Composing new poetry on the basis of existing poetry was typical of Latin literature. It created a fine network of relations between the source texts and the imitation in which older literature is substantially quoted. Flavian epic poets are extremely rich in such allusions, in particular to Vergil, and consider it a virtue not to try and set out on an original enterprise but rather to make an attempt at emulation. While Augustan poets turned to Greek models, Flavian poetry was more internally Latin-oriented. Even if all literature can be considered to be active recreation of previous efforts, to Flavians this has become a mannerism; Hinds, 95 speaks of “self esteem clothed in deference to Vergil”.

Here I wish to dwell on the resemblance between the figures of Gesander in Valerius Flaccus and the Etruscan king Mezentius in the Aeneid, both representing in certain details a type of ruthless primitive, with no regards for human values. A few words are of key importance to stress the fact that the resemblance is a deliberate allusion. Once it is clear that unequivocal “reference” (in the sense of Thomas) to Vergil is made, we may safely assume that Valerius Flaccus adds a selection of less important terms. Together
these form a coherent picture, evoking elements blending the figure of Mezentius into the description of Gesander.

_Gesander_

In book 6 of the _Argonautica_ the Iazygian chieftain Gesander makes a sudden appearance in the central part of the book and is there the agent to bring about the death of an Argonaut, the only one of the crew to fall in battle. He has not been mentioned in the catalogue of Scythian enemies in 6.42-170. To the Iazyges is ascribed a barbarian custom (6.122 ff.): if they have grown too old they ask their sons to kill them with the sword, which is carried out in good faith. This forms an ethnographical _topos_ (more on the subject in Wijsman.7) After Gesander is introduced in line 280 he starts with a long monologue praising the sturdy life of rustics untainted by civilization, based upon that of Numanus in Verg. _A._ 9.595-620 as has been noticed long since (Burman, J.A.Wagner, Langen).8)

The Gesander passage has been modelled upon the last hour of the Etruscan king Mezentius in the tenth book of the _Aeneid_. Mezentius is the main adversary of Aeneas after Turnus, and characterized in the words _contemptor divum_ (_A._ 7.648), _contemptor deum_ (_A._ 8.7) as well as _dextra mihi deus_ (10.773). He is cruel (_A._ 8.483 ff.) and he is in the derogatory sense of the word truly _barbaric_. His son Lausus tries to save his father from Aeneas (_A._ 10.789 ff.); after Lausus has been killed (reluctantly) by Aeneas, Mezentius wails for his son (_miseromihi_, _A._ 10.849).

In Gesander one virtue is highlighted: he has loved his father, to the point of faithfully fulfilling his last wish. A comparison between Mezentius and Gesander is poignant. The first is an utter rogue in almost every respect but a loving father with a better son (not

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6) Abbreviations: VF = Valerius Flaccus _Argonautica_; bare line numbers refer to Valerius Flaccus book 6. _A._ = Vergil _Aeneid_; the line numbers are from books 7, 8 or 10.
