



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### Silius versus Valerius: Orpheus in the Punica and the Argonautica

Heerink, M.

**Publication date**

2013

**Document Version**

Author accepted manuscript

**Published in**

Flavian epic interactions

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

Heerink, M. (2013). Silius versus Valerius: Orpheus in the Punica and the Argonautica. In G. Manuwald, & A. Voigt (Eds.), *Flavian epic interactions* (pp. 267-277). (Trends in classics. Supplementary volumes; No. 21). Walter de Gruyter.  
<http://www.degruyter.com/viewbooktoc/product/206280>

**General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

**Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

Mark Heerink

# Silius versus Valerius

Orpheus in the *Punica* and the *Argonautica*\*

## 1. Introduction: Silius and Valerius

Scholars generally agree that Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* was written before Silius Italicus' *Punica*.<sup>1</sup> Particularly because the two Flavian epics were composed so close to each other in time, allusions of Silius to Valerius are to be expected. Whereas Silius' indebtedness to his most important models, and Virgil's *Aeneid* in particular, has received a lot of scholarly attention, the relationship between the *Punica* and Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* has not.<sup>2</sup> This is probably due to the fact that intertextual contact between the two poems is hard to pin down. F. Ripoll has discerned various verbal and thematic parallels, but these are very general in nature, and it is difficult to interpret them as self-conscious allusions.<sup>3</sup> When Ripoll deals with possible 'direct allusions' to Valerius' *Argonautica*, an investigation that he finds 'hardly fruitful', he concludes that 'it is difficult to determine if Silius was thinking specifically about the work of Vale-

---

\* This article was made possible by postdoctoral funding from the Niels Stensen Stichting, Amsterdam, and by a postdoctoral VENI grant of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Pacific Rim Latin Literature Conference 2011 on *Silius Italicus and Flavian Culture* (4–6 July 2011), organized by Bob Cowan at Sydney University, and at the conference *Entre "imitatio" et "intertextualité". Citation et allusion dans la poésie latine*, organised by Valéry Berliincourt, Lavinia Galli Milic and Damien Nelis at the Fondation Hardt in Vandœuvres (31 Oct.–1 Nov. 2011). I would like to thank the organizers and the participants that helped me to improve this paper, in particular Peter Davis, Denis Feeney, Stephen Hinds and Markus Wilson.

1 See Stover 2008, who convincingly argues that Valerius' epic was written between 70 and 80 CE. Silius in all probability started writing the *Punica* shortly after 80 CE (see Marks 2005a, 287–288, also for more bibliography). But see also Wilson in this volume.

2 For the extensive influence of the *Aeneid* on the *Punica* see e.g. von Albrecht 1964, 144–184; Ahl / Davis / Pomeroy 1986, 2493–2501; Hardie 1993; Pomeroy 2000; Ganiban 2009; Klaassen 2009. For the influence of Lucan, Ovid and Statius see e.g. Marks 2009, Lovatt 2009 and Wilson 2004 respectively. See n. 15 below for Silius and Homer.

3 Ripoll 1999 offers the only systematic overview of verbal and thematic similarities between the two epics. For more bibliography on individual points of contact between the two epics see Ripoll 1999, 500 n. 5, and Zissos 2006a, 166 n. 6.

rius'.<sup>4</sup> Only Silius' extensive eulogy of the Flavian emperors at the end of *Punica* 3 exhibits some very striking similarities with the prologue of the *Argonautica*, which suggest direct influence.<sup>5</sup> So it seems clear that Silius at least knew Valerius' epic, but as these encomiastic passages are more or less detached from the narratives proper of both epics, the question remains why hardly any firm contact can be detected in the epics proper. To a certain extent this may have to do with Silius' allusive technique, which, as M. Wilson has emphasized, is rather peculiar:

Compared with other writers of Latin epic, he tends to eschew signposting his intertexts by the technique of 'quotation', that is, by repeating complete phrases or other word collocations from earlier poems. He prefers to signal the intertextual connection by alternative means, in particular, by coincidence of situation and detail rather than wording and, occasionally, by more explicit hints.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of Valerius Flaccus, however, this does not explain why there are not even clearly significant similar situations or points of detail.

In this article, I would like to suggest a different explanation for the relative silence that characterizes the intertextual contact between Silius and Valerius, by exploring the presence of the archetypal poet Orpheus in both epics, which reveals a paradoxical kind of intertextuality.

---

**4** Ripoll 1999, 517: "Après avoir examiné les endroits des *Punica* qui suggèrent une influence latente de Valérius, il convient de se demander si l'on ne peut pas déceler, chez Silius, des allusions directes à des épisodes ou à des personnages de la geste argonautique qui renvoient clairement à l'épopée de son prédécesseur. Or une telle investigation ne s'avère guère fructueuse: on relève bien quelques références à l'expédition des Argonautes, mais il est difficile de préciser si Silius pensait spécifiquement à l'œuvre de Valérius." Cf. Ripoll 1998a, 8: "... l'influence générale de Valérius sur Silius semble tout de même assez limitée."

**5** For the parallels between the two passages see e.g. Ussani 1955, 40–47; Wistrand 1956, 24–26; Ripoll 1999, 515–516, and Zissos 2006a, 166 n. 6, who speaks of the "considerable influence of Valerius' Flavian eulogy ... upon Silius' ..." and conveniently summarizes the striking similarities (Zissos 2008, 82 [on *Arg.* 1.7–21]): "The two passages have in common a flattering comparison with the Julian dynasty (8–9; *Pun.* 3.594–6); praise of Vespasian's British campaigns (7–9; *Pun.* 3.597–8); laudations of Titus and Domitian, dwelling on the former's conquest of Jerusalem and the latter's literary talents (12–14; *Pun.* 3.603–21); anticipation of apotheosis with similar astral imagery (16–20; *Pun.* 3.626–9). Both use *Caledonius* in connection with Vespasian's military command in Britain and *Idume* in connection with the sack of Jerusalem."

**6** Wilson 2004, 226.

## 2. Orpheus in the *Punica*

Orpheus makes three appearances in the *Punica*. The first, brief passage is part of the already mentioned eulogy of the Flavians at the end of book 3. There, after praise of his rhetorical skills, emperor Domitian is praised for his literary skills, and he is in that respect considered superior to Orpheus (3.619–621):<sup>7</sup>

huic sua Musae  
sacra ferent, meliorque lyra, cui substitit Hebrus  
et venit Rhodope, Phoebus miranda loquetur. 620

The Muses shall bring him [i.e. Domitian] offerings, and Phoebus shall marvel at his song – a sweeter strain than his [i.e. Orpheus'] whose music made the Hebrus stand still and Mount Rhodope move on. (trans. Duff 1934)

This passage seemingly has nothing to do with Valerius' *Argonautica*, as it does not evoke the Argonautic expedition at all, but I will return to this passage at the end.

In the other two passages in which Orpheus features in the *Punica* the poet is associated with the Argonautic expedition, and he thus at least brings Valerius' epic to mind. In book 11 the poet is mentioned by the bard Teuthras, who entertains the Carthaginians during their stay in Capua with two songs. In the second song (11.440–480), he sings about the power of poetry, describing legendary poets and their supernatural feats.<sup>8</sup> After Amphion, Arion and Cheiron, Orpheus is dealt with most extensively. After a description of his music's effect on nature, the poet's participation in the Argonautic expedition is dealt with (11.469–472):

quin etiam, Pagasaea ratis cum caerulea, nondum  
cognita terrenae, pontumque intrare negaret,  
ad puppim sacrae, cithara eliciente, carinae  
adductum cantu venit mare. 470

Moreover, when the Argo at Pagasae refused to launch out on the blue water which on land she had never known, the sea, summoned by the lyre, obeyed the music and came up to the stern of the sacred bark. (trans. Duff 1934)

---

**7** On (the ancient sources for) Domitian's literary activity, see e.g. Coleman 1986, 3088–3095. See also Section 6 below.

**8** On this song see e.g. Marks 2010, 192, but in particular the thorough discussion by Deremetz 1995, esp. 418–434.

This passage again brings Valerius' *Argonautica* to mind, where, in the first book, Orpheus also sings to his fellow Argonauts before the start of the expedition (1.277–293). In fact, Orpheus performs the night before departure, ending the festivities and putting the Argonauts to sleep with his song (1.294–295):

iamque mero ludoque modus, positique quietis  
conticuere toris; ... 295

And now there is an end to wine and festivity; outstretched upon quiet couches, the men have grown still; ... (trans. Zissos 2008)

This passage is a reworking of a scene in the first book of Apollonius' *Argonautica* (1.496–511), where Orpheus sings a song to soothe a quarrel between Idas and Jason, also the evening before departure.<sup>9</sup> But neither Apollonius nor Valerius mention any trouble with the launching of the *Argo* the next day, as Silius does; nothing is said about the *Argo* or the sea resisting.

In *Punica* 12, Silius uniquely depicts a historical poet, Ennius, as fighting in the front lines on the battlefield. The famous Roman epic poet is compared by Silius to Orpheus (12.398–402):<sup>10</sup>

is prima in pugna (vates ut Thracius olim,  
infestam bello quateret cum Cyzicus Argo,  
spicula deposito Rhodopeia pectine torsit) 400  
spectandum sese non parva strage virorum  
fecerat, et dextrae gliscebant caedibus ardor.

He [i.e. Ennius] fought in the front (like the Thracian poet long ago, when Cyzicus attacked the *Argo*, who laid down the plectrum and shot Rhodopeian arrows) and had made himself conspicuous by slaying many of the enemy; the ardor of his right hand was growing with the number of his victims. (trans. Casali 2006)

Silius here refers to an event that was extensively told by Valerius Flaccus in *Argonautica* 3. There the Argonauts are mistakenly attacked at night by their former host Cyzicus and his men, only to find out what happened the morning after. Valerius describes several Argonauts fighting, but Orpheus is not among them, which thus creates a striking difference with Silius' passage.

So is Silius alluding to Valerius in these two passages in which Orpheus appears in an Argonautic context? There are no 'markers' such as striking verbal

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Schubert 1998, 273; Zissos 2004a, 73, 75; 2008, 214–215 (on *Arg.* 1.277–93) for comparisons between the two songs.

<sup>10</sup> On this simile, see also Deremetz 1995, 458–460; Ripoll 1999, 517–518; Casali 2006, 573–581; Manuwald 2007, 74–82; Marks 2010, 189–192.

similarities and words in the same metrical *sedes*,<sup>11</sup> to suggest that Silius is alluding to Valerius Flaccus. But there can be no question of coincidence, as the differences between Silius and Valerius in their depiction of Orpheus are so striking, especially when one considers that the *Argonautica* was produced so close in time to the *Punica*. It is, in short, impossible not to think of Valerius.<sup>12</sup> So what is going on then? I would like to suggest that Silius does self-consciously allude to the *Argonautica*, and that the ‘vagueness’ of Silius’ allusions and his different depiction of Orpheus have to do with the different, in fact opposing, poetical agenda of the *Punica* with regard to Valerius’ epic.

### 3. Silius’ poetics

As R. Marks has recently emphasized,<sup>13</sup> Silius Italicus’ *Punica* self-consciously rejects epic on Greek mythological themes, which had become increasingly popular since the end of the Republic, as part of a broader upsurge of a-political, Callimachean poetry. In Augustan Rome, ‘Callimacheanism’ was associated with small-scale genres, such as bucolic and elegiac poetry, which self-consciously opposed epic poetry. In the Flavian period, however, Valerius and Statius “use the Callimachean *recusatio* form not to reject epic in favour of another genre but to reject one kind of epic (epic on contemporary Flavian history) in favour of another (the epics they compose). What this evidence suggests is that in the Flavian period the distinction between mythological and historical epic was being drawn quite sharply.”<sup>14</sup> In contrast to his Flavian colleagues Valerius and Statius, Silius puts his own epic in the waning tradition of Roman-historical epic, the tradition of Ennius in particular, but also Virgil. To a certain extent Homer, whose reincarnation Ennius claimed to be in the proem to his *Annales*, is also an important model, particularly because of the bard’s proven ability to sing the κλέα ἀνδρῶν, which is what both Ennius and Silius aim at: to com-

**11** See in particular Wills 1996, 18–24, 30–31, for the various ways in which allusions can be marked.

**12** I am not dealing here with Silius’ allusions to the Orpheus stories of Virgil and Ovid in *Pun.* 11.459–472, on which see in particular Wilson 2004, 232–234.

**13** Marks 2010. For Silius’ poetics, as expressed by the songs of Teuthras, which function as *mises en abyme* of the *Punica*, see in particular the extensive discussion by Deremetz 1995, 413–474 (ch. 6: “Les chants de Teuthras ou l’acte poétique: Silius Italicus, *Punica*, 11”).

**14** Marks 2010, 191, with reference to Nauta 2006 (on which see also n. 35 below), on the Callimachean *recusatio* in Flavian epic. See also Galli in this volume.

memorate the heroic efforts of famous Romans such as Scipio, who can thus act as *exempla of virtus*.<sup>15</sup>

According to Marks, it is through poet figures in the *Punica*, notably Ennius and Teuthras, that Silius “most clearly articulates his views on poetry and marshals his defence of historical epic”.<sup>16</sup> Silius achieves that by turning these two poets into warriors; this “allows him to address and mend what he sees as one of the major problems facing epic in his times, the disconnection between the genre and history; for the poet-warrior symbolically bridges the world of poetry, which Silius himself inhabits, and the world of history, about which he writes, and thus becomes the perfect vehicle by which to reconnect them”.<sup>17</sup>

As we have seen, Orpheus appears in connection with both Ennius and Teuthras in the *Punica*, so in a very programmatic context. As Orpheus in these passages also evokes Valerius’ *Argonautica*, I will argue that Silius sets off his own poetical agenda not only to Callimachean, mythological epic in general, as Marks has shown, but also reacts specifically to Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica*.

## 4. Silius versus Valerius

When Ennius programmatically appears as a warrior on the battlefield and is compared to Orpheus, Silius aligns himself and his *Punica* with Ennius and the kind of epic poetry on the exploits of Rome that he wrote. Silius and Ennius are of course both epic poets, writing about Roman history, which already suggests a connection between the two, but, as Marks remarks, “Ennius’s very status

---

**15** See e.g. Deremetz 1995, esp. 470–474; Manuwald 2007, 82–88, for the way in which Silius presents himself as a new Homer, as Ennius had done before him. For a systematic overview of Homer’s influence on the *Punica*, see Juhnke 1972. See e.g. Marks 2010, 193, for the way in which Silius’ epic “instills and fortifies in its readers those virtues and ideals that Teuthras undermines in Hannibal and his men: hard work, a thirst for glory, and martial valor, or in Latin *virtus*.”

**16** Marks 2010, 189. See also Deremetz 1995, 458–460, 470–474; Casali 2006, 573–574; Manuwald 2007, for Silius’ programmatic depiction of Ennius as a warrior.

**17** Marks 2010, 190. Cf. Casali 2006, 573–574. For the way in which Teuthras is depicted as a warrior, see Marks 2010, 192: “When we first lay eyes on Teuthras, he look like the typical bard of epic poetry who entertains guests at a banquet and releases them from their cares ... . But once the pro-Roman goddess Venus orders her Cupids to wound Hannibal and his men with their arrows during the banquet (11.385–99), it becomes clear that entertaining the Carthaginians is a way of defeating them and the banquet itself a sort of battle in which Hannibal and his men are to be conquered. ... After the Cupids accomplish this task with the bow (11.410–31), Teuthras next steps onto the battlefield, as it were, with his lyre ... .”

as a poet-warrior invites us to identify Silius with him. After all, if the collapse of the poet and the warrior into one figure implies the collapse of the poet into the martial world about which he writes, then the inference lies readily at hand that Silius is here blurring the distinction between himself, the poet of the *Punica*, and Ennius, about whom he is presently writing.<sup>18</sup> In this context Silius compares Ennius to Orpheus fighting at Cyzicus, a depiction so strikingly different from Valerius' Cyzicus episode, where Orpheus is not present on the battlefield. Silius' *vates ... Thracius* (*Pun.* 12.398) may allude to Orpheus' song in book 1 of Valerius' *Argonautica*, where the poet is denoted as *Thracius ... vates* (*Arg.* 1.277).<sup>19</sup> If this is indeed an allusion, it would emphasize – as well as generalize – the difference between Valerius' Orpheus, who is predominantly a singer in the *Argonautica*, and Silius' fighting Orpheus, a difference that seems significant in this specific context in the *Punica*.<sup>20</sup> I suggest that Silius has transformed Valerius' Orpheus into a poet warrior not only to express his own epic agenda but also to reject Valerius' mythological epic at the same time. This could also explain the sly allusion of Silius, who wants to show the difference from Valerius, but does not want to credit his Flavian adversary too much.<sup>21</sup>

But what about the other appearance of Orpheus in the *Punica* in an Argonautic context? Can this also be explained in this 'anti-Valerian' way? Orpheus is here associated with another programmatic figure, Teuthras, in the second song that the bard sings in Capua for Hannibal and his Carthaginians (*Pun.* 11.440 – 480), on the power of Greek mythological poetry and poets, Orpheus in particular. As A. Deremetz and R. Marks have shown, Teuthras – who, significantly, is from Cumae, a city that has remained loyal to the Romans<sup>22</sup> – helps the Romans

---

**18** Marks 2010, 190. Cf. also Marks' interesting interpretation of Apollo's words (and reference to his future *Annales*) that Ennius 'will raise leaders to the skies' (*attolletque duces caelo*, *Pun.* 12.411) as an allusion to the opening of the *Punica* (1.1–2): *ordior arma, quibus caelo se gloria tollit* | *Aeneadum ...* – 'Here I begin war by which the fame of the Aeneadae was raised to heaven ...' (trans. Duff 1934).

**19** As suggested by Zissos 2008, 216 (on *Arg.* 1.277–8). If Silius here indeed alludes to Orpheus' song in *Arg.* 1 (but the similarity is of course of a very general nature), the allusion could perhaps also be read as a hint by Silius to compare this passage with the other one featuring Orpheus, in Teuthras' song (discussed below), as the situation described there (Orpheus helping to launch the Argo) directly evokes Orpheus' song in *Arg.* 1 the night before departure.

**20** Cf. Manuwald 2007, 79: "By having Orpheus fight on Cyzicus, Silius Italicus includes a reference to a further Roman epic poet, while surpassing him and adapting the available material to his own narrative purposes."

**21** In line with this interpretation, *olim* ('long ago', *Pun.* 12.398) can be read as a rather ironic marker of the allusion to Valerius' singing Orpheus in *Arg.* 1.277 ("in that old mythological stuff!"), as Stephen Hinds suggests to me.

**22** Deremetz 1995, 414.



by weakening Hannibal and his men in Capua, with disastrous consequences for the Carthaginians, who will no longer stand a chance against the Romans after this episode in Capua.<sup>23</sup> As Marks has it: “It is not mere coincidence that Silius chooses a song of this sort to weaken Hannibal and his men; in doing so he can suggest that such poetry, poetry on Greek mythological themes, is morally uninspiring and even destructive.”<sup>24</sup> Orpheus in this passage also clearly brings Valerius’ *Argonautica* to mind – by reference to the Cyzicus episode, which also features in Valerius’ epic, as well as by emphasizing the primacy of the Argonautic journey, an aspect that plays an important role in the Flavian *Argonautica* as is already evident from the epic’s very first word (*prima*, *Arg.* 1.1).<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the allusions are again quite vague, and one gets the impression that Silius also in this passage rejects Valerius’ *Argonautica*. Moreover, Silius has again transformed Valerius’ mythological Orpheus, giving him more power to make him more dangerous, as he is now able to calm the seas and get the *Argo* launched, where Valerius’ Orpheus only sung a lullaby the evening before the departure of the Argonauts. Silius’ changes to Valerius’ Orpheus thus reveal what Silius thinks not only of Callimachean, mythological poetry in general, but also of Valerius’ *Argonautica* in particular.

## 5. Valerius’ Orpheus as *mise en abyme*

But if Silius’ allusions to the *Argonautica* can be read in this oppositional way, why would Silius take on Valerius through Orpheus? Of course, Orpheus is not just a character: he is the mythological poet, as well as an Argonaut, and he is thus ideally suited to represent Valerius’ epic. In fact, already in the *Argonautica* itself Orpheus functions as Valerius’ *alter ego*, the representation of the poet in the text. Of course Orpheus has a rich history of being a *mise en abyme* of the poet, notably in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*.<sup>26</sup> As scholars have often shown, for example, the series of songs Orpheus sings in book 10 of the *Metamorphoses* seem

---

**23** Deremetz 1995, 418–434; Marks 2010, 192. See also Deremetz 1995, 413–418, on the first song of Teuthras (*Pun.* 11.288–302), who interprets the seemingly just pleasant mythological song as in fact a hidden admonition to the Capuans to stay loyal to the alliance with the Romans.

**24** Marks 2010, 192.

**25** I owe this suggestion to Denis Feeney. For the importance of the theme of the *Argo* as the first ship and the inauguration of the sea in Valerius’ *Argonautica*, see e.g. Zissos 2008, 72–73 (on *Arg.* 1.1).

**26** For Orpheus as a *mise en abyme* of Apollonius in the *Argonautica* and of Virgil in *Georgics* 4, see e.g. Albis 1996, 29–31, and Lee 1996 respectively.

representative of Ovid's entire work.<sup>27</sup> Valerius Flaccus' Orpheus sings two major songs, which also seem miniature versions of the epic that contains them. Orpheus' song in the first book, for instance, which has already been discussed briefly, is about Phrixus and Helle (*Arg.* 1.277–293). It is about the prehistory of the Argonautic expedition, and so it is an 'external analepsis',<sup>28</sup> but in a sense, as W. Schubert for instance has noted, it reflects Valerius' *Argonautica* itself, as both stories describe sea voyages involving the Golden Fleece, and as the story of Phrixus and Helle ends in a minor key, so is Valerius' *Argonautica* also 'painted in rather darker colours than Apollonius' epic'.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, as P. Davis has noted, the song can be read "as foreshadowing events to come. After all Phrixus, like Jason, makes his way from Greece to Colchis and marries one of Aetes' daughters."<sup>30</sup>

The song Orpheus sings in *Argonautica* 4, when the Argonauts arrive at the Bosphorus (4.351–421), is about the nymph Io, who, transformed into a cow, is forced to travel east and is eventually deified, as the Egyptian goddess Isis. Valerius thus suggests obvious thematic similarities with the *Argonautica* itself.<sup>31</sup> So Orpheus and his song seem to resemble Valerius himself and his epic. There are also hints of a Callimachean agenda. First of all, there is the aetiological aspect of Orpheus' song – it explains the name of the Bosphorus – which brings Callimachus' *Aetia* to mind. Furthermore, Valerius' song of Io alludes to the extensive version of the same story in Ovid's Callimachean epic *Metamorpho-*

**27** See e.g. Knox 1986, 47–64, but with the perceptive additional comments of Hinds 1989, 269, and Nagle 1988, 111–113, who systematically describes the many similarities between both Orpheus' and Ovid's *carmina perpetua*.

**28** Zissos 2008, 214 (on *Arg.* 1.277–93).

**29** Schubert 1998, 273. Cf. Zissos 2004a, 75: "Orpheus seems to stand here as a figure of the poet himself."

**30** Davis 2009, 10, who continues to "suggest that elements of Orpheus' first song find parallels in both Jason's present and his future. ... Bearing in mind Jason's immediate circumstances, we can note that Pelias, like Athamas, is a relative who attempts to kill a youthful blood relation and that both Jason and Phrixus cross the sea. But the parallels with the future are more comprehensive and more persuasive. Like Athamas, Aetes is a king who attempts to kill a youth. This results in the flight of Jason and Medea from Colchis and Absyrtus' death."

**31** Cf. e.g. Murgatroyd 2009, 178: "Scholars have already pointed out that the bard's splendid song about Io ... continues the epic's themes of wandering and divinely imposed suffering; ... it has ties with Helle, Hercules and Medea elsewhere in the *Argonautica* ... . In addition, it looks back to the previous episode ... and forwards to the following one ... ." See also Davis 2009, 11–12, for interesting parallels between Io and the Argo and between Io and Medea in particular: "... the primary purpose of Orpheus' song of Io in Book 4 is to prefigure the story of Medea, the story which dominates Books 5 to 8 of the *Argonautica*."

ses.<sup>32</sup> And that is not all: Valerius adapts Ovid's version, adding new elements and omitting others, in a way that resembles Ovid's reworking of Virgil's *Aeneid* in *Metamorphoses* 13 and 14, and, as a matter of fact, the way Ovid deals with Virgil's Orpheus story in *Metamorphoses* 10 and 11.<sup>33</sup> To speak with P. Murgatroyd in his commentary on the passage: "Valerius Flaccus is doing an Ovid on Ovid."<sup>34</sup>

Whether or not the 'Callimachean' and 'Ovidian' aspects of this song of Orpheus can be seen as representative of Valerius' entire epic,<sup>35</sup> Orpheus in the *Argonautica* at least in certain respects acts as a *mise en abyme* of Valerius. These two aspects of Valerius' Orpheus – his Callimachean and Ovidian associations and his function as *mise en abyme* – make the character particularly fitting for Silius to criticize Valerius' Greek-mythological epic through Orpheus, as I think he has done in the two passages discussed.

## 6. Epilogue: Domitian and Orpheus

If Silius does indeed allude to Valerius in these passages, we are dealing with a somewhat paradoxical kind of intertextuality, which is quite vague. The reason for this, as I have suggested, is that Silius does not want to allude too much to a predecessor with whom he disagrees on what kind of poetry to write. But how far can one go in interpreting this kind of intertextuality? Could the other passage in which Orpheus features, where Domitian was considered a superior singer to Orpheus (*Pun.* 3.619–621), perhaps also be interpreted as an allusion

---

**32** For the allusions to Ovid see Davis 2009; Murgatroyd 2009, 178–179 (on *Arg.* 4.344–422). For the *Metamorphoses* as a Callimachean (and in particular elegiac) epic see e.g. Knox 1986; Hinds 1987.

**33** For Ovid's 'little *Aeneid*' see e.g. Papaioannou 2005, with pp. 3–16 for a discussion of earlier work. See e.g. Anderson 1982 for Ovid's reworking of Virgil's Orpheus in *Georgics* 4.

**34** Murgatroyd 2009, 179 (on *Arg.* 4.344–422). See esp. Davis 2009 for Ovidian influences in this episode.

**35** I have argued elsewhere (Heerink 2010, 189–206; 2013) that Valerius' reaction to the *Aeneid* in the Hylas episode can be seen as "Callimachean" and can, furthermore, be compared with Ovid's poetics in the *Metamorphoses*, with which Valerius also associates himself in the Hylas episode. As Nauta 2006, 27–30, has argued (see also n. 14 above), Valerius uses, but reworks, the Callimachean motif of *recusatio* in the proem to the *Argonautica* so as to refuse to write a panegyric epic on Titus' exploits in Judea; Valerius is only able to write a mythological epic on heroes of the past. Furthermore, Stover 2010 has recently interpreted the scene describing the building of the Argo (1.120–129) metapoetically as expressing Valerius' allegiance to "the erudition and stylistic exquisiteness characteristically associated with Alexandrian poetry" (p. 643).

to Valerius? Orpheus does not feature here in an Argonautic context, so there is nothing that points specifically to Valerius' epic, except perhaps for the bare mentioning of Orpheus itself. But I just wonder if the passage can be interpreted in a way similar to the other passages concerning Orpheus in the *Punica*. As ancient sources suggest, Domitian was apparently in his youth, before his accession to the throne in 81 CE, engaged in writing poetry.<sup>36</sup> Martial suggests that Domitian wrote an epic *Bellum Capitolinum* on Vitellius' siege of the Capitol in 69 CE,<sup>37</sup> and Valerius hints at an epic about his brother Titus' siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.<sup>38</sup> If Domitian indeed wrote these epics, does Silius in this passage then assert that he prefers Domitian's poetry to that of Orpheus because of its historical, Roman subject matter? And does Silius here again, albeit very implicitly, through Orpheus reject Valerius' *Argonautica* as an example of the kind of epic that he dislikes?

---

**36** Tac. *Hist.* 4.86.2; Suet. *Dom.* 2.2; Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.91. See Coleman 1986, 3088–3095, for an analysis of these (and other) passages concerned with Domitian's literary activity.

**37** Mart. 5.5.7–8: *ad Capitolini caelestia carmina belli | grande cothurnati pone Maronis opus*. – 'Beside the celestial lay of the Capitoline war place the great work of buskined Maro [i.e. the *Aeneid*].' (trans. Shackleton Bailey 1993). Cf. Zissos 2008, 87 (on Arg. 1.12–4): "Mart. 5.5.7 ... evidently refers to an epic by Domitian on the Flavian defeat of Vitellius in 69." Coleman 1986, 3089, suggests that the author of the epic could be Martial's addressee, Sextus, but as Nauta 2002, 327, duly notes, "the term *caelestia* ... can only refer to the emperor."

**38** Arg. 1.12–14: *versam proles tua pandit Idumen, | sancte pater, Solymo nigramtem pulvere fratrem | spargentemque faces et in omni turre furentem*. – 'Your own son [i.e. Domitian], holy father [i.e. Vespasian], sings of Idume overthrown, of his brother [i.e. Titus], black with the dust of Solyma, scattering torches and raging against every tower.' (text and translation: Zissos 2008). We have no other source for such an epic, but cf. Plin. *NH Praef.* 5, who also suggests that Domitian wrote in praise of his brother: *quanto tu ore patris laudes tonas! quanto fratris famam! quantus in poetica es!* – 'How eloquently you thunder forth your father's praises and your brother's fame! How great you are in the poet's art!' (text and translation: Rackham 1938). Waszink 1971 argues, however, that the poem referred to by Valerius is a *Panegyricus Titi* (see also Coleman 1986, 3090–3091).

