

Gesine Manuwald

‘Herculean tragedy’ in Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica*

1 Introduction

That Valerius Flaccus’ Flavian epic *Argonautica* is a highly intertextual poem, not only referring to Greek and Roman predecessors in the same genre (often by means of multiple or combinatorial imitation), but also by making use of other types of poetry (and prose) and even challenging the generic boundaries of epic,¹ is now widely acknowledged by scholars, in the wake of a re-evaluation of the epic poetry of the late first century CE in view of insights of modern literary theory.²

In relation to other poetic genres it has long been recognized that the structure of individual episodes can be seen as resembling a ‘tragedy’³ (similar to the Dido story in Vergil’s *Aeneid*).⁴ That there are individual verbal reminiscences of Senecan tragedy in Valerius Flaccus is also well known.⁵ Tragic structures and

1 On the play with generic tensions in Valerius Flaccus see Feeney 1991, 320–328; Blum 2019. On the relationship of scenes in Valerius Flaccus to love poetry see e.g. Heerink 2007.

2 For an early instance of this re-evaluation (particularly with respect to the relationship between the Flavian poets and Vergil) see Hardie 1993a; for an overview of the changing views in scholarship see Delz 1995.

3 Elements in an epic can only be identified as reminiscent of ‘tragedy’ on the basis of a definition of this dramatic genre, which is notoriously difficult. The discussion here will take its starting point from the description provided by Aristotle (*Poet.* ch. 6): it emphasizes the role of the plot and its effect on the feelings of audiences, for instance by reversals or recognitions (see also Bob Cowan in this volume). The relationship between epic and tragedy has also been explored with reference to other Flavian epics: on Statius and tragedy see e.g. Heslin 2008; Smolenaars 2008; Soerink 2014b; Augoustakis 2015.

4 See, e.g., on the Cyzicus episode in *Argonautica* 3, Garson 1964, 268–269: “The essential new feature of the Cyzicus episode is that, like Vergil’s Dido story, it is cast in the tragic mould, and this is the aspect that deserves most emphasis. We should consider it under the following heads: (1) *hybris*; (2) *peripeteia*; (3) irony; (4) ‘choric’ interludes; (5) speeches.”

5 For an overview of earlier secondary literature on this aspect (since 1871) see Grewe 1998, 173–174; Buckley 2014, 307–308. Owing to the fragmentary evidence, Valerius Flaccus’ relationship to Roman Republican tragedy is almost impossible to describe (for an overview of a few potential references to Ennius’ epic see Jocelyn 1988). The description of Hercules’ fight with the sea monster to rescue Hesione (see below) might be reminiscent of Ennius’ *Andromeda*; that the line *o domus, o fretinequiquam prole penates* (VF 1.721), spoken by Pelias, could be reminiscent of the line *o pater, o patria, o Priami domus* (Enn. *Trag.* 80 Ribbeck²⁻³ = 101 Warmington = 87 Jocelyn = 23.10 Manuwald [*TrRFv.2* / *FRL*]) in Ennius’ *Andromacha* has been supposed (Ripoll 2008, 392).

tragic colouring have been identified in the shape of scenes, character portrayals and foreshadowings in Valerius Flaccus, while the presence of such elements may lead to generic tensions.⁶ Medea, a tragic heroine par excellence and featured in numerous Greek and Roman tragedies, and her interaction with Jason in the second half of the epic have been a major focus of such studies.⁷

What has been studied less is whether — apart from Medea (and Jason) — there are elements of tragedy in the stories of other characters in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* and how existing tragic dramas about them might have influenced features throughout the epic.⁸ The most prominent Argonaut after Jason is Hercules,⁹ and it is understood that, in Valerius Flaccus' version, the scenes devoted

Possible connections between Republican tragedy, especially Accius' *Amphitruo* and Seneca's *Hercules furens*, have been considered, but the remaining fragments of Accius' play are too few to enable clear conclusions (see Fitch 1987, 48–49; Billerbeck 1999, 23–24).

6 See e.g. Ripoll 2003b; 2004; 2008; Buckley 2013; 2014; Blum 2019; cf. also Liberman 1996.

7 See e.g. Grewe 1998; Ripoll 2003b; 2004.

8 On the approaches taken in scholarships so far see Ripoll 2008, 383–384: “Mais ces travaux n'envisagent que l'emprunt de motifs ponctuels de telle ou telle tragédie dans tel ou tel épisode de l'épopée de Valérius: c'est davantage de l'influence des tragédies (et plus précisément, de certaines d'entre elles) que de la présence du tragique qu'il est question. Or certains critiques ont reconnu à cette épopée une couleur tragique que ne se réduit pas à l'influence ponctuelle de quelques intertextes, mais peut englober celle-ci. Il est donc pertinent de poser le problème du tragique sous un angle plus large, en ne s'en tenant pas exclusivement à une intertextualité «directe», mais ne élargissant l'investigation à des ressorts dramatiques ou à des éléments thématiques plus large qui contribuent à cette «ambiance tragique» ressentie par certains critiques de façon semi-intuitive. Il convient aussi de préciser la place exacte de cette couleur tragique dans le projet poétique d'ensemble de l'œuvre. Quant on parle de la présence du tragique dans l'épopée de Valérius Flaccus, c'est en général aux derniers chants, ceux où apparaît Médée, que l'on pense. En dehors des chants VII et VIII, la critique s'est peu intéressée à cette problématique: citons simplement un article de R. Garson partiellement consacré à l'influence tragique dans l'épisode de Cyzique au chant III, dans lequel l'auteur met très bien en lumière le travail de réélaboration dramatique et tragique effectué par le poète flavien à partir du récit d'Apollonios de Rhodes. C'est dans le prolongement de cette analyse que je voudrais me pencher à présent sur la série d'épisodes du chant I mettant en jeu le destin d'Éson, le père de Jason: des passages souvent étudiés séparément, notamment sous l'angle de l'intertextualité, mais que l'on n'a jamais vraiment tenté de mettre en relation les uns avec les autres pour faire apparaître la cohérence qui se dégage de cet ensemble. Je voudrais montrer que cette série d'épisodes a été délibérément conçue par le poète comme une véritable tragédie qui se développe en contrepoint de ce que j'appellerai «l'axe épique» du chant I (c'est-à-dire les préliminaires de l'expédition argonautique); les reminiscences énéidiennes relevées par les commentateurs ne sont donc qu'un élément d'un dispositif plus vaste. Je voudrais aussi suggérer que cette couleur tragique ne relève pas d'un effet pathétique ponctuel, mais s'intègre dans le projet poétique d'ensemble de l'œuvre.”

9 On Hercules in the literature of the first century CE see Piot 1965; Ripoll 1998a, 86–163. The studies of Schütz (1950) and Zwierlein (1984) do not include Valerius Flaccus.

to him form a narrative thread of their own.¹⁰ While there are studies on Hercules’ character (and his relationship to Jason),¹¹ it is surprising that the ways in which the presentation of his story in the *Argonautica* might bear resemblances to tragic narratives has not been studied in detail,¹² especially in view of the fact that Greek and Roman tragedies featuring Hercules among the protagonists survive in full (Sophocles, *Philoctetes* and *Trachiniae*; Euripides, *Alcestis*, *Heracles* and *Heracleidae*; Seneca, *Hercules furens* and *Hercules Oetaeus*¹³).¹⁴ The reduced attention to the role of tragedy, that of Seneca in particular, in comparison to that of Homer or Vergil may be connected with the fact that scholars have only recently started

10 See esp. Adamietz 1970; also Adamietz 1976 *passim*. They are therefore more than ‘self-contained tableaux’ (thus Galinsky 1972a, 164 n. 20 [p. 166]).

11 See e.g. Adamietz 1970; Galinsky 1972a, 163–164; Gärtner 1994, 100–101, 289–291; Billerbeck 1986, 3130–3134; Ripoll 1998a, 88–112 (who, among other details, notes the general influence of the mythological tradition and a Stoic presentation as in Seneca); Edwards 1999 (argues that a ‘Herculean epic’ is impossible and Hercules was eclipsed in Latin poetry with the exception of Senecan tragedy); Zissos 2014, 272–275.

12 See Buckley 2014, 307: “The linguistic influence of Valerius’ most immediate tragic precursor, Seneca, on the Flavian epic has also been long recognised — in 1871 Karl Schenkl noted that Valerius was a diligent reader of Senecan tragedy — but the significance of the role Senecan tragedy plays within the *Argonautica* has not been explored in much depth.” Buckley (2014, 319–324) provides a brief comparison between Valerius Flaccus’ Hercules and the Senecan Hercules tragedies, focusing on the presentation of characters and the impact on the epic as a whole. Some more general considerations on the role of Hercules in the generic tensions at work in the *Argonautica* can be found in Blum’s study (2019, 72–87).

13 The question of this drama’s authenticity is irrelevant in this context (on this problem cf. e.g. Walde 1992 *passim*). Views on the poet do, however, affect assumptions on the date of the play and the question of whether it was written before Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica*. For comparison of motifs, if no direct influence is postulated, this can largely be ignored too. For comments on Hercules in Seneca see also Sen. *Ben.* 1.13.3: *Hercules nihil sibi vicit; orbem terrarum transivit non concupiscendo, sed iudicando, quid vinceret, malorum hostis, bonorum vindex, terrarum marisque pacator; Constant.* 2.1: *pro ipso quidem Catone securum te esse iussi; nullam enim sapientem nec iniuriam accipere nec contumeliam posse, Catonem autem certius exemplar sapientis viri nobis deos immortalis dedisse quam Ulixem et Herculem prioribus saeculis. hos enim Stoici nostri sapientes pronuntiaverunt, invictos laboribus et contemptores voluptatis et victores omnium terrorum; Ag.* 808–866; *Apocol.* 5–7. On Seneca’s Hercules see Galinsky 1972a, 167–184; for recent overviews of *Hercules furens* and *Hercules Oetaeus* see Billerbeck 2014 and Littlewood 2014 respectively.

14 On Hercules in Greek tragedy see e.g. Galinsky 1972a, 40–80. No Roman tragedy named after Hercules is known from the Republican period (see also Galinsky 1972b, 128–129). Hercules does not appear in comic roles in Rome (see Galinsky 1972b, 128).

to explore the influence of Neronian literature on Valerius Flaccus in greater detail.¹⁵ While the focus of the present study is on the direct relationship between Valerius Flaccus and tragedy, one must bear in mind that there is indirect influence too, as his model Apollonius Rhodius already reacted to classical Greek tragedy.¹⁶ Further, Senecan tragedy is not the only intertextual reference or parallel; often there is also a connection to earlier epics, especially Vergil's *Aeneid*, with which Seneca may have also interacted. In order to illustrate the role of tragedy, possible connections to other literary genres will be disregarded here.

As a contribution to a more detailed analysis of intertextual connections between epic and tragedy, this essay will first look at the Hercules thread in the *Argonautica* as a potential 'tragedy' and then consider whether motifs in Valerius Flaccus' epic might bear similarities to existing Hercules tragedies.¹⁷ Compiling this evidence will make it possible to draw conclusions on the relationship of Valerius Flaccus' poem to 'Herculean tragedies' and to tragic structures more generally and then on the effect of these connections on the epic's outlook.¹⁸

2 The Hercules story in Valerius Flaccus as a 'mini-tragedy'

Within Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica* the Hercules story is more elaborate than its presentation in his predecessor and thematic model Apollonius Rhodius since Valerius Flaccus adds extra scenes and modifies existing ones. In his version the Hercules story covers the following main steps: Hercules (along with his young companion Hylas) joins the expedition, causing Juno's displeasure (VF 1.108–119). Jupiter announces in the divine assembly that Hercules (like the sons of

15 On Lucan and Valerius Flaccus see Stover 2012, after only few preceding studies.

16 On Apollonius Rhodius and tragedy, see e.g. Hunter 1989, 18–19. The role of Hercules as a Stoic hero will be less relevant for this literary study (on the influence of Stoicism on Hercules in Valerius Flaccus see Billerbeck 1986, 3130; on 'Stoic' aspects in Valerius Flaccus' portrait of Hercules, see Zissos 2014, 272–275; on the role of philosophy in Valerius Flaccus generally, see Ferenczi 2014; Zissos 2014).

17 Similarly, Ripoll (2004) has argued that *Argonautica* 7 has a 'tragic structure', that the 'two main characters reach the status of tragic heroes' and that there are verbal echoes of Seneca's *Medea*.

18 For Valerius Flaccus the Latin text in Ehlers' Teubner edition (1980) has been used, for Seneca that of Zwierlein's Oxford Classical Text (1986). English translations follow the Loeb editions, by Mozley (1934) and Fitch (2002/2004) respectively.

Leda) will eventually enter heaven (VF 1.561–573). Hercules wants to take action during the threatening sea storm that the Argonauts experience shortly after starting on their first sea voyage, but finds his club and quiver useless (VF 1.634–635). During the Argonauts' stay at Lemnos Hercules is the only Argonaut to remain on the ship and not to engage with the Lemnian women, so that his love of adventure makes him call his comrades back to their mission (VF 2.373–384). When the Argonauts stop near Troy, Hercules rescues Hesione, Laomedon's daughter, but does not receive the promised reward and escapes the snares of the treacherous king by moving on (VF 2.445–578). At Cyzicus Hercules participates successfully in the battle between the Argonauts and the local inhabitants, and his actions reveal to one of the victims that this is a fight between former hosts and guests (VF 3.124–137, 161–172). During the subsequent 'rowing contest' Hercules breaks his oar (VF 3.462–480). When the Argonauts land in Mysia, to enable Hercules to get a new oar, Hercules loses his friend Hylas on Juno's instigation, is devastated and is eventually left behind by the other Argonauts (VF 3.481–725). In pity for him and prompted by the entreaties of other gods, Jupiter arranges another task for Hercules, namely to free Prometheus (VF 4.1–81). Hercules' freeing of Prometheus is his last appearance in the epic (VF 5.154–176).

While the constraints of the epic plot and its form of presentation mean that there cannot be a one-to-one correspondence between a narrative sequence in epic and the structure of a tragedy, one might suggest that Valerius Flaccus' Hercules story could be read as an extended tragedy. In Valerius Flaccus Hercules is the strongest Argonaut, ready to take action at any time; yet simultaneously he appears as one of the most unfortunate. Even though on Lemnos Hercules is the only one to remind his fellow Argonauts of the purpose of their mission, he is unable to participate in the Argonauts' eventual success of reaching Colchis and obtaining the Golden Fleece. On the contrary, he not only loses his beloved Hylas, but is also left behind by the other Argonauts halfway through the journey. This catastrophe is the result of a sequence of events to which Hercules contributes unknowingly. The pitying intervention of his divine father Jupiter, which indicates the dimension of Hercules' suffering on earth, resembles the action of a *deus ex machina*. Therefore, the Hercules 'tragedy' in the epic ends with a positive outlook, rather than with utter devastation.

As in expositions in dramatic prologues, Valerius Flaccus adumbrates the fate awaiting Hercules at the beginning of the epic, when both parties of the gods, the antagonist (Juno) and the supporter (Jupiter), indicate their plans for him (VF 1.108–119; 1.561–573): it is thereby clear from the start that Hercules' path to

heaven will be tough and wearisome, but that he will finally be honoured.¹⁹ At the same time suspense is created as to how Hercules' fate will develop since Juno does not take immediate action after she has delivered the monologue indicating her plans. Moreover, while eventual reward after much toil is an expectation suggested for the Argonauts' voyage as whole (VF 1.234–238), it does not become evident to the characters in its application to Hercules. In particular, while the sons of Leda, for whom Jupiter announces a place in heaven in the same utterance (VF 1.561–573) in an appendix to his programmatic speech to the gods (VF 1.531–560), receive a divine light, which might indicate their exceptional status and the support from their divine father,²⁰ nothing of this sort happens to Hercules; therefore it is not obvious to characters in the epic that for Hercules too there is a positive expectation for the future.²¹

In an initial phase Hercules gradually accepts the requirements of the novel enterprise and proves himself successful. While he is unable to confront the sea storm on the Argonauts' first sea voyage by his traditional weapons (VF 1.634–635), he has made the mission's goal his own to such an extent that he cannot bear lingering at Lemnos and demands to be given back 'the perils of the Scythian sea' and the chance 'to stay the Cyanean rocks and to despoil one vigilant monster more' (VF 2.373–384). For readers this eagerness is full of tragic irony, since Hercules will leave the enterprise before he will have the opportunity to carry out these initiatives and to reach the river Phasis and king Aeetes in Colchis. Still, his wish to accomplish a heroic deed in connection with the sea voyage just with his friend Telamon, if nobody else is willing, is realized shortly afterwards (in a scene not included in Apollonius Rhodius): when the Argonauts land near Troy, Hercules and Telamon go off on their own and find Hesione besieged by a sea monster (VF 2.445–578). For Hercules this resembles a situation he has experienced before when completing his labours (VF 2.493–496), and he gets ready to fight the monster. The fighting raises special challenges because the opponent is a sea monster

19 That Jupiter foresees suffering even for his protégés and only initiates a resolution after much pain for individuals (see below) is in line with the portrayal of this god in Valerius Flaccus (cf. his intervention at the end of the battle on Cyzicus, VF 3.249–253).

20 Castor and Pollux are the sons of Tyndareus and Leda (Hom. *Od.* 11.298–304; VF 1.570–571; 5.367). At the same time, both of them were also seen as sons of Zeus (hence their other name Dioscuri, not used in Valerius Flaccus), or Castor was regarded as the son of Tyndareus and Pollux as the son of Zeus (VF 4.256; 4.312–313).

21 Billerbeck (1986, 3133) notes that in Jupiter's view simply participating in the voyage of the Argonauts is a step on the path to the stars. Still, although Valerius Flaccus has Jupiter make a comparison with Apollo and Bacchus, who travelled the world, with respect to Hercules and the Tyndaridae there is emphasis on toil.

in the water, and Hercules has to adapt his weapons; he uses rocks at hand and eventually kills the monster (VF 2.521–536).²² This scene shows Hercules' readiness to take action as well as his flexibility and strength in fighting; while he feels pity for Hesione (VF 2.454–456; 2.493–496), the fact that she is an attractive young woman is not relevant for him. Thus, at this point Hercules appears successful and sure of victory, just as the traditional figure of Hercules completing the twelve labours. Accordingly, he retains the attitude shown at Lemnos: he is keen to move on and complete the real task (VF 2.574–576). This hurry enables him to escape the king's snares, which would have led to a change of mood and a different plot at an early point in the story; at the same time, the poet makes it clear that Hercules is being tricked without any responsibility on his part.

This successful phase full of action reaches its collective *peripeteia* at the Argonauts' next stopover: during the battle on Cyzicus Hercules continues to fight effectively with his traditional weapons, but this time his strength is directed against friends, of which he is unaware. This situation, which applies to all Argonauts, becomes obvious in a dramatic climax in the middle of the battle description, when Hercules vaunts his success: this makes his victim realize the enemy's identity and enables him to bring the true facts to the shades in the underworld (VF 3.168–172). Hercules' proudly expressed confidence and fighting spirit, which lead to his identification, have his guilt appear personalized, even though he does not realize what he is doing.²³ This battle also sees the first military successes of his companion Hylas, while their short duration and his subsequent fate are foreshadowed, again a dimension only available to readers (VF 3.182–185). Accordingly, for both Hercules and Hylas achievements in this battle are combined with problematic consequences for the future.

Prior to the impending catastrophe for Hercules, there is a comic interlude: during the rowing contest indicating the Argonauts' relief after the fight on Cyzicus and the subsequent purification and atonement ritual, Hercules, even spurring on the contest, breaks his oar, falls over several of his companions and is reduced to inactivity until his oar is replaced (VF 3.462–480). The stopover that allows him to do so causes the catastrophe; thus, to some extent, Hercules is responsible for creating the circumstances of his downfall (as becomes apparent to

²² Structurally, Hercules' fight with this monster functions as a kind of replacement in his 'Argonautic journey', since he will not get the chance to fight monsters at Colchis, as he envisages (VF 2.378–384).

²³ In contrast to Jason (VF 3.290–313; 3.369–376) nothing is said about how Hercules deals with the situation afterwards in relation to potential feelings of guilt after the true conditions have become evident; he is a hero of action and less prone to reflections about events.

readers in tragic irony). For when the Argonauts disembark at Mysia, Hercules' archenemy Juno spots a good opportunity for her revenge: while Hercules and Hylas are in the woods, she rouses a stag luring Hylas; Hylas follows the stag, even encouraged by Hercules (VF 3.550–551), and is then drawn into a pool by a nymph (VF 3.481–564). This version of Hylas' disappearance, with Juno's involvement, only appears in Valerius Flaccus: it turns this scene into a proper element of the Hercules story and links it with its other elements. Among Valerius Flaccus' other modifications in comparison with Apollonius Rhodius are the facts that Hercules and Hylas are together when Hylas disappears and Hercules even urges Hylas to pursue the stag (thus again contributing to the realization of Juno's plan and Hylas' loss in tragic irony) and that later Hercules is left in the dark about Hylas' fate. This elaboration increases the severity of the hero's downfall and the impression of its tragic nature: as a result of Hylas' loss, Hercules is completely devastated and helpless (VF 3.565–597; 3.726–740).²⁴

The situation is resolved by the intervention of Jupiter as a kind of *deus ex machina*: in pity for his son he reproaches Juno and puts Hercules to sleep (VF 4.1–21). During this sleep Hylas appears to Hercules, tells him what happened and announces that Hercules will soon enter heaven (VF 4.22–57). This allows Hercules to get back on track, and he starts to complete unfinished business by turning his steps to Troy and claim his reward (VF 4.58–59). Here, in a second divine intervention, Jupiter, moved by the pleas of Latona, Diana and Apollo, makes Hercules go off and free Prometheus (another incident not included in Apollonius Rhodius' version; cf. AR 2.1246–1259).²⁵ This is Hercules' last deed mentioned in the epic (VF 5.154–176), so that, although he is not able to accomplish what he signed up for as an Argonaut, his story ends in a positive and characteristic way, with Hercules removing a monster with great strength for the benefit of others. Moreover, the comparison with Jupiter and Neptune (VF 5.163–164) and the indication of an almost cosmic effect of his intervention may suggest that Hercules is near his deification, although his story is not pursued further, and the

24 This episode in itself can be seen as 'tragic' in character and structure. This is perhaps not a surprise in view of the fact that Ovid lists the Hylas story among the subject matter of tragedies (Ov. *Tr.* 2.381–408).

25 Described as 'an innovative 'Prometheus Unbound' not present in his Hellenistic source' by Buckley 2014, 319. On this scene and its potential relationship to 'Aeschylus' see Liberman 1996; Tschiedel 1998. Liberman (1996) argues that the presentation of the delivery of Prometheus in Valerius Flaccus might have been influenced by a '*Prometheus Unbound*' and a version of the story as found on a red-figure vase (*LIMC* VII.1, s.v. Prometheus, p. 542 no. 72; c. 350–340 BCE). The intervention of a number of gods on Prometheus' behalf is unusual, and in the scene in book 4 the emphasis is on the eagle, and at the actual freeing in book 5 it is on the chains.

poet leaves it open what happens between this incident and his reaching the stars as promised by Jupiter. Still, such a framework created by the narrator, as is possible in the epic genre, provides a conclusion to the Hercules tragedy.

So, in the shape of a particular form of Euripidean tragedy, after ascent, *peripeteia* and downfall, the tragic nature of the ending is limited, since suddenly a positive resolution is provided.²⁶ Even though Hercules stands out by his dominant characteristic of taking action for defence or rescue, at the same time, in line with the requirements in Aristotle's *Poetics*, he is not an entirely faultless hero. Additionally, as expressed by the conventions of epic narrative, his experiences are determined by divine influences and fate; his initiatives are therefore mainly responsive. Accordingly, despite his divine descent and his exceptional status as a hero, Hercules is a human being to be pitied, and his grief for Hylas completely derails him.

3 Valerius Flaccus' 'Herculean tragedy' and Senecan Hercules tragedies

Since the section of Hercules' life depicted by Valerius Flaccus is different from those dramatized in existing Greek and Roman tragedies, there is no direct correspondence to any of their plots, yet they exhibit motifs that re-occur in Valerius Flaccus in similar or contrastive form: in addition to the 'tragic' structure of the Hercules story in Valerius Flaccus, the epic narrative includes motifs also found in Hercules tragedies transmitted under Seneca's name. Some of these correspondences cannot be regarded as particularly telling since they are standard elements of the Hercules complex (such as his heroic deeds or his fighting prowess). Others, however, are more specific and display similarities.²⁷ Such correspondences are especially meaningful if they appear in sections that Valerius Flaccus has significantly modified in comparison with Apollonius Rhodius.

²⁶ The ups and downs in the presentation of Hercules' career in Valerius Flaccus coincide with the different characters of individual books, which some scholars have identified (see esp. Lühje 1971, e.g. 127, 130, 139, 182, 237–238), but for no other character is it shown to the same extent how their fate varies accordingly.

²⁷ See Billerbeck 1986, 3134: "Tatsächlich steht unter allen flavischen Epikern der Hercules des Valerius Flaccus demjenigen Senecas am nächsten; denn sowohl in Silius' *Punica*, ..., als auch besonders in der *Thebais* des Statius treten die asketischen Züge gegenüber dem Wohltätergedanken und dem konventionellen Heldenbild wieder stärker zurück" (though Valerius Flaccus is not mentioned as an example of reception in Billerbeck 2014, 432–433).

Then they might suggest an intertextual relationship, though for individual examples it often remains hard to tell.

Firstly, in contrast to Apollonius Rhodius (AR 1.128–132; 1.1317–1320; 1.1347–1348), Hercules is not in the middle of carrying out the labours for king Eurystheus, but has already completed them.²⁸ This chronology puts Hercules in Valerius Flaccus in the same position as the character in Seneca's *Hercules furens* and in *Hercules Oetaeus* (and also in Euripides' *Heracles*): he is an established hero who has shown his credentials, but, as readers know, is now near his end. At the same time this makes the impending deification seem plausible. The ending of the plot too bears similarities to one of the Hercules tragedies transmitted under Seneca's name: Seneca's *Hercules furens* also ends on a positive note as Hercules decides to leave and Theseus offers him a friendly reception in his country (Sen. HF 1314–1344).²⁹

Further, Juno as an opponent to Hercules appears in both the tragedies and the epic; this mythical conflict is presupposed and therefore not introduced.³⁰ Both Seneca and Valerius Flaccus have enhanced Juno's role in relation to their Greek predecessors.³¹ Yet, Juno's position is less straightforward in the epic since there is a tension between her hatred of Hercules and her support of the Argonauts. Therefore Valerius Flaccus has Juno only take action against Hercules once he is separated from the rest of the Argonauts, while he has changed the sequence so dramatically in relation to Apollonius Rhodius that Juno is responsible for all stages of Hercules' downfall (VF 3.481–740): she has the stag appear that leads Hylas to the pool, she instigates the nymph, and she sends favourable winds so that the Argonauts decide to continue their journey. Juno's two monologues concerning Hercules, in which she voices her feelings and her plans at Hercules' first appearance in the epic and before her final attack (VF 1.111–119; 3.509–520),³² in particular the second one, display similarities with her opening monologue in Seneca's *Hercules furens* (Sen. HF 1–124): in both cases Juno complains that she cannot find any further measures to confront and overcome Hercules and that she is merely the sister of Jupiter (and not his wife and therefore must deal with illegitimate offspring). Then she devises a novel plan to challenge Hercules, according to which he will have to conquer himself, as he will lose

²⁸ See e.g. Adamietz 1970, 34.

²⁹ See Heldmann 1974, 52.

³⁰ See Eigler 1988, 36–37. It is not highlighted in Apollonius Rhodius apart from a passing reference (AR 1.996–997).

³¹ See e.g. Heldmann 1974, 17–56; Billerbeck 1999, 32, 184–185.

³² On these monologues see Eigler 1988, 32–47, who focuses on their structure and role in the epic as well as their relationship to Vergil.

loved boys, and to manage his feelings. Although the situations are different, ultimately, in both tragedies and in the epic Hercules suffers not because of a fight with an external, present foe, but because of a fight with his (manipulated) emotions, which is described in detail.

In addition to structural similarities there are correspondences of individual motifs. For instance, to conquer Hercules the Senecan Juno calls on the Eumenides and the 'handmaids of Dis' (Sen. *HF* 86–88; 100–106; cf. 982–986). In Valerius Flaccus, when she sees Hercules leaving the ship and is planning her attack (VF 3.487–488), she intends to stir the Furies and Dis in future (VF 3.520). Valerius Flaccus elaborates on the motif when, slightly later, he has Jupiter envisage that Juno will call on the Furies to lead the Argonauts to victory, though he indicates that this will only be short-lived (VF 4.13–14). In Seneca these auxiliaries are shown to take action, while in Valerius Flaccus their potential support is merely envisaged; this characterizes Juno and the threat she causes, but it remains open how this might materialize.

Something similar may apply to the reference to the Sarmatians in Valerius Flaccus: in *Hercules furens* the Sarmatians are mentioned as a far-off people in a cold land where one can travel over frozen waters on horseback without ships (Sen. *HF* 533–539; cf. *Hdt.* 4.21; 4.110.2). In Valerius Flaccus it is not Hercules who has reached them; instead the Sarmatians appear in the host of fighters in Colchis and personify an unknown area far away. One of the other warriors involved in the battle, Gesander, claims that his people do not need ships, but can travel on horseback through seas and rivers (VF 6.231–238; 6.326–329). Again, the Sarmatians are characterized in a way that resembles their presentation in Seneca, but they appear in a context that is different and less relevant for the main narrative.

As regards the fate of Hercules, in *Hercules furens* the constellation of the Tyndaridae already sits in the sky (Sen. *HF* 14), while Hercules is still waiting to get his star, though this seems a certainty (Sen. *HF* 23); their journey to the stars is further compared to that of Bacchus (Sen. *HF* 66; 457–458) and Apollo (Sen. *HF* 451–455). Some of these comments form part of Juno's introductory monologue; she is apprehensive of Hercules seeking a way to the gods above by force (Sen. *HF* 66–74). Whereas Seneca's Hercules is aware that Jupiter has promised him the stars (Sen. *HF* 958–960), in Valerius Flaccus Hercules is unaware of such future developments for most of the time. The deification is part of Jupiter's plan only revealed to the other gods; when he promises rewards to the Tyndaridae and Hercules after much toil, he compares their fate with the examples of Bacchus and Apollo (VF 1.561–573). In the tragedy Seneca has Megara confirm that there is no easy way to the stars (Sen. *HF* 437), just as Valerius Flaccus has Jupiter announce this view. In *Hercules Oetaeus* too Hercules expects to enter heaven (*HO*

7–13), as does the chorus, who assume that Hercules will have a place among the stars (*HO* 1564–1575). After his death Hercules is seen joining the stars (*HO* 1940–1943; 1966–1972). In the tragedies the characters know that after much suffering for the benefit of mankind the hero will be rewarded;³³ in the epic there is more emphasis on the depiction of the condition of humans being in the dark about the future, including any eventual rewards, which increases the tragic character of the events shown.

After having slain Lycus in *Hercules furens*, Hercules prays to Pallas as his ally and helper, although it has not been made explicit in what way she may have helped him (*Sen. HF* 900–902); in his agony in *Hercules Oetaeus* he implores Pallas as his sister for help (*HO* 1314–1316). Evidently, in situations particularly meaningful for Hercules Seneca highlights the relationship between Hercules and Pallas Athene. This matches the fact that in Valerius Flaccus, when she is planning to attack Hercules decisively, Juno fears that Pallas may want to support her brother Hercules (*VF* 3.489–491) and therefore gives her a task to remove her from the scene before she launches her attack against Hercules. Valerius Flaccus comments that Pallas follows Juno's instructions although she sees through the intrigue of the 'stepmother' (*VF* 3.506–508). In developing the motif Valerius Flaccus thus demonstrates that Pallas too abandons Hercules and that Hercules is left without any divine support until the later intervention of his father.

As regards the newly inserted Hesione episode (without a model in Apollonius Rhodius), there is no direct parallel in the Senecan Hercules tragedies; there is only a brief reference to this well-known myth (cf. *Hom. Il.* 5.638–642; 20.145–148) in *Hercules Oetaeus*, commenting that Hercules loved Hesione, but passed her on to his companion Telamo (*HO* 363–364). When Valerius Flaccus introduces the story of Hesione's rescue in his Argonautic narrative (*VF* 2.451–578), he focuses on the heroic deed and ignores any personal relationship between Hercules and Hesione. In fact, in contrast to the tragedies (*Sen. HF* 465–471; *HO passim*), Hercules' interest in women is not a theme in Valerius Flaccus. On the contrary, he not only remains aloof during the Argonauts' stay in Lemnos (*VF* 2.373–374), as he does in Apollonius Rhodius (*AR* 1.855–856), but Valerius Flaccus also enhances Hercules' only close personal relationship, his friendship with Hylas. Therefore the catastrophe of the latter's loss receives greater weight and resembles the loss of Hercules' family in Seneca's *Hercules furens*. Moreover, in both cases Hercules contributes to the disaster by his own initiatives: in Seneca he kills

³³ On different interpretations of Seneca's *Hercules furens* and the respective roles of philosophy and literature see e.g. Billerbeck 1999, 25–38.

his wife and children during the madness caused by Juno, and in Valerius Flaccus he causes the stopover in Mysia and encourages Hylas to pursue the stag.

Hercules' 'fathers,' Amphytrion in Seneca and Jupiter in Valerius Flaccus, know that Juno is responsible for the catastrophe of 'their' son, but not even Jupiter is able or willing to take action to prevent it.³⁴ Hercules himself learns the reason for his misfortune retrospectively, but this does not make his situation easier (VF 4.1–14; 4.25–29; Sen. *HF* 1200–1201; 1237). Since Valerius Flaccus, like Seneca, informs readers from the start that Juno intends to destroy Hercules, their pity with Hercules' grief (VF 3.565–597; 3.726–740) as well as with Hercules' feelings of guilt in Seneca (Sen. *HF* 1159–1272) acquires a further dimension.

Elements of Juno's campaign in Seneca not only show correspondences with sequences connected with Hercules in Valerius Flaccus, but also with the scene setting the entire action in motion. On the human level Valerius Flaccus' story takes its starting point from the fact that the tyrant Pelias wishes to destroy his nephew Jason, in response to an oracle and because he fears Jason's *fama* and *virtus* (VF 1.26–30).³⁵ Since there are no monsters left on earth, he has difficulties in finding a means to execute this plan (VF 1.31–34). This is similar to the situation that Juno experiences at the opening of *Hercules furens*, when she has to realize that Hercules' *virtus* is honoured all over the world and there are no monsters left (Sen. *HF* 37–42); Hercules' world-wide *fama* is also stressed in *Hercules Oetaeus* (*HO* 315–317). In Valerius Flaccus a link to the Hercules story is made explicit since the poet states that the reason for the lack of monsters Pelias could confront Jason with is that Hercules has removed them (VF 1.34–36).³⁶ In both cases the notion of Hercules as the conqueror is illustrated by the fact that he now wears the spoils of the monsters he has overcome (Sen. *HF* 44–46; VF 1.34–35). Both opponents then come up with a novel challenge: Pelias has Jason confront the sea (VF 1.37; 1.59–66; 1.74), and Juno will make Hercules fight himself (Sen. *HF* 84–122). In *Hercules furens* Juno will be victorious. In *Hercules Oetaeus*, however, when Hercules succumbs, yet not owing to Juno's plans, he regards this as a victory over her, which should be shameful for her (*HO* 1179–1191). In Valerius Flaccus Pelias is unsuccessful since thanks to divine support Jason manages to travel over the seas and obtain the Golden Fleece.

³⁴ Jason had learned of the impending loss of Hercules from an oracle at the start of the voyage, but was not given any details (VF 3.617–622). This suggests that Hercules' disappearance from the Argonautic voyage had long been predetermined.

³⁵ On the influences of Senecan tragedy on the presentation of Pelias see Galli 2002 [2005]; Ripoll 2008; Buckley 2014, 310–311.

³⁶ See also Zissos 2008, *ad loc.*

The sketch of Celaeneus' realm in Valerius Flaccus, which is located close to the underworld and where the seer Mopsus has learned the ritual for cleansing those who have killed unintentionally (VF 3.397–410), bears similarities (e.g. no seasons and thus no agriculture, no motion, darkness) to the description of the underworld, visited by Hercules and Theseus, in *Hercules furens* (Sen. HF 698–759). Despite their gloom, these are places where things are put right. In *Hercules furens* it is stressed that guilty souls are punished, according to their crime (Sen. HF 735–736); equally, good and merciful kings will be rewarded and enter Elysium (Sen. HF 739–747). These notions reappear in the presentation of the underworld in Valerius Flaccus in connection with the death of Jason's parents, a newly introduced section in comparison with Apollonius Rhodius, complementing the information about Celaeneus: there it is made clear that virtue is rewarded in the world below, and deserving individuals enter a blissful area (VF 1.841–850). One of the two gates through which the dead souls pass into the underworld in Valerius Flaccus is destined for individuals and kings other than outstanding ones and will also lead Pelias to his punishment (VF 1.832–850). This scenario in both authors is particularly significant, for punishment in the underworld is not a standard element of Stoic doctrine: it is only mentioned in Lactantius, where it is attributed to Zenon, maybe influenced by Vergil's *Aeneid* 6 and the commentary tradition on this passage (Lactant. *Div. inst.* 7.7.13; 7.20.8–10). Vergil's precedent is likely to have been relevant in Valerius Flaccus as well, but the political emphasis rather resembles the situation presented in Seneca.

4 Conclusion

The analysis of the presentation of the Hercules story in Valerius Flaccus suggests that this subplot may be regarded as a form of Euripidean tragedy, consisting of prologue, climactic development, comic interlude, catastrophe and happy ending achieved by a *deus ex machina*, and that elements in the Hercules thread as well as in other parts of the narrative correspond to characteristic features in the Hercules tragedies transmitted under Seneca's name. This is most noticeable in Juno's prominent role from the start and the path to the hero's downfall, instigated by her. Such correspondences indicate that at least the Senecan Hercules tragedies might have been relevant for Valerius Flaccus, not in the sense that the same story is told (his narrative covers a different section of the myth), but rather in a way that structure and motifs are exploited (in addition to intertextual connections to other earlier texts).

For Valerius Flaccus' compositional techniques these correspondences demonstrate that he creatively engaged with earlier literature in genres beyond epic. Since Valerius Flaccus structures the Hercules story in a way resembling the sequence in Seneca's *Hercules furens*, i.e. introduces Juno as a driving force from the start and consequently modifies the Hylas episode so that she is the direct cause of Hercules' misfortune, the notion is reinforced (by means of the language and imagery of myth) that humans are exposed to influences beyond their control, when such a sad fate can even hit a hero such as Hercules who has not committed any obvious wrong. Thereby the arrangement of the Herculean tragedy in Valerius Flaccus, with its incorporation of elements also occurring in Seneca's *Hercules furens*, enhances the impact of the Hercules story and the epic's message.

This shaping of the Hercules story as a narrative resembling a tragedy, even though a satisfying resolution is reached by the intervention of a *deus ex machina*, has consequences for the juxtaposition of Jason and Hercules: it has long been acknowledged that the two men and their fates in Valerius Flaccus invite comparison and that Jason's position is affected by Hercules' presence. When Hercules' story is regarded as a tragedy with a balancing resolution at the end, it becomes apparent how much more 'tragic' Jason's circumstances are: he goes through a number of situations where he will be unhappy with any decision made; he will achieve the obvious goal and obtain the Golden Fleece, but he will have to suffer later for having accepted Medea's help and there will not be a happy ending (VF 1.224–226; 5.442–451). He never learns details about his own future and his role in the historical developments, whereas Hercules, at least after his most devastating experience, is given an indication of his ultimate ascent to heaven. Jason, as the leader of the expedition, is an instrument in Jupiter's plan of the world (VF 1.531–560), and for him a reward, like that promised for Hercules and the Tyndaridae, is never envisaged. This contrast between Hercules' 'tragedy,' which will ultimately end positively, and the situation of the other Argonauts endows the fate of Jason and his comrades with an even gloomier outlook.