

**Zeitschrift:** Museum Helveticum : schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft = Revue suisse pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique = Rivista svizzera di filologia classica

**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Vereinigung für Altertumswissenschaft

**Band:** 63 (2006)

**Heft:** 1

**Artikel:** Valerius Flaccus' lo narrative

**Autor:** Murgatroyd, Paul

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-48687>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 18.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## Valerius Flaccus' Io Narrative

By Paul Murgatroyd, Hamilton, Ontario

At *Argonautica* 4.351ff. Valerius Flaccus has Orpheus sing about Io and her crossing of the Bosphorus for the Argonauts as they approach that stretch of water. He tells how Jupiter had an affair with the nymph and, when the suspicious Juno came down to earth, changed Io into a heifer; Juno asked him for the cow, got it and set Argus to guard it, and he maltreated the bovine Io, driving her on and on until Mercury appeared, sent him to sleep with his music and killed him; then (at Juno's instigation) Tisiphone turned up and hurried the heifer ever onwards in a panic, and would have stopped her from reaching Egypt (and salvation) if the Nile had not attacked the Fury; at that point Jupiter intervened, terrifying Juno into submission and transforming Io into the goddess Isis.

Scholars so far have taken Orpheus' song to be entirely or almost entirely serious and sad,<sup>1</sup> and there are obviously and definitely affecting elements, but I see it as predominantly comic (continuing and supplementing the frivolity in Valerius' source – Ovid *Met.* 1.588ff.<sup>2</sup>), just as one would expect in the generally less grave fourth book of the poem. Such a mood suits and reinforces the exuberance after the recent victory over Amycus (4.324–343), while extensive pathos would be a damper on the Argonauts' spirits, especially as they sail through the unpleasant waters of the Bosphorus (4.345 *qua rigidos eructat Bosphoros amnes*) on to unknown trials and dangers. It would also lessen the boost to their morale, after the horror of Amycus, provided by the song about Io (this ends on an upbeat, and with a little bit of reflection they could take comfort for their own voyage from these adventures of a Greek who went off on a long journey into unfamiliar regions, facing ordeals, setbacks and powerful opponents, but who also enjoyed the support of gods and finally triumphed). There is a rather dark wit in putting this tale into the mouth of this particular narrator and making the husband of Eurydice blithely recount a playful story of love with a happy ending, one which contains various parallels to his loss of his bride.<sup>3</sup> So

\* Abstract cf. p. 62.

1 See especially E. Lüthje *Gehalt und Aufriss der Argonautica des Valerius Flaccus* (Kiel, 1971) 154ff. and M. von Albrecht *Roman Epic* (Leiden, 1999) 264ff. The latter does allow for a little levity on p. 267, as does F. Spaltenstein *Commentaire des Argonautica de Valérius Flaccus (livres 3, 4 et 5)* (Brussels, 2004) 293, 299 and 307.

2 For Ovid as Valerius' model see M. Manitius 'Vorbilder und Nachahmer des Valerius Flaccus', *Philologus* 2 (1889), 250f., von Albrecht loc. cit. [n. 1] and D. Hershkowitz *Valerius Flaccus' Argonautica* (Oxford, 1998) 69ff.

3 We are directed to Virgil's account of that at *G.* 4.453ff. by a clear echo from it at *Argonautica* 4.374–5 (see below in the main text of this article).

Orpheus of all people sings of a beautiful nymph being aggressively pursued (by Tisiphone) and crossing rivers (402), of death in the countryside (Argus'), of charming music (used to kill Argus rather than recover one who is dead) and of a successful request (by Juno) to a divinity which secures possession of the beloved nymph. So too Orpheus, who was himself harshly treated by the gods of hell and by females (the murderous Bacchantes) and who roamed far and wide in misery, tells of Io's persecution by Juno and Tisiphone and her extensive wandering. And there is especial piquancy at 409ff. when he describes the defeat of a deity of the Underworld (Tisiphone) and her futile appeal to the nether powers. In addition to that, the happy ending (Io becoming the mighty Isis) is highlighted at 4.346 (before Orpheus begins), so that we can sit back and enjoy the flippancy. At the very start of the bard's account we see Io not as the reluctant victim of a rape (as in Ovid) but as someone engaged in a prolonged affair with Jupiter (note *saepe* in 352 and *paelex* in 357), and as a result Io is not such a poignant figure and Juno's handling of her is not so appalling, so that the tone is lighter. And throughout the narrative for the alert reader there are many certain and probable examples of wit and comedy, ranging from subtle point to verbal play, mockery of Jupiter, fun with Io's status as a water nymph, twists to Ovid (and Virgil), black humour in the malevolence of Juno and Argus, and much more, as we will now see.<sup>4</sup>

Levity is evident from the very start. At 4.351ff. Orpheus begins as follows: *videre priores/ saepe Iovem in terras Argivaeque regna Pelasgum/ virginis Iasiae blandos descendere ad ignes*.<sup>5</sup> The words *videre* and *saepe* (both emphatic by position) mean that the god was recklessly rather open and unwisely asking for trouble (unlike the more furtive Jupiter in Ovid). There is also foolhardiness here and an ill-judged slight to Juno, since Jupiter is having an affair in Juno's own domain (Argos was a major centre of her worship and was under her protection<sup>6</sup>). And in 353, whether the god is descending on account of Io's love for him or his own love for her, the use of *ignis* in connection with a water nymph is droll.

At 354–6 Juno suddenly knows what is going on and leaps down from heaven (a comically ominous reaction, more forceful than her movement at Ovid *Met.* 1.608), causing the area where the assignations took place to tremble (in addition to its guilty terror, the ground might well shake under a great divinity who has jumped all the way down from heaven!). In 355 with *Lyrceia tellus* our poet depicts the lovers as meeting near Mount Lyrceum/ Lyrceus, and thus casually and cheekily corrects the *doctus poeta* Ovid, who made Jupiter have sex with Io after she left this area in her flight from him (*Met.* 1.598). In 356

4 Humour is, of course, a subjective matter, and some may not be convinced by every example of it that I cite, but I do trust that out of so many instances most will be accepted as humorous by the majority of readers.

5 The text used is that of W-W. Ehlers *Valerius Flaccus* (Stuttgart, 1980).

6 See Livy 34.24.2, Virg. *Aen.* 7.286, *RE* 2.788. The point is reinforced by *dominam* in 355.

Valerius produces a melodious Golden Line to describe the area's rather amusing fear of the awful Juno (a Grand Guignol touch not found in Ovid) – *antraque deprensae tremuerunt conscia culpae*.

When Jupiter hurriedly transforms Io into a heifer, Juno smiles (to conceal her hurt feelings, but this is also a chilling smile of anticipation) and touches the animal – *plausu fovet hanc et pectora mulcet* (358). Both verbs mean 'caress' as Valerius dwells on and highlights via chiasmus this maliciously joking action. Juno knows what her husband has been doing with this 'heifer' and meaningfully recreates it (brought out by *fovet*, which was often used of erotic fondling,<sup>7</sup> and by the touching of the chest in particular). The patting makes for a mocking show of affection, to support Juno's upcoming request, and would be terrifying for Io (as Juno would know full well).

At 360–4 Juno asks for the cow, and Ovid's *petit hanc Saturnia munus* (*Met.* 1.616) is developed into a forceful speech which contains point, jibes and teasing ambiguities, and which really puts Jupiter on the spot by clearly hinting at her intention to maltreat the animal while also making it difficult for him to refuse her request. This is a nastier Juno who is really playing with her husband. In 362 she calls the heifer *indomitam*, which means primarily 'untamed'; but there is also ironical sport with the 'unconquerable' and 'undaunted, indomitable' senses of the word, and with the use of imagery of taming in connection with love and sex, whereby the nuances 'untamed by love' and 'virginal' are present.<sup>8</sup> The goddess then demands *da carae munera nuptae* in 362. *Carae...nuptae* is most obviously a dative and denotes Juno herself, increasing the pressure on the god to grant her request (and tartly reminding him of what her status should be with a phrase that is filled with sarcasm). But Juno will be toying with her husband here, as *carae...nuptae* could be a genitive of definition (with *munera*) and represent a sneering reference to Io.<sup>9</sup> At 363f, she goes on to say *ipsa ego dilectae pecudi iam pascua digna/ praecipuosque legam fontes*. Her personal intervention there, an apparent sign of affectionate interest, is decidedly menacing. *Dilectae pecudi* (a phrase which strikes me as intrinsically rather funny) is double-edged: the animal is (supposedly) dear to Juno, and (as Io) is dear to Jupiter. The pretence of love for the *pecus* by Juno is a neat riposte to Jupiter's actual love for it. *Digna* is another ominous touch, intimating foul pasture (cf. 379) for the foul adulteress. *Praecipuos*, a seemingly positive epithet, actually (as can easily be guessed) means exceptional in unpleasantness (cf. 379). In addition, there is pawkiness in Juno offering to select *fontes* for a river nymph.

At 364f. Jupiter cannot devise a suitable ploy and has to give in. Especially because Valerius' Juno is perceptive and unsettling, here and elsewhere Jupiter

7 See R. Pichon *Index Verborum Amatoriorum* (Hildesheim, 1966, repr.) s.v. *fovere*.

8 See *OLD* s.v. 2a and b, Catull. 68.117f., Hor. C. 2.5.1–4 and Nisbet-Hubbard ad loc.

9 For *coniunx* used of a girlfriend see *TLL* IV.343.53ff.; *nupta* is applied to a boyfriend in a homosexual 'marriage' at Juv. 2.120.



is amusingly unable to come up with the kind of lies that the god so readily produced at Ovid *Met.* 1.594, 615 and Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.1.3. As a result the wife gets the cow and sets Argus over it as a guard. In 367 we are told *custos Argus placet*. The employment of this particular verb is entertaining: Argus is pleasing to Juno, but not to Io or Jupiter; and in such a context it is easy to see exploitation of the amatory use of *placere*,<sup>10</sup> with Argus pleasing Juno in response to Io (erotically) pleasing Jupiter.

In Valerius Argus is a malicious tormentor as well as a guard, and he promptly drives Io to unfamiliar and unpleasant places, such as *monstris horrida lustra* (370). There the adjective most obviously means ‘dreadful’, but also possible is ‘bristling’ (with),<sup>11</sup> which would be a grimly graphic touch. The black humour is heightened by the fact that Argus is himself a *monstrum*, driving Io to other *monstra*. In 373 he makes her leave her father’s river (Inachus), and we are told: *ultima tum patriae cedens dedit oscula ripae*. Here our poet mischievously reduces the whole lengthy exchange between Io and her father at Ovid *Met.* 1.639ff. to a single line, in which she does not actually have contact with him. This is a melodious and elegant verse (a sort of super Golden Line, with a pair of verbs at the centre) for the laughable picture of a kissing cow, and one giving (wet and slobbery?) kisses to a riverbank at that (inherently more tickling than Io kissing her father at Ovid *Met.* 1.646). *Ultima* (stressed by position) is something of a tease, making us think that Io will not go back to her father’s stream (but she does return at 397), although these are in fact the last kisses that she gives to the bank.

At 374f. local streams/ nymphs of streams weep for and call back Io: *flevit Amydone, flerunt Messeides undae, / flevit et effusis revocans Hyperia lacertis*. There is clear Virgilian reminiscence here, as several scholars have noted.<sup>12</sup> With a background of rape *flerunt* was similarly applied to a group (natural features, including a river, and a mythical female) weeping for the loss of a beloved nymph (Eurydice) at *G.* 4.461ff.: *flerunt Rhodopeiae arces / altaque Pangaea et Rhesi Mavortia tellus / atque Getae atque Hebrus et Actias Orithyia*. Valerius will also have an eye to the threefold weepers (including a goddess’ grove and *unda*) for Umbro, a brave and beneficent priest and healer killed in the war in Italy, at *Aen.* 7.759f.: *te nemus Angitia, vitrea te Fucinus unda, / te liquidi flevere lacus*. In Valerius, in contrast to the genuine tragedy of the deaths of Eurydice and Umbro, the tears are for a heifer, which is simply going away, and which will come back later, and become a deathless divinity.<sup>13</sup> Such considerations mean

10 For which see Pichon op. cit. [n. 7] s.v. *placere*.

11 See *OLD* s.v. 1a and cf. Virg. *Aen.* 3.23 *hastilibus horrida myrtus*.

12 See, for example, ad loc. Spaltenstein op. cit. [n. 1] and P. Langen C. *Valeri Flacci Setini Balbi Argonauticon* (Berlin, 1896).

13 Von Albrecht op. cit. [n. 1] 268 and others have suggested that Valerius is also thinking of Virg. *Ecl.* 10.13–15, and this is possible, although that passage is not as close to our poet’s lines and the contrast is not as pointed.

that there is sly undermining of the surface poignancy at 374f., which is built up by means of emphatic placement and iteration of *fleo* in a tricolon crescendo of grief, with lugubrious assonance of e and (in 375) internal rhyme. Moreover, with *effusis* the meaning is 'outstretched' but there will also be play with the 'pour' sense of the verb in connection with a water nymph in such a moist context. Similar is the little joke of streams/ water nymphs weeping.

Lines 376–80 develop the picture of the sadistic Argus persecuting Io: he absolutely wears her out, repeatedly makes her sleep on rocks, deprives her of a drink for a long time (so that a water nymph goes thirsty!), forces her to eat horrible fodder and drink horrible water (for a river nymph!), and repeatedly flogs her. The (mock) pathos is increased by *heu*, several exclamations (*quotiens, quos, quae, quotiens*) and animated alliteration of q and c at 379f. All the maltreatment here and in the preceding lines means that Argus is really asking for it, and so there is a gleeful anticipation of his death, which seems less harsh than it does in Ovid (so that the tone is kept light).

At 381–3 the torture by Argus is so bad that Io is driven to contemplate suicide, and so we see a future queen of the shades and nether power<sup>14</sup> thinking of sending herself down to the Underworld to become one of the dead. Valerius really does something with the high mountain-top of Ovid *Met.* 1.666, putting Io up there instead of Argus, and making her try to use it to kill herself. In 381f. she is *ab excelso meditantem vertice saltus/ audentemque mori*. On top of the mock solemnity in *excelso...vertice*,<sup>15</sup> the idea of a kamikaze cow, flying through the air to splatter on the ground far below, is quite hilarious in itself. In addition, although *meditantem* may just mean that Io was 'intending' to kill herself, more probably she is 'pondering' suicide (i.e. ineptly taking her time and telegraphing her move, so that Argus has the chance to intervene); and with *audentemque* we have a brave cow (daring is not a quality that one normally associates with heifers, and it pointedly inverts the timidity of Ovid's Io at *Met.* 1.638 and 641). At 382f. Argus does intervene at Juno's command to prevent her escape via death, and thoughtfully he drives Io down to the bottom of a valley (so that there is nowhere for her to leap down into in an attempt to kill herself). The rather paradoxical phrase *durus servavit* is applied to this action. So one who is soon to become as Isis a saving (*conservatrix*) goddess<sup>16</sup> is herself saved. And ironically while preventing her from killing herself Argus is himself killed shortly.

At 384–90, while Argus is driving Io into the valley, Mercury appears playing a *fistula*, tells Argus to take notice of his music with *respice* (a verb which also denotes various types of looking, applied to Argus with all those eyes on his

14 For this role of Isis see Apul. *Met.* 11.5 *regina manium*, 11.6 and J.G. Griffiths *Apuleius of Madaurus The Isis Book* (Leiden, 1975) 142.

15 This expression is found elsewhere at Manil. 1.402, Sen. *H.F.* 335, Sil. It. 6.644, Val. Max. 6.9 (ext.).5, and with a different reference at Val. Flacc. 6.604 and Sil. It. 2.157.

16 Cf. Apul. *Met.* 11.9, 15, 22, 25, Griffiths op. cit. [n. 14] 181.

head) and puts him to sleep almost immediately with risible ease (in contrast to Ovid's version), prior to dispatching him. At *Met.* 1.700ff. Ovid had impudently cut short Mercury, the god of eloquence, and finished for him his soporific story of Pan's attempted rape of Syrinx; Valerius takes that process further and gives the god less than one line of (not very eloquent) speech (387). There is visual humour in the trio in motion here: Io is closely followed by Argus, who is in turn closely followed by Mercury, who is playing the pipes on the run, and then Argus' eyes start to close while he is still advancing. It will not be by chance that this fast-moving episode is framed by *celerans* (385) and *celerem* (390), and our author may well be subtly twitting his model (Ovid *Met.* 1.668–721) for his more leisurely narrative (especially his *parva mora* at *Met.* 1.671 and *nec mora* at *Met.* 1.717), and pointedly restoring to Mercury his traditional speed.<sup>17</sup> Of course, readers' knowledge of the Ovidian account is the main reason why Valerius Flaccus can abbreviate that account.

After this Io is restored by Jupiter to her original form, but Juno sends the horrendous, howling Tisiphone to deal with her. At this Jupiter turns her into a heifer again.<sup>18</sup> This has its amusing side: the king of heaven is short of ideas, trying again the same old trick, which is hardly likely to fool the Fury (instead of intervening forcefully to end the persecution, as at 414f., or at least changing Io into something else); and *recurrat* in 395 suggests panicky and unreflecting haste on his part (reinforced by the rhythm in that verse).

Driven on by Tisiphone, Io wanders back to the river Inachus at 396ff. Her return (accompanied by the dreadful Fury) could not have been very welcome, and Hyperia in particular must have regretted now calling her back at 375. In 398 Io is described as *qualis et a prima quantum mutata iuvenca*! She will be in a bad way and changed from her earlier bovine appearance in Valerius in that she will be even more worn out and dishevelled by now, and also more distraught (because of Tisiphone). But she is also *mutata* in that (in contrast to 373) she is not alone this time but has a hideous nether power with her, and she is a metamorphosed nymph, and she is unlike the heifer in the first version of this story (Ovid's) because she is going back to her father at this stage. Many scholars<sup>19</sup> have noted here the allusion to Virg. *Aen.* 2.274ff. (of Hector) *ei mihi, qualis erat! quantum mutatus ab illo/ Hectore qui redit exuvias indutus Achilli/ vel Danaum Phrygios iaculatus puppibus ignis*! There in an impressive dream at

17 For which see Hom. *Il.* 24.340ff. and Bömer on Ovid *Met.* 2.818.

18 In 395 (*in miserae rursus bovis ora recurrat*) Io could be personally transforming herself back into a cow (this would certainly top Ovid's Io), but one wonders how and where she would have acquired this new power all of a sudden. *In...bovis ora recurrat* recalls *subit ora iuvencae* in 357 (where Jupiter was involved – *sponte dei*, 358), and at Ovid *Met.* 1.738f. (*vultus capit illa priores/ fitque quod ante fuit*), although Io is the subject of the verbs and Jupiter is not mentioned, he is obviously responsible for the metamorphosis, so most probably we should assume that the god is behind the alteration in 395.

19 See e.g. Langen op. cit. [n. 12] 310, von Albrecht op. cit. [n. 1] 270 and Spaltenstein op. cit. [n. 1] 304.

a supremely tragic point the shade of the great Trojan warrior returned home, cruelly mangled. Here Virgil's famous words are transferred to a frivolous context and applied to a live cow (with impact in the late position of *iuvenco*) returning home somewhat the worse for wear; and Valerius contrives to heighten the sorrowful air by means of the spondees and assonance of long a.

In 399 we are told: *nec pater aut trepidae temptant accedere nymphae*. Despite the Fury's attentions, Io's state is hardly likely to make her now unrecognizable to her relatives (the nymphs at 374f. realized that she was Io). So, whereas at Ovid *Met.* 1.642f. Inachus and the nymphs did not approach the bovine Io because they did not recognize her, here with a diverting twist they will know who she is, but won't even attempt to go near her because they are scared stiff (*trepidae*) of the awful Tisiphone with her (even though they are deities) and perhaps because the disturbed Io now seems like a dangerously mad cow. As a result of this rejection she leaves Inachus, *ceu Styga dilectum fugiens caput* (401). Io has taken the huff with her father! The Styx (and the Underworld generally) often stood for something abominable.<sup>20</sup> But here there is drollery in the river Inachus being likened to the Styx; and in a river nymph and future queen of the Underworld fleeing from him as though he was the Styx, when she is herself pursued by a power from Hades; and in this narrator in particular (Orpheus) so employing the Styx. There is also a witty juxtaposition of *Styga* (connected with στύγος<sup>21</sup>) and *dilectum*, and fun with different senses of *caput*, which can denote a person and also a river's mouth or source or even the whole river.<sup>22</sup>

Next, at 401f., we learn of Io: *per urbes/ raptatur Graias atque ardua flumina ripis*. Although *raptatur* could be reflexive, there is much more humour and punch if Tisiphone is hurrying Io away. In addition to the comical picture of a heifer pursued by a Fury rushing past (stunned) citizens and scrambling up and down river banks, Tisiphone would be determining Io's course with real refinements in cruelty: in cities Io would be exposed to the public gaze, while the rivers would remind her of Inachus and his beloved banks (373), and the fact that they are *ardua...ripis* would increase the hardship for her (thus rivers are used to torment a river nymph).

At 403 she reaches the Bosphorus, where she hesitates a while before entering it. In fact she should be rushing at once into the water, to get on to Egypt and salvation. This is the hesitation of a heifer (rather than a water nymph) before the sea, and (at 404f.) it is immediately shown to be ridiculously inappropriate. For the strait becomes smooth<sup>23</sup> to afford her an easy passage, because it is *gnara futuri*

20 Cf. e.g. Hesiod *Theog.* 739, 775f., Hom. *Il.* 9.312, *Od.* 14.156.

21 See e.g. Hesiod *Theog.* 775f.

22 See *TLL* III.404.3ff., 409.3ff., 410.17ff., 29ff.

23 Some (like Spaltenstein op. cit. [n. 1] ad loc.) take *absistunt fluctus* to mean that the sea parts before Io (as it did for Moses), but J.A. Wagner *C. Valerii Flacci Setini Balbi Argonauticae Libri VIII* (Gottingen, 1805) ad loc. is closer to the truth when he interprets the phrase as meaning 'retro cedunt fluctus'. Io is clearly swimming through the Bosphorus at 405f., so whether the



(with a quaint prescience it knows that Io will become the powerful goddess Isis and mistress of the sea<sup>24</sup> and that her crossing of it will earn it a famous name). So we learn at 404f.: *gnara futuri/ dant pavidae alta viam*. With *pavidae*<sup>25</sup> one who earlier tried to kill herself is now frightened of drowning; a water nymph and future queen of the sea is afraid of water (when she has much more to fear from Tisiphone), and in particular is afraid of a strait which will be named after her successful negotiation of it. The pawky touch in the complicity over the crossing (whereby water helps a water nymph) comes from Ovid *Her.* 14.101f. (to Io) *per mare, per terras cognataque flumina curris;/ dat mare, dant amnes, dat tibi terra viam*. Valerius Flaccus is thus naughtily expanding on and enlivening Ovid's Io account in *Met.* 1 (which omits the journey across the Bosphorus) with material taken from elsewhere in Ovid. At 405f., as Io makes her way across: *celsis procul ipsa refulget/ cornibus ac summa palearia sustinet unda*. The horns (highlighted by *refulget*) and especially the dewlaps for the beautiful nymph increase the levity. She is holding her head up well out of the water so that she can breathe. The most likely and entertaining explanation of this is that the silly cow is in such a disturbed state that she has forgotten that water nymphs can, of course, breathe perfectly well under water.<sup>26</sup> Even if she has in fact lost that ability in her bovine form, it is diverting to see one who is really a water nymph doing this.

At 407f. Tisiphone takes preventive measures: *ast Erebi virgo ditem volat aethere Memphin/ praecipere et Pharia venientem pellere terra*. *Erebi virgo* is a solemn periphrasis,<sup>27</sup> prior to deflation. This denizen of the Underworld is trying to stop Io from reaching Egypt, where she will become Isis (queen of the Underworld)! Exactly why she is attempting to keep Io from Egypt is unclear. Perhaps she is acting on the orders of Juno, who knows somehow that Io will be saved there (maybe she has read Ovid or another account!). At any rate several scholars<sup>28</sup> have noted the clear echo here of Virg. *Aen.* 10.277 *litora praecipere et venientis pellere terra*, of Turnus (maddened by a Fury) trying to ward off the re-

waves 'move away' or 'stop' (for such absolute use of *absisto* see *TLL* I.171.26ff., 172.21ff.), the idea will be that when Io enters it the sea becomes calm (as it does at Moschus 2.115, Lucian *Dial. Mar.* 326 and Apul. *Met.* 4.31.4).

24 See Griffiths op. cit. [n. 14] 32 and 144 for her marine aspect.

25 Unlike Ehlers I prefer this to the mss' *pavida*, which does make sense but seems somewhat limp. As the sea knows the future, it might be afraid (cf. 355f.) of giving Io/Isis a rough passage and/or drowning her, although I wonder just how the goddess (or Jupiter) would take revenge on a strait for that. A lot more vigorous is *pavidae* (found in *editio Bononiensis*, *editio Aldina* and *editio Carrionis altera*). It adds much characteristic wit (see below in the main text of this article), and it would be neatly picked up by *pavet* in 416, with the tables turned there and Juno now afraid. Especially in view of her mental state at this point, fear on Io's part here would be natural (cf. Aesch. *P. V.* 730f.), and it fits with *paulum cunctata* in 403 and Io's timidity at Ovid *Met.* 1.638 and 641.

26 Cf. e.g. Hom. *Il.* 1.357f., Virg. *G.* 4.333ff.

27 Cf. Virg. *Aen.* 7.479 *Cocytia virgo* and Horsfall ad loc.

28 See e.g. W.C. Summers *A Study of the Argonautica of Valerius Flaccus* (Cambridge, 1894) 32 and Langen op.cit. [n. 12] 311.

turning Trojan fleet, especially Aeneas, who is (at 10.260ff.) an imposing figure with flames streaming from his helmet and shield, which he holds up *celsa in puppi* (10.261). Here in a frivolous new context the words are transferred to a Fury trying to ward off a lone cow, a rather comical figure with glittering horns on high (*celsis.../cornibus*) and dewlaps held up at 405f.

The intertextual sport continues at 409ff., where the Nile assails the Fury: *contra Nilus adest et toto gurgite torquens*<sup>29</sup>/ *Tisiphonen agit atque imis inludit harenis/ Ditis opem ac saevi clamantem numina regni./ apparent sparsaeque faces disiectaque longe/ verbera et abruptis excussi crinibus hydri*. There is twofold parody. An episode in an epic poem in which a mighty river violently attacks and engulfs an awesome opponent to defend a protégée reminds me of Scamander's engagement with Achilles at Hom. *Il.* 21.233ff. Here, in a flippant context now, Valerius' river outdoes Homer's: the Nile fights a divinity (who is unable to put up any resistance and calls for help in vain), does not need to appeal for assistance, and wins, quickly and easily, and is impervious to fire (the *faces* in 412). At the same time, as many critics have remarked, the wording and details recall the storm in Virgil *Aen.* 1, especially 112 (of Eurys driving along three ships) *inluditque vadis atque aggere cingit harenae* and 116ff. (of another craft) *illam ter fluctus ibidem/ torquet agens circum et rapidus vorat aequore vertex./ apparent rari nantes in gurgite vasto,/ arma virum tabulaeque et Troia gaza per undas*. Even though you would need something powerful to deal with Tisiphone, there is comic hyperbole in likening the Nile's violence (directed against an agent of Juno) to that of the whole sea in Virgil's famous epic tempest (caused by an agent of Juno). In addition, the dread Fury is thus likened to ships (and helpless, grounded and wrecked ships at that). So too at 412f. she noticeably does not make a reappearance swimming (like the *rari* in Virgil), and her female and gruesome accoutrements replace the *arma virum* and *Troia gaza*.

There is further humour. After Tisiphone's use of rivers to torment Io in 397 and 402 there is poetic justice in a river here causing the Fury such problems. So too after subjecting Io to a frightening encounter with water at 404ff., Tisiphone herself is now subjected to such an encounter, and the water for her (in contrast to Io) is rough, enveloping and harmful. With *agit* in 410, instead of driving others (like Io), Tisiphone is now the one driven; and with *imis...harenis*

29 Unlike Ehlers, I accept Markland's *torquens* for the mss' *torrens*. In a passage which alludes extensively to the storm in Virgil *Aeneid* 1 it hardly seems likely that our learned author would write *torrens/...agit* at 409f. and miss the opportunity to echo *torquet agens* at *Aen.* 1.116f. (quoted below in the main text) and to liken Tisiphone to a ship which is sucked under (cf. *imis inludit harenis* in 410), especially when 412f., of the debris from Tisiphone, recall *Aen.* 1.118f., of the debris from that same ship. In addition, *torquens*, (unlike *torrens*) presents a pleasingly grotesque picture of Tisiphone being whirled about helplessly; and there may even be play on the 'torture' sense of the verb, with a tormenting Fury (cf. Virg. *Aen.* 6.570ff., 605ff. and Austin ad loc.) being tormented herself.



in that line there is the joke of sending a nether deity to the depths.<sup>30</sup> In 411, as the Fury is in great difficulties and cannot help herself against a more powerful force (a facetious reversal of circumstances), she invokes the help of Dis and other divinities of hell too. Her cries are pointless and will go unheeded because Io is about to become the mistress of the Underworld (and quite possibly because Dis was Osiris<sup>31</sup>). They are also presumably stopped suddenly as her mouth is filled with sand. Line 413, especially thanks to the presence of both *abruptis* and *excussi* (juxtaposed), conjures up a bald or partially bald Fury, and there is stress in making this effect on her hair the third member in a tricolon crescendo as Valerius dwells irreverently on damage to Tisiphone in two (largely spondaic) verses. And no doubt *hydrus* was selected out of the various words for serpents because it strictly denoted a water snake.

The end of the Io narrative (414–8) becomes rather more serious, as Orpheus carefully builds up to his important prayer to Io/Isis at 420f., but there are still a few lighter touches. Jupiter now gets involved directly, thundering and rising up in the sky, and in 415 we are told: *curamque fatetur*. The noun may embrace 'concern, distress' (over the maltreatment of Io), but certainly means 'love',<sup>33</sup> as an open confession of love would be intimidating and humiliating. The henpecked husband is thus responding to 360ff. (where Juno humiliatingly toyed with him) and is also doing this for Io (416f.) to witness and enjoy, thereby increasing his wife's mortification. Her response in 416 is fear (*ipsa imperium Iuno pavet*), and she promptly gives in. It is laughably easy for one who is after all the king of the gods to stop the seemingly relentless Juno, and we are left wondering amusedly why he did not do this earlier and save Io all that trouble. In the sequence of the narrative it would appear that Jupiter has found the Nile's intervention rather embarrassing, and is acting now before his dreadful wife can come up with some new horror for poor Io. Finally, at 406–8 Io has the satisfaction of seeing Juno's fear and helplessness in her new manifestation as Isis, which means that this is the fourth transformation for Io and Valerius has cheekily provided two more metamorphoses for her than Ovid did in the *Metamorphoses*.<sup>34</sup>

There are many more possible instances of humour and wit in Valerius' account that I could add, but I trust that the above is sufficient to demonstrate that his Io narrative is predominantly light-hearted and in terms of entertainment even rivals Ovid's lively and inventive tragicomedy.

Correspondence:

Paul Murgatroyd

McMaster University, Department of Classics

1280 Main Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8S 4M2

30 For *imus* of the Underworld see *OLD* s.v. 2a.

31 See Griffiths op. cit. [n. 14] 142.

33 See *TLL* IV.1474.80ff.

34 Cf. Hershkowitz op. cit. [n. 2] 71f.