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6 Civil War and Trauma in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*

Mark Heerink

Abstract

Valerius Flaccus' Flavian epic *Argonautica* is replete with civil war. In this chapter I will look at one of the most obvious evocations of civil war in the *Argonautica*, the Cyzicus episode in Book 3, which is tainted by the civil wars that followed Nero's death in 68 CE and brought the Julio-Claudian dynasty to an end. In dealing with these traumatic experiences the narrator is inspired by Lucan's Neronian epic on the civil war between Caesar and Pompey, which was written just before the civil wars of 68–69 CE and almost seems to predict what was to happen after the death of Nero.

Keywords: civil war; Valerius Flaccus; Lucan; trauma; Virgil; Cyzicus; intertextuality

Introduction¹

In his ground-breaking book *Acts of Silence: Civil War, Tyranny, and Suicide in the Flavian Epics* (1997), McGuire observes that in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* civil war breaks out, or threatens to do so, at almost every stop

¹ This chapter builds – and is partly based on – Heerink (2016) (see also below). Except when indicated otherwise, the following translations were adopted (and sometimes slightly adapted): Braund (1992) (Luc.); Fairclough and Goold (1999) (*Virg. Aen.*). Translations of Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* are based on Mozley (1936). I add **bold** to mark intertextual contact between passages. When more than one text is alluded to, I also underline and *italicize* words to differentiate between intertexts. I am very grateful to Monica Palmeira, who further developed my initial ideas on reading the Cyzicus episode as trauma literature in her BA thesis (2020), which in turn inspired my own reading of the episode.

along the *Argo's* voyage – at Iolcus, where Jason and Aeson both entertain thoughts of leading a revolt against Pelias (1.71–73 and 1.761); at Lemnos (2.107–310); during their visit with Cyzicus (3.15–332); and at Colchis (all of *Argonautica* 6).²

In this sense the Flavian epic differs markedly from Apollonius of Rhodes' Hellenistic *Argonautica*, Valerius' most important model with regard to plot.³ This omnipresence of civil war suggests a contemporary relevance: written in the Flavian age and dedicated to Vespasian (*Arg.* 1.7–21), Valerius' civil wars seem to be a reaction to the devastating civil wars that followed the death of Nero in 68 CE and brought the Julio-Claudian dynasty to an end.

In this chapter I will look at one of the most obvious evocations of civil war in the *Argonautica* – the Cyzicus episode in Book 3 – to see how these events impacted Valerius' epic, and in particular his reception of his second most important model: Virgil's *Aeneid*. As I will argue, Lucan's recent, Neronian epic on civil war plays a crucial role in this respect. Stover's book *Epic and Empire in Vespasianic Rome* (2012) provided the first systematic account on Valerius' intertextual relationship with Lucan's Neronian epic *Bellum Civile*.⁴ Stover intends to show that the *Argonautica* 'reflects the restorative ideals of Vespasianic Rome, which attempted to restore order following the destructive civil war of 68–69 CE. This proposition sets it apart from the largely "pessimistic" readings of other scholars.⁵ As part of this 'poetics of recovery', Valerius, according to Stover, engages with and corrects Lucan's epic and its destructive poetics on both a poetical level (as an anti-epic) and a historical level (as an anti-imperial poem). Thus, Valerius restores epic after Lucan and supports Vespasian's restoration of the principate after Nero's death and the ensuing civil war. Stover has shown that Lucan is a far more relevant intertext for the *Argonautica* than has previously been recognized, and his book is important for putting the study of Lucan's influence on Valerius in particular and Flavian epic in general more firmly into the research agenda.⁶ In this chapter, however, I will propose a different, pessimistic reading of the influence of Lucan on Valerius, which follows the lead of two articles on

2 McGuire (1997) 92.

3 On civil war in the *Argonautica*, see esp. McGuire (1997) 88–146; Buckley (2010); Bernstein (2014); Seal (2014); Landrey (2018); Penwill (2018).

4 For excellent earlier case studies, see Zissos (2004) and Buckley (2010). See also Stover (2014); Fucecchi (2018); Landrey (2018); Penwill (2018) on Valerius and Lucan.

5 Stover (2012) back cover. Cf. p. vii.

6 For Lucan and Statius, see Stover in this volume, with n. 1 for more bibliography. For Lucan and Silius Italicus, see Marks (2010).

the other two major civil war episodes in the *Argonautica*: Buckley's (2010) interpretation of the influence of Lucan on the war in Colchis in Book 6, and Landrey's recent interpretation of the Lemnos episode as trauma literature.⁷ As I will try to show, the Cyzicus episode is informed by the events of 68–69 CE, and in dealing with these traumatic experiences the narrator is inspired by Lucan's poem, which was written just before the civil war and almost seems to predict what was about to happen after the death of Nero.

Lemnos and the Trauma of 68–69 CE

The impact of the civil wars of 68–69 CE on the Roman population must have been enormous and devastating, and if we accept that Valerius' epic was written under Vespasian's rule, so in the 70s of the first century CE, as Stover has convincingly argued,⁸ the events were fresh in the memory when Valerius wrote his epic. We can see their impact on the *Argonautica* in several of its civil war narratives. Landrey (2018) has recently shown how the Lemnos episode in Book 2 evokes the recent civil wars in ways that resemble what happens in the Cyzicus episode in the following book, as we will see later, as well as the war in Colchis in Book 6.⁹ In this context, Landrey deals with a fascinating passage in the Lemnos episode, its first apostrophe, in which 'the poet's personal connection to his subject matter casts the episode as a trauma ripped from the recent past'.¹⁰

Unde ego tot scelerum facies, tot fata iacentum
 exsequar? heu vatem monstris quibus intulit ordo!
 quae se aperit series! o qui me vera canentem
 sistat et hac nostras exsolvat imagine noctes!

7 Landrey (2018) 229–234.

8 Stover (2012) 7–26 (= 2008). I find his thesis attractive, as it would explain, without alteration of the text, why the proem is addressed to a living Vespasian (who died on 23 June 79 CE), while the epic elsewhere (*Arg.* 4.507–11) contains a clear reference to the famous eruption of Mt. Vesuvius, which occurred on 24 August 79 CE. Stover's idea is controversial, however, and there are other attractive theories for dating the epic, on which see e.g. Stover in this volume and the convenient overview by Zissos (2008) xiv–xvii.

9 For the way in which the war in Book 6 of the *Argonautica* reflects contemporary Rome, see Buckley (2010).

10 Landrey (2018) 231. Incidentally, the apostrophe also features the by now familiar strategy of combining allusion to both Virgil (*Aen.* 2.361–362; 7.44) and Lucan (7.552–555) (Landrey [2018] 232 n. 22 and n. 25).

How shall I record all those forms of wickedness, all the deaths of the fallen? Ah, to what monstrous deeds the story has brought the bard! What a sequence of horrors unfolds itself! Oh, that someone would stop me in my true song and free my nights of this vision! (*Arg.* 2.216–219)

As Landrey¹¹ suggests,

[t]he eye-witness atmosphere suggested by his phrasing rhetorically collapses the distance of space and time standing between the Flavian poet and Heroic Age Lemnos. Unlike the *Thebaid's* narrator, who selects his subject matter from a wide array of Theban crimes [...] the “sequence of the story” in Valerius’s plot [...] thrusts him into personally traumatic territory.

Indeed, this striking apostrophe seems to reveal the traumatic impact of historical events on the narrator. We are thus entering the domain of literary trauma theory, which is a huge field of research. Suffice it to say for our purposes here that scholars used to think that trauma was impossible to narrate (e.g. Caruth [1996]), but that it has become clear that, while it is difficult to narrate experienced traumatic events directly, it is possible to narrate the *experience* of trauma. As Forter puts it¹²:

Critics deploying the category of trauma have stressed in particular the power of texts that seek less to represent traumatizing events – since representation risks, on this view, betraying the bewildering, imperfectly representational character of traumatic memory – than to transmit directly to the reader the experience of traumatic disruption. Here the study of trauma joins a more general contemporary interest in writing that performs or enacts what it has to say rather than (or in addition to) conveying it representationally.

In this respect the narrator’s remark that he is singing *vera*, ‘real events’, which appear in his nightmares (218), is fascinating; this does not mean that the bloodbath on Lemnos *really* happened, but that the events are narrated in a *realistic* way, i.e. they reflect real-life, traumatic experience with the

¹¹ Landrey (2018) 232.

¹² Forter (2007) 260, reacting to Caruth (1996). Cf. also Pederson (2014). I am grateful to Monica Palmeira (2020) for these references.

civil wars of 68–69.¹³ We could then perhaps even see this traumatic impact as the motivation for writing the epic, which deals with historic events but is veiled in a mythological guise.

Cyzicus I: Virgil and Lucan¹⁴

Cyzicus is the next episode in the *Argonautica* that is cast as a civil war, and the first in which the Argonauts themselves are directly involved.¹⁵ Upon arrival at the city state of Cyzicus, at the end of Book 2, the Argonauts are welcomed by the eponymous king of the Doliones, Cyzicus. After enjoying three days of hospitality, the Argonauts decide to set sail, which is where Book 3 begins. The Muse Clio is then invoked to explain the origins of the disaster that is about to be narrated. The cause is identified as Cybele's anger at the young King Cyzicus, who had unwittingly shot one of the goddess's lions while hunting (14–31). The Argonauts set sail at night but accidentally return to Cyzicus when their helmsman Tiphys falls asleep (32–42). In the darkness, Cyzicus mistakes the Argonauts for his archenemies, the Pelasgians, and the two sides engage in battle at night. In a lengthy and bloody war, first in the harbour and then in the city itself, various Argonauts display their martial prowess, killing many Doliones. The king himself is fatally wounded by a spear thrown by his former guest Jason (43–248). Finally, Jupiter brings an end to the battle. When it gets light, the Argonauts, realizing their terrible error, are horrified (249–272). Burial of the dead follows, and the Argonauts experience a long period of depression, until finally the priest Mopsus conducts a purification ritual for his comrades, by which their spirits are restored (274–458). The Argonauts promptly set sail and engage in a rowing contest to boost morale (459–480).

13 Cf. Spaltenstein (2002) 36: '*Vera* ne saurait signifier que Val. se représente, dans ses rêves, ces meurtres comme s'ils étaient vrais' ('*Vera* could only mean that Valerius imagines, in his dreams, these murders as if they were true'); Landrey (2018) 232 n. 24: 'In asserting that he sings *vera*, therefore, Valerius insists that the Lemnian episode is historical and like real life, even if it didn't exactly happen.' The remarks of Harper Smith (1987) 104 ('The detail is exaggerated and overdone') and Poortvliet (1991) 137 ('To our taste this certainly is a bit much, but Valerius' age may well have thought otherwise') thus miss the mark, as does the interpretation of the passage by Hardie (1993) 118: 'The poet [...] confuses the night of the Lemnian slaughter with the nights of his poetic labour filled with the theatre of his imagination (*imagine*).'

14 This section is based on Heerink (2016).

15 For the way the Cyzicus episode is set up as a sequel to Lemnos through Hypsipyle's gifts to Jason upon departure, see Landrey (2018) 244–247.

As McGuire rightly notes, the episode ‘is not, strictly speaking, a civil war’.¹⁶ But because the Doliones and the Argonauts are emphatically described as friends and even relatives through what Bernstein calls ‘created kinship’,¹⁷ we are dealing with what is framed as an actual civil war. This is also emphasized by the wording, as the battle is called *infanda proelia* (‘unspeakable battles’, 14), *impia bella* (‘impious wars’, 30) and *nefas* (‘horror’, 258), which is typical of civil war and brings to mind Lucan’s recent epic specifically.¹⁸ The influence of Lucan on Valerius’ Cyzicus episode has been the subject of a chapter in Stover’s 2012 book, in which it is interpreted as follows¹⁹:

But although Valerius evokes Lucan’s epic to establish that his battle narrative is in fact a *bellum civile*, one to be read with Lucan’s text in mind, what he delivers is a most un-Lucanian civil war. The winning unambiguously possesses a moral superiority over the defeated. The episode is indeed tragic, but it is not a senseless tragedy.²⁰

So the civil war at Cyzicus recalls Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*, but can we be dealing with a ‘correction’ of Lucan here?²¹ Does civil war in the *Argonautica* really ‘have a positive function’? Does it ‘bring about positive change’ and ‘mark a new beginning, thus leading to the establishment of a better era of world history’?²² Following the lead of Buckley’s (2010) interpretation of the war in Colchis in Book 6 and Lucan’s influence on it, I rather think that Valerius’ war brings only destruction and death, in which respect it seems very Lucanian. Furthermore, the obviously grim worldview that pervades this episode, according to which a god is responsible for an arbitrary, useless and tragic battle, also evokes Lucan.²³ Of course, there is no divine motivation for civil war in Lucan, where the gods are not involved and do not care, but what is worse: no gods or the ones that

16 Cf. McGuire (1997) 92 n. 4.

17 Bernstein (2008) 48, 52 (see also n. 53 below).

18 Cf. Stover (2012) 123: ‘By portraying the Greeks and Phrygians as culturally indistinguishable and by stressing the strength of their alliance, Valerius has arranged things such that, when the two sides clash, the battle has all the trappings of a *bellum civile*.’ For the Cyzicus episode as a civil war, see Manuwald (1999) 159; Schenk (1999) 269ff.; Stover (2012) 113–148; Heerink (2016).

19 Stover (2012) 113–148 (‘Gigantomachy and Civil War in Cyzicus’).

20 Stover (2012) 125.

21 Stover (2012) 148. See also the quote below.

22 Stover (2012) 114.

23 Cf. Bernstein (2014) 159: ‘As in Lucan’s *Bellum Civile* and Statius’ *Thebaid*, the narrator emphasizes the arbitrariness of the reasons for the collective punishments levied by angry goddesses at Lemnos and Cyzicus.’

Valerius presents to his readers?²⁴ The impression is thus created that Valerius has incorporated into his epic the divine apparatus that is operational in his main model, Virgil's *Aeneid*, but looks at it through a Lucanian lens.

In fact, Valerius seems to set up the Cyzicus episode as a miniature *Aeneid*. Cybele's anger against Cyzicus, for instance, is described in terms that recall Juno's anger towards Aeneas, which motivates the entire plot of the *Aeneid*: *tantae non immemor irae* ('remembering how great her anger was', *Arg.* 3.27) ~ *saevum memorem Iunonis ob iram* ('because of the fierce and unforgetting anger of Juno', *Aen.* 1.4).²⁵ Furthermore, an important intertext for Valerius is again, as in Colchis, the second half of the *Aeneid*, where Ascanius' shooting of a stag results in the civil war in Latium, for Cyzicus' shooting of Cybele's lion results in civil war as well.²⁶ Valerius, however, seems to set up the episode as an *Aeneid* only to subvert it, for whereas the civil war in Latium can be said to have a positive outcome for the Roman cause in the end, this is not the case at all in the Cyzicus episode.²⁷

24 Cf. Buckley (2010) 439–440 on the gods' involvement in the war in Colchis: 'Valerius' *Argonautica* thus resurrects a "traditional" divine apparatus within his book of war-epic, only to collapse the oppositions of the "traditional" epic code through allusion to the anti-epicist Lucan; the intertextual presence of the *Bellum Civile* contaminates the ostensibly "straightforward" antagonism of Greeks and Colchians in the battle narrative "proper", and forges instead an innovative civil-war narrative that implicates even the gods themselves.'

25 Burck (1970) 180; McGuire (1997) 109. This intertextual link is not mentioned by Stover (2012). Compare also Valerius' address to Clio at the beginning of the episode (*Arg.* 3.14–5: *Tu mihi nunc causas infandaque proelia, Clio, / pande virum*, 'Clio, now unfold for me the causes of unspeakable battles between men') with Virgil's question to the Muse at the beginning of the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 1.8: *Musa, mihi causas memora*, 'Tell me, Muse, the causes of her anger'), on which see e.g. Schenk (1999) 170; Spaltenstein (2004) 10.

26 See in particular the parallel between *Arg.* 3.21 (*ingenti praedae deceptus amore*, 'deceived by his enormous desire for spoils') and *Aen.* 7.496 (*eximiae laudis succensus amore*, 'fired with longing for chiefest honour'), noted by e.g. Burck (1970) 180; Schenk (1999) 160 with n. 177; Spaltenstein (2004) 12; Stover (2012) 129.

27 See Buckley (2010) 443 for a similar interpretation of the war in Colchis: 'Should we pay attention to the subversive role allusion to Lucan plays in this epic, we may suspect that the "foundation myth" Valerius Flaccus provides for his new dynasty is not just a straight-forward and optimistic account of exploration, conquest and gain: it also contains an alternative reading that seeds civil war as the originary myth of the Flavians.' Incidentally, Valerius' immediately following episode (on Hylas), which constitutes the second half of Book 3, is closely connected to the Cyzicus episode in several thematic ways, for instance, in its reaction to the *Aeneid*. As I have argued before (Heerink [2015]), Valerius' Hylas episode is initially set up as a miniature *Aeneid*, as it is orchestrated by Juno, who closely resembles her Virgilian counterpart, and Hylas is hunting a stag (like Ascanius in *Aeneid* 7) instead of fetching water for Hercules, as is the case in all previous versions of the story. The expectation that the episode will turn into a second half of the *Aeneid*, however, is thwarted as Hercules and the Ascanius-like (and thus potential epic hero) Hylas are elegized and left behind, much to Jupiter's regret. The parallels with the Cyzicus episode are striking.

Apart from the episode in general and the divine motivation that determines the events in it, Valerius' technique of inverting and subverting the *Aeneid* is also visible on a micro-level, in specific passages in the text. The night-time battle at Troy between the Greeks and Trojans in *Aeneid* 2, for instance, is an important intertext for Valerius' entire Cyzicus episode,²⁸ but when Valerius turns from the first battle scene in the harbour to the battle in the city, it becomes particularly relevant:

at magis interea diverso turbida motu
urbs agitur. Genyso coniunx amoverat arma;
ast illi subitus ventis vivoque reluxit 115
torre focus: telis gaudes, miserande, repertis.
linquit et undantes mensas infectaque pernox
sacra Medon; chlamys imbelli circumvenit ostro
torta manum strictoque vias praefulgurat ense.
***talis in arma ruit** nec vina dapesque remota* 120
statque loco torus inque omen mansere ministri.
inde vagi nec tela modis nec casibus isdem
conseruere manu et longe iacuere perempti.

Meanwhile, more than before the confused city is shaken by various movements. The wife of Genysus had taken away her husband's weapons, when suddenly a gust and a still live brand lit up the hearth: poor man, you are glad to have found your weapons again. Medon, working through the night, leaves behind loaded tables and unfinished rites; a cloak, twisted up, enwraps his hand with its unwarlike purple, and he illuminates the path ahead with his flashing drawn sword. Thus he rushes into battle; the wine and the food are not cleared away, his couch still stands in its place, and his servants remained there, as a bad omen. Both then went their separate ways and joined the fight, unlike in fashion as in fortune, and far apart they lay killed. (*Arg.* 3.113–123)

Valerius immediately evokes *Aeneid* 2, as the italicized words indicate²⁹:

diverso interea miscentur moenia luctu,
et magis atque magis

²⁸ See e.g. Stover (2012) 122 n. 31 for a more extensive bibliography.

²⁹ Langen (1896–1897) 215; Spaltenstein (2004) 43. The parallel is not mentioned by Stover (2012).

On every side, meanwhile, the city is in a turmoil of anguish; and more and more (*Aen.* 2.298–299)

One possible interpretation of this allusion is that it suggests that the Cyzicus episode presents us with a battle between a good and a bad side, as Stover argues on the basis of Valerius' use of gigantomachic imagery (on which see also below).³⁰ By analogy, however, the Doliones, the inhabitants of Cyzicus, which resembles Virgil's Troy, would be the Virgilian Trojans and thus the 'good guys', and not the Argonauts. Is this an inversion of Virgil again? This notion is reinforced a few lines later (117ff.), when the Dolion priest Medon interrupts his ritual and enters the battlefield, just like the Trojan priest Panthus in *Aeneid* 2.317ff.³¹

But Valerius in this passage more clearly alludes to another Virgilian passage involving Greeks and Trojans. When the Trojans arrive at Palanteum, later the site of Rome, in *Aeneid* 8, the ritual performed by Euander in honour of Hercules is interrupted; everyone participating wants to see who has arrived, and for a moment a confrontation is threatening. Pallas, however, forbids his people to stop the ritual and goes to meet the strangers (compare the underlined words):

cuncti relictis
consurgunt mensis; audax quos rumpere Pallas
sacra vetat

and all rise up, quitting the feast. But Pallas, undaunted, forbids them to break off the rites (*Aen.* 8.109–111)

By not breaking off the rites and by communicating with the Trojans, Pallas prevents a tragic misunderstanding, and the Greeks and Trojans become allies. But Valerius' Medon *does* interrupt his ritual and he *does* unwittingly fight his friends and allies, thus inverting the *Aeneid's* narrative of allyship to a narrative that regresses from allyship to (civil) war. To underline this inversion of Virgil, Valerius' *talīs in arma ruit* in *Arg.* 3.120 alludes to Lucan³²:

30 See e.g. Stover (2012) 114: '[E]ven in the midst of *bellum civile*, there is a clearly defined "right side" and a clearly defined "wrong side". In Valerius' civil war narratives, the distinction between good and evil does not collapse, as is the case in Lucan's *Bellum Civile*.' Cf. p. 141, where Stover speaks of 'good and evil' and p. 145, where he states: 'Valerius employs gigantomachic imagery to distinguish the Greeks from the Phrygians, the heroes from the villains.'

31 See Burck (1970) 184; Schenk (1999) 222 for this parallel.

32 Langen (1896–1897) 216.

ille, dei quamvis cladem manesque minentur
maior in arma ruit certa cum mente malorum

He [Pompey], though gods and shades threaten calamity,
 more resolutely races to war, his mind certain of disaster. (Luc. 3.36–37)

Although Pompey has just been warned by the shade of his former wife Julia that he will get involved in a useless war against family that will result in death, he nevertheless goes into battle *maior*, ‘greater’ literally, with a pun on Pompey’s *cognomen* Magnus. I read Valerius’ *talis*, which replaces Lucan’s *maior*, as an instance of self-reflexive annotation³³: in such a way, i.e. just like Pompey, Valerius’ Medon goes into battle to meet his death. This allusion emphasizes that the battle at Cyzicus is a useless, Lucanian civil war. The allusions to Virgil, on the other hand, only highlight the difference with the civil wars in *Aeneid* 2 and the second half of the *Aeneid*, which can be said to have a positive outcome eventually.

Valerius further emphasizes the Lucanian futility of this Cyzican civil war by questioning and problematizing the traditional distinction between good and evil in such war narratives. He does so through engaging with gigantomachic imagery, as can be recognized in his detailed description of the warrior Phlegyas, who is killed by Hercules:

ecce gravem nodis pinguique bitumine quassans
 lampada turbata Phlegyas decurrit ab urbe. 125
 ille leves de more manus aciemque Pelasgum
 per noctem remeasse ratus pulsumque requires
 saepe sibi vano Thamyrum clamore petebat
 arduus et late fumanti nube coruscus.
 quantus ubi immenso prospexit ab aethere Typhon 130
 igne simul ventisque rubens, quem Iuppiter alte
 crine tenet. **trepidant** diro sub lumine **puppes**.

There comes Phlegyas running from the troubled city, brandishing a torch heavy with knots and thick pitch. He thought that Pelasgian troops, light-armed and ready for battle, had returned by night as usual; looking for Thamyris, whom he had often beaten, and calling out his name in vain, he tried to attack him, standing erect and flashing far and wide

33 See Hinds (1998) 1–16 on this phenomenon of self-reflexive annotation or signposting intertextuality in Latin poetry.

through the cloud of smoke, huge as Typhon when he looks down from the measureless sky, red with fire and tempest, while Jupiter holds him aloft by the hair; beneath the ominous glow the ships shudder. (*Arg.* 3.124–132)

In the last three lines of the passage, Phlegyas is compared to the Giant Typhon. Gigantomachic imagery is often used to distinguish the good (the gods) from the bad (the rebellious Giants), but as Stover remarks in his book, Lucan had completely subverted and confused the imagery in his *Bellum Civile*, 'making it impossible at times to distinguish the Giants from the Olympians'.³⁴ Valerius' comparison of Phlegyas with a Giant functions in a similar way: after the set-up of Valerius' scene as a tragic and useless civil war between friends and relatives, and following Valerius' characterization of the Argonauts as the bad guys through allusion to *Aeneid* 2, as I have suggested, now the Cyzican Phlegyas is cast as the bad guy through comparison with the Giant Typhon. Thus, Valerius' Lucanian application of gigantomachic imagery here shows how unsuitable the mythological paradigm is for this civil war, in which there is no good and evil and there are no winners, just losers.³⁵

This problematization of good and evil is further suggested by Valerius' description of the ships shuddering beneath the ominous glow caused by the conflict between Typhon and Jupiter (*trepidant diro sub lumine puppes*, *Arg.* 3.132), which recalls Lucan's description of Caesar's tempestuous passage across the Adriatic³⁶:

tunc rector **trepidae** fatur **ratis**: 'aspice, saevum
quanta paret pelagus.

Then says the helmsman of the quivering boat: 'Look at what the cruel sea has in store.' (Luc. 5.568–569)

In a replay of Virgil's famous storm scene in *Aeneid* 1, the helmsman of the boat carrying Caesar across the Adriatic from Brundisium to Epirus warns him to return to Italy because of the impending storm. Caesar, however,

34 Stover (2012) 115. For his treatment of the passage itself, see Stover (2012) 142–147.

35 I thus disagree with Stover ([2012] 115), who argues that 'in his desire to "correct" Lucan's confusion of gigantomachic imagery, Valerius achieves a level of orderliness that is not found in Virgil. His deployment of gigantomachic motifs is far more stable and consistent than Virgil's.'

36 Cf. Manuwald (2015) 102.

like a Giant opposing the gods,³⁷ despises the storm, wants to sail on, but fails and nearly drowns. But this Giant will eventually win, in the battle of Pharsalus, on the eve of which the losing Pompeians – instead of the winning Caesarians – are compared to the Olympians (Luc. 7.144–150).³⁸

So, just as Lucan, Valerius is problematizing and confusing good and bad in his civil war at Cyzicus, and along these lines one should also read Hercules' as well as Jason's feats on the battlefield. In the past, this problematization has not been fully recognized. For example, Hershkowitz has interpreted Jason in the Cyzicus episode as a 'recuperation' of his Apollonian predecessor. According to her, Jason 'shows the skills of an experienced warrior, recalling a Homeric hero', and when he kills Cyzicus, 'who has been set up as something of a guilty party', Jason 'acts as an instrument of divine vengeance'.³⁹ But to interpret Jason, successfully killing his best friends, in this optimistic way cannot be the purpose of the story. Valerius' allusions to the *Aeneid* – and in particular Lucan – rather point in another direction – and inevitably so, for allusion to Lucan's dark *Bellum Civile* almost automatically creates negative energy.⁴⁰

So what is the point of Valerius' allusions to both Virgil and Lucan? By the time Valerius wrote his *Argonautica*, Virgil's perfect, Augustan picture of a future Rome, emblematically envisaged on Vulcan's Shield at the end of *Aeneid* 8, had been shattered by Nero and the ensuing civil war.⁴¹ Behind Valerius' depictions of civil war lies a pessimistic and disappointed world view; Valerius does not believe in an *imperium sine fine* ('an empire that will know no end'), as famously prophesied by Jupiter in the *Aeneid* (1.254–296) anymore. In fact, Jupiter strikingly does not mention the Romans as the new rulers of the world in his prophecy in the *Argonautica*, which is clearly modelled on that of Virgil's Jupiter.⁴² Writing under Vespasian,

37 See Stover (2012) 100–102 for Lucan's Caesar as a 'gigantomachic mariner' in this episode.

38 Stover (2012) 114–115.

39 Hershkowitz (1998) 120. Incidentally, Stover (2012) does not treat Jason's *aristeia* in the Cyzicus episode.

40 Cf. Barchiesi (2001) 323 (quoted by Zissos [2004] 23 n. 13) on the influence of Ovid, Lucan, and Seneca versus that of Homer and Virgil on Flavian epic and Statius, in particular: 'Ovidio, Lucano e Seneca tragico si distinguono nel sistema letterario di età Flavia dai modelli canonici dell'epos, Omero e Virgilio, e Stazio li utilizza come una sorte di fonte di energia alternativa' ('Ovid, Lucan and the tragic Seneca are distinguished in the literary system of the Flavian age from the canonical epic models, Homer and Virgil, and Statius uses them as a kind of source of alternative energy').

41 This paragraph is based on Heerink (2014) 95.

42 Cf. e.g. Bernstein (2014) 160. See Stover (2012) 27–77 (Ch. 2: 'The Inauguration of the "Argonautic Moment"') for a different, i.e. optimistic, interpretation of the 'Jovian programme' (p. 28)

who fashioned himself as a new Augustus,⁴³ Valerius at first sight seems to follow suit and replay the *Aeneid* when he addresses the emperor in his proem and associates him with Jason and the Argonauts, just as Virgil associates Aeneas with Augustus. But Valerius is not slavishly following Virgil; his *Argonautica*, which initiates a new but harsh Iron Age, reveals a disappointed attitude concerning the principate and shows that an *Aeneid* in the Flavian age is not possible anymore. One can understand the optimism of the Augustan age, when the first *princeps* had ended more than half a century of traumatic civil wars, but one can equally understand Valerius in not believing in the Augustan dream anymore and siding with Lucan as his prophet.

Valerius expresses his position programmatically at the beginning of the Cyzicus episode, in his address to the Muses, where he asks Jupiter in despair, alluding to the first wars of the *Aeneid* again (*Arg.* 3.16–17)⁴⁴: *cur talia passus / arma [...] / Juppiter?* ‘Why did Jupiter permit such *arma*’, i.e. ‘instead of Virgilian ones’? A few lines later, immediately after Cybele has entered the stage (in line 27), evoking Virgil’s Juno, as we have seen already, Valerius does something similar:

quae postquam Haemoniam tantae non immemor irae
 aerisono de monte ratem praefixaque regum
 scuta videt, **nova monstra viro**, nova funera volvit,
 ut socias in nocte manus utque impia bella
 conserat et saevis erroribus implicet urbem.

When she [Cybele] saw the Haemonian ship and the shields of the kings attached to its hull from her cymbal-clashing mountain, she remembered how great her anger was and devised unprecedented deaths and horrors for him: how to commit allied hands to nocturnal combat and impious war, how to entangle the city in cruel error. (*Arg.* 3.27–31)

The goddess alludes to the opening of the *Aeneid* here (*arma virumque cano*, ‘I sing of arms and of the man’), but instead of *nova arma* she speaks of *nova monstra* (‘unprecedented horrors’) for this *vir*, and of *nova funera*

in Valerius’ *Argonautica*, including Jupiter’s prophetic speech and the transition from the Golden to the Iron Age.

43 See also e.g. Boyle (2003) 4–6 and Moormann in this volume.

44 Stover (2012) 148 interprets this question quite differently by answering it: ‘Jupiter allowed these things to transpire because the Doliones are out of step with the Jovian dispensation.’

(‘unprecedented deaths’), in short Lucanian *impia bella* (‘impious wars’). In fact, Valerius’ *nova monstra* even alludes to the *Bellum Civile*⁴⁵:

ultricesque deae dant in **nova monstra** furorem

and the avenging goddesses give him [Pothinus] frenzy for new horrors.
(*Luc.* 10.337)

So just as in the address to the Muses a few lines earlier, Valerius here, at the beginning of the Cyzicus episode, states programmatically what he will do in the remainder of this episode and the epic, that is, to read the *Aeneid* through Lucan’s lens and subvert Virgil’s teleological view of civil war. At the same time, these programmatic words *nova monstra* open up a reading of the Cyzicus episode as reflecting experienced trauma, as I will argue in what follows.

Cyzicus II: The Trauma of 68–69 CE

The phrase *nova monstra* (‘unprecedented horrors’) not only alludes to Lucan, as I just showed, but also refers back to the traumatic apostrophe in the Lemnos episode discussed earlier (*Arg.* 2.216–219). The fact that the Lemnian civil war is described with the same word (*monstris*, ‘monstrous deeds’, *Arg.* 2.217) already suggests that the civil war in Cyzicus can be read in a similar way. In fact, in the apostrophe a few lines earlier, the narrator has already spoken of ‘unspeakable battles’:

tu mihi nunc causas infandaque proelia, Clio,
pande virum.

Clio, I beg you, now unfold for me the causes of unspeakable battles
between men. (*Arg.* 3.14–15)

Whereas this address to the Muses is quite conventional, clearly alluding to comparable scenes in the *Aeneid*,⁴⁶ it is precisely in calling the ensuing civil

45 The repetition of *nova* in this same line could also be a Lucanian technique: cf. the analysis of Virgil’s and Lucan’s proems by Tarrant (1997) 66: ‘Virgil’s introduction encapsulates the movement of the poem as a whole from Troy (1) to Rome (7). [...] Lucan negates any sense of progress, obsessively repeating with variation the single idea of civil war.’

46 See Manuwald (2015) 67–68, who mentions *Aen.* 7.37–45; 9.525–528; 12.500–504, as well as *Aen.* 1.8, for which see n. 23 above.

war 'unspeakable' that Valerius' text diverges from Virgil's, pointing in the direction of experienced trauma. The paradox that unspeakable things are in fact told in what follows becomes understandable from this perspective: the traumatized narrator cannot directly sing 'real events', which haunt him in his nightmares, as we have been told in the Lemnos episode (*Arg.* 2.218–219), but is able to describe the *experience* of what actually happened in the guise of a mythological story.

The most extensive and striking example of psychological trauma reflected in the text appears later in the episode. After Jupiter has ended the battle and the Argonauts realize what they have done (249–272), they lament and bury the dead (274–361), as they did in Apollonius' version. Then, however, Valerius diverts dramatically from Apollonius' plotline, where adverse winds keep the Argonauts in Cyzicus; only after performing a ritual to appease the goddess Rhea they can sail on (1.1078–1152). The situation is completely different in Valerius' epic, where the winds are favourable, but the Argonauts get so apathetic and depressed that they do not want to leave:

At non inde dies nec quae magis aspera curis
 nox Minyas tanta caesorum ab imagine solvit.
 bis zephyri iam vela vocant: fiducia maestis
 nulla viris; aegro adsidue mens carpitur aestu,
 necdum omnes lacrimas atque omnia reddita caesis
 iusta putant; patria ex oculis acerque laborum
 pulsus amor segnique iuvat frigescere luctu.

But neither the following day nor the night, which sorrow made harder to bear, set the Minyae free from the haunting image of the slain. Twice already do the west winds invite the sails, but the heroes' grief forbids assurance; their sick minds are relentlessly vexed by worries, and they do not yet feel that all their tears are shed, or all dues paid to the slain ones; lost to view is their homeland, forgotten the keen love of the enterprise, and their joy is to grow cold in the languor of mourning. (*Arg.* 3.362–368)

When Jason turns to Mopsus in despair (372–376), the seer provides a religious explanation as well as a solution (377–416), and with an elaborate ritual Mopsus cleanses the Argonauts of their guilt and appeases the slain Doliones (417–458). When Mopsus sees that the ritual is successful, he

immediately orders the Argonauts to board the *Argo* and not look back. The men happily comply and get back to business:

continuo puppem petere et considerare transtris
 imperat Ampycides nec visum vertere terrae:
 exciderint quae gesta manu, quae debita fatis.
 illi alacres pars arma locant, pars ardua celsis
 insternunt tabulata toris oriturque tremementum
 remorum sonus et laetae concordia vocis.

462 celsis *C*: *om.* γ: *summis L*: *raptis Kramer*

At once Mopsus orders them to make for the ship and take their seats on the thwarts, and not to turn their gaze toward the land; they should forget what their hands have done, what was owed to fate. Briskly some put the shields in place, some cover the lofty deck with high-piled bedding, and there rises the sound of quivering oars and of voices raised in joyful concord. (*Arg.* 3.459–464)

I agree with Stover that ‘Valerius’ narrative focuses attention on the deep psychological trauma that participation in civil war produces.⁴⁷ In his fascinating book *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (1994), Jonathan Shay confronts his own experiences in dealing with Vietnam veterans with PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) with the behaviour of warriors in Homer’s *Iliad*. He says, for instance, that Vietnam veterans often suffered from apathy after combat, thus providing a meaningful parallel for the state of the Argonauts after the battle at Cyzicus (*segnique iuvat frigescere luctu*, ‘and their joy is to grow cold in the languor of mourning’, *Arg.* 3.638):

A deplete state of apathy, an inability to *want* anything, to will anything, often persists into life after combat, when it is no longer needed as a survival skill.⁴⁸

47 Stover (2012) 170. What follows is partly inspired by discussions with Monica Palmeira and by one chapter of her BA thesis (2020) on the Cyzicus episode as trauma literature.

48 Shay (1994) 176.

Many veterans also felt they already died in Vietnam and therefore did not want to return home, just like the Argonauts (*patria ex oculis acerque labor / pulsus amor*, 'lost to view is their homeland, forgotten the keen love of the enterprise', *Arg.* 3.367–368). As one of Shay's patients is quoted as saying:

In my wildest thoughts I never expected or wanted to return home alive, and emotionally never have.⁴⁹

Shay also stresses the importance of shared grief in dealing with (combat) trauma to prevent or diminish PTSD ('griefwork'),⁵⁰ and he notices a marked contrast in this respect between Vietnam veterans and Homeric warriors:

Any blow in life will have longer-lasting and more serious consequences if there is no opportunity to communalize it. This means some mix of formal social ceremony and informal telling of the story with feeling to *socially connected others* who do not let the survivor go through it alone. The virtual suppression of social griefwork in Vietnam contrasts vividly with the powerful expressions of communal mourning recorded in Homeric epic.⁵¹

Valerius' Argonauts, who share their grief both among themselves and with the Doliones, and who eventually participate in Mopsus therapeutic ritual together, may be compared to Homer's warriors and their successful way of dealing with the traumatic experiences at Cyzicus. This interpretation seems to be confirmed when during the ensuing rowing contest the positive sense of community among the Argonauts is stressed (*Arg.* 3. 463–464; also quoted above): *oriturque trementum / remorum sonus et laetae concordia vocis*, 'and there rises the sound of quivering oars and of voices raised in joyful concord'.⁵²

49 Shay (1994) 53.

50 Shay (1994) 55: 'There is a growing consensus among people who treat PTSD that any trauma, be it loss of family in a natural disaster, rape, exposure to the dead and mutilated in an industrial catastrophe, or combat itself, will have longer-lasting and more serious consequences if there has been no opportunity to talk about the traumatic event, to express to other people emotions about the event and those involved in it, or to experience the presence of socially connected others who will not let one go through it alone.'

51 Shay (1994) 39.

52 On trauma in Homer and collective suffering in particular, see Gardner (2019).

As Stover convincingly suggests, Mopsus' purifying ritual brings to mind a passage from Lucan's epic, which describes the traumatic impact of the climactic battle of Pharsalus on Caesar and his troops:

exigit a meritis tristes victoria poenas,
 sibilaque et flammam infert sopor. umbra perempti
 civis adest; sua quemque premit terroris **imago**:
 ille senum voltus, iuvenum videt ille figuras,
 hunc agitant totis fraterna cadavera somnis,
 pectore in hoc pater est, omnes in Caesare manes.

Victory exacts a hideous punishment deservedly, and slumber
 Brings on flames and hissing. The ghost of a murdered citizen
 stands there; each man is tormented by a terrifying vision all his own:
he sees faces of old men, *he* the forms of younger men,
he in all his dreams is harried by his brother's corpse,
 in *this* breast is his father – all these shades are in Caesar. (Luc.
 7.771–776)

As Stover remarks, 'there will not be this type of lingering mental anguish for Valerius' Argonauts'.⁵³ I do not agree, however, with his ultimate, positive interpretation of Valerius' episode. Identifying Mopsus as a *mise en abyme* of the narrator, Stover concludes:

I suggest that this episode more than any other symbolizes the critical role envisioned by Valerius for *vates* in the aftermath of the civil war that brought down the Julio-Claudian dynasty, leading to the establishment of the Flavian regime. In this, the *vates* Valerius shows the way. As for the Argonauts, so too for Valerius' Roman reader, it is time for amnesty, time to forget.⁵⁴

But can that truly be the point of the Cyzicus episode? The Lucanian intertext just quoted also brings to mind the narrator's apostrophe just before the start of the Lemnian massacre, in which he declared to be tormented by nightmarish visions at night, thus revealing his trauma, as we have seen (compare the words in **bold**)⁵⁵:

53 Stover (2012) 175.

54 Stover (2012) 179.

55 As Esther Meijer suggests to me, this passage may also evoke the nightly (*per obscuram noctem*) appearance of the 'image of his country in distress' (*patriae trepidantis imago*) to Caesar

o qui me vera canentem
sistat et hac nostras exsolvat **imagine** noctes!

Oh, that someone would stop me in my true song and free my nights of this vision! (*Arg.* 2.218–219)

But the narrator is not freed from his traumatic experience; already in the ensuing Cyzicus episode he deals with another civil war. Indeed, after Mopsus' purifying ritual 'the Argonauts are able to forget and move on',⁵⁶ as Stover observes, but only for now: the most extensive, most explicit, and most Lucanian civil war, in Colchis, is yet to come, for the Argonauts as well as the narrator.⁵⁷ I would thus interpret the Lucanian intertext just quoted in a negative way, in line with my previous readings of Lucan's influence on Valerius. At first sight the Argonauts seem to forget and move on, and Valerius' Flavian readers can comfort themselves with the idea that the Flavian regime has ended the civil wars and started a new era, just as Augustus had done a century earlier. But Valerius replays the unspeakable horrors of the recent civil wars in nightmarish, mythological guises over and over again in his *Argonautica*.⁵⁸ In similar fashion to Lucan after the battle of Pharsalus, Valerius thus states that the traumatic events of 68–69 will live on in the memory of those who experienced them. Furthermore, by writing his epic he has also immortalized these *experiences* of civil war – instead of the actual, 'unspeakable', historic events – for later generations, in marked and telling contrast to Lucan, who, a hundred years after the events that he narrates,⁵⁹ was able to comment explicitly on this function of his epic with these famous words⁶⁰:

o sacer et magnus vatum labor! omnia fato
eripis et populis donas mortalibus aevum.
invidia sacrae, Caesar, ne tangere famae;

at the beginning of Lucan's epic, when he is about to cross the Rubicon, setting the civil war in motion (*Luc.* 1.186–87).

56 Stover (2012) 177.

57 See Buckley (2010) 434 for the 'contaminating' influence of Lucan on the Colchis episode: '[I]f we pay attention to Valerius' allusive relationship with Lucan, we obtain a vantage point from which to view the *Sinnlosigkeit* of the war in Colchis as in itself, at least partly, the "point" of Valerius' battle-narrative.' Cf. the passage quoted in n. 25 above.

58 Perhaps the repetition of civil wars in the *Argonautica* also reflects the repetitive nature of the civil wars of 68–69 CE and the concomitant shifts of emperor.

59 See Walde (2011) for Lucan's epic as 'literature of trauma', more specifically, an instance of 'postmemory' (i.e. the indirect experience of traumatic events by the 'generation after').

60 Cf. Stover (2012) 177, who also quotes other, similar passages in Lucan.

nam, siquid Latiis fas est promittere Musis,
 quantum Zmyrnaei durabunt vatis honores,
 venturi me teque legent; Pharsalia nostra
 vivet, et a nullo tenebris damnabimur aevo.

O how sacred and immense the task of bards! You snatch everything
 from death and to mortals you give immortality.
 Caesar, do not be touched by envy of their sacred fame;
 since, if for Latian Muses it is right to promise anything,
 as long as honours of the Smyrnaean bard endure,
 the future ages will read me and you; our Pharsalia
 shall live and we shall be condemned to darkness by no era. (Luc.
 9.980–986)

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