believe she has literally split in two, her sides seeming to spring apart and consign them all to a watery grave (V. Fl. 4.693–694).

²¹ *TLL* 4.1081.68–70.

stern-ornaments unharmed," V. Fl. 8.194).²² These three uses of *corymbus*, the only three in Valerius, set up an expectation and rejection of the ship's celestial shape as defined by Aratus. The allusion may be mediated through Apollonius, who provides a more immediate model for the phrase ἄκρα κόρυμβα in the Clashing Rocks episode (ἔμπης δ' ἀφλάστοιο παρέθρισαν ἄκρα κόρυμβα / νωλεμές ἐμπλήξασαι ἐναντία, "but all the same the rocks sheared off the very tip of the stern-ornament when they dashed firmly together," A. R. 2.601–602), but Aratus' own passage ultimately lies behind Apollonius' use of the term as well;²³ and Valerius' reference to the Argo's catasterism in the following lines (V. Fl. 4.692–693) underscores the Aratean reference.

In short, the half of the Argo which shines for Aratus is simply removed from Valerius' world. It does not continue further on the journey, being lost to the Clashing Rocks, and it *also* will not shine in the heavens. This is not to say that Aratean influence on Valerius ends here—it does not. Rather than being a literal death, the removal of Aratus' Argo is the overtly enacted and performative destruction of a textual mirror of Valerius' Argo, one of those many disparate sources that comprise the craft. I shall soon argue that this violence, in essence intended to eradicate an alternate self and even reduce it to a state of non-existence, serves as a manifestation of the civil discord that pervades the poem.²⁴ First, however, I want to consider how the same sort of destruction also afflicts Apollonius' Argo, whose "death," I propose, we witness a little further on, at the very close of the *periplus* section.

In Apollonius' *Argonautica*, immediately prior to their arrival in Colchis, the Argonauts sail past the site of Prometheus' torments and hear his

²² See Barich (1982) 104–105 and Zissos (2008) 213, who observe the repetition but do not draw a connection with Aratus' Argo.

²³ Both Hellenistic authors draw on Homer *Il.* 9.241 (στεύεται γὰρ νηῶν ἀποκόψειν ἄκρα κόρυμβα, "for he threatens to chop off the tip of the ships' stern-ornaments"). It is possible that Valerius' choice of *corymbis* is only influenced by Apollonius' passage, rather than Aratus' as well, but it seems unlikely to me that he would adopt the unusual term in that case—why so specific an allusion to what is already his expected model? Germanicus' choice of *aplustria* (345) is certainly *not* influenced by Aratus, who nowhere uses ἀφλαστον, but it may be influenced by the same line (2.601) of Apollonius, in a reversal of what I argue is Valerius' gesture. If so, this would be an interesting case of *contaminatio*. That said, Germanicus uses *aplustria* [*Puppis*] on several other occasions (489, 620, 684), and it is the normal Latin word for the carved stern, so this is more probably his regular terminology.

²⁴ Seal discusses several major manifestations of this pervasive civil discord, in particular the fraternal civil war in Colchis, as well as the literary background to the conceit, in his essay in this volume, pp. 113–135. See also Stover (2012) and Bernstein (forthcoming) for recent readings of the contemporary relevance of Valerius' heightened engagement with civil war.

anguished cries from a distance; they also see the liver-consuming eagle fly overhead:

τὸν μὲν ἐπ' ἀκροτάτης ἴδον ἔσπερον ὀξεί ροίζῳ
 νηὸς ὑπερπτάμενον νεφέων σχεδόν· ἀλλὰ καὶ ἔμπης
 λαίφεα πάντ' ἐτίναξε παραιθύξας πτερύγεσσιν·
 οὐ γὰρ ὁ γ' αἰθερίοιο φύην ἔχεν οἰωνοῖο,
 ἴσα δ' εὐξέστοις ὠκύπτερα πάλλεν ἔρετμοῖς. (A. R. 2.1251–1255)

They saw it at dusk flying with a sharp whirr above the top of the ship near the clouds, but nonetheless it made all the sails flap as it darted past on its wings, for it did not have the form of a bird of the air but plied its long wing-feathers like well-polished oars.

While transferred metaphors of rowing for flying and flying for sailing are not uncommon in ancient literature,²⁵ Apollonius' eagle is remarkably ship-like: its wings are not simply *like* oars, but they are *equal*, ἴσα, to oars. It even appears to the Argonauts that the eagle is not a bird at all, suggesting (given its ship-like appearance) that it might be more akin to their own vessel; and indeed, the eagle in Apollonius has long been recognized as a parallel for the Argo, from antiquity onwards.²⁶ Given this parallelism, the bird's fate in Valerius' *Argonautica* is disturbing.

Valerius' Argonauts pass by Prometheus somewhat later in the Titan's history of prolonged punishment,²⁷ in fact arriving on the scene just as it is reaching an end:

contra autem ignari (quis enim nunc credat in illis
 montibus Alciden dimissaue uota retemptet?)
 pergere iter socii. tantum mirantur ab alto
 litora discussa sterni niue ruptaque saxa
 et simul ingentem moribundae desuper umbram
 alitis atque atris rorantes imbris auras. (V. Fl. 5.171–176)

But in their ignorance (for who could have believed that Alcides was on those hills, or ventured once more on hopes abandoned?) his companions proceed upon their way; only they wonder from the deep at the wide-flung snow that strews the beaches, at the cloven crags and the huge shadow of a dying bird above them and the gory dew that drizzles through the air.

²⁵ Gow (1917) 117 collects a number of passages.

²⁶ Gow (1938) 14 has argued that authors as early as Theocritus picked up on this symbolism, since Theocritus' Argo inversely enters the bay of Colchis αἰετὸς ὡς (*Id.* 13.24), "like an eagle." See also Byre (2002) 52–53 and Newman (1986) 82.

²⁷ Caroline Bishop points out to me that this belated arrival of Valerius' crew is rather appropriate for a poet of his self-consciously belated generation!

Rather than seeing the ship-like bird as it flies overhead, they see the bird's huge shadow as it dies overhead, slain by their erstwhile shipmate Hercules. This is, effectively, the death of what might be considered a veritable incarnation of Apollonius' Argo, at the hands of a former member of the Argo's own crew.²⁸ Again, repeating his earlier eradication of Aratus' Argo, Valerius here enacts the destruction of yet another textual mirror.

Moreover, just as Valerius has rejected Aratus' particular version of the Argo by reversing her catasterism and literally annihilating her surviving traces within the epic, in a way he also rejects Apollonius' specific avian embodiment of the Argo, beyond simply effecting the bird's destruction. For Apollonius, the bird is Zeus' eagle, a manifestation of the punishment that he inflicts on Prometheus, and therefore it is parallel in this way, too, to the Argo, in that they both enact Zeus' will.²⁹ Valerius, by contrast, makes the bird a vulture (4.69 and 7.359): no longer intimately connected with Zeus, the bird now evokes a new set of associations for Valerius' Roman audience. Such a heightening of Roman ideas and themes is not uncommon in Valerius' epic,³⁰ but what is its effect in this instance?

First and foremost, vultures were popular in the Roman imagination because they were the birds espied by Romulus and Remus in their augury contest. As a result, according to Plutarch, vultures were a popular bird of augury for the Romans (Plut. *Rom.* 9.5, *Mor.* 286A). But Plutarch also tells us something else about vultures, which is that they were a bird of good omen in general, and particularly for Heracles (*Rom.* 9.6, *Mor.* 286B–C). Therefore, Hercules is here destroying his own favored bird. I would argue that, through the replacement of Zeus' eagle with the vulture of Romulus and Hercules, Valerius is evoking the specter of fratricide in a variety of ways. The simple replacement of eagle with vulture might, even on its own, be imagined to draw in the fratricidal themes of Romulus and Remus' augury contest. Hercules' murder of his own propitious bird strengthens this

²⁸ In addition to the resonances of fratricide and civil war in this scene, there is another, highly poetic reason for Valerius to effect the bird's death here. The death of Apollonius' avian poem incarnate comes as a violent reaction to the intensified Apollonian narrative that has preceded this scene (an unprecedented retention of Apollonius' entire run of *aetia* in the final pre-Colchis *periplus* section), following the death of Tiphys that left Valerius' poetic craft seemingly rudderless (despite the Argo's own appointment of Erginus to fill the vacant position). See my further comments in n. 11 above.

²⁹ Byre (2002) 52–53.

³⁰ See, e.g., Boyle and Sullivan (1991) 272–275 and Zissos (2005) 511–513.

intimation of kindred destruction. To find a suggestion of fratricide in Valerius' *Argonautica* is anything but surprising: as I have mentioned, fratricide and civil war, which are parallel crimes in the Roman imagination,³¹ are themes that pervade Valerius' epic, especially its second half,³² and are also repeatedly visible in all three central scenes of the Argo's destruction.³³

If we return to the first scene of the Argo's destruction, when she loses her stern to the Clashing Rocks, we find a particularly strong manifestation of these themes. To begin with, the Clashing Rocks themselves are a locus of civil war, or fratricide. The fraternal strife inherent in the Clashing Rocks' perpetual motion is most clearly expressed by the blind prophet Phineus, who describes the Rocks' constant strife in terms that strongly suggest civil war:

furor his medio concurrere ponto;
necdum ullas uidere rates: *sua* cominus actae
saxa premunt cautesque *suas*. ceu uincula mundi
ima labant, tremere ecce solum, tremere ipsa repente
tecta uidēs: illae redeunt, illae aequore certant. (V. Fl. 4.562–566)

Their *madness* is to clash together in mid-sea, nor yet have they seen any ships; they crush *their own* cliffs, *their own* boulders when they meet. As though the deepest fastenings of the world are shaken, lo! the ground trembles, the very firmament quakes before your sight; once more they return and fight upon the sea.

They are driven by *furor*, a word which Lucan had irrevocably associated with the crime of internecine strife.³⁴ In addition, the words *sua* and *suas* in Phineus' description highlight the civil war undertones: these are not unrelated enemies that are clashing together, but a matched pair of twins. When the Rocks actually crush the Argo's stern, Valerius' apostrophic exclamation

³¹ Green (1994) 205: "Fratricide and civil war were the private and public faces of the same crime." Bannon (1997) 10: "Fratricide becomes the ultimate metaphor for the public and personal conflicts generated by civil strife."

³² See n. 24 above.

³³ Masters (1992) has argued that Lucan, an intensively important model for Valerius, had created the notion of a text at war with itself, a text that enacts the civil war which it narrates. Here, that textual self-aggression is directed not so much inwardly as at earlier instantiations of the text, which nonetheless comprise the text. The Argo, constructed of disparate sources just as the *Argonautica* itself is, always possesses within itself the possibility of dissolution; here, at the poem's very core, is where that dissolution actually occurs.

³⁴ Lapidge (1979). The Rocks' concussions even threaten a cosmic dissolution of Stoic proportions, as Valerius makes clear with *uincula mundi / ima labant* (4.564–565)—*uincula mundi* is Stoic cosmological terminology, according to Lapidge (1979) 350.

of *nefas* (4.692) further evokes the notion of civil war, the word and idea having become firmly yoked together in poetry by the Flavian period.³⁵

In the context of Valerius' Greek predecessors and their interaction with the Argo, the Rocks' fratricide stems not just from their perpetual self-aggression, but also from the way in which the similes that Valerius uses to describe them allude to earlier versions of the *Argonautica*, specifically the same versions that he will shortly endeavor to destroy. The violence of civil war is always mutual: every action is its own equal and opposite reaction. Accordingly, their destruction of the Argo turns out to be no different than their normal self-aggression—it is simply violence against a different sort of twin. Just as Valerius is eradicating earlier models of the Argo, so earlier versions of the *Argonautica* destroy his own ship.

In what ways do the Rocks recall Valerius' predecessors? One answer comes at the beginning of the episode, as the Argonauts first approach the Rocks. Valerius tells us that they do not appear to be rocks, but rather a fallen piece of the starry pole:

stant ora metu nec fessa recedunt
lumina diuersas circum seruantibus undas,
cum procul auditi sonitus insanaque saxa,
saxa neque illa uiris, sed praecipitata profundo
siderei pars uisa poli. (V. Fl. 4.639–643)

Their faces are stark with fear, nor do their weary eyes give over their watching of the waters on every side, when from afar are heard the sounds of the raging rocks, yet not rocks seemed they to the heroes, but *a part of the starry pole* plunged into the deep.

I propose that the image of a chunk of starry sky is meant to put Valerius' reader in mind of Aratus' *Phaenomena*. Not only does this allusion, placed at the very beginning of the Clashing Rocks episode, ultimately find a response in the allusion to the Argo's catasterism that brings the episode to a close, but the specific term *polus* even recalls Aratus' opening discussion of the twin heavenly poles:

καί μιν πειραίνουσι δὺν πόλοι ἀμφοτέρωθεν·
ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν οὐκ ἐπίοπτος, ὁ δ' ἀντίος ἐκ βορέαο
ὑψόθεν ὠκεανοῖο. (Arat. *Phaen.* 24–26)

Two poles terminate [the axle] at the two ends; but one is not visible, while the opposite one in the north is high above the ocean.

³⁵ The connection between *nefas* and civil war is mobilized by the Augustan poets, firmly established by Lucan, and maintained by the Flavian poets. See McGuire (1997) xi, 144–156; Ganiban (2007) 33–38.

Possibly, the allusion points more directly to Germanicus' version than to Aratus' own, if the idea of the pole being submerged in the depths is meant to suggest his *pars mersa sub undas*:

extremum geminus determinat axem
quem Grai dixere polon: *pars mersa sub undas*
Oceani, pars celsa sub horrifero Aquilone. (Germ. *Arat.* 21–23)

A twin caps the axle's end, which the Greeks call a "pole": *part is submerged beneath the waves* of Ocean, part is on high, beneath dreadful Aquilo.

As the ship partially incorporates the Aratean Argo, so the rocks embody the poem in which that Argo appears.³⁶

The similes that link Apollonius' *Argonautica* to the Rocks function somewhat differently. They do not recall the poem as a whole, but rather allude to a particular episode that triangulates with Valerius' own *Argonautica*; specifically, to Jason's yoking of Aeetes' bulls. Apollonius, in his Clashing Rocks episode, had Athena swat the Argo through the Rocks with her hand (A. R. 2.598–600). Valerius instead has Juno and Minerva alight on either side of the Bosphorus and jointly strain to keep the Rocks from crashing together on the ship; their effort to hold back the pair of rocks is compared with someone's struggle to subdue unwilling bulls to the yoke:

hic (Iuno) praecepsque ex aethere Pallas
insiliunt pariter scopulos: hunc nata coerctet,
hunc coniunx Iouis, *ut ualido qui robore tauros*
sub iuga et inuito detorquet in ilia cornu.
inde, uelut mixtis Vulcanius ardor harenis
uerset aquas, sic ima fremunt fluctuque coacto
angitur et clausum scopulos super effluit aequor. (V. Fl. 4.682–688)

Hereupon Juno and Pallas leap sheer down from the sky upon the rocks; this one the daughter of Jove, that one his spouse constrains, *even as one who with brawny strength thrusts down beneath the yoke toward their bellies the unwilling horns of bulls.* Then, as though Vulcan's heat were churning water and sand together, even so the depths roar, and choked with close-pressed waves the imprisoned sea pours in flood over the rocks.

This simile alone would evoke the bulls of Jason's future trials for a knowing Argonautic reader, although the image is closer to Valerius' own version of Jason's trials than to Apollonius' version.³⁷ However, Apollonius' version is

³⁶ In addition, the Rocks' massive size suggest, in metaliterary fashion, another epic. For massifs as epics, see, e.g., Masters (1992) and Stover (2010).

³⁷ Gärtner (1994) gives only Ov. *Her.* 6.97 as an antecedent for the simile.

drawn in more strongly through a second simile that follows immediately on the heels of the first. As the goddesses hold back the rocks, Valerius likens the roiling sea to a roaring blast of Vulcan's fire, *Vulcanius ardor*, suggesting the heat of Vulcan's forge and, in the wake of the bull simile, also recalling a simile that Apollonius had used of Aeetes' bulls, comparing their fiery breath to the blasts of a forge:

ὡς δ' ὅτ' ἐνὶ τρητοῖσιν ἐύρρινοι χοάνοισιν
 φύσαι χαλκῆων ὅτε μὲν τ' ἀναμαρμαίρουσιν
 πῦρ ὄλοον πιμπράσαι, ὅτ' αὖ λήγουσιν ἀυτμῆς,
 δεινὸς δ' ἐξ αὐτοῦ πέλεται βρόμος, ὅππότε' ἀίξι
 νειόθεν ὡς ἄρα τῷ γε θοῖν φλόγα φυσιώωντες
 ἐκ στομάτων ὁμάδουν ...

(A. R. 3.1299–1304)

And as when through the holes of a furnace strong leather bellows of bronze-smiths at times cause ravening fire to burn and blaze up, but then, when they cease their blowing, a terrible roar arises from the fire when it springs up from below—thus indeed the two oxen made a din as they bellowed the darting flame from their mouths ...

Particular resonance comes from the correspondence between *ima fremunt* in Valerius' text and βρόμος ... νειόθεν in Apollonius'.

Valerius' overall description of the Rocks, especially with this second simile of *Vulcanius ardor*, activates yet another Apollonian intertext. The Clashing Rocks are often confused or conflated in the Argonautic tradition with the Wandering Rocks, the Planktai, and Valerius has, accordingly, appropriated Apollonius' Planktai into his description of the Clashing Rocks:

ἄλλοθι δὲ Πλαγκταὶ μεγάλῳ ὑπὸ κύματι πέτραι
 ῥόχθεον, ἤχι πάροιθεν ἀπέπτυνεν αἰθομένη φλόξ
 ἄκρων ἐκ σκοπέλων πυριθαλπέος ὑψόθι πέτρης,
 καπνῷ δ' ἀχλυδαίς αἰθήρ πέλεν οὐδέ κεν ἀγῶας
 ἔδρακες ἠελίοιο. τότε' αὖ λήξαντος ἀπ' ἔργων
 Ἥφαιστου θερμὴν ἔτι κήκιε πόντος ἀυτμήν.

(A. R. 4.924–929)

Elsewhere the Wandering Rocks were thundering under the mighty swell, where previously *blazing flame had spurting out from the peaks* above the rock heated by the fire, *and the air was clouded with smoke*, nor could you have seen the rays of the sun. At this time, *although Hephaestus had stopped working, the sea was still bubbling out hot steam.*

bis fragor infestas cautes aduersaque saxis
 saxa dedit, flamma expresso bis fulsit in imbri ...
 ... praecepsque fragores
 per medios ruit et fumo se condidit atro ...
 inde, uelut mixtis Vulcanius ardor harenis
 uerset aquas ...

(V. Fl. 4.659–660, 675–676, 686–687)

Twice crashed together cliff with cliff and rock with rock, *twice shone the flame in the upward-flung spray* ... and he speeds headlong through the midst of the uproar and *plunges into the murky smoke* ... Then as though *Vulcan's heat were churning water and sand together* ...

The mention of the flame that shoots up when they crash together is a notable component of this transference, as is the smoky air, but the simile of Vulcan's heat churning the water furthers the allusion by recalling the boiling sea around the Planktai, where Apollonius locates Hephaestus' forge. While part of Valerius' purpose may be to assert the conflation of the Symplegades and the Planktai, another result is to associate the Rocks even more strongly with Apollonius' epic.

Thus, as with the Rocks' incorporation of Aratus' *Phaenomena*, aspects of Apollonius' *Argonautica* are in some ways embodied by the Rocks, especially via a network of similes. However, beyond the simple suggestion of Valerius' predecessors as both destroyers and destroyed in this section, the simile of the bulls draws our attention to another aspect of the similarity and self-destruction that are contained within this episode. In this case, the theme is, in fact, activated through a pun. Valerius uses the word *iugum* four times in the Clashing Rocks episode, leveraging three different meanings of the word—yoke, ridge, and rowing-bench—and thereby linking Rocks with bulls *and* with the Argo herself. The distribution of the words seems to emphasize that the resonances are intentional: Jason leaps over the Argo's *iuga* (4.647) as his crew first balks at the looming star-like Rocks, followed ten lines later by a reference to the Clashing Rocks as *iuga* (4.658); and Valerius' use of *iuga* (4.685) to refer to the bulls' yokes in the simile is followed just seven lines later by the very moment of the Argo's destruction, as her tip is caught by the Clashing Rocks, again described as *iuga* (4.692).³⁸ The effect is, again, to strengthen the identification between ship, Rocks, and (by extension) poetic predecessor—that is, between destroyer and destroyed.

What, then, is the result of this intertextual and intratextual web of identity, similarity, and self-destruction? I have already mentioned the theme of civil war and fratricide. By proactively destroying earlier versions of the Argo and *Argonautica*, versions which are themselves incorporated into the

³⁸ *Iuga* is also the term used for the Clashing Rocks in the proem (V. Fl. 1.3). Other terms used for the Clashing Rocks in this section are *rupes* (637), *saxa* (641), *montes* (645), *cautes* (659), and *scopulis* (668), several times each. Murgatroyd (2009) 330 observes that while Wagner and Langen wanted *iugis* at 4.692 to refer to the Argo's thwarts, "the grammar is then difficult."

Rocks that destroy his own Argo, Valerius is enacting the mutual identical destruction of civil war which will be so forcibly presented in the second half of his poem. However, even the promotion of this theme is not an end in and of itself; rather, it is a means to an end.³⁹ That end, I think, is the casting of an intensely negative light on even the most positive of elements in the poem, namely the Argo's own catasterism. Catasterism is generally a strongly positive event, frequently equated with immortality or even apotheosis, and Valerius appears to promote this positive reading of catasterism in his epic's proem, both for the Argo herself and for Vespasian (1.1–4 and 16–21, respectively).⁴⁰ Even though Valerius alludes there to the traditional idea that the Argo's *audacia* and her opening of the seas bring about the end of the Golden Age,⁴¹ there is no hint of negativity to the catasterism itself. That all changes here, in the center of the poem.

We recall that, unlike the Aratean Argo, for Valerius it is the Argo's surviving half which is deified. That half will return to Greece irremediably sullied by the Argo's exposure to civil war, not only in Colchis, where an actual civil war rages, but also in this central section, where the Argo has repeatedly witnessed and been involved in the destruction of a variety of Argonautic incarnations: herself, Aratus' Argo, and Apollonius' Argo.⁴² Her encounter with the Clashing Rocks, which embody civil war, is partially responsible for the Argo's embroilment in so negative a theme, but the Rocks' reflection of those same Argonautic predecessors, enacting destruction upon the Argo herself, suggests that perhaps civil war is a part of the Argo's own nature. And, in fact, as I have mentioned, this is true: the potential for civil war and fratricide is inherent in her construction. The disparate elements of her composition are at odds with each other, a constant struggle illustrated by an early encounter in book 1 with a highly Virgilian storm which causes the

³⁹ This is by contrast with Valerius' model for the textual enactment of civil war, namely Lucan, whose entire purpose was for the *Civil War* text to be at war with itself in as many ways as possible (Masters [1992]).

⁴⁰ Mitousi's contribution to this volume reflects on the connotations of Vespasian's catasterism, pp. 153–168.

⁴¹ Davis (1989). On the Argonauts' voyage as the end of the Golden Age and / or beginning of the Iron Age, see (among others) Fabre-Serris (2008) and Feeney (2007) 118–136; on further interpretations of the Argonauts' *audacia* in Valerius Flaccus, see Landrey (2012) and (forthcoming).

⁴² McGuire (1997) 92 suggested that *Discordia* would be "a worthy bowsprit" for the Argo, who drags conflict in her wake as she travels eastward; Seal, in this volume (p. 130), also rightly observes the internecine conflict that the Argo brings with her on her return, in particular the fated murder of Pelias at the hands of those closest to him.

vessel's explicit, if temporary, dissolution (*alnus / soluitur*, V. Fl. 1.637–638).⁴³ Such a dissolution of the Argo strictly cannot happen for Apollonius, whose divinely-built craft holds fast under all pressures (A. R. 3.340–344). Valerius, however, proclaims that Argus' task is to keep this poetic craft intact, and the need for his attention is clear, especially as the ship is fated *not* to survive the journey intact. By the time she reaches the stars, she *will* be a half-ship; the only question is how this will come about. For Valerius, although not for all Argonautic authors,⁴⁴ she will lose a part of herself as she passes through the Clashing Rocks, burst by them just as she bursts through them, a rupture which no amount of pitch or wax can mend. Argus, and by extension the poet he stands for, has failed to protect the ship from herself and from her predecessors. As the ship embodies the poem, so she embodies the poem's civil war. But beyond that, Valerius uses the Argo's destruction to alter the stars themselves,⁴⁵ by means of his inverted catasterism. Civil war, it seems, is a fate that, in Valerius' universe, will be written in the stars.

⁴³ Lóio observes, in her contribution to this volume (pp. 388–390), a probable epigrammatic use of the tall and imposing alder tree to represent epic, a sense which is possibly operative in this passage as well. Here, the (briefly homogeneous) alderwood poem-ship is temporarily fragmented by the pressures of another epic (i.e., the storm of Virgil's *Aeneid*) that hammers at her seams. The inevitable fragmentation of the ship is picked up on by Martial (7.19), who provides us with nothing except a single *fragmentum* of the Argo, which has succumbed to the depredations of time (on the poetics of this epigram, see Zissos [2004a]). There may also be an ironic interplay here with the poetic *topos* of alder-wood as particularly well-suited to sea-travel (cf. Virg. *G.* 1.136, Luc. 3.441, Stat. *Theb.* 6.106).

⁴⁴ Theoc. *Id.* 13.22–23 has the Argo emerge unscathed from the Clashing Rocks.

⁴⁵ The disarray of celestial bodies is a typical illustration of a disordered world; we see this, for instance, in Seneca's *Medea* when Medea imposes chaos on the stars themselves (*Med.* 757–759; cf. the contrasting expression of natural order at *Med.* 401–405), or even more strikingly in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* when Typhoeus threatens the proper workings of the cosmos by literally manhandling the constellations and other celestial bodies out of their proper positions (*Dion.* 1.165–218).