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Valerius Flaccus's Collapsible Universe: Patterns of Cosmic Disintegration in the *Argonautica*

The Argonauts' voyage from Greece to Colchis and back has frequently been viewed as a world-shaping voyage.¹ Their precise impact on the world, however, depends on its prior construction—namely, what particular structures have (or have not) already been fashioned by divine and natural forces. Whereas the Greeks seem typically to have understood the Argonauts as a positive force aiding in the completion of cosmic order, in Roman renditions of the voyage, where the Argo is often the first ship, the Argonauts' impact on the already-completed world and its divinely-predetermined organization is more often portrayed as transgressive, an event inherently bound up with the fall from divine grace that accompanies the end of the Golden Age and launches the strife-ridden Iron Age.²

From Catullus through Ovid, this connection between the advent of seafaring and the end of the Golden Age takes the spotlight. In the most recent iterations of the myth prior to Valerius Flaccus's *Argonautica*, however—specifically, the choruses of Seneca's *Medea* and a few brief allusions to the myth in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*—the shift from Golden Age to Iron Age is deemphasized, and the Argo's transgression of natural boundaries instead becomes the primary focus.³ Here Nature herself, a Stoic parallel for Zeus, is responsible for the world's structure, and accordingly, the cosmic repercussions inherent in these late Julio-Claudian⁴ reformulations of the myth far surpass the basic downward progression and disintegration of human morality which we find in earlier poets: the Argo's voyage

¹ Williams 1991, 22, 143–45, 185–210; Hunter 1993a, 162–69; Clare 2002; Barnes 2003; Thalmann 2011; Klooster 2014; etc. While this idea is not stated explicitly in ancient literature, the cited scholarship makes it clear that the implications are there. See Krasne 2014b on Valerius's response to Apollonius's aetiological construction of the cosmos.

² Recent and particularly pertinent studies include M. Davis 1989; Zissos 2006; Feeney 2007, 118–31; Fabre-Serris 2008, 17–93; Ripoll 2014; Seal 2014; Slaney 2014, 434–37. Clauss 2000 sees Apollonius's *Argonautica*, too, as more in line with these negative receptions of the Argo.

³ See especially Sen. *Med.* 335–39, 373–79; Luc. 3.193–97, 6.400–1. On Valerius and Seneca's *Medea*, see in particular Grewe 1998 and Buckley 2014. Biondi 1984 analyzes the Argonautic choral odes of Seneca's *Medea*.

⁴ Boyle 2014, xix, takes the play as “late Claudian or early Neronian,” acknowledging that composition under an earlier *princeps* is conceivable but unlikely.

causes the very bindings of the cosmos to collapse, turning the constituent parts of the world against each other in a sort of cosmic civil war.⁵

In what follows, I examine Valerius's construction of the Argonautic cosmos in light of these Senecan and Lucanean precedents. I focus in particular on three major loci of cosmic instability or disarray in the epic, demonstrating how Valerius crafts his universe as inherently unstable, even prior to the Argo's boundary-transgressing voyage, and how his Jupiter controls and manipulates the instability of the cosmos to his own ends. While there are images of cosmic instability, fragmentation, and collapse sown throughout the epic,⁶ in this paper, I primarily address innate and ongoing features of (or flaws in) the cosmic architecture and events of long duration. I also demonstrate that by incorporating suggestions of civil war into these same passages—either directly or intertextually—Valerius heightens the notion of cosmic fragmentation and instability, effectively reversing the direction of Lucan's pervasive analogy between civil war, boundary transgression, and cosmic dissolution. Here, the threatened integrity of the cosmos serves as the narrative baseline, on top of which glimpses of civil war refract and reinforce the concepts. In neither direction is the motif strictly Lucanean, however; civil war and cosmic dissolution are closely analogous in many ancient authors, as two levels of what Lowrie calls a “discursive progression of metaphorical homologies across spheres.”⁷ In Valerius, metaphor is further layered upon metaphor, as the pervasiveness of cosmic dissolution and the threat of its peren-

5 Fyfe 1983, 86–91; Fabre-Serris 2008, 193–204. There are, of course, hints of this sentiment in earlier literature; cf. e.g., Feeney 2007, 123, on the “atmosphere of ... chaotic instability” in Catullus 64 caused by the poem's multiplicity of “violated boundaries.” In Lucan, moreover, this confluence of the ethical, the geographical, and the cosmic forms part of a broader program of analogizing cosmic dissolution to civil war, a project which furnished subsequent generations of poets with a rich stock of words and images to exploit in a similar vein (Masters 1992; Henderson 1998; Dinter 2012; Hardie 2013); Bessone in this volume (ch. 5) explores Statius's stylistic and rhetorical development of this Lucanean inheritance. On Gee's 2013 reading, Lucretius's fragmented use of Cicero's *Aratea* to polemically illustrate the cosmos's perpetual clash of atoms is another analogy between cosmic dissolution and civil strife.

6 Valerius's overall construction of his cosmos is heavily indebted to the cosmic framework of the *Aeneid* that is so well revealed by Hardie 1986.

7 Lowrie 2016, 334. Gee 2013, 110–47, explores the link in Roman literature between perversions of celestial nature and civil war. Throughout the tradition, standard depictions of cosmic dissolution and disarray largely boil down to the collapsing of permanent order into disorder. Two particularly pervasive tropes are the disarray of stars and constellations and the remixing of disparate elements (fire, water, earth, and air); such images represent a paradoxical alteration of the fixed *lex mundi* and a reversion to primordial chaos (see, e.g., Lapidge 1979, 368). Loupiac 1998, 28–35, gives a relatively extensive accounting of these images in the context of Lucan, and Hardie 1986 is seminal on Vergil.

nial recurrence, embellished by hints of civil war, in turn become a means of speaking implicitly to civil war's similar effects and inevitability.

Within the broader tradition, cosmic dissolution does not always automatically pose an unmitigated crisis. In particular, Stoic theory, which is highly influential for Valerius,⁸ treats cosmic collapse as regular and divinely mandated: a periodic overbalancing of other elements by fire, called *ekpyrosis*, leads directly to *palingenesis*, the rebirth of the cosmos.⁹ Thus, for the Stoics, the destruction of the cosmos is cyclic and occurs in normal order, allowing cleansing and regeneration,¹⁰ and within the natural order of things is a largely positive occurrence. But Seneca's *Medea* and Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, Valerius's two most immediate sources for the Argonautic legend, both disrupt the expected Stoic system to indicate a cosmos in crisis. In these works, Stoic-seeming images of cosmic collapse are not positive and evidently do not automatically lead to regeneration, and the perverted Stoic imagery of both works, along with that of other Senecan tragedies, had a significant impact on Valerius's *Argonautica*.¹¹ Accordingly, while we

8 Monaghan 2002 reads Valerius as straightforwardly Stoic; more recent scholarship, however, in line with current tendencies to recognize the multivalency of works and ideas, sees Valerius as engaging with but problematizing Stoic ideas (Ferenczi 2014; Zissos 2014; Krasne *forthcoming*), demonstrating that despite a sustained engagement with Stoic images and ideas, Valerius's Stoicism is anything but properly functioning. See Lapidge 1979 and Lapidge 1989 for a coherent study of Stoic cosmological language in Latin literature.

9 For an overview and discussion of the theory (or theories), see Long 2006, 256–82, and Salles 2009; on the pre-Stoic background, see Hahm 1977, 185–99; on Zeus's role in *ekpyrosis* and *palingenesis*, see Bénatouïl 2009.

10 The Empedoclean cosmogony is also cyclic (Inwood 2001, 42ff.), although differently (and uncertainly) so, shifting between the two poles of Love and Strife; however, while Empedoclean doctrine is also important for Valerius and his approach to cosmic dissolution (as I will argue in the larger project from which this chapter is developed), I omit it from this current study.

11 See n. 8. I argue in Krasne 2014b that Valerius in fact constructs his Argonautic universe specifically to pave the way for the post-Argonautic cosmos of Seneca's *Medea*; Slaney 2009, 13–17, demonstrates how Valerius reshapes the late Julio-Claudian colonial and commercial anxieties of Lucan's and Seneca's narratives into a Flavian response. Loupiac 1998, 34, and Roche 2005 both observe that not once does Lucan suggest any sort of *palingenesis* that will result from the repeated images of *ekpyrosis* throughout his epic, whereas normal Stoic writing almost always mentions the effect hand-in-hand with the cause. Studies of the imagery of a deranged cosmos in Seneca's tragedies include the book-length, corpus-wide studies of Henry/Henry 1985, Rosenmeyer 1989, Schmitz 1993, and Gunderson 2015, as well as numerous shorter pieces and studies of individual plays. We can contrast the doctrine of *ekpyrosis* put into the mouth of the character Seneca in the anonymous drama *Octavia*; there, while *palingenesis* is explicitly the teleological thrust, the parallel it establishes with Nero's gross reconstruction of Rome in the form of his *domus aurea* following Rome's own ekpyrotic conflagration make rebirth just as problematic as a final destruction (cf. Van Noorden 2015, 268–82).

can assume that what appear to be Stoic underpinnings of Valerius's cosmos are likely to be precisely that, we should nonetheless not expect a straightforward Stoic worldview.

As I observed previously, while Roman authors tended to proactively align the Argo's voyage with the enactment of the shift from Golden Age to Iron Age, Seneca and Lucan had deemphasized that shift and instead focused on the Argo's penetration and erasure of boundaries, reversing the earlier actions of Nature and the divine. But while Valerius follows Seneca and Lucan in their reformulation of the Argo's crime, he also makes a significant alteration. Rather than simply turning the focus of the myth away from the Golden Age/Iron Age dichotomy, Valerius explicitly positions the Argo's voyage after the inception of the Iron Age, which appears to be in full swing long before the advent of seafaring.¹² To demonstrate the timeframe of his epic, he emphasizes various tropes of the Iron Age found in earlier poetry, including the advent of agriculture (V. Fl. 1.22–25, 1.67–70),¹³ the departure of Astraea (V. Fl. 2.361–64),¹⁴ the Gigantomachy (V. Fl. 2.16–

12 See also Seal 2014, 120–23, although cf. n. 17 (below). The parallels with other ancient literature in the next few footnotes are *exempli gratia*; for a complete catalogue of *loci* of Golden Age themes in ancient literature, see the *Conspectus rerum* in Gatz 1967, 229–32.

13 Cf. Catul. 64.397; Ov. *Met.* 1.123–24, 1.141. Agriculture straddles the line between positive and negative; see Feeney 2007, 114–15, on agriculture's inherent contradictions. Aratus allowed for agriculture in his Golden Age (see Gee 2013, 25, 40, 247 n. 17), and the old vision of the industrious Italian farmer falls into the Golden Age (Verg. *G.* 2.458–540), but the plow's imposition of order and divisions on the land (antithetical to the Golden Age's general communism and a symptom of mankind's domination of nature) is a hallmark of the Iron Age (e.g., Verg. *G.* 1.125–28, Verg. *Ecl.* 4.33, Ov. *Met.* 1.135–36 [on divisions of land and property in general]; cf. Stat. *Silu.* 4.3.40–41, with Newlands 2002, 284–325, on the ambiguities of the poem). Valerius, by using the verb *imbuat* (V. Fl. 1.70), analogizes Triptolemus's assault on the land to Catullus's formulation of the Argo's assault on the sea (*illa rudem cursu prima imbuat Amphitriten*, Catul. 64.11).

14 Cf. Ov. *Met.* 1.149–50; Verg. *Ecl.* 4.6; *G.* 2.458–74. Tim Stover has drawn my attention (*viva voce*) to the analogy that Valerius establishes between his Medea and Ovid's Astraea, through the anagrammatic phrase *caede madens* (V. Fl. 1.224–25, 5.453–54; also [not of Medea] V. Fl. 2.274–75, 6.415; cf. Ov. *Met.* 1.149–50). (See also now Houghton 2017 on this anagram.) As Ovid positions Astraea's departure at the end of the Iron Age (*Met.* 1.149–50), this if anything increases Valerius's emphasis on the Argo's belatedness, as it is sailing *so* late that we have had time to once more reach the end of the Hesiodic cycle on which Catullus focuses at the end of Catul. 64. This analogy may motivate Valerius's use of *uirgo altera* to describe Medea at the end of the epic (V. Fl. 8.463); see, e.g., Baldini Moscadi 2005, 95–96, 126–34, on the Senecan Medea as a lurid, Iron Age parallel for the Golden Age's *Virgo-Dike*. Gee 2013 argues for a Roman appropriation of the Aratean myth of Dike (which, unlike Hesiod's version, is cyclical) into a context of Rome's own myth and reality of an unceasing cycle of civil war; the multiple ways in which Valerius potentially engages with this tradition are vaster than the scope of this paper allows.

18),¹⁵ humankind's neglect of the gods (V. Fl. 2.98–99),¹⁶ and even internecine strife (intentions at V. Fl. 1.71–73, actuality at 2.220–30).¹⁷ For Valerius, all of these occur prior to the construction of the Argo, and thus her voyage, rather than inaugurating the Iron Age, simply ties it off with a neat little bow.¹⁸ In Valerius's Flavian epic, the first ship and first sea-voyage are so belated that human morality has begun to collapse long before the Argo can take the blame.¹⁹

This should not be taken to imply that the Argo's voyage is no longer a sinful affair for Valerius; she simply is not responsible for initiating humanity's moral decline. On the cosmic level, her voyage does still have seemingly negative repercussions, as she, like the traditional Roman Argo, travels through a carefully-structured world where seafaring was never meant to happen,²⁰ removing boundaries imposed by nature and the gods (e.g., V. Fl. 2.613–20), allowing disparate elements and peoples to mingle (V. Fl. 4.711–13), and enabling both *commercica* and foreign wars (V. Fl. 1.245–47, 1.544–46, 1.556–57). But there is, all the same, a significant change from the Roman tradition, in that the Argo's voyage now occurs under the auspices of Jupiter. Thus Valerius's Argo becomes something that she has not been since the Greek Argonautic tradition: the instrument of Jupiter's will.

15 Cf. *Ov. Met.* 1.151–55.

16 Cf. Hes. *Op.* 135–36 (on the Silver Age); see Gee 2013, 21–29, and Van Noorden 2015 on the Aratean collapse of the Hesiodic system of ages which becomes so influential for the Roman poets' "bipartite gold and then-everything-else pattern" (Gee 2013, 25).

17 Cf. *Catul.* 64.399–404; *Ov. Met.* 1.141–48. The passages I cite are those that, temporally speaking, occur prior to the Argo's launch. Here I reach a different conclusion from Seal 2014, 122–26, who proposes that "close examination of Valerius' poem ... shows that he follows these models in connecting navigation with the advent of violence between kin and friends, against a background in which other forms of violence are already common" (122); apart from this, however, I am largely sympathetic to his arguments.

18 This is in clear contradistinction to, for instance, the prelapsarian sailing of the Argo at Sen. *Med.* 309–39; *contra* Feeney 1991, 330, who asserts that the *Argonautica* "enacts the inauguration of Jupiter's own Iron Age with the sailing of the first ship."

19 See Seal 2014 for a salutary reminder that Valerius nowhere unquestionably designates the Argo as the first ship, although I am less skeptical than he that various references to the Argo's primacy ought to be taken at face value; and it is undeniable that we are at least meant to think of this tradition, only for it to be later complicated by the Lemnians' history of sailing and the Colchians' readily-deployable navy (see Thomas 1982 and O'Hara 2007, 33–44, among others, for the trope of bringing to light mutually-incompatible Argonautic traditions).

20 At least not according to Neptune and the Winds: V. Fl. 1.211–17, 598–607, 641–50 (with Zissos 2006). See Ganiban 2014 on the recalibration of Jupiter's dominant, post-Vergilian concerns within the epic, and see Krasne 2014b on Jupiter and Neptune's fundamentally incompatible views concerning the state of the world's completion.

It is paradoxical that Jupiter, a Stoic reflex of Nature and the god who ought to be the most concerned with maintaining cosmic order, who did in fact impose cosmic order when he came to power,²¹ actually approves of and even sponsors the Argo’s destabilizing voyage. But this is a Jupiter who is tired of the Golden Age’s *otia* and rejoices at the coming of universal war and constant change (V. Fl. 1.498–560);²² he boasts of his intentions to set the world spinning, entrenching the cosmos in a state of perpetual flux. Jupiter has, apparently, organized the cosmos simply to disorganize it according to his desires and his rules, and the visible traces of this process are what we shall examine in what follows.

1 The Sky is Falling

The first indication we receive of the cosmos’s eternal instability comes at the very end of the epic’s first book, as Valerius describes the organization of the infernal realms (V. Fl. 1.827–31):

cardine sub nostro rebusque abscisa supernis
Tartarei sedet aula patris, non illa ruenti
accessura polo, uictam si uolueret molem
[Jupiter et primae uelit omnia reddere massae 829b]
ingenti iacet ore Chaos, quod pondere fessam 830
materiem lapsumque queat consumere mundum.

829 uolueret ω] soluere *Heinsius (Lieberman)* || 829b C] *om.* γ || 830 iacet γ] placet *Ehlers* iuuet *Sudhaus*

Beneath our cardinal, and cut off from the things above, sits the palace of the Tartarean father. It would not come near the downward-rushing sky, even if ... sent the conquered mass tumbling [and Jupiter should wish to return all things to their primordial stew]. Chaos

21 For instance, Jupiter puts a stop to the Winds’ old habit of rendering sea and sky indistinct by appointing them a king (V. Fl. 1.586–93). Now, they can only cause temporary chaos within the strictures of Jupiter’s rule.

22 He is not very different, in fact, from the Jupiter of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*—a Jupiter who is not a force of stability and order and who does not have the best interests of mankind at heart, but is rather a chaotic force of perpetual change (see Rhorer 1980, 304–5; Tarrant 2002; O’Hara 2007, 108–14). It is, however, possible that change (and all that goes along with it) is neither an evil nor a good for Valerius’s Jupiter; rather, it just is. I explore below some ramifications of Jupiter’s attitude; see Río Torres-Murciano 2010 and Ganiban 2014 for further assessment of Jupiter’s priorities.

lies there with his huge mouth, which could engulf matter grown weary from its weight, and the collapsed cosmos.²³

This entire passage is a notorious textual crux,²⁴ but no matter how we emend the text, Valerius significantly allows for the possibility that the entire cosmos (*mundus*)²⁵ could, at any moment, collapse and be subsumed by Chaos; he rephrases the concept three times in quick succession, with *ruenti polo* (V. Fl. 1.828–29), *uictam molem* (V. Fl. 1.829), and *lapsum mundum* (V. Fl. 1.831). This notion that the *mundus* could come tumbling down around our ears, back into the Chaos from which it arose, smacks of *ekpyrosis*, where the framework of the universe grows weaker and weaker as its bonds senesce until all things rush into ruin; in Valerius's text, the *fessa materies* of the *mundus* is particularly suggestive of this Stoic cosmic collapse. An additional line found in Carrio's manuscript (V. Fl. 1.829b) only adds to the same notion: Jupiter could decide on a whim to return the universe to its primordial stew, the *massa* from which—as Ovid tells us—all things arose.²⁶ The focus here narrows toward the moment of collapse, which Valerius recapitulates two or three times in the space of as many lines.²⁷ An array of intertexts heightens the notion of cosmic instability inherent in this short description of Chaos; in particular, the image of a collapsed cosmos rushing towards chaos finds precedent in Lucan's description of Rome's rush towards civil war and ruin (Luc. 1.67–81) and the *Octavia*-poet's vision of *ekpyrosis* prior to *palin-gensis* ([Sen.] *Oct.* 391–94), the former underscored by the specific verbal echo of *sub pondere lapsus* (Luc. 1.71) in *pondere fessam | materiem lapsumque ...*

²³ All translations are my own. For the text of Valerius, I follow Liberman, except as noted; critical apparatus and sigla, where relevant, are adapted and simplified from Liberman.

²⁴ See Poortvliet 1991b, 38–40; Liberman 1997, 176–77 n. 164; Kleywegt 2005, *ad loc.*; Zissos 2008, *ad loc.* Emendations of various words have been proposed, while Schenkl 1871, 13, and Poortvliet detect a double recension, with 827–29 and 830–31 as alternate versions; for extended (and relatively balanced) discussions, see Kleywegt 1991, 152–55, and Zissos 2008, 413–14. Whatever the infelicities of the lines as they stand, I do not think that the parallelism of the two couplets need be a mark in their disfavor.

²⁵ See Puhvel 1976 on the semantic connections between *mundus* and κόσμος, as well as the application of *mundus* to the nether realm.

²⁶ *inque nouas abiit massa soluta domos* (“and the primordial stew, separated, went into new abodes,” Ov. *Fast.* 1.108).

²⁷ This seeming redundancy may look to Lucan's repetitive tendencies (Mayer 1981, 13; Asso 2010a, 29; Dinter 2012, 138–39); the apparent paradox between *non illa ruenti | accessura polo* (V. Fl. 1.828–29) and *Chaos ... lapsum ... queat consumere mundum* (V. Fl. 1.830–31) only increases the feeling of instability. The idea of cosmic sublimity shading into cosmic collapse, in a post-Lucanean world, is well illustrated by Siobhan Chomse's chapter in this volume (ch. 18).

mundum (V. Fl. 1.830–31).²⁸ Accordingly, Valerius’s description of cosmic collapse simultaneously evokes Rome’s inexorable progression into civil war, as the *mundus*, like Lucan’s Rome, comes tumbling down under its own weary *pondus*.²⁹

This brief and striking glimpse of unmitigated apocalypse is all we get before Valerius shifts away from this hypothetical future to a brief geography of the underworld, including the twin gates through which dead souls pass into the realm of Hades (V. Fl. 1.832–35):

*hic geminae aeternum portae quarum altera dura
semper lege patens populos regesque receptat;
ast aliam temptare nefas et tendere contra:
rara et sponte patet.* 835

Here there are, eternally, twin Gates, one of which, always lying open by harsh law, receives peoples and kings; but it is unspeakably wrong to try the other and strain against it. It opens rarely and of its own accord.

While this passage and its continuation at 1.846–50 have an undeniable debt to Vergil’s descriptions of the exit from and entrance to the Underworld (Verg. *A.* 6.548–81, 893–96), its intertextual ancestry is more complex than that, and the

28 These passages are, in turn, indebted in particular to Lucr. 1.1052–113 (as a counterexample, since Lucretius distinguishes between the indestructible cosmos and the destructible world), Ov. *Met.* 2.295–300, and Sen. *Dial.* 6.26.5–6. It is likely that Valerius had these passages in mind, as well. The trajectory of downward collapse reverses the cosmogonic motion of separation visible in, for instance, Ov. *Fast.* 1.103–20 and Ov. *Met.* 1.7–56, to which the passages from Lucan and the *Octavia* also make allusion (in particular through the phrases *antiquum chaos* [Luc. 1.74] and *caecum chaos* [[Sen.] *Oct.* 391], as well as in their shared reference to the moon as Phoebe [Luc. 1.77, [Sen.] *Oct.* 389; cf. Ov. *Met.* 1.11]). Man. 1.125–70 is additionally a significant antecedent for Valerius, with a curious contrary parallel in Man. 1.168–70, where the poet affirms that due to the equal centripetal *cadendum* of the cosmos, its *medium et imum* cannot fall. (Hosius 1893, 393, notes Lucan’s debt to these lines of Manilius at Luc. 9.469–71, in his description of the African sandstorm.) If we read *soluere molem* at V. Fl. 1.829, it echoes Man. 1.718, a hypothetical image of the Milky Way as revealing cracks in the universe; even without this reading, however, Manilius’s entire discussion of the Milky Way stands behind this passage, as I plan to discuss elsewhere.

29 Further supported by Pluto’s address to Fortune in Petronius’s spoof of Lucan: *ecquid Romano sentis te pondere uictam, | nec posse ulterius perituram extollere molem?* (“Do you feel that you’ve been defeated by Rome’s weight and that you’re no longer able to lift off her soon-to-perish mass?” Petr. 120.82–83) On the traditional equation between civil war and societal bodies collapsing under their excessive weight, see especially Woodman 1988, 128–34. Rome and civil war are also implicit in the *Octavia* passage, where the image of *ekpyrosis* hints at Rome’s own conflagration in both the literal flames of 64 CE (see Williams 1994, 190–91) and the metaphorical flames of civil war (Ginsberg 2017, 87); cf. n. 11.

parallels hint at not just cosmic collapse, but civil war. When Valerius describes his own subterranean *mundus*, here and elsewhere,³⁰ it clearly draws on not just his more immediate Vergilian model but also the Hesiodic original (Hes. *Th.* 721–814), not least through Valerius's allusion to the implicit Hesiodic etymology of χάος from χάσκω (gape, yawn) with *ingenti iacet ore Chaos* (V. Fl. 1.830).³¹ Furthermore, the *gemmae aeternum portae* which sit next to Chaos, one gate open and one gate shut, allude not only to Vergil's famous *gemi-nae Somni portae* (Verg. *A.* 6.893) but to his *gemmae Belli portae* (Verg. *A.* 7.607)—the gates of the Temple of Janus (Verg. *A.* 7.610), the god formerly known as Chaos (Ov. *Fast.* 1.103–12). By collapsing the two sets of twin gates into one, Valerius problematizes their open/shut duality; the ever-open nature of the infernal *ge-minae portae* is a *topos*, but the ever-open nature of Janus's *gemmae portae* is traditionally a problem.³² At Verg. *A.* 7.620–22, moreover, Juno had burst open the gates of war, starting the quasi-civil war between Trojans and Latins and taking on the role of Ennius's *Discordia* (Enn. *Ann.* 225–26 Sk.), a goddess who, being generally associated with strife both civil and elemental, was not dissimilar to the post-Hesiodic Chaos (cf. Enn. *Ann.* 220–21 Sk.).³³ By doubling the referent of his *gemmae portae* allusion, therefore, Valerius suggestively imports multiple versions of strife into his Underworld.

This connection between civil strife and Chaos is augmented just a hundred lines later (V. Fl. 2.82–91):

tempore quo primum fremitus insurgere opertos
caelicolum et regni sensit nouitate tumentes
Iuppiter aetheriae nec stare silentia pacis,
Iunonem uolucris primam suspendit Olympo, 85
horrendum chaos ostendens poenasque barathri.

³⁰ Most clearly in a simile at V. Fl. 3.224–28.

³¹ See West 1966, 192–93 *ad Hes. Th.* 116, on the etymology. Zissos 2008, *ad loc.*, sees Valerius's use of the term *Chaos* here as indebted to Ovid's metonymic use of *Chaos* for *infera* at *Met.* 10.30, but I would defend a more literal and Hesiodic interpretation of Chaos. Also relevant is Ovid's connection of Chaos with Janus, who professes to have charge over the *mundus* and the *ius cardinis* (Ov. *Fast.* 1.119–20); this could explain the somewhat unusual use of *cardo* at V. Fl. 1.827, although the discussion of the four *cardines* at Man. 2.778ff. may also be pertinent (see Kleywegt 1991, 151, and Zissos 2008, *ad loc.*, on the uncertainty of Valerius's precise meaning). Sen. *Her. F.* 662–79 may be an additional source for the description of the Underworld, here.

³² See Nelis 2014, ¶¶14–22, on further layers of intertextuality that accrue to this passage up through Lucan, noting the tradition that the gates “are either opened or closed.”

³³ For Chaos as a state of elemental confusion and strife, see Ov. *Met.* 1.5–21 and *Fast.* 1.103–14, among others, with recent discussion at Ham 2013, 223–36; Ham 2013, 453–56, also re-assesses the association between Ennius's *Discordia* and Empedocles' Neikos.

mox etiam pauidae temptantem uincula matris
 soluere praeuerti Vulcanum uertice caeli
 deuoluit; ruit ille polo noctemque diemque
 turbinis in morem, Lemni cum litore tandem 90
 insonuit.

When Jupiter first sensed the hidden rumblings of the sky-dwellers emerging, and their rage at the newness of his rule, and that the silence of ethereal peace was not staying put, he hung Juno first from swift Olympus, showing her horrible chaos and the punishments of the abyss. Soon, also, he hurled Vulcan, trying to loosen the chains of his fearful mother, from the sheer peak of the sky. He rushed down from the pole, night and day, in the fashion of a whirlwind, when at last he thudded onto the shore of Lemnos.

Here Valerius recalls the Homeric tale of Jupiter dangling Juno from Olympus (*Il.* 15.18–30), but rather than making it a punishment for her persecution of Hercules, he connects it with an insurrection of the gods;³⁴ and indeed, the specific language and situation also recall an earlier passage of the *Iliad* (8.5–27), where Zeus threatens to send into Tartaros any god who disobeys him. There, Zeus also briefly sketches out the organization of the cosmos, with Tartaros as the deep βέρεθρον far below the earth (*Hom. Il.* 8.13–16):

ἦ μιν ἐλῶν ῥίψω ἐς Τάρταρον ἠερόεντα
 τῆλε μάλ', ἦχι βάθιστον ὑπὸ χθονός ἐστι βέρεθρον,
 ἔνθα σιδήρειαί τε πύλαι καὶ χάλκεος οὐδός, 15
 τόσσον ἔνερθ' Ἄϊδεω ὅσον οὐρανός ἐστ' ἀπὸ γαίης·

Or having taken him, I shall cast him into misty Tartaros, very far off, where there is the deepest abyss below the earth, and there are iron gates there, and a bronze threshold, so far below Hades as the sky is from the earth.

Valerius's *barathri* (V. Fl. 2.86) picks up on the Homeric βέρεθρον; it seems that Chaos, which could be synonymous with Tartaros for Roman poets,³⁵ is the place where divine civil strife is punished. Feeney also argues convincingly for allegory in the Valerius passage, applying to it the Stoic reading of Hera's suspension in the *Iliad*, where Jupiter was the lofty *aether* and Juno the *aer* suspended below

³⁴ Yasumura 2011, 39–57, suggests an original connection between the *Iliad*'s mention of Hera's persecution of Heracles and a hypothesized lost tradition in which she sided with the Giants in the Gigantomachy in an effort to overthrow Zeus. Even without accepting the existence of such a version, the connection between the Homeric chaining of Hera, the fall of Hephaestus, and an insurrection of the gods is demonstrated by Lang 1983, 147–55, and developed in Yasumura 2011.

³⁵ Tarrant 2002, 359–60; Zissos 2008, 413.

it;³⁶ and I propose that this scene can additionally be interpreted with a view to an additional aspect of the allegory's cosmology, which took Homer's unbreakable chain (δεσμὸν ... ἄρρηκτον, *Il.* 15.19–20) as the force that binds the universe. In particular, *uincula soluere* (V. Fl. 2.87–88) is strongly Stoic language when understood in a cosmological context, *uinculum* translating the Greek Stoic terms δεσμὸς and πνεῦμα,³⁷ while *soluere* translates Greek λύω, namely what happens to these binding forces at *ekpyrosis*, resulting in cosmic dissolution.³⁸ Thus Jupiter, effectively, punishes Vulcan for attempting to destroy cosmic order by loosening the cosmic bindings.³⁹ However, given that Jupiter, who champions the Argonauts' voyage, apparently has no compunctions about causing other cosmic dislocations, it seems as though Vulcan's real crime is either the inappropriate timing of his attempt or that he, rather than Jupiter, was the one attempting to call the shots. Jupiter appears to be less concerned here about preserving cosmic stability than about preserving his own stability as ruler, an impression which only grows as the epic proceeds.

2 Perpetual Motion Machine

Let us turn now to the Clashing Rocks episode, a second major section of the epic which I see as providing evidence of the cosmos's underlying instability. Our first encounter with the Clashing Rocks comes in the form of a prophecy, when Phineus describes the danger awaiting the Argonauts in terms that combine programmatic civil war terminology with equally clear images of cosmic dissolution (V. Fl. 4.561–66, 574–76, 582–83):

36 Feeney 1991, 329; on the Homeric allegory, see Buffière 1956, 115–17. I address other aspects of allegory visible here and in the following episodes in the larger project out of which this chapter arises.

37 See Lapidge 1979, *passim*; for other Latin translations of Stoic terminology, see Lapidge 1979 and Lapidge 1989.

38 Lapidge 1979, 357: “if this binding force were released, the universe would dissolve.” Additional places in Valerius's epic where the language of loosened, shaken, and broken chains holds the potential for resonant Stoic undertones are as follows: *uincla Iouis fractoque trahens adamante catenas* (V. Fl. 3.225), *uincula soluere* (V. Fl. 3.435), *uitalia ... uincula ... soluit* (V. Fl. 4.309–11), *uincula mundi ima labant* (V. Fl. 4.564–65), *cunctaeque tremunt ... catenae* (V. Fl. 7.370), *ruperunt uincula* (V. Fl. 7.569), *nexus ac uincula dissipat* (V. Fl. 7.626).

39 Vulcan's role here may also be relevant to his metonymic existence as the element of fire—namely the very element that will, in the event of *ekpyrosis*, separate out from the moist and overwhelm the cosmic substance.

hinc iter ad Ponti caput errantesque per altum
 Cyaneas. furor his medio concurrere ponto
 necdum ulla uidere rates; sua comminus actae
 saxa premunt cautesque suas. cum uincula mundi
 ima labant, tremere ecce solum, tremere ipsa repente
 tecta uides: illae redeunt, illae aequore certant. 566
 ...
 uix repetunt primae celeres confinia terrae
 iamque alio clamore ruunt omnisque tenetur 575
 pontus et infestis anceps cum montibus errat.
 ...
 ... ‘Pontum penetrauerit ulla
 cum ratis et rabidi steterint in gurgite montes ...’

564 cum ... labant ω] ceu ... labent *Heinsius (Lieberman)* || 566 certant ω] ructant *Taylor-Briggs*

From here, your journey is to the head of the Black Sea and the Cyanean Rocks, wandering across the deep. Their madness is to run together over the midst of the sea, and not yet have they seen any ships: driven to close quarters, they press their own rocks and their own cliffs, when the chains of the cosmos quake at their depths; lo, you see the earth tremble, you see the very firmament⁴⁰ suddenly tremble. They return, they fight over the water. ... Scarcely do they swiftly return to the outermost edge of the land when they rush back with another clamor, and the whole sea is held fast and heaves to and fro with the hostile mountains. ... [A voice foretold to me:] “When any ship will have penetrated the Black Sea and the mad-dened mountains stand fast in the tide ...”

The first word of Phineus’s description of the Rocks is *furor*, a key term of civil war from Horace onwards.⁴¹ Like its equivalents *rabies* and *insania*, *furor* is not synonymous with civil war but equates rather with the madness that leads to it,⁴²

40 While the standard interpretation of *tecta* is “houses,” understanding *tecta* here as a reference to the celestial firmament (i.e., the “roof” of the cosmos) parallels *solum* much better. Although this meaning of *tectum* is largely unparalleled, it is a logical extension of the usual meaning, and a few precedents may be found (Lucr. 2.1110–11; Hor. S. 1.5.103; Ov. *Met.* 2.136; Man. 2.118). This is not to deny the very relevant influence on Valerius here of several descriptions in natural philosophical writings of houses (*tecta*) shaking during earthquakes, for which see below, but the potential cosmic dimension cannot be ignored, and *tecta* can serve a double function.

41 Hor. *Epod.* 7.13; on the pervasive linguistic codification and influence of Horace’s *Epode* 7 in Flavian literature, see the introduction to this volume (p. 9). *Furor* also can be excluded from a more generally bellicose interpretation (cf. Jal 1963, 421 n. 9: “Il est rare de voir le mot appliqué à la guerre étrangère”).

42 On the equivalency between *furor*, *rabies*, and *insania*, see Jal 1963, 421–24; see also Horsfall 2000, 310, on Verg. *A.* 7.461.

in the *Aeneid*, Vergil imprisons *Furor* as symbolic of the notion that Augustus had brought civil war to an end, while Lucan makes *furor* a catchword of civil war's criminality.

Here, *furor* compels the Rocks to *concurrere*, a verb often used of combatants in civil war,⁴³ and when they meet, the repeated reflexive adjectives *sua* and *suas* insist on the self-directed nature of their aggression.⁴⁴ Subsequently, their perpetual motion is elevated to explicit strife with *certant*, another arguably programmatic term of Lucanean civil war,⁴⁵ and they are also generally hostile (*infestis*), as well as *rabidi*. Later, when the Argonauts actually approach the Rocks, the Rocks are *insana* (V. Fl. 4.641), which like *rabidi* reiterates the madness that drives civil war.⁴⁶ Two more key-words of civil war, *nefas* (V. Fl. 4.692)⁴⁷ and *ruina* (V. Fl. 4.695),⁴⁸ accompany the Clashing Rocks' final closure on the tip of the Argo's stern.⁴⁹

Additional imagery of cosmic disarray and dissolution in this extended sequence parallels and reinforces the Rocks' civil war. When the Argonauts first see the Rocks, they appear to be a part of the starry pole fallen into the sea (*saxa neque illa uiris, sed praecipitata profundo | siderei pars uisa poli*, V. Fl. 4.642–43), which echoes Lucan's image of the stars falling into the sea (*ignea pontum | astra*

43 Cf. Luc. 7.196: *inpia concurrunt Pompei et Caesaris arma* (“The impious weapons of Pompey and Caesar clash”). The verb is often used of attacking armies, whether civil or foreign, and of gladiators (see Coleman 2006, 226, on Mart. *Sp.* 31.5), which scholars have seen as a prime thematic image of Lucan's *Bellum Ciuile* (e.g., Ahl 1976, 82–115; Martindale 1981, 74, 79 n. 16); see also Masters 1992, 34–42. Lyne 1974, 60, observes that the only two occurrences of *concurrere* in the *Georgics* refer to the strife of the Winds and to civil war; Vergil's description of the Battle of Actium on Aeneas's shield likens the massive warships to *montis concurrere montibus altos* (“tall mountains clash[ing] with mountains,” Verg. *A.* 8.692), already implicitly suggestive of civil war and perhaps also meant to evoke the Symplegades (cf. Masters 1992, 39). Valerius uses *concurrere* three other times of the Clashing Rocks' motion, at V. Fl. 1.59, 1.630, and 8.196.

44 See Krasne 2014a on other ways in which the Rocks embody civil strife and self-directed aggression.

45 *certatum* appears in Lucan's proem (Luc. 1.5). Taylor-Briggs 1995 proposes emending *certant* to *ructant*, however.

46 Perhaps tellingly, the wind Boreas had earlier applied *insana* to the Argo herself, for her rash temerity in breaching the waters (V. Fl. 1.605).

47 Ganiban 2007, 34: “During the Triumviral period and the beginning of the Augustan age, *nefas* and the related word *scelus* become important synonyms for civil war.”

48 Masters 1992, 157: “a favourite civil-war word to describe various grades of catastrophe.”

49 In Krasne 2014a, I argue that the Rocks' partial destruction of the Argo's stern is an event parallel to civil war and that the Argo's eventual catasterism, which is inverted, also implicitly embodies stellar disarray, a typical sign of cosmic disorder.

petent, Luc. 1.75–76) and suggests cosmic collapse.⁵⁰ It also rearranges the cosmos on a more fundamental level, by inverting the expected arrangement wherein the sky and stars are above the ocean, not in it.⁵¹ This picks up on two tropes of cosmic disarray, the displacement of the stars and the mixing of elements.⁵²

Furthermore, Phineus's description of the Rocks' concussions (V. Fl. 4.563–66), quoted previously, makes clear their threat to cosmic order, as he employs explicit Stoic terminology similar to that with which Lucan had depicted cosmic dissolution and Rome's collapse (Luc. 1.79–81). One phrase in particular, *uincula mundi ima labant* (V. Fl. 4.564–65), is loaded with cosmological import; as we have seen, *uinculum* is an important Stoic term, and *mundus* is parallel to κόσμος.⁵³ Every time that the Clashing Rocks clash together, therefore, cosmic dissolution is threatened, as the foundations of the *uincula mundi* totter and set off seismic tremors that pick up on Lucretius's, Seneca's, and the *Aetna*-poet's natural-philosophical descriptions of cosmos-threatening earthquakes:⁵⁴

Lucr. 6.546–49, 568–74:

quippe cadunt toti montes magnoque repente
 concussu late disserpunt inde tremores.
 et merito, quoniam plaustris concussa tremescunt
 tecta uiam propter non magno pondere tota,
 ...
 quod nisi respirent uenti, uis nulla refrenet
 res neque ab exitio possit reprehendere euntis.
 nunc quia respirant alternis inque grauescunt 570
 et quasi collecti redeunt ceduntque repulsi,
 saepius hanc ob rem minitatur terra ruinas
 quam facit; inclinatur enim retroque recellit
 et recipit prolapsa suas in pondera sedis.

Indeed, whole mountains fall, and therefrom tremors suddenly ripple far and wide at the great concussion. And rightly so, since entire houses next to a road tremble, shaken by wagons of no great weight. ... But if the winds were not to pause for breath, no force would rein

⁵⁰ Gee 2013, 127, sees Lucan's image as one of all the stars becoming disorderly planets, on an Aratean model; this may be underscored by my reading (Krasne 2014a, 43–44) of the sunken stars as recalling Aratus's epic.

⁵¹ See also Slaney 2014, 445.

⁵² See n. 7.

⁵³ See n. 25.

⁵⁴ See also the sources on earthquakes collected by Seewald 2008, 262–63 *ad* Luc. 9.466–71.

things back, nor could it keep things in motion back from destruction; now, because in alternation they pause for breath and increase in force, and they make a sally as if marshalled and withdraw as if driven back, on account of this the earth threatens collapse more frequently than it actually happens; for it tilts in and recoils backwards and, having swayed forward, recovers a stable and solid position.

Sen. *Nat.* 6.1.4–5:⁵⁵

quid enim cuiquam satis tutum uideri potest, si mundus ipse concutitur et partes eius solidissimae labant? si quod unum immobile est in illo fixumque, ut cuncta in se intenta sustineat, fluctuatur; si quod proprium habet terra perdidit, stare, ubi tandem resident metus nostri? ... consternatio omnium est, ubi tecta crepuerunt et ruina signum dedit. ... quam latebram prospicimus, quod auxilium, si orbis ipse ruinas agitat, si hoc quod nos tuetur ac sustinet, supra quod urbes sitae sunt, quod fundamentum quidam mundi esse dixerunt, discedit ac titubat?

For what is able to seem secure enough to anyone, if the cosmos itself is shaken and its most solid parts quake? If that part of it which is unified, immovable, and fixed, so that it holds steady all things directed towards itself, should waver; if the earth has lost that which it holds as its core property—standing still—when at last will our fears subside? ... There is consternation for all, when houses have rattled and collapse has been heralded. ... What hiding place do we see, what aid, if the world itself sets collapse in motion, if that which protects and supports us, above which cities have been placed, that which some have called the foundation of the cosmos, separates and totters?

Aetna 171–74:

hinc uenti rabies, hinc saeuo quassa citatu
 fundamenta soli trepidant urbesque caducae.
 inde, neque est aliud, si fas est credere, mundo
 uenturam antiqui faciem, ueracius omen.

Hence the wind's madness, hence the foundations of the earth, shaken by the savage onslaught, tremble, as do collapsible cities. Then there is no other truer omen, if it is right to believe it, that the world will regain its ancient appearance.

All three authors transition rapidly between the earthquake itself and the closely-related potential for universal destruction;⁵⁶ their precise language describing the shaking and the imminent collapse is clearly influential for Valerius. But Seneca and Lucretius in particular demonstrate that instability is not itself an automatic cause for concern, Seneca observing a few paragraphs later that nature conceived

⁵⁵ Cf. also Sen. *Nat.* 6.22.

⁵⁶ Lucretius loosely distinguishes between the *mundus*, which is destructible, and the *summa summarum*, which is not; on the complexities of his terminology in this matter, see Fowler 2002, 154–56.

of nothing as unmovable (*nihil ita ut immobile esset natura concepit*, *Nat.* 6.1.12), and Lucretius noting that the earth threatens to collapse more frequently than it actually does so (*Lucr.* 6.572–73). However, Seneca also acknowledges here that a characteristic property of the earth is *stare*, to stand still (*Sen. Nat.* 6.1.4). Normally, therefore, the cosmos weakens and dissolves only periodically,⁵⁷ since otherwise the so-called cosmos would be merely a temporary departure from chaos; the Rocks’ perpetual and unceasing threat of dissolution is, therefore, troubling. Alternatively, a different view of the problem is provided by the Lucretian passage, where he conversely emphasizes the *security* provided by the constant motion, which is caused by the alternating “breathing” of winds (*Lucr.* 6.568–74).⁵⁸ On this model, it is the Rocks’ eventual cessation that becomes problematic, albeit differently so, as it is the winds’ continued alternating inhalations and exhalations that allow the cosmos to persist: were motion to stop (whether the motion of the winds or the motion of atoms), all would come tumbling down.

In Valerius’s epic, the interminable civil-war-like conflict of the Clashing Rocks is part of the divinely-decreed construction of the completed cosmos, being all that divides East from West; but it is Jupiter who oversees its cessation. Therefore, paradoxically, this perpetual (rather than occasional) threat of cosmic disorder (on a Senecan reading) is itself a part of cosmic order,⁵⁹ suggesting that Valerius’s Argonautic cosmos resembles what Gee describes as “a universe [that is] ethically and cosmologically defective under the pressure of civil war.”⁶⁰ The paradox grows: the Argonauts, in the mode of their Greek counterparts, help to impose stability on the cosmos by passing through the Clashing Rocks and putting a stop to their eternal civil war, but they simultaneously impose disorder on the cosmos by bursting through the most famously impenetrable *discrimen* of all, allowing East and West to mix (and, on a Lucretian reading, increasing the

57 The rest of the time it “remains stable and secure” (Lapidge 1989, 1396). Even earthquakes follow the same periodic law. Earthquakes are one sign of *ekpyrosis* at *Sen. Dial.* 6.26.6.

58 O’Brien 1969, 124–26, argues for a world breath as part of Empedocles’ cosmic cycle; if correct, that concept may stand behind Lucretius’s image here.

59 The cosmic import is more or less the same regardless of whether we follow the MSS reading of *cum* or adopt Heinsius’s generally accepted emendation of *ceu*, although *cum* makes the tottering of the *uincula mundi* less notional and more concrete (appropriate in a Stoic context); however, Murgatroyd accepts the grammatical argument of Taylor-Briggs 1995 for retaining *cum* as a *cum inversum*.

60 Gee 2013, 145.

likelihood of collapse),⁶¹ as instability and fixity become inverted. The destruction of *discrimina* and the resultant cosmic disarray are, moreover, the precise crime that Seneca and Lucan had laid at the Argo's feet.⁶² Valerius is pre-writing the worlds of his predecessors.⁶³

3 Sing Down the Moon

The third major threat to cosmic order that exists in the epic is the sorcery of Medea. As is standard for witches, Medea's powers threaten the ordinary workings of the universe, destabilizing the very features which traditionally mark out order, such as the stars and sun (V. Fl. 6.439–48):⁶⁴

sola animo Medea subit, mens omnis in una
uirgine, nocturnis qua nulla potentior aris. 440
illius ad †fremitus† sparsosque per aera sucos
sidera fixa pauent et aui stupet orbita Solis.
mutat agros fluuiumque uias, †suus† alligat ignis
†cuncta sopor† recolit fessos aetate parentes
datque alias sine lege colus. hanc maxima Circe 445
terrificis mirata modis, hanc aduena Phrixus
quamuis Atracio lunam spumare ueneno
sciret et Haemoniis agitari cantibus umbras.

439 mens ω] spes *Bury (Lieberman)* || 441 ad fremitus C] ad fretus *L (Lieberman)* alia alii || 443 ignis L] igni C illi *Zinzerling (Lieberman)*

Medea alone enters [Juno's] thoughts, all her mind is on the one virgin, than whom none is more powerful at the nocturnal altars. At her †roars†⁶⁵ and juices sprinkled through the air, the fixed stars grow pale, and the orbit of her grandfather Sun is dumbfounded. She transforms fields and rivers' courses. †Her† fire binds †all things; sleep† tends to parents, wearied

⁶¹ See Krasne 2014b, 561–62, on the opposite Greek and Roman implications of the Argonauts' stiling of the Clashing Rocks. For an alternative contemporary perspective, that the ocean was an invading force disrupting the land's (now the lands') unity, cf. Plin. *Nat.* 6.1–2.

⁶² See n. 3.

⁶³ See n. 11.

⁶⁴ Cf. Man. 2.46–52 and Luc. 6.461–506, esp. 6.499–500. See, e.g., Lapidge 1979, 368–69, and Gordon 1987 on the connections between witches' activity and cosmic disarray.

⁶⁵ Lieberman prints the reading of *L* for want of a better alternative but notes that the archetype might have “less probably” had Carrio's *fremitus*. If *fremitus* is correct, Medea's powers of cosmic disarray can be linked with the chaos of the pre-Jovian Winds, who characteristically roar (see, e.g., Barchiesi 2005, 186–87; Hardie 2012, 70, 100, 161).

with age, and grants additional spindles without law. Greatest Circe of the terrifying tunes marveled at her; so did the foreigner Phrixus, though he knew the moon to foam with Atracian poison⁶⁶ and shades to be disturbed by Haemonian incantations.

Regardless of any difficulties of interpretation due to textual uncertainties,⁶⁷ it is clear that Medea's sorcerous activities are described exclusively and comprehensively in these terms: she disturbs celestial nature (*sidera; orbita Solis*), she alters terrestrial nature (*agros fluiumque*), and she interferes with human nature (*sine lege colus*).⁶⁸ The phrase *sine lege*, in particular, underscores the acosmia of her magic.⁶⁹ Additionally, Valerius's Medea is not just any witch—she is the most powerful witch in the world (*nocturnis qua nulla potentior aris*, 6.440). Even her aunt Circe is in awe of her,⁷⁰ as was Phrixus, who came from Thessaly and

66 There are three possible ways to understand *Atracio ... spumare ueneno* (see n. 72 for the wider significance of the ambiguity): either the moon foams *because of* Atracian poison (taking *ueneno* as a causal ablative; this is the preference of Fucecchi 1997, 99; cf. also Spaltenstein 2005, 133); or the foam of the moon is *itself* a poison used in Thessaly (taking *ueneno* as an almost pleonastic ablative of specification; this is suggested by the standard interpretation of Luc. 6.669, for which see n. 72, and is the preference of Baier 2001, 207, who still connects the foaming with “Zaubersprüche,” and Bicknell 1984, 68); or moon-foam is just one ingredient in a compounded Atracian poison (taking *ueneno* as a dative; for this cf. Vulcan's use of moon-foam as an ingredient in his “witch's brew” necklace at Stat. *Theb.* 2.284).

67 Although the text of *suus ... recolit* (V. Fl. 6.443–44) is inscrutable and numerous emendations have been proposed, the phrase *alligat ignis* is pleasing for its pertinence to Stoic ideas (or its reversal of them, if *ignis* is accusative or even genitive, as in the comparable ἀκαμάτοιο πυρός μειλίσσεται ἀτυρήν [“she soothes the blast of weariless fire,” A.R. 3.531]; Carrio's manuscript has *igni*, however). I find none of the numerous proposed emendations particularly convincing; accordingly I obelize it, *pace* Liberman. See also Schimann 1997, 121–22 n. 65, for consideration of various readings and their implications.

68 Valerius also emphasizes Medea's tripartite control over the celestial, terrestrial, and infernal regions at V. Fl. 7.329–30. Several of the activities that Valerius attributes to Medea find parallels in future events from her own story: Seneca has her bring a number of constellations down from the sky in order to poison Glauce's gift (*Med.* 694–770), and she famously restores Aeson (and others) to youth and tricks Pelias's daughters into murdering him with the same promise (*Ov. Met.* 7.179–349). Fucecchi 2006a, *ad loc.*, also draws a parallel between *mutat agros fluiumque uias* and Hypsipyle's description of Medea's powers at *Ov. Ep.* 6.87–88. While there is a good deal of overlap too with A.R. 3.531–33 in how Medea's powers are described, as well as with *Ov. Met.* 7.199–209 (of which this passage reads as a distorted summary), Medea's actions in Valerius seem even more sinister. Unlike the Medea of most accounts, Valerius's Medea needs no instigation from Jason to act like her future self.

69 Davis 1980, 77, usefully compares the *certa ... lege* (Man. 1.26) of Manilius's song (and, we might add, his stars).

70 Paradoxically, Circe is called *maxima* (V. Fl. 6.445), although some commentators see *terrificis modis* (V. Fl. 6.446) as an ablative of limitation.

therefore should have been perfectly *au fait* with sorcery. I propose that such an emphasis on Medea's extraordinary power, together with the two specific types of Thessalian magic mentioned at V. Fl. 6.447–48, is meant to help draw Lucan's characterization of his super-witch Erichtho into the text here.⁷¹

While Thessalian witches share many powers throughout the tradition, Lucan is our first source for two elements that are subsequently incorporated into the *topos*: the collection of “moon foam” after drawing down the moon (Luc. 6.500–5)⁷² and the use of actual corpses in necromantic ritual (Luc. 6.619–825).⁷³ The former is characterized as a typical activity of witches which Erichtho eschews (Luc. 6.506–9), while the latter is her way of outdoing the standard practice of merely summoning incorporeal shades (Luc. 6.621–23); in both cases, the extraordinary nature of Erichtho's character and power can be defined by her rejection of the norm as not wicked enough (*hos scelerum ritus ... damnarat nimiae pietatis Erichtho | inque nouos ritus pollutam duxerat artem*, “Erichtho had disparaged these criminal rituals as too pious and had directed her polluted art to unprecedented rituals,” Luc. 6.506–8).⁷⁴ Valerius's Medea, in surpassing these same

71 On Medea's larger debt to Erichtho, see especially Baldini Moscadi 2005, 135–62.

72 It has been variously assumed, in the absence of certainty (cf. Tupet 1976, 101), that the moon's production of foam (*spuma*) is simply a reference to the moon as the source of dew (e.g., Roscher 1890, 86; Fahz 1904, 47; similarly, Spaltenstein 2005, 133, tentatively draws a connection with the moon's inherent moisture); that the *spuma* is a poison or other substance naturally produced by the moon (e.g., Hill 1973, 236; Bicknell 1984, 68; Ogden 2002, 197; Baldini Moscadi 2005, 254); or that the moon's foaming is the result of magical activity (see n. 66). Elsewhere, the foam is explicitly mentioned as such only at Stat. *Theb.* 2.284 and Apul. *Met.* 1.3, as well as in Servius Danielis's note on Verg. *A.* 4.513, where he cites Lucan's *despumet in herbas* (Luc. 6.506); Ovid may refer to Medea gathering frost from the moon (*Met.* 7.268; however, see Baldini Moscadi 2005, 252–58), while Valerius's Medea collects an unspecified substance (V. Fl. 7.330). Lucan's reference to *uirus lunare* at Luc. 6.669 is often assumed to refer to the same substance (e.g., Tupet 1976, 101; Gordon 1987, 239; Ogden 2002, 237; Phillips 2002, 383; Baldini Moscadi 2005, 254–55), an assumption that seems first to occur in medieval commentaries on Lucan that derive from the sixth-century work of Vacca (see *TLL* 7.2.1838.29–33), although the gloss was undoubtedly influenced by Statius's combinatorial *spumis lunaribus* (*Theb.* 2.284).

73 Lucan, although heavily indebted to earlier necromantic episodes such as Hor. *S.* 1.8 and Sen. *Oed.* 548–658, significantly amplifies the necromantic *topos*, in which shades were evoked with a libation of blood and a chant (see Vessey 1973, 242). Erichtho's gruesome and hands-on reanimation of a corpse stands out so vividly against earlier scenes of blood-in-a-ditch-style necromancy that it irrevocably alters the trope of necromantic activity. For the tradition, see Ogden 2002, 123–25, 179–209.

74 Gordon 1987, 238–40, notes that “in Lucan's representation, ‘ordinary’ magic consists of three types of intervention, each improper”—the erotic, the meteorological, and the drawing down of the moon—whereas Erichtho is exclusively “centred upon death and corpses.” Ambühl

“ordinary” Thessalian skills, both of which seem to point explicitly back to Lucan,⁷⁵ is thus suggestive of the trailblazing Erictho.

The recollection of Erictho throws open the windows of allusion, showing us the Thessalian center of Lucan’s world of unremitting strife, where witchcraft and civil war feed each other’s frenzy and hasten cosmic ruin, regardless of the gods’ desires. In fact, according to Lucan, even “ordinary” witches have more power over the workings of the cosmos than Jupiter does (Luc. 6.462–67):

... legi non paruit aether,
torpuit et praeceps audito carmine mundus,
axibus et rapidis impulsos Iuppiter urguens
miratur non ire polos. nunc omnia complent
imbribus et calido praeducunt nubila Phoebo,
et tonat ignaro caelum Ioue.

465

The aether did not obey its law; the forward-rushing cosmos, too, grew sluggish as it heard [the witches’] song, and Jupiter, pushing on the poles impelled on the swift axles, marvels that they are not moving. Now they fill all things with rain and bring clouds in front of fiery Phoebus, and the sky thunders unbeknownst to Jupiter.

The perversions of natural law exercised here by Lucan’s witches erase the fine line between the sublime and cosmic catastrophe.⁷⁶ While the precise balance of power between Medea’s magic and Jupiter’s cosmic regency is, by contrast, left ambiguous within the *Argonautica*,⁷⁷ in looking back at Erictho, we glimpse not only her vertiginous sublimity, but also the sorceress who in turn stands behind Erictho.⁷⁸ Medea’s own future self, the all-powerful sorceress of Senecan (and perhaps Ovidian) tragedy, likewise a catastrophic force of natural perversions.⁷⁹

2016, 307, likewise observes that the already-extraordinary capabilities of Lucan’s witches serve to throw Erictho’s even greater talents into stark relief.

75 In addition, so soon after Lucan’s epic, *Haemoniis ... cantibus* (V. Fl. 6.448) must evoke thoughts of Erictho, who closes her necromantic procedure *cantu ... Haemonio* (Luc. 6.693–94); Fucecchi 1997, 99 *ad* V. Fl. 6.448 draws attention to Valerius’s unique echo of Lucan here. More generally, Vessey 1973, 248, notes in connection with Valerius’s first necromantic scene (V. Fl. 1.774–817) that “the presence of the Thessalian witch reminds a reader of Lucan”; cf. Dinter 2009, 559.

76 See Day 2013, 102–4, on the sublimity of Lucan’s witches.

77 V. Fl. 8.72–73 may give Medea the upper hand; here, Medea claims to have previously subdued *freta, nubila, fulmina*, and *toto quicquid micat aethere*, a cosmos-encompassing list of *terrena, sublimia*, and *caelestia* (see Sen. *Nat.* 2.1.1) that includes Jupiter’s own weapons and domain.

78 E.g., Paratore 1974; Baldini Moscadi 2005, 91–100.

79 Cf. especially Sen. *Med.* 739–70. Lucan inscribes Medea into Thessaly’s prehistory at 6.440–42, but he may simultaneously implicitly reject a tradition, preserved by the scholia on Ar. *Nu.* 749, that Thessaly’s poisonous pharmacopia originated with Medea’s own collection (see

Medea will ultimately, by the end of Seneca's play, be the most powerful being in the universe (just like Erictho),⁸⁰ leaving Jason with the belief that *nullos esse deos* (Sen. *Med.* 1027). And that "future" Medea is herself representative of Lucanean-style civil war: parent turned against child, symbolically attacking her own flesh, even promising that she will probe her own womb with a sword to discover and expel any unborn fetus (Sen. *Med.* 1012–13).⁸¹ There is, furthermore, an immediate element of kin-strife inherent in Medea's sorcery even as Valerius constructs it: one victim of her magic is her own grandfather, the Sun, a kinship explicitly emphasized by *avi* ("grandfather," V. Fl. 6.442).⁸²

In part, this collection of intertexts serves simply to enhance the ongoing structural destabilization of Valerius's Argonautic cosmos. But for all her power, Medea is, throughout the Argonautic tradition, ultimately the tool of the gods.⁸³ She is Juno's tool to take revenge on Pelias.⁸⁴ She is Venus's tool to continue her revenge against the descendants of Helios.⁸⁵ And in Valerius's *Argonautica*, as it turns out, she also becomes Jupiter's tool, as he takes this Lucanean and Senecan generator of cosmic disruption and kin-strife and releases her into the West. Jupiter's express plan is to have Jason bring Medea back to Greece, setting into motion a Herodotean domino-effect of foreign wars and toppling empires (V. Fl. 1.542–51, 558–60):⁸⁶

adcelerat sed summa dies Asiamque labantem linquimus et poscunt iam me sua tempora Grai. inde meae quercus tripodesque animaeque parentum hanc pelago misere manum. uia facta per undas	545
perque hiemes, Bellona, tibi. nec uellera tantum indignanda manent propiorque ex uirgine rapta <u>ille dolor</u> , sed – nulla magis sententia menti fixa meae – ueniet Phrygia iam pastor ab Ida qui gemitus irasque pares et mutua Grai	550
dona ferat. ...	

Phillips 2002, 379–80). Alternatively, Medea's ability to arrive before her own arrival can be seen as part of the temporal instability of Lucan's Thessaly (see Ambühl 2016, 307) or as a metaliterary conceit.

80 Although Erictho claims that Fortune has more power (*plus Fortuna potest*, Luc. 6.615).

81 Lucan may recall this oath at Luc. 6.558–59, his *extrahitur* echoing Seneca's *extraham*. On Medea as a *locus* for embodying tropes of civil war, see Keith in this volume (pp. 306–8).

82 The change from moon (μήνη) to sun (*Solis*) is one of Valerius's few overt alterations from A.R. 3.531–33.

83 Cf. Zissos 2012, 106–14 (with additional bibliography), on Valerius's Medea specifically.

84 E.g., A.R. 4.241–43.

85 E.g., V. Fl. 6.467–69.

86 Cf. also V. Fl. 4.13–14.

...

arbiter ipse locos terrenaque summa mouendo
 experiar, quae nam populis longissima cunctis
 regna uelim linquamque datas ubi certus habenas. 560

But the last day hastens and we have abandoned tottering Asia, and now the Greeks demand of me their time to shine. Accordingly my oaks and tripods and the spirits of their parents have dispatched this band over the sea. A path is being made for you through the waves and through storms, Bellona. Nor does only the fleece remain a cause for indignation, and next, that grief from the snatched maid, but—my mind has no opinion more fixed—a shepherd will soon come from Phrygian Ida, to bring to the Greeks groans and equal angers and reciprocal gifts. ... I myself, by moving locations and terrestrial power, shall test as a judge which kingdoms I would like to exist the longest for all people, and where I shall reliably leave the granted reins of power.

Medea's own translocation to Greece, a piece of the East brought into the West, is no less analogous to cosmic disarray than the stars falling out of the sky, just as Seneca's chorus laments (Sen. *Med.* 361–79).⁸⁷ Even if Medea may have spent years wreaking havoc with cosmic order in seeming violation of divine decree, it is only a matter of time before she, like the Winds and the Argo herself, becomes another tool in Jupiter's personal arsenal for controlling the destruction of the cosmos and the onset of civil war;⁸⁸ rather than abolishing the threat, he merely harnesses her destructive power to his own ends.⁸⁹

4 Conclusion

And so, in a world where self-aggression and the potential for dissolution are worked into the very fabric of the cosmos, the Argo, which carries Medea back to Greece, is ultimately responsible for triggering the dislocation of natural order that is a necessary part of Jupiter's plan. His plan is to set the world in motion with commerce, wars, and *translatio imperii*, and his strategy is to use the Argo as a catalyst, removing the barriers to forward progress and moving Medea from

⁸⁷ On Seneca's approach, see also Slaney 2014, 435; for Medea as the transmudial bearer of *nefas*, cf. Baldini Moscadi 2005, 94–96.

⁸⁸ See n. 65 for Medea's potential synergies with the Winds.

⁸⁹ Seneca's Medea continues to reshape nature after her arrival in Greece, promising to burn into oblivion the Corinthian Isthmus (*Med.* 35–36).

East to West, developing the latent implications of Seneca's and Lucan's indictments of the Argo's voyage.⁹⁰

Jupiter's plan leads directly, if distantly, to Rome's civil wars and their interminability.⁹¹ Rome will be the prophesied empire which holds the reins of power, but rather than ultimately falling to another empire, Rome will only repeatedly fall to herself;⁹² Vergil's *imperium sine fine*, it turns out, comes with a price. But whereas the Argo's voyage does provoke the succession of empires that ultimately culminates in *imperium et bellum civile sine fine*, the Argo's voyage does not cause the ever-attendant civil war; it is foreign wars that she drags in her wake, newly enabled thanks to the now-open sea (V. Fl. 1.545–46).⁹³ Just as the cosmos has always had the potential to return to chaos, humankind has, it seems, always had the potential to devolve into civil war, but civil war becomes so much worse once there is a non-self-destructive alternative.⁹⁴ Valerius does not, unlike so many Romans before him, try to tease out and label the origins of civil war. Instead, he suggests that civil war has no discrete origin, just as there seems to be no extrinsic cause for the perpetual self-aggression of the Clashing Rocks. Whereas foreign wars are the result of *commercia* and greed and the Argo's own voyage,⁹⁵ civil wars need no motivation. Dissolution is inherent in the structure of the cosmos and plans of the gods, and civil wars are inherent in humankind.

90 See n. 3.

91 Cf. Feeney 2007, 132–33, and Buckley 2010, 433; see also Penwill in this volume (ch. 4), with a much more thorough discussion of the Lucanean influence and allusions.

92 Just as, in the short term, Medea will repeatedly turn her hand against her own flesh in a standard *topos* of civil war (see p. 383 above), so in the long term Rome's citizens will turn their swords against each other time and again, caught in an endless cycle of internal strife; for the trope of Rome's unending civil strife, see most recently Armitage 2017a, 83–84, as well as König in this volume (ch. 8). These near and distant futures are both relegated to prophetic visions and similes in the epic. Mopsus sees Medea's murder of her children twice, and it is also depicted on the door of the Temple of the Sun at Colchis; Roman civil war serves as the vehicle of a simile in the midst of the real civil war at Colchis. Absyrtus's murder does not occur within the extant portion of the epic.

93 Quoted above. Cf. Luc. 3.193–94.

94 Cf. the Augustan poetic trope of pleading for war against the Parthians in lieu of war against Rome's citizens; Lowrie 2016, 350, notes that “imperial expansion [is] the conventional antidote to civil war.” We may contrast the evidently “lawful” kin-murder of Valerius's Iazyges (V.Fl. 6.122–28), which Gesander touts as a preferable alternative to foreign wars (V. Fl. 6.323–39); for the paradox of this, see Buckley 2010, 447–50. For Lucan, because Rome's *urbs* is analogous to the *orbis*, foreign war—enabled by the Argo—becomes another manifestation of civil war.

95 Valerius's Arimaspoi seem still to live in the Golden Age of innocence, before their discovery of gold: *et qui tua iugera nondum / eruis, ignotis insons Arimaspe metallis* (V. Fl. 6.130–31). However, ironically, they are already participating in a civil war, contrary to the suggestion of Ovid and others that the discovery of precious metals caused civil war (e.g., Ov. *Met.* 1.140–50; cf. Slaney 2014, 434, on the connection between seafaring, *avaritia*, and civil war).