

Lost Boys in Valerius Flaccus's *Argonautica*: Parental Grief and Vergilian Allusion

This paper examines Valerius Flaccus's use of Vergilian intertexts in his narrative of the abductions of Phrixus and Hylas, which he uses to intensify Vergil's preoccupation with the deaths of young men in order to demonstrate the primacy of the *Argonautica* narrative in the chronology of epic and the high cost of Roman war and Roman epic. Vergilian scholarship has long recognized that Vergil is concerned with the loss of the next generation and the cost of founding Rome (Hardie 1993). One of the major ways in which he dramatizes this loss is the motif of death *ante ora parentum* (O'Sullivan 2009). Valerius picks up and expands upon the use of focalizing loss through the parent-child relationship, creating a paradigm of child abductions and grieving parents that runs throughout the *Argonautica*.

The first speech in the *Argonautica* is Pelias's account of a gruesome dream vision he had of Phrixus (1.40-57), which alludes to Hector's ghostly visitation of Aeneas (*Aeneid* 2.274-95). Though Phrixus is alive and dwelling in Aeetes's kingdom, Pelias uses his specter to prompt Jason's departure, which sets off the chain of events that leads to the Greeks coming into contact with the East. This contact is part of the *Weltenplan* Jupiter lays out in Book I, in which he makes a programmatic speech about the way the contact between Asia and Greece will lead to a new age of warfare (1.531-560). Randall Ganniban (2014) points out that Jupiter's speech is another place in which Valerius alludes to Vergil, in this case using a Vergilian framework of all-knowing Jupiter's master plan to problematize Rome's future dominion over the world. The choice of Sol as interlocutor, whose fear for his son is justified, emphasizes the troubling nature of the prophecy, as does his complaint that his son has done nothing wrong, and has in fact

taken Phrixus in and married Phrixus to one of his daughters (1.504-527). Emphasis on this Herodotean East-West conflict places Phrixus and the Golden Fleece alongside the abduction of Io and other events preceding Helen's abduction, making the first abduction a false abduction and destabilizing the "progressive" tone of the epic.

The abduction of Hylas has been extensively discussed as a point of transition for the epic, most notably by Mark Heerink (2015), who reads Valerius's version of the story as an "essential epic," a miniature *Aeneid*, that becomes elegized by Juno and Dryope. To that purpose, he details the numerous allusions that Valerius uses to equate Hylas and Ascanius, establishing Hylas as a young warrior on the brink of manhood during the civil war in Cyzicus. I argue that Hylas is depicted as Ascanius not just to highlight the generic conflict, but to reinforce the parent-child element of his pederastic relationship with Hercules and the parental nature of Hercules's grief, which parallels the grief of fathers like Pelias and Neptune. Hylas's abduction, placed between Acastus's and Medea's abductions, illustrates that Hylas, who in another epic might have been a dead youth or a future inheritor of Roman glory, is turned into another child sacrifice necessary to ensure that Hercules is removed and the epic continues as planned.

As Valerius demonstrates in his depiction of the building of the *Argo* (Stover 2010), he is well aware of the existing literary tradition and consciously situating himself within it. He uses Vergil and the lens of parental grief to demonstrate the personal cost of trade, expansion, and war in Jupiter's *Weltenplan* and in Roman history.

Bibliography

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