

Clothing Intertexts and the Epic Tradition in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*

In his *Argonautica*, Valerius Flaccus makes use of many different intertexts to integrate himself into the Latin literary tradition and align himself with different previous authors. His use of intertexts centered on cloth and clothing do significant work here, both because of the prominence of these intertexts within the poem and because of the close metaphorical alignment between weaving cloth and writing poetry (Guilleux 2016). Through his choices of source authors for cloth intertexts, Valerius Flaccus connects his poetry to Vergil's *Aeneid* more than Catullus (Poem 64) or even to Apollonius, signaling his goal of writing an epic poem rather than model his work after the more elegaic poetry of Catullus.

Don Fowler describes the two key criteria of a reasonable intertext as “markedness and sense,” (1997); a pattern of sense often arises when several intertexts along a theme are combined into one place. This is the case for Valerius Flaccus' use of clothing intertexts, which when viewed together provide a consistent picture of his overall goal to connect himself to Vergil's traditional epic poetry. The use of cloth and clothing for these intertexts is particularly meaningful for this project, as weaving is often used as a metaphor for speech and writing poetry in particular. (Zissos 1999, Zissos 2017) The particular intertexts involved in this study are Hypsipyle's gift of a cloak to Jason (2.409-17), which recalls Vergil's similar ekphrasis of Canthus' cloak in *Aeneid* 5, and the description of Castor and Pollux's cloaks in Book 1, which recalls *Aeneid* 4. Additionally, the ekphrasis of the carvings on the Argo contain their own clothing intertexts, referencing Thetis' veil on her way to the wedding in a way that recalls both *Aeneid* 6 and a later scene in the *Argonautica*. Each of these intertexts is tightly tied to the *Aeneid*, even when it would seem more natural to connect them to Catullus 64, which contains

several famous ekphrases of cloth. Through each of these intertexts, Flaccus consistently connects himself and his characters to Vergil and the *Aeneid* while distancing from both his source material from Apollonius and Catullus' epyllion. This strange contrast indicates that Valerius Flaccus is attempting something very specific and more complicated than simply demonstrating his command of poets who have gone before; rather, in consistently identifying himself as an epic poet contrary to the Callimachean program, Flaccus constructs a picture of Rome in the age of Vespasian that, like Vergil's *Aeneid*, attempts to restore stability and glory to the empire after a civil war (Stover 2012).

Taking Stover's thesis that the *Argonautica* was written partly from political motivations, Valerius Flaccus' attempts to emphasize his connection to the other great epic of imperial Rome become an indicator of the image he was trying to craft for the Roman people as well as just for his poetry. By tightly tying his clothing descriptions to Vergil and continually distancing them from Catullus, Flaccus uses a commonplace but powerful metaphor in Latin poetry to serve this political goal and weave a new epic for the Flavian dynasty.

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