

A Tale of Twos: Poetic and Political Doubling in Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*

Valerius' *Argonautica* is rife with doubling. A clear *topos* in Lucan and the Flavian poets (Hardie 1993), particularly Statius, doubles are seeded throughout Valerius' narrative on a thematic (Zissos 1999), structural (Zissos 2004), and even syntactic level. The first book alone includes identical twins (1.365ff, 1.420ff), a double description of the Underworld (1.827ff), and Mopsus and Idmon's competing prophecies; the word *pariter* and stem *gemin-* appear in all eight books. On a global level, the emphatic bipartite structure (Zissos 2004) shapes the poem as a distorted mirror-image. I will argue that the two halves reflect against each other as alternate visions of present and future for Flavian Rome herself.

The *Argonautica*'s first half presents primarily positive models of fraternal interaction, from the Argonauts' own confraternity to the close avoidance of accidental fratricide (3.186ff), underscored by a recurrent emphasis on the Dioscuri, who were the *exemplum* of fraternal piety for imperial heirs from Augustus onward. The second half, following Hercules' deification and initiated by the strife of the Clashing Rocks, is fraught with fratricide and civil war, a politically-inspired *topos* under the Flavians (McGuire 1997).

Thematic parallels with Flavian *imperium* are obvious: Jupiter's replacement of Saturn echoes the Flavians replacing the Julio-Claudians; the opening of the seas is compared with Vespasian's nautical triumphs (1.7-9); Hercules' and the Dioscuri's potential for deification (1.568ff) and eventual catasterism is the current regime's hoped-for fate (1.15-21). However, Rome's recent experience of civil war serves as a reminder of her origins in and perpetual potential for fratricide, and Vespasian's pair of offspring (or Domitian's lack of heir) threaten more of the same. Valerius' split emphasis on positive and negative pairings confronts this problematic future and ultimately reads as a cautionary tale; the entire epic is crafted to promote its double vision.

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