

The Fault was in their Stars: Evil, Forewarning, and the *Ekpyrosis* in Valerius Flaccus'
Argonautica

In this paper I examine the relationship between the nature of evil and astral justice in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*. The presence of evil in the world of the Argonauts is undeniable, but it is not limited to the wicked actions of their foes, I argue that it is an incipient force about to engulf their whole mythic universe. Valerius characterizes evil in the poem as cosmic by setting his version of the myth well into the Iron Age. In Apollonius' *Argonautica*, which Valerius is clearly reworking, the Gigantomachia is a recent event, the Argo is not the first ship, and the final fall of Troy, traditionally understood as the event that ushers in the Iron Age, is at least a generation away. Valerius, however, follows the Roman tradition that identifies the Argo as the first ship that heralds the Iron Age. I argue that Valerius connects the mythological Ages of Man to the Stoic cycle of creation and destruction so that the voyage of the Argo is set right before the *ekpyrosis*. Important to Valerius' construction of evil as cosmic is the Stoic notion that human society is directly bound with the fate of nature. Additionally, Valerius expresses the Stoic notion of forewarning through natural phenomena. In particular, I examine the forewarnings of the heavenly bodies and contend that the references to the constellation Virgo, the Pleiades, and the star Sirius all predict the destruction of the world, perhaps even brought on by the voyage. At 2.357-364, Astraea (the Roman Dike), who has already been changed into Virgo, presses Jupiter to cause the setting of the Pleiades as a sign of the coming destruction. Virgo and the Pleiades, are on opposite sides of the Zodiac so that when one constellation is rising the other is setting. I assert that Virgo's desire for the setting of the Pleiades demonstrates her persistent interest in surveilling the injustice of the age from the heavens. Related to this is Valerius' treatment of the longstanding connection (i.e. already in Apollonius) between Jason and the star Sirius (1.681-

685, 5.368-372, 6.605-608). Whereas Sirius is connected to Jason's erotic and heroic traits, I show that Valerius draws on Stoic notions about the star to enhance Jason's destructive qualities. In this way, just like Virgo and the Pleiades, so Sirius also forewarns of the coming *ekpyrosis*.

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