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Boreads and Harpies: Unhappy Families in *Argonautica* 4

The episode of the liberation of Phineus is at the heart of Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*: his freeing from the torment of the Harpies, at the hands of his kinsmen the sons of Boreas, marks a paradigm-shift in the *Weltanschauung* of the universe from primitive world-order to the benignly provident universe promised by *pater* Jupiter at the outset of *Argonautica*. Yet what starts out for the Boreads as an act of familial *pietas* becomes the cause for their own imminent doom. For as they pursue the Harpies, these hellish creatures make their own appeal to family, calling upon their father Typhoeus. And as a result, the Boreads are warned that they will suffer – as will all men who 'deserve the anger of the gods' (*Arg.*4.526).

In this paper I will examine the difficult interpretative issues arising from the 'impious' act of familial duty undertaken by the Boreads: Valerius' overt juxtaposition of clemency and punishment; deserved and undeserved guilt; and I will pay particular attention to the appearance of the Harpies' own father Typhoeus at the heart of the episode and promises that the Boreads will be punished for their family loyalty. I will suggest that the liberation of Phineus is far from the optimistic 'narrative of progress' it is often assumed to be; and that the fate of the Boreads suggests even *pater* Jupiter himself may not be quite so benign a figure as he purports to be in this *Argonautica*.