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Female Familial Relationships in Valerius' Argonautica and Statius' Thebaid

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Female Familial Relationships in Valerius' *Argonautica* and Statius' *Thebaid*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Department of Classical Studies from
The College of William and Mary

by

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(Honors, Highest Honors)

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Introduction

ποῖα οὖν δεινὰ ἢ ποῖα οἰκτρὰ φαίνεται τῶν συμπιπτόντων, λάβωμεν. ἀνάγκη δὴ ἢ φίλων εἶναι πρὸς ἀλλήλους τὰς τοιαύτας πράξεις ἢ ἐχθρῶν ἢ μηδετέρων. ἂν μὲν οὖν ἐχθρὸς ἐχθρόν, οὐδὲν ἐλεεινὸν οὔτε ποιῶν οὔτε μέλλων, πλὴν κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ πάθος· οὐδ' ἂν μηδετέρως ἔχοντες· ὅταν δ' ἐν ταῖς φιλίαις ἐγγένηται τὰ πάθη, οἷον ἢ ἀδελφὸς ἀδελφὸν ἢ υἱὸς πατέρα ἢ μήτηρ υἱὸν ἢ υἱὸς μητέρα ἀποκτείνει ἢ μέλλῃ ἢ τι ἄλλο τοιοῦτον δοῦναι, ταῦτα ζητητέον.¹

(Aristotle, *Poetics* 1453b.14-22)

Let us, then, take up the question of what sorts of incidents strike us as terrible or pitiable. Now, such actions must occur between friends, enemies, or neutrals. Well, if enemy acts towards enemy, there is nothing pitiable in either the deed or the prospect of it, except for the suffering as such; nor if the parties are neutrals. What tragedy must seek are cases where the sufferings occur within relationships, such as brother and brother, son and father, mother and son, son and mother—when the one kills (or is about to kill) the other or commits some other such deed.

In his fourth century BCE work *Poetics*, the Greek philosopher Aristotle outlines his views on the art of poetry—its genres, its goals, and its forms. Here, he offers an explanation of what sort of occurrences are “terrible” (δεινὰ) or “pitiable” (οἰκτρὰ) enough to propel a tragic plot. To Aristotle, the stuff of tragedy arises from the tensions between family members and

¹ Both the Greek text of Aristotle and the English translation come from Halliwell 1995.

friends, and the ways close relationships can drive and complicate actions. Moreover, to Aristotle, epic is fundamentally long-form, narrative tragedy—the two genres are tightly intertwined (Arist. *Poet.* 1429b.12-221). In other words, interpersonal relationships, especially familial relationships, constitute the bedrock of epic poetry.² In this thesis, I examine the ways in which interpersonal relationships between family members motivate female characters in Latin epic poetry of the Flavian era, in the first century CE. In what follows, I argue that familial relationships drive female characters to act in transgressive ways. By doing this, I show how these female familial relationships play a crucial role in the epic and provide a deep look into the female psyche.

Classical authors did not write in a vacuum; they were consistently engaged in intertextual dialogue with their predecessors and contemporaries. The history of Latin epic properly begins with Greek epic. Many of the themes and topics present in Latin epics, from Ennius to Statius, are directly adapted from Greek literary sources, be it the Homeric epics or Attic tragedies. Early Latin authors, such as Livius Andronicus in his *Oduvia*, began the Latin tradition of engaging with Greek predecessors and transforming them into a Latin context.³ As Latin literature progressed, this connection to Greek literature continued. However, Latin literature also developed its own style and traditions. Latin epic, as a genre, is highly codified. written in dactylic hexameter, a specific meter, adapted from Greek. It also traditionally deals

² Manioti 2016a, 1.

³ Feeney 2016, 14; *Ibid.* 45; *Ibid.* 63-64; Livius' *Oduvia* (third century BCE) is the first known piece of literature written in the Latin language. It was a translation of Homer's *Odyssey* into Latin that now survives only in fragments.

with masculine themes, such as war, patriotism, and the customs of the ancestors.⁴ However, within this traditional framework, Latin epic sustains many other themes and engages with other genres of poetry. Although epic has a traditional form, it rarely exists purely within that form; instead, epic poets frequently test and play with the bounds of the genre to highlight certain themes and elevate their poetic art.⁵

In the first century BCE, during the reign of Augustus, Publius Vergilius Maro (Vergil) completed his magnum opus, the most famous Latin epic of all: the *Aeneid*. This poem narrates the adventures of Aeneas, a Trojan hero, as he sails across the Mediterranean after being displaced by the Trojan war. As is his destiny, the pious Aeneas lands in Italy, where he fights with the locals and settles down in the place that will one day be Rome. As a foundation story for the Roman people, the *Aeneid* held both cultural and political significance.⁶ It was written at the beginning of the reign of Augustus, who rose to power after a long period of civil war. Having survived the end of the Republic and the formation of a new regime, Vergil was highly in-tune with the themes of displacement, loss, and trauma that pervade the poem, as well as the themes of hope for rebirth and renewal in a new age. Thus, without considering Vergil's *Aeneid*, it is impossible to understand the Latin epic tradition.⁷ All Roman authors who followed Vergil—epicists, elegists, and historians alike—allude to his language, his characterizations, and his themes in some way. As authors of the same genre, Latin epic poets in particular were in

⁴ Keith 2000, 4-6; Ibid. 14-5.

⁵ Stover 2012, 185.

⁶ For more on the *Aeneid*, see: Putnam 1995, Cairns 1989, and Syed 2005.

⁷ Syed 2005, 13–16; for more on the influence of the *Aeneid* on later epics see Hardie 1993.

perpetual conversation with Vergil through their allusions to him, as they aspired to achieve the same level of fame and glory with their works.

Like Vergil, Flavian poets also survived a period of civil war before the ascension of a stable leader. After the death of the last descendant of Augustus, Nero, in 68 CE, Rome was plunged into a year of civil war known as the year of the Four Emperors. The fourth and final emperor was Titus Flavius Vespasianus, a popular general who rose to the throne through the support of his troops. He and his two sons, Titus and Domitian, founded a new imperial dynasty that would last for nearly thirty years.⁸ This period, one of growth and renewed prosperity after civil war, created a fertile environment for literary expression. Like the poets of the Augustan age, Flavian poets were scarred by civil war, and these scars are evident their works.⁹ However, the Flavian period also saw other societal changes, such as increased female financial and social independence.¹⁰ This change impacted the way Flavian authors chose to portray female characters, as Flavian poets imbued female characters with more agency and significance to the epic narrative than previous authors. Overall, Flavian poets responded to this new age, its changes and its challenges, in their works.

Only four Flavian epics survive, two complete and two partial. Of these four epics, only two are relevant to this thesis: Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* and Publius Papinius Statius' *Thebaid*.¹¹ The other two, Statius' short and sadly incomplete *Achilleid* (intended to tell the life

⁸ The Flavian dynasty lasted from 69 CE to 96 CE.

⁹ Bernstein 2016, 396–98; Bernstein 2015, 141–42; Bernstein 2014, 68-9; Panoussi 2019, 103–13; Stover 2012, 113-4.

¹⁰ Van Abbema 2016, 296–98.

¹¹ Henceforth Valerius and Statius, respectively.

of Achilles) and Silius Italicus' *Punica* (a telling of the Second Punic War, a more recent historical conflict between Rome and Carthage) share similar themes and ideas and are part of the same tradition. However, in order to keep this thesis focused and at a reasonable length, I chose not to include them.

Valerius' *Argonautica* is the earliest Flavian epic; it tells the story of the Greek hero Jason, his boat, the Argo, and his crew, the Argonauts.¹² Cut short midway through book 8 by Valerius' early death, this poem owes much of its plot and themes to two earlier renditions of the Argonaut story.¹³ One is Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, a Hellenistic Greek epic from the third century CE that survives complete. The other is the first century CE *Argonautae* of Varro Atacinus, which was a translation of Apollonius' work into Latin.¹⁴ Varro's work no longer survives beyond fragments and cannot be properly compared with the text of Valerius, but most likely Valerius had access to Varro's text.¹⁵ Even if Varro's influence on Valerius cannot be fully determined, Apollonius' influence certainly can.¹⁶ Valerius' epic engages deeply with that of Apollonius and innovates by adding new themes, characterizations, and even characters to suit

¹² Scholars are divided on the exact date of Valerius' *Argonautica*. I follow the arguments made by Stover 2012, which date it mostly to the Vespasianic era and place its composition largely between 70-79 CE, with edits and pieces written up until the poet's death in late 79 or early 80 CE (Stover 2012, 26).

¹³ Hershkowitz 1998, 64; Ibid. 38-62.

¹⁴For more on Varro Atacinus' *Argonautae* and its potential influence on not only Valerius, but other Roman poets as well, see Polt 2017, Polt 2013, Hollis 2003, and Feletti 1998.

¹⁵ Hershkowitz 1998, 36.

¹⁶ For more analysis of the differences and similarities between Valerius and Apollonius, see: Seal 2014, Buckley 2016, Finkmann 2015, and Hershkowitz 1998; commentaries: *Argonautica* 7 (Davis 2020), *Argonautica* 6-8, (Spaltenstein 2005) and *Argonautica* 2 (Poortvliet 1991).

his needs. He also “Romanizes” the epic, adding Vergilian allusions and topical Roman themes, like civil war, to fit the story of the Greek Argonauts better to his Roman cultural context.¹⁷

One of the most fascinating figures in Valerius (and indeed much of Greek mythology) is Medea, the daughter of King Aetes of Colchis. A powerful witch and a descendant of the sun god Helios, Medea uses her magical powers to help Jason steal the Golden Fleece from her father and returns with him to Greece. In doing this, she rejects her natal family and destroys her relationships with all of her relatives. Valerius’ text breaks off as Medea and Jason sail away, pursued by her brother, but due to the cultural power of the myth, every Roman audience member would know the rest of the story. After she arrives in Greece with Jason, Medea does more magic on Jason’s behalf, healing his father and manipulating his cousins into killing their father, Jason’s evil uncle. However, Jason eventually leaves Medea to marry a Corinthian princess. In response, Medea kills their sons and Jason’s new wife. Medea’s filicide is one of her most famous moments, immortalized in both Greek and Latin tragedy, and its shadow hangs over every moment she appears in Valerius.¹⁸ Overall, understanding the larger story of Medea informs her characterization greatly, and makes her destruction of her familial bonds even more ominous.

Statius’ *Thebaid*, completed about ten to fifteen years after the *Argonautica*, tells the story of the civil war between the two sons of Oedipus, Eteocles and Polyneices. These sons are also, of course, Oedipus’ half-brothers, since their mother is also his mother, Jocasta. Incest, as well as Oedipus’ murder of his father, Laius, lies at the heart of the generational curse and twisted familial dynamics that plague Oedipus’ children. Oedipus and Jocasta’s two daughters,

¹⁷ Seal 2014, 114; Mitousi 2014, 155–56; Bernstein 2016, 398–400; Buckley 2016, 63.

¹⁸ Davis 2014, 192–93.

Ismene and Antigone, are also forced to reckon with the war between their brothers, the collapse of their family, and their futures as married women outside of the natal home. Each of the sisters responds to this chaos differently, but with no less devotion to their natal family. Antigone buries Polyneices in defiance of the law, and Ismene disavows marriage and departure from the family of her birth.

Thematically, these two poems have a lot in common. Both deal with Greek myths in a Roman way, and both grapple with the consequences of civil war, such as the disruption of familial bonds and family life. They even share common episodes, such as the Lemnian massacre.¹⁹ Furthermore, both poets display a strong interest in the role of women within the world of epic. Although the traditional mode of epic is masculine and martial, Valerius and Statius both leave plenty of room for women to act within this traditionally masculine sphere, often in transgressive ways.²⁰ Moreover, both epics are generally pessimistic in their themes and attitudes.²¹ Overall, Valerius' work is straightforwardly pessimistic: even in the absence of the poem's ending, his epic world is closed, trapped in a cycle of impiety and war that can never be broken.²² Statius' *Thebaid* is less so: although the world of his poem is plagued by interfamilial violence and civil war, at its close he offers some hope toward healing and reconciliation.²³ Thus, although they share similar themes and general pessimism, the two poems have different outlooks on the way forward in a world recently shaken by war. Finally, both epics bring familial

¹⁹ Parkes 2014, 327–30.

²⁰ Keith 2000, 6; *Ibid.* 35; *Ibid.* 132–3.

²¹ Bernstein 2016, 396; Augoustakis 2010, 88–91; McAuley 2015, 331.

²² Bernstein 2014, 155–6; *Ibid.* 68–9.

²³ Panoussi 2019, 112; This reading is disputed, for opposite reading see Augoustakis 2010.

relationships into sharp focus, situating many of their themes, characterizations, and motifs around the dynamics that occur between family members.²⁴

In the past several decades, scholarship on Flavian epic and familial relationships within these epics has boomed. Moreover, much of this scholarship includes analysis of female relationships and the significance of the emerging importance of female characters in Flavian epic. Significant recent studies have included analysis of kinship (Bernstein 2008; Bernstein 2015) and motherhood (Augoustakis 2010; 2012; McAuley 2016). Scholars have also examined father-son relationships (Stover 2016; Gervais 2015; Parkes 2009), father-daughter relationships (Stocks 2016; Zissos 2012; Gervais 2015), and sisterhood (Keith 2016; Manioti 2016b; Pyy 2014). In writing this thesis, I build upon the work of these scholars in two ways. First, I explore sisterhood further. Flavian epic is full of sisters, true and false, demanding a deeper look into sibling relationships and their influence on female characters. Second, I focus on the concept of daughterhood, considering the crucial relationship between parent and daughter from the perspective of the child, rather than that of the parent.

Therefore, in this thesis, I analyze sisterhood and daughterhood in Valerius' *Argonautica* and Statius' *Thebaid* through the actions and characterizations of four different female characters. In chapter one, I examine sisterhood and sister-brother relationships in Valerius and Statius through close analysis of Medea, Antigone, and Ismene. In chapter two, I study daughterhood in Valerius through an appraisal of Medea and Hypsipyle, the daughter of Thoas. I hope that my investigation sheds new light on the importance of familial relationships and of the role of female characters in Flavian epic more generally.

²⁴ Bernstein 2008, 9; Manioti 2016a, 1-5.

Chapter One: Sisterhood and the Sibling Bond

in Valerius' *Argonautica* and Statius' *Thebaid*

Sibling relationships drive many of the emotional themes (and in the case of Statius' *Thebaid*, the plot) of Flavian epic. Earlier epics have sisters interacting with each other—for example, Vergil's *Aeneid* and the relationship between Dido and Anna—but Flavian epic poets' special interest in sibling bonds brings them to the forefront.²⁵ Epic poetry has always emphasized the bonds of kinship, especially the parent-child bond.²⁶ However, sibling relationships offered new dynamics to Flavian epic poets, allowing them fresh ground to explore the effects of family ties, especially on female characters. Sibling relationships, then and now, form a crucial part of child socialization and are often based in strong mutual respect and affection.²⁷ Conversely, Roman fathers had a total authority that affected their relationships with their daughters both in literature and real life.²⁸ Male Roman poets also often problematize motherhood, or neglect mother-daughter relationships in favor of exploring mother-son relationships.²⁹ Relationships between sisters or between a sister and brother therefore reveal how familial bonds uncomplicated by traditional familial power structures can shape female characters' actions. Overall, the ways in which female characters in Flavian epic choose to

²⁵ Manioti 2016a, 1-2.

²⁶ Keith 2016, 248-9; Manioti 2016a, 3-4.

²⁷ Rawson 2003, 128.

²⁸ Stocks 2016, 43; *Ibid.* 45-6.

²⁹ Augoustakis 2010, 14; *Ibid.* 22.

prioritize their siblings and natal family displays their narrative power and deepens their characterization.

In this chapter, I examine how sibling relationships affect the characterization and agency of three female characters from Flavian epic: Medea, from Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, and Ismene and Antigone, from Statius' *Thebaid*. First, I look at sisterhood through Medea's relationship with her false sister (Juno disguised as her sister Chalciope), Ismene's narration of her dream to Antigone, and Antigone's strange connection with her sister-in-law, Argia. Then, I analyze sister-brother relationships through Antigone's devotion to Polyneices and Medea's treatment of her brother Absyrtus. For all three of these women, their sibling bonds (or lack thereof) both define their actions and set them into motion. While Ismene and Antigone attempt to affirm their sibling relationships to establish familial and political order, Medea rejects them, thus causing further chaos for her family and homeland. Moreover, the authors' attitudes towards the nature of sibling bonds reflect the overall pessimism of Flavian epic.³⁰ Statius, the more optimistic of the two, allows Antigone and Ismene some measure of success because of the actions their sisterly relationships inspire. Valerius portrays Medea as negligent at best and harmful at worst towards her siblings. Unlike the generally pious Ismene and Antigone, Medea embodies disruption and distortion of familial norms, and her attitude towards her siblings reflects this. Ultimately, both poets use sisterly concern and affection as a way to develop each woman's character and drive her towards action.

Argonautica 6 opens with battle scenes, as the Colchians, aided by Jason and his Argonauts, fight the Scythians. Among these scenes, Valerius places an episode with Medea and her sister Chalciope—or rather, Juno disguised as Chalciope. They discuss men, marriage, and

³⁰ Bernstein 2016, 396.

(in service of these topics) the battle below their city walls. The narrative emphasizes the closeness of the relationship between Medea and Chalciope not only through references to their relationship in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* but also through language unique to Valerius describing their interactions.³¹ As a result, even though the real Chalciope does not appear in Valerius' *Argonautica*, the shadow of her true connection with Medea does. However, the fact that Valerius' Chalciope is actually Juno in disguise twists her connection with Medea into something more sinister than sweet.

Once Juno has descended to earth and taken the form of Chalciope, she leads Medea to the walls, to watch the men fighting below, especially Jason: *ducitur infelix ad moenia summa futuri / nescia virgo mali et falsae commissa sorori* (the unlucky virgin is led to the highest city wall / ignorant of the evil future and having entrusted herself to her false sister, Valerius, *Argonautica* 6.490-1).³² The language is ominous—Medea is *infelix*, unlucky, but also unhappy, although she doesn't yet know it. Valerius emphasizes her lack of knowledge in the text: Medea is *futuri [mali] nescia virgo*—innocent, but more importantly ignorant. She is passive, allowing herself to be led, and entrusts herself (*commissa*), both physically and emotionally, to her sister. Therefore, she ironically misplaces her trust—she should be able to trust her sister, and yet she cannot, because her sister is not her sister. This irony is only heightened by the audience's knowledge of Medea's future. The heroine's ignorance is twofold, textual and extratextual: she is ignorant of both the deception of Juno and the true identity of her "sister," and her own future deeds, which the audience knows well.

³¹ Keith 2016, 250.

³² All Latin text from Valerius, *Argonautica* is from Ehlers 1980; All English translations are my own.

Juno-Chalciope fans the spark of Medea's obsession with Jason into a roaring fire, but its seeds were always there. Thus, Juno-Chalciope works within Medea's own mind and pre-existing desires, drawing on the emotions of her previous encounter with Jason to push her infatuation further. As Medea and Juno-Chalciope stand on the walls, watching the battle below, Medea's focus is always on Jason. Even in front of her "sister," even as she tries to catch sight of her brother below, Medea is drawn to Jason instead:

quaque iterum tacito sparsit vaga lumina vultu
aut fratris quaerens aut pacti coniugis arma
saevus ibi miserae solusque occurrit Iason
(Valerius, *Argonautica* 6.584-6)

And again, wherever she, with a silent face, scattered her wandering eyes,
seeking either the weapons of her brother or her intended husband,
there only ferocious Jason appeared to the wretched girl.

Once Juno-Chalciope tells her who Jason is, he is the only person who stands out to her on the battlefield, not her own brother or her fiancé. Valerius uses language that is elegiacally charged to indicate Medea's love: she is wretched (*miserae*), and her would-be lover is cruel (*saevus*) as her wandering eyes (*vaga lumina*) light upon him. However, Medea had already begun to fall for Jason, even before Juno-Chalciope first mentions him. In fact, Medea's infatuation with Jason began even before she spots him on the walls and before Juno takes Chalciope's form to push the

match. Medea displays a similar reaction earlier in *Argonautica* 5, when Jason arrives in Colchis and sees him on the riverbank:

regina, attonito quamquam pavor ore silentem
exanimet, mirata tamen paulumque reductis
passibus in solo stupuit duce.

(Valerius, *Argonautica* 5.373-5)

The princess, although fear leaves her silent, breathless,
and with an astonished expression, is still amazed,
and with her steps receding back a little, is entranced by the leader alone.

Jason entrances Medea, but he does so ominously; *pavor*, not *amor*, elicits her first response to him. Still, the similarity between these two responses shows that the all-encompassing focus Medea turns on Jason on the walls comes not wholly from Juno's coercion, but from within her own self and desires.

Although the intertext with Apollonius and the performance of traditional sisterhood create a facsimile of the sisterly bond, Juno-Chalciope does not hesitate to pervert this relationship to achieve her goals. She uses Medea as a means to an end: helping Jason get his hands on the Golden Fleece and return triumphant to Greece. Thus, the performance of the sisterly bond between Chalciope and Medea helps her achieve this goal. This makes Juno-Chalciope's role a confused one; although she appears as a sister, her actions rather resemble those of a mother attempting to secure an advantageous match for her son. The conflation of

these two familial roles distorts both of them. Moreover, Valerius utilizes Vergilian intertext to create this perversion. Throughout the *Argonautica*, Valerius not only uses allusions to Vergil's *Aeneid* to ground his own work in the epic tradition, but also to enhance pathos as he twists and deepens these allusions.³³ In this case, Juno-Chalciope pretends to play the role of Anna, Dido's loyal sister, in convincing her sister that accepting a foreign lover will bring her happiness. But Juno-Chalciope also adopts characteristics of Amata, Lavinia's mother and Aeneas' (unwilling) mother-in-law, matchmaking for her own benefit, standing in the way of the "appropriate" match chosen by the father. Yet Juno-Chalciope cannot resemble Amata too much—she also resembles Allecto, the Fury that whipped Amata's madness to froth, in her own attempts to steer Medea towards Jason. Overall, the intersection of all these half-parallels creates a disquieting picture of the bond between Medea and her "sister."

Furthermore, through these disturbingly contorted allusions, Valerius transforms the subtle sensuality of Allecto's attack on Amata in Vergil to something more overtly sexual in Medea's reaction to Jason. In *Aeneid* 7, as Allecto infects Amata's mind and instigates her madness, she does so in a sensual, erotic way that draws on elegiac language:

fit tortile collo
aurum ingens coluber, fit longae taenia vittae
innectitque comas et membris lubricus errat.
ac dum prima lues udo sublapsa veneno
pertemptat sensus atque ossibus implicat ignem
necdum animus toto percepit pectore flammam.

³³ Nordera 2016, 47.

(Vergil, *Aeneid* 7.351-46)³⁴

The huge serpent becomes gold,
twisted around her neck, it becomes the ribbon of her long headband,
and it tangles itself into her hair and slippery, it wanders across her limbs
And while first the plague, gliding under as wet poison,
tests through her perceptions and weaves fire into her bones,
not yet has her mind perceived the flame in her whole chest.

The eroticism of these lines lies in their concern with the physical body and the sensations of sliding and gliding. Elegiac language like *pertendens* and *ossibus implicat ignem*, as well as Vergil's use of the language of fire (*ignem, flammam*), enhances this eroticism but maintains its subtlety by relegating all of the sensuality to the realm of subtext.³⁵ Valerius, in his conflation of Juno-Chalciope with both Amata and Allecto, draws upon this model to further elucidate his carnal themes.

Valerius further manipulates the language of fire and Vergilian intertext as Medea, now fully entranced, fixates on Jason from the walls:

at regina virum (neque enim deus amovet ignem)

³⁴ All Latin text from Verg. *Aen.* is from Mynors 1969; All English translations are my own.

³⁵ *pertendens*—striving on, pushing, with a sexual connotation cf. *Prop.* 2.15.17; *ossibus implicat ignem*—fire and bones are both motifs common in elegy: fire: cf. *Cat.* 51.10, *Cat.* 100.7, *Ovid Ars.* 1.240, bones: cf. *Ovid Am.* 2.9a.9-10, *Ovid Ep.* 4.70, *Prop.* 4.7.95; Scully 2000, 97.

persequitur lustrans oculisque ardentibus haeret

...saevae trahitur dulcedine flammae

(Valerius, *Argonautica* 6.657-63)

But the watching princess follows the man (and indeed, the god does not banish the fire),
and she clings [to him] with her burning eyes...

and she is pulled [along] by the sweetness of the raging flame.

Here, like Vergil's descriptions of Amata in *Aeneid* 7 and the cursed Carthaginian queen Dido in *Aeneid* 4, Valerius uses the sexualized language of fire (*ignem, ardentibus*) to characterize the spark of sexual desire that Juno-Chalciope has lit in Medea.³⁶ Like Amata, she is not conscious of any divine influence. However, unlike Amata, Medea does recognize that she is being influenced to some extent: *respiciens, an vera soror* (Considering whether [her] sister [is] real, Valerius, *Argonautica* 6.659). Medea doesn't wonder at whether or not her sister is truly her sister, which leaves her unaware of Juno-Chalciope's deception, but she displays some external knowledge of her situation. This awareness, partial though it may be, emphasizes the internal, self-driven element of her passion for Jason. Furthermore, as Medea continues to watch Jason on the walls, Valerius twists the intertext even further:

interdum blandae derepta monilia divae

contrectat miseroque aptat flagrantia collo

³⁶ Lovatt 2006, 71; For more on Medea's *teichoskopia* and the parallels between her, Amata, and Dido, see Fucecchi 1997 and Baier 2001.

quaque dedit teneros aurum furiale per artus,
deficit; ac sua virgo deae gestamina reddit,
non gemmis, non illa levi turbata metallo,
sed facibus, sed mole dei, quem pectore toto
iam tenet; extremus roseo pudor errat in ore.
(Valerius, *Argonautica* 6.668-674)

Sometimes, she plays with the necklace snatched from the charming goddess
and she adjusts it, flashing, on her wretched neck
and wherever she puts the madness-inducing gold on her delicate limbs,
she grows faint; and the virgin returns her necklace to the goddess,
she is disturbed not by gems, not by the light metal,
but by the flames, by the power of the god, who she now holds
in her whole heart; the last [of her] modesty wanders on her blushing face.

The imagery of Medea's necklace (*monilia*) as madness-inducing gold (*aurum furiale*, literally Fury's gold) ties this scene back to Allecto and Amata, but Valerius has made literal what in Vergil was only metaphorical.³⁷ Vergil's snake, a necklace only symbolically, now becomes a true *monilia*. Medea's status as a virgin (*virgo*) intensifies the focus on the neck (*collo*) and Vergilian-coded the spread of the madness of love throughout the limbs (*teneros...artus*). Her blush evinces her shame regarding these feelings (*extremus roseo pudor...ore*), constituting an appropriate maidenly reaction to this sexual desire. Moreover, the erotic nature of blushing and

³⁷ Nordera 2016, 60.

its color contrast between red and white evokes the sexual act itself and hints at Medea's desire to lose her virginity to Jason.³⁸ Therefore, although Allecto's inflammation of Amata's madness elicits parallels to elegy and implies an erotic gaze, Juno-Chalciope's work steps over those bounds, fanning Medea's desire for Jason into something far more intensely sexual. Juno adopting Chalciope's form and distorting the sisterly bond directly contributes to this heightened sensuality.

Furthermore, not only does Medea turn away from her brother in favor of Jason, she also ignores her intended husband (*pacti coniugis*). Through this action, Medea hints at her eventual total rejection of her family and homeland. Instead, Medea is inspired to follow the program for marriage set to her by the example of her false female relatives: first Juno-Chalciope, then Venus pretending to be her aunt Circe.³⁹ Juno-Chalciope is the first to suggest that Medea could leave Colchis, even before she tries to lure Medea to Jason:

deseris heu nostrum nemus aequalesque catervas
a misera, ut Graias haut sponte vageris ad urbes!
non iniussa tamen; neque te, mea cura, relinquam
magna fugae monumenta dabis, spernere nec
usquam mendaci captiva viro, meque ille magistram
sentiet et raptu famulae doluisse pudendo.

(Valerius, *Argonautica* 6.497-502)

³⁸ Fowler 1987, 185; Keith 2000, 115.

³⁹ Blum 2018, 193–94.

Alas, you abandon our wood and troop of age-mates,
Ach, wretched girl, in order to wander—not voluntarily—the cities of Greece!
Still you do not [do so] of your own accord; and I will not leave you behind, my love.
You will dedicate great monuments of your flight, and even as a captive,
you will not be spurned by your lying husband anywhere, and he will understand
that I was your teacher, and that I grieved at the shameful abduction of my handmaiden.

Once more, Juno-Chalciope twists the sisterly relationship between Medea and the real Chalciope, naming herself Medea's teacher (*me...magistram*) and Medea her handmaiden (*famulae*). She professes that she will miss Medea when she has gone and that she will be aggrieved (*doluisse*) by her loss. On the surface, this looks like a simple, typical affirmation of sisterly affection. However, because Juno-Chalciope is not a true sister, it cannot be, and this passage roils with malevolent undertones foreshadowing Medea's unhappy future.

Although she does not mention marriage directly, Juno-Chalciope's discussion of Medea's absence from her side and her references to a husband imply that Medea's impending flight from Colchis will be motivated by a lying husband (*mendaci...viro*). Although Juno-Chalciope is acting in Jason's interest, her use of *mendaci* forebodes the tragedy to come, casting the marriage she is trying to arrange in a negative light. She maintains this negativity even as she describes Medea's ostensibly positive journey to the cities of Greece (*Graias...urbes*). Medea's eventual choice to marry Jason embodies the conflict between civilization (Greece) and barbarism (Colchis).⁴⁰ From the Roman perspective of the narrator, Greece and the west

⁴⁰ Stocks 2016, 55.

(representing Rome) is inherently preferable to Colchis (the “barbarous” east).⁴¹ Yet Juno-Chalciope does not portray Medea’s choice of civilization as unproblematic—in this future, Medea will be *misera*.⁴² This stresses the inevitable darkness of Medea’s destiny. Finally, Juno-Chalciope calls Medea’s departure a shameful abduction (*raptu...pudendo*), not a marriage. Yet Juno-Chalciope casting the match she is trying to bring about in such a negative light only enhances the thematic significance of her role as false sister, as well as Medea’s own internal drive towards Jason. Since she is a “false sister,” her advice cannot be good, and nothing she says can be sincere. Her falsity necessarily taints even this speech, which seems like a profession of sisterly affection. Furthermore, these references to a foreign marriage take a more persuasive tack later in *Argonautica* 7, when Venus (encouraged by Juno) comes down to Colchis and takes the form of Circe to encourage Medea to help Jason and follow him to Greece. This encounter exhibits a different, more extra-textually ominous relationship for Medea: that of mother and child.

However, in *Argonautica* 6, Medea is still a *virgo*, defined by her relationships to her natal family. Her transition from sister to wife and doomed mother has not yet occurred. In spite of Juno-Chalciope casting negativity on her future marriage, at the end of the scene on the walls Medea wants Jason more than ever. The final lines of her interlude with Juno-Chalciope confirm this: *imminet e celsis audentius improba muris / virgo nec ablatam sequitur quaeritve sororem* (the shameless maiden hangs more boldly off the high walls, / and she does not follow or seek her absent sister, Valerius, *Argonautica* 6.681-2). Her sexual desire for Jason, driven by Juno-Chalciope, has made her shameless (*improba*), despite her continued status as *virgo*. It has also

⁴¹ Augoustakis 2010, 2; Ibid. 4-5.

⁴² Stocks 2016, 55.

caused her to ignore her “sister’s” absence, leaving her behind physically and metaphorically (*ablatam...sororem*). Because of Medea is unaware of Juno-Chalciope’s duplicity, this reaction reflects her genuine feelings towards her sister and their relationship. For Medea, the sister she no longer seeks or follows (*sequitur quaeritve*) is her real sister, and Jason, a foreigner and her future husband, has supplanted her. Although Medea’s relationship with Juno-Chalciope is based on deceit, her final choice—that of Jason over her sister—shows her willingness to abandon her natal family and her bonds with its members. Juno’s deception may have poisoned their relationship from the start, but in the end, Medea herself chooses to dissolve it.

As in Valerius, so in Statius’ *Thebaid* 8, the conversation between the sisters Ismene and Antigone involves men and marriage, playing upon the same tensions regarding a girl’s loyalty which at this point in her life oscillates between her natal and marital home. As the battles between the Argives and the Thebans rage on outside, the unfortunate sister-daughters of Oedipus lament their family’s many problems and then discuss Ismene’s dream about her fiancé, Atys. The contrast between the war outside and the domesticity within highlight the differences between masculine and feminine spheres, although soon the former will puncture the latter.⁴³ Ismene’s dream is violent and unpleasant, bringing the war into the safety of their rooms. Despite the typical topic of this conversation (a future husband), the fear the dream stirs in Ismene and its violent nature emphasize both her sisterly piety and the all-consuming power of her family’s cursed feud:⁴⁴

semel his in sedibus illum,

⁴³ Augoustakis 2010, 70–71.

⁴⁴ Keith 2016, 258.

dum mea nescio quo spondentur foedera pacto,
respexi non sponte, soror. turbata repente
omnia cernebam, subitusque intercidit ignis,
meque sequebatur rabido clamore reposcens
mater Atyn. quaeenam haec dubiae praesagia cladis?
nec timeo, dum tuta domus milesque superstes
Doricus et tumidos liceat componere fratres.’
(Stat. *Theb.* 8.628-35)⁴⁵

Once in this house I looked at him, sister, unwillingly
while my marriage bonds are given by some pledge.
Suddenly I saw everything thrown into confusion,
and a sudden fire interrupted [us], and [Atys’s] mother
was following me with frenzied shouting, demanding Atys back.
What is this foresight of uncertain disaster?
But I do not fear, [not] while our house is safe and the Dorian soldier survives,
and we might be allowed to calm down our enraged brothers.

Ismene, unlike Medea, is not *futuri nescia*, although she wishes she could be. Rather, she sees a future that her conscious self has no desire to experience (Stat. *Theb.* 8.623-4). This reluctant concern with her fiancé Atys upsets her, because her waking self prefers to focus on healing the

⁴⁵ All Latin text from Stat. *Theb.* is from Shackleton Bailey 2004; all English translations are my own.

feud between her brothers.⁴⁶ Like Medea, Ismene does not want to focus on marriage, but unlike Medea, this rejection of marriage does not carry with it a rejection of her family. Instead, Ismene's familial strife motivates her to prioritize the preservation of her natal family, rather than to establish a new family elsewhere.

Just before Ismene tells Antigone about her dream, Statius inserts a simile comparing this pair of famous mythological sisters to another: Procne and Philomela, the daughters of Pandion. This story, as related in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 6, is the tragic tale of Procne and Philomela, two sisters whose loyalty to each other overrides their loyalty to anyone else, including Procne's terrible husband and child. Although Ovid provides the lengthiest extant telling of this story, its use as a motif representing speech, lament, and the power of (female) speech extends all the way back to Homer (Hom. *Od.* 19.518-23). Yet Statius' emphasis on female relationships and sisterhood in this scene specifically recalls themes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In Ovid, after Procne's husband Tereus rapes Philomela and cuts out her tongue, he imprisons her in a hidden shack. She communicates her rape and imprisonment to her sister by weaving a tapestry. Once Procne discovers what happened, she rescues her sister and concocts a plan to kill her own son and feed him to his father, her husband. When Tereus discovers what they have done, he tries to kill them, but the gods intervene by turning all three of them into birds. In placing her sister over her husband and even her own child, Procne disrupts social norms.⁴⁷ However, the magnitude of Tereus' crime renders her transgressive behavior sympathetic, even to the gods.

The crimes in the royal house of Thebes—incest and impending fratricide—differ from those committed by Tereus, Procne, and Philomela, but they are similarly wicked in their

⁴⁶ Keith 2016, 260.

⁴⁷ Pyy 2014, 304; Segal 1994, 264; Ibid. 267.

destabilization of family structures. They remind readers of the danger (and power) inherent in women prioritizing their natal family over their marital family. Therefore, Statius's use of this simile here sets the tone for Ismene's entire speech:

sic Pandioniae repetunt ubi fida volucres
hospitia atque larem bruma pulsante relictum,
stantque super nidos ueterisque exordia fati
annarrant tectis: it truncum ac flebile murmur;
verba putant, voxque illa tamen non dissona verbis
(Stat. *Theb.* 8.616-20)

As when Pandion's bird-daughters reclaim their loyal lodgings
and their home, left behind unwillingly at the hammering of winter cold
and they stand over their nests and tell the houses
the beginnings of their bygone fate: there goes a sad and mangled murmur;
they think they are words, and their voice is nevertheless not unlike words.

This simile frames the conversation between Ismene and Antigone within the context of the story of Procne and Philomela—as well as its aftermath.⁴⁸ In this metaphor, Statius, like other ancient poets who reference Procne and Philomela, primarily concerns himself with the language of lament and the power of speech in general.⁴⁹ He highlights this power in the alliterative final

⁴⁸ Augoustakis 2016, 296–97.

⁴⁹ cf. Verg. *G.* 4.511.

line, beginning with *verba* and ending with *verbis*. Philomela's (and Procne's) final transformation into birds gives them the power of speech that Tereus attempted to deny them. After her rape, Philomela threatens to tell her sister and expose Tereus' crime, but her straightforward speech only inspires him to mutilate her and rape her again (Ovid *Met.* 6.533-563). That Philomela's speech scares Tereus enough to move him to silence her exposes the extent of its power.⁵⁰ Even silenced, Philomela still finds a way to speak through her art: first the tapestry, then birdsong.⁵¹ Although the birds' song comprises of mangled, sad sounds (*truncum flebile murmur*), these function like words (*voxque illa...non dissona verbis*).⁵² Statius reflects this transformation, from speechlessness to speech-like expression of their mutual tragedy in the lament of Ismene and Antigone that precedes Ismene's dream narration (described as *querelas*, complaints, in Stat. *Theb.* 8.609).⁵³ The use of the word *fleBILE* to characterize the sisters' song allusively casts Ismene's dream-retelling as a type of lament.⁵⁴ Moreover, the idea of epic dreams as a form of non-verbal communication that is particular to women creates an even stronger link between Ismene's dream and this simile.⁵⁵ Like Philomela's tapestry and the wordless, emotive sounds of the birdsong lamentation, dreams communicate the fears and concerns of epic women about the world they inhabit.⁵⁶ Unable to express these feelings in

⁵⁰ Panoussi 2019, 143.

⁵¹ Segal 1994, 265.

⁵² Augoustakis 2016, 299.

⁵³ Keith 2016, 259; Augoustakis 2016, 297.

⁵⁴ Augoustakis 2016, 297; *Ibid.* 293.

⁵⁵ Scioli 2010, 207.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 197.

words, they turn to alternative forms of communication, which enable expression when words fail.⁵⁷

Furthermore, Statius' allusions to Ovid's depiction of the sisters in this metaphor support Ismene's ambivalent attitude at the prospect of separation from her natal family that marriage entails. The bird-sisters return to the home they left behind unwillingly (*larem...relictum*), because the winter cold pushed them out (*bruma pulsante*). Rather than find a new nest, they chose to return to the old one—normal behavior for birds, but not for women, such as Ismene and Antigone to whom they are compared. Statius describes the “home” to which they return as birds with the words *nidos* (nest) and *larem* (home), neither of which denotes a permanent abode.⁵⁸ Yet Statius' choice of *larem*—the place where a family keeps their *Lares* (family household gods) connotes “home” as an abstract concept rather than a physical space, and thus hints at it as a more permanent residence. Statius locates Ismene and Antigone “in a secret part of [their] chamber” (*thalami secreta in parte*, Stat. *Theb.* 8.607). The word *thalamus* means chamber but also marriage bedroom, foreshadowing Ismene's troubled dream and feelings about leaving her family for Atys.⁵⁹ Thus, the specter of marriage looms large in Ismene's thoughts. It reminds her of the physical and emotional impermanence of her natal home and imbues her with a sense of unavoidable disaster. Marriage to Atys, according to her dream, will not only prevent her from properly healing her family's conflict, but will also bring chaos and death to her home. Ultimately, Ismene's apprehensions towards her marriage underscore how much she values her familial relationships.

⁵⁷ Scioli 2010, 207-8.

⁵⁸ Augoustakis 2016, 298.

⁵⁹ Scioli 2010, 210; Augoustakis 2016, 302.

This apprehension does not stem from Ismene's desire (or lack thereof) to leave her natal home for Atys. Rather, it originates from the chaos within her natal family and her desire to stay and resolve it. When Ismene recounts her dream to Antigone, she affirms her disinterest in marriage:

ecce ego, quae thalamos, nec si pax alta maneret,
tractarem sensu, (pudet heu!) conubia vidi
nocte, soror
(Stat. *Theb.* 8.625-7)

Look [at me]! I, who would not think of marriage,
not even if there were a deep peace, (oh, how shameful!),
I saw my wedding tonight, sister.

Ismene's direct address to her sister (*soror*) at the end of the line shows how she seeks to redirect the focus of her thoughts towards her family and away from Atys throughout her speech.

Furthermore, her strong disavowal of marriage, even in peacetime (*nec si pax alta maneret*) contradicts the narrator's voice earlier in *Thebaid* 8, which implied that Ismene is willing to marry Atys: *nec pectora virginis illi / diversa, inque vicem, sineret Fortuna, placebant* (and the heart of the maiden was not opposed to him / and, Fortune allowing, they would have made each

other happy, Stat. *Theb.* 8.559-560).⁶⁰ Here, the narrator states that Ismene reciprocates Atys' affection. However, in her own words, she says that she does not want to marry him. The hypothetical nature of the conditional statement, combined with Ismene's own words, proves only that she cares for him, not that she actively desires their marriage. Instead, this line reveals that Ismene consciously places solving her natal family's problems above marriage. Even as she describes a dream about her fiancé, she pivots to discuss her brothers' feud. She may like Atys, but her family takes precedence over him. Finally, Ismene ends her speech with her priorities: to keep her family safe (*tuta domus*) and end her brothers' conflict (*tumidos liceat componere fratres*).

Even though Ismene cares for and mourns Atys, she does not feel a strong desire to marry him. Some scholars argue that the final line of this scene proves that she truly loves and wishes to marry him: *ibi demum teste remoto / fassa pios gemitus lacrimasque in vulnera fudit* (then at last, with [any] witness far away / she confesses pious laments and pours tears on [his] wounds, Stat. *Theb.* 8.653-4). Here, Ismene mourns Atys appropriately, with pious laments (*pios...gemitus*) and pouring tears (*lacrimasque...fudit*). Yet these elements are typical of mourning.⁶¹ Ismene's wailing is not sad or mournful, but pious, infusing her lament with a sense of duty and obligation, not sincere emotion. Moreover, the preceding lines emphasize the importance of the natal family:

⁶⁰ Augoustakis 2016, 268-9; Augoustakis argues that Stat. *Theb.* 8.554-562 as proof of a reciprocal bond between Ismene and Atys, especially 8.559-560. However, I believe that any amount of reciprocal affection in their relationship does not disprove my assertion that Ismene prioritizes her natal family over Atys.

⁶¹ Panoussi 2019, 109.

tunc quia nec genetrix iuxta positusque beata
morte pater, sponsae munus miserabile tradunt
declinare genas.

(Stat. *Theb.* 8.651-3)

Then, because he was not near his mother and his father had [already]
met blessed death, they hand over to his promised bride a wretched duty:
to close his eyes.⁶²

As a result, Ismene's lamentation for Atys occurs because there is no one else available to do it—his mother is not present, and his father is dead. Women traditionally carry out mourning rituals, as we see not only here but across Statius' epic, such as when the Argive women conduct burials later in *Thebaid* 12.⁶³ By performing this traditional role for Atys, Ismene displays feminine piety, but not necessarily love for him. In better times—despite what she says to Antigone—she might marry him. However, the time is not right for marriage. Ismene's natal family is in turmoil, and therefore, *bella vetant taedas* (war prevents weddings), regardless of her desires (Stat. *Theb.* 8.559-561). Thus, Ismene's "rejection" of her marriage is much weaker than Medea's. It is not an open rejection, but a reprioritization of her natal family over the family she is supposed to marry into. The framing of this sisterly scene and the reference to Procne and Philomela only intensify Ismene's distaste for the marriage to Atys; they also explain the typical nature of her lament after his death. Procne and Philomela, in their new forms as the nightingale

⁶² Augoustakis 2016, 311.

⁶³ Panoussi 2019, 103-4; Augoustakis 2010, 85-90.

and the swallow, are heavily associated with lament.⁶⁴ Therefore, Ismene's lament for Atys reflects her concern for her natal family's troubles (the *querelas* from Stat. *Theb.* 8.609), not her passion for marriage to him.

Lament, like Philomela's tapestry, serves as an alternative form of communication unique to women. Thus, Statius' characterization of Ismene's dream as lament links Ismene with the Argive women in *Thebaid* 12 and confers upon her their power in the narrative. Elaine Fantham argues that lament in the *Thebaid* follows a pattern, constituting a female response to masculine war and combat.⁶⁵ She calls the lament of the Argive women at the end of *Thebaid* 12 a "fulfillment" of the cycle of male battle-death and female lament that has characterized the poem.⁶⁶ Accordingly, Ismene's dream, as a lament, does not respond to Atys' death. She follows Fantham's model and fulfills the death-lament cycle when she mourns him after he dies. Instead, Ismene's dream is a response to the metaphorical death of her family. As Fantham argues, for Statius and other epic poets, lament is connected to epic poetry; both celebrate past deeds and people and bring communities together.⁶⁷ Ismene's dream-lament therefore serves as a commemoration of her bond with her family, especially with her sister. Ismene's relationship with her sister and her brothers' relationship with each other drives Ismene's speech and accords her narrative power.

Statius, like Valerius, reworks Greek precedents when crafting his depiction of the Theban sisters. The most famous of these is Sophocles' *Antigone*. Yet Statius portrays Ismene

⁶⁴ Augoustakis 2016, 296; Keith 2016, 259.

⁶⁵ Fantham 1999, 226.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 231.

⁶⁷ Panoussi 2019, 111-2; Fantham 1999, 221.

and Antigone's bond far more subtly than Sophocles. In the *Thebaid*, Ismene has far less speaking time than Antigone—this is the most she speaks in the whole poem, and the only time she and Antigone talk at length.⁶⁸ In contrast, Sophocles has a particular interest in the relationship between the sisters in his *Antigone*. He dwells on the affection between them, especially in the first episode.⁶⁹ Sophocles' Ismene does not rebel like Antigone, refusing to behave in an unwomanly manner or to defy Creon by burying their brother (Soph. *Ant.* 61-68). Conversely, Statius portrays Ismene as far more unorthodox in her attitude towards marriage. Even Sophocles' bold, transgressive Antigone mourns the loss of her future, including marriage, which she sees as a necessary sacrifice for the sake of her natal family, particularly her brother (Soph. *Ant.* 891-927). Although Sophocles' (significantly shorter) work places more emphasis on the sisterly bond between Antigone and Ismene, it too deals with their divergent struggles to leave their natal family behind.

In the *Thebaid*, on the other hand, Ismene and the dynamics of sisterhood between her and Antigone recede into the background after this singular heart to heart. Antigone picks up on the thread of Ismene's private lament and takes it outside of the home and onto the battlefield, transforming it from something grounded in sisterhood to something that can appeal to the brother-sister bond. In *Thebaid* 11 she goes without Ismene or her mother to beg Polyneices to stop the fighting and come to terms with their brother. This last-ditch attempt highlights the importance of the sibling bond to Antigone because she has every reason to anticipate failure and tries anyway. Earlier, in *Thebaid* 7, Jocasta goes to Polyneices' camp with Antigone and Ismene to beg him not to fight. However, her motherly entreaties fail. Ismene and Antigone both try and

⁶⁸ Scioli 2010, 195; Pyy 2014, 312.

⁶⁹ Pyy 2014, 312.

fail alongside her: *nunc rudis Ismenes, nunc flebiliora precantis / Antigones* (now unskilled Ismene, now Antigone, beseeching [him] with tearful laments, Stat. *Theb.* 7.535-6). Here, Statius already sows the seeds of Antigone's later, more forceful laments, describing her as beseeching (*precantis*), while Ismene is raw and unskilled (*rudis*). Between Books 7 and 11, Antigone takes on a more active role in trying to shape the future of her family and stopping the civil war.⁷⁰ In contrast to Ismene, who uses lament to process her feelings about her family's conflict, Antigone uses these feelings as fuel in her attempts to stop it herself.⁷¹

Lament does not merely bond blood sisters like Ismene and Antigone. Through her marriage to Polyneices in *Thebaid* 2, the Argive princess Argia becomes sister-in-law to Antigone and Ismene. Eventually, she develops a contentious, yet substantial bond with Antigone through their mutual lament for Polyneices.⁷² Argia follows Polyneices to Thebes, leaving the rest of the Argive women behind, in order to give Polyneices an honorable burial. Her foray onto the battlefield, like Antigone's, marks her as transgressive and increases her agency, further emphasizing the power of female lament.⁷³ Furthermore, the connection between Argia and Antigone reaches its zenith as they burn Eteocles and Polyneices together on a single pyre. As the brothers become one in ash, so do the sisters (in-law) in their mournful madness (Stat. *Theb.* 12.385-8). Argia and Antigone's bond, like the pyre it centers on, is brief and

⁷⁰ Lovatt 2006, 60.

⁷¹ Ibid. 65.

⁷² Manioti 2016b, 140; Manioti argues that Argia and Antigone "become sisters" through their shared lament, with Argia taking on Ismene's role and therefore the sisterly bond between Antigone and Ismene. She also connects the relationship between sister-in-laws back to Homeric epic, thus embedding Statius's sisterly relationships even deeper into the epic tradition.

⁷³ Bessone 2015, 129-131; Ibid. 120-123; Agri 2014, 740.

intense, but its existence is predicated on their mutual grieving. Statius portrays no such bond between Argia and her blood sister, Deipyle, nor does the example of Argia and Antigone lamenting together come from previous (known) depictions of the story.⁷⁴ Thus, Statius' inclusion of the episode and its display of the power of grief emphasizes the connective power of lament.

Antigone's fervent desire to bury and appropriately mourn Polyneices not only connects her to Argia, but also to Polyneices himself. Argia's devotion to Polyneices is that of a woman to her husband, but Antigone's is sisterly. Unlike Ismene, Argia, or Sophocles' Antigone, Statius' Antigone never overly concerns herself with marriage or a husband, either in rejection or affirmation. She thinks only about her family and her brother. As she approaches the walls to speak with Polyneices, Statius describes her as maddened:

at parte ex alia tacitos obstante tumultu
Antigone furata gradus (nec casta retardat
virginitas) volat Ogygii fastigia muri
exsuperare furens
(Stat. *Theb.* 11.354-7)

While Antigone flies from different part [of the city] with silent steps,
like a thief, [against] the opposing commotion
(and chaste maidenhood does not hold her back),
raving to mount up the top of the Ogygian wall

⁷⁴ Maniotti 2016b, 122-3.

Not letting her status as a young woman affect her mission to save her brothers, Antigone transgresses gender norms. By speaking from the walls to her brother on the field below, she enters from the feminine sphere of the city walls to the masculine sphere of the battlefield.⁷⁵ Yet in other ways, she behaves conventionally, and her effectiveness in this scene derives from conventional female wall-watching behavior. This type of epic scene—women watching soldiers from the walls—is known as *teichoskopia*.⁷⁶ From Helen in *Iliad* 3 to Medea in *Argonautica* 6 (discussed elsewhere in this study), to Antigone herself in *Thebaid* 7, the idea of a woman watching men she knows or loves from the city walls frequently recurs. Statius' manipulation of this typical scene articulates the strength of Antigone's love for her brother and the lengths to which she is willing to go to preserve the unity of her family.

Once she has captured Polyneices' attention, Antigone begins to persuade him to stop fighting by appealing to their shared sibling bond:

rogat illa suorum Antigone devota malis suspectaque regi,
et tantum tua, dure, soror. saltem ora trucesque
solve genas; liceat vultus fortasse supremum
noscere dilectos et ad haec lamenta videre
anne fleas. illum gemitu iam supplice mater
frangit et exsertum dimittere dicitur ensem:
tu mihi fortis adhuc, mihi, quae tua nocte dieque

⁷⁵ Lovatt 2006, 64; Fuhrer 2015, 61–62.

⁷⁶ Fuhrer 2015, 53.

exsilia erroresque fleo iam iamque tumentem

placavi tibi saepe patrem?

(Stat. *Theb.* 11.370-9)

This is Antigone asking, devoted to the bad luck of her relatives,
and mistrusted by the king, and so much your sister, cruel one.

At least loosen your fierce expression; allow [me] to see
your [well-known,] beloved face, possibly for the last time,
and whether you cry, at seeing these laments.

Our mother subdues him with a supplicating moan
and he is said to cast off his drawn sword:

Are you steadfast to me yet, to me, I who cry for your exile and wanderings
day and night, [I who] already often placated our enraged father for you?

In this environment of fraternal civil war, Antigone stresses her sibling bond with Polyneices by qualifying her self-description as his sister with *tantum*. She is not only his sister—she is *so much* his sister (*tantum tua...soror*). Even when it impacts her politically (*suspectaque regi*), Antigone's first duty is to her natal family (*suorum...devota malis*). By calling this speech a lament (*haec lamenta*), she ties it to the persuasive speech of other women, like Ismene in book 8. Furthermore, she asks for Polyneices' loyalty (*tu mihi fortis adhuc*), which shows that she sees the sibling bond as reciprocal. She leverages her past good deeds towards him—weeping over his exile and interceding on his behalf with their father—to further her point that he should stop fighting for her sake, if nothing else.

The initial success of Antigone's plea to Polyneices reveals the inherent strength of sibling bonds at Thebes. At first, she manages to calm him down in spite of the Fury's lust for war:

his paulum furor elanguescere dictis
coeperat, obstreperet quamquam atque obstaret

Erinys

(Stat. *Theb.* 11.382-3)

His rage begins to droop at these words,
although the Fury roars and stands against [this].

For a moment, the power of the sister-brother bond suffices to stop the rage of even a Fury. Then she manages to elicit a dual emotional and physical response in him, using speech rife with the language of lament:

iam summissa manus, lente iam flectit habenas,
iam tacet; erumpunt gemitus, lacrimasque fatetur
cassis; hebet irae, pariterque et abire nocentem
et venisse pudet

(Stat. *Theb.* 11.383-7)

Already his hand lowers, already he bends his reins slowly,

already he is quiet; his groans burst forth, and his helmet confesses
his tears: his anger dulls, and he is equally ashamed to go
and to have come harmfully.

Antigone's lament therefore takes on a persuasive, even transformative, power. Because of her, he loosens his reins (*lente iam flectit habenas*) and cries in shame (*lacrimas...pudet*). Statius' metonymic use of helmet (*cassis*) to represent Polyneices' crying face highlights Antigone's ability to affect militaristic, masculine behavior with her sisterly devotion.

Antigone's brief success speaks to the power of the sibling bond, both for good and ill. However, this success does not last. Parallel to this scene (and described a little before it at Stat. *Theb.* 11.315-353), Jocasta attempts to persuade the other brother, Eteocles, from fighting Polyneices. She fails, and the Fury enrages him, sending him out of the gate towards Polyneices, thus breaking Antigone's fragile calm (Stat. *Theb.* 11.387-9). In her own speech, Antigone references Jocasta's attempts and claims that she has already (*iam*) succeeded in subduing Eteocles (*illum gemitu iam supplice mater frangit*). Yet this does not happen—Jocasta gives an impassioned speech, frenzied and dripping blood, and Eteocles merely “[grows] pale with fear” (*metu...expalluit*, Stat. *Theb.* 11.327). She could not change his behavior before, and she still cannot. Thebes' dark history and the incest of Oedipus and Jocasta taint Theban motherhood, and Jocasta's motherhood in particular, imbuing it with a horrific quality.⁷⁷ Because of this, Jocasta is complicit in the conflict and therefore cannot heal the rift between her sons.⁷⁸ In Thebes, too, brotherhood is fraught with conflict and fated fratricide. The turbulent, broken brotherly bond

⁷⁷ McAuley 2016, 329; Ibid. 300.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 331.

between Eteocles and Polyneices lies at the center of the epic's narrative. However, sisters and sisterhood at Thebes do not totally fail. The contrast between the failures of Theban motherhood and brotherhood is exposed in the contrast between Antigone's success and Jocasta's failure. Even though Antigone's pure sisterly devotion cannot stop a conflict fated by the gods, its brief success underlines the positive impact of sister-brother relationships in the epic.

Yet in the *Argonautica*, sister-brother relationships lead to nearly as much death as the fratricidal conflict of the *Thebaid*. While Antigone tries to diffuse her brothers' conflict, Medea creates the conflict that kills her brother, Absyrtus. He first appears in the text in the hall of their father, Aeetes. This moment directly alludes to his dark fate: *filius hunc iuxta primis Absyrtus in annis / dignus avo quemque insontem meliora manerent* ([his] son Absyrtus, [was] next to him, / worthy of his grandfather in his young age, and better things ought to await the innocent [youth], Valerius, *Argonautica* 5.557-8). Later, he fights in the civil war between his father and uncle Perses (Valerius, *Argonautica* 6.171) and is glossed over by Medea's teichoscopic gaze (Valerius, *Argonautica* 6.517). The relationship between them therefore relies heavily on tradition and norms, rather than individual moments of closeness like Antigone and Polyneices share. However, this typicality creates in Absyrtus an embodiment of the norms that Medea transgresses against. In killing him, Medea irrevocably separates herself from her family, from social norms, and from her innocence. Thus, Absyrtus represents Medea's decision to totally destroy her sibling bonds in service of her relationship with Jason.

After Medea flees, Absyrtus leads the chase of the Argonauts, but he does not focus on Medea herself. Rather, he wants to honor his father and avenge his family's shame at Jason's perceived abduction of Medea (Valerius, *Argonautica* 8.272-3). In doing this, he ignores Medea's own agency in her flight, attributing her departure to Jason and his Greeks alone. When

he finds Medea and Jason's wedding banquet, he describes his martial actions in the language of marriage:

te, Graecia fallax,
persequor atque tuis hunc quasso moenibus ignem;
nec tibi digna, soror, desum ad conubia frater,
primus et ecce fero quatioque hanc lampada vestro
coniugio, primus celebros dotalia sacra...

(Valerius, *Argonautica* 8.275-279)

I pursue you, treacherous Greece,
and I shake this fire against your walls;
and I, your brother, am not absent from your suitable wedding, sister,
but look, I am the first to bring and shake this torch at your wedding,
I am the first to celebrate the sacred marriage rites...

Absyrtus' conflation of marriage and war only confirms the destructive consequences of Medea and Jason's ill-omened wedding.⁷⁹ It also legitimizes it: everyone involved, even unwilling or disapproving, understands that a marriage has taken place. Valerius underscores Absyrtus' perception of Medea's marriage with his ironic use of the word *digna*; in this situation, the only person behaving suitably is him. His behavior in defense of his sister's (and through it, the whole

⁷⁹ Davis 2014, 194-5.

family's) honor is typical and appropriate, contrasting with Medea's inappropriate behavior.⁸⁰ Later, Absyrtus taps even deeper into the vocabulary of marriage: *tot decuit coiisse rates, tot fulgere taedas* (it was proper to gather so many ships, to flash so many torches, Valerius, *Argonautica* 8.284). Now, his torches of war are not simply ordinary fire (*ignem*) or flambeaus (*lampada*), but *taedas*, the pine torches traditionally used in Roman weddings.⁸¹ Moreover, his use of the word *coisse* (to gather) plays at multiple separate yet interconnected meanings: to gather, often in battle, but also to join, in marriage or in sexual intercourse.⁸² Medea's marriage, made outside of social and familial boundaries, has created conflict between two families, rather than joining them. Furthermore, it delineates the epic's "tipping point" into tragedy, foreshadowing Medea's future murders.⁸³ After this point, the next meeting between Medea and Absyrtus must end tragically.

However, Valerius' text ends before Medea and Absyrtus have the chance to meet again. In Apollonius, Medea lures Absyrtus to his death. She uses their sibling relationship to persuade him to meet with her alone, telling him that Jason has mistreated her and that she wants to return both herself and the fleece to the familial fold (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.435-44). When they meet, they speak earnestly, and then she has Jason brutally murder him as she hides beneath her veil (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.459-79). Valerius does diverge in some ways from Apollonius: for

⁸⁰ Bremmer 1997, 95.

⁸¹ For *taedae* as a metaphor for marriage cf. Vergil, *Aen.* 4.18, 4.339, Ovid *Ep.* 4.120, 6.130, and Stat. *Theb.* 8.559-561 (discussed earlier in this paper).

⁸² For *coeo* in a sexual sense, cf. Ovid *Met.* 11.744, 9.733 10.324; for *coeo* referring specifically to joining in marriage cf. Ovid *Met.* 4.60, Verg. *Aen.* 7.317.

⁸³ Buckley 2016, 71-2; Hershkowitz 1998, 16.

example, the civil war between Medea’s father Aeetes and his brother Perses—the war that Medea watches in her *teichoskopia*—is a Valerian invention.⁸⁴ However, Valerius certainly intended portray Absyrtus’ death in a manner similar to Apollonius’s version. When Medea first appears in *Argonautica* 5, she has a nightmare, in which (among other ominous things) her brother tries to follow her across the sea: *fratre tamen conante sequi*, (with her brother trying nevertheless to follow, Valerius, *Argonautica* 5.338). This dream ends with Medea covering her hands with gore (*spargere caede manus*, Valerius, *Argonautica* 5.340). Apollonius’ depiction of the murder is equally as bloody as Medea’s dream, comparing Jason to a butcher as he dismembers Absyrtus (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.468).⁸⁵

As he dies, Apollonius’ bloodied Absyrtus reaches out to Medea:

λοίσθια δ’ ἦρωσ
θυμὸν ἀναπνείων χερσὶν μέλαν ἀμφοτέρησιν
αἷμα κατ’ ὠτειλὴν ὑποῖσχετο· τῆς δὲ καλύπτρην
ἀργυφῆν καὶ πέπλον ἀλευομένης ἐρύθηγεν
(Apollonius, *Argonautica* 4.471-4)⁸⁶

In its vestibule he fell to his knees, and in his final moments, as the hero breathed forth his spirit, he caught the dark blood flowing from his wound in both hands and stained red her silver white veil and her robe as she pulled away.

⁸⁴ Scal 2014, 114.

⁸⁵ Bremmer 1997, 84

⁸⁶ All Greek text from and English translations of Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* are from Race 2009.

In Valerius, the gore-streaked hands of Medea's dreams are not only metaphorical, but literal, showing the truth of a certain future.⁸⁷ By alluding to this scene, Valerius invokes Apollonius' blood-soaked episode and its evocative red-on-white imagery. Moreover, like Medea's erotic blush in *Argonautica* 6, this imagery alludes to Medea's loss of virginity, intensified here by her marriage and her new husband's role in the murder. Thus, Medea's bloody veil, or gory hands, reference her loss of innocence, in every sense. No sibling relationship can withstand Medea's desire for Jason, so Absyrtus' pursuit necessitates a conclusive break. His murder, at her design, is the culmination of Medea's destruction of her sibling bonds, and her separation from her natal family.

Ultimately, the sibling bonds that Medea, Ismene, and Antigone share do not suffice to stop disaster, but they uniquely drive each woman. As Medea moves closer to her eventual departure from Colchis, she leaves behind Chalcioppe and causes Absyrtus' death. Her relationship with the false Chalcioppe steers her towards Jason and away from her family, and her relationship with Jason will lead to the death of Absyrtus. Thus, Medea's disrespect for her sibling relationships echoes her general contempt for social norms and boundaries. The gods (Juno-Chalcioppe) play a role in perverting the sibling bond, further reflecting the darkness of Valerius' world and the destructiveness of Medea's love for Jason. Furthermore, although Ismene and Antigone are unable to solve the conflict between their brothers, they do accomplish something. Sisterly love cannot overcome epic conflict forever, but it is more successful than anything else. Antigone succeeds in burying Polyneices and honoring his soul. Similarly, Ismene's concern for her brothers, her distaste for marriage, and her lament for Atys all

⁸⁷ Davis 2014, 340

demonstrate her narrative power. The sisters' partial success illustrates the small amount of optimism that permeates through Statius' distressing epic world. At the end of the *Thebaid*, Statius shows that only women (the Argive women) and their lament have the power of reconciliation in a world scarred by male violence.⁸⁸ Similarly, within the cursed family of Oedipus, only women—sisters—can achieve anything good, again through their lament. Overall, both sisterhood and the bond between sisters and brothers emerge as integral forces that help illuminate each poem's major themes.

⁸⁸ Panoussi 2019, 112; This reading of Statius' *Thebaid* is disputed. For the opposing reading see Augoustakis 2010.

Chapter Two: Daughterhood in Valerius' *Argonautica*

Like sibling relationships, parent-child relationships form a fundamental part of the emotional landscape of Flavian epic. In earlier epics, such as Vergil's *Aeneid*, poets stressed the bond between father and son and the importance of filial devotion.⁸⁹ Flavian epic poets are still concerned with the father-son bond and the importance of fatherhood, but given their increased interest in exploring gender and female characters, they also expand this interest in fatherhood to female characters as well.⁹⁰ A Roman father (*paterfamilias*) held supreme power over his children, both sons and daughters alike.⁹¹ In return, Roman children were expected to treat their father with requisite respect and honor. This obligation was both religious and social, hence its association with the nebulous concept of *pietas*, or familial devotion.⁹² This centralization of fatherhood in epic also has a political dimension; the emperor was both the father of his family and the father of the state.⁹³ Moreover, this concept took on a new life in the Flavian period, as

⁸⁹ Maniotti 2016, 3.

⁹⁰ Augoustakis 2010, 9–14.

⁹¹ Dixon 1992, 2-3; Ibid. 40; Stocks 2016, 43.

⁹² In Latin, *pietas* is a complex word, with strong religious connotations. It describes the dutiful devotion and reverence towards one's family, gods, or country. In this study, I use the term filial *pietas* not because *pietas* does not already encompass filial duty, but to emphasize the importance of *pietas* in the daughter-parent relationship in Roman society.

⁹³ Stocks 2016, 41-2; Maniotti 2016, 5; The association between the imperial family and the state predates the Flavian period. The Julio-Claudians, especially Augustus, also made strong associations between their family and the state (Maniotti 2016, 3-5).

the emperor Vespasian and his two sons came to power.⁹⁴ In order to explore this concept in new ways, Flavian epicists began to examine filial *pietas* through daughters as well as sons. Valerius in particular explores and then juxtaposes two different father-daughter relationships: Medea and Aeetes and Hypsipyle and Thoas. Moreover, Flavian epic explores parent-child dynamics by focusing on motherhood and the relationship between mothers and their children, particularly their sons.⁹⁵ Finally, this new exploration of motherhood leads to the exploration of another important female familial role: daughterhood.

In this chapter, I examine how daughter-parent relationships affect the characterization and agency of two female characters in Valerius' *Argonautica*. First, I analyze Medea's daughterhood through her relationships with three different parental figures: her aunt Circe (who is actually the goddess Venus in disguise), her mother, and her father Aeetes. Then, I look at the Hypsipyle, the daughter of Thoas, king of Lemnos, and examine how her positive relationship with her father both stands on its own and reflects Medea's negative relationship with Aeetes. For Medea, her sibling ties are much easier to break than her tie to her father, but no bond is strong enough to keep her from Jason. However, her feigned regret at abandoning her father has serious consequences for his rightful paternal authority. Yet Medea easily abandons her mother, a woman whose conventionality makes her unable to fully understand or help her daughter. This lack of relationship with her mother makes Medea ripe for exploitation by Venus-Circe, who offers maternal-guidance in a package that appeals to Medea's desire for Jason and desire for more than barbarian Colchis. This (mis)guidance leads her to disobey her father by helping and marrying Jason, thus going against the accepted authority of both parents. Hypsipyle also

⁹⁴ Stover 2012, 74-5.

⁹⁵ Augoustakis 2010, 18-21; For more on motherhood in Flavian epic see Augoustakis 2010.

transgresses gender norms, but in a more positive way: her *pietas* motivates her to save her father from androicide. Once again, Valerius' portrayal of daughterhood draws greatly from the negative outlook of his epic. Hypsipyle is pious and good to her father, but that goodness cannot stand alone—it must be complicated by her gender transgressions and exist in a world full of overturned gender norms. Medea is a bad daughter, but her father is a devious barbarian who opposes the quest of the epic hero.⁹⁶ Ultimately, Valerius shows the importance of daughters' loyalty to their parents by examining how its opposite—filial disloyalty—creates instability and damages society.

Argonautica 7 begins as Medea sits in her room, struggling with her desire for Jason. This struggle between her duty to her family and her love for Jason is nothing new—it is the same struggle Medea has faced since she first laid eyes on him in *Argonautica* 5. However, it takes on a new urgency when Medea's father, King Aetes, demands that Jason complete impossible tasks to retrieve the Golden Fleece. Worried that Jason might die in his attempt, Medea returns to her bedchamber, caught between the force of her passion for Jason and her obligation to her father. Seeing Medea's uncertainty, Juno once again schemes to push her towards Jason by inhabiting the body of one of Medea's female relatives. This time, she asks Venus for help, so Venus takes on the appearance of Circe, the famous sorceress and Medea's paternal aunt. Once Venus-Circe enters Medea's chamber, the interactions between them, although those of an "aunt" and niece, resemble those of a mother and daughter.⁹⁷

At first, Medea reacts warmly to Venus-Circe, who appears to reciprocate this warmth by professing that she has come to help Medea: *tu nunc mihi causa viarum / sola* (you alone are the

⁹⁶ Stocks 2016, 53-4.

⁹⁷ Zissos 2012, 112; Stocks 2016, 55; Davis 2020, 161; Ibid. 163; Bernstein 2008, 58.

reason for my travels, Valerius, *Argonautica* 7.223-4). Medea and Venus-Circe affirm their familial relationship by addressing each other in the vocative: *o nata* (7.229), *mater* (7.242, 7.248), but the lines establish a closeness based on not only blood kinship but also mutual concern and affection. In light of that concern, Venus-Circe has come to give Medea advice about marriage. As an older female relative, her advice about marriage holds significant cultural weight, and ought to be genuinely helpful for Medea; instead, she manipulates her so as to steer her towards Jason and disobeying her father.⁹⁸ Venus-Circe therefore subverts the cultural and social expectations of her role as an aunt/mother-figure. Rather than ease her niece's transition from her natal family to her marital family, she sows discord; rather than respect the wishes of the *paterfamilias*, she encourages disrespect towards him and his authority over the family.⁹⁹ Her subversion of familial norms reflects the tainted state of familial relationships within the epic, but it also uncovers her fraudulence: the real Circe would never advocate disrespect of Aetes' authority.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, Medea's acceptance of her words reflects her own inner desire to believe Venus-Circe's lies. She seeks affirmation of her love for Jason (as much as she fights it), but she also wants to believe that the affection between Venus-Circe and herself is real.

As the scene unfolds, Venus-Circe offers herself and her foreign marriage as a model for Medea to follow:

fas mihi non habiles, fas et tibi linquere Colchos.

et nunc Ausonii coniunx ego regia Pici,

⁹⁸ Zissos 2012, 112-3.

⁹⁹ Stocks 2016, 43.

¹⁰⁰ Stover 2011, 184.

nec mihi flammiferis horrent ibi pascua tauris,
meque vides Tusci dominam maris. at tibi quinam
Sauromatae, miseranda, proci? cui vadis Hiberno
(ei mihi!) vel saevo coniunx non una Gelono?¹⁰¹
(Valerius, *Argonautica* 7.231-6)

It was right for me, and it is right for you too,
to forsake the inconvenient Colchians.
Now, I am the queenly wife of Ausonian Picus,
and there my pasture lands do not shudder with fire-breathing bulls,
and you see that I am the mistress of the Tuscan sea. But for you,
unfortunate girl, what sort of suitors are the Sauromatae?
To which Hiberian will you go, (alas!)
or—[and] not as [his] only wife—to which savage Gelonian?

Like Juno-Chalciope in *Argonautica* 6, Venus-Circe tells Medea about her future married life; unlike Juno-Chalciope, who describes one future with stark clarity, Venus-Circe describes various futures and their undesirability. Moreover, she mobilizes these futures as negative comparisons to the future she advocates. These potential bad choices—the Sauromatae, the Hiberi, and the Geloni—are all Caucasian tribes with homelands located far from the Mediterranean center of the Roman world.¹⁰² Since Medea has already been engaged to a

¹⁰¹ All Latin text from Valerius, *Argonautica* is from Ehlers 1980; All English translations are my own.

¹⁰² Davis 2020, 162-3.

Scythian prince, Styryx (3.465-7), Venus-Circe's specific reference to these tribes not only targets Roman associations of barbarism, but Medea's personal connection to her unwanted fiancé.¹⁰³ In contrast, Venus-Circe portrays her marriage to the Ausonian (Italian) Picus as better (*meliora*, 7.225) than any other marriage because of her new distance from these tribes and from Colchis. She affirms this sentiment further by clarifying that she is the "mistress of the Tuscan sea" (*Tusci dominam maris*). This connects her even more to Italy and the west and detaches her from eastern, barbarian Colchis, just as she urges Medea to do.¹⁰⁴ Although Jason is Greek, Valerius is a Roman, and his centering of Italy reflects Roman self-importance, creating a dichotomy between the desirable west and the barbarian east.¹⁰⁵ Ultimately, Venus-Circe wants Medea to go west with Jason; she activates the underlying contrast between east and west to strengthen her argument for Valerius' Roman audience.

In spite of Medea's exceptional vulnerability to Venus-Circe's persuasions, she still has an intense internal struggle. This causes her to vacillate between pleas for help and declarations of helplessness as she tries to keep herself from making the wrong, yet desirable, choice. First, she rejects the idea that she could end up in a bad marriage: *non ita me immemorem magnae Perseidos... / cernis, ut infelix thalamos ego cogar in illos* (So don't think that I don't remember great Perseis.../ that I, unlucky, could be forced into that [kind of] marriage, Valerius,

¹⁰³ Davis 2020, 162.

¹⁰⁴ Augoustakis 2010, 4; Colchis is located in the same area as modern-day Georgia.

¹⁰⁵ Augoustakis 2010, 4-5; Blum 2018, 196-7.

Argonautica 7.237-9).¹⁰⁶ Ironically, she is indeed being forced into an ill-starred marriage, by both her own passion and Venus-Circe herself. Trusting Venus-Circe as she trusted Juno-Chalciope, Medea asks her for comfort, not marital advice:

i, precor, atque illum pro me dimitte timorem.
sed magis his miseram, quando potes, eripe curis,
unde metus aestusque mihi, quaeque aspera, mater,
perpetior dubiae iamdudum incendia mentis.
nulla quies animo, nullus sopor, arida lingua.
quaere malis nostris requiem mentemque reponens...

(Valerius, *Argonautica* 7.240-5)

Go, I beg [you,] and send away that fear [about my marriage prospects] for me.
But rather, because you can, snatch these worries away from miserable me,
[the worries] from which my fear and passion [arise], mother,
and the bitter fires of my irresolute mind, [which] I have long endured.
There is no rest for my mind, no sleep, [my] tongue is dry.
Seek out a rest for my ills, restoring my mind...

¹⁰⁶ Per Davis 2020 Perseidos (daughter of Perses) refers to Hecate, the goddess of magic (not Medea's mother (Spaltenstein 2002-5) or Circe herself (Stover 2009). This reading takes into account the strong connection between Medea and Hecate in the literary tradition (163-4).

The familiarity of Medea's address to Venus-Circe (*mater*) underscores their personal connection and therefore the type of consolation she hopes to receive.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the subject matter is also deeply personal: the agony of love. Medea's physical and emotional response recalls the madness of tortured elegiac love. She is miserable (*miseram*), her soul has no rest (*nulla quies animo*), she cannot sleep (*nullus sopor*), and her tongue is dry (*arida lingua*).¹⁰⁸ Such symptoms also appear in elegy, such as the works of Catullus.¹⁰⁹ Valerius clearly intends to activate this allusive connection to Catullus by his use of the phrase *incendia mentis* (fires of the mind), which appears in Catullus 64, a poem written in the Hellenistic genre of epyllion or mini-epic.¹¹⁰ Catullus, although not an elegist himself, is considered the precursor of the genre. Thus, by referencing Catullus' work, Valerius highlights the interconnection between epic and love poetry, known to poets and readers of his time as elegy.¹¹¹ He also stresses the importance of Medea's elegiac passion for Jason within the epic world of his narrative.

¹⁰⁷ Zissos 2012, 112.

¹⁰⁸ Per Davis 2020, *misera* is an important word in elegy which is frequently used to describe Medea (164).

¹⁰⁹ Particularly the idea of numbness/dryness in the body, cf Catullus 51.9 (*lingua sed torpet*, but [my] tongue is numb).

¹¹⁰ Davis 2020, 165; As Davis notes, the reference to Cat. 64 also interacts with Valerius' theme of parent-child discord, as it is spoken by Aegeus to Theseus as a reminder of filial duty.

¹¹¹ Although Vergil included some elegiac elements in his epic (cf. Cairns 1989, Kenney 1983), Valerius' use of Catullus' elegiac intertext here also owes a lot to Ovid and his *Metamorphoses*, which explicitly blends and bends many genres, including elegy, into epic. For more on questions of elegy and genre in Ovid *Met.* see Harrison 2006 and Galinsky 1975.

Furthermore, Medea's symptoms are reminiscent of Dido's in Vergil's *Aeneid* 4, highlighting the parallels between the two characters.¹¹² Dido, like Medea, is yet another heroine whose divinely inspired marriage leads both her and her (metaphorical) descendants, the Carthaginians, to ruin. Just as all Latin epics after Vergil contend with the shadow of the *Aeneid*, so do all portrayals of tragic foreign women contend with the shadow of Dido.¹¹³ Medea's passion-fueled sleeplessness evokes Dido's: *neque umquam / solvitur in somnos, oculisve aut pectore noctem / accipit* (and she never / is released into sleep, or accepts night into her eyes / or her mind, Verg. *Aen.* 4.529-531). Yet Dido's sleeplessness comes from her grief at Aeneas' abandonment of her; its source is the destruction left in the wake of love, not merely the anguish of frustrated desire. At this point, Dido has already decided to kill herself, and bring her own story to a close (Verg. *Aen.* 4.474-5). Conversely, Medea's passion has yet to reach fruition, and her story is only beginning. Her love has a future—a tainted, tragic future, but a future nonetheless. Thus, by juxtaposing the ending of Dido's love (fulfilled but eventually lost) with the beginning of Medea's love (yet to be fulfilled but destined to be lost), Valerius asserts the tragic futility of Medea's petition to Venus-Circe to free her mind from the madness of her passion.

Ultimately, Medea cannot receive the release she craves. On one level, it is because her madness-inducing love for Jason is an inherent part of her character and her destiny. On another, it is because Venus-Circe, with her false maternal affection, is incapable of giving it to her. She acknowledges this as she declares: *tu quoque nil, mater, prodes mihi; fortior ante / sola fui* (and you too offer me no [help], mother; I was stronger before, / alone, Valerius, *Argonautica* 7.248-

¹¹² Davis 2020, 164-5.

¹¹³ Zissos 2012, 109.

9) The enjambment that results in the isolation of the phrase *sola fui* further serves to highlight Medea's confusion and disconnect from her purported aunt's advice. It also mirrors the similar enjambment and isolation of *sola* at 7.223-4, underscoring Medea's isolation. Likewise, the use of *mater* creates a contrast between the comfort Medea sought and the disingenuous counsel she receives. Medea, although she consistently seeks guidance from people she should be able to trust, always remains alone. Instead of gentle guidance and positive examples, Medea's duplicitously divine mother-figure only leads her deeper into turmoil, thus emphasizing the destructive power of the gods.

However, Venus-Circe does not offer only herself as an example for Medea. She also invokes two other examples of women who went against their fathers for the sake of a man:

si Pelopis duros prior Hippodamia labores
expediit totque ora simul vulgata procorum
respiciens tandem patrios exhorruit axes,
si dedit ipsa neci fratrem Minoia virgo:
cur non hospitibus fas sit succurrere dignis
te quoque et Aeaos iubeas mitescere campos?

(Valerius, *Argonautica* 7.287-9)

If Hippodamia expedited previously the harsh labors of Pelops,
and at the same time looking upon so many of the displayed heads
of [her] suitors, at last trembled at her father's chariot,
if the Minoan maiden killed her brother herself:

why would it not be right for you to help worthy guests
and also order the Aeaen fields to mellow.

Neither example truly bodes well for Medea. Hippodamia betrays her father so that Pelops can win a chariot race against him and become her husband. In doing this, she dooms her father to his death, and the circumstances of her plot to help Pelops win end with a curse that plagues her descendants for generations.¹¹⁴ The second is Ariadne, daughter of Minos (*Minoia virgo*) and half-sister of the Minotaur, who forsakes her father and her brother by helping Theseus in the Labyrinth. This offers a clearer parallel between her and Medea, who is contemplating helping Jason defeat the fire-breathing bulls and the *Spartoi* (Sown men) that lie between him and the fleece. Yet Ariadne's betrayal of her father, brother, and homeland only ends badly for her: Theseus abandons her. This example too has obvious parallels with Medea's looming future self. Therefore, Venus-Circe's *exempla* do not constitute positive encouragement; instead, they offer thinly disguised disaster.

Even though Medea is initially extremely reluctant, Venus-Circe's speech persuades her to take the decisive step and use her magic to help Jason obtain the fleece. Her response to Venus-Circe's speech is horror and anger, a reaction so strong that it affects her physically:
iamque toro trepidas infelix obruit aures verba / cavens; horror molles invaserat artus (and now

¹¹⁴ In some versions of this myth, it is Pelops and not Hippodamia that bribes Myrtilus (her father's charioteer) to disable his chariot and cause his death/loss of the race. However, I believe that in light of the Ariadne reference below and Medea's future murder of her children, the version where Hippodamia bribes Myrtilus is the one Valerius and Venus-Circe has in mind (so does Stover 2011, 188); the curse on Hippodamia and Pelops' descendants is the curse of the Atreides resolved by Orestes.

the unlucky [maiden] hid her frightened ears in the couch, avoiding / [these] words; bristling dread had invaded her weak limbs, Valerius, *Argonautica* 7.295-6). Once again, Valerius describes Medea as *infelix* (unhappy, unlucky) as she pushes against the designs of a false, godly relative, highlighting her inability to evade her divinely appointed fate.¹¹⁵ Moreover, this description contrasts with Medea's earlier declaration that she will not be *infelix* in her marriage (Valerius, *Argonautica* 7.238). Overall, Valerius demonstrates that no matter how hard Medea tries to fight her desires, her future and unhappiness with Jason is divinely sanctioned and therefore inevitable.

Furthermore, Valerius' word choice offers another parallel between Medea and Dido, often described by Vergil as *infelix*.¹¹⁶ Yet Medea, unlike Dido, successfully marries the object of her desire—at least for a little while. In his description of Medea and Jason's wedding, Valerius uses a “window” allusion to not only link his work with Vergil's *Aeneid*, but also back to his Apollonian model.¹¹⁷ Thus, Valerius uses Vergilian intertext to allude to Apollonius and imbues his depiction with the doubled allusive effect. Vergil's description of the “not-wedding wedding” between Dido and Aeneas shares many thematic similarities to Apollonius' depiction of the wedding of Medea and Jason: both take place secretly in a cave, under the auspices of Juno, under some amount of duress.¹¹⁸ But Valerius' take on the wedding features no questions of

¹¹⁵ Zissos 2012, 111; cf. Medea and Juno-Chalciope at *Argonautica* 6.490.

¹¹⁶ Davis 2020, 175; cf. *Aen.* 4.529.

¹¹⁷ Buckley 2016 63. For more on window allusions, see Hinds 1998. Due to Vergil's impact on the genre, window allusions via Vergil are common in post-Vergilian Latin epic. Cf. Lucan (Hinds 1998, 9-10), Statius (Panoussi 2019, 160-1), elsewhere in Valerius (Herszkowitz 1998, 145; Zissos 2017, 202).

¹¹⁸ Buckley 2016, 68.

legitimacy or secrecy, cementing Medea and Jason's marriage as not only legitimate, but also a focal point of the epic's themes.¹¹⁹ Dido dies, and Aeneas' story, the epic narrative, continues without her; Medea's story and its ultimate tragic end drive Valerius' entire work.¹²⁰ Medea, too, will end up like Dido: separated from her natal family, in perpetual exile, isolated. However, for Valerius, these themes of separation, isolation, and exile make Medea foundational to his epic purpose.¹²¹ Still, regardless of the legitimacy of her marriage or the size of her role in the epic narrative, Dido does have one thing Medea does not: a supportive female relative in the form of her sister Anna. Dido's relationship with Anna is genuine and supportive.¹²² In Valerius' *Argonautica*, Medea has no such relationships.

Therefore, in contrast to Dido and other heroines, Valerius' Medea is uniquely isolated from her female family members. Her relationship with her actual mother, not Venus-Circe's approximation of her aunt, does not appear in Valerius' text. Nor does she have any relationship with the real Chalciope (as discussed in chapter 1). Therefore, Valerius intentionally replaces Medea's female family members with goddesses during her most significant female interpersonal interactions. Moreover, Valerius wholly invented both interludes, especially Medea's conversation with Venus-Circe.¹²³ While Chalciope appears in Colchis in Apollonius and in many other versions of the Argonaut story, Circe does not.¹²⁴ Circe's place in Apollonius

¹¹⁹ Buckley 2016, 69-70; *Ibid.* 73.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 79; *Ibid.* 83-5.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 79.

¹²² For Dido's interactions with Anna, cf. *Aen.* 4.1-53, 4.416-449, 4.672-692.

¹²³ Stover 2011, 174.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

is after the flight to Colchis, in Italy, where she sympathizes with Medea, but ultimately disapproves of Medea's flight and murderous deeds (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.659-64; 4.639-48).¹²⁵ By placing Circe in Colchis at all, Valerius highlights the importance of her relationship with Medea. Furthermore, her fraudulence, in conjunction with the duplicity of Juno-Chalciope, reveal how frayed—and therefore ready to break—Medea's bonds with her natal family truly are.

Only in book 8 do Medea's real female relatives appear, and only after her flight. The whole city gathers on the shore as a response to her departure, especially the women:

Mater adhuc ambas tendebat in aequora palmas
et soror atque omnes aliae matresque nurusque
Colchides aequalesque tibi, Medea, puellae.
(Valerius, *Argonautica* 8.139-41)

Still her mother was extending both her hands to the sea
and her sister and all the other matrons and young women
and the Colchian girls [who were] peers to you, Medea.

Medea's departure draws out all types of women, young and old (*matresque nurusque*).¹²⁶ Moreover, Valerius places her among these women, visually, since in the line,

¹²⁵ Stover 2011, 182-3.

¹²⁶ *Nurus* literally means daughter-in-law but comes to mean just young women in poetry (cf. Ovid *Met.* 2.366, Lucan, *Bellum Civile* 1.146).

Colchides...Medea puellae, the phrase *Colchides ... puellae* surrounds Medea's name, and figuratively, since the Colchian girls are Medea's peers (*aequales*). Yet these peers were never present before, as Medea relied on her false relatives and her nurse for female companionship. Similarly, Medea's mother and sister, the real Chalchiope, are finally explicitly present—but only now that Medea is not. This crowd of women, including her true female relatives, only underscores Medea's emotional isolation, which is now made physical by the ocean as the Argo sails away (Valerius, *Argonautica* 8.138).

Until now, Medea's mother has been entirely marginal to the story. Her interactions with mother-figures have been either with Venus-Circe (as discussed earlier) or with her nurse Henioche (Valerius, *Argonautica* 5.356-363). This is not a divergence from Apollonius, who has a similar disinterest in Medea's mother. Although Apollonius names her twice, it is always in the guise of her role as Aetes' wife, not as Medea's mother.¹²⁷ However, Valerius now breaks from the Apollonian model and includes an emotional speech from Medea's mother, referring to her solely by her maternal status (*parens*, parent, Valerius, *Argonautica* 8.143):

“siste fugam, medio refer huc ex aequore puppem;
nata, potes. Quo” clamat “abis? Hic turba tuorum
omnis et iratus nondum pater; haec tua tellus
sceptraque. Quid terris solam te credis Achaeis?
Quis locus Inachias inter tibi, barbara, natas?
Istane vota domus expectatique hymenaei?”

¹²⁷ Medea's mother is named Eidyia or Idyia (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.243, 269, Hes. *Theog.* 958-62). She is the daughter of Tethys and Ocean (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 3.243, Hes. *Theog.* 352).

Hunc petii grandaeva diem?

(Valerius, *Argonautica* 8.144-49)

“Stop [your] flight, bring [your] ship back here from the middle of the sea;

You are able to [do this], daughter,” she shouts, “where are you going?

Here [is] a crowd of all your people, and your father [has] not yet [become] angry;

This is your land, and your kingdom,

why do you entrust yourself, alone, to the Achaean lands?

What place [is there] for you, as a barbarian, among the daughters of Inachus?¹²⁸

Is that [where your] wished-for home [is], and your anticipated marriage?

Is this the day I sought for my old age?

Like Venus-Circe, Medea’s mother addresses her with familiarity (*nata*) to stress the intimacy of their connection as mother and daughter. However, unlike in the case with Venus-Circe, Medea does not reciprocate this intimacy, a major theme of the speech. Medea’s mother understands her but is ultimately incapable of communicating with her before it is too late. Conversely, Medea does not understand her mother, nor seems to value their relationship. Medea’s mother’s character is highly stereotypical, incorporating elements of traditional female behavior, such as lament.¹²⁹ On the other hand, Venus-Circe and the bold, non-typical prospects she offers appeal to Medea in a way that her own mother and a traditionally arranged marriage do not. Moreover,

¹²⁸ *Inachus* refers to the Argive king Inachus and the river named after him in the Argolid, therefore “daughters of Inachus” is a metonymy for “Greeks” (Spaltenstein 2005, 417).

¹²⁹ Spaltenstein 2005, 416-7.

Medea's isolation, at both the gods' hands and her own, keeps her aloof from a typical mother-daughter relationship. Ultimately, this disconnect between the pair and their values displays Medea's disturbance of social norms and the failure of familial bonds more generally.

The mother's speech subverts the themes and arguments made by Venus-Circe at 7.231-6. First, she outlines Medea's connection to her fellow Colchians (*turba tuorum, tua tellus sceptraque*). Then, she describes the difficulties Medea will face as a barbarian woman (*barbara*) in Greece. While Venus-Circe reiterates the superiority of the West and urges Medea's separation from Colchis, Medea's mother seeks to strengthen her connection to her natal family, native land, and cultural identity. Moreover, she appeals to an important cultural role for children: caring for their parents in their old age (*hunc petii grandaeva diem*).¹³⁰ In contrast, Venus-Circe disregards Medea's obligations to her parents in favor of Medea's (supposed) self-interest. In the end, her mother's argument fails to effect Medea's return because it contradicts the epic's fundamentally Roman purpose: how can it be better to be *barbara*? But she also fails because of Medea's inherent transgressiveness and inescapable future. Medea cannot be persuaded to stay in Colchis and be a good daughter, because not only is it not her destiny, but also because it is not in her nature. In this way, Medea's mother's speech reminds the audience of the normative state of mother-daughter relationships and the appropriate role of the daughter within the family, while also showing the disruptive, non-normative nature of Medea's family relationships.

Medea's mother continues to exemplify typical familial relationships when she accuses Jason of inciting Medea's flight. Most importantly, she asserts the role of the parents in arranging marriages, another norm Medea has broken in fleeing with her chosen husband:

¹³⁰ Dixon 1992, 108.

Albano fuit haec promissa tyranno, / non tibi; nil tecum miseri pepigere parentes, / Aesonide

(She was promised to an Albanian warlord, / not to you; [her] wretched parents arranged nothing with you / son of Aeson, Valerius, *Argonautica* 8.153-5).¹³¹ Although she addresses this

complaint to Jason, she ultimately acknowledges Medea's personal agency in choosing to leave.

Unlike Absyrtus, Medea's mother understands the misery of her yearnful love: *sed quid ego*

quemquam immeritis incuso querellis? / ipsa fugit tantoque (nefas) ipsa ardet amore (but why do

I blame anyone with [these] unearned complaints? / she herself flees and (oh, the impiety!) she

herself burns with such love, Valerius, *Argonautica* 8.158-9). She knows that Jason is not truly

the author of Medea's flight; she also knows about Medea's infatuation with him.

Furthermore, Medea's mother has been paying attention to her daughter's distress:

hoc erat, infelix, (redeunt nam singula menti)

ex quo Thessalici subierunt litora remi,

quod nullae te, nata, dapes, non ulla iuvabant

tempora. non ullus tibi tum color, aegraque verba

errantesque genae atque alieno gaudia vultu

semper erant.

(Valerius, *Argonautica* 8.160-170)

This was why, unlucky one, (for each thing returns to my mind)

since the Thessalian oars landed on our shores,

nothing has made you happy, daughter, not feasts,

¹³¹ Bernstein 2008, 58-9; Aeson is Jason's father.

not weather. You had no color then, and your words [were] sickly,
and your eyes wander[ed] and your face was always the opposite of joyful.

Again, Medea is called *infelix*, keeping the audience perpetually attuned to her dark future and aware of her close intertextual kinship with Dido. From the mouth of Medea's mother, the word takes on a new meaning, as she imbues it with genuine concern for her well-being. Unlike Venus-Circe, Medea's mother does truly care for her. She also clearly knows Medea well enough to see the symptoms of her lovesickness and make the connection between Jason's arrival and Medea's new attitude. However, because of the disconnect between Medea and her mother, her concern can only go so far, and she fails to put the pieces together before it is too late. She recognizes this, regretfully, and thinks about all the things she overlooked in this new light (*redeunt nam singula menti*).¹³² She fails to realize that Jason is the object of Medea's lovesickness, nor does she notice the symptoms that plague her the most, and which Medea enumerates to Venus-Circe at 7.244: restlessness, sleeplessness, and a dry tongue. These symptoms are more personal, taking place at night in private. On the other hand, the symptoms Medea's mother notices are more public and easily visible: lack of joy at feasts (*nullae te...dapes...iuvabant*), pallor (*non ullus tibi...color*), an unhappy face (*alieno gaudia vultu semper erant*). This difference clearly shows an emotional distance between them, which sheds light on Medea's isolation. Although this isolation is primarily caused by the gods, as they

¹³² The idea of "realizing too late" comes from Vergil, particularly *Aen.* 7.123, when Aeneas recalls the prophecy given to him by Anchises, as noted by Spaltenstein (419). I believe that this serves as another place where Valerius deepens the parent-child themes of his work through intertext with Vergil.

systematically cut her off from her female relatives through their impersonations, the division between Medea and her mother also contributes to her separation from her family.

Finally, Medea's mother concludes her speech with a surprising declaration: she wishes she had known earlier about the depth of Medea's love for Jason, so she could have arranged the match herself:

cur tanta mihi non prodita pestis,
ut gener Aesonides nostra consideret aula
nec talem paterere fugam? commune fuisset
aut certe nunc omne nefas, iremus et ambae
in quascumque vias; pariter petiisse iuaret
Thessaliam et saevi qualemcumque hospitis urbem.”

(Valerius, *Argonautica* 8.165-170)

Why was such a disease not revealed to me,
so that the son of Aeson could have settled in our palace as a son-in-law
and you might not have endured such a flight? Or surely we could have
wholly shared in the impious act, [and] both of us might be sailing [together]
on whatever routes; and it would make us [equally] happy to have sought out
Thessaly and the whatever city [belongs to our] cruel guest [Jason].

Although Medea's mother did understand that Medea was lovesick, she failed to recognize the true extent of her passion, or even that Jason was this passion's target. Because of her

conventionality, she could not conceive of Medea's flight with Jason, which flies in the face of all social convention. Therefore, in spite of her obvious care for Medea, she is unable to truly connect with her. Try as she might, saying that she wishes she could have shared in Medea's impious transgression (*commune fuisset...nefas*) and gone with her and Jason, it is not enough. Although this sentiment might seem transgressive, it actually aligns with Medea's mother's earlier defense of familial norms.¹³³ Typical Roman marriages required parental approval, and with her present, Medea and Jason's marriage would have some form of parental consent.¹³⁴ Thus, her contention does not break social norms and does not reach Medea's level of transgression. Overall, Medea's mother is not a bad mother; she appears to understand and sympathize with her daughter's predicament and her beliefs and values are those of a good Roman mother. However, her relationship with Medea is one-sided, and the mismatch between their values does not allow her to understand her daughter deeply enough to affect her behavior. Ultimately, in including this speech, Valerius stresses the importance of parent-child relationships for maintaining social order and highlights the disruption Medea's breaking of these bonds has caused.

Furthermore, Medea's non-relationship with her mother contrasts with her emotional relationship with her father. Medea fears her father: *at trepidam in thalamis et iam sua facta*

¹³³ Spaltenstein takes Medea's mother's statement as paradoxical rhetoric (421), but I think it reads more as a loving mother's attempt to reconcile her stereotypical values with her daughter's transgressive ones.

¹³⁴ Roman fathers had more authority over Roman marriages than mothers (see n. 36), but maternal input was valued and important (Dixon 1992, 50)(Treggiari 1982, 41). Treggiari also cites Verg. *Aen.* 7.402: Amata's assertion of the *ius maternum* (maternal right) in choosing her daughter's spouse (1984, 439). Amata's offense at this right being denied shows that epic mothers, as well as real Roman mothers, had some amount of authority over the marriage-arranging process.

paventem / Colchida circa omnes pariter furiaeque minaeque / patris habent (but nervous in her bedchamber and quaking now at her deeds / all the anger and threats of her father surround the Colchian maiden, Valerius, *Argonautica* 8.1-3). Yet she also loves him, as her genuine distress at the thought of betraying him demonstrates: Medea rends her hair and cries (Valerius, *Argonautica* 8.07-9). Still, the young woman's love and grief do not hold her; her actions reveal her filial *pietas* as self-posturing. As she prepares to flee Colchis, she addresses her father in absentia:

o mihi si profugae, genitor, nunc mille supremos
amplexus, Aeeta, dares fletusque videres
ecce meos! ne crede, pater, non carior ille est
quem sequimur; tumidis utinam simul obruar undis!
tu, precor, haec longa placidus mox scepra senecta
tuta geras meliorque tibi sit cetera proles.

(Valerius, *Argonautica* 8.10-15)

Oh, father Aeetes, if only you could now give fugitive me,
a thousand final embraces and see my tears (behold)!
And don't believe it, father! He whom I follow is not dearer to me
(than you); if only we both were drowned simultaneously by the swollen waves!
I pray that you reign peacefully for a long time, in secure old age,
and that the rest of your offspring are better to you.

On its face, this confession appears to be a reversal of Medea’s previous infatuation with Jason. Here, she asserts that her father should not believe Jason is dearer (*carior*) to her than he is and that she longs for a last embrace (*supremos amplexus*). She also wishes him a peaceful, long reign (*longa...mox sceptrā*) and better luck with his other children (*meliorque tibi sit cetera proles*). However, these words do not correspond to her actions, nor do they ameliorate the effect of her departure on her father: *interea patrias saevus venit horror ad aures / fata domus luctumque ferens fraudemque / fugamque virginis* (meanwhile, a fierce shudder came to her father’s ears / announcing his house’ fate and [its] grief, and the maiden’s deception and flight, Valerius, *Argonautica* 8.133-5). Medea claims filial *pietas*, but in claiming it she also denies it. Both things she says she wishes for her father—the long reign and the happiness in his other children—are things she systematically undermines in her departure.

In helping Jason and leaving Colchis, Medea erodes her father’s authority. The Roman *paterfamilias* had complete control over his daughter’s marriage.¹³⁵ Moreover, Roman marriage was fundamentally a “family affair,” an institution that bound two families socially and politically.¹³⁶ The alliance between Medea and Styrius, her Albanian fiancé (3.465-7), would have been very beneficial to her parents, as Styrius has already proved his usefulness to Aetes by fighting alongside him during the civil war with Perses and killing a rival for Medea’s hand (6.265-279). Moreover, he comes from a neighboring group (the Albani) that shares cultural and social ties with the Colchians.¹³⁷ Jason, on the other hand, is a total outsider, whose goals stand in opposition to those of Aetes.

¹³⁵ Stocks 2016, 46-7; Bernstein 2008, 35; Dixon 1992, 61.

¹³⁶ Dixon 1992, 62.

¹³⁷ The Albani were a Caucasian people from the area around modern-day Azerbaijan.

Furthermore, Medea's choice of a marriage that disregards her father's will and interest reflects one of the prevailing cultural tensions of the Flavian period. Elite Roman women were expected to continue to represent their father's interests after marriage and held some amount of political power.¹³⁸ However, this power caused anxieties among elite men about their ability to control their daughters.¹³⁹ Roman history is filled with stories containing the trope of the "problem daughter," like Servius' Tullia or Augustus' Julia, elite daughters who resisted the bounds of their father's control, particularly through their relationships with other men.¹⁴⁰ Medea fits this archetype with her resistance to her paternally-chosen fiancé and with her marriage to Jason.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, these anxieties stem from another changing norm of the Flavian period: the trend towards *sine manu* marriages among the elite.¹⁴² *Sine manu* marriage meant that control over a woman and her property remained with her natal family and did not go to her husband's family.¹⁴³ Although this allowed fathers to maintain control over their property, it also led to increased financial power and independence for Roman women.¹⁴⁴ Informed by the landscape of

¹³⁸ Stocks 2016, 44-6; Ibid. 52.

¹³⁹ Ibid. 46-7.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 47.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 53-4.

¹⁴² Dixon 1992, 74-6; Van Abbema 2016, 297.

¹⁴³ Van Abbema 2016, 297; Romans had several types of marriage. The opposite of *sine manu* marriage was *cum manu* marriage, which meant that the woman's property went to her husband and she came under his control (Dixon 1992, 72-3). However, it is important to note that the terms *sine manu* and *cum manu* also are modern inventions, not Roman legal terms (Dixon 1992, 207).

¹⁴⁴ Van Abbema 2016, 297.

the Flavian era, Valerius therefore portrays Medea as asserting a dangerous amount of independence in marrying Jason and negating her father's authority over her marriage.

Further, and perhaps more importantly, Medea compromises her father's authority as a ruler, which reinforces the validity of masculine anxieties about "problem daughters" and female power. Aeetes never intended to allow Jason to obtain the Golden Fleece. Valerius first describes Aeetes' offer to Jason—the Fleece in exchange for aid in the war with Perses—as *astus* (a trick, 5.54). The accuracy of this characterization immediately becomes obvious when Aeetes changes the bargain and requests that Jason defeat the fiery bulls and the *Spartoi* (7.32-77). Jason, finally wise to Aeetes' game, calls this deal what it really is: *dolos* (deceptive trickery, 7.92). Aeetes has gone to great lengths to trick Jason and keep him from taking the Fleece, first by leveraging him for his own gain and then by demanding he carry out impossible tasks. Therefore, when Medea helps Jason, she directly disobeys her father's orders. This subversion of his orders not only emasculates him, since a father should not be disobeyed by a daughter, but also steals the power the Fleece represents. In the wake of Medea's departure, Aeetes loses face, the Fleece, and finally, his son. Medea will kill Absyrtus, causing Aeetes to lose his only male heir, ending not only Aeetes' family line but also his dynasty. Overall, the destructive power she wields in her relationship with her father reveals contemporary anxieties about elite daughterhood and contributes to her characterization by rendering her regretful words hollow.

Ultimately, Medea is fully cognizant of the repercussions of her betrayal. After her conversation with Venus-Circe, as she stands at the betrayal's precipice, she sees it for what is and has a vision of the future she embarks upon: *heu quid agat? videt externo se prodere patrem / dura viro, famam scelerum iamque ipsa suorum / prospicit* (alas, what can she do? she sees that she is cruelly betraying her father / to a foreign man, and now she foresees the fame of her / own

crimes, Valerius, *Argonautica* 7.309-11). Medea knows that it is her duty to be loyal to her father, but she also solidifies her cruelty towards him (*dura*) in this analysis of her betrayal.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, by having her perceive her future crimes, Valerius ties Medea's first transgression against familial norms (her betrayal of her father) to her future, more heinous transgressions (the murder of her own children).¹⁴⁶ All in all, Medea's unfaithfulness to her father and her abrogation of her natal family establish her character.

Medea is not the only heroine in Valerius, or indeed in the Argonautic narrative. She has a foil in Hypsipyle, the daughter of Thoas and princess of Lemnos, who is characterized by her devotion to her father in spite of the machinations of the gods. In *Argonautica* 2, Venus decides to cause chaos on the island of Lemnos because of her anger at her husband and at the Lemnians' impious attitude towards her (Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.94-102).¹⁴⁷ To enact her vengeance, she disguises herself as Lemnian woman named Dryope and upends normal society by driving all of the women into a jealous frenzy, like a Fury (Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.135-219).¹⁴⁸ Maddened by Venus, the Lemnian women massacre all of the Lemnian men as they return from war (Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.220-42). This mass murder—filicide and patricide all in one—creates a model of social and familial disorder that informs Medea's characterization later in the epic. It also

¹⁴⁵ Davis 2020, 179-80.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 180.

¹⁴⁷ Venus' husband is Vulcan, the god of fire and smithing. He was thrown from Olympus as a baby by his mother, Hera, and landed near Lemnos, where the locals raised him (Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.91-93). Venus is particularly angry at him because he caught her with her lover, Mars, and the Lemnians took Vulcan's side in this argument and began to neglect her worship (*Argonautica* 2.98-100) (Poortvliet 1991, 83-84)(Garson 1964, 274).

¹⁴⁸ Vessey 1985, 333; Panoussi 2019, 152.

establishes how the gods, especially Venus, act as forces of destruction in familial relationships, another motif that will reappear in the depiction of Medea, Juno-Chalciope, and Venus-Circe.

Yet Venus-Dryope does not seem to have any power over Hypsipyle. Amidst all this social disruption and impiety, Hypsipyle alone attempts to preserve familial relationships. Medea is so susceptible to Venus's persuasions because she shares a personal relationship with Circe, while Hypsipyle does not have a special bond with Dryope, who appears only in Valerius and seemingly exists so as to be possessed by Venus.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, Medea already loves Jason and wants to be with him; Venus-Circe only fans the flames of that fire. On the other hand, Hypsipyle loves her father and has no preexisting desire to kill him; her filial *pietas* is stronger than her (nonexistent) relationship with Dryope and is strong enough to withstand godly persuasion. Furthermore, Hypsipyle's filial and religious devotion serves as one of her major character traits; Valerius even describes her as *pias armata manus* (armed with *pietas*, Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.249).¹⁵⁰ Rather than kill her father, she urges him to flee and distances herself from the slaughter (Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.249-53).¹⁵¹ Overall, this sets up Hypsipyle as a force of order amidst chaos and an example of a dutiful daughter; it also establishes Hypsipyle and Thoas' relationship as a mirror for Medea's relationship with Aeetes.¹⁵²

Moreover, like Medea, Valerius singles Hypsipyle out as a heroine of epic interest:

Sed tibi nunc quae digna tuis ingentibus ausis

¹⁴⁹ Finkmann 2015, 11; Ibid. 24.

¹⁵⁰ Panoussi 2019, 149; Hershkowitz 1998, 138.

¹⁵¹ Vessey 1985, 335.

¹⁵² Stocks 2016, 49-50; Ibid. 52.

orsa feram, decus et patriae laus una ruentis,
Hypsipyle? non ulla meo te carmine dictam
abstulerint, durent Latiis modo saecula fastis
Iliacique lares tantique palatia regni.

(Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.242-6)

But now what words could I report [that are] worthy of your
extraordinary daring, Hypsipyle, the splendor, the one glory of your
failing homeland? No ages will ignore you, spoken about in my song,
if only they endure [to be recorded] on the Latin calendar,
and the Trojan gods and the palaces of such a royal power [endure too].¹⁵³

Here, Valerius connects Hypsipyle's achievement in daughterly *pietas* to Rome in a positive way, saying that her deeds will be remembered through his poem for as long as the Roman calendar exists (*durent Latiis modo saecula fastis*).¹⁵⁴ He also links Hypsipyle to Vergil's Aeneas, the paragon of *pietas* in Latin epic.¹⁵⁵ Like Aeneas, Hypsipyle saves her father from catastrophe wrought by the gods. Hypsipyle, like Medea, evokes Vergil's Dido, especially in her relationship with Jason.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, Hypsipyle's rescue of her father is extremely abbreviated in Apollonius; Valerius' inclusion of this extended rescue scene, then, exists purely to highlight

¹⁵³ Poortvliet 1991, 150.

¹⁵⁴ Hershkowitz 1998, 136-7; Zissos 2017, 203-4; Poortvliet 1991, 149-151.

¹⁵⁵ Vessey 1985, 335; Panoussi 2019, 149; Stocks 2016, 50; Hershkowitz 1998, 137.

¹⁵⁶ For more on Hypsipyle's connection to Vergil's Dido, see: Panoussi 2019, Hershkowitz 1998, Garson 1964.

these Vergilian connections, as well as the importance of the father-daughter relationship.¹⁵⁷

Thus, Hypsipyle's Romanness, in addition to her performance of proper daughterhood, serve to create a contrast between her and Medea. Although Valerius Romanizes Medea to some extent, he still emphasizes her status as *barbara* within the text. Thus, Valerius confirms the value of filial loyalty—and the disastrous consequences of filial disloyalty—within Roman society.

In order to save her father, Hypsipyle risks both of their lives. The Lemnian women are enraged, and Valerius' gory depictions of the slaughter cement the urgency and danger of her scheme.¹⁵⁸ She takes him to the shrine of Bacchus, where she dresses him as Bacchus' cult statue and sneaks him out of the city and into the woods (Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.261-78). Then, anxious about her father's hiding place being discovered, Hypsipyle decides to get him off the island (Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.279-284). She acquires a boat and sends him off to Tauris, where he is safe (Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.279-303). As she sends him off, Hypsipyle laments the social disorder in her homeland and hopes for her father's safety:

quam, genitor, patriam, quantas modo linquis
inanes pube domos! pro dira lues, pro noctis acerbae
exitium! talin possum te credere puppi, care parens?

¹⁵⁷ Hershkowitz 1998, 138.

¹⁵⁸ Valerius' depiction of the Lemnian massacre is very graphic, eg. Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.233-4: *it cruor in thalamis et anhela in pectore fumant / vulnera seque toris misero luctamine trunci / devolvunt* (blood runs in bedchambers and gasping wounds fumes / in breast[s] and with pitiful exertion, mutilated [men] roll themselves / off their beds).

non populos, non dite solum, non ulla parenti
regna peto; patria liceat decedere terra.
quando ego servato mediam genitore
per urbem laeta ferar? quando hic lacrimas planctusque videbo?
(Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.289-93, 296-9)

What a homeland, father, how many homes you now leave behind,
[homes] empty of men!¹⁵⁹ Alas, dire plague, alas death of the bitter
night! Can I entrust you to such a ship, dear father?

Not peoples, not rich soil, not any kingdoms do I seek for
my father;¹⁶⁰ [Just] let him leave his homeland's soil.
When will I be carried through the city center, happy because of my
saved father? When will I see tears and mourning here?

This speech highlights Hypsipyle's genuine devotion to her father, as well as her concern for the stability of her country. The situation parallels Medea's flight from Colchis and her treatment of Aetes. Where Medea leaves her homeland and father in chaos because of her actions, Hypsipyle sends her father away to save him from chaos beyond her control. Like the other Lemnian women, Hypsipyle takes part in the reversal of gender norms when she rescues her father; she is

¹⁵⁹ Poortvliet 1991, 171.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 174.

strong and assertive while he is passive and weak.¹⁶¹ However, her *pietas* makes her transgressions against gender norms more positive than they might otherwise be.¹⁶² It also casts them as more noble than Medea's actions, which are selfishly motivated. Furthermore, Hypsipyle explicitly states all she desires is her father's safety, not a kingdom or political authority (*non ulla parenti regna peto*). Where Medea is concerned about Aeetes' political future (even as she destroys it), Hypsipyle's concern for Thoas is not political, but personal and religious. Both daughters express personal concern for their father, but only Hypsipyle reinforces her expression of concern with actions that promote her father's well-being.

With her father gone, and Lemnos ruled entirely by women, Hypsipyle inherits her father's throne: *donant solio sceptrisque paternis / ut meritam redeuntque piae sua praemia menti* (they give her throne and her father's sceptres / as she deserves and rewards for her pious mind arrive, Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.309-10). Once again, her pious mind (*redeuntque piae...menti*) is her defining characteristic and the reason she deserves (*meritam*) her father's throne.¹⁶³ By taking on this masculine leadership role, Hypsipyle transgresses gender norms and maintains the disruption in the social order caused by the massacre of the Lemnian men.¹⁶⁴ This complication—her sustained perversion of gender norms—casts a shadow on the positivity of her daughterly achievements.¹⁶⁵ Yet unlike the other Lemnian women, or Medea, she did not seek to create this perversion. By saving her father and displaying appropriate filial loyalty, Hypsipyle

¹⁶¹ Panoussi 2019, 153-4; Ibid. 158.

¹⁶² Ibid. 158.

¹⁶³ Hershkowitz 1998, 138.

¹⁶⁴ Panoussi 2019, 153.

¹⁶⁵ Stocks 2016, 50; Panoussi 2019, 151.

acts appropriately as a daughter and upholds gender norms even as she distorts them. Thus, armed by this loyalty, she is able to navigate her paradoxical status as a good daughter who also goes against gender norms.

Yet even Hypsipyle's *pietas* cannot fully restore Lemnos to order; the women of Lemnos need men, especially to have children.¹⁶⁶ This is where the Argonauts enter the scene. When the Argo arrives at Lemnos, Hypsipyle and Jason meet. Like Medea, Hypsipyle quickly falls in love with Jason (Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.350-5). She even claims to love him more than her father in speech: *carius o mihi patre caput* (o darling, dearer to me than my father, Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.404). However, she never has to choose between Jason and her father, and she takes Jason's departure well. She is upset, but she understands the necessity of Jason's heroic destiny and does not try to stop him from leaving (Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.400-3).

Instead, Hypsipyle sends Jason off with the greatest honor she can imagine: her father's sword. As she does so, she asks him to consider this sword to be a part of her that goes with him:

tunc ensem notumque ferens insigne Thoantis
“accipe” ait, “bellis mediaeque ut pulvere pugnae
sim comes, Aetnaei genitor quae flammea gessit
dona dei, nunc digna tuis adiungier armis.
i, memor i terrae, quae vos amplexa quieto
prima sinu; refer et domitis a Colchidos oris
vela per hunc utero quem linquis Iasona nostro.”
(Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.418-25)

¹⁶⁶ Finkmann 2015, 14.

Then, holding the sword and famous badge of Thoas,
she says, “accept [this], so that I might be your comrade in wars
and mid-battle dust, the fiery gift of the god of Aetna,
which my father bore, now worthy to be joined with your weapons.¹⁶⁷
Go, go, remembering the land which first embraced you
in its restful breast; and bring your sails back from the tamed shores of Colchis
for the sake of the Jason you leave in my womb.

By assimilating herself with her father’s sword (*sim comes*), Hypsipyle underscores the connection between her father and herself. As his daughter, she should not be able to carry on his legacy the way a son might, yet she does, by ruling Lemnos, and through his sword, fighting with Jason. This gift is particularly significant because Hypsipyle has already given Jason a more conventional womanly gift, a cloak embroidered with the scene of her rescue of Thoas (Valerius, *Argonautica* 2.408-13).¹⁶⁸ Again, the scene on the cloak displays how Valerius has Hypsipyle’s *pietas* utterly define her.¹⁶⁹ However, the gift of both her handmade cloak and Thoas’ sword show not only her pious love for her father, but also the way that *pietas* allows her to fulfill at once her masculine and feminine gender roles in a positive way. Moreover, although Hypsipyle cares about Jason and even alludes to carrying his child (*per hunc utero quem linquis Iasona nostro*), she does not let her passion rule her. Her understanding of her own duty to her homeland

¹⁶⁷ Poortvliet 1991, 229.

¹⁶⁸ Zissos 2017, 206; Poortvliet 1991, 223.

¹⁶⁹ Hershkowitz 1998, 143.

and Jason's duty to his epic destiny set her apart from not only Medea, but also Dido, who cannot accept Aeneas' departure and leaves her people leaderless after her suicide.¹⁷⁰ By averting the tragic ending that befalls other epic heroines, like Dido and Medea, Hypsipyle further establishes herself as a positive counterpart of Medea.

Ultimately, while Medea's professions of filial *pietas* and impious actions do not align with her actions, Hypsipyle's always do.¹⁷¹ Her relationship with her father inspires her to act piously, defy nefarious divine machinations, and attempt to uphold normal familial relationships. Both she and Medea are epic heroines, but where Medea systematically rejects her relationships with her father, Hypsipyle does everything she can to preserve it. Even though they both love the same man, Hypsipyle does not let that love keep that man from his epic duty, nor does she let it overcome her. She lets Jason go, something Medea is never capable of doing and characterizes her actions in Valerius and beyond. To be sure, Medea is far more integral to the epic narrative, and the inertia of her story's inevitable conclusion prevents her from averting tragedy the way Hypsipyle does. The gods' targeting of Medea also sets her apart from Hypsipyle, whose ability to resist Venus comes from her lack of connection to Venus' chosen form or her message. Still, the idealized model that Hypsipyle's *pietas* and relationship with Thoas offers to Medea only serves to intensify the harsh wrongness of her impious behavior towards Aeetes.

In the end, the bonds Medea and Hypsipyle share with their parents compel them to act outside of normal daughterhood, for good and bad. Medea's incompatibility with her mother causes her to disregard their bond, which could have tethered her to Colchis and tempered her behavior. Instead, she turns to Venus-Circe, and allows herself to be persuaded to break every

¹⁷⁰ Hershkowitz 1998, 143.

¹⁷¹ Zissos 2017, 205; Zissos takes Medea's assertion of filial *pietas* as sincere, while I do not.

boundary governing parent-child behavior. Her lack of filial *pietas* leaves total destruction in its wake. In going against her father, ignoring her mother, and entrusting herself to the false Circe, Medea allows her parental relationships to greatly influence her behavior. Therefore, her measured rejection of these relationships (except for the one that gives her what she wants) shows the bleakness of family relationships in Valerius. More importantly, they highlight the dangers inherent in impious daughterhood and the abandonment of traditional sources of authority in the Roman family. Hypsipyle's behavior is also transgressive, but to pious ends. Thus, she represents the all-consuming importance of filial *pietas* to the stability of Roman society. Yet her transgressions still color her pious actions, showing that in Valerius' pessimistic world, even *pietas* cannot exist untainted. Valerius portrays filial *pietas* as instrumental to the fabric of society, and its troubled state in the world of his *Argonautica* only serves to intensify that world's unsettled nature. Parent-daughter relationships thus play an important role in Valerius, both as motivation for his character's actions and as clarification of the poem's larger pessimistic worldview.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I examine how Medea, Antigone, Ismene, and Hypsipyle navigate their familial relationships within the pessimistic, disordered thematic landscape of Flavian epic poetry. These relationships are essential to their characterization and motivations. Every character's action constitutes a reaction to a relationship with a natal family member, from Medea's betrayal of her father to Ismene's rejection of her marriage to Atys. Familial relationships characterize these women, like Hypsipyle's *pietas* or Medea's disloyalty, showing the audience the depths of each woman's psyche. Ultimately, these four characters' stories reflect the complex nature of women's relationships with their family members, and how the tensions surrounding love, duty, social norms, and religious obligations can influence their choices. Moreover, they show the new ways in which Flavian epic poets explore these complexities, and center both familial bonds and female characters in the epic narrative.

In Valerius, Medea's desire for Jason—and eventual decision to abandon her family for him—is the fatal blow to her familial bonds, both literally and figuratively. Although Medea is manipulated by goddesses impersonating her female relatives, their manipulations find root in fertile soil. These divine false relatives—Juno-Chalcioppe and Venus-Circe—manipulate the expected norms of the sisterly relationship and that between aunt and niece in order to persuade Medea to violate said norms by choosing Jason. Medea's preexisting indifference towards her mother and foreshadowed lethal violence against her brother reveal that disregard for family and *pietas* is not only inherent in her character, but endemic to Valerius' impious world. However, Medea's lack of filial *pietas* allows her to play such an important role in the epic narrative, as her treachery against her father help Jason to achieve the object of his heroic quest. On the other hand, Hypsipyle and her devotion to her father and homeland offer a positive example that

contrasts with that of Medea. Hypsipyle resists godly tricks to save her father, and she lets Jason go, choosing the wellbeing of her homeland over her passion for him. Still, the Lemnian massacre and her gender-defying assumption of her father's role as king cast a shadow on Hypsipyle's love for her father and homeland, proving that nothing good in Valerius' epic can stand uncorrupted.

In Statius, Ismene and Antigone's sisterly devotion both serves as a contrast to their brothers' discord and catalyzes their actions. Ismene's dream reveals that she prioritizes her natal over her marital family and seeks to end the conflict between her brothers. Her lament for Atys also confirms the importance of female lament as a restorative force in the narrative, thus amplifying later laments like Antigone's and that of the Argive women. Furthermore, Antigone's *teichoskopia* and her battlefield burial of Polyneices show that familial love can not only inspire transgressive behavior, but also effect some small reconciliation in a world ruptured by civil war. Thus, each sister's devotion towards to her natal family reveals the significance of female characters' actions, especially lament, in epic. Moreover, they show that when familial love inspires the actions of female characters, the potential for positive outcomes arises. Statius' epic may have a dark, pessimistic outlook on the world of masculine, martial deeds, but the deeds of his female characters offer the possibility of a brighter future.

From these examples, Roman epic poets emerge as clearly interested in family relationships, since they affect not only the family, but the world at large. This interest grew in the Flavian era, where poets like Valerius and Statius centered large portions of their works around conflict and complicated dynamics between family members. Moreover, in Flavian epic, the importance and prominence of female characters increased, creating more room for female expression and action to impact the epic world and narrative. Together, these two factors reflect

on the one hand, the emotional stress of recent civil war on Romans' perceptions of familial relationships and interpersonal conflict, and on the other, the changing social and economic status of women in the Flavian period. Furthermore, through their intertextual dialogue with earlier poets, like Vergil, Flavian epic poets intensify the thematic resonance of their work.

Ultimately, when it comes to sibling relationships in Flavian epic, there is still more to explore outside of the topics examined in this thesis, both in the epics themselves and beyond. Although I did not include Silius' *Punica* in this study, I believe a deeper analysis of Dido and Anna's relationship in the *Punica* and the *Aeneid* could offer further valuable insights into epic sisterhood across Latin epic. In addition, the question of brotherhood, both biological and forged in battle, is extremely important to the *Thebaid*, the *Argonautica*, and the *Punica*. Moreover, since Statius' works were popular in both late antiquity and the Middle Ages,¹⁷² a study of his influence on the portrayal of sibling relationships in late antique and medieval literature could offer new perspectives on not only Latin, but also early French, Spanish, and Italian poetic works.¹⁷³

Overall, Flavian epic poets portray familial relationships as crucial to female characters' motivations, aspirations, and actions in the epic narrative. As Aristotle explained, suffering because of close relationships is at the heart of the epic plot, driving characters to act and the audience to feel. Within the context and prescribed norms of familial relationships, interactions between characters are amplified and become more poignant. From Medea's deadly betrayal to

¹⁷² Kaufmann 2015, 481; Edwards 2015, 497.

¹⁷³ For example, in Newlands 2013, Newlands argues that Statius' portrayal of Hypsipyle's lament in the *Thebaid* influenced female writers of medieval Latin lyric poetry, thus showing the importance of considering Statian influence in medieval Latin works.

Antigone's law-defying burial, the bonds of kinship that motivate these epic characters make them more meaningful and more powerful, allowing them to resonate deeply with a wide audience.

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